and we're dying with every breath we make

by tothemoonandbackmydear

Summary

“What's your name, kid?” He asked, voice uncharacteristically soft and the boy hiccuped as he glanced skittishly from him to everyone else still staring at him in shock.

“Nathaniel.”

(or the one where no one expected Andrew to be this good with kids.)

Notes

i have no excuse and have three other stories to update and i wrote this.

title from march to the sea by twenty one pilots which will give you so many feelings and is perfect for neil, my poor sad son.

not beta'd, so all mistakes are mine.
Chapter One

It was never a good day when David Wymack was awoken by pounding on his front door at some assinine time in the morning. He groaned as he pulled himself out of bed, glancing blurrily at the clock and cursing himself for ever letting these delinquents know where he lived.

When the banging started up again, harder and almost panicked, Wymack might have started moving a little faster down the hall, sore back be damned.

The last person he expected to find standing outside was Andrew, clad in pajamas, hair sticking up every which way and a frown tugging his lips down. His fist was poised to start his assault on the poor front door again, but he let it fall to his side when Wymack wrenched it open.

“Andrew? What the hell are you doing here?” Wymack sighed, rubbing a hand over his tired face and fixing the short blonde with a stern glare.

“We have a problem.”

“Oh, geez. What did you do now? How many bodies do we need to hide?” He muttered, moving aside and motioning Andrew in, but stared in confusion when Andrew stayed in the hallway. He crossed his arms over his chest and gave the coach a bored stare.

“You should just see for yourself.” He said, not waiting for an answer before he started walking away. Wymack looked after him for a moment before sighing heavily and grabbing his jacket and shoes and followed him.

It was quiet when they arrived at the dorms. Wymack wasn’t sure what he was expecting, maybe a fire, people running around in a panic, anything but the silent calm that greeted them. It just aided in putting him further on edge.

Andrew headed up the stairs at a fast pace and Wymack followed silently behind. When the reached the floor the Foxes were on, Andrew was stopped in front his room, hand gripping the doorknob lightly and he glanced back at Wymack, a small smirk on his lips. He shrugged as if to say your funeral.

“Just open the door already, Andrew.” He sighed, stomach clenching and Andrew shrugged nonchalantly before pulling the door open.

At that moment, a blur shot out the door, slamming it all the way open and making Andrew stumble back as the blur ran straight into Wymack. He stumbled back, instinctively catching the object that had just barreled into him full force with a wheeze of breath.

The last thing he expected to see when he looked down at the writhing mess in his arms is a pair of icy blue eyes filled with terror staring right back at him. It was a boy, no older than ten, hair a shocking auburn and eyes full of tears. The kid gaped at him for a moment and Wymack was struck with a feeling of familiarity in the features.

Then the kid screamed, an ear piercing wail of distress and tears flooded down his cheeks as he struggled harder to be released from where Wymack was holding him. He winced away from the noise, but kept his hold on the kid as best he could. He snapped his gaze up to where Andrew was still standing by the door.
“Ah, shit, Andrew. Did you kidnap a kid?”

Andrew opened his mouth in a sneer, but was interrupted by the rest of the team piling out of their rooms. Matt tumbled out of door down the hall, racquet raised in threat, but stopped when he saw it was just Wymack and Andrew. He lowered the racquet and the tension in his shoulders released some. Nicky and Aaron were standing in the doorway of their room, both looking flustered and scared. It sent a pang of worry through Wymack’s stomach. Dan, Allison, and Renee were piled in their doorway, sleepy, but ready for a fight. Kevin was nowhere in sight.

“Coach? Wha-” Matt stopped as he caught sight of the snotting mess in Wymack’s arms. The kid had frozen when Matt had stepped out, his gaze wide and fearful. He whined pitifully when he realized everyone was now staring at him openly in shock and began to sob violently, tiny body shaking like a leaf.

