Light at the End of the Tunnel

by Akari

Summary

While in pursuit of a wanted criminal, Edward and Roy end up in the sewer system below Central. Things quickly take a turn for the worst. One-Shot

"After him!"

"I think he went this way!"

"No, he turned back there!"

It was just after one in the morning, yet the streets of Central City were alive with search lights, scrambling soldiers, and the clamor of various orders drowning each other out in the chaos.

Dark clouds had engulfed the sky but the glow of the full moon broke through the cracks. It granted a sparse amount of illumination to the people below as cool winds blew through the humid summer air.

Within a nearby side-street, a lone man sprinted down an alleyway to distance himself from the activity, breathing heavily from the chase. He paused just before turning around an old brick building, waiting to see if his pursuers were still on his tail. Half a second later, two figures turned down the alley; one wearing the typical blue Amestrian uniform, while the other donned an obnoxiously bright red coat. The stranger continued with haste at the sight of them, thankfully nearing his goal, as he was steadily running out of energy.

When the two soldiers rounded the building, they froze as their eyes fell on an empty opening lit by streetlights in the center of the surrounding structures; numerous different pathways were created
between them. During the day, the small intersection would have been filled with people going to
and fro their apartments but in that moment, it was deserted, save for the rows of tin trash cans and a
fleeing stray cat.

"Damn," Edward spat under his breath. "There's no time to look down each alley."

"You're right. We'll just have to pick- wait, Fullmetal," Mustang ordered as the blond started for a
road at random. Edward stopped impatiently and turned back to his superior just as he was observing
the manhole in the center of the street. It had been been left half open, exposing the seemingly never-
ending darkness below.

"He must have gone down here," the colonel mused as he knelt down by the hole and heaved the lid
to the side. Manholes weren't exactly easy to get into, so their target must have come very prepared.
That was to be expected from the man who managed to murder a general and escape unscathed
earlier that same night.

The only reason that the two State Alchemists were able to follow him so closely was because Roy
was working after-hours to complete his nearly overdue paperwork, and Edward chose that night to
deliver his latest report. They had both left the building just in time to see General Gardner fall to
the cobblestone ground with a bullet hole in his head. As for why the usually careful man was away
from his security detail, was a question to be asked after the culprit was behind bars.

With a silencer on the muzzle of the murder weapon, it was a nearly soundless act which would have
given the assailant enough time to get away, had it not been for Ed and Roy's fortunate luck. As the
unknown man was fleeing the scene, the two alchemists quickly alerted the nearest soldiers and
picked up the chase themselves.

Which is why they were currently climbing down into the Central City sewer system, bickering
amongst themselves.

"What's wrong, Colonel?" The teenager sneered as he steadily climbed down the ladder, watching
the older man above. "Is the big, bad Flame Alchemist afraid to get his feet wet in the sewer?"

Mustang narrowed his eyes as he watched the younger alchemist slowly sink further into the
darkness. "Careful, or else you might slip," he commented mirthlessly. "-shrimp."

"What'd you call me?!" Edward roared as he appeared conflicted between taking another step down,
or going back up to punch the colonel in his smug face. He took an impulsive step upwards, but
missed the bar of the ladder and clumsily dropped down into the sewer with a thud. Roy waited until
he heard a stream of curses from the teenager before carefully following him down. If he had enough
energy to throw insults left and right, then Edward was clearly alright.

Edward grumbled on the stone ground for a moment, then slowly moved to pull himself up when
Mustang reached the bottom and turned to look down both ways of the tunnel. The light from the
street lamps slipped through the manhole and the drain grates further down, giving them enough light
to see relatively far in each direction.

A river of sewer water calmly trailed to the right and the air was thick with moisture. Small drops
escaped through the pipes above and fell into the river, sending echos throughout the seemingly
empty tunnel. However, the sound of rats skittering across the cold ground was a subtle reminder that
they were not truly alone.

"Alright, time to corner this guy," Edward huffed as he turned to the right and started jogging; their
target already had a bit of a head start, so there was no time to lose. However, he looked passed his
shoulder once he noticed that the colonel was right behind him. "Shouldn't you be going the other way?" He asked in a tone that implied it was obvious.

"The water is going in this direction, which means he probably did to, if he wants to find a way out of here," Roy continued, gesturing over to the stream of water besides their path. Mustang continued without sparing his subordinate a glance. "Besides, we need to stick together. Depending on how far we need to go, we'll run out of light eventually. I doubt you'll be able to get very far without my alchemy."

Edward scoffed. "I would have figured it out."

"You can't even figure out how to turn in your reports in on time," Roy chastised.

"It wasn't even late this time!"

"It was due by the end of the day."

"Midnight is the end of the day."

"The end of the work day, Fullmetal."

"Whatever! Just be happy that I turned it in at all," Edward shot back, glaring at the outstretched path before them.

He questioned why he had to get stuck with Mustang of all people. The insufferable bastard was going to be on his back the entire night. He wished anyone else was there with him instead; preferably Al, who was still in the barracks, probably expecting Ed to return in any minute... Then again, he would have heard the alarms. His younger brother was probably tearing down the streets of Central City at that very moment, looking for Ed. The sooner he found the older Elric, the better- just as long as he'd no longer have to be alone with the colonel.

"Mind your place," Roy scolded, trying to convince himself not to trip the little brat into the water besides them. It was shallow enough... even for him.

The kid had sent Mustang into a foul mood earlier that day without him even having to be present. He had expected Edward to return to Central at noon. Not only was he twelve hours late with his report, but Roy's schedule was completely butchered because he was trying to find out if the Elrics were still alive- he discovered that they were just taking their sweet time. (Probably to spite him.) Apparently, Edward managed to convince Alphonse that Colonel Bastard's head is too far up his ass to notice if they were late. At least, that's what the blond had told him that night and it probably wasn't worth it to get Al's side of the story.

The two alchemists slowed their pace to a walk when the tunnel turned, revealing a light in the distance. From their distance, it appeared to be another path splitting off from the main route. They approached cautiously, half expecting the murderer to appear behind the corner with a gun raised. Mustang raised his gloved hand slowly, prepared to strike.

When they reached the turn however, it wasn't another path at all, but just an open, square space that expanded out of the main tunnel. In the small room was a metal table in the center surrounded by a few fold-up chairs. The three walls were hidden behind rows of metal cabinets, shelves all filled with various tools and scraps of materials. A single dim light bulb on the ceiling lit the area, flickering slightly, highlighting the layer of dust and cobwebs that littered the space. The room was likely left for sewer workers, but hasn't been used for years.

Mustang quickly marked the room off as another waste of time, and turned to continue moving down
the dark tunnel. There were less sewage grates than before, offering very minimal light. From the bright room, he wasn't able to see further than a few feet into the distance. The colonel instinctively tugged at his ignition gloves for a moment, deciding that it was about time he created his own source of light.

"Hey Colonel," Edward cut in, drawing Mustang's attention back to the blond. Ed was crouching next to the table, prodding at the ground- except at second glance, he noticed that there was a small hatch in the floor. Though, it was more like a grate with hinges. It had rows of bars like a cage- each hole was just barely big enough for Ed to squeeze his hand through, if he tried. Either way, it didn't look very discrete.

An unlocked padlock weakly held the hatch shut, until the teenager slipped it off and tossed it aside. "This lock looks pretty new. Since it was unlocked, I bet the murderer went down here to hide- he probably thought we wouldn't see it," he explained confidently, struggling to force the heavy door open.

