"Yuuri, I love you more than anything in the world, but I'm not going to stand here and watch you destroy yourself."

What Viktor knows is only the beginning, whilst Yuuri isn't sure he'll make it to the end. Witness the two of them battle their way through mental illness, addiction and adoration, as well as trying to maintain a stable relationship.
The clock is ticking. Which one of them will be the first to snap?
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Trigger warning: I gotta be honest it's literally fucking everything lolol
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Uploading a fic from wattpad onto this website, so if you see it on the app don't freak out - both stories are mine! It's pretty shit, but hey, it's the first commitment to finishing a story that I've actually made, so you might as well stay along for the ride. :)
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Notes

There's a few Russian words here and there, but I'm sure we're all so far down into the vortex that we call a fandom that most of you already know what they mean ;).
It had been a week since the Barcelona Grand Prix Final, in which Japanese figure skater Yuuri Katsuki had won second place, and already the 24-year-old had begun practising for next year's competition - which was to be held in Nagoya, Japan. Content with his exploration of Eros in his previous season's short programme, Yuuri had decided to delve deeper into the theme of erotic love, in which he, the charming femme fatale that he was, had stolen the handsome prince Viktor Nikiforov from the world of ice skating, and could now revel in his company, savouring every moment he spent with his gorgeous fiancé.

"You want to skate to Toxic, by Britney Spears?" snorted Viktor, trying to conceal his laughter alongside his disbelief. He wasn't sure if Yuuri was joking, and was having difficulty staying upright at the side of the ice rink.

Yuuri smiled and nodded his head, his thick black hair flopping back and forth, "Yeah, I was inspired by Phichit's performance at the Grand Prix Final and realised that above everything else, I should enjoy my routine, so I've chosen a fun song that'll make me feel more relaxed when skating in front of a crowd."

A moment of silence past before Viktor quickly nodded his head.

"It's a slow, piano version of the song, anyway - a cover by Yael Naïm..." said Yuuri.
"Okay, lyubov moya, it's your decision after all," Viktor giggled as he regained composure, "at least now our pieces won't be too similar."
"What are you skating to?"
"Salut d'Amour, by Edward Elgar; the composer wrote it for his bride-to-be so I thought it was pretty appropriate, don't you think?"

Yuuri's eyes widened and he pulled Viktor close in a quick embrace, nearly toppling both of them over in the process.

"Cut it out!!" Yelled Yuri(o) Plisetksy, "This is an ice rink, not a homoerotic love-shack!!" The 15-year-old Russian skater was the winner of the recent Grand Prix Final, and to his annoyance was now training on the same rink as both Yuuri and Viktor.

"Is it true, are we that embarrassing?" Yuuri asked Viktor whilst both men resisted the urge to laugh at their younger counterpart. Luckily, Viktor knew exactly how to embarrass Yurio too.

"Y'know, Yurio, Otabek called earlier... " he murmured craftily, "I thought you might be interested, but it seems you're obviously above all this 'love' crap, correct?"

Yurio turned a deep shade of crimson and skated hastily towards the rink exit, pushing his long, blonde hair from his eyes as he went,
"Just don't tell Yakov I left early, okay!? Or...or I'll tell him about what happened yesterday back there in the storage room!"

And with that, Yuuri and Viktor were left alone, standing on the side of the rink together. Long winter's nights meant the days drew in early and the light of the moon radiated through the glass panes, scintillating across the ice.

"He won't really tell on us, will he?" a now slightly uneasy Yuuri asked Viktor, who smiled and simply shook his head.
"I think the man already knows -" he said, winking, "somebody had to clean up in there, you know..."

Yuuri blushed and buried his head in his fiancé's chest, whilst his Russian boyfriend quickly wrapped his arms around his shivering body.
"You're cold?"
"No, I'm fine!" smiled Yuuri, clenching his body in an attempt to conserve heat.

In truth, he was freezing. Sure, it always snowed in Hasetsu at this time of year, but St. Petersburg in the middle of December? That was something else. Viktor was constantly reminding Yuuri to layer up in case he catch a cold, but the younger man didn't really care and preferred to spend more time on the ice than dressing in the correct attire.
"We should get some coffee," Viktor said quietly, "hopefully it'll warm you up a little."

The pair then left the ice, saying goodbye to Yakov in the locker room and handing in their skates at the counter, where Yurio was still completely absorbed in the phone call to Otabek. His face was flustered and he had crossed his legs delicately, twirling the chord as he whispered sweet nothings down the phone line. Yuuri and Viktor exchanged smug glances at the sight of an entranced Yurio and just knew that Otabek would be staying over for the holiday season.

It was deep into the night when Yuuri and Viktor finally arrived home. They lived in a deluxe suite of rooms atop of an apartment block in uptown St. Petersburg, rubbing shoulders with the rich and gazing out across the city skyline. The rooms were adorned with intricate Christmas decorations from both Russia and Japan, with a grand stack of gifts (the majority for Makkachin) as the centrepiece of the main hall.

After a hard day's practice, Yuuri preferred to stretch himself across the living room sofa, whilst Viktor, sprightly as ever, was never too worn out to forego the preparation of the couple's evening meal. This evening was no different. Whilst Yuuri snored by the light of their plasma TV, Viktor bounced around the kitchen preparing a culinary masterpiece. During his stay in Japan, he'd been trained to prepare many of the country's classic dishes under the watchful eye of Yuuri's mum Hiroko Katsuki, although it did take quite some time before he could produce a perfect Katsudon. However, today was a Sunday, which meant it was the day of the week for Russian Cuisine. It was far too late to cook anything overly complicated so Viktor decided he would quickly prepare some Zharkoye: a hearty beef and vegetable stew, and his favourite comfort food. Perfect after a day of hard work and Yakov's incessant shouting (although of course Viktor knew he meant well).

"It tastes great, thank you Viktor," a sleepy Yuuri said after being awakened for the meal.
"Thank you, lapochka, it's my mother's recipe."
Viktor smiled and gently took the spoon from Yuuri's hand;
"You are so tired Yuuri, let me help you," he whispered as he spoon-fed his boyfriend the creamy stew, caressing his neck as the hot liquid slipped down his throat.

"Vkusno!" moaned the Japanese boy, running his hands through Viktor's silver mane. Like always,
he fell asleep halfway through the meal, with Viktor ready and waiting with the blanket for both of them to cuddle up in.

'Perhaps it's for the best,' thought Viktor, 'you always did seem to gain weight easily, and Zharkoye isn't a dish for those watching their calories.'

Meanwhile, Yuuri was out cold on the sofa. Viktor was a genius and a wonderful coach, but his routines were intense despite that the day had only consisted of recappping last year's jumps. Technically Sunday was meant to be their day off, but Viktor was keen for Yuuri to practise and the younger man just couldn't say no to his puppy dog eyes.

Now Viktor was feeling the effect of his own training. Tired, he flicked the off button on the TV remote and dimmed the lights to a subtle shade of scarlet. He then slid quietly under the blanket and wrapped his arms and legs around Yuuri's, cupping his hand over his partner's heart as he felt it's steady beat.

"Goodnight, my love. In a few days we fly to Japan..."

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The Christmas period was spent in Japan with Yuuri's family. Yurio and Otabek even flew over for a few days whilst his grandfather recovered from a recent back operation, much to Hiroko's delight as she enjoyed having even more people to feed. Of course, on the day itself everyone ate at KFC anyway (such had been the tradition since the 1970s), but all four boys were happy to indulge in the many delights of her home cooking. She'd even learnt how to make Pirozhki, for which Yurio was exceedingly pleased.

Christmas was also Viktor's birthday, although before meeting Yuuri that was something he seldom celebrated too. Now it was practically a regional holiday in the town of Hasetsu. During his first year in Japan, Viktor was amazed by the generosity of the townspeople and the gifts they gave him, and this year was no exception.

Obviously, Yuuri's gift was still his favourite. Generally he liked to make Viktor's present himself, be it a sweater or decorated ice skates, and you could tell he was passionate about it from all the cuts and bruises he'd gathered in the process.

There was also the gift of his body, but Viktor often received that on a daily basis so Yuuri had to pull out all the stops for his boyfriend's big day. When unpacking Otabek had accidentally knocked over a box of whips and chains in Yuuri's luggage, but he knew better than to ask what they were for. Knowing Viktor, he'd tell Yurio anyway in one of his drunken ramblings on the plane back home to Russia.

Nonetheless, after all the festivities it was still good to be flying back. Although it was only early January, everybody knew they had a lot of work to do before they were ready for the start of the Grand Prix. Viktor had an entirely new programme planned out for Yuuri, and couldn't wait to see his katsudon bring it all to life.

"Wake up pig, you're squashing my legs!" groaned a disgruntled Yurio, his body restricted by the sleeping Yuuri that was taking up a full three plane seats.

"Oh - sorry," said the tired Japanese man, "I don't cope well with jetlag so I thought I'd get ahead on a couple hours' sleep..."

Yurio sighed and drew a sad face on the pane of the foggy plane window, "How come you guys aren't bored out of your minds yet?"

An ever-positive Viktor sat upright and smiled at Yurio, mouth full of airplane peanuts. "Because the TV is great! And look, Yuuri's wearing the clothes I bought him from our trip to Tokyo!"

He paused for a moment, "Except I don't remember them being so tight - you must have gained some weight over Christmas, my little piglet!"
"Hehe, I guess so," said Yuuri, his cheeks dimpling as Viktor stroked his belly.

Truthfully, Viktor didn't mind Yuuri with a slightly softer frame. The problem was that at extremes it just wasn't aerodynamic, and too much extra weight would slow his boyfriend's progress on the ice. In fact when he first saw him Viktor thought Yuuri was absolutely adorable, as the appearance of chubby Yuuri was not dissimilar to that of a cute, cuddly teddy bear. However, it was simply too inconvenient for the body of an ice skater. Viktor could still enjoy healthy Yuuri's body in all its glory - but with more abs and sculpted definition. Chubby Yuuri may have been adorable, but his figure skating body was fucking hot.

The couple arrived at the apartment just past midnight. On this rare occasion Viktor fell asleep almost instantly, whilst Yuuri (left wide awake from his previous nap) felt restless, tossing and turning on his side of their king-sized bed and hitting his head on the hard mahogany frame. His skull throbbing, Yuuri clambered out of bed, taking caution not to wake the sleeping beauty Viktor. He then wandered across the hallway in search of a box of paracetamol.

It was safe to say Yuuri couldn't see jack shit without his glasses. It wasn't a problem on the ice, because he was always immersed in performing the routine, but trying to focus on his surroundings proved trickier than he'd thought. Oblivious to the collection of Makkachin's chew toys scattered across the floor, Yuuri tripped and went flying across the room into the stylish wooden rug.

'I give up,' thought Yuuri, 'maybe I should just go back to bed.'

He clung to a leg of the coffee table, and began to hoist himself up when something that unnerved him caught his eye, just close enough to make out. As his body curled up, rolls formed on the sides of his stomach. Yuuri had not experienced this strange phenomenon for over a year. Back then it was perfectly normal, whereas now he found it seemed rather unnatural. Was he falling back into old habits?

There was only one way to prove his theory. Quietly, Yuuri crept back into the bedroom and took his glasses from the bedside table before tip-toeing over to the mirror in the en-suite bathroom. Upon looking in the mirror, the reflection pretty much confirmed his assumptions. His arms and legs were a little doughier than before the holiday season, his face rounder and his tummy an inch or too wider. Sure, it wasn't a monumental difference, but he was pretty sure Viktor would notice.

"Heh, now I know why Viktor started calling me piglet again," Yuuri chuckled to himself. Viktor had a right to be concerned, he supposed - that new outfit he'd bought him cost over $10,000, and it would be a waste if he outgrew it.

Yuuri wasn't even that bothered about his weight gain. Over the past year he'd been working on trying to accept himself, and for the most part he did, but he figured it'd be good to weigh himself to monitor how much he needed to lose to get back in shape. If he really wanted to win the Grand Prix Final, he'd need to give Viktor the very best his body had to offer - and not just in the bedroom.

The scales lurked under the sink and were pretty dusty, contrasting with Viktor's spotless apartment. They looked like they hadn't been used in years, and why would they? Viktor had always had an insane metabolism, and the rigorous daily training insured he'd never put on a single pound. Yuuri was always extremely jealous of this, and couldn't quite accept just how sluggish his metabolism really was.

'Still, there's no point doing anything drastic,' he thought as he stepped onto the scale, 'this is just how my body works, so I won't fight it too much.'
Yuuri kept the same relaxed approach to the number he saw on the scale - 62kg.
'Okay, so I gained about four kilos over Christmas, but hey, my BMI is still only 20.7, which is pretty low, right?'

The extra four kilos really didn't phase Yuuri. He figured it wouldn't be enough to affect his performance on the ice, so why should he even bother trying to lose weight? He'd suffered with issues in the past as he debilitated back and forth between weight loss and gain, so Yuuri saw no reason as to why he should put himself at risk when in all honesty he was still perfectly healthy.

'Viktor will just have to accept this slight change,' Yuuri thought as he scuttled back to bed, 'he wouldn't say anything too harsh anyway, even for someone as outspoken as he is.'

The next day Yuuri felt pretty confident. He was wearing tight-fitting leggings that made his butt look perky, and he felt cute in the leather jacket he'd bought at the airport even if it didn't match his usual aesthetic. Viktor, who was already awake and cooking French toast, grinned when he saw Yuuri's legs in tight black spandex.

"Wow Yuuri, you look amazing! You're getting curvier these days, have you been doing squats?"

"Yeah," said Yuuri, trying to avoid the topic of his unprecedented weight gain, "I was hoping you'd notice!"

"Oh I did!" Viktor beamed, "You can definitely see the gain in your legs!"

"You can also see it in his stomach, cheeks and hips," joked Yurio, interrupting as he walked through the door with a Starbucks cup in each hand. Viktor automatically ignored the criticism in his comment and laughed, but Yuuri was caught out, and in a moment of self-consciousness buried his head into a nearby pillow.

"So, what brings you to our humble abode?" said Viktor, arm around Yuuri (who was now burying his face in a stack of French toast).

"Nothing much," grumbled Yurio, "Yakov just wanted me to warn you not to be late for practise, and I can't be bothered to deal with his constant shouting when I've already got a headache."

Viktor gave Yurio a quick thumbs up and the younger Russian left for the rink, grabbing a piece of toast as he walked out of the door. Soon after, the other skaters getting ready to leave when Viktor suddenly pulled Yuuri aside, caressing his cheeks with his soft and supple hands.

"You know Yuuri, those leggings look very flattering on you," he said in a lustful tone, gazing at his partner's crotch and thighs, "but I can't wait to rip them off tonight."

Yuuri grinned and slid his hips against Viktor's thigh,
"Depends on what you make for dinner," he said with a wink.

Viktor knew just what Yuuri had in mind. He spent the walk to the rink planning in his mind the most extravagant katsudon recipe the Japanese boy would have ever seen, and one that was orgasmic to taste. Yuuri was having a little difficulty keeping up the pace as an excited Viktor sped through the streets, but he too was looking forward to tonight. He hadn't eaten Katsudon since they were in Japan and he was starting to experience withdrawal symptoms.

It was a Monday morning so the ice rink was pretty empty. Yurio had already been there for half an hour, so Yakov was not pleased to find Viktor turn up late for their training, giggling with Yuuri like a bunch of naughty schoolgirls.

Yakov never choreographed Viktor's routines, Viktor would never let him; he preferred to give his
performances their own personal flair and this instance was no different.

"You want HOW many quads in your short programme?!!" Yakov roared in his face, "Not when you've been out for a year, you need to start small and work your way up!"

Viktor laughed and skated away, proceeding to perform a quadruple flip like it was nothing. "You were saying?" he said smugly.

Viktor and Yakov began to engage in petty disagreement for the next five minutes or so. In the end Yakov gave up, nodding his head in defeat as Viktor wrote down all four quads he'd originally planned into his routine.

Scheduling time on the ice rink was tricky business. Yurio usually turned up early so he could leave soon after Viktor arrived, but Viktor would sometimes spend the best part of a day on the ice whilst Yuuri had to be worked around their practise sessions.

Viktor's routine consisted of a multitude of twists, jumps, loops, and salchows, as well as a mesmerising step sequence that made Yuuri's eyes hurt. It was enough to make your average ice skater feel dizzy, but after three hours of practise Viktor hadn't even broken a sweat.

"Are you ready for your training now, Yuuri?" Viktor said with a menacing smile.

Although love was the greatest emotion Viktor felt for his fiancé, pride came a close second. He expected dedication and a top performance from Yuuri each time they stepped out onto the ice, so the Japanese boy was constantly working to please his coach.

Ever since Yuuri won silver at the last Grand Prix Final, Viktor had made sure to increase the difficulty of his routines. Today they were practising Yuuri's short programme: a slow, acoustic cover of Britney Spear's toxic. He sure felt intoxicated after performing the routine - but not always in a good way. It was extremely tiresome and Yuuri often had to pause the session for a moment while he caught his breath back.

"Yuuri," said Viktor sternly, now full engulfed in his 'coach persona', "you seem a lot slower today than you were at our practise before the Christmas holidays, what's going on?"

Yuuri hung his head, slightly embarrassed, "I may have gained a little weight whilst we were in Japan..." but he soon raised himself again, "I'm still healthy! I checked online, so I'm okay, right?!

Viktor smiled, "Yuuri, I already knew, and that's okay - even my own weight fluctuates from time to time."

"See, I told you it's oka-"

"But if it continues, then of course we might have a problem, just stay off the vatrushka and you'll be fine, I'm sure. Now keep going, I want to watch Katsuki Yuuri's winning performance!"

Yuuri cursed in Japanese and slumped over the side of the rink, annoyed at how useless his body was, but after drinking some energy drink he felt a little more awake. In retrospect, going to bed late the night before probably wasn't one of his greatest ideas, but he ploughed on, determined to prove to Viktor that he was just as agile as ever. He went on to complete all his toe flips, loops, jumps, axels, lutzes and salchows, feeling almost as confident as he did before by the time he and Viktor arrived home.

"I'm going to put on a clean pair of leggings," Yuuri cooed from the bedroom, trying to muster a bold, positive attitude for Viktor, "these ones are far too... dirty."
He wanted to act as sultry as possible, still slightly nervous from the incident at the rink. Yuuri hoped that if he stepped up his game in the bedroom it would compensate for his lacklustre performance on the ice.

'That's the signal!!' Thought Viktor, who sped like lightning into the kitchen, grabbed the katsudon ingredients and whipped out the pans (which he sincerely hoped wouldn't be the only things whipped out that night). When he'd finished, Yuuri ate it like he'd never eaten before, moaning in pleasure with each delicious mouthful. It wasn't better than sex, but it was close.

Later that night they made sweet, sweet love. Both were energised after the meal and took turns in their positions, switching back and forth from top to bottom as the night went by. The session ended as Viktor climaxed, they both reached their limit and the bed collapsed beneath them.

"Crap...I'm so sorry..."

"Don't worry Yuuri, we can always buy a new one," Viktor whispered as he lay over his partner, "or we could get a hot tub, it'd be fun to do it in there."

Yuuri clasped Viktor's rugged shoulders, "I'm sorry, akachan," he said, "we've been wilder before... I'm not sure what I did...."

Silence fell across the room, ended by the sound of Yuuri getting up to make tea. He really didn't want to talk about what had just happened, and the soothing taste of green tea would hopefully calm some of his nerves. Whilst standing by the kettle, Yuuri felt Viktor's hands slip around his waist, resting his head on Yuuri's shoulders.

"It's not your fault, Yuuri, that bed was old. Don't think about it, okay?"

Despite Viktor's continuous reassurance that it wasn't his fault, Yuuri felt terrible. The bed had never broken in previous sessions, was it his weight gain that caused the frame to give out? Was he that heavy? All sorts of questions flooded his head, and the scene of the bed breaking replayed in his mind over and over again, making him question why he'd ever felt confident in the first place.

As Viktor lay on his side and was slowly falling asleep, Yuuri made an important decision. He'd lose the four kilograms he gained over Christmas, but healthily and by himself. The choice was rational, he thought, as it wasn't fuelled by self-hatred or pressure from anybody else, but just a lifestyle change that'd make him feel better about himself. It may have been influenced by the bed-breaking episode, but he was also doing this for his own mental wellbeing. Yuuri even looked forward to this new diet; maybe it'd make him less of a pessimist once he'd made this positive change to his life.

"Well, a little bit of weight loss could be good for me..."
Yuuri decided that it was for the best if he avoided letting Viktor know about his weight loss plans, as he didn't want him getting involved and they both needed to concentrate on practise anyway. When morning came, he picked up his phone from the bedside table and discreetly downloaded MyFitnessPal, a calorie-counting app that would carefully monitor his food intake and exercise. It was a little difficult sitting upright whilst simultaneously trying to avoid falling into the giant crack in the middle of the bed, but Yuuri doubted he'd come to any harm as it was already lying on the floor.

The app was easy to use; Yuuri just had to enter his age, height and weight, and it would calculate how many calories he'd need to lose, gain or maintain weight, as well is BMI.

24 years old. 173cm. 62kg. BMI of 20.7. These were the numbers that defined the physicality of Katsuki Yuuri. To lose weight he'd need 1500 calories a day, to maintain 2500, and 3000 to gain. However, Yuuri decided 2000 calories would be a good amount for his diet, taking into account the 3-4 hours of ice skating practise he did everyday that would surely burn off some of what he ate.

'Wait, how many calories is in a serving of Katsudon?' thought Yuuri, panicking at the thought of life without his precious dish, 'Let's see,' he muttered as he scrolled through the app's library of foods and their nutritional content, trying not to disturb a sleeping Viktor, 'here we go... cooked rice is around 130kcal per 100g, fried pork cutlet can be anyway near 500, vegetables are about 100-150 - oh! And don't forget the egg and sauces...’

In total, Yuuri's typical serving of Katsudon came out at around 900 calories. 'No wonder I gained weight so weight easily, I used to eat this at least twice a day...' he thought to himself in amusement.

Viktor stirred in his sleep as Yuuri continued to scroll through the MFP database. The rink was closed for maintenance until much later that day, giving the two of them an excuse to laze about the apartment. Whilst Yuuri was usually the type of person that'd sleep in until noon, today he was up bright and early to make himself a calorie-controlled breakfast (and hopefully manage to complete a round of press-ups before Viktor woke up).

Yuuri was actually rather proud of himself. He'd managed to wake up, download MFP, brew green tea and prepare a healthy breakfast of porridge oats, all before eight thirty in the morning. 'Maybe being healthy isn't all that difficult,' he thought as he tucked into his steaming bowl of porridge. In all honestly it didn't even taste that bad once he'd mixed some honey and goji berries in it. After he'd finished he logged the calories into his diet app, determined to stick to his new routine.
'200... 130... etc... That comes out at around 400 calories for breakfast. I guess that's okay.'

Considering he'd probably throw up if he attempted to do some press ups straight after that heavy meal, Yuuri lay down on the sofa and swiped through the large array of apps he could use to personalise his own fitness programme. The problem was that they were all so unreasonably macho, with intimidating titles like 'GET RIPPED ABS AND BENCH PRESS A BEAR WITH THE NEW INSANE WORKOUT' that didn't really apply to him in any way, shape or form. In the end he simply planned his own programme using the notes app on his phone. The workout consisted of:
- 25 press-ups
- 25 sit-ups
- 10 crunches
- 40 squats (his curves were one of Viktor's favourite features...)
- The dreaded 2 minute plank...

The clock hit nine and Yuuri decided it was time to start exercising. He began to do some slow, badly-formed sets of press-ups on the wooden kitchen floor as Viktor walked in, quite unsure of what he was trying to achieve.

"You okay Yuuri? That's a weird place to sleep," he said with a laugh.

The younger male pushed his glasses back as he raised his head, his mop of sweaty black hair flicking upwards,
"I'm trying to build muscle. I want to be like you, Viktor." He said in a cunning move that he knew would make Viktor's heart melt.

"Wow, Yuuri, that's so thoughtful!" He beamed, making Yuuri blush.
"However, you're doing it extremely wrong!"

"Oh."

"Watch me, dorogaya, I'll show you."

Viktor immediately dropped to the floor and demonstrated the most perfect, correctly-formed press-ups Yuuri had ever seen.

"So that's how you get such bulging muscles," said Katsudon, utterly smitten.

"There's that," said Viktor, "but late nights and those pictures of you from that calendar photo shoot help too."

Yuuri rolled his head back in loving laughter for his fiancé. To this day he still couldn't believe that he, Katsuki Yuuri, your average dime-a-dozen Japanese figure skater, was engaged to the Russian dreamboat Viktor Nikiforov. That's why he had to get back in shape, he thought, as he assumed he was already lagging behind Viktor in terms of attractiveness and this extra weight wasn't doing him any favours.

"There you go Yuuri, now you try a press-up!"

Yuuri gulped, and positioned himself for what was probably going to be an extremely anticlimactic moment for both of them. He tenses his muscles and tried hard to concentrate at the task at hand. Slowly, he lowered his chest towards the floor, arms trembling like his friend Phichit's array of many hamsters. For a moment he felt a pulling sensation in his biceps and thought it was a sign he could go on, but all it proved was a false sense of hope and Yuuri soon fell flat on his face.
"Hehe, you look like Makkachin that time we let him out on the ice!" Viktor snorted as he helped Yuuri to his feet. Makkachin, who was not impressed, snorted and ran into his bed (mansion) for comfort.

'Oh well,' Yuuri thought, 'at least I made Viktor laugh.'

They spent the rest of the morning hanging out together, listening to old music on the radio and enjoying each other's company in the privacy of the apartment. Early afternoon quickly rolled around, and with it Viktor's nagging appetite.

"Yuuuuuuuuri, can we go out for food?"

"I don't know Viktor, I'm a little short at the moment..."

"Pleeease! I'll pay!"

Viktor snatched his wallet from upon the countertop, and after scrolling through the endless pictures of Yuuri inside pulled out a 5000 Ruble note.

"Viktor!" Yuuri gasped, "that's like $80! Where did you get that kind of money from? We have to pay our gas bill tomorrow!"

"Brand advertisement, mostly. I'll admit that recent commercial I did for chupa chups wasn't exactly glamorous, but it sure payed well. It's not all for the meal anyway - I was looking at your outfit earlier and noticed you'd outgrown your old belt. Now let's go, I'm starving!"

It was getting close to two o'clock in the heart of St. Petersburg and Yuuri was feeling rather hungry too, although slightly worried about how eating out would affect his calorie total for the day.

"Where do you want to go, Yuuri?" said Viktor as they bustled through the busy city streets.

"I don't really mind..."

"Are you sure?" Viktor asked as Yuuri nodded his head, "...okay then, I want to go to McDonald's!"

They walked some more until they came across a food court with a McDonald's a couple of blocks from the ice rink. Viktor was excited as this was his first meal from the restaurant in weeks, fidgeting as Yuuri was quickly trying to calculate just how calorific this meal was going to be. In the end Viktor ordered a double cheeseburger with large fries and a gigantic strawberry milkshake. Yuuri opted for a Filet-O-Fish with small fries and a diet coke, roughly 700 calories in total.

'Don't sweat it,' Yuuri thought to himself, 'you've still got 900 calories left for Katsudon, you'll be fine.'

Trying to appear delicate as he ate, Yuuri took small bites of each dish whilst Viktor scarfed down his entire meal in the space of a few minutes. Eventually Yuuri couldn't stop himself from picking up the pace; he was so hungry. He supposed his metabolism might be speeding up after nearly a day or so on his new diet, so hopefully finishing this meal wouldn't affect it too badly.

In contrast to Viktor, Yuuri's last McDonald's meal was the previous weekend. He loved fast food, but this chain was particularly special to him. Apart from the whole drunken fiasco at the GPF banquet, Yuuri also met Viktor in Sochi when they were at the McDonald's in the airport. They only locked eyes for a moment, but those few fleeting seconds were enough to send his tender heart aflutter.

"What are you thinking about, Yuuri?"
"Oh - nothing, I just enjoy looking at you." Yuuri said, gazing into the depths of Viktor's sapphire iris. Viktor batted his eyelashes, leaning over to him and planting a peck on each cheek.

"Viktor, not in public!" squirmed a bashful Yuuri, "Anyway, it's getting late - we should get to practise..."

"My my, it's not like you to be so insistent!" exclaimed Viktor as the two of them arose from their seats, "but I agree - today I want you to work on your jumps especially, so we're going to need a lot of time to work with."

The rink smelt like detergent from the newly-polished ice and had been closed to the public that day, so the surface was much smoother than usual. It was reaching sunset when the couple arrived, walking into the main arena just as Yurio was reaching the climax of his routine. The Russian Fairy danced about the ice like a graceful sprite through a kingdom of roses and mythical grottos, and Yuuri was completely entranced. He couldn't spot a single fault in the young champion's routine, and began to feel queasy as he realised how his own performance might look in comparison.

"Yurio, what was that piece you were skating to? It's amazing.." Yuuri asked as the exhausted Russian drifted over to the side of the ice.

"Jesus Christ pig, can't you give me just a second to cool down?"

"Sorry!"

"Anyway," he said, breathing deep and heavy, "it's called like Crystallise or something stupid-sounding.. Yakov chose it for me, I don't know. Don't you have practise to be getting to, or are you feeling slobbish after that big meal? Yeah, that's right - I know where you and Viktor went! And without me!"

"??"

"He bought me a mcflurry," Yurio grinned, skating away to the changing rooms in search of his chocolate dessert.

Yuuri knew he was right, he did have practise to be getting to. Viktor had ever-so-bravely taken the day off due to suffering from a brain-freeze-induced headache, much to Yakov's annoyance, but it did mean that Yuuri didn't have to wait as long on the sidelines before he could practise his routine. Today was the day Viktor showed Yuuri his choreography for the free skate. It was intense, fast and unpredictable - something Yuuri'd need if he wanted to shock and impress the judges at the upcoming Grand Prix Final. Viktor had written in a move called a 'quintuple flip', which Yuuri wasn't sure even existed, and was beginning to feel the pressure as he realised the GPF was just under a year away.

The music Viktor had chosen was unusual for a typical free skate performance, as it was a power ballad consisting of heavy riff guitars and powerful synthesisers, but he reassured Yuuri that the song was a metaphor for the power inside of him and the spirit encompassed by his fellow skaters, and how it could help him through anything, including making the difficult move to Russia from his home in Japan.

Yuuri kept this message in mind all the way through practise and carried on doing so all the way home. Viktor would frequently offer him a sugary snack or too after they came home from the rink, and Yuuri was currently plucking up the courage he needed to refuse.
"You look exhausted! Want some of my Pastila?" said Viktor, offering Yuuri a bag of sweets hidden inside his coat pocket.

"No thanks," lied Yuuri, his mouth watering, "I'm hungry for a proper meal, so I'll make us both some Katsudon."

Viktor let out a small squeak of happiness,
"Vkusno!!"

"Ah-ah-ah," said Yuuri, "you have to let me prepare it by myself, that way it'll be more special."

Viktor agreed, blissfully unaware that the sole reason for this was just so Yuuri could control the meal's calorie content. He scanned the measurements for each of the foods listed under 'Katsudon' on MFP until he came across a tab that read 'breaded pork cutlet' - the first and most vital ingredient of the dish. The recipe said it was to be fried, but Yuuri didn't want to risk going over his daily calorie budget so he grilled his own, whilst leaving Viktor's in a vat of oil as the recipe instructed.

'Great, that's about 500 calories out of the way.'

Once the cutlets were cooked through, it didn't take long for Yuuri to prepare the rest of the ingredients. Cooking was one of his favourite past times, even if it was now slightly soiled by the fact that Yuuri had to meticulously weight each vegetable before it was allowed into the pot. He even removed and re-weighed some of them a couple more times, ensuring he adhered to the meal's calorie limit of 900.

When the food was piping hot, Yuuri began to plate up the Katsudon into his and Viktor's separate bowls.

"Thank you, lyubov moya, it looks delicious," Viktor said, demolishing the contents of the entire bowl, "is there any more?"
"Sure, there's more in the kitchen, let me get you some."

Yuuri quickly went up to heat up Viktor's extra portion when the older man tugged on his trouser leg, halting his actions in the process. He managed to stretch towards the counter top and quickly grabbed an extra pork cutlet bowl and hastily propping it down in front of Viktor.

"There you go!"

"Wait, Yuuri, aren't you going to get any more for yourself? You love Katsudon, and I'm not going to eat everything here - it'd be a shame to let it go to waste."

"Well, I'm not really hungry, and this way I can save some for tomorrow" said Yuuri, pushing his empty bowl aside.

The two of them cleared the table and went into the bedroom to unwind, despite the fact that Viktor hadn't actually done any exercise that day and was still full of energy.

"Yuuri, yuuri! Can we watch a film?" he asked, frantically pointing to a copy of 'The Princess Bride' that lay by the TV.

"Sure," said Yuuri, seemingly disinterested as he tapped away at his phone screen.

He needed to finish logging in the calories he'd consumed that day, before it turned midnight and the counter reset again. It'd turned out there had been a slight miscalculation in weighing the pork
and breadcrumbs resulting in him going over his daily limit, but Yuuri let it pass. He was just starting this diet and he knew it wouldn't be perfect so worrying about it seemed pointless. He'd just be more careful tomorrow to make up for his silly mistakes that day, but he promised himself he'd stay positive no matter what happened. Yuuri sure wasn't perfect, but at least he was trying, and vowed not to beat himself up over the things he couldn't change. Yuuri's only concern was with eating more fruit and veg, a goal which could easily be achieved.

He was capable of doing this. He believed in himself. Yuuri had made a promise to commit to this new lifestyle and never look back, and that's what he was going to do.
The Beginning of the End

Chapter Notes

{A.N.: Ahhh I know the story is bad but please stick with it I'm planning so many exciting/heart wrenching bits in the plot!!! If you actually like my shitty fanfic please kudos and comment it means so much!!} :)

No no no. No, this can't be right. It just can't be. Why has this happened?!?

It had taken Yuuri about a month and a half to lose the extra 4kgs he'd gained over Christmas, leading him into mid-February at a weight of 58kg and a BMI of 19.4. Sure, it was a slow weight loss, but it was safe and hadn't overly provoked any of Yuuri's naturally destructive behaviours, so for the most part it had been largely beneficial. Yuuri was so pleased with himself when he stepped on the scale; he couldn't wait to show Viktor how much his overall fitness and stamina had improved in bed that night. They'd bought a new one, from a deluxe range, soon after he'd broken the last one, but Yuuri didn't want to try it out until he was in perfect shape. Now he had the perfect opportunity to test just how well it'd stay together.

This positive attitude is what would've been if Yuuri hadn't stopped to take his shirt off in front of the bathroom mirror. For quite some time Yuuri presumed that a combination of diet and exercise would sculpt the killer body he'd been striving to achieve, but the reflection he saw was quite the opposite.

All Yuuri could see was a soft, round body taking up the majority of the mirror view. He just couldn't comprehend what he'd done to himself - his thighs rubbed and jiggled together, lumps of fatty tissue had clustered to his pecks and the cheeks on his face, and his stomach now slightly overlapped the belt of his pants. Obviously whatever efforts he'd previously made simply weren't enough, and the situation with his body has gotten worse - much worse.

"I don't understand..." said Yuuri as he stared at himself in the reflection of the mirror, "I lost weight.... I used to be 58kg and perfectly slim... did I do something wrong? Did I lose muscle, and gain fat? This used to work, what's going o-"

Yuuri was also extremely disappointed that he couldn't demonstrate the capabilities of his new body in the bedroom.

'Now here's no way I'm letting Viktor see me naked, not with this much fat clinging to my body.'

Suddenly Viktor strode into the bedroom, dressed in a sharp black turtleneck and loose grey trousers. He tapped gently on the bathroom door after noticing it was locked and Yuuri hastily scrambled back into his t-shirt, praying Viktor hadn't heard his self-loathing groans from the other side of the door.

"Are you okay in there Yuuri? he called from outside the bathroom, "It's okay if you've locked yourself in again, the door sticks and..."

"I'm okay, I promise!!"

"Really? You don't sound okay! Hold on," Viktor said sternly, "I'll break it down, step back."
"Noooo!" groaned Yuuri, turning the lock and running out into the bedroom, "I'm fine, see?"

Viktor stood in the middle of the room with an unusually frantic Yuuri collapsed in his arms. He couldn't comprehend what was going on; none of the magazines kept in the bathroom contained any photos of him, so there was no explanation for why Yuuri had taken so long inside.

"Oh, hehe, so you are. Why I don't get you something to eat, lapochka - it's our day off after all. We can do whatever we want!"

"Sure - I'll be there in a moment..."

Viktor left and Yuuri retreated to the comfort of the bathroom mirror. What if by chance his insecurities weren't just the voices of dysmorphia attempting to claw itself inside of his head? Yuuri once again removed his shirt and clutched at his stomach, grabbing a small pooch in front of him and jiggling it about like a sadistic game of catch.

'The scale is wrong' he thought, 'it must be wrong. There's no way I can be 58kg and still a complete and utter whale.'

And yet, even after he'd weighed himself for the tenth time in a row, the number didn't budge. 'These scales must be broken,' thought an aggravated Yuuri, tossing them back under the sink.

Soon after he heard Viktor calling from within the dining room.
"Yuuri, breakfast is ready!"

As he walked through the door, Yuuri could detect the salty scent of miso soup wafting around the room. 'Thank God,' he thought to himself, 'for once, a breakfast that's low in calories.'

Whilst Yuuri's diet had indeed been conducted in a safe, controlled manner, his calorie-counting habit had begun to grow increasingly paranoid as the six weeks went by. Yuuri passed this growing compulsion off as merely an increase in dedication, but what were once considered minor setbacks in his diet had mutated into major problems. By the end of this period, Yuuri was completely obsessed with calories and how many he was consuming in a day. 2000 was his magic number - anything else was simply unacceptable.

After finishing breakfast Viktor had to leave and run some errands in the city, leaving Yuuri home alone with his thoughts. Luckily Makkachin was also leaving the apartment for a walk with Viktor, so at the very least Yuuri didn't have to deal with their dog silently judging him from the corner of the room whilst he wallowed in self pity.

First and foremost he had to log the calories of the meal he'd just eaten, which luckily came out at around 100 - the lowest meal in ages. Yuuri stared at the home screen of the MFP app, feeling like a fool. If the calories recommended for weight loss were 1500, then no wonder he still looked like a human sack of potatoes if he'd been eating 2000 everyday so far.

'I'm such an idiot...'

Obviously 2000 calories heavily exceeded what Yuuri would need to lose all the extra weight he was lugging around. 1500 seemed like a fair deal, but Yuuri knew he needed to lower that total if he wanted to seriously lose some fat. On the other hand, 1000 calories did seem rather low for a grown adult, let alone a professional figure skater, but Yuuri decided he needed to push himself and prove to the world just what he was capable of achieving. 1000 calories would be a challenge, but if completed he'd be rewarded with a body he'd always dreamed of, and that alone was enough to convince Yuuri - regardless of the additional strength and agility he'd gain on the side.
'I'll need more exercise too if I want to pull this off,' thought Yuuri as he glanced towards the treadmill in the corner of the room, 'Viktor only uses the treadmill on his days off, so if I'm secretive about this I doubt he'll even notice me using it.'

After getting changed into his running tracksuit Yuuri walked up to the treadmill and gingerly pressed the start button. The directions on the machine were all written in Russian, which didn't exactly aid matters, but Yuuri remembered just enough of the vocabulary Viktor had recited in bed and managed to select the button reading 'faster' on the side of the control panel.

The pace shot up and Yuuri was thrown off the treadmill into a stack of beanbags by the window. 'I hope nobody saw that,' thought Yuuri, forgetting they lived at the top of a skyscraper.

Yuuri climbed to his feet. He needed to persevere and get used to the feel of exercising on a treadmill since he'd be using it everyday after Viktor had gone to bed. With a little apprehension, Yuuri stepped back onto the treadmill and aligned his pacing with that of the machine.

'It's okay,' he reassured himself, 'it's just like running outside. You can do that, right?'

Yuuri's stamina proved helpful as the pace continued to climb. After about an hour he'd hit 'the wall', legs aching, shirtless and drenched in sweat, but he pictured the dream body he'd one day hopefully achieve and found the will to power through it. Yuuri also thought about the positive impact workouts would have on his performance whilst skating, figuring Viktor would be proud to see the improvement in his fitness if he ever discovered Yuuri's secret running sessions. Either way, he definitely wasn't giving up.

'Do it for Viktor. Do it for Viktor.' he chanted. Yuuri imagined how his fiancé would react when he saw Yuuri's new body, adding it to his mental list of reasons why this weight loss was so important - not just for him, but for everyone he knew. People had always made fun of Yuuri for being overweight and he knew proving them wrong would be the sweetest of revenge.

After placing silver at the last Grand Prix Final Yuuri had always felt a sense of inadequacy when around his idol. Even after two solid hours of continuous exercise he felt weak in comparison to Viktor, despite the fact that according to his app he'd just burned 1000 calories. Yuuri didn't incorporate that number into his intake either, assuming that due to his slow metabolism it wouldn't make a substantial difference to his net intake. He was also too exhausted to make any precise calculations anyway, all Yuuri could think of was sprawling out on the sofa next to a cool jug of iced water.

In a short time Viktor arrived home with Makkachin, who was bounding along at his feet, and smiled when he saw a topless Yuuri lying across the sofa.
"Why so sweaty, Yuuri?" he chuckled, running his fingers through a matted lock of hair and poking him in the belly.

Yuri panicked, trying to think of an excuse that wouldn't make him sound like some idiot who'd been exercising behind his fiancés back. Eyes darting around the room, he managed to spot a cup on the windowsill with all but some small tea leaves left inside.
"I, er, drank a hot cup of tea way too fast," he lied, "the change in temperature must have shocked my body, or um, something..."

"Oh, okay," said Viktor, pulling Yuuri into a hug, "I was worried you were ill. Remember to take care of yourself Yuuri - I don't want you overheating."
"It's fine," he replied, leaving a soft kiss on Viktor's lips, "I'll be fine."

Yuuri felt guilty about lying to Viktor, but he knew it was for the greater good. He was perfectly fine - just tired.
'I'm so weak,' he thought, 'an hour or two on the treadmill and I'm practically comatose. That's kinda pathetic.'

For the rest of the day, all Yuuri could think about was how easily he succumbed to fatigue at the hands of a wretched treadmill. He was grateful that Viktor hadn't been around for lunch, as it was the perfect opportunity to skip a meal and save calories, but at the same time he was really hungry.

That night Yuuri and Viktor ate Katsudon for dinner - they often ate the dish multiple times in a week. Despite his growing phobia of calories, Yuuri just couldn't resist his favourite dish, even if it meant accommodating the rest of the day's meal plans around its whopping nutritional value. He loved the taste of the pork cutlet bowl far too much to let it go. Despite that he didn't eat it everyday, Katsudon forever held a special place in Yuuri's heart that no other dish was able to fill.

Katsudon had created a problem, fortunately to which Yuuri had the solution. There was a grocers located just down the street, selling a variety of fresh fruit and vegetables as well as low-calorie health foods designed to aid weight loss and limit appetite. In this category Yuuri's saviour could be found: a pack of zero-calorie rice, made from the flour of the konjac root that was commonly found on farms in Japan. If used in the same proportions as the normal rice in his Katsudon, switching to this alternative would save Yuuri 300 calories for every pork cutlet bowl he had. He could even shave off an extra 100 calories if he swapped some of the dish's starchy vegetables for ones with a higher water content. Either way, for now his intake was safe.

'The day I stop eating Katsudon is the day my life falls apart.'
Yuuri was all alone in the changing rooms at the side of the ice rink. Viktor had left early that day so he'd only just arrived, but his boyfriend's absence was the perfect opportunity for Yuuri to skip breakfast. He'd been doing it on and off for the past couple of weeks anyway, prioritising his 'body checks' and secret workouts over actually eating when he woke up, so the hunger he felt upon arriving wasn't really noticeable anymore. Yuuri still considered this an acceptable routine as he often ate Katsudon at the end of the day - he simply wasn't a big fan of breakfast.

For the past 15 minutes Yuuri had made several failed attempts to measure the width of his stomach with a pencil. This peculiar behaviour was influenced by a trend he'd read about on Instagram, the pencil challenge, in which the participant lies on their back and measures the width of their stomach against the length of a normal sketching pencil. If you're thinner than the pencil is long, congratulations - you are now deemed socially acceptable by society.

Yuuri was initially discouraged to attempt this challenge as there was no lock on the changing room door, but it was still reasonably early in the morning so he hoped nobody would discover what he was up to. After multiple precise measurings, Yuuri gave up. 'My stomach's at least twice the width of this pencil, maybe more.' his thoughts groaned. Each time he looked up the distance between the graphite tip and the tip of his own bulging stomach seemed to grow farther and farther.

"Yuuri, aren't you gonna come watch m - oh.." Viktor began as he poked his head around the door, only to find Yuuri sitting alone on a bench in the corner of room without a shirt. One look at his half-naked fiancé and Viktor was over by the benches in a heartbeat.

"Hi Viktor!!!!!!" Yuuri said, trying to hide his roaring self-disappointment, "sorry, I'll be out on the ice in a minute, I'm just getting changed...."

Viktor put a finger over Yuuri's lips and whispered quietly into his ear, "There's no pressure, dorogaya. I was enjoying the view back there."

"Oh," replied Yuuri, not entirely convinced. How could anyone enjoy the view of his love handles, pudgy arms and numerous rolls of back fat?

"You've recently lost weight too, I've noticed," Viktor continued, "and you look positively ravishingly." He proceeded to plant a stream of sharp kisses upon Yuuri's neck.

"Stop it, Viktor!" Yuuri giggled. For a moment he forgot about his insecurities and enjoyed playing into his fiancé's naturally flirtatious personality,

"Viktor, you're gonna give me a hickey!"
"I've given you hiccups in much dirtier places before," Viktor grinned, moving downwards towards Yuuri's crotch.

"Viktoor~~"

"YOU TWO, OUT, NOW!" a deep voice boomed from the edge of the room, "Vitya, I want you out on that ice right now, and take your little lap dog with you! I am NOT cleaning your mess up again."

"Sorry!" Yuuri squeaked, embarrassed. Viktor looked up at the furious coach looming over the two of them, and smiled.

"Oops, sorry Yakov."

Yuuri began to dress himself after the others had left the room. In all honesty he was relieved; usually he loved cuddles with Viktor, but in these freezing temperatures and the current state his body was in he reluctant to engage in physical contact with anyone.

He was satisfied that Viktor had noticed his weight loss, but suspicious since he'd no reason to do so. Yuuri knew he looked fatter than ever. Viktor was always blunt with his words and it was unusual for him not to mention anything about his growing figure, Yuuri thought. Was Viktor lying just to spare his feelings?

'Who cares, I know I'm a whale anyway.'

Practise was especially tiresome that day. Viktor was keen for Yuuri to work on his step sequence, but he was already running on an intake of zero calories and had drank at least two litre bottles of water before leaving their house earlier in the morning. It was another supposed weight loss tip he'd picked up from the internet, but the large quantity of water sloshing around Yuuri's insides certainly didn't help his coordination on ice. He was already worn out from his early morning exercises and as a result of made numerous mistakes during training.

It was a shame, as up until that day Yuuri's performance on the ice had been exceptional: for the most part he'd been landing all his jumps and he'd almost gotten the hand of a long and intricate step sequence. This time, however, Yuuri just couldn't keep up with the music. He'd flubbed the majority of his jumps, almost breaking his arm trying to land the quintuple, and was exhausted by time he'd finished this routine.

"Yuuri, what's going on today?" asked Viktor, seemingly annoyed, "I thought your performance would have improved now that you're in better shape.

"Ah, well, I've been really tired recently, and I'm kinda stressed, and I haven't eaten yet, and I'm really in much worse shape than you think..." Yuuri trailed off, staring at the ground. He didn't enjoy being lectured by his own fiancé, particularly when he had his own self doubts to worry about.

"Come to think of it, I don't think I've seen you eat breakfast once this week, Yuuri. Is this why today you've run out of energy?"

Yuuri nodded, crossing his skates sheepishly.

"I haven't had time, I've been waking up later these past few days," Yuuri lied, knowing full well about his early exercises and the workouts that kept him up at night, " - I'm sorry, I'll be more
more committed to my routine from now on."

Viktor smiled and put his arm around Yuuri's shoulders,

"It's alright, lyubov moy, I know you're not doing it on purpose. If you really were being that restrictive I suspect you'd be underweight right now, and since you're perfectly healthy it's obviously just a silly mistake. Don't worry, even I forget to eat sometimes. Why don't you go sit out and rest for a few minutes, I'll call you when I've finished training with Yakov."

Relieved that practice was over, Yuuri glided over to the benches and began to remove his skates. Everything was a little blurry without his glasses, but he could just about make out a blurred fleshy blob sitting in the corner.

"Hey-" he called out nervously in the figures' direction, "this session is private, you'll have to leave, sorry..."

"Put your glasses on, pig!"

Yuuri instantly recognised the raw, agitated tone of voice, "Sorry Yurio!"

He scrambled around the benches for a few minutes as he looked for his glasses. Luckily they hadn't been broken, and one he'd adjusted the frame back into place Yuuri could see everything crystal clear again. He decided to walk over to Yurio's bench, as an angsty teenager seemed better than no company whatsoever.

At close range, Yuri realised that Yurio wasn't alone. The fleshy blob was in fact, not one person, but two of the world's best figure skaters, both topless and rather flustered upon discovery.

"Oh. Hi, Otabek."

Otabek gave Yuuri a casual nod, eyes still fixated on Yurio.

"What are you doing here, Yuuri?" Yurio snarled, hurriedly putting his shirt back on.

"Oh, my practise is over for today. Wait, what's Otabek doing here?"

Otabek, who had finally taken his eyes off Yurio, turned to face Yuuri and spoke in a soft accent, "They're renovating the rink back in Almaty, so Yuri said I could stay here with him. Right now we were together, but Yuri is probably too shy to mention that."

"Beka!" Yurio whispered, "we can't tell him stuff like that!"

"Why not? We heard him and Viktor do much worse through the thin walls of that house in Hasetsu, didn't we?"

Otabek smiled and squeezed Yurio's arm, then left to go eat lunch in the city centre.

"Yurio, you have a hickey on your shoulder," Yuuri said, pointing to a patch of bare flesh not properly covered by the jacket. Yurio turned beet red.

"The age of consent here is 16. I'm fine."

Yuuri smiled, thinking to himself just how amusing it was seeing the hardy Russian punk so embarrassed.

"It's fine, at least you won't end up a 23-year-old virgin," Yuuri chuckled.

"Of course not, I keep myself in shape, unlike you did in the past."
"I guess so -," he smiled, "so how much do you weigh?"

Yuuri regretted his actions the moment he asked the question. Why would he say something so weird and invasive? Now he'd make himself look like a clueless weight loss failure in front of the slimmest person in the room.

"Why do you want to know?" Yurio asked, puzzled.

"Because... because," mumbled Yuuri, "because you're an amazing skater and you look so light on the ice - I want to be like that and improve my skating."

Yurio chuckled and shook his head,
"You do realise that if you wanted to know, you could just look up my stats on the ISU's website? Yours are on there too, look," he said, pulling out his phone and scrolling through numerous pages of famous figure skaters.

Yurio's weight was 47kg. BMI 17.7. Yuuri had now learnt to automatically calculate BMI in his head.
"But wouldn't that make you underweight?" he blurted out, his second foolish mistake of the conversation. Yurio shot him a look of contempt.

"I'm sorry!"

"Whatever, I'm used to it," Yurio sighed with a smile, "people are constantly telling me to gain weight, but despite that I eat like a horse I can't gain a single pound. Kids at school would call me anorexic... They're all idiots anyway; I'm a top athlete and I'd be barred from competing if I wasn't healthy."

Yuuri nodded, trying to conceal his utter jealousy. How could someone who ate so unhealthily have such an undeservingly low BMI?

"I've got to go find Otabek anyway, don't tell him about this, okay?" Yurio said defensively, leaving the side of the rink.

Holding hands whilst he and Viktor walked through the streets of St. Petersburg, Yuuri couldn't stop thinking of how he'd never felt so envious of another person in his life. 'I'd love it if people mistook me for an anorexic, at least I'd be skinny.' he thought as they crossed the bridge, looking out towards the river, 'No - wait, that's horrible of me. Anorexia is a serious illness, and I'm not ill, I just want to lose all this weight so I can finally be skinny. I can't believe Yurio is only 47kg when I'm still a whopping 53kg. I need to get my BMI under 17 so I can perform at the height of my ability - maybe then I'll finally be known as the thinnest and most talented ice skater.'

Yuuri looked back to see a silent Viktor lovingly gazing into his eyes.
"Sorry, I must look so tired..."

"No, not at all," Viktor replied, "just a little hungry. Here, eat this. I got it from a bakery downtown this morning so it's fresh, I promise."

He handed Yuuri a small, wrapped bundle of pastries, "Take one." He said, smiling.

Yuuri's heart lurched at the thought of eating something so high calorie, and for breakfast too, but didn't want to appear ungrateful so carefully selected the smallest pain-au-chocolate lying in the wrapping.
'Great, 500 calories and it's not even dinnertime.' Yuuri thought as he took his first tiny bite.

"Come on Yuuri, I've seen you take much bigger mouthfuls before!" Viktor laughed, winking as Yuuri bit down hard into the delicious, crispy pastry and its gooey chocolate centre. Oh, how he'd missed breakfast.

"I can see it tastes good," said Viktor, interrupting Yuuri's orgasmic pastry experience. Yuuri nodded as he scarfed down the last of the pain-au-chocolat, leaving specks of residue dotted around his mouth which Viktor felt more than inclined to lick off.

"There, hehe, how was it?"

"It's delicious, thank you."

"Have you had lunch yet, Yuuri?"

"Yeah, I brought some sushi to eat on the benches whilst you finished practice." Yuuri lied convincingly. Usually he brought a bento box or picked up a salad to eat at the side of the rink, but today he'd been in such a rush that he'd forgotten to bring anything at all.

"Sorry, Viktor, I forgot you liked bento - I'll bring you some next time."

"Don't worry Yuuri," Viktor said, kissing his ring, "Maybe you can teach me someday, and then I'll make bento for a change."

The air grew colder as the couple walked up to their apartment block, Yuuri fiddling with numb fingers on the key in his pocket. However, Viktor continued ahead, turning away and smiling when he heard Yuuri running to catch up.

"Viktor," panted Yuuri, "where are you going? The apartment's back there! Did I do something wrong?"

With a simple shake of the head, Viktor turned to face Yuuri and produced a shining silver card from his quilted Chanel purse. He looked extremely pleased with himself.

"Look, lyubov moya, I got us a reservation at one of the classiest establishments this city has to offer."

Yuuri's eyes widened in both amazement and fear. The card had the restaurant's name emblazoned on the front in large, embossed writing, and smelt faintly of oregano. He'd heard about this place online and knew it was highly elite, serving St Petersburg's most rich and famous, but also that its meals with their multiple courses would not be forgiving on his waistline.

"Wow, thanks, Viktor," Yuuri said, trying to sound appreciative, "but are you sure we can afford all this, and for food? You don't have to waste money on me, not really, I'll enjoy spending time with you no matter the activity-"

Viktor put his arm around Yuuri's shoulders and chuckled,

"Yuuri, I'm doing this because I want to, okay? I love you, and as your fiancé part of the job is taking you out to fancy restaurants. I can afford it, and I really enjoy the time we spend together." "Besides," he continued, "You took me out to Big Apple Buffet across town the other week, I'm simply returning the favour."

'I took you to Big Apple for the very reason that it's a buffet, where it was acceptable for me to have just salad and a couple of dumplings, not an upscale restaurant with grand, fanciful dishes and desserts loaded with empty calories.' Yuuri thought. He was running out of options to try and convince Viktor to turn back home, but it only took a
couple of minutes before he gave up and accepted his fate. 'I'll just get something low-calorie, that can't be too unhealthy.'

The clouded night sky had started to rain by the time they reached the restaurant's main entrance, but Yuuri was just glad they walked the journey there instead of riding the metro. One of the many advantages of being engaged to Viktor was that the man was a constant ball of energy, and whilst walks were an activity he himself enjoyed, they were also a great opportunity for Yuuri to burn some extra calories.

The two of them were seated in the house's best spot by the window. From just looking around at the decor Yuuri could tell this place was extravagant, and judging by Viktor's interaction with the staff he'd dined there numerous times before they'd met.

"So I guess you know what's good, then," said Yuuri, twiddling Viktor's hands as they sat on opposite sides of the table. He didn't want to annoy his fiancé with any of the food-related anxieties he was currently having so kept Viktor engaged in witty conversation, but at the same time Yuuri wished that he wasn't there at all. It was almost annoying, he thought, that he'd taken the time to plan out an entire day's worth of meals to have them scrapped for a pastry and mountains of fattening foods.

It wasn't long until a tall Russian server came bounding up to their table, an excited look on his face. Viktor had sometimes wondered why he was always the first to be served, despite the diners who'd been waiting long before he arrived, but the server's expression said it all - he was their best and (more importantly) most famous customer. "Mr Nikiforov, so good to see you again! What can I get you and your partner today?"

Every few seconds the server would make eye contact with Yuuri, who smiled awkwardly before darting his glance back to the floor. Of course, he couldn't understand a word of the Russian conversation between the two other men, so he scanned the menu as a way to briefly pass the time. Luckily it was written in English, and Yuuri knew he'd found the perfect opportunity to plan his meals.

'Calm down Yuuri, don't look so obvious,' he thought as he opened the calorie app on his phone, 'they've almost finished talking, I can tell. You're safe - you're still got 500 calories left.'

The food arrived in no time at all. Since this was a fusion restaurant, they had the option of ordering dishes from various different countries, and Viktor was quick to dig into his first of many plates of food. Yuuri had ordered chilli miso soup for a starter and oriental-style tacos as the main. Like a human calculator he added up the calorie total in his head, repeating the numbers in fear of exceeding his allowance.

"Come on, Yuuri, your food is getting cold!" Viktor laughed with a mouthful of battered fish. Unlike Yuuri he'd ordered multiple main courses, and was surprised his partner was satisfied with just the one. "You're usually much hungrier when we go out to eat! What's up?"

"N-nothing! I was just distracted by the amazing smell of the food! It's super good!"

Yuuri took a deep breath and lifted the bowl of miso soup to his lips. It was warm and has a strong but pleasant spiced aroma that made his nose crinkle, but overall it was delicious. 'Let's hope I wasn't wrong about the calories,' he thought as the warm liquid slipped into his stomach.
As Viktor was finishing his third plate, Yuuri placed the empty bowl of soup back on the table and looked down at the overwhelmingly large plate of tacos that lay in front of him. He hadn't eaten a meal this unhealthy in weeks and a feeling of guilt was starting to creep up on him. Gingerly, he took a fork and scooped a small portion of meat and cheese from the middle of the largest taco.

'Holy shit, it looks so good.'

Yuuri felt his body shake in pleasure the moment the oily foods were in his mouth. They were warm and smooth, greeting his taste buds in a snug embrace of oriental flavour, which reminded him of all the home-cooked meals his mum would cook everyday after he came home from practice. Totally engulfed in this sensual experience, Yuuri ate extremely slowly and with minuscule bites, desperately trying to savour every mouthful as he thought it might be the last indulgent meal he'd have in a while.

Towards the end of the meal, Yuuri could feel the stodge of carbohydrates forming in his throat and was forced to come up for air. At that moment he caught a brief look of his reflection in the window: messy, sweaty and cheeks stuffed with food. His resemblance to a pig was actually startling. Immediately, he put down his fork and pushed the empty plate away, trying to dissociate himself from the crime he'd just committed. Yuuri continued to stare at himself for a few more seconds, feeling his discomfort rise as he realised just how gluttonous he looked - and in front of his fiancé.

"Wow, someone was hungry!" Viktor remarked, nudging him playfully, "I suppose it's because your diet's over, isn't it? All that freedom must feel good. You look great Yuuri, I'm glad you're looking better lately."

Yuuri's thoughts were focused on the exact opposite. He didn't know why Viktor thought he could stop dieting when it was currently the most important thing on his mind. All his weight loss, the number on the scale - his efforts meant nothing if he couldn't see any results.

He could physically feel the food swashing around inside his stomach, fit to burst, a grotesque sensation that hadn't come about in so long. Yuuri was sure he'd adhered to his 1000 calorie target, but the way the grease felt against his lips was no reassurance to the nagging thoughts at the back of his mind.

Whilst Viktor babbled on about how beautiful Yuuri looked that night, the Japanese skater scrolled through his phone on pages of google results suggesting how to get rid of calories - and fast. The majority of the websites suggested quick, rigorous exercise - but that just wasn't possible given the current situation. It was only on google page 9 that he found a viable answer.

The website wasn't magnificently designed, nor was it easy to navigate through the sea of badly-written comments, but at least it had the answer. Yuuri was initially sceptical of the url, by desperate times called for desperate measures. Between briefly smiling and nodding at Viktor to keep the conversation running, Yuuri read the post describing the appropriate actions for when your intake has gone out the window, and was finally ready to take action. He knew what he had to do.

"Hey, um, Viktor, I need to use the toilet," he whispered across the table, "I'll be back in a moment, I promise."

"Okay, Yuuri," the Russian man smiled as he finished a glass of prosecco, "but are you feeling okay? You've been really quiet the whole time."

"I'm fine, honest, just tired. It must be your exceptional training regime, right coach?"
"Hehe, I guess so."

Yuuri turned on his heels and was relieved to let his smiled drop for the first time that evening, making haste for the toilets on the other side of the room. He couldn't be gone too long or Viktor might come looking for him, and that'd ruin his plan.

Calmly, he walked into the bathroom and entered the cubicle at the very end of the room. Yuuri dropped to his knees, something he was very much an expert at, and began to position himself, leaning over the bowl of the toilet. The air in the room was damp and Yuuri could feel droplets of sweat running down his neck and back. He knew this wasn't right, that this wasn't normal, but supposed that just this once it wouldn't hurt, and he'd be much more vigilant with his calorie intake from then on.

Yuuri took deep breaths and remembered the instructions he'd read in the article. Slowly, he pushed two fingers down the back of his throat, tickling his uvula. He immediately gagged and proceeded to choke a little on the fingers in his mouth, but to his dismay nothing came up. Yuuri put his head in his hands as his breaths got faster, panicking at the impending thoughts of weight gain. By how much had he gone over? 200 calories? 400? According to the menu it would've fit perfectly inside his calorie budget - but Yuuri could feel his body swelling with gluttony and knew it wasn't to be trusted.

"I'm so fat and useless, I can't even throw up,' Yuuri's head roared, 'I have to do this.... for me... for Viktor... he likes it when I get slimmer, he says I look ravishing... even if I know he's lying, I can't go back to eating normally, I'll gain weight, I'll be fatter than I already am - I'll... I'll'

Determined to succeed, Yuuri closed his eyes and swiftly rammed the fingers back down his throat. Thick, hot vomit rose up his oesophagus and spewed out of his mouth, missing the toilet bowl completely as his body jerked back in shock. It was violent and uncontrollable, running across the floor as Yuuri lay trembling on the linoleum flooring, flushing and covered in his own vomit. The back of his throat felt as if it were on fire but his extremities were ice cold.

Yuuri wiped the vomit from his glasses with a piece of toilet paper and sat up, shaking.

'Shit, what a mess I've made.'

Then came another thought,

'Did I really eat that much?'

He knew he'd eaten a lot, but the sloppy puddles surrounding Yuuri were overwhelmingly large. He felt so badly betrayed by his appetite and lack of self-control, swearing to never eat such a large amount of food ever again.

Yuuri tried his best to mop up the entirety of the chaos but it had partially soaked through the floor and the entire room stank of vomit. He hoped the other restaurant-goers wouldn't notice, despite the obviousness of it all. However, they'd definitely notice him, he thought as he looked down at the vomit splattered across his chest.

Summoning the courage to leave the cubicle, Yuuri slowly stood up and leant against the wall to stabilise himself before opening the door and stepping out, all in intense apprehension. Luckily the coast was clear and Yuuri quickly moved to the sinks, turning on the tap and frantically splashing his shirt with cold, icy water. He hadn't thought of an excuse for his wet clothes, but time was of
the essence and there were more important things to worry about.

