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| Archive Warning: | Choose Not To Use Archive Warnings, Graphic Depictions Of Violence |
| Category: | F/M, M/M |
| Fandom: | Fullmetal Alchemist: Brotherhood & Manga |
| Character: | Edward Elric, Roy Mustang, Ling Yao, Alphonse Elric, Pinako Rockbell, Winry Rockbell, Jean Havoc, Riza Hawkeye, Truth (Fullmetal Alchemist), Father (Fullmetal Alchemist), Envy (Fullmetal Alchemist), Greed (Ling), Van Hohenheim, Scar (Fullmetal Alchemist), Mei Chan | May Chang, Xiao Mei (Fullmetal Alchemist), Lan Fan, Darius (Fullmetal Alchemist), Alex Louis Armstrong, Olivier Mira Armstrong, Miles (Fullmetal Alchemist), Buccaneer (Fullmetal Alchemist), Vato Falman, Black Hayate (Fullmetal Alchemist), Heymans Breda, Zampano (Fullmetal Alchemist), Jerso (Fullmetal Alchemist), Heinkel (Fullmetal Alchemist), Kain Fuery, Homunculi (Fullmetal Alchemist), Maria Ross, Izumi Curtis, Denny Brosh, Gracia Hughes, Elicia Hughes, Chris "Madam Christmas" Mustang, Vanessa (Fullmetal Alchemist) |
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Nequitia Est Manus

by Azei

Summary

Madame Christmas meets a blonde brat with a fondness for drinking all her whiskey and giving her more headaches than Roy ever did.

AU in which Ed fakes his death at the end of episode 26 and uses it as a means to stop Father's plans from the sidelines.

"I'm slowly, painfully, fangirling, feelingly, dying, Thank you, now FMA fanfics will be the reason for my death. The fluff is klling me, the angst is suffocating me, the feels are being bitchy while stabbing me, and Ed is just huge goofball. Hahahaha absolute chaos. How is it possible for a fanfic to be this good and painful at the same time :'-)" - Awesome_Fangirl33, chp 9

"I'm effing in love with this fic. You capture everyone's characters so well, it's like watching the show without actually watching it. Thank you for this gem!!! 😊 Please update as soon as you can ;D" - AlgorythmicGalaxy, chp 9

"Just read through every chapter! This is a great fic. I love your world building. And the constant angst Ed has... and everyone else... I like how you fleshed out Trisha! I always felt that the anime/manga never told us enough about her." - Tzipporah, chp 12

Notes

...when I was rewatching the series and Ed asked Ling to protect them if Ed didn't make it back...my mind whispered, "what if he didn't make it back?" to which my inner fangirl responds, "what if he did but everyone thinks he didn't?" to which my brain says, "write that shit down before you forget dumbass!"

And, so, here we are.

Also, I based Truth off of Sherlock Holmes...it made sense honestly.

- Inspired by Reverti Ad Praeteritum by Batsutousai
He startled with a gasp before liquid golden eyes fluttered open only to force themselves shut moments later at the sight of the blinding lights. His metal hand made its way up from his side where it lay to his head, trying desperately to block the light as he continued to groan.

Ed's eyes snapped back open as a dark chuckle permeated the room, the young blond sat up and gazed at the sight before him, golden eyes widening in utter terror. He continued to stare at the creature- no, God before him, its gleaming white teeth grinning at him just like he remembered from so many years ago and the same default position he seemed to favour in place.

"Now, what's this? You're not even trying to get your body back, are you?" Truth smirked, a maniacal tone shifting up from somewhere deep in his throat.

The deity made a show of looking far more enthusiastic in his fingernails than he should be - *if he had any Ed thought*- as he pretended to pick dirt from underneath them.

Ed fixed a glare at the immortal being as he sat down, taking his time to lower himself as he felt his bones ache. His joints creaked as he finally placed himself on the ground and sat in a position much like Truth. Ed rubbed his flesh hand on the back of his head where a bump that felt like a watermelon lay, hidden beneath the deep tresses of his golden ponytail.

"Ha, as I would ever come here to make that mistake again."

"Interesting. Well then, Edward Elric, tell me, why did you come here?" Truth glanced over at him, a hint of curiosity taking hold in his tone, for once his attention solely on the blonde brat before him.

"I was trying to escape."

"Escape what? The military, people, the disillusions of reality, life in general- then again, if I were as short as you, I would try to escape that last one." Truth offhandedly commented, his grin growing bigger as he watched the little runt grow more enraged before him.

Ed felt like punching the prick but if he had a lick of common sense- *which he did, thank you very much, Colonel Bastard*- then he wouldn't lose it in front of an actual god, whether he believes in said douchebag or not is another thing, but, regardless, he really didn't want to die today, so he would play nice...for now, that is.

"From that Homunculus, that fat one, Gluttony, he swallowed Ling and me whole! And that bastard Envy was there too! I thought you would know more about them, given their leaders plan to try to upsurge you and sacrifice the whole damn country! Aren't you supposed to be omniscient or something?"
If he even had one, Ed thought he saw Truth's face had darkened and for a moment, he could've sworn he heard the teeth rub against one another and had to surpass the feeling of his spine-tingling.

Truth glanced over at the alchemist before him, a shadowed aura giving way to a curious one as he took in the blonde before him...almost as if he was finally noticing the blonde's presence before him.

"...humans are such fickle creatures, I'm sure you know that by now, but they'd rather ignore my warnings...after all, ignorance is bliss...which begs the question how do you know of this? Humans don't see what they don't want to believe, poor things they are, but you seem to have an uncanny knack for sticking your nose where it doesn't belong...seeing things others have chosen to ignore."

Ed remained silent for a moment as he stared at the being in front of him before he cleared his throat, thoughts disrupted as he focused back on reality, "I mean I didn't know what it was all about until I got stuck in Gluttony's stomach...but once I did, it was almost child's play to figure it out...now, an eye for an eye: why haven't you done anything?"

"Oh, surely you must jest! I have my own rules, my own guidelines, if I don't abide by them, what is the point in creating mankind? You must save yourselves, I can't do everything for you, you wouldn't learn if I did. Yes, I can talk, warn, give advice and take back what was once and always will be mine, but I can't interfere directly. I'd need a third party, someone to execute it for me, a human willing to do it."

Truth trails off and gives the elder Elric a look over, shuffling around him, lifting his ponytail and shifting his head all while he continued to mutter under his breath. At this point, it's only when Ed is about to deck the ever-living shit out of him-

- does Truth relent and steadies himself in front of Ed.

He rubs at his chin, tilts his head and gives him a once over before stating ominously, "Unless..." and leaves it at that.

Now, let it be known that Edward Elric is no dumbass, no matter what Colonel bastard the says behind his back, and that, reasonably, he is, for all intents and purposes, a genius. That was a fact. However...that didn't mean it didn't take him a moment to truly process what the egotistical asshole in front of him was implying.

He couldn't actually be suggesting that right?

Right?

"What are you doi-!"

"Hush, I'm thinking. I'm considering it. I'm interested. Yes, you'll do nicely."

"...what just happened?"

"I thought it was obvious, I want you to be my third party and get rid of this 'Father' character and his Homonculus."

"What part of that was obvious?" Ed muttered under his breath, eyes wide and disbelieving.

Truth looked at him as if he had grown a third head and mumbled in an astonished voice, "Dear me, look at you. Your so...jaded. I truly envy you."

"You, envy me?"
"You mind…it's so placid, straight forward, barely used. It must be relaxing."

"I would ask a god, any god really, to save me from you but oh, look, here he is standing in front of me and it's just my luck that he's a gigantic prick!" Ed whispered.

"So, you'll do it then?"

"Me? Are you kidding? Hell no! I'd probably fuck everything up, scratch that, I will fuck everything up! I'm the last person you want to help save a country filled with millions. No, no way am I doing this!"

---

"I can't believe I'm doing this," Ed protested under his breathe.

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The 15-year-old grumbled as he trekked through the streets of Central, a black jacket and hood covering his face from any prying eyes and curious ears, not that Ed really believed anyone would recognize him down here in the Red Light District.

Though on the city maps it's officially known as the Canal District, no one would believe that Edward Elric, Fullmetal Alchemist and Hero of the People would be slumming it down here with the nitty and gritty side of town where bars, brothels and shady people thrived.

Ed travelled through the back alleys and dimly lit streets in case there was something out there because Ed doesn't think he can sleep without one eye open. Not after the night that he's had, not after the truths he learned and the monsters he's faced.

No, right now Ed's damn glad that he's a paranoid bastard.

Now if only he could find that damn bar the Colonel mentioned. He hadn't been paying attention, too busy trying to focus on writing something down in his notes but as the Colonel walked Ed to the train station after he had become a state alchemist, he mentioned a safe haven.

A place to go if no one in the military could be trusted and Ed either couldn't get to the Colonel or couldn't tell him what he was doing. Ed hadn't put much thought into it before, never really believing he'd need to go to her.

But, regardless, alongside gun control, the art of disguises and emergency first aid, one of the many things Mustang drilled into his head was the location of Madame Christmas's bar.
Ed let all doubts wash away as he pushed open the heavy oak door of the bar, soaking up the bright lights, the sounds of people fiddling with small knick-knacks and the sharp smell of cigarettes wash over him. He took a deep breath and suddenly, he was back home: watching Winry tinker with her automail, the smell of Granny Pinako's pipe and the brilliant sunrise of Resembool's countryside rush through him in a swirl of memories.

As fast as it had come, it was gone and he let his golden eyes flicker across the bar, taking in the multiple exits, the possible weapons and more importantly, the patrons. It was empty, but none of its regulars seemed to mind, and it was classy. That much was true.

All the girls- escorts as Winry would call them- dressed in elegant dresses that clung to their bodies like a second skin and wore their hair in elaborate styles. Shiny jewelry hung off necks and ears like decorations from a Christmas tree and they wore heels of different shapes and sizes, each giving them new heights that allowed them to give off power only they could give.

But the person who truly caught his eye was the woman behind the bar. She was in her late 40's no older as her sleek black hair suggested, she was rather big-boned and wore a deep purple dress covered in a fuzzy overcoat. She wore two necklaces, one of them was made of pearls and another made of gold.

A mole made a stark contrast against her pale skin from where it rested beneath her bottom right cheek. Her lips were the colour of blood and a cigarette- the one he smelled earlier his mind supplied- hung from her mouth, much like Havoc's did.

She was more than just a brothel and bar owner and he knew it the moment her eyes laid on him, familiar dark black eyes that burned like charcoal eyed him as he approached the bar and flipped off his hood, revealing his golden hair and youthful face. It took him a moment but Ed finally recognized where he's seen those eyes before.

**Colonel Bastard.**

Huh, so that's why he drilled this location into his head. She's his relative, probably that aunt Riza mentioned. Madame Christmas, Roy Mustang's aunt and the only place Ed found himself turning too in his time of need.

Ed let himself slink into a bar seat and set his arms atop the bar, his chin propped up on his hand and his other resting nonchalantly atop the shiny wooden counters. He let his golden eyes glance over at Madame Christmas, eyeing her and every other occupant in the room as he began to tap his finger on the wood.
Madame Christmas eyed the little brat in front of her, the one who strut in and placed himself at her bar. She knew for a fact he wasn't legal and the last time a child his age was allowed in her bar was when she was raising Roy.

She looked over at Vanessa and let her eyes flicker over to the back where her gun was, the one that Roy gave to her before he was deployed for Ishval. The young blonde nodded briefly and made her way to the back as she strode over the little brat. She stopped in front of him and let herself look over him once more before she opened her mouth to speak before she was interrupted.

"Shots of Whiskey, please?"

Ed held back his smirk as he eyed her startled expression and eyed her up, noticing the nod she sent to the older blonde who had made her way to the back...oh so he was a threat, was he? Oh well.

"Are you even legal brat?" Madame Christmas's gruff voice asked him.

Without blinking, Ed threw his state alchemist watch and gazed on with fond eyes as she caught it with one hand, barely even flinching as she did it. "There's only one state alchemist who's as young as you...what's the Hero of the People doing here ordering a drink? Better yet, does Roy know you're here?" She asks as she pours him his shot and passes it to him.

"Nope," he answers before knocking it back. "That's actually why I'm here Madame."

"Oh?"

"...I need your help."

Madame Christmas eyed him with her small beady eyes, "Why are you coming to me? Shouldn't you be going to Roy? He is your superior officer after all."

Ed didn't say anything, he merely grabbed a note from his pocket and pushed it towards her. He grabbed another one of the shots lined up in front of him before knocking it back. Out of the corner of his eye, he watched as she picked up the thin paper and read it, her eyes briefly widening before she sighed and grabbed the last shot he had in his hand and chugging it back herself.

She set the small shot glass on the countertop, "I know Roy said you were a handful, but dear god kid, you need help."

Ed barked out a laugh," Trust me, god will definitly be no help to me. You're the best thing I've got, so, what'd'ya say? Think you can help me?"

Madame Christmas let a small smile grace her lips and Ed was stunned at the resemblance between Roy and her at that moment that he almost missed what she had to say to him, "Yeah kid, I think I can help you. But I've just got one thing I've gotta ask you."
"Shoot."

"Who knows about your little plan?"

"Including us, it'll be six."

"I'm gonna take a guess and say Roy isn't included?"

"No, and he can't ever know. No one can ever know. Right now, my friends, family and the military will be hearing the news about my death. How I sacrificed myself for my country, my people. Hell, I'll probably be promoted, not that it'll do me much good. But for this to work, Edward Elric can't live. I can't complete this mission as myself, there are too many eyes looking at my every move for me to take action. No, I have to become someone else. That's why I needed your help. You're my only hope, Madame Christmas."

She didn't say anything, merely handed him another shot which he took gratefully before she leaned back and crossed her arms, eyeing him as if contemplating what to say next to him...or rather ask.

"If you don't mind me asking, why? Why all the secrecy? This mission...what's so damn important?"

Ed grabbed the shot from the counter and gave her a grateful nod before downing it in one go, "The military's been compromised from the inside, from the very heart of the nation. Anyone who ever finds out too much gets killed...Roy knows this...or rather he was close to figuring out the truth before I went missing and 'killed'." Ed made air quotes as he explained.

He was treated to the sight of Chris's eyes widening as she dropped a glass on the floor, not even noticing it shattering at her feet or hearing the concerned calls of her girls and it took her several moments to process what Ed had just told her. He could see it in her eyes as the gears turned and her eyes light up in understanding before they darkened as the severity of his statement went through her head.

"Roy was right, you are a complicated brat. Vanessa, take him upstairs and put him in Roy's old room. You can crash here tonight, I doubt you have anywhere you can stay what with you being 'dead' now. Get plenty of rest, the real shit show is only the beginning."

Ed gave her a tired salute as he slipped off the barstool and stumbled a bit though he managed to catch himself. He followed the blonde who gave him a friendly smile that he made an effort to return.

Just as they were about to head up the stairs, Madame Christmas called out to him, "Hey brat!"

He stopped with his back turned towards her, "Just promise me something?" she asked.

"Yeah?"

"Promise me you'll keep him safe...Roy is all I have left in this world."

"...I promise."

"Thanks, brat...now scram!"
Less Is More

Chapter Summary

When Ed agreed to fuck up all the Homonculus’s plans, he didn’t know all he needed to do was raid Chris's liquor cabinet.

Chapter Notes

Please read: This follows the plot points of episode 29 'Struggle of the Fool'. Or at least most of it.

I'm basically skipping the 'Father' episode because honestly, I don't know how I would write that whole thing out. The only difference is that Ed doesn't appear and everyone's confused but Envy won't explain and Ling is a little too busy being a self-sacrificing dolt like a certain blonde twat that we know and love.

Now, for those of you wondering who the other 4 people that will be in the plan with Ed, I will give you a couple of hints and also tell you that if you can guess at least 2 of the 4 right, I will dedicate a chapter to you and if you guess all 4 right, I will contact you from my author email and you can either get a preview into the next chapter or give me one idea you'd maybe like to see happen and I'll see if I can make it so.

Here are some hints:
- there are more males than females
- at least 2 of these people are in the military
- all of them are born in Amestris
- at least one of them holds a higher rank than Ed

You'll have until I reach the end of 520 Cens Promise.

That's all, hope you like this chapter and happy reading!

Ed stirred to the sounds of Madame Christmas's girls hustling and bustling about, sunlight gushing through the curtains and a headache pulsating within the confines of his head. He wrapped himself in the duvet, waves of nausea adding to his misery before he attempted to open his eyes. A groan tore
its way from his lips as he did so and no, just no, he wasn't ready to deal with this now.

He fell in and out of consciousness more times than he could remember but he knew some time had passed by the time he woke. After a few more minutes, Ed finally felt brave enough to try and open them again. He raised his heavy eyelids half way only for them to fall shut. Yeah, no. He could be a coward right now, his brain swirling as the memories of last night and his meeting with Truth resonated in his mind.

Ed was more aware of his cracking headache than the layer of dehydrated saliva that coated his cracked lips. He smacked his lips and his stomach turned in an unfriendly way.

A repetitive knock cut through his dark thoughts and Ed began to sit up but gave up halfway and dove under the snug and warm covers of his bed, his flesh hand brushing the last few grains of sleepy sand from his golden eyes and a yawn escaping his lips as he did so. If the world wasn't ending, he knew he could've stayed under these covers forever.

The door cracked open before a gentle, melodious voice cut through all the chatter from downstairs and the pounding in his head, "Mr.Alchemist, may I come in?"

"Ugh, yeah, come on in." Ed managed to crack out from beneath the thin blankets.

The large wooden door creaked opened to reveal Vanessa. A tray was in her delicate-looking hands and what looked like his breakfast sat upon it; a steaming cup of coffee that roused the sleep from him and a plate of what smelled like bacon and eggs caused his stomach rebel against his better nature. Feeling his stomach protest to the smell, Ed tried to get himself to move towards the bathroom he noticed last night.

He raised them again and swung his bare feet to the wooden flooring; it was cold in an unforgiving way and if Ed wasn't already worried about so many other things at the moment, he would have shrieked like a little girl and jumped back into the welcoming covers that called to him from his bed.

Once on his feet, the room swayed almost causing him to lose balance and he reached out for the wall. His hand slipped along the high sheen paint and he sprawled onto the carpet with a crashing thump. The room swirled before becoming stationary again and he used the bedstead to pull himself to standing.

The sight that welcomed Vanessa was one of the younger blonde sailing past her to get towards the conjoining bathroom and hearing him empty his stomach into the polished toilet bowl.

Against her better nature, Vanessa let a snicker escape her as Ed made his way back into the room, hair a mess, dried drool shining on his face and cracked lips smacking on one another as he stumbled back into the room. He proceeded to trip over the odd knick-knack and object that was thrown haphazardly into the room by Roy back when he was still living with them. Chris just hadn't had the time nor enough worry to straighten the room up after he left for Ishval.

Ed stopped before the bed before falling face forwards and it was then that Vanessa let herself bark out a laugh at the sight of him. Ed lifted his head and gave a half-hearted glare before the sun hit his glassy unfocused eyes and he groaned, letting his head fall back into the covers.

"What'daya wnat?" came his muffled voice.

"I brought you your breakfast. The Madame asked me to tell you to straighten up and then you'll be getting to work. She asked me to ask you what to call you?" Vanessa told him, voice to preppy for him this early in the morning.
Ed turned his head to the side and paused for a moment, lost in thought, before he spoke, "...call me Trick."

"Trick? Is that like a last name or something?"

"Yeah, something like that," Ed told her.

Between the pounding headache, Ed closed his eyes and tried to think of anything else but the last 48 hours. In his mind, he saw flashes of blonde hair and blue eyes and blew out a breath of air as he tried to move on from those memories.

Vanessa nodded before she set down his tray on the wooden end table near the bed before she disappeared into the hall only to come back a few moments later. Towels alongside a few bottles that Ed assumed were some soaps before she bid him farewell and left him to his own devices.

Al didn't know what was happening, one moment he was following Gluttony to his 'Father', the next both Ling and Envy burst from Gluttony's stomach in a show of red alchemical light, blood and guts. And Ed didn't come through. His brother hadn't come through. Al knew if he had a body, he would be hyperventilating right now but he didn't, so he didn't get that luxury.

Then a big fight happened and Ling sacrificed himself to become the Homonculus Greed and he was shoving the little black and white cat and Xingese girl into his armour as they slept having over exhausted themselves fighting. After the dust settled, Al was left standing surrounded by immortal beings with not so innocent intentions and he had no idea what he was doing.

All he could think of where his brother was? Where could he be? What if he was hurt, bleeding somewhere in a dark back alley with no one to help him? Al found himself being led down a dark, wet tunnel that seemed to go on forever by the homunculus Envy. It seemed to be hours before the two of them stopped in front of an elevator and Envy clicked something before he turned to look briefly at him.

"Just get in." He said before he entered the elevator. After a moment, Al followed Envy's order and once he entered, Envy pushed a red button and the doors shut before them.

The elevator began to rise up through the shaft and Al tried to keep himself occupied by looking anywhere other than Envy before he couldn't help himself and looked over to see an unknown soldier, so common and human-looking that Al could see why Envy hadn't been caught up until now by anyone.

A ding resounded through the elevator before the doors opened to reveal a familiar looking hallway to Al and it was enough to make him pause in shock, however, Envy had no such problems apparently as he walked through without blinking at the change of scenery before them. It took him a few seconds before he could gather his bearings and he left the little elevator behind.

"Is this...?" he let the question trail off.
"Central command? Why yes, it is." Envy asked as he looked back at him before an evil grin overtook his face and looking at it now, Al could see Envy shining through the soldier's human appearance.

"Come on, I need to take you to see Wrath, he'll be taking over babysitting you now. Right, this way." Envy led them down long twisting hallways and passages before they stopped in front of a set of large intricate wooden doors with shiny golden doorknobs. Envy opened the door and gestured for Al to follow him.

Al stepped inside almost to step back in shock as Bradley and Mustang were shown to be sitting across from one another, but he shook off his shock as he moved closer. Al approached the table as Mustang turned his head forward once more and closed his eyes and kept his arms crossed.

Bradley- no, Wrath, looked towards the two and narrowed his eye when Envy didn't leave right away. "Where's Fullmetal?" he asked in a no-nonsense tone.

"Dead."

It only took one word to shatter Al's world into a million little pieces. And no amount of alchemy could fix it again. He knew that but at that moment, Al wished for more than anything that it did.

Because human transmutation couldn't bring back the dead and even if it could, Al could give nothing.

He had nothing left.

Mustang barely had time to register that before Envy and Wrath were talking again, nonchalant and uncaring that everything in his world turned upside down. If Roy thought his world was turned upside down before, it had nothing on what he was feeling right now. The little brat was gone? Impossible. It just didn't seem real. Then again none of this did and yet...it was.

"What happened?"

"Well, the only way to get out of that fat bastard's stomach was to perform a reverse human transmutation to open the failed gate he had inside. The blonde brat warned us that it could rebound on him...guess it did, because he didn't come back with us. We don't know what exactly happened, but we know he's as good as dead, whether he's still stuck inside, stuck inside the gate or simply dead. We'll need to find another sacrifice. Better start looking!" Envy gave a shit eating grin as he waved them all goodbye.

A pit of dread seemed to drop in his stomach as Roy looked back to Bradley with eyes reflecting his days from the war and a heavy heart weighing down his shoulders. Now was no time to mourn, not here, not now.
Ed stumbled his way down the stairs, dried hair pulled back into a messy bun and a fresh pair of clothes that Vanessa snuck in earlier when he finally made his way into the shower. He wore a pair of military blue sweatpants and a black tank top that somehow fit him perfectly and Ed had the sneaking suspicion that these belong to a certain Furher Bastard back when he was young, but he didn't say anything to Chris when he walked into her bar barefoot with his travelogue in hand.

He hopped onto one of her many maroon leather bar stools and caught the steaming cup of coffee she slid him from down the counter where she was pouring her own. She looked up, took in his appearance and gave an approving hum. Ed picked it up and began to take a sip.

"You'll need a makeover," she commented absentmindedly, watching with amused eyes as Ed did a spit take all over the counter at her comment.

"Excuse me!" Ed hacked out.

"You're dead, aren't you? And as far as I know, from what Roy told me, only you and you're brother have golden hair and eyes," she answered.

"So what, you're gonna dye my hair black or something?" he cried.

"Heavens no, that's a bit extreme and what happens when the dye starts to come out? People will instantly know you dyed it when your blonde locks start to show. No, I think we should dye it a different shade of blonde, that way when it starts to come out, it won't be as noticeable. I can get Vanessa to go get you some different shades for you to choose from."

"What about my eyes then?"

"That's easy, coloured contacts and just to sure, we'll get you some fake glasses to complete the look. I was thinking about a shade of blue or brown. The hair you can get away with being somewhat blonde but your eyes will have to change."

Ed took a deep breath as he shuddered, gears turning in his head and mind racing a million miles an hour. He turned and looked her in the eye, "Ok, okay...do I have to cut my hair?"

Chris waved her hand in a dismissive wave, "Nah, you can keep it. If anything, from behind people might think it's you but the more you subtly change your appearance, the easier it'll be to fool them when they actually see you. They'll think its a trick of the light and wave it off as nothing. By the way, 'Trick'?" she asked.

"I don't know if you can get me this, but I'll need a military licence. Lt.Colonel Patrick Mors."

"A Lt.Colonel, huh?"

"Rank means nothing to me, however, I want to be as far away from my old identity as possible. By the way, I'll need to be outfitted with some new automail."
"New? What kind of new?" Chris asked.
"The Northern Type."
"North? What's up North?"
"Allies."

Mustang watched as Al ran away from the room as fast as he could with his money, leaving him standing alone in the hall. The boy had been given a state alchemist's watch and a renewed hope after their conversation with Bradley...Ed might not be exactly dead, they just didn't know for sure that he was alive either.

And Al thought that maybe if he went with May on her journey, they could find the philosopher's stone together and he could pay a toll to grab his brother back from the gate...but before that, he left to tell Winry the news.

Mustang sighed, a swirl of emotions inside him raging as he walked down the halls absentmindedly before he remembered something very important...it was on the tip of his tongue...usually, Riza would remind hi- oh...

"Lieutenant!" Mustang shouted as he came to a stop.

Armstrong's massive figure appeared towering over Mustang, his face stoic and his eyes shadowed over, "Is there something troubling you, Colonel?" He gruffly asked.

Mustang deflated and turned to the wall, putting his hand on it and bowing his head. "You seem slightly discomposed," Armstrong said. Mustang turned and gave a half-assed glare.

"Just how do you expect me to appear? I had hoped a young woman would be standing there, not a mustachio, muscled man." He said as footsteps were heard.

"Colonel," Riza said.

Mustang looked up to see Riza in front of him. He gasped. "Lieutenant."

"I was getting worried," Riza said before snapping back into respectfulness. "Sorry." She saluted. "Lieutenant Hawkeye, reporting back to post from latrine break, sir."
Major Armstrong happened to be passing by. He was nice enough to watch my post for me." She dropped the salute and turned to Armstrong. "Thanks for everything, Major. I appreciate it."

"No trouble at all," Armstrong said. Mustang just stared at Riza. "So you didn't run off?" Riza looked at him. "Someone once told me to never give up, no matter what and once was all I needed."

Mustang blinked, surprised in his eyes before it melted away to a warm fondness for the woman before him, "Just don't ever tell me you wished you'd run when you had the chance." He turned around but looked over his shoulder at her. "Alright?"

"It's too late for regrets." She said before walking over to him.

Roy stopped about 12 feet away from her before he turned around and called back, "Oh, and Lieutenant?"

Riza turned towards him," Yes, sir?"

"I have some troubling news to tell you later. Could you gather the old team together at the usual spot? I have some things to tell you all."

"Of course sir."

Al stood awkwardly inside the phone booth, letting the phone ring as his ears- metaphorical- began to pound. He had already called Granny and Teacher, heard yelling, screaming and promises to help him find Ed. Now, all he had to do is deal with Winry.

The phone finally connected and before he could even get a word through, a soft "Hello?" reached his ears.

"Hi, Winry."

"Al!" she happily greeted him. "Its good to hear from you. Are you okay? Where's Ed? Is he there?"

Al swallowed before he spoke, "Well, you see..."

Ed was fiddling with his new hair and glasses as he fought the urge to rub his eyes for the fifteenth time in the last hour since he had gotten his new hair colour and glasses. They were a lot like the ones Riza wore when undercover and his hair was almost the same shade as Aunt Sarah's. His eyes
were blue like Winry's and his sighed as pulled back his hair into an elegantly messy bun.

He was wearing the uniform Chris managed to get him- **don't ask him how she got it so fast, he didn't want to know**- though he took it off just before he came down again and pulled on Mustang's old sleepwear. He now definitley knew that Furher Bastard was completely nuts because how could anyone leave these clothes behind, they were so soft!

Ed hopped on the bar stool and nodded thanks to Vanessa who passed him his glass of whiskey. Just as he was taking his first sip, the bell rang and Ed briefly turned to look at the newcomers and proceeded to choke on his drink.

Why? Because Mustang and the team just walked into the bar.
Reap What We Sow

Chapter Summary

Ed hadn’t expected the backlash of his actions to hit so soon, but it had. It did. And all he could do was sit and watch from the side of the bar, whiskey in hand as the people he loved, the life he lived and the home he made crumbled before him under the weight of their grief from his ‘death’.

Takes place in “Struggle of the Fool” and in “The Ishvalan War of Extermination”. However, please note, that I won’t go into a lot of depth into the second episode, it’s mostly just him getting ready to head North during that episode. Then after that, we’ll be in “520 Cens Promise” where I will be revealing another of the 4. This will be the last chapter to guess for all four!

Chapter Notes

⚠️ WARNING! ⚠️

Some pretty heavy angst and guilt this chapter, hold onto you tissues ladies, it’s about to get bumpy.

Last call aboard the ANGST TRAIN! CHOO CHOO FUCKERS!

I’m a mess, this is literally making me cry and I wrote it to sad music, mainly Hallelujah so I cried and I’m gonna make you cry because I’m an ass who can’t help it. Get ready for Ed who can’t even with anything!

If you want to feel the mood I wrote this too, listen to Hallelujah by Pentatonix and Can’t Pretend by Tom Odell.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Ed knew.

He had known. Really, he had.

He had known it would happen, known it was coming, whether he liked it or not.

Known the moment he asked Truth that question. Deep down, he knew. He may not have thought much about it, but he had known.
He had known when Truth asked him, had known when he denied it, knowing he would probably fuck it all up, knows when he ultimately accepted the burden because he was a self-sacrificing idiot who couldn’t bear to place this burden upon anyone else. After all, look at what happened to Al, to Hughes, to Maroch.

He couldn’t let that happen to anyone else.

He wouldn’t let it happen to anyone else.

He was smart. A genius. Proclaimed with pride by his people, stared with envy by his fellows and smiled at lovingly by people he knew he didn’t deserve.

He didn’t deserve them, but he had them. And somehow along the way, he took that for granted.

He remembers the way Izumi has smiled at him, how gentle her voice would get, how enraged she would be and how caring she was when she thought he wasn’t looking. How he called her mom in his head and called her teacher in the same tone he would when he called out to his mother.

And he knows it was foolish but sometimes, when it was late at night and he laid awake unable to sleep, he’d think of Izumi and how she was so different yet so much like his mom and he falls asleep to her gentle smile and dreams of them both.

He can remember the way Sig would gently pat his head, never remarking his small stature, only how big he had grown and how he cared for both him and Al in his own way.

He remembers Granny, the smell of her smoke pipe and the sharp wit that spits like fire from her mouth as she talks. How she can whip insults and comments around as easy as she breathed out from her pipe and the endless nights she spent working with him during his recovery.

He can see Winry, tinkering with whatever project she had, how happy she was to see him every damn time. Even though he never called, never visited and never wrote her letters, she never stopped smiling like it was yesterday and how she would throw her wrench with an amazingly scary amount of accuracy and wondered why she treated him as if he hadn’t fucked up everything. Because he had, he did, he still does.

He remembers Riza’s gentle smiles that she sent his way, the soft fondness that entered her hardened eyes when she looked at him.

Remembers the way Havoc favoured one pack of smokes over another, his jokes he tried not to laugh at but would sometimes crack a smile, the way he called him “Chief!” with such genuine respect.

He can see the way Fuery would send him shy smiles anytime Ed talked to him, had seen the gentle ways that reminded him of Al when he first snuck Black Hayate into command.

He remembers the way Breda would offer his food whenever he found himself in the office, remembers the way he would always give his silent support against the Furher Bastard whenever the bastards back was turned. The way he helped him fact check and give him a hand in the library.

He can remember all the facts that Falman gave out, the way he was such a stickler for the rules yet seemed to lighten up when it came to Ed, how he seemed to make exceptions and could recite any rule for Ed when he was arguing with the Colonel Bastard and needed to one-up him.

He remembers the way Al calls out to him with such adoration, such genuine love that it makes him fill with guilt, wondering how he could ever forgive him. How he couldn’t hate Ed with every fibre
how his being? How he wasn’t able to experience all the joys he was supposed to because Ed, his big brother, his protector, had fucked up.

He can almost feel the way the Colonel Bastard would send him that smug smirk, eyes so dark that it was unbelievable how expressive they were, how much emotion he showed. He hears the insults, the snide comments and the way he would make a joke only to watch with fond eyes as the blonde would blow up in rage.

He remembers the almost gentle touches of comfort, the head pats, the light touches on his shoulder and the hugs he gave when Ed needed them, especially after Nina. He remembers the way he would yell at him, so concerned and upset it reminded him of Hughes as a father would. He remembered sometimes thinking as he stared at the stressed man in front of him if that was what a father was supposed to be like.

He remembers all these little things and finds himself drowning in a sea of guilt.

And yet, that still didn’t stop him from being startled.

From feeling an overwhelming amount of guilt that made it hard to breath when he glances over and notices them.

Sees them all together, without him and knows from the solemn look in the Colonel Bastard’s eyes that he was about to tell them about Ed.

And he mourns. A gut-wrenching sob wants to pull itself up from his throat and makes him want to scream himself hoarse.

Because he had known.

And he still did it anyway.

---

Ed observed with steady eyes as Roy- and since when has he started to refer to him as Roy in his mind? - led the group to a table in the back, conveniently close enough for him to hear their conversation.

He made himself look busy as he grasped the discarded pen that laid off to the side on the wooden counter. He plucked up his travelogue and made a show of writing in it when he was actually taking notes of their conversations.

He watched as they sat down and looked around the bar at the patrons before they almost catch him staring and he made himself busy by pretending to scribble something down neatly in his journal.

Vanessa delivers him a meaningful look that Ed caught and proceeded to scoff at. It wasn't like he knew the bastard would come here, really how could he know? 'Then again' his mind whispers, 'you knew about everything else.' And just like that, Ed knows this is not gonna be easy. He had known that, of course, but...
"Colonel, what are we doing here anyway?" Fuery asks, tone curious and just...tired. As if he couldn't be bothered to deal with all the problems life kept throwing at him and fuck, Ed just knows it's gonna get a whole lot worse once this conversation starts going.

"I've called you here today because we've gotten an update on Fullmetal," And, as if it was some magical spell to make all the shitty things in life all better, the team perked up: Riza's eyes shined, a fond smile came across Breda's face, Falman straightens his back and Furey gains a hint of excitement that he was lacking before.

Fuck.

Oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit 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oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh
for the distress he's in or the fact that it's all real.

It's all real.

This is his reality.

There was no turning back.

It hits him, then and there, sitting on a beat-up leather stool, Chris's favourite brand of whiskey in hand as he wears Mustang's old clothes and talks with Chris’s girls like they were his team, as he listens with both ears wide open as his team wail and sob and lose their ever immaculate composesures. They've never done that; not really, never for anything other than brief smiles and Ed was certain that there were never any silent tears or never-ending cries before.

Look what he's done, what he's made, what he's caused. This was his fault.

All his.

He caused this, he did it without a second thought and why?

That had to be the worst part because at the end of the day; he didn't even know why. He just did it. He did it without considering anyone or anything in his life. Something Ed realizes that he has a bad history of doing and knows that he really hadn't thought it through.

Because if he had...if he had taken a second and stepped back...maybe he wouldn't be staring at Hawkeye, who has tears in beautiful brown eyes; eyes that would smile at him even as her face remained as cold as ice.

Maybe he wouldn't be watching as the Colonel clenches his fists as he trembles, trying to keep it all down and bottled up inside because that's what he does. It's all he's ever done and without Hughes...no one had realized.

He wouldn't be watching from a bar as Fuery shakes in disbelief, as Falman becomes slowly more depressed and as Breda goes quiet, ever easy-going smile lost as he gains a solemn appearance.

He wouldn't be watching from across the bar as if a glass wall separates him from them, from his life, his family. But it was there. It might as well have been. Maybe then it would make it easier; knowing he could at least try breaking down the wall instead of waiting from afar with dark thoughts that weigh heavy on his mind and a drink in his hand.

You reap what you sow. It taunts him in his mind, on repeat, like a constant noise in the back of his mind ready to creep out at any given moment when he lets his guard down.

A glass wall separates Ed from everything he's ever loved, known and wants more than anything in his short life and he can't even be bothered to try to break through.

The sledgehammer was right there; just a couple steps and he could put this whole facade away, say he ended up coming out somewhere different, that it just took him a while to get back and why were they crying? Didn't they know it was his fault but he was back? Look at him; he was fine. Wipe those tears away, Lieutenant. Please, someone, notice me. Can't you see me? Look at me!

Please...someone...why can't you see me? LOOK AT ME DAMMIT!

The sledgehammer was right there in front of him and he didn't break the glass wall even as his mind screamed and his ears continued to echo out bombs that went off faster than Hawkeye's gun.
Because he hadn't thought it through.

And he didn't even know why.

The never-ending static is like a battering ram against his eardrums and the room spins as Ed begins to breathe in heavily because it was all his fault. And he had known. Hadn't he? Why didn't he think it through? Why did he do this? He doesn't know why and it's killing him because he had known.

He risks a glance over to his team and catches sight of Mustang trying to calm down a distressed Hawkeye as the others hang their heads and clench their fists yet Ed can't hear a thing- a deafening silence rings through his ears and his vision spins before he's forced to closed his eyes in pain and hang his head again

Loud booms echo through his ears and Ed swears that time slows to a stop as the noise rings in his memory before it all comes crashing down as his gravity lurches forwards and the room spins and its too much, he had known, he didn't think it through, he doesn't even know why he did this, why had he don-

"'Trick?" a warm soothing voice cuts through the bombs that continue on repeat like background noise; muted yet alive all the same. He startles when a small delicate hand places itself on his shoulder and Ed looks over to see Vanessa; a small smile on her pale plump lips and a shine of concern and worry in her big glistening blue eyes.

"You've been staring off into space for about 20 minutes now. I just locked up for the night."

Ed took in her gentle appearance and her kind nature and simply fell into her arms. He could tell she was surprised by the way she tensed but it left him warm inside when she quietly opened her arms and shifted him so that she could hug him tighter. He lifted his arms that once felt like lead and encircled them around her; letting her warmth and her love surround him, shifting its way around him until it covered him like a blanket and for the first time in what felt like years, he felt safe.

He didn't know how long they stayed like that but after what seemed like hours, Vanessa finally broke the tender silence they shared as she asked him in an even softer tone than he's heard before"...I know its not my place to ask questions, hell, I don't even know who you really are Trick, but, I just wanted to ask...are you okay?"

He took in her question and thought back to the past few hours, days, weeks, months, years...everything that's happened, every tragedy, struggle, hardship and disaster. He thinks to the night that he ruined his brother's life. He thinks back to Hughes death to Maria Ross to Nina...he thinks of every failed attempt, every death that he could've prevented and every mistake he's made.

"No," he breathes out from where his face is tucked into her neck. "No, I'm not okay, V. I don't think I've been okay for a long time. I fuck up everything I touch and I ruin the lives of those I love, why can't I ever do anything right? I try so hard, all the fucking time, but it never makes any difference...does...does that make me broken, V? Am I broken?"
Vanessa breathed in, silent for a moment as she started to rock the both of them back and forth. "No, love, you're not broken. I think that you forget that you're human. It's okay to make mistakes. You need to let go...Let go, Trick."

And with that, the dam burst. He didn't make a sound aside from the small sniffltes and hiccups he let escape in his moment of weakness. Tears fell like a waterfall from his eyes and he couldn't stop them. At first, the tears were meagre and soundless but as the seconds ticked by, his cries grew louder until he was sobbing, gasping for breath as he cried in between the breaths of air he managed to suck in.

Vanessa's arms tightened around him as he continued to wail; shoulders trembling, hiccuping as his heart bled and gut-wrenching sobs forced themselves out of him like the full force of a bomb, unyielding and uncaring of whoever it hurt.

"I can't stop. It won't stop. V, I can't stop crying. Why won't it stop? I want it to stop! I can't stop crying a-and...it hurts! It hurts so much. It's like my brains on fire and my heart is beating too fast...i-it won't stop, make it stop!"

"I...I just can't stop.' Ed hiccups. "It hurts too much...I don't even know what happened...a-and I can't think! I need to think! But my head keeps swimming and my heart aches and it hurts...so bad! It feels like it was ripped out of my chest and its... its just...so much pain. How could I even think of that? They acted like it was no big deal, that I could get it done easily like it was no big deal, okay? But it's not, it'll never be easy! To them, this is just something I need to do...like it didn't matter that I have to watch as everything I've rebuilt for him crumble, but it does! It matters...Al matters...he's the only family I have left, my little brother, my everything! "

"I knew, I really did and I still did it and now? Everything is fucked up and I have to watch them mourn me and why can't they see me, V? Don't they see me standing here? Please, just someone see me! I did it anyways and I didn't think and I DON'T EVEN KNOW WHY! I-I don't know even know why I did it anymore and I don't think I ever knew in the first place...and I...I...I don't want to be broken anymore...I just want to be me again. Is that too much to ask?"

"No, sweetheart, it's not. It's not..." she trails off as she hugs him closer to her and that's when Ed feels it.

Tiny drops of water still warm hit the top of his head and he's startled to realize that the tears are coming from Vanessa. He knows when her shoulders start to shake and the tears continue to stream that she's crying just as much as him.

It's not fair that he's broken.

But he is.

Chapter End Notes

Oh god I'm so sorry please don't kill me...I'm just gonna go hide in that corner over there and sob my heart out, I made myself cry because I listened to sad shit...OH GOD!
A Northern Assignment

Chapter Summary

Ed comes to realize that his plan is coming along a little too well and he isn't sure that he likes it. Another one of Ed's allies joins in as Al decides to head North in hopes that General Armstrong will help him after talking it over Riza and Izumi on what to do over the last few days.

Follows the episodes "520 Cens Promise" & "The Furher's Son"

Chapter Notes

THE RESULTS ARE IN!

Ok, so I know I'm late by like a week or so but I wanted to give you guys adequate time to vote and try to guess all four - which no one got btw. Back to the point, no one guessed all four, a lot of you guessed Olivier and Scar; good job you guys, they were 2 of the four.

Some of you guessed others like Izumi. Weirdly enough most of you either guessed Darius and Heinkel or Al and the Team. No to both - Al and Team Mustang are too important to Ed for him to willingly risk their lives by telling them. Also, if he's supposed to be undercover as a fake soldier, it'd be weird for Al, a civilian, to be conversing with an unknown soldier he's never met before when he's supposed to be grieving for Ed's death or the like.

The point is to remain as unsuspicious as possible so as to not alert the Homonculus that Ed's alive. It would defeat the purpose.

While Darius and Heinkel are currently under Kimblee, so he's not gonna just go out and tell them without giving them any reason to trust them and vice versa. Not to say they can't find out, but this list is people Ed is willingly and has planned to tell the whole truth to because he needs their help.

Here are some others that people guessed: Ling, Mei, Winry, Sig, Gracia, Dr.Knox, Buccaneer, Marcoh and for some godforsaken reason, Kimblee.

Now, I take great joy in this, but only one person mentioned - that's right, mentioned not guessed- the name while they explained their reasoning for their choices and that person they mentioned was the final person in the group of 4.

Over 12 people guessed and the one that did write the mystery person name only mentioned it and didn't actually put it in their guess...do you know long I yelled at my screen when I went through everyone's to write your names and I realized this? It was like one of the more obvious ones actually, so yeah.

I won't tell you, you have to read the chapter to figure it out! Tell me if you facepalm or yell at yourself for thinking but not guessing it.
The Four Ed Will Tell:
1. Olivier
2. Miles
3. Scar
4. ?? (read to find out)

Now, here's what everyone is waiting for, the dedications in order by chapter through the first two are the exception of course:

1. SolarCupid - the first to guess correctly with the hints
2. DiaHonkers - first to guess before I even posted the damn hint list
3. FireEmblemFanGirl
4. FloatingOnAFeeling
5. Luminores
6. runeofluna
7. GammaCavy
8. ThunderBirdNinja

And those are our dedications ladies and gentlemen, thank you for playing and please read on to find out the last person I have chosen. Hope you've enjoyed the challenge so far and who knows I may even add another one, later on, to keep up the excitement to come~!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Ed knew he should have felt more relieved when he woke up the next morning. Really, he should.

But he doesn't.

And he doesn't know why.

By now, Ed had gotten used to his new glasses and the eye contacts. He had grown used to the new uniform, the hair and the fact that he practically lived in Roy's room. He had become used to the curses that fell from Chris's mouth faster than he could blink when she's realized that he'd gotten into her liqueur cabinet again.
Grown used to the way V would place her hand atop his and give him a sweet smile, the way the girls treated him more like their kid brother rather than a soldier who had needed Chris's talents to help him. Had gotten used to the dim lights, the thick smell of Chris's cigarette, the taste of his favourite brand of whiskey and the way that Chris's record player seemed to be on nonstop throughout the odd hours of the day.

He had even grown used to being called Trick.

But he hadn't grown used to the fact that he was dead.

That the team were being split up, that Al had to tell Teacher and Granny Pinako and Winry that he was dead. That to Sig, Gracia and Elicia he was gone. That he couldn't even be seen looking at them from afar lest he risks getting the Homonculus suspicious. That he had gone to an automail mechanic and was outfitted with Northern Automail by someone who wasn't Winry.

He wasn't used to it. To the lies, the secrets, the liqueur and the weight of it all.

He found himself looking in the mirror after he changed that morning and stopped dead at the sight of his appearance. It wasn't that anything was wrong with it. No, Ed was many things but a slob had never been one of them. Sure, he can tough it out just as much as the next guy but if he can, he'll clean himself up. It was a habit mom had instilled into him and Al as young boys and something Izumi and surprisingly enough Mustang had continued throughout the years with them all.

It was the fact that Ed didn't recognize the person staring back at him through the mirror.

He waved a hand and was startled to see the reflection wave back in the same way he had. And that's when he realized it. It was him. That was him. That was him.

And suddenly it was real.

*This was real.*

His once golden blonde hair was now a champagne blonde and pulled back into a messy bun and his bangs farms a face that seemed thinner than it had been before. It emphasized his cheekbones and enhanced the other sharp features that he inherited from his mother. Instead of liquid gold eyes, a deep navy blue that seemed to glimmer from behind the semi-rimless frames that were perched atop his nose gazed back at him.

His right arm gleamed a different colour; it was still silver but it still felt wrong. It all felt wrong and he knows that if he were to lift up his military standard pants, he'd see a similar looking automail leg. His shoulders seemed broader with the uniform on and the tassel annoyed him, if not for the golden colour it sported then for the way it mimicked his racing heart. Mocking him. A reminder that at any moment he could be caught and it would all be over for them.

The black boots on his feet shined in the light and it made him ache for his old shoes; the uniform colour taunted him for something he couldn't have, a life he willingly left behind. For reasons that he had known but still didn't know why he chose.

The bags under his eyes were more pronounced than from the sleepless nights he'd have while in the library. He could almost smell the thick scent of the books, the numerous paper cuts he'd get flipping endlessly through the yellowed pages, the way his eyes would strain from the continuous researching and the way his body would sag in exhaustion when he allowed himself to release the tension in his shoulders.
He remembers the way he would glance around before he did that; checking for Al, to make sure he couldn't- no, wouldn't see Ed that way. And yet, somehow, he looks more worn now then from all those nights among the books. And it scares him.

Because he doesn't recognize himself when he looks in the mirror.

"Chris, I'm heading out now. Did they come in ye-?" Ed steps into the dining room of the bar as he shrugged on the uniform jacket he took off upstairs only to blink when he notices that the girls are looking at him in disbelief.

"What? What are you all looking at? Is there something on my face?" Ed got a sinking feeling in his chest when he notices that their looks of wonder were slowly turning into small grins of...something. Now that he thinks about it, it kinda looks like that one smirk that Mustang would give him when he would...oh no.

V sauntered up to him and placed an arm around his shoulder an evil grin stretched across her pale lips, "So, Trick, who knew you could clean up so well?"

The other girls laugh and another girl, Clarisse, remarked, "Our little Trick is growing up!"

"Just look at his cheeks, they're bright red!"

"Ahh, is he blushing?"

Before Ed could blow up at them, a cough interrupted the girls teasing. All of them turned to see Chris coming out from behind the bar, in her arms a note, a gun and its holster and an id badge. "Are you done?"

Ed rolls his eyes fondly at the girls who shuffle away from Chris's gaze except for Vanessa because she's a little shit (he's so proud!). He makes his way over with Vanessa still locked around him like the damn spider monkey she was and grabs the outstretched items from Chris' grasp. He opens the note and memorizes the location and time within before catching the lighter Chris threw into his outstretched hand and setting it aflame.

"Here's the bare essentials, kid. Your contact got them to me not long after I sent the message. You should be meeting them at that spot in half an hour." Chris takes a drag from her cigarette as she finishes.

"Thanks for everything Chris, it really means a lot." Her eyes softened and her hand came up to ruffle his hair.

"Don't be a stranger kid." Ed smiled before turning to hug Vanessa who tightened her hold and placed her face in his neck.

"Trick, promise me something?"
"Anything."

"Don't go and get yourself killed, you're my little brother, 'kay?" she whispered in his ear, low enough for only the two of them to hear.

"I promise. Bye, V."

"See ya, Trick!"

Ed grumbled as he made his way through the crowds and shuffled past the sea of bodies until he found himself seated in a dainty chair at some old fashioned cafe that usually only old ladies at. He looked around subtly before taking a small sip of the tea- seriously tea where the fuck was the coffee, huh? -as he waited for his contact.

It couldn't have been more than 10 more minutes before an older lady with absurdly red lips relaxed into the chair across from him and subtly pushed over a plain white envelope. Ed cracked open the seal and peered down to see the official ID card he needed for his badge. There was also a small notebook with the pencil already attached, a lighter, a silver whiskey flask and his transfer papers alongside a formal letter of recommendation to Fort Briggs.

He nodded to his contact and the two began to walk down the sidewalk in silence until Ed couldn't see any people around, "I really appreciate this, sir."

"Think nothing of it. I knew something was up when I got two separate calls from my former subordinates, both with clear messages; they needed help and the military was clearly going to give them none. First you then Mustang. What is this plan of yours anyway? Was it so bad that you really had to fake your own death?"

"Worse."

"I see."

"What's my assignment?"

"Officially, you'll be my assistant who's heading up North to Fort Briggs under the guise of preparation for the Annual North-East Training Exercise and discussions with Major General Olivier Armstrong and Major Miles. North Command has already been notified of your arrival tomorrow and an envoy from Fort Briggs will pick you up there. Don't try to go up there yourself, they'll think you're a spy and you'll never gain their trust then."

"Of course, sir."

"Now, get moving. Your train leaves in half an hour. Your bags have already been sent up there and it should've arrived in your room at Briggs by now."

Ed nodded before turning to leave when Grumman spoke, "Lt.Col.Mors, try not to die, please. I'm
an old man and I don't need something like that on my conscious."

"You got it." Ed gave a mock salute as he made his way in the direction of the station with his hands in his pockets.

Grumman watched him leave with a small smirk, "Cheeky brat, reminds me of Roy."

---

Al walks with Izumi around Dublith as they wait for his train to arrive so he can head North.

"So, you've decided to head North then Al?"

"Yes Teacher, Major Armstrong told me that his sister could help. She's a General up North and if anyone can help, it's her."

"If you say so Al, I guess this is goodbye for now then?"

"Yeah, it was great seeing you again..." Al trails off.

Izumi sees Al's hesitance and lifts her hand to cup the cheek of his helmet, turning his head to look at her, "Is everything okay Al?"

"Teacher...?"

"Go on."

"...do you think brother is proud of me? For doing all of this?...for doing what he would've done?"

"I think that he would be so proud of you Al. All Ed ever wanted for you was to be safe and happy and if doing this helps, well then I think you'll make him happy, knowing you can do this, that it wasn't all for nothing."

"I-I...I just don't want him to be upset with me. I know he's still there, he has to be, because he promised that he wouldn't leave me alone again and brother always keeps his promises...but I don't want him to be disappointed."

"I don't think Ed could ever be disappointed with you Al, maybe a little upset because he worries so much about you. Ed would never admit this but he's honestly a pretty selfless person. Sure, he's not like this with everyone, but he always is when it comes to you. That boy would move heaven and earth for you. He's always tried to take care of you, even before your mom passed away and I don't think he ever really stopped trying to take care of you even as you boys grew up. He never stopped loving you because he's your big brother and you're his entire world."

Al bends down and wraps Izumi in a hug placing his helmet in her neck as he starts to snifflie, "Thank you, Teacher."
Kimblee watches as Envy grows quiet and wonders briefly what the Homonculus was contemplating when Envy glanced at him through the rearview mirror and spoke abruptly, "Kimblee?"

"Hmm, yes?"

"I have another task for you as well." Envy looks back onto the street as he leaves Kimblee to process his request. Kimblee didn't know what else he could possibly want from him but it must be good.

"Go on."

Envy's lips stretch into a manic grin as he briefly glances back at Kimblee through the mirror, "I knew I liked you for a reason. I don't know if you've heard but the Fullmetal Alchemist has recently gone missing, presumed dead."

"No, I hadn't, after all, not many options to read while locked in isolation. What of it?"

"Officially, he ended up in Gluttony's stomach with a Xingese Prince and me. Gluttony is a failed portal of truth and so the kid hypothesized that he'd need to do a reserve human transmutation to get us out. However, he warned us that it could backfire on him."

"So, what is it you're exactly asking me to do?"

"We want to find out what happened. If he really is dead, fine, we can adjust the plan, but if he's still stuck in Gluttony's stomach and there's a way to get him out, we need you to find it. He's very valuable to us. Hell, maybe if you do a good job, we'll throw in an extra stone for you in the end. What'd'ya say, eh Kimblee?"

"Sounds like an offer I can't refuse, count me in!"

Far away from plotting Homonculus, blondes with a fondness for drinking, a cross-dressing general and a housewife comforting her pseudo-son, a figure stood atop the Briggs wall.

Her long blonde hair billowed in the wind and she snapped her eyes open to reveal an icy blue glare that could freeze a bear in its tracks, "Hmm, when did you say that envoy was arriving again?"

"Tomorrow morning, sir."

"Good, I want you to pick them up and bring them to me."
"Sir?"

"Miles, I have a feeling things are about to get interesting." A devious grin tugged itself on her pale plump lips and all the soldiers standing guard nearby shivered at the sight.

'She's smiling?!?'

Miles looked at his commanding officer and simply sighed, 'Of course now she decides to get into one of her moods. It's gonna be a long day tomorrow.'

Meanwhile, in a train heading towards Northern Command, a young blonde suddenly sneezed.

"Are you alright kid? Don't tell me you've already got a cold, we've only just crossed the border into Northern Command territory." One of the soldiers, Major Finnegan, asked, concerned.

"I'm fine, it's just a little sniffle." Ed waved him off.

"You know Trick, they say every time you sneeze, someone's talking about you." A female soldier named Second Lt. Dawn pointed out.

"Don't be ridiculous Dawn, if that were true, then I'd be sneezing all the time." he retorted as he rolled his eyes at the audacity of even the notion of that being possibly true.

"Yeah, don't joke, guys who would know him? He's so short no one would be able to see him, let alone remember his name!" First Lt. Warren boasted.

Ed tried to keep himself calm, he really sounded like himself when he got angry and that would defeat the whole purpose of faking his death and drinking himself to an early grave. Though a tick mark appeared on his forehead as his eyebrow twitched.

"You do realize I'm your superior officer right, First Lt. Warren?"

"Oh yeah, I kinda forgot he was our superior." Finnegan murmured to Dawn who nodded. Warren just laughed, "Ha! Like hell a pipsqueak like you has a higher rank than any of us!"

Ed's eye started to twitch as he brought out his flask and knocked back a swig of Chris's good whiskey. Warren, however, noticed and angrily exclaimed, "Hey, you can't have that, your underage! Captain Simmons!"

Ed watched as Simmons came to stop in front of him and gave Warren an exasperated look, "What is it First Lt."

Warren pointed at Ed who only took another swing from his flask, "He's drinking booze! Not only that, but he keeps claiming he's a higher rank than all of us on the train."

Simmons than noticed Ed for the first time and smile, "Oh, hey Trick, how are you?"
"Oh I'm good Dave, how's the wife and kids?"

"Great, Tommy made the soccer team and Lucy spoke her first words the other day. Karen was practically sobbing when she pointed at her and said 'Momma'. Hey, we still on for poker at Chris's when you get back?"

"Of course, could never let you down. Say hi to the family for me will ya?"

"Can do, see ya later Trick!"

Warren looked at Simmons in disbelief, "What about the booze? And the rank?"

