Summary

Nico confronts the ruins of the day. Follows Ep 22.

Notes

Okay, so a lot of us were pissed off after ep 22, as was I. So instead of stewing, I wrote this, mostly as a character study. It may or may not continue. It does not relate the two works I have already written. The GA writers have effectively pushed those into AU territory now, which is fine. The boys are happy there and I plan to keep them happy.

And thanks to my new friend Naomi, whose encouragement helped me decide to write this.

And yes, I will continue this...
The bland sterility of the room seems appropriate to him. Cold. Impersonal. Empty.

Nico Kim's eyes sweep the on-call room. But he doesn't see it.

What does he see?

He sees his dead patient's face on the operating table, the droning monotone of the heart monitor piercing the silent OR.

He sees that patient’s grandfather, the shock and disbelief twisting his face as he hears the awful news.

And the he sees the frozen pain of Levi's face later in the conference room, after Nico said the worst possible thing he could say to the man who loves him. Well, loved. Because Nico thinks he's killed that love as just surely as he killed his patient.

Is there a feeling more desolate than complete emptiness? Is there a fire more consuming than utter self-loathing? Nico Kim would like to know.

He has a perfect memory of every step he took for Josh's procedure. Not a piece of it is missing from his mind. Everything was done in Nico's usual meticulous way.

And now Josh is dead.

Funny, Nico's remembers every single thing about Josh. But his Skype interview for UCSF? From his first big fake smile at the beginning, to his last agonized thank you at the end, Nico remembers absolutely zero of the interview. A complete blank. His dream job, everything he's worked towards. Zero. That seems appropriate, too.

Now what, Nico Kim?

He can't stay in this room. Nico looks around, and sees Levi in it everywhere. Go to Joe's? Where his colleagues, who've surely heard by now, might be? Sure, get drunk and have them ignore, or worse, pity him. Sounds fun.

How about his apartment? Great idea. Where he can see Levi, hear Levi, smell, taste and touch Levi in his mind until he's balled-up on the bathroom floor crying uncontrollably. Awesome.

Nico Kim, who has always known where he's going, has no idea where to go.

He puts his head in his hands. The fellowship is done. At best, he's looking at a harsh reprimand. Worst? Suspension. Malpractice lawsuit. And once UCSF finds out, which they will, eventually, that's done, too. At Nico's level, the profession isn't large. News travels.

Bailey's not done with him, not by a longshot. And he hasn't even had to deal with Karev, or Link yet. Link! Jesus! The thought of seeing him physically turns his stomach.


How? How could he have said what he said? He couldn't have said “Back off, leave me alone!” Or
“Not now, we'll talk later.” No. He had to negate every positive thing he'd ever said to Levi. He had to find his most vulnerable spot, and stick the knife right in. And then twist it. Failure. His entire identity? Who says shit like that?

He does, apparently.

How can he fix this? Nico fixes things. That what he does. That's who he is. He’s got to find Levi. Then he’s got to find the words, the right words. Maybe he can minimize the damage he’s inflicted. Maybe he can find a way to tell Levi that the poison that shot out of Nico’s mouth was really directed inward, not outward. That the pressure to be perfect has driven him from childhood. That failure isn’t something he knows how to deal with. Which is its own kind of failure.

“So arrogant.”

Nico hears again what Levi teasingly said to him earlier in the day. Just a few hours ago, when Nico’s life was in perfect order. When his boyfriend had said everything he could to Nico except the words he really wanted to hear: Stay. Please stay in Seattle. Please stay.

If Levi had said those words, it might have tipped the balance. Because Levi means more to Nico than any job. He’s what matters. Nico knows that now. Now, when it’s probably too late.

Nico fingers the tie at his neck. Then he furiously yanks at it, pulling at the knot until he feels a slight tear in the fabric, and then he throws the tie across the room. “Fuck!” He turns his face to the wall, pounding on it with both fists. “Fuck fuck FUCK!” He leans his head into the wall. Its slight coolness the only thing he feels, other than the heat of his rage.

He can’t stay in this room.

A plan slowly starts to coalesce in his clouded mind. Head down to the fellows lounge, where he can change out of the goddamned suit. Take a shower. Collect his thoughts. Then find Levi. Whatever it takes, find Levi. But not before he can find the words. He’s failed at everything else today. He can’t afford to fail again. He needs the time, even as he can feel it slipping away, to find the right words.

Nico turns, strides to the door and yanks it open, just as someone else is pushing it from the other side. Their bodies collide in the open doorway. It takes a moment for both to see who the other is. And then Nico Kim and Levi Schmitt are staring at each other across the threshold.