'Gotta go fast,' Yuuri chanted to himself, 'gotta be spee- huh?'

The door to the bathroom opened and Viktor stood in its way, discovering a very drenched and smelly Yuuri bent over the sink and ran across the room to tend to his muddled fiancé.

"Yuuri?" Viktor said, taking the Japanese boy in his arms, "What happened to you?!

Stammering and an utter mess, Yuuri tried to communicate but couldn't find the right lie for the situation, so simply ended up babbling into Viktor's shoulder as his fiancé dried him off.

"Are you okay, Yuuri?" Viktor asked, the last of a string of many questions.

Yuuri tried to muster a sense of calm despite the fact that his throat was still on fire, "Yeah, I'm sorry, I guess I've just been ill these past few days," he lied, "I didn't want to tell you because it would interfere with training, it's not a big deal - I promise."

A few seconds passed as Viktor looked Yuuri up and down, assessing him for any major illnesses. "Well, you do look a little peaky. However, you're still effortlessly handsome, so I don't think it's a life-threatening diagnosis." He gave Yuuri a quick forehead kiss and took him by the arm, leading them out of the bathroom and the restaurant altogether.

"Viktor, don't you-

"Don't worry, lyubov moya, I've already paid. Come on, let's get you home."

For Yuuri, the streets of St Petersburg felt strangely colder as the couple walked home. He didn't want to mention it but Viktor noticed when he felt his fiancé shivering against his arm, shoulders hunched in an effort to protect himself from the night's fresh chill. He took off his own coat and put it over his fiancé's, unbothered by the city's cold air.

Makkachin came bounding up to greet the skaters as they shuffled in through the apartment door, his warm fur a comfort to Yuuri's freezing fingertips.

"I'll make us some tea," said Viktor. By now he knew that Yuuri only drank green tea, and definitely wouldn't want the hot chocolate despite the weather outside.

Yuuri sat on the edge of the bed with a hot water bottle, slowly sipping his tea in front of the TV. He was covered head-to-toe in blankets and Viktor had constructed a small fort from the pillows in their bed, sitting behind Yuuri with his arms and legs wrapped around his waist.

"How are you feeling, Yuuri?"

"A little better. Thank you for the tea."

"Remember I took your temperature earlier? Well, you're burning up, lapochka, and with you being sick in addition I think it's best if you miss practice until you recover."

"Okay..." Yuuri groaned, feigning illness - in truth he'd dipped the thermometer in his tea when Viktor asked to take his temperature, "but you should still go, I don't want to get you in trouble with Yakov."

"Pfft - he'll just have to deal with it. I'm not going to leave my darling Yuuri alone with a fever, am I?" He said, playfully poking Yuuri's stomach. It caught the Japanese boy by surprise and and he
felt burning in his throat as if he might be sick again.

They spent the rest of the night cuddled up in bed, resting by the light of soppy rom-coms on the TV and covered in popcorn crumbs as Viktor brought out snacks for the movie. Yuuri said he wasn't hungry but happily drank more tea, aware of its apparent metabolism-boosting qualities. The warmth of the drink also helped soothe his sore throat. He'd taken some painkillers in hope that it'd lessen the aching, and was finally feeling a little more at rest.

Despite the pain, Yuuri was glad he'd taken action against his earlier gluttony. For once in his life he felt mentally strong; he was so used to doing what other people wanted, so acting for himself was in a way quite freeing. However, knew he couldn't do this again. It was too risky, and if Viktor found out he'd be forced to come clean and his whole weight-loss plan would be blown to smithereens.

He knew Viktor's comments on his weight loss were fake, but Yuuri would feel even more humiliated if his fiancé ever found him vomiting again. He'd link the two events together and realise Yuuri was trying to slim down, a plan which obviously wasn't working, and probably pity his boyfriend for even trying. No - Yuuri would stick to his traditional method: diet, exercise and the (not so) occasional bout of self loathing. A recipe for success.
Yuuri woke with the foul taste of vomit still lingering in his mouth. He remembered everything that'd happened the night before and groaned, turning over in the bed as a sleepy Viktor pulled him tighter, "Yuuri... relax... you need to rest..."

Reluctantly, Yuuri returned to the clutches of his fiancé. It was frustrating that he couldn't exercise that morning, but he reassured himself that he could always make it up later that night.

Viktor took the day off to care for Yuuri, forbidding his fiancé from leaving the house in such a 'fragile state'. Yuuri feigned a stomach ache so ate even less than usual, relieved that his temporary lack of activity would be compensated by a lower calorie intake. He regretted lying to Viktor, but it didn't cause him too much anguish as Yuuri knew it would only be for a few days - just enough to supplement his original lie from the restaurant.

A few days later and Yuuri had fully 'recovered'. To his relief he was finally allowed to leave the house, and took full advantage of his new found freedom by taking a 2 hour run whilst Viktor slept in.

Before leaving, Yuuri left a note on the bedside table.

~ Going to check up on Yuri and Otabek - I'll grab some pancakes on the way home so don't bother cooking me anything xxx ~

At least the note was partially true. Yuuri may not have passed the young couple during his run, but he did stop for pancakes in the new health restaurant in the mall. A whole stack only cost him 150 calories, and he could take a photo of himself eating to prove to Viktor that he'd been fed.

"Yuuri, you're back!" chirped Viktor as the sweaty katsudon plodded into the front room. "I knew you didn't want any food so I made tea!"

Yuuri gratefully took the tea as Viktor pulled him in for a full-frontal hug, kissing him softly whilst Yuuri tried his best not to let the tea slosh into their laps.

"Why don't we go shopping today?" said Yuuri, "I haven't been out properly in a while, and today we have a day off from training, so maybe we could go into the city."

Viktor smiled, nestling his head into the shallow crevice of Yuuri's collarbone, "Good idea - I think both of us could do with some new clothes, especially now all your old piggy
jumpers are baggy!"

Yuuri flinched slightly at the word 'piggy' but ultimately knew it was the title he deserved. Truthfully he had no interest in shopping, aside from seeing Viktor half-naked in the changing rooms, but his trousers didn't fit like they used to - Yuuri suspected the waistband had worn out.

The Japanese boy initially put this down to weight loss, but upon looking in the bathroom mirror Yuuri realised he was mistaken.

It was late morning and Yuuri had begun his first weigh-in of the week. Since embarking on this new-and-improved diet his weight had fluctuated on a day to day basis, at times raising considerable alarm. Fortunately he was still losing at a consistent rate: the first week, he'd lost 1.5 kilos, the second he'd lost 2, and now he waited in anticipation as he loomed over the bathroom scales, eager to find out the results for week 3.

Yuuri stepped onto the shining metal scales with baited breath, wearing nothing but underwear and the quivering frown on his face. The turning of the numbers by the dial seemed like forever. Finally he looked down at the reading, nervous that the number had increased since last he weighed himself, and let out a long, heavy sigh of relief. 52kg, BMI 17.4. Yuuri may have surpassed his goal BMI but deep down inside he still felt like a failure.

'Wow, if anything I need to shop for bigger clothes...' he thought to himself, 'I was right about the waistband, maybe it was the sheer protrusion of my own stomach that broke it.'

On advantage of the situation was that at least he had lost some weight, even if not a terrific amount. Six kilograms in three weeks wasn't bad, and if he kept going at a consistent rate Yuuri hoped to lose another six by the end of April.

Still, it certainly didn't show on his reflection in the mirror. Yuuri knew he was the same doughy-armed, flabby thighed sack of crap as before, and if anything the weight loss was probably the muscle he so vitally needed. He yearned to be skinny and beautiful like the rest of the skaters, so elegant in wispy in their movements, but for now he was still confined to the prison of his own fat, clunky vessel that no right-minded person could even begin to consider attractive.

Groping at the meaty flesh of his belly, Yuuri stared into the mirror, wishing he would disappear. At least if he ceased to exist than he wouldn't have to feel like a constant disappointment to everyone around him.

"Yuuri, are you ready to go?" an impatient Viktor called from the other room, "There's a taxi by the side of the road and we can't keep Mila waiting!"

Mila was Viktor's friend-turned-younger sister, a fellow skater who'd trained with him under the watchful eye of coach Yakov.

"Sorry Viktor, I'll be right there!"

Yuuri hurriedly struggled back into his clothes and dragged the scales back into place, being cautious not to leave any evidence of that morning's body check. As he left the bathroom Yuuri fixed his hair into a messy bun for convenience; his hair had grown considerably since he'd last been bothered to have it cut and was almost shoulder length, falling in loose waves like a gentle black waterfall.

"Woah, malysh, "Viktor swooned as they left the apartment, "you should warn me before you put your hair up like that, it's only the morning and I already want to get in bed."
He gave a cheeky wink and Yuuri smiled, hiding his blushing cheeks with the sleeve of his sweater. He hadn't yet admitted that the only reason he'd let his hair grow out was to conceal his swollen double chin, and always made sure to leave small ringlets of hair over his jawline even when he tied it up.

The taxi ride into the city centre was laborious as congestion built up around the main shopping district, but the three friends kept themselves entertained with casual gossip and the occasion game of 'I spy'.

"And that's why I'll NEVER again use peach-flavoured dental dams when I'm with Sara!" laughed Mila, stepping out of the taxi and onto the neatly-paved sidewalk in high heels and a low cut pullover. Yuuri and Viktor followed suit and they soon found themselves at the entrance of the Galeria, St Petersburg's largest shopping mall.

Viktor turned to Yuuri with a smile,
"Where would you like to go first?"

'Anywhere but the food court,' thought Yuuri, but instead suggested they browse the clothing shops on the upper floor.

Viktor had expensive taste and insisted they visited the Chanel outlet first, waltzing in whilst Yuuri and Mila walked behind and prepared their bank accounts for reaping. He was acting like an excitable child in a toy shop, gazing in awe at the diamond-encrusted sunglasses behind the glass pane and stroking the sweaters on display in admiration of their elaborate designs.

"Wow, Viktor, these sure are expensive..." commented Yuuri as his fiancé added another 5 jackets into the shopping basket. The price often soared to tens of thousands of rumbles per item and with a full bank account Viktor didn't show any signs of slowing down.

Pleased that Viktor had found his happy place, Yuuri took a seat in the changing room cubicle and watched him model all the clothes he'd hastily piled into the basket. He appreciated the beauty of his sculpted abs and the private time they shared together as Mila browsed the woman's section, but soon after felt dismal after comparing Viktor's god-like body to his own humiliating form.

"Yuuri, are you okay?" asked Mila, concerned by the reserved look on his face. He gave a forced smiled and nodded his head, explaining that he was simply still tired from his (fake) illness.

"Alright, but take it easy, you look kinda pale today." she smiled.

"I'm fine, don't worry," chuckled Yuuri, "it's Viktor you need to worry about, he's on a rampage and doesn't show any sign of slowing down." He pointed towards the hyperactive Russian dashing into a nearby sportswear shop,
"we should probably keep and eye on him.."

Viktor, who was currently trying on a variety of sunglasses in the shop mirror stopped in his tracks when he noticed the Japanese boy standing behind him.

"Yuuri, look!" he cried, throwing his arms around his fiancé, "All these beautiful clothes, and at such great prices!"

Yuuri nodded with about as much enthusiasm as he could muster.

"Wait! Yuuri, you haven't bought anything!"

"Not true," he replied, "look, I got some free cologne samples from Chanel."
Viktor rolled his eyes and dragged Yuuri into the depths of the clothing section, smiling mischievously at the thought of dressing his fiancé.

"This day was for you, dorogaya, surely there must be something you want to wear?" he said with puppy-dog eyes.

"Hehe, okay Viktor..."

For the sake of his partner's sanity, Yuuri reluctantly agreed to try on a few outfits. He wasn't too enthralled by the idea of looking at his fat, unclothed body for the second time that day, but figured that if he gave away from the mirror in the changing room then hopefully the experience wouldn't be too traumatic.

"How about this?" Yuuri suggested, holding up a baggy sweater and tracksuit bottoms. Truthfully he didn't actually dislike this outfit, as its billowing nature was useful at hiding his grotesque marshmallow form, and black was supposedly slimming anyway.

Unfortunately Viktor disagreed, insisting instead that Yuuri wear something more form fitting to showcase his figure so he looked more like an athlete than a lazy day, but this was one thing he wouldn't back down on.

"Pleeeeeeese...?"

"No, Viktor," Yuuri giggled as his fiancé tried to tickle and agreement out of him, "I like baggy clothes, they're more, er, comfortable."

"Okay then," said Viktor, shrugging his shoulders with a smirk on his face, "meet me halfway and try on both."

Yuuri couldn't really argue as this was the most logical solution, but at the same time he wasn't exactly pleased with the outcome. After further negotiations he ventured into the changing rooms to try on both a baggy tracksuit and the tight purple skin that Viktor had preferred.

Expecting a fairly relaxed changing experience, Yuuri received a shock upon discovering that every wall of the cubicle was covered in large, unflattering mirrors that reflected the even more unflattering lighting.

'Don't be discouraged Yuuri; you don't want to ruin this day for Viktor.'

He shut his eyes and rammed the sweater over his head and shoulders, leaving them closed as he wriggled his arms through its loose sleeves. True to its label, the sweater was extremely baggy, and provided a more off-shoulder look on Yuuri than the boatneck described in the store catalog. Fitting into the bottoms was an equally easy task despite his lack of sight. The only problem was that they were unnaturally loose around the waist and would constantly slip down Yuuri's legs if he wasn't holding them up. He suspected there was a problem with the stitching, but despite the presumed manufacturing problem Yuuri was glad that clothes, for whatever reason, felt increasingly looser on him than before.

"How do I look?" asked Yuuri as he walked out of the changing rooms, opening his eyes and striking a pose as he modelled the outfit in front of Viktor.

"Amazing!" exclaimed Viktor, "but why are your hands behind your back?"

"I - uh - this is part of the pose!" Yuuri replied thrusting his hips forward, trying to look convincing as he held the bottoms up by the waist.
"Ah, doki doki! You look beautiful even in an outfit like that!"

Yuuri laughed at Viktor's plain bluntness and returned to change into his second outfit. He'd already squeezed into a tight pair of leggings without any trouble, and was about to attempt struggling into the lycra skin, when Yuuri accidentally opened his eyes and caught his half-naked self bending over by the mirror. Looking at himself whilst wearing clothes was difficult, but this was unbearable. Yuuri felt his throat lurch in discomfort.

'I can't bear this - why the hell would Viktor want me to try this on? To humiliate me, so everyone in the store could point out my pockets of fat poking out from it's clinging material? Does he have some weird fat fetish that I don't know about? And Mila - she'll see me too. What will she think? She'll likely think I'm a freak - a joke of a skater. Viktor and I both know I'm in no fit shape to perform but I continue to train on the rink- what if Mila discovers me like this, tells Yakov, and I'm banned from skating in competition because I'm too flabby? What if-'

His thoughts began to trail off into the abyss of despair and self-loathing, but were stopped abruptly by a female voice calling by the curtain of the changing room.
"Yuuri, everything alright in there? If you need help changing Viktor said he's more than happy to offer assistance..."

"Thank you, but I'm okay, I just realised I took a few more items in here with me so I'll try them in first before the big reveal!"

"Don't keep me waiting, Yuuri!" Viktor cooed from the other side of the curtain.
'I'll just use an excuse as to why I can't wear this, it's for the best.' thought Yuuri, hoping Viktor would just assume he was still slightly ill.

About half an hour since first entering the changing rooms, Yuuri emerged with only the sweater and tracksuit in a shopping bag.

"Where's the lycra?" asked Viktor, concerned for the safety of his favourite arse-enhancing fabric.

"It was too small, but that's okay. I bought this:" Yuuri said, holding up the shopping bag so that Viktor could see.

Mila, who had been waiting for some time at the front of the store, was pleased to see the two other skaters finally leave and proposed that they order lunch in the food court of the shopping mall.

"Sounds perfect," replied Viktor, "what do you want to eat, Yuuri?"

Eventually they all decided to order from Starbucks. Yuuri, who was too worn out from shopping to make any major decisions, settled with with Mila's suggestion of a tuna baguette and white chocolate mocha. He was aware of the meal's high calorie content (801) but knowing that he could simply purge the contents of his stomach afterwards was a comforting thought.

Whilst he'd been 'ill', Yuuri had taken the time to practise purging in case a situation arose similar to the incident that happened in the restaurant. However, it had become rather addictive, and he now couldn't bring himself to stop. Something about the effort to get it up and the victory of emptying out the cause of his weight problems was immensely satisfying. He was pretty good at it too, and managed to dispose of around 200 calorie's worth of vomit in the back of Starbucks without Viktor or Mila knowing. It even allowed him to eat more on a daily basis - he could eat an increased amount of food at a higher calorie level, but the frequent purging meant that his net intake always remained at 1000.
"Hey Yuuri," said Viktor, "Mila needs to go buy some lingerie for Sara or whatever... I don't really know why they want more, I've seen pictures of them together and they're not even wearing lingerie when they do it most of the ti- OW!"

Mila had slapped Viktor with an issue of Vogue Russia, leaving a large red imprint on the side of his face.

"Anyway," he continued, rubbing his bruised cheek in agony, "why don't we get some? It could be fun!"

Yuuri, who quite frankly just wanted to go back to bed and cancel that day altogether, shrugged nonchalantly and finished skimming the lasting remains of vomit from the back of his mouth with his tongue.

"Sure," he said, "I guess it would be pretty fun."

"Yay!"

Yuuri and Viktor had to be discreet upon entering the women's lingerie store, but the couple weren't usually ones for gender roles so quickly collected the packs of elaborate undergarments from the store shelves, and then ran into the changing rooms as Mila casually slinked about the fantasy section.

"Do you think anyone saw us?!" asked Viktor, barely able to contain his laughter.

"Nah, we're good." Smiled Yuuri, scanning the shop floor from around the corner of the changing rooms. He still felt faint after his purging session but hoped the emptiness in his stomach would make it easier to fit into the underwear.

"Viktor, is it okay if we don't change together again? I want to buy some lingerie for a couple week's time and it should be a surprise...."

"Ooh, a surprise? I love surprises! Go ahead, I've got all these pieces here and they won't try on themselves!"

Yuuri closed the curtain separating the two changing rooms and was relieved to find that his only contained a single mirror on the wall opposite, which could be avoided by simply turning away from its reflection. In fairness, Yuuri actually had a secret kink for lacy undergarments - just not when he was wearing them.

'Still, this is a two-way relationship,' he thought, shaking off his boxer shorts, 'I suppose I should contribute something, even if it's just myself in a pair of velvet suspenders..'

Yuuri'd recently adopted the habit of wearing a t-shirt during sex, but a little glitz and glamour never hurt anyone.

Out of pure curiosity he'd also brought a full burlesque set, and after minutes of debating convinced himself to try it on. It was a foolish decision based off his previous experience, but he hadn't performed his daily photographic 'body check' and was running out of opportunities.

Big mistake - Yuuri immediately burst into tears.

The sight of his himself unclothed and covered by nothing but a lace thong, fishnets and fingerless gloves made his stomach turn. Remembering the body check's true purpose, Yuuri quickly snapped a photo, without bothering to look at it, and sat down on the bench to cower in the corner of the changing room as the tears rolled down his fat, naked body.
In the opposite corner lay a stack of lingerie magazines plastered with scantily-clad supermodels, making Yuuri feel even worse.

"Why can't I be like them? Why are they perfect and I'm not?" his head cried, "I'm doing every right - diet, exercise, even fucking purging after meals, so why can't I lose this weight?"

Soon after a notification popped up on his phone screen, illuminating the background of Viktor, Yurio and himself having fun at Disneyland Tokyo. Yuuri felt so angry; it was so unfair that despite Yurio's higher BMI, he was by far the skinnier out of the two of them.

'I have to keep going,' he thought between sobs, 'strive for perfection, don't give up - that's what Viktor's always told me, and that's what I intend to do.'

"Hey Yuuri, look at me!" Viktor beamed as he burst into the changing room wearing a tutu and victorian-style corset, "I'm getting a moulin rouge vibe from this outfit, what do you think Yuuri?"

"Y-yeah, you look great!"

'I've got about a second to cover myself before Viktor realised how revolting I look naked with the lights on...'

'Oh my god. I can't think straight,' Yuuri thought, his mind consumed with the incessant thoughts of horror and embarrassment that he just couldn't escape from.

'Holy fuck, Viktor looks hot.'

'Holy shit, I look terrible.'

"Viktor, I can explain!" Yuuri stuttered, covering his torso with magazines his fiancé had knocked all over the floor.

"No need to," the enamoured Russian replied, peeling the magazine from Yuuri's chest, "I knew you were going to surprise me, but this... you're beautiful, Yuuri..."

Yuuri managed to give Viktor a small, wavering smile, trying to ignore the irritating feeling of his belly rolls against each other as he sat up beside the fellow skater.

"Wait, why are you crying?"

"I'm not crying - it's just allergies, I think. Maybe there's a lot of dust in here?"

"No, lyubov moya, your eyes are red and soppy and so are your cheeks."

"Besides," Viktor chuckled, if it was allergies then you'd been using your inhaler, yet it's still in your trouser pocket over there."

Viktor shuffled next to Yuuri, who tried (and failed) to wriggle away anxiously. Despite his best attempts, Yuuri couldn't console himself and continued to cry facing a nearby wall until Viktor gently pulled him back.

For Viktor there was no explanation as to why he was crying. All he knew was that when Yuuri had entered the changing room, something bad must've happened to have caused this, and that all he could do was stay by his side until he felt a little better.

After a few minutes of Yuuri crying whilst Viktor hugged him in uncomfortable silence, Mila peeked round the curtain to check on the couple.
"Hey, are you guys oka- woah, what's going on?"

Viktor shrugged, a look of 'I have absolutely no idea, please help me' spread across his face.

"Yuuri, are you okay?" Mila asked Yuuri, who had calmed down slightly.

"We should go home."

"You're right," said Viktor, "I don't think Yuuri's completely better yet, right Yuuri?"

Yuuri nodded and wiped his eyes with each wrist, blowing his nose on a monogrammed handkerchief that Viktor had offered earlier.

Later, as the three of them rode in the taxi home, Mila turned to Viktor whilst Yuuri lay, asleep, sprawled across his lap.

"Well, at least we got him back into his normal clothes.." he said.

"Yeah," said Mila, her eyes trailing off out of the window as she looked up at the evening sky.

"This is a bit of a random question, but did you think today that, when we both saw Yuuri in his underwear, that he looked unusually skinnier than usual?"

Surprised, Viktor replied,
"Skinnier, yes, but unusually? No, it's just his diet, I guess."

"Diet? Yuuri doesn't need to diet.."

"Not now, he looks amazing now. He's so lean, it's incredible - you can see traces of his ribs and his abs! I've always loved him, of course - he's adorable, but there's something about his lean body that proves he can achieve what he wants when he works for it, and it's that determination that I find incredibly sexy. Don't you find abs sexy in a guy?"

"Um, huge lesbian, can't really relate," laughed Mila, nudging his shoulder.

"But seriously, don't you think he's losing weight a little too fast, even if it's just for a better performance on the rink?"

Viktor thought for a moment and shook his head.

"No, not really. I'd say he's lost a few kilos at the most, and he's been losing steadily so I don't see any reason for concern."

"Okay," said Mila, seemingly satisfied, "it's just, with his insecurities and the pressures of a sport so fixated on aesthetics, I wanted to make sure he was doing okay."

"He's doing fine," a rather defensive Viktor replied, "under my coaching, he's sure to win a medal this year."

A few moments of awkward silence ensued, then broken by Mila's inquisitive voice.

"So, about this diet..." she asked, "there's a guy in one of the skating classes I teach at the rink - he's amazing, and he's got such great potential, but his weight's causing him to lag behind the others and I really wanna help him out. Can you tell me how Yuuri did it, how he lost weight?"

Viktor smiled, gazing down at his fiancé who was sleeping peacefully in the comfort of his lap.
"I honestly don't know. Portion control, I guess, and maybe exercise? I saw Yuuri using my treadmill a couple of times, but that's only because he said he was curious to see how it worked..."

"Oh, I see.."

"But honestly, I'm proud of him, I-"

As Viktor further listed the many benefits of Yuuri's weight loss, particularly in bed, the Katsudon began to wake from his slumber, but wasn't fully awake and so laid there in a state of semi-consciousness as he listened to Viktor and Mila's conversation.

"...and that's why Yuuri's abs are my new religion."

'What is he talking about?'

" Okay," said Mila, "what else?"

"Well," continued Viktor, "don't tell Yuuri this, but I actually enjoy it when he's smaller, from a self-confidence point of view. When he's slightly slimmer it makes me feel more masculine, like he's mine to protect, and I love the feeling of both of us being secure."

'Huh, so he DOES prefer it when I'm skinnier,' Yuuri thought, satisfied that his original thoughts were correct.

"You'd still love him if he changed though, right?" asked Mila, "Cos let's be honest, Viktor, you're a material bitch at heart, and there's no way I'm letting you ruin your relationship with Yuuri."

Viktor shook his head with an appropriate amount of enthusiasm, "No no, of course not! He is by far the best thing I could ever ask for."

'Awh, that's cute,' thought Yuuri.

"But even you must admit he looks better with a little less weight on his body. It's also better for his health - don't forget he has asthma!"

"I guess so.." said Mila, "to be honest I stopped listening about five minutes ago when you started going on about his ass again."

"It's a good ass! Even with less fat, it's still perfectly round!"

'Hehe, I was right, although what he said about my ass is vaguely concerning. Still, it shows that Viktor definitely has a preference when it comes to my body, and that is when it's smaller. I too agree - but I think he's partly deluded, as I'm not even thin yet. He must be talking about those photos of me from that magazine photoshoot I did last year, but those images were heavily photoshopped and there's no way I'm at that level of achievement - not yet anyway."

"Mila, don't tell Yuuri about this conversation, okay?" asked Viktor, serious, "He already has self-esteem issues, and he's perfect the way he is - I don't want him to think he has to please me I some way."

Yuuri smirked slyly; he'd heard everything.

'Oh, I'll please you. I'll be as skinny as you want Viktor - anything for your love, you name it. 50kg, even 40kg, there is no limit when it comes to how much devotion I have to offer you. Sure, it'll be hard, but hey, this is the Grand Prix Final we're working towards - and I want to win! I can't
do that if I stay fat forever now, can I? It's fine - I want it too. I want it more than anything in the world. I will be skinny, I promise. For you, Viktor, I'll give you the world.'
"Faster, higher!" Viktor called across the ice rink as Yuuri flung himself into the air, arms fully extended into position, before free-falling into the perfect quadruple salchow.

Yuuri, who'd been at the rink for a consecutive total of four hours, was not amused. The building was freezing and the only break he'd been allowed was a 20 minute pause for lunch - most of which he'd purged anyway.

"Why do I have to stay for so long? I've been here for hours, can't we go home yet?"

"Soon, I promise," smiled his Russian coach, running his fingers through wisps of silver hair, "but your first competition is exactly a week away, and you desperately need some more practise."

"Can I least have a hug? I'm really cold."

Viktor nodded and sped into Yuuri's arms, catching the smaller skater off guard. Yuuri struggled to balance the hefty weight of his lanky Russian fiancé, who wriggled playfully in his clutches.

"Careful!" Yuuri warned, "I'm super tired right now, and I don't want to drop you."

"Fine then, I'll carry you."

Viktor scooped Yuuri into a ball and fire-man carried him around the rink, skating increasingly faster as they went along.

"Viktor, stop!" Yuuri laughed, "I'll crush you!"

"Never, I'm practising for our wedding night!" Viktor retorted, continuing to pick up the pace.

After a while, Yuuri began to realise that in this position Viktor could feel just about every part of his body - his arms, his thighs, his love handles... suddenly this didn't seem quite so enjoyable.

"Can you put me down now-"

"Huh?" Viktor giggled, "I'm sorry, I can't hear you over the sound of my muscles!!"

"No, seriously Viktor, put me down."

Slightly perplexed by Yuuri's sudden change of mood, Viktor gently lowered him back down until he was once again upright on the ice.

Yuuri proceeded to restart his free skate routine, taking position in the centre of the rink. Twilight shone through the glass panes overhead, scintillating across the surface of the ice as he began to
skate to the dramatic rhythm of his background music.

Starting with a triple axel, the skater kicked off at the ice and twirled gracefully through the air before making a swift landing into a series of twirls, watching Viktor's face light up as a result.

The Russian spectator called out a series of jumps, all of which Yuuri performed flawlessly. Axels, lutzes, loops - words of a language that Yuuri was fluent in. He'd been skating since 8 years old and couldn't remember a time when he wasn't on the ice; it was his first love in addition to the cause and solution to most of his life's problems.

It seemed that a total of at least four quads was almost mandatory when it came to Viktor's choreography. Initially Yuuri had problems performing such technical moves, and would usually end up flubbing the jump out of his own nervousness, but so far this season he'd actually been doing pretty well. Despite the negative thoughts that plagued his mind he'd been able to keep a level head during practise, if not for him than for Viktor and all the remaining Russian skaters who would often look in on his performances.

Yuuri didn't really mind falling on the ice, regardless of the painful consequences. On multiple occasions had he flung himself across the rink, only to sustain a large amount of cuts and bruises, or smashed into a wall by the side resulting in a throbbing concussion that would often last for days.

Following a few minutes of his perfectly-executed step sequence, Yuuri clenched his jaw and flew into the quintuple salchow, bracing himself for an onslaught of pain upon re-entry. He soon felt the concrete-like surface of the ice punch up at his flailing body as he came crashing back to earth, drifting for a few seconds before grinding to a halt at the foot of Viktor's shadow.

"Ahah... sorry Viktor, I guess I misjudged that one." Yuuri laughed uneasily, blood pouring from every orifice.

Viktor inspected the state of his student as he looked Yuuri up and down for any broken bones.

"It's okay, my love, but we should probably get off the rink before you leave a stain on the ice." said Viktor with a smile as he tried to make light of the situation. Covering a tissue over Yuuri's bloody nose, he raised him to his feet and with a series of gradual shuffles the two of them finally reached the exit.

"Wait here, Yuuri, I'll fetch you some plasters."

"Thank you," said the slightly dazed Japanese skater with a hint of guilt residing in his voice - this was the third time he'd emptied the first aid kit that week.

By now Yuuri had learnt not to criticise his mistakes too harshly. They were so frequent and easily achieved that he'd grown used to this feeling of inadequacy that quietly ebbed away at his character from time to time.

Days later, and Yuuri was still feeling incomplete. He couldn't pinpoint the exact emotion that was causing this inner emptiness - currently it was probably just boredom. Viktor was attending a parent's evening night at Yurio's high school and there seemed to be nothing better to do, so Yuuri opened up his laptop and browsed the depths of the internet as an adequate way of distracting himself.

For a while it seemed he was content with simply scrolling through endless pages of Tumblr tags, stopping occasionally to investigate interesting news articles or frantically close a pop-up ad linked
to Viktor's favourite leather online store.

Yuuri paused as a photo of an emaciated dancer suddenly appeared on his dashboard. She looked so fragile, so dainty and utterly beautiful. Curious as to where the image of the girl originated, Yuuri clicked on a link at the bottom of the post and a familiar site soon cropped up in a separate window. Immediately recognising the design, he quickly switched the browser settings to 'private' but showed no intention of leaving the page.

'Myproana? This is the website I found in the restaurant... what the heck is it about, anyway?' he wondered, trying to navigate the homepage, despite the fact it looked as if it'd been designed by a five year old blind girl. It seemed graphic design was not their passion.

Yuuri had some inclination that the site was vaguely related to posts about weight loss/gain, but so far hadn't delved into the complexity of its post log or discovered what the main goal of its users actually was. Who was Ana anyway? Was she the benevolent dictator of this alien regime, the god of an obscure religion he'd previously never heard of? Yuuri had so many questions.

After a few minutes scouring the website for any clue as to who this mysterious 'Ana' was, Yuuri finally found the answer. 'Ana' was apparently an abbreviation for 'anorexia', a personification of the deadly illness often associated with an aversion to food and weight gain.

'That's kinda sick...' thought Yuuri, yet he was still inclined to know more about the website. 'I'm nowhere near anorexic, but if it'll help me lose weight than so be it.'

He continued to perform further research, visiting various different forums catering to an array of different difficulties. There were threads on starving, purging, drugs, medicines, BMI - you name it, this website had it. Yuuri decided after a few minutes of debate that he would create his own profile, purely for the purpose of weight loss and without the unhealthy obsession with a fictional anorexia character.

'Hmm... I guess I'll need a fake username,' he assumed as he entered his details into the computer, taking an occasional sip of green tea from a teacup by the side of the armchair.

'Yuuri Katsuki.... maybe Kats-pukey? No - that's terrible. How about 'Giant Yuuri'.... no Yuuri, think of something positive... uh, oh god... goal-achiever? Perfectionism?'

Yuuri stared blankly at the screen, hoping the ideal name would come to mind. He had a limited time remaining until Viktor returned home with the takeout he'd promised to order, and needed to come up with something short but relevant to his situation. After many minutes of pondering over different names, Yuuri had finally thought of something suitable.

He typed the new username into the blank box without any sign of hesitation. 'h1story_mxker' was to become the alias of his secret online identity, as in Yuuri's mind he hoped to make history not only on the ice, but also in what he could achieve with his weight if he showed true dedication to the cause.

Satisfied with the details of his user profile, Yuuri then went on to join his very first public thread. He scanned the endless lists for the perfect conversation until finally discovering the forum that catered to his interests.

~ 'Starting at a higher BMI' ~

'That's gotta be perfect for me.'

Yuuri was excited that he'd finally found a group of people who felt the same way about their
weight as he did. Keeping a close eye on the clock in case of Viktor's premature reappearance, he started to write out his entry for the article when a piece of text caught his eye and he abruptly ceased to type anything else.

Upon re-reading the entries shared by other users, Yuuri began to feel a sense of bewilderment. There were BMIs of 23, 20, and similar values, but none of 17, his current total. Did this website not consider it high enough? Yuuri didn't understand as his frequent body-checks suggested otherwise.

There was an array of interesting articles featured in the starvation category, and Yuuri was particularly captivated by the links to diet pill websites provided by fellow myproana users. Rumour had it that a miracle chemical, Dinitrophenol, possessed the mind-blowing ability to drastically increase metabolic rate should it be administered orally. Still, living in shared accommodation meant he'd have no hope of ever purchasing this miracle drug; Viktor would notice the package when it arrived and Yuuri couldn't run the risk of being so easily found out.

As he reached the bottom of the thread, Yuuri had finally summed up the courage to make his own post on the community forum. Whilst the skater mentioned that he wasn't anorexic, he wanted readers to know additional help would definitely be appreciated.

Within minutes Yuuri had received his first application: a 16-year-old girl living in southern England. His eyes widened as he inspected her profile picture, a shrunken teenager bent over in a way which displayed the most prominent and beautiful ribcage that Yuuri'd ever seen. If the girl in the picture was truly her, his prospects were looking good. Yuuri immediately messaged back.

----

h1story_mxker: Hey there, my name is Yuuri. You commented on my post about the weight loss coaching?

----

XxxstarvingprincessxxX: hi, yes, i did. my name is alice. whats ur BMI?

----

h1story_mxker: 17-ish? I know, I'm a whale haha. Can you help me? I need to lose weight fast before the end of the year.

----

XxxstarvingprincessxxX: i've helped a lot of ppl. my BMI is 13 so im quite gud @ losing weight.

----

h1story_mxker: Wow, that's amazing! How did you do it?

----

XxxstarvingprincessxxX: ana has been my bff for 4 yrs now. starvin and xersize is all i know.

----

'Well she definitely doesn't know anything about correct spelling and grammar,' thought Yuuri, vaguely amused by her complete her lack of writing skills. Nonetheless this was the best chance he'd have at actually achieving his goal, so Yuuri would have to tolerate this appalling abomination of the English language whilst unlocking the secrets to his deepest and darkest desires.

XxxstarvingprincessxxX: ... and thats how i ended up her.

----

h1story_mxker: That's amazing - I wish I had your resilience. I'm still on 1000 a day, lol.

----

XxxstarvingprincessxxX: thats ok, u r still nu 2 this. just tri hard and u can always cut down if u want 2 speed fings up.

----
h1story_mxker: I guess so, maybe one day I'll even have a BMI like yours, if I'm lucky! I'm sorry, I'm not really a proper anorexic, I just want to lose weight lmao. It's for my fiancé.

---

XxxstarvingprincessxxxX: its a state of mind. one day ana will find u i promise. my tip 4 now is 2 focus on what u want 2 acheeve. keep goin it will pay off.

---

h1story_mxker: Thank you, I'll try my best :) talk to you later.

---

A feeling of guilt began to crawl across Yuuri's back, twisting and contorting with the slightest hint of fear. He knew full well that what he was doing wasn't right - that he was actively deceiving Viktor, his future husband, but Yuuri had already put himself in a position where there was little he could do to improve the situation, and he was slowly running out of options.

With a sigh Yuuri remembered the conversation he'd had with Viktor that morning, and the look on the Russian's face that had made his heart sink deep within his chest.

"Yuuri, why were you crying the other day in the underwear store?"

The Japanese boy froze and bowed his head,
"I'm sorry - I wasn't myself at all. I guess I was upset because of the way the lingerie looked; it didn't suit my body at all."

"Yuuri," said Viktor, his hand placed softly on the other skater's cheek, "why would you think such a damaging thing? I saw you there and you looked amazing."

Even thinking about the experience made Yuuri want to start crying. He felt so awkward and unloving, knowing that Viktor didn't deserve to be dragged onto the emotional rollercoaster that he himself had been enduring for some time now.

But what Viktor didn't know couldn't harm him. As long as Yuuri held it all inside and bottled up these feelings of dejection, nobody would know but him.

The front door opened and in strode the man himself, beaming with pride as he waved a perfect report card in Yuuri's face.
"Look!" he exclaimed, "All A's!"

Yuuri smiled. If he was the dark and mysterious night, Viktor was the radiance of day. Whatever happened, he'd take comfort knowing that together they were complete.
Yuuri opened his eyes to the blinding light of the afternoon sun penetrating through the glass of the airplane window, feeling tired and a little groggy. He sniffed and turned his head towards the ceiling, rolling out the stiffness from his neck after the terrible quality of sleep he'd had the night before.

An air hostess dressed in a red suit and kitten heels walked down the aisle, rolling the trolley up to Yuuri as she offered him a meal from the serving tray.

"No thanks," he declined in badly-spoken Russian, indicating that he was busy on the phone. The woman nodded and returned to speak to the other passengers. This time Yuuri actually wasn't lying - he was using his phone, despite the terrible signal. For the past hour he'd been messaging Alice on kik, asking for tips on how to escape eating vast quantities of food in the presence of his family.

----

XxxstarvingprincessxxxX: where baggy clothes so ppl dont notice ur weight loss nd make u eat more. u said ur Mum likd 2 feed u alot? tell her ur on a speshul athletes diet.

----

h1story_mnxker: Are you sure? I don't wanna hurt her - food makes her happy. What do I do if I'm forced to eat?

----

XxxstarvingprincessxxxX: if posible, try 2 avoid 2 much food @ a time. ur pretty good @ purgin so just do that

----

h1story_maker: And if I can't?

----

XxxstarvingprincessxxxX: get sum diet pils. theyre super cheap.

----

'Wow, so unbelievably helpful,' thought Yuuri sarcastically, slipping the phone back into his pocket. Despite this, overall Alice had been a huge help in the context of his weight loss journey, and though her writing skills needed desperate polishing, her knowledge of the techniques required was far more extensive then Yuuri's could ever have been.

Minako, his friend and former ballerina, was sitting on a chair in the airport lounge whilst she waited impatiently for the arrival of her younger companion. She caught a glimpse of the light
reflecting off Yuuri's glasses as he passed through the final gate, and bolted over to him the moment their eyes had met.

"Welcome back, Yuuri!" she said, greeting him with much enthusiasm, "Are you ready for the Kyushu championship?"

The skater smiled, "Heh, as ready as I'll ever be. How's mum by the way? She texted me before I boarded the plane, but still hasn't learned how to turn off caps-lock, so I can never tell whether she's furious or has just messed up her new phone again."

"She's fine, don't worry," said Minako, letting out a small snort in amusement, "I think she's even prepared an extra large bowl of katsudon for when you arrive!"

"Great, just what I needed," Yuuri replied, trying to sound appreciative.

'Great, just what I needed...' he then thought, already plotting a way to escape such a situation.

Hasetsu was beautiful in the spring, and after the lengthy train ride from the airport Yuuri was thankful he'd finally arrived back home. The glow of the sun glistened against the cool ripples of the ocean, warming his face as he and Minako walked along the town's shoreline, gazing in wonder at the horizon.

It'd been months since Yuuri had met with his family and he was beginning to feel a little anxious. How would they react after noticing his weight loss? His dad would likely be impressed that he'd managed to overcome one of his biggest obstacles, whereas Yuuri knew his mum probably wouldn't approve. In spite of his sport's requirements, Hiroko's passion for cooking meant she'd always ensured Yuuri ate well - perhaps at times a little too well. Yuuri hoped that she wouldn't be overly doting during his visit, but simultaneously still cared for her feelings. After all, she was his mother.

Minako noticed Yuuri, who was deep in thought, and put a comforting hand on his shoulder. "Hey, what's wrong? You seem a little quieter than usual. Why didn't Viktor come with you?"

"Oh, he couldn't travel to Japan because he has a qualifier event in Moscow," Yuuri responded, "I guess they're held at the same time all over the world. I - I'm okay. Things are just different than before, and it's not necessarily bad, but I'm not sure how to describe it..."

"Yuuri." Said Minako, her hand now growing firm, "If there's something bothering you, you know you can tell me, right?"

Yuuri sighed and looked at the ground, "I don't know, and I'm not sure if I want you to know either, it's just.. I guess I've lost a lost of weight recently, and I'm unsure of how my parents will react, that's all. I want them to be proud of my achievements but they'll probably just overreact. It's not important, don't worry about it."

That last sentence was met with a swift pinch to the cheek. Minako then relaxed her grip and looked deep Yuuri's soft brown eyes, smiling with reassurance.

"If it's bothering you, then it it important Yuuri. Trust me, I'll bet you'll be fine; your weight used to fluctuate all the time back in high school, and in all honesty I can't even tell the difference under that huge overcoat you're wearing."

They exchanged conversation on the short walk walk back to the onsen and were greeted by a very sprightly Hiroko Katsuki as the front door swung open. The hallway smelt strongly of his mother's
cooking, one of his most beloved home comforts, and without hesitation Yuuri flew into her open arms.

"Kaa-chan!"

"Yuuri!" Exclaimed the short Japanese woman, "I've missed you so much! And look how much you've grown, you look so handsome! I'm so proud of you, my-"

"Thanks mama, I love you too," said Yuuri, smiling fondly. However much underlying anxieties often plagued his mind, the skater was relieved to finally be home.

"Hey there, Yuuri, good to see you home," a laid-back Toshiya called from a nearby armchair.

"Thanks dad, good to see you too."

Hiroko took Yuuri by the arm and gestured towards the direction of his bedroom, "There's a surprise waiting for you inside."

Curious, he picked up his suitcase and wandered over to the sliding doors down a side corridor leading from the front room. A part of him hoped that his parents had bought him a new dog, as Makkachin wasn't getting any younger, but as Yuuri stepped into the room he discovered the alternative was far more exciting.

"Oh my god... Phichit?!?!?!" he cried, dropping his bags at the door and running over to the beaming Thai boy perched on the edge of the bed.

"Konichiwa, Yuuri!"

"Sawasdee Krab! What are you doing here?"

"Well," said Phichit, producing a hamster from one of his shirt pockets, "the qualifier in Bangkok was held last week because of a scheduling issue with some ISU officials, and since Viktor couldn't be here he asked me to come and look after you for a few days!"

"So... you're my coach?" Yuuri chuckled, vaguely suspicious as how Phichit, who was three years his younger, was expected to actively supervise him when he was unable to control the numerous hamsters spilling out of their bag.

"Yeah, pretty cool, right? It's okay, Celestino showed me the ropes - by the way, do you have a cage for these guys?" he said, gesturing to the tiny creatures falling from his hands.

The Japanese boy pointed to a corner filled with random old pieces of junk, "In there, probably."

Yuuri had missed spending time with Phichit outside of skating competitions. They'd shared an apartment back in Detroit, along with their Italian coach Celestino, and Yuuri'd found things had always seemed so much more lively when his old friend was around. Phichit spoke conversational Japanese and Yuuri alike in Thai, so the boys got along with each other's family pretty well too.

They spent some time playing Super Smash Bros on his old console, in which Phichit thoroughly wrecked Yuuri, but in spite of the fun they were having the Japanese boy couldn't take his mind off of the approaching katsudon dilemma.

It wasn't a critical problem - Yuuri had purposely not eaten anything that day in preparation for the pork cutlet feast. However, he certainly wouldn't be able to avoid food for the remainder of his
stay, and doubted he could do so without arousing Phichit's suspicions anyway. They were best friends and had lived together for 5 years in the past, so practically knew the other better than themselves.

That night, Yuuri felt a comforting rush of flavour run down the back of his throat. It was his first proper Katsudon in over a month. Sure, he'd eaten the same dish in the time since then, but the fibrous, artificial texture of shop-bought low calorie rice just couldn't compete with the savoury deliciousness of his mother's home cooking.

"So Yuuri, what's it like in swanky St Petersburg?" asked Toshiya, biting into a chunk of pork cutlet.

"Yeah Yuuri," said Mari, his older sister, "How's life with the sensational Viktor Nikiforov?"

The Japanese boy smiled, looking out across the dinner table as his friends and family enjoyed their food. For some unknown reason he seemed to enjoy watching others eat, for it was a way of experiencing part of the sensual activity of eating without actually consuming any calories. He couldn't taste the food that other people ate, but he could see, smell, and hear it and still be vaguely satisfied.

"Oh, not much, you know - just skating I guess."

"Just skating..?" asked an inquisitive Phichit, winking subtly at his friend. "Tell us some more!"

"Yeah, tell us more Yuuri!" echoed a slightly drunken Minako, finishing her third glass of wine.

Yuuri lay his chopstick against the side of the bowl, "Well... life with Viktor is pretty great." he said as he recalled their numerous date nights in the bustling Russian city, "the other week he took me out for dinner in one of the best restaurants in St Petersburg. It was nice, I wish I could do more things like that for him, but he insists, hehe."

"Somebody's blushing!" laughed Mari. She handed Phichit some coins and it was obvious he'd won some sort of bet.

"Well, as long as he's treating you right. I want the best husband for my best son, after all." said Hiroko, smiling proudly in Yuuri's direction.

"Yeah, he's amazing. We went to a buffet and he bought me tacos, and drank champagne, and... well, I don't want to go on, but it was really nice." he replied. *Somehow* Yuuri'd forgotten to mention the entirety of the events that had happened that night, almost as if he wanted to specifically avoid bringing it up.

It was late when they'd finally finished the meal. Yuuri was exhausted from a day of travelling, and after removing the various layers of tops and sweaters draped over his body was ready to sleep like a log.

Phichit didn't want to sleep at all and stayed awake for most of the night scrolling through social media accounts, but recognised that Yuuri needed rest and sat quietly on the edge of the bed so as not to disturb him. Still, that didn't stop him from ensuring his friend was up early the next day.

"Yuuri, wake up! It's 8 o'clock, you lazy bones! We're gonna miss our time slot on the rink! No time for breakfast, go, go, go!" yelled Phichit, bouncing on the lump in the middle of the bed.

"Wha- is it really?" A rather disgruntled Yuuri moaned from under the covers, "fine, I'll get up. Just gimme a sec."
Victorious, Phichit rolled off the bed and packed Yuuri's bag as the other skater desperately scrambled for some clean clothes to wear.

"Are you ready, Yuur-"

Whilst Yuuri was changing, Phichit had caught a glimpse of his torso and a pang of surprise hit him in the chest. He'd lost so much weight. An incredible amount, considering he'd seemed substantially heavier at the last Grand Prix Final. Not that Yuuri was overweight at the competition in December, it was just a dramatic change from the last time they'd met.

Phichit held his tongue as Yuuri finished tightening his sweatpants. He was aware that his friend's weight was a sensitive topic, but simultaneously knew that he couldn't let this go undiscussed.

"Are we ready to go?" said Yuuri, slinging a tatty backpack over his shoulder. His hair resembled that of a shaggy black mop, and it didn't help that his glasses were lop-sided, but otherwise he looked okay.

"Um.. yeah, sure."

The skaters sprinted across the hallway, diabolically late for their practice session, when they were stopped in their tracks by a bouncing Hiroko carrying two colourful bento boxes with matching chopsticks under each arm.

"Don't forget to take this!" she said, thrusting the boxes towards them.

"Thanks, mama!" called Yuuri as he was tugged along by Phichit, who was already out of the front door.

The short walk to Hasetsu Ice Castle, the town's main ice skating rink, was one often filled with joking, and warm-up exercises that prepared Yuuri for the training ahead of him. Today was no different - Phichit and Yuuri chatted excitably in phases of Thai and Japanese about all sorts of things, including their relationships, and for a while it seemed just like old times.

However, thoughts of curiosity still persisted in the back of Phichit's mind. He didn't want to approach the subject of Yuuri's weight too harshly, but his inquisitive nature meant that eventually resistance was futile.

"Hey, Yuuri," he said as they neared the concrete steps of the Ice Castle, "this is random, and uh, don't take this too seriously, but have you lost weight? You look..." he wanted to use the word 'skinny', but decided against it.

"... good. Yeah, you look good."

Yuuri shook his head, still fairly positive from their upbeat conversation,

"Maybe, I guess... I've been working out more, so maybe its muscle? It's not much, I love food too much to go on a diet; look at how much bento my mum gave me!"

There was a hint of uncertainty in his voice, but that could've been attributed to his typically bashful personality. Phichit tried to overlook Yuuri's change in appearance since he trusted his friend, knowing he would never lie to him, and nodded in acknowledgment.

Phichit may not have been the most professional coach, but he was certainly enthusiastic. He watched in awe as Yuuri skated to his short program and free skate, calling out in encouraging Thai phrases as his best friend leapt across the ice. Whilst he did look incredibly tired as he neared the end of the performance, there was no denying that Yuuri was entirely dedicated to his sport.
"Do you want to see something cool?" he said with a smirk, giving Phichit a friendly nudge of aggression.

"Yes!" replied the younger skater, wide-eyed in anticipation.

In truth, Yuuri was unsure whether the end result of what he was about to attempt would actually be successful, but he wanted to impress his friend, and besides - a little intimidation to spark friendly competition between two rivals never hurt anyone.

He checked his skates and then positioned himself on the far edge of the rink. Gathering speed as he dashed across the ice, Yuuri tucked in and pushed off as he began to soar upwards, feeling the force of gravity and the insignificant impact it had upon his body when he was gliding through the air. First rotation, check. Second, third - check and check. Forth... easy.

'Fifth...fifth... fi- shit!' thought Yuuri as gravity got the upper hand and he came tumbling into the ground.

After initially checking that his friend was okay, Phichit let out a burst of laughter from his seat in the stands,
"Nice one, Yuuri, I bet Viktor thinks it's really cool!"

"Haha, be quiet idiot!" Yuuri snickered back, "Go on then - let's see you two do better!"

"Oh, I will! Watch this!"

The two of them exchanged positions, with Phichit on the ice and Yuuri looking on from the sidelines. Phichit had a menacing grin on his face, arms stretched out wide like a phoenix before it bursts into the sky like a blaze of beautiful fire.

When it came to both artistic flair and technical credibility, Phichit's programme massively outshone Yuuri's own performance. Whilst the Japanese boy was well aware that it lacked a certain element of fun and spontaneity, he'd opted for a rather more structurally sound sequence to ensure there was no room for error. Clearly he was wrong - and his consistent failure of the quintuple toe flip frequently proved this point.

"How'd I do?" asked Phichit, sweating profusely as he sat down on the ice.

Laughing weakly, Yuuri replied,
"Great, but I've got much more work to do now I've seen this!"

"Told you! At least I didn't fall over!"

"Yeah, well I'll be better at this year's Grand Prix Final!"

"We'll see, we'll see," chuckled Phichit as he returned to the benches, removing his ice skates. "We should eat lunch now whilst it's early afternoon. I want to go sightseeing later so let's not take too long!"

Yuuri, who'd always assumed that Hatsetsu wasn't anything special, was puzzled as to why Phichit wanted to look around. He was also partially anxious towards the fact that he still needed to purchase some diet pills before that evening’s meal, and didn't have much time left to do so.

"Yeah, sure, I'm starving anyway!" Yuuri said with a smile. He hadn't had time for breakfast, and when coupled with that morning's skating he began to feel exceptionally hungry.
Yuuri opened the package his mother had made specially for their visit to his childhood ice rink. There was nothing much that could beat the smell of a fresh Bento box. Well, perhaps freshly-cooked Katsudon, but the undoubtedly satiating quality of Bento meant it came in at a close second.

Watching his friend tuck into a piece of sushi, Phichit breathed a sigh of relief knowing that Yuuri was still eating healthily. The Japanese boy did avoid some of the food available to him, pushing discarded pieces of meat and egg into the corner of the box, but Phichit supposed that maybe Yuuri just didn't like their taste and that it wasn't related to an aversion to their calorie content.

After a few seconds of silence with Yuuri quietly chewing in the background, his focus shifted to Phichit's box, unopened, whilst Phichit himself continued to stare back at him.

"Is the food okay? Sorry if it's a bit cold, but I promise it's still edible!"

"Oh no, it's fine!" said Phichit, opening the box and shoving a large piece of sashimi in his mouth.

'Why was Phichit hesitant to eat lunch?' Yuuri thought, intent on observing his friend for the rest of the meal. 'Is he on a diet too? He must be, he's so skinny. But I don't think he's lost any weight... maybe that's how he keeps it off?'

"Right, I'm finished," said Phichit, closing the empty bento box as he stood from the lunch table. "I've got to go now, the man down by the beach hut promised to lend me a boat for the afternoon."

"Okay, see you later!"

"Bye!"

Yuuri left the rink shortly after Phichit's swift departure. Whilst he'd told his mum that he was running errands across town, the reality was that he'd snuck off along the back alleyways of Hasetsu to a pharmacist on the edge of town for some calorie-blocking diet pills. There was a feature on the store's website that allowed customers to pick up their medication from a locker onsite, which Yuuri happily clicked to avoid recognition from any of the pharmaceutical staff.

Yuuri entered his details into the security key pad attached to the front of a locker, opening the door as he cautiously checked for nearby employees. The package was neatly wrapped in a thin layer of tissue paper, sealed with a small patch of tape at the back of a metal locker.

'Well, it's not the glorious dinitrophenol... but it should help a little.' thought Yuuri, shoving the package into his bag. The fluorescent lighting that glared from the ceiling fell heavily on Yuuri's pale skin, dark shadows casting under his eyes and cheeks. He was beginning to develop a migraine and made way for a swift exit, only to be stopped short by an oncoming member of staff.

"Oh my god sir, are you okay? You look really ill-" a woman in a violet headscarf said, holding the door with a concerned look on her face.

"Yes, thank you," replied Yuuri, trying to avoid her worried gaze, "just picking up my prescription, thank you." He ducked under her arm and scuttled away into the street before any further awkwardness ensued.

It began to rain as Yuuri made the long walk back to his house. As he stumbled along the backstreet cobblestones, his legs twitched and suddenly a puddle of muddy water was thrown straight up into his face. Yuuri sighed and wiped the dirt from his glasses, clutching his bag in order to protect it from future mud-related disasters.
Miraculously Yuuri managed to reach his bedroom with the package intact. He'd arrived home slightly earlier than anticipated so had some time prior to Phichit's return to Skype Viktor, who was currently sat on the edge of the rink back in St. Petersburg.

"Yuuri, I was beginning to worry how you were!" Viktor exclaimed, kissing his fingers and waving them in front of the webcam, 
"How are you? How's your family? I miss you!"

"Haha, Viktor, slow down," said Yuuri, kissing his webcam in response. 
"I'm doing great, and Phichit's such an enthusiastic coach! You should've been there today - it was hilarious!"

Viktor raised an eyebrow and pretended to wipe away tears from under his eyes, "Oh, well, it seems I've been replaced..."
He then winked and blew another kiss towards the camera, 
"Just kidding! I'm glad you're having fun - preparing for competitions is always so boring, especially with Yakov over here. I wish I could've come to Japan!"

"Ah, thank God, I got a little worried there," Yuuri laughed, still a little uneasy as his momentarily rapid heart rate was still dropping back to its normal semi-anxious beat. 
"We've got competition though. Phichit's routine is amazing, and I've got a lot to do if I'm to thoroughly reck the two of you at this year's Grand Prix Final!"

"What makes you think you'll win?" the Russian skater retorted, twirling his hair.

"What makes you think I won't?" Yuuri smirked, although at that moment he was feeling rather insecure. Sure, Phichit was amazing, but Viktor was a five-time Grand Prix Final gold medalist, not to mention an Olympian. Could her really compete with the same skill and ability as his god-like fiancé?

Whilst Yuuri's thoughts began to trail off, Viktor jumpstarted the conversation with his continual interest in Hiroko's cooking.

"So, has your mum made anything good to eat? I mean, of course she has, but have you got any new recipes to bring back here? I'm starting to get bored of Yakov's boiled eggs and 'signature' radish stew."

He rolled his eyes and Yuuri laughed, rubbing his tired eyes with the side of his sleeve. They both edged closer toward their webcam, where they could see each other up close and personal.

"Awh, Yuuri, your eyes are almost cl- wait - are you okay? You look a little ill..."

As Viktor began to see Yuuri's face in greater detail, he noticed the Japanese boy's eye bags and pallid skin; a rather unflattering look but also one of vague importance.

The younger skater shook his head and rubbed his eyes once more, 
"Nah, I'm fine, it's just jet lag... I get it really bad. It should go away in a couple of days." He performed his best fake yawn, eager to convince Viktor that everything was as it should be.

"Promise?"

"Promise. I know we're far apart right now but I'll be back in St Petersburg soon, and you can see me all you want."

"Okay," said Viktor, content with his fiancé's answer, "I'll be waiting for you!"
Yuuri could hear the regular thump of footsteps approaching the bedroom, looking sharply behind him to find his mother standing in the doorway.

"Phichit's back, and he's waiting for you in the dining room. There's fresh Katsudon on the table - we're having it two nights in a row since I know you love it so much."

"Gotta go!" said Yuuri, his eyes darting back and forth between Hiroko and the computer screen. "I love you Viktor!"

"I love you too Yuuri," he replied, "see you soon!"

Yuuri shut down the computer and carefully opened up the package that'd been sitting at the bottom of his bag. It smelt of disinfectant and cardboard - a classic pharmaceutical scent - and the box itself was no bigger in size than your average wallet, but the results pictured on the back were enough to convince Yuuri to overlook the product's meek appearance.

'Take one before a meal to reduce the amount of calories you absorb...' Yuuri read from the back of the box. He was initially a little sceptical as a product that acted as a calorie blocker seemed too good to be true, but upon analysing the pills' ingredients, he came to the conclusion that even if they weren't effective, there were no negative consequences of taking them anyway. Perhaps Yuuri's biochemistry degree wasn't completely wasted after all.

Sliding the film wrapper out of the box, Yuuri popped a single white pill from the packaging and placed it daintily at the back of his throat, taking a large chug of water afterwards. The taste, whilst mildly unpleasant, was bearable, but it was unlikely that would've stopped him anyway. Yuuri was about to consume a meal consisting of over 900+ calories, and alongside the calories he'd consumed at lunch and the dessert his mum often offered him he simply couldn't afford not to take action. Getting up from his position on the bed, Yuuri did a double take when looking back at the pillbox that was now situated on top of a high bookshelf.

'I should probably take two, just to be sure...'

He hastily snatched the pillbox from its place on the shelf and swallowed a second tablet. Yuuri didn't particularly care for recommended guidelines anyway - be it pills, alcohol, food, or the attitude he had towards his own self image.

"Yuuri, are you coming?" a warm female voice called from the dining area.

"Yes, mama!"

The Japanese boy shuffled into the dining room with his hands in his pockets, trying to ignore the rumbling ache that was brewing in his stomach. Maybe ignoring the side of the box that listed the pill's side effects was not the best idea Yuuri'd ever had.

The meal itself went swimmingly, with Yuuri enjoying the heartwarming flavours of his mother's signature dish and the pleasant conversation that circled round the dining table. Despite his growing abdominal pain, he managed to smile and enjoy the familiar atmosphere of eating with his parents, reminding him of the years they'd spent together before he'd moved out to Detroit.

When the dinner and dessert plates had been fully cleared, Yuuri and Phichit excused themselves to return to the bedroom for another heated game of Super Smash Bros. It was during the short walk back that Yuuri's crippling stomach pain could be ignored for no longer, causing him to hunch over in agony as he leant against the wall with a surprised Phichit looking on in confusion.

"Hey, uh, are you okay Yuuri? You're looking kinda... grey?"
Yuuri looked up at his friend and gave him a rather uneasy smile of reassurance, "I'm good, I'm just - I really need the toilet; I'll be right back!"

With the contents of his digestive system fit to burst, Yuuri waddled at break-neck speed to the nearest bathroom. Slamming the door shut, he practically fell onto the toilet's welcoming seat and in an agonising 10 seconds the stomach problem had subsided.

'Shit, now I know why the box only recommends a single pill' he thought, looking over in disgust at the carnage he'd created inside of the toilet bowl. On the bright side, that day Yuuri hadn't purged a single meal.

Things was rather awkward between Yuuri and Phichit when the Japanese skater re-entered the room, but neither had the courage to speak up about the unusual two minutes that had just passed.

"Feeling better?" asked Phichit in an attempt to break the uncomfortable silence.

"Oh yeah, I think I ate too much at dinner, you know what I'm like," Yuuri lied, not wishing to discuss the real cause of his momentary stomach upset.

"I assume you're well enough to get your ass kicked on Super Smash Bros, then?"

Yuuri laughed and sat down beside his best friend in front of the small monitor by his bed. What better way to distract from his melancholy thoughts than to get beaten black and blue in a few games of mindless pixelated violence?

As he was getting ready to go to sleep, Yuuri slid his phone out from under the pillow and sent a message to Alice, hoping she'd be proud of his efforts that day.

h1story_mxker: Hey, thanks for suggesting the diet pills, I think they're really effective! :) ----

XxxstarvingprincessxxX: thats okay lmao how meny have u takn 2day? ----

h1story_mxker: I only got the pills this afternoon, so I took two before dinner. They worked well - perhaps a little too well... ----

XxxstarvingprincessxxX: lemme guess, u shit itself ----

h1story_mxker: That's a rather graphic description, but nearly, yeah.... ----

XxxstarvingprincessxxX: dont do that cos. their super strong ----

h1story_mxker: I gathered that... anyway, I was just messaging to thank you, lol. I've got a skating competition at the end of the week - do I still need to cover my entire body, like you said? ----

XxxstarvingprincessxxX: if u dont want teh jujes 2 mark u down 4 being fat, then yez ----

h1story_mxker: Oh yeah, haha. I gotta go, I'm exhausted. Bye!

----

Yuuri placed the phone back under the pillow and closed his eyes to go to sleep. As he began to drift off, he pictured himself with Viktor, in the summer, wearing crop tops and sipping ice cold beer from a champagne flute to the picturesque backdrop of Hasetsu's shoreline. His collarbones popped out like the rocks in the sand, his ribs as deep and protruding as the sandy dunes to the side
of the beach. It was the beginning of one of his favourite dreams. Yuuri smiled and happily drifted off to sleep, dreaming of the day he could show his skin in public without the insecurity of his own chubby body.

'If only this dream could be reality...' thought Yuuri, transitioning into a blissful state of dreams and anorexic thoughts. Summer was right around the corner, and this year he was determined to make a splash.
Hey, look, it's Minami

{A.N. Sorry I haven't posted in literally forever! For the next month or so I'll be studying for end of year exams, so things might be a little slow, but I promise I'm trying!!!}

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The rest of the week went by in a flash. Phichit and Yuuri spent the majority of the time preparing Yuuri for the Kyushu competition, with a few breaks in between for some hardcore gaming sessions (and of course the bouts of self-inflicted diarrhoea induced by Yuuri's most recent purchase).