"Oh, Trick is actually a Lt. Col so he's allowed to drink on the train since he holds a high enough rank. Good day."

"...what just happened?"

"Dave is a good friend of mine, we met after I found Tommy wandering the streets lost and helped him find his parents. We just hit it off and the rest, as they say, is history."

"Wow, you two must be good friends, how long have you known each other?"

"About a week."

"That's it. I'm done, I'm too old for this shit." Dawn muttered as she got up.

"You're only 23!" Finnegan called after her as he followed.

"Exactly!" she shouted.

"...how...why...what just happened?!" Warren muttered staring at Ed.

Ed merely raised his flask, "Don't look at me! All I did was sneeze."

Chapter End Notes

That's right, IT WAS GRUMMAN!

I honestly don't know how people didn't get him sooner. Ed needs him as shown in this chapter because Grumman is the only one of Ed's allies with the highest rank and thus clearance. No one would question an old man known for being crazy when he's simply sending his assistant up North. Also, Grumman is already one of Chris's contacts so it makes sense to me.

If Armstrong had done it herself, it would have raised red flags in the Homonculus's eyes because 1. she's a threat to them and it under watch and 2. because of 1, anything and everything she does is under watch when it concerns Central.

I hope you liked Major Finnegan, First Lt. Warren, Second Lt. Dawn, Captain Simmons & his family and their interactions with Ed. These are all my own characters so you won't find them in the show. I only added it as a plot thing.

Originally, they weren't gonna have names but then I imagined Ed making friends and
shit after he was finally able to leave Chris's bar since his disguise was in place...so plot bunnies.

Hope you liked this chapter my lovelies, please leave a review, I love talking to you guys its so much fun and tell me what you think. Also, if you give me ideas and I like them, I might end up incorporating them into the story.
Sparkles

Chapter Summary

Ed finds himself facing the Northern Wall of Briggs and her second-in-command.

Follows just a bit before the episode; "The Northern Wall of Briggs" but only by a week at the most. Also, HAPPY EASTER MY DEAR READERS!

Chapter Notes

So, my dear lovelies, I've noticed something. The countries in FMAB, not just Amestris or Xing, are also based on real-world countries. I've gone through them and their Wikia pages and finally linked FMAB countries with their real-world counterparts. You'll need them for this chapter trust me;

Xing - China with hints of other Asian cultures such as Japanese

Drachma - Russia (no surprise there really like you refer to it as "the large country to the North" like really Ed?)

Amestris - Germany (not really surprising either)

Aerugo - Italy with hints of the Byzantine Empire formally the HRE and thus Greece and Rome

Ishval (back when it was its own country and not apart of Amestris) - Middle Eastern cultures, traditional Indian culture as well as North American Aboriginal culture and yes, a big basis on Jewish culture and the Holy Land

And finally, Creta who I shit you not is based on North America, more specifically, America.

Even if we never fucking see them at all in Brotherhood except on a map that one time and when Ed decided to give a brief history lesson on any of them but didn't elaborate which shame on you Ed fanfiction needs more than a name and speculation damn it!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

"Don't go giving me any more grey hairs brat!" Dawn fondly called as she made her way over to Simmons.

"You're 23, Dawn!" Ed replied cheekily.

A middle finger answers him.
"Dear God almighty, that woman is overdramatic some days," Finnegan muttered under his breath.

"Some days? Try every day!"

"Amen to that,

Suddenly a voice calls from behind them, "I can hear you brats!"

"GAH!"

Ed didn't jump thank you very much.

It was merely a slight lifting of his heels while his toes stayed on the ground; they never even moved. Movement? What's that? Ed's never heard of it and neither has his legs. As if his feet would participate in such heinous and disgusting acts of depravity. What is this the stone ages? Get that shit out of here right now!

His mother raised him better than that. He was many things, but a filthy, depraved, weak, animal who jumps at the sight of yet another motherly figure who can beat his ass seven ways to Sunday and then do it another 30 times and still have time to fool him into thinking she wasn't dangerous? As if!

Now, Finnegan on the other hand?

Finnegan jumped 3ft in the air. He shrieked like a little girl. Wait, no, scratch that- that's insulting to Elicia and all the other little girls like her. He's on another level of embarrassing and it tugs at his heartstrings to know that poor, defenceless Finnegan was obviously either not raised right or an idiot.

And since he's met his mother and she's a sweet caring soul who bakes you cookies and takes your side over her son even though she's just met you three seconds ago...then it means that Finnegan is an idiot. Not that that was anything new or anything but it was nice to get confirmation. It's just sad to know that yet another soul is still clearly stuck in such simpler times.

Look at him; making progress and shit!

Maybe it wouldn't be as hard as he thought now that he's out of the city and away from everyone...maybe this could work...

It did not work out.

"Oh fuck me...fuck me!"

It fucking sparkles. What kind of snow sparkled like that? Was...was it supposed to do that? How does he know if this is normal? This is what he gets for thinking he knew better. Sure, he was born in North City and they lived there for a couple of years, but they moved shortly after Al's 2nd birthday.
They hadn't been back since and all Ed could remember from his time there was that it was white. That's it. Just white and a blur of faces...sometimes blue- like the military uniforms and even a mess of other languages. He can barely remember the words now, but sometimes, when he was younger, he'd catch his mother singing a song that he couldn't understand. He could remember the way she always seemed to be reading books in another language or how she would sometimes speak to him but he couldn't seem to understand what she was saying.

He always knew his family wasn't fully Amestrian- have you seen that bastard Hohenheim lately? The fucking man's face practically cries out "look at me I'm foreign" just as much as it screams "punch me" over and over again.

Hell, Mustang wasn't and neither was Sig or even Uncle Yurii! Mustang was a bit Xingese if his eyes had anything to do with it and Sig had admitted that his father, whom he takes after, was from Aerugo and Uncle Yurii's father was from Drachma.

As for his mom? Well, he had never asked and by the time he had questions she was long gone, but before he burned down their home, he'd found a box of her old things from her life in the North. It had pictures of people he never remembered seeing, of books he didn't understand and family heirlooms he had no idea even existed.

All of it was foreign. Not a single thing was of Amestrian make and all of it was from family, of life before them, before Hohenheim, before she settled down. Back when she was young and had dreams, a family he never met, a history he never knew. It hurt. Knowing they had a family out there, one they hadn't met and probably never would hurt. More than Ed would care to admit. He didn't know what it was at the time, but he saved her things and locked them up in a safe at the bank.

He even kept the photo of her with her family. The one she had kept out on her bedside table in her last few months. Her parents- his grandparents his mind whispered- and siblings, maybe some aunts and uncles. Or cousins. He never had any of these options. Only Al and Mom. And then it had just been him and Al. He wanted so badly to get to know them, but he couldn't, even with the mess of names written hastily on the back. Because he couldn't understand it.

He had always been frustrated about that particular detail but every time he had asked his mother, she had only laughed and tousled his hair before a coughing fit would overtake and he'd forget; too concerned with her health than some half-forgotten memories of languages he didn't understand and a photo of a family he never knew. Of the colour white that seemed to blur over his memory.

Now he knew why. It was fucking everywhere!

What was he thinking? Forget the Homonculus finding him out; the fucking snow was gonna stop him in his tracks! Fuck this shit; where was Chris's liqueur cabinet and V's hugs when you needed them?

"Is something wrong?"

Ed's thoughts are shaken by the deep baritone voice that came from behind him. He whirled around to see a taller man, dressed in the standard military blue and a puffy black coat to brace against the cold with. His grey hair contrasted nicely against his lightly tanned skin and it was pulled back into a high ponytail that stuck out at the back. His eyes were covered by a pair of dark-tinted goggles.

"Peachy," he replied.

"Are you Lt.Col Mors, by any chance?" The man asked, stepping up from behind him, all in perfect
militaristic ease that came with years of practice.

"Who's asking?"

"Major Miles, I was sent by Major General Armstrong to pick you up from the station when you arrived and ensure you reached Fort Briggs safely for the training talks between the General and yourself."

"She doesn't take chances." The now known Miles replied without hesitance.

"Ahh, a paranoid bastard? Well, who am I to judge? I'm probably even more paranoid than her." Ed laughed, strained and oh so tired, as he subtly pocketed the photograph in his back pocket.

Miles raised an eyebrow at it but didn't mention it and simply grabbed Ed's bag and led him to a sleek black military issued car. Ed followed diligently as he could with the whirl of emotions rushing inside him. Between his mothers past, his mission, the Northern Wall of Briggs and even his connection to the North, Ed doesn't quite know how he's gonna handle his first meeting with General Armstrong.

He just hoped he could get them to listen.

---

Yeah, **fuck this**, why hadn't anyone ever told him how **fucking scary** she was?!?

---

"So, Grumman couldn't come himself? What, is the North to good for him and the rest of those twits down East?"

Ed stared at her wondering if she meant it. He subtly looked over to the side where Miles stood dutifully and arched a perfectly sculpted eyebrow at him, silently asking if she was serious.

Miles let out a barely audible sigh and if his goggles weren't there, Ed knows he would be able to see the look of someone who was done with everyone's shit and he almost cracks a smile at how alike both Armstrong and Miles were to Mustang and Riza.

"I'm waiting, soldier!" she snaps.

"No ma'am, but General Grumman is unable to pull himself from Eastern Command what with the sudden transfers. Due to these, Eastern Command is down on manpower and as such, is unable to attend these discussions unless he wishes to abandon his post... sir." Ed responds, painfully biting down on his cheeks.

He didn't trust himself to not smile with the thoughts of Riza and his team on his mind.
"Transfers?" she questioned, voice still cold as ice, but if Ed listened carefully, which he did thank you very much, he could hear a hint of curiosity and an edge to it. Ahh, so no one told her.

"Yes, shortly after Brigadier General Hughes' murder, Central pulled in the heavy hitters from Eastern Command, specifically Colonel Mustang and his team. However, not too long ago, the Fullmetal Alchemist, Colonel Edward Elric, went MIA while on a mission and was officially declared dead, most likely murdered. Mustang's team was broken up not long after that and scattered to the four regions of Amestris..., now that I think about it, it was before they had even declared Colonel Elric missing." Ed told her, willing his eyebrow to not twitch in front of them.

He still can't believe that they promoted him to the same rank as that bastard and he couldn't even use it to rub it in his face! Stupid Truth, stupid Father and fucking Mustang with his smug bastard smirk- argh, fucking assholes! Ed watched as a range of emotions crossed her face before she looked him in the eye and asked another question in a sickly sweet tone that nearly made him shiver;

"That's a lot going on down South, but enough about that, what about this Fullmetal Alchemist and Mustang?"

Ed shifted on his feet, careful to not let his automail bang on the floor before he answered her, "Scar, the State Alchemist Killer, is a prime suspect in his death and the military are declaring it as such. However, personally, General Grumman doesn't believe it's him. It's not his MO and we haven't found a body like in his previous killings. It just doesn't work. Not only that but he hasn't been able to contact Hawkeye or even Mustang for that matter." Ed sent up a silent prayer that Riza wouldn't kill him for this.

"Oh, and why is that?"

**Nope, nope, nope.** just NO! He did not like that fucking tone! She was way too fucking curious now and it fucking showed!

---

He was so **fucked.**

---

"Hawkeye is his family, sir. And he hasn't been able to speak with her after she and the rest of Mustang's team were separated. Not only that, sir, but Mustang was investigating the same thing that Brigadier General Hughes was before his death and shortly after this happens. He doesn't think it's a coincidence, sir."
"Is that so?" she practically purrs.

Oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit.

Her eyes take on a hardened glint as she finally asks the question he knows she's been leading up too. "Tell me then, Lt.Col. Mors, what was it that they were investigating? Did they ever find what they were looking for?"

'Deep breaths Ed, she might not kill you for this next bit.' he thought as he looked her in the eye and steeled himself, body going tense and he knows when she sees it because her cold eyes flicker in surprise for just a moment before the frown on her face hardens and she leans forward, ready to tear into him at his next words. Here goes nothing.'

"I can't answer that, sir."

"I am your commanding officer, answer the question!"

"I understand that sir, but with all due respect, I'm afraid I can't do that, sir."

With that, Ed walks forwards towards her desk, surprising both of them when he pulls out a piece of paper and begins to scribble down on it. Once he's finished it, he holds it out to her and waits until she's grabbed it before he even thinks of letting a little bit of the tension in his body release itself.

'General,

I'm afraid the military high command is compromised. Hughes was killed for finding out and Mustang was threatened with the lives of his team to keep his silence ensured. I can explain later, including everything you need to know and more but until you can find a secure room where you're certain none will be able to overhear us, I can't risk the lives of your men. I've managed to keep under their radar but if these people ever found out I told you, they won't hesitate to kill everyone here. '

After a few moments, she stood up suddenly and walked over to a furnace before throwing the paper inside before whirling around to face Ed with a cold look in her eyes and tense look in her posture that wasn't there before. "I understand, forgive me, I'll get Miles to take you to your room while you stay with us. We'll resume our talk later, is it okay if Miles gets you?"

He got what she meant instantly; 'Is it okay for Miles to be listening in on this?'

After his nod, nothing changed about her appearance but Ed could've sworn he saw a flicker of relief in her eyes and that's when he realized it. He had thought it before, but he hadn't connected it until now. Armstrong was a lot like Mustang and Miles like Riza. Mustang was lost without Riza and vice versa if what Al had told him about her reaction to his death in Lab 5 was to say anything.
"Miles, I'll leave you to it then."

Miles was silent as he leads Ed to his room and by the time they had reached it, a tension between
the two had reached a staggering point that drove Ed mad with how stifling it was. If he wanted
Armstrong to be on his side, he needed Miles and vice versa. Without either one of them, the other
wouldn't do it. Well, Armstrong would, but she wouldn't trust him and neither would the other
Briggs soldiers.

"Here's your room Lt.Col." Miles stiff voice broke him from his thoughts. He nodded in thanks,
something the older man returned before Miles turned and left. Ed was about to do the same before
he stopped and looked back, "Hey Major?"

Miles stopped froze in his tracks and he didn't even turn his head as he responded, "Yes, Lt.
Col.Mors?"

"I know it doesn't make much sense right now but I promise I'll tell you everything." He could tell
that he didn't believe him so Ed took a step forward, letting his automail leg clang throughout the
deserted hallways and watched with a wicked sense of satisfaction he hadn't felt since before this
whole mess started when Miles turned his head back with surprised eyes and mouth open a little.

Ed could practically feel the way Miles looked down to his leg and then back at him before Ed
banged his automail arm on the wall and heard it echo through the halls. He looked Miles in the eye
and gave a small smile.

"Do you trust me, Miles?"

"I just might, Mors."

"Good, then know when I say that I will win the trust of you, the General and every Briggs soldier
stationed here even if it kills me."

"You know, its scary," Miles said.

"Why?"

"Because I'm starting to believe it."

Chapter End Notes

PLEASE READ IMPORTANT SHIT!

Okay, so some of you may be confused, that's fine, but I ain't gonna change my mind
about anything. I once read, on a forum, that some people were speculating that Trisha
wasn't from Resembool (or she was but her family wasn't) and actually from the North. I
don't know why that stayed with me but I really liked it.
You can stop reading after that if you will accept my shitty answer of "because of reasons, plot convenience...also I said so!" But if not and you want to actually know how I planned this shit out and made it work canon wise and keep with the basis that FMAB world basically has a lot of parallels to ours, then read on.*

They also theorized that she would've probably followed Hohenheim on his journeys and in canon, you never really know anything about her family.

Hoheinheim, sure, the boys and Trisha were his family and even if he had family back in Xerxes, he wouldn't have known them being a slave and if they had been alive when he helped make the DIAF, then they would've been sacrificed so no explanation needed.

But Trisha? Not even a peep. Nothing, zilch, nada. Normally that's fine, except, they said she was born and raised in Resembool except, no mention of a family at all, not even a grave marker or something. They didn't even say she was an orphan or anything; It's just like she was there and that's it.

No family, no orphanage, no graves, just a way too new house that definitely didn't belong to Trisha until a little before or after she had Ed which means she didn't inherit it or anything...and Hohenheim even said it was "his house" implying he bought it for her and the boys.

So what she was just there? No, thank you. I don't buy it. But paired with the other countries and the fact that other characters are clearly mixed heritage (aside from the obvious such as Miles) then its possible that those living closest to the borders and such would mix with immigrants from other countries.

That and how the other countries have some real-world basis (although the author claims she didn't intend to) and I could totally see Trisha not being full Amestrian. I even went and looked at her name and it's meaning, looking for variants of it in other languages that the other countries surrounding Amestris are based on. And guys, she could totally be a child of mixed ethnic heritage.

Aerugo is speculated to be strongly based off of Italy and even its flag is based off the Byzantine Empire’s, which used to be apart of the HRE. Trisha, a variant of Patricia, has an Italian version of her name. Elric also has an Italian version of it. And a lot of immigrants would, in the real world, change their name to fit in with their new country. Her family could've done that with no problem, leaving the traditional names of their country for personal and private use at home and the new versions out in public and on official records. Lots of people did, hell my family did it.

As for the north, I like it and I also like to think that while Trisha might be able to pull off the Italian look, she's a little too pale and Drachma, being based on Russia, I think would be perfect if she had a grandparent or even a parent from their...and I really love the trope. This is just me trying to make it legit and stuff so it sounds cool in my story.

I like to think that she was born in Resembool and was partially raised there, but they also moved around a lot. They probably would've moved permanently to the North and after she met Hohenheim, left with him. When she found out she was pregnant with Ed, they may have moved temporarily to be with her family for support back in the North and they just stayed until after Al turned 2.

Then they left. And canon happened. And then my fanfic interrupted around episode 26
and here we are.
Late Nights

Chapter Summary

Ed pulls an all-nighter and almost misses Sloth's invasion. Olivier won't admit it but she's grown fond of the brat and a new soldier finds himself coming closer to the answer of his little sister's disappearance now than in the last 18 years. Al doesn't know how he got from being stuck in a snowstorm to running around Fort Briggs with Falman.

Follows the episodes "The Northern Wall of Briggs" and "Ice Queen"

Chapter Notes

Okay, ladies and gents, this chapter is a long one. Please comment and review, I love it when you guys do!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It was the dead of night. The moon shined brightly from the night's sky, stars twinkling in the distance and Ed finds himself staring at them for hours on end, sleep eluding him; his mind ran a million miles an hour and nothing he ever did calmed it.

He had only gotten back from Northern Command about 2 hours ago, working late to plan for the training exercise and he returned to Fort Briggs around 3 am. He tossed and turned around in the military issue bed before he finally reserved himself to another sleepless night. Or, well, morning to be accurate. He'd spend all day and night working on the plans, trying to incorporate a plan for the Promised Day when it came.

With a sigh, he pulls himself up from the concrete slab they called a mattress, careful to not make much noise and alert any of the guards he's sure Armstrong's posted outside his room. He grabs his long champagne mane and twists and turns it until it sits innocently atop his head aside from the few stray hairs that frame his gaunt face.

He pulls his knees up to his chest and simply stares at the madly twinkling lights up in the sky, the odd bits of snow fluttered across his window; pushed, pulled and taken wherever the howling winds willed it so.

They were so free...so far out of reach...so safe from all that happened down here on the ground. From all the pain and suffering. From the sacrifices that people had to make. From the choices that people make to protect themselves and those that they cared about. Without realizing it, he starts to
Ed traces the pattern of skin over and over again, reliving the memory of that night in his head, the way he looked down in horror at his side: blistered, burned and so horribly defaced. They would never be smooth again. They would always be an ugly red colour. He remembers what Granny Pinako had told him; that the skin underneath had gotten infected. The skin was horribly mutilated and he didn't even realize that he had started to cry until the first few wet hot tears splashed onto his scarred palm.

What would they say; knowing he willingly did this, willingly faked his death and abandoned them all for a half baked plan some prick of a god he didn't believe in asked him to do?

These scars were the ones that made him the Fullmetal Alchemist, Hero of the People and Edward Elric. The metal leg was the one Winry made so he could stand on his own two feet again, so he could fix all the pain he put his baby brother through. His eyes were the ones that marked him as a child of a lost nation from a past long forgotten by the people of today, the ones that caused Furher Bastard to offer him a place in the military. His callouses marked him as Teacher's student, the one she housed, taught and loved.

He looks back down at his flesh hand: calloused and covered in scars. His metal hand had been in a similar state. It was difficult. To look at his automail only to see a different arm. It wasn't the right shade and the model was different. Don't even get him started on the fact that it was clear. Scratch free; no nicks or indents that covered Winry's make. A clean slate.

But he didn't want one. A clean slate that is.

It was bad enough between the fake death, new name, the hair dye and contacts. Or the new rank and uniform and glasses. But his automail? That was the only thing about him that never seemed to change. And even when it did; it was always Winry's. But, now it wasn't. Not anymore. He wasn't Edward Elric or Edoardo as his mother would sometimes whisper in his ears as he fell asleep. He wasn't Fullmetal, Ed, Edward or even Brother. He was Trick now.

**He was Trick.**

And didn't that hurt?

He wasn't ready to let it go; his old life, his friends, his family. All the people he's met, saved and had adventures with. He wasn't ready to let himself be dead yet. But it felt like it. He felt dead. Looking at the shiny new automail limbs, he didn't feel like Ed. He felt like a fake, an imposter, a **trick.**

Ha! And wasn't that ironic? A trick; that's what he was. A trick of the light, an illusion to fool others; the ones he cares about and his enemies. He wasn't Edward Elric. He was Trick.

His molten gold eyes trailed down to his side and traced the length of the fierce red scar, one that circled around his mid-thigh all the way around. It was partially covered by the automail covering it and his stumps ached. He then pulled up the shorts he had worn to bed and looked down to his leg, now healed, but covered by a large jagged scar that was pale in some areas but still a deep angry red that would never go away in others. He was littered with scars all over his body.

But they meant something. **It** meant something.

He had gotten each and every one of them from protecting Al, saving him, keeping him alive to live another day, so he could see the day he grew into a wonderful young man with liquid golden eyes that practically sparkled with intelligence and fluffy golden hair that reminded Ed that he was his kid.
brother. To see the day when he could hug him and feel his beating heart instead of cold metal and a hollow interior.

And his new life? This new identity he had? Sure, it may not be the greatest for his mental health, but if it meant that Al would be safe...that they all would be safe...

Well, he would do it over and over and over again if it means protecting him.


And no matter what name he wore, they would always be his family.

**Always.**

Molten gold eyes flutter and a groan pulls itself from his mouth as Ed registers that everything; his whole body from the tips of his toes to his long thick champagne mane of hair, even his teeth, just aches. As he starts to pull herself up, a hiss tears itself from his lips as a sharp pain erupts from his stumps. They ache and throb in a way he hasn't felt for a long time. Not since after he first got them. A bright light hits his face and a grunt of irritation makes its way from the bottom of his scratchy throat.

He raised his heavy eyelids half way only for them to fall shut as a single beam of light that managed to peak through his curtains hits him in the eye. He groans as he tries to wait for the dots of colour dancing across his vision to disappear. When the dots finally disappear, Ed opens his eyes and stares at the plain concrete walls of his room. He looks towards the curtains and finds them to be black; charcoal that reminds him of Chris's eyes with the streams of sunlight trying to break through from them.

Ed raised his legs and swung his bare feet to the concrete flooring; it was cold in an unforgiving way and if he wasn't already worried about so many other things at the moment, he would have shrieked like a little girl and jumped back into the welcoming covers that called to him from his, admittedly, crappy bed. He sucked it up and padded over to the window, throwing the curtains open.

Daylight gushed through the curtains bathing Ed in its warm rays. The sun continued to set, unwavering in its duty while Ed watched, completely enthralled, as its rays hit the frigid land. It's streams of light reaching every nook and cranny in the North, the snow lighting up like a thousand crystals. It made it look as if it had been set ablaze and Ed found himself utterly captivated by its beauty. It looked like a forest on fire and if Ed hadn't known any better, he would have been worried that all the snow would melt.

Leaning forwards, Ed watched as the night's sky began to poke its head out and he was baffled that no one had come to wake him all day. It wasn't like he was off the hook while up here in the North and Miles even said the lastest he would let him sleep in was 2 o'clock if he was pulling all-nighters. Which he had been, *again.*
Ed noticed that the darker storm clouds had begun to recede and left only lighter ones; the ones that let out a simple rain of flurries. So, there was a storm earlier and he slept through the whole thing. He wondered why Miles hadn't woken him and resolved to find out later after he grabbed a late supper.

He had been at Fort Briggs for about a week now and had come back late yesterday after spending time with Simmons in Northern Command. He actually did have to do the training talks like Grumman had said and had been going back and forth for information and contact with the eccentric old man. Ed pulled his hair back and weaved it into a messy bun, uncaring for the way the little hairs poked out and gave him the appearance of a med-student living off ramen cups and no sleep.

He put on the contacts and his glasses before grabbing his uniform pants and putting them on. He tied his military issued boots and a black wife beater that he put on over his bare chest. He holstered his guns, yes guns, as in plural because Chris found out he left the extra two Hawkeye had given to him years ago when he first started in the military and sent them up to Northern Command through express delivery under Grumman's name.

Ed began to shuffle towards the door, grabbing his military jacket and the other items Grumman had seen fit to give him before his departure. He left his cold barren room and walked through the endless monochromatic halls of Fort Briggs intent on finding Buccaneer and seeing if the man wanted a bite to eat.

Rafael Alberico was a simple man. He was a soldier; a first lieutenant by his own skill and merit. He served under Captain Buccaneer and Major Miles and was proud to call himself a member of their team. His twin, Niccolo, worked alongside Neil and the other engineers as a mechanic, keeping Fort Briggs alive and heated. He wasn't as comfortable serving as a soldier against the Drachmans.

Personally, he didn't see it as an insult to his Drachman and Aerugoian heritage when he battled either of them on the front lines or in Fort Briggs. His mother with her dark skin and even darker hair gave the colouring he and his brother inherited and hid fathers sharp jaw and elegant facial structure allowed him to call himself a pretty boy if he was 20, as he wasn't, many called Niccolo and him handsome men nowadays.

He thought himself simple, even if his family wasn't. His mother, Sofia Alberico, came from a wealthy family in Aerugo near the border the separated the country from Amestris. His father, Viktor, came from Drachma to her country looking for work. He wanted to sever himself from the war between Drachma and Amestris and his only other option was to find work elsewhere.

The two met and had a whirlwind romance that ended with the two wanting to marry. As cliche as it was, his mother's family forbid it and the two ran away. They settled in Amestris, in a small sleepy town called Resembool and within the year, gave birth to his older sister, Candia. A little babe who took after their father's colouring and blinked up at them with ice blue eyes and white blonde hair that curled as their mothers own dark brown did.

However, their happiness was cut short when his uncles were found snooping around town. In order to prevent his mothers return to Aerugo, they moved to West City and had him and his brother 2
years later. He didn't really remember what it was like living there as they moved again to North City
when he was 3. His sister liked to tell him it had sprawling countrysides and friendly people that
reminded his mother of her home.

Shortly after they moved into their home in North City, they had Patrizia; a fair skinned child with
their mother's green eyes and dark brown hair. Two years after her, they had his youngest sister,
Valentina, who not only acted like his hotheaded mother but was practically her carbon copy. They
never moved after that, choosing instead to stay in the North and it suited them.

They were happy; they laughed, cried, smiled and spoke curses in their parent's mother tongues
when they thought no one else was around. It was a good childhood, a happy one, but not all happy
things last. They grew older and Patrizia fell in love with a man who never stayed anywhere for
more than a year. Their mother wasn't quite ready to let her go yet, only 18 as she was, and they
fight.

And then Patrizia left.

He caught her doing it. He watched her as she packed and even helped her when she asked him to
hand her things. He gave her small things from their childhood; books in their parent's mother
tongues, toys they never quite got tired of and family heirlooms that were given to him as the eldest
son.

He hugged her before she left, whispering in her ear how proud he was of her, how much he loved
her and a million other things that came to mind as he held her.

He watched her as she left, closing the big wooden door behind her, a smile lighting up her beautiful
face when she saw her lover waiting there outside for her, an older man with golden sun-kissed hair
and fiery eyes the burned like liquid gold.

He sat at the kitchen table with a steaming cup of coffee in hand as he watched the clock tick by,
seconds turning to minutes turning into hours. He sat there until the sun began to rise and he heard
his mother's footsteps move around her room as she got up and ready for the day.

After that, he left out the wooden door Patrizia herself had gone out of only hours before. He leaned
on the walls of their childhood home and took out a cigarette and a lighter. By the time he had
finished his first drag, he heard it.

His mothers scream.

Rafael had continued his cigarette, listening inside the house as his mothers scream woke everyone
else to find Patrizia's bare room. He didn't know how long he had stayed outside but by the time he
finished his smoke, he ended up walking around town without a care, not wanting to go back home
and face their persistent questions and prods as to where she was.

To where he had been.

Why he hadn't stopped her.

He must've walked for hours and by the time he got back home to a grieving mother and angry
siblings and a solemn father who he had no doubt known what he had done, he was an enlisted man.

He left not even two days later.

And the years past, he had gotten married while stationed down South and moved back home with
his darling Isabella to a home that was less broken than when he left it. One that was not whole; but
getting there. Children's laughs and their sounds of playing filled his childhood home as his mother surrounded herself in grandchildren and other family members.

The hole Patrizia had left never quite filled; something he felt with each passing day as he tries to search for her. Was she happy? Did she have any children? Where was she? They were all questions Rafael knew he wouldn't get answered but sometimes he would stare up at the ceiling and wonder.

Wonder what would have happened if he had stopped her... if he had just asked her to wait to say goodbye to everyone else...would she have been a part of their lives right now? Would they have been whole again?

He didn't know, but that didn't stop him from trying to find out what happened to his baby sister after she left. His train of thoughts was broken when an alarm blared overhead.

"Lieutenant Elric!"

"Yes General?"

"Quit twiddling your thumbs over there and get going!"

"Yes, sir!"

"And someone find me Mors! Tell him to get off his ass and come help!"

Ed hadn't been doing anything when he heard it but as he walked the halls coming back from the mess hall with a couple of other soldiers who'd just come off their shift, the alarm blared overhead.

His blood ran cold and he barely registered the fact that he was running towards Development as he skidded through the hallways and pushed past soldiers on his way down. He kicked open the door using his metal leg and they opened with a bang causing everyone from Armstrong and her group to the engineers to other soldiers apart of the Development department to look up and see him practically hanging over the ledge.

He noticed that besides Miles, Armstrong and Buccaneer, two others looked at him with particular interest. A soldier standing guard off to the side of Armstrong and what looked to be the guy's twin down with the engineers. He had no idea who those two were but it was obvious they thought they recognized him from somewhere. Though he doesn't know where.

"GENERAL!" he called out as he hopped over the ledge and began to run towards her. He landed in crouch, putting most of his weight on his metal leg and paid it no mind when it let out a small creak at the pressure it was under. As he stood up, the Homunculus- Sloth? Pride? Who knew anymore?- threw a bunch of rubble at a group of soldiers and engineers causing them to run in a
panic. Just as he was about to save them using his alchemy-screw the consequences and saving a trump card or whatever Mustang would call it-when blue lightning shot out from behind him and a large stone hand blocked the incoming debris.

Ed stiffened from where he was beside Buccaneer as he stared at the person who saved the soldiers.

Al.

He swiftly hid behind the towering man, earning himself an eyebrow and watched as his baby brother ran over to Olivier. "It won't work!" Al shouted. "Try whatever you want to, but he won't die!"

That definitely caught her attention, "He won't?" She asked, voice growing cold. Ed swiftly made his way up the tank and perched himself behind the General, who noticed him and simply nodded but Al clearly didn't see it as he was preoccupied when Buccaneer stepped forwards.

"Just what are you saying? How does a kid like you know something like that, huh?" Buccaneer demanded.

Al looked down at his feet, "Because of -…"

It was clear to everyone that Olivier wasn't taking it because she banged her sword's sheath into the side of the tank and barked out, "Drop the act! You will answer all of my questions clearly and completely."

"First off, how do you know about that thing? Are you a Drachman spy?" she asked. Sloth was shown with the sheath of her sword pointed at him. "Is that thing a spy?" Sloth pushed a pipe down and looked around.

"I really doubt it," Ed mumbled from behind her. She ignored him in favour of glaring at Al and asking him, "Does that thing know you?"

"Eh, no," Al said. "Apparently not."

"What is that thing?" she demanded. Sloth lifted a tank and looked under it. "I can't answer," Al said, voice meek and strained even through his helmets voice.

"Who does that thing work for?"

"I can't answer that!" Al shouted.

"Why can't you answer me?" she commanded, voice as cold as the ice and snow of the border she guarded.

"I can't answer," he said. After staring down at Al for a few seconds, she shifted her stance and opened her mouth, "This is my last question. Are you on our side or are you in league with that thing?"

"I'm not with him. I don't want to see anyone here get hurt." Al replied. "Then tell me what that thing's made of."

"His body structure and composition elements are probably the same as a human's," Ed piped up from behind. His voice got the attention of everyone, including Al and Falman, something he wished hadn't happened.
"The same as a human's, huh?" Olivier repeated. She looked down. "Buccaneer. Bring me some tank fuel now. We're going to douse it." she ordered.

"Sir," Buccaneer simply said.

"I told you! It won't work, General." Al said. "Set him on fire, but he still won't die!"

"I understand. I learned from our last attack that we can't kill it," she said. "The best that we can hope for is to stop or delay it." She continued before looking to the side at Sloth. "So we'll have to hit it with something even stronger than fire."

Ed smirked and when he gave her pleading puppy dog eyes, Armstrong merely sighed before rolling her eyes and nodding at him. He grinned as he looked over at Al and gave an evil grin, one that he hoped wouldn't remind him of Ed.

"Now you get to see the Briggs way, kid."

Chapter End Notes

I hope you liked this week's chapter. Some things it establishes are:

- Trisha's past and family
- what her family are doing now and if they know about Ed and Al
- the fact that Ed's gained the trust of Briggs
- the fact that Ed slept through Al's arrival and only learns of it during Sloth's break-in
- some more angst because it felt right.
- angst because Ed is slowly coming to terms that he's two different people; Trick and Ed. And how he's learning to balance the two as the chapters go on

PLEASE COMMENT! I love it when you do and I would appreciate it if you would review, and if you have a few suggestions, I may even use them as the story goes on.
Accidental

Chapter Summary

Ed didn't mean to drive Miles into alcoholism. That was an accident.

But what else can you expect when you reveal nigh immortal beings have been planning to sacrifice the whole country for the last couple of centuries?

Well, at least Olivier has her priorities straight; all she's concerned with is how fast she can get to Bradley's chair after she kills the prick.

Chapter Notes

This is part one, yes PART ONE, of the episode "The Shape of This Country" I didn't realize how long it was getting until I had written past my normal limit for a chapter and I WASN'T EVEN 6 MINUTES IN! But in all honesty, I'm a little too excited to focus on writing right now! It's my birthday tomorrow!

"Okay, what next?" Al questioned as he gazed at the Homonculus from down the hall.

The group cornered Sloth into an elevator alongside the General and her tank before hightailing it out of there with the tank fluid. Buccaneer then led Falman, the twin soldiers and himself to the stairs, fuel-filled jerry cans in each of their arms. The captain guided them down complex twists and turns as he navigated his way through the unending halls of Fort Briggs.

"Hey Buccaneer wait up!" a voice called out. It was hauntingly familiar and Al whipped his head around- hoping, dreaming, wishing that it was him please let it be him he knew he wasn't dead he promised - to see a shock of blonde hair. His ignited hope seemed to drown a little when he took in the young soldier's other features.

The sight that greeted him was one so similar to his brother but yet so different. While the soldier's blonde hair was about the right length, it wasn't the right shade. It was a champagne blonde, one that resembled his late Aunt Sarah's own hair and instead of expressive molten gold eyes that Al's been accustomed to looking for guidance to over the years, a pair of deep blue- almost navy- looked at them in a calculating gaze.

He had his older brothers height but not his build. Where Ed was short and muscled, something that reflected with his frame, the man was thinner in areas his brother never had been before. Dark bags,
even darker than the ones his brother sported, sagged under his shrewd eyes and unlike his brother's favoured braid or even ponytail, it was clear the man preferred the messy bun he wore.

He had broad shoulders and a lean body if the way the uniform hugged his body in some areas said anything. Not only that but the guns holstered at his sides and the distinct lack of his brothers automail limb tapping away as he walked wasn't there either. But the biggest evidence was the uniform itself; his brother would rather drink milk than wear the damn thing. He had some, of course, but after burning the first 15, Roy caught on and stopped getting them made for him.

The real question was; if he wasn't Ed, then who was he?

All he knew was that the soldier had to know about Father's plans; that much was clear. How else would he have known the Homonculus's genetic makeup if he hadn't fought one of them before?

He didn't have much time to think about it as Sloth made his way out of the elevator and fell into Buccaneer's carefully planned ambush. Al helped douse the giant in the tank fuel and looked at the grinning faces of the soldiers around him in confusion.

Sloth couldn't die; so what was the point?

As if to answer his question, the elevator dinged behind them and both Buccaneer and the unknown soldiers smirked before moving off to the side, saluting as they did so. Falman and himself watched in an awe-inspiring horror as it opened to reveal the barrel end of the prototype tanks from Development.

The young blonde turned towards the cold-hearted general, "Sir!" he saluted. As he did, his navy blue eyes seemed to twinkle with mischief and his lips upturned into a smirk.

Al's heart stirred as he saw his brothers smile in the soldier. He shook his head to clear the memories swirling around in his brain. He shouldn't have such thoughts; they were popping up everywhere he went ever since he heard of his brother's assumed death.

"Sleeping Beauty, make sure nobody gets in my damn way!" she barked and without another word, she fired. The missile went flying and slammed into Sloth's stomach, sending him flying out Gate 8's doors and he stopped at the railing, denting it in the shape of his over-muscular body. "Hey!" she shouted. "One more."

"We're out of ammo," Liran shouted in reply.

Falman looked at them before grabbing his gun from his holster, something that 'Sleeping Beauty' himself copied. "Well, in that case." Both of them fired a few bullets out into the gate. Al thought for a second they were aiming for Sloth when he saw it. One bullet hit an icicle, and the other hit the one next to it, knocking them down. Sloth didn't notice until both icicles crashed onto his head, one after another. "Pain." He moaned. "Ow."

Both Al and the twins rushed forwards, legs up as they slammed them into the still dazed Homonculus. It had the desired effect as it sent the oversized giant tumbling over the damaged railing; he fell into a free fall and smashed into the mounds of snow that billowed in the northern wind below them. The twins, one a soldier and another an engineer, alongside Al looked down over the rail.

Without looking, both of them fist bumped one another as the soldier hissed out in an enthusiastic voice, "Nice!" A pang struck through Al as he looked forlornly at the brothers, now wishing Ed was here to share this moment with him. It should have been the two of them beating back Sloth together.
It only steeled his resolve to find his brother.

"That fuel is specially blended for the cold." Buccaneer's voice said, making Al and the twins look over his shoulder at him. "It will vaporize almost instantly, and as it evaporates, it will sap his body heat."

"This blizzard will help too. It will freeze him," the blonde soldier piped up as he made his way to the railing. "Right down to his brain." He peered down to see the fuel have its desired effect, causing a merciless grin to take hold over his features as he stared down at Sloth.

Armstrong hopped out of the massive tank and walked up from behind the blonde, icy blue eyes hardening as she took in the Homunculus's frozen form, "You can sleep there until spring, monster." she spat out. She then turned to Buccaneer, "Alright, Buccaneer, now take these two away."

The man simply saluted her, "Sir!"

Al stared at her in shock, frozen long enough for the twins to tie a rope around his hands and begin to take him and Falman away to the cells beneath Fort Briggs. When he finally found his voice, Al let out a small cry and turned to her," B-but we helped you!"

"You were forced to," she retorted. "That was just the excuse you needed to fight, right?" her voice took on a dangerous tone as she continued. "Besides which, I'm not letting you go anywhere until you explain exactly what that thing was and what it wanted,"

Ed watched them go from his place by the broken balcony with a longing in his eyes before he closed his eyes and sighed. He walked up from behind Armstrong and waited for her to acknowledge him once she had finished speaking to his brother.

"Sir, I can help answer some of those questions you have." It hadn't even been a second after the last few words left his mouth before she turned to him with stiff eyes and frown marred on her pretty face.

Ed flinched at the sight of her eyes; he had worked so hard to gain her trust and now in her eyes, he was no better than Al who simply showed up on his own- something he still had to figure out.

"Explain." she hissed out.

"I think its time we had that talk, don't you agree sir?"
Armstrong locked the door behind her and Ed glanced back at her, “Where the hell are we anyway?”

"Quiet Mors, we’re in the most secure room in the country."

"Then why the hell is it so dark?" he mumbled under his breath.

It apparently wasn’t quite enough as Ed could see from the corner of his eye Miles cracking a smile under his ever-present mask.

“And I say; let there be light.” She retorted, a bite building in the back of her throat as she flickered on the lights.

The room came alive as it was bathed in the single light coming from the ceiling. It was a bedroom. There was a plain bed—though it looked far comfier than any of the military issued beds he’s seen—and a few simple pieces furnishings such as a coffee table and chairs and bedside tables.

What drew his attention was the large ornate mirror standing off to the side of the room beside the matching dresser and closet doors.

It suddenly clicked in his mind that this was a girls room. One that didn’t share and was obviously for someone of a higher rank. It was her room. He whirled around to face her and pointed a gloved finger at her unimaginably smug face.

"Thi-this is your room!" He shouted at her. Miles was unsuccessfully trying to bite back the chuckles building up if his broken mask of a calm and stoic soldier was to say anything.

Armstrong didn’t even bother trying to hide her glee; her icy eyes melted as she took in his reaction and the way the corners of her mouth twitched up into a smile said it all.

"Yes, now get moving!" She barked out. Ed has to wonder what she meant before she was pushing him towards her closet and Miles opened the doors helpfully.

He didn’t know why they were going to hide in here; it wasn’t even big enough for one person let alone three! It was practically barren aside from the military regulation uniform and some gear to brave the cold, there wasn’t a single personal thing in her closet. Ed didn’t know why it surprised him so much. He kinda expected it to be honest.

Armstrong ignored his questioning gaze and bent down to push the uniforms hanging on the rack back. All it revealed were a set of hooks holding scarves and other jackets she couldn’t on the rack. He didn’t bother to try his small gasp when she grabbed one of the hooks and pulled down on it, revealing it to be a lever of sorts. From behind the wall, Ed could hear the twists and turns of cigs and other gears as they worked open a trap door, big enough for even Buccaneer or Al to get through.

He peered down to see a set of metals rungs leading down into the darkened hole. A push from behind caused him to stumble forwards as he fell, grabbing onto the ladder when he recovered.

“Get moving brat!” Armstrong called as she began to make her way down, Miles following after her as he closed the door. While he waited, Ed looked around to see the bare essentials; some chairs, food, water, weapons, a coffee table and of course, hard liqueur. A whole cabinet full.

When they finally reached the bottom, Armstrong lit the candle in the coffee table and gestures for him to sit on the couch facing her. She herself sat down in the room’s only chair; regal and poised in her alter ego as Queen of the North with Miles standing dutifully behind her.
"Starting talking," she orders briskly.

Ed stared the two of them, wondering just how exactly he was supposed to explain all of this. This nightmare. This unbelievable situation he's found himself in. This undeniable truth he's had to face. He stares down at his hands and gently pulls off the glove covering his flesh hand.

"What are you doing?" Armstrong asks, a note of confusion buried deep beneath the growl building up in the back of her throat.

He ignores her as he takes off the one covering his metal hand and then begins to unbutton his uniform jacket with deft fingers that don't halt as he sees her gaze. Once he's done that, his glasses come off and he neatly puts them off to the side where he then starts to pluck the coloured contacts from his eyes. He can feel the moment they realize they had been lied to, the tension so thick and opaque he could practically breathe it in.

Ed looks up with molten gold eyes and can see the surprise in his comrade's own eyes. From the slight increase in her own icy blue to the sharp intake of breath from the man behind her, he could see it all; every detail, inconsistency, all of it. It was like breathing again. Being Ed again. Being himself.

Being me.

"My name's Edward Elric, the Fullmetal Alchemist, and I need your help."

"So, let me get this straight; you faked your death to protect your friends, family and comrades because you found out the military's been compromised and you know they aren't afraid to kill and you came to me because you can't go to anyone else without the military finding out?" Olivier asked him, straight-faced as she stared deep into his golden eyes. Behind her, Miles was pacing back and forth, a frown set on his face and look of concentration on his face.

"Essentially."

The two continued to stare at one another in silence before Miles broke it. He suddenly made a beeline for the liqueur cabinet and Ed watched in a barely contained awe as he proceeded to grab the strongest bottle and didn't even bother to pour himself a glass before he knocked it back.

"I-is he okay?"

Armstrong waved a hand, "He's fine. Back to the point, how was it you managed to convince them you were dead exactly?"

Ed started to answer, but he never let his eyes stray from the Major," Well, in alchemy, when you commit the taboo-"

"Human Transmutation, yes, I know."
"Well, you meet Truth. He's basically what we would call a god, the creator of our world and everything on it." In the background, Miles made a pained sound as he knocked back another shot. Ed continued on anyways," He's basically the one who's allowed us the use of alchemy, we've never actually owned it or discussed it. It's his power, his and his alone; he just allows us to borrow it. But he has rules for us. Alchemy is a wonderful thing, yes, but when we tread into god's domain, we get burned for our insolence."

"And you know this how?"

He cracked a pained grin as he lifted up his pant leg and gestured to his automail," Well, how do you think I got this? Al and I...we missed our mom. We just wanted to see her smile again and we thought we could do it. In the end, Al lost his whole body and I lost my leg."

"I sacrificed my arm to attach his soul into that armour you see now. But it's not permanent; it can reject him at any time. That's why when Mustang found out what we had done...he offered the military's resources so we could find a philosopher's stone...so we could get our bodies back."

"I met Truth again. He was still an asshole but me being the naive brat I was yelled at him," Miles choked at that.

Ed ignored him as he continued, "Asked him why the hell he wasn't doing anything. After all, the end goal for Bradley and his partners is to become immortal...to beat god and take what is his. He just looked at me as if I was an idiot. He told me he wasn't allowed to interfere, something about interfering with his purpose for creating humanity...he'd need a third party." At this, Ed trailed off.

"And naturally you accepted, I assume." He didn't speak but nodded and looked up at the ceiling of the bunker for a few minutes as he took out a photograph before turning his molten gold gaze back on her.

"I didn't realize what it would do...faking my death like that...it's been a rough couple of week, but for him, I'd do anything. I just keep looking at this picture and thinking of Al, knowing that when its all said and done...we can be a family again." Armstrong eyed the photograph and motioned for him to hand it over," I don't see you in here."

"That's my mom's family. I never met them, she ran away from home and she died from the plague when I was about 5...about a year after Hohenheim abandoned us...I can't read the names on the back...she wasn't Amestrian...at least her parents weren't." She let out a pleased hum as she turned to the back and read the names, her eyes widening at the sight of them.

"Miles, come here. Tell me, do you see it?"

Miles stopped what he was doing- having a mental breakdown - and starred down at the smiling faces of the family of 7. He looked over at the names on the back, taking in their names with cold eyes, entirely focused on recognizing them.

"Alberico..." he mummers softly in the entirely silent room.

"Well, do you recognize them or not?" Miles looked into the golden eyes of his friend, someone he's grown to trust with his life and the lives of his family and lets his own trail down to the names on the back.

Sofia.

Viktor.
He looked back at Ed, his own red eyes searching through the expressive molten gold of his friend and he found himself thinking, 'It's no wonder I thought he looked odd...gold suits him...'

"Miles."

Miles thought to his friend Rafael; with deep green eyes that always twinkled with mischief but held a deep sadness in them. One he saw in Ed's eyes looking at him now. He could see Rafael's features in him, something the man obviously shared with the boy's mother for it to pass onto Edward.

He saw the same will to protect his loved ones; the one that made him the soldier he was today.

"Please!"

It was like staring into a mirror as he looked at Ed. He didn't know how he hadn't seen it before. Or maybe he had and he just chose to ignore it...maybe he didn't want to see the mess it would assuredly bring.

Maybe he always knew, knew something was wrong with Ed and hadn't wanted to acknowledge it...because that would mean more heartbreak...more grief...more death. And that was something that Miles wasn't ready to let happen to the 15-year-old pleading in front of him, not like he let happen to his friends, his family, his people.

But that wasn't for him to decide. It never was and it never had been. He had no right, but some days he liked to think he could protect them all. That he wouldn't fail them as he had with his people...but that was a naive dream for the innocent and Miles hasn't been that way for a long time. He's starting to think he never was.

"Yes."

Chapter End Notes

I hope you guys enjoyed this chapter and don't hesitate to review! I love hearing from you all!
A Family History

Chapter Summary

Miles reveals Ed's family history while Ed has a few revelations of his own

Chapter Notes

OK people, I'm back and ready to wow you all with more on the Alberico family and Uncle Rafael.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

"Yes."

It was just one word. Just one. It only had one syllable. One vowel. The 'y' didn't count since there was an 'e' already. It was just one word.

Yes: a noun meaning to give an affirmation to a question and or statement.

Just one word. It was just one word.

But it changed everything.
Ed gave a shaky breath as he brought his hand- \textit{not flesh}. \textit{Never his flesh hand}. It's been so long since he's felt it ...the callouses, the little nicks and bruises and even the scars that litter it like paint splatter- up to his forehead as he sucked in the air just as fast as he breathes it out. It was like a battering ram to the chest but as the minutes ticked by, the pain lessened and the roaring silence that rushed through his ears, that drowned out the sights and sounds of reality, began to recede.

Absently, he swallowed down that tight feeling that rose up in his throat, one that kept getting smaller and smaller until a hand came down on his back and suddenly- he could breathe.

His ears rang and the world spins and in a daze he attempts to get up, holding onto the seemingly simple yet intricate wooden table beside the couch he was sitting only moments beforehand. Ed can see his lips move, he can't quite make out what he's saying, but as he gets louder and louder, the ringing in his ear dissipates.

He can barely understand when he cries out his name- \textit{not Trick, no it wasn't Trick anymore, it was Ed, he was Ed again and it shouldn't have felt that nice to be him again but it did}- but then a gloved hand reaches forwards and takes a hold of his naked shoulders and shakes him.

He snaps his head to the side and finds himself peering into the gleaming red eyes of Miles. His eyes, usually so apathetic \textit{and covered in his goggles why were his goggles off he never takes them off}, were alight with fear and worry, but a hint of resolve behind them.

"-d! Edward! Can you hear me?"

It was like a fog had lifted and quickly he tried to find something to say, anything at all, to reassure him that he was all right when he blurted out the first thing that came to mind, "Miles!" Instantly, relief swam in his oh-so-red eyes as he stared at him, a hint of exasperation behind them.

When Miles smiled, so tired and anxious, that it was then that it hit him as Ed stared into his concerned wine-red eyes; the care and worry he held in them, all for him, all for Ed. And suddenly he was back in Eastern Command; with Hawkeye who'd hover over him when she was concerned in her angry mama-hawk mode, with V who would speak in gentle tones and hang off his neck like the spider monkey she was, with Maes who used to drag Al and him after a mission back home to Gracia and Elicia who offered their hearts and home with open arms, with Chris who wouldn't speak and simply poured a glass of their favorite whiskey.

And Roy who would stay at his bedside whenever he was in the hospital from his latest mission, who would tease him all day long and push his buttons, who would ruffle his hair and sometimes even re-braid it for him when he's too tired and sore to do it himself, who would sometimes slide a plate of food to him when he was researching at the library or rare books from his home library and would drape the blanket he got specifically for Ed when he fell asleep on his office couch...

He's reminded of all the people at Fort Briggs who've adopted him, both Trick and Ed because he was still Ed just as much as he was Trick now. He thought of Armstrong who came up with a colourful collection of nicknames for him and would play chess when both of them had moments to spare, he thought of Buccaneer who he went sparring with and had talked of automail late into the night.

He thought of Bobby, Patricia and Neil who he discussed engineering with at lunch in the mess hall. He thought of Mick and Roach who he practiced at the gun range with.

With Miles who would smile and laugh at his jokes, who would sit in silence with him as they stared up at the stars like Chris, who would ruffle his hair like Roy, who gave advice like V, who stood watch over him like Hawkeye, who took him under his wing when he arrived like Maes...
So, as he looked into his concerned eyes, he realized something; Miles and Armstrong were his new Hawkeye and Colonel Bastard...worse, they seemed to realize that and had no problems with it...in fact, he's pretty sure they're trying to unofficially adopt him like Riza and Mustang are...and he finds he doesn't mind it. Not one bit.

"You okay Ed?"

It was just a little thing, but it made all the difference. He was Ed, he had a name that his mother gave him and one that Al and Izumi and so many others cherish. He was Ed. And Miles knew that. He accepted it. And that made all the difference. He tried to calm down the building tightening seizing knot that gripped his lungs in a vice-like grip and breathed before looking down at the floor, messy bangs falling over his eyes like a curtain as he tried to calm himself. Then the sound of Armstrong clearing her throat cut through the room as reality sunk in.

"Yeah," he swallowed, voice meek and barely a mummer," I'm good, thanks Miles...uh, you said you knew them...w-who are they if you don't mind me asking?"

The look on Miles's face was something Ed thought he recognized but just as fast as it came, it passed as he took a seat next to Ed on his couch. He leaned into the couch, his posture losing its prim and proper structure, and rested his head on the back of it. His goggles sat in his lap, innocent and not on his face why weren't they back on, before he opened his eyes and stared at the ceiling of Armstrong's bunker. His gloved hands played with the goggles in his lap as he fiddled with the lens and appeared deep in thought. The silence seemed to go on forever if not for Armstrong barking out," Miles, spit it out!"

It seemed to snap him out of his funk- Funk? Where the hell did that come from? Fucking Mustang and his old fogey language fuck him for getting to rub off on him and he wonders why he fights with him at every turn- as he snapped his head up and breathed in deep. He gestured for Ed to pass the photograph of his family over to him.

Miles' wine-red eyes skimmed over the picture resting on the woman. He pointed to her, with her dark curls and bright gleaming green eyes and dark tanned skin. "This is your grandmother, Sofia Alberico. She's from Aerugo which is where she met your grandfather, "

Miles gestured to the man beside her; at least a head taller with silvery blonde hair, fair skin and ice-blue eyes. He didn't have a beard and was clean-shaven. Where most men were strong muscled, he had a wiry build with lean muscles indicating a runners build and broad shoulders to accompany them. "His name is Viktor and he's from Drachma. He left home when he was about to be enlisted and emigrated to Aerugo where he met your grandmother."

Next, he pointed to the oldest child, a young girl with his grandfather's colouring and his grandmother's features, "This is your Aunt Candia, she is there first child and the only one to inherit Viktor's Drachman colouring. She's married to Julio and they have one child, a daughter, Giada. She's pregnant though, about 3 months."

He then motioned over to the only sons, identical twins. They had lighter skin then Sofia but her dark brown hair and green eyes." These are your uncles, Rafael and Niccolo, they work here at Fort Briggs. First Lieutenant Rafael Elric serves under Captain Buccaneer and his twin, Niccolo is an engineer with Bobby and the others."

"Rafael has a wife, Isabella and they have 3 kids. The youngest is Laverne, a sweet little girl who is too smart for her good. Then there's their twins, Felix who prefers books and likes his quiet and Elara who is as bright and loud at her father, she goes on a different adventure every day. Niccolo married his husband Peter last spring and they've recently adopted a little girl named Anya."
He paused as he pointed at the next girl, with fair skin and green eyes and light chestnut brown hair and it's like the air was stolen from him, "This is Patrizia, your mother...I'm guessing by the look on your face, she didn't go by that name?"

Ed reached out with a shaking finger and gently traced his mother's smiling face, "No...she went by Trisha Elric. She settled in Resembool and had a life with Hohenheim there...she came back to North City when she was pregnant with me. We stayed until after Al turned two...I don't remember much, just languages I don't understand and a mess of white...lots of white. I can barely remember the words now, but sometimes, when I was younger, I'd catch her singing a song that I didn't understand. I can remember the way she always seemed to be reading books in another language or how she would sometimes speak to me but I couldn't seem to understand what she was saying."

"Did she ever call you any other name other than Ed?"

"Sometimes...especially in the last few days before her death, she'd get delirious and call me Edoardo and call Al Alphonso. Other than that, she kept her life before we came along locked up and packed away...this photo was one of the few things she kept out on her bedside table, but that's about it..."

Armstrong was silent through his explanation before he sat forward and gestured to the last child, a little girl who was a carbon copy of his grandmother, what with her big green eyes, darkened skin and curly dark brown hair, so dark it almost looked back. "Who's she?"

Miles looked at her with something in his eye, a warmness that wasn't there before and a softened edge in his sharp eyes. He looks at her smiling face, her pudgy legs peeking out from her dress and the two pigtails in her hair with a fondness he had never seen before," She's the youngest daughter, born about two years after that. Her name is Valentina and she's as strong-willed as her mother and sisters before her. She never listens to anyone and if you try to tell her otherwise, a book or the nearest object, usually an alarm clock or lamp, will be thrown at your head. She doesn't take no for an answer and she's too smart for her good with a mouth to back it up. It gets her in more trouble than it should. She can't sit still for her life and she changes hobbies and careers like hairstyles."

Ed looked at him and was about to voice his thoughts when Armstrong beat him to it, "How do you know so much about them?"

