

## the falling dream

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## the falling dream

by [ThatWeirdGuyInTheBushes](#)

### Summary

There's a sword wound in his dad's chest.

“Yeah. Who are you?”

Fundy purses his lips, even though he shouldn't have expected Phil to know him in the first place. “I'm Fundy. I'm your grandson.”

Phil's eyes widen before he shuts them tight, hands balled up into fists. He lets out a laugh that's so bitter it makes Fundy cringe. “I don't suppose you're gonna make this easier and tell me you're Techno's?”

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Fundy Soot on; November Sixteenth, the month after, and finding what he wants.

### Notes

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edit: this fic now has a russian translation by the lovely spoiledbleach ! if you speak the language go show it some love :)

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

His home gets ripped to pieces beneath his feet and the only thing Fundy can manage to think is *well, at least it's done.*

Which, when he gets down to it, is a shitty thing to think about the country you that grew up with you. But he's tossed into the lake. The explosion burns his feet. There's a piece of the podium lodged in his arm. And taking that into account, he can't manage to give a *shit* about L'Manberg.

He gets out of the lake near the end of Technoblade's speech, in time to spot the grandpa he's only ever seen pictures of swoop in from above. He's coughing up his lungs on the shore when the Withers are summoned.

His uncle grabs him by the ankle and tries to drown him.

The battle is still raging when he finds his dad leaning against the wall, a sword through his stomach. Fundy regrets wearing a binder into a warzone because now he can't get a lungful of air for the life of him.

He hears footsteps behind him and ducks on instinct. The sound of netherite hitting the cave wall echoes in Fundy's still-ringing ears.

He whirls around to see Sapnap lifting his axe again, and holds his arms up, scrambling backwards. "Sorry about this, Fundy, it's nothing-"

And that's about the point where Fundy trips over Wilbur's legs and goes tumbling to the floor. Sapnap's eyes go wide, his axe lowering to his side.

“Oh.”

A manic laugh rakes itself out of Fundy’s throat, because of all the things to save his life, of course, it would be this. Of course, he can’t stop owing everything to Wilbur, even after he’s run through with a sword.

Sapnap shifts, looking awkward. Of course, Wilbur even gets this. It can’t be their friendship that saves him. It can’t be all the nights they spent sleeping in tents together, hunting Dreamon’s. It can’t be respect between war veterans.

No, it can’t be any of that. Instead, Fundy’s only alive because his dad is dead and Sapnap is an emotionally stunted bastard.

“Oh,” Sapnap says again, looking down at him. “Oh, shit.”

Fundy lost his weapons in the lake. He had to kick off everything but his chest plate to get out of Techno’s grip. He reaches up and undoes the straps on the armour, tossing it straight at Sapnap’s head.

Sapnap goes down hard, clutching his head in his hands, falling into the wall. Fundy scrambles past him, feeling one of his claws tear on the stone.

He runs until he can’t feel his legs. Until the biting cold of the November air and the heat lingering from the explosion make his skin go numb.

Fundy collapses on the edge of the crater, grasping his shirt like it's the only thing keeping him afloat. He drags in a heaving breath. His entire body feels like it’s splitting in half, because of course, Wilbur leaves. Of course, he gets the last laugh.

Of course, Fundy gets left here, holding the crumpled body of his sister.

Wilbur always gets what he wants, so of course, he leaves both of his children in ruins.

It feels like hours later when Jack finds him. Maybe it is hours. Maybe his legs have gone numb. Maybe he's dead.

Jack's glasses are gone. He looks dazed, confused, and who fucking wouldn't be, after today? "You alright?" Jack asks, and Fundy can't get enough air in to answer, so he forces himself to nod.

Jack holds out a hand, and Fundy takes it.

His chest is cold, the skin tingling. When did he put on his binder? What time is it now?

Jack is limping, so Fundy takes the hand still locked in his and swings it over his shoulder. Slowly, they make their way down the lip of the crater, and Fundy sets Jack on a rock so he can rest.

Every breath is harder than the last.

He feels a hand on his arm, looks down and sees Niki. She's staring out at the carnage, at the wrecked and disembowelled corpse of the country. It's supposed to be so alive. On quiet nights, you could press your ear to the Earth and hear it breathing.

"Fundy?" she asks, voice jagged and breathless. He keeps walking, and her hand slips off of him, and he's not kind enough to go back and hold her.

