

Title: Us Against the World



CHAPTER 1

NO ONE POV

The room was gloomy, lit only by the night light beside the bed. Outside, crickets chirped, the only noise that broke the stillness that came with later hours. A boy was sleeping soundly, his face buried into his pillow, and the blanket was tangled around his legs. The air felt calm—until a soft rustle came through.

A shadow swooped in next to his bed. Then...

"...Nani," came the hushed voice.

Nani moaned softly, turned over. "Mmm..."

Before he had the chance to open his eyelids fully, someone shook his shoulder gently. Startled, Nani's eyes sprang open, and a hand covered his mouth.

"Shhh!"

Nani blinked a few times, his heart racing. But as his eyes grew accustomed to the dark, he recognized the familiar grin above him.

"Ohm!?" he mumbled against his hand, eyes wide.

"Ohm quickly put his hand back, barely containing his laugh. "Keep it down! Idiot! You're going to wake your parents."

Nani let out a small huff and sat up, rubbing his eyes. "You nearly gave me a heart attack," he said, his voice still thick with sleep. But then his lips slowly broke into a warm smile. "What are you doing here so early?"

Ohm's grin grew bigger, pulling something off the bedside table. A small cake, slightly malformed, with a happy birthday written on it in cursive, with two candles barely standing up straight.

"Well," Ohm said, playfully shrugging, "today's your birthday. And I wanted to be the first to wish you."

Nani blinked at the cake for a moment, then looked up at him with surprise and warmth. "You remember?"

"Of course."

The candles glowed dimly in the room's subdued light as Ohm lit the match, shielding it with his hands, and the amber light masked their faces.

"Make a wish," Ohm whispered.

Nani smiled slightly and closed his eyes for a moment before blowing out the candles. A small puff of smoke floated between them. Ohm clapped once and smiled at him.

"Happy Birthday, Nani."

"Thank you," Nani said, grinning. His smile was real... bright and unfiltered, the kind that makes others forget the world is there.

They cut the cake with the plastic knife that Ohm had brought, chuckling at how uneven the pieces were. A blob of icing smudged his finger, and he licked it off, making Ohm's chest flutter.

After that, Nani didn't really stop talking, talking about how his mom was planning something strange for his birthday, about how he couldn't believe he was turning eighteen already. His hands were waving everywhere, his eyes sparkling.

Ohm barely heard it all. He was just watching.

The way Nani's lips curved when he laughed. The way Nani's lashes fluttered when he grinned too much. The way Nani's voice dipped softly when he moved into something genuine.

Ohm could feel the tightness in his chest again. His hands fidgeted in his lap, fingers curling.

Nani noticed the hush of silence and tilted his head a little. "Hey, what's with you looking at me like that?" he teased, letting out a small chuckle.

Ohm didn't share a laugh back. He continued to stare blankly until suddenly, his throat went dry, and then, slowly, he leaned closer towards Nani.

Nani's smile faltered and spread in confusion. "Ohm... what are you doing?"

Ohm's voice came out steady and low, trembling. "I just--" and his hand rose to gently cup Nani's cheek, "I just can't pretend anymore."

Nani froze, his eyes widening.

Ohm swallowed hard, gazing from Nani's lips up to his eyes. "I like you, Nani. I have liked you for a long time."

The air turned completely still.

Nani's breath stopped. "Ohm, I—no, I—"

Before he could finish or take a step back, the door swung open. The light from the hallway made both boys freeze in place.

Nani's parents were standing there — his father was tall and broad-shouldered, effortlessly carrying a small birthday cake with candles that danced and flickered. His mother stood next to him and was smiling, she had been.

The smile evaporated when they saw Nani and Ohm.

The air shattered.

The candles flickered. His father's grip on the cake became white-knuckled, and his mother's small smile evaporated altogether. The sweetness in the air from the icing suddenly tasted overwhelmingly sickening.

For a long, weighty instant, there was no sound between them. The only sounds were the faint whir of the air conditioner and the distant barking of a dog outside.

Finally, a deep and cold voice broke through, "What the hell are you both doing?" Her father's tone was not confused... it was disgusted.

Nani's stomach plummeted. Ohm snapped upright, sputtering, "Uncle, I—it's not—"

His father's glare put a swift end to his speech, and he said, "Get out. Now."

Ohm's eyes travelled briefly to Nani before going back, guilt and dread gouging them like a knife. He looked like he wanted to say something... to stay, to explain, but one glance at Nani's father and it was obvious he didn't think it was worth it.

Nani swallowed hard and shook his head slightly, whispering, "It's alright... just leave."

Ohm hesitated before stepping back just an inch. He was barely audible. "I am sorry." He turned and walked away slowly, the door clicking behind him, and he exited slowly, quietly.

Silence descended upon the room again with crushing weight.

Nani turned to his parents, the sound of his heart beating in his ears. The cake slipped a bit from his father's hand - frosting sliding along the box - it landed on the floor with a flat, final sound. The candles went out with the connection.

"Dad, it's not what you think," Nani quickly began, his voice quavering. "Ohm just came to—"

"To what?!" roared his father, shaking the walls. "Sneaking into your room in the middle of the night? Putting his disgusting thoughts into your head?"

Nani hesitated; he felt his throat constrict. "No! It was not like that!"

But his father was not listening. He stepped closer, his eyes fiery. "Do you know what you've done? What does everyone say about you if someone were to know of this disgraceful behavior? You have embarrassed this culture!"