However, it really wasn't that simple. Even as Edward spoke, he knew there were holes in the idea and things that didn't quite add up. For example, if the murderer went inside the lower room, then why was the lock loosely blocking the hatch from opening? He wouldn't have been able to adjust the lock in that position after climbing inside, as the holes in the grate were too small for an adult hand. If anything, it could be a poorly established trap. But their target clearly went through so much work to invite the alchemists there- it would be rude not to drop by, right? But of course, the colonel would ruin his fun if he explained his thoughts to him. Ed wasn't sure how, but he had no doubt that Mustang would.

But then again, maybe he was wrong; maybe the murderer really was hiding down there. Either way, it was too suspicious to pass up.

Roy watched with growing apprehension- though he wasn't entirely sure why. Perhaps because if Edward was wrong, then they would have basically allowed their target to escape by then. The colonel looked back towards the caliginous tunnel, narrowing his eyes slightly. The longer he stared into the endless darkness, the more he thought he could see something within it, staring back at him.

Screeching metal hinges caught Mustang's attention and he turned back to the blond who had just finished flipping the hatch door open.

"Thanks for the help," Ed said sarcastically under his breath, though he would have waved the colonel off if he had tried to offer assistance anyway. Without another word, he slipped into the hatch, followed by a splash and an annoyed groan.

Edward squint his eyes in an attempt to adjust his vision. The floor of the secret room was covered in a layer of water and the walls were lined with dim red lights, but none of them were strong enough to light more than a few feet in radius. The room was cluttered with storage crates, boxes and loose pipes that littered the floor and balanced against the walls, blocking his path. He would have to maneuver through the debris to find a way to the other end.

The ceiling was low enough that even he had to slouch to walk through. He began moving, stepping carefully around anything in the water that threatened to trip him in his blindness. He would have to listen carefully too, since the murderer could be hiding behind anything.

Mustang hesitantly crouched by the hatch, leering in just as Edward moved out of his eyesight. He wasn't sure if he should follow or not. He noticed a red gleam on the water, telling him that there were at least some lights down there. "What's going on Fullmetal? How much space is down there?"
"Eh- I can see the end of it," Edward called back, his voice laced with caution. "He probably couldn't even fit down here... But I'm going to keep looked just in case I missed something."

Roy released a grunt of acknowledgment and turned away from the hatch. There was only a slim chance that their target had gone down there in the first place, not the mention that they weren't certain he was in the sewer system at all. For all they know, he could have gotten away the moment they stepped underground.

Mustang didn't have time to wait for the kid, but he couldn't just leave him there either. Knowing Fullmetal, he'd somehow manage to blow up the entire sewer system if someone wasn't watching him. With a sigh, Mustang decided to search the surrounding area to keep himself from feeling impatient. He might as well examine the walls for transmutation marks or unseen passage ways, just in case. Just to keep himself from feeling useless.

His only saving grace was the knowledge that the entire Central Military had swarmed the city in search of the general's murderer. Hopefully, it wouldn't be long before they started looking underground as well. Therefor, he couldn't have gotten far.

Though, Roy honestly hoped the culprit was still nearby. Catching the killer of a general would certainly do wonders for his reputation.

Meanwhile, Edward had climbed over a stack of crates and pipes and was slowly approaching the far wall. He was beginning to think that there was truly nothing down in that room and he was just wasting valuable time. To make things worse, the red glow pained his eyes; offering just enough light to know he wasn't blind, but not enough to see much more than outlines and vague shapes.

Ed kept his eyes peeled for any signs of movement as he shifted through the shallow water. It was just high enough to seep into his shoes and get his sock wet, unfortunately. The closer he got to the end of the room, the more he wanted to just turn back, even if it meant joining back up with the colonel.

He was about to do just that until something caught his eye. One of the small red lights in the corner was blinking slowly, briefly reflecting off of the nearby pipes with an eerie glow. Surely it was nothing. But it was too consistent to be a faulty bulb. With a shrug, Edward decided to investigate while he was down there.

He stepped over a large busted pipe to approach the light, but it appeared to be hidden deep within the row of tubes that were attached to the wall and streaming out the ceiling. As he got closer, Edward almost thought that he heard a faint, steady beep that matched the flicking of the light. The blond reached the corner and pressed the side of his face against the pipes to peer through them at the blinking light. He could clearly hear the beeping now, noticing that each tone came marginally quicker than the last.

It almost sounded like a countdown.

The blood drained from Edward's face when he noticed a collection of wires poking out from a strange device, which also housed the blinking light and the steady tone. He stared at it blankly for a moment, praying that his assumption was wrong. His eyes automatically followed the visible wires upwards, which led to another flashing red light hidden further into the collection of pipes several feet above the first one. Just how far did the system of wires and strange machines stretch? Edward didn't really want to know. Both lights were in perfect synchronization with the beeping. As the sound increased in speed, his heartbeat did as well.
"Mustang!" He called and scrambled away from the wall. He had to get out of there. He had to warn the colonel.

Before the bombs went off.

Edward tripped over a fallen pipe and collapsed into the water with a splash. Spitting the grimy liquid out of his mouth, he quickly pulled himself further away from the wall, blindly climbing over the debris.

In a split second, the once dark room was illuminated by a bright flash from behind him. He impulsively glanced over his shoulder, bringing a hand up to shield his eyes before the light could blind him. However, something within the water stole his balance again, causing the teenager to fall backwards.

It all happened in slow motion. The pipes against the far wall shifted and were blown apart from the wall by an incredible force from behind. A brilliant combination of orange, yellow and red filled his vision as an eruption roared in his ears for a brief moment before it was replaced by a maddening ring.

All he knew in that moment was that he had to do something to survive. Even if there wasn't enough time to do anything. Survival is all that mattered.

Edward's body moved automatically as he brought his hands up in front of him to clap.

Then everything went to black once more.

The world was bare and empty. A black void had consumed everything within its reach, leaving nothing behind. The complete lack of substance was the only constant for a prolonged amount of time.

It was calming, relaxing, clear of worry. But there was no thought or emotion either, leaving something to be desired.

It was utterly blank.

Slowly and subtly, something else slipped into that void: pain.

At first, it was easy to ignore. It was so easy to pretend that it wasn't there, or it was always there and he had simply gotten used to its existence. But at some point, his subconscious was able to register that the pain hurt much more that he realized. But it was bearable.

That it, until it steadily grew into a white, raging fire that burned anything and everything. Even the empty blackness distorted into a blinding fury.

He wanted to know why that pain consumed him but more importantly, he wanted to escape it.

That searing agony relentlessly pulled at his subconscious, dragging him with it against his will. Except he didn't want to go with it. He just wanted to stay in that calm, empty space.

Reality formed around him, reminding him that it was all in his head. He was just sleeping. None of it was real. If he woke up, he could get away from the pain.

As consciousness returned to him, he quickly registered the coolness that seeped through his clothes, touching his skin and the sound of gushing water, which was almost immediately drowned out by a
Moments passed before he realized that he was the one screaming hysterically. Roy Mustang’s eyes were clamped shut and he tightly clenched his jaw to keep the pitiable sound from escaping, biting into his lip for good measure.

Despite his previous hopes, the pain was very real. It wasn’t just in his mind- it was what pulled him out of his mind, as his body was no longer able to silently put up with it.