And Nico has absolutely zero idea of what to say.
Chapter Summary

The same day following Ep 22, from a different perspective.

Chapter Notes

So, yeah, the story continues. And will likely continue from here...

And how was your day, Doctor Schmitt?

Today started off great. He got to assist on a really cool procedure. He got to see his boyfriend gear-up for the most important interview of his life. He dropped massively unsubtle hints to Nico that he wanted him to stay in Seattle. He even mentioned *sports*, for God’s sake! True, Nico ducked, but that was okay. There would be time for that discussion later.

The procedure flew by, the patient was up and walking, and…

The blur of panic, fear and blood in the OR. A destroyed pulmonary artery. The lacerating voices of Doctor Pierce and Doctor Bailey. The heart monitor’s drone. Nico’s eyes coagulating into shock, then disbelief.

Then finding him in the conference room later, his manner as cold as the blue suit he was wearing so perfectly. A harsh word. A flung arm. And then Nico’s thunderbolt, “‘Because you let failure hold you back your whole life. It’s basically your entire identity. But it’s not mine.”

His brain froze at that point. He watched Nico take a seat and give a big used-car salesman smile to the laptop screen. He sort-of remembers walking out and slamming the door, but it’s fuzzy.

Then, a brilliant idea! He goes to the foofy flower shop a few blocks from the hospital. Because, you know, *flowers*. They make things better. And he has a nice little conversation with an older dude looking to propose to his bae, and then he pays for the guy’s bouquet when he forgets his wallet. Because why not, right? *Somebody* should have a good day.

And then two minutes later, he finds the dude face-down in a welter of blood on the sidewalk. And then Levi rides in the ambulance with the EMTs, and *then* finds out the sidewalk dude is the Seattle fire chief. Because why wouldn’t *that* happen?

Who. The fuck. Is writing today’s script?

Now Levi Schmitt slumps outside the Grey-Sloan main entrance. His mind is blended into mush from the last twelve hours of his life. And no flowers to show for it. Dammit!

Okay, wait. Think a minute. Take a breath, and think.

Nico prepped everything perfectly. Levi watched him with a laser-focus, because Nico doesn’t let
anyone near a patient unless they’re as ready as he is. Levi saw every step. Nothing was missed. Every base covered.

And Josh died.

Wait. Take another breath. Think harder.

Nico did everything he could to save Josh. Doctor Pierce, Doctor Bailey -- everyone did everything humanly possible to save that kid.

Josh died anyway.

Breathe, breathe, breathe, goddammit Josh! Breathe…

Levi can’t hold his tears back any longer. He covers his face with his hands. The sound of the heart monitor melding with Nico’s knife-edged voice in the conference room. The sight of Josh’s bloody chest merging with the face of the fire chief bleeding on the sidewalk. The wail of the ambulance turning into --

“Hello? Young man. Are you okay?”

Levi looks up and sees a woman standing in front of him. His mom’s age, perhaps a little older. Her eyes squinting in concern. “Are you okay?” she repeats.

Levi quickly wipes his eyes with the back of his hand. “Uh, yeah, thank you, I’m...it’s just been a really awful day.” He tries to smile. “I work here. As a doctor. And --”

“Do you?” Levi nods at her. “I’m sure you have good days, too, as well as bad. Isn’t that true?”

Levi isn’t sure how to respond. “Well...yeah. It’s just that --”

“You save people, don’t you?”

“No always.” Levi’s voice is shakey.

“Well, I’m just leaving the emergency room here,” the woman says, “where some very nice doctors and nurses just saved my brother.” She smiles at Levi.

“Oh,” Levi says, “that’s great! Our emergency staff -- “

“My brother collapsed on the sidewalk,” the woman cuts Levi off, “after buying flowers, of all things! No warning. Apparently there was a doctor from this very hospital who just happened to be right behind him. Miraculous.”

Are...you...fucking...kidding...me? Levi can't believe what he's hearing.

“And he helped save my brother. That’s what the ER doctors said. So!” The woman looks at Levi with a sparkle in her eye. “Thank God for you, and for the people like you at the hospital.” She smiles at Levi. “So I hope this bit of news makes your day a little better.” She pats Levi’s arm in a buck-up-kiddo kind of way.

“You have no idea,” Levi says slowly.

“Good.” The woman says brightly. ‘Well, have a better day tomorrow, Doctor…?”

“Schmitt. I’m Doctor Levi Schmitt.” Levi smiles broadly at her, and offers his hand. “And I’m the --
I’m so glad your brother is okay.”