"I was a childhood friend...we lived down the street and we stuck together, being some of the only kids with immigrant families...we weren't as welcome, myself with my Ishvalan colouring and them with their Drachman heritage. After your mother left, the family broke apart. Your uncle Rafael let her go in the middle of the night and two days later he left an enlisted man...met his wife down south and moved back up here just before the Ishvalen War of Extermination began. Your uncle Niccolo took it hard; with both Rafael and Patrizia leaving...so he took an apprenticeship in town and was eventually hired by the military."

He took a shaking breath before he continued," Candia didn't take it well...she's not good at expressing herself so she just gets angry instead. She can be cold and indifferent too, after years of being bullied by the townspeople...her siblings all took after their mother but she looked like Viktor, was practically his copy and so they knew she was Drachman, that his blood ran strong through her...she wasn't welcomed in town...she was cold to me when we first met, she thought I was like everyone else until I showed her my eyes. I became friends with them all through her. She's my best friend...instead of a maid of honour, I was her Groomsmen of Honor at her wedding..."

"Your mother leaving had to hit your grandmother the hardest. She wasn't ready to let any of them go, she valued family strongly and while she loved your mother and blessed their union, she knew that Hohenheim wouldn't stay in the North for long and that your mother would follow him...she didn't like everyone being separated after the fiasco with her own family...it was eerily similar and it
broke her. Your grandfather took it best, he understood the need. Patrizia was too much like her mother to listen to them."

After he finished, it was silent. Ed processed everything he just heard and found himself with one burning question...something he had noticed but never asked about...it gnawed at him until it became too much and before he had even realized it, he was calling out, "Hey Miles?"

The older man looked over at him from where he was staring at the photo,” Yes?"

"Can I ask you a question? I just noticed something earlier in your explanation and its been bugging me."

At the man's nod, he takes a deep breath before opening his mouth, "When you were talking about Aunt Valentina earlier...you got this look in your eye and you talked as if you knew her better than the others, even better than Aunt Candia, your best friend...why is that?"

He could tell Miles was surprised; the sharp intake of breath, the dilated pupils and widening eyes, the way he snapped his head to look over at him, the tense posture he adopted as soon as he heard his question. Miles knew something and he hadn't told them for a reason. He knew Armstrong saw it, the way her icy blue eyes widened in delight, a cat-like smile stretching across her pretty face. She leaned back in her chair, her one leg crossed over the other and the side of her head came to rest on her arm, a lazy and relaxed position that only she could manage to make regal and over-powering to any who saw it.

"Oh? Do tell Miles...I can see it in your eye...you don't want to tell us, but you can't hide it forever...it is the boy's family after all?"

Miles slumped in his seat, a defeated look coming across his face and a sigh being released heavily into the air, "Okay fine, I do know Valentina better, but that's to be expected considering how close we are..."

"How close it that exactly?"

"...

"Miles, talk."

"Valentina...she's my wife."

Chapter End Notes

Yes, I just dropped that bombshell and guess what? IT FITS CANON WISE! Miles mentions that this wife wasn't of Ishvalan blood but was of different ethnic heritage.

Here's what I based the Alberico family members on;

Viktor Alberico which is a Harry Potter animation but I love the way she draws Draco and that's what I based him on - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kukKIRL9zDs

Sofia Alberico - https://www.pinterest.ca/pin/447334175486536646/

Valentina - https://www.pinterest.ca/pin/447334175486536638/
Candia - https://www.pinterest.ca/pin/598486237954040811/
Julio - https://www.pinterest.ca/pin/404338872794179745/
Niccolo - https://www.pinterest.ca/pin/447334175486536701/
Peter - https://www.pinterest.ca/pin/447334175486536702/
Rafael (with Laverne) - https://www.pinterest.ca/pin/447334175486536731/
Isabella - https://www.pinterest.ca/pin/370702613074966979/
Giada - https://www.pinterest.ca/pin/468867011206587531/
Anya - https://www.pinterest.ca/pin/619737598702897427/
Felix - https://www.pinterest.ca/pin/774478467150811133/
Earla - https://www.pinterest.ca/pin/542472717611761177/
Ed stares at Miles, big molten gold eyed unblinking as the man gazed back at him. A tense silence, one so thick and opaque that he could practically breathe it in, threatened to choke him to death as it slowly covered the room.

It was a suffocating type of silence. The one that could strangle you at a moments notice and you couldn’t do a damn thing to stop it. His ears rang and a faint popping noise seemed to go off like bombs in his ear. He vaguely heard a clock chiming in the background and wondered how he hadn’t noticed it was in Armstrong’s bunker beforehand.

"Well," Armstrong drawled from her throne. “This has been nice and all, great chat, I’m sure, unfortunately, Miles has to head down to Northern Command and it’s already 6:30." Both men turned to looks at her, Miles with an uncertain look in his red eyes before understanding filled them and Ed with a raised eyebrow.

"Now, I know we learned a lot of things, like how Miles obviously has a lamp fetish since your aunt loves to throw them at him- repeatedly, might I add- and you’re a short midget, but can we get back to the part where we move forward with your little plan so I can kill the damn prick sitting on our nation's throne and become Furher?” she continued, unconcerned with the matching tick marks both Ed and Miles sported.

"Miles," she barked suddenly." You need to go investigate Kimblee!"

"Wait just a fucking moment," Ed pipped up from his earlier rage. "Kimblee? As in Solf.J.Kimblee? Mass murderer and genocide man that’s supposed to be serving life in prison and the Colonel Bastard was trying to get executed for the last 12 years because he's a danger to public safety!? That Kimblee! Why the fuck is he free?!"
"Yes, I believe it is that one. Now, I'm more concerned with who Colonel Bastard is...tell me more?"

Armstrong leaned forwards.

Ed waved her away with his metal hand, "Ahh, it's my name for Roy. I do it just to piss him off. Riza seems to think it's funny so I like doing it...it makes her smile more...and Roy didn't mind it as much after Hughes...I think it reminds him of a time when he was still alive and would join in with me." He got quiet after that.

"Maes? That was the man who died because of the Homonculus, yes? Mustang seems awfully fond of him."

"Maes was his best friend. Met in the academy and they served in the war together...before any of this, Roy resolved to never let another Ishval happen again and he realized the only way was to become Furher...Maes and Riza were the first to pledge their loyalty..."

Armstrong leaned back into her throne with a thoughtful look on her face. She observed the way Miles naturally inclined himself towards Ed and how he allowed it. She went over the way he talked about Hawkeye, Mustang and this Maes character...a few moments went by before she uncrosses her legs and suddenly stands up.

"Ed, I've decided to help you. On the condition, that you'll support me for my claim of Furher after I kill Bradley!" she asked him, imposing in her stance and conviction in her voice.

Ed looked at her, unable to hide the surprise in his molten gold eyes and his jaw dropped a little. He had to admit; he was not expecting that. Not at all. He half suspected her to ask him for favours given his connections with so many political figures in and out of Amestris. And since Grumman and her were the only ones of the High Command not corrupt, there wasn't a lot who could run for Furher so quickly after Bradley's death.

"So, let me get this straight. You want me, Ed, to support you for the position of Furher after we kill said man and I reveal myself to all of Amestris that no I wasn't really dead and have to explain to all the women in my life why they shouldn't kill me for doing this plus my brother, Mustang and basically every other parental figure who's unofficially adopted me, which includes the two of you by the way, and you think this will go over well?"

"Well, when you put it that way you make-"

"Okay, I'll do it."

"e- wait, what? You'll do it?"

"Yeah."

"Just like that? Knowing all this, you'll still support?"

"Well yeah, it's not like I have anything better to do. Life's been a little too quiet now that that idiot prince Ling is gone and I'm bored."

"You're bored?"

"Did I stutter, sir?"

Olivier looked at the young man before her, intense molten gold eyes rolling at her semi-baffled expression- she knew he was even doing it if he tried to hide it. 'Such a cheeky little thing' she observes. 'Then again he was under Mustang's command so it's not that far-fetched that the man's
personality would rub off on him at such a young age...at least that's what Miles said.'

Ed brushed a stray strand of champagne blonde hair out of his face and gave her an unimpressed look.

"No, I suppose you didn't, little one. Now, are you ready to get started then?"

"Lead the way, Furher Armstrong."

"Watch it, brat!" she growled out, a tone of fondness in her voice.

She watched him leave with Miles first as her assistant began to berate him for swearing so much. Her icy blue eyes took in his appearance and she just knows that a 15-year-old boy his size shouldn't be so skinny, not when he must be getting all the exercise he needs fighting his way across Amestris. 'He said I was a parental figure?... As if! I gave up on being able to have children a long time ago when I became the Northern Wall of Briggs...but maybe...if I had a son...I'd think I'd want him to be like Ed...yeah, that sounds nice...'

"It's huge." The crane carrying the pipes lowered onto the floor as Olivier, Buccaneer, Ed and some other soldiers stood around the giant hole Sloth had made in the lowest level of Fort Briggs.

"A platoon could fit through the hole." Clarink continued. "It curves gently then continues on for a long way. But there were no signs of anyone in it."

Armstrong narrowed her eyes at the hole and gazed at Buccaneer out of the corner of her eye. "Lower some horses," she ordered, voice final and tone drawn up tight, giving nothing away.

"Yes sir," Buccaneer faithfully replied. She turned her heads towards him. "And I want to see the Elric brother." She ignored the look Ed gave her and instead strode away, not waiting for him to catch up with her as she did so.

"This is a serious tunnel," Ed said. He was riding next to Armstrong, her face set into a permanent scowl as she narrowed her eyes at the tunnel, as if it was a personal offence and stain of existence against humanity...which to be fair, it kinda was.

"I still can't believe that an intruder was able to get this far through our defences." she spat out.

This evidently got Al's attention. He looked up at them from where he was between Rafael and shit
what the fuck how hadn't he noticed him earlier-he looked back at the two of them, taking in his Uncle's features and thinking back to what Miles- or is it Uncle Miles now too? - told him about his family, about the one he hadn't met. He could clearly see his mother in his uncle and was hit with a sudden pang because he looked a lot like Al...Obviously, his mom and her brothers shared the same facial features and he always knew Al looked a bit more like their mom but right now it was hitting him more than ever.

"So has anyone else ever made it into the fort before?" Al asked, making her look at him.

"No, not in all the time I've had command here," Armstrong said as she looked forward once more. "But once, nearly twenty years ago, there was a strange incident where the mountain guard was attacked in the middle of winter."

"Apparently, a mysterious woman stole food and supplies for a full month." she continued, uncaring for the way both Ed and Al flinched violently and looked anywhere but at her. Both her and Rafael shared a look at this and vowed to get the story from the two teens.

A scary looking Izumi with an evil grin in place appeared in Ed's mind with hellish fire surrounding her. "I survived for a whole month in the Briggs mountains!" Izumi's voice rang through his head. Ed and Al, who were sweatdropping, were unknowingly thinking the same thing. 'It was Teacher.' Both boys thought to themselves.

"This should be far enough," she announced to the group.

She looked over at Al and gave him a subtle glare, "You, dismount," Olivia said, making Ed glance at her. She ignored him in favour of Al who looked at her with a confused expression on his helmet-how was he doing that?-" Hmm?" Al said.

The end of Olivier's sword connected with the ground between her feet with a dull thud. "Now then," she declared with Ed standing beside her while Buccaneer and Rafael stood on either side Falman and Al, who both still had a rope tied around their waists.

"We're safely away from any prying eyes. You can tell me everything without fearing discovering. And I mean everything." Al gasped but Olivier paid him no mind as she continued, "Don't hold anything back. Yesterday I asked you about that monster. Remember what you said?"

"I can't answer." Olivier's voice mocked, making Ed's brow furrow from where he was at her side. "You refused me, and that even as a hint, is a dangerous thing to do."

"I told you to answer my questions fully and completely. At great peril to yourself, you neglected to do so," she said. "I think there's something you're trying to hide and you'd risk your lives to protect it." Olivier paused...probably for dramatic effect. "Something or maybe someone."

Armstrong stared darkly at Al, "This time, don't lie to me." She said in a low, commanding voice. "I want the truth." Ed looked down for a moment before gazing back up at her. "We need your help, General."
Olivier's gloved hands rested on the hilt of her sword as she began to tap one of her fingers against the back of her other hand. "The Philosopher's Stone, Homunculi, Fuhrer King Bradley, a mysterious man called Father, corruption in the senior staff."

"There are hostages involved as well," Buccaneer pipped up from beside Al's left side.

"Your childhood friend, the automail engineer, and all Mustang's men. We've done some joint training with eastern command over the years. So I know Officers Hawkeye and Havoc." She put a hand to her chin. "And I'd hate it if we lost either of them."

"I would like to help them," Olivier finished. "And, uh, what about Colonel Mustang?" Falman asked nervously. "Yeah, I couldn't care less about him," she deadpanned. "I'd just as soon see him fall from power. That would eliminate another rival."

Armstrong suddenly stood up. "Never mind him. The question is what do we do next?" She pointed a thumb over her shoulder. "This tunnel here, I would like to know what you alchemists make of it. Brat, get to it!" Ed looked up sharply at that, a tick mark on his face, and immediately set to work. He placed one his gloved hands on the track and the other on the tunnel floor.

"First of all, the tunnel probably didn't originate in Drachma," Ed finally announced to the waiting group. "This is just my guess, but I say chances are we'll found it's dug in the shape an enormous circle."

"Why?" Buccaneer asked.

"It has to do with alchemy. In our field, a circle is the symbol used to control power." He looked down at the map and pressed his pencil into his chin. "I need to look at this more closely." He stared the map before blinking and gasping as Ed circled Ishval.

"Lieutenant Falman," Ed said. He lifted his head up from where he was busy studying the map intensely to look at Falman, who turned to look at him. "Can you list the major events in Amestris that were accompanied by bloodshed?"

"By bloodshed?" Falman repeated. Falman approached him and kneeled. "What are you getting at?" he asked. He gasped before he pointed somewhere on the map, "First there's July 1588. In Riviere."

"Okay, Riviere," Ed said as he circled it. "Next."

"October 1661, the Cameron uprising." Falman pointed at it on the map as Ed circled it. "February 1799, the Soapman incident, there in Fisk." Falman moved his finger along the map. "March 1811, The Wellsley incident."

"October 1835, The First Southern Border War in what is now known as South City."

"What about Pendleton in the west?" Ed asked. "There's been fighting with Creta," Falman said as Ed circled it. "A lot of soldiers have died. And then, later in 1914, there was the Liore insurrection. There were many causalities."

"What?" Ed asked.

"An insurrection?" Al asked surprised. "But why?"
"I don't understand. Brother and I exposed the fake priest in Liore and then Brother reported it to Eastern Command immediately." Al said.

Falman looked over at Al with something akin to pity in his eyes that made Ed clench his fists tightly, which Armstrong gave an approving hum at once she saw his self-control. "Yes, you did. But the Central forces came in and ran out the troops from the east. After that happened, Liore just fell to pieces," Falman said.

Ed bowed his head with his hand grabbing at his hair. "Oh no. Damn." He muttered, closing his eyes. "No time for that," Olivier interjected. She stood and gave a comforting squeeze to his shoulder when Ed turned his head to look at her. "Back to work, Trick."

"Alright, fine." He said as he turned back around and circled Liore. "And now. We just connect the dots." Ed said as Buccaneer, Al, and Olivier moved in closer to watch. She didn't bother covering the bit of surprise that came over it when she looked down at the map. "How is that possible?"

"It looks like the transmutation circle from the fifth laboratory," Falman said.

"Is that so? The Philosopher's Stone array that draws power from human lives," Buccaneer commented offhandedly. "If they make a Philosopher's Stone with something this huge, how many will have to die?" he asked them all.

Ed played with his pencil while his automail hand rested on his chin as he leaned over the map, after a moment his eyes widened. Ed tapped the map with his pencil. "The first of the conflicts happened in 1558."

"Right," Olivier stated. "It was just after the founding of Amestris."

Falman put a hand to his chin. "They attacked Riviere. That was the neighbouring country at the time, and then the military…” He paused and picked up the map. "Wait." He was looking at the map closely. "That's it."

"It was the military. They were involved in all of it." Falman continued as those who didn't know gasped in surprise. "Each incident was a coup d'état or insurrection. Like in Liore. Forces from Central would be sent in and they would make everything worse."

Ed blinked and then frowned, deep in thought as he ran it through his head and asked the question on everyone's mind. "It's been going on that long?"

"We kept growing. Our country started out as a small nation, but we expanded as we took over more and more neighbouring countries." Armstrong started. "That was all to create this circle."

"So that means, not only are they planning to use this country to do whatever it is they're doing, but they actually created it in the first place for that single purpose," Ed stated.

"My country," she said as an ugly look passed her face and her fists gripped the hilt of her sword tightly. Ed looked up at her and gave a small nod of his head, letting her she wasn't alone and that he was there to support her bid to become Furher before Mustang did. He felt bad for doing so, but he knew Mustang wasn't ready yet to become Furher, maybe in 10 years but not now, not while grief clouds his mind a fire rages in his heart.

Al turned his head. "Do you think General Hughes…?"

Ed looked up at that. "Yeah, before he was killed, he must've seen the transmutation circle. He was serving in the court-martial office. He had all the information about the military incidents. He would
have known that something wasn't right. That must be why he…"

"I'm sorry, but who are you exactly?" Al asked suddenly, unable to keep his curiosity about the mysterious champagne blonde in any longer.

Ed looked up at him, dark blue eyes blinking up at him as if he was stupid before he sighed in exasperation at his brother." My name is Lt. Colonel Mors, I was a friend of your brothers and his intelligence network stationed in Eastern Command. After his death, Grumman got suspicious and sent me up here to gather allies with General Armstrong."

"He never mentioned you before!" Al said, getting weirdly defensive before Ed remembers...oh yeah he's dead and Al is probably really sensitive about it...'Jeez' he thinks. 'It's just like when Winry throws wrenches at me...I'll have to tread carefully.'

"Your brother was a very private person and he didn't like to involve you in a lot of his affairs with the military. Before his death, he told me everything, because he had a bad feeling. It isn't that uncommon for soldiers to have a confidant both in and out of the military. One for personal affairs and others for military ones. You were his personal and I was his military. Mustang relied on Hughes for both his military and personal...Armstrong, you got a confidant?"

"Of course, Major Miles is my military and personal. Buccaneer?"

"Major Miles is my personal and you sir my military."

"Major Elric?" Ed asked. He could see Al whip his head around to look at Rafael and knew that even if he couldn't comfort his brother right now, he could make him happy. Even if it was just for a little while.

"Miles is both my military and personal."

"Your last name is Elric?" Al asked him.

"Yes? First Lieutenant Rafael Elric. And you are?"

"Alphonse. Alphonse Elric."

Ed could see Rafael blink in surprise, his jaw dropped a little before he closed his mouth and swallowed down the lump building in his throat and asked the one questioned Ed was waiting for him to ask."Do...do you know of a Patrizia? She sometimes went by Trisha...she's my little sister, please, I've been looking for her for the last 18 years after she left home...d-do you know her?"

"Yeah, I do! That's my mom! Hey, you do look familiar! Mom had a photo of her family on her bedside...but brother had it last I knew...and he's dead now..." Just as Al got more and more depressed, Ed popped up from his seat and moved over to Al and his uncle.

"I think I have what you're looking for."He made a show of digging around in his pocket before grabbing the photo of his family and handing it over to Al. "Here. Ed gave it to me, asked me to look into the names and see if I could find out whatever happened to them for you guys. It was gonna be a present for you...a vacation after you got your bodies back...to see your last living family...besides your father, that is." He lied smoothly.

Al grabbed it with shaking hands and looked up at him," T-thank you Mors! You don't know how much this means to me."

"Believe me, it was the least I could do for you."
"As sweet as this is Mors, I do not like this." Armstrong drawled out from behind them all. Ed turned and raised an eyebrow at her which she ignored, "As far as I can tell, there's only one place left."

Her face grew angry as she continued, "If you're right about your theory, the next place they're going to hit is right here in Briggs. Those bastards in Central. What kind of dirty plans do they have for my fort?" she growled.

The sound of hooves echoed through the cave, "General!" A soldier shouted, making Olivier turn towards him. "You're needed back at the fort. Lieutenant General Raven from Central is here to see you."

"It looks like our time's already up," she announced, sounding exasperated. Ed looked at her.

"Excuse me, sir." Olivier looked at him, angry eyes softening just a bit. "I'd like to ask a favour of you," Ed replied. She looked at him with a slight hint of surprise in her eyes. "Do you think you could con some information out of General Raven?"

"General Raven, sir," Miles said behind Raven. "I'm terribly sorry to have to ask you to wait."

Raven turned to face him. "No, please, don't worry about it. It's my fault for dropping in like this."

"General Armstrong should return at any moment now," Miles said. "This way, please."

"Oh," Raven said with Kimblee behind him. "And as you can see, I brought a guest with me. If it's not too much trouble, then perhaps you would be so kind as to show him around the fort." Raven stated.

Kimblee grabbed his hat. "I'd appreciate it." he took his hat off to show a cruel smirk on his face. "Thanks, Major Miles."

Chapter End Notes

Lots of Miles and Armstrong parental fluff towards Ed!
Kimblee is a major prick with a long ass nose that he sticks where it doesn't belong. General Raven is a backstabbing bitch with a fake ass smile and as Ed observes the burning wreck he calls his life, he finds that it's a Tuesday and thinks that yeah that sounds about right.

Chapter Notes

I'm back my lovelies and I hope you enjoy this next installment. We've finally reached episode 36 "Family Portrait" which means we are 11 episodes in since we've started this. This chapter only goes about mid-way through this episode since I had to finish the last few minutes of episode 35 at the beginning of the chapter and I felt where I decided to end it was a good place. We are 11 minutes into this chapter so I hope you enjoy!

Some more background for Trick's character is included alongside a POV from Olivier! Please review and comment, I love it when you guys do, it lets me know I'm going in the right direction and that I'm not just doing it for nothing!

Stuck in the dainty supply closet that he found himself in, Ed wondered how it ever amounted to this. How one little question could ever lead to this. How asking "why?" got him from one trainwreck to another. It was almost laughable now that he thought about it; questioning everything was something alchemists just did. Questioning life itself was what they lived for.

They just couldn't help themselves and Ed was no different. He could never stop thinking; his brain ran a million miles an hour at any given moment and everything he came across he either studied, questioned and found an alchemical purpose for. He never could stop himself.

Roy did it sometimes, he'd notice. Ed would be in his office, lying on the couch reading or writing notes in his travelogue. He'd look up to find the man looking off into a random space; starring at nothing and everything. He knew the look in his eyes, it was the same one Ed got.

The same one that bastard Hohenheim got sometimes from his few memories of the man. Teacher did it as did many other alchemists he's met over the years. They just did it. And look where that got him?

He found himself squished inside the small room surrounded by allies who didn't know the truth, a
family he couldn't touch and a plan to sacrifice the entire country by a genocidal maniac to stop.

Rafael and Al hadn't left one another's sides since they found out about their new-found relation and Ed found his chest tightening into a small ball of...something whenever he thought of them or even looked at them. Buccaneer and Falman were beside him manning the wire Armstrong was wearing and Ed knew he'd owe her everything if they could actually get through all of this...maybe a trip to Chris's was in order.

He could catch up with the girls, hug V in what seems like forever. Raid Chris's liqueur cabinet. He let the memory wash over him. The sound of Chris's music rang in his ears, the feel of V's sweater on his skin and her heartbeat against his chest, the sight of Chris's smile and the taste of his favourite whiskey. As it surrounded him in its embrace, he started to imagine everyone there with him.

Not just Chris and the girls, no, Mustang and Hawkeye and the team were there. So was Teacher, Sig and all his other friends. Winry, Granny Pinako, Denny and Al. His friends up North, his mothers family, Armstrong and Uncle Miles. His cousins and everyone else he loved and met and protected with the price of his life. All of them, his family, in the one place he felt the safest in a long time...yeah, that sounded nice.

"Winry's apple pie," Al's voice broke the memory, making Ed look up from the ground. "That was the first thing I wanted to do when I got my body back. But now, even that much may be out of reach forever...especially since Ed's gone now..."

"You'll have all the apple pie you could ever want," Ed blurted out, not thinking, still stuck in the memory. Everyone was looking at him, eyebrows raised and a question ready to leave their mouths, just on the tip of their tongues.

"What are you talking about Trick?" Buccaneer asked, finally breaking the silence.

"Ed...he wasn't just my confidant...I met him before either of us were apart of the military...I was in Central when he came in to take his exams, I found him asleep in the library while working a night shift. We got to talking and eventually, he became my friend...he inspired me during a time in my life where I had nothing to show for in my life... no feats...nothing...said I would do great things one day...after he became a state alchemist, he got me a job as Grumman's secretary. I eventually became his intelligence network. I owe him my life. I promised him that I would do anything to make it up to him...you know what the little shit told me?"

"What?" Falman asked.

"He told me; Protect him, make him happy and keep him safe for all the times that I can't and I'll consider us even.' I promised him, I swore on my life...so when I say you'll get all the pie you could ever want; you're getting it."

Al was silent as he stared at him and Ed could feel his breath shortening, the memory of a life he could never have might never have again stuck on replay in his mind and his chest just grew tighter and tighter until-

He looked away and shushed everyone, hearing the faint static over the radio as Armstrong worked her magic.
"I apologize for the chaos, sir." Olivier's voice came over the stereo. "We were attacked yesterday."

"By who?" Raven asked, smug ass voice still as irritating even through the static. "I think it's most appropriate to call it a monster," she answered. "But fortunately we were able to fend it off."

"A monster," Raven repeated. "What do you mean?"

"We killed it, but it didn't die, sir."

Raven chuckled, sounding like many of the fucktards that called themselves villains that Ed wondered how no one noticed it up until then. "Is that so?"

"I suspected that it originated in Drachma, but the younger Elric brother," Olivier said and at the mention of the Elrics Raven stopped drinking and became more alert. "Didn't I mention? The late Fullmetal Alchemist's brother is here."

She picked up her own teacup again if the slight clinking was anything to go by. "I found it disturbing. He seemed to know about this monster. But they wouldn't talk."

"Obviously if we have a State Alchemist's brother doubling as a spy for Drachma, that's a serious problem. I've locked him up. I've been told the late Fullmetal took his brother on missions and it's possible he learned so many things from simply this, whether Fullmetal knew or not is another matter we'll have to get out of the younger one."

"Perhaps you'd like to speak with them." she continued.

"Certainly," Raven said as Ed, Rafael Al, Buccaneer, and Falman gathered around the speaker and lantern. "They won't tell you anything?"

"Correct. He said he came here to research living transmutation or something," Olivier replied. "What could be more suspicious? I distrusted him instantly."

She paused for a moment before speaking again, sounding so meek and fragile that Ed was unsettled by it- she was Major General Olivier Mira Armstrong and she shouldn't ever sound like that."I had thought about torturing him to get the information. But I am a woman after all. The thought of hurting that little boy." she rested, "Let's just say I couldn't stand it."

Ed, well, let's just say he couldn't help it. He snorted and before long he was laughing, desperately trying to hide his giggles behind his gloved hand. Both Al and Falman looked at him as if he'd grown another head, Rafael stared at him with a grimace as he knew what he was laughing at and Buccaneer grinned up at him, his fist out for a fist bump which Ed returned enthusiastically.

"Now that's rich." Ed breathed out in between his giggles as he tried to catch his breath.

"She would've tortured you in a second and not thought twice about it," Buccaneer said as the two shared another laugh at the looks of horror and disbelief coming from the other two before him.

Raven's laugh echoed over the speaker, interrupting their festive mood and ruining the moment. "But General Armstrong, aren't you known as the Northern Wall of Briggs?" he asked condescendingly. "Walls aren't as soft as that."
Olivia chuckled over the speaker, sounding as weak as she was before to everyone but both Buccaneer and Ed could hear the tone hidden underneath, one promising vengeance and death to the man before her. "You know General Raven, at my age most women are expected to have had a child or two at least. Unfortunately, I'm well past that now."

"Come now. Surely men are lining up to have children with you," he claimed.

"Hardly, sir," Olivier responded. "I'd hate to say, but like everybody else, I'm growing older. And my body is too."

Ed and Al leaned in closer at those words, eyes narrowed as they tried to hear if he would take the bait, unaware of the way the three older men looked at them with questioning looks on their faces. Buccaneer narrowed his eyes, a question forming in his mind as he looked at the two before him...

'Trick said he was an only child but looking at these two...Sir said there was a threat to this country, one unknown to everyone and orchestrated by the higher-ups, I mean, look at the dumbass Raven, falling into her trap like that...and that he was 19...but most teenagers can pass off for older age and it's not like the military cares, after all, I was 16 when I enlisted and I knew I didn't look like a 19-year-old but they didn't even bat an eye at me...is it possible?" Buccaneer thought.

Falman meanwhile looked at the two boys and could only see Ed in every little thing Trick did, 'He looks so much like Ed...no, stop it Falman, he's gone and he wouldn't want me to pin after something that isn't there! He'd want me to protect Alphonse and help everyone else!' he reflected before he shook his head.

"That Drachman monster though. It had an outstanding body. An immortal body. Like something from a dream," she continued.

"What if I told you that very soon it wouldn't be a dream anymore?"

"Tell me, General," Ed could practically hear the shit eating grin he no doubt wore at this very moment, "Would you be interested in a legion of immortal soldiers?"

'He took the bait.' the men all thought.

Stuck inside that little room with a disgusting piece of human filth, Olivier wondered how she got herself in this mess. Life was fine without plots of demons that hid in the dark, with genocidal maniacs who threatened her country and a monster on her throne. Life was good with just herself and her men, with Miles and Buccaneer and her Northern Wall of Briggs. Everything was fine without the small brat.

Except...it wasn't, not really. Life from before Ed seemed duller when she looked back at it now. She never had this much fun before he arrived and she can't remember the last time she's done anything remotely exciting in years. It was...nice to have a change for once. The little brat had somehow wormed his way into her heart and she's never been this fond of someone before, other than her own men.
Is this what her mother meant when she said she'd understand when she had children one day?

Raven appeared in front of her, leaning into her face. "Never dying or getting old." He rested his hand on top of hers before rubbing it perversely, "You want it to, don't you?"

In the back of her mind, she screamed in outrage at his audacity, 'What I want is to kill you!'

"Hmm?"

Her grimace changed to a smile as she said gently, "Oh, it's just such an incredible question. I don't know what to say."

He lifted up her hand. "Well, are you interested or not? There are only two answers."

She hoisted her other hand and pushed Raven's away as she spoke, voice commanding respect and practically promising danger for him if he continued with this charade of his. "It is intriguing. Can you tell me, General? On the day when this dream comes true, will my men share in this gift as well? Or is it only for me?"

"I can tell you when the time comes," Raven said as he stood up. With one hand resting on her chin as she watched Raven, Olivier thought of the many ways she could murder the prick without getting caught and most of them involved with her getting away with it.

'Does that mean they are no guarantees until then?' she thought. Raven sat back down, smiling. 'If I buy into this, I'll be forced to facilitate whatever dirty plans he has for Briggs. And if I refuse, I'll just be swapped out for some other pawn.' She lowered her hand from her chin. 'Probably demoted.'

'So, do I accept his offer or not?'

A rapid pounding could be heard from the doors as it broke her concentration and she found herself wanting to promote whoever was on the other side, "Excuse me." Olivier said as she stood up. 'Thank god for small miracles' she thought as she opened it.

"Yes, what is it?" she asked. The soldier saluted. "I'm sorry to disturb you, but the underground tunnel advance team..." He froze as he caught sight of General Raven and started to lower his hand.

"What's this about an underground tunnel?" Raven asked, smiling as he did. 'You dumb fuck, no one believes that old smiling grandpa routine for a moment, if I wanted an old pervert with grabby hands I'd find one of the old fucks down at the local pub'

"Speak, soldier," she demanded.

"Yes, sir."

"Something's happened to the advance team."

"Very well," Olivier replied. "I'll be right there."

"I'm coming too," Raven spoke up.
Al, Falman, Rafael and Buccaneer stood up. "Right, let's move," Buccaneer said as the three started to move towards the door. As they did, Ed stayed kneeling on the ground as he looked around quickly. "Hold on a sec." He told them softly.

They stopped before they turned to face Ed who came towards Al with a bag in his hand. There was a flash of blue alchemical light as the bag turned into a rope which twirled up as Ed pulled his hand away. "Sorry, kid, but it has to look convincing." He then proceeded to tie Al up.

The five of them made their way out of the tiny room, Ed leading then while Buccaneer, Falman and Rafael all held parts of the rope as if they were restraining the big suit of armour that was Al. As they walked down the long winding corridor, they met up with Miles and his guest.

"Buccaneer, what are you doing?" Miles asked.

"Prisoner transfer, sir. I'm moving the Elric brother from the east cells to the west." Buccaneer replied.

"May I ask who this is?"

Miles gestured to Kimblee, "This is Mr. Solf J. Kimblee. He's General Raven's honoured guest." he answered.

Kimblee lifted his hat to show off a predatorial grin on his face, "Wait, did you say the Elric brother? You mean the Fullmetal Alchemist younger brother?"

He lifted his hat off his head. "Nice to meet you. I've heard so much about your brother, the late Fullmetal Alchemist. I'm so very sorry for your loss."

As Al replied with a monotone "Hello," Ed starred at Kimblee with a bored, annoyed look, hoping the intensity of his hatred for the man would make him burn where he stood...Unfortunately for Ed, he wasn't Mustang and it wasn't working...pity, he was feeling like setting some things on fire.

Miles turned to look over at Ed, "Trick, General Armstrong wants to see you. She should be around here somewhere."

"Aye sir, I'll see you all during dinner then?" He adjusted his glasses, letting the glint cover up his eyes as he did.

"See you then, Trick." Miles nodded to him as he took his leave.

Walking away from them and heading down to the lowest floors of Fort Briggs, Ed couldn't help fiddle with his glasses, 'I hope Uncle Miles is alright...he seemed tense...and what about General Armstrong? She's stuck with that wannabe villain fucktard. And let's not forget about Al and my new found family! Geez, I need a drink.'

Chapter End Notes

Please review and comment, I love it when you guys do, it lets me know I'm going in
the right direction and that I'm not just doing it for nothing!
Ed looked down at him, his face impassive and his dark blue eyes clear of emotion, "You know," he starts, digging his heel into the bullet wound. "I almost pity you...almost being the key word; because then I remember you were working with those fuckers who killed my friend and then I feel nothing."

*WARNING*

This might be pretty angsty this chapter at some times, other moments funny and some might be 'holy shit'. Now, some things will be revealed in which I have been subtly hinting at since the second chapter, which I don't know if anyone's noticed. Regardless of any of that, I hope you enjoy this chapter. It was a word count of 5336 words so this is my longest chapter yet! Enjoy!

Roy stood in the empty room. He stared at it with sharp charcoal eyes that analyzed too much and a mind that ran a million miles an hour. His shoulders felt weighed down and his heart heavy.

He wasn't like the others but like the boy with hair that looked like it was spun from pure gold and eyes that seemed to spark brighter than the flames he made. He wore his heart on his sleeve and that was something most didn't realize.

He loved fiercely, protecting those he deemed his and loved them as much as the aunt who raised him and the girls he called sister. He loved them all like he would family, not just a friend, not just a subordinate. Never lesser than him; always equal in a way others weren't. He wouldn't trust someone who wasn't equal to him to watch his six and he wouldn't ask them to risk their lives if he knew they weren't in it like he was.

And his flames always protected them. Always. Because while they were all equal, he worried. He sat back and stared into the empty spaces of a room and wonder, he'd toss and turn throughout the night wondering if they were safe and it was always something that was on his mind. Just like he told Maes so many years ago, he'd rather kill himself than let any of them get harmed.
But he had. He let it happen. He left in that damn car with Riza and Knox and left him all alone. He trusted him to take care of himself, to get the job done...but he was blinded by grief. Because if he hadn't been, if he had been thinking straight and had protested more, well then maybe he wouldn't have had to bury an empty casket.

He looked around the room, messy and then clean in some areas and it was just so much like him that it hurt. His desk had a pile of books, all on the theory of alchemy and its properties of course, and scrunched up balls of paper. Alchemical equations were hastily written on the pad of paper with an inkwell Falman had gotten him for Christmas last year.

The walls were lined with bookshelves and a large cork board filled up one of them. The bookshelves were filled with even more books however some items such as photographs, boxes and other knick-knacks he had never even seen before collected dust on them. The corkboard held files, photos and string connected them all. Off in the farthest corner was a small dainty bed and on its bedside table was a coffee maker.

"It's time sir," Ever dutiful, Riza stood in the doorway of the room. Her hair was down and she wore her civilian clothes as he did. The light from the hallways bathed the room in light and just showed how empty it was...how devoid of life...

"I'm...I'm just not ready yet Lieutenant...I just keep thinking he'll burst into my office, yelling at me or I'll look up from my paperwork expecting to find him asleep on my couch or reading one of the many books I get for him...and then I remember and i-it just hurts."

"I understand. We can come back tomorrow and do this if you want sir?"

He was silent for a moment, staring into the empty room of a boy who was too smart for his own good, too bright, too sad, with eyes of molten gold and of a son that wasn't of his blood but was his all the same. Riza and he may not be able to be together with each other the way they wanted...to have a family...but they had him and everyone else and that was enough.

But now it was all gone. Broken. A piece missing.

"...I don't think I can do this today, Riza." She walked forward, closing the door behind her as she did, and wrapped him in her arms. He let himself go willingly slack in her arms, his face buried in between her shoulder and neck, breathing in her scent as he struggled to keep the tears at bay.

"It's okay to be sad, Roy...I miss him too...he was our son and they took him from us... but we can't keep going on like this. We have to be there for Al. He's our son too and he misses his brother just as much as us. And no matter what, we'll win this for our boys."

"For our boys." he agreed. He let himself hold onto her for a few moments longer as they lingered in their eldest's room. "You go on ahead. I'm just gonna clean it up a little."

She pulled back from their embrace, arms still around one another, and gave him a look." I know, I know, he hated it when we touched his things but do you know how many times I told the little brat to pick up after himself? And it's not even his bedroom! This is just the storage unit that he converted into an office."

"Fine, I'll see you tomorrow then." With that, she leaned up and gave him a peck on the lips before slipping out of his arms. He stood there until he heard her car come to life and drive away from the storage unit. He turned on the lamp and slumped down onto the dainty little bed's covers with a sigh.

He put his head his hands, trying to block out the images of Ed and all the times they had together.
The moments of them all as a family, the lunches in his office and the little ways he and Riza parented both boys. The shopping both of them did where they'd lose themselves for hours in between the shelves of alchemy books and how Riza and Al would have to drag them out.

He looked up, his head resting on his hands and stared around the room, taking in all the imperfections, all the items and everything that was his. It simply screamed Ed. And it hurt so much more because that was his son, his, and they took him from him. Just like they took Maes. Just like they took his Queen. Just like his Pawn, Rook, Bishop and Knight. They took it all and that wasn't something he was willing to let slide.

It was time to get to work.

Roy stood and was about to walk out the door when a glint caught his eye. He turned to see the only frame on his son's desk. It was one of those new and expensive frames that held multiple photos, the biggest being one of Ed, Al and Winry as children.

The second biggest was one of the team and another of Maes and his family posing with the boys. There was one of Trisha and the boys all smiling. One of Pinako and another of their alchemy teacher, Izumi Curtis, and her husband, Sig. The one that pulled at his heartstrings was the one of Riza and him with the boys, all smiling as the posed for the picture with Maes, Gracia and Elícia.

However, it was the last one that caught his attention.

The last photo showed Ed and another boy, just a few years older, one with dark navy blue eyes and light blonde hair. He wore a white collared button up and black suspenders to match his equally black pants. His dress shoes matched his pants and the brown leather jacket in the background finished his look. His sleeves were rolled up to his mid forearms and he had a pair of glasses on his face that seemed to glint in the photo. They had their arms around one another and looked to be in the library.

He carefully opened the frame and grabbed the photo from its place. He traced his son's smiling face and turned the photo around to read the writing on the back.

5. August. 11.

Edward Elric & Patrick Mors

National Central Library

Central City

Acta deos numquam mortalía fallunt

"We lost all contact with the advance team that was sent down to search the tunnel. Shortly after,
Smith's horse returned." Was all that Ed came to hear as he entered the room.

"Sir," he saluted as he took up his post at her side just as Miles usually would. The only indication she gave him was a nod before going back to the conversation, something that Ed tried to his best to keep track of but he just couldn't. Not with that old pervert staring at him from behind like the creepy fucker he was.

"It came back with what we assume was his arm." Henschel finished dutifully. He released his stance as he saw Ed and appeared to relax a bit. It almost pains him to admit it but it took him a moment to remember that he and Henschel played cards with Smith all the time in the mess hall between shifts. Internally, he was glad to bring some relief to the man and resolved to not let any more of his friends suffer a fate such as his.

"Just his arm," Olivier repeated, looking at the stretcher out of the corner of her eyes. She regarded Ed doing the same and knew it was bugging him just as much as it was her. She shifted back to Henschel. "Where's the rest?"

"It's still missing, sir." He looked down and off to the side. This caused both Ed and Armstrong to follow his gaze. "And his horse can't lead us back." The horse in question was down in the hole with a few soldiers around as it struggled against the reins that were tied to a pole. "It's too terrified to be of any use."

"Henschel, get a rescue party," Olivier ordered, eyes set and determination gleaming brightly within.

"I'm afraid you can't do that, General Armstrong," Raven said, making Armstrong and Henschel look over at him. Ed growled at the sight of him, low enough that the fucker wouldn't hear but enough that both Olivier and Henschel looked over at him briefly with small grimaces as they felt the same.

Raven walked up from behind them as he picked up Smith's wrapped up arm. "That tunnel is too dangerous." He turned around, his face straying from his normal 'punch me' smile yet Ed found this one he wouldn't mind beating in either. Both were as equally annoying if you could believe it.

"What have you done with the immortal monster you were telling me about earlier?" He struts towards them all only to come to a stop before Olivier. He could tell from where he stood that she was having trouble not killing him and Ed found it in himself that he couldn't blame her.

Raven leaned down into her face, still holding Smith's arm in his gloved hand. "Put him back and seal the tunnel's entrance, General."

"But there are still--" Henschel began and Ed shook his head at him, trying to tell him to back off before something bad happened.

"I am speaking to the General." Raven interrupted. "See I know northern law. Obey strength and obey the power. Isn't that the way it works?" With that he walked away, throwing Smiths' arm into the hole and left the room.

Ed looked down at Smiths' arm and then the horse as he clenched his gloved fists at the sight of the bloodied bandages. He ground his teeth, making them creak from beneath the weight of his grinding. Olivier put her hand on his flesh shoulder grounding him back down to reality, "You need to calm down Ed. I know it makes you angry, I feel the same, but we won't be able to get anything done with him still here. Don't worry, I have a plan."

He looked at her as the anger in his eyes dimmed at her words," Fine. But at least let me shoot the
"No promises," she said. He raised an eyebrow at her which she held for a moment before she sighed and looked at him. "Fine, but if your uncle asks, I didn't have anything to do with it! I'm not dealing with him mother henning you as he does with everyone else! He still hasn't gotten over the last time I let one of you do anything fun!"

He shot her a brilliant beaming smile. She merely rolled her eyes and pat him once on the shoulder before walking off.

"Obey the one who holds the power." Kimblee leaned his arms on the railing as he watched. "They call her the impregnable Northern Wall of Briggs, but even she yields to authority. Well, that certainly is the wisest approach."

Miles's face betrayed nothing to his comment, causing him to smirk a little. From the side, the elevator dinged and both men turned to see its door open and reveal Sloth, somewhat unconscious and surrounded by soldiers. "Oh, so that's the monster," he remarked.

Sloth stopped in front of Raven, Olivier and Ed and it took all of his self-control to not jump down there and keep both the General and his nephew from harm. Oh, and he was close to shooting Kimblee himself. From down below Sloth groaned as he started to push himself up.

"Well, good morning, Sloth. Did you have a good rest?" Raven asked.

Sloth turned to look at him. "Who are you? I'm still sleepy."

"You'd best wake up. There's still a lot of work to be done here." Raven replied. "Pride explained it to you, now didn't he?"

Sloth began to get up groaning he did. "I guess. What a pain," Sloth repeated as he started walking forward. "Oh well. I have no choice." Sloth approached the makeshift building to get to the hole in the ground. "Such a pain. But I forget, why is it a pain again?" he rambled on.

"Too much of a pain to remember," Sloth concluded as he jumped and landed in a crouch and started to dig once more. Raven stood above the hole, watching Sloth begin to work and turned to all the soldiers, workers and engineers. "Not to worry," Raven said. "He's a chimera doing some work for the Central forces."

From beside Olivier, Ed snorted before muttering, "Are you sure about that?"

"He's helping to make this country even greater than it already is." Raven continued, having not heard his words. Olivier's arms crossed and her custom glare in place, with Buccaneer and Henschel standing behind her. "Of course it's still a top secret operation." He smiles and raised his hands. "So close this hole and guard our secret. I'm counting on you, soldiers. Its people like you who make this country what it is."
It had only been a few days since General Raven arrived and yet it showed.

News of Armstrong closing the hole spread like wildfire and some of the soldiers from Northern Command showed up, one by one replacing some of Armstrong’s loyalists. It took all he could to reverse the transfer, working round the clock and keeping the rumours from erupting into physical altercations and trying to make sure the verbal jargon they spit out about her became mummers, barely heard and muffled before they could grow into something more. Something damaging.

Ed had to become his Uncle Miles; keeping Briggs in order as Armstrong played to Ravens tune.

At the same time, his uncle had taken to keeping an eye on Kimblee and more than once Ed was sure he saw Miles sprinting around Briggs because he lost the man. Kimblee was a slippery snake, that much he knew.

He also had to keep Armstrong from killing Raven, surprisingly, as her nerves kept getting shorter and shorter every time the man opened his mouth and spoke. It didn't help that he kept touching her. The way he was doing it would be considered sexual harassment and if anyone of lower rank were to do it, Mustang would've made it so not only were they dishonourably discharged, but also serving jail time. Sometimes up to 10 years.

In fact, some of Raven's men he brought with him started to act like him. Not his bodyguards who seemed to hold a greater disdain for the man than even Armstrong herself. No, it was the slippery weasels like Private Balazs that really pissed him off. He was a greasy rat who couldn't keep his mouth shut or his hands to himself.

He found himself more than once stopping several soldiers, mostly female, from killing the man after he touched them inappropriately. But he couldn't kill him. As much as he wanted too, he was Raven personal assistant and thus, untouchable. And the rat knew it. Oh, how he longed to place a bullet between the weasel's beady little eyes. Maybe break a few arms.

Currently, he stood off to the side, just behind Armstrong as she and Raven watched the cement be poured over the hole. The workers pushed it to all the corners and made it smooth as they worked on it. On Raven's other side was Balazs.

"You see, General. We are the chosen ones and we will receive immortal, near-godly, bodies. We'll rule the entire world." Raven told her. Ed had to hold back a snort because he knew for a fact that she couldn't wait to kill him. She closed her eyes and 'hmmed' as he continued, "The name was Smith, wasn't it?" He asked. "There was nothing we could've done to save them."

She opened her eyes. "Those who aren't chosen, will they be sacrificed for those who are?"

"Yes, the survival of the fittest," Raven said. "The weak will become the foundation of the country, and the strong will take their rightful place on top."

"Is that what happened in Ishval?"
"Indeed. They were part of the plan. They were weak and deserved to perish for the good of their betters."

She was silent for a moment before she spoke again, "When did all of this begin?"

"From what I hear when the country was first founded," Raven said. "And now my generation shall preside over its completion."

Raven turned to Armstrong and put a hand on her shoulder, rubbing it like the perv he was. "I'm grateful for your assistance. You're a true servant to your country. I'll speak with my superiors about preparing a seat for you."

Olivier smirked. "There's no need."

"What's that?" Her sword was pushed out of its sheath and blood splashed into the air as it was lodged halfway through Raven's arm. The fucker screamed and he closed his eyes to listen to it because he had been dreaming for this moment to happen.

Ed let an, admittedly, evil grin show on his face and Balazs watched in horror as his boss was skewered by Armstrong's sword.

"Which arm did Smith lose in the tunnel?" she asked. "The left or right."

"I believe it was the right, sir," Ed replied without hesitation, coming up to her side faithfully.

"Thank you, Trick."

"Anytime sir,"

"Wait! What are you…"

"Growing old is truly terrifying, isn't it?" Olivier said as the soldiers and workers around the two just stood there watching. "You would know, General. Before you became so afraid of your own mortality, I'm sure long ago, you had an earnest love for your country."

"You…You can't." Raven said as his hand twitched repeatedly. "You were going to be one of the chosen ones. You would have been one of us."

"I don't need a new seat from you." She opened her eyes to glare at Raven. "You're going to lose the one your mouldy ass has clung to for too long." She ripped the sword out of his arm. "Right about now!"

Raven stumbled back, anger shining on his face. His uninjured arm dived into his coat. Olivier charging at him with her sword ready to swing down. "You old traitor!" She screamed as she brought it swinging down. A slicing sound was heard as Raven, who now had a gun in his hand, fell back with blood spurting out of his body. He fell back into the cement as it began to cover him. "But immortality… was right before…our eyes."

"General, you are among the weak who will become the foundation for this country." She ran a gloved hand over the sword to clean up the blood. "Literally." She slid her sword back in its sheath. Raven's face sunk farther into the cement. "I was going to…to be im–" His face sunk farther in with the cement covering it and filling his mouth, cutting him off as he vanished from sight completely.

Bobby, Niccolo and the others began to lift their tools cover the cement when Ed raised a hand stopping them which made Olivier turned to look at him. "Why are you stopping them? Don't tell me
your upset I killed the perv!" she asked as she took off her now bloodied gloves and threw them in with the cement.

"No, I'm not upset you killed that pervy old fucktard!"

"Well, then what's the holdup Trick? I have shit to do and Kimblee's still here, unfortunately!" she growled.

"You said I could shoot the bastard!" he waved his hands at her, motioning to the tomb of General Fucktard.

"Oh, I completely forgot. I truly am sorry Trick, however, he was pissing me off. But, if it makes you feel any better, you can have the assistant if you want?" she apologized. At the mention of his person, Balazs cried aloud like the coward he was and began to run away.

"Apology accepted, sir" Without looking, Ed whipped out his pistol from behind his back and shot the shitty excuse for a human in the kneecap, causing him to fall to the ground and shriek pitifully as blood spurted from his leg.

"Nice shot, kid."

"Thanks, Riza taught me!"

"Well, she is the best sniper the military has to offer. I'm sure she'll be proud."

"Yeah, she's a good mom," Ed replied as he blew over the top of the smoking barrel.

He holstered it as he walked over to the still screeching man and dragged him by the hair back to where Armstrong was. He threw him to her feet and Ed looked down at him, his face impassive and his dark blue eyes clear of emotion, "You know," he starts, digging his heel into the bullet wound causing him to scream. "I almost pity you...almost being the key word; because then I remember you were working with those fuckers who killed my friend and then I feel nothing."

"Please, I don't want to die, I'm sorry!"

"Oh, don't worry, I won't kill ya. I got better morals than that." At those words, Balazs calmed down. "Really?"

"Yeah, that's why I'm gonna leave ya to all the women you've harassed since you came here. Roy was always a better dad than that bastard Hohenheim and if there was one thing he taught me; it was to share. Have fun girls!" He called as said women came upon the screaming man and began to beat him senseless.

"Don't take too long ladies or else the cement will dry. Then you'll need a new place to hide the body!"

"We won't Trick!"

"Thanks again!"

"Let's have coffee later, ok Trick?"

"It's no problem, don't mention it."

"Now that that's done, get in touch with Major Miles," Olivier said.
"Sir," Buccaneer replied. As Buccaneer pulled out a new pair of white gloves, Armstrong looked at her men. "The rest of you, we have work to do." Buccaneer held the gloves out to her. "General."

He shoved his hand in his pockets and followed Armstrong and Buccaneer as they began to make their way out. "I want that concrete nice and level," she ordered as they left.

"Please wait, General Armstrong," Henschel said as he struggled to catch up to them all. She turned the corner, unwilling to wait for him.

"We have to search for Smith and the others before we seal it." he endured as he rounded the corner much like she had before he froze in surprise at what he saw. Both Buccaneer and Trick stood next to a trap door with Olivier in front of them.

She turned to him with a deadpan expression before bluntly stating, "Trick saw this coming, so he made us this secret passage into the tunnel." she continued as Buccaneer grabbed the door handle and opened it.

Ed was walking the halls, keeping an eye out for Kimblee and his goons as Armstrong and the rest of them dealt with the trapdoor he made earlier. He walked silently, passing Kei who came from the direction of the cells. He paid the man no mind, even as they exchanged greetings and went on their way.

As he wandered around, he bumped into someone's chest which sent him sprawling to the floor. "Sorry," he murmured an apology. He looked back to see four hulking figures that he hasn't seen around the base before. They were decked out in full winter military gear and were looking at him strangely as if they knew him from somewhere but he didn't know where he could have possibly met these guys. Maybe they saw him at Chris' pub and just remembered him?

"I don't think I've seen you four around here before," he remarked.

It took a moment for one of them to respond, but the one he bumped into shook his head after a moment, causing his dreadlocks to shake with him, "No, sorry, you wouldn't have. We just arrived, I'm Jerso." He paused as if to see Ed would recognize it before the moment passed and he gestured to his buddies, "These guys are Zampano, Darius and Heinkel."

"Where'd you arrive from? I know you didn't come in with General Raven and his men...and they all left after his disappearance. Only Kimblee stayed."
"Kimblee called us in and told us to escort Miss. Rockbell to the Fort safely." They parted to reveal Winry and it was like everything shut off. His breath was stolen from him, his lungs seized up and his eyes blinked in shock as he stared at her. His legs locked up and his mind went blank and he opened his mouth to say something, anything, but no words would come out. He watched as she bounded forwards, a bright smile on her face and her hand out to shake his in slow motion as if it was a movie. "Hi!"

He blinked at her, dumbfounded because here was his crush, his childhood friend and his almost something that they never got to explore because he left for Central and then he was dead and now here she was in front of him, but it wasn't him, was it? This was Trick. And Trick wasn't friends with Winry. He wasn't a childhood friend, wasn't her client who she made her best automail for, wasn't her almost-boyfriend who left because he got recalled to Central, wasn't her anything before he went and faked his death.

He was Trick. She was Winry. And they weren't anything, virtual strangers, until now.

"Uhh, hi, Lt.Col, uh no that's not right. No, I'm Trick, that as in my name is Patrick but I don't like it much so I'm Trick and my last name is Mors but that sounds too weird because it sounds like Morse as in Morse code so nobody calls me that but everybody calls me Trick and you are extremely beautiful, and I'm sorry, I'm rambling aren't I?"

He was mortified. When had he turned into a bumbling fool around her again? As Ed, he wasn't like this but he wasn't Ed right now, was he?

He heard her laugh, full and bright and beautiful and just as he remembered, so he looked up to see her smile and his breath caught in his throat at the sight of it. God, when was the last time he heard her laugh? Seen her smile? It felt like a lifetime ago and yet he'd missed it all the same. He'd missed her, missed them, missed their talks, their laughs, their hugs and the late night kisses that were stolen when they thought no one was around.

They kept it unofficial. He didn't want her to wait up for him when he could spend his life trying to bring Al back and she didn't need a target on her back as the Fullmetal Alchemist's childhood sweetheart. They agreed to that but it didn't mean he didn't want more. But they agreed Al was more important.

Her career was more important than what could have been so they resolved themselves to stolen kisses and late night phone calls and hugs where they stayed embraced longer than what was strictly necessary.

"It's fine," she waved him away." I haven't laughed like that in what seems like forever. I-I needed that. Someone dear to me passed away not to long ago and I just haven't been myself lately." she told him and just like that he was reminded of it.

"No problem...um I'm Lt. Col Patrick Mors, but everybody calls me Trick." he finished lamely...god he felt like such a loser right now...

"Winry. Winry Rockbell," she replied, holding out her hand for him to shake.

"How do you do? If I may ask, what brings you here Winry?" he asked, trying to play it cool and knew he was failing by the way the four men next to them snorted and snickered at him. Assholes.

"I'm here to see Al, do you know where he is?"

"Yes, right this way. Why don't I escort you all?"
"Oh, thank you, but you don't have to!"

"Really, I insist, you can get lost here easily, after all, General Raven and his assistant disappeared."
From behind the talking pair, the four unknown chimeras shared a look and raised an eyebrow, not willing to believe Raven really disappeared but that guy was a dick so they didn't really care.

Roy stood in the middle of Investigations, dressed in his civilian clothes and a photograph clenched tightly in hand. It was the middle of the night, so only the midnight shift was on and as he looked around, he couldn't seem to find the one person he needed to talk to."Colonel Mustang, what are you doing here sir?"

He whirled around to see her." Sheska, just the person I was looking for!"

"Oh, what did you need?"

"You used to work at the library, correct?"

"Yes, and after it burned down, Ed got me a job here under General Hughes." Roy closed his eyes in pain at the mention of his late friend and son. "I remember, I was going through Ed's personal effects and I found this. Do you know who this person is?" he showed her the photograph.

She took it in her hands and her big brown eyes widened so he continued talking," On the back, it says Patrick Mors, but I've never heard of him before in my life. Do you know where I could get into contact with him?"

"Yes, but I haven't seen him since before the library burned down. I don't know where he's been for the last couple of years. But I can give you his last known address if you want?"