To make matters worse, the cool air smelled like an unsettling mix of melting metal, smoke, moisture, and a hint of burning flesh... The last part was too subtle for most people to notice, but he had a particularly acute sense of smell when fire was involved.

He needed answers.

Roy pried his eyes open only to see nothing. If it wasn't for the fact that every nerve in his body was shrieking, he would have assumed he was dead.

His legs were particularly bad. As Mustang become more coherent and alert, the reality of the situation began to sink in as well. Any attempt to move his legs rewarded him with daggers piercing through his very bones. An involuntary cry slipped through his lips as he eased himself into the liquid that pooled around his body, promptly deciding not to do that again, as long as he could help it.

Wait... Liquid?

Alarm shot through his chest and his body went rigid with fear. It wasn't blood, right?

Tensely laying on his back, Roy gingerly placed a hand on the surface of the liquid to get a feel for what it was.

Just water...

Even a sigh of relief was enough for another spike of pain to engulf his body. After calming his worries about bleeding to death, it took the rest of his willpower just to refrain from screaming again. He began to wonder if his legs were even still attached. What else could cause such an unbearable sensation?

Alright, calm down Mustang, he urged himself all while trying and failing to prompt his heart rate to decrease to a tolerable speed. You’re alright. So just... calm down and figure out what happened..

God, this hurts...

Blinking rapidly in an attempt to adjust his eyes to the lack of light, the only things he could make out were various shapes in the darkness. From his stiff position on the ground, he craned his neck slightly and noticed an incredibly dim, orange light coming from behind some of the wreckage, which looked like a small fire, or dying embers at the very least.

It was a miracle that any source of heat could survive in that environment; The entire floor was covered with a layer of water and it seems the pipes overhead had been broken, spewing gallons of water into the destroyed tunnel in all directions. A cold mist sprinkled down, but did little due to the fact that he was already soaked. Including his ignition gloves.

Great... Just great, he thought spitefully.

Roy slowly, hesitantly traveled his hands down to his legs, trying his very best not to move anything
below his waist. After a moment of nervous probing, he was able to discern that his legs were indeed still intact. They were just badly burned and broken.

Upon closer observation, Mustang noticed that his arms and face stung with various cuts and burns as well, but nothing that seemed particularly life threatening.

Once he got his own status covered, he had to then figure out what the hell happened.

Last thing he remembered, he was examining the tools that were stored in the dusty old shelves in the side room while Fullmetal was searching the room below. Right before blacking out, his ears caught something, pulling him to a stop. As soon as he did so, there was just silence. Alerted by his sixth sense, Mustang knew something was wrong.

In that moment, he heard Edward yell out to him, his voice laced with alarm. However, that's where his memory became foggy.

Roy took a deep breath. "Fullmetal!" He called out to the younger alchemist and strained his ears for a response. In the several seconds that he waited, the colonel only heard the splashing water, a faint crackle of fire, and his own laborious breathing.

The cold, merciless fingers of dread quickly latched themselves around his chest as the seconds passed. Fullmetal had to be alright. He couldn't have gotten hurt, or worse. Not under Roy Mustang's watch. But the kid was much closer to the explosion that he was.

No, no, that wasn't possible. He wouldn't have allowed it!

Roy was going to find his subordinate, and then he was going to court-martial him for dragging them into this mess! Or at least threaten to.

Mustang's hands fidgeted at his sides as he took many deep breathes, all while preparing himself for the next burst of pain that was undoubtedly going to come.

The colonel decisively placed both hands on the wet ground besides him and pushed himself up to a sitting position. His abdomen strained sorely and he felt knives pierce his ribs as his shifted, gasping for air when he finally sat up. With a arm wrapped around his torso, his squinting eyes scanned the area. From what he could gather... it didn't look good.

As he had guessed, a bomb must have gone off. Or perhaps several bombs... It was difficult to tell from where he was. The brick walls of the tunnel had been blown apart, scattering themselves throughout the closed in space that Roy currently found himself in. He also may or may not have been attacked by stray bricks while he was blacked out. The colonel was probably just pushed back into the main sewage tunnel, but it looked like a completely different place.

Large pipelines had fallen from their places on the roof or against the walls and caved in, blocking any and all possible exits. The large metal cabinets that once lined the walls of the separate room had been blown across the stone ground, distorted and melted. Mustang soberly noticed that one of said cabinets had landed precariously close to where he was laying.

The confined space was cluttered with drenched debris. Water poured out of every opening from the wrecked walls and steadily slipped through cracks in the ground or escaped from underneath the mess and into the sewage stream, which he could still hear flowing nearby. The cave-in had covered his view from it, but the sound of moving water was a kind reminder that Mustang was still where he recalled.

Past one of the mangled cabinets, a folding chair had caught on fire, offering a scant amount of light,
which just barely allowed him to examine his wounds in the faint orange glow.

Roy felt the blood drain from his face as he realized that his legs were not supposed to bend that way... Last he checked, shins were supposed to be straight and knees only bent in one angle. His blue military pants had been darkened by blood, or were charred from the explosion. Probably both. At that point, he wouldn't have been surprised if he had a fractured rib or two, either.

"Fullmetal!" He called again, his voice strained. Again, there was no response as his eyes searched the area of any hint of the boy.

Realization hit the colonel in the head like a sack of bricks. Edward was in the lower level when the bomb went off; he was just wasting him time by looking for signs of him from where he sat.

Roy eyed the opening in the ground where he last saw Fullmetal disappear into. The grate had been blown back down and the majority of the hatch was covered by one of the destroyed metal cabinets, which in turn, was locked down by an overturned table and many busted pipes that protruded from the walls and even burst through the floor. (It was amazing that the floor managed to stay in tact anyway.) Water rushed out of said pipes and rolled down the cabinet like a decorative fountain until it disappeared into the darkness of the second level.

Unless there was another way out, Edward was trapped down there. There was too much weight on the grated hatch for Roy to move in his condition. But then again, that wasn't going to keep him from trying.

Mustang shifted his weight so his upper body fell back down to the ground, but held himself up slightly with his forearms. The soft collision was enough to send shocks through his nerves, causing a choked gasp to flee from the man. He viciously cursed his weakness and his own body's betrayal, then began to crawl over to the small opening, using his elbows to pull himself forward.

Roy paused as his shifted onto his stomach, cringing as his mangled legs were displaced with his movement. He couldn't move them himself, as any attempt just left him clawing at the ground in agonizing regret. He would occasionally allow a pathetic cry to break through his defenses, overwhelmed by the torture as he inched across the ground.

Though the hatch was just a few feet away, he had to stop half way there. Mustang rested his head momentarily on his clenched fists, breathing heavily. His body rejected any movement, as if he had just run an excruciatingly long marathon.

After a moment, Roy continued to trek across the cold, swamped floor. He cursed inwardly as his broken legs dragged uselessly behind him. With an outstretched arm, the colonel curled his stiff, dripping fingers around the grate and heaved himself over to the pit.

Besides the waterfall that was created by the broken pipe and the cabinet, not much water was slipping inside. Thankfully, the hatch itself was about as thick above the ground as the water was high, keeping the liquid from obscuring his view as he looked inside.

"Fullmetal! Answer me," he ordered, peering into the darkness through the bars. The top of his head touched the distorted metal cabinet as he tried to get a good view inside the small opening, allowing the stream of water to roll off of him. But despite his efforts, it was impossible to see anything down there. Even with the vague red lights reflecting off of the water, it was simply too dark. Most of the lights must have broken from the explosion.

