Deadbeat Dead Ringer

by Fargosis

Summary

Spy has had 27 years to be a father to Scout, and he is admittedly somewhat of a shithead for not even attempting to do so. But, in his mind, that still doesn't give Sniper the right to barge in and take over! Now with competition on the horizon, Spy will either have to shape up and be the father Scout's been lacking, or ship out and hand over his only child to, in his mind, the feral unwashed bushman of their team. Of course, Spy isn't going to do either and will rely on his usual tricks. But! What will his fellow teammates think? And, more importantly, how will Scout react?
Chapter 1

Spy was the first one to admit he was an adhorrant father. More a sperm donor to the boy’s mother than anything. And a teammate, obviously. But he still liked to think he cared for the boy a little. He had done a well enough job keeping him out of serious trouble after all. Of course the boy still had no idea. Clearly he hadn’t taken after his father in the smarts department. Apparently one could still be disappointed in their offspring without even originally taking an interest, as Spy had learned from dozens of occasions of the boy’s stupidity. Still, they were flesh and blood, and Spy didn’t actually hate him. Maybe he even...liked him. No, that wasn’t the right phrasing. Spy didn’t like Scout. He liked what Scout was. He liked the idea of having a son. He liked the thought of his son dodging enemy fire and stealing the intel for their team, even if in practice Scout’s ego made each and everyone of his minuet achievements obnoxious to even observe.

But really!? 

Really!? 

Sniper!? 

It had started about a month ago now, Scout having found himself on the receiving end of the cold shoulder from the rest of the team had decided to undertake the daunting task of pulling Sniper out of his shell. Although it had appeared more so that Sniper had simply made room in his shell to accommodate Scout alongside him. Scout would run to the camper everyday after battling and prattle on and onto Sniper about this and that. Apparently Sniper was a real good listener. Or simply a mix of too shy and too polite to ask Scout to leave. It was fine. Kept Scout out of everyone’s hair, but of course, the bushman had to go and ruin everything by opening up his stupid donkey gullet one day.

“Hey kid,” Sniper had begun, turning over his SMG in his hand as he worked at polishing it for another day on the battlefield.

“Wassup Snipes?” Scout turned and held his baseball, which he had been bouncing against the wall of Sniper’s camper, against his chest.

“How’s about you and me take that ball of yours outside and burn off some of this pent up energy of your’s?”

Spy had overheard Sniper say that Scout’s face lit up “just like a christmas tree the first real night of winter”

Apparently Sniper’s freakish legs could do more than make him look like a shaved ostrich, as he dashed across the barren ground, not doing too poor of a job keeping up with Scout.

Engineer leaned against his dispenser and sighed, a goofy grin smothered on his face.

“Ain’t that just the thing Spy?”
Spy glanced down at the halfling of a man as he inhaled the smoke from his cigarette nice and deep.

"Your boy-"

"Don’t call him zhat!" Spy snapped. "I...My past behaviors have placed me in no position to claim Scout as ‘my boy’." his lips sneered cruelly as he bit down on his cigarette. Scout was not ‘his boy’ and never would be, they had both made plenty sure of that.

“Alright, settle down now partner,” Engineer eased with a soft chuckle before turning back over the banister, watching as Scout and Sniper ran up and down, like a dance. Someone would run backwards with the ball and the other would go flying after it, then they’d sort of criss cross by each other. “Probably for the best, both of em I mean,” Sniper peeked an eyebrow at this.

“Never seen Sniper so open with somebody, and Scout’s...y’know,” Spy clenched his fists “No...explain,”

“Well just...a boy needs someone to look up to right? Ain’t like you were considering picking up that particular job anytime now,” Engie shot Spy a knowing smirk. Spy crumpled his box of cigarettes in his hand. Something would have to be done about this, no ‘boy’ of his was gonna romp in the dirt like some uncivilized bushman! Not if he had anything to say about at least.

Spy bent over, hands on his knees, trying to catch his breath but unaided by his laughter. “Boy! You sure can run huh?"

“Yeah well, I bet my paycheck on it.”

“Ha! That you do son,”

Scout flinched but tried to play it off “Well uh you ain’t too slow yourself,”

“Did track back in school I did”

Scout perked up “Really?” He tried to imagine a young Sniper out on the track. But he couldn’t wipe that droopy old mug off his face.

“Yeah. Was alright. Only sport they let blokes with glasses play back in those days. Now you kids got those fancy soft contacts--” Sniper ran a hand over the back of his sweaty neck “--anyhow, woulda been a lot better if ain’t for the growing pains,”

Scout chuckled “growing pains? You? I just assumed you came into the world 6’0,”

Sniper laughed at this “Ah, so that’s why me mum gave me up aye?”

Scout got very quiet at this, “shit….I’m real sorry about that man,”

Sniper smiled and shook his head “Im 42 mate, a grown man, and was a baby when it happened anyhow. Don’t matter to me one bit.” Together he and Scout started to walk back to base, dust trailing lightly behind them.

“Yeah just, you know my dad walked out on my Ma and I so like...I understand what that’s like you know? Even if the two of us were just tiny babies when it happened? Still don’t feel so good...”

Sniper frowned and turned to Scout, placing a hand on his shoulder. “Hey kid, uh...I know it
probably don’t mean much to a...guy like yourself, but uh, if you ever need someone or wanna talk about uh....all that, well...my camper is always open y’know,” Sniper rubbed the back of his head awkwardly, feeling mighty stupid. He really hoped Scout didn’t think he was trying to make light of Scout’s situation. Being adopted as a babe onto a loving farm where your the only rugrat running around is miles different than growing up in a crowded house with 7 other blokes for brothers, an overworked mother, and no pa around to speak of. But still, Sniper felt it was best to offer what little comfort to Scout he could.

Scout turned and beamed up at the taller man, eyes a little damp, “Aye uh thanks Snipes, uh I might just have to take ya up on that sometime. So no backing out!”

Sniper laughed deep and rich, slapping Scout on the back “You got a deal kiddo,”

Spy was drinking coffee inside the kitchen when the two of them returned, they were practically climbing each other. Disgusting.

“AH! Come here ya little bugger!” Scout leaned away from Sniper as he held out his hat.

“Your gonna have to try hard than that old man!” Sniper laugher as Scout triped over his legs, bringing both of them down onto the linoleum floor.

“Gentlemen,”

“Oh, heya Spy, sorry bout the racket--I know how it ruins ‘the constructed composure of your persona’ Sniper couldn’t help but crack a smile as he tried to hold back his laughter. Spy rolled his eyes.

“This is a job you know,” He huffed, Scout rolled his eyes.

“Man Spy why you always gotta be such a sour sprout,”

“Hm..yes well it would do you some good if you started acting like this was a job and not one of your infantile baseball camps,”

“Aye come on now Spy, don’t be too hard on Ol’scout, he works hard enough,”

Spy scoffed “And how exactly are you two working on right now?”

“Building morale of course, can’t expect a fella to stay top of his game if he don’t kick back every now and again,” Sniper stood up, carrying Scout with him as he pulled the younger man into a noogie, knocking off his cap. Scout grinned and playfully kicked his legs. Spy felt as though he’d be sick. Finally Sniper let Scout go back on his feet, picking up the boy’s cap.

“Well now I have your hat” he stated before running off, with Scout playfully chasing after, laughing all the way. Spy groaned and rubbed his forehead.

“Aye! Mornin’ Spy” Demoman yawned as he plotted into the kitchen.

“Eh, hangover finally wear off I see?” Spy piqued an eyebrow mockingly.

“Just gearin’ up for round two,” Demo rummaged through the team fridge before pulling out another bottle of liquor.

“Isn’t it a little early for a second round of drinks?” Spy teased with a smirk,
“Aye, ain’t it a wee early for a third cup of coffee yourself?” Demo slapped Spy on the back and laughed. “Thought you could pull one over on ol’ Demo didn’t ya?”

The corner of Spy’s mouth turned upwards and he murmured a little ‘hmm’ into his coffee.

“So,” Demo stood up straight and turned his gaze past Spy, “seems your boy’s been on the up and up eh?” Spy choked on his coffee before sputtering it out.

“Excuse me!?” How many people exactly knew about his relation to Scout? First it was Medic, for medical reasons; then it was Medic and Heavy; then Medic, Heavy, and Sniper; and now it was--wait….SNIPER knew! That outback bastard! Spy stood up from the tabled, pushing past Demo and marched down the hall to Scout’s quarters, where he knew he’d find the australian.

“So then I tells her, ‘Aye lady, if that’s the inside I don’t wanna see the outside!’” Scout and Sniper both threw their heads' back in ravenous cackles of laughter, Scout lying on his side on his bed, and Sniper sitting upright against the wall.

“Pardon me Scout, but I must speak to Sniper in private,” Spy demanded as he marched into the room, grabbing Sniper by the wrist and forcefully pulling him out.

“...Uh sure thing Spy” answered a very confused Scout before having his own door slammed in his face.

“Aye listen here mate I don’t-”

“No!” Spy slammed Sniper by the wrist up against the hall wall. “You listen here bushman”

Sniper swallowed nervously, never had been one for confrontations, especially on the receiving end.

“I may have sat back and allowed you the honor of courting Scout,” Spy spat in disgust

“Courting!?” Sniper gawked, before being silence by Spy’s gaze

“--but I am afraid I may have passed judgements too soon. You are not to see my son again, and you are strictly prohibited from mentioning a word of this or of the...unfortunate true relationship I have decided to keep secret from him.

Sniper shook his head, he couldn’t believe this, ANY of this. “Are you bloody serious right now?”

“Deadly,”

Sniper laughed, this was gold, “You really gonna drag me out here and threaten me case you think I’m gonna blab to your, let me remind you, estranged 27 year old son, cause you’re too chicken to fess up to your own god damn mistakes?”

It did sound rather silly when put in such terms.

“Sniper I know this may come as a shock to you, but some of us need to keep our identity secret if we do not wish to have our head’s found in mobster’s beds!”

Sniper just shook his head and grinned “Quit the bullshit for once in your sad pathetic life, that ain’t got nuthin to do with anything, and you know it and I know it. But I’ll tell you this, no, I ain’t got any plans to wank off Scout, you hear me? It’s scout, you’re more a teammate than father and don’t act like you ain’t. AND I already swore to Medic to take that secret wit me to me grave, less be it you decided to fess up before I kicked the bucket. Which, y’know, don’t seem too likely wit the way
things is headed.” Stunned into silence, Spy loosened his grip and Sniper managed to wiggle free, falling to the floor before picking himself back up.

“Now, if you’d be so kind as to excuse me, we was having a lovely afternoon before you decided to butt in,” and with that, Sniper walked back to Scout’s room, leaving Spy alone, very confused, and very angry with Medic.
Spy, thoroughly annoyed, tries to ignore the insipid antics of Sniper and his son. Sniper discovers there's more to Scout than there would appear.

Spy spent the rest of the week sulking around the base, keeping his eyes pinned to Sniper and….the boy. At breakfast they had entered side by side, giggling out the sides of the mouth as each other’s hats sat atop the other. Sniper’s was too large for Scout and fell down around his eyes, making him somehow appear smaller and more childish than he already was. Scout’s hat was far too small for the sniper, Spy was certain it would leave an ugly red mark as his hair jutted out from under it in all directions. The rest of the mercs hardly paid attention, side for Soldier who battled the two of them for breaking uniform, causing Scout and Sniper to erupt erroneous laughter. Sniper slapped the table, falling apart at the seams as Scout kicked back in his chair, nearly falling over.

“You alright there son?” Engineer asked as he helped Sniper catch the chair before it fell flat. Spy rolled his eyes, noticing how the stupid smile plastered over Scout’s face had managed to find its way on Engineer’s fat mug. Disgusting, even if Spy couldn’t help but appreciate the care Engineer had towards Scout. It didn’t mean anything, but Spy had always been relieved that Scout had another responsible and sensible man looking out for him on the team. The boy was a handful and as the saying goes, it takes a village.

“That was uh, mighty funny of the two of you,” really it wasn’t. At all, but Scout’s energy was so contagious a couple mercs couldn’t help but snicker at his and Sniper’s morning antics.

“Don’t look at me mate, all Scout’s idea, boy’s a real ideas man what he is’ maybe one of these days he’ll turn in his scattergun for your PDA eh?” Sniper proudly wrapped his arm around Scout before pulling him in for another noogie, quickly knocking both of their hats to the floor in all the commotion.

Engineer chuckled warmly to himself “Is that so Scout? Well I could always use an assistant down in the shop,”

Scout sputtered out the eggs he had been shoveling into his mouth with a quick laugh “Ha! In your dreams old man!” Spy winced. Scout’s eating habits were definitely one of the boy’s…..lesser qualities.

Well, they were worse together, Spy could say with confidence. Scout was already annoying but it seemed that the bushman just made him worse. Still, Spy was a gentleman and Sniper didn’t seem smart enough to lie to him about having intimate relations with Scout. Besides, Sniper wasn’t the first person Scout had tried to befriend on base, it would only be a matter of time before Sniper tired of him. Spy decided that his best course of action would be to simply ignore the two men and relax in his study.

Bad idea.

After breakfast Sniper followed Scout back to his room to help him find his bat. Sniper always couldn't help but chuckle and shake his head whenever he saw Scout’s bedroom, it was just
constantly a disaster.

“Promise I ain’t gonna accidentally swap hands with your unmentionables?”

“Hey! That happened once! And I said I was sorry!”

Sniper laughed “I thought you promised to tidy up since then,”

“I did!” Scout protested with a pout as he pushed junk out from under his bed. Crumpled papers, clothing, books, and lots of trash.

“Oi what’s this we got ‘ere?” one book stood out in particular as Sniper crouched down to take a look. The book was a well loved notebook filled cover to cover with various drawings and sketches, some colored in with pencil. One particular cartoon of the Red team’s spy being shot with large comedic Xs over his eyes caught Sniper’s gaze.

“Aye these are pretty good mate,” Sniper laughed. Scout quickly turned around, red as a beet and grabbed for the book.

“Hey! Not cool man!” Sniper just turned his back and continued to flip through the pages. Lots of pages were of desert sunsets, stuff Scout must had drawn from reference around the base. Sniper was quite fond of Scout’s more lifelike drawings of flowers and critters, mostly birds and rabbits, that he had come across.

“This ain’t funny!” Scout stood up and made a charge at Sniper, only to found himself held at arm’s length away by his forehead.

“I’m bein’ serious snipes! This ain’t fair that stuff ain’t meant to be seen!” Sniper honestly couldn’t see what all the fuss was for, there wasn’t anything partically offensive in the book. Except unless maybe the reader was Spy, then maybe they’d take offense. Lots of pictures of cartoons, looked just like they did on the telly. Sniper was impressed, there was even a number of the mercs themselves. He found the doodle of a rather fat engineer snoozing peacefully and a zany looking Demoman bent over drunk particularly amusing. He’d really have to talk Scout into showing the rest of the team they were all sure to get a kick out of—oh.

Oh. a couple pages of Ms. Pauling made Sniper’s hands particularly clammy.

“Don’t think the lady would appreciate this mate…”

Scout buried his face in his pillow and screamed, cheeks a blaze in shame. “Ugh I know! It’s so stupid and creepy. That book is super old. It was the first one I got when I joined the team, didn’t know the ropes or anybody really. I was so dumb and immature. Ugh. And I know it’s stupid but I keep meaning to throw it out but like….what if someone sees it somehow? Don’t Spy and Ms Pauling sometimes gotta look for evidence or whatever?”

“Scout I don’t think--”

“—I know! But I just keep thinking, ya know? Like some Murphy’s law shit,” Scout plopped down on his bed and rubbed his neck, ashamed of himself for being so dumb.

Sniper nodded slowly “It’s alright mate, ain’t nobody gotta know. Here I know, why don’t you bring the book back to my camper sometime and just toss those dirty pages in the rubbish. Ain’t nobody gonna go through my garbage. We could ever burn it.”

Scout smiled softly and pawed at his eye, “Really? That would be super, thanks man, I really owe ya,”
Sniper returned the grin “I’d like to see some of your newer art if that’s alright with you,”

“This is really something else!” Sniper could definitely tell that scout had improved over the years, while there were still several cartoons of the Mercs Scout had also gotten into the habit of filling the pages with character studies. It was almost a little creepy

“Yeah, I thought I really did a bang up job capturing the cold lifelessness of Pyro’s mask,”

Sniper snickered “Might of gone a little light with the frown lines for Spy eh?”

Scout chuckled softly “hehe, yeah…” Spy had always been rather, odd towards Scout. He was always bickering or scolding him, treating him like a petulant nuisance. At first Scout thought maybe it was a little annoying but kind of nice, cause ain’t nobody ever take interest in him tracking mud or wearing dirty socks asides from his Ma, but Scout soon learned that Spy didn’t care for anybody and just had a petulant stick up his ass. Scout almost felt a little sorry for him. Almost.

“Hey Sniper?” Scout asked.

“Eh what’s on your mind bugger?”

“Just….we’re friends right?”

Sniper laughed, “course we is! Don’t see me palling around with too many other blokes day in and day out, do ya?” That wasn’t entirely accurate, Sniper had other friends on base. He was particularly fond of the jovial Demoman and dependable Engineer, but he sure found Scout to be a real hoot himself.

“Kay cause like...sometimes I worry the other Mercs don’t like me so much you know?”

Sniper frowned, asides from Spy he hadn’t noticed any ill will from anyone towards Scout “Why’d’ya say that now?”

Scout turned his head “I dunno, I was always the youngest so like I’m used to being picked on. But like, I know I can be real annoying and I worry the others ain’t like me cause I’m too loud or in the way or whatever, like with Spy the other day,” Sniper walked over and sat down next to Scout, resting his hand on the other man’s shoulder.

“Spy don’t like anybody,”

“Ha, no shit, but still...gets me down every now and again,”

Sniper just frowned and nodded “Hey kid, you’re the life of this base you know that?”

“What?” Scout asked, genuinely confused.

“Everybody thinks so. Even Spy. You keep the rest of us dolts going, with your funny jokes making us laugh and your wild uncontrollable energy. Know for a fact Demo and Engie wouldn’t be the same without ya round,”

Sniper laughed “Yeah but those guys like everyone though”

Sniper smiled and shook his head, “Ain’t nobody like Spy,”

That made Scout genuinely laugh “Yeah ‘cause he smells!” Sniper chuckled, glad to see the life returning to his pal. “Spy sucks!”
“You got that right, so don’t go round worrying about Spy, ain’t see nobody else doing so, why should you be?”

Scout snickered and rested his head against Sniper’s shoulder “Yeah, s’pose you’re right. Thanks man,”

“Anytime little buddy.”

The following day Sniper took a trip out to Engineer’s workshop, weren’t a lot of high end material dealers in the desert, so Sniper knew Engineer had to improvise with spare parts from time to time.

“Afternoon Slim!”

Sniper tipped his hat “Mate”

“Anything I can do for you?” If Scout was the lifeblood of the team than Engineer was definitely the glue, wasn’t anyone he didn’t look after. Maybe it came from the job. So many days out on the battlefield protecting the points and saving teammates hides with his dispensers, helping ease the burden with his teleporters and sentries, trying to help out probably just came naturally for him. Maybe he was just born that way.

Snipper clapped his hands together “Actually, was hoping you might have some old picture frames or something of the sort,”

This made the Engineer laugh “Picture frames? You and Scout fixing to put on some sort of gallery display,”

Sniper smiled, realizing for a moment that all three of whom he would consider his close friends had this very similar contagious positive energy. Wondered what that meant about Sniper. “Kid showed me some of his art the other day, said I was welcome to take what I pleased, figured it could brighten up the camper nicely,”

“Ain’t that nice, good reminder there’s more to life than dirt and bullets,”

“Don’t forget intel cases,”

Engineer chuckled “can’t forget those oh so important intel cases, bet if it weren’t for that athletic tape Scout’s hands would be red and calloused right down the middle from’em,” Engineer rubbed his hands together and stepped back, briefly looking around his workspace.

“Y’know I could probably cobble up a thing or two to your likings, although I think Pyro might have made off with all my lumber again--say--you don’t happen to have anything on hand for measurements do ya?”

Sniper smiled and quickly pulled Scout’s notebook from his vest “It’s the latest one he’s finished, why don’t ya take a look for yourself,”

Intrigued, Engineer flipped through a few pages, chuckling lightly to himself. “Sure has captured your essence I’d say,” Sniper laughed quietly and rubbed his neck, Scout had dedicated a large chunk of the pictures to Sniper and it made him a little bit embarrassed.

“Hey! Shoot, I’m not really that rotund am I?” Engineer laughed.

“It’s just a cartoon mate, supposed to be exaggerated,”
“I don’t know, seems like Scout pegged Solly pretty dead on to me,” Scout had drawn a very top heavy man with a big chin and wide open mouth, posing stoically with an eagle on his shoulder and raccoon by his side.

“Could almost be an emblem couldn’t it?”

“Represents my feelings on this here ‘war’ fairly well, just overly patriotic dribble”

Sniper placed his hands on his hips and laughed “Yeah well, best be off, you say Pyro had some frames?”

Engineer shrugged “He’s got my wood, but I’ll happily make ya a real nice metal one, ain’t got much else use for all this scrap today,”

Sniper smiled “Yeah, I’d appreciate that,” before walking out the door.

“Oh--uh hey didn’t see ya there Spy,”

“Be a rather pathetic spy if you had,” Spy jeered. He had been on his way to see if the engineer could fix his ceiling fan. Blasted thing stopped working and his whole room was filling up with cigar smoke without it’s aide.

“Yeah, well, shoot--hey this might be to your liking,” Snip pushed the notebook into Spy’s hands, a knowing smirk plastered along his stupid donkey face. Spy smirked at that thought, a donkey would probably do his job better anyhow, and be less smelly. Sniper frowned when he realized what the book was, it was one of Scout’s insipid drawing notebooks. Although, even Spy had to admit the kid had some artistic ability, even if he wasted most of it one silly doodles and children’s cartoons. Spy raised an eyebrow in interest as he opened the book, first few pages were rather nice. Landscapes and animals Scout must have seen or copied from other books, skillfully drawn if Spy did say so himself. But his interest was quickly crushed as the book devolved into page after page of insipid, and frankly insulting, depictions of the team. Hadn’t his mother taught him any respect? Spy being shot, Spy being run over and then… peed on by a dog. Clearly, Sniper was having a greater influence over Scout than Spy would’ve prefered.

“Thank you bushman but I believe that is enough for today,” Spy rudely shoved the notebook back into Sniper’s hands, thoroughly annoyed, offended, and disgusted. It appeared as though he and the engineer would have more to discuss than just his ceiling fan.
“Howdy Spy,”

“Labourer,” Spy briefly acknowledged the engineer as he began to slowly pace around the workshop.

“Is there uh...something I can help you with?”

Spy slowly pulled out one of his cigars, not even lighting it, just letting it droop from his lip “What is it about him…”

“About who?”

“The Bushman,”

“About what?”

“Scout!” Spy shouted in frustration,

The engineer chuckled under his breath and scratched his chin “Yeah I reckon they’ve uh gotten pretty close haven’t they?”

“Too close…” The Spy responded, now taking the time to light up.

“Reckon Slim was just in here goin’ on about how much he liked the kid’s art, sweet really,”

The Spy rolled his eyes “well the boy certainly knows how to fill his time,”

“See I don’t get ya Spy,” Engineer finally spoke up, not willing to go chasing their conversation the other day ago round in circles.

“And what is there not to get?”

“Here ya are gettin yourself all in a tizzy over the Scout takin’ a likin’ to the Sniper, and not even that in which way it may be appropriate for the father--” Spy jeered at the word “to be gettin’ concerned. The boy’s 27. Ain’t really even a boy by any stretch of the imagination. Any yet, here you are marchin’ up and down like Soldier on a rainy day, when I know for a fact you have no intention of talkin’ to the Scout about all this and sucking up your pride for once and-”

“Alright! I get it already!” Spy didn’t believe his relationship to the Scout’s was any of the team’s business in the first place, asides from Medic obviously, and couldn’t fathom why it appeared everyone always felt the need to tell him how he should be. Christ. He knew how old the Scout was, and he was far too old to still be clinging on or acting so childishly. Honestly, the way he ‘played’ and ‘frolicked’ with the Sniper was downright embarrassing for him to see.

He just couldn’t understand, the relationship between Spy and HIS father had been a dream. He was quiet, well educated, supported the family, and Spy stayed well behaved and stayed out of the way. Although he did suppose He had followed up with at least the first ⅔’s of his father’s model, and Scout was mildly decent at staying out of his way. But, as the Engineer had highlighted, it did appear
that what had suited Spy in his adolescence was not going to suffice in this instance. What was it boys and their fathers usually bonded over, in this god forsaken country?

Fishing? No. Spy hated to get wet and his suit would surely stink for days.

Mechanitry? No. Spy wasn’t even sure Scout knew how to drive, and there was no way in hell he was letting him within a foot of his car. Spy’s suit would also smell for days.