He picks through the rubble, climbs his way up to the hole in the wall, and he finds his grandpa hunched over his dad's body. He looks like he's praying. If Fundy considers the wings, he looks like an angel.

After a long minute of staring, he gets through the tight pain in his chest and says "hey. Phil, right?"

Phil jolts up like he's been jerked out of slumber. There's a sword hanging on his hip. It still has blood on it.

There's a sword wound in his dad's chest.

“Yeah. Who are you?”

Fundy purses his lips, even though he shouldn't have expected Phil to know him in the first place. “I'm Fundy. I'm your grandson.”

Phil's eyes widen before he shuts them tight, hands balled up into fists. He lets out a laugh that's so bitter it makes Fundy cringe. “I don't suppose you're gonna make this easier and tell me you're Techno's?”

Fundy shakes his head before remembering that Phil can't see him. “No, I'm not.” Fundy swallows, even though his mouth is dry as dust. “Did you kill him?”

Phil doesn't answer, and yet it is the most damning thud of a gavel that Fundy has ever heard.

“Will never mentioned a son,” Phil mumbles, eyes opening to stare down at his hands. “What happened to your sister?”

And fuck, if that's not a punch in the gut. Wilbur never even bothered to help with this. Probably stopped sending letters when Fundy was a baby.

What was the tipping point? When Wilbur realized he would age faster than a human child, that that was odd, unnatural? When Wilbur realized that he wanted responsibility, wanted recognition, *wanted?*

“Same person.”

It's darkly amusing, coming out to his grandad over the corpse of his father.

“Oh,” Phil says. “Oh. Sorry about that. It's nice to meet you, mate.”

For some reason, both their eyes turn to Wilbur. He's smiling. Of course, he's fucking smiling.

Fundy leaves Phil alone with a corpse, and he does not cry about it

He looks around. The sun is setting. He's had his binder on since it came up, since before that. He needs to take it off, needs to find somewhere private, but there's nowhere to go.

There's nowhere to go.

Fundy lets his fidgeting hands drop to his sides, and he stares out across the wreckage. There's nothing left. Wilbur is dead, and there is nowhere to go.

He'd like to be at some kind of poetic peace with his dad's death. He wants to throw around some bullshit about how the real Wilbur died a long time ago. But that's not true. The real Wilbur led the revolution, sang Fundy to sleep, spat in his face and called him a traitor. The real Wilbur watched as Schlatt tried to break a bottle over his head. The real Wilbur nearly shot Schlatt in the face when he told Fundy he would never be a man.

The real Wilbur is- was a complicated oxymoron of a person that Fundy could never wrap his head around. And now he never will.

He's probably still disowned.

An involuntary shake runs through his body, and he needs to take his fucking binder off.

"Hey." Fundy jumps at the voice, turning around and finding Quackity. "Where are you gonna go?"

Is Quackity mocking him? "Funny," he spits.

"Eret's opened their castle. Tommy is going to the Holy Land."

"Oh." Fundy rubs at his arm, awkward. "I don't know."

Quackity scratches at a forming scab on his head, not seeming to care when little droplets of blood

well up by his fingernails. "I'm going with Sam." "Okay."

"Sorry. About Wilbur."

Fundy blinks, tongue turning leaden. Before he can respond, Quackity is walking past him.

He stands there in the rubble for a little while longer, before he finally picks himself up, coughs up a pound of dust, and just starts walking.

He feels angry, guilty and, swollen with grief, so he really shouldn't be surprised when he ends up in Pogtopia.

He pushes aside the heavy wooden door, makes the descent into the ravine. There are still buttons all over the walls. Why did he do that?

Fundy can't help but stare at it, standing on the bridge above the ravine. What could have happened if he left at the beginning? Would Wilbur have even let him in?

Probably not.

He doesn't bother to waste time walking down the stairs and jumps to the bottom instead. It sends a small shock through his legs. He can still see his father pacing around the ravine, pressing buttons with a giggle, snapping at him every time he spoke. The slow, curdling dread that had built up in his chest with every passing minute.

He had held out his diary like an offering. Fundy hardly has a right to be religious, not after abusing his position as high-priest under Schlatt. But at that moment he felt like a sinner coming to confess, coming to beg his father for absolution.

Wilbur had ripped the book from his hands and gave him nothing.

There's a hole in the stone leading into a room. There's a sign nailed to the wall. Fundy leans in to read it and almost laughs.

Ozymandias. Of course. Wilbur loved his dramatics.

