

*it was a march we made towards ruin and despair, but we held hands all the while*

It was happening again, all too fast for him. Scout stumbled back, his mind a blur. No, no, no. He can't do this again.

He swayed back and forth on the camper doorstep, trying to decide whether or not this was a good idea. His head was swimming with thoughts, his hands fidgeting with his shirt. Knock, don't knock, leave, don't leave. His mind fought with itself. On one hand, reason argued: *don't you dare bother this man again, Jeremy, you already messed things up enough the first time, don't get yourself any deeper into this.* On the other hand, a more messy and emotional part of his mind, one that he had never heard so spirited on an issue, argued back: *do it. think about how happy he makes you. talk to him again, even if it goes poorly. talk to him, talk to him, **talk to him**, it'll make you feel better.*

*shut up, me's... I'm trying to think.* He told the arguing voices in his head. He cursed himself for being stupid. Not supposed to drink, not supposed to go out at night, not supposed to talk to the other team, not supposed to do any of this. Not supposed to even be awake at this hour, he had work tomorrow. Instead, he found he had a date with a bottle of bourbon that smelled like it wanted to hurt him and the front door to the home of the man who just wouldn't leave his head. Stupid, stupid, stupid. What would he even do? Probably just blab about his tragic backstory, make them both feel worse. Selfish fuck. Ruin Sniper's night with his incurable self-destructive bullshit, like he did with everyone. But he had made up his mind. He was not a good person. He knocked on the door.



Sniper was awake. It was late, and he should have been resting for the long day ahead. But naturally, with a kind (or cruel) twist of fate, he was awake to hear the knock. Who could that be at this hour? He felt a leap of hope in his chest but quickly stamped it down. Of course not. He got to his feet with a sigh and pulled the door open a crack. Like an angel from heaven, the Scout stood on his doorstep. He looked Cam straight in the eyes.

"Hi."

"Hi."

Sniper found he was smiling despite himself. He had missed Jeremy. It had been a long time since he had visited last, or had it...? Maybe it hadn't. He had found himself counting the seconds between the last times they saw each other. Not for any particular reason, you understand, but when you have such a peculiar encounter with someone, they tend to cross your mind. Definitely for no other reason.

Jeremy looked... to put polite words to it, rough. He stood in a slightly defensive position, like he was afraid Sniper might attack. His hands fumbled with his shirt, then moved to his necklace, then started to pick at each other, and so on. He was making a solid effort to stand as still as possible, but Cam could see a sway in his movements that he recognized from hanging around the Demoman. ...The guy was drunk. *'course he was*, Sniper thought to himself bitterly. *Why else would he be here?*

Then, Scout broke the silence. His voice was quiet, and Sniper could recognize his honest attempt to speak clearly through the effects of the drink. "I... I really mmissed you, man."

Sniper froze, unsure how to respond. "Uh." *Shit.*

"I did. Spent all this time thinking about going to see you again. Couldn't get the nerve. Figured i ruined everythin'."

Scout wobbled slightly. Sniper grabbed his shoulder out of reflex, out of fear he might topple over. The touch made the Scout gasp slightly.

"...nah, mate. Didn't ruin anything." Sniper's voice was low, unsure of what to do.

"...missed you too."

Scout closed his eyes as if in exhaustion and dropped his head in what looked like relief.

"Thank God."

"You should come in, mate. Have a drink of water. I'll get ya home."

Scout allowed himself to be steered inside and sat down but whined in protest at the mention of being sent back to base.

"Don't wanna. Wanna be here with you."

Cam felt a flush spread across his face. "...right, then. We'll talk about it."

Cam fixed him another glass of water and sat across from him cautiously. A few seconds passed where neither of them spoke a word. Then, Jeremy spoke again.

"Sorry I'm so weird."

"Huh?"

"Sorry i'm so weird, and annoying, and gross."

"Mate, you're not-"

"I am, though. I'm so...everything. Everything wrong."

Cam furrowed his brow in concern. "Who told you that?"

"Myself, jackass."

Sniper leaned back a bit, taken aback by Jeremy's sudden outburst. The scout put his head in his hands and mumbled.

"God, I'm sorry. I shouldn'a said that. Just slipped out."

"Nah, 's fine. Just surprised me."

"Ugh. I'm. I'm so... angry. I'm so angry, Snipes. All the time. At everyone."

"For what?"