"Dad—"

"Be quiet!" his father screamed. "You're eighteen and you think this... this sickness is something to take pride in?"

Nani could feel his breath get caught in his chest. He could feel the tears pooling in his eyes, but he wouldn't let them fall.

His mother leaned against the door jam, head down, not saying a thing. No words. Not to defend him.

Not hearing anything from her hurt him more than his father yelling at him.

Nani inhaled unsteadily, his voice quivering yet unwavering. "So what if I'm gay?"

His father halted mid-stride.

Nani's hands clenched into fists. His voice wavered again as he said, "Yes. I am gay. I am not sick, I am not dirty, and I don't feel bad about who I am. I am still your son, Dad. Nothing has changed."

For an instant, he wished... only a beat... that his father would relent, see him for who he was. But that was not the expression his father wore; instead, his father glared with hatred and spat, "You are not my son."

To Nani, it felt worse than having been slapped. His knees almost gave out from under him.

His father turned away slightly, rubbing his temples as if he were waking from a nightmare. "It is your environment," he said bitterly. "Those friends of yours, that boy... he has corrupted you. You were not like this before. We gave you everything, and this is how you repay us?"

Nani's best attempts to keep it together failed, and tears fell down his cheeks. "It's not about anybody, Dad. I'm just me!"

"You're what?" his father spat. "You are my son, and I know you will not grow up to dishonor our name like this. You're going back to a new school... one that can straighten you out. I won't tolerate this in my house."

The walls spun. "What?" Nani said, whispering because he felt he might pass out. "You're sending me away?"

His father's response was as merciless as he expected. "Maybe they can fix what's wrong with you there."

Now Nani's tears came forth like an endless torrent; they could no longer be stifled. "You think I'm defective?"

No response.

He looked to his mother... she seemed frantic, shaking. "Mom, please... just say something."

She looked up, her eyes wet and empty. She parted her lips, but said nothing. She simply looked away.

That silence broke him.

The one person he thought might attempt to understand him, the one who hugged him every night as a child... the one who said no matter what, he was perfect, stayed silent.

Nani let out a little, broken laugh through his tears. "So that's it then? I thought maybe one day you would accept me. I didn't think you'd love me any less because of who I love."

His father's voice hardened again. "That's enough. Get your things ready. You are going. You will be gone by the end of the week."

Nani stared down at the floor, the tears staining his trembling hands. "You can send me anywhere you want, but you can't change me."

He looked back up one last time - red eyes, raw voice.

"I'm still your son. But maybe...I was just never enough to be loved by you."

His father's jaw tightened, but he did not reply. His mother turned away completely.

For the first time, Nani understood that silence could sting more than any words.

The candles on the cake that had fallen were now out. Only a faint trace of sugar and smoke remained, a memory of what the night was supposed to be.

His birthday.

Which turned into the night he lost the home he believed he had.

See you in the next chapter. 💙💖

Author's Note 💙💖

Hello, everyone! I'm finally back with a new story that is very close to my heart, "Us Against the World." I have invested so much emotion into this story already, and I hope you enjoy Sky and Nani's journey as much as I enjoyed writing it!

Thank you for joining me, for reading, for waiting, and for your unwavering support of my stories. Your comments, likes, and reactions... I cannot put into words how much they mean to me! 🥺

So buckle up... this story is going to be full of love, heartbreak, healing, and all the chaos that comes with finding your place in the world. Let's walk through it together. 💖

CHAPTER 2

The sun hung low, casting rays of light into the old school corridor of Nani. Dust motes floated lazily in the golden beams. In the background, he could hear students laughing faintly, but to Nani, it was too quiet in the world.

He stood right at the office door. His parents were inside the principal's room, and he could hear them talking, but the voices were indistinctly muffled behind the door... polite and formal and lacking emotion.

He no longer wanted to stand there.

So he turned and walked down the corridor to his old classroom.

He made each footstep louder than it should have been. He could almost hear himself in the past laughing with his classmates, Ohm teasing him, practicing with their band before festivals, while he strummed his guitar and mixed with the rhythm of laughter.

As he entered his classroom, it was empty... except for that one familiar object. His guitar leaned against the back wall, bathing underneath a sunbeam like the spotlight on a stage.

He crouched to pick it up, running his fingers over the strings. "Guess it's just you and me now," he murmured under his breath. The sound of footsteps behind him made him pause.

He turned—and froze.

"Ohm."

Ohm stood at the doorway, slightly breathless as if he'd rushed there. His uniform shirt was untucked, his expression soft and worried. For a moment, neither said a word.

Then Nani broke into a small, tired smile. "Hey."

Ohm's lips curved faintly, but his eyes didn't match the smile. "Hey."

There was silence... thick and awkward, full of words neither knew how to start. Nani finally sighed, slinging the guitar strap over his shoulder. "Sorry about yesterday," he said quietly. "You went through such an awkward situation because of me."

Ohm's brows furrowed, his voice firm. "Don't act like you're okay, Nani. You're not."

Nani's smile faltered.

Ohm stepped closer, guilt flickering in his eyes. "If I hadn't gone there... if I hadn't done that, maybe none of this would've happened. Your dad..."

"Hey," Nani interrupted gently, before Ohm could spiral further. He smiled again, but this time it was brittle. "Don't blame yourself, okay? If it wasn't last night, it would've been another day. Either way... I came to know how much my parents love me now."

The bitterness in his tone hit like a slap.

Ohm exhaled, looking down, his throat tightening. "Nani..."