“M-Mommy, I-I want m-my m-mom!” He wailed, stomping his foot and pushing weakly against Wymack’s stomach in a futile attempt to get away. Wymack stared down at the boy, the feeling of familiarity coming back full force and kneeled down so he was almost to even height with the kid, hands wrapped around fragile wrists to stop him from getting away. He looked at him closely and his stomach flipped. With the auburn hair, icy clear blue eyes, and the fact that he was wearing a familiar oversized t-shirt made something funny happen to his stomach.

No way, that had to be impossible.

“Coach-” Nicky started to say, voice wavering, but shut up when Wymack sent him a tight glare before turning his attention back to the kid.

“What’s your name, kid?” He asked, voice uncharacteristically soft and the boy hiccuped as he glanced skittishly from him to everyone else still staring at him in shock.

“Nathaniel.”

It was like a punch to the gut and Wymack let go of the kid- of Nathaniel - like he had been burned.

“What the fuck.” Matt breathed behind him and Wymack could relate to that sentiment.

The kid had moved back as soon as he had been released and he huddled against the far wall, eyes darting between everyone and the door to the stairwell. Andrew moved casually so he was positioned in front of the door, eyes never leaving the cowering form and the boy swallowed audibly, lower lip beginning to tremble again.

Renee was the one to move first, slipping past Dan and Allison to move slowly down the hall and kneel down a few feet away from Nathaniel. The boy tracked her movements and flinched when she moved closer.

“Nathaniel, right?” She asked, voice soft and kind, a gentle, welcoming smile gracing her lips. The boy stared at her with wide eyes before nodding slowly, wrapping his arms tighter around himself. She moved a little closer and the boy didn’t even flinch.

Thank god for Renee Walker.

“My names, Renee. That’s Matt, Allison, and Dan.” She motioned behind her. Dan smiled and waved while Matt raised his hand dumbly, still in shock. Allison gave a small smile and waved.

“And I’m guessing you already met them, huh? Is that where you woke up, in that room?” She gestured to the door where Nicky and Aaron stood silently. Nathaniel glanced over and nodded,
blinking his eyes rapidly.

“That must have been scary, waking up somewhere strange.” She stated gently, shifted forward and just like that she was right in front of Nathaniel and the kid didn’t even flinch or look like he was about to try and take Andrew on to get to the stairwell.

Thank fucking god for Renee Walker.

“Yeah.” The kid whispered, tears welling up again in his eyes and Wymack almost looked away. It was the most open he had ever seen Neil (or Nathaniel? He wasn’t sure, this was so confusing and weird) and he felt like he needed to hide him away from the prying eyes of his teammates.

“Do you remember where you were before you got here?”

The boy squinted his eyes in thought and it was so familiar to what Neil does when he is so concentrated, whether on schoolwork or Exy, it’s that that solidifies the fact that the ten year old boy in front of him is who will grow up to be the hardened, scarred eighteen year old he knows. It makes his slightly sick to his stomach.

“I was at the bus stop with my mommy. We...we runaway.” He ended in a whisper, like he was telling a secret. It was almost cute, if only he didn’t know what would happen in the years to come.

“Running away from home?” Renee asked and Nathaniel nodded.

“From daddy. He’s a mean man. Doesn’t deserve to be my daddy.” Nathaniel boasted, sounding like he was repeating something that had been said to him many time.

“Well, you’re very brave. We are actually friends of your mommy’s. She dropped you off here to stay with us for a while.” Renee said smoothly, smiling openly at Nathaniel, who stared back at her. His face twisted into an angry scowl and he clenched his hands into fists at his sides.

“She wouldn't leave me. I know she wouldn't. You're a liar!” He screamed. He shoved away from the wall and sprinted forward, knocking Renee to the floor with a mighty shove. He made a mad dash towards the stairs, straight towards Andrew.

Matt yelled an aborted curse, moving quickly forward, Dan yelled a warning and even Nicky moved as if to try and stop the kid from running straight into his untimely death.

They all watched as if in slow motion as the kid aimed to dodge between Andrew’s legs. He didn’t make it far, as Andrew suddenly dropped down to the floor and caught him full on, one arm wrapped around his upper chest, effectively trapping his arms to his side while the other cinched around his upper thighs, making his legs useless. Andrew stood smoothly, arms full off a wiggling ten year old, his face impassive.