Baseball? Spy’s face contorted sickly. Men in silly little white outfits fall overing one another, chasing a ball of all things. Pah! Barbaric. The sport was rudimentary at the very best but a loud disgusting display of the unrefined delinquency of Real men engaged in duels of the mind, in nice clean air conditioned buildings. Chess of course was traditional, of course the scout wasn’t in any sort of position to be dueling with his mind. It would only be dangerous to overexert such an underused muscle. Spy snickered to himself, yes, the boy was an idiot wasn’t he?

“So uh, you come in here just to complain about Sniper? Cause, as much as I love the company Spy I can’t--”

“Oh yes,” Spy said, finally snapping back to the here and now, “It would appear the ceiling fan in my private room has stopped functioning,

Engineer chuckled softly “That all? Worried you had gone and broken your watch,”

Spy smiled and shook his head “I could never be so careless,”

Spy considered himself a patron of fine arts, having being born and raised in the heart of Paris had left him with a life long appreciation for the finer crafts. It was a spot of pride for him, to hail from the epicenter of culture in Europe if not the world. That said, he had been rather intrigued when Janice had told that the Scout had taken after him in such regards. Of course any hopes he had were crushed the first time Scout tried to show him one of his assinane doodles. It was an insult to the Louvre herself to call the Scout an artist, and yet Spy was finding himself surrounded by more of it than he thought he could ever stomach. Apparently, the Sniper’s small brain having been so impressed with Scout’s childish drawings, had the tremendously stupid idea of distributing them throughout the base. Spy felt the need to cloak from his own teammates in hopes of avoidance of another

‘Hey Spy check out what the Scout drew? Ain’t it something?’

And yes, it was something.

Something that belonged in the trash.

“Hey Spy!” Great, it was him.

“What is it Scout, and make it quick,” For such a fast runner, he sure did like to take his time to get to the point of his insipid stories.

“...Sniper just thought you might want this,” The boy placed a frame into my hands, it was one of Scout’s drawings. Of Spy. Spy rolled his eyes, at least it wasn’t of him being hit by a car this time. Just him. Standing there. Lips curled back into a sneer under a large hooked nose. Tiny beady eyes staring back at him. He almost felt something…almost. The Spy ran his thumb over the wooden frame. Almost.
“Scout! Wait! I--I didn't mean to yell earlier,” Spy reached out as Scout turned to walk back down the hall, but he didn’t dare touch him. No...it still...wouldn’t be right of him.

“Huh?” Scout stopped and turned on his heel to address Spy.

“I--uh...Scout, you’re a man of the arts correct?”

“Uh........sure thing Spy…” who was setting him up to this? “I guess I uh...draw a lot?”

“Hmm...yes, I think I have something in my study that may interest you in turn Scout,” Scout bit his lower lip in consideration. This wasn’t....like Spy, who had been acting kind of...off lately.

“Uh...sure thing Spy?”

Art books! Of Course! Spy had a small collection in his library, he couldn’t believe he hadn’t thought to do so sooner!

“Yes...your drawings--” Spy felt like he downed a bottle of bitter cough syrup giving even the most minor of acknowledgement to Scout’s.....visual displays. “--I was thinking perhaps I could give you some private tutoring on the matter,”

Scout snorted a laugh “Yeah? And what exactly would your balaclava clown-ass know about art?”

“You know if you sat still, shut up, and listened every now and again you could learn a thing or two on the topic itself,”

Scout smirked, Spy was a smart guy right? Maybe he did know a thing or two.

Spy picked a few books from his shelf as Scout sat himself at Spy’s desk. Spy placed down the...caricature Scout made of him and opened a book on art theory and technique.

“Now you see Scout, a proper artist should always begin a piece by dividing their canvas into thirds, here like this--” Spy grabbed a pen and harshly slashed lines across the drawn Spy,. “HEY!”

“You see? The portrait would’ve come out much better had you followed these rules,” Spy laughed lightly “And that is of course before even getting to the matter of proper anatomy, proportioning, and shading--”

Scout reached across the desk and snatched the drawing out of Spy’s grasp

“Hey man! Not cool! I mean--if you didn’t like it you coulda just said somethin’ or tossed it out or whateva’, but demeaning another man’s baby? That’s just cold Spy.” Scout said with a slow disapproving head shake

Spy sighed and rubbed his temples, this as exhausting, the Scout was exhausting.

“I am only trying to help--here,” Spy drew his own piece of paper, eyes glued to the instructions provided by the book.

“You see, the foundation of a good human face is a circle...no,” Spy erased and re-traced furiously in attempts to copy the book’s diagram. How could it be so hard to draw a circle!? Let’s see...the next step was to make a big crosshair in the middle. Scout watched Spy’s pathetic effort to convince him he knew the first thing about actually drawing and couldn’t help but find amusement in the poor attempt.
“You really don’t know the first thing about drawing do you? Ha! Shows you. Sittin round on your frenchass reading your fancy smancy books all high and toity can’t compare to the real deal and brotha’ lemme tell ya, it ain’t got realer than this.” Scout momentarily flexed before pointing to himself proudly with both thumbs, sticking his chest out like was god damn Superman. In a huff Spy threw down his pen and paper. This was impossible. Art was impossible. The Scout was impossible. Spy sighed in defeat and massaged his temples

“You...are free to go Scout.” Despite his outburst, the Scout didn’t think to grab the framed, now ruined, caricature of the Spy. The cartoon store back up at the real Spy, serving as a reminder as to how much of a failure this plan had been. No, the Spy would have to try something else.

“Thank you kindly Pyro! And I’m sure Scout would love to show you more of his cartoons, kid’s got a dozen of ‘em!” Turns out the Engineer was right, Pyro did have a bundle of old wooden picture frames. Things seemed to be in god enough condition, by Sniper’s standards anyways. None of the wood was wet or rotting, probably just needed a good sanding and paint job. Sniper still couldn’t believe the stuff Americans threw out. Money could be...tight on the farm, and a good responsible shepard always had money saved for his flock and possible veterinary bills. At least that was what Sniper’s father had taught him.

“Ah! Good afternoon herr Sniper!”

“Medic! Just the bloke I was hopin’ to see!”

Medic laughed lightly, “Ja, seems like I am very popular on the battlefield,” Sniper chuckled lightly in return before going back to flip through Scout’s art book, he knew there was one of Medic in here somewhere...Ah!

“Actually, I uh...scout made this and we uh thought you and the big guy might loike it,” It was sorta cute, a pencil drawing of a larger than life heavy being ubered by the medic. Sniper had liked it, at least.

Medic took the paper from Sniper and smiled lightly to himself. Scout’s art was always...amusing to say the least. “Ah yes, you and herr Scout,” Medic winked not so subtly towards the Sniper, throwing him off balance. “You know it is nice, although I was unsure about the two of you at first. Didn’t think Scout as...but oh he is still young ja plenty of time for him to come into his own. Now you herr Sniper I had no doubts about! I just didn’t quite make the connection with you and Scout--but Ja! All in the past well and good! Of course the extra company is nice, safest to stay in groups you know, and Heavy has always been an experimental man--”

“--what are you going on about now doc?” Sniper’s ears were burning something fierce, even if he himself didn’t fully understand why or what was happening.

The Medic couldn’t help but chuckle, poor Sniper, so easily flustered. Cute really. “Come now, don’t be so coy,” He teased, lightly swatting at Sniper’s arm in a flirtatious manner. Sniper swallowed as he grew even redder

“Doc I-”

“Shh…” The Medic silenced Sniper with a gloved finger pressed gently against his lips. “Later…” Sniper shivered as he felt the Medic slide his hand into his back pocket. Coulda sworn he felt a squeeze…
“My door is always open for you boys herr Sniper, pass it on to Scout,” Medic turned back down the hall, playfully waving over his shoulder as Sniper.

“What in the right doodley--’ Sniper rubbed the sweat from his forehead in confusion. Chills ran up and down his spine and he felt as though he was choking, once he was finally feeling...himself did he check his back pocket. It was a key, the key to Medic’s private chambers. Sniper swallowed down the lump that had been building in his throat. Medic didn’t think he and Scout were....oof. He only hoped it wasn’t Spy who had planted the idea. Sniper shook his head, he would have to tell Scout, but later. He...he needed some time to himself to process what had just happened, maybe use the time to get the frames up in his van.

The sun was beginning to set when Spy finally sulked out of his personal study, reinvigorated with a new plan to bond with the Scout.

“Aye Sniper!” Scout had been propped up sitting against the side of the base, lazily throwing his baseball up and down “Up for a game of catch?”

No.

Never.

Absolutely not.

Over his dead body would Scout ever get Spy to participate in his mindless barbaric activity.

No wait, this was Sniper. And a good Spy should always react like their target expects.

“Uh….shure thiang mate,” okay so his Sniper impression was a little rusty. Wasn’t like Sniper ever talked very much to begin with. Except to the Scout, apparently.

“Well don’t just stand there,” Scout tossed the Sniper-disguised Spy a leather glove. Well, if Spy was going to have to do this, he might as well do it proper. Scout ran up and down with glee, tossing Spy the ball and blazing after it when Spy tossed it back. Spy slumped his shoulders, he had no idea how Scout could find such much enjoyment in such a mindless sport. Simple for the simpletons, he supposed. Although, it did warm him a little to see Scout so enthusiastic and...happy. Especially after their disastrous art lesson earlier. Sure Scout didn’t know it was Spy, but that didn’t matter right now, what mattered was for the first time in his life Scout was happy to spend time with his genuine father.

Sniper stepped back to appreciate his handiwork. He wasn’t much for interior design, his family’s farmhouse had been rather bland to say the least, but he did feel as though Scout’s artistry lightened up the place. Some of em looked like the type of stuff some blokes spent a fortune on down at the auctions, when properly framed and put on display. Boy, it wasn’t like Scout was exactly shy or private about his drawing, but Sniper did find he sold himself rather short. Could probably make a living off of it when the war was over and his contract expired. Sniper at least hoped he would consider it, reciting his contract, kid didn’t belong out here. Half the team didn’t really, and the other half, that Sniper considered himself a member of well...they probably didn’t have too many other options besides it.

He bet Scout would really like the display, wonder what that little bugger was up to.

“Aye! Nice toss Snipes!” Spy couldn’t help a small chuckle, Scout’s enjoyment was contagious, as
much as he hated to admit it.

“Alright now go long!”

“Scout!” The disguised Sniper shouted as the ball flew way over his head. He widened his stance with a sigh, he was beyond frustrated but he couldn’t let the facade fall. The idiotic bushman would’ve happily ran off, anything to please the boy. And so, Spy trotted off, praying he wouldn’t get too sweaty and stain his shirt.

“Scout!” The real Sniper dashed over the sand,

“Man Sniper, you start running any faster and Imma be out of a job,”

“There ya are mate, just finished getting the pictures hung up in the camper rear noice,”

“Wait—” Scout stopped, the gears in his brain turning, “Whaddya mean you was just in the camper? We’ve been playing catch for like...20 minutes”

“What!?”

“Hey where’s the ball? Man this desert sun sure is getting to ya Snipes, and I thought you was like super duper outback survival….man.”

Sniper laughed quietly but stopped, staring off over Scout’s shoulder with intense confusion.

“Hello? Earth to Sniper whats—” Scout swivelled his head around, met face to face with another Sniper. Albeit, a muh sweater and more disheveled Sniper.

“I got…..the ball…. He collapsed over himself, breathless, sniper disguise fading in his exhausted.

“Damn it Spy!” Sniper shouted in frustration, fists clenched at his sides. He had had just about enough of Spy and his antics as of late.

Scout quietly shook his head, “What the fuck is your problem? Dude this is like beyond creepy, even for you Spy! If ya don’t like my art and ya don’t like me why don’t you just leave us the fuck alone!? Just...jeez man why can’t you just leave me be!??”

“Because I am your father you nincompoop! And it’ll be a cold day in hell before the likes of my spawn is seen fraternizing with the likes of a piss-throwing illiterate bushman!” Spy yelled in anger. Scout was goddamn 27 years old and he had been acting like a child. Scout felt like his heart was gonna burst it was racing so fast, the world became a blur as he began to hyperventilate, his throat swole up and his ears burnt with white noise.

“Get up” Sniper stands over Spy, knuckles barred white, voice dark and gravely.

“Excuse me?” Spy couldn’t believe his ears as he slowly rose back to his feet. How DARE the bushman talk to him like this.

“Get the fuck out of my face, and you best stay out of it, come on Scout,” Scout quickly pressed himself up against Sniper for comfort.

“You ain’t nobody’s fucking father mate, stop lyin’ to yourself,” and with that Sniper and Scout left Spy, alone and sweaty, in the sand under the ever blazing New Mexican sun.
So some of you may be wondering, why is Spy such an unapologetic asshole? Part of the inspiration for this fic was the overabundance of fics in which Spy is supposed to be sympathetic. It's not that he can't be a sympathetic character but I thought it would be fun to try my hand at a completely UNSympathetic spy.
“He don’t care about me,” Scout whimpered, shifting uncomfortably in his seat, watching as Sniper boiled tea over his small stove.

“Shhh...there there now, you know that ain’t true. Here, drink this, it’ll put some color in yer cheeks,” Sniper bit down on his cheeks, Scout’s cheeks, and the rest of his face for that matter, were already beet red.

“It IS true though, my own dad….he don’t care about me,”

“We all care about you Scout, I care about you,” Sniper wrapped his arm around Scout’s shoulders for emphasis, Scout leaned against him with his head rested against the crook of his neck. Scout wiped at his eye with his taped palm.

“Yea...I know Snipes...but it’s different ya know? He’s my friggin dad and shit,” Sniper frowned, thinking back to his own reunion with his biological father. At least he had had a perfectly good and caring father as a boy. Scout was just stuck with Spy.

Spy’s shoulder’s shifted uncomfortably as he listened from what he supposed was the bushman’s ‘kitchen’. The deep bitter aroma from the tea kettle choked his nose as it seeped into every crevice of the incredibly cramped living space.

“Look...I know he doesn’t show it much...or very well...but deep down we both know that Spy uh…” Sniper found lying incredibly difficult, always had. And the truth of the matter, at least how he saw it, was that Spy was a no good two faced heartless son of a bitch who would never have even acknowledged having a bastard son if they weren’t forced to work side by side.

“He...he hates me…” Scout whimpered out in sudden realization. “He’s embarrassed of me, he don’t even give half a shit, he thinks I’m a big joke!” Spy felt his chest tighten as he watched Sniper’s futile attempts to soothe the crying boy...his crying boy. Of course, this hadn’t been guilt. The time for guilt had long since come and past as it was drowned under a lifetime of alcohol, cigarettes and bial—as were most of the man’s regrets.

No, this wasn’t guilt the Spy was plagued with.

It was shame .

_Burning_ shame.

Even if the Spy hadn’t exactly been looking forwards to it, he had always assumed that one day he would eventually tackle and excell at fatherhood, as he did with most tasks that he had tackled in the past. But watching how Scout cried and clammered to the bushman for comfort and protection, comfort and protection from that which the Spy had done himself.

Well,
Nobody is perfect. Spy could easily accept his failings as a parent, but,

Really!?

Really!?

Spy refused to believe that the bushman was capable of beating the man at anything, except perhaps in a contest for most consecutive days in a row without bathing. Even now the Spy’s nose stung enough to make his eyes water. Or at least, that was what he was going to keep telling himself.

Spy’s finger traced a picture frame hanging on the wall, Spy couldn’t bare to look. But he couldn’t pull his eyes away. Scout’s drawings, dozens of them, covered the camper. All nicely framed and displayed, all artfully done landscapes and still lives done in pencil and ink. Spy had never seen these drawings before. He would’ve remembered something good being made by the Scout for once among his sea of cartoons. Speaking of which, one of Sniper was hanging proudly above the Sniper’s cheap TV.

“No….no that’s not true Roo,” Sniper dully shook his head, pulling Scout in closer protectively. Unsure himself how to remedy the situation himself, just quietly rubbing Scout’s back.

Deeply uncomfortable Spy began to slowly back away towards the door, hoping to make a quick escape unnoticed whilst Sniper and Scout were preoccupied.

CRASH

Apparently the world had other plans. Spy had managed to bump into the wall and knock a hanging picture off the wall, glass shattering on the floor.

Sniper’s head snapped in the direction of the noise, Scout peeking out from behind his arms.

“Bloody hell…” He muttered under his breath, “’scuse me a moment..” Sniper slowly raised from the bed and walked over to inspect the fallen frame, Spy quickly holled himself against the corner.

“Ain’t that a damn shame..” Sniper picked up the broken photo frame. It had been a particularly nice one, from when Sniper had taken Scout out fishing. He could hardly believe it when Scout had told him he’d never been. Of course, Teufort wasn’t fit for anysort of fishing. Place was dry as a bone and what water there was, well…Ms.Pauling did supply the mercenaries with plenty of bottled water for a reason. So, during one of RED’s man stalemates, Sniper had talked Scout into following him out to a camping ground the Sniper liked to drive out to from time to time. Even still, Scout wasn’t much of an outdoorsman, though a little more exposure to mother nature would change that in a jiffy. The one fish he had managed to catch was pitifully small and sickly yellow but the duo had been proud all the same. Sniper had helped show Scout how to hold his catch without having it squirm out of his hands, the right way to hook his thumb within its mouth. In the photograph itself Scout stood proudly with his chest puffed out nearly as far as he could push it, a big goofy grin stretched across his face.

Sniper smiled fondly remembering the day, it had been slightly too hot, and Scout had nearly tipped their boat several times, but it had been nice all the same. Scout had surprisingly complained very little, perhaps a sign of some maturity, or that his years working with the company had increased his patience. Sniper had been the first to get a bite, and Scout nearly jumped out of the boat, admitting that he had never actually...seen anyone catch a fish before. The pressure held heavy on Sniper. This kid had never seen a man reel in a fish before and goddamn Sniper was gonna reel in the biggest fish that kid ever did see.
Unfortunately, Sniper had never fared well under pressure, and the slippery bastard got off scott free back into the lake. Sniper hadn’t had long to be angry or ashamed, however,

“Aye Sniper! I think I got a bite!” Sniper was quick to help steady Scout, digging his heels into the bottom of the boat and holding the boy by his waist. Scout hadn’t exactly developed his sea legs after all, and Sniper was determined to help this kid nab a prize. Scout’s pole bent and jerked, Sniper helped guide Scout’s hands.

“Let it give a little kid, don’t wanna snap the rod, than really reel ‘er in! Come one--alright you got it now! Come on! Really give it to her now!” Scout pulled backwards and a small yellow fish dramatically breached high into the air. Sniper nealy squeezed Scout into two he was so excited.

Despite his best attempts to ‘play it cool’ Scout couldn’t stop grinning ear to ear and boy, was that kid’s enthusiasm contagious as hell.

“Well won’t you look at that!? Caught yourself a real beaut is what ya got their kiddo!”

Scout laughed awkwardly, trying to hide his excitement “aha yeah well ya know, it ain’t no biggie,” he shrugged. Sniper rolled his eyes playfully before pulling the kid into an affectionate noogie. Scout squirmed in performative frustration, annoyed with how the large height difference between the two gave Sniper so much control over him. Sniper was always sweet and gentle though, teasingly messing with his hair or planting soft kisses across his cheek and jawline. It always make the scout flustered but after growing up with an overworked mother and 7 older brothers, he was more than appreciative of all the attention. Sniper, on the other hand had been an only child found by a couple who had given up on children after a series of stillborns and miscarriages. ‘Miracle child’ Sniper’s mum had called him. Of course he had been rightfully spoiled, and taught it was how you ought to treat those in your life who meant something to you. So yeah, the two were rightfully made for eachother Sniper had decided, and if Spy had no interest in paying any notice to the kid, then Sniper was happy to pick up the slack.

Hmm...come to think of it, it had almost been a year since that fishing trip huh?

“Hey Scout? Think it’s about time we go on another fishing trip eh?” Sniper asked, turning around to look back at scout who was perched up on his bed, Spy decided now would be the opportune moment to sneak out, whilst the bushman and scout were distracted.

“HEY!” Unfortunately the Sniper had fallen for Spy’s tricks one too many times to not be on guard at all times.

Shit

The spy knew he was toast, he tripped in surprise and decloaked, catching his balance and staring silently back at the sniper, expecting to quickly be diced open with his kukri, or pissed on, or both. His breathing hitched and he could hear the blood pounding in his ears as he tried in vain to read the face of the stoic sniper, eyes and thoughts hidden behind thick aviators.

“So,” Spy hadn’t realized he had been holding his breath until he gasped in relief when the Sniper finally spoke.

“Since ya been oh so kind as to join us this afternoon, why don’t you join us out on the lake?”

Sniper swore in that instant he could’ve supplied his own jarate.
Of course, in hindsight Spy knew he had been let off pretty much scottfree, of course his presence had shaken up the Scout a good amount, but Spy had figured that the two of them were already at rock bottom as far as parental relationships went, and that at this point there was nowhere to go but up. The Spy could live with that. The Spy had been living with that, quite comfortably in fact, until the damned Sniper had to step in and ruin everything.

Despite this, one though remained burnt into the Spy’s mind, the other photo. The photo that had hung above the one of Scout until Spy had clumsily knocked it down and shattered the frame. Of the scrawny little boy in shorts and a t shirt, proudly holding a cat fish at least three times his height. The animal flopped over lazily in his arms and a big toothy grin painted across the kid’s face. Next to the boy had been the boy’s father, a gentle yet toughened balding man with his hand proudly poised on the boy’s shoulder, sporting an equally excited grin. Had Spy not known better he would’ve laughed, the kid was already awkward enough but that damn fish looked like it would swallow him alive in a heartbeat. Must’ve been a hell of a scene for those little arms to haul such a beast from the river.

Of course, Spy did know better, and that nameless little boy was no nameless little boy but instead RED’s very own sniper. Of course, that was fairly obvious to deduce, even the Soldier would have come to that conclusion. Sniper had no children or siblings of his own, and it would be preposterous to assume a man to own photos of children with which he was non-related.

But it wasn’t the photo itself, no, the Spy could care less how the filthy bushman decorated his hideous van. No. What bugged Spy, what ate him up inside was the bloody fucking symbolism of it all. That smug ass prideful grin smeared across Sniper’s face in the first photo and his presumed fathers in the second.

The Sniper was trying to replace him.
Chapter 5

Sniper leaned back against the wall and let out a deep sigh. Spy had left without a word and once he had finally calmed the Scout down, Sniper walked him back to his room to rest. As much as he liked the kid this shit with the Spy was starting to wear on him. He just didn’t get it, if the Spy didn’t care why wouldn’t he leave them the fuck around? And if the Spy did care, well, he sure had a funny way of showing it. Of course, he probably didn’t but goddamn did Sniper need the spook to. It broke his heart to lie, he wasn’t ever too good at it. Even telling the kid half-truths didn’t sit right. Sky’s blue, water’s wet, and Spy didn’t care about anyone but himself, it was common knowledge. Ah well, he was in the base, might as well grab a beer from the kitchen and try and forget about the Spy for the time being.

The kitchen was oddly, quiet. Usually soldier or demoman or...someone would be hanging around. Usually Sniper would’ve welcomed the quiet as a chance to de-steam but he felt oddly anxious, and found himself carrying the 6-pack down the hall.

“Howdy Sniper,”

“Afternoon Engineer, thought you could use a cold drink while you were woking out here,”

“Much appreciated,” The Engineer turned away from his work and took the beer Sniper offered, wiping the sweat from his forehead. “How’s the kid doing?”

“Scout? He’s well...got pretty riled up over things, but uh managed to calm ‘im down a decent amount. You know how he is,”

Engineer nodded slowly as he took a sip from the can, listening intently, “Yeah, can’t always blame him with how Spy is, boy...what I wouldn’t do to give that rat bastard a piece of my mind…”

The sniper sighed and ran a hand under his hat, scratching his head, “Yeah...Spy Spy’s well...Spy’s....”

“Is’ alright, he been gettin’ under your skin huh slim?”

Sniper exhaled, he had done his best to give Spy the benefit of the doubt, the second chances of second chances, but it was honestly starting to become a lot.

“Invited him out camping with Scout and I,”

“Hmm….think that’ll do anything?”

Sniper shrugged and walked around the room, “Figure it can’t make anything worse, I mean...gotta try right?”

The Engineer shone the Sniper a relaxed smile before taking another drink from his can "Take it you and your ol'man were pretty close eh?"

"Ha...yeah kinda, I mean---I was an only child y'know? And after what happened..."

"Hm?"

Sniper mulled over if it would appropriate to delve further into it. "Docs said my folks couldn't have kids. I mean, I should've figured I was adopted when they told me that, wasn't like that part was a
secret. Mum called me her 'miracle baby'."

"Aww that's real sweet Slim, you s'pose you take after her?"

Sniper laughed awkwardly "You callin' me a shelia?"

"Don't know any other men who can knit like you can,"

"Hey come on now, I grew up on a sheep farm for god sake!" behind his defensive tone Sniper cracked a small smile in humility.