"About what you said yesterday," Nani continued softly. "I know it took courage to say it." He looked straight into Ohm's eyes, sincerity glimmering through the sadness. "But I've always seen you as my best friend, Ohm. I'm sorry I can't give you the same feelings, but..." His voice trembled slightly, though his smile didn't fade. "I still like you a lot as my friend. You've always been there for me. I'm grateful that you have been there in part of my life, and you've been... the best part of it."

For a second, Ohm just stared at him. Then his eyes glistened, and he let out a shaky laugh that broke midway into a snuffle.

"Don't say it like you're saying goodbye, idiot." His voice cracked as he stepped forward and wrapped Nani in a tight hug. "It's fine if you don't love me. I can live with that. But don't be like this... it hurts seeing you so broken."

Nani froze for a moment, then his hands clutched the back of Ohm's shirt, holding on like he didn't want to let go.

Ohm's chin rested on his shoulder. "Also," he muttered, forcing a teasing tone, "we have phones, you know? It's not like you're going to war. Stop talking like we're in the vintage era."

That made Nani laugh softly, a sound that cracked but still carried warmth. "You sound like my grandma," he said, pouting.

Ohm pulled back just enough to look at him, then flicked his forehead gently. "You deserve that."

"Ow!" Nani rubbed his forehead, pretending to glare. "You're so annoying."

"Yeah," Ohm said with a grin that didn't quite reach his eyes. "But you'll miss me."

They both laughed, the sound echoing softly through the empty classroom.

Then, without words, they hugged again. This time tighter. Longer. Like they were both trying to hold on to something that was already slipping away.

Outside the classroom, a quiet figure stood by the half-open door.

Nani's mother.

Her hands trembled slightly as she held the envelope meant for the transfer papers. Her eyes glistened with tears as she watched her son, her boy... laugh through his heartbreak.

When she'd come to call him, she hadn't expected to see this... two boys clinging to each other like the world was ending. She covered her mouth, suppressing a sob.

She turned away, unable to watch longer. Her husband wouldn't understand. He was too afraid... afraid of what society would say, what people would think about his son.

But she?

She just saw her son suffering.

As she sauntered down the hall, her tears fell silently from her eyes, their sole familiarity the words she'd wished she'd had the courage to speak aloud to him: *I'm sorry, Nani. I wish I could have protected you.*

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The engine of the car hummed loudly to fill the silence. It was night outside, an endless blackness, with dim fields pulling away and the dim glow of streetlights flickering down the road like dying stars.

Nani slept in the backseat, leaning his head against the window, the vibration of the car causing him to take slow, even breaths. His body was peaceful, though his swollen face left traces of having cried... a red rim around the eyes and faint stains specifically around his temple.

Next to him was his guitar case, and his fingers rested lightly against it as he slept, the only piece of home that he was allowed to have with him.

At the front, his parents sat in silence.

His father's hands gripped the steering wheel a little too tightly. He kept glancing at the rearview mirror, at his son's reflection, his heart twisting a little more each time.

He swallowed hard, the guilt pressing against his chest like a weight.

After a long stretch of silence, he finally spoke, voice rough and low.

"You hate me for doing this, don't you?"

His wife turned her face toward the window, her reflection pale against the glass.

"Yes," she said quietly, the word trembling. "I do."

Her tone wasn't sharp, but it cut deeper than any shout.

He let out a heavy sigh, eyes still fixed on the road. "You think I wanted this? You think this doesn't break me too?" His voice cracked slightly before he steadied it again. "I don't want to do this, but..." He hesitated, his throat tightening. "I'm scared."

She turned to look at him now, her eyes glistening in the dim car light. "Scared of what?"

He clenched his jaw. "Of what he'll go through if people find out." His voice lowered, heavy with fear. "You know what society is like. You know how cruel they can be. What they'll say about him. The things they'll whisper behind our backs."

Her lips trembled. "And you think sending him away will protect him?"

"I think," he said quietly, "that it might give him time. Space. A place where he will learn to face the people who will judge him. Somewhere he can... learn to face the world on his own terms. Where he can become strong enough to handle criticisms."

She pulled her hand away when he reached for it, glaring through the tears forming in her eyes.

"Then what are *we* alive for?" she demanded, her voice shaking. "If not to protect him ourselves? He needed us. Not some school. *Us*. You think the world will be kind to him when his own father isn't?"

Her words echoed sharply inside the small car, mingling with the low hum of the tires on asphalt.

He closed his eyes briefly, his grip tightening again. "You think I don't love him?" he murmured.

"You think I don't want to hold him right now and tell him it's fine?" He exhaled shakily. "But what if he grows up hearing people mock him, shame him, hurt him for what he is? What if he starts to hate himself because of it? I can't—" His voice broke. "I can't stand that thought."

His wife looked at him, her anger slowly fading into sorrow.

Tears streamed down her face, silent and raw.

"You don't get it," she whispered. "You think you're protecting him, but what you're doing is breaking him."

He didn't respond. He couldn't. The truth in her words burned too deep.

In the back seat, Nani stirred slightly, mumbling something in his sleep, his fingers tightening around the guitar strap. His mother turned immediately, her expression softening as she reached back to adjust the blanket over him.

"He's our baby," she whispered through trembling lips. "No matter what he is. Gay, straight, whatever... he's our son. Our little boy who used to run to us after school, who used to make us laugh."

Her husband's eyes softened, following her gaze in the mirror. He saw that same boy... sleeping quietly, fragile, lost.