Nathaniel struggled wildly, bucking his entire body and thrashing his head.

“Let me go, asshole! I’ll kill you, cut you into little pieces! I’ll kill you! Let me go, now motherfucker!” He growled, threats colorful and blatantly not his. Andrew stood calmly, face bored as he shifted to accommodate the weight of Nathaniel’s futile escape.

“Whenever you are done would be fine with everyone here. You are not leaving.” He said, voice equally bored. This only caused Nathaniel to struggle more, voice becoming hysterical as he began to tire himself out.

“Please, please. I want my m-mom. Let me go, I w-won’t tell, promise. Please.” He sobbed and
finally went limp in Andrew’s arms, letting his head rest in the crook of Andrew’s neck. He hiccups and whined, getting snot and tears all over Andrew’s neck and shirt, but the blonde didn’t seem to care. He simply relaxed his grip around Nathaniel’s upper arms and the kid automatically pulled his arms free, moving to drape one over Andrew’s shoulder as the other one wove around his neck. He continued to cry as he clutched suddenly desperately to Andrew.

Nobody moved, all watching in stunned as Andrew let himself be hugged and snotted over by a kid.

Eventually, the kid seemed to fall silent and it took a moment for everyone to realize he had fallen asleep, face still tucked into Andrew’s shoulder and arms resting heavily across his back.

It was silent for a moment longer before Nicky broke it with a disbelieving chuckle.

“Well, who would have known Andrew was the only one on this team equipped to deal with a hysterical child.”

Andrew gave him a bored look and moved steadily towards the room. Nathaniel made a sound in his sleep and shifted in Andrew’s arms. To the blatant surprise of everyone, again, Andrew gave him a squeeze and hushed him with a surprisingly gentle whisper. Nathaniel fell silent and Andrew moved into the room and out of sight.

He returned a moment later, arms empty and crossed over his chest, face still blank and eyes bored. Everyone was silent for a moment.

“Well,” Dan said, breaking the tense silence, “are we gonna talk about the fact that Neil is a child?”
Chapter Two

Chapter Notes

heyo, so im really into this story at the moment so be prepared for frequent updates.

i hope you like this chapter, though there isnt a lot of discussion on how neil got the way
he is, but there is super fluff and andrew being andrew and nicky being dad goals.

so i hope you enjoy. again, this is not beta'd and i cant be assed to re read so all mistakes
are mine!

song for this chapter is have we met before? by tom rosenthal

Nathaniel woke with his face smushed into a pillow, arms folded under him, numb from where he
had been lying on them, and incredibly warm. He wiggled further under the blanket that was
draped over him, sighing contently. The pillow smelled like lavender and sleep and a little bit like
boy. It was oddly calming. He raked his sleepy brain, but couldn’t remember the last time he was this
comfortable. Surely not since his mom had dragged him out of his bed in the middle of the night with
no explanation and told him he could sleep at the bus stop. Confusion finally moving to the forefront
of his mind, he blinked his eyes open and immediately jerked into full awareness.

He was in an unfamiliar room, on the bottom half of a bunk bed. Another bed was shoved against
the wall near the door and was empty, three wardrobes were shoved side by side on the farthest wall
and that clothes were spilling out of the drawers and onto the floor. The walls were painted a dull
grey and the curtains were drawn to try and keep out the worst of the morning sun.

His mother was nowhere in sight.

Throwing back the blanket, he shivered as he left the warm comfort and moved towards the door.
Pressing his ear against the wood, he strained to hear anything, but nothing moved or made any sort
of noise. He glanced back into the room and tried to swallow the panic that was building in his
throat, making it difficult for him to breath properly. This didn’t look like any hotel he had stayed in
before. This looked like somewhere people lived, he thought, as he took in the personal affects that
only happened when people stayed in one place for a long time.