"Yeah? Most folks back home raised cattle personally, had an uncle who did,"

"But not you, right?" Sniper asked with a smirk, pacing around aimlessly, felt good to keep his legs stretched.

"Nah, been engineers for as long as we care to recall," Engineer had a warm soft laugh, one that couldn't help but make Sniper smile even a little. "So," said Engineer, cracking open another beer, "You really think taking Spy and Scout out together into the woods is a good idea?"

"Well I figure things can't exactly get worse between 'em, might ease the pressure off Spy a little,"

"I dunno about that one slim, you ever even see Spy without his gloves on? Figure that fella don't like dirt and nature and all that too much,"

Sniper grinned and placed his hand on his hip "Yeeeah, Scout hadn't ever been camping when I first took 'im,"

"--and I take it he doesn’t take after his daddy does he?"

"--took to it like a fish to water,"

Engineer smiled warmly and turned to put the scraps he was working on away.

"Yeah, ‘member when my daddy took me out first time, must’ve been 6 or 7 years old built me my first proto-sentry out there,"

"Aw man, shoulda said something earlier, woulda asked you to come along instead, camper gets kind of cramped y’know?"

The engineer laughed gently before placing a hand on Sniper’s shoulder “Haha yeah, I can imagine,” the engineer said before pursing his lips “y’know really appreciate you takin’ your time with the boy slim,"

Sniper laughed a little awkwardly and rubbed his neck “It’s not any trouble really, don’t mind a bit” The Engineer chuckled and stepped back, giving sniper his space.

“Glad to hear it partner, think it’s real good fo the kid y’know? Boy needs a dad after the bang-up job Spy did…”

Flustered, Sniper chuckled awkwardly and rolled his shoulders “Aw come on, it ain’t like that now. He’s just my little buddy is all…” Engie gave a smile at this, as Sniper cracked open his own beer, suddenly very warm and claustrophobic. Maybe it was just stuffy in the garage, always closed up and with machines running letting off god knows what in their fumes. Easy to get...dizzy.

“Aw your too sweet Slim, kid’s lucky to got a guy like you watching after him, I mean course we all
care deeply ‘bout Scout, but y’know him. Kid uh...kid can be quite the handful,”

“Must take after his father in that regard,” Sniper sneered

“Yeah? Been meaning to ask you about that myself Slim,”

Sniper took a swig of beer before slamming it back down on the countertop, finally letting his grievances with the Spy boil over. “Fucking asshole…” he murmured. “You don’t walk out on family—you...you just don’t! That mask wearing piece of shit think’s he gets to call himself a gentleman and what not, just cause he’s too good—or thinks he’s too good anyways for the same wares as the rest of us blokes and wears lady’s perfume. Lousy piece of shit...and you know what?” The sniper was pacing rapidly now around the garage, around the engineer, flinging his hands madly into the air without remorse. “If it was just that—If he has just walked away like that when Scout was a tot—maybe I could overlook it, understand, maybe even forgive that rat bastard. I get it, we all do stupid shit and fuck up when we’re young, but that spook--no that spook can’t leave it be--” The Engineer leaned against his workbench, finding the Sniper’s ramblings mighty amusing as he nursed his beer.

“No, no that would be too bloody nice for ‘im wouldn’t it? Nah, instead he’s gotta act like the kid don’t exist, or treat him like shit the other 50% of the time. And even then, that ain’t good enough for that fucking snake—No! Must think the kid and I are dumb or something. I don’t get it, if he care’s he’s sure got a funny damn way of expressing it, and if he don’t,which is what I expect, then why can’t he just leave me and scout the fuck alone? Ain’t like we doin’ anything…” Sniper’s voice trailed off as he swirled the can of beer in his hand, mildly embarrassed by his behavior.

“Well, shoot, you know I’m always here, in case you ever need someone to help out keepin’ the spy in line,“

“Yeah? Well I do appreciate the offer Engie,“

“Hey, It’s alright I get it, I can get a little protective over Pyro myself,” Sniper offered a smirk in response.

“Yeah?”

“Well you know how important family is too me, poor fella, ain’t got anybody. Doesn’t like to talk about his life before the war too much with the others, can’t blame ‘em really,”

“Oh..”

“But shoot, you let me know how the spoo gets along on this here camping trip of yours, it’ll be a cold day in hell before that son of a bitch takes that there stick out of his ass and lightens up,”

“Suppose so,” Sniper responded with a soft smile, a little looser and more mellow than he had been earlier, partially due to the beer and partially due to the Engineer letting him voice his complaints with the RED spy.

“And don’t be afraid to bring that van of yours in! That poor gal’s gotta be pushing 20 now and she ain’t getting any younger,”

Sniper mumbled something about money under his breath that the Engineer couldn’t make out, “Had ‘er since I came to the states,”

“Ever think about trading her in? Make enough now you could clear the whole lot of any damn dealership this side of the Mississippi I figure. Heck,could probably clean out any dealer on the other
side just as easily."

“Nah, you know me, too old to learn any of them fancy gadgets you blokes love dabbling with. I’m a simple guy, yep, just the simplicities for me thank you very much,”

“Haha, just my type of guy,” The Engineer laughed, and in an impulsive move, pulled down the Sniper’s hat before turning back to his work. Perhaps out of shock or confusion Sniper responded with a quick flash of a playful smile before adjusting his hat and stepping back out into the base.

A wave of confusion over what just happened crashed down onto Sniper as he slowly slid down the side of the door, holding his face in bewilderment. What just happened? What had happened? Just a second ago Sniper had been so eased and relaxed, ad now his head was spinning and his ears were buzzing.

Ugh!

He just let himself curl up into a ball on the floor, mind spinning too fast to make sense of anything other than the rising lump in his throat. He hadn’t even had that much to drink.

“Ah! Guten Tag Herr Sniper!” The overly cheery dementor of the deranged doctor quicly sprung Sniper to his feet.

“Ah! Aye...Doc....”

“Are you alright? Spy seemed off as well?”

Spy rolled his eyes, “Yeah, damn spook can’t seem to decide if he wants to have a heart or not,”

“That’s just it!” Medic’s eyes were bright and wide, or at least more so than normal “I think...he does,”
Spy had been completely thrown when Sniper had invited him along, not like he had much choice, it was only the polite thing to do after how he had been acting, even Spy could understand that in his current...emotional state. More upsetting still was the implication that scout had truly replaced spy with the sniper, which to him was completely unacceptable. And yet, despite how much he desired to, Spy had no idea how to father the scout. Maybe it was because he hadn’t bonded when Scout was a baby, but neither had Sniper….Was something wrong with him? None of the other men or women in his family had ever had trouble rearing children. As much as he hated it he only had one option left:

He had to go see medic.

He knew medic had tons of books on the subject, he had bred baboons and kept a healthy flock of doves, at the very least he should have been able to provide a general overview.

Reluctantly Spy strode back to the base and up to the infirmary, a wing the mercs dared not venture to.

“Ah! Guten Tag herr Spy! I see you are--Oh, well it looks like you’ve come to the right place,"

“E-excuse me?”

“My my, have you seen yourself lately? You look like you’ve seen a ghost mein freund!”

“Oh?” Spy followed Medic inside and stopped to take a look at himself in the full hanging mirror. The medic was right, he was pale as could be. “No, no I’m fine,”

“Well I suppose most mercenaries usually don’t care for such things as routine physicals, but I do suppose you are entitled to one as per contract--”

“What? No,” Spy was nipping this thought trail in the butt, “I’m...I’m here about Scout,”

“Scout? Oh? Did he break his legs again?”

“What? No it’s about Sniper--”

“Oh!” Medic laughed, walking deeper into his office “Oho, don’t worry I’ve talked with herr Sniper, he is not...engaging with Scout, a shame really if you ask me, it would’ve been nice for Heavy and I-”
“WOULD YOU SHUT UP AND LISTEN!?” Medic jumped back, surprised by the usually reserved Spy’s outburst

“I want...I want to try...and be a father.”

“Oh...oh I see…” Medic leaned his weight against his desk, generally touched. “Well...what seems to be the issue?” Medic asked, briefly taking off his glasses to wipe them, doing his best to appear relaxed and approachable.

Spy took a deep breath and ran a hand down his head, briefly forgetting he had a balaclava on. “I...I just can’t seem to connect. I--I just don’t understand, I’ve tried everything I feigned interest in his stupid doodles and even then--”

“Ah ah--you’ll never make a meaningful connection with that attitude herr Spy!” Medic interrupted, with a teasing finger wiggle in Spy’s face.

“I DON’T--I...I am not one for emotional vulnerability but the sniper--”

“Herr Spy you can’t just expect the two of you to be close without a little emotional vulnerability, a meaningful relationship between any two men requires a give and take, you have to show Herr Scout you care--”

“--I’ve tried! I...I know I wasn’t a good father...but that doesn’t mean I never cared...I--”

Enthralled, Medic leaned against his desk and began to quickly jot down notes, he usually wasn’t this privy to emotional honesty with any of the mercs when not sedated, outside of Heavy and the occasional drunken ramblings from Demoman.

“I’ve done all I can to provide for him and his mother--” Spy was pacing now “--done what I could to keep him out of trouble, push him down the straight and narrow, tried to give the boy proper artistic instructions but--”

“Ah I see,”

“What!? What is it!?"

“Tell me Herr Spy, what was the last thing you saw the Scout doing with Sniper?” Crying. About Spy. The image was burnt into his brain and all he could picture when he could close his eyes, the scout childish and sniveling curled up against the Sniper for comfort. And Sniper…

“Well...the bushman’s been doing a lot of running up and down the base showing off the boy’s drawing pad hasn’t he?” The Medic nodded enthusiastically, grinning ear to ear, madly scratching against his pencil against
his notepad. “Yes! Exactly! Do you know why that is?”

“Because he is a simpleton?” Spy teased, eyebrow raised cockily.

“Because he loves the Scout, Spy.” Medic’s voice dropped an octave, tone lacking any hint of the usual playful doctor.

“Pah! I suppose next you’ll tell me it’s a lost cause,” Spy cringed at his own assessment of the situation, it was certainly begging to seem like a lost cause from his vantage point, this upcoming camping trip was likely to be the final nail in the coffin, as it were.

“No, not at all! In fact I think this will be a lovely study—oh most people of your condition aren’t usually this willing...or curious,”

“People of my condition?” Spy scoffed.

“Why yes but of course herr Spy, the cold cruel and heartless,”

“Ah but of course,” The spy replied sarcastically, digging his nails into the Medic’s desk

“Don’t be so snarky now, you are a perfect specimen, I doubt the administrator herself would have provided a better test subject for such a matter, now come along, there is much work to be done yet!”

The medic’s eyes lightened in a delightfully maleficent enthusiasm. Oh how he loved to study and experiment, it was why he had taken such an interest in medicine in the first place. So many avenues to be explored!

Spy struggled to keep up with Medic as he excitedly dashed up the stairs and into a large room filled with computers and other large medical machinery that Spy could not even hope to name, all covered with trim white doves.

“Hallo meine Lieblinge! Ja, ja Papa hat dich vermisst!” Many of the doves affectionately cooed and a few fluttered up nearer to the doctor. “Ah Archimedes! Mein kleiner schatz! You’re looking healthy, now where is deine kleine Frau?” Spy rolled his eyes at the Medic’s overly-sweet baby talking. The whole room reeked because of said flying rats, now a good chaton? Spy smirked to himself, yes, the room and medic would be much better off with one. Archimedes briefly cocked his head before turning out of the Medic’s hand before flying up behind one of the many computers.

“Ja! Josephine, ooh, you are a very lucky birdie mein freud.” Medic reached into the hidey-hole and gently pet the lady dove, “shh don’t fret meine liebe frau” Medic lightly nudged the birdie off of her roust and gently removed a small egg from her nest, her and Archimedes crooking their necks in a mix of curiosity and anxiety, not that they didn’t trust their dear papa, but still...

“Ah, you must forgive me or being cliche Herr Spy, but even I cannot beat the classics!” Spy just stared in confusion as Medic delicately placed a small white egg. “Take zhis egg as a metaphor for Herr Scout now—you can feed and dress a baby but to properly bond you must allow the life and well being of zhis baby into your—”

“I dropped it”

“You...you what?”
“I...I dropped the egg.”

Medic looked down at the small splotch of white, yellow, and red in front of Spy’s shoes. Archimedes fell off Medic’s shoulder, unconscious. “Ah well,” Medic pivoted on his heel, clasping his hands together as he thought over how to proceed, ja...it is no matter, the next phase of experiments iz much more fun ja,”

“Please, take a seat Spy,” Medic gestured towards a examination chair as he waltzed over to one of several large computers. Seeing no other obvious options, Spy reluctantly obeyed, regret starting to settle in the pits of his stomach.

“Now, we are going to address the root of the problem--” Medic frantically pushed buttons and pulled switches as the room began to fill with a low rumble of a hum, before walking back over to Spy and pulling down a large helmet overtop his head. Now Spy was definitely beginning to regret asking Medic for help

“Now luckily for the both of us I trust you to be a model patient, and so the usual straps won’t need to be necessary, not that you won’t have the chance to prove my assumptions wrong,” he joked with a devilish spark in his eyes. With the helmet pulled over his head Spy could no long move his head freely and instead focused on the moderate dizziness the whirring noises were beginning to produce. Suddenly the mild whirring was replaced with a much louder churggling sound, in the corner of his vision Spy could spot a long piece of paper being produced from a slot in a machine.

“Ah! Wunderbar!” Medic exclaimed as he clapped his gloved hands together before pulling out.

“Now let’s take a look at those test results shall we?” Medic grinned ear from ear as he ran the long stream of paper over his hands. “Hm..I am sorry but...well it would appear mein freud that I have good news, bad news and more good news,“

Spy swallowed down the building lump in his throat “what is the good news?”

“All of your bells and whistles are in perfect tune, fit as a fiddle as it were,”

The news was starling but, reliving, he was fine. Not that he had...expected any different.

“Then what is the bad news?” Spy smirked coyly.

“Your brain chemistry is in ideal condition yes,” Medic restated, beginning to pace round in circles as to get his words straight “But that also means we must be dealing with sickness of another kind...psychologisch, sickness of the mind as it were. Dark things..ohoho I cannot wait to crack your brain open like an egg and get a look at what dark hidden secrets are--” at this point the Medic was now menacingly standing over the Spy, who, as it would appear, would need those restraints if Medic were to continue as he was.

“--hm well!” Medic clapped his hands together in a sudden shift in tone before pivoting on his heel and marching back over to the computer “The good news is that psychological examinations are almost always more fun and creative than medical tests Ja? Can hardly recall the last time I was given
an opportunity to play in such dark arts!” Spy wasn’t sure if the medic thought of his...enthusiasm in such fields as comforting to his patients but it certainly wasn’t. Nor had it ever been for anyone else on base. His eyes flashed crazily and all the dimly blinking lights in the room softly reflected off his pearly white teeth.

“Spy, I am going to show you a series of images related to children and fatherhood, and I am going to ask you how they make you feel, now this will only work if you answer honestly, do you pinkie promise hmm?”

Spy rolled his eyes and sighed “Fine, I pinkie promise."

“Wunderbar!” With another clap of his hands Medic pulled a large switch on the side of the wall and a large monitor blazed a photo of a mother duck and her ducklings onto the screen.

“Now herr Spy, how does this image make you feel?”

“Apathetic.” Spy could already see that this whole testing process was a huge waste of the two mens’ time and he desperately wished to leave. Medic frowned, before skirting up next to the spy. “Oh come on now--don’t be such a Sauertopf! How do the sweet mama duck and her cute, fluffy, little ducklings make you feel?” Medic leaned up against the arm rest provided for spy, chin playfully resting in the palm of his hands as he batted his eyelashes at Spy, hoping to elicit a more...engaged emotional response.

“Aggressive…” Spy gritted his teeth in frustration, frustration with the Medic’s nonsense approaches to human relations, drawn out testings, the mellow throbbing in the back of his skull from the radiation, and the Medic’s obnoxious behavior.

“Oh! Now we are getting somewhere with this hmm Ja Spy? The medic cheekily grinned and poking Spy in the cheek. “Now let us try another image!” The medic pressed a button the dashboard and the screen flickered to a new photograph, this one of a standard nuclear family A father, mother, and two children smiling happily for the camera.

“And now…?”

“Stable.” The family had been similar to Spy’s own in his youth. Despite even the best of his efforts however, Spy could not pull a more affectionate word from his lips, though his mind warped to do so. Medic hesitated for a moment before pushing the button to change the slide again, but the look on Spy’s face assured Medic that this was the deepest of a response that either man were willing to elude. “Alright Herr Spy, last image,”

A baby.

Of course.

Of course it was a baby. A chubby smiley little baby drooling up at the camera. Of course. Of fucking course it was. Spy gripped the ends of his arm rest.

“Medic--please,”
“Come now Spy, how does the baby make you feel?” The sickly smile spread across his face was too much. Spy was angry—no enraged. Was this some kind of cruel joke? Get Spy all worked up and laugh when he admitted he couldn’t rear a child? Was that it? Was that what the medic had been building up to this whole time?
“Frustrated.” Spy finally managed, sulking back into his seat, determined not to make a scene and be marked off as another one of RED’s deranged lunatic mercs. That was the last thing he needed with how his week was going thus far.

“Ooh very interesting, very interesting indeed. And what a response! I was worried you didn’t have it in you herr Spy! Oh! But you proved me wrong yes you did!” The medic said with a wink and tap on Spy’s hooked nose. “If that was your response to an illustrated baby I cannot wait to see how you will respond the the stimuli of a living baby!” The medic was practically on standing on his toes he was so excited.

“Wait what—”

“Here!” And before he had time to question what was happening the Spy suddenly had a bad, a real living infant, thrust into his arms and the helmet ripped from his head.

“Medic!”

“Oh just a second now mein freud,” The medic ran his finger up a needle before inserting it into the Spy’s wrist, “And soon we will have all sorts of wondrous data about your blood pressure!”

“Medic I--who’s child is this!?!” The baby squirmed platfully in Spy’s lap, undeterred by his raised voice.

“Oh don’t worry about it, you’ll never be a good father if you can’t learn to relax,”

“Huh!? But...but where!? Where did you get a BABY!?”

“Psh, please Spy, who’s running tests on who here? Just worry about focusing on all of your daddy hormones and I will worry about who gets who’s babies and from where.”

Medic finished with a smug grin before returning to the streams of paper rutting out the machine. “OH wow, you really weren’t kidding Herr Spy! Children DO make you stressed! Your blood pressure is off the CHARTS! If I didn’t know better I’d suspect you of having TWO hearts! Hm, I’d stay off those cigarettes if I were you, or at least avoid small children ja!”

“I’M STRESSED BECAUSE I DON’T WANT A REPEAT OF LAST SMISSMAS YOU OVERZELOUS TWIT!”

SHIT.
The momentary awkward silence between the twomercs was cut short by the wails of the infant echoing off the walls. Spy found himself at a complete loss, he tried to hold the baby close and shush it, rock it back to sleep, to no avail. Turning instead to Medic in hopeless confusion and agony.

“OK! Zhat is enough of zhat!” Medic proclaimed as he snatched the infant out of Spy’s hands. “Shhh Shhh...There there little one, za bad man can’t hurt you any longer,” Medic’s soothing was quickly met with soft giggles and babbles from the baby.

Great. Spy thought, even their wackjob of a nurse was a better father than he could ever hope to be at this rate.

“Hmm, my apologies herr Spy, I may have veered too young on that last one--”
“Medic please...If Ms. Pauling or the Administrator were to find out that--”

“--So now lets take a looksie at how you respond to older children!” Medic let out a soft enthusiastic ‘squee’ as he gestured towards three assorted children of various ages standing near the wall.

Spy nearly choked on his own spit

“MEDIC!? WHERE ARE YOU GETTING THESE CHILDREN FROM!?!”

“Sigh You now i really pegged you for smarter than this herr Spy, they’re from Teufort, obviously,”

“And you are qualified to be looking after them!??”

Medic rolled his eyes “Certainly more qualified than anyone in that backwater town, ugh, you know how people there are herr spy.” Really, the children were far better off as test subjects in Medic’s laboratory than as students in that insult to academia that Teufort dared to call a school. Maybe one day they could work themselves up to be assistants. As for now medic was studying the effects of parental detachment and lead poisoning on young minds.

Spy’s breathing hitched and he collapsed against his seat in exhaustion, he was completely overwhelmed, the Medic was far too much for him to stand. He was mentally kicking himself for ever even thinking about coming down here. The sniper was probably wrapping scout around his little finger as they spoke.

“Oh my!” Medic exclaimed as he read back the latest test results “Meine Liebste! Herr Spy i do believe you experienced a heart attack just now!”

Spy just responded with a half-hearted gurgle.

“But, no matter!”Medic sighed “CHILDREN! RÜCKKEHR ZU IHREN KAMMERN! PAPA
Spy woke up on Medic’s examination table, a place he had spent far more time than he had ever cared to. He prayed that the incident with the children earlier had been a fever dream of sorts produced by the lack of blood being transported to his brain. He wasn’t going to think about it hard enough to convince himself otherwise.

“Ah! You are awake ja? Good timing! I have just finished constructing a hypothesis as to the lack of success in your relationship with herr Scout. Now judging by your reaction to the last test I believe that you are uncomfortable with children Ja?”

Spy opened his mouth to correct Medic, but decided against it.

“I think your problems can be rooted back to your absence in herr Scout’s early life—” Spy rolled his eyes, but of course. “—So, to counter this issue we must recreate the initial bonding process. Now of course we cannot reverse time, not even I can do that, and of course we do not have the time to wait for you to impregnate another woman, but luckily the differences between mother and father are superficial at best—”

“—What!” None of this was making any sense.

“Ah! I see, you’re more of a visual learner ja of course,” The Medic reached overhead and pulled a sort of mechanical arm down closer over the Spy. An X-ray machine, of course. Immediately the large computer monitor in front of the two man lit up with a black and green pulsating image. Spy trembled as the facts began to fall into place in front of his very eyes.

“Ja! Congratulations Herr Spy! You are going to be the mother of a healthy baby baboon!”

“You put WHAT in me!?” Spy demanded, patience completely damned.

“Ah well you see,” Medic stuttered awkwardly “The most crucial stage in mother-child bonding is the period immediately after initial birth.”

“So you gave me a sex change operation and stuck a baboon uterus in me!?”

“Ah! But you are only half correct Herr Spy! I did not give you a sex change operation. Don’t be ridiculous, I was lucky you were out long enough to even get your heart started again after I inserted the baboon uterus!”

“How do you expect me to be a mother than!?”
“Herr Spy! I expected better from you!” The medic gasped “Such notions of ‘biological gender’ and inheritable social roles and functions based on genitalia structuring! Honestly I am appalled! Honestly! What would Miss P—”

“Medic.” Spy sneered, a grin of anger and frustration sprawled across his face. “How am I to give birth without a vaginal canal?”

Spy caught Medic off guard and he merely paused in the midst of his ramblings. “I--Oh...I see”

And so, after another round of highly invasive surgical proceedings, Spy found him presented with a tiny wide eyed baboon baby.

“He’s got his mother’s eyes that’s for sure,”

“Medic….on my life….I will kill you,” The medic just laughed at Spy’s retort before placing the small fuzzy baby in Spy’s arms. Spy rolled his eyes, really, this was silly. Like a tiny dirty animal that had been ungracefully ripped from his abdomen would--

*Oh*

*What a sweet little yawn*

Ok...he could admit it The damn thing was rather cute. And it felt good to have a soft, warm weight in his arms. Especially after the hell Medic had just placed him in and pulled him through. Spy rested his head against the pillow Medic had provided, god, he was so overwhelmed with a wave of emotions he could cry. He was crying. And yet he could only smile down at the tiny fuzzy face wedged against his chest. What a sweet little baby it was....his sweet little--

*No.***

*No, no...he couldn’t*

He turned to look up at Medic, rapidly breathing and completely at a loss for what to do. Medic frowned sympathetically and pulled back the baby baboon, ignoring the tiny squeals in protest to remain with his mother that pierced through Spy’s soul.

“It is...for the best perhaps. You could never properly care for such an exotic creature anyways.”

Spy just looked up at Medic with an exhausted, defeated pout.

“Ah yes, that would be the post-partum depression mein Freund, it will pass in time. But you must understand that I cannot allow the baby to become too attached. Baby primates will cling to a warm rag rather than a cold feeding hand after all.”
“...Sniper’s the warm rag”

Medic offered a sad smile, “I am afraid so, ja, but it can be fixed! We can warm you yet!” Spy smiled back.

“Now, you must forgive me again for we are turning back to the cliches!” Medic announced as he pivoted around the small round table he had seated Spy at.

“Pretend this...is Herr Scout,” Spy was met with a sack of flour being plopped down in front of him.

“What?”

“It’s like the egg test, except this bag of flour is completely lifeless. Here--” Medic shoved the sack into Spy’s lap. “Give your son a hug!” Spy glared up at Medic, already exhausted from their full day of ‘tests’.

