

## The Family Man

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# **The Family Man**

by [EllaMariexoxo](#)

## Summary

Edward has chosen his path, but what if he travels to a parallel universe and discovers a whole other life? EdxWin

## Two Paths

The steam blew out of the smoke stack like a giant sigh from the metal beast. The conductor signaled the train's complete stop, allowing the passengers aboard to flow out onto the platform. A few travelers got off; their bags forgotten as they rushed towards their waiting loved ones. Before long the platform was empty again, save for the railroad conductor, the station attendant and a couple off to the side. They had a schedule to keep, but the conductor politely pretended to do a quick maintenance check to give the familiar couple just a little more time.

"And you'll call me if anything should happen to your automail?" The blond haired girl asked anxiously.

Ed swallowed the lump in his throat; goodbyes were right up there with attaching automail. It was uncomfortable to watch her struggle to hold back tears. Winry was strong but she couldn't fool him, this was killing her. Feeling sort of awkward he rocked back on his heels.

"Yeah, sure thing Win."

The past few months in Resembool had made him feel so normal and to be honest, happy. Helping with chores around the house, running errands with Winry and eating his favorite pie once and awhile had made him forget those agonizing years he spent chasing after the unknown. It was an adjustment but without alchemy he had felt normal for the first time in what seemed like a lifetime.

A gust of wind picked up, drawing out a few strands of Winry's hair over her face. His hand automatically reached towards her, gently tucking them behind her ear. The softness of Winry's pale skin pulled him closer, his fingertips lingering on her face. What was the reason he was leaving again? He heard the ominous 'All aboard!' and knew their time had run out. He wanted to ask her to come, but the selfish thought had no room to linger. Instead he looked longingly at her pretty blue eyes and wondered how on earth he was going to let this moment pass him by.

"You better go." She said sadly.

"I'll miss you." He offered in return for that look in her eyes. There wasn't much else he could give to her with such a limited amount of time.

Tears threatened in his oldest friend's eyes. "You could stay, if only for a little longer?" Winry asked him breathlessly.

It was the letters from his brother that had initially cast the first shadows of doubt in his head. The tales of mischief and adventure he didn't quite fathom through just words on a piece of paper. It felt so disappointing to write back and see his most adventurous day had been trying to help give Den a bath. The nagging indecision in his mind had been eating away at him. He couldn't stay.

The train whistle sounded loudly and Edward glanced nervously over his shoulder, the next train didn't depart until the following day. "Winry..."

"Edward, I'm asking you to stay." Her voice hitched on the last word.

A desperate part of him held onto her words with reverence, as if they might really help him to stay. Ed knew what would happen if he got on the train. Once he arrived in Central he would take on his new position within the military and there would be no going back. There were no brakes on this train, it was all go from here. This new life in Central, this career he had chosen with the military, it was too late to turn back now.

"I've already stayed too long."

Ignoring the furious butterflies in his stomach he embraced the girl who really resembled more of a woman. Winry meant something to him, but he wasn't sure exactly what to do with that and while there was a spark he had a more pressing call to answer. He didn't want the promised day to have been the peak of his life, there had to be another adventure, another mission he had yet to accomplish.

Winry whispered into his neck as her hands gripped him tighter. "I'll miss you."

Edward felt an overwhelming urge to kiss her, but that was selfish and a promise he just couldn't keep. Instead he boarded the train; his body cold as he watched Winry's outline fade from his sight. By choosing this path he was effectively turning his back on another.

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"Still here Fullmetal?" A voice echoed from the hallway. The state alchemist title might no longer be his, but the nickname had stuck.

Ed picked his head up long enough to give the Fuhrer a shrug. "I need to finish this stack before I go." He replied mechanically, a learned behavior he resented a little.

Headquarters were particularly empty today, but that was no surprise. After all, today was the Promised Day. After the defeat of the homunculi ten years ago they had begun to celebrate the promised day as a national holiday to pay respects to all those who had lost their lives under the hands of Bradley's regime that had finally come to an end.

"Figured you'd catch a train to Resembool by now." Roy commented as if he were fishing for some savory morsel to torment him with.

The idea had come to mind, but he had pushed it away. His brother was traveling the world with that little bean girl...ok well she wasn't really little anymore, but still. Granny had passed a year after his own father. All that was left in that small farming town was a what if. "Nah, Al is still traveling, no point in me going all that way for nothing."

Roy had that knowing look on his face that irritated Ed to no end. "Nothing huh? Thought there was more to it than that."

*That* was an entirely different story, one that would never have a happy ending, for him at least. Last he had heard she was dating a doctor who had moved out to the country to start his own practice. He might have had his chance ten years ago, but the minute he left it seemed doomed that he would never return. "She's got her world, I have mine." There wasn't anything between them anymore, no family, no friendship and no...well the last part would stay locked away in the back of his mind.

"Not too late to fix your mistakes." Mustang offered in a surprising show of optimism.

"Easier said than done." Ed fought back. He knew the bastard was living proof that mistakes can be fixed, but this one had been broken for far too long. "Any information on Kimbley?" He asked trying to provide an opportunity to change the topic. Talking about his mistakes only ever led to her, and he couldn't think about her without that terrible plunging feeling in his stomach.

A grim expression came over the Fuhrers face. Ever since the downfall of Bradley's regime there were still a few extremists lurking around. From their reconnaissance they had found evidence that tied them all together, a common thread and apparently their leader, Zolf Kimbley.

"Fuery tapped a phone line outside of Briggs, seems like their planning their move soon." His eyes narrowed, "Been hiding up in the mountains, biding his time."

Ed chewed thoughtfully on his lower lip. Lately there had been several small, scattered bits of terrorism, but that wasn't Kimbley's style. They all knew that something else was brewing behind the scenes, these little distractions would be nothing compared to whatever psychotic plot he had in mind. Blowing up parliament was only one of the threats they had come across. "There isn't so much of a question of what they are going to do, more along the lines of when."

"Listen." Roy Mustang looked rather tired and old in the dim lighting. "Go home Ed, while you still have one to go to."

"Haven't been home for a long time." He replied softly but Mustang had already left.

By the time Ed pulled himself out of his work again the clocks hand had already passed the twelve. Feeling beat he put away the remainder of his work, pulled on his long military issue trench coat before jamming his hat onto his head as he exited the room. The empty hallway engulfed him as he set out pondering what the next day's work would entail.

Living in Central had taken some getting used to; some of the city's rather unpleasant elements were now just ordinary occurrences. The sight of homeless figures lurking in the alleys was a silent reminder of the work that still needed to be done. The endless amount of human suffering that plagued their world now unsettled him in a way that made him twitchy with anxiety.

"Your sins are unforgivable."

Ed paused, his eyes narrowing in the dark as he watched a man step towards him. The white haze in his pupils gave his blindness away as he continued to walk forward into the streetlight. He should have taken a damn taxi; Ed was too tired to put up with this crap.

"Yeah and for a small fee I can atone for my sins can I?" He replied back sarcastically, he had heard this one before.

The old man's bony finger shook as he pointed in accusation. "They are unforgivable, until you learn from them."

Either this man was a genius or a crackpot, maybe both. "Thanks for the advice." Ed muttered under his breath as he continued to walk down the street imagining the wonderful feeling of a pillow under his head. Stuffing his hands into his pockets Ed frowned as he pulled the familiar watch from his pocket. How did his old alchemist watch get in there? Staring at it Ed shook his head and kept walking.

"You will learn Edward Elric, you will learn." The voice trailed after him, as loud as if he had been standing right next to him.

Turning to look over his shoulder Ed rubbed his tired eyes. There was nothing there, nothing but an overactive imagination with a need for rest. He only briefly thought of the man who could see things without actually seeing. Overworked; that explained a good majority of this shit. Exhausted and thoroughly over the rather lackluster day, the aging man decided he would take a new route to and from work.

Without much thought he paused outside a local pub, the lights inside more appealing than the dark apartment that waited for him. Deciding on a detour Ed visited the closest pub to his apartment and parked himself on a bar stool. The drinks came easy and the lovely bartender didn't ask any questions. Just a few drinks in and already his mind grew hazy with relief.

"Can I use your phone?" Ed asked, suddenly needing to talk with someone.

She gave him an indulgent smile and pointed towards the back corner of the bar.

Dialing the number he suddenly forgot the reason why but it was too late. Alphonse picked up, his voice exasperated. "Hello?"

Ed knew it wasn't polite to call his brother at such an hour but he needed to hear a familiar voice. "Hey Al."

"Brother, do you know what time it is?" The younger Elric asked the sound of a yawn on the other end.

"Yeah." He mumbled.

"Whats wrong Ed." Alphonse sighed, any exasperating giving way to sympathy.

"Is she happy?"

"Who?" His brother asked, concern beginning to build in his voice.

Fuck the booze was getting to him. "You know who."

"Brother, its two in the morning. Can you just call me tomorrow?"

"Yeah, sorry." What was he thinking?

Hanging up he stared at the counter, it was time to go before things got bad. Not the first time but he wasn't prepared to clean up another mess. Feeling more alone than usually he paid his tab and picked up the pieces of himself and retreated.

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The repeated blare of an alarm clock brought his troubled dreams to an abrupt end. Without opening his eyes he reached out his right arm instinctively to shut off the damn thing, he didn't remember his alarm being quite this annoying. As his fingers groped for the nightstand table he was dumbfounded, it felt nothing like a table. In fact he would have staked a guess that it was probably a person.

His fingers slid down the soft skin, his brain working overtime to figure out how he had lured a woman into his bed and why he was in fact sleeping on the wrong side of the bed. Ed was accustomed to the right side, a sleeping habit he had picked up since he began to live by himself in Central. A soft moan halted his investigating hands, a blush staining his cheeks as he opened his eyes to see the bare back of a woman lying next to him. The vertebrae in her spine stuck out slightly, her silky hair pillowed around her head. Quickly retracting his hand Ed gazed in confusion at the blond mop of hair on the pillow next to his. There was one detail above all that threw him for a loop, this was not his bed and that sure as hell was no random girl.

Closing his eyes he tried to pretend he was still asleep, maybe then he could wake up for real. The same woman chuckled, the sleep still gripping her as he heard her shut the alarm off and mutter something under her breath. His eyes flew open, the same scene still painted out in front of him. There was only one explanation as to why this particular woman was in his bed, he was dreaming. It was cruel but still absolutely fascinating. The woman stretched slowly, her arms rose above her head as her shoulders made a slight popping noise. The blonde cast her gaze over her shoulder, those piercing blue eyes locking on to his.

"Ed, you're staring." Her cheeks flushed a lovely shade of pink that did nothing to distract him from the curve of her hips to the low dip in her back. The more he stared the more he found himself wondering if he had ever truly seen her before. Of course he had dreamed of her from time to time, but for whatever reason this time felt real.

"You're beautiful." He practically choked out, his voice sounded much closer to his teenage years than it should.

Her bemused smile widened. "If you think sweet talking is going to get you out of getting the kids ready for school you're wrong."