He thought back to the dream he had had last night, about waking up in a strange, dark place and
being surrounded by strangers that acted like they knew him. It felt like deja vu, but he shook his
head to clear it. It was just a dream, a strangely realistic dream, but one no less.
Maybe it was a-what had his mom called it? Somewhere multiple people stayed in one room with strangers? Hostess? No, hostel. That was it, a hostel. This could simply be a hostel and his mom was just sleeping in another bed. He didn’t want to leave the room, he felt oddly safe in its confines, but he knew he had to go and let his mom know he was awake, before anyone else found him. He had learned awhile ago people don’t take too kindly to a nine year old walking around by themselves.

Taking in a shaky breath, Nathaniel reached up and carefully turned the knob, pushing the door open slightly. He stuck his head through first, looking around what seemed to be a small living room, bean bags slouched in front of the entertainment center and a couch shoved haphazardly beside them in front of a messy coffee table. Desks lined the far wall in front of the windows, but there were no more beds. Stepping silently further out of the room, Nathaniel moved around the room, heart beating a rapid tattoo against his ribs as he found no sign of his mom or of anyone, really.

Nathaniel couldn’t remember the last time he had been alone for so long. Usually, his mom was with him, Lola (though he hoped she didn’t show up any time soon), or one of his dad’s many bodyguards. He didn’t have a single clue as to what to do and he was beginning to get a little (a lot) scared.

He could feel the tell-tale burn of tears and blinked rapidly. He couldn’t cry, he wouldn’t cry. He would find his mom and then everything would be okay. With new found confidence, Nathaniel puffed out his chest like he had seen his dad do many a times and marched towards the door on the other side of the room. He yanked it open without thinking and walked out into a hallway lined with more doors and tripped right over someone leaning against the wall.

With a scream of surprise, he crashed to the floor, landing painfully onto his stomach, smacking his elbow loudly against the door frame. He lay on the ground for a moment, winded and whimpered as he hugged his throbbing arm to his chest.

“Oh, shit. What the hell?” A voice grumbled behind him and Nathaniel was scrambling to his feet immediately. He pressed his back to the wall opposite of the voice, chest heaving. The man was tall, much taller than Nathaniel, which wasn’t hard as his mom promised him he would hit his growth spurt soon enough. This guy was giant though and his face was pinched in surprise, green eyes wide and disbelieving. His black hair was wild and face slightly familiar, though Nathaniel couldn’t quite place where he had seen him before.

The man made to move closer and Nathaniel flinched violently, a strangled scream forcing its way out of his throat. The man stopped, frozen as he stared at the boy in front of him.

“Oh, Neil?” He finally whispered and Nathaniel squinted his eyes at him. He swallowed loudly and slowly shook his head.
“My name is Nathaniel.” He said and the man visibly jerked back in surprise, eyes nearly bulging from his head. His mouth gaped open, but he didn’t get a chance speak as the door at the end burst open. A short man with bright blonde hair and a blank look stepped out casually, arms crossed as he looked between the two. With a shock, Nathaniel recognized him from his dream last night. He was the one who had stopped him from getting to the stairs and had held him till he fell asleep. Was it not a dream? Did that actually happen? If it wasn’t a dream, where was his mom?

“Where’s my mom?” He asked, mind racing. His head was going to explode with everything that was happening. He felt dizzy and slightly sick from everything that was going on around him. More people were piling out of the door behind the blonde, all talking at once in hushed whispers, eyes trained on him unnervingly and the tall man in front of him was still staring at him intently and it was all too much for him to handle.

He turned to look at the blonde man, the only person he could vaguely remember and the only person to give him any sort of comfort, besides his mother, which wasn’t saying much, but still. He could feel a pull towards him, something almost instinctive and safe. Without really thinking about it, Nathaniel found himself shoving off the wall and practically sprinting towards him. He ran straight into him, wrapping his arms tightly around the man’s stiff body. He wasn’t very tall, but neither was Nathaniel, so he came up to about middle of his stomach and he pressed his face into the surprising softness of it, letting his eyes fall shut.

