Summary

Les Amis come up with a plan that helps them storm the national guard and survive the barricade. Enjolras is arrested in the chaos, sent to jail and an interrogation under none other than Javert, who finds his suicidal plans foiled. Confused and finding himself changed after Valjean spared his life, Javert takes Enjolras to none other than Valjean himself, and from there, everything changes.

Notes

Welcome to my Everyone Lives After the Barricade AU! This should be about five or 6 chapters long, give or take. I don't know what the updating schedule will be, but I can guarantee it will be finished. I hope you enjoy!
Bahorel comes up with the plan to bust through the barricade.

Enjolras isn’t surprised.

He is surprised Bahorel’s standing, frankly. Blood’s been slowly dripping from a bayonet wound near his ribcage, his shirt and red waistcoat ripped through.

That bayonet could have killed him if Prouvaire hadn’t shouted at him to move just in time, allowing Bahorel to slide away and sock the responsible National Guardsman directly in the jaw.

But then Bahorel is Bahorel, after all.

*It’s a flesh wound Joly, stop fussing,* has been his constant refrain. *And you too, Combeferre.*

“They’ve blown a hole through the middle there,” Bahorel’s saying close in his ear, and Enjolras shuts out the noises all around him—the cannon fire, the groans of pain, the pistol shots—focusing on his friend’s words, and only those. “They’re going to rush us, but I say we rush them. It’s our only chance to run them off. We should take it.”

They’re one of the only barricades left in the city, if not the only one, if his reconnaissance is correct. There’s nothing left to lose, and only something to gain.

Otherwise, they’re all dead. He prepared for that. All of them did. But if they can break through that barricade, if they can make one show of strength, it might earn them their survival, and the ability to fight another day.

And make a statement at the same time.

This will not end in a whimper, but in a bright burst of the daylight they all seek to bring about.

That tomb all flooded with the dawn he spoke of still creeps around the edges of his mind with shadowed golden light, and he knows that might still be the case. He finds Bahorel’s idea a smart one, however and their best—their only—chance to keep breathing past this sunrise. He looks around at his remaining friends, his chest tightening with melancholy and love because they are France, they are the future, and he wants them to have their own.

“Prouvaire might be on the other side, too,” Enjolras murmurs, and he hears Bahorel’s sharp intake of breath when he says Prouvaire’s name. The National Guard had taken Prouvaire and another of theirs captive, but they only heard one executioner’s shot.

Perhaps Prouvaire is still alive, if they’re keeping one as ransom.

They don’t know.

*Your friends have just shot you,* Enjolras remembers saying to Inspector Javert when they heard the shot go off.

Truthfully, the inspector barely looked as if he cared. The mysterious man who showed up out of nowhere and blocked the grapeshot with a mattress killed Javert in the end. He’s still here, hovering near an injured but still standing Marius Pontmercy, Courfeyrac watching them with from nearby with a gleam of intrigue in his eyes.
“Tell the others to gather the men that are left. Have them pull out swords, knives, any stray bayonets that fell.” Enjolras keeps his voice low, staying still as another blast of cannon fire explodes into the air. “We need to wait for a lull while they reload the canons, and then, we’ll run at them. Get some of the others to make sure anyone who is injured has a partner to help them out.” He pauses, remembering Grantaire upstairs with a flash of frustration and sympathy all at once, remembering his earlier anger at the friend he can never seem to understand, and certainly hadn’t possessed the time to as the barricade took shape, not when people’s lives were at stake. “Someone needs to wake Grantaire up. We can’t leave up him upstairs.”

“Joly and Bossuet are on it, don’t worry.” Bahorel winces, putting a hand to his wound before he grins at Enjolras, a spark of fire in his eyes. “How is it there’s not a scratch on you?”

Enjolras smiles, his heart pounding in his chest as adrenaline cuts through his exhaustion. “Luck, I suppose.”

Bahorel shoves Enjolras in the arm, his fondness apparent. The new plan spreads in a whisper among those who remain, the air thrumming with a reckless, radical hope, the strange excitement so clear they might have reached out and grasped it to hold onto in what could very well be their last moments on this earth.

Either they live, or they die. And if they die, it won’t be for nothing. Enjolras refuses to believe that.

Even if they die, they’ll have the last word today, just as dawn bursts over the horizon and bathes the barricade in bright, undeniable light. Enjolras spots Feuilly gathering the snipers he’s been directing into a knot behind what’s left of the barricade, preparing some to run over the remains and some directly through the middle. Bahorel comes over to help him, and Enjolras steps over to them both.

He needs to make sure of something.

Feuilly seems to sense Enjolras has something important to say before he even speaks, concern glimmering in his eyes as he brushes a stray auburn-brown hair out of his eyes.

“They’re going to focus on me, if they can, when we run through.” Enjolras keeps his voice steady, holding Feuilly’s eyes even as he hears Bahorel’s noise of disagreement, his friend already knowing what he means by this. “The soldiers. I ask both of you to please make certain Combeferre and Courfeyrac don’t try and chase after me, if I’m arrested. I don’t want anyone else taken in or killed just because I am.”

Feuilly frowns, shaking his head. “That’s not what we do, Enjolras. We don’t leave people behind.”

“It’s not what I want,” Enjolras presses. “But if it comes down to all of you dying just to keep me out of jail, the answer there is clear.”

“Is it?” Feuilly sounds angry now, even as his voice cracks. “Enjolras, understand what you’re asking us to do here.”

“We could break him out of prison later,” Bahorel suggests. “Not impossible.”

“Bahorel,” Feuilly chides, and Bahorel raises his hands in apology.

Feuilly focuses back on Enjolras, putting a hand on Enjolras’ shoulder. “If this is about the man you executed, or the artillery sergeant, then please know you are not stained because of that. None of us love you any less for it.”

Enjolras covers Feuilly’s hand with his own, a heaviness settling into his chest. “It’s not about that.”
Part of it is. Part of it is and you know it, a voice whispers from a dark place inside his head. Part of him wonders if he has a place in this world he’s striving to create, the world that won’t come without bloodshed.

Not yet.

But it is about more than that. It’s about making certain all his friends don’t sacrifice themselves just to keep him out of prison. The logic of that is clear.

The emotion less so.

“I’m not aiming to get taken in,” Enjolras continues, and Feuilly smiles at him now, his pinched, sad expression almost unbearable. “But if they come after me, and the rest of you can get out to safety, please, Feuilly…” Enjolras swallows. “Please tell me none of you will get yourselves killed trying to stop it. Please promise me the two of you will get the rest out. I know this is not easy, but I also know it’s necessary. If you cannot, I understand.”

Feuilly’s face changes at the words please promise me, and Enjolras presses on. It’s not that Enjolras thinks Feuilly will have an easier time of this than the others, but Feuilly’s endless generosity, his fierceness in protecting others, and his innate pragmatism make him the right choice, with Bahorel’s help.

“Nothing may happen. But if it does, please protect the others, Feuilly. I cannot ask this of Courfeyrac, and in this instance Combeferre would…” Enjolras trails off. He knows asking any of his friends to take this burden is too much, but Combeferre, no matter his strength and the brilliance Enjolras so loves, cannot do this. He could not let Enjolras go.

“You’re asking me to live with it if something happens to you, Enjolras.” Feuilly’s words are almost inaudible.

“I know.” Enjolras blinks, letting a tear escape him. “And I’m sorry.”

Feuilly stares at him and Enjolras stares back, the love they bear each other hanging in the air and shimmering in the new, raw, sunlight.

“All right.” Feuilly blinks, wiping away a few of his own tears, squeezing Enjolras’ hand tight. “I will, Enjolras. I promise.”

Bahorel nods in agreement, looking solemn for a moment, and Enjolras thinks it doesn’t suit him.

“I will not promise not to break you out of jail,” Bahorel whispers, his voice brimming with feeling. “I make no promises at all about the lengths we will go to later, if something happens.”

Enjolras nods, out of place laughter bubbling up his throat. “Thank you.” Enjolras allows his voice to break here in the quiet with his two friends. “Thank you both.”

As the cannons fall silent, there’s nothing to do but go forward. Enjolras feels Combeferre’s hand on his back as they stand together awaiting their fate. Courfeyrac’s there too, and Enjolras steps in-between his two friends for a fleeting moment, placing an arm around each and pulling them close to him before he has to let go.

He hopes the small action conveys the I love you that he means.

He stares down the shattered barricade in front of him, taking a deep breath.
Then, they all run. Over pieces of the barricade. Through the ruined middle. Everywhere. The clash of swords and the crack of pistols echoes against the shouts of the National Guard and the single, unified roar of his fellows as they burst through.

Everything happens at once.

*Marius!* Courfeyrac’s voice shoots through the air, worry threaded through every letter of his friend’s name.

Enjolras whips around for a split second, seeing Pontmercy fall. He sees the old man rushing over, and he sees Courfeyrac fending a guard off with his sword cane, but he can’t see the extent of the wound. The approaching footsteps of a soldier force him back to the task at hand, a bullet whizzing just past his cheek with a sharp, insistent sound.

Enjolras has a sword himself—he’s honestly not sure of the origin, he only knows Combeferre handed it to him—adjusting his *canne de combat* skills and using them with a blade instead of cane. His sword clangs against a soldier’s bayonet, the sound crashing into his ears as he forces his opponent to the ground and kicks the weapon away. Gun smoke fills the air, and he can’t keep his eyes on all of his friends at once, he can only focus on what’s in front of him, he can only focus on the sheer confusion they’ve started, watching some of the men from their barricade rocket into the street and away from the National Guard, who don’t quite know what to do.

He hears a cry of alarm behind him,

*Joly.* It sounds like Joly.

His friend’s freckled, cheerful face appears in his mind, and Enjolras spins on his heel, seeing a soldier aiming for a limping Joly with a sharpened bayonet.

And then, another figure. Someone pushing Joly out of the way. Someone with a head of unkempt brown curly hair and stubble on his face.

Grantaire.

Grantaire pushes Joly clear just as the soldier lunges forward with his bayonet, the blade slashing against the side of Grantaire’s arm. Both of them go toppling over, and Enjolras rushes over, kicking the soldier in the knee, hearing a sickening crack resound beneath his shoe. Enjolras meets Grantaire’s eye and helps him up, offering a smile as Grantaire grasps Joly like his life depends upon it. Grantaire gives him an unsure, lopsided smile back just as Bossuet comes to their side.

“Go to Bahorel’s.” Enjolras seizes Bossuet’s wrist, squeezing it tight, admiring Grantaire’s courage even if he can’t process it right now. Grantaire’s loyalty and friendship have always been his good qualities. It’s his follow through where he runs into trouble. But there’s something in Grantaire’s eyes, today. Something new. “Meet there, as agreed upon.”

Bossuet squeezes Enjolras’ wrist in return, his skin slick with sweat in the warm June air. Grantaire looks hesitant to leave Enjolras there, and he grasps Enjolras’ hand before he throws Joly’s arm around his own shoulders, he and Bossuet both helping him walk. There’s not time for another word, there’s not time for another *thought*, as Enjolras watches his friends run down the narrow Rue de la Chanverie.

The chaos is to his advantage.

Until it isn’t.
He hears the words, *you bastard*, just before he feels someone kick his shin, a boot heel smashing into the bone hard enough to leave a bruise, at least. Enjolras keeps upright, spinning around and facing a man who can’t be much older than him.

“That artillery sergeant you shot?” The man bites out the words. “That was my friend. But you don’t care about that, do you?”

*I do care*, Enjolras wants to say, but he can’t let that memory overcome him. Not right now.

“The leader is here!” the soldier shouts, drawing the attention of his fellows. “Let’s haul him in.”

Several soldiers rush over, and though Enjolras thinks he could fight off a few on his own, he’s not sure he can push all of them off at once. Out of the corner of his eye he sees Bahorel emerge from the crowd and the smoke, holding up someone much smaller than him. Someone unconscious, but breathing.

Enjolras’ heart beats faster.

Prouvaire. Jean Prouvaire is *alive*. Blood drips from a wound on Jehan’s forehead, his reddish-blonde hair matted with sweat.

But he’s *alive*.

Gavroche stands at Bahorel’s elbow, a gun in his hand despite all their efforts to keep one from him.

One of the soldiers looks behind and directly at them.

If Enjolras lets the soldiers take him, maybe they’ll be too distracted to notice their other prisoner being taken away.

He drops his sword and throws his pistol to the ground, locking eyes with Bahorel, a thousand years passing in a matter of a few seconds.

Then, he raises his hands.

“Don’t move!” one of the soldiers shouts, as another seizes his arms roughly and pulls them behind, making quick work of binding them with rope, the coarse material cutting into Enjolras’ skin.

Enjolras hears a voice. He hears a voice calling his name.

*Enjolras*!

Courfeyrac.

He just makes out his friend’s face, realizing with a jolt that he hasn’t seen Marius or the old man — they never did get his name, did they?—since he saw Marius fall.

Nearby, he sees an open sewer grate.

Did they go through *there*?

He doesn’t have time to think further, his heart screeching to a halt when someone else runs up beside Courfeyrac, his spectacles cracked.

Combeferre.
Combeferre doesn’t need to speak for Enjolras to make out the devastation on his face.

Both of them step forward as the soldiers drag Enjolras away, and Enjolras would rather die here and now himself than watch bullets strike Combeferre and Courfeyrac down when they’re so close to getting away.

*Enjolras!*

Courfeyrac’s scream pierces the air, and Combeferre cocks his pistol, preparing to shoot the guards pulling Enjolras down the street.

*No. No no no.* If Combeferre shoots, if Courfeyrac runs forward, both of them might die for trying to save him. He remembers shooting Le Cabuc. He remembers his own words.

*Soon you shall see the fate to which I have condemned myself.*

And Combeferre’s words.

*We will share thy fate!*

He knows better than anyone that his friends knew what they were risking by doing this just as much as he does. But they’re so close to keeping their lives intact, they’re *so close*, and he can’t bear to see them go down now. Feuilly runs up to Courfeyrac and Combeferre with Gavroche at his heels. Bahorel comes up behind him, Prouvaire still slung over his shoulder. Feuilly keeps Courfeyrac physically back as Combeferre argues with Bahorel, likely knowing Enjolras’ motivations. Enjolras can’t make out the words, but he knows how sharp Combeferre’s barbs can be better than anyone, especially if he’s upset.

The trouble is, the ruckus draws the attention of the guards pulling Enjolras away. He sees two of their gazes dart over toward his friends as Feuilly and Gavroche tug Courfeyrac and Combeferre away, Bahorel’s hands full with carrying Prouvaire. Enjolras’ hands are bound, but his feet are still free, and he kicks one of the guards with all his remaining strength, their attention falling back on him.

One of the soldier’s slaps him so hard that he stumbles, falling to the ground and smacking his head on the paving stones.

The last thing he sees as his vision goes blurry are his friends rushing down the narrow street. The last thing he hears is Combeferre shouting his name, his friend’s voice ragged and broken and spilled out across the ground in pieces.

*Enjolras!*

Then, everything goes black.

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Javert directs the carriage back to the station.

He’s not even sure why, really.

He should be dead.

He should be *dead*. 
Valjean should have killed him. Instead, Valjean had offered himself up. They rode in a carriage together to take the Pontmercy boy home, then to Valjean’s home itself.

And then…

And then Javert left. He didn’t arrest Valjean. He didn’t do his duty. He just…

Left.

The entire world shudders beneath his feet as he steps out of the carriage, the fog in his mind refusing to dissipate.

Valjean let him go. Valjean spared him. Valjean went through the muck and the mud for an insurgent and for what?

Valjean is…

Valjean…

Valjean is right.

Valjean is good.

No. That cannot be. It cannot be.

It is. It is.

Javert steps around to the side of the station and out of sight of two of the officers exiting.

Has goodness been Javert’s goal? Being irreproachable, yes. But good? What is good? There is the law and chaos. Criminals and citizens. Everything made sense, before today. Everything made sense.

He can’t do this. He can’t do this.

What’s this, the voice in the back of his head asks. What can’t you do?

Live, he answers back with an internal snarl. I can’t live. Not like this.

He curls one hand into a fist and leans against the wall, a rush of maddening energy overcoming him. A letter. Yes, he wants to write a letter to the prefect. He’ll just go inside, do that, and then…

Well then he’ll throw himself into the Seine. Yes. Yes that’s it. That’s what he’ll do. A loud, shrieking noise screams an unending chorus inside his head and he shuts his eyes, feeling tears run down his cheeks. Tears, of all things!

He hasn’t cried since…

He doesn’t know the last time he cried, the memory lost to time.

You’re going to kill yourself after someone spared your life?

He didn’t want a criminal sparing his life. He can’t live under the weight that Valjean was right all along, perhaps. That he was wrong. Long buried feelings rise to the surface, memories of his boyhood raised by the state after they took him from the prison where he spent his early years with his mother, memories of anger and fear and loneliness. He possessed but one choice, in those days: to prey on society, or to guard it, because he could never take true part. Not someone like him, born
in the world’s gutter.

He chose to guard.

Except now he can’t even do that, because he let Valjean. Go.

What is the world, if not how he’s defined it for so many years?

Maybe he shouldn’t go inside at all. Maybe he’ll just write his letter and then…

“Inspector Javert, sir.” One of his underlings, Chevalier, approaches, cutting through Javert’s spinning thoughts. “Are you quite all right? You look pale.”

“I’m fine, Chevalier.” Javert stands up straight again, ignoring the fact that his buckle is somewhere near his ear instead of in the proper place.

Chevalier bites his lip, but ploughs forward anyway. “We’ve been looking for you, sir. For your help with something.”

“My help with what?”

“The National Guard brought in one of the barricade leaders, sir. From the barricade where you were, I believe.”

Javert stares at him, not quite processing the words.

“From the barricade on Chanverie, sir?” Chevalier’s voice goes higher in question. “One of the last to fall. If not the last.”

“Yes, I understand!” Javert shouts, making Chevalier jump. He closes his eyes, taking a deep breath, forcing a calm he doesn’t feel into his veins. “What happened?”

“The insurgents rushed the National Guard, and they…well…” Chevalier twists his fingers, his eyes darting around and looking anywhere but at Javert himself as though fearing a reprimand. “…most got away. But they caught the leader. He surrendered to them.”

Javert perks up, the overpowering thoughts of flinging himself into the deep, dark river still swimming forefront in his mind, but he can’t tear himself away from this. He can’t look suspicious, after all. Or they’ll suspect him of wanting to throw himself into the Seine.

Or worse, of letting a criminal go. Not just Valjean, but an insurgent, too.

Javert rubs his temples. The worst possible situation, if so many got away.

Of course.

“What do you need my help with, Chevalier?”

“They’ve been interrogating him for hours, sir. He won’t tell them anything. We thought maybe you would be able to do something.”

Javert gestures him forward, and there isn’t even a moment for him to collect himself, his heart still racing as heavy nausea takes root in the pit of his stomach, pushing upward until his throat burns with acid.

Bisset, another inspector though still below Javert in seniority, meets him outside the door of one of
the unused offices in the station, where they must be keeping Enjolras.

“Javert.” Bisset nods. “We’ve been waiting for you. The insurgent is inside. We hope to know where some of his fellows might have gone, plans for any other strikes, things like that.”

Javert half waves his colleague off, making the other man draw back in confusion.

“I require a moment alone with the prisoner,” Javert says, not really knowing why he’s saying it. “Open the door if I knock.” He stops when he puts his hand on the doorknob, remembering Enjolras’ fierceness. “Is he in irons?”

Bisset nods in assent.

Then, Javert goes inside.

Enjolras looks terrible.

He sits with his legs tied to the chair, his wrists in shackles. He looks up when Javert comes in the door, his bloodshot eyes widening in utter shock. There’s a wound near the side of his head, the blood dried into his unfashionably long fair hair. A purple bruise spreads across his left cheek like a violent flower, the knuckles of his right hand cut up and smeared with red.

And those are just the injuries Javert can see.

Javert steps further into the room and Enjolras just keeps staring at him, those bright blue eyes Javert remembers from when the boy offered him water oddly hazy and unfocused.

“You’re supposed to be dead.”

Enjolras’ voice sounds hoarse, like he’s been without water for far too long.

_İ wish I was_, Javert thinks. _Soon, I may be._

Javert clears his throat, stepping closer so he might gain a better look. “I’m not.”

Enjolras narrows his eyes at the obvious answer, but Javert’s gaze is drawn down toward the boy’s arm, which is oddly bent. Enjolras holds his wrist gingerly in his opposite hand, his forearm laid out across his lap, an awkward feat while in irons. The sleeve is still down, so Javert can’t get a proper look.

“How?” Enjolras narrows his eyes even further, the blue irises turning to slits. “What?”

“Are you an imbecile?” Javert snaps. “I said how.”

Enjolras coughs, wincing, and Javert suspects his ribs might be bruised, also. “I know what you meant. I don’t understand why you’re asking.”
“Because I’d like to know if my officers did this or not. Yes or no, for now.”

“No.”

Javert strides to the door, his knock making a resounding echo through the small office. Bisset opens it, sticking his head inside. “Yes, sir?”

“Water, please. For the prisoner.”

Bisset raises his eyebrows, but doesn’t comment. Javert steps outside and shuts the door behind him, feeling angry for reasons he doesn’t entirely understand.

“Did the officers here do this? He’s in rough shape, which you didn’t bother to tell me.”

Bisset furrows his eyebrows instead. “No, sir. The guardsmen got a bit out of hand, I suppose. Not surprising, that wretch must have killed plenty of their fellows.”

Javert huffs. “The National Guard will not have to pay for his medical care. The water, if you please.”

Javert thinks again of the letter he intended to write before he got pulled into this, and the section on barefoot prisoners and medical costs he intended to put in. The dark, whirling waters of the Seine seem far away in the bustling station, the chatter of officers loud even in the middle of the night. Usually it’s quiet now, but the chaos in the streets has everyone on double time.

What would Valjean do in this situation?

Javert closes his eyes once more, centering himself in the here and now. He cannot let this internal war inside him spill outward to his colleagues’ notice. It doesn’t matter what Valjean would do. Valjean is not a police officer. Valjean is a convict.

*It does matter now, and you know it.*

Javert looks around the station, studying his fellow officers. Do they have these conflicts? Do they feel torn? Do they question?

He doesn’t dare ask them.

Many of them have wives. Children. Friendships. People they love and who love them, he supposes.

He has none of that. Not really.

What is love in the face of the world’s darkness? A complication. A danger. Nothing more.

*Are you sure?*

He loved his mother as a boy, though the memories of her are faint. Should he have loved a criminal? A child didn’t know better.

He soon learned.

He pushes a stray piece of black hair behind his ear, adjusting his buckle so it’s in place. Bisset brings the water and Javert goes back into the interrogation room without another word. He carries the water to Enjolras, who leans away from him, his sharp intake of breath loud in the quiet room.

“Drink this.” Javert’s words are nothing less than a command, and Enjolras pulls back further, even
as his eyes dart down to the glass of water with a hint of desperation.

How long has he gone without?

Javert hasn’t checked the time for a while, but it’s past midnight, he thinks. On the seventh. If they took him in early this morning, it’s been fifteen hours or more.

“Drink.”

Enjolras meets Javert’s gaze dead on then looks down at the glass again, giving a nod. Javert doesn’t dare undo the irons, so he tilts the glass to Enjolras’ lips like Enjolras did for him at the barricade.

*This brat was going to let Valjean shoot you. He was going to have you killed, no matter what. Remember that before you feel sorry for him.*

*I don’t feel sorry for him.*

*How can you complain about him ordering your death if you want to be dead anyway?*

*That was before…it was before Valjean. Before he let me go. Before I owed a convict my life.*

*I suppose that shows how little you care for your own survival.*

Enjolras drinks half the glass down before he ceases, and up close Javert sees the sweat beading along his hairline. Javert puts the glass down on the desk that’s been pushed aside, his mind running a mile a minute.

This is any other interrogation. This is any other day any other minute any other second.

It isn’t. It *isn’t*. His life stands on a fragile edge as he looks out into the abyss, everything shattered around him.

He doesn’t know who he is, anymore. So he’ll have to pretend.

“I have heard that you’ve refused to give up any information on your comrades who escaped,” Javert says, standing in front of Enjolras. “I assume you understand why they sent me in here as a last resort.”

Enjolras keeps his eyes fixed on the wall behind Javert, not looking at Javert himself. “I assume because you are the one who makes people talk.” Pain weaves itself into Enjolras’ words, and Javert feels something strange pricking his chest. Something sympathetic.

No. No. *No.*

None of this forgiving, weak, Valjean *nonsense.*

“I am not afraid of you, Inspector Javert.”

Enjolras words, soft as they are, ring in the room. Inside Javert’s head. Perhaps out into the streets of Paris itself.

No one *will* fear him, if they get word he let a convict go free.

Javert steps forward on a wave of anger and mania, seizing Enjolras’ chin even as the boy’s involuntary gasp of pain sinks into Javert’s bones.
“You will tell me. And you should be.”

If he can get this information, any information, on the insurgents, no matter how small, maybe that will make up for letting Valjean go free?

_You can go arrest him if you want, fool. You know the address._

_I can’t. I can’t._

“No.”

“I will make certain the court knows you were uncooperative when the time comes for your trial, and it will certainly weigh on your sentencing. It might mean the difference between prison and death, do you understand me, boy?”

Enjolras meets Javert’s eyes again, and the burn in them makes Javert flinch, because it feels like a judgement.

“I understand very well, inspector.”

Javert remembers Enjolras’ strange kindness to him at the barricade, especially odd given Enjolras also sentenced him to die. He lets go, stepping back again.

“I am not so important,” Enjolras continues. “Not even the chief of a large barricade. Only a small one.”

“We are interested in any insurgent, their knowledge, and their comrades,” Javert growls. “What is more important than saving your own skin, hmm?”

Enjolras looks somewhere off in the distance when he speaks again, a flash of life passing across his drawn, bruised face.

“My own safety, my very life, is not worth more than the safety and lives of my friends, Inspector Javert. You will never hear me utter their names or their whereabouts. You will not hear anything that was ever discussed among us, no matter what you or a court might promise me in return.”

Enjolras speaks the words with the ring of an old hymn, something ancient and powerful that might echo at night from the bell tower of Notre Dame.

Something about it sounds like Valjean, too. Three simple words that turned Javert’s world upside down.

_You are free._

Then later, after they took the Pontmercy boy home: _Inspector Javert, grant me yet another favor._

And he did it. He did it because Valjean spared him, even though Javert shouted at him to kill him. The kindness in his voice was unbearable, and Javert can’t stop thinking about it.

He hears that same kindness in Enjolras’ voice now, different and perhaps less gentle and more passionate than Valjean’s, but God, he hears it still.

But criminals are selfish. Criminals think only of themselves.

_Valjean stole to feed children, didn’t he? And this boy risks his life for his friends? Is that selfish?_ The voice speaks again.
It's illegal, he argues back.

When Javert gets up, he barely knows what he’s doing. He knocks once more on the door to the office, and Bisset and Chevalier both step inside.

“This is a useless exercise,” Javert says, abrupt. “And unfortunately we must tend to the insurgent’s broken arm. Where are the rebels being sent?”

“La Force, for now,” Bisset answers, still looking perplexed. “But we can keep him here, surely. Call for a doctor.”

“No.” Annoyance cuts into Javert’s voice, even though he has no plans to take Enjolras to La Force at all.

He’s going to Rue de l'Homme Arme, No. 7.

“La Force has an infirmary already,” Javert continues. “And therefore we will not incur extra costs paying a private physician. Besides, you did not see this particular insurgent in action. I did. He needs to be locked up where he cannot get out. Trust my word.”

“Yes sir.” Bisset looks less suspicious and more worried now, sharing a look with Chevalier. “Are you sure you’re quite all right, Inspector Javert? Have you slept?”

“I am perfectly fine, Bisset. I will sleep as soon as I am able. Retrieve me something that might be used as a sling for his arm, if you please, and Chevalier, hail a fiacre.”

Both men do as asked. Soon enough Enjolras’ arm is in a makeshift sling and they’re climbing into the fiacre, Javert forced to help Enjolras inside given his injuries. They sit across from one another, moonlight flowing in through the window and lending an ethereal glow to Enjolras’ young face.

“How did you break your arm?” Javert asks, speaking his curiosity aloud without really meaning to. “Not during the fighting itself?”

Enjolras stares at him, the blood in his hair and the bruise on his face somehow more prominent in the eerie light of the Parisian streets at one in the morning.

“Why?”

“Answer me, Enjolras.”

Enjolras sighs, probably too exhausted to fight him.

“One of the guardsmen struck me with the butt of his pistol until I heard a snap. That, and the pain indicated to me it must be broken.”

A month ago, a few days ago, Javert would not have cared about the injury of a criminal. A treasonous criminal, at that. And if he had, he would have pushed it down down down until it vanished.

Now, he does. He cares about the excessive use of force after someone’s surrender.

Why does he care?

He hates it.

He *hates* it.
Yet, here he is.

When the fiacre pulls up to Valjean’s street Enjolras speaks again, confusion and exhaustion melting into one emotion in his voice.

“This isn’t La Force.”

“Very astute,” Javert grumbles, as he helps the boy out. “Don’t say a word, do you hear me?”

Enjolras doesn’t agree, but Javert steps toward number seven anyway, giving a firm knock on the door.

Valjean appears when it opens a few seconds later, his shock of white hair tousled like he’s been running his fingers through it over and over again. Javert watches emotions cascade through Valjean’s eyes: fear, grief, a strange sort of relief, and some things he can’t name.

“Inspector Javert you’re…” Valjean pauses, unsure how to finish his sentence, his hand grasping the doorknob until his knuckles pop white. “…back.”

Javert gestures Enjolras into the doorway, and Valjean’s eyes widen as he gives a start.

Javert speaks four unexpected words to the most unexpected man of all.

“Monsieur Fauchelevent, I need your help.”
Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

Enjolras finds himself under the care of Valjean, Javert, and Cosette, tenuous new bonds forming even as emotions run high. Valjean wonders what to do with a wanted man and a police inspector in his house, fretful over whether or not to tell the truth about his life to Cosette. The Amis regroup, devastated by Enjolras’ arrest. Javert opts for life, instead of death.

Chapter Notes

Ta da, a new chapter! I don't think I'll always be able to update this fast, but I got lucky this week! Thank you all so much for the lovely comments last chapter, and I hope you enjoy this installment!

“I need to understand something.” Pain thrums through Enjolras’ body to the point of distraction, but he has to understand why a police inspector would bring him here. “You, Inspector Javert, have brought me to the home of the man who told me that he killed you. And not to prison.”

“I will take you to prison if you keep asking questions,” Javert mutters, sounding more like a petulant child than the forbidding police inspector from earlier.

“I have a right…” Enjolras sucks in a breath as the dull, pounding ache in the back of his head grows more persistent. “To understand where I am and what is happening.”

Javert stomps his boot heel on the ground. “You have no rights. You broke the law.”

Something about these words draw…Monsieur Fauchelevent? Enjolras thinks that’s the name he heard, but his mind is hazy and he doesn’t know what happened to his friends and the pain is nearing unbearable levels and he doesn’t know what’s happening to him.

“Come in, out of the street.” Fauchelevent ushers them in, putting an arm around Enjolras’ shoulder and helping him to a chair just inside the entrance.

Enjolras appreciates the kindness but he tenses nevertheless, because he doesn’t know who to trust. This certainly feels safer than La Force, but he doesn’t want to fall prey to a trick. The house is clean and modest, though devoid of anything ornate. A vase of flowers on the table next to him adds a splash of color into the darkness, and Enjolras sees a small pool of light coming from a room near the bottom of the stairs. An office, perhaps? He remembers seeing the sewer grate open, with no sign of Marius or this Fauchelevent man in sight. He glances at Fauchelevent, seeing the purple smears below his dull, tired eyes and shock of white curly hair.

Did he take Marius through the sewers? If so, why did he rescue him?

Fauchelevent looks to Javert, striking a match and lighting a candle as he does so, an orange glow
illuminating the shadowy hallway. “What happened to him? Did you do this?”

Javert crosses his arms over his chest, looking affronted. “No. The National Guard did. We’ll need a doctor. His left arm is broken, to start with.”

“Inspector Javert…” Monsieur Fauchelevent pauses, his skin paling. “Are you here to arrest me for…my part in the barricade? Because if so, I need to know.”

There’s something odd in the way the older man lands on the words my part in the barricade, as if he’s leaving something out. As if he’s leaving a thousand things out.

Javert crosses his arms over his chest, releasing a sharp huff as a tendril of his long black hair comes loose, falling around his face. “I hardly think I’d bring an insurgent leader to your doorstep if that were true. I’m risking everything to do this. I’ve never done anything like this in my life.”

There’s an odd ghost of a smile on Fauchelevent’s face. “And you came here.”

Enjolras wants to ask then why did you do it, he wants to ask how do you know each other, he wants to ask how much do both of you know about my friends, but he can’t quite force the words out, his entire body one unending throb of pain, his arm chief among them. Nausea makes his stomach ache, and he feels very near to vomiting, if he’s telling the truth, and the idea of losing his non-existent lunch—when was the last time he ate?—in a stranger’s home, is mortifying. He wills the nausea back, but he can’t will back the pain.

“My daughter is here, inspector.” Fauchelevent sounds the tiniest bit irritated. “What am I to tell her?”

“Do you want me to take the boy elsewhere?” Javert snaps. “Because there is nowhere else, as I possess few acquaintances who might hide a law-breaking treasonous rebel.”

“No,” Fauchelevent says. “No, of course not, he needs help.”

They talk further, the words sounding like nonsense in Enjolras’ ears. Something about needing a doctor and something else about what Javert will tell his superiors, and so on and so forth, but Enjolras can’t make out anything else.

At least, not until footsteps come creeping down the stairs.

“Papa?” A woman’s voice, asking the question of a child. “What’s going on?”

Fauchelevent turns from his half-argument with Javert, his face going even whiter, because he clearly hasn’t had a chance to think of what to tell his daughter.

“Cosette,” Fauchelevent says. “I….”

Cosette. Cosette. The name rings in Enjolras’ head. He knows the name. Why does he know it?

Cosette.

Cosette is her name, apparently, he hears Courfeyrac say, sprawled out on Enjolras’ bed with a newspaper in his hands as Combeferre perused the bookshelves, looking for something. Marius thought her name was Ursula, of all things, can you imagine? I don’t know what he’d do without me, sometimes. Or ever, really.

This is the girl Pontmercy is in love with.
Cosette comes all the way down the stairs, her voice the kindest thing Enjolras has heard since his arrest.

“This young man is hurt!” she exclaims, clearly not needing an immediate explanation for why there’s a bleeding stranger in her house in the middle of the night. “Why is he sitting in a chair like this? He needs to be in bed.” She squats down in front of Enjolras’ chair, not touching him for fear she might exacerbate an injury. “We have a guest room, would that be all right? I know you must have come from the barricades.”

“The inspector here asked that we give him a safe place to stay,” Fauchelevent says. “Inspector Javert, this is my daughter, Cosette. Cosette, this is Inspector Javert, I knew him when I was…a younger man.”

Through the fog in his mind, Enjolras sees Javert look at Cosette with widened eyes, giving a jolt when Fauchelevent says her name. He clenches one fist and undoes it again, his nostrils flaring.

Why is this young woman’s name evoking such a guilty expression in a forbidding police inspector? What is going on?

Javert casts a glance around the room as if he hasn’t felt the emotions he’s experiencing until this very moment, then looks back at Cosette.

“Madmoiselle.” He nods his head.

Cosette returns the greeting and furrows her eyebrows, clearly knowing something else is afoot, but she doesn’t question it just now. She brushes a strand of chestnut hair behind her ear, the candlelight revealing the deep gold undertones hidden within the brown. “We are going to help him, aren’t we, Papa? I don’t understand why he’s still sitting here in this chair.”

“Yes, of course.” His daughter seems to restore Fauchelevent to himself, and Enjolras sees a kind gleam in his eyes as he comes over. “I’ll help you up the stairs if you can stand?”

Enjolras nods, thinking he can stand.

He’s wrong.

His legs give out as soon as he stands up, quaking beneath him until his feet give way entirely. He angles himself so he doesn’t fall on his broken arm as he crashes to the floor, a sharp searing pain shooting through the angry limb nonetheless. He tries to get up, but he can’t, god he can’t. His ribs ache afresh, and he’s certain when he removes his shirt he’ll see a bruise in the shape of a National Guardsman’s boot. He hasn’t eaten, and his only water was just an hour ago.

Fauchelevent crouches down next to him in an oddly graceful way for such a broad, strong man.

“Let me carry you up.”

Enjolras shakes his head, heat flooding his cheeks and blotching them red. “I just need assistance, you don’t have to.”

“Your legs gave out twice,” Enjolras hears Inspector Javert’s sharp voice, and he still doesn’t know why he was brought here, he doesn’t understand. “So I doubt that’s true.”

Enjolras props himself partway up on his good arm, feeling exhaustion rush over him in intoxicating waves so strong he might just fall asleep on the floor. “How am I to trust you?” Enjolras directs his question to Fauchelevent. “You…you helped us a great deal at the barricade and then you lied to me
about Inspector Javert. How do I know I can believe anything you tell me?”

Javert rolls his eyes. “This is farce. If we were in a conspiracy against you I would have just have taken you to La Force.”

Enjolras notices that Javert doesn’t speak to the comment about his averted death.

“But why did you bring me here?” Enjolras presses. A cold sweat breaks out along his hairline, the beads creating a damp path down his cold, clammy skin.

God, when was the last time he slept? Not during the barricade, not at the police station.

Two days, at least. It’s the seventh, isn’t it? Did the barricade only fall yesterday morning? Enjolras remembers gazing out at the golden horizon slicing through the early morning darkness, grasping onto his dreams for a changed France even as his hopes for this particular revolt fell in blood-soaked ashes at his feet.

He won’t let go of the dawn in his soul, even if grief makes it shudder here in the dark.

He won’t.

Fauchelevent looks at Enjolras and then at Javert, before his eyes finally rest on Cosette, who looks at him with both concern and intrigue, like she’s hanging onto the fragmented thread of a long-held secret.


A silence rings loud and overwhelming in the room, and Enjolras realizes even in his state of pain and exhaustion that Fauchelevent seems to have revealed something with larger ramifications than just Marius’ rescue, even if he hasn’t spoken the words yet. It still leaves the question of how Fauchelevent and the inspector know each other, it still leaves the question of why Javert didn’t take him to prison, but that information is enough, the fatherly air and the gentle gleam in Fauchelevent’s eyes is enough, to make Enjolras understand that he might be safe in this house.

As safe as he can be anywhere.

He might trust Fauchelevent. Or there’s at least the potential.

He doesn’t trust Javert. He can’t. There’s something wild in his eyes. Something unstable he’s only barely concealing.

*He saved you,* that voice whispers in the back of his head.

Enjolras glances at Javert, feeling an odd sympathy rush through his veins. He feels a strong impulse toward kindness for this strange police officer, but he doesn’t yet know if Javert regrets his impulsive choice.

Until then, he’ll remain careful.

“Papa…” Cosette’s whispered word threads through the air like gossamer strands, fragile and unsure, love held fast between every letter. “You saved Marius’ life? I…” she looks over at Enjolras again, the situation at hand coming back to her. “I am so grateful. But I know we need to get Enjolras…” she smiles at Enjolras then, testing out the name. “Upstairs. But please tell me, was Marius alive
when you took him home?”

Fauchelevent nods, wiping away a few tears. “Yes. He was quite ill, but alive.”

Unlike her father, Cosette lets her tears flow down her cheeks unabated.

Fauchelevent turns back to Enjolras again. “Let me get you upstairs, all right?”

Finally, Enjolras relents. Fauchelevent lifts him up from the floor like he weighs nothing, carrying him up the stairs and whispering some words Enjolras can’t make out to the servant who appears in the hallway, roused from sleep. Cosette goes with her to help with whatever Fauchelevent requested, looking behind her as she follows the other woman. Fauchelevent sets Enjolras down on a bed in what must be the guest chambers Cosette mentioned, Javert coming in just behind.

Enjolras sits on the edge of the bed, resting his head in his hands for a moment so he might ease his dizziness.

“Inspector.” Fauchelevent says the word with a touch of concern and a touch of stifled fear, but still with a pinch of authority, like a memory from someone he was long ago. “I need you to please go for the doctor. There’s one just a few doors down at number ten.”

“Me?” Javert asks. “Why? What am I supposed to tell them? I can’t tell them he’s an insurgent.” Javert’s deep, gravelly voice sounds almost childlike here, and Enjolras still doesn’t understand what the connection is between these two.

“Because you are a police inspector and will be listened to faster,” Fauchelevent says. A hint of bitterness splashes onto the words, like the ghost of a man Fauchelevent tries hard to keep at bay. “That is the way of things. You’ll tell them Enjolras was accosted by insurgents who got away.”

Those words burn Enjolras like fire, but before he opens his mouth to speak, Javert cuts him off.

“You will abide by whatever story we say,” Javert growls. “No arguments.”

Enjolras narrows his eyes. “Who are you, to dictate to me?”

Javert leans forward, narrowing his own eyes in mockery. “The police officer who saved your sorry hide, boy. Don’t make me regret it. Part of me already does.”

“Inspector…” Fauchelevent warns. “Please go.”

Javert spins on his heel and adjusts his great coat with a huff, his footsteps making the stairs creak as he goes.

Enjolras is left alone with Fauchelevent.

Despite himself, the wild look in the inspector’s eyes worries Enjolras.

*You were going to let him die,* a voice whispers in the back of his head. *And now you worry.*

*We’re away from the barricade,* Enjolras argues back. *This is not a place for death and violence. He’s alive, and he saved me, for whatever reason.*

“I think something might be the matter with Inspector Javert,” he tells Fauchelevent. “I don’t know him well, obviously, but he seemed different from the man I spoke with at the barricade when he came into the police station. If you know him, perhaps you ought to ask him if he’s all right.”
Fauchelevent nods, lighting another candle so they might see better. “I’ll talk to him upon his return.”

