Edward Elric (the second) has always had to balance the two sides of his life: on one proper flesh and blood hand, he's a genius working as a crime scene investigator, putting his younger brother through university. On the other not-actually-flesh-and-blood hand, he's also the red-hooded vigilante Fullmetal, protecting Central City from criminals and assholes like 'the Dragon'. But mutilated bodies have stared showing up, and now he has to deal with his estranged sorta-maybe-ex-boyfriend (who's in charge of hunting down Ed's alternate persona), keeping the public from various levels of hysteria, and stopping a mysterious group who seem to be echoing the one his mother used to belong to...

Notes

Um oh god. Okay. So, probably not the first long-fic to come out to this fandom–really bad idea, actually–but I marathoned a bunch of superhero movies (Batman, Superman, Watchmen, etc.) after I finished CoS for the second time and this started to pop up.

Note 1. Please don't hate me.
Note 2. Liberties taken. I was in a deep mourning process. You should have seen the original draft. Actually, be glad you haven't.
Note 3. This fic has kinda been by baby–it's the first fic of this length I've actually finished–and yes, at over 160K the fic is finished, and I'm just lightly editing it now. I have no beta. Please be lenient with me.
Note 4. It's just for fun. It's just for fun.
Note 5. On that note, fuck editing.
Note 6. There's–ugh–a sequel. And there's gonna be stuff down there that you're like uhhhhh...but if you can't reason it out (because it all echoes the original series), then it will be explained in detail in the sequel. Sigh. God.
Note 7. Again, please don't hate me. If you see ANY errors, please, PLEASE, tell me immediately. I'll fix them as soon as I can. As you can see, I really am putting minimal editing effort into this. ALSO THERE IS A PAIRING IN THERE THAT MOST YOU WILL PROBABLY BE LIKE '...what.' SO YEAH.
Chapter 1

i'm giving you a nightcall to tell you how i feel,

i want to drive you through the night, down the hills,

i'm gonna tell you something you don't want to hear,

i'm gonna show you where it's dark, but have no fear

– nightcall // kavinsky & lovefoxx

Al called him at exactly between shift changes at First Central Bank, which, he wasn't supposed to but Edward decided to give him some leeway. His younger brother had been consecutively freaking out for the past three days now, and even though he had a strict 'do not call me unless someone is going to die' policy while he was on patrol, Al had never really adhered to it in the first place, even though this was the first time he had called Edward so often.

Edward shifted back the hood of his red jacket and stooped lower to the building, keeping a close eye on the now guard-free front door. His anonymous tip to the bank’s management to keep smaller dead zones was definitely put into effect (considering they owed him one for the whole Envy situation), but the security guards didn't seem to pay much attention to it. He was annoyed to say the least; he didn’t know much but the bank was becoming the topic of conversation and Ed had no idea why. If there was another bank robbery he was going to scream. While one of the guards refilled his cup of coffee, just barely visible through the window in the break room, Edward pulled out his phone and answered it, cutting off Al's unique ringtone. He really ought to change it from Madonna's 'Like a Virgin' but there was something so right about it being Al's.

"Al," he started to reprimand (like always, not that it never did any good) but Alphonse cut him off before he could even get another breath out.

"She's going to have to share a bathroom with me," Alphonse nearly hyperventilated, or at least, panicked in the distinct Al way of mildly fast breath. Edward rolled his eyes and held back a sigh. It was the eighth time Al had brought up the fact that their apartment only had two bathrooms. One bathroom with a shower so small it was amazing Ed could fit in it half the time, squeezed into Ed's room, and another with a large tub and shower off to the side in the hallway.

"We discussed this already," Edward grumbled. "I told you we could just make her stay in my room and I'll take the guest bedroom-"

"But your room is small and dark, and what if she looks underneath the floor boards or in the closet or - just because Winry knows doesn't mean she approves, brother, you know that."

"Right," Edward answered, and for the eight time brought the conversation back around to the same point. "So, she'll stay in the guest room. Al, do you really honestly think Winry, of all people, cares if she shares a bathroom with you? And besides, you're a total neat freak, she’ll have nothing to bitch
about."

The guards finally resumed their posts at the front of the bank, leaving Edward to divert his attentions else where. He stood, stretched, and shook out his free hand, ignoring how it sent tremors of cold up and down his spine. He was going to have to start wearing his arm warmer if the weather kept itself up. It was supposed to be nearing summer, and the nights were getting warmer but not fast enough. Edward was hunched behind rooftop walls, scowling at the bitter cold air that blustered through the streets.

"Do you think?" Al asked, and Edward grinned, before checking the small police scanner clipped to his belt. There was a red light flashing at the top, and even though he know he shouldn't get excited at the thought of someone in the city performing a crime, he couldn't help his grin widening.

"Al, I don't think, I know, alright? Anyway, I gotta go. Looks like someone stole a police car off of 45th."

Al gave an irritable sigh, annoyed like he usually was with the city's felons. "Yes, that seems intelligent. Don't forget to be back by noon, okay? I don't want to be late picking Winry up."

"Why?" Ed asked, and quickly judged the difference between the two rooftops. Running everywhere was a drag, but until Winry came tomorrow and was able to fix up his bike, he supposed he would have to deal with it. "You gonna finally tell her that you're in love with her?"

Al made a very impressive spluttering sound and must have almost dropped the phone by the clattering sound that echoed through the receiver. "Brother, she's our cousin!" he said, scandalized. Ed rolled his eyes.

"Second cousin; it doesn't count - anyways, I gotta go."

"Fine, fine," Al sighed. "I'll leave the front door open, even if you never use it. Have fun, brother."

Edward grinned and tugged his red hood back over his hair, carefully clipping it so that it neatly covered half his face. Only with the proper light would anyone ever be able to see through the shadow it cast, covering most of his face. The fabric was perforated with a sheen fabric, letting him see through it. Boots were fastened tight - if he had to run down a police car, he'd rather not trip over a loose buckle - leather pants were snug against his skin (because chances were he was going to be drug after said police car), and one last check to his right arm, carefully checking each appendage for the proper flexibility. Winry would kill him if he ruined his grandfather's automail arm.

"You know I will," he grinned, and pocketed the phone before jumping off of the roof.

In contrast to the cold nights, the sun tended to rise higher and higher in the sky these days. By the time the correct bus slowed to a stop in front of them - Al nervously twisting his hands together, Edward inhaling his fourth cup of coffee in the last hour - it was already bright outside, heat beating down on them. Al wore a loose white t-shirt and shorts, enjoying what breeze there was that wasn't stopped by the skyscrapers and towering buildings. Edward wore an AC/DC short sleeve over a long white t-shirt and jeans and while Al's hair was just barely on the ends of 'getting shaggy', Edward's was long and golden thin, pulled up into a high ponytail. To make matters worse, the bus that was supposed to get in at noon was two hours late. By the time it rolled in the parking lot, it was
a little past two thirty.

It was impossible to know what Winry would look like as she hopped down from the bus. It had been four years since she had gone away to college for mechanical engineering, and now she had come to nearly too big, too bustling Central to get a degree in medical engineering. When she had left Ed and Al after she had come to visit, her hair had been cut short to her ears, and said ears were still red from being pierced so that she could wear Ed and Al's going away present: a pair of black balled earrings. For the past three birthdays he and Al had sent pair after pair after pair along with a group photo but she had never sent any pictures back.

She had been on the chubby side as a child, easy to bruise and even easier to bring to tears. At times it seemed that the only person to ever calm her down was her Grandfather Alphonse, brother to Ed and Al's Grandfather Edward (also their name sake). During their teenage years she had died her hair every color imaginable, enough to make her parents scream, never helping their strained relationship. As it was, if she stepped off the bus with a red Mohawk, Ed was sure her parents would somehow feel it all the way in Florida and have a heart attack.

Yet, through all the ups and downs, Winry had a safe spot in Edward Elric's heart as 'best friend' and a permeant spot in Al's heart as 'dear god he's been in love with you since you were three years old how can you not see that'.

Al, of course, saw her first. Where Edward would have struggled to pick out Winry in the flooding crowd, no matter his observational skills, Al could pick her out no matter what she looked like in just seconds. Edward suspected that he had a compass somewhere in the back of his mind, except that instead of north, it pointed out Winry.

"There," Al breathed, and moved forward, hand tight around the chocolate bar they had walked all the way to the mall for. The expensive kind that probably broke Al financially. Edward moved after him a second, shoving his way through the people that were moving in the opposite direction. He could see her now, hair a startling platinum blond and long, pinned back into a ponytail, but it was cut in layers so the front part of her hair and bangs were hanging loose.

Jean shorts and a white tank top, with a thin leather jacket over it, and white gladiator sandals. Alphonse nearly stopped in his tracks trying to take all of her in as she struggled to pull her two humongous duffle bags off of the bus, a nearly as big backpack strapped over his shoulders.

"Is that a tattoo?" Edward called in greeting and Winry jumped, spun on her heel and grinned, before extending her right foot forward. Right on the side of her knee was neat blue star.

"Do you like it?" she questioned, and grinned. "The boys gave it to me for graduation."

The boys, Edward assumed, were the group of bikers that she had mentioned, who came into the auto-shop she worked at. Casually, he leaned over and shoved Al, whose brain started up again as he moved forward, ripping his gaze away from Winry's bare leg.

"Here!" Al said, and shoved the chocolate bar into Winry's hands as he picked up one of the duffle bags. He stopped for a second when he got it hefted over his shoulder. "No, wait, I mean-"

"Hi, Al," Winry laughed, and transferred the chocolate bar to her other hand so that she could hug him tight. It only took a second before Al responded, nearly squeezing the life out of her. Winry didn't seem to mind; she usually hugged like she was trying to get the last bit of toothpaste out of the tube anyway. As she held on to Al for dear life, Ed could see the collection of metal earrings that ran up and down her ears. He had wondered which pair she was going to wear but it looked like she was just going to wear all of them. "Ugh," she groaned. "I missed you guys."
She let go only to attack Edward, who flailed for balance but obligingly let her hug the stuffing out of him as well. "Yeah, well," he said loudly. "We were doing just fine without you, gear head."

Winry pulled back and glared, and he tensed for the hit but it never came, instead she pulled away and lugged up her other duffle bag before throwing at him.

"Come on," she demanded and started off towards the bus station. "I'm starved. I'm feeling for some chicken."

Edward rolled his eyes out of habit, but trailed along after her. Al was only two steps behind him, and quickly over took him, stumbling along side Winry with a bright smile. "So, what have you have been up to?"

"Oh, nothing much," Winry dismissed. "Graduated last month, parents cried and completely embarrassed me in front of everyone, got a tattoo and got accepted here, spent a fuck long time getting my papers to go through so I could get over the border." Her grin was wide and white. "Ugh, it's going to be great living with you guys again though, like when we were kids? Where's your bike, Ed?"

"In the garage, right now. Front's fucked, and it won't start. You're gonna take a look at it for me, right?"

Winry rolled her eyes. “That depends on whether or not you can pay my fee.”

“You’re living with us for free!” Edward stared at her, scowling. She grinned, and poked out her tongue at him.

“That’s not my problem,” she said as she chided him with her finger. “Besides, you shouldn’t have wrecked it like that in the first place, and don’t you have insurance on it? Why do I have to fix it?”

He glared at her, and pointedly ignored Al’s widening smile. “As I have told Al at least a dozen times, you know why.”

“Brother stopped a bank robbery by crashing his bike into their get away van,” Al explained, and Winry’s lips twitched. It had been over a year since Al and Ed had broken the news to her, but it was obvious she still wasn’t taking it well. There had been exactly thirteen lectures, forty-seven angry phone calls in the middle of the night, three tearful rants about Ed nearly dying after Alphonse was forced to call her because you couldn’t make phone calls yourself when you were in a near-coma, and three livid shouting matches that came after said tearful rants because Ed had to explain, why, exactly he couldn’t go to the hospital.

(‘The first place they’re going to check is the hospitals, and besides Al wants to be a doctor so I’m just giving some practice - holy fuck, Winry, okay, okay! I’m sorry! I’m sorry!’)

Winry was frowning at him, crossing her leather-jacketed arms across her chest. She looked half-way to a rant, before she visibly deflated. “Were you hurt?”

Edward tensed, and waited for the outburst. Sometimes it was like a volcano; the longer the build up, the worse the explosion. “Uh, no, not really. Skinned my arm when I rolled off, but-”

“If you hurt that arm,” Winry growled, and grabbed at his right hand. She felt it up and down through his shirt, probably looking for any breaks or dents. He knew she wouldn’t find any; one, because he actually did take care of his prosthetic limb, he really did, and two, because any time he had seriously dented it he had fixed it before anyone could notice.
“The arm is fine,” Edward wrenched his arm out of her grip. “Relax, gear head.”

“He has been taking care of it,” Alphonse spoke up. They stepped over the edge of the station, and Winry took a second to search through the collection of fast food restaurants along the strip, before leading them towards a barbecue stand. “Really, he has, Winry.”

She studied them suspiciously, before turning on her heel and getting in line. “I’m going to take Al’s word for it. I’m not taking Ed’s word at all.”

“What - that’s not fair, come on! He said the exact same thing I did!”

“But, he’s not you,” Winry pointed out, and turned to the vendor, ordering, and completely ignoring Edward’s look of disbelief. He got over it in a few seconds when it was his turn to order, mainly because Ed could get over anything (with very few exceptions) in a few seconds when someone offered him food. “Tell me about your day jobs, then,” Winry said, waving a hand as she accepted her plate of barbecued chicken.

“I work at the university hospital,” Al said, taking his plate before Edward could steal half of his food. “Final year in med school, so, you know, paid intern.”

“Top of his class,” Edward gushed, grinning proudly. “Only person in the history of the school to get a medical degree at twenty-two. Probably the fastest, too.”

Alphonse turned an interesting shade of red, and stared down at his plate of food as they walked towards an empty bench along side the road. The bus station was located in the very heart of Central City, near the park and university, but barely visible by both. Only now could they start to see the very beginnings of the university’s campus, huge maple trees lined up the streets, and a more casual feel to the air.

“I’ve been in college since I was sixteen,” Alphonse muttered, holding back a grin. “I just finished my undergraduate faster than others.”

“Either way, that’s pretty impressive,” Winry grinned, before leaning back and sighing. “I wish I was done with school. I mean, I could be, but I got three more years before I get my PhD, you know?”

“But,” Alphonse said, quickly. “You’re doing medical engineering too, that’s a whole ‘nother degree right there. So, you’re pretty impressive too.”

“And then you have Edward,” Winry grinned, shoving Alphonse. “Who graduated school in four years with a degree in theoretical physics and yet works as a crime scene technician. I’m sure your grandpa would be ecstatic that his legacy is currently working for the very people who try to kill him on a daily basis.”

“One,” Edward rolled his eyes. “The police aren’t the ones with the shoot to kill order, that’s the shit-heads in the military. Two, leave my job alone, alright? I’m good at it, it pays well, and it gets the job done. Evidence is the basis of truth and I need the evidence one job gets me to do the other, okay, Grandpa would understand.”

Winry scowled. “You’re worse than our grandparents were. ‘All is one, one is all.’ ‘Equivalent exchange.’ What was that one Grandpa Edward used to say whenever we were acting up?”

“‘There’s a whole other world outside of our own’,” Edward and Alphonse spoke. Edward lifted his lips to smile wryly at the both of them, before continuing on his own; “‘You can’t live with your eyes closed, pretending that your world is the only one that matters.’”
“Yeah,” Winry sighed. “You really took that one to heart.” She slapped him on the shoulder roughly, ignoring his outcry of pain. “But for fuck’s sake, I’m nearly positive he didn’t mean ‘become a vigilante and get in trouble whenever you can.’”

“I don’t get in trouble whenever I can,” Edward protested, chewing through his food. “If anything, trouble finds me.”

His front pocket suddenly gave a sharp trill before easing into the theme song from the X-Files. Alphonse and Winry both gave him unimpressed stares. Edward scowled.

“It’s not trouble,” Edward groused, sliding his phone out of his pocket and answering it, turning away from his brother and second-cousin. “It’s work. Hello? ... No, right off of 16th? ... Same pattern as the others, then. It is my day off, you know that right? ... ... ... What do you mean you have an ID, no-one else had an ID - how did you ... ... give me twenty minutes.” He hung up, scowling. “I have to go. Al, you got Winry right?”

“Brother,” Alphonse hissed. “It’s your day off. You’re not supposed to be working today, that’s not fair!”

Winry raised an eyebrow, clearly torn between joining in the reprimands and the fact that more often than not, she’d be a hypocrite keeping him away from his work. (How many times had they found her lying face down in the middle of a pile of car parts?)

“Apparently there’s an ID for this vic,” Edward said, before he began to beg. “Al, you know this is my case. I’ve been searching for this guy for the past two months and he’s never once let us have an idea who he’s killed. Please, please, please? I’ll be home for dinner. I’ll bring Chinese food from that diner you like. Promise?”

Alphonse stared, then shifted his gaze over to Winry, who smiled at him, before he deflated. “Fine. You better bring the vegetarian plate this time instead of like last time when you ‘forgot’.”

“I won’t,” Edward shook his head, getting up from the bench and darting his gaze up and down the street for the nearest intersection. “I gotta go call in for a ride. Winry, for god’s sake, please take a look at my bike when you get home. I can’t do this whole walking this for much longer.”

Winry flipped her loose hair over her shoulder and huffed. “I’ll take a look at the damage. If I like the food you bring, maybe you won’t have to walk to work tomorrow. Looks like it’s gonna rain soon - you don’t want to walk through that.”

Edward grinned at her, pulling out his phone to call the precinct for a pick-up. “Knew I could count on you. See you guys tonight, then.”

–

The sky had turned grey and the weather boiled with humidity before Edward hopped out of the police car he had gotten a ride with. The crime scene was stuffed in a back alley behind a butcher’s shop and an apartment building. It had already been taped up and around the corner Ed could see a small crowd that was slowly growing bigger. The smell was bad enough but the garbage dumpsters were nearly full up and down the alleyway, leaving a hot, stinky, well, mess.

Edward flashed his ID card at the police officer standing outside of the yellow tape, only to have the
woman stop him.

“Boss wants to see you,” the woman instructed, pointing towards the hasty white tent that had been set up over the body incase the rain started.

“Which boss?” Edward questioned, raising an eyebrow. The woman grinned wryly at him, nearly devoid of any humor except the ironic kind.

“The big boss. Got a special interest in this case, you know?”

“Wouldn’t you?” Edward questioned under his breath, ducking under the tape. “sides, it’s like we’ve got our very own serial killer.” A clearly fake Western American accent: “By golly, it’s must be Christmas.”

“Good,” the woman called. “Means I should be getting my raise soon!”

He laughed and waved at her before carefully walking along the already marked walkway. A blood trail that stained the alley floor for a few feet was visible. Probably had hair and fibers if the body was dragged, and a dead body weighed more than people expected, fingernails tended to rip when latched that deep into the flesh, maybe there was some left?

Not likely, Edward knew. The past five bodies had little to no trace evidence, and with ruined hands and mutilated faces, it wasn’t as if he could slap some pictures on the side of a billboard and ask ‘do you know me?’ One of the younger technicians started when she saw him, hurrying to her feet to walk over to the quick set-up table off near the side and offer him latex gloves.

“Thanks, Beth,” he murmured, because he had a hell of a time writing down her last name and he had stopped using it all together, catching her quick, wide smile, before he was turned around and facing an older man in a suit. “Ah,” Edward grinned. “Hughes.”

“Edward,” the man greeted. He had a smile ready, but there were obvious tension lines at the corner of his mouth and eyes. Ed braced himself for a barrage of photographs, but instead of whipping them out, he gestured towards the body. “Fifth body.”

“I know,” Edward sighed, turning on his heel to stare at the body. The skin on the face was ripped beyond any recognition, red and horrible. The white dress shirt was stained red from the blood that still flowed sluggishly down it’s neck. “How old?”

“Looks like less than two hours,” Beth spoke up. “Single knife wound upward, past the rib cage, into the heart. Lacerations around the wrist and bruising around the neck. Broken fingernails, too. He fought.”

“Looks like less than two hours,” Beth spoke up. “Single knife wound upward, past the rib cage, into the heart. Lacerations around the wrist and bruising around the neck. Broken fingernails, too. He fought.”

“There’s that,” Edward said, and crouched, rooting through the large tackle box that Beth had next to her, before pulling out a pair of tweezers. He carefully lifted the collar of the shirt away to stare at the almost distinctive hand-like bruising. “Coroner get here yet?”

“Stuck in traffic,” Hughes spoke up. “Got your usual, figure it might help.”

“Damnit, Hughes,” Edward bit out, looking up, no real heat in it. “Russell’s on holiday, he’s supposed to be spending time with Fletcher before the kid flies to London.”

“Hey, he sounded pretty fierce about being the first one to look at the body,” Hughes pointed out, holding up both his hands. “Sides, you don’t like Maxwell.”

“That’s because Davis is a freaking idiot,” Edward muttered under his breath. Beth giggled under her
breath, and he grinned quickly at her before shuffling down to the body’s feet. Two shoes, once shined, now horribly scuffed. “He was dragged. That doesn’t make any sense.” He stood and frowned. “Why kill him and then drag him a few feet away.”

“To hide him better? If he left him where the blood trail began it’d be partially visible from the street,” Beth said, worrying her bottom lip.

“That’s not this guy’s MO,” Edward shook his head. “Christ’s sake, vic number two was left in the middle of a park in the playground, this guy doesn’t care about hiding the crime. You said two hours?” At Beth’s nod, Edward scowled. “He wasn’t dragged then. He dragged himself, trying to get away. Those must be concrete burn on the knee of his pants.”

Hughes turned towards the blood trail began and followed it’s direction towards the other end of the alley way which was currently cut off by two parked police cars. “Why go that way, then? The street is that way.”

Edward ran a latex-gloved hand across his chin. “Hard to say. Maybe’d it be better with a visual. Beth, be our vic. Go stand where this starts.” She nodded and moved to the beginning to the blood trail, and Edward turned towards Hughes. “Be the killer. On the other side. Blood splatter looks like the killer was facing south, and our vic was facing north.”

Hughes nodded, and moved, standing in front of Beth. Beth did her best to mimic what their victim would have been positioned like when he was first attacked, and carefully raised two hands to her face, sliding her fingers upwards into her bleach-blond hair and huddling away from Hughes as Hughes lifted his hand into air, mimicking a knife. Edward slowly walked down the length of the alleyway, looking for whatever compelled their vic to drag themselves away from what could have been salvation.

“You said you had an ID,” he called, and saw Hughes shuffled out of the corner of his eye.

“Matthew Halsey. Twenty-two. There’s a distinctive birthmark on the back of his hand, he’s been missing since last week Saturday,” Hughes called. Edward scowled. Same age as Al - it was always more difficult when he saw the similarities between a crime scene and his brother.

He stopped suddenly, blinking down at the single gum wrapper in the center of the alleyway. He looked around for the culprit, scanned the dumpsters for anything similar, but two of them were full with cardboard and the other three were closed. No chance for anything to fly out and contaminate the crime scene. Logically it knew that couldn’t possibly be relevant, but people didn’t throw out random pieces of a puzzle because they didn’t fit the game.

“You’re being attacked,” Edward spoke out loud. “Viciously, someone with a knife, and you’re hurt. You’re wounded; and you know that if you make it to the road you’ll be safe, so what the hell would make you think you’d have a better chance crawling in the opposite direction? What would make you so sure?”

Edward looked back to Beth and Hughes, still frozen in place, to the body, to the single gum wrapper. The more he thought about it - a gum wrapper someone had to have put there, recently by the clean look of it, empty and white. He blinked at it, before staring back at Hughes and Beth.

“Unless you knew you had a better chance,” he said, and they relaxed to look at him. “Unless there was someone else here. Someone Matthew Halsey knew and trusted and hoped would help him. Get me a camera.”

One of the police men standing guard walked over a few steps to hand Edward a camera. He knelt
and took two quick pictures of the gum wrapper, before carefully retracing his steps.

“Who’s the detective on this? I gotta tell them-” he cut himself off at the wince on Hughes’ face as the man came closer. Edward frowned. “What?”

“No detectives,” Hughes spoke. Edward blinked.

“The hell do you mean, ‘no detectives’. Who’s gonna solve the fucking case, then, Hughes? Mary Poppins?”

“Not exactly,” Hughes shrugged, and Edward narrowed his eyes, taking a step back.

“Wait - why the hell are you here? You weren’t here for the last body, why would you-”

“Matthew Halsey is a soldier; a sergeant, to be exact,” Hughes cut in, smiling apologetically. “Which means that the military is now involved.”

“No,” Edward breathed, eyes widening. “No-”

“Yeah,” Hughes grimaced. “We’ll be working on this case with-”

“Don’t say it.”

“Colonel Mustang and his department.”


“Bullshit!” Edward exclaimed, throwing his hands into the air. “Why the hell is it Mustang? Why do you hate me?”

“Had to be Mustang, Edward,” Hughes said, and his voice was just a bit harder now. “Anyone else, god forbid we got saddled with Archer, would have taken the jurisdiction from us and claimed it as their own.”

Edward recoiled, nearly hissing. His fists were clenched tight, and he could feel a headache coming on from how hard he was grinding his jaw. Even though the most experienced sailor could have lost himself on the seas that were Edward’s hatred for everything Colonel Mustang, the idea of losing his tie to the entire case far outweighed it. If Edward Elric lost hold of the ‘Scarface Killer’ case, then Fullmetal would barely hang on. As it was, Edward was scrounging everything he could for evidence to help. If he lost his access...

“You calm now?” Hughes questioned. “Do you need to do a breathing exercise? Gracia does these yoga poses that might help, be the tree Ed, be the tree-”

“If you don’t shut up, I don’t care if you’re my boss, I will rip your arm off,” Edward growled without breathing, before closing his eyes and inhaling deeply. “We get the body.”

“We’re already getting the body,” Hughes pointed out. “They’ll be using a lot of our facilities. They’re short staffed because of the conflicts up north.”

“I am not sharing my lab.”

“We can work for that.”
“Or my techies.”

“We might have to compromise on that one,” Hughes winced. Edward opened his eyes and glared.

“They don’t get Beth,” he pointed towards Hughes. “Or Russell. I’m still head forensics on this.”

“Wouldn’t have it any other way,” Hughes said, cheerfully. “Besides, now we’ll have access to military files we didn’t have access to before. Who knows, maybe they’ll help speed this along!”

“They better or else this is just another way the military is being completely useless,” Edward grumbled, and Hughes caught him around the arm, pulling him a step closer.

“And,” Hughes said, tone completely devoid of the teasing from before, serious and sober. “Certain night-time prowlers should most likely keep their distance from this case for the time being. We all know how Mustang gets when he senses Fullmetal’s involvement.”

Edward stared at Hughes, before sighing and wrenching himself out of Hughes’ grip. “Ugh, fine. You’re worse than Al. Why’d I tell you, anyway?”

Hughes wrapped his arm around Edward’s shoulder, pressing down onto him. “Because you’d never have gotten this job if you didn’t? And you’d never lie to your dear Uncle Maes?”

“Yeah, fucking right,” Edward said, shrugging off his arm. “When’s the bastard getting here then?”

“Soon. I’m supposed to meet him, give a press statement, and then get my ass back to the office.”

Edward grinned. “Good. We don’t want your kind here anyway. Pencil pusher.”

“You’ve wounded me,” Hughes said, shaking his head. “Don’t mock me. This pencil pusher is making sure you’re not the most hunted man in the city.”

“Suppose there’s some perks to you being commissioner,” Edward sighed. “Though there are very, very, very little. Now, get, I have a crime scene to process.”

Hughes scrubbed his hand across the top of Edward’s head before the younger man could stop him, before grinning and walking towards the group of police men gathered near the edge of the crime scene, holding back the crowd. Edward watched his back for just a moment before turning back to Beth and another crime scene investigator who were currently fingerprinting what was left of them. He was from the graveyard shift, someone Ed had only see in passing, but Edward knew Sarah, searching through the dumpsters, and Eric, who was running over the alley ground with a UV light.

His mind strayed as he focused on the basically routine job of processing the scene. Anything worth noting was photographed and bagged, blood was chipped up from the concrete, and Edward felt his knees start to lock as he basically crawled along the concrete.

“We’re not going to get much out of these finger prints, not that we need them now. Military’ll have finger-prints and dental records,” Beth muttered, dropping the paper back into her tackle box. “Maybe Russell’ll be able to tell us something?”

“Yeah, maybe,” Edward said, distracted as he carefully studied the blood trail. “If he fought there might be blood here that’s not from Halsey. Pretty impossible to separate it out, though.”

“Who knows?” Beth questioned, cheerfully. “Maybe Fullmetal’ll get a lead and solve the case for us.”
“And let him get all the fun parts?” a voice spoke up from behind them both, coming under the cover of the white tent. “Perish the thought.”

Edward froze, eyes closing as he carefully counted his breath, before he stood. Once he was sure he wasn’t going to attack on just pure instinct, he turned and leveled Colonel Mustang with an unimpressed look. He was wearing a dark grey greatcoat over his uniform: a white dress shirt and dark blue pants with a matching jacket that buttoned up the front. His black tie was tucked neatly into the jacket, and not a single hair was out of place in casual disarray. Edward really, really hated him, mainly for the tightening in his chest that never failed to build whenever Ed saw him. “You’re supposed to talk to Hughes.”

“Already did,” Mustang said, pulling a pair of latex gloves before kneeling next to the body. “Filled me in, but there’re four files waiting for me back at the police station that I’m going to have to read before tomorrow morning. Bruising around the neck?”

Beth cleared her throat (and ignored Edward’s hissed ‘traitor’ as she shook the blush away) and knelt next to Mustang. “Lacerations on the hands and wrists, concrete scrapes on the knee of the pants. Bruising looks like hand-like. Single upward knife wound to the heart. He bled out.”

“Not before he tried to crawl away from his attacker and to someone else,” Edward added, crossing his arms. “Face wounds happened before he died, same as the others. Blood splatter indicates that the kill was over there, or the knife wound at least,” he pointed to the beginning of the blood trail, “so, whoever did this probably ruined his clothes, or was wearing something over them.”

“Shame,” Mustang murmured. “Halsey was a good soldier. Well, if you’re done with the body—”

“What?” Edward blinked. “No, I’m not done with the body - our coroner will be here any minute.”

Mustang stood and blinked at him, before smirking. “That’s nice, but I brought my own.”

“No,” Edward shook his head, stalking forward. “Hell no. My crime scene - you can’t just take the body—”

“I don’t see what the problem is,” Mustang said, a hint of irritation lining it. “It’s going to your facility. You’re going to get access to the same information, my coroner is here—”

“Because it’s not your fucking crime scene,” Edward hisses. “Russell’s worked on all four of the bodies, if there’s a similarity he’s going to be the one to point it out, and he’s going to be the coroner working this.”


“By skill, he’s a coroner by trade,” Edward muttered and cursed the fact he had ever told Mustang about Russell. “And he’s the only one who’s gonna be touching this body so back the hell off, Mustang.”

“You do know I’m the lead investigator on this, right?” Mustang questioned, raising a dark eyebrow.

“You could be the President of the United fuckin’ States - look, there’s Russell now.” Mustang turned to look, and there was Russell, shoving his way through the crowd, before flashing his ID card at the police officer on duty. The coroner’s van was right outside of the crowd, and Russell was almost struggling with his duffle bag. “You’re late,” Edward called.

“Oh, you’re here,” Russell greeted, setting down his duffle bag. “No wonder you’re so short; they
are called vacation days for a reason, they help the mind and the body grow.”

“Fuck off and die,” Edward said, cheerfully. “You’re supposed to be on vacation too.”

“Well,” Russell said, pulling on a pair of latex gloves and crouching next to the body, picking up it’s hand. “You know me. Rigor mortis hasn’t set in yet. Still a bit warm. Knife wound, into the heart. Probably what killed him, but...” He pulled out a ruler and carefully measure along before sticking it in the wound. It stuck up at an angle. “Knife was two inches across and six inches long.”

Edward shifted at his distracted tone and ignored Mustang stepping closer to him to give Russell more room. “What?”

“Blood in the hair,” Russell murmured. He carefully lifted the head up to feel the back of it. “Yeah, there’s a heavy blow to the head. I’ll need to open it up to see the full damage.”

“A blow to the head?” Edward questioned, confusion evident in his voice. “None of the other’s had that.”

“Yeah, well,” Russell shifted. “This is - the shape’s weird. It’s almost-” He held up his hand up, fingers spread. He looked up at Edward, and then to Mustang. “This is the shape the blow is in.”

“That’s how big the blow is?” Mustang questioned, bemused. Russell shook his head.

“No, I mean, my hand fits perfectly in the concave. Like someone smacked him so hard his skull just...indentured. Definitely going to have to open it up to see the full damage.”

“Huh,” Edward muttered, and took a step back. Something scratched at his memory, something relevant he was sure, but he couldn’t put his finger on it. “The force needed behind that - if it was a human hand.”

“I’ve never heard of a weapon in the shape of a human hand,” Mustang pointed out, dryly. “But still, no-one should have the power to do that. Not without breaking their own hand.”

“I’ll take the body back the lab. There isn’t much I can do here,” Russell said, reaching in his bag to pull out a thermometer. “Let me just -” He carefully pulled up the body’s shirt and stuck the end of the thermometer in. Edward shifted while they waited, Mustang turning to look down the alleyway, before Russell made a small sound and pulled the metal stick out. “Huh. This body defiantly hasn’t been here for more than three hours. I’ll get a more accurate reading back at the lab.”

“I’ll ride with you,” Edward said, stripping off his gloves.

Russell gave him an amused look. “Still haven’t fixed your bike yet?”

“It’s getting there,” he shrugged, and rolled his eyes. “Am I getting a ride with you or what?”

“Sure,” Russell shrugged. “We can grab dinner on the way.”

Edward blinked. “Wait, what? What time is it?”

Mustang turned back and checked his watch. “Just turned six o’clock. I got here just about an hour ago.”

“Oh god,” Edward breathed, holding a hand to his head, mild panic setting in. “Al’s gonna kill me and then Winry’s gonna bring me back and make me watch her destroy my bike. Russell, you gotta take me to that Chinese place on Central Boulevard. Please.”
“You know I can’t,” Russell scowled, and moved out of the way as two technicians rolled a gurney past him. “That’s in the clear opposite direction from here.”

“I hate you and you’re a traitor,” Edward hissed. “If I run I might be able to get back before they decide to kill me.”

“I’ll drive you,” Mustang spoke up, and raised his eyebrow again when Edward stared at him. “I don’t mind if it’s out the way. I’m a bit hungry myself.”

“I’d rather walk,” Edward started to murmur under his breath, but Russell pinched the back of his thigh from his sitting position, glaring at him when Edward yelped and turned to yell at him. Edward started at him, offended, before he hissed, “Traitor. Fine, fine, you can drive me.”

“Great,” Mustang said, nearly cheerful. “Car’s over here. I’m in the mood for lo mein, to be honest.”

“I’m gonna get you back for this,” Edward hissed at Russell as he slowly walk backwards and glared at him. “You just watch for it.”

“Goodbye, Edward,” Russell called. “See you tomorrow.”

“Traitor!” Edward called, one last time, before he ducked under the yellow crime tape and maneuvered through the dwindling crowd towards Mustang’s car. He had never seen it before and Edward had never been good with cars - that was Winry’s division - preferred motorcycles, but it was obvious that Mustang’s car was on this side of ‘wow’ with a side of ‘are you fucking kidding me’. “It’s a Mustang.”

Mustang (the person, not the car) looked up and nodded. “It is. ’53.”

“You either have a sick sense of humor or really, really bad taste,” Edward murmured, before he gave a small dry laugh to himself. “Oh, wait, what am I talking about? It is you, after all.”

“If you must know, I lost a bet with Hughes. I did laugh when I first bought it, though,” Mustang shrugged, climbing into the driver’s seat and starting the car. Edward slid into the passenger seat. It was clean, which he wasn’t sure he was expecting. More often than not he usually couldn’t expect anything Mustang did, which was usually a major point of aggravation. “You mentioned a Winry. Girlfriend?”

“Ew,” Edward shuddered. “One, none of your business. Two, god, no. Extended family; second cousin. Three, Al’s been head over heels for her since he realized what being head over heels means. Did I mention the ‘ew’?”

Mustang carefully pulled out onto the road and merged with traffic easily. “Excuse the prying. I just don’t think I’ve ever heard you mention anyone in the...romantic light.”

Edward’s jaw tensed. “Oh, I’m sorry, I forgot that I managed to tell you everything that’s happened to me since we last talked, over a year ago.”

Almost impeccably, Mustang’s hands tensed around the steering wheel. “Touché.”

“Turn here,” Edward inclined his head, and Mustang looked at him out of the corner of his eye.

“If I turn on Main I’ll hit traffic,” Mustang pointed out. Edward rolled his eyes and said, “Just turn here, Mustang, alright? Freakin’ trust me for once.”

He caught Mustang’s reflection in the window, just the quick hint of a tired smirk, before they were
turning left. The street was nearly empty. Mustang stared, eyebrows just barely drawing together. “Huh,” he said. “Main’s usually completely packed.”

“That’s what everyone else thinks,” Edward shrugged. “So everyone avoids it at six. Just wait a few minutes, though, it’ll fill up real fast. You’ll wanna turn on 20th, though, diner’ll be right on the other side but 21st’s a one-way coming this way.”

Mustang, surprisingly (and for once) did what he was told. They turned the corner onto 20th and turned on Central Boulevard, before turning back onto 21st and parking in front of the self proclaimed ‘Chinese Food Palace.’ Edward unlocked the passenger door and got out, sticking his head back in the car as he turned around.

“What do you want?” Edward questioned, and Mustang reached into his pocket for his wallet, digging for it as he answered, “Lo mein, sweet and sour pork, and a box of fried rice? For Hughes? Two lemonades, too.”

“Put your wallet away,” Edward scathed. “You drove me, I buy the food. Equivalent, yeah? I’ll be back in fifteen minutes.”

Mustang started to protest, but Edward closed the door on him, leaving the man still searching for his wallet and he skipped over the parking lot divider and pushed open the door to the restaurant. The maiter’d or whatever the Chinese version of a maiter’d was at a podium set into an alcove, off of the side, barely visible from the main room.

“Sit or pick up?” the man asked, holding up a notebook. Edward shook his head.

“Order out.” When the man was ready, Edward rattled off his order: one vegetable platter, two boxes of lo mein, two boxes of sweet and sour chicken, two boxes of white rice, one box of sweet and sour pork, two lemonades, three sodas, one box of fried rice. The man nodded and turned, most likely to drop off his order with a call of ‘ten minutes.’

Edward moved over to the set of wooden benches, sitting down on them before crossing his legs and sticking them up on top off of the glass coffee table in front of him. Half his mind was still stuck on the crime scene he had left, which was probably why he didn’t realize the dark clothed figure stumble through the door, right arm trembling.

What did catch his attention was when the man, black hood covering his head and work gloves over his hands, moved straight up to the cash register and leveled a gun upwards into the startled waitresses face.

“Hands up, alright - and I won’t hurt you,” the man ordered, voice shaking. Edward blinked at him, still relaxed in his reclined position. The waitress nearly fell over, opening the cash register, clearly already recognizing what was happening. The man obviously was expecting it to be a quick robbery. It wasn’t an uncommon plan, and was even a semi-good one. The entire restaurant was bustling. No-one was going to pay attention to robbery happening in the middle of it. “Give me the money out of the cash register,” the man continued, sliding a plastic bag across the countertop.

Edward sighed. “That’s an awful way to treat a girl,” he called, and the man jumped horribly, swinging around to aim at him. “You didn’t even say please.”

“Shut up,” the man hissed. “Or else I’ll shoot.”

“You’re not gonna shoot,” Edward called out, relaxing back to stare up at the ceiling. “You’re trying to be subtle. People are gonna notice a gun going off.”
“I mean it!’ the man stressed. The waitress fumbled with the cash out of the register, and Edward sighed again.

“Man, you’re a real amateur, aren’t you?” he muttered to himself, before swinging his legs off of the coffee table and standing. “It’s my day off, too.”

“Stop!” the man cried. “I mean it - I’m gonna shoot!”

“Have fun with that,” Edward rolled his eyes, stalking forward the two paces. The man jumped in surprise, not expecting him to move as fast as he did, going to squeeze the trigger, but Edward was already there, right hand covering the barrel of the gun. “Now, don’t shoot,” Edward instructed. “Because it will ricochet back at - wait a minute.” He stared at the gun, eye level, before glaring at the man in front of him. “For fuck’s sake, this isn’t even loaded, is it?”

“Shut up!” And before Edward realized it, the man had wrenched the gun backwards out of his grip and swung the handle of it towards Edward’s temple like a club. Edward sighed for the third time, and stepped back, out of the range of the man before bringing his right fist up and striking it across the man’s jaw. He dropped like a sack of dirt, completely out cold. Ed stared at him for a moment, eyes narrowing as he remembered the man’s panicked glare, the near desperateness that was in his expression, before he saw the waitress twitch, the bag she was filling hitting the counter with a loud thump.

“That takes care of that, then,” Edward shrugged, and stepped over the body towards the waitress, trembling on the other side of the counter. “Are you alright?”

The waitress managed to nod, and Edward carefully laid a hand on her shoulder, before grinning at her. She blinked at him, shaking her head just slightly, before she stared to ramble, “Oh my god, you just, oh my god you saved me, he was going to - and you just -”

“As long as you’re alright,” Edward said slowly, but she cut him off with, “Thank you, thank you, thank you.

“It’s really no problem,” he shook his head, grinning unabashedly. “No really, it’s no problem.” He kept repeating himself, even as another waiter came by and the waitress started to talk to him in rapid fire Chinese, nearly tripping over herself to get the words out. Suddenly Edward found himself being hugged by three very happy waiters who were trying to offer him his entire meal for free. At the risk of sounding ungrateful, he took the accepted box and shook his head. “No, for real, it’s alright. Just, you know, call the police. And, uh, if you didn’t mention that I was the one who did this? I’d be really grateful.”

After he got a confirmation that they’d keep him out of it, he managed to hurry out the door into the cooling night-time air, letting out a breath. Weird. He had known that the city was experiencing a spike in robberies and muggings, but Ed didn’t realized that it was getting to the point that he was going to be on the other end of it. Edward carefully flexed his right hand, feeling the gears whirl and grind. Sometimes he wondered the amount of trouble he’d be in without his metal limb, and then laughed at the idea that he was actually grateful that he had a missing arm. He supposed that it was alright to feel grateful to have the mechanized arm in the first place, though, considering all the trouble his grandfather had in taking off his own arm and outfitting it onto Ed’s own before he died.

Edward let his arm wrap around the cardboard box holding the collection of food before heading towards Mustang. It would probably be best if both of them were gone before the police showed up to do their jobs.

He opened up the car, and Mustang already had his seat pulled forward so that he could place the
cardboard box on the backseat, before he pushed it back into place. Edward crawled in after a second, closing the door behind him. “That took longer than expected,” Mustang said, eyebrow raised, pulling onto the street. Edward shrugged, because he couldn’t exactly tell him what had happened.

“Long line,” he said, instead, staring out the window. “Do you need instructions or-”

“No, I still know the way,” Mustang said, nearly devoid of any awkwardness. Edward, on the other hand, was rolling in it, barely holding back his nervous shifting. “You’re right. Should I ask how you’ve been? It’s been awhile.”

“Better if you didn’t, Mustang,” Edward said. “There ain’t much to talk about.”

“How’s your arm?” When Edward turned to look at him, Mustang shrugged. “You were clenching at the scene.”

“It’s fine,” Edward stared down at his right hand. “Hasn’t given me any trouble. Why are you working this case?” he questioned, changing the subject, before he gave a wry smirk. “I thought you were supposed to be in charge of the man hunt for Fullmetal.”

“Still am, among other things,” Mustang said, voice cold, as it usually got when Central City’s resident vigilante was brought up. “This case might be related to Fullmetal.”

Edward felt his face scrunch up in confusion before he could stop it. What? “What?” No, what? “How?”

“You know I can’t tell you that,” Mustang scolded, and turned a corner. Edward gave him an incredulous look, heart tight in his chest - 

“If it’s relevant to - the case, you have to tell me! What the fuck, Mustang? How the hell is this case connected with Fullmetal?” Edward sat straighter in his seat, leaning forward slightly over the glove box in between his and Mustang’s seats. Mustang rolled his eyes.

“I can’t tell you-”


They came to a stop at a red light, behind a plumber’s van, and Mustang leaned back, sighing. “Damnit; alright, fine. The reason why the military hasn’t taken this case completely is because we don’t want to tip Fullmetal off.” Edward held back a wince; too late for that. “Two of the other victims were in the military as well. Number’s two and three. The first one was Sandra Walters, a Major that went missing a month ago. The second is Andrew Jones, a Lieutenant who was missing for two days before he showed up. When Halsey showed up we put the vic’s dental records against our own,” Mustang finished, answering Edward’s question of ‘how the fuck do you know who these people are?’ before he had a chance to ask it.

“What the hell do they have to do with Fullmetal?” Edward questioned, running their names over in his mind. None of them rang any bells. Mustang drummed his fingers on the steering wheel, staring up at the red light.

“They were all saved by him,” Mustang said, exhaling. When Edward didn’t speak, he went on. “Andrew Jones was saved from a house fire three months ago by Fullmetal. Sandra Walters was nearly mugged and killed in an alleyway a year ago, Fullmetal saved her. Halsey and his father were hostages in the bank robbery six months ago.”
Edward remembered the house fire; faulty wiring and a loose sweater that sent an apartment building up in flames. There had been people stuck on the third and fourth floors, and Edward had cut open his flesh hand to write a transmutation circle that brought the concrete upwards into a durable set of stairs that helped everyone to safety. He couldn’t pick out Andrew Jones, but he couldn’t pick out Sandra Walters either out of the nearly staggering amount of stopped muggings he had stopped. The bank robbery had yielded little different. Most of that was a painful blur with a sharp hatred directed towards Envy. One day he’d cut that punk’s green dreadlocks off and set them on fire while he watched, he swore it, and then who’d be shorter than a dime then?

“That means nearly half the city’s at risk,” Edward murmured, dragging a hand through his hair, only stopping when he hit his ponytail’s band. The red light turned and Mustang pulled forward. “Fullmetal’s saved a fuck ton of people.”

“I know,” Mustang said, voice low. “Which is why we have to stop this before it gets worse.”

“I have a headache,” Edward whined, tugging at his ponytail. He had the urge to kick out his feet and beat his fists against his legs, but knew it would do little good. “Everything sucks.”

Mustang grinned wryly at him, darting his gaze to look at Edward, before he turned his gaze back on the road. “My sentiments exactly.” He turned another corner, and Edward recognized the front stoop of the apartment building he lived in. It was victorian, with white stone and a black gate surrounding the very small lawn. It wasn’t overly big, but it was over ten stories tall and in the middle of the city, perfect for Ed. As Mustang stopped in front, he leaned forward and caught Edward’s wrist as Edward opened the door and began to get out. “Tell Al hi for me?”

Edward turned back and stared at him, flexing his hand. “Yeah, sure.”

“Do you need a ride tomorrow morning?” Mustang pressed, and Edward glared at him.

“I should have my bike fixed by then,” Edward said, tugging on his hand. Mustang’s gaze dropped down to it and visibly started, as if he was surprised that he was still holding on. He released it after a second, holding his hand in the air before letting it drop. Edward raised an eyebrow at him, felt his stomach twist, and then he dropped his voice down to a cold, flat tone. “You know us being forced to work together doesn’t change anything, right?”

Mustang’s jaw clenched, barely noticeable. Edward made a point not to stare at him.

“I know that,” Mustang said, and sunk back. “I apologize if I made you uncomfortable.”

Edward climbed out of the car fully and pulled the seat forward, carefully pulling out Mustang’s order from his own before tugging out the cardboard box and holding it both hands. His stomach clenched (a familiar feeling around Mustang) as he stared down into the car at Mustang, who was staring forward, hands back against the steering wheel, tense.

It would be cruel, he could almost hear himself think, if he said something he wasn’t sure he meant even if would not be the first time Ed had done so. More than that, he’d pay for it later if he didn’t do anything other than turn on his heel and stalk up the steps. He and Mustang didn’t have the best relationship, but Ed knew damn well that he couldn’t improve it; but he also knew that if he made their relationship any worse, the guilt and fury and clash of emotions might make Ed sick. Where they were was what Ed could deal with easily; Ed’s guilt was at a manageable level, and his indigent rage at Mustang wasn’t too horribly overwhelming.

“Thanks for the ride, Mustang,” Edward said, briskly, sliding the chair backwards to lock it in the place, before he chewed on his bottom lip, sighing. “You didn’t make me uncomfortable.”
“Oh,” Mustang said, and Edward looked away as he watched his expression relaxed just slightly. “Have a nice night.”

“Yeah, you too, Roy,” Edward murmured, and closed the door with his hip, hands busy with the box. He winced a second later at his slip up, and hoped that his voice was quiet enough the older man hadn’t noticed. Considering the way his luck went, however, there was no way he’d be that lucky. He made sure not to look back as he keyed in his code to the gate, and again to the building, before slipping inside.

He and Al lived on the seventh floor, which was mildly annoying because more often than not he’d have to scale up the fire escape to get up to the roof so that no-one could see him, but there was no way he could afford the pent houses up above. He only knew that some rich old woman lived in one apartment, and an Asian family that was obviously rolling in it, considering their car in the garage, in the other. There was an elevator that constantly seemed to be out of order whenever Edward wanted to use it, so even though it was currently working, Edward took the white tiled stairs up the seven floors before coming to his and Al’s apartment. He knocked once, with his hip, and waited for Al to open the door.

Alphonse glared at him when he opened the door, though it softened considerably when he spied the food in Ed’s arms. “You’re late,” he pointed out, mildly. Edward winced.

“Sorry ‘bout that. I’ll fill you in while we eat?”

“Better not to. Winry’s here, remember? I don’t think she wants to hear about dead people over dinner,” Al reminded.

“Who wants to hear about dead people over dinner?” Winry called, coming to the front door. She scrunched her nose up. “Is it Ed? ‘Cause he certainly smells like dead people.”

Edward went to protest and only stopped when he caught Al’s sharp glare. He rolled his eyes and shoved the food into Al’s arms. “Fucking fine then. Go dish this out. I’ll shower, if her highness commands it.”

“She does!” Winry sung as she picked out her soda and broke the tab, taking a sip. “Use soap, Edward, I really don’t want to smell decomposing organisms over my chicken.”

“Technically, you’re already smelling decomposing organisms in your chicken,” Al pointed out, and Ed rolled his eyes as he emptied out his keys onto the side table and headed towards his bedroom. Apparently not even Winry was safe from Al’s ‘why the hell would you want to eat other animals?’ As if the cats that Edward was just barely keeping out the apartment weren’t bad enough.

The apartment was structured as so; the door was on the far right side of the apartment which lead down a hallway which really wasn’t a hallway but the other side of a half counter that separated it from the breakfast nook and the kitchen. The family room filled up the other half of the room and was separated by a kitchen counter that wrapped around a quarter of the room, a set of bookshelves against the wall and a mantle above the heater with a host of pictures. In between the family room and kitchen was another hallway that led straight down into Al’s (and now Winry’s) bathroom, another hallway crossing across it’s path. The bathroom was shifted to the right so that it shared that half of the apartment with Al’s bedroom. There was a window at the end of the hallway, Ed’s bedroom to the right of it, and Winry’s smaller guest bedroom straight across it.

It was important that Edward knew the exact layout of the apartment because hidden in most nook and crannies and secret hide-aways were usually entire sets of knives and kevlar. Al had laughed him off when he talked about the chance that his night job could ever follow him home, and glared
angrily when Ed ripped up the back of the couch to stuff kevlar in the back of it, but Ed wouldn’t risk his little brother for the world.

“Oh my god!” Winry shrieked as Edward moved through his bedroom towards his really quite small bathroom. He paused, waited a second to see if he should head back out, but Al was already there, asking questions. “Is this a fucking machete?!” she yelled, and Edward winced. It wasn’t a machete, most likely she had found the hunting knife in the cutlery drawer, and usually Ed preferred to use his fists, but there were some people who couldn’t be beat down.

Considering Winry didn’t come into the room, chasing after him, Edward assumed that Al had calmed her down so that she wouldn’t kill him. Once his shirt was off he checked around the automail port to look for any signs of pulled flesh. He had to feel it out, unwilling to take off the pale white skin-like cover that currently covered most of the arm. He never particularly liked wearing it, but too many people stared and ran off when they got sight of his metal arm.

It had been a little over twelve years now since he had surgery for the automail. Originally he had only lost the lower part of his arm, a little above his elbow, but the rest of it came off soon after because of infection. He supposed that it could have been worse - that he could have lost his left arm instead of his right, and then what would he do? At least losing his right arm meant that his grandfather could give his mechanical arm without giving his grandkid two right hands.

Once his trail of thought started, as he turned on the shower, it was hard to stop. He thought of what restaurant he would take Al (and now, Winry too, he supposed) for the anniversary of their mother’s death, coming soon. Usually, for their father’s they stayed in and watched old Western movies until they felt sick, but proper clothes and a classy night out had been the tradition for the past five years.

It all depended on what they felt like doing when it came to their grandfather’s anniversary, but most of the time it was a quiet night in while Ed and Al went through his old library, pouring over the meticulously hand written books that didn’t make sense to most people, and most of the time, didn’t make much sense to them either.

The shower was almost too hot when he stepped under the spray, already reaching for the shampoo. As much as relaxing in the shower was a nice thought, there was food waiting for him, and he never got to finish his barbecue plate. He quickly washed his hair, before grabbing the bar of shop and washing the rest of him. After a second he was satisfied he didn’t smell of ‘decomposing organisms’ and instead like the usual lye scented soap he used. Luckily the fake skin cover kept the automail from getting wet, but he’d have to take it off eventually to oil the automail.

Pajamas, because he wanted to sleep for a few hours before he went back out, and he toweled his hair as dry as it could go. He usually left it down when it was wet and it dried straight. More than once, Winry had teased him about getting him a blow dryer for Christmas or a birthday present to help, but he usually responded by starting up a shouting fest with her.

When he came out, Winry was sprawled on the couch, soda in her hand and plate empty while Al munched on his vegetarian platter as he studied some medical text book. Most people relaxed with a nice novel, but Al settled his mind with - he bent for a second to read the spine, oh - Hippocrates. Ed grabbed a plate and scooped up his food before he sat across from Al, checking to make sure Winry was completely focused on Top Gear before he leaned close to Al and caught his attention. It only took a few seconds to relay everything that had happened, and Al’s frown became more and more pronounced.

“Why on earth would they target the people you’ve saved?” Al questioned, eyebrows drawn together. He was upset, and frustrated. “That’s just - it’s awful.”
“I know,” Edward murmured. “Which is why I have to get a handle on this before it gets worse. I thought this was bad before, but this is - it’s worse.”

Al frowned. “Brother, you’re gonna be careful, right?”

Ed grinned. “Since when am I not careful?”

If anything, Al looked even more worried.

The story goes like this. Edward and Alphonse Elric are born a year apart from each other to Trisha and Richard Elric. ‘Elric’ is not Richard’s last name (which was Martin) but the Elrics’ are just prestigious enough to warrant a maternal last name. Their grandfather is Edward Elric (the first) who also has a younger brother by one year named Alphonse, and both are associated with the term ‘World Peace’. (After all, wouldn’t you call the two men who ended World War II and smoothed over the Cold War ‘peace keepers’?)

When Edward is three years old, their father - a cop and rising star - is shot down during a car robbery; on his day off. Trisha Elric is killed two years later in a car accident that costs Edward Elric his arm as he held up the wreckage so that his younger brother could climb out of the car. They go to live with their (very old) grandfather who is loosing his mind. In an effort to keep it, he writes. Everything. From his furtherest memory to a very complicated division of science that only his grandchildren are privy to understand.

He passes away when Ed is ten and Al is nine, and instead of being put with their mother’s cousins, who currently live out of the country, or with a family friend, they’re placed in an orphanage until Ed turned fifteen and declared emancipation for him and his brother. It’s approved and Ed enrolls at the university on a scholarship and graduates four years later in theoretical physics. Instead of doing the sane thing, like, getting a job somewhere in theoretical physics, he wheedles his mother’s friend, Maes Hughes, into getting him a job with the police. Because, here’s the kicker, he’s decided he’s going to be a superhero.

Have you laughed yet? It really is alright, if you do. After all, five foot five men with long blond hair who are missing an arm don’t exactly scream ‘crime fighting’ material.

Then again, Edward Elric did enjoy smashing everyone’s perceptions of him.
Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

In which there is exposition, leads, and criminal activity. (If you look up 'contrived' in the dictionary, you'll see this fic.)

Chapter Notes

1. Thank you for all the support. You guys—it really means a lot to me.
2. No beta so please, please tell me if there are any errors. I only have enough time to post this, and finding the time to edit was crazy enough as it was. If you see any words that shouldn't be somewhere or misspellings, just drop me a line and the minute I can, I'll tidy it up.
3. Thank you for reading. No. For real. Thank you for reading.

when i trip on my feet,
look at the ground,
the words are
written in dust

– dance, dance, dance // lykke li

Rose tended to be the first awake. She honestly couldn’t tell why she was a morning person, but she had always tended to rise with the sun. She usually tended to set with it too. More often than not she’d be curled up, ready to relax with a mug of tea the minute the sun had sunk under the horizon. It had served her well at the convent, for the time she had spent there. Early morning mass was, quite frankly, hell on those that thought that there wasn’t much to do at the Sisters of Mary Catherine Convent, but mornings began at five and it was the way Rose had liked; the day busy, and the night ended early.

She didn’t necessarily have to get up early now, not for the past two years. In fact, if she wanted to she could sleep for ages. At least, until seven o’clock, when she had to hurry to the elementary school. It never took long to get dressed, and she wasn’t one for spending a long amount of time putting on makeup. With her dark skin, it only took a few swipes of mascara to look presentable before she was hurrying out the door.

Still, here she was at five twenty-five, steaming cup of tea in her hands as she sat on the back patio
and watched the sun rise. Habit dictated a quick prayer, eyes closed and words murmured, before she
drank her tea and hid a smile to herself. Little comforts like this she was still getting used to, even
though it had been years.

Rose supposed, though, that it’d always be a bit odd, changing your faith from something divine like
God to something mundane like herself. She’d never leave God, not really, but now she knew it was
more important to put her thoughts and her body first and use her own mind to be with God, not
anyone else’s words.

The phone rang next to her, but she had a hand on it the minute it began to vibrate, pressing it to her
ear. “Good morning,” she greeted, cheerfully, voice muted. “Rose speaking.”

“Figured you’d be up,” the voice on the other side said wryly. “Do you ever sleep?”

“Of course I do, Edward,” Rose smiled. “Instead of staying up the whole night, some of us get up
early.”

“Heathen,” Edward shot back, and she could see him roll his eyes. “I have a favor to ask. You have
today off, right?”

“It is Saturday,” Rose confirmed. “I have to grade some tests tomorrow, but I’m free today.”

Whatever Edward was going to say was momentarily put on hold. “Tests? Rose, you teach
kindergarten. The hell are you testing these toddlers on?”

She couldn’t help it. She laughed. “They’re not full blown physics tests, Edward. Simple ones.
‘Circle the word that starts with A’. ‘Which one is an animal?’ ‘What block is blue?’ Even you could
do them.”

“Aha, ha, ha,” Edward said, dryly.

“You have a favor to ask?” she prodded, and he made a small ‘ah’ in the back of his throat.

“My friend, Winry, she came into town yesterday. Al is in class, and I’m working today, but I don’t
feel right leaving her alone in the apartment. Then I remembered, ‘wait, I know a girl’ so I mean, you
two should hit it off right away, right?”

Rose bit back a grin. “Just because we’re girls, doesn’t automatically mean we’ll be best friends. But,
I will be glad to spend the day with her. Alex’ll be working anyway, so I won’t have anything to do
here today. Do you want me to pick her up? We can go window shopping, eat at a café—”

“Yes, normal girl stuff, pedicures, hair doing, gossiping,” Edward cut in, and she knew that he was
making his ‘ew, okay gross’ face. “I will owe you.”

“No, you won’t,” she reminded softly, cupping the phone to her cheek. “I’ve got a lot to do for you
before we even think about being even in terms of owing one another.”

“Don’t get sappy on me,” Edward said sharply, before his tone relaxed. “Thanks, Rose.”

“It’s no problem, Edward. I better get dressed then.”

“Rose, it’s like - what - six o’clock in the morning.”

“Oh, I assumed you meant you want me to come over now. I’ll bring breakfast?”

Edward’s line was silent before a sound of approval came through. “I’m sure this could go horribly
wrong, but you’ll bring those danish things and bacon?”

“Sausages, too,” Rose tempted, humming. “I’ll be there around seven thirty.”

“You’re a beautiful person,” Edward revered. She could hear wind whipping across the phone, and knew he was probably somewhere up high and dangerous. “See you then.”

Rose hung up the phone and carefully placed it back on the patio table, enjoying the now fully rose sun before standing. Her robe was horribly big for her, trailing the ground, but she scooped it up and walked past the patio and into the kitchen. Danish things, bacon, and sausages. That, she could do.

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The night had yielding a productive nothing.

Edward slumped against the couch, unable to find the sleep he knew he was going to need for the day ahead. It had been smart of him to catch a few hours before he went out before because he was sure he’d be dreading the thought of going into work in a few hours without it, and he hated working on a Saturday, hated it, but what could you do? Danishes though, and bacon. Mmm, he could smell Rose’s cooking now. When Al was thick in the middle of med school and Ed was struggling trying to find a rhythm between Fullmetal and Edward Elric, Rose had been a literal godsend, showing up every morning with three plates of breakfast and a kind smile. Things were much more stable, now, but it didn’t mean that their relationship had dwindled.

Of course, as if to counteract the delicious thought of danishes and bacon, he remembered the fact that Mustang awaited at him at work. Ed groaned and threw a hand over his eyes (the flesh one because whenever he did it with the metal one his headache got worse), slouching even farther into the couch. If that was possible.

It had been literally months since he had last seen Mustang. That, of course, didn’t count seeing him in the hallway as the man went to visit Hughes and nearly climbing up the walls trying to disappear before the other man could see him, or on the street the few times they had oh-so-nearly bumped into each other before Ed threw himself out of the way at the last second. Considering their last encounter on the street, it was best if Edward Elric and Roy Mustang kept their space.

The worst part (the very, very worst part and also mainly the only worst part) was that Edward had wished he could have just come out and told Mustang why the hell he irritated him so much. It felt dirty and awful making the man think that his once-upon-a-time attraction towards Edward was the reason they had such a bad relationship, but Edward couldn’t hardly come out and explain it was because the bastard had shot at him and basically made his alter-ego’s life hell, could he...?

It was far too early to be thinking about Mustang, and the smile Mustang used to direct towards him, and Mustang’s hands, and Mustang’s lips on his cheek, and Mustang, in general. He could feel his problems stacking up, and he knew his physics, breathed and lived it; the tower would eventually fall and then what? Would he be left picking up the pieces, or would the ensuing tidal wave completely destroy him?

Edward groaned and rubbed his hand over his face. The headache was slowly building from the top of his head downwards towards his jaw. He thought to let out his ponytail and braid it back like he used to, but he only put it in a braid as Fullmetal and he didn’t want to risk anyone noticing the
Someone knocked at the door, and from the time it took Ed to stand up and walk towards the door, he could already hear Al roll off his bed and stumble around his bedroom, gathering his clothes together. Ed was already showered and dressed. He had stumbled in a little over an hour ago and knew that if didn’t take care of himself then, he’d never get around to it. Now he was wearing jeans and a long sleeved grey t-shirt with a vintage poster of Frankenstein on the front. Hughes had stopped trying to get him to wear a dress shirt and slacks nearly fifteen months ago.

He opened the door and smiled up at Rose, who grinned down at him, teeth white and hair spilling over her shoulder. It looked like she had cut it recently, to the middle of her back, and re-dyed her bangs the same maroon they always had been. There were little to no highlights in her dark brown hair except the slightly gold hue it took on when she spent too much time in the sun. Which, more often than not, she did.

“Sorry I’m a bit late. I hit traffic. However, I brought breakfast,” Rose greeted, holding up the green tote bag she was carrying.

“Excellent,” Edward grinned, changing his ‘fuck yeah’ at the last second ‘cause it was still kinda of awkward swearing in front of Rose. “Come on in, then.”

“Ed?!” Alphonse called from his bedroom. “Is that Rose?”

“Yeah,” Edward called back, and Rose moved through the apartment like she knew it like the back of her hand, stepping around the mop that was perpetually slumped against the wall, into the kitchen to start pulling out tubber-ware. “Oh, god,” Ed moaned. “Food.”

“Three raspberry danishes, made with soy milk,” Rose chimed as she placed the three pastries on a plate. “And bacon, and sausages. I brought eggs too.”

Edward moaned and carefully bit into one of the danishes before basically shoveling it into his mouth. He spoke, but his voice was completely muffled by the food inside of his mouth. Alphonse cleared the corner into the kitchen, and rolled his eyes. He was wearing a clean dress shirt and cargo pants, looking every part the respectable student.

“He said, ‘you’re the best’,,” Al translated, wrapping a hand around Rose to give her a quick hug. “How’ve you been, and what are you doing here giving my brother a breakfast he clearly doesn’t deserve?”

“I’ve been great,” Rose smiled, and ignored Edward’s offended look. “My kids and I are going on a field trip to the dinosaur museum on Monday, so I’m a bit busy from that, but other than that, everything’s been smooth as silk.”

Edward snorted, before breaking into barely contained laughter. “You’ve been hanging out with the socialites too much,” he pointed out. Rose rolled her eyes, grin still in place, and handed Al a plate of food.

“I’m here to meet your friend,” Rose clarified. “Winry?”

“Oh!” Al said, chewing on a piece of bacon and just barely holding back a blush. “She won’t be up for another thirty minutes or so.”

“Hell yes, she’s gonna get up,” Edward growled, and called out at the top of his lungs, “Or else she’s not getting any bacon!”
There was a distinctive thump from the direction of the guest bedroom, then two doors opening and closing.

“Like fucking hell, Edward!” Winry shrieked, over the sound of running water, voice muffled by what was most likely a toothbrush in her mouth. “There better be fucking bacon out there for me!”

Edward gave an unimpressed look down the hallway while Al gave a ‘oh god I’m not actually related to these people, am I?’ look towards the ceiling as Rose bit her bottom lip in order to not laugh.

“I see the family resemblance,” Rose noted, grinning as she took up a third plate.

“Can I come live with you?” Al pleaded. “You have, like, eight guest bedrooms now. You won’t even know I’m there. Better yet, adopt me.”

Rose’s laughter became steadily louder. A second later Winry hurried down the hallway into the kitchen, dressed in a black tanktop and jean shorts, barefoot with her hair loose around her shoulders. She zoomed in on the plate waiting for her, before she stopped and looked at Rose.

“Oh,” Winry said, and then blushed. “Oh god, you just heard all that.”

“Don’t worry,” Rose assured. “I’m used to Elric family antics. I’m Rose. Eggs?”

“I’m Winry and - yes, please,” Winry nearly moaned, taking the plate from Rose’s hands and sitting at the table. “Ugh, I’m so tired, and hungry, and jetlag sucks - what time is it?”

“Like eight in the morning,” Edward said, and then looked down at his cell phone to confirm. “Eight on the dot, actually.”

“Is there coffee?” Winry questioned seriously, glaring at him, and Alphonse walked towards the coffee maker where a nearly full pot was waiting. Edward suddenly remembered why he was out in the living room in the first place, laying on the couch. He had never gotten the coffee he had put on.

Alphonse obligingly brought over four mugs and filled them all with coffee before placing the pot back and moving towards the fridge. A second later he returned with milk (Edward scowled and pushed the carton away with a finger), creamer (Edward pushed that away too), and soy milk (which Edward grabbed greedily and poured into his coffee).

“Just be a vegan,” Alphonse wheedled. “You’re half way there with the dairy products.”

“You’re asking me to give up meat,” Edward stared. “Alphonse, I have done a lot for you, and I will do a lot for you, including cook entire meat-less meals alongside my own and put up with you dragging me through the organic aisle, but you’re asking me for something I just can’t do.”

Al rolled his eyes, but there was a grin tugging at his lips. Rose chuckled, and sipped at her coffee before turning to Winry.

“I was hoping we could spend the day together,” Rose spoke up, smiling. “I could show you around town and we could get lunch together and talk?”

Winry quickly swallowed her eggs. “Oh - oh, sure! That’s cool. Beats lazing around the apartment.”

“Sweet,” Edward said, because it always was when his plans came together, finishing off his last danish and effectively the last of his food. He picked up his coffee mug (a bitchin’ awesome coffee mug, if he might add, with a dragon wrapped around it and it’s head was the handle) and stood,
placing his plate inside of the sink. “I better get going.” He turned towards Winry and clasped his hands together. “Please, for the love of all that’s holy - no offense, Rose - please tell me that you fixed my bike last night.”

Winry shrugged. “I couldn’t fix your dent, I don’t have the proper tool for that though I did hammer out the worst of it. Fixed your engine though, you just fucked up your circuit breaker and ruined a part. Took less than thirty minutes to fix.”

Edward could honestly hear the sky open up and angels descend from above. It was the most beautiful thing he’d ever witnessed.

“Beautiful, beautiful,” he nearly cried, grabbing his keys and downing the last of his coffee. “Beautiful!”

“Is he safe to drive like that?” Winry questioned, and Rose hid her smile behind her coffee mug as Al rolled his eyes again.

His bike was glorious - utterly glorious. He had worked his ass off for this bike, and maybe it wasn’t top of the line or in the best shape, it could get up to a two hundred and ten miles per hour and had helped him stop exactly forty-seven attempted crimes. It was red, ridiculously, shiny, firetruck red, with black decal. At night, people knew it as Fullmetal’s ride of choice. During the day, people knew it as that slightly banged up motorcycle from 2005 that Edward drove everywhere instead of getting a car. He didn’t want a car. Cars couldn’t maneuver through traffic at rush hour, slide between alleyways and around side walks, ride silently down the highway until bam! There he was right behind you - did you really think you could get away?

Edward loved his damned bike. He had a reserve of money tucked away just for keeping it in shape, and now he’d probably be dishing out most of his paycheck to Winry to get his bike in peak performance. It would be worth it though, oh so worth it, god he was gonna cry -

She rode like a dream. Some people preferred classic motorcycles, Ed liked them well enough, knew that his father was a bigger fan of those, that even his grandfather had owned one, but those were made for long trips down the open road, not crowded cities and small streets. He had saved up every penny since he was twelve years old, every dollar anyone had ever given him, every paycheck from every random job since he knew he could get a motorcycle license. It was a Ducati, but older, though that made it nonetheless expensive. The day Edward had walked into the bike shop on the northern side of town, the one that sold fancy imported cars and motorcycles and mopeds, and gave his price range, the day Edward had been led towards the back of the building with an upturned nose towards the older, used (cheaper) models and there - at the very end of the line up - bright red, and utterly perfect, there she was.

Ed parked in the staff parking lot, twisted the key to turn her off, and just...sat. God, he just - he just really loved this bike.

He climbed off it after a second, running his hand down the black leathered seat, before pulling the keys out and tucking it in his pocket. His helmet came off a second later, a standard black one with a visor, and he clipped it onto the side of the bike before zipping down his leather jacket. When he was out as Fullmetal he never wore it, just wore the large red overcoat and the red helmet with it’s black
visor. When he was out as Fullmetal there were different plates on his bike too, but other than that, there was no real change. It was amazing what people were willing to ignore if they were never pushed.

Edward jogged up the steps into the police station, which was connected to the forensics lab and the police morgue. The lights in his lab were already on, Beth sitting at her computer, chin propped up in her hand and now brown hair wild around her cheeks (she had a tendancy to dye it blond, and then brown, and then maybe red depending on her mood), and Eric was looking at something underneath a microscope. Beth jumped when she saw him, grinned and waved as he walked by towards the locker room to stuff his jacket inside of his locker.

“Got your bike back, then,” she grinned up at him, and grabbed two files off of the stack next to her. “Russell’s done with the autopsy. Finished about a few hours ago, and I’m running a few tox-screens now. The other file is Halsey’s military record. Colonel Mustang said you might want to see it.”

Edward frowned at the mention of Mustang, but opened up Halsey’s file first. The kid stared up at him, looking horribly young and bright in his blown up ID photo that Edward almost felt sick for a second. His record was nearly spotless; apparently, he wanted to be a soldier to make his dad proud. Never mind the almost, he felt a churning in his stomach.

*Did you die because I saved you?*

But, no. He couldn’t think like that. It was just a theory. There was only one common thread between three out of five of the victims. He - Fullmetal - wasn’t responsible for this. (Because, he knew that if he was, it’d probably kill him.)

Ed closed the file and turned to the autopsy report instead, walking backwards through the lab into his small office, just barely separated from the masses with a layer of glass. If he had it his way, the walls and desk would be bare, but he had spent too much time in the room to let it be that way. A photograph of his mother, father, grandfather, granduncle, Winry’s parents and Winry herself, and finally Ed and Al, sat on the corner of his desk. The laptop the station had given him when he first started still sat open from when he had last used it, though it was off. Papers covered the desk, and even a corner of the floor, and behind the desk was a white board carefully divided into squares that made up the three cases he was currently working on.

The first one was closed, the man in custody, and Ed would be in court sometime in the next months to testify his evidence against him. The second one was still ongoing but past the forensics stage. The third, and final one, was of course the ‘Scarface Killer’ case, whose press title made no sense because it tended to imply that their killer had a scarred face, instead of leaving bodies with mutilated faces behind. Whatever kept the public happy, he supposed, even though it was far too close to the Scarred Killer from a few months back - and Ed didn’t want to remember his debut case and things like Nina and Tucker didn’t bear thinking about.

He had spent most of the night in the bad parts of town, trying to scrape up any leads who might have a grudge against Fullmetal (the answer: everyone) but who could also somehow know who Fullmetal had saved (the answer *so far*: no-one). He hadn’t visited Solaris yet, mainly because even though most information passed through her he was always hesitant about involving her as Fullmetal. Solaris was an Edward Elric acquaintance, not a Fullmetal one, and he always felt dirty about using her. Unfortunately, if he kept turning up what he was turning up (read: *nothing*) then he would have to.

Russell’s autopsy report was wordy, as usual. Ed gave him a few more months before he got into the groove of quick short sentences. Edward skimmed down it, already aware of the bulk of the report. It had been the same for the every victim before Halsey, so instead he moved towards the bottom,
towards the section of the file that detailed the head wound.

‘Six and a quarter inches across, ten inches long, human hand shaped, skull cracked under pressure and imbedded into the brain causing serious inter-cranial hemorrhaging and bleeding. Note: impossible for a human to cause this kind of damage without something more - a weapon, a special glove made of hard enough material, DNA from the planet Krypton.’

