

A New Family

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A New Family

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Summary

"Unlike smell or taste, it was impossible to stop himself from being able to touch things. He would always be feeling the wind on his face or his soft clothes against his skin. He would always find himself running his hand along whatever was near him and immersing himself in whatever he felt. To him, nothing could compare being able to feel whatever he was holding onto. It made him feel grounded. It made him feel human."

While walking home in the middle of a storm, Alphonse comes across a little creature who needs his help.

Notes

I had a headcanon that Ed finally lets Al get a cat post-promised day, then it developed into me writing this. I hope you enjoy!

Ever since Alphonse's soul reunited with his body, he had unlocked an entire world of brand new experiences that he never thought was possible. With a body to call his own, his senses were finally within his possession, and he savoured every single moment with them.

His sense of smell took the longest time to get used to. The overwhelming concoction of thousands of different scents from different things almost caused him to faint from taking it all in. He still had trouble with processing strong smells like perfume or alcohol, but he found himself enjoying scents that showed up throughout his world. In the morning, he spent hours just breathing in the fresh dewy grass and sweet flowers. At night, he sat in the kitchen with the warm and rich scent of food in the oven, and he would feel a lot better when he got to eat the food afterwards.

Alphonse sometimes had to stop himself from eating too much out of sheer joy of being able to taste again. He was fascinated with how many flavours existed in the world and he made it his mission to taste each one. He loved tasting the sweetness of Winry's apple pie and the savoury smoothness of his grandmother's stew. There were some flavours that he didn't like, like spicy or sour things, but he was still enthusiastic about trying them.

He held all of his senses very dear to him, but the sense that he loved the most was his sense of touch.

Unlike smell or taste, it was impossible to stop himself from being able to touch things. He would always be feeling the wind on his face or his soft clothes against his skin. He would always find himself running his hand along whatever was near him and immersing himself in whatever he felt. To him, nothing could compare being able to feel whatever he was holding onto. It made him feel grounded. It made him feel human.

One feeling he didn't like, however, was the cold. It reminded him too much of his dark, miserable life inside of his late father's armour. That was why he always tried to seek out sources of warmth, even if he got a little chilly. Unfortunately, there were no sources of warmth around him at that moment.

Alphonse lifted the collar of his coat up around his head to prevent anymore raindrops from dripping down his neck. It didn't help much, because his entire coat was drenched. He sighed heavily. When he had arrived at the train station, he hoped he would have arrived home before the storm caught up to him, but that sadly wasn't the case. The rain started with a few fat drops here and there before it developed into a downpour. Now he was trudging through the mud and shivering gently.

Despite his predicament, he still managed to keep his spirits relatively high. He had visited central for a week and he hadn't seen his brother since then. The thought of entering a warm house and talking with Edward about his travels kept him going. Besides, he knew from recognising a few landmarks that he was only fifteen minutes away from his home. He only had to endure these conditions for a little while longer.

Suddenly, his mind was forcefully removed from these thoughts. His heartbeat rose in tempo and his head swivelled from side to side as he tried to find the source of the noise he had just

heard. From his and his brother's travels, he had learned that any unexpected noise could very well be a warning for danger and shouldn't be taken lightly.

Alphonse strained his ears when he heard the noise again. It was faint, but he could pick up a small squeaky noise coming from a patch of long grass towards his right.

He now recognised the noise. He gave a short gasp, dropped his suitcase, and fell to his knees beside the grass. His hands parted the green blades.

Sitting right in the middle of the grass, lying on its side in the mud, was a tiny kitten. As soon as it saw Alphonse, it tried to push itself to its feet. It failed, falling onto its side and smearing more mud on itself.

"Shhh... It's okay," Alphonse murmured, slowly reaching his hand out towards the animal, "I promise I won't hurt you."

The kitten hesitated when his hand came close to it. Gradually, its pink nose sniffed him curiously. Alphonse patiently watched, seeing if the cat would detect any sort of threat on him. The cat didn't seem to be afraid of him, as it nudged its nose against his fingers.

"Don't worry, little one. You're going to be okay," Alphonse said. The boy gently scooped the kitten into his arms and carefully inspected it for injuries.

The cat wasn't hurt, but it was too thin to be healthy and its creamy-brown fur was soaked through and covered in mud. Its wide, orange eyes inspected Alphonse curiously.