The hall was deathly silent, nobody was moving or even breathing. Then, a hand came to rest in his hair and fingers running through the unruly curls to cup the back of his head and hold him steady. Nathaniel practically sagged against him, the tension he had been holding in all morning flowing out of him and he sighed softly.

“I see you’ve met Nathaniel, Kevin.”

Nathaniel flinched at the rumbling under his cheek as the blonde man spoke and the hand squeezed gently. He peeked open his eyes and glanced up, but the man wasn’t even looking at him. He was staring calmly at the tall man, Kevin. Nathaniel turned to look at Kevin over his shoulder and he stared back in surprise, looking between the two of them.

“Is...Is that really...I mean- how?” Kevin sputtered.

“We were just talking about that, though-um, not, you know with…” A voice piped up and Nathaniel leaned around the blonde man to see another tall man with dark skin and hair gesturing towards them. He stopped when he noticed Nathaniel staring at him and let his arms fall to his sides, smiling awkwardly.
A hand came up and pushed Nathaniel back, drawing his attention away from the weird man and back onto the blonde one he was still holding onto. Blushing, he quickly dropped his arms and allowed himself to be nudged back a few steps, though the hand on the back of his head remained.

“Nathaniel, go with Nicky into the room.” The blonde man said, voice making sure there was no room for arguing. He felt compelled to try anyways.

“Why?” He asked, defiance clear in his tone as he crossed his arms tightly over his chest. The man raised his eyebrows, but his expression was still calm.

“Because I said so. Now go, I won’t ask twice.” He dismissed and removed his hand from the back of his head. Nathaniel missed it immediately, but tried not to let it show.

“Yeah, and what are you going to do if I don’t? I don’t even know any of you. Where is my mom?”

“No one here is going to hurt you, so stop acting like it. Also, if I recall correctly, you were the one who ran to me.” The blonde man looked vaguely amused as he made to move around Nathaniel. A flash of anger flashed through him, drowning the fear that had been ever present since he had woken up. With a burst of adrenaline blinding him for a moment, Nathaniel reached out and shoved the man as hard as he could.

“Where is my mom!” He yelled, chest heaving with anger as the man barely even stumbled. He stopped and turned slowly to look down at Nathaniel. It made the fear come back in full force and he tensed himself for a hand to yank him around by his hair or a slap to the face, but it never came. The man was simply staring at him, expression bored as ever.

“Andrew…” A cautious female voice hissed, but Nathaniel didn’t risk taking his eyes off of the man, Andrew, for second. He had made that mistake once with his dad’s right hand, Lola. He would never do it again and he had the scars on his stomach to help remind him.

“Nicky. Take him into Boyd’s room. We will finish this conversation in ours.” Was all Andrew said to break the tension and then moved swiftly down the hall and into the room Nathaniel had woken up in. Eventually, everyone else who was in the hall, a dark girl with wild curls, a blonde girl, and another blonde with dyed tips moved past him with sympathetic smiles. Another blonde boy who was identical to Andrew moved as well, not even glancing down at Nathaniel as he passed. A tall man with spiked hair stopped in front of him, kneeling down so he was level with him, but still a far enough distance away.
“Just stay with Nicky, okay? We will be right down the hall if you need anything. It’s gonna be alright.” He said, voice gentle and so very kind that Nathaniel watched his retreating form in open shock.

The tall man he had tripped over this morning lingered in the hallway for a moment before turning and going into the room, shutting the door behind him.

This left Nathaniel and Nicky, the tall, tan skinned man in the hall. He was smiling slightly with his hands shoved in his pockets. His smile grew as Nathaniel turned to him, chuckling softly.

“What?” Nathaniel demanded, scowling harder when it only caused Nicky to laugh more.

“Nothing, man. Nothing,” He raised his hands in surrender and gestured towards the open door behind him, “Let’s just get inside. We can watch TV or something.”

Nathaniel hesitated, glancing back at the room where everyone had disappeared into before looking back up at Nicky.