“You think you’re funny Russell, but you’re not,” Edward said, biting back a grin. He wasn’t going to laugh, he really wasn’t. Even he had standards. (He made sure he had closed the file before he started snickering at something completely unrelated.) One of the few things Russell and he agreed on was their sense of humor. When he said few, he really did mean few, however. Russell went to the University in Edward’s last year, was a year younger, and came out with a degree in the family business - botany - even quicker than Edward had. Edward had been in Russell’s apartment. It wasn’t an apartment. It was a freaking greenhouse. Everywhere you looked there was some plant or another growing, and the entire house was hot and humid, but Russell and Fletcher (Russell’s younger brother by two years) never seemed to mind.

The thing was that the degree that Russell had graduated with also gave him a medical degree, which also gave him a license, which Ed then used to his advantage. Edward had roped Hughes into hiring him as a coroner just a few months ago. Which Russell had laughed at, and then yelled at him, and then finally accepted the job with the promise that Edward would owe him a favor in the far future because while the two had scholarships and grants aplenty, they were both putting their younger brother’s through college and needed the job. Which he had yet to call in.

When he and Russell weren’t snarking at each other, they were usually yelling at each other. It was hard being two geniuses stuck in a police station, they had to take out their extra energy somehow, and if they mainly tolerated each others presence out of mutual respect for their abilities and the fact their little brothers would kill them, well, there was that.

There was a note at the very bottom of the file, stuck off to the side in Russell’s seriously fancy cursive (which Edward often laughed at him for, but Russell would just point out his horrible left-handed chicken scratch and they usually started fighting after that), right in the corner. ‘Your Royal Shortness: double check the stomach contents.’

Edward had the file up in the air, ready to slam it down onto the ground in rage, before he stopped to read the note over. The stomach contents were still in the lab, he knew that much, so he placed the file on the table and moved around it towards his office’s door and into the outer lab. Beth was still at her computer, apparently skimming through dental work, but Eric was gone.

“We have Halsey’s bile up here, right?” Ed questioned as he slid to sit down in front of the abandoned microscope.

Beth pulled away from her computer to pull box full of slides. “Already went through them and categorized them out. I was going to write up a report in a second.”

“That’s alright,” Edward dismissed. “I’ll do it. Can I have them?”

“Yeah, sure, boss,” she said, and stood, sliding the box over to him. Edward leaned over to grab a pair of latex gloves and pull them on before opening the box and pulling out the first set of slides. “Normal contents really. He ate before he was killed. Recently by the look of the food.”

“Rate of break down looks like...” Edward chewed his bottom lip as he studied the microscope in front of him. “Couldn’t have been more than an hour. Less, maybe. It’s - hard - what was he eating?”
“Doing the lab work on that right now,” Beth chimed, and pushed her chair towards another machine, opening it up and staring at the computer next to it. “We’ve got what looks like beef, vegetables - lettuce, tomatoes, onion.”

“He was eating a burger,” Edward said, squinting through the microscope lens. “I see what could be bread, or you know, parts of it.”

“Got that too,” Beth agreed, and scrolled down. “Acid levels looks like he was drinking soda. Fast food, maybe?”

“I’ll tell Mustang to check his credit card records. If we’re lucky maybe our second person was with him,” Edward grinned, and spun around in his chair. “God, it is Christmas.”

Beth winced. “I’m Jewish.”

Edward stared at her. “And I’m an atheist. Come on, Beth.”

She shrugged, but her lips were twitching upwards in an attempt to keep them flat, so he placed a foot on her chair and pushed her so that she would fumble backwards when it started to roll.

“I’ll be in the front,” he said, standing up. “I lied. Write up the report for me?”

Beth sighed. “I figured you were going to do that. I’ll take care of it, Ed. I’ll try to get a more accurate reading, too.”

“Thanks, Beth,” Edward waved and left the office, turning towards the stairs. The lab was only a short walk away from the police precinct, connected by a walkway, and even though it was barely nine in the morning, the building was swamped. He moved past the detective offices and the line-up, before walking up the marble stairs to the cut-away second floor. Hughes had chosen his office so that he could see the entire floor below him, even though it was a slight bitch to walk all the way around the stairs and around the bannister.

Edward knocked once with his right hand, feeling the metal thump on the wood.

“Come in!” Hughes called, and Edward twisted the lock to open the frosted glassed door. “Edward,” Hughes greeted, standing over his desk. His coat was off, and his shirt sleeves were rolled up to his elbows. “Tell me you have good news?”

Edward’s opened his mouth to speak, before he caught a small movement in the corner of his eye. He clenched on instinct, turning to his left and blinked at Mustang, who was sitting on the other side of a hastily made desk, files strewn across it. Just from a quick glance, Edward knew that it was the previous victim’s files that he was reading, if the photos were anything to go by.

“Have you looked at Halsey’s credit card records?” Edward asked, still turned towards Mustang. Mustang blinked at him, before turning to Hughes, shrugging, and searching through his files.

“When he first went missing it was the first thing we pulled,” Mustang said, holding up a set of papers. Edward prayed to whoever would listen - “There’s no activity on it since he disappeared.”

Edward lifted a hand and rubbed at his eyes. “Fuck. We found what looks like a burger. He might have gotten fast food right before he died.”

“And if we found out where, we could get security tapes,” Mustang finished, leaning back. He sighed, and flexed one of his hands. He looked worse for wear; his jacket was thrown over his shoulder, tie loose around his neck, and his sleeves were pushed up to his elbows.
“He’s not malnourished, either,” Edward pointed out, and forced himself to look away. “That week he’s been gone, I don’t think he was kidnapped. I think he went voluntarily.”

“That doesn’t exactly fit with Halsey’s personality,” Hughes countered. “The kid never missed a day of work. Why would he take off without telling anyone for an entire week, not even his dad or his superior officer? The kid cherished both of them.”

“Who is Halsey’s superior officer, again?” Ed questioned, raising an eyebrow. “I got distracted by the autopsy report.”

“Technically, Archer,” Mustang spoke up. “But he’s directly under Major Armstrong. Has been for the past few months.”

“Alex Armstrong?” Edward blinked, hand falling from his face. At Mustang’s raised eyebrow and nod, he shrugged. “Huh; small world.”

“You know Armstrong?” Hughes asked, eyebrows drawn together. Ed grinned, knowing full well that Hughes didn’t like not knowing his possible contacts. Ed had been holding back on him and he knew he was gonna get a lecture later.

“We have a mutual friend,” Ed shrugged. “I’m pretty close with his wife.”

“Wait - you’re close with Rose Armstrong?”

“We’re getting way off topic here,” Edward pointed out, glaring at Hughes. He closed his eyes and shrugged. “I’m not a detective but I’d ask about any new love interests or new friends - anyone that could have an influence over Halsey.”

“You’re thinking drugs, aren’t you,” Hughes said, flatly. Edward shrugged again.

“If there’s any the tox-screen will show it, but we should cover all corners, shouldn’t we?”

“Anything to get out of this office,” Mustang stood, stretching. Edward’s attention was suddenly interested on the picture of Hughes’ family on the desk. “Armstrong’s working today. I’ll ask him and Halsey’s friends about his behavior. Maybe it’ll turn up something new.”

“I’d like to look inside of Halsey’s apartment,” Edward spoke up, tapping his finger on his hip. “He lives with his father, right?”

“Actually, his father lives with him - his father’s vision is deteriorating, can’t live on his own,” Mustang corrected, before he sighed. “He’ll be moved into military care.”

“You probably should talk to him as well,” Ed pointed out. “They seem close - if anyone would notice something different in Halsey, I bet it’d be his dad.”

“We’ll need a warrant,” Hughes said, moving around his desk towards his phone. Mustang shook his head and stopped him.

“We already have one from when Halsey first went missing,” Mustang said, and looked down at his watch, before shaking out his cuffs back to their full length and tightening his tie. “It won’t be that hard to get ahold of Alex, especially after lunch.”

“Great,” Hughes clapped. “Mustang, you can take Ed to Halsey’s apartment while you question his father, and then you two can meet Armstrong together.”
“Wait-” Ed blinked, before scowling. “Hughes, damnit-”

“I probably should go alone,” Mustang interjected, clearing his throat. “I can give you access to Halsey’s apartment after his father is moved.”

Edward shifted, glaring at Mustang, feeling his irritation boil over. “After you’ve trampled all through it, I don’t think so, Mustang. We’ll go together. ’sides, you’ll probably get more out of Armstrong if I’m there anyway.”

Mustang glared right back, eyes narrowed, and nearly yanked his jacket off of the chair before sliding it over his shoulders. “I have to call Hawkeye, then,” he said, frowning. “She took my car this morning to run errands at the office.”

“Ed has his bike,” Hughes spoke up, smiling innocently. Edward turned towards him and gave him a glare that could convince mountains to move, golden irises just barely holding back righteous fury. How - the hell did he even know that? “Have you ever been on it - whoa.”

“You,” Edward pointed, and carefully aimed another pencil towards Hughes. “You’re not allowed on my bike ever again.”

“Lighten up, Ed, I missed, didn’t I?”

“Just barely!” Edward hissed. “You just barely missed the tree. By two inches.” He turned towards Mustang and scowled at him. “You have been on a motorcycle before, right?”

Mustang’s mouth dropped open for a second, before he exhaled. “Twice? Does riding a dirt-bike count?”

“No,” Edward scowled, and moved towards the door. “Be in the parking lot in five minutes.” He didn’t wait to hear Mustang’s answer, just jogged down the stairs, walked through the precinct, and back down the stairs and into the lab. He nearly ripped his leather jacket off of the rack in his locker, making sure his keys were in his pocket, before he stuck his head into the lab and called to Beth. She perked up, blinking at him.

“What’s up?” she questioned, leaning towards him.

“Text me when the tox screens are finished?” he asked, quickly grabbing a small rolled up set of tools. “I’m going to go check out Halsey’s apartment.”

“Might take awhile, boss, machine’s acting up again. I’ll tell you the second they’re finished,” she promised, turning back to her computer. Edward waved at her reflection and pushed open the door to the parking lot. Mustang was already there, standing in front of his motorcycle with an unreadable expression on his face. Edward felt his jaw tense - hoped, really, that Mustang (who spent a lot of time looking at Fullmetal) wouldn’t recognize the similarities in the bike, but this was Mustang they were talking about.

“Did someone key my bike?” Edward called, zipping up his jacket halfway. Mustang turned halfway to raise an eyebrow.

“No,” Mustang shook his head. “It’s just - red.”

“And the sky is blue,” Edward snarked. “Congratulations, Mustang, you know your colors. Can you tell me what’s green?”

“Your wit knows no bounds,” Mustang drawled, and Edward grinned up at him, flashing his teeth,
before taking his keys and opening up the space underneath his leather seat, pulling it upwards. He always kept a spare helmet inside, mainly for Al, and was smart enough to not risk anyone seeing the red helmet he wore as Fullmetal. Not only was the red distinctive enough as it was, on the side in black paint was his symbol: a winged serpent wrapped around a crowned cross.

He pulled out another black helmet and handed it over to Mustang. “Just take the damn helmet, bastard,” Edward muttered, shoving the helmet into Mustang’s hands, closing the compartment and sliding his keys out. Mustang stared down at the helmet like someone had just presented him with a puzzle, before he slowly slid it over his face and flipped the visor up. Edward followed suit after he unclipped his own helmet, swinging his leg over the bike. He adjusted his seat and slid his keys in, starting up the engine, and slid his visor up when he realized Mustang had yet to get on.

“So where do I put my feet?” Mustang questioned, still standing on the side of the bike. Edward blinked at him, before twisting and pointing out the extra spoke.

“Just push it against there once we start to move. It’ll feel natural, I swear, Al rides with me all the time,” Edward said, leaning forward just barely. Mustang stood for a second more, before stepping forward and carefully swinging his leg over the bike, settling against it. Edward looked at him over his shoulder, ignoring the fact that Mustang was staring at the nape of his neck like it had somehow captured all of his attention. “You good?” Edward asked, clearing his throat when he realized how out of breath it sounded.

“Yeah,” Mustang said after a second, and carefully wrapped his arms around Ed’s stomach loosely. “Like this?”

Ed stared down the intertwined arms, exhaling shortly as he grabbed them and tightened them manually. Mustang gave a soft breath when he was pulled forward, now flush against Edward’s back. “Tighter. I don’t you want falling off. Just do what I do, alright?”

He snapped his visor down, and rested a hand against one of the handles, and made the other bend backwards to slide down Mustang’s visor, who gave a surprised blink before his face disappeared behind the dark plastic.

“You’ve never crashed, right?” Mustang said, voice so steady Ed knew that he was hiding a hint of nervousness.

He really meant to tell the truth, to laugh about the fact that he crashed his bike at least twenty times, and nearly all of them were on purpose, but instead he found himself leaning back against Mustang’s chest, patting one of the hands that were wrapped around his side.

“Don’t worry,” Edward murmured. “You’re completely safe with me. You’re not stingy about the speed limit, are you?”

He could feel Mustang blink at him, and his arms tightened around his waist. “Why?” Mustang nearly growled, and Edward grinned.

“No reason,” he shrugged, before opening up the throttle and peeling out of the parking lot. Mustang’s grip around his waist was nearly unbearable for a second, reminding him of when Al had first ridden with him and shrieked his ear off. Ed still stayed five miles underneath the speed limit whenever he had Al on board with him, just to save his eardrums.

Edward leaned around the curve, just barely making the green light and coasted the ground, and felt Mustang hold onto him for all that he was worth. They straightened out again, and Edward eased between a Benz and a taxi, cutting in front of the former to catch the tail end of another light,
crossing the intersection just as traffic moved towards them.

He remembered Halsey’s address from his file, even knew the apartment complex in passing along South Hampton road and 28th street, knew that the lunch hour rush would be heavy around 23rd, so he hooked a tight right onto Central Boulevard and slowed to a stop at a red light, holding the bike steady with his foot.

Mustang’s grip had yet to lessen, and Edward was finding it hard to breathe. He shifted, glad that his grin was hidden, before he nudged Mustang’s shoulder with the back of his own. “It’s alright,” he assured, and felt Mustang jump just barely, before his grip started to relax.

“You’re insane,” Mustang growled, and Edward felt his grin get even wider.

“You know me,” Ed shrugged, and moved with traffic when the light turned green. “Don’t be such a tight-ass, Mustang, if I take you down, I’m gonna have to go down too. We’re not going to crash.”

“The speed limits are there for a reason,” Mustang pointed out, and Edward sighed, lifting his eyes from the road to stare up at the sky, before sliding around a truck.

“Just relax,” Edward said in the calmest voice he could manage - the one that he saved for the people he had just saved, halfway to shock. “Open your eyes, look around. Watch the world go by. I’m not gonna let you get hurt.”

“I highly doubt that-”

“Roy,” Edward said, and looked over his shoulder for just a moment. Mustang was silent. “Trust me. Enjoy the scenery.”

His passenger was still quiet, but Ed knew that Mustang - that Roy had listened to him. Once you started looking at the city around you, passing by, it was hard to find anything more beautiful. People became just that - people. They suddenly were all moving with one purpose, all the cars seemed to be following the same tempo, the shadows flickered across the pavement. The walls around them became a little less dirty, the people seemed a little happier, and the world seemed a little brighter.

Ed loved his city. It was the whole reason he had decided to do what he had done, decided to put on a nearly too big red coat and use what skills he could to just do something productive. Every person that lived in Central City deserved a chance to live, to know they were safe, because this was their home and they deserved it.

At night; when the street lights illuminated the dark sidewalks and chased the shadows into the corners, when the lights shined upwards into the sky and turned it into a cover of inky black, no stars in sight (and Ed remembered the stars, loved the stars, but it felt like the city was an oasis in the middle of the universe) it was his. People walked the streets, still following the same patterns they always did, but were skittish, nervous, aware that there was something in the darkness, and he couldn’t keep living in his own world, couldn’t keep pretending that he was the only person that mattered - these people mattered, and he had the skills to help them, and why should he be so selfish to hoard it to himself?

Alchemy - every lesson he had learned taught him that it was a failed science, but then why did it make so much sense? Everyone was made out of the same basic elements, came from the same stars and dust that filled the universe. A loaf of bread had enough energy to power Central City for an entire year, that was how much mass energy it held, every element built upwards into something more concrete. Every life force must hold a million times - a billion times - more energy.
All he had to do was spill a little blood, draw the array, bend the elements’ energy to deconstruct, and then reconstruct it as something else. The law of conservation of energy was still in tact, something became something else, never out of nothing. His grandfather’s principle of equivalent exchange still held strong, Edward knew better than to try and break it, had lived most of his life by it.

Equivalent exchange: Edward could become Fullmetal, but he’d have to dedicate his entire life towards it. There would never again be an early night or a plead for help he could ignore, but the pay off was so, so worth it.

Equivalent exchange: Edward could become Fullmetal, but he’d see the world with another view no-one would ever really understand. People would live their lives in casual, ignorant bliss, unknowing of all the times that Ed crawled home broken and bleeding to keep them safe.

(Equivalent exchange: Edward could become Fullmetal, but he couldn’t have the things he wanted.)

“You’re quiet,” Mustang murmured when they pulled to a stop in front of Halsey’s apartment. He slid off his helmet, hair mussed, and Edward stared up at him, sliding his own helmet off, before he turned away and laughed. Mustang frowned and ran a hand through his hair, shaking it out and set it back in it’s usual messy state.

“You thinking?” Edwards shrugged, turning off the bike, and waiting for Mustang to climb off before following.

“Penny for your thoughts?”

Edward grinned at him, grabbing the rolled up pack of tools from inside of the bike. “I don’t come that cheap, Mustang.”

Mustang laughed, scoffed really, and shook his head. “Of course not. Are you ready?”

Ed shrugged. “Ready as I’ll ever be,” he said, and started towards the complex door, an older wooden one that fit right in place with the slightly run down apartment building. It looked kept well enough, just needed a new coat of paint, and only went up four stories unlike most apartment buildings in the city. “Are you?”

He got a raised eyebrow in response, and Ed shrugged again. Mustang handed back the helmet (Edward put it away) before moving towards the apartment building. “Here’s hoping,” he murmured, and then pushed the door open.

“–

“So, how did you meet Ed and Al?” Winry questioned, licking off a dollop of whip cream of her finger. Rose sat across from her, both outside, sitting half in the shade (Winry) and half in the sun (Rose), finishing off a muffin, giving her a suddenly curious gaze.

“Ed’s night job,” she said, after a second, and carefully watched her. Winry blinked, before laughing.

“Oh, I totally know about the whole night job thing,” Winry said, waving. “I mean the whole-” she leaned forward towards Rose. “Fullmetal thing. So ridiculous - Ed made me talk in code over the phone once.”
“Oh!” Rose laughed. “Thank goodness; the story’s a bit awkward if I have to censor about all of it.” She took a sip of her iced coffee and cleared her throat. “I was a nun, with the Sisters of Mary Catherine Convent, about three years back for about, let me see, since I was eighteen so four years?”

“You were a nun?” Winry questioned, eyebrows drawn together in some sort of embarrassment - she had been swearing in front of this woman - before she shook her head. “Wait - just go on, I have a feeling the story will work itself out.”

Rose grinned. “I joined when I turned eighteen. I was an orphan; my parents died when I was twelve, and the only person that I had attached myself to, my boyfriend, had passed away in a car accident. I couldn’t focus on college, not with the way I was feeling, so I decided to join the convent. My parents were very religious, and I had grown up with God. It seemed like the logical choice. The convent - we were having money problems, which, looking back was very odd. It wasn’t as if we didn’t have a proper source of income, but yet there was never enough money. That’s where Edward came in.”

The story goes like this.

“It’s nice to meet you, Brother Edward,” Rose inclined her head, smiling down at the golden haired man who was staring past her, past the aisle of pews towards the cross on the wall. “I’ve made your bed; I’m sure you’ll be very comfortable during your time at Mary Catherine’s.”

Edward’s attention drew back towards Rose, blinking at her. “Oh, yeah, sure. Nice digs you guys got here. How old’s the building?”

Rose blinked at him, but gave a delighted grin. “Not many people ask about the architecture. The church itself was built in 1801, and the convent was added on in 1829.”

“Must take a lot to maintain,” Edward pointed out, following Rose from the main church to a hallway in the back, towards the living quarters. “Place is pretty big.”

“Well, we do a lot of work maintaining it,” Rose said, and lead him towards a set of stairs. “It’s hard work, but it’s worth it to keep a house of God in it’s proper state. This here, is your room. I’ve added extra blankets, it gets a bit drafty in this area of the building.”

“Thanks, Rose,” Edward grinned, giving a quick look around the room. There was a single iron bed, a few blankets and sheets, a desk, and a set of shelves that were devoid of anything except a black bound bible. “It’s real nice of you to put me up while I’m passing through.”

“Oh, that’s alright,” Rose said, smiling at him. “It’s not often we have other Fathers or Brothers pass by. Do you know how long you’ll be staying?”

The look he gave her made her shift, though not in uneasiness. It looked like he was genuinely searching for the answer himself. Edward shrugged. “Don’t wanna sound rude, but hopefully soon. Gotta lot to do, you know?”

“Well, make sure you keep in touch after you leave,” Rose said, gently. “I’ll leave you to it. We have mass at five thirty tomorrow-“
Edward looked pained suddenly. “Don’t suppose you mean in the afternoon?”

Rose laughed, and shoved at his shoulder. “Very funny, Brother Edward. I’ll see you tomorrow morning. I’ll make sure that there’s a set of pancakes with your name on it.”

He winked at her, and grinned. “You’re a real God send, Rose,” he said, before he closed the door. She blinked at the door, before crossing herself across her chest and shrugging lightly.

Edward certainly was strange.

Stranger still at mass. Edward looked barely awake as he sat in front of the congregation, bible open on one knee and book of hymns on the other. He fumbled for a second, trying to find the right verse so that he could join in on the morning prayers, and looked visibly surprised when Father Cornello called him upwards to the podium to introduce him.

“Oh, yeah, no,” Edward said, shifting uncomfortably. “My, uh, grandmother was pretty religious. She was a Rom, taught us all the hymns and stuff, made us pray before dinner and I decided to join up.”

“A total lie of course,” Rose said, sipping her coffee.

“Oh, yeah,” Winry said, grinning. “Their granddad was a huge atheist - uh, sorry - and their grandmother wasn’t super religious. She apparently got really disillusioned after World War II because - she was Roma, you know? Apparently people refused to let her into church and at one point she got fed up with them.”

“An understandable reaction,” Rose said, smiling. “And so, of course, Ed fit in as well as you would expect.”

Edward helped her with her daily chores, helped sweep and mop the floors, clean the windows, and clean up the kitchen.

“So, you guys all seem pretty close knit,” Edward said, conversationally. Rose nodded, and folded another towel to hand off to him. “How long has the Father been around?”

“For about four years now,” Rose answered. “From what the other Sisters told me, he came after Father Benedict passed, God rest his poor soul. Cornello was the one that offered me a place with the convent - a home. He’s been helping to restore the convent. We hold a lot of bake sales and donation drives now, but it’s just not for the convent; it’s for the orphanage, and the public schools, and the homeless shelter. It’s very successful.”

“Oh, yeah, I know,” Edward said, placing a towel into the linen closet. “I heard about the drive for the orphanage.”
Rose smiled. “We collected donated clothes and patched them up. Three quarters of the proceeds went towards the orphanage, and the rest we used so that we could paint the convent. It was this truly awful shade of green, before. Why do you ask?”

Edward shrugged. “Just heard a rumor. I stopped by the orphanage my first day here, you know? They just don’t seem to be doing so well.”

Rose paused, and frowned. “What do you mean? I volunteer at the orphanage but I haven’t been there in over a month - Father Cornello urges us to put more work here so that we can finish faster and attend our other duties sooner.”

There was something in Edward’s eyes, but he turned away before Rose could study it. “Orphanage is over-crowding by the looks of it. They don’t have much money for food, ’s all.”

“We raised over twice of what we were expecting,” Rose said, sharply. “They should have the money - that doesn’t make any sense. Are you sure?”

“I’m just repeating what Mrs. Banks told me,” Edward shrugged, and Rose bit her lip at the orphanage’s matron’s name.

“I should talk to Father Cornello about this,” Rose spoke up. “We have a reserve, and the money we were going to use to replace the roof, but it’s not as important as the orphanage. I’m sure with both there’ll be more than enough money to help the orphanage. They’ll need beds and blankets too if they’re over-crowded.”

“I could take a look at your books?” Edward offered. “I’m good with numbers; maybe I could find a pocket of money you guys aren’t using.”

“I don’t know,” Rose shook her head. “Father Cornello manages our finances by himself, in his office.”

Edward grinned. “Come on, Rose. Don’t worry. It’s not like he’s hiding anything, is it?”

Rose studied him for a second, before placing the towel in her hands back in the basket, running a finger along her robes’ high white collar. It always had stood out vividly against her darker skin, and she tugged it just a tad loose. “Alright,” she agreed, after a moment. “You’re right. You really think you might be able to find some extra money?”

The grin that Edward gave her was nearly animalistic. “Positive.”

Father Cornello’s office was locked, but Rose knew where the spare key was - always had known where the spare key was. It had been in the potted fern next to the office door since Father Benedict’s time. She carefully unlocked the door and pushed it open, closing it behind Edward.

“The books are in his desk drawer,” Rose fidgeted, twisting the key between her fingers. Edward sat at the desk chair, tugging at a drawer, but it stayed closed. He stared down at it, before taking his left hand in his right hand, tugging off his white glove, before grabbing a pencil off of the desk and scribbling something on the drawer, before biting at his finger, hard enough that it tore the skin and a drop of blood welled out. “Don’t hurt yourself!” Rose cried, moving forward, but stopped when he winked at her.

“Doesn’t hurt,” Edward promised, and pressed his finger to the figure he had drawn. Rose blinked, just barely missing the flash of white light, but no - that couldn’t be - it was probably just a reflection of something from off the window...
The drawer slid open, and Edward pulled out the heavy black folder, opening it up to study the pen marked pages.

“Yeah,” Edward said, chewing on his bottom lip. “Here’s the money from the clothing drive, and here’s the minus from giving it away, here’s the convent’s total and here’s...” he trailed off, leaning forward and scoffing. “I knew it.”

“What?” Rose questioned, hurrying around the desk, nearly tripping on her robes. “What’s wrong?”

Edward looked up, eyes sober but victorious. “I’m sorry Rose, but the numbers don’t add up. Look,” he pointed towards one number, and the other. “He’s good - it’s just a little off the top, sometimes just a few cents-”

“What are you saying?” Rose questioned, taking a step away from him. Edward stared at her.

“Cornello’s robbing the convent. Look, I’m sorry but I’ve lied to you. I’m not who you think I am. My name is Edward, but I’m not a Brother from the Franciscan Order from out of town. I’m actually investigating a tip I received. The orphanage only got a small sum of the money that you raised. Cornello’s been taking a dollar here, a dollar there, but when you add it all up, it’s a lot. He’s a sham.”

“You’re lying,” Rose shook her head, eyes squeezing closed. “You’ve already admitting to lying, you’re lying about this too - he wouldn’t, he wouldn’t. Father Cornello’s been good to us. He helped me when I was alone, when I was lost - he wouldn’t do that! How dare you!”

“Rose,” Edward stressed, standing and placing both hands on the table. “Put all the evidence together and you get the truth. I have the evidence. Just because you don’t believe it doesn’t make it a lie. I am sorry, but Cornello is not a good man - and this isn’t the first time he’s done this.”

Rose walked backwards until the back of her knees hit the chair set in the corner, and she dropped into it, still shaking her head. “Why would he - why would he -”

“Because he’s not a nice man, Rose,” Edward explained, closing the black book and tucking it under his arm. “I could feel it the minute I met him - and I am never wrong about what kind of a person people are.”

“What are you going to do?” Rose questioned, staring up at Edward. “You can’t go to the police - you can’t. Cornello is the one who convinced the Order that the convent should stay open, that we could restore it, but if there’s no money - they’ll - they’ll close us down, move us to the East, and the orphanage, Edward - I can’t leave the orphanage or the homeless center-”

“I have to,” Edward said, firmly. “It’s my job.”

Rose stared up at him, wearily, eyes wet, but no tears fell. “Who are you?”

Edward was quiet, before he moved around the desk, black ledger still under his arm, as he kneeled in front of Rose. “My name is Edward, I didn’t lie about that. But you probably know me as Fullmetal.”

She inhaled, sharply, standing immediately. “You’re - you’re - but-”

“I know,” Edward said, laying a hand on her shoulder after he stood. “And this why I need you to do this, Rose, I need you to go to the police and tell them what you found - go to Lieutenant Hughes, he’s a detective. He already knows about what’s going on.”
He took the black ledger from under his arm and placed it in her hands, wrapping her fingers around the edges of it. Rose pressed it to her chest, and exhaled slowly, holding herself steady.

“Then what?” she questioned, quietly. “What do I then? They’re going to move the Sisters, I know that they’re going to move us - but I can’t - I can’t leave-”

He was shorter than her, his head only came to her nose, but he still took a hand and gently rested it on her cheek, moving it forward. “You’ve got two good legs, Rose. I can’t tell you what to do with them - no-one can. Only thing you can do is walk, okay? Walk forward. You’re not going to be alone, I promise. You won’t see me, but I’ll be there with you, alright? But you’re not going to need me.” He made her meet his eye, and she felt her breath catch at the hardened determination in them. “You’re strong enough to make your own path.”

Rose stared at him, quiet, before she nodded and pulled out of his grip. “Can you walk me to the police station, then, please?” She looked into his eyes, jaw clenched tight, and eyes furious. “I have a crime to report.”

“Then the Sisters were moved out east,” Rose said, stirring what was left of her iced coffee. “I decided not to go with them. I was - I don’t think I’ve ever been that lost. After I reported what had happened, Cornello disappeared. Ed was never sure but he was pretty positive he was paying off some big debt, and when his source of income stopped, his collectors weren’t very happy. But,” she grinned, and leaned back. “The day after the case had semi-officially closed - at least to the point I wasn’t needed anymore - Edward was there, waiting for me with Alphonse. They both explained how they knew this great little apartment, and this teaching position had just opened up at the elementary school. The orphanage and the homeless shelter were put under new management, this charity division of the Armstrong shipping company.”

“The guy with the muscles?” Winry questioned, blinking. “I get most of my parts shipped through them.”

Rose nodded, smiling. “That’s them. I started helping out at the orphanage and soup kitchen, and that was how I met my husband. He was volunteering too - we still do, ever Monday and Wednesday. After awhile, I guess we just...fell together.”

“Aw,” Winry cooed. “What’s his name?”

“Alex Armstrong,” Rose said, sipping the rest of her iced coffee. Winry stared at her.

“The guy with the muscles?”

“That’s him.”

“Well, shit. No wonder Al said you had like eight guest bedrooms.”

Rose tilted her head back and laughed. “That’s a total exaggeration. There’s a mansion yes, that his parents own, up on the north side, but Alex and I live due east of here and we only have three guest rooms. And a pool.”

Winry perked up visibly. “I officially have to come to visit.”
“Oh, totally,” Rose agreed. “Ed and Al are over half the time anyway. Alex loves those boys,” Rose said, quietly. “Ed gave me away when I got married, did you know?” At Winry’s blank look, Rose laughed again. “He was so embarrassed I thought I was going to die, I was laughing so hard. I didn’t have anyone else, though, and I wouldn’t have wanted anyone else.” She tugged her necklace out of her shirt and played with it.

Winry blinked. “Hey, you’ve got one too?” She dug in her pocket to pull out a long necklace with a single charm at the end of it. “I have to keep it off because it gets in the way when I work.”

“Ed gave it to me for my twenty-fifth birthday,” Rose nodded, before she grinned. “It basically makes us his property. If you’re ever stopped on the street, or if you ever are about to get mugged, all you have to do is flash it and they run the other way. No-one wants Fullmetal on their back personally.”

“Hear, hear,” Winry said, grabbing her coffee and sipping it. “Hell hath no fury like a munchkin scorned.”

Edward stopped on the stairs leading up to Halsey’s apartment, narrowing his eyes. Mustang paused after a second in front of him, turning back to stare at him.

“You alright?”

“Yeah,” Ed said, distracted, eyes still narrowed. “Suddenly I feel like I need to yell at Winry at something, but - eh.” Mustang was staring at him, bemused, and Ed shrugged, before continuing up the stairs, passing him. “Hurry up, slow poke,” he called, and checked the door for the right number. He gestured towards the door and Mustang cleared his throat, patting one of his jacket pockets, before knocking on the door.

When there was no answer, Mustang leaned forward and called, “Major Halsey? It’s Colonel Mustang - we’re here about your son?” He turned to Edward and frowned. “He should be here.”

“Will you wait a second, Jesus,” Ed scolded, and rolled his eyes. “The guy’s like seventy years old and freakin’ disabled. Wait for Christ’s sake.”

“We don’t have all day,” Mustang snarked back, and Ed stuck his tongue out at him, drawing it back in hastily when he heard footsteps on the other side of the door, before the chain unlocked and the door swung open.

An older man stood on the other side, hunched over a worn wooden cane, smiling faintly, but Ed guiltily looked away from the older tear stains on the man’s cheek and the redness to his eyes. He was balding, liver-spots dotting his head, and his eyes were just being to turn milky white.

“You have to forgive me,” Major Halsey croaked, before he cleared his throat. “I’m afraid my vision isn’t what it used to be, and it’s getting worse every day. There are...two of you?”

“Yes,” Mustang said, quickly. “I’m Colonel Mustang, and this is a crime scene investigator with the police.”

“Edward Elric,” Ed introduced, and inclined his head. He knew Major Halsey, could remember him
more clearly now - the oldest out of the hostages Envy had taken at First Central Bank, and his son who stood in front of the two youngest children and his father while Fullmetal and Envy dueled it out. “I hope you don’t mind if I look around.”

Major Halsey blinked at him, turning his murky eyes onto Edward, a faint look of surprise crossing his face. “That voice - I know that voice, from the - could it be?”

Panic. Major Halsey obviously wasn’t relying on his sight anymore, which meant that he must have relied on his sense of touch and hearing - and Edward never bothered to chance his voice when he was out as Fullmetal.

“Mustang, why don’t you go make the Major an’ me coffee?” Edward quickly spoke up, stalking into the apartment and shoving Mustang towards the kitchen.

Mustang stared at him. “I highly doubt-”

“Roy, go make some coffee,” Edward pressed, teeth clenching. “I’m sure Major Halsey doesn’t mind. Come on, you shouldn’t be standing like this…” He carefully grabbed Major Halsey’s elbow and led him into the small, cozy living room.

“You are, aren’t you?” the Major asked, leaning forward as they sat. “That man with you - the Colonel doesn’t know?”

“The Colonel,” Ed stressed, and took a quick look around the room, taking in the pictures on the walls and the books strewn about. “The Colonel is currently ‘posed to bring Fullmetal in so he can face a review that basically only wants to put him in front of a firing squad. So, right now, he doesn’t know. Hopefully, he never will.”

“I never thanked you,” Major Halsey said, placing a hand over Ed’s flesh hand. “Not just for the debacle at the bank, but you helped Matt out of a dark time.”

Don’t tell me that. Don’t tell me that. “What do you mean?”

“Matthew was involved with a group of kids when he was in high school - I told him to stay away but he never did. But, he stopped when you first showed up. I’ll never forget the day he saw you on the news, all red and proud, and he turned to me and said, ‘He doesn’t have to do this, but he’s doing it anyway - he’s giving up his life to help others’. I suppose it was an epiphany for him. He stopped the bad things he was doing and he enlisted in the next week. All because of you.”

Edward stared down at the hand over his before, he turned it upwards and squeezed it gently. “Thank you for telling me that. Colonel Mustang - he’s going to ask you if there’s been anyone different in your son’s life, a girlfriend or boyfriend, maybe an old friend?”

Major Halsey frowned. “Before he disappeared, he was acting - strange. He did mention meeting someone, but he never told me who, which was odd. Matt always told me what was happening.”

“Have you ever seen them - did Matthew mention where he met them? A gender, age?” Edward pressed. There was a tightening in his gut, one that usually meant that he was on the right track. Major Halsey shook his head.

“I’m sorry - no. Are you - are you looking for who did this?” Major Halsey questioned, voice hushed. Ed grinned and nodded.

“I’m gonna find them, too. I promise.”
Major Halsey smiled, leaned forward and patted his hand. “Thank you, Fullmetal.”

There was a clattering of cups from inside the kitchen suddenly, just as the coffee timer went off. Two cupboards opened and closed, before Mustang walked into the living room, carefully holding three mugs of coffee.

“I’ll grab milk and sugar and be right back,” he said as he set down the mugs on the coffee table and went back into the kitchen, reappearing a second later with a carton of milk and a bowl of sugar. Edward hissed as the milk was set down, grabbing the sugar and spooning three huge dollops into his mug.

“I have half-and-half, if you’d prefer?” Major Halsey asked, but Ed shook his head.

“I - uh - don’t like dairy. I’m a soy milk kinda guy,” Edward said, sipping at his coffee. “I’m gonna leave you two to it and look around, if that’s alright?” When he got his confirmation, he took another gulp of his coffee and set it down on the table, standing up to walk down the hallway into the two bedrooms.

One was obviously Matthew Halsey’s, a little bit dirtier, a spare uniform hanging up in the open closet, another one hanging in the back, and Ed carefully scanned the floor for anything he could contaminate by walking forward. The carpet looked cleaned, regularly vacuumed by the look at it. He reached back into his pocket and pulled on a spare pair of latex gloves before he turned towards the bed. It was made, sheets still creased, and Ed searched the pillow for a second before picking out a short brown hair on the cover. He unrolled the tool kit onto the bed, pulled out the tweezers and bagged the hair before carefully getting down on his knees to look under the bed.

“So, you just met someone knew,” Ed murmured to himself. “Come on Matt - a matchbook from a club, a business card, give me something.”

Underneath the bed was a suitcase, empty, and nothing hidden inside of it. No extra seams or hidden compartments, and Ed slid it back before standing and moving towards the desk.

Matthew Halsey obviously didn’t use it much, probably used the one he was assigned to in military headquarters more than the one in front of Edward. Spare papers in the first drawer to the right, spare pens and a ruler in the first drawer to the left. A photo album that was nearly bare except for photos of what Ed assumed was Halsey’s mother was tucked in the other drawer. The other drawer was completely empty.

Ed frowned, before moving to the closet but it yielded less than the rest of the room. There was barely enough room inside it for Matthew’s clothes.

“You are a teenage boy,” Edward growled. “Where the hell are your teenage boy things?”


Edward stood in the middle of Halsey’s room, before his eyes darted up to the air vent up above the bed. He raised an eyebrow, before he toed off his shoes and climbed up onto the bed, fiddling with the air vent cover. Miracle of miracles; it was loose. Ed grinned, sliding the face off to stare in. The dust had just barely settled, and due to the awkward angle of the light Ed could only see a few inches around the edge before it disappeared in darkness.

He stuck his right hand in, mindful of booby traps, before his finger’s pressure sensors registered something in front of it. Ed grinned and grabbed what seemed to be a small open topped shoebox,
sliding it towards him. Ed fell back into a sitting position on the bed, rifling around.

There were those ‘teenage boy things’. Playgirl and - well, now - Playboy, though only two of each. A pack of condoms, half-empty pack of lube and it looked fairly clean but Ed stuck his tongue out and was glad that he was wearing disposable gloves.

“Come on, come on,” he muttered, rifling through the few sheets of folded numbers that were all too old to be what he was looking forward.

Something was stuck underneath the lip of the shoebox’s bottom, and Edward fumbled with his metal fingers, trying to pull it out, before he switched hands and managed to get a grip.

He couldn’t help it - he laughed, victoriously and ironically. It was a photo, smaller and square of a man with dark hair, just casually messy and dark, nearly violet, eyes; and, best, oh-best-of-all-bests, the picture was taking in front of a familiar looking bar, it’s next door neighbor, an antique shop, just in the corner of the picture. Joy of all joys, the date the picture was taken was printed in orange - just two days before Matthew Halsey went missing.

Carefully, Edward tucked the photo into an evidence bag and tuck that into his leather jacket’s inner pocket, replacing the shoebox back into it’s hidden place and fitting the face back over it. He stooped back down to grab a small screwdriver and tighten the previously loose bolts before jumping off the best entirely and pulling on his shoes.

It looked like he’d have to pay Solaris a visit anyway.

“Sorry, Roy,” Ed murmured as he rolled up his tool kit. It didn’t feel right stealing evidence, and moments like this he knew - he knew - that all that talk about Fullmetal being a menace to society and impeding investigations were valid, and he knew it was an excuse, but there was something about this case, about this killer, that didn’t make him feel right leaving it to the police.

He would tell Hughes, he compromised. He would tell Hughes about the picture, but only after he had a chance to talk to the mystery man himself.

(In the back of his head, in his mother’s voice, finger tapping the end of his nose - *do the ends justify the means, Ed?*)

Edward shook his head when Roy stood as he entered the living room. Together they said their goodbyes, and by the time they were outside, in front of Ed’s bike, the other man was staring at him curiously.

“You’re being quiet again,” Roy murmured, and carefully sat behind Edward, voice muffled by his helmet.

“Disappointed, I guess,” Ed shrugged, and pulled away from the curb into traffic.

Roy’s arms shifted around him, tightening for just a second. “We’ll find something,” he said, firmly. “We’re not going to let him get away.”

Nevertheless, Ed was silent.

Central Military Headquarters loomed above the both of them when Ed pulled up. Armstrong was waiting for them, visible through the iron gate in the parade grounds. It was hard not to notice him; nearly seven feet tall and huge. Mustang flashed an ID card at the sentry at the gate post, and waited while Ed signed in, leaving his driver’s license with the young soldier.
“Commissioner Hughes called ahead,” Armstrong said when they were within range, after he saluted to Mustang and winked at Edward. His voice was low and sober, which - quite frankly - was unusual. Ed blinked at him. “I’ve come to show you where Sergeant Halsey worked. The office has been cleared out - but only for a few minutes.”

“I won’t need much longer than that,” Ed shrugged, and he and Mustang followed Armstrong as they walked inside of headquarters.

Ed was tense enough as it was. It was only his second time inside of Headquarters, and he, quite frankly, felt like a mouse in a room full of cats. This was where the military operated - where most soldier’s lived. It was taking most of his focus not to seem overly jumpy at this many blue jacketed people. He thought he was doing fairly well considering his entire being was thrumming with ‘alert! Soldiers! Run the other way!’

“I don’t think I’ve ever seen you during work,” Armstrong said as he unlocked the office door, mustache quirking up at Edward. Ed grinned.

“Well, now you’ll be able to see a master at work; it’s so interesting crawling on my hands and knees looking for trace evidence,” Ed drawled, rolling his eyes. He pressed a fist into Armstrong’s shoulder (not unlike fist-pumping a boulder) and looked around the room. Four desk were pressed against themselves in the middle of the room, in-between two large windows. A huge printer and fax machine were in the corner, and four filing cabinets were stacked against the wall. Ed took a second before he moved towards the desk with Halsey’s name on it.

“There isn’t much left to ask you, Major,” Mustang said, shaking his head shortly. “Did Sergeant Halsey mention anyone different before he disappeared? A new or old friend? Someone new in his life?”

Armstrong shook his head, the previous teasing light gone. “I’m afraid not. He and the others sometimes went out drinking, he never seemed distracted, and I’ve often been told that he was one of the few to go home early.”

“What time is it?” Mustang spoke up, looking down at his watch. “I take it you’re finished here then?”

“Just after two thirty,” Mustang spoke up, looking down at his watch. “I take it you’re finished here then?”

Edward looked over the desk again, and felt the picture in his pocket grow heavy. He really did hope that he’d get a lead from it considering that there was literally nothing else to go on. He shook his
head and stood, stripping off his gloves and throwing them away into the waste bin.

“We never ate,” Mustang said, shoving his pen and notepad into his pocket. His usually unreadable expression wavered for just a second, a glimpse of frustration showing through, before he turned towards Ed and smirked. “Would you like lunch? Hawkeye usually has a few sandwiches in the fridge waiting for me. I’d be happy to share.”

Ed weighed it in his head, before pulling out and checking his phone (the numbers flashed up at him ‘2:38’) and checked his messages. There was nothing from Beth, which meant that the only real reason he was needed at the lab wasn’t ready yet. Plus, free food.

“Yeah, sure,” Ed agreed after a second. Armstrong exchanged salutes with Mustang, and then rested a hand onto Ed’s shoulder when he passed by.

“I do hope you know what you’re doing, Edward Elric,” he said, quietly, giving him a warning look. Ed grinned in response.

“You know me, Alex - ‘course I know what I’m doing.”

Armstrong sighed, which pretty much said what he thought of that statement. But, he let Edward go and waved after him when Ed lifted his hand in a goodbye.

“My office is upstairs,” Mustang said, as Edward caught up and scaled the steps upwards. Three different soldiers stopped on their way and pressed themselves to the wall with salutes at the ready as Mustang passed, and Ed was torn between disgust and a weird sense of admiration.

“Pretty ritzy, Mustang,” Edward pointed out as Mustang held open the stairwell door to the fourth floor. “I remember you being on the second floor.”

“When I was promoted, I got a better office,” Mustang said, and smirked at him over his shoulder. “What were the words you used - ‘perks of being a kiss-ass’?”

“Oh, you admit to being a kiss-ass?” Edward replied without missing a beat, grinning sarcastically. “That’s wonderful, Mustang. The first step to recovery is admitting you’ve gotta problem, you know?”

“Big words for such a small man,” Mustang shot back, and ignored Ed as the blond haired man exploded.

“These sandwiches better be damn well worth it,” Edward growled, following Mustang around the corner and through an open door. The office he was led into was bigger than Halsey’s, three tall windows against one wall and six desks pressed against each other, with one at the head. There was a door, probably to Mustang’s inner office off to the side, and Ed blinked, caught off guard, staring as five heads swiveled upwards to look at him.

“There you are, sir,” the only female in the room spoke, voice hard. “Just because you’re in an ongoing investigation does not mean you’re other duties have disappeared.”

Mustang tilted his head back, staring up at the ceiling - and began to whine. Ed stared at him. He had known Mustang could whine - he often did, complained about basically everything when they had talked - but Ed never knew he did in front of other people.

“Hawkeye,” Mustang pleaded, but she stood and suddenly Mustang was moving towards his office like a kid who was just threatened with a spanking. “Can we at least have lunch first?” he called from the office.
“No,” Hawkeye said sharply, in a tone that obviously brokered no argument. Mustang sulked and turned back into his office, apparently going to work. Then (dear god) her gaze turned towards Edward, who froze. “Can I help you?”

“Uh - I’m here for free lunch,” Edward said, shifting - which, wouldn’t you when you were pinned with that glare. “Which I was told there would be. I’m Edward Elric; I work with the police station.”

“You’re Edward Elric?” the second tallest man spoke up. His hair was a mess of blond, and he was chewing on an unlit cigarette. A grin spread across his face as he leaned back in his chair. His mouth opened, but a pen suddenly came flying out of the inner office to hit him on the back of his head. Both he and Edward turned towards to Mustang, but he was hunched over his desk, pen flying across the paper, just barely mumbling to himself. The man rolled his eyes and sat straight. “Guess we’re not gonna be talking ‘bout that. Jean Havoc. That’s Fuery, Falman, Breda, and you’ve met Hawkeye.”

“Nice to meet you,” Edward said, lifting up a hand shortly. “Free lunch?”

“We have sandwiches and soda in the fridge,” Fuery spoke up, gesturing to a mini-fridge stuffed in the corner. “You’re welcome to it.”

“Finally,” Ed muttered under his breath, before speaking louder. “Thanks.”

Joy of all joys; they had three turkey and swiss sandwich in the back, and he peeled off the cheese slices and threw them away, tongue sticking out while he did it. Ed devoured two, and sipped at a soda a second later. The office workers, while remarkable subtle, kept shooting him furtive looks when they thought he wouldn’t notice. Havoc and the man he had introduced as Breda were the most common, followed by Fuery (who seemed more innocently curious than devious), then at last Hawkeye and Falman, who both looked at him a total of once to send him one piercing look (from Hawkeye) and one half-a-second lift of the head in recognition.

It was awkward. Ed could feel the awkward - knew he was free to leave the minute he finished his food so why wasn’t his sandwich finished yet for Christ’s sake, he could devour an entire three course meal in twenty minutes but - it was the cheese he was sure of it, it had infected the sandwich somehow and was now infecting him.

And if he thought it was awkward when he was eating, it was even more awkward when he realized he was two bites away from finishing. Ed stared down at his food, before frowning, reaching inside of the fridge and grabbing the last sandwich. Carefully (because, like a prey escaping a predator) he slid into the inner office, hoping that he hadn’t caught Hawkeye’s attention. Mustang barely looked up when Ed slipped into the office and padded towards his desk.

“Here,” Edward said, clearing his throat. Mustang startled and looked up, and then looked at the sandwich that Ed was pushing towards him, neatly wrapped in saran-wrap.

Mustang stared at it, and then took it, unwrapping it and laying it out over his paperwork. “You’re still here. I thought you would have left after-”

“I’m not a total asshole,” Ed groused, and glared at the sitting man. “Sides, I’m sure you get bitchy when you’re hungry.”

Mustang made a sound of affirmation and took a bite of his sandwich, before swallowing. Ed’s gaze conveniently found itself pinned to a picture of Mustang’s team on his desk. “Speaking from experience?”
“Fuck off, Mustang,” Ed bit out. “I’m heading out after this anyway - I gotta get back to the lab and check the tox screen.” And hopefully after that he’d be at Solaris’ bar, and two feet away from Matthew Halsey’s new ‘friend’.

“Oh,” Mustang said, and set down his sandwich. “Do you-” He stopped himself suddenly, eyes closing before he opened them and rolled them. “I was going to ask if you needed a ride but you’re the one that drove me here.”

“Aw,” Ed mocked. “Does your IQ also drop when you’re hungry?”

“Brat,” Mustang growled under his breath, and glared up at him. “You can leave now.”

“Was planning on it, bastard,” Ed rolled his eyes, and shoved his hands into his pockets. “Are you coming back to the precinct or-”

“I probably won’t have the time. I still want to question a few more people in Headquarters, and then Hughes has roped me into having dinner with his family tonight,” Mustang said as he shuffled the papers on his desk around. “You?”

“Back to the lab then-” Out. “Straight back home. It doesn’t seem like I’ll be getting much sleep for the next couple of days.” He sighed, and shook his head before shrugging. “Anyway. See you later, bastard.”

Ed kicked open the door with the toe of his boot, and then swung it open so he could walk backwards through it, lifting a hand in half-hearted wave. Mustang stared at him, before he smiled, just shortly, and Ed closed the door.

He froze and met Hawkeye’s eye and realized that the rest of the office was quite suddenly looking away pointedly, and Hawkeye was leveling him with the flattest look he’d ever seen.

“Edward Elric,” she said, and stood promptly, her chair dragging across the ground in one clean movement. “May I speak with you?”

“No, not really I’m quite busy I really gotta go you kinda scare me - a million and one excuses at the tip of his tongue and all Ed could do was nod. “Uh-”

“Privately,” Hawkeye said, and walked around her desk towards the door. She was wearing a closer cut version of Mustang’s uniform, black tie tucked into the blue jacket over the white button up. She was taller than Ed, just by a few inches, and her hair was clipped back into a folded bun, not a strand out of place. Ed could do little other than follow her out into the hallway, mindful that there was a gun strapped to the back of her belt.

“Please don’t kill me,” Ed said suddenly, once the door was closed, before swallowing. Well, now, that was - and to think he had stood eye level with a loaded gun and barely even flinched. “I”

“I have no reason to,” Hawkeye said, shortly. “Unless you give me one, that is. This is a warning.”

“A warning-”

Her eyes narrowed just barely, and Ed felt his mouth shut with a small ‘click. “The Colonel is a very busy man and I do not tolerate slacking of any kind in the office. You’re reputation proceeds you, but just barely. I will not stand for any distractions you present knowingly or otherwise. The last time your name was mentioned in the office was not a particularly pleasant time and I will do whatever I need to do to ensure it doesn’t happen again. Is that clear?”
Ed could do little but stare. “What?”

The glare became sharper, and Ed flinched. Hawkeye leveled him with an unimpressed look. “You two will be working together - I can do little about that - but I refuse to see the Colonel hurt, again.”

Oh. Oh, she was talking about - she knew about - Ed felt his fists clench and his jaw tighten. “I don’t want to hurt him.”

“That does not mean you won’t,” Hawkeye said, shortly. “Am I clear?”

For a second, he glared back. Put everything he had into, the whole Fullmetal ‘if you don’t drop the gun I will break your legs’ force behind, and just for a second maybe they were matched, but after that second passed, Hawkeye was still staring coolly down at him and Ed felt (quite frankly) like shit.

“Crystal,” he managed to not bite out. He couldn’t fault Hawkeye for this, for protecting her own, how many times had he done the same with Al? What had happened between him and Mustang had always been a closed conflict, though. Hughes knew, of course, as did Al, but both trusted his judgement even though Al had refused to speak to him after he had gotten over the initial urges to kill Mustang himself, and Hughes had never failed to bring Mustang up at least once a week, but both knew, damnit, that there wasn’t anything they could do to change Ed’s mind.

Hawkeye only had one side of the story, saw Ed as the horrible person he had forced himself to be, who snarled at Mustang with nothing but distain in his voice and manipulated and used -

“You don’t like me very much, do you?” Edward murmured, under his breath, and Hawkeye’s glare was nearly razor sharp now.

“Not very much,” she said, flatly. “No.”

“Good,” Ed said, and smirked up at her. “Wish your boss shared your sentiments.”

He really didn’t want to see the expression that might have crossed her face, so he spun on his heel and stalked down the hallway, making sure to only start biting his lip when he was sure there was no possible way to see him.

Ed stood by his bike after he had grabbed his license from the sentry, unclipped his helmet, and stared up at the sky for moment, eyes closed as he collected his thoughts and sorted them out. The sky was a murky blue, and he remembered that there was supposed to be a light shower that night. The sky seemed to have another idea in mind from the way it was turning grey.

It didn’t matter, he told himself, and shrugged on his helmet. He had a job to do, a serial killer to catch, a lead to follow. Al would understand, as always, if he didn’t come home tonight as he always did. Solaris opened her bar at seven, after closing down her antique shop, and he knew that the best time to speak to her was when she was utterly busy.

He climbed over the bike, started it up, and took off, back in the direction of the lab.

“--

“This is the University,” Rose said as she helped Winry off of the bus. “I’m afraid I only know the medical commons - I know that the engineering buildings are off in that direction, though.”
“Jesus,” Winry whistled, and looked up at the nearly high rise buildings. “This is...a lot bigger than my other school.”

“Your grandparents helped set it up, didn’t they?” Rose questioned, blinking at the courtyard in front of the buildings. “I just - I think Al mentioned that once.”

“Technically, yeah. It was just a lecture hall, and they put some money into it, and once it got out that the Elric Brothers were investing into something, everyone else invested into it too.” Winry smiled, and shrugged. “My grandpa used to tell me stories about this place. They used to hide refugees in the school, did you know? During World War II.”

“I didn’t, actually,” Rose said, and blinked. “That’s amazing.”

Winry shrugged, and grinned, before walking into the large courtyard, sitting down on an iron bench. “I don’t remember much of my grandpa - and my grandma died when I was born. But, I remember the way he used to get so excited about the stuff I was excited about - and I mean, the stupid stuff, like my first plastic tool kit, and he helped me take apart a TV remote once, and...” She trailed off, shrugging. “He died when I was five, just a few years before Ed and Al’s grandpa went.”

“They were close with him, weren’t they?” Rose prodded, gently, and sat down next to her. “I know that he raised them for awhile.”

“After their mom died, yeah. Just for a few years before he passed away. Ed’s arm-”

“Didn’t really get to wear it until he was ten, that’s why he does everything with his left hand - I don’t think he’s used to the dexterity yet. He’s so used to a regular prosthetic.” Winry sighed. “He says he gets that it’s one of a kind, but it’s been years and I’m not even half way sure how the nervous system hook up works, and if he ruins it, I don’t think I’ll be able to recreate it. Whoever built that thing was...she was amazing.”

“I’m sure you’ll figure it out,” Rose nudged her gently, and smiled. “From what Al tells me, you’re quite the genius.”

Winry rolled her eyes. “All the Elrics are geniuses. You should have seen my Aunt Trisha - she was going to go into nuclear-chemistry before she decided she just wanted to get married and raise a family. My mom - she went into rocketry like Ed and Al’s grandpa - she never forgave her for it, not until the accident.” Winry huffed a sigh. “And now it’s my turn to continue the Rockbell family legacy and you just wait for it, I’m going to figure out that automail and make one of my own.”

Rose studied her, the determined glint in her eye that was nearly identical to the one that Ed and Al wore, before she grinned. “When you’re famous, mention me in your interviews?”

Winry turned towards her and grinned. “It’s a promise.”

“-”

“What-” Ed twisted the report upside down, as if somehow, miraculously, that would help. “-the fuck?”
“That’s what I said,” Aiden said, licking a glob of yogurt off of a plastic spoon. Ed flinched and glared at him. Aiden grinned. Ed didn’t mind Aiden - he was a good kid, a little better than Eric when it came to breaking down chemical compositions, and while Eric was often in the field with Ed, Aiden was often stuck in the lab, blowing things up - but Aiden loved to bring bottles of milk to work and never failed to eat a yogurt for lunch. Calcium deficiency, Ed’s ass. “So, I made Russell take a look at it.”

“What you mean is, you decided to make Russell do your job for you?” Ed questioned, and blinked down at the tox screen.

“Russell has no idea what the hell it is either,” Aiden shrugged. “It’s a hormone, I can tell that much.”

“Hughes could tell that much,” Ed said, rolling his eyes. “And he flunked out of chemistry. Is this - maybe a glandular disorder?”

“Can’t be. Military’s anal about check-ups. It would have clocked on his blood work. This is recent, look at the make-up. It’s not made for lingering effects - maybe a week at the most. It’s already breaking down at an exponential rate.”

“It could be-” Beth spoke up, and then bit her lip as she fell quiet. Ed turned towards her, and raised an eyebrow. She made a hesitant sort of gesture and chewed on her lip before shrugging. “I don’t know it looks - I’ve read a few books on pheromones, just for fun - it’s almost like a super-sex-pheromone.”

Aiden snorted. “Did you just say super-sex-pheromone?”

Beth glared. “Shut up, Aiden. Look at the make-up, the rate of degeneration. Pheromones aren’t meant to last long, and this looks completely unaffected by the decomposing body - it...it works.”

Ed stared at her, (and Aiden burst out laughing) before looking down at the report. “Aiden, shut the hell up. She has a point.”

Aiden’s laughter died away, and when Ed looked up, Aiden was staring at him. “Boss-”

“I’ll have my brother look at it,” Ed said, snapping the folder closed. “If anything he’ll be able to tell us if it is a pheromone or not. Never seen anything like it, though.

Beth and Aiden were making faces at each other. Ed rolled his eyes. “For Christ’s sake. There’s nothing much we can do and it’s-” It had just turned seven, literally - did Ed really sort through files and evidence for the last few hours while waiting for Beth to run tox screens on the at least fourteen different samples of blood? At first, she confessed, she had thought that the results were a mistake with the machine, and then a mistake with her own readings, and then a mistake with the blood, and then maybe a mistake with the area she had chosen to draw blood, but it kept bring up the same result and she freaked out while Aiden stared at her test results and Ed sat in his office, growling over the report he had written for another one of his cases.

Beth looked up at the clock, and cursed. “Seven o’clock. I gotta go. Alice is waiting for me, we’re supposed to have dinner.”

“That’s fine,” Ed waved off, and ran a hand through his bangs. “There’s nothing more we can do,” he repeated. “We better just head home.”

Aiden scowled. “This case is throwing off my schedule, I hope you know.”
“I know, Aiden,” Ed called, walking towards the locker room while Beth hurried to clean up. “It’s just that no-one cares.”

He could hear Aiden splutter suddenly and Beth’s high laugh just as he opened his locker and pulled out his leather jacket and bag. He threw it onto the wooden bench and pulled out his phone, pulling up the camera, before taking a picture of the results and sending it to Al with a ‘?’.

After he made sure the message had sent, he tucked the folder into the bag and threw it over his shoulder, and waved to Beth, who was pulling on a pair of heels after she slipped off her sneakers, and a quick glare towards Aiden who lifted his hands into the air with a ‘who, me?’ expression. Ed rolled his eyes again.

It was threatening to rain - as it had for the past month; spring, honestly - by the time he had crawled onto his bike and stuffed the bag under the seat. He seriously hoped it wouldn’t storm; his metal arm tended to call for some close encounters with lightening when he was perched on the higher buildings. Of course, if this lead checked out he wouldn’t have to spend the rest of the night scouring the city for another one...

He drew out the picture out of his pocket of the dark haired boy with the dark eyes and frowned down at it. There was a smile on the boy’s lips, light and lovely, and a general air of kindness around it, but Ed knew first hand that first impressions never told the whole story. Ed stuffed the picture back into his pocket and started his bike, turning out of the parking lot and onto the street.

Joy of joys, by the time he reached Solaris’, it was pouring. The helmet helped keep his vision clear, but by the time he parked his bike under a small over hang across from a three story building, right on the corner, he was soaked. The bottom was a dark shop, a sign hanging from the window that declared ‘Antiques’ in a delicate cursive. Next door was another three story, the top floors clearly meant for living space, but Ed knew they were empty, and that Solaris lived by herself over the antique shop.

There was no name to the bar because that was the way Solaris did things. The antique shop also was unnamed, as was the bar, only a small green neon sign that proclaimed ‘Alcohol’ and ‘Open’ in the dirty window. Ed sucked in a breath, pocketed his keys, threw his helmet into his bike’s storage compartment, and walked across the street and into the bar.

It was busy, as it always was, filled with every variety of businessmen and slackers and even a few bikers. A garden variety book-club group of moms were in the corner, loudly talking over drinks, and nearly a dozen stragglers were strewn about; a few college kids, a few alcoholics, a few people Ed knew that he’d eventually be meeting again, except with a hood over his eyes and probably in an alleyway.

“Oh,” Solaris drawled, when she turned around from the bar to see him standing soaking wet in the middle of the door. “It’s you.”

“Yeah, yeah,” Ed groused, and climbed up onto a bar stool and she sauntered towards him.

“Are you going to buy something this time, boy, or are you just going to ask for information?” Solaris questioned, raising a fine eyebrow down at him. Ed rolled his eyes.

“Just get me a beer, alright? I need to talk to you.”

Solaris’ eyebrow didn’t drop, but she turned around, towards the large set refrigerator towards the back, and pulled out a bottle of beer. Ed took it from her and inclined his head in thanks. She leaned over the bar towards him, (and Ed looked upwards with a muttered, ‘Christ’) and ignored the sudden
stares towards her person as her purple blouse opened, revealing a good eyeful of cleavage. There was just the barest bit of discoloration in between her cleavage, impossible to see if you weren’t looking for it. Solaris smirked at him, just barely fond, and sighed.

“What do you need, boy?”

Ed lowered his eyes, and felt his expression soften just barely. Solaris couldn’t be more than ten years older than him, but since Ed could remember she had just been - there. For the few weeks after he had gotten himself and Al out of the orphanage, they had lived with Solaris above her antique shop until he was able to get a solid job. When Ed decided to become Fullmetal, Solaris was the second to know. When Ed was in trouble, it really wasn’t hard to ask Solaris for a way out of it.

“This guy,” Ed murmured, pulling out the now crinkled picture out of his pocket. “Do you know him?”

He slid it across the counter, and Solaris twisted it around with a finger, lips pressing together in thought. “I’ve seen him before, once or twice. Keeps to the back, only orders a few drinks.”

Ed felt like cheering. “Have you seen him with this guy?” He pulled out another photo, this time of Halsey, and handed it over to Solaris. She blinked at him.

“Only three times,” she said, after a moment. “Ordered beer with a group of friends once before they left. Came back once, and then he left with this one, next time they were together.” She placed another finger onto the first picture. Solaris looked up at him. “I hope you know what you’re getting into, boy.”

Ed grinned at her, and pocketed both pictures. “Why do you say that?”

Solaris’ gaze slid carefully down the bar. “Cause Mr. Tall, Dark, and Handsome is five barstools away.”

His entire body tensed, suddenly, and Ed carefully picked up his beer, wiping the frosted ice away to stare at the warped reflection. There, five seats down, right after a couple who were clumsily making out, half hidden in the dim light, was the man from the first picture.

“Fuck,” Ed muttered, and couldn’t help the grin. “Fuck.”

Solaris gave him a warning glance. “Outside. The last time you ‘found’ someone inside of my bar, I had to buy three new tables."

“Outside, I promise, fuck,” Ed said, and grabbed his beer, taking a deep swig of it. “How do I look?”

“Like you were caught outside in a rain storm after a day of work,” Solaris said, bluntly, and leaned back, flipping her long, dark, curled hair over her shoulder. “You better keep the jacket on.”

Which sucked, because it was just the slightest bit uncomfortable with it on, but Ed trusted her judgement. “I haven’t flirted in over a year,” Ed confessed.

Solaris raised an eyebrow. “I know.”

“Wish me luck.”

Her lips curved upwards into a soft, fond smile. “You won’t need it.”

He sincerely hoped he wouldn’t. Ed took another sip of his beer, before grabbing the bottle and
walking around the couple still making-out, before sliding into the seat next to the man from the picture.

“You don’t mind if I sit here, do you?” Ed asked, just barely curving his lips into a smile. The man looked up from his whiskey, neatly folded so that he was leaning on top of the bar, but not hunched over.

For a second, there was the worrying fear that Ed had failed - because, well, it had been awhile. (He wasn’t going to think about the last time, because he really didn’t want that on his mind.) The man turned his dark eyes towards him, trailing up and down his body carefully, before he returned the smile with a small smirk.

“Only if you’ll find a new seat with me,” the man said, leaning towards Ed. “I’m afraid the two next to us are getting a bit too personal for my tastes.”

The couple nearly fell off of their barstool, but didn’t stop kissing. Ed’s gaze flickered towards them, before turning back to the man, and letting his smile grow. “Fine by me.” He stuck out his metal hand. “Edward.”

“Lance,” the man returned, grabbing it. His eyes flickered down to the glove, but didn’t say anything. Ed took the moment to study to him, to make sure that there wasn’t anything obvious he was missing and ‘Lance’ didn’t seem to broken up about flirting with someone else while his boyfriend laid on a cold slab of metal in the police’s morgue. “I’m sure there’s a booth free - in fact -” He stood and gestured towards a booth that was empty right in the corner. “You know, I distinctly remember them saying that there was going to be a light shower today.”

Ed rolled his eyes as they sat down. “Tell me about it. I got completely soaked on the way here.”

Lance smirked. “So, I suppose the rain isn’t a huge disappointment, then.”

And there wasn’t…anything he could say to that. Ed faltered, just managing to duck his head and scoff out a quick, embarrassed huff of laughter while he tried not to be thrown too off key. He could see Mustang grinning down at him, holding the newspaper over Ed’s head, rain stuck on his eyelashes and Ed held his breath - So, I suppose the rain isn’t a huge disappointment, then.

Well, this wasn’t going to work. Ed looked up, eyes sharp, and grin just on the side of animalistic. Lance blinked at him.

“Let’s get the technicalities out of the way,” Ed said, and took a sip of his beer, making sure to keep his eyes on the man in front of him.

Lance stared at him, before he smirked and picked up his drink, a glass of whiskey, and drunk the rest of it. “Wonderful. It’s getting awfully hot in here, would you like to go outside?”

Ed finished the last of his beer. “God, I thought you’d never ask.”

The other man stood up and extended a hand, and Ed set down his empty beer bottle, before grabbing his hand and letting Lance pull him up. There was a height difference because most people were unnaturally tall, nothing too bad and nothing Ed hadn’t dealt with before, and Ed stared at Lance’s chest for a second, not moving. He was wearing dark jeans and a white button up, and the style itched at the back of Ed’s head - something about the seams seemed familiar, but they were seams for God’s sake, how the hell would Ed know?

Outside, though. Outside where he go throw this pretentious douche against the wall and interrogate him until he’d cry out the information Ed needed, outside, outside-
“Ed!”

Not outside. Not outside because the door to the bar had swung open and Ed was in the direct line of sight of Hughes, grin wide as he waved, and fuck - fuck - note to self, the next time Ed wanted to withhold information from Hughes he shouldn’t because then man would show up and completely ruin everything and wait why was Hughes here, Hughes wouldn’t bring his wife and daughter through the pouring rain into a sketchy bar so why-

Hughes took a step forward, clearing the doorway so that man behind him could step through, grey great-coat nearly soaked through, nearly black where the rain collected on his shoulders, shaking out his hair and Ed felt his stomach leap into his throat with shit shit fucking shit fuck.

“Friends of yours?” Lance murmured, and Ed carefully did not swallow around the lump in his throat.

Was Hughes, the very public police commissioner, his friend? Well, Edward, was he? “Family friend,” Ed said, and shrugged. “I didn’t even know he knew what a bar was. We should-”

Maybe if he kept his head down and tried not to think about the fact that he couldn’t actually use the picture as evidence now that he had been seen with said man in said picture, he could just push his way out, and with that Ed took a deep breath, grabbed Lance’s hand, and pulled him towards the door.

“If you’d rather talk to them,” Lance started, and Ed darted his gaze up to him to pin with a firm ‘shut up’ glare. Lance complied. Apparently he wasn’t that much of an idiot.

Hughes grinned as Ed came closer, and Ed glared at him, tried to communicate ‘not now’ with his mind, but Hughes only clapped him on the shoulder.

“Good to see you getting out,” Hughes said, seriously, before breaking back into a grin. “Didn’t think I’d see you here tonight.”

“And you conveniently came today,” Ed finished, glaring up at his boss. “Huh.”

“Just had dinner with Gracia,” Hughes said and then (Ed held his breathe and kept his expression steady) stepped aside so that Mustang could blink down at him.

It couldn’t have lasted more than a second, but it felt like an eternity as Mustang’s gaze darted between Ed, to Lance (who was staring at all of them with a bemused look), down to Ed’s hand, clasped around Lance’s wrist, before things went very still.

“Straight home,” Roy said, quietly, and Ed closed his eyes without meaning to. Fuck.

“Let’s go,” Ed murmured, and tugged Lance through the door into the rain. It was still pouring, though it had let up slightly. It was a warm rain, at least, and he stood for a second, before pulling Lance towards they alleyway between Solaris’ antique shop and her bar, shoving Lance against the wall. Something scattered, a cat most likely, and Lance’s eyebrow raised.

“Ex-boyfriend?” he questioned, and Ed fisted his hand into his shirt, and pushed him tight against the brick wall.

“Please, shut up,” Ed growled, and tugged the man down so that he could kiss him. It only took a second for Lance to respond, to slip his tongue past Ed’s lips and into his mouth and - and - and -

Why wasn’t -
Lance slid his mouth downwards to suck on Ed’s throat, at his collarbone, and Ed felt his breath start to grow heavy and, distantly, in the back of his mind, he tried to remind himself that he was supposed to be *interrogating* the man currently sliding his hand down his stomach, not *letting* him slide his hand down Ed’s stomach. But, he couldn’t - he couldn’t focus on breathing much less focus on stopping.

This could be his last resort for getting the information he needed, Ed reminded himself and most definitely did *not* moan as a hand rested on the band of his pants. He had to -

He had control over his right arm. The metal had always seemed to operate on another tangent of his brain, and Ed brought it up and shoved Lance back, against the wall. The other man grinned down at him.

“Well, if you’re into that sort of thing...”

“No, really,” Ed said, blinking. He took a few deep breaths before he let himself speak. “Matthew Halsey. Name sound familiar?”

Lance stared down at him, blinked once, and then - and then his lips curved upwards, and his eyes narrowed. “Ah.”

Ed tensed. “Ring a bell?”

“Little Matt?” Lance questioned, pouting. “Let’s not talk about him. Let’s talk about you.”

His weight shifted, suddenly, and Ed saw nothing but the alleyway flip onto it’s side as his arm was wrenched back and around, and before he could even process it, he let instinct take over as he pulled his weight back and flipped Lance over, so that he was straddling the other man around his waist, metal hand wrapped around his neck.

So, no more pretending to be innocent. Ed snarled, “Talk.”

Lance laughed. “Oh, but we could do so many more *fun* things.”

“If you don’t talk, I’m going to beat the shit out of you,” Ed warned, and tightened his grip just a little more. “Well, actually, either way I’m going to beat the shit out of you, so you should probably talk.”

“Oh come now,” Lance pouted, and leaned upwards. Ed’s eyes widened, and his automail creaked as it bent back. Lance brushed the tip of his nose against Ed’s and kissed him, taking his bottom lip between his own. “We were having so much fun a second ago.”

And - there it was. The urge to duck his head down and just *let* the man in front of him do whatever he wanted, and for Christ’s sake he was not getting hard, he wasn’t - what the *fuck* -

“Don’t you love it?” Lance whispered against his cheek, and Ed focused on keep the automail tight, but it was beginning to shake, his grip wasn’t what it was supposed to be. “Just give in - I’ll make you feel so *good*.”

“Shut up,” Ed snarled, and shook his head. “Shut *up*.”

“If you close your eyes, I’ll let you pretend - I can be whoever you want,” and he licked a stripe up Ed’s cheek, right to under his eye. “You can call me whoever you want, I don’t mind, try it out, I know you’ll like it, just close your eyes and call me ‘Roy’.”
Ed bared his teeth, pulled up his automail hand, and slammed Lance’s head back into concrete. A flash of pure pain crossed the man’s face before it was replaced with one of anger. “You-”

“That hurt-”

“You - how the fuck do you-”

Lance laughed. “You really don’t know. Do they call you Fullmetal because you have a thick skull?”

Something cold collected in the bottom of Ed’s stomach, and he stared down at the man underneath him, and at lack of anything else to do, slammed his head back into the concrete. Lance cried out.

“How the fuck do you know that?” Ed carefully did not yell, because he was still in charge of the situation, even though he was beginning to feel sick. “Who are you?”

Lance grinned. “Wrong question. You should be asking ‘who are we?’”

He brought up a leg suddenly, directly into Ed’s stomach, and Ed felt the breath leave him like it had been dragged out of him, leaving him gasping for air. It was a hard hit - the hardest Ed thought he had ever taken and Ed had taken quite a lot - and he rolled off of Lance and laid in the rain water, gasping for air.

“Bastard-” Ed choked out, and rolled onto his stomach, managed to get up onto his knees, and Lance kicked him in the ribs.

“Have to say you figured me out pretty quickly,” Lance said, inspecting his shoe. “You made me lose a bet, you know. Should I go back inside that bar and steal it back from that pretty little bartender? Or maybe - ooh - I could hold the police commissioner ransom until they pay it off for me, how does that sound?”

