

Debriefing

By Vashtan and Marquesate

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Those bastards were keeping them on base, or at least no further than that damned bar right next to the camp gates, where all a man could do was get drunk or end up going home with one of the town’s hoes—for money or free—who were always congregating in that shitty hole. But it was the only place to be, apart from his room, and Hoot was that high-wired by day three, he was going to get as much JD into him that night as he could possibly fit, and if that meant upchucking in the sink, so be it, as long as there was a way of getting rid of what he called the jitters.

The Mog. A cluster fuck of epic proportions. More comrades dying than should have been possible in a shithole like that, and those damned questions after he’d come back out the second time. Questions he didn’t want to answer, and which made the restlessness grow with every word, slicing deeper and deeper into the unease. All Hoot wanted was to be left the fuck alone, or get the whole shit out of his system, the only way he knew. But no chance. None. Stuck in Fort Bragg like a high profile prisoner—just that he was free. Or so they said. Funny, he didn’t feel it.

Sanderson had been debriefed to the point that he felt he was an LP stuck on repeat, the sounds edged out of him by sheer repetition. Somebody in the Pentagon had shat himself, and the reverberations echoed through the ranks, down to him. And like all other desk jockeys that had got the job by fighting wars when they’d been easy, with clear blacks and whites aligned by geography, these guys were seriously questioning everything. Deltas had been wounded, five had died, and Matt was killed just a couple of days later. He kept repeating what he felt and

knew to be the truth. But he had learnt one thing during the past days: If you repeated the truth often enough, it started to ring hollow.

After yet another one of those Q and A sessions, Sanderson just stopped in the bar outside, still dressed in his fatigues, and ordering himself a Bud. He'd still have to drive a bit, and he'd promised to visit the wife of one of the dead Nightstalkers as soon as he 'had a moment', but after all these questions, he couldn't face another one. Didn't find the words about courage and duty, felt tired and defeated and unable to go on like nothing had happened.

Hoot opened the door, shades still before his eyes, wanting nothing but to drink himself out of this high-wired buzzing that was threatening to send him over the edge, when he stopped dead in the door. Fuck. Sanderson. His team member. So much for 'anonymity' and drinking. The man hadn't seen him yet, while he would have recognized Sanderson's back like his own, but Hoot wasn't going to back down and he walked inside. Planting himself a good three yards away, on the other end of the bar, ordering a double JD.

Sanderson's bright blue eyes moved when a familiar silhouette shifted into his peripheral vision. Not grating on his nerves, though, which was certainly not because of the weak Bud. More like, an ease of having him around. He glanced to the side, recognizing the man. Hoot. Who'd fought like a man possessed in the Mog, and, despite heading back out into the filth and madness, had returned in one piece. Exemplary soldier, such a worthy man to have, and Sanderson felt his guts knot up because it hit him what if Hoot hadn't come back? If he, like Gary and Randy had bitten the bullet? And was anybody to blame for it? He nodded towards him, felt he shouldn't just stare. Hoot looked less shaken than anybody else. Hoot had enough guts for a platoon of soldiers. Fiercely loyal, but this thought wasn't reassuring. At all. He took his bottle and moved closer. "Hey. How you doing?"

In any normal circumstance—but Hoot wasn't doing 'normal' often,—Sanderson was one of the good guys. Distinguished fighter himself, who took his responsibility for his buddies everything but lightly. Yet tonight...Hoot felt he would break a raw recruit's neck, just to be left in peace. Couldn't ignore the man, though, still his comrade. So he nodded, raised the JD to his lips, and forced out, "Fine." Before emptying the double shot in one go, immediately ordering another.

Sanderson didn't even try to smile to ease the tension. Hoot wasn't fine, he wasn't fine, but military decorum demanded they'd at least keep up appearances.

He should find some good words, acknowledge the enormous contribution, guts and balls, and all he could think was ‘I’m so glad you made it’, and shook his head, paid the Bud, and slid off the stool. The music was jarring, the hooker two stools down was grating, how she tried to bend forward far enough to make her tits fall out of her pink top. Very nicely toned sides, he thought, great belly button, but he just couldn’t deal with any fake orgasms right now. He didn’t want her to tell him he was the greatest and that nobody else had made her feel that way before, ever. “Shit place to get drunk,” he murmured, to nobody in particular, and one especially. “You grounded on base or can you get shitfaced somewhere else?”

Hoot looked up, the second JD in his hand, wishing he’d gone for a quadruple measure. He shrugged, finished the drink, and put the glass down with a nod to the barman, who refilled without prompting. “Depends where.” Seemed he wasn’t going to get rid of the man, and damnit, maybe it wasn’t such a bad thing after all. Sanderson wouldn’t try to make him talk, knew him too well.

“I’m fifteen minutes down the highway.” The most convenient place after the divorce. Close to base. A good morning jog away from his work place without being actually on base. Made sense, he sometimes had to be deployed immediately. How his wife had hated the calls in the nights, his addiction to CNN, because he knew the men who risked life and limb out there and never received credit, and he usually couldn’t even talk about it. No ‘honey, how was work?’ for him. Or her. That was, he reflected, probably what broke it. Some people could deal with it, and military wives had to be made out of really strong stuff. He didn’t fault her that she wasn’t. She’d wanted kids, and telling them Daddy had gone away just wasn’t in her.

Hoot nodded. Didn’t quite know why, but after JD number three, he didn’t care either. “Got to phone base.” Said nothing more, except for a nod to the bartender, and he got his fourth double drink in record time, tipping it down before he went to the public phone at the side of bar. Forced to move past a woman who pressed herself far too obviously against him, but apart from a second of wanting to snap her neck, he didn’t care and didn’t show he’d noticed. The drink was already doing some of its work. Couple of minutes later he was back, glancing at his empty glass then back at Sanderson.

Sanderson moved outside, hadn’t bothered to lock the car doors, just got in and waited till Hoot sat beside him, started the car, pointed it in the right direction,

and drove down the road. Pretty much on the dot fifteen minutes, during which Hoot sat and looked out of the side window, barely containing his fingers that wanted to drum on his thigh. Good thing the bourbon made him mellow.

They drove up in front of the garage and Sanderson stepped out of the car. Not locking anything. Small, actually tiny, military community. He'd gotten drunk with Hoot before, but the man had never been to his house, not this one, not the previous one, no barbecues, either, really mostly because of the bitching at home. The last thing he wanted was one of his comrades picking up the bad vibes.

The place was tidy, a bit dusty, mostly because he'd never really lived here. Sixpacks in the fridge, vodka and pizza in the freezer, a bowl filled with fruit. He had just stored some of his stuff upstairs, never really unpacked it. He slept and lived in the living room, couch was folded out, which he'd forgotten, all the brouhaha post-Mog just screwed with his routine. And what petty thoughts. That tidy, civilian concern of what his house looked like. Appearances.

Hoot looked around for less than a second, then stood in the middle of the room, taking the shades off his eyes. "Got bourbon?"