"That would be most appreciated." Once she was done writing it down, she handed him the folded note and he took it, pocketing it and the photo into his back pocket swiftly. He slipped on his coat and was about to run out the door when Sheska called him back.

"Yes?" he asked.

"Sir, if you can't find him there or anywhere, you should know that he went by a nickname."

"Oh? And what would that be?"

"Trick, sir, he went by Trick."
The Mother Hen of Fort Briggs

Chapter Summary

In which Miles isn’t a mother hen, Winry is introduced to Ed and Al’s uncles, Kimblee is an ass so what’s new? And Roy treats Riza right

Chapter Notes

I HAVE FANART BY THE LOVELY Awesome_Fangirl33

Here they are;

first one - https://www.deviantart.com/awesomefangurl33/art/Lieutenant-Colonel-Patrick-Trick-Mors-799631569

the second one- https://www.deviantart.com/awesomefangurl33/art/My-Name-is-Edward-Elric-Fanart-799793276

This one is based on this quote from the story; "My name is Edward Elric and I need your help."

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Roy glanced at her from the rearview mirror of his car as he spoke, "Kimblee?"

"Yes, I heard about it from a friend of mine who's working as a nurse at the base of the mountain," Madeline replied as Mustang rested his arms on the steering wheel and his head on them. "She said he was admitted with serious injuries, but after General Raven came to visit, he recovered right away."

Mustang shifted his arms a bit. "Raven and Kimblee."

"That's all the information I have for now," she told him with her eyes closed. A bit of shuffling made her open her eyes to see Roy facing her with an envelope in his hand, one that outstretched to her. "Thanks a lot. Tell me if you hear anything else." She made to leave when he stopped, "One second please."

"Yeah Roy?"
"Can you tell the madam I'll be by sometime this week? I need to talk to her about something important." She gazed at him for a moment, staring into his eyes almost as if she was searching for something before she smiled, something small and sweet like the ones from his childhood. "Sure, I'll tell her."

Roy then got out of the car and opened her door for her, helping his sister out and letting her gather her bearings before he let go of her hand. She began to walked away, only to turn back and wave in one of her fake cutesy poses that he despised, "It was really nice seeing you." He hated seeing them act like that. They were his sisters; they were beautiful, fierce, intelligent women who could outshine any of the men they serviced. They didn't deserve this life but at least they were under the protection of the Madam. It was a whole lot better compared to even 20 years ago.

He remembered when he was younger and his aunt hadn't been the Madam but one of those escorts. She'd come home with bruises and he resented it because his aunt was anything but weak and yet no one would speak up for her and the other girls- after all, why would the military care about prostitutes and their well-being? If you were from the Canal District you were either a criminal or dead. He was one of the lucky ones. His aunt worked extra hard to keep his education up. If she hadn't, he wouldn't have been able to afford his apprenticeship under Master Hawkeye and he wouldn't have accepted an illiterate student.

As he waved Madeline off with a frown on his face from his thoughts, a short stout woman came up to him with her flower cart in tow, "Nice? That's not much to go on." He looked down at her and took in her appearance, there was something familiar about her but he couldn't just put his finger on it. "A bouquet of flowers might help you next time."

He closed his eyes and turned his head away. "Eh, I'm better off without her, but thanks anyway." The woman glanced down. "When one woman leaves you, another may find you." She reached towards one of the flowers just as he closed the open door of his car with a small push.

"I have a message for you from Olivia Mira Armstrong." The woman stated as Roy shifted to look at her. She turned to face it with a smirk on her wrinkled face. crow eyes around her eyes from smiling so much and a delicate flower in hand. "Colonel Roy Mustang, right?" He blinked, looking at her for a moment before he smirked, "I'll take every flower you have in that cart."

Miles would deny it to the end of his dying days because damnit he wasn't overprotective! He wasn't. Really. Sure, he might hover, lecture, clean up and fuss over the soldiers of Fort Briggs, but overprotective? Mother hen? He wasn't any of those things, no matter what his darling Valentina and General told you. Valentina would tease him, saying she didn't need to have any children since he seemed to adopt everyone he ever met. His General, on the other hand, would pout at him and deny the fact that the one time she let Buccaneer and the engineers do unregulated experiments in the Development Department.

And he didn't hover! Setting that fire went against regulations and the fire was so big he was just...concerned...for their well-being. Especially Niccolo and Rafael, ever the pranksters even 20
something odd years later...after all, his Valentina would have his head if he let anything happen to them. He was just being a good brother-in-law and husband. That's it. Nothing more nothing less. And he would deny it to his ending days.

So when those four soldiers, hulking men bigger than Buccaneer and under Kimblee's command came to Fort Briggs escorting Miss Rockbell...well, he was just interested in the wellbeing of the entirety of the Fort...that's it. And then he was reminded that his newly discovered nephew was here, well both of them, and he was running around after Kimblee and left his poor- sweet, defenceless Ed with Armstrong and then Raven and his greasy assistant disappeared and he just knew his boss had sunk her claws into him. Converting him to the dark side and he just knew it was too late for him...but there was still time for Alphonse to be saved and that gave him hope.

And now Kimblee's loyal dogs, as they were so fondly dubbed, had arrived with Winry and Armstrong was busy and no one could stop Kimblee now...you could see why he went grey in the first place, right?

He snuck around the base and found himself coming to one of the platforms situated high up from public view. He firmly believed Olivier only put them up here so they could spy on the guests they so rarely got...but now it was if they were Northern Command, people coming and going as if they owned the place!

Kyle, one of the workers who helped level the concrete down below, seemed to have the same idea as him if his crouched position and binoculars were saying anything. He didn't seem to have noticed him which suited Miles fine as he came to a rest near him and crouched down right beside him, all without the man taking notice.

"I can't see, hand them over will you Kyle?"

The poor engineer practically jumped as he whirled to the side and saw his boss in a similar position. He didn't speak, simply slid the binoculars over to his gloved hands and pulled out a smaller pair seemingly out of thin air- he believed it was magic, but Ed says it was pockets- and they watched as the four heavy men walked through the fort without a care in the world, unconcerned with the glances, whispers and craning necks trying to get a glimpse of them. He didn't know why everyone thought they were big scary silent men and women who were tougher than northern bears and were monsters, well they were but they were also the biggest gossips in all of Amestris.

After all, with a leader like Olivier, who depends on her trek to becoming Furher on knowing anything and everything going on around the whole country, you would assume it would rub off on them...it worked a little too well in his opinion.

"So what's the story with these guys?" Kyle inquired as he looked over at Miles for a second, the two of them lounging over the railing without care.

"They showed up under the pretext of escorting Miss Rockbell, but I'm not buying that. They only answer to Kimblee."

The engineer seemed unimpressed with his response as he glanced back at him for a second before turning back to peer through the binoculars. Miles, ever-dutiful and a gaze that could put Hawkeye to shame, spoke without looking," What's with the look?"

"What look, sir?"

"Don't give me that, you gave me a look. What's with it?"
"It's just...this wouldn't have anything to do with Trick sir?"

Miles whipped his head so fast he was afraid he had gotten whiplash, "What? Why would Trick have anything to do with these guys?"

"You mean you didn't hear sir?"

"Heard what man?"

"He was seen talking to Miss. Rockbell as if they were old friends."

"Sir?" Kyle turned to see a space where Miles once was and if he squinted, he would swear a dust trail was visible as it leads further into the Fort. He sighed as he picked up his binoculars and put them away,” He's such a friggin' mother hen, he should just adopt the kid already!” he murmured to himself as he got back to work.

He should have been paying attention but he wasn't.

He knew better than this or else he wouldn't have lasted this long as he was. It had been easy to be distracted. after all, he was showing Winry around after a day full of action, lies and half-truths. If he wasn't so distracted with everything going on around the Fort then maybe he would've noticed, but he hadn't. So, it was no surprise that when his automail leg finally broke from the strain he had put it through, he wasn't prepared for it and promptly fell flat on his face while he escorted Winry from the cells.

He felt the spring snap and then suddenly he had a face full of genuine Fort Briggs Concrete, recently cleaned by Bob the custodian. He liked Bob, he was a nice man, married a sweet girl named Leslie and they had three kids, all adorable little shits. Little Bobby Jr., Caitlin and Sandy. He was middle age, had sunny blonde hair and a 5 o'clock shadow and bright icy blue eyes. He was friendly enough and kept the whole Fort clean, spick and span. He somehow managed to clean the Fort in one day, every day and never missed a day of work. He also seemed to prefer the lemon-scented waxing scrub.

Ed vaguely heard his fake name being called as Winry, Rafael and Niccolo too- when the fuck did he show up?- ran to his side. Kimblee, the fucker, just stood off to the side, an amused little smile on his fucking face while Darius and Heinkel, lazy little shits they are, simply stand off to the side as they try to, and failing miserably, by the way, keep in their laughs at him face planting.

Winry reaches his side first, "Oh my god, Trick are you okay? What happened?"

Ed tries to lock up the small feeling in his chest, the one that feels warm and cuddly inside from the concern he hears in her voice, as he pushes himself up from the floor with his arms."It's fine. I'm fine. My leg just broke."

"Your leg?"
"Yeah, its automail. I couldn't get to my normal mechanic before I headed up North and I guess it broke from the strain of fighting that intruder a few days ago."

"Oh, well I have my tools with me. I could take a look for you if you want?"

Before the word 'no' can pass his lips, Ed looks up and sees her eyes, ones bright and shining with a feeling of being lost and wanting something they could never have again and that's when he's reminded that she's probably not done any jobs since his 'death'...and something in him breaks and he sighs as he smiles at her, one so small and tired and just resigned to his fate, as he says, "Yeah, I'd like that."

He wouldn't admit it, but the smile she gave him was the greatest thing he's seen in a while.

Ling didn't know how to feel.

It was simple as that and it didn't take any amount of stubborn pride to admit that. He would speak freely about it because it troubled him so.

Living as one of the 50 heirs of Xing was troubling. You were either killed by one of your many many siblings or lived long enough to become the Emperor or Empress. It was a simple fact. But first, you had to survive to make it long enough to be crowned. That required bodyguards, training and that was all in between lessons on politics, history, royal etiquette and so many more subjects that the list went on and on. Even thinking about was giving him a headache.

But with all those lessons, the assassinations and politics, it didn't leave enough time to make friends.

It was either they were scared they would be killed by another heir or heiress to hurt you or you simply didn't have the time. You were ostracized but revered. Feared, but their saviour. The one who would save their clan and keep them safe for as long as you lived. It was a lonely life and the only one he could've called a friend was Lan Fan, but as his bodyguard, she too had to watch from behind a glass wall the separated him from everyone else.

But...Ed, Ed was the only friend he ever had really. His first friend. His best friend. For all the yelling, curses and fights they had, it was closest Ling had ever felt human in all his life. And it was precious to him. But like all things precious, it was also fleeting. His first friend, his only friend, was gone, because of a bastard who feared death and wanted to control the world. He was like Greed in many ways, but while Greed sought after large armies, jewels beyond compare and immortality, Ling was after something different.

He sought the protection for his people, the reform of his country, the arms of Lan Fan- someone he could never have- and his only friend with hair that was spun from the sun itself and eyes of molten gold.

But now he had none of that.

He'd let Greed do whatever he wanted, but only if he helped him take down Father. Only if he
helped him save a country that wasn't his own.

Because Ed asked him to, his final wish and Ling wouldn't be able to live with himself if he didn't do it. He wouldn't be able to look Lan Fan in the eye if he didn't, wouldn't be able to take the throne with the guilt weighing down his shoulders, because how could he promise to become Emperor and save his country when the only person that made him feel like he mattered had asked him to save Amestris and he hadn't?

The answer was easy: he couldn't.

So he mourned, he thought, he resolved and he planned.

Until the day he could fulfill his promise. Until the promised day came. Until he could look Lan Fan in the eye and said he did it. Until he could tell Alphonse and his family that his brother was avenged.

And so he waited.

"So, Trick, how'd you get an automail leg if you don't mind me asking?"

Ed was lost in thought. Hearing her hum as she worked on his leg, the familiar feel of her hands as she tinkered with the metal and wires was something he sorely missed. It was enough for him to almost miss her question but when he did hear it, it startled him. He blinked up at Winry, a little surprised before he sighed.

"I don't mind, but really, it isn't anything interesting. I was just a kid and I was being stupid. We lived in a mining town, and all the kids used to play in the abandoned mines. My mother must've told me a million times to not play in them, but I didn't listen. One day, while we played in the mines, an old explosive was left behind. We don't know how it happened, but it went off. I was in the mineshaft when it went off. I was the only one trapped and I was there for 3 days before they got me out. The tissue in my leg was long dead by the time they got me out. They had to amputate it."

"That's awful," she remarked and he could feel the curious stares the others were giving him.

"It's fine, I've gotten over it. Ed helped a lot. I was drifting around for years, unable to get a job in my hometown because of my leg. It rained a lot and my port would always ache. I finally settled in Central and got a job at the library. That's where I met Ed. He really inspired me and eventually convinced me to try for the military as an aid...he even got me my current job as Grumman's assistant. I've been there ever since."

He heard a sniffle and turned his head to see Winry wiping away a stray tear, "Yeah," she laughed shakily," that sounds a lot like Ed. God, he was such an idiot, but he never gave up on people. Even when he claimed he hated them. I'm sorry, it's just been rough for me...well for everyone I know."

"C-could you tell me what he was like?" Rafael asked, unable to keep his curiosity in check. He rubbed the back of his head when he saw everyone staring at him," It's just Alphonse keeps
mentioning him, saying he died but that's about it."

"I'm sorry, but I don't think we've been introduced?" Winry asks, directing it to Al, who's been silent up until now in the corner.

"Oh, sorry, these are Rafael and Niccolo Alberico, otherwise known as Rafael and Niccolo Elric."

"You mea-?"

"Yeah, turns out mom had a few more secrets than we thought. Remember that photo mom had of her family on her bedside?"

"How could I not? All three of us must've tried to read the writing on the back for hours on end, but we couldn't because it's in a different language. It used to drive Ed nuts, he could read, write and speak four different languages but it was in a ne language he didn't know."

"These are the two boys from the picture. Her older brothers...our uncles." Said men cheerfully waved at the dumbfounded blonde before them.

"Oh...well welcome to the family!" Winry stood up from where she was seated and held out her hand to the two men.

Niccolo stepped forward to shake her hand, "You're Miss. Rockbell, correct?"

"Yeah, Winry Rockbell, Granny and I are friends of the family. So, you're Auntie Trisha's brothers?"

Rafael shook her hand as he asked, "Yes, could you tell us about them? Al doesn't like to talk about it."

"Well, Aunt Trisha was always there, as long as I can remember. She never left town, aside from when Ed and Al were born."

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, well, when she found out she was pregnant, she and Hohenheim went North and stayed in North City for about 4 years, long enough for Ed and Al to be born. Al was 2 I think when they came back. When Ed was 5 and Al 4, Hohenheim left and about a year later, Aunt Trisha died from a plague that passed through the countryside with the Ishvalen War of Extermination. My parents were doctors in the war and treated everyone, be they soldier or Ishvalen. They died before they could come back. Then Ed and Al left to train under their teacher, Izumi Curtis...they suffered an accident shortly after they got back. A year later, Ed joined the military and they've been travelling ever since...had been travelling..." she trailed off.

The room was silent as Ed watched his family lose what little light in their eyes at the mention of his death and his hand clenched tightly on the sheet on the bed beneath him. And it nearly killed him because he wasn't their older brother, their nephew or boyfriend. He was a stranger who knew that man.

And wasn't it ironic? The person who by all accounts was said to hate people craved them more than ever now that he had gotten his wish?

What a joke he was.

He just needed to move. Say something, anything really because it was watching Roy tell the team about his death all over again. He wanted to reach out, put it all away, hold her in his arms, safe from
Kimblee and the rest of the world. She was so close, he could almost reach her. He wanted to hug his brother and never let go, tell him he was a sorry a million times and feel that it was never enough. He wanted to get to know the uncles he never knew and a family who had never given up hope on them. He wanted to be back home with Roy, Riza, Granny Pinako, the team and Teacher. He wanted it all and so much more.

And then it was gone and he was left all alone again.

Kimblee stood up and put a hand on Winry's shoulder, gently telling her in a soft simpering voice that it was time to take Al back to his cell and Ed felt a wave of anger that seemed hotter than the flames Roy made when he snapped his fingers at the sight. He wanted to do so many things to Kimblee for all the strife and shit he was putting Al and the others through but no other desire than the one to kill the man was what he wanted. He could imagine it now; punching the ever-living crap outta him. It made his blood boil, knowing that man was close to his family and manipulating them. Trying to weasel his way in while they were at their most vulnerable.

And he couldn't do a damn thing but watch it happen.

The only solace he found was when Kei and Buccaneer arrived, taking his precious people away from the douchebag as Darius and Heinkel took Al away back to his cell. Ed sat up from where he was, swinging his legs over the bed and onto the cold floor, his automail leg making a clunk noise as it hit the concrete.

Just as he was about to stand up and leave, he froze as he realized there was still someone else in the room with him. He turned around slowly to face the man and caught sight of the razor-sharp smile he tried to hide beneath the hat on his head. "Well then," he spoke, voice like nails and Ed could practically hear the grin in his tone...he couldn't help it though when a shiver crawled up his spine seeing the mans reflection in the nearby mirror. "Your little upgrade's all taken care of and out of the way."

"What do you want Kimblee?" he growled out, trying to restrain himself from punching the man for what seemed like the millionth time today.

"Hey now, no need to get feisty, wouldn't want for your little friends to get hurt now would ya, Trick?" He froze as he started to shrug on his military jacket, the blood in his veins running cold at the man's words.

"So why don't we find a place to sit down? I'm eager to discuss our business."

"Is that so?" Roy asked the woman before him. "Sounds like things are getting out of hand up north." He looked at her closely as he tried to remember where he'd seen her before. It was on the tip of his tongue and it was practically driving him insane.

She nodded as she began fixing up different bouquets, "Indeed. They could use an offensive lead by
"The Fort Brigg's strong suit is defence," she picked up a different flower, looked at it before shaking her head and putting it back to pick up a bright yellow tulip, one the shade of Riza's hair and Roy was vaguely reminded that he needed to speak with her. He hadn't even gone home yet, having gone to talk with Madeline as soon as he left the storage unit. "But you need more than defence if you plan on being the one to make the first strike."

"With the offensive expertise of your eastern forces, Madam Olivier believes they have a chance." Roy thought it over, the words weighing over him just as heavily as the photo in his back pocket. It seemed to weigh him down the more he thought of it, taking in his sons smiling face and a boy he didn't know but who might have the answers.

"I'm honoured that she would choose me as her partner in arms," he replied civilly, mind occupied on other things as he tried to focus...but it got harder with each day. Without Riza and everyone else, it seemed as if the weight on his shoulders got heavier and it showed with the baggy eyes and the slow pace at work.

"Oh no." The informant said, surprising Mustang out of his pity party. "Madam Olivier needs the strength of your army, not you." He sighed at that because yeah that sounded like Olivia, always insulting him and always threatening to run him through with her sword. "She said you might as well just get lost."

"Uh-huh," he numbly said as he closed his eyes. "I have to ask. It's kind of risky telling me this. What's stopping me from warning Fuhrer Bradley?" He looked over at her, a fake ass grin taking over his face, which he knew she could see through the moment she turned over at him. She simply went back to her flowers, expertly making another bouquet and putting it off to the side.

"Well, you are." she spoke, "She assured me you weren't that kind of man." She turned around with a smile and another bouquet. "Well then, that will be 35,000 cens please." She held her hand out.

Roy closed his eyes and fumbled around for his wallet. He opened it to grab the money and found himself gazing at the photo he took from the storage unit, Ed's smiling face staring back at him. His hand hovered for a moment and traced his smile before the informant's voice rung out, "Looking at a little kiddie, eh? I thought you didn't have any children."

He stared at the photo with a hand trembling," Yes, two of th-" he stopped himself," one now actually."

"Oh?"

"My eldest passed away recently," he admitted, still lost as he looked at it. "I'm sorry for your loss, how did it happen?"

"I-he um went out one day and..." he coughed." He just never came back. We buried an empty casket last week." He stared at it for a little while longer before he remembered where he was and held out the bills out to her. "I appreciate it," he told her earnestly.

"Hey, wait," Mustang called, getting the informant to stop. "Who are you?" The informant turned part of the ways around and untied her bandana that her hair was wrapped in. "Oh, just someone who's served the Armstrong family."

She turned around fully and pulled the bandanna down to reveal her blond hair with a part of her hair curled at the top that had sparkles around it. "For generations."
"Well, Hughes," Roy mumbled to himself. "It's safe to say that our closest allies may invariably turn out to be the same people that we fought side by side without on the battlefield."

"But," he stated. "What do I do with these flowers?"

He stopped for a moment as he stared at them all, a thoughtful look gaining on his face as he started to put all the flowers in the back of his trunk, ignoring all the women gossiping about him as they stared. He got in his car and drove away off into the night.

"You've got a job for me?" It was too good to be true and yet Ed knew it wasn't. This would not end well for him and he knew it.

"That's correct." Kimblee said. "And it's a few jobs actually." He held up three fingers with a smile. "Three." He lowered two of his fingers. "All from the Fuhrer."

"First off, he wants you to hunt down Scar." Ed frowned, not getting where Kimblee was going with this. "You just find him and I'll take care of the rest." He didn't like the bastard's smile either, it unnerved him and he wished he had Hawkeye or Roy to back him up because Kimblee was unknown to him. And he hated being in the dark.

"Secondly, he wants you to locate Dr. Marcoh who has very likely fled with Scar." Ed let his cobalt blue eyes flicker to Kimblee's hand where he held up two fingers as if he was a little kid...it made him want to punch his greasy face even more. "And last but not least," the man paused for dramatic effect. Bastard. "He wants you to carve a crest of blood here."

"Crest of blood? What's that?" Ed lied, trying not to panic.

"Don't play dumb with me 'Trick'" Kimblee mocked. "Did you think I didn't look you up? Up until two weeks ago, you were Grumman's personal assistant. Now you're up here, practically running Briggs in Miles stead and you have Armstrong's ear. She would've told you what that dumbfuck Raven asked of her before she killed him. Oh don't look so shocked, if you think I didn't know about that little tidbit, you're more stupid than I realized. Armstrong's a smart girl and with you to help her, the two of you would've figured it out. Now, by the will of his majesty, Furher King Bradley, you are hereby ordered to carve a crest of blood here at Fort Briggs...you know, just like I did in Ishval, simple?"

He opened his mouth to tear a new one into the prick before him when Kimblee tutted, "I wouldn't do that if I were you because otherwise all your new little friends here at Fort Briggs just might find themselves becoming apart of that crest you need to make. You're in no position to refuse: so you better take a good long look at your situation and decide which is more important- your pride or your comrades?"

Ed stared at him for a moment longer before he closed his eyes and sighed, "Fine...but let me tell Alphonse and Winry."

Kimblee's eyes showed a flicker of surprise which was gone as fast as it came, he leaned onto his
"Winry," Ed said. He turned his head slightly to look at her. "You were only brought to Briggs as a hostage."

"A what?" Winry asked. She looked at Al. "What does he mean, Al?" She looked back at Ed. "Are you joking?"

"Listen, I've been ordered by the Fuhrer to fulfill my duties as a human weapon." he paused as he continued to stare at them, trying to gouge their reactions to what he was about to reveal. "In other words, they're ordering me to help them commit mass murder."

At this, Winry looked up sharply at him, "Why don't you just refuse?"

He looked at her and then Al, trying to convene his words in a way she would understand...but he just didn't know how to say it. "I see," she said closing her eyes, "I won't cry." She said. "I won't." She tightened her fingers as she blinked back her tears, "I'm just upset at myself for being so naïve."

Al clearly didn't get the message and it hurt Ed to know that they didn't have that instant understanding with one another anymore, it hurt to know his brother didn't see Ed and only saw Trick, he saw a stranger where his brother stood and it made his chest tighten in an uncomfortable way that made him want to clutch at his chest.

"Why? Why do you care so much? You don't even know us? You were just brothers friend, one he didn't even tell us about!"

Ed closed his eyes and tried to will the eyes away, he breathed in heavily as he steeled himself. "Because he made me promise to protect you two if he couldn't...there are things Ed found out that he didn't share with you. You could be executed just for knowing these things. He knew the risks, he played the game but he made sure all of you were taken care of, ensured you were protected before he entered this shitshow that I've gotten myself into. You need to stop looking into this Al, or everything we've been working towards will have been for nothing." With that, he walked away and out the door to see Kimblee loitering around like an annoying dog.

"It's settled," he told him.

"I'm in, alright?" Ed said. He walked a few steps closer to Kimblee, keeping his eyes trained on him. "But finding Scar is the first thing I want to do." "Oh yeah?" Kimblee asked. "Why's that?"

"Scar is the one who murdered Winry's parents. They deserve vengeance." Ed said as he and Kimblee walked off.
"I see." Kimblee said. "Fine with me."

"This is the general vicinity in which Scar was last spotted," Miles told Kimblee, Ed at his side and Al behind them. "Then that's our first stop." Kimblee said.

"Hey," Winry shouted, grabbing the three soldiers' attention. "Make room for one more. Come on, Al. Scoot over some."

"What are you doing, Winry?" Ed all but shouted.

"I'm sorry, Winry." Kimblee said, trying to sound all sweet and simpering but it didn't even phase the girl for one second. And Ed was once again vaguely reminded why he was in love with her. "But you need to wait here at the fort. We're not going for a picnic."

She gave him a look that said she didn't give two shits before smiling brightly, "And neither am I." Her toolbox rested on her lap with her hands resting on it. "I just performed a complicated upgrade on his automail," She turned to Kimblee, "that I never have done before."

"What if there's a malfunction?" Winry asked. He was vaguely reminded of the acting she used to do as a child and then remembered that even his mom was fooled sometimes and it stirred something warm in his heart at the thought of it. "It would tarnish the Rockbell name if I'm not there to fix it."

"Do you even realize how obsessed with your job you are?" Ed spoke up, trying to keep the act up of two bickering teens and it felt good to do it again. "You're a workaholic,"

"And proud of it too," Winry replied.

Kimblee put a hand to his hat as he sighed.

"This has been my family's business for four generations," she continued.

"Very well then. You can join us." Kimblee sighed, resigned to his fate. "I guess I can allow you to."

"Oh yeah, totally," Ed rejoined. "Four generations of gearheads." At this, Kimblee practically made a sound of a dying cat and slowly backed away from the car as Miles watched on smiling devilishly.

"There's nothing wrong with that." Winry snapped before they growled at each other.

This was nice, Ed decided with a small smile tugging at his lips, one that Winry mirrored on her face. Yeah, this was nice.
"Sir, what am I doing here? I've had a very long night." Riza asked him as he drove around Central city during the early morning, where the first rays of light barely reached over the building tops.

He smirked, "What? I can't cheer you up after the scare with Pride earlier?"

She shivered at the reminder," Please don't, it was bad enough for me to call you to have you pick me up. Now, where are we?"

"You'll see," he replied cryptically as they turned a corner and came up the hill to a very familiar place. Riza felt her eyes widen at the sight and she turned to look over at her lover," What are we doing here Roy?"

A smile tugged at his lips as he turned to look over at her, eyes full of love and adoration for her, "Oh, so I'm Roy now am I?"

Instantly, a blush spread across her cheeks and he chuckled, one from deep in his throat and full of joy and Riza felt her breath catch, wondering when the last time was that she had heard that laugh. It felt like forever since she'd heard it, let alone seen it. It must've been before...her smile dropped and her eyes dimmed. Roy seemed to know what she was thinking because he reached over and grabbed her hand in his. His hands were warm, covered in burn marks, scars and callouses from endless hours of paperwork and it was such a familiar weight that it brought calm to her instantly.

Roy parked the car and he practically raced over to her car side, opening it up with an overdramatic gesture and held out his hand for her. She accepted it gratefully and he covered her eyes, leading her away from the car and onto the soft grass beneath them. "What are you doing Roy?"

"Hush, its a surprise."

She felt him stop her in front of something and he let go of her head to a sight that made her eyes water with unushered tears at the small simple grave.

Colonel Edward Elric

1899-1914

Loving Son, Brother & Soldier

Roy came up from behind her and put an arm around her shoulder, where she then let her head rest on as she started to cry. Surrounding the grave, Roy put all the bouquets, planting them into the grounds and arranging them into a perfect mess of colours that it was too much for her. He rubbed her shoulder as she continued to cry, "This must've taken you hours Roy."

He didn't speak for a moment as they looked on at his grave and from behind them, the sun finally rose up from behind the horizon signalling a new day to the citizens of Amestris, though the two were content to stay right where they were. He turned his head and pressed a kiss into her temple, his tears barely kept at bay, and whispered," He was our son too..."
Jesus Christ people this was a lot of words! Over 6536!
Roy quietly stumbled through the doorway with the slumbering woman in his arms. Tear stains streaked her flushed cheeks as she slept peacefully in his arms after their visit to Ed's grave. He wouldn't admit it but he growled as he tripped over Black Hayate who had come barreling through the halls of his master's small apartment when he heard the jingling of keys in the door.

"Down Black Hayate! Go away!" he hisses as he fumbles for the knob on her bedroom door.

He quickly enters and tries to close it shut behind him as the small dog begins to paw at the door, his soft whines accompanying them. Roy leans against a nearby wall when a soft sigh comes from Riza. He looks down to see her snuggling into his chest and smiles at her before he hears the clacking noise of nails as Black Hayate leaves.

He pushes himself off the wall, mindful of Riza who sleeps unaware of the world outside and makes his way to her bed. Slipping her gently under the covers, Roy tucks her in and traces her cheek with his gloved hand and a fond look flashes across his face at the sight of her sleeping peacefully. He leans down and presses a kiss onto her temple for a moment, a single tear running down his cheek before he pulls back and brushes her hair from her face.

"I love you," he whispers as he begins to stand. He makes it all the way to her door before starring back at her, the light from the hallways illuminating her face and with one last look, Roy leaves the apartment.
"We got a report on someone matching Scar's description." Miles' voice rang out. "We believe he was heading here."

"An abandoned mining town?" Captain Fucktard asked. From beside his uncle, Ed scowled at the man when out of nowhere a blow came to his side courtesy of his uncle. Agony exploded from his side as he wheezed out in pain, his metal hand coming up to rub it as he tried to get control of his composure though he was clearly failing when Kimblee looked at him with a raised eyebrow.

Miles then proceeded to smile sweetly at Kimblee when the man turned to him next and murmured low under his breath, that damn smile still present **holy fuck it was terrifying oh god why was he one of his parental figures everyone else combined was terrifying enough, "I swear you're worse than Armstrong!"**

"That's right," Miles replied, ignoring Ed again having felt his scolding was enough for now. "Baschool's pretty much a ghost town since the mines were closed. Plenty of buildings to hide in."

"This could be tricky." Kimblee said. When his uncle turned away from him, as did Kimblee, he stuck out his middle finger in full view of everyone. From around the courtyard, snorts and giggles and coughs were heard. Jerso, who was one of Kimblee's bodyguards today, choked on a laugh and started hacking while Zampano, who also had guard duty, tried to keep a blank face.

Miles raised an eyebrow at the two men before turning back to Ed only to see a middle finger flung in Kimblee's direction...Ed looked at his uncle and then his middle finger and back to his uncle before swiftly hiding the 'offending' hand and giving his uncle an innocent grin...wow, he must be getting shitty at this because Miles did not look convinced at all! The man's eye was twitching like crazy as he sighed before he whirled around and caught up with Kimblee once more.

"We'll need to split into search parties." His uncle told him. He then turned to the scattered and still snorting group of soldiers. He gave them the Unimpressed Mother Hen™ look which caused most of the men to sober up...some idiots just sniggered and Ed himself was holding his breath to stop himself from laughing. "All squads are to contact us here immediately if you spot Scar."

"Yes, sir!" The soldiers replied.

Ed watched as Darius and Heinkel, who got to play babysitter for Al, walked away with his little brother and his other uncle, Rafael. Niccolo stayed behind at the Fort to keep watch over the remaining bulk of soldiers that Kimblee's had shipped in from Central. Miles gave Ed a nod and soon he was off on his own trying to find Scar before anyone else did.

Should be easy, right?
This, Ed decided, was complete and utter horse shit.

Who decided to make it so backwards and in the far lands of Tim Buck Too that he couldn't even see where the fuck he was anymore?

He couldn't even hear any of the soldiers marching around in the snow or the yells of Kimblee and his men! Oh god if he got lost and his uncle had to rescue him he'd never live this down. He wandered around the back alleys of Baschool hoping to find a familiar path or at least a set of footprints! Anything really would work! Eventually, he gave up trying to find his own way back and started to absentmindedly hum some song he once heard his mother listen and sing to while she cleaned around the house.

Ed let himself get lost in the memories of just watching her; it was about 3 months before that bastard Hohenheim left them and he woke up earlier than he usually would. He remembers hearing a faint sound of music coming from downstairs and resolved, all of 4 years, to find out what it was.

'Never thought that you would be standing here so close to me'

He stumbled and fumbled down the wooden stairs of his childhood home and somehow made no noise even when he tripped over one of his wooden blocks. He walked down the hallway, seeing a light shining from the kitchen and shadow moving about inside.

'there's so much I feel that I should say but words can wait until some other day'

Ed remembers peeking his head inside, the music slow and sweet to see his mother, in her normal lavender dress and hair pulled back in a loose ponytail and Hohenheim in his slacks and long golden hair pulled back from his face. They were wrapped together in each other's arms, swaying gently to the music coming from their record player.

'It's been a long, long time Haven't felt like this, my dear'

His mother had a small smile on her face, serene and calm and happy in a way he'd never remember seeing her like again after Hohenheim left. She held onto him like a lifeline, swaying to the music and her head in between the crook of his neck, like two pieces of a puzzle.

'Or just how empty they all seemed without you So kiss me once, then kiss me twice'

Hohenheim was also peaceful for once, his lines of stress and worry, the bags under his eyes and awkward stature fell away in his mother's arms, he let the tense posture he always seemed to hold melt away while he was with her. His mouth was fixed in a permanent small smile, one as peaceful and soothing as his mothers, and it was n't that hard to see how perfect the two were for each other. They complimented each other perfectly and in some ways, the made it harder to hate the bastard.

'You'll never know how many dreams I dreamed about you'

It made it harder because his mother loved him so dearly, yet he left. And she waited. And waited. And waited until her dying breath. With a sad little smile, one that had been so happy not even a year before in a tiny kitchen, dancing in candlelight at midnight to a song they swayed so sweetly so gently too. It hurt to know that not even 3 months after that night would she never wear a smile as calm and peaceful until her death.
'So kiss me once then kiss me twice Then kiss me once again It's been a long, long time Long, long time'

Ed was lost in the memories of his mother, so much so that when he suddenly slipped on a patch of ice in one of the many back alleys, he was so unprepared for it. His head hit the soft snow with a THUD and pain erupted from his side where Uncle Miles elbowed him earlier and Ed knew he must've landed on a rock or something to piss off the bruise there. He blinked a few times as the snow he kicked up fell onto his face and in his slightly blurry vision he could just make out the silhouette of a figure.

"Nice to see you again, Fullmetal. I got your message."

"Scar...would it kill you to use my codename?"

Elsewhere around Baschool, Miles suddenly whipped his head around and gazed off in a random direction of an empty sector. One of the soldiers noticed his furrowed expression," Sir, is everything alright?"

He stared for a moment longer before he replied," Something's..off."

"You think something's about to happen, sir?"

"Yes.."

"Will Lt. Col. Mors be the culprit sir?"

Miles sighs," He usually is."

He then proceeded to stalk off in another direction, schooling his features as he tried to find Kimblee and keep the man from going off on his own. It was bad enough the bastard kept getting away from him in Fort Briggs but to lose him in Baschool...well that was one nightmare he didn't want to think of. He really wanted to kill the man but resorted to a few glares and threats that were disguised as small talk and 'advice'...

Roy looked at the wooden door of the apartment in front of him.
He was slightly skeptical that this was the right place. Maybe Vanessa got it wrong? Madeline wrote down the wrong address? His aunt had an off day? Because here he was, up 6 flights of stairs and down 5 doors and found himself staring at the slightly chipped rust red painted door with the numbers ‘6B5’ in bronze metal on the front of it.

Boarders with the same colour outlined the door and small rug that was a plain grey was at its doorstep. The stairs were a light oak wood and the flooring matched it, but neither were too old nor too new. The hallways were coloured a light grey and the lamps that went up down and walls were either broken or flickering wildly except for the occasional few brightly lit ones.

He hesitantly knocked on the door and waited a few moments hearing the footsteps walk towards it. The little knob turned and the door swung open to reveal a young man, no older than 18 with ash blonde hair pulled back into a messy bun and deep navy blue eyes. He had on a simple pair of black slacks and penny loafers to go with his white button-up shirt. He left the first few buttons undone and his sleeves were rolled to his mid-forearm.

"Hello, can I help you?" the man spoke in a clear crisp voice, one befitting of someone with no issues and nothing to hide.

"Patrick 'Trick' Mors?" The teen nodded, clearly confused.

Roy held up the picture of him and Ed and Patrick's eyes widened, "We need to talk."

Patrick looked at him and then the picture, gulping as he tried to school his face and failed, miserably. He shuffled on his feet, clearly losing whatever confidence he had to hide his secrets, and gestured for Roy to come inside," Come in."

Ed sat across from Scar, watching the man as he processed what he just told him, from Truth to Bradley, the Homunculus, Father and the higher-ups and faking his death and eventually making his way to Fort Briggs to get the support of General Armstrong...Scar opened his mouth to say something when the door slammed open and two figures made their way inside.

"You must be Scar," Jerso said as he came through the small dust cloud they made when they entered the room."We'll need you to come with us. Mr. Kimblee is waiting for you."

"I'm impressed with your tracking skills." Scar replied.

Zampano stepped in from beside him and caught sight of Ed and raised an eyebrow at him and then Scar, "Kidnapping kids now Scar? Despicable!" Ed, who had jumped up when the door was busted open, felt his eye twitch, a vein popping up on his forehead at their comments,'They may not have called me little, but a kid? Seriously!'
"Hey, do I look like a kid to you? I'm your superior asshole!" He was ignored as they continued on with their conversation as if he wasn't even there.

"But do you honestly think that the two of you are going to be enough to take me against my will?" Scar asked. "We'll see, but we do have a slight advantage," Zampano said. His hand came up to remove his glasses.

They spread their feet and their bodies tensed up. Their backs exploded into a rapid expansion before Jerso's eyes started to glow white. Jerso grunted as his body grew and his skin turned yellow. His head got bigger as did his body, which resulted in his shirt tearing off of his body. Zampano's body turned gray as his face was contorted into one of an animal with sharp teeth as his own shirt tore off of his body because of the rapid growth he went through.

"Let's just see how this plays out," Zampano said.

Scar raised a hand, eyes narrowed at the two chimeras in front of him. "Chimeras, huh?" His hand tensed up. "Let's go!"
Patrick 'Trick' Mors didn't expect much when he opened his door.

He was an unassuming young man with his blonde hair and blue eyes, just another one of Amestris's youth who inherited its generic colouring. He hid his sharp features and oh-so-intelligent eyes behind a modest and uneasy smile. A mask of a shy cowardly boy who was an assistant to a government official and worked a dead-end job at the local grocers in his off time.

It was a boring life; they thought it was a slow, menial job that bore no fruits of labour and if you weren't an informant in the Fullmetal Alchemist's spy network; then they'd be right. How lucky it was for Trick that he was apart of it. Scratch that; he was the network.

Ed left it in his capable hands as he continued his journey to find his brothers body and while he mostly operated in the East, not exactly the gossip's hub of activity, it made him unassuming. It made them unassuming. Because no one would suspect a hotheaded loudmouthed pipsqueak like Edward Elric to have a spy network covering the entire country. They wouldn't expect him to have the countless lives he saved and the numerous allies he makes to become his network.

Didn't expect that through small acts of kindness, he built the country's biggest intelligence network.

A network that he was working on expanding into other countries.

Edward Elric was many things; Hero of the People, the Fullmetal Alchemist, a student, a friend, a brother, a son and a lover. He was so many things, but he wouldn't be Ed without his alchemy and he wouldn't have learned it from a book if he wasn't intelligent.
There was a spark of something in those molten gold eyes- a reflection of a mind that worked a
million miles an hour and never stopped thinking. It shined brighter than the gold in his eyes or that
sun that was spun into his hair. And Ed wasn't just going to stop because Roy Mustang became his
superior. Because this 'Father' character told him too. Because everyone said he shouldn't get
involved. They should've known better.

Trick was prepared for anything and everything; he's spent years building Ed's intelligence network
and he knew from the start when Ed saved his life that he would do anything for him. He would
make sure Ed was prepared to play the game and to do that he needed to take all precautions. Why
do you think he moved to Central while Ed galavanted around the country pretending to be him? No
stone was left unturned and nothing was to be taken for granted. He never let himself be lulled into a
sense of security. Because then he got sloppy. Then he'd make mistakes and he couldn't afford to do
that. Not with Ed on the line.

So why, pray tell, was Roy 'I'll light your funeral pyres' Mustang in front of him demanding
answers?

His eyes flickered over to the man sitting across from him. The other man sat cool, calm, collected
even. Ever the soldier. He was sure that Major Armstrong would be shedding tears at Mustang’s
manly stance or so he assumes, he only knows what Ed's told him of the man. He's incredibly buff, is
very, very loud and he shits you not, the man sparkles. Yes, sparkles.

Mustang, on the other hand, is the very picture of an attractive, sophisticated man in the prime of
life. With his dark, intruding eyes and clean-shaven, youthful visage, the infamous colonel attracts a
great deal of attention from admirers. His dark hair was free of greys and the other signs of stress that
most of the high-ranking officials seemed to collect over the years. He was young; in his prime and a
model soldier. It was no wonder that he was promoted- especially since he knew how to play the
game.

Roy was known for a new lady on his arm every other week and he was a loud boisterous young
man with large ideals that most officers said were too big for him. He would crumble they'd whisper.
He'll fail, they say to one another. He'll never make it to the top, they reassured themselves.

But that was their mistake; Trick could see it. He could see where they went wrong. He had almost
done the same when he first met Ed. But one look in his eyes and he knew. He knew he'd beat the
odds. One look into Mustang's eyes and he can see the same thing.

There's a fire in those eyes and wherever he goes, Roy will leave a trail of fire in his wake. He'll
leave them all in glowing awe; leave the rest of the players on a pyre as he rises through the ranks,
burn those that get in the way of his goals and spark a revolution from the incandescence of his
actions. A snap of his fingers will light the ignition and Roy Mustang will leave them all in a blazing
inferno.

That much he knew. And it scared him...because Ed was the same. The same fire burned in the
molten gold of his friend's eyes.

Trick let himself trail over the figure in his living room, the man eyeing the pictures and possessions
he had. He let his eyes wander down to see the previously steaming cup of coffee on the table
separating them. It was left untouched; had gone cold in the time the two men eyed one another.

His own foot tapped continuously from where it rested on the floor as he scrambled over the picture
of Ed and himself in the library. One of two copies in the whole country - one of which sat on the
mantlepiece of his fireplace. The other was in Ed's possession, probably in his office or bank
knowing his best friend. However, one of those two copies was missing, evidently. And since his
copy still rested where it's been for the past 3 years that means Ed's was gone.

Good news; he found it.

Bad news; it was currently grasped tightly in the hands of the Flame Alchemist, Ed's adoptive father.

"I see," Mustang began from his seat. He stood up and walked over lazily over to the mantle of his fireplace." that you knew my subordinate." The Colonel picked up the matching picture and gestures to him.

Trick almost rolled his eyes. If he was anyone else, this 'my subordinate' business might've worked, but he was Ed's best friend and his goddamn intelligence network. Ed shared everything with him.

Including the not-so-subtle ways that Roy and Riza adopted and brought both Ed and his brother in their lives. Roy Mustang was fooling no one.

"Please, just stop with this whole" he waved a hand at him." whatever this is. Ed was my best friend. He was your son; don't even try that bullshit with me."

Mustang blinked at him for a solid 5 minutes as if he couldn't believe what he was hearing," So, you know about all that...what else do you know?"

"Let me put it in plain terms to make this easier to understand; I'm his intelligence network. I have eyes and ears across the country and I hear everything. There isn't a place where I don't know what's going on. Ed never went anywhere without all the basics. I told him everything."

"How can I be sure of that?" Mustang's eyes narrowed at him in suspicion and Trick really wanted to sigh because like really dude but he knew Ed would kill him if he gave Mustang sass when he was in a time of mourning.

"I was Ed's...what do you guys in the military call it? A confidant?" The Flame Alchemist at this point turned back to place the picture frame back on the mantle. He stayed there for a moment longer likely taking in Ed's appearance.

"I was his military and personal. Al was a personal one too, no doubt about it, but sometimes his military life crossed with his personal and there were just some things Ed couldn't tell his brother; not without involving him in the game." Mustang tensed at this and whirl around to look at him with frightened eyes.

"He was doing what?" he hissed out...almost like an overprotective momma cat over her kitten...huh wasn't that an image?

Trick shrugged, "There was a lot of things Ed did you wouldn't approve of. Having an intelligence network and manipulating the politics of this country's government wasn't at the forefront of my mind when I thought of things you'd disapprove of your son doing. But hey, what do I know?"

"What do you think would be at the forefront of my mind?"

"I don't know; the fact he drank sometimes or how he and Winry were an item."

Mustang sighed as he pinched the bridge of his nose in frustration," That little shit's still giving me headaches even from beyond the grave."

"Yeah, it's funny that you mention that, but I think you need to come with me, "Trick gave a nervous laugh as he rubbed back of his neck.
Ed clicks his tongue, watching as the three men before him lunged at one another. He feels his ire growing when Scar punches Zampano in the face, sending the boar-man sprawling to the floor in a crumpled heap. Jerso, seeing his partner's limp body, let out a shout and spit out a glob of saliva towards the Ishvalen. Scar ducks, narrowly missing the attack and gazes back at the wall where the eyes the glob of spit slowly beings to slide down it.

He narrows his eyes in anger and turns slowly back to the two chimeras, watching warily as Zampano stands up from his spot on the floor and how Jerso loses his relaxed stance. "You should be out cold by now!" he snarls.

"I'm not that easy to take down, you bastard!" Zampano roars as he pounces. Scar makes to dodge the man when Jerso makes a similar warcry and rushes forwards, body-checking the Ishavlen into the stone wall behind them. Scar groans in pain before slamming his hands down onto Jerso's head, dazing the chimera enough to let him go and back away from him. The red-eyed man sweeps his leg under an incoming Zampano sending him sprawling to the floor.

Off on the sides, Ed watches in anger as all three grown men proceed to fight with one another. Never really any delivering any fatal blows but enough to incapacitate any one of them for more than a day if they continued on like this. As he watches them throw kicks to the back of the head, a punch to the stomach, ramming one another into a wall or pillar, his anger begins to rise.

It's when Zampano is thrown into a wooden crate and a piece of the lumber goes sailing past Ed, barely missing his head, does he finally lose it. Eyes narrowed, Ed pulls up his sleeves to his forearms and stalks forwards, a glint in his eye and fingers aching to do something anything. He almost lets himself fly into the fight, ready to beat the ever-living crap out of the three men when a gleam catches his eye.

He breathes deeply through his nose and whips out one of his guns not needing to check to know it's his gleaming silver Beretta Pico that he's pulling out from its holster. He doesn't even hesitate before shooting at the three men. All three froze from their fight when three bullets whizzed past them, narrowly missing their heads, and embedding themselves into the stone wall behind them.

"Would you three stop acting like fucking children!" Ed barked out.

From the shadows, Winry and Al raced into the room staring them all with frightened expressions at Ed and it took him a moment. It took him a second to realize that they were scared. Not just of anything, but of him. Of the picture, he must have painted. He knew he didn't look like the friendly if mischievous Trick they knew. This Trick had abandoned his coat and uniform shirt, allowing them to dry off to the side when Scar first found him.

This Trick was in his black shirt, showing off his many guns and the intricate way the holsters hugged his body. They had known he was armed. But knowing and seeing were two different things. Seeing him standing there with guns all over his body, an angry gleam in his eye and the
smoking barrel pointed at the three grown ass men was different from the Trick they met. Was different to the Trick they became friends with and trusted.

Before he can even open his mouth, to think of something to say to them, anything at all, his uncle walks in and just stops short at the sight. Ed can just see it now, his oh-so-red eyes trailing the bullet stained wall to the frozen statue like men to the frightened looks and the smoking barrel of Ed's still raised pistol. He nods at Ed and he breathes a sigh of relief.

"Sir," he replies curtly, holstering the pistol in its holster, his lower back.

"That's close enough," Miles tells them as another soldier walks in from behind him.

"You brought her here, Major?" Ed asks, a hint of protectiveness in his tone and a subtle note of tired. Just tired.

"What are these creatures?" One of the soldiers asks, not really waiting for a response but still curious enough to voice his thoughts aloud for them all to hear.

"I guess they're the result of some ungodly experiment by our superiors." Miles answers. "Tie them both to that column."

"Right away, sir."

He turns towards the still stunned Ishvalen, "And as for you Scar."

"I regret having to treat one of my own people so harshly," Miles says as he raises a gun towards his kin. "But I can't just let you walk away. Not after what you've done."

"Your own people." Scar repeats incredulously.

"You two can leave," Miles tells both Winry and Al. "We've got it from here."

"Winry!" Al said as he put a hand to her shoulder she continues to move towards the captured man. "Stop Winry. Stay back."

Trick watches from off to the side, his bangs overshadowing his fake eyes that are the same as his Aunt Sarah's and fights back the itch to drag her away and tell her everything. To hug her and keep her safe from everything that's happening in the outside world. But, if he did that, he'd never forgive himself. Because she needed to do this. If he can't be there for her as Ed, her childhood friend and almost something, then he could be here for her as Trick. Strong, silent and supportive. And that's all she needed from him right now.

"Let me go. It's alright," she tells Al, his bangs overshadowing her eyes as she trembles, trying to stay strong despite everything.

"Miss, you need to stay back," Miles said.

"Just let me," Winry said. "Please understand. You have to let me talk to him."

Al makes to grab ahold of her when Ed places a hand on his shoulder and looks his little brother in the eye before he shales his head at him. "But-!" Al starts when Ed interrupts. "No, Al, she needs to do this. Between Ed being gone and all this, she needs to have some closure in her life." Al stares at him for a few moments and if he didn't know his own brother any better, Ed could've sworn Al was going to ignore his advice anyway.
"Why?" Winry asks. "Why did you kill my mother and father?"

"There's nothing I can say that won't sound like an excuse." Scar replies. "And nothing can change the fact that I am responsible for their deaths."

'Riza?'

Rain splashes against the glass pane of the bedroom window, the wind howling quietly from outside and Black Hayate whines as he hides under the bed. The room was dark and unforgiving, cold in a way it shouldn't be as the storm rages on outside.

'Yes, Ed?'

She tosses and turns underneath the thin covers of her bed. Her hair was undone and splayed out across her pillows in a rampant manner. The lumpy mattress did not help as she continued to have flashes, memories, of a time long ago and a boy with hair spun from gold and eyes brighter than the sun and a smile worth more than anything in the world.

'C-can I call you mom? Not all the time! Just...just in private...please?'

Flashes of a laugh like honey and warm glowing skin tinted red on his cheeks either in anger or embarrassment she didn't know which. She turned, restless in her uncomfortable bed as more memories continued playing in her mind. She remembers the feeling of his skin, so soft and warm, of scars and callouses and nicks and dents.

'I'd love that, Ed. '

She remembers the hugs she gave him, the tears staining her shoulder and the kisses she pressed into his temple. She remembers determined eyes, burning like molten gold and thinks of similar eyes, the eyes of her love, so dark and piercing, reflecting the burning inferno he snaps into existence at a moment's notice. Not even a flinch at the screams.

'Mom.'

Oh, god the screams. The explosions, the burns and the bodies. All of it flashes through her mind, she can see it now, oh so clearly now, that endless wasteland, filled with nothing but fire, blood, screams and bullet holes. Her fingers twitch in her sleep rhythmically pulling as the bullets fire off one by one never-ending why doesn't it end can't they see it hurts too much inside oh god there's so much blood-

'Mom'

Why did it hurt so much? All she could see were his eyes, his beautifully gorgeous molten gold eyes, oh so bright and so alive and can only imagine that light dimming, gunshot bleeding from his chest and his body falling back into the abyss, never to be found as she watches that empty casket enter the ground all over again.
She sees flashes of his face, so bright and full of life as gunshots ring out and the casket lowers, empty and he wasn't even there for them to bury, and the gunshots get louder and louder and she can feel it; back when the bullets had ripped through her too. Except she came back. She came back from the war. Her baby, her son, her Ed...he didn't.

Letting out a silent scream, Riza bolts up from her bed, the lightning flashing from outside, illuminating the room in its glow as thunder roars. She stares for a moment before she starts to cry, clutching her stomach as she sobs. She gasped for breath, gut-wrenching sobs working themselves up from deep inside as she cried out for a son she didn't have anymore. A son she lost. A son she wanted back in her arms again.

She could hear a pounding in her ears on repeat, like a never-ending boom that faintly sounds like bombs, explosions that Kimblee used to slaughter all those people, those men, women and children and tears fell freely from her eyes as her sobs grew even louder. She can't breathe, she can't think or feel and she doesn't want to. It hurts too much.

All those children, those babies with bright eyes and trusting smiles and parents who loved them and a land soaked to the brim with their blood and she can't stop feeling the bullets ripping through her. Of feeling the pain as they entered but never exited. Of waking up to a world of pain and a doctor who only patched her up enough for her to continue on. To continue killing all those innocents.

Her sobs crew, her throat raw and her eyes a blurry mess as she continued to cry, Black Hayate whining as he nudges her with his snout. She was so caught up with her memories that when two familiar arms reached around her middle and pulled her close she didn't even think.

She just clung to him, held him close to her so she could feel his heartbeat, know he was alive and in her arms and he wasn't going to leave her all alone again. Her face rested in the crook of his neck and she was sure she had ruined his clothes with her sobs and tears. She clung to him like a lifeline and for a second, it was enough.

"I miss him so much why'd they take him from us, Roy? Why'd they take my baby?" she sobbed out, voice muffled as her face remained pressed into her neck.

"Shhh, I've got you. It's okay; I'm here." his voice, deep, calm, familiar and safe whispered in her ear, barely tickling the shell of it. He turned his head, pressing a kiss into her temple as he rocked them back and forth.

An explosion ripped through one of the buildings, sending dark smoke into the air.

"What happened?" A soldier shouted.

"That's where Major Miles was." Another soldier said.
There was a brief sight of blue alchemical light flashing along part of the building before another explosion rocked the building, sending a lot more dark smoke to fill the air, causing some soldiers to run from the building.

Coughing was heard before Ed appeared from the building. "Damn it." Ed cursed, glaring out of the side of his eyes at where he just came from.

"What's going on in there, Lt.Col.?” Kimblee asked

Ed whirled around, a snarl on his face and an arm raised for dramatic effect," You bastard. "This is all your fault, Kimblee! You were supposed to be watching Winry!"

Kimblee stood there blinking in surprise with a couple of soldiers behind him, staring in shock. One of the soldiers looked up at the roof then back at Kimblee. "Mr. Kimblee, look up there on the roof."

They all looked up at the roof in unison to see Scar standing there with an unconscious Winry under his arm.

Trick led Mustang through a back alley, a sleeping Hawkeye in his arms, tear-stained cheeks and her dog, Black Hayate following faithfully from behind. He pushed open the big wooden door and gestured for the Colonel to enter. Not even a few steps in, Mustang stopped and looked back at Trick with narrowed eyes.

He continued walking, not waiting up for Trick, almost as if he knew the way around this place and as they reached the bar, he jogged forwards, wanting to explain Roy's presence to the Madame.

"Roy! You're back!" Was the sound the greeted him. He walked into the room to watch as the girls of Madame Christmas's bar flocked over to the soldier, Hawkeye still in his arms and Black Hayate being picked up from Vanessa.

"I know Madeline said you'd be by sometime this week Roy, but I didn't think you'd be bringing your lover alongside with you.” Madame Christmas drawled out from behind the counter, her signature cigarette hanging from her lips. He stepped out from behind Roy and saw her eyes widen.

"Mor-?”

"He knows Chris. We've gotta tell him. Everything."

"Everything?" she repeats.

"Everything."

"Oh, the brats not gonna like this."

"He'll get over it; just buy him that whiskey he likes."
An Understanding

Chapter Summary

Trick and Chris sit Roy and Riza down for a talk. Ed has a plan to shake things up.

"Tell me something, Kimblee." Scar's gruff voice rang out to the scattered soldiers below him with Winry still seemingly unconscious in his arms."Do you remember when we first met?"

Ed could see it in Kimblee's eyes; the passion, the fierceness and most of all, the wrath in those dark eyes. Ed found himself seeing the other cues; the way the older man's jaw ground itself, his clenched hands and tense body. No, Kimblee didn't answer Scar; he was far too angry for that. "It seems we changed places." The Ishvalen continued, uncaring for the way the Crimson Alchemist slowly but surely lost his composure.

"You shouldn't be so confident!" Kimblee spat out in disgust almost as if the words had left a foul taste in his mouth.

Ed flickered his navy blue eyes upwards, eyeing the storm that was slowly but surely coming their way. He let them trail back down to the suit-wearing alchemist taking in his stance and readied himself. The question was; would Kimblee take the bait?