A thousand questions run through Enjolras’ mind, but he can’t make himself ask them. Instead, a secret vulnerability comes rushing out of his mouth.

“I’m afraid Inspector Javert knows my friends’ names,” Enjolras whispers. “How am I to know he won’t turn around and report them?”

“He brought you here.” Fauchelevent gestures at Enjolras’ shoes and slides them off himself at Enjolras’ nod. “I don’t think he will. Let me see your arm?”

Enjolras nods again, biting his lip against a gasp as Fauchelevent slides his sleeve up, Cosette coming inside with a bowl of water and cloths just as he does so. The arm looks as bad as it feels: it’s oddly bent, a purple bruise splattered across the skin.

“Oh,” Cosette breaths, dampening a cloth and reaching out toward Enjolras’ forehead before drawing back again. “Do you mind if I clean up your face a bit? If it hurts, just tell me.”

“Thank you,” Enjolras answers, giving his permission. “I appreciate it.”

It feels so strange not to be able to take care of himself. To let strangers take care of him, and not the friends he already misses with a sharp pang in the center of his chest.

How will he get word to them? He’s afraid to tell anyone Bahorel’s address. Even these people helping him. He can’t endanger them, even if he knows they’ll be desperate for word of him, especially if they show up at La Force.

Cosette starts working away at some of the dried blood around his hairline, tutting at the red streaked through his hair and the cut spread across the knuckles of his right hand.

“Touissant is putting together some food,” Cosette tells Enjolras, sharing a look with her father, her eyes glimmering with questions, but she stays on the task at hand for now. “I wasn’t sure when you’d last eaten. And she’s bringing a pitcher of water, too. Your lips are cracked, I noticed.”

“Thank you,” Enjolras repeats. “You are kind, mademoiselle.”

Cosette smiles at him, then looks back at Fauchelevent. “How’s his arm, Papa?”

“I’m no doctor, but it’s definitely broken,” Fauchelevent mutters, searching Enjolras for other injuries. “And I see the blood in your hair, a head wound, I assume?”

Enjolras nods. “The guardsmen knocked my head into the paving stones. I…I passed out for a bit. I think there’s bruised ribs, too.”

“Hmm.” Something about the mix of anger and the absentmindedness in Fauchelevent’s voice reminds Enjolras of Combeferre, and the homesickness for his friends washes over him afresh. He longs for Combeferre and Joly to tend to him now, and not some strange doctor he doesn’t know. He longs to know if Jean Prouvaire is all right. He can’t get the sound of Courfeyrac screaming his name out of his ears and Feuilly’s devastation at being asked to leave him behind out of his head. He remembers Grantaire shoving Joly aside and out of the way of a bayonet. He remembers grasping Bossuet’s wrist and sending him off toward Bahorel’s as gun-smoke hung acrid and thick in the air. He misses them.

His hands start shaking again, and Fauchelevent notices, putting one of his own over Enjolras’.
“I know you are having a difficult time trusting anyone.” Fauchelevent’s timbre sounds like Enjolras’ father’s but deeper, reminding him of his childhood and all the nightmares his père soothed.

This nightmare is all too real.

“But you are safe here,” Fauchelevent continues, sounding every inch a father himself. “I promise you that.”

The words soak into Enjolras’ mind, and he’s so exhausted, and Fauchelevent’s face so kind, that he can’t do anything but believe him.

Valjean leans against the wall outside his guest bedchamber, taking this fraction of a moment to himself. Javert is in with the doctor, explaining their altered story about insurgents attacking Enjolras a few streets over, and the doctor doesn’t seem to question it, acquainted with Valjean as he is.

Valjean doesn’t know what to do.

There’s a wanted man in his house. There’s a police inspector who was bent on arresting him just hours ago in his house. His secret about Marius is out.

*Why don’t you want Cosette to know? Why are you so bent on keeping the best of yourself from her?*

*Because if she marries soon, there won’t be room for me. I can’t tarnish her with my past and what it means for everything about my future, I can’t…*

Things have changed, now.

He’ll have to tell her…something.

*Everything.*

No.

Yes.

With Javert in the house, it’s inevitable, isn’t it?

*She’ll hate you.*

She won’t.

He wants to be angry at Javert for breaking all this open. For showing up here and not giving him any room to think on what he might tell Cosette.

How he might continue to keep the past from her. To protect her. To keep her safe.

But he can’t. Not entirely. Enjolras needs help. Truth be told, Javert looks like he needs help. What had taken the unbendable, unbreakable police inspector and put a tremble in his voice?

*You spared his life. You, a convict.*

Is that enough to shatter a man?

But they’re both shattered, aren’t they? Javert because a criminal did something kind. Himself
because he might lose the daughter who means everything to him. Perhaps the young man just on the other side of the door shares their feeling. Valjean doesn’t think so entirely, though the adamantine soul he bore witness to on the barricades does seem cracked. Valjean remembers listening to the speech Enjolras gave, the words soaring through the air and lifting up his weary old heart. Even if Valjean isn’t sure how to accept Enjolras’ willingness to sacrifice his young life for his beliefs, he cannot deny the lad’s rightness of soul. He remembers Enjolras falling silent after the speech, studying his palms with wide-eyes in a secret, darkened corner of the barricade, as if searching for blood that was no longer there. Enjolras had wiped his hand on his trousers before going back over to his friends, leaving no trace of anything on the fabric. Death haunted that youthful, life-bright face as he walked around the barricade, his fair hair gleaming against the shadow.

Three paths have intersected, leading three very different men down roads he guesses they never expected. Javert into a conspiracy to keep safe a rebel. Enjolras alive where he expected death, a half-freedom where he expected prison. Valjean himself where…

What was his plan, before Javert knocked on the door?

Save Marius. If things worked out, watch Cosette marry Marius. And then…

An empty, black space lays out before him, and he realizes he doesn’t have an answer. He wants Cosette to be happy more than anything in the entire world, and if that means marrying that young man, he will do everything in his power to make it happen. But he doesn’t know how to be a father-in-law to Marius, with all his secrets. He can’t let those secrets harm Cosette, once she’s safe with a husband.

Who knows how long he is for this world? What matters most is Cosette’s joy, whatever that means for him.

But now there is also Javert. There is this young man Valjean finds himself drawn to.

The sound of footsteps pull him from his thoughts. Cosette comes down the hallway with her dressing gown tied properly now, and her hair braided back. She puts her hands out for Valjean’s, and he can’t do anything but take them.

“Papa,” she whispers. “I can’t believe you weren’t going to tell me you saved Marius’ life. That you went to the barricades just for that.” She pauses, tilting her head and giving him a chiding look. “Actually, I can believe it. Why are you always so determined to hide things? Even good things? Papa, I couldn’t be more grateful. And more relieved that you survived.”

Valjean squeezes her hands, pressing a kiss to her forehead. “Thank you for being so willing to accept Enjolras into our home. It may cause some trouble, I fear.”

“He’s hurt, and very brave.” Cosette casts a glance at the cracked door behind her. “I don’t know very much about the politics, but I’d like to know more. And…well. I have a lot of questions. About Inspector Javert, and how he knows you, but I’ll save them, for now. Until things settle.”

Her for now, indicates she’s going to be more persistent about answers.

What can he say? What will he do?

Without warning Cosette wraps her arms around him, her small form hugging him close. “Papa, you love me enough to risk your life to save someone I care for. Why do you fear I won’t love you because of whatever secrets you bear?”

Her perceptive words pierce his heart, because she’s spoken his worst fear into being. Her happiness
is always paramount, but in the depths of his soul he keeps a selfish secret.

His secrecy is almost entirely an effort to keep Cosette safe from his past. To keep her from the burden of carrying that with her every day.

But a tiny fraction of it is because he fears that if he speaks the truth, if he frees himself from the shackles of his secrets, she won't love him anymore.

Who is he, without his daughter’s love?

Nothing but ash.

He’s willing to become ashes and dust if it means keeping her happy. If it means keeping his truth to himself and fading away once he sees Cosette safe.

*Are you doing that for her safety, or because of your fear?*

*If I thought telling her the truth would make her happiness greater, I would risk her withdrawing her love. But it won’t make her joyous to hear her father was a convict. To hear the whole truth about her mother. It just won’t.*

*Are you sure?*

Something else nags at him. Something pulling him toward the police inspector and the insurgent on the other side of the door.

They’re counting on him, too.

Valjean doesn’t answer Cosette’s question, only holding his child closer to him.

She breaks the embrace after a long moment, gesturing toward the door. “I was going to sit with Enjolras while the doctor sets his arm and help as needed now that Enjolras is changed out of his dirty clothes. Will you be right here?”

Valjean nods. Cosette goes inside the bedchamber as soon as Javert comes out, and the inspector can’t seem to meet her eyes.

Fantine, Valjean realizes. He feels…guilty? Has the man ever felt such a thing? Valjean isn’t sure.

“The boy broke his arm rather badly,” Javert says without preamble. “The doctor says it will take two months at least, to heal. Likely three. And he’s concussed. Bruised ribs, too. Among other things. The young National Guard soldiers are reckless, sometimes. They could have killed him if they hit his head harder, and those were not their orders, once he surrendered.” Javert half mutters the last few words, looking down at the floor.

“Are you all right?” Valjean asks, remembering Enjolras’ earlier warning.

“What?” Javert snaps up straight, another hair falling loose from his ribbon. “Of course I’m all right.”

“You left.”

“What?”

Valjean lowers his voice so Cosette and Enjolras don’t hear. “In the carriage. You *left*. Why?”

Javert crosses his arms over his chest. “I would prefer not to speak about it, thank you.”
“I think you should.”

“We are not friends, Valjean.”

The sound of his real name makes Valjean wince. He cannot be Jean Valjean. Not even in his own house.

“No.” Valjean draws out the word. “But you’re here in my house, so if you’d like someone to talk to…”

Javert seizes Valjean by the collar, yanking him away from the bedchamber door through sheer determination, pulling him further down the hall so as not to be overheard. “What are you about?”

Valjean shakes his head. “What?”

“You spared my life!” Javert exclaims with a harsh, fearful tone, keeping his voice low. “And now you’re offering to…I don’t even know what. Why?”

Valjean barely knows how to answer.

“Because,” he says, giving himself a few seconds to articulate his tangled jumble of thoughts. “Well…I don’t know if you have anyone else to speak with. I don’t truly know you, Inspector Javert. Do you have anyone to speak with?”

Javert looks away, which is answer enough.

“To talk about the utter devastation a convict sparing my life has caused in my soul?” Javert’s eyes widen when the whispered words emerge, as if they’re sent past his lips by a force other than his own permission. “No.”

Valjean reaches out toward Javert, but his hand doesn’t meet Javert’s sleeve before the other man pulls back like Valjean’s touch might have burned him.

“I saved that rebel…” Javert sounds like he cannot even bear to say Enjolras’ name, because that might make what he’s done real. “Because I thought it was what you’d do. And now what am I to do now, hmmm? What am I to tell my superiors? I’m ruined, and his freedom only temporary.”

A pained, stifled shout echoes down the empty hallway, coming from the direction of the guest bedchamber. The doctor must have set Enjolras’ arm, made all the more painful for the hours passing between the break itself and the treatment.

Valjean winces at the sound, and interestingly, so does Javert.

“He’s no coward,” Javert grouses. “And loyal to his cause, doomed though it may be. I’ll give the boy that.”

“You’re going to tell your fellows that he got away from you,” Valjean says, an idea popping into his head. “That you got out of the fiacre to take him back to the sight of the barricade to make him talk.”

Javert rolls his eyes. “Why would I do that?”

“To make him fear his own death, if he laid eyes on the devastation and blood around him, and to remind him that might be his own sentence if his trial went a certain way.” A shiver runs down Valjean’s spine at his own words. It does sound like a tactic the Javert of a few days ago might have
Old anger at the man in front of him rises up in Valjean’s chest, not for his own sake, but for Fantine’s. He knows Javert has been doing his job all these years, paying reverence to the system in place.

But Fantine.

What happened with Fantine Valjean will always and forever blame himself for. But Javert made her last moments so cold and cruel and dark. If the way Javert looked at Cosette is any indication, he’s been thinking on that, too.

*You have killed this woman.*

But Javert is here, now. Javert wants to change.

Valjean knows all about that.

Javert scoffs. “That boy isn’t afraid of death.”

“You’re fellow officers won’t know that,” Valjean argues. “You’ll say that once you were out of the fiacre you were attacked by some stray insurgents, who took Enjolras and ran off. You couldn’t be expected to fight back against a group on your own. Besides, you’re the last person on earth that someone might suspect of letting a rebel go, aren’t you?”

Javert stares at him, that wild look roaring in his eyes again before he swallows it back. “Before a few hours ago, yes. It still won’t look well on my record.”

“Everything’s changed, tonight,” Valjean replies. “There were people talking in the street earlier. They already have one or two of the other leaders, and are hunting another. Charles Jeanne. So perhaps it won’t reflect so badly.”

Javert shakes his head, putting his hands in his pockets in a way that looks unnatural to him. “They’ll still want to look for him. No matter who else they have.”

“We’ll deal with that as it comes.” Valjean studies Javert closely. “You should probably go soon, so as not to look suspicious. Will you…are you going to be all right, on your own?”

Valjean doesn’t know how to name what he suspects, but something tugs at the back of his mind. An instinct toward concern for this man who should be his enemy, and somehow isn’t.

Javert scowls, returning to himself. “Yes. I’m not a child, Valjean.”

“Come back here as soon as you’re able to do so.”

Javert nods, agreeing without words as he adjusts his coat, the black fabric flowing out behind him as he goes down the stairs.

Then, he’s gone.

The doctor comes out shortly after, listing Enjolras’ injuries: a concussion and head wound, badly broken left arm, bruised ribs—one likely cracked—and various other cuts and bruises. He leaves some laudanum behind, indicating that Enjolras refused a dose. Valjean goes into the room, finding Enjolras changed into an old nightshirt of his, the broken arm in a more fitting sling and bandages wrapped around his cut hand. The shadow of more bandages wound around his ribs are visible.
through the shirt. His face looks paler than before, the purple bruise an ugly splatter against alabaster skin. Cosette has a comb and a bowl of water, doing her best to get the dried blood out of Enjolras’ hair.

“I can finish that, Cosette,” Valjean says. “Why don’t you try and go to sleep for a few more hours? We’ll talk in the morning. And inquire after Marius, if the streets are calm enough.”

*And what will you say?*

“All right, Papa.” Cosette looks skeptical, but she relents. She turns toward Enjolras, giving him a smile. “I hope you sleep well, Enjolras. You shall have to tell me any stories you have about Marius, when you’re better.”

“Thank you, Cosette.” Enjolras looks unsure for a moment before he presses her hand in thanks, apparently trusting her more than he does anyone else. “You as well.”

Cosette kisses the top of Valjean’s head before leaving them, her footsteps fading down the hallway as Valjean hears her whisper something to Touissant. He spies crumbs from some bread and cheese on a plate, next to an empty glass of water. He’s glad Enjolras ate, at least.

Valjean picks up the comb Cosette left behind, dipping it into the water, which has turned a pinkish-brown from the blood. Enjolras doesn’t protest, so Valjean combs through the strands, a few more hardened specks of dried blood threading through the blond and coming off on the comb.

“The doctor said you wouldn’t take the laudanum?” Valjean asks, hoping he might sound casual. “Might I ask why?”

Enjolras stares ahead of him, his blue eyes dark with grief. “I do not want to be without my senses. I took Laudanum before, at the barricades of 1830 when I sustained an injury. It makes one quite… senseless.”

Valjean finishes combing, drawing back in his chair. “You don’t trust me.”

Enjolras still doesn’t look at him. “I want to. You have helped me a great deal, tonight. But why did you lie to me about Inspector Javert?”

“Because I knew him from a long time ago,” Valjean says, the half-truth heavy on his tongue. “And did not want to see him dead. It was not to harm you, or your comrades.”

Enjolras does look at him now, a flash of frustration in his eyes. “But you knew that might endanger any of us, if he went back to the station with our names, with any information about us.”

Valjean jolts.

He hadn’t actually thought of that, precisely.

“I am sorry,” Valjean replies. “But then, if he were dead, you would be in prison now. So it worked out, didn’t it?”

Enjolras doesn’t agree or disagree. He only looks away again, staring off into the middle distance at something Valjean can’t see.

“You must think ill of me, monsieur.”

Valjean notices the use of *monsieur*, rather than the *citizen* he heard at the barricade.
“I did not long for anyone’s death,” Enjolras continues. “Not the artillery sergeant’s, not Inspector Javert’s, not…” he swallows then, not naming the last person, but he shuts his eyes tight before opening them again, his free hand grasping at the bedclothes. “But I do not possess a way to change France without violence, because those in power do her people a violence every day. That is the truth.”

Valjean thinks of Toulon and the cries of the convicts against the lash, their barely concealed sobs as night fell, and the pain of the labor crushing their bodies on a daily basis.

“I am not judging you, Enjolras. Nor will I ever. I would like to see change in France, too. I suppose I only go about it differently, where I can. When I meet people who need help.”

Enjolras looks at him again, the bloodshot eyes looking childlike for the first time since Valjean met him.

He was an otherworldly force on the barricade.

But God, he looks like a boy now.

“I’ll take the Laudanum,” Enjolras says softly. “I…I haven’t slept in days and I suspect it might help.”

Valjean pours a small measure into a glass, tilting it to Enjolras’ lips.

“Thank you, monsieur.”

Enjolras lays his head against the pillow, his eyes fluttering closed. He’s asleep soon after, and Valjean finds he cannot quite leave his chair. He brushes his thumb against Enjolras’ forehead, making a vow to himself.

No French prison will ever lock up this boy.

A stray pen goes sailing through the air, just barely missing the mark of Bahorel’s face.

In fact, Combeferre remembers talking to more than one of his friends about the advent of pens with metal nibs, but that all seems so far away now. Another life. Another person, even.

Enjolras.

Enjolras has been arrested.

Enjolras could be…

Well he could be any number of things, and Combeferre can’t bear it.

“Stop throwing things at me, Combeferre!” Bahorel sounds less good-natured than normal, if not as irritated as he ought to, given the projectile aimed at his face. “I thought Courfeyrac was the one who threw things, not you, lest we all forget the charter flying into the fire.”

“You’re refusing to explain to me why you dragged me away from the barricade and stopped me from helping Enjolras!” Combeferre raises his voice, his grief over this quashing every other thought. “I need you to explain why. I need answers, Bahorel.”

“And I need you to lower your voice.” Bahorel lowers his own to indicate the right volume, but he looks nervous, and Combeferre doesn’t understand. “Prouvaire is finally asleep, and Joly possibly
Guilt pinches at Combeferre then, and he does quiet down. Prouvaire will certainly survive, but he’s concussed and exhausted, still unwilling to talk about watching their other comrade being executed in front of him. Combeferre helped Joly tend to Prouvaire and Bahorel both, realizing that Joly had in fact also sprained his ankle. Combeferre bound it for him and insisted he sit in a chair with his leg propped up on the bed where Prouvaire slept. This left him to tend to the flesh wound on Grantaire’s arm, and some of Bossuet, Courfeyrac, and Feuilly’s scratches, as well as his own. He did all of this in a haze he barely remembers.

Getting back to Bahorel’s took two hours at least. Not because of distance, but because of the remaining chaos in the streets. Because they looked like insurgents, and didn’t want to get caught.

So he’s only just getting the opportunity to shout at Bahorel.

Bossuet and Courfeyrac sit curled together in one of Bahorel’s large armchairs, but neither of them is asleep. Grief has extinguished Courfeyrac’s smile, his eyes dull and the purple smears beneath pronounced. Feuilly sits across the room, staring at nothing. The chaos of the streets has faded into an eerie, ominous hush, punctuated by the occasional shout of a stray National Guard soldier outside the window. Grantaire’s holding vigil in Bahorel’s bedroom, taking his turn watching over the injured Prouvaire and Joly. They’d convinced Gavroche home with them, and he passed out long ago on the sofa.

“I wasn’t going to let you get yourself killed.” Bahorel sounds angry now, and not in the usual *I’m ready for a brawl* sort of way, but in the exhausted, worried, serious way, and Combeferre’s not certain he’s ever heard him sound like this. “It’s not what Enjolras would have wanted.”

There’s something strange in Bahorel’s voice when he speaks those particular words, like he’s holding something back.

“You don’t know what Enjolras wanted.” Combeferre’s words are sharp, sharper than he even means, but this hurts, and he can’t erase the image of Enjolras being dragged away and slapped to the ground from his mind. “I do. How could you just leave him like that? I need you to explain it to me, Bahorel, because I don’t understand.”

A hoarse, sad voice cuts into the argument, and Courfeyrac gets up from his place next to Bossuet, drawing all of their attention. He puts a hand on Combeferre’s arm, and Combeferre is so upset he almost pulls away. But he can’t. Not from Courfeyrac.

“Combeferre,” Courfeyrac says. “Please, just come sit with me.”

“Our friend is hiding something and I want to know why.” Grief bubbles up from the pit of Combeferre’s stomach, and hot tears start filling his eyes.

“And I want my friends not to argue.” Courfeyrac glances between Bahorel and Combeferre, and Combeferre sees tears glistening in Bahorel’s eyes, too. “Bahorel, what…” Courfeyrac begins in a softer voice, until someone else cuts him off.

Feuilly.

“Enjolras asked us to do something for him.”

“Feuilly…” Bahorel tries, wincing as he puts a hand on the bandaged bayonet wound near his ribs. Feuilly gets up, waving away Bahorel’s words with a splintered smile. “They might as well know,
Bahorel.”

Bossuet shifts from his laying down position. “Wait, what’s going on?”

Feuilly comes over to Combeferre, meeting his eyes. “Enjolras asked that if he was arrested, that Bahorel and I make sure everyone else got out and not let anyone sacrifice themselves for him.”

The words ring in Combeferre’s ears, and he cannot open his mouth. He cannot think. He cannot think.

Why would Enjolras do this? Why would he not share this?

You know why. You could never let Enjolras go.

He feels Courfeyrac take his hand.

“And you mean Combeferre and I in particular.” Courfeyrac speaks Combeferre’s thoughts aloud. “Because he knew we’d try.”

Feuilly nods, and Bossuet puts an arm around his shoulder, his hand moving up and down in comfort.

“It’s not that he thinks either of you less than capable.” Bahorel’s voice grows serious. “You must know it’s the opposite. He only knew you would do anything to save him.”

Combeferre opens his mouth, but nothing comes out. He wants to be angry at Enjolras, he wants to shout how dare you make this choice without consulting me. Even if his mind understands the logic of it, his heart cannot do the same.

All their lives for one arrest.

But Combeferre can’t be angry. At least not right now, because all he wants is Enjolras back. He remembers the last words Enjolras spoke to him.

Know that if we should fall, Enjolras whispered, those blue eyes bursting with life even as death nipped at their heels. That you are my most treasured friend. And I love you.

“Combeferre?” Feuilly’s voice breaks into the quiet, and he steps out from Bossuet’s arm. “Are you all right?”

Combeferre shakes his head, not in disagreement, but in a scattered attempt to clear his head. He clasps Feuilly’s offered hand, smiling sheepishly at Bahorel. “I’m sorry, to both of you. I…I know how hard it must have been for you to do as Enjolras asked. And I’m sorry I lost my temper, Bahorel.”

Bahorel gives a ghost of his usual grin. “It’s all right. I was just worried you and Courfeyrac might have switched bodies. But Feuilly and I told Enjolras in no uncertain terms we’d do anything it took to get him out of prison, once the gunfire ended. I say we go tomorrow or the next day when the streets have cleared, pretend to be his brothers or some nonsense, and find out where they’re holding him.”

Combeferre nods, but his mouth feels full of cotton, and he can’t make himself speak again. Courfeyrac pulls him close as Feuilly’s hand rests on his back.

“We’ll get him back,” Courfeyrac whispers, his voice full of heat, his fingers grasping onto
“What do you mean he got away?”

Gisquet’s voice echoes sharply through the room, and Javert hates himself.

What has he done? What has he done?

“I took him out of the fiacre to take him back to the sight of the barricade.” Javert keeps his posture straight as he sits across from the Prefect of Police. “I thought it would inspire the boy to understand that if he didn’t cooperate, a death sentence was more likely for him.”

Gisquet nods, clearly thinking this a reasonable tactic, and his expression does soften.

“But as soon as we reached Chanverie, a group of rogue insurgents came out of the dark,” Javert continues. “Perhaps they’d been hiding in the café there and didn’t run like all their fellows. They put a gun to my back, seized my truncheon, and ran off with the Enjolras boy in tow.”

Truth be told, Javert threw his truncheon into the street on his walk back here, thinking it might add to the story.

“Your life is worth more than an insurgent, Inspector Javert,” Gisquet finally says, and Javert keeps his sigh of relief to himself. “But we’ll need to hunt for him. They already have men looking for one called Charles Jeanne, so we’ll add Enjolras to the list. You know his face well enough, I imagine, to help someone draw a sketch?”

“Yes.” Javert folds his hands on Gisquet’s desk. “My endless apologies, sir. I had hoped to find out where his allies were, and bring in more insurgents. It backfired.”

Gisquet raises a hand, and Javert falls silent. “You are one of our best, Javert. I have no doubt of your intentions. It is unfortunate, but the insurgents were only successful in causing brief chaos. I have all the faith we’ll find the lad, and make do with the ones we’ve caught, in the meantime. Gisquet pauses. “You should go home, Inspector Javert. When was the last time you slept?”

Javert considers, and he realizes he doesn’t know.

“I’m not certain, sir.”

“Well, help Chevalier and Bisset draw up the sketch, then go home. We’ll need your help searching for Enjolras once you’re rested and have your head clear.”

It takes everything Javert possesses not to laugh.

He’s not sure his head will ever clear again.

He helps with the sketch—what else can he do?—before leaving as Gisquet all but ordered. Part of him wants to turn around and demand Gisquet fire him, or at the least censure him.

But he can’t.

As he exits the familiar station, he doesn’t go home.
He doesn’t go to Valjean’s.

He walks to Pont Neuf.

He leans his arms on the rail, looking down at the dark swirling waters below him, ominous in the night. After a few moments of contemplation he steps up on the edge, his heels scuffing against the stone.

He could jump now, and end all of this. He wouldn’t have to worry about Enjolras and the hunt to find him. He wouldn’t have to worry about Valjean. He wouldn’t have to worry about seeing that girl again, his new guilt at what he did to her mother nagging at him like it was yesterday, because to his conscience, it might as well have been, the memory of it a fresh wound.

God, he was so cruel.

But he thought himself so right, then.

Except, if he jumps now, there will be people wondering where he went. People who are waiting on him. People other than his colleagues.

A convict.

A convict’s adopted daughter, the daughter of a fallen woman.

And the insurgent he set free.

People he should hate. People part of him still does.

But not as much as he hates himself. For questioning. For not questioning before. For so many things he can’t even name, just now.

The first hints of morning light bleed into the horizon, the thinnest slice of a golden glow visible at the river’s edge.

Javert steps off the ledge.

For the first time since he was a lad, Javert cries.

He cries and he cries and he cries.

The stone of the bridge soaks up his tears even as the stone around his heart trembles and cracks, breaking open and leaving nothing but a raw nerve behind.

He’s not sure how long he stays.

But as dawn breaks he turns away from the Seine and the death he so longed for earlier, walking toward life, instead.

A life in pieces.

But a life nonetheless.
Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

The Amis come up with a scheme to try and help Enjolras, only to find he isn't where he's supposed to be. Enjolras dreams of the barricade, sharing a moment with Valjean. Cosette grows determined to ask her father for the truth, and Javert finds himself arguing for the trust of a revolutionary.

Chapter Notes

Hi all! Thanks to everyone who left me such lovely comments, wow! I do usually try to answer them all, though I'm slow sometimes, but I am SO appreciative!

Just as a note, there's a scene here that's partly in italics, which indicates a dream sequence. I hope you enjoy the chapter! I originally said this was going to be 5-6 chapters, but now more like 8-10, depending on how it goes!

“Bahorel.” Prouvaire crosses his arms over his chest, the white bandage wrapped around his head mussing his reddish gold hair. “I look the part more than any of the rest of you. I have the lightest hair.”

“You are also concussed and in no shape to try and fool a police officer into believing you’re Enjolras’ brother,” Joly chides from his place next to Prouvaire on Bahorel’s bed as Combeferre unbinds his ankle, inspecting it for swelling. “Though you are the closest in looks, it’s true. Perhaps next time.”

Combeferre looks up from his work, glancing at Joly over the top of his spectacles. “Perhaps next time Enjolras is in prison?”

A laugh bursts out of Bahorel, the sensation leaving an ache behind his ribs, which are still sore from their run in with a bayonet.

When the last time he laughed? Not since he laid eyes on unconscious Prouvaire with blood running down his face, for certain. One of the soldiers had smacked him in the head with the butt of a pistol before executing his compatriot. He’s damn lucky to be alive.

A shiver runs down Bahorel's spine at the thought.

Watching Enjolras dragged away was certainly no help.

“Well it’s not improbable, provided we can get him out of this scrape,” Bossuet comments from his place leaning against the doorframe. “What is the plan, exactly? I’m all for breaking Enjolras out of prison, mind, but I don’t know how we accomplish that at this juncture.”

“This is for reconnoissance,” Jehan says, a marked solemnity threading through his words. “To find
out if he is in La Force, and what’s being done. Is he being put on trial, and the like.”

Bahorel’s stomach growls. Grantaire, being far more helpful—and quiet—than usual, has gone to a nearby café to pick up some food, bringing Courfeyrac along so he might get out some of his restless energy. In the wake of Enjolras’ arrest and the fact that Marius Pontmercy is missing, Courfeyrac certainly isn’t himself. He suspects Marius might have been swept off by that old man who showed up at the barricade, but then, why? Bahorel can’t begin to think, unless the old man is somehow related to the young woman Pontmercy is mad over. But then why wouldn’t he introduce himself as such?

Many places still remain closed, anxious after the chaos in the streets, but given little came of it—Bahorel doesn’t have the capacity to process that, just now—this is a very different scenario than two years ago, when lots of things remained closed as residual scuffles broke out and the government itself changed over, even if it was a government that displeased many.

Soon enough, life in Paris might go back to normal. Feuilly will have to go back to work in a day or two.

But for them, everything has changed. If they had all gotten away, things might be different. As it is, Enjolras will be facing a trial. Jail. Death, even, though perhaps they won’t go that far for such a small rebellion as it turned out to be.

Bahorel clenches his fists.

He’ll be damned if he sees Enjolras locked behind bars. He’ll break him out. Get him a new name. Send him south, if need be. Anything.

“I want to help break Enjolas out of prison!” Gavroche appears next to Bossuet in the doorway and Feuilly trudges up behind, looking haggard.

Bahorel raises his eyebrows as the lad twirls over toward him, looking mischievous. “Afraid not, Gavroche.”

“Why not?”

Bahorel crouches slightly so he’s at Gavroche’s level. “Because we’re not trying to break him out. We just need information, and you’d blow my cover.”

“I would not.” Gavroche crosses his arms over his chest, reaching out to poke Bahorel with one bare foot, his ragged shoes sitting by the door. Bahorel makes a mental note to try and get him new ones, if Gavroche will take them.

Frankly he’s surprised he’s gotten Gavroche to stay here as long as he has. Feuilly had been attempting to wrangle Gavroche to show him how to sketch, since Gavroche was watching Feuilly intently while he sketched earlier, but apparently talk of subterfuge was enough to distract him.

“All of this is beside the point.” Jehan’s voice draws Bahorel’s attention back over. “The point I am still not convinced it shouldn’t be me to go.”

“You need your rest, Prouvaire.” Combeferre’s voice is gentle when he speaks, devoid of the ire from a few hours ago before they all collapsed into sleep. It seems his anger was driven by the lack of answers, and now he just sounds sad. “And it’s as Joly said, you’re hurt and will look conspicuous.”

“Besides…” Bahorel sits on the bed next to Prouvaire as Joly vacates and moves to the chair when
Combeferre finishes binding his ankle. “Your acting deserves a better stage, my friend. I’ll deign to try and fool a police officer into the fact that I’m Enjolras’ non-existent older brother.”

Prouvaire looks away, ghosts haunting his eyes as Bahorel’s joke falls flat. “I want to help Enjolras.”

His words suck some of the vague attempts at humor out of the air, the true nature of what they’re discussing returning to each of them.

_They shot DuBois in the head right in front of me_, Prouvaire whispered in a rare moment alone last night. _Some of that blood on me was his._

Bahorel remembers the tremble in Prouvaire’s voice. He remembers the flat sound in his tone, which is only just now dissipating.

_Shock, I think_, Combeferre told him later, Joly nodding at his shoulder. _He’ll return to himself, Bahorel. You know how resilient Jehan is._

There was an absence in Combeferre’s words when he spoke. As if couldn’t say as much as _we’ll all return to ourselves._

When Bahorel slept last night, he couldn’t get the ringing of cannons out of his ears.

He wonders if he ever will.

“Give us a minute?” he says, returning to the moment at hand.

Everyone files into Bahorel’s sitting room, leaving the bedroom door cracked as if afraid of any true barrier between them. Combeferre had been worried enough about letting Courfeyrac and Grantaire go to the café.

Prouvaire crosses his arms over his chest, not looking at Bahorel. “Sending our friends away isn’t going to make me back down.”

Bahorel turns Jehan’s face toward his with one finger, the tears glistening in Prouvaire’s eyes like shards of silver starlight.

“You can’t, Jehan. And don’t you say I don’t think you capable, because that’s not it. You’re hurt, and it will make them suspicious.”

Prouvaire wipes his eyes with one hand and takes Bahorel’s in the other, pulling it toward him. “I just keep thinking of Enjolras is prison alone, wondering if we all made it out. He could be hurt. He could be…so many things. I want to help him, Bahorel. When he shot that man in the head, he…I think I felt what Enjolras felt, in that moment. And Combeferre did, too. I worry for his mind.” Jehan swallows, and Bahorel squeezes the hand holding his. “Enjolras will always get back up on the rare occasions when he falls. But it doesn’t make the fall any less hard. He did those things so we wouldn’t have to and I….”

“I know.” Bahorel tugs Prouvaire’s hand toward him, pressing a kiss to the palm. “You can help me rehearse what I’ll say to the police, does that sound all right? I desire your approval before I go. The others don’t have as much an appreciation for good acting. Well, Courfeyrac perhaps. But you have better taste, though don’t tell him I said so, I’ll never hear the end.”

This does draw a smile out of Jehan, and it cuts through the tension vibrating in the room. A determined force pulls Bahorel forward by his lapels, and Prouvaire’s lips meet his with the gentle but breathtaking fervor Bahorel’s familiar with. Bahorel returns the kiss before pulling back in
surprise, unable to stop himself from grinning.

“Thinking about what an excellent kisser I am while you were held captive by the National Guard, were you?” Bahorel asks, keeping his voice even.

Truth be told, realizing that the guard had Prouvaire was the most frightened he’d been since he can remember.

He hears his front door open, Grantaire and Courfeyrac’s distinct voices floating into the sitting room. Grantaire’s saying something pointedly about how the café lacked the wine he wanted in particular, how dare they, but Bahorel hears the worry weighing down his usual humor, with not a ten minute long ramble in sight.

It’s the worry they all share over Enjolras, his absence like a living, breathing thing surrounding them. He takes a quick glance through the crack in the door, seeing Combeferre embrace Courfeyrac as if he might have been gone for hours.

Prouvaire tries frowning at him when Bahorel turns back around, but it doesn’t quite stick. “Bahorel you know I was thinking of a great many things, then: the future of the republic, whether anyone would find my poetry and publish it posthumously, eternity and what God might look like, though of course I can’t decide exactly what I believe, there’s so many options. I thought about love and loss and all the books I wish I’d read and the plays I hadn’t seen. I thought about all the things I would never witness, that bright tomorrow Enjolras spoke of so eloquently, while still knowing I was playing a part in bringing it about.” Prouvaire does smile now, that look Bahorel’s so familiar with gleaming in his eyes. The look of intrigue and mysterious mischief, of being half in another world all the time, that Bahorel loves so much. “…but yes, I was thinking of how I wished I might have seen all our friends, and kissed you one last time.”

“But you’re alive.” Bahorel leans his forehead against Prouvaire’s, taking both of Jehan’s hands and intertwining their fingers. “And I plan on keeping you that way.” He sits up, quirking one eyebrow. “Now. What waistcoat do I wear to pretend to be Enjolras’ brother? Can’t be red, they’ll suspect my dastardly republican ways.”

“Hmmm.” Prouvaire ponders, his eyes going toward Bahorel’s ribcage. “Black. Or dark blue. That way they won’t see it if you bleed.”

“What?” Bahorel asks. “Combeferre and Joly bandaged me up, I’m fine. I’m following their orders on being careful. Mostly.”

Prouvaire points at the red smear on Bahorel’s shirt, shaking his head. “You’re bleeding as we speak.”

Bahorel curses.

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*Enjolras smells the coppery scent of blood in the air. He tastes it. He sees the splatters of it on his skin, dark red crusted into the crevices of his knuckles.*

*Not his blood.*

*He is uninjured, somehow.*

*Other people’s blood.*
The man who shot the shopkeeper.

The artillery sergeant.

Others.

God, how many others?

He spins around from his place in the smoke-drenched barricade, searching for his friends.

Combeferre.

Courfeyrac.

Feuilly.

Joly.

Bossuet.

Bahorel.

Jean Prouvaire.

Grantaire.

He calls out each of their names, met with no response.

His memories haunt the barricade around him, the sound of ghostly laughter off somewhere in the distance.

But where are his friends?

He searches around the entire barricade, but it's not just his friends missing, it's everyone. All his comrades are gone and silence hangs in the air like a punishment, because all he can do is think and he doesn't want to think he doesn't….

Someone tugs on his coat and he turns around again, met by the face of the young artillery sergeant he shot, dried blood staining his coat where the bullet struck.

"I could have been your brother."

"I know." Enjolras feels more than just one tear coming down his cheek now. "I know, and I wish it wasn’t like this."

Another tug.

Enjolras spins in the other direction, seeing the man who shot the shopkeeper at his feet.


The words pour from the man’s mouth unending, and more tears pour down Enjolras’ cheeks and he can’t breathe, he can’t….

Enjolras gasps for breath as he sits straight up in bed, his face wet from tears. His entire body shakes and he can’t make it stop, his arm throbbing with pain even as the remnants of the Laudanum lend everything a sheen of unreality. His heart races so fast he feels nauseated again, wiping his eyes even
as sobs break free from his lips without his permission.

For the first time since his arrest, he allows himself to feel the loss of not just his own freedom, not just his separation from his friends, but the loss at the barricade itself. He knows Paris will rise one day. It’s happened before and it will again, but why not now?

Why?

He has always been willing to do what is necessary to make change. He doesn’t regret what he did, but god it hurts even still, the shadows crowding the edges of his mind.

He didn’t want to die when he set foot on the barricade. He only knew he was willing to do so. He was willing to make that sacrifice, if it came to that.

But as the night crawled on, when it became clear to him perhaps before anyone else, that the people weren’t coming, he started preparing himself for it.

No.

Perhaps he started preparing himself for it from the moment he shot that man in the head.

An impossible, horrible choice. But Enjolras couldn’t let that man’s actions stand. He couldn’t let that needless cruelty occur without an answer. He knows well how people perceive the violence of revolutionaries in response to the violence of power. He knows how some people speak ’93 with disdain.

He couldn’t let that man’s mercilessness stand on principle, nor could he let it tarnish the efforts of all the people standing with him on the barricade. And so to emphasize that they were to show mercy, he was forced to show no mercy himself. Even if it ached. Even if sent a splitting pain across his soul, ripping it apart.

He doesn’t want to be dead.

But he expected to be.

He buries his head in his hands, hoping he might stifle the sobs he can’t quiet.

He longs for Combeferre and Courfeyrac, because they have seen him raw before, raw until he was bleeding.

Though he’s not certain anyone has seen him quite like this. He’s not sure he’s seen himself like this.

The floorboard outside his room creaks, indicating someone’s presence.

Then, a knock.

“Enjolras?”

Fauchelevent’s voice.

What time is it?

Sunlight sneaks in through the gap in-between the curtains, and Enjolras realizes that it’s dawn, or a little past.

Twenty-four hours since the barricade fell.
Enjolras clears his throat, unable to mask his cracked voice. “I’m all right, monsieur. I’m sorry to disturb you.”

Fauchelevent opens the door and steps inside anyway, his eyes going round when he sees what must be the evidence of tears.

Fauchelevent shuts the door behind him. “Are you all right?”

Enjolras nods, though he has to wipe his eyes, which gives him away. “Some bad dreams, and the Laudanum, I’m sure. I’m sorry if I woke you.”

Fauchelevent sits down on the edge of the bed, not convinced. “I wasn’t sleeping terribly well myself. Would you like to talk about your dream?”

Enjolras shuts his eyes for a moment, Fauchelevent’s kindness wounding him for reasons he can’t explain even to himself. He sounds like such a father, and it’s no wonder to him that Cosette treated him with such a radical compassion. She learned it from the man who raised her.

“It’s all right,” Fauchelevent says when Enjolras doesn’t answer. “You’re safe here, Enjolras.”

Enjolras shuts his eyes tighter, his arm throbbing afresh even as the Laudanum sits heavy in his veins.

Enjolras doesn’t just cry.

He sobs.

He covers his face with one hand, willing the emotions and the tears back, but they come like the inevitable crash of a waterfall. He grasps at the bedcovers, his knuckles popping white as the blood flows toward his fingertips.