"Kids?" That wiped the grin right off his face, he didn't like where this dream was heading. "I...we, don't have any kids." This was ridiculous; he hadn't seen Winry in years. He recognized the style of the room and even the color of the walls, he was definitely in

Resembool, but how in the world did he get there? Standing up he tugged the cover with him, his dream girl might not have any problems standing naked in front of him, but he would feel much better with at least a pair of boxers.

Out of the corner of his eyes he saw her laugh again, as if he were joking. "Funny Ed, but that won't work either. Today is your day to get them ready; pretending we don't have kids is not a good excuse."

She crossed the room in a few steps, leaned in and kissed him briefly on the cheek before humming happily to herself. He didn't have time to argue that it damn well was an excuse; she was already in the bathroom, the squeaky sound of a knob followed by the rushing of water.

Feeling dazed, he walked over to a dresser praying for clothes. Lucky for him it all looked to be his size though a good portion of his brain wondered why she had guy clothing in her room at all. Well that wasn't entirely true, most of his brain power was focused on why he was naked in bed with Winry and why she was acting like they were an old married couple, with kids at that. Either he needed to wake up or he needed to figure out what kind of drug the man on the street had slipped him or maybe that coy bartender.

Subconsciously he walked towards the bathroom where the door was halfway open. Placing his hand on the wooden barrier he paused. One look at her silhouette could render a guy speechless, not to mention the longing feeling in his stomach that wished this wasn't a dream.

Dressed in a rather familiar tank top and jeans he started walking down the hallway when he felt the presence of someone behind him. Spinning on his heel he half expected to see granny one more time, even though he knew she had passed.

"Daddy?"

Ed's jaw fell to the floor at the sight of the small child standing in the doorway of the next room, his hands rubbing the sleep from his eyes.

The boy seemed to realize he wasn't responding. His blue eyes, the exact shade of Winry's, widened in confusion. "Daddy?" He asked again.

"I-I'm not..." Two small arms snaked their way around his leg making him jump. "Gah!" He stared alarmingly at the beautiful little girl tugging at his pant leg. The familiar shade of amber in her eyes made his head spin.

"Can you make us pancakes?" She requested with large, pleading eyes.

Looking around he felt a kind of panic begin to surge through him. It was so surreal he just couldn't fathom any of it. The eyes of the two small children were trained on him, as if expecting him to play along with their charade. But if this was some act, if this was some kind of dream, why hadn't reality sunk it yet? He pinched his arm, but all that did was hurt.

As if things couldn't get any more confusing or terrifying there was clearly the sound of a baby beginning to cry. Feeling like a character in a horror novel, he walked cautiously

towards the noise, compelled by the weird direction this was all was taking. Pushing open the last door down the hallway he stepped into what used to be granny's old room. The space had changed quite a bit; the old, traditional white, was now baby blue with soft yellow window treatments and decorated accents. The worst addition was the white crib in the center, its purpose only cementing his belief that his dreams were rising to a new level. Unable to halt his curiosity he stalked the crying noise into the crib revealing a small baby boy, his tufts of blonde hair slightly matted to his head as his tiny fists flailed helplessly. This time he wasn't caught off guard by the amber eyes. Hell, it was like going back into time and staring right into his own eyes.

Feeling remarkably bold his muscles moved in a way that told him he had done this before. Holding the baby out at arm's length he was almost there when a whiff of what resembled a garbage dump engulfed him.

Scrunching his nose Edward eyed the saggy diaper in disgust. "You've got to be kidding me." He mused in horror. Besides the gross factor, he didn't have any idea how to change a baby's diaper and frankly he had no interest in finding out.

The baby's lower lip jutted out, his large eyes widening with tears before his entire face puckered once again and the wails began.

Feeling unbelievably small and helpless himself he tried to hold the baby as far away as was possible. For as tiny as this little guy was, he could hold the octave of an opera singer. "Winry?" No answer, "How do you get this thing to stop crying?" He asked, his voice fringing on hysteric.

"Mamma changes his diaper on the table." The small little girl stood cautiously at the door, her tiny finger pointing at the changing table in the corner of the room.

"Yeah...thanks." A part of him encouraged it and reveled in the absurdity of it. Then again maybe if he played along with all this he might end up back in bed with Winry. Now that was the part of this dream he wanted to explore. Looking back down at the miniature human he found himself staling for some kind of sign, some message this was supposed to be sending him. Waking up would sound better if he had only had more time with her. Forsaking any breathing from his nose he placed the baby on the changing table, pulling out a fresh diaper as well as a packet of wipes pushed towards him from the little girl. That's it, this wasn't so bad right?

Unfastening the Velcro like sides he pulled the front flap down and swore chocolate would never look the same. Luckily the fresh air seemed to have calmed the baby's wails for the moment.

"Ha ha!" He laughed triumphantly. His gag reflex which had been stifled at his first sign of a victory dimmed considerably when he was graced with a spray to the face.

Tight lipped he glared at the little girl who was holding back a fit of giggles. Wiping his face with a wipe he winced, why was he playing along with this dream anyways?

"Daddy, you have to open the diaper and check before leaving it open like that." Another giggle escaped her as she watched the little baby roll around a little, the contents of his diaper spreading across the table and his back.

Ok, this had turned from an intriguing dream into a full out nightmare. Just dreaming about Winry was pretty normal for him but why the hell was he being tortured with the idea of being a failing dad too?

"Daddy...you put the diaper on backwards." She admitted with a laughing smile.

Something inside him snapped as he looked into the faces of children that would never be his. "If it's so damn easy you do it!" He spat at the little girl.

The little girl's face, which appeared to be a sweet miniature of Winry's features, began to fill with tears.

"I'm sorry." She whispered in a trembling voice. Stepping closer she tried to reach out to him. "Daddy?"

There was a strange ache in his chest that made his chest constrict. Angry and confused he tried to keep it together but he was losing it. "I'm not your dad." He spoke harshly.

He watched uselessly as the girl burst into tears, the older brother running into the room not long after. Ed watched in terrible suspense as the boy looked between them before he scooped up the baby from the table and gently pushed the girl from the room. "Come on Sara I can make you pancakes."

Sara? As in Winry's mother's name? The world flipped and whirled around him. The look the older brother gave Ed before guiding his sister from the room made his heart pound hard in his chest. The stubborn clench of his jaw and the stern eyes were all his except for the piercing blue...that was all Winry.

Unsure of what to make of it all he bolted from the room and down the stairs. Vaguely he heard the sounds of the kids in the kitchen and the distant trickle of water from the shower but it didn't matter. He ran as fast as his feet would take him, never once stopping to look back at what could have been. Eventually he was going to wake up and miss her like he always did, but the addition of children to his list of what if's had brought him to an all-time low. Maybe the blind man had been right, he had unforgivable sins. There was a balance in the world and he had traded the possibility of having a family for the adventures that now seemed so hollow and fruitless. There was a family waiting in that house for him but he put one foot in front of the other and waited for his journey to wake himself up.

# Wake Up

The countryside disappeared, the city blocks beginning to replace the endless fields as the train chugged along. Getting on the train had been no small feat; thankfully small towns still seemed to operate on the honor system because at the moment he didn't even have any type of identification. Edward slept most of the ride, hoping that each time he woke up it might be the end to this strange reality. Capital station came into view and the wearied man realized he had no belongings, no cash, just a notion of where home really was.

Edward was already standing in front of his apartment building when his hands dove into empty pockets. Fuck, his keys. It was too late to get a hold of his landlord to bail him out. Grinding his teeth Edward decided on a second option, one that he really didn't want to take. Without any cash he walked the whole way, wincing at the way the clock tower chimed the late night.

There were footsteps behind him, the pacing beginning to match his own. Feeling strangely vulnerable Edward looked over his shoulder in apprehension but nothing was there. Turning his gaze back he stopped cold. The old man from the night before sat on the stoop to the next building, the gaps still hollowing out his toothy grin

"You." Edward pointed an accusing finger in his direction. "What have you done to me?"

The old man chuckled his expression bemused. "Who me?"

"Yes, you." He stormed up to the haggard man. "You put me here, now send me home!"

"That's not how this works Edward." He shrugged his shoulders, "You have to learn what home means before you can return to it."

"That doesn't even make-I don't know even know you? What do you want from me?" Ed threw up his hands.

"Now there's a question. Do you even know who you are? Do you know what you really want Edward Elric?"

"Want? I have everything I want, which is why you can take me back now." Edward sneered.

"No, don't think I can do that. That's against the rules you see."

The old man was crazy but Edward wondered if he was crazier for listening. "What rules?"

"The rules are simple; you get one shot at this life. If you are successful you go home, if not, you will find yourself somewhere you don't want to be." He warned, all humor gone from his tone.

"This is insane, you know that right?"

"Yes and once you speak of this they'll lock you up too. Hence rule number two, you are Edward Elric and you will follow this life until we've decided you're ready to go home."

Edward felt his stomach growl, when was the last time he had eaten something? "And what if I don't want to play along?"

"Then you will be stuck in time. I suggest you play nice."

There was a loud snap behind him and when Edward turned back, the old man was gone. It was then that he realized where he was. Breathing out a sigh of relief Edward approached the steps of a regal looking apartment building, knocked and hoped the bastard was home.

It took a good three knocks before a light came on and the sound of footsteps echoed behind the thick wooden door.

The surprise was mutual.

To begin with, Edward was positive Riza had not been pregnant when he had last seen her at headquarters a day ago, and she certainly did not have long hair.

His gawking had not earned him any favors. Riza met his stare, confusion in her gaze. "Come in." She ordered him with sharpness to her tone.

The space was warm and Edward became aware of how much he needed a shower and a new pair of clothes. There was an ache in his back from sleeping on the train which made him fidget uncomfortably as he sat half perched on the sofa.

"Listen..." He began rubbing the back of his neck at the stupidity of it. "I don't mean to bother you but I've somehow lost my keys."

Riza gave him an odd look. "What are you even doing in Central, shouldn't you be in Resembool?"

Not her too. "I told Mustang I'm not heading back there; I've got enough problems without digging up the past." He muttered, trying not to think about those three kids.

The sound of feet coming down a set of stairs revealed a very different looking Roy Mustang. Edward eyed him closely and felt a validation in his earlier objections. There was something wrong here and seeing his boss confirmed it. Roy Mustang did not possess an automail arm the last time they had talked.

Feeling unnerved he jumped to his feet, his gaze sweeping back and forth between the pair of them. Pointing his finger indignantly at Mustang he narrowed his eyes, "What's the meaning of this?"

Mustang held up his hands, his body slowly closing the distance between him and Riza. "Easy Edward."

"What's going on here?" He held his head in his hands. "Riza are you pregnant?" He almost barked in disbelief, "And...automail?"

Roy stepped in front of Riza, "Easy there, how much have you had to drink Edward?"

Edward pinched the bridge of his nose and tried for patience. "I haven't been...fuck." He began to pace. "I just saw you yesterday and you weren't pregnant and you sure as hell didn't have an automail arm."

Roy must have said something to Riza because she ducked out the room.

"What did you say to her?" He asked shakily.

"Sit back down Edward; you're not making any sense." Mustang suggested.

"No." He began to panic, the earlier fear drowning him in its complexities. "This is wrong and you know it!" He shouted.