He ran towards the man grabbing him by his suit jacket and sending the man down to his eye level, "Kimblee! Damn you!" he snarled.

"Stand aside." Kimblee snapped, taking off his gloves.

"What are you doing? Stop! Stop this now, Crimson Alchemist!" Ed shouted, sounding hysterical by now and he knew it was getting to the Crimson Alchemist. "Can't you see Winry's up there with him? I won't let you attack."

"Why can't you just stay out of the way?" Kimblee growled voice filled with annoyance and his fury-filled eyes trailed down to meet his defiant ones ready to reprimand him when the older man's breath caught in his throat.

Kimblee stared down into eyes made of a never-ending blue, cold and unforgiving in their fury. They blazed like a raging inferno only...colder. Ed pulled Kimblee down, even more, letting his mouth get close to the other alchemist's ear before whispering, voice frigid and gruff in his fury. He slowly slipped his pistol from its holster and pressed it slowly into Kimblee's abdomen causing the man to stiffen.
"If you ever open your mouth to contest me again Crimson Alchemist then you're going to wish you were facing those fucking Homonculus and their genocidal maniac they call Father. You may have thought you had something over me, but you forget yourself, Major. " he spat it out like a curse.

"I agreed to those farce demands from that second-rate dickwad, not because of duty or any sense of honour but because I made a promise. I made a promise to a dead man who would've brought down this entire operation you think you've kept a secret if those two were ever hurt. So, shut up, listen and close your goddamn mouth before I shut it for you! " He pulled back and looked the older man in the eyes.

"Now, I can never be the wrathful warrior Edward Elric was if he ever thought his precious baby brother was going to be hurt, but I do have every single eye and ear in the country watching us." At this revelation, Kimblee's eyes widened.

"Don't look so surprised Mr.Kimblee; Elric had friends in both high and low places. They wait. Looking for the slightest hint of hesitation from you and then it's over."

"You wouldn't! You can't! You must be bluffing!" Kimblee hissed back at him, suddenly gaining a spine after the last few moments. Ed simply stared at him with apathetic eyes as the barrel of the gun began digging painfully into the man's abdomen.

"Ah ah ah," he tutted."I thought I told you to keep quiet."

"Try me, you little shit!" Kimblee suddenly snarled out, his anger and fury bleeding through plain as day.

"No, you don't talk to me like that. You may think you're the biggest threat out there, but I assure you Mr.Kimblee, you cannot possibly fathom the lengths I will go for them; I will bring this country crumbling down in my rage and your so-called employers will topple down with me. Do we have an understanding, Mr.Kimblee?"

A moment passes as he lets his words sink into the older alchemist's mind, the cold barrel of his gun still digging painfully into him, but the man doesn't respond. He doesn't even register the way Ed's stiff and calculating eyes, eyes filled with a cold fury and protectiveness of Winry and Al, are trained on him. Watching him for any sign of a reaction.

Ed sighed as he shook his head regretfully," I was hoping I wouldn't have to do this."

Before Kimblee could even look up at him, a question on his lips, Ed stepped on the man's foot catching him off guard and yanked him down by that god awful tie, a gleaming knife taking its place at Kimblee's throat.

"I said; Do. We. Have. An. Understanding?"

"...yes." Ed promptly released his hold on the man, swiftly placing his knife back into its sheath as he stepped back, a calm and serene smile on his face. Ed then spoke lowly, only enough for Kimblee to hear, "Now, I expect you to get Winry back at any cost- you may be in Father's pocket, but wouldn't it just be a shame if I were to expose everything he was working towards to the entire country. Make no mistake Mr.Kimblee, I don't wanna cause you any trouble, but it's your choice."

Ed paused as he let his piercing eyes trail over Kimblee's keeled form with disdain before his lips twitched up into a predatory, "So, I suggest you choose wisely."
"Young girl, you have every right to pass judgment on me," Scar said.

She didn't anything as she turned her back on him and began walking towards one of the broken crates, shifting the rubble around before she seemingly found what she was looking for and came back to his side, a roll of cream coloured cloth used for bandaging in her slightly trembling hands.

"Your arm," Winry stated as she crouched in front of him. "You'll die if we don't bandage it." She wrapped the bandage around his arm.

"Winry!" Al cried.

"Quiet, Alphonse. I think...I think this is what my parents would've wanted." Winry continued. "Mom and Dad saved his life before after all. There has to be a reason for that."

Scar stared at her. "Does that mean you're forgiving me?"

At this declaration, Winry glanced up sharply at him, an angry look settled deep into her face, the raw fury contorting her pretty features. "Don't get me wrong. I don't forgive your wanton murdering."

A little while later, Winry stood up from where she had been bandaging Scar's arm and stepped back to admire her handiwork. Ed looked over at her and noted her glistening blue eyes and fought every urge to run over to her and never let go. Not again.

"Winry," Ed said softly.

"It's alright," Winry murmured. "I won't cry. I promised Ed that the next time I cried they would be tears of joy." Winry told him, her big blue eyes still glistening with the unshed tears she so clearly needed to let go.

"Should we contact headquarters, sir?"

"Yes," Miles replies.

"Major Miles, wasn't it?" Scar asks his uncle. "Can I ask you something?"

"What?"

Scar raised his head and opened his oh-so-red-eyes, "Earlier you said I was one of your people."

Gun still pointed at Scar, Miles began to speak, "That's right. I'm part Ishvalan on my grandfather's side." He reached a hand up and removed his glasses to show his red eyes. "I wished we didn't have to meet like this, red-eyed brother of mine."

"How can you bring yourself to be a part of the Amestrian military?" Scar asked.

"My objective is to work from the inside to change how the people of this country view the people of Ishval." Miles retorted.
Scar's eyes widened, "I don't think that great a task will be easy to accomplish."

"I'm an Ishvalan pebble tossed into the ocean of the Amestrian military," Miles said. "Maybe in time, the ripples I create will become great waves." He put his glasses back on, "And do you want to know what the most ironic part about is? It was an Amestrian who set me on this path in the first place."

Scar glared down at himself as he clenched his fists in anger, "Look at me. I'm a festering wound of hatred born of the great Ishvalan war." He looked back up at Miles. "I am thankful that there is someone like you out there.

"Major," A soldier said as he walked over, causing Miles to take his eyes off Scar.

Miles took the phone offered to him and held it up to his ear. "Copy. Major Miles here. We captured Scar. We're holding him in area D. Inform Kimblee."

"Whatever the circumstances may be between us, I cannot let you go," Miles said. "You must accept the judgment."

"Hold on!"

"Who's there?" Miles shouts out into the shadows. From the doorway, Dr.Marcoh and May appear.

"May!" Al shouts.

"Dr. Marcoh." Ed breaths.

"Please don't take Scar as your prisoner. We need him." Dr. Marcoh tells them all.

"Deciphering notes, huh," Miles says as Dr. Marcoh's holds out the notes to the 1/4 Ishvalen.

"Yes! It's groundbreaking research that tries to fuse Amestrian alchemy and Xingese Alkahestry." May explained

"But all of the important parts are unreadable, written in ancient Ishvalan." Dr. Marcoh said before looking over at Scar. "Scar's the only one who can make sense of it." He looked back at Miles, who was still pointing his gun at Scar. "Don't you see?"

"Hmm." Miles looked over at May, a pensive look on his face while Ed stood off to his side, trying to hold himself back from blurting out something to the good Doctor. "So you're the Alkahestry girl? I have orders to bring you back to the fort."

"Me? But what do they want with me?" May asks scared. She jumped behind Dr. Marcoh to hide. "Don't worry. You'll receive a warm welcome I'm sure." Miles said.

Miles turned his head and put a hand to his chin. "Now, let me think here. Scar needs to be kept free and it would be just as bad if they found out Dr. Marcoh was here as well. Alright, I think it might be best if we took you back to Fort Briggs to hide you from senior military staff."

"But we also have another problem," Ed finally spoke up.

"What is it Trick?" Winry asks.

Before he can open his mouth, his uncle interrupts, "I heard they're using the Rockbell girl as a hostage against you." May and Dr. Marcoh turn to look at Winry. "If we act now, we can disgrace Kimblee and find someplace to hide her where they can't touch her."
Miles raised his gun once more and pointed it at Scar, "Listen up Scar. If you're willing to work with us, I'll postpone your judgment day. Well?"

"It doesn't look like you're going to give me any other choice." Scar tells them."Yes, I'll help you decode the notes."

"I have your word on that?" he uncle presses, trying to make sure the other Ishvalen wouldn't betray them at a moment's notice.

"You do. I swear on my Ishvalan blood. You can trust me, my red-eyed brother."

"We have a deal then," Miles agrees. "My apologies, Ms. Rockbell. You'll have to wait a while before we can punish your parents' killer."

"Fine." She said with a slight nod.

Miles then notices that both Zampano and Jerso were now waking up. "Right, I almost forgot about these two freaks of nature." He looked at his men. "Dispose of them."

"Yes, sir." The soldiers saluted.

"Hold on a second," Ed said as he and Winry turned to face Miles. Al stepped forward and spread his arms wide. "Wait!" Al said. "You don't have to kill them."

"I see no reason to let them live," Miles said before turning to look at the soldier. "Kill them."

Al took another step forward. "No! A life is a life! What better reason do you need than that?"

"Humph, showing us mercy. How adorable." Jerso said. Zampano turned his head.

"You're just a sentimental fool. We didn't ask for your help, did we?"

"Look at these bodies." Jerso says."What kind of future can we have? If you're gonna kill us, do it."

"I don't understand," Al spoke. "Don't you have families? Loved ones?"

"Sure we do," Jerso admitted.

"But as soon as we got these bodies, they were all told that we were dead," Zampano added. "And to them, we are."

"Don't you want to see them again?" Al asked.

"Even if we did, how could we go back to them like this?" Zampano replied.

Al scoffed. "So you don't want to get your original bodies back then. You're content the way you are now, is that it?"

"No, how could we be?!" Zampano said angrily.

"Of course we want our true bodies back." Jerso snapped back.

"There's your answer. I don't want to hear a bunch off fatalistic nonsense. Why not live and learn whether there's a chance of getting your bodies back?"

"How could you possibly know what we're going through?" Jerso asked.
From the back where the others stood, Ed snorted and gave Winry a look which she returned with a small smile, "They are so screwed."

"And what chance do we have of going back?"

Al angrily shoved his helmet off, showing the armours hollow shell as her roughly declares, "Well, I'm going back. No matter how long it takes, I'm not giving up!"

"Major!" the soldier with them calls out. "It's not good. A snowstorm."

"We can't complete a snowbound march with this equipment," Miles said. "We have no chance of reaching the fort."

Winry turned to Ed. "What do we do now?"

"This is a mining town, isn't it?" Yoki asks them all blandly. "Why don't we just go in the underground tunnels?"

"What's wrong?" Yoki asks as he looks around fearfully at the awed expressions he's getting from them. He raised a finger. "I mean, this is a pretty large mine, right? So surely there's a tunnel that can take us beyond the mountains? Uh…I think."

"That's it!" Al and Ed shouted.

"Mr. Yoki!" May yells out excitedly.

"Hey," Yoki said, chuckling as he put a hand to his chin. "Give me some credit. This is what I did for a living."

"He's right. The tunnels come out passed the mountain." the soldier confirms.

"Right," Miles says, "Once you run into Briggs soldiers, just hand them this." He closed the book and held it out to Dr. Marcoh. "I've explained our arrangement so you shouldn't have any trouble with them."

"Thank you. But there's still the matter of the young Ms. Rockbell. She can accompany us to the fort of course, but when word gets out that she's missing, won't Alphonse be the first people they suspect?"

"I can handle myself." Al protests.

"No," Miles shuts him down, slightly switching into Mother Hen Mode, not that the man noticed but both Ed and the soldier did as they hide a giggle behind their fists at the man's overprotectiveness. "This is Kimblee we're dealing with. He's very skeptical. He's automatically going to be suspicious of whatever we tell him."

"Um," Winry said, causing Al to look at her. "I hate to be the one to suggest this. But, uh," She turned to look at Ed. "What do you think Kimblee would do if I was suddenly taken hostage by Scar?"

"You want him to kidnap you?" Al asks her in slight disbelief.

"Hold on, Winry," Ed said. "You're saying…You want us to let him go?"

"Right, Scar runs away carrying me," Winry explains. "Then Trick, you and the others try desperately to stop him, or at least that's what you pretend to do." She looks at Ed and Al. "You
Understand?"

"You can't do that!" Ed is practically shouting at this point. "You're crazy!"

"Well, I don't have a choice, do I?" She throws a hand over her chest. "I'm hostage either way so I might as well get to choose my capturer."

"But he's a mass murderer. There's no reason for you to be risking your life!" Al argues.

"Don't you get it? It's time for you to learn that you don't have to do everything alone."

"Make up your minds." Miles pipes up from behind them. "The storm is coming in. If we don't hurry, we won't be able to get out of here."

The soldier by the window looked towards the group. "I can see Kimblee's forces now."

"Us too," Jerso speaks up from his bindings. "Please, you have to take us with you too. I know you don't trust us. So I understand if you want to keep us tied up. Kimblee shows no mercy to troops who fail to accomplish their mission."

"One way or the other, we're dead," Zampano said. "Besides. We don't want to give up either."

Al makes a happy little sequel and Ed turns to his uncle as he whispers, "There's no point anymore, Al's all for it and if you can't handle my puppy dog eyes, you'll never make it past 5 seconds of Al's."

"I don't understand. The Central forces weren't told about any of this." Jerso said.

"Please, we need to know me. What's going on?" Zampano pleads with them.

"Yeah, I'm sure everyone will feel a whole lot better if we're tied up," Jerso tells them gratefully.

Miles turned to look at Scar. "Alright, Scar, give us a good performance."

"I know what I'm doing." He replied harshly.

"And you will keep your oath, your solemn word as a true Ishvalan." Miles bites back to which Scar just nods solemnly.

"Excuse me, miss." The soldier said quickly to Winry. "Your ears."

She gives him a confused look, "Your earrings are made out of metal. If you don't take them out,
you'll get frostbite." The soldier explained. "Oh," Winry breathes out as she started to remove her earrings.

She turns to Ed, "Trick! You hang onto these for me. They're very precious to me, Ed gave'em and I know you were a good friend so I trust you to take good care fo them for me. I'll see you back at the fort."

She turned back around and jogged up the stairs leaving a solemn Ed who looked at her with eyes full of sadness and shoulders tense as he fights the urge to hug her and never let her go again.

Riza stared down at her hands, taking note of the nicks, scars and callouses on them. She was distracted that much was true. Ever since her nightmare last night, she couldn't get Ed out of her mind and it was killing her. She had been doing so good, trying to stay strong for Roy not even realizing that maybe, just maybe, it had been the other way around.

A hand placed itself over her fiddling fingers and Riza looks up to see her love, Roy, smiling at her fondly as the two waited for Madam Christmas and this Trick character to get on with all these secrets. In truth, Riza just wanted to go home. She was just so...tired. All the time. Emotionally drained and she was barely functioning as it was. Nothing they would tell her could give her what she wanted. They couldn't give her back her sons, her babies, her Ed.

"Can we get on with this? It's been a long..." her love trailed off, sounding just as tired as she and Riza knew it wasn't much, not with she being just as much of a mess, but she scooted closer and placed her head on his shoulder. Their hands lay in her lap as she traced the scars on his palms and while it wasn't much; she could feel Roy lose some of the tension he held.

"'A long' what, Roy?" His aunt Chris asked them.

"It's been a long month, Madam. I do not doubt that you already know, but..." Roy trailed off once more, his eyes losing focus and his hand tightening in her own. "But our eldest passed away recently and we...we haven't been taking it very well. And with everything else, it's just making it harder on us."

Madame Christmas 'hmm' as she took a long drag of her cigarette, blowing smoke out into the empty room as her dark eyes took in their haggard appearances. "Yes, I know, the brat mentioned it before he went off galivanting with my favourite bottle of whiskey." She laughs, one so gruff from years of unused, and it startles them.

"Look, I'm going to be blunt, but I was opposed to not telling you two from the start, but the kid insisted, saying he didn't want you guys to get hurt. I don't think he thought it through, but then again, he was your kid, so there was no use in telling him no; he was too much like you to listen to me."

Riza blinked, her confusion plain as day, "I'm sorry, but what are you talking about?"

"Your brat, Ed."
"What about him? He's dead Madame and a week after we have to bury his empty casket, you're spouting nonsense." Roy tenses as he speaks to his aunt, form his side, Riza begins to shed a few tears.

Madame Christmas rolls her eyes," That's the thing Roy-boy, he isn't."

"Isn't what?"

"Dead."
A Mother's Love

Chapter Summary

Riza and Roy react in different ways when finding out their dead son isn't quite as dead as they thought.

Chapter Notes

You're all going to fucking hate me

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Ed knew he wasn't exactly the ideal soldier, not by a long shot, but at least he knew when to follow orders.

He knew when to keep quiet and when to obey his superiors because he could see it. Sometimes he'd forget it, especially when he was being particularly rebellious, that these soldiers were human too, even if some of the decisions they made suggested otherwise.

And he was reminded of that every time he looked in their eyes. The agony, the misery, that pleading look that just seemed to twinkle in the corner of his own eyes. It reminded him that just because they were soldiers it didn't mean they had to like the orders they gave any better than he did. Sometimes, he'd look at them and find that they hated it more than he did.

Regardless of all of that, he was an alchemist first. And sometimes, he likes to think that those soldiers, the ones who he forgets are human beings underneath all that soldier, also forget what Ed is. That he's an older brother, a son, an alchemist and a human being before he was a soldier.

But sometimes... sometimes when the heat of the moment is too much and there's no room for an alchemist, no need for an older brother or a son, and it was no place to be a human being- Ed was a soldier.

"The storm has finally passed." His uncle says with a slight undertone of relief in his voice as he turns away from the window. "Start preparing."

"Yes, sir." the soldiers saluted before they begin to trek outside into the snow-covered wasteland.

Miles makes his way over to Ed, "We can't take any risks with Kimblee and his men." He gives
them a look and they all turn to look at Kimblee and his henchmen of the day Darius and Heinkel," So first chance you get, take out all three of them."

"Right."

"Yes, sir."

Ed walked up from behind and took his place beside his uncle. He waited in silence, not needing to look back to know Kimblee and his men were shooting the two of them looks every so often. That suited him just fine; he had other things to worry about. He looked out the window watching the wind carry the snow up and around violently in its last few bursts of a storm. It's silent as the two simply stare out into the frozen tundra they both have come to call home.

"We killing him?" he asks.

"Yes," his uncle replies nonchalantly.

"And the henchmen?"

His uncle stays quiet then and Ed closes his eyes," I see." Ed bows his head, arm going up to his heart in a salute as he backs up a few steps from his uncle."If you believe it to be the best then."

"Three men in this squad!" Miles calls out, voice commanding respect. Ed watches from the sideline, a fake-Al by his side, as he leans back comfortably on the frozen stone building. He could feel he might be here a while, so why not get comfy? He had been sitting outside for more than a couple of hours as Miles and Kimblee begrudgingly worked together to organize the search parties. Well, it was more like Kimblee told Miles in a douchebag like manner what he wanted to be done and when it needed to be done by and Miles organized it. But really, what was the difference?

"There are five men in mine, sir." a soldier calls out from off in the yard.

His uncle turns around, a rigid look in his frame and a gruff undertone in his voice as he barks out orders, "Each squad is ready then. Spread out and carefully search your designated sector."

"Sir!"

"Yes, sir!"

Hearing the commotion get louder and louder, Ed looks up from where he was reloading his pistol to see Kimblee and his henchmen beginning to leave the area. He gets up from where he was leaning on the wall and nudges the fake-Al with his foot, "Get up, we have work to do." he orders. He begins to walk away, not waiting for the suit of armour as he does and tries to smother the grin that threatens to burst from his mouth when he hears Cyril panting as he gets up from his spot. He fails. Miserably.

'Al' stood up. "Yes, sir."
Rolling his eyes, Ed lets his metal leg fly and doesn't even try to stop the feeling of joy spreading through him when it lands on the other man's foot. He grins in satisfaction as he hears the man wince and begin to hop around on one foot. The problem with that is that its a suit of armour weighing up to 200 pounds. When a loud **CRASH** resounded throughout the yard, Miles turned to see the suit of armour rolling around on the ground yelling "ow!" while his nephew was bent over, holding his stomach laughing his ass off.

Off in the distance, he could hear Cyril, who was in the suit, whisper-yell at his nephew," Trick, It's hard to move around in here. Couldn't you have made this thing lighter?" In response, his nephew only began to laugh harder as the man continued to roll around helplessly.

His nephew began to wipe the tears currently streaming down his face, "You're strong, you can handle it." Ed snorted as he tried to keep back his laughter. "Come on, Kimblee's watching. Act natural."

"What do you mean 'act natural'?"

"Act like Alphonse, you dolt!" Ed whispered back between laughs as he walked over to his uncle. His uncle raised a perfectly arched eyebrow his way and if he wasn't so busy laughing till his sides hurt, Ed would be awed to think how much his uncle and Riza were alike...with their arched eyebrows and pointed looks that made you feel bad for doing something hilarious.

It wasn't his fault that Cyril was a walking talking source of entertainment. That was just fate.

"Do I even want to know what you told him 'act natural' means?" Miles asked. Ed turns his head and looks at his uncle, seeing the pinched eyes and stress lines and promptly grins to his uncle's immense horror.

"Just watch," Ed giggled. Miles does as he asks with a long-suffering sigh and gazes on with what vaguely looks like horrified eyes to Ed as Cyril finally rolls over onto his knees and pushes himself back up. As he stands up, he turns over to where Kimblee was then whirled around trying to find Ed. Cyril finally finds him and begins **skipping** over to him dramatically like a little princess.

"Oh no no no no n-" Cyril then proceeds to trip over a stray rock and goes crashing into a nearby snow bank.

"Someone help me!" Cyril yells in the highest voice possible, trying to keep up appearances...failing miserably. From beside him, Ed made a wheezing sound as he laughs out loud, tears streaming down his face as he clutches his sides and falls to his knees.

Miles, meanwhile, watches on as his nephew loses his composure and Cyril flays around like a helpless toad and Kimblee watching on in a confused manner, He was even sure he thought he heard the man whisper to his henchmen, "Is this supposed to be some kind of psych-out backstreet Fort Briggs violence?"

As he looks at the chaos surrounding him, Miles sighs and pinches the bridge of his nose," Children, I work with absolute children."
Walking through the deserted and snow-covered streets of Baschool, Ed carefully makes his way down the steps of the stairway they found themselves on as he tries to catch up to his uncle who was just up ahead conversing with another soldier about Kimblee and his men.

"Did you overhear Kimblee say where his squad is searching?" Miles asks his men just as Ed takes his place by his side. He snickers as he hears Cyril panting from behind them, trying to keep up with them all, who in his opinion, were way too fast for his tastes.

The soldier, Benjamin, who played poker like a novice but could drink everyone under the table, turned to look at him. "You saw that shaft in the center of town, didn't you?" Yeah, Ed knew of it, but he wasn't particularly paying attention as he and Scar were dealing with other things at the time when they passed by it. Unbothered by his pensive look, Benjamin continued, "They're headed down there to search the tunnels."

"I heard him mention that he couldn't trust the Northern soldiers, so he's only taking the men he brought with him, sir." Luke, another soldier, piped up.

The four of them were silent as they looked towards Kimblee and his men and his uncle narrowed his eyes with a thoughtful frown set upon his face. "I guess he's figured us out then."

His uncle then sighed, the same one he used when he was done with everyone's shit and Ed just knew that his plans were moving up ahead of schedule if they were making a move against the crimson alchemist this early. "We'll head them off. Position snipers near the opening of the mineshaft."


Ed watched from his uncle's side as the men around them scurried into action, ducking behind corner streets and into dark alleyways as they silently made their way forward to the mine shaft Benjamin had told them about. Cyril was still panting behind them and Ed sighed, whirling around to push the man into the nearest alleyway where Luke was waiting to help him out of his armour.

He made his way back to his uncle side as the two of them trail after Kimblee and his henchmen, "You know what to do?" his uncle asks.

Ed fails to stop the snort he lets out, "What do you take me for?"

His uncle is oddly silent as they continue to stroll leisurely through the streets, the snow softly crunching beneath their feet, "I take you as my nephew. My hot-headed nephew who's too smart for his own good."

"Relax, I'll be fine. You need to have faith, I didn't get to be a state alchemist from my brains alone, I actually have to have talent, ya know?" he teases.

Miles is sombre for a moment before he sighs, running a hand down his face, "I can't believe I'm listening to you for advice; you're aunts gonna kill me when she finds out."

Ed laughs, head tilting back and his glasses catch the light, "That sounds like a you problem, old man!" With that, he jogs forwards to keep up with Kimblee and his men. Miles watches him go with a passive face as his mouth twitches up into what you could call a smile.

"Cheeky brat," he sighs, "He's definitly his mother's son."
Trick would tell, if asked, that he was, by no means, a mean person.

He didn't know how he would describe himself. Compared to others, he was...odd. Ed was what one might call a "Chaotic Good." Ed acts as his conscience directs him with little regard for what others expect of him. He makes his own way, but he's kind and benevolent. He believes in goodness and right but has little use for laws and regulations. He hates it when people try to intimidate others and tell them what to do. He follows his own moral compass, which, although good, may not agree with that of society. And he loves to cause chaos most of all.

He wouldn't say he was exactly like his best friend, he was more subdued and he didn't show his joy of fucking over assholes who deserved it. He was more...subtle. Nevertheless, he could still enjoy a good prank or getting some sort of revenge even if he didn't go as far as his friend. Though, on the other hand, he could still feel twinges of guilt or remorse if he felt like the person deserved it.

Not every sob story moved him like it did Al. He wasn't like Al who was a "Neutral Good" if there ever was one. Who thought the good of everyone he ever met and had hopes that those would see the error of their ways. He is devoted to helping others and tries to help anyone he can, no matter what form they come in if the multiple times he's tried to adopt and bring home stray cats says something.

Trick didn't think good of everyone nor was he hesitant to ignore the signs of something darker going on. If he saw something and thought something else was going on behind the scenes, then it was his responsibility as Ed's intelligence network to find out the truth. Trick was somewhat of a mesh of the two and at times, he was conflicted on how he should feel.

Take what's happening to him right now for example; Madame Christmas just implied to Roy Mustang and his lover Riza Hawkeye that their pseudo-son, his boss and best friend, Edward Elric was not as dead as the two of them had believed.

On one hand, he felt a twinge of joy, just the tiniest of smiles that threatened to break through the carefully immaculate mask that he's built throughout the years as he stares at the parent's faces. They were as Ed would say....priceless. However, he felt a sliver of guilt for bringing up what was clearly a personal and sensitive subject to them. In the end, his better nature won out and he immediately placed on his best sympathetic face that he could muster.

"What, exactly, are you saying?" Roy asked, clearly still shocked if the dazed look in his eyes was anything to go by.

The Madam's nephew,-and wasn't that a shock?- obviously wasn't doing all that well. The bags under his eyes were prominent and his hair was even messier than usual. His shoulders hung low like he lost his will to move one with the same confidence he had before and "Is this some sort of sick joke?" Riza cried out, her voice breaking just a bit.

The 'Hawk's Eye' clearly wasn't much better than her partner. She had hair sticking out from her usually immaculate bun in every which direction and red-rimmed eyes from her crying earlier. Bags
hung awfully low under her now unusually dimmed brown eyes and they were so dark Trick thought they were actually from a black eye rather than lack of sleep. Her hands flayed around her head as she spoke and an urgent tone in her voice, one that was usually kept calm and steady, suggested that she was either about to start screaming or crying again.

Seeing that the Madam was just gonna be blunt, which really wasn't they needed right now if Riza really started to cry. He leaned forward and opened his mouth-

"I'm saying the little brat isn't dead. What are you deaf?" And then the dam burst. Riza began to cry as she leaned into her lover's side who curled his arm protectively around her, glaring at them both as he thought this was some sort of sick joke they were playing on them.

He turned incredulously to the Madam and motioned with his head."What the hell, Chris? I thought we agreed to ease them into this." She rolled her eyes and ignited the lighter in her hand before bringing up to her unlit cigarette and lighting it. She took a long drag and gave him a pointed stare, "You agreed to it. I was getting a drink."

Trick turned back to the two and smiled sweetly," What the Madam means...is that Ed never died in the first place."

"Could you be any vaguer than that?" Chris piped in (un)helpfully from the side.

"Like you were any better you hypocrite!"

"Excuse me, but could someone, anyone really, just tell me what's going on, please?" Trick whips his head back to look at Riza, who was a mess, with her pleading eyes and the unushered tears she was clearly failing to hold back any longer than she was at the moment.

"Ed didn't die when he was swallowed by that homunculus, Gluttony. In fact, he got out perfectly fine. You see, Gluttony is a failed portal of truth, how much did Ed tell you about those?"

Roy and Riza shared a look before Roy spoke up," Not much, he said he didn't want to bother us with irrelevant things."

Trick sighs, "Yeah, that sounds like that numbskull. A Portal of Truth is basically what gives a person the ability to do alchemy," At this, Roy's eyes widened and Riza let out a gasp, "and when you perform human transmutation, it opens up that portal so you can learn all there is to offer in alchemy, all its secrets and all its truths." He waits a few moments to let them process what he's just told them and accepts the glass of brandy Chris offers him, taking a tentative sip and letting his leg bounce up and down as he prepares to continue on with his story.

"But there's a price and Truth, or what you could call god, takes away something as punishment for trying to take what isn't ours. You see, according to him, he gave Alchemy as a test, to see if we humans could ever learn from it, almost like a meaning to life. But alchemy, it was a gift to us and by asking for more, by performing that human transmutation, you tread in his domain. So, he burns you for your insolence, for trying to be what we aren't."

"A god..." Riza finishes.

"Yes, well, when he went through Gluttony's failed Portal of Truth, he met up with Truth again. And well, instead of leaving as he could've, he decided to stop and ask why Truth wasn't trying to stop Father."

Roy snorts at this and when all eyes turn to him he elaborates," Yeah, that sounds like my son."
"Anyways, Truth revealed he can't interfere yadda yadda and said he needed a third party. And Ed being Ed, he volunteered. Now, he knew he couldn't mess with Father's plans as Edward Elric and so, he faked his death, pretended that the Portal of Truth backfired on him when in reality, he was let out elsewhere and came here."

"What do you mean by here?" Roy asks, voice suspicious. From beside him, Chris takes a long drag before blowing out the smoke," He came here Roy-Boy, he was paying attention when you told him if he needed any help outside the military to come here. So, he did. Hell, when you broke the news of his 'death' to your team out front, he was sitting 10 feet away at the bar!" She cackles.

At this, Riza stands up and begins to make her way out," Riza! Riza, honey, where are you going?"

She turns and gives him a look he knows too well by this point; it was the "you're a dumbass Roy" look™.

"What does it look like I'm doing; I'm going to find my son!"

"Check the entrance for tracks in the snow. We'll follow them in if you find multiple sets." Kimblee tells his henchmen who then proceed to salute him.

"Yes, sir." They reply in a uniform fashion. Ed slowly makes his way out into the yard, making sure not to look over where his uncle and the others were preparing to snipe Kimblee out of the picture. It wouldn't do for him to give up their position. He had a role to play and he was gonna make it sell.

Kimblee turned around and didn't bother to hide the surprise of seeing him there, "What are you doing here Lt. Col Mors?"

"The major asked me to see if you needed any help. He and the others are off checking the other shaft but he saw you only had your two bodyguards and thought you could use a hand." His easy-going smile was threatening to break any moment now, not that Kimblee would be able to tell. No, Ed may be rusty after years of not using it, but he still knew how to lie. And lie he would.

Kimblee gave a sinister chuckle, "Oh really? Major Miles oh so graciously lent me your expertise? Like I would believe that! He's threatened me before and even if he really had sent you to help out of the goodness of his heart, I wouldn't trust you to help in a million years."

Ed ground his teeth because really, he and his uncle were too alike for this to work. "The mere fact that you're stopping me is proof that we're in the right place. Now I know that they're down there."

"And how is that? Look, I wanna catch Scar just--" Ed was interrupted before he could even finish lying to the man. Hey, we all knew it was a big fat lie, he wants to kill the fucker, after all, why would he tell the truth?

Kimblee turns with a slight grin on his evil fucking face that it makes Ed want to beat his ass, "You're trying to buy some time for your snipers to get into position, aren't you?"
"Nobody wants to hear you or your nasty ass try to be smart, not that you are, after all, if you were, you'd know its common courtesy to let someone finish the sentence their lying ass is spouting. You're just an asshole otherwise, but then again, nothing's new there, is it?"

"So, you admit it?" Kimblee asks a big ass creepy grin taking over his face slowly but surely.

"Admit what?"

"That you were lying to me?"

Ed looks at him as a vein begins to throb in his forehead, "Is that the only thing your dumbass got from my rant?"

Kimblee ignores him in favour of grinning maniacally and raising his palms up into the air, threatening to use his alchemy. "Oh shit," Ed mutters as he watches Kimblee push his palms into the snow.

Without warning, red alchemical light sprung up and around the area and Ed impulsively covers his eyes as the lights threaten to blind him. It's when a sizzling noise resounds through the area that Ed whips his head up in horror to see Kimblee's evil grin before a BOOM explodes through the area. Snow and rubble are thrown outwards in any which direction as the explosion causes a smokescreen to cover the vicinity. Ed coughs as he waves his hands trying to clear the smokescreen as he desperately searches for Kimblee. "Damn it!"

Finally, the smoke clears enough for him to catch sight of the man trying to make a break for it in the mineshaft., "Kimblee!" Ed shouted angrily right before Kimblee went through the door. Said man paused in his steps before turning back to smirk cruelly at the raging blonde before him.

"Your fake Michael Jackson looking ass better start running because I'm about to whoop it!"

Kimblee merely tipped his hat and began to slide back on the tips of his toes as he steadily disappears back into the mineshaft like the asshole he was.

Ed made an angry noise in the back of his throat as he began to move forward into the smoke screen, "Son of a--". He was promptly cut off when a slicing noise echoed through the yard and he fell quiet as he stared around, searching for the culprit as he kept his guard up. He started to turn in surprise when a fist came out of the smoke and just barely got his arms crossed in front of his face to block the fist. He looked down at the fist, finding it to be a furred...paw? He narrowed his eyes as he 'tched' in disgust, "Chimeras! I should've known."

He locked the hand between his arms and using the advantage of his automail arm, twisted it harshly, not caring when the low growl turned into a whining yelp and pulled with all his might. The chimera which looked like a lion came tumbling out of the smoke as he went sailing over Ed's body. The lion quickly recovered however as he landed on all fours before backing up into the smoke again. "Damn you, Kimblee!"

"I can't see anything. On the bright side, they can't see me either. The odds are--" A hand came flying through the smoke and grabbed Ed around the throat. Immediately, Ed started to flay around as he was lifted up and into the air, eventually latching his hands onto the wrist of the lion with his metal arm, "There's no point in trying to run, Trick. You can't hide from us here. We may not see you, but we can smell you!"

He glares at Heinkel through his slightly fogged glasses as he manages to speak out in butchered words, "Y-you should know better!" He could hear more than he could see the confused feeling Heinkel must have been feeling as Ed slams his automail arm hard onto the chimera's forearm,
making him cry out in pain and in the process, release his grip enough for Ed to swing back and kick him in the chest. The lion chimera goes flying through the air and into a nearby snowbank. "That that just isn't my style, fuckers!"

Ed landed in a crouch and just managed to raise his arms in an x above his head as Darius slammed his arms down on his head. Ed places his hands on the ground before he swipes his leg and catches Darius in his trap. He sends the gorilla looking fucker flying into the same snowbank at Heinkel and judging by the pained yell, right onto of Heinkel.

"Trick!" his uncle calls out from beyond the smoke screen, distracting Ed enough that Heinkel is able to get a kick in, sending him sprawling to the ground. "What's going on in there?" Ed opens his eyes to see Darius coming up from above with a kick that would really, really hurt. "Trick," Miles snapped demandingly. "Answer me!"

Eyes widening, he rolls over and barely manages to miss the kick that creates a small indent where Ed previously was. He looks up at the chimera with wide eyes as he calls out to his uncle with a slight undertone of panic in his voice, "Kinda busy sir!"

"Don't give me that bullshit!" his uncle shouts at him angrily as Ed gets up and blocks a kick from Heinkel and then narrowly misses a punch aimed for his head. He continues to back up closer and closer to the open space of the mineshaft as he

"These guys are chimeras and they know how to fight in low visibility," Ed yells back. "Stay out of here, trust me--" Ed steps back onto a piece of snow that quickly breaks away, a small scream leaving his mouth as he begins to free fall into the mineshaft. Before he can even register anything else, he slams into a snow-covered wooden shed and immediately cries out in pain as the roof he slammed into breaks under his weight.

He falls through and lands with a deep THUD the echoes throughout the mine, "Ow!" He moans as he lowered his automail leg. "Falling like that's going to stunt my growth even more!" He sits up, grabbing his head as he does, and looks around the shed he fell through. His eyes catch the sight of a wooden box off in the corner.

"Dynamite, huh? There's one perk to fighting in a mine."

Hearing a soft crunch from behind him, Ed whirled his head to catch sight of the two chimeras who were crouched down in the snow behind them. They stood up and Ed then dramatically showcased the dynamite in his hands like a spread of jewels or a holy grail. Well, considering what was about to happen, he could consider it a holy grail. "Whoa, you might wanna keep your distance, guys. These aren't exactly cigars I'm holding."

"You idiot!" Darius said while he laughed.

"That stuff isn't gonna do you any good. It's too damp." Heinkel added with his own laugh.

Ed chuckled. "You sure about that? Do you happen to know what dynamite's made of?"

The two chimeras shared a look with one another before looking back at Ed with a questioning look in their eyes, "It's Nitro Glycerin, isn't it?" Heinkel asked.

"And Nitro Glycol. And there's sawdust. Isn't there Ammonium Nitride in it, too?" Darius added.

"Yes, there is," Ed replies cryptically as the two chimeras turned to look at him. "And what's Ammonium Nitride made out of?"
"That's easy. Nitric Acid and Ammonia." Heinkel said. It then dawns on the two, a horrified look passing through their faces as they turned to look over at Ed. Ed, who by this point, has turned back to them with a nose plug in his nose. He grinned evilly with a chuckle as he raised a hand before the two chimeras.

"Hold on you!"

"Damn you!"

All that was seen afterwards was a blue alchemical light before smoke rapidly filled the area, covering all the occupants in it as Ed's cackles echoed through the mineshaft causing Kimblee to start making his way back to see what was going on.

"Ugh, what's that disgusting smell?" Kimblee demanded as he came upon them all.

"It's Ammonia," Ed explained as he stood up. "They're downsized to having a sharp nose. I doubt they'll be of much use to you now."

Kimblee smirked. "Your attitude changed rather quickly now that I've lost my hostage." He said as footsteps were heard. Ed was staring at Kimblee in determination as he walked towards him.

"What'd you expect to happen, dumbass?"

"Let's make this easy. All I want here is for you to tell me everything you know." Ed said as he came to a stop and faced the smirking crimson alchemist. He let himself fall into his preferred stance and watched at the man simply raised an eyebrow at him, "Oh, is that all you want from me? I just got out of the hospital and I don't feel like getting banged up fighting a youngster like you." Kimblee starting searching in his pocket. "Not to mention that I really don't have the time either."

Ed looked up in surprise. Why? Because in Kimblee's hand, for all to see, was the Philosopher's Stone. "I guess I'll have to speed things up with this." the man remarked haughtily. Ed eyed the stone, 'At least I won't have to search for it now.'

Already in a fighting stance, with Kimblee standing calmly in front of him, holding the stone up, Ed began to run towards the man which seemed to shock the man for some reason. He moved to punch Ed, but Ed dodged and circled around him. Kimblee looked over his shoulder just as Ed got there in surprise. 'He's fast.' Ed threw his leg up and kicked Kimblee's arm up. In one short move, the stone went flying out of his hand and over an opening of the mineshaft where it fell down. It continued to glisten as it fell into the depths of the darkened mineshaft.

"Too slow!" Ed taunted as he whipped out his pistol and shot at Kimblee who was in the process of trying to transmute with the now gone stone. A shocked Kimblee looked down at his hand where a bullet hole was shown to have gone through the middle of his palm, leaving a massive gaping wound.

Ed had expected many things now that he had done this, for one; 'He's lost his Stone and he can't transmute now.' was the general tone. And he'd be right in this case.
Two; he expected the bastard to be on the ground crying his ass off. This was not the case.

In fact, Kimblee, being the psychopath Ed knew he was, simply started laughing like crazy. Full-blown laughter as he stares at his hand and looks at it as if it were a simple paper cut. "Did you really think this would stop me? Me? You give yourself too much credit!"

With that, Kimblee opened his mouth and beneath his tongue, a glistening stone lay. Ed's eyes widened in horror; how could he be so stupid? Ed felt a growing terror build up in his chest from somewhere deep down as the Philosopher's stone fell from the man's mouth. An absolute silence overtakes his world. He can't hear anything outside the sudden, roaring rush in his ears. The silence had turned into a weapon. A bomb that goes off in his ears continuously, one after another, uncaring for the distress he's in or the fact that this is it.

The never-ending static is like a battering ram against his eardrums and the room spins, slowing down to an almost stop as Ed pushes his body forwards, ice in his veins and fear gripping his heart in a vice-like embrace, unwilling to let it go because this shouldn't be happening. He's only a few feet away from the man when the world suddenly speeds up and the stone hits the fucker's, outstretched palm. And he cackles.

Kimblee whip's his head down to look at Ed with a maniacal grin overtaking his features, "Too slow!" as a red alchemical light overtakes his vision.

And Ed?

The last thing Ed hears is the resounding BOOM as Kimblee sends the mineshift crumbling down into no more than rubble.

Chapter End Notes

(1) for Ed's laugh, this is what it sounds like - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U1UtRnGn5hc
It was quiet.

Still.

A type of calm he wasn't used to. It was the same kind of quiet he heard before something bad happened, a stillness that forebode the end.

He knew this feeling well. It was something he could say he was familiar with. That sense of *wrongness*. A type of feeling that no one could fix. Not his mother, not Granny Pinako, not Al or Uncle Miles or Roy and Riza. Not even V. It was a type of wrong that could never be undone.

*And it terrified him.*

It's all he could hear. A silence that overtook his ears and filled his existence with a sense of nothingness. It permeated the room, taking up every single nook and cranny that it could find.

Then he heard it. It was faint but it was there.
He opened his eyes, one of his contacts had fallen out, leaving his left eye a deep navy blue while his right was back to its molten gold. His glasses were gone. He didn't even know what happened to them. That sucked. They were kinda growing on him after all this time. He blinked slowly shaking his head as he did.

It was getting louder.

The ringing.

It was like a bomb, a bomb that went off in his ears over and over and over again and he closed his eyes in pain. It was getting to be too much. Flashes of memories, of events, of bright lights, of noises and of people ran through his mind a million miles an hour. Faces, eyes brights and smiles wide as they flashed through his mind.

Al...

Louder and louder. They went off without a care and Ed shook his head as they echoed through his ears. He could see it clearly; the same golden eyes as his. His soft fluffy hair that mom used to ruffle. That laugh- the one filled with such joy and warmth. How trusting he was of a brother who fucked up everything he touched.

Teacher...

A smiling woman, with hair as dark as her eyes and temper as bad as his own. She shouldn't remind him of his mother, but she did. She was. His mother that is. She was the mother they needed when their own died.

She kissed them when they cried and stayed up when the nightmares got to be too much. She was also his father at the same time. Supporting his thirst of knowledge, his want of alchemy, his teacher to help him when it all got jumbled together.

A support system of a father they didn't have wrapped in the maternal ways of the mother that was forcibly taken from them.

Winry...

It wouldn't stop. The ringing. Just kept getting louder and louder and louder until all he could hear was the silence. He felt dizzy and the pounding in his chest matched the ringing in his ears.

Blonde hair flashed behind his eyes, of a girl with a smile big enough for the both of them and eyes that were always gleaming in the light. So happy to see him. Always so god damn happy to see him.

A fuck up.

A dog of a military that planned to kill every single person in the country they swore to protect with their lives.

A brother who failed to protect what mattered most to him.

A son that failed to see the signs.

A student that failed to follow what rules his teacher set out for them.

A soldier who refused to kill or follow orders.

What a joke.
What a joke he was.

*Riza...*

Tears welled up in his eyes and he slammed his fist into the ground. His vision went blurry and that's when he felt it. He breathed in and there! Right there! A sharp pain travelled up his spine, causing him to scream out in pain. It hurt so god damn much! Why did it hurt? It was like his body was on fire, lighting his nerves in a burning inferno and it felt like he was being burned alive.

He didn't know why he looked. But he did. Maybe it was the thirst of knowledge all alchemists had. Maybe it was that curiosity all teenagers are said to have. Or maybe it was because he was a dumbass.

He didn't want to look and he didn't know why he did, but Ed slowly turned his head, ignoring the strain he felt on his back as he did and froze at what he saw. He closed his eyes and shook his head, hair flying from his bun as he did.

"No no no no no no, this cannot be happe-" he coughed.

No, he didn't 'cough'. That was too mild. **He choked.** He choked and he hacked as his body convulsed and blood spilt from his lips like a waterfall.

Utter terror runs up his spine and agony blossoms from his side as he continued to choke on his own blood. His throat burned, it felt like it was choking him inside out as he coughed out the blood running through his veins. He snaps his eyes shut, willing them to subside and bends his head down as he tries to breathes. Tries to think but he can't. He can't because its- it's too much! It's too much and it's not enough and its everything in between and beyond.

A few strands framed his face, soaking up the blood he's smeared on them and he reached up to wipe them away. His eyes open and just stares.

He stares.

At the pool of blood that just *drips drips drips* like a leaky faucet to that dirty dust-covered ground. He stares. Because he's mesmerized. It was so red. So red and so much and then it was too much and that ringing is like a battering ram and he just-

**He screams.**

He screams because he can. Because it's all he can do and it's all he feels and it's all he ever wants to show the world if there was ever a chance to do so.

He screams because it's unbearable. An agony unlike any other. His skin was on fire and his nerves burned in a never-ending flame. Electricity trails through his body, causing his muscles to spasm and cry out in rage and ice fills his veins. His ears pop with every bomb that goes off in his head and his heart *pounds thumps beats* in his chest like a battering ram and its too much.

*It's too much.*

His eyes snap shut and his mind flashes to warm brown eyes and small smiles and soft kisses and hugs that made him feel safe inside and he doesn't realize he's crying until the first tears hit his hand. They soak into his skin, hot tears of pure anguish and self-loathing, and he wishes he couldn't feel anything.

*He wishes he couldn't feel a damn thing.*
A growl slips through his lips and his fist slams into the concrete, his skin splitting and the blood flowing as he pounds his fist over and over and over again. He stains the floor, a trickle of blood runs from him, joining the steadily growing pool from beneath his wound.

"I'm such a fucking joke..." he mumbles. "I'm so fucking useless...I hate it. I hate it. I hate it. I HATE IT!" In one swift movement, he claps his hands and swipes his blade arm across the beam.

He heaves as the weight of the beam is cut in half, the other side of it clattering to the ground nearby. A new type of pain trails up his body, engulfing him in its embrace and he wishes he wasn't so weak.

He doesn't want to be so weak.

He hates it. He hates it more than that bastard Hohenheim. He hates it more than his mother leaving him as she did. He hates it more than how she didn't tell them of her family.

And for what? A disagreement?

For an argument that was so petty and insignificant that she'd leave her only children alone in the world?

He had felt so alone for so many years...to find out this whole mess could've been avoided if she had picked up a phone and talked to his grandmother...maybe he and Al wouldn't have been alone...maybe he wouldn't have convinced Al to do what they did that night.

Maybe Al would've been whole then.

Roy...

But no, that wasn't it, was it?

Because it wouldn't have changed a damn thing. He still would've been angry and he still would've thought of it and Al would still agree because he cared. He cared way damn too much and it didn't change a fucking thing.

Except...

He wouldn't have Winry, who looks at him like he hung the stars, moon and sun by himself for her. Who smiles when he growls and tells her not to be an idiot. Who throws wrenches at him when she's done with his bullshit and stays up countless hours to build him only the best automail.

He wouldn't have Granny Pinako who he learned his more creative swear words from. Who was so petty that she'd fight with a traumatized kid and gloat when she won. Who spent hours upon hours with him when he was an idiot and pushed himself to recover within a year. Who charged him nothing for the first 5 years until he could pay her back.

He would never have Teacher or Sig. Teacher who took the place as his and Al's mother, father and alchemy teacher all at once and never complained. Who loved them more than she did herself and who only had two rules that they broke and still held them in her arms. And Sig who was always supportive of them and never judged.

He wouldn't have Fuery who would send him shy smiles anytime Ed talked to him, who had snuck Black Hayate into command and who reminded him of Al with his gentle tones and acts of kindness.

He wouldn't have Havoc who calls him chief with such genuine respect and never treats him any differently. Who smokes when he's supposed to be working and who makes such bad jokes he can't
help but laugh at them.

He wouldn't have Falman who seemed to make exceptions when it came to his no-nonsense attitude and could recite any rule for Ed when he was arguing with the Colonel Bastard.

He wouldn't have Breda who offers his food whenever he found himself in the office, who remembers the way he would always give his silent support against the Fuhrer Bastard whenever the bastards back was turned. Who helped him fact check and give him a hand in the library.

He wouldn't have Chris or V or any of the girls, his sisters who teased him, who loved him and cared for him despite not knowing who he really was. Chris who did what he asked with no questions and the utmost faith.

He wouldn't have Riza, his mom, who taught him how to shoot his first gun and who treats him and Al as her own children. The children she can never have. Who hugs him when he needs it, gives him advice when he asks and kisses his forehead goodnight every time he leaves.

He wouldn't have his Uncle Miles or Armstrong who supported him when he came to Fort Briggs, who never doubted him when he told them the whole truth, who he grew to see as other parental figures, who gave him and Al the chance at knowing their own flesh and blood relatives.

But most of all, he wouldn't have Roy. Who looks at him with a smirk so smug and eyes so dark that it was unbelievable how expressive they were, how much emotion he showed. Who makes short jokes just so he can rile him up and watch on with fond eyes. Who gave him comfort when he needed it, who hugged him, watched out for him and yelled at him when he was being a dumbass.

Who gets so stressed with his worry over Ed's well-being that he looks at him and he doesn't need much to believe Roy was his dad.

**His dad.**

*His dad who loved him, who supported him, who inspired him, who never judged.*

"Roy's my dad, Riza's my mom, Teacher is both, Al's my brother, V's my sister, Miles is my Uncle, Armstrong's my aunt, Chris and Granny are my grandmas, Winry's my best friend and I won't make her cry. Especially not over something this stupid!" He shouts as he claps his hands and a small boom is heard as the rubble shifts to release the chimera from its hold.

"Oi!" he calls."You two!"

"Hey, kid, you still alive?" Darius asked as he and Heinkel started to make their way towards him. "What made you decide to rescue us?"

"You're more injured than we are," Heinkel added.

Ed looked up at them, his mismatched eyes hazy in the wake of his pain, "Don't get the…wrong idea." He replied while breathing heavily. "I can't pull this out of my stomach on my own…I could use…a little bit of help."

"We were enemies just five minutes ago, and now you're asking us to save your life?" Darius asked.

"Yeah…basically," Ed replied.

The two chimeras share a look, "Well, it's not like we were given orders to kill you." Darius told him. "Come on."
"You know, kid, you're gonna bleed to death pretty quickly once I pull this out." The chimera told him as he helped him sit up. Ed panted already feeling the strain on his body at this point.

"Not if I heal it." He grunted and wiggled back in preparation. "As soon as it's out of me, I'll close up the wound…with alchemy."

"What?" Darius demanded.

"Have you ever performed any kind of medical alchemy before? Wait, are you even an alchemist?" Heinkel asked as Ed straightened his leg out in front of him and leaned farther back against Darius's supporting body.

"Sort of," Ed replied. "I did some research on it…when I tried human transmutation."

"Just some research?" Darius suggested. "Your guts have got to be all messed up. You're gonna need a Philosopher's Stone to make this work."

Ed bit his lip, holding back his groan of pain and opened his mismatched eyes to stare at the two chimeras before him, "I'm gonna have to use my own life force… the same way I would use a stone."

"It will probably take a few years off my lifespan though." Ed continued.

"You positive?" Heinkel asked.

"I don't really have time to think about it," Ed said. "If this is really what showing mercy is going to cost me, then I'm going to have to learn to pay the price, right?"

Heinkel sighed and walked in front of him as he grabbed the support beam. "I don't know what you're talking about, but it sounds like you're sure."

"Ready?"

The last thing Ed remembers is the sounds of screams and the bright blue lights as his alchemy worked its magic on his damaged body.

Sofia Alberico knew she wasn't perfect.

Ever since she was a child, her family expected the best. The best hair, the best smile, the best clothes and the perfect little girl with perfect grades and a perfect little family. They expected her to not talk unless spoken too, to listen when they told her something and to always, no matter what, be perfect.

The 'or else' her father left out hadn't needed to be said for her to know it was there. Her older brothers had no trouble with following orders. They were so monotone, so monochromatic and they were so eager to please their parents that they lost themselves along the way.

It's not that they were unkind or mean to her, but after many years, she had come to realize that they
took the brunt of their father's anger and expectations so she didn't have to. And for that, she was grateful.

When she was old enough to realize that they had lives before the expectations; that they had given up on their hopes and dreams, their choice of friends and given up any choice they might have had to please their father, she had decided. She wouldn't be like them – she would be free. She would be the freest girl there ever was and nothing would shackle her down.

It's not like her father cared. He didn't even want her. **He** had 3 perfect sons already; what use would he have for a girl? Not only that but a disobedient girl who wouldn't follow his rules or listen to a word he said.

He was not a kind man and he didn't entirely love their mother; that much she knew. From the red-rimmed eyes, the bruises her mother tried to cover up and the shouting matches her parents got into-well, it didn't take a genius to guess what was happening.

Sofia knew from a young age that her mother was a very beautiful woman. Her mother, Esmeralda Alberico, was known for her beauty. She was a unique character in their sleepy little town. She had beautiful upturned eyes, with a startlingly shade of green so vivid that it put the emeralds of her namesake to shame. Her skin was the colour of chocolate, a mocha colour, that held no scars or blemishes. Her hair, so long and silky, fell down her back in gentle waves that blended together in perfect black tresses.

Her father was not a handsome man.

He liked to pretend he was, that he was a kind, handsome, generous man who didn't hit his wife and who let his kids live a life that they wanted. One not lived in fear that they would be next. But he wasn't.

And that wasn't the life she wanted for herself. She didn't want a husband who would try to cage her, she didn't want her kids to blindly follow the orders of a man who can't love and think she was weak and feeble because someone who promised to love and cherish her for the rest of their days was abusing her.

She didn't want to be her mother- only used for her beauty. She wasn't like her. She wouldn't be like her. She refused. She won't be stifled or put down by others because they had already categorized her as a weak housewife from day one.

So she tried her best.

Sofia slowly took over more chores as head of the household in her mother's stead. She'd go into the market and pick up the daily groceries. She'd bargain on milk and bread and find little knick-knacks for her mother to try.

And that's when she saw him. Sofia would tell you if asked, that that was the moment she began to believe in love again. **He** was the reason she knew what love was. How it felt. She hadn't been paying attention, looking through her bag of groceries to check for her list when she bumped into him.

She dropped all her things and had fallen to the ground and looked up when a hand offered itself to her. The sun illuminated him, his white blonde hair practically shining and his eyes, oh his eyes, almost like ice, but most of all; they were smiling. The breath had been knocked out of her instantly.

When was the last time she had seen smiling eyes?
Her fathers, a deep ugly brown, were always angry. It was like a fire burned in them, so hateful, so angry, so spiteful that it made them look black. Her brothers, all light hazels, were so emotionless, there was a spark, but it was dying and it had been so many years since she's seen even a flash. They had their own personalities, but it had been so many years since they've tried to act like themselves around her. Not with their father in the house.

Her mothers were vacant.

Unknowning.

She had been so unhappy, for years they were either glistening with tears or flashing in fear, the pain bleeding through her emerald green eyes like a waterfall. She used to see them smiling, once upon a time, but that was a long time ago and happily ever after's didn't exist in her world. Her father made sure to remind her of that when she got too whimsical for his tastes.

But his? They were smiling. And they were directed at her.

She hadn't noticed it before, but it was like a light had switched, one moment her world was a mess of dull greys and harsh lines of black and murky whites then suddenly, colours burst up from around her.

Since when had the roses looked so red? Was her dress always such a bright yellow? The grass reminded her of her mother's eyes. A world of colour thrived around her and Sofia had spent years unaware until this stranger, this angel her mind whispered, had looked at her and his eyes smiled.

He must have been an angel. His hair, his eyes, his creamy white skin, and those smiling eyes that saved her from a dull world of pain and torment, what else could he be but an angel?

"Are you okay?"

Oh dear heaven above, he had an accent!

"I'm fine, thank you!"

She took his hand and he pulled her up, a big sappy smile on his face, so wide that it made his eyes crinkle and his smiling eyes positively thrived in his happiness, lighting up even more if it was possible. She dusted her dress off and cleared her throat, hoping the blush she could feel rising wouldn't be as noticeable with her darker skin.