Sanderson nodded and pointed at the shelf. "Half a bottle. After that, it's vodka." Finding two glasses and placing them next to the sink, he took the bourbon and poured several fingers' worth of the alcohol into the glasses. Pulling at his fatigues. "I need to get out of this," he growled, exasperated. "Help yourself." Meaning the alcohol.

Hoot's eyes flashed for a moment, before they returned back to indifference. No wonder he preferred to wear shades, his eyes were letting on too much, at least after four double-shots. "Cheers." He took the bourbon and drank it down as if it were water. Like back in the Mog, returning from the carnage.

Sanderson shrugged, feigning indifference, but Hoot was going through the stuff at an alarming rate. The man tried to get drunk. Really, badly drunk, and this was not the cheerful happy shitfacedness that they'd both shared with comrades. Hoot was being eaten by something. He headed into the small bathroom, to finally peel himself out of the fatigues, and instead slipped into a grey t-shirt that he fished from the laundry basket. Still mostly fresh, and the dark blue jeans. Re-emerging, he picked up his glass. "Much better." And emptied it.

"Yeah." The look Hoot cast over Sanderson was everything but appropriate, but it didn't last any longer than a fraction. Those too-expressive eyes somewhat

blurred by the drink that kept finding itself into Hoot's system, as soon as he managed to refill the glass.

Sanderson moved to walk around Hoot to get to the fridge, and once Hoot didn't look at him anymore, he placed a hand on the man's shoulder. Why? He had no fucking idea, only that it was good that Hoot was alive, and he wanted to say so many things, but no single word was appropriate.

Hoot stiffened for a brief moment, the most natural response, but then he relaxed under the touch. He'd had enough bourbon to forget about his normal responses. "Sir?" Bottle and glass in hand, unfilled.

Sanderson placed the other hand on Hoot's other shoulder, somewhat surprised at the weird address but noticing the lack of alarm. It was still as comradely as it had ever been. Touching Hoot was like touching the only real thing left in this world. He couldn't find any word that was not 'I'm so glad you're alive', instead moved closer suddenly embracing him, and once he'd started, he didn't seem to be able to stop it. Firmly holding the other man, who had bottle and glass still in his hands, standing in the embrace without moving. Until finally, Hoot murmured. "I wouldn't do that, sir."

"I wouldn't either," Sanderson answered, but still couldn't let go of him. No, he wouldn't. Sergeant First Class Jeff Sanderson, Delta Force, wouldn't do this. Not appropriate. Hands opened to touch Hoot's front, almost claw into him, but he stopped, felt that strange thing that didn't have any kind of word, just that holding, asking something he had no words for, as if Hoot could just radio Gary and Randy and check whether they were okay. But they were dead. After a foolhardy, useless, needless last stand defending the indefensible. Sanderson felt his whole body tighten. Shit. Standing invitations from both their families, all that grief and the doubts. At least Hoot had come back out. The indestructible.

Hoot still hadn't moved. Not one muscle. Just...standing. Still standing. What a pile of shit, and wasn't that a pistol in Sanderson's pocket. "I would have gone to Fayetteville to blow off steam. If they let me." Dry voice, dry lips, and he couldn't even get to the damned bourbon.

"Don't. Stay." Sanderson realized it sounded like an order. Hoot's strength was so fucking reassuring, he'd kicked himself for that thought if it hadn't been so goddamned true. Hoot's strength and presence. He pressed further against him, held him tight, then suddenly realized he was hard, hard as fuck, and cursed

himself, half disbelieving. He'd gotten hard in weirder situations, on the other hand, did it really get any weirder than this? Shit. He moved back, even though he didn't want to, but pressing a hard-on into a comrade's butt was nothing he could just simply do. Forces. Army. Delta. "Stay." Sounding shaken now, no longer touching Hoot all the way, reluctant to let him go. Shuddering with all those emotions and thoughts, he'd wanted to get rid of all that, had wanted to get drunk, but he couldn't just let Hoot go, impossible, much like the other would likely not let go of the bottle.

Hoot unexpectedly swiveled round, the moment he had room. Bottle in the left, glass in the right, arms at his side. "Stay?" Slight slur in his speech, hardly noticeable. Too fit to get drunk on what he'd had so far. Now it was he, all of a sudden, who was pressing into his comrade. Full frontal, making Sanderson gasp. "Is that an order?" The same address again, and he repeated, closer, ever closer, not allowing Sanderson to come back to his senses, "Sir?"

"If you ... need an order ... yes." Sanderson couldn't move further back, and didn't want to. He wanted to grind against Hoot, instead pressed his lips together, meeting that stare full-on. Hoot so fucking close, so intense, not recoiling or punching him for that indiscretion, for this crossing of a line that had been drilled into them to be respected. "Do you need ... that order? Hoot?"

"Yeah." Quiet voice, but the body as lethal as out there in battle. No movement, though, arms still at the side. "As I said, would have blown off steam." Hoot shifted his weight to press closer again, and Sanderson felt the work surface press against his ass, trapped between a rock and a hard place. Hoot's head went back a fraction, bearing the throat. Just like that. Hardly detectable, only for someone who'd understand. "Want me to stay, Sir?" Emphasis on the last word.

Sanderson's mind reeled, that powerful, tanned throat, offered. One of the most vulnerable areas of the body, and he knew he'd lose his mind tonight, but the 'Sir' sobered him, and increased the tension. How could Hoot make it sound part insult part ... sexy? He swallowed, nodded, fighting for words. "Stay. That's an order." Placing his hands on Hoot's hips, pulling him closer, shifting to grind against him, that unshakable presence. Normally calm, but underneath filled with tension that seemed unlike him. Hoot was the most businesslike of all of them. "Blow off steam here." With me.

“You got it in you, Sir?” Question, no insult, and Hoot took in a sharp breath when groin pressed and shifted against groin, hard cocks trapped, and friction sending signals to his mellowed brain.

“Yeah.” Sanderson had no idea what he was agreeing to, only that this felt good. Hoot was hard, too, he hadn’t read him wrong, had crossed the line, but not into disaster and professional suicide. His career was on the line anyway, and he thought, funny, Hoot didn’t strike him as one of those ‘don’t ask don’t tell’ guys, but then, he wasn’t either. He tried to move, turn and press Hoot against the work surface for a change, and it was easy, too easy, the man just moved with him. “I do. Fuck.”

Arms still at his sides. Passive, unlike anytime Sanderson had ever seen him, Hoot stood, pressed into the kitchen range. Head still back. Throat still bared. Eyes still giving far too much away. The hunger, the need, and too much about the man himself. “I can take a lot, Sir.” Voice rough, putting the bottle and the empty glass behind him. He tensed, despite the alcohol, as if he expected something.

I know, thought Sanderson, remembering Hoot bloody and exhausted on other missions, and returning after Mog, tested to the limits and beyond, walking half-dead on his feet. Collapsing days later onto his bunk after he’d located the dead men, deep in enemy territory. The fucking bravery mixed with skill, the quintessential Delta, a man he’d die for and who’d die for him. Comrade. Sanderson moved forward, opened his teeth and bit into that powerful throat, the muscle and firm, tanned skin, making Hoot groan and bare his throat further. A sudden hunger possessing Sanderson like none he’d ever felt, and he took Hoot’s wrists, held them, pushed them back behind the man, biting into the shoulder, which made the body shudder, wanting so much to feel alive and needed, and still hearing the words *I can take a lot, Sir*.