"I know," he whispered back. "I know, love. But maybe I'm doing this because I *am* scared. Because I don't know how to protect him from a world that hates what it doesn't understand."

She turned to him again, voice thick. "Then learn. With him. For him."

He looked at her, guilt and confusion twisting inside him. "You think I haven't tried? I've been awake all night thinking about whether I failed somewhere as a father. If I didn't raise him right."

"Stop saying that!" she snapped, wiping her tears harshly. "There's nothing *wrong* with him. You didn't fail. But you'll fail him now if you let him believe that who he is makes him unworthy of love."

The car fell silent again after that... just the hum of the tires, the rhythmic flick of the indicator, the whisper of wind outside.

In the rearview mirror, their son's sleeping face looked peaceful.

But both parents knew it was just exhaustion. The kind of quiet that comes after crying too long.

His father's eyes softened. He reached across the seat, hesitated for a moment, then gently took his wife's hand again. She didn't pull away this time.

He whispered, almost to himself,

"I just hope one day... he'll understand that I was trying to protect him. Even if I did it the wrong way."

She glanced at their son again, wiping a tear off her face.

"Maybe," she gently said, "but by the time he knows, he may be too far gone to forgive the two of us."

Neither of them spoke after this. Their silence was no longer angry, but heavy with love tangled and twisted with fear and the burden of being parents who didn't know how to do the right thing.

As the car moved along through the night, Nani stirred again, murmuring in his sleep. His mother turned toward him and whispered so softly it was almost inaudible... "I'm sorry, my baby."

The road was still endless and dark in front of them, just like the road ahead, in uncertain as the family now headed into it.

See you in the next chapter. 💙💖

CHAPTER 3

The courtyard of the new boarding school was calm. Birds chirped gently from the trees, and leaves rustled softly in the breeze, but Nani hardly noticed. He stood back against the building, gripping the straps of his backpack, feeling smaller than he had in many years.

The buildings were really tall... precisely mowed grass, and the type of place meant to impress visitors while intimidating students. There were no students there because most were still in their classes, and the hallways at the school were empty.

His parents had just helped him carry in his belongings and expertly arranged everything where it should go. They still lingered in the doorway, allowing him some time to settle in peace.

Finally, after standing and looking at him in amazement for a few moments, his father stepped toward him. His face was softer than it had been for several days. But worry lines and heavy eyelids still told a deeper story.

Gently, he reached to cup Nani's cheeks, and he brushed the pad of his thumb lightly across the skin of his face, better than words could for reassurance.

"I apologize for doing this," his father said quietly, his voice wavering slightly. "I just... I just hope that one day you'll understand why I'm doing this."

Nani's lips pressed against one another as he shook his head, moving back just enough to escape his father's hands. "You could have hugged me," he said, his voice even, though his chest tightened.

"Instead of all this drama, all this planning, all these... rules. I don't know why I need to study here, or if this is just your way of thinking I can change... from being myself."

His eyes glistened with tears that would not fall. "If that's what you think, Dad... you are wrong. This is not a fever that comes and goes when the climate changes. I am not going to just... disappear or forget that I am still me."

His father let out a breath, his own look heavy with helplessness. "I know," he said softly, almost to himself. "I know you are strong. I just... I can't help but worry. I wanted to protect you. Maybe I went about it wrong, but I -".

Nani shook his head again and released a small, self-deprecating chuckle. "I get it, Dad. I can get your fear, worrying, as a parent, about how society will treat me, or what people will think. But... I don't hate you or anything. I just don't get why you didn't comfort me, or hug me, or say 'it's alright' like you used to. Why did I have to feel like I was being punished for being me?"

His mother was standing frozen at the door, glistening eyes and mouth closed. She, too, was almost reaching out to touch his arm. But she didn't. She stopped. Nani saw that she was hesitating, and his chest tightened again... but this time it wasn't with anger. It was with the yearning for that warmth he knew she was willing to give him if she hadn't been too afraid.

His father coughed to clear his throat. "We've organized everything here," he said, taking another half step back toward the door. "You'll start your classes tomorrow. Be safe, be responsible, make friends. That's all we can ask."

Nani gave a small, almost imperceptible nod, watching them move toward the door. The soft click of the door closing behind them sounded throughout his body like a chapter he did not want to end.

He exhaled deeply and sat on the edge of his bed, allowing his backpack to fall off his shoulders. The furnishings in the room were spare: a bed, a desk, and a small dresser, but neat, organized, and clean, all untouched by any memories. The room was neutral, sterile, and devoid of a sense of home.

As he leaned back, he stared up at the ceiling. His parents' words replayed in his mind. He understood his father's fear now, the anxiety of societal perceptions, and whether his son would be hurt. More than anything, he recognized that they were acting out of love, not escape, as it may have felt at the time.

He could simply continue, but the stark sense of abandonment still hurt. The deep sensibility of loneliness when he needed them the most hurt.

The family comfort, affection he had been used to every day: the hugs, the soft words, and the absolutely paternal presence signaling safety, had been eliminated by this cold agreement, this imposed distance.

However, Nani was resolute in his decision. He felt, deep down, that his parents would eventually come around. The love they had was just deep underneath the layers of fear and worry. He needed to survive this place, learn its walls and its rules, and find his way.

Classes would begin tomorrow. Friends may or may not be there. Challenges would be ahead of him. But Nani was sure of one thing: he was not going to allow this school, or anyone in it, to change who he was.