Fundy looks to the left of it, and the air gets punched out of his lungs. It shouldn't be surprising that Wilbur kept the coat. But it still hurts, because Fundy always hoped that they both chose to burn theirs.

He takes his jacket off, then his binder, letting out a big breath of relief as the pressure finally lifts. He puts his shirt back on and before he can stop himself, takes the L'Manberg President's coat off the wall.

The mattress on the floor is hardly that. It's more of a sheet thrown over a pile of straw. Fundy collapses on it anyways, pulling the coat over himself.

He doesn't think he'll be able to sleep in the cold, but it's hardly been a few minutes when the exhaustion sends him into darkness.

He doesn't know how long he's out. But he does know that by the time he's climbing out of Pogtopia, his binder strapped on tight, Wilbur's coat hanging off him, the sun is at its peak.

All the trees surrounding Pogtopia look the same, but Fundy just stands, breathes, and feels the magnetic tug of North. The foxes he comes from would have used it to hunt. Fundy uses it to point himself towards Manberg. Or has it been renamed already? Is Tubbo working through the documents himself, or is he pushing all the work off onto his cabinet?

Is Fundy part of his cabinet?

He runs his hands down his face. Gods, he wants to cry. He can feel it building up in his chest, crawling up his throat. It's been bubbling down there for so long that it's probably moulded by now.

He swallows it. Doesn't matter that he's alone, crying is for little girls. Crying is for Niki and Tubbo. Not that Tubbo's a girl, but he's not the most masculine kid either.



Unlike Fundy. Fundy is a man. And real men don't cry. Fundy doesn't want to cry anyway- just because his dad is dead and his home is gone and his whole life is in fucking shambles doesn't mean he has any good reason to bawl his eyes out like a baby.

So he walks.

And when he gets to L'Manberg, Manberg, home, it's still in ruins. This was no cruel dream. No sick joke. It's real. The country is gone.

Fundy takes a deep breath, so deep he feels the oxygen filling up his head. He can spot tiny dots sifting through the rubble, shoving rocks and dirt to the side. He'll help them, later. Wilbur called him selfish, and Wilbur was right, but if he wants a place in this cabinet he's got to help clear the ashes.

He doesn't even know if he wants a place in the cabinet.

But not right now. Right now he's got some business with a corpse.

"Still here, huh?" He asks Wilbur's dead body with a snarl. It's crazy of him, getting this mad at a lifeless shell on the floor, but he can't help it. He kicks Wilbur's shin. "You just get to- to sleep through it all. Go out with a fucking smile on your face." He kicks Wilbur in the leg, harder this time. The body slides a little further down the wall.

Then, he reaches down and pulls Wilbur's trenchcoat off his shoulders. "You'd probably want Tommy to have this," he realizes despondently. "You always liked him more. Well, guess what?"

For a brief second, Fundy is disappointed by the lack of response.

"I'm taking it instead. All your coats are mine now, even though they're shitty." He tries to grin and it feels more like snarling. "If you were here, you'd take them, but you're not, so they're mine now."

And without even knowing why he wants it so bad, Fundy slings the bloodsoaked trench coat over his shoulder. "Selfish piece of shit," he murmurs, and he can't tell if he's talking about his dad or himself.

He spends the rest of the day clearing rubble with Tubbo and Quackity. He's practically wheezing by the end of it. The dust clings to the blood on his hands.

He's so tired, he thinks that he's hallucinating the ghost.

But Tubbo is staring at it too.

Fundy stands there for a few long seconds, his ears ringing, his head stuffed full of cotton. He's fuzzy, unreal. He can't feel his fingers.

He doesn't hear Tubbo call his name when he turns, climbing out of the crater, claws scraping against the rock. He wanders, not knowing where his feet are taking him. He doesn't know a lot of things, these days.

He finds himself at a river. Fundy unties the trenchcoat from around his neck and lowers it into the water. It's probably not the greatest thing for the fish, all that blood and dirt, but Fundy can't bring himself to care. He rubs the fabric roughly. He doesn't care much about the stain, he just wants the crusted blood gone. This will be a much more comfortable blanket than the L'Manberg coat. He scrubs until his fingers are wrinkled by the water.

He stays in Pogtopia another night, shivering beneath his father's coats. He can't sleep so he wanders, a torch clutched in his hand, nails digging into the wood. He holds it up in Wilbur's room and reads the messy scrawl of his father. That stupid poem. It digs into his tongue, salty and bitter.