It was late evening on Friday, the final day before the competition, when a familiar nervous feeling began to crawl on Yuuri's back. Sat on the bed with Phichit as they played with their phones, he began to feel his hands subtly twitching in anxiety for the challenging day ahead of him. There was so much worry and self-doubt swimming in Yuuri's mind that his forehead began to throb in synch with his stomach, aching and uncomfortable.

His thoughts shifted back to the subject of weight and self-worth. Yuuri opened the BMI calculator in preparation for Phichit's next trip to the bathroom, in which he'd drag the old scale from underneath his bed out onto the floor and weigh himself to reassure that everything was going to plan. Phichit drank a fuckton of soda; he was currently on his 4th can that evening and pretty soon something had to give.

"I'll be right back," said the younger skater, jumping from the bed and strolling in the direction of the bathroom.

Yuuri smiled, wishing he had the same energy levels as his Thai counterpart, and began to sift through piles of clothes and discarded water bottles under the bed for his old metal scales. Surprisingly, they were still there. Yuuri pulled them out quickly in order to avoid Phichit's discovery on his return from the bathroom across the hall.

'Right.. my stomach's empty from the pill, I'll take my top off for accuracy, I don't think I've drank that much water...' Yuuri's weighing ritual had begun. 'Focus! Just do this quickly and efficiently, like you normally do.'

As his breathing steadied, Yuuri stepped onto the scales and turned his head down to the number that appeared on the dusty screen.

47kg.
173cm.
BMI 15.7.

'Holy shit, 47kg and it's only the start of May. I must've gotten lucky - I never usually get a loss like this; it must be because I've been training so hard. Wow, I can't belie-'

"Yuuri?" Phichit interrupted, chuckling in amusement, "What the hell are you doing?"

"I can explain-" the Japanese skater replied, although it was blatantly obvious that he couldn't.

"This isn't another one of your fad diets, is it?" Laughed Phichit, trying to lighten the mood without showing his growing concern. "I had enough of your protein shakes and paleo diets in college, don't tell me you're doing it again, hah."
"I'm not - it's just to monitor my progress, for Viktor. He stays in shape so easily, I don't wanna fall behind, that's all."

"Oh, so you won't mind if I have a look then," Phichit said in a cunning move allowing him to assess the magnitude of Yuuri's weight loss, "just, you know, to get a second opinion."

"Sure." said Yuuri.

'Shit.' thought Yuuri.

Phichit attempted his best Sherlock Holmes impression as he wandered over to the scales. He was a little worried, as Yuuri hadn't looked this thin since they'd started college, but he couldn't show it, or else Yuuri would just clam up altogether.

"Ah, 47kg. I'm about 50 - so I guess you're currently 'winning', and I'm much shorter than you. Now, don't bite my head off, but I'm not a doctor and even I'm aware this isn't what peak male fitness looks like." Whilst he was trying not to let the situation progress with too much negativity, Phichit knew he couldn't let the conversation slip again as it had previously done so.

"It's fine, I'm healthy, I promise." said Yuuri, feeling a little cornered by Phichit's interrogative tone.

"Okay, sure, I mean it *could* be a healthy weight," Phichit replied, scrolling through his phone for a BMI calculator, "for a teenage girl, that is." A smile had still remained on his face, but it had turned rather pitiful since the conversation had began.

"Haha, I'm fine, honestly - " Yuuri laughed in an attempt to muster a sense of light-heartedness, "these scales are too old to give an accurate measurement anyway. I mean, looking at me you'd probably think I'm about 70 kilos, hehe."

Phichit stared blankly in disbelief at Yuuri, who was not only growing visibly anxious, but had also started shivering.

"Okay, hah. You should probably put your clothes back on, you look kinda cold."

As Yuuri was getting changed back into his 5000 layers of wooden sweaters, Phichit was debating to himself on which method of interrogation he should use to gather further information about Yuuri's recent weight loss. Attempting to add humour to the situation was obviously a complete failure, and there was little point in waiting to have the same conversation over Skype, so he eventually decided on a more direct approach.

"You look kind of tired, Yuuri. Have a can of soda." Phichit said with a smile. Whilst his tone was friendly and casual, this was actually a crucial test to determine Yuuri's reaction to unanticipated calories.

"Nah, I'm good thanks. I need to get some sleep anyway." Yuuri grinned back, turning over and pulling the duvet with him.

"It's diet."

"Oh, okay I guess!"

Phichit watched Yuuri gulp the first few mouthfuls, before interrupting with: "Sorry, my Japanese is super bad, it's actually regular, heh."
The Japanese skater froze and spat his current mouthful of soda back into the can.

"Ugh, I hate regular. The taste is terrible."

"But you were just knocking it down like you do green tea!" said Phichit, growing frustrated.

"I hadn't fully gauged the taste of it!"

Phichit crossed his legs as he sat on the floor, resting his head on his hands.
"Yuuri, I can tell when you're lying to me." He said with his shoulders slumped, "Please tell me the truth."

"Haha, what?" the skater laughed nervously, "I am! Why would I lie?"

"I've got a pretty good feeling why..."

"What?" answered Yuuri, growing agitated.

"Yuuri, you're my best friend. I can tell when you're not right. It's also kind of obvious; I can see that diet and exercise app on your phone since you're constantly using it."

Yuuri's eyes widened. He felt threatened, as if Phichit was looking to take this lifestyle away from. This was his thing; it was private. Yuuri didn't need anybody else involved in the relationship between him and his weight.

"Okay, so maybe I'm struggling a little, sue me," he retaliated, "it's not like I'm unhealthily thin, I just want to lose a little more - then I'll stop!"

The anxious laughter had returned.
"It's not like I've got an eating disorder or anything. What could you do about it anyway? You wouldn't understand... you've always been skinny, haha."

Phichit wasn't quite sure what to say in response. He'd assisted Yuuri with his past binge-eating issues when they were living together in Detroit, but he'd never had any previous experience with restrictive eating disorders - one of which Yuuri undoubtedly had, despite the protests stating he was perfectly fine.

On one hand, Phichit could've told Yuuri's mum straightaway about what was going on, but he felt that somehow this wasn't the right thing to do. He'd never told anyone about Yuuri's binge-eating disorder, and at the time that was equally serious. Phichit was reluctant to let his friend deteriorate any further, but simultaneously didn't want to force-feed him back up to a healthy weight. There was a possibility that such a method could backfire and Yuuri would fall back into a destructive cycle of binging and purging as he'd done so in college. At his heaviest, Yuuri had reached over 100kgs, and whilst it oddly didn't have a detrimental effect on his athletic performance, it did have adverse effects on his mental health. Then again, so would this cycle of extreme diet and exercise. Phichit was unsure of what to say next.

"Just, just don't tell anyone, okay?" said Yuuri, his eyes pleading for secrecy. "I won't take it too far - I'll stop soon, I swear. Just please don't tell Viktor, I don't want him to feel bad. This was my idea, not his."

'What can I do, as a friend, except support him through this mess?' Thought Phichit, feeling powerless.

The Thai skater reached out and put a comforting hand on Yuuri's shoulder.
"I'm not going to force you to do anything. To be honest, even if I tried, you'd probably find a way to outsmart me. Just please, take care of yourself. At least eat something, okay? Even if it's small. You need the energy for competitions." Phichit felt he was becoming a little overbearing, "-and for beating me on Smash Bros, of course!"

Yuuri recognised that Phichit was trying to lighten the mood, nodding his head in agreement.

"Thanks, I appreciate it."

"Now we really should get some sleep if you're going to thrash the other competitors tomorrow!"

Glad that Phichit had returned to his usual upbeat self, Yuuri gave him a vaguely enthusiastic thumbs-up and rolled over into his bed. Although it wasn't the exact result he'd ultimately wanted, Phichit was relieved that Yuuri was, for a moment, able to at least admit that he was dieting. He was aware he couldn't behave too strictly with his friend, or he'd loose Yuuri's trust altogether.

All Phichit hoped was that Yuuri ate an adequate amount on the day of the actual event, as he'd definitely need it. The competition was fierce, and if the contests's participants were to be anything similar to the level of skill he'd seen in Thailand, Yuuri would need to be fully focused in order to gain his first gold medal of the season.

The following day Yuuri was awoken by a gentle shaking on his shoulder, opening his eyes to a smiling Phichit dressed in a coach's tracksuit and holding a bowl of shredded cereal.

"Phichit, that's kind of you, but I have to do these things myse-"

"It's wholegrain, and the lowest-calorie option I could find in your cupboards. I don't care what you eat, as long as you're eating." the Thai skater said in encouragement.

"Oh - thanks. I'll just take my medication first, then I'll eat it." said Yuuri, rising from the bed and extracting a diet pill from its box on the bookshelf.

Phichit squinted inquisitively at the small tablet Yuuri held between his fingertips.

"What's that for?"

"Asthma mediation." Yuuri lied, "You know, since my lungs are so *generously* working at 65% capacity."

Phichit laughed as Yuuri swallowed the tablet, clutching a nearby pillow to his stomach in preparation for the fast-approaching onslaught of pain. Time was trickling away, so Phichit handed the bowl of cereal into the Japanese boy's hands. Yuuri supped delicately at the bowl of milk and frosted wheat shreds, totting up the calories he'd consumed in his head after researching the cereal's nutritional value online.

Despite the fact that Yuuri hadn't drunk the bowl of milk that remained, Phichit agreed to take it back to the kitchen as his friend dressed himself for the competition. After wriggling into a black sweatshirt and trousers to match, Yuuri gazed fondly at the team Japan jacket resting on the side of a nearby footstool. It felt good to be competing again.

Yuuri's costumes consisted of a tight, black leotard with holographic detailing and loose silk sleeves with coverings for his legs for his short programme, and a slate-coloured kaftan-style garment with detachable leggings and sleeves for his free skate.

The skater had opted for outfits that covered the entire body, as his ana buddy Alice had suggested this was the most secure way of hiding weight loss from the crowd and officials during
performances. Whilst Yuuri's health was not currently in danger, if it was considered he'd lost weight too quickly then he'd be pulled from the competition - a risk not worth taking.

"Are we ready to go?" said Phichit, poking his head round the door.

A hamster transport cage sat as his feet and a pair of pom-poms were strapped to his backpack at an ominous angle. Yuuri wasn't quite sure what type of coach Phichit would become once he was out on the competition's ice rink, but hoped his behaviour wouldn't resemble the characters from scenes he'd watched on a re-run of Dance Moms.

"Yeah, I'm ready." Yuuri replied. "Let me just grab my medication and we'll get going."

'There's no way I'm leaving this behind.' he thought, picturing the calorific celebratory meal Phichit would have in mind once Yuuri had finished competing.

The train ride to Fukuoka, Kyushu's capital, was neither lengthy nor laborious, yet Yuuri was still feeling dragged down by tiredness and the conflict of last night's conversation. Phichit was generally an upbeat kind of guy, so something must've snapped in order for him to talk to Yuuri in such a serious manner. The Japanese skater gazed out of the carriage at the rolling fields and mountains that passed them by, his mind wandering as he tried to distract himself from his melancholy thoughts and the typical anxiety that plagued him before a competition.

Phichit and Yuuri arrived at the ice rink late that morning, whereas the majority of competing skaters had been there since late last night.

"What gives?" asked Phichit, "Aren't they tired or anything?"

Yuuri chuckled, "Yeah, but some of these guys are as young as 15. They don't know what they're up against, so they have to be ready for everything; when you get to my age you learn to just go with it a little more."

"Dude, you're like 24. I'd hardly call that old age."

The two of them laughed in agreement and made their way over to the bleachers by the side of the rink. Whilst it wasn't completely empty, the venue was hardly fit to burst. It seemed that this year the competition was even more low-key than usual, with many of the previous year's competitors participating in an event in Chūbu, which was usually more popular anyway.

Yuuri left the stands for a brief moment to change into his short programme costume, returning minutes later covered in black and dotted with squares of dazzled holographic beauty.

"Isn't that your costume from last year?"

"What? No it isn't."

"Yeah it is," laughed Phichit, "you wore it during your zeros performance last year. It has the same detailing and everything!"

Yuuri hadn't really noticed the similarities between his costume and the one from the previous year's Grand Prix series, but upon closer inspection of his outfit could see where Phichit was coming from; the design of the costumes was practically identical.

"Yeah well," said Yuuri, closing the velcro clips on his thighs and shoulders, "this one has looser arms and legs, look!"
"Okay, if you say so Yuuri." Said Phichit, laughing as he fell out of the coach's chair.

"Anyway, you should get going to the competitor's lounge. I expect you guys will be performing pretty soon."

"Okay," said Yuuri, giving his friend a high-five, "well, 'coach', I'll try my best."

He winked at Phichit, who high-fived him back, before making his way down to the lounge with the other competitors. The room was sparsely decorated with a few motivational posters, and, to Yuuri's utter horror, a poster of his teenage self from his senior debut 8 years ago.

Yuuri had about two seconds to relax before a familiar voice came bounding up behind him.

"Yuuri! Yuuri, over here!"

The skater turned around with limited enthusiasm to find a skittishly-excited mound of caramel hair bouncing up and down in front of him, its streaks of jam-coloured fur moving with it. Beneath was the face of Minami Kenjirou, the 17 year old figure skater from Kagoshima, beaming in the presence of his idol.

"Your performance at last year's Grand Prix Final was amazing, I wish I could skate like you! Do you think I could ever be able to skate like that? I hope - no, I wish I could! I'd be so happy if I was able to perform a..."

Yuuri's mind had begun to wander as Minami's jumbled way of speaking was turning into mouthfuls of inaudible rambling, his eyes assessing the skill level of his fellow competitors. There was a guy from Nagasaki, about 22 with long hair and broad shoulders, trying to chat up a set of twins from Fukuoka, with little success. The boys instead were curious about Minami's fearless approach towards Japan's top figure skater, considering the way he'd been treated in previous years.

"Yuuri! Hey, are you listening? I have something to tell you!"

"Eh?" The skater's mind snapped into focus and he turned his head sharply to face Minami once again. Truthfully, Yuuri simply wanted to get through the competition with as minimal interaction with the other skaters as physically possible.

"Oh, hey Minami." said Yuuri, mustering a sense of confidence and suave in front of an adoring fan.

Minami gave Yuuri an appreciative squeeze as the older skater tensed up in surprise, "OMG! You know my name? Yuuri Katsuki knows my name!"

Yuuri, who up until this point had been feeling rather irritated by Minami's overly energetic personality, remembered the words he'd spoken to him the previous year, when they were both competing in the equivalently significant Kyushu cup of 2016.

--"Don't make fun of me for looking up to you for so long and trying to catch up to you!"--

'Chill out, Yuuri,' the older skater thought as Minami continued to bounce up and down in excitement, 'don't be so hostile simply because you've only consumed 200 calories so far today. Sure, you're hungry, but what you ate for breakfast was originally about 350 calories, which is more than enough to give you energy for today's competition. Don't take it out on Minami, he's just trying to be friendly.'
"Good luck out there today, Minami." said Yuuri, smiling as he hugged the squealing nugget-haired boy in return.

The blood drained from the younger skater's face, turning him as white as a sheet, before shrieking out of confusion as well as the admiration he possessed for Yuuri.

"Wow.. thank you, Yuuri-kun," he said, unsure of what to say in his moment of pure ecstasy.

"It's okay, I'm sure you'll do great."

The speakers cracked as the booming voice of an announcer rang out and ricocheted across the walls of the room:
"Competitor Minami Kenjiro to the ice. I repeat, competitor Minami Kenjiro, please present yourself on the ice."

Minami looked back at Yuuri,
"I need to go now. Good luck on your short programme, I'll be watching!"

"Okay, you too!" Replied Yuuri, ignoring the slight creepiness of that last sentence.

Based on last year's set of performances, Yuuri had a promising chance of winning. Whilst Minami's short programme was generally filled with dynamic creativity and glittering jumps, he lacked the skill to pull off the high-difficulty moves crucial to a decent score in his second performance, and typically fell short of top marks during his free skate.

Whilst Minami was out on the ice, Yuuri briefly returned to check in on Phichit, who had lost control of a number of his hamsters, and was scrabbling around on the floor beneath the spectator seats in a desperate search for his beloved rodent family. Fortunately Yuuri, who's anxious, sweaty body smelled not too unlike cheese, attracted the presence of Phichit's lost friends. He scooped them up with a single hand and placed them back in their cage, much to the ease of a shaking Phichit.

"Thank God you found them - I was worried that someone might've trodden them, or worse, someone could've..." he went silent, drawing a finger across his head in a decapitating motion; his mouth making a pained squeaking noise.

After gathering the hamsters back into their cage, Phichit turned his attention to the skater strutting his stuff in the middle of the rink.

"It looks like that kid's just finishing.. when is it your turn to go on?"

"Oh, you mean Minami?" said Yuuri, pointing to the figure on the ice, "And I don't know for sure, but I think it's last."

"Oh well, gives you more time to prepare, I guess," grinned Phichit, glancing at the schedule in his notebook.

"Cry, panic, sleep - sure, prepare's gotta be in there somewhere!" the skater replied in self-deprecation. He was currently entranced by Minami's performance, both his awe and anxiety heightened by the sprightliness and elegance of the teenager bopping to the music on the ice.

The time between the first and last performances passed substantially quicker than Yuuri had anticipated. Whilst he was, to some extent, prepared to compete, his mind was already in turmoil over whether or not he should even attempt to pull off a quintuple toe flip - especially when situated before a panel of intimidating judges.
"Look, Yuuri, you'll be fine," said Phichit with an encouraging smile, "here - drink this; it'll give you the extra boost you'll need out there."

The older skater's eyes narrowed in reluctance, the look on his face saturated with suspiciousness.

"It's just a milkshake, dude, don't worry."

Yuuri grabbed the milky protein liquid, gulping its thick texture with a slight indignance in his gaze.

"See? Look, now you're bound to do great!"

With a camera in one hand and a peace sign in the other, Phichit squeezed his Japanese counterpart into the frame for a commemorative selfie. Yuuri wasn't completely enthralled by the idea of being photographed in his currently pudgy state, but posed regardless. His Instagram had been looking rather bare recently, and denying a selfie with Phichit was practically a death wish.

Yuuri trudged towards the entrance of the rink, feeling rather queasy as a consequence of being force-fed by his temporary coach.

'There's no way I'm not gonna purge after drinking that piece of crap...’ he noted to himself.

The crowd cheered as the announcer's voice boomed from the speakers on the walls, and Yuuri slowly took his place in the spotlight of the rink. Whilst the size of the audience has significantly dwindled by the time it was his turn to perform, Yuuri still couldn't escape the piercing gaze of his spectators as they watched from the sanctuary of the bleachers, droplets of panicked sweat beginning to form between his drooping brows. Countless times had he been in this exact situation, the sickness of anxiety all too well-known.

As the gentle, twinkling sound of music played out across the icy hush of the rink, Yuuri let out a snort. In the midst of all the tension building up to his skate, the Japanese boy had completely forgotten he was about to perform to what was essentially a Britney Spears cover. Whilst he'd attempted to remain inconspicuous, his brief smirk caught the attention of the crowd, who applauded in response. They'd assumed the expression was entirely intentional, roaring in approval at the skater's admirable self-assurance. Yuuri, however, had just shrugged it off and had already begun to skate his short programme.

Whilst the competition was, admittedly, substantially less fierce than what was typically expected at an event such as the Grand Prix Final, Yuuri was desperate to make a good impression. His initial short programme was a depiction of the type of performances the skating world could expect from him that season, so Yuuri felt it crucially important that he was to surpass the other competitors in both numerical measurements and charismatic prowess.

Yuuri took deep breaths as he floated across the ice, skates leaving crystalline trails like a painter swiping his brush across a milky white canvas. He was absolutely freezing. Whether it was the sudden costume change or his failure to acclimatise to the atmospheric chill of the rink, the Japanese skater found himself shivering immensely as he began his initial sequence of turns and jumps.

The jumps themselves, of course, were no problem at all. Yuuri crossed his legs and soared into a quadruple salchow with relatively little effort, arms fully fledged like a majestic bird of prey, followed by the security of the skates' soothing grind as he darted back down to the ground. Perhaps this newly-discovered weightlessness could've been attributed to the magnitude of his recent weight loss. As the time the skater'd spent dieting increased, Yuuri had begun to feel
progressively lighter with every performance.

With his confidence gradually starting to pick up, Yuuri made the snap decision to incorporate the quintuple toe flip into his short programme. Sure, it was initially intended for his free skate, but he figured the jump would be an effective way to win over the onlooking judges, and since everything was going swimmingly so far he had no reason to avoid doing so. With great gusto Yuuri spun into the air, twirling in majesty... unsurprisingly, things had begun to spiral out of control on the fifth reduction. The skater fell onto the cold of the rink's claw-like surface, the hardened ice slamming against his body with equally great gusto.

"It's okay Yuuri, you're doing fine, just concentrate on completing the routine!" Phichit yelled from the stands in an oddly authoritative tone. It seemed he wasn't quite the inexperienced coach Yuuri'd expected to be.

"Fuuuuuuuuu" the Japanese boy uttered under his breath. He immediately rose from the ice and proceeded to skate the remainder of the routine as if nothing had happened, yet inside his heart felt as if it would burst out of his chest.

'Idiot. See? This is what happens when you get too comfortable. Try not to mess anything else up, okay? You want to succeed here and skate against Viktor, right? You've gotta beat this competition first!'

An aching pain had begun to engulf Yuuri's lower body. His stamina so far had been admirable, given the sheer amount of high-difficulty moves the skater had attempted so far in the routine, but Yuuri knew it wouldn't last - even for an athlete of his standard.

Finishing the routine with an impromptu horizontal Biellmann, Yuuri left the ice drenched in his own cold sweat, buckling at the knees as he flopped into his chair by the bleachers.

"Dude, what was that?" said Phichit with a amused yet rather critical look on his face, tossing his empty soda can into an already towering pile of discarded containers.

Yuuri looked down in the floor in, smiling guiltily, "I don't know... improvisation?"

"Haha, okay - just don't mess up like that on your free skate! So far I think you've pretty much won the competition - don't ruin your chances!"

The Japanese boy took a quick drink of water and prepared for the free skate. Whilst his second performance was flawless, it lacked a sense of risk - something that Yuuri so desperately needed out there on the ice. However, in accordance with coach Phichit's guidelines, he obeyed the rule of self-restraint. The words 'mess up' and 'ruined' echoed in his mind, as if they were describing him and not his previous performance, and Yuuri was determined not to make the same stupid mistakes as before.

Following the completion of his free skate, Yuuri dashed to the bathroom, keen to find a reclusive spot that'd allow him to be anxious away from the prying eyes of the local press. After a few minutes of searching he'd finally located the ideal space for wallowing in self-pity: a toilet cubicle round the back of the ice rink.

Coincidently, the bathroom was also fairly isolated from the rest of the building. Yuuri remembered the milkshake he'd been forced to drink earlier that afternoon and shuddered in disgust. Thankfully, he'd found a solution. The toilet cubicle was spacious, and whilst since regularly consuming diet pills he'd lacked the need to purge, the situation called for such misconduct.
For a brief moment Yuuri’d forgotten just exactly how to purge - it'd been a while, after all, and it was not something he particularly enjoyed thinking about. Luckily, with a few soft pokes of his uvula the skater’d soon rediscovered the swift and easy method to expel the contents of his stomach, and hopefully would finish before Phichit'd clocked he was missing.

He tickled the back of his throat, waiting in anticipation for what was to come. The warm, frothy remains of what was once a milkshake thrust up from Yuuri’s stomach and had begun to erupt from within his mouth into the bowl of the toilet, splashing back and forth in an almost rhythmic sequence.

Yuuri didn't mind purging the milkshake at all - it was smooth and creamy, coating the back of his throats as if it were a soothing cup of cocoa. Of course, this cup of cocoa was phlegmy and rather discoloured, but the mental imagery was there and that's all that mattered.

'Perfect.. just like before,' thought Yuuri, repeatedly triggering his gag reflex, 'this should cut a few hundred calories, so as long as I keep taking these pills I'll be fine for the rest of the day..'

"Yuuri?" a juvenile voice called from the opposite end of the room, "Are you okay?"

The skater payed no attention to the voice; he was still busy chucking up.

'They must be mistaken, nobody can see me if I'm locked inside this cubicle..' 

Suddenly the cubicle door swung open, and there was Minami standing at its entrance. The expression on his face was humourously quizzical - it was clear that he'd realised something was awry, and yet he lacked the deductive powers to be able to confirm what it was.

Yuuri, who by now had finally noticed the inquisitive Minami standing by the entrance to the cubicle, ceased all vomiting and looked back in terror, rather dismayed at the fact he’d been discovered. It appears that in a rush of excitement he'd forgotten to lock the cubicle, and it was now time to face the consequences of his carelessness.

"...Yuuri?"

"I'm not doing anything!!" he said, slamming down the toilet seat defensively.

Minami looked puzzled,

"Are you sure? Cos about a few seconds ago, I saw you bent over with your fingers down your throat.."

Eyes shifting in a sea of panic, Yuuri made the impulsive decision to lie his way out of the situation (which was ,quite frankly, his usual course of action anyway).

"I was just, er, smelling the freshening scent at the back of the bowl!" The older boy said, a slight wavering in his voice.

"Are you sure? It kind of looked like-"

"Positive! Now, uh, why don't you go back to the main area? I'll catch up, and maybe we can get pizza afterwards..."

Minami glanced at the bathroom door, then back again at the slightly shrivelled 24-year-old leaning against the edge of the toilet seat.

"Okay!" he replied, his tone massively picking up in an attempt to distract from the awkwardness
of the situation, I'll see you later!"

Yuuri smiled, 
"Okay, save some pizza for me, yeah?"

The younger skater nodded and bounded out of the door, waiting until he was out of Yuuri's sight before changing into a slow, slightly more mature gait.

'Why was Yuuri throwing up in there?' Thought Minami, 'Sure, he's skinny, but he's always been kinda skinny during competitions, and-

He tried to reason with himself as to why Yuuri couldn't even been making himself sick, but couldn't find a fitting answer. Eventually he was forced to come to the conclusion that Yuuri, his idol, was deliberately harming himself, as moments ago he'd literally seen it in action. Minami was perhaps a little immature, but he wasn't stupid.

Fortunately, Yuuri did join the rest of the skaters for pizza afterwards. Following the awards ceremony, in which Yuuri achieved (a rather obvious) first place, they snuck out round the back of the rink to a nearby restaurant, keen to refuel after the taxing day they'd just had.

Phichit, who sat next to Yuuri, kept an eagle eye on his friend's eating habits, but for once there was nothing that could cause concern. Yuuri, who'd beforehand taken another pill, gladly ate an entire pizza as an effort to prove to the other skaters that, contrary to their beliefs, he was doing just fine.

Later that evening, whilst Yuuri and Phichit played Smash Bros on the edge of the Japanese skater's bed, Yuuri's phone began to ring. The caller repeatedly attempted to make contact, with Yuuri finally silencing his phone after a few consecutive minutes of constant noise and vibration.

Phichit looked at the phone with a quizzical expression,  
"Wow, they sound really desperate," he began with a laugh, "lemme guess - it's Viktor, isn't it? Even though you two got all smushy on FaceTime earlier, and EVEN though you're seeing him tomorrow anyway... you may as well call him back."

Scooping his phone from on top of the covers, Yuuri smirked and playfully shoved Phichit onto the floor in response.

"Knowing my luck, he's probably called to brag about the competition in Moscow."

"Oh," said Phichit, "well, say hi for me!"

Yuuri nodded and opened up his phone, ready to check the list of recent callers. 99% of the list was, not surprisingly, Viktor's repeatedly efforts to contact his fiancé, but the number at the top of the list wasn't his at all.

'That's odd... who could be trying to call me?'

"It's probably just sales," said Phichit as he finished downing yet another can of soda, "but if it's that Nigerian prince that keeps sending me emails, tell him he's gonna have to wait - I'm a busy man."

Whilst Phichit continued to fool around, Yuuri's suspicion began to grow. He was certain he recognised that top number, but was still unsure as to where from. Calling it would've been too risky in the presence Phichit, as it might've been the pharmacy or confirmation from the various internet dieting sites he'd signed up to, so for the time being Yuuri switched his phone silent and
resumed playing Smash. Bros with his best friend.

Later that night, and Yuuri signed into MyProAna for the the first time in a few days. He felt guilty for his recent lack of contact with Alice, but truthfully the skater just hadn't had time to spend hours triggering himself on the world's most pointless website. He hoped she'd be forgiving, especially if he lied about passing out from exhaustion (as it demonstrated his lack of a suitable intake), but prepared himself for the worst regardless.

----

XxxstarvingprincessxxxX: o, I see ur fineally back on.

- H1story_mxker: I know, sorry for being gone these past few days.. I had a competition. XD

- XxxstarvingprincessxxxX: i no. i saw nd I tried 2 call u.

- H1story_mxker: Oh, so you were that number, but wait - how did you see me? Don't you live in England?

- XxxstarvingprincessxxxX: It was on te sports channul ;)

- H1story_mxker: Oh wow - what'd you think?

- XxxstarvingprincessxxxX: I think ur skatein was good...

- H1story_mxker: Thanks :) 

- XxxstarvingprincessxxxX: ...but u look absolootly obees.

- H1story_mxker: I know but.. I don't understand. I've been following my diet and exercise regime, and I'm losing some weight, but why isn't the fat melting off of me like I hoped it would?

- XxxstarvingprincessxxxX: idk, its probs just ur metabolism slowin abit. But u need 2 lose weiy more 4 ur next competishun - ok?

- H1story_mxker: Yes, of course. Thank you :)

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Yuuri knew what he had to do next. Keep trying hard at his currently weight loss routine, take his pills, purge when necessary and continue on the straight path to victory. Alice's feedback was, whilst a little upsetting, highly motivating, and he was determined to make her proud.

Meanwhile, in Russia, Viktor was just finishing his first competition, standing on the podium with a medal in his hand...
Detective Yuratchka is on the case!!!!

A.N. ~ This chapter is diabolically short and uninteresting, but I'm currently studying for exams (which I'll undeniably fail anyway lol) but I wanted to squeeze in a (sort of??) filler chapter.. I mean it has some vague significance, but most of my work is utter drivel anyway haha..

____________________________________
*flashback to an earlier part of the week in which Viktor prepares for the qualifier that's to be held in Moscow*

Viktor's eyes flinched at the influx of light streaming through the bedroom window, an unusual amount for this early in the morning. As he lay under the covers, it came to the skater's attention that the typically crowded king-sized bed had suddenly become uncomfortably spacious, realising that Yuuri had left before the break of dawn for his hometown in Japan without so much as a tender kiss goodbye.

"Don't look like that, old man, he probably just didn't want to wake you."

The unanticipated words of advice took the Russian by surprise, as he shivered first upright and then out of the bed, tumbling in confusion towards the bedroom floor. After shaking the ache of the fall from his head and shoulders, Viktor glanced upwards to find Yuri Plisetsky, the Russian Punk, leaning rather unimpressed against the doorway at the sight of his older teammate flopped against the carpet in nothing but his fleshy pink skin.

"Iisus Khristos, put some pants on..' he grumbled, shielding his eyes ashamedly, "if you're wondering how I got here: I let myself in with the spare key - come on, we have a plane to catch, and they're not gonna let you on 'dressed' like that."

It seemed that Viktor wasn't content with usurping the position of Yurio's adoptive father, but instead had become the fear of every vaguely fashionable teenager: a sad, naked, shameless adoptive father.

Following the awkward bedroom encounter, and once Yurio'd had a chance to mentally bleach his eyes and retching mouth, the two skaters boarded the brief plane flight from St. Petersburg to Moscow. They were to train at a private rink on the outskirts of the Russian capital, under the watchful eye of Yakov and his former flame: Lilia Baranovskia.

The majority of the week was spent in rigorously intensive skating practise for the upcoming competition, with both Viktor and Yurio pushed to their physical limits as their coaches temerariously demanded an increased amount of precision and flair.

As a result of this, during practice Viktor had spun out of control whilst performing a quadruple salchow and slammed his knee against the barriers of the ice rink. Whilst the slight bruising in no way affected his ability to continue the routine, the skater saw the opportunity for a break and without hesitation began a series of fake moans and shrills. Yakov, who (oddly enough) wasn't a complete idiot, immediately picked up on his student's sub-par acting skills, but the entire rink was getting rather annoyed with the shrieking man-child cradling his leg in the corner of the bleachers, land so he (reluctantly) allow Viktor to rest his knee until training the following morning.

Sprinting back to the hotel room - with his leg mysteriously 'suddenly healed' - Viktor clapped his hands in delight as he hastily set up the Skype call, heart fluttering at the thought of seeing his
"Hello - is the signal okay..?" a semi-crackled voice called from the other side of the screen, transforming into an indiscernible blob of pixels, and finally the equally exhausted face of a handsome Japanese man.

"Yuuri!"

They chatted for a while until Yuuri had to go for dinner, and Viktor left the video call feeling pleasantly refreshed. He was glad to hear that Phichit had been an adequate coaching substitute so far - he was initially suspicious of just how much progress Yuuri would be able to make when staying with the mischievous Thai skater, but figured their regular breaks for memes and jokes couldn't possible be more distracting than his frequent on-ice make-out sessions with the Japanese boy.

The rest of the week dragged along rather slowly, as Viktor wasn't used to working in such a hostile environment - 'hostile' his impression of any place lacking the presence of a certain black-haired beauty named 'Yuuri'. The Russian wasn't particularly disinterested in practice, but had discovered it lacked its typical leisurely atmosphere when wholly supervised by a stern-looking demi-gorilla who'd trained under the hard-hitting pressures of the former Soviet Union. When he was with Yuuri, Yakov's harsh behaviour mattered little, and was often ignored altogether. However, since the upcoming qualifier was vaguely important, Viktor decided he'd pay a decent amount of attention to his coach's advice.

Of course, on the actual day of the event Viktor was a shoe-in for the gold medal. Yurio was, as usual, rather peeved that in his opinion, someone who'd put in supposedly half the amount of effort was awarded double the standard amount of praise, but had gotten somewhat used to living in Viktor's shadow. Still, the young skater was just grateful he'd made it through, as this season's competition was surprisingly fiercer than in previous years.

"Ugh, I just wanna sleep..." he groaned, head flopping into the softness of the coach back at Viktor's apartment in St Petersburg. It was early in the morning and Yurio's grandfather was reluctant to travel at night, so agreed the young Russian could stay overnight at the apartment until the following day. Whilst initially Yurio was reluctant to sleep on the same couch Viktor and Yuuri had (at some point) probably had sex on, he took comfort in the assumption that they'd likely washed the covers before he was to come over.

Viktor slung his large, marble-coloured jacket from a nearby coat-hanger and proceeded to collapse in exhaustion onto the floor, elegantly slumped on the carpet whilst cradling the warmth of his iPhone in his arms.

"Hey, Yurio, why don't you grab a blanket from the bedroom - it gets cold at night, and Otabek's back in Almaty so it's not like you two can cud-"

"Shhhhhhhh...." replied Yurio, too tired to dish-out any of his classic pieces of savagery, and yet too proud to just ignore the comment altogether.

Eyes drooped, he staggered over to to bedroom and dragged the first blanket his aching arms could reach, only to discover the blithering fool that was his so-called superior totally unconscious, happily curled up in the feral position as he lay asleep on the floor. Yurio let out a sigh and clumsily wandered through the darkness back into the bedroom, climbing under the covers in search of sanctuary from the night's piercing chill.

'If that oaf won't have it, then I'll gladly sleep here - he can enjoy the stiffness of the floor..' thought the younger skater. He felt a little guilty for abandoning his older rink-mate by the front entrance, vulnerable to masked-murderers and house intruders, yet decided the most appropriate thing to do
would be to stay in bed, diverting from the situation altogether. It was large, new, and reasonably comfortable - as long as Yurio avoided the ominous white stains scattered across the top of the mattress he was almost guaranteed a decent night's sleep.

The following morning, the fair-haired Russian was changing for the day ahead of him when he accidentally slipped on a pair of discarded socks and tumbled clumsily onto his back. Luckily, there was no harm done, but from this new ground-level perspective, Yurio had now discovered an array of curious objects under the bed that were previously hidden from his typical view when standing.

The majority of the objects piled under the bed frame didn't invoke any sense of interest whatsoever, but the Yurio was determined to find something scandalous. If anything, he simply wanted dirt on Viktor and Yuuri - they'd embarrassed him countless times in the past, and he felt inclined to give them a taste of their own medicine.

After a few minutes of hopeful scrambling and tossing discarded underwear, Yurio uncovered a small square-shaped box from underneath a pile of dusty sports magazines. The box itself lacked any form of imaginative decoration, but it was the message scrawled across that invoked a sense of interest.

Private - KEEP OUT!

'What could it be?' Pondered the Russian, still only half-awake, 'Perhaps it's a long and detailed list of their sexual history together - if so, is it worth risking my eyesight?,' he thought with a shudder, 'But, if I never open it, I'll never know.... screw it, I'm going in..

Slowly and carefully, Yurio lifted the box's cardboard lid and place it gently to its side. No evidence was to remain of this private investigation (since he'd never hear the end of it) so the skater monitored his every move. However, the resulting contents weren't anything he would've ever anticipated.

The box was not particularly wide - no more than 30cm across - nor was it tall at approximately 3 inches deep, but despite its lacklustre appearance its contents were wholly peculiar. Inside lay a notebook, tape measure, unlabelled tablets and-

'Calipers?' thought Yurio, 'what the hell would they want calipers for?'

He gingerly lay the calipers aside, following suit with the tape measure (which was discovered in numerous indecipherable pen markings) and examining the film of the tablet casing for any external information on their source and/or intended use. Yurio felt a little guilty for prying into the hidden depths of his rink-mates' private belongings, but the mystery of the box was far too compelling to stop.

Yurio finally opened the small notebook that leant across the side of the box. Whilst the pages were covered in writing, strokes and scrawls of a rather frantic penmanship, these strokes failed to form coherent sentences, and the skater doubted whether the writer'd written actual letters, or if his hand had suffered ongoing spasms and produced this mess of a text.

Confused, he turned to the next couple of pages. Whilst no obvious text was to be found, Yurio could indeed read the substantial amount of numbers and their corresponding units all lined up in an ordinary fashion that sprawled over and onto the other side.

62kg/20.7
It was after reviewing the units that Yurio understood into the meaning of the otherwise meaningless list of numbers. Whilst he didn't completely understand the situation, he imagined he could gauge (with relative accuracy) what was happening here. An unnamed individual, who presumably wasn't Viktor (on account of his self-proclaimed love for pastila, was actively trying to lose weight, supposedly intending to achieve a rather unhealthy BMI.

As he searched for external clues that may have lay under the notebook, Yurio uncovered an old photo of Yuuri, topless, slugging a beer with an enthusiastic Phichit cheering at his side. A noticeable muffin-top spilled over the waistband of his boxer shorts and rolls of back fat toppled formlessly over the side, drenched in sweat from the rather sizeable breasts that hung from above. Yuuri was clearly over 100kgs when this photo was taken, with a large 34.1 written across in condemning red ink and arrows pointing to the mounts of fat, accompanied by a series of angry face sketches. Suddenly, Yurio regretted ever calling Yuuri 'piggy'.

Almost immediately afterwards there was a solid knock on the apartment door. "Yuri, it's your grandfather!"

Semi-startled, Yurio hurriedly bundled the emptied contents back into the box and shoved it deep underneath the pile of magazines. He felt conflicted as to whether he should inform Viktor of his recent discovery, but at the last minute decided against it. The skater remembered the complexity of the issue at hand, and how Viktor's blunt (and frankly, rather naive) personality would prevent him from being able to understand the difficulty of Yuuri's situation. He simply hoped it was all just a minor part of the Japanese skater's previous diet, and that he'd refrain from pushing the limits any further in future.

Yurio sprinted out of the bedroom and into the living room, where a rather sore Viktor was huddled on the sofa after spending the night on the cold, hard floor.

"Good sleep?" he asked, delicately blowing his nose with a nearby handkerchief.

"Um - yeah, it was great," mumbled a slightly preoccupied Yurio, hastily closing the latches on his overnight bag.

"Your grandfather told me he went to start the car, so you'd best not be too long!"

"Mmmhmm.."

Yurio stopped and stood still for a moment, considering his next move, before softly speaking from the living room doorway:

"Hey, um... Viktor? Keep an eye on Yuuri, he's uh, I um, I think he had a cold earlier or something... just make sure he eats well, okay?"

"Funny you should say that," chuckled Viktor, "Phichit just called from Bangkok to ask me the exact same thing."

"Oh - we must've both noticed." the skater said as he left, closing the door behind him.

'Oh Viktor, if only you knew....'
Double Down

{A.N. ~ I'm gonna be honest, this is absolute drivel... I'm so sorry for this chapter, but please hang on - the next few are gonna have some major drama, and I'll try my hardest to make them extra interesting. In the meantime, thank you for all your comments! It's nice to know you guys care, and respect the person behind the story :) please continue to kudos and comment; I love interacting with you and knowing what you think of the fanfic so far! But yeah, apologies for this chapter, but I've been averaging 4 hours of sleep a night this past week and things are a little hectic ^w^ xxxx}

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Clutching his beanie as he sped through the airport gateway, Yuuri dashed into the arrivals lounge, embracing the comforting familiarity of Viktor's face following the pain of their time spent apart.

The blue-eyed beauty soon clocked the arrival of his long-awaited fiancé and stretched his arms in anticipation of the hug that came after, relieved they were united once again. Almost instinctively, Yuuri fell asleep on the softness of Viktor's felted coat as the taxi drifted through the streets of St Petersburg. Viktor appreciated this gesture, as he knew it meant the Japanese skater felt comfortable in his surroundings. Additionally, he also appreciated the creamy, velvety taste of Hiroko's homemade mochi, a souvenir Yuuri'd brought back from Japan, which were quick to calm his voracious appetite.

His inky-haired fiancé was looking noticeably pallid, as if all colour had drained his face without so much as a speck to fill out the darkened bags beneath his eyes. Viktor simply assumed he'd remained fatigued from the competition and the flight back to Russia, but made a mental note to monitor Yuuri's colour over the course of the next few days. If he'd caught something whilst staying in Japan, it'd likely become much harder for the two of them to train. In reality, there was no such thing as 'being ill' during skating season.

Viktor didn't have the heart to wake his sleeping beauty, and so carried his fiancé as he lumbered up the stairs from the elevator to their apartment. Whilst Yuuri gradually rose from his slumber, his nostrils twitched at the scent of freshly-prepared Katsudon, its smell instantly recognisable. Upon noticing that the Russian skater's cooking lacked the use of diet rice packets, the younger boy feigned stomach cramps and soon drifted back off to sleep by the flickering light of their living room candles.

The following day and things were business as usual. The couple frequented their local rink as they resumed their rigorous training schedules and Yakov was as eager as ever to berate them for their playful on-ice shenanigans. Oddly enough, Yurio had remained abnormally muted whilst the three of them were at practice, only occasionally making snide remarks, but even then their nature was unusually mellow. This unorthodox behaviour hasn't gone unnoticed - after observing the young skater for an substantial amount of time, Yuuri could tell there was something not quite right with the young auricomous.

Engulfed in the warm wrap of Viktor's jacket, Yuuri shivered his way across the changing room and casually plonked himself down aside Yurio, who was currently engaged in a battle with his laces - and losing hopelessly. Initially the Russian ignored him, continuing to fumble with his skate whilst pretending to text Otabek about a new breed of cat he'd recently discovered, but eventually admitted defeat and turned to face the concerned older skater.

"Yes...?" he said in a tone that, whilst not yet aggravated, was certainly very tired.
Yuuri twiddled his thumbs and looked at the ground, a little anxious now, "Sorry, it's just - you've been so quiet today, suspiciously quiet... is there anything wrong?"

His concerned expression only made Yurio feel worse. Truthfully, the skater had been debating whether to confront Yuuri on the issue regarding his diet and weight loss, yet he recognised it was likely a touchy subject and thus so far had refrained from attempting to discuss it. The Japanese skater appeared undoubtedly thinner than when he'd left for Japan, and Yurio knew his concern would only grow if the weight loss was to continue. Finally, he summoned the courage to approach the subject - best case scenario, it was all just a temporary diet, and there'd be nothing to worry about anyway.

"Look, Yuuri..." the Russian began, "are you feeling okay? Like, not just today, but in general?"

Before the older skated could reply, Viktor chimed in from the showers opposite; "be careful, Yurio, Yuuri's got a bad case of the sniffles, and he's contagious!" before striding out out of the building on the trio's daily coffee run. Well, Viktor drank coffee - Yuuri opted for his usual green tea, and Yurio a cup of cocoa.

A dubious Yurio turned back to face his older counterpart, "do you actually have a cold?"

"Yeah, I guess my asthma's pretty bad around this time of year - it's probably the pollen..." Yuuri smiled, twiddling with the collar on Viktor's jacket. It smelt of cinnamon and musk, one of his preferred fragrances, and inhaling his fiancé's scent was surprisingly calming after tensions usually ran high during practice.

"Ugh - no, damn i- I meant are you feeling okay in general?"

"I'm fine, Yurio - is there something wrong? You know you can always talk to me if you're worried about something..."

'Perhaps he's being genuine,' thought Yurio, examining the Japanese boy's appearance in the least conspicuous way possible, 'for all I know, that box could be from when Viktor arrived in Hasetsu, or years ago when he was in college... I suppose I'll have to actually ask before the idiot gives me a clear answer.'

Whilst Yuuri continued to scroll through his phone as the two of them sat on the bench, the Russian further inspected him for any noticeable signs of illness. His multiple layers of woollen jumpers were hardly beneficial to the investigation; all that was properly visible was Yuuri's neck and head, which weren't particularly clear indicators of anything- sure, he was a little grey, but Yurio noted the colour was mostly similar to his typical anxious glow anyway. He supposed from the width of the older skater's neck that he'd definitely lost some weight, as he'd become rather lollipop-like in appearance, but the amount lost was difficult to quantify. Additionally, he was still unable to confirm whether or not Yuuri was still losing, and was hardly enthusiastic to jump to conclusions.

"I'm alright..." he continued, "it's you I wonder about..."

"Huh?" replied Yuuri, chuckling slightly, "Nothing's wrong."

"-whatever, Katsudon. Look, it's just, just lately you've been looking kind of ill, and you're always shivering."

"Again," the Japanese boy reiterated, still smiling uncomfortably, "there's no reason to worry about
anything, I'm absolutely fine. I appreciate you care, but it's just hayfever - I promise - hayfever and the faulty lungs that are unable to deal with it." He gave himself a derogatory pat on the chest.

Yurio sensed he was making little progress, and decided to terminate the conversation before any further awkwardness could ensue. "Just, look after yourself, okay?" he said with a half-smile, "I know you're kinda dumb, and probably won't want to call me, but I'll still be here if needed," before he'd left the building, Viktor entered with their various beverages. Yurio swiping his cocoa from the tray, grabbing a pair of designer sunglasses as he passed through the main exit of the rink's reception.

"What was that about?" asked Viktor, a quizzical look spread across his face.

"Beats me - did you manage to get the tea I like?"

"Here and accounted for," he replied, bowing humourously as he handed his fiancé the scorching green tea, encased by a polystyrene cup and holder. The material felt scratchy and artificial against Yuuri's slender fingers, but he was grateful for the general nature of the gesture.

Viktor watched intently as Yuuri took small, paces sips from the cup, his arm around his shoulders in an attempt to blanket the ongoing shivers.

"Maybe you should see a doctor, lyubov moya, it's unnatural to be so cold all the time, especially when it's the beginning of June."

"And it's unnatural for everyone to be so worried all the time," Yuuri smiled, running his hands through the soft silver grass on Viktor's head, "if you want to warm me up, why don't we go home and cook something to eat?"

"Ha, like what, another one of your boring salads?" he replied, mimicking sad pieces of lettuce with his fingertips.

"Actually, I was think of something more satiating... perhaps something like... Katsudon?"

The sultry, suggestive look in Yuuri's eyes (whilst somewhat manipulative) was enough to convince Viktor to return to the apartment. The Japanese boy was excited to prepare his favourite dish once again, enticed by its array of irresistible flavours and decadent textures. As always, he'd planned his daily calorie intake in advance, so had already prepared packets of diet rice and noodles should the situation arise.

"You know..." said Viktor, tying his leather like a chef at a master charcuterie, "how come we always eat separate rice or noodles? Is their some masterful flavour my fiancé is hiding from me?"

Viktor gave Yuuri a playful poke in the stomach, the younger skater clenching his fists as he felt his intensities ricocheting against the side of his abdomen. He laughed, steam brimming in his glasses from the heat of their active kitchen.

Smiling fondly, Yuuri swirled a batch of noodles and presented them in front of Viktor's lips, a subtle smirk twitching at the sides of his mouth, "Why don't you try some, and see for yourself?"

"Okay, I will.." Viktor smiled back, somewhat intrigued at the smarmy grin on his fiancé's face.

He took a rebellious slurp from the batch of Yuuri's low-calorie noodles, chewing them with suspicion before his face screwed up like a can crumpling in the hot summer's sun. The strands felt like slippery plastic strings on the surface of his tongue, their rubbery konjac consistency
extremely unpleasant. Viktor immediately spat out the noodles and ran his mouth under a spurt of refreshing tap water - anything to remove the taste.

"What WAS that?"

"Oh, you don't like them?" replied Yuuri, mustering a sense of sincerity after Viktor's expected reaction.

"Eugh no," chuckled Viktor, "how could you eat that stuff?"

"I used to eat them all the time in college, they were cheap; I guess I like the taste.." the younger skater lied, returning the remaining noodles to the security of the bubbling pan. Konjac noodles were, if anything, horrifically expensive. However, Yuuri considered them an essential, and was willing to pay the price for his low-calorie deity.

Before seating himself at the kitchen table, Yuuri quickly swallowed his dinner-time tablet and slid onto a chair opposite his onlooking fiancé.

"Another indigestion tablet? I swear you have one every meal.. you sure you're not coming down with something?"

"Relaaaax," said Yuuri as he tucked into his steaming dish, fiddling with the candle betwixt them, "it's probably all the dairy I've been eating just lately."

Viktor smiled, and the two skaters continued enjoying their meal. The kitchen was festooned with fairy lights that glimmered against the windows' twilight backdrop, their soft beams reflecting on the hazel tones of Yuuri's eyes. Reaching his hand across the table, Viktor began to caress the side of his fiancé's cheek, stroking it admiringly.

Yuuri giggled and fidgeted away,
"Viktor, wait, I'm ticklish-"

"Sorry lapochka," the Russian whispered gently, "but you looked so soft, so sweet - besides," he said with a laugh, "I didn't think you'd notice, what with your head neck-deep in that bowl."

He smiled and pulled Yuuri into a hug that spanned across the surface of the sturdy wooden table. The Japanese skater was grateful that this particular piece of furniture had not yet collapsed under the strain of his body weight, but couldn't help but notice the Viktor's teasing comment on his eating habits. After rolling out from under the security of his fiancé's arms, Yuuri stood up and headed for the sink, taking his bowl with him. He then walked into the living room, grasping the television remote, before plonking himself down on the sofa nearest to him.

"You've only eaten half of you dinner, Yuuri, don't you want to finish it?" asked Viktor, curious at this sudden avoidance of his partner's favourite dish.

"Nah, I'm full - I think I ate it all too quickly."

The Russian chuckled, rising from his hardy wooden seat and falling next to Yuuri's shadow, "Wow, you must really be ill - I've never seen you leave a bowl of Katsudon like that."

"Well, as I was saying to Yurio, my hay-fever's being acting up pretty badly just lately. Maybe it's interfering with my appetite."

Surprisingly enough, Viktor believed Yuuri's pitiful excuse for refusing to finish his meal, and the couple spent the remainder of the night slumped over the sofa whilst watching trashy TV shows - a
combination of Viktor's post-dinner sleepiness and Yuuri's utter languor.

The Japanese skater spent the next few days pondering just how much he was able to get away with in relation to food and his desperate desire to avoid it. Over the past month he'd reduced his intake from 1000 calories to 900 after realising the rate of his weight loss had begun to decline considerably, but for now it was a seemingly sufficient amount. Sure, the constant looming feeling of exhaustion wasn't particularly pleasant, but it hadn't increased since adapting to his new intake, so Yuuri had at least one thing to be positive about. Additionally, due to his apparent 'hayfever', the skater practically had a free pass to only eat half of his dinner each night, allowing his 'leftover' calories to be filled with carb-less, fat-less fruits and vegetables (which was basically just cucumber, and a truckload of it).

It was Friday night, and Yuuri was enjoying the end of a day's fast, as Viktor was out late at practise and thus couldn't keep an eye on his eating habits. He didn't fast often, but on the miraculous occasions that it was made possible, Yuuri felt marvellous. Emptiness made him feel so perfectly light and free, like he was walking on air through the night's sky. Furthermore, it also made the task of weigh-ins slightly less stressful, as the absence of food in the skater's stomach provided a reading of increased accuracy.

After such a successful week of dieting, Yuuri was anticipating a positive result as he stepped into the welcoming grooves on the scale. For the past few weeks his progress had been somewhat fluctuating, nearly reaching the forbidden risk of plateauing, and Yuuri was looking forward to pushing on with his weight-loss journey. He considered his goal to be a rather grey area, instead substituting his original intent with the policy that he'd put a stop to his dieting endeavours once he was finally 'skinny enough'. The thing quantifying as 'skinny enough' was something that Yuuri was still rather unsure of, but reassured himself that he'd instinctively know when he saw it.

As of yet Yuuri hadn't experienced neither a gain or plateau, and he certainly wasn't expecting it. He was a good (admittedly somewhat obsessed) little dieter: he popped all the correct pills, avoided all the worst foods and always ensured he ran for at least an hour every day before sunrise. He definitely deserved at least a kilo's loss a week.

'Perhaps if I've lost more, I can reward myself with a full bowl of Katsudon tomorrow' thought Yuuri, "even if it is a little indulgent, I'm sure I can make an excepti- oh, shit.... shit, shit, shit....'

It seemed a plateau had been reached.

Yuuri'd remained at a weight of 45kg for two weeks straight, his BMI an immovable 15.0.

'This can't be possible - I've been restricting... working out.... this can't be po-'

As flashbacks of his previous obese self played before his eyes, Yuuri scrambled into the bedroom and practically ripped the lid off of his secret motivational weight-loss box.

'Has somebody moved this?' he questioned, noticing the contents' disorderly arrangement, '- no, I took measures into making sure nobody would ever find it..

Yuuri shrugged it off, assuming Makkachin had accidentally knocked the box in an avid search for hidden dog treats, and gazed upon the photograph inside. Eyes watering at his utterly repulsive past self, he began to subconsciously grope at his flesh as his finger trailed its smooth film surface.

'I'm can't go back, I am NEVER going back...'

Banishing that version of himself to the confines of his memory, Yuuri grabbed a lighter and
marvelled at the marigold flame as it burned through the creases of the paper, wishing that his fat would one day do the same.

Filled with determination, the skater ran to his box of diet pills, chugging a whopping five in one go. Sure, the recommended dosage was one tablet per meal, but fuck it - Yuuri was feeling extra. It's not as if the pills would kill him; they'd give his digestive system a kick, that's all. Yet immediately after he knew something wasn't right. Without a second thought, Yuuri dashed into the bathroom and leapt over the cold, tiled floor onto the tip of the toilet seat, draining himself at mach speed.

'I'll weigh myself tomorrow morning;' he thought, grasping the edge of the seat, 'hopefully all this will cleared me out a little..'

As he gagged at the foul stench of self-induced defecation, Yuuri then flushed the toilet and calmly returned to the bedroom so as not to alarm Makkachin, who was sleeping peacefully on top of the bed, before collapsing beside him and burying his head in a nearby pillow. The initial goal was suffocation, but Yuuri decided he wasn't in the mood for melodrama. With his face flattened against it, he assured himself this plateau wouldn't change anything, he'd just have to work a little harder to achieve his goal - even if it meant sacrificing his bowels in order to do so.

However, even Yuuri was aware that five pills per meal wasn't a sustainable option (nor one he could currently afford). His hands still trembling timorously, the Japanese boy lifted the notepad from within his secret box and began to draw out rough sketches of a table dictating the times of day he'd take the pills, and how many he'd take at a time. Yuuri eventually gave up after a few redraws, concluding there was little point in extending the session considering the rules never changed: two pills per meal, every meal, every day - doubling down on his current dosage.

'It's in no way perfect, but this should get me back on track.'

Yuuri had confidence in this newly-developed strategy. Nonetheless, the comfort was minimal as intrusive thoughts plagued his mind. As he lost weight, the skater grew increasingly further from gaining it back. A plateau was dangerously close to the line of acceptable progress, veering into the risky territory of maintenance, and in extremely unfortunate circumstances possible weight gain.

*click*

It was the front door.

'Oh shit,' thought Yuuri, 'Viktor's home early again.'

With the thought of being discovered practically unbearable, he threw himself from the middle of the bed and onto the floor, Makkachin squeaking in protest. Whatever happened, he had to hide the box before his fiancé entered the room, or else his hopes of keeping this a secret would be out of the window. Yuuri sped across the carpet, thrusting out his hand on the box's lid as the door creaked open, a stern-faced figure glaring down at the boy who lay in close proximity to his pills and the box used to contain them.

"Yurio?"
Tunnelling

{A.N. ~ Heeeeeeeeeey guys - I finished the next chapter within a two week timespan, are you proud of me? :) jk, it's, ugh, full of *questionable content*. Things get super weird and highly graphic, and you might question my mental wellbeing, but it's all worth it! Fun fact: Everything that happens inside of the supermarket (definitely not after) is based on a true story!!! Have fun!! I suggest you put sad/angsty music on in the background to create a real ambience :).

Also, fun fact about the author (it's not much lol I'm super boring, but I'm from the UK! So sorry if I reference things that people from here might not know/if I used £ as currency, it's a force of habit! Anyway, all I can say I sorry for this chapter..}

------------------------------------------------------
CHAPTER TRIGGER WARNING: VIOLENCE, SEXUAL ASSAULT
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"Katsudon?" said Yurio, gazing in disappointment at the Japanese boy opposite, his typical moodiness now overcome by a somewhat melancholy tone.

"Oh, h-hey Yurio..." he stammered, immediately shoving the small brown box behind his back, "what are you doing here?"

The Russian quickly glanced at a nearby pillow, soaked with tears, but decided to momentarily ignore it,

"Viktor asked if Yakov could drop his jacket off, but I offered instead, so he gave me the key to let myself in - I, er, need to talk to you about something..."

Perplexed as to the meaning of Yurio's pitying smile, Yuuri shrugged his shoulders and gestured at the floor for the younger skater to sit down beside him. As Makkachin began to stir in his sleep, he lowered his voice to a whisper and crossed his legs to make room for the approaching Russian boy.

"Are you doing okay, Yurio?" asked Yuuri, discreetly sliding the box back into place under the bed, "You've seemed a little disturbed these past couple of days... what's worrying you?"

'He should be pretty naive,' thought Yuuri,

'I assume he doesn't know about my diet; I've kept it reasonably well-hidden - regarding my physical appearance, anyway. If anything, he's probably worried about his progress during practice, or Otabek's whereabouts, and hopefully not me-

'How naive does he think I am?' thought Yurio, observing the Japanese skater's tired eyes as he fumbled with a row of undone buttons on his collar, 'I've tried being subtle, but it doesn't take an idiot to know that something's up with him. Jesus Christ, I've asked him multiple times about this - why won't he give me a decent answer?"

This couldn't continue any further; Yurio decided to bite the bullet and confront the Japanese skater on his suspicious behaviour,

"Yuuri... I know about your diet, I know you're losing weight, I've seen your b-"

"What?!" said Yuuri, eyes widening in alarm.
'I knew it,' thought Yurio, 'he's definitely not stopped.'

"Please, let me finish.." the Russian replied, "I've seen your box, and I saw you shove it under the bed just now. I don't know what's going on, but don't think that I haven't noticed anything. You're gonna get ill if you continue to live like this, and I l-"

Yurio stopped in his tracks as soon as he picked up the sound of Yuuri's shallow, rapid breathing, regretting this sudden interrogation. The Japanese boy's face was lit with distress. His right eye began to twitch ferociously and his upper lip jolted up and down in fearful expression.

"Yuuri, Jesus, calm down - I'm not yelling at you, I'm just letting you know that I'm aware of what you're doing, and that if you don't stop it soon, I'll have to tell Viktor."

Yuuri's raspy breaths immediately slowed, deepening as his head turned to face the younger Russian boy.

"You know absolutely nothing about this - about me," he said through gritted teeth, fists balled at his sides, "you are just a stupid, immature teenager who doesn't understand, and who is incapable of understanding, the complexity of this situation. It's none of your business to go poking around in other people's lives, regardless of their current health - it's just not. Just go away."

As much as he regretted this rather unorthodox behaviour, Yuuri knew it would benefit him in the long run. If he scared Yurio off, then it'd be likely he wouldn't approach the subject again, leaving him free to his blissful world of starvation and continual spiral of weight loss. For him, this was the only way forward.

"What the fuck I'd do? I'm just trying to help..." sighed Yurio, "and those pills, how many have you taken?"

"In the last few days? Two at a time."

"And the most you've ever taken at a time?."

"Five, and-" the Japanese boy shook his head, "this isn't important... and you need to go."

'Why doesn't he want my help? Surely he hates the feeling of what he's going through?' Yurio's mind puzzled.

'Why does he care so much?' Thought Yuuri, 'He doesn't understand what I'm going through.'

'I don't want to go, not until you promise me you'll try to get help for this."

"What do you know?" Yuuri grumbled, his voice almost as loud as his stomach, "You're perfection. Waif-thin, gliding as you walk; it's as if your feet never touch the ground. You'll never understand what it's like to yearn for such a state of being."

"Do you not ever think perhaps I hate being this thin? That I'm known as the 'fragile one'? I was born this way, and sure, maybe you were born chunky, but you should be glad with the body you were given!"

Yurio clasped his hands over his mouth, suddenly regretting the words he'd just said.

"Look, when I said chunky, I meant... well, what I meant was-"

"No, you're right." Yuuri snapped, "I'm chunky. Curvy. Squishy. Anything synonymous for obese,
really..

"You seriously believe that? Don't say it..."

"WHY?" yelled Yuuri, who was hardly ever one to ever raise his voice, and after this was somewhat taken aback by this sudden outburst. Still, Yurio had encroached on a part of his emotional territory, and the Japanese skater wasn't letting any of his walls down.

"YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT'S GOING ON, NOBODY DOES. VIKTOR DOESN'T, MILA DOESN'T, AND NEITHER DOES YAKOV OR MY FAMILY. AND IT'S GOING TO STAY THAT WAY, OKAY? SO WHY DON'T YOU JUST GO HOME TO YOUR GRANDPA, OR WHATEVER, AND LEAVE ME ALONE. I'M NOT ANOREXIC, I'M JUST FAT, AND I DON'T NEED YOUR HELP OR ANYONE ELSE'S!"

From the corner of the room, a slight knocking could be heard coming from the other side of the thin wooden door,

"Yura, is everything okay in there?" said a deep, husky voice, opening the door and walking in at what was quite possibly the worst moment to do so.

Yurio glanced up at the broad Kazakh, smiling faintly next to his raven-haired companion.

"Otabek," the younger boy said gently, "I thought I told you to wait outside!"

"You did," he replied, "but it sounded as if someone might die in here, so I felt it wise to step in."

"I'm sorry," continued Yuuri, "but what the actual fuck is going on?"

The couple turned back to face the fuming Japanese boy, who was currently resisting the urge to scream at them, and reluctantly pursed his lips as smoothed out the knots in his hair.

"I'm sorry. I'll see you two on Monday at the rink."

"Yuuri-" said Yurio, with disappointed eyes, "you know, we're not attacking you here, we're just concerned, okay?"

Otabek nodded his head in agreement as the flaxen teenager rose to his feet. He gave Yuuri a reassuring nod before closing the door behind them, then closing the front door with a gentle click.

All alone and brimming with a concoction of anger and frustration, Yuuri hoisted himself from the floor and gathered the motivation to make a pot of tea. The familiar swirl of emerald green and wispy white foam was comforting, calming his rapid heartbeat as he sipped the sweetened froth that lay on top.