"I said sit down." Mustangs tone changed, its commanding boom startling Ed from his haze. Using the strong metal limb Mustang pushed him back towards the couch, his eyes flashing. "You don't get to barge into my home and demand nonsense. Either calm down or..."

"Or what?" He interrupted feeling slightly hysteric. "This isn't real; none of this is fucking real. That arm." He gestured wildly towards the metal appendage. "It's not fucking real, not you or that imposter of a woman."

Edward didn't get a chance to explain himself further because he was looking at Mustangs metal fist and the sound of crunching left him with a surge of pain and then a blissful nothingness.

"He's here, came in around midnight...no... I'm sure he will...I bet...take care."

Roy was talking to someone on the phone and Edward had a good idea who it might be. His body felt older than he remembered; stiff joints and one hell of a migraine to add to his misery. Bastard. Reaching up Edward held a hand to his head. "Fuck." He cursed as the blood rushed to his head. Opening his eyes he stared at the offending male, an odd almost pitying look on his features.

"There's water and two aspirin tablets." Mustang offered.

Edward turned away; he didn't want to be analyzed and dissected. The sun leaked through the closed drapes and he wondered how long he had been out for. The lump on his head was not going to go away and if he wanted some answers Ed figured maybe it was time he played along. Picking up the water he washed down the aspirin and cast another look around the living room in search of some answers as to what was going on.

"Winry's worried about you, said you bolted from the house. Scared her and the kids by the sounds of it." Roy tilted his head to the side. "I'm flattered that you would come all this way Ed, but really a telephone call would have sufficed."

Grimacing Ed sat back down as his empty stomach churned. "I don't remember."

"Last night?" Roy prompted when he didn't elaborate.

"No." Ed lied carefully, "Any of it, you and Riza, Winry and...the kids."

His eyes widened briefly before narrowing back into slits. "Just what do you remember?"

"Living here in Central, working for you." Ed was relieved it didn't sound as ridiculous as it had when he began explaining the night before.

Roy shook his head in disgust, "You better sober up quick Edward."

"I-" He paused at the look Roy was giving him, maybe it was better he stopped speaking altogether.

It was just Winry that greeted him at the train station. Edward knew how much she was forgiving him when her arms looped around his neck, her face buried within his shirt. It was the same forgiveness she had always given spiced with the occasional wrench. It felt honest and real in ways his imagination couldn't reproduce so Edward gave in and let the feeling warm him. The intimacy of the moment made him squirm with repressed thoughts, this was Winry.

"Roy told me he called you out there for business, why didn't you just tell me?" She murmured into his shoulder.

Edward heard the hitch in her voice and felt ashamed for putting it there. "Listen Win..."

She pulled away just enough to hold his head in her hands. "You're not having those dreams again are you?"

Edward didn't know what kind of dreams she was referring to; he thought this whole business was a nightmare. "Let's go home." He offered with the hopes that they could keep moving, there were eyes watching them and Edward didn't want an audience. *Play along and you get to go home.*

It was late by the time they arrived at the house upon the hill. It seemed like an eternity ago that he was alone in his Central apartment; Resembool just a place he visited in his dreams. Ed was startled at the man who was sitting in the living room, his friendly face familiar but aged with the time since he had seen him. Ed knew Pitt still lived in Resembool, but why he was in the house and more importantly why he was looking at Winry so intently was concerning.

"All in bed Winry." Pitt stretched as he offered a kind smile.

Edward moved past him toward the kitchen, keen on distancing himself before he was absorbed into another element of this life he didn't understand. Winry relying on Pitt didn't sit well with him. He pretended to grab a glass of water when he was really listening to every exchange desperate for information.

"Hey, you a'right there Winry? I'll stay if you need me to." He offered in a hushed voice that was still loud enough to hear.

Winry didn't disappoint as she scoffed. "Nothing a wrench won't solve, but thanks again Pitt."

"If you say so. Have a good night then."

Edward couldn't help himself as he watched Pitt give Winry a hug that he thought lasted a bit too long. "Don't let the door hit you." He called out as the figure retreated into the night.

Winry turned towards him standing in the doorway, her eyes blazing. "You have some explaining to do."

"I already told them-" He began feeling exasperated with the lie he had already told.

"No." She interrupted, a defined defiance clearing the way. "You owe me an explanation as to why after almost eight years of marriage and three kids you suddenly seem to think it's okay to just walk out."

Ed swallowed...hard. This was real, in a stomach dropping way that made him falter. "I don't know who they are." He admitted. "I remember the promised day and then the rest is just... not there anymore."

"Its not funny Edward." She hissed. "I was worried!"

"Well fuck Winry, do you see me laughing?"

Her eyes flashed. "Why don't you sleep on the couch until you can remember how to apologize."

And then he remembered where they were. They were that couple at the train station only this time it felt like he was watching her ride away from him as he stood helpless on the platform watching the ass end of a train that wouldn't be coming back.

He turned his nose down to his shirt, he smelled like two days without a bath and it made him feel like shit. This was a nightmare and he wasn't sure what the right thing to do was. A part of him considered following her up the stairs and arguing for a right to sleep next to her while the other part wanted to remain in the right. He was willing to bet she'd have a wrench waiting for him should he try and find her bed tonight. Ignoring the thrill that ran through him he collapsed on the couch, throwing a blanket over his head.

"Is he dead?"

"No, but if he's on the couch it means he *wishes* he was."

"Oh. Why is he sleeping on the couch?"

"Moms mad at him."

Edward opened his eyes, waking up on a couch for the second time in two days. He decided waking up next to a naked Winry was a hell of a lot better than the kinks in his back that made him feel knotted and wretched like an old man.

The small girl, Sara, wrinkled her nose at him. "Ew daddy, you smell like Maes."

Blinking owlishly at the girl Ed just stared. Had he heard her right, did she just say Maes? "Maes Hughes?" He pulled her in, making her look him in the eyes. "Maes Hughes is alive?!"

"Sara, Edward it's time for your chores, leave daddy alone." Winry barked from the stairway.

Sara gave him an odd look before running along at her mother's orders.

This was too much. He braced his head in his hands feeling overwhelmed. He didn't realize Winry was holding him until she kissed him on the cheek. Her fingers lingering on the bruise left on his cheek from Mustangs punch.

Backing away he knew he had hurt her again as she sent him a longing gaze before letting out a sigh. "I thought you put all that behind you. What's going on with you?"

Wasn't that the kicker? Wasn't he in this mess because he couldn't remember what the hell he'd done to get here? Edward didn't want to make her cry, that was a promise he remembered making. "Winry I-"

Winry shook her head no longer meeting his gaze, "Go shower, I'll have breakfast for you when you come down."

After a long shower Ed dressed himself and frowned. Since when had he turned into a farmer? The worn jeans and flannel felt odd, even more so was how well he fit in them. It was as if he had been wearing them for years. Well the pants were a little snug but that probably had something to do with his waistline...since when did he have trouble fitting into something?

"Edward breakfast."

Ed paced for a moment; he needed more clues, something to give him an idea of how he had gotten here. He caught sight of something on the dresser, a photo album.

The first few pictures were real, all pictures he remembered thankfully. Then as the faces began to age he watched as his world morphed into something new and unexpected. There was a picture of Winry, dressed in white and more importantly himself in black, their hands intertwined. His breathing turned ragged as he stared at the look on their faces. Turning another page he touched a photo of Winry, her head in his lap, his hand on her growing stomach. And then came the baby pictures, and more baby pictures. It didn't escape him that the most recent pictures were labeled Maes Elric. Closing the book quickly he held his hands over his mouth and pushed them deep into his hair. There was no running from this, it was real...it was undeniably real.

Forcing himself back together he headed back downstairs. His appetite which had been on hold remerged as he dug into the breakfast spread Winry had cooked up. This he wanted to be real; a home cooked meal in Resembool was something he had been pinning for.

"Good riddance Ed, you know what eating that fast does to you." Winry offered with a raised eyebrow.

Ed managed a shrug before stuffing another muffin in his mouth. "Too good." He managed between mouthfuls.

Winry blushed briefly before turning serious again. "Alright but it's your stomach Ed, and you don't get to complain about not fitting into your clothes."

Hell with it, this was a dream dammit; he was going to enjoy the food. Take out just couldn't compare to Winry's cooking.

"Don't forget to clean out the horses stalls today, Eddy can help. I'm taking Sara and Maes into town to grab a few more ingredients for the festival tomorrow." Winry announced her mind already on to the next thing on her to do list.

"The spring sheep festival?"

Winry examined him closely, "Are you sure that fall didn't just give you a bruise?"

Mustang must have covered for him, "Uh yeah the sheep festival, right."

Winry put a hand to his forehead, "Do you feel woozy; maybe it's a concussion?"

Ed waved away her concerns, "M'fine Winry."

Winry didn't look like she was taking the bait. "Somethings wrong Edward, but if you don't want to tell me I can't help you."

That gaze, the all-knowing look of someone who probably knew him better than he knew himself. "Go, I'll be here when you get back." Edward thought about that phrase and knew it sounded like a lie even to his own ears.

# Fake

## Chapter Summary

Don't forget, October third...

Edward had grown up in Resembool, but the small town didn't have what he needed to bring his brother's body back. When he burned down his childhood home they had decided the past would never keep them from moving forward. But this wasn't the past, couldn't be the future, so it remained an ignorant substitute to what had to be an alternate reality. A parallel to his own reality that had him doubting the very foundation of his memories.

Edward stared at the boy long enough that the kid turned and pouted out his lower lip. *Just like his mother.* The thought whiplashed through his head before he had a chance to chew on it. It was strange to have a miniature version of himself with so many Winry traits that the relation couldn't be denied.

They had been awfully busy to have three children at such a young age.

A piece of dung flew by his face, snapping his attention back to the task at hand. Growling under his breath he gestured his shovel towards Eddy, "Next one that comes near me will be your last boy."

Eddy frowned, a monstrosity manufactured glare consuming his face. "I'm not afraid of you."

Edward thought that was funny. He walked over to him and made sure to stand erect so that the height difference might become more obvious. "You should be."

Eddy gulped, "You can't tell me what to do." He whispered, a fierceness to his voice. "You're not my dad."

"Yeah well in this world I am so for now watch where you throw shit."

Eddy drew back from him. Maybe he realized that his dad was actually gone, and that Edward had no intention of filling that role. He never had the intention of being a father and this boy made the job seem less than desirable.

They didn't speak and that was just fine with him. While he wasn't interested in getting familiar with anything he couldn't deny the sense of building curiosity. The old woman had never been a farmer, but the grounds had been suited for it. Now, the yellow house was the center of a small but fruitful apple orchard, horse barn with two older work horses and three smaller mares.

While Eddy moped on back to the house Edward took the moment to get a better grasp of the situation. Standing up on the hill he made out a small herd of cattle and a lone bull grazing. How could something so different feel so familiar? Looking down at his weathered hands he wondered how they had built this life together. What choices had he made to earn a life like this? An unexpected feeling of pride began to build as he searched the grounds, he was a damn good farmer.

"Apples, horses and cows." He muttered under his breath. "Never thought I'd see the day."

"A little help!"