“I’ll rip off your legs,” Ed gasped, pressing his hand against his stomach. It didn’t feel like anything had broken, but he was stuck in the middle of a haze of pain and delirious want and nothing was making sense, everything was a cocktail of information he couldn’t connect -

“Or maybe,” Lance said, bending down so that his lips were shying the shell of Ed’s ear. “I’ll finally find where you’re hiding your brother and I’ll beat it out of him-”

Ed’s vision went red as he lashed out with his left hand, the flesh one, still weak but he was pissed, and struck Lance across the face with a tightly balled fist, hard enough that the man fell backwards onto his back, groaning. He inhaled and forced himself to his feet, snarling.

“If you even think about touching my brother,” Ed warned, pressed the heel of his foot into the man’s palm. “I’ll fucking kill you.”

He pressed down with his heel, sharply, enough that he heard bones creak against each other, and Lance yelled, choking on the rain water, before he pulled his hand back so fast that Ed couldn’t do anything else except waver with one foot in the air and one foot on the ground for a second, before Lance darted out with his leg and struck him to the ground. By the time Ed rolled backwards into a crouched position, he was gone.

Ed sprinted out of the alleyway, searching the streets, but they were completely empty. He had lost his lead.

“Fuck,” Ed muttered, and then stomped his foot on the ground. “Fuck!”
He felt sick, nauseous really, and he knew he looked like a mess, covered in alley rain-water, so he couldn’t go and find Solaris (and even if he could, Hughes and Mustang were inside of that bar, he wouldn’t go in for anything less than lives in danger he was sure they were fine, and he couldn’t handle that on top of this) and the only thing that kept him from loosing his lunch was the fact that Lance and whoever the hell he was working with (and more of them - Jesus Christ) had no idea where he and Al lived, which meant that the months of preparation he had put towards making sure that their apartment was hidden was worth it.

He was going home. If he could actually get onto his bike, then he was going home.
Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

In which Boots started running out of ideas, wrote this chapter, and then found out how she was going to finish this stupid beast of a fic. (How do I put gifs in here, I have one of this look of pure horror which should describe most reactions to this chapter and my writing.)

Chapter Notes

I edited the first two chapters a bit. That does not mean this chapter is edited. Readers, beware. If you see ANY errors please tell me! I have no beta (still) *sobs* Also you guys are the freaking best and I love you lots.

i’ll take you in pieces
we can take it all apart
i’ve suffered shipwrecks
right from the start
i’ve been underwater
breathing out and in
i think i’m loosing where you end and i begin

– basic space // the XX

Maes put another beer in front of Roy. He kept getting looks from the bartender - not the flirting, interested looks, he was happily married thank you very much - and Hughes was nearly positive it was because of the whole debacle at the door with Ed (and he would ask Ed about that later, he would grill him and also update him on the pictures he had taken at Elysia’s school play, and Ed would cave because who could withstand his darling daughter’s face?). He only knew Solaris through Ed, and Ed’s father and mother, not enough that he could get up and demand her to tell him what the hell was going on. Solaris kept looking towards the door, eyebrows just barely tugged together, and Maes wanted to follow after Ed and make him explain what the hell he was doing that was making her so worried, but Roy was in front of him, despondent and Maes had his duties as ‘best friend’.

Roy was moping. It was painfully obvious to anyone who had known Roy for more than four years,
and Hughes knew him for something going on ten now. He kept playing with the label of his beer and lapsing into silence when Hughes didn’t keep up the conversation.

Of course, it wasn’t nearly as bad as it had been a year ago. That - didn’t bear thinking about. Mainly because if he started thinking about it, he’d get...itchy. He could still remember Roy watching Ed’s back as he walked away from the coffee shop, and Ed looked over his shoulder, jump at being caught, and Roy’s gaze ducked downwards, embarrassed at being caught (and how many times had Maes ever seen his friend embarrassed?).

“I shouldn’t be out,” Roy spoke up. “I have to get up early tomorrow.”

“That’s never stopped you before,” Maes pointed out, raising an eyebrow. “Running away’s never become you.”

Roy glared at him, before rolling his eyes. “I’m not running away, Maes.”

Maes raised an eyebrow. “Why do you keep looking at the door like you’re going to bolt if a certain someone steps through it?”

“Maes-”

“Or, if you want to prove me wrong, you could always just go outside and find him-”

“Maes-”

“Or, are you scared of what you’ll find?”

“Why are you doing this?” Roy questioned, closing his eyes. “He asked me to stay away from him. I am. I’m listening to him, why do you keep pushing this-”

“Because I saw you happy,” Maes said, quietly. “You were - really happy for those few months, Roy, and I haven’t seen you that happy since. Shouldn’t that be something worth pursing?”

Roy shook his head, grinned wryly, and took a sip of his beer. “Still missing the very big part where he told me - and this is verbatim - ‘I honestly don’t want to ever see you again, and if I never do, then it’ll be too soon.’”

Maes winced. “Right.”

“Should I go on? There’s more.”

“You...probably shouldn’t.” Maes fiddled with his drink. “Maybe if you just talked to him?”

Roy raised his eyebrow, before his gaze dropped to the table. “He keeps calling me by my first name. Whenever he’s irritated with me. That was a dirty trick you pulled. I could have had a officer drive me.”

“If you really didn’t want to, you could have spoken up,” Maes shrugged. Roy glared at him.

“I’m going to drink this, and then I’m going home,” Roy said, picking up his beer. “And you’re going to drop this subject.”

“Will you at least talk to him?” Maes pushed, and held up both hands when Roy glared at him, finishing off the rest of his drink.

“Drop it, Maes.”
Roy stood up, completely ignored Maes’ protests, and headed towards the door. Maes sighed and turned towards Solaris, who raised her eyebrow at him.

“Can I have another?”

The bartender smirked.

“There you are!”

Edward jumped, nearly slamming himself into the hallway wall as Alphonse leapt in front of him, grin wide. “What?” Ed managed to get out.

Al grinned around a mouthful of bacon. “I didn’t know you got in last night. I looked over that picture you sent me.”

Ed blinked at him. “What?”

“That is one charged pheromone,” Al said, and really there wasn’t anything Ed could do except follow him towards the kitchen table and start eating the food that was placed there. “I mean - holy crap, Ed, what were you doing to get that?”

“Wait - wait.” Ed swallowed his food, and some sort of realization dawned on him, something that he took offense to, most likely. “Are you saying that it’s a super-sex-pheromone? Fuckin’ hell.”

Al blinked at him, and drew his eyebrows together. “If you want to get really vague, yeah. It’s not natural, though, it’d be hard to recreate it biologically - well, I mean.” Al stopped and stared at the ceiling, unconsciously drawing random patterns with his index finger onto the table. “I suppose if you broke down the basic chemicals and fused them together just right-”

“Broke it down and fused them,” Ed stared. “Al, you mean - like alchemy?”

Alphonse nodded, slowly, as if he wasn’t quite sure why Ed wasn’t getting it. “Exactly like that. Why were you playing with chemicals, then?”

“What?”

Al blinked. “What?”

“Al - I didn’t make that. That shit was in Matthew Halsey’s blood.”

Silence, and then Al’s eyes widened. “Brother, I thought you - you can’t make that naturally or through normal means. You have to deconstruct-”

“Fuck.”

“The chemicals down and then reconstruct-”

“Fuck-”

“Them back together to get something like this. Where - how?”

“An alchemist,” Ed moaned, and ran a hand over his face. “We’re dealing with an alchemist. That pretentious douchebag’s an alchemist.”

“The asshole from - I may have -”

“Brother.”

“Alright, alright,” Ed murmured, before sinking back into the wooden chair and giving Al a quick recap of the past day. “And when I got up, the bastard was gone.”


“Al, I know, alright. I’m sorry I did it, considering, but it’s over with. Gotta move on.”

“Do you know the minimum prison sentence for stealing evidence? And from an ongoing investigation? And a military one?”

“Do you know how much a few more marks on my file are really goin’ set me back, Al?” Ed questioned. Al stared, before shrugging.

“Touché.” Alphonse frowned. “Brother, I think you should stick to being legal on this one. This really has the potential to backfire on you.”

“I know it does, Al,” Ed murmured. “But, this guy - he knew who I was. Not only that he said he wasn’t working alone. He knows about Mustang, about Hughes. I back off as Fullmetal that’s basically a huge sign saying ‘oh by the way, I don’t care what the hell you do to these people, go ahead!’”

Alphonse stared, before leaning back in his chair. It was still early morning, and Winry was asleep inside of the guest room - or not the guest room anymore, it was her room (and yes Al still blushed at that) - so he let himself talk at a normal level of voice.

“Or you could get them all hurt,” Alphonse pointed out. “Look what happened with the Colonel-”

“Al-”

“What happened with the Colonel,” Al pressed. “You got too close.”

Edward was quiet, lips twisted in an obvious attempt not to fire back with something he knew he’d regret later on. “No, Al,” he said, quietly. “I didn’t think. I’m gonna think this through, though. Trust me, alright? And start walking with that knife I gave you, please?”

Al sighed, before he grinned. “Like they could take me anyway. You still have yet to beat me, you know?”

Ed scowled. “Don’t remind me. Just walk with one, alright?” He caught Al’s look and sighed. “I will play by the book today, alright, Jesus.”

Alphonse stared at him, clearly not believing a word he was saying, but dropped his gaze back down to his food. Edward sighed and picked up another slice of toast.

Tonight, however, he didn’t say anything about.

Nothing that day. Nothing that night. Nothing the next day.
Ed shrugged on his red coat and barely checked the urge to scowl. Mustang had been out searching for leads for two days straight, which was a blessing because ever since the incident at the bar, it felt like Ed had gone back to step one and locked the door behind him accidentally; there was only so much they could do with Halsey’s body and Ed was going over the evidence boxes for the last few victims. Hughes kept giving him looks in the hallway. Three of the lab assistants were sick with the flu, and Ed was roped into basic work all while he felt like hitting his head against the steel counter until an idea formed.

He slugged a mugger across the face so hard, he might have broken the man’s jaw. The woman said mugger was attempting to rob couldn’t care less however, and Ed patiently waited with her until a police car rounded the corner before disappearing.

Last night, he had gone back to Solaris’ bar, hoping that Lance would have been seen, but he got nothing. Solaris had promised to keep an eye out for him, but Ed knew it wasn’t worth it. Lance wouldn’t visit the bar again, unless it was to taunt Ed.

And then, the conundrum. Lance’s picture was tucked away, and Ed could only do so much with the facial recognition scans that the police gave him access to. There was a chance - a small chance - that Lance’s face was buried in a military file, but that meant either a) giving up the picture to Mustang, who could then recognize it as the man Ed was with, or b) break into military headquarters and look for himself. Which.

He had only been on military ground three times, twice at the Headquarters and both with Mustang, and once at the shipping yard up the port by the river. Yet, here Ed was, standing across from the front gate, hidden in the shadows.

He was loosing his urge. The doubts were flooding up. How would he get access? Everything was stored on a sever now, especially after fire that had swept through in the seventies. He would need a passcode and a username, most likely. There were security cameras everywhere, and even though it was near midnight, the place was packed, flood lights keeping the courtyard lit.

This wasn’t something he could do on a whim. He had to plan it all out, figure out his method of attack. Hakuro had a strict shoot-to-kill order out on anything that wore a red coat with a winged snake on it’s back, and Ed couldn’t risk fucking up the only possible lead he had at the moment.

But -

Oh, he didn’t want to. He really didn’t want to.

And yet he found himself turning on his heel to leave the military headquarters behind and start back home, to where his regular clothes awaited.

He didn’t want to, but he would. He’d go and visit Dante.

--

Ed twitched in the waiting room of the retirement home, ignoring the look the receptionist kept giving him. He had to wait until visiting hours began, after lunch, before they would even let him into the building, and now he was waiting for his choice of visit to be found and wheeled into the...room where they put people who were being visited.

Dante was wheeled out, hair pinned back into a bun, and there was a pleasant smile on her face up until the point she was within range of him, and then she hit him with the cane she had laid across her lap, frowning at him.
“Fucking bitch!” Ed snarled, holding his flesh arm. God, he hated Dante. “What the fuck!?”

“You never visit,” Dante sniffed. “I want to watch Jeopardy. Put me in front of the TV.”

“You’re fucking insane, do you know that?” Ed questioned, but took the wheelchair from the orderly and wheeled in front of the television, handing Dante the remote. She clicked until she found the channel she wanted, and turned to him.

“What are you doing here, then?” she questioned, raising a grey eyebrow. “I know this isn’t a social visit.”

“Of course it’s not a fucking social visit. You think I’d drop by after six years just to catch up?” Ed snarled. “I came for information, since you still seem to know freakin’ everything.”

Another prim sniff. “Just because I keep active, doesn’t mean I deserve your bad mood. Why should I help you?”

Ed rolled his eyes and sighed, sitting into one of the really quite horrible plastic chairs. He struggled with his words for a second; most of it was a deep urge to just kick Dante’s wheelchair from out underneath her, or stuffing down the self-loathing that he was actually talking to Dante and imploring her for help. “I think I may have found another alchemist.”


For the second time, Ed recounted everything that had happened, leaving out key parts about the investigation that he knew she’d sell later on. Dante didn’t nod or agree with him until the very end, where eyebrow raised.

“Pheromones?” she questioned. “Are you sure you just didn’t want to fuck this young man?”

“Oh my fucking god,” Ed said, jumping back. “Jesus - no. He freaking - he licked me and it was like all I wanted to do was - and I am so not discussing this with you, you’re what, ninety-seven?”

“Ninety-two,” Dante scowled. “That’s alchemy, however. A very specific form. No doubt the array is tattooed somewhere on the body, and whenever he wants to, he activates it and boosts his pheromone production. You’re lucky it was raining. Imagine if it wasn’t constantly being washed away.”

He had. The image wasn’t pretty. “So, do you know anything about this?”

Dante frowned at him, obviously torn between telling him something and lording it over his head. They had never, ever been close - Al was her favorite - and she only knew them because of their grandfather and Ed and Al’s martial arts teacher, who had died of cancer just before their grandfather had. Their relationship was not…pleasant, but they had put up with each other for Al’s sake after their acquaintance list died out (i.e Teacher, Ed and Al’s mother, and then grandfather). She sighed, finally, and stared at the television. “There was a rumor, about a year ago, about another group forming - not unlike the one I started.”

“You mean the alchemy freaks?” Ed questioned, and blinked. He didn’t know much of the so-called alchemy freaks, other than the fact that there was a group of seven people who used a very limited form of alchemy. Solaris had been part of them, and so had Ed’s mother; Envy had been the second recruit after Pride (who still kept contact with Ed and Al, weirdly enough), and Greed (who Ed didn’t want to think about, at all, and thinking of that situation was actually worse than thanking about the Hakuro or the Roy Situation). “Who the hell would be stupid enough to start up alchemy freaks two?”

"I’m not entirely sure," Dante said, and frowned angrily. “But they’ve been rerouting business.”

Ed leaned forward. “What business?”

“Arms from up north, drugs, there’s even been a few whispers about human trafficking. And all of it seems to circle around the mil-”

She stopped suddenly, turning towards the window, and she lifted the cane, pressed the end of it into Ed’s stomach in one clean movement, and shoved Ed backwards off of the chair, right as the window exploded in a burst of glass, and she flew backwards out of her chair.

“Fuck,” Ed hissed, blinking up at the ceiling. His vision was black in some areas, and a shard of glass had caught his flesh hand, scraping a red line across the top of it. “Dante - shit - are you al-”

He cut himself off suddenly as he turned to look at the overturned wheelchair, and the unmoving figure laying in it, a splatter of red staining against the already grey-stained carpet. There was a moment of stunned silence, and Ed couldn’t do anything but stare before the doors slammed open and orderlies ran in, crunching through the glass to pull Ed up to his feet and crouch near Dante’s body.

“She’s not-”

The orderly who had rolled Dante in shook his head, face white, and Ed felt his knees give out. People kept asking if he was alright, but -

Mustang was in front of him, crouched down so that for once Ed had to look down at him, instead of looking up. There was an orange blanket around Ed’s shoulders, and Mustang stared up at him, before sighing.

“You’re brother’s on his way. I called him.”


“You’re in shock. You haven’t moved for awhile. Do you remember what happened?” Roy’s hand was on his knee, and Ed stared down at it like it had appeared out of nowhere, before he blinked and reached a hand out, carefully prodding it with his own. Mustang grabbed it and carefully intertwined his fingers with his own. There was a bandage over it, and Mustang turned to the side and threw away the wrappers, and Ed couldn’t - how did he -

“Dante?” Ed questioned, voice breaking. Roy shook his head. Ed crumpled. “Fuck - fuck. She was just - and then - she fucking pushed me out of the way why would she - she hated me-”

“I know, I know,” Roy said, soothingly, which didn’t make any sense because he didn’t know Dante, Ed had never even mentioned Dante before, so how could he know?

“What - what time is it?” Ed asked, looking around, hand still tight around Roy’s. The orderlies were gone, and it was darker than it was before. Police were at the doors, and the second team of CSI were processing the scene, unfamiliar faces that Ed had only seen once or twice.

“Five o’clock,” Roy answered, and repeated, “You haven’t moved for awhile. The receptionist called the police, who found you, and then they called me. Ed, I have to ask you some questions, alright?”

Ed stared down at him, before nodding. “Fine.”
“Alright,” and Roy squeezed his hand. “How’d you know Mrs. Alighieri?”

“We, uh,” Ed cleared his throat. “She knew our granddad. Our - me an’ Al - our tutor, master, she raised her. We knew her.” He stopped suddenly, quiet. Roy nodded.

“Alright,” Roy repeated. “What were you doing here?”

“Visiting her, she - got the urge. She - the case was giving me trouble, sometimes I just hang out with her even though - she hates me and she pushed me out of the way-”

“Did she see who attacked her, then?” Roy asked. “Did you?”

Ed shook his head. “I couldn’t - she was watching Jeopardy. I wasn’t - I wasn’t looking out the window, but she would have saw.” The thought hit him suddenly. “You can’t let Al see. You can’t - Roy, he loved Dante, she adored him, it’ll kill him-”

“I’ll keep him outside,” Roy said, and squeezed his hand again. “Do you want to go outside to wait for him?”

Did he? Yes. He stood, wavered on his feet, and Roy carefully held onto his hand and put a hand onto his shoulder to keep him steady before leading him outside.

Roy’s hand loosened around his. “I have to-”

“No-” Ed choked out, and then bit his lip so hard he thought it might bleed. He was in shock, this wasn’t the first time he had been, but he knew damn well to keep a hold on himself. But - there had only been one time he had seen someone killed like that, someone he had known, blood thrown against the floor, enough of it to make him sick, enough to make his grip tighten around Roy’s hand, and it was bringing a queasiness up to his throat with all the memories it was dredging to the surface (his mother, blood welling on her stomach from the glass stuck in it; Greed, blood wet and sticky on Ed’s face, and Greed smiled, nearly amused, but Ed was going to vomit and couldn’t pull back his hand). “I just - can you-” He stopped and stared down at their hands. “Can you?”

“Okay,” Roy said, and carefully led him towards one of the wooden benches. “I’ll wait with you. It’s alright, Ed.”

It wasn’t alright. It really wasn’t alright. He wanted to turn towards Roy and bury his face in his chest and not resurface for at least a hundred years, until he felt like not being nauseous was a possibility. He couldn’t though. He knew he couldn’t. So, he sat down next to Roy, and held his hand, and waited for Al.

Al cried. Crumpled against Winry’s shoulder, who held him, and Ed tried to stand up, to go to him and comfort him, but all he could real do was shake his head while he held onto Roy’s hand like it was a life line.

“But she - she-” Al hiccuped and he and Winry sat, right in the middle of the courtyard, Winry holding onto him as tight as she could. “Why - who?”

Who? Dante had run one of the best underground groups in the entire country. Her name was known around the world, the list of enemies she had racked up was too long for Ed to even process, and this certainly wasn’t the first time someone had tried to kill her, but Dante had always gotten to them first, and how odd that they waited until Ed was there...
“I don’t know,” Ed said, and found out it was all he could say. “I don’t know. Al, I’m sorry - I’m sorry.”

“Ed, it’s not your fault,” Winry said, after it was clear that Al couldn’t do much more than cry into her shoulder. “It’s not your fault.”

It might have been though. Dante had shoved Ed out of the way, which led to the question of who was the intended target. Did Dante just get in the way? Who was next then? Winry? Roy? Al?

He felt sick again.

“We didn’t know,” Winry murmured. “We took the bus. Ed, I can’t let you drive your bike home, not like this.”

“I’ll drive you,” Roy spoke up, and squeezed Ed’s hand. “I have enough room. I can even drive you back here tomorrow for your bike.”

He could protest, could think of a dozen reasons he couldn’t leave his bike behind - he needed it for tonight, was going to find every informant Dante had and beat the information out of them - but all he could do was nod, tired, and Roy tugged him up into a standing position, and then carefully worked the orange blanket off of Ed’s shoulders and left it on the stone wall.

“Car’s right over here,” he murmured, and tugged Ed along after Winry helped Al up. “You two can sit in the back.”

Roy slid the seats forward, and Winry helped Al into the back, holding him around the shoulders as Roy snapped the seat back into place and Ed sat down, staring down at their intertwined hands, before Roy tugged his hand loose and closed the door.

A second later, Roy was in the driver’s seat, the car blowing out warm air, and Ed had no idea what he was doing, he really didn’t, but he reached across the divider and grabbed Roy’s hand. He could feel Roy tense, but Ed’s gaze was pinned out the window, and Roy paused for a second, before brushing his thumb across the inside of Ed’s hand, pulling the car out of the parking lot (one-handed, and Ed remembered to be impressed, though it was a bland feeling) and onto the road.

The ride was silent, or almost. Winry murmured to Al in the back seat, brushing her fingertips along his forehead, and it kept up a comfortable background noise. By the time they had pulled in front of the apartment complex, Al had stopped audibly crying, and Ed could feel the shock leaving him drained. He got out after they stopped, pulling his hand away from Roy’s, helping Al and Winry out of the back and towards the front steps, before turning towards Roy, who waited on the sidewalk, car still running.

“Thank you,” Ed said, and took a step forward to - what, he wasn’t sure - before he stopped himself. Roy smiled down at him.

“You’re welcome,” the other man murmured, and turned back to his car. Ed stared at him and watched him, even as he pulled away and started down the road.

“Ed,” Winry called from the door, and Ed started, turning on his heel to walk up the front steps. Winry leveled with a look. “Are you alright?”

He shrugged. “I’m not sure.”

Winry sighed. “Of course you’re not. Come on, then.”
Most of Dante’s informants typically were the kind of people you’d except to be informants. Skeezy drug dealers that patrolled the streets and who Ed had a hell of a time running down trying to explain that he wasn’t trying to bust them, he just need information damnit. Of course most of them responded with some sort of ‘the old lady’s dead?!’ accompanied with either a wide grin or look of horror that one of the major players in the underground had been taken out.

Ed knew that Dante had hands in high places, from a few shipping companies, to arms manufacturers, to political playing pieces, but they were never on Ed’s radar because Dante was retired. She had given up the sword constantly dangling over her head when the arthritis started setting in, and while she had made sure her absence was never felt, with her gone there was now a huge hole in the criminal hierarchy. Which basically meant hell for Fullmetal.

Seventeen attempted robberies, fourteen actual robberies that Ed had to hunt down, nearly city-wide increases in mugging, dealings under the table, and debt-related murders. Within the first night. The night after Dante’s death, after Ed had ignored Hughes’ voicemails that called him in sick and walked back to the retirement home to pick up his bike (and he pointedly ignored Hughes note that Roy’s offer was still open for a ride the next morning), Winry had yelled at him, lectured him for twenty minutes while he shrugged on his coat and checked his gear, all while Al sat on the couch and made quiet comments that neither helped nor deterred either side. In the end she had thrown her hands up and stormed into her bedroom, finally giving up. Al stayed, made him promised to be safe, and here Ed was, chasing down van number seven, who was also informant number thirty-three who had proved to be no help, at all.

Traffic was dense (did he mention the car accidents? no? well-) and cluttered back along the main roads, and Ed weaved in and out of traffic, scowling when the older black van jumped the curb and rode up onto the sidewalk, people screaming as they leapt out of the way. Ed opened up the throttle on his bike and pushed forward, just barely riding the edge of the street, waiting for the prime moment for -

There it was. With one skilled twist of his wrist, Ed saw the patch in traffic ahead as it stalled at a just barely turned green light, the van slowing just for half a second to make the turn onto the road from the sidewalk, pulled out a small throwing knife from his belt, aimed, and hit. The knife embedded itself into the tire, and the tire rolled forward and pressed the knife deeper and pop went the rubber, ripping to shreds at the force.

The van, half way across the turn, flipped at the sudden loss of balance, skidding across the intersection and cleanly into the concrete barrier, which was lucky considering that only two inches away where pedestrians and waiting cars. Ed rolled his bike closer, came to a stop, and tugged his helmet off and hopped off, jumping onto the side of the car using the exposed tire axel as a step up. He clenched his metal fist and struck through the glass, unlocking the door and pulling out the driver.

“Freakin’ idiot,” Ed muttered, and dragged him out. There was a gash right on his forehead that was bleeding profusely - but head wounds usually did, so Ed threw him over the edge and reached for the next man -

Except he was waiting, and two sharp gunshots echoed into the air as Ed flew backwards, one bullet missing, and the other clipping his automail. He really didn’t have time for this. It wasn’t even eleven o’clock but his radio was still beeping with what he was sure was a car robbery that he needed to get to, and this idiot had the nerve to shoot at him?

“Fuckin’-”
He didn’t have the time to deal with this. He stripped the glove off of his left hand and picked a clean looking piece of warped metal to slice his finger. In a second he had drawn a simple, and familiar, array onto the side of the van, before pressing his palm to it.

The crowd that had gathered around the scene went quiet, people climbing out of their cars and leaning as close as they could without getting too close. The crackle of energy rippled like a wave of static through the air, making hair rise just slightly and fingertips tingle. Blue arched across the van, waved through the structure, and with a huge groan the black metal twisted towards, morphing together to form a large hand that stretched itself into the air then dove into the van to grab the second man and pull him upwards, giant hand tight around his entire body, leaving only his head exposed.

The man, like they usually did, freaked out.

The crowd, like they usually did, started to clap, calls and whistles echoing through the air above the man’s frightened yells as Fullmetal saluted them jauntily, and climbed off the van to pull open the back doors and shake his head at the luckily still in tact television and computers, still in their boxes. He quickly counted through them to make sure he had gotten the right car, before catching sight of the black suited police officers breaking through the crowd. His cue to go.

Fullmetal nodded, stepped over the first man he had pulled out of the van, and climbed back onto his bike, revving away from the scene just as the police officers reached the van.

The police officers, like they usually did, wondered how the hell they were going to get the man out of Fullmetal’s latest so called masterpiece.

“I don’t freaking understand why you guys do this,” Fullmetal muttered as he secured yet another mugger to a lamp post and waited by a payphone for the operator to dispatch a police car. One thing that was nice about Hughes knowing about the whole Fullmetal night-job thing was that whenever Ed needed a police pick-up he didn’t have to put on a fake voice and find a pay phone and gush in over glorified detail about ‘Fullmetal’s latest deed’. That didn’t mean it was fun, however.

Tonight, Ed was going for ‘baker-with-three-kids-and-a-dog-walking-home-from-late-night-yoga.’ The operator seemed skeptical (they always seemed to know when it was him) but complied.

The woman he had cuffed to the lamp-post stuck her tongue out and sat down. Fullmetal had seen her before, once or twice, and he rolled his eyes for good measure just as he heard the familiar sounds of a police siren. He turned towards the woman who raised her eyebrow at him.

“Stop,” Fullmetal said, sternly. “Just - stop.”

“Sure, doll,” the woman shrugged, and grinned. Fullmetal rolled his eyes again.

“Jesus, why do you - you’re just gonna get caught again, you do know that?”

The woman shrugged, apathetic. “Doesn’t matter much, doll. City’s going to the dogs. Least in jail you get security, three square meals, and a warm bed.”

She had curly red hair, pulled back into a frizzy ponytail and freckles scattered across her nose. Fullmetal had found her holding another woman against a wall with a knife and a grin while she looted through a purse that wasn’t hers.

But that - that he wasn’t expected.
“Why do you say that?” Fullmetal questioned, and she raised an eyebrow, before her grin widened.

“Like I’m gonna tell you,” the woman shrugged. “Unless-”


“Get out jail free card, doll. Just this once. Got my man waiting for me back home, you know?” The woman smirked at him, and Fullmetal stared back, clocking how close the police car was, the traffic along the main road, and how badly he needed the information.

“Talk,” Fullmetal said, after a second, and the woman’s grin was so wide it nearly split her face, but it only lasted a second, before she shifted closer to him.

“Look, there’s been talk for awhile now about some new big-wig stepping in. All the gangs are doing turn overs, people are callin’ in debts real fast. We all want out - that’s why I was out tonight. I need the cash for a train ride over the border.”

“The borders are closed because of the skirmishes. It’d take - months for the papers to go through,” Fullmetal shook his head. The woman laughed.

“Not to the right people, doll. Not for the right price. My boy, Mark, he said that his friend Toby went to this guy who hooked him up.”

Fullmetal stared. “How?”

The woman shrugged. “How else? Military papers. Guy’s a forger, or I guess, considering the fuckin’ price, it’s the real thing, you’re just not enlisted. Thing is, he only takes certain people.”

There was a haunted look to the set of her jaw, the way the skin across her cheekbones stretched. Fullmetal kneeled down next to her and leaned forward. “What do you mean?”

She shrugged, and exhaled. “People have been going missing. Lots of people - not the people you care ‘bout, course. Homeless, people needing money, strays. There’s a rumor going around that a lot of the people who are lookin’ to get out of the country also are missing, too. They get over the border and they don’t call, don’t write. They just - go.”

“You think that the guy who’s getting people out of here, is also making them disappear?” Fullmetal questioned, and she nodded. “Then why the hell do you want to risk your chances?”

She smiled up at him - didn’t smirked - just looked resigned. “Cause my chances out there are ten times better than my chances in here.”

There wasn’t anything he could say to that. “Who’s the guy everyone’s going to?”

“Rumor is that you to First Central Bank, talk to the cashier and tell ‘em that you’re there for this guy called Robert MacKenzie. You tell the cashier that you want to open a new account along side the one you got. Hell if I know what happens next.”

Fullmetal lifted up and unlocked the cuff. The woman grinned and rubbed her wrist before standing, Fullmetal standing with her. Her smile melted back into a smirk.

“Thanks, doll,” the woman said, inclining her head and grabbing her purse. “See you around?”

“You better fucking hope not,” Fullmetal growled, and rolled his eyes. “Get the hell gone.”

The woman began to walk backwards, grin wide. “Name’s Luca, doll - call me!”
“No,” Fullmetal called back. Luca shrugged, and took off at a dead sprint, right as the police car started to turn the corner. Fullmetal cursed and jumped onto his bike, pulling back into the alleyway as it passed by, before pulling out behind it and starting in the opposite direction.

First Central Bank, huh? Well, what did you know.

“You shouldn’t be at work.”

“Fucking-”

Ed slammed his hand down on the keyboard, effectively exiting out of First Central Bank’s employee list which he technically wasn’t supposed to have access to, but the police servers were just made for breaking in and why would Ed waste that opportunity?

Hughes, and Mustang. In his office. Ed leveled them both with an unimpressed glare as Hughes swung one of the seats in front of the desk around and sat on it, while Mustang leant against the door frame. Hughes stared, and then continued on, “Ed, I’m serious. You have an entire legion of sick days. Use them. They’re there for that reason.”

“I’m fine,” Ed scowled, and shuffled the papers around on his desk to make it look like he wasn’t completely interested in a mostly illegal act. “I didn’t even like Dante.”

“You look like you haven’t seen a bed in days,” Mustang murmured, and Ed lifted his gaze to glare at him.

“Well, it’s not your fucking business what I do in bed, is it?” Ed snapped back, and realized two seconds too late, eyes closing in a grimace, that he had gone too far. Mustang’s face was blank, had been since Ed had first looked up, but now there was a coldness to it, and Mustang stood, inclined his head, and left. Hughes raised an eyebrow.

“Smooth, casanova.”

“Please, fuck off,” Ed muttered, and ran a hand through his bangs. “I don’t have the fucking patience.”

“Really? I’d have never guessed.” Hughes shrugged when Ed looked up and glared. “I’ve never seen Fullmetal so active.”

“Well, that’s what happens to a crime-fighter when there’s an influx in crime,” Ed mock whispered, and looked back to his laptop. “Did you come down here to lecture me or did someone find something? ‘Cause I get enough of the lecturing when I’m at home.”

Hughes frowned. “Security cameras from a parking lot two blocks away Matthew Halsey’s crime scene. He’s on them.”

It didn’t register at first, was like a quiet attack, silent until the realization hit him in the stomach like fist to the gut. “Fuck,” Ed breathed, and stood, nearly flipping over his chair. “Fuck.”

“Congratulations,” Hughes said, and leaned forward over the back of the chair he was propped up on. “We have a new lead.”

Ed could cry - he really, really could. He hurried around the edge of his desk, grabbed Hughes’ shoulder and nearly shook him before he realized that Hughes probably wouldn’t enjoy that too

“Slow down there, cowboy,” Hughes murmured. “Let’s talk.”

Hughes had said ‘Let’s talk’ a total of three times to Ed. The first time was the day Ed had graduated and Hughes offered him his job. The second time was after Ed had told Hughes who he actually was. The third time was after the Mustang debacle which didn’t bear thinking about. The trend proved that when Hughes said ‘Let’s talk’, it was never good.

“Shit,” Ed murmured, and sat on top of his desk, pushing papers aside to make room. “What?”

“You’re killing yourself,” Hughes said, bluntly. Ed couldn’t do anything but blink. Hughes continued, “Roy’s right - you haven’t seen a bed in days. When was the last time you slept?”

Ed shrugged half-heartedly, knew he looked like a mess with his half-brushed hair and the dark bags under his eyes. But he had fresh clothes and a ten minute shower which was better than he could say most days.

“I slept…” he started, and stopped. The last time he had properly slept was before Dante’s death, four days ago. Ed shrugged again. “Last night.”

“On the kitchen table for thirty minutes at seven in the morning does not count as you sleeping last night,” Hughes said, flatly. Ed scowled.

“Al.”

“Winry,” Hughes said, and grinned. “We spoke on the phone. She sounds like quite the young lady.”

“Freakin’ blood traitor,” Ed muttered, and Hughes sing-songed over him, “Second cousins, doesn’t count.”

“I’ve done worse,” Ed pointed out, eyes narrowing. “I’ve been-”

“Chasing a lead?” Hughes questioned, raising an eyebrow. He leaned back, button-up shirt wrinkled for the two o’clock work day and a small coffee stain on the edge of it. His hair was pushed back, but messy. He had been running his hands through it all morning most likely. “What lead?”

“Never said there was a lead,” Ed said, frowning.

“Right,” Hughes said, and looked at him. Ed lasted two minutes.

“Fucking hell, I should have never fucking told you,” Ed grumbled under his breath and reached around the desk for his bag, rifling through it and pulling out Lance’s photo. “I had my reasons.”

“You always have your reasons,” Hughes murmured. “They’re usually horrendously stupid reasons. What is this?”

Ed inhaled. “Matthew Halsey’s boyfriend. Met him a couple of days before he disappeared.”

There was the pinch of fury he was expecting, right as Hughes took the photo. Hughes didn’t get angry. It’s why he made such a good cop because he kept a cool head no matter how horrible the crime, but now his eyes narrowed and his mouth turned downwards, and his glare was pinned directly onto Ed, who felt about two feet tall, which for Ed was nearly ten times as horrible as it felt to anyone else.
“I should put you in handcuffs, take you upstairs, and tell Colonel Mustang exactly just who you are,” Hughes said, voice flat and cold. “And then I should fire you and put you in jail for two lifetimes worth of criminal offenses, that is if I don’t let Roy put you in front of a firing squad first.”

Ed closed his eyes, and exhaled. “I’m sorry.”

“You’re not. You’re never sorry. Ed - this could have -” He fell silent as he studied the picture, and then his gaze flickered back up to Ed. “This is the man you were with - a few nights ago. At the bar.”

“Yeah,” Ed murmured, and ran a hand through his bangs again. “Hughes - look. This guy - these guys, there’s more than one - they’re not easy, alright? He tried to kill me, and there’s something...more going on here. I was going to tell you about all this the day after, I swear, but then I had to - I had to make sure.”

Hughes’ eyes narrowed. “Did you sleep with him?”

Ed stared. “The hell kinda question is that?”

“You seemed pretty close, considering, and it’s not like you haven’t gotten around,” Hughes said, and studied the photo. Ed rolled his eyes and stared up at the ceiling before, for the third time, he recounted his encounter with Lance and it’s effects. Hughes didn’t lift his eyes from the photo, even after Ed had dropped what he had named ‘the alchemy bomb’ and when Hughes was silent, he talked to fill the silence.

“And this probably doesn’t have anything to do with it, but I can’t - I can’t ignore it. Dante’s death, I got this lead - people have been going missing apparently, there’s this whole turn around, and Dante warned me about this group, like the one she used to be head of, who’re buried in some risky stuff and I just - it feels like I’ve got all the pieces for the same puzzle but I can’t get them to fit,” Ed growled, and slammed his left hand against his knee.

Hughes looked up. “I’m not going to turn you in,” he said, and shook his head. “But you can not leave me out of this now, Ed, you can’t. If you do, I don’t know what I’m going to do with you. I have to trust you and I - I promised your father I’d keep you safe—”

Ed shuffled, turning his head away. Hughes sighed.

“I will,” Ed said after a moment. “I’ll keep you in the loop. I’m going to check out this lead at the bank. They’re connected - the group Dante warned me about has to be part of this kidnapping thing, and they’re all tied up with these murders.”

“And for God’s sake,” Hughes said, and stood, spinning the chair back around so that it was back in place. “Talk to Roy, will you? You might as well have broken his favorite toy and then flaunted a better, newer copy at him.”

Ed scowled. “Hughes—”

“Indulge me,” Hughes said, and rolled his eyes, adjusting his glasses. “I didn’t think it was possible but you actually make his life hell on both sides of your spectrum. The very least you could do is not push down on the knife in his back.”

“Roy, Roy, Roy,” Ed muttered under his breath. “The hell does everyone take his side? If anyone remembers, he shot me.”

“And whose fault is that?” Hughes said, quietly, moving towards the door. Ed glared at him. Hughes
shrugged. “Security videos are in the conference room. They’re waiting on us.”

“Freakin’ great,” Ed said, and walked through the door with Hughes. “You could have told me,” he complained as he locked the office door and followed Hughes past the lab and into the precinct.

Hughes shrugged. “Where’s the fun in that?”

The conference room was packed, and Beth hopped up, waving towards an empty seat next to her which he knew she fought tooth and nail for considering how packed the room was. People sat on the edge of the table, doubled up on the chairs, and Mustang and (to Ed’s mild surprised) Lieutenant Hawkeye were leaning against a far wall. Hawkeye had a yellow pad and pen ready, and Ed blinked at the both of them, before blinking at the small TV that was in the front of the room. With the number of people he was surprised there wasn’t a projector or a wide flat screen set up.

Mustang turned towards them, inclined his head towards Hughes who nodded back, and pushed his way towards the front of the room as Ed climbed over a set of police officers and into the chair and Beth had saved. She had a glitter coated pen at the ready, a plastic star at the tip of it, and it hovered over a white notebook.

Ed shifted, realized that he was the only person in the room who didn’t have something ready to write down, and succumbed to the peer pressure, reaching inside of his pocket for the moleskin journal and the small pen he constantly kept there. He tended to keep it hidden because he used it as Fullmetal and he was paranoid someone would recognize it, but he was curious (and wary) as to why everyone was so ready to jot down any stray notes.

“This tape was collected this morning at a park-and-ride off of 12th. They’ve been experiencing a few car thefts and installed this one camera on the southwest corner. Our victim, the then Sergeant Halsey, who’s been promoted posthumously to Second Lieutenant, is seen on the tape two times, once on the eighth at sixteen-hundred hours and again the following day, the day of his death, at seven-forty-three approximately five hours before his death,” Mustang spoke and turned towards the tape. One of the police detectives that Ed knew was running research picked up the remote and pressed play.

The tape was black and white, and slightly grainy. It skimmed through the first few minutes at fast-forward before the remote clicked again and it resumed normal pace.

The portion of the park and ride that the camera caught was at an angle, and for a moment the entire screen was still until a car pulled forward, disrupting a peace, and then Matthew Halsey strode across it, heading left across the TV. No-one followed.

“The first time,” Mustang murmured, and waved towards the police detective who fast-forwarded through the next day until he paused a minute before the right time. It was busier now, people late to work, and Ed caught himself leaning forward as Matthew Halsey strode across the screen, in the same direction, stopping half way to look over his shoulder and twist his fingers together before continuing a run.

Ed blinked at it. It was - bizarre. Halsey walked across the screen with such a casual air, before he paused and looked back, and something must have caught his attention because then was sprinting across the screen. His expression was too blurred to make out, damnit, and Ed found himself leaning over the table to try to get a better look.

“Again,” a officer called, and Mustang nodded, the detective clicking at the remote again. Ed studied the screen, Beth’s hand flew across her notepad noting the direction, how long he took, how many steps, what direction exactly he turned towards, and Ed’s eyes darted downward towards her pen, the
star catching his attention for just a second, and in the way down, he froze.

“You see something?” Mustang questioned, taking a step forward. Ed didn’t respond, just rewinded and played it, staring at the back windshield and the reflection.

Black and white grain, Halsey’s shadow as it passed by, and Halsey paused and there - fucking there - was the flash of white against the windshield for just a fraction of a second and Halsey froze, turned, and took off a sprint.

Ed stared, felt his stomach twist, and then sunk back into his seat.

“What is it?” Mustang questioned, and tilted his head forward - as if somehow that would give them some semblance of privacy.

He didn’t swallow, or pale, or let his jaw clench. “Nothing. Just the sun reflecting off of the car. Thought it was another person’s shadow.”

The room seemed to let out a collective, disappointed breath. Beth pouted and turned back to her notes, sketching out a quick note, while Ed stared at the table.

Lie. Lie, lie, lie. Always lying; but how could he explain the light he saw? How could he explain something so familiar and so dangerous in the wrong hands? An alchemical reaction always had a release of energy, usually a pretty bad backlash to those who weren’t prepared, not unlike a gun’s recoil. Ed knew alchemical reactions better than he knew his physics, his chemistry, knew the criminal underground.

Someone had performed alchemy right in that parking lot, and Halsey had seen it and panicked, fleeing in the opposite direction. Was it Lance? Had it been someone else?

Mustang was talking about setting up search parameters around the parking lot, looking for anything that could even be there, even after all the time that had passed. Ed let it filter through as background noise, Roy’s strong, solid tone (that brokered no argument) echoing behind him. He barely registered it (military checkpoints, police patrols, the day team would take the first shift, followed by the afternoon set, the graveyard next) instead thinking about a world where he could have turned to Roy and said, straight to his face, ‘that’s an alchemical reaction - that’s an alchemist.’

He’d get laughed out of the room. Probably put into an insane asylum if the obvious connection between him and Fullmetal wasn’t pointed out first.

A world where (instead of alchemy being known) Ed as Fullmetal was common knowledge, then. Horrible - and something he didn’t want to think about. Enemies hurting Al, seeking out Winry to hold her for ransom, Hughes under even more pressure, and Ed never getting a moment rest.

Then, a world where he could pull Roy aside and explain, warn him. Better yet, a world where Ed could have climbed through a window late at night days ago, come home to a ready ear and someone to lean on - and Al would have his back, would always be there, but Ed would never tell Al about half the things he saw when he wore his other face - and Roy would sit with him and a cup of coffee and instead of the clusterfuck Ed found himself in most of the time, things would be - nice.

He couldn’t think like that. Ed’s eyes pressed shut before he opened them and stared at the paused
TV screen. Mustang was listening to one of the squad leaders discussing shift schedules and Ed took the moment to (selfishly) drag his eyes up and down him, to breath out a slow exhale at the man’s messy hair and slightly strained uniform, at the attention he was giving the man talking, at the small downturn of his lips.

Eyes - always a hot feeling in his stomach that made him want to squirm. Ed turned away from Mustang, checking himself, and turned his head just slightly to stare at Hawkeye, who had him pinned with a blank look. Of course, it only looked blank. Instead it felt like she was personally going through a file cabinet of every secret he ever had all while he stood naked in the middle of the crowded room.

He averted his eyes and looked away, didn’t care if that meant he lost because she - quite frankly - terrified him. This was someone who obviously didn’t care about masks and walls and decent fucking courtesy and instead stared straight into a person’s soul as non-self-righteous judge, jury, and executioner. Ed had never been one for the political run-around, had been told more times than he could count that every expression was a giant flashing neon sign to what he was really feeling, hence the whole reason the Fullmetal outfit had the hood. But, there were lines and Hawkeye played hopscotch with them.

Her gaze didn’t move, or even waver, until Mustang called for her quietly, and she moved forward to hand him a set of files that she grabbed off of one of the tables stacked against the wall. She didn’t look at him again.

After another recap, Mustang finally dismissed them and she trailed after him, Hughes leading them towards his office. Ed sat, watched Beth make a large cross-hatched star next to a circled ‘bus schedule/pass?’ before she looked up at him and smiled.

“Hope wherever your mind is, it’s nice,” she said, lightly. “I hear Hawaii is great this time of year.”

“Don’t like the tropics,” Ed mumbled, and stood. She followed quickly, and together they headed out the door together.

The obvious attempt at ending the conversation didn’t work. Beth poked him with her star-pen. “What’s up, boss? You seem more rage-filled than usual.”

“Just a tough couple of nights,” Ed shrugged. Beth and Aiden and the others had no idea that Ed had watched a pillar-like figure in his life get murdered, and that’s the way he wanted to keep it. Beth was older than Ed, but it felt like he had decades on her, and Aiden was what Ed was lucky Al didn’t turn out to be, while Eric was the friend he supposed he could have if he ever saw them outside of work. Even calling Russel Ed’s friend was cutting it close - though Ed knew, he knew, that they all wouldn’t hesitate to slap the friend label on him.

If keeping his distance meant keeping other people safe, then Ed would deal with it. It was only equivalent.

“I’m going to head out early,” Ed said as Beth plopped into her chair and started looking through the folders that had amassed. He knew it was an assholish thing to do considering the backlog that had piled up, but Beth smiled up at him and nodded (and right then, he knew that she knew something - either from Hughes or from casual observation) and didn’t give him the lecture he was expecting.

“Alright, boss,” Beth said, and winked. “Tell your hot date I said hi.”

The blush bloomed on Ed’s face before he could stop it, and he rolled his eyes. “See you tomorrow, Beth.”
“Bye, boss,” she called, lightly, and he closed the lab’s glass door behind him.

It wasn’t a date - but he did have an appointment to keep at First Central Bank.

The cashier blushed when he looked up, before he fumbled with a pen, and licked his lips. Ed shifted.

“Can I - how can I help you?” the man said, and Ed blinked at him. He was a blond, the pale sort of blond, with light blue eyes, and Ed was attracted - he was human, damnit - but he really didn’t have the time to flirt.

“I need to speak with Robert MacKenzie?” Ed questioned, tilting his head to the side just barely. The cashier straightened the waist coat on his uniform. “Is he in? I’m interested in setting up another account in addition to the one I have.”

Ed hated fancy speak. He had grown up in the part of the city where everyone chopped their words in half, and then traveled with his grandmother’s people who were a whole mess of languages, and then his grandfather, who spoke broken German and English and another language entirely, and getting through a conversation without blending two words together was nearly impossible. Then in the orphanage, when everyone had slung their words together and fucked up their pronouns. Ed had gone to public school after their grandfather had died, the shitty one in the slums, but he had thanked everything that he had he knew Hughes, who lived in one of the better districts with a better school, because Ed wasn’t quite sure he would never gotten Al into said school without their address. Al never fucked up his pronouns or ended sentences with ‘got’ or used ‘ain’t’. Rose could take Al to the highest level party society had to offer and he would blend in perfectly while Ed scowled at the fact that he had to wear a tie.

The cashier, though, apparently didn’t care how Ed spoke considering he could barely speak himself. He tripped over his words before picking up the phone next to him and speaking into it, apparently connected to MacKenzie’s secretary.

“Do you have an appointment?” the cashier asked, wincing. Ed shook his head, and leaned forward.

“It’s kind of urgent, though. I’m looking to go on vacation, you see, and I have some assets I need to put away.”

The cashier stuttered out a nod, before repeating Ed’s words into the phone. There was a pause, and then the cashier smiled.

“He can see you in twenty minutes. Mr. MacKenzie has an appointment at four he needs to take care of and then he’s free. Is that alright?”

“Perfect,” Ed smiled, and leaned off of the counter. “I’ll be waiting right over there.”

He gestured towards the set of leather couches in the middle of the room, in front of the set of office desks and decorative folded screens. First Central Bank had always been on the lavish side, with marble floors and pillars and a painted ceiling three stories up. The long set of cashiers were set up against the wall to the right, and the wall to the left were entire floors that held the office, cut away so that Ed could see up all the way to the very top floor.

His grandfather had an account with First Central Bank, one that once held a truly ridiculous amount of money that Ed and Al eventually dwindled through between funeral costs for their father, mother, and grandfather, keeping their grandfather’s apartment maintained before they could legally sell it,
putting Ed through college even with his scholarships, and then Al, and funding Fullmetal’s career. It still had a decent amount that Ed refused to touch now. He planned to give it to Al when Al finally moved his ass and married Winry (or married whoever, or just started his life separate from Ed), but until then it sat, gathering dust.

Their mother had a fair bit of money but that was emptied out with the legal costs of getting Ed and Al out of the orphanage in combination with the money Ed had saved, and what was left was put into their grandfather’s account. Al had wanted Ed to use it to buy his bike, but then that would have defeated the purpose of buying his bike in the first place.

He hadn’t been in this bank since the hostage incident, when Envy - or, excuse Ed, the Dragon (insert eye-roll) - had taken sixteen people hostage and nearly a hundred thousand dollars times that. Ed still had yet to find him, or the money he took. Out of the years Ed had been Fullmetal, there had only been three times he ever felt like a (cough) superhero - and yes, that terminology embarrassed him, even though most newspapers used that and ‘vigilante’ varyingly. The first time had been his ‘debut’ - or rather when the public had first noticed him because Ed had brought that freaking crazy religious freak down with the scarred face. The second time was the General Hakuro incident - which shall not be discussed because it happened a day before and was the leading cause to the Mustang incident. And the final was the bank incident.

Luckily the cashier from before tapped his shoulder before Ed could start thinking about that. The blond shifted, and smiled down at Ed (and he was taller than Ed, but not for long - Ed would grow, he would), before gesturing towards the elevator. “He’s right on the top floor, and to the right. It’s a huge office, you can’t miss it. Would - Would you like for me to come with you?”

“That’s alright,” Ed grinned. “I’m pretty good with directions. Thanks for your help.”

The cashier started. “Oh - you’re welcome! Um-”

Ed nodded, and side-stepped around him, walking towards the elevator, and ignored the tinge of guilt he felt. Maybe - if he wasn’t in the middle of chasing down a lead - maybe he’d flirt back, go out for a drink and then -

And then what? He sighed as he stepped into the silver-plated elevator and glanced at his warped reflection. He had been wearing a red sweater - the kind people wore to church - and had stuffed it over his white Star Wars long sleeve in an attempt to not look like a punk. Against the wall, the red swirled and blurred, and Ed ducked his eyes away when he realized he wasn’t searching for his reflection, but Fullmetal’s.

He needed sleep. That’s what this was. He needed sleep.

The elevator dinged once, twice, and a final time for the doors slid open. To his left the wall was cut away, showing the very bottom floor and the cashier booths, and Ed stared down at it, leant against the railing for just a second, before moving away towards the right, down the hallway.

The office was impossible to miss. Huge double doors and a secretary typing away at a keyboard. Ed opened his mouth, but she held up a finger, finished her sentence, and then looked up at him over her half-moon glasses.

“Name?” she drawled. Ed tilted his head.

“Edward Milton.”

The secretary leveled him with an unimpressed glare. “You have ten minutes.” She gestured towards
the double doors and turned back to her computer, continuing her clacking. Ed blinked down at her, before walking around her desk to the double doors.

He knocked once and then walked in, never really one for waiting. The noise must have started the occupant inside because the man who was standing over his desk jumped slightly. He was older, white hair parted in an obvious comb over with an expensive looking suit. Ed summoned up his most tolerant smile took a step forward, extending his left hand.

"Sorry," he spoke, and made sure to make every word clear. "I didn’t mean to surprise you."


"Edward Milton," Edward said, and shook the man’s head. "I’m interested in setting up a sub-account."

"Wonderful, wonderful," MacKenzie clapped his hands together and walked around his desk to sit down. "I’ll need a birth certificate, proof of residency, and a statement from your employer."

"I don’t have any of that on me, I’m afraid," Ed said, and sat down. "I’m more interested in information. I’m looking to go on vacation, you see. I need to make the proper arrangements, but I need to make sure you’re the man I need before I do so."

MacKenzie’s gaze suddenly turned sharp. "Ah - Mr. Milton, was it? I think I can be very helpful."

"Wonderful. I was thinking about someplace south; warmer climates and all that," Ed said, and leaned back against the chair. "I’m a bit worried about the blockades, obviously but-"

"I’m sure you won’t have any problems with that," MacKenzie shook his head. "Of course, that is - if you have the right documentation."

"My main concern," Edward smiled. "Can you help me?"

"Yes, I believe so," MacKenzie nodded and leaned forward. "I must say, I’ve heard it’s easier to travel in pairs."

Ed narrowed his eyes, just barely. Was he fishing for information? Or money? Ed could use Al, talk about the brother he was close with - but what if -

"My-" Edward paused for a second and did not bite his lip. "Close friend might be interested in coming."

"A name?" MacKenzie questioned, raising an eyebrow. Ed did not panic.

"Roy," Ed said, without meaning to, and smiled as coyly as he could - which he had been told could be quite coy. "You’ll forgive me if I withhold the last name. I don’t think he’d appreciate me giving it out to people I’ve only met once."

MacKenzie laughed. "That’s fine with me," he said, and checked his clock. "I’m afraid I have another appointment. Tomorrow I have time, if you bring yours and your...friend’s documentation, I’m sure you’ll have a wonderful vacation."

That easy, then? Ed smiled. "Wonderful. If I could ask, though, for a sample for tomorrow. I want to make sure my trust isn’t misplaced - no offense."
“None at all,” MacKenzie shook his head and stood. “If you’ll excuse me.”

“Of course,” Ed murmured, and stood as well as MacKenzie walked around the desk and stuck out his hand and Ed shook it on instinct - didn’t even realize he had used his right hand (the automail one) until MacKenzie’s eyes darted downwards. Ed pulled his hand back. “Sorry. I’ve been told I have a strong grip.”

Whatever was on MacKenzie’s face was gone. The smile returned. “That’s quite alright. I’ve been told I have quite the grip myself. Tomorrow, then, Mr. Milton.”

Edward nodded again, and turned towards the door, walking past the secretary as the door closed behind him. He flexed his automail hand, jaw clenched. He had made a mistake - he knew he made a mistake. But would it be the fire to chase out the rat, or the warning signal?

He had wanted to finally catch up on sleep, but now he couldn’t risk it. He would watch the bank - more specifically, Robert MacKenzie - until he left, and then he would follow him. Maybe, if he was lucky, he wouldn’t even need to show up tomorrow.

MacKenzie didn’t leave the bank until almost nine o’clock. By the time the man was walking to his Porché Ed had fallen asleep nearly five times for twenty minutes increments. He was nearly on the sixth time before he saw the familiar man leave the back door towards the employees garage.

Ed made sure that the hood on Fullmetal’s long jacket was clipped before he took the running jump across the building he was perched on onto another lower one and climbing down into the alleyway where he had hidden his bike. He could barely make out MacKenzie’s Porché as he carefully took his bike around the street and into another hidden alleyway, giving him better access.

The man was reading a newspaper by his car, keys dangling forgetful in his grip, and Ed could feel the impatience rising and he rolled his eyes, propping his bike up behind a dumpster and waiting for MacKenzie to get into his car and actually do something.

And then, as if Ed had screamed his own thought aloud, MacKenzie looked up and looked directly at Fullmetal, who froze as his instincts went wild and pushed away from his bike, dove wildly out of the way as his body flung itself to the side into a crouch.

“Damn,” MacKenzie said as he wrenched the steel bar out of the concrete. “Missed.”

Ed stared at him, and then looked back to the MacKenzie who was still in front of his car and in one practiced motion, Ed twisted his arm
backwards and backflipped out of the way, wrenching the steel bar out of the man’s hand. MacKenzie yelped as his arm twisted, and Ed struck out with the bar, slicing across the man’s arm.

The suit ripped and tore off on the rod, and MacKenzie scowled. “You’re paying for that!”

But what caught Ed’s attention was the red tattoo that was now visible on the side of the man’s forearm, a snake twisted into an ‘eight’ or an upwards ‘infinity’ symbol, at the top the head angled to eat it’s own tail and at the midsection were two wings. Above the top was a crown.

“You’re fucking joking,” Ed swore; because he hadn’t seen that symbol before, but he had seen the crowned, winged, circular ouroboros that his mother had always tried to hide that was tattooed onto her breast bone, and the one Solaris had on her chest that she usually hid with her makeup, and the crowned winged snake that wrapped around a cross that his grandfather had kept on a patch - that Ed had chose to wore on his back.

“Not quite,” MacKenzie said, and darted forward. For the next few minutes, Ed danced in and out of the man’s attempted attacks. He was good - fast - but Ed had a better teacher and even with minimum sleep, Ed kept out of the man’s way.

At least - he tried. MacKenzie darted forward suddenly and Ed couldn’t get up the steel pipe in time, and the man - in a move that should have hurt - caught the tip between his fingers and used the leverage to wrench it out of Ed’s grip, tipping him off balance. Ed hurled himself forward, ready to vault forward into a handstand, but MacKenzie lashed out and caught him in the stomach with his elbow, swiping backwards.

Ed went flying. He didn’t know how but suddenly he was against the dumpster, choking out a glob of blood. It didn’t feel like anything was broken, but his lip was split, and his hood had been wrenched off, half torn around his neck, ripping off their hooks. Maybe it was from the hit to the ribs he had taken from Lance days before, but Ed’s chest burned. Something had broken, maybe, or at least cracked, and Ed felt the after effects.

MacKenzie stood in front of him, twirling the steel pipe into his fingers before bringing it up above his head, pointed end downwards. Ed snarled out a curse, prepared to fight to the last breathe - fuck, sorry Hughes, didn’t mean to make you feel like shit, Winry you were right, I did die in an back alley, Al, Al, god I’m sorry don’t hate me don’t hate the world it isn’t the world’s fault keep moving forward -

Shit, shit -

Sorry, Roy, I lied - I lied -

MacKenzie stabbed downwards, Ed pushed himself backwards against the dumpster, eyes pressed shut, ribs burning, lips pressed together, ready for the hit.

A gunshot rung out, echoing against the alley walls. Ed tensed even tighter, but the hit never came. There was clatter of metal on concrete and Ed opened his eyes just as MacKenzie fell to his knees and slumped over. Ed stared - stared as the blood leaked out of the wound on the side of his head and then the entire body - disintegrated. The man’s skin began to flake off and the entire body turned to the dust. The last thing to go was the tattoo, that seemed to burn a darker shade of red, before it too collapsed into nothing.

When Ed couldn’t stare anymore, he turned towards the alleyway opening to see the blue uniformed figure step forward into the streetlight, and Ed couldn’t help bark out a single laugh at the absolute irony. It eventually dissolved into helpless laughter as he sat in what seemed to be some sort
of...clone’s dust remains while the gun was pocketed and then -

Ed caught the flash of movement, and without thinking his laughter cut off and he reached into his belt, grabbing the throwing knife he kept around the rim of it, and he threw it forward, launching forward to grab Hawkeye around the waste and push her out of the way.

The knife connected and MacKenzie dropped his own knife as blood began to well from his forehead, where Ed’s knife was buried. After a second he dropped, and broke into dust as well.

Hawkeye - Fullmetal on top of her, both staring at the heap of dust - cocked her head to the side. “I believe you’ve just killed the man I just killed.”

“Try saying that five times fast,” Fullmetal muttered, and leaned off of her, trying to stand but his ribs shouted angrily at him and he collapsed onto one knee, left arm around his waist. Okay - so he wasn’t standing anytime soon.

“You’re hurt,” Hawkeye said flatly. “Broken ribs?”

“Cracked, most likely,” Fullmetal said, and then realized that Hawkeye had just saved him from being killed and then he had just saved Hawkeye from being killed.

Let’s rephrase that correctly. First Lieutenant Hawkeye had just saved Fullmetal from being killed and then Fullmetal just saved First Lieutenant Hawkeye from being killed from what seemed to be some guy’s clone.

“Why aren’t you shooting at me?” Fullmetal questioned. Hawkeye looked at him, like she was horribly unimpressed, and then he realized that his hood was in tatters around his neck and that she wasn’t looking at Fullmetal - she was looking at Edward Elric. “Ah,” Ed said, eloquently. “Fuck.”

“The Colonel would be very displeased if I had the opportunity to sit two inches away from Fullmetal and I didn’t bring him in,” she murmured. Ed stared at her, ready to bolt; his bike was right around the corner, he could make it - maybe. He might have to actually flee the country, which, talk about ironic, but he could do it.

“I suppose he would be,” Ed said, just as quiet. Hawkeye exhaled through her nose.

“He would also be very displeased - and perhaps even distressed - if I arrested Edward Elric under the pretense that he was Fullmetal.”

Ed felt his jaw clench. Just a short run to his bike. “Perhaps.”

Hawkeye made a small hum. “Yes, you’re right. He would be very distressed. One could even say, heartbroken.”

“You’re trying to guilt trip me,” Ed scowled, and forced himself to his feet. “Why the hell are you trying to guilt trip me?”

“He would also be very displeased that I lied and left work early to trail you to the bank, and then back to your apartment and witnessed you climb out your window as Fullmetal twenty minutes later, and watch you watch the bank.” Hawkeye stood as well, dusting off her uniform. “I doubt, however, that he would be very displeased that we managed to save each other’s lives within the span of two minutes.”

“The hell are you trying to do, Lieutenant?” Ed growled, and took a step backwards. Hawkeye tilted her head to the side.
“At the moment? Understand. I witnessed two identical men both turn into nothing but dust.” She stared at him. “You’re hurt. I have a first-aid kit. Come.”

Ed really wasn’t going to follow, but she extended a hand, and he realized that for all his pep-talk he really couldn’t even get to his bike. He scowled. “Did you drive here?”

“I walked,” Hawkeye said, and Ed took her hand and leant against her shoulder. “Your bike?”

“Around the corner. Can you ride?”

“I’ve had lessons, though I don’t own one. It’s been awhile however.”

Ed looked up to the sky for a quick prayer. “As long as you’re better than Hughes. Please be better than Hughes.”

Hawkeye’s expression didn’t change, but he got the impression she was amused with him. “I will try.”
Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

You all thought it was Roy, but it wasn't. In which we have some more exposition and flashbacks. Don't worry about those flashbacks, they aren't italicized and you'll know when they're there.

Chapter Notes

Fun Facts About This Story:

1. It was originally called Bruce Wayne's Got Nothing On You.
2. You may have noticed the lack of me mentioning Ed's automail leg. Well, that's because he has both legs. However, one of them might not be there to stay. *eyebrow wiggle*
3. Same with Roy's eye. *eyebrow wiggle to the extreme*
4. ARE THOSE SEQUEL THINGS OR IN THIS FIC WE JUST DON'T KNOW YET
5. Okay, because I'm anal I put a TON of thought into Ed's development - he still is missing a father figure but his sense of righteousness comes from his father and his grandfather - not like original!Ed. I just - god this fic is too complicated. It required a fuck ton of thought especially because of his lineage, hence this chapter's exposition.
6. Read by only myself. D: Thank you for sticking with me so far and for all the kind words. Guys, this chapter is for you. Or, it would be, if I wrote it with you guys in mind, but I already wrote it. Whoops.
7. If you're still sticking with me after this chapter, bless you.
8. Also, I still have no idea what country this is set in. Somewhere in Europe - the way I kinda a reason it out is that World War II set a lot of countries' borders, and maybe an another country popped up because of that? Because it was settled earlier?? IDK.
9. Also, if you guess who Beth is, you win a prize.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

run fast for your mother, run fast for your father

run for the children, for your sisters and brothers,

leave all your love and longing behind

you can’t carry it with you if you want to survive

the dog days are over, the dog days are done

can you hear the horses, cause here they come

and i never wanted anything from you
All Ed really remembered was holding on for dear life as Hawkeye maneuvered around traffic (is that what it felt like when people rode with him?) and her helping him up the stairs to her apartment after she parked his bike into her garage. Then he remembered sitting on her couch after looking around her small, sparse two room apartment and then - nothing. Most likely, he passed out, because when he woke up his shirt, jacket, and shoes were gone and there were tight white military-bandages around his chest and his ribs hurt significantly less.

“Good,” Hawkeye said, and Ed realize she was holding his jacket, staring at his ruined hood. “I was wondering when you would wake.”

“Sorry,” Ed groaned out, and rubbed the sleep out of his eye. Then he realized that without his shirt his automail was exposed - or at least the port and white flesh cover was. Hawkeye’s gaze didn’t linger on it and she sat at a small table, a light on overhead, as she inspected his hood.

“Your jacket is damaged,” she said, flatly. “You’ll have to get a new one.”

Ed gave a short, tired laugh and was pinned with a sharp look in response. He winced before he forced himself to stand. “I’m not - I wasn’t. I’m not laughing at you. Just - here.”

He sat in the chair across from her and grabbed a pen from the rack on the window and a stray piece of paper, sketching out a quick array before taking the jacket from her gently and laying the hood on top of it. She had a letter opener as well, and before she could do anything he had cut the skin on his thumb, adding to the already numerous small white scars on his hand, and squeezed a single drop onto the array, before pressing his hand to it.

The blue light crackled once in warning before it flashed, filling the room with a wide arc of energy, and the ruined pieces of his coat hovered in stasis, before the cloth fused back together. Clothes were always more difficult because the weren’t solid substances in themselves, made up of millions of threads, so Ed always had to focus more - which is why he didn’t notice Hawkeye standing above the table until after he was done.

Her gaze was sharper than usual. “I’d like an explanation. I was lead to believe that the tricks you used were just that; tricks.”

Instinct dictated that he refuse - but, she had stayed up and dealt with his limp body and nursed it back to passable health. Equivalent exchange.

“I suppose you do.” Ed sighed and leaned back in the chair, before wincing. “Can I tell you on the couch, though?”

Hawkeye nodded once, and helped him stand before leading him towards the couch. She sat down next to him, and he realized that her jacket and tie was gone, the first four buttons on her shirt open, her suspenders loose around her waist. Ed sighed and ran a hand through his bangs.

“This is - I’ve only explained it once and I’m not sure she really understood it from what I was trying to say, so just - uh. Bear with me.”

“I’ll keep an open mind,” Hawkeye murmured, and Ed leaned against the cushions and sighed.
“Alright, from the beginning I guess. Uh - World War II. Or, I guess, before that. My granddad - he was Edward Elric. If you asked him he’d say he was born some time in the 1800’s which makes no sense because he was eighteen in 1924. He just - right,” Ed tapered off lamely when he saw Hawkeye’s blank look. “World War II. My grandpa and his brother - Alphonse - protested the war. Basically they did this whole thing where they petitioned the countries fighting and-”

“I know,” Hawkeye said, cutting it. “Everyone who lives in the city is aware of Edward and Alphonse Elric’s efforts for the war. They’re the reason we avoided one of the biggest bloodsheds in history.”

“Right,” Ed said, and squirmed like he usually did when someone mention his family. “But - I mean. My parents. My granddad never really loved my grandma. They were cool with that - they married so that she could cross the border with his visa, and I guess they got drunk once and woke up and nine months later my mom was born.” Ed blew out a breath. “My grandmother she was a Romany, Rom - a gypsy. My mom’s really dark, darker than I am. I only saw my grandma a few times that I can remember before she died. Then - my dad died off duty in a robbery. My mom died in a car accident and then-” he twitched his right arm. Hawkeye’s attention dropped to it. “We went over a bridge. The car flipped and was sinking into the bank and the metal - it was all twisted, the roof caved in, and I held it up so that my brother, Al, could get out and swim to shore, but the metal collapsed and shaved off my arm to my elbow. The mud that got in it, though, from the bank - it was about an hour until we got help - it got infected and it had to be cut off to the socket.”

“I’m sorry,” Hawkeye said, devoid of pity, but her eyes were sympathetic. Ed gave her a quick twist of his lips.

“s alright. Worked out well, considering. I had a normal prosthetic for about five years, and this thing - it’s called automail - used to be on my granddad, but when he passed away, he gave it to me. But…before that. My mom - my granddad taught her everything she knew, and when she was around my age she got - she fell in bad a crowd. This group called the Homunculus.”

At Hawkeye’s slightly confused look, Ed backtracked. “There are these stories about these golems, these people who can be made through non-natural means, the perfect human. They were led by this woman named Dante, one of my granddad’s colleagues. My granddad - he had this.” Ed swallowed. “He practiced alchemy, which, it’s not exactly what you think it is - none of that kitchy crap.. I never found out where he learned how to do it but he taught my mom, tried to keep the legacy alive, and she joined this group that practiced this form of alchemy - this really, really specific form of alchemy. They could only do one-one things. My mom liked to play with water, played with the molecules in the atmosphere, dropped the freezing points - but apparently someone got killed in the group and she wanted out. She went to my granddad and he broke off contact with Dante, but they still - it didn’t make them hate each other.”

Ed stared at his hands. “Always thought it was really fuckin’ ironic that my mother was supposed to be this great water alchemist and she couldn’t save herself from drowning.” Ed shook his head. “Anyway. She met my dad a year later, had me, and that was it until she died. Then we went to live with my granddad.”

“Edward Elric?”

“Namesake, yeah,” he shrugged. “He was - he was loosing his mind. He started writing down everything obsessively. Winry’s granddad - Alphonse - he died a couple of years back, and I think it was setting in that he wasn’t going to live forever, even if he was pushing for it. There’s - I have entire volumes of the most bizarre stuff. It’s not in order, everything’s just what he was thinking at the time, and the brunt of it’s alchemy and how to practice it, how you have to use your own life
force - blood - to power it because it’s like a reflection, the energy needs to arch up through you and then your blood and then down to the array.”

Hawkeye was silent, and Ed went on, quiet. “The thing is, he wasn’t the only one. Alchemy’s been around for - ages. Magic’s been around for ages. People have been able to do it, they just don’t see it as a science. I know there are some dangerous people out there - I mean,” he laughed. “Look at what I do for a living.”

“And how did you start doing what you do for a living?” Hawkeye inquired, leaning forward just barely.

Ed blinked. “My dad was close with Hughes; they were in the same division when they were in the police academy, after Hughes transferred from the military academy into the police one. I mean, he was over for dinner and stuff like that all the time. When I got out of college he offered me a job, or kinda suggested it as a joke and I jumped on it. I spent six months in the police academy before I graduated, and then two years as a police officer in homicide under him. When the promotion opened up, I became a crime scene investigator, and then eventually I got up to head of the day shift, and I’m not technically supposed to be in the lab too, but a forensics lab is still a lab and a crime scene’s nothing but parts of a equation, nothing too hard. It helped - and when I became Fullmetal.”

He sighed. “I lived in the bad part of town after my grandpa died, did a lot of bad stuff to give Al a good childhood. I saw the kind of people my dad used to deal with - and he kept - he always used to believe in second chances.”

He licked his lips. “My granddad, he used to say all the time, whenever we were being little shits, he used to tell us, ‘There’s an entire world outside of our own. You can’t live your life believing that your world is the only one that matters. You can’t keep your eyes closed and pretend that problems don’t exist.’ And I just - I mean, obviously I didn’t start running around in a freaking coat and pretending I was a superhero. I just saw a crime and I stopped it, and I mean, I was a police officer when I was doing it, even back in the academy. It wasn’t out of character. I could, so why not? It didn’t do anybody harm. I stopped a mugging here and there, caught a robber, and then it just...didn’t stop.”

Hawkeye was silent, for a good long time. “Tonight-”

“I have no fuckin’ idea what the hell that was,” Ed said, shaking his head. “Some kind of alchemy, some sort of mind link and transmuting the dust into a body shape - I don’t - Envy, I mean,” eye roll here. “’The Dragon’ uses this complicated as shit array to transmute dust into a thick layer so he can take on anyone’s appearance, but that’s the only thing I can think of that’s like this. It’s just - it’s bizarre.”

“Is this related to the Halsey case?” Hawkeye asked, bluntly. Ed winced.

“I don’t even know. I think it might - but there’s only a small connection. I have to find out more about it. But, considering that I was nearly killed, I think I’m on the right track.”

“Is that how you usually judge a situation?” Hawkeye questioned, halfway between an amused sort of air and a scolding sort of tone. Ed shrugged. She sighed. “Well considering how close you came, I’d say there’s a good chance you’re on the right path. Would you like breakfast?”

The question was sudden and out of place. Ed stared, before nodding because - food. “Yeah, actually, that’d be great.”

“I’ll make some eggs,” Hawkeye said, standing and walking towards her kitchen. “It’s just about four in the morning. If you’d like to sleep, you can use my bed.”
He meant to be polite and protest, but he couldn’t do anything more than getting out a thank you and walking to the bed in the corner of the room, flopping down on it. He was out in seconds.

Hawkeye woke him about forty minutes later long enough to eat an entire plate of eggs before he was back asleep. The second time she woke him she was dressed in a new, pressed uniform and was pinning back her hair.

“Good morning,” she said, and inclined her head, fastening her clip. Ed yawned.

“Morning,” he mumbled, and blinked away the sleep. “Thanks for lettin’ me crash here.”

“It’s not a problem,” Hawkeye said, and picked up her gun from the side table and clipped it into the holster on the back of her waist. “I do hope you realize that this means I expect to be made of aware of every new detail that arises, now.”

Ed winced. “I figured you’d say that.”

“I will filter the information through the Colonel and deem whether or not he should become privy to it. I will keep your secret safe, however.”

“Even though you were supposed to shoot-to-kill on sight?” Ed questioned. Hawkeye nodded sharply and buttoned up her jacket.

“Yes, even so.” She finished her jacket and turned towards him. “I’m expected to be in the office at seven. You may stay here as long as you need provided you lock the door behind you. If anyone asks, you went to the bank, and then home. I went to the spa, though you’ll have no idea about that.”

Ed shrugged. “Simple enough cover story, got it.”

“I have two more questions, however,” Hawkeye said, and Ed stared up at her. “Approximately a year ago—” Ah, fuck. “General Hakuro was held hostage by you. You said that he was trafficking arms across the northern border. There was absolutely no evidence. Was that true?”