Whilst he was grateful that Yurio had finally ceased all interrogation, the Japanese boy couldn't help but wonder what would've been done had he admitted the extent of which he'd been losing this weight. Sure, it was one of the major things giving him purpose in his current state of mind, but at the same time it was also a rather lonely experience. With the exception of his online anorexic friend, there was nobody for him to vent his experiences to. Whilst it was a secure lifestyle, at times Yuuri did feel incredibly lonely. Bored and sitting alone in the apartment, the skater drew his phone from a back pocket and opened up a recent message from Alice.

----

XxxstarvingprincessxxX: Hay, i havent talk 2 u in a few days, u okay,
H1story_mxker: I know, I'm sorry - life's pretty pretty hectic at the moment, haha.
-  
XxxstarvingprincessxX: oh lol. i ass yume ur diet has been goin fine?
-  
H1story_mxker: Well, I'm trying hard, and even though I hit a plateau, I'm determined to come through :)
-  
XxxstarvingprincessxX: Plateau? thatis kinda dissappointin 4 sum1 with such a hi wait..
-  
H1story_mxker: I know, and I regret not making more progress, but I've just had an argument with a friend, so I guess I've got other things to worry about...
-  
XxxstarvingprincessxX: why
-  
H1story_mxker: Supposedly he's worried that I'm losing weight unhealthily, but he'll never understand, he's so skinny and perfect. He has the body of an anorexic and it's beautiful.
-  
XxxstarvingprincessxX: U'll have to work like that if u want same body
-  
H1story_mxker: I know, I know - it's just taking so long..
-  
XxxstarvingprincessxX: trust me, one day ull get there. ur 2 fat 2 be anorexic rn, but if u try ana will find u
-  
H1story_mxker: You think so?
-  
XxxstarvingprincessxX: I no so.
-  

With little hope ticking in his soul, Yuuri stirred the tea leaves at the bottom of the cup, hoping for a prosperous fortune. He then remembered what he'd said to Yurio, his face falling once again as the recurring feeling of guilt swept across his body. In order to distract from this unpleasant mood, the Japanese skater decided he would visit Viktor at the ice rink a couple of blocks away, cash in hand for a coffee afterwards and perhaps a walk by the river.

Dusk was falling fast as the sun darted behind the horizon, the moon creeping up into the twinkling night sky. It was a clear night, the air caught in a pleasant summer breeze, but Yuuri still felt the need to wear his overcoat. For whatever the reason, to him the months seemed to be getting colder. He partially blamed global warming and the wealthy capitalist overlords in control of the country's energy sources, but in reality was mainly annoyed that he kept having to carrying hand warmers in his pocket on a daily basis.

Yuuri was already planning his apology for an encounter with Yurio the following morning. He supposed the Russian wouldn't be overly appreciative of flowers and chocolate as Viktor usually was, nor did a hug seem very appropriate, so in an unusual approach to typical social situations he concluded that perhaps playing it by ear would be the best method of apology.

Suddenly, the Japanese skater's stomach began to growl and his buttocks clench in protest of his upset digestive system. Yuuri recalled the excessive amount of pills taken earlier and turned a little green, wondering if they might affect his journey, but soldiered on regardless.

'It's not like they're gonna do any harm,' he thought, fingers tapping to the beat of his earphones, 'if anything, they should just make digestion a little quicker.'
And so, it seemed, they did. Yuuri could practically feel his intestines shake in protest of the damaging medicine, angered at its presence when there were no calories present to cut. He clutched his stomach as he sped through the city streets, grumbling at the odd wrong turn and his forever lack of knowledge on Russian directions.

Pretty soon, Yuuri finally reached the local supermarket. This was his favourite shop as he was familiar with the owner, who often gave him discounts on diet foods such as rice and tea, as she'd said he was a 'sweet boy' who deserved to achieve his goals. Yuuri thought that perhaps if she knew his goal was to deprive himself of all food and nutrients her opinion would somewhat differ, but as usual kept his mouth shut and smiled at the gentle old dear on his way in.

The supermarket wasn't very large, neither was it particularly impressive. The floors were 'decorated' in tinted linoleum covering, the plastic shelves grey and unexciting. Occasionally, Yuuri would find himself bumping into Yurio's grandfather, who always seemed to have a keen eye on the body of the shopkeeper, but generally he smiled and went about his business. Today was no different; the Japanese skater grinned convincingly towards the towering Russian in the same way he always did, just this time he was trying not to let liquid shit pour out from his arsehole.

Yuuri was feeling a little desperate; it appeared visiting the supermarket at a time like this was probably not a good idea. He could physically feel the disruption wrecking a tempestuous storm in the middle of his lower abdomen, accepting the possibility of a rupture if he continued to hold it in as he was currently doing. Fortunately, the stacks of green tea were reasonably near to the store's entrance - if they hadn't been, it was likely he'd have give up altogether. However, despite his urge to erupt all over the plasticky flooring, Yuuri held it in. He'd come this far, and shortly after he could always use the toilet at the rink.

Grabbing the box of tea from its place on the highest shelf, Yuuri made a beeline for the checkout. Navigating through the maze of endless aisles somewhat slowed the process, but the skater was making progress and was nearly at the till when an annoyingly anticipated obstacle stopped him in his tracks.

The Japanese boy stood like a statue, slowly retreating to the back end of the store as he felt a stodgy brown liquid drop down the side of his left leg, then shortly after the right and an array of areas in between.

'Shit,' he thought, removing his coat and wrapping it around his waist in an attempt to disguise his lower half's current state, 'haha, shit, literal shit - shit's crawling down my leg. Fuck. What do I do? Shit's literally gliding in freefall down my leg.'

In an effort not to look conspicuous, Yuuri simply placed the box of tea amidst a pile of tampon packets (they were both green, so he was halfway there) and tried his upmost hardest not to allow another drop of soggy brown to leave his lower midsection. Such actions were futile, his attempts in vain, and with every clenching movement his stomach was having fits, shocks of pain knocking against the wall of the skater's abdomen. Yuuri supposed this was what it might be like to be a pregnant women, likening these shocks as somewhat similar to contractions. Of course, the skater lacked a cervix, but assumed his currently inflamed anal cavity was a reasonable substitute.

Gingerly, Yuuri began to take cautious steps toward the exit of the supermarket. He smiled again at the shopkeeper and Yurio's grandfather, praying they weren't aware of his diabolical stench, before slowly tip-toeing through the last few aisles and out into the busy street. It didn't make him feel any better, but Yuuri hoped that here the smell would at least be a little less concentrated.

The skater certainly didn't want to visit Viktor in his current state. Sure, they were close, and not exempt from the hilariously gross occasions couples often share together, but Yuuri felt this
situation was a little too extreme. Besides, he could barely walk. His debilitating stomach ache was only increasing in severity, and it was already going to be a long and tedious shuffle home without the task of collecting his fiancé.

As he turned down a side road, rain began to pitter-patter and bounce off of the concrete pavement, swirling into the oil at the side of the road like an opalescent blanket of sheen. If it hadn't've been for his current state, Yuuri'd like have appreciated the scenery, but currently time called for no distractions.

Rather oddly, the streets seemed to be getting increasingly dark. Townhouses and back alleyways projected their shadows into areas of light, their tenebrosity leaking out and into the depths of Yuuri's pupils. Amidst the chaos of his previous few moments, the skater had unsurprisingly taken a wrong turn, and was now facing the consequences of his misjudgment. In no way was Yuuri a snob, but there were some parts of the local neighbourhood he instinctively knew never to visit without Viktor's protection at his side.

Aware of the risk of his location, the Japanese boy's easy-going shuffle transformed into a slightly energetic walk. He wasn't in the state to run, and his lack of food that day pushed dizziness closer and closer to his head. Yuuri'd almost reached the end of the road and was almost guaranteed safety - that is, until he was ambushed by a gang of leather-clad Russians.

Yuuri stopped in his tracks, fearful eyes locked onto the trio stood in front of him. A tall, spindly figure stepped out from the formation, drawing closer as the skater was rooted in fear. Her smile was crooked and her skin a mauve tinge, but something about her captivated Yuuri's attention - although he couldn't quite put his finger on it.

The woman, who Yuuri assumed was the leader, looked him up and down, stroking the ends of his sleeves with sharp, boney fingers and inspecting the lining of his jacket. From the corner of her eye she spotted what looked like a wallet, fat with cash, tucked into his trouser back pocket. Yuuri'd never fully understood the way Russia's currency worked, and thus simply grabbed a handful of cash for whenever a transaction was necessary; he currently had about 25,000 Rubles (£322) on his person.

"Дайте мне свой кошелек."

Due to the terror of his current situation, Yuuri didn't understand a word she was saying. He replied to the request in stuttered Japanese, seemingly incapable of remembering the little Russian he knew in the heat of the moment.

"Wallet." The woman demanded as she pulled curled strands of marigold from her face, her accent thick and raspy. As she stated the skater down, her comrades darted behind and locked his arms, pushing them into his back.

Yuuri was somewhat reluctant to relinquish his cash to the likes of a raggedy street gang. With tired muscles, he struggled in an effort to make a feasible getaway, but such actions were met with the blade of a Korsar knife, sharp and glistening daintily in the moonlight, droplets of rain crowding on the tip of its metal edge. He was left with no choice but to give up the goods. With a gulp, his eyes gestured to the pocket full of cash, and before he could close his eyes it was gone, the masked thieves running in the opposite direction.

That is, with the exception of their leader. With her associates gone, Yuuri had planned to make a run for it, but terror clung to his legs like vines and the most he could manage was an ungainly canter. The woman laughed, taking long strides towards the skater as he attempted to flee, catching up and pinning him against the wall of a nearby stone building.
Suddenly, Yuuri remembered a speck of Russian the other Yuri had fired at him on many occasions, "Уходи!" (Go away!)

The woman glared at him, a little unsure of what he was playing at, then proceeded to further defile him by unbuttoning his trousers, finally removing he underwear. Recognising that yelling did nothing, Yuuri made an attempt to fight back, but she was too strong. Although she was extremely svelte, the little weight the woman had was mainly muscle and her 5'11" frame towered over Yuuri's. The Japanese boy clenched his fists and thrashed his head at her, biting his lip in the process and managing to bleed profusely onto his t-shirt.

However, she seemed to take no notice, and dodged his ill-aimed attacks. She slinked towards him - initially Yuuri didn't understand what was going on, and when he finally did, he wished he'd never tried. The skater, of course, felt no pleasure whatsoever from this interaction. He was surrendered, sweaty, and very, very afraid.

With a sharp push from the woman opposite, Yuuri slid down on the ground, his neck clicking in protest as he did so. Striking him with a supposedly seductive wink, she threw down her skirt and fell to her knees, bent over and poised to pounce. The skater shut his eyes as she slid over him, a delicate part of himself now enveloped in the her wiry body. Whilst she sped things up, so did Yuuri's breathing; he was having a panic attack.

With his ribs tightly bound by the woman's mighty fists, he could feel his trapped lungs begging for a flood of oxygen. Soon enough, his surroundings were spinning with a familiarity that only heightened the severity of Yuuri's situation. He twitched as his eyes sharply rolled back into his head, his blurred vision darkening until everything was dark.

Half an hour later, Yuuri woke up in a secluded alleyway a couple of blocks from the apartment. Engulfed in putrid sweat, bodily fluids, and his own blood and faeces, he wandered into the street, collapsing in a nearby puddle as rain showered overhead. It was only now that his head had begun to recollect the memory of what had happened in the previous couple of hours, and with that Yuuri soon bolted upright. Now alert and semi-clean, he gathered the energy to raise himself from the ground and made a break for the apartment. He could recognise its jutting figure in the silhouette of the city's skyline, running as fast as he could towards the prospect of security.

'What am I going to do?' he thought, wiping away tears from his scratched cheekbones, 'My wallet's been stolen, and I've just been taken advantage of by someone of the opposite gender... holy shit, how do I tell Viktor about this? Wait... do I even tell Viktor about this? No - no, he'd be horrified. Even if I had no control over the situation, I've basically cheated on him. Oh god... no, I don't even want to think about this. I feel disgusting... I feel..' 

Yuuri decided that he was to go home as normal, pretend everything was fine, and tell Viktor he was at a movie screening. Sure, it was rather deceitful, but given the circumstances this was the best the skater had to work with. Without telling a soul, he intended to go the police the following morning. If anything, hopefully they'd help locate his wallet. But until sunrise, there was nothing else for him to do...
Cold.
Yuuri felt so, so cold.

Not just on the surface, but in the deep, dark murky waters of his head. Hazy flashbacks to the night before replayed in his mind, his body tense as he squeezed Viktor tight under the safe haven of their crinkled bedsheets.

After running home, Yuuri’d immediately showered, before crawling into bed and his fiancé's tender embrace.

"Yuuri, where were you?" Viktor had asked, "I was worried sick, and you weren't answering your phone..."

Yuuri had mustered a casual tone so as not to cause alarm, ruffling Viktor's hair with the tips of his fingers, "I was watching a movie, so I had to turn it off - but don't worry, it was amazing - we should go sometime!"
"Also..." The Japanese skater had muttered, attempting to downplay his emotions, "I maaaaaay have accidentally lost my wallet. I know, I'm sorry! But I'll get it back tomorrow; I'll go down to the police station and see if they've picked anything up."

However, now that morning had come, Yuuri wasn't feeling quite so adventurous. Wrapped in the security of Viktor's muscular frame, he clung to the Russian's chest - he needed to touch something real, the ambiguity of his situation only increasing as the lines between his perceptions and reality continued to blur. Yuuri felt safe when he was with Viktor. It was as if when like this, he was completely protected from the terrors of the outside world.

However, a sense of guilt was simultaneously sweeping across the skater's body. He'd recently had sexual relations with a third party not included in their relationship, and yet he had the nerve to be currently snuggling with his husband-to-be, who was completely unaware of the whole situation. It just didn't seem fair. And yet, Yuuri definitely didn't want to discuss it with Viktor - he didn't want to hurt him like that.

As the early summer's sun began to rise to its place in the sky, Yuuri clambered out of bed, kissed a sleeping Viktor on the forehead, and quietly entered the bathroom, undressing before he stepped into the shower. Staring into the bathroom mirror, the skater assessed the state of his shivering naked body with despair. He'd been dieting for months now, and by now had hoped for even a smidge of visible progress, but in Yuuri's eyes he was the same flabby lump he'd always been - just with considerably less muscle mass.

'I don't understand... why would anyone want to have sex with ME?' He contemplated as the rush of freezing cold water spread itself across his face and down his back, engulfing his body from the top down as fearful sensations rose up his spine.
'Literally, who would even want to touch this?' Yuuri thought, grabbing at his stomach and quivering thighs, 'I can't afford to be unfaithful... it's not even like I'm attractive and have anything to flaunt; if Viktor left me because of this, there's no way I'd ever find anyone else. I'm surprised even he can withstand the extent of my hideousness...' 

"ARGH" the skater yelled in a desperate outburst, slamming his fist into the wall, porcelain tiles cracking and collapsing towards the ground. 

A concerned voice arose from the bedroom; 
"Yuuri, what was that noise? Are you okay?"

Naked and afraid, Yuuri clutched his bloody knuckles and ran them under the shower head above, hoping to wash away the crimson splatters from his battered fist. 

"I'm okay; I just slipped over." He replied timidly, licking the open wound. 

Ignoring his fiancé's obviously untruthful response, Viktor, aware of the pain in Yuuri's voice, ran into the bathroom, heaving the Japanese boy from the shower whilst ice cold water droplets flooded his polished skin. 

"Oh my God, Yuuri, you're bleeding - you're obviously not fine!" the Russian cried, snatching a nearby toilet roll and frantically wrapping it around his disfigured hand, "How the hell did this happen?"

"I don't know, I guess..." Yuuri stammered, eyes darting upward as they reached for an excuse, "I guess I'm just tired and confused, I got frustrated with myself and lashed out - I'm sorry." 

Viktor sighed, 
"It's okay, moya lyubov, but you look hurt..." 
He looked Yuuri up and down, hand grasping his chin as a disturbed look grew across his face, 
"It's not just your hand, either - your whole body looks pretty ill. You've gotten very skinny lately, haven't you Yu-" 

"I've been ill, y-you know that, I always try to eat, and I don't want to lose weight, I'm just I-" 

"I know, and that's what concerns me," Viktor continued, "we should take you to the clinic, see if there's any underlying condition affecting your health." 

Yuuri nodded, relieved Viktor hadn't detected any signs of intentional weight loss. 
"I'll get my coat-" 

The clinic was merely a couple of blocks away, but Viktor insisted on hailing a cab. Yuuri was partially grateful as it entailed avoiding the street of last night's eventful encounter, but was vaguely disgruntled over the lack of exercise the journey would require. 

Yuuri sat tentatively on the edge of a coarse leather seat, unscathed hand grasping at its cracked edges whilst the other lay lifeless between his thighs, covered in makeshift toilet paper bandages. Viktor placed a reassuring grasp on his bruised shoulders as he resisted the urge to wince in agony, his joints battered from being thrust against a tough stone wall by his female attacker. Occasionally his fiancé would translate the disorganised posters on the waiting room's cracked walls as a slightly less awkward method of passing the time, with Yuuri nodding back and quietly laughing from time to time at extracts of unsolicited medical advice. 

"Yuuri Katsuki?" an elderly woman read off a clipboard she held up in front of her face.
Yuuri raised his hand and shuffled across the carpet towards the consultancy room, turning back as he beckoned Viktor to accompany him. The Russian shortly stood from his chair and had begun to cross the room when he was halted by the aged nurse, who with a rigid hand soon pushed him back into his seat.

"Sorry, there's only room for the patient," she said to him, speaking sternly in a thick Russian dialect Yuuri couldn't understand.

Yuuri glanced back at Viktor as if to ask, "What's going on?"
But was met with a shake of the head and a gesture encouraging him to continue. The younger skater raised an eyebrow and shrugged before moving forward into the Doctor's office.

The room looked more like a play area than a place of work, with colourful children's posters plastered all over its low lilac walls. Soft toys collected in the corner, adjacent to a child's medical stretcher adorned with fake plastic stethoscopes. Almost immediately Yuuri spotted a bright pink scale lurking in a discreet corner of the room, shuddering internally in fear of an unprecedented weigh-in. Fortunately, his attention was soon directed to the broad grey-haired man sat behind a desk, running his fingertips along its mahogany surface. He was dressed in a form-fitting blazer with exaggerated shoulder pads, and wore black-rimmed glasses coordinated with the colour of his name tag. It read 'Dr. Smirnoff' in thin gold lettering. Yuuri could help but let out a small squeak of amusement.

"Yes I know," the doctor said with a smile, speaking English, "sadly, I don't have any vodka on me."

"Goddamn, just what I needed at 10 in the morning," Yuuri replied, trying to engage in friendly banter in an attempt to distract from the awkwardness of the situation.

"So..." continued Smirnoff, "says here you're a 24 year old male, Japanese origin, with bruising, swelling and a slight laceration on your right knuckles."

"Sounds about right.."

"Well first off, my apologies Mr Katsuki," he said with a chuckle, "seems there's been a mix-up in the system, and you've been given an appointment in the children's office by mistake. Never mind - I'm perfectly qualified to see you - I just hope you don't mind if your bandages turn out pink and sparkly."

"It's okay, I live with a walking body of glitter," the skater grinned in reply.

Smirnoff returned the gesture and held out a large paw-like hand, inspecting Yuuri's injured digits as his glasses slid down with the oils of his nose.

"Such boney hands," he smiled, "you've gotta be careful with these, they'd shatter easily."

Yuuri nodded his head in obedience, but a rewarding sensation inside. To your typically average person, a compliment may perhaps include a comment on your face or body - but for this young skater, that just wasn't the case. Caution and genuine concern for his fragility were what he found most endearing.

The skater's expression soon fell as Smirnoff followed up with more questions, curious as to how he'd acquired an injury of such awkward angles and proportions.

"Without causing you too much embarrassment," the doctor began, "I just want to let you know
that I can tell these wounds were self/inflicted, and I hope you don't harm yourself again in future -
trust me, you're worth more than that."

To be truthful, the prospect of self-harm had never even crossed Yuuri’s mind. Sure, his conscience
was literally the epitome of self-hatred and shame, but the Japanese boy - who was a somewhat
hypochondriac - had never imagined a situation in which he’d willingly inflict pain on himself. In a
self-deprecating sense, he’d always assumed the pain of living was the worst.

"Oh no, it's not what you think..."

"Are you sure?" Smirnoff replied, rather unconvinced.

"I'm sure."

"Well, either way, there are plenty of leaflets in the waiting room regarding such topics."

"Thank you, I'll be aware of that."

The two men sat in silence as the doctor tucked the edge of the last bandage behind Yuuri's little
finger. As expected, it's decoration was vibrant and adorned with anthropomorphic cartoon
characters, but Yuuri appreciated the sentiment behind it. His eyes had been playing up for the past
few hours and a pop of colour was greatly welcomed; it drew his vision back into reality.

"Is there anything I can do for you, Mr Katsuki?"

"No.. I don't think so anyway."

"Okay, well then," he said, the warm, husky tones of his voice reverberating back and forth across
the room, "I wish you all the best. If you have any queries, don't hesitate to give me a call."

As the pain from his hand had began to subside, Yuuri thanked Dr Smirnoff and delicately tucked
the small armchair back under the consultancy table. He'd always somewhat feared medical
professionals, as from previous experience it'd seemed as if they were all pitted against him, but
Smirnoff's reassuring attitude had ridden him of any prior wariness. As Yuuri made his way
through the hallway, he remembered Smirnoff's last few words. He'd been given the impression
that this doctor was a kind one - someone that was trustworthy, that would keep his information
confidential. Yuuri needed an outlet for last night's trauma, and he was sure Dr Smirnoff wouldn't
tell.

"Actually," said the skater, poking his head back around the door, "is it okay if I get some advice?
It's for, er... a friend of mine."

The doctor looked up from a copy of a Russian medical magazine and turned to face him,
"Sure, what's the problem?"

Yuuri took a deep breath and explained everything. The stealing, the beating... the assault. The
only difference was that instead of featuring himself in this dramatic recollection, he mentioned the
victim only as a 'friend' - he didn't have the confidence to admit it was himself, and an afraid aspect
of his character simply didn't want him to.

"Jesus Christ, that's horrible.. we'll put a referral into the sexual health services immediately, and
your friend should contact the police. I suspect she's feeling rough right now..." his finger reached
for the phone, but loosened its grip as Yuuri interrupted.

"I don't think that's possible... you see, my friend is a guy."
Dr. Smirnoff stared blankly at him for a few uncomfortable seconds, "Are you sure about that?"

"Positive.."

'Why would he just assume it's a girl?' Thought Yuuri, clasping his sweaty palms together under the desk. He knew he couldn't reveal a large extent of what he'd experienced, as it ran the risk of him being revealed as the true party involved.

"Aha, well..." the Doctor laughed, "I've a feeling your friend's not quite been telling the truth.. who would assault a guy? We're not as weak as women, nor are men as desirable - such events simply do not occur, not in this day and age."

"But..but I'm positive it's a guy.." said Yuuri, repeating himself. He'd worked himself into far too much of an anxious state to protest against the Doctor's false assumptions of gender, but felt reluctant to give up. Yuuri told himself that everyone else was just as unlikely to believe him, and that Smirnoff was, at this point, the easiest person he could talk to.

Doctor Smirnoff continued to chuckle, smiling in amusement, "Your friend probably just wants attention... how emasculating would it be if a woman had truly assaulted a man?"

"But..."

"Or worse," he roared, beaming as he thumped the desk, "imagine being attacked by another GUY? Homosexual assault... oh, the hilarity!"

"I..."

"Oh... this is all too entertaining.. But honestly, I suspect your friend is simply looking for attention. And if he really was raped, especially by a man... you should dissociate yourself from him immediately. It'd ruin your reputation; nobody wants to be associated with a weakling or a f*****."

Yuuri's heart froze as the doctor spat the last ugly word in his direction.

'How could someone so seemingly kind, so outwardly trusting... how could a professional doctor say such things, and in a place of work?' Yuuri thought, his steadied pulse rising once again.

The doctor could sense the skater's nervous attitude from his obviously timid body language, leaning over the shining table-top and peering into the eyes of his anxious patient.

"You're not one of them, are you?" he said, his temperament that had so far been easy-going transforming into one of suspicion and threat.

"I...I..." stammered Yuuri, "I'm-

"I'm sorry, Doctor, but Yuuri has to go," Viktor burst in, swinging the door on its hinges. He then turned to face his obviously distressed fiancé;

"Come one Yuuri, we've got trai- woah woah woah, what's going on here?"

The Japanese boy swivelled to face Viktor, then back to the aggravated Doctor, and shook his head as he forced the moisture back into his tear ducts,
"Nothing, I'm okay - we should go."

The Russian skater turned in suspicion to Smirnoff, narrowed his eyes, and utter a gruff sentence in their naive language under his breath. He led Yuuri by the (non-bandaged) hand out of the office and into the bustling backstreets, the morning sun augmenting the night's dewy residue.

"What did he say to you?" enquired Viktor, "you look a little rough."

"Nothing, I'm just still a little shaken up from earlier, that's all."

Yuuri didn't know what quite to make of his most recent encounter; homosexuality had been decriminalised in Russia at least 5 years ago, and although he and Viktor received the occasional disapproving glare they generally experienced no disruption within their daily lives. He wondered why the doctor felt so strongly about a lifestyle that didn't even affect him.

The skater continued to fixate on the doctor's words as they arrived at the ice rink, imagining how the possible threat of homophobia would affect Yurio as he continued to mature, worrying for his safety as he passed yet another one of his make-out sessions with Otabek in the locker room.

"Viktor, am I gross?" Yuuri asked his fiancé, wiping the sweat from his brow as practice came to an end.

Viktor looked up at the Japanese boy from the cushion of the rink's ragged bleachers, beaming in admiration at his partner's perfect expression,

"Well, aside from the fact you're covered in sweat and a little bit of eye gunk from waking up too early, I think you look beautiful." He said with a cheesy wink.

Yuuri gave a casual laugh, pausing to rub the dusty sleep from the corner of his eyes,

"But seriously, do you ever think about our relationship, how you being with me... not all people would like it?"

"I don't understand.."

The skater sighed,
"The doctor I saw today - Doctor Smirnoff. He disapproved of me.."

Viktor giggled, amused by Yuuri's nonsensical statement.
"Haha, what, of your existence? Cos there's not much he can do about tha-"

"-of my sexuality."

A stony silence fell across the ice.

"What did he say to you?"

"Not much, he just wasn't very polite..."

Viktor rose from his chair and leant over to Yuuri,
"I'm being serious, lapochka, what did he say? I know you'd looked offended from the situation I'd interrupted earlier, but I didn't know it was because of that."

"It's just, he- well, he used a slur,' and I-"

"Yuuri!" Viktor said as he clasped his partner's face, alarmed.
"What?"

"That's terrible!"

"I've been called worse."

"That's not the point!" the Russian spoke through gritted teeth, "Yuuri, his words don't define you, okay? I love you for who you are, and so does everyone else! Don't let the opinion of an antiquated old man get you down-"

Yuuri shrugged and bowed his head, "Perhaps."

Sensing his pain, Viktor brushed Yuuri's ebony locks from his eyes and stared into a creamy chocolate sea,

"This isn't the first time something like this has happened, and I doubt it'll be the last. We don't have to accept it, and we'll continue to live in the way that makes us most happy, okay?"

"Okay," replied Yuuri, skin creeping up a little at the corners of his mouth, "but still, we should go home - it's getting late."

With the local taxi service fully booked, the couple ambled home under the light of a hazy summer twilight. Tinted pink clouds swept across the sky like wild horses galloping through a misty meadow, accompanied by singing bluebirds circling the horizon.

"What would you like to eat, Yuuri?"

"Hmm... I don't know, probably something light; I'm still feeling kind of ill..."

The Japanese boy had been feeling like pure concentrated shit ever since breaking his day's fast that morning, wrecking his winning streak with a disappointing bowl of soggy cocoa puffs. Viktor had mentioned he needed his strength in preparation for the trip to the doctor's office, but, rather unnaturally, Yuuri was feeling the opposite of strong. He'd just broken perhaps the shortest fast in the history of myproana users, and his online friend was hardly pleased about it.

Consequently, the skater had strived to eat light for the rest of the day, hoping to undo the damage of his own gluttony and greed. Viktor had once again taken him to McDonald's in an effort to raise his spirits following the disheartening appointment, and upon scarfing down a quarter pounder with fries and a mcflurry Yuuri felt compelled to swallow a consecutive total of 4 diet pills, too tired to resist the urging appetite inside of him but simultaneously too deathly frightened of gaining weight.

After taking his nightly dosage of pills before a Katsudon dinner, Yuuri had a spare 30 minutes or so to lounge around as his loving fiancé prepared their favourite meal. Whilst Viktor hummed and drummed around the steamy pots and pans of their lively kitchen, the younger skater gazed out of the bedroom window and down upon the swarming traffic below.

'It's strange,' he thought to himself, 'all those little people, so insignificant to society as a whole, can in collaboration create such a large scene as pictured in this mass blot of congestion.'

He liked to think in similar processes towards his dieting technique. Sure, small mistakes and bouts of overeating would presently seem insignificant, but in accumulation would be enough to ruin his entire weight-loss journey.
Moreover, Yuuri continued to reflect upon the events of last night's unpleasant encounter - how his own assumptions of self-weakness and doubt had basically been reassured by Dr. Smirnoff's harsh accusations.

'I can't hate my sexuality; to hate my sexuality would be to hate Viktor, to hate my closest friends and their lifestyles... being gay is who I am.' He thought, smiling as he considered the worthlessness of a homophobic slur in comparison to the happiness his relationship had brought him.

'However... my weakness, my lack of control... that, he was right about. It's terrible really, that I, a supposedly strong and independent male figure skater, could be so easily dominated by an unknown woman of the night.'

He covered his eyes, replaying the memories in his head.

'The way she touched me... it's disgusting... and I don't even know if I would recognise her face - it was so dark. I can definitely remember where she touched me - I can still feel it... God, I feel gross... and it was my fault. I feel so corrupt, so small right now, and it's my fault. I shouldn't have collapsed under the pressure like that; I shouldn't have been so helpless. And Viktor, oh Viktor... I can't tell him. There's no reason to tell him. If he knew, the consequences could be dire... and I can't lose him.'

Yuuri was so undeniably annoyed with himself. It was him that this has happened to, nobody else, and it was him and him only that had failed to assert himself in the pressure of the situation. If anything, the entire thing was his fault, and he'd certainly be held accountable for any subsequent consequences too.

Rubbing the exhaustion from his tired eyes, the skater moped across the room and edged closer to a delicate box placed at the back of the dresser's bottom drawer, decorated with intricate traditional Japanese patterns and his name written in the calligraphy of his native language. Inside lay his most treasured keepsakes. His first lock of hair, his mother's necklace, Vicchan's old collar... Yuuri smiled a sad smile as he recalled the happy memories shared with his now deceased dog.

At the bottom of the box sat an old and perhaps his most dearest possession, an embroidered handkerchief signed by Viktor himself from a meet up at an old junior championship. Yuuri carefully unfolded the silken layers and caressed the lilac monogram - but he hadn't come for the handkerchief itself. What the skater desired was the object tightly wrapped inside the safety of its folds.

'Heh, this takes me back,' he thought, bringing back memories of early high school days.

A tiny container, no larger than a matchbox, sat quaintly in the palm of Yuuri's right hand. He opened it gently, tipping its contents out onto the top of the dresser.

'1.. 2.. 3.. 4... and 5. The gang's all here.'

5 shining razor blades were spread across the smooth wooden surface, with sharp, double edges glistening in the moonlight.

Yuuri felt angry. He felt sad. Shocked. Embarrassed. Afraid. But most of all, Yuuri felt nothing. He remembered high school, recalled the days of walking the halls without a friend in the world to comfort his loneliness. The days when he'd feel absolutely numb, of locking himself in the school bathrooms during lunch breaks, avoiding food and hacking at his thighs just to feel something inside. When he smiled, his wounds smiled back at him, curling at the tips.
It had been almost 8 years since Yuuri had purposely harmed himself in this way. For the most part, he'd tried to forget his high school and college days, as they were undoubtedly depressing portions of his life.

'But then again.' thought Yuuri, chuckling slightly, 'most of my life's been depressing in one way or another.'

Viktor had seen the scars on Yuuri's legs, but each enquiry had been met with a similar excuse: "I got that one falling off my bike."
"Vicchan scratched me after accidentally stepping on his tail."
"My hand slipped whilst shaving for a competition."

Yuuri could never bring himself to tell his fiancé the real truth about his scars, and supposes it was better if he didn't know. Viktor was like a living God, a perfect being with no conceivable flaws, and the Japanese boy wasn't about to add to the list of his.

However, at this point, the skater had stopped caring. His body shook with numbness and all he desired was to forget. To forget the attack, to forget his weakness - to give himself a break from the confusion that had engulfed his thumping mind.

Yuuri needed to feel something. Anything.

Closing his eyes, Yuuri pressed the shiniest blade to his skin.
Beauty Queen

{A.N. ~ Sorry I haven't posted in forever! I've been working, on holiday, doing schoolwork, and, well, all that usual drivel! I split this chapter up into two parts because it's simply too long, but hey - at least you get two chapters at once, right? Not that they're particularly spectacular, but please take into account that I'm incredibly sleep deprived :3 }

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It was the beginning of the last week of June, and following the previously devastating effects of his weight-loss plateau, Yuuri was glad to have shifted a considerable amount of weight. No longer had it levelled off at a miserable 45kg - the skater's mass had reached a reasonable total of 42kg. This put his current BMI at 14, and whilst Yuuri'd decided it was still not wholeheartedly desirable, it meant he wouldn't be forced to continue the increase the dosage of his nauseating diet pills. Thus, hopefully no further defecation incidents would occur.

Sweat crawling down his forehead and his joggers sagging at the waist, Yuuri clenched his muscles as he stretched into an arabesque, clean arms and wrists pointing up and outwards towards the streaming rink lights overhead.

On that unfeeling night a few weeks back, in his moment of isolation and despair, the skater had been thoroughly tempted to rip open his skin. And yet, he didn't. Yuuri couldn't quite determine the explanation for this sudden aversion to self-injury, but had concluded that, in the moment, it just hadn't felt right.

'I'm already a fake anorexic,' he'd thought, collecting the blades and placing them back into their silken handkerchief, 'if I self-harm, I'll just become a fake depression victim. I'm already ruining it for people who actually have these problems, I'm just attention seeking...'

Besides, Viktor had recently been snooping around his belongings, enquiring about any unknown illnesses he should be aware of, and Yuuri was not appreciative of this sudden inquisitive behaviour. The last thing he needed was his fiancé discovering his bloodied arms when they were in bed together (aside from the distressing psychological impacts, it would almost certainly kill the mood).

In an effort to disguise just how horrendous he'd been looking for the past few weeks, Yuuri'd recently started wearing makeup. With a shared credit card and a stockpile of items in the department stores nearby, the skater was able to indulge in both the creativity of cosmetics and the secrecy of a hidden mental illness. It was a win-win situation Furthermore, if the day ever came when Yuuri felt an uncontrollable urge to tear his wrists apart, at least now he was vaguely aware of the makeup techniques necessary to cover up the injuries.

Yuuri sat perched on a toilet seat at the back of the rink's side bathrooms, carefully reapplying his foundation in his phone's front-view camera. Upon spritzing himself with a couple shots of setting spray, the skater was motivated to leave the cubicle and return to practice out on the ice, but stopped dead and hid behind its brittle plastic door as he heard two pairs of footsteps increasing in volume approaching his location. From the familiar click-clacking on heels against the linoleum flooring, Yuuri could deduce that at least one of these pairs belonged to a woman, or at least a man with perfect experience wearing such difficult footwear. The other pair was owned by the wearer of tight-laces sneakers, the soles squeaking in intervals with each step towards the ground. The Japanese boy sat tightly on the uppermost section of the toilet; he wasn't particularly bothered about being seen in makeup, but was reluctant for anyone to discover the explanation as to what it
"Are you sure you saw him go in here?" A female voice whispered to what Yuuri could only assume was a figure opposite.

"Yes, I did," replied a masculine, slightly higher voice, "I saw him take his bags in; God knows why, you don't need an entire bag to use the toilet."

Suddenly, something in Yuuri's mind clicked and he was able to deduce the identities hidden behind the voices outside the cubicle.

'Why are Yurio and Mila in here together? They're both in a relationship, so I don't think they'd be doing anything suspicious, but- hang on, are they looking for ME?'

A few seconds past in which the voices didn't say anything, simply listening tentatively for the shallow, rapid breathing emanating from inside the end cubicle.

"He's here."

"It's okay, I've got this," said the male voice.

With a mighty swing of his leg, he pounded the door with a flexed foot; the latch undid violently under the sheer power of his kick and the cubicle opened immediately.

"Oh, hey!" Yuuri waved as Mila came into view, his expression anxious as he stuffed the bottle of foundation back into his bag.

Mila smiled at the Yuuri's hopeless attempt to conceal whatever peculiar activity he'd been engaging in, her mouth curved upwards but her eyes a little sad.

"Um, not to be rude, but I think you have the wrong bathroom..." Yuuri's eyes shifted as he noticed Yurio lurking to the side of the cubicle opening, "..well, one of you does anyway, heh."

Mila shook her head and beckoned for the skater to rise to his feet,
"We needed help moving some equipment into the store room, can you lend us a hand?"

"Uh, sure, I guess."

Yuuri was perfectly aware that there was no substantial amount of equipment to shift, but in reluctance to appear awkward agreed regardless.

"Are you sure all you want me to carry are these tiny flags?" the skater asked, somewhat sceptical as despite being the older male present, he was the individual tasked with the least strenuous load.

Yurio turned to Mila as they walked towards the room and whispered under his breath; 
"This isn't very convincing, is it? We're lumbering about with these heavy poles and cones, and all you've given him is a couple of pieces of cloth?"

"I think he's already aware of what's going on," the redhead replied, "knowing Yuuri, he's just trying to be nice. But if he's playing along, then so be it. We've got him where we want him, don't we?"

Following a few minutes of shuffling equipment into the side room, the three skaters paused to take a breath amongst the pairs of discarded skates and used, sweaty team jerseys.

"I suppose I should be getting back to practise.." said Yuuri, heading for the door.
Mila glanced at Yurio with raised brows and placed a conspicuous foot in front of the exit, "Sure, we'll get back to practise in a sec. but now, now we need to have a little talk, okay?"

Dropping his head back in frustration, Yuuri made slow claps as he shot Yurio a discreet look of annoyance.

"I suppose she knows, then?"

"Yuuri," said the flaxen-haired skater, shaking his head with a look of exhaustion on his face, "if anything, she's probably known the longest."

"Yeah, well, like I've already told people... it's stopping soon. I just need to achieve my target weight, and then this'll end, okay?"

"Okay," said Mila, intrigued, "what is this 'goal BMI' of yours then?"

"I don't know yet, but when I do, I'll stop, okay?"

Running a palm across her folded brow, the female skater paused to think, turning to face Yuuri as she did so.

"Look, all we want to do is make sure you're safe."

"Well, I think I'm already doing a reasonable job."

"But do you know why?" asked Yurio, scuffing his shoe against the floor.

The Japanese skater thought for a moment,

"I don't know, so Phichit doesn't go after you?"

Mila chuckled, glad to find a little humour in the mess of the situation,

"Well, yes, that as well, but also... well, did you know that if Viktor, or anyone really involved with the ISU discovers what you've been doing, you'll likely be pulled from the Grand Prix series?"

Yuuri went to refute her points, but stopped short. This was likely going to be his last year in competitive skating; he'd be turning 25, and although other athletes such as Viktor and Christophe had furthered their careers even in their late twenties, the skater knew he lacked the resilience they had to prolong their time on the competition's ice.

"Wait, so none of you have told Viktor about this?"

"No, nor Yakov," Yurio replied, "it's not like we wanna ruin your career, we'd just prefer it if you didn't die - it's bad publicity, you know."

It seemed Mila was not the only one resorting to humour as a coping mechanism in this situation. Yuuri laughed a fake laugh; a few weeks ago he would've actually found this joke reasonable humorous, but as a result of various recent events he lacked it in himself to react in such a way - he was both physically and emotionally exhausted.

"Well," Yuuri began, "actually, nevermind... it's not fair to worry you guys about something that's barely important."

"Worried?" said Mila, "You've barely paid attention to anyone but Viktor these past few weeks."

"I know, and I apologise," the Japanese skater replied. He then turned to Turio, "look, I'm so sorry about how I treated you a while back. I was tired, hungry, and - well, actually, forget that last part -
but it wasn't me. I didn't mean it, I swear."

The Russian boy chuckled,
"Good to know I'm not a stupid, immature teenager after all."
Although his tone was vaguely positive, Yuuri knew his younger counterpart was still a little bitter about it from the sheer fact he'd remembered such a statement.

The three skaters stood in silence, staring into each other's eyes and analysing the situation from their own unique perspectives.

'Oh Yuuri, I hope you take some of this to heart.' Thought Mila, delicately chewing at her nails.

'Tch, it's a wonder how Viktor hasn't noticed a thing,' Yurio thought, 'it doesn't take an idiot to realise Katsudon's been looking a mess lately. Still, I hope he's okay.'

Yuuri's mind was going crazy.
'I mean, I appreciate the concern, but there's no need for any. It's not like I'm dying; for the most part, I feel completely fine physically - emotionally, well, that's a somewhat different story, but that's only due to my crippledly disgusting appearance, so it's stupid trying to ignore the benefits of changing it.'

Aware of the fact that there was little space for the conversation to continue, the two Russian skaters left Yuuri with a few words of encouragement, Mila hugging him on her way out as Yurio gave an uncomfortable smile of reassurance.

 Shortly after, Yuuri had begun to follow in their direction when an excited Viktor came jogging up to him, waving two brightly-coloured cards back and forth in front of his fiancé's questioning facial expression.

"Viktor, what are you doing?" the skater giggled, his nose crinkling up from the card's synthetic plastic scent as he swatted them away from his face, "Whose birthday is it?"

"Haha, mine, I wish - I could really do with some cake!" Said his silver-haired partner, his blue eyes dazzling in the reflection of the ice, "But actually, I think I've found the perfect solution to your recent lack of build!"

'Oh god, he hasn't bought me some sort of fast-food voucher, has he?'

"Look, Yuuri!" Viktor declared, repeatedly tapping his perfectly-manicured tips on an image of a dumbbell, "They're gym passes! I got them free as part of a sponsorship deal, but it means you finally have the opportunity to build up some muscle!"

'Oh, okay, that's actually pretty good.'

Yuuri was thrilled (majorly because he now had a legitimate excuse to exercise twice as hard), throwing his arms around his fiancé in appreciation.

"Thanks Viktor, I've been looking to work out more recently, I need to regain my figure before the Grand Prix series begins!"

By chance, Mila happened to be walking past at the time of their conversation, shooting Yuuri a look of concern,
"Well, you two, don't forget their deals on protein bars as well - you've got to constantly refuel if you want to properly bulk up."
"Okay, mother," replied Viktor sarcastically, "but Yuuri eats fine - he's just been ill recently; a few rounds of weights will help him get back to his peak for sure!"

"Sure, I just didn't have Yuuri down as a big eater that's all."

"Don't worry guys, I'm eating fine!" The Japanese skater said reassuringly, wrapping Viktor's arm around him as an imaginary protective shield between him and Mila's attentive sense of enquiry.

To some degree, this statement was true. Overall Yuuri genuinely ate a suitable amount for someone his size and height - the only dilemma was, generally his food wasn't that calorically dense, nor was it ever properly absorbed as chemicals obliterated its nutritional value or it was regurgitated before ever travelling to his stomach.

"Well, okay," said Mila, "just stay safe, you guys," although Yuuri knew this statement was especially directed at him.

"We will!" Viktor chirped, "now, Lapochka, what do you say we hit the gym? It's been ages since I've gone myself, and I guess my routine's been getting a little slouchy lately."

Yuuri nodded his head in agreement. He couldn't believe his luck! Double the opportunity to burn calories, and no prospect of discipline in sight.

With the ligature from the doctor's visit still tightly wrapped around the skater's knuckles, Yuuri's body had now become accessorised with bandages from the amount of tumbles he'd taken during practice. Pretty much everything about his two routines was virtually perfect, but the quintuple flip still dragged down his accuracy score. Yuuri was determined to change that.

"Hey Viktor,"

"Yes, Yuuri?" he replied, arm still firmly enveloping his shrinking fiancé.

"Do you think I could use the gym's acrobatic area? I desperately need to practise my rotations."

The Russian tightened his embrace, pulling Yuuri into a hug,
"Sure, but we should probably prioritise the weight machines - you've been looking rather gangly lately, and I'm starting to get worried it's more than a minor cold or stomach bug."

It wasn't as if Viktor hasn't noticed his partner's weight loss, the dilemma (according to Mila and Yurio) was that, in his mind, there was no possible way that his once-chubby katsudon-loving boyfriend could ever be refusing food - to him, eating was instinctive, and body fat a dear friend that naturally clung to him like a baby koala to the winding trunk of the eucalyptus tree.

"I guess," replied Yuuri, reflecting on his last sentence. Whilst Viktor likely had no malicious intentions in labelling the Japanese figure skater as someone with a 'gangly' frame, all he could envision was a pillow-shaped body with stringy arms and legs flailing out in all directions.

'It's nice to be reminded the majority of my fat congregates in my stomach' thought Yuuri.

As they arrived at the gym, the younger boy tightened his grip on the opening of his tracksuit's collar, naturally disposed to hiding his body in situations involving physical activity. Viktor, meanwhile, had gone to great lengths to showcase the attractive qualities of both his body and his fashion sense, changing into a pair of tight-fitting shorts with an aerated bomber jacket to match, exposing every one of his perfectly sculpted abs. It was practically impossible for Yuuri to look away.
"You know, it's strange," said the Russian skater, "but I don't think we've ever been to the gym together before - I don't even think I've ever seen you in one, either."

"Welp, I guess my lazy ass finally has no excuse to hold back." Yuuri chuckled in response.

Viktor was right; Yuuri 'd never used a gym in his life. Previously his avoidance had been on account of his reluctance to being discovered whilst overexercising, and when coupled with his propensity to avoid large gatherings of hot, sweaty members of the public, it was easy to see why he'd had no past inclination to visit. However, with Viktor by his side, Yuuri felt a little more secure - most of the public's attention would likely be focused on his partner's God-like figure as it pounded weights in the presence of grateful gym-goers.

"It's probably best if I warm up before beginning anything strenuous, so if you need me I'll be by the treadmills."

"Okay Yuuri, be sure to save me a space for later!"

What Yuuri constituted as a light warm-up was, realistically, more similar to a separate workout entirely than a light jog on the treadmill. Unlike his partner, who was currently playfully experimenting with the various weight settings on the gym's elaborate mechanical equipment, Yuuri hasn't come to the gym to mess around. He'd come for one reason, and one reason only, and that was purely to burn as many calories as possible. Sure, beginning on the treadmill was a reasonably efficient method of warming up, but the skater simultaneously knew that it was the quickest way to raise his fat-burning levels before engaging in the significantly slower art of lifting weights with his coach.

With a finger drifting warily through the sea of Russian buttons, Yuuri finally managed to start up the treadmill and set it to a 30% incline. Fortunately, this wasn't the skater's first attempt at exercise on such a machine, and he'd had plenty of practise in the months prior running secretly on the treadmill back at the apartment.

The Japanese boy clung to the rails on the machine, legs beginning to wobble as he feared he'd soon fall flat on his face once again. After a few sequences of frantic tripping he'd finally steadied himself, or at least enough to appear vaguely competent at running as Viktor came running over to join him.

"Having fun?" the Russian smirked with a subtle laugh, "I take it running isn't your favourite activity."

"Oh boy, how'd you guess that?" smiled Yuuri.

"It's probably this baggy tracksuit that's weighing you down," said Viktor, tugging at Yuuri's baggy nylon sleeves with a suggestive look on his face, "perhaps you should take it off?"

'It's probably my baggy buckets of flab that's weighing me down.' The Japanese boy thought to himself.

"As much as I'd appreciate a break from the heat, I'm pretty sure the gym wouldn't welcome such public indecency."

"It's not public indecency if you're hot," winked Viktor, gazing up at his fiancé as he leant on the side of the treadmill.

The Russian was aware that there was no way in hell Yuuri would removed his clothing in such a public environment, but his flirtatious personality supposed it was worth a shot. Yuuri, on the other
hand, smiled uncomfortably, and whilst searching for the fan switch unknowingly raised the intensity levels on the treadmill. As he realised his mistake, the conveyor belt cascaded out from within the treadmill, flinging the Japanese boy into the carpeted gym floor and pulling Viktor in tail as he scrambled for a point of support.

"Woah, careful! Are you okay?" he laughed, tossing a mop of glossy silver hair back as he regathered himself.

"Haha, yeah, my hand hurts like a bitch though."

Yuuri's hand wasn't the solitary source of discomfort. Over the past few weeks, the consistent aching in his joints had become increasingly noticeable, especially with exercise. Despite his low weight, his caloric intake enable a somewhat half-life and a vague source of nutrients, but more detrimental effects were starting to appear. The Japanese skater frequently took caffeine pills when exhausted; these helped to alleviate some of his symptoms, but the underlying creaking of his bones was a feeling that still often plagued his body.

Still, Yuuri felt such things were rather insignificant. Whilst frequenting pro-ana websites, the skater often encountered people upholding a BMI of less than 13 and still fully functioning. Initially, his reaction was rather incredulous, but soon after investigating he attributed their 'progress' to a hefty dosage of caffeine, vitamin and protein pills.

Yuuri had never envisioned himself meeting such a fate - other than the occasional aches and pains, chapped lips, constant shivering and frequent blurred vision, he felt reasonably okay. For the most part, he'd relinquished his favoured habit of purging altogether, and his digestive system seemed to have grown accustomed to the double dosage of diet tablets.

"Well, when did the Doc say your hand would be better?" asked Viktor, gently stroking the bandage with his thumb.

Yuuri shrugged and smiled, eyes squinting in the gym's fluorescent lighting, "Soon, hopefully. Thank God we got another guy - the first one was, well, not the most pleasant person I've encountered..."

"Yeah, I vod-can't believe a guy called Smirnoff would be so mean-spirited!"

"Pfft-" said the Japanese boy, shaking his head with laughter as he ignored an oncoming cloud of headaches, "puns? In the gym? Well, I've heard laughter can supposedly help with toning up your abs..."

"Anyway," he continued. "I should be able to remove the bandage any day now, and to be honest, I'm glad - in fact, I'll do it here!"

Yuuri removed the fabric from his hand and slung it in the direction of Viktor's face, with crusted blood and scabs being flung into the path of his large, rather alarmed eyes.

"Ew, Yuuri!" Viktor chuckled, gingerly removing the bandages from his face and holding them at arms length, "but what about your hand? Doesn't it hurt?"

'To be honest, most things are hurting in one way or another," Yuuri thought to himself (it seemed the gym was not his favourite place in the world to visit.)

"Nah, I'm fine! Besides, Viktor," he teased, "how was I gonna 'build muscle' with my hand ensnared in that?"
The Russian gave his partner an innocent shrug, playfully flicking the bandages across the room and past the eyes of many repulsed gym-goers.

Soon after, the two of them hit the weights. Viktor, rather unsurprisingly, was dispensed to showing off just how much he possessed the ability to bench press at a time, lifting with a strength that enabled him to bear loads that easily doubled his own weight. The Russian was undoubtedly aware of his own strength, and had the biceps to show for it.

Yuuri, on the other hand, was significantly less ambitious when it came to testing his abilities. He supposed that if a mere wall was nearly enough to devastate the bones in his hand, what little strength resided in his body would likely be a meagre amount compared to that of his companion's. Thus, Yuuri started off light, his muscles already begging for relief after a few reps of using what were essentially toddlers' dumbbells.

"Come on, Yuuri!" Viktor chuckled, "how are you going to be able to lift yourself high into the air for the Grand Prix series if you can barely lift a few kilos?"

"It's hard to lift myself as it is; I'm afraid to perform a quintuple move in front of such a large crowd," said Yuuri, accidentally thinking aloud.

"Hard? But Lapochka, you're lighter than air as it is!"
Viktor leant in, planting a kiss onto Yuuri's sweaty, yet somehow still chapped upper lip, "I'm sure these exercises will bulk you out eventually!"

The word 'bulk' wasn't exactly music to the Japanese boy's ears - 'dainty' or 'nymph-like' would've been melodic and pleasing, but 'bulk'? Yuuri didn't particularly warm to the concept of growing in size; it seemed that already he was cursed with a natural tendency to grow outwards at most given opportunities, and he really didn't need unnecessary muscle on top of all those grotesque layers of fat.

"It's okay," replied Yuuri, returning Viktor's intimate favour, "I'll start small - after all, I still need to fit into my costume."

"Well, whatever you look like, you look perfect to me."

'Well,' thought Yuuri, 'we'll see about that, Mr I-prefer-skinnier-Yuuri-with-abs.'
Yuuri pushed on, determined to succeed and prove his strength. However, his ongoing perseverance was not without its drawbacks. The following morning, the skater awoke writhing with agony. In a failed attempt to muster a sense of athleticism before his beautiful fiancé, he'd pushed himself too far at the gym, and subsequently was feeling the consequences.

"Good morning, lyubov moya," a hazy figure whispered, towering above his aching head with the tray in hand glistening in the morning sunlight, "you looked rather, er, tired from last night, so I made you some food. Look, I made your pancakes into a smiley shape for a happy breakfast!"

'Did we have sex last night or something...?' questioned Yuuri's mind, seemingly forgetting his unpleasant gym experience from the day before, his thoughts reverting to what only appeared the most logical assumption.

"Thanks," replied the Japanese boy with a soft smile, "and don't worry about last night, you didn't do that much harm, I guess I'm just a bit fragile at the moment."

"Wait, what?"

"Last night - we, well, we 'did it'... right?"

Viktor, wholeheartedly confused, set the breakfast tray down beside him, perching it on the edge of the nearby breakfast table,

"Yuuri," he replied with a giggle, "don't you remember? We were at the gym, and you were - erm, you were having a little bit of trouble with the weights."

"Oh, whoops... haha, I must've looked so weak.." anxious flashbacks began to play in Yuuri's head.

"Come to think of it, we haven't had sex for a few weeks now..."

Yuuri immediately recognised the tone in Viktor's voice: a tad let down, but echoing with tones of suspicion.

In all fairness, Viktor had a right to be fairly concerned. It was typical of the younger skater to readily display affection when in the bedroom, being an both an ample giver and receiver of sexual
initiations. This recent apprehensiveness of his was rather unorthodox, but Yuuri himself saw it justified.

Every morning, before Viktor had arisen from the dreamy underworld that was their cotton bedcovers, the skater would stand dressed only in his underwear before the unforgiving reflection of the bathroom mirror, inspecting every nook and cranny for an array of imperfections and poking with his flesh until each interference would leave a red mark that faded only as he returned to his sleeping fiancé.

However, this morning, Viktor had been the first to stir, had dressed into his best (and perhaps most revealing) chef's outfit, and cooked breakfast: eggs, bacon, smiley face pancakes with lashings of maple syrup; a breakfast of champions. Yuuri had often appeared fatigued these past few weeks, and the Russian had concluded this was a reasonable way to provide some much-needed energy and nutrients.

"Thanks, Viktor," said Yuuri, caressing the side of his partner's cheek, which at this point in time was slightly masked with silver stubble, "but I'm not that hungry - I was just going to have some miso soup, like usual; it's my favourite breakfast dish, really."

"But Yuuri, I spent ages making it... and this isn't exactly my first attempt," the Russian replied, gesturing his head towards the contents of the kitchen trash can, brimming with the charred remains of previously cremated fruits and breakfast pastries.

Nonetheless, this pitiful site made no difference in the growing anxiety bubbling inside of the Japanese boy's head - however, this time, a dash of irritation had been shaken into the mix.

'Viktor knows I hate unplanned meals - I mean, I guess my claim that they supposedly throw my schedule off isn't particularly valid, as it's still early, but he knows regardless that I don't appreciate it. Neither do I want to end up with my head in the toilet at 8am on a day before practise, since I'm currently fresh out of diet pills; I'm not even a morning person, never mind a morning purger.'

Viktor waved a hand in front of Yuuri's eyes, which were squinting as he was deep in thought trying to calculate a viable escape path,

"Lapochka, it's getting cold..."

He then glanced up from the breakfast tray at his fiancé's face, his pale eyes, and his reddening nose, thinking to himself:

'Perhaps Yuuri's feeling too tired to eat... with more time at the gym, his energy and immune system should hopefully improve.'

"It's okay, Yuuri, I understand if it's too much for you, I was just trying to help you recover from last night - but, even now I've realised that perhaps three plates of pancakes is a rather substantial amount for just one person."

"Thanks, Viktor."

"But," the Russian continued, "it might be a manageable job if we share."

Unfortunately for Yuuri, there didn't seem to be much of a reasonable way out of this. Just lately, his partner had been growing suspicious of him during just about everything they did together - wherever they went, the Japanese boy's compulsion to lose weight prevented him from ever behaving as his true self, and Viktor, who knew his companion better than anybody else at the rink, was catching on fast.
"Sure, that sounds great!" replied Yuuri, forcibly enthusiastic, "and I can make us miso soup tomorrow!"

"Sure, lyubov moy - I heard tofu is full of protein, so why not?"

The younger skater died a little inside as he began nibbling at the minuscule bites of high calorie, high fat, artery-cloggingly sweet scotch pancakes. Sure, they were beautiful delicious, but the harsher aspect of his mind did not appreciate the act.

'You'll eat slowly, okay Yuuri?' he lectured himself, 'if you do, Viktor's pace will soon overtake yours, and it's likely you'll only end up eating a quarter of the platter altogether.'

Suddenly, as Viktor finished wolfing down his three out of the total of six pancakes, in one swift movement he lay his cutlery on the tray and downed a glass of orange juice, afterwards wiping his mouth delicately with a nearby napkin.

"I'm finished - I didn't want to eat too much, and you look like you could do with some more, you've only had one pancake!"

Yuuri chuckled, "Heh, yeah, sorry about that, I guess I'm just so tired."

"Well, you've been training super hard. Still, perhaps we should start earlier next time."

"Yeah - maybe it'll give us time for more coffee! I could kill for an espresso right about now."

Viktor rose from his perched position on the side of the bed and began to change into his tracksuit,

"If you want, I'll go get us some, but you should probably stay and finish these off; they're too dense for Makkachin to eat."

"Okay Viktor, I'll be here."

Viktor flashed the skater a hearty thumbs-up, before wearily stepping it across the apartment landing and out of the door as he ventured to the nearest Starbucks. It appeared the night-time gym session had started to catch up on the both of them. However, when coupled with Yuuri's existing state of perpetual exhaustion, the younger boy felt increasingly rotten with each succeeding movement.

Still, he hoped his fiancé's exit would buy some time to successfully dispose of the unwanted plate of food. It's not that Yuuri particularly hates pancakes - in fact, it was quite the opposite. The skater could physically feel the drool escaping from his mouth, and knew such signs were dangerous - he ran the risk of falling into temptation, this single-handedly devouring the stack altogether. Yuuri knew he could not afford such things to fall to chance; he had to get rid of the food - and fast.

With a keen eye, Yuuri surveyed his surroundings for key sites of disposal.

'Let's see... ' he began to think, '... behind the TV? No, I don't think Viktor would appreciate being electrocuted... 
...perhaps in the trash? Actually, wait, maybe not - Makkachin forages in there sometimes; I doubt pancakes would be exempt from such treatment... '

Yuuri began to grew frustrated; this was a lot of effort, especially so early in the morning.

'Can't I just throw them out of the window?' he questioned, before reasoning against it. The
apartment was over 20 stories high, and Yuuri didn't feel like being charged for manslaughter on account of a deadly onslaught of falling breakfast items.

Ten minutes had passed, and Yuuri knew he was running out of time. There was only one person he could contact in emergency situations such as this one. Without hesitation, the Japanese boy whipped out his phone and began to type in the username of his idyllic advisor.

----------
H1story_mxker: Hey, sorry, I've realised you're probably sleeping right now, but I really need your help.
----
XxxstarvingprincessxxX:
----
H1story_mxker: Are you awake?
----
XxxstarvingprincessxxX: I'm now
----
H1story_mxker: Great! Sorry to wake you. I just need to know how to hide food you don't want to eat, and fast.
----
XxxstarvingprincessxxX: I thort u were good @ purgin..
----
H1story_mxker: I still am, I guess, but I'm too tired right now, please just tell me - and quickly.
----
XxxstarvingprincessxxX: yoov gone 2 grate lengths- im impresed, ur liek a proper anorexix now..
----
H1story_mxker: A fatass like me? Ha, don't think so...
----
XxxstarvingprincessxxX: Fine - just becuz ur still fat tho, not cuz of ur mind. Ur mindset iz good
----
H1story_mxker: Thanks, I try I guess.
----
XxxstarvingprincessxxX: Hopefuly is werking. Enyway, what i do is choo food n spit it in 2 the toylet. so it is small enuf 2 go down.
----
H1story_mxker: Okay, thanks, got to go - bye!
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With limited time remaining, Yuuri grabbed the plate of pancakes and ran into the bathroom, clumsily banging against the sides of the room in the process.

He looked dead into the chocolate-chip eyes of the first pancake, showing disdain for its cold, unfeeling sponge centre. Following a moment of composure, Yuuri sunk his teeth into its fluffy outer circle. The sensation of eating such a decadent food seemed a foreign concept to the Japanese skater, but he pushed through," as he focused on the task of hand, too wary about running out of time.

Chew, spit. Chew, spit. Chew, spit. Mouthfuls of mashed-up pancake cascaded into the bowl of the toilet. Yuuri had found himself a rhythm to work without, making the experience slightly more bearable. Nevertheless, it still wasn't enjoyable. Even without actually swallowing the fatty breakfast items, Yuuri could sense the lipids circulating his body cling to the sub-dermal layers of his skin, begging to be united with their brothers in the pancake batter. However, he knew better than to let them win. On the final spit, Yuuri wiped his mouth with an accomplished look on his
face, flushing the toilet indignantly as he watched his saboteurs being engulfed by the unforgiving waves that swirled around them.

Yuuri hastened back towards the bedroom, rolling under the covers and fixing himself into the previous positioned assumed. He sprinkles some crumbs that he'd collected for good measure onto the empty plate and the sides of his pillow, providing the effect of a meal that's been heartily enjoyed by its consumer.

Soon after, Viktor returned with a coffee in each hand. Yuuri kissed him and smiled,

"Thanks, for both the coffee and the pancakes - they were delicious. How did you learn to cook them so fluffy?"

"Ah," replied Viktor, "well, the art is to read the instructions - I found that very important - and make sure the time on the microwave is correct."

Yuuri laughed at his fiancé's attitude, his ribs aching painfully as he attempted to appreciate the humour of the situation. Of course, it rendered Viktor's previous few attempts virtually invalid, as the Japanese boy had assumed it was practically impossible for his partner to fail at microwaveable pancakes, but decided it made the result ever more hilarious.

"Oh, and by the way," said Viktor softly, taking short breaths between sips of his cappuccino, "I've going for a meeting with an American brand sometime in the next couple of weeks, and I was wondering if you wanted to come?"

Yuuri rested his steaming coffee on the bed side table, pausing for a moment to assess the risks to his diet of a trip to the United States, home to McDonald's and the birthplace of deep-fried Oreos. Whilst a holiday was greatly needed, Yuuri's aversion to fast food cautioned him against visiting - he couldn't afford to gain any weight; the Grand Prix final was less than half a year away.

"It's fine, I need to perfect my routine, and besides... who'd look after Makkachin?"

Viktor glanced down at the furry creature wagging its tail in the doorway, mouth wet with what appeared to be toilet water. Yuuri soon noticed and could only assume she'd detected the smell of the pancakes, but to his relief they'd been long gone before she'd had the chance to begin searching.

"You've got a point," the Russian muttered, "our girl's getting old now, and I'd rather not leave her on her own."

"Then it's settled! You go, and I'll stay here and looking after Makkachin!" said Yuuri, ruffling her fur as she came bounding up to him, rubbing against his leg in affection.

"Are you sure, Yuuri?" Replied his companion, "Maybe I should call someone to stay with you, just so-"

"-It's fine, honestly! Makkachin and I will have fun, don't you worry - I'll make her a cake, and then I'll eat a cake - we'll have a good time!"