He held out his hand again, an offering of friendship and introduction, something she had only seen men do with one another. Women never did it to one another and certainly, it was never offered to them by men. That would be telling them they were equal in each other's eyes. She could already feel the stares. The whispers started to flood her ears and she grabbed his hand, dragging him off to a side street away from prying eyes. She could feel his confused eyes from behind her, he was clearly confused as to what she was doing.

Once she was sure they were safe, she whirled around to looked at him, "You shouldn't offer your hand out to a woman like that, that's declaring them equal to yourself, a man, in your eyes."

She expected him to understand, for this to be some big misunderstanding and it was simply a reflex and that he wouldn't let it happen again. If anything, he got even more confused, his smile turning into a slight pout and dear lord he was adorable she just wanted to kis- No! Stop it Sofia, keep it to yourself.
"But why?"

"What do you mean 'but why'? That's how it is here. Women are seen as inferior, we're not supposed to talk unless spoken too and we shouldn't ever go against the rules they've set up for us. Don't you know this?"

"That's not how it is in my country. Women are seen as equal, sometimes even superior to men. Without them, we wouldn't be here. They are the backbone of our country and keep us together when the winters are tough and the food is scarce. Women are precious. While they may not be as strong physically, they are stronger in ways men are not." He explained.

Sofia looked up at him, this time she was confused as he held out his hand again. "You'll be an outsider even more now...if you do this...are you sure?" she whispers.

He gives her a smile, one so bright and happy and all for her, as he takes her hand in his and says in a low soft tone that sent shivers down her back, "I'm sure."

He raised her hand, still in his much bigger one, and pressed a small kiss onto the back of it, "I am Victor."

"Sofia," she breathes out, her eyes wide and her heart racing, "Alberico. Sofia Alberico." All she can feel is the imprint of his lips still warm on the back of her hand and when he takes her hand in his she feels...happy. For the first time in a long time. For the first time in what seems like forever, Sofia feels happy. So happy that her troubles melt from her mind and her shoulders relax whenever she's with Victor.

She's happy with him. She makes him happy and that makes her happy. He smiles at her, eyes smiling as wide as his mouth and she forgets everything that's wrong with her life.

She finds herself sneaking out each and every day, looking her best and ignoring her brothers questioning gazes.

Cleto, her eldest brother, with his mousy brown hair and eyes as black as her fathers, looks at her with suspicions. He was not unkind, but he was not generous either. He simply didn't know how to be. Years spent under the harsh training of their father had hardened his heart to all but his family. Most didn't understand, but that was okay. She knew he cared. And that was all that mattered.

Raimonda was all easy smiles. Most of the time. He was the second eldest and while he had their mother curly black hair, his mocha coloured eyes and dark skin made him a looker around town. But his eyes, so carefree and happy, would lose their spark whenever their father was around. He had to have a million jokes and smooth voice that could charm anyone if he tried hard enough.

Tore was far too kind for the life of their father. He was closet to their mother before she started to grow more and more scared to be herself. She would teach him about the flowers, sing songs and cared for the animals together. Sofia knew he wanted to run and get away from it all, but he couldn't leave mother. If he was leaving, she knew that either their mother was dead or she was going with
him. He simply loved her too much to leave her behind with their father.

There was nothing she could do. There was nothing any of them could do. So, they resigned themselves to a fate of living in fear, of a life where they would pretend their father didn’t exist and that life was happy.

And life went on.

Her brothers slowly became more and more like soldiers following blindly and her mother slowly turned into a shell of her former self. She was no longer a bright intelligent woman with smiling green eyes, she no longer sang any happy songs or danced. She was like a husk. She flinched away whenever her father was nearby. She had receded to the depths of her mind.

And by the time Sofia was 17 summers, Esmeralda Alberico had killed herself.

It was Sofia herself who found her.

Her emerald green eyes were glassy and no matter how many times she called out to her mother, she would not answer. Her food laid untouched, just as it had for the past few days.

And on the ground were small glossy black berries.

Her whole world had tilted on its axis and she felt the room spin in her shock. Tears slipped down her cheeks suddenly and splashed upon the cold floor of her mother's room. She backed out of the room and slid down the wall to her knees, silently crying as she did. She looked at her mother's room and saw a single berry in her view.

**She screamed.**

She could vaguely hear the running through the halls of their families ancestral home as she sobbed cried wailed in her sorrow. Cleto was the first to reach her, grabbing her shoulders as he shook her, "Sofia! Answer me, please! What's wrong?"

She only cried as she pointed towards their mother's room her finger shaking as she did. Just then, Tore and Raimonda came skidding around the corner as they reached the two of them." Sorella! What is it?"

"Mama is gone!" she sobs, her chest heaving and her breath coming in short gasps. Her brothers fall silent and Cleto slowly gets up, looking warily at the room before walking into it.

He returns a few moments later, fists clenched and a sad and hurt look in his eyes. "She killed herself..." he mumbles. He paces up and down the hall before punching a hole through the wall."Why would she leave us?!" he asks. His voice is hoarse and deep down, she can tell he's slowly breaking apart. "Just tell me why she would leave us all alone with him...why mama...did you not love us?"

Tore is crying in her arms and out of all the siblings, its Raimonda who is silent."Sorella," he calls out to her."Pack your things. You're leaving. Tonight."

"What?" Cleto asks, the anger in his voice betraying him."Our mother is dead. And all you can think about is sending our baby sister away?"

"You know what father is like! And I for one do not want to see what he might do to her when he finds out mama killed herself just to get away from him!" At this, the anger bleeds from Cleto's eyes and the tension in the room left as quickly as it came.
"She needs to leave town, no, the country. Go pack your things. Get your lover and leave, Sofia. And never look back."

Sofia Alberico is 64 summers when she wakes to the sound of rapid and frantic knocking upon her door.

It has been 47 years since she left her family and country.

The hazy sleep bleeding from her emerald green eyes. She looks to the oaken bedside table to her right and sighs at the numbers glaring back at her from their place on the table.

2:45 AM.

She gets up with a groan and leaves the comfort of her bed, of her husband and all the warmth and love it gives her. Her beloved Viktor calls out to her, "Sofia, darling, come back to bed. Whoever it is can wait."

A small smile graces her tired and wrinkled face, her laugh lines twitched up as she walked over to her husband's side and presses a kiss to his lips, her hands clasped in his as she does. "I'll only be a moment, mio angelo."

With that, she leaves the comfort of her room and walks down the hall, careful to not wake her family, passing the doors decorated in children's drawings and a doorway that she once used to mark her children's heights as they grew.

She goes down her staircase slowly, step by step, each one creaking as she makes her way to the large wooden door, candle in hand and a bathrobe she threw on haphazardly when she first woke. Sofia opens the door, her mouth open to reprimand whoever was bothering her so late at night when she sees two men carrying a young soldier.

A young soldier who was bleeding from his abdomen. Before she can even speak, the blonde man interrupts her," Are you Dr.Alberico?"

She blinks, taken aback, "Yes, but how did you even find me? I haven't practiced medicine for a long time."

"The kid told us. He refuses to go to a hospital and given the recent events, I'd agree with him. Can you help us?"

She doesn't know why, but she took one look at the 'kid' and stops herself. She stops herself from saying no. She stops herself from saying no to what is clearly on the run soldiers.

Maybe it was the way he looked so young, so misplaced in the world of the military or maybe it was his face. His face that was so familiar that it made her pause. It made her second guess herself. She shouldn't say yes. She shouldn't because she hasn't practiced medicine since her darling Patrizia left, finding no interest in something she once loved.
Because how could she find joy when her life held no joy in it?

But for whatever reason, she took one look at his face and finds herself saying "Yes."

Chapter End Notes

NOTE PLEASE READ SO CHAPTER WILL MAKE SENSE:

The berries I was talking about are Nightshade berries or the berries from a Belladonna plant. Just 2-4 can kill a child but 10-20 can kill an adult. Esmerelda has a beautiful garden which has a nightshade plant in it and each day while Tore or Sofia would take her out to walk around it, she'd grab a couple until she had enough to kill herself with.

The mental, physical and emotional abuse of her husband was enough for her to break and it was enough that she'd rather end it all. Sofia lied to her children, saying her parents, their grandparents, had forbidden the marriage of her and Viktor because to her, it was better than admitting her father abused them so much that it drove her mother to kill herself.

The FMAB takes place in the 1940s during the whole Father incident(or is based on the 1940s if you will)and by using the timeline they've so graciously given me, I can pinpoint when Sofia Alberico was born, which is the year 1866. She's 18 when she has Candia, and 12 years after she runs away, has Trisha. 18 years later, Trisha runs away, and 3 years later Ed is born. Skip 15 years and we're up to speed to the current timeline of the story.
A Shake-Up

Chapter Summary

Ed didn't know how he got into this mess.

Chapter Notes

I'm so sorry that I'm late again! You all know I've been working at my COOP placement and this week I did the bakery, so I was up early and left late. I got home yesterday and I just wanted to sleep. So I did...until 10:00 am where I then got off my ass, made a cup of tea and started this! Hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

It was a nightmare.

That much he was sure.

It had to be, otherwise, he'd have to admit to the living hell he's found himself in. How did it ever come to this? It was supposed to be a simple routine mission; isolate the target, kill him, dispose of the body and have Northern Command relay the accident back to Central Command.

Instead, it all went wrong.

**All horribly wrong.**

Nothing could have prepared him for the horror of that day. It felt like his heart had been ripped out and a growing terror filled him, threatening to consume him as he looked below at the carnage before him.

It shouldn't have happened like this. None of it should. But it had. It did. And it all happened because he wasn't careful enough.

**First:** the plan to kill that homicidal maniac Kimblee failed.

No, that wasn't right. It didn't fail. It got ripped to shreds, caught on fire only for a shit storm the likes they hadn't ever seen before to rain down upon them for their insolence just for it all to blow up in their miserable faces.
So no, the plan didn't just fail.

**It burned to the ground.**

He could still hear it. Could still see it, could still feel it and *it haunted him.*

When he saw the smoke come from the mine and coughed up the smoke that invaded his lungs and stood up on shaky feet as the very earth rumbled from beneath them, Miles felt a fear he had never known before.

He didn't have kids.

Valentina was so free-spirited and she couldn't even choose a career that lasted longer than a year. She wanted to try them all because she couldn't think of just trying one. To her, having one thing alone was boring. Miles was the exception, of course. His wife was different.

At 19, she managed to convince her mother, who was still reeling the loss of her second youngest leaving in the dead of night, to let her go backpacking across the country. Of course, it took 3 months of crying, screaming and pleading to let it happen, but she did it.

She had gone backpacking and came back 2 years later with a healthy tan from her time near the border between the Great Dessert and Amestris. She met so many new people, explored the country that kept her family safe for so many years and came back happier than before.

But when he looked her in the eyes as he gave her a hug and joined them for a welcome back party the night she came home, he noticed it.

A haunting shadow lingered in her eyes.

Never there but just quite.

Something you wouldn't notice when you looked at her, but if you knew what you were looking for, you could find it.

It had troubled him because it was a look only soldiers had. Something he saw every time he looked in the mirror when he woke up. And it shouldn't have been in her eyes. Never hers. But they were. Something happened when she came back from her trip around the country and Miles wouldn't have admitted it then, but he had wanted to wrap her up in his arms and never let go.

She would later admit to him, on a quiet night when the moon was up high in the sky and the wind was howling, that she had crossed the border into Aerugo. That she had gone to the town where her mother was supposedly from and found the house she and her brothers had grown up in. Never to be used again. It was a landmark now.

A landmark to the murder and tragedy of a family that was evidently hers but one she didn't know anything about.

She had started crying by then and explained to his growing horror of the disaster her parents hadn't told them. Refused to tell them. According to what her parents had told her, they met in Aerugo and fell in love. The marriage was forbidden by her parents and they eloped, running away to Amestris, evidently moving around to keep their new family safe from hers.

When Valentina told him the true story, Miles would come to realize the only part of the fairy tale Sofia and Viktor Alberico had told their children that was true was the last part. Moving around to keep them all safe. But not from being torn apart, but from being killed.
Esmeralda Alberico killing herself from years of physical and emotional abuse kick-started the whole thing.

After that, her husband came home to find her dead and lost it. Nero Alberico was evidently not a kind man and he certainly had a temper. That would later become an understatement. The man came home already raving drunk to find his wife dead. He burned the house with his wife's body and his children still inside.

Nero had escaped in the panic and set out for Amestris where he was caught a year an a half later trying to break into a house in Resemboole. He had been seen around the town for up to month prior looking around for someone. People reported seeing him deranged and usually drunk. The house belonged to a couple with a young child.

They were saved only by the fact that they were having dinner down the street with the local mechanic, Pinako Rockbell. He was arrested that night and returned to Aeurgo where he was executed by the state for his crimes.

They never found the bodies of any of his children.

It had frightened Valentina. It broke her heart that it wasn't a fairy tale romance that led her parents to Amestris, but because her grandfather had tried to kill them all. Had probably killed her uncles. Had caused her grandmother so much pain and suffering that she killed herself to escape him.

For the first few months after she returned, Valentina Alberico was haunted by the truth of her family's past. Miles tried to help her the best he could. And in that time they grew closer. Eventually, they did get married and the subject of children came up. Valentina was still haunted by the wrongdoings of the Alberico family and would avoid the question when he asked.

Miles respected her decision. If she wasn’t ready, he would wait. But it did get lonely. Over the years, watching them all get married one by one and have children. He had nieces and nephews but never any children of his own. It was hard. Valentina was still so scared she’d mess it up somehow and Miles knew that even he had his doubts.

How could two people who were so broken ever muster enough love and care for children?

The answer wasn’t easy but in some ways it was: they didn’t know.

So when he met Ed, then Trick, and came to see him as the son he and Valentina were too scared to have. And when he revealed himself to be Ed, to be his nephew, it didn’t change his feelings nor his resolve. It was time to stop being scared. He knew then and there when Trick became Ed who became his nephew and pseudo son, that it was time. It was time to take to Valentina about it.

It was time to try for the happiness they’ve wanted for so long.

And then Baschool happened.

That fear that had gripped him for so long came back. It wasn't a type of fear most had. It wasn't a type of fear one felt when they were facing death. No, it was worse than that. To care for someone more than yourself was often a hard thing to do. You had to be selfless to do so and unfortunately, not many humans did so. To move without thinking. To act in defiance of odds for another human being was hard. But for parents, for those who decided to have children whether they be biological or not, it wasn't as hard.

They did it to protect something- no, someone that they viewed to be more precious than their own lives.
Miles hadn't understood this.

His own grandfather went back to the Holy Land of their people in their greatest times of need and died for his efforts. His mother was a kind and caring woman despite how many looked at her for her eyes and skin rather than her soul. At the time, they had lived in a little town about an hour from North City and were close to the mountain that Fort Briggs occupied.

And when Drachman spies had gotten through Fort Briggs and rained hell down upon his little town with their bombs and their guns, she had shielded him from a blast. He hadn't understood then why she hadn't tried to save them both.

He was four years old when he became an orphan.

Miles was alone in his empty house, hiding under the table, with his mother's body 3 feet from him and a hole that fell through the roof. Bullet holes littered the walls and burn marks scorched the paint that had once been a daisy yellow and a sky blue. His toys burned, the pictures shot up and his mother died in a pool of her own blood.

His father never came home.

He died fighting the invading Drachman's and had inspired Miles himself to join. And when the grandmother he didn't know came down from North City to come to see if they were alive, he felt even lonelier. Abandoned by the parents that were supposed to protect him. He was thrust into a new home and it hadn't felt like he was safe again until he met Candia and thus, the Albericos.

They were just like him.

His grandmother tried, but she didn't understand. She couldn't understand to be a child from two worlds. She was Amestrian and his father's mother. And she wasn't his parents. His parents died protecting him. And until now, he hadn't understood what it felt like.

What it feels like.

That ever-gripping fear that nothing would ever be okay again. An overwhelming sense of grief and anguish had fallen over him like water had been dumped over his head. A shiver had run up his spine and he blinked back tears at the thoughts he had when he heard that explosion. When he felt the tremors rocking through the earth. When he inhaled that smoke.

Ed was missing.

Gone.

Presumed dead

And suddenly, Miles felt like every other person in Amestris that was close to that wonderfully bright boy with hair spun from the sun and eyes a gold molten when he supposedly died. Miles felt true fear grip him when that explosion rang true around the abandoned mining town.

Then he had gone back to the Fort with a heavy heart to discover something absolutely disheartening.

Second: his general, the one who backed him no matter what colour skin or eyes he had, was sent back to Central and was replaced by a puppet head.

A puppet figure who took one look at Miles and sneered. He saw his skin and his hair and the
contempt filled his eyes before Miles had even opened his mouth. He took one look at him and his mixed heritage and the Major General didn't even bother to hide the scorn that practically dripped from his face.

And when the Northern Command relay officer introduced them, a Captain Simmons, Gartner ignored his words and announced loudly for them all to hear, "I thought Order 3066 was still in effect?"

He had felt the blood freeze in his veins and he saw all those around him, his soldiers, his comrades, his friends and family, stiffen at this general's words. Shoulders tense and eyes hardened at the man who would dare threaten there Major. The man who was second place to only their general, who this man this phony was sent to replace.

The Major General Gartner didn't help as he continued to alienate every single soldier, no matter if they were man or woman, with his hate-filled words and the contempt written plain as day across his face every time he looked at a Fort Briggs soldier and found a fault he didn't like or a flaw that was uncontrollable.

He who would look at Buccaneer and his size and his automail and find fault with them. Who called him an unintelligent brute and a cripple. He'd mention in passing that he didn't know that they were so close with Xing now that they'd accept their illegal aliens into the military. His next comment would've probably made Ed strangle the man. Buccaneer might've even helped him.

"Then again, look at Mustang. An alien if I ever saw one. Don't know what the Furher was thinking when he accepted that Xingese son of a whore into the alchemist program."

Miles genuinely believed that his nephew would've killed the general if he caught him saying that in front of him. No, not even in front of him. In the fort itself. Ed was fiercely protective of the Flame Alchemist and his Hawk's Eye. Sometimes just as protective as he was of Al and Winry. And that told Miles that he could trust those two.

Gaertner continued to insult the soldiers and works of Fort Briggs. And each word sent a blinding rage through Miles. His shoulders tenses, his eyes narrowed and his fists clenched in his anger. A white fury shot through him and Miles wondered why.

Why was he more angry at the words of an Amestrian man to these soldiers than to the bombs and gunfire of a thousand soldiers to his own people, his own flesh and blood? Because they were his family.

They were his. His soldiers, his comrades, his friends, his family. They were the ones who accepted his red eyes and dark skin when the rest of Amestris couldn't. They took one look at him and smiled and laughed and cried with him.

They were the soldiers of Fort Briggs.

And some asshole from Central Command wasn't going to change anything.

Miles slowly became more and more protective of his soldiers with every insult that flung from the General's mouth and every sneer he didn't bother to hide. He had to hold back Patricia from killing that man when he told her, she who looked sweet but could probably send them all on their asses, that the Fort Briggs was no place for a woman. It would've been comical to see the Mountain Lion of Fort Briggs who back their Arctic Fox from killing the new General if everyone else was also ready to kill him.
He comforted the Alberico Twins when Gartner took one look at them and saw their darkened skin and sharp features and broad Drachman shoulders and asked them why they weren't on the other side of the mountain.

With every word he spoke, Gartner slowly signed his death wish and Miles the Mother-Hen of Fort Briggs had made his reappearance and to the soldiers of Fort Briggs, they usually would've laughed and joked about it if it wasn't what they sorely needed right now.

Other than their General, Miles was the one who cared about them the most. He saw their flaws, their mixed heritage, the things that made them undesirable to the mould that Amestris had made for them and took in their broken souls and accepted them. He understood the pain. He knew what it felt like. Every minute of every day was a battle for their Major and yet, he never complained.

He only helped them. He made them feel safe, loved and like they mattered. Like it didn't matter what the rest of Amestris thought because they were Fort Briggs. They were a united front and they would stay that way until it was time for their general to come back home.

A day went by without Mike's being able to go home and fall into the arms of his darling Valentina. That's when the new Major General announced that until further notice, all personnel whether they be soldier, engineer or civilian would be required to stay in the Fort. Unable to go home and see their families and friends.

The soldiers of Fort Briggs saw through his message for what it truly was: they were being detained inside the Fort they served to protect with their lives.

This didn’t sit well with anyone, least of all the soldiers themselves.

Needless to say, Gartner probably wouldn't make it to springtime if he continued as he was.

Ed didn't know why he felt like he was being stared at, but it was starting to annoy him.

It wasn't like Al who would glance over at him just to make sure he was there. Needing reassurance in the brother he sometimes had trouble in believing was real. When he couldn't sleep, the guilt eating away at him for what he did to Al, he'd lie in bed and would watch the hypnotic glowing eyes of his brother's helmet. Sometimes he'd even fall asleep to those oh-so-red eyes as they lulled him into his safe space.

Most times he watched all night to make sure that light never went out.

It wasn't like Winry who would stare at his limbs; a million ideas flashing through her mind because she wanted him to have the best automail no matter where he went or what he was doing. That was her way of showing him she cared. Neither of them was particularly good at dealing with emotions and being child prodigies with traumatic pasts didn't exactly help. He understood; it made him feel warm inside when he noticed that bright spark in her eyes grow into a burning inferno of ideas.

Sometimes he'd pretend to be asleep nearby only to fall asleep to the sounds of her tinkering.
It wasn't like with Roy who would watch him quietly from his desk. Who pretended, failing rather miserably at that, to be doing the mountain of paperwork at his desk to watch Ed. Ed, who was tired from travelling, but still insisted on reading the latest book Roy had found for him. Ed, who was falling asleep on his office couch, with a carefully thrown blanket over his previously still form.

He would often wake to find Roy asleep at his desk. Hair a mess and drool all over his paperwork. And not having the heart to wake him, he'd spend hours doing his own research all the while keeping an eye on the dozing man.

No, this was not like those times. Or any other times. It was...a gaze he didn't know. People he didn't trust. Eyes on him that made his spine shiver and his gut twist in an unflattering way. Just thinking about it made his skin crawl; his side all torn up, that alchemy he performed in front of Darius and Heinkel, his contacts coming out...everything makes his head hurt and his side throb in anguish.

He doesn't know how long he's been out but it must be longer than a day because his brain is hazy and his memories give brief flashes of half-memories and no matter how much he tries; he can never decipher between the truth and the lie.

That lie his brain made up for him. That lie that was made to make him feel safe. That lie that was made up to give him hope. But all it ever did was make him feel unsafe. He didn't know what was real and what wasn't. How could he trust others? How could he make himself feel safe?

How could he when he couldn't even trust himself?

The answer was easy: he couldn't.

He can't.

Ed opens his eyes and sees a world settled in darkness. Everything's hazy and nothing makes sense anymore. He can see a blur, a shadow, from the corner of his eyes and he can feel his breaths come in short beats, his airway closing: getting smaller and smaller and smaller until it feels like it did in that mine shaft. Until that's all he feels. Until it's all he can think about.

Fear.

Pure unadulterated dread.

He gasps as he feels it getting closer and closer and closer until its right there. It's right in front of him and Ed doesn't dare open his eyes. He's too scared to and it shouldn't because he's fought with monsters, men and everything in between and come out fine. But now, now Ed can't bear to open his eyes. Not now. Not ever. His breaths keep coming in shorter and shorter and Ed's never hyperventilated before but he knows what it looks like. He's read the symptoms and seen the signs and there's a first for everything evidently.

Suddenly a hand, soft smooth and delicate, runs its fingers this his untied hair and then a soft voice, so tired and so familiar speaks out to him, "Shhh, it's okay. You need to calm down, sweetheart."

It shouldn't have made any sense because normally telling Ed to calm the fuck down would not work. It didn't work with Al or Roy or even his uncle sometimes. If Izumi, Riza or Armstrong tried, he might be more willing to listen. But this woman, the one running her hands through his hair and starting to sing songs in perfect Aeurgian?

She had his mom's voice.
When Ed wakes again, it's to 5 pairs of eyes blinking up from above him.

**He screams.**

"Nonna, he's awake!"

"Look at his eyes, they're so pretty!"

"I wanna see! I wanna see!"

"Shut up stupid, no one can have one blue and one gold eye!"

"I'm not stupid! You're stupid! Hey Mister! Are you're eyes really like this?"

Ed blinked.

He lifted his arm and rubbed at his eyes and blinked again.

Nope, still there.

Looking down at him are five pairs of eyes, one of them an ice blue, two bright green and the other two a beautiful brown. As he starts to pull himself up, a hiss tears itself from his lips as a sharp pain erupts from his side.

"Careful, kid, you'll pull your stitches."

Ed whips his head to stare at the doorway where an older woman was. She had white-blond hair styled in a short bob and beautiful ice blue eyes. She was wearing loose clothing but it still did nothing to hide the slowly growing baby bump. Her pale pink lips were pulled up into a small smile and her sharp features stirred a faint memory in his mind and suddenly his eyes are widening because that's his aunt.

That's his Aunt Candia!

And like the genius and alchemist prodigy that Ed was, the only thing he could think to do was stare. Jaw dropped and eyes wide in slight disbelief because of course, this would happen to him.

It wasn't long until he feels someone tapping him on the shoulder. He looks down and off to the side to see about 5 kids, varying ages, sizes and skin colours. Two of them are obviously twins, maybe around 7, with dark skin and beautiful black curly hair and excessively bright green eyes, just like his mom and just like his Uncle Rafael and Niccolo. And since Niccolo only has one child, these two must be Felix and Earla.

His gaze shifts to the oldest child, she's about 12 with white-blond hair and blue eyes and dark skin and knows this is his Aunt Candia's daughter, Giada. She's holding a younger child, a baby really, maybe around 2 and the baby has the same dark curly hair as its siblings but trades it green eyes for a pair of deep brown. He knows she must be his Uncle Rafael's child, a little girl they named Laverne. He turns to the right and sees what he guess is the adopted daughter his uncle Niccolo and his husband Peter adopted, Anya. Anya was maybe 10 and had light mocha skin, caramel brown
hair that fell in curls around her head and bright brown eyes.

He clears his throat with a cough and looks down as little Earla, "Yes?"

His voice is hoarse and it feels like he's swallowing sandpaper as he blinks at his cousins and fucking shit, he never thought he'd say something like that. He'd never thought that he'd get the chance to have a family as he has now. Like an angry little boy with a mom who died and a father who abandoned them, he never thought, never even suspected he might be as loved as he could be now.

"Do you really have one blue and one gold eye? Can you tell us? We've been fighting over this for over a week!"

From the corner of his eye, he can see Candia lose her smile. A look he can't describe enters her eyes and it makes him gulp because of course, she'd know of only one man with eyes like gold. He reaches up and removes his other eye contact and rubs at his eyes. Blinking at them all he gives a smile, ones he's reserved for his mom, for Al and Winry and Riza and Roy and his Uncle Miles and sees the colour drain from his aunt's face at the sight of it.

Granny Pinako always said he had his mother's smile.

And Candia obviously recognized her little sister's smile in him.

"No, my eyes are gold."

"What about your hair? It's really pretty, its like mummy's hair and gold, but together!" Felix gestured with his hands, clearly just as excited as his twin and their younger sister claps her hands as she babbles in agreement. His other cousins, Anya and Giada, are certainly less vocal about it but just as eager to know at the rest of the children.

Ed grabs a strand of hair and notices the dye has begun to recede and he can already see the hair spun from the sun peaking out. He chortles," No, no my hair isn't like this always. It's...it's actually the same shade as my eyes. Gold."

"Well, then why were hiding them?" Anya asks with a perfectly arched eyebrow that reminds him of Riza raised at him.

"I don't have my uniform on right now, but I'm in the military...and well, I'm on an undercover mission at the moment. I got hurt while on that mission and that's why my friends took me here. To help me get better."

"Someone, come here please!" his aunt calls out to the rest of the house.

And just like that, it seems like the rest of his family, the ones he's never met before are in his recovery room and looking at him with wide eyes and dropped jaws. He spots his grandmother, who's green eyes are filled with tears and the pain in his grandfathers ice blue eyes. They look at him as if they've seen a ghost and Ed just knows, right then and there, that this was gonna be a long day.

Chapter End Notes

PLEASE COMMENT! I love it when you do and I would appreciate it if you would review, and if you have a few suggestions, I may even use them as the story goes on.
A (long awaited) Family Reunion

Chapter Summary

Ed didn't know what to say. He was frozen.

Chapter Notes

I'm back my lovely reader's and so is my dear friend Awesome_Fangirl33 with another fanart, this time is Aunt Candia:
https://www.deviantart.com/awesomefangurl33/art/Candia-Alberico-806239899

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Stranger.

That was a funny thing.

**Stranger - noun. a person with whom one has had no personal acquaintance**

Strangers was an odd word as while someone was a stranger, they could already have a connection to you.

It was odd word.

But it didn't make it any less true when Ed looked out a sea of faces he didn't recognize but knew they were his family.

They were strangers.

But they were *his* strangers.
Ed stared.

They stared back.

His cousins - *dear god he'd never thought he'd say that* - had noticed the way they all seemed to be looking at one another. Earla, ever the smart one, spoke up, "Nonna, what's wrong?"

Her sister, cute little Laverne, began to toddle over to his Aunt Isabella who caught her when she swayed a little. She expertly swished her daughter up into her arms and fixed her on the side of her hip as if it was nothing.

"Sweetie, why don't you come with me and we'll go have some lunch?"

Earla got a contemplative look on her little face and it took everything he had not to coo at her. She looked so much like Al at that moment that he couldn't help but feel protective of her.

She looked like she was weighing her options when she finally crossed her little arms and spoke aloud, "Okay, but only if we can have ice cream after!"

Aunt Isabella cracked a smile as that, "Fine, but you better move your little butts before Uncle Peter and Uncle Julio eat it all!"

At this, his uncles ran out the door before the kids could even blink. Once they realized what had happened, they all cried out in protest and made their way out the door with a chuckling Isabella and babbling Laverne behind them.

The tiny toddler waved goodbye to him and he couldn't help but give a tiny wave goodbye to her as she left. He was rewarded with the biggest smile and a laugh that would ring through his ears and make him smile for years to come.

He sighed and fixed himself up into his bed, careful not to aggravate his side and looked back up at his family, his mothers family, and took them in. His grandmother couldn't take her eyes off him. His mother certainly had gotten her sharp features and button nose from her as well, but his grandmother had upturned eyes instead of the doe eyes that Trisha Elric possessed.

His mother had rounded eyebrows and a square face compared to Sofia's arched eyebrows and heart shaped face. Her hair color was certainly a trait they shared, a nice chocolate brown, but where his mother had naturally straight hair, his grandmother had wavy hair as if they had been constantly in braids.

But it was the eyes that got to him. They were a vivid shade of green; one that reminded him of his mothers but that's where the similarities ended. While Sofia had bright green eyes, the color of bright green palm trees he only saw in picture books, his mothers were a more dull shade. They were a moss green.

But that wasn't it was it?

Because for whatever reason, Ed knew they still were his mothers eyes. That stubborn look that only a mother could have. He remembers his mom having that look in her big doe eyes. Izumi had it. So did Riza and Olivier. And now, his grandmother as well. He didn't know how this day would end, or how this conversation would go, but one thing Ed did know was that he would try.

Not for his sake, not for theirs and or anyone else.

Only for Al.
Always for Al.

So, in the end, it was Ed himself who broke the silence they had all found themselves in.

"You have the same eyes."

It seemed to stun his family. His grandmother jaw's dropped open while his aunt's Valentina and Candia seemed just at a loss for words as their mother. It was only his grandfather, Viktor his mind supplied, who gained a glint in his eye, the same one he saw in his moms when she was thinking and suddenly, Ed finds that maybe his mother gained more from her father than just his skin color and facial features.

"I'm sorry, what?"

Her voice was soft, a gentle tone that could harden to embodied the tone of a firm stubborn woman that was just hiding beneath and it strikes Ed then and there that he's heard that voice before once upon a time.

It was the same voice who calmed him down from his attack days earlier and was the same voice that belonged to the hands that carded themselves through his hair.

His mothers voice.

"Her voice too. You sound just like her. Look like her too, of course, mom had lighter skin than you."

He didn't know what he was doing, but he couldn't stop. Sometimes, it felt like he didn't even know his own mother, she had died when he was so young and so many other gorgeous and beautifully talented women had stepped in to raise Al and him that he felt like he knew them better than her.

He knew of Izumi's condition, something Trisha Elric had never told them. He knew of Riza's horrid past, something his mom never told them. Something he learned from a photo with a language he couldn't read and pure chance of running into his Uncle Miles.

And now here he was in front of the people who knew his mother best. Better than even Hohenheim did. They had 18 years with her, Hohenheim had maybe 10. These people, these amazingly caring people who valued family over personal goals and trust above all else, knew her.

They had stories of her, they had things of hers, knew all the little things she did, the ticks and habits and flaws and...

And he didn't.

Ed didn't know.

He didn't know anything about his mom. He learned everything about her second hand from others who weren't even family, some were strangers and when talking to them, they had stories of her he didn't even know. Knew a history she never told them. Was told a family secret not even her own children knew.

And 10 years after her death, Ed felt more than ever that he never knew Trisha Elric in the first place.

It was like that bastard Hohenheim all over again.
Because she left.

She was the one who left them. The one who decided to not get help until the last moment. She was the one who was so petty that she wouldn't even let her family know about them. So petty that she would rather he and Al be orphans than have a loving home.

In some ways, he's grateful for that pettiness. Because then he wouldn't have Granny Pinako or Izumi or Sig or anyone else. But at the same time, he didn't know these people. He didn't know his own flesh and blood. He didn't know their birthdays or the languages they spoke or anything about them.

They were virtual strangers.

Just like Trisha Elric.

Sofia took a step towards him and Ed smiled at her tentatively and promptly froze something because tears welled in his grandmothers big green eyes and he remembers how his Aunt Candia was the same way.

"You have her smile..."she breathes out. "...a-are you my Patrizia's boy?"

Ed didn't know what to say. What could he possibly say to her?

The explanation of "Hi, I'm your dead daughters angsty teenage son who joined the military at 12 and is currently thought to be dead because I faked my death after learning of a plot to overthrow this entire country by immortal beings, but lets not talk about that, how was your day grandma?" didn't seem like it would go over well with her.

After a few moments, deciding to play it safe, Ed nodded his head. Without warning, her arms were wrapped around him and Ed didn't know what to say. He was frozen. He could feel her breath on his neck and the way her tears soaked his shirt enough that a damp patch would most definitely be there.

She slowly pulled back and looked back up at him with red rimmed eyes,"What's your name?"

"My names Ed. Edward Elric." She pulled a face, one that he couldn't recognize until he realized that everyone in the family had Aerugoian names, not Amestrian. "But mom called me Edoardo sometimes...she'd call Al Alphonso too, when she was tired or we thought we were asleep."

She smiled and brushed back a stray lock of his dyed hair," I'm guessing you take after your father more, you look just like him!"

Immediately, his smile left his face and his fists clenched the thin blanket covering him. "What's wrong?"

"Could you please not mention him around me anymore? I don't want to piss myself off thinking about that bastard!" His family shared a look and his grandfather stepped forward and placed what Ed thought was supposed to be a comforting hand on his shoulder.
"Now, Ed, why would you call him that? I know we didn't like him because he was an older man who swept your mother off her feet at 18, but that doesn't mean you should call him a bastard."

"You don't understand," He cried out as he moved away from them as he felt tears welled in his eyes and god dammit! He was almost 16, he shouldn't be crying like he was 5 years old and crying for a father who wouldn't come home and a mother who wouldn't ever comfort him or kiss him goodnight again.

"He left! He left and he never came back and then mom-!" he stopped himself before he could continue and his eyes widened in horror that he had let himself slip. Tears slid down his face and Ed could feel a growing terror grip his heart.

"What about Patrizia?"

He shook his head, his dyed hair flying around him and he lifted a hand to cup his mouth because he should not have said that. He shouldn't have let himself slip but he had. He did. And now he had to tell them the worst possible news and what if they hated him? What if they couldn't stand the sight of him? He who looked like that bastard Hohenheim the man who stole their daughter away and left her to die with two young children?

Ed looked down at his lap, his hands playing with one another as he tried to ignore their prodding as to what he meant about his mom. He watched as the tears slowly slid down his cheeks onto his lap, staining the thin blanket with his tears. Suddenly his vision was filled with the firm and stubborn eyes of his grandmother, who had grabbed his chin and jerked his head up to look up at them. He looked into the eyes of his family and found that he couldn't look away.

He didn't know what they were looking for, what purpose they had in trying to dig into this ugly festering wound he had tried to hide and bury for so many years but it wasn't something he wanted uncovered. But he didn't have a choice evidently. He looked into his grandmothers eyes, eyes so green so much like his mothers and he found himself unable to open his mouth and give that excuse he had on the tip of his tongue and it only made tears well up in his eyes because he was about to ruin their lives.

"What happened to your mother, Edoardo?"

His mouth felt dry and his side gave a throbbing pain in protest and it was too much. It was too much. He couldn't tell them the daughter, the sister, the aunt, that they had been looking for for over 18 years was dead gone and buried without them even noticing? No, no he couldn't do it but just as he was about to open his mouth and deflect the question he caught sight of his grandfathers eyes, the pain and heartache and pure misery, and his response died in his throat. Gone before he could even form a single word.

"She's...she...uh...I'm sorry...I'm so sorry..."

Ed was wrapped in his grandmothers arms and he could hear her cry out in her grief. It wasn't long until his grandfather and his aunts slowly joined them, all crying in their shared grief and Ed didn't know what to do. He mourned everyday for his mother but over the years, it had lessened. With each passing year, Ed had only Al's best interests in mind. Because Al still needed him.

But them?

They had held out hope for over eighteen long years. Hope that their daughter and sister would come home. Would come see them. Would let them love her and cry with her and be a family with her all
over again. But she never did come home and with each year that he mourned her, each year they held out hope. Because they loved her and cared for her.

And now?

Now Ed had broken them. Had broken their spirits and their hope and their heavy hearts ready to be a family again and he didn't know what to do anymore. He didn't know how to fix this and for another time in his life, he had fucked up. He didn't know what to do and usually Al was there for the emotional damage control because he was no good at this. But Al wasn't here now. He hadn't been here in a while and once again Ed was reminded that this was his fault.

But he wanted to try.

So he slowly encased her in his arms, rocking her back and forth slowly until her sobs trickled down slowly into small sniffles and his family all looked at him with red rimmed eyes and tear stained cheeks and broken hearts and Ed gave a soft sad smile.

He then spoke a low gentle tone and made sure his grandmother heard him, "It's okay. Let it all out; I miss her too."

His grandmother gave him a watery smile and pressed a kiss to his cheek and for the first time in his 15 years of life, Edward Elric felt like he had made a difference. A good difference.

Miles glared.

The week following the arrival of Major General Gartner was not one he would remember on with any type of fond feelings. If anything, it was a living hell.

With Armstrong gone, the new general in charge decided that in light of all the 'flaws' within in the Fort, it was time to fix it. A total revamping. New soldiers were brought in from Central Command and every time Miles turned around, more and more of his soldiers disappeared into the backdrop of paperwork that the General hid.

Patricia and the others were holed up in their offices night and day working and normally Miles would've dragged them out by now for a little sunshine, however, he took one look at the new and improved inventions and noted that most of them would be able to kill Gartner if he ever tried to use them...after taking note of that, he'd slid food onto their desks and had Falman make sure they had everything they needed.

Buccaneer and the other soldiers in his squadron were another matter all together because instead of being subtle about trying to kill the General, they'd charge the man in board daylight. It was a good thing the man was an oblivious dumb ass or he'd have several of his soldiers charged with attempted murder and thus, treason against the state.

Then again, even if they succeeded, Miles wasn't sure they'd be charged anyways, after all, Gartner already managed to piss off his escorts.
As he walked down the hall behind Kimblee, yes that asshole who made his trigger finger a bit happy, and Gartner, he saw a flash of yellow and blue and froze in his tracks. The figures boots made a soft echo through the concrete halls as they made their way up to three men.

Miles looked at them and felt his breath catch in his throat.

"Good evening gentlemen, I understand that since General Armstrong's departure, I'll be talking to a General Gartner in respects to the Annual North-East Training Exercises?" the figure held out a hand, gloved and immaculate, as he smiled at the three men.

Why was he so shocked?

Because Lt. Colonel Patrick Mors was standing in front of them, cheeky smile on his face and mischievous twinkle in his eye. "Major General Gartner, I presume?" the general nodded dumbly as Trick took hold of his hand and shook it. And from behind Trick were four soldiers; Captain Simmons and his team.

They were all smiling as they watched this spectacle unfold and when Trick turned to Kimblee and spoke in a sickly sweet tone that the Major often adopted himself, Miles struggled to keep back the gob-smacked expression from his face.

"Major Kimblee, its so nice to see you again."

Chapter End Notes

It's a short chapter I'm sorry but I burned my hand so its hard to type.
Breaking The Wheel

Chapter Summary

Ed is ready to finally break the wheel and Trick is having way too much fun. Darius and Heinkel are so done™. Miles is having a good day.

We have reached episode 44 of the FMAB series; Revving at Full Throttle! Only 20 more episodes to go till we reach the end of the series!

Chapter Notes

I AM SO SO SORRY!

Words cannot describe how sorry I am for missing my update day. Its been a long week; my hand is healed and my brother and his fiancee just moved into their new home. Hint; it's a fucking gorgeous house. I love it and so do they. We've been helping them move in and I was asked to make them a string art and it's taking me a little while.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"So it's a countrywide transmutation circle," Van spoke aloud, sitting across from the suit of armour that was his youngest son. "And you plan on destroying it."

Al nodded in agreement, "Yeah. So I was kind of shocked to find you here, Dad. I must have some good luck after all." He took a step towards his dad. "We encountered a man who was identical to you in Central. I don't know how you're connected to him, but I'm guessing you at least know who he is, right?"

Van looked away from his son. "Are you sure you want to know, Al?"

The older blond turned his head slightly to look at his son out of the corner of his eye. "Did it ever cross your mind I might be on their side?" Al gasped all dramatically and Van resisted the urge to facepalm because while he loved his children, it was clear that Edward's paranoia was what kept them alive so long.

His Al was just too trusting. He almost laughs because Ed wouldn't have hesitated to knock him on his ass, whether because of the plot behind the country or not, Ed never trusted him. Not like he trusted the Rockbells or his teacher. No, Edward Elric had enough mistrust of others for both of his
children...speaking of his eldest, where was he?

Hohenheim shifted his gaze back to his youngest, "You've given away your entire plan. Aren't you the least bit worried I might leak it to them?"

Al gasped. Again.

Goddammit, it was times like this he regretted leaving.

Not only because he had to leave his darling Trisha and his boys but because of all the things he's never gotten to teach them. Most thought that Ed was like Van himself and that Al took after their mother. That just wasn't true. Sure, Al looked more like his mother and Ed was practically his carbon copy when he was that young, but what most didn't realize is that Al took after him more.

Once upon a time, Slave Number 23 helped make a creature born of his blood and his master's alchemy.

Once upon a time, he trusted that creature, that Dwarf in a Flask and became an alchemist himself with that Dwarf's help.

Once upon a time, Slave Number 23 became Van Hohenheim, the man who helped kill his entire nation, his friends and master and king.

Once upon a time, Van Hohenheim became a monster.

And a monster he's stayed for the past 400 years.

Al was too much like him.

Too trusting. Too naive to the workings of the world. Much like he was, once upon a time. No, Ed may look like the father he so despises, but he was his mother's son. He was the son of Trisha Elric, a woman who could be as kind as she was fierce. Who captivated him the moment he spotted her. Hohenheim who was ready to stand in and help when he spotted two grown men bugging her.

No, Trisha never needed the help of Van Hohenheim.

He learned that the day he met her.

He knew she was the one for him when she beat up two grown men who tried to harass her. All the while he stood off to the side gaping like a fish. He was so shocked he dropped his books and briefcase and when she picked them up and offered them to him, a soft smile on her face, a striking contrast to the image she just gave of a fierce warrior, he fell in love just a little more than he already was.

Edward Elric may look like his father, but he would always be first and foremost, Trisha Elric's son.

She was always so much stronger than he could ever be. And Ed emulated that with everything he did.

Everything he did was her.

And Al?

Al was his father's son.

While Ed held a grudge, something his mother could do for years, Al forgave Hohenheim before he
even knew what he had done. He was always so calm, so kind, so smart. Much like himself. He preferred books over the streets and the vast farmlands and while he hated fighting, he learned because he knew the necessity of it. He understood the need for it, but he didn't like it.

Al was a scholar first and a fighter second. He was too emotional, too naive, and far too kind for this world.

Ed was different. He shouldn't find joy in violence, and normally you'd be right, but like Trisha, Ed found a perverse kind of justification when those who've wronged others and more importantly, himself and his loved ones, got what they so sorely deserved. Ed enjoyed fighting and while there was a scholar in his eldest too, the fire burning in his son was too big to be controlled. Much like Trisha's.

But like Ed and like Trisha, Hohenheim had to learn. He had to learn that not everyone was as nice as those that loved them. He had to learn how cruel and unforgiving the world was and while Al needed to learn this as well, it shouldn't be in a way that they had to. It should be like ripping off a bandaid, not breaking every bone and then being set on fire.

He stared coldly at his son, trying to help break him in and wondered vaguely where his eldest truly was. Because ever since he first laid eyes on his younger brother, Ed kept to his side. He kept his brother close and his emotions and desires locked up tight because Al came first. Al always came first to Ed.

And maybe if he hadn't left, maybe if he was there to nurse Trisha back to health, maybe then his eldest wouldn't have to become Al's parents when he was still a child himself.

Maybe he would've stayed that happy child who loved him as much as Van loved him.

But that time was gone and past and while he wished he could've changed so many things, he didn't regret the life he's lived. He's never regretted the friend's he's made, the people's he's met, the life he got to live with his love, the children they had with one another. Trisha was what kept him going when after 400 years when he was down and felt like he wanted to give up.

After 400 years, he felt so alone. So so alone. Like he was a monster watching from a human form. He felt like he wanted to die but he never would. He would never die and with each passing year, he grew more and more depressed. And that's when he met her.

She was his rock.

His other half.

The light of his life.

And when he found her, got to marry her and have kids with her, it made him even more determined to keep them safe. He had to stop the Dwarf. The one who made him feel like a person, the one who gave him his name and was born of his blood. He had to stop Father. He had to keep his family safe. The Dwarf may have been his family once upon a time, but now he had a new one.

One he would give his life for.

When he first started his journey, when he first left his family, he did it to keep them safe and told himself it would all be worth it in the end. But now, he felt that same tired feeling from before. Trisha was gone. The love of his life. The mother of his children. His other half. She was dead and gone and he hadn't even noticed. He didn't even find out until almost a decade later.
He knew his time was coming to a close soon, he wasn't long for this world, he should have been dead and past from the memories of men long ago but he was forced into a body that made his skin crawl and his spine tingle and it was all wrong. So very wrong.

*Unnatural.*

*Monsterous.*

Hohenheim was a monster in a man's body and all monsters eventually died. It just took a little while longer for him. The only solace he'd have when he went beyond the great gate is that he did everything he could for his children and that he'd be reunited with his love once more.

*His Patrizia.*

He was a broken man with a broken family.

But he had kept a promise to her.

He would keep his family safe and if that meant teaching Al what he hadn't been able to teach him all those years ago, so be it.

And as Van knocked his fist against it, he was reminded of why he did this. For his children. For Trisha. For his family. Van took his fist away as he smiled up at Al. "I'm glad that you feel like you can still trust me. Thanks, Alphonse."

"Heh, sure." Al nodded.

"This won't be easy to explain," Van said as he turned around to face his youngest son. "It would be for the best for Edward to hear it as well."

At this, his youngest looked down, a sad sound escaping him and those eerily red glowing eyes dimming in what Van supposed was sadness. For what he did not know, but he knew he was missing something. Something important.

"Alphonse," he called out to his son but he wouldn't look at him. A desperate tone entered his voice, "Alphonse! Look at me! Al!"

His youngest son, stuck in a suit of armour born from a desire to feel a mothers love once more and his heart constricts painfully because *that was his fault if only he was there maybe this wouldn't have happened why wasn't he there they were his family goddammit* - looks up at him and though he can't read his facial expressions, the blank looks and eerie blood-red eyes made a foreboding feeling run through his body.

"Where's Edward?"

It shouldn't have been possible, but it was.
In two weeks, Fort Briggs went from a dreary, bleak hell that its soldiers found themselves living into the home they had all come to know and love. It wasn't a dramatic change that shook the very core of the Fort and left them all reeling in its aftermath.

No, it was something smaller that set off a chain reaction and one by one the dominos fell into place exactly as they need to.

Miles supposed it started two weeks prior when Lieutenant Colonel Patrick Mors came back to the Fort after supposedly being caught in the blast that killed the two bodyguards that were with Major Kimblee. He returned without a scratch, all his work down for the Annual North East Training Exercise and when questioned where he was and how he survived, he had to give the best possible answer.

"Lt. Colonel, if you don't mind me asking, but we were under the impression that you were dead. How did you survive the mine shaft exploding?"

Trick got an odd look on his face, almost as if he was confused, as he continued to stare at not only Major Kimblee and Major General Gartner but also the swarm of soldiers who had come from all around the base when the news of Trick's return to the Fort had spread.

"I'm afraid I don't quite follow, General Gartner." If Miles hadn't spent time with a cheeky teenager like Ed, then he might have been fooled with not only the genuine honesty in the teenager's voice but also his confused curiosity.

The Major General looked just as equally confused and the rest of the Fort didn't bother hiding their curious expressions either. The only person out of place was Kimblee who had a dazed look ever since Trick returned and Miles himself who was always keeping up appearances of the calm and aloof Major of Fort Briggs. "I don't quite understand either, what confuses you, Lieutenant Colonel Mors?"

"Sir, I have no idea what you're talking about. I was never in any explosion and certainly not the one in Baschool. I was at the library and Northern Command for the last three days working on the Annual North East Training Exercise plans. I frankly have no idea why you were under the impression that I was dead or even near Baschool."
In the background, most of the soldiers are trying to hold in their giggles and one guy loses it, laughing so hard he falls over the railing and if it weren't for Buccaneer, he would've landed on a group of unsuspecting soldiers. The General, on the other hand, is standing in shock, jaw dropped and a dumb look on his face and if he wasn't the stoic man he was, he might have broken out laughing at the sight.

What Miles knew for sure was that only good things would follow from now on...

___

Present Day...

___

Yes, Miles had decided that he was starting to like his nephew's friend if he could fool both Kimblee and the General into thinking that Ed hadn't even been at Baschool that day.

Ever since Trick had returned, things had gotten better at Fort Briggs.

For one, Patricia and the other mechanics left their labs. The day that happened was the day Miles was proud to admit he stopped what he was doing and gave a proud Mother Hen™ as he watched on as they shuffled into the cafeteria all bleary-eyed and cute yawns escaping them. It was the proudest day of his life and he was even more proud when Patricia took one look at him, hugged him, handed him a full proof plan to murder General Gartner then body-checked Neil when he tried to use the last of the hazelnut creamer.

Buccaneer had gotten the pep back in his step as he walked around the Fort with a new and improved automail arm Neil had designed for him. He had taken extra pleasure in scaring Gartner when the man took one look at his new arm and slowly began to back away.

Bobby and the other engineers had taken to hiding around the Fort ever since Gartner arrived and Niccolo especially liked to hide in the vents. He tried to hold back the snort when he saw the jaw-dropped expression Gartner held when Niccolo fell from the vents with a harness and grabbed the last three raspberry loaves before being reeled up by some of the other Venters™ as the soldiers around the Fort like to call them.

Rafael was once more the charming charismatic guy he was before Gartner arrived. It turned out the man just needed to see his family, specifically his wife and kids and then he was back to his old self again. To keep him from wilting like the spring flower he was, Miles discreetly slid over a photo album full of cute pictures of all three of the man's children. The look of pure adoration on his face left a warm feeling in his chest.
"Major Miles!" a soldier called out into the cafeteria effectively pulling the attention of everyone. Instantly, everyone in the cafe quiets down and looked at the Major who was overseeing them from atop the platform. It was so silent a pin could drop and you would be able to hear it.

"Yes, Lieutenant Fog?"

"You have a phone call, sir?"

Miles looks at him as he calls out, "From who?"

Fog looks unsure as he glances between Miles and the rest of Fort Briggs, General Gartner and Kimblee, "Spit it out Fog." he demands, not caring if they heard who it was from.

"Valentina, sir, she says she's your wife?"

"That would be correct. Tell her I'll be down in a second."

With that, he turns with a swish of his coat and makes his way down the metal stairs as he hears Fog talk to his wife," Mrs. Valentina? Yes, he said he'll be down in a second. Here he is ma'am." Fog hands over the phone and Miles put it to his ear.

"Hello mia Amata, how are you?"

What would follow in the cafeteria of Fort Briggs would scar, haunt and stun many soldiers, engineers and mechanics for years to come. All they could hear was Valentina say something to her husband, their Major, and once he hung up the phone and turned around to face them, there was a tiny, insignificant smile.

It was so small it was barely there.

But it was there.

And so the Fort erupted into chaos.

And Miles smiled as he sipped his coffee because yes, this was a good day at Fort Briggs.

"Next in line please." a young woman spoke out to the long line of people.

What stepped forwards was a rather large and intimidating man. He was wearing a black turtle neck and a classic movie villain trench coat like one saw in the movies, "I'd like to make a withdrawal from the account of State Alchemist Colonel Edward Elric. His research account." He slid forward a silver pocket watch and watched with narrowed brown eyes as she picked it up and eyed it suspiciously.

"Are you the account holder?" The teller asked. She picked up the watch and ran a finger across the engraving on the top before clicking open the button on the top and watched as it popped open to reveal an engraving on the inside and the correct time. She snapped it shut before she could grow
attached with the simplistic beauty of it and looked up at the man.

"I'm his representative," he replied. "But I brought a letter of attorney."

The teller, a dark-skinned woman with rather shockingly bright blonde hair, gave him a look of disbelief but complied with his demands as she gathered the money and placed it in the standard envelope. She warily slid it under the window and watched the man walk out the door without a car in the world. She waited until he was out of sight before racing towards the phone and dialling a number.

"This is the Bank of Amestris, Northern Branch. I just had a very large withdrawal taken from State Alchemist Colonel Edward Elric's research account," she told them.

From the other line, her boss, a middle-aged man who was missing much of his hair as much as he was missing most of his brain cells and still tried to act like he still had both, sighed like she was stupid and said in a very condescending manner of fact way, "He's dead, Carol."

"Yes, I know he's dead! What I'm telling you is he had his watch, sir! He couldn't possibly have his watch, the Colonel's body was never found! They buried an empty casket!" Carol whispers harshly into the phone as she rolls her eyes. She knows its not going to end nicely because it never did when her boss started questioning military policy and honestly, she wonders how he even got this job in the first place.

"Well, what would you have me do about it? Contact Northern Command and tell them we have a possible lead in the Elric case?" he asks her as if she's an idiot and wasn't that laughable?

"Yes," she tells him.

"Oh, I can do that?" His tone is completely free of sarcasm and filled with such genuine curiosity she wants to scream and rip out all her blonde locks. Why did she have to deal with him?

"Yes, sir, in fact, it's your legal obligation. You could be charged with treason if you don't. The Colonel's case is ongoing and we have to report any tip we have. We are a military-run bank after all." she answers.

"We are?"

"How have you not been fired yet?" she whispers under her breath.

She can tell that the conversation was going to take slightly longer than necessary and closed her till earning groans from the long line up of clients she had waiting. She gave them an apologetic smile and motioned to the phone and while some seemed to understand, one fucker gave her a middle finger. She just grins and bears it because she doesn't get paid enough for this shit.

"Did you say something, Carol?" her boss asked, unsure and completely oblivious as always.

"Nothing sir, but yes, we are."

"Thank you, and, uh, Carol?"

"Yes, sir?"

"...who, uh, would I, uh, contact?"

"You're supposed to contact Major General Armstrong but since she's in Central at the moment sir,
you must talk to Major General Gartner who will handle it from there."

"Thank you, Carol!"

"You're welcome, sir." she hangs up the phone and turns to her co-worker, Sean, a fairly attractive young man with a black spikey haircut and bright blue eyes and mocha brown skin.

Sean had been at the bank longer than her by about three years and they had become close friends fairly soon after she got hired. And alongside the other tellers, they all have had to deal with their boss one way or another. So, it wasn't that surprising when Sean looked over at her, blue eyes unamused as he dealt with all her extra customers and gave her a small smile and said, "Gerald?"

"Gerald," she confirmed as he gave her a quick hug and pressed a quick kiss to the side of her temple. "I'm sorry you had to deal with him babe, but it can't be helped. That man can't tell his ass from his elbow!"

Carol knew it was true and simply basked in the comfort her friend gave her."Hey, don't you have a date later?" she asked as she reopened her till and looked out at the long line that suddenly appeared in the time it took her to put the 'Sorry we're closed!' sign off to the side.

"Yeah, Alex is picking me up later! We're going out for drinks! Do you wanna come? You could bring Parker!" Carol gave him a teasing smile and turned back to her work as she helped out her clients with their transactions and questions.

And later, if she gives her bosses portrait the middle finger on her way out, well all the other tellers will tell you they didn't see anything.

"Here," Darius said as he slapped the fat wad of cash into Sofia Alberico's small and dainty-looking hands. "That should cover your medical bill."