Enjolras hears Fauchelevent’s hesitant intake of breath before he feels a strong but gentle hand come to rest on his shoulder. Enjolras looks up at the touch, seeing nothing but concern in Fauchelevent’s eyes. There’s no judgment. There’s no anger. Just this stranger who somehow cares for him.

Fauchelevent’s hand remains, squeezing Enjolras’ shoulder in comfort. Enjolras sniffs, wiping his eyes once more, missing his friends with a pang of grief.

He wants to see them. But he won’t endanger them to do so.

“I’m sorry,” Enjolras whispers, feeling Fauchelevent press his shoulder. “I’m so sorry.”

“It’s all right. You’ve been through a great deal, in the past few days.”

Something about his tone reminds Enjolras of Jean Prouvaire’s whispered reassurances, and the thought of his friend strikes him with ferocity.

Is he alive?

He was injured, when Enjolras saw him, blood running from a wound on the side of his head.

*Most bleeding on a head wound is superficial,* he hears Joly say. *It’s how hard they hit you have to worry about. And how much.*

Enjolras’ own head wound throbs in response. He remembers waking up after the soldiers slammed his head to ground, met by nothing but the cold, hard, paving stones, the shadows of several soldiers
Not so fearsome now, is he? One of the soldiers questioned. We should have shot you when we had the chance.

That particular soldier smacked Enjolras’ arm with the butt of his pistol until he heard the snap echo through the air. After that, all he remembers is boots kicking his ribs without mercy until he passed out again, waking up once more when they brought him to the police station.

He hopes Jehan is all right. He cannot bear the idea of him in pain. Or worse, dead. He is too fully of light, too utterly astonishing a soul to be lost.

“I…” Enjolras swallows back, fighting against more tears.

They break through anyway.

He honestly isn’t sure the last time he cried like this. He’s not sure if he’s ever cried like this, the tears coming with such force that he can’t stop them. He’s used to melancholy, to feeling overwhelmed and angry, but this is…this is something else.

He feels such grief.

He can’t even sort it all out, right now. He only knows he feels it rushing through him.

Fauchelevent wraps one arm around Enjolras, a hand moving up and down his back. Enjolras rests his forehead on this stranger’s shoulder, feeling like a little boy again at Fauchelevent’s touch.

His parents. He’ll have to write them. Tell them something…tell them…he isn’t sure. Both of them share a more liberal political bent, but they aren’t comfortable with going to the lengths Enjolras is, and to be quite frank, he keeps much of it from them because he doesn’t want them worrying.

Finally Enjolras masters himself, pulling back and looking Fauchelevent in the eyes. “You are so kind, citizen,” he says, and he notices Fauchelevent smiling at the word. “I…it is beyond anything I would have expected, and I always try to believe in the best of people. But you have hidden me in your own house. You have saved Marius Pontmercy’s life. You are unfailingly generous. You…” Enjolras pauses, but the Laudanum and the sleep and the pain make his tongue loose. “You are as kind as I hope everyone will be, in the world I dream about.”

Fauchelevent blushes, the red more prominent in contrast with his white hair. “You give me too much credit, Enjolras. You have known me but a few hours.”

“What more need I know? You risked your life at the barricade to save someone else’s. You are risking a great deal to keep me safe, even though you do not know me. I…I know I may have been harsh with you earlier. I am sorry.”

“You worried over what my keeping Inspector Javert alive might have meant for your friends’ safety,” Fauchelevent replies, shaking his head as if to brush off any argument Enjolras might make. “That is only natural.”

“You extended your kindness to him,” Enjolras continues. “I…well I cannot regret my actions toward Inspector Javert at the barricade, though the matter is more complex, now. But you have been kind at your own risk to more than one person, in the past days.” Enjolras frowns, grateful toward Javert and annoyed at him all at once. He still doesn’t know what to make of the inspector bringing him here. “I hope he understands what you’ve done for him.”
An odd shadow passes across Fauchelevent’s face, holding secrets of which Enjolras does not know the root.

Just how do they know each other? That’s still a mystery.

He doesn’t suppose Fauchelevent might answer the question right away.

Even as he wants to trust this man he’s already growing fond of, he senses the gaps in what Fauchelevent is and isn’t telling him. He isn’t owed a stranger’s secrets, but they’re all tied up in this together, now. Javert decided that when he brought Enjolras to this doorstep.

If Fauchelevent is hiding something, it might be for his own safety. But secrets can’t remain hidden forever. Not in a situation like this.

“I think he is thinking upon a great many things,” Fauchelevent says. “I am hoping he might return soon so we can speak about a few things. Though, I imagine he is less in the business of hiding rebels even than I am, so we’ll all need to talk.”

In all the chaos of his arrest, Enjolras has barely possessed the time to consider what he’ll do. He can’t stay here forever, surely, only until he’s well, and things calm down. But then what? Unless a pardon comes—and that’s no guarantee—he isn’t sure how to live as a fugitive. How will he be useful? Will he have to become someone new? Take a new name? All the blank space before him spins around in his head, making his headache worse.

One day at a time. One hour. One minute.

Dark memories of the nightmare flood his mind, and the tears threaten him again until Fauchelevent presses his hand.

“I’ll bring up tea, I think. It might help get another dose of Laudanum down.”

Enjolras nods, wishing he could argue about the medication, but his entire body still aches with pain, his arm and head and ribs screaming in protest. “If it wouldn’t trouble you, I’d like to try and start writing a letter to my parents. I’ll need to tell them...something.”

“Where do they live?” Fauchelevent asks, rising from the bed.

“Marseilles. So news won’t have reached them yet. But I don’t want them coming here, if I can help it.”

Fauchelevent tilts his head. “You aren’t close?”

A smile ghosts across Enjolras’ face, remembering family nights by the fireside, his mother telling a witty joke that made his quiet, gentle father laugh. They were close in those days, and he still loves them very much. But so much of his life is here in Paris with his friends and the cause he’s sworn his life to, so he can’t always share as much with them.

How does he tell them he’s a fugitive without endangering them? Without breaking their hearts? He finished his studies not three weeks before the barricades, but how can he be a lawyer now? How can he be anything?

“They’re good people, I just can’t tell them as much as I’d like to, or they’d protest for my safety,” Enjolras explains. “Several generations of my father’s family were merchant stock, and invested in French shipping. It made them quite wealthy, though my father became a lawyer, anyway. He always helped people when he could, taking on cases for free when people couldn’t afford services. I
don’t think he expected his son to become a revolutionary when he sent me to Paris to study, even if my opinions were strong before I left home. My maternal grandfather was an untitled noble, and my mother the fourth daughter. I’m not sure they liked that she married a commoner, no matter how wealthy. Though after the Revolution, there was much less power to object.”

Fauchelevent opens the curtains before he speaks again, letting the dim morning light filter into the room. “So much has changed, in France. And yet…”

“So much is the same.” Enjolras finishes the sentence. “Here we are again with a king, even if some people claim it’s better than the Ancien Régime. It’s progress, but it’s still a king. A backward step instead of forwards. There are still people dying. There are still people hungry. There are still so many without a voice, and so many ways for them to block our protests. I wasn’t alive for the revolution, but sometimes….sometime it feels like I was. Do you remember it, Monsieur Fauchelevent?”

Fauchelevent looks out the window, and he’s gazing at something in the past, rather than the here and now. “I remember.” He turns back toward Enjolras, not going further. “Your parents share your beliefs?”

Enjolras brushes his sleep-tousled hair out of his face. “In some respects. They approve of universal suffrage for men, though my mother wishes it for women even if she doesn’t say so often aloud. They care about establishing more public education. Though I am more of the Jacobin school than they’d like. I…I wish for a softer world. I only know violence is necessary to achieve it, much as I wish it weren’t true. Maybe one day, it won’t be, at least not in the form of bloodshed and gunfire.”

Enjolras thinks of Combeferre, his heart clenching with a sharp pang. Violence comes in many forms. Poverty. Hunger. After listening to Combeferre, Enjolras understands more how much violence women face, too. He sees that future where the violence enacted upon France’s citizens won’t have to be met with violence on their part. There will be avenues of protest without guns and barricades and blood. Everyone, and not just a precious few, will hold the power to vote for those who speak for them. The images of those days to come dance around his mind, dripping with a dazzling golden light and creating a painting so real he might summon it from the depths of his imagination.

They’re not there yet.

Enjolras looks out the window too, thinking the streets are still more hushed than usual. “I do hope we can at least be soft toward each other.”

Fauchelevent smiles, and there’s another life, another time hidden with his eyes. “I hope that, too. I’ll be back in a short bit.”

Enjolras nods and watches Fauchelevent go, the old man leaving the heaviness of his secrets behind him.

Cosette doesn’t like keeping secrets.

Though, she supposes she’s used to them. Her father has held secrets all her life, ever since the day he appeared like an angel out of the darkness and stole her away from that horrible inn and those horrible people. She’s buried the memories of those days far back in her mind, but she hasn’t forgotten them. She can’t.
Even if her Papa thinks himself undeserving and dark—though she doesn’t know why—she always sees light around him, glowing around the edges of his person.

She thinks Enjolras has the glow, too.

Her hand stills over the letter she’s writing, only three words written on the page in deep black ink. 

*My Dearest Marius.*

She wants to tell him the truth in this letter. The truth about her father saving his life.

So why is she hesitating?

She sees her Papa’s face in her mind, his secrets locked up tight behind his eyes, his hesitation to tell her the best of himself, to tell her that he risked his own life to save the man she loves.

She breathes in deep before exhaling, tightening her grip on the pen.

No. She won’t keep this secret. There are more secrets, she knows. More secrets that her father possesses. Secrets that she might have to tell Marius one day. She can’t tell him all at once, because she doesn’t know them.

But she can start here.

She puts pen to paper, wet ink flowing across the page, her love making the letters breathe with life.

*My Dearest Marius,*

*I know you went to the barricades. But I have not gone to England, and am writing this letter to let you know that I will be at your bedside as soon as you are well enough to receive me, and I hope your grandfather does not mind, because I must see you.*

*My love…*

Cosette pauses here, her heart fluttering with giddiness when she pictures Marius’s black hair falling into his eyes when he smiled at her, dipping his head shyly when they met in the garden at Rue Plumet.

*My love, it was my father who saved you from the barricade. He brought you home to your grandfather. He very nearly didn’t tell me, but I found out anyway. There is much more I cannot tell you in a letter. But know that I love you. I know you must be in pain, but you will be well. I will make sure of it.*

*All my love,*

*Your Cosette.*

She folds the letter, placing it carefully in an envelope.

She certainly could not say *one of your friends is hiding in my house from the police,* because who knows what person might read the letter? She doesn’t know anyone in the home of Marius’ grandfather, nor Marius’ grandfather himself, so she cannot trust them outright.

Everything has changed in the space of a day, though she feels life thudding through this house like a heartbeat. More life than she’s seen since…perhaps ever. She loves her Papa, but their day to day existence has always been a lonely, quiet one, and she’s longed for more. More people to speak with,
since she left the convent and her friends there behind. More adventure. More truth. No matter the
danger they face, she senses something happening, now. Something changing.

Something that might finally prompt Papa to bare his secrets to her.

Whatever they are, she’ll love him.

She thinks it might need to start with Inspector Javert. The way he looked at her last night left an
imprint, memories in his eyes and guilt in his face, neither of which she understands.

But he knows her. Or about her, at least. Even if she doesn’t know him. That much she knows is
true.

She goes down the hallway, seeing Enjolras’ door cracked open. She knocks, thinking fleetingly that
perhaps she ought not speak to a man she barely knows in her dressing gown, but so far he’s only
seen her in that, so there’s no sense rushing to change now.

“Good morning,” she says, stepping inside when he looks up. “How are you feeling?”

“A touch better,” Enjolras replies, though she hears the pain in his voice, still. Anything might be
better than his state last night. “Thank you again for your kindness, Cosette.”

She sits in the old armchair astride the bed, twirling the curly end of her braid around her finger, the
chestnut strands brimming with dark gold in the candelight. “I’m glad to help. I was writing a letter to
Marius, just now. Though I couldn’t tell him about this on paper, of course.”

Enjolras chuckles softly, and Cosette’s charmed by the sound. “No, I should think not. Whenever
I’m able to safely contact my friends, I know Courfeyrac in particular will be relieved to know
Marius survived. They are quite close.”

Cosette rests her chin in her hands. “Marius has said the name, before, though I’ve never had the
pleasure.”

A real smile breaks out across Enjolras’ face, the first one Cosette’s seen since they brought him
here, and it makes his blue eyes shine with affection. “Courfeyrac is very easy to grow fond of. I
know you’ll like him. And he you.”

Cosette shares the smile, hearing her father speaking to Touissant in the hallway and hoping they’ll
be able to get the letter off to Marius shortly. Her heart longs to know if he’s well, or as well as can
be expected, and something about sitting in this room with someone else who knows him comforts
her.

“You speak of your friends with such joy, even in this difficulty.” She smooths Enjolras’ bedcovers,
a thin sunbeam falling across her hand as the sun moves higher in the sky outside the window “Tell
me about them? It might help to pass the time until you’re due for sleep again. And Papa’s bringing
tea, I think.”

Enjolras’ blue eyes brighten further, the dull shadow chased away even if his face is drawn with pain
and exhaustion.

“All right.”

Enjolras pushes a strand of golden hair behind his ear, and for just a moment a blurry image of her
mother drops into Cosette’s mind. That same shade of sun-kissed hair. A laugh. A fierce, warm hug
before an absence that never ended.
“She’s determined to find out more.”

“What did you say your name was, monsieur?”

Bahorel releases a dramatic, pointed sigh, fighting the urge not to fiddle with his waistcoat. It’s an old black one he never wears, which barely fit.

*This looks fit for a funeral,* he complained when Courfeyrac, agreeing with Prouvaire’s pronouncement about dark colors in case of bleeding, pushed it into his hands.

*Yes well we’ll all do what we must, so we can make certain this isn’t Enjolras’ funeral.* Courfeyrac’s voice went dark then, darker than Bahorel ever remembered hearing it before, every word trembling with anxiety.

*We’ll get him back.* Bahorel echoed Courfeyrac’s own words to Combeferre back to him. *I am not going to let Enjolras die in prison. I swear it, Courfeyrac. Besides, you have to know Combeferre is already coming with a backup scheme in case I fail. Trust in that.*

Courfeyrac smiled then, but it died before it reached his eyes. Even more worrisome, Courfeyrac didn’t say anything else. He didn’t shout at Bahorel for letting Enjolras go. He didn’t ponder aloud why Enjolras didn’t tell him what his plan was. He just continued rifling through Bahorel’s wardrobe, looking for a suitable coat.

“I told you already. Felix Enjolras. I’m looking to see my younger brother, Lucien Enjolras.”

The officer’s eyes widen at the name Enjolras, and Bahorel isn’t sure what that means, so he ploughs forward again.

“I received word he was arrested for taking part in those dreadful revolts.” Bahorel sniffs. “He’s always been a problem, you see. And I would like to be able to write my parents and let them know his fate. He’s lucky I’m in Paris at all, to prevent my father from storming up here.”

From what Bahorel knows of Enjolras’ parents and his brief meeting with them when they visited Paris last year, Enjolras’ father would likely never storm anywhere, even-tempered as he is, but this works better for his purposes.

The officer narrows his eyes. “Do you have your passport?”

Bahorel huffs. “No, monsieur. I live in Paris and did not expect to be interrogated for my papers when inquiring into my brother’s location. You may trust that I am not interested in his radical politics, but he is family and I need to know if I might see him and when his trial is set to take place. I will need to acquire an attorney, you know.”

“Well, Enjolras never arrived here.” The officer slides a hastily done wanted sketch of a man who must be Enjolras across the desk toward Bahorel. “He escaped Inspector Javert and ran off. There’s currently a manhunt for him.”

Javert? Javert is supposed to be *dead.*

“My word.” Bahorel grasps the flyer, doing his best to hide his shock.

If Enjolras escaped, why didn’t he come to them?
Is he laying injured somewhere? Is he hiding?

Is he dead?

No, Enjolras is too clever to escape and then die. He must be somewhere.

“Know that if you find him and hide him you also will be subject to arrest,” the officer says, eyeing him with suspicion.

Bahorel keeps every feeling out of his voice when he speaks again, standing up straighter, because saying he won’t hide his fictional brother might be laying it on too thick.

“Merci, monsieur,” he says. “I will check back in a few days, to see if you’ve brought him in.”

The officer doesn’t question him further. Bahorel tips his hat before stepping outside.

Then, he runs.

“What?” Courfeyrac’s voice explodes inside Bahorel’s sitting room. “What do you mean he wasn’t there?”

“Good to see you’re far less quiet than previously, because it was disturbing” Bahorel grumbles. “But I mean he wasn’t there, mon ami.”

“Was he trying to trick you?” Grantaire chimes in, running a finger over the rim of a half-empty glass of wine. “Maybe he wasn’t fooled by your acting.”

Bahorel shoves him in the arm, earning a shout of protest.

“It wasn’t my acting. He showed me the wanted flyer they drew up for Enjolras. A rough one, I assume there will be more, soon. They did not, of course, do his countenance justice. Or his hair.”

“And you said he escaped Javert?” Combeferre runs both hands through his auburn-brown hair until it stands on end. “That’s a strange link. Javert is meant to be dead. That old man killed him. We all heard the gunshot.”

“Well apparently he didn’t.” Bahorel sits down on the sofa next to Prouvaire, who insisted on coming to sit with the rest of them, his face still pale.

Bossuet sighs, his arm tight around Joly’s shoulders. “I’d say Enjolras not being in prison is a stroke of good luck, but he isn’t here, either, so I’m certain what to call it.”

“Strange,” Combeferre mutters, eyeing Courfeyrac, who’s begun pacing back and forth across the floor. “Courfeyrac, come sit, all right?”

Courfeyrac shakes his head, an almost manic glimmer in his eyes. “I don’t know if Marius is alive, and now Enjolras isn’t where he’s supposed to be? That old man was hovering around Marius, and now we find out he didn’t kill that police officer who tried to spy on us? There’s a link. There has to be.”

Combeferre gets up, gently taking Courfeyrac by the hand and sitting him down, not letting go once he sits down himself.
“There may be a link,” Feuilly adds, looking sympathetic about the angry tears Courfeyrac can’t hide. “But we don’t know his name, so how do we find anything out?”

“Enjolras will come to us, if he’s able,” Prouvaire says, his voice full of a surety Bahorel wants to share. “Perhaps he’s trying, but hasn’t made it yet. Maybe he’s hiding out until he can?”

Joly scrunches his nose, his ankle propped up as he leans against Bossuet, Grantaire on the other side of him, reluctant to move far away.

“I worry about what state he might be in,” Joly says. “He might have some injuries now, if he was in the National Guard’s custody.”

“Or the police,” Combeferre says, his voice soft as he keeps a tight hold of Courfeyrac’s hand. He pushes his spectacles up his nose. “We have to figure something out. We have to find him.”

Bahorel hears the crack of desperation in Combeferre’s voice, but he isn’t given time to answer, because someone else speaks up.

“I know where that old man lives.”

Gavroche.

“What?” Bahorel asks. “You know him?”

“Don’t know him really,” Gavroche answers, twisting his fingers in his lap and looking as if he might spring up from the floor at any moment. “But I took a letter to his house for Marius. He was nice. If he has something to do with Enjolras not being in jail, it might be a good thing.”

Bahorel meets Gavroche’s eyes, knowing if he moves too suddenly Gavroche might run away like a cat. “What’s the address, Gavroche?”

“I’ll go see if I can talk to him again,” Gavroche replies, not answering the question. “Maybe he’ll know something about Enjolras.”

“No,” Bahorel knows this is a failed argument as soon as Gavroche hops up from the floor with a grin. “Gavroche, it isn’t safe.”

“I know the streets of Paris better than any of you lot,” Gavroche pokes Bahorel in the chest, his grin growing wider. “And besides, no one will look twice at a gamin. They might look twice at one of you, though. It won’t be odd for me to knock on an old man’s door, but it would be for you. I’ll come back when I find something out.”

Bahorel stares Gavroche down. “You aren’t going to tell us the address, are you?”

“You don’t need it,” Gavroche argues, but there’s a strangely serious gleam in his eyes. “You’ve been letting me sleep here, so now I’m going to do this for you. Fair’s fair.”

“Gavroche, you don’t have to….” Bahorel protests, but before he quite knows what’s happening Gavroche is patting him on the shoulder, giving them all a wink before the door slams shut behind him, earning a shout of disapproval from a neighbor when it shakes the floor.

Bahorel swears he heard the boy singing as he goes down the stairs, and he honestly can’t help but laugh.

If Gavroche isn’t careful, Bahorel might just adopt him.
“Should we…go after him?” Courfeyrac asks, looking worried.

“No.” Bahorel shakes his head. “I think he wants to help, and he does know his way around better than any of us. He’ll be back once he learns something.”

“I think he’ll be all right,” Feuilly says, taking off his hat and crushing it in his hands. Bahorel knows he was a gamin for a short while after his parents died when he was eleven, before the first fan-maker he found a job with let him sleep in the tiny room above the shop. “He knows how to take care of himself, he just shouldn’t have to.”

“I told him he could stay here as often as he likes,” Bahorel answers. “We’ll see if he takes me up on it.”

A thick silence permeates the room, Enjolras’ absence a huge, gaping hole.

None of this makes any sense.

Now, all they can do is wait.

“You are a stubborn fool!” Javert exclaims, his voice a low, harsh whisper. “I saved you from prison, and now you don’t see fit to trust me.”

“Inspector Javert…” Enjolras grits his teeth, clearly trying to keep his temper. “I am grateful to you. But it doesn’t mean I’m going to trust you just yet with the information about my friends’ safe-house. You are still a police inspector. And pardon me for saying so, but your moods are erratic. How am I to know you won’t change your mind? Didn’t you say yourself just now that you are part of the manhunt to bring me in?”

Javert crosses his arms over his chest, rolling his eyes. He returned an hour ago as evening fell, finally having slept at his own home. He felt drawn here, even if he might have waited for the night to pass before coming back. He came in to find Enjolras expressing worry over his friends thinking him dead, and so this argument ensued.

“A fair argument, Javert.” Valjean remains maddeningly calm out the outside, though a storm brews in his eyes.

“Of course you side with him,” Javert mutters. “God knows what I was thinking, doing this. If a doctor told me I suffered a case of apoplexy I wouldn’t be surprised.”

“It is not a matter of sides, Javert,” Valjean says, his eyes flicking over toward Cosette, who watches the scene intently, looking very much as if she’s trying to piece something together. “I’m saying it makes sense Enjolras might be hesitant to tell a police inspector where his friends are.”

“I kept him from prison.” Javert knows he sounds petulant, but he can’t help it. “That ought to count for something.”

“I already said I was grateful.” Enjolras’ words sound painfully sincere, and Javert doesn’t know why he’s trying to win this rebel’s trust.

Who is he? He certainly doesn’t know anymore.

He remembers interrogating Enjolras at the station, the boy’s sure, powerful words making
something inside Javert shudder with fear.

*My own safety, my very life, is not worth more than the safety and lives of my friends, Inspector Javert. You will never hear me utter their names or their whereabouts. You will not hear anything that was ever discussed among us, no matter what you or a court might promise me in return.*

This young man frightens him. This young man frightens him for all the vulnerabilities being around him might reveal in Javert’s soul. What need did he have for such a thing, before the events of the barricade pushed the damn thing to the surface, dark and dusty and untouched since he was a child? That was the last time he thought of his soul before shoving it away. Now he *feels* it, patches of warmth spreading across the permanent cold in his chest.

Valjean began this and now Enjolras joins him, both rendering Javert’s life unrecognizable. Yet here he is in the room with them, unable to tear himself away.

Javert sits up straighter. “I don’t think you understand how grateful you *should* be. If anyone finds out, it’s not just my job on the line. I’m risking being put on trial right along with you.”

Enjolras sighs sharply. “I didn’t ask you to do this, Inspector Javert. You chose to. And I still don’t understand why because you won’t tell me. Offer me that and then perhaps I can trust you.”

Javert gets up from his chair, feeling the still quiet Cosette’s eyes on him. “Would you rather be in prison? I can take you back right now and say I found you bleeding in the street, if you prefer.”

“*I would obviously not prefer that.*” Just a hint of danger spills into Enjolras’ voice, and Javert’s reminded of the fierce young man he saw on the barricade, willing and able to do whatever it took to fight for his beliefs, fire and ice blending together like magic in one soul.

Javert finds himself oddly drawn to that aspect of Enjolras’ personality, even if he doesn’t share the ideals.

*Not yet,* his brain taunts.

*Please,* he shoots back. *It’s insane enough that I’m starting to agree with Valjean’s ideas, despite myself. I’m not going to stand up on some barricade and commit treason.*

*But you are breaking the law now.*

He shakes his head, pulling himself back to the moment at hand.

“Let’s not argue,” Valjean cuts in, his eyes darting over to Cosette again. “Enjolras, if you tell me the address, I’ll go.”

An awkward, pained silence hangs in the room when Enjolras doesn’t answer right away, the lad looking truly aggrieved.

“I want to tell you, Monsieur Fauchelevent,” Enjolras says, gazing at Valjean with a far softer look than he gave Javert. “But I still don’t know your connection to Inspector Javert. If I knew that, I would tell you without any hesitation. You have done so much for me, and I am endlessly appreciative.”

Javert runs his hand through his hair, mussing the strands and hardly caring. “So, you won’t trust the man who kept you from prison or the man who is hiding you in his house as we speak. Of course.”

“Inspector…” Warmth and love splash down onto Enjolras’ words, soaking them with feeling. “My
friends mean everything to me. I cannot treat their safety lightly.” He tilts his head. “Besides, what is it to you if I don’t see them?”

Javert can’t answer. Wanting Valjean’s approval is abhorrent enough, but at least he can admit that. Feeling anxious and guilty around Cosette only makes sense given his past dealings with her mother.

But Enjolras?

Javert almost respects him, and he hates it.

He’s never been a part of something like this. Something involving the lives and emotions of other people. Something where the people involved can’t do without him. Even in the force, he’s replaceable.

But not in this scheme.

This scheme with a convict and his adopted daughter, a rebel, and a police inspector.

What is he doing?

Cosette stands up from her chair, surprising them all. The words out of her mouth surprise Javert even more.

“I’ll go.”

Valjean shakes his head with an immediacy that makes Cosette furrow her eyebrows in irritation.

“Before you argue, Papa, let me finish. Enjolras is worried for his friends, and he for them. Of the three of us, I have the most reason to keep his secret. My own Marius is a rebel, and giving away the address of his friends could possibly endanger him. Besides that, like Enjolras, I did not know until last night that you knew a police inspector, so we both have the same question that neither of you are willing to answer.”

Cosette doesn’t sound harsh with Valjean, but she does sound determined, and Javert senses this is building to something Valjean might not be able to run from or avoid.

“So therefore,” Cosette continues, putting a hand on her father’s shoulder to ease his worry. “I think I am a safe choice to go.” She looks at Enjolras, satisfaction in her smile. “Will you trust me with it, Enjolras?”

“Yes.” Enjolras nods, looking more alive at the prospect of seeing his friends than he has since Javert encountered him at the station. Granted, the boy is full of fire, but this is something more. Something even stronger than his bright inner spirit. “I will.”

“Cosette,” Valjean protests, his voice hoarse. “It…this could be dangerous. I can’t let you go.”

“Papa…” Cosette speaks softly, but it’s clear she’s not giving up. “Enjolras was brave enough to fight for what he believes in, and his friends deserve to know he’s all right just like I deserved to know Marius was alive. You risked your life to save Marius’. Inspector Javert showed courage by breaking the law to do good and bring Enjolras here. I can surely do this.”

Javert freezes at those words, unable to bear this young woman thinking well of him.

He doesn’t deserve that from her, even if a week ago thinking this way would have made him retch.

But then, maybe his questions about Valjean and the things that sent him to the Seine were in his
head long before a few evenings ago. He just wasn’t willing to recognize them until Valjean spared his life and set everything happening right now in motion.

Valjean takes Cosette’s hands in his, running his thumbs across her skin. “I want you to be safe. The streets…”

“Are nearly returned to normal,” Cosette finishes, still gentle. “And Touissant can ride in the fiacre with me, and then I’ll go in myself. I assume your friend doesn’t live somewhere dangerous, Enjolras?”

Enjolras shakes his head, sharing Cosette’s smile. “No. And his portress is very nice.”

“That’s settled then,” Cosette says, shaking her head when Valjean opens his mouth to argue, though her voice grows unsteady when she speaks again. “I’ll go bright and early in the morning. But for now, Papa I…I’d like to speak to you in private, if that’s all right.”

Valjean stares at Cosette with widened eyes, and Javert thinks he knows just what she wants to talk about.

She wants to talk about how Valjean knows him. And with that, everything will unravel. She’s not demanding it, but she’s asking so directly, and yet still so kindly, that Valjean might not be able to refuse her. Javert feels guilty over causing this, but nothing can remain hidden forever, and he couldn’t take Enjolras anywhere else.

Valjean nods once, terror passing across his face before it recedes, just a hint of bright hope lending his cheeks color. He asks Javert to sit with Enjolras before following Cosette out of the bedroom, her smaller hand slipping down to grasp his fingers in reassurance.

Then, Javert and Enjolras are alone.

Javert sits back down in the chair with Enjolras watching him.

“A gamin saw me come in the door,” Javert says. “Hopefully that doesn’t bode ill for us. Although, it might have been the one on the barricade. The one who told you who I was. But he ran so fast I couldn’t quite tell.”

Enjolras releases a breath of relief that’s half a laugh. “Gavroche? Gavroche saw you?”

“I said it might have been.”

Enjolras furrows his eyebrows, thinking. “My friends might have sent him but then…I don’t know how they could know I was here unless they tried some scheme or…” he trails off, frowning. “But if he saw you, god knows what they might think. They might think you’re interrogating me here.”

“Well won’t they be in for a surprise,” Javert murmurs.

Enjolras keeps gazing at him until Javert’s forced to look up.

“Yes,” Enjolras says, intrigue in his voice and a hint of warmth in his eyes, even as his words sound far off in the distance, living in some world Javert can’t yet see. “They certainly will be.”
Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

Valjean tells Cosette the truth about his past. The Amis reunite with Enjolras. Valjean and Javert share their vulnerabilities with one another, cementing a shaky friendship. Everyone looks forward, wondering what the future holds for a house full of insurgents, a rogue police inspector, and two wanted men.

Chapter Notes

Thank you to everyone for the lovely comments on the last chapter! I hope to get back to my regular schedule of answering them this time around, but be assured they are so very appreciated! I hope you enjoy this next installment.

Cosette takes them into her bedchamber.

Were they in Rue Plumet, he’s certain she might have taken him to the garden. As it is, she’s taking him where she feels safest. They sit in the pair of chairs by the window, a stream of weak moonlight cutting into the shadows cast across the floor. The stripes of light and dark look like prison bars against the wood, a humid, late spring breeze blowing in from the cracked window.

Valjean’s hands won’t stop shaking.

“Papa…” Cosette takes both of his larger hand in her small ones, perching on the edge of her chair. “I won’t demand you tell me your secrets. But I am asking you to tell me, once more. You’re always trying to protect me, and I understand that. But there is an insurgent in our house. There is a police inspector you say you know. The man I love is laying ill, and only alive because you saved him. I don’t know how to continue on with all of this unless I understand how you know Inspector Javert. Unless I know…more.”

Valjean doesn’t answer immediately.

He could lie, he supposes. He would have, before. Made up some tale about he knew Javert as a younger man, but there’s too much happening for him to keep up a story like that, and it would feel like he’s protecting himself rather than Cosette, in that instance.

But how does he tell her? How does she tell Marius, or does she? Will he have to tell Enjolras too?

Everything will come spilling out. Will he ruin her? She needs him, still. Enjolras needs him. Javert needs him.

Perhaps they all need the truth.

He shudders against the terror rushing through him, feeling goosebumps race across his skin.

Then, he looks in Cosette’s eyes.
A fierce courage gleams within them, reminding him of the dying embers of such a thing in Fantine’s eyes. She’s so young, but maturity of spirit flows forth, and something’s changed in her. Or maybe it hasn’t. Maybe it’s been there for months, for years, and he’s only just seeing it now.

He’s so proud of her.

Maybe that’s what makes him cry.

Maybe that’s what makes him burst into tears in front of his daughter for the first time since…

Ever.

“Papa…” Cosette’s voice is so unbearably kind. So generous. So full of love he feels he does not deserve.

He’s so afraid of losing her. More afraid of hurting her. Of ruining her chances if she knows the truth.

But he has to tell her, doesn’t he? Javert all but assured that when he showed up at the door with a broken insurgent in tow.

“Papa…” Cosette repeats, letting go of his hands and wrapping her arms around him instead. “Papa it’s all right. I love you. Do you understand that? I always will, no matter what you tell me. I’m strong enough to hear whatever you have to say. I’ll be fine, I promise you.”


“I was a pruner in Faverolles.” The words emerge like pieces of shattered glass, cutting his throat and leaving him bleeding with memories of a past he hardly ever lets himself think upon for too long. “I lived with my sister and her husband. Their seven children. I…” He pulls back from his daughter’s embrace, placing both hands gently on the side of her face, their eyes locking together. “Back them my name was…” he breaths in deep, afraid of his own name. The name he hasn’t used for so long. “Jean Valjean.”

“Jean Valjean,” she whispers, and the sound of his real name on his daughter’s tongue shakes him to his core. “Keep going, Papa.”

The next words come out of Valjean’s mouth, every syllable trembling with grief and fear. He lets go of Cosette’s face, and she takes his hands back, holding tight.

“We were hungry. Starving. And one night I broke a window and stole a loaf of bread to feed the children. I was arrested for it. I was…” he swallows, breaking her gaze, even as she squeezes his hands and keeps them linked. “…I was sent to Toulon. Five years hard labor but I…I kept trying to escape. I was a convict for 19 years, all told.”

Cosette stares at him, her eyes wide as tears stream down her cheeks already. “Those convicts we saw,” she says, her voice low with shame. “I was so afraid of them, and the things I said, you must have…Papa, I didn’t know…I didn’t…”

She’s still calling him Papa, he realizes. She’s apologizing to him. “Shhh…” It’s Valjean who pulls her to him now, rubbing one hand up and down her back. “You have nothing to be sorry for.”
She pulls back again, taking his hands once more. “Is that how you know Inspector Javert?”

“He was a guard at Toulon,” Valjean replies, the truth heavy on his tongue. “But our paths have crossed since and have grown decidedly more complex. When I left prison, I was angry. I was…not the sort of man who could have raised you. Things were…difficult. When you’re released from the galleys, you’re given a yellow passport, and many people would not give me work, then. People seemed so cold.” He does not go into specific detail about how he was judged by everything the yellow passport represented, because it’s all he can bear to tell the story right now. “Until I met a bishop in Digne.”

Cosette sniffs, tilting her head. “A bishop?”

Valjean nods. “He gave me a place to stay when no one else would. But I was so angry, I was so…broken, that I stole his silver. When I was arrested for it, he said he gave it to me. He told the officers to let me go, told them he’d given it to me, even though I’d stolen from him after he was so kind. He even gave me the…”

“The candlesticks,” Cosette breathes, her eyes alight with realization. “The silver ones you love so much.”

Valjean nods again. “His kindness changed my life. He saw the good in me, saw who I might be, even when I couldn’t. When no one else would. And the silver he gave me was a new start. It…I think of him every day. Always. And I wanted to pass what he did for me on to others. I wanted to create a place where people didn’t have to suffer.”

He tells her about Madeline. He tells her about the bead factory. He tells her about becoming the mayor of Montreuil.

He tells her all of it, and then, he arrives at the matter of her mother. Of Javert. He will tell her everything, but he doesn’t think he can bear to tell her about the last moments between Javert and Fantine. He’s not certain he should be the one to tell her.

He pauses in his tale, and Cosette look at him with a particular glint in her eye, as if wishing she might steel herself against oncoming emotion.

“This is where my mother comes in, isn’t it?” Cosette speaks quietly into the room, and Valjean realizes just how silent the house is.

He hopes Enjolras and Javert haven’t murdered each other in the interim. At least Toussaint would alert him if she heard anything strange.

“Yes,” he whispers, focusing back on his daughter. “It is. She…are you certain you’d like to hear?”

Cosette squares her shoulders, still holding his hands in hers. “Yes, Papa. I’m certain.”

“Your mother worked in my factory. One day she was fired by my foreman, though I knew nothing of why, as I wasn’t present. I trusted the woman I’d hired, perhaps too much. She…” Valjean struggles with the next words. “By the time I encountered Fantine, she…she had struggled. She was destitute, she’d sold everything to send money for you. She…she was forced to sell herself. That’s when I found her, in an encounter with the police.”

Cosette shuts her eyes, holding tighter to Valjean’s hands as tears flood down her cheeks.

“Inspector Javert was working in Montreuil at the time, and was suspicious of me. We clashed then, because he…well your mother was accused of attacking a man, and Javert considered it his duty to
arrest her.” Valjean stops, wondering why he’s trying to soften the blow against Javert, not really understanding his own motivations. For some reason, he doesn’t want Cosette hating the man, if Cosette is capable of hate at all. Maybe she’s too bright and golden for such a dark thing. “I stepped in, and took your mother to the hospital instead. It…it was my fault, Cosette. That your mother ended up that way. She slipped through the cracks of a place I thought was devoid of any cracks. But she loved you. Until her dying breath she loved you. With everything she was.”

Cosette shakes her head, wiping her eyes. “No. It wasn’t your fault, Papa. You didn’t know.”

Valjean pushes a stray brown curl out of Cosette’s face, staggered by the fact that she hasn’t run screaming from him. “I should have been more aware.”

“Inspector Javert should have been more kind-hearted.” The first hint of anger slices into Cosette’s voice. “Is that why he brought Enjolras here? To make up for his past?”

“Perhaps, yes,” Valjean says, not wanting to speak to Javert’s motivations for fear of getting them wrong. “I think in part.”

Valjean tells her about the trial at Arras and his dark night of the soul. He tells her about his second arrest and his time on the Orion. He tells her about how he spared Javert’s life at the barricade, and how that led him here.

He supposes he hasn’t spoken so many words in many years. Perhaps not ever.

“Your mother loved you, Cosette,” Valjean repeats when his story comes to an end. “I am a sorry replacement, but I love you. I hope you know that. When she died, I knew I had to find you. Protect you where she was no longer able. Little did I understand how much of my heart would belong to the little girl I met in the woods that night.” Half of a sob cuts through his words and he forces it back, because he needs to be here for Cosette, and not let his own emotions overcome him.

Cosette launches herself into his embrace, wrapping her arms around his neck and sobbing with abandon, the sounds stifled slightly against his shoulder.

“If you’re frightened, or if you’re angry at me, I understand.” Valjean moves one hand up and down his daughter’s back, feeling himself shaking again. “I promise I will do everything I can to ensure your future. I’m sorry I couldn’t keep these secrets until that was done.”

Cosette’s sobs quiet down, and she hooks her chin over his shoulder, her fingers grasping at his shirt. “I’m not frightened, Papa. I’m not angry at you. I’m….” she pulls back again, looking him in the eyes. “I’m so sorry about everything you went through. I’m sorry you shouldered that all alone. I wish you would have told me, Papa. Don’t you see? I love you. I still love you.”

“…” Valjean’s voice breaks, and he fights for composure. “I didn’t want to risk your future. I want every happiness for you, and no burdens. You had enough of that as a child.”

“You shouldn’t have had to suffer like that because your family was hungry,” Cosette insists. “My mother shouldn’t have had to suffer. She shouldn’t have had to give up being with me for us to survive. It’s…I know my mother loved me. I wondered sometimes. But some part of me always knew it was true, because of the memories I had of her, and because you told me, even if I didn’t have the details. And now I know…now I know for certain. And you…you have done everything for me, Papa. I want to know you. Please promise me you won’t hide yourself from me anymore. Please, Papa.”

Valjean smiles, his heart pounding hard against his chest. “I will try. I promise you that.”
Cosette sits quietly for a moment, a thousand questions passing through her eyes that she can’t seem to ask just yet.

“You’re still hiding from the law.” Cosette looks up, meeting Valjean’s eyes once again. “That’s why all of the secrets.”

Valjean nods, exhaling a breath. “I’m afraid so. I don’t think that will ever change, though no one is actively looking for me, these days, as far as I know. Except…”

“Inspector Javert,” Cosette says, a hint of fear in her voice. “But he can’t…surely he wouldn’t do anything now. He would have to turn himself in, too.”

“You’ll find Javert has little trouble subjecting himself to the same harsh punishments he might bestow on others.” Valjean thinks of that day in Montreuil, when Javert came to him and insisted on terminating his employ in the police force because he thought he’d falsely accused Valjean. “I still don’t think he will give me away, but for different reasons.”

Cosette nods, unable, perhaps, to ask anything more, occupied as she is soaking up everything Valjean’s told her. She doesn’t ask how they’ll tell Marius or Enjolras, or if they will. That is a problem for another day. Exhaustion runs through Valjean’s blood, leaving his limbs heavy.

For now, it’s just a father and his daughter holding a fragile truth between them.

“I’m sorry if all of this has put a damper on the future you dream of with Marius,” Valjean whispers. “I swear to you Cosette, I’ll find a way to make it so, if you wish to marry him. There is money aplenty for you. I’ll go away, I’ll…”

Cosette grasps his hands tight, almost to the point of pain. “No, Papa. I won’t have that.”

“Cosette…”

“No,” Cosette emphasizes, her voice sharp with admonition. “We will tell Marius if we have to, but we can speak about that later. We will keep the secret to keep you safe even if I don’t like secrets. I need you. I want you, Papa. And I think…well I think Enjolras and Inspector Javert need you too. If you want my opinion.”