“Bullshit there was no evidence,” Ed snarled and nearly stood up before he forced himself down. “Clever little shit - the paintings in his house all came from up north. That’s his pay off. All he has to do is put those into the bank and liquidate them and there’s the payment. It’s a fail safe. The dealer he listed that he bought the paintings from goes to an answering machine and a P.O Box, but who’s going to investigate a bunch of paintings he’s got proper owner paperwork for?” Ed could feel the rage curdling inside of him, and he tightened his automail hand into a fist. “And then the fuckin’ bastard turned it around on me; I didn’t even touch him and suddenly people are hollering that I got a knife to his neck and the asshole plays it up - and then—” He didn’t want to think about the ‘and then’. But Hawkeye wasn’t letting him get away with it.

“You came out to negotiate peace terms,” Hawkeye prodded, and Ed closed his eyes, hunched forward on himself.

“You mean I was tricked,” he murmured. “You think I’d ever have thought about being in the open if I knew I was gonna get a bullet in the arm for my troubles? You’re freaking lucky my right hand can reflect bullets, and it ricocheted and cut open my left arm instead of digging a hole in my head. Don’t wanna talk about this.”

“You only agreed once you heard it was the then Lieutenant Colonel who was going to be talking to you.”
Ed groaned and threw his arm to the side. “Because I fucking trusted him and looked how well that turned out for me. Bastard took one look at me and pulled out his gun and shot.”

“He was promoted because of that shot,” Hawkeye murmured. “The next day he went to talk to you.”

Not Fullmetal. Edward. The Mustang incident. Ed closed his eyes and felt another groan bubble up his throat. “Do we have to talk about this?”

“Would you like me to call the Colonel and chose the alternative?”

Ed opened one eye to glare at her before closing his eye and falling back onto the bed. His ribs ached. “Fucking hell, fine. Day after I woke up, it was a Saturday, and felt like shit - which people usually feel like when they’ve been shot at. But I had - I had work. It’d be suspicious if I didn’t show up and it wasn’t that bad, and I’m on my way to work angry at fucking everything and the freakin’ last person I want to see in the world calls my name and stops me on the street.” His eyes flew open and he glared at the ceiling. “What was I supposed to do? Explain? ‘Oh, hey, Roy, how are you doing? Oh me? Well, you shot me last night so - not as well as I could be, yeah I’d love dinner, thanks.’ Fucking right. I wasn’t - I couldn’t.”

He clenched his hand and refused to look at Hawkeye. “Our grandmother was psychic did you know that? It wasn’t bullshit - you should have - you could have this one memory and she’d be able to tell you what it was down to the last detail. My mom, it sounds ridiculous but she always used to know what would happen before it did. Day before my grandma died she drove us across the country and got us there right so she could spend the last hour with her. Before my dad died she tried to make him stay home and three hours later, well, and day before the accident she was worrying about this huge storm even though the skies were clear and they said it’d be clear for the next week. Next day, storm rolled through, she swerved, and that was it. Al - he always - he always knows what people are feeling. ‘s why he’s so good with people I suppose and he says - so stupid - he says I can ‘see into a person’s heart.’” Ed scoffed.

“Two hours ago I didn’t believe in alchemy,” Hawkeye said calmly. “What you’re saying is perfectly reasonable.”

Ed closed his eyes. “Third time I saw Roy Mustang, Al was with me - joked about my - he calls it an ‘ability’. Mustang asked me to see what kinda person he was. I took his hand and I - he was-”

After a period of silence, Hawkeye prodded, “He was?”

“Good,” Ed murmured. “He was good. Protective and warm and caring, and I looked him straight in the eye and said ‘My sixth sense is telling me you’re a bastard - but I didn’t really need a sixth sense for that.’ He laughed.”

“So, you lied.”

“Of course I did. It fucking terrified me. Only person I’ve ever felt like that was my dad and my brother. And then we - and then after Hakuro, we were on the street and I told him, I said ‘I think you got the wrong idea of where I was going with this’ and ‘you really are a bastard and I don’t want to waste my time with you’ and then,” Ed laughed, bitterly. “ ‘I honestly don’t want to ever see you again, and if I never do, then it’ll be too soon.’ Walked away before he could say anything but I still - I still remember the look on his face and I wanted to be happy, the bastard shot me, he leveled a gun at my head and shot me, but I just remember thinking about what might have happened if I had actually told him and that made me even more terrified. And then what freaked me out even more was the fact that I was so angry but I was - I mean I should have been happy to get him out of my
life, but I just felt - like shit. Next time I saw him was a little over a month later when he was visiting Hughes and he never saw me because I stuffed myself inside of a broom closet until he was gone.”

Hawkeye was quiet, and stared at him, studying him. Even turned away Ed could feel her gaze.

“You made a mistake,” she said, bluntly, and start gathering her rain jacket and her keys. Ed turned towards her, but before he could speak she continued on. “You know for a fact that the Colonel is a good man. I don’t mean to dictate to you, but you should have told him. I think you would have found yourself in a much more pleasant situation.”

Ed stared at her. “Well, there isn’t anything I can do now.”

Hawkeye stopped in the doorway and turned to him. “If you honestly believe that, then no, I suppose there isn’t.”

The door clicked softly behind her and Ed ran through her last words in her mind before groaning and running a hand through his hair. It was far to early in the morning to deal with the headache that was building behind his eyes.

The story goes like this.

“Why’re we in a freakin’ hipster coffee shop?” Ed groused to Al, who bounced lightly in place in line. The room was filled with university kids and a few people in suits, hurrying to get their coffee before the work day began. Ed honestly didn’t have the patience for all this; he had a new lead from Solaris about the arms smuggling he had been looking into and while Ed loved caffeine, he hated waiting and the fancy drinks that one could purchase from said ‘freaking hipster coffee shops’. Al turned towards him and shushed him, straining to look at the menu.

“What do you want?” Al questioned, once he sank back onto his heels. Ed’s scowl deepened, and he crossed his arms and glowered. Al - with his freakish height - could just see over the crowns of the line’s heads, but Ed was stuck staring at some guy’s back. It wouldn’t be for long, his growth spurt would come soon, people grew all the time...


Al made a face. “No. It does not.”

Ed responded with a rightfully hurt look on behalf of their coffee maker. They had had the thing since before they were both born. It had dignity, even if it did break down every few hours. Their coffee maker was Ed's friend. "I'm going to remember that the next time you ask for coffee,” Ed hissed. "It'll be four in the morning and you'll be dying and you'll ask for coffee and I'll say 'remember that time at that coffee shop when you dissed our coffee maker, remember that?' And then who's coffee will be crap then?"

"Probably still our coffee maker's," Al said, flatly and stepped forward in line. He frowned. "Brother, you probably should cut back on the caffeine - that's probably why you stopped growing-"

"Who are you calling smaller than a coffee bean?!" Ed raged, turning on Al. Al sighed.

"Oh!" Someone called and elbowed their way through the crowd. "I thought I heard the sound of a miniature explosion."
"Miniature?!" Ed nearly roared, but Al placed a hand on his shoulder and shook his head.

"Please try not to kill Detective Hughes," Al asked, warily. "How would we ever explain that?"

"You wouldn't!" Hughes called cheerfully, and swung an arm over Al and Ed's shoulders. He was dressed in civilian clothes: a purple button up and beige slacks. "And what are we doing on this fine morning?"

Ed growled "Get the hell off," right as Al smiled and said "Morning coffee." Hughes 'ah'ed. "I see, I see," the man continued and Ed stared distrustfully up at him.

"The hell are you doing here, then? Don't you have work to do?" Ed questioned, folding his arms over his chest. "Don't see how ever expect to get that promotion if you're never in the office."

"You wound me, Ed - but I'm actually meeting a friend. In fact..." Hughes trailed off and looked over Ed, waving suddenly. "There he is now!"

"I don't wanna meet your shitty friends," Ed hissed and looked to Al for help, but he was currently ordering and flirting mildly with the barista. If Al could read minds instead of emotions, he'd be currently ignoring an offended yell of 'traitor!' As it was, he was completely blissed out as the barista talked about the animal shelter she volunteered at.

"I'm sure I have no idea what you mean," Hughes said cheerfully and waved over whoever had just come through the door. Ed looked for an escape and didn't find one. "You'll like him, I promise."

"I hate you," Ed hissed. "You know I don't like people and I hate you how could you do this I hate you-"

Hughes' smile widened. "Roy," he greeted and Ed tensed and turned, feeling his nerves turn up even tighter as he looked at the blue-uniformed figure. He was tall, though not overly so, barely matching Hughes (and yet still abnormally tall - Ed was average height, damnit, anyone else was a freak of nature), with messy dark hair Ed was sure wasn't regulation and dark blue eyes that seemed black in the proper light. Embarrassingly enough, Ed could feel his tongue grow thick in his mouth, and he swallowed before turning to Hughes, who was grinning.

"I hate you," Ed said, one last time, resigned, and Hughes shook the man's hand.

"Ed, this is Lieutenant Colonel Roy Mustang; Roy, this is Edward Elric, one of our crime scene technicians," Hughes introduced.

Ed scowled, like he usually did when people mistook him for his grandfather, or brought up his mother, of fucking skimped on the two years of hell that Ed went through in that precinct. "Didn't spent two years in a stupid fucking uniform for you to ignore that promotion, Hughes."

"Ah," Hughes said, and gestured. "Officer Elric. Crime scene investigator." Ed inclined his head, before forcing his gaze up. Mustang blinked at him, before his lips curved into a slow smile, eyes widening just barely.

"Pleasure," the Lieutenant Colonel murmured. "I didn't know you were brining company."

"Didn't bring 'em," Hughes corrected, chipper. "Bumped into Ed and his brother a few minutes ago. We should get a coffee together!"

"I have-" Ed started, right as Mustang spoke with, "We wouldn't to be a bother-" and Ed froze and looked at him, frowning. He opened his mouth to say something like, 'What, you're too good enough
to have coffee with me?' But Al appeared by his shoulder, holding two drinks, and blinked.

"We'd love to talk for a few minutes, but brother and I are needed at the university at ten sharp," Al said cheerfully, which - traitor. "Ed, I got you a marble macchiato."

"A fucking what?" Ed questioned, and stared distrustfully down at the drink. Al sighed and rolled his eyes. "And marble - isn't that whipped cream?"

"White and dark chocolate - it's non-dairy brother, no milk or half-and-half. I made them use soy."

"Oh," Mustang said, jumping into the conversation. "Are you vegan?"


"Ah, then that would explain-" Mustang cut himself off suddenly and Ed just barely caught the edge of Al suddenly frantically shaking his head and waving his hand. Mustang stalled, expression frozen, before continuing on with, "Your delightful complexion."

Ed stared. "Okay."

Al let out a whoosh of air. "Brother, try the coffee. It tastes good, I promise."

"Yeah, well, you promise a lot of stuff," Ed groused and took a sip of his coffee, before humming and staring at the cup. "This is a freakin' coffee? It tastes like a dessert-"

"Ah, the new age," Hughes said, and turned to Mustang. "The usual?"

"Actually, I'll try what he had," Mustang said and gestured to Ed's cup. "I'm curious."

"If you wanna try you can just have some," Ed said bluntly and pressed the cup into Mustang's hand. "Don't spend like eight dollars on something you might not like."

Mustang's expression shifted just barely. "Are you sure-"

"Offered, didn't I?" Ed said lightly and made a gesture with his hand. "Go on, it's alright. It's pretty sweet though."

There was a second pause, before Mustang lifted the drink to his lips and took a sip, making an appreciative sound in the back of his thought. "It's - sweet. A bit too sweet for my tastes, this early. Maybe my regular, then."

"Told you," Ed said, and grinned as Hughes slid away to grab a place in line. "Now you don't have to waste your money."

"Suppose I should thank you," Mustang said. "Let me buy you another coffee sometime, then."

Al choked on his coffee. Ed felt like he was falling through white space and then - "Um-"

"He would love too," Al said, after he got his breath back, and nudged Ed. "It's only equivalent, right?"

Damn. And Ed did enjoy free stuff, and - "Yeah, alright. I gotta work tomorrow late, but - uh - the next day? Um, eleven o'clock?"

"Wonderful," Roy smiled. "I'll meet you here, then. Here," and he reached inside of his pocket for a blank looking business card with two numbers on it and handed it to Ed, who took it, blinking down
at it. "If you'll excuse me, I think Maes is trying to force pictures of his family onto the barista again."

He brushed his shoulder against Ed's - the shop was still crowded - and Ed turned towards him, face turning red as Mustang smirked, and then winked down at him, before he disappeared, presumably to drag Hughes away from his unwilling victims.

Al's grin was huge. Ed stared. "What just happened?"

"You're going on a date on Friday, at eleven, that's what," Al said, and nudged Ed with his shoulder, grinning wide. "And you didn't want to go out for coffee."

"What?" Ed said again, because really, what?

Ed was half way to the lab before he realized he wasn't suppose to be in the lab, and pulling a one-eighty in the middle of traffic and flipped around in the other direction. He had left Hawkeye's apartment almost twenty minutes ago, just after nine o'clock, after he had replaced her sheets and did the dirty dishes in the sink - which were the two plates from breakfast - because Ed didn't feel right stealing her bed for the entire night and then leaving her (nearly impeccable) apartment in less than perfect condition. He did root around in her pantry though, and found it nearly bare save for an extremely old package of dog food and a matching bed and food dish under the bed. Obviously there was no dog in the apartment, and Ed wondered what had happened to it.

He was wearing the same pants, but he had learned long ago to keep a spare shirt inside of his bike for when he didn’t have time to get home. Using Hawkeye’s shower was cutting it, but there was a spare toothbrush in her drawer that was unopened and he combed back his hair into a loose braid that he was going to have to put up into a ponytail when he got to the scene.

There had been quick check in the mirror before he went out and Ed winced. The bags were mostly gone, thank goodness, but now they were replaced with a gash behind his ear from the dumpster he had slammed into, lathered with antiseptic thanks to Hawkeye, and his bottom lip was split open and raw. Luckily most of the damage to his chest was hidden and bound away under his spare shirt - one of his favorites, a worn one his dad used to wear that had a faded Led Zeppelin logo on the front of it. It took twenty minutes more to get to the park and ride next to Halsey’s crime scene and Ed paused for a second, wrenching off his black helmet and combing his hair up into a ponytail. He went through his checklist before anybody saw him; went home early, not that it was anybody's business, and Hawkeye went for a half-a-day at the spa even though Ed had no idea about that.

Hughes was the first person Ed saw, apparently on his way out, and Hughes crossed the parking lot towards Ed, who sat on his bike and leaned forward over the handlebars.

“What the hell happened to you?” Hughes questioned, and raised an eyebrow over his glasses. Ed gave an irritable sigh.

“Got beat up in a back alley,” Ed shrugged. “Nothing new.”

Hughes’ eyebrow didn’t lower. “And how did you get beat up in a back alley?”

Ed furrowed his own eyebrows together. “I think...confirming a lead. You’re commissioner, aren’t you? You know all these fancy people; do you know a Robert MacKenzie? Works at First Central Bank?”

“ Heard of him, but can’t say I’ve met him,” Hughes said, frowning. “Why don’t you ask Mrs. Armstrong?”
Ed glared. “You’re not going to let me forget that I didn’t tell you about that, are you?”

“Nope.”

“Wonderful,” Ed sighed, and shrugged. “You’re right, Rose might know. I’ll give her a call. There’s been an influx of kidnapping cases, right? I think-”

“No,” Hughes said, shaking his head slowly. “The rates are normal.”

Something twitched in the back of Ed’s mind. He had never stopped to confirm Luca’s numbers. “Are you sure? From the slum areas?”

Hughes shook his head. “No. Or at least - if there are - they’re not reporting it.”

Ed ‘hm’ed low in the back of his throat, before climbing off of his bike and clipping his helmet onto the handlebars. “Weird. I - alright. Just, uh, keep an eye out on MacKenzie for me? If he comes across your desk, tell me about it.”

“Will do,” Hughes said, and grinned. “I’ve gotta get back to the office. The mayor wants to hold a press conference today with the media. Roy’s gonna be tickled pink.”

The mayor wanted to hold a press conference, huh? Ed felt his frown deepen. The mayor was only one level underneath the military’s commander-in-chief. The entire country was a militarized government, with Central at it’s center, and if the mayor made a big deal out of the whole clusterfuck then it was only a matter of time before it became a countrywide affair. Not for the first time, Ed was glad that Mustang was in charge of handling military relations because he didn’t want to think what would have happened if they got someone like Archer who would have pulled the military onto them within seconds.

“Is Mustang here?”

“With Lieutenant Hawkeye,” Hughes said, and gestured towards the clump of people. “Two of his other men are here, Havoc and Breda - they’re-”

“I know which ones they are,” Ed murmured, and caught sight of the taller blond and the red-haired man. Hughes looked at him.

“Didn’t know you were introduced,” he said, mildly. “Well, that saves some of the awkwardness.”

“Some of it,” Ed said, rolling his eyes. “See you later, Hughes.” He walked away before he could see Hughes respond, and Ed thought he was in the clear, he really did, but then Hughes called out, ‘Maybe you should try to tell them to not be so rough!’ which rang clear across the parking lot and suddenly Ed felt everyone’s attention on him. He blushed a deep red, and it only worsened with a few officers raised their eyebrows and looked at him with semi-leering glances at his bruised neck and spilt lip. Oh, God, they all thought that - Ed was going to kill Hughes.

Hawkeye’s eyes were on him - a warmer feeling now, and not as squirm inducing - and he thought he saw her lips twitch upwards in some form of amusement, but Ed was quickly distracted by Mustang catching his eye, and then looking away, mouth twisting.

Which, great.

He’d get back Hughes by introducing Elysia to a new curse word the next time he saw her - equivalent exchange, bitch. Gracia would forgive him if he managed to make Elysia promise to never say his choice word in public.
“He’s right,” Havoc said, sidling up next to Ed, cigarette smoking. Ed almost grabbed it and put it out on instinct, but realized that most trace evidence in the scene was ruined by now, what was one more butt of ash? “Pretty bad love bite there, boss.”

“It’s not a fucking hickey,” Ed snarled, and slapped a hand to the gash on his neck which of course bruised purple, lending to the wrong illusion. Why did he bother getting beaten up every night for the people of this fuckin’ city if they were just going to get the wrong idea? “Shut the fuck up.”

“Tetchy in the morning,” Havoc noted, grin widening. “If you ask me, the Colonel lucked out on passing you up.”

Ed froze, stared, stared some more, opened his mouth to yell and what came out was a high-pitched squeak that was somewhere completely offended and bewildered because how the fuck did Havoc know about that?

Well, how did Hawkeye know? Well - wrong example to use. Hawkeye seemed to know everything, and Ed knew why. But - why the fuck did -

“Shut up,” Ed repeated again, voice breaking, feeling the bottom of his stomach drop out. Fucking hell - did everyone know? Did Mustang fucking tell everyone what the fuck- “What the hell - how the fuck do you-”

“Know about you and him?” Havoc said, and blinked. “Hawkeye, of course. Had a office-wide ban on your name for three months.”

Hawkeye. Ed felt the bottom of his stomach disappear entirely. Roy wouldn’t have told the entirely military - besides the fact that it was embarrassing, Roy also liked his privacy, and Ed felt like shit for a few seconds because of course Roy wouldn’t tell, of course he wouldn’t.

“You guys all hate me,” Ed said, flatly. Havoc grinned and nodded.

“The chain goes something like: you made the chief’s life hell, he made our lives hell, we’re gonna make your life hell the only way we can.”

He should have gotten angry - Hawkeye had already confessed to stalking him, what would the rest of them do? - but instead he huffed a quick sigh and averted his gaze. “You guys’d really do anything for him.”


“You know he doesn’t deserve you, right?”

“You really think that?”

He could still remember Mustang’s hand in his, fingers warm and curved over Ed’s own and then - a tightening his stomach, something prodding his chest - Ed knew, could see Roy’s dedication and protectiveness and his caring and it was even, distributed to people close to him but also towards the city - the entire country - as a whole, and (the most terrifying part of all) was the lack of deception there, even though Ed knew for a fact that the man in front of him would manipulate his way to the top if he had to.

“No,” Ed murmured, and exhaled through his nose. “You idiots should learn to mind your own business.”

“Where’s the fun in that, boss?” Havoc questioned, tapping out his cigarette and smirking. “I gotta
“Is that so?” Mustang said, from behind them. Ed slowly closed his eyes and spun around his heel to open them and see Mustang raising an eyebrow down at him, expression just faintly amused but mainly blank. “So glad you could enlighten us with that information.”

“I’m two seconds from going home,” Ed said. “Two seconds.”

“And getting some actual rest?” Mustang inquired, shaking his head. “We can’t have that. I need you to take pictures of the path Halsey walked and map out any possible route he might have taken to where he died.”

If there was a God, he hated Edward. “You want me to take detailed pictures of the entire street and several alley ways?” Ed rephrased, and Mustang nodded. “God, I hate you.”

“That isn’t exactly new information,” Mustang said, dryly. “If you please? I think it’s going to rain.”

Ed scowled and looked up at the clear skies - but, his mother was the one with the freaky premonitions, not Ed, and more than once he had been caught in a random storm that he had no idea was coming. Big storms were usually pretty hard to miss, his automail began to ache and his severed stumps always felt rawer than usual, but Ed sucked at the predicting the weather.

Havoc was gone when Ed turned around, apparently taking the opportunity to get the hell out of dodge, leaving Ed alone with Roy whose gaze kept darting down to his busted lip.

“I wasn’t actual-” Ed fumbled and then stopped. “He was - I was joking. I tripped on the stairs.”

“Whatever you do on your personal time isn’t any business of mine,” Roy said, mildly. “You’ve made that clear.”

Ed could agree and feel shitty about it like he usually did, or protest which he knew he’d regret even later, and being torn between the both of them made him silent. Roy inclined his head after a second, and then walked around Ed who finally found something to say, opened his mouth - but it was too late.

Hawkeye was looking at him again and caught his eye as she trailed after Mustang and she opened her mouth to say something but Ed shook his head and shoved his hands into his pocket. “Don’t really wanna hear it,” he murmured and she studied him for a second, before she nodded and hurried after Mustang.

Someone would be dishing out forensic tools, and Ed began to search for them. He had a job to do, after all, and he didn’t know why but he suddenly felt like it was going to rain.

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Bored, bored, bored. He had taken pictures upon pictures upon pictures and texted Al through out who lectured him for never coming home, worried over the incidence with MacKenzie and Ed’s health, and then helped him reason out why it was a good thing Hawkeye knew the whole story.
The text had read ‘we need someone in ever corner - that’s what you said when you told me you were going to tell Hughes. We have you and Hughes in the police, Solaris in the underground, and now we have Hawkeye in the military. We have every corner covered.’ It wasn’t one text, obviously, more like six straight texts, but Ed felt better and in combination with the sleep he had caught at Hawkeye’s there was a bounce to his step. Which would have been useful if he wasn’t wasting his time taking pictures of absolutely nothing.

He sat with Aiden for lunch who recounted in detail his latest campaign in Halo as the sky began to turn bleak, which Ed drowned out at one point in pure bliss at the burger he was eating which had to be the best thing he had eaten to date, but he probably only thought that because Hawkeye had made him one plateful of okay plain eggs.

“So, then I was like ‘you freaking fucker - what the fuck do you mean you’re not in position? We gotta take this jackass down now’ but GrimAgent is like ‘who the fuck put you in charge’ and I was like ‘I put me in charge now get the fuck in position-’”

“Cool story man,” Ed droned and took another bite of his burger.

Aiden shoved his shoulder. “Fine, Mr. Casanova. Who’s the lucky chick?”

Ed blinked up at him, blankly. Aiden shrugged. “Guy then, whatever man, I don’t judge-”


“Why do I hang out with you people?” Ed muttered under his breath. Aiden grinned.

“You don’t get a choice, remember?” Aiden pointed out. “Wonder how the mayor’s gonna take the news that we’ve got a total of no leads.”

“Hughes will stall,” Ed murmured. “Mayor Forsyth is just gonna soak up the publicity. He’s been pissy ever since all the attention went up north.”

“Still,” Aiden said, and sighed. “You’d think Fullmetal would have brought this guy down by now.”

Ed frowned. “I think he’s been a bit busy with the fucking crime sprees lately.”

“Yeah, but,” Aiden shifted. “Don’t get me wrong, I don’t do his job so I can’t criticize - but I mean we haven’t had a serial killer like this since the freaking 80’s. People are getting worried you know? And since no-one can get out of the country-”

“The panic’s brewing,” Ed finished, and sighed. He knew it was true. The criminals were getting out their claustrophobia by making Ed’s life hell, but what about the civilians? Most likely they felt like mice in a trap, scurrying around frantically and clawing at each other, but not doing anything to get themselves out. “And Fullmetal’s a public figure and if he’s not doing anything, it feels like no-one’s doing anything.”

“Exactly,” Aiden nodded. “It’s the politics of the thing.”

Ed scowled. “I hate politics.”

“Well, yeah - but Fullmetal better get a good hand on them. I know he and Mustang aren’t exactly freakin’ BFFs, but you’d think he’d suck it up and talk to the man - tell him that he’s investigating on his end. Just - something so it doesn’t feel like we’re only standing on one leg, you know?”
Aiden was staring down at his fries, picking at them, obviously completely oblivious to the fact he was making Ed feel like shit. He didn’t - he made sure to keep a semi-public air, because the public was important. Superman was Superman because the people knew Superman. The public meant the line between hero and deviant but the current public figure on this case was Roy Mustang.

“If I get shot at again, it’s your fault,” Ed muttered under his breath. Aiden looked up, blinking.

“Did you say something?”

“No.”

“-okay, okay no need to be so pissy, geez...”

“I ordered for you,” was the first thing Roy said, and Ed blinked as a warm coffee was placed into his palm. “I’m sorry for assuming - but the line.”

“Uh,” and Ed trailed behind Roy as they sat at the only empty table in the entire coffee house. “Thank you.”

“Those were the terms of the agreement, weren’t they?” Roy said, lips lifting upwards, amused. “One coffee? Now that we got that out of the way, how you know Maes?”

“Hughes?” Ed stared. Was this - “Is this an interrogation? Cause, I got my coffee, I can leave now-”

“No,” Roy suddenly said, leaning across the table and into Ed’s space. “No. I had to - it’s a common topic. Usually when one has no idea what to talk about, one finds a shared factor and goes from there.”

“You could have just said ‘I have no idea what to say’ and then we could have played twenty questions or something,” Ed pointed out and relaxed. “He knew my dad. They were pretty close before he died.”

“Oh,” Roy said, and then - “Oh. How - old are you?”


Roy shook his head and visibly relaxed. “No reason. Your father?”

“A cop,” Ed said, and shrugged. “Shot off duty in a car robbery.”

“I’m - sorry,” Roy said and looked genuinely torn up about it. “That’s - your father’s name wouldn’t happen to be Richard, would it?” At Ed’s nod, his frown deepened. “Maes has mentioned him. I heard he was a good man.”

“One of the best,” Ed shrugged again.

“And your mother?”

“Died in a car accident. I - uh,” and Ed didn’t really talking about this but the last person he had kept it from had just been so surprised when they slept together. “Lost my arm.” He held up his right hand and waved it. “It’s fake.”

“It’s - but, you’re-” Roy blinked at him and Ed rolled his eyes, before grabbing one of his free hands and placing it on top of Ed’s right arm.
“It’s real special, I promise, but it’s made out of metal. Gives me hell at airports.” There was a small grin to Roy’s face, and Ed exhaled without realizing he had been holding a breath. The tension seemed to lessen, and Ed pulled his hands back. “What about you?”

“My father and mother were bakers,” Roy said, shrugging. “My grandmother’s from Japan, my father’s from America, and his grandfather is Chinese. I’ve lived here my entire life.”

“Wow,” Ed said, dryly. “That’s a pretty boring childhood you got there.”

Roy smirked. “You’d think that a simple baker’s kid couldn’t get into much trouble as a child, but you’d be wrong. I was supposed to go into the family business and I rebelled every step of the way.”

“Only child?”

“Yes. You have a brother - Al.”

“Alphonse, I got a year on him,” Ed shrugged. “Kid’s ten times better than his older brother.”

There was a look to Roy’s expression. “You don’t honestly think that, do you? Maes has - he told me that you’re a certified genius, that he has no idea what you’re doing working for the police, and I share the sentiment. I’m sure your brother is - exceptional - but you can’t sell yourself short.”

“Sell myself what-”

“Ah - I meant to say that you can’t revel in self-deprecation,” Roy corrected, and Ed lowered the sugar shaker he was about to throw. “You seem -” He shifted suddenly, and ducked his gaze down, apparently very interested in his coffee. “Amazing.”

The blush leapt to Ed’s cheeks before he could stop it. “Oh - uh - thanks.”

Roy nodded, and picked up his coffee, taking a sip. “Alphonse is in school, then?”

“Medical school, yeah,” Ed said, leaping onto the change of subject. “Thought he’d go into chemistry, or physics - like me - but the kid loves helping people. How ‘bout you?” He crinkled his nose. “The hell you’d go into the military for?”

“Ah,” Roy said and smirked. “You’re one of those peace-anti-military types.”

“We - disagree on certain things, yeah,” Ed shrugged. “Can’t think of a worse hell than the military has to offer.”

“Glad you approve of my choice of career,” Roy said, amused. “I didn’t enlist - well, I suppose I did, during the first skirmishes when they were offering free admissions to the military academy, so I enrolled and here I am.”

“The first skirmishes,” Ed said, and blinked and carefully did not mention the fact that the first skirmishes were nearly over a decade ago because age was usually a topic for the third date. “You’re one of those hero types aren’t you?”

“Well, one of us has to be,” Roy said, and took another sip of his coffee. The grin widened on Ed’s face. Ah, irony. “But, here I am now and I’ve already made a career of it, so too late for anything else.”

“I don’t know,” Ed said and shook his head. “There’s always the bakery business.”

Roy laughed. “Yes, there is that. I have to say, I do know how to make a wonderful Devil’s Cake.”
“There’s a insult hidden in there somewhere, I just know it,” Ed muttered, narrowing his eyes. “You think you’re sneaky but you’re not.”

“Oh?”

“Actually, you’re kinda a dick.”

Roy blinked at him. “Well, no-one’s ever come straight out and told me before. Usually it’s whispers behind my back, water-cooler speak, things angry boyfriends yell at me as I make out with their girlfriends—”

“You better not be calling me a girl,” Ed glared. Roy smirked.

“Never.” Roy stared at him, and then averted his gaze out the window. “I’m afraid - I’m needed back at the office for a meeting but. Would you like to do this again?”

Ed swallowed. “For coffee?”

“If you like. There are other options, of course. Out to lunch, out to dinner, in to dinner—” Ed turned a truly delightful shade of red. “Whatever you’d like.”

“I’d - uh - I have to,” he closed his eyes and ran through his schedule, the various meetings Solaris had lined for him with a whole variety of informants that would keep him busy most nights, his work schedule, Al - but he could, dammit he could. “I probably won’t be able to for awhile.”

Roy’s expression shifted just slightly and suddenly became closed off. “I - see. Of course. Then, I suppose you could call me when you found the time-”

“Hold your goddamn horse,” Ed growled and rolled his eyes. “Jesus Christ. You always this impatient? I just have to - I have work and I’m pretty swamped so I won’t be free until - next...Thursday? At the earliest.”

“Thursday,” Roy repeated, straightening just slightly, and his lips twitched upwards into a pleased smile. “I can do Thursday. Seven o’clock?”

Seven o’clock, get home by around nine, be out on patrol by nine-ten, that could work. “Sure. Uh-”

“Dinner,” Roy said, and inclined his head. “Out?” When Ed took a second to long to respond, his lips twitched upwards even more. “In?”

“Out,” Ed murmured, somehow even redder than before. “Nothing fancy. Burgers and a movie?”

Roy stared at him, before his smile widened. “I haven’t gone to just a dinner and a movie in a very long time. Would you like me to pick you up?”

Say no, his brain hummed at him. You’ll need your bike, you don’t want to be bending to his will, say no - “Sure. Uh,” Ed reached inside of his pocket and grabbed one of the business cards Hughes forced him to carry around before grabbing a pen from his jeans and scribbling his address on the back of it and signing his name. It was sloppy and awkward with his left hand and he felt ashamed about it for a second before he handed it over. Roy probably had one of those elegant signatures, the kind that swept to the side and downward. “My - uh - address,” as if that wasn’t clear. “Seven o’clock, Thursday, burgers and a movie.”

The burgers really were the most specific part because Ed only had one tux and only had worn it a total of two times and one time was to a wedding and the other to a funeral and there was just a
whole bunch of mojo going on with that he didn’t want to mess with. Roy smiled at him.

“Seven o’clock, Thursday, burgers and a movie,” Roy repeated, and didn’t stand, just sat across from him, before he gave a neat little jump and stood, as if he realized that their little get together was over. “I will - I’ll see you then.” He hand Ed’s card in between his fingers and kept running his thumb over it, like it was precious or valuable, and somehow that made Ed even more embarrassed.

“Kay,” Ed said, and ducked his head down, shoulders hunching, before forcing himself to stand. “Um - right. Thursday.”

“Thursday,” Roy said, and after a second he made a lurching sort of movement forward, bending his head towards Ed, and Ed froze and Roy pressed his lips to Ed’s cheekbone before turning on his heel and walking out the door, leaving Ed standing there, staring at nothing, and he only moved when someone bumped into him, apologizing hastily.

Oh, Ed thought as his heart felt like it was going to jump out of his chest. Oh.

You have to do this, Ed told himself. You have to do this. You’ll be a better man for it. You have to do this.

Fullmetal stood on the fire escape, hanging off of the bar, and stared up at the sky for a few minutes which was coated with a thick cloud cover. Luckily, it had yet to rain, but Ed’s luck was never that good. Mustang lived on the sixteenth floor of a newer apartment on the upper east side of the town. The building was classic and shiny and Ed had passed by it twice while he argued with himself. There was something remarkably sickening about the first time him setting foot in Mustang’s apartment being this, but he had already gotten the address from Hughes’ date book when he wasn’t looking, and Aiden was right (which didn’t happen often, but apparently when the guy was right, he was right) and Ed needed to get it out there that Fullmetal was on this case without taking the control from Mustang’s hands because that would only make things worse.

He hadn’t told Hawkeye, or Hughes, or even Al what he was going to do. He wasn’t even sure he was going to do it. No - no. He was going to do it, damnit, he was going to man the hell up - after all the shit he had caused the very least he could do was man the fuck up for ten minutes.

Nevertheless, Ed wavered on the fire escape and for the tenth time made sure his hood was clipped on so that it would hide his face. The plan was simple, break-in, maybe root around for Mustang’s ID and passcode if the man wasn’t in - ah, who was he kidding, like everything else Ed did, he was gonna fucking wing it no turning back now -

He jimmed the window lock free and pulled the window up, climbing into what seemed to be the living room. One wall was lined with bookcases, and a leather couch sat in the middle of the room, a soft looking arm chair to the left of it. In front was a coffee table topped with meaningless books and a few candles, and there was a desk to Ed’s right, covered with papers, and with the way it looked Roy must have spent most of his time there and the couch...

A kitchen behind the couch, a island separating the two areas not unlike Ed and Al’s apartment. The kitchen was - shiny. Steel stove, steel dishwasher, steel sink, steel microwave, steel fridge, and clean too. A baker’s kid indeed - Roy obviously prioritized the kitchen over his own living room considering the mess of papers strewn about. Down the hallway Ed could see a bathroom and a bedroom, dark now that the sun wasn’t shining anymore. He waited for a second to see if there was any movement, and when he was satisfied that no-one was home, he moved down the hallway and into the bedroom.
A bed, of course, was the first thing Ed saw. Pressed navy blue sheets and a folded back blanket that wasn’t made - of course Mustang would just throw his covers back and leave it - and a closet to the side of the bed. It was - personal. There was a picture of what had to be Mustang’s parents and another of Hughes and Roy, and even though he knew he was breaking a million lines Ed moved towards the bedside table and slid open the drawer.

Prescription bottles, and Ed panicked for a second, grabbed them so he could read the label before he heaved a breath. Just sleeping pills and nothing ridiculously strong at that. Ed carefully replaced the bottle and sorted through the loose papers, abandoning them when nothing of interest showed up. But then, just as he was about to close the drawer, his fingers hit something shoved towards the back and Ed grabbed the small box and pulled it out to set it on the table’s edge, prying off the metal lock carefully.

Inside: letters in handwriting that obviously belonged to Hughes, folded and pressed; a medal that Ed knew was for outstanding acts of bravery and merit; a picture of what had to be Hawkeye as a child in a sunday dress and blue pinafore; and, underneath it all, a single business card with a sloppily written address and a single photo.

Ed felt something tighten around his throat, and carefully brought up the photo so he could see it better in the dim light coming from the street, stared at his own face half-surprised, cotton candy half way to his mouth, and he remembered what happened next but that didn’t bear thinking about because he didn’t know Roy had gone back to buy the fucking picture after all, and his face on the photo was probably just as surprised as he felt -

The light flickered on suddenly and Ed was pinned, breath caught in his throat as he slowly lowered the photo back into the box and closed it with a quiet click.

“The only reason I haven’t shot yet is because I don’t relish the thought of trying to get blood stains out of my carpet,” Roy said, quietly, and Ed’s jaw clenched as he carefully turned around, keeping his arms a good distance away from his body. Mustang glared at him, tie gone from around his neck and jacket open, but gun raised at eye level and aimed directly at Ed’s head.

“Easy,” Fullmetal said, shortly. “I came to talk.”

“Did you plan to go through the rest of my belongings before or after, then?” Mustang questioned, raising an eyebrow.

“Never took you for the sentimental type,” Fullmetal pointed out, cocking his head to the side. This was a game he could play, however; the push and pull, the taunts and insults. “Are you telling me there are people out there who don’t think you’re a total ass? Maybe I should do some research, find out-”

Mustang moved, and suddenly Fullmetal was pinned against the wall, elbow against his neck and gun against his temple. He really was grateful that Al had made the tiny clasps on his hood that kept it tugged down because if it fell off now, Ed had no idea what he’d do.

“You’re not to touch him,” Mustang growled, warned. “You’re not to touch any of them.”

Fullmetal darted out with his right arm and wrenched the gun back, moving his left foot forward to wrap around Mustang’s calf and pull him off balance. On the way down, his upper arm raked against the wall, catching on the light switch and before they hit the ground the lights went out. He landed on top of Mustang and knocked the gun underneath the bed, out of range, and struggled for a second to grab Mustang’s wrists and force him down.
“Will you wait for a fucking second?” Fullmetal rasped, throat bruised. “I said I came here to talk.”

Mustang struggled once more before he resigned himself to being pinned down. Fullmetal kept both hands on his wrists and carefully straddled his waist. In the dim light, Fullmetal saw him glare. “Talk, then.”

“The Scarface Killer case,” he rasped, and cleared his throat, but it didn’t help. “I’ve been looking into it. Have a sum total of one lead that might be leading into something else entirely.”

Mustang glared. “If you’re telling me to back off—”

“No,” Fullmetal stressed and bent downwards so he could lower his voice instead of yelling. Maybe he could get the freaking point across then. “I’m just telling you you’re not looking in the right direction. This isn’t a freaking lunatic, this is a planned thing. The people who got killed—”

“All are related to you?” Mustang cut in, raising an eyebrow. Fullmetal winced.

“Yes, but - that’s not. I don’t know if that’s the common factor. I hope it’s not the common factor. This isn’t just random killing; this is organized. Set up, and the people who are involved...” Fullmetal trailed off, voice growing quiet. Mustang was silent, until he prodded, “The people who are involved?”

“Are not,” Ed said, and ducked his head away. “They’re not normal. You might - not have the means to deal with them. Which is why I’m here. I - look, I know you don’t like me, I don’t like you, but we have to combine our resources, alright? You can hate me all you want, but neither of us want another dead body on our hands.”

Mustang was silent and then he tugged at his hands. “Let me up.”

Ed grinned, a flash of white in the dark. “What - don’t like not being on top?”

Wrong thing to say, apparently. Mustang narrowed his eyes and then suddenly Ed was on his back, his own wrists pinned and Mustang bending over his body and fit between Ed’s bent legs. He blinked up at Mustang, before grinning even wider. “You use that in bed?”

“You’ll never find out,” Mustang growled, and Ed felt the laughter bubble through his throat at the ridiculousness at it all. He had to leave - soon, would be best, which meant he needed a distraction and the good mood pooled in his stomach and his grin became coy.

“Oh, that’s a shame,” Ed murmured, and carefully brought his head up so that his nose brushed against the tip of Roy’s. The man on top of him started but couldn’t pull back without loosing his grip on Ed’s wrists and was just as pinned as Ed was. “And I’ve heard such good stories about the famous Roy Mustang.”

“Stop,” Roy said, roughly, and Ed smirked, bringing his head even closer, sliding his nose against the side of Roy’s.

“Give me a good reason to.” Closer now, lips barely brushing each other, not quite there.

“Because then I’ll really regret not shooting you when I had the chance,” Mustang said, coldly, and Ed froze - or, no. Fullmetal froze, because it wasn’t Ed, was it? Not really - it was someone else entirely and Ed pulled back, head thumping against the carpet, shifting his hood back, and the light from the street shined across his face just for a second-

Recognition flashed across Roy’s face (at what, he didn’t know, was it the spilt lip, a flash of the
eyes, what was so familiar - ), and Ed felt like a bucket of freezing water had been thrown over his head, and he panicked, bringing his legs together to shove Mustang off and break the suddenly slightly slack grip on his wrists. The man hit the floor with a thump and Ed grabbed the lip of his hood to tug it securely back into place. No, no no no.

“Robert MacKenzie,” Fullmetal rasped out. “If I find out anything more, you’ll know.” Before Mustang could get up, Ed was in the hallway, and he could hear footsteps behind him and Roy rounded the corner just as Fullmetal disappeared through the window, a flicker of red filling his vision before he disappeared. Ed scaled the fire escape as quickly as he could before he hopped onto the neighboring’s building’s roof, catching his breath as he leant on the roof’s wall. There was movement in Roy’s window as the man finally reached it and stuck his head out it, searching the fire escape and then the street for any movement. Ed held his breath, and after a moment, Roy went back inside, sliding the window closed and locking it in place.

Fuck. Fuck. Did he - what had he seen? The hood had cast the usual shadow over the top half of his face and couldn’t have shown much when it shifted - was it the spilt lip? What did - was Ed panicking over nothing?

Fullmetal had done his job. He had gotten the hell out of there, and now Edward had to hold up the rest. Maybe it was nothing. It could have been nothing. It probably was nothing. Either way Ed resisted the urge to wrench his hood back. He wanted to go home and sleep, but knew he didn’t have the time. Even now the police scanner on his belt was flashing red with some new trouble. Fullmetal was needed and Ed - Ed needed to put his own problems on the back burner.

Attempted burglary off of Main and 14th? No problem.

(And as if the world decided to add another kick in the stomach, it started to rain.)

—

“Oh-” Ed said on Tuesday morning as he blinked at Roy and Hughes, maneuvering themselves through the coffee shop’s crowd. “Mornin’.”

“Morning, Ed!” Hughes called cheerfully and threw his arms around Al and Ed’s shoulders. “Beautiful day, isn’t it? My darling Elysia made me breakfast today - look!” He whipped out an entire collection of photos and waved them in front of Al and Ed’s faces. Al indulged him, because he was Al. Ed chose to focus on Roy, who looked - tired. Ed twisted out of Hughes’ grip, and like a compass pointing north the man gravitated towards Al to show him more photos.

“You look like shit,” Ed said, bluntly. “You alright?”

Roy looked at him, and then smiled wearily. “I work in security and I’ve been given a new assignment that’s...taxing. I’m fine.”

“You don’t look it,” Ed frowned and moved towards the shorter than usual line. “Don’t kill yourself or anything.”

“I will try,” Roy said, amused. “I just need a good night’s sleep, which, hopefully I will be getting tonight, if everything goes as planned.”

Ed hummed and tilted his head to the side. “My mom used to say that sleep’s right up there with breakfast and brushing your teeth.”

“Brother sleeps everywhere,” Al interjected, apparently pulling himself away from Hughes. “On the bus, at lunch, on the couch, during meetings-”
“Once,” Ed hissed. “That was once. And - you know why.”

“Lack of sleep makes people irritable,” Al recited, and raised an eyebrow. “Which is odd - considering.” Roy’s smile widened, and Hughes grinned, but Ed glared and felt the urge to throw something. “The doctors at the University Hospital are always irritable, probably because they don’t get enough sleep.”

“Al, that’s probably just because they’re doctors,” Hughes pointed out. “They’re put under a lot of stress, you know.”

Al shifted, and looked semi-frustrated. “Doesn’t mean they should be so irritated all the time. It’s like working in a wasp’s nest. All that frustrated energy-”

“Just ‘cause your attuned to people’s pissiness doesn’t mean you can hold a sabbatical for an entire legion of doctors,” Ed said, rolling his eyes. “People are pissy.”

“And you’d think I’d have a lot of practice dealing with them, too,” Al muttered, and Hughes laughed again. Roy raised an eyebrow.

“Attuned? Being aware of a person’s emotions is a good skill to have, Alphonse. Don’t listen to these two, you can use it to your advantage.”

“One, don’t you dare turn my little brother into a mastermind - he’s bad enough as it is,” Ed hissed, and then slightly more amused. “Two, I think we’re thinking of two different things. When I say attuned, I mean - attuned.”

“Oh?”

Al smiled, and took a step closer to Roy, closing his eyes. “Oh,” he said after a second, before taking a step forward so that he could whisper into Roy’s ear. Whatever he said made Roy jump away and stare at him.

“How did you - I can’t be - I’m not that obvious-” Roy nearly tripped over himself. It was a good look for him, Ed thought - a step down from the cocky mask and incorrigible attitude.

“Oh, no!” Al said, quickly. “You’re not - I promise! But, I’ve just been - since I was a child, you know? Runs in the family.”

“Damnit,” Ed muttered to himself as Roy turned his gaze onto him and stared and said, “Runs in the family?”

Al lit up. “Oh, yeah! Our mother - you could call her psychic, and our grandmother could literally read minds, and brother-”

“Don’t say it,” Ed said.

“Can see into a person’s heart,” Al finished, smug. Ed glared and muttered under his breath about lame titles and unscientific phenomena. Roy grinned.

“Really now. And how does that work?”

Hughes leaned forward. “Pretty simply, actually. He did it for me and Gracia, and even Elysia. Show him, Ed.”

“Put it on the record that I hate all of you,” Ed hissed and then flexed his hands before stripping them
of their gloves and sticking them out because it only ever worked with skin-on-skin contact. Roy gave him a bemused glance but let Ed grab his hands together before he closed his eyes.

Stupid, stupid, stupid - he hated doing this because what if - what if Roy was a real bastard? Like an awful person who kicked puppies and was just - awful. Ed had always used that little feeling in the back of his mind to help with cases, used it as easily as one breathed, but now he had to search for it and Roy’s skin was warm in his flesh hand, fingers loosely wrapped around his own and -

He couldn’t breathe for a second. It was like being stuck in blank space, drifting towards nothing, and then - warmth, like standing in front of a burning hearth, cozy like a warm fire on a cold day but the fire could burn, could lash out, he was protective not possessive, and the people close to him were allowed the comfort of fire, but fire couldn’t help who it warmed and the range it reached was - amazing - and there was a pin point feeling that Ed knew was something directed towards him but he couldn’t -

His father, standing over him, running his fingers through his hair and Ed felt like the entire world could be against him but if he had his dad on his side he’d be just fine -

Holding Al’s hand for the first time, tiny fingernails and chubby fingers and Ed knew, he knew that his little brother was going to be the center of his universe, how could someone so pure not be -

It terrified him. His father, Al; they were staples. The sun rose, the earth rotated, Ed loved his father and he loved Al. They were good people - and Roy was -

His father, Al - it was like seeing the sun for the first time. You could never go back to the way you were before, and he had lost his father and maybe that ruined him but he had Al to keep moving forward for, to fight for, so he pushed on and kept his father’s presence in the back of his head as a reminder about why he did what he did.

Ed opened his eyes, met Roy’s, and thought ‘how am I supposed to live without you?’ which was the most terrifying thought in the world.

“So?” Roy questioned, eyebrow raised, and there was a mild hint of worried anticipation in his eyes. “What’s the damage?”

He had to clear his throat. He was worried his voice might have broke if he didn’t. “My sixth sense is telling me you’re a bastard - but I didn’t really need a sixth sense for that.”

Roy laughed, threw his head back, and the tired lines and the stress were gone for one glorious moment. “Well, it was worth a try.”

“Yeah,” Ed said, and pulled his hands back, feeling as if the room had dropped about ten degrees. “It was.”

Chapter End Notes

Dogs live for around seven to fourteen years if I remember correctly. Sorry about Black Hayate D: It killed me but...

For real, if you actually want to read this fic after this mess, god bless you omg.
Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

In which the reader should kindly go with the flow.

Chapter Notes

1. My editing process goes as so; read once when I really have no time to, post, read again. If you see any errors, it'd be nice if you told me.
2. God, I still have no idea real idea how to get from point A to point C with the sequel even though I do know what point A and point C is. That's something, right?
3. Dear readers, because you are dear to me, thank you. No for real, thank you. You guys are the best, and thanks for not ditching me in the second chapter.
4. ( seriously, no guess as to who beth is?? lame guys; lame. ;) )
5. On the note, however, my flashbacks are confusing, that's my fault - I didn't want to italicized them, so each flashback will be marked with a ~ breaker on top of it (before the flashback) instead of a -. If it's still confusing, tell me, and I'll figure something out. There are, however, no flashbacks in this chapter. This chapter's more on the short side. :)
6. Even though this fic is set somewhere in Europe (still not sure on the where), I'm using Fº. No disrespect - it's because I'm sure that I'd muck up the Cº conversion.

your relations are of power

we all have good intentions

but all with strings attached

– natural's not in it // gang of four

Winry shook him awake. Ed cracked open his eyes and stared at her. He was still dressed as Fullmetal, police scanner digging into his waist. She sent him an unamused look.

“You were supposed to leave for work twenty minutes ago,” she said, flatly, and Ed blinked, before reaching for his phone which proclaimed - yup. He was late. “How much sleep did you get anyway? You couldn’t change?”

Ed rolled off of the couch and forced himself to stand, stripping off the jacket and checking the phone again. “Ah - in exactly two minutes I’d have gotten exactly...” he did the calculations quickly
and headed towards his bedroom. “Forty minutes of sleep.”

“Jesus,” Winry muttered and followed him into his bedroom, sitting on the bed he hadn’t used in days while Ed started up the shower and started to brush his teeth while he stripped. “This can’t be healthy.”

“Prob’ly not,” Ed said through a mouth full of toothpaste, yawned, stripped his boxers, and climbed into the shower. “What day is it?”

“Tuesday,” Winry called and he could hear her rifling through his closet. “Jesus, Ed - how many knives do you have?”

“They keep getting broken or lost,” Ed called over the water of the shower and scrubbed his hair quickly before grabbing his bar of soap. “Did anyone call last night?”

“Not that I know of,” Winry said as he rinsed off and shut off the shower, toweling himself and his hair dry before wrapping the towel around his waist and accepting the set of clothes she offered. Boxers went first, then a pair of older worn jeans, followed by a long sleeve black henley. It was tighter than what he was used to but he didn’t have the time to really argue with her.

He combed out his hair and bangs and put it up into it’s usual ponytail. He had down in a braid last night - usually did as Fullmetal. It kept the hood from sticking up awkwardly.

“I have school today,” Winry said as he hurried into the bedroom, looking for his shoes. “Then I’m going shopping with Rose. Will you talk to Al? He hasn’t seen you in almost two days.”

“Al’s used to that,” Ed said, grabbing a pair of clean(ish) socks and his boots. When she kept glaring, he amended, “I’ll give him a call - better yet. I’ll bring home dinner. I shouldn’t have anything planned.”

Winry gave him a look that clearly said she didn’t trust him, but she sighed and shook her head. “Fine. Pizza.”

“Can do,” Ed said, and grabbed his leather jacket off of the rack by his door and headed for the front door before stopping - Jesus, he almost forgot. He walked into the kitchen, grabbed four slices of white bread and stared eating them plain, heading for the door. He’d get Beth to go out for donuts, but this would have to do for now. Winry rolled her eyes and closed the door behind him as he waved, searching for the key’s to his bike and pulling out his gloves out of his jacket’s pocket.

His bike was waiting for him in the garage, and after a second Ed was on it and on his way to work. On the now official list of things he had to do today, he had to talk to Hughes, hand in his statement for case number two, see what fresh hell awaited him concerning Mustang, probably force himself to talk to Hawkeye, and then go through and label all of the photos he had taken - which, fun.

Beth wasn’t in the lab when he arrived, so Ed stuck a post-it to her computer labeled ‘donut run’ and hoped she was out on one already. His statement was the first thing he took care of, reading it over before emailing it off. Next were the crime scene photos, and for the next hour he buried himself in labeling and searching through each one, only looking up when Beth came in with - god be good - a boxful of donuts. She deposited them, grinned at his thankful expression, and slipped out and left Ed to his work.

The thing about labeling photos was that it was horribly boring. With a stomach full and forty minutes sleep, Ed found himself struggling to keep awake. There was a small black couch pushed against the wall to his right that everyone used mainly to drop off evidence boxes on, but it was
looking more and more comfortable by the second - and it was past twelve now, Ed could use his lunch hour just for some quick sleep...

He left the photo program open on his computer to give him some initiative for a light sleep, but by the time his head hit the sofa cushion, he was asleep.

It had to be a dream. He didn’t know how he knew it was a dream, but he knew that it had to be a dream. He trotted down a set of steps and rambled about something or maybe nothing, things he only vaguely recognized; Green Lions, bastard Colonels, train schedules, research -

Al spoke from besides him, a familiar ‘Brother’ starting his sentence but he couldn’t be right next to him - his voice was distorted as if he was talking over the phone, or through a metal pipe - and what was that clanging sound, metal shifting on metal, almost in a familiar footfall...

Ed looked up, the sun blinded him, and a flicker of red caught his gaze - the end of his own coat - and he turned to look at Al who -

He woke gasping for air, heart pounding, and for a second he was disoriented, more than he’d ever been. The room seemed unfamiliar and yet complicated recognizable at the same time, and he stared down at his hands - one flesh and scarred a hundred times over, the other an odd, fake white - and then down at his legs and he thought why do I have both of them?

A hand, on his shoulder, pushing back into the cushions gently, and Ed blinked blearily up at Roy, who frowned down at him, concerned.

“You were having a nightmare,” Roy said, bluntly. “You kept muttering under your breath about a philosopher’s stone.”

Ed - choked. “What?”

“‘The Philosopher’s Stone, the Sage’s Stone, bypasses the laws of equivalent exchange,’” Mustang recited, eyebrows drawing together. “That’s all I caught, you were - I don’t think I’ve ever heard that language before. You might have said my name; you said Al’s, muttered about a suit of armor - what were you-?”

“I don’t-” Ed said, and then forced himself to breath. “I don’t. Know. I don’t know.” He inhaled once and held his breath, forced his heart to slow, and then blinked the rest of the disorientation from his eyes. “What are you-”

“Hughes called you,” Roy said. “You didn’t answer. He sent me down here to tell you, there’s going to be another press conference today, this time to the public instead of just the media. He said you might be interested in that.”

“Wh-” his voice broke and cleared his throat before sitting up. “When?”

“A little over an hour from now. I’m heading to City Hall now. Would you like a ride?” Roy questioned, and Ed blinked up at him. Usually - usually he would say no, but his legs felt unsteady and he couldn’t keep his vision straight. He had crashed his bike once trying to come with a concussion because his balance was fucked. Did he really want to risk that again?

“Yeah.” Ed murmured, and closed down his laptop after he forced himself to stand up and walk over to it. “Yeah, actually. If you don’t mind.”
“No, not at all,” Roy said and obligingly waited for Ed to finish shutting of his computer and gather his things. “Are you - you don’t look...well.”

“I’m fine,” Ed shrugged off. “Haven’t gotten much sleep lately.”

“Nightmares?” Roy questioned, taking a step closer. “Do you want to talk about them?”

“No, not nightmares,” he said because - he was tired and he was tired of lying and maybe then it’d bring up the question of what was keeping him away but frankly he was sick of it. “Just...tired, lately.”

Roy’s lips twitched upwards. “Don’t kill yourself or anything.”

Without meaning to, Ed smirked. “Just as important as breakfast and brushing your teeth, right?”

“Right up there,” Roy said and stepped aside so that Ed could walk through the door and close it. Ed stopped when he noticed Roy had stopped walking, and Ed studied him as the man obviously worked himself up to say something and then - “Ed?”

Ed was quiet before he said, “Yeah?”

Roy’s mouth parted, a silent half-formed word escaping before his jaw shut with a tiny click and he shook his head. “No, it’s - nothing.”

“You sure?” Ed pressed, tilting his head to the side, and Roy stared at him, was nearly there - but, he shook his head.

“I’m sure,” Roy murmured and turned towards the exit for the parking garage, and Ed stared at him as he went before following.

There was silence as Roy unlocked the doors to his car, and they both climbed in and pulled out of the lot and onto the main road.

“Radio?” Roy questioned, gesturing towards it, but Ed shrugged.

“I’m about to fall asleep again,” he warned and leaned back against the car’s seat. “Talk to me about something; keep me active.”

Roy was silent for a second, before inclined his head in agreement. “Hawkeye’s birthday is soon. The entire office is trying to plan a birthday party for her without her knowing, which is frighteningly difficult considering she seems to be omniscient about what occurs in that office. Havoc and Breda have taken to talking in code, which just lends to the suspicion. They put Falman on top of finding a time in everyone’s schedule so that we can all be together when we’re not at the office because we all think she won’t appreciate us using her birthday as an excuse to slack off on duty.”

When Ed was silent, he continued on. “Fuery’s in-charge of distracting her while they hold what they think to be secret meetings because she has a soft spot for him - or at least, her equivalence of a soft spot. They’ve put me in charge of catering and now I’m struggling to find a dish that Riza’s ever seemed particularly pleased about. She’s never been a big sweet person and I’m sure if she could live off of bread and cheese, she would.”

Ed remembered searching through Hawkeye’s cabinets. They were bare except for the bare essentials and Ed had figured that maybe she just didn’t have any time to cook. “Hawkeye - is she English?”
"Her father was, yes, which I suppose lends to bland palate she seems to possess." Roy fell quiet for a second, before he licked his lips. "We...grew up together, did you know? She lived down the street for me and we met in Sunday school. Her mother used to order a baker’s dozen of sweet rolls every Sunday afternoon. Riza used to come back and give me the extra one and play cards on our front stoop."

The picture - Hawkeye with long hair folded back into a plait, serious red-brown eyes and a flat expression in her white frock and blue pinafore. “You two must be close then,” Ed murmured. Roy smiled, just slightly.

“She enlisted when I did. Her parents disowned her because of it, and she’s been watching my back ever since. We were up north together for a few years before I was promoted and sent back down here. I brought her, Havoc, and Breda with me. Fuery was a communications officer at base, and Falman was an office aide, and now they’re under me. Am I boring you?”

“No,” Ed shook his head, quiet. He leant his forehead against the window and felt his eyelids grow heavy. “Keep talking.”

“My mother used to make angel cake with strawberry sauce every Sunday night,” Roy continued after a second. “To this day I can’t recreate it. Anything else I can manage - but I can’t get the cake right. I thought it was the way I whipped the eggs but that seemed to make it even worse. She laughed at me when I told her I kept screwing up the recipe and refused to help me. I think you would like her - she has a habit of calling bullshit on me too. Sink or swim, I suppose. I never got to let you try that devil’s cake - it wasn’t an insult, by the way. I just thought you would enjoy chocolate more than vanilla, and I’ll make it one day for you, if you let me - I could - we-” he stopped, hands clenching around the steering wheel. “I still..” he trailed off and blinked. “Ed?”

After a second, Roy laughed softly, and shook his head. Ed continued to sleep.

It had felt like he had only fallen asleep for a second - he was sure he had fallen asleep for just a second - until he opened his eyes and blinked at the sun shining through the windshield of Roy’s car, his blue uniform jacket slung over Ed like a blanket. He checked the clock on the dashboard and blinked. Just over an hour had passed since he had last checked the clock, and Ed stared out the window, blinking at the crowd that had gathered on the outer edge of the parking lot he was sitting in.

They were outside City Hall, he recognized. The crowd moving around him was in front of the front steps where an sound stage had been set up and the car was empty except for Ed and Roy’s jacket. He buried himself down in it, suddenly cold, and pressed his nose against the collar. It was still warm, tinged with Roy’s aftershave and the spicy cologne he usually wore.

It was a gorgeous day out; the rain had dissipated to leave a clear sky, only barely-chill weather, and a generally cheerful atmosphere. People buzzed around the soon-to-start press conference with picnic baskets and an attitude that seemed out of place considering the context. Ed was only wearing the black henley, shivering even though it had to be upwards of fifty degrees outside, and sat up, blinking the sleep out of his eyes completely. After a second he climbed out of the car and slung the jacket over his shoulders, slipping his arms through the sleeves. It was entirely too big on him but Ed wore it anyway and searched the crowd for a familiar face.

Al - and Winry, and Rose. Ed blinked, before pushing his way through the edge of the crowd towards the platinum blond, the sandy blond, and the brown head of hair, calling out their names once he was close enough. Al spun on his heel at the sound of his brothers voice, before sending him
a bewildered look as Ed shoved his way towards them.

“What you doing here?” Al questioned, and blinked at him. “You’re supposed to be at work.”

“And you’re supposed to be in school,” Ed said towards Al and Winry, who scowled at him.

“We were until we heard about this and then literally everyone in the University ditched. I can see one of my professors over there. We just met up with Rose two minutes ago,” Winry explained, and stretched her arms over her head, black tank-top riding up her stomach.

“Alex is on security duty,” Rose said, and gestured with her chin towards the sound stage. “Not only that - everyone’s curious about what’s been going on. The news last night was...vague, at best.”

No-one mentioned the military jacket Ed was wearing, but he did catch Al’s glance towards it and his raised eyebrow. “Is the Colonel here, then?” he questioned, and Ed glared at him.

“Drove me. I fell asleep in the car and you know I don’t like putting the automail in the sun - even with one layer it gets hot,” Ed said, and brushed the end of his ponytail over his shoulder.

“Commander Licht should be here today,” Rose said, suddenly, standing on her tiptoes to see over the crowd. “At least, that’s why Alex is here.”

“Shit,” Ed murmured. “So - military’s involved now.”

“That’s gonna suck,” Winry said, and chewed on her lip. “I think they’re starting soon - they’re testing the sound, now.”

“You probably should go give the Colonel his jacket back,” Al warned, eyebrows dragging together. “He’s going to be up on stage any second now and it’ll look kinda unprofessional if he’s not wearing half his uniform.”

“Fuck,” Ed hissed, and searched for the quickest way to the back stage. “Fuck, you’re right. I’ll - stay here, I’ll be right back, maybe Hawkeye...” He trailed off as he started pushing his way to the front, using his metal elbow to shove people out of the way. A few even jumped out of the way just seeing the jacket he was wearing. By the time he hit the front he had to leap over the blockade set up and avoid the set of military guards posted nearby. When he finally reached to the set of stairs that lead up the side of the building inside City Hall, Ed slipped past the patrol and shook his head. The military really needed to beef up their security.

Speaking of beefing up security. Ed turned the corner into the welcoming hall and blinked at Armstrong and Mustang, bent together over a desk. Roy was missing his jacket, obviously, tie tucked into the buttons on his shirt and talking in quiet tones. Armstrong was listening before Ed caught his eye, perking up and then frowning.

“How’d you get in here?” Armstrong questioned, and Ed grinned. Did he really have to ask?

“Here,” Ed said, instead, stripping off Mustang’s jacket and handing it over. “Thought you might need this.”

“I do, thank you,” Roy said, and took it, laying it over his arm. “I was just about to send someone to go wake you up.”

“No need,” Ed shrugged and took a quick look around. “You guys should really tighten your security - it took me like two seconds to get in here.”
Roy frowned. “We’re on level three lock-down.”

Ed did not gulp. “Maybe I was lucky.”

Mustang gave him his patented ‘I’m not taking your bullshit but I’m going to ignore it and use it at a later date’ and turned to one of the soldiers stationed nearby, calling out, “Up the patrols and put a guard on every exit, will you?”

Ed had the decency to wince and apologize. He watched the soldier head towards another group, and Roy said, “Give me two minutes and I’ll take you back,” and Ed shrugged, scanning the welcoming hall for - well, he didn’t know what exactly, but it was instinct to survey his surroundings. Which - when looking back - was probably was alerted him to the smell of burning ozone coming from one of the offset hallways.

Ed looked to Roy, who was completely engrossed in talking shop with Armstrong, and then followed his nose to the hallway, standing in front of one of the small offices and walking inside. There was a soldier standing there, over a desk, and Ed raised an eyebrow. “Pretty sure you’re not supposed to be in here,” he called out, and watched as the uniformed man froze.

“Well,” the man said, and turned. Ed had never seen him before. “If it isn’t the Fullmetal Pipsqueak.”

Ah. Fuck.

“Envy,” Ed growled, and closed the door behind him with his foot. “The fuck are you doing here?”

“The name is the Dragon, brat,” the man growled, and shrugged. “Came to see what all the commotion is about - there’s talk on the streets, don’t you know? People missing, corpses turning up, and the old lady’s dead.” A grin stretched the face Envy was wearing into a grotesque parody of a smile. “Which, Happy Birthday to me. Only thing that could make this better is that pretentious bitch dropping dead and you going on along with her.”

Ed clenched his fists. “Stay the fuck away from Solaris - she has shit to do with this now. If you got beef with me-”

“If I got beef with you,” Envy mocked, and rolled his eyes. “Ask a stupid question, pipsqueak.”

“Don’t fucking calling me pipsqueak,” Ed snarled. “You’ve got two seconds before I kick your ass-”

“And won’t that be one for the papers,” Envy drawled, leaning against the desk. “Random civilian defeats thief of the century. Newsflash, idiot, you’re not wearing the big red cape.”

“It’s a coat, fucker, one, two, you’re surrounded by an entire building full of armed soldiers-”

“Not exactly the safest situation for you either, is it?”

“-who would probably go after the guy who stole over a million dollars and nearly killed twenty people instead of someone who hasn’t done shit,” Ed finished, and narrowed his eyes. “You wanna try your luck?”

He grabbed the door knob, ready to scream his head off - because Envy was right (which - ugh). Envy could out Ed as Fullmetal at any second and it was only some kind of sick pleasure that kept him from heading straight to military headquarters and revealing Ed. Well, that and the fact that no matter what he said he was wary of getting on Solaris’ bad side who had no secret identity to think of and therefore had no safety net to catch Envy.
Envy was silent and then rolled his eyes. “Guess we’re at a, how you say, impasse.”

“Truce.”

“No,” Envy snarled. “Impasse. The day I fucking align my ass with you is the day I kill myself. I’m not here to do any real trouble - just heard a rumor I couldn’t pass up.”

Ed narrowed his eyes even more. “Which is?”

Envy shrugged. “Whatshername, Licht, she’s supposed to be here today, isn’t she? Apparently someone’s got beef with her - and someone intends to do something about it.”

“The fuck do you mean by that?” Ed questioned, mouth pinching. “What do you-”

“I mean exactly what I mean, pipsqueak,” Envy said and rolled his eyes. “Seems like someone’s upholding the honored tradition of a gun to the head of state.”

Ed felt the breath leave his chest. “What?”

Fucking - Ed wrenched the door open and flew down the hall, looking for - he didn’t know what he was looking for but a small group, tightly packed and carefully looking around, walked from the back of the welcoming hall, one of their group stopping to stare up at the ceiling and Ed saw a figure cloaked in the shadows slip towards the group from the door he had come through, off to the side and Ed didn’t think except to register the way the uniform didn’t fit like it should, the pace didn’t match the tempo that every soldier seemed to walk to, the beat Hawkeye struck when she moved, the tempo Roy kept when he strod-.

Ed knew he wasn’t wearing a hood over his head or a red coat around her shoulders, that his face was completely in the open - and he must have looked like it a sight in his black henley and jeans as he suddenly sprinted across the hall.

The figure saw him, eyes widening and he moved forward, drawing out the gun from his side and stepped into the light and Ed’s eyes widened in recognition as Lance snarled at him and brought the gun up.

“Gun!” one of the soldiers yelled, but it was too late and Ed crossed the last step and dashed out with his left hand, knocking the gun upwards as the bullet went wide and dug itself into the ceiling’s molding, a piece of it cracking and falling against the ground.

Lance couldn’t get his hand down, and Ed struck out with his metal fist but Lance pulled backwards, tugging Ed off-balance and forward. Roy yelled from across the hall, “Ed!” but Ed used the momentum and let go of Lance’s wrist, pushing himself into a frontwards flip, twisting suddenly and landing on his feet, and before Lance could move, Ed had jumped and struck him across the temple with a roundhouse kick.

The gun, still in Lance’s hands, went off and struck wide, shouts coming from the people darting out the way and Ed’s attention flew onto the bullet to make sure it didn’t strike anyone, and it was the few seconds Lance needed to barrel into him and knock him to the ground. Suddenly Lance’s elbow was against his neck, pushing down and really, Ed had been in this position twice in the last forty-eight hours - that wasn’t flying well with him.

“Told you you’d like it,” Lance said, against his ear, licking along the shell, and Ed snarled but the man leveled the gun downwards towards Ed’s forehead. “Should have known you’d be here to
protect your precious lover-boy.”

Which - wait.

“Licht,” Ed choked out, and Lance’s expression turned puzzled for just a second before his grin widened.

“You thought - oh no, no. That bullet wasn’t meant for Commander Licht - that bullet was meant for Roy Mustang,” Lance taunted into his ear, and Ed stared at him, blank, before he snarled - ready to bite Lance’s lips off he had to because no - no -

And then suddenly, Lance was gone and the pressure on Ed’s neck and disappeared. Ed choked on his sudden inhale, air filling his lungs, and stared up at Roy, gun out and aimed towards Lance who was hunched over his stomach on his hands and knees.

Ed connected the pieces and then - did Roy just...kick Lance off of him? That was -

Needless to say Ed was very attracted Roy right then and considering the situation he quickly pushed the thought out of his mind and rolled up. Lance’s face was angled away and the gun had been flung out of his hands, landing somewhere too far for him to reach.

“I don’t know who you are, but that was a big mistake,” Roy growled and his gun stayed steady. “You have once chance to put your hands up and surrender or else I will shoot.”

Very attracted. Ed swallowed and watched Lance look at him, face shielded from Roy which Ed was lucky for because he didn’t want to think about what would happened if Roy recognized Lance as the man Ed was with at the bar.

But then - and Ed saw it before Roy did or else he was sure Roy would have shot - Lance rolled away and slammed his hands onto the ground and Ed had one second to think ‘alchemical reaction’ before a burst of red lit up the entire hall, and Ed didn’t think, just got to his knees and tackled Roy to the ground. The transmutation wasn’t terribly strong or even wide and was as if someone had sprayed a fine mist over Ed and Roy - the only two within range - except that Ed had covered Roy with his body and the only exposed skin Ed was the back of his neck which suddenly trembled.

“Oh, fuck,” Ed murmured, and the room started to sway to side to side and Roy looked at him - Roy looked at him - or maybe he didn’t look at him, maybe that was just in Ed’s head, but everything was so...nice all of a sudden. The world was nice, Roy was nice - Roy was always nice to look at, to touch, to smell, to taste and Ed - Ed needed - “Fuck.”

He swallowed around a thick lump in his throat and felt his stomach bottom out. This was - he could hear a pounding in the back of his head, and Beth staring down at the paper in her hands, “It’s like a super-sex-pheromone,” and oh-fucking-crap.

“Are you alright?” Roy questioned, after a second, and Ed swallowed again, tongue thick in his mouth, and he wanted to - he could lean forward and he remembered how Roy tasted, bitter coffee and cinnamon, and Ed wanted -

No, no he wasn’t alright. This - wasn’t alright. These were thoughts that Ed had buried to the deepest recesses of his mind, to never be brought up again except when Ed was feeling particularly lonely.

Lance was gone, and he could hear Armstrong calling orders to following him, to hurry, and to most importantly keep the whole incident from the public. Ed could barely register what he was saying, was completely enamored with the man in front of him. Roy’s neck, Roy’s hands, god, Roy’s mouth -
“I’m fine,” Ed croaked out and shied away and biting down on the feelings that were bubbling to the surface. “I’m fine, I’m fine, I’m fine.”

“Don’t ever do something like that again,” Roy scolded, eyes narrowed, and there was a hint of alleviated panic in his eyes. “Jesus Christ, Ed, I know you’re used to doing shit like that on the force, but what - what the hell were you thinking?”

Ed shied away as Roy lifted a hand to check the bruise that was definitely developing on his neck. Roy stilled, and then pulled his hand back and Ed felt horrible about it for a second except that he didn’t know what he’d do if Roy actually touched him -

The most terrifying part was that none of this was unfamiliar. Everything he was feeling he knew - he knew - wasn’t a product of some ‘super-sex-pheromone’, it was all things that Ed felt for Roy, all things he shoved down and told to shut up from the day he had saw him on the street and suddenly it was like someone had forced them to the surface and Ed couldn’t do shit about it.

“He was,” Ed gulped and shook his head. “He was-” Aiming for you, he was going to shoot you - shoot you like they shoot at me, like they shot at my dad - Roy -

“Ed, promise you’ll never do that again,” Roy said, voice tense. “Swear to me you will never, ever do something like that again.”

More lies, but Ed had gotten so good at looking Roy in the eye and lying, now. “Okay.”

“Ed-” Roy went to say, but suddenly he looked over Ed’s shoulder and scrambled to his feet, snapping out a salute. Ed blinked up at him before turning and looking over his own shoulder at the two men and the woman standing above him.

General Hakuro - and Ed was half way to baring his teeth in a snarl before he shut his jaw with an audible click. In the haze for uncontrolled desire was a burning, indigent rage, and Ed wanted to slam him against the wall and growl I know what you did but he forced himself to stay still. Another man, darker skin and suspicious eyes that Ed couldn’t place, with a trimmed mustache and the stars on his shoulder ranked ‘General.’

And then, in between them, a small woman with blond hair cut to her shoulders and a soothing smile on her lips. She was wearing the female version of the military uniform that Ed had only seen desk workers wear, most on-duty female officers preferring the tailored version of the men’s uniform. She was wearing tights and a blue pencil skirt, and instead of a tie she wore a clipped piece of fabric underneath her collar, and she was - young. Not horribly young, but there was a smoothness to her skin, and her eyes were bright, and compared to her current company Ed had expected someone - old - but the person in front of him couldn’t be older than Hughes.

“Commander Licht, ma’am!” Roy said, briskly, and there was - wait - Commander Licht -

Fucked up hormones aside, Ed scrambled to his feet and didn’t know what to do - should he salute? What did one do when one meets the leader of the country?

Licht’s blue eyes were amused, which Ed hadn’t expected. There was a kind look to her eyes and she laughed gently. “At ease, Colonel. And who is this young man with you?”