Nothing but small sounds from his throat, Hoot closed his eyes: impossible for a man like him. Yet he did. Utter trust and passivity, needing to take not give, to be made to feel, to get rid of that goddamned tension that was eating him up from inside. Bottled up, stashed away, and only the right amount of violence and lust could unleash it.

“Cross your wrists in your back,” murmured Sanderson, his voice rough, and Hoot did, without questioning. Eyes opening once more, simply staring ahead, not looking at the other man, as if he hadn’t been given permission.

Sanderson's hands moved to Hoot's uniform, opening the tunic, the shirt underneath, and god damn him, Hoot's chest was as tanned and perfect as he remembered, even though he saw it with a completely different pair of eyes now. Not the friendly measuring of comrades, but...what? He closed his eyes, pulled the clothes down and off Hoot's upper body, didn't know whether to lick or bite or kiss. The ball of his hand slid down to press against Hoot's trapped cock, which made the man take in a sharp breath, tense visibly, as Sanderson squeezed the firm, hot flesh. He knew this body, but had never touched him like this. Yet it felt normal, natural. They had agreed, on some level, to do this, and Sanderson found the prospect dizzying. He discarded the clothes, pulled his own T-shirt over his head and tossed it on the kitchen floor.

Hoot was still not looking, until his eyes won over his bourbon-mellowed mind, and they strayed towards Sanderson, staying on the muscled chest, lean, powerful, as deadly as himself, and he gave too much away once more, as his eyes widened and darkened for a moment. Stood, arms behind his back, wrists crossed, legs braced, as confident half-nude as he'd be in battle.

Sanderson stepped back, allowed himself to breathe deeply, needed the moment of distance. Meeting that gaze, and realized suddenly what Hoot wanted, fully understanding. Holy fuck. But he wanted to give that, and he confronted that, the willingness to abuse him. That would never have been possible out there, not in the field, not during an exercise, but in here, it was feasible. Sanderson tightened his lips, sought the gaze, then raised his hand and hit Hoot square in the face, bitchslapping him like he meant it. Left, right, left again, Hoot's face flying from side to side, completely defenseless, his arms not even twitching. No sound, not even when he cut the inside of his lip on his own tooth, and tasted blood.

"Down," Sanderson hissed, and that was all Hoot needed. Following the order immediately, throwing himself to the ground. In the same position as if he were about to do press-ups.

Sanderson took his cue from that. "Give me fifty, soldier." Shouldn't be a problem for Hoot, only that Sanderson moved his booted foot right under Hoot's face, shin close to his cheek. He moved with a seriousness that surprised him, pushing Hoot's hands apart, making the muscles in the back stand out more. "That's too easy, soldier. Further." Increasing the angle, which made these nice press-ups a bitch. Not that Hoot couldn't deal with that, but it made him dependent

on both hands being on the ground, and it forced him to use far more of his strength than he would have. Strength that was handicapped by over half a bottle of JD.

Yet he was doing the press-ups, as fast as he could, powering with everything he had. One after the other, until Sanderson suddenly kicked one hand away, and Hoot crashed flat onto the kitchen tiles. Face down, nose first, unable to suppress a groan.

“What the fuck do you think you’re doing, soldier? This is not a fucking game!”

“Sir, sorry, Sir!” Hoot got up again immediately, the moment the foot moved away, and started again. Hands wide, as far apart as possible, buttocks clenched, to counteract his taut abs, using the core strength of his body as he went down and up again and down once more, body starting to get covered in a sheen of sweat.

The rolling muscles and that tight ass shouldn’t turn him on so much, thought Sanderson, reaching for the bottle of JD and finishing it, while he counted Hoot’s press-ups in his head. Kicking the other hand away at forty. “You’re completely useless. Count them this time!” He snarled, alcohol making this easier.

Hoot lost balance once more, flat onto his face, and it felt as if he’d broken his nose. Knew he hadn’t, had first-hand experience of what it was like, but it hurt like fuck, and the pain was so damned good, he swallowed the groan and got up once more. “Forty-one...forty-two.” Forced out, between his teeth, body glistening by now, muscles working so hard, they were chiseled planes of the well honed killer machine of his body. “Forty-three...forty-four...forty-five ...”

Sanderson moved back to Hoot’s feet, and swiped them from under him with a well-calculated kick, causing the whole body to crash down. This time the groan came out when Hoot’s chest slammed onto the floor, and his knees connected with the hard surface. But he got up again, once more, back onto hands and feet, despite the trembling arms and the muscles that were trying to fail him.

The smell of sweat turned Sanderson on, he just hoped he would be able to see Hoot sweat in camp or on the battlefield without thinking of the harsh breathing in his kitchen, the way that body fought to complete the impossible task. Hoot was pure motivation, always giving one hundred fifty percent, even when he was being...tortured? Taunted like this. “You want to be Delta? You’re no fucking

Delta, soldier.” Touching that pride, unsure whether Hoot would explode and in what way, but Hoot just grunted. Going back down again, forcing himself up once more, spitting out: “Forty-six.”

Sanderson pushed the legs apart, placed a foot on Hoot’s ass, pressed in with his heel, making the push-ups doubly hard, and the body beneath him fought a fight he couldn’t win. Not giving up, though, struggling back down, and in a Herculean effort coming back up. “Forty-seven.” Hoot was not just fighting against his own body weight, failing strength, and protesting muscles, but fighting against the weight that was forcing him down.

Sanderson was thinking. That body. Underneath him. He didn’t doubt for a moment Hoot was hard, but he had to give up first. And that was the challenge. “Open your legs,” he commanded, moving the shoe to press into Hoot’s balls, digging in deep, then sliding the foot further in.

Hoot’s body responded the only way it could, shuddering against the strain and with the pain. Just taking it, even when the heel of the shoe was hard against his cock, making it nearly impossible to get back down again without crashing onto the floor. He was barely able to force his voice to comply. “Forty...eight ...”

Sanderson’s foot went back to the balls, and to the ass, all firm, powerful muscle, and he wanted to touch him again, with his hands, arms. Wanted to bite and other things, and on the last push-up, as Hoot brought out “forty...nine ...” he kicked the legs away again, and Hoot fell down once more, whole body trembling. Yet he tried to get back up again, fighting with all he had, but Sanderson couldn’t have Hoot complete the task, not the way his body shone with sweat.

“Stay down.” Sanderson knelt down, took hold of Hoot’s trousers, pulled him up to open the belt and buttons, and leaving the man with his hands and feet on the ground, ass lifted up, as Sanderson pulled the trousers down, baring him completely. Removed the boots as well, until Hoot was naked, exposed, but remained in the position, as if he needed the order to lower his ass back down again. Sanderson kept thinking that he wanted to fuck him, like this, on the floor, but they weren’t quite there yet, Hoot needed more of this, whatever ‘this’ was, finding a word for it was impossible. Floundering until he reached between Hoot’s legs, pulling on the exposed balls and squeezing them in his hands, painfully, he knew that much, because Hoot’s reaction a groan, impossible to suppress. Hoot bit

his lip, body shuddering and muscles tensing, but he remained hard, and in exactly the same position.