“Go on now,” Medic crossed his arms impatiently, not letting Spy weasel his way out of this test, it was so easy after all. Spy sighed in defeat and squeezed the sack.

“Don’t just squeeze it! It’s not just a flour sack Herr Spy, pretend it’s Scout, your child, a tiny helpless life that has only you to rely on.”

Spy pulled his lips back taut and once more looked down at the sack, slowly bringing it up to cradle it against him.

*Remember it isn’t a sack it’s your child, this is scout, this is your baby,* he repeated to himself in his mind.

*Oh god*

**OH GOD**

Spy was crying again, it was his baby, his baby, sweet baby boy and he loved him SO MUCH oh god oh god. He clutched that sack of flour against his chest like his life depended on it as he sobbed openly and without abandon.

“Wundurba!” Medic placed his hands on his hips in triumph, they made a breakthrough after all.

The rest of the evening went on without a hitch, Spy studied parenting books and Medic helped administer a dozen more exercises in emotional expression and affection. Finally, at long last as they
worked into the late hours, Spy was ready.

“Go,” Medic said “Go to him,”

and he was off.

Spy didn’t have a moment to waste, he had wasted far too many already. 27 years worth of moments in fact. And god damn it, god damn it, he was gonna make up for every last one.

“SCOUT!” Spy practically cried as he barged into the runner’s bedroom, Scout shot straight up in bed in shock.

“Ok ok I’m awake just---wait---Spy!?”

“That’s right mon fils, and it is time for us to make amends. Get ready, there isn’t a moment to waste. I simply cannot wait to do you in the sack.” Spy had been so overcome with emotion that he hadn’t even realized what he had said, that he hadn’t said ‘do you like I did with the sack’ even with his impeccable language skills English was just his third language after all.

Unfortunately for him the Scout had realized what Spy had said, and from that night forwards only ever slept with Sniper in his camper.
Sniper had still been feeling a little weird about Engie when the Spy incident...incidented. Which Sniper felt almost more weird about. He was more upset about it. Definitely. Honestly this whole week had kind of been a lot and Sniper had half a mind to just leave Spy out in the woods when they went out. At least he would only have to put up with his issues with Spy, then when they got back he and Engie could...talk.

All he had to do was quickly pack up the camper behind the base.

“Howdy Sniper!”

Shit

“Uh…afternoon’” Sniper subconsciously rubbed his thumb over the spot on the brim of his hat where Engie had pulled it down playfully last they met. His cheeks were already starting to burn and his stomach flip flopping like the day before.

“heard about what happened the other night, you still uh sure about this?”

“I don’t know anything about anything anymore Engie, ‘specially not Spy,” Engie let out a light chuckle that couldn’t help but make Sniper in response.

“Scout still seem up to it?”

“Eh…he’s still a little shaken up over Spy, but uh, think he’ll be alright once we get goin’,”

“Yeah? Can’t blame the boy, sure ‘as been through a number,”

“Honestly I’m kind of just hoping this trip get’s this...whatever out of Spy’s system,”

“Ya think it will?”

Sniper just shrugged, “Spy ain’t the...familial type...or even the friendly type really,” Engie nodded slowly in agreement. “So I figure that Spy must be going through some...Scout...thing…”

“Yeah, real slimy snake he is,” Engie was right, but Sniper still had to lean against his camper, resting his head back to think.

“Had to tell Scout he cared about ‘im, loved ‘im,”

“You don’t believe that now do you?”

Sniper let out a sigh, “I really don’t like lying mate, you know I don’t,”

“Slim--”
“I...I hate lying Engie, I hate it I hate it---but what was I s'posed to do? Damn it Engie it just tears me to pieces!” His voice was strained now and while Engie couldn’t see it behind his aviators, his eyes were dewy and wet.

Engie frowned momentarily, Sniper was a good guy. A real good guy, apparently had more patience in his finger than the rest of the team had combined judging by just the week prior. And yet...poor guy didn’t really have anyone to turn to himself. Everyone else had, as much as Engineer hated to say it, kind of just accepted Scout as he was. No time for deeper considerations. Luckily Spy tended to stay amongst himself as the apple didn’t fall far from the tree. of insufferability.

“Aw well, hey--at least you did it with good cause Slim--”

“--No...not that…” Sniper swallowed after clarifying “It’s about Spy,”

Engie frowned and offered a sympathetic hand on Sniper’s shoulder “I..I can see how he’d get your goat partner…”

Sniper inhaled sharply in attempt to control himself, walking over to sit down on the outer step of the camper “He doesn’t care Truckie, He doesn’t give a shit and he sure as fuck doesn’t care about Scout--not really”

The Engineer followed Sniper and sat asides him and began to rub small circles over Sniper’s back as he continued to listen.

“God damn it Truckie...I just don’t get it. Whaddid Scout ever do to ‘im anyways? Be born? I just flat don’t get it,” Sniper said with a low shake of his head, “‘least I was always lead to believe a man ought to care for ‘is family and loved ones, least I always tried to…”

“Hey slim?”

“Yeah?” Sniper responded, turning to look down at Engineer

“Do you love Scout?”

Sniper quickly cast his gaze astray with a nervous chuckle, “Aw geez Truckie…”

“Shoot, didn’t mean to put you on the spot there Snoopy, you just...well family seems like it’s real important to you, and I uh get you tryin’ to help Scout out in that department but uh--”

“--Shit...what’s Medic been saying now!?”

Sniper’s sudden outburst made Engie throw back his head in a fit of healthy laughter. Sniper looked at the dirt and nervous rubbing the back of his neck, worried that he been looking and smiling too much at the other man.

“Don’t worry, whatever half-baked ideas Medic has been stirring up haven’t traveled far,”

Sniper let out a sigh of relief, last thing he needed was the other mercs al thinking he was some sort of perv. However the mood feel back to it’s serious tone once Sniper made eye contact with the Engineer again.

“Yeah,” he finally responded with a deep breath “Yeah guess I do love him don’t I,”

The Engineer chuckled softly and adorned a wide grin “Well that’s great!:

“Yeah?” Sniper couldn’t help but beam back at him. Wondered if he was drawn to a certain type of
person. Scout was much the same way, radiating an upbeat energy and positivity that was just overwhelming to the point Sniper couldn’t help but share it in the moment.

“You thinkin’ about tellin him?” Engineer asked sincerely.

“Ah...guess I should...don’t wanna freak him out though, you know how the kid can be; and after what happened with him and Spy? Don’t think the kid needs any grand declarations right now,”

“You know you’re a real sweetheart Micky,”

Sniper would’ve sworn he stopped breathing.

None of the mercs ever called him by his name. He had always just been ‘The Sniper’. Not even when his parents died and the others offered their condolences had this rule been broken. He could feel his face grow very red. He could only offer a goofy grin in response to Engie’s kind words, his voice caught in his throat.

“Aw come’ on now, keep this up and you’ll be the death of both of us,” Engie stuttered awkwardly, hoping he hadn’t spoiled the moment too much, playfully tapping Sniper’s chin with his thumb. Sniper nearly lost control of his balanced and toppled over on top of him.

“S’nothing really….just trying to look out for the lil’ guy is all…” Sniper muttered, unable to pull his hand away from where Engie had touched him.

“Really, you’re a sweet guy Snoopy, too sweet for the rest of us” and absolutely too sweet to be spending a weekend cramped in with Spy, but it was too impolite to say.

“Now you’re just teasing--” Sniper playfully swatted at the shorter man, suddenly uncomfortable aware as to how close the two men were sitting.

“Hey now! I meant what I said! You’ve put up with more than double a lifetime of Spy’s nonsense all for Scout’s sake, speaking of which I haven’t seen that kid happier since you took up such interest. Even went through the trouble of distributing his art around the base--”

“...It’s good art…”

Engineer smiled “It sure was, doesn’t make you any less of a dear for what you did though.” The Engineer was now leaning up softly against the Sniper, whose ears were burning something fierce and who couldn’t bare to hold eye contact in the moment. Slowly, Sniper became more comfortable in the presence of the Engineer, it wasn’t like anyone else was watching or that he was a particularly cruel man, and slowly the Sniper shifted as to be pressed up against the other man’s side.

After a couple minutes, Sniper broke the easy silence between the two.

“So...why Snoopy?”

“What?”

“Y’know, why...why’d ya start callin’ me that?”

The Engineer turned his head as to get a better look at the sharpshooter and laughed “guess it suits you ‘s all,” Sniper smiled contently and offered a sasified hum. He had seen the Peanuts comic. It was cute if sometimes not painfully accurate to the sniper’s own experience as a middling awkward child that in all of puberty’s ungracious awkwardness had stretched him into a painfully awkward adult. Except...he didn’t feel so awkward right now, just uh sitting and talking about nothing with the
Engineer. In the past he had avoided socializing with the other mercs out of fear of his own social shortcomings. But...overtime the Scout had managed to drag him out of his shell and work his way into his heart and now...things didn’t feel so bad any more. He could’ve even reached out and held the Engineer’s hand if he really wanted to.

Not that he wanted to.

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.

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Did he?

“Feels pretty good not to be compared to Charlie Brown for once,” The Sniper oked, more as a means to distract himself than anything.

The Engineer chuckled in response “S’pose that makes me that kid with blanket huh?”

“Spy could be that little girl who bosses everyone around in the blue dress,”

They both laughed at that.

“So...everything ready to go for the trip?”

Sniper stood up reluctantly to stretch, “Yeah, just brought the van out early, waiting on the other two to get their bags ready and their butts out here, should be here soon actually,”

“Yes well, promise you don’t get yourself too wrung out over Spy hm?”

“Do my best!” Sniper mockingly copied the scout’s honor hand gesture.

“Good, cause you’re pretty good company, and I know how the Spy can wear at your patience,”

The Sniper let out an annoyed groan in agreement, they had reached that conclusion hadn’t they?

“Cause I figured you might need this to help you get through the weekend,” after the Engineer stood up it was as if time had come to a standstill. Sniper felt the cool metal from the side of his campervan as he was gently pressed up against it by the Engineer. His fingers grazed over the back of Engineer’s hand as he was kissed softly. He was almost sad when the Engineer pulled away. He was completely thrown aback, unsure what to think or say or do, but he had the doofiest grin spread ear to ear, that he continued to adorn for the entirety of the drive out to the campsite, despite the heavy tension sitting between the two other men.

After all, even if Spy made this trip a living hell,

He still had something to look forwards to when they arrived back on base.
Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

Sniper, Spy and Scout go camping and have a ...time

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Spy had been rather...embarrassed to say the least. If it could be said that Scout often preferred to keep his distance from the man before, he outright avoided him now. Just what Spy wanted as they went into their big father-son bonding camping trip right? Just. Perfect

Spy was sure to pack extra cigarettes, he knew he would need them.

Scout kept his head down as he walked into the garage, him and Spy avoiding eye contact

“You fellas ready to go?” Spy shuffled a step back as Sniper’s enthusiasm for the weekend getaway drew a soft smile from the Scout.

Even after what had happened a few nights ago, Sout couldn’t help a small smile, enraptured by Sniper’s new infectious positivity “Yeah...be nice to get off base for a little while,”

Woulda been a whole lot nicer if a certain someone was STAYIN’ on that base. But, whatever. Scout and Sniper had already talked about it and Sniper had hoped that one weekend of indulgence would knock some sense into Spy or...somethin’ akin to that. Scout really wasn’t too sure about the plan.

Still, he trusted Sniper and climbed into the front of the camper next to the driver’s seat, with Spy taking the back living space.

“Ya’ll have a good trip now!” Engineer called with a wave. Sniper nearly fell backwards over the camper, giggling out the side of his mouth as he slid into the driver’s seat.

“You’re really sure about this Sniper?”

“Oh well I know it seems kind of sudden but we’ve been mates for some time and he--"What the hell are you talking about?!"

“Oh--” That was right, nobody had seen “--I’m uh I’m sorry Scout my mind must’ve wandered somewhere else, what’s on your mind?”

“I still don’t know how I feel about Spy comin’ along and all…”

Oh right, that.

Sniper sighed, “I’ll be real frank with you kid, I’m not in love with him coming either,”

“Then why the fuck did you invite him like that!”?
“Cause, this bugger ain’t gonna get that thought of you bein’ his boy out of his head otherwise. Y’know, let ‘im think he tried before givin’ up for good and all.”

“Yeah...I guess,” Scout shrugged and leaned back in his seat, “You...you don’t think of me any different do you?”

“Why would I?”

“Cause he’s my freakin’ dad man!”

“There’s a laugh…” Sniper growled under his breath, eyes focused on the long stretch of road in front of them. The sky was deep and blue and they’d be stuck in New Mexican desert for another few hours or so before pulling up into Colorado. “Spy ain’t anymore your dad then he is mine mate,”

“Snipes what the fuck are you talking about?” Scout shot Sniper a look of both confusion and annoyance, he hated to think about how his...his DAD was in the back of the camper as they spoke, after being gone near 30 years. “You heard what he said--”

“Knew before than roo,” The whole camper shook, pothole.

“You what!? You freakin’ knew!? This whole ass time!?”

“Yeah, reckon the whole team knew,”

Scout swallowed back a sob as he sunk into his seat, eyes glued to the ceiling,

“Yeah, think I did too. I mean at least a little…”

Sniper chuckled “It’s alright, you don’t gotta lie about it roo, ain’t no shame in--”

“--Hey I’m tryin’ to be serious! I’ve been havin’ weird dreams and shit for a...for a long time now, or I was anyways…”

Sniper cleared his throat, frowning sympathetically down at Scout, “...Had? Mate?”

“I dunno man...they happened a lot when...when y’know, first joined and stuff, and again when Ms. Pauling got the whole team together again…”

“Makes sense,” Sniper concluded, “Have em since he told you?”

“Nah--see thats the real weird thing--must’ve gotten it out of my system or somethin cause I ain’t been havin’ those kinds of dreams no more,”

“Yeah? Whaddya think changed?” Sniper asked with a half-knowing smirk

Scout smiled back quietly, nothing had to be said.

Spy watched with hazed eyes as rolling hills of sand and dirt were slowly replaced by greens and dottings of trees. He just sat contemplating the weekend ahead of him, after what transpired between him and Scout, he was determined to make things right. He could be a good father god damn it, Medic had made that horrifically clear. The entire camper reeked to high heaven and the sickly yellow, orange, and baby-vomit green color palette was not helping. While spy was grateful for the privacy in the back, the knowledge that Scout was up in the front with Sniper just worsened the blow. Like the two of them needed anymore time together to rub elbows. Whatever, It was no
This was Spy’s last shot and they all knew it. Spy might not have been camping before in his life but god dammit he was the Spy of Team Fortress! He had spent his life stepping in and taking over jobs he had no background in really, he could do anything damn it!

Let’s see what tricks that bushman had up his sleeve huh?

Green pine sprawled as far as any of the men could see as Sniper pulled up through the check gate, Spy was snoozing peacefully when the camper jutted to a stop.

“Aye Spy! C’mon lazybones we already got the tent up!” Spy quickly staggered to his feet and poked his head out the camper door, they couldn’t possibly have been parked for more than 10 minutes and there it was!

“Not too shabby eh?” Snipe proudly rubbed his chest, “How was our time Scout?”

“Eh, 6 minute 40 seconds, coulda been faster specially if somebody--” Scout craned his neck in Spy’s direction “weren’t so busy with their beauty sleep!”

“It was an eight hour drive! So I took a nap, big deal!” Spy couldn’t believe this, less than 10 minutes in and the Sniper was already beating him out 1-0, well, two could play at that game. Spy smiled slyly “My apologizes gentlemen, I can assure you that I will be fully present for the remainder of this weekend’s activities. “Shall I get the campfire started?”

Genuinely impressed with Spy’s apparent attitude adjustment Sniper smiled and rest his hands against his low hips “Sure! That would be just great Spy,” Scout rolled his eyes, not fully convinced yet.

Spy strode over to the ring of rocks pre-laid by the campground, clumsily tossed a few dried sticks over top and smugly pulled out his cigarette lighter and set the whole mess ablaze.

“How was my time on THAT Scout?”

“Damn it Spy!” Sniper raced over and stomped the pitiful fire out “If you didn’t know how to build a proper campfire you shoulda said something!”

Filled with validation, Scout smirked up at Spy, “Yeah city-slicker leave the campfires to the campers,”

Spy rolled his eyes, not even bothering to put forth the effort to point out how Scout was, by all definitions, a ‘city slicker’ himself.

“Come on now then--Scout go get some dry branches, Spy--” Sniper shot the other man a sour look “Just...just get some leaves and twigs and try not to start anymore fires,” Spy soffed, as if it really mattered. Sniper set to disposing of the ashes.

Reluctantly Spy set to gathering kindling for the bushman. He couldn’t stand it, anything he did—no matter how much more efficient or practical—Scout remained convinced that his way was wrong and the bushman was right. As if there were a right way and a wrong way to set a fire! Hell! Spy was half convinced that if Sniper had been offering Scout art advice instead of him the Scout would have ate it up in an instant, no matter how inferior, uneducated, or backwards the advice from said bushman may be.

“I got the firewood Snipes!”Scout proudly presented a bundle of sticks and branches he had scavenged, Spy rolled his eyes, speaking of proper and improper, he knew that proper firewood was to be chopped and dried. Ha! And the bushman called himself a survivalist.
Great job sport! This'll burn real niely, have a real beaut of a fire goin’ here in a minute. That is assuming’ Spy got the kindling,” Sniper said with a laugh before jostling Scout’s hair

“Here!” Spy shoved his bundle into Sniper’s arms, throwing him off balance causing him to stumble backwards for a moment

“Jeez Spy what’s got your panties in a knot? France lose another war?”

“Oh wouldn’t you love to know Jeremy!” Spy spat before stomping off. The bushman was just stressing him out was all, he needed some time to himself.

“Oi Spy! Where you runnin’ off too?! We were just about to build the campfire!”

“Just---just taking a walk, what? Is it a crime for one to stretch their legs? Especially after being cramped in that piss soaked excuse of a vehicle for hours on end!?" Spy stormed off past the camper and down the forest trail. As frustrated as he was, it really was a lovely area, much better than the sprawling dusty desert he and the others had become accustomed to.

He as blowing it, this was his last chance and Spy knew he had to give it everything he had or he would potentially lose Scout, his one and only son, to the filthy unwashed hands of the Sniper.

He couldn’t give up.

He was going to have to give his all for these next few days and really impress Scout.

He had to beat the bushman at his own game.

By the time the Spy had finally circled around back to their camp Scout and Sniper had finished unpacking the camper and were each enjoying a cold beer from the cooler whilst recounting about camping trips prior.

“You should’ve seen the look on your face Roo!”

“Hey man now that bear was pissed!!”

“I’d say,”

“Ain’t my fault her butt-faced babies looked like raccoons in the dark! I’ll tell you Sniper if they was bear cubs then lemme just say that they had a fae only their mama could love,”

“You’d know a thing or two about that wouldn’t ya?”

“Ha ha! Hey shut it,”

“I hope I am not interrupting gentlemen,” Spy remarked as he strode towards the camper van.

“You enjoy your walk now?”

Spy pursed his lips, the Sniper’s patience was ironically one of his more infuriating traits.

“I must say, you chose a lovely camping spot here, I’m impressed,”

“Beautiful ain’t it?”
“Truly,” Spy offered with a polite smile, trying his best to behave for Scout’s sake.

“Ayy ladies! If the to of you’se guys are done gushing about mother nature or whatever are we gonna go fishing or not?”

“Oh right! Hey Spy, Scout and I were just about to head out to the lake, wanna help catch us some supper?”
Damn it, the bushman was catching on to him. Fishing, like sniping, was a meandering game of waiting, giving Sniper the clear upper hand. Still...Scout seemed very interested in going…

“Fine, why not,” Spy responded, as polite as ever, bearing a courtesy grin ear to ear. Even if it were a simple sport for the simple minded man with far too much free time to was doing nothing, how bad could it be?

Hell.

This was hell.

Spy’s actions in life, his apathy towards the lives and interests of others, his disregard for the sanctity of human life, especially that of those of people he had once perceived as below him; his inexcusable abandonment and neglect of a woman, expectant mother, who reared his only child in life.

It was with absolute certainty that one would argue that he had desired every last drop of what could possibly be waiting for him past the cold black curtain of death.

But this !?

THIS!??

Spy knew with absolute confidence that no mortal man had ever committed such a crime against god, nature or fellow man himself as to justify this...this unprecedented magnitude and variety of torture.

Spy leaned back on his seat in the boat and let out a guttural groan, his fifth in the past hour.

Fishing was hell. HELL

“Hey! C’mon Spy! You’re gonna scare the fish away!”

“There are no fish! We’ve been out here a full two hours and none of us have felt even the slightest bite!” Spy shot a look past Scout towards Sniper, who was contently laid back with his hat pulled down to keep the sun off his face.
“This is a waste of time, at this rate we will all starve!”

“Aw calm down spook, just give it a little time, the fish’ll start bitin’ soon as they’re hungry” Sniper pulled his hat back down with a smile as he leaned back, foot bouncing slightly.

“I have had enough of this! I am done waiting for my dinner and I will not be bested by creatures that swim in their own filth ” Spy spat as he stood up, pulling his Ambassador from his jacket. He flipped off the safety with a satisfying grin as he peeked down into the lake. The bushman had been right about one thing, there were fish.

“--Hey Spy! Knock that shit off you’re gonna tip the boat!”

Sniper placed an arm in front of Scout “Shh..I wanna see where he’s going with this…” he said with an encouraging grin towards Scout.

“Gentlemen, dinner will be but momentarily--” Spy announced as he began to angrily fire off rounds into the water below, each resulting in an ear splitting gunshot as each bullet fired rapidly before losing momentum against the resistance of the water. Spy laughed hysterically as the fish all shot off in opposite directions with each flash of the barrel. Even after the last bullet was fired Spy still obsessively pulled at the trigger, blinded by the anger that had been building inside him for the past couple hours.

“Alright easy there spy, think you got the last of em” Sniper offered a comforting hand on Spy’s shoulder that was quickly nudged away. As if Spy was going to accept his pity now of all times.

“Keep your dirty hands to yourself--” Or at least Spy had tried to nudge his hand away, instead his sudden turning sent him head over heels into the cold murky water.

“Hey Snipes! I think I got a bite!”

Well a meal for three hungry outdoors man one fish did not make, and even though the sun would be setting soon Sniper suggested they take a quick duck into the woods to see if they couldn’t catch any game.

“Rabbit breeding season mate, they’ll be popping up out of the ground like gophers”

“Don’t you mean like rabbits?” Spy had joked slyly, much to the annoyance of Scout. At least hunting meant he could get away from the freaking weirdo.

Normally, Spy would’ve felt confident about his hunting abilities, after all Sniper wasn’t the only person who could nail a headshot. But..he had regrettable unloaded his barrel into the lake. Nethertheless, he would not be defeated, he still had his butterfly knife and invisiwatch after all! He would still be victorious and win over the Scout’s adoration.

“Sure you’ll be alright by yourself? You haven’t been rabbit hunting before have ya? As cute as they are they can be real tricky bastards Spy,”

“I assure you Sniper, by the end of the night you will see who is the superior hunter,”

Scout rolled his eyes while Sniper just offered an awkward laugh, “It uh...ain’t exactly a competition there spook,” not exactly like it would have been a fair fight, Sniper had been hunting since he could
stand afterall.

Spy laughed in response, oh poor poor bushman. He had no idea what was coming.

While Sniper and Scout had headed off in search of rabbits, Spy had his eyes on a large trophy.

Deer hunting. A rabbit wasn’t much more of a meal than a fish, and a deer would be a surprise, and Scout loved surprises. Spy brushed his fingers against the handle of his knife, readying himself as he stalked through the trees, hungrily looking for deers. In the distance Spy spot a hefty doe, and a horrible grinch of a grin crept across his face.

Slowly, ever so slowly spy crept amongst the brushes, careful not to snap any twigs or russell any leafs. Spy could practically smell the beast’s breath as he leaned over the animal and in the flash of a hand, stabbed her in the back.

The creature let out a sharp cry before kicking Spy and running off into the bush. She was surely near death but Spy had miscalculated how fast she would die. Not wanting a repeat of the fishing mishap, Spy took off after her. The deer was much harder to keep up with than Spy had assumed, and he quickly had to rely on tracks, than, he spotted him! He was in much better shape than Spy had expected, deer were heftier than he has expected and it seemed as though it would take two back stabs. Slowly Spy began to creep forwards once again.

CRACK

Shit. Spy had hit a twig and the deer snapped his head in his direction, eyes bloodshot and angry. With one snort Spy’s blood ran cold and the man found himself freezing in fear as the mighty beast charged him. In a heartbeat Spy was tossed upsides by enormous antlers, hooves beat him to a pulp against the dirt. When Spy finally thought it was over he let out a groan and pulled himself back to his feet, he was ready to head back to the camp when he spotted the actual deer Spy had stabbed. Maybe the brutal beating wasn’t a complete waste. Upon further inspection, Spy was in no shape to carry the deer back to camp and, regrettably, he would need the help of Sniper and Scout.