Edward turned in time to see Winry struggling up the long pathway towards the house, her hands full with the baby and several bags. An unexpected chuckle came out as he watched the little girl try to keep up with her mother, her own bags bouncing dangerously in her tiny arms. Rushing forward he caught himself pulling the bags from their arms before he realized just how natural it all felt. There was something to be said about routine and maybe his past memories were just filling in the blanks.

Sara stayed behind her mother's legs and while Winry might not have noticed, Edward knew his behavior had not been dismissed by everyone. He wondered how long it would be before she picked up on the stranger in her home; the man who wasn't really there. Edward wondered just how long he could play this man before he found it unbearable. Staying in one place, especially this place, had never suited him.

Back in the house he continued to study their relationship, feeling the same curiosity he had always felt at the thrill of the unknown. The baby began to cry and Winry kept on talking to him pausing only to pick up Maes and sit down across the table from Ed. She began to untie the laces holding her top together along the line of her cleavage and suddenly he felt distinctly uncomfortable, covering his mouth to keep from saying something that might get him a wrench to the head.

A knock at the front door thankfully gave him a reason to leave the room. Edward nearly sagged in relief at the sight of his younger brother. "Alphonse." He breathed out, feeling the relief wash over him.

His younger brother surprised him by stepping forward quickly; his hands fisting at the front of his shirt and pulling him in menacingly. "What did you write inside the watch." He hissed.

Edward tried to wriggle out from his brothers hold. "What the hell Al?!"

"I said, *what did you write inside the watch?*" He repeated darkly as he pushed him violently up against the wall.

"Don't forget, October third." He finally breathed out before jerking his brothers hand away.

Alphonse gave him a small shove looking around him towards the sounds of where Winry and the kids was drifting out from the kitchen.

"It is you." His younger brother spit out as if that were worse than what he had originally thought.

"Who else would I be?" He asked feeling indignant with the line of questioning as he straightened his shirt. *They* were all the mad hatters at this tea party.

"Eddy called me, told me what you said to him." Al's expression darkened, "How could you say that to your son? After all our father put us through."

"So you assumed I was a homunculi?" He ventured feeling thoroughly unimpressed.

"It would make this a lot easier to explain."

Edward rolled his tongue around in his mouth deliberating his next words. "Yeah, well this isn't exactly a walk in the park for me either."

Before he could try to explain, a little blonde haired girl came racing into the room, her arms held out towards the sky. "Uncle Al!"

Alphonse brightened at the sound of the voice; the joy lighting up his face as he pushed around Ed to scoop the little girl up into his arms. "Look at how big you are!"

She giggled as he smothered her in kisses. "Stop." She squealed in between bouts of laughter.

Eddy was next only he whispered something into his uncle's ear before retreating into the kitchen. Edward couldn't make out what was said but he knew his brother seemed upset about it.

"Alphonse, this is a surprise." Winry peaked her head out of the kitchen. "Eddy, go grab another place setting."

"Sorry Winry, didn't mean to show up unannounced." He seemed truly apologetic and Edward felt a pang at the way the two of them embraced like long lost siblings. When was the last time the three of them were together?

Edward sulked, he had been greeted with a freaking accusation and a threat.

"How about I get you boys some sweet tea?" She offered.

Al began to protest, but Winry cut him off. "It's no trouble at all; go on outside and I'll bring them out to you."

Al nodded and Edward suddenly had the feeling that Eddy wasn't the only one who had phoned his brother. The thought made him uneasy and he wondered why he should be upset, it wasn't like she was actually his wife.

Once Winry brought them drinks and retreated Alphonse rounded on him. "What happened."

It wasn't a question, but an accusation and Edward was getting tired to trying to explain himself. "You're not going to believe me."

Alphonse raised his eyebrows, "I was a suit of armor for half my life and you think I won't believe what you are about to say? Must be good." He scoffed.

Edward leaned forward, the glass of tea dangling between his legs as he let his elbows rest on his knees. "They aren't my kids."

"Wow, you're right Ed, I don't believe you." He amended looking irritated.

"Just hear me out, okay? I'm not married to Winry, we never even dated! I live in Central City and work for Mustang. So the other day I meet this strange guy and all of the sudden I wake up next to Winry and everyone seems to think we're married with kids."

He stole a glance to gauge his brother's expression but that was a mistake. Alphonse looked angry and worried all at the same time.

"You're telling me you don't remember anything about your time here in Resembool?" He replied dismissively.

Finally, he was getting somewhere. "Nothing, I don't remember any of this."

Alphonse ran his fingers down his face making Edward fully appreciate just how much the two of them had aged. "Have you told Winry you don't remember?"

Edward shot him a look, "You think I'd still be alive if I had?"

"So you just plan on pretending they don't exist?" Alphonse surmised.

Edward heard Winry call them in for dinner so he stood and just shrugged his shoulders. "Until I wake up."

"Brother-" Alphonse started but decided against whatever he was going to say. "Probably shouldn't keep Winry waiting."

Dinner was quiet and even Ed could tell this was unusual. Winry rearranged the contents of the table several times and kept conversation light by talking about Alphonse and his family. Edward was surprised to learn that his brother was married and when he spoke of his daughter he could almost feel the blood run cold in his veins.

This was wrong, this whole narrative was wrong. Alphonse had never married, in fact he was part of the team that was actively tracking down rogue alchemists. He certainly didn't have any children, neither of them did.

"I'm sorry." He stood up and threw his napkin at the table. "I can't, I can't do this anymore."

Winry sucked in a breath, her eyes wide. "Edward?"

Alphonse reached out a hand to stop him, but Ed managed to jerk his body out his reach.

"I need some air." He reiterated and began to walk out before he had to answer their unspoken questions.

It wasn't until he was looking at the small lit up town that he realized just how far he had wandered. By this time the sun was low enough in the sky that most had gone home, but the local tavern lights were on and he needed a drink. Walking in he sat himself at the bar top and appreciated, even though the world had changed, whiskey still tasted the same. The bartender lurked while he drank, watching him with a strange look in his eye. Feeling like he was being babysat he set his empty glass firmly down on the counter and motioned for another.

"Just leave the bottle." He amended when the bartender attempted to fill it.

"Don't think that's a good idea Mr. Elric." The bartender hesitated, his automail hand lingering on the glass.

Of course he would be a customer of Winry. "Thanks for the advice, I'll take that bottle now."

The man shook his head but left the bottle and continued cleaning glasses. Apparently, this version of himself didn't drink that often because it didn't take much to curb his appetite for drowned feelings. Halfway through the bottle he began to thoroughly appreciate his predicament. His brother believed him to be a liar, his made-up family was afraid of him and now he was drunk without a companion to enjoy.

At some point he must have passed out, either that or he had been knocked out because his brother was half dragging, half carrying him out of the tavern.

"Who do ya'think ya are?" He slurred out when his mouth refused to enunciate.

Alphonse either didn't hear him or didn't care because they continued forward even if Edward wanted to stop. They may have hitched a ride or just walked but Edward knew when he was back at the yellow house because he was greeted with a fury that reminded him of reattaching nerves and wrenches.

"Thank you Al, I'll take it from here." Asserted a cold voice.

Edward felt the ground rush up to meet him. He smelled the earth from between the blades of grass as his face sat buried within them.

"Get up."

He groaned in response, refusing to look anywhere but up.

"Are you sure Winry?" Alphonse asked, sounding apprehensive.

"Yes, I can handle him. Thank you for coming Al."

Edward rolled over to his back, laughter not the only thing threatening to spill out. "Stop fightin' over me." He managed.

His brother and Winry exchanged a loaded look. They had always conspired against him; damn peas in a pod.

"I'll be upstairs if you need me." Alphonse replied quickly, though he took his time retreating back to the house.

The blonde-haired woman wasted no time in straddling him with her legs before dropping to her knees, pinning him where he lay. Ed got a close-up view of a ledge of cleavage and wondered if they had ever seemed that big before.

*Slap.*

He must have tried to grab them, fuck he didn't remember that thought turning into an action. He brought a hand up to his cheek, the sting still evident as his brain tried to realign itself. "Damn it woman."

She hauled him up to look him in the eye, "You better start explaining."

Funny that's all he had tried to do, and no one had listened to him. "Can't."

Her eyes narrowed, "*Try.*"

Edward opened his mouth, but had to turn it off to the side as his stomach lurched. Winry sighed and rolled him over to his side. "Idiot."

When most of it had come up he finally managed to speak. "Nnng. Wanna go inside." He mumbled, the taste of bile still on his tongue.

She lifted him back up to face her. Edward couldn't find a shred of sympathy in her expression.

"Give me one good reason."

He thought he could give her five but his mouth still wasn't working that fast. "Its cold out here?"

When Winry laughed it came out as bitter and forced. "Maybe you should have worn a coat."

"Don't wanna." He burped again; maybe he hadn't puked it all out yet.

"No, you do not get to act like a spoiled child Edward. Not when *we* had to drag your ass out of a bar after *you* just up and left in the middle of dinner."

"Gon-be sick." He tried to impress the immediacy of his statement, but it was too late. The hand that clutched his shirt loosened as she pulled away, quickly clambering to her feet. "Ugh." Even in the dark he could see the puke on her arms.

"You're unbelievable."

Using his arms, he started to crawl after her. "Don't go!"

No one had ever looked at him that way. It was a mixture of disappointment, anger, sadness but most of all hurt. Even if this was fake Winry, he still didn't want to see her hurt.

"I told you when you married me, I've done my waiting. Come inside, lay out here... I really don't care what you do."

Just when he thought she might reconsider and take pity on him, his hope dissipated as one by one the lights in the house faded until his only companion was the darkness.

# Forgiveness

## Chapter Summary

I see your nose took a beating today, but it must have addled your brain if you are using words like please.

There was an audible sigh before he felt something nudge him in the side. "You awake yet brother?"

Edward groaned, hoping that would suffice as an answer.

"He has risen." Alphonse stated in a matter of fact manner that made Edward think his appearance must indicate the opposite.

Shielding his eyes from the blinding sun he caught a whiff of something unpleasant. "This place smells." He remarked through a pounding skull.

Alphonse chuckled. "It's you."

"S'not me." He fought back, though it felt weak. "Where's Winry?"

His brother raised an eyebrow looking like it should be obvious. "Its past noon Ed, you definitely missed her."

Edward sat up quickly making his world tip in different directions. He got a glimpse of his clothes and cringed. There was grass stains on his jeans and dried puke on his shirt and in his hair. "Missed her? Where'd she go?"

"They left to visit Pitt's farm down the street."

Ed swallowed, the scratchiness of his throat constricting. "That dumbass has a farm?"

Alphonse didn't hesitate. "You do." He challenged with an heir of defiance.

Funny guy. "When are they coming back?" He reached a hand up towards his brother in an effort to stand up.

Alphonse gave in and pulled him up while feigning disgust as he wrinkled his nose. "I'm assuming she's just taking the kids to see the sheep before the festival. Don't give me that pout Ed, you have some apologizing to do before you go acting all forlorn."

This world was just hell bent on making him the bad guy. "What am I supposed to apologize for again?"