Sanderson saw the cock between Hoot's legs and moved to slap it, because the alternative was to touch it, pump it, maybe even taste it. The first slap caused Hoot to jerk, but no other sound, jaws locked, and hands in fists on the floor. The second slap was harder, more vicious, and Hoot began to lose as the groan slipped through, and his body shuddered again. The third was delivered without any holding back, and Hoot finally cried out, body losing balance as he fought, fought so hard against the pain, and against himself, and yet he was still hard, still wanted more, even when one knee came down on the floor, and he had to force himself to lift his ass again, once more back towards the hands that would just torture him more.

The groans made Sanderson's cock twitch. God damn him, he loved this, it was like cutting open a festering wound, that fucking relief to let this out somehow, get to some deep, underlying shit in his soul and mind and he knew Hoot felt the same. He wouldn't accept it like this if that wasn't exactly what Hoot felt, too. "Keep your chest off the ground."

Hoot did, pushed himself up, hands still as far apart as before, making it nearly impossible to stay in this position. His arms visibly shook, muscles cramping and close to giving in. Sanderson ran his hand over Hoot's cock, then took his own middle finger between his lips, wetting it, and pressed that between Hoot's cheeks, and into the tight ring of muscle with very little consideration. It would just burn a bit, yet enough to make Hoot jerk violently. Pushing it in deep, while squeezing Hoot's cock. "This is what you want, soldier. Tell me how much you want this."

"Sir!" Pressed out between his teeth, Hoot's arms shook so badly, he threatened to collapse. "Yes, Sir!"

Sanderson pulled his finger free and slapped Hoot's ass hard, enough to topple the delicate balance of willpower against the failing of the abused body, and Hoot crashed to the floor. Arms giving up, and yet, despite his suppressed sounds of pain and what was almost despair, he struggled to get first one arm, then the other, back up again. No sooner was he barely managing to keep his chest above ground, when Sanderson entered him with his finger again, alternating between

two kinds of pain. Both of them, each on their own, but most of all both of them together, making Hoot's cock weep.

Sanderson relished in making Hoot feel this, roll with it, take it this way, and turning him on so badly. Never mind his own need. That seemed almost secondary, and he took Hoot's cock firmly in his hand, slid up to the head, then delicately touched his thumb to it, rubbing the precum across the tip. Slowly, the touch intense and calculated, while his other hand forced two fingers in.

The impossible happened. Hoot's body trembled, then shuddered harder, his arms gave in and his chest crashed once more onto the ground, but his ass stayed up. Lifting even more towards the fingers, and he whimpered. *Whimpered*. The words that wanted out were trapped behind the barrier of his teeth, like everything else he always locked away.

Sanderson looked towards the couch, that was where he had the Vaseline that he needed, damn it, *right now*. A fast, desperate glance, shit, but he could make that part of the game. Yeah, game, fuck. If a game was being incredibly hard from performing sexual torture on a comrade, it was the best fucking game he'd ever played. The darkest, too. And not so dark if it made Hoot feel good. "Speak. Tell me."

But Hoot didn't, couldn't. Wanted to, but instead almost killed himself by trying to get back up onto his arms. Even though they were aching so badly, he felt as if they had cramped for all eternity.

Sanderson slowly moved away, as if teasing, but he really wanted to have that Vaseline. The fridge was empty, he didn't have anything properly greasy in there, but one or even two fingers were one thing, and fucking Hoot without lube would be too hardcore even for the Delta. "Close your eyes, and tell me."

Chest heaving, eyes closed as ordered. So close, so damn close to salvation, but Hoot just couldn't fucking say it! Not even when Sanderson moved away, just five steps, which wasn't easy being as hard as he was. Then it occurred to him that getting Hoot on the folded out couch was probably the best thing. "Come to me, like a dog."

Hoot's head flew up, eyes opened, and he stared at the other, in something akin to rage.

Sanderson smiled and swallowed, Hoot's intense stare was threat enough, the threat to pounce him instead and turn the table. That stare told him that Hoot would be alright. "Come here," he repeated, indicating the couch. "Soldier."

Yet nothing happened, nothing apart from Hoot slowly getting onto his hands and knees, but the stare did not diminish. Yet neither did the hardness of his cock.

Sanderson crossed the distance again and grabbed hold of Hoot's hair, which made the man let out a sound, no doubt it was hurting like shit, tearing at the dark hair, and Sanderson couldn't resist. Pulled Hoot's face against his groin and held him there, pushing his hips forward, and rubbing himself against Hoot's face, which caused another *whimper* for god's sake. Another one of those impossible sounds from the man who'd gone back into the Mog to locate dead comrades, and who would jump into the midst of an impossible situation without a single sound and the most stoic expression.

"I said. Come," Sanderson snarled, pulling Hoot with him to the fucking couch, by his hair, then released him once they were there. Not allowing him to regain his balance as he covered the body with his own, grinding against Hoot's ass, and the man lay flat across the mattress, his breathing a harsh sound in the room. Legs opened, but he still didn't say anything, even though his body yelled out the words in deafening clarity.

Sanderson got it, though, understood it so clearly as if there'd been a military hand signal for 'fuck me', and he'd played as hard as he could. He reached over, finding the Vaseline he used to jerk off, scooped out a fat dollop of the grease, pushed it between Hoot's cheeks, who bucked. Making a right mess, then just opened his fly, ran the greased up hand over his own cock, while Hoot's harsh breathing increased, so loud now, it filled the room.

Sanderson groaned with pent-up need, forcing his cock between the slippery cheeks, against the ring, fuck, what was he doing there, fucking Hoot, for Christ's sake, wrestling hard to enter, using more force when it didn't work first try. Hoot's whole body tensed until it was rigid, hands clenching into ever tighter fists, nearly beating the mattress beneath him. Forcing back desperate sounds of pain and too much fucking lust.

Pulling back, Sanderson positioned himself more carefully, felt like a right idiot, but didn't want or need any help, as he suddenly managed, and he couldn't

help it, he pushed in hard and fast. Hoot screamed out, head thrown far back in his neck, while Sanderson held onto Hoot's shoulders, still wearing the jeans, but didn't matter, all that mattered was the heat and tightness, and the man underneath him. A man who thrashed all of a sudden, who fought the violent intrusion and yet he didn't. Who bucked up and pushed back, and simultaneously spread and tensed his legs.

Hoot transforming into something straight from a porn movie, only that Sanderson's kind of porn never featured guys and only mock violence, every now and then. He slid in, deeply in, as Hoot pushed back, buried in the man up to his balls, breathtaking to be surrounded by so much fierce power, to see Hoot not restrained, not ironic, not stoic, but as intense as now. Quite frankly awed by the man, his comrade, and turned on fiercely. Needing to do this, as he pulled out, then coming back in, working against the muscles, against the body that greeted and defied him at the same time. Fucking Hoot in long, powerful thrusts that gradually sped up and became downright vicious, but he'd be damned if he could go on for very much longer. Too new, too different, too fucking intense. But he forced himself to calm, to breathe, to slow down, and Hoot shuddered, losing himself, making unrestrained noises that forced their way out.