“Where’d you say she was?”

“Just pass these trees...no wait...to the east and--” Damn the forest, as beautiful as it was it all looked the same, and Spy was half sure he had been leading his teammates in circles.

“Aw come on Spy! We all know there’s no way you killed a deer with your bare hands!” Scout finally snapped, tired of Spy and his antics. Tired of him hijacking what should’ve been a great weekend camping trip with Sniper.

Everyone stopped.

“Aw come on roo, we don’t know--”

“I don’t know what fucking shit you’re trying to pull Spy! There ain’t no way in fucking hell you killed a deer, when nobody was there to see, somewhere supposedly you can now not take us--”

“--but I am taking you there!”
“Then why’d you kill an animal you couldn’t carry back with you if you were going to go off on your own!? The flies have probably got to it now! It’s a waste! It’s irresponsible right Sniper?”

“Scout!” Sniper was struggling to salvage the situation.

“Fine!” Spy snapped “I’m sure you and your new best friend have caught ALL the rabbits in the entire fucking forest haven’t you!”

“Spy--”

“--Shut up! This is your fault, you had to go and stick your nose in MY business and now we’re all out here where it’s hot and buggy walking in circles!”

“Oh ain’t that just fantastic coming from you!” finally losing his patience, Sniper stepped up and shoved Spy backwards.

“C’mon Sniper…” Scout gently nudged Sniper’s arm, tired of fighting, tired of Spy, and tired of this stupid camping trip. Reluctantly, Spy followed behind, silent as could be. Not speaking up when he spotted the dead deer carcass.

“Then why’d you kill an animal you couldn’t carry back with you if you were going to go off on your own!? The flies have probably got to it now! It’s a waste! It’s irresponsible right Sniper?”

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“There! Give this baby a second and she’ll be roaring,” Sniper announced proudly after getting the campfire lit using only a couple of sticks.

A lighter would’ve done the same thing only faster, Spy thought to himself, as he nudged loser to the fire in hopes of drying off from his pathetic display earlier. The meat smelled delicious over the fire as it fried. Spy could feel his mouth begin to water, admittedly he had never eaten anything cooked over flame, but his stomach hoped to in a minute.

“Good job out on the lake Scout, if it hadn’t been for the likes of you we’d be going to bed hungry tonight,”

“Yeah ah geez it was nothing Snipes, nothing to it really once you know how to think like a fish,” Spy rolled his eyes, come to think of it Scout’s usual thought pattern probably wasn’t too different from that of a trout.

“Hey Spy! How’s about you grab us a couple of beers?” Spy reluctantly sat up and marched over to where he had last seen the cooler.

“What did you do with the cooler?”

“In the tree, can’t leave food sitting out when there’s critters around mate!”

Spy’s entire body ached, but he had used up the energy he would’ve used to complain or find a way out of the task, instead he tiredly climbed the tree in writhing pain to untie the cooler and carry it back to the fire. By the time Spy made it back with the beers, Sniper and Scout had both abandoned him to climb atop the camper to stargaze, Sniper’s vest was wrapped around Scout.

Furious at being made a fool, Spy switched on his invisivatch and watched Sniper and Scout closely from below.

“See those three stars? Orion’s belt, see? There’s his arms and his legs!”
“Woah! Yeah! I see it now Snipes! And there’s the big dipper!” Scout sat up excitedly and pointed towards the sky.

“Haha, nah Roo, that’s the little one up there, big one is actually right there,”

“Hey how come you know so much?”

Sniper just chuckled and rolled onto his side to look at Scout “Just read a lot I guess,”

“Well it’s cool, that you know so much I mean. You’re like...the coolest guy I know. Out here I mean,” Sniper let out a hum in appreciation and Scout laid back down to curl up against Sniper for warmth, which Sniper happily accepted.

Spy stormed into the camper, he had seen enough. The deep pits of is stomach ached. No matter what he did it wouldn’t be good enough. He wouldn’t be good enough. It was too late,

He lost.

Sniper was a real father. Scout loved him. More than he could ever love Spy.

And Sniper loved him back.

In frustration, frustration with Sniper, frustration with his biological son, and frustration with the world Spy childishly kicked over Sniper’s trash bin. And...well, Spy always was a snoop, not that there was much to see just some trash and..

Oh. Wasn’t that interesting?

Spy shoved the paper into his coat pocket before retiring for the night, formulating a plan in his head, he was so excited he couldn’t sleep.

Of course, excitement could only last so long and Spy had crashed the next day after helping Sniper and Scout pack up in the back of the camper.

Spy cursed himself when he finally woke up, before cursing Sniper for just leaving him in the back of the camper after pulling back onto base. Not that it mattered, he still had his plan and he couldn’t wait.

Spy rushed out the van and into the meeting room, the one with the pool table, perfect! Everyone was here, including Scout and Sniper, he couldn’t wait to see the look on his face. If he couldn’t win Scout over than he would turn him—he’d turn all of them against Sniper.

“Gentlemen! I have an announcement to make!” Spy eagerly pulled the paper from his oat, holding up the crude lude drawings of their beloved superior Ms Pauling. “The Sniper is nothing but a twisted pervert! We should’ve known! He lives in a van for christ’s sake! Ahaha!”

Nothing. The 8 other mercs store up at Spy, some shaking their heads in disbelief, all sharing a look of disgust and disapproval. As Sniper lead Scout out of the room from the back something became blatantly clear to the Spy,
They weren’t disgusted with the Sniper.

They were disgusted with him.

The silence of the room wasn’t broken until the door slammed behind Scout, echoing throughout the room.

“What!? The Sniper is a pervert! What am I missing?”

“This is low Spy, even for you”

“...didn’t think you had it in you…”

“Have you really no shame!?”

“DESPICABLE YOU MAGGOT”

Spy shot a desperate look at Medic, who only sadly shook his head and left with the Heavy. Without speaking the Engineer walked up to the Spy and slapped him clear across the face.

“What was that for!?” The Spy demanded.

“Real bold of you to march on in here throwing accusations around like that at a time like this, after all that poor boy has been through..you still can’t help but make everything about yourself…”

“What!?” Spy’s mind was racing “Dell what on earth is going on!?”

“Scout’s ma...she..she passed this morning. Just got the news in.”

Chapter End Notes

i might edit this later idk
The RED base had been uncomfortably silent all week, despite Sniper’s best attempts Scout couldn’t be drawn out of his room. Although to be fair, neither could Spy. His entire team had abandoned him, and he thought it was bad when only Scout preferred the bushman over him, now the whole team was eating out of his grubby unwashed hands. He couldn’t stand to do a thing all day but sit, sulk, and smoke. He had been doing just that when he heard a knock on his door. Probably Engineer coming to give him another tongue lashing.

“Go away” Spy groaned, he had had quite enough.

“Spy I know you’re in there!”

Spy sighed and stepped up from his chair to answer the door. “Medic?”

“Look, Spy, I know things were...shaky with Scout,” Spy rolled his eyes, ready to close the door on Medic “but--and this is a big but mein Freund, the base just received another phone call for Scout,”

“What? Did his real father die too?” Spy spat.

“Excuse me Herr Spy, but I do not believe you are fully taking this situation seriously--”

“--What!? Like how I didn’t take the camping trip seriously!? Or you’re infantile fatherhood tests or-”

“Spy please--I am trying to help you here!”

Spy scoffed “Like anybody would care to help after the mess I made,” he mumbled as he slouched deeply into his chair.

Medic took the seat adjacent to him and offered the sullen spy a soft smile, “Yes, you’ve gotten yourself into quite the predicament mein Freund”

Spy groaned, face in hands “Don’t remind me,”

“But--what are friends if they do not offer a hand in such trying times?”

“What are you talking about? The entire team *hates* me,” Spy responded, breathless.

Medic’s grin widened “I do not hate you,”

Spy looked up, searching the man for signs of insincerity.

“Yes you’ve horribly slighted the Scout and Herr Sniper. Yes you are an absolutely atrocious father. But such things are no grounds to end a many year’s friendship. And rest assured the rest will come around. *Sorge dich nicht*, the others will forgive and forget soon enough. Except maybe Herr Engineer.

“What?”

“Ohoho no matter it is nothing.” The Medic, for such an outwards goof was surprisingly extremely perceptive. Very little went on around the base that he did not know about, earning him the reputation for being quite the gossip.
Spy gave the Medic a small smile, he hated to admit it, but he really did appreciate his company and attempts to cheer him up. “Thank you, I am not one for suh emotional sentiments but you...you are a good friend, thank you.”

“Psh! Oh it is nothing, what is a little friendship between two friends Ja?”

Spy chuckled softly

“Yes yes, but I have come with serious news. The base received another call, the funeral for Scout’s mother has been scheduled for Friday. And if you are really interested in making amends than I think you--”

“--NO! ...I... I couldn’t” He could never face that woman again, even in death, nor her sons, not after the crimes he had committed against them. He just wasn’t strong enough. Especially after the week he had been having.

“Spy....”

“It’s….its too late for me, for us, the Scout and I..” Spy sighed defeated “I am no father, if the Sniper really loves him so much he should accompany him,” Spy spat bitterly. While he could forgive and understand the Scout not wanting to pursue a relationship with him, he was still torn up about the Sniper’s utter disrespect. You don’t replace a man’s father….you just don’t! It isn’t right! It wasn’t exactly like Scout was an abandoned child, he didn’t exactly need or depend on his father, as nice of a thought it might have been.

Medic nodded solemnly “Whatever your relationship with Scout may be….it is my opinion that this would be the right thing to do.”

The right thing, pah. Scout probably wouldn’t even let Spy take him even if he offered. The boy hated his guts. Sniper won and Spy lost, that had been made abundantly clear. Spy wasn’t even sure if he wanted to make amends anymore, all he wanted was to just sit alone in his room and stew in his self-pity.

“No...no I cannot,”

Medic sighed before standing from his seat “Understandable, but I think you are making a big mistake Herr Spy;”

Spy rolled his eyes and crossed his arms over his chest to sulk when medic shut the door behind him on his way out. Who was he to be giving him advice? The last time Spy took Medic’s advice he almost ended up mother to a baboon, talk about big mistakes! Pah!

What did spy care how Scout attended his mother’s funeral anyways!?
Chapter 10

Silence echoed down the halls of the base as Team Fortress shared an exceptionally quiet dinner in the mess hall. It wasn’t unusual for Sniper or Spy to be absent, both men preferring to eat on their lonesome, but the absence of Scout’s candid laughter and loud recollections of the week’s events or tales from Boston shook the team to their core. Not even Soldier’s suggestion of a movie night in celebration of the one year anniversary

“Aye...someone...someone ought to go check on the lad,” said Demo, finally breaking through the blanket of silence that had sunken over the room.

“I’ll do it,” Engineer volunteered, picking up and carrying Scout’s tray out of the cafeteria and down the hall.

“Kid? You still breathing in there?” Sniper asked for the 500th time that day, knocking softly against Scout’s door, met with nothing but gentle sounds of fabric rustling. Yeah, he was breathing and could hear him, but he didn’t have any plans of getting up anytime soon.

“Sniper? You been out here all day?”

“All week. Poor little fella, kid hasn’t even left to use the bathroom. Heh, I taught ‘im that one,”

Engineer’s face cracked with a small smile “Hehe, yeah bet you did dear--say--I brought this here dish out for Scout but from the sounds of it you could use it just as badly,”

Sniper frowned “I couldn’t Truckie I really--”

“Slim from the sounds of things you haven’t had a bite to eat all week, and from the looks of things those twigs you call legs are gonna buckle if you don’t get some meat on those there haunches,”

“Truckie!”

“Sniper, I ain’t askin’” Engie finished, lightly pushing the tray in Sniper’s hands, Begrudgingly, Sniper slid down against the wall and took a bite. Unwillingly he let out a soft moan as his stomach began to fill with food for the first time in days. Before he knew what had hit him he was eagerly wolfing down bites of gravy-logged meatloaf and potatoes. Taking pride in his handiwork, and in getting his stubborn mule of a boyfriend to eat something, Engineer couldn’t help but stand back and chuckle.

“I don’t know how you do it Slim, skinniest cowpoke on the range but could easily give Heavy a run for his money in a proper pie eating contest,”

“Would depend on the pie,” Sniper quipped back. Engineer smiled back before solemnly taking a seat next to the taller man.

“Hey...just wanna check in on how you’re handling things. It’s been one heck of a week for all of us ‘round here, and I haven’t seen hide nor hair of yeah since...y’know…”

Sniper frowned and averted his gaze from Engineer, choosing to stare off down into the hall before speaking.
“Honestly...been just doin’ all I can to look out for Scout,”

Engineer smiled “I know partner, and despite how things look right now, You’ve been doing a bang up job,” better than that damn Spy ever could. Engineer thought to himself, but decided it would be wisest not to talk on such matters in the current moment.

Sniper smirked momentarily before turning back to Engie and frowning again.

“I’m….I’m real sorry about all of this. I know after the camping trip I had promised---you had been looking forwards to--”

“Oh shush. Nobody could’a predicted what happened would’a happened,” Engineer responded with a slow shake of his head.

“Still. I promise I’ll make this whole mess up to ya, to the both of ya’s!” Sniper hung his head

“Never should’ve let that bastard ass spook come along…”

Engineer rested a hand on Sniper’s shoulder and frowned “You did what you thought was best Slim, nobody blames ya for what happened.”

“I do, shoulda known better...there ain’t changing no blasted spook. Ain’t got any excuses, I shoulda known that Spy was nothing but bad news, ‘specialy after what happened between ‘im and Scout,”

“Yeah...I uh...I heard about what happened, how’d uh, how’d the kid take it?”

Sniper gestured towards the door.

“Oh. right.”

In the lull of conversation between Sniper and Engineer more rustling and soft cries could be heard from outside the door.

“Scout!? Jeremy!? Come on you gotta open up kid!” Sniper shouted as he pounded at the door with newfound vigor, rattling the doorknob hoping it would open.

“Woah hey there now, ain’t gonna make friends with the goldfish if you shake the bowl now!”

Sniper sighed and stopped, turning to the engineer “I don’t know what to do truckie…” he admitted with a tired and defeated exhale that just broke his heart.

Engineer pursed his lips, the gears in his mind ra cing a hundred miles a second, trying desperately to think of a way to help or comfort the Sniper.

“Hey, I think I might have an idea,” It had been roughly a year since Soldier killed Tom Jones, Scout’s idol, it had been the last time anyone had seen Scout so torn up. In commemoration of his life one of the major networks was showing a special documentary on the life and death of Tom Jones. Apparently good ol’ Solly was hosting a premiere night in the common lounge as he had since learned that part of the documentary would focus on the circumstances of the singer’s death and in turn, on Soldier. The plan was simple enough, after giving Scout a little bit of space and time Engineer would push the TV guide under Scout’s door, with the page the special was advertised on dog-eared. Then it would just be a matter of waiting in the TV room for Scout to appear.

Soldier had been over the moon when he saw Sniper walk in with Engineer and the Pyro, glad to have others in attendance of his great film debut, with the Demo already half drunk on the floor, perched up against the coffee table.
Sniper could feel his stomach flip as he sat down, Engineer gave his hand a little reassuring squeeze, Sniper did his bet to muster the smaller man a smile. However, Sniper was horrified as to what he would do if Scout didn’t show, they didn’t exactly have a backup plan. But, sure enough, Scout shuffled in as the introduction faded out, plopping down on the other side of Sniper, heavy bags drooping from his eyes.

“Glad you came,”

“SHHH! QUIET MAGGOT! MY BIG MOMENT IS ABOUT TO COME ON!” Sniper didn’t exactly have the heart to tell Soldier that he wouldn’t actually be in the documentary but that they instead would have hired an actor to recreate the scene. Despite the purpose of the ‘party’ Sniper couldn’t be bothered to pay attention to the documentary and instead found he couldn’t pull his eyes off of Scout. The kid was completely pale with dark sunken bags under bloodshot eyes. Was probably dehydrated, Sniper woud nag him to get something to drink when the movie was over. Scout turned and shot Sniper a small smile, Sniper feel a wave of relief wash over him, he could tell that Scout was glad he’d come down too.

The documentary turned out to be a regular snooze-fest, to everyone but Scout that was. Once Soldier’s moment of glory had come and gone he seemed just as disinterested as the rest of the room, only watching out of obligation, but was the first to leave when it was finally over.

“Well as much as I’d love to stay and catch up with ya’ll--” Engineer said with a yawn “This cowpoke’s gotta mozy on and get some shut eye if I’m going to be of any use on the battlefield tomorrow,” Engineer stood up and stretched out his tiny limbs before planting a quick goodnight kiss on Sniper’s cheek and giving Scout a friendly ‘good-to-see-you’ pat on the shoulder. Pyro mumbled something in the affirmative and followed close behind out the room.

“So uh...you gonna tell me ‘bout that? You and hardhat?”

“AHAHAHA--- later” Sniper laughed nervously out of embarrassment, face red as could be. He briefly wondered if Engie had said something about their...relationship to Pyro yet.

After finally giving in to Demo’s protests that he wasn’t too drunk to pick himself off the floor and crawl back to his room, Sniper escorted Scout back to his bedroom. The poor kid looked so frail Sniper was afraid he’d fall apart. As a pleasant half-surprise Scout allowed Sniper inside with him. Sniper had been in Scout’s room many times before, just hanging out, and it was just as messy as he remembered it but....darker somehow.

Pulling together whatever last bits of strength remained Scout sat on his bed, staring at Sniper mouth open “Ok--Look Snipes I know I’ve been acting crazy and shit--”

“You haven’t been acting crazy,”

“Huh? What!? Snipes I--”

“Shhh...you ain’t ought to be so hard on yourself. Nobody thinks less of you for wanting your space,” Sniper said assuringly, offering a comforting smile as he sat down on the opposite end of Scout’s bed

Upon hearing this Scout struggled to keep his lip from quivering, his chest rising and falling with increasing speed as his big blue eyes began to dampen.

“Scout--” unable to control himself any longer Scout threw his arms around Sniper and buried his
face against his shirt, crying softly. Oh god. Oh god he missed this.

“Scout?!! C’mon easy there roo. I’m here,” It only took Sniper a moment to adjust, holding Scout in his lap and stroking the back of his head, chin resting against his forehead

“‘M so pathetic, act’in’ like a baby and shit…” Scout whimpered

“Nah, you’re just grieving. ‘S healthy, comeon now, let it all out Scout, I’ll be here long as you need me,”

Scout pulled back from Sniper “Nah...I..I think I’m good Snipes,” he said with a sniffle.

“Yeah?”

“Yeah...it’s just...fuck man--” Scout’s voice cracked as if he was on the verge of bawling again, “--I can’t believe she’s gone man,” It had been bad enough that Spy was Scout’s real deal, and that was REAL bad, but now his mom was…

“It’s alright roo, you take all the time you need Scout,”

Scout wiped at his eyes “Man--I just...I feel so dumb, crying like a baby and locking myself in my room and shit,”

Sniper frowned, now was not a good time to relay to Scout how his own flesh and blood father had been reacting as well. Sniper took a deep breath, he knew this wouldn’t be easy.

“Scout, do you wanna hear what I did when my parents...well...you know?”

Scout blinked his eyes clear, looking intently at Sniper, he had heard the recount of what had happened from Demo, how they found Sniper dirty and gnawty, all alone in an abandoned farm house. How he had been more animal than man. How Demo had never seen a man as lost in his own craziness.

Sniper explained how he had been out hunting, how he and his father had been arguing with increasing frequency as to his own life trajectory. He was 42 with no kids, no wife and had only ever killed men for a living wage.

“Dad always...always pressed me to make something out of myself. He knew I was thin and hadn’t gotten along well with others. Wanted me to go to school, go off on my own and make an honest living, than settle down and take over the farm.” In truth, every reason Sniper had ever given had been a thinly veiled excuse. As much as Sniper valued his solitude, being alone, truly alone, terrified him. And yet, he still struggled with crippling social anxiety, nothing had ever sounded more hellish than university. To be all alone, but completely suffocated by the surroundings of complete strangers? He’d rather die. Only situation Sniper ever truly felt comfortable with was living a home, his parents were located out in the middle of the bush so neighboring farms were few and far between, and there was plenty of open space to wander off into if he ever felt the need. He suspected he might have been sheltered or spoiled or...something as a kid. It hadn’t exactly been a secret from him that his folks had tried and failed to have kids other times, with him being his mother’s ‘miracle’. Made enough sense, his ma was always more than happy to have her ‘special boy’ at home, and his father had always been absurdly over-protective and proud over the most inconsequential of things. Sniper had, as embarrassing as it was to admit, become overly dependent. Both as a child and well into adulthood. He’d never properly planned for a day when he would finally be completely alone. He had hoped the team would be enough, they were the first group of people outside of family he had felt truly comfortable with.
“When I came home and found them...found them like that...I vowed I’d never leave. Of course that was until the pieces started to fall apart, I needed my birth certificate--my OFFICIAL one, not the fake IDs Ms. Pauling comes up with, to legally inherit the property but nobody--government officials, neighbors, family friends, hospital staff, I’d even turned to the nearest orphanage only to turn up nothing. Than I started looking into Ms. Pauling and the rest of the team, waiting for and opportunity to strike and--not completely proud of my actions but I think the point is, you’re handling things just fine kiddo. Ain’t nothing to worry about,”

Scout frowned, resting lightly against Sniper’s chest. It was a lot to take in. Both his mother’s….y’know, and the emotional baggage Sniper had just unloaded. “So...they were just there? Dead?”

Sniper sighed, resting a hand on Scout’s shoulder “Dead as a doorknob, Mom in bed and Dad on the floor. He was always a fighter I suppose.”

“Wow…” Scout gripped at Sniper’s shirt lightly, “Whaddid you do than?”

“Steeled myself. My heart was racin’ faster than a thoroughbred in it for the triple crown but I was able to pull myself enough to do what i needed and bury ‘em both out back,”

“YOU BURIED YOUR OWN PARENTS!?”

“Someone had to,” Sniper shrugged, “They weren’t getting any deader,”

Scout hummed in agreement before curling back up against Sniper “Still though, you’re lucky--I mean most of that sht still sucks ass but like..you got to say goodbye and stuff.”

Sniper rubbed slow comforting circles over Scout’s back, a thought tugging at his mind,

“You can still say your goodbyes you know,”

“What? Sniper what are you--”

“Got a call a couple days ago, funeral is friday,”

“Friday!?” Scout’s entire demeanor changed, he was back on his feet both metaphorically and literally, “Aw geez how the hell am I supposed to get there by Friday!? I ain’t got a car or--”

“Don’t worry about it roo,” Sniper sat up with a light chuckle “I can get ya there no problem”
He didn’t care

That’s what he kept telling himself at least,

He didn’t care

It had been so long since he had thought about her—about any of them really, and even longer since they last met. It was an awful bitter memory and he had done his damned best to repress it and all the—eh—emotions attached as well.

She was the daughter of one of his first bosses when he first came to the states, older than him by a couple years, he had been taken aback when she started to show interest. He was very well trained in the art of seduction, it was important for him as a spy to be after all. He had even been trained in how to brace himself against seduction, but this had not been seduction. Not intentionally. They saw each other quite a lot and they had...they had liked each other. It had been simple as that. No plans of espionage or ransom or special favors. It just...happened, no plan from either party at all.

But that was life was it not?

She was funny and witty and so, so bold! Always taking charge, never backing down, so full of life she was! Or at least, had been. And well, Spy didn’t mean to brag but he was quite the catch himself in his prime, daring and confident and charming. And how lovely the two of them had been together, oh the memories, the fine cuisine and the dancing and the parties! Spy wasn’t sure there was anywhere she went at night where he didn’t follow. Oh what a time they had had!

But...well, that was life was it not?

But it was fine. He was fine. Janice was dead now and his last lingering connection to that point in his life was the Scout—who he had all but severed ties with.

He didn’t care.

The fire roared and the burning logs cracked, sending off the occasional spark, illuminating Spy’s long face in the darkness.

Stupid! Stupid! Stupid!

It had been easy enough to deny, for years now. Oh he was a stupid old fool, such a stupid old fool he was. He was too old now, wasn’t he? To try again?

Darn it. His tumbler was empty.

Spy stood from his chair to refill his glass, long black shadows grazed against the wall. He had never been able to ponder over such matters sober, and it was as good an excuse as any to lock himself away and drink himself to death wasn’t it? Stupid old fool. He was becoming more and more like father with every turn of the calender, Scout was a reminder of that, as hard as he tried to deny it.

God what would Janice think of him? Washed up, drunk, and alone. It was what he deserved, she’d agree, he knew she would. Stupid, stupid, old fool.
God, he thought, suddenly very aware and present, what would father think? How at one point he had such hopes and pride and high plans for Jeremy, how excited he had been before it all fell apart. How disgusted he had been in himself when it was all over.

How disgusted we was with himself now, a horrible mix of too cowardly and too proud to admit his mistakes, make amends, and go home. Could he ever go home? With how badly he had managed to waste the past 30 years of his life? He doubted it. But it was no matter. He had come to terms with that the day Jeremy had shown up on the team.