Viktor looked out of the window at the rising sun, then back at Yuuri,
"Okay, but remember to train hard for when I get back!"

"I will, and not just on the ice rink," he replied with a wink. Yuuri actually had no intention of offering his naked body, nor did he plan to reveal his growing imperfections to his fiancé, but needed all the opportunities alone he could get and the false premise of sex would be too much for his partner to resist.
It was settled: Viktor was to travel to America, and Yuuri was to stay at home and care for Makkachin.

Yuuri nodded politely, but on the inside his head was bursting with excitement. This would be the perfect chance to get ahead in the game of starvation, and now nobody would be there to stop him.
It was the beginning of the perfect day as Yuuri stirred from his peaceful slumber, opening his eyes and ears to the sight of his sleeping fiancé and the fleeting songs of birds nearby drift past their bedroom window. A dense, heavy scent of blossoming summer flowers and a crisp breeze that danced off the wispy waves of the city's border with the Baltic Sea lingered in the air, smoothly traversing the endless expanse of a cloudless azure sky as it came to rest along the peaks of St. Petersburg's jutting silhouette. Yuuri, in typical fashion, following his discreet morning exercises, crept along the creaky, tiring floorboards of the apartment before fixing himself by the large stretch of glass centre to their living room, gazing out in awe through its glistening panes at the city that lay beneath him.

With a smile on his face, the skater swirled a heaped teaspoon of sweetener into the depths of a mug of green tea, admiring the emerald-tinted effervescence followed by the swift disappearance of bubbling alabaster-white crystals into his scorching concoction. Before he then took a sip of the improved mixture, Yuuri couldn't help but steal another glance at the myriad of sights that surrounded him. By the entrance to their apartment skyscraper, a blossoming Sakura tree had begun to bloom. This reminder him of the comforts of his hometown that sat pleasantly on the tip of the flourishing Kyushu coastline, where by now no doubt had the cotton-candy petals of his favourite leafed memory began to wilt and faint from their positions up high towards the ground, leaving behind them a barren twiggy wasteland that preceded their silken replacements the following spring.

Whether it was the soothing burn of hot tea as it slipped down his throat or the impressive caloric burn that resulted from his compulsive morning exercises, Yuuri's skin began to break out in a flurry of sweat, the warm, fragrant droplets augmenting both his increasing desire for immediate hydration and the vaguely comforting reminder that at least the majority of his bodily functions were still up and running. In addition, exercise temporarily alleviated the Japanese boy's continual gelid state and the grogginess that accompanied it.

Pushing the rims of his moistened glasses back against the tip of his brows, Yuuri turned to rested against the window, his garnet-tinted cheeks against the glass as a streaming waterfall of endorphins gushed throughout his body. Although exercise was becoming increasingly painful with each kilo lost (the reason for which Yuuri couldn't entirely comprehend; he assumed that, somehow, fat gain could be inhibiting his stamina), the skater absurdly took please in pain, relieved with each accomplishment as the calories melted away.

However, that day there were to be no more thoughts of dieting, exercise or weight loss, as Yuuri hoped to give Viktor a proper send off prior to his U.S. departure. The two spent the day lovingly gazing into the depths of each other's eyes, arms linked as they skipped (well, Yuuri kind of hobbled) together along the city streets. Sure, on occasion Yuuri was forced to retire to a local public bench as his vision became distorted and his head drifted up into the clouds, but these days such an event was a common occurrence - especially considering the recent surplus of physical activity. The skater attributed this unusual behaviour to a disagreeable amount of caffeine, the type he often consumed in the couple's beloved teas and coffees. Viktor, despite at times feeling mildly concerned, generally found humour in his fiancé's clumsiness, and although Yuuri was typically embarrassed by these situations, the Russian provided comfort and the relief of light-hearted remarks as the younger boy was finding his feet.

Soon it was time for Viktor to leave - and, in spite of his lover's departure, Yuuri was teeming with an inwardly exuberant spirit, rather than apprehension, towards the following few days he was to
have alone to himself.

In preparation for such fun, the skater had stockpiled the various necessary supplies in the days prior to Viktor's departure; diet pills, laxatives, green tea, diet rice and noodles - you name it, Yuuri'd bought it. Of course, the skater didn't actually plan to eat anything (and why would he? This would be the perfect opportunity to fast without suspicion!), but he felt it reassuring to know that, in case of emergency, or perhaps in the event that he succumbed to the inconvenient belligerence of his own hunger, he would have materials that were to act as a safety net. Yuuri supposed that, in the unlikely case that he did eat, at least he wouldn't blow his budget on the rather pathetic amount of a meal's equivalent.

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H1story_mxker: He's gone, now I'm free!
----
XxxstarvingprincessxxxX: woo, hav fun
----
H1story_mxker: I will! Any tips for enjoying myself?
----
XxxstarvingprincessxxxX: idk- look @ thinspo, wach tv I gess
----
H1story_mxker: Okay, thanks!!
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'Hmm,' thought Yuuri, 'that list wasn't particularly conclusive... oh well, I suppose the main focus of this exercise is simply not to eat - it can't be that hard, and I'm already geared up for the excitement, so.'

As dictated by all knowledgeable pro-ana sites, one must begin their fast by activating the stop watch in the numerical sector of the clock app on their phone - if this hasn't been done, it would be hard for one to technically label the fast as legitimate, as there would be no obvious way to keep track of time spent without food. Yuuri, being the diligent little member of such sites, knew exactly what to do, and at the strike of twelve that night activated the very same function on his own mobile phone.

The fast had begun.

As the result of at least a gallon of green tea, currently Yuuri's body was not yet rendered uncomfortable by any unprecedented hunger pangs - although, such pains themselves were not something the skater was unaccustomed to. Filled with pride and determination to succeed, the Japanese boy flicked through his phone at the array of past times he'd recorded whilst going without food: 12 hours, a day, once he'd even managed to stretch it to a day and a half. However, this time was different. Yuuri decided he'd have to expand his goal if he ever wanted to accelerate his progress and impress his online friend, and with courage typed the memo 'three days' into the phone's empty notepad.

'Think about it this way, Yuuri: if you could binge for three days straight, you can fast for three days straight. It won't be difficult - not if you think of Viktor, and how pleased he'll be to see you twirling weightlessly through the air when you finally meet your goal. This is all helping you, don't fuck it up.'

And with that lasting thought, the skater fell asleep - such an activity was as good a distraction as any.

In the dark of early morning, Yuuri was poked awake by a small bubble of hunger that had popped
in his stomach - a minor disturbance, but not yet a concern. He supposed that the cause was down to last night's lack of meals, but, Yuuri reaffirmed, that was the entire point of a fast anyway. It wasn't as if he'd never practised this before - it was just a slight extension of his typical routine.

Still exhausted from the collective burn of regular nights at the gym, Yuuri seized the rare opportunity to stay in bed until noon, until he was roused by the ringing of his phone.

~*SHAWTY HAD THEM APPLE BOTTOM JEANS (JEANS) BOOTS WITH THE-*~

"Shit... shit," he murmured, shoving his glasses into his face and banging against the bedside table for the device that was now vibrating vigorously across its wooden surface.

~*...SHE HIT THE FLOOR! (SHE HIT THE FLOOR!) NEXT THING YOU KN-*~

The incoming call was from Georgi Popovich, another Russian skater that frequented the rink. Sentimentality was Georgi's biggest strength, but it was, inconveniently, also his biggest weakness, and the skater would often call up Yuuri in the ungodly hours of the morning to vent his feelings of frustration towards the typically tragic events that plagued his love life.

"...Hello?" said Yuuri, ears still ringing from the violent outburst of sound, "Georgi? Yeah, it's me, Yuuri... wait, what? Look, Georgi, I'd love to pick up your dry cleaning, but you see, this is my day off, and yes I know you don't want to run into your ex girlfriend again, but I don't really - you'll pay me? Well, I do like money..."

He glanced upwards at the clock on the wall; the skater had nowhere to be and no meals to eat, so theoretically such an activity was entirely possible.

"...fine, okay. Yep, Georgi, it's fine, yep - no, it's - yep, okay, bye now... yes, I'll be there, okay - bye, bye now."

Sleep-deprived and with the initial twangs of hunger beginning to kick in, Yuuri threw on an old pair of jeans and a t-shirt as he finished downing a pot of coffee, ready to face the day ahead of him.

For Yuuri, the first day of a fast was always the most 'enjoyable'. The hazy glows that resided in the back of his peripheral vision hadn't yet become blinding, the hunger, whilst noticeable, wasn't a substantial inconvenience, and amidst the chaos of daily training these short bursts of starvation remained undiscovered - well, by Viktor and the senior adults at the rink, anyway. On a couple of accounts Yuuri had realised that Mila was undoubtedly catching up to his regular starvation antics, but prayed that the fear of losing him further would prevent him from being thoroughly accosted.

Today's outcome was slightly different, but Yuuri didn't feel himself that greatly effected by the recent lack of food. Premature dizziness and rapid dehydration were becoming a slight concern, and a few rather pitiful stares from strangers left the Japanese boy rather intrigued as to why he'd captured their attention, but for the most part, the day ended with a positive outcome. Yuuri even received a rather enthusiastic embrace from Georgi's ex girlfriend, who ruffled his hair affectionately and told him he was 'so strong', although for what the skater had absolutely no idea. Even the woman at the dry cleaner's looked at Yuuri with a vague sprinkle of sympathy.

"Hi, I'm here to collect a cape for Mr. Popovich." said Yuuri, glaring at the bowl of lollipops that sat on the counter top, somewhat teasing him with their glistening sugary glow.

"Sure - can I have a signature?" Asked the woman at the counter.

"Oh, um - here you go.."
Yuuri’s hand, now a little unsteady, fumbled with the ballpoint pen in his pocket, withdrawing it and carefully spelling his name across the sheet of paper.

"Sorry sir, we only accept documents in English or Russian," she added.

The skater turned his head to face his mistake, reeling with embarrassment as crimson waters flooded his complexion. It turned out he'd written his name in Japanese without even realising his mistake, now such a blunder had been revealed by no less than a complete stranger.

"Sorry, I'm a little tired." he replied, head ducked in embarrassment.

Before long, Yuuri had escaped from the curious stares of public onlookers and was dashing to Georgi's apartment downtown, his cape flapping in the day's blustering winds whilst he avoided the crowds of tourists that often congregated around the city centre. He'd managed to deliver his friend's obscure textile accessory within relatively good time, the bell of the nearby gothic cathedral chiming for 4 as Yuuri drifted past the local supermarket with a sprinkling of coins jangling in the palm of his hand.

Even by the skater's typical standards, today had been unusually exhausting. The weak and feeble nature of Yuuri's hunger had never before been a formidable match against the hopeful buzz produced by prolonged periods of starvation, the anticipation of presumed weight loss far more uplifting than his usual apprehension towards mealtimes. On a whim, Yuuri entered the store and swiped a gargantuan can of zero calorie power drink from its home on the shelf, the coins spilling out onto the counter as he hurriedly paid for his beverage.

Yuuri'd never previously resorted to the consumption of caffeinated fruit drinks, and considered doing so to be a cowardly behaviour in general, but, not wanting to allow the usual frivolous essence of a fast to dissipate in the absence of energy, he felt he was left with no choice. Hiding the can in his coat pocket, the Japanese boy calmed himself before returning home, sprawling across the crevice left from last night's lengthy slumber as he knocked back its sugary contents.

It was late in the day, and by now that morning's extra large caffeine pill dosage had completely slipped Yuuri's mind. Supposedly their magical effects had never actually kicked in, thus the user perceived no harm in topping up his seemingly depleted source of caffeine.

Well, that was at least until his vision had begun to blur, his eyelids falling shut as he collapsed onto the floor.
"Yuuri?" said Viktor, shaking him at the shoulders, "Yuuri, can you hear me?"

The skater opened his eyes to the blinding fluorescent lighting glowing above him, arms bound to a bleach-scented mattress by bundles of wires and a canular that had presumably been rammed into his badly bruised wrist.

'What's going on?' he thought, 'What is this, where am I? And why is Viktor here?'

Yuuri shut his eyes once again and racked his brains for a reasonable explanation as to why he was confined to these tiled walls, machines beeping rhythmically around him. He thought back to the days preceding this event, hoping to discover the cause for his current situation.

He remembered being nudged awake on the second day of his fast by one of Makkachin's slobbery kisses, wiping away the excess spittle with a rub of his sleeve and catching the foamy residue of the previous night's energy drink, attributing a slight caffeine overdose to his sudden loss of consciousness. The majority of that second day was spent with Yuuri cooped up in the confinement of the apartment, yet again feigning illness to the skaters at the rink so that he could remain home and over-exercise in peace. No doubt would he have burned a sufficient amount of calories out on the ice, but Yuuri was simply too exhausted for any sort of social interaction, no matter how minuscule the amount.

This feeling of enervation continued into the following day, the final 24 hours of the fast and the peak of his starvation period. Yuuri knew he would have to face the others at the rink; he couldn't avoid them for more than a couple of days consecutively or they'd start to suspect what he was up to.

At around 9am, Yuuri whipped out his phone to check the hours on its clock, the current number reading at 57. How exciting! Yuuri'd never fasted for such a substantial period of time before, and despite the encroaching presence of fatigue upon his body, the skater had budgeted about half an hour specifically for an updated body check as he hoped for a new spout of success.

Foregoing the use of the scale until the fast had properly concluded, Yuuri stripped to his underwear and frolicked (with the best of his frazzled ability) into the bathroom. He tripped over a couple of discarded packets of pills on the journey inwards, but nonetheless the promise of perhaps a new thigh gap was far more enticing than the prospect of having to remedy a bloodied knee.

Then, doubt hit his consciousness like a bullet brimming with despair, 'Who am I kidding? I can't expect anything magnificent, my body can't do anything right. It's always the same - I fast, I jog, I purge - nothing happens. Still, I can only but hope...'

The skater posed in front of the mirror, the dingy lighting illuminating every fault present in plain
eyesight. Suddenly, his eyes opened wide, and with great excitement Yuuri began to clutch his inner thigh, fingers gripping at its receding layers of flesh.

'It's a thigh gap... a THIGH GAP! Wow... finally, I've actually achieved something,' he thought, smiling wide as the voice in his head reaped the rewards of a self-imposed system of destruction, 'I can't believe it's taken this long, wow... I really am completely shit at this, haha, but wow... it's here.'

Yuuri looked at his thigh in perhaps the same way a proud mother would gaze upon a newborn child. He grabbed his phone and hurriedly took photos of his achievement for his secret 'thinspiration' folder, snapping his work from all angles in what could've been likened to some form of grotesque photoshoot. As he reviewed these snaps from the comfort of the bathtub, Yuuri thought lovingly of his admiration for this newly-acquired achievement of starvation, reviewing his methods of enactment and beginning to fantasise about future areas of interest.

Yet, as his inspecting eyes wandered across each and every photograph, Yuuri continually found fault with various aspects of his unclothed body - his ribs weren't protruding his stomach still flapped like a ship's sail in the tumult of a winter storm, and his cheeks were as chubby as ever. Despite his utmost efforts, he wouldn't ever be as perfect as he dreamed. Yuuri knew that, whilst in his efforts he could perhaps grasp the menial success of a couple of inches lost, he would never achieve true greatness and would be destined to remain a fat, slovenly piece of crap for the rest of his miserable life.

Crying was pointless; nothing worthwhile was to gain from it. Yuuri wasn't upset, as by now substantially visible weight loss wasn't something he ever expected - he wasn't upset, persay, just rooted to the ground in an ongoing mindset of cold and emotionlessness.

'Snap out of it, Yuuri!' the skater told himself as his head was leant against the wall, 'Do you not realise how lucky you are? The universe has presented you with over three days' worth of unlimited fasting, and you're going to mope around like a slob? No! You may as well make the most of it.'

The skater knew his conscience was right; he had absolutely no time to waste. Although the current mounds of fat that hung off of his aching frame were currently immovable, something could possibly be improved about the gargantuan bloat pressing against the side of his stomach - something immediate.

'What are you afraid of? You've done this before, it's just the same but on an empty stomach...'

Yuuri returned to the toilet for yet another self-hatred-infused session of purging and tearing his tonsils apart, sweeping a matted lock of hair out of his face with an icy blue hand as he readied his position to fire. Without a second thought, the skater shoved three bent figures down the back of his throat, tickling his uvula playfully in hope of a regurgitated waterfall. However, nothing happened.

It seemed that, in order to purge effectively, he would require actual food in his stomach so that it could subsequently be brought back up again. Yuuri bent his head in frustration, letting it lie there until he felt the dampness of the toilet water swimming by his split ends. Unwilling to succumb to his own body's weakness, the Japanese boy reached for a nearby toothbrush and rammed it inwards, bristles scratching the surface of his throat as he scrubbed it back and forth.

Sure enough, a flood of phlegmy liquid had begun to rise from deep inside of Yuuri's abdomen. He retched, mouth opening wide and giving way to the stream of watery-red that flowed into the toilet bowl, the taste of iron fillings stinging his gums as a couple back teeth began to wobble.
'That's odd,' Yuuri thought to himself, 'I don't remember drinking anything red lately...'

Still, the skater couldn't hang around for too long - he had somewhere to be! The Gran Prix series edged ever closer, and with Yuuri's chronic fear of failure ever growing, it was vital that he stuck to a rigorous training regime. Gym one day, training another - Yuuri needed to be in prime condition in order to gain even a chance at making that final podium. Plus, with the added bonus of accelerated weight loss, what wasn't there to love?

Following a few more insecure pinches at his discoloured flab, the Japanese boy finally summed up the energy to gather the equipment he required for a day of training.

'Skates... check, tracksuit... check.... hmm, what else?'

Furrowing deep into his sports bag, the upbeat cheer of a Japanese cartoon character caught Yuuri's eye, and as he retrieved the bento box attached to it he began to read the message on the outside, which said:

*Yuuri's Bento Box*

written in his mother's handwriting. Despite the guilt and emotional turmoil that wracked Yuuri's conscience as he pushed the brightly-coloured item swiftly under the bedroom wardrobe, he knew in his heart that his actions were for the best. Fasting never caused him any harm that was detrimentally dangerous to his body, and apart from the occasional minor inconveniences often caused as a product of his own stupidity, Yuuri frequently reminded himself of just how proud his mother would be if he were to win the Grand Prix Final - a topic of substantially more importance than simply missing a few meals.

Nonetheless, the arrogant hunger still refused to subside. Yuuri jogged to the rink hoping that in the half hour he'd spent exercise the pain would simply retreat, but his actions were seemingly futile. The skater didn't care all that deeply (hunger was once an enjoyable part of starvation), but this most recent fast was quickly growing tedious - where was the euphoria, the light and airy feeling of an empty stomach? Yuuri found this instance to be most unsatisfactory.

It was just after lunch when Yuuri clattered in through the entrance to the rink, throwing his bag towards the floor and himself nearly with it.

"Yuuri, hi!" exclaimed Mila, who to be honest was simply glad her friend was still alive, "we haven't seen you in a while, and you just missed the pizza round!"

"Oh... oh no... what a sha-"

"It's okay, we saved you a slice!" she added, knowing beforehand exactly the excuses he'd likely fabricate in an attempt to escape eating in public.

Somewhat disgruntled, and with no other legitimate reason to refuse her offer, Yuuri turned to face the clock and tried to calculate the hours that remained until the end of his fast.

'Let's see...' he began to think, 'well, it's nearly two o' clock now, so I've been fasting for roughly two days and fourteen hours; that means I have ten hours to go. If I can prolong the amount of time spent practising, and then promise to take the slice home with me, perhaps I can avoid breaking it without too much suspicion.'

"Okay, thanks!" replied Yuuri, "I'll eat it after practise, since I'm all riled up now!"

Mila shrugged her shoulders and smiled rather defeatedly,
"Okay, I'll wait with you so you don't have to eat alone!"

"Okay!"

Yuuri muttered an exasperated sentence under his breath, but it was in Japanese and luckily the concerned Russian skater wasn't yet fluent enough to understand what he was saying.

Adjusting his skates, the skater combed back his hair into its typically unkempt position as he glided out onto the shimmery surface of the new polished ice. Having not visited the rink in a few days, it felt rewarding to be reunited with at least one familiar aspect of his life.

'Right - I've got an idea,' thought Yuuri, 'I'll skate for a few hours, perhaps until Mila gets bored, then I'll take it from there - I'm not having her ruin it for me, not a streak this big.'

In the absence of his usual pre-skating caffeine boost, a premature ache had begun to sweep across Yuuri's body like locusts over a vulnerable population of livestock. He endured it with a reasonable amount of confidence - Yuuri often found his muscles to be in pain, regardless of whether or not he was exercising, and frequently attributed it to both his natural weakness and the amount of fat his poor organs were having to carry around.

Still, aside from the minor health complications associated with his fasts, Yuuri certainly felt lighter than the crisp freezing air that hung around the edge of the bleachers. With nothing inside of him to act as an anchor, he possessed the ability to jump and twirl around the rink with ease, legs pumping excitedly as the music's tempo sped up and extending like the span of a delicate swan's wing as it opened to take flight into a sunlit sky.

"It's funny, the name of that song - 'Toxic' - well, the boy certainly looks intoxicated."

Mila turned from her slumped position by the rails of the rink and found Yakov gazing out across the ice at the skinny figure circling its parameters.

"Well, I guess at first it was a purely sexual thing, like Eros, but I suppose now it's taken on a different meaning..." she said, sadness hanging in her voice.

"I'm surprised Viktor still allows him to perform like this."

Mila squinted her eyes at the older man, somewhat disapproving of her teacher, "You haven't discussed this with either of them?"

Yakov sighed, "It's not my place, Mila. Viktor is too proud; he wouldn't believe the truth unless it came from Yuuri himself. I can't interfere in case the boy is disqualified from the championship, and if we press too hard for an answer the boys together will simply retaliate by moving further away."

Mila nodded her head with recognition, surprised that Yakov was so well-educated on the subject.

"How do you know all of this? Yuuri's so ill, it's obvious - can't we help him."

Yakov smiled, "I know because I am a great deal older than you. I've trained many skaters under my belt, of all shapes and sizes, and I've seen all the tribulation the job has to offer."

Mila said nothing else, but smiled understandingly as she resumed her initial position.

Meanwhile, Yuuri was flying free - both metaphorically and literally. In the absence of food, his
eyes had begun to grow wobbly, both blurring and lighting up the rink with every rotation. Quadruple salchow, triple toe flip, triple axel - all were hilariously easy for the skater in his current states of deprivation, and Yuuri wasn't intent on stopping there. Continually determined to push his limits, he pressed forward to mimic a series of routines exhibited by Viktor at the most recent olympics, determined to prove to himself and the others that his performance was just as satisfactory, if not more refined, without the food that wasn't desperately needed anyway.

A couple of hours had passed and by now Yuuri was beginning to feel incredibly wearisome. Whilst the quality of his routines never faltered, you could see it in the visibility of his facial expressions. Sweat his body quite frankly lacked the energy to produce drained the little moisture that lingered inside his face and back, his mouth swimming with the taste of blood as it became clear that Yuuri was testing his limits.

'Fuck, I'm never going to make it out of here with this minuscule amount of practise,' he lectured himself, 'perhaps if I temporarily increase the intensity of my routine, it'll be enough to feign exhaustion as an excuse for lack of appetite.'

The skater dashed repeatedly back and forth across the ice, accompanied by the dizzying exhilaration of breathlessness and indignant spirit towards the prospect of having to break his most successful fast yet. Jump after jump was completed, Yuuri's ankles cracking in defiance as his blades pounded the ice leaving spiralling tracks in their wake. The Japanese boy left no part of the ice unscratched; he was going to skate as if the fate of his life depended on it, that statement being relatively true, as for the foreseeable future the fast that he had currently undertaken was central to his quality of life.

"Oh my god," Mila whispered to herself, "he doesn't look right - we should get him to come off -" she reached for the gate at the end of the bleachers but was halted by coach Yakov's swift and mighty grip.

The aged Russian shook his head, "As much as I'd love to, it's pointless. If we stop him now, he'll simply return tonight when there's nobody around to stop him - then, if he does find himself in danger, we won't be there to help him."

Mila had no choice but to agree. The coach was many years older than her, and a great deal wiser too. She longer for Yuuri to reach out to her and accept her propositions of care, but knew all too well that such things were easier said than done.

Meanwhile, back out on the ice, Yuuri was gearing himself up for the most difficult and technical move found in his current skating regimen: the quintuple flip. It sounded simple enough - a toe flip, with five rotations, but in reality was everything but straightforward as the skater had initially anticipated. Nevertheless, the move was to be an essential constituent of Yuuri's routine if he hoped to match the skill set of the other Grand Prix series competitors, and one that he could not afford to do without.

Breathing deeply, the skater engaged in a vaguely crouched position as he angled himself for a theoretically perfect execution of the ever-feared quintuple flip. Yuuri swayed back and forth across the ice with great caution, both mentally and physically preparing himself for the takeoff, then with all remaining power within him twisted into the air before the eyes of his friend and her watchful elder.

The first rotation came with ease, the second like swimming through a lake of sweet fresh air, the third slightly faltering as his once clouded eyes fully misted over, the fourth collapsing into a severely twisted fall, and the fifth only half complete as Yuuri's vision faded into the pitch black of utter darkness, his limp body crashing into the ice in an unconscious pile of bones and skin.
"Holy shit - YUURI!" Mila cried, face screaming with alarm as she hastily undid the fence gate, shuffling across the ice to the body of the Japanese skater slumped in corner of the rink.

Yakov sighed,
"I supposed this would happen sooner or later."

Mila combed her fingers through her friend's hair as she lifted his head from the bitter chill of the ice, inspecting his pulse for the vital signs of life. Whilst a beating pulse and regular gasps of breath remained, all signs of consciousness had been knocked from the Japanese boy's face from the moment he'd began to land the jump. With Yakov's approval, Mila dragged Yuuri's body out onto the furry mats by the bleachers, swathing him with mismatched items of lost property and what little she could find in the locker room. Following a few minute's pause after his initial fall, as Yuuri eventually began to rouse from his temporary slumber, a fresh mug of tea gently pressed against the chapped surface of his lips as the numbness that had conquered his face slowly cracked and fell apart.

"Wha...." he croaked, seeing stars, ".what happened?"

"You seemed to have had a bit of a fall, it'd be best for you to rest up until the ambulance arrives."

"Yakov? Oh shit -" the skater continued, "I'm so sorry you guys, I'm wasting so much practise time-"

Mila returned the steaming mug to Yuuri's lips in an effort to momentarily silence him,
"Shhh... don't wear yourself out any longer. I was so worried, Yuuri, I thought you might've die-"

This lasting comment was met by a sharp shake of the head from her coach, instructing her to drop the subject of Yuuri's personal battles immediately in the likely case that it'd only increase his current anguish.

"Regardless, you're safe now - well, relatively."
She checked her watch,
"Hopefully they should be here soon."

Yuuri put up a pitiful resistance as he was bundled into the ambulance by a pair of hospital workers, struggling in the strangled embrace of medical blankets to comprehend just what they were going to do with him. Drifting in and out of consciousness, the skater remembered little of the journey to the hospital, neither was he reluctant to fall asleep as the nurses fussed over his vital signs. Yuuri didn't particularly care whether or not his blood pressure was critically low, or the damaging loss of electrolytes from his system - the Japanese boy was simply relieved to have upheld his commitment to the day's fast.

Once he was fully checked over, with all necessary tubes inserted in various locations of his body, Yuuri curled up in the hospital bed, steaming under the numerous layers of blankets piled on top of him and wearily hoping that he'd understand it all a little better in the morning.

It was an hour before lunch the next day, and Viktor was anxiously pacing the floor by the side of his fiancé's bed, suede loafers squeaking rhythmically to the rapid beat of his heart. Suddenly, as the repetitive beeps of Yuuri's monitor began to increase in frequency, the skater began to blink awake, groaning in discomfort and twisting his body with great amounts of disorientation. Viktor rushed over to his bedside, dimming the harsh light of a nearby lamp and shaking his partner with timid gentleness.

"Yuuri? Yuuri, can you hear me?"
The Japanese boy wriggled upwards, back leant against a tower of pillows as he squinted at the tubes that lay deep inside of him,

"Viktor, is that you?" he replied sceptically, "Heh, aren't you supposed to be in America?"

The Russian skater chuckled grimly, unsure of what to say,

"Well, aren't you supposed to be in peak physical condition for your Victory at the Grand Prix Final? I'm here because Yakov called me, he said you were in danger of falling seriously ill, and I couldn't just leave you alone like that lyubov moya."

Yuuri smiled, his facial muscles screaming as a result of their unprecedented contortion. In that moment, the skater's body was like a terrible jigsaw puzzle - numb in one area, the other painfully tender; freezing blue legs with simultaneous beads of sweat dripping from his forehead. If he had remained undisturbed, it would've been likely that upon continuing his inspection, Yuuri would regain the ability to remember exactly what had happened, but his memories dissolved into disconnected scenarios as the ward doctor entered the room, his thoughts interrupted completely.

"Good morning - well, I suppose it's nearly afternoon by now," the doctor laughed heartily, "Mr. Katsuki, is it? Well sir, it seems you've taken a nasty fall, that bruise on your elbow certainly looks menacing."

As the Japanese boy turned to witness the gargantuan violet splodge that had engulfed the best part of his left arm, the doctor then approached Viktor in whispered sentences of serious Russian conversation. The skater nodded, collected his bags from the rack by the window and swiftly exited the room, this action met with a sharp cry from his fiancé.

"Viktor! Where are you going?!?"

The Doctor replied in his partner's place, "I was just about to discuss the specifics of your case, Mr. Katsuki, so perhaps incorrectly assumed that you'd prefer to be alone in receiving the details. By all means, Mr. Nikiforov is perfectly welcome to stay if it would be a comfort."

Yuuri paused to think for a moment, 'Why would he this concerned about sharing the details of a minor collapse? It's not like it hasn't happened before - it was probably caused by the caffeine pills, or the tea....'

"Mr. Katsuki?" added the doctor, clipboard in hand, "your decision?"

"Oh, um, sure - he can stay."

Viktor smiled thankfully in response, kneeling down at his partner's bedside as the two braces themselves for the expectedly mundane details of Yuuri's minor injury.

"So, Mr. Katsuki, are you aware that yesterday, at around 5 in the afternoon in the presence of a friend and a rink associate, you proceeded to temporarily lose consciousness for a span of around 15 minutes, your heart rate and temperature dropping in the process?"

"Yep, I'm aware of it." said Yuuri nonchalantly, Viktor a little alarmed by his overly relaxed attitude.

"And are you aware of the treatment that was conducted as once again lost consciousness on the hospital premises? I.e. - the blood tests, the routine checkup, and the immediate administration of a glucose drip?"
The Japanese boy's pupils shrunk in alarm, "You mean, you're just pumping tons of sugar into my veins as we speak?"

His question was met with a positive response, "Well - not the kind of sugar you've typically heard of, but yes - I suppose so. It was indeed a fundamental aspect of your treatment."

'Fucker,' thought Yuuri, 'what's he trying to do, fatten me up so I can't leave this bed? This is stupid."

"So... I imagine you'll remove it from my arm pretty soon, right?"

"When you're discharged, yes."

"And when will that be?" Interrupted Viktor, prompting a question whilst trying to remain on his partner's good side.

"I expect, Mr. Katsuki, that you'll be allowed to go home sometime next week - when you've gathered your strength, yes? I think that will be best."

"What?" retaliated the skater, "Why can't I go home now?"

"Because..." said the doctor, pressing his glasses against the crusty brow of his forehead, referring to the clipboard for evidence of relevant informant.

"Mr. Katsuki, I am diagnosing you with Anorexia Nervosa."

"I'm sorry?"

"Whilst you were asleep, we weighed you using technological advancements installed in our hospital beds. Your weight was discovered to be 39 kilograms, give or take, putting you at a horrendously low BMI of 13.0. Fortunately, you appear to possess an unusually high body fat percentage, which decreases the level of damage committed with each kilogram lost compared to that of someone with a naturally muscular frame, but difference between your weight and that of a healthy athlete's is detrimentally large."

Viktor suddenly chimed in, himself sensing the hostile atmosphere of the conversation, "Surely you've made a mistake? Yuuri's thin because he's ill - not because he's starving himself. I see him eat all the time, he's got an amazing appetite -"

"- Mr Nikiforov," the doctor continued, ignoring the skater's obviously oblivious excuses, "we found traces of acidic material around the lining of his gums, as well as progressive tooth decay and high levels of energy-suppressant pills in his digestive system. Furthermore, I've received information from a close friend of his recent unhealthy behaviours, and she's exceptionally concerned for his wellbeing. Either Mr. Katsuki's a master of deception or you're covering him to save your reputation - and the latter seems a little far-fetched to me."

"Yuuri? Is this true? Have you been lying to me all this time?"

The Japanese boy refused to look his partner in the eye, "Come on Viktor, we're going home."

"Mr. Katsuki, that's hardly advisable considering your current condition -"

"I SAID WE'RE GOING HOME. I'm a legal adult, I'm discharging myself, and there is absolutely
nothing the two of you can do about it."

And with that, Yuuri thrust himself from under the dirty bedclothes, struggling into last night's discarded undergarments and the clothing that accompanied it.

"You can stay or you can come with me, I don't care. I need a shower, and the ones here stink of mouldy and disinfectant."

Horrendously embarrassed, Yuuri absconded from the hospital before any further chastisement could occur, dragging Viktor and a heap of emotional turmoil on their wake. Images of the hospital room, its windowless sides and prison-like bars hanging off the door continuously plagued his thoughts, his strong suspicion of medical professionals and their practises present once again.

Viktor's mind, meanwhile, was still swimming with confusion, betrayal, but worse of all - guilt. How could he possibly have been so blind to Yuuri's struggles, so distant when his fiancé was so fraught with emotional distress? Sure, he was rather angry with Yuuri, but the majority of aggravation was wholeheartedly directed at himself.

Once the pair had arrived home, not a word was spoken. Yuuri crashed out onto the sofa, pretending to preoccupy himself with an unusually intense mortal kombat session on his phone, but for once it was no use - Viktor saw straight through his delusive antics, and in place of his once gentle fingertips a disturbingly firm grip had begun to steadily engulf Yuuri's right shoulder.

"Yuuri, we need to talk..."
Freckle, freckle, what makes you so special?

Viktor wasn't angry. Sure, his veins were wracked with the blood of betrayal, and the confusion that had one gradually steamed inside of him was reaching boiling point - accompanied by a violent slew of guilt, uncertainty and trepidation as to what would be his next move - but he wasn't angry. His partner was currently in no shape for a formidable argument, and Viktor wasn't particularly inclined to engage in one. Still, the topic desperately needed to be breached, and now that the Russian skater knew the truth it was becoming increasingly difficult to ignore the shivering mess hunched over in the corner of the sofa on the opposite end of the room.

"You want to talk?" Yuuri said gruffly in response to his fiancé's earlier proposal, "Great - look, I'm talking! Okay, we should probably go to sleep now, goodnig-" "Come on now, Lapochka, don't do this. I know you're mad because your friends sent you to the hospital, but the doctor said it was for your own good - you even needed a glucose drip, and I suspect that's only reserved for the serio-"

Suddenly, Yuuri's expression was pierced with alarm; he'd forgotten all about the practically liquidised sugar the hospital staff had secretly pumped into him, a calculated act of deception designed to balloon him from his current size.

"Shit - I'm sorry Viktor, I have to go out." he said, heading for the open door in hopes that he might still claw at the ability to ferociously burn some pesky extra calories before bed. The nurses had already broken his fast for him, and Yuuri wasn't going to allow for another ruthless defeat.

Viktor exhaled in frustration, yanking his fiancé's shirt and dragging him back towards the ground, perching him on the end of the sofa as he prepared for a flurry of confrontation.

"We need to talk, and we need to talk now."

Rolling his eyes with passionate vexation, Yuuri then displayed a smile stewed with acrimonious undertones and replied sarcastically, his speech squeezing through the bitterness of his firmly gritted teeth.

"Fine," the Japanese boy goaded, "your wish is my command, 'master' - all you need to know, I shall tell you. Happy?"

"Well, I'll certainly be somewhat less inquisitive."

Yuuri rolled his head back and stared expressionlessly at the empty ceiling that hung above him, leering like a black cloud crowding his thoughts. Viktor may have had a right to act solicitously in this situation of distress and uncertainty, but the Japanese boy perceived it as a rather false perpetuation of self-righteousness; Viktor always wanted to be seen as the person on the right side of an argument.

"Okay," said Yuuri, rather reluctantly, "I suppose you can ask away."

The Russian skater hopped up onto the sofa to accompany his partner, perching on its arm as not to threaten Yuuri's need for personal space at this current point in time.

"Well, when did all this start?"

"When did what start? There's a lot, I'm afraid you'll have to be specific."

"This - the anorexia -" Viktor began to stumble over his words, unsure of how to put it lightly.

Yuuri shook his head,
"Viktor, I don't have anorexia. I don't have an eating disorder-"

"-but-"

"No," he continued, chuckling uncomfortably, "I'm not anorexic. Look at me - does this look anywhere near emaciated enough to you? No, it doesn't; I'm a simple guy, I like hot, naked Russian ice skaters, and I'd also somewhat like to become a hot, naked ice skater myself. However, a certain barrier to that dream is this fat sack of crap - or, well, my actual body."

Yuuri fiddled with his stomach to reiterate the point, Viktor attempting to hide his disturbed grimace behind the blankness of his current expression.

"But lapochka, everyone knows it isn't about weight - it's about your mindset, okay? You're clearly unhealthy, and I'd rather you didn't continue this way..." he restrained himself, pausing to correct the growing perplexity that rested in his gritted teeth.

"Well, I'm not anorexic, I'm simply on a diet - you can start there."

Viktor realised he wouldn't get anywhere if he didn't cease to aggravate his fiancé's swelled temper, and remembered that in order to get Yuuri to cooperate, he'd likely have to temporarily accommodate his thoughts and feelings - however irrational they were.

"Okay, okay," said the Russian calmly, hand gestures now much more reserved, "but whatever this 'diet' is - when did it start?"

"I don't know - you mean properly? Probably around January, just after Christmas. Everybody commented on my weight gain, and I decided to do something about it. Nothing special there."

"Yuuri, you know that your friends and I were just joking, right? We love you regardless of what you look like; I thought you were just as beautiful then as you are now - but you were a lot healthier, and I'd really like that back."

"Well, I wouldn't." Yuuri retorted, "You've never been fat, you'd never understand."

"And neither have you, well, at least not in the time frame that I'd met you in!"

"You're wrong, you're so utterly wr- wait, time frame?"

"Shit..." muttered Viktor, realising he'd said too much, "it's just - I know you were equally as unhealthy back in college - Yurio told me about it, I'm sorry..."

'Ahh, the winds of betrayal blow strongly through this friendship group,' Yuuri thought to himself, resentment burning in his pallid cheeks.

"Regardless, you can't keep doing this. It's desperately unhealthy, and you need to be in top shape for the Grand Prix Series."

The Japanese skater sighed,
"Is that all that matters to you? Public faces? Just because I'm struggling with my diet, doesn't mean I'm a hopeless case of a skater! I'll never be perfect and pristine like you are, so get over yourself!"
"If you haven't noticed, I am not just you're fiancé, I am your coach! I have a duty of care, and right now I'm certainly not fulfilling it!"

"How can you be mad at me?" Yuuri snarled, "You're not the one on a diet! Have you ever puked your guts Viktor? Ever gone days without eating? No!! Cos you're Mr-Fucking-Perfect, can do no wrong, and will never understand what it's like to be as repulsive as yours truly!"

Viktor grunted sadly, placing his thumb and forefinger in the centre of his brow in frustration, "Yuuri, you're delusional... you have to stop this, it's not healthy - why didn't you tell me? You know how much that hurts, that you couldn't trust me, your future husband?"

"Ah, yes," the shorter boy retaliated aggressively, "I'm certainly going to tell you when I'm feeling like shit, definitely - who doesn't love to admit their plethora of weaknesses to their perfect fiancé? And why should I have told you? Mila and Yurio, even Phichit, they were receptive enough to notice I wasn't feeling great! Sure, I despise their decisions to turn me in like this with a passion, but at least they cared!"

"I'm sorry!" snapped Viktor, "I'm a selfish prick, blah blah blah, I'm a terrible partner, a terrible coach and a despicable human being! Is that what you wanted to hear?"

"No! I just want you to understand!"

"I'm trying goddamnit, it's hard when I'm not mental like you!"

Yuuri was taken aback by Viktor's sudden cold-heartedness. Whether or not this outburst was spurred from a throbbing bout of concern the Japanese skater wasn't sure, but given his current condition was far too exhausted to care.

Silence stirred the room, Viktor shaking his head as he regretted his precious actions.

"Wow, how meaningful of you."

"Yuuri, I'm sorry - I'm just worried sick. How could you do this to me, to worry me like this?"

"Have you ever considered that perhaps the world doesn't revolve around you?" snarled Yuuri, momentarily forgetting the sole cause of his diet in the first place: to please Viktor and win his everlasting affection.

"Look, malysh, promise me you won't lose any more weight?"

"Why would I make a promise to someone as dishonest as you?"

"Promise me, okay?"

"I don't want t- fine, we'll see."

'Anything to get the blithering idiot to shut up,' thought Yuuri.

Legs shaking as he stood, the Japanese boy turned to face his partner, staring down at him in a mixture of annoyance and pain.

"I'm going to bed now."

"Thank god - you need some rest," replied Viktor, "here, let me helped yo-"

His outstretched hand was met with a sharp swipe, swatting it away as Yuuri shook his head
powerfully.

"No Viktor, I need to be alone right now."

Head tucked between his shoulders as he faced towards the ground, the skater froze for a moment to picture the stillness of his partner's ice blue eyes, then fled his gaze, seeking sanctity behind the locked and boarded door of their bedroom.

Yuuri knew wasn't thinking straight, but he didn't care. He'd been stabbed in the back by everybody close to him, held up for ransom by doctors that would only free him on the premise that he fit their definition of competent. The skater was sick of it - this was his life, and he was going to live (or, in his case, slowly die) by his own accord.

Everything was so conflicting, the change so desperately frightening. What was he to do now? Yuuri was perfectly aware that he wouldn't be allowed to continue down this path of self-destruction; his bickering fiancé would simply drag him back kicking and screaming to the solitary confinement of the hospital, and that wasn't an option he could bear to think about. However, Yuuri certainly didn't want to gain any weight - that would mean the doctors were winning, and he was not about to have his intellect defeated by a group of unfeeling shrinks.

Yuuri needed relief, and he needed it now. He scrambled for the artefact in mind, intent on uncovering the only sort of therapy he could currently bear to deal with.

There they were, softly glistening in the twilight as they lay on top of each other, sprawling out like an elaborate Venetian fan on a lady masquerade's dresser table. Yuuri could never have hoped to live a life as glamorous, but these treasures were as good as things would ever get.

'Who needs diamonds when you've got razor blades?'

He trembled softly; Yuuri hadn't felt the sharp graze of the blade along his skin in so long, he'd entirely forgotten what it felt like. Everything had become so warily unfamiliar - a point that wasn't necessarily negative, but the skater was certainly frustrated, it was as if he was starting from scratch.

Thinking about his friends made Yuuri only want to scream louder, yearning to evaporate into a cacophonous wave of fury. By now the Japanese boy couldn't differentiate between anger and despondence, let alone feel any aspect of guilt, he was completely emotionless and yet atmospherically violent at the same time.

Most of all, Yuuri was furious with himself. He'd allowed for his guard to be let down, his weakness rendering him unconscious and not even putting up a substantial fight on the ride to the hospital shortly after he'd been captured by unsympathetic doctors and nurses. Nobody else could possibly be to blame for Yuuri's shortcomings - he alone stood on the stage of defeat, accepting the award for the world's largest fuck up.

'How could you let yourself be discovered like this?,’ cried the voice inside his head, 'This was your secret, your special secret - the only thing that made you unique! And now you've gone and shared it with the rest of the world, how pathetic! You were supposed to stay under the radar, as intended, but your stupidly obsess from exposed yourself before you could even begin to make any decent progress! You're not anorexic, and you'll never be an anorexic. You're a gluttonous wannabe with dreams of skinny superstardom, hitting rock bottom as your so-called 'friends' halt you in your tracks, all because you were too stupid not to push them away. This was yours, this was private. And now it's out there for the whole world to laugh at your stupidity.'
His thoughts stung like a knife to the head, incomparable to any meagre damage than that of what a razor blade could do. As his head once again fell silent, Yuuri broke it with a sharp slash across his left wrist. A shuddering sting tailed on the end of the blade as his flaked skin ripped open, garnet waterfalls erupting from the crevice as it began to expand.

'Baby scratches,' thought Yuuri, who at one point had been used to regularly viewing fat and muscle. It had been so long ago, and he majority of his scars had faded - with or without cosmetic intervention - that he yearned for a mark, any lasting mark, to remind himself that he was human, and that whatever he was currently feeling wasn't a temporary nightmare, but very real.

The skater proceeded, repeatedly slashing at his arm. Blood flowed out of his wrist and onto his lap, soiling his baggy black tracksuit. Despite being able to remove the stains once the blood had dried, Yuuri knew that he wouldn't be able to remove the stain from his consciousness or forget the mark on his memory.

Everything throbbed and yet the entire process was pleasantly soothing. Endorphins and the sweet rush of adrenaline flooded his body, spurring the skater on to continue. The once brilliant sheen of the blade grew dull as it was engulfed with the blood of a dehydrated loner, the fluids of a past success now the poison of a social outcast, deemed mentally unfit and penalised for actions he could no longer control.

Yuuri grew tired, wiping the blade with his shirt before placing it back into its rightful container. For a while he lay on the bed, back propped up by a copious amount of feathered pillows (Viktor's choice, naturally), observing intently at the blood trickling down his arm, forming intricate patterns as the streams were reunited into a single river of ruby red. Despite being somebody with a crippling fear of needles, Yuuri certainly didn't mind when it came to the sharpened blade of dingy shaving razors.

At last, the skater's mind was finally off the topic of starvation. He felt nothing, and nothing was exactly what he'd desired to feel. Self harm was a small price to pay for a glimpse of serenity, and if was to leave a permanent mark, so be it. Yuuri no longer cared, and besides, if Viktor wanted to disprove his mental competency, then perhaps it was time to show him what Yuuri was really made of.
A Disgruntled Compromise

{A.N. ~ I’m sorry for this chapter... so, so sorry... it’s utter shit. Literal garbage. I feel like a twat, but considering this past week I’ve been averaging roughly 4 hours of sleep a night, it’s legitimately the best I can do. Gotta love being 15 and slaving away at school each day! Anyway, I suppose there’s not harm in publishing it - it’s been ages since I’ve done anything, and I suppose this crap is better than nothing. I’m aware of the numerous spelling/grammar/muddled tenses, but I’m just horrendously tired lol!! If you want to, please comment and interact with me in the chapter’s comment section, I love talking to you guys! Thanks for sticking with me, I honestly don’t deserve your support :) }

Just over week had passed, and Yuuri's arms still stung like the faded memories of his past. Viktor, once again unsure of how to breach the subject of his partner's disorder, snuck about the apartment as a rather graceful fugitive out of fear that any further confrontation might exasperate Yuuri's deterioration, offering the occasional hug and kiss as emotional support at a time in which he didn't know what else to do. All that Viktor could do was gaze pitifully as his partner obsessively picked at pieces of half-eaten food, observing discreetly with the eyes of a hawk.

The Japanese skater was determined to raise Viktor's spirits in spite of his currently drained existence, blaming himself and his utter careless for his fiancé's recent bout of despondence. Yuuri wasn't able to comprehend just why Viktor was upset regarding his collapse - sure, it was somewhat unhealthy, but he saw it as more of an abrupt inconvenience than a life-threatening bout of hypotension. Regardless, as the Russian continued to mope and extensively research outdated psychology articles based on the treatment of Anorexia, Yuuri realised that something would have to be done to bring this depressive episode to a close.

"Viktor?" he enquired, poking his head around the corner of the bedroom door as he found the skater glued to his laptop.

"Yuuri!"
The Russian's glance shifted upward, embracing the Japanese's inquisitive gaze with an anxious smile,
"How are you feeling?"
Almost immediately after Viktor rolled his eyes in embarrassment, regretting even referring to Yuuri's current state of affairs.

"I'm... well, I'm not the worst I've been," he smiled back, moving over to a nearby chair, "but you were right - I suppose we do need to talk."

"Really? What made you change your mind?"

"This last week or so you've been really upset; I want to try and help cheer you up."

Viktor chuckled softly, shaking his head,
"With all due respect, Lapochka, I'd be far happier knowing you were well."

"I am well.."

"..."

"Okay," replied Yuuri, smiling sheepishly as he admitting defeat, "I'm not exactly healthy, I guess,
but you needn't worry about me. And sure, you did perhaps act like an absolute idiot the other night, but.."

"That's exactly it!"

"But I don't mind, you were angry."

"I was more in shock than anything-" the Russian interjected, "- to know that the love of your life is starving themselves, all whilst you've been totally oblivious - well, I'm ashamed of myself, ashamed that you felt you couldn't tell me, that's all."

Yuuri nodded in agreement, the embers of his partner's disappointment burning across his collarbones. In all fairness, there'd been a lot he'd never told his fiancé, the majority of which he didn't plan on telling either. Viktor didn't know about the binge eating, the Bulimia, the self harm, or his disturbingly powerful obsession with the British band 'S Club 7', and had only discovered the Japanese boy's previously overweight lifestyle via the despicable treachery of his once-revered rink mates, who, somewhat unsurprisingly, hadn't spoken to the skater all week.

"Well, I suppose now you know, haha," replied Yuuri, "...tada?"

Viktor snatched Yuuri's hands and pulled his frail body into a full-frontal hug, the warmth of his cheeks brushing against his partner's frosty icebergs,

"I don't really understand any of this," he began, "but I'm willing to help you get better."

"Better? Haha, that implies I need to improve in the first place."

"Well, that'd be nice, yes." smiled Viktor, Strangely enough, I like it when my partner isn't teetering on the brink of death."

Yuuri chuckled, appreciating his fiancé's playful tone, yet ignoring the underlying statement.

"Fine, Viktor, I promise not to die."

"How very courteous of you!"

"I know, I know," joked Yuuri, rubbing his tired eyes as he tried to ignore the burning itch of his lower wrist, "I'm practically the embodiment of chivalry."

The couple continued to engage in a series of light-hearted chit-chat, both sinking on the inside but skirting around the issue in fear of propelling yet another argument. Yuuri was currently conscious and could be considered vaguely upbeat, so Viktor allowed the conversation to flow as a distraction from the mess currently scribbled inside of him.

Whilst fooling around in the creased covers of the unmade bed, the Russian, keen to yet again embrace his younger partner, gently tugged at his covered wrists to sway him in the right direction when the attempt was met with an almighty screech.

"Yuuri, what the fuck? Are you okay?"

"Yes, I'm just horrifically ticklish, hehe," replied the Japanese skater, immediately and anxiously pulling at his sweater sleeve.

"Oh Yuuri," said Viktor, lovingly stroking his partner's salmon cheekbones, "you're too fragile for fooling around... I guess I can understand your reluctance in the bedroom now."
The word 'fragile' possessed such significant connotations that it froze Yuuri on the spot, the ice on his skin only cracking as the light in his partner's eyes burned its way through. Still, even being recognised as fragile was a vague achievement, Yuuri thought. Whilst, currently, he didn't suppose the term was a wholeheartedly correct label for himself, nevertheless he felt honoured to be its receiver.

"I'm sorry, I'll work on it."

Viktor's smile pricked up with enthusiasm, "Your health?"

"Well, I actually meant our sexual satisfaction," Yuuri giggled softly, "but sure, maybe one day, haha."

The Russian fell quiet as he'd done so in the days prior, stirring in the uncomfortable silence of the bedroom. He threw a few rapid and inconspicuous glances in the path of his laptop, debating internally as to what would be his following course of action.

"Come on, Viktor, it's not the end of the world," said Yuuri gently, lifting his partner's drooping head by his dribbled jaw.

The older skater ignored the casual remark, then continuing his side of the conversation, "Yuuri, don't flare up, but I also have something to tell you."

Yuuri wondered what his fiancé's mysterious piece of information could be. For a split second the Japanese boy feared that he too had fallen victim to an eating disorder, and was overcome by an unpredictable sweep of jealousy. However, Viktor's incoming sentence soon rectified any doubts the younger skater had towards his partner's health, and also decimated any lasting speck of mutual trust between the two.

"Don't get mad..." Viktor hushed, detecting Yuuri's rising agitation, "but I've booked you in for therapy sessions, starting next week-"

"-what?"

"-please don't get mad!! It's just, you know, as a safety net. I don't know how to deal with something like this - everything is so new and uneasy - you've seen what I can get like when I'm upset, it's not pretty. Besides, she might be able to help you!"

So far, Viktor's attempt at redemption had been rather, well, shit. Sure, he'd no doubt had intentions to salvage any traceable amount of respect his fiancé had for him, his clandestine efforts to educate himself all completed with the best of intentions, but he could never think as an anorexic did - for one thing, anorexics hate surprise.

Yuuri bit his tongue and buried his tangled web of thoughts deep inside of him. He faced an impossible decision - remain indignant and eventually buckle under the complete incompetency out of the one out of a myriad of therapists he was likely yet to face, or play to the rules, feigning recovery to shake off both Viktor and now the numerous health professionals likely monitoring his case.

"Fine - I'll go," said the skater, swallowing his pride, "if it'll make you feel better, I guess it won't hurt to try."

The Russian's expression lit up like a Christmas tree, "Really? You're serious?!!"
"No, Viktor, I'm going to remain a retched pile of shit and slowly deteriorate into madness," replied Yuuri, a seasoned master of sarcasm, "...of course I'll go, you dipshit!! As long as you're happy I'm happy!"

"That's awesome! Your appointment's next Thursday, okay?"

"Yeah, and I'll even try to gain some weight before the visit!"

"Amazing!" said Viktor, "I'm proud of you, Yuuri!"

The Japanese skater soon regretted running away with his words. No way in hell was he even to attempt to put on weight, let alone allow himself to balloon back to his original size. Temporary appeasement may have been effective at masking his further intentions of decay, however Yuuri recognised that this option wasn't eternally viable.

Following their conversation, the partners devised a plan (featuring mainly Viktor's input) with the purpose of improving his health, stating that he'd gain at least 3 kilograms prior to his appointment with the therapist. Furthermore, he was to consume additional supplements without question on the weekdays that he had to partake in training exercises, and no further expenditure of energy was to continue when he arrived home. The plan wasn't particularly well constructed; Viktor wasn't a qualified health professional, and his haphazard approach to his fiancé's recovery massively failed to consider Yuuri's emotional wellbeing, but currently deep down the Russian was afraid just like everybody else, afraid enough to make such uneducated decisions.

There was no way in hell that Yuuri would obey this ridiculous list of oppressive guidelines that would eventually force him out of his beloved habits, but that didn't mean he had to say no. He'd simply allow the lies to continuously spiral in alternate directions, avoiding the suspicious gaze of Viktor's watchful eye. Yuuri still wasn't spectacularly overjoyed at his partner's approach to the myriad of sensitive topics that involved the pair, but he didn't want to hurt him.

"Ugh, I don't know what to do..." sighed Yuuri, whispering into his phone in a late-night FaceTime call to Phichit, desperately trying not to wake his slumbering fiancé.

"Well, I mean, I did kind of warn you about taking it this far," Phichit said playfully as he rummaged through a bag of crisps, yet his tone was laced with concern, "and I'm not exactly going to encourage it..

"For fuck's sake, why does everybody think I'm about to drop dead?" Chuckled Yuuri, "I fell over once - you're constantly falling over!"

Phichit shook his head, 
"True, but at least I don't look like Slenderman himself.

"Who's that?"

"Oh, nobody you'd know," smirked Phichit, vaguely amused by the comparison.

'Well, I mean, Slenderman does have the word 'slender' in his name,' the Japanese skater wistfully thought to himself, 'I suppose I'll take what I can get.'

"But seriously," continued his friend, "everybody's pretty worried about you."

"Even Chris?"

"Especially Chris! Seems it's hard to bust a nut when you're flooded with updates of your friend’s
deterioration .."

The older skater burst out laughing, quickly cupping his mouth in a bid to contain the subsequent noise that had escaped.

"Phichit," said Yuuri with a smile, clapping the phone as if it were the shoulder of the boy on the opposite end, "it’s fine. I just don’t know what I’m going to do about this - this ‘plan’, you know?"

“If I were you, I’d just gain some weight. Isn’t this a lot of aggravation?”

Yuuri raised an eyebrow and simply shook his head.

His Thai counterpart shot a strained eye roll in his direction, “come on, dude, you said you’d be safe.”

“I am safe!”

“No,” chuckled Phichit, “I meant a sane person’s definition of safe.”

The casual labels of insanity, from doctors, his fiancé, and now his best friend, were starting to somewhat bother the Japanese boy. Whilst he was aware that they weren’t intended with malice, Yuuri didn’t particularly appreciate being compared to an asylum patient, even if comedically - for starters, many of the figures he’d seen on TV were coincidentally overweight, an attribute he certainly didn’t want to be associated with.

“I guess I’ll just take it day by day.”

“That’s the spirit!” chirped Phichit, “When you’re better, you should come over to Bangkok some time and we can get some sticky rice together!”

As much as he loved the luxurious sweetness of his friend’s homemade dessert (or five of them) Yuuri knew that when the time came he’d have no choice but to politely decline. Phichit’s excitement for the future made the older boy all the more grateful for his support, but simultaneously dejected at the fact it was wasted on a hopeless case such as himself.

Still, Yuuri wasn’t one to lose face - it wasn’t only Viktor’s happiness that he’d felt it his duty to preserve, but additionally the emotional well-being of everyone that was close to him.

“Thanks for tonight, Phichit; I’ll figure something out in the end.”

“No doubt you will, but like, if you could not die in between now and the next time we see each other, that would be great.”

“Well,” Yuuri said with a smile, “I cant make any promises - who knows, maybe the coffee addiction will finally catch up on me.”

“Okay, well, be careful.”

“I will, I will.”

“See ya!”

And with a final wave, the call ended, plunging the bedroom back into the lonesome darkness prior to their meeting.

Guilt gnawing at his subconscious, Yuuri attempted to distract himself from the persistent negative
aura that engulfed his spirit by fumbling with the weight loss app on his phone. The only thing the skater’d eaten that day was a microwaved bowl of corner-store ramen, a rather inadequate substitute for his usual Katsudon platter. Still, it was 500 calories - only just tipping the scale past the halfway mark of his current allowance of 900. Yuuri wasn’t keen on breakfast and lunch, often omitting such meals for energy bars or highly caffeinated beverages for sustenance, but pork cutlet bowls were still one great desire he refused to give up altogether.

Often, too tired to sit up straight at the table, the skater would eat on the couch with a pillow to support his tray table, balancing the conversation between Viktor and his online friend, Alice. However, as Yuuri came to think of it, she hasn’t been in contact with him for quite some time - perhaps as long as a week and a half. The Japanese boy assumed she’d grown tired of his tedious whining and moved on to coaching another wannabe anorexic; he couldn’t blame her, even Yuuri himself was sick to death with his constant self-pitying attitudes.

However, without the online anorexic there to guide him, Yuuri had little clue as to how he’d continue to diet whilst displaying the signs of recovery, something he’d foolishly proposed and that Viktor was now to expect from him.

The Japanese boy has learned miles before his internet encounters that the most successful way to fake weight gain was to sew stones into pockets on the inside of his trousers, but the diet and exercise aspects of his plan would be anything but easy to avoid. Yuuri presumed that the best way to continue was to increase the weight of the stones with every kilogram he lost, ditching his current daily intake in favour of a new and improved 800 calorie regimen. This was to compensate for an expected decrease in exercise, which, much to Yuuri’s annoyance, was to be closely monitored by his fiancé.

This new plan was horrendously incomplete, but it was the most effective he could conjure in such short notice, and would have to be implemented immediately if it was to prove successful. Yuuri’d dieted up until this point, and there was no way he was prepared to stop just because his health was a minor inconvenience. He had bigger and better things to focus on. Yuuri was going to shift this weight, and if he was forced to get again deceive his lover so be it.

Yuuri knew he was destined for greatness, with only his weak will and high weight blocking his pathway to victory. From now on, nothing, not even his health, was to stop him from reaching his goal.
‘I surrender!’

{A.N. ~ Finally, we're on to the therapy chapter! This'll be fun to write - I love flashbacks to my therapist, who treated me like shit and didn't solve any of my problems (most which linger to this day, no doubt sparking a catastrophic relapse as I move away to college!), but yeah - I'm not bitter at all (lol). Anyway, don't see this mini-rant as an accurate representation of all therapists - just because mine was a dick, not all are; most are there to help, and if you need one, don't be afraid! The one in this chapter is actually pretty nice:) x}

The gentle pitter-patter of a late August shower tapped percussively against the roof of the apartment, an up-tempo accompaniment to the concealed retching sounds emanating from behind closed bathroom doors.

Today was Yuuri's first scheduled therapy appointment, and somewhat unsurprisingly, the skater wasn't jumping for joy. In fact, he'd done just about everything in his meagre power to postpone the session, but it was all in vain - his excuses weren't legitimate, besides, too much whimpering and Viktor might've caught on, giving way to all manners of discomfort.

Still, at this moment in time Yuuri wasn't exactly comfortable. His fiancé'd persuaded him to ditch the diet pills, monitoring his recent purchases for any suspicious items, therefore the skater had to resort to his old (and vaguely reliable) method of purging his unwanted intake. Yuuri, a person was typically uninterested in activities that required tremendous amounts of effort, didn't particularly appreciate this remake of a past regime, but it wasn't as if he had a choice. Viktor has become the self-appointed overseer of his physical and mental wellbeing, and to Yuuri, his partner's happiness took extensive priority over his own.

"How were your waffles, Lapochka?" asked Viktor, teasing flakes of burnt dough from his hair as the Japanese boy returned to the kitchen.

"Good, thanks," Yuuri replied, spitting a mouthful of toothpaste into the kitchen sink.

"You must've been hungry, you snaffled them up so quickly! See - isn't this better than starving yourself?"

"Haha, I guess so."

'Absolutely fucking not,' thought Yuuri, 'this is bloody difficult and an awkward bastard to maintain.'

Viktor nodded approvingly, settling himself in a lounge chair as he waited for the grease to evaporate from his crusted silver strands. Casting a vacant glance in the vague direction of the television, he took a sip from the hefty wine glass that stood prominently on the table top.

"Wine?" Giggled Yuuri, "Viktor, it's 10am."

"I think you've forgotten the fact that I'm Russian," his fiancé replied, returning the gesture.

"Well, pace yourself," said the Japanese skater, "between your love of alcohol and my obsessive eating habits, the therapist'll assume we're both destined for the asylum."

Viktor nodded, casually dismissing the remark in favour of another lengthy sip. His partner smiled,
shrugged his shoulders, and gave the Russian a brief peck on the cheek as he prepared his bag for the day ahead.

Sighing, the older skater kissed back, cupping Yuuri's face in the furnace of his hands before he slipped away towards the wardrobe. Viktor'd always possessed a soft spot for aged alcoholic beverages; ever since he'd nearly died from alcohol poisoning at 14 at a friend's house party had his affections for the bitter liquid grown. The majority of his life he'd been known as a social drinker, but the toil of recent events had seen the skater reach for a glass more frequently than ever before. Viktor wasn't an alcoholic, yet the vibrant effervescence of a bottle of prosecco was perhaps the most efficient relaxation he'd ever encountered. Besides, amidst Yuuri's varying degrees of self-destruction, it wasn't as if anyone would notice the dramatic increase in his intake.

"Okay, I'm dressed," said Yuuri, interrupting the flurry of colliding thoughts in Viktor's mildly slushed mind, "are you ready to go to the rink?"

The Russian shook the daze from his head and stood up, nodding as he rose to take his partner's icy hand. As per usual, Yuuri's clothes were falling off his sharpened frame, but the younger boy insisted he'd been gaining weight. Even if completely untrue, to the Japanese skater the visual effects were entirely real.

"So, how much do you think you've gained so far?" asked Viktor as they past over the bridge, chewing on a mint to conceal the hint of tipple on his breath.