Sanderson gathered just enough strength to fuck Hoot hard again, bringing himself close to the edge once more, only to slow down another time. Enjoying this, fucking drinking and eating the other man, who had finally lost all discipline or control. Kissing the sweat between Hoot's shoulder blades, while panting as if he were on the last five hundred meters of a marathon. Yet the completely abandoned noises and movements that Hoot made were enough to keep him going, just to watch how this forever controlled man had lost it completely. Fighting, no, begging for what was being done to him. Hoot let go, bleeding the festering wound dry. Open and vulnerable, while fiercely strong.

Sanderson thrust in hard again, remained as deep inside as he could, feeling sweat trickle down his sides, wanted to shed the damned jeans, but that would have meant stopping, and no way he could do that. Staying deep inside, calming, as calm as a finger on the trigger's pressure point. Anything could set him off now, and he didn't want that, not like this. His hand moved to Hoot's cock, stroking him, twisting his hand like he did when he brought himself off.

"No!" The words hardly amongst the barely human sounds. "No!"

Sanderson stopped, confused, maybe he did that wrong, but too turned on to not go through with this. He resumed the thrusting, relieved that Hoot reacted to him, enjoyed this. Instead changing the angle of his thrusts and speeding up again, knowing that this time, there was no coming back from the brink. He needed to cum too badly, and the thrusts became even harder, using every ounce of strength on pounding that ass, and his orgasm build up, then took him like a sudden, unexpected, violent current. Washing him away, and cumming into Hoot, his comrade, who groaned out and shuddered, and fuck, Sanderson clawed into the other's tanned flesh, his own groans too loud in his ears. He stayed inside, twitching, holding Hoot tight, hands then moving again to the other's cock.

"Hurt me." Hoot's hands scrambled into nothing, his body as much fighting and begging as it had before. "Get me off." Not over yet, not there.

Hurt me. Gooseflesh all over at that request, right now that Sanderson wanted to rest, but he wanted to make Hoot come more, and if that was what it took...He brought one hand down to squeeze the balls, kneading them, holding them tight in his palm and squeezing them in time with the strokes of his other hand. The motions pulling harshly like he was trying to tear the cock off or torture Hoot more than give him pleasure, while his teeth came down in Hoot's neck, taking a good amount of flesh and pulling back.

That was it, that was what Hoot needed. Last barriers torn down, and he bucked up into the hand and let go. Shouting as he came, the exact opposite of the soldier who did his lethal job day after day and night upon night. This man, now, was convulsing wildly in complete abandon. Trusting enough to let lose more than ever before, and to cum hard until he finally fell down onto the mattress. Chest heaving, eyes closed, his sweat-dripping body dead to the world.

Sanderson let him go, needing to find his own breath, and he pulled out and rolled to the side, even though he wanted to rest on top of Hoot. Seeing the bite marks on Hoot's body, he shook his head, grinning tiredly to himself. So much for getting shitfaced together. Hadn't quite worked out. Fuck. He rolled over on his back, placed his arm across his forehead and closed his eyes, feeling the sweat dry on his skin, and very nearly drifting off to sleep.

Hoot lay silent and immobile for a long time, oblivious to anything and seemingly dead to the world. Until suddenly, when Sanderson was nearly asleep,

his voice drawled in his usual way, “Got any water?” Adding, with barely a split second’s pause and a flash of a half-grin, “Sir?”

Sanderson turned his head, looked at Hoot. “Yeah. You...want anything to eat, too? I could microwave a pizza or something.” Not ‘or something’. The fridge as desolate as the wasteland of Somalia.

“Yeah, and a shower.” Hoot lifted his head, but nothing else. Watching Sanderson sit up, laboriously, then shaking his head, yawning, before he got up and stuffed his limp cock into his jeans, closing the fly. He walked into the kitchen to wash his hands, then filled up a pitcher with water and some ice cubes and wished he had fresh lemons to slice up. He really needed to go shopping. He found two pizzas in the freezer, sliced off the plastic and put the first one into the microwave, then gathered up their various shirts and clothes from the kitchen floor, placed them on the armchair to the side of the couch, and then brought in the pitcher and glasses, pouring both himself and Hoot a good amount, handing one glass over. “And it’s Jeff, or Sanderson.”

“Yeah.” Hoot drawled, moving at last to sit up. The cum had cooled on his body, but he couldn’t be bothered to do anything about it. “Just wanted you to know ...” never finished the sentence, drinking half of the water instead.

Sanderson nodded. “No problem.” It would be fucking awkward, they were still in the same team, they’d crossed the line, more than one line, actually. He reached over to touch Hoot’s shoulder in what he hoped was a comradely, easy gesture.

“Shower?” Hoot looked up, then lifted his thumb towards the second floor.

“Yeah, upstairs. My house is your house and all that.” Sanderson frowned for a second. “Fresh towels are on the pile next to the shower.”

Hoot nodded and got up. His movements stiff, giving proof to the sore state of his body. His gait everything but smooth, yet he made no sound nor grimaced. His ass could have been ripped apart and he wouldn’t show it. He was upstairs and in the bathroom for no more than ten minutes, and when he came back, he was as naked as before.

Sanderson had used the time to eat the first pizza that was done by now, and hearing Hoot return, he switched on the other one. A few minutes later, he got the steaming food out on a plate, sliced it up and brought it into the living room to

set it down on the low table next to the couch. He looked at the plate, then shook his head. “I have cutlery, too. Sorry. Will get it.”

“Not necessary.” Hoot flashed another of his rare grins and sat cross-legged on the couch, almost managing to mask his stiffness. Unconcerned at his state of nudity, as he reached for the plate to get a slice.

Sanderson grinned and went upstairs to have a quick shower himself, and shed the jeans. He wore a bathrobe when he came back, though, but didn’t mind Hoot being naked. There was really very little he’d mind with Hoot. He was uncomplicated, good to have around in any kind of situation, ranging from getting drunk to fighting for one’s life in Mog. He drank his water and resolved he’d drive down to the supermarket tomorrow and fill up the fridge. He’d been too drawn into the whole shit of debriefing to care much about anything else. Had eaten takeaway and just come here to sleep, but maybe it was time to relax and wait for the decisions. Who’d lose their job, if he’d get charged with anything, what would happen, how they decided he’d acted and what was the price to pay for that fuck-up. He looked at Hoot, watching him decimate the pizza. As meticulously as he killed. “I know it’s a bad thing to ask, but are you okay?”

Hoot looked up, licking some grease off his fingers. “I’m okay now.” He put the plate down and stretched his arms, rolling his shoulders. “Done it before. Wasn’t as ...” Good? Intense? Intimate? “Wasn’t like this.”

And what was ‘it’? Sex with a guy? “No. Same here. Apart from the first part. Haven’t done it before.”

“Less complicated.” Hoot flashed a grin and reached for his water.