The older alchemist tried in vain to push the wreckage off of the hatch, but his minimum strength wasn't even enough to push himself back, as he had assumed. He placed a forearm against the cold,
twisted metal, hoping to put more weight on it as he used the other arm to push himself against the
ground, but the debris didn't move in the slightest.

The remaining string of hope was becoming thinner and thinner as his attempts continued to fail. Roy
called out to the kid, straining his vocal cords as concern for his well-being ached in his chest.

Sure, he would banter and insult the younger alchemist on a daily basis. Fullmetal nearly drove him
insane every time he stomped into his office, or was late with a report, or disrespected him in front of
his coworkers or superiors. But despite it all, he was still one of his subordinates. Roy made an oath
that he wouldn't allow any of them to die before him, and he certainly wasn't going to break that
promise over something so pointless.

That's not to say that catching the killer of a high ranking general wasn't pointless. It's just that Roy
didn't even particularly like the man, and it had absolutely nothing to do with the Elric's quest of
finding the Philosopher's Stone. Therefor, in a way, it was pointless. Or at the very least, nothing to
die over. Nothing for Edward Elric to die over.

Mustang shook his head, realizing that he had been stunned, staring down into the darkness for
several minutes during his phase of musing. Forcing himself back into action, he tugged at the bars
and continued to call for the blond, all while knowing that there was no way to get inside.

"Dammit Edward, answer me!" He growled colliding a curled fist to the metal as he dropped his
head to rest on his arm. His voice echoed through the destroyed tunnel, filled with frustration and an
inescapable anguish, which was both emotional and physical.

What was he supposed to do? He could hardly move, he didn't have the means to actually look for
the other alchemist, and there was no one to help them. And he was soaked.

How long had he been out for, anyway? Surely someone heard the explosion... If only minutes had
passed since the bombs went off, then he could understand why the military wasn't there to dig them
out yet. But if hours had passed, then they should have arrived by then. Right? Either way, he sure as
hell didn't have the time to wait for them.

"C-colonel...?" A small, broken voice broke through the gushing water, causing Roy's head to jolt
upwards, listening intently to make sure that his tired, frazzled mind didn't just make the sound up.

"... Fullmetal?" He dared, heart racing.

"Hey," the blond inhaled sharply, apparently in pain.

Roy sighed deeply from the overwhelming relief that immediately filled his body and mind; every
breath in his lungs left him all at once as he laid his forehead against the cool metal grate of the hatch.
His eyes were wide as they searched the darkness below, looking for more confirmation that Edward
was alive, even though the kid had already proved it. He was nearly oblivious to the constant stream
of water and dripped down the side of his face and into the second level.

"Thank god," he breathed, clutching the bars tightly. By the sound of it, Edward was almost directly
underneath him. Since it was impossible to see, Roy had quickly given up on trying. He had heard
the boy, so he'd take what he could get. Ed must have just woken up as well.

There was a pause as Roy collected his breath, trying to calm himself down. But for the blond, the
silence was more awkward and uncertain.

Finally, he could no longer handle it and decided to break it himself. "Heh, you almost sound like
you were concerned for me," he sneered, but his voice quivered ever so slightly. The teenager
cringed as he noticed the wave in his tone.

Mustang opened his eyes as he glared at nothing in particular. "Fullmetal," he began carefully, processing what he just heard. "What's wrong?" His voice was sharp and final, giving Edward little room to deny it. The newest priority was enough to push his own physical anguish further to the back of his mind. At least for the moment.

"W-what? Nothing," he laughed nervously. "I'm more worried about-"

"Fullmetal!" the colonel barked, effectively interrupting his subordinate. He dutifully ignored the sharp stab of pain that shot up his legs, causing his shoulders to tremble under the pressure. "Tell me what's wrong. Now."

Edward closed his eyes, easily able to picture his power hungry boss sitting behind his mighty desk back in the office, giving orders left and right. But his intuition was nothing to sneeze at, apparently.

The teenager didn't reply right away, wondering how to word his response. He looked up at the hole in the ceiling, able to clearly see Mustang's silhouette as his figure was lightly highlighted with a weak, orange glow, which Ed presumed to be from a small fire. His eyes then trailed back down to himself, examining the situation he found himself in once again.

"Well," he started slowly. "For starters, my arm is gone." Edward raised what was left of his right arm, squinting his eyes in the darkness to make out the burnt fabric of his coat and the wires poking out from what remained of the outer shell of his automail. Everything above the elbow was gone—obliterated in the explosion. Winry was going to *kill* him.

His other arm was not spared either. The fabric had been burned away as well, leaving just his bare, angry red skin. The burn was deep, but probably not bad enough to have his arm amputated, if he had anything to say about it. Edward was in no mood to lose *another* limb.

"Which one?"

"Which one do you *think*?" Edward spat through his teeth as he tried to control the shaking on his blistering arm. He so desperately wanted to hold his own arm or... something! He couldn't handle just sitting there as his skin melted off!

Yes, he was obviously not on fire, but it damn well felt like it!

"Alright," Roy muttered, deciding to ignore Edward's harsh tone due to the circumstances. "What's your status? Can you find a way out? I can't get this hatch open," he explained, spitefully punching the metal of the cabinet, causing specks of water to fly back at his face.

While Mustang was talking, Ed was eyeing the stream of water that fell through the grate and landed just inches away from him. Stray drops lightly sprayed overhead, though he didn't particularly mind. He shifted closer to the small waterfall, carefully bringing his burning arm closer to it.

"I don't think there's any other way out," he answered through his teeth, eyes locked on the stream of water.

Surely it was cold enough to soothe his burning skin. It had to be. Anything would help at this point. He couldn't handle the pain—his stinging skin itched for something cold. And yet, he knew it would hurt. His skin was too raw for anything *not* to hurt, and that's not to mention that added pressure of the free-falling stream.

Edward slowly continued, realizing that Mustang was waiting for more information. "I can't really
move either. I think my automail leg is cau- Ahhhhh!" His arm shook violently as the water pounded on his raw, exposed skin, irritating and soothing it at the same time. It was so blissfully cold, but also felt just like acid falling into an open wound.

He pressed his head into the the crook of his elbow, lacking any other place to put it. Edward's shoulders tensed and his body went rigid as he tried to endure the pain and revel in the relief as much as he could, breathing sharply through his bared teeth.

"Fullmetal!?" Mustang exclaimed, pressing his face against the grate. He saw movement within the darkness, just below the stream of leaking water. Now that he knew where to look, he could vaguely make out the usually-vibrant red and blond. "Are you hurt? Don't leave anything out!" He demanded, glaring at the small figure below.

Edward drew his arm out from the stream, gasping breathlessly. Yet within the first second, the burning sensation had already returned as the remaining drops of water rolled down and sunk into what remained of his sleeve. Even the small, cool drops felt like fire against his skin when the rest of the downpour wasn't there as well.

The colonel must have heard Ed's indrawn breathing, because he impatiently called out to him again. Edward was going to snap at the man to shut up, but he simply didn't have the breath. He decided to save the little air he had for the words that actually mattered, for once.

"My other arm is... kinda burned," he breathed, eyes shut tightly in his suffering.

"What does \textit{kinda burned} even mean?!"