Alphonse carefully cradled the kitten close to his chest as he scrambled to his feet. He headed towards home, this time with much more urgency than before.

"DAMMIT!" Edward swore through his gritted teeth. He stared hatefully at the pot he had burned his hand on and resisted the urge to shout again. He had forgotten that his right arm was no longer made of metal, therefore, no longer heatproof. He glanced at the angry, red mark that had appeared on his thumb and decided that it wasn't too serious. It still hurt like a bitch, though.

He set the ladle down beside the pot and turned down the stove's temperature so that the stew was gently simmering. The heavenly scent of meat and vegetables wafted throughout the house. This, combined with the sound of rain pitter-pattering on the rooftop, gave off a comforting atmosphere.

Since he had nothing to do but wait, Edward's mind drifted away towards other matters. The rain had grown heavier since he started making dinner, and he had a feeling it would only grow heavier. He knew Alphonse was supposed to return home that day and he hoped his brother was fairing well in the weather. He half-considered going to the train station himself so he could try and assist him in any way, but before he could decide on anything he heard the sound of knocking on the front door.

He left the kitchen and walked towards the entrance of the house, silently hoping the visitor was who he thought it was. Sure enough, he opened the door to see a soaking-wet Alphonse shivering in the rain and holding a small bundle in his arms. Edward let out a sigh of relief at seeing him in one piece, followed by a frown of concern at seeing his brother's condition.

"Are you okay?" he asked, "You look..."

His voice trailed off when he inspected Alphonse a little closer - more specifically, the bundle in his arms. It was wrapped in a white shirt that probably came from his suitcase. He could just make out two pointed ears before the person holding it ran past him and made a mad dash towards the sitting room.

"Huh..." Ed stated. He didn't know what had gotten into him, but he had a sneaking suspicion that it had something to do with that mysterious bundle. Trying to decide how to feel about all of this, he followed him into the sitting room.

He walked through the doorway and immediately blew a long, irritated breath out of his nose when he saw what was sitting in front of the fireplace.

A cat. Of course Alphonse brought home a cat. Why wouldn't he?

Alphonse cautiously peeked over his shoulder and placed a protective hand over the animal when he saw his brother's face.

"I know you don't like it when I do this, brother," he said, "but I couldn't just leave her there!"

"You say that about every cat you pick up, Al." Edward frowned. Alphonse frowned harder.

"I know, but she was all cold and wet and couldn't stand up on her own. I actually think she's sick. What was I supposed to do?"

Edward looked into Alphonse's wide, golden eyes. His pained, pleading expression made his own features soften a little. To be honest, he wasn't really mad at his brother. He was just worried about him and the fact that he had to trudge through the rain on his own. He seemed exhausted, so the least he could do was let him look after the cat for a while.

He glanced out the window before giving a one-shouldered shrug.

"Well, it's not like she can go outside in this weather," he sighed, "I guess she can stay, for now."

Alphonse's face immediately brightened at these words. He sprung to his feet and wrapped his arms around his brother.

"Thank you, Edward!" he laughed, "I promise you won't regret it!"

Edward chuckled a little as he gave Al a few pats on the shoulder.

"You should probably go get changed, the rain really did a number on you," he said. Alphonse's face turned pink when he remembered how drenched he was.

“Oh, yeah. Good idea.” he said, “Would you mind watching the cat while I do that?”

“Yeah, sure.”

Alphonse nodded his thanks and raced upstairs. Edward turned his attention back to the cat. She was curled up into a tight ball and her eyes were closed. She looked a little drier than before, but only just.

“You’re lucky Al found you, little guy,” he said. The cat did not reply.

After about five minutes, he heard thumping footsteps behind him. He turned around to see his brother changed into a clean set of clothes. He was also holding an old hairbrush and a few towels.

“How’s she doing?” he asked. Edward gestured towards the animal he was referring to.

The next half an hour involved rubbing the cat down with towels and the warmth of the fire speeding up the process. Then, Alphonse used the hairbrush to brush all the tangles, burrs, and knots out of her brown fur. She let out some squeaky meows when the brush gave a tug that was a tad too painful, but Alphonse managed to calm her down with a few soft words and a pat on the head. With one final stroke of the hairbrush, the kitten was completely dry and purring contently. She still smelled like mud, but at least she wasn’t cold anymore.