He closed his eyes and softly said to himself, "I will endure. I have to. And I know... they'll get it."

The quiet of the room embraced him, a fragile barrier. Alone, but not defeated.

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The campus was a labyrinth.

Nani wandered through the tall brick corridors, taking mental notes of each junction, staircase, and hallway. Tomorrow, he had to find his classes without getting hopelessly lost. Already, he could feel the maze-like layout conspiring against him. He sighed, tightening the strap of his backpack.

Why did Dad think this was a good idea? he wondered. *An all-boys boarding school... and he knows I'm gay.*

But Nani was practical. He wasn't one to gawk at sexy guys or be distracted by curiosity. Commitment was what he was about, not wandering eyes. His heart belonged to someone he could

trust and share everything with, eventually. And perhaps, just maybe, that person did not even exist yet, but he had plenty of dreams. Dreams that his family had filled with love.

He thought of his parents. For all their shortcomings and fears and misunderstandings they had about sending him here, they had given him everything: love, security, a life of care. Even amidst their harsh words and awkward arrangements, he could see their reasoning.

So, he put bitterness aside and walked forward with purpose to make an assessment of this place for tomorrow.

The cafeteria was full of students. Nani walked into the room and cut through the noise of high school chatter and laughter, bought himself a juice from the vending machine, and leaned against a table to scope out the place.

Just as he was about to leave, a voice cut through the background noise, sharp and mocking.

"Hey! You there!"

Nani was startled to a standstill. The voice was biting and deriding. Nani turned slowly, trying to maintain a demeanor of confidence to fight the distinctive tightening in his chest.

"I haven't seen you before. Who are you?" he asked, with as much confidence as he could muster to keep his voice from shaking.

Nani: "New transfer"

A group of boys shuffled around them, a smile in their eyes. One leaned against a table, arms crossed, with a dumb smirk on his face. "You are a new transfer? I heard a little rumor about you.... Something about being gay. Your parents abandoned you here, didn't they? That's rough."

Nani blinked a couple of times, jaw clenching. *Great. Just great. Welcome to my first day.*

He raised an eyebrow, sassy despite the nerves. "Wow, that's... original. Did you all come up with that yourselves, or is there a newsletter I missed?"

The group was caught off guard by Nani's attitude and was momentarily stunned. Then, the leader, a small but fiery boy with sharp eyes - Kay - stepped forward with tight fists, ready to make his point.

Before Kay could lunge, a firm hand landed on Nani's shoulder, steadying him. He turned, eyes widening, and saw a tall, confident boy stepping in between them—Sky.

With or without words, Sky was changing the mood of the environment. The noise in the cafeteria seemed to dull as people quietly shifted their attention to him.

Sky's dark hair was falling just right over his forehead, his posture relaxed, but somehow commanding, and the barely visible smirk on his lips made him look untouchable.

"Okay, boys," he pronounced pleasantly, his voice calm but clearly full of authority. "That's enough, our new student here deserves to have his juice free of a circus act."

Kay let out a scowl and stepped closer, heat flickering in his eyes. "Why are you protecting him? We're simply trying to have some fun."

Sky tilted his head, the corner of his lips twitching into a faint, dangerous smile. "Fun?" he repeated slowly. "Harassing someone who doesn't even know their way around yet? That's not fun. That's pathetic. Walk away before I start thinking detention isn't harsh enough for you."

Kay's glare sharpened. "You think you're scary just because you're president? I don't care!"

Sky's eyes darkened, and a low chuckle escaped him. "Oh, I *don't* care that you don't. But I do care that I'm not letting you push someone around. Now step back, or this ends very badly for you."

Nani froze, caught between the two hot-headed boys, his mind racing. *Wait... is this guy... actually saving me?*

Sky leaned slightly toward him and whispered, a faint grin teasing his words, "Don't worry. I've got this."

Nani blinked, astonished. He could barely comprehend how effortlessly Sky commanded the situation. Kay, on the other hand, looked furious, his small frame trembling with rage at being confronted by someone taller, stronger, and fearless.

"I suggest you leave him alone," Sky said evenly, voice calm but lethal. "He's here to study, not to entertain your gossip. And believe me... You really don't want me upset."

Kay's fists twitched at his sides. "Fine. But why let him go? We were just starting to have fun!"

Sky shrugged lightly, smirk unwavering. "Sometimes saving someone is *more fun* than picking on them. Try it sometime—it's enlightening."

Kay seethed but finally stomped off, muttering insults under his breath, glaring daggers at Sky as he left.

When the group dispersed, Sky turned to Nani, walking beside him now, leaning casually against the counter. His expression softened slightly, though the smirk lingered.

"You okay?" he asked quietly.

Nani blinked, still processing the whirlwind. "Uh... yeah. I... I guess. Thanks. I didn't expect someone to just... step in like that."

Sky's grin widened, faint teasing in his dark eyes. "I don't like seeing someone treated unfairly. You're new. It's my job to make sure you don't get completely eaten alive on your first day."

Nani let out a soft laugh, shaking his head. "First day... and already saved by the school president. That's... unexpected."

Sky shrugged lightly, leaning slightly closer. "Yeah, I'm full of surprises. Don't make a habit of putting yourself in tight spots. Not everyone's as forgiving."

Nani raised an eyebrow, tilting his head. "You're... something else. I still can't tell if you're being serious or just showing off."

Sky chuckled softly, a sound that seemed to echo in the now-quiet cafeteria. "Maybe a little of both. But I'll be seeing you around." His eyes flicked to Nani's face with a playful glance. "And don't think of me as just the president who saves people. I just... hate bullies."