Edward sighed exasperatedly. "You know... it's burned. Red all over and hurts like hell. Come on, \textit{Flame Alchemist}; you know what burns are, don't you?" The teenager taunted, clearly irritated, but was unable to hide the tremors in his voice.

Roy's eye twitched from frustration. "Yes, I know what burns are," he replied coldly in a tone that would suggest his words held a million meanings.

"Anyway," Edward growled pointedly, clearly changing the topic. His voice was tense as he moved on. "As I was saying, I can't move either. My leg is caught on something," he huffed as he tried to pull his leg out from whatever had snagged it, only to feel it tug at the port.

During the explosion, he had been thrown into a pile of wreckage, reclining him ever so slightly above the ground. It was nearly impossible to see for sure, but it seemed that he was nearly sandwiched by flying debris during the explosion as well but lucky for him, his legs were the only parts to actually get covered.

He looked for something to grab onto to pull himself out, but the only solid object was the overhead grate. If he stretched, he believed he might have been able to reach it, but the prospect of actually grasping anything with his tender hand didn't seem worth it.

Just before the bombs went off, Ed remembered trying to run away before realizing that he couldn't escape in time. He vaguely recalled trying to perform some quick alchemy, but the rest was a blur. He just had to assume that he made some sort of shield for himself to keep himself from dying in the explosion. Though he wished he could at least have covered his arm...

Though, it wasn't like his arms were the only parts of his body to feel the effects of the bomb. Even in the darkness, Edward could see that his clothing had been singed, to say the least. His face and chest had been mostly spared, but at the expense of his limbs. His leg had also been burned in
various placed, but it wasn't nearly as bad as his arm, which was enough to drown all other pain out.

"Then we'll just have to wait it out," the colonel cut in, pulling Edward out of his head, at least for a moment.

"What? How long? I don't know how long I can-" his voice trailed off as he gingerly slid his arm back under the stream of water, followed by a sharp hiss.

"Unless you forgot to mention anything, then you're not in critical condition. Neither of us can move, but we're not dying either. They'll dig us out of here eventually. It's best to just remain calm and wait," the colonel growled, equally upset about their situation.

"Shit," Edward breathed, slowly pulling his vulnerable hand into a fist, then immediately regretting it as his injured fingers rubbed together.

Mustang didn't add anything, as Ed had taken the word right out of his mouth.

It already went without saying that the murderer was already long gone. They walked straight into a trap and had fallen victim to their target's plot.

The precious, yet merciless torrent that brought that small, much-needed relief to the blond's burn suddenly distorted into a wider, inconsistent waterfall, like a faulty shower spray. He looked up to see Mustang's form covering the exposed corner of the hatch, just underneath where the water was spilling.

Roy had brought an arm up to rest on the cool metal of the grate and buried his face into his elbow, welcoming the liquid to wash over his head as if it could clean away all of his worries. Many would find irony in the Flame Alchemist lying willingly under a fountain, but that joke had long since gotten old. It was common knowledge that he had no love for rain- despised it, in fact- but he didn't hate water in general. That would be impractical.

The steady drum of heavy droplets cascading down his head and neck almost served to distract him from the miserable ache of his crooked legs. Almost. Not quite. But one could hope.

When he closed his eyes in the comfortable shadows of his arm, he could nearly see himself back home, taking a cold shower after waking up from yet another unpleasant dream. When that happened, he always felt the uncontrollable urge to wash away the disgusting mix of sand and blood of Ishval that infected his mind.

But on second thought, he would much rather endure his current predicament then relive his night terrors.

A low rumble resonated through the sewage system, causing the two alchemists to curiously scan their respective areas. The very pressure in the humid air seemed to increase somewhat as the walls and floors rumbled from an unknown source.

"Uhh Mustang?" Edward began nervously, subconsciously drawing his raw arm close to his body while propping himself up with his elbows.

Mustang didn't reply as he strained his ear, listening intently to the ominous growls that suddenly rolled through the tunnel.

The complex pipe system gave out all at once. Many of the long metal tubes that trailed overhead and winded down the walls of the small room where Edward was suddenly burst after having built
up too much pressure from the previous explosion. Gallons upon gallons of relentless water gushed into the area.

Edward released an alarmed gasp as one of the new blasts shot onto his hip before dying down slightly, just enough for him to fall out of its reach. However, the water seemed to have no end.

"Are you alright?" Roy snapped urgently after the initial shock dissipated. Many of the pipes near him had erupted as well, spilling water into the grate or into the stream of sewer water that was hidden behind the wreckage. Even the folding chair that had caught on fire was quickly extinguished. If he didn't know any better, Mustang would have guessed that a dam broke somewhere in the lower level, by the sound of it.

"Yeah, yeah, I'm fine," the blond sighed warily. "It's just a little water."

"It doesn't sound like a little water," the colonel probed, trying once again to see into the darkness below him. He was still vaguely able to see Ed's usually vibrant attire just feet below him but he was also, just barely, able to point out the vast amount of movement. Some of the burst pipes gleamed with a dim red glow as sections had been dislodged from the walls and ceiling. Cold, unforgiving water flooded from the metal tubes, splashing waves against the debris that piled inside the four walls.

For a moment, Edward was actually glad that he was thrown onto a trash heap, as it kept the rising water from completely engulfing him. However, he wasn't worried. Surely sewer systems were built in preparation for such events. He had no doubt that the water would soon begin to drain out.

In response to his commander's comment, Ed simply shrugged, nearly forgetting that the man couldn't really see him.

But the longer Edward watched the rapid waves in the water that surrounded him, he began to question if it really would drain. With so much debris, the drainage system could have easily gotten blocked, though it was incredibly difficult to know for sure with how furiously the water splashed.

"Talk to me, Fullmetal; what's going on?" Roy asked again, causing Ed to realize that he had gone silent for several minutes, lost in the endless waves.

The younger alchemist didn't reply right away as he felt a hollow gap form in the pit of his stomach. He had locked his eyes on the water level, watching carefully for a long while, slowly dreading more and more that it was rising at an alarmingly fast rate.

Before he even knew what happened, the water had completely swallowed his feet and was quickly traveling up his legs as he reclined on the uncomfortable pile of wreckage.

"Uhh the water is rising," Edward said, trying to sound calm but cringed as his voice sounded anything but.

Mustang was quiet for a beat as he processed the information.

"I see," he finally said lamely as the situation sunk in. "You need to find a way to dislodge yourself. Surely there's something you can do."

"I... can't think of anything," the teenager admitted, forgetting to cover up the fear in his tone. "I can't transmute anything without my arm and there's nothing here that I can draw a circle with. I might be able to get my right leg out, but I think the left is pinned down by something," he explained, already squirming in an attempt to free himself.
If he could twist his body in the right, unnatural angle, Edward believed that he could possibly free his flesh leg, but whenever he tried to move the left, it felt like something was holding it down; like something had lodged itself somewhere in the metal limb, preventing him from budging. Furthermore, his attempts to move the debris off of him have all ended in laughable failures.

The worst part about the whole situation was that he couldn't see a damn thing. A daunting headache had already formed from him trying to strain his eyes so much with only the nearly-useless red lights to help, that were now lost under the water.

"Colonel, I-" he swallowed. "... What should I do?"

Mustang blinked rapidly, wondering if his ears were failing him. Edward Elric just blatantly asked for his help? The world must be ending. Usually, he would laugh- but there was absolutely nothing funny about the dire situation.