“Wow, she looks a lot bigger now that she’s dry.” Edward pointed out. It was true: her creamy-brown fur was now all soft and fluffy again, making her look bigger than she really was.

“She looks a little thin, though,” Alphonse replied, “we should probably get her some food. Have you got anything?”

“I’ve got a few meat scraps leftover from making dinner.”

“That sounds perfect! Would you mind getting a few?”

“Sure. Be right back.” Edward stood up and left for the kitchen.

After a few short minutes, he came back holding a small plate of meat. He had minced and crushed it so that it was easier for the cat to eat. He also carried a saucer of fresh water. As soon as the plates were set down in front of the kitten, her head perked up in excitement. She stuck her face in the plate of mince and scarfed it down. Alphonse gave a low chuckle at her enthusiasm. She probably hadn’t eaten in a long time. Suddenly, he felt his stomach grumble as he remembered that it’s been a while since he ate as well.

Edward, upon hearing this, headed towards the kitchen again. He came back with two bowls that were filled to the brim with hearty stew.

“You came here just in time, Al,” he said as he gave one of the bowls to his brother, “I’ve just finished making dinner.”

Alphonse’s face lit up when he took the bowl.

“You’re a lifesaver, Ed!” he said with glee. He took his spoon and shovelled the first bite into his mouth. His taste buds exploded with a vast variety of flavours and textures.

“Mmmm... this is so good, brother!” he said as he took another bite.

“Thanks, Granny let me borrow her recipe.” Ed said, sitting down on the floor.

The next few minutes were filled with silence. Only the sounds of the crackling fire, the purring kitten, and joyful eating remained. After every morsel had been consumed, the silence developed into idle chatter. Alphonse talked about his visit to Central and how all their friends were doing.

“How was Mustang?” Edward asked, “I assume he’s as irritable as ever.”

“Not really, he was actually kinda polite. At least, polite for him.” Alphonse grinned.

“I guess his duties as Fuhrer made him too busy to yell at people.”

“Oh no, he still yells at people. He’s just a little more patient. I think Hawkeye humbled him a little.”

Edward chuckled, “I think one of the best things about living in the country again is that I won’t have to listen to his short jokes anymore.”

Alphonse opened his mouth to reply, but he was interrupted by a slight pressure on his thigh. He looked down curiously and grinned when he saw the kitten had her front paw on him. He stroked his finger against her cheek and earned a quiet purr. She half-closed her eyes and kneaded her paws against his leg.

“She seems to have taken a liking to you.” Edward pointed out. Alphonse just nodded, gently picking her up and cradling her in his arms. She melted into his embrace and purred even louder.

“She’s... so soft...”

Edward silently watched Al gently rub his cheek against the top of the kitten’s head. He had never seen his brother look so... content. Sure, he was ecstatic when he finally got his body back, but it was rare for him to be so comfortable and relaxed like this.

He quickly remembered that since Alphonse had spent most of his life unable to feel any sort of warmth or texture, it was difficult for him to draw comfort from things. He loved cats and he would look after them whenever he could, but he was never able to feel the vibrations from their purring or the silkiness of their fur.

And now, here he was. He was sitting in the middle of a warm room with a full belly and a peaceful kitten in his arms. He was experiencing the kind of comfort that he couldn’t even dream of while he was bodiless. Alphonse was happy, and it made Edward feel all warm inside.

“So,” he spoke up, causing his brother to look up at him, “what are you gonna name her?”

The expression on Al's face went through an entire journey in two seconds. First, it was a look of confusion as he tried to process what he had just said. Then, it was a look of realisation when he understood what Edward's words meant. Then, it was a look of pure joy.

"You mean I can keep her!?" He exclaimed, holding the kitten closer to his chest. Edward nodded.

"Sure, you did save her after all."

Alphonse's smile grew even wider at this and thanked him profusely. The cat, seeming to sense that something good was happening, gave a little squeaky meow and snuggled deeper into his arms.

"Cedar." Alphonse said. He looked at his brother, who raised an eyebrow a little.

"I think Cedar would be a good name," he explained.

Edward smiled slightly and turned the name over in his head. He reached over and gave Cedar a quick scratch behind the ears.

"Cedar... I like that name."

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