“Will you tell me where my mom is?” He whispered, averting his eyes as he fidgeted with the hem of his too large shirt. He heard Nicky sigh, before a hand came to rest gently on his shoulder. He flinched slightly and the hand moved back quickly.

“Sorry, sorry. Geez, just, um, we will talk about that soon, okay? We will, just not right now. How about we go watch a movie, huh? Your pick, anything you want.” Nicky rambled and Nathaniel nodded slowly. He could wait until tonight, then maybe sneak a phone or something to call his mom. She would be worried about him, he had to let her know he was alright. He could already tell something was wrong with these people and he didn’t like it one bit.

“Yeah, okay.” He shrugged and Nicky practically beamed at him. He motioned for Nathaniel to go in first and he did, keeping an eye on the man as he moved throughout the room, leaving the door open, which helped ease some of the tension in Nathaniel’s shoulders. The room was set up almost the same as the one he had woken up in, only this one didn’t have bean bag chairs. He pulled himself up onto the couch and sat criss cross as he watched Nicky run around the room in search of movies.

“Okay! So, we have Beauty and the Beast, Cinderella, and The Muppets Movie. Which one will it be, kiddo?” Nicky asked, laying the three disks out onto the coffee table. Nathaniel shrugged, giving
the disks on the table a confused look.

“Have you ever seen these?” Nicky ventured, look a little green when Nathaniel shook his head. A
determined look steeled his face and he gave a curt nod, picking up the Cinderella disk and walking
over to the TV.

“Alright, then we will just watch all of them. God, how haven’t you seen at least the Disney movies?
I mean I can understand The Muppets, their kind of overrated anyways, but I mean, come on, Disney
movies are the staple to all childhoods.” Nicky rambled, shoving the disk into the player and
grabbing the remote. He flopped down onto the couch beside Nathaniel, a little too close for his
liking but he stayed where he was.

It was as the movie started to play that Nathaniel said,

“Dad hated movies.”

It was barely a whisper, but Nicky heard him all the same and turned to stare at him. Nathaniel
shrugged, reading the sympathy in his eyes as a demand for an answer.

“He said the made too much noise and that they were too fake. The world isn’t like what they show,
it’s messy and stupid to imagine it any other way.”

Nicky simply stared at him before giving his head a little shake. He inched close to Nathaniel and
surprisingly, Nathaniel didn’t mind.

“Well, your dad is stupid for not imagining it.” He said, sounding all of five years old and it drew a
giggle out of Nathaniel.

Nicky snapped his head over to stare at him in blatant shock at the sound, his eyes comically wide
and mouth hanging open. It was funny sight and it only made Nathaniel laugh more. Nicky’s face
pulled into a goofy smile as he shook his head, turning back to face the movie.

“You are a conundrum, you are.”
Nathaniel nodded like he knew what the word meant and turned his attention back onto the movie as well. It turned out to be quite interesting, though the girl shouldn’t have run from the prince in his opinion. He wanted to help her and love her, so why choose to go back to her mean mom and sisters. It was stupid to Nathaniel, but he kept his mouth shut, seeing as it turned out alright in the end. He was halfway asleep by the time Nicky put the second movie in, barely able to keep his eyes open. He listed sideways, coming to rest against Nicky’s shoulder. The man stiffened under him for a moment, before melting into the couch. He stretched his arm out over the back of the couch and Nathaniel took it as the invitation it was to curl up and snuggle down into his chest. He was too tired to over think his actions or to remember that he was not suppose to trust these people.

A hand started to card through his hair, gently pulling out the tangled curls. He hummed sleepily and moved closer to Nicky.

“Go to bed, bud. I’ll be here when you wake up.” He murmured and Nathaniel couldn’t think of a reason not to.
Heyo.

So this is more of a filler chapter. I wrote the scene where they were discussing Neil and oh my god it was so bad. So I am currently rewriting it, but I wanted you guys to have something. so. have Neil being a little shit and emtional Kevin/Nathaniel.

Comments and Kudos are, as always, very appreciated.

warnings: violence and knives. be safe guys.

song for this chapter is anathema by twenty one pilots because holy shit that song.