Nani smirked, adjusting his backpack. "Noted. And thanks... for stepping in."

Sky gave a final teasing glance before turning to leave. Nani watched him go, a faint smile tugging at his lips.

See you in the next chapter. 💙💖

CHAPTER 4

NO ONE POV

The next day, the dorm bell rang through the hall, announcing the morning. Nani stood in front of the mirror, adjusting the freshly ironed uniform... the sharp white shirt, navy blue blazer, and tie that was still too tight. He breathed in deeply, moved hair from his face and said, "Okay, first day. Don't fuck this up."

The halls of the school were filled with noise. Groups of boys in uniform laughed, said hello, and moved around as if they owned the place. Nani walked by himself among them with the strap of his backpack hung over his shoulder. He looked up, over the soaring ceilings, glossy floors, and huge glass windows letting bright light filter in. This boarding school looked like a palace!

He arrived at the staff room, knocked lightly and looked inside.

"Ah, you must be the transfer student," remarked a woman with a pleasant face in her 40's, adjusting her glasses. "Come in. I'm Ms. Ratha - the homeroom teacher. Here is your schedule."

"Thank you, ma'am," Nani said politely, bowing slightly.

"Follow me, I'll take you to your class," she said warmly, leading him down the hall.

As they neared the classroom, the noise grew louder... boys laughing, desks moving, loud jokes being exchanged. But the moment Ms. Ratha opened the door, silence fell like a curtain.

"Good morning, class," she said with her usual authority.

"Good morning, ma'am!" they echoed back, though a few were already whispering.

"I'd like to introduce a new student who joined us today," Ms. Ratha continued. "Please welcome him warmly. Go ahead."

Nani stepped forward, feeling dozens of eyes on him. His voice was calm but soft. "Hello everyone, I'm Nani Hirunkit. I just transferred here... I hope we can get along."

He bowed slightly, earning a few murmurs and curious glances... but then, his gaze caught **one pair of eyes** watching him closely from the back row.

Sky.

The same boy who had stood up for him yesterday.

Their eyes locked... Sky's calm, unreadable gaze met Nani's startled one. For a second, the noise faded from the world.

He's here... in my class?

"Mr. Hirunkit, you can take that seat right in front of Sky Wongravee," Ms. Ratha instructed. Nani nodded and went to his desk.

Sky smirked faintly when Nani turned toward him. "Guess fate wanted us to be classmates too," he whispered when Nani sat down.

Nani blinked, trying not to sound flustered. "Seems so. I didn't expect the school president to be in my class."

Sky leaned slightly forward, resting his chin on his hand, voice low and teasing. "What, disappointed?"

Before Nani could reply, a familiar, mocking laugh cut through the air.

"Well, look who we have here," Kay sneered from a few seats away, lounging back in his chair. "The transfer boy from yesterday. Guess he didn't learn his place yet."

A few of his friends — AJ and JJ — snickered, clearly ready to start something again.

Sky's chair scraped softly as he turned his head toward them, his tone cold this time. "Kay, if you're bored, go find something useful to do. Maybe study for once?"

Kay's jaw tightened. "You think being school president makes you the boss of me?"

Sky gave a half-smile... the kind that didn't reach his eyes. "No. But it does make it easier for me to write your next disciplinary report."

A tense silence filled the room for a moment before Kay clicked his tongue and looked away, muttering under his breath.

Nani exhaled quietly, his heartbeat calming down. He didn't want trouble, but somehow trouble seemed to follow wherever he was.

Sky leaned forward again, whispering just enough for Nani to hear. "Don't let him bother you. He's all bark, no bite."

Nani glanced back with a small smile. "You sure about that? He looks like the type who bites."

Sky chuckled softly. "Then it's a good thing I bite harder."

Nani froze for a second, eyes widening at the boldness in his tone. Sky just smiled faintly, turning his attention to the front as the teacher began the lesson... but that playful spark didn't fade from his gaze.

And Nani, despite his best efforts, found himself sneaking glances back now and then.

He didn't know what it was... gratitude, curiosity, or something else, but Sky Wongravee had a way of making his calm heart skip.

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After an exhausting two-hour lecture marathon, the bell finally rang, signaling the end of class, and it felt like a minor forgiveness ringing through the classroom. All chairs scraped together as students stretched, talked, and edged toward the cafeteria.

Nani pulled his notebook together and stood, rolling his shoulders back and trying to shake out the stiffness.

"Finally," he sighed quietly, trying to begin a small smile. It was not something he was used to; sitting for so long through strict classes. The teachers here were awful; teaching with military precision, no questions were encouraged and no compassion given.

Nani soccered over toward the cafeteria to see if there was something cold he could drink. The moment he stepped inside the cafeteria, he felt it... the ambush. The mood in air shifted and the eyes felt like they were upon him.

Whispers trailed behind him like a shadow.

"That's him... the transfer student."

"You mean the gay one?"

"Yeah. Heard he tried to flirt with someone yesterday, and Sky Wongravee stepped in."

"Seriously? No wonder Sky looked pissed."

Nani stopped mid-step, his fingers tightening around the strap of his bag. His chest ached — not because of the words themselves, but because of how casually they were thrown around. Like venom disguised as gossip.

He took a slow breath and walked toward the counter anyway. *Ignore them.*

The cafeteria lady gave him a polite smile as she handed him a cold juice can. "First week can be tough," she said softly, as if sensing his unease.