She takes Levi’s hand and beams at him. “Thank you, Doctor Schmitt.” Then she turns and disappears down the sidewalk.

Levi watches her go. And then it hits him full-force: thanks in part to Levi, a bleeding man on a sidewalk survived today. And his sister probably got to hold his hand, and got to tell him she loved him, and left the hospital with enough gratitude that she could comfort a distraught young doctor on her way home.

This doesn’t make Josh’s death any less painful; Josh’s death will always be a tragedy. And it doesn’t excuse what Nico said to him. But this puts things into a...what? A perspective. Levi can forgive Nico. Deep down, Levi knows Nico didn’t really mean what he said. Nico’s not that guy.

Nico. He needs to find Nico. Right now. He pulls out his phone and then -- wait a minute. Think. Breathe. Think. Then Levi turns and races into the hospital.

He’s almost out of breath from running, as he pushes the on-call room door, which suddenly gives way and Levi crashes into someone pulling the door from inside. Bodies thump. Levi pulls back.

And he sees the stunned, silent figure of Nico Kim. They lock eyes.

“I...I” is all that comes out of Nico.

Think. Breathe. Think.

Breathe.
The End of the Beginning

Chapter Summary

The same day after Ep 22. What happens after they collide in the on-call room doorway.

Chapter Notes

I think this is it for this one. I think.

Thanks to everyone for your kind comments!

“I...I” The words seem stuck in Nico Kim's throat.

Levi Schmitt stares at him, waiting. Levi finally sighs and pushes past him into the on-call room. He sits on one of the lumpy beds.


“Sit.”

Nico walks to the bed and sits heavily next to Levi. The room is silent. Levi’s ragged breathing from his four-floor sprint slowly subsides.

“I...was going to look for you.” Nico’s voice is barely audible. “That’s what I was doing when --”

“Yeah, so I was looking for you.” Levi says tightly. “So at least we still have that in-common.”

Nico turns his face away from Levi, as if he’s been slapped. Which, in a way, he has. The silence thickens in the room.

“How long have you been in here?” Levi finally asks, a whiff of accusation in his voice.


“Uh-huh.” Levi still doesn’t look at Nico. “And how did the interview go?”

Nico snorts softly and shakes his head. “I have no idea. I don’t remember any of it.” Levi rolls his eyes.

“I don’t!” Nico rockets off the bed and wheels on Levi. “I don’t remember one fucking thing about it! I’m sure I was my usual smooth and charming bullshit self. But all I could think about was Josh!”

Levi finally looks up at Nico. “So, is that a compliment? Or are you blaming me for you blowing the interview?” Nico can’t, at first, believe that Levi just said that. But Levi’s face is stoney. Nico knows he meant every word.

Time is slipping away. Fast.

Nico walks back to the bed and sits.

“Levi,” Nico starts softly, “no. God, no. I’m not blaming you for anything.” Nico looks around the room. The words, the words -- he needs them. Right now. He won’t get another chance. “I needed time before I saw you again, to find the right words to fix this -- us. I don’t want to screw up anything else today.” Nico pauses, swallows. No. He will not cry. “I want to find a way back --”

“You can’t,” Levi says flatly. Nico swivels his head to Levi in panic.

“Levi, please --”

“Stop.” Levi’s tone is softer, but still firm. “Listen to me. We can’t be what we were when today started. There’s no way back there, Nico. That’s -- done.” Nico drops his head. “We can only go forward from where we are now.” Nico cock his head to the floor. “What does that mean?”

Levi continues. “You can’t un-say what you said. I can’t un-hear what I heard.” Levi slowly turns to Nico, and put a tentative hand on his leg. “We have to start over with what we have left.” Nico can’t look up. But he slowly puts his hand over Levi’s.

Levi takes a deep breath.


The dam breaks.

Nico starts to slide off the bed. Levi would remember later as almost in slow-motion. Nico’s knees hit the floor. Then he falls forward and crumples into a ball. And then he starts to wail. Loud, ripping cries ricochet off the walls. The sound wrenches Levi from the bed. He scoots to the floor, and grabs Nico’s shoulders as they shake uncontrollably.

“Nico! Nico, please! NICO!”

“I’VE KILLED EVERYTHING!” The words heave out of Nico’s throat in a volcanic fury. “I killed Josh! I’ve probably killed my career! And us! I’ve killed us!” Nico’s choking sobs are punctuated with his fists pounding the floor.

“STOP IT!” Levi yells. In one swift notion, he yanks Nico up, with a strength that surprises both of them. “You haven’t killed anything, or anyone! Do you hear me?” Levi shakes him, hard. “Do you?”