Roy's chest tightened, easily catching the apprehension in the kid's voice. Hope wasn't lost yet, but he was scared and knew that there was nothing he could do to save himself, at least without some assistance. It pained Roy to know that the one time Ed asked for his help, he was physically unable to give it to him.

No. He had to do something.

"What about this grate?" Roy asked, eyes focusing in on the metal bars that divided the two alchemists. "Could you reach it?"

"I... I think so," Edward responded slowly as he sorely shifted into a sitting position and raised his flesh arm above his head, towards the very low ceiling.

Roy watched the kid's hand emerge from the darkness and was silently shocked at how mangled it looked. His sleeve was all but nonexistent, burned to ash. The skin itself was red and blistering and the entire limb was quivering uncontrollable.

His hand was within reach of the grate, but he didn't move to grab hold of the bars. Edward didn't say anything, but Roy assumed he was afraid of further irritating his wounded skin by grabbing hold of the metal. It would undoubtedly hurt... Mustang was tempted to just reach down and pull his arm up, but his own hands couldn't even get through had he tried.

"Come on, Fullmetal," he prompted, now able to see for himself just how high the water level had gotten as it got closer and closer to him. "You'll drown if you don't try!"

"You don't even know if it'll work," he barely heard the kid say, but he didn't have the words to reply.

Edward was already convinced to give it a shot, without him needing to add anything.

The small reddened hand reached upwards again and decisively grabbed hold of the grate. The action caused a muffled cry to emit from the teenager below. Edward had bitten down on what remained of his other sleeve and shut his eyes as his skin protested the sudden movement and contact.

His muscled tensed as he tried to pull himself up in hope of dislodging himself from the debris, but his arm refused to cooperate.

"Ow, ow, ow, shit, ow," Edward spat, then suddenly released the bar and collapsed down onto his back with a splash. "Shit," he breathed again, glaring at the grate above him. "I... I can't..."
"Don't give up so easily."

"I'm not giving up! I just... I can't do anything like this!" The blond replied quickly, his frustration evident in his tone. "If you have any ideas," he trailed off for a moment. "What about your alchemy? Can't you blow the hatch off or something?"

Roy hesitated. "... No, I can't... My gloves are soaked."

"Seriously?" He growled, pulling his back out of the water by sitting up again. "The one time I actually need you for-" His voice cracked and he paused mid-sentence.

Roy clenched his fists, his nails nearly threatening to rip through the fabric. He had never let one of his subordinates down so badly before. He knew that his ignition gloves had their weaknesses, but he could never have foreseen falling into such a situation.

"... I'm sorry, Edward," Mustang breathed, unsure if he was heard or not. "But we can't give up. We-" he cut himself up as a thought struck him. While his gloves were wet, there was nothing wrong with the array itself.

"... Colonel?" Ed inquired, his voice wavering as the water sneaked up his torso. He heard Mustang's sudden inhale just after he stopped talking. "Do you have an idea?"

Roy was quiet for a moment longer, tossing and turning the thought around in his mind. "If I can reach the water, I might be able to concentrate the oxygen. With the right chemical mixture, it should be enough to even blow this hatch loose." But then again, with everything that was piled on the hatch, that might prove to be difficult... In that case, he would just do the same thing but to the ground beneath the obstructive wreckage. If he could use the power of a chemical reaction to break through the ground, he could get the weight off of the grate...

"W-well that are you waiting for? Hurry up," Edward urged, already feeling suffocated as the rippling water surrounded him. The only upside was that he was able to completely submerge his burning skin in the cold liquid that threatened to suck the life out of him.

"It's not that simple. First of all, it'll be dangerous. The blast might create an avalanche of rubble."

"It's worth a shot. I don't have time for you to contemplate it!"

"Well..." Mustang bit his lip, hesitant to explain the problem further. "I can't actually reach the water. My hands won't fit through the grate."

"So... What are you saying?" Edward asked, though he already understood what the colonel was trying to get across. He was just futilely hoping that he was wrong.

Roy's fingers curled around the metal bars as his breath was caught in his throat. The kid was really going to make him spell it out? "I'm saying that I'll have to wait for the water to reach the top."

Fullmetal didn't respond. Instead, he reached up and grabbed hold of the bars again, bringing his hand just inches away from Mustang's face as he silently fought against the spike of pain that shot through his limb. He just barely reached it, which meant that the ceiling was roughly two feet above his head. While the water was rising quickly, he honestly wasn't sure if he could hold his breath that long.

There was a long, uncomfortable pause.

"... You're certain that it'll work?"
"Yes." Well, it was only a half-lie. He was confident that he could get the hatch open, but there was no guarantee that Ed could last, or that Roy could free him anyway.

Edward wasn't entirely convinced. He saw the very same flaws with the plan, and knew that it was risky. His heart was pounding in his chest as the water climbed up his body. Mustang would do what he could, but it was all up to Ed to hold his breath. His doubt steadily increased the more he thought about it and the faster air nervously traveled in and out of his lungs.

He was fairly certain that the colonel noticed as well.

What if it didn't work? What if he drowned to death before the water reached a high enough level? Are his last words going to be "sure, let's give it a shot"? He couldn't stand the thought. Ed still had things to do, things to say...

Well, if he was going to be honest, now was the time.

"I-I don't think I'll be able to make it," he admitted, fingers tightening around the bar. His voice was small and defeated, and filled with so much raw pain that it hurt Roy to listen. He watched the kid's hand clutch into the grate for dear life, silently overwhelmed. Some strange, paternal part of him wanted to grab hold of Ed's hand and tell him that everything will be alright. But despite that, there were multiple reasons as to why he couldn't.

"I'll do everything in my power to get you out of here, Edward," he promised, making the conscious decision to use his real name. Twice in one day was certainly a new record- but doing so somehow meant something to him. "You have to trust me."

Nearly drowned out by the gushing water and splashing waves, Roy thought for a moment that he actually heard Ed agree to trust him. But his voice was so quiet that the colonel wasn't sure if he was just imagining it or not. He almost wanted to ask him to speak up and say it again.

Edward cleared his throat as his arm tensed in another attempt to pull himself up. The water level had reached his collarbone and was trailing up his shoulders.

"Listen, Mustang; if this doesn't work out-" Roy nearly cut the kid off, to demand that he stop thinking like that. But his own fear silenced his voice. Ed deserved to say what was on his mind before... "- tell Al that I'm sorry. And- and try to help him find the stone so he could at least get his body back."

"... Of course, kid," he muttered, unable to bring himself to say more. He hated this; he hated how defeated they both sounded. He hated the criminal who trapped them there and he hated himself for being unable to avoid it.

"And," Edward continued, his voice speeding up as the water drew closer to his head. "I'm sorry to you too. I shouldn't have stopped here. You wanted to keep going. If I never said anything, we would have found him by now. So, I'm sorry. This is my fault..."

Roy's composure wavered as he listened to the kid and finally fell apart when he finished. He allowed himself to gingerly place a hand on Ed's quivering fist, just lightly enough to let him know that he was there. He felt heat radiate off of the burn, but he was careful to avoid hurting him further.

He never thought that he would hear the Elric speak so sincerely. It was just so wrong. That naturally annoying kid wasn't supposed to sound afraid. Even when he was facing off against dangerous criminals, there was always something he could do to get out of it alive. But here, down in devastated sewer tunnel, he was trapped, unable to do anything. It simply wasn't natural.
"This is not your fault, Edward. You always try to pile the blame on yourself for everything, but not today- not this. As your commander, it's my responsibility to keep you safe. But I've failed... And I am truly sorry. But I'm going to fix it. So, please don't blame yourself." He spoke through his teeth, struggling to regain his confidence.