Nani smiled back faintly. "Yeah... but I'll manage."

He turned, scanning the crowded tables. The moment his eyes met anyone else's, they quickly turned away. Some whispered; some laughed quietly. A few even shifted their chairs further when he walked past.

He finally sat down in a corner... alone. He wasn't used to this kind of silence. Back home, his school had been filled with warmth and friends who didn't care who he was. Here, it felt like walking through a battlefield where kindness was extinct.

From a nearby table, a group of boys snickered.

"Can't believe they let someone like that into our dorms."

"Yeah, what if he stares at us while changing?"

"Gross."

Nani's grip on his juice can tightened until it dented slightly. He closed his eyes, steadying his breath. *Don't react. That's what they want.*

But the ache of isolation crept deeper.

Across the cafeteria, Sky stood near the teachers' counter, going over some paperwork with another staff member. As student president, he was always around... composed, unbothered, the golden boy of the academy.

But even from across the room, he'd noticed the sudden hush whenever Nani entered. He'd noticed the pointed glances, the murmurs.

"The new boy's already causing trouble."

"Sky, I hope you're keeping an eye on him."

The teachers' casual words made Sky's jaw tighten slightly. He didn't answer. He didn't need to... his silence said enough.

He turned his head subtly, eyes landing on Nani sitting alone in the corner, sipping his juice with his head lowered but posture straight. No trace of defeat... just quiet dignity.

Sky exhaled softly. *He's holding it together, he thought. But this place... it'll eat him alive if no one steps in.*

Still, Sky didn't move. Not yet. He knew the school too well... if he publicly defended Nani again, the whispers would only grow uglier. This time, he needed to be careful.

Instead, he watched quietly, making sure no one crossed the line.

Meanwhile, Nani finished his drink, stood up, and walked out as if nothing had happened. His steps were steady, but his heart wasn't.

In the hallway, the murmurs followed him like ghosts.

"Why did the school even accept him?"

"Do you think Sky actually likes him?"

"Please, Sky's way out of his league."

Nani rolled his eyes at their whispers. *They don't matter. You came here to study, not to please anyone.*

But as he reached the empty stairwell, where sunlight poured in through the tall windows, he finally allowed his mask to slip.

He leaned against the wall, staring out the window.

"I thought I'd grown stronger," he whispered to himself. "Guess... I was wrong."

See you in the next chapter  

CHAPTER 5

NO ONE POV

By the time the last class ended, Nani's head throbbed with exhaustion.

The corridors were loud... laughter, teasing, chatter... yet somehow, he felt like he was walking through silence.

He didn't stop to talk to anyone. Didn't bother to look around. He just wanted a moment away from the endless whispers.

When he reached his dorm room, he threw his bag on the desk, pulled off his tie, and sank into the bed. For a few seconds, he lay there motionless, staring at the ceiling.

The day had felt like a war fought in silence. He hadn't shouted, hadn't fought back, but every passing glance, every half-suppressed laugh, had chipped away at something inside him.

He sighed softly, rubbing his temples.

You're fine, Nani. You're fine.

But even as he told himself that, he could feel the heaviness in his chest.

His eyes landed on the corner of the room... where his guitar case leaned against the wall.

A small smile tugged at his lips. Music had always been his escape... his quiet way of speaking when words failed.

Without thinking, he got up, grabbed the case, and slung it over his shoulder. The dorm was starting to fill with noise again... boys returning from class, laughter echoing through the halls. He slipped out quietly before anyone noticed.

The sun was already slipping below the horizon when Nani made his way up the staircase that led to the rooftop.

The rooftop was his favorite kind of place... high, quiet, away from everything.

He exhaled slowly, setting his guitar case beside him before sitting cross-legged on the floor. The wind tousled his hair, carrying faint traces of the city beyond the school walls.

He ran his fingers along the strings, tuning by instinct, then began to play.

The sound was soft... almost fragile... yet carried easily through the still evening air. It wasn't a performance. It was a confession without words.

Every note that slipped from his fingers seemed to breathe his exhaustion, his quiet frustration, his determination not to fall apart.

He didn't notice the door open behind him.

Sky had come to the rooftop out of habit... it was the one place he could think without being followed.

But tonight, he stopped in the doorway, his breath catching at the sound that drifted toward him.

Music.

Soft, aching, raw.

And then his eyes found the boy.

Nani sat near the edge of the rooftop, the setting sun brushing gold across his face. His uniform was slightly rumpled, his hair catching the light like strands of amber. His expression... calm but heavy, seemed to hold a thousand unsaid things.

Sky leaned silently against the wall, half in shadow, watching.

He'd seen countless students on this rooftop before... crying, arguing, sneaking calls, but none like this. There was something different about the way Nani sat there, alone yet somehow... at peace.

Each strum of the guitar pulled Sky's attention deeper. His gaze lingered on the boy's profile, the delicate line of his jaw, the way his brows furrowed in concentration, the faint curve of his lips as he lost himself in the melody.

It wasn't just the music that was beautiful. It was him.

Sky couldn't look away. He didn't even try.

The dying sunlight caught Nani's eyes as he glanced upward... a fleeting, golden reflection... and Sky's chest tightened unexpectedly. There was no pretense in him, no mask, no attempt to please anyone. Just quiet honesty.

It was disarming.

Sky's jaw flexed as he tried to pull his gaze away. He'd never been the type to linger, never the type to *feel* something just by looking.