Because that was the truth of it wasn’t it?

He was just like him when he was young.

Granted, he was just like him at a much younger age.

But he was just like him all the same.

For a moment, Spy thought to mourn. Even if he was still the black sheep of the family, never quite meeting up to father’s expectations but not quite falling short either, he had still managed to whip Spy into a right and proper frenchman---an heir worthy of the family name. Jeremy, on the other hand, was not quite as lucky. And now the Sniper was set on taking that which was nothing and dismantling it into something absolutely repugnant, with no value onessoever.

But that was the way of things, was it not?

Jeremy was no more a Jones than he himself was a James. How he had hoped, how he had hoped that through Jeremy he could salvage some of his lost time, all the mistakes he had made in his youth. Either from preventing him from making the same or turning him into some sort of...figure, an achievement rather than an accident. Well look how well that had panned out for him.

No, he was far far too old and had nothing to show for it. Now all that was left for him to do was to wallow in his own self-hatred and drink.

Briefly, he hoped that Janice had been happy.

It hadn’t taken Scout very long to pack, never took him very long to do anything he had set his mind to.

“Oh just wait until you meet my brother Johnny Snipes--lemme tell you I have never met a fella who could--” Scout prattled on about his many older brothers, uncles, aunts, and neighbors from back up in Boston who would surely be in attendance at the wake. Sniper had originally asked about the lot as a means to distract Scout and get his mind off the much more depressing motivation behind their cross-country trip, but now he was only half listening as he finished the last of the preparations on the van for the trip.

“---and don’t even get me started on Auntie Felicia! Boy did I learn my lesson when I--
Honestly, Sniper was beginning to regret asking.

“Hey come on now, you’re gonna wanna save the best of them there stories for when we’re halfway through the Chihuahuan Desert and both goin’ blind from prairie madness

Scout’s trademark grin grew so wide Sniper worried his face would split in half.

“Oh believe you me Sniper, you haven’t heard ANYTHIN’ yet!”

It was so nice to see the kid back to even a fraction of his usual self, after days of isolation and grief Sniper had worried he’d never see that happy smile again. He couldn’t help a chuckle.

“That the last of it?”

“Yeah, not a lot but y’know,” Scout said with a shrug.

“Yeah alright,” Sniper responded as he did his own double checking of supplies. First aid, emergency window breaking kit, coffee, hunting knife, all important necessities for any good van dweller to keep in stock.

“Come on slowpoke! You’ve been back there for like, ever now!” Scout stuck his head out the front window, reaching over to honk the horn. Sniper rolled his eyes and climbed out the back

“Move aside kiddo,” Sniper said, climbing into the driver’s seat.

“Sure you ready to go? Did you remember to say goodbye to your boyfrie-” Scout yelped as his face slammed down into the dashboard

“Oops,” Sniper said cheekily.

“Funny.” Scout responded dryly, holding his nose with both hands “It ain’t broken is it?”

“Nah you’re fine you big baby! Barely hit ya self”

“Yeah? Well it sure don’t feel too funny if ya ask me!”

“Well i sure will be if it swells up as bad as it did when ya smacked yourself in the wall!”

“Oh shut up! You weren’t even there when it happened!”

“Ms Pauling said you flattened against the wall like a pancake,”

“Shit. Ms Pauling saw that?”

“Scout she was the one who told everybody!”

“Aw shit,” Scout said, arms folded across his chest, “Ya know, I used to talk about her to Ma a lot.”

“Yeah?” Sniper didn’t pull his eyes off the road but did his best to focus on Scout.

“Yeah, about like...girls ‘n stuff,”
“Ha, that’s pretty cute. Wouldn’t have expected such a ladykilla’ like yourself to need any outside help,” Sniper teased.

“Sniper--”

“Right. Sorry, not a good time,” Sniper had always been a little bit socially awkward, but now wasn’t the time to try and raise the mood. “You uh...you wanna talk about it? About your Ma I mean?”

Scout let out a deep sigh and leaned into his seat, “I really wish you could’ve met her,”

“Jeremy…” He was truly touched, everyone on the team knew how close Scout was with his mother. It...it meant a lot to know he had wanted him to meet her. Scout offered him a soft smile in response.

“It’s...it’s alright Snipes...It’s just--” Scout’s voice began to shake, “God...I miss her so fucking much,” Scout curled up in on himself, weeping softly. Sniper pulled the camper off the road immediately.

“Jeremy---c’mon roo,” Sniper helped Scout rest against his chest, rubbing his back in soothing circles.

“God Snipes I’m---I’m so fucking sorry man I...I…”

Sniper moved one hand up to pet the back of Scout’s hair “It’s alright roo, I gotya.”

The two of them continued to sit there, Scout crying softly with his face buried into Sniper’s shirt.

“God….I can’t believe she’s gone man”

Sniper’s stomach churned, he couldn’t help but think of when he lost his own mother. It still stung, a lot actually. God he hoped the funeral would be close casket. He would’ve done anything to scrub the image of his dead mother lying at the bottom of the grave he dug from his mind. It haunted him.

“Hey, c’mon Scout, I think it’s time to retire for the night,” Scout offered a slow nod.

Sniper helped Scout into the back of the camper, promising he would be joining him soon, he just needed to pull the camper out further off the road as to not be bothered by any night drivers.

The sun set peacefully over the yellow sands, painting the landscape in a beautiful orange under the magenta sky. Sniper frowned, they weren’t even out of New Mexico yet.

Sniper had hoped to get a good few more hours of driving squeezed in that evening, maybe checking into one of those motels with the complimentary breakfast for a nice change of pace from his usual morning routine, but it was clear Scout needed the break.

“How you holdin’ up back here roo?” Sniper flicked on the light only to find him curled up on the bunk wrapped in the sheets. Least he wasn’t bawling his eyes out anymore.

“She’s...she’s really gone…”

“Afraid so Roo,” Sniper said as he climbed up to sit next to Scout.

“Y’know my first night on base, as part of the team, it was so...quiet, could barely sleep a wink.”

“Yeah?”
“Guess growin’ up I just became accustomed to all the noise of people comin’ and goin’ that I was conditioned or something. All that quiet it...it didn’t feel natural Sniper.

“I can bet. You know...had the same problem myself when I first joined,”

“Really?”

“Well, maybe not exact same,” Sniper mumbled, rubbing the back of his neck, “Base was always far too loud for my liking,”

“What? Really? I mean, guess that shouldn’t be too much a surprise you’re like, Mr. Quiet,”

“Heh, yeah well the Bush ain’t exactly New York City or nothin’”

“Or Boston,” Scout said with a smile creeping up his face, one Sniper couldn’t but mirror.

“Wouldn’t know, this’ll be my first time up there I reckon,”

“Oh holy shit I almost forgot about that!” Scout practically sprung to his feet “We gotta take you to see Fenway!”

“Fenway? Jeremy are you really sure this is the time to--”

“Oh man Snipes you’re gonna freakin’ love it! Fenway is like...the best place in the whole world!”

Sniper couldn’t help a light laugh “Heh, oh is it now?”

“Yeah! Like holy shit I musta spent like every weekend there until I moved in with all youse guys on the team!’

With a smile Sniper couldn’t help but give in, “Well than I guess we’ll have to make a stop in won’t we?”

Scout’s enthusiasm wasn’t so easily dampened “No no you don’t understand!!! I got this uncle who has it in good with the owners or the managers or whatever! We get own freakin’ box seats and everything! You don’t even gotta get up to like get a hotdog or whatever! They bring you whatever you want!”

Fenway wasn’t starting to sound half-bad.

“I can see why you’d like it so much than,” Sniper teased with a chuckle.

“Yeah well,” Scout said “It’s still be pretty awesome regardless.”

“Yeah,” Sniper yawned, stretching his long limbs before lying down vertically on the bed, so as his legs hung over the side. Scout followed suit.

“How you holdin’ up kid? Really, it’s okay if you’re upset,”

“Yeah I know,” Scout said “It’s just so weird cause like. Man my mom always could do freakin’ anything she set her mind to. Like she was the coolest lady ever.”

“Better than Wonder Woman?” Sniper teased.

“Man! My mom could totally kick Wonder Woman’s ass if she had the chance!” Scout cackled, causing Sniper himself to laugh.
“She was just...she was always there for me y’know? Like I mean, so were my brothers, but like..”

“You were ‘the baby’ of the family?” Sniper asked, half sincerely.

“Yeah! Exactly! Hey wait a second--”

Sniper burst into laughter, Scout bright red “It’s alright! I know what ya meant. Ain’t nothin’ wrong with it. Was the same way myself,”

“Nah it’s not the same, you were an only child. I was the youngest,"

“Aw, you were always ‘lil Jeremy’ weren’t ya Roo?”

“Ugh, don’t remind me!” The two men laughed lightly, “I swear those stupid Mann co. uniforms were the first clothing I ever wore that weren’t hand-me-downs!”

“Oi! And you think I gotta walk around in fancy new dreads every damn sunrise and sundown on the farm? Bein’ an only child don’t mean you get new clothes---it just means ya get em from your da--” SHIT

“It’s alright Snipes. I know you have... had a dad, it ain’t a big deal.” Scout said with a shrug.

“Sorry,” Sniper winced at his own over-protective instinct, he was gettin’ more like mum everyday now “I just figured, y’know, with all that was happenin...I-I mean---look I know Spy ain’t the best guy but you don’t--”

“Sniper,” Scout said, cutting him off from his unintelligible stutterings “I ain’t exactly torn up about the dad thing,“

“What? Really? I kinda figured, y’know, with your mom gone and all now that the dad stuff would-- y’know. Make ya feel even worse about the situation with Spy ”

“Nah,” Scout reassured, “don’t really care about that whole nonsense anymore,“

Well Sniper was certainly taken a back, “Really? Why’s that now?”

A smile pulled cheek to cheek across Scout’s face “Well duh dumb-dumb, why would I need no stinkin’ deadbeat asshole dad when I have you?”

For the first time that day, Sniper was now the one crying.
Chapter 12

Chapter Summary

sorry this one is short, was gonna be longer but i got some personal stuff going on.

Scout hadn’t been kidding when he told Sniper he hadn’t even heard half of his best stories, and honestly Sniper was thankful for it.

“So there I am, one foot stuck in a gopher hole, the kid’s still crying and the guy in the bunny suit is catching up fast—” it meant that Sniper didn’t have to contribute or think of anything to say, he could just listen and watch the open road. Slowly desert had turned to forest and to sparse suburbs into busy highways as they crept towards the north east. Scout slept more during the trip than he’d like to admit, and Sniper barely slept to begin with, so to the runner the trip just flew by,

“Hey kid?”

“Uh yeah Snipes?”

“You sure that was the right address?”

“Yeah, why?” Scout asked confused, why wouldn’t he know his own uncle’s address?

“Uh…” The property they had pulled up into the driveway of was immaculate, perfectly manicured green lawn decorated large marble fountain with a three story red brick mansion. Wasn’t Scout poor? Maybe his family had invested what Scout sent back? “This where you grew up?”

“What? Nah. This is the family house, belonged to my old pops, passed it down to my uncle. We use it for events and holidays and stuff. Ma and I we uh…we lived in a much smaller house.”

“Oh, I see.” Scout was quick to jump out the van and run up to the door, with Sniper thrown completely off guard still by the large expensive house.

“Jeremy! Thank god you’ve made it!” The doors flew open as a portly man, not old exactly, but definitely older than Sniper or Spy, threw his arms around Scout.

“What are you kiddin’ uncle Jimmy? You really thought I woulda missed my own Ma’s funeral?”

“Ha! Of course not Jeremy, we knew you wouldn’t have missed it for the world. It’s just—-you’re so far,” There was a distant sadness in the older man’s voice. It didn’t sound like Scout had made too many visits back home.

“Yeah well,” Scout took a step back, breaking the hug, “You can thank good ol’ Snipes here. I don’t know what i’d do without him,”

“Snipes?”

“Uh, it’s Mick sir, Mick Mundy,” Sniper stepped forward and awkwardly offered Scout’s apparent uncle his hand.
“Mick! I love it!” The older man laughed, shoving Sniper’s arm aside and pulling him into his own hug. “And I don’t want any of this ‘sir’ stuff while you’re stayin’ here you hear me? Jeremy’s our boy, he’s family, and family begoths family. You’re gonna call me Uncle Jimmy just like all the other boys and I ain’t gonna hear any other which way about it!” There was a jovial tone to the man’s voice, ne Sniper had noticed a while back in Scout’s. An energy, a certain rhythm to it. Sniper wondered if perhaps it was a side effect of the local manner of speaking or if Scout had just picked it up from the other members of his family and so on.

“I uh…” Sniper stuttered nervously thrown off by the man…. Uncle Jimmy’s friendliness. Of course he was Scout’s family, that shouldn’t have come at such a surprise.

“Come on Snipes--whoops I mean Micky,” Scout placed a reassuring hand on Sniper, grounding him again, “We need to unpack.”

“Jeremy! Come now, the two of you must be exhausted--I’ll call for the servants to get your bags.” Sniper was once again taken by surprise as Scout’s uncle pulled each arm around the younger men and led the two of them inside. Scout shot a nervous smile at Sniper.

“Hey uh uncle Jimmy, the rest of the guys here yet by any chance?” Scout asked.

“As usual you were the straggler. I think Joey is upstairs, he just got here this morning, actually, Jeremy be a dear and go see if he needs any help unpacking. Jodie just made tea and I’d love to have a talk with your little friend,”

Somehow Sniper didn’t like the sounds of that.

“Sure thing!” Scout pulled his head free and dashed up the stairs. Actually, come to think of it, Sniper wasn’t sure he’d ever seen a house like this before outside of the movies. They had a beautiful green double grand staircase and dining room off to the side, that he was now promptly being guided into.

“Please, have a seat,”

Sniper gulped. Uncle Jimmy stayed calm and composed after he took his seat opposite of Sniper.


Sniper shook his head and extended a hand “Er...no thanks mate I’m...I’m alright…”

“Very well,” Uncle Jimmy dismissed the help with a wave of the hand.

“So--”

“I ain’t fuckin’ your nephew I promise!”

“What!?” Uncle Jimmy exploded, slamming his weight down on the table.

“Sorry!” Sniper held his hands up defensively, “Just....just been gettin’ asked that a lot lately…” The two men both sighed and sank back into their seats.

“Well...now that...that’s cleared up...has dear Jeremy told you much about Janice?”

Shit. Janice, that was Scout’s mom right? This was probably her brother or her uncle or something. Seemed like a pretty big family from what little Sniper had heard from Scout. “Eh...a little, sco--
Jeremy’s talked about her before. Real sorry ‘bout what happened mate,”

Uncle Jimmy just smiled and shook his head slowly, taking a long slow sip from his wine, “Loved that gal. We all did. Real wild card she was, had a real fire in her—just like her father.”

Sniper shifted uncomfortable in his seat, it was clear that Uncle Jimmy intended to unbox some heavy emotional baggage Sniper would’ve assumed would’ve been too heavy to unload on a bloke you just meet. Whoever she was to him, it was clear they had been very close.

“Everyone loved that girl, ha, and she knew it. Real flirt. Ya know the story behind Jeremy’s….’old man’?” Uncle Jimmy asked, leaning over the table.

“I uh….” Sniper pulled at his collar, sure he knew Spy, and that he was the father but...he wasn’t real sure what else he knew. That he left?

“It’s okay, Jeremy doesn’t know anythin’ either. Real rat that guy. Thought he was good when he came around. Ever shows his face around here again I’ll kill’em for what he did to our family,”

“Oh,”

“But you...you’re a good man Mick, I really can’t tell ya enough. Droppin’ everything and bringing our lil Jeremy out here. How long have youse guys been palin’ around?”

Sniper shrugged, “Uh...couple months I guess?”

Uncle Jimmy noded, “Definitely been makin’ a big difference,”

“Uh..thank you sir, I’m uh glad I could help,” Sniper stood up and extended his hand out to shake Uncle Jimmy’s

Uncle Jimmy swatted his hand down and laughed, standing up himself. “Hey, come on now whaddid I tell ya? We’re family now, get over ‘ere!” Sniper took a step closer and was instantly pulled into a bear hug by the shorter man.

“C’mon, lets get Bruno to help ya get settled in, want you well rested for the big day tomorrow morning!”
Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

Everything finally comes to a head.

Work had been going smoothly. Very smoothly. Tom had always been a solitary man but he was starting to get an appetite for the type of team-based operations and relations his new employer promoted. There was something very classy about their nights and dinners out as a unit Tom liked especially. A certain light atmosphere away from the brutality and high stakes anxiety their job usually entailed. A nice relaxing evening was something any man could enjoy, but there was something particularly enjoyable in watching the same touch faces and calloused fat hands that strangled the life out of smaller men all week finally relax under the warm yellow lighting that made Tom especially sentimental. He had known of dinnerside business meetings back home in France, but this, this wasn’t about business.

There was a dull anxiety looming over the house in the morning, even Sniper could feel it as he hurried to get dressed. It had been the first night in a long time in which he slept in a...bedroom and not his camper. Wasn’t half bad. He briefly wondered if the engineer was going to expect that of him from now on. He would wouldn’t he? That’s what you did when you liked each other right? Sleep in each other's beds? A hot red flush washed over his face. Crikey…

“Ay yo Sniper you awake yet?” came Scout’s voice as he banged on the bedroom door.

“Yeah, I’m decent,” Sniper called back as he pulled up his the slacks he packed.

“Check me out!” The door swung open and Scout slid in, presenting himself like one of those cocky young musicians they sometimes hosted on late night TV. “Do I look like a hundred bucks or what?!” Sniper had to admit that it was the most cleaned up he had ever seen the young mercenary, the black suit he sported must have been custom made or at least tailored as it flowed over his body like water over a stone, a perfect fit. The only thing off about the whole ensemble was Scout’s shotty attempt to tie his black necktie the same way he did with his running shoes. Sniper couldn’t help a light chuckle and shake of the head.

“C’mere, lemme help you with that,” without question Scout stepped before Sniper. Sniper knelt down and began to undo the mess Scout had made of his tie.

“This your first time gettin’ all dressed up?”

“Hey! It’s not every day your mom dies!”

Scout instantly regretted opening his mouth, as the room was filled with a heavy silence only amplified by the soft whirring of the ceiling fan.

“So...how come you know so much about tying ties Mr. fancy pants? Don’t tell me you were one of those boy scout weirdos”

Sniper smiled softly as he tucked one end of the tie around the other, “Me dad taught me how when I
was young. Y’know, church and stuff, besides, when you’re tryin’ to farm one of the dumbest animals alive in the Australian bush you gotta know how to tie a damn good knot to keep those wooly bastards out of harm’s way.”

Scout raised his chin and let Sniper tighten the knot to an appropriate length, when he was done he took a step back to take it all in. For such a simple favor, it wasn’t like it had been especially hard on Sniper’s part, he couldn’t help but be bursting at the seams with pride. Sniper’s eyes met with Scout’s large blue eyes staring up at him, so hungry for approval Sniper thought he was going to cry.

“Well? How do I look?”

Sniper’s voice caught in his throat, Scout was so so handsome, with his shirt tucked in for once, hair combed back and tie neatly in place. Without thinking Sniper reached out and buttoned up his coat for him. Scout opened and closed his mouth in surprise but gladly let Sniper continue to groom and preen. He felt surprisingly...safe. Like there was nothing else in the world but the two of them. It was a lovely feeling. Without warning Scout pressed up against Sniper, nuzzling his face against his shirt and tightly wrapping his arms around the taller man gently.

Sniper was mildly taken aback but gladly hugged Scout back, he could tell he was grinning ear to ear like a doofus even if his face was numb “You look great kiddo, real handsome. Gosh your mother would be proud to see you now,"

Scout froze, his muscles tense and eyes wide open. Shit. That’s why this felt so familiar but...different. If this had been anyone else’s funeral his ma woulda been the one to tie his tie and straighten him up and tell him how handsome he looked-- Shit.

“Uh...I better get goin’, car’s gotta be here soon and all,” Scout stuttered and quickly pulled away, making a b-line for the door. He couldn’t believe he let himself do that to his poor ma, and on her day no less. Downright disrespectful.

Tom had only been working for the Don for a little less than a month now but was growing accustomed to him and the gang exponentially. He had even begun to view their friday night dinners as something to be anticipated and enjoyed, while previously he had just done his best to get ahead and make good a good impression on the men large enough to put him in the hospital with just their bare hands. He gave himself one final glance over in the mirror before heading out the door. Pinstripes were the look of the season, and his jacket broadened his stature nicely, and with a last minute straightening of his tie he was out the door. Romano’s was the spot of the night, owned and run by the family of one of his higher-ups. It was a good restaurant for a mafia front, the generations’ old recipes were enough to keep the Boston police force off their backs at the very least. As per usual the gang was seated in their private table at the very back of the establishment, with the Don Jack ‘The Big Man’ James

“‘Ay if it ain’t the Phantom of Boston! Howya doin’!?” Tom was enthusiastically greeted by Jimmy ‘The Lemon’, their boss’s closest consigliere. “Big J’s in the back wit’the others. Gotta say, haven’t seen ‘im in a mood this good since you took out Ol Smiley.”

Really Sniper shouldn’t have been surprised, this was a family affair after all and it made sense for Ma’s family to appear together at the wake. Still, he felt awfully silly showing up at the graveyard in
his camper, at least Scout would get to spend a little bit of time with his brothers, maybe help get his thoughts sorted out. It was a good day for a funeral, as long as it didn’t rain, clouds were moving in on the horizon, it was gonna be a cool dreary day. Perfect for mourning a beloved mother and member of the community.

Woulda been cool to ride in that limo though.

Tom grinned “It’s amazing how many men these days are so sensitive to 15 grains of lead through the face.

Jimmy laughed and patted Tom on the shoulder “Hey you’re alright kid.” The restaurant was rather packed, which was understandable, most of the soldiers who had been deployed into Europe had begun to return home and people were out celebrating their families’ reunification and the Allies’ triumph over Mussolini and the liberation of the Italian people. Made sense to celebrate in an American-Italian atmosphere.

“Ah! If it ain’t the Phantom of Boston in the flesh! Buonasera!” Before Tom could even take a look around the room, Jackie had already leapt from his seat and kissed him on the cheek.

“Hey server! Another round of your finest red wine!” he called back, still gripping Tom by the shoulders. “Tommy boy, I want you to enjoy yourself tonight, no expenses spared. Tonight is about celebration, freedom and family!” Tom didn’t know what to say, he was completely shell-shocked. Never before had he worked for a man who was so...friendly, and yet still completely capable of shoving his head down against the chopping block if push came to shove. It could be incredibly off-putting and yet...Tom could not recall ever working for a better boss.

“Whatever you say don,”

“Eh we ain’t doin’ that tonight no more, tonight we is all family!” Their table of mafia partners responded with drunken cheers in agreement, “Everybody call me Jackie! That goes for you too kid,” Jackie laughed with a slur as he tapped Tom’s chest.

Jackie had taken an exceptional liking to Tom ever since he killed his infamous rival, an importer of illegal substances by the name of ‘Smiley’. Tom had been hired by a small band of investigators to steakout the gang’s business. When one night went particularly bad Tom had found himself forced to shoot the boss, and the next day had found a perfumed envelope personally inviting him into Jackie’s crew the next morning underneath his apartment door.

Tom took his seat at the crowded table whilst Jackie excused himself to the bar “You stay right there kid, your eatin’ with me tonight at the head table!” before he made his way over to fill himself with what was certainly enough alcohol to kill a cow.

Jimmy was quick to introduce Tom to the rest of the mob’s most esteemed members and family, many of the men’s wives and siblings were also tied up in the gang or performed side jobs and night work while daylighting under fairly mundane work and social lives. The rest of the folks sitting at the table were content to talk loudly amongst themselves, telling amusing stories of their times in the mafia, friends they’d lost, people they had all but happily tossed to the fishes, men and women they’d loved and left. Spy was more than content to sit quietly and listen. He was much younger than anyone else in Jack’s Pack, and was possibly the newest member as well. The light atmosphere of the room was enhanced when somebody popped Sinatra on the Jukebox, he was no Trenet but Spy
liked the American well enough.

“Hey, dance with me?” A woman Tom hadn’t noticed before at the table gently grabbed his hand, and never one to deny a beautiful lady, Tom eagerly followed her out onto the floor where a few other couples had gathered. For the first time in his life Tom was thankful for the dance lessons his father had insisted he participate in as a child.

No matter how much he’d tried Spy couldn’t stop thinking about her. About Janice. He had always told himself that he had been sorry for what he had done to her and her family, that deep down he truly did care. Well, if his behavior was any indication, he clearly didn’t. The engineer, Demolitions man, and Heavy weapons guy all gave him a particularly tongue lashing over his refusal to go with Scout to the funeral.