"I dunno. Just... everything. If someone says something to me that pisses me off, someone looks at me wrong or funny, anything. Everything. Sometimes it just slips out, like, i can't help but just be rude. I get pissed off when people try and comfort me too, because like, who are we kidding? There's no helping something that's already so fucked. And they always are so nice about it too, like they genuinely care. An' I don't want them to. I don't want them to like me and I don't want them to care 'cause I know I'll end up screwing things up. Sometimes-" His voice trembled as a hiccup of a sob shook his body. "Sometimes, I just hate everyone and I don't know what to do about it. I... I don't think I'm a good person, Cam."

"Nah. I get that."

"Do you? Do you **really**? Do you really get how it feels to be so on edge about everything all the time? Do you know how it feels to have your body react to something your mind won't let you remember? Do you know how it feels? Do you really?" Jeremy snapped again, voice raising an octave or two.

"What...?"

"I **said**,"

"No, I meant the... the body versus mind thing. What do you mean?"

"Fuck do you think i mean?"

"I... what happened to you, Jeremy?"

"All these goddamn questions, why do you even care? Why do you want to know? Not like anyone can do anything about it. Not like I can do anything but drag everyone I care about, everyone I l- I like into the cesspit that is my life."

"I'm sorry."

Scout buried his head deeper into his hands.

"No, I'm sorry. I'm sorry for doing this again. It just all keeps slipping out and I can't stop it. I don't want to tell you any of this. I'm doing it again. I'm so sorry, Cam, I'm so sorry."

His voice sounded teary, and Cam felt a sinking in his chest, like he was watching someone drown when he himself barely knew how to swim.

"I... I really wanted to just be your friend. I really wanted you to like me, Cam."

"... I do."

Scout paused and looked through shaking fingers at him.

"Don't play with my emotions. Don't just say that. You can't just say that to make me feel better, you don't get it, it's not fair, it's not fair, it's not fair."

"No, I do mean it. I do like you."

Silence fell over the table. Jeremy's shoulders shook slightly with silent sobs. Finally, he spoke up again. His voice was wild with anger and desperation.

"Why would you say that. Why would you say that? Now I can't leave you alone. Now

you're even more in my head and I can't get you out. What did you do to me? Why can't I stop thinking about you?"

Cam felt a twinge of happiness followed by a twist of guilt for feeling so in such a serious situation.

"I really like you, Jeremy. I'm sorry I can't be of more help to you."

Scout's voice broke and stumbled, as though he had mustered all his strength to shout and be angry and now all that was left was quiet defeat and remorse. "Nno, I'm 'lready asking too much. I shouldnt'a come here, I'm jus makin things worse. More complicated."

"I'm glad you decided to come. It's not making anything worse. I'm glad you chose to see me."

Scout clenched his fists still covering his face. "I'm... glad I did too. I. I don't know how to tell you what's going on with me. I don't know what I'm feeling. Jus.. wanna be close to you.. allth time." he mumbled.

Cam nodded understandingly, trying to suppress the swelling of a feeling he didn't recognize in his throat. "...yeah, mate. I get it. I..." he paused, fighting the urge to blurt out something stupid. "...y'don't have to talk about what happened if you don't want to. Let me just get you a place to rest, okay? You're gonna be fine, lo-" he barely bit back another pet name from spilling out, then looked at Jeremy for any reaction.

Jeremy parted the fingers covering his face, eyes focusing blearily on Cam. A smile spread unevenly across his face, his cheeks pink in the kitchen's light. "You can call me that, ion mind.. 'cn call me anythin' you like, Snipes..."

Sniper turned his head to the side and stared at the wall determinedly, trying to fight down the wave of... something that just crashed onto the shore that was his heart.

Jesus holy mother of Christ, this boy had him on the ropes. Sniper cleared his throat, hoping his voice wasn't as shaky as he felt. "Course. C'mon, let's get you to bed, bluebird."

Scout's smile widened. "Awwh.. like that. Bluebird. Like a pretty lil bird, I am, aren't I snaipa?" he mumbled, twisting his name into a funny little (admittedly not very good) mimicry of an Australian accent.

"Yes, yes. Now, c'mere. I'll let you take my bed, I'll sleep on the-"

He stopped as he heard a whine of protest from the man who leaned into him, close enough to make his heart thump even harder than before. He could feel his arm around him and his touch was like electric pulses sent directly through his skin. He felt the Scout's head tilted slightly to face him, his hair falling across his face slightly and casting shadows on his face. He felt his breath, warm and uneven on his chest, through his shirt. He... He forced himself to snap out of it. *C'mon Cam, focus. You've got a drunk,*

*beautiful boy in your home. A boy who could **definitely** get you in a **lot** of trouble with your employers and also possibly killed by your twitchy overprotective french coworker. **Focus**.*

"Hmn... wanna.. ugh. can you.." Jeremy stumbled over his words. Huh. Apparently, being drunk didn't make him louder. In fact, it seemed to rob him of his confident attitude.