But there was something about this boy... something unguarded and sincere... that drew him in without permission.

He found himself watching the way Nani's fingers moved on the strings, how gentle his touch was, how naturally emotion bled into each motion.

Sky exhaled slowly, closing his eyes for a second. He didn't understand why it hit him so hard. Maybe because it was real. Maybe because he hadn't seen something this real in a long time.

When the song ended, Nani sat quietly, his hands resting on the guitar, eyes fixed on the fading sky. The breeze brushed against his face, lifting the edges of his hair. He looked almost ethereal, soft but strong, lonely yet content in it.

Sky stayed still, hidden in the shadows.
For once, he didn't want to interrupt.

He just watched.

The way Nani tilted his head slightly as he breathed in the evening air. The way the light curved against his skin.

He looked beautiful, not in a way Sky was used to noticing... but in a way that made something in his chest ache.

When Nani finally stood and began to pack his guitar, Sky took a quiet step back. He didn't want to be caught... didn't want to explain why he was there, why he couldn't seem to look away.

As the door clicked softly shut behind him, Sky took one last glance over his shoulder.

The boy was still there, sitting beneath the soft orange glow of the sunset... a calm amidst the chaos of everything else.

Sky inhaled deeply, feeling something unfamiliar stir in his chest... admiration, curiosity... maybe something he didn't want to name.

"Beautiful," he muttered under his breath before he could stop himself.

And with that, he turned and left, the faint sound of the guitar echoing in his memory long after it had faded from the air.

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Next day

The morning sunlight filtered through the tall classroom windows, painting golden stripes across the polished desks. Students were still chattering about the latest gossip, and somewhere in between those whispered voices, Nani's name still floated.

He walked in quietly, clutching his notebook close to his chest. He could feel the eyes, the stares, the whispers, the small laughter that wasn't even trying to be subtle anymore. But he didn't flinch. He had promised himself he wouldn't.

He walked straight to his usual seat, the one right in front of Sky's bench. For a second, their eyes met. Sky was leaning back in his chair, one arm resting lazily on the desk, pretending to look uninterested in everything around him.

When Nani gave him a small, polite smile before sitting down, Sky felt something flicker in his chest. He didn't smile back, not openly, but his lips curved just slightly, just enough that it felt like one.

As Nani opened his book, a chair scraped beside him. Someone sat down, a tall boy with sharp features, mischievous eyes, and a calm, confident aura that screamed *don't mess with me*.

"Yo," the boy greeted casually, resting his chin on his hand. "You're the new transfer, right? Nani, was it?"

Nani blinked, slightly startled. No one had really *talked* to him since the cafeteria incident. "Uh, yeah. That's me," he said softly.

The boy grinned. "I'm Nanon. Nanon Korapat." He tilted his head, studying Nani. "I wasn't here, yesterday. Guess I missed the drama."

Nani's brows furrowed slightly. "Drama?"

Nanon smirked. "Yeah, this school's famous for it. They gossip faster than the internet here. Someone sneezes weirdly, and by the next period, it's a full-blown rumor that you've got a secret disease."

Nani let out a small chuckle. "Sounds... accurate."

The conversation flowed more naturally than he expected. Nanon was sharp-tongued but funny, confident without being arrogant. He had this energy that made the heavy atmosphere feel lighter.

Nanon leaned closer after a moment, lowering his voice. "So, I kinda heard what they've been saying about you..."

Nani stiffened slightly. His hands froze mid-turn of a page.

Nanon noticed the hesitation and added quickly, "Don't worry, I'm not here to judge or join the idiots' club. I just—" he lowered his voice to a whisper, "—wanted to ask, privately, if it's true. Only if you're okay with answering."

Nani looked at him for a long moment, torn between fear and relief. He didn't owe anyone an explanation. But there was something about Nanon's tone, it wasn't mocking or curious. It was... respectful.

So finally, Nani exhaled and said quietly, "Yeah. I am gay."

There was a pause.

Then Nanon grinned widely. "Cool."

Nani blinked. "Cool?"

"Yeah, Welcome to the club. " Nanon said, shrugging casually.

"I mean, who cares? You're not hurting anyone. We are just existing. And trust me, people here are bored out of their minds. They need something to talk about."

That earned a small laugh from Nani.

Encouraged, Nanon leaned back and crossed his arms. "Listen, don't let them mess with your head. There are so many homophobic bitches around here, but honestly?" He smirked. "We'll slay the year without giving a damn."

Nani's laugh this time was louder, warm and unrestrained. It startled even him. For a second, he forgot where he was, forgot the stares, the whispers, forgot the weight on his chest.

It had been so long since he'd laughed like that.

Sky, sitting right behind him, froze at the sound.

He hadn't realized he was listening until that soft, genuine laughter slipped through the air. It wasn't the quiet smile Nani always wore; it was bright, unguarded, the kind of laugh that made everything around it seem lighter.

Sky looked up from his notebook. His eyes lingered on the back of Nani's head, on the way his shoulders shook slightly as he tried to stop laughing. His smile was reflected faintly in the window glass, and it was beautiful.

Sky felt something tug inside him again, that same unfamiliar warmth he'd felt yesterday on the rooftop.

He quickly looked away, pretending to take notes. But he couldn't stop the small, involuntary smile that curved on his lips.

So that's what his real smile looks like, Sky thought, stealing one last glance. *I... want to see his smile again.*

For the first time since Nani arrived, the classroom didn't feel as cold.

See you in the next chapter. 💙💖