He thought about everything that had happened since he had woken up next to Winry. This life was just too foreign to feel real and apologizing for what he had done felt ridiculous. Anyone else in his shoes would have been just as overwhelmed. *But maybe not as much of an asshole*, his conscious quietly remind him.

That triggered a flare of anger in his brother's eyes that followed up with the very hand that helped him coming full force at his face. If he had seen it coming he might have ducked, but considering he was barely standing under his own volition, he had no choice but to take it.

Holding his nose, he brought his hand back to see red staining his skin. "What the hell Al?"

"Someone has to knock some sense into you. You really don't get it?"

Edward seethed, his jaw clenched tight to avoid the hideous words that lurked under his tongue. "Apparently not."

Alphonse exhaled through his nose as he stared up in the sky for a moment before making eye contact again. "I'm here because we're family Ed and I can't let you self-destruct. I'm here because your son and wife called me in tears. You do realize I haven't heard Winry cry since-" He paused looking uncomfortable for a moment. "Since Charlotte."

"Charlotte?" He ran his tongue over his upper lip, tasting the metallic of blood.

His brothers eyes widened, "You really don't remember anything."

"How is this news? *I told you I don't.*"

Al just stared before taking another deep breath. "We need to get you cleaned up. Come on."

Edward didn't want to listen to his brother because while he felt like shit, there was something in his brother's eyes that told him it was about to get a whole lot worse before it got better. *Might as well get it over with.*

Shower was first, a few cotton balls up his nose to stem the bleeding and an ice pack to ease the throbbing pain. His brother was quiet, sneaking glances at him as if still unsure what he was seeing. Ed couldn't blame him, it was the look he had worn on his face ever since he got there.

Al fed him some leftovers and seemed mollified when he cleaned his plate. "At least that hasn't changed, you still eat like a pig."

The photo album he had stumbled upon the day before slid across the table towards him. "I've already tried that." He mumbled.

"One more time can't hurt."

The beginning was nothing new. He remembered everything up until the train station and then a lightbulb when off. Sitting up straighter he pushed his brothers hand away as he tried to turn to the next page. "Wait." He slid the book back over to Al. "Start here."

His brother explained that was the day Gran got sick and Edward had carried her all the way into town. The old woman had complained the whole way but when the doctor told her she could have died she stopped. Al told him that that night was special because it was the night Winry had told him she loved him. "At least that's how you guys explained it." Al grinned wolfishly, "Although with Pinako staying in town for a week you two had the house all to yourselves."

Edward thought about that day and tried to remember what he had chosen to do instead. Then he remembered, and the thought taunted him cruelly. Pinako had died that day and he had missed Winry's call. Worse, he had missed the funeral too. He swallowed back the shame, staring at the photo of the three of them. Pinako looked sick but happy as she sat in a wheelchair with a pipe sticking out of her mouth, Ed and Winry flanking her sides. "She lived?"

"Yeah." Al smiled, "Tough old bird, held out to see you two get married."

His brother flipped through the wedding pictures, explaining the details he had missed the first time he had seen them. Their wedding had been quite the event, the town of Resembool had nearly folded under the pressure of hosting their guests. President Mustang and the royal family from Xing drew crowds from all over. Al chuckled at the picture of him and Mei in the background speaking about how the wedding was the first time he had found the courage to ask her to dance.

If he had never left on that train...one simple choice had led to all this.

The picture of Winry with one hand on a protruding belly, another working on his automail leg made him smile with a renewed sense of wonder. He knew the younger mechanic Winry, but this side of her, the maternal side was foreign to him. When they were finished he closed the book and sat still, letting each wave of emotion wash over him like the sea. Then a question finally came to his lips. "What happened to Winry's shop in Rush Valley? Why did I leave work in Central?"

"Charlotte." Al said it like the name should mean something to him.

"Charlotte?" He skimmed through the pages of the photo album but there wasn't anyone named Charlotte.

"You won't find her in there." Al sighed, "You feeling better?"

Edward wasn't sure what he was feeling anymore. "Good enough I suppose. But you still haven't answered me, who is Charlotte?"

"Let's go for a walk, I'll explain on the way."

True to his word Al took him for a walk, but he remained tight lipped. Ed figured out where they were going and decided maybe it was better they didn't talk. When they arrived at the cemetery Ed thought about how long it had been since he had been there at all. Hell, he couldn't even remember the last time he had visited Resembool. While he knew instantly

whose graves he was looking at, it startled him to find a smaller, lighter stone that now stood between the two set of family graves. *That* was new.

The name Charlotte Elric was carved out on the fresh headstone. He swallowed hard as the dates matched one another.

Images, each like an old photograph began to flicker across his mind.

*Winry was slumped on the bathroom floor; her nightgown stained with blood. "Somethings wrong." She whispered, the panic and fear keeping her frozen to the floor.*

Ed snapped his head up, his eyes wide. What the hell was that? Was he actually remembering something? No. His chest hurt as the Winry in his mind sobbed so loudly he could hear her heart breaking. "She miscarried?"

"Almost broke you." Said Al calmly. "You didn't talk to anyone for a long time. It was Winry that saved you, pulled you back from the dark, like she always does."

When Edward just stared his brother cleared his throat. "It was before you two got married, you were living in Rush Valley at the time. Winry wanted her headstone here and when you came back...you couldn't bear to leave her." Al put his hand on Ed's shoulder.

Ed didn't know if he should say something, that alone made him feel low and ugly.

"After all that they-we decided to try to have a family?" He finally managed to ask.

"You quit commuting into the city and stayed with Pinako, started the farm together. As for the kids? Your son came along after a few years and then there was Sara and now Maes. You both say the country and fresh air reminded you to slow down and appreciate the little things."

He was a good man. In this life he was a family man, a man who loved his wife and children.

*Why would fate rip that away from this family? Even worse, why would they give it to him?*

Edward thought about the look on Winry's face when he had come home on the train. He thought about how she doted on the three children and he wondered how he had never seen it before.

"What is happening to me?"

Al squeezed his shoulder, "Don't mess up the best thing in your life just because you're a little unsure of who you are. Like I said before, you need to apologize Ed. This time you've really hurt her."

The memory of Winry on the floor haunted him. It felt so unlike his other memories that it had to be real; what kind of dream would make him see something like that? "Let's go home."

"Think that's a good start."

Ed found it was easier to just let his brother talk while they waited for Winry and the kids to get home. The more he talked the more pieces began to fit together in his life even if they didn't come with memories like Charlotte had, they still came.

When they came in the children were easily distracted by Al and once Winry had Maes asleep he took his chance.

"Winry."

She shut the door to the nursery gently before facing him.

"Can we talk?"

She looked tired, "Its been a long day Edward."

He noticed she used his full name and thought it had to be intentional, she was mad.

"Please."

Her eyes widened, "I see your nose took a beating today, but it must have addled your brain if you are using words like *please*."

"I'm sorry Winry... for everything."

"Are you Edward? Or are you just saying that so I won't make you sleep on the couch again?"

Edward stood his ground, "Please Winry."

"Alright, but you've got only a few minutes, I'm exhausted. Unlike you I actually got up early today and took care of three children after taking care of a drunk asshole last night."

They headed downstairs and Al vacated the living room without being asked. Edward thought his brother looked like an animal sensing a coming storm.

"I want to explain, but first you need to promise me that you'll listen to everything."

Winry crossed her arms over her chest, making her boobs sit up and Edward twitched with a different type of anxiety.

"Fine."

"We were young, you had your shop in Rush Valley and I was offered an independent detective job with the military. I didn't stay when you asked me to. I got on a train and left to take the job in Central. I could have commuted to you in Rush Valley, but I didn't. I got so caught up that when I realized what I had missed it just felt like I was too late."

"What are you talking-"

"You promised." Ed gave her a stern look.

Winry rolled her eyes and waved him on with her hand.

"In my timeline I've already lost you." He reached out tentatively, brushing a strand of her hair behind her ear. "I've never known a life where you and I end up together like this."

She opened her mouth but shut it firmly at his glare.

"I don't know this world or who I am anymore." He sat closer to her on the couch, his thigh now resting next to hers. His heart was racing. "Winry I don't remember any of this...so why do I remember Charlotte?"

Winry sucked in a deep breath, her hands clenching. Ed reached out and cupped her face in his hand. "I remember her. I can still feel it. If I'm not from this timeline, how can I feel something that never happened?"

Winry looked down, her shoulders slumped. She suddenly looked up, her eyes searching, "Sometimes I don't think she was real."

Edward wrapped her in his arms. "She was real to me."

When Winry kissed him he could feel thousands of kisses like echoes in the wind. The way they wrapped around one another felt like a lifetime of being close in ways his imagination could never cook up.

"Aren't you exhausted?" He murmured into her neck feeling as though he were taking advantage of something.

"No." She was fierce. "Just shut up and kiss me."

They were quiet as they snuck upstairs and when she closed the door with a switch of the lock he realized just how stupid he had been. He took his time unzipping her dress because his hands had begun to shake. She was Winry and despite everything he was kissing the parts of her skin he had never laid eyes on before. When he had her on the bed he just stared.

"You're beautiful."

She was breathless. Ed paused her probing hands refusing to let this piece of information die. "You were always pretty Win, but this..."

Winry's cheeks were pink. "How can you do that?"

"Do what?" He couldn't take his eyes off of her, even if he wanted to.

"Look at me like you haven't looked at me for the last ten years."

He had never laid a hand on Winry, never felt the curves of her body or explored the taste of her mouth. Maybe he had never properly seen his childhood friend until this very moment. How could he not stare?

Maybe she didn't need an answer because when she kissed him he knew they wouldn't be doing anymore talking. With every touch she was forgiving him for more sins than she knew.



# Parallel

## Chapter Summary

He leaned his head back and let out a chuckle. His wife. The sentiment still felt awfully strange, but he couldn't deny his body had felt oddly at ease after spending the night with Winry. It was like she had rewired every nerve in his body, he had never felt so alive.

"Pack your bag."

Winry looked skeptical; hands placed on her hips in contemplation.

"It would help if you told me where we are going."

"*Then* it wouldn't be a surprise." Edward replied lamely.

Twisted memories and feelings aside, after spending the night with Winry in his arms, he had decided to make some changes. Edward wanted to experiment with his life in this world. A part of that experiment required him to have Winry all to himself and that's exactly what he was doing.

Winry was staring at her open suitcase without adding a single garment. "Ed, did you forget we have kids again?"

Edward puffed up his chest, grinning. "I believe Mrs. Hughes is more than qualified to babysit."

"Mrs. Hughes?" Winry brightened up, "She's here?!"

Ed nudged her out the bedroom, "Go see for yourself."

Winry darted out of the room and down the stairs. Ed listened as his wife reunited with her favorite Central resident.

Wait.

He leaned his head back and let out a chuckle. *His wife*. The sentiment still felt awfully strange, but he couldn't deny his body had felt oddly at ease after spending the night with Winry. It was like she had rewired every nerve in his body, he had never felt so alive.

"Elicia!"

Ed shook his head as Winry squealed in delight. It had been worth it to leave out that both Hughes women were there.

“So, its settled.” Gracia reached over and squeezed Winry’s hand. “You and Edward are going to have a wonderful time in Central.”