"Thank you, normally I wouldn't have charged you all so much, but most of my equipment wasn't working properly after all these years and I had to order in new things on express, cheap bastards they are." she apologized to the two chimeras in her clinic.

After they had gotten the kid patched up, they were all moved to what Darius and Heinkel had thought was the garage. In reality, it had been converted, refurbished and revamped into a working clinic that Sofia had used for over 40 years as the town's best doctor. She even had a room dedicated to automail and the reattachment process as she was learning to become the town's first independent practitioner. Niccolo and Valentina were helping her when Patrizia had run away and it all got put into storage.

In the room off to the left, Viktor was busy making tea downstairs for them and while he appreciated everything the doc and her family had done for them, he and Heinkel were itching to get outta town. They had already spent over two weeks in North City but the sooner they and the kid left, the faster they'd be away from Fort Briggs soldiers.
He wasn't scared of much, but even he was wary of those guys.

"It's no problem, you and your family have done so much for us," he told her earnestly. Now that they had all the kid's grandparents paid and were all relatively healed, they just needed for the kid to get back so they could leave.

"You brought us back our grandson, for that we are in your debt forever," Viktor told them as he came in the room with a tray of steaming tea.

Heinkel turned away from the window. "Darius!"

They all looked at the blonde-haired man and odd feeling bubbled up in his chest at his friend's gaze. It bore no good news and as he made his way to the window, he ran through all the possible scenarios. Looking down, he caught sight of a platoon of Fort Brigg's soldiers looking around the neighbourhood. He was glad that Doc's family were up at Fort Briggs visiting their family and not there with them.

"I guess they found us," Darius said.

A loud knocking interrupted them and Sofia carefully opened the door to her doctor's office to the soldiers who were no doubt on the other side. Standing in front of her were three soldiers, all armed and looking fairly serious.

"Yes? Hello? Oh, you're soldiers. Do you need a physical?" she asked, playing the doting old grandmother they no doubt wrote her off as.

"We're looking for someone." The soldier standing in the middle said as he walked forward and pushed the door open farther and stepped into the clinic. A soldier Heinkel recognized as Coen stepped in.

He saw Heinkel getting his bandages removed by Viktor who gave them a smug smirk when they looked at him and double backed on his features. Even in his sixties, Viktor Alberico still held his white-blonde hair and his icy blue eyes that could stare into your soul. If anything, the years had only been kind to the heads of the Alberico Household for only a few wrinkles and crows feet told the effects that the ravages of time had on them.

The soldier's eyes narrowed at the older man as he took a step forward into the room, "Is this man your only patient? There's no one else?"

Viktor smiled kindly and gave a small shrug just to see how the soldier huffed and puffed like a child before pointing at the back and replying, "There's one more in the back resting." It was clear that his thick Drachman accent threw the soldier off because he stumbled forwards and blinked rapidly in shock, pointing his gun at him instead.

"Relax, I've been a proud Amestrian for over 50 years now. So had my wife." Viktor raised an eyebrow at him as he took a sip of his tea and Heinkel tried to keep back the snort from escaping him.
because dear god this man was definitely Ed's grandfather, the sass was uncanny.

The soldier shouldered passed the doctor. He was followed by one of the other soldiers. They stopped in the backroom to see Darius under the covers as he almost successfully pretended to be resting. Almost being the keyword because he sucks. He's not good at this.

**What we're trying to tell you is he needs acting lessons.**

"Are you the only patient back here?"

Darius started to sit up. "Yeah. Why are you asking? What's wrong?"

"Tell me, were you at the bank this afternoon?"

Darius's face grew tense and he slowly started to pull the gun he had under the covers of the bed out, which made the soldier quickly raise his gun and point it at Darius. "Don't move."

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Walking up the steps into the clinic attached to the Alberico household, a lone figure turned around the corner and caught sight of a lone soldier standing guard outside the door of his destination. He walked clearly and as he got closer, the soldier, Harris, stepped into his path. "Hold it. Do you work at this doctor's office?"

The figure was holding a bag of groceries and chewing on a kebab stick as they stared at the soldier with unamused bright golden eyes making Harris shiver when he looked at them.

There was something vaguely familiar about the young man before him that was bugging him.

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The soldier pointed a gun at Darius and shouted, "Slowly raise your hands above your head."

"Have you seen anyone unusual frequently the clinic lately? We're looking into the disappearance
and assumed murder of Colonel Elric and was wondering if you had seen either him or anyone suspicious near him. ” Harris asked as the figure played with the kebab stick with his teeth. Harris raised a piece of paper close to his eyes to get a better read, "He's described as…”

The soldier pointing a gun at Darius took an angry step forward. "Right now!” Darius slowly pulled his gun farther out from under the blanket. "Show me your hands!

"A red coat, blond hair worn in a braid,” Harris looked up from the paper. "And short.”
A sharp resounding snap echo through the hall and Harris looks up to see a fist flying at his face. He didn't even have time to blink before his world turned dark.

From inside the clinic, the sounds of a snap and then a thump from the hallway were heard and it made the clinic's occupants freeze as they stared at the door leading to the strange sounds. The soldier holding Darius at gunpoint turned to look at his comrade and ordered, "Check it out!"

The other man, Cohen, nodded sharply and ran out into the hall with a pensive look on his face and his gun drawn. He looked off to the side and gasped when he saw his comrade unconscious on the ground. He holstered his gun and crouched down to draw his friend up by his coat. "Harris! Harris, what happened to you?” He asked before shaking him. "Come on. Snap to!"

A shadowed loomed over him.

"Har–"
Inside the clinic, the third and final soldier pointed his shaking gun at Darius as a loud crack and second thump was heard from out in the hall. A look of horror and terror spread across his pale face when he realizes he's outnumbered.

An eerie creaking noise resounded through the room and he whirled around to see the door swinging open slowly. Whimpers escape him as he hides behind the hall and waits for whoever took out his comrades to walk through the doorway. Sweat drips down his face as he peeks around the doorframe. "Cohen! Harris!" He shouts. "What's going on? Hey, answer me!"

A hand slammed through the wall next to his head, sending rubble and dust flying through the air. An automail hand came barreling through the dust as it swung around and wrapped itself tightly around the soldier's neck. The soldier kicked his feet into the ground to no avail as he clawed at the arm choking him. It did nothing to affect the figure and slowly but surely, the soldier's eyes rolled to the back of his head as he passed out.

From across the room, Darius watched in a shocking horror and Heinkel dropped his gun as he stared at the figure. Viktor sighed and sipped at his tea, murmuring under his breath about women and genes and as his wife clapped happily he rolled his eyes. The figure slowly pulled his arm away, leaving the unconscious soldier to slide down the wall and hit the ground.

"Damn," Darius said as he threw the blanket aside and stood up with his gun in his hand. He walked towards the doorway. "You're just had to take them out on your own, huh." He walked over to the downed soldier. He bent over and rested his hands on his knees as he looked at the unconscious soldier. "You're pretty reckless, kid."

"You haven't even fully recovered yet." Standing up straight, he looked towards the doorway. Black boots with red bottoms and his signature black outfit, "Don't treat me like I'm an invalid." He clenched it into a fist. "My injuries are completely healed."

Ed looked on at Darius with a steely glint in his eyes and a kebab stick clenched between his teeth. "And I'm revving at full throttle."

Darius stared at him and motioned towards his hair, "I see the dye finally came out?"

"Fuck yeah, now let's blow this popsicle stand!"

"Edoardo!" He turned around to look at her and gave her an 'I'm-totally-innocent-but-look-I'm-also-a-shit-disturber' that she wasn't buying at all. He sighed and walked forward to kiss her on the cheek.

"Sorry nonna, love you."

Chapter End Notes

QUESTIONS FOR YOU MY LOVELY READERS:
Did you want to do a Q&A with me? Like you ask me questions and I answer.

And...

Did you want me to make an announcements board? Like a story on my account where I give updates in between stories so you know why I'm not updating or anything like new stories I'm doing. It would be better than leaving you wondering why I'm not updating and this way you don't need to go to a whole other platform just to see messages.

Now, what do you think Valentina told Miles? The first one to guess correctly gets a prize.

And- mia Amata means my lovely
If there was one thing Solf. J. Kimblee hated, it was failing.

He supposed it started early in his childhood, what with his prim stuffy parents and their need for perfection. Everything, every single floor, window and wall of his house was spotless. It was such a startlingly shade of white it reminded him of freshly fallen snow. Nothing was out of place, not a hair left unbrushed or a shirt left untucked.

Everything had their place and everything was spick and span. 

*He hated it.*

**It was all too perfect.**

He had to be perfect.

He had to be the perfect little boy who smiled charmingly at all the ladies his parents hosted and gave firm handshakes to the men who came by. He was the golden child surrounded by a sea of white and not a speck of dirt in sight.

And for a while, that was enough. It was enough because he only ever wanted to please his father. Only wanted his mother to tell him how much she loved him. Have them tell him how proud they were of him.

*He strived for it.*

It was his only goal for the first ten years of his life. Everything had to be perfect or else they wouldn't love him. They wouldn't appreciate him. And he didn't want to disappoint them. No, never that, because then he'd be looked at with such contempt or worse, nothing at all. It always hurt worse when they ignored him as if he didn't exist.

Especially when his darling baby sister got more attention than him. When she became the favourite. Lavished for her bright baby blues and perfect golden curls and red rosy cheeks. It made him want to
puke. Because he wasn't enough. Not in their eyes. Why would he be?

She was the pure golden darling everyone adored unlike him, with his stringy black hair and dark black eyes that could stare into your soul and skin too pale to be healthy. And for those first few years, he tried to ignore it. Tried to ignore how it slowly crept upon him. How perfect everything was.

And he'd tell himself if he only did better at lessons. If he got that perfect grade. Charmed the ladies and lords who came over. Became the perfect child they wanted then he could ignore it.

But it was all a lie.

A big fat lie.

Because as they talked etiquette and fawned over his sister as she gurgled and babbled like the little angel they all said she was, it slowly crept. And as he sat in that dining room, surrounded by men who talked politics and women who only gossiped about one another and then pretended to be friends the next second, he realized something;

**It drove him mad.**

He couldn't stand it.

How everything was never enough. Never good enough. Never clean enough. Never smart enough. Never anything. Nothing was enough and he doesn't remember when it turned into an obsession, but he can see when his world turned upside down.

It was a clear crisp morning, with a bright blue sky and big fluffy clouds with freshly fallen snow that had come unexpectedly overnight. And when the other neighbourhood children had come over asking him to play, he went even though he wanted to stay inside and read his alchemy books.

One look from his mother who put on a poised smile and a grunt from his father who hadn't even bothered to look over at him from his newspaper and he found himself outside in the snow surrounded by snot-nosed brats who couldn't tell him anything of value.

He was forced into "cute" little shorts and a button-up jacket complete with a knitted scarf that was too big for him but his grandmother had made it for him so he had no choice lest she shows up unexpectedly and sees it unused. Needless to say, he was not amused as his mother practically threw him out to the other children with a wave and then slammed the door shut behind him.

He didn't bother talking to any of them. They were clueless morons and he'd be damned if he lowered himself to their level.

But as the day progressed and the children ran out games to play, little Tommy Douglas, who was a moron if he ever saw one and made the other dumbasses look smart with how incredibly dense he was, got the bright idea that they should climb trees.

Now, while the other children were stupid, Kimblee could at least admit they had some merit for not immediately jumping to the idea of climbing a tree.

However, he couldn't say the same for Tommy Douglas who all called them crybabies and proceeded to climb the tree.

Approximately two minutes later, Tommy Douglas fell out of a 50ft tree and broke the femur bone in his left leg. It snapped in two and as he fell to the ground in a screaming heap of mangled skin and
frozen tears, the bone broke the skin. But it wasn't the only thing it broke.

No, broke wasn't the correct term.

_It shredded._

When Tommy Douglas fell from the tree, he snapped his left femur bone and it pierced through his skin. This would have been fine and dandy and little Tommy could have walked off and been fine in a couple of months if not for the other part of his injury. Because at the same time, the angle of which the bone was pushed outwards, shredded through his femoral artery. He bled out within 5 minutes while the other children ran off screaming like they were being murdered.

And Kimblee?

He stood frozen as he watched the blood stain the perfectly white snow a deep red.

It was exhilarating.

Fascinating.

Magnificent.

It was like a new world had opened up for him and he couldn't wait to try it out. His parents chalked it up to being traumatized from the death of Tommy Douglas. But no, that wasn't it, was it?

Because he wasn't scarred for life.

If anything, he felt elated.

All because of that deep crimson staining the ever-perfect white snow.

It wasn't perfect.

Not anymore.

And Kimblee wanted more.

He became obsessed.

He continued to study his alchemy even further than before becoming frantic in his search for more disorder. More damage. He needed more. A blood lust he didn't know he even had sung in his blood and begged for more. More blood. More chaos. More destruction. More...crimson.

Alchemy was the key, that he was sure of. But it wasn't until he turned fourteen and his father, Mr. Heinz Kimblee, took him on a tour of his company. You see, the Kimblee's were a wealthy family known for helping and funding the Amestrian Military.

They were, by definition, a weapons manufacturing company.

Specifically in explosives.

When his father took him to a demolition site and demonstrated the power behind the newest line of explosives that Kimblee Industries had to offer, he knew he had found his calling.

By the time he was eighteen, Solf J. Kimblee had developed explosive alchemy. He was backed by a family friend, Brigadier General Fessler and was accepted into the State Alchemy Program with a
handshake from the Furher and wide smiles from all those around him.

If he had been concerned with being perfect in his parent's eyes, then this might have made him happy once upon a time.

But he wasn't.

And while he was happy, it wasn't for those reasons.

He was happy because he finally found it.

His means of destruction.

His new way of spreading chaos.

It was perfect. And it only got better when the war started. Then came the philosophers stone and Kimblee could feel it all coming together just as it should. And when they wanted to take it back? Take back his calling, the perfect weapon that not even his family's company could dream to make. No, he wasn't going to let it go so easily.

And then he spent the better part of a decade in prison, people saying he snapped and finally lost it. That all the death and destruction got to him and when those generals told him to continue with the killings, he just couldn't bear it any longer.

What a joke!

It was almost laughable that they thought that. It was of no means to him and he didn't care when his father came to him, telling him that he had lost all right as his heir to the Kimblee name and fortune. That his sister would be inheriting it all.

Maybe once upon a time, he would've cared, but not anymore.

He remembers what he told him like it was yesterday.

Six Years Prior...

Kimblee sat in a dark cell, thoughts swirling over the crimson red stone he held on him. Thoughts of all the destruction and chaos he could leave on this wretched country and the best about it was they
didn't even know that he could go out and wreak havoc whenever he wanted. The thought of it all almost made him starting cackling again but the sound of footsteps made him pause.

He looked up when the door was swung open and the warden stuck in his head, a scowl spreading across his face at the sight of him and Kimblee was elated to realize that because he hadn't been tried yet, he was still wearing his soldier garb. The clothes of a respected soldier. Not one of a deranged maniac who snapped.

"You got a visitor Kimblee."

He looked up in time to see his father, his dark black hair greying in some spots and bright blue eyes trying to hide how tired he truly was by being impassive. Once upon a time, Kimblee may have thought his father strong, but that time had been over long ago.

Now, all he saw was a tired old man still griping to the ways of old. His father had a thick handlebar mustache, the salt and pepper hairs adding to his age, and strong features and the same nose as him. He had thick bushy eyebrows and wore a three-piece suit that screamed money but held no room for respect.

It was a pitiful sight.

"Solf," he greeted. His voice was grating and held the rasp of a smoker in its tone.

He didn't say anything, just stared off into the wall and hidden by the shadows as his father lost his determined stance and shifted on his feet as he tried to regain it. "I won't beat around the bush, I'm disowning you. You've brought shame down upon our family name. Your sister will inherit the family name and its fortune."

If he expected for it to bring some sort of reaction or delayed remorse for his actions, he was sorely wrong. "Do you even understand what I'm telling you, you stupid bo-!

He was cut off by the dark chuckling from the shadows and he looked fearfully into the holding cell Kimblee was put into until his trial. "Of course I know what you're telling me! I'm just surprised it took me killing those soldiers for you to finally notice that I couldn't care less about your family name or your company! Give it all to my darling sister! I'm sure she'll do a fantastic job!"

Heinz Kimblee was ushered out of the holding cell with a newfound fear in his eyes and the cackling laughter of his disowned son echoing throughout the stone walls of his prison.

Present Day...
It was an enjoyable memory, that was for sure.

But as the years passed by him in that little cell, Kimblee waited for his next mission. And what he was promised came to him.

More chaos.

More destruction.

More...blood.

It was everything he could ever want and more and for what? Finding a missing kid? Hunting down a rogue Ishvlaen? It wasn't exactly the hardest job in the world, but it was a fair trade in his eyes.

But now?

Now he was pissed.

He was downright furious.

He was...confused at the same time because as he stared into the eyes of Lieutenant Colonel Patrick Mors who told him he had no idea why he thought he was in Baschool, Kimblee realizes something.

He was failing.

He was failing the mission.

He hadn't made any headway and he didn't have any progress in any of his missions.

It was only the blood crest, where his blood sang as he let the red alchemical lightening flow from his hands and destruction chaos anarchy just...spills freely from him in a never-ending symphony of turmoil and disorder and for the first time in over 6 years, Kimblee feels like himself again. It was the only reason why he wasn't a jittering mess as he worries over his confusion from Baschool and not being able to catch Scar.

But now?

Now he had to find out what this Trick kid was hiding.

Fast.

Because Kimblee refuses to lose and he doesn't do failing.

Ed stepped out of his grandparent's clinic and out into the hallway with a sigh.

He rubbed the bridge of his nose and looked down towards the knocked out soldiers. Harris was
laying out on the wooden flooring in a heap with drool coming out of his mouth and eyes rolled back into his skull. Near his unconscious form, lay a small slip of paper that he had dropped when Ed punched his lights out.

The corners of his mouth lifted slightly into a small smile at the thought of beating the crap outta that guy and without stopping his stride, Ed scooped up the small sheet of paper off the ground. He munched on a piece of bread as he read the description they were given on him, *That's all they're looking for? Someone with a red coat and a braid?*

"No wonder I haven't been caught yet...they're all morons!"

Darius and Heinkel snorted from behind him and before either chimera could even open their mouths, a voice rang out from behind them, "Freeze!"

Ed jerked in surprise and looked over his shoulder to see two soldiers at the end of the hallway, their guns pointing at them and a hardened look in their eyes. Ed shrugged his shoulders because it wasn't that scary, not anymore. When you had Miles for an uncle and Armstrong for an aunt, nothing did faze you that much.

"Drop your weapons!" The second soldier shouted.

Ed calmly ate the bread in his mouth while staring in boredom at the soldiers.

"Tch, we took too long," Heinkel said.

"Get your hands up in the air! Do it now!" The first soldier ordered.

"Move it, kid." The second soldier said. "Those guys are dangerous."

Ed swallowed his bread and gave the soldiers a dull look because after all the shit he's been through, he didn't have time to deal with morons like these two. Unknown to him, both Darius and Heinkel gave each a look and nodded in unison.

Darius wrapped an arm around a surprised Ed's neck and pointed a gun at his head. Heinkel pointed his hands at Ed like they were guns. "Stay back or he's dead."

"Don't force us to blow this kid's brains out!" Darius added.

*This couldn't possibly work, right?* Ed thought as he stared at the group unimpressed with the spectacle before him. Then, the unthinkable happens and the soldiers lower their weapons. *ARE YOU FUCKING SHITTING ME?* he shouts in his mind.

Seconds later, Ed feels an arm grab him before he's hoisted into the air by Darius. Darius ran around the stair railing and down them with Heinkel following after them. The soldiers followed a second later.

Once they reached the exit, Darius elbowed the door open. He and Heinkel stopped at the top of the stairs to see a group of soldiers standing around a car, not doing anything but talking with one another.

'*If only Auntie Olivier could see them now,*' Ed muses.

In his mind, an enraged Armstrong appears standing atop a hill of beaten and bloody soldiers she deemed unsuitable or even unfit for duty and he shudders.
"Maybe I shouldn't back her for Furher..." he mumbles.

"Did you say something kid?" Heinkel asks him.

"Only your doom," he replies, apathy levels up to the max.

"Yeah yeah whatever you say, kid," Darius tells him. He raises his gun in unison with Heinkel and shoots just above the soldiers, it hit the roof of a house nearby. The wood blew apart, causing the snow to lose its support on the roof and fall onto the surprised soldiers. The snow that hit the ground created a smokescreen around the three soldiers so they couldn't see.

"I'll hotwire some wheels for us," Darius said.

"Okay,"

"You're not listening to me," Ed says as he gets in the back of the car.

"What were you talking about?" Darius replies, not paying attention as he continues to hotwire the car. He gets in on the driver's side while Heinkel takes the passenger's side and they get onto the road, the military issued cars not far behind them.

"I'm pregnant," Ed deadpans.

"That's nice," Darius says as he turns down a random street.

"The father is Kimblee,"

"Uuhh,"

"We got married in secret,"

"Cool story kid!"

Ed sighs and turns his head and sees how close the other cars were. Eyes wide, he shouts up at the two chimeras in the front seat, "Hey, Gorilla," Ed turned back around. "Step on it."

"Don't call me that!"

"Oh, now you hear me you fuckers?"

"What are you talking about?" Heinkel screams.

"Just drive faster!"

"These guys are from Northern Command," Darius replies. "We're never going to ditch them."

"Well not with your shitty hearing we're not!" Ed screams at a particularly sharp turn which left him plastered to the one side of the car, "I fucking hate you guys,"

"Did you say something?" Darius yelled.

A car drove through an intersection before a horrified and shocked Darius and he quickly spun the wheel. The truck beeped frantically and the car Ed's group was in swerved around the truck and through the intersection. The truck finished getting through the intersection just as the military vehicles made it there and through the intersection.
"Yeah, that you're a shit driver!"

"Oh, you think you could do better?" Darius snapped back.

"I know I could, if only because I could hear better!"

"What are you rambling on about?"

"Shut up you maniac, and pay attention to the road!" They just managed to avoid crashing into a farmers market. Ed sat in the back with a deadpanned look on his face and he barely restrained himself from rolling his eyes.

"That was a little too close," Heinkel said.

"No shit sherlock!"

"How's it looking behind us?" Darius asked.

Ed looked back, "Not good. They're right on us." he replied. Ed turned in the backseat watching the cars.

"Damn it," Darius said, making Ed turn his head to look at him.

Ed quickly turned around and leaned forward as he pointed at something. "Turn there! I got an idea."

"What?" Darius snapped.

"Just shut up and turn!" Ed snapped back at him.

"Ah," He said annoyed before he took hold of the steering wheel and started to quickly spin it. "This better be a good plan." His foot pushed down on the gas.

"Just park the car as soon as we turn." A metallic ringing filled the scene as he clapped his hands.

Not even a few seconds later, the military cars passed them by without even slowing down and Ed slumped back into the seat. He let out a sigh of relief before he smirked. "Phew, and you doubted me."

"Yeah, well, can you change it back into a normal car now?"

Ed looked back around with a frown. He leaned forward, glaring at Heinkel. "And why is that? I think this car looks cool as hell." Ed said as the car started to move.

"Just change it back," Darius ordered.

"Please, we're begging you."

"Oh yeah?! You guys got a problem with my sense of style?!"

"You don't have any." Heinkel and Darius replied in sync.

"Fuck you, you old geezers! At least I can hear properly!"

"Why do you keep mentioning that?!"
Darius was peeing at the bottom of a tree, Heinkel leaning against the car with his hands shoved in his pockets, and Ed standing on the other side of the car with a hand to his chin.

"So I guess this means we're drifters again," Heinkel said.

"Yeah," Darius replied.

'I never should have dropped my guard around Kimblee. Talk about a setback.' Ed sighed as he flipped the coin up into the air. 'And Al. I hope he was able to safely find Winry.'

"Hey, Fullmetal," Darius said. "Quit spacing out." Ed jerked in surprise and he turned to look at them.

"Don’t call me that! Do you want this whole plan to fail?" He told them.

“Well, what are we supposed to call you?” Heinkel asks.

"Just Ed. Or kid. I don’t give a crap. But you shouldn’t use that name.”

"Speaking of a plan, what's the next step?" Darius asked.

"Well, let's see. The first thing I need to do is meet up with an old friend of mine." Ed stood up and smiled, "I got it. Come on guys, get in the car. We have a long drive ahead of us!"

"What have you done, Greed?" Ling's voice asked. "Are you determined to prove you're a monster?" He got quiet before he opened his eyes and yelled out, "What kind of sick creature would kill his FRIEND?!"

Veins still throbbing in pain and his hand trembling as he slowly lifted it, Greed managed to mutter out "He wasn't my…friend." He grabbed his head, groaning in pain as it hit the ground hard.

"Then why do you remember him? And are you going to try and tell me Bido was just making
"Those are the last Greed's memories. They're not mine!"

"Then why are you in so much pain?" Ling shouted back at him. "I know what it feels like Greed, to lose someone so close and dear to your heart..." Ling's voice was gentle, soft, quiet as he spoke.

Just as fast as his gentle words appeared, they were gone as he threatened the Homonculus, "Pull yourself together, Greed. I'm warning you. I'll take my body back if you drop your guard."

"They aren't mine. Father purified me and purged the old Greed's memories." Greed growled at the prince. "Those memories aren't a part of me anymore."

"No! You're wrong, Greed!" Ling got into the face of Greed's red soul. "It's not that easy. They'll always be a part of you. You can't just erase them from your soul! They were the only part of you that you chose! I should know! It's not just something you can get rid of."

"No," Greed cried."You're wrong!"

"Look at them," Ling replied as flashes of Martel, Roa, Bido and Dolcetto light up through his mind like a Christmas tree."Can you not hear their souls crying out?"

"You abandoned them!" Ling accused. "Your real family!"

Memories, flashes, lights appeared in his mind going a million miles an hour and it hurt, it hurt more than anything else and he felt his nails dig into his skin as he cried out at the onslaught. He shook his head and felt the sweat trickled down his head as pain like no other coursed through his body.

"You threw them away like trash! Fool. You turned your back on something you wanted." Ling's starred angrily into the abyss of souls that made up the homunculus. "You don't deserve to call yourself Greed! You have no right!"

"What would you know!? I've seen your memories! Your life! What would you know of friends and want?" Greed screamed back at his host.

Ling suddenly got quiet and his bangs covered his face. He looked up at the soul of Greed with a dark look in his eye and slowly pushed himself up from his spot on the floor, walking towards him like a predator. "You don't know me, Greed the Avaricious. You may think you do, you may think I've shown you everything, but you are wrong. You think I, Prince Ling of Xing and Leader of the Yao Clan, am a simple prince with too much greed than what could be called healthy and ambition too big for him that he would give up his body to a monster in human form, yes?"

He leaned forward, "You know nothing. Not of humans or of honour or duty or family and friends. You think you know all, but you don't. I do this for my clan. Nothing about this was to fulfill my gain. I did this because of the 100,000 clansmen that ride and breathe on my ability to secure the throne of my country." he hisses.

"Tell me Greed; do you know what happens when you pit 50 children against one another and tell them the one who pleases you most shall be crowned the eternal emperor?" When the homunculus failed to answer after a few moments, he started walking around him in slow steady circles.

"It gets bloody. Children are killed. Clans destroyed. Mothers cry over split blood and each heir dreams of the day they don't have to live in fear of their siblings. I am the 13th son. I have siblings who never made it out of the womb, who never got to breathe their first breath, who never felt the
sun on their skin and were buried nameless alongside their mothers. I am lucky to make it this long. If I were born into a clan of any lower standing and wealth than I was, I would not have made it past my first year."

"My mother is dead. My grandfather was killed for protesting the fact that my mother would be used for the breeding stock by the emperor. My grandmother was slain protecting me. My mother had her throat slit for giving birth to me. Do you know who killed them? No? My older brother, Guang of the Xi clan. He didn't like the fact that another son was born and decided to even it out again."

He then let the memories of Ed, all of them, all the moments and precious flashes flood their bond and let them assault the homunculus.

"And I had a friend. Once upon a time. Someone who didn't treat me like a prince and beat me to the ground as if I was just another teenager who pissed him off that week. And now he's gone. He's gone and I can't snap my fingers and have him magically reappear. It doesn't happen that way. Not in real life. So don't you ever tell me this bullshit of want and loss again, Greed the Avaricious." he slinked away from him.

"If you can even call yourself that, that is," With his peace said, Ling sat himself down and closed his eyes, arms crossed as he ignored the prodding stare of Greed.

Three figures walked the countryside of Amestris, bickering as they did so.

"What do you mean we took the wrong train?" the eldest asked, brown eyes looking back at his companions. He ran his tanned hand through his silver-streaked hair and sighed.

"I mean, we took the wrong train, you idiot! What else did you think I mean? "The second eldest snapped back. He brought out his map and looked at the markers they had set up so far and found it to be unhelpful.

"Would you two stop fighting? For over 40 years I've had to hear you two fight and I'm done with it!" the youngest barked out, gaining the attention of his two elders.

Before any of the elders could open their mouths, a car pulled up beside them, two men in the front and a teenager in the back. The golden blonde opened his window and they could hear snippets of the conversation between him the two men.

"Why are we stopping?" the brunette asked, grumbling under his breath.

"Cuz I know these guys!" the golden blonde teen replied.

"How?" the blonde man said.

"Nonna had a picture of them at her house!"

"And that justifies stopping to pick them up because?"
Whatever was said next was drowned out as the blonde teen turned to them and held out his hand, "Hi!"

"Do we know you kid?" the eldest grumbled.

"Nope!" he replied cheerfully. "Want a ride?"

"Yes, please, thank god for small mercies!" the youngest companion said aloud as he made his way in, not even bothering to wait for the other two to get in. The two companions gave each other a look as they grumbled and got into the car.

Once on the road, and an awkward silence ensued and before anyone could speak, the second eldest turned to the blonde teen and said, "So, kid, how do we know your Nonna again?"

Without missing a beat the teen replied, "You're her brothers; Cleto, Raimonda, and Tore. Nice to meet you, I'm Edward."
Pit Stop

Chapter Summary

Ed makes a pit stop in Central.

Chapter Notes

I AM FREE! NO MORE COOP!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

This could go very well for them or it could all go wrong.

Ed didn't know which he'd preferred if he was being entirely honest. Sure, it would be nice to have someone see him for once and no, chimeras who tried to kill him and granduncles he met by chance do not count. But as nice as it would be to meet up with a person who knew him, who knew Ed, not Trick, something was holding him back at the same time.

He couldn't quite figure out what it exactly was. It being that feeling. The one that was holding him back. Keeping him from reuniting with all his friends, his comrades, his family. It had been almost a month since his supposed death and he didn't know how he was going to fix things.

He abandoned them. He left them.

**His friends.**

**His family.**

And now what? He was just going to show up out of the blue and tell his best friend that he wasn't as dead as he left him to think?

No, Ed couldn't imagine that going over as well as he hopes it would. Not even hoping, more like, in his dreams. At night, he'd dream of the day this ruse would be over. Of the day he could go up to his brother and hug him. To go on adventures and laugh and live and to just be Ed and Al again. Because all of this, all of it, every single tear, every drop of blood and every lonely night was all for him. For Al. It was always for him.

For all of them.
Because Ed couldn't bear to live in a world, in any world, where they couldn't be happy. He refused to. He never wanted to watch another one of them live their lives in sadness. He's already had to do that once, watching his mother waste away before his very eyes. And he doesn't think he could do it again. Not to them. It killed him to watch it happen once. If it happened again...well, he isn't entirely sure what he'll do.

He did this for them. Because he wanted to be with them again. He's seen what the Homonculus would do to them. Maes was gone and so was Nina and he can't do that again. Never again.

Ed once said he didn't know why he said yes to Truth, but looking back it all now, he's pretty sure he knew. He knew when he said yes. He knew it all along because it was for them. He didn't want them to go through what he did. So, he looked Truth in the eye and told him yes. And shouldered all that pain, all those tears, all those nights where he wanted to scream because he felt like he didn't know who he even was anymore.

All for them.

It would all be worth it.

That's what he kept telling himself. Because when all was said and done, when the dust settled and that bastard Father went back to whatever hellhole he came crawling out of, he'd get to go home. Maybe not back to the one he left, but home all the same.

Home to the people he loved. To the ones, he called mom and dad. To his teacher and his granny and his uncles and aunts and all those cousins, he'd never thought, no, never dared to even dream of having. Back to Alphonse. Back to Winry.

His heart ached at the thought of her.

They may not have pushed anything farther than stolen kisses when they thought no one was looking, to moments where he'd spend the afternoon with her up on the hill where they all played as children. Where they'd walk around the country roads, holding hands just because they could and not because it was expected. Where he'd buy her small gifts, earrings or new tools and would watch as those bright blue eyes positively thrive in the light.

But...

He missed her.

A lot.

More than he would've cared to admit because he couldn't have feelings grow. Not now, not when he was trying to fight back a nigh immortal being, not when he was trying to save them all. Because if he started to care, if he started to let his feelings for her grow, he knows he won't be able to stop them.

He'll dive in head first, eyes closed and he wouldn't even regret it.

Because she was amazing.

She was everything he wanted and more. He didn't think he could ever love someone as much as his mother loved Hohenheim. Trisha Elric fell hard and she fell fast. Just like his grandmother Sofia and just like him. Thoughts of bright blue eyes and daisy yellow hair flashed behind his eyes when he thinks of home and he just...he just wants this to be over.
He wants to go home.

He wants to practice alchemy again. He wants to have his brother. He wants his dad to let him crash in his office and for his mom to give him advice. He wants to spar with Teacher and hear his uncle Miles sigh. He wants to get to know his newfound family. He wants to smell Granny's smoke pipe and hear Den's barking. He wants to have Aunt Olivier run Amestris so he can just be Ed again.

Not the Fullmetal Alchemist.

Not Trick.

Just Ed.

And most of all, he wants to be with Winry.

He wants to put a label on their relationship. He wants to be able to parade her around Central and not worry that immortal maniacs will try and kill her. He wants to give her soft kisses and wants to talk shop with her. He wants to all of this and so much more. But he can't.

Not right now.

So, he boxes it all up and tries to focus on the matter at hand.

But, he would be lying if he said he didn't think about them all, think about all the things they'll do together after the dust settled.

In his heart, he wishes and he dreams and he desperately wants this more than anything. And he hopes that when he sees them again, sees them all again, it'll be as Ed.

It'll be as Ed and not as Trick and that he can be with them all.

That he'll be accepted.

That they'll forgive him.

But unfortunately for him, he doesn't always get what he wants. He never gets what he wants. If he did, he wouldn't be in this situation right now. He wouldn't be dead to the world, frantically hoping for someone to just see him and he wouldn't be in the back seat of a stolen car with two chimeras and his granduncles.

He wouldn't be in this mess because of a megalomaniac who decided to try and overthrow God himself.

No, Ed didn't dare get his hopes up because rarely did things ever go right for him.

He sighs at his depressing thoughts and turns to look out at the looming forest in front of them. It was just as he remembered. Every detail, every crack, every glaring remembrance that this was where it all began. This is where his downfall began. He turned to stare out at the gleaming lights of Central, high above on the hills, grass as green as it had been on that day and still it flowed gently in the wind. As if one of the greatest downfalls he's had hadn't happened a few feet away.

The lights twinkle off in the distance and he almost gives into the memory. He remembers the way he had reached out for his friend, his best friend, and felt that ugly warning. Even just thinking about it now left a sick feeling in his body and a chill ran up his spine, making his body shudder at the sight of the torn and burned cottage.
He walks slowly up to the ruined building and pauses at the scorch marks and the tire tracks. Rubble splayed across the garden from the corner of his eye and he breathes in because he can't let this get him. Not this.

"Where are we?" Darius asked. He barely registers how close the three of them have gotten to the house. He breathes in sharply as the memories stir, the last time he saw his brother as Ed was here. The last time he saw his parents as their son happened here.

This was where Edward Elric died.

And this was where he'd be reborn.

"We've used this place as a hideout before," He blinked back tears as he desperately tried to swallow down that feeling. It spread through his lungs and travelled up his throat and it slowly started to choke him. He breathed in silently as a sob worked its way from the back of his throat.

The three of them make their way inside the damaged home and Ed can see, even in the dark of night, how the blood stained the walls. How the floorboards were ripped up in some areas. How the glass from the shattered windows littered the floor. He can see everything from that day. And he doesn't know what's worse at the moment; the memories from that day or the meeting that was about to take place.

As it was, he was already anxious and with the two chimeras asking all these questions, he didn't know how he was going to be able to do this. He already left his granduncles in the back of the car, all three of them lightly dozing from their journey across the border. He remembers the fright he had when they told him that. How'd they even get across without getting arrested? Because last time he checked, Amestris and Aeugro were having a border war at the moment.

"And you're positive that your brother's here?" Heinkel urged, breaking his thoughts.

Thinking he heard the man wrong, Ed whirled around to look at the two chimeras and arched a perfectly sculpted eyebrow -courtesy of V and the girls - with confusion shining in his golden eyes brightly. He let out a small "Huh?" and then tilted his head because what the fuck were these two numbskulls talking about?

"Al? Why would Al be here? No, he's in Liore."

"What do you mean he's in Liore? Why'd we even come here? Aren't we supposed to be meeting up with him?" Darius cries out.

"No, why do you think that? We're meeting up wit-" Ed stopped as he whirled around to see a shadow moving slowly across the lawn as the three of them hid behind the broken wall of the house.

Heavy footfalls danced across his ears and he closed his eyes briefly, steeling himself for the confrontation that was about to come when he heard a 'THUD' and looked down to see Ling face first on the ground before him.

"You can't do things the normal way, could yea, Ling? I mean Greed." he corrected himself.

A low rumbling was heard and Ed eyed his friend's body in surprise, "Hungry. Need…food."

"No, it's Ling," Ed said, an unimpressed look in his eyes and a tired expression dragging itself across his face. He rubbed a hand into his eyes as he sighed and snapped his fingers before pointing at his friend's semi-conscious form.
"Pick'em up will ya? This dumbass can barely move and I'm worried if I touch the bastard he'll latch on to me. I have enough debt from the moron as it is."

"You're a fucking moron."

Those are the first words that Ling, 13th son of the Emperor of Xing and Leader of the Yao Clan, hears when he starts to come out of his semi-conscious state.

He doesn't know if he's hallucinating or not because of ya know, the food deprivation, but he could've sworn he just heard Ed talking right now. Which is, of course, absolutely ludicrous because his best friend is long dead by now. By at least a month. And even if he was alive, he would've heard about it from the homunculus when they gave their regular updates to Greed.

He forces himself to open up his eyes because he's tired. He's so so tired. He's tired of it all and some days, when the grief hits him particularly hard, he feels like he should let go. Like he should just give up. Then he'd remember eyes of molten gold and hair that looked as if it was spun from the sun itself and he stops himself before he can continue thinking that line of thought.

Because it wasn't about him or even his clan anymore.

It was about Ed.

**Ed.**

Who looked at him as if he wasn't some untouchable prince and, on a few memorable occasions, tried to kick his ass.

He almost laughed at the thought because those times were some of the best memories he's had in a while. Everything was so dark and dreary back home, everything the same, over and over and over again that he felt like he wasn't even Ling anymore, just a mindless machine taking his place.

And he was so alone, had been for so many years, that he doesn't know if he's Ling or if he's Ling, Prince of Xing and Leader of the Yao Clan.

**Ed.**

Who screamed at him about his latest room service bill while Ling sat there with a smile on his face because it was nice.

It was nice to just be Ling.

Not Ling, Prince of Xing and Leader of the Yao Clan.

It was refreshing to be a teenager.

It was delightful to have friends.
It was so fucking unbelievably precious to have fun for once in his life. And he couldn't even remember a time when he wasn't training to become Emperor or working on his form or even running a whole clan of 100,000 men, women and children that all depended on him. Him. Not his mother, who was dead and gone, or his grandparents who died for their daughter and their only grandchild but him.

A boy.

A teenager who felt that he was so ill-equipped he wanted to run away and never look back.

A prince who wanted nothing more than to have friends, title be damned because he couldn't care less about becoming emperor.

He only did it for his clan, for all those men women and children who were counting on him to save them. Who chanted his name, who sang his praises, who looked up at him as if he was some saviour.

But who made sure to keep their distance. Who made sure to watch as he wallowed in sadness and self-pity because no one, not one person, cared enough to step forward and be a family to him.

The closest he could have called family were Lan Fan and Fu and even they had to keep their distance lest the clan elders try to remove them from his service. He already had to fight tooth and nail to keep them with him. It was a familiar part of his life, a sense of normalcy, that he wasn't even willing to give up. Not for anyone or anything.

Ed...who was looking down at him with eyes that looked bored and an expression that said he was unimpressed...

Eyes widening, he shot up like an arrow and looked up at his friend, his best friend, who stood before him with his arms crossed and his eyes narrowed. He was so real, so life-like, that a pang shot through his chest and he blinked back tears at the sight of his only friend.

Ling raised a hand to his head and muttered, "Holy shit, these hallucinations are strong!"

Ed was just as he remembered.

Albeit with a few minor differences.

His friend was maybe an inch or two taller but that didn't matter. His friend wasn't wearing his signature braid but rather a ponytail and bandages to wrap around his head. He was wearing his boots, black leather with red lining the bottoms and his stomach gave an ungraceful lurch at the sight of Ed's boot, remembering when they boiled it to make food while stuck in Gluttony.

Ed wasn't wearing his red coat or his black outfit, rather a black t-shirt and a white winter coat to go alongside his familiar black pants and shoes. There wasn't anything physically different about his friend but he noticed how Ed seemed to be holding his arm to his side, almost as if he was trying to protect it and saw how he seemed to have lost most of the baby fat on his face, leaving only the sharp features his friend had hidden underneath.

"I'm not a fucking hallucination you moron!" his friend snapped back at him.

"You can hear me?" Ling cried out, back digging into the wall as he did.

He blinked as he tried to process everything because while he could see his friend, he also saw two large overbearing men off to the side-eyeing them as if they were crazy which, to be fair, was
probably correct. But, who cares anymore! His best friend was back! Even if it was only for a couple
of minutes, it was far more than he ever deserved and he would be eternally grateful for this
opportunity.

Oh, the gods must be smiling down upon him today to be given a chance to talk with him from
beyond the grave!

"Of course I can hear you, you dumbass!" Ed stomped on his feet and gestured to his body, which,
admittedly, was not as translucent as he would've thought a ghost would be, but hey, who was he to
judge? Maybe not all ghosts were translucent? Or! Maybe because Ed was an alchemist he had a
different form.

It took all but a split second before Ling sprang into action. He got down onto his knees, raising his
hands in forgiveness as he cried out to his ghostly friend," Forgive me, Ed's ghost! I'm sorry I didn't
look harder for your killers!"

Ed growled at him as he looked down, bangs covering his head and his whole body shaking in his
anger as a shadow loomed over his face. His fists clenched tightly as he shook and his mouth thinned
into a line. He looked up at Ling, an unreadable expression in his eye and Ling didn't know why he
had a sudden foreboding feeling come over him but surely he had nothing to do with E-

A sharp kick to the head sent Ling tumbling through a wall.

"YOU MORON I'M NOT DEAD! I FAKED MY DEATH!"

"Well, that did the trick. Thanks, Edward. You're too kind." Ling set down the empty container, well
the last empty container and crossed his arms as he allowed himself to relax.

"Amazingly, you're not a giant fat ass," Ed replied. It was making Ed twitchy. How was he so calm?
It was driving him mad not being able to know. And it seemed Ling knew it too if the way the lazy
smile on his face deepened at the sight of Ed's leg moving up in down as he fidgeted to stay still.

Darius shook the bag he was holding. "He ate all of our rations."

Ed fought back the urge to scream in frustration because why was this taking so damn long and you
know what? Fuck it, he couldn't take it anymore!

"How are you so okay with this?" he cried, reaching up and shaking his friend's shoulders.

Ling simply smiled and grabbed onto Ed's shoulders, pulled him down close and let their foreheads
touch. His eyes were smiling and Ed hadn't realized it but a tense feeling in his body instantly melted
away as did that nagging feeling in his chest. He felt like he could breathe again and damn if it wasn't
the best feeling in the world at the moment. He was with someone who knew him! Who knew Ed!
Who knew him from before the incident!

That weight he seemed to hold on his shoulders suddenly disappeared and a small smile slipped onto
his face without realizing it. He closed his eyes, letting himself just be Ed, letting himself bask in the euphoria of having Ling around and oh dear god, he'd never thought he'd think that. Ever. But he was. He had. And he felt the tears pricking his eyes as he let himself just breathe for more than a second and enjoy the feeling.

"Edo," Ling whispered, voice soft and gentle and he didn't know how much he needed to hear this until now. "I need you to look at me."

Ed didn't want to. He wanted to let himself melt away just like all his problems and he didn't want to open his eyes and have it all be a dream. Because those were the worst and he was already going to cry, but he knew if he opened his eyes and it was just a dream, he would lose it. He would break down.

"Ed!" Ling raised his voice. "Open. Your. Eyes."

Ed whined but agreed and held back his gasp at the understanding and the compassion and just-argh! Why did he have to have such good friends! It wasn't fair! Now he couldn't wallow in self-pity or some other emo angsty teenager bullshit he liked to play with Roy because now he had good friends...shit.

"Why aren't you angry with me?" he whispered back, voice tired and broken and he just wanted the world to swallow him whole.

"Because I'm your friend and I trust you, Ed. I trust you to make the right choices. Isn't that what friends are supposed to do? Trust in one another? Now, are you going to introduce me to your pals?"

Ed motioned to Darius. "That's Mr. Gorilla."

"My name's Darius." Darius snapped.

"And I'm Heinkel," Heinkel said.

"We're ex-military, but we wound up getting stuck working with this kid somehow." Darius pointed at Ling. "Now what's this guy story?"

Ed put a hand to the back of his head. "Well, let's see, it's kind of complicated."

"I'm a Homunculus," Ling stated plainly, surprising Ed.

"Oh yeah, by the way-!" Ed smacked the back of Ling's head, causing him to cry out and rub his wound as he pouted at his friend.

"What was that for, Edo? I thought we were friends!"

"We are, you jackass! That was for becoming a homunculus immediately after my death! Idiot prince!" he yelled at his friend, causing him to shrink back in his terror of the golden hair teen. "Also, can you try to be more discreet?" Ed asked

"Seriously?" Darius asked.

Ed glanced over at him. "It will take too long to explain." He gazed back at his friend. "What are you doing here? I thought you'd be in Central still."

"Well, to put it lightly, Greed had a falling out with the other Homunculi, so I took advantage of his confusion and managed to regain control of my body." He paused and grimaced a bit. This time,
Ling had trouble getting the words out without grimacing in pain every few seconds, "I had to get out of Central. I needed someplace close by to hide, so I...." He paused again and grimaced again.

"What's the matter?"

Ling lifted a hand and held it just before his forehead as sweat started to dot his face. "It's Greed. He's starting to fight back." He bowed his head a bit and put his hand to his forehead.

"Don't let him overpower you!" Ed ordered. He just got his friend back, he wasn't going to lose him again so soon!

"Listen," Ling said roughly. "That guy beneath Central, the one that they call their Father. He's gonna open the portal. On the Day of Reckoning." He rubbed his forehead as Ed gave a small gasp and same to his friend's side, "I could be wrong about this, but I think you and Al should jump in when he does. It's the best chance you have to get your bodies back."

"Wait a minute. That makes sense and everything, but," Ed frowned. "There's a toll that must be paid to even open the portal." His eyes widened in horror, 'And why? Why is he opening the portal?'

Ed turned back to his friend, "This Day of Reckoning, do you know the exact day he's going to open it?"

"It's happening," Ling stopped and put his hand to his face as he groaned.

"Ling," Ed said as he leaned forward. "Come on!"

"I can't hold him much longer." He dropped his hand and asked gruffly, "The message? You got it to Lan Fan, right? You gave her the message?"

Ed shifted his eyes downward. "The message?" He looked up in remembrance.

"Al gave it to her, and she's doing alright. I don't know where she is, but she's safe."

Ling sighed in relief. "Thank you, Ed. That's good to hear." He groaned again. With a grimace, he covered his face with his hand again. Ed reached forward. "Ling!"

"I'm sorry...That's it for me...I'm gone." Ling bowed his head.

"Damn, pain in the ass prince. He needs to learn to keep his big mouth shut."
Fixing the collar of his coat, Ed made his way down the back alleys of the Canal District.

He sighed as he brushed back a stray strand of golden hair and narrowed his eyes at the sight of it. He pushed it back behind his ear and tightened the ponytail he decided to sport for this visit. He needed to keep his golden hair hidden and his eyes covered. It was bad enough he was wearing a god damn trench coat like his dad, but now? Now, he had to wear a hat and sunglasses as well. It wasn't even day time!

It wasn't one he had planned. The visit that is. It was a spur of a moment type of thing because he didn't know how to feel. But his eyes lite up at the thought of his destination and a small smile played at his lips as he turns around the corner and finds himself opening up a familiar oak door. The smell of smoke, the faint jazz playing in the background, the bright lights that reminded him of his family.

He had needed this.

Definitely needed this.

He eyed Chris who had her back turned to him and how all the girls were either not paying attention or upstairs and he decided to take his sweet time taking off his things. He folded the glasses before placing them into the trench coat's pocket and hanging it up. The hat went on the hook followed shortly by the coat. He sat himself down at the bar and let his head rest lazily on his automail arm, gleaming in the light of the bar.

"What'll it be?" Chris asked, back still turned to him.

"Shots of Whiskey, please?" he teased, his voice echoing throughout the room as Chris froze stiff and the glass she was cleaning dropped to the ground and shattered. And V, beautiful smart courageous V, poked her head out of the back at the sound and promptly stiffened at the sight of him.

He waved his automail hand, a small smile playing at his lips. "Trick!" The next thing he knew, he was knocked off his barstool by a blonde blur and found himself staring up at the ceiling as V hugged him as if he was a giant teddy bear...then again, to her he probably was.

"Are you even legal brat?" Chris asked him, her smirk teasing and he laughed, bright and happy as he stared up at his family and he felt happier than he had in a long time.

"You know it, Chris!"

"It's good to have you home, kid. How long ya staying?" she asked, taking a drag of her cigarette as her pearls shined bright as ever in the bar's limelight.

"Only for a couple of hours, I have to hit the road again. The boss is just letting me settle my affairs here in the city before we go."

"Well then, three shots of whiskey it is."
Chapter End Notes

Please review, I love to hear from you all!
Fateful Reunions

Chapter Summary

It’s been over 7 months since the death of Edward Elric and all around the country, the people gather in preparation of the Promised Days arrival.

Chapter Notes

I am alive~! Some of you might be wondering where I've been. To be honest? Some shit went down. My partner broke up with me. It's my last year of high school and my parents discovered that I could potentially graduate early if I just get two required credits moved to the first semester.

The thing is; that would mean I'd miss out on 6 months with my friends because if I go through with it, I'd be done high school by January and wouldn't go back to school until college the following September. I mean, do I want that? Not only that but how would they react?

It's a scary time. It's scary enough to think how all of us will already be splitting up and leaving town for newer lives. So, do I want this? Yeah, it would be awesome to finish school, but then I'm an adult 6 months early and I risk all my friends leaving me behind as I work constantly for those 6 months.

But enough about that scary crap!

This has to be my favourite episode and arc because not only am I sucker for time skips where the characters grow and improve but also this whole episode until the very end of the show always makes me jump up and scream. It’s just so much fun from beginning to end I’m always on the edge of my seat!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

He stared.

She stared back.

It felt like a contest. To see who would break under the pressure, to see who could lose control and let all the pent up aggression and tears come flooding through. He didn't want to lose and it drove
him crazy to think that she had even some sway over him. He knew if he broke, then the dam of swirling and never-ending emotions he was desperately trying to hold back would breakthrough.

He would be bared.

Naked for all the world to see and it left an uncomfortable feeling in the back of his mind. His spine shivered at the thought and he tensed, fists clenched and teeth grinding against one another. Ed was not one to let his emotions control him, popular to contrary belief, he had a good grasp at them. He had to when there was Al to think of. If he just acted like a child all the time, who would take care of him?

No, Ed needed to be in control.

It was something that kept him grounded, something to keep him from going insane. All his life he never felt like he was in control of anything; he was forced into the military, he was forced to grow up. Forced. That was a common thing Ed seemed to have going for him.

And it made his skin crawl.

Not because it was just a general feeling of unpleasantness, he could deal with that any day, but because of that night.

Meeting Truth for the first time was a pivotal moment of his. If he wanted to pinpoint the root of all his problems, all the times he got fucked over in life, all the times he was forced into doing something; it all generally led back to the Truth. Just look at him now; sitting across from her, 10 seconds away from losing his composure all because Truth decided he was to be his third party and used Ed’s better nature against him.

It made him shudder. A chill ran up his spine and he blinked back the headache he could just feel coming as he tried to focus onto other matters. More important matters. Like the situation he's found himself in;

Being vulnerable in front of her...that was something he could never allow.

It was an insult.

He was never one to let himself show weakness- it was just something he never allowed. After his mom died, he had to be the parent. Not anyone else. Him. He was the one who had to comfort Al when he had nightmares, he was the one who cooked all their meals, who made sure his brother was happy and healthy, he was the one to kiss him goodnight and spend hours cleaning up after themselves.

So, whenever Izumi or Granny tried, it made him defensive. He didn't need someone to replace his mother. And he certainly didn’t need anyone to baby him.

It was hard letting others in.

It took time and effort and years of trust before he allowed Roy and Riza to be the parents he and Al were deprived of. And what would probably surprise most was that he took to Roy better than he did Riza. He didn't know what it was like to have a father, so anything remotely parental was new for him. He had no basis to judge Roy upon. It was easy to accept something he never had in the first place.

Logically, Ed knew that Hohenheim was his father, loath as he was to admit, but Hohenheim wasn't his father.
Not really.

The man was only related to him biologically, but other than that, the only purpose he had served in Ed's life was that of distant memory that he barely remembered better than he did of his home in the North.

He hardly remembered the man and what few memories he did have of him were all of a golden-haired scientist coped up in his office writing alchemical equations throughout the night. He never had a father, even when Hohenheim was still there. He was distant, cold, uncaring in a way that only he could manage and that was fine with Ed, he could care less, but Al was a different story.

Al was bright and loving and kind and far too good for this world and he deserved the best there was to offer. He deserved a brother who could protect him, a father who hadn't left before he could barely walk, a mother who didn't die and leave them to brave the heartless world they lived in by themselves. He deserved everything and more.

That's why he was so goddamn angry all the time.

I-it just wasn't fair!

Why did Al have to suffer?

Why did his mother have to die from a broken heart?

Why did all the bad things happen to the best people?

His baby brother deserved it all and for that stupid bastard to give him anything but his best pissed him off. It was something that made his blood boil because Al was precious and whole and so much more. And all Ed ever wanted for him was to for him to be happy. And for Al happy meant family and friends. It meant alchemy and adventure and cats and not a fucking suit of armour for a body!

Al couldn't have most of those things and that was Ed's fault. He could admit that and he was trying to fix that, but the family aspect- the father who loved him and told him he was proud and taught them alchemy, that was all Ed. He was Al's father for those few years on their own. Hohenheim did nothing when he could have and it made him despise the man more than anything.

So, no, Ed didn't have a father, at least not a parental one.

Until Roy.

Roy was everything Hohenheim wasn't.

He was everything Ed imagined a father would be and more.

He screamed at Ed when he did reckless shit, which was about 95% of the time but he knew it was just because the bastard was overprotective. No, Ed knew when he was really in trouble because then Riza would be there too, what with her cold fury and sharp eyes and even thinking about his mom pissed off at him made him want to run for the hills.

Roy would spend hours in the library with Ed looking for any leads on the philosophers stone because he knew how much it meant to him, he would buy him books that Ed thought were sold out just to see Ed's golden eyes light up with joy and liked to ruffle his hair because he knew it pissed Ed off and would discuss alchemical theory even if he wasn't on the same level as Ed was, not because it was something they shared as a common interest, but because he was happy when they did.
He liked bonding with Ed.

He got to know him as Ed before he tried to parent him as his son.

With Riza, it was a different story.

While she was different from Trisha, some of the similarities were uncanny.

Unlike Roy, he knew what it was like to have a mother. He knew what it was like to have a mother's embrace, to see a warm smile and to be loved so unconditionally that it left him baffled and in awe. He knew what it was like. He had a basis. The first time Riza tried to be his mom, he lashed out. He had felt the hot tears spilling down his face at her smile because he hadn't seen Riza's smile at all but Trisha's.

It had made him angry at first.

And then sad.

Because it reminded him of what he didn't have anymore. With Riza it was different. Izumi was much like him, she didn't know what it was like to have a son after losing one and Ed didn't know what it was like to have a mom after losing her. They were in uncharted territory and so never pushed and prodded at the wounds that had never quite healed properly.

But that didn't help. Because while they loved one another, they would never replace the ones they lost and it just left them more hurt and filled with grief than before. They knew that and so never embraced it. At least not fully.

Riza was complex.

She never was afraid to poke at him. She never hesitated to push his boundaries and held firm when he lashed out. It was different from Izumi and that had him reeling for a while. Riza never lost any children. But she could never have any children. The war had ensured that the Hawkeye line would never continue. It had taken away not just her innocence but her choice to start a family. It took away the only chance at happiness she could've had after the horrors of the war.

Riza may have never lost a child, but she lost the ability to have any.

She was hurt in a different way than Izumi was.

Similar, yet not.