Valjean pulls Cosette’s hands to his, pressing a kiss to her knuckles. “I do. I do, Cosette. You…” he stumbles over the words. “Are you certain you do not fear me, after what I have said? I would understand if you did. I was…for a time, in those years in Toulon, I was a broken man. An angry man. If not for Bishop Myriel, if not for you, I do not know who I would have become.”

Cosette puts a hand on the side of his face, her gentleness making him want to cry once more. “You are who I have always known you to be: the man who rescued me from darkness, who became my father, who I know my mother trusts from heaven. My father who risked his life to save the man I love. I know that man. And I would like to know the man you were before, Jean Valjean from Faverolles. I think I saw something of him in Fauchelevent the gardener when we lived at the convent.” Cosette smiles, and it makes Valjean smile too. “Even if I didn’t know it.”

Valjean kisses Cosette’s forehead in response, feeling her trembling.

“Sleep, Cosette. I know this has been so much for you to hear, but we can talk more, later, if you wish, and I know you’ll need your rest if you are to go on your errand to see Enjolras’ friends, tomorrow.”
Cosette raises her eyebrows, the surprise clear among the exhaustion. “You aren’t going to argue with me over that?”

Valjean shakes his head. “No. I only knew your mother for a brief time when she was very ill, but I saw her spirit, even then. That spirit full of defiant life in the face of every dark thing thrown her way. I see it in you, too. It’s past time I recognized it, instead of letting my own fear control everything.”

“I understand why you were so protective, Papa,” Cosette says softly. “Truly, I do. Will you stay with me?”

“Let me see to Javert and Enjolras and then yes, I’ll stay. For as long as you like.”

Valjean kisses the top of Cosette’s head before he goes, leaving her alone with her thoughts.

A great many things flood through him as he walks down the hallway: fear, regret, anxiety, joy, and one thing most of all, a thing he never really expected.

Relief.

——

Courfeyrac runs a hand over his face, hoping it might make his head spin less.

It doesn’t work.

He crouches down so he’s closer to Gavroche’s level, though it puts him a little below his mark, given Gavroche’s gangly, awkward height.

“You’re sure it was Inspector Javert you saw go into the house?” he asks, hoping that maybe if he asks again it won’t be true.

Gavroche frowns, resting one hand on his hip. “I saw him plain as day. He’s got all that long black hair, stern face. Hard to forget.”

“We were worried about you,” Bahorel adds, mussing Gavroche’s hair and earning a grin. “Why didn’t you come back until this morning?”

Gavroche shrugs. “Police were crawling around here. They’re gone now, though.”

“Must have been more insurgents in this neighborhood than others,” Feuilly mutters. “I sent that note to another fan-painter I work with who was at another barricade. I have to be at work in two more days, though luckily enough of my fellows are sympathetic to the cause that I might not get too many questions. But I don’t want to go back before we’ve figured out what happened to Enjolras.” Feuilly takes his hat off his head, twisting in his hands.

Courfeyrac wants to comfort him. Courfeyrac wants to embrace Feuilly and tell him they’ll find Enjolras. That it will all be all right.

But he feels frozen. He can’t think of anything to say. He can’t wipe away the image of Enjolras giving himself over to the National Guard. He can’t wipe away the image of an injured Marius, babbling nonsense until he fell unconscious.

He doesn’t know where either of them are, and Enjolras might be in very real danger. A police inspector at the home of a man who abruptly showed up at the barricade? Are they in some scheme
together?

Nothing makes sense.

Finally, Courfeyrac manages to clasp Feuilly’s shoulder. He receives a sad smile in return, knowing his friend feels some guilt at both agreeing to let Enjolras hand himself over and about not telling them.

Courfeyrac isn’t angry at Feuilly.

But part of him is angry at Enjolras, even if he wishes he wasn’t. Why wouldn’t Enjolras trust him with this? Why would he just…hand himself in without saying a word?

He can’t think of that right now. He won’t, until they find him.

“Do you think he’s all right?” Grantaire speaks the question softly into the lull in the conversation, and Courfeyrac’s not sure he’s ever heard him sound so gentle. “Do you think that old man you’re talking about and a police inspector are keeping him there? Hurting him?”

Bossuet puts an arm around Grantaire’s shoulders and slides one hand into Joly’s from his place in-between them on the sofa. “We can’t assume we know anything, because we don’t have the facts. Enjolras might not even be there.”

Even Bossuet sounds worried.

“I couldn’t see through the window like I wanted,” Gavroche grumbles. “That inspector saw me, and I ran for it.”

“As well you should,” Bahorel says. “I say if Enjolras doesn’t come knocking in a day more we go to that house. Find out.”

Prouvaire puts a hand on Bahorel’s knee. “I want to agree, but what if that gets us in trouble? I don’t want Enjolras’ sacrifice to turn out to be for nothing if we also end up in jail.”

“True,” Bahorel mumbles, his hand going absentmindedly over Prouvaire’s. “But I made promises about the barricade. I didn’t promise anything after.”

Combeferre, who’s remained silent through this entire proceeding, gets up abruptly from his chair, excusing himself with a soft “I need a moment” before retreating toward Bahorel’s bedroom.

Courfeyrac follows.

Eventually they’ll all have to go back to their own homes, but Courfeyrac suspects it will be a while until then. It’s not yet safe to go, and he couldn’t bear to leave his friends. Especially not with Enjolras and Marius both missing, two pieces of his heart missing along with them.

“Combeferre?” Courfeyrac finds his friend’s back to him, putting a tentative hand on Combeferre’s shoulder, thinking it must be the first time he’s ever been tentative about anything, really.

He doesn’t feel himself. None of them do, of course. They’re all worried for Enjolras, and deeply. But no one understands the ache in his chest quite like Combeferre does.

“I’m sorry.” Combeferre turns around, his smile melting away as soon as he tries forcing one. “I just needed a moment. I thought I had answers when Bahorel and Feuilly told us what happened at the barricade, but now there are just…more questions.”
Courfeyrac sits on the edge of Bahorel’s bed, scrunching at the fabric of his trousers with sweaty hands.

“Is that why you were angry with Bahorel, at first?” he asks. “Because you didn’t understand? You weren’t angry at Enjolras?”

Combeferre tilts his head, pushing his glasses up from where they’ve slipped down his nose. “Essentially. Why?”

“I…” Courfeyrac crosses his arms, ashamed of his own emotions. “I am angry. At Enjolras. I hate even saying it because all I want right now is to find him. To make him safe. But I…why didn’t he trust us?”

Combeferre sits down next to him, and Courfeyrac feels the tension in his muscles relax at the touch of his friend’s hand on his back.

“It’s not about that. He trusts us with everything.”

“He trusts you. Perhaps he thinks I’m just silly, after all.”

Combeferre turns Courfeyrac’s face toward his, meeting his eyes over the rims of his spectacles. “You know that isn’t true. You know Enjolras considers you one of the most important people in his life, and absolutely crucial to everything we fight for. You hold us all together. Enjolras knows that.”

“Sometimes he flies so high I don’t know whether to go up with him or stay on the ground.”

Courfeyrac thinks of the thousand times Enjolras sat in the corner of the Musain, gazing off into the distance as if looking toward a future he saw more clearly than the rest of them. “I’m angry that he handed himself over so easily. I worry it’s because he hates himself for shooting that man in the head.”

Darkness passes across Combeferre’s face, and he turns away, staring out the small window. “I worry about that, too.”

“Then why aren’t you angry?”

Combeferre turns back from the window. “Because I understand the logic. It was him, or all of us. And I know that I couldn’t have let him go. I know it as well as he did, in that moment. I couldn’t be rational, then. Not about that.”

Courfeyrac shakes his head. “I can’t think like that. Maybe that makes me childish. But he didn’t give me the chance to do as he asked. He didn’t give me the chance to let him go or save him. He just cut me out of the choice entirely.” Courfeyrac starts, realizing how his words might sound. “I’ll do anything to find him, you must know that. That’s my first concern.”

Combeferre does smile now, that familiar wise twinkle in his eyes settling Courfeyrac somewhat. Eccentric as he is—and as many times as Courfeyrac has found him awake at odd hours of the night and tripped over a pile of books for his trouble—Combeferre always makes him feel grounded.

“Of course I know. I would never doubt that for a second.”

“I wonder what that old man’s story is,” Courfeyrac ponders. “I wonder if he helped Marius. Maybe that means he helped Enjolras, too?”

“Maybe,” Combeferre says, though his tone indicates he wants proof. “But then, why that police inspector? It’s odd.”
There’s a knock on the door, making both of them jump.

“Enjolras?” Combeferre says, his voice hoarse with abrupt emotion.

They both leap from the bed, dashing into the living room and finding Bahorel by the front door, his eyes narrowed in suspicion.

“Who is it?”

Then, a voice.

A feminine voice.

Courfeyrac’s heart sinks.

Not Enjolras.

“My name is Cosette Fauchelevent.” The woman’s voice stays at a whisper, as if afraid she might be overheard. “And I have some news you might like to hear. About a friend of yours.”

Bahorel opens the door, gesturing the girl inside quickly before shutting it behind him.

“I’m sorry, did you say Cosette?” Courfeyrac speaks before anyone else can.

Cosette looks at him, a half smile sliding onto her face as if she knows who he is. “Yes. I’m Cosette. Are you Courfeyrac?”

“Yes,” Courfeyrac echoes, hearing the desperation in his own voice as he steps closer to her. “You know me?”

“Marius has mentioned you.” Cosette smiles fully now, tears in her eyes. “And Enjolras, too. They’re alive, both of them. I meant to say so as soon as I came in the door.”

Courfeyrac takes Combeferre’s hand, holding it tight, letting Bahorel ask the next few questions.

“When sent you, mademoiselle?” Bahorel asks, both suspicion and eagerness in his voice. “Our friend Gavroche here saw a police inspector going into what I assume was your house, and you understand we were worried when we heard that.”

Cosette nods. “I understand perfectly why you would worry, but Enjolras sent me himself. He wanted me to take you to him, at my father’s house. My father was at the barricade with you. Inspector Javert he…he brought Enjolras to our house, and my father is keeping him safe there.”

The old man. The old man is Cosette’s father? Cosette, who is the love of Marius’ life? Courfeyrac shakes his head, taking it all in.

“How is he?” Combeferre asks,

“Inspector Javert is helping hide him?” Bossuet says at the same time.

“Yes,” Cosette says, answering Bossuet’s question first, before turning to Combeferre. “He’s injured, but he’ll be all right, don’t worry. Badly broken arm, bruised ribs, concussion.”

“He didn’t have any of that when we lost him.” Courfeyrac hears a rare hint of anger in Joly’s voice. “Do you know how he came to those injuries, Cosette?”
“When he was with the National Guard,” Cosette says. “I… I believe they broke his arm with the butt of a pistol.”

Courfeyrac glances at Prouvaire, who rubs his own head wound in sympathy.

“A doctor’s seen him?” Joly persists in his questioning. “Set his arm?”

“Yes,” Cosette repeats. “My father made sure of it. I promise you, we’ve been looking after him. But he’ll be so relieved to see you.”

“I think I speak for all of my friends when I say we are grateful for the generosity your father has offered…” Feuilly speaks up now, gazing at Cosette with interest. “But might I ask why he might be so eager to help a fugitive? We knew him only briefly at the barricade, but then later learned he helped Inspector Javert. It was a bit of a confusing picture.”

“My father saved Marius’ life himself,” Cosette replies, though she doesn’t speak to the piece about Javert, and Courfeyrac wonders why. “That’s why he was at the barricade. Because he found out I was in love with him, and he’s safe in his grandfather’s home now, ill, but alive, last we heard. He… my father is kind, and wants to help. I…” she gazes around at them all, looking fond. “Marius told me about all of you, and Enjolras too. We should go, I know he’s eager to see you. We can talk more once we’re there.”

“Wait…” Grantaire finally says something, sounding skeptical. “We’re supposed to just trust a police inspector who suddenly went rogue?”

“Same question,” Gavroche echoes, jabbing his thumb in Grantaire’s direction in agreement. “Your father’s nice, Madmoiselle Fauchelevent, but that inspector is nasty.”

“We must trust him if we want to see Enjolras,” Prouvaire cuts in, his voice holding a gentle ferocity. “And Madmoiselle Fauchelevent seems rather trustworthy.” He smiles at Cosette, whose eyes gleam with joy at the trust.

“If Marius’ words are to be trusted she certainly is,” Courfeyrac adds, reaching out his hand to press Cosette’s fingers, feeling as if they’re old friends, though he notices the purple smudges beneath her eyes. “Perhaps if it’s safe for you, when I

Cosette shakes her head. “No. Not anymore.”

As they all prepare to go, Courfeyrac pulls Cosette aside, gathering her into a tentative embrace she returns with enthusiasm.

“I am so pleased to finally meet you,” he tells her. “Marius is a fool for you, you know. And thank you so much for helping Enjolras. We have all been frantic.”

“Marius speaks very well of you, and Enjolras too.” Cosette presses his hands as if they’re old friends, though he notices the purple smudges beneath her eyes. “Perhaps if it’s safe for you, when I
hear back about a time to visit Marius, you can come with me.”

“I’d love that.” Courfeyrac squeezes her hands before letting go. “Thank you.”

But first, they must see to Enjolras.

Courfeyrac’s heart clenches when he thinks of his bright, golden friend so hurt and so worried over them, no doubt. So alone with strangers, even kind ones.

Enjolras’ light shines with such strength that Courfeyrac can’t bear to think of it dimmed. He swears that if it is, he’ll help Enjolras find it again.

He hopes Enjolras might trust him with that.

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“Nine of you?”

Javert’s voice cuts into the room with an edge of disbelief.

“Is it so strange to possess nine close friends, Inspector Javert?” Enjolras asks, shifting in bed as his arm twinges with pain. He’s taking Laudanum still, though less during the day so he might be more alert. He counts Grantaire among the nine, though sometimes he can’t tell if Grantaire likes him or only likes to tease him, though Combeferre always says he’s eager for Enjolras’ approval, rather than the opposite.

I believe in you.

He remembers Grantaire’s words, sounding sincere for once, though he didn’t know what to make of it, then. He thinks of Grantaire shoving Joly out of the line of fire as they ran from the barricade, at the risk of his own life.

It’s the sort of courage Enjolras always thought he might possess, if he only might believe in himself.

“I find it difficult to believe that many people might care for each other all at once without some kind of selfish interest,” Javert says, leaning back in his chair.

Valjean raises his eyebrows, putting down his newspaper, and it strikes Enjolras how utterly unexpected this situation is, sitting with a rogue police inspector and a man with so much mystery surrounding him that Enjolras doesn’t know where to begin. “That’s terribly cynical, Javert.”

Javert snorts. “I’ve seen a great deal of selfishness in my time, Valjean. Besides, it’s not as if you entertain a large group of friends.”

Valjean opens his mouth to respond when the front door opens.

The sound he’s been waiting for.

Enjolras’ heart jumps from his chest to his throat.

His friends. It must be them. It must.

He swings his legs over the side of the bed, going to his feet in an instant, even if they’re still shaky.

“Easy there,” Valjean says taking his good arm. “Let me help you.”
Enjolras agrees without argument, the stairs just wide enough for Valjean to help him down. He doesn’t care about the pain. He doesn’t care about how weak he feels. All he cares about is seeing his friends’ faces. Javert follows behind them, and when they reach the entrance hall, at first Enjolras only sees Cosette and Touissant coming back inside.

Then, the door opens wider.

He sees Combeferre’s face. Courfeyrac’s. Feuilly’s. Jean Prouvaire’s. All his friends file in, eight pairs of eyes looking at him.

Nine, he realizes, when Gavroche slips inside too, and Enjolras almost laughs when the boy winks at him.

Combeferre gets to him first.

Enjolras doesn’t have the chance to speak before Combeferre’s arms are around him, conscious of his broken arm in the sling. Enjolras grasps onto Combeferre’s coat, holding his friend close. He melts into Combeferre’s touch, quiet tears sliding down his face.

“You’re all right,” Enjolras says, hardly even meaning to speak. “You’re alive, all of you.”

Combeferre pulls back, his hand sliding down into Enjolras’ own. “We’re all right. A little cut up, but fine.”

Combeferre gives him a doctor’s once over, looking as if he wants to say more, but he saves it for now, allowing their other friends forward to greet Enjolras.

Courfeyrac comes up to him next, tears welling in his eyes, his curls limp and lifeless. He puts both his hands on either side of Enjolras’ face, placing a kiss on his forehead before pulling back. His hands move to Enjolras’ shoulders.

“Don’t you scare me like that again,” Courfeyrac whispers. "Please, Enjolras."

“I’m sorry, Courfeyrac,” Enjolras replies, resting his forehead against Courfeyrac’s own, even though he feels strange with Fauchelvent and Javert watching them. “I know how worried you must have been. Marius is alive, did Cosette tell you?”

Courfeyrac nods, a flash of something in his eyes Enjolras can’t quite interpret. “She did. Does your arm hurt a great deal?”

“It’s not too terrible.”

“A yes, then.”


“I see Joly is all well?” Enjolras puts his hand on Grantaire’s shoulder, hoping the small gesture communicates his feeling. “You are braver than you think, my friend.”

Grantaire blanches, looking almost overcome.

Then, he smiles.

“Grantaire and Bossuet helped me all the way to Bahorel’s,” Joly says, sharing his own smile with
Enjolras. “My ankle was so swollen! But it’s on the mend.”

Enjolras gazes at all his friends, all of them bandaged and bruised and cut, but here. Alive. Whole.

As whole as any of them can be, anyway.

Prouvaire approaches him last, and Enjolras is more aware now of Cosette, Fauchelevent, and Javert’s eyes on them now, knowing he’s being rude in holding off the introductions.

Prouvaire takes Enjolras’ hand, pressing a kiss to his knuckles as Enjolras ghosts a hand over the bandage still wrapped around Prouvaire’s head, visible now that he’s removed his hat. Enjolras has his own such bandage, the head wound still making his temples throb.

“We match,” Prouvaire breathes, and Enjolras studies his face, feeling known by his friend without words. Feeling so grateful to see him again, when he worried he might be dead. Enjolras remembers those hours at the barricade after Prouvaire was taken, wondering if he was alive or lost to them.

“So we do,” Enjolras replies, pressing Prouvaire’s hands once before letting go and turning toward Cosette. “Thank you so much for retrieving them, Cosette. I am eternally grateful.”

Cosette smiles. “Of course. Everyone, this is my father, Monsieur Fauchelevent. Papa, this is Bahorel, Prouvaire, Feuilly, Combeferre, Courfeyrac, Joly, Bossuet, Grantaire. And Gavroche, who I hear has been to our door before.”

Fauchelevent’s eyes widen, and Enjolras wonders if he’s ever had this many people inside his house, though he looked pleased even still.

“Cosette and her father have been kind to me beyond measure.” Enjolras feels his legs start quaking beneath him again, and Combeferre takes his arm, helping him sit down in the chair from that first night.

How many nights has it been?

It’s only the ninth of June, he realizes.

It feels like longer.

He sees Javert hanging back, and speaks once more.

“I don’t know what Cosette told you, or what you might have learned before she came. But Inspector Javert did bring me here, at risk to his own standing.”

A marked, awkward silence falls, none of his friends knowing how to respond to that, because he still doesn’t, either.

That is, until Prouvaire speaks up.

“Thank you,” he says, his voice holding an ethereal quality in the quiet. “For bringing Enjolras to safety.”

Javert stares at Prouvaire for a very long moment, taking in his injuries with a glint of what looks like upset in his eyes before he blinks it back, clearing his throat.

“I…you’re welcome.”

Feuilly steps past Javert and right up to Fauchelevent, who looks surprised.
“We are grateful to you, monsieur, for taking our friend into your home. You’re very kind.”

Fauchelevent waves his hand, a shy blush creeping into his cheeks. “It’s nothing.”

“Keeping a wanted man in your house isn’t nothing,” Feuilly argues. He glances back at Enjolras, offering a smile that Enjolras returns. “And it seems you took good care of him, too.”

“You can’t take him back with you.” Javert’s voice cuts into the air with a strange urgency, though Enjolras had assumed as much. “It won’t be safe to do so.”

Bahorel raises his eyebrows, looking ready for a fight. “And why should we trust you?”

Javert steps closer to Bahorel, though the space in the small entrance hall grows tighter by the minute, and the tension makes Enjolras’ heart beat faster.

“One because I brought him here, as was just pointed out,” Javert growls. “Two, because I’m one of the inspectors assigned to looking for him. Taking him anywhere outside these doors is dangerous to him, unless…” he hesitates for just a slight second before he says Fauchelevent’s name, not enough for the others to notice, but Enjolras does. “Monsieur Fauchelevent and his daughter would prefer not to take the risk any further.”

“No, we are glad to keep Enjolras here.” Fauchelevent exchanges a look with Javert, and Enjolras notices Cosette looks worried too, if determined.

That same silence falls again, and Fauchelevent takes note of it, his eyes searching the group. “Why don’t we all go to the sitting room and talk further? I know it would be better for Enjolras.”

“Actually, might I have a word with Combeferre and Courfeyrac and then join the rest of you?” Enjolras asks. “We’ll just be a few minutes.”

Feuilly presses Enjolras’ hand before Combeferre and Courfeyrac help him up the stairs and toward the small room where he’s been sleeping. He sits down on the side of the bed and Combeferre does too, one hand covering his own. There’s anxiety in Combeferre’s touch but no sign of anger.

“How is your arm?” Combeferre asks as soon as the door shuts. “Joly will want to look too, but I can’t help myself.”

Courfeyrac, Enjolras notices, doesn’t sit down, a worried look in his eyes and…

Is that anger he sees?

Enjolras is certainly familiar with Courfeyrac’s anger, but he suspects this anger might be directed at him.

Honestly, he expected the opposite. He expected Combeferre to be angry.

Not Courfeyrac.

Enjolras turns back toward Combeferre, needing to answer the question, relieved beyond measure to have both his friends with him again, even if Courfeyrac might be upset with him.

“It…the pain is rather persistent. But the doctor said it set well, despite the time between the break and treatment. He said it would take longer to heal because of it.”

“How long?” Combeferre asks.
“Hours. I’m not sure how many, but several. I was at the station for quite a long time, being needlessly interrogated.”

Combeferre furrows his eyebrows, gingerly inspecting the arm as well as he can while it’s in the sling. “Other injuries?”

Enjolras knows Combeferre has gone into his physician mode to distract from all the anxiety and questions awaiting them, but the familiarity comforts him.

“Concussed,” Enjolras tells him. “That seems better now, though my head does ache. And bruised ribs. One possibly broken. It could have been worse, I suspect.”

“Worse?” Courfeyrac finally speaks, tears glistening in his eyes as he crosses his arms over his chest.

Enjolras keeps hold of Combeferre’s hand, turning to look at Courfeyrac, feeling utterly unequipped. He has no memory of Courfeyrac ever being angry with him. Fleetingly annoyed maybe, but not angry. He doesn’t think he’s even argued with Courfeyrac before. With Combeferre sometimes, but in a way that was more an elevated debate than a fight.

But Courfeyrac?

He truly doesn’t recall.

Enjolras opens his mouth, but Courfeyrac speaks again, an anguish in his face that says he doesn’t want to be angry, but is despite himself.

Angry, and hurt.

Enjolras remembers Courfeyrac screaming his name, the words screeching through the air until they shattered on the paving stones below.

“Don’t say it could have been worse, Enjolras. We were worried sick. I can’t…you’re hurt enough as it is, I don’t want to spend more time thinking of worse.”

“Courfeyrac…” Enjolras squeezes Combeferre’s hand before he reaches out toward Courfeyrac, grasping his fingers. Courfeyrac stiffens before accepting the touch, his fingers curling around Enjolras own.

Still, he looks away. “Courfeyrac,” Enjolras repeats, looking over at Combeferre for confirmation.

Combeferre nods, verifying Enjolras’ suspicions that something was amiss before they arrived here.

Courfeyrac’s voice grows sharp, threaded through with anguish. “You just decided that you were going to hand yourself over if things turned bad. You just decided it. You, who always talk about how we all decide things together.”

“I…” Enjolras tries. “I did tell…”

“Feuilly and Bahorel, I know,” Courfeyrac says, fire inching into his voice, but he still keeps hold of Enjolras’ fingers. “But you didn’t ask them, did you? You told them.”

“No.” Enjolras remains firm on that point. “I did not order them. I did ask.”

Finally, blessedly, Courfeyrac looks at him, and there are tears streaming down his cheeks. “But you didn’t ask me. Or Combeferre.”
The sight of Courfeyrac’s tears moves Enjolras to tears, too, and he thinks that’s he cried more in the past few days than he has in a long time. “I could barely bear to ask them. I knew I couldn’t ask either of you. I couldn’t put you through it.”

“You knew we couldn’t let you go,” Combeferre says, his words soft. “Right?”

Enjolras nods, and he feels Combeferre’s hand on his back as Courfeyrac finally sits down on the bed, leaving Enjolras sandwiched between the two of them. “It was either me, or all of you. That was the choice.”

Courfeyrac tugs on Enjolras’s hand, their eyes meeting. “If you don’t trust me, Enjolras, I need to understand why. Please tell me.”

Enjolras feels like someone might have socked him in the gut. He never even considered that Courfeyrac might feel like that, exactly.

“Courfeyrac I trust you with all that I am. Both of you. But I…I didn’t even know if Bahorel and Feuilly could let me go. I really didn’t think either of you could. And I didn’t want to ask it of you.”

“Combeferre understands your choice better than I do, though I should tell you he threw a pen at Bahorel’s head when Bahorel was being cagey about what you asked of him.”

Enjolras furrows his eyebrows. “What?”

“Later,” Courfeyrac assures him. “But what I’m saying, what I’m asking, is that you give me a choice, next time. To either do as you ask, or not. You wanted to protect us. But we wanted to protect you, too. After…what you said after you shot that man, Enjolras. About condemning yourself. It doesn’t have to be like that.”

Enjolras’ voice grows hoarse. “This wasn’t about that, I promise. It was about making sure all of you got out.”

At Combeferre’s concerned glance, Enjolras knows he thinks it was at least in part about that.

Maybe it was.

But it was about protecting his friends, above all.

There’s time to talk about that later. Right now, Enjolras is grateful and relieved to see his friends again, comforted in the knowledge that the rest of his family waits downstairs. He glances over at the table next to his bed, the half-finished letter to his parents resting there. He has to finish it. He has to figure out what to say, without endangering them, hoping his friends might be able to help. He doesn’t want news of the barricades reaching them too far in advance of his own letter.

“I will try my hardest,” Enjolras continues, looking between the two people he loves most in the world. “I promise. I’m…I’m so sorry I worried you. I just…”

Enjolras feels the tears fill his eyes again, wondering when if he’ll ever stop feeling this raw.

What is he going to do? Who is he going to be? He only knows how to cling to the pieces of himself he recognizes, the pieces in his soul that keep shining like an unrelenting dawn, even if so much is darkness.

“We know,” Combeferre whispers, putting an arm around his shoulders as Courfeyrac leans his forehead against the side of Enjolras’ head. “We know, Enjolras.”
“What did those National Guard soldiers do to you?” Courfeyrac asks. Ferocity bubbles up in his voice, heat flooding the room.

Part of the trouble with that question is that as awful as his time with those soldiers was, half the memories haunting Enjolras are those from the barricade itself.

The gunfire. The blood. The screams of pain. The smoke and chaos of that final moment when they burst through.

What makes him shiver most about the soldiers who dragged him to the police station isn’t the pain that still throbbing beneath his skin.

It was the laughter.

It was the way they laughed at the idea that he could ever change the world.

_I heard some of the other boys calling this one Apollo, though I don’t think he’s worth all that much. He’s just another fool who thinks he can change the world. Guess we’ll see if he’s really immortal or not, if they decide to execute him._

Enjolras had noticed more than a few of the soldiers who looked like they might want to join the insurgents, and even more who looked torn between their duty and their empathy toward people who weren’t so different from them, every last person standing on either side of the barricade caught up in the chaos as France swung back and forth between progress and the past.

The soldiers who dragged him away were less conflicted, it seemed.

But no matter how low he feels now, he swears he will keep on trying. He will seize the light with both hands.

He will hold on.

“It doesn’t matter, Courfeyrac.” Enjolras’ voice cracks, the sound echoing in the small bedchamber.

“It does matter,” Courfeyrac protests. “It matters that they hurt you.”

Combeferre’s arm tightens around Enjolras’ shoulders, and this gives Enjolras the courage he needs.

“They…they knocked me out when you last saw me, and when I woke up I was in a dark street corner somewhere, and they struck my arm with a pistol until they heard the snap. They kicked me in the ribs because I wouldn’t give them any information. I passed out again, from the pain, and woke up in the police station.”

Enjolras sees a fire spark in Courfeyrac eyes, burning dangerously bright.

“I’ll kill them.”

Enjolras shakes his head. “No. Right now we…we have to find a way to grieve and we have to find a way to move forward.”

How they’ll move forward with the police hunting him down right now, Enjolras doesn’t know. Though if he knows anything, he knows his friends won’t leave him behind.

But he also doesn’t want to get in the way of their lives. He wants to be useful. He can’t hide away forever, or he can’t do anything to change France.
That’s what scares him most.

Combeferre seems to sense his thoughts without Enjolras speaking them, taking one finger and turning Enjolras’ face toward his.

“We will share your fate. Remember? That means we will never abandon you. Even if we have to give you a new name. Hide you. Do whatever we must.”

“You didn’t shoot that man in the head. You didn’t kill the artillery sergeant.”

Enjolras speaks without knowing what he was going to say, guilt and pain at those memories dripping down onto the words. He believes the world can change, and he will keep trying to change it. He had to do what he did, on the barricade, but god, it still leaves a searing pain in his chest.

Right now, he does wonder at his place in that changed world he sees so clearly. He wonders about his place in the world now. He wonders about how to live as a fugitive without endangering his friends. Without endangering Fauchelevent and his daughter.

Combeferre keeps looking at him, their eyes locked. “No. But I love the man who did, and I understand why he had to do it. So does everyone sitting downstairs. No matter what happens, that will never change.”

Despite all this worries, despite all his grief, Enjolras lets himself breathe in this moment and breathe in those words.

Even as the shadows grasp at his soul, the sun pools in through the crack in the curtains hiding him away from the world.

For now, that will have to be enough.
they are by prison bars. They took him away when he was still small, and he doesn’t think he’s ever been touched with that kind of love since. Monsieur Chabouillet helped him with his career, but real affection? Javert doesn’t think so. A vague friendship, maybe. But the truth is, Javert doesn’t have any friends. He doesn’t have personal relationships.

He always thought he didn’t want them. He didn’t think he needed them.

Was he wrong?

Perhaps so, even if the thought makes him shudder. He hasn’t loved anyone since he was a little boy with his mother, and those memories are so short, so faded, he doesn’t think he could even grasp them again. No one remembers his mother but him. His Romani mother, who died in prison. He doesn’t know anything about his father, except that he was in the galleys like Valjean, swallowed up and never heard from again. He fiddles with a strand of his long black hair, lost for a moment in the child he barely ever had the chance to be.

He catches Enjolras’ eye for a second, turning away when the boy tilts his head in concern.

“Oh Papa may we go this evening?”

Javert hears Cosette’s voice, directing his gaze toward the front door now. The letter must have contained an invitation to visit the Pontmercy boy. Cosette goes back into the sitting room, likely to share the letter and news of Marius’ well-being with the rest.

“We’ll need to come up with a reason for them to be here if they’re going to be coming in and out,” Valjean mutters half to himself as he approaches Javert again. “Neighbors might be suspicious. Though if things get concerning we can move to the house on Rue Plumet. It’s bigger.”

Javert stares at Valjean. “You keep two residences?”

Valjean almost smirks. “Of course.”

“Clever devil,” Javert mumbles, feeling an odd urge to laugh.

The urge spreads to Valjean, who chuckles first, and Javert joins in, the deep, rumbling sound half choked off.

When was the last time he laughed? He surely doesn’t know, because he doesn’t laugh often generally. When was the last time he thought of anything other than the dark, ominous waters of the Seine as dawn broke the night? When was the last time he heard anything other than his boots scraping against the stone of the bridge?

If he hadn’t stopped at the station, if he hadn’t encountered Enjolras, if he hadn’t taken part in this scheme, he would be dead now.

He’d planned to write his letter, then toss himself into the waters into eternal sleep, never to think of Jean Valjean again.

Never to think of the man whose mercy sent him running toward the bridge in the first place.

Yet now…

Now here is with that same man. With a group of insurgents. With the daughter of the woman in whose fall he played a part.
With not just one wanted man, but two.

He doesn’t know what to do with that.

How does he remain a police officer and hide fugitives?

Those two things might be impossible to do at once. They might tear him apart and drive him back to the bridge.

He shakes his head.

“Let’s go sit in the kitchen a while, and let the young men and Cosette talk,” Valjean says. “We can have some tea.”

Javert follows without argument. He isn’t required at the station until the morning, though with the manhunt ongoing his colleagues might find it strange that he’s missing, especially given his usual work ethic. He doesn’t really like much other than his job.

He sits down at the small table as Valjean gets to the work of making the tea himself, casting a glance back at Javert every so often. Finally, he asks the question Javert’s been dreading most.

"Are you all right?"

"No."

Javert says the word without meaning to. He wishes he could take it back the moment it passes his lips.

Valjean abandons the tea preparation, sitting in the chair across from Javert. "What's the matter?"

“What isn’t?” Javert snaps, noticing Valjean jump in surprise. “I’ve put everything at risk. Everything I’ve ever believed in is ash, thanks to you and that damned insurgent. My whole life will be gone too, if I’m found out. I’d deserve it. I’ve broken multiple laws.”

“I see you still blame me for sparing your life.” Valjean speaks the words without judgement, not speaking to the rest of Javert’s proclamation. “But what exactly has Enjolras done?”

“Made me respect him,” Javert grumbles. “I don’t respect treasonous rebels.”

“Apparently you do. It is possible for us to contain multitudes, Javert.”

“I suppose you would know.” Javert folds his hands on top of the table. “You’ve been multiple people in your life, haven’t you?”

“Yes,” Valjean whispers. “Though I haven’t been allowed to be the man I began as for a long time. I don’t even know who he is.”

The intimacy and vulnerability of Valjean’s confession make more words spill out of Javert’s mouth. Words that might break him open. Words that might leave him with a gaping, bleeding wound he isn’t sure how to heal.

"I almost threw myself into the Seine before I found Enjolras at the station." Javert admits his near suicide because he can’t keep it inside himself anymore, even though that horrifies him. "Part of me still wants to."

"Javert..." Valjean sounds like he’s searching for words, reaching one hand toward Javert before
pulling back, unsure. "Don't do that. Please don't do that. If I'd known I wouldn't have let you
leave."

"Why am I even telling you this? We aren't friends." Javert looks in the direction of the room where
the young men sit, soft laughter flooding out through the door.

Valjean drums his fingers on the table in thought, looking younger than he did last evening. "We
could be. You were right about what you said before. I don't have friends, either. Maybe I ought to
change that."

“A convict and a police officer?” Javert questions. “Sounds like one of those silly damn stage plays.”

“What made you come back from the bridge?” Valjean asks, not letting Javert steer away from the
situation.

“I…” Javert isn’t sure he can bear to tell the truth. “Just…” he stumbles uncharacteristically over his
words, wishing he could just melt into a puddle and slide out the door and away from this
conversation. “Well. I didn’t know if you and Enjolras could manage this scheme by yourselves, is
all. I was prevented from going when I wanted to go because I made the stop at the station. Then
later I just…something changed.”

Valjean looks at him for a long moment, understanding that this may only be a half-truth, but not
pressing him.

“I know what it is to not value your own life, Javert.” Valjean sounds as if he’s speaking a secret of
his own that he’s only just now stumbling upon. “And I have you to thank for making me re-think.”

Javert narrows his eyes. “What?”

“If you hadn’t shown up on my doorstep with Enjolras, I…well I didn’t have a plan, exactly, but I
didn’t have much intention to live beyond seeing Cosette married. I didn’t think she would need me
anymore, or want me.”

Javert clenches his fist, feeling an urge to press Valjean’s hand, though he doesn’t act upon it. “What
changed your mind?”

“I’m still in the process of changing it.” Valjean’s voice sounds less burdened than before. Less
weary. “But speaking with Cosette, largely. Telling her the truth once I realized I had no other
choice. I thought it would go terribly and I don’t exactly know how to move forward, but it…it
opened something up. A road. That, and knowing that Enjolras needs my help. And maybe…”

Valjean meets Javert’s eyes, though he doesn’t finish his sentence.

And maybe you do too, is what he doesn’t say.

“I don’t know much about these things,” Javert says, breaking Valjean’s gaze and looking resolutely
down at the table. “But that girl loves you. Did you…did you tell her about the way I treated her
mother?”

Javert feels a throbbing beneath his ribs, old, forgotten memories of Fantine feeling raw in his mind
as shame creeps up from the pit of his stomach. Shame he never expected to feel.

Not until Valjean broke everything open.

Valjean winces. “Not exactly. I only told her you attempted to arrest Fantine, not about those last
moments. I didn’t want her thinking ill of you, since you seem to have a desire to change. I didn’t want to ruin that for you.”

Javert rolls his eyes, a sigh punctuating the room. “You are terribly soft, Valjean.” He looks toward the doorway, his heart beating faster. “But if I am to make any effort to examine the way I want to go, I need to admit my failures. Openly.”

Valjean furrows his eyebrows. “You are determined to punish yourself.”

Javert leans forward, jabbing a finger into Valjean’s chest. “You are no better.”

Valjean dares to smile, looking almost mischievous. “Well, perhaps we can learn to be better together. I can think of one young man in the other room who might need our help on that front.”

Javert raises his eyebrows. “Enjolras doesn’t seem the sort to struggle with that.”

Valjean’s eyes flick toward the door. “Perhaps not before. But it’s different now. I’m quite fond of him already, I find. And I think you are too.”

Javert sits back in his chair, crossing his arms over his chest. “Make the damn tea, Valjean. Before I turn you in.”

Valjean smiles again, and it’s the smile of someone Javert’s never seen before. The smile of a young man yet untouched by the galleys. Untouched by a lifetime of running and hiding and worrying. Javert doesn’t know that man.

He hopes that one day, he might.
Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

Cosette, Courfeyrac, and Valjean visit Marius. Enjolras finds himself bonding with a police inspector as he questions his future, memories of the barricade clawing at his mind. Cosette convinces her father to tell Enjolras the truth about his past, and pulls some truth of her own out of Javert.

Two weeks after the barricade fell, danger comes to call.

Chapter Notes

Thank you to all for the VERY kind comments! Going to be better about answering them this time around, but I am so grateful, and I hope you enjoy this installment!

“Monsieur Fauchelevent…” Cosette keeps a tight hold of Marius’ hand as he speaks, his voice hoarse from exhaustion and illness. “I…I cannot thank you enough. We kept wondering who brought me here, and to know it was you, what you risked…”

Cosette smiles, looking between Marius and her father. If her father had his way this secret would have remained buried, and she’s glad it isn’t. She’s glad that Marius knows what her father did for him. There’s so much, right now, to think over in respect to her father: his past, her mother’s past, their past, really, but one thing about him still remains crystal clear. Well, two things, really.

His unending generosity.

And his love for her.

She also knows that her love for him has perhaps grown stronger now than ever before, even if she has a thousand questions to ask.

Valjean waves his hand, a blush creeping into his cheeks. “It’s…”

“Everything,” Cosette says, not letting him get away with it. “Everything, Papa.”

Marius presses a kiss to Cosette’s hand, and Cosette sees the effort that even that takes. He’s not as ill as he might be, but he is very ill, and they won’t be able to stay for much longer. His skin is pale, the rings of purple under his eyes clear even after hours of sleeping.

“And you…” Marius lowers his voice even further. “You have Enjolras? At your home, monsieur?”

“That you must keep to yourself, Marius,” Courfeyrac adds from his place on the other side of Marius’ bed. He brushes several strands of Marius sweaty black hair from his forehead with a gentleness that warms Cosette’s heart. “You musn’t tell anyone, even your grandfather.”

Marius nods in understanding. “How is he? Injured?”
“Badly broken arm,” Courfeyrac answers. “Bruised ribs. Head wound. But he’ll be all right, physically.” Courfeyrac frowns, his eyes clouded with anxiety, as if he might be worried over Enjolras’ emotional state. He puts a smile on a half second later, smoothing Marius’ hair again. “I turn my back a moment and two of my dearest friends are hurt, though at least he Enjolras is not feverish like you. You need to rest and take care of yourself, all right? Or I shall know. It might be dangerous for me to come back for a while, so Cosette will report to me, I’m sure.”

Marius smiles at Courfeyrac, even his freckles looking faded as he grasps Cosette’s hand tighter. “When Courfeyrac isn’t joking you know it must be serious. You’ll soon see, Cosette, if you’re still interested in marrying me. My grandfather has given his permission now that he’s met you, and seems to adore you as he should.”

Cosette puts a kiss on Marius’ sweaty forehead. It’s true the Marius’ grandfather was very kind to her, and to her father, once he realized Valjean was the one who brought his grandson home. She wants to like Gillenormand, though she knows he and Marius were separated for a long time, so she worries over that. Still, she’s going to try her hardest, and give him the benefit of the doubt.

“That is…” Marius stumbles a bit awkwardly over his words. “If you give your permission, Monsieur Fauchelevent.”

Cosette watches her father nod in response, a small smile gracing his lips. “Of course. Anything to make Cosette happy.”

“If I may be so bold,” Courfeyrac adds, winking at Cosette and drawing out a giggle. “I don’t think Monsieur Fauchelevent would have come to the barricade to save you, Marius, if he didn’t intend on accepting your proposal of marriage to Cosette.”

Marius blushes, and Cosette notices his hand shaking from the effort of staying awake.