Winry looked humbled. “Are you sure? I feel like you watching the kids and letting us use your home for the weekend is awfully one sided.”

Elicia laughed, “Are you kidding? A weekend in the country is just what I need to get away from exams!”

“That still doesn’t explain the kids’ part, you have met our children, right?”

Gracia smiled. “Maes and I use to talk about having a big family, you will indulge an older woman in her fantasies, now won’t you?”

Winry sighed happily, “Has anyone ever told you you’re a saint Mrs. Hughes?”

“Oh, I hear it from time to time. Now you two better finish your packing before you miss your train!”

Just as he was about to head out Ed felt someone’s hand at his elbow. Looking over his shoulder he raised his eyebrows at Gracia’s halting grip.

“I’m doing this for her.”

Ed felt humbled by the expression on her face. He thought Gracia had been on his side, “Winry?”

Her lips pursed, “Word travels fast in Central Edward and Roy is an open book with a few drinks in him. I agreed because you said it was for Winry, now don’t make me regret my choice.”

“She’s in good hands.” He promised, though he wasn’t sure he could ever admit that was one promise he shouldn’t be making.

“A vacation.” Winry sighed happily as they dropped their suitcases in the well-kept town home. “Why don’t we do this more often?”

“We don’t get out much, do we?”

Winry took his response as sarcasm and laughed instead of hearing the real question he was posing. The thought sat heavy in his stomach, had he really stopped traveling altogether?

“What should we do first?”

While he might have been a boring farmer who had never indulged his wife to the finer things in life, that was about to change.

“I think I have an idea.”

Winry rolled her eyes but squealed in delight as he scooped her up in his arms. Without the fear of children in the next room he decided to thoroughly explore just how much he could please his wife. By the way she said his name he figured he was doing just fine.

The next day they explored downtown, walking through the main park, window shopping, even if it was for tools, he found he didn't mind. Edward indulged her every whim, feeling content as she laced her hand through his as if they had been doing it for years.

While the countryside might be calmer, he enjoyed that in the city it could be crowded but people minded their own business. He didn't have to worry about the bar tender tattling on him or the neighbor questioning his previous nights escapades. When women left his apartment in the early morning no one paid him any mind.

Edward frowned as Winry stopped to pet a couple's dog as it came up to sniff at her.

*Who was I?*

Strange, those memories were starting to feel foreign. Those women had called him the Fullmetal alchemist and he didn't miss when they recoiled at his automail. Did he ever believe there was a future there or had he just been lonely?

Winry's laugh echoed around him and he stopped thinking long enough to enjoy the sound. She was real in this world, *they* were real.

When the day grew late, he treated her to the best Xingese restaurant outside the country itself. The sushi there was pricey, but he waved off Winry's concerns, he had always had more than enough money. Picking the most expensive wine they had offered he sat up tall. This was how he had wanted to treat her.

When the bottle came Winry stared at him, her mouth agape. “Edward, are you nuts?!”

“What?” For a moment he wondered if he had ever seen her drink. Gran had always been a drinker, *maybe he should have ordered some moonshine instead.*

Winry stared at the bottle as if the sight of it offended her.

“That costs more than we make in a month!”

Edward shrugged, “I doubt that.”

Winry shook her head, “Between you and your mini me, we barely can afford to keep food in the fridge.”

“Well.” He grabbed her hand from across the table thinking this was a good time to tell her the news he had been holding off on. “I was thinking, why don't we move here? I can get a job with Central that pays way better than taking on apprentices and farming.”

The good feeling that had surrounded them suddenly felt tainted as his wife slowly pulled her hand away. “What are you talking about Ed?”

Why was she looking at him like that? Didn’t she want to move out of that country, backwoods town?

“Win, I’m talking about us starting fresh here, in Central.”

“Fresh? We can’t just up and move out of nowhere. What about my customers, what about the kids?”

That argument was void in his mind.

“You can have customers anywhere and what about the kids? They have schools here too.”

He was good at making money in the city and he was positive this was the best of both worlds.

Winry absently rubbed her fingers against her temples. “It’s home.”

Edward felt heat rise into his cheeks. “That house is falling apart. Look around you, Resembool doesn’t even come close to all the city has to offer.”

“What makes you think I’m not happy in Resembool?”

Edward scoffed. “We live in a crumbling home on a farm that honestly I have no idea how to take care of. You’re stuck at home with three kids making automail like some kind of slave into the night.”

There was fire in her eyes and suddenly he felt like cowering away.

Her words were abrupt, each one laced with a venom only Winry could emit while still sitting calmly.

“When did we stop measuring up to you?”

Oh shit, those were tears budding in her eyes and he couldn’t differentiate if they were angry or just plain sad. This was not how he had envisioned the night going.

“I didn’t say that.”

Winry chewed on her lower lip. “This isn’t about moving to the city Edward. This is about you and your damn wanderlust. I thought that after all this time you were done with all that.”

Feeling agitated by the insinuation, Edward poured himself a glass of the stupid wine that had turned their night into another argument.

“Of course. Drink away Edward.” She stood up throwing her napkin on the table. “That way you can go back to pretending we don’t exist in your world.”

“That’s the thing, you don’t exist in my world.”

Winry was already halfway down the block by the time he managed to throw some cash at the waiter and race after her.

“Winry!”

Turning over her shoulder she paused and he wondered why everything in this world crumbled in his hands. Maybe she was better without him.

But she was waiting and that meant he owed her, again.

“Just tell me what to do.”

Winry looked confused, “What?”

Ed threw his hands up, feeling like he would always be lost. “Just tell me and I’ll do it. I’m sick of trying to guess how to make this right and fucking it up.”

“You still act like you’re some kind of alien to all this. Like we’re all supposed to entertain this midlife crisis.”

“What do you think all this was for?” He gestured back towards the restaurant.

“I’m not trying to argue anymore, that’s the point Edward. Move to Central, take a job far, far away and keep following whatever voice is calling you. And I will follow my own, back home where it’s always been.”

“Winry?”

She took a shuddering breath. “You leave now and we don’t speak again. You don’t get to reappear like Hohenheim, when it’s convenient. You disappear for good.”

Rushing forward he grabbed her arms tightly his heart hammering in his chest.

As if the touch had turned to electricity he was jolted to another place entirely. He was standing on the bottom step of a locomotive, halfway on staring at a much younger version of Winry.

*"Edward, I'm asking you to stay." Her voice hitched on the last word.*

*He answered without much thought. "I've already stayed too long."*

*Then he turned his back on her and wondered if he would be able to sleep on the ride to Central.*

“What was that?”

Edward blinked and stared back into blue eyes. “You saw it too?”

“I don’t understand.” Her head shook back and forth as if trying to physically remove the vision from her head. “You stayed, when I asked, you stayed...”

A few pedestrians gave them a suspicious look before hurrying by.

“Come on, this isn’t the place for this.”

They didn’t talk after that; he led her back to Gracia’s apartment and wondered why the memories were surfacing.

“Is that what its been like for you; all this time?”

He took his shoes off and sat down heavily on the couch, motioning for her to join him. “At first I didn’t recognize any of this, but the more time I spend here, the more I start to catch glimpses.”

Winry narrowed her eyes in suspicion, refusing to sit next to him. “So why am I seeing it?”

“I don’t think I have much time left here.” He guessed with a shrug.

With a sigh Winry finally flopped next to him, “Do you want to go back?”

*Do I want to go back?*

He wished he could back and just make this choice, make the choice to be here and live this life in its entirety. For now, all he had were bits and pieces of both worlds, and if Winry was starting to see what he had done it wouldn’t be long before he ruined this life for good

His wife suddenly leaned forward, her forehead resting against his. “Don’t answer that.”

Her hands snaked around his neck as she pressed her lips against his.

“Winry...” He managed to protest softly.

“No.” Her breathing was becoming labored, “It’s not 85%.”

“85%?”

“I promised you my whole life. So, if we only have this, if you are going to leave us, then I want it all. I don’t want to argue over some stupid wine or job.”

Edward knew it was coming, even across worlds he could tell when Winry was going to cry.

Pulling her into his embrace they didn’t stay on the couch long before heading upstairs. Brushing the hair on the top of her head, he kept her in the crook of his arm, snuggling her close before placing a kiss on the crown of her head.

He waited until her breathing slowed and the sleep set in before he whispered into the dark.

“I don’t deserve you.”

Truth answered as if it weren't a rhetorical question. "No, you don't."

# Times Up

## Chapter Summary

“No.” He shook her gently, “Don’t fall asleep.”

“Mmm...just shutting my eyes, not falling asleep.” She trailed off.

Ed held her close, “Stay with me.”

“I’m right here.” She wriggled against him. “Just closing my eyes.”

Somewhere in the room a clock ticked the time away, but Edward fought the heaviness in his eyes and the warmth spreading through his body as the night tried to pull him under. He put his chin on Winry’s shoulder and felt his chest ache as he held her close.

Sounds of a bustling city woke him up earlier than he would have liked, but they had an early train and Winry seemed a bit anxious to get back to the kids. Winry either didn’t remember their conversation from the night before or was actively trying to pretend it never happened. Either way Edward didn’t mind the escape. They packed and cleaned the place up before heading home.

Gracia seemed pleased with Winry’s happy demeanor and gave him a bone crushing hug in return.

“You and those boys are like a spinning compass, sometimes you just have to trust due north and follow the path. Or if you want to be truly happy just listen to your wife and that should guide you down the right path.”

Winry gave him a sideways smile, her eavesdropping evident.

“Yeah, she does like to be right.” He answered with a grin.

After saying their goodbyes Edward carried their bags to the waiting truck outside that would take them to the station. With a few promises to come and visit again he began to walk back up the house when suddenly everything went deadly quiet.

The hair raised on his arms as the eerily calm settled around him. Taking a cautious step forward he opened the gate leading back up to the yellow house.

Standing at the bottom of the steps, as if he had woken from a slumber, was the homeless man from the city.

“It is time.”

Edward froze, the words sinking in like a knife cutting through his heart, and then the rage took over. This was truth and he had beat it before. Pointing his finger at the old man he laced his words with menace.

“I’m not going back.”

“You’re not allowed to stay here.” The figure’s milky eyes were emotionless.

“Like hell I can’t! This is my family.” He asserted as powerfully as he could, pointing towards the house. He half expected Winry to peak her head out and yell at him for making a ruckus.

“You never had this family.” The man’s face began to change shapes, its features beginning to fade to white. The figure in front of him was now illuminated by the bright white of a place Edward knew too well. Truth.

Looking around into the emptiness he began to panic.

No...he never even had a chance to say goodbye.

“You don’t get to play with people’s lives like this.” He half choked out; half pled.

Truth just stared back with a face full of teeth. “This was always temporary.”

“No.” Edward began to back away, the scenery around him beginning to resemble home again. “No.” He repeated before turning on his heel and racing back towards the house.

Once inside Edward slammed the door shut behind him, nearly sagging in relief at the sight of Winry sitting on the couch with Sara and Eddy cuddled, a book in her lap. *They were still there.*

He joined them, pulling Sara onto his lap, inhaling the smell of lavender from her hair.