"Honestly, I don't know exactly," said Yuuri, gesticulating his mild uncertainty, "you took away the scale, which I suppose was for the best, but it means I won't know for sure until I go to therapy this evening."

"Ah, yes, I'd forgotten about that. But hey, don't worry, it's for your own good - I promise."

Yuuri didn't seem to agree, but rebuttal would only add an uncomfortable tension to the conversation - besides, what Viktor didn't know wouldn't kill him, and this was merely the Japanese skater's opinion.

Although the younger boy wasn't aware of the specifics of his current weight (and wouldn't be until a couple weeks' time; he was taking it slow to avoid disappointment), he'd estimated that the stones in his pockets would've added at least two or three kilograms, enough to convince both Viktor and his therapist that improvements had been made.

Truthfully, Yuuri's psychological state wasn't as dire as it has been previously. His ability to actively practise starvation in secret provided the skater with a glimmer of hope, even if the recurring flashbacks of his assault and the increasing performance anxiety that preceded the Grand Prix series was constantly eating away at him. Yuuri didn't like to remember what happened that night, reverting to a dissociative state when thoughts of the scene came to mind.

The Japanese boy wished he possessed the strength to tell someone, anyone, but was frightened of the same reaction that Dr. Smirnoff has thrown at him so many moons ago. Men couldn't be rape victims; it just didn't happen. As Yuuri passed a local gym, he stared intently at the figures within, analysing their muscular physiques and comparing them to his own droopy, feminine frame. Perhaps he just wasn't a real man.

Yuuri was then subsequently irritated that he was barred from visiting the gym alone, and only under strict observation was he to engage in light weight lifting in an effort to improve his muscle tone. Of course, this didn't prevent him from over-exercising until he nearly passed out from a lack of energy/hydration, but each day the skater had a limited window of opportunity until Viktor woke
for practice, and this was becoming most inconvenient.

"Yuuri, welcome back!" exclaimed Mila, throwing herself into the skater's arms, immediately retracting herself once she'd recalled the events of their previous time together.

"Sorry if that hurt, I forgot you-"

Yuuri chuckled,
"Don't worry, I'm fine."

Merely being around the skater felt like treading on eggshells; he looked so fragile and susceptible to breakage that his rink-mates were scared to lay a finger on him.

"So, they finally let him out of the hospital?" said Yurio, turning to Viktor as the charcoal-haired boy stretched in preparation for his skate.

"Nope," Viktor smiled, "he discharged himself - and he's making wonderful progress.

"He still looks pretty dead to me."

The older skater shot his younger counterpart a silencing expression of annoyance and gestured to his partner, who was finding his feet on the ice,
"Trust me, we have a plan. It's not even been a month yet, so I doubt we'd see a difference."

"Sure, whatever," replied the flaxen-haired boy, slinking off towards the showers as Otabek bundled up to his side.

'I do hope he's okay...' he thought, concealing his pensive mood with the typically disgruntled look on his face.

Viktor smiled, shaking his head dismissively as he was left with only Mila whilst they rested on the bleachers. The air smelt fresh, the ice was crisp, and the wavering effects of that morning's glass of wine had evaporated into thin air. His future husband was circling the rink with his arms spread like the feathered wings of a beautiful French swan, firefly eyes shot to the sky as he raised a hand to the silver clouds above.

"Is he really okay?" asked Mila, "It wasn't long ago that he, you know.."

Viktor grasped the arms of his female companion, embracing her with a reassure tone to his voice?
"Trust me, he's on the road to recovery. As long as I'm around, Yuuri will be fine."

"Are you sure?"

"Trust me - I'm his coach, and with me, I promise that Yuuri won't ever get hurt like that again."

"I hope so.." Mila replied with a subtle smile.

Viktor intended to keep to his word. That evening, when all was done and dusted out on the practice ice, he gathered up their things and, expecting some resistance from his fiancé, prepared for an array of lectures and protests on their journey to the therapist's office. Whilst Yuuri had previously pledged to fully comply in an effort to catalyse his recovery, the Russian skater knew that he couldn't always hold the Japanese boy to his word. Not after what'd happened.

The therapy building stood as any individual might've imagined it to be - cold, dreary, likening in appearance to a mental asylum; such as place wasn't particularly encouraging when its visitors
were mentally unwell themselves. Yuuri gulped as he saw the ladders to the fire escape that had been welded shut, ruining any last minute plans to flee and hide. The skater couldn't decide as to what was more daunting - the prospect of venting his deepest emotions to a complete (and possibly judgemental) stranger, or the claustrophobic tension that crept up his back as he entered the ancient 18th century structure.

"How are you feeling?" asked Viktor as they entered the waiting room.

"A little nervous - mostly because of the amount you've spent on these sessions," Yuuri's replied, a weak chuckle lying in the weakness of his throat.

"Well, at least you'll get to see if you've gained weight. You had a pretty hearty lunch today, so let's hope for a positive increase!"

'Ugh, don't remind me,' thought the Japanese skater, picturing how utterly horrendous the scene was as he reimagined the memory of chucking up an entire lasagna in the back of the restroom of a local diner. Truthfully, it was not one of Yuuri's most glamorous moments, but it satisfied the need to rid himself of unnecessary energy, and that was more than enough.

Lowering his head into a pamphlet on the study of depression, Yuuri's vision crept along its crisp edges as he studied the other so-called subjects of the therapists' analysis. He wondered what psychological misdemeanours they were in for, and as to whether or not he'd make it out alive. Yuuri knew from past experience that eating disorder patients weren't ever treated with sympathy for their condition, and prepared himself for the presumed hostile treatment that was sure to follow as he was called to an individual room at the side.

"Do you want me to come in with you?" asked Viktor, hand tugging at Yuuri's sleeve as the Japanese boy shook his head.

"I'll be fine," he smiled, "besides, there's a reasonable chance that at some point in the session I'll burst into tears, and nobody wants to see me ugly-cry."

"Okay, well, I'll be waiting here until you get back."

Yuuri nodded, shaking his fiancé from his sleeve as he furthered himself into the darkened corridor on the left. Fear paralysed him; sure, the skater could easily fabricate the false effect of rapid weight gain, but mustering the strength to construct protective emotional barriers seemed somewhat more difficult. Unsurprisingly, Yuuri didn't particularly enjoy looking like a blubbing mess in front of complete strangers, and they likely didn't appreciate such a gesture either.

Still, there was no point in turning back now. The weights that were dragging downwards inside Yuuri's trousers weren't the product of hours of unskilled labour for nothing, and Viktor had already spent an outrageous amount of money on the first set of sessions. If Yuuri backed out now he may have been doing his own agenda a favour, but a substantial disservice to his fiancé.

"Hello?" said Yuuri softly, fingers tightly gripped around the wooden doorframe as he slipped into the therapist's office. Scanning the terrain with great fixation on the more intricate details - was the window barred shut to avoid any impromptu suicides? Did the therapist drink unimaginable amounts coffee, as all elitist, self-preserving men and women of work did? The mind boggled, but Yuuri had little time for further investigation; a soft, raspy voice beckoned him to a chair by a large wooden desk.

"Mr Yuuri Katsuki?"
"That's me."

"Hey, welcome to your first session! I'm Dr. Anastasia Vasiliev, and I'll be here to talk you through whatever's currently bothering you."

Adjusting himself in the leather cream of the four-post recliner, Yuuri positioned himself to face the voice's owner. The outcome was unlike anything he'd ever expected a therapist to look like. Instead of harsh, unforgiving glares and crevices that cut across the brow, there was a young woman dressed in a black pencil skirt and satin cerise blouse that complimented her chestnut complexion, smiling with sympathetic hazel eyes that didn't prompt any cause for alarm, as the Japanese boy had worried beforehand.

Extending a perfectly-manicured hand, Anastasia disclosed the purpose of their meeting, with Yuuri, already aware of the many unpleasant details, smiling and nodding in a well-coordinated response.

"You're probably going to hate me for this," she laughed gently, withdrawing a set of scales from behind her desk, "but I'm afraid I have to weigh you as part of your treatment. You know, to monitor progress - but hey, the faster you gain, the faster you get to be out of here!"

Yuuri smiled. He appreciated Anastasia's humorous composure, and the way that she didn't take things too seriously as Viktor'd done in times before. There was no doubt that she cared a great deal for her clients, regularly reassuring the skater not to be discouraged as she took a blind measurement of his weight gain (this agreement was to dampen Yuuri's accident, as she worried openly tracking his weight gain would furthermore heighten his anxiety), yet her jokes and occasionally satirical comments made the Japanese boy a little more at ease.

"Well, you've gained weight, which is good-" the young therapist began.

"Mmm-hmm," mumbled Yuuri, rather sarcastically - he was unbothered, as the rocks bundled in his trousers provided the perfect facade, but concluded that perhaps a little acting would really seal the performance.

"Trust me," Anastasia said, reshuffling her papers, "it's a good thing. Think of it as being a bit less dead, if that helps."

Yuuri chuckled,

"Ah, yes, I'd love nothing more than to strengthen the perpetual misery and dread of human existence."

"I take it you're something of a pessimist?"

"How did you know?" Smirked the Japanese boy, revelling in his sarcasm and Anastasia's acceptance of its frequency.

"I suppose now that we've got the awkward task of weighing out of the way we can focus on the actual session" she continued, "so, do you have anything you want to talk about, or shall I roll out the typical 'where-did-it-all-begin' routine that most therapists love to use?"

Pangs of distant memories flooded back into Yuuri's head, his smile beginning to recede

"Perhaps you should take control for now."

And so she did. Anastasia furthered the conversation to investigate the source of Yuuri's psychological woes. The skater couldn't believe how understanding she was being; not even Viktor displayed this level of contemplation and consideration when they discussed such uncomfortable
issues. What's more, none of this ever felt like hard work. Yuuri wasn't pressurised to reveal the entirety of his dark past, but when he did, Anastasia was wholeheartedly accepting, quietening the conversation's casual tone as the Japanese boy struggled to hold back tears. Offering him a tissue, Yuuri took it and, in an attempt not to look like such a snotty mess, lightly dabbed it against the crimson pillows of his eye bags. The paper smelt like sweet vanilla that mingled with an essence of Jasmine; Yuuri wondered if this was Anastasia's perfume.

"How are you so understanding?" he questioned, sceptical that a therapist could ever be so considerate, "I swear, it's like you're inside my head."

"Haha, I guess that's my job."

"Well, you'd be surprised how many therapists are absolute assholes - no offence to the profession."

"It's fine, it's fine," Anastasia laughed, "I know all about that. Trust me, you're looking at a high school bulimic right here."

Yuuri was touched that the Russian was so open with him, especially since it was their first encounter. Immediately he began scouring her appearance for any indications of a past mental health condition. So far, nothing was particularly apparent - no scrabbled bite marks etched across her knuckles, perfect teeth and the whites in her eyes as bright as anybody healthy.

"I know what you're doing," Anastasia snickered jokingly, "Yuuri that was 5 years ago, I was just 15 - but look at me now, I'm a grown woman, I've got my doctorate, and I've worked hard to recover. You can do anything, I promise, but you've got to get better first."

Yuuri was utterly mesmerised - at age 20, this woman had overcome her struggles and had even been intelligent enough to earn an early doctorate.

'Perhaps there's some hope for me at the Grand Prix Final after all-' he thought, 'even if unwell, if I try my hardest, I can do this.'

The two young adults spent the rest of the session talking through Yuuri's adolescence issues, and perhaps where his adult difficulties stemmed from, in a slightly unorthodox but welcomed light-hearted manner. Yuuri frequently caught himself lost in the deep pools of Anastasia's eyes, checking himself as he struggled to reign in all feelings of admiration for his new therapist. The skater's conscience repeatedly assured him that he wasn't in love, but Yuuri was certainly enchanted by her empathy and charismatic tone.

"So, I've got some tips for next session. Promise me you'll try your hardest to work on them?"

"Sure," said Yuuri, guilty as he lied to her face. Once again the skater fiddled with the stones in his pocket, instructing himself to remain discreet in his anorexic deviance so as not to upset Viktor or his new therapy companion.

"Okay," she continued, "I recommend that, for now, you allow Viktor to prepare all your meals, and it'd also be best if he ordered for you when you're out and about-"

Yuuri's jaw dropped in protest.

"Don't look at me like that!" She chuckled, patting him on the shoulder as his crumpled smile returned once more, "it'd be good for you to relinquish the notion of counting calories; trust me on this, it's super freeing. Make sure to take it easy when skating - I know, I know, you're an international superstar, but you can't perform to your loving fans if you're lying in a hospital beds.
Yuuri moved to interject, but restrained himself and managed a subtle nod. None of these instructions were anything he'd actually be willing to accomplish, but the skater decided he may as well agree to them for the sake of Viktor's sanity.

"Also," continued Anastasia, rotating Yuuri's dropped wrist into an upright position, "please don't harm yourself again, I know you're better than to do that again."

Yuuri gulped, snatching his arm back as concealed his inner embarrassment with a weak smile and the usual automatic nod.

"Take my number; you can always ring me if you find yourself going through a rough patch."

Turning his head to face the wooden clock leant against the patterned wall, Yuuri's spirit dropped as he realised the session was coming to a close. The skater had no idea why he suddenly felt so aggrieved by the concept of time - he'd always known that their meeting was to last an hour, and yet he was reluctant to let go of the conversation. Everything was safe, laced with acceptance and open to his despondent admittance. Yuuri thought of his fiancé's warm embrace and was ultimately reassured by the thought of returning to the homely comfort of the apartment, feeling a little better with the anticipation of next week's apartment.

"Please remember what I told you - I promise it'll help."

"I'll try," Yuuri smiled, "thank for today, it made things a little less shit than I'd expected."

"Well, that is my advertisement slogan - 'making your life a little less shit one cocoa-infused interrogation at a time.'"

"I'll see you next week, Mr. Katsuki."

"You too, Miss Vasiliev."

And with one last look of appreciation, Yuuri exited the office and returned to the chilly confinement of the waiting room. Whilst thoroughly enjoyed conversing with Anastasia, the Japanese boy couldn't help but feel a little guilty for the feelings he was currently attempting to subdue, and was grateful that the session had ended before any further admiration could ensure.

"How was it?" asked Viktor, offering Yuuri a heavy winter coat as they prepared to leave for the warm summer streets of evening St. Petersburg.

"Honestly," replied the younger boy, "it went much better than expected. The therapist was pretty compassionate."

"That's always good, I was so nervous you'd get somebody you didn't like. See, I've had many therapists in the past, so I know how reassuring it is when you find somebody you're able to connect with."

'Oh, we connected very well.' Thought Yuuri, 'Perhaps a little too well...'  

"So, lapochka, did she have any recommendations to compliment your recovery plan?"

Yuuri thought for a moment, scheming in order to achieved the most desired outcome for his undercover weight-loss journey,

"She said to always let me prepare my own meals - you know, to become familiar with food again. Also, she suggested I buy some more jumpers, ones that conceal my wrists; apparently those types of jumpers do best to seal in the heat."
"Well, she does have a doctorate, so who am I to argue with a professional?"

"Hehe, I suppose," replied Yuuri, glad his lie had been accepted without any unprecedented scepticism.

"I'm proud of you Yuuri."

"Thank you," the skater replied, leaning upwards for a kiss as they passed under a decorative traffic bridge, flowers trickling down and stroking the tufts of the skaters' hair. Viktor's strong and musky scent juxtaposed against that of Anastasia's - it was neither better or worse; the two were seemingly incomparable. Anastasia was the comforting blonde that had brightened what would have otherwise been a dreary hour of unconfined sobbing, and Viktor was the sensual silver stallion that provided him with the strength, the motivation to disguise his daily discouragements and struggles with the essence of love and perseverance.

Still, Anastasia’s brilliant wit and charm had certainly had a lasting effect. Yuuri tried to shake her image from his mind, at least when he was with Viktor anyway, but resistance was futile as memories of their session came flooding back into his mind. Truthfully, although the skater knew he wasn’t quite in love, embers of affection began to glow in the depths of his heart - immeasurable, of course, in comparison to Viktor’s burning hearth, but still present nonetheless. Yuuri wasn’t quite sure how he was supposed to feel - stifling his inner warmth could never extinguish said embers, but at the same time his fiancé was his true one and only.

Shaking at the pebbles in his trouser leg, Yuuri smiled and looked out across the harbour. He sincerely doubted that this fixation on his therapist would amount to little more than a brief crush; anything more and the guilt would be unbearable. Life has already become so inexplicably complicated, and his bond with Viktor was what held all the shattered pieces of himself together.

The skater thought of his future self, shrouded in drooped garments as his fatless knees knocked against each other. Romantic confrontations were a temporary issue, and one that would eventually solve itself.

‘Hopefully soon I’ll have bigger things to think about.’
Checking in

{A.N. Sorry it’s so short guys!!! I’m kinda struggling with things myself at the moment, and it’s probably best right now to focus on my own sadness +sh lolol. Still, I guess this is just a little interlude, a little update in the story if you will. (: }

His handiwork lit by a backdrop of scarlet skies, Yuuri’d just finished tying the final knot in a row of stitching across a particularly pesky laceration that scraped across the side of his arm. The bloody effluence had been no more than in previous instances, but with the increased frequency of self-injury came the rough, dimpled skin as the result of numerous painful swipes from a sharpened razor blade.

None of this particularly bothered the Japanese skater - in fact, as he sanitised his bandages to the sweet music of a static TV screen (Yuuri’d left a copy of the musical ‘Anastasia’ in the VCR), he felt truly surrounded by the gentle ripples of peace dancing in the quiet air of the bedroom. Viktor's growing desire for a bedtime glass (or three) of wine rendered him rather drowsy as the nights drew to a close, often ending with Yuuri gratefully tucking him in, anticipating the evening of harmful behaviour that awaited him. Whether it involved over-exercising to the brink of exhaustion or narrowly avoiding slicing into an artery, the skater could relax knowing his fiancé would not wake from his semi-peaceful slumber.

Although rather graphic, self-harm was currently Yuuri's only emotional release; venting to Anastasia was somewhat worthwhile, but even then the skater rarely divulged the truly gruesome nature of his rituals. Sure, she was his therapist, but he didn't want her to assume he was some kind of lunatic. Besides, she'd already been supportive enough. Anastasia had somewhat accepted Yuuri's urge to injure himself, understanding it provided vague relaxation, and had even presented him with antiseptic wipes and medical bandages in an attempt to lessen the risk to his physical health. She'd handed him the number of a local wounds clinic to ensure he was keeping himself safe, but of course Yuuri'd thrown it away the moment he'd exited her office. The idea of exposing himself and his scars to a team of strangers wasn't particularly pleasant, and having read up on medical sutures online had somewhat sorted the situation anyway.

Still, Yuuri's growing independence (or rather, isolation) wasn't a reflection of his partner's attitude towards his care. In fact, despite his increased alcohol intake, Viktor has truly stepped up, often doting on Yuuri and trying to ensure that everything was alright. He'd bought healthy, dense ingredients from the local grocer's to assist with Yuuri's meal preparation, transferred money into his amazon account for undisclosed 'self-care' materials (you know, if zero-calorie noodles and fat burners counted as self-care) and taken the Japanese boy out shopping for warmer (long-sleeved) clothes as the summer drew to a close, wanting his partner to remain comfortable.

Yuuri did feel a little guilty when considering the counts of emotional and financial manipulation he'd committed in order to further his own self-starvation goals, but hey,what Viktor didn't know couldn't harm him - right?

On the surface, things did seem pleasant and undisturbed. Yuuri, although exhausted and now falling for his therapist, possessed the ability to lose weight whilst providing the impression he was absolutely fine, and with each improvement Viktor grew more relieved and proud of his fiancé's achievements - although the crippling fear of his partner's health declining did sometimes render him terrified, accompanied by the comforting opening of a bottle or two. Each skater had their own personal downfalls - yes, Yuuri's was dangerously intense and perhaps eventually fatal, and yes,
Viktor's willingness to support his boyfriend did leave him neglecting his own personal health - but that was life. The smiles they presented to one another, though likely artificial, were a reassurance that neither was totally alone, and that they would be able to count on each other to the very end.

One night, the couple had decided to venture out of the apartment and enjoy a meal in one of the swanky uptown restaurants plastered in the newspapers and status magazines. Yuuri didn't particularly appreciate an evening of unknown, uncontrolled calories - especially not in three full blown courses - but remained largely unbothered as he could likely dispose of them onsite; that's what the toilets were for.

"How are you enjoying your gateau; Yuuri?"

"It tastes amazing." The skater replied, and it was true. His past habit of infrequent dining had caused his tongue to savour every morsel - not overly advantageous to his weight-loss, but essential for his body's survival. Food to Yuuri had the texture of unnecessary mush; it was only the taste that made it vaguely tolerable.

"I would've ordered it myself, if it wasn't for the sherry trifle," said Viktor as he swallowed a mouthful of alcoholic jelly, taking a sip of prosecco to cleanse the sweetness of his palate.

Yuuri chuckled,
"Do you remember the trifle we shared back in England on that weekend trip to London? It was massive!"

Viktor smiled. The trip had commenced sometime following the rush of the previous Grand Prix Final, just a few weeks before the beginning of Yuuri's downward spiral. It hurt remembering the tabloids' cruel headlines as they papped the hungry Japanese boy heartily tucking into his beloved dessert, emphasising his most bulging features with the same level of scrutiny the skater would later give himself. Yuuri resisted all attempts to label him as anorexic, protesting that his situation wasn't all that die - this blatant ignorance somewhat pained Viktor, who himself was coming to terms with his own ignorance, but it appeared to vaguely please his partner so for once he allowed things to slide.

Still, the Russian supposed that as long as Yuuri was to continue improving, their relationship would continue to strengthen. For better or worse, Viktor learned something new about the younger skater every day they were together - whether it was a gaze through the aperture of his sullen brown eyes or a bashful wink out on the gleaming ice, gradually the extent of the damage, and perhaps the repair, to Yuuri's psychological state was eventually began to emerge from within his internal cocoon of partial reclusion.

It was the second week of October; neither boy has realised just how much time had passed between Yuuri's critical injury and his initial therapy appointment. Viktor had begun to occasionally participate in therapy sessions, with Anastasia keen for him to involve himself in his fiancés treatment ; Yuuri, though his love for Viktor never diminishing, simultaneously grew in his affections for her warm, comforting demeanour. Their relationship blossomed, although despite his often eager tone her perception of it may have been strictly professional. Yuuri currently had no intentions of altering that dynamic - for a start, Viktor was the light of his life, Anastasia merely a twinkle that shone within it - however, her comforting tone and encouraging attitude were growing on him with every session.

So far life had pretty much hit the doldrums. Yuuri was neither contented nor aggravated by his situation, merely riding out the last of the storm as the seas returned to a calm hush. Viktor was pleased with the situation, and as the Japanese boy's own well-being was semi-reliant on his partner's happiness, all was vaguely well. He regularly refilled his extensive supply of makeup,
diet pills, tooth strengthener and zero-calorie noodle packets, all secretively collected from his local post depot, and nobody (except perhaps Yuuri in the long run) got hurt. His skin may have been cracking and molar teeth crumbling, but with enough foundation and enamel paste it was enough to sustain the skater’s facade for the foreseeable future.

The humorous thing regarding his situation was that Yuuri still didn't have a clue as to the exact details of his current weight. The Japanese boy had a vague idea in relation to his range of BMI, but as the set of rock-filled trousers altered with every week, it was difficult to pinpoint the precise measurements that were still so essential to his way of life. Yuuri pretended the number was irrelevant - as long as he felt a little lighter each week (and as long as the fibre padding under his shirts maintained its thickness) there was hopefully nothing routine-wise that required improvement. Every stare into the mirror may have been met with a gargantuan sack of flab, the suicidal thoughts briefly rising from their dormant state, but the skater's continual flashbacks and growing affinity for self-injury did well to keep him somewhat preoccupied.

Yuuri still hadn't revealed his panicked recollection of that dark evening to Anastasia - it would've been too much to comprehend, even for somebody so considerate and experienced; he didn't want the therapist to realise just how fucked up her client-turned-vague-admirer actually was. Perhaps in future, if he felt decently courageous, the skater would attempt to convey the extent of the damage he'd received. However, Yuuri knew he'd feel rather deceitful revealing that eventful night whilst retaining the full bout of information from his fiancé. But what else could he do? If Viktor was to know what'd happened, that Yuuri'd shared his body with another person... he'd be heartbroken. Surely, if the Russian was still painfully oblivious to the myriad of other issues concerning his partner's health, little damage would be done if the lies continued to prosper.

Currently, everything had vaguely stabilised itself. Life on the surface was peaceful, Yuuri’s relationship with both Viktor and Anastasia was going swimmingly, and even his training improved since the skater had starting eating more. Sure, his frequent use of pills and purging somewhat counteracted his caloric intake, but even the placebo was having positive effects. Yuuri was enjoying himself, and that’s truly what mattered. If he could keep this up, he’d be in peak condition for the Grand Prix Final, and finally prove to himself that he deserved a shot at ultimate happiness.
Yuuri stepped onto the scale with confidence. By his calculations, he'd have lost enough weight to deem it a successful week, yet added enough pebbles to his trousers to surely exceed Anastasia's expectations of weight gain. If Yuuri's calculations were correct, he would have 'gained' five kilograms exactly since their last appointment.

"Wow, seven kilos? That's a pretty big achievement - well done - have you been doing weight training also?"

A bolt of panic shot through Yuuri's abdomen; this wasn't supposed to happen.

"Um, yeah, probably - can I just go to the toilet? I think I was water-loading..."

Anastasia looked at him with surprise, "Water-loading? I mean, it's a little unorthodox for someone usually as compliant as you, but if it would reassure you then you're welcome to do so. It was a pretty big gain, after all."

Yuuri nodded and stumbled his way to the building's only toilet. Ambivalent as to what he should do - accept the current readings and return to the room, or attempt to achieve a more accurate reading, possibly exposing himself - the skater paused for a moment, thoroughly assessing the situation.

'I suppose it'll look a little suspicious if I return, she weighs me, and nothing's been lost. She'll wonder why I claimed I'd water-loaded when I haven't.'

However, upon using the toilet, it appeared that Yuuri was bone dry. He hadn't drunk much that day, and a rigorous training session with Viktor and the gang had already rendered him somewhat dehydrated. With no other path to follow, Yuuri shamefully returned to the room, Anastasia sympathetic as he entered.

"Do you want me to reweigh you? You seem a little distressed..."

Yuuri shook his head, "No, it's fine - I just remembered I'd used the toilet before the session began," he lied.

"Okay, well then, have a seat - anything you feel you want to talk about this week?"

Yuuri chuckled, "Other than the usual self-hatred, intrusive thoughts and your frequent lectures on injuring myself whilst in a safe environment? Haha, yes, I am excited to discuss my crippling mental health, as always..."

"Well, it seems that luckily none of these things have affected your usual sarcastic attitude," Anastasia rolled her eyes playfully, "but you are being safe, right?"

"Eh, as safe as one can be I guess."

Smiling reassuringly, the therapist placed a sympathetic hand on Yuuri's shoulder, with the skater's heart leaping at the embrace, "You know, I'd really prefer it if you didn't do it at all. I know it's to help - I get that - but have you tried any of the other coping mechanisms I suggested you use?"
"Aside from the comfort blanket and Disney movies? Erm, no, not really."

"Yuuri," she sighed, "I do worry about you."

The Japanese boy chuckled, pulling his sleeves over his wrists harshly as they began to rise with the movement
"Isn't that your job?"

"Well, I guess so, but I worry about you even when we're not at sessions together. Strangely enough," she smiled, "I enjoy talking with you, I want to help you."

Yuuri's eyes lit up like a glowing furnace. Did that mean she missed him, that she was despondent in his absence? Did she feel the same for him as he did her? 'Surely not,' thought the skater, searching for signs of attachment in her twinkling brown iris, 'I'm doubt I'd be so fortunate.'

"I know Viktor worries about you too."

"You think so?"

Anastasia ran her hands through her thick, glossy curls,
"Yuuri, you can see it in his face. He was there when you were ill; I can tell he's deadly terrified the same thing may happen again."

His heart beat accelerating as he watched the morning sun raise its amber head over the swirling clouds, images of Viktor, beaten-down and bleary eyed, swarmed Yuuri's vision. Of course, the Russian was bound to be somewhat upset by his collapse, but just how detrimental had the accident been on his partner's health?

"I mean, I know Viktor's been a little stressed recently - and yes, his affection for wine may have somewhat skyrocketed - but surely he isn't doing that badly?"

Anastasia shook her head disappointedly,
"If you ask me, the poor guy looks as if he needs therapy himself. Maybe it's not just you - perhaps the pressures of a top world figure skater are also eating away at him - but either way, just consider how much you mean to him. Imagine how he'd feel if he knew you were harming yourself."

"But he's nothing to do with it..."

"I suppose, but he might think he's involv-"

Yuuri snorted,
"But I know why I self-harm, and trust me, it's not because of him."

"But are you sure? We can't always trace the roots of our problems..."

"I know he's not-"

"How come-"

"Because I was raped!!!"

Anastasia's mouth snapped shut, searching for a response as her client erupted into tears. Nodding her head as she tried to process the situation, she moved her seat next to Yuuri's and put a comforting arm on his hunched shoulders, patting him gently as he sobbed into her collar.
"Yuuri, I'm so sorry... when did this happen?"

"Ages ago, it doesn't even matter anymore - but you asked, and there you go."

"Does Viktor know?"

"Absolutely not," Yuuri smiled weakly, attempting to mask his utterly melancholy state, "and he
never will."

"Did you contact the authorities?"
The session had strayed so far off topic, but Anastasia didn't care. Her job now was to ensure that
Yuuri could let it all out in the safest space possible.

"I tried telling a doctor, but..." he trailed off, ".well, to put it simply, guys 'don't get raped'."

"Are you fucking kidding me, someone said that to you?"

"More or less..."

Anastasia returned to her seat,
"I expect it's had rather a large impact on you, and on your disorder?"

Yuuri cringed at the term 'disorder', but nodded with tired eyes.

"Do you want to talk about it?"

The Japanese skater shrugged his shoulders. At this point, the cat was out of the bag anyway, so it
didn't particularly matter whether she knew a grain of the truth or its full, gruesome entirety.

"I suppose so."

So Yuuri told his story, and Anastasia listened with full intent. He recalled the night spent out on
the street, alone, as he festered against the freezing stone wall of the cobbled backstreet alleyway,
swamped in bodily fluids and their resulting shame and disgust. Yuuri knew of his attacker except
her appearance, nothing of her life now or whether or not the same had happened to anyone else.
The office clock ticked on, his session continuing into the next allocated slot, but Anastasia
deemed his case too dire to ignore. Yuuri was obviously in a state and until Viktor, who was stuck
in traffic, could arrive to pick him up, she wasn't letting him come to any harm.

"Yuuri, I'm so sorry that happened to you. The trauma you've experienced, your strength - well, if
there's anything you want to talk about in relation to such an event, I'm here for it."

The Japanese skater nodded, wiping the few remaining tears from his hollow cheeks, still burning
from embarrassment.

"I'm sorry for making a scene.."

"Don't be - emotions are simply an example of the brain's natural chemical processes."

Yuuri's cheeks dimpled as he raised his head and smiled slightly, the corners of his mouth barely
creeping past their natural position. Anastasia was so beautiful, so kind. She understood everything
he'd said and passed no judgement; Anastasia hadn't question him once, not denied his experiences.
The therapist had validated everything the skater had said, and with the elegance and grace of a
goddess.

And that's when found his lips pressed against hers.
"Yuuri?"

"Mmph-"

The office door opened, with the secretary stood speechless in its entrance.

"Miss Vasiliev? Mr Katsuki? What on Earth are you doing?"

Anastasia pulled away, a pitiful grimace spreading across her expression.

"Yuuri... why did you do that?"

"I'm sorry, it's just - you're so kind, and pretty, and-"

"Yuuri, you know that doesn't give you an excuse..." she replied, voice drooped.

"I know, but... you're the first person to ever understand me - do you know how that feels?"

The receptionist cleared his throat,

"Mr Katsuki, your partner is waiting to collect you from across the hallway. Miss Vasiliev, I'm going to need to to report to the main office immediately."

"I'm so, so sorry," said Yuuri, voice beginning to waver.

"Yuuri, you know that I won't be allowed to see you again. You've broken the agreement between patients and their therapists - Yuuri, I could lose my job for this..."

"I know, I'm sor- never mind, I ruined too many things to know when I should just give up. I'm sorry, I'll email your company, tell your boss it was my own fault; tell Viktor our sessions weren't working out - anything to save your job. I'm sorry, it's just, you were so lovely to me."

Anastasia, holding back her sadness under the watchful eye of the witnessing secretary, turned to face the skater with a blank expression,

"I'm sorry - I wish you the best Mr Katsuki. Please try to get better, for all those that you love."

Yuuri was then promptly escorted by the secretary out of the office and into the waiting room, biting his lip as he held back buckets of tears. He'd now cheated on his partner not once, but twice, and this time additionally ruined his relationship with a trusted friend and companion. Why did he always have to ruin everything? Yuuri knew he was a hopeless case, but even he was shocked at just how much damage he was capable of causing. Still, he could never tell Viktor. Immoral or not, Yuuri desperately needed someone to care for him, and couldn't bear the thought of being alone. The pants of guilt were exactly pleasant in comparison to loneliness, but they weren't quite so painful.

Walking out into the waiting room with a beaming smile of his face, Yuuri hugged his partner with as much enthusiasm as he could muster, holding his hand as they walked out of the building together.

"Ooh, what's got you so bubbly?" Viktor chuckled, surprised but appreciative of his fiancé's sudden cheerfulness.

"My therapist, Anastasia, said today was our last session together - she believes that I'm doing well enough to continue on my own, with support from you of course."

"That's wonderful!"
“Yeah, I guess it is.”

It was easier to lie than to deal with the consequences of the unforgivable truth.

As the two arrived back the apartment, a little cold from the mid-autumn chill outside, Yuuri removed his numerous layers of clothing, pebble trousers and shoes, and began to snuggle into a comfort blanket by the radiator, desperate to forget what he’d just done.

“I made you some tea,” said Viktor, handing his partner a steaming mug, “so, are you excited to end your therapy treatment?"

The Japanese boy shivered, before shaking it off and looking up with ambition, “Yeah, I actually am; now I can really focus on my training and spending time with you.”

‘Not that I deserve you at all,’ the skater thought subsequently.

Viktor sat down beside Yuuri on the sponged carpet, sliding his way into his partner’s blanket fortress and bringing him close to his muscular chest, taking a sip from a cup of mulled wine as the two snuggled together in the light of the television. It wasn’t particularly late in the day, but the temperature certainly allowed for some quality relaxation time.

Meanwhile, Yuuri felt like an utter bastard. Here he was, casually chilling with his future husband, when in reality he was a disgusting adulterer who didn’t deserve Viktor’s attention, let alone his love.

The Japanese boy took a melancholy sip from his steaming drink, the hot liquid slipping through the cracks between his teeth as his mouth clinked against the class. Suddenly, Yuuri felt a solid tab slip on to his tongue. It may have been no larger than the nail on his pinky finger, but it was certainly noticeable. As Viktor stared intently at a cartoon playing on the TV screen, the skater gingerly removed the tab from inside his mouth and place it in the palm of his hand. It had been a pill all along.

‘That’s odd,’ he thought, ‘I don’t have any prescribed medication that Viktor would be aware of...’

Casually, so as not to raise the suspicion of his partner, Yuuri rose from the carpet and moved into the kitchen, thoughts quaking as he went.

Even after ransacking the medicine cabinet Yuuri was yet to find evidence of a box of pills and a list of their currently mystery effects. He shook boxes of herbal tea, emptied inhalers and cracked open cough sweets. Yuuri just couldn’t comprehend how exactly that pill had entered his tea, but he knew for sure that it wasn’t his own doing. The skater reassured himself that Viktor wouldn’t administer medication without his partner’s permission, but he could never be sure. Despondent at the lack of findings, Yuuri shut the cabinet door with a frustrated slam - a light shaking noise coming from inside as he did so, almost as if something had been dislodged.

Yuuri reopened the door with a curious eye, wondering just what had been previously hidden and the reason for it being concealed from sight. Could this hidden treatment explain his growing anxiety, his hormonal urges, and possible his weight maintenance? Yuuri hoped so; he wished to lose this weight as soon as possible.

The skater was nervous, but knew for his own good that this had to be done. Unsure of what he was about to discover, Yuuri quickly snatched the fallen box from inside in the least conspicuous manner possible, reading the instructions on the back with rapid eyes - one focused on the box, the other with its peripheral vision locked onto the kitchen door.
‘Oh, OH.... well, okay then, Viktor, fine.’ he thought, outraged, as he finished reading its contents and returned to the living room, box in hand as a presentation of evidence against his fiancé’s deviance.

Viktor’s eyes lit up as his partner entered the room, the light inside it only growing with his affection.

“Yuuri, there you are! You were in the toilet for quite a long time, are you okay?”

“Sure,” said Yuuri, eyebrows raised and a little smirk forming in the corners of his mouth, “if you can tell me the exact meaning of these weight gain pills.”
The Birth of a Bachelor

{A.N. ~ Just a small PSA: the next few chapters might be a little triggering regarding depression/death/eating disorder - but I've been waiting to write these chapters for a while now! Brace yourself... (; )

__________________________________________________________________________________________________________

Viktor looked Yuuri up and down, "I've never seen those pills in my life."

Representative of the fire raging inside his head, the Japanese skater's nostrils flared as he stood his ground, the ambiguous bottle of weight gain pills gripped tightly in his fist.

"Is that so?"

"Honest!"

"So then," Yuuri continues through gritted teeth, "this medication just happens to 'magically' belong to w Mr. Viktor Nikiforov?"

The accused party sighed and flopped backwards into the cushion of the sofa, taking a swig from his glass before tossing the excess into an unfortunate houseplant nearby. There wasn't much he'd be able to do to improve the situation, except to construct a string of blatant lies, but even that appeared futile. Yuuri, unfortunately, was high perceptive - although typically shy, it was impossible to out do him on an intellectual basis, and the Japanese skater typically won the majority of their confrontations.

"Fine, you got me."

"I did..?" said Yuuri, eyes widening as he came one step closer to the truth.

"Yep. They're for me."

Yuuri narrowed his eyes in suspicion, peering through the aperture of his eyelashes at his fiancé, who was smiling back rather uneasily. Initially it appeared that there was little point in growing aggravated and lashing out at his partner, and a little inappropriate considering he'd made physical contact with another party just hours prior to their confrontation, but the unorthodox rage that had begun to strike like lightning far inside his head and diaphragm was rapidly increasing in size, and Yuuri, although deceptive himself, couldn't ignore the truth he'd uncovered. He needed to say something, even if it cost him their peace.

"You're lying. I know you're lying."

Viktor chuckled, "How? I could have bought these for myself - they could be for muscle gain. Come on, lapochka, do you think I'd actually go behind your back and actu-"

"-don't you lapochka me! You want to know how I know this isn't for you? One, you're a perfectly muscular, chiselled sex god as it is, trust me on that; two, I have a masters degree in biochemical engineering, and it doesn't take an idiot to realise that oestrogen as a primary ingredient will not assist you in building muscle; and finally, I know how much you want me to gain weight, to get fat again and lay around all day like the repulsive slob I am - well guess what? I don't want to be pigeonholed into what you or some bullshit medical team define as a healthy weight, and I'll be
healthy when I'm skinny!"

Yuuri was fiercely territorial when it came to policing his body mass, and to some extent he was in the right. He'd never once been asked how he'd like to deal with things, or his opinion on his weight gain plan, just forced to blindly comply with whatever expectations were thrown at him, and Yuuri was pissed. Although the skater didn't usually enrage at the beginning of an altercation, this time, he felt, he a valid excuse.

In fairness to Viktor, all he'd ever wanted was for Yuuri to nourish himself back to hell. Yes, he was a compulsive control freak, but the Russian skater harboured the best of intentions - even if the execution of his ideas was a tad unjust. Still, now he would finally be forced to confess his latest act of deception, and to the party of which it had extremely offended.

Viktor wipes the sweat from his brow, biting his lip with a nervous expression as his tongue caught the remnants of alcohol on his lip,

"Fine. Okay, Yuuri, you have a right to be angry - I gave you these pills without your permission, but I did it to protect you. Didn't you also want to gain weight and get better? That's what you told me, remember? I was just trying to make you happy!"

"Ah, yes, that," the skater sighed, pursing his lips, "well, Viktor, you're not the only despicable liar under this roof."

"You don't mean..."

"See...." continued Yuuri, pulling back three sweaters and an undershirt to reveal a matching set of hipbones, backbone and protruding ribs, "admittedly, I've got rather a long way to go, and that 3 or four kilos those pills 'helped' me gain and maintain were most inconvenient, but look: your efforts, the medical team's efforts, Anastasia's efforts - it appears as if, oh dear, they're looking a little futile to me."

Viktor was utterly clueless as to what had suddenly wrecked Yuuri’s typically subdued temperament; this abrupt, smug attitude could have only been incurred by an irrepressible anger, one that was buried deep inside the Japanese skater’s quaking bony vessel.

“Yuuri, I... I was trying to help you... why don’t we talk about this in the bedroom, where we can keep you safe?”

“I. Am. Not. A. Child.” Yuuri clenched his fist, wrestling out of his sweaters as he stood, topless and emaciated, in the centre of the room.

“Look, Viktor, you see this? I did this, and I did it alone. All by myself, without any weak reliance on anyone else, without the cushy mental health services. I am a grown man, although you lot down at the rink are too patronising to admit it, and this is my life. If you’re unhappy with it, you’re welcome to make it plain, but don’t expect me to listen to a word from you or any of our other so-called friends. I trusted you Viktor, I gave you my heart, my love, and you repay me by betraying me with this?”

Yuuri flung the damaged pill container to the ground, its contents erupting like sparks from an explosive bolt of lighting.

“I know why you did this,” the skater grunted, “I just don’t know how someone as good-natured as you could ever have done this.”

Viktor’s voice grew gruff and impatient,
“I only did it to protect you.”

“Lucky I outsmarted you then.”

“Yuuri, I didn’t want you to die, okay? Was that so selfish of me? As your weight increased, so did your spirit - your smiles, your laughs, and our love with it.”

The Japanese boy stamped on the empty container, shoulders arched and eyes squinted in disgust.

“And I suppose you were oblivious to my admirable acting skills?” Grumbled Yuuri, tears swelling in his eyes, “Can’t you, for once in your life, concentrate on the abstract and ignore the physical? Is all I am to you my weight? I have been putting up a front for almost a year, rarely letting my guard down, and I am not going to be told my hard work was all for nothing.”

Viktor briefly escaped the situation, dragging himself into the kitchen to pour himself a hefty glass of aged scotch. Chugging the first glass, he refilled the tainted cup and returned to the room in which his devastated partner was crouched in the corner of the sofa, furiously rubbing his eyes as he attempted to erase any outward signs of emotion.

“Yuuri, everything I do, I do to protect you. Couldn’t you just be a little grateful and get better, please?”

“Excuse me?”

“It’s just, I’ve..” the Russian took an extended gulp from the glass, “I’ve buried my problems, tried to get better - look, I’m doing pretty well - how come you’re blatantly ignoring the right path when it’s been calling you all this time?”

Yuuri knew that the alcohol was beginning to kick in. Viktor’s moods had recently become so irrationally changeable; the majority were pleasant, sometimes even ecstatic, but when they were low, they plummeted to the depths of the Earth.

Viktor wipes a tear from the inner corner of his eye, “Please don’t die. Please, please Yuuri. I know you’re mad. But you have to try yourself. I only did this to protect you; ever since the hospital I’ve known you can’t protect yourself.”

“Don’t even try to make it better...”

"Look, Yuuri," said Viktor, head in his hands as he sought an escape from the imminent pressure of the situation, "I understand this is hard for you, but if you only chose to improve yourself, you cou-"

"Hard? You think this is fucking HARD? It's fucking UNBEARABLE. Imagine everyday, living in a constant state of fear and misery, desperately afraid of gaining weight yet perpetually yearning for the satiating taste of even a crumb of food. It's forcing yourself awake before sunrise every single day so you can sneak out and burn an extra 1000 calories whilst your partner lays in bed, comfortable and oblivious to the pain of your aching joints as your feet pound against the unforgiving hardness of a concrete pavement. The agony of pre-digested, acid-like vomit erupting from the back of your scorching throat and into the welcoming bowl of the toilet, penance for the minuscule amount calories you've eaten that day. And if you want to avoid purging, you're forced to invest in the pre-emptive measurement of stuffing countless diet pills into your oesophagus so your stomach has no option but to digest itself, your colon rupturing and unimaginable levels of liquid shit and bile spewing out of your back end; all your endeavours to prevent the absorption of life-ruining calories into your starved, frail body. It's looking into the mirror thousands of times, all
in the same naked, hopeless state, each round acknowledging your body's disgustingly morbid obesity and the relentless suicidal feelings that accompany such battering self-hatred. Your dependency on the welcoming metal fortress that is the scale - its magical fortune-telling abilities predicting whether you'll be required to starve that day, or whether you'll allow yourself a morsel of low-calorie rabbit food. This benevolent dictator becomes your best friend, and your mortal enemy. Elation isn't the word I'm looking for to describe the way you feel when your hollow sockets gaze down at its screen after a loss, the feeling of supremacy and overcoming your most ruthless obstacles, and mortified doesn't even begin to cover the feeling of pure horror as you repeatedly step on and off the dented aluminium plate, ferociously rechecking the display screen in disbelief as even then, after all your tiresome endeavours, you've either maintained, or shockingly gained, just half a kilogram. This is no way to live, it's a half-life. It's walking around with a corpse on your back, the feeling of being dragged down by a dead, decrepit waste of a body - except the body's yours, and you're the one dying. It's watching your loved ones shake their heads in disbelief, urging you to take just one bite when they can't comprehend that you'd rather die than allow even a single morsel to pass your lips. Of course, eventually you'll want to die anyway. You're aware that continuous starvation isn't something that can be prolonged, but simultaneously you know that if you eat again you'll simply pile the weight back on and ruin every perfect thing you've ever strived to create. It's food or death - and you'd obviously choose death. Do you think I wanted this? For me, for US? DO YOU THINK I WANTED TO STARVE MY BODY OF LIFE-PRESERVING NUTRIENTS, OF THE CALORIES AND FAT I SO DESPERATELY NEED TO SURVIVE? THIS WASN'T A CHOICE YOU INSENSITIVE DIPSHIT! YOU ONLY EVER THINK ABOUT YOURSELF, AND THE WAY IN WHICH THE CONSEQUENCES WILL AFFECT YOU! YOU, VIKTOR, WERE OBLIVIOUS FOR MONTHS, UNMOTIVATED TO SPEAK UNTIL NOW, WHEN I'M TEETERING OVER THE ABYSS OF DEATH AND DESTRUCTION, AS YOU APPARENTLY PREFERRED IT WHEN I'D ACQUIRED A 'LIGHTER FRAME'!

"Yuuri, please don't, you're too young to ruin yourself, you're too beautiful..."

Beautiful....?" continued Yuuri, circling the corners of the room with his stands stiff at his sides, "No, Viktor, I am not beautiful. I'm not like you- I will never be like you. You, my dearest companion, are an ethereal being of beauty and mystique. I, Viktor, am the lowest of the low. I am not worthy of love, of comfort - the only thing I know how to do is starve myself. Let me have this one thing, this one talent, please."

Viktor has begun to weep,
"You are everything but that - I don't know why you'd think so terrible of yourself, I love y-"

"OH FOR FUCK'S SAKE, GIVE IT UP! I HEARD YOU TALKING TO MILA IN THE CAR; I KNOW EVERYTHING YOU'D SAID ABOUT ME! HOW YOU LOOOOVED MY SKINNY BODY, HOW YOU WERE PROUD OF MY DIET; YOU SAT THERE AND APPLAUDED MY WEIGHT LOSS WITHOUT EVER KNOWING ITS TRUE CAUSE! UNLIKE YOU, BACK THEN SHE ACTUALLY CARED EVEN THOUGH THE CHANGE WAS STILL MINOR. IT DOESN'T TAKE A FUCKING IDIOT TO RECOGNISE THAT EXTREME DIETS DON'T LAST FOR MONTHS ON END, ESPECIALLY WHEN THE VISIBILITY OF YOUR PARTNER's RIBCAGE IS SO PATENTLY OBVIOUS! You don't care about me, Viktor, you only care about yourself, and what others will think of you when they see you outside, turning away as you attempt to conceal the shame of your emaciated fiancé. You know what, yes, I AM anorexic. I AM mentally ill. But Viktor, my therapist is gone, our friends hate me, and my friend, who by the way, was a mere teenager, is dead. I feel like utter shit, so, for the sake of my sanity, don’t even talk to me. I may usually be an emotional doormat, but even I know when I’ve had enough. This pills were the last fucking straw.”
"Yuuri... I"

"WHAT?" yelled Yuuri in the midst of crying his eyes out, "What could you, or anyone else for that matter, possibly say to make this situation any better?"

"Look, Yuuri," said Viktor, his teeth gritted from the influx of sheer emotion coursing through his tightly clenched veins. The Russian slammed the palms of his hands onto the table, tears beginning to stream down his already reddened face, "you think I don't care? You think I never cared?"

Yuuri shrugged his shoulders and turned away.

"Well, considering I was wholeheartedly bulimic, depressed and wrecked with anxiety during our first year together without much discovery, the only logical inference is that you're only concerned when your personal reputation is at stake."

Viktor ran over to face him once again, but the Japanese skater simply shut his eyes. It was clear that at this point he was was simply repulsed just by looking at him.

"Yuuri Katsuki. I love you. I love you so very much. And yes, perhaps I have acted insensitively in the past. That was my misjudgement, and I take full responsibility for my reckless behaviour."

Yuuri opened one eye, rather disbelievingly so, staring at Viktor as a stony silence swept across the room.

"But," continued the distressed Russian man, "for you to assume that I never cared, HOW COULD YOU EVER THINK SUCH A THING? I would move the heavens and the earth just to witness the radiance of your beautiful smile. I'd bring the Gods to their knees, weeping in submission as they bow to the power of love I have for you. I'd...I'd... I'd give my own life if it meant I could save yours. You're killing yourself, Yuuri, and you know it. I can't bear to watch you in distress any longer - please, just try to get better. If not for you, then for me."

Yuuri sighed, dropping his hunched shoulders and bending his neck back in frustration. The room spun around him in a torrent spiral of guilt and shame; the skater had no intuition as to what he should feel.

"It's not that easy. This mentality I've adopted, this way of life - I can't just give it up. I'd love to eat, I'm not lying, after all this time I'd probably orgasm if I ate a single piece of cake without wanting to die," he laughed, sad eyes creasing up at the corners, his croaking voice laced with sorrow, "but I can't. You wouldn't understand. I'm sorry."

"Well, have you tried?"

"I'm sorry, what?"

"Have you even tried to get better?"

The younger skater shook his head in disbelief, "Get better? GET BETTER? You still don't understand, do you? I can't just 'get better'. If you asked someone with a broken leg to just 'get better', you know what'd happen? Nothing. Their leg would remain as crooked and broken as ever. Because when you're ill, you can't just get better. Likewise, I'm destined for the same fate - to perpetually exist in a state of crookedness and a broken, distorted mentality. It's the same for me. I can't get better without help, and we both already know therapy just isn't working. I'm a lost cause. It'd be easier to just let me die, I don't want to be a burden any longer."
"Если ты умрешь, я убью себя..."

"What?"

"Nothing..." said Viktor, "but please... please stop thinking like that. Can you not see what this is doing to us... to everyone? Your mother, she’ll be worried sick, Phichit can't stop crying, he told me this himself, and I... well, I think you don't realise the hurt you're causing by continuing this terrible cycle of destruction. I've tried being reasonable, Yuuri, but I can't take it anymore."

Viktor walked in a stiff gait towards the front door, his head hung in despondence as he dabbed at the crimson wine stains scattered across his shirt.

"Where are you going?" asked Yuuri, tears streaming down his face, conscience weighted by fears of being left alone in this vulnerable state.

"Out." he replied glumly, grabbing his half-drenched wallet as he left.

"Whatever, go. It's clear you've had e-fucking-nough of me anyway."

Viktor said nothing; a slam of the door concluded their argument, the hushed tones of the heated debate transitioning into the slow trills of night-time.
Oh shit BOI, he bout to do it!

[A.N. ~ okay guys, major psa: this chapter will probably be suuuuper triggering on the whole depression/suicidal topic, so please remember that I don’t encourage this, and if you have any problems in regards to this topic, please find help! You are loved, and don’t at all deserve the bad things you experience.]

Yuuri wasn't worried, in fact, he was far from it. Was he anxious? Oh yes. Devastated? Absolutely. But there was nothing detrimentally worrisome about the results of the altercation; Viktor'd stormed off and likely sought shelter from his troubles in the back of the local tavern in his usual secretive fashion. Yuuri, although up until now had feigned ignorance in regards to the nature of Viktor's alcoholism, knew exactly where his partner would be at this time of night, but by now the Japanese boy didn't particularly care. He was so, so tired of it all, his exhaustion exacerbated by his tempestuous anger, that the skater could do nothing but sit cross-legged on the cold of the living room floor, dabbing at his wrists as the effects of his anger began to wear off.

'Where did we go wrong?' He thought to himself, 'How could he have done this? How could I have done this?'

Yuuri himself was motivated to reach for a desperate bottle of whiskey, chugging incessantly before vomiting over the now tattered rug. Even now, he couldn't bear the thought of excess calories in his system. All comfort appeared to have vanished, anorexia his only 'companion'.

The skater had forfeited his pride in exchange for freedom - in admittance of defeat, he recognised that he was, and likely always had been, an anorexic mess. There was nowhere to run anymore; although maintaining it, he'd reached his once-revered pre-hospital BMI, close to 14.5. Yuuri knew this wasn't exactly healthy, but what could he possibly do? In the skater's eyes, he'd always be the fat, slovenly oaf his now despairing fiancé had repeatedly made fun of in the past; the clumsy idiot subjected to the laughter of his peers; and worst of all, a disappointment to everyone around him.

This was too much. All these thoughts, this pain, the guilt - Yuuri couldn't bear to even recognise what was happening right now. The skater ran into the bedroom, shutting his eyes as he dived under the bed, encased in a thin layer of blanket as he fended off the encroaching sense of urgency. There was so much to be done, and so little he could do about it. Yuuri couldn't take it anymore. He swung his head upwards, slammed it against a hard, wooden bedpost, and immediately blacked out.

Viktor may as well have done the same. As he crouched over the table of the bar, body slumped as it perched on top of a rusty stool, he knocked back drink after drink as if nothing mattered anymore, and the world was to end the day after. If anything, his world had already ended - Yuuri hated him, he couldn't stop drinking, and the Russian acknowledged that in the end they'd both be dead if they didn't put a stop to their destructive habits.

"Can I get another one please?" He slurred to the bartender as she wrestled off a slew of nearby drunkards. This bar was rough, located in the centre of St Petersburg's grimy underworld, and the best place for a drink. It was cheap, dark and scummy - pretty much a projection of Viktor's current self impression. The skater, himself being of a prim and polished background, revelled in the grittiness of the alleyway joint, finally positioned in a place that Viktor felt he belonged.

Finally, after what appeared to be years of waiting, the mauve-skinned bar-woman turned to face
the sloshed skater. He was struck by her spindled frame, wondering if she Too was suffering from what Yuuri had; he hoped she wasn't experiencing the same levels of pain and anguish, and had begun to miss Yuuri as she poured his pint into a glass.

Meanwhile, the Japanese boy had just started to wake from his self-induced slumber. His head hurt, but his chest hurt more. With a few brief coughs, Yuuri shook his head and rose to his knees, creaking his neck before once again vomiting straight onto the floor.

Remorse crawled on the skater's back as he wandered into the apartment's main area, gazing at the undone dishes and discarded pill containers scattered on the ground.

'Why the fuck did you do this, Yuuri?' he asked himself, knocking over a tower of plates and watching motionlessly at the subsequent crash, 'Sure, he gave you those pills, but you kissed another person; you're a disgrace! Viktor was only trying to protect you, and you've gone pushed him away - you're a fucking idiot!'

Washing his wrists in the kitchen sink, the skater then grabbed his coat from its rack and fled the apartment. Negative thoughts chased him down the stairwell; he couldn't return without Viktor, the outcome would be too desolate to think of. With a slight sneeze, Yuuri lost control of his balance, stumbling down the last few steps as he struggled to control his rapid pulse.

At the same time, Viktor's conscience was drenched in alcohol. The barmaid watched him with sympathetic eyes, extending a comforting hand as she sought the cause of his troubles.

"It’s my boyfriend.." the Russian said glumly, wiping the froth from his upper lip, “...he hates me, and, well, I don’t know how long he’s got..”

The skater once again broke down in tears. Infuriated by Yuuri’s stubbornness but broken by his demise, Viktor was overcome with emotion and unable to say anything at all. As the Japanese boy sprinted through the city streets, finally tracking down a plausible location, Viktor looked deeper and deeper into the eyes of the woman in front of him, wishing she would offer him advice.

“You got a name?”

“Oh..” the skater mumbled, words spluttered, “Viktor - it’s Viktor.”

“Well, Viktor, do you come here often?”

“Only when my partner isn’t home..”

“Oh,” she remarked, a look of surprise on her face, “is that often?”

“Sometimes. He has therapy, I have an unquenchable thirst for the sweet release hat only alcohol provides...” his uncomfortable laugh trailed off into an awkward silence as he bent his gaze back towards the floor.

“I know what could make you feel better.”

“You do?”

“Oh yeah,” the woman said, taking Viktor by the collar and kissing him, her actions without hesitation reciprocated by the lonely Russian man. He was uncomfortable, wishing for the situation to disappear, but simultaneously couldn’t find the courage to pull himself away. Maybe it was the alcohol, maybe it was his unspeakable sadness; that night Viktor had already lost Yuuri’s affection, what else did he have to lose.
“Viktor?” A shocked Yuuri called out across the bar, eyes reddening as he saw the Russian in the arms of the tall, spindled woman.

Viktor opened his eyes, pushing the barmaid away in an instant,
“Yuuri, wait, I didn’t mean to!”

But Yuuri was already out of the door, into the street and running as fast as he could. Seeing his fiancé in the arms of his rapist, the woman who’d shaken him to his very core, was unlike anything he’d seen in his life. She’d not only defiled his body, but she had defiled the one body keeping him alive - and it looked like Viktor was enjoying it. Yuuri didn’t know where he was running to, but he had to get away. Anywhere was better than their home or the unforgettable scene at the bar, and the skater didn’t stop until he found himself at the crossroads by the bridge, unsure of where to flee next.

Yuuri gazed up into the sky, accompanied only by the hazy glow of the moon and a sprinkling of slats that lit up the sky. It felt as if he didn’t have a friend in the world; those at the rink hated him, as a son he was a constant disappointment, and as a fiancé, well, Yuuri knew he wasn’t really any better than Viktor.

‘I deserve this,’ thought Yuuri, walking over to the edge of the bridge, ‘I’ve deserved everything I’ve had so far. I cheated on Viktor, he cheated on me. I’m a disgusting little brat that even sexual assault could not correct, an anorexic mess that no treatment could protect, a wanderer without a home or place where I’ll be welcome. Viktor can’t love me, I’m disgusting. I don’t deserve love. Why am I alive? If there is a supposed great ruler of all life, why do they hate me so? What’s worse is that I can’t correct myself - I know what the problem is, yet I’m too selfish to stop it.’

Yuuri stood upon the edge of the bridge, looking down at the sparked train tracks below as his heart raced with fury. A train was fast approaching.

“Well, whatever’s on the other side can’t be worse than this.”

Yuuri jumped.

{A.N. 2 ~ This isn’t the end of the fanfic.}
Heartbreak Hotel

{A.N. ~ Okaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaayyyy, sorry about the long wait! I've been inundated with schoolwork, and honestly, this will probably continue until around June next year (GCSE struggles haha). I've got mock exams to revise for which, let's face it, I will probably do shit in, but I'll try my hardest to get a few chapters out. :) }

'I suppose this is it.' Thought Yuuri as he relinquished the safety of the ledge, 'Well, I guess I had a good run.'

The skater began to experience flashbacks, early memories of Viktor and his childhood undone before his eyes. Yuuri saw a chubby, stumpy looking child crashing into the ice as his classmates laughed, jeering at his failure as they grabbed thick holds of his disgusting flesh. He witnessed a teen Yuuri engulf a hoard of snacks before rushing to the school bathroom, purging it all prior to a heated cutting session. Some high school jocks has managed to bust the cubicle door, exposing him as they tossed his body onto the ground, beating him profusely for his weakness. Yuuri saw his college self, enormous and grotesque, shovelling handful after handful of putrid, greasy crap into his crumb-covered mouth, neither man nor beast wishing to be at his side.

Finally, Yuuri saw himself. He remembered his blackened, bruised half-corpse; the rotting teeth and gums; and the protruding, flabby stomach. The flashback spouted recollections of assault, adultery, and a combination of both as his final memory unravelled before his eyes.

The Japanese boy began to weep as he tumbled towards the ground, acceleration ever growing. He wasn't upset in anticipation of his death, oh no; Yuuri was ashamed by the stain he would leave on the beauty of the world.

'I guess this is the only way to do it. I'm a terrible person, and it's evident that Viktor will never love me again. I'm a dishonourable son at best and a catastrophic friend at worse, an idiot who can't control himself and who leaches off other's attention to feed his own insecurity. I've done things, I've done terrible things. I'm repulsive, useless - the one thing I strive for, that I dedicated my life and soul to as I pushed all that I loved away, I know it will never be. I love anorexia, love what it can give be, but it'll never be enough until I'm adored for who I am.'

'But, since that'll never happen, I guess I'll have to go with this instead.'

Yuuri shut his eyes, hoping for a clean and painless death as he hurtled towards the ground. Clutching his scars, the skater prepared himself for impact, tilting his head back as he aimed his neck at the passing trains below.

He fell.

He stopped.

He floated.

He floated?

Eyes still cemented shut, Yuuri waved his arms mid-air as he questioned just why he wasn't dead yet. In a rather ungainly fashion he began to coordinate such movements with his legs, flicking and kicking in an aim to propel himself further downwards.
"Hey, quit it!"

The Japanese boy slowly lifted his eyelids, gazing down at the roaring tracks below, utterly perplexed. He glanced up at the sky; it was too dark to perceive any minor interference, but nothing noticeable had occurred. Yuuri shook himself, shifting his focus straight ahead to the surface of the lower rail bridge, brimming with night time traffic, the glittering of headlights abundant.

"Oh, hello Yurio," Yuuri waved weakly as he turned to face the unexpected Russian, "what are you doing here?"

The younger skater gently lowered his older counterpart, holding his hands as Yuuri was still shaking with excitement. With his typical brave face completely diminished, Yurio threw his arms around the Japanese boy's scarred and shrivelled neck, bursting into tears as he pulled his friend close.

"What the hell Katsudon?" He exclaimed between sobs, "What are you playing at? Do you really think this would solve anything?"

Yuuri didn't know what to say. Both physically and emotionally drained, he shrugged his shoulders, leaning on the shoulders of the Russian as he too began to cry. The latter, shaken by his friend's rippling shivers, was shocked by the bones protruding from his back, tracing the contour of his ribs and the raised scars striped on his twig-like arms.

"What are you doing here, Yurio?"

"Out looking for you, dummy," the skater sighed, "Viktor rang and said you'd ran away; I thought I'd help find you-"

"-please don't call Viktor! I don't think I could take it - I've seen and done too much - please, please, don't call him!"

Yurio stared straight through Yuuri's sunken eyes, hands cupped around his pointed jaw as neither dared to move.

"What - what happened to you guys?"

"We had a fight, and I saw something I shouldn't have... it doesn't matter anyway; I'm worthless, why couldn't you have left me?"

Yurio continued to weep, devastated by his friend's deterioration. He'd ignored the spiralling issues for far too long out of convenience, out of laziness... it may have almost been too late. As he dried his worried tears, Yuuri sat on the kerb with a bottle of water from Yurio's backpack, explaining the trauma of the situation as the other listened with intent.

"Look, Yuuri," the younger boy began, "sure, you can be annoying as hell, and yeah, I don't care about much in this world... but please, please, promise you won't try to kill yourself ever again."

His friend smiled, pain creasing in his eyes,
"Well, I guess - hopefully not directly anyway."