“I think we need to let you sleep,” she whispers. “You’re very ill, Marius.”

A pang of worry strikes deep in the pit of her stomach, making her feel a little unwell herself. Marius’ grandfather said the doctor believed Marius was out of the woods as far as death, but that it would take a while for recovery. She trusts the doctor, though she can’t help but worry. She wishes that perhaps she could send Combeferre or Joly over for a second opinion. She’s only just met them of course, but they’re friends of Marius’ and evidently good doctors both.

“You’ll come back?” Marius asks, his eyelids already falling heavily.

“Of course,” Cosette assures him, pressing a kiss to his knuckles as Courfeyrac smooths the covers. “In a couple of days, when you’re rested.”

They leave him sleeping after that, bidding Nicolette and Gillenormand farewell on the way out, and Cosette watches her father nod kindly when Marius’ grandfather starts speaking of wedding plans, which by necessity will be far out, given Marius’ health.

And, Cosette, thinks the situation in their own house.

Her father insists on sharing a fiacre with Courfeyrac to get him back to Bahorel’s rooms where all the young men are apparently still staying for safety’s sake, wanting to make certain he arrives safe and sound. Valjean tells him that they may all return the day after tomorrow, so as not to draw too much attention by coming back the very next day.

Courfeyrac’s eyes gleam with worry when he steps out, his hand white-knuckled as he grasps the door. “You both have done so much for Enjolras and we are all…so grateful. But if he should need
anything, if you need anything for him, please don’t hesitate to send for us. We’ll be there. Did he write his parents? I didn’t get to ask.”

“You needn’t worry on that account, son,” Valjean says. “We will. And yes. We sent the letter off with some vague details, but it will take a while to arrive.”

Cosette hears the worry in her father’s voice because she knows him, but Courfeyrac doesn’t notice it, smiling as Cosette pats his hand, bidding them farewell. Both Valjean and Cosette stay quiet for the first few minutes of the ride home, Cosette pondering on just how much her life has changed in the past few days.

A wanted insurgent in her house.

The near loss and rescue of the man she loves.

The unraveling of her father’s past, and the police inspector who goes along with that.

She curls and uncurls the fingers of her right hand, feeling both anger and sympathy toward Javert, who seems terribly lonely. Her father wouldn’t give her the entire story about her mother and Javert, but she suspects it’s worse than her father might want to let on. She wants to give the surly inspector a chance—which he seems desperate for, even with few words. She doesn’t want to push Javert further over the ledge of his fragile state of mind, but she does want to talk to him. Until all of them are honest with each other, none of them are safe.

She reaches out for her father’s hand, drawing his gaze away from the window of the carriage. “Papa?”

He turns, the space of the carriage dark between them. “Everything all right?” he asks.

“Yes,” she says, still keeping hold of his hand. “You? Thank you taking me to see Marius, even if we could only stay for a short bit.”

Valjean smiles, and she repeats his real name in her own head, relishing the fact that he’s trusted her with the truth.

“Of course,” he answers, but the worry is evident in his eyes. “I do hope no one else overheard us speaking of Enjolras.”

“I don’t think so.” Cosette squeezes her father’s hand, hoping he finds it reassuring, and he still seems baffled that she hasn’t run screaming from him. “But now that you’ve brought up Enjolras, there’s something I’d like to talk about.”

Her father gazes at her, brushing a strand of his snow-white hair from his face. “You want to tell him the truth about me.”

“I…” Cosette struggles with the words, feeling as if she’s paining her father, and that’s the last thing she wants. “It’s not my place to demand it of you because it’s your story, but with all of us in the house and so many secrets….I worry it will prevent us from doing the right thing, and tripping over who knows what.”

Valjean looks away, biting his lip, but he doesn’t let go of her hand, either. “Telling Enjolras might entail later telling his friends. And possibly your young man. I…”

“I don’t want to put you in danger, Papa,” Cosette says, worry making sharp pricks in her stomach again. “If it will, then let’s not.”
Valjean shakes his head, taking her other hand. “I worry about what it will do for your future, if too many people know, and it seeps out into the open. That’s my concern.”

Cosette purses her lips. “Papa. That is not my worry. Now that Marius knows you saved his life, I doubt there will be any trouble there, but my concern is for your safety. Most of all.”

Valjean runs his thumb across her palm, and Cosette finds herself wondering just what sort of man her father was when he was young. She hopes one day he’ll speak to her of it in more detail, though she suspects it causes him great pain. There’s so much she still doesn’t know, a lifetime of secrets and experiences she’s never heard.

But the truth is a start. She’s always known how kind and generous he was, but his bravery has been revealed to her in such an astonishing way—saving Marius at the barricade, and everything he’s done since he broke his parole—that she cannot stop thinking upon it. Her mother was brave too, it seems, something she always felt she knew, but without proof except for a feeling deep inside her.

Both of her parents are brave, and she misses the mother she never got to know, memory tugging at her with visions of a beautiful woman with fair hair bidding her farewell outside the inn in Montfermeil, tears spilling from her eyes even though she tried hiding them. She focuses on the parent she does have, the man who always has been and always will be her hero.

“I think Enjolras will keep your secret,” she whispers. “I’ve only known him a few days, but I trust him. He’s trusted us with his safety. With his life. If you are willing, I think we should trust him with the truth. You trusted me with it, and I’m still here. I think we should all do this together.” She takes a deep breath, meeting her father’s eyes, thinking that she loved him from the very moment he walked into the inn. “I know you’re used to doing things alone, Papa. But you don’t have to anymore. We can all do this together.”

Something about her words makes Valjean release the tension in his shoulders, a bright gleam in his eyes she doesn’t think she’s ever seen before. “A convict, his daughter, a rebel, and a police inspector.” Valjean smiles, and it lifts Cosette’s heart. “What a strange group.”

Cosette squeezes his hands, loving the playful sound in his voice. “I like strange.”

Her father still looks worried, but he also looks younger, somehow, than he has in years.

“So do I,” he whispers, trust and belief slicing through his usual solemnity. “So do I.”

Enjolras jolts from his sleep—a hazy nightmare he can’t quite recall, only dark, unclear shapes splattered with blood—met with an unexpected face starting back at him.

Javert.

He fell asleep…he looks at the clock, searching for the time—three hours ago. His friends could only stay a while to avoid suspicion from the neighbors, though they promised to return the day after tomorrow. Enjolras feels their absence keenly even, even in his half-awake state.

“What are you doing here?”

The words slip from Enjolras’ mouth without thought, groggy as he still is.

Javert scowls from his place in the chair next to the bed, his posture impeccable even in the absence of anyone else. “You are impolite, aren’t you? I suppose I shouldn’t have expected differently.”
Enjolras closes his eyes and keeps his temper, which always seems short around Javert. “I’m sorry, that’s not what I meant. I meant…what’s going on?”

“Fauchelevent and his daughter went to see the Pontmercy boy. They took that friend of yours with them, which I thought foolish. We don’t know if Pontmercy’s grandfather is likely to turn him in.”

“And turn his own grandson in too?”

“He has enough money to keep his own boy safe,” Javert grumbles. “I don’t know if the same would hold true for anyone else.”

Enjolras raises his eyebrows. “Admitting to a flaw in the system, are you?”

Javert jumps, realizing the truth of Enjolras’ accusation. “No. I...well they need to be careful, is all. We don’t want the whole story unraveling.”

“I trust Monsieur Fauchelevent and Courfeyrac to be smart about it. And Cosette too, for that matter.”

“Not the Pontmercy boy?”

Enjolras twists the covers to-and-fro with his free hand. “Marius is a good sort, too. But Courfeyrac knows him better, and so the same applies.”

Silence falls thick and heavy between them as night takes hold outside the window, though Enjolras notices the lack of moonlight coming in. He glances out through the glass, seeing clouds masking the stars and the crescent moon, leaving them both shaded in shadow. Javert must notice the same, because he lights the candle on Enjolras’ bedside table, a pool of orange-gold light illuminating a corner of the room and accentuating the black around them.

“What are you going to do?” Enjolras asks, knowing he probably shouldn’t. “Now that you’re assigned to go after me?”

Javert furrows his eyebrows, looking pointedly away. “I don’t know.”

Enjolras leans forward, his ribs giving a sharp twinge as he does so, choosing to lay back against the pillows instead. “Do you want to stay a police inspector?”

“I don’t know.” Javert whispers the words even as he somehow raises his voice at the same time, starting when he hears himself.

An accidental confession, perhaps.

Javert clears his throat. “I have some ideas I would like to implement. Changes, to the way prisoners are treated.”

Enjolras nods, unsure, exactly where the conversation is going, but he doesn’t want it to end, either. “That’s a start. Changing things from the inside is respectable, though there are limits to that without outside pressure.”

Javert huffs, though it sounds put-on. “Like a barricade? Like causing rioting in the street? You weren’t alive during the revolution, but I was. All that blood, all that upheaval, and for what? France went back around to having a king again, and not terribly long after.”

Enjolras’ broken arm twinges, as if it too is offended by Javert’s cynicism. “The revolution changed
the world. Progress is never guaranteed to be linear. It comes in fits and starts. In desperate gasps of air. Sometimes we go backward after we’ve gone forward. But as long as there are people to pass the torch, as long as there are people willing to be radical with their hope, we’ll let more and more light in.”

Javert stares at him with wide gray eyes, rubbing absentmindedly at his chin, which is covered in black stubble. Aside from his side-burns Javert seems the clean-shaven sort, and certainly not the type to exit between that and a proper beard. When Javert doesn’t answer, Enjolras takes a dangerous plunge.

“When you came in to interrogate me…” Enjolras speaks slowly, careful with his words. “It seemed like you were vexed. Were you?”

Javert goes rigid in his chair, his light-olive skin ashen. “Why are you asking me that?”

Enjolras fiddles with his bedcovers, looking out the window again and wishing for more light on this deep, dark evening. “It was just that something seemed off. I was in a lot of pain, then, but it almost seemed liked you didn’t want to be at the station at all.”

Javert doesn’t answer immediately. He gets up from his chair and goes over to the window, the clouds moving as a thin slice of the crescent moon finally comes through the glass, falling across the edge of Javert’s black boots. The light looks silver and cold in the dark, and it’s still so dim in the room that Javert might have been a shadow. Enjolras shifts in bed, watching the warm, yellow-orange glow of the candle dancing across his covers.

“Inspector?” he asks.

Javert still doesn’t respond, looking out into the quiet city street below. They won’t be alone for much longer, Enjolras suspects. Fauchelevent and Cosette will no doubt return soon from Marius’ home. Enjolras feels the secrets slithering into the room. Secrets that must be related to Fauchelevent’s own.

What are these two men hiding, and why?

He no longer fears them in respect to himself—Fauchelevent and Javert have both harbored not just him, but also welcomed his friends, and there would be no logical need for some kind of elaborate plan to trap him. If Javert wanted to, he could easily just drag him off to prison.

So what is their story, and why won’t they tell it?

Enjolras supposes he isn’t owed the secrets of strangers. Although, they hardly feel like strangers anymore. How can they, when Enjolras is depending upon them to keep him from jail? It feels odd, to be so vulnerable with anyone other than his friends. It was not his choice, to be brought here. He expected prison. He expected a trial. He expected…not this. But he cannot say he is ungrateful, of course, he just…he doesn’t know what he’s going to do. He never planned for this, and knowing the secrets of this police inspector and the mysterious man who hides him might help him at least understand. Cosette might know, but he could never ask her to betray that confidence.

“I was on my way to lose myself in the Seine when I came back to the police station.” Javert speaks the words into the silence in an odd, absentminded way. “Or at least I…I was thinking of it.”

“Lose your…” Enjolras understands as soon as he says the words, something going cold in the center of his chest. He feels such sympathy for this police inspector who so unexpectedly saved him from prison, and he doesn’t know how to manage it. “Oh.” He pauses, unsure if Javert wants to
speak further. “But you didn’t.”

Javert turns away from the window, and Enjolras swears he sees a tear roll down the policeman’s cheek before he wipes it away.

“You were rather a distraction, boy.” Javert moves toward the end of the bed, resting his hands on the edge and looking at Enjolras like he understands and doesn’t all at once. “But you know what it’s like to be single-minded about something, don’t you?” Javert gestures between the two of them. “We’re not so different. You dedicated yourself to something just like I did, at the expense of all else, and now you’re unable to interact with it in the same way, having to hide here. We just chose different things. I chose wrongly, it would seem. I admire your persistence, even if what you’re persistent about still baffles me.”

“There’s something else.” Enjolras says the words before he means to, something urging him on, something deep inside him that he knows to be true even if all else around him is uncertain. “My friends. My friends are…” Enjolras swallows, feeling a sharp, overwhelming emotion welling up from the pit of his stomach. “They are the best people I have ever known, and I would be a far different man without them. You don’t have friends like that, do you?”

Javert narrows his eyes, and Enjolras almost regrets his words, though he doesn’t retract them. Javert’s eyes go wide again, and he looks almost like a child.

“I’ve never had a friend,” Javert whispers. “And I never sought one out.”

“Monsieur Fauchelevent might be your friend, if you let him.” Enjolras speaks softly, feeling Javert’s fragility in his hands like a glass about to break, tiny cracks running from the rim to the base, held together by nothing more than sheer willpower and perhaps the touch of a miracle.

Javert laughs. It’s a strange, dusty sound that sounds a bit like a bark, and Javert doesn’t answer the statement.

“Inspector Javert…” Enjolras eases carefully into the words, afraid he might have set something off. “Why did you help me?”

Javert looks at him again, weariness clear in his face. “Because Monsieur Fauchelevent spared my life, and I couldn’t bear it. I didn’t know what it meant about everything I’d ever believed. Or about where I belonged. Funny, isn’t it? How one other person, one moment, can make you question everything you ever thought you knew about yourself.”

The soft words ring loud in the quiet room, and Enjolras doesn’t even expect to say what comes out of his mouth next.

“I shot a man, at the barricade. Not in the heat of battle, but after he killed a shopkeeper who wouldn’t help us. I shot him in the head, all while he asked me to show mercy.”

You have one minute, pray or think.

“He might have been a police spy sent to disturb the barricades or just someone taking advantage of the chaos. That hardly mattered. What did matter was that his actions could not be allowed at the barricade. Not for one moment. If one person was allowed that, more people might think it was all right.” Enjolras breathes in deep, knowing he had no other choice. The memory haunts his dreams and weighs heavily on his soul, even in daylight. “So I judged him and executed him. I didn’t want my friends to stare down that burden. They belong to the world we all dream about. I’m not always sure I do.”
Javert stares at him, his eyes wide in light of the confession. “What are you saying?”

Enjolras looks away from the candlelight and straight at Javert. “I’m saying I know what it’s like to wonder about your place in the world. I know where I belong, now. Or at least I did before I was arrested, which leaves my future a bit murky. But sometimes I wonder where I’ll belong, if the France I long for comes to pass. I don’t mean in a way that I would take my own life, I just…I wonder what place there is in a new world for those who broke the old one with blood. Who perhaps, sometimes, wished to break it with blood, even if they have dreams of a different world. Dreams their friends showed them. Dreams about a slow, steady sunrise instead of a red sky. And I don’t have an answer. I go forward, anyway.”

He does not speak these thoughts, often. To Combeferre once or twice, whispering his fears into the dark. To Prouvaire and Feuilly once, when he went with them to look at the stars. Almost to Courfeyrac, though he could not let the words pass across his lips, because he could not bear to make Courfeyrac frown, though he suspects Courfeyrac knows, anyway. The thoughts have occurred to him more over the past few days, because even if the future they imagined didn’t begin on the barricade, he still doesn’t know what the future holds for him. He doesn’t know where he’ll belong, because he cannot go back to his life.

“If your friends are any indication,” Javert says, going back to his chair, a strange sadness glimmering in his gray eyes. “I think they would have an opinion on the matter. Besides…” the words turn into half a grumble, but Enjolras makes them out anyway. “There will always be some foolish cause to fight for, in our short lifetimes.”

The word foolish nearly sounds like teasing, but before Enjolras can parce out the idea that a police inspector, the man he sent Fauchelevent to kill, is perhaps just a touch fond of him, the front door opens.

Fauchelevent and Cosette must be home. There’s the sound of muted voices downstairs, and then footsteps coming up. Fauchelevent and Cosette appear in the doorway, and Enjolras thinks there’s something in Fauchelevent’s eyes, something anxious and relieved all at once.

“How was Marius?” Enjolras asks.

“Quite ill,” Cosette tells him, sitting down on the edge of the bed. “But he’ll be all right, the doctor says, once the infection leaves him. It will just take time. And we took Courfeyrac to Bahorel’s, so no need to worry on that account.” She tucks a stray hair out of Enjolras’ face and into the white bandage still wrapped around his head. “How are you?”

“All right,” Enjolras answers. “Not as ill as Marius, it would seem.”

“Well…” Javert stands up, looking nervous now, and Enjolras supposes it’s because he thinks he revealed too much of himself. “Now that you’re here, I’ll take my leave. I shall return in a day or two.”

“Wait, if you please,” Fauchelevent says. “Stay a while, Javert, if you’re able. I have some things I’d like to tell Enjolras, and I’d prefer you here while I do it.”

Enjolras’ stomach sinks.

Has he done something wrong?

Fauchelevent seems to sense his concern, giving him a small smile even as his hands shake when he pulls up a second chair. “You haven’t done anything wrong, Enjolras. I would just…I would like to
tell you the truth. About me. I know you must have questions, about how I know Javert, etc.”
Fauchelevent sits down, looking Enjolras directly in the eyes. “We may opt to tell your friends this
information later, but until then, please, I need you to promise you will not whisper a word of this to
anyone.”

Enjolras cannot imagine what on earth Fauchelevent might have to say, but it’s clearly something
secret, something that makes him vulnerable and potentially unsafe. Given how vulnerable and
potentially unsafe Enjolras knows his own position is, and how hard this near-stranger has worked to
hide him, he doesn’t hesitate before answering.

“İ won’t, monsieur. You may trust me.”

It’s deep into the night when Fauchelevent…Valjean, that is, finishes his story. It must be nearing
midnight, or even gone past. Enjolras’ body is angry at him for still being awake—soreness
permeates his ribs, his head pounds, and his broken arm twinges with pain whenever he shifts—but
he can’t go to sleep. Not now.

“So…” Enjolras shuts his eyes, thinking he’ll need to take more Laudanum later, though he is
lowering his doses, now, hating how hazy it makes him. He opens them again, looking over at
Javert. “You…you’ve been trying to arrest Fau…Valjean for years, and now….you aren’t.”

Javert’s eyes flick between Valjean and Enjolras before falling to his hands, which are folded tight in
his lap. “That’s right.”

Enjolras looks at Valjean. “And you spared his life. Even though he was chasing you. You’re even
kinder than I realized, monsieur.”

Javert opens his mouth in protest before closing it, clearly thinking better of it.

“I don’t know about all of that,” Valjean says, a blush creeping into his cheeks, making his white
hair even more apparent. “Cosette convinced me I should tell you the truth because we are full of
secrets in this house. Dangerous secrets that could harm us all. And felt we might be stronger if we
all possessed the truth.” Valjean looks over at his daughter, who gives him a bright smile. “I hope I
haven’t made you uncomfortable.”

“Monsieur…” Enjolras takes in a breath, almost overcome by all of this. “I am honored and touched
that you would trust me with this. And that you would risk yourself to protect me, when you are at a
risk yourself.”

“I didn’t give him much choice,” Javert grumbles, breaking into the conversation, and Enjolras
notices Cosette studying him. “I brought you here without asking. And I knew he wouldn’t say no.”

“I am glad to help.” Valjean glances at Javert, more empathy in his eyes than Enjolras would have
expected. “To help both of you.” He turns toward Enjolras again. “You are not bothered by my past?
I would understand, if you were.”

Enjolras shakes his head. “You have risked a great deal to keep me safe. And besides that, if I were
afraid of a man who stole to feed his family after what I hoped to stand for on the barricade, I would
be rather a hypocrite. I know how terrible prison conditions are in France. I can only imagine what
you’ve been through.”

Valjean looks out the window at the wall of black beyond the glass, the moon disappeared from sight
“It is not what I stole for, but who I became in the bagne that I’m ashamed of.” Valjean speaks so softly Enjolras barely hears him, watching as Cosette puts a hand on her father’s arm and Javert flinches, possibly thinking of some things he might regret, too.

Enjolras grasps Valjean’s fingers with his good hand, and the older man looks up, something tangible, something powerful, forming between them no matter their vastly different lives.

“I see who you are now,” Enjolras whispers. “And understand parts of who you have been, over the years. That’s who you are, to me. A man whose kindness was radical enough to make Inspector Javert bring a wanted rebel to your door, knowing you would open it.”

“He’s right, Valjean.” Javert’s voice sounds low and a little broken, but there’s something brimming within it, something suggesting that he might be able to put the pieces of himself back together. “If you’d told me a few weeks ago that I would be sitting here now, that I would help an insurgent to your doorstep, of all people, I would have thought you were mad. And I’m not just saying that because you spared me. I’m saying it because I’ve been thinking of all the things you did for others that I witnessed, things I disdained you for, and realized all these years later, how right you were. I’m still making sense of it, but you’re…” he struggles with the next words. “But you are a good man. I’m sure your daughter would attest.”

“I would,” Cosette whispers, her gaze lingering on Javert before going back toward her father. “Don’t you see, Papa? Three of the people you’ve helped most are assuring you that we see who you are. I hope one day you can see it, too.”

“Once you’re comfortable with it,” Enjolras adds, pressing Valjean’s fingers before he lets go. “You can rest assured that my friends will not whisper a word of the truth.”

Valjean nods, offering Enjolras a smile. There’s silence for a moment or two, before Cosette speaks again.

“Inspector Javert,” she says. “Before you go, would you mind coming down to the kitchen with me, for a few minutes?”

Javert jolts, clearly surprised by the request. “I…if you wish, mademoiselle.”

“Let me know if you require anything,” Valjean calls after them as they go, and Cosette turns back around in the doorway.

“We’ll be all right, Papa.” Cosette blows a kiss in Valjean’s direction, though there’s something in her eyes, a determination with just a hint of anger, and Enjolras thinks he doesn’t envy Javert whatever conversation he’s about to be a part of.

They’re gone after that, and Valjean keeps his eyes on the closed door for a few seconds before turning back toward Enjolras. “Are you all right? Would you like anything?”

“No, I’m fine, thank you,” Enjolras says, stifling a pronounced yawn. “Though I may not be long for consciousness after I take another dose of the Lauandaum.”

Valjean bites his lip, trying quite hard not to smile. “I see you are less stubborn on that topic than before.”

Enjolras scowls, though he too, fights a smile as fond thoughts of Joly and Combeferre flood through him. “My friends are terribly persistent, which is a wonderful trait usually, but only amplified when they are doctors and you are injured.” He pauses, meeting Valjean’s eyes again. “Thank you for having them here. And for having me. And for trusting me with the truth. I’m honored by it.”
Valjean smooths the bedcovers. “Cosette has me rather convinced of things I could never believe in before. And I know what it’s like, to be hunted down. Perhaps I need not fear that as much now, but I still cannot go out with my real name on my lips. So I would like to help you, Enjolras, even after the most imminent danger fades. We don’t have to talk about it now, but we can, later on.”

There it is again, Enjolras realizes. That blank, unspoken future. He can’t go home to his parents, and wouldn’t want to, anyhow, not because he doesn’t love them, but because he doesn’t belong there and can’t do anything, not to mention the danger it would put them in. He finished his legal studies only just before the barricades, but he cannot do that, either. He expected so many things, but never this…this middle ground where he must be a ghost, or end up in prison. Or possibly dead. He feels himself becoming a burden to his friends, to Valjean and Cosette, even if they don’t realize it yet. What scares him most is having to, perhaps, leave France altogether, and separate himself from his friends. The mere idea of it makes him feel as if he might be rent in two.

Heal, he tells himself. Hide, until the worst passes. And then you will figure it out. If Valjean can be someone else for years, for most of his life, you can, too. You can find a way to do good like he did. You may need to adjust the idea of how and what.

He repeats the words, but for the first time in his life, he can’t convince himself of the truth, because the truth about his situation could change at any moment.

“Thank you.” Enjolras grasps Valjean’s hand again. “I am more grateful than you know.”

Valjean gives him that shy smile one more time before adjusting the pillows and coaxing Enjolras into sleep after a bitter swallow of Laudanum.

After that, Enjolras falls into dreams.

And nightmares.

Javert supposes he knows what Cosette wishes to speak about when she asks him to go to the kitchen.

He still doesn’t know what to expect, exactly.

He can’t get a good read on the girl, honestly. She’s very outwardly sweet, and no doubt just as generous as her adoptive father. There’s something else, though. Something less predictable, something brave, perhaps even wild, beneath the surface. He remembers that same look in her mother’s eyes, even as she begged him, even as she tried to make him understand the desperation of her circumstances. He remembers the drops of half-melted snow glittering on Fantine’s sad excuse for a dress, the blood of the man she attacked smeared beneath her fingernails. She looked dead herself, then, but those eyes. Those eyes were filled with life.

“Tea, inspector?” Cosette asks as they enter the kitchen, a small table sitting in the center of the room.

“Oh.” Javert suspects she wants something do with her hands while they talk. “Yes. Thank you.”

Cosette sets about making the tea after she lights two silver candlesticks that sit in the center of the table. They look finer than most anything else in the house, and Javert wonders where they came from.
“A bishop gave my father those,” Cosette says, guarding her words more carefully than Javert’s heard before. “In Digne.”

Javert doesn’t press for more, watching Cosette make the tea, his heart racing in his chest. She’s going to ask him about Fantine, no doubt. He has no excuses to offer, no reasoning other than your mother was a prostitute who attacked a man, and I wanted to get back at your father for defying me over it, for pretending to be the mayor of a town when he was really a convict. No excuse other than I was doing my job.

When has he not? But even then, even though he was doing his job, he let personal anger seep into his interactions with Valjean, and in turn, with Fantine. Cosette sits down with the tea, offering him sugar but looking unsurprised when he says he takes it without. She curls her fingers around her tea cup, both of them watching steam waft into the air. Their backgrounds aren’t so vastly different, Javert thinks. She the out-of-wedlock daughter of a prostitute and whatever man abandoned her, and he the son of a Romani woman and a galley-slave father he never met, born in prison. Both come from the muck of poverty, and everything that might entail.

There is of course, one breathtaking difference. The same difference Enjolras pointed out when Javert spoke of the similarities between them. Enjolras has his friends, and Cosette has Valjean. Javert doesn’t have anyone. Part of that was circumstance. But part of it was a choice. Relationships are weakness. People are fools. Who is he to trust anyone with his heart, such as it stands, anyway. He’s never felt lonely.

Not until now, when he realized what he was missing.

“What was your childhood like, Inspector Javert?” Cosette asks, the words abrupt and unexpected. “If you don’t mind my asking?”

Her words are kind, but there’s a determination in them, too.

“I…pardon?”

Cosette’s eyes flick up sharply. “I want to understand something. And if you don’t want to answer that’s all right, but if you’re willing, please tell me.”

Javert pauses, feeling a tiny bit like someone might have shot him, though that seems like a strange thing to say about sitting at a table drinking tea with a young girl.

You have killed this woman.

Javert remembers Valjean’s harsh, grating words, but didn’t care, then. He didn’t give a damn about what a convict thought of him. He takes a sip of the tea, giving himself a moment.

“I…” He’s not sure he’s spoken about his parents to…well anyone, honestly. “I was born in a prison, to a Romani mother.” He touches his long black hair. “I lived there, for the first few years of my childhood. My father was a galley-slave somewhere else, but I never knew him. I was raised by the state, after that, though I spent some time on the streets, briefly.”

Cosette doesn’t take a sip of her tea, apparently content to just keep looking at him in that piercing sort of way. “And yet you chose to become a prison guard? Why?”

“Madmoiselle…” Javert tries. “If this is about how I treated your father in Toulon and beyond, I well I hope to work that out, with him. If we continue to become…” he struggles to articulate what they are, exactly, though he remembers Enjolras saying that he thought Valjean wanted to be friends with him. “…friends.”
Cosette finally does sip her tea. She shifts in her chair, brushing a stray chestnut hair behind her ear. “I trust Papa to handle his relationship with you, Inspector Javert. He says you were just doing your job, even if I can’t bear the idea of him in pain. But I want to understand. I want to know why someone who was born in a situation like yours would…would turn on people who came from the same place. People who needed your help.”

“Your mother,” Javert whispers, and something about this girl makes his emotions slide quickly out of control, his voice already shaking. “That’s what you mean.”

Cosette blinks, tears swimming in her eyes. “Papa wouldn’t tell me what happened between you. Not all of it. I’m asking you to tell me.”

Javert hesitates, pulling away from the table and into his chair. “I don’t… I’m not certain you want to hear it. Not because I don’t want to tell you my part, but because it’s…”

“I’ve rather had enough of people thinking they know what’s best for me,” Cosette interrupts, a rare anger in her voice. “Whatever you have to say, Inspector Javert, I am able to hear it. I… my memories of it are hazy and confusing, but I remember being hit and shouted at by the innkeepers who Papa took me away from. I’m… I’m stronger than people might think.”

This sudden, emotional speech surprises Javert, and he takes another sip of his tea. The girl is asking, and he’s obligated to tell her the truth. If she chooses to demand he leave afterward, it would be her right.

He was wrong, about Fantine. He was wrong about everyone like her.

He just doesn’t know what to do about it now.

“Your mother was caught attacking a man in the street, striking him and the like, after she said he shoved snow down her dress,” Javert begins. “She was a prostitute, and no matter her protests that he attacked her first, I believed the man, because of his status. I attempted to send her to prison for six months, but your father stopped me. He took her to the hospital, gave her rest and medical treatment. Promised to go retrieve you. But then another convict was arrested, a man they thought was your father, and when your father revealed himself as the true Jean Valjean, my suspicions were confirmed. I came in, shouting. I told your mother that he was a convict, that she would never see you again. And she…” Javert pauses his here, swallowing back the new disgust he has with himself when he thinks upon this moment. “Her ill body seemed to give out from fright, then. I don’t know how long she might have lived. But I sped her death along. She died in terrible fear, and that’s my fault.”

The words hang in the air like dark shrouds, and Cosette stares at him as her breaths grow rapid. She rests her face in her hands, and Javert doesn’t know what to do. What can he possibly say?

Then, Cosette speaks, sounding so like a child that it makes the stone around his heart break entirely. The stone that Valjean and Enjolras cracked shattered by the voice of a young girl who lost her mother.

“Why didn’t you care about her?”

Javert shuts his eyes, a searing pain running in a jagged path across his chest. The man he was two weeks ago, the man he was up until the very moment where Valjean spared his life, would have scoffed at this young girl. The trouble is, he’s not a new man. Not yet. He’s a man who doesn’t know who he is or what to do. He knows he’s been wrong. He knows he’s trying to forge a path forward, but he doesn’t know where it might take him. He only knows he finds himself depending
upon a convict he once chased and an insurgent who once ordered him dead.

And maybe, just maybe, the girl in front of him, even though he has no right to ask.

“I didn’t care about anyone, Cosette.” His words sound gruff, but he can’t help it. “In my mind your mother broke the law, and deserved the punishment. Those were the rules, and I followed them. That was how I lived my whole life, until recently. I never imagined, until your father showed me, than any criminal could be a good person. Maybe the good part barely mattered. I expected myself to be irreproachable. So I expected it of everyone else, too. Demanded it. Goodness is something more complex, I see now.”

Cosette looks up, tears streaming down her face, and Javert doesn’t know what to do. She surely wouldn’t want comfort from him, and he doesn’t know how to give it. He won’t go for Valjean, either, because he did this, and he will answer for it.

“Was it your job to shout at her?” Cosette just barely raises her voice. “To let her die in fear and pain?”

Javert looks the girl straight in the eyes, making himself hold her gaze. “No. I did that because I was furious your father had fooled me after I spent so long being suspicious of him. I did that to hurt him, more than your mother. She was collateral damage, and I am ashamed of it now. But I wasn’t then. And if you want me to leave, I would understand that. I don’t know that I can be gone entirely until things with Enjolras are settled, but I can make myself scarce.”


“And why not?”

The girl is as bewildering as her father.

“Because…” Cosette’s voice grows kind again, and Javert isn’t sure he can bear it. “You let my Papa go, in the end, when you could have arrested him. You broke Enjolras out of jail at the absolute risk to your career and your freedom. You are clearly different than before, and I don’t want to take that change from you. I just…I want to understand how you could grow up the way you did, and then....treat my mother that way.”

“Because I never wanted anyone to say I was anything but irreproachable.” Javert’s words come out in a hoarse, cracked voice. “I went after criminals because I was the son of people like that, and I wanted to show everyone that I wasn’t like that. It didn’t matter why people broke the law. It didn’t matter that…that the system in place, the one that Enjolras and his friends sought to bring down, was cruel on its face. I didn’t see it as cruel. I saw it as just. I didn’t question it, ever.” He pauses, more honest with this girl than he perhaps ever has been before. “I’ve always been afraid. I just never realized how much, until now.”

A gleam of determination appears in Cosette’s eyes, and she reaches across the table, grasping just the tips of Javert’s fingers. He jolts at the touch, but he doesn’t let go.

“I know what it’s like to be afraid,” she whispers, looking him in the eyes again. “It’s all I was when I was little, after my mother had to leave me at the inn. And then Papa came to get me, and it made me brave. The idea that someone could love me, when the only person who ever did was gone. Maybe I was brave earlier than I realized, to even survive them. But I didn’t feel brave.”

Javert’s breath catches in his chest. Tears spill from his eyes before he can think, before he can stop them, before he can even entirely process her words.
“I’m sorry, Cosette.” He pushes the words out. “For what I did to your mother. And to Valjean.”

She squeezes his fingers and then releases them, wiping her own eyes. “I believe you, inspector.” She smiles at him then, a bright, wondrous thing in the dark kitchen. “And I know I will be able to truly forgive you for it, if you’ll give me time. But I would like you to be friends with Papa. He needs one more than he realizes, and I think, despite everything, that you both would find something good in it.”

Javert laughs in a soft, quiet way, the sound rusty with disuse. “He’s stubborn about accepting help, I take it?”

Cosette shares the laughter, her smile widening. “Terribly.”

There’s a soft knock on the doorframe after another moment or two, and Valjean steps inside, looking worried. “All right in here?”

“Fine, Papa.” Cosette smiles at her father, and Javert wonders if she’s angry about all the secrets, or if she’s just determined to not let anymore in the house. It seems like the latter. “How is Enjolras?”

“Asleep. Quite a day, for all of us.”

Cosette sips the last of her tea and gets up from the table, affectionately straightening Valjean’s cravat as she goes past him. “I’m tired myself and wish to write Marius a note before I sleep, so I will leave you to talk.” She turns toward Javert. “Thank you, inspector. For talking with me.”

The words sound so sincere, so earnest, that Javert can’t quite process how, but he keeps his wits about him. “You’re welcome, mademoiselle. I hope you sleep well.”

Cosette kisses her father’s cheek and then she’s gone again. Part of Javert wonders if he imagined the entire conversation. Valjean sits down in the chair Cosette vacated, and Javert’s eyes linger on the silver candlesticks, speaking before Valjean has a chance to ask about Cosette.

“Cosette said you got these from a bishop in Digne? How?”

Valjean folds his hands on the table, studying Javert in that way that makes Javert feel as if the other man sees into his soul, somehow.

“He gave me shelter one night, while I was on parole. When no one else would.” Valjean speaks the words with a reverence reserved for God himself, if Javert were inclined toward religion, anyway. “I stole some of his silver. Except, not these.”

Javert stares at him. “What do you damn well mean, Valjean?”

“I mean I stole it.” Valjean looks at the candlesticks too, memories flitting across his face. “I was caught. And the bishop said he gave it to me to save me from being sent back to the galleys. And he gave me these, too. Said I’d forgotten them. That was one of two moments that changed the course of things for me. The other of course, was Cosette.”

Javert just keeps staring. “But he…why would he do that?”

“He wanted to give me a chance,” Valjean says, his voice hoarse with deep, old emotion. “To start over. It was the shock of that that made me steal from Petit Gervais, on the road.” He looks up at Javert, meeting his eyes. “Because I couldn’t believe someone would be so kind to me.”

Javert shakes his head, his words sharp as the edge of a knife. “Don’t, Valjean. Don’t compare me to
“Why?”

“Because…” Javert stumbles over his words, hating himself for it. “I can’t even…I’m still figuring out the depths to which I was wrong. Whatever anger you had after the galleys, whatever wrongs you did then, is not comparable to what I’ve done, if I’ve been wrong my entire life.”

Valjean laughs, the sound tired and very soft, but genuinely amused.

“Stop it!” Javert demands. “Stop laughing at me, this is serious.”

“You make everything so black and white, even now. Shades of gray, Javert. You need to learn them. I’ve had to, ever since I broke parole. Since before.”

“I’m trying, Valjean,” Javert grumbles, crossing his arms over his chest.

“I know.” Valjean smiles at him, and Javert almost tells him to stop that too, but he bites his lip against a smart remark.

“More tea?” Valjean asks.

“I should go.” Javert looks at his empty tea cup and back at Valjean. He’s not sure he wants to go back to his lonely lodgings, where he’ll only be alone with his own mind, and it’s also best if he stays away from here for a few days after this, to avoid drawing attention from any neighbors.

Valjean raises his eyebrows, repeating his words. “More tea?”

“Fine, dammit.” Javert pushes his teacup toward the convict he once swore to bring down, both of their secrets humming in the dark. “More tea.”

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**Two Weeks Later**

“You should have come in split up groups,” Javert grumbles. “You coming all at once is going to provoke suspicion.”

He’s sitting around a table with nine insurgents, a convict and his daughter, and…a gamin. He’s having dinner with them, somehow.

“And you won’t?” said gamin demands, ripping off a piece of bread. “You’re police.”

“I cover my face very well before I come in, thank you very much,” Javert argues, and Valjean raises his eyebrows as if to say really? “Not a soul has seen me. I’m quiet. And careful. You lot, meanwhile…”

“I don’t think coming in split up groups would be any less suspicious,” Bahorel argues, narrowing his eyes in annoyance. “In fact it might look more suspicious.”

Javert rolls his eyes. “And are you trained in this sort of thing?”

“I’ve been a part of revolutionary groups in Paris for years.” Bahorel leans forward in challenge. “So I know a little bit about sneaking around, yeah.”
Javert leans forward too, momentarily abandoning his food. “Apparently not enough. I should have said no to this idea from the start, and demanded you all visit in small groups. People don’t visit Monsieur Fauchelevent often, and so it looks strange if that abruptly changes.” Javert looks at Valjean, quickly feeling awkward. “I mean to say…”

Valjean raises up one hand, giving a little smile. “It’s perfectly all right. It’s true that Cosette and I have kept to ourselves, until recently. I don’t think my neighbors the suspicious type, at least, though we should be careful, and perhaps consider some of Inspector Javert’s advice.”

Valjean meets Javert’s eyes, quietly bidding him to ease his mind, perhaps, in front of a group of people who still don’t know the entire truth.

“It’s too bad Marius couldn’t join us!” Courfeyrac says, likely hoping to break the tension. Most the young men are still distrustful of Javert, and Javert supposes he can’t blame them. “Poor man. Though he seems to be doing better, these past few days.” He smiles at Cosette, a gleeful warmth in his eyes. “You went to see him this morning, you said?”

Cosette nods with enthusiasm. “His fever is lowered, and he’s awake for a good bit longer now, and the doctor believes he is out of the woods, but that it will, unfortunately, be a long recovery period. But I’m relieved that he seems out of danger.”

“He knows I would have forced him back as a ghost if he’d gone and died on us.” Courfeyrac grins now, looking mischievous. “And I don’t think Marius would make a terribly good ghost. He wouldn’t be good at a proper haunting.”

“Spent a lot of time thinking on that, have you, Courfeyrac?” Feuilly asks, raising eyebrows and trying mightily not to grin.

“Of course, Feuilly.” Courfeyrac scoffs at his friend. “I have decided which of you would make a good ghost and which would not, Jehan knows my thoughts on this.”

Jehan nods with a gravity Javert certainly wouldn’t expect of such a situation, taking a final few bites of his food and glancing over at Enjolras, his eyes glimmering with fondness for his friends. His head wound is much better, the bandage removed and the cut healed over. His ribs are still wrapped, and his broken arm in a sling for the foreseeable future. But though he looks content enough now, Javert notices the tension in his posture, sensing that something is wrong, he just doesn’t know exactly what. Enjolras looks down at the letter he apparently received from his parents today, a necessarily short missive entreating him to keep them apprised of the situation, to keep himself safe, and to come home to them, if ever possible. Javert suspects he won’t do any such thing. He also suspects Enjolras will have to write another letter entreating them not to come to Paris, which will only complicate matters, but Javert gets the sense that they love their son, even if they don’t entirely understand him.

He tunes back into the conversation, hearing Grantaire and Bossuet argue over who would make the better ghost while Joly moderates and Combeferre peppers in some kind of scientific facts that might point toward the existence of ghosts.

“As much as I enjoy this conversation,” Javert says, rising up from his chair. “I have a shift to get to.”

“Hmm.” Bahorel crosses his arms over his chest. “A shift.”

“Bahorel,” Prouvaire warns, putting his hand on Bahorel’s forearm.

“He doesn’t have to go,” Bahorel says, but his anger isn’t directed at Prouvaire, whose hand he
covers with his own. “How can we really trust him if he keeps going back there?”

“I have a livelihood to maintain, you know,” Javert snaps. “I don’t have family money or anything of the sort. Just myself, to depend upon. So perhaps you shouldn’t make judgements.”

“I’ll make judgements when you happily would have had all of my friends killed or arrested up until this last minute change of heart I don’t entirely believe you’re committed to.” Bahorel half growls the words, and the sound surprises Javert, because Bahorel always seems to be laughing. “How am I to know that you won’t march back to your fellows and turn Enjolras in?”