“Edward?” Winry looked up from the book. “What’s wrong? Did Gracia and Elicia make it off okay?”

He shook his head, trying to fight down the lump that had risen in his throat. “Yes, nothing to worry about.”

She gave him an odd smile before getting back to the book. When the kids started to doze Winry made to get up, but he stopped her.

“I’ll do it.” He nearly begged as he picked up Sara in his arms and led Eddy up the stairs.

Sara could barely keep her eyelids open as he tucked her in, kissing her on the forehead.

“You’re back.” She smiled.

“I’m back.” He answered feeling so much love for his little girl he thought he might burst. The memories felt good, the struggle between what was his old life and his new finally at peace.

“I like you better than alien daddy.”

“Do you now?” His smile wavered.

“Mmmhmm. I Love you daddy.” She mumbled into her teddy bear before snuggling in.

Edward thought about those words, tasted them in his mouth before realizing how true they were. “I love you Sara.”

As the oldest, Edward knew the boy was going to be the hardest and it didn’t escape him that their initial contact had not been ideal. Eddy had his back to the door, the covers pulled up to his chin.

Placing his palm on his sons head he tried to smooth down the unruly strands.

“Hey buddy, you still awake?”

Eddy turned over; his eyes holding back sleep.

“You’ve done a good job taking care of your mom and sister.”

Eddy looked a little leery. “Don’t forget Maes.”

“Yeah.” He thought about meeting him for the first time but for once those memories were laced with new ones, ones of being in a hospital or hearing his first cries and feeling an immense relief. These were his children; this was his son and the thought of leaving was so gut wrenching he resisted the urge to wrap them up in his arms and refuse to let go. “Maes too.”

“Did you get rid of that impostor?” Eddy asked, his tone belying his youthful optimism.

“Yeah.” Edward couldn’t explain because there was now a lump rising in his throat.

“Okay, good.”

“Will you promise to always look after them for me?”

Eddy answered with a yawn and snuggled back under the covers.

“Right, thanks buddy. Love you.”

Once his son was asleep, he reluctantly tucked him in, switching off the light and closing off his heart. Peering into the nursery he watched the youngest Elric’s chest rise up and down. Sitting in the rocking chair he let it hit him fully.

*He would never see these children grow up.*

With his head in his hands he cried for all the things that could have been and what *should have been*.

Exhausted and depressed he finally walked into the bedroom where Winry was already lying down. Thankfully she was distracted by the automail blueprints in her hands, the small lamp

on the bedside table keeping her the focal point of the room. He crossed the room quickly, pulling the papers out her hands and letting them fall to the ground.

“What in the world-? “

He climbed on the bed, effectively cutting off any further protest with a kiss. If he only had one night left, he was going to make it count.

“Make me remember-” he whispered into her ear, “-everything.”

When they were officially spent and he had nothing left to give, he held her close, refusing to let her go.

Winry’s eyes began to flutter as she let out a content sigh.

“No.” He shook her gently, “Don’t fall asleep.”

“Mmm...just shutting my eyes, not falling asleep.” She trailed off.

Ed held her close, “Stay with me.”

“I’m right here.” She wriggled against him. “Just closing my eyes.”

Somewhere in the room a clock ticked the time away, but Edward fought the heaviness in his eyes and the warmth spreading through his body as the night tried to pull him under. He put his chin on Winry’s shoulder and felt his chest ache as he held her close.

“Stay with me.”

But she was already asleep and when his eyelids finally closed Edward prayed for just one more day.

An alarm went off somewhere and without opening his eyes he slammed his fist at the offending object. The noise stopped, but his eyes flew open. Sitting up quickly he looked around the room, the panic beginning to build. Jumping out of his bed he stormed over to the window and threw open the curtains to reveal the city street below. His heart sank.

“No.”

Looking around the apartment he drove a hand through his hair, pulling at the fibers. *No.*

It was late, but he needed something better than that. He needed to know. Picking up the phone he requested the operator connect him to the one person who might be able to sort him out.

“We are being invaded.” The voice answered quickly.

Thrown off, Edward just frowned at his brother’s odd choice of greeting. “Huh?”

“It’s the only acceptable reason why you would call me at this hour.”

“Wanna bet?”

Alphonse seemed reluctant, but he cleared his throat. “Okay, what couldn’t wait ‘til morning?”

“Tell me the truth.” He asked regretting the words as they came out.

“You’re going to need to be a bit more specific.” Al grumbled in response.

“Winry.”

That seemed to get his brothers attention because the line went quiet before there was an audible sigh. “Brother...”

“No, I need you to tell me about her.”

“Are you taking those pills again?”

“What?” Edward frowned, that had only been one night. He should have never told his brother. “No, I haven’t taken anything.”

“Then you’re going to need to explain to me why you are calling me in the middle of the night to talk to the one person you know neither of us has spoken to since Grans funeral.”

That was it. He knew exactly who he was now. “So, she really is gone then.”

“Gran?”

Edward slide down the wall until he was on the floor. “No, Winry.”

Alphonse sounded hurt. “Yeah, she’s no longer in our life, you made sure of that.”

“This is all my fault. You were happy, you know that?”

His younger brother took a moment to respond. “What makes you think I’m not happy?”

Edward heard the hollowness in his answer and realized that his brother in this lifetime had chosen to be alone. He had chosen to follow his path because he had dragged him down it. What if Al could see his life with Mei? What if he could see how happy being an uncle had made him? Instead he was alone, wandering the world looking for answers Edward had forced him to find.

“Winry was the catalyst.” All along that hollowness, that wanderlust and had been an excuse to ignore the way his world revolved around her, each time almost colliding but instead running parallel into this empty life.

“Sorry for waking you.”

Alphonse sounded like he might protest, but Ed had already placed the receiver down.

What if truth was just outside? What if he was still masquerading as a homeless man in the streets? With a renewed sense of purpose, he dressed himself and headed out into the night.

What was he suppose to do with these ghosts in his mind, the night taunting him with several faces but none of them offering what he was looking for? It wasn't until he was at the train station that he knew what he had to do. Take me back, he pled like a dying mantra inside his head.

"One-way ticket to Resembool." He requested, almost throwing his money at the train attendant.

"One way?" The attendant asked hesitantly, her eyes suggesting his empty hands might be an odd sight at a train station.

"Any luggage?" She prompted.

"No."

"Well, alright then, looks like you'll be on the last train out for the night. One-way ticket to Resembool, leaves in just a few minutes."

By the time the train pulled into the Resembool station it was early morning and only a few people disembarked with him.

Ed was fortunate enough to bum a ride and was able to somehow convince them to go out of their way to drop him off at the bottom of the hill near the yellow house.

The old farmer looked at his automail leg and nodded his head, "Awfully early in the morning, you must be here to see Miss Rockbell."

"Yes." He breathed out in a rush, anxious to see her face.

It was there and that alone prompted him to keep going despite the obvious absence of an apple orchard, farm, or really any trace of what he thought might have been home. But he hadn't come this far to let that stop him. As he walked up the path and prayed for tiny footsteps and a family waiting for him to come home.

# Merge

## Chapter Summary

“Whatever guilt trip you’re on Edward, you can check my name off your list now. I forgave you a long time ago. I don’t know why you came all this way to stir up the past, but you can go back to your life in Central now.”

“You weren’t just some name on a list Winry.” He fired back, but the air felt stagnant, this was going nowhere.

Reaching for the door handle he paused, this wasn't his home. Bringing his fist back he rapped on the door several times and waited. When there was no movement he began to pound on the door, the panic starting to set in. Was she not here anymore?

A light came on, and suddenly there was figure approaching the door. He wasn't sure who was more shocked when she opened the door, him or her.

“Edward? What are you doing here?”

The confusion on Winry’s face began to morph into horror, a hand flying to her mouth. “Oh god, is it Al?”

“No.” Edward couldn’t keep the grin off his face. It just felt so damn good to see her standing there. She was real, she existed in this world too. “I came here for you.”

Winry ran a hand through her hair before letting it drop down to hold onto her neck. She inhaled and Edward found himself suddenly dreading what must be formulating behind those lips. Why didn’t she look happy to see him?

“I don’t understand.” She looked over her shoulder, frowned and stepped out on to the porch shutting the door behind her. “What do you mean you came here for me?”

He felt distinctly sheepish and hopelessly pubescent as he struggled to get it out. “Yeah, I know, I should have called but-“

“But what Ed?” She barked out a humorless laugh, “I haven’t seen you in years. What is this?” Her eyes narrowed and she wrapped her arms tightly around her stomach. “If you need repairs on your leg, you’re going to have to schedule an appointment like everyone else. *Especially since the mechanic you’ve been using is a hack. I’ll probably have to start from scratch.*”

She looked annoyed and flustered, but Edward didn’t let it deter him. He was just happy she was there, that she was *real*.

“Winry, I’m not here for automail.”

The blonde woman rolled her eyes, “Right, so then what other catastrophe has brought you to my doorstep?”

Edward suddenly wondered if she would ever forgive him for taking away the chance of being surrounded by a family.

“I thought I should be the one to tell you.” He shifted awkwardly for a moment before meeting her glare. He couldn’t live with ghosts of her playing through his mind. He needed to keep it alive, because if those moments erased, he wasn’t sure he could live with that.

“I love you.”

Winry’s mouth dropped open before shutting with a slow shake of her head. “Edward.”

He could feel his face heat up, the Winry in the other universe had needed those words. But this Winry looked infinitely disappointed as if she neither believed nor needed to hear it.

“What are you doing?” She whispered.

“I know this is- this is crazy. But I love you. Maybe I just couldn’t picture what our life would be like because we were always off in different directions. When you asked me to stay, I thought we had so much time and then suddenly we were so far away and time was everything. But I’m here now and I don’t want to pretend that I don’t feel this way anymore.”

A vein flared along her jaw as she clenched her teeth together and Edward knew there were stores of rage under the surface.

*“I wish you would pretend.”*

“You don’t mean that Winry.” He searched those eyes for a hint, a sign, anything to justify how this woman might still love him.

“I do.” She pushed him back from her, a familiar anger casting her in red. “Why can’t you just let me remember you when it was good?”

“When it was good?”

“Yes.”

Winry looked ready to punch him or cry, Edward couldn’t decide. But Winry never backed down from a fight and maybe this would be the only way to reach her.

Edward tried to step closer, but she took one step back.

“Winry...”

“I asked you to stay and you left. You made your choice Edward. You don’t get to come back here years later and pick up where you left off. I’ve moved on and so have you.”

When he didn't answer, she seemed to bend.

"Please Edward, don't do this. Let me remember you as the boy who stopped me from shooting that gun and the hero who saved the world, *not the boy who broke my heart.*"

Feeling irrational and desperate he thought of her face while she slept and how she mewed when he kissed her the right way. Edward grabbed Winry's arm and pulled her forward so that their lips were pressed against one another.

That was quickly followed by a slap and as he began to rub a hand against his sore cheek, he realized she was holding back tears.

"Whatever guilt trip you're on Edward, you can check my name off your list now. I forgave you a long time ago. I don't know why you came all this way to stir up the past, but you can go back to your life in Central now."