“Damn it Spy! Ya spend all your time mopin’ around bout how Scout don’t think shit of ya, and the universe done gone and dropped the perfect opportunity to not just apologize for actin’ like a fool but maybe prove you give even the slightest teensie weensie bit of a shit about somebody other than yourself and this is how you go on about it!? Pah!”

“Spy says that spy loved this woman, have little baby scout with this woman, would do anything for this woman and now she is dead and this is how Spy act? Heavy not even going to dignify Spy with eye contact am so disgusted.”

“AY! You act like an ass and a half all worked up over Scout and the poor lad come cryin’ to you for a ride to his own MOTHER’S funeral, and you cannae even be bothered t’pull ya’self out of ye godforsaken room!? Well ah say whatever befalls ya whether it be bodily harm or emotional catastrophe, ye deserve a thousand times worse for tha way ye been actin’! Ye sorry sack of SHIT”

Even Medic seemed disappointed in him. The man hadn’t said a word since Scout and Sniper left together.

Fine!

If that’s how things were gonna be Spy’d go himself! See what all this fuss was about! Not like it would matter because clearly Spy didn’t care about anyone and never had!

“You’re the french guy right?”

“Oui,” Tom responded wittily with a smirk as he spun her around to the music.

“Well for a dirty no-good cowardly bastard you’ve got a rather handsome mug ya’know?” she teased, reaching up to caress his face, Tom gladly leaning into her soft touch.

“Well for a woman with such a mouth you sure do look kissable right about now,” she giggled and eagerly pulled Tom down for a soft kiss. His toes curled and he uttered a light moan against her lips, shuddering as her hands crept down her back. Eagerly, he deepened the kiss and grinned wickedly as he felt her grip grow tighter around him, pulling herself in closer.

“Wow,” she gasped, impressed but not completely surprised.

“Nothing beats a french kiss from a proper frenchman no?” Tom asked, his smile widening.
“Well ain’t you somethin’ else? Come on now, how’s about you and me let these nice people celebrate their way and you and I can step outside and celebrate my way, ”

Now Tom’s interest was piqued. Despite all his suave methods, his body was red hot and flustered all over like a silly school boy, and it only got worse the longer she spoke and looked at him. His knees were weak and he stumbled--almost falling as she lead him out the backdoor.

The wake was scenic if not somber, Sniper straightened his tie and took his seat amongst Scout’s brothers. Honestly he was a little taken aback by how heavy the turnout was, then again a woman with 8 sons of family having age was bound to have a large family. Scout didn’t look up at him once, keeping his eyes firmly on his shoes, poor kid. Sniper still remembered how bad he felt when his own folks kicked the bucket. He grieved and grieved, shutting down almost completely. Couldn’t bring himself to organize the funeral with the church and just up and buried them himself out back. His whole world had been shattered, he was nothing. He’d do anything to prevent that from happening to Scout.

The service continued on, a couple of Scout’s brothers and uncles stood to say some words. It had been a car crash, so for obvious reasons the casket was closed, which was relieving for Sniper. Scout may have wished for a face to face final goodbye but he knew this was much better for the boy in the long run. No days where her dead face imprints itself so everytime you close your eyes all you see is your dead mum.

The sky was a deep gray by the time the service had finished and the coffin put in the ground, Sniper, Scout, and the rest of the immediate family stayed whilst friends and members of the church offered their blessings and left one by one. Sniper, realizing he was probably intruding on a very intimate family moment turned to leave himself when someone reached out and grabbed his shoulder.

“Hey, you’re the guy who drove Jeremy right?”

“Well? Who’s asking?” The man answered by pulling Sniper down into a tight hug. “Sorry I--we can’t thank you enough. We all knew Ma woulda wanted the whole family here and we just...we don’t know what we would’ve done without you.”

Sniper broke the hug to step back and continue with a comfortable distance between them “D’aww ain’t nothin’. Anyone woulda done it really.” Anyone except Scout’s ACTUAL father, who had a whole lot more reason than Sniper to attend in the first place. What being the girl’s old boyfriend and all.

“You weren’t leavin’ were you?”

“Yeah I was just on my way, figured you fella’s would like some time alone with your family. Didn’t wanna intrude,” Sniper shoved his hands in his pockets.

“Are you kiddin’? You are the Sniper aren’t you? You work out in New Mexico with my baby brother?”

Sniper nodded “Yeah, don’t see what that’s got to do with it--”

“Holy shit! Jeremy is like crazy about you! You are all he ever talks about now, how cool you are and how nice and patient you are with him---and I lived with this guy so I know how impressive of a feat that is!”

Sniper blushed and rubbed his neck, embarrassed. “Shoot. I like’em plenty guess I just...didn’t know
I meant so much to him…”

“To him? You mean a lot to all of us here, driving him out here aside. You’ve put everyone at ease knowing lil’Jeremy is well looked after and cared for when he’s a million miles away from home fighting in some war or whatever. You ARE family man,”

Sniper didn’t know what to say. He looked over the brother’s shoulder and gazed over the family, men of all heights and shapes and ages were standing, talking to, and hugging one another, a couple even waved at him. He had been so alone between his parents dying and hanging around with Jeremy back on the base. He felt like he could cry.

“I...I guess I am--I mean--we are,”

The man laughed and threw an arm around Sniper’s shoulders, apparently this was a very affectionate family, “The guys and I were gonna go out and get lunch. Y’know, celebrate Ma’s life as it oughta.” He said with a cheeky wink.

“If you think that’s what your mum woulda wanted,”

“Oh I know it is. She always said the more the merrier in regards to family,”

*It was Tom’s job to learn the personal, private, and professional information of other people. And he was very good at his job and liked it very much. But never before had he felt this enticed, so invested, in the stories one had to tell about themselves. He immersed himself in her fire as she laughed about her days as a waitress during the depression as a means to help support the family. He offered her a sympathetic hand when she spoke of her poor dear younger sister and how she had died of tuberculosis while they were still in school--it was her medical bills that caused the need for her to work. How she never knew her mother but had an adoring older sister who married young and died as a nurse overseas. Tom found himself talking about his own in quite detail. Ah dear sweet Marie, how he missed her dearly. His heart felt like it was going to explode when she laugh uproariously and freely as he relaid stories of his days of a lad, pestering his sister and her friends and stealing cigarettes from the corner store to sell to the other school boys, oh how angry his poor dear father had been! This time it was her that kissed him, just a soft peck on the cheek; Tom had felt as though he’d lost all sense of gravity. For a moment he was floating and then falling. She laughed once more and helped him up and allowed him to sneak her back inside as to not raise suspicions. Although from the sounds of her stories, it didn’t seem like anybody would have been particularly surprised or aghast had he been less of a gentleman and herself less of a lady that particular evening.*

The limo was much more cramped than Sniper would have imagined, still it was pretty neat to get chauffeured around town like a big time celebrity or something.

“So Jeremy said you’re from Australia right? Ever shoot a kangaroo?”

Sniper smirked with a shrug “Few times yeah, that’s good eats,”

“You can EAT Kangaroo!?”

“I mean people eat rabbit and deer right? Don’t it make sense for Australians to eat their own critters?”
“Yeah but they’re invasive,”

Scout’s brothers all asked about a hundred questions each on the way to the restaurant, what was Australia like? Had he ever met the real Saxton Hale? What was it like being a sniper? Usually Sniper would feel overwhelmed with all this of attention, but it was always different with family, and they were family after all.

“Janice! There you are! Ah! I see you’ve met Thomas!” Tom’s hair stood on ends.

“Daddy!” Janice let go of Tom’s arm and threw her’s around the Don Jackie James. Tom’s blood froze in it’s veins. He had just spent the better portion of the night getting cozy with the daughter of his boss, his boss the mob-boss. He was certain his heart had stopped.

Spy had watched the entire funeral transpire disguised as a groundskeeper for the yard. So many familiar faces of people he had once known. There was something oddly sad about seeing them all again with so much life having passed, he wondered if they would have even recognized him if he hadn’t gone disguised. Poor poor dear Janice, his heart ached for her, it really did. And was that--yes! Old Jimmy ‘the lemon’ Jimmy, and that was Fred Two-shoes Mcgee! And Shortstack! And Penny ‘the Snitch’ Penelope Riverstein! Spy’s stomach sank. Jonathan, little johnny with eyes as big as the moon. Poor poor little Johnny, he had to be at least 32 now, 33? Spy had lost count, if he had ever been counting. He had had such sweet dark curls and pinned for Spy’s attention more than anything else in the world, and there had been a time in which Spy had been happy to appease. Spy watched as he stepped back from the podium and went to sit with who was presumably his wife and his own children.

Poor Jeremy. Poor poor Jeremy. Spy held his breath as he watched the scout in his chair, head down, politely declining the invitation to stand and speak. Nobody blamed him. There was a deep pang from within his chest that Spy could not accurately place. He wanted so badly to disappear, to run, and yet he couldn’t pull his eyes away. God damn it. God damn it. The longer Spy watched Sniper do NOTHING as his son—as Scout grieved just made his blood boil.

Slowly, the other guests began to clear out, offering their condolences and hugging a few of Janice’s sons. He watched as dear dear sweet Johnny approached that godforsaken bushman and...hugged him...before bringing him over into the group with Jeremy and the others. Slowly, Spy shook his head in a forced disbelief. Spy couldn’t hear them but we watched as Sniper eagerly mingled with the other men, laughing with them, even receiving a few more tender embraces amongst them before they all climbed into the black limousine the family had solely arrived in together.

That stupid stupid busman.

Spy’s skin grew dry, his eyes itched and his heart fell.

No.

No, this was HIS fault.

He finally understood. He finally fucking got it.

All this time, it could’ve been so simple and...and nice.

Scout and his brother’s didn’t care who or what Sniper was, just that he was there, that he... cared.
Now alone, Spy let his cloak fall and took the time to lay his own flowers amongst those left for Janice. Red tulips. Her favorite. He still remembered. God he still remembered, she snorted when she laughed. It was completely unbecoming of a lady but she had never really been a lady. But god what a woman she had been. So bold and full of life, Spy’s first real friend since he left France, maybe the first real friend he had ever had. Oh and how clever she was, she got the two of them out of as much trouble as she got them into, and he had loved her for it, they wouldn’t have had it any other way.

Good god he still loved her.

He was a fool. He was still a fool. He had been a fool.

And now he had nothing.

Spy allowed himself to collapse to his knees as he sobbed, really sobbed. Not the crocodile tears he shed to earn sympathy. All the emotions and memories he had worked so hard to keep buried. God how Spy had wished he could have decloaked and re-joined his old gang members. They were the closest thing to a real family he had…

Dear lord...Spy could’ve died right then and there, this whole thing had been staring himself right in the face.

Scout wasn’t too different from Spy,

Scout was EXACTLY like him.

The realization washed over him. Don HAD loved him, all those private shooting lessons, all those family dinners. He had been so so excited when Spy confirmed his intentions to marry his daughter after they discovered she was once again with child. He had been so shocked by the level of affection between him and Spy and the other gang members. Like when a starving man finally eats and is overwhelmed by the flavor. Spy remembered the horrible fights he had had with his own father one he had come of age, neither would ever do anything to hurt the other but it wasn’t unusually for plates, vases, or furniture to be broken or damaged beyond repair after one of their squabbles. Spy had loved Don, as odd as he first seemed. He had been so eager to kill and lie in his name, in his defense. He had been utterly stunned when he told Spy he...he wanted him to call him dad. Since he was marrying his daughter and all. But honestly? Spy had never felt happier. And he had thrown it all away and pushed it all down until the own bile left over from his time back in France was all that remained to pass down to Jeremy.

And just like his father before him, Spy had pushed his only son away with his cold obsession over status and appearance. Spy clenched his fists against the grown as the rain began to drizzle.

This was what he deserved.
“--and then I say ‘If that’s what he looks like on the inside I don’t wanna know what he looks like on the outside!’ The men’s giddy laughter filled the small back dining room, the brothers had insisted on taking Sniper out to their favorite American-Italian place, with a sign out front that boasted ‘Best Alfredo Sauce Outside of Italy!’

“Ay yo Joey didn’t ya get it the other way around?”

“Ah shut yer trap Jared!”

“Ay Jeff how about you shut your fuckin’ trap for once ay?”

“Ay c’mon! Can youse guys stop clowning around for one fuckin’ afternoon!? We’ve gots a guest for christ sake!” The brothers all immediately stopped their roughhousing and multiple conversations to turn and look at Sniper. Luckily for Sniper, their server had just arrived

“Buon pomeriggio! Ay! It has been a while since you’ve all been here together!” A portly Italian man walked out of the kitchen, pushing a large cart of food towards their table.

“Aye yo how ya doin’ Giuseppe?”

“Oh I have seen better days, some-a asshole party of 9 has-a really been-a pulling the staff thin,”

“It’s good to see you too Giuseppe,” joked Jacob

“I swear-a youse a boys keep-a me young!” The older Italian man laughed,

Sniper would have sworn he never saw so much food in his life, than again it was intended to feed 8 grown men.

“--And finally a chicken Alfredo for a--” Giuseppe blinked. Weren’t there only 8 James brothers? He quickly started counting off heads on his fingers. Johnny, Jimmy, Jeffrey, Jared, Jason, Jerry, Joey, Jeremy, and--

“I’m’a so’a sorry, I do not’a believe we’ve’a met’a before,” The man was looking at Sniper now, who blinked in surprise behind his glasses.

“Yo Giuseppe! Check it you’re gonna fuckin’ love this man! Ok so like you remember how our baby brother Jeremy over here booted off to New Mexico or some shit I don’t know, like fucking 6 years ago? Well our man Micky swooped right n when we needed him, like…like a

“Like freakin’ superman himself man!”

“Yeah! Exactly!”

“And it’s just great cause like, we always like worry about Jeremy and like shit man. Like if he’s eating or whatever, but it turn out we ain’t gots to worry cause fuckin’ superman Mick over here’s been lookin out for lil’ Jeremy!” Jim threw an arm around Sniper and Sniper laughed nervously, he was not used to this much attention. He was an outright recluse, and now all these men he had only met earlier today were praising’ him left and right like he was some sorta god-send. It was as if he couldn’t go a minute without someone asking about or swooning over his Australian heritage. Come
to think of it, as much of a hoot they’ve been having and as much as Scout’s brothers kept going on and on about how cool Sniper was, Scout hadn’t spoken up one since they left the graveyard.

The dinner continued on like that, Sniper shared stories of the outback and was met with many stories from the brothers growing up in Boston, it seemed like while most of them moved within the greater Massachusetts/New England area, only Scout had travelled so far as New Mexico. After the meal the brothers dropped Sniper off back at the graveyard so he could drive the camper van back to the house.

The graveyard was much the same, just much emptier than it had been earlier, save for one lone dark figure standing...standing over the tombstone of...of Scout’s ma.

“Excuse me--”Curious, Sniper approached the stranger slowly, they may have been a lone relative or friend who either hadn’t made the ceremony or wanted some time with the lady alone."Spook!?”

“Afternoon bushman, lovely service, terribly sorry I could not attend,”

“What the hell do you think you’re doing here!?”

“For a man whose job relies on him sitting still and waiting quietly I’d have assumed you be a better listener Mickolas,”

“Don’t call me that--sides you have some nerve showin’ your slimey ass up here of all days!”

“Is it such a crime for a man to wish to pay his respects?” Spy shot back, snarky and tired of this conversation and of the bushman accusing him of mischievous he had no intention to commit.

“Pah! Respect! That’s real funny spook, you ain’t got no respect! Not for anybody but yourself! And I’ll be damned if I go another second letting you--” Sniper’s threats were cut off by a quick and hard SMACK across his face, nearly throwing him off his feet he was so shocked.

“How...DARE you...” Spy spat, with more contempt than Sniper had ever heard in his usual insults, his eyes red and puffy. The spook hadn’t been...cryin’ had he?

“How DARE you come torment me after I have already lost everything! Does this amuse you bushman!? To come and kick me when I am at the lowest of lows!? Do you have no SHAME!?"

“What in sam hill are you going on about now!?” Snipe demanded, face still pink and sore.

Spy sighed and sat down against the grassy slope, he should’ve known better than to expect Sniper be smart enough to understand the immense pain he had put him through. “You’ve met Scout’s brothers haven’t you?”

“Yeah…” Sniper rubbed his cheek and took a seat next to the Spy. “They’re right fine blokes, good to know Scout’s got family to….you know..”

“He’s got you too you know,”

Sniper hummed and looked away, not sure how to comfort Spy. Or even if he deserved comfort.

“It’s….it’s alright. You’re….you’re good for him,” It pained spy greatly to admit defeat to the bushman but he had to, in order to ease some of the immense guilt that threatened to tear him apart from the inside outside. “You’ve...won.”

Sniper blinked and shook his head in disbelief “Spy it ain’t a competition,”
“They love you, they accept you, you...belong with them,”

“Spy--” Sniper was getting tired of Spy talking about him and Scout like it was accidental, like Spy hadn’t actively pushed the Scout away and was a mere victim or circumstances. “Spy you know that...that it’s not just me right?”

“How do you mean bushman?”

“I mean...Scout doesn’t just...he don’t just like me for nothing!”

Spy grunted in response.

“Hey! I’m tryin’ to be serious here! Scout didn’t just wake up one day and decide he wanted to be my best buddy, it---these things take time see? Ya can’t just force it.”

Spy sighed and leaned against his knees, “She said the same thing....all those years ago,”

“Who?---OH! Oh...Spy I’m...I’m real sorry. You really loved each other huh?”

Spy shut his eyes to soothe the fierce burning of tears and nodded. Oh Janice...his sweetest and dearest companion. He promised himself he’d never love so deeply again. The burning in his chest that he had managed to ignore up til now would dull with the coming years but it would never be filled. He’d go the rest of his days half-formed.

Sniper, now deeply regretting intruding on Spy’s solitude, pulled away and quietly walked backwards back up to his camper. As nice as t was to know the spook did have a heart after all, Sniper had had his fill of heart wrenching emotional outpours from the morning’s ceremony.

Afterall, Scout would be waiting for him back at the house.

Initially, it was easy for sniper to write the size of the James’ manor off as exuberant wastefulness. A needless show of wealth and fortune. However, with the house now filled and bustling with the numerous families, Sniper’s tune was quickly changed.

“AY Mickey!” A mildly familiar voice called, Jeff--it was Jeff! “We’re playin’ poker! Wanna be dealt in?”

“No, fraid not, some other time. Any of you see Sc--I mean, any of you seen Jeremy around?”

“Jeremy? Oh yeah! I think he’s up in his room, think the funeral hit him hard,”

“Thanks, I really owe you one mate,”

Jeff laughed “Hey whats family for?”

A shiver ran down Sniper’s spine as Spy’s words echoed through his skull.

Scout curled up in on himself in his bed, he loved his brothers but why did they have to say all those things about Sniper? What would Ma think? Today was supposed to be about her, and Sniper went and---no, Sniper didn’t do anything. Ugh. What was he supposed to do? Tell Sniper he was worried that he was taking over? That he didn’t like that HE thought of him as a dad? That he was worried he was disrespecting his dead mother? No. That was stupid

“Scout? Jeremy?” There was a knock at the door followed by his voice.
“Yeah. C’mon in Snipes,”

Sniper walked in and was not surprised to find Scout curled up, as sad as he still found it. “Hey roo, how ya holdin’ up?”

Scout merely whimpered and turned away as Sniper sat down on the bed next to him.

“C’mere Roo,” Sniper’s voice was warm, comforting and welcoming, Scout reluctantly crawled into his arms, ashamed of his need to be comforted. C’mon then, what’s at your mind love?” Scout balled up his fists in Sniper’s shirt and whimpered in response.

“Ya ain’t my ma!”

Sniper frowned and stroked Scout’s hair “No I ain’t Scout, no I ain’t.”
By the time Scout and Sniper were packing up into the camper van, Sniper was a fully fledged ‘brotha’ as John, Jim, Jeff, Jason, Jared, Jerry, and Joey now proudly called him. It was...kinda nice if Sniper was honest with himself. It hadn’t always been easy or particularly fun being an only child as much as Sniper valued his alone time. Course it wasn’t the type of thing he would’ve ever expected to change. He thought it wouldn’t have been that different than the team, except it was. It was in the most wonderful and unexpected ways. Despite being the second-youngest Jerry was a good bit older than Scout and had felt guilty about leaving his Ma alone with Jeremy and had instead stayed home to help support the family, Joey was on the local police force, John had moved across town and gone into the family ‘business’...whatever that meant. Jason and Jerry worked down in the steel mills, and Jim was a school teacher working towards his masters. Sniper was charmed and enraptured by their stories of both simple adult working life, their families, and of the shenanigans they had gotten up to in the city as kids.

“What about you Mick? Can’t spend all your time babysittin’ Jer now,”

“Hey! I resent that!” Scout had declared in annoyance to a chorus of laughter from the other men.

Sniper smiled and shook his head, really he hadn’t done too much of anything before becoming a mercenary. When he was about 10 or so his dad, god bless his soul, had taught him to fire a rifle, figuring he was old enough to help him protect the herd from dingos. Found that it was really the first, and since only, thing his boy was really good at, a natural even. That’s what he had told him, “Son you’re a natural!”

On his worse nights Sniper blamed his old man for the way things were now, for pushing him into gun-slinging and hunting. Signed him on for just about every junior marksman competition he could find. Course with his social and general anxiety and all Sniper had horrible stage fright and made a piss-poor mockery of himself at every show. Still, he was happy to be making his dad so proud. Sniper kept turning up to each and every one until one year the knockback from the gun had knocked his glasses straight off his face, and like a newborn deer (he had just hit his growth spurt) clumsily stumbled about, trying to find them without breaking the lenses before slipping and falling face first in the mud. All the other kids had laughed their asses off as he stumbled about like a doofus. When he finally got them back on, he wished he hadn’t, the competition had come to a pause as the kids all pointed and laughed, their parents in the stands gulling them on as the ref blew his whistle in attempts to settle the ruckus. He had never been so humiliated in all his life and ran from the range red-faced and in tears, clothes ruined with mud.

His father, who had been watching uncomfortably from the stands followed him out to the parking lot, after that his dad never made him sign up for any competition.

Still, Sniper knew it wasn’t his dad’s fault he was...like he was, no home, no ‘regular’ job, no wife, no kids, no family, he had never been right for people, his comfort zone was slim, his dad just wanted to make sure he didn’t grow up to be completely good for nothing.
Still, Sniper hated talking about himself and his situation. People always tried to hide their feeling and fake being nice, like he wasn’t completely pathetic.

“Your parents stay with you? That’s very kind and responsible of you to take care of them,” No...I live with them. It’s a family farm so there ain’t any rent and we get our water from a well and electricity from a windmill.

“Oh! Well...it’s a farm right? They need you to stay and work!” Last sheep died in 1970, crops haven’t grown in decades, soil ain’t got the right nutrients mate.

“...Oh….well I’m sure…” --and it ain’t like I was marryin’ any farm girls out in their daisy dukes workin’ the fields and milkin’ the cows, never even talked to a girl that weren’t my mom. Let alone children to take over....

He hated it. The condescension, the performative kindness. He knew what he was.

Or he thought he did at least, cause these folks ‘round him were hangin’ onto every word, practically falling off the edge of their seat, just over Sniper shootin’ dingoes! Not a lot of Australians traveled outside the country, he was a living spectacle! And for once, Sniper didn’t mind the attention.

“Yep, shot my first dingo when I was 10, low-brow bastard goin’ off after the lambs,” the room was filled with Ooos and Aahs, Sniper smiled to himself, he could get used to this.

“You ever meet Saxton Hale!?"

“Uh yeah, we both have Jerry, c’mon you guys know that! He’s like 300 freakin’ pounds of muscle!”

Sniper chuckled “Heh, yeah, still don’t get why that bloke needs us for exactly,”

Breakfast was much the same, except this time with eggs, more stories were shared and Sniper couldn’t help but find himself growing incredibly attached to Scout’s family, as awful a reason for their trip out here had been, he was glad they’d come.

What surprised Sniper more was when everyone, everyone, insisted on hugging him goodbye. Even uncle Jimmy, who pulled Sniper into a tight hug and thanked him again for bringing Scout home.

Ah the camper, as nice as the manor had been, Sniper wouldn’t trade his ol winnie for nothing. Nothing could ever beat

“So...you’re family seemed to like me fine,” Sniper mentioned once he and Scout were back on the road.

“Heh, are you kidding’ me!? They’re freakin’ nuts for you!”

Sniper’s cheeks turned rosey “Oh come on now...they was just bein’ polite ‘m sure,”

Scout laughed “Holy crap man I hope you like Bostom cause they ain’t ever gonna stop pesterin’ me about bringin’ you ‘round now!”

“...and Dell?” Sniper found himself saying before he could properly think about and stop himself from saying it.

Scout blinked, a little surprised by Sniper’s mention of the relationship “Yeah...I uh...I don’t see why not. Most of my brothers are married and bring their wives and girlfriends to those types of things,”
Scout chuckled and rubbed his neck awkwardly “actually uh...I’m kind of the only one who usually doesn’t got a date…”

Sniper chuckled “Ahaha, ‘m not sure Truckie would agree with you assessment of our relationship there roo,”

“Huh? Wait--but you guys like kiss and hold hands and junk!?!--”

“--That wasn’t exactly what I meant roo--” Sniper hated how red and flustered he got when any aspect of Truckie or his relationship to the man was discussed, as ‘cute’ or ‘sweet’ Truckie insisted it was.