“Because I’d have to turn myself in, you idiot.”

“Javert…” Valjean’s voice maintains its calm but it does go lower, indicating Javert should stop.

Bahorel narrows his eyes, and Gavroche imitates him. “You seem the sort to drag yourself down. I don’t know why, but you do.”

“Bahorel.” Enjolras speaks now, and though there’s a slight reprimand in his voice, it’s mostly just affection. “Inspector Javert did put a lot at risk to bring me here, and I know it’s strange, but we need to trust him.”

Bahorel looks down the table at Enjolras, and though he doesn’t appear angry, he does seem…Javert supposes haunted might be the right word, he just doesn’t know why.

Javert does his best not to look surprised—possibly even touched—by Enjolras’ words. He notices the one called Feuilly who sits in between Courfeyrac and Bossuet looks very distrustful, and as if he might raise a counterpoint to Enjolras statement, but opts not to. Grantaire, sitting nearby, does no such thing, though he sounds more subdued that Javert expected.

“He’s a police inspector, Enjolras, don’t think you can blame anyone for being suspicious.”

Grantaire runs a finger over the rim of his wine glass. “Weren’t you spying at the barricade? I was asleep so I missed it, but that’s what my friends were saying.”

“I was a spy, but you’re perhaps forgetting that all of you were very eager to have me killed and I’m not harping on about that, now am I?”

“Javert…” Valjean says again, more exasperated this time. “Can we at least not have this discussion while Cosette is present, if you please?”

“I’m all right, Papa,” Cosette replies, squeezing her father’s hand and looking rather intrigued by the entire thing, if not a touch anxious.

It’s Cosette’s soft response that makes Javert swallow back any more harsh words—particularly for Bahorel, hellion that he is—and push his chair into the table where it was before he sat down.

Javert nods at the lot of them, meeting Enjolras’ eyes for a fleeting moment. “Be careful when you leave. I won’t be back for a few days, just to avert any suspicion, though I don’t believe anyone’s seen me.” Javert puts on his hat, turning to go.

“Inspector Javert?”

Javert turns at the sound of Feuilly’s voice, who must want to say what he didn’t earlier.

“Yes?”
“When Enjolras was arrested you must understand that we were all concerned we might not see him again.” Feuilly folds his hands on the table, and though his voice is calm, his eyes hold a sharp, burning look. He’s a fan-painter, Javert knows, the marks of his trade splattered in faded stains on his fingers. “And I understand you’ve put your livelihood at risk helping him. Hiding our secrets. I hope nothing will convince you to break this strange pact we’ve all made.”

Javert nods again, finding he cannot answer, but he does meet Feuilly’s eyes as he does so, and this seems to settle him at least somewhat.

“I’ll go with you to the door,” Valjean says. “Keep eating everyone, I’ll be back in a moment.”

The two of them go down the hall and to the front door, not opening it just yet due to the sound of footsteps just outside. Javert listens as they fade away, putting his hand on the knob.

“All right?” Valjean asks, that concerned glimmer in his eyes that Javert’s become familiar with over the past two weeks.

“I’m fine, Valjean. I’m not planning on jumping from any bridges, if that’s what you mean.”

Valjean tilts his head, a sign of his frustration. “Javert.”

“I’m having some trouble sleeping.” Javert feels odd admitting vulnerability, or anything about himself at all, to anyone. “And I’m not certain what I’m going to do, truth be told, about continuing to lie to my superiors. I don’t care for it.”

Valjean looks alarmed at this, and Javert raises up a hand. “I am not turning the boy in…” he lowers his voice. “Or you. Not to protect myself but because I simply…I cannot. But I also cannot simply leave the force with no plan to keep myself, and because…well…” he trails off, checking his watch. “In any case, it won’t do for me to be late, as I never am, and it will draw attention.”

Valjean presses Javert’s hand for the barest, fleeting moment, offering a smile to go along with it before pulling back, looking unsure of himself. Javert tips his hat and turns to go, listening for the sound of any footsteps before he steps out into the night. He flexes the fingers Valjean touched in the night air, which has grown cooler since the barricade fell, even though summer approaches.

Truth be told, they’re just two old men who have never really had a friend before. Valjean has a daughter of course, but that’s different, and both have known plenty of people, but friendship? It’s new territory, and Javert is hardly certain on how tread the path.

He’ll probably be terrible at it, all things considered.

He reaches the station after a brisk, refreshing walk, pushing all thoughts of what he’ll do from his mind. Confused as he’s feeling about his profession, there are certainly still good things about it, dangerous criminals to take off the streets and the like, and he’s good at it. No matter the lies, no matter the nervous sweat gathering beneath his great coat, he knows that. How to turn it toward his new frame of mind remains a question. He could ask another officer, but that might be dangerous, and he doesn’t know who he would ask, anyway.

Except, when he steps inside, all of this confidence shatters magnificently, and he has to pretend like the breath isn’t being sucked from his lungs.

“Sir,” Chevalier says, breathless himself as he rushes up. “Word is they’ve caught Charles Jeanne.”

“Oh.” Javert keeps his expression neutral, because Charles Jeanne isn’t his problem. If he was stupid enough to get caught, so be it.
You can’t divide things up like that, that voice in his head warns. That’s not how it works.

“Well that’s good news, then,” Javert continues. “Anything else?”

“Yes. There was a report from someone who was walking near Rue l'Homme Arme and said he saw what looked like a group of possible insurgents on that street, going toward some of the apartments there.”

Javert freezes, his mind spinning as he sorts out what to say to get more information without sounding guilty.

“A neighbor?”

“Someone who lived a street or two over,” Chevalier says. “Was out for a walk.”

“And why did he think them insurgents?” Javert asks, keeping his posture utterly straight. “A group of young men is no strange thing.”

Chevalier wipes his brow, looking nervous at the edge in Javert’s voice. “He said he walks there all the time, and hasn’t seen any group like that, and knew we were on the lookout for several insurgent leaders to bring them in. I think he just thought it suspicious. So you and Bisset are to go to those apartments and check all of them up and down when he arrives in a half hour or so. It might not be anything, but the prefect is apparently particularly eager to catch Enjolras, since he got away from us, and there’s speculation those young men might be his associates. Personally I think it’s a bit of a stretch, but we have to do as we’re told, don’t we?”

“Yes,” Javert mutters, only half paying attention to that last bit. “Yes we do.”

A half hour. A half hour. Javert has to find a gamin. Now. He has to write a note. He has to get Enjolras, at least, out of there, or this is all over. If Enjolras is caught, he’s obligated to turn himself in, too.

If Enjolras is brought in, Valjean will be, too, and his whole life will come crumbling down.

So will Cosette’s.

Valjean could be sent to prison. He could be executed, for this final crime.

“Thank you, Chevalier.” Javert keeps his voice steady. “I need to tend to something, and then I will be ready promptly when Bisset arrives. We’ll need to take some others with us, in case we meet any resistance. See to it, please.”

Chevalier nods, obviously not sensing anything strange afoot.

Javert goes to his tiny office, ripping a scrap of paper off and writing as legibly as he can, even though his hand shakes.

“Steady man,” he whispers to himself. “You have to be steady.”

Get the boy out immediately.

He can’t say much. He can’t say he’s coming. He can’t sign it. He can’t give away anything in case it falls into the wrong hands. He goes back outside without much notice from anyone, his eyes searching for a gamin in the dark.

That is, until one jumps at him from the shadow of the station, a wide grin on his face.
Javert seizes Gavroche by the collar, pulling him around to the side where they’ll be less noticeable.

“What are you doing here?” he asks, letting go and shoving the boy just a bit in his surprise.

“Followed you,” Gavroche says, narrowing his eyes. “From the house I mean. Just to make sure you weren’t up to something.”

Javert rolls his eyes. “Bahorel sent you?”

Gavroche grins wider. “He didn’t have to say he wanted me to go. I knew. So here I am.”

“You need to go back.” Javert pulls out the scrap of paper, pushing it into Gavroche’s hand and closing his fingers over the top. “Take this. Now.”

Gavroche opens his mouth to argue as he looks at the paper, his skin going ashen and his mischievous smile dying off as he looks back up at Javert, the one line apparently telling him all he needs to know.

A smart lad.

“Tell them I’ll see them soon.” Javert emphasizes the last word, hoping Gavroche knows what it means and that Valjean will have some time to ready himself for Javert shouting at his door, pretending he knows nothing of any of this.

Gavroche nods before setting off at a dead sprint, his dark blond hair flying behind him.

Javert looks up at the sky and all around him, searching for an answer, but the stars offer him nothing.

He has to do this himself.

And somehow, some way, people are depending on him.

He’s never had that. He’s not even sure he likes it. He feels cracked and confused and all out of sorts.

But he does remember Valjean pressing his hand. He remembers talking to Enjolras in the quiet dark days ago, connecting with a rebel who once wanted him dead. He remembers facing down Cosette in Valjean’s kitchen, and feeling her grief in his bones.

He doesn’t understand Enjolras’ ideals or Valjean’s almost disgusting generosity or Cosette’s overwhelming kindness.

He only knows he made pact with them, a pact to finish what he started when he brought Enjolras to Valjean’s doorstep.

And now, he has to find a way to honor that.
Valjean jumps when he hears the loud, urgent knocking at the front door.

_The police_, he thinks immediately. _The police are here._

_It might not be that_, a calmer, newer voice assures him. _It could be Javert. It could be anything._

“It’s me!” a childish voice shouts on the other side of the door, audible in the dining room.

“Gavroche! You need to let me in!”

“What on earth?” Valjean mutters, getting up from the table eat the same time as Bahorel. Both of them go to the door and Gavroche stumbles inside when Valjean opens it, out of breath.

“Are you all right?” Bahorel speaks first, his eyebrows furrowing in an odd seriousness as he gives Gavroche a once over.

“I’m fine.” Gavroche doesn’t pay the concern any mind, only giving Bahorel a tiny, muted grin before turning to Valjean, handing him a scrap of paper that only reads _they’re coming_.

They’re coming.

The police. He must mean the police. He internally curses the lack of information, but it must have been all Javert could provide, and Valjean wonders how dire the circumstances are. Would Javert come also, putting on a show to fool his superiors? Valjean can imagine what that might do to the man’s mind.

He has to get Enjolras out of here.

He has to come up with a plan.

A shiver rushes through him at the idea of more police at his door, of putting not himself, but Cosette’s future at risk if they find him out in any capacity—about Enjolras, or the truth about his past—but he’s certainly faced worse, he tells himself. He has. He has.
He ushers Gavroche inside and locks the door, grateful the lad was smart enough not to utter the words where someone else might hear them. The color has flooded into Bahorel’s face rather than drained out of it, his eyes shining with anger.

“Whatever you need us to do, monsieur, we’ll do it,” Bahorel says, clasping Valjean’s shoulder. “To keep Enjolras safe, and you and Cosette too.”

Valjean surprises himself by smiling, even as his stomach feels like it’s dropping somewhere toward his feet.

“Gavroche?” Bossuet tilts his head as they enter the dining room again. “Back so soon? I thought Bahorel sent you to spy on Javert?”


“What?” Bahorel echoes, before giving into Enjolras’ frown. “It was a look, I gave the boy a look and he interpreted it, is all.”

“Javert sent a note,” Valjean interrupts, his eyes landing on Enjolras, who stiffens as if he already suspects what he’s about to be told. “The police are coming. Soon. We have to get you out of here and to my other address. Now.”

“A second house?” Courfeyrac asks, sounding slightly astonished. “Really?”

“A larger house,” Cosette answers, standing up and coming over toward Valjean, resting one hand on his forearm in comfort. “With a garden. On the Rue Plumet. Papa…” she turns toward Valjean, and he sees the ideas spinning behind her eyes. “We could pretend this is an engagement celebration for me, when they come. There’s plenty of young men in here, I’m sure one of them would agree to be my fiancé, in Marius’ place.”

Valjean covers one of Cosette’s hands with his own, impressed at her quick-wits in this strange crisis. “One of you will need to go with Enjolras. We’ll put you in a fiacre to an address nearby, then you’ll have to walk a short distance, just to make sure. Actually, no. The fiacre driver might know your face, Touissant said she saw some flyers out yesterday, when she went out. Enjolras, can you manage the walk?”

Enjolras nods. “My legs are all right, my arm’s the problem, but I’m feeling stronger now, I can do it.”

“Volunteers to be my fiancé?” Cosette asks, looking around the room and surveying her choices.

“Feuilly,” Joly, Bossuet, Combeferre, and Prouvaire say at once.

“Hey!” Bahorel exclaims. “I was going to volunteer.” He turns toward Feuilly, giving him a wink. “Not that I don’t think you’ll be excellent, but I did already play Enjolras’ fake older brother.”

“You’re too angry,” Prouvaire says softly. “And you’ve already played his brother. In case someone talks, we don’t want the ruse in trouble.”

“True, quite true.” Bahorel taps his finger on his chin. “And Feuilly is an excellent liar.”

“Thank you?” Feuilly’s voice goes up an octave.

“I mean you’re cool under pressure,” Bahorel adds.
“And handsome to boot,” Grantaire adds, draining his wine glass.

“So I’m a handsome liar, good to know.” Feuilly’s voice is dry, but his eyes glimmer with worry when he looks up at Enjolras. “Who is to go with Enjolras, then?”

“Combeferre and I will,” Courfeyrac says, without asking, and Valjean notices that Enjolras doesn’t argue. “Just give us the address, monsieur, and we’ll get there.”

Combeferre gets up, remaining steady even as his face grows pale. “How far?”

“Only three miles or so, not far.” Valjean looks at Enjolras, who has risen up from the table, a strange look in his eyes that vanishes when he notices he’s being watched. “Enjolras, you’ll need to put a hat on, to try and hide your face. Are you certain you can walk that far?”

Enjolras nods. “There isn’t a choice, Monsieur Fauchelevent. Being caught around here would put you in danger, and I won’t have that. I’ll be all right.”

Valjean steps over toward Enjolras, putting a hand on his shoulder, feeling a rush of affection for this young man he’s known for such a short time. He’s lived a solitary life with Cosette for so long, that this sudden influx of people has been surprisingly welcome, even if he’s still frightened sometimes. His secret rests in the hands of not only Cosette but Enjolras too, and he’s still learning to trust that. Not their ability to keep it—he knows they both will—but the idea that perhaps things won’t implode if other people know the truth.

If Enjolras is found here…

Well that would be bad for both Enjolras and Cosette’s future. For the first time in years he feels a sliver of concern for his own fate. Not because of himself exactly, but because he knows he’s needed. By Enjolras. By the rest of these young men, too. By Cosette still, as she’s expressed to him so many times since the great unburdening of his soul. Even by Javert. His vague plans to sneak away to some unknown future—possibly even fading away into death—afer Cosette’s marriage seem to have abandoned his thoughts. He’s not sure when that happened, exactly, he just knows it has.

“Let’s get you out of here,” Valjean whispers, wishing there was an easier way for them to go, but putting Enjolras in a fiacre would only serve to let someone else they don’t know see his face. “I’ll go retrieve a hat from upstairs.”

Valjean returns quickly, bringing down an old hat of the stovepipe variety, handing it over to Enjolras, who is in borrowed clothes of Combeferre’s, none of them willing to risk going to Enjolras’ old rooms in case those are being watched. Enjolras puts it on, his out-of-fashion longer hair flowing out from underneath.

“No,” Prouvaire protests, removing the hat gently. “We need to tuck some of it under. Cosette, do you have any pins?”

“Yes!” Cosette exclaims, dashing up the stairs and retrieving some in a matter of seconds.

Enjolras makes to try and do it himself, but Prouvaire slaps his good hand away. “No, you can’t pin your hair with one hand, my friend, just stand still.”

Enjolras obeys without a word, letting Prouvaire and Cosette pin some of his hair up beneath the hat so it looks shorter and not so obvious, though some golden strands still fall out of the bottom.

“No, I think that’s all we can do.” Valjean smiles at his daughter. Apparently, he has a lot to learn about Cosette’s capacity for subterfuge. He looks at the trio, worry creeping through his veins with a slow, nauseating precision. Worry won’t do him any good here, but it’s an old, bad habit. “Stick to the shadows where you can. The sun’s just down now so that should help, but take your time. Don’t be seen, as much as you can manage.” He writes down the address, pressing that into Courfeyrac’s hands and the keys into Combeferre’s. “We’ll be there later, as soon as we’re able. Perhaps in groups and not all at once. That’s likely safer.”

“We’ll be all right,” Courfeyrac says, glancing over at the other two, his eyes bright with determination. “We’ll get him there.”

“I’m sorry to cause you this trouble,” Enjolras whispers, speaking for the first time in a while. “Truly, Monsieur Fauchelevent.”

“I am honored to keep you safe.” Valjean meets Enjolras’ eyes, feeling his own secret bubbling up between them. “Don’t worry yourself over it. Now go. They’ll be here too soon to dawdle.”

Valjean opens the door, making certain there’s no one outside before sending the three into the street. Courfeyrac tosses his arm with careful ease around Enjolras’ shoulder, his laughter piercing the air. “Oh don’t you worry!” he exclaims. “I’m sure we’ll find you a fiancé soon, but what a joy to see our friend so happy, isn’t it?”

“Such a joy,” Valjean hears Enjolras add, false merriment in his voice.

The door shuts behind them and Valjean hears Combeferre’s voice but not what he says, hearing Courfeyrac’s laughter again until they must round the corner, going out of sight. He turns back around to the rest of the group, thoughts spinning through his mind.

“This is a celebration of Cosette’s engagement to Feuilly.” Valjean keeps his voice steady. If he can sneak into a convent in a coffin, he can certainly do this, surely. “You were just recently engaged, and plan to marry in two months. Gavroche, you’re his younger brother. The rest of you can come up with backstories as you see fit. Can we all keep that straight?”

“Yes,” Feuilly replies, moving around to sit next to Cosette at the table, pulling his own plate over. He smiles at Cosette. “I hope Marius won’t mind. I shall try and do the job admirably.”

Cosette smiles in return, tapping the edge of Feuilly’s freckled nose. “I’m sure he’ll love to hear the story.” She clears her throat and folds her hands on the table, her fingers pressed tight together.

“Take your hat off, Feuilly.” Joly comes around, removing the offending object and sticking it in his own pocket. He smooths Feuilly’s auburn hair with care, making sure no more strands are sticking up after being stuck under the hat. “There. That looks convincing.”

“What’s my occupation?” Feuilly asks. “It’s likely better if I don’t use my real one, just in case.”

Bossuet rubs his chin, thinking. “It needs to be something they won’t really follow up about.”

“We’ll say you’re my friend from Lyon, who came to visit me,” Grantaire offers, looking thoughtful. “And you fell in love with Cosette when you met her at a public dance in Sceaux.”

“Very good Grantaire.” Bahorel clasps his hands together, apparently taking some delight in their subterfuge, no matter the circumstance.

“I could be a silk worker!” Feuilly exclaims, his eyes lighting up with enthusiasm. “Yes, that will do
just fine. I know enough about that to speak on it, should they ask.”

“They revolted a year ago in Lyon, if you’ll recall,” Prouvaire tells Valjean with a fond smile. “Feuilly was constantly reading about it in the papers.”

“Well,” Valjean mutters. “It would seem you hardly need me.”

Perhaps it wouldn’t be too bad of a thing to tell these young men his secret, if he must, though he can hardly believe he’s thinking of telling yet more people. The times do change, and quickly, undoing years of instinct and fear that parts of him still can’t quite let go of. Cosette’s warnings about secrets serving them ill in this situation echo in his mind, and these lads, it seems, love Enjolras too well to stay away for long. Courfeyrac is also particularly close with Marius, and which makes them even more a part of Valjean’s future family.

Family.

He hasn’t thought of a wider family other than Cosette since he was arrested, fated never to see his sister and her children again. Cosette was enough. Cosette was everything. Now, his world is breaking open.

“Years of running an underground society that wanted to overthrow the king will teach you some tricks, Monsieur Fauchelevent.” Bahorel winks at him, and despite his churning stomach, Valjean gives him a ghost of a smile.

As it turns out, doing things with others is much easier than doing them all on one’s own. Valjean hands Enjolras, Combeferre, and Courfeyrac’s plates to Touissant, bidding her to dump out the remaining food and put them away in the kitchen, in case the officers find anything suspicious. Valjean goes upstairs, cleaning up Enjolras’ room with Bossuet’s help, smoothing the bedcovers and storing the spare clothes in his own wardrobe, as well as replacing the used candle with a brand new one.

Valjean’s just sat down again when he hears a hard, pounding knock at the door.

“Police!” A deep, familiar voice shouts the word, full of urgency.

Javert.

Bisset sighs as they approach Valjean’s door, and Javert hopes to god his fellow officer doesn’t hear the pounding of his heart or notice his sweaty hands.

Stay calm. You have faced real criminals before. Dangerous ones. This is nothing. This is…

A lie. A blatant, active cover-up.

“These damn rebels,” Bisset says, cutting into Javert’s internal lecture. “Should have just let the national guard beat this one up a bit further, then maybe he wouldn’t have been able to get away from you. No one gets away from you, usually.”

“There’s a first time for everything, I suppose.” Javert feels some relief flood him, satisfied, at least, that Bisset doesn’t suspect him of anything, but then who would have, before recently? “He had help, besides. We’ll see what we can find out here.”
It’s dark out now that the sun has gone, the last dregs of light vanished from the sky. The waxing moon’s just rising, spilling light onto Valjean’s doorstep as Javert steps up to it. A light breeze punctures the heat, now in full force as July approaches.

“They’ve handed down a death sentence or two, for some of the insurgents that were caught, so far.” Bisset speaks conversationally, and Javert wishes he would just be quiet, each word making his headache worse. “Though there’s what, eighty or so trials they have to do? Some of the fellows at the station are wondering if the capital ones will get commuted. I imagine that Charles Jeanne fellow will have something to say, when it comes to be his turn.” Bisset pauses, thinking. “I’d like to catch the Enjolras boy, for what a pain he was, when he was brought in. Damned stubborn, he was.”

“We’ll search the whole house, make sure he isn’t hiding anywhere,” Javert answers, not speaking to any of Bisset’s other points. The man he was a few weeks ago might have said they deserved a death sentence for what they’d done, but he can’t make himself say it now. Though, when he thinks back on Toulon, on any prison he’s ever set foot in, he thinks death might be a mercy, as opposed to that. God, he has a headache.

He raises his hand and knocks on the door, his knuckles making a loud contact with the wood that won’t be missed.

“Police!” he exclaims.

There’s a lull until he hears footsteps coming toward the door. It opens after another few seconds, Valjean’s face appearing on the other side. They lock eyes for a fleeting moment, saying so much without words. Enjolras is gone from the house, Javert surmises just from reading Valjean’s expression, which looks less panicked that it might otherwise, though there’s a gleam of nerves in his eyes, still.

He’s caught up in a scheme with a convict. With a convict he swore to high heaven he would bring back in. Caught up in a scheme with a group of insurgents. Willingly. Almost, dare he say it, happily, though he’s not entirely sure he would go that far. Perhaps so, perhaps not. He’s not certain what happiness is, exactly, or what it feels like, or if it’s even something honorable to strive for. Irreproachable, has been his constant refrain. He’s not certain if that’s the same thing.

“Are you the resident of this flat?” Javert asks, keeping his voice steady.

“Yes?” Valjean injects a question into his voice, playing as if he doesn’t understand what’s happening. “Is there something the matter, inspector…”

“Javert. And this is Inspector Bisset. We received a report that there might someone hiding a wanted insurgent in this home. One we’re looking for, at present.”

Valjean grasps the doorknob just a bit tighter, but though Javert notices, Bisset is too interested in gazing through to the foyer to notice. Valjean loosens his grip not a second later, opening the door wider and stepping out of the way.

“I’m no supporter of those rebellions going on,” he says, inviting them inside. “But you may search, if you like. Though I’m afraid you’re interrupting a small dinner party we’re having to celebrate my daughter’s engagement.”

“Papa?” Cosette comes around the corner as soon as Valjean says her name, Feuilly behind her and clasping her hand. “What’s going on?”
“Two inspectors are here, apparently there’s an insurgent loose and someone believed we might be hiding him here.”

Cosette puts her hand to her mouth, emitting a small gasp, a good bit of acting for such a sweet young girl, Javert thinks.

“We aren’t hiding any rebels here, inspectors.” Cosette clasps Feuilly’s hand tighter. “Is this going to take long? We’re just in the middle of a party so I could meet my fiancé’s friends.”

“It will take as long as it takes, mademoiselle,” Bisset says, inclining his head. “Javert, you want to question them? I’ll search upstairs, if that suits.”

“Perfectly.” Javert wishes it was the other way around because he doesn’t know how much time they had to prepare the house, but arguing won’t do. “Meet me in the dining room, when you’re done.”

Bisset goes up to the stairs without another word, going into the guest bedroom first, the very place where Enjolras has been staying.

Of course.

Javert hopes they thought to make the bed, at least.

Thinking like a criminal now, are you? A voice asks somewhere in the back of his mind. That same voice that sent him to the bridge.

I’ve dealt with plenty of them, Javert argues, pushing it back. I might as well use it here.

He shares a look with Valjean as soon as Bisset is out of sight, but it’s too risky to drop the façade now, when they’re still in earshot. Valjean slips a piece of paper into Javert’s pocket as they step into the dining room, Bahorel, Prouvaire, Bossuet, Joly, Gavroche, and Grantaire still sitting around the table, though Combeferre and Courfeyrac are missing, along with Enjolras. There’s one extra wine glass, Javert notices, though trio’s plates are gone.

“So. An engagement dinner, you say?” Javert asks, as Feuilly and Cosette take their seats again.

“We’re set to be married in two months.” Cosette speaks first, loudly so that Bisset might hear upstairs, and Javert hears him rifling around in a wardrobe, his footsteps making the wood creak as he moves to the next room. “And before you ask no, none of my fiancé’s friends are rebels in disguise. He’s a canut, in Lyon, but everyone was acquitted in that tussle, so don’t think you can use that to make things up here. None us had anything to do with the uprising a few weeks ago.”

“Calm down, mademoiselle.” Javert sighs, and though he notices Cosette’s breaths come in and out a touch more rapidly than normal, she almost laughs. “We’re just trying to ascertain the truth here.”

“Who reported that we were housing an insurgent?” Valjean asks, keeping his tone even.

“That, monsieur, I’m afraid I cannot tell you. It’s confidential.”

They hear Bisset coming down the stairs again, joining them in the dining room.

“Anything?” Javert asks.

“No.” Bisset shakes his head. He turns toward Valjean. “Who lives here, monsieur?”

“Just me, my daughter, and our servant Touissant, who is in the kitchen.” Valjean gestures around at the young men around the table. “These lads are friends of my soon-to-be son-in-law. You can
understand that we are a touch upset at being interrupted with such an accusation.”

“I understand, monsieur,” Bisset says. “But we must still search your downstairs rooms, and if no evidence is found you may go back to your evening. We have to take every report of this rebel sighting seriously.”

“I understand.” Valjean lessens the ire in his voice. “There is a sitting room here, and a study, and the kitchen.”

“Who are you looking for?” Bahorel chimes in now, and Javert truly wishes he wouldn’t. “I heard they caught some fellow the other day… Jeanne? We’re just getting real news of what happened here down in Lyon.”

“His name is Enjolras.” Javert doesn’t want to look at Bahorel because he knows that’s what Bahorel wants and this young man in particular annoys him. He does anyway, because even if Bisset doesn’t suspect him, he doesn’t want to give his colleague a reason to start. There’s already been some surprise around the station that he hasn’t been taking up the extra shifts he used to openly volunteer for. “He unfortunately got away from me in route to La Force. Helped by some of his friends, it would seem.”

“We saw some flyers with his face on them,” Grantaire adds, taking a long swig of his wine, reaching over for the accidental extra glass and finishing that off, too. “When we were coming in.”

Javert and Bisset search the sitting room and the study, finally going into the kitchen, where Touissant looks unruffled by their presence. Javert feels his pulse slow down when no evidence arises of Enjolras’ presence, as if he might have been a ghost in Javert’s imagination.

“Write your full name down, please,” Javert demands, handing Valjean the notebook and a pen he keeps in his pocket at all times. “In case we need to contact you again.”

Valjean writes *Ultime Fauchelevent* down in smooth, easy cursive.

“Any other addresses we ought to know of?” Javert asks.

“No, inspector.”

A lie. A certain, absolute lie. Javert’s sure that was what was on the piece of paper Valjean slipped him earlier, but the older man says it without a tremble in his voice, and Javert sees now, how he’s managed to get away with several identities—and keep out of prison—for so long. Valjean is nice—too nice, in Javert’s mind—but he’s sneaky, as well, even if it might not appear that way at first glance. Mostly used to protect others, especially in this instance, but Javert finds he respects him more for it.

“Well then.” Bisset speaks again. “Our apologies for disturbing your evening. We’ll let you know if we need anything else. And if you do see Enjolras, report it immediately.”

“I will. Rest assured of that.”

Javert and Bisset step outside into the night after that, and Javert stops himself from exhaling a breath.

He’s lying to his colleague. He’s going to have to lie to his superiors. Again. He’s caught up in an endless, enduring lie, and he doesn’t know what he’ll do. He doesn’t know how long he can keep this up and still remain in the force.
What will he do, if he cannot? It’s been not just his way of supporting himself, but his entire purpose, for years. The question wraps around his mind, tightening further and further until it makes his dull headache turn sharp, taking up residence right above his right eye. Still, he has no answer.

“Dead end, it would seem,” Bisset says, his voice sounding far off. “Sneaky lad, this Enjolras.”

Javert mutters something in agreement, pulling out the piece of paper as soon as they’re back at the station.

55 Rue Plumet.

The moonlight is a curse, in this case.

It bleeds down onto the streets of Paris, forcing Enjolras, Combeferre, and Courfeyrac into the shadows of buildings and deep down alleyways, the three-mile walk taking longer than it ought. Enjolras feels his legs tiring beneath him, rusty from over two weeks of sitting in Valjean’s house without much use, his body weak from what happened at the barricades and after his arrest. His still-healing ribs throb in protest, his arm aching, though the pain is less sharp than before. He has to keep going. He has to keep going, and remove himself from being anywhere near Valjean’s apartment.

He’s endangered him.

He’s endangered Cosette, too.

Maybe after a few days at the house in Rue Plumet, Enjolras can go stay with Combeferre. Perhaps it’s time, now. Valjean will argue it isn’t safe. Javert certainly will protest. But how does Enjolras do this? How does he act as a wanted man, constantly putting others in danger to keep him safe?

He didn’t plan on this. He planned on everything and anything but this, a strange middle ground where he is dead and alive all at once.

“Are you doing all right, Enjolras?” Courfeyrac asks, offering his arm for Enjolras to lean on.

Enjolras takes it with a tight smile, hating that he can’t just walk on his own without help, but knowing he needs the assistance. “I’m all right. I’m glad to have you with me.”

Courfeyrac smiles too, keeping an eye on Enjolras as they walk, their argument of a few weeks ago fading away as Enjolras lets Courfeyrac help him without protest, his friend leading the way in the dark. Enjolras trusts him to know the way because Courfeyrac knows Paris like he knows the depths of his own soul, the city as much a part of each of them as the blood running through their veins. Combeferre walks behind them, stopping abruptly after another few minutes, his shoe scraping against the ground.

“What’s the matter?” Courfeyrac asks.

“That noise…” Combeferre narrows his eyes in the dark, a slice of moonlight glancing off his spectacles. “Like footsteps stopping and going again. I heard it before, too.”

They keep walking when the sound doesn’t manifest a second time, but once they round the corner onto Rue Plumet itself, Enjolras hears the noise, too, pulling himself out of his own thoughts and paying attention to what’s going on around him.
“I heard it that time,” Enjolras says, searching around for the source.

There’s a moment. A pause, as the three of them look around, seeing nothing in the dark. Nothing in the patches of moonlight.

At least, not until Enjolras sees a flash of silver swipe through the black night, the same color as the nearly full moon above them. The blade’s coming toward his throat from behind and so is an arm. The person tries wrapping their arm around his neck, but Enjolras jabs his assailant out of instinct with his good elbow, pain reverberating down as it meets the bone of the stranger’s ribs. The attacker grunts in pain and releases him, but Enjolras overcorrects and loses his balance, throwing himself so he lands on his back and not on his broken arm when he falls.

“Enjolras!” Combeferre exclaims, crouching down on the ground next to him as Courfeyrac mirrors him, both of them helping him up after he has a split second to catch the breath that was knocked out of his chest.

The person who attacked coughs before emerging from the shadows, his dark, glossy hair melting into the evening sky, his lips red as fresh cherries.

“What are you after?” Courfeyrac says in a low, angry voice. “If it’s money, we haven’t got any on us.”

“Oh, that’s not what I’m after, though I wouldn’t say no,” the man answers in a casual tone, and Enjolras thinks he can’t be more than maybe twenty or so. “I’m after your friend here, which I think I made clear when I tried to slit his throat open.”

In one swift, fluid movement, Combeferre and Courfeyrac push Enjolras behind them, as if they had expected to encounter a murderer on their way to Valjean’s second house. Enjolras wants to protest, he wants to say, I can fight even with a broken arm, but it’s likely better in this situation if he just does so rather than arguing now, the danger palpable in the air. Still, there are three of them, and one of him, knife or no.

“You’ve been following us for a while,” Combeferre points out, his hand sliding down to grasp Enjolras’ wrist as if he cannot bear to let go. “Almost since we left.”

“From the old man’s house, yeah,” the young man answers. “Followed Gavroche from the police station as it happens, wondered what he was doing, saw you come out. I heard some things when I stood by the window, realized Gavroche was spending time with insurgents.” He pauses, a smirk sliding across his face, anger gleaming in his eyes when he looks Enjolras dead in the face. “You killed my friend, you see. So I intend to remedy that. Fair’s fair.”

“You killed my friend, you see. So I intend to remedy that. Fair’s fair.”

“Your friend?” Enjolras speaks, and Combeferre presses his wrist tighter. “If you’re talking about a soldier…”

“I’m not.” The man’s mouth sets into a thin line, and as the clouds shift above them, the moonlight making clear his fine clothes. “You shot a man in the head, if you’ll recall? That was him. I knew he was at the barricades. Went by there, saw his body in the aftermath. Heard some soldiers talking, saying some kind of Apollo, the fair-haired leader, did the deed. Then I saw posters with your face go up not long after. So when I saw you leave the old man’s house, I thought I’d take my chance. Luck is luck.”

Enjolras’ chest goes cold, and he finds he can’t quite get a deep breath. “Who are you?”

“Doesn’t matter who I am, it just matters that you might as well say your prayers, Apollo. If you
believe in that sort of thing.”

Before Enjolras can move, before he can think, Courfeyrac rushes forward with his hands outstretched, shoving the attacker to the ground in a momentary distraction. A cry of pain pierces the air, Courfeyrac’s cry of pain, as the slick, wet sound of a knife swiping across skin fills Enjolras’ ears, blood droplets flying into the air.

No. No. No. Enjolras can’t see in the dark, he can’t see because Courfeyrac fell into the shadows instead of the pool of moonlight, tossing himself away from the attacker.

If Courfeyrac’s hurt, it’s his fault.

He wills himself to think clearly, he wills himself into the moment and out of the spiral of anxiety threatening him.

Combeferre releases Enjolras’ wrist, making to go for the man himself, but Enjolras holds him back.

“Go to Courfeyrac, go now!”

Combeferre obeys, though Enjolras catches his eyes darting back and forth between him and Courfeyrac’s hunched over form, trying to decide which friend needs him more.

As Combeferre shifts Courfeyrac’s arm into the moonlight Enjolras can see it’s the top of Courfeyrac’s forearm that’s cut, though it looks fairly deep. Enjolras sees his friend’s blood gleaming in the silver light spilling onto the attacker’s knife, and it doesn’t matter that he only has one arm, it doesn’t matter that he’s tired and still a bit ill. He leans forward to better keep his balance, and runs directly at the man as soon as he gets up, kicking him directly in the stomach. The man swipes out in rage with the knife, leaving a thin, shallow cut across Enjolras’ shoulder before doubling over, the knife clattering to the paving stones at their feet.

Enjolras kicks it toward Combeferre, who seizes it, still kneeling next to Courfeyrac in the street. The man regains some of his breath, and even without his knife he shoves Enjolras, pushing against his broken arm. Enjolras stifles a shout, pain rippling through him. Courfeyrac gets back up, coming at the man from behind and kicking his feet out from under him so that he falls down again, his groan audible.

Combeferre rushes up to them both, the light from above glinting off his spectacles. “Enjolras arm around my waist, you’re going to lose balance with that arm, Courfeyrac, take his hand, if you’re able. Then, we run. We need to run, it’s not far.”

Enjolras and Courfeyrac do as told, and as they start running, Enjolras hears Courfeyrac sucking in shallow breaths through his teeth, the wound clearly hurting him. They spot number 55, Combeferre pulling the keys out of his pocket and putting them in the door with calm precision even though Enjolras hears his labored breathing, the tell-tale click of the lock sending relief flooding through him. They practically fall inside, slamming the door and locking it behind them.

“Enjolras, I’m all right.” Courfeyrac’s voice remains gentle, but he pushes down on Enjolras’ leg bidding him to sit down. “You’re acting like Joly more than yourself.”

“Oh, now,” Joly cuts in, having just arrived with the others a half hour ago. Valsien and Cosette plan to transfer over in the morning, as earlier might cause some suspicion. “Has my mothering ever done
you ill?"

“No,” Courfeyrac admits, wincing as he shifts in his chair.

“You brought your medical supplies to dinner! Bahorel exclaimed. Joly, you dear man.

“I wanted to check on Enjolras’ arm! Joly argued, trying and failing not to laugh. And Lord knows, with you lot, and it turns out it was a good thing, wasn’t it?

All nine of them and Gavroche are gathered in the sitting room of this much larger house, the garden visible beyond the window, the plants looking like shadows in the night. Combeferre hands out the coffee, steam curling up from the cups. Enjolras turned down Joly’s remaining Laudanum, pressing it on Courfeyrac instead, who took only half the dose before sliding the rest pointedly back toward Enjolras as if to say you have a broken arm, you idiot, so Enjolras gave in, after that. His body aches from falling to the ground, his arm most of all, the shallow cut on his shoulder stinging, though it’s not as deep as Courfeyrac’s.

“What were you saying, Gavroche?” Courfeyrac asks, leaning forward in his chair again and earning a reprimanding glare from Combeferre. “About the man who attacked us? Who was in that street gang?”

“That was Montparnasse, I’m dead certain.” Gavroche sits back in one of the armchairs, his feet swinging just above the floor. “Pretty sure the friend he mentioned was Claquesous. The one Enjolras shot in the head, I mean.”

Gavroche speaks the words in a blunt, childish way that isn’t meant as a judgement, but Enjolras feels it sitting heavy on his chest, anyway. There wasn’t a choice, on the barricade. Not really. He wanted to take on that burden so his friends didn’t have to, and yet here Courfeyrac is, bleeding because of it anyway. A flash of that moment appears in his head. His own words. Pray or think. The cold feeling of the pistol in one hand and the man’s hair in the other. The sound of the shot going off and the warm, deep red blood dripping down to the paving stones. He was angry, in that moment, but he didn’t act on the anger. He acted on pure logic. He acted because he knew the sort of things letting that man go free might have caused among not just the other men, but in the words people might speak about their rebellion. If he was in that Patron-Minette street gang, if he was a police informer as Gavroche said, sent to cause trouble among those at the barricades, he wasn’t wrong. Still, it haunts him.

The corners around him keep growing tighter, especially after tonight. His friends told him that the inspector with Javert seemed convinced of Valjean’s innocence, and Enjolras is glad, but how do they keep this up, with the police searching for him? He doesn’t know how long that might continue before they give up, and it still doesn’t speak to the matter of what he’ll do in the future.

How many more people will he endanger?

All his life, he’s gone forward. He’s forged the way, determined to break down the darkness and make the light shine through. For the first time since he can remember, he doesn’t know the way.
Prouvaire’s voice breaks into the quiet. “You know we don’t judge you for that, right Enjolras?” he asks. “We understand why you did it.”

Enjolras looks at Prouvaire, who frowns when he looks away a second too soon.

“I know.” Enjolras looks at Gavroche instead. “Do you think he’ll try again, Gavroche? This Montparnasse.”

“Dunno.” Gavroche shrugs, narrowing his eyes in thought. “He doesn’t usually get beat like that, and you did it with a broken arm.” Gavroche looks impressed and Enjolras feels proud of that, for some reason. “So maybe not. But he’s pretty stubborn, too. I wouldn’t go out at night, for a while. I’ll keep an eye out.”

“Gavroche,” Bahorel argues. “Far be it from me to tell you what to do but…”

Gavroche sticks his tongue out at Bahorel, though it’s good-natured. “He isn’t going to hurt me, you know.”

“It’s best Monsieur Fauchelevent and Cosette are coming by daylight, then,” Bossuet says, running a hand over the top of his head. “I do suppose Cosette will have a great deal to tell Marius, when she visits next.”

“I don’t think I can visit Marius again until my arm is better,” Courfeyrac grumbles. “He will worry himself into being more ill, no doubt, or perhaps I can make something up other than an attack in the street. He’ll never believe it if I say I stumbled, though. I’m far too graceful.”

“We shall have to tell him about my pretending to be married to Cosette,” Feuilly adds, though Enjolras has noticed Feuilly’s eyes flicking over to him every few minutes, looking worried. “She was sly in the face of all that. I was impressed.”

“Cosette is full of surprises, I think.” Courfeyrac glances over at Enjolras. “Are you all right? We were on the lookout for police, not a murder attempt. And he hit your arm.”