Roy dropped but the salute and shifted his stance but didn’t relax. “Edward Elric, ma’am. He was-” He stopped suddenly, and his expression was carefully blank. “I disobeyed orders and brought him into the building.”

Oh - oh. “No - he-” Ed tripped over himself, taking a step forward, and Hakuro tensed, hand flying
to his gun, and Roy’s hand was suddenly on Ed’s shoulder, urging him down - but Ed had never been one for listening to Roy. “Listen, he didn’t - I snuck back here, he didn’t even know.”

“It’s alright,” Licht soothed. “You’re not in trouble, Mr. Elric - is that...are you perchance related to the Edward Elric?”

Ed’s lips twitched downwards. “My grandfather.”

Licht’s smile didn’t waver. “You have his bravery and most of his characteristics,” she said, wryly. “I’m in your debt, Edward Elric. You saved my life.”

Not her life. Roy’s life, but Ed could roll with this. He swallowed, made sure his throat was clear, and nodded. “It was - I mean, it wasn’t my pleasure, but-”

Licht laughed. “I understand the sentiment, Mr. Elric,” she said and gave him an indulgent smile before turning to Roy. “Colonel Mustang, even under different circumstances I wouldn’t have berated you for this. Next time, however, try to impress your objects of affection in a slightly less hostile environment?”

Roy turned a neat shade of red which was - glorious. Ed felt like someone had just strummed ever nerve and he wanted to touch - and he forced himself to stay still. “M-Ma’am-” Roy choked out, and Licht’s smile became just a bit more mischievous.

“We wouldn’t want you to be preoccupied if something happened, would we?” she questioned, and winked, and Ed turned red himself.

“Ma’am, I would never-” Roy started, but Licht waved him off.

“Yes, yes, you’re a perfect soldier; honestly, Colonel, you’re only human, I can’t fault you for that,” Licht said, casually waving with her hand and was the current leader of the country currently giving Roy permission to -

Ed swallowed again. Well, he wasn’t too fond of Licht before but he might change his - no, damnit - he needed to get the hell out of there -

“All,” Ed said, suddenly. “Al - I need-”

“Yes,” Roy said, quickly. “Yes, to Al - is he-?”

“With Winry, in the crowd, I’m going to-”

“Right,” Roy nodded and waved over a soldier. “Ma’am, please excuse me, but we’re behind schedule as it is...”

Licht smiled and nodded. “I suppose that I should be getting outside. Good luck, Colonel, taming the masses.”

Roy stared at her, before nodding slowly. “I will - try, ma’am. Thank you.”

“It was a pleasure to meet you, Edward Elric,” Licht said, and Hakuro bent his head to say something, and she sighed and turned towards him, cutting him off before he could speak. “Yes, yes, I know, I’m going.” She started to march towards the front doors, keeping a fast pace for someone so remarkably small, and Ed did not just think that because she was about as tall as he was -

“To Alphonse, then,” Roy said, and gestured towards a waiting military officer, and took a step
forward. “Ed-

Ed gulped. “Yeah?”

“Please promise me you won’t die, on the way home or otherwise.”

He couldn’t help the grin, even though his stomach was flipping itself up and down. “Promise, Mustang.” And before Roy could say anything more, Ed forced himself to walk to the guard and started towards the side-door. It had gotten warmer outside and Ed was glad he had given Roy’s jacket back when he had. The soldier followed him dutifully and helped him shove his way through the crowd before Ed caught sight of Al waving, before the soldier turned on his heel and walked back towards the city hall.

“The hell happened to you?” Al nearly yelled over the clapping crowd as Licht walked down the steps of front hall, onto the sound stage, and to the podium. “Ed - your neck!”

“I just saved the leader of the country except not really!” Ed called back and Winry, Rose, and Al stared. He shook his head and tried to tame the queasiness that rose. “I'll explain later!”

Licht spoke into the mike, suddenly, pulling Ed’s attention away as he swung his gaze up the stage. Her hair caught the sun and shined brilliantly and in clear, even (nearly indulgent) tones started to speak.

“We're gathered here to discuss the recent rash of murders that have terrorized our dear capital city. In the press conference that was held last night we discussed that this murderer was extremely dangerous and the measures the people of this city should take to ensure their safety. Now, I stand before you as your leader and I tell you that I will not let this stand. We are putting our best efforts into hunting down the party responsible, and we will bring them to justice. I will be kept informed as each stage progresses, but I now hand over the center of attention to Colonel Roy Mustang, who, in tandem with the police, is in change of this investigation.” Licht inclined her head downwards, and then stepped away from the podium, going to stand off to the side with Hakuro and the other general Ed had seen before as Roy took the stage.

He was quiet for a second, before he spoke in solid, firm tone. “For years Central City has stood as a pillar of knowledge and integrity, but no city is perfect and without fault. But, although we may hold one of highest records for crimes, we also hold the highest rate for cases solved and closed. We could not do this without the police that enforce the law and the military that provide the backbone to this city’s structure.” He paused for a second, mouth twitching - and even this far away Ed hummed, wanted to - no, damnit. Roy continued after a second. "With our combined efforts there is a guarantee that the person responsible will be brought to justice. If anyone has any questions, now would be the time to ask."

The crowd erupted, but Roy held them silent with a single raise of his hand. He chose someone in the crowd, and what had to be a university student shoved his way forward.

"Yeah, what about Fullmetal?” he called, and a murmur ran through the crowd. Hum of agreement and shouts echoing the same question rushed around Ed, Al, Winry, and Rose. There was something pleasing about it, but Ed could barely concentrate on it, breath held as he waited for Mustang’s answer.

And then - Mustang leant towards the podium's microphone. "There is knowledge that Fullmetal is also currently investigating this case, yes. I have no idea about his intentions towards this case or his motives, and usually orders would dictate that we command him to cease, but Fullmetal has access to information that the police and military are not privy too. He is still an enemy of the state and wanted,
but at this time we can not focus our attentions towards him."

Silence. Utter silence - and then someone started to clap and the sound built through the crowd as it began to get louder and louder and suddenly people were cheering, and Ed wanted to kiss Roy and instead he turned to Al, said quite calmly "I'm going to be sick," and succumbed to the nausea.

He was lucky there was a garbage can to the side of him and the vertigo seized at his stomach and he couldn't do anything except empty digested donuts and bread into the bin. Al leaned with him, rubbed his back and sent Winry to get a bottle of water as Rose carefully shielded them from any curious onlookers.

"Brother," Al said, distressed. "I thought you'd be happy - you could have told me."

"Not-" and Ed heaved a quick breath as the nausea settled in again, turned, and vomited again. "There was - Lance tried to - and Mustang - and he used an array and sprayed this shit over me and now I can't-"

"What?" Al hissed and grabbed at his shoulder, pressing a hand against his forehead. "Brother, what - the pheromone guy?"

"Yeah," Ed choked out and Al barely held back an expression of pure panic. He turned towards Rose, who studied them both, worried, and shook his head.

"Rose, your car, we need - it's in his skin now, dammit-" Al swore, which was so strange all Ed could do was stare. "I need to get him home, now, Winry-"

Winry handed over the bottle of water and Al shoved it into Ed's hands. "What?" Winry breathed, winded. "What's happening?"

"That pheromone isn't intended for something like this," Al explained and started dragging Ed towards the parking lot. "Just having a little bit in your system is fine because your body just filters it out, but this much all at once - the level of dependencies that it builds - we need to flush it out of his body. It's like he's ODing on it."

Ed drained the water bottle, but was still thirsty. "Am I gonna die?" He croaked and Al's are swung towards him.

"Don't be stupid, brother," Al scolded. "You're not allowed to die."

"Oh," Ed said. "Well."

Rose drove a modest, energy saving car and Al pushed Ed into the back seat as Winry and Rose climbed into the front.

"You should have told me right away," Al said, quiet. Ed laid down on the backseat and hit his head in Al's lap. He frowned.

"I'm sorry, Al, I just - I don't know what the hell's going on, and there's this guy that I think can duplicate himself, and freakin' Lance, and Roy nearly shot at me and did you know he kept that stupid business card?"

"I figured he would do something like that," Al murmured. "Brother, I need you to take deep, steady breaths, alright?" That was probably the most difficult thing Al had ever asked Ed to do. Ed felt his every breath send an entire wave of sea-sickness churning through his stomach. He wanted - Al's hand was comforting on his forehead, but Ed (for the first time) didn't want this brother, he wanted
He wanted Roy to hold him close, to stroke his forehead and murmur that everything was going to be okay, he wanted Roy to hold his hand and press Ed's forehead against his waist, he wanted, he wanted. It was the worst feeling in the world. Al started stroking faster and somehow Rose broke every speed limit available all while keeping the car from swaying horribly. In a few minutes the car came to a stop and then there were hands urging him up and out of the car.

"Gonna be sick," Ed whined and Al's hand was replaced by Winry's grip on his upper arm. Somehow he was in the elevator and then upstairs, and Al pushed him into his shower, turning the water and suddenly Ed was wet.

"I want Roy," Ed nearly sobbed, dignity be damned, pressing his forehead into the tile of the shower wall. "Al, I want Roy - fuck the Fullmetal thing, call him, call him tell him to come - I want him."

"I know you do, brother," Al murmured. "But you have to take a good long shower and then we need to get what's in your system out, okay?"

"But-"

"I know, Ed," Al soothed. "I know. Just stay underneath the water, alright? Winry's getting you some food."

"Was supposed to get pizza," Ed frowned. "I'm sorry. I keep - fucking up."

Suddenly Al was half way in the shower too, brushing his hair out of his face. “Brother, you are not. It's hard sometimes, I know it is, and you do a lot of stupid things in the name of other people’s safety, and sometimes I want to hit you over the head - but you’re not fucking up. Do you remember when you first came up with the idea?”

“That dream I had,” Ed murmured.

“The one where they called you the People’s Alchemist,” Al prodded when Ed didn’t continue. “You woke me up in the middle of the night all frantic and wouldn’t leave me alone - you could barely string two words together.”

Ed shivered and huddled closer to Al. “I was walking down the street,” he started, stuttering through the words. There was no hot water sluicing from the shower head, just cold water, and the automail felt like ice attached to his shoulder. “And I was wearing the red coat, and someone called me the People’s Alchemist and then-”

“Grandpa said that his second name was Fullmetal,” Al said. “That symbol on your jacket-”

“Flamel’s Cross,” Ed murmured.

“You suck at drawing,” Al said flatly. “I had to design the coat and it was only after you pointed out the cross in Grandpa’s books did I realize what you were getting at.”

“Sewd the coat too,” Ed said, huddling closer to his knees. “Al. I’m really lucky to have you.”

“You really are,” Al said, flatly, and brushed back Ed’s bangs again. “I’m going to go see if Winry’s got any food ready, alright? Ed, listen to me. You can’t leave alright? Don’t leave.”

But - But, No, no, Al had to stay because without Al to keep him distracted Ed’s mind could start to wander and when it started to wander it went down the one-track it had started keeping for the past
hour and that led to -

“Roy,” Ed moaned into the tile, and he forced himself to hold his breath, to concentrate on the cold water running down the back of his spine, but once the thoughts had started it was hard to stop. Where was he right now? Still at City Hall? The press conference would have been finished by now - at the office then? The police station?

At home?

Ed knew where Roy lived, knew the rooftops that he had to run along to get to Roy’s apartment building, and there was a fire escape that Ed could climb, except he wouldn’t be breaking in as Fullmetal - he could use the front door, what would Roy do?

He couldn’t find his common sense. The plan was beginning to seem nearly godlike; Ed had to wonder why he didn’t think of it sooner. He wouldn’t - he wouldn’t do anything but Roy had almost (unknowingly) been killed, what if - Ed had never made sure he was alright, what if he was hurt? He had a duty to the people of Central City to keep them safe, Ed had an obligation.

His feet were unsteady and his legs wobbled, and his clothes were completely soaked through, hair wet in it’s ponytail, but he forced himself to climb out of the shower and the bathroom and towards the window in his bedroom. It was never that hard to slid the pane up, and then climb onto the fire escape. Water dripped off of the edge’s of clothes, leaving a clear trail through the metal grate as he began to climb up the steps, but he couldn’t care about the fact that he was shivering.

Roy would make it better, he told himself and bit back a nearly manic grin. Roy would make it better.

If he had waited two minutes more he would have seen Al come into his bedroom and swear heartily, before rushing for the front door.
He wasn’t nervous. He couldn’t be nervous. It’s just dinner and a movie, he told himself over and over. Dinner and a movie, no possible way to fuck that up, but Ed had never really dated. Dating meant putting yourself forward and expecting the other person to judge and he had never had the time for something as complicated as that. Even before becoming Fullmetal, Ed could never see anyone as ‘serious’ (except for that one time and it didn’t count), but here he was, nearly vibrating because (for once) he honestly didn’t want to fuck this up.

Reasonably he knew that military work days usually ended at six-thirty so there was little chance that Roy would be wearing anything other than a uniform (which he was fine with, he really was; he usually hated the sight of those uniforms but seeing Roy wear one made it hard to breathe) so reasonably Ed could wear his usual clothes and not stand out.

There was something suddenly horribly immature about the mass of worn shirts he had collected. He had panicked for a full ten minutes in silence before Al had rolled his eyes and grabbed the one sweater he owned, a nice one that Ed wore to Al’s special events, a dark red wool thing and then a long-sleeved white shirt underneath it and jeans. The boots could stay because Ed rarely wore anything other than his boots, and now here he was, hovering near the front door of their apartment...
building and resisting the urge to check his phone for the millionth time.

What if he never showed up? How the hell could anyone be actually serious about Ed - Ed who kept odd hours and worked around decomposing bodies and was abrasive and loud and -

He threw his hands against his forehead (which hurt with the right one) and slumped against the wall. What the hell was he doing? It wasn’t like - It wasn’t like he honestly cared if Roy never showed, wasn’t like Ed was dependent on Roy, that was ridiculous. He had met the man a total of three times, only knew a vague outline of childhood and job - didn’t even know what his favorite color was, his favorite movie, his favorite place in the city -

The sickening part was that Ed couldn’t help admitting that he wanted to know. He wanted to know meaningless information about the man he had met for a total of three times.

Maybe, even, maybe Roy would want to know meaningless information about Ed; and then maybe, one day, Ed could tell him...

His legs felt unsteady for a second. This - couldn’t have been happening. Things like this didn’t happen to Al, who jumped at every email Winry had sent, and was obsessive about keeping in touch with her, and never failed to smile at the picture of her on their mantle every morning - and even when Al dated and flirted and forced himself to have a life away from Winry, she was never far from his mind.

But that was - that was because Al loved Winry. It had started out as a childhood crush, but then Al fell genuinely in love with her, and Ed scrunched his nose and rolled his eyes when Al worried over Christmas and birthday gifts because Al treated it like it was the only time he’d ever get to make Winry happy.

Ed wanted Roy to be happy. That didn’t mean that he loved him - scientifically, Ed knew that love could be treated as a hormonal imbalance, but the majority of the world put love in the philosophical category and Ed hated philosophy which meant that there was a huge disconnection between Ed and the whole love/falling-in-love thing, and not only that, whenever it seemed to happen to Ed (which was a sum total of one ‘for sure’ and one ‘maybe, not maybe’) life tended to give him a savage kick in the stomach and ruin the entire thing. God, he didn’t want to ruin this stupid thing with Roy - and it wasn’t so much that Ed was in love with Roy, he wasn’t, he barely knew him, but what if...maybe, eventually...

Seven o’clock and Ed felt sick. He had Roy’s number. He could call and cancel and call Solaris and find a new lead all within ten minutes. The arms smuggling that he caught wind of took precedence over some silly date, so why didn’t he care?

Ed inhaled -

The buzzer sounded.

- and choked on the exhale, head flying up to stare at the somehow now familiar head of messy black hair, and before Ed could scold himself about being too eager, he had the front door of the apartment complex thrown open before the buzzer could finish.

“Oh,” Roy said, and turned before smiling down at him. “Good evening.”

“Hi,” Ed breathed, breathless, before he forced himself to force down a quick gulp of air. Roy was wearing his uniform, like Ed had reasoned out, neat and tidy and just the tiniest bit worn (and breathtaking and Ed had to get used to that). “Hi, are you -”
“Ready?” Roy finished, raising an eyebrow. “Yes. I’m afraid I don’t have a car currently, so we’ll have to catch a taxi, but I found a diner not too far away from here; we could walk.”

“Sure,” Ed said, and nodded, stepping out onto the front steps and closing the door behind him. “Sure, I don’t mind walking. Walking’s good and all.”

“At the base, they recommend us to get twenty minutes of good walking in per day,” Roy said, somberly, and smiled at Ed’s eye roll. “I suspect it’s because we’re confined to our desks for nearly the entire work day.”


“Oh, it does,” Roy agreed, and they turned onto the sidewalk and started down the road. “And my commanding officer is a horrible slacker and I’m meant to do most of the work he’s supposed to do.” He huffed a sigh and hung his head. Ed grinned.

“Ah - didn’t know you worked as a lackey.”

“If you look up the definition of Lieutenant Colonel, you will indeed see a pack-mule,” Roy nodded, and sighed again. Ed’s grin widened. “Soon, however, I’ll be promoted and then I can fob off all my work on some hopeful individual.”

“And you wonder why I don’t like the military,” Ed said, lightly. Roy tilted his head to the side. “I have yet to ask why you don’t. Not that you have to answer, of course. To each their own.”

Ed shrugged. Mainly because he couldn’t say ‘well, you guys put me down to be arrested at first sight so our working relationship isn’t that good’. ‘Al and I visited America once, our Aunt and Uncle live there. The whole democracy thing appealed to me, I suppose. Military totalitarian dictatorship, not so much. I mean,” Ed shrugged. “We could have it a lot worse, but ‘be thou for the people’, you know?”

“I’m afraid I don’t,” Roy said, drawing his eyebrows together. “Be thou for the people - where is that from?”

Ed blushed at his slip up. “Some - old book. I just - it stuck.”

“I like it,” Roy said after a second, tilting his head up to study the darkening sky. “Be thou for the people.” He swung his gaze down to study Ed. “I suppose that’s another thing we have in common.”

Ed blinked. “What?”

“Hughes,” Roy counted on one hand, ticking up his pointer finger, before ticking up the one next to it. “And a love for democracy. I spent about four summers in America with my aunt as well; it is addicting. I agree - the state needs to change. We’re a good hundred years behind the rest of the world in terms of government, and while it works, it doesn’t mean it works well.”

There was a look to Roy’s expression, a hardening gleam in his eyes and a twitch of his lips. Ed took a subtle step closer to his side. “Are you taking me out just to talk shop?” Ed questioned, raising an eyebrow. Roy blinked, and stared at him.

“I’m - forgive me. I didn’t mean to - you’re very easy to talk to, did you know that? I don’t believe I’ve ever had a moment where I didn’t know what to say to you and yet at the same time, I keep worrying about not finding the proper words.” Roy shrugged lightly and smiled down at him. Ed’s
blush turned a lovely shade of red. “It’s nice to be able to talk with someone who knows what they’re talking about.”

“Thanks,” Ed murmured, and kicked a rock that was in his way. “You’re not so bad, either.” And then - “Oh, by the way, what’s your favorite color?”

Roy blinked at him.

The inside of Roy’s apartment building was nicer than it was outside. Marble pillars and clean carpet and Ed dripped water as he climbed the stairs, struggling for breath. Roy had to live on the second to top floor because that’s just the way the man was - and look at that, even with hormones cranked to eleven, Ed still found it in him to be utterly annoyed with the man.

One more floor now, and Ed cleared it, leaning against Roy’s door with his cheek pressed against the wood, breathing heavily. So close - Roy could be on the other side of the door, for all Ed knew, Ed hoped he was because maybe Roy could somehow will away the queasiness that made Ed’s head feel light and airy and just not there - and he knocked with his metal fist because it didn’t take much to produce a sound before leaning back and huddling on the doormat in front of the door. He was freezing, the automail ice on his shoulder, and water kept dripping from his bangs into his eyes but he had made it.

The door unlocked suddenly, after the chain had been moved back, and then swung open to reveal Roy standing there, top button of his uniform’s shirt open, suspender’s loose around his waist, and jacket missing. He blinked and stared at Ed before he took in how utterly soaked he was, shivering with his arms around his chest, and moved forward, eyebrows drawn together in confusion.

“Ed, what the hell?” Roy hissed, and dragged Ed into the apartment. “You’re - soaked, freezing, what the hell?”

“I-” Ed started, but his teeth started to chatter so badly he couldn’t get the word out. *I came to see you, I had to see you, to touch you, Roy, Roy, Roy-*

A towel was suddenly around his shoulders, wringing his ponytail out, and Roy urged him towards the couch but Ed shook his head and regretted it two seconds later when the dizziness took hold and nearly toppled him over. Roy caught him by the upper arms before he could tip into the side table, and held him steady, and suddenly Roy’s hand was on Ed’s cheek, brushing his wet bangs off of his face, concern blatant in his expression.

“You’re shivering, Ed, and warm - you have a fever? Where’s Al?” Roy questioned, and Ed opened his mouth, tried to answer, and had to close his mouth. Roy’s hand was on his forehead, curved over his cheek and temple, and Ed pressed into it, reveling in the heat. He reached forward and grabbed Roy’s shirt with his right hand and grabbed the hand with his left, pushing it closer to his skin, and took a step closer.

“I-I c-ca-came t-to s-see y-yo-you,” Ed stuttered out, and took the final step so that his forehead was pressed into Roy’s chest, right where the shirt was unbuttoned and skin was showing. “H-Had t-t-to.”

“Ed,” Roy said, but Ed couldn’t see his expression, didn’t even care if he was getting Roy’s clothes wet (and there was the thought of *Roy* and *wet clothes* and oh). “Ed, why did you come here? You should be in bed - how - what’s wrong with you?”
He knew what was wrong with him. If he had any common sense left it was screaming at him, rallying him to get the hell out, but Ed couldn’t hear it, just tugged insistently down at Roy’s shirt, and the man bent obligingly and froze when Ed pulled his head away from his chest to brush his nose against his own.

Ed swallowed and tightened his grip. “Roy, I need - I need-”

“You’re not well,” Roy said, quiet and harsh. “Ed, you’re not okay - you’re too warm and shivering, and I need to call your brother.”

“No, no-“

“You’re going to regret this,” Roy pressed and tried to pull back, but Ed tensed the automail and held him steady. “Ed, you’re going to regret this when you’re better and you’re going to hate me even more if I let it happen.”

Ed whined. “I’m giving you permission - I’m giving you permission, Roy, please, please, I’m begging you-” and then before Roy could pull away again, he arched up and pressed his lips to Roy’s throat, right under his chin and Roy stilled immediately. “I don’t care, I don’t care anymore, please, please-”

He punctuated each please with a kiss, moving lower and lower until he was at the edge of Roy’s collar. Roy was so tense he had begun to tremble. His hand was still pressed to Ed’s hand, twitching, and his grip around Ed’s automail would have hurt if Ed could feel anything with his right arm.

“It’d both make us happy,” Ed murmured into Roy’s skin. “It’d make me happy, Roy. Please,” another kiss, through the collar, and then Ed loosened his automail fist to tug the shirt away. “Please,” another kiss, this time to the exposed skin. “Please.”

Ed pulled away and moved upwards, lips just barely brushing Roy’s, and the man started to lean down, before he jolted away and ripped himself out of Ed’s grip. Ed was pulled off-balance, and his head swam with the sudden movement and started to fall, before he caught himself on the edge of the hallway table and had to cover his mouth to keep the nausea down.

“It wouldn’t make you happy,” Roy breathed, shaking his head, leaning against the wall across from Ed. His eyes were wide and confused and maybe even slightly horrified. “It wouldn’t make you happy, you know it wouldn’t make you happy - I don’t know what’s wrong with you, but Ed, you’re not in your right mind. You can’t - it’s not fair - you can’t just do this to me-”

“To you?” Ed growled, suddenly, feeling his hormones flip in a completely different direction. “I can’t do this to you? I thought you wanted this!”

Roy’s expression closed off, eyes turning cold. “I wanted you, Edward, willingly. You made it abundantly clear that you weren’t, and so I stopped because you asked me to. So, no, you can’t do this to me - it’s unfair, horribly unfair. I would have-” his expression broke. “I thought that - that we were - happy, but I was wrong.”

Another hormone flip. The back of Ed’s eyes began to sting. “It wasn’t my fault - It wasn’t my fault. It was - you - you -” He inhaled, trembling. “You’re such - such a bastard, I - I lov-“

The door swung open suddenly and before Ed could finish, he was suddenly on the ground, Al on top him, pinning him. Frustration grabbed ahold of Ed’s instinct, and before he could register it, he had Al kicked off, swinging upwards into a crouch, but Al moved forward, grabbing his automail and wrenching it behind his back, kicking out his calf and knocking Ed off balance.
“Give up, brother,” Al growled, and twisted back the automail so that the nerve socket on his shoulder port screamed. “You’ve never won a fight against me.”

“I hate you,” Ed raged, and twisted miserably. “I hate you - I hate all of you-”

“I should have known you wouldn’t have stayed put,” Al murmured and pulled Ed up carefully, before easing up his grip on the automail. “Brother, stay still.”

“Why-”

There was a needle in his flesh arm, suddenly, and Ed snarled - needles, damnit he hated needles - and swatted at it, but Al had already pressed down on the plunger and the room started to sway even worse than before. After a second, Ed stopped struggling and slid down to sit on the floor. Al let him go, watching for a second, before looking up at Roy, who was staring at them wide-eyed, obviously torn between confusion and horrified surprise.

“Colonel,” Al said, and cleared his throat, catching his breath, trying for nonchalance and failing miserably. “I’m so sorry, I really am - I should have been watching him better-”

“What the hell is wrong with him?” Roy asked, hoarsely. “What the hell - he was soaked to the bone and freezing and he-” He closed his mouth suddenly, lips pressing together. Al frowned, and Ed watched him, them, blearily, struggling to keep his eyes open.

“He’s delusional and running a high fever,” Al said, and pushed the hair that was falling in his face out of his eyes. “He only gave me a vague outline of what happened today, at City Hall, before he got too sick to focus.”

“The assassin,” Roy murmured. “He did this?”

“Brother mentioned a spray, some sort of liquid; I’ve already called the Commissioner and told him about it but,” Al continued, nodding. “He was dosed with it-”

“...trying to protect me,” Roy finished, frown deepening. “He only...” he trailed off, leaving his sentence hanging.

“Brother...wouldn’t regret keeping you safe,” Al said, after a moment. “But he’s not - well, right now, and I need to get some antitoxins into his system. I don’t know what he was doing or saying, but, Colonel, you can’t - it’s not him. You were there when this began, I think he just chose you as something to focus on. When the delusions started, the thought of you transferred over. I’m...sorry, Colonel Mustang.”

Roy inhaled. “Don’t be, Alphonse. Please. I’m sure he’ll be horribly angry about this tomorrow, so it’s best not to think about it. He’ll probably appreciate it if I never bring it up.”

“I’m not sure he’ll remember it,” Al said, softly, and looked back at Ed, who stared at them, confused. Remember what? “His body’s been through a lot. The shock might make him repress the memories. He was - what was he saying as I came in?”

Silence, and then, “I’m not sure. You cut him off before he finished. He was - angry at me. Not unusual.”

Al shifted. “Did he mention anything? He wouldn’t have - there would have been no filter. I’m sure some of the things he said he had no idea what he meant. Any...people he talked about, or things he might have did.” Al swallowed. “If he mentioned-“
“He came in and yelled at me,” Roy cut in, ducking his gaze away from Al’s. “It was obvious he wasn’t himself. He said - things that I know weren’t true.”

“Alright,” Al said, after a second, and took a step closer to Roy. “You’re - I know you’re confused, and nervous, and worried, but Colonel, he’ll be fine.”

Another inhale. “I’m sure he will be, Alphonse. Would you - please, if you could give me a call when he is better? I doubt I’ll be getting any sleep tonight and it’ll be...worse, if I’m up worrying after him.”

“I’ll make sure to do that,” Al said, and turned to Ed, who blinked sleepily at him. “Come, brother. Let’s go home. Winry’s waiting with pizza.”

“But I want-”

“I know, brother, but you can’t, not right now.”

Ed pouted and let Al wrap his arms around him, picking him up and slinging him over his back. Ed rested his cheek on Al’s shoulder. He sighed. “I’ll never get him, will I?” he murmured into Al’s neck, and his brother looked back at him, sending him a quick smile.

“I’m sure one day you will, brother,” Al assured, and it was enough to push Ed over the edge and into sleep.

The last thing he saw was Roy staring at the ground, leaning against the wall, gaze averted from him, and Ed felt his heart clench before his eyes wouldn’t open and his mind went blank.

~

“I like food,” Ed said, defensively, when he saw Roy smirking at him. “You ordered the same damn thing I did.”

“Ah, but I’m not finding it nearly as blissful as you seem to be,” Roy said, raising an eyebrow. “I didn’t think one could get such pleasure from a slab of meat.”

“You do know the human body’s just a slab of meat,” Ed said, glaring. “And people still have sex.”

Roy’s smirk widened just barely. “Touché.”

The diner they were both in was nearly abandoned except for a group a few booths down of high school kids, drinking milkshakes. Roy took another bite of his burger, chewed, and tilted his head, considering the meat carefully. “Perhaps I should have said I’ve never known someone to get such pleasure from a deep fried slab of meat.”

“Don’t know why I haven’t found this place sooner,” Ed said, and nearly moaned at the next bite of his burger. “Who came up with the idea to deep fry a burger? Freakin’ genius.”

“I thought you would think so,” Roy said. “Honestly hoped you wouldn’t, but I did think you would.”

“And vegan milkshakes,” Ed said, grabbing his glass. It was topped with soy whipped cream and everything. “I didn’t think anyone made vegan milkshakes, other than Al.”

Strawberry and delightfully dairy free. Ed could cry. Roy’s smirk softened into a smile.

“It was a bit of a hassle finding somewhere that had a vegan option but also sold meat,” Roy said,
and played with his spoon and fork. “But, it was worth it don’t you think?”

Ed nodded and finished his second milkshake. “Hell yeah. We’re gonna have to come back here sometime.”

He froze after he realized his wording, throwing his head up to stare at Roy and wait for the inevitable brush off, but Roy looked - delighted. “We will,” he said. “You could work your way through their milkshake selection.”

“There’s over forty-eight different types of milkshakes here, and that’s the ones that aren’t combined,” Ed pointed out.

Roy hummed. “Yes, there is.”

A wide smile broke on Ed’s face without him meaning to, but he couldn’t regret it. Well, if there was anything more serious than a promise to work through forty-eight types of vegan milkshakes with a promise of forty-eight different dates, Ed didn’t know what was. He couldn’t - he could not fuck this up.

“What’s your favorite milkshake?” Ed questioned, leaning forward. Roy titled his head to the side, smile turning confused before it brightened.

“Pistachio.”

Ed drew his eyebrows together. “Al...right. I can deal with that. Favorite movie?"

Roy twisted his lips in thought. “It’s a tie between Two Mules for Sister Sara and Pulp Fiction. You?”

Ed stared. "I thought you were gonna say something like Saving Private Ryan or something.” Roy stared at him and tsked.

“I’m not a total walking cliché, you know.”

“Not a total walking cliché.” Ed chewed on his lip. “Mm, Mean Girls.”

Roy’s smile suddenly became strained. “Ah.”

“I’m so totally joking. It’s a toss up between Texas Chainsaw Massacre and the original Superman.”

“Thank God,” Roy breathed, and visibly relaxed. “You don’t know what you were asking me of there right then.”

“That does not mean that I can’t quote Mean Girls from heart,” Ed finished, leveling his spoon towards Roy. “We only wear pink on Wednesday.”

“I’m dating a fourteen year old preteen girl,” Roy drawled, and blinked, startled, as Ed turned a bright shade of red before tensing. “I mean - we are - aren’t we?”


“We’re dating,” Roy said, a tad bit firmer. “This is a date which will be part of a series of dates which will eventually lead to-”

Even though he didn’t know how, Ed turned an even brighter shade of red. “Eventually.”
Roy cleared his throat. “Eventually. We - should probably get moving. The movie’ll start soon and we still have to walk to the theater.”

Ed nodded, finished his third milkshake, and stood. “Wait, did you just call me a fourteen year old preteen girl?”

Roy stood and threw down a few dollar bills onto the table, forcing his attention somewhere else. “Hmm, no, Ed, I don’t think I did.” He got a suspicious stare. Roy moved towards Ed and slung an arm around his waist and pulled him against his side. “You are - quite luckily - a very adult male and we really should get moving.”

Ed decided to let it slide, not because he was suddenly very aware of the fact that even though they were moving towards the door and down the street, Roy’s arm didn’t move. Ed wet his lips, fumbled for a second, and then reached up with his hand and grabbed Roy’s hand, holding it as they walked. He pointedly ignored Roy’s grin.

–

Ed woke up feeling - oh.

“Gonna be sick,” he chanted as he rolled off his bed and flopped onto the floor. “Going to be very sick. Gonna be really sick.”

He kept a wastebin by the desk and just managed to pull himself over the lid of it before he emptied out his stomach. When did he eat pizza?

Actually, when did Ed get home? When did Ed even-

He close his eyes and curled up on the cool wood of his bedroom floor and thought back. City Hall, Envy warning him, stopping Lance just in time and finding out - finding out he was there to kill Roy, and Ed’s eyes flew open as he pushed himself up.

But he had stopped Lance, who got away, and then -

A blast of red light, he could remember that much, but what - what else - what time was it?

Three in the afternoon. Ed felt his heart leap into his throat as he scrambled for his phone, and there was a text from Beth that said ‘get well soon :)’ and a missed call from Solaris, but no Hughes beating down on him and no call from Mustang to question why he wasn’t in work. It wasn’t the first time that Al had called him into work sick, but this was the first time Ed must have actually been sick. He could feel the remnants of a fever, a hot churning his stomach that was definitely of the aftermath of an even more violent churning, and he felt - he felt -

Needy. He needed something, or needed something - past tense - and now he was dealing with the effects.

His neck felt like it was on fire, and at least he remembered why. Lance’s forearm digging into his trachea had left a yellow bruise right under his chin if the reflection on the screen of his phone was anything to go by. It hurt to touch, and he knew he wouldn’t be eating any horribly hard foods for awhile, but - why couldn’t he remember what happened after?

Lance activating what had to be an array, but everything started getting topsy turvy from there. Had he met Commander Licht? Was that the product of a fever dream?

Roy’s skin, underneath his lips, reaching up to brush the edge of his nose against his own - that had
to be part of a fever dream. Ed curled up on himself, ignoring the hot flood of embarrassment that it sent through him. Did he - he didn’t actually seek the man out, did he? He didn’t beg?

The dream (or memory, god he hoped it wasn’t a memory) had a shiny edge to it, kept slipping through his fingers. Obvious leaps in logic leapt up. How did Ed even get there? It hadn’t rained last night so why did he think his clothes were wet? Why did - Why did Roy push him away?

Ed faltered. Could it have been that it wasn’t a dream, then? Why would Ed dream something like that? Unless his subconscious liked to fuck with him, which - alright, Ed had that kind of luck.

He called Solaris first, still laying on the floor, and Ed waited for it to ring until one of the university kids - a girl from China who wore her hair in braids and buns - answered. Ed tensed for the enviable snark-battle.

“Antiquaries, Mei speaking,” she called into the phone and Ed had to lean away from it to clear his throat.

“Yeah, can I - is Solaris there?”

“Name?” still chipper. Ed scowled.

“Mei, it’s me,” he said and turned so that he was leaning on his back. Mei hummed, “I’m sorry, is your name ‘me’?”

“I hate you so much,” Ed muttered, running hand over his face. He could see Mei’s smirk. “It’s Edward Elric.”

Mei called, chipper, ‘one second!’ and there was the sound of shuffling before Solaris was answering the phone.


“Yeah,” Ed swallowed. He could feel her raised eyebrow.

“You never miss my calls. I was beginning to get...concerned.” Solaris continued speaking before Ed could come up with his excuse, her voice wavering as it shifted away from the phone for a second. “There’s this fascinating little rumor going around about Edward Elric and City Hall.”

“Please, kill it,” Ed moaned. “Kill it with fire - I’m not even quite sure what the hell happened.”

He could feel Solaris’ displeasure through the phone. “We agreed, boy, that Edward Elric would stay out of the lime light. This is strike number one.”

Ed’s head thumped against the ground. “Fuck - I’m sorry, alright? It’ll be old news in a few days. Why’d you call me?”

“Angela saw the most interesting thing on the street today. Looks like someone else has begun snagging Dante’s old territory and claiming it for their own; and they’re not getting opposition from the Martillos and Nueves.”


“Most of the west side is taken over and they’re moving south. The most interesting part is that there’s a warning spreading throughout said group’s members, to stay away from an entire square mile of area - between 14th and Crescent.”
“That’s just a park,” Ed said, after a moment. “Why would they?”

“The reason given was simple; ‘So there are no witnesses. And if there are, they’re going to be killed.’ Very blunt, if you ask me. They don’t want any of their own being caught in a cross fire.”

Ed hissed. “Jesus Christ. When-”

“An hour ago,” Solaris said, bluntly, and almost sounded uninterested, but Ed could hear the hint of urgency under her voice. “The order is still in effect. Hurry, boy.”

Ed didn’t even end the call, just forced himself up and threw his shirt off. He stripped off the poster of *An American Werewolf in London* and carefully unlocked the safe, pulling out the leather pants, black long sleeve shirt, and red coat that Fullmetal wore, stripping and pulling all of them on. Dark leather gloves went on next, and then Ed wrenched the hood over his eyes, checking through the strategically thinned cloth that allowed him just enough vision to see, and slammed the vault closed after clipping on his belt. The poster was thrown back over it and without breaking a beat, Ed pocketed his phone and grabbed his keys.

Food - he needed food. The last time he had gone out without food hadn’t been nice, and he felt especially shitty. He didn’t break stride as he sprinted out the bedroom door and into the kitchen. Winry yelped and fell off the couch as he grabbed one of the emergency-fuck-you’re-late pastries from the cabinet and vaulted out the window, ignoring Winry’s holler that he was ‘SUPPOSED TO BE IN BED, YOU FREAKIN’ IDIOT!’

His bike was - wait, where was his bike.

At the precinct. Oh fucking hell. He didn’t have *time* - he ran to the front road and waved down a taxi, the driver of which stared at him as he climbed in and ordered in his gruffest voice, ‘14th and Crescent’.

“I’ll give you forty bucks straight up if you just pretend this never happened,” Ed growled and after a second the taxi driver shrugged before pulling away from the curb.

“You’re not the weirdest customer I’ve picked up,” the taxi driver said before turning confused. “Is this - are you gonna go save someone?”

“That’s the plan,” Fullmetal said. “I’ll make it a hundred dollars if you get me there within the next ten minutes.”

The taxi driver hummed and cracked his knuckles before carefully clenching his hands on the steering wheel. “My kids are never gonna believe this - their dad’s a real hero.” And then Fullmetal was thrown against the side of the car as the taxi peeled around traffic.

Ed hated cars. He couldn’t get to his seatbelt and with the leather pants he had no grip on the chair made of lamination, and he slid around, crashing clumsily against the side of car and forwards into the front seats.

“Hey, so, can you actually do magic?” the taxi driver asked conversationally as he slid in front of an eighteen wheeler and pulled out of the way at the last second. Ed felt his heart leap into his throat.

“Not - magic,” Fullmetal managed to get out, grabbing one of the seats with his automail. “Alchemy.”

“What?”
Fullmetal rolled his eyes and nearly fell over himself as the taxi stopped suddenly, backed up, and then rode up a back alley. “Magic, but real.”

“Oh,” the taxi driver said, like it made all the sense in the world. “Can I get your autograph, by the way? My son - he’s eleven, Joey - he really loves you. I bought him a red coat for Christmas and the kid never takes it off.”

Ed’s head hit the roof of the car as they rode over a pothole. “Sure.”

“Thanks, man - I really appreciate that.” And suddenly they came to a stop and Fullmetal blinked when he realized they were right in front of the park between 14th and Crescent. Ed hurried out of the car, turned to the taxi driver before pulling out a crisp hundred dollar bill and handing to the man, before taking the offered pen and pad of paper.

“Joey, your dad’s a real hero. Don’t do illegal things. - Fullmetal,” the taxi driver read and grinned. “Thanks man.”

“Thank you, citizen,” Ed said and saluted jauntily.

“Bob,” the taxi driver laughed. “Can’t wait to see who you save this time.”

Honestly, at this point, Fullmetal hoped that there was someone left to save. The park wasn’t too large, he could see the end of it from here, but it was crowded. Not only that half of it was up on a hill, the beginnings of the mountain range that began just on the border of the city. Huge boulders were thrown every which were, and Fullmetal was already beginning to attract attention.

And then - the scream, out of place of the children shouting and the radio’s blaring. Fullmetal’s attention turned immediately towards one of the bridges that kept the running path level, the water way under it dark and damp. The stream was barely higher than a few inches but during huge storms it usually overflowed and lead out into the river. Fullmetal swung himself over the railing of the bridge, landing in the water with an audible splash. His boots filled with water immediately and slushed through it, into the dark bridge.

“No, no, please-” someone said, voice feminine.

“I’m coming!” Fullmetal called. “I’m coming - hold on, I’m coming!” He drew out a knife and pulled off his leather glove in the same movement, nicking his finger and hurriedly drawing an array on to the palm of his hand before slamming it down onto a rock by the river.

All at once the moss and algae began to grow brighter and it lit up the entire stream in a hue of vibrant pale blue, illuminating the long tunnel. Down at the very end was a teenage girl, long brown hair wrapped around someone’s fist who Ed couldn’t quite make out. Whoever it was, their nose was bleeding, and Ed supposed that the hit was the only reason the girl had managed to call out for help.

Ed rushed forward, throwing the knife forward, but the figure leant out of the way and growled. The light finally reached a vibrant enough color that Fullmetal could start to make out the details. It was a woman, wearing a pale trench coat and high-heeled boots with perfectly styled platinum blond hair and teal eyes.

“They said you might show up,” the woman hissed, and wiped the blood on her nose away with the edge of her sleeve. “Ugh - this never happened to asshole Wrath! Why do I have to get the bad luck?” Her expression twisted into something ugly. “It’s not fair Wrath’s Pride’s favorite! I deserve to be someone’s favorite!”

Fullmetal carefully took a step forward. “Look, lady. Let her go.”
The woman’s gaze twisted towards him. “Why the hell would I do that?” She yanked on the girl’s hair, who sobbed. “I want dark hair,” the woman muttered to herself. “Why were you born with dark hair? Doesn’t even look good on you.”

What - the absolute fuck? He didn’t have time to deal with this. Not with the way he was still feeling weak, but the woman shifted, trench coat sliding open to reveal a white silk blouse and a black pencil shirt, and there, as she turned, was a red tattoo against her shoulder, only visibly as her shirt dipped open.

He drew out a set of knives, thinking up a quick plan. He’d apologize to the teenager in front of him later, but hair grew back. Ed moved forward, leaping up from the water to the exposed stones so that he could move faster, and with one movement, sliced downwards and cut a straight line through the girl’s hair. She pulled free and rushed behind Ed, clumsily slipping in the river.

“Damnit!” the woman growled, and threw away the handful of loose hair. “Fucking Wrath never has these problems - will you stay still?”

“Not until you tell me who you’re working for,” Fullmetal called, and darted forward, lashing out with the knife, but the woman was quick, moving backwards with practiced steps, face still twisted in anger.

“I’m not stupid,” the woman rolled her eyes and backflipped through the water, landing neatly a couple of paces away from Fullmetal, and before he could stop her, she rushed past him, a glint of silver in her hands, and he turned on his heel and screamed at the girl who was tripping over self in the fast-flowing water to get out of the tunnel, and she turned towards him and the woman sunk her hand into her chest.

“No!” Fullmetal yelled, and moved, striking forward with his automail fist towards the woman’s head. “You fucking bitch!”

“Name’s Jealousy, dipshit,” the woman rolled her eyes as Ed grabbed onto the girl before she could fall and pressed his hands against her wound. “Fuck this, I’m not made for assignments like this.”

“I’ll get you for this,” Fullmetal growled. The girl underneath him choked, and Ed pushed down harder, ignoring the way blood slipped through his bare flesh hand and his clothed metal one. “I’ll get you all for this.”

Jealousy rolled her eyes. “That’s the plan. Whatever - I’m out of here.”

She flipped her hair over her shoulder and sauntered out of the tunnel, and Ed couldn’t help but yell, “Jealousy’s a fucking awful name!”

“Better than Envy!” she called back, and rounded the corner, disappearing. Fullmetal fumbled with one hand, pressing his metal hand onto the girl’s chest. The wound was bad; a large part of her flesh had been gouged out, deep enough to make Ed worry, but the human body was Al’s department, not Ed’s - how deep did a wound like this have to be before...

“It’s gonna be alright,” he murmured to her. “It’s gonna all be alright. What’s your name?”

“M-Ma-Marissa,” the girl choked out. “Am I - Am I gonna die?”

“No, no no no,” Ed shook his head. “No - did you hit that woman in the nose?” When Marissa nodded, Ed grinned, and before he could think too hard about it, he pulled back his hood and smiled down at her. “Good job, such a good job. I’m very proud of you. I’m gonna make a phone call, alright? Help’s coming.”
Marissa stared at him, eyes wide, but her expression softened and some of the panic eased as Ed pulled out his phone, carefully gripping it and ignoring the way blood smeared across it, before thumbing in Hughes’ number.

It took a second for him to answer, and Ed sent Marissa a reassuring smile. Hughes picked up with a tiny click.

“How’s illness working out for you?” the man asked, jovially, but Ed cut him off.

“No, Hughes, I need - an ambulance at 14th and Crescent under the Waterborough Bridge. Like, ten minutes ago. Hurry, we’ve got - just hurry.”

“Ed,” Hughes said, voice dropping a serious, sober tone. “Ed, are you alright? I’m sending one now. Are you hurt?”

“No, I’m with - Marissa. She’s just been stabbed and she’s going to be fine.” He kept up a smile and nodded down at Marissa. Her eyes had over-watered and the stream leapt up and splashed at her face and Ed wanted to move her out of the cold, but he didn’t know if he could stop the bleeding if he did.

“They’re on their way,” Hughes said, after a second. “What’s the damage?”

“I think I just met the Scarface Killer, or at least, one of them,” Ed said, scanning the edge of the tunnel. Someone poked their head in, eyes growing wide, and before Ed could stop him a group of people were hurrying towards him. One of them, a couple, was tugging along a picnic basket and the older woman fell to her knees next to Ed.

“It’s okay, I’m a vet - I at least know how to do this,” the woman said, and stripped the picnic cloth into folded sections, gently removing Ed’s hands and pressing down. “It’s gonna be alright. Look, see, they missed the heart. You’re gonna be fine.”

It was a small group - two families, the couple, and three joggers - and they all carefully crowded around Marissa as the vet’s husband took the phone from Ed’s hands and began to speak with Hughes. One of the joggers brought over her bottle of water and carefully rinsed out Marissa’s wound while the vet stripped away soaked pieces of blood stained cloth and replaced them with new ones.

“It’s gonna be okay, it’s gonna be okay,” the jogger murmured. “Beautiful day out, isn’t it? Perfect for a run. The river gets so lovely around this time, don’t you think? That’s right, focus on me darling, that’s right.”

“It’s alright, son,” the vet’s husband said, and handed Ed his phone back. “They’re on their way. You can breathe, you saved this girl’s life, you know?”

Ed stared at him, started them all, and then reached up to his cheek, smearing blood against it, and realized his hood was missing. His look of horror must have shown, before one of the joggers, male and tall, grinned down at him, before carefully sitting down next to Marissa’s head and placing it in his lap.

“It’s alright, kid,” the jogger said. “We all know how to keep a secret.”

“Yeah,” one of the mothers said, picking up her young son. “You’re a hero - the least we can do to repay you is keep quiet.”

“You’re gonna want to get out of here,” another mother said, gaze darting out to look outside the
tunnel. “We can take it from here. We’ll keep her safe.”

“Momma - look! Look at the river! It’s glowing!” one of the little girls called, tugging on her mother’s shirt. “Momma, the entire river’s glowing!”

The jogger darted her gaze out of the window. “Wendy, go wait for the ambulance, will ya?” Her attention turned back to Ed. “Get out of here, Fullmetal. We’ll get this girl to safety and all that. Won’t be worth if you get arrested too, ya know?”

“Thank you,” Ed said, after a moment. “Thank you - all of you. I-”

“Show us by being safe,” the vet’s husband spoke. Ed nodded, and took one glance down at Marissa, who struggled but lifted her lips in a determined smile, before Ed started to move backwards towards the edge of the tunnel.

He managed to disappear into the alleyways behind the park right as the ambulance and a host of squad cars showed up; and well, it wasn’t often that he was able to spy on a crime scene as Fullmetal.

–

Mustang showed, eventually, along with Hughes. The crime scene, Ed knew, would be useless thanks to the stream. Witnesses talked about seeing the platinum blond woman leaving the scene but everyone had become too distracted to notice where she left. The people under the bridge didn’t withhold any information except about the fact they had all had an eyeful of who Fullmetal really was, helpfully (and not helpfully) shrugging at questions like ‘where did Fullmetal go?’ and ‘what was Fullmetal doing here?’

Marissa had been moved, alive thankfully, to the hospital, and Ed had watched her go, safe in paramedic and armed escorted hands. Eventually Hughes and Mustang had moved towards where Ed was hiding, and Ed carefully leaned under one of the fire escape.

“This is-” Mustang started, and Hughes finished, “Great.”

“Well,” Mustang amended, and Hughes, next to him, shrugged.

“She’s alive - we have to be grateful for the little things. Like the fact we have a description of who the hell is terrorizing the city, and now there’s confirmation that Fullmetal is on our side so the masses can be at ease,” Hughes finished, putting up air quotes around masses and at east.

There was a twist to Mustang’s lips, and Ed leant forward as Hughes furred his eyebrows and questioned, “What?”

Roy sighed. “Fullmetal came to visit me the night before last. I say visit, I mean broke into my apartment and pinned me to the floor,” he said, after a second. “He told me we should put our differences aside for the moment being, and then gave me a name. I haven’t found anything on it, but I can’t - help think I’m being strung along.”

“By Fullmetal?” Hughes questioned.

Roy shook his head. “For once, no. The name was Robert MacKenzie, an executive at the bank, and I’ve put Falman on going through his records but so far, nothing. And I can’t question him without probable cause.”

“Fullmetal breaking into your apartment and pinning you to the floor isn’t probable cause?” Hughes
questioned, after a second, most likely recognizing the name as the one Ed had asked him to look into. “We all know Fullmetal isn’t your biggest fan.”

Something in Hughes’ words must have sparked something in Roy’s memory, because the man looked away and scowled. Hughes waited for him to speak, and when he didn’t he elbowed Roy in the ribs. Roy scowled. “We were - in a compromising situation.”

“Compromising how?” Hughes asked, after a second. “Compromising like your gun to his head or-”

“There was something in his eyes. It must have been the light but they looked like the same color - that burnt gold, you know?”

Ed felt sick again. He slid down the roof wall until he was sitting and threw his head back against the brick, which hurt and gave him a headache, but he couldn’t focus on it.

Hughes finally spoke. “I’m sure it was just you seeing things,” Hughes said after a second, and forced out a laugh. “Ed as Fullmetal?”

“Ridiculous, I know,” Roy murmured, shifting, embarrassed. “I don’t want to even think about it. Fullmetal is-” he was quiet for a second, before his tone shifted, becoming harder. “A miscreant. A trouble-causer. A vigilante. Ed’s a troublemaker, sure, but - he couldn’t. He’s not.”

“Hypothetically, he was?” Hughes questioned, quiet. Ed felt the bile rise up his throat - no, no, don’t ask that, dammit Hughes -

“Hypothetically,” Roy laughed, before he exhaled heavily and leaned against the police car they were standing next to. “Hypothetically, I’d have to fulfill my orders.”

“You’d kill him?” Hughes asked, horrorstruck. “Roy-”


“So he could face a military tribunal that wants nothing else other than to put him in front of a firing squad, Roy-”

“I don’t have to worry about it because he’s not,” Roy said, steadily. “Ed and Fullmetal are two completely different people - and if they were one in the same, which they’re not, then I would do
my duty and I wouldn’t let personal feelings get in the way.”

Hughes was quiet, before he sighed. “Guess that answers that question.”

Roy blinked. “What question?”

Hughes must have shook him off, or changed the subject, but Ed couldn’t hear, just wrapped the red coat around him more tightly and bit his lip savagely.

Hughes had been right. He had answered the question he had asked Ed over six months ago.

(“Don’t you think things would be different if Roy knew?”

“I guess we’ll never know, Hughes.”)

~

After the dinner and movie date came the stroll in the park date. After that came the ‘let me show you the boring university’ date and Ed and Roy threw bread at pigeons and laughed at the haggled running professors and students running by which was followed by the date where they couldn’t find a taxi and were stuck in the rain and Roy gave up his newspaper to put it over Ed’s head, and then came the date where they didn’t do anything except walk around the city and Ed pointed out the places he had come to know and love.

A whole slew of dates followed, long dates, short dates, dates that had to count like the one where Roy left his jacket slung over Ed’s shoulders and Ed braved the military complex early in the morning to give it back, and they talked for an entire hour before Ed realized he had to get to work. Dates to the movies, to the diner, to random snow cone vendors in the park, and they found everything and nothing to talk about.

And yet -

“Shit,” Ed murmured, phone vibrating in his pocket. Roy’s lips pressed together and they slowed to a stop over the bridge running through one of Central’s many parks. Solaris’ name blared up him. It had been a running trend - one that Ed was beginning to get annoyed with. If Solaris didn’t call him, it was Hughes. “I have to-”

“Work,” Roy said, finishing the excuse. “That’s alright. I can wait.”

Ed smiled up at him, before turning his attention to the phone and answering it.

“Yes?” he carefully did not sigh into the phone. Solaris hummed on the other end.

“The Martillo’s are moving their shipment of drugs via van in twenty minutes, boy,” Solaris said. “If you hurry you can catch them when they pass over Nicholas Bridge.”

“Now?” Ed questioned, looking over his shoulder at Roy, who had taken off his uniform jacket and slung it over one shoulder on his fingers. “Are you - are you sure?”

“Yes,” Solaris said. “I am sure. Is this a bad time?”

Her tone of voice was the one she usually gave Ed when reminding him about the commitments he promised to uphold. Ed closed his eyes, noted that he had almost gotten two hours with Roy this time, before turning back to the phone call.

“I’ll be there. Ten minutes.”
Solaris ended the call and Ed stared at the phone in hand before texting Hughes and telling him to cover for his disappearance in case Roy asked after him. When he turned back to Roy, the man was waiting for him, smiling softly.

“I’m-” Ed started, the apology so common now that Roy probably knew it by heart.

“It’s alright,” Roy said, and took a step forward so that he was closer to Ed. “It’s alright, Ed, I don’t mind.”

“You do mind,” Ed muttered. “You have to mind. I would mind. We haven’t had a full date in two weeks.”

“Alright,” Roy said, and put his free hand on Ed’s shoulder. “I’m feeling a bit annoyed that I haven’t gotten to spend any time with you because you keep getting called away, but Ed, I’m not annoyed with you; I’m okay with it. I really am.”

Eight minutes left. Ed chewed on his lip. “I’m sorry.”

“Don’t apologize,” Roy murmured. “It’s fine. We had - I had a lot of fun during the time we got. I always have fun with you.”

Ed looked up and met his eye, giving a small smile. “’Cause I’m one of the few people that doesn’t put up with your bullshit?”

“That’s part of it, yes,” Roy said and smiled down at him. Ed felt - horrible, to be honest. For the past four months Roy had been, well, perfect. He was annoying, and snarked back at Ed, and together they could disagree about the fact the sky was blue, but every step had been taken with a patient grain of sand and Roy - Roy waited for him. Roy who was chaste in the oddest ways, kissing his cheek instead of kissing Ed, holding his hand but making sure to walk a respectful distance away, bringing Ed home before Al’s appointed ‘curfew’ (eleven) each night, but who could also tease Ed into a ferocious blush with the tiniest comment, made sure to touch Ed just so to elicit a dry mouthed want, and always stared at Ed like he was the best thing in the world.

And Ed responded by ending dates earlier than they had any right to be ended, and rushing off to the unknown, and lying - always lying - straight to Roy’s face.

Ed fumbled with his hands, awkwardly (six minutes), and gathered the courage he usually reserved for facing down gunmen and angry villains. Every time he had suggested a date it had been always horribly casual, leaving no room for Ed to feel embarrassed about it, but - but there was something he wanted, needed, to do and he needed to do this first.

“Friday is-” Ed cleared his throat. “Friday’s the last day for that carnival running through town. Do you - would you like to-?”

“I’d love to,” Roy said, a pleased smile twitching his lips upwards. “Friday. Seven?”

“Seven,” Ed said, breathless. “I - fuck it.”

He had kissed someone before, obviously, had actually done it a whole slew of times - but he had never done it with Roy. Whenever he thought the man would, Roy averted his lips to Ed’s cheek, or even sometimes to his forehead, and Ed forced himself not to whine irritably; and well, if Roy wasn’t going to do it, Ed would.

Roy blinked down at him, startled when Ed placed a hand against his chest, and before he could properly process it, Ed had moved forward, pulling him down as he rose up, and then - there, they
were kissing. Nothing so hard about that.

Chaste, at first, because that seemed to be Roy’s thing. Roy froze as Ed pressed his lips against his, nose pressed against his cheek, and then like a train coming to life Roy’s hand went limp, dropping his jacket onto the bridge, and one hand slid onto Ed’s cheek and the other arm wrapped around his waist, dragging him up.

It deepened then, his tongue slipping into Ed’s mouth, Ed pressed flush against Roy’s chest, and something in Ed’s mind reminded - four minutes - and Ed pulled back, breathing heavily, and swallowed, licking at his lips.

“Friday, seven o’clock,” he said, breathless, and swallowed again. “I-”

“Ed,” Roy said, roughly, half way to continuing, and Ed leaned towards him before forcing himself back.

“I have to - go, Roy, uh-” he started to step backwards, and watched Roy take a step towards him, jacket abandoned on the ground, but Ed sent him a quick smile, turned on his heel, and took off at a sprint. His bike, where was his bike?

–

“You’ll be pleased to know Marissa Stewart is going to be alright,” Hughes said, leaning against the wall of door leading up to the roof. Fullmetal sat on top of the small structure. “We have a description of the woman responsible, but I think you’d give a better one.”

Fullmetal shrugged. “Mid-twenties, slender. Kinda of stick looking with freaking white blond hair. Her hands...I don’t know. Hughes, this is - getting away from me.”

Hughes looked up from his wallet and from putting away the pictures he had just tried to force on Ed. “What do you mean?”

He sighed. “Looks like there’s a new gang taking over what’s left of Dante’s, and at the top must be whatever the hell group Robert MacKenzie, that dick Lance, and this new chick is part of. She - called herself Jealousy. Said that Wrath was Pride’s favorite.” Fullmetal looked down, voice dropping an octave. “They used to call my mom Sloth, and Solaris still looks up if someone calls her Lust. Hell, everyone knows Envy - even if he’s trying to be ‘the Dragon’ now. Wrath and Gluttony dying are the whole reason Solaris and my mom got out of the business, and you - you know what happened to Greed, and I know Pride - dude runs a movie theater on 2nd street and sends us a freaking card every Christmas.”

“You think that we’re dealing with the Seven Deadly Sins version two-point-oh,” Hughes said, frowning.

“Which means there’s at least seven people with those bizarre tattoos,” Fullmetal murmured. Hughes looked down at the quick sloppy sketch he had given him, the red crowned winged snake twisted into an eight, eating it’s own tail.

“What are you going to do about it?”

Fullmetal was silent, before he sighed. “Hunt them down. I have no idea what the hell they’re doing, but something that chick said - that I was supposed to get them for all that they did.”

“A trap?” Hughes asked, sharply. Fullmetal shrugged.
“Probably. Solaris is working every angle she can to get me information about who the hell’s at the top of all this. It’s just - it doesn’t add up. Why kill people randomly? Why lure them in an’ then kill them? Why get some people out of the country and then kidnap the others? Why try to kill Mustang when you could get to Licht ten times more easily?”

“To draw you out,” Hughes said, after a second. “Ed, they’re drawing you out.”

Ed’s jaw clenched. “Well, fuck that. I know what three of them look like, which means there has to be four, minimum, that I don’t know about. That Jealousy chick - I’ve seen her some place before, I just don’t know where. These are just - they’re just humans. They make mistakes; and when they trip up, I’ll be there to kick their asses.” He was quiet for a second. “Hughes, I think you should take Gracia and Elysia up north. I know it’s risky because of the conflicts, but if it’s out of the city—”

Hughes grinned. “Way ahead of you, Ed. They’re up at Gracia’s mother’s on the north-western side - farthest place north you can get away from the skirmishes. They left two days ago, just got in this morning.”

Ed exhaled. One thing less to worry about. “I’m thinking of making Rose take Al and Winry up to the cabin the Armstrong’s own up north too.”

“Do you really think Al’s going to go for that?”

“Hell no,” Ed sighed. “But Lance knows about him, which means that the others probably do too. I promised myself - I wouldn’t let him get hurt because of this.”

“Al can handle himself,” Hughes pointed out. “Remember that time that group of drunkards thought it was a good idea to mess with Solaris? Al’s - scary, when you think about it.”

“I try not to,” Ed muttered. Al could be absolutely terrifying when pissed. “But, I can lord Winry over him now. Trick is getting Winry to go for it.”

“And Roy?”

Ed - faltered. “What about him?”

“Well, we’re going down the list,” Hughes shrugged. “You went to visit him - to tell him about MacKenzie.”

Ed scowled. “Yes, I did. He aimed a gun at my head.”

“Well, you did break in,” Hughes pointed out and ignored Ed’s irritated glare. He shoved his hands into his pocket. “Ed - I know you don’t want to hear it, but I’m really proud of you for telling him. And now that Riza knows about you - it’s good, Ed, it’s really good.”

“I’m not telling Mustang,” Ed muttered. “I know where you’re going with this. I’m not telling him.”

“So, you were listening in,” Hughes sighed. “Ed, you don’t really think-”

“Duty first,” Ed drawled. “Always knew he was a perfect soldier.”

Hughes was quiet. “So, then, what’s the plan?”

Ed exhaled, again. “I’m not sure. I can’t just sit around for them to make the next move, but I don’t know what to do without directly drawing them out. The most I can do right now is do what I’ve been doing.”
“Running yourself half way to death?” Hughes questioned, dryly. Ed glared.

“This is just a puzzle,” Ed said, quietly, and stood on top of the doorway, judging the distance he needed to make to jump down and land safely onto one of the fire escapes so that he could get to his bike. “And I’m good at puzzles.”

Hughes was silent, and Ed jumped.

~

Roy was waiting for him at the entrance to the carnival, two tickets in hand. He was wearing his uniform, which Ed come to expect now considering the man usually came straight from work to his dates with Ed. Ed didn’t mind, not anymore, but one day he expected to see Roy in civilian clothes. He wanted to see Roy in civilian clothes, which was odd considering Ed didn’t really care about clothes. Or at least, he never used to. He had agonized over his wardrobe for ten minutes before Al finally rolled his eyes and helped him.

Ed was wearing jeans and a dark shirt, some meaningless logo on the front of it and his hair was up in it’s usual ponytail, bangs brushing his face. Roy hadn’t seen him yet and Ed took a second to park his bike in the motorcycle aisle and study him, hiding a shy smile as he did. Roy looked down and checked his watch, bouncing his foot slightly, and Ed clipped his helmet onto his bike and grinned. Maybe he’d make Roy ride home with him tonight and - oh, that - he meant that he had yet to even tell Roy about his bike and maybe he’d -

Oh, who was Ed kidding. If there was a reason he had never ‘dated’ dated before it was probably because it had been four months and they had done little more that the silly kiss on their last date. Ed was used to silent gestures and then alley-ways or the back of cars or anywhere, really, that constituted a semi-private place for a few minutes. But Roy was - he was different. Ed could barely raise his eyebrow without blushing up a storm.

Roy checked his watch again, frowning slightly, and Ed grinned before climbing off his bike completely and carefully coming up behind him, and sliding his hands over Roy’s eyes. The man jumped, hard, but froze when Ed said, “Three guesses as to who and the first two don’t count.”

Silence, and then, “Mary?”

Ed scowled and dropped his hands before pinching Roy’s arm. The man yelped and rubbed at his shoulder, but his grin was wide, even if Ed was frowning.

“Who’s Mary?”

“A person I just made up,” Roy answered, laughing. “Ed, one of your hands is pure metal, it’d be impossible not to know it was you.”

Ed rolled his eyes and grabbed the second ticket out of Roy’s hands. “You’re lucky I’m going to take your word on that.”

“Oh?”

“Yes, oh, bastard. Buy me cotton candy.”

Roy grinned, and mock bowed. “Your wish is my command. Come on.” With that he gestured towards the booth and they both flashed their tickets before stepping into the carnival.

Ed loved carnivals. He could remember the first time he had ever met his grandmother (that he could
remember), she had taken them to a Romany fair and Ed had spent the day dizzy on attractions and funnel cakes. It was one of his oldest memories, and it was just as dizzyingly exciting as he remembered. Roy ushered him towards one of the food vendors, buying Ed an entire cone of cotton candy and Ed grinned and picked at it with metal fingers.

He was half way to his second piece when he looked up, instinct tensing his muscles, and one of the carnival workers snapped a button on a camera in front of him. The flash went off, catching Ed’s surprised look, hand half way to his mouth, and blinked to clear the lights from his eyes.

“Memories fade, but pictures are forever,” the worker grinned. “Only a fiver to get a copy.”

Ed rolled his eyes and licked off the piece of cotton candy on his finger. “Please,” he said, and grabbed Roy’s hand. “Come on, I wanna try one of the roller-coasters.”

“I should have figured,” Roy said, dryly. Of course he indulged Ed, and together they worked their way through the rides, from the spinning seats to the rickety roller-coasters. Each one built Ed’s excitement up and up, and by the time they had finished the trek around he was breathless with it. The sun had sunk over the horizon and the moon was bright in the sky. The carnival was lit up, every attraction armed with some sort of whirling light, and Ed didn’t think he’d ever felt happier.

“Al doesn’t like carnivals,” Ed said, conversationally, as he followed Roy - well, he didn’t know where. “He gets sick on the rides. I keep telling him not to eat before we come but he never listens. And he doesn’t trust the vendor food.”

“To each their own, I suppose,” Roy shrugged, and stopped suddenly, scanning the crowd for something. Ed licked his fingers clean of his third funnel cake.

“What are you lookin’ for?” Ed questioned, going on his tip-toes to see over Roy’s shoulder. “Someone?”

“Something,” Roy said distracted, before ‘ah’ing. “Found it.” He grabbed Ed’s hand and dragged him forward, around one of the game booths, and towards a moving line. “Ferris wheel,” he said, grin wide on his face. At Ed’s raised eyebrow, he rolled his eyes. “Indulge me, Edward.”

“Fine, fine,” Ed rolled his eyes. “You’re such a sap, you know that?”

“You keep reminding me, so yes, I do know,” Roy said, and tugged Ed forward so that he could wrap his arms around him. “A few moments of peacefulness, that’s all I want. You, and me, and we can look out and see over the city. I know how much you love it.”

Ed looked up, resting his chin on Roy’s chest. Roy pressed his cheek into his hair. “Understanding bastard,” Ed said, after a second. “You’re really - ugh.”

“I’m really ugh?” Roy said, pulling back to raise his eyebrow, and they moved as the line shifted up. “Should I be offended?”

“You keep reminding me, so yes, I do know,” Roy said, and tugged Ed up the steps, waiting until the attendant opened the door for them and let them climb in. Ed took the seat closet to the window, Roy sitting next to him, and carefully, with a few halting stops, they slowly rose over the carnival, and eventually, it seemed, over most of the city.

Ed’s heart swelled. He really, really loved this damn city. It was breathing taking at night from the
ground, but from above it was hard to think of anything else. The moon was half hidden behind what Ed knew to be an executive skyscraper downtown and slowly rose as they did, the angle shifting, and then they were slowly starting to reach the stop, stopping for a few moments as the attendants below let off passengers.

“It’s gorgeous, isn’t it?” Ed murmured, and pressed his forehead against the window. “Perfect.”

“Yeah,” Roy said, and Ed turned towards him, except that Roy wasn’t looking out the window, he was looking at him. “Gorgeous.”

Ed felt the blush spread across his cheeks, and he shuffled backwards into the seat with a happy smile. “We should-”

“We should,” Roy finished, nodding. “We definitely should. Ed?”

He blinked up at Roy, who looked away for a second, hands tensing. Ed drew his eyebrows together and shifted towards him, half-way to asking what was wrong, before Roy moved forward and kissed him.

Ed was so caught off guard that for a few moments he didn’t do anything except blink, before he smiled against Roy’s mouth and pushed forward, trailing after Roy even after he had pulled away. His eyes fluttered open and blinked at Roy who was staring down at him, determined.

And then, “I love you.”

Silence, and Ed couldn’t breathe, the words echoing in his mind - I love you, I love you, I love - before it registered - you - and Ed felt his heart jump upwards, nearly escaping up through his throat. Oh, oh.

The smile widened, hurt his jaw, and his heart beat madly with yes, yes, yes, and he opened his mouth to respond, to say the words god, I love you too, you bastard, took you long enough, but his phone suddenly vibrated against his leg, making him jump, warning him just before it began to belt out Solaris’ customized ringtone, ‘Brick House’.

Ed closed his eyes, pressing them tight, before pulling his phone out of his pocket. “I have to-”


I love you.

“Yeah?” Ed breathed into the phone, opening his eyes to stare out over the cityscape.

“Now, boy,” Solaris said, breathed almost, and Ed almost dropped the phone. “Your chance, it’s now. Cora just got word from one of the military lackeys - the shipment’s just come up from the south not even ten minutes ago, ready to be shipped down the river over the border. Hakuro’s sending it off himself, something happened with the man he chose, boy, this is what you’ve been waiting for. If you can catch him in the act, loading those guns into ships, you’ll have him.”

Ed’s breath stuck in his throat. Hakuro was - and the ships were being sent across the border up north to the wrong side, the moment he had been carefully waiting for almost four months now - and Ed could - he couldn’t breathe. I love you.

“I have to,” he breathed into the phone, and risked a look towards Roy, who was politely interested in view over the carnival. “Now?”
“Now,” Solaris said, firmly. “Hurry, boy - it leaves in less than thirty minutes and this’ll never happen again.”

The ferris wheel began to move downwards, and before Ed knew it they were near the ground. “I-” he choked into the phone, and forced the breath down his throat. “I’m coming. I’ll be there. Five minutes.”

Solaris ended the call when it was clear Ed wasn’t going to. He slid the phone back into his pants and searched for the words he needed to say - I love you, too - and came out with ‘Work.’


“I know,” Ed choked. “I know.” The ferris wheel came to a stop, Ed could barely wait for the attendant to open the door, ran out the door as Roy stumbled behind him. “I have to-”

“Okay,” Roy said again, quietly. “Okay. I’ll - I’ll see you later.” His expression closed off suddenly, turning shy, and Ed had never seen Roy shy before. “Won’t I?”

“Yeah,” Ed said, and nodded. “Yeah - yeah. I have to-”

Hakuro. Hakuro and his lead and Ed had him - he turned on his heel and sprinted for the parking lot, for his bike, where Fullmetal waited for him.

Ed looked back once, just to see Roy stare at him before jumping and answering his own cell phone, turning away to talk, his expression hardening, and Ed grinned at him even though he wouldn’t see it, and turned back towards his bike.

He still couldn’t breathe. I love you.

Chapter End Notes

*stares up at ceiling*
Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

In which shit gets serious but not super serious, not yet.

Chapter Notes

*laughs so hard at this chapter the author makes a wheezing noise and starts crying*

((i meant to update on friday but college stuff??? gomen))

only one flashback in this monster chapter and it's marked with a ~ above it. once again, thanks for reading and commenting. *blows kisses* you guys are the greatest and you also give me life.


down the burning ropes

past the places where the

steel beams meet concrete skies

you make your bed under the moonlight

i think it's time we said goodbye

– down the burning ropes // james vincent mcmorrow

Rose hummed as she got ready for the day. She brushed out her hair, checked her make-up again (always just a light eyeliner and mascara) in the vanity again, and made sure that her purse had her keys and wallet inside of it.

“I have a doctor’s appointment today,” she called, throwing her purse over her shoulder as she grabbed a bottled water off of the kitchen counter. “And then I might pick up Winry for lunch. Did you grab the beef sandwiches I made out of the fridge?”

Alex looked up from his paper and inclined his head. “I did, dear. They look delicious.”

Rose gave him a pleased smiled. “Thank you. You do know I just slapped left over meat onto them, right, with some cheese?”

“Nonetheless,” Alex rumbled, stood, and wrapped his arms around her, pressing a kiss into her hair.
“You made them, and therefore I’m sure they’ll be amazing.”

“You’re a big flatterer,” Rose scolded, laughing into his chest. She barely came up to that high, but she had never minded. “And I’m going to be late for that doctor’s appointment. I hope Marie is doing alright with the kids, maybe I should cancel—”

“The kids will be fine,” Alex said, firmly. “Marie’s substituted for you before, the children are familiar with her. They’ll be fine. However,” he frowned. “Please be careful, Rose. Neither the police or Edward have been able to find this killer and the streets won’t be safe until they do.”

“The streets are never safe,” Rose said, and reached up with one hand to place it over the symbol on her necklace. “That’s why Ed does what he does. But, I’ll be careful.”

“Thank you, dear,” Alex rumbled, and leant down and pressed a kiss to her cheek. Rose smiled into it, before dancing back.

“Late,” she chanted, checking the clock and pulling out her keys, checking for her phone as she slid her flats on. “You’ve made me late, husband, awfully late.” Rose blew him a kiss, threw her dark hair over her shoulder, and hurried towards her car. It started easily, and she checked her appearance one more time - a sundress with spaghetti straps, a light yellow, that came up to her knees - and pulled out of their driveway.

The house was modest compared to every house that belonged to the Armstrongs’. It was two stories with four bedrooms, and a pool in the back. Ed adored it, spent most of his free time lounging around her kitchen (but considering how little free time he had, it really wasn’t that much) and Alphonse often came by to do laps in the pool. They lived in the nicer side of town, the side that Rose wasn’t all that familiar with up until a few years ago, with always-green lawns and trimmed trees.

Rose loved her life, and as the sun rose steadily over head, she couldn’t think of any place better to be.

–

Winry hummed as she washed the dishes. Al tried to focus on his medical textbook but he found that he couldn’t. She was wearing her usual jean shorts and white tanktop, but she was wearing fuzzy pink slippers and had all of her hair loose around her shoulders, and she - hummed.