"Yea?"

"Can we uh... can...you don't gotta move. Jus. Don't wanna be alone."

"Oh." *shit. shit shit shit shit shit. fuck.*

Against all odds, Cam managed to keep it together for the time being. C'mon, normal, normal, **normal**, focus, focus, **focus**, his brain yelled at him. Don't be weird.

"Yea, of course. If that's what you want."

"Jus.. don't try anythin- funny, y'know."

Cam's eyes shot open, a little taken aback. "No! no, god no, Scout. I wouldn't."

"Gee, thanks." It was weird, Jeremy sounded almost hurt.

"No... ugh, not like that. Sorry. Just... y're drunk, mate. Wouldn't wanna, er-." He trailed off awkwardly. What was he supposed to say to that? *"it's not that i don't want to be close to you, it's just that i'm not gonna be a creep about it"*? Yeah, that'd definitely clear everything up really fast, he thought to himself bitterly.

Scout considered this for a few seconds. "Huh. Sorry, jus... felt the need to uh.. say so. Jus.. force'a habit, I guess."

Now what the hell did he mean by that? Cameron felt shaken by the amount of implications. Did Scout get like this a lot? Why did he have to clarify that he wasn't okay with being taken advantage of? Had it happened before? And if so, why did he tell Cam? Did he think that he would...? Okay, okay, no. no no no, we're not doing this either. Just move on.

With a huff, he half-carried the scout into his room and sat him down on the edge of the bed. The boy didn't hesitate to immediately lay down on the inner wall, looking over at Cam, who had already begun to head for the bathroom, from his resting point.

"Y'comin?"

"Yeah, mate, just gotta get myself together. Hadn't even started getting ready for bed yet."

"Sheesh, mister fancy over here with his nightly routine.."

"Yea, yea. You would benefit from having one too, y'know. Good for ya."

"Uhuh, uhuh, what are you, my mom? I'm doin' fine, thank you very much."

He seemed to be regaining some of his sarcastic nature, at least. Cam half jokingly wished to himself he'd go back to being quiet.

After a while, Sniper came back into the room. All the lights had been turned off already, but he could see the outline of the scout's body in his bed. In *his* bed. God. Was he really going to do this?

"Scout? You still awake?"

Jeremy didn't answer. Cam could see his chest rising and falling. Was he already asleep?

"Jeremy? Jer?"

Still, no answer. Damn, fair enough. With a deep sigh of weariness, he crawled into bed next to him. Huh. It was weird, weird to feel Jeremy's warmth beside him. But somehow comforting in a way he had forgotten he missed. Annoyingly, the little jerk had grabbed most of the blankets, the selfish prick. Cam wrestled him for his half of the duvet, managing miraculously not to wake him up in the process. He must have been exhausted, to be sleeping so deeply. Cam turned over to face the outer wall, then restlessly turned back. He wanted to face him. God, he was pathetic, wasn't he. Just... seeing Jeremy's face, eyes closed gently, freckled and spotted cheek squished against his pillow... it made Cam feel right somehow. Like he had found a part of him that he had been missing his whole life and had just learned to deal with. Scout slept on his side, legs crossing over one another and arms reaching out towards Sniper. With a steeling of his nerves, he dared to pull himself closer. His body heat felt nice against the cool blankets. Sniper felt like he had died this afternoon and this was heaven, but still he could not sleep. Scout breathed in and out gently, breath fluttering the scrap of bangs that fell across his face. Sniper found himself murmuring to himself, lines from a song he had heard once. "Hmm-hmmhmm hmm- I swear that I loved you, I swear-" He caught himself suddenly. Love? Was that what this was? No, right? Right? They were just friends, right? I mean, sure, they were close, he guessed. But... he also guessed he wouldn't really... know what love for Jeremy would feel like. Beyond the... friend kind. Or, what? It had been a long time since he had even attempted to get close to anyone, his coworkers or anyone else. Especially close in... that way, y'know? Ever since he had taken this job, at least. He just wanted to do his work, generally avoiding social situations unless he really had to. Now there was someone in his bed again, and his affection-starved mind mistook that for love. that must be it, right? He screwed his eyes shut tight and mentally filed that away for future thought, when he had a clearer mind. He was not going to go down that rabbit hole tonight. Tonight, he was going to simply enjoy the feeling of someone else beside him and rest. Morning Cam could deal with this and whatever else happened afterwards. Sniper snuggled his way deeper into the covers and fell into a restful sleep, the Scout beginning to entwine himself in his arms.