Fundy stares out at the potato farm, gnawing on his bottom lip. It's all going to go to waste if someone doesn't harvest them, given how ready they are.

He should go to bed.

Fundy shrugs off the trenchcoat, leaving it pooled up on the floor. He kneels down on the stone and begins to dig into the dirt, uncovering a potato and pulling it from the ground. He spends the next couple of minutes searching for a basket to put it in.

Once he has one, he gets to work.

The dirt builds under his fingernails, pushing into the skin. He's bent in half for so long that he thinks his back has resigned itself. By the time he's through a single row, he's wiping sweat off of his forehead. And wondering why he ever thought fighting a man who could do this for months on end was a good idea.

He tears a clump of new potatoes from the ground. "Fucking Technoblade," he mutters to it. "Stupid fucking pig. Stupid fucking dad." He tosses it into the basket and moves on to the next one, uses his claws to dig up the roots. "Dying like you had any right to just leave me here." He grunts as he has to tug particularly hard to get the potatoes up.

A drop of sweat trickles down his temple, across his cheek, dropping off his chin. He thanks the gods that he hadn't been stupid enough to put on his binder.

"Gave the country to fucking Tubbo. Even after losing your damn mind, I still wasn't good enough," he growls. Fundy didn't even realize he was mad about that. "I'm never fucking good enough!"

He pulls the potato from the ground, reaching for the next one when he realizes that he's done.

Slowly, he stands, surveying the field. As quickly as the rage in his chest had peaked, it crashed. He hardly remembers doing half of that. Fundy looks down at his hands, picking at the dirt encrusting them with his fox claw nails.

He did all of that.

He smiles and, for the first time since the election, Fundy is proud of himself.

He's stumbling out, basket slung over his shoulder when he sees a lever on the ground. Curiously, he presses it with his foot. And he watches as water pours out over the potato field from dispensers, soaking the dirt and unearthing one of the potato bunches that he missed.

Fundy runs his hands over his face, not bearing any mind to the streaks of dirt. "You gotta be fucking kidding me."

So that was all pointless. But, now that he's working, he might as well relight the lamps.

It hasn't been that long since Pogtopia was occupied, thankfully, so there isn't any oil buildup. Unbidden, the image of Wilbur putting out all the lamps comes to mind.

Did he prepare to leave this place forever? Did he know he was going to die that night?

Fundy finds a matchbox in Tommy's room. It's like the one he used to burn the flag. That particular matchbox is empty now. He's been biting his claws for as long as he can remember, but burning matches down to his fingertips was a nervous tic he developed under Schlatt.

He should stop that, even if it's not as bad a habit as he could have gotten out with. Quackity plucked his feathers. He's pretty sure Tubbo started smoking.

The skin of his index finger seems permanently rubbed raw, but that's hardly a hindrance.

Once he's lit all the lamps, he stops for a second and then stuffs the matchbox in the President's jacket pocket.

He steps on a button. He's already in the mood. He might as well.

First, Fundy puts a potato in a furnace. Then, he grabs an axe from off the wall and begins prying the buttons off the cave wall. "Shitty grandad," he tells the buttons. "No damn mom. Dad fucking died."

He swings hard and chops one of the buttons in half. He stands and marvels at the axe in his hands. He can't remember the last time he felt this manly. And he's not even wearing a binder! Damn.

Then he thinks about Schlatt and his mood drops into a pit. He swings again, taking two buttons off the wall in one go. "Motherfucker. What does he know about being a man? Couldn't even fight."

Wilbur would tell him stories of Schlatt when he was a little kid. The sharpest conman in history. He grew up idolizing the guy. The first thing he did when he came out was ask for a haircut like

Schlatt's. He was such a wreck, meeting him for the first time, he almost chickened out altogether. The only person who looked up to Schlatt more was Tommy.

His arms burn. Schlatt had called him a right-hand man. It felt so good, to be recognized like that. It wasn't like he'd ever dealt with transphobia; he had been Wilbur's son since the moment he asked for it. But it wasn't special. He could be Wilbur's daughter just as easy.

You couldn't be a right-hand girl.

Part of him knows that Schlatt just said it to make him feel bad. He doesn't even really know if Schlatt meant it like that. He said shit like that to Quackity all the time. It was probably meant to be more about drinking and weightlifting.

But that doesn't change how it felt.

He got drunk for the first time with Schlatt. It wasn't even bad. It was fun. But he only did it because Schlatt called him a pussy and he couldn't stand for that.