Al hid the grin in his book. He had gotten so used to the only sight of Winry in the apartment being the picture on the mantle, but now she was here, and how was Al supposed to cope with that? Winry put another dish away and checked the time, twisting her lips, probably at the lack of anything to do. She didn’t work today, and the university was on holiday for the next two weeks. They had passed it off as a national holiday, but Al knew it was because so many students (and professors) had fled the city. So, two week hiatus it was.

Suddenly, Al had the nerve. He had no idea where it came from, the sudden courage building in his stomach, but he would tell her - tell her right now -

Okay, maybe he wouldn’t. How painfully awkward would it be if he told her and she - she just didn’t? They lived together and what if she liked someone else, or worse, Ed had always rolled his eyes when Al worried about them technically being blood related, and Ed explained and pointed out that second cousins seriously didn’t count, but what if Winry counted it? Her parents wouldn’t approve, Al knew that much, and Winry was already estranged from her parents as it was, trying and
always failing to make amends with them - Al didn’t want to make it harder. He could have always just - looked, but there was no way he’d break Winry’s privacy like that.

So, he lost his nerve. Just like that. He pushed himself back into autoimmune diseases and held back a sigh. Tomorrow, maybe?

Then, something shattered outside.

Al turned to Winry immediately, who jumped and nearly dropped the plate she was holding. Winry stared, gaze darting towards Al, who pushed his chair back and stood to walk towards the door and saw the door split as someone kicked against it.

Winry dropped her plate. It shattered in the sink. Al stared, and then backtracked and grabbed her and pulled her towards Ed’s bedroom just as the door flew open, footsteps echoing down the hallway, and Winry stared up at him wide-eyed, but Al inhaled and locked Ed’s door behind them, tearing open the closet door to push back the fake wall and draw out the set of knives Ed kept there.

“Out the window,” Al breathed. “Come on, Win.”

“Al,” Winry said, panicked. “Al, what the hell-”

“I don’t know, but I’m not going to stick around and ask them,” Al said, grabbing her hand as he clipped the band of knives around his waist. “Come on, Winry, come on.”

She stalled for a second before she scurried through the window. “Up or down?”

“Up,” Al said. “If they’re smart they’ll be waiting for us down there. Up, hurry.”

Someone kicked against Ed’s door, but Ed had four deadbolts on it and had replaced the door when they first arrived with a heavy steel frame. The plan was that if Ed’s night job ever followed him to Al, Al would barricade himself Ed’s room, but it wasn’t just Al anymore, it was Winry too. He went behind Winry, murmuring to her as she climbed, and finally they reached the roof. Al risked a look down and saw an older man with an obvious combover scowl and stare down at the street.

“Must have had a head start on us,” the man called. “Down the street, maybe.”

Al held his breath and carefully helped Winry over the edge of the roof and over onto it before climbing up behind her. He pulled her across the gravel and towards the building closest to them, stopping at the edge to make sure no-one would see them before turning to her.

“Trust me alright?”

Winry stared at him, eyes wide, but she nodded. Al drew out one of the knives and slit open his hand, squeezing it until the blood began to pour, and the wet the tip of his finger and started to draw on the edge of the roof before he pressed his palm to it and watch it shine bright blue. The gravel and bricks arched to his will, reaching up from the floor and stretching across to the next roof.

“Come on,” Al urged. “It’s safe, I promise.”

Winry swallowed, wiped her hand on her jean shorts, and let him tug across quickly onto the next roof; and that’s how they went, Al pausing before each edge to make another bridge and hurrying across it, hand tight in Winry’s.

“Phone,” Winry said after they cleared the eighth building. “Al, we have to call Ed. If they know where he lived, they have to know where he works.”
Al froze, searching his pockets, found his wallet, but he had left his phone charging on his bedstand, and Winry’s was still on the kitchen counter. He swore to himself, before staring. “Alright, this is alright. We’ll just have to call him - there are phones everywhere, it’s not even ten o’clock. It’ll be alright.”

“It will be,” Winry said, steadily. “Al, it will be. Let’s call Ed. Come on, let’s get down from here.”

Al stared at her, and after a second, they did.

Ed cut between two taxis, skipped over a divider, neatly avoided oncoming traffic from the opposite direction, and cut onto Main street. Early morning, and he wasn’t supposed to be into work until noon. Home then. He had called Al but it went straight to voicemail and the idiot must have gotten distracted by Winry again and forgot to turn back on his phone. Ed sighed and cut over the intersection, turning onto -

He cut the throttle and pulled for the break, throwing his heel against the ground, but it was too late. The man in the middle of the road turned towards him and Ed choked out a curse - why the fuck are you in the middle of the goddamn street! - as the bike didn’t lose enough speed and then -

The man threw out a hand and stopped the bike. Ed flew forward, hitting the handle bars, the breath leaving him as he felt his stomach bruise, and he flipped over the bike, skidding onto the pavement as the bike’s velocity transferred over onto him, and the man - dark black hair long and shaggy and a crazed solemn look in his eye - squeezed and the front light shattered.

Fullmetal stared and the man bent down and grabbed the back tire, lifted the bike into the air, and then broke it in two.

Something in Ed’s heart snapped, and it didn’t register until his bike, in two separate parts, ripped and savaged down the middle, hit the pavement. Someone screamed in the crowd of people, noticing what was happening, and within seconds people were running the other direction, cars backing into each other as the man walked slowly towards Fullmetal.

“My bike,” he managed to croak out. “You son of a bitch.”

The man grabbed Ed by the hood, forced him to his feet, and Ed tightened his automail fist, ready to lash out, and the man struck him across the head. Ed slumped to the ground, unconscious. His cell phone, kept on vibrate, buzzed in his pocket urgently, but it didn’t wake Ed.

The large man bent over, picked Ed up, and threw him over his shoulder.

“He’s not picking up,” Al murmured quietly, so that no-one in the restaurant could hear them. “He’s not picking up. Ed never not picks up. Something’s happened.”

“Maybe nothing’s happened,” Winry said, calmly. “Call Commissioner Hughes. Maybe he’s just in the middle of something.”

“Right,” Al said, nodding his head. “Right, Hughes. Hughes will know.”
Hughes didn’t know where Ed was. The fact he had no idea where Ed was was troubling enough, but having Al call him to tell him he had no idea where Ed was was even more troubling. Maes promised to ask Beth if she had gotten a call from him, and Al hung up, rushing to call Solaris and find out the last thing Ed had been doing.

Al and Ed’s apartment, broken into and attacked. Maes couldn’t send any officers to investigate because one, he had no idea what they were up against, and two, if the officers decided to make Ed’s apartment a crime scene, they’d find a whole slew of things that would make life a whole lot harder for the Elrics. At least, he knew, Al could take some comfort that their most precious items (photo albums, century old books, their grandfather’s and granduncle’s research) were all carefully stored away in a storage unit Ed payed with cash every month.

“Who was that?” Roy questioned, leaning over Maes desk as he wrote his weekly report to Commander Licht. “Al?”

“Yeah,” Maes said, and struggled for a second. “He can’t find Ed.”

Roy froze. “He’s missing?”

“We don’t know. He isn’t picking up his phone.” Maes couldn’t tell him the Elric’s apartment building was attacked because then Roy would question why it was attacked. “Ed’s probably - he probably went home with someone and his phone died. Al worries, you know how he is. If he doesn’t come in for work, I’ll call him myself.”

Something closed off in Roy’s expression. Maes winced, but it had been necessary. Roy was his closest friend, could maybe only be second to Ed’s father - Richard - but Maes had promised to Ed that he would do everything in his power to keep his secret safe. Not just for petty reasons, Maes knew that a lot of people’s safety were at risk.

Suddenly, his phone rang, and Maes answered it, expecting Al, but it wasn’t. He listened to the officer speak, his expression growing more and more horrified. “When?” Less than twenty minutes ago. Maes gulped and Roy dropped his pen, straightening up. He raised an eyebrow when Maes put the phone down and began calling another number.

“What’s wrong?”

Maes swallowed, again. “An entire street of people just saw Fullmetal nearly run his bike into someone standing in the middle of the road. Said man apparently proceeded to stop Fullmetal’s bike with his bare hands, throwing him off before breaking it in two, leaving it in the street, and making off with Fullmetal over his shoulder.”

“What...the fuck?” Roy questioned, eyebrows drawing together. “Who? The Dragon?”

“Apparently not. This guy was - huge according to descriptions. I’m sending someone to start patrolling the area.”

Roy stared, before shrugging. “How bizarre.” Maes stared, and shook his head at the completely different feelings, and for the same man too. Just seconds ago Roy looked ready to play hero himself if it meant saving Edward, but Fullmetal in trouble got little more than a shrug.

“If you only knew,” Maes murmured, waiting for the squad he was calling to pick up. He’d call Al
once he could get Roy out of the office and relay what had just happened.

“Jesus Christ,” Al swore after he got after the phone with Hughes for the second time. “Jesus Christ.”

Winry worried her thumbnail as they moved down the street. She knew she must look like quite the sight in shorts and a tank top and pink fuzzy slippers but at the moment she couldn’t be concerned with her appearance.

“Where are we going?” Winry questioned, for the first time, because she was trying to give Al room to breathe. He looked back at her, and gave her a steady smile.

“Solaris,” he said. “It’s not too far from here. She’ll give us clothes and a place to hide, hopefully. We won’t be able to stay for very long.”

“Okay,” Winry said, nodding. “Okay. Al, he’s going to be fine. Ed can handle himself.”

The sun was now directly overhead, noon ticking by. Al stared at it for a second, before looking down the street. He kept darting looks over his shoulder, watching for anyone that might be following them. Luckily he still had his wallet on them so finally they were able to stop a bus stop and Winry flashed her student ID that she constantly kept tucked away in her bra while Al flashed his own. Al pushed her towards the back and they sat on the third to last row, next to the back door.

Murmurs were beginning to be more audible now. It seemed like the entire city now knew what happened to Fullmetal, and the panic was thick in the air, like humidity before a big storm. Winry reached over and grabbed Al’s hand, squeezing it tight. He startled and looked at her, searched her expression for any signs of doubt, and sighed when found none.

“I hope he can,” he said after a second, as the streets passed by.

Solaris opened the back door to her antique shop with what Al had come to recognize as the ‘your brother has once again gotten himself in trouble and now I have to bail him out of it’ expression, which really was nothing more than a slight downturn of the lips and raising of an eyebrow.

“Hurry,” Solaris said, and ushered them in. “Quickly. Were you followed?”

“No, I made sure,” Al shook his head. “Whoever broke in - they thought we went down the street instead of up to the roof.”

“Did you see them?” Solaris pressed and lead them into the back room and up towards the apartments. Mei stuck her head in, blushed at Alphonse and waved and sunk back before Al had a chance to respond.

“Sort of. If I had a picture, I might be able to point them out. One of them was older, with silver hair in a really awful hair cut.”

Solaris’ lips twisted as they stopped at the top of the stairs. “Come.” She led them into her apartment,
and gave Winry a subtle smile. “I have some clothes that’ll fit you, and slippers. You can wear whatever you like, through there.”

Winry gave her a grateful smile, shying away through the bedroom door while Al sat at the kitchen table. Solaris walked to her bookcase and rifled through her books, pulling two photos out of somewhere. She laid them on the table in front of Al, one an obvious work ID photo of a man with a straight nose and slightly pudgy cheeks, and the other a picture taking from half behind a bush of the same man.

“That’s him,” Al breathed. “Who is he?”


“Ed - he was-”

“I know. Rebecca called a few minutes ago with the report.”

“Do you know anything?” Al pressed. “A name? Where they took him? Anything?”

“Why?” Solaris questioned. “So you can rush after that fool boy and attempt to save him? No. If I find any information it’s going straight to Commissioner Hughes. You can flush out a rat with fire, but sending more food will only make the situation worse.”

Al felt the urge to growl at her, and that was probably how Ed felt all the time. Irritated and frustrated at a lack of anything to do. “What then? What do I do?”

“You wait here,” Solaris said, firmly. “I’ll call an old contact who might have some information and you stay here with that girl and you stay safe like your brother would want.”

Al twisted his hands together, breathing heavily. He could feel Solaris’ emotions, even from here. She was worried, but was forcing herself to keep a level, steady head. He could feel the concern and the frustration and even the anger deep inside of her. Alphonse forced himself to breathe, and tried to sort through his own emotions, but ironically enough he could never read them. He was blessed with a calm, rational mind, something their mother and father had, while Ed had inherited their grandfather’s temper, and usually the emotions that were coursing through him just - didn’t.

Winry cleared her throat and twirled out a little, wearing one of Solaris’ old blue dresses, gathered at the front and haltered around her neck. Her bra straps were bright yellow, and Al laughed softly when she blushed and kicked at the ground with a sandaled foot.

“I haven’t seen you in a dress in ages,” Al said, gently. Winry rolled her eyes and blushed.

“No offense, Ms. Solaris, ma’am, but none of your shirts or pants would fit. They all - kinda - fell off of me around the bust and waist area.”

Solaris’ lips twitched upwards into a smirk. “Most find themselves unable to wear my clothing, girl. It’s quite alright. I have to get downstairs, but make yourselves at home. Eat if you’re hungry; sleep if you’re tired.” When Al swung his gaze towards her she stood and straightened out her black blouse, exposing a good amount of cleavage. “Relax, Alphonse. I will tell you if I hear anything about your brother. That does not, however, mean you’re allowed to leave.”

She slipped down the door and closed it behind her. Winry sat on the couch gingerly and visibly forced herself to relax with a sigh.
Al moved to the chair next to the window, sat, and waited.

Maes hung up the phone after Solaris called him to tell him that she had Al and Winry under her roof. Roy had left, finally, gone back to the military base while Maes allowed himself two seconds to panic over the utter mess he had found himself in. The general public was in a frenzied panic at the sight of Fullmetal being kidnapped in the middle of broad daylight and Maes had ordered for all police to make sure they were seen so that some sort of comfort returned to the people, but now that Fullmetal was known to be out of commission, crime took a sharp wave up. People were breaking into stores in the middle of the day, forcing people out of the cars in the middle of the road, all eager to take the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity of not having Fullmetal on their backs.

Just as Maes slumped downwards, someone knocked on the door, and Officer Martell stuck her head in, scowl set firmly in place.

“Gotta a woman askin’ for ya, sir. Refuse to leave until she speaks with ya.”

“Who is she?” Maes said, rubbing his temples. Martell sucked on her teeth.

“Luca somethin’. Says to tell ya ‘she’s here to repay a favor for the doll in the red coat’.” Officer Martell shrugged, but Maes leant forward, gaze swinging upwards.

“Bring her in, hurry,” he ordered and cleared the papers off his mess. A woman stepped through a second later, hair a curly mess of red hair with a splattering of freckles over her nose. She smacked loudly on some gum, looked around his office skeptically, and then slung herself into one of the chairs. She was dressed in a blue hoodie and white shorts. Maes stared at her, and then leaned forward. “A favor for the doll in the red coat?”

Luca smacked on her gum, frowning. “Doll’s gotten himself into trouble, ain’t he?”

Maes’ lips twisted for a second, before he sighed. “Yes.”

Luca scowled. “Figured. Told him as much.” When Maes stared silently at her, she rolled her eyes. “Couple days back, doll helped me out a bind. Gave him some information ‘bout the people who’re disappearing, you know? Told him about this real asshat called Robert MacKenzie, works up at the bank you know?”

Maes nearly choked on his own breath. “Yes, yes, I know.”

“Right, so,” Luca popped her gum. “Told me that MacKenzie’s the one getting people out of the country considering the shit fest goin’ on. War up north, people dying here, it’s going to the dogs, except that not everyone’s making it out. Some of them are not showing up. Well, told the doll all about it, and I guess he went to do the whole hero business.” She scowled fiercely. “Thing is I want out too, and my man went to go get us the passports.”

Her scowl wavered suddenly and she looked down. Maes leaned forward. “It’s alright. You can tell me.”

She sniffed and her scowl deepened. “We only had enough for one,” she murmured. “So Mark, my boy, he goes to MacKenzie to get me my passport. Then I figure I find a job on the other side and send the money back and Mark comes over with me.” She shifted miserably. “He went three days ago. I got my passport and papers in the mail today.” Luca wiped at her eyes and scowled harder.
“Mark’s gone.”

Maes felt horror chill in his stomach. Ed had said - MacKenzie only took pairs. “They took him as payment.”

A tear streaked down Luca’s cheek. She wiped it away angrily. “Yeah. Yeah, except I’m not gonna fuckin’ stand for that. That asshole is not gonna get away with this shit.” Her lips trembled, but there was hellfire in her eyes. “I want my boy back.”

Maes felt his jaw clench. He lifted his phone off of the receiver. Probable cause his ass. “I don’t know if we can get Mark back,” he said, honestly, dialing. Luca’s expression broke just slightly. “But we sure as hell can get this fucker.”

—

Rose nearly skipped up the front steps of Military Headquarters. She couldn’t wait - not anymore. She had been at the doctor’s office, and then in her car nearly all day except for when she had rushed home to put together the dinner she had thrown inside of a lunchbox to surprise Alex with. She hadn’t put on the radio because she could barely focus on it, and every inch of her thinned with excitement. Alex had been transferred over a little bit after that poor boy had been found dead, so Rose forced herself to focus on the directions he had left for her should she need him at work.

Four o’clock, and Rose knew that it was unusual for her to bother Alex at work but - oh, oh.

Finally, door 415.

—

"Can I help you?" Hawkeye questioned as she looked up and the woman slipped into the office, and Havoc grinned and started moving towards his unsuspecting pray. Just as he was about to pounce, the woman smiled demurely and said, "I'm looking for my husband, Major Armstrong?"

"You're Rose Thomas?" Breda questioned, slightly incredulous. The women blinked and turned her smile towards him. Havoc tripped into the filing cabinet.

"Rose Armstrong, now," she said, and smiled so widely Hawkeye suddenly could see how Major Armstrong could fall in love with her.

"I thought you were gonna be-" Havoc started, and then stared. "But the Armstrongs, they're always - we thought - I thought-" He spluttered and then took a few quick steps back until he was pressed against the wall. "You're not crazy strong like Katherine, are you?" Another skeptical look. "Or crazy crazy like the Major General?"

Rose seemed to think about it for a second. "Alex once said that I have a 'capacity of kindness worthy of any Armstrong'?" She shrugged. "That's all I can tell you."

"Well," Breda spoke up. "You're definitely not what we were expecting."

"What are you talking about?" Falman inquired, raising an eyebrow. "She looks exactly how I was expecting."
Havoc and Breda turned their looks towards Falman, but it was Fuery who spoke up with a 'yeah, but didn't the Major show you a picture? So that doesn't count.'

Hawkeye rolled her eyes, or rather gave the impression that she did. "The Major is in with the Colonel at the moment," Riza said promptly, and gave Rose a small smile. "They should be out any minute. You're more than welcome to wait."

Waiting didn't seem to be something Rose wanted to do, as she basically strummed in place, and it was only a second before she was speaking again. It wasn't as she was disrupting any work - Breda and Havoc were communicating with their eyebrows, and Fuery and Falman had stalled their work to quietly argue whether or not seeing a picture of someone you've never met fell into the category of 'what you expected'.

"I wouldn't usually bother Alex at work," Rose spoke, though her voice was pitched low. Hawkeye felt a level of appreciation that she didn't want to actively break anyone's concentration. It was nice to have someone who actually cared about the workplace environment.

"Did you bring him dinner?" Hawkeye questioned, eye darting down to the lunchbox in her hands. "That's very kind of you."

"Oh," Rose laughed. "He always talks about how the mess food is hearty for his diet, but I think that's just his way of saying he'd appreciate a home cooked meal instead of what they serve. I figured since I was coming here I might whip something together. It's just a chicken sandwich and some fruits."

"Must be nice," Havoc said wistfully, chewing on the end of his unlit cigarette. "Having someone make you dinner and come visit you during work."

"I try," Rose said lightly, smiling. "I'm afraid it's a little bit sloppy, however. I was still excited from the news-"

"News?" Fuery questioned, and as he did so the Colonel's inner office door swung open, Armstrong and Mustang darting after each other, talking quietly. The office stood and saluted, and Mustang put them at ease with a simple hand gesture. Their conversation ended as Armstrong turned away from Mustang to see his wife standing in front of him, bottom lip tagged in between her teeth and a grin threatening to split open her face.

"Rose!" Armstrong cried, jovially, and took two quick steps to come in front of his wife, who nearly bounced on her feet.

"Hi, Alex, hello," Rose tittered, grin wide. "I'm sorry to bother you at work, here I brought you dinner since you said you were working late, I made it after I came home from the doctor's office and oh, Alex-" She paused and everyone held their breath as she clasped her hands together and tucked them under her chin. Even Hawkeye studied them with a lingering curiosity. Rose couldn't hold it anymore. "Alex, I'm pregnant!"

Silence, and then Havoc called 'a baby?!!' and then things were thrown back into motion. The office stood up and clapped on instinct as Alex took a step forward and lifted Rose into the air and spun her around.

"A baby - a baby!" Armstrong called. "Another addition to the Armstrong family - oh Rose, you've made me the happiest man in the world!"

Shouts of congratulations littered the office, and Armstrong bent down to litter kisses over Rose’s
cheek as Rose laughed and tried to get the full story out.

“Oh, I’m sorry I didn’t tell you what I was thinking - I had to be sure, that’s why I was at the doctor’s, and Alex we should make Edward godfather, you know he’d love to be and Olivier can be godmother-”

“No,” Armstrong said flatly, pulling away. Rose blinked down at him, still lifted into the air, and questioned, “Who do you think then?”

“Maria Ross,” Armstrong offered and smiled at Rose, who pretended to think about it. “Edward is dear to her heart and she has a mother’s kindness.”

“Perfect,” Rose agreed, and leaned down to kiss her husband. Armstrong set her back down on her feet but kept her close to him as the office got up to offer individual offers of congratulations.

“Congratulations, Major Armstrong, Mrs. Armstrong,” Colonel Mustang offered, last, and smiling. “I’ll be happy to arrange leave for you before and after the baby is born. But, I’m afraid I must excuse myself and my team from the celebrations. Hawkeye, suit everybody up. Hughes just called.”

Hawkeye’s expression turned grim as she turned towards her desk and began rearranging papers. Mustang turned back towards Armstrong, and smiled softly. “Take the rest of the day off, Major.”

Armstrong blinked. “Don’t you want me with you?”

“That’s quite alright,” Mustang said, and shook his head. “Go home, open a bottle of wine, or don’t.” He made a face. “I’m not quite sure when expecting women are supposed to cut out alcohol, but better safe than sorry.”

“Sir, may I ask what the situation is?” Hawkeye questioned, eyebrows drawing together just barely. Mustang’s smile became grim.

“The news this morning,” Mustang started and when he saw Hawkeye’s blank glance he stopped. Rose looked up to Armstrong, then down to Hawkeye, who tilted her head to the side. Mustang shifted. “Fullmetal was snatched off the streets early this morning.”

Rose gasped without meaning to. Hawkeye forced her expression to keep still, but she noticed the way that Armstrong tensed and Rose’s hand came up to grasp at his arm. Mustang didn’t seem to notice.

“We have information about where he’s being held?”

“We might soon,” Mustang murmured. “Excuse me, I have to go talk to the Brigadier General.” He turned to the Armstrongs. Rose stared at the ground, and Armstrong rested a hand on her shoulder. “Once again, congratulations. If you’ll excuse me.”

Once he left, Rose began to chew on her lip, reaching inside of her shirt to grab at her necklace, worrying it between her fingers.

“Alex,” she said, softly, eyebrows drawing together. Armstrong nodded.

“Home,” the Major said, softly. “We can call Alphonse and tell him the good news.”

“Yes,” Rose murmured. “Yes, let’s do that.” They left together after a second, and Hawkeye clenched her fist.
Edward had been kidnapped - snatched right off the streets, and as Fullmetal no less. What was he doing? More importantly, was he alright?

---

Ed wasn’t alright. His head swam, which seemed to be such a normal occurrence lately these days he wasn’t sure why he was surprised. He knew he was dreaming because everything was blurred around the edges. Dimly he could hear running water - was he under the bridge again? Where was Marissa? Jealousy?

Not under a bridge. It was sunny out, nearly blinding.

Roy stood in front of him, expression furious, desperate, and he was talking, yelling, and finally, “Why the hell didn’t you trust me?!"

Ed choked on the air he was inhaling as he woke up, already registering that his hands were bound his back and his ankles were loosely tied together. He blinked the glare from his eyes and quickly studied his unfamiliar surroundings - a warehouse, not abandoned, boxes and crates all around him, and his hood was still clipped over his head so he supposed he should have been thankful.

Rope and Ed stretched with his automail hand, ignoring the bite as the rope bit against his wrist. The sun shined through one of the windows at the top and Ed stared at the shadow and guessed at the time, somewhere around three or four o’clock, maybe later, maybe earlier.

He could remember his dream in the back of his mind but it was fading quickly. Roy in front of him, angry, something about trust and why didn’t Ed trust him, why didn’t Ed trust him, why the hell didn’t Ed trust him?

“You’re not supposed to be awake yet,” an accented voice said, and Ed looked up, stared into the eyes of the man who broke his bike and snarled, teeth bared, ready to bite at him, but the man lifted a needle - no - and plunged it into Ed’s neck.

He slumped over, unconscious.

~

On the list of ‘worst days in Edward Elric’s life’, it went, tied at number one, the days that his mother and father died; number two: the day his grandfather died; number three: the whole mess with Greed; and number four: last night and today.

He had found Hakuro at the shipping yard and everything had already been set up without him; the military surrounded the shipping warehouse only two seconds after Ed knocked out the last gun-for-hire and with that, he was trapped. Still, nothing Ed couldn’t get himself out of. That had been the real kicker; it would have taken minimum effort to transmute a hole into the warehouse’s floor, scale the sewer running underneath it that emptied out into the river, and slip past the barricade.

The thing was that Ed didn’t want to have another note on Fullmetal’s file that said kidnapped and held General Hakuro hostage. He really didn’t. That was - bullshit. For one, Hakuro was at the clear other side of the room, and Ed started at him, incredulous. Hakuro thought he won, thought he had shaken Fullmetal into a corner and now any evidence Fullmetal gathered would be held unusable. Idiot.
So, Ed had a whole slew of options, really, but only one that would actually keep him in the clear. Besides the military owed him one, didn’t they? For the Scar incident - Ed’s debut? He had put away the serial killer that had plagued the city for months, the serial killer the military couldn’t even deal with. That counted for some sort of credibility, didn’t it?

Hakuro was making tick-tock motions. Ed wanted to hit him, except with the current situation, that wouldn’t work out well. Still, Hakuro was still a bargaining chip. If Ed could just explain to someone -

And, as if on cue, someone called over a megaphone about surrendering and negotiating terms of release, and here was the kicker, the kicker that made Ed’s head shoot up automatically, and who would be in charge of it was Lieutenant Colonel Mustang, as the voice of one Brigadier General Gran.

Ed twisted his lips - Hakuro obviously didn’t think he was actually going to talk, Hakuro probably thought that Fullmetal was going out tonight with a military-issue bullet through his head, but Ed had other ideas.

“Damnit,” Ed muttered, marched towards the front doors, ignored Hakuro’s surprised look, and slid one open, hiding behind the closed one, back pressed against it. The crowd outside quieted, suddenly, and Ed took the opportunity to call, “Alright, talk about these terms.”

Roy’s voice. Ed’s automail hand clenched without him meaning to. I love you.

“What do you want in exchange for the General?” Roy - Mustang - the Lieutenant Colonel called out. His voice was colder, flatter than Ed was used to, and Fullmetal peeked around the corner of the door to see the man standing past the blockade, arms crossed over his chest.

“I don’t want shit,” Ed shouted back. “You got the wrong fucking idea.”

There was something that shifted in Roy’s stance, but Ed didn’t know what. “Come out, then. We’ll negotiate.” Ed hesitated, and then. “We’ll talk,” Roy said, again.

There was something wrong with the whole situation. It curled in Ed’s stomach, and he frowned before he carefully stepped forward around the door, half shielded by it, and he could feel Hakuro’s incredulous gaze that he was actually going through with it, and Fullmetal took one step out, then another, wary, and stood in the open, breath held.

He was expecting some soldier lined up to the side of him or a sniper hidden on top of the other warehouse’s roofs, but instead of that, Roy calmly reached behind him, drew out his gun, aimed, and shot at Ed.

Surprise was the first emotion that Ed felt, and instinct took over as he batted away the bullet with his metal hand. The heat cut through the white skin covering and the bullet skimmed Ed’s upper left arm. Ed snarled, dove back into the warehouse, and that’s when everyone else decided to start shooting too. Fullmetal skid back, grabbing his bleeding arm, and without even thinking about, drew on the warehouse’s floor, pressed his palm to the array, and threw himself down the hole and into the sewer line.

He moved quickly, guided by a hand on the wall, against the water pushing out to the river, and he felt sick - he probably was sick. His arm felt numb and that probably wasn’t good. He remembered how his right arm felt before he lost it to the infection, how it had hurt and hurt and hurt and then - nothing.
Things he now knew: somehow Hakuro had known that Ed got his information through Solaris, that Ed was beginning to get desperate for a lead and had put a subtle nudge that Hakuro would be at the yard that night. The question to that was how did Hakuro know, and how the hell did Ed stop him now?

It wasn’t until he had followed the sewer line back into the central part of the city did he realized the extent to how sick he felt.

Roy had shot at him. Not - not at him. At Fullmetal. At him. Roy had looked directly towards him and shot - and Roy was part of the military, Ed knew that he had his obligations to put his orders first, but he felt sick, so sick, and once the thoughts started, they didn’t stop. What if - god, what if Roy had known? Would he had stopped?

Worse, would he have still took the shot?

He loves you, he told himself. He said.

Yeah, well, you were in love with Greed and look what happened there.

He wouldn’t.

Maybe he would.

He wouldn’t.

You know what you need to do.

Ed swallowed, tightened his grip on the sewer wall and tried not to vomit.

And so here he was, arm bandaged and luckily devoid of infection considering the amount of filth he had been crawling in, and he had talked with Al, felt disconnected from the situation, but Al had inhaled, resigned, and kept his peace. The streets were crowded, buzzed, and every few seconds - from a passing radio, a conversation, a TV speaker - he could hear mentions of the incident last night.

Surprisingly, Ed had slept well. Or, not well, he just slept. He had been - exhausted. He didn’t dream, just fell onto the bed and passed out, and woke up and realized he still had to go to work. He showered, went through his routine, managed to power through breakfast and Al frowning at the table and then at his arm, and he couldn’t manage his bike with his arm like this, it’d throw him off balance, and so he walked.

Hughes would grill him about what happened, not that Ed wanted to bother him because he was concerned with working himself up to the top of the station, but Ed was - well, he was angry. He was angry at everything, mainly, but tired so the anger had dimmed into a cold sort of apathy. He’d have to make an effort not to take it out on Beth or the other lab workers.

He didn’t want - he didn’t want to even think about what he had to do -

“Ed!”

Automatically, still, he froze. His heart jumped like it always did, and then stopped beating altogether. Ed worked his jaw silently, swallowed, turned, and saw Roy carefully slipping past an older woman walking her dog, smiling an apology down at her when he bumped at her. Ed could run, he realized. He could outrun Roy easily, most likely, except that Roy knew where he worked, knew where he lived, and he could just as easily chase Ed down. Ed managed to be bitterly amused
at his own thoughts - like one would run down a criminal.

In the maybe two odd seconds that it took for Roy to reach him, Ed had already decided. His stomach was tight, his heart didn’t even feel like it was beating in his chest, and he inhaled just as Roy came to a stop in front of him.

“I didn’t think I’d see you today,” Roy said, smiling, and he looked - happy, maybe. Slightly shy (still a odd expression to see) and maybe even nervous. “Last night,” he started, and then rerouted his conversation. Ed had half a thought to be thankful. “They promoted me this morning.” Roy’s lips twitched upwards into an even broader smile. “Colonel Roy Mustang.”

“That’s great,” Ed said, quietly. He wanted to add, enthusiastically, I’m happy for you! Now you get to push all your work onto someone else, right? Lazy bastard. He wanted to be angry, where was the anger? Where was the furious indignation?

Roy faltered at his lack of enthusiasm, or, anything really. He shifted, barely. “Ed, about last night - what I said-”

Ed flinched - I love you - and couldn’t hide it in time. Roy quieted.

Ed had to do it. He knew better than anyone else that in order to save the body, you had to cut off the limb that was killing it, and Roy was - Roy was a complication. Roy could put Hughes in danger, Solaris, Al. He couldn’t think do this for Al because Al would have been angry that Ed would ever use him as a reason for this, but he had to. He had to.

“About that,” Ed said, swallowed, and forced his voice steady. “We should talk.”

“Alright,” Roy said, easily, and there was only apprehension in the way he looked down at Ed. “Now? Or-”

“Now,” Ed nodded. “Now’s - I think. I don’t think we’re on the same page.” Before Roy could talk, like stripping off a bandage, Ed ended it before he could let himself begin. “I think you got the wrong idea of where I was going with this.”

Before Ed could continue, Roy questioned, “Wrong idea?” Ed’s jaw tensed - Roy sounded...lost. Ed’s nerves were pulled taut, and he should have been relishing in the fact he had made the man who had shot at him feel this way, but all it did was curl unpleasantly in Ed’s stomach. Nevertheless, he moved on.

“This wasn’t going to - last long. It wasn’t a long term thing, for me, and yeah, I think you got the wrong idea.” Ed swallowed, and forced himself to meet Roy’s eye. His expression was closed off, neatly devoid of any emotion. “I’m sorry if you thought I was taking this in another direction, I really am, but the truth is that you really are a bastard and I don’t want to waste my time with you. So, I’m ending this - whatever this is.”

“You’re breaking up with me,” Roy said, bluntly. He worked his jaw for a second. “You’re breaking up with me.”

Ed’s throat was closing up. “I am.”

“Oh,” Roy said, and Ed dropped his gaze to the sideline. “Just like that? After-” He cut himself off, and Ed looked up just in time to see Roy’s eyes press closed, and Ed wanted to laugh suddenly, walk forward, kiss him, and call out Just kidding! God, you should have seen your face - the hell would I ever leave you, idiot?
Because he shot at you, Ed reminded himself. He’s a liability. The longer you draw this out, the worse it is. You can live without him.

*I love him.*

You can live without him.

“This is what you want?” Roy asked, quietly, eyes still closed. “For me to leave you alone?”

“Yes,” Ed said, and somehow, miraculously, managed to not choke on it.

“That would make you happy?”

No. “Yes.” He inhaled. “I honestly don’t want to ever see you again, and if I never do, then it’ll be too soon.”

“Alright,” Roy said, and his eyes opened and he looked at Ed with nothing. There was nothing there except apathy, and Ed tried to mirror him, and had to duck his eyes away because he was always shit at hiding what he was feeling and Roy could always see through him easily. “It’s - over.”

Just like that. Just over four months, of kisses to Ed’s cheek, and dates so varied Ed couldn’t count them all, and Roy managing the three words Ed had only managed to get out to family members and once before he had - and now, nothing.

Ed managed to get out a, “Goodbye, Roy,” before he spun on his heel, walked into the crowd permanent on the sidewalk, and sprinted when he was sure Roy couldn’t see him anymore. He slowed to a stop, managed to slip into an alleyway and lean against the wall, left arm’s wound burning, automail aching, and he didn’t cry because he didn’t care. He had to not care.

Hughes called him into his office (and he was one of the few that had one, even if it was little more than a broom closet, really) with a *let’s talk* and the look on his face when he saw Ed’s own was nothing short of worried and concerned.

“Ed,” Hughes started, and Ed closed the door behind him and leant against it. “Last night.”

“Don’t want to talk about it,” Ed said, and shrugged. “I broke up with Roy.”

“What?” Hughes asked, after a second. “Ed - you what?” Luckily he didn’t ask ‘how could you?’ or other sentiments, because Ed was torn between standing and just *yelling* and between asking if he could just go back home and wait the entire thing out. “Hakuro,” Hughes said, instead.

“A set up,” Ed said, business like. “A really fucking good one, enough that even Solaris fell for it. Maybe it was even true, but he was prepared for me to come.”

“What now, then?” Hughes asked, and leant slightly over his desk. “With Hakuro?” As if Ed could possibly misunderstand and thought he meant with Roy.

“Like I’m going to let him get away with this,” Ed scoffed. “Now I know for sure he’s guilty. I just need to collect what I need to collect, that’s all.”

“Roy-”

“Leveled a gun at my head and shot,” Ed finished, coldly. “Don’t you dare try to tell me that’s my fault.”

“Ed,” Hughes said, aghast. “Ed, no, God, no. I just - you know Roy. You know he was following
orders, you - couldn’t you have...explained?” Ed’s gaze turned sharp, but Hughes’ softened, quieted. “Don’t you think things would be different if Roy knew?”

“I guess we’ll never know, Hughes.” Ed said, stood, and managed not to scowl. “It’s over with, done with, whatever. No big deal.”

Hughes gave him a look that clearly said he wasn’t buying it, but Ed was sure - if he repeated it enough - they’d both start believing in it.

—

“Lang might have something,” Solaris murmured quietly to Al. “MacKenzie keeps a villa on the south side of the city, unlisted. I called Hughes, told him about it. MacKenzie hasn’t been into work since yesterday and his apartment is empty. No-one knows where his family is.”

“Ed?” Al questioned, hopeful, but Solaris shook her head. She opened her mouth to say something but the phone rang in the kitchen suddenly, and Solaris raised an eyebrow before going to answer it.

“Yes?” she said, promptly, and drew her eyebrows together. “Your name?” After a pause she turned to Al. “Do you know a Rose?”

“Rose,” Al breathed and scrambled up. He nearly knocked over a chair and Winry, asleep on the couch, barely shifted. He took the receiver from Solaris and pressed it to his ear. “Rose?”

“Alphonse,” Rose said, happily, before her voice turned sober. “Oh, Al - I heard about Ed - is he-?”

“We don’t know,” Alphonse said. “Guess that means you don’t either?”

“No.” He could see Rose shaking her head in his mind. “I heard it from Colonel Mustang - I went to visit Alex, oh Al, I’m pregnant by the way, I wish it was under better circumstances-”

Al blinked in surprise. “Rose, that’s - wonderful! Congrats!”

She giggled, though it sounded miserable, and said, “Thanks,” before turning sober. “Colonel Mustang’s looking for Ed too. I’m not sure if he knows where but he mentioned Hughes and then he had his soldiers get ready.”

“That’s either really good or really bad,” Al murmured. “Rose, I’m going to call Hughes then, and see what the hell is going on? I’ll try to call you if I find anything.”

“Alright,” Rose sighed. “Alphonse, I basically have an entire hospital in my downstairs bathroom. No matter how bad it is, don’t be afraid to come here.”

“We may have to,” Al said, after a second. “We’re putting Solaris in a lot of trouble by being here.” Solaris looked up and glared, true anger on her expression. Al swallowed and explained, “People know that Fullmetal goes to Solaris for information. Sooner or later they’re going to come here and check. They don’t know that Rose Armstrong, or any of the Armstrongs, are connected to Fullmetal.”

“My door’ll be open,” Rose said, firmly. “You don’t even have to call. Alex and I’ll be up until morning. Please, be safe.”
“I will, Rose,” Al said, quietly. “I promise.” The line went dead with a click and Al replaced the phone before turning to Solaris. “I’m not going to put you, or Mei, or the bar and the shop in more trouble than they need to be,” he said firmly. “You can’t help us if you’re running too.”

Solaris’ lips twisted. “You inherited your mother’s mind,” she said, after a second. “They didn’t call her Sloth because she was lazy - they called her that because she made everyone else seem slow.”

Al held back a pleased smile and moved towards the armchair to sit and look out the window. In her sleep, Winry murmured about different caliber wrenches and about a missing part she couldn’t seem to find. Al smiled, and rested his head against the glass.

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Solaris had pulled through with her contact and Luca had given him enough reason to storm MacKenzie’s apartment and office, and now, the villa. Maes walked through the mess of papers the SWAT team had left behind and turned to Mustang who was staring down at a photo on MacKenzie’s desk. In the background he could hear a team of officers breaking open the foundation of the villa. They had already found nearly a dozen forged documents stuffed in the walls, enough to convict MacKenzie with fraud and forgery a dozen times over. Maes stepped closer to Roy so that he could see the picture.

“Tall thin platinum blond, teal eyes,” Roy murmured and handed over the photo. Maes took it, raising an eyebrow at the picture of MacKenzie and a blond woman, standing in the park together. “He’s married to a different woman, who we can’t find. This woman - she’s a model. I see her on the billboard outside of work everyday.”

“Mistress, then,” Maes sighed. “Maybe the woman from the park.”

“Romance murders?” Roy said, skeptically. “I don’t know.”

“Either way,” Maes said and put the picture back on the desk. The officers around them carefully combed through MacKenzie’s villa. “Let’s think back. Fullmetal gives you this name - a name he got from a woman who was looking to get out of the country. MacKenzie only takes pairs, puts one over the border, and then kidnaps the other. We have no idea where those are, but five people show up dead with their faces and hands maimed and a seventeen year old girl is almost the sixth victim.”

“Until Fullmetal shows up and saves her.”

“He got the tip from overhearing orders going between that gang on the west side.”

“What do they call themselves?” Roy said, tapping at his chin. “The gang?”

“The Sins,” Maes said, and rolled his eyes. Roy drew his eyebrows together and Maes remembered that he wouldn’t know why that was so stupid. “What are you thinking?”

“Do we know what they export? Electronics?”

“Drugs, of course,” Maes said. Roy ‘ah’ed.

“Then they have to keep that somewhere, someplace safe.”

“Someplace they’d think they could hold anything. You’re not thinking-”
Roy shrugged. “Fullmetal might be there, maybe. Not only that, maybe these people aren’t dead - maybe they’re being held somewhere.”

“You want us to jump up the chain of command, don’t you?” Hughes said, and then it hit him. “Fucking - I’m an idiot.”

Roy blinked at him, but Maes was already pulling out his cellphone.

Solaris answered the phone for what had to be the seventh time in the last fives minutes. She listened to whoever was on the other line, before standing.

“Yes,” she said and searched around for something, finally grabbing an address book off of the table. Al perked up. “Yes, his name is King, he owns a movie theater. He might know.” She paused, and her jaw clenched in thought. “Somewhere on the west side, near the mining caves. I don’t know where but King might, he just might.” Another pause. “Just tell him I sent you. He was Dante’s second in command, if anyone will know he will. Do you really think-?”

Another pause and Al was on his feet now, taking a step towards her.

“No, no, don’t take him here, if you find him. Take him to Rose Armstrong’s. As it is, I think my time is running out.”

She looked at Al, and then out the window, towards the setting sun. The street was nearly empty except for one car that had been parked outside of the building in front of them since before Al had started his watch. “We’re ditching the bar. We’ll be at Armstrong’s. Do you have the cell number?” Pause. “Yes, alright. Good luck.” Solaris hung up, jaw still clenched. She turned on her heel towards Al and stalked past him into the bedroom, falling to her knees and throwing the rug aside, pulling up floorboards.


Solaris reached down and pulled out a small safe box. She carefully twisted it and then pulled out two pair of long black gloves, ones that reached up to her elbows with red lines running up it. There, on the palm, in delicate red stitching was one of the most complicated arrays Al had ever seen.

“They might have found him,” she said, quietly. When Al started to move, she stood, throwing the gloves onto the bed and turning towards her closet, grabbing a bag that was already filled with clothes and what looked to be two guns and an entire makeup bag of cash. “We’re moving.”

“No? Why now?”

“Because the man watching the outside of the building just saw Mei leave for the day and now knows that there are no witnesses,” Solaris said, bluntly. Al blinked and stared.

“No, I’ve been - I was-”

She indulged him with a small smile. “You’ve got a lot to learn, Alphonse Elric.”

Solaris reached down in the bag and withdrew a small dagger, and carefully cut both of her palms open, before spilling her blood over the gloves, soaking the hands, before pulling them on. She flexed her hands, as if testing them, and handed the bag to Alphonse. “Wake the girl up. We’re
Ed came to silently. It took him a second, after he questioned whether or not he had fallen asleep on his bedroom floor again, before the memories to come rushing back. His hands and legs were free, the ropes gone leaving burn behind. He licked his lips, carefully brushing his hair out of his eyes and the braid back over his shoulder. It was coming loose, but it would hold. The hood was still clipped, and Ed supposed that if the people who took him were who he thought they were, there was no need to take back the mask if they already knew who he was.

He was in the middle of the same warehouse, no longer propped up in the corner but in the middle of the room. The boxes and crates had been cleared away, leaving an empty space, and the sense of displacement Ed felt made him realize he was almost the third floor of the building. It was dark outside the windows, the street lights shining upwards.

“Awake, are you?” a familiar voice called and Ed forced his head up to stare at Jealousy who was inspecting her nails. “You know, you’re shorter than I remember.”

A growl was half way to his throat, and he was ready to leap at her before she tsked and rolled her eyes. “Sloth, he’s up again!” she called, and went back to filing her nails.

Ed turned, catching sight of a man he had never seen before, yawning and scratching at his blond goatee, blue eyes utterly bored, before he tapped Ed’s forehead with a finger and the room swam.

“Troublesome,” the man murmured, and stretched. “Where’s Lust when you need him?”

“Stop complaining,” Jealousy hissed, leaning forward, and Ed pressed himself against the floor and kept telling himself that the floor did not move, that it was just an illusion, throwing off someone’s inner ear balance could put the body in an extreme state of vertigo, he just had to find his center, to train the mind, one had to train the body...

He pressed his forehead into the cool concrete and counted backwards as Jealousy railed at Sloth and complained about him complaining about his powers. “At least you and Lust get something cool - I’m stuck with fucking turning into a fucking she-beast! How fucking lame!”

Sloth yawned. Ed moaned, “What do you want with me?”

Their attention towards him. Jealousy rolled her eyes. “Like I care. I just want - things. Everything. The only one who really cares about this shit is Pride and Wrath.” She gave Sloth a disgusted look. “Sloth doesn’t even fucking want anything, he just wants to get high all the time - how fucking useless.”

“Sloth, Jealousy,” an accented voice called out. “That’s enough.”

Jealousy’s lips twisted but she complied, rolling her eyes. Ed turned his gaze upwards to stare at the large man who before, and Ed was furious but couldn’t do much except lay on the floor. He had a square face, a once-broken but now healed nose, and dark eyes. There was a thin beard over his chin and cheeks and he bent down to study Ed.

“Wrath,” Jealousy murmured. “How long do we have to fucking wait?”

“Just for awhile longer,” Wrath said, accent hard. He had slightly darker skin, not as dark as Ed.
“Pride is making the last few touches to the sacrifices.”

Ed swallowed. “Sacrifices?”

Wrath turned towards him, and smiled, almost indulgently. “You don’t think that the power we’re trying to harness can be accessed without some sort of fuel, can you?”


“Sacrifices, yes,” Wrath said, nearly amused. “How amusing however that the public would latch onto our failed tests as some product of deranged murder.”

“The Scarface Victims?” Ed questioned, gasping as the room shifted. “What the hell are you talking about?”

“You’ll see soon enough,” Wrath said, and rested a hand on top of Ed’s head, almost father-like, and Ed raged, twisted miserably, and tried to shove him off. “You’re our main ingredient, of course.”

“You pieces of shit,” Ed snarled. “You pieces of fucking shit - those were people, not fucking ingredients! What the fuck is wrong with you?”

“Come now,” Wrath said, patting his head. “You’re an alchemist, aren’t you? Some sacrifices are necessary in the great scope of things. Equivalence, yes? To obtain, something of equal value must be lost?”


Wrath smiled. “You’d be wrong. Don’t worry, you’ll be seeing the product of all our work soon.” He tilted his head to the side and looked to his right. “Ah. Sloth, lift it. He’s going to have to walk. Now, be good Mr. Elric. It’s either you or your brother, you know.”

Big mistake. Sloth darted forward, touched his finger to Ed’s forehead, and the dizziness disappeared leaving Ed clear-headed and pissed. He threw his leg out and slammed his heel into Sloth’s jaw, who stumbled back as a crack echoed through the warehouse. Jealousy yelped and toppled off of her crate, and Wrath reached for Ed, sighing irritably, but Ed rolled out of the way, whipping his jacket out of his way to draw out two knives and hold them ready.


Jealousy wavered, looked down at Sloth who was out cold, and then to Wrath who looked faintly annoyed. Ed waited, waited for the right moment - and Jealousy took a step backwards - before he moved forward, throwing his hands out, metal glinting off of his knives. He went for Jealousy first, who yelped and shrieked when he sliding the knife past her cheek and cut off a chunk of her hair. She screamed, furious, and tipped away from him, red energy sparking from her hands.

And then - Wrath slid in front of him, and Ed felt his breath choke because he was fast and Ed couldn’t do anything but turn on his heel and sprint towards the set of stairs off to the side, sliding down them, metal crashing into his legs as he flew into the wall at the bottom of the stairs.

He would have to - he had to - there was no way to stop the man coming down the stairs after him. Ed would have to kill him and Ed had only every killed one person before and it still gave him nightmares, the way the knife slid into Greed’s stomach (not this Greed, the first Greed, the one who smirked and rolled his eyes, and called Ed ‘kid’ all the time), and Ed was sure Wrath wouldn’t smile down at him like Greed had and tell him it was alright.
Fullmetal flew towards the next set of stairs on the opposite side of the warehouse, kicking out a crate from underneath a stack of boxes, toppling them over. It wouldn’t hold Wrath off long, but at least he could buy some time, and Ed stripped out his leather gloves, abandoning them on the ground, as he grabbed a knife of his belt and cut open the days old wound on his hand, sliding down the stairs and drawing out a quick array on the concrete before slamming his hand to it and tripping down the stairs.

The concrete arched up and covered the stair way, closing it off, and Ed stared at it for too seconds before the warehouse thrummed and the concrete began to shake.

Shit - shit - he was forcing his way through it. Ed backed up, staring in horror as the concrete began to shake and crack.

He didn’t know what to do. He could fight it out, but his head was still swimming, and Wrath was fast and strong and Ed could only take so much, his instincts were going wild, fight or flee, fight or flee -

“Fuck,” Ed hissed, and turned on his heel, searching for the exit because he could run at least, but the warehouse doors swung open and Ed stopped suddenly, skidding to the floor as a team of blue uniformed soldiers stared at him, semi-surprised at the shaking warehouse, guns aimed. “Fuck!”

The concrete was beginning to crack. The doors were nearly full open now, letting in more and more streetlight, in a second they’d know he was there, and the concrete above him shook.

He was pinned. He couldn’t get past the soldiers and Wrath was coming and - “Fuck.”

The concrete shattered. Lesser of two evils, and he would not have someone else killed. Fullmetal barely made sure to check that his hood was still on and then he was running towards the soldiers.

“Move!” he ordered, yelled. “Get the hell out of here!”

The shadows shifted and Ed saw Hawkeye first, eyes wide as he felt his heart stutter in his chest. Not nameless faceless soldiers, Hawkeye, and Havoc, and Breda, and Falman, and even Fuery, and in the middle was Mustang and Ed could have laughed, he really could. They stared at him varying levels of confusion, and Hawkeye exhaled, once, before Fullmetal darted his gaze over his shoulder to check if the concrete was still standing.

“No,” he said, and slowed to a walk before shaking his head. “No - no. You have to - you have to get out here, now!”

Another pound and the room shook. Havoc, with his gun raised, blinked and stared upwards. Mustang had his eyes narrowed, but it was Hawkeye who took a step forward, gun still raised. “Why?”

“You have to - he’s coming. You’re not gonna - stand a chance, please, damnit,” Ed pleaded and risked a look back. “Please, go, hurry; I’ll hold him off, I’ll try to hold him off, Hawkeye, get them out - go-“

It could hold it anymore. The concrete to the stairwell finally exploded, and Wrath kicked giant pieces of concrete out of the way, and came lumbering down the steps, taking three at a time. Ed took a step back, and turned towards him, flexing his hand so that the blood began to pour before crouching down and sketching out an array. He pressed his palm to it and in a flash of bright light the concrete alchemized and moved upwards into a spear. Ed grabbed it, swinging it into his hand, swallowed.
“Hawkeye, get them all out of here,” he said, sternly, catching his breath and trying to dispel the lingering queasiness.

“What about you?” Hawkeye questioned, taking a step forward. She had her gun aimed towards the man, and Ed could feel Roy’s gaze swing over to her, confused and maybe even angry. Oh, who was Ed kidding, he was angry, but it didn’t matter because Hawkeye was ushering him towards a set of crates, ignoring his stare. “You’ll—”

“I’ll be fine,” Ed said, inhaling, knowing he wouldn’t - no, he would, he’d force himself to be. “Go. Hide.”

“There you are,” Wrath called, and stopped a few paces away. “I thought you had almost gotten away. Jealousy’s worked herself up into a right rage upstairs.” He raised his eyebrow and stared at the group behind him. “Guests?”

“None of your business,” Fullmetal growled. “They got nothing to do with this - you and I got beef, right? You fucked up my bike, bastard.”

Wrath laughed. “I suppose we do. However, we have a very specific rule. No witness.”

Fullmetal flipped the spear around and aimed it towards Wrath’s head. “Need me alive? Cause I’ll kill myself before you get the chance to hurt them.”

“Pride did not specify,” Wrath said, after a second. “I suppose I could always kill you, and if your blood doesn’t work, we could use your brother.”

Rage arched up Ed’s throat, and he yelled to Hawkeye, “Get out of here!” before charging forward and leaping into the air, swinging the spear down. Wrath stepped out of the way, and Fullmetal leapt forward once he hit the ground, twisting out of the way as the man swept down with his hand. Fullmetal flipped backwards, twisting onto his hand, and bringing the spear up in an arch towards his face, but the man leaned out of the way.

Fullmetal landed on his feet and pulled out a knife from his belt, throwing it towards Wrath. He leant to the right to avoid it, but Ed was already there, darts the spear forwards from the left. The man couldn’t get out of the way in time, and Ed drove it into his eye before pulling it back.

Wrath grabbed at the side of his head, frown deepening, and Ed stared, swallowing. The man had acted like Ed had just swatted at him, which, what?

“My turn, yes?” Wrath questioned and moved forward. Ed couldn’t get out of the way as the man knocked the spear out of his flesh hand and grabbed onto the automail.

Ed had just enough time to say “No—” before Wrath maneuvered him into position, and wrenched the arm backwards.

The metal snapped, the wires tore, and Ed screamed. The nerve wires went crazy, sparking electricity as the man wrenched the arm off from it’s break off point, Ed still screaming murder as his arm burned, and Wrath tugged the coat off when he tore the arm off, lifting Ed clean off the ground before the arm broke completely off, pulling the hood back, and the jacket slipped off of Ed’s head as he fell to the ground, grabbing at the broken end of his arm.

Roy was standing in the middle of warehouse door, pale and horrified, and Ed choked on a sob, bit it down, twisting away, looking up to Wrath lift a fist over his head and start to bring it down -

Footsteps, and then Roy slid into him, pulling him into his arms (the automail screamed) and curling
protectively over Ed’s body, tucking Ed into him, and Ed managed to think no you freaking idiot before Wrath brought his hand down.

A gunshot echoed through the air and Wrath staggered backwards, taking one step, then two away from Ed and Roy. Roy’s grip didn’t loosen, tightened actually, and Ed managed to see Hawkeye standing in between the warehouse doors, gun still smoking. She shot again, and then again, and Ed saw Wrath stagger out, obvious hurting from the hits, but still not falling.

“Colonel,” she called, urgently. “Colonel - we have to go.”

Roy pulled away, not looking at Ed, and reached over to grab Ed’s un-attached arm, before hauling Ed into his arms and standing up, backpedaling towards the warehouse doors. The rest followed behind, hurrying towards a military issue black suburban, and Hawkeye was the last to leave, gun still aimed, before she sprinted and threw herself into the passenger seat.

“Drive, Lieutenant,” she ordered Havoc, and Havoc, eyes wide, threw the car into reverse and peeled out what Ed now recognized to be the west industry district.

Somehow he was laying Roy’s lap, clutching as his missing arm - and there was the phantom pains, the port sending waves of pain up and down his spine he was gonna vomit again - and Ed was speaking, rambling, “Al, is Al - they said - is Al - did they get Alphonse, please-”

“Alphonse’s fine,” Hawkeye said, twisting in the passenger seat. “He’s alright. He’s with Mrs. Armstrong.”

“Take me,” Ed breathed. “Take me to him. I have to-”

“We should take him a hospital,” Fuery spoke up, worried. “He’s - his arm. The shock is killing him. That can’t - he’s probably in a lot of pain.”

Tons and tons of pain. If Ed could turn his pain into fuel, Central City could run for decades off of the pain he was feeling. He keened as the automail wires touched, arching up, and Mustang pressed down his shoulders, running a hand over his forehead. He focused on it, on the warmth, and trembled.

“Al,” Ed pleaded. “To Al - please.” He had to stop and swallow down bile. “Al’s - he’s gonna be - be a doctor. Winry - she knows - they’ll know what to do, please-”

Hawkeye was looking at Roy, waiting, and Roy ran his hand back and forth over Ed’s forehead. “The Armstrongs',” Roy murmured. “Havoc, you know Alex’s address, correct?”

“Yeah, Chief,” Havoc said. “I can get us there in twenty minutes. Fifteen, if traffic’s clear.”

“Yeah, Chief,” Havoc said. “I can get us there in twenty minutes. Fifteen, if traffic’s clear.”

“Alphonse’s then,” Roy said, quietly, and stroked his thumb against Ed’s forehead. “Ed, you promised not to die.”

“Bastard,” Ed choked out. “I promised a lot things.”

“No,” Roy said, and his grip on Ed’s flesh shoulder tightened. “You’re not allowed to die. Do you understand? I’m very - very - angry with you and you have to live so I can yell at you and so that you can yell back.”

“Fuckin’ bastard,” Ed breathed. “Always - turning everything into - something about you-”

“Ed,” Roy said, firmly. “You are not allowed to die.” He bent forward, eyes furious and pale. “I love
you, remember? So you’re not allowed to die. Not without my permission. Equivalent exchange, damnit.” He looked up, and started stroking Ed’s forehead again. Ed’s mouth trembled. “Lieutenant Hawkeye, please call Hughes and tell him to meet us at the Armstrong residence. I believe he owes me an explanation.”

–

Al woke Winry, who blinked blearily at him, but didn’t question it when they closed all the curtains and shut off all the lights, following Solaris towards the hallway and down the back fire escape. She was wearing her gloves and a black v-neck t-shirt now, and kept flexing her hands. They climbed together, Solaris first, Al second, and then he helped Winry down as she shivered in the cold. The sun had set now, and Al wrapped an arm around her for two seconds.

Something knocked over down the alley, hitting the ground with a clash, and Solaris whirled around throwing her hand forward, and the fingertips of her glove crackled red and the tips extended faster than Al thought was possible, nearly skewering a rat. Solaris was still for a second, before she shook her hand and the spears retreated with a crackle of red.

“You’re quite handy with that, Solaris,” Winry remarked, surprised. “So, do they charge you extra when you go to do your nails, or do you get a discount just cause?”

Solaris twitched her lips upward for just a second, before stalking down the alleyway, pressing her back against the side of the building, scanning down the street. A moment passed, and then she waved a hand towards them and forward. Winry jumped, obvious wary of said appendages, but they followed her across the street and hurried across into the alley near the bakery across from the bar.

“Wait here,” Solaris murmured, and moved towards a car parked a few paces away, a green Toyota. She searched for a second, before aiming her fingertips towards the door handle, extending them slowly and sliding them into the lock, twisting it after a second. She unlocked the door from the inside and inclined her head towards Al and Winry, and they moved together. Winry slid into the back seat and Al hurried into the passenger side as Solaris slid into the front seat.

She ripped out the wires underneath and carefully twisted two of them together before tapping another two together. The car revved suddenly, and Solaris pushed the wires back and replaced the plastic covering before pulling the car out from it’s parking space and onto the street.

“Very neat trick,” Winry said, leaning forward, a hundred times more interested. Al rolled his eyes.

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Rose opened the door the minute the black suburban began to turn into the driveway. She was still dressed in her sundress, and in a second she had the backseat door pulled open, holding back a gasp as she looked at Ed, who blinked at her. His right arm was completely separate from his body, a mangled wreck of wires and metal, and Ed grinned at her, wearily.

“You’ve got a child, Rose?” he said, smiling, something that wasn’t quite right in his eyes. “You gonna name him after me?”

“Edward Elric, I wouldn’t risk my child having your absolute stupidity for the world,” Rose raged, and moved out of the way so that Colonel Mustang could pull Ed into his arms and carefully slide him out of the car. “You complete moron.”

Her gaze softened and her lips trembled. “I thought you might.” She turned towards Mustang. “Please, we have - I have everything set up. In the living room.”

Alex had helped her push the coffee table against the wall and slid the armchairs into the corner and pull out the couch. They had never used the bed, but Rose had no idea what condition Ed would be in, and what if they couldn’t get him up the stairs? Ice packs, an entire legion of first aid kits - but Rose didn’t except for Ed’s automail to be completely ripped off. He kept twitching, spine arching up and face grimacing, and through it all he chewed his lips and didn’t let out even a whimper of pain.

“We have to take the arm off,” Rose said, after a moment, when Ed was finally out the pull-out couch, wincing every few seconds, sweating and feverish. “I have to - god, I’ve only - I’ve never done it before, but-”

“It’s alright, Rose, you have to. It’s - I think it’s killing me,” Ed rasped. “Just twist and turn. It’s alright.”

“What if I make it worse?” Rose questioned. “We should - wait for Winry-”

Ed swallowed. “Rose, I need it - I need it off. Twist forward the bolt, press the latch down, and turn the arm - what’s left of the arm. It’s alright.”

Rose tensed, closed her eyes, and then quickly reached up, and twisted the arm just so, so that the port was exposed, and then twisted it back and off. Ed hissed, jaw clenching, before he visibly relax.

“Told ya,” he murmured, and then lost consciousness.

Colonel Mustang moved forward, only barely not shoving Rose out of the way as he felt for a pulse and sighed in relief when he found one. “He’s alive. He’s - Jesus Christ.”

“Alex is at his parents,” Rose said. “I didn’t know - I wasn’t sure what would happen so I sent him to make sure that we had enough to - in case we had to leave the country and Ed needed - because we used them-” She cut herself off suddenly, pressing her lips together as Mustang’s gaze swung towards her. His expression was cool but it didn’t take much to see the fury bubbling under his gaze.

“Last time,” Hawkeye finished. “You used them last time.”

“Yes,” Rose said. “Last time. I should - let me-” She moved around Mustang who refused to move from his seat next to Ed’s side, and Rose pulled out a cold wipe and started clearing the debris and sweat off of Ed’s forehead. His expression softened in his sleep, and Rose bit back a worried murmur at the sight of his bruised neck. “I need to - help me take off his jacket.”

Hands were suddenly there, more than Rose was used to. Hawkeye lifted Ed gently up from behind the couch and Mustang carefully unclipped the little hooks on Ed’s clothes, peeling back the coat.

“I don’t want to - if he hurt his back,” Mustang murmured. Rose nodded and dug around the first aid kit for a clean scalpel, handing it over. Mustang took it and ripped a straight line down Ed’s shirt, opening it. It was already bandaged, but they were bloodstained and dirty. Mustang carefully peeled them away, and they all hissed at the sight of Ed’s chest.

It was a mess of purples and yellows, and Rose had only seen something worse than this once before. Mustang turned away, bandages in his hands, and he rubbed them between his fingers, eyebrows drawing together.
“These are,” he said, and inspected them closer while Rose started rubbing antibiotic cream over Ed’s chest. “These are military bandages.” He looked up and met Hawkeye’s gaze, who looked coolly back at him. Mustang’s expression turned frigid. “You knew.”

“Yes, sir,” Hawkeye said, promptly. “I did.”

“You bandaged him up. You knew who he was.”

“I did, Colonel,” Hawkeye said, expression never wavering. Mustang stood suddenly, nearly shaking, and Hawkeye didn’t move. Rose forced herself to keep her gaze down, and the other military men looked away, eyes down.

Mustang glared at her. “Explain. Now.”

“Sir, yes, sir!” she said, and went to attention. “Approximately a week ago I followed Edward Elric from work to First Central National Bank to his place of residence before witnessing him emerge as Fullmetal before heading back to the bank. I then watched him run surveillance at the bank until Robert MacKenzie left the building. Fullmetal was then attacked but what seemed to be a clone of Robert MacKenzie. MacKenzie was about to deliver the final blow and I killed him before witnessing him turn into nothing but dust. Then Fullmetal tackled me out of the way and killed another copy of MacKenzie, which also turned into dust. He was badly hurt and so I took him back to my home and bandaged him and allowed him to sleep before hearing his story.”

“You didn’t think,” Mustang scoffed, as if he couldn’t believe what was happening. “You didn’t think to tell me? To follow orders?”

“Which order, sir?” Hawkeye questioned. “The shoot-to-kill order issued on Fullmetal’s head? The order you ignored before protecting Fullmetal with your own body?” Her gaze sharpened. “Sir, forgive my impudence, but I do not take well to being called a hypocrite.” And then her voice softened. “If you would just let Edward explain, I think you’ll find a lot of the confusion cleared.”

Mustang stared at her, looked down at the unconscious man on Rose’s pull-out couch, and stalked towards the door.

“Sir?” Havoc questioned, quietly.

“I need to be alone for a few moments,” Mustang said, quietly. “I’ll go outside and wait for Hughes, or Alphonse and Ms. Rockbell. Please come get me if Ed wakes.”

“Will do, sir,” Havoc murmured and went to go sit down at the kitchen table with Breda, Fuery, and Falman. They bent their heads together and began to talk amongst themselves. After a second the bed shifted, and Hawkeye took Mustang’s place near Ed’s side and began to clean the other side of his face.

“Thank you,” Rose said. “Not for - for this, but also-”

“You’re welcome, Mrs. Armstrong.”

“Rose, call me Rose,” she smiled, and Hawkeye looked up blinking, before inclining her head.

“Riza, then, if you please.”

Rose nodded her head, and turned back to Ed. Well, at least his temperature was beginning to go down.
Solaris pulled into the driveway only seconds after Hughes did, parking behind a black military car. Al wrenched open the door, only two seconds before Winry, and hurried up the path, rushing past Mustang after the man nodded at him and moved towards Hughes’s car. Solaris waited a second, watched Mustang glare down at Hughes, who sighed, climbed out of his car, and closed the door behind him.

She cut the engine and leaned back, studying Mustang as he spoke in quiet, angry tones, as Hughes sighed and looked away and ran a hand through his hair and fixed his glasses. Finally, after a second, she grabbed the duffle bag from the back and climbed out of the car just in time to hear Mustang angrily hiss, “He could have died, Maes, what the fuck - what if that had been his left arm? What if-”

“If you keep lingering on the what ifs,” Solaris called as she walked past them. “You’ll never see what’s right in front you.”

Her gaze didn’t slide towards them, and she climbed up the steps of the front porch and closed the door behind her, just as Hughes started with, “He knows what he’s doing.”

Instead Al and Winry were crouched in the living room around a pull-out couch, and Winry was running her fingers alongside Ed’s right shoulder, the metal arm missing, and checking his pulse and eyes with penlight.

“He’s fine. In mild shock, but he’ll be fine.” Winry frowned. “No damage to the port, which is lucky. I - do I want to see what’s left of it?”

One of the soldiers, a younger, dark haired man cleared his throat and gestured towards the armchair where two broken pieces of automail sat. Winry stared, stood suddenly, and then keened over, stumbling over to the ruined arm, moaning.

“Oh, no, no, no, god no,” Winry moaned. “Please, god no, tell me this isn’t happening-”

“You can’t fix it?” Rose questioned, quietly.

Winry hung her head, tears of frustration leaping her eyes. “I don’t - there are no schematics for this arm, nothing. Even - my granduncle barely knew anything about it, could only build a general prototype - I -” She swallowed and carefully touched the hand of the automail. “I have to fix it.”

“You will fix it,” Al said, from the couch, eyes trained on Winry. “Win, I know you can fix it. You have to.”

Winry looked at him, lips trembling and eyes wet, before her jaw clenched and something sparked. “I need a bag.”

The youngest soldier leapt forward, extending a plastic garbage bag and Winry carefully placed each piece inside of it, mouth turned downwards. “I need to get to my shop. Someone - I need to start, now, or else I’ll never get it finished.” She looked at Ed, and tsked to herself, though her eyes were fond. “I’ll have it ready for you Ed, when you need it. And it’s going to be the best damn automail in the world, you hear me? So if you ruin it, I’ll ruin you.”

“Falman, Fuery,” a woman spoke, and Solaris knew she must be Hawkeye. “Take the car and take Ms. Rockbell to wherever she needs to go. Don’t leave her side and keep communication open.”
“The workshop’s across town, down south,” Al said, standing, eyebrows drawn together. “That’s—”

“I’ll be fine, Al,” Winry smiled steadily at him. “I can handle myself.”

“I - I know that,” Al said, shaking his head. “Winry, I know you can handle yourself, I just—” He wrung his hands together. “Be safe.”

Winry stared at him, before her smile widened and she took a step forward, pressing her lips to his cheek. “I will, Al, don’t worry.”

Alphonse blushed, choking on an inhaled breath of surprise, and Winry winked at him, before heading towards the front door, bag of automail in her arms. “W-Winry—”

“Be back soon,” Winry called, and inclined her head. “Please keep Ed safe for me.”

With that she, Falman, and Fuery left. Solaris watched them go, before dropping her bag to the ground. “I have to go, as well.”

“Solaris—” Al spoke up, blinking. Solaris shook her head.

“I’m going to King’s. We’re going to need to see how much information our enemy has.”

“Havoc can go with you,” Hawkeye spoke up, and Solaris lifted her lips in a smirk.

“I can handle myself,” Solaris said, flexed her hand.

Hawkeye frowned. “Nevertheless. Take Havoc and Breda. Havoc will provide extra protection and Breda is an excellent strategist. Any information you come across will become ten times more precious if we can work into a plan.”

Solaris stared at the red-haired portly man who raised his eyebrow at him and the tall blond man, who blushed a vibrant shade of red, and chewed on an unlit cigarette.

“We won’t slow you down,” the red-haired man said after a second. “Besides, she’s right. I’m one of the best.”

The blond ran a hand through his hair and reached for his lighter and started to light his cigarette, but Solaris flung her hand out, impaled it and pulled it back towards her. Surprise ran around the room; Rose jumped into air, Hawkeye raised an eyebrow, the red-haired man Solaris was sure was Breda visibly jumped away, and Havoc’s jaw dropped.

“Definitely can take care of yourself,” Havoc said, faintly.

“It’s rude to smoke inside of a house as a guest,” Solaris said, and threw the cigarette into the trash. “Come, then. If you must.”


Solaris stared at him, before her lips twitched upwards. “Don’t thank me. I promised your mother I’d keep you safe.” She inclined her chin towards the bag on the floor. “Promise me.”

Al stared, and then shook his head. “I can’t, Sol.”

“Yes, you can. If things get too dangerous, you take that bag and you leave the country. I don’t care if you have to force your brother over your shoulder, you get out.”
“Solaris-

“Promise me, Al,” Solaris growled, dark curly hair moving over her shoulder as she took a step forward, violet eyes narrowing. Al stared at her, swallowed, and then looked away.

“I promise.”

“Good.” Solaris nodded and turned towards the door. “Be safe.”

She left before she could hear his answer, trailing down the front steps towards the stolen car, only stopping once to make sure that the two soldiers were following after her, before stopping by the door. Mustang and Hughes were in front of the garage, talking quietly to each other. Mustang had his arms folded over his chest, leaning against the garage door and perked up when Havoc walked through the door.

“Ed?”

“Still asleep, chief,” Havoc said and shook his head. “We’re going with Ms. Solaris here to find out some information about what the hell’s going on. Phones are on.”

“Just Hawkeye left then,” Mustang murmured. “Fine. Keep yourself out of the line of fire and for god’s sake, come back alive, will you?”

Havoc grinned. “Can do, chief.”

“Like we’d die,” Breda called, rolling his eyes as he opened the door to the back seat and slid into the car. “Please.”

“What he said,” Havoc called as he moved into the passenger seat. Solaris studied them for a second, before turning towards Mustang, who stared at her.

“Equivalent exchange, Colonel,” she called. “I won’t let anything happen to them as long as you protect my boys.”

Mustang’s gaze softened for just a moment. “You have a deal.”

With that, Solaris slid into the car, started it, and pulled away.

–

Someone was humming next to him. Ed blinked his eyes open, trying to remembered his dream. It had been very boring - he was on a train, staring out of the window, while Al read to him about the properties of matter. It was fading fast, there was some sort of importance to it, but now he couldn’t remember.

Hawkeye was stroking his hair away from his face, and tilted her head to study him as he stared up at her.

“What is your name?” she asked, and Ed blinked at her.

“Edward Elric. The second.”

Hawkeye hummed. “Good. How many fingers am I holding up?” She held up three and her thumb, which was cheating. Ed told her as much. She almost very nearly smiled down at him. “What do you
remember?”

Ed swallowed. “I was heading home on my bike and-” The memory hit him like a sledgehammer, and felt like another one had hit him in the stomach. “My bike - is it-”


“Fucking Wrath,” Ed hissed, and twisted. He was off balance, why was his right side so light? Then, he remembered - waking up with Jealousy and Sloth and Wrath and rushing down the warehouse stairs and blocking the exit, only to have Wrath tear his ways through. And - “Oh, fuck,” Ed murmured. “Please tell me I dreamed that.”

His arm was missing. He could still remember the fury and desperation as Roy threw himself over his body and cradled him from Wrath. What an idiot.

“That idiot almost got himself killed,” Ed hissed. “What the hell was he thinking?”

Hawkeye exhaled through her nose, nearly a laugh. “I believe he was feeling desperate.”

“He knows, doesn’t he?” Ed questioned, after a second. “He saw.” It was all still a bit of a blur, and then the memory began to shift into nothing after his arm had been ripped off.

“Yes,” she stroked his forehead. “He’s quite angry, as well. Hughes is outside still receiving a lecture. I expect I’ll be next, if I’m not discharged immediately.”

“He can’t,” Ed breathed. “No - tell him I made you; lie, Lieutenant-”

Rose was asleep, curled up on an armchair, gently sleeping. The sky was just beginning to get light. Hawkeye continued to stroke his forehead. “Edward, are you in pain?”

Ed waited to see if he was. It usually crept up on him. “No, not - not really. My chest, but. My arm, is it-?”

“Ms. Rockbell came and picked it up before I had Officer Falman and Sergeant Fuery escort her to her workshop. She seemed determined to fix it.”

“And - and Al?” Ed questioned, quiet, breath held. Hawkeye nudged him slightly and gestured with her chin towards the other side of the bed. Ed twisted and exhaled at the sight of Al curled up next to him, pressed into his flesh arm. Ed felt tears leap to his eyes from the sheer relief he felt. “Thank - thank god.”