Enjolras gives Courfeyrac a tight smile. “I’m fine.”

A loud sigh breaks through the room, and Enjolras turns toward Grantaire, who’s raising his eyebrows in disbelief.

“What?” Enjolras asks. His voice is sharp, even if he doesn’t want it to be.

“You’re not fine, Enjolras,” Grantaire argues. “There’s no need to pretend, I imagine, with anyone in this room.”

Enjolras swallows, knowing Grantaire is pointing this out in good faith, that there have been, perhaps, some changes in Grantaire over the past few weeks after the shock of the barricade, but there’s an old tone in his voice that in this state, Enjolras finds aggravating.

“I am not lying, Grantaire. I was surprised, but there’s a lot going on, right now.”

Grantaire tilts his head. “More than someone darting out of the night to try and kill you? When you’re already on the run from the police?” Grantaire softens after that, giving Enjolras a strange, vulnerable look. “All I’m saying is you’d have a right to be, I don’t know, upset by it. You’re a person, after all.”

Enjolras curls his fingers against his palm, feeling exhaustion flood through him as his temper frays.
“Last I checked, yes.”

“Grantaire, let’s just leave it, Enjolras might not want to talk about it right now,” Bossuet warns, putting a friendly hand on Grantaire’s shoulder as he smiles at Enjolras, who returns it, because being annoyed at Bossuet is nigh impossible.

“Well he should, is all I’m saying,” Grantaire mumbles.

“Yes, well, you are not always the best at being forthcoming with your problems,” Bossuet says, not unkindly. “It’s been a long night for all of us.”

“Actually, if it’s all right with everyone, I might find one of the rooms and lie down,” Enjolras adds, feeling as if he might be making the mood in the room awkward, even if his friends don’t think so, and he owes them better than his dark, confusing mood. “My arm is troubling me.”

“I’ll go with you.” Courfeyrac seems determined not to let Enjolras out of his sight. “My arm hurts, and if I’m asleep I won’t notice. That dose of Laudanum is making me quite sleepy.”

Enjolras can’t say no to the warmth in Courfeyrac’s voice, even if he thinks being alone might be best. He bids the others good night, feeling their concern following behind him as whispers filter into the air, heavy with worry.

He hates that he’s making his friends worry.

Combeferre follows them, the three finding a spare bedroom that doesn’t seem to belong to either Valjean or Cosette. Enjolras and Courfeyrac slide into bed in their trousers and shirts, the covers welcoming after the long events of the night. Combeferre checks them over a final time before bidding them goodnight, telling them to come retrieve him should they need anything. Enjolras feels Combeferre’s hand linger on his forehead a moment longer than needed, his fingers brushing across Enjolras’ skin with meaning.

_You’re all right. We’ll be all right._

Enjolras’ old, enduring words in Combeferre’s touch.

But Enjolras isn’t sure, right now, if his presence will allow his friends’ continued well-being.

He only isn’t sure what to do about it.

“I feel you worrying, Enjolras.” Courfeyrac grasps Enjolras’ fingers beneath the covers, holding tight. “Please don’t. Your life is worth a cut on my arm. I’ll be just fine.”

Tears spring to Enjolras’ eyes, falling down his cheek when he closes them, feigning like he might be falling asleep.

“The last thing I wanted was you hurt because of me.” The truth comes out of Enjolras’ mouth even as darkness and a pillow hide his face. “But thank you. For everything you did. For coming with me. For risking yourself. I…” Enjolras swallows, covering the crack in his voice. “I hope you know that I trust you. With everything that I am. What happened at the barricade it…it wasn’t that I didn’t. It was that I wanted to protect you.”

“I know,” Courfeyrac whispers, squeezing Enjolras’ hand. “But sometimes, Enjolras, we want to protect you.”

Courfeyrac tries to say something else after that, but his words melt into nonsense as sleep claims
him. His grip on Enjolras’ hand loosens, and Enjolras pulls his hand away, forced to sleep on his back due to his broken arm.

It’s an hour before he falls asleep, visions of Valjean’s panicked face and Montparnasse’s silver knife smearing the night following him into his dreams.
“I can’t believe the moment I let the boy out of my sight he gets attacked in the street,” Javert mutters. “What am I supposed to do with that?” His voice grows louder, and he half slams his teacup down, the china cup clattering against the saucer.

“Not so loudly,” Valjean chides. “He’s still asleep.”

“It’s nearly eleven in the morning. I thought you said he was an early riser, even when he was still more ill. Is he feverish?”

Valjean shakes his head. “Just tired, I think. And upset, without a doubt.” He frowns, looking concerned. “Still, it worries me.”

It’s been nearly two days since the police showed up at Valjean’s door and Montparnasse attacked Enjolras in the street. Javert hadn’t been able to make his way to the Rue Plumet the morning after, drawn into business at work, so he’s just now making it over, wondering once again how he’s going to manage all of this. The lie keeps getting more intricate and he has to keep track of more and more and more and he doesn’t know what he’s going to do.

Much like that night he considered throwing himself into the Seine, he doesn’t know what to do. Except now…

Well now he feels something tethering him to living. Something that makes him unable to contemplate the bridge again, even if his mind still feels shrouded in doubt. Doubt, and darkness.

And just a little bit of light. More light than he’s ever had. Everything up until now has been so gray. He didn’t realize how gray until it wasn’t, anymore.

The other insurgents are out in the garden with Cosette, save Feuilly, who is at work until the evening. Javert arrived this morning to find them all sleeping in various places: Courfeyrac sharing a bed with Enjolras while Combeferre slept on a chaise lounge in the same guest room; Bahorel, Prouvaire, and Feuilly on various blankets on the floor, while Joly and Bossuet took the sofa, Grantaire making a makeshift bed out of two chairs. Gavroche wasn’t around, but Javert was sure he would be back.

“Those damned Patron-Minette rogues.” Javert takes a sip of his tea, scowling. “We don’t need them in this business, there’s enough people already.”

“I ran into the Montparnasse fellow, once,” Valjean remarks. “Realized it when Gavroche said his name and said what he looked like. I gave him some money. Suggested he possibly find a new profession.”

Javert stares at him, feeling himself trying mightily not to smile. He’s not used to smiling a great deal, and he feels it stretch the muscles on his face in a way he isn’t used to. “Of course you did.”

Valjean takes a sip of his own tea, a blush pooling in his cheeks that makes his white hair stand out. “What does that mean?”

Javert rolls his eyes. “It means you are too kind for your own good. Giving money to a street criminal.”
Valjean shrugs, looking away as if he can’t quite handle being so well thought of. “Criminal or not, he was poor. I had money to spare. Didn’t really know he was the murderous sort, at the time. Certainly didn’t expect him to try and slit Enjolras’ throat, though a few weeks ago I didn’t think I’d be keeping a rebel in my house.”

Javert abandons his tea entirely, drumming his fingers on the table. “And I didn’t think I’d be sitting here with you. But we are where we are, and this is a crime I can’t report because it means turning Enjolras in, and it also leaves Montparnasse on the street, though I suppose I could try and bring him up on another charge we haven’t caught him for yet, though he’s slippery. I don’t like it.” He clears his throat, not liking what he’s about to say next either, but he has to say it. “I have a meeting with the prefect day after tomorrow. About the search for Enjolras.”

“You need to throw him off the trail,” Valjean says, with more confidence than Javert expects, like he’s been waiting to make the suggestion. “It’s been nearly a month since the barricades, surely they’re losing interest.”

“Hardly.” Javert’s voice goes low as he gets up from his chair, pacing back and forth across the kitchen floor. “Some trials have already happened, and more are set for the coming months. They want Enjolras still, and they will for some time to come. He also escaped after his arrest, which comes down on me, so they are not soon going to release me from the investigation any time soon.”

Valjean pales slightly, but he still looks determined, watching Javert go back and forth. “Does anyone suspect you?”

Javert stops, meeting Valjean’s eyes. “Not yet. My record up until now was…” he swallows, feeling his mouth go dry. “Irreproachable.”

The word rests between them, heavy in the silence, and somehow, Javert can’t make himself speak again, resuming his pacing. His whole body feels like it’s itching, even though nothing but nerves is causing it. He hasn’t felt so uncomfortable in his skin since he was a boy. He always had a routine to follow, which soothed all the things in his mind he pushed away a long time ago. Things he doesn’t want to think about again.

A hand grasps his wrist, stopping him in his tracks. He turns around, and Valjean is looking at him. God, he can’t bear it. That look. That wide-eyed, worried look. Especially not when it’s directed at him. He’s done this man so much wrong, and yet still what he’s doing now doesn’t exactly feel right, either. Is that because it isn’t? Or is it because he’s inevitably caught in his old life while trying to tread water in this new one? He doesn’t know. He doesn’t know. But what is the answer? He doesn’t know anything, other than being a police officer, or in the old days, a prison guard. It isn’t just the question of what he might do to sustain himself—and that is a question—but who he might be, if he left the force.

“You did the right thing,” Valjean whispers, squeezing Javert’s wrist with something that might be called affection, if Javert knew how to recognize it. “You did, Javert.”

Javert doesn’t pull away, finding himself listening to the words and searching for a reassurance he hasn’t asked for since he was a boy. He never got it, then, in any case.

“Is it always like this?” Javert asks, speaking words he doesn’t really want to say aloud, but he can’t seem to stop himself. “Doing something that….that feels right, but isn’t legal or approved of?”

“Sometimes making the right choice means we lose things. I learned that well enough at Arras. I learned it when I broke that window to try and feed my family. That second thing might have been
illegal, but it was right, anyway.” Valjean looks out the window toward the direction of the garden, a soft smile slipping onto his face. “But sometimes doing the right thing brings its own reward. I learned that when I took Cosette in. I had no idea I’d love her so much, but when it happened, it swept me away. I was so afraid, then. Afraid that taking in a little child might direct more notice toward me. Afraid I’d be a terrible father. Afraid I would dishonor Fantine’s memory by making her sacrifice useless if I ruined her child. I’m afraid all the time, Javert, and it stopped me from telling Cosette the truth. But I try very hard to not let it get in my way. I know how hard that is.”

Javert pulls his wrist out of Valjean’s grasp, sitting back down at the table and curling his hands around his now cold tea.

Valjean doesn’t let him go that easily.

“Sometimes we think we’re doing right, and we aren’t.” Valjean turns his gaze back toward Javert. “I’ve done that, too. Keeping secrets all this time from Cosette. I thought I was right. I thought I was protecting her. And for a while, that was probably true, when she was too young to understand. But now, after these past few weeks, I realize I should have told her sooner. Decisions made in self-imposed isolation aren’t usually thoughtful ones.”

“I used to think…” Javert hesitates, making sense of his own words. “That if something was illegal, then it was wrong. But I went even further than that, I think. I went…certain kinds of people were good, and others were bad. Inherently, and in most cases irrevocably. Because people don’t change. Nothing a criminal did, in my mind, could ever be construed as upright. I was born in a prison, I spent part of my childhood in one, with my mother.” Javert’s not terribly sure he’s ever spoken those words aloud to anyone, but he keeps looking at Valjean anyway, because he will not cower. He never has, and he won’t start now. “So I felt I knew exactly what I was looking at, when I saw someone like Fantine, or like you. I made a choice, a long time ago, that I could either guard society, or be outcast from it. I was never going to be a part of it, a half Romani boy with a galley slave father and a mother who died in prison. That was what was right, to me. It was what everyone who was an authority said was right. I didn’t know what to do when it all came crashing down around my ears because of you. You, and your mercy. It was all more fragile than I ever realized. I was more afraid than I ever realized.”

“Javert…” Valjean tries.

“Don’t.” Javert holds a hand up, the word a growl in the back of his throat. “I can’t bear your pity, Valjean.”

“It’s not pity. It’s friendship.”

“I’ve never been anyone’s friend. I’ve never wanted one.”

“Maybe you were afraid to have one.”

“You’re one to talk, Valjean.”

“I don’t have a great deal of experience either,” Valjean admits. “So we’re both learning.”

Javert scoffs, narrowing his eyes. “You had a family, in another life. You have a daughter. It’s still a sight better than me, I suppose.”

“That’s true,” Valjean agrees, so calm it makes Javert angry. “But that’s not the same as a friend. Someone simply to…share a cup of tea with. Someone to ask advice from. I’m not sure I’ve had that, before.”
Javert considers that he’s never had that, either. He’s never had anyone to talk to. Had he ever wanted that? He’s honestly not sure, no matter what he said a moment ago. He’s honestly not sure he even realized how lonely he was—if that’s even the right word—until he was around people other than his colleagues.

“Well…” Valjean’s eyes grow distant as he continues, remembering something Javert wasn’t there for. “I’ve had one, years ago. Fauchelevent. When we lived in the convent. It’s where I got the name from.”

“Wait…” Javert’s eyes widen. “The man you helped out from under the cart?”

Valjean nods. “He helped me find shelter in the convent when I was on the run from you, actually. There was a coffin involved.”

“A what?”

“The coffin isn’t the point,” Valjean says, and Javert thinks he looks just a touch sly. “The point is he was my friend. My first real one, in the end. I knew a lot of people when I was mayor. But I wouldn’t let them get close enough to be my friends.”

Javert leans back in his chair, breaking his usual perfect posture. “Cosette said she would like me to be your friend.”

Valjean smiles, and there’s almost a teasing gleam in his eyes. “Cosette is wise. Wiser than I gave her credit for.”

Javert sits up straight again, folding his hands on the table, a half smile slipping onto his face. “You’re a crafty fellow, Valjean. No matter how innocent your face might look, these days.”

Valjean laughs, and for just a fraction of a moment, Javert laughs too, forgetting everything pressing down on him. Pressing down on all of them, because for now, they’re all intertwined. He wonders what he’ll do when that’s no longer the case.

“What do we do about the boy?” Javert asks, hearing the—dare he say it—affection in his voice. He wrinkles his nose at the sound, but he doesn’t banish it either. Perhaps he’ll say fondness, instead. Yes, just fondness. Temporary, fleeting fondness.

Affection is far too strong.

“I think we let him sleep, for now.” Valjean’s eyes flick toward the doorway to the kitchen, traveling up to the edge of the just visible staircase across the hall. “He’s a resilient young man. Letting him rest for a day or two won’t hurt anything, I’d wager.”

Something in Valjean’s voice betrays the confidence in his words, but for now Javert drinks the last of his cold tea, letting his thoughts flow forward.

For the first time, he might—maybe—feel comfortable with sharing them.

“Can I say something?” Grantaire asks, taking advantage of a lull in the conversation. A garden seems a perfectly peaceful place to argue, if this comes to arguing, anyway.

Bossuet arches one eyebrow, the movement more pronounced given the lack of hair on his head. “You may, but since when have you asked permission?”
Grantaire scowls, but it turns into a grin before he can stop it, leaning over to shove Bossuet in the arm. “Hush, L’Aigle. I’m minding my manners.” He gestures at Cosette, who giggles, the morning sunlight highlighting the strands of dark gold in her chestnut hair. “It’s Cosette’s garden, after all. The least I can do is not interrupt.”

“He likes you.” Bahorel whispers conspiratorially in Cosette’s ear, making her giggle again. “Up until now, Grantaire has possessed absolutely no hesitance about interrupting anyone, of any gender.”

Grantaire narrows his eyes. “Are you saying I talk too much, Bahorel?”

Joly puts his arm around Grantaire’s shoulders. “We love you, but Bahorel is not wrong, you know.”

“Anyway.” Grantaire speaks the word loudly, directing his gaze to Combeferre and Courfeyrac in particular, unable, as usual, to even chide Joly. “In case the lot of you haven’t noticed, Enjolras is still in bed.”

“Yes...” Combeferre says the word slowly, drawing it out. “I don’t think any of us can begrudge him that, he’s been through a lot.”

“Yes,” Grantaire repeats, making Combeferre furrow his eyebrows, wondering if he’s being mocked. “But it’s not like him. You know that better than anyone. You know his habits better than anyone.”

“It hasn’t exactly been normal,” Courfeyrac adds, not unkindly. “He was arrested, beaten, has spent weeks in hiding, and then someone else tried to slit his throat in the street. I’m not surprised he’s sleeping more.”

“And I think shooting that man in the head is bothering him, still,” Prouvaire pipes up, sounding grave. “The barricades in general. I mean, the barricades are affecting us all, but...him more so.”

“See?” Grantaire points over to Prouvaire. “Jehan agrees with me.”

“We shouldn’t be talking about him like this, when he’s not here,” Joly whispers, looking toward the doorway. “It’s not kind.”

Grantaire puts a hand on Joly’s, unable to be sharp with him. “Well we can’t talk about it in front of him, my friend. If he doesn’t come out here soon, I’m going to wake him up.”

Combeferre frowns, looking vaguely annoyed. “He needs his rest. If he’s still doing this in a few days, then I’ll be concerned.” Combeferre’s voice wavers, and he clears his throat, pushing it back. “I grant that Enjolras can sometimes be stubborn about admitting his own grief. But he would tell me, if something was very wrong. He always does, in the end, even if it takes him a while to sort out in his own head.”

“He’s not himself.” Grantaire pushes the issue, ignoring the voice warning him that he shouldn’t, because when does he ever listen to that? “So it’s reasonable to say he won’t keep to his usual patterns of behavior. That includes being honest with you.”

“Grantaire...” Combeferre rubs at his temples, and he looks like he hasn’t slept, either.

“What?” Grantaire asks. “If it were Feuilly saying this, you’d believe it.”

*I know what it’s like to want to sleep so I don’t have to think,* Granaire wants to say, but doesn’t, all at once.
Combeferre leans back in his chair, looking confused. “What does Feuilly have to do with this?”

“He said last evening, to me, that Enjolras seemed too quiet. And now it’s eleven in the morning and he’s still asleep.”

“He was having nightmares last night,” Courfeyrac chimes in. “That’s probably why. I think we’ll all have to spend a few nights at our flats soon, to avoid too much suspicion on Monsieur Fauchelevent, but I don’t like the idea.”

Cosette grasps Courfeyrac’s hand, a fresh letter from Marius resting on her lap. “Even when you’re not here, we’ll take care of him. I promise you that.”

“I think that might be part of the problem,” Combeferre whispers, offering Cosette a smile. “He thinks he’s burdening you and your father. I know that without him saying so. He gets a look in his eyes.”

Grantaire stands up, patting his thigh, the sound drawing their attention. “Which is why we need to go wake him up.” He looks at Combeferre, softening his voice, because now isn’t the time for an argument, and he realizes that. “Do I have your leave to go look in on him?”

Combeferre studies him, a hint of fondness in his eyes behind the exhaustion and the irritation. “You don’t need my permission.”

Grantaire smirks, drawing one out of Combeferre in turn. “Don’t I?”

“Be gentle, I still think he needs his rest,” Combeferre says, giving in. “If Enjolras is doing anything it’s thinking too much, and not sleeping enough.”

Grantaire bows, hearing murmuring behind as he goes. He hears the rumble of voices behind the kitchen door as he goes down the hallway and up the stairs, wondering what the two old men are talking about. He knocks on the slightly ajar door where Enjolras sleeps, but when he steps inside, he sees Enjolras isn’t asleep, at all.

He’s lying under the covers, staring at the wall. Well, not the wall in particular. More like he’s trying to stare deep into his own mind.

“You...” Grantaire lowers his voice, shutting the door behind him. “You aren’t asleep at all, what are you doing”

Enjolras breaks his contemplation of the wall, looking over at Grantaire, but he doesn’t sit up.

“I’m tired, Grantaire.” He looks away halfway through his sentence. “That’s all.”

Weight bears down on Enjolras’ voice, and the sound makes something twinge in Grantaire’s chest. He doesn’t like it.

“Then why aren’t you actually sleeping?” Grantaire knows he shouldn’t press quite so brusquely, but his impulses won’t be denied. “That what we all thought you were doing in here. It’s almost noon.”

Enjolras looks at him again, this time with the harsher look Grantaire’s more familiar with, his eyes narrowing and those blue irises lit with frustration. Enjolras certainly doesn’t always look at him like they—they are friends, even if Grantaire knows he makes it difficult for Enjolras to connect with him, more often than not—but he’s familiar with it far more than their other friends. He’s grown used to the softer looks of the past few weeks, the softer looks he earned from Enjolras when he dove in
front of that bullet for Joly. This look, however, reminds him of Enjolras’ words during the barricade. Words for which Grantaire can’t really blame him, because he’s still angry at himself for being quite that drunk. Drunk enough that if things had gone differently, his friends would have died while he slumbered. Maybe Enjolras was a little too sharp, but only a little, and Grantaire’s vowed to do better, vowed to try and make certain that should his friends ever encounter another situation like this, that he won’t miss it out of his own fear of losing them.

Because losing them all while he slept…he doesn’t even like to think upon it.

“I don’t need you to lecture me about what time it is, Grantaire.” Enjolras’ voice goes sharp now, a distinct go away not-so-very-well-hidden in his words.

“Hmm.” Grantaire sits down the chair next to the bed, seeing Combeferre’s imprint already there. “I think if it were any of our other friends you would be a bit kinder. But since it’s me…”

Enjolras sits up, looking offended. Grantaire smiles.

“That’s not true,” Enjolras argues, and Grantaire sees the purple smudges beneath his eyes.

“Maybe it is and maybe it isn’t,” Grantaire says. “But it did get you to sit up.”

Enjolras runs a hand over his face, looking even paler than normal. “Did you come just to tease me?”

Something about the ache in Enjolras’ voice makes Grantaire feel bad, willing himself to just say why he came, rather than darting around it. He talks all the time, but he so often doesn’t say what he really means.

“No.” Grantaire hesitates, putting a hand on Enjolras’ knee over the blankets. “I came to check on you.”

Enjolras’ eyes widen, darting down to Grantaire’s hand and then back up to his face. “Is everything all right? Is…”

“Everything’s fine,” Grantaire says, meeting Enjolras’ eyes. “Other than you, that is.”

Enjolras stiffens. “What does that mean?”

“It means that it’s nearly noon and you haven’t gotten out of bed. And you weren’t even sleeping, which is what I suspected. That would have been odd enough. You’re grumpy in the mornings but you don’t sleep until noon, at least according to our friends who are more familiar with your habits. It’s worse than that. You’re avoiding us.”

Enjolras looks away, and that tells Grantaire all he needs to know. “I’m not.” Enjolras injects that tone into his voice, that dangerous tone that indicates he doesn’t want to be argued with.

Grantaire argues anyway, because it’s what’s called for, right now.

“Yes you are.”

“Grantaire.”

“Enjolras.”

Enjolras huffs. “Why do you do this to me, Grantaire? Tease me like this. Confuse me. Just…please say what you mean.”
“First, I do it because I’m impossible,” Grantaire replies. “Just ask Bossuet or Joly, they’ll tell you. And I...” Grantaire swallows, wishing he didn’t have such a hard time just talking to Enjolras without being ridiculous. He does know he doesn’t like seeing him like this, and wonders if it’s because he’s just a little more distant from him than the others, that he might see the cracks more clearly. “I’m worried about you, all right? That’s why I’m here.”

Enjolras blinks in an owlish way, looking at Grantaire again. “I’m sorry for being sharp. And for worrying you.”

Grantaire hesitates again, then grasps Enjolras’ hand. “I don’t want you to be sorry, Enjolras. But just...if you’re feeling guilty about that Montparnasse business, Courfeyrac is just fine.”

“He got hurt,” Enjolras says, finally admitting that something is wrong, though Grantaire doubts it’s that simple. “Because of me.” Tears grate through Enjolras’ words and shred them to pieces. Grantaire feels that in his chest.

He’s certain he’s ever seen Enjolras cry.

Grantaire tugs on Enjolras’ hand, drawing his attention. “Listen, I don’t...I slept through so much of the barricade that I didn’t see it all, but a lot of hard things happened, things you had to make choices about. You made a choice that day. You made a choice to sacrifice yourself to save the rest of us. You didn’t make the choice to land yourself here, Javert did that, and Monsieur Fauchelevent willingly accepted. So, whatever’s going on in your head about that, stop it.”

“Grantaire...”

“No, I’m talking,” Grantaire interrupts. “I told you once that I believed in you, you know. Do you remember that?”

Enjolras pulls back, looking bewildered. “I remember it, but I didn’t think...”

“I meant it? I did.” Grantaire pauses, feeling an old emotion rising up, an emotion he knows well but pushes down by ignoring it. “I know what it’s like to feel like you’re burdening your friends. But you aren’t, Enjolras. So quit thinking it.”

Enjolras searches Grantaire’s face, and it’s a moment or two before he speaks again.

“The barricade it...it stays with me,” Enjolras whispers. “The gunfire. The cries of pain. And the laughter. I hear the soldiers’ laughter. They laughed for a long time, when they heard my arm crack.” Enjolras looks at Grantaire again, blinking back tears. “Well, not all of them. Some looked uncomfortable, even distraught, but I...that was worth it, to make sure the rest of you got out. But I hear those sounds, when I try to fall asleep.”

Grantaire’s eyes widen, shocked at the vulnerability of the confession even if something niggles at the back of his mind. Something saying he’s not telling you everything, but how can he not be, if he’s offering Grantaire this little piece of his soul?

“I wasn’t...” Grantaire selects the word carefully. “...conscious for much of the fighting, as I said, but I understand, Enjolras. When we broke through that barricade, and I saw that hailstorm of bullets, all those soldiers...I see it when I fall asleep, too. I think we all do. It’s even worse for you.”

“I...” Enjolras teeters on the edge of the word like he might say more, but doesn’t, just yet. “I’ll go outside with you to the others, if you’re amenable.”

Grantaire wants to push. He wants to say I know there’s more, but for once, he doesn’t. He nods
instead, helping Enjolras out of bed, careful of his still healing arm.

“Grantaire?”

“Yes, Enjolras?”

“You aren’t a burden to your friends.” Enjolras whispers the words, and Grantaire feels tears prick his own eyes, forcing himself to look over. “And I thought you were very brave, diving in front of that bullet for Joly. He might be dead, if not for you. I...was harsh with you, at the barricade. I’m sorry about that.”

Grantaire shakes his head as they reach the door. “Don’t be. I was scared of losing all of you, and I acted out because of it.” Grantaire smirks. “Although, perhaps you should apologize for telling me I wasn’t capable of loving, Enjolras. I have some warmth in this cold heart, you know.”

Enjolras smiles, but there are still shadows in his eyes, making them a darker blue. “You don’t fool me, Grantaire. I see how much you love our friends.”

And you, Grantaire wants to say, though the soft, warm look on Enjolras’ face seems to indicate that he knows. The manner of love Grantaire bears Enjolras he’ll keep to himself, but he’ll also take any love Enjolras gives him back, even if it’s always friendship and not what Grantaire sometimes dares to let himself think of.

The earnestness strikes a chord in Grantaire’s chest, an aching, throbbing chord, and he wonders if Enjolras knows how to be anything other than terribly sincere when he’s giving someone a compliment.

“Hush now,” Grantaire says, leading the way down the hall. “Don’t tell them that.”

Enjolras follows, leaning in close to Grantaire’s ear with a surprising amount of sarcasm, no doubt picked up from Combeferre. “Oh yes. Surely it’s our secret.”

When they finally make it to the garden everyone greets Enjolras, and he’s swept up in being offered tea or coffee or breakfast—lunch, at this point—or being tutted over by Joly and Combeferre even as he asks after Courfeyrac’s arm. Cosette retrieves Monsieur Fauchelevent and Javert, the latter lecturing Enjolras for getting into a street-fight without his permission.

Grantaire watches, thinking about the day of the barricade. Thinking about how he almost threw himself at the National Guard when he saw them arresting Enjolras, stopped only by the tug of Bossuet’s hand on the back of his shirt, needing help with Joly and his injured ankle. Grantaire’s emotions around Enjolras are always strong—sometimes he thinks he’s in love, and sometime he thinks it’s something less clear, but it’s powerful nonetheless—but he didn’t know until that moment just what he was willing to sacrifice when it came to Enjolras. The he could in fact, stand up straight beside him. He’s always believed in Enjolras, but that was action, and not just words.

And he believes in Enjolras now, even if Enjolras, for the first time, might not believe in himself.

That moment, that almost, will remain his own.

For now, he’ll keep an eye on Enjolras, and he won’t let his fear get in the way.

The clock strikes three in the morning exactly when Enjolras wakes up in a hot, shivering sweat.

He tosses the covers off his legs awkwardly with one arm, sweat sliding down his neck beneath his
nightclothes. His arm protests when he knocks his elbow against the nightstand, cursing under his breath. The images from his dreams splash up against the inside of his mind like wet, dripping paint, everything colored too bright.

*Police at Valjean’s door.*

*Valjean behind prison bars, his face covered in striped shadows.*

*Montparnasse’s knife a smear of silver in the night.*


*His friends arrested, one by one. Shackles locking shut around their wrists. For helping him. For hiding him. The sign for a new medical practice broken and shattered on the ground. A half-finished poem blowing away in the wind. A ripped red waistcoat.*

*Cosette, crying. Marius’ grandfather pulling him away from her.*

*A gunshot, exploding over it all. A laugh dying before it begins, the streetlamps of Paris gone pitch black dark.*

He was always prone to nightmares as a child, his imagination running away with him. But he hasn’t had them like for many years. A bad dream or two, once in a while, when he was very worried about a friend, or angry over something political. There was a slate of them, after 1830, and those barricades.

Now...

Now they haunt him even when he’s awake, shadowy fingers grasping onto him with a cold, merciless grip. Voices, asking him the same question over and over and over again.

*What will you do?*

*What will you do?*

*What will you do?*

And then another, worse question.

*Who will you hurt when you do it?*

Ever since Valjean came in with Javert’s note about the police, he’s wondered if he ought to hand himself in. Then came Montparnasse, in the same night. Then came the horrible, stomach-dropping moment when he thought Courfeyrac was dead. All of that, added to the constant question of how will he live as a fugitive, and not be a burden to those around him?

He doesn’t want to turn himself in to make a point. It’s not for glory or some sense of self-loathing, though that has crept into the edges of his mind more often now than it ever has before. He doesn’t regret his choices at the barricade. They were right. But he wonders still, if he belongs in the new world he hopes to forge.

The only thing is, they aren’t there. He wants to help forge it. He doesn’t want to abandon his friends, even if means making them safe.

One of his choices almost cost Courfeyrac his life. Staying might cost Valjean his freedom, if things go wrong.
How does he keep leaning on Valjean and Cosette, who have their own lives and risk everything the longer they hide him? How does he risk his friends getting caught for helping him, putting their lives on hold to protect him? When he handed himself over to the National Guard, he knew what he was giving up personally. He was willing to sacrifice it to save his friends’ lives. They didn’t ask it of him. They never would. But he saw the choice in front of him: a distraction to save them, or all of them—at best most—dead. Arrested maybe, but likely dead.

And then, Javert.

Then Javert, and his life-altering choice, not just for Enjolras, but for Javert himself.

If he turns himself in, maybe his friends and Valjean and Cosette will be safe. His friends might then try anything to get him out, and how will that play into Javert’s well-being? For all the lies he’s told? How will it play into theirs, when saying a word might uncover their own involvement at the barricades, and get them throw into prison right next to him.

“It’s all right,” he tells himself in a trembling voice. “It’s all right.”

Maybe it isn’t. Maybe it can’t be unless he is removed from the picture. Maybe it can be all right for everyone else, even if it isn’t for him. Maybe that’s the choice he has to make.

He’s only not sure his friends will forgive him for it.

Even a few days ago, before the police showed up at the door, the thought of turning himself in was only a distant, shadowy wisp of an idea. Then the police knocked, breaking down Valjean’s fragile sense of safety. Then Montparnasse appeared in the night, and god knows what he’ll do with that information. And then and then and then.

A few weeks ago, before the barricade, before all of this, the idea of turning himself over willingly wouldn’t have occurred to him. Not once. Not ever. He wants to stay and fight. He wants to. He just doesn’t know if he can do that, and not risk everyone else.

Doubt creeps into the center of his chest, its ice-cold fingers wrapping tight around his heart.

A sob builds in his throat, pushing, forcing its way upward.

It comes out with a cracked, messy sound, and he puts his hand over his mouth, stifling the noise. There’s a creak in the floorboard down the hall, and he curses again, hoping he hasn’t bothered Cosette or Valjean. The footsteps sound light, so he thinks it must be Cosette.

Then, a knock at the door.

“Enjolras?” Cosette’s soft, sweet whisper. “May I come in?”

“Yes, Cosette, of course.” Enjolras wipes his eyes, hoping it won’t be too obvious, though really, he’s already found out, and perhaps there’s no point in hiding. He doubts that Cosette will know that he’s thinking what he’s thinking, about handing himself in, that is.

Although, she might, and not say so.

Truthfully, Cosette might be the wisest person among them.

Cosette opens the door, her nightgown fluttering around her ankles as she steps inside.

“I’m sorry I woke you.” Enjolras keeps his voice low, hoping he won’t wake Valjean too, though
sometimes he doubts the man ever sleeps for the odd hours he seems to keep.

“Oh, you didn’t.” Cosette sits, shifting her nightgown and smoothing it out beneath her. “I was reading.”

“Reading? This late?”

A hypocritical statement, really. He’s certainly read until he fell asleep with the book in his hands, before.

A faint blush spreads through Cosette’s cheeks. “Well. Trying to. I was missing Marius, truth be told. Silly, I know. I saw him yesterday, and he’s well enough now that he’s meant to come for dinner next week, here. Only a short one, mind you, he’s still very weak, but it will be nice, to see him away from his grandfather, and everyone there. His grandfather is kind to me, but I...well I know he was not always to Marius, before. Courfeyrac told me.” The blush grows deeper. “I’m sorry, I’m going on.”

Enjolras shakes his head. “Not at all. And it’s not silly. I miss my friends and I saw them this very morning.”

There’s a prolonged pause, not bereft of awkwardness. Prouvaire always says that the night makes the wall between people and their secrets thinner, and right now, Enjolras thinks that’s true. Most of what Prouvaire says is true.

“Enjolras...” Cosette tries. “I...well I don’t want to bother you, but I thought I heard you...well I thought you sounded upset.”

*Upset* sounds less invasive than *sobbing*, and Enjolras appreciates the thoughtfulness of that.

“I’m all right,” he says. A lie. “I just had a bad dream.” The truth.

Cosette reaches over, hesitating just a moment before taking one of his hands. Normally Enjolras would be hesitant about letting someone he’s known for so short a time be so familiar, and he has very little experience with having women as friends, but Cosette is warm and kind easy to talk to, giving him every reason to step outside his usual boundaries. Perhaps one day she might like to talk to Combeferre about women in politics, and the thought makes him smile for the first time all night.

“I know you must be going through a great deal,” Cosette whispers. “I won’t push you to speak about if you don’t want to, but you know, Enjolras, it’s all right if you’re sad. Maybe you don’t need me to tell you that, but I think someone like you, especially right now, might think you aren’t allowed, because there’s so much going on. I think Papa has that trouble sometimes, and we were so alone, just the two of us, that I couldn’t always talk him out of it, until lately.” She grins, meeting his eyes. “But you have your friends, who I expect would never allow you to fall too deeply into your own mind. You’re less isolated.”

Enjolras nods, feeling what he’s not telling her resting heavy in the pit of his stomach. “My friends are the smartest people I’ve ever met. I have learned more than I can say from them.”

Cosette squeezes Enjolras’ hand, letting go and folding her own in her lap. “I’ve been thinking about my mother lately, after everything with Papa and Inspector Javert, and I remember...well my memories of her are very faded, sometimes I can hardly grasp them at all, but I remember she had this smile. This bright, breathtaking smile, and then I remember that she was sad, too. But still so full of life, somehow. Maybe I’m making that up, but it reminds me of you. Very different circumstances, and yet still something I see.”
“Thank you, Cosette.” Enjolras hears his voice go soft, touched by the sentiment and Cosette’s vulnerability. “That’s very kind of you to say.”

There’s the sound of more footsteps, and another knock at the door. Valjean, no doubt, and Enjolras feels guilt press down on his chest, not wanting to drag Valjean and Cosette down into his troubles any more than he already has.

_They want to help_, a voice reminds him. A softer voice than before. _What good will isolating yourself do? You know better._

Except every time he turns around, his actions, his presence here in this house, puts someone or something in danger. Valjean’s freedom. Cosette’s reputation, maybe even her marriage, if Marius’ grandfather revokes permission. Courfeyrac’s life, and Combeferre’s too, if Montparnasse had gotten close enough.

He doesn’t know what to do. He doesn’t know what to _do_ and it frightens him.

He won’t make his mind up. Not tonight.

Soon, he’ll have to.

Valjean opens the door at Enjolras’ call, smiling and looking more awake than Enjolras expected. Apparently he was the only one sleeping, until the nightmare woke him up.

“Both of you up, I see?” Valjean asks, sitting down on the edge of the bed at Enjolras’ nod. “Everything all right?”

Valjean’s eyes look more vibrant now than when Enjolras first arrived here in Javert’s grasp a few weeks ago, despite all the stress. He likes the company, Enjolras thinks, even rebel company that might get him in trouble. It must be a relief too, for his daughter to know the truth about him. Enjolras can’t even imagine what that must be like, walking around under such a lie that even the person you love most didn’t know. He could do the first. He has been, he supposes. But keeping a secret like that from the people he loves most? No.

Except, he reminds himself, that’s exactly what he’s doing now.

_Thoughts aren’t secrets_, he argues. _Those thoughts are my own._

“Just talking.” Cosette squeezes her father’s hand, smiling over at Enjolras and not giving away the secret of his nightmare or his tears, though Valjean looks like he suspects, anyway. “What was keeping you up, Papa?”

Valjean folds his hands, looking at Enjolras now. “Actually, I was thinking about something. You put the idea in my head, Cosette, before we told Enjolras the truth about me. About how all of us involved in this need to know as much as we can, in order to keep everyone safe.”

Enjolras tilts his head in question, shifting his arm, which at least hurts less now than it did before, the sharpness turned into a dull, throbbing ache. He tolerates pain well enough, but he does long for the day when some part of him doesn’t twinge. The shallow cut from Montparnasse’s knife still stings, too, though he wonders if the memory of that is more than the wound itself.

“I was wondering if it might be time to tell your friends the truth about me, Enjolras.” Valjean speaks the words with a cautious anxiety, as if just the idea frightens him, but he wants to do it, anyway. “In order that we might all speak honestly with one another. The police coming to the house made me...well it made me consider the danger of everyone involved not knowing the facts.”
“Papa...” Cosette breathes, reaching out for his hand again. “I...well I am for it, but I know it must worry you. Are you sure?”

Valjean closes his eyes, a thousand memories flitting across his face. First there’s a smile, then a shadow, then some mix of both, and Enjolras thinks he could have hundreds of conversations with this man and still not know all the stories he has to tell.

“I’m as sure as I can be,” Valjean says. He looks at Enjolras again. “I know it’s difficult for you not to be honest with your friends, who are so very clearly your family, Enjolras. I hope this will help with that.”

“Valjean…” Enjolras feels pressure behind his eyes, worried he might cry again. “You don’t have to do this for me. You may trust all of my friends without a single doubt, but please, do this only if you wish.”

“I do wish.” Valjean takes Enjolras’ hand as well as Cosette’s, sounding very earnest even if there’s the usual sound of a perpetual worrier in his voice. “For the first time in my life, I want to tell this truth. I think we will all be better for it, going forward.” He looks at Enjolras for a long moment, as if he might just be reading his mind. “Is there anything you want to talk about? You slept an awful lot, these past few days.”

Yes.

Yes.

Yes.

“No.” Enjolras shakes his head, hating the lie, but he can’t make himself tell the truth. They’ll stop him, if he tells the truth. “There’s nothing.”

“Wait...” Bahorel says, narrowing his eyes in question. “So you...” he points at Javert. “Chased him?” He points at Valjean. “And now you’re...friends?”

A thick surprise hangs over the room, but it isn’t the nasty shock the demons in the back of Valjean’s mind told him it would be. In fact, it seems he couldn’t have found a more sympathetic audience.

“Yes.” Valjean answers before Javert can protest the words friends.

“It’s not that difficult to understand,” Javert grumbles, perpetually annoyed by Bahorel as he always is, though Valjean finds him quite charming.

“Not to be argumentative, inspector,” Prouvaire says, as patient with Javert as he always is, unlike most of his other friends, save maybe Joly. “But it’s quite a story.”

“It is.” Combeferre pushes his spectacles up the bridge of his nose, looking with intrigued empathy at Valjean. “I won’t pry Monsieur...what should we call you now?”

Valjean laughs, swallowing half of it back when he sees Javert glaring at him. “Just Valjean is fine, Combeferre.”

“Valjean,” Combeferre repeats, as if he’s memorizing a fact. “Well I was going to say, we were all terribly curious about you at the barricade, and even more so now and I hope you know that we would never judge you. We have all read pamphlets and things on the galleys and well...”

Combeferre pauses, possibly thinking he’s said too much. “Well as I said we won’t pry, but I admire
you, for all your kindness. Especially to Enjolras and to us.”

“He’s not telling the half of it,” Cosette adds, and Valjean feels his cheeks grow warm, trying to protest. “I expect I don’t even know the half of it, but we will make you tell us one day, Papa.”

Valjean squeezes Cosette’s fingers from his place next to her at the dining room table, the space that most comfortably fits them all. It stills the shaking of his hand, because he still isn’t used to telling people his secret. He isn’t used to trusting. He isn’t used to being loved, in the face of the words I was a convict, and my real name is Jean Valjean. He was always afraid to say them, and not without cause, but now...now he’s saying them all of his own volition. Not because he must, like he did with Cosette when Javert showed up at the door. Not because Cosette convinced him, like when he told Enjolras. But because of his own free choice. It frightens him, still. He had a bad dream last night, thinking over telling these young men the truth. It didn’t stop him, and he’s glad of it.

Now, perhaps they can all find a way to move forward together.