He's thinking about this too much.

Fundy looks down at the last button. How did Wilbur feel, before he pressed the button? Did he think about Fundy at all? Did he think about Tommy? Or did he, as usual, only think about himself?

He breaks the last button and then takes his potato out of the furnace. A little overdone, but good enough.

Maybe he can find a village nearby and sell these potatoes. He can't imagine getting through all of them before they rot.

Fundy shakes himself. What is he thinking? He should be back in L'Manberg, rebuilding with everyone else. If he wants a place in the cabinet, he wants any power at all, he has to work for it.

It's with an unexpected amount of reluctance that he picks himself up, brushing dirt off on his

pants and heading back into his room. He puts on his binder and his normal black jacket.

When did it start being his room?

Fundy leaves Pogtopia, skipping the stairs in favour of climbing up the wall.

The sun has just started rising, which means he was working all night. That explains why his arms are so sore.

He gets back to L'Manberg and finds Tubbo chopping down trees on the outskirts. The kid has probably been up all night as well. An arm slings around his shoulders and Fundy jumps.

“Fundy!” Karl shouts. Fundy rubs his ears.

“What the fuck, Karl?”

Karl grabs him by the shoulders and turns him around. “Look, new people! I’m showing them around!”

Fundy rubs at his eyes and does, in fact, see three people he’s never met before. Karl introduces them all as Ranboo, Connor, and Captain Puffy.

“And this is Fundy Soot!” Karl gives a grand gesture that is hardly worthy of the way Fundy probably looks now.

“Soot?” Connor asks. “As in Wilbur Soot? You one of his brothers or something?”

Fundy goes stiff. Karl chuckles awkwardly beside him. “His son, actually. I age fast.” Connor nods. Before he can stop himself, Fundy is opening his mouth again. “How did you know my dad?”

Connor grins. “Met him on SMPLive, way back when. Always wondered where he ended up. Is he still here?”

Karl makes a noise. “About that-”

“He’s dead.”

He wonders how long it takes for potatoes to rot.

Connor’s smile drops. “Oh.” His voice is heavy, a little choked. “Damn. Him *and* Schlatt. Maybe I should go. This server doesn’t have a very good track record.”

His stomach feels like it’s being run through. Everyone is shuffling awkwardly.

And Fundy doesn’t know what to do.

He helps with the cleanup. That day, and the next, and the next.

He sleeps in Eret’s castle. Him, Tubbo, Tommy, splayed out on the same mattress, like kits with no mother, like they’re still in the first war. If this were the revolution, Wilbur would be watching them, hat over his eyes, trying to pretend he was asleep as well. But Fundy could never get through a full night, not with his sensitive ears and the raucous outside the walls. And every time he stirred, his dad was there, running a hand over his head.

Sometimes he’d speak. “Shh, champ, go back to sleep. Dad’ll protect you.”

Sometimes he’d be humming something under his breath, what Fundy later learned was a first draft of the anthem.

But mostly he was silent. Fundy doesn’t know how he did it, how he was always there whenever Fundy woke.

And somehow, when Fundy’s gentle stirring in the night turned to violent nightmares, Wilbur always slept through them.

Sleeping in a pile doesn't work the same way it did when they were fledgeling soldiers. Tommy talks in his sleep and wakes up choking on sobs he won't let out. Tubbo thrashes in his nightmares and steals all the blankets.

When Fundy was young, he had this nightmare nearly every night. He'd be soaring above Newfoundland, wings on his back, swooping over his birthplace with his arms spread out and a laugh in his lungs. Then, suddenly, he'd find his wings were gone, and he was plummeting down to Earth. Sometimes, his dad caught him. Sometimes, no one did. Sometimes, he fell forever.

Wilbur called it the bird dream, in some poor attempt at optimism. Fundy always called it the falling dream.

He hasn't had it since he was a kid, but he remembers that, even on the good nights, he'd crawl into his dad's bed and snuggle under his arm. And Wilbur would ask "did you have the bird dream again?" and Fundy would nod, just so he'd get to sleep under the warmer blankets, curled up next to his dad, head on his chest.

Fundy untangles himself from the sleeping pile and spends the night on the balcony.

"*Theseus's Ship* it," Tubbo says, spreading out the blueprints for New L'Manberg on the table. "Take every piece and replace it with something else, till it's different." Fundy nods, and Ranboo scribbles something in his book.