Sanderson grinned. “I...guess.” Which told him it would be okay. Just because they’d had sex—holy fuck—didn’t mean they’d screwed up the team. Everything would be alright, and perfectly normal once they returned to duty. “But I’m glad...I did.” He didn’t want Hoot to think it had been an accident and it had shocked him. Surprised, hell yes, but apart from the creeping disbelief how things had happened, he wasn’t shocked. “I mean. It’s okay. Nothing to worry about.”

“Yeah.” Hoot suddenly laughed, put the glass back and slid down the couch, until he lay down. “I don’t worry.” Added, with a raised brow, “Jeff. Sir.”

Sanderson grinned, felt relieved, then decided he could clear away the plate later. Pouring himself more water, and drinking half of it, he shed the bathrobe and lay down again, too. This was, after all, his bed.

Hoot watched, opened his mouth to ask a question, but never did, when Sanderson gathered up the blanket that was really only big enough for one, but if he lay close, it would be sufficient for both of them.

Hoot turned his head, then moved underneath the blanket. “Guess I don’t have to get a cab back to base yet?” Hoot asked, even though he knew the answer.

“I’ll take you there tomorrow. Have to pick up some paperwork, anyway, and face another commission.” Sanderson gave a small laugh. “Maybe I’ll even find some breakfast ...” He stretched out and closed his eyes, breathing deeply. It was nice to share the bed again. Nicer than the tired relaxation after porn.

Hoot grinned, turned onto his side, close to Sanderson, so close their bodies touched, and relaxed. Now that he could. At last.

* * *

Hoot woke a few hours later to the dawn chorus coming in through the patio windows, and to the distinct impressions that first of all he needed a leak, secondly he wanted a cigarette, and thirdly...he felt damn good pressed up with his front against someone’s back. Yes. Remembered. Not someone. Not anyone. Sanderson.

Sanderson was still out cold, mostly, deeply relaxed, and his military timekeeping shot to hell by the last week and the strenuous activity of last night. He moved a bit when the other person in the bed shifted, rolling over onto his front and blindly reaching for his pillow, then, once that was stuffed under his head, he went back to sleep.

Hoot went upstairs to take a piss, and returned downstairs to fish a cigarette out of his jacket. He didn’t smoke often, but there were times when he really craved the nicotine fix. Settling back down, the room began to light up as the new day approached. Sitting cross-legged again and looking down at the other man, while he smoked.

Sanderson turned his head, opened those bright blue eyes, looking tousled and relaxed. “Ah. Good morning....I think.”

“You mind?” Hoot indicated his cigarette.

Sanderson shook his head, then stretched, debating whether going upstairs was really urgent, but then assumed that it was. He stretched some more, yawning,

and pushed himself up. Remembering he'd had a shower last night. And why. "When do you want to be back on base?"

"Got time yet." Hoot watched, gaze too intense, while the smoke curled out of his nostrils and vanished into the room.

"Okay." Sanderson rubbed his face, then headed upstairs to take a leak himself, had a wash and a quick shave to feel more presentable, then headed back downstairs. All the clothes he usually wore were downstairs, packed neatly in boxes. He preferred to keep the essentials close by. But what to wear. He wasn't too keen on the fatigues, not yet, and civilian clothes felt like a waste of time. Plus, Hoot wasn't dressed either, and was still reclining on the couch. He turned to face him. "Uhm. Slept well?"

"Yeah." Hoot answered, a half-smile on his lips. "You in a hurry?"

Sanderson paused, realizing that he was acting strangely, getting ready when there was no need for it. "No. Actually, I'm not." He sat down, looking at Hoot. "Figured you might want breakfast."

"No." Hoot shook his head, then leaned forward to extinguish his cigarette on a pizza plate. "Thought I'd reciprocate."

Sanderson looked at him. Reciprocate. He'd thought last night had been a mutual thing. They'd both gotten off.

"Give you what you need." Hoot looked at Sanderson, letting his eyes wander from the chiseled cheekbones to the aquiline nose and down to the thin but perfectly formed lips.

What I need. He'd had that, he'd needed somebody close, and Hoot had been that. Hoot had been alive underneath him, shared that strange sense of need with him. Sanderson wasn't quite sure what Hoot meant, but the longer the silence lingered, the more it turned into a possibility. Cross the line not once, but twice.

"You could start with sitting down." Hoot added with a small quirk of his lips.

Sanderson sat down on the bed, pulled his legs up to sit in a lotus position. Still looking at Hoot, his body, down to his cock, back up to his dark eyes.

Hoot placed a hand onto Sanderson's thigh and let it run upwards along the smooth muscle, until his hand reached the groin, and he looked up, making Sanderson tense somewhat, as if he expected Hoot would grab his cock right away.

Looking not saying anything. Hoot moved closer, studying the face in front of him. “Lie down?” Not a request, but a question.

Sanderson shifted, still looking at Hoot’s eyes, not sure what to expect, but wasn’t that half the fun? He stretched out, lay where he’d lain when he’d woken up, head on the pillow, but on his back.

Hoot leaned over and close, his face coming into Sanderson’s vision. Didn’t need nor wanted words, letting his body speak, and he simple lowered his head enough to kiss Jeff. Sanderson. Comrade.

Sanderson stared at him, surprised, but he did enjoy the touch, holy fuck, kissing Hoot, of all people, not only a guy, but...so many other things. He decided he wouldn’t just lie there and leave everything to Hoot, but brought his hands up to kiss Hoot properly, despite the stubble. In an embrace, holding him and kissing him more deeply, because, yes, it was fucking weird to kiss a man—and like this—but any new thing felt weird at first.

Hoot changed the kiss from a light attempt to connect, to something entirely different. Moving closer, body upon body, an odd compassion in a kiss that was growing with intensity. A kiss that could have been between lovers, were it not for who those two men were. Hoot’s hand moving along Sanderson’s body, caressing, and most of all connecting, before he suddenly lifted his head, broke the kiss for a moment to murmur, “Remember. I’m alive.”

Alive. Sanderson was surprised at the impact of those words, feeling the reassurance, the goddamned motherfucking relief Hoot had come back and unharmed. Not blown apart, not strung up, not dismembered by a wild drug-crazed Somali mob, and he clung to him, clawing almost, lips and teeth opening wide to devour the kiss and the touches and everything else. The closeness was making him hard, but that was okay, felt almost normal and was probably welcome.

Hoot shifted his leg, thigh pressing into Sanderson’s hardening cock, rubbing with every small movement, while he continued the full-blown kissing with the same intensity and focus. Focus, entirely and exclusively on the man beneath him. His calloused hands stroking along the skin, down Sanderson’s flank, back up and slipping underneath, to knead a muscular buttock. Traveling further towards the chest and across the nipples, before holding onto the shoulders. Taking his time, that the most precious commodity of all: time and focus.

Sanderson moaned, moved against Hoot's leg, hands going to the head and hair, shoulders, arms. Powerful and male, Hoot likely was stronger than himself, but that was okay, because he trusted him with his life. And the relief to be no longer alone, no longer trapped in that dread and the sadness and the guilt of could have, should have, might have.