Edward didn't have enough time to digest the words before the water reached his neck. He craned his head upwards to stay out of its grasp for as long as possible. For the first time since the bombs went off, Ed was able to look Mustang in the eyes. It was incredibly dark, but he was somehow able to make out the worried gleam in the colonel's shadowed eyes. It seemed so uncharacteristic to see the unshakable officer fret over someone else.

The deadly water slowly reached his chin as he strained to lift his head up higher. His skin protested against the stretch but he paid no mind to it.

"Colonel," he breathed, uselessly begging the man to save him from the inevitable.

"Fullmetal! Edward!" Roy called desperately. "Hang in there, alright? Just breath!"

The blond inhaled deeply as the water inched over his mouth, sucking in as much precious oxygen as possible. He didn't think it was possible to feel any more afraid, until he was no longer able to open his mouth. His mind knew it was a death sentence, so he became physically unable to do so. And yet, he suddenly wanted so desperately to get one more gulp of air. Instead, he inhaled through his nose until the water prevented him from that as well.

Before the level got to his head, he was thinking that surviving this might have been possible. Surely it wouldn't take that long for the water to get to the ceiling. Two or three feet wasn't that bad, right?

Except now that he could feel the water slowly rising up his face, hope plummeted rather quickly. Maybe he would manage if he was in a better condition, but he had already worn out his lungs prior to the water covering his mouth. He couldn't hold the air in long enough. He wasn't going to make it. Ed was going to die there and Roy would be forced to live with it for the rest of his life. He didn't want to weigh the man down like that...

And Alphonse- poor, dear Alphonse would be left all alone. He had no idea that his older brother was currently drowning to death...

Edward shut his eyes as the water slowly approached them, realizing that such thoughts were doing him no favors.

Once his ears were submerged as well, everything became muffled and distant. For a moment, he thought that he was already passing out. But through the water, he could still make out Mustang's voice.

"Just hang in there! It'll be okay!" the man continued to repeat the mantra to himself, trying to convince himself more than reach Edward's ears. As soon as the kid stopped speaking, he knew that they were quickly running out of time. Ed's hand was still gripping the metal grate, giving Roy some dwindling reassurance that he was still alive.

The teenager had completely forgotten that he had locked the bar into a death grip. Edward's lungs screamed, demanding relief from the strain, effectively distracting him from the burn of his hand as his grip tightened. He had also managed to forget that Roy was just feet above his head, begging for his survival.

Edward couldn't move, he couldn't think- the pull at his insides was too strong to ignore for much
longer. Half of his brain desperately wanted to open his mouth and breathe, but the other half knew that he shouldn't. Yet somehow, a small fraction of his young, arrogant and invincible mindset quietly whispered that he'd get through it somehow.

Bubbles slipped through his mouth as he bit down on his lip, barely aware that his entire body was shaking. He had no idea how much time had passed; he was only aware of the fact that his entire body, besides his outstretched arm, was now underwater.

*Open your mouth! You need to breath. Maybe you'll be pleasantly surprised.*

*No, keep your mouth shut! It'll be a less painful death that way.*

*Then at least get it over with quickly. Just give in and swallow.*

Edward was reminded of when he was a kid, back in Resembool. He and Al were playing in the river with their mother watching nearby. She looked away just for a moment to return the greeting of a passing neighbor, just in time for Edward to slip one on a hidden stone and fall onto the water. It was shallow, but he was too surprised to remember that fact at such a young age.

Ed screamed from the shock, which caused him to inhale the water in his struggle. As he swallowed the water into his small body, he actually feared for his life for a moment. But of course, there was no real danger then. His mother picked him up out of the water immediately afterwards, lightheartedly scolding him for not being careful, but was clearly more relieved than anything else.

What Edward would give to feel that care and protection now...

But of course, such hope was nothing more than a fantasy. Reality is so much more cruel.

All of his ability to control his movements abandoned him at once, just like the bubbles that escaped his mouth and nose. His mouth opened widely against his will, almost as if he was trying to scream. Ed's golden eyes opened to watch the large bubble of air float above him and towards the surface. The edges of it glistened with the sparse amount of light coming from above. Edward was literally watching the life drain out of him. That one last gasp of air had left him, leaving him with absolutely nothing.

He had never felt emptiness like this before.

Water poured into his mouth and down his throat after he had already lost the strength required to cough. It freely delved inside as his body weakly spasmed in protest. His heart was beating rapidly and his lungs cried, searching for the oxygen that simply wasn't there.

After the water had done all it could to weigh him down, his body went limp. His eyes were still trained upwards, allowing him to get one last glance of Mustang's form through the ripples. He should have sunk to his back at that point, but Mustang must have been holding him up from above the water.

His eyes unfocused as the darkness somehow managed to become even darker, swarming everything until nothing remained.

As soon as Edward's grip on the bar weakened, Roy was quick to grab onto his hand. When all the strength and tension was gone, he held tightly onto Ed's fingers even as an invisible force pulled him down. It didn't make much of a difference in the end, considering he would have to let go to perform the alchemy, but he couldn't stand the thought of simply allowing Ed sink.

The water level was just inches away from his reach at that point, but he despised having to wait.
He knew that the kid had long since lost the ability to hear him, but Mustang continued to speak small, desperate encouragements; if not for the kid, than for himself.

"Oh, god," he breathed, colliding his forehead against the metal cabinet that still spilled water down his head. "Come on, Ed... Please don't die."

But the despair that tried to suffocate the colonel weakened him as well. The red, burned hand slipped through Roy's trembling grasp. He quickly tried to reach down into the grate and grab hold of him again, but Ed sunk too quickly out of his range.

"Shit," he spat, banging a clenched fist against the metal. The vibrating ring bounced off the water and echoed down the destroyed tunnel as he peered down into the darkness.

He knew this was the most likely result, but there was no other option! There was still a slim chance that he could revive Edward, but that hope steadily died with every passing second.

He couldn't allow this to happen. He refused to let it end this way!

Roy glared daggers into the water, willing it to reach him faster. Once it finally filled the entire room and began to surface, Roy dropped his gloved hand into one of the grate holes and used his other hand to activate the circle.

The chemicals within the water morphed to his will as he forced them into a highly concentrated bubble against the stone ceiling with a finger. Upon activating the array, a chemical reaction erupted below the surface, cracking the stone beneath the debris. He repeated the action once, twice, until the ground became too weak to hold the weight. The ground besides the grate gave in, allowing the metal cabinet to slid into the water. The many pipes that were also stacked on either followed it down or rolled out of the way.

With the majority of the weight gone, Roy was able to shove what remained off to the side or into the newly created hole and swing the hatch open. He then took a deep breath and blindly dove head-first into the black water as his mind was racing rapidly. However, the sudden movement served as a painful reminder that his legs were broken.

His nerves screamed as bolts of agony shot through his entire body as his twisted legs rolled passed the edge of the opened hatch, nearly choking all of the strength out of his body.

Roy wasn't entirely sure how he was going to get back out with two broken legs but... he'd figure it out.