Riza was like saltwater on a wound. It hurts for a little while, stung actually, but in the end, it helped heal those wounds. The wounds he had from his mother's death had never quite healed and meeting Izumi was only a bandaid. Riza was a cure.

Those wounds he held onto so desperately, for some reminder that it was real and his mother mattered to him even if everyone else went on about their days like it was fine, were festering when he met Riza. He was scared and bitter and in so much pain, the trauma from that night and losing his limbs had made him angry. Angry that when she tried to mother him, he lashed out.

It would take many months, long nights and so many tears before he let her in. Before he let her be his mom. Part of his problem was that he thought that if he let Riza in and she became his mom, he would lose what few and precious memories he had of Trisha. His mother.

"You've gotten taller, short stack," she remarked, letting out a drag of smoke from her pipe.
"WHO ARE YOU CALLING A PIPSQUEAK MIDGET WHO CAN'T EVEN GO TO THE BEACH BECAUSE HE'S SO SMALL, HE'D SINK INTO THE SAND AND WHEN THE TIDE COMES IN HE DOESN'T EVEN SINK OR HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT DROWNING BECAUSE HE'S SO MICROSCOPIC HE CAN BREATHE ALL THE OXYGEN ATOMS IN THE WATER??!!"

"Well, you're definitly Ed alright."

"Who else would I be Granny?!?" he seethed.

"Forgive an old gal for her memory, but last I checked you midget, you were dead!" He faltered at that and rubbed the back of his neck nervously. His hands found themselves winding in his lap, the fingers fiddling with one another as he looked away from her glare.

Pinako's gaze softened and she placed her own hands atop of his, causing Ed to snap his head up at her to see her barely-there smile as his breath caught in his throat. She patted his hands as she got up and though he dwarfed her by nearly two and half times her height, she ruffled his golden hair and let out a huff, smoke billowing from her as she did.

"Welcome home Edward."

In his defence, he was just looking for a quiet place to eat a sandwich. He was tired of it all.

Of the stares, the digging questions and the teasing comments and it was enough to rattle him. He hadn't been discomposed since Kimblee. Then again Kimblee was a special kind of crazy, one that seemed to rile up even the most unseemly urges to inflict violence that Ed tried to keep buried. The urges to break and destroy because he just had all this rage and nowhere to put it.

No place to vent.

Not completely.

So to avoid trying to strangle his best friend and his homunculus roommate, he had angrily made a ham sandwich and ventured up into his girlfriend's room. They used to spend hours in there, just doing what they loved. They didn't need to share common interests to be happy with one another.

He could listen to her tinker all night long and likewise, Winry confessed to him as they laid under the stars one evening that hearing him scribble down half-written alchemical equations as he mumbled was quite cute. Something she enjoyed because it was normalcy that she yearned for after the boys lost their limbs. After all their parents passed from this world and left them to grow up way to fast.

Winry's room was always a haven, even when he was still living with the Rockbells. He had actually lived with her in her room during his one year of recovery and he still remembers what she had told
him- that if he was going to be a dumbass then she was going to be there to keep track of him after each day of tearing muscles and gaining bruises in places he didn't even think he could bruise.

If he was to describe his relationship with Winry, it would probably take all night.

Not because it was a complicated matter, not because she was annoying or they fought all the time or how she throws a fucking wrench at him instead of talking about her feelings because apparently, that's a thing nowadays? No, it would take him most of the night because he couldn't convey it into words.

Ed was never meant to be a poet, that much he knew, and he could never do her justice when he described her. Maes had once asked, on a dark and stormy night where the two had been sitting up late together on the couch nursing a cup of coffee as they mused on different ways to drive Roy insane, what exactly Winry was to him.

Back then, a 12-year-old Ed had been hesitant.

They hadn't been exactly dating- if you could call it that- but rather growing closer, closer than just best friends. Not siblings. Never siblings. Winry was an only child and for good reason. It wasn't because she couldn't share, though she had some problems in that department, or because she never got the chance, Sarah and Yuriy had even asked her if she had wanted one.

She just didn't.

She never saw the need. She was happy for the time being and wanted to relish having her parents, her granny and Ed and Al and everyone else all to herself for just a little while longer. Winry knew her parents had been relieved. Sarah never had siblings herself while Yuriy had had an older brother once upon a time- Ivan Rockbell who left home to travel the world.

The Rockbells were okay with just having Winry, content with just their little mechanic when it had occurred to them that maybe she had wanted one. A little brother to protect and teach automail to or a little sister she could talk girly things with and play dress up.

She didn't.

Winry would later admit on a quiet night when the wind blew through the grass in a warm breeze as the two lounged on an old quilt and looked up at the star-speckled sky that maybe if she had said yes, her parents wouldn't have left. That may be the thought of leaving both Winry and a younger child with only Pinako to look after them might have been too much. That it could have made them pause before they agreed to serve in Ishval as doctors.

She had admitted that she sometimes spent all night thinking and questioning what could have been. That over the years it had increased to one or two nights a week where she just stared at the ceiling and wondered.

That was the night he had first kissed her.

They had been 13 years old and the best of friends until Ed couldn't stop himself and kissed her under a gorgeous lit sky where the stars looked like a million speckles of paint splatter and the sky lit up like kaleidoscope of azures, cyans and bright purples. He thought back to the answer he had given Maes, just a year before he changed it all with a chaste kiss under the stars.
"So, Winry, is she your girlfriend or what, Ed?"

Like always, Maes Hughes was not one for being subtle. He ended up spitting his coffee all over Maes in his surprise as he started hacking while the older man drenched in coffee and grinning like a loon looked at him with smug eyes and wiggling eyebrows.

"Winry? The blonde who throws wrenches at me when I piss her off, who I've known since we were all still crawling in diapers, my childhood friend, that Winry?" the golden-haired blonde preteen spat out as he coughed.

"Is there another Winry you haven't told me about? Come on Ed, you can be honest with me, kid!"

It made Ed pause, mid-sip as he thought on it and his golden brows furred in his thoughts. His knee stopped its little jig and a frown found its way onto his face at some point. You see, up until that point Ed hadn't given it much thought as to what he'd call their relationship and his face definitely showed Maes this when he studied the golden-haired alchemist.

Winry was many things to him, too many to count and if he had to explain it all, Ed knew it would take all night.

Winry was extraordinary.

Special like Al.

**Family.**

She was his best friend and besides Al, his biggest support system. She understood him better in some ways that Al just couldn't, not because she was closer than him but Ed hadn't at the time when the failure of night was still fresh and everything was turned upside down to put it all on Al's shoulders.

So he confided in Winry.

Gorgeous, brilliant, thoughtful Winry who never judged him for his fears and only ever reassured him. She knew that some nights he just wanted to do nothing, to not talk about feelings and all those other things that Al only ever wanted to do when they had a problem. The thing was; **sometimes Ed just wanted to escape.** Sometimes he wanted to just be Ed and not anyone else.

He just wanted it to be like when they were little kids with actual parents who were alive and loved
them and limbs they could run with and bodies that weren't broken down and scarred and before it had all went to shit.

Ed just wanted to be Ed.

Nothing less and nothing more. It was times like that when he felt closest to her. Ed had Al and then they had Winry and while they were all the best of friends, there had always been that bond formed between him and Al that he and Winry hadn't had for those first few years of friendship.

"...Winry is Winry." Was all he said.

Maes hummed as he gave the preteen a glance and sipped at his chiller coffee. He made a face at the taste and sighed when Ed gave a small laugh at the sight before getting up and getting the both of them hot chocolate instead.

In Ed's mind, it had made sense.

There was no real way to completely describe Winry, well, no real way for Ed to describe her in a light she deserved. Just like Al, Winry deserved it all. She deserved someone who could be there for her, who could put her above his needs of searching for a myth, someone who wouldn't die because he was entangled in a plot to sacrifice their country by a megalomaniac who wanted to play God.

Someone who wasn't scared and broken and had a burning inferno of anger he just couldn't seem to control at times.

Someone who could admit he loved her.

Ed couldn't do that.

Not to her.

He couldn't promise her a hundred percent and not give it. Not when the threat of Father and the
Homonculus loomed over them like a shadow, not when he was more committed to bringing back his baby brother, because he had fucked up once upon a time and seemed to keep doing it wherever he went, no, Ed wouldn't do that to her.

When he told her that he loved her he wanted it to be on his terms, not just because he would die and then selfishly leave her all alone. He cared too much about her to do that. He wouldn't be his rotten excuse for a father, promising love and a life together where they could be happy and then leaving.

Just up and gone with the wind, as if he had never been there in the first place. He refused. It was bad enough that he looked like Hohenheim, bad enough that he lived with the remainder of the bastard every time he looked in a damn mirror, he didn't want to be like him.

The thing was: he was scared. He was scared that would end up like Hohenheim, what with his empty promises and his half-assed excuses and his fucking cryptic ass answers that he gave the golden-haired teen every time he saw him. No, Ed wouldn't commit unless he knew he could.

Winry deserved better than that.

That's what made this whole thing harder than it needed to be.

He liked Winry, he could feel what might develop into more...into love. It was something that had been on his mind for a while and he wanted to be able to give it all to her, to be able to introduce her as his girlfriend, to walk around the streets going on dates, to walk up to Roy and Riza and Uncle Miles and everyone else and tell them that this was Winry. His Winry.

And maybe it wasn't exactly the best time to be having deep thoughts about your maybe girlfriend while in said girlfriend's room eating a sandwich.

And it really should not have surprised him when he failed to notice the said girlfriend walking into her room after travelling as the supposed captive of Scar the Alehmist Killer for the past 6 months because a maniac named Kimblee was using you as a pawn to keep Ed, said boyfriend, who you didn't know was you boyfriend because you thought he was dead and where was he going with this again?

Right, girlfriend screaming at the top of her lungs because she saw him, Ed, her supposedly dead boyfriend, in her room while she was trying to get undressed as he ate a ham sandwich and brooded.

One by one, it turned into even more of a shit show as the two Brigg's soldiers, Darius, Heinkel and Greed with his smug ass smile and all-knowing eyes came up to Winry's room.

And then Den made an appearance and at this point, Ed was just about done with everything...almost as much as Winry if the way she was starting to huff and the way her eyebrows started to twitch(which Ed found adorable by the way) was any indication.

"GET OUT OF MY ROOM!" Four grown-ass men and a homunculus stuck inside a Xingese prince's body were thrown from the room rather violently as Ed and Den looked on in terror.

Well, maybe not as pissed off as she undoubtedly was.

Winry clicked her cheek and pointed out the door, making Den go running for the hills as the blonde mechanic slammed the door shut, wrench still in hand as she panted and leaned against the wooden door. It was silent, far more silent than he was used to and while he knew he was probably in worse shit for doing this to her, he couldn't help but marvel at how beautiful she had gotten in their time apart from one another.
It was then that he had heard the quiet sniffles and watched as a few tears, ones that he had promised she'd never cry, were shed and fell to the wooden floor. Ed placed his sandwich down, long forgotten, and made his way over to Winry.

He was only a foot away, about to reach out for her when she whirled around and slapped him full force, a resounding echo throughout the room rang in his ears as his head snapped to the side a bright red palm print etched into his skin and Winry's hand raised in the air.

He slowly looked back at her, golden eyes full of sorrow and longing in him to make this right once he saw the unshed tears in her bright blue eyes and the way some had escaped down her beautiful face like a waterfall.

"I deserved that."

"You're damn right, you asshole!" she hissed at him, tears streaming down her face and her eyes dark with an anger that burned brightly.

Ed was usually the temperamental one. And it took a lot to get Winry angry. Oh, she could get mad. She threw wrenches at his head enough for him to know that, but it took a lot for her to get truly angry. Winry was a mix of him and Al. Al had the patience of a saint while Ed...didn't. He rarely had any. Winry was in between, she had Al's patience which was mainly to hold back Ed's temper.

It truly took a lot to piss her off.

Unfortunately for Ed, he had managed to do that.

"I know you're angry" at this Winry snorted and her eyes burned," but if you just let me explai-!"

"Explain?! Explain!? Explain how you faked your goddamn death for seven months! SEVEN MONTHS ED! YOU LET ME ALL ALONE FOR SEVEN MONTHS THINKING YOU WERE DEAD AND I-I couldn't handle that. I couldn't handle you leaving me like that Ed! What gave you the right to steal my heart when you left? What gave you the right to make me feel like I couldn't function because just the thought of you being gone left me shattered? WHAT GAVE YOU THE RIGHT TO MAKE ME FALL IN LOVE AND THEN LEAVE ME?!"

"Y-you love me?" Ed stuttered, heart-pounding because he hadn't thought of that. He hadn't thought she was in love with him. Not like he was with his head over heels and couldn't function when he saw her smile type of love.

"Of course I do, you moron! Why wouldn't I be? You made me fall in love with you!" Winry stalked forward and rested her arms around his neck. Her forehead came to rest on his own as she closed her eyes and breathed in deeply.

He didn't know how long they stayed like that but it must have been a while for Granny Pinako to yell at them from downstairs about dinner being ready. Winry sighed and pressed a quick kiss to his lips before pulling from him and making her way to the door.

"We will be having a very long talk about this all later, Edward!"

And there was Ed, still dazed from the feel of her lips on his own and how everywhere she touched left him feeling electrified. A happy feeling spread through his chest as he stared at the spot she was previously and he reached up to trace his lips, a fond smile fixed on his face at the thought of it.
Chapter End Notes

There! We have officially ended “Looming Shadows” and the time where Ed and Al and everyone else reuniting is at hand! Please review, it always makes me happy to hear from you all! I hope you have a wonderful day as well!
Windows To The Soul

Chapter Summary

Ed heads back to Central to meet up with his allies.

Chapter Notes

PLEASE READ - I have been gone for a while. I know. And nothing I can say to tell you how sorry I am. It wasn't even my school or personal life that stopped me from posting before. No, it was just every time I opened and started typing, it never seemed right to me. Usually, I'm always satisfied but for whatever reason, no matter what I wrote, it just didn't seem right to me.

But! Enough about that, welcome back my lovely readers, today I'm introducing the 24th chapter to my book and I hope you love it!

ALSO PLEASE READ - I am opening up an announcements board so stories and things. Also, I have decided to do a Q&A so if you have any questions whatsoever for me or the book, don't hesitate to ask and I'll answer them all next chapter. I love you all, please read and review and I hope you like it!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Bright azure eyes blinked at the setting sun in front of them.

The sunset was a symphony of pleasing pinks, lilac purples, sunshine yellows, burnt oranges and cherry reds and it filled her vision as the colours seemed to dance and blended until it was all just one big mess.

But it was beautiful.

And that was something Winry could appreciate.

Ed was... he was kind of like a sunset. He was like the sun, so bright and hot-tempered and just overpowering in a way that you just couldn't look away but sometimes... sometimes he was a mess of colours and other times he was just the perfect blend. He was everything and nothing and all of it in between and beyond. He was someone she wanted to know for the rest of her life.

To be with him for the rest of his life.

It didn't even have to be in a romantic way because, at the end of the day, Ed was her friend, her best friend, and he was her boyfriend but he would always be her best friend and she wanted that until the end.

She didn't want to be alive and doing what she loved if she couldn't share it with him. He made it
worth it. Granny was her only living family except for Uncle Ivan but no one knows where he went and she loved her Granny, but she knew she wouldn't be there forever for her. She knew that and it hurt but it was true and her grandmother always reminded her, every year for the past five years...ever since the incident.

Because the boys would need her, Ed would need her, and Granny wouldn't always be there to patch them up and give them a hot meal and advice. It would fall to Winry then and whether she and Ed were still together or she was back to being his best friend, it didn't matter to her, because she couldn't imagine a life worth living without her sunshine.

"Would you stop moping and go already!"

Winry yelped as she spun and Den barked and one thing led to another before suddenly she was tripping and down the stairs she went, tumbling onto the dirt and grass in a less than graceful manner. When she opened her eyes, her grandmother was above her smoking her pipe and looking at her expectantly.

"W-what do you mean Granny?" she stammered and gulped because Winry Marya Daria Alisa Rockbell did not stammer and oh god what was she doing? Since when had she turned into Ed?

Just thinking about him leaves a warm feeling in her chest and her heart beats just a little bit faster and breath is stolen from her throat and she staggers back, mind reeling because she loves that idiot and he just up and left her again! And he expects her to be okay with that?

"Just go to him already."

Winry blinks, train of thought lost and stared past her Granny to see the bright sun surrounded by a sea of purples, pinks, yellows, oranges and reds as it continues to set undaunted by her emotional dilemma and only thinks of Him and before she can even think she's up and dusting off her pants as she rushes up the stairs towards her room.

Because Ed was her sunshine, her everything, and he was worth it and she promised him she wouldn't cry but she did and goddammit why was she in love with a sacrificial dumbass?

She loved him.

That's why.

A dazzling smile pulls up at her lips and she running off into the hills trying to catch the next train before it leaves because if he thinks he's gonna leave her behind again then he had another thing coming! He would be doing this with her or not all!

After all, what if he broke his automail?

Molten golden eyes trailed out the window in a mindless search as he tried to alleviate his boredom.
Ed let his gaze trail out onto the countryside, a sea of green that passed by far too fast for him to truly appreciate, as the train made its way across the country. He eyed the rolling hills littered with sparse patches of flowers, a whole rainbow of colours scattered around in bouts of bright blues, deep purples, sunshine yellows, pure whites and pretty pinks.

He could only see the endless fields

There were very few trees on this side of Amestris and much like the West, the East State held no need for great looming forests when there was farming to be done. The West State was famous for its agriculture and the rolling hills and bountiful crops was a very common sight if one were to simply pause and glance around them. It was Amestris main source of food to the rest of the country.

In the eastern state, however, it was far and in between to find farming as extensive as it was in the west. Ed knew the East wasn't good for a lot of farming like the west was, but he remembers running through pastures of wheat and corn with Al and Winry, whole fields covered in them that he never seemed to see where they began and where they ended.

Unlike the South who was once the tourist attraction of the country...Ed can see it when he closes his eyes, beaches of white sand and bright blue skies that reminded Ed of Winry's eyes and the water was the colour of liquid amazonite. He feels the warm breeze on his skin and can hear the rushing waves and it's like he was there. But he was never there. It was Granny Pinako who as a young girl ran across the white sandy beaches and remembers fondly of her childhood before they moved to the east.

He's smiling, just a little upturn at the corner of his mouth and he can't wait to be able to go and visit it for the first time, it had been a childhood dream of Winry's and he wanted to be the one to take her... his lips drop into a grimace because no, that wasn't right. It wasn't beautiful beaches and bright skies and opulent waves. Not anymore.

*It was blood-soaked sand, bullet-ridden walls and rotting bodies beneath the Aeurgian sun as the border war raged on.*

The North wasn't any better.

It was a tundra where only the strongest survived. The highest mountains covered in a frozen fire that burned. And the land that was as unforgiving as its people. In the north, it was about **power**, about **control**, about **survival**. With how cold and ruthless it was, they didn't export many items to the rest of the country and the only ones he could recall were lumber and coal and even those were scarce if not mined properly.

While the Northern State is too cold and too harsh as it remains unrelenting to Drachma, the East held different resources.

Mining was a big one, that much he knew, but he also recognized its handful the gold mine of automail. It wasn't just Granny Pinako or Rush Valley that supported the automail trade so many others held bigger names and were the ones behind the actual manufacturing of those powerful creations.

*Where did you think all that ore came from?*

It certainly wasn't from the North nor the South or West.

*All those ores, of gemstones and gold hiding beneath the ground no matter where you were in the east. Just beneath Resemboole alone was a minefield of iron and Youswell was the main export as*
well what with it being the only town for miles meant they could dig as far and as deep as they wanted without disturbing the people. After all, there was no one around for 30 miles in any direction.

Don't even get him started on the latest gold mine they found about two years ago. A report had come in from the small town of Cameron who was known for their oil mines. It claimed of a mountain about 120 miles east of the town, edging along the border into the Desert Area that separated them from Xing.

They called it the Mountain of Xerxes.

He had found it a little odd and thought nothing of it but then Mustang caught wind of it- because of course, he did that man had eyes on the back of his head and superhearing- and was immediately intrigued and sent Ed running along to investigate.

When he got to Cameron, it was in the middle of the night and he was alone. Mustang had been excited, trying to figure out why they named the mountain after the city that disappeared in one night that he put Ed on a train the moment he reported in.

Well, he hadn't done it himself, Havoc counted though.

That meant Al wasn't with him and was instead staying at the dorms. Unaware, that Ed had left the city.

He remembers cursing Roy vindictively the whole train ride there and when he finally reported in at Cameron, the older man was practically oozing amusement and his smug ass smirk through the phone, if that was even possible that is.

Ed could recall the endless nights of travelling through the countryside with a shady guide who then tried to ditch and dash him a quarter of the way there. He had continued regardless and was about to give up when he caught sight of something peculiar. It was a bird. A very large bird and not one that was commonly seen in the East.

At the time, it had looked like an eagle.

He knew very little about the birds aside from their habitats- they lived in dry, desert areas where large mountains to build their nests upon were. Ed decided then and there to take a risk and followed the bird. By the time the sun rose up from the desert skyline, he caught the silhouette of a mountain range. He had stopped short at the sight before him, jaw dropped when the light hit it.

It shined.

No, it glowed.

It sparkled.

Standing at over 1500ft, was a mountain made of gold. It wasn't an idiom. It was quite literally a mountain of gold. Ed was sure his jaw had dropped but he hadn't cared. He now knew exactly why they named it after Xerxes who's people were rumoured to be made from the sun itself.

Ed would later find out that the reason no one had found a literal mountain of gold was that up until two months ago, it was a normal mountain. Well, not normal, it just looked ordinary. Some drunks decided to head up to the old mine to see if they could find...well anything of value.

To make a long story short, they managed to set all four tons of the explosives left in the mines
aflame and then hightailed it out of there. It destroyed the brittle walls of rock and sent the mountain crumbling to reveal the gold inside.

As per orders of Mustang when he called in to report what he found, Ed was ordered to stay and secure the mountain until troops could be sent to fence it off and declare it the militaries. Because of this fact, he missed what had transpired back at Eastern Command once the General had found out about the mountain.

Ed knew he had a vindictive streak, it was one of his defining traits that his darling baby brother enjoyed to point out to him. That's why when he heard of how Grumman got drunk and flashed everyone back at HQ as he ran around the halls completely devoid of any clothing. According to his mother, Grumman had come in and hugged his dad, still naked, and well...no one dares to speak of that day again.

Oh, what he would've given to have seen his father's face when it happened!

Unfortunately, or fortunately, if you want to look at it, for Ed, he was 200 miles east sitting in front of a mountain that quite literally sparkled and not getting scarred for life. He was there for well over four days waiting for the research team and their escorts to relieve him of his hold and secure.

(Those first two days included trying to wrangle in Grumman from the ventilation system, extensive trauma therapy and comprehension lawsuits against the military. The third day was taken to clean every inch and surface in command and the last day was declared a mental health day)

When the team sent to replace him had finally shown up, they had the Mining Alchemist with them. Dr. George Donavon was a middle-aged man with black hair, even darker skin and unusually enough, bright blue eyes that sparkled like gems. He specialized in locating ores beneath the ground and as such, was mainly stationed in the east to help locate large portions of gems and ores.

Ed likes to think that if he dug down deep enough, he would be able to call upon the precious metals below them and mould them into whatever fleeted his fancy. He had always wanted to make something with his alchemy like he did when he was younger...before Hohenheim left...before his mother died...

He recalls of the gold beneath the ground and all he could do with his alchemy now...all the art he could perform, all the smiles he could make...he craved it. When he learned alchemy, it wasn't because he liked it. It was to make his mother smile again. She missed Hohenheim and the bastard was an alchemist, so naturally, Ed thought it might make her smile.

It had.

Al had caught him one night and wanted to give it a try. From then on, his sweet baby brother joined him. He didn't know why Ed had aspired to learn and hadn't asked even after all these years. But it was so worth it.

It made her smile again and he was so desperate to see an inkling of the mother from before that he tore through all the notes, every single book and if it was in another language, so be it, he'd learn. He learned 3 different languages researching alchemy. All for her.

He remembers the look on Dr. Donavon's face when Ed showed him the mountain. He had wept actual tears of joy and had thanked Ed profusely for being able to locate such a find. All Ed had done was nod his head and stayed around until he was certain they were secured and properly set up. He always knew the east was profitable for its ores and gems but knew what truly brought in the dough.
What the East was especially known for.

Because the crown jewel of the East had to be what they supplied to the military.

**Alchemists.**

**Soldiers.**

**Weapons.**

The East alone supplied over 2/3’s of the Amestrian military and almost all of its alchemists have gone down in history for some reason or another. Roy, Kimblee, Marcoh, Grand and Comanche. All the heavy hitters came from the East except for Alex. The East also supplied 3/4’s of the militaries weaponry and while most would be surprised, Ed himself wasn’t.

It had made sense to him, after all, all the ore and metal used to make the guns and other explosives came from the mines in the East and to just make the weapons in the east while they were still closest to the resources before being shipped off to Central to being tagged and distributed.

And it was because of this fact that Ed was able to make his way across the country unseen.

Now, according to some underhanded reports that made it into his hands, gossiping soldiers who were too loud for their good and a particularly timed plot gave way to where he was now. According to the soldiers he overheard, Central was demanding more weapons as soon as possible after a series of storerooms and warehouses containing guns, grenades, bombs and other weapons were suddenly finding themselves empty.

They were in such a hurry that the trains were sent out without proper inspections. Which meant less security and thus, his ticket into Central. It was far too easy to blend into the crowd, to find himself surrounded by a sea of people until not even the few soldiers would be able to discern him in the masses that populate the busy train station.

That in of itself was something Ed was familiar with. He knew how to move across whole cities without so much as being glanced at, he's familiar with how to blend in with any crowd he finds and Ed finds himself both prideful of his abilities and filled with disgust for the reasons he learned them.

Not even disturbed by his actions, but by himself.

An ugly feeling sweeps through his chest and he forgets to breathe for a moment, his body going still as his heart hammers in his chest and it's like a never-ending drum in his ear as it pounds thumps beats until it starts to hurt. The pain brings him to a place he hadn't ever wished to go back to. It was a place he had been to many nights since his journey started.

One filled with hate and self-loathing so much that he sometimes thought it hurt him just as much physically as it did mentally.

He can't make heads or tails of where he is in the country and his vision sways with vertigo and he can't think. **It just hurts.** And it never seems to go away. It lingers in the back of his mind, an ever-faithful reminder that not all wounds were physical. His stomach churns and the thumping is slowly becoming unbearable more and more by the second until all he wants to do is scream himself hoarse.

He barely blinks back the tears he knows hid in his eyes and sucks in a shuddering breath, one that makes his chest ache all over again. His side throbs in phantom pains and Ed releases a shuddering breath as the pain spikes. He raises his flesh hand and places it over his heart. The steady beats
beneath his fingers soothe his fears and clear his mind.

It reminds him of what he's lost, what he can gain, but more importantly, *what he could lose should he fail*. He knows that it was all coming to heed in the coming days but he can't help himself in wanting it to be all over now.

Ed wasn't much for regret, after all, what would he do with it when guilt filled his heart constantly? He knows it shouldn't, but what was once ruled by guilt alone, now finds an undertone of shame.

The worst part has to be that he can't find it in himself to care.

He wasn't one to let it rule him.

**Guide him, yes.**

**Rule, never.**

He never let his guilt control his head, never let the swirling emotions of his heart get the better of him. Guilt drove his desire to see his baby brother back in his body. He said he did it for both of them, but every time he said those words, bitter ash filled his mouth.

*It was for them both, he'd say.*

*Lie.*

*It was his dream, he says.*

*Lie.*

*It was his life's goal, he tells himself.*

*Lie.*

And then the guilt stirring in his heart would slowly crawl its way up into his throat as he told that filthy lie over and over and over again until he tells himself it was true.

**Until he believes it is.**

But that bitter feeling wells up in him and his lips curl as he catches sight of the looming gates of Central off in the distance. He can see the emerald green flag of Amestris, embroidered in golden accents as it ruffled gently in the summer breeze. It was mocking him and a deep hatred filled him, pushing aside his guilt and shame because what good were they when he fought?

Ed always worked his strongest when he was angry.

When he was emotional.

**Passionate.**

**Wild.**

**Unpredictable.**

Things like tranquillity and being level headed only ever got him brushes with death. When it was him and his blade, *his alchemy*, all senses of logic flew away because he was in his element then. He
was born for it and he always felt most at home with his blade and his alchemy than with any other weapon.

When he was Trick, when he wielded a gun, he was calm. Logical. Level-Headed. Ed can relive the first lesson his mom taught him when he first joined the military, the first lesson when wielding a gun.

"If you ever pick up a gun, Ed, you use it with the intent to kill. This isn't some toy, it's a loaded weapon. You don't close your eyes and shoot. You face them, eyes locked with their own. This is their life your taking, you can at least give them the honour of treating them with respect when you pull that trigger." Riza's voice rang just as clearly through his head today as they did when she first told him that.

He had taken the words to heart and unlike his blade or his alchemy, he didn't feel as in control when he brandished a gun as he did with either of those. It was just something that came down to personal preference and his parents were quick to reassure him that there wasn't anything wrong with that, that it was perfectly natural.

But he remembers long nights and a head filled with dark thoughts.

Because you didn't pick up a gun unless you had control. It was one of the finer aspects one needed when they used them. No control meant mistakes were made, it meant people were hurt, lives were lost. Entire wars started and ended by the barrel of a gun, its gleaming metal mocking you, it's ricochet echoing in your ears, that pain as it rips through you.

Ed tried to ignore the holster at his side, the way it glinted in the light, how his hands couldn't seem to just to stop fidgeting and the way his leg seemed to have a mind of its own as it jittered in place. He blocked out the other passenger's voices and his eyes burned from the lack of sleep he's been getting in the last few days.

He reached up to wipe at them, it wouldn't stop that stinging sensation he's gotten so used to, but it distracted him even if it was only for a second. His fingers brushed his hair and he pulled the loose strand forwards to eye it and looks at his sun spun hair in contemplation and stifles the groan he can feel working it's way up to his throat.

He hadn't bothered trying to dye his hair again, what with the promised day upon them, he knew he shouldn't even bother. Everything was about to come to a steed and while the thought shouldn't bring him as much joy as it did, the very thought of being reunited with his friends, his comrades, his family, made his heart thump just a little bit faster as a warm feeling spreads through his chest.

A complete idiot he was not and Ed at least had enough common sense to pack a pair of coloured contacts. He could get away with leaving his hair untouched, his eyes, on the other hand, were a completely different matter. Trying to hide those without contacts would be like leaving a bull in a china shop and well, you get the picture. It wouldn't end well for anyone.

Not for him, not for the soldiers who'd catch him or for his plan.

Ed knew that his plans were coming to an end. He had played his hand and it was time to finally see if he had won the house. He wouldn't stand for anything less, no he couldn't stand for anything less. Because anything less meant that the bastard hiding beneath Central had won, it meant that faking his death and living in exile from his family for over 7 months was for nothing.

And he didn't know what he would do if it came to that.
Coal-black eyes glittered in mirth as he watched his love disable, reload and polish her guns.

It was a strict process and one she only seemed to do when she had a lot on her mind. Take now, for example, she has disassembled, cleaned, polished and reassembled the same gun over seven times and if he had to watch one more time as she wiped down the same pin, he was going to explode. Normally, it was fun to see his love so distracted, being the Hawk’s Eye that she usually was, but now it was starting to get tedious.

They had decided to go out for dinner the other day and ended back at her apartment for an extra cup of coffee which had gradually turned into one more and then another until it was 3:00 AM and Riza had fallen asleep in her chair, her head propped up on her arm and the slightest fluttering of her eyelashes every so often. He had smiled and then put her off to bed.

When they both woke, he cooked them breakfast and that when it finally started.

She had been going strong for about three hours now and it was nearing noon last he checked. He knew he needed to distract her with something else and so he cleared his throat and almost smirked at the way she whipped her head up, bright blue eyes seeming surprised and a lock of blonde hair falling into her face. He reached across the table and tucked it behind her ear.

He brushed his thumb on her cheek, the rest of it leaning into his palm as she closed her eyes and breathed in. She pressed a kiss to the corner of his hand and slowly covered it with her hand. “It’s time, love.” His voice is clear and smooth and despite this, he can tell it takes her a moment to truly register what he's said.

"Already?” she mummers as her eyes cast themselves to look down at the soiled cloth in her hands.

Roy nods and Riza breathes in sharply, "It’s time to find our son, Riza. Lord knows what the tiny bastard has gotten himself into this time, hmm?"

Her blue eyes flashed and the steel was reinforced at the mention of their wayward son and Roy bit back a gulp because while he was in love with her and the two of them were raising two emotionally stunted children who ran around the country breaking shit( Well it was more like his eldest broke shit while his youngest sat on the sidelines and 'protested'), his love still managed to scare him.

She hummed in agreement and stood up, breaking away from his embrace and holstering her guns. She walked over to him and grabbed his face in her hands, starring into his coal eyes with love and steel before surging forwards and kissing him. He closed his eyes and wrapped his hands around her waist as he got lost in the kiss.

It was everything and nothing and yet he can't seem to shake off the lightheadedness he gets whenever she does this to him. He was usually so focused but with her, he can't ever seem to think straight. He melts into her and he feels her smile against his lips and it feels like fireworks were exploding in the background. His heart beats just a little bit faster and the butterflies he thought he had gotten rid of flutter in his chest.
Her fingers leave a tingling sensation on his skin and her palms burned against his cheeks. He surges forward, tightening his grip because he didn't want this to end. He didn't want any of it to end and he knew that once they broke apart, they wouldn't get to do this again anytime soon, if ever at all. Her lips left him reeling and he can't help the warmth the spreads through his whole body at her touches. And just like that, as fast as it had begun, it was over.

She pulled back and was out the door with Black Hayate tight on her heels leaving him sitting there, arms outstretched and eyes blinking rapidly and a little breathless. The door to the apartment opened and closed as he sat there for more than a few minutes, mind running a million miles an hour and nothing was working right up there if a little kiss could leave him so confused.

He brought his gloved hands up to his lips tracing them and a smile fought its way on his lips. Coal-black eyes wandered over to the door and he smirked as he leaned back into his chair, "You little minx."

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Sparkling eyes the colour of green apples turned their attention away from the bustling street when a flash of gold caught her eyes.

She pressed her face closer into the window and peered down, straining her eyes as she fought all the bright and alluring colours of the crowd. She knew what she saw and she wasn't about to lose him. A whirlwind of colours, mostly dull and never anything fun, not like him, was all that she could see and a tiny frown pulled at her lips despite her best attempts to try and stop it.

She knew mommy had told her he was gone... just like Daddy was and just the thought started to make her tear up but she was a big girl and she promised herself that she wouldn't cry. Mommy pretended she wasn't sad but she could hear mommy crying in her bedroom at night and knew she sad, so she decided she was gonna be happy for mommy!

Elicia smiled to herself and got down from her spot as she went to find her mom and give her the biggest hug ever!

As she turned away, a figure in the crowd stopped, his navy blue eyes softening as he looked up at the window and smiled. He brushed the hair from his face and continued on his way, disappearing into the crowd as if he had never been there in the first place.

Gracia Hughes never saw what her daughter had been looking out of the window at so intently, but it must have made her happy if the smile on her face had anything to do with it. "Come on Elicia, we have to grab some groceries."

"Okay, mommy!"
Liquefied gold burned in his eyes and yet, not a single part of him burned with the intensity of it.

He was tired.

He was old.

He was done.

Van Hohenheim was a man who didn't have much in his life. Not anymore. He had his youngest son and that was it. He had no pride, no ties, no joy and no spark left in him. The only thing he had ever wanted was a family and for the longest time, he had been denied. He thought it fair, he was a monster stuck in human form after all.

And then she came alone and it was a second chance. It was a joy. It was happiness. It was...love. He was loved, he loved others. He had a family to call his own and children to spoil and a wife he would die for.

But then it all went wrong and one by one his family was taken from him and he wonders if Al will be next and would he even notice. He hadn't noticed Trisha's for over a decade. He hadn't known Ed's until almost a month after it happened. Would he even realize it when Al's time came? What about his own?

He couldn't find it in himself to care.

A monster didn't deserve love and monster he was, he didn't know how he had gone into fooling himself into believing he was something he wasn't but at least the universe was there to remind him. And he finds it hard to move some mornings and wonders if he should just let himself waste away until he can't feel anything because it hurts more to live with this pain.

He remembers one of the happiest days of his life fondly.

At the turn of the year in 1898, a terrible blizzard hit the small town of Yeyeim and Edward Elric, born Edoardo Gennarino Elio Alberico, came into the world during such a time. Ed was born in the North State of Amestris in the small town of Yeyemi forty miles northwest of North City. His birth came with the wind, a loud piercing howl that rattled the windows of their tiny wooden cabin, and a sea of white that swished and swirled outside whenever the wind willed it so.

Al came in with the spring and a soft cry and no tears for he smiled when he was born. His birth name was Alphonso Beniamino Julio Elric and Hohenheim had known that just like his eldest son that his youngest would also change the world. They both had.

Footsteps echoed in front of him and he looks up to see a group of men, only three, being led by one of the residents in Kanama and the leader, a xingese teen if he ever saw one stepped forwards, the two hulking men stayed close by and on guard.

"Are you Van Hohenheim?" his tone screamed arrogance and yet he held a certain air around him, not to mention his aura...it reminded him of...

"That depends on who's asking, young man?" he turned and stared at him. He was ready to defend himself and he clenched the wooden stick in his hands and it wouldn't do much but at least it could serve to distract someone. And-
"Holy shit, the pipsqueak was right, you do look like him!"

W-wait, what?

"Come again?"

Icy blue eyes gazed over the estate and inside the privacy of her new home, Olivier Armstrong smirked.

Everything was going to plan and soon the Promised Day would be upon them. In the meantime, she had gathered her forces and settled them down in the lower catacombs of the Armstrong Estate. Not only that, but she had successfully managed to get her family to leave the country and to hand over the headship to her. One might even dare say she was happy and if any of her men had big enough balls to tell her that to her face, she might even tell them she was.

Of course, that would probably scare them more than growling and telling them to piss off like she usually does.

Her thoughts are interrupted when a knock at her door echoes throughout the halls of the Armstrong Home and all the talking ceases. Her soldiers tense, looking for places to hide and Buccaneer takes the tray of appetizers as he and the twins slowly back into the kitchen as if she wouldn't notice. Puh-lease! They forget themselves- she taught them everything they know.

She gives a nod to Bobby and the others as she makes her way down the steps of her foyer, the floors shined and she could see her reflection in the polished marble and at least they knew better than to track mud in her home. She couldn't see through the frosted glass of the door but she could tell they were male and that was all. Her faces settled into its usual frown and her eyes hardened themselves.

She wasn't the beloved General of Fort Briggs who's soldiers loved and were loyal to more than the Furher but the Impregnable Northern Wall of Briggs who could turn a Northern Bear to stone with just one glare.

Olivier fixed her coat as she paused in front of the door and gave a quick sideways glance to where all her soldiers had hidden. Not bad, but could use some improvement. She cleared her throat and all murmurs ceased from their hiding places as she grabbed the handle and opened it. The visitor had his back to her," How may I help...?" she trailed off.

The figure whirled around and she was greeted by bright blue eyes and a teasing smirk as her breath catches in her throat and her eyes bugle out in her shock, Trick or Ed as he reveals himself to wave at her and she subconsciously lets him in before shutting the door behind her. She breaths in for a few moments and by the time she turns around, he's already lost his coloured contacts and smiling molten golden eyes looks up at her from beneath his hood.

"Edward," she states and she can see more than one of her soldiers falter, clearly wondering who he is or wondering how he's alive...you know given that he's supposed to be dead.
He pulls back his hood and shakes his hair, letting the long sun-kissed hair free from its confines of his jacket. He smiles and looks around with impressed eyes before turning back to her, a teasing tilt to his voice as he softly smiles.

"Hey, auntie!"

Chapter End Notes

So, I gave Ed, Al and Winry middle names.

Ed:

Elio (Italian) - one who has the power of the sun.

The reason why I chose this is obviously stemming from the golden hair and eyes and while both Hohenheim and Al have those two, Winry and even myself view Ed as this hot-tempered and powerful person who can bright everyone's day, even if he's not necessarily a cheerful person it can just be him rescuing them or offering them a second chance.

Gennarino (Italian) - Diminutive of Gennaro (God Janus)

This has a couple of meanings, I like to think Ed was born in January. I don't know why, he seems like winter baby to me and he can be dramatic and what else says dramatic like being born on the turn of the new year exactly at 12:00 am, huh? Not only that but Janus refers to the first month of the year January and it is also the Roman God Janus (so Italy which means its sticking to his Italian heritage.)

Janus is the god beginnings, gates, transitions, time, duality, doorways, passages, and endings. Now, who does Janus sound like in FMAB? Truth. That's who and if this is not a more fitting parallel I don't know what is because Ed is his 'chosen one' so to speak

Al:

Julio (Italian) - people with this name try their best to please everyone. They show interest in making friends.

This was perfect for him. I just had to.

Beniamino (Italian) - Right-hand Son; Similar to Benedict; Son of the Right Hand

First, I made it based on Hohenheim because they do have a better relationship than Ed does with him and in the anime and certainly within this fic, the two are very close and help one another. The right hand is suggesting the directions both Hohenheim and the DiTF went when they left Xerxes. Hohenheim went right towards Xing and became the Philosopher of the East and the Dwarf went left and is the megalomaniac we all know and love today.
Winry:

Alisa (Russian) - Rational, balanced, coherent

Daria (Russian) - Trustworthy natured person

Marya (Russian) - A Russian variant of name Maria, meaning rebelliusness

They all fit her well and I liked them a lot. I chose Russian names because of her dad who was most likely half Drachman given his name Urey or Yuriy depending if you watch FMA or FMAB.
Chapter Summary

Ed is proving to be more and more like his father than Olivier had first thought- she's coming to regret that.

Chapter Notes

VERY IMPORTANT PLEASE READ! Okay, so a little while back one of my readers requested a family tree and I think I finally found a way to show it since last time didn't work. It might be a little blurry but I did the best I could to try and crop it so when you guys zoomed in, you could read the names, dates and see the pictures.

Here's the link: https://www.deviantart.com/azei042902/art/Alberico-Elric-Family-Tree-815734211?ga_submit_new=10%3A1570315188&ga_type=edit&ga_changes=1

I also have one down below so you don't have to copy and paste it!

I'm BACK! Thank you guys for the continued support through these last few months, it means a lot to me that you guys are here to stay with me and my little story until the very end.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Contrary to popular belief, she didn't care all that much about her brothel.

Or her liquor or her fine clothes and expensive jewelry because no matter how hard she tried to give off an aloof brothel owner who smoked all day and drank booze all night, there was nothing she cared about more than her Roy and his happiness.

After her kid brother and his wife died, Chris remembers having a baby, no older than two, dumped in her arms, sleeping peacefully and completely unaware of what had happened. How he was the only survivor of a car crash that claimed the lives of both his parents, two people who loved him more than anything in this world.

She could barely remember anything about what happened afterwards.

The only thing she knew was that she had been given a gift and she was not going to screw it up. She would not screw it up and if not for her late brother and his wife than for Roy. Because he deserved the world. He deserved it all and Chris had been determined to give it to him.

And dear god did she try, she did. But the odds had been stacked against her the moment she was told what had happened.

You see, once upon a time, Chris Mustang had been Christine Royce of the Royce family. Her family had been one of the military's main exportation for warcraft vehicles. She was loaded and
probably had more money than the Armstrongs.

Unfortunately for the two of them, her father, Rolls Royce, was a xenophobic bastard and refused to help her.

He had already disinherited her brother for marrying a 'xingese alien' as he put it and would rather die than help keep their 'half-breed spawn' alive. He had no problem getting rid of his spinster of a daughter and his half-breed grandson. There hadn't been even a hint of hesitation in him when he slammed the door in their faces.

That was the day that Christine Royce and Hiryur Royce disappeared. In their places emerged Chris Mustang and her nephew, Roy. She got rid of her honey blonde locks and chose to look closer to her nephew giving her the appearance she had now. She hadn't looked back, not then and not now, 20 something odd years later.

Out of the corner of her eye, she watched her nephew -her son her mind whispered- look through the many photos and newspaper clippings she had found for him. The brothel was silent, aside from the slight rustling of the papers and it unnerved her more than she wanted to admit.

Chris was used to the chatter of her girls, to the hazy smoke and slow jazz and the light clinks as the ice hit the bottom of a glass before smooth whiskey was poured over it. She had gotten used to watching young girls growing into young women under her care, she's gotten used to learning how to bartend, how to run a business and raising a gaggle of children, more than she thought she'd ever had but nonetheless hers.

She had become accustomed to the molten golden-eyed child, the adopted son of her Roy and his lover, barging into her bar whenever it fancied him and crashing in his room above them over the last seven months. His long nights filled with alchemical equations and planning and the way her favourite brand of whiskey always disappeared whenever she went to go grab a glass to unwind.

"Is something bothering you, madam?" Roy's voice, always so smooth and clear, rang out in her empty bar as he put down some of his papers. The concern in his voice was clear as day and she realized that she had been polishing the same glass for well over 20 minutes now.

Chris gave a weary sigh as she sat the glass down and picked up her bag, "No, Roy, I'm just thinking."

She can tell he doesn't believe her and she didn't expect him too, but he knew better than to mouth off to her. He may be some big shot Colonel now, but he was still her son! That was never going to change and it was best that he was always reminded of that. Even now that he had his children of his own, it just made her more determined to embarrass him.

After all, it's what he got for making her a grandmother before she was ready.

Time seemed to have flown by when she wasn't looking and Chris smiles to herself, thinking back to when that brat had first come into her bar. She holds out her arm for him to take as they descend into the canals beneath and he pulls out a detonator.

He pauses and turns towards her, his head tilting as he used to as a young boy with a mischievous smile she's seen a thousand times from both him and his problem child before he hooks it up to the central line of her bar. His thumb rests over the switch, so large and polished and oh so red, and he thinks she can't see, but his smirk drops down into a grimace as he stares into the gleaming button.

His dark eyes, the ones made from coal and obsidian and everything in between that he inherited
from his late mother, are far away and his lips that twitch into smirks that often remind her of her late brother from their years as troublemaking youth are barely holding themselves into the smirk he's never without.

Her hand rests over his and his eyes flicker over to her surprise glistening in them clear as day and her heart lurches in her chest at the sight before her. A tiny smile made its way on her face as she tries to think of what to say, her mouth opens and her breath hitches but nothing comes out and her it doesn't even matter because he seems to know what she's trying to say.

Roy's thumb presses down and above them, their home is rocked with tremors.

Olivier Armstrong was not much for emotion.

That was not to say that she didn't value it, rather she kept it locked uptight to be able to serve as best she could. Emotions had no place on the battlefield and she's seen one too many soldiers killed ahead of their time from some sense of misguided righteousness.

Emotions were a double-edged sword in her opinion and the safest option she's found was to reign them in tightly and forget they existed until she needed them again. It wasn't the best method, that much she knew, but it was better than being dead. She acknowledged that in the long run bottling up her emotions would only backfire on her, and Ed would never even doubt in smugly telling her so but at this moment, seated across from him in the parlour, all she can think is;

'What a fucking hypocrite!'

The jittering leg and the hands clenching the hem of his coat were the only indications that the staring was getting to him, other than that, Ed was a blank slate.

His molten golden eyes were a swirl of emotions, all too much and yet not enough for any of them to decipher. His face was impassive and free of any sort of cuts or scars but Olivier could see the fading imprint of a bruise on his left cheek.

Her eyebrow raises at the sight of it but the time to discuss that was not now. Right now was the time to confess. She needed Ed to tell them where he's been all these months and dear god she sounds like her brother and if she turns a little green at the thought, well, none of her soldiers mention it to her. Not that they would-

they did value their lives after all.

She's not much for words and lives by the way of the North, but she knows now, that actions right now were not going to settle anything. She was going to have to talk and open herself up. She was going to have to let herself feel, not because of some misguided attempt at trying to connect with Ed but because of the look in his eyes. She's seen it one too many times.

Something happened in the last 7 months.

And she was going to find out one way or another.

She brought the cup of tea Jarvis brought her up to her lips, her legs crossed and made herself as nonthreatening as possible because she needed hi- and there it was. Ed's leg didn't stop jittering but it seemed to have lessened and his previously rigid shoulders lost some of the tension they held. His eyes, previously a sea of jumbled emotions, begin to clear and his face relaxes.

The rest of the room, at this point, has been successfully (read: failing miserably) trying to pay attention to the power plays being made here and she can see the way the twins have been staring at the golden-haired teen for what was longer than considered necessary.
Edward," and just like that, he tenses.

He places his porcelain teacup on the saucer and sets it down on his lap, staring into the orange liquid as if it held all the answers. Or as if it would swallow him up so he wouldn't have to have this conversation. He fiddles with the handle for a moment before clearing his throat, "Miles is with General Grumman, I assume?"

She nods. "Yes, as my right hand, he is expected to help make the annual training exercise runs smoothly."

Ed snorts. "And how well is that going for you?"

Olivier closes her eyes and lifts her teacup to take a sip. "Considering the Fuhrer's train blew up over a ravine with him still in it, I'd say pretty well."

Her lips form into a smirk and she might dare say she was even happy if someone were to ask her. She can see a few eyes bugling in the background and some gasps and vaguely remembers that oh yeah the whole reason for this conversation is to explain the plan. Rafael gapes obnoxiously and soon after, a yelp is heard throughout the room and she catches sight of Buccaneer with a raised hand.

He sees her eyes and immediately hides his arm behind his back as he and the twins whisper furiously in what they thought were hushed tones. "Did you have to hit us with your metal arm?"

She fights down a smile at their hissed remarks. Ed laughs and for the first time in 7 months, Olivier can see the boy she met all those moons ago. "Good! That means all my planning didn't go to waste then."

She can see out of the corner of her eyes as her soldiers freeze and turn to stare at the blonde, like they were just connecting the dots now and she sighs because while she is proud of her soldiers and knows how competent they are, some days they were, if she were to put it so eloquently, complete dumb ass's.

"I think it's time you introduced yourself then." She hears him sigh and watches as he puts the saucer down and off to the side.

Olivier doesn't know what happened but it was like a switch was flipped in between the time he put his cup down and looked back up at her.

He gains a gleam in his eyes and crosses his leg over the other, leaning back into his chair and letting his head be propped up from his arm, a bored expression filtering across his face and a small smirk that looked like his fathers settled on his lips.

It was such a contrast to the pesky little brat she first met that she felt as floored as her men looked. Ed 'hmm' and let his golden eyes flicker across the room, taking in each face as he let his presence sink in. He closed his eyes as his smirk widened and opened them and she felt her breath catch in her throat. 'He is his father's son...'

"I figure I should introduce myself, feel free to ask questions whenever you feel confused, I have all night." his declaration is smooth, it's clear that they're rehearsed and are said without any hesitance on his part.

"My name is Colonel Edward Elric and for the last 7 months, I've been undercover trying to expose the infiltration of the military high command."
Just like that - the room erupts into chaos.

Olivier felt her eye twitch and she knows without having to look in a mirror that the vein on her forehead is throbbing as chaos spreads like wildfire around her. Her soldiers may be of Briggs but they were headless chickens when bombs like these were dropped on them.

She sighs and shifts in her seat to keep her head propped up. She can already feel the migraine coming and unless the idiots were to calm down in the next few minutes, she doubts it'll be anytime soon.

And Ed?

Well, he just sat there and watched it all come raining down with a smirk on his face.

Oh, there was no doubt about it now, Edward was truly his father's son...her fist clenched together as she begins to shake in her rage. She was going to kill that god-damn pyromaniac for corrupting her nephew like this!

Mark her words: Roy Mustang was going down!

"About time Colonel. Didn't think you were gonna show." Breda gave a small simpering smirk as he said this.

Roy stepped into the room with the door squeaking behind him "Keep up with the smart ass comments - I'll take them as a sign of confidence." A grin made its way across his face at the sight of his subordinates.

He turned to his love, " You made sure that you weren't followed?"

Riza resisted the urge to smile and instead bent down a little to pat at Black Hayate's head as she spoke," Yes, and if we had been, this little guy would've alerted us."

Black Hayate, tail wagging madly in his excitement, barked loudly at the sight of his other owner and Roy felt a smile fighting its way across his face as he crouched down and started to scratch at his head.

"Good boy, you keep your nose peeled, okay?" the dog rubbed its head into Roy's palm with what little like a smile as he grumbled happily.

Roy stood up and turned to his second, "What is Bradley's status?"

"I've got the entire family's itineraries for the next three days." she paused for a moment. "The Fuhrer went to observe the training in the east. Selim joined him for the trip as well."

Dark eyes flickered over to the side as he tilted his head, "Then you haven't heard the news? The Fuhrer's train was destroyed with the Fuhrer riding in it." He ignored the gasps from his subordinates and the way that Riza flinched.

Breda gulped, "Well I'll be damned. Old man Grumman doesn't like to take chances, does he?"

Roy bit back a chuckle, "Actually, you have my wayward son to thank for that."

Riza's eyes flash at the mention of their eldest and he sends a small prayer to Ed in the hopes that his mother doesn't find him before he does. Then there'd be no stopping her. "That means security is
gonna be elevated now. This could be even more difficult than what it thought it would be." she mummers.

Furey steps forwards, "How much is this going to affect our mission? Is the Eastern battalion still going to invade Central as planned?" His face is panicked and if they weren't about to become fugitives of the state, Roy would've smiled.

He had missed his team and the months apart hadn't lessened the ache. He reminisces days where he'd look up expecting one of them to be there, whether it was his love's calm demeanour, a joke he could share with Havoc or even discussing wine and food with Breda. It was nice to be with them all again as a team.

He sighs quietly before answering, "All we know is that the Fuhrer is missing. This is either a once-in-a-lifetime chance or we're walking into a trap."

"It doesn't really make a difference, we gotta see this thing through." Breda states and from behind him Fuery makes a noise of agreement, lightly nodding his head. He can see the way his darling Riza agrees with them. She may not show her emotions through facial expressions, but her eyes were truly the window to her soul. They said all the words she wouldn't speak aloud.

When she looks at him, he can see a tiny smile pulling at the corner of her lips, "Your orders, sir?"

"Whatever action we may take, we're heading straight for the battlefield. And no matter the outcome, there's no turning back. Even if we win this mission still won't be close to completion, not until we rebuild this nation with me as the Fuhrer, we'll still have the task of setting things right." He can see all of them nod to his words and warmth fills his chest at the faith they have in him.

Roy pauses for a second, "In other words, I'm only giving you a single order to obey- Don't die! Understood?"

"Sir!" they chorus together.

"Good, then let's mov-" Roy was cut off of his explanation as he sneezed.

"Are you alright?" Fuery asks, his voice portraying just how concerned he was. Then again he was like that for any little illness and god forbid he coughs from a tickle in the back of his throat.

"I'm fine, just a little sniffle."

"You know, they say every time you sneeze, someone's talking about you." Riza, his sun and stars, his sky and moon, love and light of his life, pointed out.

"Don't be ridiculous, if that were true, then I'd be sneezing all the time." he retorted as he rolled his eyes at the audacity of even the notion of that being possibly true.

Crunch.

Crunch.

Crunch.

It was a cycle.
Tiny pebbles, wooden twigs and overturned gravel ground itself beneath the soles of her feet. It was obvious someone was home. The immaculate cut grass and the pristine fountain told all the telltale signs of someone keeping the estate in tip-top shape. Don't even get her started on the illuminated windows she could see on the west side of the mansion.

That wasn't the problem.

No, the issue was essentially this:

**She didn't know what the fuck she was doing here.**

She had no idea why she was even there and she didn't know why she had even thought to come to her as if she could help and the world was spinning too much to fast-God, she did not have a fucking clue. The light-headed feeling was getting to her and for a moment, she wondered why.

It was only when the black began to eat at the corner of her vision did she realize. *She wasn't breathing. She just had to breathe. She just needed to open her mouth and inhale and god she was an idiot why would she do tha-* She had just upped and left without more than a rushed 'goodbye' and the cold metal of her toolkit felt like it was burning her hands.

Winry felt sick to her stomach at the thought of what she had and she took in a deep breath as she reminded herself that you needed air for your brain to function properly. It wasn't like it was entirely weird for her to get an idea in her head and drop everything she was doing to write it down. This was something she did quite a bit: no, it was the dropping everything she was doing and taking the first train to Central because the guy she likes was being a gigantic dumbass.

That was out of character.

Then again, Granny always said she was like her parents- a bit head-strong and too smart for her good.

And sure maybe she didn't exactly think it through before she left, but Winry Rockbell was no coward and she was determined to see this through till the end. She lifted her hand and she hadn't even noticed it but it was shaking. Her hand, covered in nicks and scars and too many callouses to count, shook as she raised it.

It wouldn't stop trembling and She grabbed her wrist and tried to stop the tremors and it was too much and goddammit!

Without thinking, she banged on the door.

https://www.deviantart.com/azei042902/art/Alberico-Elric-Family-Tree-815734211?ga_submit_new=10%3A1570315188&ga_type=edit&ga_changes=1

Chapter End Notes

This was a long-time period between updates, my longest yet at almost a month, just shy of 2 days. Stuff has been crazy lately but I just want to reassure everyone that I will not be going on a hiatus ever.
And I just want to thank everyone for their continued support as I finish the last year of my high school and as I juggle my friends, family, and my budding relationship.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!