“But Josh --”

“You don’t know what happened to Josh! You don’t, I don’t, Bailey, Pierce -- nobody knows. Until there’s an investigation, nobody knows.”
“He was *my* patient! *My* responsibility! And --”

*“He died, Nico! He. Died.”* Levi squeezes Nico’s shoulders. “Every doctor in this hospital has lost patients! Bailey has. Pierce has. Karev, Link -- *Doctor Grey*! Every single one of them. *I’ve lost a patient* --”

Nico shakes his head fiercely. “It’s not the same --”

*“Dead patients don’t compare notes on how they died!”* Levi yells in a fury.

The words stun both of them into silence. Nico’s ragged breath is the only sound in the room for a long moment.

Levi gives Nico a penetrating look. “You have two choices, Nico. You can get your act together, come back here tomorrow and take your lumps. And then afterwards, get to work on your next patient, who’s going to need you. And then the next one, and the one after that. Or...you can fold up and slink away.” Nico blinks back his tears and stares at Levi. “But I don’t think you’re going to slink away,” Levi says, his tone softening. “That’s not the Nico Kim I know. That’s not the Nico Kim I love.”

Nico’s eye widen in surprise. “You...you still --”

“Of course I do.” Levi releases Nico’s shoulders, and takes Nico’s hands into his. “Nico...it’s really easy to fall in love. *Falling* in love with you,” Levi smiles wanly, “it was easiest thing I’ve ever done.” His smile fades a bit. “But *being* in love with you...that’s a lot harder. It takes work. You don’t make it easy.”

Nico dips his head. “I know, dude.” His shoots a half-smile to Levi. “Sometimes you don’t, either.”

“I know, I know! I can be a pushy little nerd, and I probably drive you crazy in a million ways, and I’m --”


“See,” Levi says, “you found the right words.”

They look at each other for a moment, then Nico throws himself into Levi’s arms. “Oh, God, I’m so sorry, Levi! I love you, so much. You *have* to know that! I was so angry at myself, I didn’t mean what I said, I --”


Nico pulls away and shakes his head. “Statues have cracks, Levi. They’re not perfect.”

Levi puts a hand to Nico’s cheek. “I know. But...that doesn’t make them any less impressive, or beautiful. You love them in spite of the cracks. You admire them even more, because they’ve gone through so much. And they’re still standing.”

Nico shakes his head. “You amaze me, Levi Joshua Schmitt.” He puts his hands around the back of Levi’s neck. “I promise, I will never hurt you like that again. I swear --”

“No, Nico.” Levi pulls Nico’s hands away. “Don’t.” Nico frowns, confused. “You can’t promise that, and neither can I. We just need to promise that we’ll keep trying with each other.” Nico thinks a moment, and nods. “We still have a lot to talk through,” Levi says slowly. “You know that, right?”
Nico nods again. “So we -- wait.” Levi narrows his eyes. “Where’s your tie?”

Nico’s eyes cut to the other side of the room. “I yanked it off and threw it over there.” Both of them turn to look at the twisted fabric dangling over the edge of the bed.

“Nico,” Levi says quietly, “I know I haven’t been out as long as you have. But even I know gay people aren’t supposed to treat fabric that way.”

Nico’s jaw drops, and then he starts to laugh. “Dude, seriously, you kill me sometimes --” Nico stops when he realizes what he said. “I mean, you...”

“Yeah, yeah, I get it. Those were not the right words, but I get it.” Levi untangles himself and gets off the floor. “Come on. We should go.” He reaches out his hand to Nico, who grabs it and gets unsteadily to his feet.

“Go...where?” Nico’s voice is tentative. He’s not sure if Levi means...

“Home. Where else?” Levi looks at at Nico quizzically. “Unless you don’t want me --”


“And on the way home, I’ll tell you how I bought you some really awesome flowers this afternoon, but they got left behind while I was in the ambulance saving the Seattle fire chief’s life. It’s a cool story.”

Nico looks at Levi, dumbfounded. “Uh.. what?”


Nico smiles and turns back, quickly retrieving the tie. He looks at it. It’s had a rough day. It’s rumpled, and there is a slight, very slight tear in the fabric. You’d have to look hard to see it, but it’s there. But the tie’s intact. It’ll live to see another day.

“Nico.” Levi has his hand out, wagging his fingers. “Come on.”

Nico stuffs the tie in his pocket, walks to Levi and takes his outstretched hand. They pull the door open and walk out together. They’ve turned the corner and vanished by the time the on-call room door finally clicks shut in the silent, deserted hallway.

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