It was as if Hoot knew all of this, could understand Sanderson's feelings and was addressing the darkness with every touch and every movement. He was hard, just as hard as the other man, but for a long, long time, he did not act on it at all, merely kept Sanderson aroused by using all of his body to connect with the other's. Shifting once more until their cocks were lined up. He pressed down lightly, rubbing against the other. "Sir?" Lifting his head from the kiss. The formal, unnecessary address again, as his hand went between their bodies, smiling briefly.

Sanderson opened his eyes, every muscle in his body felt alive and full of energy, like he'd been charged. All touches were welcome, whatever they were, even the one that moved towards his ass. "Yes?" His voice felt rough, he was aroused and mellow, trusting, and he swallowed hard. "You..." *want to fuck me*, was the question.

Hoot nodded. "Yeah." The brief flash of a half-smile again, while he shifted his hips, letting his cock slide against Sanderson's. Waiting for permission.

"I'll be shit...haven't...done this." Sanderson gave a breathless laugh. He personally didn't like virgins very much, and it occurred to him that Hoot might not like virgins either, because, god damn it, he was. Virgins were usually a complete waste of time in bed. Funny, how he could feel insufficient because he'd never engaged in this flavor of sex.

"Don't need to do anything." Hoot let his hand run down Sanderson's flank, before it settled once again on his balls as a steady presence. "Just let me."

"Okay. But I warned you." Sanderson flashed a grin, finding it hilarious that he had just agreed to be fucked by one of his comrades, and 'comrade' had a weird taste now, hadn't it? He lay back, watching Hoot, and knew he'd be alright.

Hoot lowered his head until his lips were so close to Sanderson's ear, they touched when he whispered, "Won't complain." And he meant so much more with it. Reaching to the side, he found the tub of Vaseline that was still open, and moved up, kneeling between the other's legs. Looking down at Sanderson, while coating his hand then his cock, before moving between Sanderson's legs. But he

stalled, and flashed another half-grin, before suddenly lowering down once more, this time over the other's cock. His lips closed around the head while his fingers slid behind the balls, along the dam and towards the ring of muscles, increasing the pressure as he sucked down.

Sanderson arched up, would have cursed if he'd had any breath left. Oh fuck. Hoot's lips around his cock. Fuck. His brain short-circuited at that sight, and most of all the sensation, and then felt himself yield to that other pressure. Too much to process and comprehend only that it was damn good how Hoot did it, and, God save him, that Hoot was too good at this, too experienced to be straight.

Fingers moving, pressing in, opening Sanderson up while Hoot's lips remained around that cock, increasing suction every time he moved his fingers deeper, making Sanderson moan and squirm. Panting with lust and need, until Hoot slowly came back up, lingering at the head, his tongue swirling, finally letting go of the twitching cock and he looked up, both hands on Sanderson's legs and pushing up and forward. Lifting the legs as he moved closer between them, that half-smile on his face again. The movement was so smooth that Sanderson just accepted that, even though he knew why and what for, but it seemed the logical next thing to happen, despite the self-consciousness that reared its head.

Hoot placed the legs onto his shoulders, and leaned over Sanderson's body, almost shielding, as if taking any feelings of vulnerability away. As if he knew, knew all too well what all of this was, felt like, and meant.

Sanderson was glad he didn't have to see anything, thought, what a virgin thing to do, switch off the light and hide under the covers. His hand was near his face and gave the military 'all clear' sign, because he absolutely could not speak.

Nor did he have to, and neither did Hoot, because he just shifted once more, already poised, and every movement smooth despite the aches and pains from the night before. Guiding his cock one-handed, while supporting his weight on one arm. His head lowered, back arched, close enough to kiss while he pressed forward, slowly but steadily, giving Sanderson the chance to get accustomed at every stage. Mere increments, allowing the tight muscle to accept the intrusion, while never letting up the kiss, allowing the other to simply feel, while Hoot had himself so incredibly under control, as if everything he did was *for* the other.

Sanderson gave a groan and closed his eyes, fully accepting the sensory input, and he thought he was too sober for this, because he was taking it up the ass.

It being Hoot's cock. But slow and considerate, unlike him pounding away last night, and he got an idea of how much that must have hurt, because even with all the preparation and the slowness, it wasn't altogether pleasant. A burn and stretch, and he forced himself to relax, kept breathing, kept kissing, and then the burn subsided and changed to something completely different when he was finally stretched and filled completely. He moaned and pulled Hoot closer with his legs, who lifted his head to look at the face beneath him, giving another of his half-smiles, unseen by Sanderson, who had his eyes closed.

Pulling back slowly, supporting his body with both arms now, and feeling the weight of the other's legs as a reassuring burden on his sore shoulders, Hoot paused for a moment, before pushing back in, slightly faster. Watching the face with an intensity as if he was staring through a sniper scope. He shifted the next time, changing the angle, before thrusting once more. Deliberate, concentrated, and yet the lust was obvious on his own face.

Sanderson made a strange sound, the sensation was part good and part electric shock, making him tense hard and unable to relax for a long time. His body not under his control anymore, which was hard to swallow, until the next thrust that caused the same, intense sensation. He arched, groaning, hands forming fists. Shit, this was almost too much, and got worse when he opened his eyes and saw Hoot watch him with that fully alert, hungry expression. "Fuck, this ..."

"Is unlike anything else." Hoot gave a breathless laugh, before taking a deep breath. Eyes on Sanderson's face, not leaving it for a second, drinking in each expression, the tiniest sound, every miniature reaction, before he pulled out once more, shifted the angle and pushed in harder, faster, then pulled out again before the other had time to realize what was happening to him, and thrust even harder this time. Still smooth, nothing erratic, everything controlled, but the intensity grew with each minute.

The tension mounted, no relaxation anymore, Sanderson's body tensed up completely under the onslaught of sensation, until he was utterly helpless and swept away, shuddering violently. Feeling Hoot fuck him, move in and out, up to his balls and suddenly the tension increased up to unbearable, like a cramp, a seizure, only it felt good, and he arched into the feeling, felt his balls draw up and tighten, cumming across his chest and stomach.

“Shit!” Hoot forced out, completely taken aback at the reaction, hadn’t ever touched Sanderson’s cock, hadn’t...and it blew his mind, the way the other’s face changed, sharp white teeth bared, every muscle tensed, the body reacting, out of control. He took Sanderson’s orgasm as permission to let go himself, fucking harder, concentrating on his own sensations, and yet never taking his eyes off Sanderson’s face, not even now. His thrusts powerful, fast, and his breath came in short, harsh gasps, as he finally got himself over the edge, and he came in almost silence, except for a low, drawn-out groan.

Too intense, too much, Sanderson was almost relieved when it was over. Complete overload of feelings and need, and he, in turn, watched Hoot lose it, let go, seeing that thing behind his eyes he’d spotted before and had never been shown before. Hoot always wore that mask while on duty. He wanted to push him away or pull him closer, torn between wanting to be free and not have his knees pushed up to his ears when Hoot went in close, and not wanting to lose contact and touch, and he just reached up to touch Hoot’s cheek. Grinning at him, wordless, while Hoot was still panting, still inside, not even soft yet.