“Wait, so...” Courfeyrac turns toward Javert, looking skeptical, but interested. “It was Valjean who made you... change, then.” He hovers over the word change as if he’s not sure that’s right, but sticks to it anyway. “When he spared you at the barricade. That’s what made you break Enjolras out.”

Javert frowns, looking more tired even than he usually does, something wearing on his mind. His meeting with the prefect tomorrow no doubt, and everything that’s happened generally, leaving him torn up over what choice he might make.

“That’s correct.” Javert tenses as if waiting for Courfeyrac to make an accusation, but Courfeyrac only says “hmm” in an intrigued sort of way, and doesn’t comment further.

That, Valjean supposes, is progress. He can’t blame the young men for being distrustful of Javert—most Parisians are, of the police generally—but he’s been hoping things might cool down between them so they can all trust each other. Still, he thinks things will be difficult until the manhunt for Enjolras dies down, or Javert leaves the force altogether, and Valjean isn’t sure Javert will do that, or even if he can, practically speaking.

He can’t leave now, besides. It would look suspicious. Only, he’s not certain how long Javert can live with himself like that, keeping secrets and actively lying every single day when he goes to work. But even he doesn’t look as beleaguered as Enjolras, who sits quietly toward the corner of the table. He’s quiet by nature, it seems, and Valjean can appreciate that but...

He’s worried.

There’s puffy, purplish bags under Enjolras’ eyes even if he claims to be sleeping late, and he looks as worn out in the face as he did when Javert dropped him at the doorstep, even though he’s less ill now.

All the young men keep shooting concerned looks at Enjolras too, but no one says anything, just now.

“And you were the mayor of a town, you said?” Feuilly breaks into the awkward silence Javert left behind him, a warm eagerness in his voice. “And you ran a factory?”

Valjean nods, bittersweet memories filling him up. Those days were some of his best, before he found Cosette, that is, but it’s also where everything fell apart. Where Fantine died. Those days taught him that there was a way to make a difference. He saw it and did it with his own two hands.

Until he had to leave again.
“A story I do like to tell.” Valjean smiles at Feuilly, who he thinks might be quite a kindred spirit, once they get the chance to talk more. “I would like to tell it to you all, but for now, I think we all should get some rest. I’ll answer anything you might like to know tomorrow, but I wanted all of us to have the same information so we can be certain of everyone’s safety. And I didn’t want Enjolras to have to keep a secret from all of you any longer.”

Enjolras drops his eyes, looking down at the table as if he feels guilty at hearing Valjean’s words, and this makes Valjean even more worried. Combeferre grasps Enjolras’ hand from his place in the next chair, and this at least draws out a small, wan smile.

Javert taps his hand on the table, picking up his hat. “I should go. I need to be up early for my meeting with the prefect tomorrow.”

A thick, sudden silence falls over the room like a pall, cutting through the feeling that was in the air. A feeling that was something like family, if Valjean dares think the word. They’re near it, at least. He can sense it, but he’s afraid to say it aloud, because it’s only been a few weeks. Cosette has been his only family for so long, his sister and his nieces and nephews long-gone and disappeared into a fate he will never know, but can only assume. Truth be told, he’s thought of offering Enjolras to stay here permanently, to help the lad come up with a new life here in Paris that would keep him close to his friends after the worst blows over. He certainly knows how to do it and once Cosette is married it will give him something to think of. Someone to help.

“That’s in the morning?” Enjolras speaks for the first time in a while. His hands are folded on the table, and he’s resolutely looking only at Javert.

Javert nods once. “I don’t plan on turning you in, if that’s what you’re worried about. I chose to do this. I will handle it.”

“Thank you, Inspector Javert,” Enjolras says softly. He opens his mouth again as if he might say something else, then closes it again, leaving whatever it might have been up for debate.

Javert glances over, something new in his gray eyes. Something that Valjean swears might be fondness, or something swiftly arriving there. The rest of the young men watch him go, and then Joly says something about needing to check Courfeyrac’s bandage, making the rest of the group break up. Enjolras tells them he’s going to bed, and when Bossuet offers to help him get dressed—Enjolras’ arm makes it difficult—Enjolras gives him another of those small, wan smiles before declining and going down the hallway and up the stairs, the sound of the bedroom door closing sounding louder than normal.

“Is he going to sleep in his clothes?” Bossuet asks Combeferre, and he’s devoid of his usual easy-going manners, the tension clear in his shoulders. “Not that we all haven’t mind you, but...”

Combeferre puts a hand on Bossuet’s shoulder. “I’ll check on him in a bit. Let’s just give him a moment.”

Combeferre frowns when Bossuet turns away toward Grantaire, sharing a look with Courfeyrac and Feuilly both. Combeferre barely waits for anything like a moment before he heads upstairs toward Enjolras’ room himself.

“Papa...” Cosette comes up behind Valjean, slipping an arm through his. “Is...do you think Enjolras is all right?”

“I don’t know, my dear,” Valjean says, listening for any sign of an argument from Enjolras’
bedroom, and hearing none. “I hope if he’s not, that we may all endeavor to fix it. But he’ll have to tell us first.”

Enjolras isn’t all right, Valjean knows that much.

He only wonders now, if he’s up to something.
Chapter 8

Chapter Summary


Enjolras full-body jumps when Combeferre enters the room.

Combeferre hesitates in the doorway, surprised at the violent reaction. He shuts the door behind him, though he’s not under any impression that they truly have privacy in a house full of people, so he keeps his voice low. He saw Valjean watching Enjolras with wariness earlier, and he certainly can’t blame him.

Enjolras is acting strange.

“Enjolras, what’s the matter?” Combeferre finally steps inside and shuts the door, resting his hand on the footboard of the bed.

Enjolras meets his eyes directly, almost as if he’s trying to avoid looking suspicious. “Nothing. I’m simply tired.” He looks away, avoiding Combeferre’s gaze.

“Nothing?” Combeferre’s words come out with a harshness he didn’t entirely intend, and he tries to soften his voice. “Enjolras, I know when you’re lying to me. At least...” he pauses a moment, sitting down on the bed, which draws Enjolras’ attention again, and for longer. “If you can’t talk to everyone right now, at least talk to me. To Courfeyrac. Just start there.”

Enjolras blinks several times in a row, and Combeferre knows what that is—a concerted effort to keep back tears.

“Grantaire told me you were having nightmares. Thinking about the barricades.” Combeferre reaches out for Enjolras’ shoulder, and for the first time, he hesitates before he grasps it in a gentle squeeze, almost feeling as if Enjolras might run if he moves too quickly. “We all are, Enjolras. You don’t have to be alone with that. You don’t have to be alone with the night where Montparnasse attacked us, either. I hope you also know Courfeyrac is all right, and surely doesn’t blame you. It’s just a small wound.”

“I know.”

Combeferre squeezes Enjolras’ shoulder, feeling the tears in his eyes when he gets a good, long look at his friend, the person who means the most to him. When he sees the purple smeared beneath his eyes like an irreversible stain. When he sees that Enjolras looks thinner than before, his collarbone more prominent.

“I know you were alone for everything that happened with the guards. While you were in jail.” Combeferre’s eyes trail over Enjolras’ broken arm still stuck in its sling, feeling rage shoot through him. Cold, icy rage, and even his non-violent soul considers every medical way in which he might
injure the men who did this to his bright, adamantine friend. “I know you’re carrying that. Is that what’s bothering you? We have always shared everything, Enjolras. Please unburden yourself to me now. Even if it’s only a little bit at a time.”

Enjolras offers a thin, tight smile. It’s not real. Combeferre knows it isn’t.

“What Grantaire said about the nightmares is true, but that is nothing new. It’s…I’m struggling right now. We all are. I’m no different.”

“Enjolras.” Combeferre looks over the rim of his spectacles, hearing the reprimand in his own voice. “You are different. You went through even more than the rest of us. It’s all right to say so. I’m not demanding you be your usual self. I’m just asking you to talk to me.”

Enjolras shakes his head, shifting on the bed so he might stretch out. “I am talking to you.”

Now Combeferre does feel annoyed. “No. You aren’t.”

Enjolras gives him that odd, close-mouthed smile again. “What do you want me to talk about?”

Combeferre gets up from the bed, pacing around the room instead. “It’s not about what I want you to talk about, it’s what you need to talk about.” He turns toward Enjolras, who gazes back, looking like a shell of himself. More of a shell than when they finally found him after the barricade, even. When he was more ill. When everything was raw. Everything is still raw, but…it has to be about the close-call with the police. About Montparnasse and Courfeyrac. Combeferre understands the reasons, but he doesn’t understand why Enjolras won’t confide in him.

“You want to push me away, but I won’t let you, Enjolras.”

Enjolras’ voice shakes just slightly when he speaks again, a hint of guilt flooding in. “I’m not. I don’t.”

Combeferre throws his hands up in the air. “Enjolras, I know you. That’s what you’re doing.”

Enjolras shifts again, wincing when he moves his arm the wrong way. “I am having a hard time…adjusting to what I’ll need to do. What I will do, at all. After the hunt for me dies down, I will have to figure out what to do with myself, and that’s becoming clearer now that I’m less ill. That’s what’s bothering me. I do not wish to burden everyone with it, but I am unable to do it on my own. That, and I am tired of being unwell.”

Combeferre gazes at Enjolras for a long moment, knowing it isn’t a lie, because Enjolras isn’t prone toward them, really, but it doesn’t feel like the entire truth, either. Combeferre releases a soft, sharp sigh before sitting on the bed beside and gesturing his friend’s head into his lap, careful of his arm. Enjolras doesn’t protest or hesitate like Combeferre expected him to in this mood, and that, somehow, worries him more.

“We’ll figure it out together,” Combeferre whispers, running his fingers through Enjolras’ hair. “All of us. It’s not a burden to us. Do you know that?”

“I know.”

Enjolras closes his eyes, and the lack of elaboration, the flatness in his tone, makes Combeferre think that Enjolras knows that’s what he’s supposed to say, but when he closes his eyes, the exhaustion making him look terribly pale, Combeferre finds he can’t argue any further. There’s a pause. A long pause that makes Combeferre thinks Enjolras has fallen asleep, the soft words surprising him when they reach his ears.
“Combeferre.” Enjolras says his name like it might be a prayer. Like he’s never treasured something more, and must treat it delicately, or it may break. The trouble is, his and Enjolras’ friendship has never been breakable. Not even in the early days, and to Combeferre’s mind it isn’t now, either.

“Yes, Enjolras?”

“Surely you know...I mean to say, I hope you know how much your friendship means to me.”

Enjolras opens his eyes, looking almost panicked, and while Enjolras has certainly had moments of anxiety and upset, panic isn’t something Combeferre’s ever seen before. When Enjolras departs from his usual calm, it’s for deep passion and sometimes that flash of intense, lightning strike anger, that capability to do what he must when the situation calls for it. Panic? Combeferre doesn’t recall.

“I...I love you, all of you, so dearly,” Enjolras continues. “I perhaps don’t speak it enough, in words, because I feel my actions do so. But it bears repeating.”

“I know you do.” Combeferre keeps the same reverent tone as Enjolras, feeling he shouldn’t speak too loudly. “We all know. Hopefully you know we feel the same.”

Enjolras nods with a wrenching earnestness that has flashes of Feuilly in it, and then he really and truly falls asleep, not waking up even when Courfeyrac gives a soft knock, stepping into the room. He sits in the chair next to Enjolras’ bed, resting his bandaged arm on the covers. “Did he say anything?”

“A little,” Combeferre whispers. “We can talk about it later. I don’t want to wake him.”

Courfeyrac nods, reaching over and grasping the sleeping Enjolras’ fingers lightly in his own. Combeferre smiles at the sight, but that heavy, nauseated feeling in the pit of his stomach doesn’t go away.

He thinks he has the puzzle pieces he needs, but for once, he doesn’t know what to do with them.

Javert wakes up in a hot, drenching sweat.

He sits up, some of his hair stuck to his forehead for how damp it is, and he tosses the covers off, his legs feeling like they’re burning. He swings them over the side of the bed and gets up, desperate for fresh air. He opens the tiny window, because the one in the sitting room creaks and he doesn’t want to wake anyone neighbors up, given how thin the walls are.

What time is it?

He looks at his clock.

Four. Four in the morning.

His meeting with Gisquet is in four hours. He certainly won’t be going back to sleep now, not with his heart racing like this. He hasn’t recalled a dream for years, not until these last few weeks. First, he dreamt of the dark, swirling waters of the Seine. Swallowing him up. Pushing him down until nothing was left except his lifeless corpse. Tonight, he dreamt of something different. A nightmare, full-stop, leaving a sticky residue of dread in his veins.

What he remembers most is the sound of shackles. Clanging, rattling shackles. Around Valjean’s wrists. Around Enjolras’ ankles. Not around his own, even as he shouted that he was as much a part of this as them, that he started the entire thing when he brought Enjolras to Valjean’s doorstep. When
was the last time he dreamt over worry for someone else? Has he ever? With his mother, perhaps, but those memories are so faded and lost behind years and prison bars he can’t scarcely grasp hold of them. He leans on the windowsill, drinking in the cooler night air, only found in the dark of night as they reach midsummer.

Sometimes now, he wonders if he should quit.

In fact, he wonders more every day. Every second. Every hour. He doesn’t know who he is, if he isn’t a police officer. If he isn’t guarding something. He doesn’t know what he would do to support himself, besides. He doesn’t know how to bow out, without provoking suspicion. His health? He could use that, perhaps. Why would he quit? To earn the esteem of a gaggle of young rebels? Valjean certainly hasn’t asked it of him, but how can he be friends with a convict, truly, and maintain his current post? Working for what he wishes to achieve from the inside is a thought, but still, it would mean lying, every day. He hates lying, and he’s never wanted to be good at running a con.

He’s better at it than he realized. Unless a gamin catches him, then not at all.

He doesn’t know who he is anymore. He doesn’t know who he is, and he knew who he was for so long. He leans on the windowsill for a long while, contemplating who he might be.

“There was nothing of consequence at Fauchelevent’s house, then?” Gisquet asks the question and Javert repeats Fauchelevent Fauchelevent Fauchelevent over and over in his head so he doesn’t accidentally say Valjean.

“No, sir. Nothing. I suppose people were jumpy, after the fighting. Not every group of young men in the city are loose insurgents, after all.”

The lie tastes bitter on Javert’s tongue. He’s never lied to a superior like this. He’s never lied to one period, until all of this started. Until he started it.

Gisquet drums his fingers on his desk, looking out the window a moment before focusing back on Javert. “You know, I have always admired your work, Inspector Javert. I’ve always thought you a fine officer. Clever. Loyal to your work.”

Javert hears the but in Gisquet’s voice. He hears it coming.

“But I am being chastised for this. We need to try something else.”

“I am not excusing myself,” Javert says. “I am as furious with myself over my failure so far as anyone else, but why is there such determination for him, in particular? If I am allowed to ask, sir, when plenty have already been rounded up and trials set.”

Gisquet sighs. “I tried to set out a decree, as you know, that doctors and the like would report to the police anyone they treated within twenty-four hours of the barricades. That, as you also know, fell somewhat flat. There’s others out there we might not even know about, that we need to catch. People have heard about Enjolras now, they’ve seen the flyers with his face. It will only encourage more rebellion if he’s allowed to keep his freedom, in this charged atmosphere.”

When does France not have a charged atmosphere, Javert wants to ask, but keeps those particular thoughts to himself.
“Charles Jeanne is already making a ruckus, now that he’s been caught,” Gisquet continues. “That, combined with Enjolras still out there, makes us look weak. We don’t need that, with everything that’s gone on. People don’t trust the government, after all of this cholera business.”

“Understood, sir.” Javert doesn’t elaborate, because the more he says, the more he might cause himself trouble. “I am sorry again, that I let him get away from me. If you would rather another inspector assigned to the case, I understand.”

Gisquet swipes his hand through the air. “No, I still find you one of the best, Javert, but I will be assigning more. Bisset, in particular, since he’s already been working on it with you. Do you still have those lists?”

“Lists, sir?”

“Of cafes where rebels might be having their meetings. You had drawn it up, shortly before Lamarque died.”

The lists. God, Javert entirely forgot those in light of everything that’s happened since. He curses his former self because this is going exactly where he doesn’t want it to.

“I do.” Javert clears his throat. “There were five or six on it in particular. The Café Musain was one I recall, among others.”

No. No, don’t ask this. Don’t ask this. What he fears Gisquet is about to ask him to do will only serve to make Enjolras and his friends angry with him.

Why does he care about that? He shouldn’t care about that one bit, he should just never go back to Valjean’s house again and let them figure it out from here. He should…

No, a voice demands, a voice that sounds a bit like the man he thought himself to be, but with a different tone. You started this. And you will finish it.

“I’d like a team created to search them urgently. See what can be found. People to talk with who knew Enjolras and could be persuaded to answer questions.”

Of course. Exactly what Javert feared he would ask.

“Do you think anyone will be there, sir? I would think they might be licking their wounds, so to speak.”

Gisquet almost smiles. “You are a smarter man than most, Javert. These rebels won’t wait long, and a few weeks have passed. I suspect some might be returning to regroup. An officer will go to each one, and see who you can talk to. Ask them about Enjolras, and make clear to them the repercussions if we can prove they were at the barricades, too. It wouldn’t take much.”

It wouldn’t take much almost sounds like we don’t need proof at all, and Javert doesn’t like that sound in Gisquet’s voice. He doesn’t like the implication that people might spend time in jail, and even receive punishment on a maybe. Not so long ago, in very, very recent memory, Javert wouldn’t have cared about this, because if there were rebels in a café, logic followed that they were probably at the barricades, too. He would have preferred hard proof, but sometimes that’s hard to come by, and the logic would do. He followed that logic when he believed Bamabatois over Fantine, because Fantine was a prostitute. He didn’t need to hear anything else.

Now, he sees the corruption of his not long ago thought process. The injustice he laid down, even if he thought he was doing the opposite. Javert always prided himself on solving crimes, on taking
even a winding trail and finding his way out. On guarding a society he felt he could never truly be a part of. But he also knows how much he judged people based on who they were and where they came from, judging himself in the process. What he thought they deserved, just based on that, and nothing else. He thought certain people more likely to commit crimes, and couldn’t be moved to believe otherwise. The law said Valjean should be in prison, but what danger is he to society? None at all.

“When would you like us to begin, sir?” Javert asks, because he certainly can’t argue. No one suspects him still, and he needs to keep it that way. Perhaps the most maddening part of all is that they never would, and that shows the chasm between who he was and who he might be now.

“As soon as it can be managed. I’d want to give the rebels a few more days to start going back to their holes. One of them is bound to know Enjolras, and where he might be.” Gisquet does smile now. “I have faith in you, Inspector Javert. The powers that be outside the police don’t always appreciate how to bide their time, or how to be patient when it comes to tracking down a criminal. You do. What was the one you mentioned by name?”

Javert folds his hands on the desk, stopping himself from picking at his fingernails or making a fist or drumming his fingers, anything that might make him look nervous. Anything that might make him look like he’s hesitant about doing his job. He’s never had patience for fidgeting unless it was full on pacing, and that can’t change now.

“The Musain, sir.”

“Send Bisset there, since he has the most experience other than you,” Gisquet says. “And gather a few others to go to the other ones on your list. You’ll run point. How long will you need?”

“Perhaps a full week, if we want to make sure the rebels might be there, and to take time to set everything up,” Javert replies, his mouth going desert dry, because a week is a stretch but he needs time to think. His stomach aches now, it burns from anxiety, and honestly, part of him wants to wretch. “I’ll need to gather the others who will be going, and choose an exact day and time. If we don’t hit all the cafes at once, they’ll talk to each other. That I’m sure of.”

Gisquet nods, getting up from his desk, indicating Javert can go. “Good luck, inspector. I suspect there will be some reward in it for you, if you catch Enjolras.”

Javert lingers in the doorway, a protest on his lips. “I don’t think that would be appropriate, sir. I am the one who lost him in the first place.”

Gisquet waves his hand in dismissal of that idea. Now that Javert’s nearer the window, Gisquet studies him in the light, a frown of concern marring his neutral expression.

“Are you feeling all right, Javert? You look…a bit ashen. Are you ill?”

“Keep calm. Keep. Calm.”

No, sir, simply tired. I’ve been here late, a few nights.”

True. If he isn’t at Valjean’s he’s usually here, trying over the past couple of weeks to take extra shifts like he used to, making up for the ones he didn’t right after the barricades, when his mind was so torn up that being in the station only made it worse. Sleep has come only in stolen snatches. Being asleep means dreams. Being asleep means something can fall out of his control, like Montparnasse and his attack that might have unraveled everything he’s done.

“I’ve heard that. Well, do try to get some rest. You need a sharp mind if we’re going to catch this lad
and I don’t want your health to suffer.”

There was something condescending in Gisquet’s well. Something that….will they fire him, if he
doesn’t catch Enjolras?

You were thinking of quitting before, what does that matter?

Losing his job in shame and quitting on his own are two very different things.

No. No. Gisquet is just concerned, and Javert isn’t used to people being concerned over him, even if
now he seems to have almost too much of it that he doesn’t know what to do.

“Thank you, sir.”

“I might bring Vidocq in on this,” Gisquet says, making Javert turn around in the doorway. “He’s
started that private investigation business on his own, but he’s been eager to catch the insurgents,
apparently. Whatever my quibbles with him.”

Javert certainly knows that name. Vidocq is known for trying to bring ex-convicts into the force, and
now, apparently, into his own somewhat private police…whatever one might call it. Javert had little
use for him before, given that he didn’t really think ex-criminals were the best sort to hunt down
current criminals—how was he to know if they weren’t just helping them?—but now he might think
differently on the matter.

Except, he supposes, he can’t agree about being harsh on the rebels. Obviously. Not that he’s fond of
rebels generally, but he is growing fond of the one he broke out. Protecting Valjean is one thing,
because Valjean isn’t trying to bring down the government, but those young men now half-living in
Valjean’s house certainly want to, no matter what happened a few weeks ago.

God, he hates this. He made this situation and he hates it.

Doesn’t he?

Not entirely. Not entirely.

“Understood sir. I’ll report back to you tomorrow.”

What will change before tomorrow?

Javert walks through the main room of the station, giving greetings he barely remembers to other
officers before he steps outside into the morning light, the underarms of his coat drenched with
sweat.

He has to tell Valjean.

It’s the first thing that occurs to him, to tell someone else. To tell a…friend.

That’s frightening enough, on its own. The idea that he needs someone else to help him.

For the first time in his life, he doesn’t argue.

Because he can’t do this alone.

He doesn’t want to.
Javert barely gives Enjolras a greeting when he comes in the house, sparing only a curt nod and a brief, *hello, Enjolras*, before shutting himself up with Valjean in the kitchen. Cosette is out at the market with Touissant to pick up a few last minute things for dinner tonight—Marius is well enough to attend, much to Cosette's and Courfeyrac's delight.

Cosette entrusted Enjolras with some chocolates she bought a few days previous, asking him sweetly if he might arrange them in boxes while she was out, so they would be ready for everyone, and Enjolras, despite his lack of experience with such a thing, and with only one working arm, agreed. He abandons the task momentarily now, alone in the sitting room as he is, his friends not coming back around until the evening. Javert and Valjean's voices draw him toward the kitchen as they grow louder, and he can't really help but listen.

"We shouldn't tell him," Valjean says, worry coursing through his voice, and he sounds a bit more like the man Enjolras first met the night Javert broke him out, with that tight, secretive anxiety in his voice, rather than the more open, happier man he’s been lately.

*Something's come alive in him again I think, Cosette confided to Enjolras last evening. I think finally telling me the truth helped, and having you and your friends about gives him something else to think of, someone to help. I think he needs that. Although what he doesn't understand, though I am determined to make him, is that even when I am married I shall always need him.*

"He's been upset. Feuilly came to me about it, asked me to keep an eye out."

"Tell him what?"

"He's not a child, Valjean," Javert argues. "Going back to your secret keeping ways, are you?"

"No." Valjean keeps his patience, and Enjolras thinks it truly must be endless. "I just think we ought to wait a short bit. At least until after the dinner tonight, with Marius. Let them all enjoy something, Enjolras especially."

"Well, I won't be able to come tonight."

"Javert."

"I'm not avoiding it. Gisquet wants me to pick the officers I'll have going to the cafes by a few days from now. And I need to see if I can find a way to go to the Musain myself, instead of Bisset, who will sniff any rebels out if they're showing their faces there. That's the one where Enjolras and his friends went most, Prouvaire was telling me about it not long ago. Very odd, that one and yet somehow charming, despite that."

Enjolras stiffens. They’re going to raid cafes, now, looking for him. Asking people about him. They’re going to raid the Musain.

There probably won't be anyone there, he tells himself. But then, there might be. It’s been a bit over a month since the barricades fell, and people will want to regroup. None of his close friends have gone back yet for obvious reasons, but others in their group might.

Oh, god.

And Javert himself will only be able to go to one café, at best, and control the damage. Who might end up arrested to keep him hidden, even if no one but his friends, Javert, Valjean, and Cosette know where he is? When it will only be their fault for knowing him, or for merely participating in the same
insurrection? People that got away from the barricades themselves might get caught, for going back to their old haunts too soon.

Enjolras puts a hand over his mouth, willing back the nausea burning up his throat, the ease he tried to cultivate this morning turned to ash. He spent half the night debating whether he ought to turn himself in.

No. Yes. No. Yes.

You’ll hurt your friends if you do. You’ll hurt them if you don’t.

What about Valjean? Cosette? Their safety?

The words spun around in Enjolras’ mind until three at least, his eyes sore and throbbing now from the lack of sleep.

“Well, that’s too bad,” Valjean answers, sounding genuinely sad. “You’ll be missed.”

“Perhaps by you,” Javert grumbles. “And Cosette, who is kinder than I deserve, frankly.”

“Javert.” Valjean chides the grumbly, growly police inspector, which makes him a brave man, in Enjolras’ estimation. “I think the lads are warming up to you, Enjolras in particular. You have to give them time. You did break into their barricade, if you’ll recall.”

Enjolras practically hears Javert rolling his eyes, but he doesn’t argue.

“I need to get back,” Javert says. “I’ll come back tomorrow evening. Be careful, with the dinner, don’t draw too much attention.”

“A task I’m adept at,” Valjean replies, and Enjolras swears he hears Javert laugh in response, though it sounds oddly like bark.

He steps away from the door, taking up a seat on the sofa as soon as he hears Javert leave the kitchen, not quite resuming his task of arranging the chocolate boxes before the inspector steps inside the sitting room.

Javert gazes at the chocolates and their wrappings, then at Enjolras, arching one eyebrow. “All right, Enjolras?”

Enjolras only nods, thinking he shouldn’t say anything just yet.

Javert looks suspicious.

“You haven’t written to your parents again, have you?”

“No. Not since I answered their reply to me. You told me not to.”

Javert keeps staring at him. “Good. Stay inside, do you hear me? Don’t even go in the garden anymore. Not until I say otherwise.”

“All right.”

Javert tilts his head, narrowing his eyes.

No. Wrong answer. He expects you to argue with him.
“Why?” Enjolras amends himself, but that doesn’t seem to do any good because Javert looks…well Javert looks concerned, and he finds he doesn’t know what to do with that.

“Because they’re putting more inspectors on the case, looking for you. That’s why.”

Half of the truth. Javert still isn’t telling him about the raids, oddly obeying Valjean’s request in this instance. But Enjolras knows, anyway. Everything keeps building. Everything keeps happening, and he stands at the center of it all, with this strange police inspector. The police knocking on Valjean’s door, endangering Valjean’s freedom and Cosette’s future. Montparnasse attacking them in the street and nearly killing Courfeyrac. His friends’ freedom and their paths forward hanging precariously in the balance. His comrades’ safety, if those café raids happen.

“I understand. I’ll stay inside.”

Javert’s eyes turn into slits, and he opens his mouth and closes it again before only nodding in response, as if he suspects something he can’t name. He leaves after that, shutting the door behind him, the sound echoing into the quiet.

Enjolras stares after him, the chocolate abandoned on the table. Valjean moving about in the kitchen is the only sound in the entire house, and he misses the chatter of his friends, which at least allows him to turn his mind off for a while, the constant loop of anxious thoughts coming to a halt, if only temporarily. Enjolras turns his gaze away from the front door, looking instead at the palms of his hands. For a moment, for a second, for something short that still feels like forever, he thinks he sees blood smeared across them, irreversible and permanent in the creases of his skin.

He knows what he has to do.

Cosette feels light. Happy. Joyful. There’s never been so many people in the house all at once, their small dining room alive with laughter and light and warmth. Usually the meals they take in this house are simple and without extravagance, but tonight the room smells of roast chicken and freshly baked bread, the table laden down with soup and cheeses, the scent of coffee coming in from the kitchen. Touissant’s never made a meal for this many, and Cosette helped her make some of it, proud of the achievement. She sits next to Marius, keeping an eye on him as he eats and watching for any sign of trouble. His feverish state has passed, but his constitution is weak, his grandfather said, his skin paler than usual beneath his black hair.

She feels the precariousness of the situation. The hot breath of the police on their necks. The way her Papa’s fingers tighten just so over his cutlery when the house creaks, making him think it’s a knock at the door. Still, she hasn’t seen Valjean quite like this in…well her entire life, perhaps. Looking younger and eager and curious. When they lived in the convent maybe, but even then, even if she didn’t know it, secrets were weighing him down. Now, surrounded by all these young men and unburdened of his past, he looks like half a lad himself.

She looks down the table at Enjolras, who appears just the opposite—tired and dull-eyed and staring off into the distance like he sees something the rest of them cannot. That, according to most of the other boys, is normal. The weariness and the lack of a spark in his eyes far less so.

There’s a miracle, in this room. The miracle of her Papa being free and out of the galleys. The miracle of her entire life, really. The miracle of Marius’ survival and Enjolras’ freedom. The miracle of every single young man in this room still breathing to tell the tales of their revolution. She knows the miracle could break any second. She knows it could snap without warning if the wrong person comes to their door.
She only hopes it doesn’t.

“Cosette, my dear,” Courfeyrac says with the air of a pouncing kitten. “Have I never told you the story of the time Combeferre nearly scared the trousers off your betrothed?”

“Courfeyrac...” Marius tries to interject, but Cosette just puts a hand on his arm, and he falls silent with an embarrassed sigh.

“You haven’t,” Cosette says, hearing her father’s soft chuckle on her other side. “Please, do tell me.”

“Please do not,” Combeferre cuts in, looking over the top of his spectacles at Courfeyrac. “I didn’t scare Marius, you’re telling a falsehood.”

“I am not!” Courfeyrac crows. “He went pale.”

“Combeferre.” Cosette glances at him with a grin. “You are so kind, I can’t imagine you scaring Marius.”

“Combeferre is the master of the cutting one-liner,” Bahorel says, a gleam of amusement in his eyes. “He could destroy a man, just with a few words, you’ll see the longer you know him.”

“Here I thought we were here to tease Marius and instead it’s me,” Combeferre grumbles, but Cosette sees the smile in his eyes behind the spectacles despite the worried glances he keeps throwing at Enjolras. “You always find a way, don’t you Courfeyrac?”

Courfeyrac winks. “So I do. Anyway. Our dear Marius here was talking about Bonaparte...” Courfeyrac pauses for a moment as if worrying he might offend, before going forward. “A difference of politics between us, you see. He went on a rather magnificent tangent...”

Marius runs a hand through his hair and mumbles something unintelligible, but Cosette sees more color in his cheeks than she has in weeks.

“And then he said...” Courfeyrac pauses, looking over at Jean Prouvaire. “What did he say exactly, Jehan?”

“I believe it was what is greater than this? Or something of that nature,” Jehan answers, giving Marius a kind smile, which does make Marius look up, a jolt of that endearingly sweet laughter bursting out of him.

“And then Combeferre said to be free,” Bossuet chimes in, looking amused. “And then just left! Started singing!” He looks over at Marius, inclining his head. “It’s all right Marius, no one can stand up to their first one-liner from Combeferre.”

“Oh, please.” Combeferre rolls his eyes, but he’s laughing too, and Feuilly pats him on the back from his place in the next chair over.

“Bossuet was very kind to me,” Marius tells Cosette. “He responded to my name being called, even if it meant trouble for him, since it meant he was absent. From one of our law school classes, that is.”

“Bossuet,” Cosette says, laughing again. “You are too good.”

“He’s also quite mischievous, you’ll find, Cosette,” Grantaire interjects. “Just you wait.”

“True,” Joly adds, earning a tug on the hair from an offended Bossuet. “We musn’t forget though, Enjolras’ part in this story.” Joly look across the table at the still silent Enjolras, who gives them all a
smile, though it’s shaky until he makes it solid, some of that charm Cosette’s seen shining through the grief that’s so clearly weighing him down.

“*My mother is the republic.*” Feuilly finishes Joly’s story, looking across at Enjolras as well. “Most of us were downstairs by then, but heard it still.”

“It was very poetic indeed, Enjolras,” Marius says, grasping Cosette’s hand tight under the table.

Enjolras tries that smile again, and it is a little brighter this time, which makes Cosette’s nerves settle somewhat, but she can’t quite banish them. Everything is so warm in here, everything is so full of life, but something else creeps around the edges. Danger. A threat. Cold, even in the middle of summer.

She just doesn’t know what.

“The words come to me, sometimes,” Enjolras says.

“Sometimes,” Courfeyrac shakes his head, looking at Enjolras with an almost painful fondness, the bandage he wears just peeking out when he rests his arm on the table. “Always, my friend.”

Enjolras smiles a third time, and though he doesn’t say anything Cosette feels the love for his friends coming off him in waves, mixing with the grief she noticed. The earlier chatter resumes, and Cosette catches her father watching Enjolras with a concerned expression. She tears her gaze away for a moment, keeping hold of Marius’ hand beneath the table and studying him in the candlelight. His black hair looks darker against his still pale skin, but he’s gained some of the weight he lost back. He won’t be able to stay for much longer, and she can tell he’s tiring, so she treasures the moment, mouthing a silent *I love you* when no one else is paying attention. She gets a shy smile and an *I love you* in return before she turns toward her father again, that love for him bursting inside her chest.

If not for him, she wouldn’t have any of this.

She thinks back further, to her mother, and those faded memories wrapped in shrouds of white and gold. Her mother sacrificed everything so she could have moments like these, and Cosette will carry that love, that love she has even if her mother is gone, with her every day. Every moment. She gazes at the empty chair that was meant for Inspector Javert, wishing her could have been here tonight. Maybe that’s insane, given his past with both her parents, but she seems him trying. She sees him risking so much, and she cannot help but give him that chance. She cannot help but hope she might help him see what love is, because she remembers the moment love broke her own life open anew, the moment her Papa stepped inside that terrible inn.

She supposes it’s just her nature.

She watches Enjolras, knowing, even in the short time that’s passed, just how much love he holds within him. For his country. For the ideals he holds close to his chest. But most of all, for his friends. And now, perhaps even for herself and her father.

Except now...now she worries he might do something he shouldn’t because of it.

She keeps hold of Marius’ hand under the table, hoping she’s wrong.

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Enjolras waits until he’s certain Valjean and Cosette are asleep.
Don’t do it.

Do it.

“Stop,” he whispers to the voices in his own head, the voices tearing him apart until he feels like he should be bleeding.

A tear slips out of his eye, feeling oddly cold on his skin as it slides down his cheek. He puts his hand on the doorknob, willing the floor not to creak as he goes. Goosebumps shoot up his spine, and he pulls his coat tighter around him, one slide constantly slipping off because the sleeve can’t go over his arm, which is still in a sling.

He takes one glance back through the darkened house, feeling so much affection for the two people sleeping upstairs, two people he’s known only a few weeks, that it makes a few more tears come. Tears of gratitude for their selflessness. Tears of fear that even if he hands himself in, that somehow he’ll still get them in trouble. Tears of frustration, because maybe they won’t understand why he’s doing this, and he only hopes they will. He hopes that he’ll be allowed visitors before his inevitable trial, though he doubts that will happen now, given the notoriety he never meant to obtain. He left a note on the dining room table, unsigned for fear of leaving any shred of evidence.

Thank you for everything, it read. You’re good, kind people, and I am more grateful than I can say.

He whispers those same words into the quiet hallway before opening the door and slipping outside. The paving stones are wet from an earlier summer rain, the moonlight making the drops glow silver. He walks slowly on the slick ground, because falling will do him no good, with his still-healing arm.

Don’t do it.

The words repeat themselves, except this time the voice sounds like Combeferre.

Please don’t.

Courfeyrac, this time.

Enjolras, please think about this.

Feuilly.

Don’t be an idiot, Enjolras.

Bahorel.

Go back. Go back, Enjolras. We need you.

Jean Prouvaire.

You just need some sleep, my friend.

Joly.

Do you really need to be that self-sacrificing?

Grantaire, with that frustrating tease in his voice that Enjolras is only starting to understand.

Don’t tease him, Grantaire. He should turn around, though.
Bossuet, worry cutting through the usual friendly lilt.

*I have to do this,* Enjolras argues back with the voices of all his friends. *For you. For Valjean. For Cosette. Even for... god help me, Javert.*

“Yes,” he mutters. “Yes. I have to do this.”

He somewhat remembers the way to the station, having walked in this area of the city before, though he thinks it isn’t the same one where Javert works. All the better, he supposes, because it will look less coordinated. It isn’t of course, but he does worry some of the officers might suspect, and he doesn’t want Javert in trouble, even if a few weeks ago he couldn’t have thought of feeling such a way about a police officer.

He hears one miniscule scrape of something that sounds like a shoe on the paving stones, stopping in his tracks and looking around in the eerie darkness, but he doesn’t see anything, and he doesn’t hear the noise again. He continues on, looking up at the clear, star-studded sky, tiny orbs of light scattered across like someone might have painted them there. He takes a deep breath of the midsummer air.

With most of the city asleep, Paris is his and his alone, tonight. He’s not sure what he’s walking toward, exactly. Death, perhaps. Maybe prison. The galleys, perhaps. For how long, he doesn’t know. Perhaps he won’t survive it. Perhaps he will.

It’s the only calculus that makes sense. It’s the only thing he can do.

If he runs south, he endangers his parents.

If he hides with any of his friends, he endangers them, either by way of the police, or even Montparnasse, who could easily become a problem a second time. Enjolras won’t soon forget the way Montparnasse looked at Courfeyrac under the black sky near the Rue Plumet, ready to kill him without a second thought.

If he hides with Valjean and Cosette, Valjean’s freedom, his life, even, might be at stake. Cosette’s entire future. Enjolras learned that when he had to run across Paris before the police knocked on Valjean’s door, only getting out before it was too late because of Javert’s note. This is not even to mention the café raids he heard Javert and Valjean discussing, which will put an untold number of people at risk. People who have lives and families and who need to continue on with their work, which they can’t do if they’re stuck behind jail bars. He has a responsibility to place those people over his own freedom.

When it was just the matter of what he would do in those first hazy, frightening days after Javert broke him out, that was something he felt he could figure out. He could hide for a while. Lay low. Figure out...some way to build a life. In the first week or two after the barricade he was in such physical pain that he could scarcely even think forward, feeling as if he might be ill forever. As his mind cleared, he realized what a burden he might be to his friends, a bird trapped in a cage that they must constantly tend to at the expense of their own futures. He won’t let others pay the price for his half-freedom. Not people he cares about so desperately. People who will do good in the world. Part of him feels selfish, for doing this. For handing himself over so he won’t have to live under the burden of a lie when so many people are risking everything to help him. But he doesn’t want that he doesn’t….he wants them to be free. Completely so, and not trapped just because he must be.

He thinks again of the man he shot in the head, He thinks of the words he spoke after.

*Soon you will see the fate to which I have condemned myself.*

Combeferre’s words soon after, as he clasped Prouvaire’s hand.
We will share your fate!

Is this what it’s like to feel your heart break? Enjolras hears it shatter in the chasm of his chest. He swears he does.

He wills the pieces back together, because he will not give into despair, even now. He will not give into it even though he feels heavy with grief and fear and doubt doubt doubt. He’s never felt like this. Not in his entire life.

He stops, shutting his eyes against the rising tide of sadness threatening to drown him. He keeps his head above the metaphorical water, forcing better memories into his mind. Forcing the light inside him to outdo the darkness that wants to consume him. Whatever happens to him, there is good in the world. Goodness and kindness and people willing to fight for it. He knows that. Whatever happened on the barricade, whatever happens now, he knows that. He’s heard it over and over again as history called out to him, and he’s seen it in the faces of the people he loves best.

But are you a good man? A snide, mean voice asks him. A voice he never heard much of, until the past few weeks. A voice born of the loss at the barricades and the laughter of the national guardsman striking his arm until they heard it snap. A voice born of a moment, and his own words.

Pray, or think. You have one minute.

How can he not regret what he did that day, and still feel so heavy with the memory of it?

He supposes he’s always been willing to sacrifice himself for what he believes in, right down to the soul he knows he possesses.

I have tried to be, he answers back.

He’s across the street from the station before he realizes how far he’s gone. His broken arm gives one twinge as if in protest, the rebel, the radical, turning himself into the police of his own free will.

“I couldn’t endanger any of my comrades in order to keep myself hidden any longer,” Enjolras says to himself in a low voice, practicing what he’ll say when he walks inside. “I am handing myself in. I will not give you any information about anyone who fought on the barricades with me, or about anyone who helped me, for any lesser sentence you may offer.”

He repeats the words to himself a few times, willing himself steady. A final tear slips loose from his eye and he wipes it away, taking one step forward.

Before he can take another step forward, he hears something. Something that sounds once again like the scrape of a shoe on the wet paving stones. Before he can move, before he can think, someone steps out of the darkness. Someone who knows the darkness. The stranger wraps an arm around Enjolras’ chest, clapping a hand over his mouth in one swift movement.

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