His dad’s eyes glinted meanly in the low light of the basement, a twisted smile morphing his face. His fists were clenched tightly around two butcher knives, the blades dripping with blood and pooling on the ground at his feet.

Nathaniel cowered back into the corner, eyes wide as he watched his dad advance towards him slowly.

“Dad, please.” He begged, throwing his arms up in front of him in futile protection. His dad let out a booming laugh and swung the knives down quick as lighting, slicing through flesh like air. Nathaniel screamed, agony coursing through his body as he hugged his bleeding arms to his stomach.

“Dad! I’m sorry, please!” He cried, but his pleas fell on deaf ears as the knives swung down towards his head-

Nathaniel lurched forward blindly a scream tearing past his throat. He felt something touch his shoulder and jerked away violently, eyes blurry and unfocused as he tried to escape. His dad was behind him, he could hear him laughing, see the knives falling at his head. Nausea suddenly clenched his stomach tight and he vomited.

“-eil! Hey, Neil, it’s fine, you’re fine. Breath, oh my god.” A frantic voice reached his ears after a moment and it took him a minute to realize it sounded nothing like his father. He opened his eyes, not even remembering closing them in the first place and turned to see a frantic Nicky hovering behind him. Nathaniel panted as he glanced around as the memories of waking up in a strange place without his mom, watching movies, and falling asleep came rushing back to him. He had managed to
get himself huddled into the corner of the living room, Nicky standing by the couch, hands raised as he looked worriedly at Nathaniel.

It was all too much.

He could feel tears well up in his eyes, burning the bridge of his nose. His dad would have beat him for crying, his mom would have too, but they weren’t here. They weren’t here and Nathaniel was alone with strangers and he was scared.

He sobbed loudly, a broken wail rising out of him and Nicky flinched. He made an aborted step forward, but Nathaniel was suddenly jumping to his feet.

“NO! DON’T COME NEAR ME!” He screamed, hot, burning anger suddenly flooding his veins. He hated everyone, his mom, his dad, Nicky, the Andrew man who wouldn’t tell him anything. He was angry, so very angry, he felt like he could explode.

“I HATE YOU! I HATE YOU! I HATE ALL OF YOU!” He wailed, rushing forward and shoving Nicky roughly, the tall man falling onto the couch in surprise and Nathaniel made a mad dash to the still open door. He made it to the stairwell, shoving the door violently so it banged against the wall as he stumbled down the steps. He had no idea what floor they were on, but he didn’t care. All he wanted was to leave, to get out. He wanted to run and run and run until he couldn’t run anymore, then run some more.

Unfortunately, luck never seemed to be on his side.

He made it down one set of steps, when arms suddenly wrapped around his waist, yanking him back against a broad chest and up into the air. He squeaked in shock, frozen in momentary surprise before he began to struggle.

He beat his fists against the forearms around his stomach, clawing and pushing. His legs beat against the person's knees and thighs, dull thuds echoing in the air and Nathaniel hoped they hurt like hell.

“Let me go! LET ME GO! I HATE YOU! MOM!” He cried, tears and snot making a mess of his face. The person holding him didn’t say a word, moving silently back up the flight of steps Nathaniel had managed to clear in his pathetic escape attempt. The giant man with the spiked hair was standing at the door, holding it open, his eyes wide and sad he moved aside to let them through.
Nathaniel grabbed at the door frame, nails scraping uselessly against metal as he screamed.

“Nei-Nathaniel, it’s okay. Just calm down, bud. We aren’t going to hurt you.” The spiky haired man pleaded, but Nathaniel simply howled in response, kicking harder and digging his nails into the arms wrapped around him.

The person hissed in response, but didn’t lessen their hold on him in the slightest. If anything, the arms tightened even more and Nathaniel wheezed.

Suddenly, Andrew appeared in front of them, his hand coming up to grip Nathaniel’s chin tightly. His face was bored and unimpressed as he took in the younger’s appearance. His other hand shot out and grabbed Nathaniel’s wrists, holding them together.