“Yeah.” Hoot breathed out, an answer to a question that had never been asked, and he grinned back, having enough presence of mind to shift his weight, pull out carefully, and lower Sanderson’s legs, before he rolled off and to the side. Just breathing.

Sanderson stretched out, lying there for several long breaths, then reached over for the box of Kleenex and wiped his stomach and chest with a bunch of the tissues, dropping the stuff to the side. “Fuck,” he murmured, and turned his head to look at Hoot. And how exactly had he gotten into this situation? “You okay?”

“Yeah.” Hoot turned his head and grinned, the same brief flash as always, and yet everything was different now. He seemed relaxed, calm. Looking unlike any time Sanderson had ever seen him: like a man who led a normal life and who just happened to have had a couple of Buds with his mates over a BBQ.

“That’s good,” murmured Sanderson and smiled, tired and sated, but that nagging feeling, the nagging sensation from his ass kept reminding him how strange all this was. He watched Hoot breathe for a long time, a perfectly normal scene in the early morning light, wet Kleenex, and half empty Vaseline tub for company, and he gave a chuckle, amused and relaxed. Thinking, damn, taking all this too seriously was probably a bad idea. They were both still alive, and there

was nothing they could do to change the past. It was out of their hands, they only had to accept that. “It’s good you’re alive.”

“Yeah, figured.” Hoot drawled, grinning, as he sat up and reached for the packet of cigarettes that he had discarded earlier. “You mind?” Holding it up.

“Go ahead.” Sanderson sat up, then stood, lazily reaching for the bathrobe, and went upstairs to get the sticky shit off himself. The hot water felt great on his skin, being clean was even better, and he couldn’t ignore the thoughts about Hoot. Damn. It was none of his business, just because they put their lives on the line together didn’t mean he had a right to Hoot’s private life. Hoot was quite famous for keeping his thoughts to himself, stone cold professional under fire, never the one who drew too much attention, always focused on the mission. But Sanderson had never thought Hoot might be hiding something. Like being gay.

He brushed his teeth, glanced into the steamed up mirror and was glad he couldn’t see his receding hairline like that. None of his business. He was just his comrade. What or whom Hoot fucked was really not his concern. Only that Hoot had just fucked him. He towed his head and padded downstairs, prepared two mugs with instant coffee and pulled a little Tetra Pak from the fridge that he hadn’t cleared out before heading to Mog. That would be breakfast.

“Thought your fridge was empty?” Hoot’s voice was suddenly close, standing naked in the doorway, leaning against the frame.

Sanderson nodded. “Empty in terms of dinner. And this is some weird egg mix that doesn’t even need refrigeration. Bacon already included. America’s gift to the world: convenience food. If democracy doesn’t work, we can at least bring them quick and easy meals. And instant coffee.” Pointing over at the mug when Hoot laughed again, a short, dry sound.

“Columbus and all that shit.” Hoot looked at the coffee, exactly the way he liked it. Comrades knew these things about each other.

“Got anything to scrape up?” No way he could go back into camp with that stubble in his face.

“Sure.” Sanderson glanced backwards. “Disposable razors are on the shelf, I should have an unopened toothbrush.”

Hoot vanished upstairs, staying no longer than it took Sanderson to prepare breakfast. He was back down, smelling of soap as he passed the kitchen, then some

rustling from the living room, and he was dressed in just the fatigue trousers, socks and boots, when he came back to take his mug of coffee.

Sanderson looked up, grinned, pouring the 'scrambled eggs' onto two plates, shrugged apologetically. "My ex-wife took the ketchup, though."

"Okay." Hoot nodded. "Easier not to get married in the first place." Taking hold of one of the plates.

"I guess." Sanderson grinned and had several forks full of the stuff that tasted enough like egg and bacon to fool a ten-year old. "That way they can't make away with half your dishes, cutlery and video cassettes."

Leaning against the kitchen counter, Hoot shoveled the food down, like he'd eat anything that wasn't particularly tasty. It was food, would sustain him. That was all that he needed. "Never bothered with any of that either." Another mouthful, he hardly chewed it, before looking up and straight at Sanderson. "But you should."

"Last thing on my mind at the moment," Sanderson admitted. "I should probably not ask."

Hoot looked at him over the rim of the mug. Raising one brow, he let out a questioning grunt.

"It's...none of my business. I'm just your comrade. You do have a private life. I don't...really don't want to ask, but I wonder. Shit. I'm half there asking, because...and have not, because I just shouldn't."

"And I shouldn't answer."

Sanderson nodded. Don't ask, don't tell. If this ever got official, by any stretch of the imagination, it could destroy Hoot's career. The career of one of the finest soldiers he'd ever known, ever encountered, had ever had the privilege of serving with. "No, you shouldn't. That's the rules," he said, but gave a somewhat sad smile. He could fuck up his marriage, but guys like Hoot could not even share what they felt. How pathetic was that?

"Yeah." Hoot nodded, suddenly offering more information, like an offer of...friendship. "Someone else is just as caught up."

Hoot was protecting a lover? In the Forces? Sanderson stepped closer, placing a hand on the other man's shoulder. "Hoot, you're one of the finest men I know. If you or your...special friend need any help, whatever it is ..." Putting his own career and reputation on the line, but fuck, if he had to decide between a

comrade and the rulebook, the decision was easy. He wasn't Delta for nothing. Prioritizing was a vital skill, in battle and in life, too.

Hoot let out a dry huff at the 'special friend'. "We're fine. Logistics is a fucker. That's all." But he smiled before glancing at the watch that had never left his wrist.

Sanderson nodded, thought, shit, he should have used the more honest word, 'lover', political correctness be damned. "Thank you. For the company."

"Yeah, you could call it that." Hoot commented dryly, flashing another grin, before heading back into the living room and the pile of clothes.

What else to call it among comrades? Sanderson began to get dressed, had another grilling at ten, so enough time to fill up the car and mentally prepare for the next round of questions, while Hoot was dressing as well, back into the uniform in which he'd come.

"We should head back to camp." Sanderson commented.

Hoot just nodded, ready as always, but when he moved up from picking his cap off the floor, he was stiff, masking the soreness immediately. "Ready."

Sanderson winced in sympathy, walking towards the door. But before heading out, he turned to face Hoot, standing close, face to face. Opened his mouth to say something, anything, really. Getting this damn close in a few hours, and with all the stuff ahead...not fucking easy. But he didn't feel as alone anymore. Not quite as guilty, more relaxed and positive. Seemed sex did a lot of good, he was more ready now to face the bastards and whatever was due for him after Mog.

"Hey." He gave another grin, then touched his lips to Hoot's, who grinned back, tilted his head and slipped his tongue between Sanderson's lips, just like he'd done, not much more than an hour ago. A hand towards the back of the other's neck, pulling close and kissing him with the exact same intensity as if they were still on the couch, and Sanderson relished it, which wasn't entirely straight, either.

No more than a few seconds, before Hoot let go, flashed another grin and nodded. "Yeah." Then he turned and opened the door, stepping out into the sun and towards the car, just a guy who got a lift into camp from his buddy.

~The End~