Finding Edward's limp body was easily enough, considering he was only a few feet below. By concentrating the oxygen inside the rubble around his trapped leg, freeing him from its trap was a simple task as well. Mustang then wrapped an arm around Edward's motionless body and used his other arm to push himself up. Fullmetal's immobile body moved with him like a rag doll, only serving to increase the terror that grew inside the older alchemist exponentially.

His free arm quickly shot upwards and grabbed the edge of the opened hatch just as his lungs were beginning to strain. When he pulled himself and Edward up, the weakened ground around the hatch trembled under the extra pressure. Not having the time to worry about it, he pulled his head out from the water, followed by a thankful gasp for air.

Roy lugged the blond's head above the surface as well and threw his arm over the edge to stabilize himself. With a pained groan, Roy pulled the boy out of the water and over the side.

Dragging himself out proved to be slightly more difficult, as he had little to no control over his legs.
Roy propped himself onto the edge with his legs still dangling in the water and turned Edward into his back. The poor kid's face was blue from lack of oxygen and his eyes were cracked open, glossy and empty.

Roy's heart nearly lunged out of his throat once he was actually able to sum Edward's appearance up. His hair was a mess and his arms were truly mangled. By the looks of it, something had impaled his shin, given the wires that were poking out of the gaping hole. The sight was enough to send chills down his spine that stretched to his very core.

The Flame Alchemist shifted uncomfortably over to the teenager and pressed his head against Edward's chest, cursing inwardly when he failed to hear his pulse.

There was no time to lose.

"Come on, Fullmetal," he begged through his teeth as he placed his hands over the waterlogged kid's chest and pushed down in quick, decisive bursts, counting quietly to himself. He felt Edward's ribs crack under the pressure, but refused to stop or slow down in the slightest.

The chest compression continued for several, painstakingly long seconds but showed no results.

After a few agonizing seconds, he decided to switch tactics. Roy pinched Ed's nose and held his chin up as he forced the much-needed air into the kid’s lungs.

"You're not allowed to die, Ed," he gasped halfheartedly through his efforts as he began pressing down on his chest again.

"You can do it, kid! Wake up," he ordered as he felt a small, disheartening hope that Ed would somehow hear him.

The process repeated itself for a while. Roy couldn't say for sure, because he quickly lost track, in spite of him counting each second. No matter what, he couldn't stop. Part of him idly wondered if he’d be there for hours, vainly trying to push life back into a corpse.

But at last, Edward's body arched as he struggled to gasp, then broke into a coughing fit, spitting up water. Relief and disbelief washed over the colonel so strongly that he thought he was hallucinating for a moment.

Roy put a hand on Ed's shoulder and gently prompted him to his side, allowing the water to leave his body more freely. He was just barely refraining from pulling the kid into a suffocating hug then and there.

Edward continued to cough and hack the vile liquid out of his system for several minutes. His body shivered weakly and he was yet to open his eyes, but Roy was too overcome with solace to worry.

His hand remained on Edward's shoulder as a silent reminder to the kid and himself that he was alive. Cold, battered, choking on his own throat, but thankfully, wonderfully, blissfully alive.

As Edward slowly regained the ability to breath again, he hesitantly cracked his eyes open, staring at nothing in a daze. He was exhausted and drained, but more than anything else, he was confused but far too tired to search for answers.

The last thing he remembered was, well, nothing. Absolute emptiness. Did he die or was he momentarily trapped in a stage between life and death before somehow getting dragged back?

Awareness quietly returned to him and he eventually noticed a trembling weight on his shoulder. It
took a great amount of self-persuasion, but he eventually decided to pivot his head until he could see
the soaked colonel sitting besides him, legs still in the water. He really managed to break through the
hatch and save him...?

"C-co-" he coughed again, voice too hoarse to cooperate just yet.

Mustang opened his eyes and looked down at the kid, allowing an expression that could only be
described as amazement to appear on his face. He released a deep, shaken breath, as if he had been
holding it for several minutes.

"You're alive," he whispered. "God... You don't have to say anything, Ed. Just... regain your
strength." He sounded just as out-of-breath as Edward felt.

It just seemed so hard to believe that Colonel Mustang had gone to such lengths to save his life. Yet
all the evidence he would need was literally staring him in the face. Ed wanted to say that he was too
worn out and confused to really understand his own thoughts about the topic. But even so, he
couldn't deny the almost suffocating sense of thankfulness and admiration that quickly flooded him.

"M-mustang," Edward croaked, cringing at the ache in his chest. There were so many things he
wanted to say, but he lacked the strength and cohesion to make any sense of them, let alone properly
portray said thoughts. "Thanks."

That was all he could muster, but he knew it would be enough. Mustang would find the weight in
that single word; he always did.

Roy's visage relaxed as an honest, warm, yet tired smile appeared. "Anytime." And he meant that,
too. He knew for a fact that Ed realized that as well. However, his face abruptly hardened as he
stared the blond down, earning a slightly startled reaction. "Don't you ever do that to me again, got
it?" He demanded, sounding more like his old, bossy self. But the difference between then and now
was the concern that was so evident.

Edward considered him warily for a second, eyes scanning his tired, beaten, thoughtful expression.

"Yes, sir." Edward failed to completely keep the feeble smile off of his face, so he simply turned
away from the colonel, mildly embarrassed. People would often express their concern for his safety
and told him to stop being so reckless every time he got stuck in a hospital, which happened quite
often. But the way Mustang spoke to him was different somehow. The way he scolded Edward yet
seemed more relieved than anything somehow felt familiar, but Edward wasn't quite able to place
why. Probably because he just woke up from a near-death experience. He was certain that he would
figure it out in time.

Roy took note of Ed's contemplative, yet embarrassed expression, but decided to let the younger
alchemist keep his pride for once, and kept his mouth shut.

While a day rarely passed where Mustang didn't think the older Elric would be the death of him, he
realized that he would do nearly anything for him and his brother. Not just to keep them under his
command, but because he truly wanted them to be happy and see them succeed. Roy always knew
that, deep inside, but that fact had come to light in his mind.

It was a small accomplishment for everything they had gone through but if he was going to take
anything out of the recent experience, then that was good enough for him.

The walls of the tunnel began to rumble and shake again from an unknown force. The hand on
Edward's shoulder tightened, digging slightly into the fabric, as if that was enough to keep the boy
The two alchemists were both rapidly wondering if they were just going to get swamped in more water. The thought brought an entirely new level of dread.

However, it was short lived.

A bright, blinding light appeared from a newly created hole in the ceiling of the tunnel, dispersing the lingering shadows into the deepest corners. The two both flinched away from the light, as their eyes had long adjusted to the darkness.

"Can anyone here me?" A voice called, as if an angel had come to save them from the abyss.

"Uh- yes, we're down here!" Roy called back before Ed could even consider doing so himself.

"We got survivors here," the voice said again, but more distantly as if speaking to others.

Roy laughed quietly and rubbed his eyes with his free hand, keeping himself from looking up at the blinding search light. They were finally saved. It was about damn time, but he was far too relieved to be angry.

Edward was still a bit too out of it to really react, other than allowing a ghost of a smile to slip onto his face. His eyes were closed and for once, he looked rather peaceful.

He deserved some peace, after everything that he had endured, and for what was to come.

It was simply amazing that they both managed to survive the incident, and all in one piece- for the most part. Despite how forlorn and hopeless they may have felt at times, they had not been abandoned. There were people searching for them, just waiting to shine a light down.

It seemed that even in the darkest of moments, there was always a light of hope somewhere.

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