"You weren't just some name on a list Winry." He fired back, but the air felt stagnant, this was going nowhere.

"Winry." He pleaded again.

She shook her head again and backed into the house, closing the door in her wake.

*What am I doing? I'm losing her. I'm losing her all over again.*

Edward thought of this Winry, his Winry, and decided this world would crush them both before it was done.

Feeling a hell of a lot braver than he should, he took a deep breath and stepped forward, opening the door that had just been shut in his face.

There was probably wrench waiting for him, but even that didn't sound so bad. There was no turning around and he knew he wouldn't get another chance like this.

"Edward Elric what do you think you are doing?!"

Walking over to the nearest chair he sat himself down and crossed his arms over his chest. If she was going to scream at him, he might as well be sitting for it.

Carefully she sat herself opposite him in the living room and placed her hands on her thighs in a rigid fashion. "Well?"

"I'm, not leaving."

*Not this time.*

Winry sighed, looking less angry and more exhausted. "Fine."

Standing up she threw a throw blanket at the couch and pointed. "You can sleep there if you want, it's too early to fight."

He wanted to tell her about how beautiful their children were or how happy they could make each other. Neither seemed real when she was giving him that look and he decided it was best to wait.

Before she got up to head upstairs, he took one more risk, grabbing her wrist to halt her movement.

“Charlotte?”

It had been the catalyst for him in the other world, he had to know if that name meant anything.

Winry stared at his hand on her wrist before meeting his eyes, her own still red with tears. Slowly she unhooked his hand and shook her head.

“Whatever brought you here, whoever it is your looking for, it’s not me Edward.”

Without another word she headed upstairs.

# Real

## Chapter Summary

Picking up the pencil she made a mark on the original timeline. “But we’re here Edward. We’re not married, we don’t have kids and Mei and Alphonse are worlds apart.”

“I know.” He pulled her up to her feet. “But why can’t it be like that?”

The smell of coffee wafted through the air. Edward drew the blanket back from over his eyes, surprised to find he had drifted off to sleep. Sitting up he took a moment to look around the living room and hated the quiet of the house.

She had her back to him when he first entered the kitchen, but Edward didn’t shy away, he took her lack of yelling as a peace offering and quietly took a seat at the table.

Her hair was braided, the long plait sitting between her shoulder blades. The Winry of this world was leaner, as if she had forgotten to eat or take good care of herself. He wondered if he too had that same look. Without someone to tell her when to quit he wondered how many sleepless nights she spent working on automail or fretting over the things she wished she could change. Or maybe it was just him who never slept well.

Winry was still for a moment before her hand reached up and grabbed a second mug from the cabinet. She filled each one before finally turning his way. Edward gave her a smile because if she was offering him a cup, that felt like an olive branch of sorts.

She returned his smile reluctantly before joining him. “I’m sorry I yelled at you.”

Edward nearly choked on his first sip. Wiping his mouth, he swallowed the rest before attempting to speak.

“You didn’t say anything that wasn’t completely deserved.”

“You just caught me off guard is all.” She tapped her finger against the coffee mug before taking a sip.

“I know, but if you had seen...”

Edward froze as his words died in his throat, what was he getting at? She hadn’t seen, she wouldn’t know.

“Edward?” Winry reached forward, her hand resting on his, “What has you so spooked?”

“Why haven’t you hit me with your wrench yet?” He answered stupidly, still confused at her calm demeanor.

Winry smirked, shrugging her shoulder before taking away her hand. “You know some of us grew out of our violent phases, but I always keep one around in case someone needs some sense knocked into them.”

Sitting back in her chair she smiled at him, “I guess its good to see you.”

Edward suddenly noticed the apples in the sink and the pie tin on the counter. “Getting ready to make an apple pie?”

Winry narrowed her eyes, “Maybe, depends on how well you explain yourself this time. So, I’m here, I’m listening, what happened?”

Edward looked around again, “Do you have paper and something to write with?”

The woman in front of him laughed but got to her feet anyways. “Okay alchemy geek.”

Once he had a paper and pencil, he began to draw a timeline. “Here.” He pointed to the train station date. “When we said goodbye.”

Winry scoffed, “So far you’re doing stellar Edward.”

“No.” He diverged the timeline. “I didn’t go. I stayed.”

The second timeline ran parallel, Winry’s eyes still searching with each new notch on its length.

When he told of Gran, she sat up straighter, but when he started to tell her about Charlotte and the beautiful headstone that sat between her grandparents, she put her coffee down and just stared.

“Al transmuted the torn fabric of your mothers veil back together; you wore it at our wedding. You were the most beautiful bride.” He continued to draw the second timeline out ignoring the way she stared at him. “You insisted on naming our first child after me, but it got sort of confusing so we like to call him Eddy and he is the biggest pain in the ass, just like me. Then, because we can’t keep our hands to ourselves, we had Sara and finally Maes.”

Winry finally reached out and touched the paper, like it might tell her the truth more than he had.

“Al reunited with Mei at our wedding and they have started their own family. We live here in Resembool, in this house and I guess I’m okay at farming.”

When he finally put the pencil down, he reached out and grabbed her hand. “It felt so real. I was happy, we were happy.”

“How did you, how did you see all this?” She asked quietly, her hand pulling away to examine the paper closer.

“Truth, it showed me what I gave up.”

Picking up the pencil she made a mark on the original timeline. “But we’re here Edward. We’re not married, we don’t have kids and Mei and Alphonse are worlds apart.”

“I know.”

He pulled her up to her feet. “But why can’t it be like that?”

Edward rubbed her left hand, hoping the lack of a ring was enough to insert him back into her life.

Pushing a stray hair from her face, he cupped her cheek, wishing he could have loved her like this all along. “Come back to me.” He pulled her closer, “I’m finally home.”

They were close enough now that he could feel her heart beat in her chest, her breath on his face.

Her lips began to tremble, the walls slowly breaking. “How do I know this is real?”

Edward took that as encouragement and pulled her in, pressing his lips hard against hers, digging his hands through her hair.

# Linear

## Chapter Summary

Winry wondered if they had always hidden so much of themselves from one another.

Everyone always has the same questions, most of which she poses a clever or biting response. It must be awfully lonely up on that hill, what happened to those Elric boys, why don't you settle down, and are you ever going back to Rush Valley. It's not that these questions weren't warranted, she had asked herself those same questions, but in the end her response always felt justified. She had done nothing wrong, at least that's what she had believed until that very thought showed up on her front door in the middle of the night.

Winry had chosen to cut them out after they had let her down for the last time. Grans funeral was the least they could have done for her after all she had done. The woman had raised them and if not for her they at least owed Winry an explanation. Instead they had disappeared and this time she didn't wait, she didn't follow and most of all she didn't hope.

That's one thing she prided herself on after her grandmother's death. She was finally making decisions for herself, ones that had conviction and there was no longer the wavering of what if. If they had chosen their path, she was going to choose hers.

So why stay in Resembool? Honestly the nostalgia had rooted her to the spot, like concrete drying her feet into its foundation. This was home and while lately she had felt awfully lonely, she was reminded of who did need her. Resembool's population had begun to boom after the promised day. Many families had fled from the city and its destruction, opting for a quieter life. Winry had seen her clientele peak as soldiers retired, and families grew.

Was she lonely? Fair question, but she had friends who kept in touch and while Edward had failed to ever notice her, she had been surprised by how the boys in town had responded to her presence. Maybe her grandmother had passed down some other traits because she never did feel compelled to stick to just one person. Besides, there were very few men who could handle her temper and keep up with her drive. Long hours in the basement tinkering away or her nose in a book had turned off more than one. Then there was Pitt.

Pitt should be an entire chapter alone, because he was one of the few who had cracked her open and dug deep into what really made her work. His passion for medicine had reminded Winry of her parents and helping him open his clinic had filled that hole for a little bit. When he had asked for her hand in marriage, that had been a sticking point. One she was still unsure she had handled correctly. She had let her temper rule and said things that had hurt him. The worst part was she had never felt the urge to fix it.

Seeing Edward had stirred up more than memories and now with a night of restless sleep she was warring with herself. This couldn't be the boy who had ripped her heart out and betrayed her trust. The man embracing her wasn't shy about his affection, wasn't nursing a conflicting resolution or a hero complex. His conviction was so strong she almost believed it.

*Almost.*

"Edward." She pushed him back slowly, fully aware of how badly she didn't want him to stop.

He looked anxious and she wondered if he was finally discovering that magnetic pull her compass had always used. Winry reveled in the idea that for once he was the one pointing in her direction.

"You cant tell me you don't feel something." He said breathlessly.

Winry took a step back from him, steadying herself on the nearest chair. "I feel a lot of things Ed, but like I said yesterday, a lot has changed."

"Are you..." He cleared his throat. "Is there someone else?"

Winry smiled at that, "There were a few."

His lips turned down. "I guess I deserve that."

She wasn't the same frivolous girl wringing her hands, Winry wasn't shy about much anymore. "Are you asking if a man is going to walk down those stairs and kick your ass?"

Edward scowled, "Well?"

Winry liked being the one in control for once, it had been a long time since they had verbally sparred. But it all just felt comfortable and even in this moment she was beginning to settle. "No."

He seemed to sag in relief, taking a step forward, "Then why are we stopping?"

Maybe it was the lack of sleep, or the way Edward had matured or the lack of any male presence lately in the house. Whatever it was, she decided the people in town were right, she was lonely and the boy she had grown up loving was offering her something here.

*How did he know?*

The way he began to kiss along the crook of her neck and move his hands. Winry had been touched before, but not like this. Suddenly all of her unease, her stores of anger and reservations of past hurt became silent. He was kissing her like he had done it before and for the first time she wondered if this was what they meant by soulmates. That there might actually be a puzzle piece out there that was designed to fit just right with hers. Not that Edward had every actually tried before this.

She should have stopped it. Winry had not been ghosted for ten years to just let him take what he wanted. But she had also learned that good things don't happen often and turning this down seemed cruel when he was playing all the right notes.

They were both breathing hard now, their remaining clothes falling down the steps as they moved upstairs. She must have been moving too slow because he picked her up and together, they found their way into the nearest room.

He was hovering above her and Winry squirmed, displeased at the sudden pause.

"I should have told you I loved you a long time ago." He lowered himself closer to her. "Winry I..."

There were scars on his body, some she had only heard stories of and others she wondered about. But in this moment, he looked just as lonely and bruised.

Winry wondered if they had always hidden so much of themselves from one another.

"Shh." She didn't want to talk anymore. "Show me."

In her mind Edward would have been awkward, afraid, unsure and cold. Instead he was assertive, responsive and more importantly he was loving. The way he held onto her and whispered into her skin things she didn't know she needed to hear.

*How did he know?*

They laid together in a mess of covers, the now afternoon sun bathing them in light. Winry didn't want to break the silence because she dreaded the conversation, she knew they needed to have. Physical affection aside, there was a rather large gap in their history. One, despite the still pleasant tingling in her body, she knew wouldn't go away anytime soon.

"Tell me about her."

Edward turned; his expression confused. "Who?"

Winry avoided his gaze. "The Winry you married."

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