“--wait...aw Snipes don’t tell me your ‘the girl’!”

Sniper was bright red when he slammed on the brakes and Scout bucked forwards against the steering wheel.

“We’re both ‘ the man’ alright? I mean...obviously…” Sniper huffed, still a little touchy on the subject. As much as he loved Truckie he hated how flustered and silly he made him.

“So….you really love him huh?” Scout asked, innocent of the fire burnin’ Sniper alive from the inside out.

“Jesus roo! Ya--....ya can’t just ask that!”

“Hey! What’s the big deal anyways?”

Sniper sighed and relaxed against the steering wheel “I’m....I’m sorry Scout...I..yeah...yeah you know what? I think I do love that ol’bucket of bolts,” Sniper said, slowly accepting the emotions that had been rattling around his insides. “Yeah...yeah..Holy Dooley!”

“What!” Sniper’s rapid change in tone and sudden outburst caught Scout off guard.

Sniper ran a hand over his forehead and giggled uncontrollably “I really AM in love with truckie aren’t I? Yeah. Yeah! Yeah I am!” Sniper nodded along to his own assessment.

Scout smiled back “Well hey--that’s great man! I’m happy for ya!”

Sniper slid down back against his seat, another realization crashing down upon him “Crikey...what am I gonna do?”

“Ya could marry’im. Ain’t that what adults do when they love each other?” Scout

God , Sniper could just die.

“Ahaha, hey c’mon man I’m only foolin’ around, we’ll stop and pick up flowers or somethin’, you’ll see.” Sniper turned back to the road and hummed in acceptance, yeah, flowers, that sounded nice.

On their second day they stopped in a sleepy Missouri town, they ate dinner and checked into a motel for the night. Sniper said he was off to get gas for the drive tomorrow, and Scout stayed back and watched TV.

“Can you get the door for me roo?”
“That you Snipes?” Scout asked, walking from the bed to open the door.

“Check it out! Think he’ll like em?” asked Sniper as he walked in and set down a vase of flowers down on the nightstand.

“Uh yeah, think so,” Scout shrugged, “Think he’s a flower guy?”

Sniper leaned back on his heel, shifting his weight “Can’t say he doesn’t. ‘Sides if he don’t this was your idea so ‘m off the hook”

Scout laughed “He’s not gonna be mad”

“S’pose you’re right,” Sniper flopped down on the bed next to Scout “Anything good on the telly?”

“Nah, bunch of local crap,” Scout flipped the TV off, setting the remote aside and stretching before lying down against the cheap motel pillows they always piled on to make the rooms appear fancier.

Sniper frowned and rolled over on his side so he could look Scout in the eye, “Still thinkin’ bout your mum huh?”

Scout, who had been in vain trying all evening to do anything else sighed in defeat, “Yeah…”

“It’s alright. I mean...It’s terrible---what’s happened. But I understand what your feelin’,”

“Hey Snipes?”

“Yeah Roo?”

“What was your mom like?”

Sniper nearly choked on his own breath. “What?”

“Oh shit--I’m real sorry I didn’t mean--”

“No...no it’s...it’s alright Scout. She uh...she woulda liked you a lot,”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah,” Sniper nodded with a light chuckle, “She was all big on community and loving thy neighbors. Sweet lady;”

“Oh, hey uh Snipes I’m real sorry about...y’know,”

Sniper smirked “You don’t have to apologize, it’s alright.”

“My ma would’a liked you a whole bunch too ya know;”

“Oh really?”

“Yeah, me’n my brothers were all loudmouths. She used to joke about how we were all gonna end up with real shy soft-spoken wives just to balance us out;”

Sniper chuckled “Wouldn’t say Ms. Pauling is much in the way of shy,” soft-spoken maybe, in the presence of the Administrator anyways, but than again most people were.

“Aw hey shuddup! Neva shoulda introduced you to my brothers…” Scout joked, hitting Sniper with a pillow.
Sniper laughed and recoiled “Hey I liked your brothers, real nice group of blokes you fellas have goin’ there.” Sniper was embarrassed to say it, but he had been over the moon when his brothers had welcomed Sniper with such open arms. It felt...nice to be part of a family again. Got awful lonesome he did.

“Yeah well---we can be a real pain together,”

Sniper smiled softly “So can the team, don’t mind’em either,”

Scout rested his head against the nape of Sniper’s neck and sighed contently “I’m really glad you came to this with me Snipes,”

“Of course Roo, nice to visit the city,”

“Yeah, you lived on a farm right?”

“Yeah, we raised sheep.”

“Oh that’s cool,”

“Yeah, mum and dad always wanted me to move back home, take over the farm with my own family, get married, have my own kids, y’know. Adult stuff.”

“Ha, thought you said you weren’t lookin’ to marry Engie
“Boy you just expect everything to move as fast as you don’t you?”

Scout laughed and propped himself up on his elbows “Aw c’mon man! Yknow…” Scout swalloed nervously “…You know you’re y’know...like a..like uh…”

Sniper corked his eyebrows “Like a…?”

“You know...like a dad,” Scout whimpered in embarrassment, turning away fro sniper quickly, unable to bring himself to look at the man.

Sniper’s expression softened Hey Roo?” he asked as he wrapped his arms around Scout’s back, resting his chin on top of Scout’s head, much to his surprise. “I’m real glad you told me you felt that way, cause I, y’know, have taken a liking to thinking of you as ‘my boy’ me’self,”

Scout laughed, wiping a stray tear from his eye “Aw c’mon man--”

“No I’m...I’m bein’ serious!” Sni

“...You’re not gonna make me call you ‘dad’ are you?”

Sniper barked a laugh “Nah, when have I ever made you do anything?”

Scout paused, turning halfway to rest his cheek against Sniper’s shirt “...can I call you dad? I mean--of course not in front the guys or nothin’”

Caught off guard, Sniper couldn’t hold back a squeak

“Yes"
“Aw darlin’” said the Engineer as he took the large bouquet from Sniper into his arms. “Ya shouldn’t have” Engineer reached up for Sniper’s face and kissed his cheek. Always the gentleman, Sniper giddily pulled back his hat and grinned ear to ear.

“Hope’d you’d like’em,”

“Course I do! You’re too sweet y’know that?” Engineer asked with a chuckle, playfully shoving Sniper, before his long dangly arms wrapped around him from behind, pulling the two of them down to the floor.

“For someone who just got back from a cross-country funeral, you’re certainly in a good mood,” Engineer chuckled.

“Well…I think I might of…kind of adopted Scout?”

“I don’t think that’s a ‘kind of’ kind of thing’ darling, what happened exactly?”

Sniper laughed nervously, the cheesy-ness of the last few days beginning to dawn on him, “Scout and I were just talkin’, bout how much his family liked me…’bout how he liked to...like to think of me as uh...as his dad since Spy is--

“--I know,”

Sniper swallowed dryly “And I may have told him that...uh..that I kind of think of like thinkin’ of him as my boy and all....”

“Aww look at you, my big strong family-man,” the Engineer purred, nuzzling his head against Sniper's neck.

Sniper purred contently “Quite a nice little family we’ve built ourselves ey? For a couple world-wary mercenaries out in the middle of the desert?” God, Dell had missed that rich smoky voice of his.

“Mmm, s’pose so darl, you and I ‘nd Scout and Pyro--”

“Pyro?”

Engineer grinned in a forlorn sort of way up at Sniper, “Yeah..well, I’ve always looked out for the little guy ‘nd a couple years ago we tried to go through with some paperwork. Kinda silly really but call me old-fashioned or stuck in my ways..”

“What paperwork?”

“Oh, there were just some forms that woulda legally recognized Pyro as my kin in the eyes of the state, but we needed a signature from the original family ‘nd caretakers and well...that just wasn’t going to happen…” Engineer trailed off, freezing as he and Sniper held close eye contact.

“Crikey…”

“You don’t suppose...
“Suppose there’s no shame in tryin’,” Engie shrugged.

“...Think you could give me a ride down to the Teufort town hall?”

Engineer chuckled “Really? What? You tired of driving?”

“Heh, like that’d ever happen,” Sniper joked, before he returned to the process of drowning himself in the Engineer’s deep succulent ocean.

Abhorrent. That’s how Spy’d describe his flight back to New Mexico. Simply abhorrent, first the flight was delayed, then there wasn’t any news for him or the other passengers for 2 hours, then the barista lady spilled coffee on his nice shirt, and then his flight was changed, and THEN he was told his baggage would cost extra. As if his baggage hadn’t costed him enough these past few weeks. Spy sighed as he watched the grey clouds outside his window, a fitting background for his current predicament. Sure he had been glad he took the journey out to see he--out to the funeral, but the engineer had been right, it should’ve been Spy who had taken Scout and not Sniper.

Or was he?

As much as Spy had been trying to put Janice behind him he found himself plagued by the memory of another, of memories he had long repressed years ago. Her father.

Don, or Jack as he had been asked to be called, was a large man, in both meanings of the word. He could lighten a room when in the right mood for it, always the life of the party, always the center of attention, and not just because he was head of the Boston Mafia. He ruled the streets with a deep voice that demanded attention and a strong, guiding hand that Spy had clung to for his first few years in the states. He was like a---no, he was a father to him. As big and as loud as he was he was never too big to be kind, that had surprised Spy, who hailed from a neighborhood where you were as only as good as your name, and your name was only as good as your bank account and the stacks of cash and fine arts and pearls you adorned your house and loved ones with. No. Spy had been let in almost instantaneously, and it was no question how or why or where Janice became the woman she was, she was, afterall, a chip off the old block and all.

And so was Scout. Spy just didn’t see it until now.

Spy stiffened a cry as the plane began to descend, it wouldn’t be long now before he would be welcomed by the shunning of his teammates.

Spy offered a shallow smile to the stewardess who informed him they’d be emptying the aircraft soon and to keep his seat belt buckled until the plane came to a complete stop. As he left the plane Spy felt empty, light, weightless. He felt more unbalanced and airy with both feet on solid ground than he had when he was literally miles in the air. Once he made his way over to his chauffeured ride, Spy felt as though his legs might give out. Once inside, once being driven, his weight returned tenfold. He felt as though he had been cut open, had his insides pulled out and replace with rocks, and sewn back up. By the time he was back at the base he couldn’t tell which way was up, just that he wanted to scamp off to his smoking room and drink until it didn’t matter anymore.

“Pregnant!?” Thomas sputtered, this was bad, really REALLY bad. He had a good thing going on here, this was bad.

“Doctor said I’m at 3 months,” Janice sighed with a shrug.

“Well what are we going to do!?”

“Jonsie please, everything is going to be okay,” Spy paced anxiously around the kitchen, this was it,
he thought to himself, Jack was going to have him hanged just like all of Janice’s past exes.

“Daddy likes you, you’re good with the kids, everything is going to be ok,” Spy stopped his pacing and took his seat across from Janice at the kitchen table. He couldn’t help a small reluctant smile, she always kept such a cool head.

“Alright,”

At dinner that night Spy’s blood ran cold as he watched Jack down his third glass of wine. He had really been hoping to have this talk sober and was worried what the much larger man would be capable of without his inhibitions.

“Daddy,” Janice uttered sweetly, placing a hand on her father’s forearm as he laughed heartily at another man’s recounting of a recent shoot out. “Thomas and I have something we need to tell you…”

The mention of Thomas certainly caught Jack’s attention, “Hmph? What is it dear?”

Thomas swallowed dry, the building anticipation nearly choking him.

“I--we’re pregnant,”

The table went silent. All laughter and chatter ceased, with all eyes on the young couple.

“I--”

“Tom, is this true?” Jack asked, turning to his youngest gang member with complete seriousness in his voice.

“Oh...yes sir...” Thomas scolded himself for allowing his voice to quaver as it did. Janice was relying on him to step up and be a big man right now, which was always very hard to do in the presence of Jack.

“And you Sweetie, you love this man don’tcha?” Jack piqued an eyebrow, a heavy breath was felt throughout the dining room.

Janice laughed “yes, of course,” the mood lightened and Jack even let out a hearty laugh,

“Wonderful! We’ll hold a wonderful Spring Wedding!” The room burst into applause as Thomas fell back into his chair, heart in his throat.

“I--I won’t let you down sir,”

Jack laughed and slapped Thomas on the back “Ah ah we’re not havin’ any of that anymore, from now on you’re calling me dad!”

Despite the frantic racing of his heart, Thomas felt surprisingly comfortable and at ease. Maybe things would be alright after all.

Oh how foolish and young he had been. Except perhaps Sniper was just young and foolish enough to keep the promises he had made to Scout. At this point, drowning in his own lifetime of regrets and miseries, that was all he could hope for.

Spy took another sip of cold bitter whisky, the burn on his tongue drew out memories of laughter and
tender kisses from a time long past. Oh how young and foolish he had been in deed. His was a
dangerous line of work but heir to a don? Head of a syndicated crime organization? For a man his
age of his history he would’ve been dead in the water, as they had indicated he would be if he ever
returned to Boston again.

He wondered if Janice had remembered him, if she had thought of him at all in her final days. For he
was sure that when his time came he would think of her--

KNOCK KNOCK

For once, Spy was almost glad to be interrupted amongst his brooding.

With a sigh, Spy stood and pulled himself reluctantly from his armchair over to the door “What?
What do you-- Bushman ” Spy’s lips curled cruelly around his mean little nickname as if he were
sucking on a lemon wedge.

“Eh...nice to see you too Spy” Sniper was only half caught off guard by Spy’s sour expression, it
wasn’t exactly like Spy had been all too happy to see him in the graveyard.

“What do you want? And you better make it quick,”

“Look...I know you ‘nd I have had our differences…” Spy rolled his eyes

“Oh like stealing my son?”

Sniper swallowed nervously, color flushed from his face. He handed Spy the form he had been
holding and walked away.

One glance at the paperwork and Spy could already tell he’d need more than a drink.

“ Willkommen zurück Freund Spy! How was your flight?” Medic cheerily greeted his masked friend
with a bright grin, it was rare for Spy to visit, and Medic gladly accepted the company from one of
the three other ‘educated’ mercs. Well the Demoman DID have an education, he was just. Too
drunk. To make use of it in conversation.

“ Bonne après-midi, it is good to be back at the base,” Spy sighed, exhausted. The past few days had
been anything but relaxing, enough to make the usual chaos of Team Fortress appear so by
comparison.

“Please please, do come in,” Spy smiled weakly as Medic stepped aside and allowed him into the
medibay. The familiar hum from the various experiments and machines medic had running 24/7
filled his ears. Spy shuddered at the sight of a stray bag of baboon food that had been left out in the
corner.

“Judging by your expression am I to guess the relations with Herr Scout did not ideally no?”

Spy sighed and frowned. “No..no. He’s a grown man and canmake his own decisions,” Medic
frowned and helped Spy to a chair “Please do sit down, you look simply exhausted. Sitting cooped
up in your room breathing in all that smoke can’t be good for you you know, oh especially at our
age--”

“Please don’t remind me,” Spy rubbed his temple in attempt to soothe his pounding headache. The
passage of time, of years, decades even, hung heavily around his shoulders.

“Herr Spy, I am...deeply sorry. That trip could not have been an easy one. Here, please, I insist.” Medic pushed a chilled glass into Spy’s hands and he smiled, graciously welcoming the alcohol. Sputtering and nearly choking when the burn of alcohol was absent.

“It’s water, I do wish you’d drink more of it.”

Spy shook his head and rolled his eyes “Well it was certainly sobering.”

Medic chuckled and pulled up a chair next to Spy, “Care for a game of chess? I find it helps clear the mind when times are troubling.”

Spy smiled warmly at the not-doctor “That sounds lovely,”

Medic flashed his trademark grin and eagerly leaped from his seat with vitatitly other could only dream of having at his age, before shoving a chess table down between where the two mercs had been sitting.

“So, how is Herr Scout if it is not inappropriate to ask? I haven’t had the chance to speak with him since he returned this morning,”

“He’s...well I think he’s happy anyways,” Spy moved his pawn in an attempt not to think of the form sitting in his lap.

“Yes, well he and Herr Sniper certainly have been getting on rather well haven’t they? And how are you Herr Spy? It isn’t healthy to bottle yourself up like that?” Medic asked as he placed down a knight.

Spy swallowed, “The trip, it uh...it was a lot.”

“It must’ve been years since you’ve been to the North East ja? Unless you and the boy’s mother had been making secret trips the rest of the team didn’t know about ja?” Medic teased.

“Janice...Janice and I didn’t keep contact....” Spy pursed his lips and held his head in his hands, so many regrets, so many feelings long forgotten bubbling to the surface.

Medic paused “Herr Spy...if this is too much and you wish to be alone--”

“No…” Spy looked up, teary eyed but managing a soft smile “It...it helps to talk,”

Medic instantly relaxed, “Ja, it certainly does.”

The game was soon forgotten about as Spy happily spent the rest of the afternoon chatting away about the past few weeks, and even events and people years and years in the past, and Medic was more than happy to hear him out, smiling contently and listening along.

“So you have a sister still living in France ja?”

“We haven’t spoken at length in years, can’t remember for the love it why thought,”

“Ah wha t is in the past is in the past!” Medic declared, absently moving a chess piece illegally.

“Hm yes well, perhaps I’ll pay her a visit...”

“So eager to get off base now are we?” teased Medic.
Spy chuckled lightly and shook his head, playing with a chess piece in his fingers “She’s married with children,”

“Ah, so it is the jealousy that has kept you zwei Geschwister apat ja?”

“Halbgeschwister,”

“What?”

“Oh...nevermind,” Spy responded with a hand gesture, “It’s just, it’s been a while since I have paid a proper visit,”

“Don’t want to make the same mistake we made with Herr Scout now do we?” Medic chuckled.

“Perhaps I am not as cutout for fatherhood as I had hoped afterall,”

Medic snickered “Yes that has been made quite clear,”

Spy sighed and leaned back into his chair “Yes well...”

“You and Janice had not wanted children I thought?”

“Janice had children when we met, and it had been easy enough to--”

“But none of them were of your, heritage as it were,”

Spy cringed, lips pulled back taut. He had never particularly enjoyed confrontation, especially of the emotional kind.

“Oh, I think we’ve struck upon something Herr Spy,”

“Well Sniper certainly seems more cutout for it than I am--than I was ,” Spy mumbled, turning over the form in his hand before reluctantly handing it over to Medic. Medic took it without saying anything and quickly skimmed over the fine print.

“Seems as though Sniper certainly believes he is,”

Spy groaned again “I...He....We BOTH know he is! That’s the problem!”

Medic laughed “Finally bested you has he?”

Spy groaned again, this time much louder, head in hands “Don’t remind me! It is completely humiliating!”

Medic chuckled again, crossing his legs “And how do you think Herr Scout feels about the whole arrangement?”

Spy’s cheeks burnt in shame, he had been an utter ass towards the boy hadn’t he? All in vein to preserve his own name and legacy Scout had no investment in.

“He....he didn’t have a particularly good male presene in his formative years no,” Spy still cringed at the thought of those barbaric ‘uncles’ of his raising him...teaching him to be so unabashed and unashamed, so open with his feelings, so brutish...but than again…

Wasn’t that why he had loved Janice?
So open so BIG so bold, no woman had ever done to him what she had done, and Spy doubted any woman would again. Wasn’t that why he had loved Jack? And Jimmy and John and Jacobi and the others? Why he had been so ecstatic for those first few months of pregnancy? So ready and excited for a future together, with them all?

Wasn’t that why Scout loved Sniper?

Spy swallowed hard, anxious and ashamed all at once, Medic’s warm gaze absolutely driving him mad. “He...he deserved better,”

“Ja, well, wouldn’t you look at the time? You must be starving, and besides, I find the food goes down easier voluntarily,”

“Soldier...can be rather forceful,” Spy softly agreed.

In truth, Spy had been doing all he could to avoid the mess hall with the others. After how he had been treated for...how he had admittedly poorly treated Scout, Spy was by no means in a rush to return.

But yet...dinner was surprisingly peaceful, at least, as peaceful as it usually was. Sniper and Scout were back, with the latter gladly participating in multiple conversations around the table. Even the meatloaf wasn’t so bad, although word was the Engineer had cooked it as a ‘welcome home’ of sorts for the Scout and Sniper, the latter of which hadn’t stopped making goo-goo eyes at him the entire meal. Spy rolled his eyes, ah to be in love, he had had enough reminiscing on such feelings for a lifetime but...there was no shame in allowing his teammates their fun. All was fair in love and war, as the saying went, and this certainly wasn’t a conventional war by any stretch of the imagination.

Sniper felt as though he was weightless, after several days sleeping on the road, Engie had so graciously ‘offered’ his room to Sniper for his first night back. Not that the two of them had spent much time sleeping, nothing a little coffee couldn’t fix. From the sounds of it, the Engineer had had just about enough of the Team Fortress lifestyle and was eager to return to more conventional engineering back home in Texas. He had grown up on a farm there, not that his family was much for farming. Sniper had laughed at that, gleefully relaying how one autumn his own father had tried to expand the prospects of the Mundy family farm from sheep to sheep and vege, which had failed spectacularly when darn near everything he could get his hands on wilted in the dry Australian soil. Sniper hadn’t given it much thought about what he’d do when his contract expired, he assumed he wouldn’t have had much to think about. This job was the best thing to ever happen to him. He hadn’t had much else. No gals back home waiting, and he certainly wasn’t all that good for much. Engie had said he was plenty smart for the couple of ‘em. Sniper had liked that. And now with Scout and his family, Sniper figured he might as well stay in the states. Never had folks like him like that. That had earned him a kiss on the neck from the Engineer.

“Come home with me, to Texas.”

That had caught Sniper off guard. “Eh, I don’t know much about engineerin’ or nothin’”

Truckie laughed “No but you sure do like workin’ don’t ya? Musta learned something from your folks,”

“Aw, Ma taught me plenty bout basic stuff. Cookin’ and butcherin’ me own meals. Knittin’ and sewin’ to pass the time,”

Truckie laughed again and kissed Sniper on the cheek, making him all rosey and light-headed. “You’d make a perfect lil’ farm wife,” he cooed, causing Sniper to blush and laugh.
“’M as tame as I am short,”

“Hey! ’Sides you know more about all that domestic ‘nd farm work than I do,”Engie reached over and stroked Sniper’s face, pulling himself closer to purr against.

“Ain’t gettin’ me in a skirt you are,” Sniper mumbled.

“Don’t need one, you’re pretty enough.” Engie responded with another kiss.

“....s’pose I know enough about the farm chores for the both of us,” Sniper sighed contently against the Engineer’s neck as he dozed off.

Sniper sure was learning a lot about the benefits of sleeping indoors, the bed in his camper would never hold more than one person, and never at enough distance for Snipr to wake up like this, gazing upon his lover’s beautiful face. Sniper leaned down and kiss him gently before pulling himself from the covers and dressing him in his clothes from the day before. Briefly, he considered if one of Engie’s shirts would fit, before realizing how silly an idea that was.

“Leavin’ so soon darl?” Engie rolled over and asked sleepily, still rubbing his eyes awake.

“Just getting breakfast love, gotta run out to the camper still and get me guns before work.” Sniper responded warmly, hobbling over to the bed with his pants around his knees. H graciously kissed Engie before he finished dressing and dashed off to the mess hall. Usually he just ate dry cereal and coffee in his camper, but he was already on base and Scout was there and Demo would be making breakfast and hey---Sniper had maybe had enough of his camper the past couple days.

“Well good mornin’ sleepy head!” Demo called as Sniper waltzed in. “Stick around a while longer and the sausage’ll be ready,”

“Nah, I’m fine thanks,” Sniper insisted as he poured his morning coffee.

“Hey Snipes, you talk to Spy since we left?” asked Scout, sitting at the table eating cereal as it was supposed to be eaten, with milk.

Sniper’s face dropped, “Why?”

“Looked like he was out on his way to the camper, figured he must’ve been looking to talk about that paperwork and--”

Sniper’s mug shattered against the tiled floor.

“OY! You don’t expect me to clean--” when Demo turned Sniper was already gone, sprinting out to his beloved camper as fast as his lanky legs would carry him.

SHIT SHIT SHIT

Sniper knew the form was too much, that Spy was still pissy and bitter over Scout likin’ him over his pasty French ass.

SHIT SHIT SHIT

Sniper was just SURE he’d key up his van, or pop the tires or or or---

Leave an enveloped taped neatly to the door.

Sniper let out a relieved sigh and stepped inside to retrieve his rifle. He had a long day on the
battlefield ahead of him and besides,

He ought to make his boy proud.

Chapter End Notes

This is it! Thank you so much to everyone who has stuck along with the story, my first ever completed fic, this long! I have plenty more stories coming up, and I hope you stick around for those as well!

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