Quackity leans over the blueprint with a pen in hand and draws a new design over part of the old.

Fundy pushes at his eyes, at the headache behind them.

Ranboo fidgets with his pencil, gnaws on the eraser, opens his mouth like he's about to say something before he snaps it closed. It reminds Fundy of Tubbo under Schlatt, full of ideas but knowing better than to speak his mind in meetings.

Fundy breathes in deep, ignores the smell of cigarettes, and wonders how long it takes for a cabinet to rot.



The ghost is in the rubble again.

Fundy wanders over, picks his way through, griping to no one about the rocks in his shoes and the dry cough tickling his throat until he's at the ghost's side.

The ghost. Ghostbur. Wilbur. Whatever. Any name except dad is appropriate.

Ghostbur smiles at him, eyes scrunching up. Fundy shifts his weight from one foot to the other, anger forgotten as he settles into the familiar awkwardness.

"What's up?" Fundy asks. Because Ghostbur doesn't like digging around in the rubble, and there was no one else around. Fundy wraps his tail around one of his legs, still tapping his foot to an incomprehensible rhythm.

Ghostbur frowns, eyebrows furrowing together. "I came down here for a reason, but I forgot it."

Fuck his stupid eyes and the stupid way they're heating up. He's not gonna let something as shitty as that break his no crying streak.

"That sucks," he finally mutters. He should have just ignored the ghost picking through the remnants, should have kept to himself. When Wilbur was alive, Fundy would leave bad conversations feeling ashamed and patronized. Now that Wilbur is dead, Fundy leaves every conversation feeling hollow.

"You look sad, Champ," Ghostbur says, "have some blue, please, calm yourself."

Fundy's torn between the desire to rage at him, because he is not allowed to use that name anymore, or to laugh in his face. Sad is not even the fucking beginning of everything he feels right now.

"I'm alright," he says instead.

“Are you sure?” Ghostbur asks, and Fundy stomps his foot on the ground.

“Yes, Ghostbur, I’m sure! Now stop!”

Ghostbur vanishes into the air, beside Fundy one moment, gone the next, just like Wilbur.

He stands there for a long time, and he doesn’t remember getting up to leave.

It takes three weeks for Connor to walk up to him and ask if he wants to get a drink. He does. Fuck, Fundy needs a drink.

“Tell me about my dad,” Fundy says, a couple of drinks in, his head on Connor’s shoulder.

Connor hums and goes quiet for a long time. Finally, he shifts. “I didn’t know him too well. He sang a lot. Good voice. He still sing?”

Fundy shakes his head, a sudden lump in his throat. “Not at the- not at the end.”

“Oh.”

“I’m thinking about leaving,” Fundy finds himself admitting. The words are still clumsy, unrefined, but they tumble out anyways. “Nothing good here for me.”

Connor’s shoulder shrugs, jostling him around. It takes Fundy a second to realize that Connor is laughing. “Why are you having a midlife crisis? You’re what? Twenty?”

Fundy scoffs. “Given the family history, I’m a little late to the party.”

Connor laughs again, louder this time, and Fundy lifts his head away from the man’s shoulder. “Do

it, then. Leave.”

Fundy grabs the bottle of vodka from the floor and drinks again so he doesn't have to answer.

He falls asleep on the floor of Connor's living room and wakes up on the couch. Connor's already shuffling around the kitchen, yawning and pouring coffee into two mugs.

Connor gives him a cup and Fundy doesn't drink it. Connor seems to notice and takes a sip out of Fundy's mug, pointedly, locking eyes with him.

Fundy can't tell if the point was to make him jealous about how delicious the coffee was or to reassure him that it wasn't poisoned or both. But he drinks the coffee, so Connor wins.

“I think you should leave if you really want to.”

Fundy sips from the coffee. Wonders if a month is too long to leave a basket of potatoes. He makes a non-committal humming noise and steps around the question as best he can, has to leap over it to get out the door.

Dream stands next to him on the edge of the crater. Fundy's gonna float away if he doesn't tie himself down. “Do you want to get married?”

Dream reaches over and grabs his hand. Fundy shudders. He can't tell if it's Dream or Dream's touch that does this to him, that makes him weak in the heart and knees. “Do *you* want to get married?”

Fundy nods. He doesn't think he loves Dream, even though he doesn't know what love feels like. But he's sure that it feels safer than this, warmer, that it should make it easier to breathe, not harder. But if he closes his eyes tight enough, if he keeps his breath shallow, he can almost imagine the red string of fate is wrapped around his finger, not his neck.