“Temper tantrums will get you nowhere. Stop screaming.” He said, voice blank. Nathaniel growled at him and aimed a kick at the blonde man. He side stepped easily, raising his eyebrows in faint amusement.

“I hate you.” He snarled, his chest heaving. He tried to glare, but it couldn’t be very intimidating when he was still crying in earnest with snot running out in nose. If anything, he probably looked even more like a kid than anything else.

“You’ve said that. Renee, if you would.” Andrew said and motioned with his head for the girl with the colorful tips of hair to come forward. She moved quietly to them, giving Nathaniel a kind smile that he growled at, wiggling in the tight grip. She had a box of tissues in her hands and pulled one free, reaching up slowly. Nathaniel flinched back, fear replacing the anger for a moment and he pressed himself against the chest behind him. Andrew still had his wrists and chin in a death grip, he couldn’t block the incoming blow. He whimpered and saw Renee stop for moment, before continuing and he jerked violently when her hand brushed his face. He waited for the pain, the angry words, but they never came. He blinked his eyes open slowly, staring as the girl simply wiped his tears and snot away with the tissue.

“There, all better, huh? You’re okay, no tears now.” She whispered as she continued to wipe the tears that replaced the old ones. Nathaniel didn’t know what to do. No one had ever done this. He was used to punches and kicks when he cried, not soft hands and gentle words. He trembled, going limp in the hold around him, finding it to more comforting now than restricting. He was so tired, his body throbbing in exhaustion, eyes sore from crying.

“There we go, sweetheart. That’s better, huh? No one is going to hurt you, you can relax.” Renee continued her soft mantra. Andrew dropped his wrists and chin and Nathaniel let his arms hang limply, barely able to hold his head up now.
“You must be tired, darling. Mmmh? How about you let Kevin here carry you to bed and you can sleep all you want. Does that sound good?” Renee whispered and Nathaniel found himself nodding along willingly. Sleep sounded nice. He always slept a lot after he cried.

He jerked as he felt himself be maneuvered around in the arms wrapped around him. He moved so he was facing the person, the black haired man, Kevin, he had tripped over in the hall. The man looked uncomfortable holding him, but Nathaniel didn’t seem to pick up on that, his eyelids growing heavy. He instinctively wrapped his legs around the man’s waist and threw his arms around his neck, resting his head on his shoulder. Kevin stiffened before relaxing fully and moving to hold him for securely, one large hand pressing into his back as his other arm moved to support him under the tops of his thighs.

“I had a friend named Kevin.” Nathaniel suddenly found himself mumbling, half asleep. The memory of a black haired boy running and laughing across a field flashed through his mind before disappearing. He felt the man stiffen against him and grumbled sleepily. The hall was silent around them.

“He was the nicest ever. Gave me his old Exy stick and everything, it was blue,” He continued, words slurring in exhaustion.

“I miss him.” He sighed, before slipping into darkness.

_____

Everyone was silent, staring at Nathaniel as his eyes slipped closed.

“I miss him.”

Kevin’s eyes went wide, his hold on the child tightening slightly as he stared down at him. The air was thick with tension as Kevin let out a shaky breath, eyes trained on Nathaniel’s slack face. He felt like he was going to be sick.

“Well, shit.” Matt mumbled, breaking the silence and Kevin snapped his gaze over towards him.
“You knew him before?” Dan asked, eyes confused and questioning. Kevin only nodded numbly.

“Y-Yeah. We...We played together when we were younger. H-His dad was...I don’t know.” Kevin stammered quietly and Renee pressed a hand to his shoulder.

“This is very enlightening, but Kevin, go put Neil to bed. Stay with him, since Nicky seems incapable of dealing with a child.” Andrew said and Nicky threw his hands up in exasperation.

“We had a great time watching movies before he freaked out! Everything was going swimmingly, it's not my fault he went all Karate Kid and escaped.” Nicky whined.

“Whatever, go, Kevin.”

Kevin nodded and moved quietly down the hall and into Matt’s dorm, cradling Nathaniel against him gently.

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