The two continued to talk into the early hours of the morning. Whilst Yurio had notified Viktor of his discovery, he hadn't mentioned anything relating to the suicide attempt, nor did he disclose the Japanese boy's location. It all seemed too private, too personal - Yuuri was hurting, and what he needed right now was a friend to keep him safe, not a distressed lover with an argument on his mind.
Helping the weakened party off the ground, the Russian boy took his friend by the hand and led him through the backstreets of the city. The two began to pass through the mossy, cobbled streets of the old centre as the sun rose over the antique buildings, the sky a shade of youthful amber.

"Where are you taking me?"

"You'll see," replied Yurio, "although I warn you now, you probably won't like it."

Yuuri certainly didn't. He'd been led to the rusted entrance of an old Russian graveyard, the cemetery lined with frosted ivory and blood-red berries as the autumn had drawn in. A dimly-lit gravel passage spanned from the gate to a shadowed forest at the back, gravestones either side of its well-trodden path.

"Why did you bring me here?"

But Yurio said nothing. Instead, he steered their pace towards the side of the cluttered grounds, stopping to kneel by an etched headstone littered with the weathered petals of old daisies.

It was difficult for Yuuri to make out any discernible piece of writing from the faded scrawls across its front, but from the two words he had make clear, and the solemn expression of his young friend's face, there was no further explanation required.

"Vitaliya Plisetsky."

"Your mother...?"

Yurio nodded with a melancholy sigh,
"Yes, she was the most prestigious prima ballerina the world had ever seen."

The Japanese boy glanced once again at the marble headstone, a shiver running down his spine as his knees were soaked from the morning dew,
"How come she was only 25?"

"Indeed, why did she have to be so young?"

Neither said anything as nothing could be said; Yuuri was at a loss for words, and Yurio not inclined to give any.

"You know, she too had anorexia."

Sharp fears pierced Yuuri's heart as he immediately realised the intent of this journey.

"Perhaps it was something else?" The Japanese boy asked rather foolishly.

Yurio shook his head,
"A shrunken heart, ravaged brain and creaking bones? It was either that or old age.

Come on, Yuuri, be realistic - I'm just as angry as you are at Viktor, but if you don't recover from this illness, it's going to destroy you the same way that it took my mother."

Burning tears shed from the Russian's pinched sockets as he lay another daisy at the head of the grave.

"I'm sorry, I'm so, so sorry," replied Yuuri as he bent to comfort the skater, "I'm sorry, I don't know what to do."
"Please try, please just try to get better."

"I'm sorry, I don't know how. I'm broken, Yuri, I don't know if anyone can fix me."

Yurio was at a loss - he couldn't leave the older boy alone, not in his current state at least, but a drunken, sluggish Viktor was the opposite of what he needed right now.

"Yuuri, let's go home." He said, gesturing away from the graveyard.

"Don't you want to stay with your mother?"

Yurio wipes the last strayd tears away from his face,
"She's at peace now Yuuri, she's looking out for me. Hopefully she'll look out for your too.

But seriously, dude, you need to go home. Get clean, have a drink, and then we'll work on the eating part. You need to promise me you'll be safe."

"I promise."

The two skaters shuffled back to the apartment, shedding the occasional tear as they went. The morning rush hour had began to grow in full swing, with the city alive and bustling once again as the sun rose high into the sky.

"I texted Viktor, told him to give you a chance."

"But wait, does he kno-"

Yurio shook his head,
"Not about the attempt, no. I think it's best if you tell him yourself."

"And if he's angry?"

"He won't be, I gave him firm instructions. Trust me, Yuuri, he just wants you to be safe."

As the older skater headed for the entrance to the block, the younger pulled him into his arms, squeezing him tight as he went,

"Yuuri, we all love you so, so much. Please don't end up like my mother."

The Japanese boy nodded, returning the gesture with a ruffle of his friend's luscious golden hair. Their eyes, moistened by tears, glistened in the rays of the morning sun, and for a brief moment, time stood as calm and still as the gravestones they'd just visited.

Yuuri began to climb each stair, legs aching with exhaustion. He'd never been more afraid in his life, and yet the man who terrified him most was his fiancé. Viktor was a wonderful, brilliant man - and that's what hurt the most. Yuuri's crippling illness and murky attitude had sullied all the good in this once pure beam of light.

'No, I cannot ruin him like this,' the skater thought, checking Yurio was gone before slipping through and into the apartment.

Viktor, utterly inebriated from a night of hard, fast drinking, lay sprawled across the sofa when he glanced up to find his partner by the door.

"Yuuri, Yuuri - oh my God, you're home!"
Viktor ran to greet his fiancé, arms open wide in jubilation, but was met with a quick but stone-cold touch from his partner upon contact.

"Yuuri?"

"Viktor, we need some time apart."

Yuuri knew he couldn't halt his self-destructive ways even if he tried. This was his identity, his new persona now - and neither one partner nor a thousand would ever change that. He needed to do this, to exercise his freedom, but without the risk of hurting Viktor in the process. However many attempts were made, the Russian would always be a casualty of the battles that he faced, and it could go on for no longer.

If Yuuri sacrificed his happiness to save his love, so be it.

"I'm sorry Viktor, I came to tell you I'm safe, but for now I'm afraid I must go."

Viktor's heart was skipping beats, 
"Go? Go where? This is your- this is our home-"

The Russian simply could not comprehend it. He'd lost the single most precious thing he'd ever dreamed of loving, his one true reason to exist, and now it yet again was to be so cruelly snatched from his hands by the claws of fate itself.

"You cannot be a casualty of my madness any longer."

"..."

"I'm sorry, Viktor, but this is for your own good."

Viktor said nothing, he couldn't say anything right. Following a deafening silence and the small jolts of unintended gulps, he spoke.

"Yuuri, I love you more than anything in the world, but I'm not going to stand here and watch you destroy yourself."

“Good. You no longer have to.”

With a swift turn on his heels, and the wavering of his lips, the Japanese boy had left the apartment quicker than he'd entered.

Where was he to go? Anywhere it seemed. A hotel, a hostel, a shelter - anywhere he could fester alone, without harming the goodness of others.

Not a tear dropped as Yuuri left Viktor speechless in the front of their apartment. This was for the greater good.
(Yuuri’s POV)

Well, I’ve gone and done it.
I’ve fucked up.

And yet, although I’ve tried all I could to remedy my idiocy, it was all apparently futile.

Viktor hates me.

Well, not exactly.

I’m not sure what he thinks.

Surely he must hate me? I’ve made him hate me - he needs to hate me.

Everybody hates me. That’s the thing about being Yuuri Katsuki, the world’s greatest fuck-up -
global disdain sort of comes with the territory.

I had to cut Viktor off. I’m sure everyone will understand? Only I, and I alone, will finish this. In
life or in death, I will be perfect.

Still, I’m not exactly sure what perfection is.

I think I’ve come to accept the notion that I’m vaguely skinny now. Not anywhere near where I
want to be, no, but decently thin, I think. Still, I need to be a lot smaller. I have to be perfect for the
Grand Prix Final.

Speaking of the Final, now that Viktor’s not around I’ve had the past three weeks virtually to
myself, if you discount the drug-addled schoolgirls in the hotel room next door, and thus many
spare hours to practise. I hope I’ve improved. I need to get my speed up to ramp up the score on my
routine, and training at a new rink hasn’t been a walk in the park.

I suppose you - whoever’s listen, God I guess, are wondering what I’ve been doing all alone in this
 cramped, back-of-town old shack of a hotel room. Aside from practising? Not anything, I don’t
think. I’ve spent most of my days cooped up in the comfort of my own solitude, a real treat for the
senses, dabbling in The occasionally feast of next door’s foods before they’re to be sold on
honourable black market.

Amphetamine really isn’t all it’s made out to be. Neither is cocaine. I asked (well, pleaded) for the
girls to whip up a batch or two of their finest dinitrophenol - you know, so I could eat dinner a
couple of nights a week - but they wholeheartedly declined.

Apparently it was ‘too dangerous’.

It’s a shame, I was really looking forward to taco Tuesday.

Still, I suppose I should be wary of anything that could potentially sabotage my current weight loss
plans. Without Viktor to upset, I’ve felt free to exercise my starvation plans to great extent, and so far it’s all been going swimmingly.

To be truthful, I still don’t know my current weight. From the girls’ passing comments I’m guessing my BMI’s around 11-12, which I suppose is pretty cool. Apparently I should be ‘dying’ right now, but energy drinks seem to be doing the trick when it comes to staying alive.

That’s all there is to say, really. I miss Viktor greatly - although I doubt he misses me; I’m a little shit - but this is all for the best. If I die, at least I’ll be hurting him a little less.

I’m not actually suicidal. In fact, I’m quite comfortable where I am.

Am I hopelessly depressed?
Yes.

Is my life meaningless?
Undoubtedly.

BUT I know I’m still losing weight, so there’s always a reason to carry on. Plus, there’s hope for the Grand Prix Final - I know I won’t win, but seeing Mari again before my frame collapses in is a treat I cannot wait for.

I sincerely hope they still allow me to compete.

From what I’ve gathered, neither Viktor nor Yakov has reported me to the competition authorities, so there’s still hope for me yet.

All I can do is try my best, I guess, and hope that I’m not scrutinised for my disgusting presence and self.

With all these needle pricks in my arm and scars on my wrist, who knows if Viktor will ever take me back.

I don’t really have anything in life to keep me going. Viktor, I suppose, but there’s no getting my hopes up.

All I can do is wait and see what happens next.
The Nutcracker

{Viktor's POV}

I know I've been an idiot, but this time, I've really gone and done it.

I don't know where he is. I don't know if he's warm enough, if he's eating enough; I don't even know if he's alive.

Yurio called. He was furious.
It's all my fault and I know just why.

"Why didn't you go after him?" Was the voice yelling through the phone, "Don't you care at all?"

I do care. Perhaps I care too much. Maybe it was the overbearing pressure to perform, or his willingness to please that pushed him to the edge. Either way, Yuuri's gone. If not forever, then for eternity.

Mila said she'd seen him on the outskirts of the city, wrapped in an old skater jacket, withered and alone. After that I spent 6 days searching for my partner, wishing my fiancé would return to me. Surely he couldn't have ran far - not in his condition anyway. I even resorted to calling the police, who in fact correctly identified his location, but the bastards confirmed that he wished to remain alone, and I have no legal right to his situation. Idiots.

Still, I'm not angry, I couldn't possibly be. What is there to be angry about? Yuuri can't help this - the funny thing is, I know he can't, and yet I proceed to antagonise him further. I'm not good with people crying. In fact, I hate to cry myself. I've never been good with emotions, but now? Now is not the time Viktor, not the time at all. You have to be strong for Yuuri - that is, if he decides to return at all.

I will find him. If not here, then at the Grand Prix Final. Nobody is going to report him once they know of his condition, nobody is going to be so cruel. I don't believe truly believe that he will die. Yuuri is a fighter, and even if the battles at its climax, he'll scupper out of it eventually. It's just getting there that's the hard part.

Makkachin's not doing so well either. The dog won't eat anything I give her, and drinks less and less each day. I think she's on her last legs, and to be honest, I empathise. Not that I'm going to die, and I suspect I won't be doing so for a long time, but my heart grows more desperate each and every day.

All I can do it wait. Wait and pray, wishing for Yuuri to return. I hope he is at least trying to look after himself. He needs to keep training, to keep achieving if he has any intent on winning at least bronze in this year's competition. I could never ban him from his passions or withdraw him from the skating that he so desperately needs, but at the same time, Yuuri needs fuel. Without food, he turns to chemicals and drugs - I can't bear to imagine what he's doing to himself right now, even if just by cans and boxes.

My training isn't going all too well. The guys at the rink aren't their usual selves, and even Yakov’s been feeling down. I’ve tried to curb the alcohol - which, so far, has been going semi-well, but it’s still difficult to function. Sometimes I still come flying off the rink. I’d never thought I’d say this, at least not when Yuuri’s competitive streak was used to flaring up, but I’m not sure I’ll even win anything this season. Not until I know what Yuuri is safe can I finally take control again.
I must find him. I’m the one who caused this mess, and even though he ran away, I’m the one who must bring him back.

Yuuri, I will find you.
(Yuuri’s POV)

The day draws to a close as I arrive home from another day of training, sky overcast with wispy grey clouds as I enter the hotel room.

Luckily the cleaning lady’s visited. I can’t imagine she appreciated the numerous pill bottles and ambiguous containers scattered about the place, but I expect she’s forgotten about it now. This has come to be a rather regular arrangement, so perhaps the worrisome habits of guest 34b are now a simply common occurrence.

Yes, I know Viktor wouldn’t approve. I suppose amphetamine isn’t the safest of substances, but it’s a good high whilst it lasts. I use to pass the time between intense sessions of wallowing in self-pity as my weight stabilises once again, its latest stage of dormancy hitting around late October.

Regardless of my physical appearance, mentally my spirits have been somewhat lifted. I’ve been practising a move that I think is sure to please the judges at the Grand Prix Final, even if I collapse shortly after.

The idea first came to mind whilst I was sat by the bleachers in the empty rink downtown. I think it’s mainly used to teach the Russian junior competitions, but still, it’s quiet and therefore a great place to escape the clutches of my partner. Viktor might not approve of this addition when he sees it, but hopefully will be impressed by the routine nonetheless.

I liked the way this new ice felt against the polished blade of my skates, smooth and without any sign of grain. I’d yet to complete a fully successful quintuple flip, but in that moment, I had a much better idea.

Sure, there was no way of knowing if it’d work. If failed, I suppose it could’ve killed me. That would have been rather unfortunate, given my current circumstances, but I was desperate to try it out anyway. Besides, I live as a complete fuck up, so I didn’t particularly mind dying a complete fuckup either.

Anyway, back to the story. I was practising laps as the sky dimmed to a pale shade of pink, the windows closing overhead as strobe lights were lit up. For a second-rate rink, the allure of the ice is still so powerful and moving. I twisted, turned - admittedly, often falling - and spun my way across the glistening white surface, much to the amazement of the onlooking trainees. Yes, they were only 5 years old, but at least it felt good to be appreciated.

Recognising that it was indeed a good day for skating, I continued to push myself even further, completing many flips and salchows independently as freely as I could. Continuing on from my earlier rambling, this is when the new idea finally came to mind.

Was it dangerous? Yes. Was it easy? Definitely not. Did my recent lack of rationale and emotional stability play a factor in influence such risky behaviour? Quite possibly. However, when it was complete, it felt glorious.

Bending my legs, I raced up and down the rink, gathering as much speed as I possibly could. Positioning myself at such a precise angle for the jump was rather tricky, but I eventually had it under control. The trainees looked on in anticipation as they wondered just what I’d planned to do, but I turned away, as I couldn’t afford any distractions. If I pulled this off, it could change
everything, and then, maybe then, would I finally be as talented as Viktor himself.

With as much force as my useless body could give, I thrust myself into the air. As I gazed upwards, stars began to swirl and a sea of dots ensued, my eyes burned by an oncoming migraine, but I bent my head backwards and continued for the good of the cause: to prove that I wasn’t useless on my own. As my body curled backwards, sensations of weightless and gravity shot down my spin, my back rolled up in the shape of a moon as I completed my first rotation. Shortly after, I stretched out again, feet landing firmly on the ice before I shot into the side. The move was not complete, however I saw hope - it was, at this stage, still vaguely possible.

Unfortunately, when you’re severely weak and helpless, your body can’t really hold itself together properly.

I fainted on the spot.

The junior coach collected my pile of bones off of the ice and dragged me to the locker room - not something I really appreciated, but I suppose it would have been selfish to die in front of all those little children. Luckily, with a bandage and a couple spoonfuls of medicine, I was soon sent ‘home’ to rest. I was frustrated that she’d thwarted my most successful attempt yet, but I guess it’s hard to practise if you’re collapsing constantly anyway.

Fortunately, there was tomorrow!

I was back in no time. After a pleasant morning of hanging with the neighbours, burning letters from Yurio (who, annoyingly, keeps trying to contact me via post), and a couple whiffs of quality cocaine, I was ready to yet again attempt my new idea!

I do feel somewhat guilty for ignoring all my friends. The other day I thought I’d saw Mila on the south side of the city, but hopefully she wasn’t looking for me and it was a mere coincidence. I’m not embarrassed of my current living conditions, per se, but I’d rather keep my relations away from this glorified hovel. I still greatly miss Viktor and Yurio, but I must resist their attempts to find me. I’m not good for them; why should I let them burn to ashes when I’m the one caught in the fire? Hopefully, when I’m successful, or possibly dead, they’ll realise that I did this with the best of intentions - and if not, let’s pray that they’re able to move on.

These pesky thoughts continued to trouble me as I was practising my skating. As much as I love a good cry, I’m not really one for all that sentimental bullshit, so concealing my thoughts whilst at the rink was particularly troublesome.

Mid-way through my new, exciting move, this mood struck unexpectedly, once again rendering me emotionally confused. I’d completed the most difficult aspect of the jump - that is, lifting my bloated vessel from the ground - but mastering the second rotation appeared a more difficult skill to master.

It is annoyingly frustrating; I have so many good ideas, and yet they’re difficult to conceptualise without the help of Viktor.

I’ve been dreaming of him recently, too. Whether it’s via a drug-induced hallucination, or simply from the comfort of my single wooden bed, he frequently appears to me, hand held out to greet me as we parade through the centre of the city. To be honest, I’m not sure what to make of it. I’m a skeptic at the best of times, and it’s hardly convincing this means anything at all. Still, part of me can’t help but cling to the idea that we can still live together happily, that I won’t make him destroy himself completely.
Nevertheless, I had other things to think about. Viktor is a competent adult, and he’ll do fine without me - although I can’t exactly say the same for myself. As I tried to flip a second time, I pictured our first date together as a way to keep me going. Did it work? Possibly - I didn’t complete the rotation, but it was the farthest I’d gone in a while. Not bad for a jacked-up kid on weight loss pills and a taste for serious self hatred! Still, I’ve begun to feel rather like a soppy teenager - forlorn, lonely, and perhaps even a little spotty; and I think it’s affecting my performance.

I think I’ll get it one day. Hopefully before the Grand Prix Final, as I’d quite like to win, but if not, I’ll play it safe. My back’s not what it used to be - to be fair, neither is my entire body. I’m nearly 25, so I guess I’m no spring chicken anymore. Regardless of my current mental instability, if I want a shot at making it past the four continents, I need to look after myself.

I just don’t know if I can do that without Viktor’s help.
Viktor couldn't believe his eyes.

"Not you, please, not you too..."

It seemed now Yuuri wasn't the only figure that'd left the Russian all alone.

"You know, despite it all, I thought you'd be there to help me.

You never startled, never criticised, and yet, you, the purest of them all, are gone."

A deathly chill froze over the apartment as a short gust of air wafted against Viktor's reddened ears. Laying in front of him, body frozen and icy to the touch, was the body of his much beloved pet, still and without any sign of life from within.

"Please, Makka - please wake up..!"

But Makkachin did not stir at all. She'd been lying there since the previous day - foot uneaten, and coat falling into shaggy, matted wave - and was not sleeping anymore. Viktor had dashed in as he heard he last few gasps of air, but was ultimately too late. Had he taken her to the vet, it was likely there was nothing they'd have been able to do - Makkachin was an old dog, and old dogs cannot live forever.

Her legs didn't work like they used to before. Viktor had known that for a while now, but what could he have done? His mind had been so preoccupied with thoughts of Yuuri’s suffering that he'd hardly had the time to sort out anything remotely medical for the poor girl.

Perhaps it was a sign. Death's musty stench hung in the air like an uncomfortable cologne, wrapped around his neck as it tightened on his throat. Viktor paused and looked to the ceiling. Was Yuuri fading too? They hadn't talked in over a month, so he had no way of knowing if he was actually still alive. Viktor hoped, Viktor prayed, but he couldn't bear the thought of being totally alone.

The skater put a shaking hand on the head of his deceased pet. He just couldn't stop crying. Fat tears rolled down his reddened face as he ran his fingers through her curls, playing with her ears as he did when she was still alive. He thought of her years as a puppy, bouncing around him in the dark of his bedroom as he hid from yet another night of abuse. When his parents started raging at each other, this puppy had been his only solace, and now that the roaring flames of overcoming loneliness blew in his face, he knew that source of comfort was now gone.

"I have to find Yuuri."

Apartment in tatters, Viktor pulled together and dragged himself towards the kitchen phone. Fingers quivering, he dialled the only number he knew for sure would answer, praying for a positive response.

"Hello, who is it?"

"Yurio, it's me, it's V-"

"Viktor? Have you managed to talk to Yuuri?"

"No, not yet, but I thought that you knew where he was."
"I do," sighed Yurio, "but even I am barred from visiting..."

"This is an emergency!"

"Ugh, fine. I'll text you the address. Just don't expect a positive response."

Viktor thanked his younger counterpart and flew out of the room, wrapping a scarf around his shoulders as he set out to rescue his fiancé. Nothing seemed to matter anymore; so what if Yuuri was angry? He'd calm down... eventually. If Viktor could preserve his life, he'd never ask for anything again. With Makkachin now gone, the Russian was so desperately alone, and if he couldn't bring Yuuri back to him - well, then he was fully prepared to do the worst.

Viktor reminded himself to keep it in, to not lose face as he wandered through the crowded autumn streets of St Petersburg. Trees of copper and tarnished crimson lined the pavement, shedding their leaves onto the cobbled ground, deflating as they hit a nearby puddle. Viktor too was feeling majorly deflated. It was as if a ticking time bomb had been strapped to the centre of his chest, the seconds running out before he was alone forever.

After a while the skater arrived at a crossroads, a shabby hotel located shortly opposite. It paled in comparison to the opulent Russian buildings standing proudly beside its desecrated walls, but this was the address that Viktor had been given - if Yuuri wasn't here, then he wouldn't be anywhere else.

Well, possibly a morgue, but Viktor hoped it hadn't come to that.

Swallowing his pride, Viktor steadied himself as his cracked knuckles pounded against the icy door frame of room 34b.

No answer.

The Russian kept knocking, resulting to banging against the door with the night of his fists as he broke down in desperation. It seemed as if all hope was lost, having crawled out from the back of his crushed spirit just as the final strike hit the door. Yuuri wasn't here. Yuuri wasn't anywhere.

What he with Makkachin? Was her passing a sign, a signal that he was ready to go, and she there to guide him? Had they departed together? Viktor could only wish for their security and happiness as he broken down on the tattered staircase, wishing for another way for him to see his love again.

"Hey there - are you okay?"

A shivering, frail figure had slunk out from the crowded room next door, eyes in a daze and poking at a plaster on his wrist as he approached the shaking Russian.

"Don't be afraid - you look lost, do you need help?"

Viktor knew the voice was familiar, but couldn't pinpoint where exactly he'd heard it before. A portion of it still lingered in his distant memory - but it was gruff, it was croaked and chapped. Hardened by the cold and strain of a harsh existence. He was still yet to know the face to which this voice belonged. Gingerly, Viktor turned around to face the figure standing beside him. Yuuri's safety was important, but a friendly face could help a little. He opened his eyes and could not believe his luck.

"Yuuri?"

"Viktor?"
The figure had begun to run away, but Viktor stretched an arm and seized him by the leg.

"Yuuri - I'm sorry - I can't let you go again!"

Yuuri tried to shake him off,
"Please, Viktor - you don't deserve to go through this."

It appeared as though they'd reached a stalemate. Time ground to a halt as Viktor clung on for dear life, with Yuuri finally relinquishing the desire to pull away, and flinging himself into the arms of his fiancé.

"What's the use in trying anymore?"

Viktor began to weep, tears of happiness intertwining with those of bitter sorrow.

"I can't believe you're here, I thought you'd left me forever!"

"Ha, if only - Viktor, I don't want to hurt you, are you sure this is okay?"

"Yuuri, this is all I ever wanted. I am totally alone, and need you here with me."

The Japanese skater chuckled as he clung to the arms of his partner,
"I'm sure Makka's a better companion than I'll ever be."

The older boy began to weep with sorrow,
"Yuuri, Makkachin is dead."

The skater's face turned to stone as he looked into the eyes of his Russian fiancé.

"Dead?"

"She was old, Yuuri - and with you gone, it seemed that she had nothing else to live for."

Yuuri couldn't believe what he was hearing. Despite all their troubles, their trials and tribulations, the couple had always relied on their faithful companion to keep them out of the depths of their emotion. Flashbacks to Vicchan's death replayed in his mind, the painful memories of missing his beloved pet's passing aching as his body shook with guilt.

"I'm sorry, Viktor - I had no way of knowing..."

"It's not your fault, Lapochka, but please - please come home. I need you. Yurio needs you. We all need you here, with us - please Yuuri, we just want you alive. Stay alive."

Yuuri just could not stop crying,
"Makkachin is gone? Where is she? How did she go?"

"Peacefully, I promise."

Yuuri shook the tears from this hair and face,
"I need to see her."

"I'll gladly take you."

"But first I must say goodbye to the girls."

Viktor was confused. Who were these girls? He knew that Yuuri was bisexual, but wouldn't have
been able to accept any new found love - not in his current state. The Russian couldn't bear the thought of his love in the arms of another, whether male, female, or neither.

Yuuri, sending the writhing tension in his partner's head, put a hand upon Viktor's quaking back, "Relax, Viktor - they're not my girlfriends. They've just helped me through some hard times, that's all."

Yuuri decided it was best not to include that they were drug dealers. Viktor, although himself not totally opposed to substances, needed nothing more to worry about. Besides, recently Yuuri had been weaning himself off of the most harmful chemicals anyway. In a few days he'd be back to his typical condition of diet pills and energy drinks, and everything would be vaguely back to normal.

Nobody said a word as they returned to the apartment. Death's fresh stench still lingered in the walls as they approached the rigid corpse of their once rambunctious canine, and with one look at her the Japanese boy could no longer hold it in. He dropped to the floor, scooping up her body in his arms as he held her to his chest.

"She's gone."

Viktor nodded sadly.

"We didn't even get to say goodbye."

That night, the couple held a vigil for the body. They lit candles with thick magnolia incense to conceal the smell of flesh, and lay roses upon her body as it was covered with a satin cloth. Neither had the energy to reference their relationship, and both were simply glad that the period of longing was now over. In a strange, perturbed way, Makkachin's death had somehow brought them closer together. The two realised that their differences were minimal, and that, despite their difficulties, being together was the most important thing of all. Neither wished to be alone again.

"I'll call the crematorium tomorrow."

"Okay," replied Yuuri, "I just wish there was a way we could've let her know that she was loved before she passed."

The room, once again, fell into silence.

"Viktor, do you believe in ghosts?"

"Hmm.. well, I'm not really sure."

"Okay, okay..." muttered the Japanese boy to himself as looked towards the ceiling, "This might sound crazy, but... when I was a kid, around 12 or 13, my grandfather died... and I was so upset that, well, I tried to contact him."

"Yuuri!"

"I know, it sound stupid. But when I found a ouija board in my sister's closet, it felt like fate had led me to it. So I used it to contact the spirit world, and well... I think I met my grandfather. What if we could do the same with Makkachin?"

"I don't know, Yuuri - do these things even work?"

"It did last time I tried it. I contacted a friend from the internet that had died young, passed in a lot of pain - and she said she was finally at peace."
Viktor sighed, shaking his head, "I guess things can't get any worse."

Thus, around half an hour of drawing and scavenging for makeshift items later, the couple had made their own semi-decent ouija board, make of a decorated chopping board and broken wine glass.

Yuuri placed his hand upon the homemade planchette, "Are you ready?"

"Ready as I'll ever be."

The Japanese boy closed his eyes, "Are any spirits here to talk with us?"

Nothing.

"See, Yuuri, I knew it wouldn't wor- Oh."

Something.

Yuuri tried to keep his cool. Sure, he was the lowest of low right now, but he needed to be strong for Viktor.

"Is Makkachin with us today?"

The planchette slowly slid to no. Viktor's eyes widened in disbelief.

"Yuuri, you moving the glass?"

"No, I'm barely touching it - the same goes for you, right?"

The Russian nodded in response.

The younger boy pressed forward, "That's okay, don't worry - who's spirit is with us today?"

V-I-T-A-L-I-Y-A

Yuuri's face fell frozen stiff.

"Know who that is?" asked Viktor, concerned.

"Perhaps," Yuuri gulped, turning back towards the board, "hey there, Vitaliya, can you tell me what you did in this physical world?"

B-A-L-L-E-T

"Good, you're doing well... and what is the name of your son?"

"Yuuri, what the hell?"

The board froze, the planchette shaking violently.

S-A-M-E

"Same as who?"
Yuuri could no longer take the pain inside. He had contacted Yurio's dead mother.

"Viktor, we need to put the board away."

"Away? But I don't understand, you were the one who wanted to try it out-"

"-Viktor, please! Let me put it away."

Viktor smiled,
"Yuuri, come on, this spirit isn't dangerous. It might be lonely for her up there, why don't we keep her company?"

The Japanese skater placed his head in his hands,
"Okay, but you're asking the questions."

The planchette has started to vibrate again.

"Okay," said Viktor, "um... what's the spirit world like?"

"You're not allowed to say?"

YES

"Okay... how did you die?"

H-U-N-G-R-Y

"Oh my God.." exclaimed Viktor, "Yuuri, you don't think she died in Leningrad, do you?"

Yuuri didn't say anything, simply speechless in astonishment. Why has Yurio's mother contacted him? What purpose did this serve, and more apparently, how was he to tell her son about this inexplicable event? And more importantly, would he tell her son at all?

The younger boy looked up at his fiancé,
"Huh? I don't know Viktor... why don't you ask her why she's here?"

"Okay, Vitaliya, what do you wish to tell us?"


"What does this mean?"

Yuuri shrugged his shoulders,
"Vitaliya, could you elaborate?"

But the spirit had already said goodbye.

Yuuri was visibly shaken. Viktor prepared tea and attributed it to his damaged immune system, but the former was having trouble keeping his panic concealed. It was almost as if Vitaliya has tried to warn him of something, something imminent and pressing. Was he truly going to die? Life was so
painful to live, but to be extinguished altogether? Yuri did not want to think about it at all. Keeping a brave face as they put the ouija board away, the Japanese boy was wholeheartedly relieved when the couple had returned to their seating in the living room.

The two boys spent the rest of the night curled up with one another, apologising for their mistakes and crying as they thought of time apart.

"Yuuri, promise me you'll never leave again?" said Viktor through a mouthful of tears.

"Not for as long as I shall live, I swear to it."

Yuuri was growing weaker by the day. Viktor just couldn't believe how ridiculously skeletal his partner had become. His figure terrified all that set eyes upon him - he couldn't ever totally repulse his fiancé, but he certainly did frighten him.

“How did it feel, staying in the hotel like that?”

“Honestly,” Yuuri began, “it was hard, but necessary. I needed time alone, I think, to evaluate just how selfish I’ve been. You can’t cure me - you and I know that for sure - and it was wrong of you to trick me with those pills, but I am no saint either. And if I carried on by myself, who knows where I could’ve ended up. My wages paid for everything I needed, but I felt as if I deserved nothing good. Most nights I slept on the couch as I was too tired to move myself to the bed. Most days I saw little point in carrying on. I know now that, despite our disagreements, we just want what’s best for one another. And since Makkachin’s gone, we need to be strong for her too. I can’t promise I’ll be totally okay, Viktor, but I can say that I hope you’ll never let me leave again.”

“I won’t. I promise.”

The candles were extinguished by a spritz of rose water, their floral smoke and ash swirling around the comforting warmth of the room.

“I suppose this is what she would have wanted.” Said Viktor.

“If only she could see you now,” murmured Yuuri, “instead, she saw you at your worst so far. I did this to us, Viktor, and I accept full responsibility.”

“Makkachin loved you, you know that? I doubt she’ll ever stop loving you.”

“I loved her too,” Yuuri smiled, stroking his fiancé’s bandaged knuckles, “and I’ll never stop loving you, even if I am an awkward piece of shit.”

Viktor chuckled. An air of sadness still lay as a veil over their shoulders, but its cover grew increasingly transparent. He was afraid for the future - for the Grand Prix, and whether Yuuri would be able to cope with the difficulties of competing, but pushed it to the back of his mind as he gazed at the boy lay across his lap. Yuuri’s bones may have prodded awkwardly, but at least Viktor could feel his partner’s touch. Yuuri was home, and he was real. He was in a bad shape, but he, and their love, was truly, truly real.

Corners of his mouth curled up, Yuuri leant over to his boyfriend’s chest, “Viktor, are we going skating tomorrow?”

“Sure, if that’d make you happy.”

“Good,” Yuuri replied, “I’ve got just the thing to show you.”
Blueprints

Makkachin was cremated that morning. The service was beautiful, with her ashes packed inside a detailed vase. Viktor hadn't spared a penny.

"Ah, just like you-" remarked Yuuri, "extra to the very end."

There was little time to sit and mope around. As the four continents and Grand Prix Final loomed over the weary heads of the young couple, they soon found themselves back at the rink where they were reunited with friends once more. The atmosphere, although still a little uneasy, conveyed a sense of long-awaited relief. This, of course, was mainly just because Yuuri had managed to survive his time alone, but spirits had settled nonetheless.

Viktor turned to an astonished Yurio as he entered the arena, winking as the younger boy looked on in amazement.

"How the hell did you manage to bring him home?" He murmured, just about out of earshot from the accompanying Japanese skater.

Viktor shrugged, smiling calmly,
"I guess it was our time."

Of course, the older boy was still bitten with anxiety. Yuuri wasn't doing well, and it was obvious he'd been deteriorating, but Viktor was determined to assist him without wrecking his partner's trust. The Japanese boy had managed over half of his protein shake at that morning's breakfast, and although he didn't seem too keen on lunch, the skater promised his fiancé that he'd try his katsudon at dinner.

"Welcome back," said Yurio to Yuuri as they passed each other in the cloakroom, "how are things going since, well... let's just call it our last meeting together."

Yuuri, who was applying some light concealer under his sunken eyes, looked up at his younger companion and smiled sheepishly,

"Oh yeah, that.. look, I'm so sorry about what happened. I didn't mean to get you so involved, that was awfully selfish of me."

Yurio shook his head and smiled,
"Don't be stupid - what kind of idiot would want to be left alone with Viktor all the time?"

The Japanese boy pretended to laugh as his friend then walked on by, acknowledging the sentiment but also the awkwardness that had come with it. He couldn't get the image of the ouija board from out of his mind, blinking furiously as he attempted to wipe the trace of ominous mediumship from within his deepest thoughts. However, after a few moments, Yuuri could no longer hold it in. Holding his breath, he tailed behind the Russian as he went to leave the room, gently tapping the young skater as his heart raced deep within.

"Yuuri, don't lie to me, are you sure you're not still bad?"

Yuuri shook his head, laughing rather nervously,
"What? Ha, no, I'm... relatively fine. But there is something I need to tell you."

"Oh? What is it?"
The older boy then sat his young friend on a nearby bench, and briefly set out the events that had occurred upon his ouija game last night. Yurio, still rather skeptical, listened with a mind inclined to believe him, and yet he could not understand just why his mother had come through the board.

"So you've never seen or heard her near you before?"

"No, I swear - look, now probably wasn't the best time to tell you, Yurio, I'm sorry..."

Parting his golden hair, the Russian gave a saddened smile,
"Don't be. It's not your fault. I've seen her too, more often than not, but she rarely talks to me.."

"Oh..."

"It's fine, I've been like this all my life. The other day I panicked as I'd though I saw you too, but I think it was just another boring vision."

Yuuri said nothing, as he didn't know what exactly he should say, but slowly nodded in agreement. There were powers outside of this existence that he obviously could not control, and was thus simply content with listening to his friend.

"Yuri Plisetsky, where on Earth have you been?!" called an irritated Yakov through the trembling artificial wall, "You're supposed to be practising, not hiding in here like a child!"

Yurio said nothing, rising from the bench before moving towards the door.

"We won't speak again until the Grand Prix Final. Practise is getting hectic and I can't afford to miss any more, I'm sorry."

"It's okay-"

"Take care of yourself," the skater said, "even if you are just a red-faced, somewhat scary old Katsudon, you're still my friend."

Yuuri carried those words with him onto the ice as he prepared to demonstrate his latest and greatest move yet. He was fully aware that Viktor would likely disapprove, on the grounds that such a strenuous task would undoubtedly withdraw his energy for the day, but he needed someone to see it - to at least gauge how reliable such an attempt would be.

"Yuuri, you do realise this move is totally illegal?"

Yuuri squinted, smirking as he brushed off his partner's criticism,
"Perhaps, but if I could pull it off, and do it twice, then maybe they'd allow it. How else am I going to win a medal otherwise?"

"But-" argued Viktor, "-but you could seriously hurt yourself."

"I'm not made of glass Viktor.."

"I know," he sighed, "it's worse - you're made of bone."

As it often did, the conversation once again became quite heated. However, Yuuri - who, at this point, simply wanted to keep the peace - said nothing more, and planted a kiss on his partner's burning cheek. He may have been dying inside, but on the outside he could be just as smug as ever.

"Look, Viktor, just watch."
With a flick of a switch on the stereo, the soundtrack music began to stream out of the stadium's speakers as Yuuri drifted along to its gentle, charismatic beat. He completed his usual routine with, let's say, some 'minor' difficulty, but when it came to the climax, he made sure to pull out all the stops. The initial takeoff and primary execution went swimmingly, with the connecting balance smoothing out into the second stage. Unfortunately, as it always had been, the move couldn't be complete. Although the landing wasn't catastrophic, Yuuri immediately glided to a halt, ultimately disappointed by his sheer incompetence and the fact he hadn't proved his partner right.

"Yuuri!" Viktor cried across the ice, losing his calm, collected air as panic quickly set into his nerves, "Are you okay?"

"I'm fine, Viktor."

Yuuri skated over to the bleachers, spindle arms chucking his skates aside as his head flopped into his hands. His Russian partner brought him out of the bitter cold and eventually into the warmth of a backstreet café, the morning chill still lingering in the air.

"Still," said Viktor, sipping from a steaming chai latte, "I'm worried about your performance at the four continents. Are you sure you'll be able to cope with the pressure?"

Yuuri rolled his eyes, "I'll do okay, don't worry - anyway, there's not much we can do at this stage. I suppose I'll just have to give it all I've got."

The two sat in silence, the only sound the clinking of porcelain teacups that playing in the background. The Japanese boy sipped at his third green tea, gazing attentively out of the window at passers-by as they struggled against the autumn's chilling gusts. It was as if for just a split second, the world appeared to move in slow motion, like a classic Hollywood movie with all the little extras.

"Viktor, do think I'll ever win a gold medal?"

The Russian chuckled, unsure of what to say, "I sure hope so - I think Phichit will murder us if we don't get married soon."

"But what if we never get married?"

Viktor sat back in his chair, a little stunned by his companion's unexpected enquiry.

"Sure we will, and I'm sure - although, hehe, perhaps when I'm not competing - you'll win a gold medal soon enough. You've got the talent, you just a little more... eh... health."

Yuuri sighed and shrugged his shoulders, "I guess so. Everything just feels so raw right now, you know, so real - it's unnerving. Our first competition's fast approaching and it seems like I can't do anything right."

"Hey, come on now, you did well in that contest in Japan!"

The skater laughed half-heartedly, "It's not really the same though, is it?"

Viktor, I'm so sorry about all of this. I wish I could improve, I really do. I wish I had the strength to eat enough."

Viktor, once again, was at a loss for words. Could anything he said have made a reasonable
difference? He was a skater, not a psychologist, and afraid of making the wrong impression. Perplexed by his own conflicted emotions, he simply reached out and lay a sympathetic hand on Yuuri's shrivelled palm.

"I know you're trying, Yuuri, and to be honest, that's all anyone could ask of you. I hope - well, more often than not I pray - that one day you'll be able to beat this completely, that you'll be fearless like the rest of us, but to be honest, what you're doing now is enough. I know we've both said terrible things, and I apologise for my mistakes, but please accept that I'm new to this mental illness too. I'm happy to share your burden, but I'm still to fully understand it. As long as you promise you'll try to eat each day, well, that's all I could ever ask of you."

Yuuri had begun to tear up, hiding his moistened eye bags with a nearby napkin.
"Still, I'm so sorry - I love you."

Viktor sensed his partner's growing discomfort, swiftly deciding to shift the conversation forward.

"Right, well, are we all set equipment-wise for the first competition?"

"I think so - although, heh, I may need to make some adjustments to my costume; it's been a while since I last wore it in a performance."

Viktor nodded in agreement. It turned out that, in fact, the skaters had a lot more preparation to do than previously assumed, and were left scrambling for lost items the night before the two were headed for Beijing, in China. There they would be facing off with Phichit Chulanont, Jean-Jacques LeRoy, Christophe Giacometti and a whole host of other worldwide friends and stuff competitions.

Yuuri was, undoubtedly, rather afraid. His parents hadn't seen him in months, and would likely be quite alarmed for his rapid decrease in size and mobility, and Phichit, who recently had been following his social media obsessively, would without doubt cause a minor stir worrying about his friend. For the most part, Yuuri simply wanted to be left alone. Life in the limelight was, at times, glamorous, but otherwise could soon become a hassle.

As he lay in bed the following morning, suffocated by intense anxiety, Yuuri stared up at the ceiling from beneath the king-sized duvet as he yearned to disappear. Skating was his passion, but currently the Japanese boy wanted nothing more than to sink below the covers, drifting off into the bliss of an eternal slumber.

Viktor, however, had other ideas.

"Come on Yuuri, let's get up and go!

Today the competition really begins."
Shivering, yet simultaneously sweating profusely, Yuuri stepped out of the terminal as he clung to Viktor's hand, ambushed by the paparazzi as he hid behind his typical mask of shyness and a chronic poker face. The skater certainly didn't feel like smiling, but soon perked up a little after noticing the bubbly Thai boy standing by the signs to the local station; he'd have had to smile sooner or later anyway, he needed to look good enough to prove he wasn't ill - or at the very least not dying.

"Phichit!" exclaimed Viktor as he ran towards the couple, "it's good to see you! Ready for the competition?"

"You bet I am!"

Viktor turned to face his somewhat reclusive fiancé, "I've got to go and register our visit, but I'll be back soon, okay?" With a small kiss, he left for a nearby kiosk, luggage in each hand.

"Hiya," said Yuuri, bashful and a little ashamed of his unexplained sheepishness, "well, here we are again."

Phichit wasn't one for formalities, pulling his Japanese friend into a tight embrace, "I'm just glad you're okay! You haven't been on Instagram recently, that's not like you - but you better be ready! This year's competition is tough, apparently even JJ's got some new moves under his belt!"

Yuuri smiled, trying to play into the fun of their unexpected meeting, "Well, he better be prepared for us; I've been training non-stop for the last week or so and I'm ready to go!"

Mildly concerned, Phichit looked at Yuuri's waif-thin arms and spindle legs, "Well, it er- looks like you've been exercising anyway."

This conversation continued by text, the two exchanging witty banter as they prepared for their first performances against each other. As their time apart increased, so did Phichit's suspicions, and by their following meeting together he had finally gathered the courage to approach the supposedly unspeakable subject.

"Yuuri, you've gotta be careful out there today, okay?"

The Japanese boy sighed; looking at his friend's bleary eyes he could tell that he'd verb up all night. He knew it was it fault, that his friends were worried half to death from his skeletal appearance, but all that he could really do was apologise for the inconvenience.

"It's okay, Phichit," replied the skater, "look here," (Yuuri lifted up a crumpled can of powerade)
"I'll have plenty of energy for the short programme."

"No, Yuuri, you don't get it-"

"I'm fine, I promise."

Phichit lowered his tense, hunched shoulders, exhaling once again as his jacket subsequently fell to the slow thrills of his cover track, sweating furiously as the routine progressed in increasing difficulty. As the Japanese boy flipped and thrilled on the ice, Phichit turned to fellow skate Chris Giacometti, who was simultaneously preparing for his season's first performance.

"Do you really think he'll be okay?"

Chris wasn't particularly one for formalities, and loved to joke around with fellow competitors. He'd been an interest of Viktor's many moons ago and still found humour in teasing younger skaters, his chiselled, stubbly face and hyper-sexuality both a blessing and a curse. This year, however, the Swiss has been unusually quiet, often caught drifting in his own thoughts by the sidelines as the others prepared to compete. Although he'd never been substantially close to Yuuri, they'd spent time together in the past, and he was one of the many that had recently witnessed the regression of the once-healthy Japanese skating phenomenon. Like most others, it was fair to say Chris was more than simply mildly concerned.

"I do hope so - he's rather dear to me, and Viktor too. It's a real shame, he used to be so beautiful, his body was simply divine this time last year. Not that that's all that matters! I suspect he's also having trouble mentally - but still, it's disappointing to see a great skater fall from his prime."

Phichit nodded,
"I get what you mean; I'm his best friend."

Chris said nothing, a tad taken aback that he hadn't been recognised as such, but understood the bond between Yuuri and the younger skater.

"I mean, I'm sure he'll get better soon - the ISU won't let him in like this forever..."

"But what if he doesn't?" wept Phichit, fat tears rolling from his eyes, "What if he can't recover, what if he leaves us all? It's not like Viktor's doing anything, he doesn't care at all-"

"sorry, Chris. I forgot you're up next. You probably don't want to listen to me like this."

The Swiss skater shook his head, placing a comforting (albeit rather uncomfortable) arm around his Thai counterpart,
"I don't really know what to say, I'm not good with emotions, sorry. It's okay to cry though, you can cry on me if it makes you feel better."

Phichit continued to sob into the older skater's arm.

"Also," Chris continued, "know you're not his therapist. I mean, it seems great that you want to try and help him, but you're only human too. You can't solve all of Yuuri's issues by yourself. I know Viktor might seem lazy, but maybe he found out the hard way that it was best to take a step back from all of these problems."

Viktor often sent Chris texts in response to various chaotic situations, so the skater was well accustomed to the troubles of their relationship. Whilst the advice he offered seldom made much difference, he was a source of reassurance when Viktor was at his lowest, and thus could only do the same for Phichit - even if the two weren't particularly close, one way or another they'd been
brought together by the tension of their situation.

The younger skater looked upwards as the speakers roared, catching a glimpse of Yuuri’s quadruple salchow on the television screen before he landed into the complicated step sequence, wobbling a little on the landing.

"To be honest, I’ll be surprised if Yuuri makes it to the next stage of the competition," said Phichit in a muted tone, "I don't know what's going on, but he certainly doesn't look good."

Chris nodded in agreement, watching intently at the stick figure gliding across the nearby flatscreen. Despite his inaccuracies, the Japanese boy's step sequence showed promise - as it always had done - and hopefully the technicalities would supposedly grab a few points here and there.

"I think he's still got a shot at it."

"Really?"

"Why not? We've had worse days than this - I remember your tumbles last year in the four continents" Chris jested lightheartedly, "My point is, maybe it's not the anorexia, maybe he's just tired, or thirsty, or-"

But Chris' speech was cut off by another mighty cheer from the stadium crowd. Yuuri had finished his routine, with his fiancé and best friend running out to applaud him as he leant against the railings by the side of the ice.

"How'd I do?" asked Yuuri, completely pale as the blood rushes away from his head.

Phichit and Viktor exchanges brief glances, both somewhat unconvinced he'd advance to the next level of the competition.

The Russian turned to face his partner, "Yuuri, you did wonderfully. However, your angles were a tad off, and your rotations could perhaps do with an increased incline or forty-fi...." he began to trail off in typical coach format. Yuuri subtly rolled his eyes, with a Phichit laughing in response, as the two attempted to forget his rather ungainly performance."

However, despite his relatively healthy outward behaviour, Yuuri's chest strained and struggled as if caught in a vice. The pain was almost unbearable, but the skater soldiered on, unwilling to lose face in front of the countless camera flashes. Viktor sensed his partner's discomfort, wrapping his coat around the shivering Japanese boy as they ignored the crowds of hungry journalists willing to prey upon the weak for a decent piece of gossip.

"Drink this," said Viktor.

"I don't really want to-"

"Drink it."

Reluctantly, Yuuri gulped down the banana protein shake as his fiancé gave him a hug.

"Are you going to be alright on your own, Yuuri?"

Viktor was set to unfurl his performance at the end of a long night of skating, but recognising the skater's fading energy had ordered Yuuri to return to their hotel room and rest in preparation for the
following day. Mila had somewhat warned against this - given the fact that in previous instances he'd acted rather dangerously unsupervised - but Viktor insisted it was what the Japanese boy desperately needed, so Yuuri changed out of his costume and headed back through the frost-bitten streets towards the comfort of their deluxe tenth-floor suite.

Despite having finished his performance, Yuuri wasn't in a particularly pleasant mood. He'd researched the brand of milkshake on the way home, discovering it was harbouring over four hundred gluttonous calories, and had begun to feel sick to his stomach. Discarding breakfast (which had, er, been 'orally disposed of'), the skater had already consumed a whopping five hundred calories at lunch with Phichit and Seung-Gil Lee - much more than his typical daily total - and Yuuri was beginning to panic.

It seemed only fair that the Japanese boy carried on his tradition from the previous competition - perhaps his only positive memory of that catastrophic occasion and encounters - returning to the comfort of the toilet bowl that day as he managed to chuck up the last pesky drops of banana froth.

To give credit, Yuuri did know better. Before they'd boarded the plane back in the St. Petersburg airport, Viktor had warned Yuuri not to push himself too far, and to concentrate on being healthy for the competition.

'What does Viktor know?' Thought Yuuri, 'He could probably win the Grand Prix Final skating on his ass.'

The Japanese boy felt a little guilty, as he always did when gradually destroying his insides, but since reuniting with Viktor had decided it was bad that he practised this in secret. The Russian may not have realised it, but now that Yuuri was vaguely (although not yet adequately) skinny, he was determined to keep it that way - for better or for worse - besides, the lingering fear of gaining too much weight and diminishing the love of his partner was all too real. Although Yuuri's mind wasn't completely consumed by the all-too-enticing concept of losing even weight, he did at least want to keep the weight he had lost off - well, for the moment anyway.

The skater finished a half-hour ab workout and then crashed out on the couch with his head swivelled towards the television. There was little point in focusing his energy on a programme, as he didn't understand a word of the local language, so instead proceeded to channel surf in the vague hope that something vaguely visually interesting appeared. Suddenly, Yuuri's finger paused, halting as it hovered over the remote button.

There was Yuuri, on the television screen - they must have pre-recorded his performance - twirling about the rink, arms and legs extended as he spun and tumbled his way across the gleaming ice. However, the skater was not one to focus on the positive things in life. He instead then zoomed in on his clunky thighs, his arched back, and his stomach that still frustratingly rolled up as he tucked into the final spin - yet the most devastating thing of all was the Japanese boy's score, a disappointing total indeed.

Yuuri whipped out his phone, calling his best friend in a joking but concerned tone, "Why didn't you tell me I did utterly shit in my short programme?"

"Huh?" Said Phichit sympathetically, "you didn't do that badly; everyone messes up their first event - look at my score."

The Japanese boy looked up his friend's score, which, to be fair, was still pretty terrible - but in comparison to his own was mighty and most admirable.

"Hehe... oh man," Yuuri chuckled nervously, "they're gonna kick me out for sure."
"I wouldn't think so..." said Phichit, "are you watching the competition on TV?"

"Mhm-"

"Okay, well, look at the screen in 3...2...1... okay, now."

Yuuri glanced up at the blaring screen on the wall. To his amazement, he wasn't in last place - not yet anyway. Seung-Gil has sneezed mid-routine and taken a critical tumble into the side of the rink, losing valuable points and time.

"It's a miracle.." said Yuuri in astonishment, "..still, I feel pretty bad for Seung-Gil, he's worked so hard this year."

Phichit agreed, "Yeah, it really sucks. But that's life, isn't it? No matter what it throws at you, you've just gotta keep going, or the alternative is just to die unaccomplished."

Yuuri paused suddenly. He had not expected such a deep, profound statement to come from the friend that had once shoved a can of cheese sauce up the back of a taxidermy in college.

Phichit's voice broke the uncomfortable silence, "Yuuri, you still there?"

"Yeah, yeah, sorry... just thinking."

"Chris texted me, he said Seung-Gil's nosebleed is causing a bit of a clean-up issue on the ice, so they're not gonna be done for at least a good while. Are you on your own up there?"

"I guess - where are you?"

"About five floors down. Do you wanna come over and play Mario Kart? ~I've got pizza if you want it~" he said in a sing-song tone.

'Ah, great, a third trip to the lavatory,' thought Yuuri, wincing as he anticipated the pain of vomiting scorching pepperoni pieces later that night.

"Do I have to?"

"~Yeees~"

Yuuri sighed, smiling a little at his friend's playfulness.

"Fineee. I'll be over in a bit."

"Yay!" replied Phichit, putting the phone down. His plan had worked. Not only would the two of them spend the evening kicking ass in Mario Kart, he would also get to keep an eye on his best friend's intake. Phichit didn't want to be the bad guy, but he certainly wasn't going to let Yuuri fester in the dark alone - not this late in the year anyway.

Yuuri didn't want to visit Phichit straight away. He may not have been trailing in last place, yet he still felt as though he were a walking disaster, a disappointment. He also felt bad for Seung-Gil; in a way, Yuuri was responsible for his position in the rankings, as he was currently placed just above him. Whether he did well or badly, the Japanese boy couldn't skate the feeling that he just didn't belong, as if he wasn't allowed to do anything right.

A tad buzzed from a downed energy drink around just after 10pm, the skater breathed a sigh of
relief as he drew a chopping knife across his wrist. Its shape was a little inconvenient, but it was well that was available from the ensuite kitchenette; Yuuri decided he’d just have to grin and bear the discomfort of this new serrated blade edge.

The blood soon began to flow, drawing from his wrist like a long, drawn out sigh of relief. It’d been a long, hard day. The preparation, the paparazzi, the terrifying prospect of pepperoni pizza - Yuuri’s skating performance paled in comparison to the sheer terror evoked by such uncomfortable events. To be honest, Yuuri didn’t even know why he bled anymore. Long gone was the euphoria, the brief soaring before the inevitable crash; time just seemed to lull like a sailboat stranded in the centre of the endless doldrums, and whilst Yuuri could offset some of his negative energy through cutting, the act made very little difference to the eventual emotional outcome.

Wary of the time and his roommate’s impatience, Yuuri rose to the kitchen sink and washed the half-dried blood down the centre of its polished basin.

’Hehe, lets hope nobody thinks I’m a murderer...’ the skater thought to himself, arms still bleeding up the cuffs on his sleeves.

Yuuri had five or so minutes to spare, the majority spent perched on the edge of a stool, waiting for his blood to finally clot. After what appeared to be forever and at least a roll of tissue, he was all cleaned up, and ready to intercept a call from his increasingly anxious best friend. Phichit rang, masking his worry as he joked about how Yuuri’s pizza would soon turn to ice, and soon enough the Japanese boy was knocking at his door.

"There you are, what took you so long?"

"Oh," said Yuuri, "I figured I should wait a bit so I was just chopping some meat."

Technically he wasn’t wrong.

“Oh...” said Phichit, winking dramatically, “you were beating your meat, eeyyyyy??”

Yuuri snorted, shaking his head as he laughed at the skater’s comical tone, “Sure - I, a 25 year old idiot, loser and failure of a partner was having that much fun by myself at ten o clock at night.”

“Well,” chuckled Phichit, “sounds pretty much what you’d be expecting sometime like that do do alone at night!”

The two friends laughed again, giggling like childish schoolboys at the nature of the dirty joke, as Yuuri was welcomed in and sat facing his friend’s new Nintendo.

“Do you like it?”

“Depends - will you let me win all of the races?”

“Hmm.... nah!”

Yuuri enjoyed joking around with Phichit like this. Although his companion often showed concern, the Thai boy was one of the skater’s only friends not to treat him like shattered glass or an emotionless skinny robot.

“Haha! Told you I’d win anyway!” exclaimed Yuuri as he shoved his friend from the final stretch on the infamous rainbow road, racing over the finish line as he leant back in his chair, grinning smugly. The skater’s wrists were in agony, with droplets of blood leaking onto the inside of his
shirt, but Yuuri was just glad he’d won at least one competition that day.

“Well, I suppose you did beat me,” said Phichit, standing as he tossed the controller aside, “I guess it’s a good thing I’m not the smug little bitch for once.. haha.. anyway, I’ll go get the pizzas. They’re probably ice cold since SOMEONE took too long to decide between Tanooki Mario and Waluigi.”

“What can I say? I’m a man of good taste.” Joked Yuuri, hiding his arms to the side and away from Phichit’s vision, clutching his arm in an attempt to stop the blood flow.

“I’ll go get the pizza, be right back.”

The Japanese skater’s heart began to pound inside his chest, but with a few deep breaths had at least reduced its pace by a little.

‘It’s fine,’ thought Yuuri, ‘Phichit has a toilet, and by now my throat’s often numb to the crippling burning sensations of vomiting anyway.’

Little did he know, as he schemed for ways to dispose of the tasty cheese treat, his friend had already prepared a pre-emptive scheme to assess the severity of his guest’s situation. Phichit knew that Yuuri would never willingly eat a whole pizza unless he had a valid method of disposing its digested form, and that was precisely the point. As Yuuri leant over the bowl, the younger skater planned to listen by the bathroom for clues as to how he was doing, so he could finally get clarity on his best friend’s situation.

“Yuuri, you okay in there?” asked Phichit a few minutes after the meal had ended.

“Fine, thanks, just er - spending a lot of time washing my hands,” a croaky voice responded, its tone choked and off-guard, “I’ve gotta be clean for tomorrow, right?”

Phichit sighed as the tap continued to run, pretending to leave as he pressed his ear to the door and winced at the sound of his best friend retching into the unforgiving bowl of the toilet.

“Are you sure you’re alright?”

A pause.

“Yeah, I’m done now.”

Following the rumble of the flushed toilet and the last of a series of painful coughs, the door swung open and Yuuri stepped out, visible disheveled and reeling of vomit. However, as mentioned, his hands did smell pretty good.

“Sorry I took so long.”

“Oh, it’s fine,” said Phichit with a false indifference, shrugging his shoulders as the two of them returned to the warmth of the heated living room.

Smiling, Yuuri picked up a controller and switched his focus back onto the karts spiralling across the screen, waiting to restart the game as his friend stared blankly at the wall.

“Aren’t you going to play?”

“Huh?” said Phichit, shaking his head back to attention, “Oh, nah, it’s fine - it’s run out of charge anyway.” He lied.
Phichit didn’t want to play games. He wanted to hug his friend, to tell him he was loved and that he didn’t need to go through this. He didn’t want to live in fear that he’d have to bury the Japanese skater before his time, that he’d be the one to have to comfort Viktor on his deathbed.

Yuuri looked deathly pale. His eyes, whilst lit up by the animated characters that flew across the screen, were tired and begging for rest. Sure, his outward behaviour portrayed the mind of a healthy, sometimes even bubbly individual, but behind that well-rounded exterior lay a lost soul screaming for the help of a friend.

Utterly despondent at the prospect of his best friend’s untimely demise, Phichit turned away and lay across the sofa opposite, shutting his eyes as his mind raced like a thousand frenzied horses.

“You okay there, Phichit?”

“Me?” The Thai boy laughed uneasily, “haha, I’m just tired."

The younger boy didn’t know what to do. Past evidence showed that reasoning with Yuuri wouldn’t work, and he’d never come to a life-changing realisation by himself. The anorexic mindset had become firmly entrenched in the skater’s psyche, and there was no viable way of arguing against it. Phichit wished it didn’t have to be this way. Partly, he resented Viktor for what he had allowed Yuuri to become, yet simultaneously hurt for the fiancé of a dying man.

Turning back to face his guest as not to be inhospitable, Phichit’s eyes quivered in shock as he noticed the gaping lacerations that circling his companion’s arms. Yuuri’s attention had been focused on the television and thus had forgotten to pull up his sleeves as they repeatedly fell down, but Phichit had seen everything and it was now too late to rectify such a careless mistake.

“Phichit - it’s - it’s not what you think it is -”

The younger skater didn’t say a word. He merely sat up in silence, gaze fixated on the self-inflicted, crusted and mangled wounds that lay deep into his friend’s pallid skin. Tears filled his eyes as he inches closer to Yuuri’s frame, the Japanese boy frozen solid by embarrassment and fear. Phichit finally summoned the courage to speak, voice cracking in anguish as he did.

“Yuuri... why?”

“Look, Phichit, I’m tired - please don’t do this now.”

“I can’t -” he replied, “I just can’t ignore this any longer. You’re killing yourself Yuuri, you’re going to die if you don’t stop this, you know that right? Do you want to die?”

‘Doesn’t matter, I’m not exactly good at it.’ Thought the Japanese skater.

“I promise, Phichit, I’m not going to die.”

“How can you say for sure? Yuuri, you don’t need this competition right now; you need help.”

“Trust me, ‘help’ is the last thing I need, I’m trying to get better, I swear— ow, actually, these do kind of hurt,” (gesturing to his cuts) “can I quickly go wash these? The last lot got infected and it’s really not my favourite past time.”

“Wait here.”

Phichit swiftly left to room, covering his fearful expression with his hair as he searched the kitchenette for a first aid box. The Thai boy then returned, clutching bandages and an antiseptic as
he smiled sadly at his pain-stricken visitor,

“Will these do?”

“No, Phichit, that would be selfish of me; I don’t want to waste the hotel’s materials...”

But the younger boy insisted on helping his ailing companion. Constantly checking up on his friend, he slowly and carefully wrapped his wounds in cotton bandages, dressing them as he went with Yuuri flinching at the sting in response. Neither of the two said a word throughout the process, merely sat in silence by the dimmed lights and a backdrop of the starry night sky.

Finally, Phichit broke the silence.

“Why did you do it?”

“Which one of my many acts of debauchery are you referring to?” asked Yuuri with a saddened smirk.

“Why did you do this?”

Yuuri sighed. He’d been running from the truth for far too long. Part of him yearned to give it all up, to relinquish all fears and mindlessly binge-eat his way back to the blissful naivety of his own obesity, but the other part abhorred even the thought of gaining weight. There was little point in lying any long; Phichit had been his best friend far longer than Viktor had been his lover, and if Viktor could listen to his deepest, darkest thoughts, the younger boy could too.

“I don’t know...” said Yuuri, beginning to trail off as he shook himself back into conversation, “I guess... I guess I’m just in so much pain that I no longer feel anything. It sounds crazy, I know, hehe, but... when I’m doing this, I don’t have to think about anything. About anorexia, about you or Viktor. It’s almost like the blade is my friend, like it’s an outlet for all this pent-up negativity. I’m sorry, this is all so stupid... it’s just, well, since my other friend is gone-“

“What other friend?” Phichit interrupted, a little jealous.

“I don’t know, some poor, misguided teenager I met on a pro-ana website... it’s sick, I know, but to me she was the only person who truly understood what I was going through. Heh, she even gave me tips.”

Phichit put his arms around the skater,

“Oh, Yuuri, what are we going to do with you? Surely there’s some other way for you to live your life?”

“Haha, well, I’m pretty sure I’m still alive now.”

“But for how long?” The Thai skater worried to himself.

“Look, Yuuri, there’s just no other way to say this. You need to get better, even if it’s just a little each day. It’s been heartbreaking to watch this strong, confide- well, semi-confident treasure of a skater regress to the state you’re in now. I know you hate this talk, and I know Viktor puts his trust in you, but I can’t leave you stranded on your own like this. At least when you were overweight you were still vaguely healthy, now look at you! I can’t let this continue, I’m sorry. Tomorrow I’m going to have to go to the officials’ hut and tell them of your illness, of your failing health and frequent substance abuse.”

“Hey, I didn’t even tell you about the dru-”
“It’s all too obvious, Yuuri,” sighed Phichit, “I’m truly sorry, but I have to tell them. I know it probably feels like the ultimate betrayal, but it’d be even more irresponsible of me to let you slip away unnoticed. Let’s face it, I’m the only one truly willing to take action about your crippling illness. Forget Viktor and his mindless complacency, I’m going to get you the help you need, even if it means barring you from competing in the Grand Prix Final.”

Flames of fury sparked in Yuuri’s hollow eyes.

“What gives you the right to tell them about my personal matters? If you were really my friend, you’d want me to be happy-”

“-no, Yuuri, if I were your friend, I’d want you to be alive.”