He felt exhausted all of sudden. His eyelids could barely stay up, and Ed reached out with his hand and wrapped it around Al’s hand, who shifted closer to him.

“You can sleep, Ed,” Hawkeye murmured. “We’ll be here when you wake up.”

And so, Ed did.
Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

The breather chapter.

Chapter Notes

Things:
1. If you see ANY typos, drop me a line and I will get on that shit as soon as I can.
2. All of your comments and love give me life and really thank you so much and I never actually thought I'd make this far with this much love, so thanks, thanks, thanks.
3. Yeah so obviously this is the most cliché thing whoops.
4. At the very bottom, there's surprise for you. Whether you'll like that surprise I have no idea, but hey. At least you get something.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

so this is it?

i sold my soul for this?

washed my hands of that for this?

i miss my mom and dad for this?

– some nights // fun.

The second time he awoke he was in one of the guest bedrooms, sunlight streaming through the window. He could hear movement downstairs, pots clanging against each other, and Armstrong talking to Rose about something, who laughed merrily. Ed blinked away the sleep and shifted into the pillow, searching for Al, but he must have been downstairs, or in another room.

Roy was sitting in the desk chair, staring out the window. Ed studied him for a second, before forcing himself to sit up, choking on a moan of pain as his chest ached. Roy jumped, startled, and then moved over to the bed, pressing a hand to Ed’s shoulder, forcing him to lay back.

“You have two broken ribs and a mild concussion,” Roy murmured. “You shouldn’t move for awhile.”

Ed was silent, staring up at Roy, jaw tense. “Are you going to turn me in?” Ed questioned, after a second, lips pressed flat. Roy stared at him before anger built in his eyes.

“You’ve got - a lot of nerve asking me that.”

“That doesn’t answer my question.”

Roy laughed, bitterly. “No, Ed, I’m not going to turn you in. For one, considering the cluster fuck
we seem to be in, you’re the only one with enough information to help us get out of it, and two - I-” He shut his mouth and looked away from Ed, jaw clenched. “You’d ask me that, even after - you really don’t like me, do you?”

“A person’s perception tends to change after someone levels a gun at their head, yeah,” Ed glared. Roy swung his gaze back to him, frowning.

“I - you can’t use that. I had no idea-”

“You’d level a gun at a complete stranger, why shouldn’t it be much of a leap to think that you’d level a gun at me-“ Ed cut himself off suddenly, pushing himself off the bed, and choked as his missing arm screamed at him. It felt like someone had rubbed his entire right side raw with a wire scrubber.

“Damnit, Ed,” Roy growled, and pressed against his shoulder. “You’re going to hurt yourself! Stay down!”

“Don’t” Ed pushed at Roy’s hand with his left hand, forgot he was missing his right one, and threw himself off on to the bed when there was nothing to support him. He thumped against the mattress hard, body tensing in agony, before it twisted into rage. “God damnit! I hate not having my fucking arm! Fucking-“ he twisted miserably, hollering in frustration.

“Ed-” Roy tried to keep him steady, but Ed arched his back and yelled even more, twisting away from his hand.

“The world’s kicked me in the balls enough fucking times,” he hollered hoarsely, propping himself up on his arm. “You think that they’d fucking stop at taking my fucking arm - at my fucking mom and dad - at my fucking granddad - at fucking everyone I’ve ever given a shit about - but fucking no, do you - I never fucking get a break, do you understand that?! And fucking helll don’t fucking care about my choices, thought fucking karma would take care of the fact that I save lives on a daily fucking basis, that I have to give up my life to keep everyone else safe, and fucking finally I thought I could get something - someone I wanted who wanted me back and of course - of course - because what’s another punch to the stomach, a knife in the back?” Ed threw himself out of the bed, stumbled onto his feet, grabbed a pillow and threw it at the door. It pressed itself flat against the wood frame, shaking it, before it slid down. “Where’s the fucking equivalence?! Where the fuck is my due?!”

The people downstairs were silent, but Ed couldn’t stop.

“I’m fucking sick of it! I can’t - I’m not - fuck-”

“Ed,” Roy said, knocking over the chair as he scrambled around the bed to catch Ed before he crumbled. “Ed, you’re having a panic attack.”

“I’m not,” Ed wheezed. “I’m not panicking.”

“That’s not-” Roy cupped Ed’s cheek and carefully stroked his thumb back and forth. “Breathe, alright? Out, and in. Come on.”

“I - hate you,” Ed snarled, but sucked in a long breath of air and let it out. Roy smiled at him, wrapping his arm around Ed’s back to keep him upright.


Ed inhaled, leaning his head forward so that it was resting against Roy’s shoulder, and then exhaled. “I hate you so much - you’re such - such a bastard. I hate you, I hate you, I hate you.”
“I know, I know,” Roy said, quietly. “Breathe for me, that’s it. You can hate me all you want, I’m okay with that.”

“No, no,” Ed moaned. “You’re not - supposed to be okay with it. You asshole, I - on the ferris wheel-”

Roy stilled, thumb pausing, and Ed wanted to pull away to see what his expression was but he couldn’t do much more than focus on breathing and keeping his one handed grip on Roy’s arm.

“Yes, Ed. On the ferris wheel.”

“You said-” Inhale, and the back out. “You said-”


“Bastard,” Ed breathed into his shoulder, into the collar of his shirt. “Absolute bastard. You went back and bought that picture.”

Roy shifted. “I wasn’t sure I’d ever see you again. I didn’t know how to take you running away. I suppose it was fortunate I did, considering the next day.”

Ed’s grip tensed on Roy’s arm. “I said - things. Roy, I didn’t - I thought I meant them, but I felt. I nearly puked in an alleyway after.” Inhale, and back out. “I didn’t mean any of it.” He pulled back, tongue thick in his mouth. “You didn’t have the wrong idea, even after you fucking shot at me I wanted to see you, and - you’re still a bastard, I didn’t lie about that - but I-” He swallowed, and stared down at the shoulder of Roy’s shirt. “Do you remember when you asked me to - to read you?”

“In the coffee shop?” Roy questioned after a moment, quiet. Ed nodded. “Yes. You called me a bastard.”

“I lied,” Ed breathed. “I lied. It was - you’re - you are. Like a fire in a hearth, warm and safe, and I can’t explain it, but - you scared the shit out of me. I’d never...I’d only ever seen someone like that with my dad, and Al. I couldn’t, I thought, ‘how’m I supposed to live without this?’ and I knew - I knew I couldn’t. I couldn’t - like seeing the sun for the first time, except it was like that with my dad, and Al. And I meant to, on the street, to tell you everything - I told myself when I left the ferris wheel that tomorrow, I’d tell you, everything. The Fullmetal thing and then. Then I’d - then I’d tell you that I loved you, too.”

Roy tensed in Ed’s grip, and Ed focused on his breathing, trying to force the calm back into him, and very quietly Roy questioned, “What?”

“I loved you, too,” Ed murmured. “I love you, too. Bastard. Even though you shot at me and keep fucking up my life.”

Roy’s hand slid down to his neck and gently tilted his head back so that he could stare into Ed’s eyes. He looked distrustful and wary, but he couldn’t help the hope in his eyes or the way his mouth was twitching upwards.

“Say it again,” Roy said, quietly. “Please.”

“I love you,” Ed said, blinking slowly. “I love you.”

Roy’s lips twitched upwards, and then fell flat. “I don’t - I’m-”

“You’re hopeless,” Ed murmured, and moved forward, kissing Roy chastely. “I’m sorry, I’m sorry,
I’m sorry. I know I fucked up, but you - you fucked up too, and I’m so fucking tired of this, so can we - please, can we just, start it even?”

“Even?” Roy said, pulling back slightly. “A clean slate?”

“Yes,” Ed breathed, and swallowed. “I’d - if you don’t want-”


“Yes?” Ed questioned, leaning forward, eyes wide, disbelieving. Roy nodded, and smiled.

“Yes. Yes, yes, yes,” Roy said, and then leaned forward, and for the first time in a year, he kissed Ed. Wonderfully enough, Ed forgot that he was missing his right arm, and let Roy lean him backwards, but with no arm to prop him off, they fell backwards, hitting the ground harshly with a ’oomph’. Ed felt his chest sing.

“Shit,” Roy breathed, propping himself up on his hands. “Shit, Ed - I forgot. Where does it hurt?”

“Everywhere,” Ed croaked, but he was grinning. “Kiss me again.”

“I might hurt you,” Roy said, after a second. “As much as I want to kiss you, I don’t want to hurt you. Let’s-” He bent down and wrapped his arms around Ed and pulled him up right. “And you’re probably hungry too.” Well, now that Ed thought about it, he was starved.

Roy rolled his eyes. “I figured.”

“I like food,” Ed hissed, and since Roy was keeping him upright, Ed felt free to lash out and hit him with his flesh hand - his only hand. Roy stared down at him, and said flatly, “Ow, yes, I remember. Come on.”

He helped Ed to stand while he grabbed the robe off of the edge of the bed and wrapped it around Ed. Ed frowned down at it, sniffing it. It smelt like honey.

“Is this - Rose’s robe?”

“Ed, you can’t possibly blame me for this. Alex’s robe wouldn’t even fit me.”

Ed bristled. “What the hell does that mean?”

Roy stared at him, and then his lips spread into a grin and he laughed, for a good two minutes. Ed stared at him, frown deepening as each second past. Roy had to sit on the bed. Ed rolled his eyes.

“Still an annoying bastard,” Ed noted. “Screw you, I’m getting food.”

He moved towards the door. Roy was still laughing.

King held open the back door as Solaris, Havoc, and Breda climbed through it and down into the reel room. It was dark, and dusty, and Solaris made sure to keep her hair off of the dusty shelves.

“Lust,” King greeted, because he was a bastard like that. Solaris barely held herself back from rolling her eyes. “And how are Sloth’s children?”

“Both fine,” Solaris shrugged, and nodded towards the stairs. “Company?”
“Not yet. The theater won’t open until eleven. You brought your own, however.” King smiled at them. “Welcome to my theater. Any friends of Lust’s, or just movie-lovers in general, are welcome here.”

Breda nudged Havoc, who elbowed Breda, who coughed and deliberately did not stare at the eyepatch. “Thank you for having us, sir.”

“You’re very welcome. Now, come upstairs with me. Let’s talk shop, shall we?”

She would need a new casing - or rather, she’d have to build one herself. The wires needed to be replaced, and Winry supposed she was partially lucky because at least now she could see what they were made of. Maybe she could salvage the old ones and re-use the thread...

First, the inner structure that held the tubing for the wiring. The port attachment was undamaged so at least she didn’t have struggle to find out how to connect the nerve endings. Winry checked her medical textbook again, checking the bone structure of the human arm. If her theory was right than the arm was built exactly like a human arm, where it’s structure lay in it’s bones, and the muscles provided it’s binding. The method could be used exactly the same - the metal skeleton was the bone structure, the wiring was the muscles, and then outer plates were an exoskeleton skin.

From the basics then. The arm bone’s connected to the shoulder bone.

Ed finished another strawberry vegan danish and reached for another plate of eggs. Al grinned, glad to see his brother was back to his semi-normal self, and from the way the Colonel was hovering over his shoulder, apparently he had fixed more than just his health.

His cheek was still warm from where Winry had kissed it, and Al couldn’t help but smile widely down at his eggs. Rose caught him, and grinned.

“My eggs aren’t that good,” she teased.

“I don’t know,” Ed said through a mouthful of said eggs. “I could live off nothing but these eggs for an entire week. A month.”

“You’d get sick,” Al said, conversationally. “The human body should only ingest two eggs per day.”

“Nerd,” Ed said after a second, rolling his eyes, grabbing another cup of coffee and downing most of it. “Hughes, you went to MacKenzie’s villa?”

Ah, well, the peace was nice while it lasted, but Al knew that Fullmetal would always be at the forefront of Ed’s mind. Hughes looked up from his own eggs, obviously exhausted. He had only gotten a few minutes sleep last night.

“Yeah, we did. Found a picture of what might be that woman you described.”

“Jealousy?” Ed questioned, swallowing his eggs. “Long blond hair to her shoulder, teal eyes, stick skinny, looks like she swallowed a ripe lemon?”

“Pretty sure that’s her; she’s a model, Joanna Mâyer, missing, currently,” Hughes said, and took a sip of his coffee. Ed twisted his mouth and grabbed another slice of toast, staring down at his plate.
“Al, why don’t you take Rose outside for some fresh air?” Ed suggested, not looking up. “Guys have been cooped up here for hours, haven’t you?”

Al knew a diversion technique when he saw one. He scowled. “Brother-”


“Ed,” Rose said, softly. “It’s alright - I know - you can tell us.”

“All of us,” Major Armstrong said, from the kitchen table. “We deserve to hear it.”

Ed’s lips twisted in frustration, but the Colonel laid a hand over his shoulder, and gently squeezed it, and Ed sighed. Al stared in wonder and noted that he’d have to ask the Colonel on his technique later.

“This group is basically another Homunculus, except, from what I can gather, they’re not led by someone outside the Sins. I’m nearly positive that Pride’s at the top - and I don’t know what he or she looks like. Second in charge looks like Wrath, the guy I put a spear through and Hawkeye shot three times and still isn’t dead.” Hawkeye frowned when Ed turned towards her and sighed. “There’s Sloth and Jealousy - I don’t know what Jealousy does, but Sloth - he just - touched me and it was like someone had threw me in a blender. I nearly puked.”

“Vertigo?” Al questioned, perking up, sketching out a few arrays on the countertop with his finger. “I suppose you upset the fluids in the inner ear canal with the proper transmutation-”

“Oh, right,” Ed murmured, and frowned. “Let me - and then Hawkeye and I can walk you through it, alright? When I - basically these guys are using an advanced form of science.”

“Like...magic?” the Colonel questioned, after a beat. Al bit back a smile as Ed groaned and muttered ‘why do I even-’ and nodded his head.

“Yeah, like magic. Except real.”

“Yes, that makes sense,” the Colonel said, rolling his eyes. “Continue. I’ll try to keep up.”

“Wrath obviously uses something to boost testosterone or something because the guy - he’s stronger than you,” Ed said, inclining his head towards Alex. “Greed - MacKenzie - he makes copies of himself. I killed one, Hawkeye killed one, and there was another one. I’m not sure if he has a limit - but there has to be. Equivalence dictates it and it must take a whole shit lot to keep those things active.” Ed swallowed. “Which. Brings me to - to this. They’re - the people that have gone missing aren’t - they’re not-”

“Alive?” Hughes said, gently. “Did you see them?”

“I didn’t have to,” Ed shook his head. “Wrath told me - they’re using them for something - big. Something alchemical.” He looked up and met Al’s eyes. “I told him, nothing equals the value of a human soul. Wrath said I was wrong.”

“That’s-” Al scoffed, and then realized that Ed wouldn’t joke about something this serious. “A transmutation that big - what are they-?” His eyebrows drew together and he seemed halfway to remembering something before he was silent, staring at Ed, horror stark in his expression. Ed stared, licked his lips, and ducked his gaze down to the counter.
“I don’t know. I do know that the bodies we found were after products of whatever the hell they’re trying to do, but they only - only five came out. I don’t know where the others are, the maybe hundreds of missing people.”

Silence. Rose lifted a hand to her mouth and sat down on one of the bar stools slid under the counters. “That’s,” she breathed. “That’s horrible.”

Armstrong stood and walked over to Rose, placing a hand on her shoulder. “It’ll be alright, darling. We won’t allow this monstrosity to continue.” He looked at Ed. “Right?”

“No,” Ed said, eyes cold. “We won’t. The things is that - Wrath said that they needed me. Not just me, me or Al. Said they needed my blood.”

Al furred his eyebrows together. “Why you or me? We’re human, same as everybody else.”

Ed swallowed and ducked his gaze away to the countertop. “Do you remember, when we were kids, and grandpa used to talk in the language that we could never understand, the one that sounded German and Japanese, but never really was? And grandma always knew what he was trying to say.”

“Yeah,” Al said, confused. “You used to tease him and he used to come after you in his wheelchair.”

“He called it Amestrian, once, didn’t he?” Ed asked, quietly. Al shrugged, and couldn’t remember if he had or hadn’t.

“I - I don’t know. I don’t remember much of that, you know that. I remember him writing down everything-”

“It’s just,” Ed cut in. “Why does Solaris have to cut open her hand and bleed so much when we can do what she does with just a few drops?” His eyes narrowed. “Why is our blood stronger than everyone else’s?”

“Brother,” Al said, and couldn’t find the words. “I don’t - know. Why are you-”

“It’s nothing,” Ed murmured. “I’m sure it’s nothing.”

Then, as if sensing that they needed a change of conversation, Rose started to pick up the dirty dishes, smiling at the Colonel and the Commissioner. “Would you two mind terribly if I asked you to put away the bed away?” When they shook their heads and moved into the living room with Hawkeye following after them, Rose turned to Alex. “Darling, you need to head into work. It’ll look suspicious if you’re not there.”

“You’re right, as always,” Armstrong rumbled, bending down to peck a kiss onto Rose’s lips. “Be safe. I’ll be home tonight.”

“We will,” Rose smiled and put the dishes into the sink. She blew a kiss towards her husband before turning to Al and Ed. “Alright, you two. What is it, Ed?”

Ed blinked and looked up, startled, before he grinned, wryly. “Could never get anything past you.”

“No,” Rose said, firmly. “You never could. Spill.”

“I’ve just - been.” Ed scrubbed his only hand through his hair and into his bangs. “I’ve been having these bizarre dreams. Stupid, really, just - fantasies, I guess.”

“Like the People’s Alchemist dream?” Al questioned, drawing his eyebrows together. “You’ve
always had those dreams.”

“Yeah, but now they’re getting pretty bad. I can actually remember a few of them.” Ed twisted his mouth in thought and stared at nothing. “Al, I’m not hearing - German, or English, or Latin, or French, or any of the languages I know. I’m hearing - I’m hearing what grandpa used to speak.”

Al stared at him, quiet, before he shifted. “Are you sure?”

“Positive. I don’t know,” Ed bent his head down. “Am I going crazy? Is that what’s happening? Am I loosing my mind like grandpa?”

“No, brother,” Al said, reaching across the counter to grab his hand. “No, you’re not going crazy. There’s an answer. We just have to - gather all the evidence and then we’ll have our answer. Evidence is the basis of truth, isn’t it?”

“Yeah,” Ed said, and sounded miserable about it.

Al grinned. “Sides, you can’t be going crazy. You just got the Colonel back, didn’t you?”

As expected Ed threw his head back, ignoring Rose’s laugh, and said, “Or that could be evidence I am going crazy.”

Rose walked into the living room, fully intending to clean up the mess inside, but carefully stilled in the middle of the room when she caught sight of Mustang and Commissioner Hughes passed out of the pull out bed, Hawkeye asleep in one of the reading chairs. Rose smiled, tugged the blanket back over Riza’s shoulders, and carefully stepped back. Well, the bed could stay down for awhile longer.

“No!” Winry called over the roar of her blowtorch. “You’ll be totally fine! Just keep it steady!”

Fuery nearly passed out but managed to keep his hands steady, and he held the two metal plates together while Winry fused the metal down the seam. She cut the gas to the blowtorch and pulled back her heavy iron mask, grinning widely.


Fuery suddenly realized why Falman was passed out in the corner.

“So,” Roy said, gaze darting between Rose, Ed, Al, Hawkeye, and Hughes. “Alchemy.”

“Yes,” Ed said, seriously. “Alchemy.”

“The science of...understanding, deconstructing, and reconstructing matter.”

“That’s it,” Al said, and nodded.

“And it’s - not parlor tricks.”

Ed scowled. “No, it’s not parlor tricks. Not everyone can do it, you know. It takes years and years of study - and god forbid you wanted to learn a specific kind of alchemy instead of a general range.”
“Brother’s very protective of alchemy,” Al informed the Colonel. “We’ve been learning since we were kids. Our mom specialized in water alchemy.”

“And your mom was...” Roy trailed off, eyebrows drawn together. “Sloth, in the original set of Homunculus, which are a group named after fake humans?”


“Uh-” Roy said and Ed scoffed, leaning forward over the coffee table but Rose slapped his hand, glaring.

“That is an heirloom, Edward Elric, I will not have you leaving those annoying little marks all over it.”

“Jesus,” Ed rolled his eyes and reached over to grab the decorative twisted iron statue in the middle of the table and slide it front of him. He got the okay from Rose, and broke open the thin skin on his palm from the day’s old cut, shaking his hand until the blood dripped down on his finger, before sketching out a quick array. “Alchemy.”

He pressed the blood stained palm to the counter, the statue in the middle of the array, and the air sparked with blue energy before the iron began to twist and meld together to form a gargoyle. Al, Hughes, and Rose rolled their eyes. Ed looked proud. Hawkeye was Hawkeye. Roy looked lightheaded.

“Oh,” Roy said, after a second. “Alchemy.”

“And now you know,” Ed said proudly. “Welcome to the loop.”

Falman and Fuery were passed out in the corner and Winry wiped the sweat from her brow as she carefully slid the elbow hinge of the lower automail arm onto the upper part. A half a dozens turn on the screwdriver, familiar like a childhood home, until it felt perfect.

She had gotten - a little too excited. The design was different, and slightly bulkier, but all she had on her were chrome alloys that she had to melt down with the original iron platings, making a slightly more fragile, but strong nonetheless casing. It was light too - she had shaved off ten pounds and she knew it would be good on Ed in the long run. He already had started slouching one shoulder down constantly due to the weight, but now it would be slightly easier to carry around.

Winry couldn’t help the grin. She had gotten excited, yes, but excitement bred creativity. Stripping the automail down to it’s most basic parts had been like unlocking the key to the universe. Winry lifted the arm and inspected the inner structure once before before she reached over and grabbed the few...extra attachments she had thrown together.

Well, she knew for sure that Ed would be excited about getting his arm back, but wait till he saw the added surprises.

“You’re not serious,” Breda said, something cold building in his stomach. “You can’t be.”

“I’m afraid I’m perfectly serious,” King said, blinking at Breda. “This is the information that I’ve been privy to.”
“But this is - this is Headquarters. They can’t-”

“They are, I’m afraid. I was able to trail an order back to it’s source, and it came from there.”

Solaris was frowning, flexing her fists open and closed. Havoc scanned the people below them, mulling about as the theater started to open by the workers. He kept a hand on his gun and was chewing on an unlit cigarette.

“What we know who, then?” Solaris questioned.

“Not yet,” King said, after a second. “I’m looking into it.”

Either way, Solaris’ frown deepened.

“Aw,” Ed cooed and lifted up Rose’s camera to take a picture of Hughes and Roy, curled around each other on the couch. “Blackmail.”

“Brother,” Al rolled his eyes and gently helped Hawkeye from her chair. She blinked wearily at him but looked ten times better than she had before. Her jacket was thrown over the chair, tie loose around her neck, and her shoes were kicked off nearly the front door. Ed looked around for the remains of his black shirt, pulling it out of the trash, grimacing.

“Think I can save it?”

“You can try, brother,” Al said, lightly, and turned to look at Hughes and Mustang. “They are kinda cute.”

“Tell me about it,” Ed grinned and threw his shirt onto the table, swiping his thumb against the inside of his still bleeding hand and sketching out a quick array, before pressing his palm to it. Blue light filled the air for just a second before his black long sleeve shirt stitched back together, the blood, dirt, and debris separating out and forming a thick, small ball that landed on the table with a thunk.

“What?” Roy shot up, hand searching for his gun. “What’s - who’s-”

Hughes was jolted awake by the bed moving, nearly falling off the side. “Gracia?”

Ed and Al stared. Hawkeye calmly raised an eyebrow, and sighed. Roy stared at Hughes. Hughes stared at Roy. They then proceeded to scramble away from each other as they realized they had an arm looped around each other. Ed tugged his shirt on, covering the white bandages swathed over his waist. “Well, now that you’re up…”

“What time is it?” Hughes questioned, fixing his askew glasses. “I have to be in the office in - I was supposed to be in the office an hour ago. Damn.” At Ed’s raised eyebrow, he continued, “We had someone come forward with information about MacKenzie giving us probable cause to search his villa, you know that. We found a whole host of ready to be made forged papers, enough to send out search parties and put an APB.”

“Who came forward?” Ed asked, confused.

Hughes cleaned his glasses. “A woman named Luca. Said you knew her.”

Ed rolled his head back. “Please tell me she wasn’t arrested and using that to get out of trouble.”

“No,” Hughes said, blinking. “She came voluntarily, after she heard what happened to you.
Apparently her boyfriend’s gone missing.”

“Damn,” Ed murmured. He rubbed at his eyes with his one hand. “And you haven’t found MacKenzie?”

“Would have gotten a call if they did,” Hughes pointed out. “Ed, we’ll find them. I have to - I need to go in. It’ll be weird if I don’t, considering.”

“Alright, commissioner,” Alphonse said, nodding. “We’ll tell you if anything comes up.”

Hughes nodded and stood, running a hand through his hair. “At least I have a spare suit in the office. I’ll see you guys later.” He grabbed his coat off of the hook by the front door, waved, and closed the door behind, the sound a car starting up echoing a second later.

Ed inclined his head and leant back against the chair he was sitting in, mouth twisting in irritation. “I hate waiting.”

“I know you do, brother,” Al murmured. “But you can’t do anything with one arm.”

“Bullshit I can’t do anything one arm,” Ed raged. “Just you wait - I’m going kick that asshole Wrath’s balls so far up his stomach he’s gonna be choking on it-”

“Delightful image,” Hawkeye said, flatly.

“Don’t fucking care,” Ed growled, before his expression broke and he gripped his knee with his hand, knuckles turning white. “Fucker ruined my bike - I mean,” when Al jumped and opened his mouth to say something uplifting. “Ruined it, Al. He, the front basically exploded, and he ripped it in two, right down the middle.” Ed closed his eyes and hung his head. “It’s gone.”


“Don’t be,” Ed said, irritably, wiping at his eyes with his shoulder. “I just - need to hit something. Wrath’s a pretty fucking good target.”

Roy’s lips pressed together, and he swallowed. Al’s gaze darted towards him, and he sunk back against the chair, waiting for the inevitably fight that was coming.

“Ed, I know - I know you do this for a living, I know you know what you’re doing but I’m not,” Roy stopped for a second and searched for his words before continuing on. “I’m not - sure you can handle this on your own.”

Ed looked at him, and his frown deepened. “The hell do you mean?”

Roy paused and twisted his lips together again. “Ed, these people are dangerous, and they’ve already proved that they’re - difficult. You’re not even at your top, right now, so-”

“You want me to stop?” Ed said, quiet and furious. He stood, nearly knocking into Roy and the Colonel sighed, leaning back, before standing. “You want me to - what - just let them go? You want me to let them get away?”

“Ed,” Roy said, briskly. “One of them ripped your arm off. Another nearly killed you, nearly killed Lieutenant Hawkeye. This isn’t something you can face yourself-”

“Fuck you,” Ed hissed, leaning forward. “Fuck you. You don’t get to - I am not going to let someone get hurt because I didn’t stop this when I had the chance. You don’t get to-”
“I’m not forcing you to do anything,” Roy said, quietly. “I’m asking you to think this through. You can’t run off the minute you get arm back - you’re not - you’re not-“

“Not what?” Ed raged, taking another step forward. “Not what?”

“Invincible, damnit!” Roy shot back, just as angry, even if his expression was more composed. “You almost - you were almost killed right in front of me - your arm was ripped off, Ed, what the hell - what if it wasn’t fake?! I can’t-“ His lips tugged downwards, and his hands clenched erratically. “Damnit, I can’t lose you when I just got you back.”

Ed stared up at him, expression unwavering from the indigent rage. “You’re not gonna loose me. You’re - you’re not.”

Roy didn’t look convinced. “Say you’ll wait. Promise me you’ll wait until - until we know for sure we can handle what we’re dealing with. Promise me.”

Al swallowed, and waited for Ed to explode again, and Hawkeye was watching the conversation with a guarded gaze, carefully waiting. Al supposed it was near enough to a miracle that Rose hadn’t waken up from her nap upstairs. But all Ed did was press his lips together, jaw clenched, and said in a flat tone, “I promise.”

The Colonel visibly relaxed. “Thank you.”

“The minute I get the opportunity, I’m going,” Ed warned. Roy nodded.

“That’s - it’s fine. Just please...wait.” He struggled for a second, before, “Thank you.”

Ed’s frown still deepened, and he held out his arm. “I’m extremely pissed off at you right now. You better hold me until I feel like I don’t want to knock your head off.”

“I can do that,” Roy murmured, taking a step forward to wrap both of his arms around Ed’s shoulders. “Ed, I’m sorry, but you have to - put it through my point of view.”

“I know,” Ed murmured. “I don’t want to lose you either.”

Alphonse ducked his gaze down, giving them some semblance of privacy, only darting it up once to check, and promptly felt his mouth go dry as Ed stared over the Colonel’s shoulder, staring at the wall with a hard expression, eyes cold and mouth grim. Al swallowed again, and closed his eyes, pressing into the now folded couch.

Brother had said he had gotten good to looking Mustang in the eye and lying.

—

“Finished!” Winry trilled as she tested the nerve endings of the automail one last time. The fingers bent with each small hiss, the arm flexing, and she oiled it once more, checking the wiring. “Perfect, perfect, my precious automail, look at you!”

“It looks pretty amazing, Ms. Rockbell,” Fuery said, inclining his head. She grinned at him and climbed into the back seat of the black SUV. No-one was in the shop yet, luckily, but Winry knew they were on their way. She had cleaned up her workplace and carefully hid the detailed schematics of the automail away under lock and key in her desk.

“To Ed,” Winry sung. “My precious automail - look how the chrome catches the light! The way the metal overlays just so! My masterpiece!”
“I’m sure Mr. Elric will be delighted,” Falman said, as he maneuvered in traffic. Winry cooed at the arm in her hands, pressing to side of it to her cheek. Oh, Ed would be ecstatic - and more than that, Al would-

Winry pressed her lips together and grinned. You will fix it. Win, I know you can fix it. Alphonse would be - pleased.

It seemed like they were pulling into the Armstrongs’ driveway in mere seconds even though Winry knew it had taken half an hour. She grabbed her tool box and cradled the arm to her chest, climbing out of the car and skipping up the steps.

“Hello~!” She sung, throwing open the door. She could see the people in the living room jump and Winry grinned at them. She knew she was a mess, with the blue sundress Solaris had given her covered in grease, and there was dirt all over her face, but the automail was finished-

“Winry,” Al breathed, and stood smiling wide. Winry danced to him, pecking him on the cheek, and swinging him around with one arm. “You look-”

“I did it, I did it, Al. I did it!”

“Winry - that’s amazing!”

“You fixed my arm?” Ed said, pulling away from Colonel Mustang. Winry grinned at him, and twirled to him before extending the arm she had wrapped in oil cleaning cloth, presenting it with a grim. “You fixed my arm,” Ed breathed, amazed. “Winry, you - holy fuck.”

“Say it,” Winry said, closing her eyes. “Come on, say it.”

“You’re the best,” Ed said, grinning. “Winry, you are the best.”

“I know I am,” Winry sung and shoved him towards the couch. “Come on lay down, I have to reattach it.”

No matter how excited Ed was that he was getting his arm back, he paled slightly and looked at the couch with a wary gaze. Colonel Mustang drew his eyebrows together in confusion, and Al went to his side, murmuring, “Brother takes off the arm for maintenance every year, and getting the arm off isn’t the bad part.”

“The nerve attaching is worse the longer the arm has been absent,” Winry said, pulling the coffee table to Ed’s side so that she could study the port. “The phantom pains stop, but it is fake. The nerves start to protest anything that’s been gone for more than an hour. Ed, you’re going to feel less than your best after this.”

“I know,” Ed grouched, and pushed his face into the sofa cushions to his right.

“He’s going to be in a lot of pain?” The Colonel asked, concerned, and before Winry could blink he was on the other side of the couch, holding onto Ed’s hand. “Can’t we - drug him?”

“Might make it worse, and I need to make sure the nerves are responsive,” Winry murmured and lined up the automail to the port. “Ed, ready?”

“Yeah,” Ed said, looking up from the cushions to stare up at the Colonel. “Yeah, go, ah - fuck-”

Winry twisted the arm back on before he could finish, sliding the port lock into place and grabbing a wrench from her toolbox and twisting the port tight. “Too tight, too loose? You gotta talk to me,
“It’s fine, it’s not bad,” Ed choked, pressed his forehead into the cushions. “Not too tight, not loose.”

“Alright,” Winry murmured. “I’m tightening the nerve endings. It’ll feel a little better after this - you gotta tell me if starts to hurt more.”

The Colonel grabbed Ed’s hand with both of his, murmuring down at him, and Winry listened for two seconds, half-way curious to see what was grabbing Ed’s attention before she heard ‘and we’ll go back to that diner and the new greenhouse opened up, we can go there, and we’ll-’ before she turned back to testing the nerve endings.

“Move your fingers,” Winry said, and Ed trembled for a second, before the automail fingers twitched. Winry grinned. “Alright, play chopsticks.”

“I - hate you,” Ed growled, but started to move his fingers accordingly.

“I’ll have to run some dexterity tests, but the response time looks perfect.” Winry grinned at Ed, who pulled his gaze away from the Colonel, eyebrows drawing together.

“What - what is that? Did you put another fucking finger on it - what’s-”

“Oh,” Winry breathed, excited. “Oh, Ed - I - I just got so excited. Bend your fist down and expose - like that, like you have a peashooter strapped to your forearm, and just-”

“Fuck!” Ed yelped, Al jumping out of his seat, Falman and Fuery blinking wearily, Hawkeye reaching for his gun, and the Colonel blinked as something shifted in the automail and suddenly a long plated blade of metal slid out from under the plating. Ed stared, eyes wide, before he grinned. “Holy fucking shit, Winry-”

“Oh, do you like it?” Winry questioned, leaning forward. “That’s not - I got the idea when I remembered the machete I found in the pantry-”

“What?” said the Colonel.

“Not a machete,” said Ed.

“And now you don’t have to worry about loosing a knife because you are a knife, and it’ll probably give you hell at airports, but you already said it was a bitch of a time - and oh, Ed - look, just-”

Ed stared at the hand, and then the blade slid back in with a quiet snkit, the plating locking into place. “That’s-”

“Look,” Winry said, and grabbed onto Ed’s hand. “Just - I’m not sure how to explain it but it’s connected to the wrist movement, I wired the nerve receptors in, just - detach it.”

She got a skeptical stare in return, but did, and with a small click, Winry pulled out his arm, a long cable. Ed stared. Winry grinned. “I had extra cable - it’s balled up in your upper arm around a relay near your port. I was worried it might make it off balance, but it worked out well. It doesn’t just detach it - here. Put it back in.”

Ed stared for a moment, before jiggling his hand a little and the thin black wire started to run back rapidly into the arm.

“Now,” Winry said. “Aim and I just - I don’t know - you have to-”
Ed lifted his hand, aimed towards the wall in front of him, and the automail ejected the hand, black wire spitting out. It flew against the room and Ed grabbed onto the wall, metal fingers digging into the plaster.

“The cable is - ridiculously strong. Evan, my boss, he bought the stuff to suspend entire cars from the roof when he thought he was going to redo the shop into something fancier, and that can hold around two tons, and the line is about thirty meters long, and it takes up most of the room in the upper automail, but - do you like it?”

“Winry,” Ed said, after a moment. “You’re the best.”

Winry’s grin was even wider than before. “I know.”

Rose came down the steps, yawning, and stopped short. She made a small sound in the back of her throat, stared at Ed’s hand embedded in the wall, and turned towards him. Ed winced.

“I can fix that,” Ed said, quickly.

Rose moaned. “My wall.”

“I can fix it,” Ed pressed, turning to Al. “Al, go fix her wall.”

“It’s okay, Rose,” Al said, grinning. “Just give me a second.” He went to go fix the wall as Ed lifted his automail and stared at it, flexing the hand.

“Winry - did I say you’re the best?”

“Multiple times, but I always enjoy hearing it,” Winry grinned, and leant back. “Now, if you’ll excuse me, I’m going to go pass out. I feel like someone’s nailing a screw into my forehead.”

“The guest bedrooms are free,” Rose said, tittering over her wall as Al sketched out a careful array. “You’re more than welcome to a shower and my clothes.”

“Please and thank you,” Winry breathed and stood, cracking her back. “Ed, you should get some sleep too. It’ll be better for you.”

“I can carry him up to one of the bedrooms,” Mustang murmured. “We were in the one on the far right, before.”

“I’ll shower and take the other one, then. Keep him on his back, we don’t want to stretch the muscles in his shoulder. Water every hour, and if I’m not up, make him flex out the arm.”

“Alright,” the Colonel agreed and walked around to the other side of the couch, bending down. “This okay, Ed?”

“Not an invalid,” Ed growled, pressing his forehead into the Colonel’s shoulder as he was picked up. “Just wanna sleep.”

“Alright,” Roy murmured, again. “Alright, let’s go then.”

Ed was asleep before they could even get up the stairs.

Chapter End Notes
SURPRISE:

He bent down and kissed Ed's cheek, feeling the other man start in surprise and his cheek heat up under his lips. “Do you know,” Roy murmured into his cheekbone. “How very much I adore you?”

Ed scrunched up his face and shook his head, but couldn’t dislodge Roy from his cheek. “Is the answer a lot?”

“The answer is a lot,” Roy confirmed, and pulled away to kiss Ed’s jugular, before moving away entirely.

“Hey, wait, bacon,” Ed whined, staring down at his plate, already devouring his eggs.

Roy rolled his eyes. “I’m working on it, Mr. Human Garbage Disposal.”

*throw hands up* WOO DOMESTICS
Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

In which there's a reveal and a cliffhanger.

Chapter Notes

1. ~college~
2. you'll notice that this fic is probably getting more and more contrived as it goes on but i still love it and hold it dear to my heart so thanks for reading it regardless
3. *sips coffee*
4. wait have i mentioned that this fic takes place like a few years ahead of our time yeah jsyk (i.e, Ed and Al were three to five in 2005, and now Ed's 22, so 2015-2020-ish.
5. also the pacing in this chapter is awful but i'm not sure if that's because i'm reading it quicker than a normal reader would because I know what happens in it?? or what so comments on that please

and he prays up to his god

that he might his save his soul

the gray in this city is too much to bear

– alpha shallows // laura marling

Roy woke him up on the hour ever hour for a few minutes while Ed finished half a glass of water and obligingly drummed his fingers on command. Eventually Ed woke on his own, pressing closer into Roy’s shoulder. The man was curled up next to him, wrapped around Ed’s side as Ed laid on his back, the blankets drawn up to his chin, fast asleep.

Ed frowned and tested the automail again. It was light - really light. The usual ache in his shoulder had all but disappeared, and the nerve strumming agony from the automail reattachment was finally dulled into a gentle thrum. Roy slept besides him, shifting when Ed propped himself up, so that he was laying on his back instead of his side. Ed smiled down at him, and leaned over him, pressing his forehead to Roy's own.

Roy was - dreaming. Ed didn’t have his grandmother’s ability, or at least, if he did he had never shown it before. Instead a quiet hum echoed through Roy into Ed, and Ed searched for the warm center.

He hadn’t seen it since that day, but it was familiar in a way that Ed didn’t understand. He smiled, eyes closed, and pressed himself closer for just a second, before pulling back. Roy slowly blinked up at him, still half-asleep.

“You’re up,” he murmured.
“Not for long,” Ed said, quietly. “Go back to sleep. I’m right here.”

Roy hummed and closed his eyes, smiling. “Love you.”

“Yeah,” Ed murmured. “Yeah, I love you too.”

He leant down and pressed his lips to Roy’s, pulling back and kissing his forehead, before pulling away completely. Then he carefully climbed off of the bed and stared outside the window. The sun had just begun to set, and Ed exhaled slowly as he studied the neighbor’s lawn, the empty street, the-

His heart stopped suddenly, and Ed pressed himself into the shadows as Robert MacKenzie climbed out of a black car and stretched, before turning directly towards Ed and waving. Ed felt his stomach clench, his mind race, but the man held up a folded piece of paper, threw it onto the Armstrongs’ driveway, got in his car, and drove off.

After a second, when it clicked that MacKenzie wasn’t storming in the house after him, Ed pulled away from the window and gently moved downstairs, unlocking the front door and padding across the lawn to the edge of the driveway. He picked up the folded piece of white paper before it blew away.

It only had one line, an address, and nothing else. Ed stared at for a second, searching through his memory for where the address would lead him to and managed to place it somewhere on the northern side of the city, where the city evened out and the mountains began to build up and forests littered in-between the gapes of society. People like the Major’s parents, and the highest officials in government lived up there, where their yards were acres of open land, and most of it was uncharted.

Ed crumbled the paper in his hand and scowled.

He’d never get an opportunity like this again, but he had thought the same with Hakuro and that didn’t end well.

He couldn’t leave it alone though. There might have been people still alive and Ed - Ed needed to-

“Damnit,” Ed murmured, turning on his heel and moving back into the house and up the stairs. He paused for a second, in front of the door to the guest room, before carefully opening it. Roy was still sleeping, frowning slightly in his sleep, arm stretched out across the bed, and Ed seriously considered throwing the paper away and just curling back up next to him, but - he couldn’t think like that.

He was wearing one of the spare sleeping pants that Rose kept for him, with his black shirt, but the clothes that he wore as Fullmetal were neatly folded on the chair. Ed stared at them, before moving forward, stripping the striped pants and pulling on the leather ones. Black socks came next, and Ed’s boots were still downstairs. His leather gloves were still at the warehouse, abandoned, and Ed picked up the red coat, shook it out, and stared at it.

You could be going to your death, the red cloth taunted him. You put me on and you may never see Roy or Al or any of them ever again.

His dad had never hesitated, didn’t even pause when a half-drunk man aimed a gun into his face and pulled the trigger, because his dad just wanted to do something good and what was Ed doing? Was he - slowly going insane? Was he making the worst decision of his life?

Did it matter? There could still be people alive, waiting and praying for help, and Ed had - he had promised. No, it didn’t matter. Ed gripped the red coat in his hands, one metal and one flesh, and exhaled.
Then he shrugged it on, pulling it over his shoulders, and let the hood dangle around his neck while he threaded the buttons on his shoulders through the holes made for them, and neatly clipped the little hooks onto his shirt. Roy didn’t move. Ed walked over to the side of the bed and carefully sat next to him, brushing the man’s messy hair back from his forehead. Roy leaned into his touch, and exhaled in his sleep. Ed smiled, and leant forward, pressing his forehead against Roy’s.

“I really do love you,” he said, softly. “I’ve lied to you a lot - I keep lying to you - but that’s not one of them. You’re a bastard, and I hate you, but I love you, too. Promise me you’ll take good care of Al, and Winry, and you won’t let Hawkeye work you too hard, alright?”

Edward leaned forward and pressed a gentle kiss to Roy’s lips, before pulling back.

“Don’t hate me, okay?” Ed murmured, pulling away, before he pulled the hood over his head and clipped it into place. “If I get out of this, I’ll never lie to you again, I swear.”

He got one last look at Roy before he closed the guest door and padded down the stairs and pulled on his boots, buckling them on before he turned towards the garage. He carefully pulled open the door and flicked the lights on. Inside was Rose’s little car in all it’s energy saver glory, and next to it was -

Ed grinned and turned towards the key rack on the wall, grabbing the second seat of keys, took Rose’s off the hook and flung them into the corner, before hopping down the steps and pulling the tarp off of the black motorcycle. It was the classic kind, with shiny chrome tubes and glistening black finish, and Ed sent a quick apology to Armstrong for stealing his bike - and Ed was lucky that you didn’t have to be particularly (or abnormally) large to ride these kinds of bikes. He swung his leg over it and twisted the key in the ignition, not starting it up yet. He threw out his automail hand, letting the hand detach as it flew across the garage and pressed against the garage door opener.

The garage door opened with a loud rumble, and Ed winced, knowing that it would wake everyone up, before backing the bike out into the driveway, past the parked cars, and into the road. He stared at the SUV for a second, next to him, and broke open the skin just barely with his teeth, swabbing his thumb against it. He drew an array onto the back of the car and pressed his palm against it. The metal seized and fused the cracks in between the door shut. There - at least no-one could follow him and put themselves in even more trouble.

A bike was still a bike, Ed thought as he stared down the street. He twisted the key, pushed his palm against the clutch, and opened the throttle.

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Al woke up to the sound of the garage door opening, shaking the whole house. It was an noisy thing, and Al groaned, pulling himself off of the armchair. The couch was pulled out again, Falman and Fuery laying on it, and they both blinked awake as Rose climbed down the stairs, eyebrows furrowed as she checked the clock. She met Al’s gaze, confused, and Al blinked at her.

“Alex isn’t supposed to be home for another hour,” Rose said, frowning. “And he doesn’t use the garage door. Only I do.”

There were footsteps from above suddenly, and the Colonel hurried down the steps, scanning the room for something, and something like panic set in. He turned towards the front door just as the distinctive sound of a motorcycle engine revving echoed through the room.

“Alex’s Harley,” Rose breathed, taking a step towards the door, and Al’s eyes widened as he connected the dots - *where was Ed?* - and stood. The Colonel was already moving towards the front
They managed to catch the glint of a sun against a black motorcycle, Fullmetal’s red coat cracking in the wind, right as he turned the corner.

“No!” the Colonel yelled, frustrated, already turning towards the black SUV, only to find the doors seamed into the framework, and the Colonel looked back at Al, who was already trying to think up the array he needed, looking for something to draw blood. “Alphonse, he’s getting away-”

“I’m hurrying, Colonel,” Al said, and finally managed to bite open his thumb and sketch an array onto the side of the car, pressing his hand to it.

The car shuddered, and didn’t move.

“Damnit,” Al breathed. “He - he fucked with the composition, I can’t-”

“F-fuck,” the Colonel bit out. “He - he promised-”

“I know,” Al said, and Rose hurried into the garage, stopping in front of the key rack. Her jaw dropped, mouth hanging open as she spun on her heel and said, “My keys!” and started searching the ground.

“He knew,” Mustang murmured. “He planned this - I should have - he waited until I was asleep to-”

“It’s not your fault,” Al said, quietly. “Let’s call Solaris - maybe she’ll have something knew. Maybe she spoke to brother. He’ll be fine.”

Winry was waiting for them when they walked back in, dressed in a yellow short sleeve t-shirt and gym pants. Her frown was deep and troubled, but not surprised. “Ed took off, didn’t he?”

It wasn’t a question, even if it was phrased like one. Al ran a hand through his hair as the Colonel fell into an armchair, next to Lieutenant Hawkeye, who sighed and rested a hand on his shoulder while he rubbed at his eyes.

“Yeah,” Al said, after a moment. “He did. Let’s call Solaris. Maybe she - maybe.”

“Yeah,” Winry said, softly, and wrapped a hand around his. “Maybe.”

Fullmetal had seven knives strapped to his belt, two hidden in each boot, and a blade in his arm. The Major’s bike was cumbersome - he had to nearly do a full body lean to get the thing to turn - but he took it from the Armstrong’s onto the highway, and up to the northern part of the city. The roads became covered with trees, the darkening sunlight barely making it through the cover, and Ed checked the address he had tucked into his pocket once more, sure he was heading in the right direction.

He was heading up, up one of the mountains, or rather in-between two of them. He stopped for a second at a crest of a hill and looked down at the valley crevice below, and in the middle was a stone mansion in obvious disrepair. It was at least five stories tall, made out of dark grey bricks, and Ed stared down at it before pushing the bike forward.

Answers, he reminded himself. He would get the full story one way or another. The scenery rushed past as he began to descend, the road becoming more and more untamed, large cracks and
potholes appearing, and eventually the concrete disappeared into a flat dirt path. Ed twisted his lips as he rode down it, barely keeping the bike steady. At least there was no fallen trees; Ed didn’t want to think about walking the rest of the way.

Finally the tree line broke to a courtyard, and Ed rolled up and around the circular driveway and around an unused fountain. He cut the engine and sat on the bike, feet on the ground as he stared up at the face of what had to be a mansion. He had seen the Armstrong estate once, and this was nearly as big. Ed scanned the windows for any sign of movement, but they were all covered.

He climbed off the bike and carefully walked through the nearly knee-length grass on each side, ignoring the tall weeds, and peeking behind the building. There was a stone patio that dropped down over something, maybe a river or a cliff, a elegant stone railing protecting whoever from the fall. Ed frowned and walked back to the front and stared at the dark double doors. Well, they did know he was coming.

Ed pushed down the weeds and forced himself to the front, staring at the door, before lifting his foot and kicking it open. The wood shattered, the lock breaking, and a host of dust swarmed into the empty air. He waited a second, tensed and ready for an attack, but where the wasn’t any he stepped forward into the threshold.

“Your manners leave something to be desired,” an amused voice called, indulgent tones echoing through the front hall. Ed froze, darting up to look at the top bannister above the set of dual stairs in the middle of the room. “Well, are you surprised?”

“Honestly?” Ed questioned, raising an eyebrow. “Not really.”

Commander Licht smiled down at him, uniform prim and pressed, and tucked her hands behind her back, sighing softly. “I must admit it’s not as if I’m breaking all the clichés. The evil mastermind being the person in charge - how original.”

“Yeah, well,” Ed said, flatly, flexing his hands. “You guys don’t seem like the most creative bunch. Stealing another person’s MO - newsflash. If you wanna be scary, don’t try to rip off of someone’s street cred.”

“Ah, but,” Licht called, smiling, lifting a finger to wave it at him. “Why mess with such a good thing? Have you met everyone in our little group? Everyone, come meet Mr. Elric - now’s the time for first impressions.”

From the shadows on the first floor, walking around the stairs, and Ed took a step back as Lance stepped forward first, smirking, followed by MacKenzie and the blond haired woman. From Ed’s right, Wrath stepped forward, half of his head bandaged, the white stained red, and then Sloth followed behind him and yawned, eyes blood shot and skin pale.

“Have you met my daughter?” Commander Licht questioned, and gestured to her right. A small girl in blond pigtails caught the corner of Ed’s eye. She darted across the hall towards her mother, hiding behind her.

“Mother,” the girl sniffed, and tugged on her mother’s skirt. “I’m hungry.”

“You’ll eat soon,” Licht soothed. “Soon, my dear Gluttony, soon.”

Ed felt the horror freeze in his stomach. “You sick f**ker.”

“Language,” Licht scolded, sharp suddenly, covering her daughter’s ears. “Please, you wouldn’t want to be a bad influence, would you?”
Gluttony peeked out behind her mother’s leg and stared down at Ed, sticking her thumb in her mouth and sucking on it. She blinked blue eyes down at him, gave him a shy smile and ducked behind her mother even more. Ed stared at her, felt something tight around his throat and held back the snarl. “Is that him, mother? The man you need?”

“Yes,” Licht said, and crouched down in front of her daughter. “That’s Fullmetal - the man in the red coat I told you about. He’s going to help us open the gate to Shamballa, and finally we’ll have everything we want.”

“What?” Ed breathed. “What the hell are you talking about?”

“You don’t know?” Jealousy questioned, scowling. “Fat load of use you are.”

“The other side of the Gate,” Lance said, waving his hand, casual. “A world where alchemy reigns supreme and the world holds unlimited energy - ripe for the taking.”


“Where alchemy can be used without the use of blood,” Wrath finished, spreading his hands out. There was a glint to his eye, like a child who had just saw a toy in the window shop and he wanted. “Where we’ll harness the energy and use it to strengthen our own means.”

Ed felt his breath stutter in his throat. “What - the hell -”

“The plan is simple,” Licht called, inspecting her nails. “I open the door to Shamballa, and then we will convert the entire other world into pure energy. There will be no laws of equivalent exchange, no need for blood spilt - well, ours, of course - just unlimited energy. And then we shall move north and declare war. Soon, the rest of the world will follow.”

“Are you insane?” Ed nearly roared, after a moment’s silence. “Are you fucking crazy - that’s - for fucking one, world domination doesn’t work - or did you not see what the fuck happened to Hitler? Two, another world? Are you - that’s-”

“Oh,” Licht said, blinking down at Ed, nonplussed. “Did you not know? I assumed that your grandfather would explain it to you.”

“What?” Ed shook his head. “What-?”

“You grandfather,” Licht said, amused. “And his brother. Your namesake. He was from the other side of the gate - you truly did not know, how odd. I had assumed he would tell you considering how much he favored you.”

“That’s - my granddad was born in freaking London-”

“Is that what he told you?” Licht pressed, lips lifting upwards, smugly. “You never found anything...odd, about him?”

The language that Ed could never place, the weird blend of German, English, and Japanese. His grandfather pressing his hands together to pray even though he wasn’t religious. His odd sayings that he seemed to think everyone else said. Al and Ed and Winry’s granddad had only needed one drop of blood to do what they needed several to do, what the rest of the world needed pints to achieve.

The stories he used to tell, the names he mentioned, the alchemy -

“There is another world outside of our own,” Ed breathed, and stumbled back.
“Yes,” Licht said. “There is. And you’re going to help me open a gateway to it.”

Roy was panicking. He couldn’t sit still, kept rubbing his hands together, and Maes watched him pace the length of the living room. They were waiting on Solaris, Havoc, and Breda - apparently whatever they had found couldn’t be told over the phone.

“Let’s go through this again,” Hughes said. He and Hawkeye were sitting at the kitchen table while Roy paced up and down, up and down. Winry and Al were upstairs with Rose doing - well, Hughes didn’t know. Officer Falman and Sergeant Fuery were outside, waiting on Havoc and Breda. “Walk through it, in detail.”

“Maes, what the hell else am I supposed to say?” Roy growled. “I fell asleep - I had my arm over him the entire time, and I remember - I must have woken up or he must have woken me up because I remember him hovering over me and he-” Roy stopped and twisted his lips. “We - he kissed me and then that’s it. I went back to sleep. He said he was going to be right next to me - I just.” He turned towards Maes and frowned deeply, and Maes could see the betrayal in his eyes, still fresh from last night like an open wound someone had just rubbed salt into. Maes winced, reminded himself to smack Ed upside the head, and tried not to let the panic he was feeling show. Roy couldn’t hide the flash of near desperation and hurt fast enough, and he turned away. “He promised he wasn’t going to do this. I trusted him.”

“Ed does a lot of stupid things in the name of other people’s safety,” Maes sighed. “You’re sure he headed north?”

“The freeway’s spilt,” Hawkeye said, mouth flat. She was - well, pissed, if it was the right word for the downturn of Hawkeye’s lips, and the set of her jaw. “If he was heading south, he would have headed in the opposite direction to get on. He has to be heading north.”

“That’s good - he wouldn’t leave the city. Maybe the outskirts at the very least.” At least, Maes hoped Ed wouldn’t - no, Ed loved the city. The city was in danger, that what had prompted all of this, Ed wouldn’t have run because a) Alphonse was still here, and b) Ed just - didn’t.

“The north is nothing but unpopulated forest and mountain range,” Roy growled, running a hand through his hair, frustrated. “Did he take his cell phone?”

“It was part of the wreckage with his bike,” Hughes said, grim. “Are we missing anything? Did he take-”


“He’ll be fine,” Maes murmured. “Ed can take care of himself.”

Roy shook his head and paced up the length of the kitchen counter, scowling. “You didn’t see it, Maes. You didn’t see - that man - Wrath, he just pulled Ed’s arm off, like it was nothing. He didn’t even let it bother him that Ed stuck a fucking spear into his eye, just acted like it was nothing.” He stopped and turned towards Maes, the desperation spilling over in the downturn of his eyebrows, the way he was clenching his jaw so hard it trembled. “How the hell is Ed supposed to deal with that?”

As if on cue, the front door flew open and Havoc slid in, breathing heavily, Breda two seconds behind him. Roy jumped, turned towards them, and Hawkeye and Maes stood, taking a step closer to him.

“We-” Havoc managed to get out, before he choked on his breath and had to catch his breath. “We-”
“King followed the order back to Headquarters, the car stalled - we had to run the last mile,” Breda managed to wheeze out. “So we went - went to communications to find the relay. Only one private phone call was delivered, hell of a time to track it through the run around.”

“Finally,” Havoc choked out. “Went to - private relay station - up near the - northern outskirts of the - city. Name on the delivery receipt - was Commander Catherine Louise Licht.”

“What?” Roy said, drawing his eyebrows together. “What?”

“We didn’t believe it either so we-” Breda inhaled. “We backtracked, went through the files - Licht is an old maiden name from - her father’s side. Traced it back to someone called Eckhart who-”

“-Had a real beef with this guy named Hohenheim,” Havoc said, waving. “This university professor from Munich, real close with the British government during World War I, guess-”

“He’s Edward and Alphonse’s great-grandfather,” Solaris said, sliding in, only breathing heavily just so, Fuery and Falman following after her. “The first Edward and Alphonse’s father.”

“Check it,” Breda said, and swept a hand out. “Something happened in 1924, something that the German government put under wraps, but when we were searching through the files-”

“I took them through Dante’s personal records,” Solaris cut in. “She had copies of - things.”

“It looks like Edward Elric, the first not the second,” Havoc said, and inhaled. “It looks like he killed Licht’s grandmother.”

“Or, at least,” Solaris corrected. “He must have felt responsible because when it got out that Eckhart had a daughter a few years laughter, he searched for Eckhart’s next of kin. The daughter died during the World War II, leaving behind-”

“A baby daughter, born in 1944.” Breda swallowed. “Who was raised by Edward Elric and his wife before they had a child of their own. Trisha Elric.”

“What?” Al said, stepping down the stairs, holding the cup that Roy had been using to give Ed his water in his hands, Rose and Winry behind him, eyebrows furred together. “What? My mom didn’t - she never mentioned-”

“She wouldn’t have, if she even knew,” Solaris said. “Your mom was born when Licht must have been at least twenty, in college, maybe, but gone.”

“Thing is, no official records state that Licht was legally adopted by the Elrics. She’s the equivalent of a bastard, and when your mom came along,” Havoc said, grimacing. “Something must have happened, she must not have taken it so well to being replaced.”

“If she was raised by my granddad then she knows alchemy,” Al breathed, shaking his head slowly. “It’s - you can’t not live with my granddad and not pick something up, and if this is - during the early years, then that was when he was researching alchemy. She would have had a front row seat. She’d be as good as I am, as Ed is.”

“Jesus,” Roy said, hissing, running his hand through his hair again, making it stick up at odd ends. Maes couldn’t even find it in him to feel amused. “So - what? This is some sort of sick revenge on Ed? On you? On your grandfather for apparently outcasting her? And what - she became the leader of the entire damn country for fun?”

“Elektra complex,” Winry murmured, ticking a finger on her arm. “She wanted to make him proud -
and you can’t do much better than Commander.”

“Wait,” Rose spoke up, shaking her head. “I’ve seen pictures of the Commander - if you’re guys are saying she was born-

“In 1944,” Hughes calculated, quickly. “She’d be - that’s impossible. The official date is 1968 - if she was born in 1944, she’d be over seventy years old by now.”

“She is,” Solaris frowned. “We found a copy of her birth certificate - the original one. She was born Catherine Louise Eckhart. She must have forged a birth certificate with the name Licht.”

“But why is she so young,” Rose stressed. “There’s no possible way to keep her that young-”

Al dropped the cup, eyes widening. Everyone turned towards him and he stared in horror at the broken glass. Winry frowned and moved forward, resting a hand on his shoulder, and he darted his gaze up to her, mouth murmuring silent words. Winry stared, shaking her head slowly.

“Al - Al, what is it?”

Al swallowed, tried to speak, couldn’t, and had to swallow again. “A Philosopher’s Stone. Our grandfather, like it was a bedtime story, the dangers of wanting power - the risks and lines you’d have to cross. It - Brother said - the - that serial killer from the eighties, when Licht first became Commander, they never found who did it. Ed said ingredients, the kidnapped people - to make one you need to commit genocide, and if she used one, and used the energy then-”

“Ingredients,” Hawkeye said, bluntly. “She killed the people she kidnapped, made a Philosopher’s Stone, and used to it to keep herself young.”

“It’d explain it,” Al said, scrubbing a hand through his hair. “She’s - been leader of the country for years now, and even before that she had - access to-”

“I don’t want to think about it,” Breda said suddenly, pale.

“But then - Ed said that they needed him,” Hughes said. “They said they needed you or him. Because of this grudge?”

“I’m not sure - but whatever they’re doing is big. Making another one? But why would they need Ed or me for that?”

Solaris’ phone rung suddenly, and she pulled it from her pocket, staring down at the screen, before searching their faces. “I think I might have found him.”

“What?” Al questioned, spinning on his heel towards her. She nodded, and stared down at her phone.

“I told King to search for any properties under Licht’s name before, but then I made him look for Eckhart - there’s one in the city, up north, on the outskirts.” Solaris looked up and met each of their eyes, mouth pressed tight.

“That’s where he went,” Roy said, firmly. “Do you have the address?”

“Yes,” Solaris said, nodding.

“Good,” Roy said, and turned towards Alphonse. “It’ll be dangerous. I won’t ask you to come with us.”
“Good,” Al repeated, and cocked a grin. “Cause I’m coming anyway.”

“We are too,” Rose and Winry stepped forward. Rose twisted her lips. “We’ll stay in the car if we have to, but if someone gets hurt, you’re going to need us with you.”

“We need a distraction,” Hughes pointed out. “She’s the commander of the country; if she wants backup, or to frame us, she’d only need to think about it. We need to keep the attention off of us, and her, so that we can get Ed back.”

Rose grinned. “Let me call Alex.”

Lance had attacked him first, darting forward and reaching out with his hands, two twin knives sliding out from his sleeves, but Ed was prepared. He flipped out of the way and landed on one foot, kicking Jealousy out of the way as she landed in front of him, and before he could turn around, he elbowed Sloth in the stomach with his metal arm. MacKenzie kept to the outer edge, but Ed kept him in his sights, before dancing out of the way as Lance moved towards him. It would only take one hit, skin-on-skin contact, and Ed couldn’t let that happen. He could see something happened with Jealousy out of the corner of his eye - her nails were sharpening, she bared her teeth at him, and her eyes -

“Mother,” Gluttony said, tugging on Licht’s dress. “Can I play too?”

“Not yet, dear,” Licht cooed. “Soon, soon.”

Ed slid underneath Lance’s hand and darted up in front of Jealousy who lunged forward, swinging out a clawed hand. They clashed for a second, moving across the length of the hall as Ed blocked each hit with his right arm before spinning out of the way and extending the blade in his arm. It locked in place with a quiet click, and Ed moved forward, putting Jealousy on the defense as she struggled to block each blow.

“Nice haircut,” Fullmetal taunted, and Jealousy glared at him, baring her teeth.

“You fucking brat-”

“Language,” Licht scolded harshly. “Remember not to hurt him too badly - I don’t need him losing blood away from the array.”

Ed backflipped over Sloth and ducked under the man’s swipe, neatly avoiding his finger tips. Sloth frowned, troubled, and bent over as Ed lashed out with boot, shirt stretching, revealing the red tattoo around the back of his neck, underneath his ear.

“Drag,” the man whined. “Stop moving around so much.”

Ed scoffed at him, disbelieving. “No.”

Sloth shrugged. “Worth a try.”

“Wrath,” Licht called. “Start to bring him into the other room, will you? It’s almost time.”

Ed snarled, but Jealousy darted towards him, paralleled by Lance, and in between Wrath began to lumber towards Ed and he couldn’t do much more than carefully back track under the stairs and into the next room, tripping over the three marble steps. It was even larger than the hall, two stories tall, a balcony wrapped around it, with marble floors and pillars covered in dust, and in the middle, etched
in red paint, was the array.

For the second time, Ed’s heart started and stuttered in his chest. He froze, gaze caught on it, and he didn’t know where he had learned the information coursing through his mind, but he knew the array in front of him, could hear the rain pounding around him, see the lights flickering, and Al - where was Al - no, no not Al -

“It has that effect,” Licht called, and slipped a shining red stone out of her pocket. Ed stared at it, felt something wrap itself around his throat, and he choked. Licht tutted at him, and rolled the stone in between her fingers, admiring the way it caught the light. “Breath, Mr. Elric. They’re just memories.”

In the car, trapped, water pouring in and his mother wouldn’t move, and Al was stuck in between the roof and the seat and Ed struggled towards him and pushed the metal back up, screaming Al to get through the window, and just as Al had climbed through the metal shifted and sliced downwards -

Pain gripping his leg, his arm, tears hot on his cheeks, pleading to get his brother back -

Screaming as his arm lopped off at the elbow, screaming for his mother for help, and Al grabbed him through the broken window and pulled him out -

The thing inside of the circle stretching for him, hand extended, and he felt sick -

His mother staring at him as Al pulled him away, smiling with ‘take good care of your brother’ before the water swallowed her -

Watching his mother drift away in the air, smiling with ‘take good care of your brother’ before the atmosphere consumed her -

Opening the door to Hughes frowning down at him, eyes still wet, and knowing that his dad was dead before the man had opened his mouth -

Teeth white, eyes kind and proud, and that fucking idiot reached upwards and tugged downwards, and teeth cut through his midsection no dad -

Staring up at the Gate as the eyes stared back at him, elbowless arms reaching for him -

Ed fell to his knees, trembling, a wordless silent scream escaping his throat. Licht came to stand in front him, tilting her head to the side, contemplating the stone in her hand. “Remarkable isn’t it?” She leant over him, some sick parody of a hug, and held up the stone between two fingers. “You know what this is of course, I have no doubt that your grandfather told you the same stories he used to tell me, the Sage’s Stone, the great Philosopher’s Stone - I had to gather quite the number of people to make this…”

Al, Al, Al, Al in the armor, his finger dragging through his own blood, Al with strange dark markings, Al glowing, Al lifeless and Ed thought no -

Al - Al wasn’t a suit of armor. Al was human and alive and waiting for him to come back. Winry was waiting, Hughes, Solaris, Hawkeye, Roy -

Ed slowly moved his head over to stare at Licht who was staring at the stone with some sort of sick fascination, tilting her head just so. Ed stared at her, eyes wide, before he threw his head back and threw his forehead into the side of her head. She went flying, gasping in surprise, hand tightening around the stone in her hand, and Ed forced himself to his feet, shaking his head.

“What - what the hell?” Ed croaked, bringing his automail arm up, his other hand reaching out for
balance. Wrath took a step forward, but Licht raised a hand and held him still.

“You’ll have your answers soon,” Licht said, softly. “All knowledge will be revealed at the Gate’s entrance.”

The Gate, double doors, the tree of life, the bodies twisted in ecstasy, agony, reverence, the eyes, the hands, and Ed was pulled through to the other side -

He shook his head again and took a step backwards, then another one. No, no he wouldn’t go back - he wouldn’t go through for a third, fourth, eighth, hundredth time, he wouldn’t. Licht gently got to her feet and gave Ed a wide smile. Ed froze, mind clicking into place, and looked down.

Fuck.

He was in the middle of the array.

Licht raised her hands, and lifted them into the air, holding the stone over her head (the armor gleaming red, the stones that were all that was left as Solaris withered away, red liquid spilling around him mind humming before it burst; the Philosopher’s Stone, the Sage’s Stone, bypasses the laws of equivalent exchange), and Ed started for the edge but Lance stood on the other side, grin white and wide, Wrath next to Licht, the seven of them surrounding the array.

“Oh, Great One!” Licht called to the ceiling, tone reverent but almost as if she was speaking to a friend. “I offer you the Sage’s Stone-” Ed felt sick. “And the blood of the one who has descended from the other side of the Gate. Open yourself to me so that I may take your secrets for my own!”

Wrath pulled out a thin dagger and Ed took a step back as Licht took it and sliced open one of her palms, the stone in the other, and bent down, pressing her hands to the array.

Red light crackled through the room, before it arched up with red lightening. Ed stared as the array began to glow, and all at once the people gathered around the circle, even little Gluttony, cut their hands open and pressed their palms to the edge of the array. Ed could hear screaming from underneath him, was that him - Al - their mother? - and then-

Nothing.

The world went white, blank and lifeless and empty, and Ed spun on his heel, breathing coming hard and fast, looking up at the two double doors that loomed above, human bodies carved into the structure, the tree of life looming down at him. Jealousy shifted, Sloth stared, Gluttony furred her eyebrows together as if she was about to cry, and Lance grinned - all circled around Ed, and the doors swung open.

The eyes - the eyes that Ed knew but didn’t know - and suddenly long elbowless arms lashed out and Jealousy shrieked as they began tugging on her hair, urging her towards the door, yanking her towards it when she didn’t budge. She flew through with a shriek, disappearing into the blank inkiness, and Ed stared, wide eyed, and felt himself tremble. MacKenzie took a step back, shocked, and Lance frowned, stepping back as well.

The arms lashed out Sloth, bloodshot eyes widening, one of the arms wrapping around his mouth before he could scream and he was tugged through, MacKenzie following afterwards, the man protesting and screaming every inch of the way.

“Jesus,” Lance breathed, grinning widely, excitement strumming through him.

“Mother?” Gluttony questioned, blinked, non-perturbed. Licht inhaled, smiled, and gestured towards
Ed, who took a step back, feeling his breath catch in his throat. No, no, please someone - he didn’t want to go back, he didn’t want - Al, Roy - Grandpa, Mom, Dad, please -

The arms reached out and tugged him through.
Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

groaning noise

\textit{i could change the world}

\textit{i can make it better}

\textit{kick it up and down}

\textit{take a chance on me}

– kick-ass // mika

Al could barely keep still. Winry had pried open the doors of the SUV with a crowbar before everyone had piled through. It was cramped, and Winry had to sit on Al’s lap, and Solaris was perched on Havoc’s (who was blushing a cherry red) but they were heading north, through the abandoned roads. They coasted up a hill as Hawkeye broke the speed limit, and back down the crest.

Hughes was back at the police station ‘dealing’ with the mess that Armstrong and he had caused. It looked like someone had accidentally messed with the power plant next to headquarters, sending the entire military command into a power outage that they couldn’t find themselves out of. Al was sure if anyone had bothered to look they would have seen the frizzy red haired woman, stalking out of the generator hold with a pair of rubber wire cutters, but no-one ever paid attention to those types of things.

“There,” the Colonel said, leaning against the window to see out the passenger window. “There it is.”

The stone mansion broke the tree line and Al caught a glimpse of it before they started to sink downwards, turning towards it.

“\textit{You’re not planning on sleeping all day, are you?’} Something shoved at his shoulder, poked at him, and Ed shook him off, before rolling onto his back. It was entirely too early to be up, and what time had he gotten in? Why was Al \textit{bothering} him, Al always let him sleep in when he was out late on patrol. Ed screwed his eyes tighter shut for a second, before blinking them open, a yawn just barely on his lips.

Richard Elric smiled down at him. Ed’s heart stopped.

“\textit{Am I dead?’} Ed asked, staring. Surely he was dead. That made sense - Licht must have killed him, what a stupid way to go, Al and Winry would be so angry and whoops, Roy, sorry. Ed was near hysterical.
“Not yet,” Richard said, and shoved Ed slightly, until he was sitting, bending over his knees. “Up, sleepyhead. You’ve been busy.”

Ed continued to stare, before - “Dad?”

Richard smiled. “Yeah, kid.”

But - no. That couldn’t - because. Because. Because. But Ed was staring at his father, blond hair in slight disarray, glasses perched on his nose, a teasing smile on his lips. He was wearing his uniform, the badge catching the light, and Ed looked around his shoulder to see green grass as far as he could see, the sky blue and just lightly dappled with white clouds, and he turned to see his mother smiling at him, brushing her long brown hair over her shoulder, red tattoo on her collarbone, and for once she didn’t seem as if she cared that it was on display.

“This is a dream,” Ed said, mouth trembling, stomach churning. “This is a - dream.”

“No, sweetie,” Trisha murmured and pressed her forehead against his. “No, it isn’t. It’s very real. You paid the price and this is what you wanted - what you needed to see.”

Ed shook his head, memory itching at him, remembered the red light from the array, but he couldn’t -

Someone struck him on the back of his head, and his mother pulled away, scowling with ‘D-ad’ before Ed winced and looked up.

It was looking into a mirror, but the man in front of him had a shade lighter skin, a slightly different shade of hair, but the scowl was the same, and gold eyes glistened down at him, every emotion clear as day; anger, annoyance, frustration, worry.

“Of all the stupid things to do-”

“Brother,” Alphonse - except not Al, that couldn’t be Al - rolled his eyes. “I think it’s quite nice.”

“He’s a freaking idiot, that’s what he is,” his double turned back to him, hands on his hips. “The hell were you thinking, Junior?!”

No-one had called him Junior since - Ed’s eyes widened. “Grandpa?”

Edward Elric, the first, glared down at him while Alphonse Elric, also the first, sighed to himself and rolled his eyes up to the sky. There was a smile tugging at his lips, though, and Ed thought that it was exactly the same as his Al’s - his brother’s - and this was - this was bizarre.

“A crimefighter?” his grandfather pressed, except he couldn’t but - but he was - the eyes were the same, the golden ponytail, he wore brown slacks and a waist coat over a white shirt, even the scar on his cheek, white against his tan skin. “Shit, that’s stupider than joining the military.”

“On the contrary, Fullmetal,” a voice drawled. Ed’s stomach tightened. “I find it very heroic.” Ed swung his gaze over and looked at Roy - except it could be Roy, Roy didn’t wear an eyepatch, Roy didn’t have that look in his eye. The man smiled down at him. “He saw a need and decided to do something about it. If you recall, you used to do the same thing all the time.”

Ed couldn’t do anything but stare. The people around him crowded, not too close, and not too far, all curious and smiling, and suddenly he could pick out familiar faces, Winry and Winry’s grandmother, Rose, Grandma Noah, Armstrong, Hawkeye, Havoc, Breda, Hughes, Gracia, even Beth except she was wearing rounded glasses and her hair was cut to her chin - they were all there, in front of him.
“You can’t stay for very long,” his mother murmured. “The Gate took the payment and brought you here, but since you’re still alive, Cat can use your blood to open the gate.”

His grandfather scowled. “I expected more from her. I told her that she was part our family, I loved her like my own kid, but she - I’m sorry you have to deal with this mess.”

“No,” Ed said, suddenly. “No, it’s - alright.” And it was alright, it had to be alright, even if Ed had no idea what he was talking about because his mother was - and his father was - and it was like watching a movie or reading a novel, and he wasn’t the main character, he couldn’t be, he was just reading the story as it progressed and watching as it moved along.

“You have to go back soon,” Richard said, smoothing a hand over Ed’s hair. “When you do you need to be ready. Help is on it’s way but they can’t do much if you’re dead.”

“Remember; quick movements and keep down,” Granduncle Al reminded, sagely. “You’re small.”

“Hey!” both Edwards growled on instinct, before blinking at each other. The Mustang look alike grinned, and Trisha and Richard shook their heads.

“You’re small,” Alphonse stressed, ignoring Ed’s stare up at him. “And that’s one of your key advantages, always has been. Don’t let them knock you down.”

“Keep Al safe,” Trisha said, smoothing back Ed’s hair off his forehead. “You’re doing such a wonderful job, darling, I’m so sorry I was never able to be there.”