“Okay,” Dream says. And for a second, Fundy lets himself believe that finding happiness will be that simple.

But the thing is that it's not simple. Because Quackity plucks out grey hairs when he thinks no one is looking and Ranboo is too nervous to speak up and Fundy caught Tubbo smoking last week and Wilbur is dead.

And Wilbur is dead.

Phil takes him fishing. It is nothing like and yet exactly the same as the time his father grabbed him by the hand and said: *"You are different, and I cannot protect you from that."*

It is different because there is no heat between them, no deep breaths that burn on the way down and burst like fire-crackers in his stomach. It is different because Phil puts one hand over his and smiles at him and tells him how to breathe right. It is different because Phil says "I'm proud of you" and makes Fundy feel so full he could burst.

It is the same because he storms home with tears hot in his stomach and crawling up his throat. It is the same because he swallows them like they'll burn if he lets them out.

He stays up late, making shapes out of the patterns in his ceiling, and wonders how long it will be before he's rotted, too.

Some nights, Fundy can't stand the white house. He seeks out other places.

It's Niki, at the start. He appears at her doorstep, soaked to the bone by the rain, shivering in the coat that's so much lighter than Wilbur's. She lets him in, passes him a towel, and they curl up together. It is nothing like what it used to be, in the early days; when they wrapped up so tight they nearly melted into each other's skin.

It is hesitant because they are not the same people they were back then. His hand finds hers from the other side of the mattress. She pulls her knees to her chest when she sleeps, so different from how she seems awake. Niki awake has spent her whole life clawing her way to being something, just like Fundy has. She's always had to work for it, to push back her shoulders and raise herself taller.

Niki asleep always looks like she's trying to make herself smaller.

She holds his hand back until the night that she doesn't anymore.

He goes to Jack, after that. Fundy doesn't know where Tommy sleeps. Tubbo doesn't sleep anymore. Niki curls up tightly. He and Jack are the only people who still sleep like soldiers. Jack is the only one who will indulge Fundy in the idea that they are still in the first war, still trying to snatch a second of slumber on cold stone floors. He's the only one who will give in and let Fundy pretend that he needs to tangle into someone to get warm.

Fundy thinks that they are both very desperate to keep pretending.

He and Jack spar together, whenever Fundy can get away from his work. Jack smacks him on the head if he turns up with his binder on, so he doesn't, and he's surprised to find that he doesn't mind all that much. It makes sense, in a way: Jack is family.

They don't go easy on each other. They used to, back when Wilbur would get protective if Fundy showed up with too many bruises or too much blood on his face. No one cares about that anymore. They don't go easy on each other.

Jack asks if he wants to get drunk and sing karaoke like they used to. Fundy's chest twists up.

"Can't tonight. Maybe some other time."

Jack nods, gives him a little smile. "Whenever you're up for it, mate."

It's the same thing he's been saying since Schlatt got elected. Since he started spending all his nights looking for approval. Doing paperwork until his fingers cramped for Schlatt's. Spying for Wilbur's. How many nights out with Jack did he miss for them?

He doesn't like to think about it. Going down those rabbit holes, spiralling down the blurry nights.

"You should do it," Connor says, next time they find each other on the Nether roof. "If you want to, if being here makes you so miserable, you should leave."

Fundy doesn't know if the way he's holding onto reasons by his fingertips is any better or worse than the freefall.

What has L'Manberg ever given him? What has it ever been but the golden child to his black sheep?

What does he have left to give it, anymore?

Fundy is above L'Manberg. He's gliding, back brushing the clouds. He can't see anyone on the surface, not as more than tiny specs.

Fundy flies and flies and flies.

And then he wakes up. No falling. No dad to tell it to.

He holds a hand up to his mouth and laughs into it, tears dripping over his knuckles. So much for that no crying streak.

He goes into the bathroom. He splashes water on himself. He stares into the mirror for a long time, mapping out his face. All the peaks and valleys, all the different angles, all the things he has spent so long loving and hating. Mostly hating.

How much time has he wasted in front of this fucking mirror? How much of his life has he spent hating himself? How much of his life has he wasted trying to prove that he was worthy of being Wilbur's son, of being a man at all?

Fundy pushes himself up and straightens his back. He sucks in a deep breath, setting back his shoulders, squaring his jaw.