“Me too, kid,” Richard murmured, hand on Ed’s shoulder. “I’m proud to call you two my sons.”

“Junior,” the other Edward said, and knelt down in front Ed. He stared at him, serious, before he smirked. “You could have done a lot worse. Glad to see you carrying on the Elric family name properly.”

Ed felt very - small. “Thank you.”

“You have to go now,” Trisha said, eyes closing. “We’ll be waiting for you and Al, and Winry - and tell Al that I’m waiting for the day he mans up with Winry, alright?”

“You and me both,” Ed murmured. “Mom - Dad, Grandpa - I -”

“We know, kid,” Richard said and patted him on the head. “We know. Tell Hughes and Solaris thanks from your mom and dad. Give Al a big hug, and most importantly, give ’em hell.”

Ed’s eyes closed.

“– The plan, Colonel?” Hawkeye questioned. Al watched the Colonel narrow his eyes and stare up at the mansion in front of them. Luckily there was enough moonlight that they could see easily, throwing long shadows across the circled courtyard and across the abandoned fountain. It was nearly midnight, if Al had to guess, wind drifting down from off the mountain and whining somewhere at a high pitch. Tension thrummed through the group, and Al would have been aware of it empathetic powers aside. He was a bit nervous himself, and had to keep one hand wide open so that the sweat wouldn’t melt the pen ink on his palm. He had dealt with half melted arrays activated by accident before. The apartment had smelt like sulfur for weeks.

“Split up,” Mustang said, after a second, and Al felt the conviction and determination take root.
“You, me, and Ms. Solaris from the front. Havoc, Breda, Al, go around from the back. Ms. Rockbell, Mrs. Armstrong, please stay in the car. Fuery, Falman, you’re to watch the perimeter. If anyone come out that isn’t us, you four are free to do with them as you will.”

“Sweet,” Winry grinned and grabbed a heavy monkey wrench from her tool kit, burying herself in the front seat of the suburban. She was nervous, but excited; there was no ounce of doubt, or a thought in her mind that they could all be killed in a few minutes, she saw nothing but the best possible option, and Al loved her all the more for it. “It’s been awhile since I bashed a few skulls in.”

“Uh,” Havoc spoke up, nervously chewing on a lit cigarette. “Can we switch Al for Solaris?”

“Seconded,” Breda chimed in. Al cast them both an offended look, tearing his gaze away from Winry. “No offense, Al,” Breda shrugged, once he caught sight of Al’s protruding lower lip. “She can do that fingernail thing and-”

Suddenly, Winry, Rose, and even Solaris began to laugh, though the latter was more of a huffed breath. Havoc and Breda stared. “Uh.”

“Don’t worry,” Al said, smiling, ‘ah’ing. “You’re perfectly safe with me.”

Al was tall, sure, and kinda muscly, but Havoc and Breda stared skeptically before chewing their lips. “Alright...” Havoc said slowly, giving Al a slow sort of look, up and down. “If you’re sure.”

“Just stay behind me,” Al assured, and nodded towards the Colonel. He fingered the knife he had slid into his pocket, the one that he always kept on his person, and turned towards the side of the house. “Come on.”

“O - kay...” Breda said and the two trampled through the weeds after Al. They were tense, nervous, but it didn’t show in their actions. They were used to tense situations, Al supposed; Ed had said that the Colonel and most of his group had been up at the border skirmishes, so they couldn’t be all unused to life or death situations. “So - uh - what can you do?”

“Hm?” Al hummed, searching up at the windows, but they were all curtained off. He scaled around the side, trampling through the weeds, to the large gravel patio in the back, statues covered with moss and over-grown ivy, and walked carefully towards the back door, trying to peak through the window.

“Your brother does - magic stuff, and Solaris does the thing with her hands, so - what do you do?”

The floor rumbled suddenly, and then a breeze caught the curtain, shifting it back just in time for Al to see a large man walking towards the back door, expression grim. Al pushed Havoc and Breda away from the door just in time for the man to barrel through it with his shoulder, shattering the wood. The man stopped and looked at him, a white bandage around his eye, and Havoc breathed ‘the big guy’ and Al knew who he was dealing with.

“Wrath,” Al said, conversationally and tilted his head to the side. The man in front of him had little to no emotions - no pity, no mercy, but there was something like vague horror that made Al tense. Al flexed out his hand. “You hurt my brother.”

“Aye,” Wrath rumbled, inclining his head down. He raked his gaze over Al, and then to Havoc and Breda, but Al stepped deliberately in front of him, the two men tense with both guns drawn. “You must be Alphonse Elric.”

Al smiled demurely. “Yes, I am.”
With one easy motion he drew out the knife and sliced a cut down the diameter of his hand, blood welling as he clapped his hands together, activating the array he had drawn in pen on his other before slamming his palms to the ground. The gravel sparked blue for just a second, and Al focused on the make up of their materials, the composition, the structure that he knew as well as he knew how to breath, pulling the minerals from the ground and up, and the night turned into day for one glorious moment as he moved his hands upwards, the gravel blending together into a dark metal, before it begun to form around him.

“Well,” Havoc said, cigarette dropping out of his mouth, ash hissing on the gravel, as he stared at the seven foot of armor that Al was wearing. “Shit.”

“You can say that again,” Breda said, eyes wide. Suddenly the armor moved, metal creaking, and settled into a ready fighting position, hands extended, feet set widely apart. Wrath tilted his head to the side, before darting forward, pulling his fist back to drive it towards the armor’s helmet.

The armor moved, hand thrown up to catch the fist and stop it midair, before it moved and flipped Wrath around and back on it’s back.

“I do hope you know the expression ‘pick on someone your own size’,” Al said, voice tinny inside of the armor as he stared down at Wrath who slowly picked himself up. The armor’s eyes glowed red. “Well, found someone your size.”

Wrath - laughed. “This should be fun, yes?”

“My sentiments exactly,” Al said, cheerfully. “I do enjoy beating the shit out of people who’ve hurt my brother.” The helmet turned towards Havoc and Breda. “I’ve got this, here. Go help the Colonel - and my brother. The others are still in there, they’re going to need your help more than mine.”

“You sure?” Havoc questioned, and dived out of the way as Wrath charged again. Al carefully stepped out of the way, moving the armor out Wrath’s wave, lifted his leg into the air, and drove it down into the man’s back.

“Sure!” Al called and somehow got the armor to backflip a few paces away. Havoc and Breda stared, but forced themselves towards the broken backdoor, jumping up the marble porch and slinking inside. It wasn’t running away - Al had asked them to, and besides.

“Think he’ll be fine?” Breda questioned. Havoc risked a look back just in time to see Al throw a punch that threw Wrath back a few paces.

“Yeah,” Havoc said, nodding, voice high. “Yeah, I think he will.”

–

Ed stared at where Licht - Cat, why Cat, why - Pride used to be standing, except she wasn’t anymore. He was laying in the middle of the array, head pounding with - he wasn’t sure with what. It felt like had been dreaming for an entire eon, dreary and lulled by the sound of wind blowing behind him, through a draft.

The door that he had been forced through opened, and Ed forced himself to get ready and stand, to fight, and he stumbled to the outer age of the array before he fell back to his knees, except it wasn’t Lance, or Gluttony, or Wrath, or Pride, it was Hawkeye and Roy, who slunk around the room with her gun poised and ready while Mustang sprinted across the length of the room and slid to a stop near Ed, bending down to check his pulse.

“Fucking idiot,” Ed growled at him as Roy pulled him up into arms. “What the fuck are you doing

“I know,” Ed murmured, looking away. “And I saw an opportunity and took it.”

“I’m going to scream myself hoarse at you later,” Roy hissed, looking around. Hawkeye brought her gun upwards and checked up in the balconies around them, but came towards them after a moment, shaking her head.

“They’re still here,” Ed shook his head, forcing himself up. “I can feel it. They - Jealousy, MacKenzie, Sloth - they’re gone.”

“Gone where?” Hawkeye pressed. Ed shook his head.

“Through - through-” He could remember the Gate, and he looked down at the array, loosing his sentence, remembered the feel of hands around him and the screams, but what had happened afterwards? “We have to get out of here.”

“That’s the plan,” Roy said. “Solaris is checking the rest of the mansion, your brother is out back with Havoc and Breda - or.” He amended as footsteps came from behind them. “Right here.”

“Al’s dealing with Wrath,” Havoc breathed out, eyes wide, gun drawn. “He’s - a fucking suit of armor-”

Ed seized suddenly - drawing a cross-matrix in the back of the armor, red eyes staring down at him, the dark markings on the armor’s outer shell, the empty lifeless armor, Ed drawing arrays on his forearms and chest and forehead and then the Gate pulled him through - he arched up, almost screaming but not quite, and Roy’s grip around him tightened with ‘Ed, Ed?’

“Al - Al - not Al - my brother - all I have-”

“He’s fine,” Breda said, quickly, sure. “He put the armor around him and he’s toe-to-toe with Wrath, he’s fine, Ed, he’s fine. Where are-”

“I don’t know,” Roy said, frowning. “Maybe Solaris-”

As if on cue, something rumbled and crashed underneath them, echoing like a landslide, and Hawkeye pulled Roy and Ed away from the array, Havoc and Breda falling backwards, just as it started to collapse around them. It continued to shatter, cracks building out from the epicenter, and finally the floor caved in, falling into the dark basement. The gaslight flickering on the walls shown down into the hole, just for a second, illuminating Solaris as she darted out of the way, nails fully extended, batting away Lance as he came at her with a knife, grin wide. They were evenly matched for speed, and Solaris flipped over a set of crates before sliding out of the way of another attack, nimbly jumping over the rubble.

“We have to help her,” Ed breathed. “We have to - Roy.”

Roy stared at him, before nodding. “Downstairs. That must be where they’re hiding.” He helped Ed up to his feet and carefully pulled him back towards the door. “Ed, what are up against here?”

“Lance,” Ed said, and shook his head. “Halsey’s boyfriend, sort of - he does pheromones, freaky pheromones-”

“The man at City Hall,” Roy said, eyebrows drawing together. “When you were-” He cut himself off.
suddenly and Ed stared at him, expression twisting. “Nothing,” Roy said, shaking his head head. “Pheromones. Is Licht here?”

“Course you would know,” Ed said, trying for a scowl, but he couldn’t manage it, and let Roy pull him around the dual stairs and towards a door in the wall, wrenching it open. The stair case was dark and dusty, but they didn’t miss a beat. “She’s Pride. Her daughter is Gluttony - kid can’t be more than ten years old. Only other one is Wrath.”

“The rest are dead, then?” Hawkeye questioned. Ed looked over his shoulder, nearly slid down the steps, and nodded. “Alphonse suggested that Licht - Pride - would be as good as you are at alchemy.”

Ed narrowed his eyes, clenched his hands, still slick with blood and he had no idea where it came from. When he had been fighting? In front of the Gate? “Well, we’ll find out.”

The stairs tapered off into the beginnings of a huge dark room, the ceiling caved in a few feet over, and the light from upstairs cast an eerie shadowed look. Crates and boxes were piled high, and in the middle were a ring of cages, filled with some lifeless gray mass, and Ed stepped forward and stopped short, Roy bumping into him, before Mustang caught sight of the contents and gripped onto Ed’s shoulder, hard.

“Fuck,” Ed breathed, and looked away at the dead bodies inside. “Fuck.”

“Ed, come on,” Roy said after a moment, clearing his throat. “We have to find Solaris. She passed by here, look.” He gestured to the set of five long marks gorged in the concrete, and another set along the wall near the ceiling. “Is there another layer?”

“Might be,” Havoc said, stepping closer. “This place is pretty old. They’re need to sink the supports as low as they could.”

“If Solaris is fighting, she might knock out one of the supports,” Ed warned, before stepping forward, eyes narrowed, and the light shown just so that he could see the array the five cages were set around and felt his heart pound in his chest - staring at the array on the wall, seeing it embedded onto Al’s armor-body-armor, the arm that raised and the hand that set on his forehead gently and his time had come, his eyes closed - before he forced himself to look away. His hands shook. “Come on,” he said, roughly, and started towards the other side of the room, carefully stepping around the butterfly like array. “There must be a set of stairs somewhere.”

There was, a narrow one, and they could only go down one by one, Ed first, frowning the deeper they went. The door at the bottom of the stairs was ripped to shreds, probably by Solaris, and Ed stepped over it’s remains, staring at the cave they were in that opened out at what must have been the bottom of the ravine behind the railing he had seen before.

“How far down are we? We must have been walking down those stairs for five minutes,” Roy pointed out, carefully following Ed towards the mouth of the cave. Ed stopped suddenly, holding his arms out, stopping the others in their tracks, just barely stopping Havoc in his tracks.

“No far enough,” Ed gulped and looked at the straight drop down. They weren’t at the bottom, not yet, not for awhile yet, and embedded into the cliff face was an old, small walkway, made of old concrete and wood, leading over to another platformed patio, the intricate stone railing half torn away, jutting out a little down underneath them, and there was Solaris, leaping out of the way as Lance swept his hand out, something oily and shiny on his finger tips, knife in his other hand. Ed took the first step onto the stairs, felt the concrete creak, and pointed. “Shit, there they are.”
There was Licht, and Gluttony, the woman bent on the ground, hands red with blood and calmly
drawing out another array while Gluttony held onto her uniform and sucked on her thumb. Licht was
making wide strokes, coming down the middle, and Ed knew what she was drawing. He didn’t
know how, he had never drawn the array before, but he knew the gestures like they were ingrained
into him. It was beginning to form the array from upstairs, the one that had collapsed, except this one
was smaller, not the size of an entire ballroom. Ed stared, and stared, and then started to the steps.
Roy frowned behind him, before turning to Havoc and Breda, nodding.

“Cover us,” he ordered, and hurried down the steps towards the plateau behind Ed and Hawkeye.
From there on out it was pure instinct for Ed to push himself into a running start and dart behind
Lance, blade extended, and Ed swung outwards, but Lance leapt over him and landed a few paces
away, deftly on his feet, and there was something experienced and practiced about the way he
moved, not like the quick hard motions that Wrath used, the crazed wild swipes Jealousy utilized, or
the sloppy but fast-paced attacks Greed had attacked Ed with. Lance knew what he was doing,
almost as well as Ed.

“Come to play have you?” Lance called and Ed growled, charging forward, and in tandem with
Solaris, they began their attack, cross-helixing before lashing out and Lance couldn’t do anything but
backflip out of the way and dodge to his left to avoid being pushed over the ledge.

He was only dimly aware, in the edges of his peripheral vision, of Roy and Hawkeye skidding
across the platform, guns raised, to a stop besides Licht.

“Commander Licht!” Roy called out in a solid voice, tone cold and hard. “I’m placing you under
arrest for the murders of Matthew Halsey and several others. Put your hands in the air and surrender,
peacefully.”

Licht froze, still sketching her array, hands red and bruised, before she looked over her shoulder at
Roy. “Colonel Mustang,” she called, pleasantly, and then stood. Hawkeye inhaled suddenly, and
Roy nearly lost his grip on his gun, only keeping it upright at the last moment. The right side of
Licht’s face was completely torn, bleeding freely over her uniform and her right had was mutilated to
the point it was nothing but a red mess, and yet she stood steadily, tilting her head to the side to study
Mustang and Hawkeye. Her daughter clung to her leg, and Licht reached down and patted her head,
smearing blood in the girl’s blond hair. “So nice of you stop by. Have you met my daughter?” Licht
looked down and smiled. “Darling, are you still hungry?”

“Starved,” the girl chirped, pulling her thumb out of her mouth, and Roy and Hawkeye faltered for a
second, guns still trained on Licht, who grinned.

“Eat up then,” Licht said, pushing her finger against the girl’s nose. “They’re all yours. Keep them
busy while momma finishes the transmutation circle, please?”

The blond haired girl detached herself from her mother’s leg and took a few shy steps towards Roy,
and Hawkeye dropped her gun towards the girl who didn’t stop, just smiled and popped her thumb
back in her mouth.

Then - she begun to inhale, sucking in a deep breath, and Roy took a step back as the girl’s body
began to stretch and pull, her face aging rapidly, the nearly floor length dress she was wearing
becoming smaller as she began to shoot up and up, and finally it wasn’t a ten year old girl standing in
front of them, it was a full grown woman, smirking, teeth white and wide.

“What - the fuck?” Roy questioned, gun still raised, taking another step back. Hawkeye was staring
at the woman warily. “What do we-”
Gluttony answered that question for him, charging forward, and Hawkeye pushed Mustang out of the way with her shoulder, diving to the side. Hawkeye landed on her back as Gluttony pushed her to the ground, harshly, and aimed upwards with the gun and shot once, twice, and for a moment Gluttony faltered, two smoking holes in her chest before the sounds began to close, and then the bullets disappeared into her skin. The blond woman rolled her tongue and then spat out a bullet directly at Hawkeye at the same speed it was shot at her, and Hawkeye only managed to roll out of the way before Gluttony spat out the next one.

“Don’t shoot! She’ll just spit it back!” Hawkeye called and Roy scowled and holstered back his gun.

“I can’t hit a girl!” Roy hollered, but tensed his fists away. “Hawkeye-”

Hawkeye threw herself back up, lashing out with her foot and delivering a solid kick to the woman’s temple. The woman stumbled, scowled, and Hawkeye jumped out of the way as the woman came back towards her. They traded blows, and whatever hit Hawkeye landed bruised visibly, disappeared, and then Gluttony dashed out towards Hawkeye, just as strong.

“Ed!” Hawkeye called, and then ducked another a punch, pulling her arms back towards her chest.

“Little busy!” Ed growled, back flipping into the air and landing in a crouch, batting away Lance’s knife at the last second with his own blade.

“Switch with us!”

“For fuck’s - fine!” Ed said, and darted away from Lance and Solaris, like a missile locked onto Gluttony, striking out his left fist. Hawkeye switched her gun hand and aimed towards Lance, eyes narrowing, and then she shot. The bullet skimmed past Lance’s ear, sliding it open, and the man hissed, turning his sights towards him. Hawkeye took a step forward, gun still raised, and shot again. Lance moved out of the way, but Solaris was ready and waiting for him, throwing out her hand to sharpen her fingertips into spears towards him.

“Colonel, the Commander!” Hawkeye called, and saw Roy nod, darting past Gluttony towards Licht. She lifted her gun and aimed towards Lance again.

Roy leveled his gun directly towards Licht’s head, and the woman stilled, still sketching out her array. “Ma’am,” Roy said, in a low voice. “Please, don’t make me shoot you.”

“Do you think you could?” Licht questioned, and smiled, turning towards him. “You always were a perfect soldier.”

Roy’s frown deepened. “That’s the problem, ma’am. I’m really not.”

“No,” Licht said, smiling, and tilted her head to the side. “Considering you’re aiming a gun at my head instead of at Fullmetal’s, I suppose you’re not one for following orders.”

“Thing about orders, ma’am; sometimes it’s better to ignore them,” Roy said after a beat. Licht stood and took a step backwards into the array, blood red and perfect, and Roy took a step towards her, stepping onto the edge of the array and then -

Cold, wind howling, white white white but where was the red, he wanted the red, the silver, the burnt amber gold -

A gun trembling in his hands, a splatter of blood against the ground, and he aimed the gun upwards into his mouth -
Standing in front of a tombstone that filled him with so much resentment it burned -

A blade through his shoulder, a child thrown to the floor, and he picked up the skull and drew the circle in his own blood -

A flash of white teeth, gold hair swinging in the sun, browns and whites and gold, there was the gold -

The gun fell out of Roy’s hand as he fell to his knees, pressing his hands against his forehead, mouth falling open in a silent scream, and Licht smiled and moved forward, picking it up, considering it. “Always has such a staggering effect on those that aren’t used to it,” she murmured, and aimed the gun downward’s towards his temple.

“Colonel!” Havoc yelled from up above them, wind nearly sweeping his voice away. “Colonel!”

Ed ducked out of the way of Gluttony’s hand and turned to see Roy kneeling in the middle of the array, and he felt panic close around his throat - no, no -

He unclipped one of the knives on his belt and threw it forward, towards the blond woman. Licht barely managed to lean out of the way in time, her attention turning towards him, gun swinging up towards him.

“Switch, damnit!” Ed hollered to Solaris, who gave him a quick glance before turning to Gluttony, back to back with Hawkeye. Ed sprinted forward, pushing Roy out of the way just as Licht leveled Roy’s gun back down and shot.

Havoc reached around the cave entrance and shot down at her, barely missing, and Licht turned towards them, aiming the gun upwards, shooting back. Ed and Roy slid across the balcony, nearly skittering off the edge, and Ed forced his legs back up over and pushed Roy onto his back.

“No, no, no,” Ed murmured, and waved a hand over Roy’s eyes, but they were glazed over, unresponsive, and he felt his heart leap up into his chest. “Come on, Roy, come on - you can’t - come back, alright? Come back-”

He grabbed Roy’s collar and forced him up, shaking him lightly, sliding his hand around his neck.

“You’re not allowed to leave,” Ed pleaded, wrenching his hood back around his neck. “If I’m not allowed to die, you’re not allowed to leave me - it’s equivalent, I love you, you love me, come back, come back-”

Roy twitched, just barely and Ed pushed his forehead against Roy’s, shaking his head slowly.

“I’m right here,” Ed murmured. “I’m right in front of you. Come on, bastard, I’m waiting on you, come back - you don’t want to stay there, not without me, not without Hawkeye and the others, come back, Roy, come back. Please, come back.”

He leaned forward and kissed Roy chastely, before pressing his forehead back against his own, thumb sliding across his cheek, leaving a trail of red blood behind.

“You said you’d never not want me,” he said, quietly. “You said.”

Roy shifted, and Ed froze as his hand gently wrapped around his shoulder. “Yeah,” Roy said, roughly. “And I don’t have a lying problem, unlike you.”

“Bastard,” Ed breathed, and kissed him again. “God damnit, stay here and don’t die, will you? I have
He kissed him again and stood, risked one last look towards Roy who looked like he was going to vomit, and then went to swing his bladed arm towards Licht, who turned from Havoc towards him, nimbly darting out of the way as Ed attacked her.

Licht turned the gun towards him, pulled the trigger, but it clicked empty and she rolled her eyes, throwing it off to the side. Ed took a step towards her, blade still extended, and she cocked her head to the side. Ed tensed his hand.

“I always felt that drawing arrays were always an useless waste of time,” Licht said, and shrugged, before she flexed her undamaged hand, before lifting both into the air. “The Gate took me through it as well, let’s see what it gifted me, shall we?”

Then, in sudden silence, she clapped her hands together, coated with blood, and pressed them down to the floor.

The platform was wide, and long, obviously once set up for lavish garden parties and get-togethers that lasted well into the night, and Ed supposed he was lucky that Solaris and Hawkeye were down at the end closest to the stairs, and Roy was off to the side, head in his hands by the edge of the balcony, because suddenly the entire stone structure around Ed started to vibrate, and like a snowball rolling down the side of the hill, it picked up momentum and suddenly Ed was throwing himself out of the way as spikes shot themselves upwards from the floor, nearly impaling him. Ed landed on his feet, skidded for just a few inches, and then stared at them. Licht considered the spikes, smiled, and then looked down at her hands.

*The Gate took me through as well.*

He had gone through the Gate - once, twice, three times, he had no idea. He had *gone through the Gate*. Ed remembered his grandfather in his wheelchair, sitting in the morning sun, eyes closed hands pressed together in prayer, but no that couldn’t be right, Grandpa laughed when Ed mentioned the other kids going to church, and he remembered -

His mother kneeling by his bed, tone wise, *whenever you feel scared, Ed, just press your hands together like this, yes that’s it, all is one, one is all* -

- and he clapped and threw his hands down onto the ground.

The array - the *array*, clean cut, beautiful, each piece designating a certain relay that the energy had to run through, he knew it like he knew how to breathe, like he knew how to move one of his limbs - came from out of nowhere. He knew which one he wanted, one of the basics to move the concrete back, the one he used to subdue criminals, and, as if bending to his mere thought, the concrete arched up in four long elbowless hands and reached for Licht, ripping material from the ground, the wall, and the railing.

Licht twisted her lips and darted between the hands as they threw themselves downward, just barely missing her, and really, it was only the thing to do for Ed to clap his hands again, blood sticking against the metal, and try again.

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Roy’s head - swam. It was as if every thought he had was suddenly conflicted, locked in a stalemate but each side just kept *fighting*, his mind ached, and he stared down at his hands, blinking blearily up
at as Hawkeye and Solaris tried their best to deal with the dark haired man Ed had called Lance and Gluttony.

He was drawing something into the ground with his fingertip, something familiar, and the urgency pressed at him, and before he knew what he was doing, he reached towards one of the throwing knives Ed had embedded into the floor and started tracing it on the back of his hand with a light tip, trying to get the image out before it disappeared.

A circle inside of a circle, a flame at the top, an hour glass with lines running across it and - he knew, he knew -

“Havoc!” Roy yelled, stumbling to his feet, tilting dangerously, somehow making it towards the bottom of the stairs. “Havoc, your lighter! Now!”

Havoc fumbled for a second, surprised, but drew out his lighter out of his pocket, aimed, and chucked it at Roy. Roy dropped the knife and dove to catch it before it flew over the edge and this - this he somehow knew how to do -

The chemical composition was stuck in his mind, and he knew his chemistry, his physics, but he knew he didn’t know them like this -

He lit the lighter.

“Jesus fuck!” Ed yelped, Solaris barreling into him in alarm as Lance’s arm went up in a suddenly flume of fire, burning hot and brilliant for just a second before extinguishing. It had nearly lit Ed’s coat. The man screamed and patted at his arm, before turning towards Roy, baring his teeth in an animalistic snarl. Ed’s eyes widened as he caught sight of the array on the back of Mustang’s hand, just barely welling blood, and he stepped forward before he had to force himself out of Gluttony’s way. “What the - what are you doing?”

“Get back!” Roy called, waving his hand out. “Fullmetal, back!”

Another click of the lighter and this time Lance’s leg went up in smoke, melting his jeans onto his skin, and there was was a crazed deranged look in his eye.

“Damnit, Roy!” Ed called, and backflipped out of the way as Gluttony charged him, panic stark in his voice. “The recoil, the recoil - stop! It’ll backfire on you!”

Lance moved towards Roy, picking up speed, but this time Roy narrowed his eyes, clicked the lighter, and the entire man went up in a burst of flame, a scream of agony working its way through his throat. He bared his teeth, skin crackling, fat turning dark and made the last two steps towards Roy, and Roy knew he should move, should get out of the way but he didn’t - and a gunshot cracked out, echoing along the ravine’s walls, and Hawkeye had her gun raised even after Lance stopped and slumped to the side, over the railing, and into the ravine.

Roy felt - exhausted. He wavered on his two feet, and Solaris struck Gluttony in the back with her nails, digging into her spine, Gluttony giving a harsh wail when Solaris didn’t pull back, not giving her a chance to heal, and Ed was distracted just a second and Licht moved towards the array, hands wet with blood, and went to slam her palms down-

Ed tackled her, slid against the stone platform, and over the edge.

For a second everything stopped. Gluttony fell to the floor and started twitch spastically, bones cracking as she began to shrink, and Solaris pulled her hand back and looked up, counting one, two -
Then Roy yelled, “No!” and they all realized that Ed had slid straight off of the platform, into the ravine.

Mustang skidded to the edge, on his knees, and searched the dark crevice for any sign of them, but it was a straight drop and Hawkeye fell next to him, Solaris breathing hard, and Roy felt his heart leap into his throat, cut off his breathing, something hitting him (no, no, no you promised, you’re not allowed to die, he lied before he could lie about this, not about this, not about this) -

- and then Ed’s metal hand flew up and landed behind them, scrabbling for purchase, slid across the stone without one and Hawkeye was the first to move towards it, grabbing it and pulling back, nearly loosing it as it stared to rewind towards the edge, nearly pulling her over. Hawkeye dug her heels into the ground, and Mustang grabbed her around the waist, grabbing around the wire, and then Solaris extended her nails into the wall and grabbed Mustang’s arm. The line was slack, slack, slack, and Roy stared at it, hands trembling, please, please, please and then it suddenly went tight.

Havoc and Breda rushed down the steps, grabbing Solaris’ waist and pulling her back, and then metal clanking down the steps, and just in time because Solaris’ grip slid - but then Al was there in his armor, rushing to the front and grabbing the metal wire and holding it steady, tugging it up and back, feet digging into the earth.

Slowly, it started to rewind.
Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

groans even louder

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

real human being and a real hero

back against the wall and odds

with the strength of a will and a cause

your pursuits are called outstanding

you’re emotionally complex

against the grain of dystopic claims

not the thoughts your actions entertain

and you have proved to be

a real human being, and a real hero

—a real hero // college

It had been lucky. It had been extremely lucky. Al had been tangled up with Wrath who was just as strong as Al had hoped, but Al - in the armor, the armor his grandfather had teased him about and got a wistful look in his eye whenever Al showed him his quite frankly fantastic master piece - was just as quick, and just as strong.

It had taken forever; years with Teacher, building the proper muscles, getting the armor links just the right, the hand-holds, the steps up, all so that Al could manipulate the physics themselves into turning him into a power house. Ed had never beaten him in a fight, and that was without the armor, and in the armor Al felt a hundred more times at ease, even if sometimes it felt like he couldn’t breath in it. The metal grating was familiar, the way the weight shifted was easier than moving his own body, and Wrath’s mouth was turned down into a pert frown because Al had nimbly ducked under his swing again.

Winry - one day he’d show her the armor. She had seen him fight Ed before, knew how good he was, how would she take the armor? Maybe she’d freak, or panic, but somehow he knew that she would be delighted. Maybe she’d push him into lifting the cars she worked on, coax him into moving the heavier parts around her shop, maybe even persuade him into carrying her on his back like he used to, still could even without the armor, and she’d laugh like she used to -
He really shouldn’t be thinking about Winry, and Winry’s smile, while engaged with in a fight. For one (he ducked another of Wrath’s swings, and kneed him in the stomach), it was horribly rude. Wrath was giving Al his full attention, and Al was distracted by the lovely lady in the front yard, ready to bash any wanders’ skulls in. He hadn’t seen Winry in a dress since they were kids…

Ooh, that was a close one, and Al slid out of the way, grabbed Wrath’s hand, and flipped Wrath onto the ground.

“You’re very strong,” Al said, conversationally. “Very, very strong.” The armor was shaking to keep him down, but Al had always been a quick, thoughtful thinker. He released Wrath and jumped backwards, flexed his hand so that the blood poured, and pressed it to the array on the inside of his glove, before slamming his hands onto the ground.

Wrath wavered, unsteady, but Al was already there as the ground neatly lifted itself up and like a surf pushing against the beach, rolled upwards and knocked over Wrath, forcing him to the ground as the entire layer of bedrock flipped on top of him.

Al pushed the chest plate forward, and pulled the syringe out of his shirt’s pocket. He had always kept a supply at Rose’s, upstairs under her bed (with her knowledge, of course). The usual set of antibiotics and a tidy set of three sedatives, for when Ed was in too much pain to be awake. He had been upstairs collecting them with Rose and Winry when Solaris had come back, and now he was glad that he had grabbed them.

“Good night, Mr. Wrath,” Al said, cheerfully, and stuck the plunger into the struggling man’s neck. He loved giving shots, oddly enough, even if Ed loathed them as badly as he loathed everything dairy.

Now that Wrath was slumped over with about thirty CC’s of horse tranquilizers in his veins, Al turned towards the mansion, clanking up the steps in the armor in case there were more enemies up ahead. And inside he found -

The middle of the room, collapsed, and Al didn’t think or hesitate, just took the armor and jumped down the hall into the -

The array in the middle of the room made his stomach churn, and the bodies in the cages only worsened the feeling. Remembrance itched at him like a persistent dog at the front door, and Al wanted to sit and study and remember except that he could see the remnants of Solaris’ handy work everywhere he looked, and so he forced himself towards the stairs and down and down, and the armor grated against the walls, nearly too large to fit through.

In the cave, and he saw the opening and looked out to see Havoc and Breda rushing down the steps, Hawkeye and Solaris and the Colonel holding onto some sort of rope desperately, Solaris’ extended hands dug into the wall, and Al realized it a second later that the Colonel and Hawkeye were holding onto a metal hand -

Al didn’t know how he managed to get the armor to move so quickly. He just didn’t know. One second he was at the top of the stairs thinking no no no and then he was down the steps, in front of the Colonel and Lieutenant, grabbing onto the thin metal wire and yanking up and back and this was - the weight was nothing, Al could stand there all day.

And slowly it started to rewind up.
Ed grabbed onto Licht’s hand at the last second, twisting his body around and shooting his automail hand towards the cliff edge, watching the rock face slide by him like a tape on fast forward. For a moment there was nothing, startling blank nothing. Panic leapt into his throat, at the bottom of the ravine was a fast stream cutting through the strata of rock; he’d hit it and break his neck on impact if the water didn’t swallow him up whole, just like his mother. Ed scrambled for a hand-hold, couldn’t find any, and they fell even faster, before suddenly the line went taut. Ed cut the line on instinct, felt his shoulder yank in place and scream at him but it stayed steady, and he and Licht both slammed into the rock wall.

“Hold on,” Ed said, trembling. His hand was still slick with blood and Licht was staring down at the bottom of the ravine with a casual interest. “Fucking hell - hold on.”

“Why?” Licht said, drawing her eyebrows together, before looking up at him. Her hand was shaking. “I suppose there’s always the chance that Wrath is still alive, but I’m grossly out numbered. I’m not so proud as to not accept defeat when it stares me in the face.”

The right side of her face was still mutilated, bleeding freely, but some of it was caked and coagulated. It dripped into her eye and she blinked it away as if it was nothing. Ed forced the automail to start rewinding the wire, even though the pain hit him like someone sticking hot iron pokers into the port. It wasn’t supposed to take this much. His body wasn’t supposed to take this much, not the automail and certainly not having it ripped off and then this added strain on it. It jerked, burned, and then they slowly began to move upwards.

“Your face-” Ed questioned, tightening his grip around Licht’s good hand. “Your side-”

“The Gate,” Licht said, calmly. “I suppose I should have expected the backlash considering that you used the Stone and the Gate didn’t take you as an offering. I had nothing to offer, but something to give. The same thing happened to all our previous test subjects. I miscalculated.”

“The bodies,” Ed breathed and looked down at her. The ravine swung unsteadily underneath them and he had to blink away the vertigo. “They all went through the Gate.”

Licht hummed, as if she wasn’t dangling for her life. The automail jerked, bounced them a little, and Ed fought to keep his grip on her. “The last one was even alive after, a soldier. He was so fond of Lust too. Shame.”

“You are - such a bitch,” Ed growled. “You’re going to spend a long time in prison lady - if you’re not put in front of a firing wall.”

There - her mouth twisted slightly. “So close too,” she murmured. “I had thought that perhaps if I found a way through the other side - if I found passage to Shamballa, like he had always wanted - he would have finally been proud of me.”

“Who?” Ed questioned, staring. She looked up, and blinked calmly.

“Your grandfather, of course. The man I came to recognize as my father.” Licht sighed. “I suppose you’ll hear the whole story later. I could have been your aunt, you know, if your grandfather hadn’t replaced me with your mother.” Her lips twisted into a frown, and for the first time displeasure showed on her face. “Do you know what it’s like to be replaced?”

“You fucking idiot,” Ed growled, and felt the memory bloom, his grandfather staring a photo at a young blond girl, before putting it away, and Ed had never seen him draw it out again. “You fucking idiot. He loved you - he thought of your like his own daughter. You’re the one that thought he was replacing you - fucking shit. It’s called having a sister for Christ’s sake.”
Licht was silent. “Do you think so?”

“Hell - I know so, for Christ’s sake - you can’t force people to like you, it doesn’t fucking work like that. You couldn’t - we could have - you could have been an Elric, damnit, if you hadn’t let your fucking pride get in the way.”

The automail seized again, and Ed shook it again, feeling the gears switch, straining against the weight. Licht stared up at him.

“Nephew,” she said, and tilted her head to the side. “I’m sorry that I’m not sorry about what I tried to accomplish.”

“Apologize later,” Ed groused. “You should start climbing up, if you can.”

“And face a firing wall, like you said?” Licht said, tone indulgent. “I think not. My daughter - your cousin, I suppose. Will you take care of her? She’s a child at heart, the array feeds energy into her body and produces - that. She truly is innocent.”

Ed stared down at her, and then tightened his grip. “You’re going to take care of her, dammit.”

“I am Pride, yes?” Licht questioned, smiling. “And I am proud. Good-bye nephew. If I see your grandfather, I’ll apologize. Besides her you would be my next of kin. I hope you find the answers you seek.” She squeezed his hand and then -

He could see.

Like reading a novel, watching a movie, a little blond girl stumbling up the steps of a hotel, not their home but it felt like home because momma and dad were there, and someone by the front desk started at the sound of the child’s cry, blond ponytail flickering out as he swung towards her, grinning, kneeling to the floor, arms out, and the blond child nearly tripped over himself into his arms, his cheek pressing against her.

“Hello, kitty Cat.”

Late nights, late nights where the moon hung fat in the sky and she couldn’t sleep and she pushed herself out of her bed and down the hallway into father’s study, pushing open the door and holding a hand in her nightgown, and he smiled down at her and ushered forward and up into his lap and look kitty Cat, see the circle is the matrix that lets energy flow through the array -

Older now, hands sweaty, she would ask them today, she would give up the family name Eckhart and be an Elric, they couldn’t say no, she had been the perfect daughter, they loved her even though she was not their flesh and blood, she had gotten into Munich University just like father, had learned the arts of alchemy, he was proud of her, they wouldn’t begrudge her that; mother would smile and kiss her cheek and dance with her, bare feet padding across the hardwood while father would clap and laugh, and they couldn’t say no, she wanted to be one of them, and she pushed open the door to see her mother turn towards her and say “We’re having a baby.” and the world crashed down around her -

Research, paper cuts, eyes straining in the dark, but the story fresh in her mind and she wanted to go to him, to have him grin proudly down at her when she told him I’m going to find a way for you to get home any, any price would be worth it because she couldn’t go to her own home anymore - it wasn’t her home anymore - they smiled down at that baby, the baby they didn’t even know they wanted, and they had shunned her, and father said, “Going to make the Elric name proud,” down at that little monster and she wanted to scream I could have been one of you!
And the research shifted, no longer a safe way home - she would pay any price - but power, more power, power to make them proud, and she had shunned the Eckhart name but she could never reach the last inch for the Elric and somewhere in the middle of the haze in her search for power came Commander and then the red stone, the stone he had warned her against, but if he didn’t want her to reach for the sun he should have been there to stop her -

Gratification, finally. Gathering people who would be useless and valuable later on. Gathering ingredients and performing the ritual, finally having a Philosopher’s Stone, never caring if her sins racked up. The first victim through the gate coming back mangled beyond recognition. The second coming back worse, then the third, then the fourth and all of them had to be killed quickly to be put out of their misery, and Matthew Halsey smiled Lance with trust in his eyes but ran when he saw Jealousy coming towards him, eyes wild and green, and they shoved him through the Gate and look at that he came out alive, even in the alleyway they had picked him up from and he dragged himself towards Lust with his last breath, and in between ordering Dante to be killed, the incident at City Hall and cold blood in her veins when she met Edward Elric -

Finding the key - blood from the other side. Staring at the Gate, gesturing to Ed, the Gate taking all of them through and information, all the information, but her goal was still just out of reach and she was - tired -

- she let go.

“No,” Ed breathed, scrambling for a grip around her hand, but she let go, eyes closing, and fell into the ravine. “No!”

A sudden crack, water sloshing, and Ed looked away and buried his face into his shoulder, shaking. The automail, at the loss of weight, began cranking up again smoothly, pulling Ed towards the lip of the ravine. Hands pulled him over the edge, grabbing at his shoulders and under elbows and legs, and Ed breathed hard, shaking his head. His arm finally connected back his hand with a small click.

“Licht?” Hawkeye questioned, wary, clothes torn, a open wound on her chin. Ed closed his eyes and shook his head, and panted, kneeling on the ground.

“She let go. She didn’t - want to be put in prison, or executed. Said she was too proud.”

Roy wrapped an arm around his shoulder, and Ed pressed into it, eye pressed shut. “It’s alright, Ed, it’s alright.”

“It’s not,” Ed murmured. “She said - she was raised by my grandfather.” I saw, I saw, I saw -

“Yes, brother,” Al said, and reached up to peel the last bit of his armor off. It clattered to the ground in a heap, caught Ed’s eye, and he stared until he forced himself to breath. “Granddad raised her after her mother died. They must have had a falling out when mom was born.”

Little monster -

“Jesus,” Ed said, and sunk towards Roy. “Jesus.”

“Wrath is upstairs stuck in the concrete,” Al said. “And Lance is dead, and she’s-”

Solaris was standing over Gluttony’s body, reverted back to her original age, dress torn and dirty. The girl sniffed and rubbed at her eye. “I want mother,” she cried. “It hurts - I’m hungry!”

“Shush, child,” Solaris said gently. “Quiet, now. You’re mother isn’t here, don’t waste your tears.” She looked up at Ed, and then carefully lifted up the girl’s sleeve. There on her arm was the red
tattoo, and once Solaris had made sure Ed had seen it, she carefully tore what was left of the dress off of the girl’s stomach, lines crossed over each other, circles interconnected, one of the most complicated things he had ever seen. Ed followed it for a second, looked for the sudden influx of energy, the boosts in the hormones and cell count, and lost his trail.

“That is - complicated,” he murmured.

“The child will have to learn how to control it,” Solaris said, frowning. “It’s scarred underneath, impossible to remove her. If she doesn’t, she’ll eventually consume anything she can get her hands on. King and I will take responsibility of her. The man’s always wanted a child. We’ll keep her safe.”

Ed let Roy help him up, helped him walk over to the girl, and he crouched down next to Gluttony, who swiped at her eyes. “Hi,” he said, quiet. “I’m Ed. I’m your cousin - what’s your name?”

“Bea,” the girl sniffed. “Cousin?”

“Yeah. That’s Solaris,” Ed said, inclining his head. “She’s gonna be your new mom. That alright?”

Bea stared distrustfully. “Where’s mother?”

“She’s not here anymore,” Ed said, quiet. “But she asked me to take care of you. Okay?”

“Okay,” Bea said, after a second. “I’m hungry.”

Solaris hummed, musing. “The array steals a lot of energy. She’ll be a heavy eater until I can teach her to redistribute the energy. It’ll take time, but I can do it. With a counter array, she might even have a normal life.” Solaris crouched down and tucked Bea into her arms. “Come, child. Sleep now, it’ll be alright when you awake.”

“Fucking hell,” Ed muttered. His gaze moved towards the smaller transmutation circle that Licht was sketching out. “We’ll have to come back and destroy that.”

“I’ll call Commissioner Hughes,” Hawkeye said, after a moment. “He can have officers up here within the hour. Until then we need to get our story straight. We need to talk with the others and deal with Wrath.”

“I sedated him. He’s out,” Al spoke up. “Wrath won’t be moving for awhile. I sunk him all the way into the bedrock.”

“Go on, then,” Ed murmured, and gestured towards the group huddled around him. “I’ll be up in just a second.”

“Ed?” Roy questioned, blinking, but Ed inclined his chin.

“Just need a second alone,” he said, softly. “I’ll be fine. You have to go tell Winry and Rose that everything’s okay.” The man wavered for a second, staring at him, mouth twisted, before he accepted Hawkeye’s offered arm and started up the walkway after Havoc and Breda. Al had Solaris’ arm thrown over his shoulder, and his brother cast him one long look before hobbling up the stairs after them.

Once he couldn’t hear the footsteps anymore, Ed stared down at the array for just a second before pulling out his small notebook and pen. He carefully traced the array on to the paper, careful not to touch it, and the closed the book and put it back into his pocket. There was no need to write it down - he could see the array in his mind as clear as day, from Licht’s memories (and how, how did that
happen?) and from the twisted, warped images in his head. He stared at the array for just a second more, before turning on his heel and hurrying up the steps.

“...”


“You look chipper,” Roy pointed out, an orange blanket wrapped around his shoulders. He was sitting in the back of one of the police cruiser. Rose, Solaris, Winry, Ed, Al, and Bea were long gone with the suburban and Armstrong’s motorcycle, and Mustang’s team sat exhausted on the front seats of the mansion.

“That’s because we just found the old abandoned railroad building that Licht was keeping the rest of the missing people, registered under her other name. Dear Luca is reunited with her Mark, and we get a happily ever after.”

“One,” Mustang said. “I have no idea who those people are. Two, except for all the dead people, you mean.”

“Glass half-empty, glass half-full,” Hughes said, shrugging, and leant closer to Roy, smiling broadly. “Gracia and Elysia are on their back down as we speak. Our stories all collaborate. You’re a hero.”

“Am I?”

“Yes,” Hughes said, seriously, the smile flattening. “You and Fullmetal both. The story’s already begun to leak; Col. Mustang and Fullmetal team up to stop Scarface Killer; revealed to be Commander Licht. It’s going to be the biggest thing since sliced bread. The military is already freaking out over the scandal.”

“Elections, then?”

Hughes grinned. “If enough of an effort is made. You’re time to move is coming up, Roy.”

Mustang stared, before smirking, leaning back. “I already had Alex put the proposal forward before we all left. Considering my sudden popularity, I’m sure there’s a serious chance that it’ll be taken into consideration.”

“Parliament,” Hughes breathed. “Look at that.”

Roy laughed, and stood, shrugging off the blanket. “Could I bother you for a ride? It’s on your way home, I promise. Ed, Al, and Ms. Rockbell went back to their apartment to check out the damage. If you wouldn’t mind.”

“Don’t mind at all,” Hughes said, grinning, and they moved towards his brown car. “How’s the hand?”

Roy blinked down at it and the bandages wrapped around it. “The paramedic said it wouldn’t scar - apparently I didn’t cut deep enough. I have - no idea what the hell it is.” He frowned at Hughes over the top of the car. “It was...odd. I don’t remember ever picking up the knife. It was if someone else was controlling my body and I was seeing it from an outside point of view.”

“That’s...bizarre,” Hughes said, and shrugged. “But Hawkeye told me that you also saw a ten year old turn into a grown woman so, not like we’re deviating from the trend today.”

Roy considered it, and then shrugged. True.
Al slumped on what was left of their couch, which wasn’t much. Actually, it broke even more as he sat down.

He was bruised, at the most, and he had gotten the call a few minutes ago that Hughes had finally picked up an unconscious Wrath, promising to keep him drugged. The man couldn’t do much if he couldn’t stand on two feet, but eventually a tolerance would build up. And then what? He didn’t need that on top of the complete wreck that was their apartment, and spared a thankful look up that Ed was paranoid about these types of things and made them put most of their more precious valuables in an unlabeled safe.

“Sacked the place,” Ed growled as he stalked up the hallway. His red coat was thrown over one of the few unbroken chairs in the kitchen, black shirt rolled up to his elbows revealing his flesh hand and the silver metal one, and Winry swept broken dishes off of the ground. “Completely sacked the place. Everything is - god damnit. We can’t even close the fucking door.”

“Rose said we could sleep with her for as long as we needed to,” Winry pointed out, propped up on her broom. “I know it’s not ideal - I don’t want to overstay any welcome - but it’s not like we have any choices.”

“She’s right, brother,” Al sighed.

“Rose has two bedrooms,” Ed pointed out. “We can’t ask her to move her stuff out of the third, and she’s expecting - she needs room for a nursery.”

“We’re not going to get our deposit back,” Al said, dryly, staring at the cracked plaster. “We also don’t have enough money to get a new three bedroom until either of us get paid so we can have the down payment and it’ll take - awhile to fix all this up with alchemy.”

“Al and you could share?” Winry said, and winced. “Or I could move out-”

“No!” Al and Ed said, immediately rounding on her. She blinked. “No,” Ed continued, shaking his head. “Win, you’re not moving out. I’ll - I’ll think of something.”

“Well, for now,” Al said, leaning back. “Winry and I could stay at Rose’s. You could try the Colonel - so we don’t over crowd Rose.”

Ed stared. “Roy only has one bedroom.”

Al sent him an amused look. “That’s - not exactly what I meant.”

“I-” Ed’s jaw dropped, and he turned red. “I - can’t - we haven’t - I can’t move in with him, we’ve only.”

“Technically you’ve been dating for over four months now, Ed,” Al said, conversationally. “That’s definitely enough period of time to wait before asking about the whole move in thing.”

“He’s right, Ed,” Winry pointed out. “And - it doesn’t have to be forever. Just a month or so? Until we can clear this place up, break the lease, and find someplace new.”

Ed felt his lip wobble. “You guys don’t want me anymore.”

Al sighed and hung his head. “Brother, you’re twenty-three. We’ve lived together since I was born. Just because you go to live with someone else for a month or two doesn’t mean I’m going to
suddenly cut off all communication with you.”

“No, you don’t love me anymore, I see how it is!” Ed stood up and marched towards the door. Al rolled his head back. Ed threw open the door and blinked at Roy, who was half way to knocking. Ed’s expression crumbled and concern bloomed on the Colonel’s expression, and the man stepped forward, wrapping his arms around Ed automatically.

“What’s wrong? What happened?”

“Al doesn’t love me anymore,” Ed wailed, pressing his forehead into Roy’s neck. “He hates me!”

“What?” Roy questioned, pulling away to stare at Ed, and then at Al, who scrubbed a hand over his head. Roy’s eyebrow raised. “Ed, I highly doubt Al hates you.”

“Then why does he want me to move out?”

“For Christ’s sake, Ed,” Winry rolled her eyes. “We’re all moving out. I’d ask the Colonel if I could stay with him if that wasn’t the most awkward thing I’ve ever do.”

“Stay with him?” Roy questioned. Al swung his gaze over to him.

“We can’t stay here, and Winry and I were thinking of heading to Rose’s, who only has two rooms free. I brought up the possibility of Ed staying with you, just for a month or two. He didn’t take it well.”

“See!” Ed hissed. “They’re trying to get rid of me.”

Roy looked at Ed, amused. “Ed, you can stay with me. I don’t mind. I mean,” he amended. “I’m not going to be home much during the day considering, and I don’t think you’ll be there most of the night so it...has the potential to work out.”

“I’ve only been in your apartment once,” Ed said. “It wasn’t the best experience.”

Roy ‘ah’ed. “We - have to talk about that.”

“Once?” Winry said. “I thought it was twice.”

Al threw a sofa cushion at her and shook his head frantically. Ed drew his eyebrows together. Al leant back, as relaxed as can be and said, “So, sex, huh?”

Ed choked and Roy stumbled, turning red. “Al-

“Smooth,” Winry rolled her eyes.

“Wait,” Al said, changing the conversation, again. “Why aren’t you going to be home?”

Roy cleared his throat. “Because - my proposal’s gone through. The military will be holding an election for Commander, or Prime Minister, whatever you want to call it, and reinstating a Parliament. I’ve been promoted.”

“What?” Ed said.

“Brigadier General. Also, I’m in charge of the peace talks between the border skirmishes.”

“What?” Al said.
“Also I might be running from Commander,” Roy finished.

“Well, shit,” Winry said, after a second. “Yeah, I can see why you might not be home a whole of a lot.” She clapped her hands together. “Well, that takes care of that. Al and I are gonna get a taxi to Rose’s, have fun at the Colonel’s!”

She grabbed Al and forced him through the door before any of them could protest and Ed stared at them, before turning to Roy. “I need a shower,” he said. “But, uh - they kinda - busted my shower, so. Um.”

“You can shower at mine,” Roy said, nodding. “Do you - clothes?”

“There,” Ed said, pointing towards a hastily packed bags. “It’s mostly, uh, knives and stuff, sorry. And socks.”

“The important things,” Roy said, lips twitching upwards. “Hungry?”

“Starved,” Ed grinned. “Food?”

“Of course,” Roy said, and grabbed Ed’s bag. Ed grabbed his coat and folded it over his arm before walking through the door. Roy paused when Ed continued on. “Don’t you want to lock it?”

“It - doesn’t,” Ed said, shrugged. “Nothing in there to steal anyway. Everything important’s in storage.” And the most important piece was tucked away in Ed’s pocket, ink still drying. “I’m - are you sure?”

“Sure, yes,” Roy said, smiling, trailing after Ed down the stairs. “Happy - ecstatic, even.”

Ed’s lips twisted. “You’re not gonna be saying that after I climb into your window at four in the morning with internal bleeding,” Ed noted. Roy’s expression froze for just a second, before he shrugged.

“Maybe less ecstatic, then.”

“I’ll replace the carpets,” Ed muttered. Roy caught his arm and turned Ed towards him. Ed stared at him; his uniform was disheveled, dirt was caked onto his sleeve, and one of his hands was wrapped in a white bandage. Ed must have looked worse, with bruised cheeks and scrapes up and down his body. His black shirt was torn and his hair had been pulled back in a hastily put together ponytail, hair spilling out around his neck.

“Ed,” Roy said. “I’m not worried about the carpets. I’ll be worrying about you. I’m not going to - I’ll...deal with you being - being who you are, but you can’t stop me from worrying about you. Chances are I’m going to have nightmares about you loosing your arm until you die - and they’ll probably only get worse from here on out.”

“I have nightmares all the time,” Ed said, taking a step forward, not sure as to what he was saying, but he felt the need to talk. “They’re - bizarre. I worry about Al, and sometimes I have no idea what’s going on, and once I dreamt that I was smaller than a bean and Al was worrying himself to death over me cause he couldn’t find me and I kept jumping up and yelling at him from the floor but he never noticed and finally he died and I killed myself by drowning in the tears he cried before he passed, and then I was in the car with my mother and I dreamt I couldn’t get Al out in time and I had to live without him.”

“That’s - horrible,” Roy said, eyebrows drawing together. “That’s really horrible.”
“I know,” Ed said and looked down at his hand, one shining metal and flesh. Winry had never given the white skin cover back, and he supposed it must have been ruined. “But - I mean, they won’t be so bad if I have you, you know? You can wake me up and tell me everything’s alright.”

“As long as I do the same for you?” Roy asked. Ed nodded.

“Equivalent exchange,” Ed shrugged. “So-”

“Alright,” Roy said, softly, and walked past Ed, tugging him down the stairs. “Deal.”

Ed smiled at him, hopped down the step, and walked closer to Roy.

“Hawkeye’s been working on a report,” Roy called through the bathroom door. Ed looked over his shoulder, towards the sound of his voice, and continued oiling his arm. Ed lifted up the metal flaps to air dry it and checked the wiring. He could see the large wire spool around his upper arm’s structure if he twisted his head just so. After a second, he shrugged and went back to oiling.

“What on?”

“General Hakuro. We’re going to began a full investigation into him. It’ll be slow going, and take...forever, but, we’re going to pull the rug right out underneath him when we do.”

Ed tipped over the bottle of shampoo, went to catch it, and knocked over the shaving kit from the sink. He stared at it, eyes closing, before he picked it up and began replacing everything.

“Are you alright?” Roy called, after a second passed. Ed made an affirmative sound, and oiled between his fingers, flexing them. “She said she plans to hand it in tomorrow, even though I told her to take the day off. She’ll be the only one working besides me.”

“Like Hawkeye’d let you around office supplies unsupervised,” Ed snarked. “You could choke on that stuff.”

“Ha, ha,” Roy said, dryly. “You’re hilarious. Point is that - I - will you come out here? I feel ridiculous having this conversation through my bathroom door.”

“But, Roy!” Ed called, putting on a fake southern American accent. “I’m not decent!”

Roy was silent, and Ed blinked at the door, before the man called through the door, “That doesn’t exactly deter me from wanting you on the other side of the door.”

Ed was sure was a wonderful shade of red. “Oh.”

“I-” Roy started. “Sorry.”

Ed stared, confused, blush still staining his cheeks. He set down the oil can and drew his eyebrows together at the closed door. “What? Why?”

“I don’t want you to feel...pressured,” Roy said, after a second, and with a small thump, Ed was sure he was leaning against the wall to the bathroom, shifting in the hallway. “That would be - why I was so...innocent with you when we first started - this. I’m used to casual flings and quick romps before moving on and I - didn’t, with you. I wanted to make it last.”

“Is that why you didn’t do anything but freaking kiss my cheek for four months?” Ed questioned, nearly squeaking. Another thump sounded, must have been Roy’s head hitting the wall.
“Still not a conversation I want to have through a bathroom door,” Roy muttered, and Ed was in his boxers and bandages and nothing else, hair loose around his shoulder, but he moved towards the bathroom door anyway, just remembering to press down the automail flaps before wrenching the door open. He could have felt self-conscious about his automail but the man had seen it ripped off so it wasn’t like he was going to be particularly surprised. Roy blinked as the door swung open, pushed off of the wall, and froze.

“You withheld sex with me for four months because you thought you were fucking up - Jesus Christ!” Ed said and stared at him. “You’re such a freaking idiot.”

“You keep saying that,” Roy said, faintly. His eyes ghosted over Ed’s bandaged chest, to the automail, downwards, before he forced himself back up to Ed’s eyes. “I’ve never seen your with hair down.”

Ed scowled. “I need - to cut it-”

“No,” Roy stepped forward, shaking his head. “Jesus, no.” At Ed’s raised eyebrow, he swallowed again. “I like your hair.”

Ed raised an eyebrow. “How long have you wanted to have sex with me?”

“Ed-” Roy choked. Ed lashed out and hit him with the automail hand on his shoulder. Roy yelped. “Since - the first time in the coffee shop, and I just wanted that from you until, until the first date, and then I-” He fell silent. Ed hit him again. “Will you stop it? The first date I just - I wanted you. Not just sex, but I - you were amazing. I wanted you, okay?”

“So you withheld sex for four months,” Ed repeated, again. “Do you know how confused I was because you kept kissing my cheek? I thought we’d never get around to it - you-” Ed paused for a second. “On a scale from one to ten how injured are you.”

“Two?” Roy said, after a second. “You?”

“Seven, at least,” Ed said. “Not a ten though, so.” He tugged Roy forward and pulled him down, kissing him soundly before pulling back. “Let’s have sex.”


“Or,” Ed said, voice dipping lower as he pressed himself against Roy. “You could fuck me. Or I could suck you off. There’s options here, dipshit. Fucking hell - I was freaking abstinent for four whole months. Do you get that? That’s the longest stretch I’ve ever had - no actually, the longest stretch I’ve ever had is from where I was an actual virgin, which was fourteen years, and yet somehow those four months were the worst.”

Roy was making a sound in the back of his throat. Ed sighed.

“Or, we could,” Ed muttered, kicking at the ground. “We could take it slow and wait and you can sleep on the couch.”

“Or we could have sex,” Roy said, after a second, swallowing again. “We could have sex.”

“We’re going to have sex,” Ed corrected. “We,” He gestured between them. “Are going,” He leant forward and licked a stripe up Roy’s neck. The man quivered. “To have sex.”

“Here?” Roy questioned. Ed thought about it.
“No, we should probably use the bed,” Ed said, and pulled Roy backwards against the hallway and into the bedroom. The light was off and Ed didn’t particularly want to fumble for the light switch. Also, neighbors across the street. “Bed,” Ed said, cheerfully, shoving Roy onto it. The man nearly fell back onto it, only barely managing to catch himself on the lip before Ed climbed on top of him and settled on top of his lap.

“How-”

“How do you want it?” Ed murmured, running his hand’s up Roy’s chest, unbuttoning his shirt slowly. “You have a thing for being on top, don’t you? We could do that.” He pulled back Roy’s shirt and pressed his lips against the skin of his chest, kissing erratically as he worked the last of the buttons. “I don’t mind.”

“You’re - your chest,” Roy managed to get out. “We have to think about your chest. You can’t - hold my weight up if I-”

“We’ll have to be careful, then,” Ed said, against his shoulder, pulling his shirt off. “Do you want to fuck me? Or-”

“Whatever,” Roy said, pressing a hand to Ed’s chest, running it down and over his ass. Ed grinned. “We can do - whatever you want.”

“Yeah,” Ed said, grinning. “You can fuck me.”

Roy swallowed. “In the drawer.”

“We’ll get that in a second,” Ed murmured, pressing Roy back until he was laying flat on the bed, legs bent over the edge of it. “I love you.”

Roy’s expression softened. “I love you, too.”

“Well, now that we got that out of the way,” Ed said after a second and grabbed onto the belt of Roy’s pants. Roy pushed himself onto his elbows to stare at him. “Not fair I’m nearly naked and you’re still wearing pants.”

“No, not really,” Roy agreed, and helped pull them his pants and his underwear off. Ed nearly caught his hair on the belt, but Roy carefully threaded the damp strands out of the way before pulling Ed onto the bed, changing their position so that they were laying horizontal instead of vertical. Ed climbed on top of him, ghosted up his chest with one hand, before bending over him. Roy carefully brought his hand up to brush Ed’s hair back over his shoulder. “You’re sure?”

“Mustang,” Ed growled. “I’ve been ‘sure’ for over a year now. Are you gonna fuck me, or what?”

Roy moved, suddenly, pushing his leg in between Ed’s and then Ed was on his back, staring up at Roy. Ed stared, before he grinned.

“Told you; so have a thing for being on top.” Ed raised an eyebrow and Roy sighed, irritably.

“It’s just easier this way. You can be on top in two seconds, but I have to-” He cut himself off and stretched over Ed and the edge of the bed, fumbling with the bottom drawer of his bedside table. “Ready?”

“You keep asking that question,” Ed growled. He shifted his hips up, pressing himself against Roy, and then man lurched forward, eyes widening. “Does that answer your question?”
“You - brat.” Roy glared down at him, grabbing a small slim bottle of lube and throwing it on the bed next to Ed’s head. Ed grinned.

“Oh, what are you gonna do, Colonel?” Ed breathed, leaning upwards. “Certainly not fuck me considering how long it seems to be taking you.”

“Brat,” Roy said, huffed, then proceeded to take off Ed’s boxers. With his teeth. Ed keened.

“Absolute brat,” Roy murmured, pressing his lips to the inside of Ed’s thigh. “And you say I’m the impatient one.”

“Hurry,” Ed breathed, running his flesh hand through Roy’s hair, forcing himself not to grab at his scalp. “Hurry, hurry, come on.”

“Two minutes,” Roy stressed, grabbing the lube from up near Ed and started rubbing it in between his hands, mindful of the bandages still wrapped around his palm. “Do you really want cold lube?”

Ed whined. “You’re taking too long.”

“Have some finesse, Edward,” Roy said, and pressed in with his thumb. Ed inhaled, sharply.

“Patience.” Carefully he worked one of his fingers into Edward, slowly - which, damnit - but slow could work, Ed could deal with slow right now, as long as there was something to work with instead of four months of aggravation and stints with the image of Roy in his wet uniform, Roy’s lips against his cheek, and Ed’s hand down his pants. Ed forced himself to relax, before nodding, and Roy carefully slipped in a second finger. “Good?”

“Yeah, just-” Ed shifted for a second, before nodding. “Yeah, good.”

“Good,” Roy murmured, and bent upwards to kiss Ed’s throat. “Just a little more, I promise, come on, love, almost there-”

Ed nodded, and ran a hand up and down his cock, pressing his head back into the pillows. “Now?”

“Nearly,” Roy said, softly. “Let me just - okay?”

“Okay,” Ed said, and chanted, “Okay, okay, okay.”

Roy grinned, carefully tugging Ed’s legs over his back, before shifting his position. “Alright,” he said, and nodded.

“Fucking finally,” Ed whined, and then - oh.

Ed clenched for a second, discomfort outriding the pleasure for just a moment, before one of Roy’s hands was stroking back his hair and covering the hand over his cock, restarting his previous motion. “Okay?” Roy questioned. Ed cracked open his eyes, and glared.

“Move, damnit,” he growled, and Roy huffed a breath of laughter before he obliged. Roy rocked his hips forward, gently, before he started to build momentum, his hand matching his rhythm. Ed rocked forward into his hand, and fell back, choking on his own gasp, automail hand gripping the headboard because he wasn’t sure if he put it on Roy’s shoulder the man would come out it unscathed.

“Fuck,” Roy breathed as Ed shimmied his hips and rocked back. “Fuck.”

Ed laughed, moved forward, and fell back. “That’s the idea, yeah.”

“Brat,” Roy shook his head, grabbing onto the pillow that Ed was laying on with his injured hand,
knuckles turning white. “Such a brat.”

“Come on, Roy, come on, faster,” Ed said, and arched up. “Fuck me like you mean it.”

“You’re still - injured,” Roy pointed out, rocking his hips against Ed’s. “Your ribs-”

“Are fine,” Ed gasped. “Harder - yes-”

He hissed as Roy rocking back and then slammed his hips upwards, pushing Ed against the bed, before pulling back and slamming back just as hard. Ed chanted ‘yes, yes, yes’ while Roy focused on trying to maintain his rhythm around Ed’s cock.

“Ed,” Roy breathed, arching his hips into Ed’s. “Ed, I’m gonna-”

“Come on,” Ed cut off, wriggling his hips. “Come on, come for me-”

Roy pressed upwards, Ed moved just so, and Roy moved over the edge, still suddenly and pressing himself against Ed’s body as he bent over and choked into Ed’s shoulder. His hand clenched around Ed’s cock and the man underneath him moaned, pressing his hips into Roy’s hand, and came.

“Your ribs,” Roy choked and managed to fall onto his shoulder. “Are they-”

“For Christ’s sake,” Ed panted. “They’re fine. Everything is - fine.”

“I have to change the sheets,” Roy moaned. “I don’t think I can move.”

“We’ll ignore it,” Ed said, firmly and wrapped himself against Roy’s arm and side. “Shower in the morning, which - considering I just showered.”

Roy turned and smiled into Ed’s hair. “Sounds perfect. I assume I’m cooking.

“I suppose I don’t honestly think I’ll be Commander this term,” Roy said, stroking his hand through Ed’s hair. Ed still had his eyes closed, but he was awake, the sun just starting to peek through the window. “The plan is that I establish myself and then run.”

“Can’t believe you want to rule the country,” Ed said, moaning.

Roy shifted and stared down. “I can’t believe you’re a crime-fighting vigilante.”

Ed stilled, thought, and shrugged. “Alright, you got me there. Continue.”

Roy grinned, and played with a strand of Ed’s hair. “The trick is to be behind whoever wins, and who will hopefully retire soon, and then I’ll move up.”

“Good plan,” Ed murmured into his side. “Hey, why do you wanna be the top guy in charge?”

Roy stilled for a second, before to continuing to stroke Ed’s hair back. “Do you remember when I
told you about my parents?”

“Yeah,” Ed nodded. “Bakers, from Japan and America.”

“We didn’t live in the wealthiest neighborhood,” Roy said, after a second, inhaling. “I said Hawkeye was my neighbor. I lied. She lived in the clear other direction. My dad used to work for her father. His second job was maintaining their lawn. When I wasn’t helping out at the bakery, I was with him, helping. That’s how I knew Hawkeye. She used to come out and sit with me while I weeded their garden and mowed their lawn.” Roy shifted, looking away. “Her mother did used to buy sweet rolls every Sunday, and Riza used to save one for me until I came the next day, after school. That’s why they were so angry when I joined the military. They thought I was abandoning everything they had worked hard for.”

Ed stared at him, before he licked his lips. “Al and I were in one of the worst orphanages in town. I was lucky that my grandpa raised us when he did because I don’t think I would have kept me an’ him alive. I used to break into people’s homes and steal their stuff, sell it at pawn shops, trying to get Al something nice, trying to buy books and clothes. I lied on his school application, said he lived with Hughes. I walked him forty-five minutes uptown every day one direction at five in the morning and then walked back, went to school, and then went and picked up him. I did - a lot of bad stuff so that we had the money for my emancipation. Our mom and grandpa gave us some money - but we couldn’t access to it until after, you know? I never told Al.”

Roy stared down at him, not an ounce of pity in his eyes but something like sympathy and indignation - as if he was offended that Ed and Al ever had to live that kind of life - and Ed smiled softly, pressing his lips to the side of his chest.

“Do you honestly think I’m gonna think less of you ‘cause you had a hard life?” Ed questioned, and Roy turned away, smiling, shaking his head.

“I wasn’t - I didn’t know what to think. I suppose I wanted you to see me as a better man than I was. But - I saw the world around me and I wanted it to change.” Roy’s expression hardened. “People deserve better. The reason we’re in the slum we are is because we’re constantly fighting with our neighboring countries and forcing money into the military. We’re stuck in two extremes, poor and rich, and we’re suffering because of it. Licht didn’t - she didn’t care.”

“And you do,” Ed murmured. “Well,” he shrugged and leaned upwards, baring his neck and pressing his chin into the skin between Roy’s arm and chest. “You have my vote.”

Roy stared at him, before his smile brightened. “I don’t think you know how much that means to me.”

Ed pinched his arm, with the left hand, because the right was pinned under Roy’s body. “Don’t let it go to your head, bastard. Someone has to keep you from over-inflating your ego.”

“Are you applying for the job?”

“Oh, I applied for that job long ago, Commander Mustang, sir.”

Roy smiled into his hair, pressing a kiss into it, before pulling back, clearing his throat. “Ed, I know - uh, this is temporary. But I.” He swallowed. “If you’d like to stay, then, I’d be - okay with that. We’ll really only see each other a few hours each day, and-”

Ed stared up at him. “You mean, like, you want me to live with you?”

“If you like,” Roy said, looking away. “I’d understand if you didn’t, with Alphonse and Winry, and
the-"

He was cut off as Ed leaned forward, tugging out of his grip, and kissed him, grinning against his mouth. “Really?” Ed said, pulling a hair’s breath away. Roy blinked.

“Y - Yes?”

“Then, sure,” Ed said, throwing himself back on the bed and Roy’s arm. “We’re gonna have to put kevlar in your couch.”

“Um.”

“And I hope you’re not too fond of your carpet because we’ll probably have to tear it up so I can hide my Fullmetal stuff under the floorboards.”

Roy blinked. “That’s - fine.”

“Also you’re probably gonna have to drive me everywhere until I get a new ride.”

“Also fine,” Roy said, and laughed. “You’re testing me.”


“Happily,” Roy said, and rested his cheek against the top of Ed’s head. “The word you’re looking for - it’s happily.”

Ed’s nose scrunched. “We’ll see, Mustang. Anyway, get up. I’m hungry.”

Roy sighed, and rolled out of bed.

...a year later.

“Baby!” Ed sung. “Baby, baby, baby!”

Bianca Marie Armstrong squealed as Ed swung her into the air again. Bea sat on the couch, sketching out a simple array with a crayon. Alphonse leant over and carefully corrected her hand, smiling down at her. Bea grinned, missing two front teeth.


“You’re too happy,” Alphonse pointed out. “Careful or else the General’s going to expect a surprise soon.”

Ed swung around and glared, eyes narrowing. He was halfway to swearing before he remembered the babies in his arms, and little Bea, blinking up at him. Elysia was in hearing range, playing with
her dolls, and Ed could not swear.

“You know what you are,” Ed said, flatly, and turned back to Bianca, planting a kiss onto her head. The baby made a delighted sound and laughed while Lionel became distracted by Ed’s ponytail, flicking back and forth. “I can’t - can you imagine me with a kid? Roy with a kid? We’d scar them for life.”

“I don’t know,” Al said, chewing on the end of his pen. “The General’d make a good father.”

“And?”

“And what?”

Ed glared. “You know what you are.”

Al grinned and patted Bea on the head, nudging her. “Why don’t you go play with Elysia, take a break from all this boring stuff.”

“Mm, kay,” Bea sung and skipped towards Elysia who grinned up at her as Bea shyly asked if she could play. Elysia nodded her head so hard that Al was worried she might get whiplash. The two girls giggled at each other and started playing with the dolls.

“Hey, when did we start running a daycare service?” Ed questioned, bobbing Bianca and Lionel up and down gently.

“I’m not sure,” Al said, and leaned back. “It kinda just - happened.”

“You need to stop letting our friends walk all over you,” Ed said, nodding. Al stared at him and mouthed ‘you?’ “Anyway, Solaris and Rose should be around soon. I should probably start heading out on patrol.”

“Lionel just wet his diaper, didn’t he?” Al said dryly, arms suddenly full of babies.

Ed grinned as he headed towards the window. “Yes, he did. Have fun, Al!”

“I hate you!” Al called after him, and sighed before turning towards Lionel who grinned toothlessly up at him. “Not you,” Al cooed. “Aw, I could never hate you, you’re too cute to hate...”

–

Four in the morning and Ed stretched his back out before climbed down the fire escape of Roy’s apartment building. His head felt heavy on his head, and the folded sheet of paper was worn and heavy in his pocket, nearly a year old now, and Ed could - but, no.

He slid the window to the living room open, yawning and yanking the hood off of it’s hooks as he climbed through, letting it shut with a click behind him.

“There you are,” Roy said, padding into the hallway, barefoot. He yawned and rubbed at his eye. “Almost didn’t hear you get in.”

“Idiot,” Ed scolded. “You’re supposed to be in bed. Don’t you have some big meeting in the morning?”

“The Federation meeting?” Roy questioned, and yawned again. “Not that big.”

Ed stared. “You just told me yesterday that’s literally the biggest meeting of the year. Go back to
“Not without you,” Roy said, starting the coffee pot. He closed his eyes and smiled at Ed, and leant his back against the counter, gripping it with both hands. Ed rolled his eyes and pulled his coat and boots off, throwing them on the couch.

“You’re an idiot,” Ed repeated, leaning over the counter dividing the kitchen from the living room. “If you fall asleep during that meeting, Hawkeye’ll kill you.”

“Love you, too,” Roy murmured, still smiling, eyes still closed. “Maybe I’ll just lay down until the coffee’s finished.”

Ed sighed and walked around the counter into the kitchen, stopped the coffee maker, and tugged Roy away from it, towards the bedroom. “We both need sleep. Coffee can wait. Come on.”

“But-”

“Sleep, Mustang; beautiful, comfortable, sleep.” Ed pushed Roy onto the bed, who laughed, before folding himself under the covers, waiting for Ed. Ed stripped his shirt off, then his pants, and shook out his braid, before sliding next to Roy, wrapping an arm around him. “You better be asleep in the next five minutes.”

“Might take less than two,” Roy murmured. “Did you have a good time?”

“Fucking idiots went and drove off with a police car and I had to chase them down on foot. Went pretty well, considering.”

“That’s - I’m glad,” Roy breathed. Ed stared up at him, and sighed.

“Big idiot. You don’t have to wait up for me every night. You’re gonna hurt yourself.” Roy stared to mumble something, but Ed pressed his lips to his forehead, shutting him up. “I’ll always come back to you, don’t you know that? You don’t have to worry. You can go to sleep and I promise, I’ll be right there when you wake up.”

It wasn’t a lie. Ed hadn’t lied to Roy since that night at Rose’s house. Sometimes he had to carefully omit truths, but he never lied, and this felt as strong as the sky is blue and the sun rises every morning and I love you.

Equivalent exchange. Roy was his, and he could be Ed’s. For once, it hadn’t fucked Ed over.

Chapter End Notes

thank you seriously for reading and sticking with me and all that and the sequel is well i don't know where it is but it's happening i can promise you that so any questions you're left with they'll probably be answered no for real thanks
Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!