"If you want to," he tells his reflection "if it makes you so miserable... If you want to, you should do it."

And gods, he's weak in the knees. He stumbles forward, barely catching himself on the rim of the sink.

"If it'll make you happy," he says to it again, voice a little breathy.

It would, he knows. But does Fundy even deserve to be happy?

He makes eye contact with his reflection and finds that he's crying again. Two in one. What a morning.

He scrubs at his cheeks until they're red. Who cares if he deserves to be happy? Who cares if he's needed somewhere else? Fundy never claimed to be anything other than a selfish bastard. He wants to be happy, so he will be.

Fundy laughs at himself then, fuller than he has in a while, because what a head he's got screwed onto these shoulders, huh?

He straps on his binder, throws on his t-shirt and jacket, and strides out of his room, head up higher than he's held it in a long time. It's a cold morning. He finds Quackity outside, watching the sunrise on the podium, and the man doesn't even look surprised to see him.

"I'm leaving," Fundy says, and that seems to get him, just a little.

Quackity uses his head to gesture across the piss-poor makeup job they've given Wilbur's favourite child. "What about L'Manberg?"

A bark of laughter is torn from his chest. Even Fundy feels surprised at the manic smile spreading across his lips. "Fuck it!"

"Watch it," Quackity warns, voice edging on serious.

"I mean it," Fundy says, even though he didn't know that a few seconds ago. "My dad died for an

acre of dirt. Fuck that!”

Quackity swats his hand away. “You sound like Technoblade. Off to join him?”

“No.”

“Where are you going, then?”

Fundy shrugs, breathing in and feeling the air in his lungs fly around like sparks off a fire. “Can’t stay here.” He’s pretty sure that Quackity has been planning an escape for months now; maybe he wants to compare notes.

Quackity surprises him with a pat on the back and a laugh of his own. “Y’know what, man? Good for you.”

He can’t bring himself to say goodbye to anyone else, but he hugs Jack. Jack splutters for a second. Fundy wonders how long it’s been since either of them had a hug. But eventually, fidgeting and awkward all the while, Jack brings his arms up and hugs him back.

Fundy stands. Orients himself. Feels the pull of magnetic North.

He sends himself South, through the woods. He keeps himself slow, no matter how much he wants to run all the way there.

Fundy arrives in Pogtopia for the first time in a while. He’s greeted by dust tickling the back of his throat and the smell of potatoes.

He finds the basket. He guesses that potatoes take more time to rot than he thought they did.

The lamps have all burnt themselves out. He’ll have to relight them.

Fundy grabs the coats piled up on the floor, slips off his own, and shrugs on the L’Manberg President’s jacket. He finds Tommy’s matchbox still shoved in the pocket and pulls it out. He



grabs some of the firewood propped up in the corner and builds it up into a pyramid, grabbing dry pines needles from the corner and stacks them on top.

“Fundy?” His heart skips a beat at the sound of the voice. He whirls around and finds his father. “Oh, I’m sorry, Champ. Did I scare you?”

Fundy, instead of spitting, finds himself smiling. Even if it’s a little sad- even if it’s forced. “No, Ghostbur. Not at all.”

“What are you doing?” Ghostbur leans over his shoulder.

“Lighting a fire. Need to stay warm.”

“Oh, is it cold down here? Is that why you’re wearing my coat?” Ghostbur blinks at him with those big, child-like eyes. Fundy nods, striking the match against the box.

Ghostbur sits on the other side of the fire as Fundy sets the match on the kindling. He watches the flickering orange flames. “Pretty, right?”

It’s Ghostbur’s turn to nod. Then, he shakes himself. “What are you doing here?”

Fundy leans back on his hands, watching the fire as well, his situation settling in. “I live here now. Didn’t like L’Manberg.”

They are both silent. The fire slowly consumes all the logs until it’s a roaring thing, sending warmth up Fundy’s chilled bones. He sags towards it as he realizes how cold he was.

Finally, Ghostbur shuffles closer, sitting down beside him. “Can I stay, too?”

Fundy swallows something heavy and rock-like in his throat. He doesn't think it's forgiveness; it's a little too heavy for that. But it's something. It's good enough.

“Yeah,” he says softly, barely able to hear himself over the crackle of the fire on the wood. “Yeah.

You can stay as long as you want.”

## End Notes

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ill try to reply to all comments. they really make my day :)

i only use he/him pronouns. do not refer to me as anything else. thank you!

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