The Japanese skater purses his lips, turning away as he made a beeline for the door. He just couldn’t believe his best friend had the capability of such devastating betrayal. Phichit had always remained friendly in his treatment of the ailing skater, so accepting of his difference and encouraging, not brutish, in his attitudes to change.

“Why are you doing this?” The older boy asked, turning back one last time as he opened the door to the apartment.

“Because I want you home alive.”

“Well,” said Yuuri, menacingly gliding across the room until he leant over the skater in a domineering, threatening stance,

“continue to talk of this nonsense, and I’ll be the one to personally ensure that I’m not.”
Dancing in the Dark

{A.N. ~ sorry this took so long to come out! I've had GCSE mocks, I've had to make a dress, and well, to be honest, I'm kind of a lazy piece of shit, whoops... anyway, I hope you're having a good January!}

Yuuri may have just lost his closest ally.

Phichit, wracked with grief, had nothing more to say to Yuuri throughout the duration of their time spent together at the Four Continents competitions. Of course, the Japanese skater was still close to his heart, but the agony of being in his company prior to his painfully inevitable death was too much to bear. He'd failed Yuuri anyway; if Phichit, Yuuri's best friend, was unable to reach out to the debilitating soul, who would be?

Yuuri seemed to vaguely understand. He'd made a few vague attempts to establish contact between them before he was due to skate the following day of the first competition, but Phichit was plain and dismissive at any move to start a conversation. The older skater was aware that the Thai boy simply didn't want to see him in this way, but the fact was that Yuuri was in no position to make any decisions to recover; if anything, the Japanese boy was making increased efforts to ensure he continued to lose weight in preparation for the Grand Prix Final.

As predicted, Yuuri had placed bottom in the competition so far, scraping by each round by mere decimal places or through superior skaters' elimination as a result of discovered acts of debauchery. Either way, as Yuuri's position in the rankings remained stagnant, his physical and mental health were rapidly deteriorating.

The skater's physique paled in comparison to that of his competitors. Viktor, naturally, raced ahead in first place, with Yurio lingering close by, his score just managing to surpass that of Chris Giacometti's. After him came Phichit, then, somewhat surprisingly, Jean-Jacques LeRoy, whose scores had repeatedly taken a tumble during that year's season due to his frequent, paralysing anxiety attacks. Yet he soldiered on, and in acknowledging JJ's struggles, Yuuri knew that he couldn't allow himself to grow sluggish due to his own myriad of impairments.

And finally, there was the Japanese skater himself, struggling in last place every single time - only just managing to position in the ranks that moved forward. After his first few competitions, Yuuri knew it was far more tactical to reserve his more technical moves for the Grand Prix Final - partially because he was constantly too exhausted to give his absolute all, and partially because he couldn't actually complete them yet. Still, he vowed to learn in time for when it would matter most.

Recognising his partner's frequently unhappiness, Viktor had decided to cheer Yuuri up by taking him out on a date prior to the first round of the Grand Prix Final. Of course, anything that remotely involved eating was definitely off the table, but Viktor had promised himself that he'd at least attempt to get a smile out of his ailing fiancé. Yuuri was a grown adult, and the Russian knew that he had no power to force him into eating anything he didn't want to; his job now was simply to keep him alive for the duration of the final competition, and then, hopefully, he would finally be justified in contacting the authorities.

"It was nice of you to take me to the fair," said Yuuri as he looked out of the ferris wheel carriage, reeking of vomit and with death's glare seeping from his eyes.
Viktor smiled; even now, with his body encroached by decay, Yuuri looked beautiful against the glittery backdrop of the funfair's neon lights against the indigo dim of the night sky.

"It's no problem, lapochka, I'm just glad to see you're having a good time."

Yuuri sighed. If only every moment could be like this, still and serene, without having to think or feel, living life as a mere wisp of energy and fulfilling a blissful existence.

Exhausted from a day of mere walking and literally nothing else, Yuuri leant against Viktor shoulder, utterly exhausted. So much so that he was on the verge of passing out, which recently had not been known as a particularly enjoyable occurrence.

"Yuuri," whispered Viktor, gently nudging the drowsy boy awake, "Yuuri, please don't fall asleep, the ride will be ending soon - hehe, they might think I've tried to attack you, imagine that?"

The Japanese boy squirmed awake, hugging his partner tight as he rose back into consciousness.

"Oh, right, sorry... I guess I just need more sleep."

"Or food - we could go to a nearby ramen joint, if you're hungry."

"I'm fine, thank you."

Truthfully, Yuuri probably needed a lot more of both.

Viktor nodded sadly, acknowledging his partner's wishes but with the vain hope residing inside of him that the skater would accept even a little sustenance.

"You're okay though... aren't you?"

Yuuri chuckled,
"Viktor, I'm fine.. I'm just enjoying the view."

The Russian faked a muted laugh in response; nothing was okay, but the situation was running out of his control. He thought he'd be able to manage this, that he'd somehow be able to save Yuuri from his own self-devastation - that Phichit had been wrong. Now that he'd seen the extent of his fiancé's destruction first-hand, he was beginning to realise that perhaps he should take advantage of the possibly short time the couple had left together.

"Yuuri, let's get married."

The Japanese boy's eyes widened in surprise, his heart beating out of its cage with excitement as he immediately sat up, smiling from ear to ear.

"Really?"

This was it, final acceptance. Proof that this hadn't all been a silly game to taunt him, to pray upon the gullibility of the weak. Viktor wanted to be with him, potentially forever, and Yuuri knew he would never forgive himself if he allowed such an opportunity to escape.

There, was, however, one minor inconvenience.

"But Viktor - I haven't won a gold medal yet, and, to be completely honest, I don't think I ever will."

Viktor thought the same. His partner simply would not be able to achieve the majestic, heavily
complex and intricate manoeuvres required of fully-able skaters, let alone anorexic stragglers with a slim possibility of surviving his next season.

Still, it was easier to accept a pleasant lie than to confront the painful truth. That was a fact known to both parties.

"Yuuri, it doesn't matter anymore. I said that to divert from an awkward situation almost a year ago, and besides, you're already worth much more than gold to me. We can go right now, race to the town hall before midnight, and sign the documents needed to officially become husbands. I'm ready, are you?"

Viktor had pre-prepared the correct papers months in advance, panicked in case such a situation would ever arise - which it inevitably had. If Yuuri was to depart, and the Russian having no control in such a process, he wanted to ensure that they'd be together forever - perhaps even in death.

"I think I'm ready, Viktor."

Yuuri was ecstatic, yet simultaneously terrified. This was everything he'd ever wanted: love, acceptance, a dedicated partner, but the skater knew he was hopelessly inadequate in comparison. As the two of them stood by the registrar, Yuuri couldn't help but ask the pressing question:

"Viktor, are you sure you want to do this?"

"Yuuri," the skater spoke softly into his ear, "I don't think I've ever been so sure in my life."

The Japanese boy's cheeks turned a subsequent red, but he remained doubtful,

"What about our friends and family? Won't they be angry?"

Viktor smiled,
"We won't tell them. We can have another wedding, a ceremonial one, but right here, right now, all I want to do is be with you."

Hand in hand, the couple signed the official documents, sharing a passionate kiss before walking out into the empty streets of Nagoya under the opaque blanket of swift nightfall.

"Thank you," said Yuuri, "I know how hard this must be for you, for everyone."

Yuuri wasn't stupid. He knew that Viktor was frightened for his life, but at the same time, the Japanese boy could not believe his luck. Instead of worrying, Yuuri vowed to savour every moment of that night. If he believed in the magic of his dreams, in meeting his idol and making a life for themselves together, then he could believe in the whimsy of the night.

"Viktor. I want to have sex with you."

"Yuuri? Are you sure? You don't have to, if you're tired then we can go back to the hotel, don't feel you ought to do this just for me-"

"Viktor, I'm doing this for us. Now come on," he said, smiling as his weakened hands trembled with excitement, "I don't know what's going to happen to me. Nobody does. But for the sake of a bit of fun, we may as well make tonight ours."

The Russian responded with a smiling, yet vaguely sad expression on his face. He could feel the overwhelming sense of weariness Yuuri held inside of him, and not knowing just how long they'd
have left together, promised himself he'd do all he could not to let his partner down.

"Okay, let's go back to the hotel."

Viktor wasn't sure if he was particularly prepared for this situation. For starters, due to Yuuri's anxiety and his own blind ignorance, he hadn't seen his partner fully unclothed in nearly a year, and was fully preparing himself for a shock. The skater expected that whatever he saw would be rather upsetting, but he had to be strong and withhold his pained grimace from Yuuri, who no doubt had also been panicking about the ordeal beforehand.

The Japanese boy was also unsure that this was what he wanted. The initial elation from their marriage was beginning to settle as anxiety as he wondered if Viktor would find him inadequate in some way, that although his current body was drastically underweight, he'd appear a bloated mess as he leant over his husband under the satin covers of the hotel's king-sized chamber bed. However, he wanted Viktor to be happy. They hadn't felt the bare touch of one another's skin in a long time, with Yuuri aware that his partner secretly ached inside.

With the lights dimmed and rose-scented candles illuminating the bedroom, Viktor began to undress to his underwear before stripping to his naked body, the glow of mellowed ochre flames reflecting off his chiseled abs and chest. He'd tried to reduce the amount he drank merely out of stress in the run up to the Grand Prix Final, and it showed. Viktor's body oozed the very essence of Eros as he lay against the sheets, waiting for his partner to undress and do the same.

Now came the hard part. Yuuri had long since come to terms with the inadequacy of his own form in comparison to his husband's god-like appeal, but solely focusing on his own uncovered body was something the skater found heavily uncomfortable.

"Yuuri," said Viktor, "we don't have to do this if you don't want to... we can just cuddle."

The Japanese boy could feel the apprehension in the fellow skater's voice, yet it was accompanied with a twinge of disappointment. Yuuri knew he could no longer be selfish. Despite his own difficulties, Viktor had needs too.

"No," Yuuri replied, "I'm okay, I just - I think I just need to take my time, that's all."

"Okay, well I'll wait for as long as you need."

Yuuri sighed.

'I may as well get this over and done with,' he thought, body shaking as he began to lift up the corners of his thick, woollen sweater and reveal his shrivelled frame.

He started off slowly; to increase the pace of such a difficult task would have been out of the question. As he continued to pull his sweater from his pale, mottled skin, it took every bit of Viktor's strength not to cry out in shame - shame for his own carelessness. He could easily count Yuuri's ribs as they jutted out far from his body, wishing to hug his partner's concave stomach and reassure him that everyone loved him, and that he needed to get better.

However, the full extent of Yuuri's mental instability was finally revealed as he finished removing the jumper altogether. Along his shrunken arms lay crevices of scar tissue, some inches wide whilst others attacked his wrists like an onslaught of many tiny spears. As the skater dropped his trousers, bruised and bloodied thighs were brought into the spotlight, with Yuuri attempting to cover the further evidence of lacerations with his emaciated fingers. Yuuri was reluctant to remove his underwear, as the waistband was currently pressed against his stomach, supposedly flattening...
it, but promised to himself that it was necessary for his own liberation.

Viktor, who had now been stretched length-ways across the bed from quite sometime, was finding it hard not to scream. How could he not have realised just how much Yuuri was destroying himself? The Russian had known he was bad, but hadn't figured quite how detrimental his partner's actions had been, or the damage they would cause. Feeling sick to his stomach at his own foolishness, Viktor buried his negativities and put on a brave face for his husband; after all, he was the one going through this, the Russian was merely an observer with no right to pass judgement on Yuuri's constant struggles.

"I'm sorry-" said Yuuri, "I know it isn't pretty."

Viktor smiled in response, "Nonsense, you'll always be beautiful."

It was true. Even at his most broken, damaged and deranged, Yuuri's deep brown eyes evoked deep emotion that Viktor could never even begin to comprehend, simply delighting in the timeless beauty of his (albeit, rather sickly) companion's bashful smile.

"Do you still love me?"

"Yuuri, I will never stop loving you. Just because you're ill does not mean that you're redundant."

"Okay - well, I think I'm ready."

Truthfully, neither of the men were ready for what happened next. They made love, but it was void of lust. Viktor tried his hardest to be gentle, frequently offering to postpone such strenuous activity until a day when Yuuri might have been physically ready for it, but each attempt was then met with refusal. Despite the Russian's best efforts to maintain a steady pace, Yuuri was in great pain, and even though no indications of his anguish were made, Viktor knew after a while that enough was enough. Not wanting to embarrass his companion, he climaxed as soon as he physically could, swiftly withdrawing himself from inside Yuuri's exhausted body before swathing his husband in bedsheets in an attempt to keep him warm.

"Well, at least that's over and done with.." he thought aloud, mistakenly.

"What?"

Yuuri froze, ashamed but not surprised. He knew he was a fool to ask Viktor to sleep with him; he clearly wasn't up to standard, the skater would never be as handsome as his Russian partner. Was he still not quite thin enough? Surely not - Viktor had mentioned multiple times that he worried for his health, and yet Yuuri wondered if somehow, subconsciously, he still hadn't reached perfection through the eyes of his companion.

"I'm sorry," Viktor apologised, running his sweaty fingers through a sea of platinum hair, "it's just, well, I didn't want to hurt you. I mean, your arms... your legs... do you want to talk about it?"

This was a huge step, emotionally, for the elder skater. Known for his tendency to shy away from any indication of distress, stepping forward and offering his warm, comforting palm was, at this stage, more than Yuuri could have ever wanted.

"Thanks, but honestly, my spoilt ass has probably already stolen most of tonight's spotlight," Yuuri chuckled uneasily, attempting to divert the his partner's attention to a slightly more light-hearted topic, "this is technically our wedding night. Why don't we have some fun?"
Viktor was easily swayed, "For example...?"

The Japanese boy scooted over to the bed-side table, lightly pressing a nearby speaker as a flowing piano melody began to drift across the room.

"You want to dance?"

Yuuri blushed and shrugged his shoulders, "It's kind of like skating, but without the ice."

Viktor nodded his head; dancing was harmless enough, and who knows, could have provided some form of preparation for the vast-approaching Grand Prix Final. His partner continued to smile - partially as he was putting on an act to mask his withering inner turmoil, and partially as it was an efficient method of secretly burning more calories. Obviously, to Yuuri, the latter was by far the more significant.

"You're pretty good at this," he said, impressed, as Viktor took his hand and led them to the centre of the room, decorated only in a shirt and his underwear whilst Yuuri hid under an oversized sweater and scarf.

"Hah, I should be - how else do you think I got scouted for the ice?"

Yuuri was amazed; there was so much he had yet to learn about his husband.

As the dimmed light glistened against the golden candelabra by the ivory dressing table, the couple, hand in hand, floated across the room, feet and hips in unison as they swept back and forth between the candles on opposite sides of the room. Yuuri, a little breathless, struggled to maintain a steady pace as his partner did so effortlessly, but Viktor was patient and forgiving, lightly grasping his trembling hips as he pulled him to his sturdy chest.

For a moment, all was perfect.

Sometimes Yuuri wished that such pleasantries had ceased to exist. He delighted in the soulful energy of the moment, but missed it dreadfully once it had passed. The following pain of daily mundanity pierced through his heart; Yuuri's disappointment lay in that this peace was not forever, that soon he would be forced to return to the bleak reality of his own existence. It seemed to Yuuri that not even hope could be eternal.

Viktor often felt the same. It was still difficult to bring himself to consider the possibility of his husband's sudden passing, let alone imagine a future in which he did not exist. The Russian tried to savour every moment, forever fearing it would be his partner's last. He'd done all he could; each day he prepared Yuuri's meals, monitored his intake and limited rigorous exercise where possible, but the Japanese boy continued to lose weight without any signs of slowing his alarming pace.

The two danced long into the night, yearning to forget their constant strife - even if for a little while. The Grand Prix Final awaited their disheartened spirits later the following day, and there was nothing either could do to prevent it from occurring. The competition was an inevitable hurdle, although appeared more similar to a minor inconvenience in the grand scheme of Yuuri's health than what was supposed to be the pinnacle of his career as a figure skater, and quite frankly unavoidable.

Still, at least they had tonight.
The car journey from the hotel to the stadium was over in a matter of minutes, yet within the silent confines of the vehicle, the restlessness between the couple made it practically an eternity.

It was late afternoon, and as the setting sun began to fall below the hedge of crimson clouds, they held their breath as the taxi cab approached the very building that could either witness each other's glorious success or be subjected to their greatest downfall.

"Yuuri, are you ready to get out?" Asked Viktor, his husband having yet again fallen asleep whilst they were out in public.

The Japanese boy shook himself awake,
"Huh? Oh, yeah, sorry - I'll get up..."

Despite his best efforts to resist the gluttonous temptation of Viktor's cooking, Yuuri had succumbed to the primitive clutches of hunger earlier that morning and reluctantly eaten a bowl full of porridge. Sure, all of its caloric content had likely been burnt off in the rigorous practise session that followed, but Yuuri was still rather disappointed in himself. This was his first Grand Prix performance of the season, to be streamed on international television and watched by his family in person, and it was crucial that he at least attempted to look his best.

Nagoya was freezing at this time of the year. The overcast, tundra-like evening rainfall Mid-December was not one of Yuuri's favourite climactic conditions, as he fought with biting winds upon approaching the building and clenched his teeth whilst braving the frosted chill that not even his many, many layers and Viktor's favourite duffle coat could tackle.

Although reluctant to disappoint the press, Viktor swatted away the onslaught of journalists and flash photography as they entered the stadium's main hall, with Yuuri hunched over underneath a thick woollen hat and scarf as he groaned at them under his breath in aggrieved Japanese.

From the perspective of the media investigators, they didn't quite understand why Viktor was behaving quite so dismissive of their efforts given his typical affinity for life in the spotlight. Although Yuuri had always been somewhat wary of the incoming sea of cameras that fought savagely to capture every flawed angle of his dreaded body, this year he was noticeably more reserved. Nobody could quite pinpoint the disturbance in his character, or the questionable change in his appearance, but something was clearly off. In previous years, the Japanese boy would've at least greeted the paparazzi with a subtle smile. Now he didn't appear to want to do anything.

"These guys, eh?" Yuuri quietly remarked to his husband, attempting to find humour in the situation.

"You know, Yuuri," replied Viktor as they entered the skaters' waiting area, "it's okay if you're scared. Last night was fun, but you don't have to pretend with me if you're not having a good time."

The younger skater gulped and slowly shrugged his shoulders,
"I don't suppose it matters, hehe, I'm just....." he exhaled heavily,
"Fine, okay, I'm horrifically nervous. What if I don't do well? I don't want to fail myself, you, or my family, especially not in front of so many people. Truthfully, I don't know if I'm ready..

"That's okay, Yuuri, I don't think anyone is.

Look," Viktor continued, "you've still got your ring, and I'm wearing mine. As long as we're wearing these, I promise that nothing terrible will happen. Even if you fall, you can still get up."

"But you haven't fallen once-

"Eh, true... but that doesn't mean you still can't do your best!"

A rink official approached Viktor with a clipboard, gesturing towards a room to the right.

"Oh that's right - I'll be right there."

Yuuri looked puzzled.

"Don't worry," chuckled Viktor, "just a mere test! I suppose they want to make sure nobody's cheating."

A look of fear overcame Yuuri's expression, paralysing his tired eyes with sudden, piercing anxiety.

Viktor smiled,

"Don't worry, they're not going to get you. You haven't taken anything in over a month, right?"

Yuuri nodded convincingly,

"Oh, no, yeah, I'm totally clear now. I stopped taking those diet pills ages ago."

Of course he was lying, but the skater was not about to admit his most recent dosages of excruciating diet pills and the occasional round of amphetamine.

"I'll be back in a second, anyway. Why don't you try and find your family? I head they arrived not too long ago."

"Okay, see you soon." 

Yuuri, suddenly stranded in the centre of the room, made a beeline for the sofas on the sidelines. However, amidst his panic and confusion, the skater had forgotten to keep an eye out for any prior occupants of the cushions, and was met with a subsequent 'ouch!' from their current owner.

"Hey, watch where you're sitting, idiot," an annoyed female grunt retaliated after being semi-squashed by Yuuri's clumsy frame.

'That's odd,' the skater thought to himself, 'she was speaking Japanese; I didn't think any of the international skaters conversed in anything but English...'

"Sorry," Yuuri replied apologetically as he began to swivel round, "I guess I wasn't looking where I was going."

The second figure smiled, immediately recognising him,

"Haha, yeah, well I wouldn't expect any less from my baby brother."

"Mari?"
His sister winked, "Yep, I know, the one and only."

Yuuri laughed, falling into his older sister's embrace. It had been almost a year since they'd last seen each other, and although he still felt scared, lost, and semi-isolated from his other friends, Yuuri knew Mari would be a comfort amongst the trials of the competition.

The skater looked around, "Wait, where's Mum and Dad?"

"Oh yeah, sorry they couldn't make it to your short programme," she said, placing a reassuring hand upon his shoulder, "their car got stuck in a thunderstorm on the way up here; they'll arrive by tomorrow, but for now, I guess you've got me. Minako's also here, but I think she's currently schmoozing it up with some of your competitors - although, to be honest, that's always been a given."

Yuuri was somewhat relieved; at least his parents would miss half of his mistakes.

It was beginning to grow hotter as the stadium grew increasingly busy, and Yuuri desperately needed to remove his outer coat. Mari was a wild soul, and cool with pretty much anything, so he hoped that she wouldn't be too disgraced by his sudden and obvious indication of illness, nonetheless, when the decision had been made, she certainly had something to say.

"Yuuri, you don't look so good, what's going on?"

The younger sibling's eyes darted back and forth suspiciously as he attempted to avoid her gaze, "What? I'm fine - just a little nervous..."

Mari wasn't convinced.

"Turn around."

"What? Why?"

His older sister spoke in a low, hushed tone, only distinct between the two. She whispered through gritted teeth, "Turn. Around."

Yuuri shrugged, secretly puffing out his chest to diminish the protrusion of his backbone. He assumed that, on top the multitude of layered clothing he had swathed his decrepit body in, it would be difficult to Mari to discover anything unusual.

Yuuri was wrong.

Delicately, but with obvious intent, Mari ran her perfectly manicured fingers along the back of Yuuri's neck, across his shoulders, and down to his tailbone. It appeared that any effort to conceal the effects of his condition had been significantly inadequate; as each second passed Mari's face grew substantially more concerned, until she was forced to withdraw her touch out of pure shock and disgust.

"Gaha... well, you're obviously sicker than me, and I'm a fucking chainsmoker," she laughed a little, pained.

"Mari, shh! You can't be so rude in here!"
"Relax," she retorted, "but you are gonna tell me what the hell is going on, like, right now. Mum and Dad had mentioned something about you being way too skinny for your age, but I figured they were just being overdramatic. Obviously not..."

Yuuri grumbled to himself; although his sister would likely be the most understanding of confidants to date, topping even his own best friend, he didn't want to burden her with the constant worry that he would suddenly fall hopelessly ill. Besides, the skater was rather good at lying - he'd kept it up long enough to, at times, have even deceived his own husband, so it currently appeared the easiest (if a little morally dubious) course of action.

"Mari, I'm addicted to cocaine."

"You're what?"

"I'm addicted to cocaine."

"Seriously?"

"Yep. I guess I can't stop snorting that sweet, sweet snowy stuff."

Mari took a moment to process what her younger brother had just said, almost bursting out laughing as a result. Considering his rather fragile disposition from childhood, she severely doubted that he was indeed a cocaine addict, and having dabbled in debauchery herself wouldn't have been too critical of his acquired tasted so long as he sought help - if that was indeed the truth, which it most likely wasn't. Yuuri's older sister figured that whatever he was hiding from her must have been substantially worse than a cocaine addiction considering he so readily lied about the subject, but decided not to pressure him; it was clearly apparent that something was hurting him inside, and by the looks of things, on the outside too.

"Yuuri... you're obviously not addicted to cocaine," she said, stifling the rising laughter before quieting down again. "still, if you want to tell me what's really going on, I'm here, okay? And no, I won't go running to Mum and Dad like I did last time."

"Last time?"

"Yeah, don't you remember? I was there and so were you, but you weren't awake, and you were bleedi-"

"I'm sorry, I really don't remember anything," lied Yuuri, repressing yet another frightful teenage memory as he witnessed Viktor run towards him with a little plastic cup, clear that he was late for his drugs inspection.

"Mari, I need you to pee in this cup."

"What?"

"I promise I'll tell you later. It's nothing bad, I swear, but I really need you to pee in this cup, like, right now."

"Yuuri," called Viktor as he bounded towards them, "oh, and hi Mari!"

He then turned to Yuuri,
"They gave me this cup for you, not that you really need it, eh?"

"Haha, no, no... I bet I'll be fine," laughed the Japanese skater, "forgive me, but I've got to show
Mari to the ladies' first - I think it's her 'time'."

"Ah, okay," mouthed Viktor, reclining on a nearby sofa as Yuuri whisked his sister into a side corridor.

"Why the hell did you tell him I was on my period, jerk? I'm not even on my period!" Mari said, trying to sound angry, though finding it very difficult not to let out even a little giggle.

"Aren't you on your period?"

"No!"

Yuuri wasn't particularly well-versed in understanding the female psyche.

"Oh... sorry."

"What are we doing this for, Yuuri?" Asked the older sibling, growing increasingly irritated.

"Fine. I took a shitload of diet pills this morning, and I need you to pee in this cup so I don't fail my drugs test. I know it's only minor, but I just can't risk anything today."

Mari was a tad stunned, unsure of how she was supposed to respond.

"Um... okay?"

"Really? You'll do that for me?"

"I guess," Mari replied, semi-reluctant to comply, "now if you'll excuse me, some idiot wants me to go piss in a cup..."

All was then done, and Yuuri passed his drugs test with flying colours. Though some mild concerns were raised in regards to the abnormally high presence of oestrogen in his sample, the doctors dismissed the skater almost as immediately as he'd arrived.

"Phew... glad that's over with."

"Yeah," said Viktor, "I guess it's a little scary, even when you're totally clean."

The couple were then ushered into an even smaller area in which only the finalist skaters were allowed to sit; the competitors herded into a crowded waiting room as they prepared themselves to face the roaring crowd. The huddle of skaters suddenly fell silent as Yuuri and his husband entered the room, unsure of what to say or do in the presence of such frightful illness.

"Hello, Yuuri," waved Phichit, rather monotonous. No anger had lingered inside of him from their previous encounter - in fact, he'd never actually held any resentment against the Japanese boy. He was simply so deeply, deeply distraught that his best friend had allowed himself to be eaten alive by this soul-crushing disease.

Yuuri smiled back.
'Well, Phichit officially hates me,' he thought to himself.

He sighed as he increased his grip on Viktor's hand, embarrassed in front of his rivals. At a closer look, Yuuri began to notice small incisions creeping across his ex-friend's wrist; he desperately hoped that Phichit wasn't following in his footsteps.

Keen to move on from the initial awkwardness of meeting that year's final contestants, Viktor had
almost straightaway plonked himself down in the centre of the group. He began to converse with his usual circle, chatting with Chris and even JJ, who's personality had vastly improved once he'd finally received treatment for his anxiety. Phichit, unable to speak to Yuuri without retching at the thought of his friend's shrivelled body lying under all those futile layers of clothing, simply rested on the sidelines, investing himself in the conversation yet too nervous to actively participate.

With the other four skaters immersed in conversation, the only two left were Yuuri and his younger Russian counterpart. Viktor had asked his husband to stay close to him throughout the duration of the competition, for his own mental and physical well-being, but the skater had refused, arguing that he didn't want the others thinking of him as his partner's dependant. Thus, he'd sat with Yurio, and whilst the two hadn't seen each other in a while due to various incompatible training schedules, they embraced soon after they'd approached one other.

The young skater and his Japanese friend huddled with the rest of the group in front of the room's main television, gazing at the screen as the competition's opening ceremony began. Yuuri, at this point a little smug that only he was able to fully understand the announcer's speech without subtitles, had always enjoyed these ceremonies. They were often filled with beautiful ice-themed decorations and tuneful live music; in previous years he would've wished to be sitting in the crowd as the sponsors threw candy to the adoring fans, but this time around the skater was quite content to simply sit and watch.

After the ceremony had ended, the competitors' names were read out from a main screen and called up in order of performance. Yuuri, surprisingly, would be performing third, following Viktor and Phichit's routines. This was odd, as usually the displays would be ordered based on the skaters' current rankings, but Yuuri didn't particularly care. If anything, it prevented those ahead from gaining an additional advantage.

"Seems I'm up first," said Viktor, running to promptly change into his costume for the short programme.

As he returned, Yuuri flashed him an enthusiastic thumbs-up, wishing his husband good luck in the event that followed.

"Not too much luck though," the Japanese boy chuckled, "I actually want a decent shot at winning this thing."

"Hehe, well, we shall see."

Viktor pat his husband on the shoulder before ascending up the stairs to the competition floor, batting his eyelashes as the crowd roared in delight whilst attempting to conceal his inward apprehension. The Russian undoubtedly wanted to do well, but simultaneously did not wish to intimidate his partner - for all he knew, this competition could be his last unless Yuuri finally came to his senses, and the crippling fear of losing his most loved one was not exactly an encouragement.

"I assume you're ready?" said Yakov as the skater was led up to the entrance on the ice.

"You bet!"

"Well," continued the elder Russian, "just forget about that boyfriend of yours, I can see that look of panic on your face. He wants you to do well; nerves have never held you back before."

Viktor sighed,
"I guess you're right.."
Yakov was probably correct. The younger skater knew he had to acknowledge that, no matter his score, Yuuri would always be universally disappointed in his own, and he couldn't allow such pressure to wound him right now.

With a dignified smile, Viktor stepped onto the ice, winking into a nearby camera as Yuuri smiled proudly from the competitors' waiting room. If anything, the Russian knew he had to try his best - to inspire his husband, and remind him that not all was yet lost.

Viktor had always performed to a classical piece carefully selected by coach Yakov. This season was no different; the Russian beauty tip-toed across the ice to the elegant chimes of a grand piano, thrusting himself into a mid-air quintuple salchow as the piece finally climaxed. When all was done, the skater returned to the gentle crouch that he'd used to set the routine, indulging in the rapturous applause that ensured as the music trailed into silence. Viktor smiled; even after all these years, he always felt as though he was experience this rush as he did the first time, the exhilaration of the audience's cheers both liberating and a comfort.

Soon after, Viktor was lounging by Yakov in the 'kiss-and-cry', striking a teasing pose at the multitude of cameras and beaming as his score was revealed on the main screen.

120 points.

"A new world record!" announced the blaring speakers, the news met with an appreciative roar from the audience. Viktor, although somewhat used to breaking his own records in previous years' finals, shot a playful smirk towards the camera, knowing Yurio would be infuriated as the older skater humiliated him on international television.

"Still," Viktor said to the young blonde after he'd returned to the waiting room, taking a seat as Phichit rose to take his place on the ice, "it hasn't even been your turn yet, and besides, how hard can it be to beat a wrinkled old man like?"

"With my fists? Very easy." Replied the younger skater, only half-joking. He was stressed out of his mind, and Yuuri's panicking wasn't particularly beneficial either.

Viktor glanced around the room,
"Hang on, where is Yuuri?"

Yurio shrugged and gestured towards the bathroom,
"Getting changed, I think, although he's been in there for around twenty minutes and didn't want to talk to me when I approached him, so maybe you should check it out."

Pinching the bridge above his forehead is frustration and concern, Viktor nodded before heading for the skaters' bathroom with a snack in one hand and some water in the other. The bathroom could only accommodate one person at a time, so Viktor stood outside, knocking impatiently as the tension rose inside of him.

"Yuuri, it's Viktor, are you okay?"

Initially, the skater was unable to reply. Annoyingly, he'd accepted a small chunk of Chris' protein bar a short while ago, and had thus proceeded to empty the entire contents of his stomach to purge himself of this supposedly unacceptable atrocity (well, in Yuuri's mind anyway).

Eventually a tired voice replied,
"Yeah, sorry - I'm just nervous."
To be honesty, Yuuri was a little nervous. After vomiting, he'd stuffed toilet paper down his 
costume in a attempt to appear adequately toned, but unfortunately it hadn't really worked and the 
skater now stood in front of the mirror, tears streaming down his face as he held his breath in the 
midst of the storm.

Viktor, meanwhile, had managed to unlock the door with a clip in his pocket, running to console 
his trembling husband as the two sat down in the shower.

"Do I look okay?" Asked Yuuri, a little shaken.

Viktor looked the skater up and down. Whilst, truthfully, the body of his partner was no longer 
visible emaciated under the numerous rolls of tissue, he figured the crowd may have something to 
say regarding the triangular protrusions of particularly messy folds.

"You look great," said Viktor, smiling as he held his husband by the shoulders, trying to subtly pat 
down Yuuri's harsher silhouette.

"Thanks," The Japanese boy mumbled, trying to stifle a quiet sob as the tears soon began to flow, 
"I'm just so, so so afraid."

"Lapochka, you'll do wonderfully, I know you will. Sure, you haven't yet hit your marks in 
training, but this is the final competition - you know, there's always the buzz, the excitement, you'll 
do amazing, I promise- Yuuri?"

The skater was beginning to drift in out of consciousness, overcome y nausea and fatigue.

"Yuuri?"

"Huh? Oh, sorry, yeah- I guess I'm falling asleep, aha."

Viktor narrows his eyes, 
"Are you sure you're all right to perform?"

Yuuri nodded, ignoring the sudden onset of uncomfortably blurred vision, 
"Yes, I promise - we should go find the others, I expect they're waiting for us to get back."

Stumbling out of the bathroom and leant on his partner's tensed arm, Yuuri made his way towards 
the waiting room as his name was suddenly announced on the speakers.

"I guess I've got to go.." he said, mustering the strength to maintain his balance before exiting 
towards the rink.

On his way up to the main hall, Yuuri passed a wandering Phichit, noticing he was a little sunken 
from his placement in second. Not knowing what to say, the skater simply smiled at his ex-best 
friend. Phichit suddenly hugged the Japanese boy in response.

"Phichit?"

"Yuuri, I'm sorry, I can't process this right now, but... well, good luck. I'm proud of you."

The skater smiled, then lessened his grasp, allowing the older party to continue on his way. As the 
Thai boy approached the waiting room, he waved before entering the bathroom to the side, hands 
cupping his face as he watched Yuuri's performance online. He just wanted to be alone. Phichit 
didn't know what was going to happen - at best, Yuuri would smash his personal record before 
resting up for the competition tomorrow, at worst his weakened heart could stop beating
altogether.

It was time. Burying his intrusive thoughts deep inside his subconscious, the skater opened up into position as the music began to play. Yuuri almost laughed, amidst the panic he had forgotten that he'd chosen toxic for his short programme, and although the cover was poetic, his mind could not divert its attention from Britney's classic tune.

'Come on, Yuuri, focus,' the skater told himself, imitating the move into a complicated step sequence.

Bleary-eyed and half-conscious, Yuuri zig-zagged about the ice as he strived to stay awake, his feet tapping rhythmically against the glistening crystal sheet whilst with each succeeding move his heart heaved with embarrassment. Yuuri couldn't comprehend how such a useless, untalented lump of lard was even allowed to enter that haven if a building, let alone hold the privilege of skating inside of it.

For the most part, the rest of the performance followed suit. Sure, Yuuri was a tad dragged down by the ebbing regret and self-hatred that stabbed away at his inner thoughts, but technically his routine had not yet met a fault, and for someone who was barely conscious, the Japanese boy was already doing pretty well.

Soon, as the music drifted into a crescendo and the audience anticipated the climax of his piece, it was time for Yuuri to perform the terrifying quintuple salchow. He was truly determined to succeed, gearing himself up for his flight into the air. However, at the very last second, his chest was stuck with a searing pain unlike anything he'd ever known, and he skater was forced to bend into a quadruple flip instead. Yuuri managed to squeeze in two more quadruple salchows before the music silenced, but he knew by now that it was too late to improve. Defeated, he lay against the ice as freezing sweat dripped from his thinning scalp. Eventually Yuuri summed up the energy to raise from the chilled bed of ice beneath his thighs, and with his legs shaking as he stepped forward, fell into Viktor's arms with devastating anguish.

"Viktor, I'm so sorry - I didn't mean to mess up like that. Ugh, I'm just - I'm so sorry."

Such a reaction almost brought the Russian man to tears. To witness his husband, such a beautiful orb of emotion and light, ravaged by his own mistakes, was far too painful to experience. He wrapped his arms around the skater, steadying his trembling hands and wrapping him in thick blankets as they headed for the kiss-and-cry, which, in a literal sense, was likely more a cry-and-cry for Yuuri.

Viktor grew extremely defensive as the paparazzi closed in on their embrace, shoving them away to protect his partner as Yuuri's eyes rolled up into his head. The Russian knew they had to go; any longer and Yuuri would be disqualified for any discernible signs of illness.

As discreetly as possible, Viktor grabbed the Japanese boy by his cracking wrist and dragged him into the foyer, searching for a side exit to escape back to the hotel.

"Not long now," he said, "come on Yuuri, just a little bit further, I promise you'll feel better soon."

Yuuri groaned, trying not to vomit in his mouth as they made their way to leave.

"Viktor, please, just let me sit down."

Viktor couldn't really refuse. His husband's head was spinning and he was beginning to slip into unconsciousness.
"Yuuri, what's going on, have you taken anything?"

The Japanese boy faintly shook his head as they sat down on an indoor bench found close to the back of the main entrance, bent over and clutching his knees as he began to gasp for breath.

"I'm just, just so tired...."

"Yuuri, it's okay - is it your anxiety again?"

The younger partner nodded vaguely, shrugging his shoulders - he couldn't be bothered to find out the right answer. All Yuuri could understand was that his everyday weakness had drastically descended into what felt like sudden death, perhaps exacerbated by the past few weeks' ridiculous amount of exercise.

"Yeah, I'm anxious."

Oddly enough, Phichit happened to be wandering down the same hallway, aggravated muttering coming from under his cap. He'd changed out of his leotard and was snugly tucked into a fur-lined tracksuit, listening to music as the Thai skater wished to forget the unfortunate moment when he had fallen on the ice. By chance, he happened to notice Viktor and Yuuri bundled up against the wall, and ventured over to the couple to investigate.

"Hey... is Yuuri okay?"

"Huh?" Exclaimed Viktor, a little started by this unexpected arrival, "Oh, hi Phichit... I hope so; Yuuri says he's anxious, but I don't think he looks right..."

"I'm fine-" retorted Yuuri, "I just need sleep, that's all."

Phichit nodded, not entirely convinced, but agreed to help the Japanese skater to his feet. At this point all grievances between the two were minimal, as in reality, all he wanted was for his best friend to be okay. It was a miracle that Yuuri hadn't fallen on the ice, let alone suffered the consequences of his strenuous performance afterwards.

The three boys were linked liked a chain, with Yuuri in the middle, held up by his supporters at the sides.

"I'm fine, haha, don't worry." Said the Japanese boy, wriggling away from their cautious grip.

Trying his luck, Yuuri began to run towards the exit, moving in a snake-like formation as a demonstration of his supposed agility,

"Look, see, it's really not that - OOF-"

Yuuri had collapsed onto the floor.

"Shit, not again." Muttered Viktor.

"What the hell do you mean, 'not again'?"

The Russian shook his head, rushing over to his ailing husband and taking his pulse as his own surged through the roof.

"Yuuri, Yuuri are you okay?"

He glanced back at Phichit.
"Well?"

"His heart beat's rather fast, but I think his breathing is okay," said Viktor, "he must have just fainted, I guess."

Phichit breathed a strained sigh of relief, "I hate to say this, but you've gotta get him out of here - if they see him, well, they're not gonna let him compete like this, and I doubt they'd go easy on us considering we knew beforehand."

Viktor agreed, scooping his frail partner from the floor and carrying him towards the door in his arms. Phichit stood guard behind them, then lead the through into the alleyway beside the stadium. It was dark, dingy and very, very cold, so the boys removed their jackets and placed them over Yuuri to act as a make-shift blanket. As they approached the main road and the taxis parked outside the building, an onslaught of ravenous photographers ambushed the threesome as the two conscious boys struggled for cover.

"Over there!" said Viktor, pointing to a cab close by with tinted windows. Phichit acknowledged its location for late before diving into a sea of hungry media representatives, posing for photographs to briefly divert their attention from his friend. When the time was right, the Thai boy snuck away, dashing into the back of the taxi where Viktor and his unresponsive husband were waiting for him.

"That was close," he said, smiling, "how’s Yuuri holding up?"

Viktor checked his partner’s breathing once again, "Stable, I guess, but he’s still unconscious."

The two friends spent shifts watching over Yuuri as they waited for the skater to finally come around. Phichit finally realised that he could no longer be angered by Viktor’s lack of action; even in preparing his partner for the competition, Yuuri’s troublesome habits had managed to evade discovery, and the Russian was undoubtedly remarkably upset. If anything, the younger skater felt pity as well as anguish.

"You know, perhaps he’ll get better real soon," Phichit whispered as the other lay across the bed, "I know it’s wishful thinking, but I’ve known Yuuri for years now; if he used to eat before, I’m sure he’ll eat again. Things won’t continue like this forever."

"Hehe, I hope so. I thought he was getting better, but, well, clearly not..." tears began to well up in his eyes, "what if he goes, Phichit?"

The Thai boy soon began to weep in response, "Truthfully? I don’t know... I’ve never seen him like this before. Have you truthfully been doing all you can? Don’t worry, I won’t get mad, I know it’s hard."

"No, no, I genuinely have - I took him to therapy, tried to prepare all his meals, I even attempted to monitor his exercise, but, well..."

Viktor scoffed and shrugged his shoulders.

"...I suppose what I did just wasn’t enough. Yuuri’s still ill, and I’m still a terrible person. I’m sorry if I’ve made you hate me."

"No way!" Phichit exclaimed, hugging the distraught Russian skater, "you’ve tried your best; I’m sorry I was angry. All we can do now is ensure Yuuri gets the right nutrition for the free skate tomorrow, and well, after the competition, I guess it’ll be time to finally take action."
Both skaters hoped he’d last that long.

They continued to talk and cry the night away, reflecting on the blissful times when the emaciated half-corpse lying under 6 layers of blankets was a bright, food-loving (even if a little overweight) joy of a man. Their voices hushed as this silent figure finally began to stir, as they waited in anticipation for what could follow.

First a hand moved, then a body, and finally a soft shake of the head. Yuuri’s blurred and rather shifted vision were rather confusing, with the skater initially wondering if he had recently taken any hallucinatory drugs, but as his gaze began to rise to meet that of the other two, much of what had happened suddenly became clear.

Slowly and with heaving weakness, the Japanese skater found the energy to sit up in the bed. Lips wavering, he gave his companions a faint but reassuring smile.

“Yuuri!”
Delighted that the Japanese boy had finally risen from his stupor, the two friends rushed over to his side, a glass of water in one hand and a hot water bottle in the other.

"Haha, Yuuri, thank God you're alright," said Viktor, sweltering from nerves, "I was scared you wouldn't wake up in time."

"Or at all.." mumbled a relieved Phichit, his words indistinguishable as his heart still roared inside his chest.

Yuuri sighed, shaking his head,
"I'm sorry guys, I really am. I don't know what happened out there."

"Lapochka, you need to eat," suggested Viktor, offering a crumbling shortcake from his bag, "it's not much, I promise you that, but please - for me?"

Phichit looked back with the Russian skater into the depths of his friend's yearning brown eyes. Everyone knew that all Yuuri wanted was to release his inhibitions, bite the bullet and chomp down on the gloriously greasy morsel placed in front of his quivering lips, but the task was simply too impossible.

"I'm sorry, Viktor, there's little point."

"What do you mean?"

Phichit interrupted,
"He'll just throw it back up when we're off guard. I've seen it firsthand, it's not pretty, I swear..."

"Wait, what?"

"Yep, sorry Yuuri - I just had to check up on you at mine, cos, well, it was pretty audible.."

The Japanese skater twiddled with his thumbs, picking at the duvet as he stared downwards, rather ashamed of himself and his embarrassingly fucked up habits.

"I'm sorry Viktor."

Viktor shrugged his shoulders in despondence, smiling subtly as he tried to support his husband,
"It's okay, we're too far gone for anger now. I know you're tired, you can eat tomorrow, right?"

The younger skater made a disgruntled sound but reluctantly nodded his head,
"Sure, hehe, I guess."

"That's good. All the finalists are meeting for brunch, you can make that, right?"

"Yeah," continued Phichit, putting a hand on his friend's shrunken arm, "the gang will be there. I bet even JJ will be excited to see you!"

"Haha," replied Yuuri, "sure, guys, I bet everyone will be delighted to spend time with this hopeless sack of crap."

The three skaters laughed, breaking the pauses of deafening silence as an air of decay wafted about the room.
"Listen guys," croaked Yuuri, "I'm sorry, but I'm super tired. Can I go back to sleep now?"

"Sure, sure," said Viktor, pulling the covers back over his husband's chest, "Phichit's staying over for the night, just so we can all get read for tomorrow, so I guess we'll see each other in the morning."

And with that, the three skaters retired to their beds (well, aside from Phichit, who chose to lay across the recliner in the warmth of the fire-heated living room), bleary-eyed and hearts aching from a night filled with disgrace and dismay. Yuuri, who lay semi-paralysed by guilt, fear and the crushing psychological weight of his existence, cling to each breath as though it were his last. He'd never felt so sick in his life, and as his husband slept close to his own shivering body, he clung to the duvet for extra security. Eventually, he managed to drift off back to sleep. His breathing was still shallow, and at times extremely patchy, but so far he'd made it through the night.

Meanwhile, Phichit couldn't fall asleep. Fidgeting as his mind was very much awake, he tossed and turned under the suffocating sofa covers until it all became unbearable. Sitting up abruptly, he reached for the solid black casing inside of his rucksack.

Viktor awoke suddenly, eyes opened as he heard a pained wincing piercing his eardrum. Afraid that Yuuri had hurt himself again, he flipped over as his eyes scrabbled in the dark for the sight of his husband. To the Russian's surprise, his partner was fast asleep. His sockets were dull and sunken with his lips horrendously cracked, but he was silent nonetheless. Somewhat confused, Viktor left the room on his tip-toes, scaling the hall for any suspicious activity before catching a Phichit in the act in the living room.

"Ah- shit, fuck..." the Thai boy swore as he placed his wrist to his mouth, fumbling around for a nearby box of tissues in the dark of the night.

The skater crept around the corner, "Phichit, are you okay?"

"Phichit, are you okay?"

Viktor crept over to the ailing Thai boy, removing a handkerchief from his pocket and wrapping it as a makeshift tourniquet around his shaking wrist, "Phichit, why are you doing this?"

"For the same reason Yuuri does, I guess."

The Russian was rather taken aback by the whole situation; he'd seen the trails of scars engraved into his husband's flesh, but never an array of open, gaping wounds before. Phichit's were nowhere near as drastic as the Japanese boy's incisions, but it pained him to know the younger skaters were
hurting like this.

"Oh, you're a 25 year old Japanese man with devastating anorexia and an overbearing husband?" Viktor joked, attempting to lessen the Thai boy's crippling embarrassment.

Phichit smiled,
"Nah, I'm just a soppy asshole who worries for his friend, I guess."

Viktor scooted right up to the younger skater, hugging him again,
"I'm not going to pry, but you've got to know that whatever you're feeling is valid without the connection to Yuuri, you're allowed to feel this way - your emotions aren't an extension of his own, y'know."

"Haha, thanks."

"It's okay."

"Wait, hold on-" murmured Phichit, sitting upright, "- did you just say husband."

'Well, shit, the cat's out of the bag now, isn't it?' The older skater thought to himself.

"Promise you won't tell anyone?"

"Well," chuckled his younger counterpart, "for someone so addicted to social media, it's going to be tricky, but yeah - I promise."

"Thank you."

"But how come you did it?"

"Truthfully?" replied Viktor, "I didn't know if he'd ever make it to a proper wedding.."

Phichit nodded sadly, but understood perfectly where Viktor was coming from. A few years ago he was faced with the same situation, preparing for Yuuri's sudden demise. However, instead of the once deathly obesity that ravaged the skater's health, he was attacked by the very thing that had helped him slim down.

They chatted well into the night, with Viktor dressing Phichit's sounds as required. The Russian swore not to tell a soul on the grounds that the Thai boy would seek help, or at least tell somebody the next time he felt the urge to hurt himself, and the latter eventually agreed. Viktor mentioned his strained relationship with alcohol and his dependency on such beverages as Yuuri further descended into darkness, with Phichit listen supportively as they both had a good cry over the utter drag of adult life, laughing through their tears as they thought of their love for their beloved Japanese companion.

As the sun began to rise, Viktor could still detect the pain in the deep mahogany of Phichit's eyes.

"Do you need to see a doctor?"

"I- I don't think so..."

Viktor sighed,
"Look, my Japanese still isn't perfect, but I promise this will be discreet. If Yuuri won't let me care for him, at least let me help you."

Softened by the desperation in the Russian's voice, the skater reluctantly agreed. They left in the
early hours of the morning for a local walk-in clinic and to briefly meet with the other skaters, discussing breakfast plans in an attempt to minimise the stress placed on Yuuri in such a situation.

The skater in question happened to rise as the front door of the apartment slammed shut, dragging his skeleton from beneath the bedcovers and traipsing into the kitchen for a heart breakfast of black coffee, antidepressants and a handful of diet pills. The sunrise was beautiful as the sky shifted to a deep shade of amber, with minuscule water droplets falling and rolling down the window like the tiny teardrops on Yuuri's face. He was nervous, ashamed and disgusted with himself. The skater knew he'd never fully be ready for the final free skate, but after accepting that there would be nowhere to delay the inevitable he simply perched himself on one of the stools by the kitchen table, skimming through the note Viktor had left as he fought against the sleepiness that overwhelmed him.

'Today's the day I die,' Yuuri thought in reference to his self-esteem, afraid of the embarrassment of once again failing in front of the ominous glare of a crowd.

As much as he tried to banish such negative thoughts, time and time again Yuuri's attention was diverted back to the beckoning cry of the bathroom scales hidden behind the bathtub. The skater had seen Viktor rapidly sneak away with them as they arrived at the hotel, but was quick enough to see where the Russian had put them. As despondent as he felt, Yuuri was a little proud that he'd managed to outsmart his husband in a final bid to monitor his progress.

Truthfully, Yuuri didn't expect to have lost any weight at all. He constantly felt like a slob, forever shovelling crappy carbohydrates and fats into his shitty vessel before vomiting them back up again. Still, no matter how much he'd thrown up, Yuuri could physically feel the allures clinging to his body. He knew that, as he stepped onto the scales for what would likely be the last time in a while, he would be hopelessly disappointed in himself.

But he had to know. He couldn't be kept in he dark, not for a matter so significant.

'Well, if my tracking has even been semi-reliable,' he thought, 'I should expect to hover around 40 kilograms. I've likely both gained and lost a reasonable amount in the time I've been concentrating on the final, and whilst it's nowhere near where I need to be, and is still far too close to the line of obesity, it'll hopefully be easy to lose from there once the competition is over.'

Shutting his eyes and taking a deep, drawn-out breath, Yuuri stepped onto the rusted metal scales and shook in anticipation. He was very, very afraid.

'3...2...1... right, come on Yuuri, you can do this...

... 1...2...3... look... now!'

Yuuri opened his eyes...

33 kilograms.
BMI- motherfuckin'-11.0

Well, that went majorly better than expected. Yuuri would have even felt a little excited inside, if it wasn't for his regularly fluttering heartbeat.

'If my BMI has dropped to 11, I wonder just how much I've lost when looking in the mirror...' The skater used all the energy he could muster to gallop into the bedroom, practically tearing his clothes off of himself as he stood naked in front of the full-length mirror, inspecting for any miraculous signs of change. Yuuri felt a tad giddy with pride; this was the lowest weight he'd ever
been. Sure, perhaps it wasn't something to be proud of - at this point Yuuri had fully well realised his habits weren't exactly healthy - but the skater didn't care, he'd worked hard for this and he was going to savour this fleeting self-validation before the others returned.

But something strange had happened.

Yuuri's skin had turned a deathly shade of purple, his arms and legs littered with bruises with veins like rushing torrents of a river, coloured frozen blue. His knees caved inward, slanted as he struggled to maintain his posture, the skater's back curving unevenly like the anorexic cousin of a modern-day Quasimodo. As for the legs themselves, they were struggling to hold up the weight of the rest of his shrivelled corpse. Just underneath the adjacent hipbones, which jutted out like two sharpened blades of a knife, lay what might have once been recognised as thighs - now they were long gone, substituted with mere toothpicks as distorted skin clung to his near-exposed bone. Shoulders hunched by the cold, Yuuri's collar bones lurched forward, hollow crevices sinking deep inside of him as the light was then shifted onto his rippling chest. The Japanese boy's ribs were as plain and discernible as the ivory keys of a grand piano, shaking with each breath he took as he tried to look away from the hollow within his chest. Trailing his twiggy fingers up and along the contours of his stiffened neck, Yuuri looked up at the mirror and deep into the dreaded soul that lay in the darkness of his eye, afraid of just what he had become.

Lips cracked and flaking off, Yuuri's teeth had yellowed and were crumbling at the back, the numerous counts of stomach acid finally taking their painful toll. His pallid skin was stained with the smears of unjustifiable layers and layers of smothering foundation, face completely discoloured as his once endearing freckles had all but disappeared. The skater's ears were slightly drooped, blisteringly red from the chill of the relentless cold, his once perky nose a dramatic shade of burgundy to match. His eyebrows, though frozen and rather furrowed, were growing hairless, along with his frost-bitten scalp. Yuuri tugged at his hair in utter disbelief as masses of matted black hair tumbled towards the ground, his head growing patchy and bare with each strand lost, the skater grimacing with every look.

What the fuck had he done to himself.

Yuuri continued to stare with fuming hatred at the stranger in the mirror. Such a terrifying monster could never have been him, it just couldn't have, and yet it was. There was no other explanation; the skater had finally burnt his body to the ground. There was simply no turning back from something like this, not after he'd seen what he'd become.

The Japanese boy dropped to his knees, eyes fixated on the mirror as he picked at the skin of his cheeks. Where had their padding gone? Since when had he adopted spears for his once concealed cheekbones? Initially Yuuri had been vaguely pleased with his results, but this was simply frightening. He didn't look at all like himself. The ugly duckling has transformed into the remains of a shrieking ghoul.

'Well, this was not the glow-up I'd expected...' Yuuri thought to himself, before flinging himself to the ground and weeping on the floor.

Yuuri had never wanted to be so devastatingly disgusting. Thin? Yes. Vaguely concerning? Yes - although he was reluctant to admit it. But repulsive? No, Yuuri was not a fan. To himself, he'd never exactly been beautiful, and this certainly did not help matters. Looking this deathly had next to no benefits, and was almost as bad as being fat itself.

But still, there was good news and bad news.

The good news was that nobody was home to hear the skater's repetitive screeching echoing off of
the polished bathroom marble.

The bad news was that the worst was still to come.

Yuuri shuddered to his feet, squinting at the mirror as though there was nothing else it could possibly hide. His glance slipped downwards.

"Are you fucking kidding me?"

Cursing under his breath, Yuuri's eyes locked onto the centre of his torso. It was all so terribly out of place.

Despite all that had happened, despite all of the skater's hard work and the results it had produced - whether or not they were positive there was one final obstacle standing in the way.

The stomach. It had always been the dreaded bloody stomach. No matter how much weight he'd lost, no matter how many calories Yuuri had tirelessly burnt, his dream could never be complete. He was damned to a degrading and distasteful existence, his crumbling flame still dragged down by the heavyweight that was a sack of such unnecessary flab.

Yuuri uttered nothing more. His friends were out; there was nobody to talk to - not that he would've opened up to anybody anyway. This was his burden to carry, his fault to disguise. Nobody could be blamed but himself.

It was all so dreadfully tragic, as it seemed though Yuuri would never reach the true perfection he so desperately craved.

Yuuri was certainly sick, but it seemed he could never be sick enough.

"Why the fuck do I even fucking try?" Yelled Yuuri, hands locked behind his neck as he bent over the sink in pure, unadulterated shame.

'What is the fucking point anymore?' Thought Yuuri, slamming his clammy hands to a nearby shelf and throwing its contents to the floor in a sobbing rage, 'I slave away, day after day after fucking day, and this is what I get? This... this thing?'

The skater clutches at his lower torso, which, to the perception of an ordinary person, was alarmingly concave. Yet all that Yuuri could see was a gurgling mass of gluttonous fat that never had belonged, that impeded all his efforts to achieve ultimate perfection. Scratching at his stomach, the skater clenched the remains of his rapidly declining dental structure as he bit his tongue, blood beginning to ebb out as he made scars among his stretch marks. Luckily, they proceeded to dry up on their own, however Yuuri wasn't done just yet.

He'd been working for this most of his life. Despite not being consciously anorexic, Yuuri had always struggled with his weight and self-esteem. The skater shook as scarring memories took him back to the continuous bullying, the shouts and abuse from his peers - Yuuri had been the only chubby kid in town, and the others' favourite target. Embarking on his road to weight loss with his first diet at just age 9, the cycle of shame and regret had hazardously morphed into the only thing he was to ever know. The Japanese boy drank and drugged his way through high school and university, crashing and binging repetitively as he searched for self control. Yuuri supposed it was his own fault that had brought him here. If only he could have been born skinny, not burdened with the fault genes of an incompetent, chubby oaf unlike the rest of his friends and family. It was simply too unfair.

Yuuri didn't feel like throwing up. It had been the first morning in a long, long time that he hadn't
begun the day with a fresh mouthful of regurgitated bile, and truthfully he felt rather ashamed, but deep down the skater knew that he was growing far too weak. This pain felt like dying. And yet, even now, he wasn't sick enough. With that troublesome belly forever looming in front of him, blocking his path to success - well, paradise just wasn't meant to be.

Yuuri was beginning to think of killing himself once more. What was the fucking point of living? Sure, he had a beautiful husband who loved him - but for just how would such divinity last? The Japanese boy feared the Russian would soon come to his senses and he'd be forced to part with his one true sweetheart, separated by his own selfishness and crippling instability. There was little point in pursuing his unattainable goals if they truly were impossible late, but it was way too far to turn back now. Yuuri couldn't simply return to a pattern of normal eating; his stomach would supersize, and the heaps of flesh he oh so abhorred would begin to creep ominously back under his skin, strangling his hard-earned bones. His breathing rapid and increasingly shallow, Yuuri attempted to reach for his uvula, but his arm arched with every little flinch of movement, and he eventually gave up. Even if he wanted to, he could no longer throw up. His vocal chords were scorched as he screeched out in hoarse agony, passing out onto the floor.

Death wasn't something that Yuuri was particularly afraid of. The skater had witnessed death on multiple accounts throughout the span of his short, sad little time spent on Earth. He remembered his grandfather tripping in the snow, his neck broken, never to walk or talk or smile again; his grandmother wincing as her final round of chemotherapy was injected into her leathery skin, crying as she left, her hands around his face; he remembered Vicchan, and Makkachin, and even Alice. Yuuri remembered them all.

Perhaps death would be like an old friend, carrying him to an eternal bed of dreams for a well-earned rest after a life of toil and struggle. Perhaps death was an illusion, and Yuuri would simply phase into another stage of consciousness - an alternate dimension also consumed by hate and suffering (so, luckily not that much different to existence on earth). Yuuri wasn't sure if he believed in God, or any omnipotent divinity. He couldn't understand why something so supposedly benevolent would condemn him to the hardships and destructive habits he'd been forced to encounter, and was additionally evasive of a system that judged humans based on their behaviour in the physical world (Yuuri hadn't always been so moral).

However, suicide also required unnecessary effort, and Yuuri was far too exhausted to fling himself off any additional bridges. The Japanese boy didn't particularly wish to inconvenience his parents with extortionate funeral costs and, he supposed, the trauma of burying their youngest child.

'Will they really miss me?' Yuuri thought to himself as he slowly awoke from the dulling unconsciousness, 'I have been a bit of a little shit, if I'm totally honest.'

'Maybe if I'm lucky, I won't have to kill myself. Maybe these past few months of slugging, drugging and starvation will finally catch up to me, and I'll die a painful but fortunately natural death. Nobody would suspect a thing. But then again, Viktor....'

Yuuri wasn't totally convinced that his husband would be wholeheartedly upset if he were to pass; there were far more attractive and talented young fish in the sea of chiselled, greased-up male skaters. By comparison, Yuuri was a timid flounder cowering in the shade of sensuous, dramatic schools of swordfish. But still, what if this whole departure business truly did shake his lover? The skater could barely maintain at least a touch of control over his own mental health, let alone be held responsible for the well-being of somebody else.

Yuuri didn't know just what to do. Continuing to tug at his imaginary fat, he remained squatted on the bathroom floor until the later hours of the morning. As the front door of the hotel room clicked
in its lock and the chatter of whispering voices could be heard from across the hall, Yuuri rose and slid into his baggy clothes. Breakfast was waiting.
"Viktor, please, I'm tired. Can't I just meet you guys at the rink again?"

The Russian sighed, trying to smile as he and Phichit headed for the door,  
"Please, lapochka, I think we're all too exhausted to fight now. We've been invited to breakfast with our friends, so we've got to go."

Phichit nodded in accompaniment, hastily pulling down his sleeve as his eyes met his best friend's disappointed gaze,  
"It's true, they'll all be there. Don't you at least wanna grab some coffee with us?"

Backed into a metaphorical corner, Yuuri swallowed and sighed as he reluctantly agreed to his companions' proposal.

"Just breakfast?"

"Yes, just breakfast," replied Viktor, putting a protective arm around his husband's brittle shoulders, "the competition is around 2, so I guess we can all go out for lunch afterwards."

Yuuri dreaded what was to come next. There was absolutely no way to escape the impending doom that was soon to slap his across his pallid face, cutting up his bitter lips and shocking him to the core.

The Russian could sense Yuuri's building discomfort,  
"You don't have to eat, if you don't want to..."

"Really?" The Japanese boy's eyes widened.

"Yeah," the skater reassured his husband, "I brought along one of those high-calorie protein drinks if you can't face food today."

"It's fine..." said Yuuri. The skater knew he would rather risk consuming 100 calories of fat-free, putrid and curdled diet yogurt than 500 calories plus of some god-awful nutrition supplement - in terms of fat-loss conservation, anyway.

Phichit, who was leant against the door, stood upright and gestures to the exit,  
"Perhaps we should get going; we don't want to be late for the rest of the crew.."

"Okay," said Yuuri.

"Yeah, that sounds good," replied Viktor, turning to face the Thai skater, "are you sure you're going to be alright?"

"I'll be fine, thanks for earlier."

Yuuri has no clue as to what his companions were alluding to, but shrugged his shoulders as the three of them descended down the staircase and past the hotel's seemingly ancient decor, wandering our into Nagoya's freezing city streets in search of the rest of the competitors.
Today Phichit seemed unusually evasive. His hands remained in his pockets at all times as his head sunk down into his hood, lying there sheepishly between his shoulders. He appeared vaguely ashamed in manner, although regarding what Yuuri discovered impossible to determine. His best friend, typically so exuberant in nature, has become so suddenly closed-off. Sure, he was still happy to converse when prompted with conversation, yet definitely was not himself, quiet as his attempts to remain inconspicuous failed with increasing obviousness.

The Thai boy was in fact in a great deal of pain, both physical and emotional. His wrist throbbed under the layers of bandages, but his heart throbbed in fear that he'd lose his best friend that day on the ice. Phichit knew deep inside that Yuuri was growing weaker by the minute, and though the Japanese boy has become an expert in concealing his present condition, the younger boy knew he was hurting too. Preparing himself for the imminent confrontation that was to follow at the communal breakfast, the skater tried to smile through the pain as he knew his friend would be going through something much worse.

"We're here!" Declares Viktor as the group approached an upscale restaurant, "The others should already be inside."

The younger skaters gasped in awe as a group of giggling waitresses ushered them towards one of the luxury function rooms, enamoured of the myriad of gold and diamond decorations hanging from the painted ceiling.

"Viktor," Yuuri whispered, "can we really afford all of this?"

Continuing to smile, Viktor murmured aside through gritted teeth, "Absolutely not, but our sponsors definitely can!"

Phichit chuckled at the oldest's remark as they finally entered the most lavish room of all, with ornaments encrusted in a variety of glistening jewels and an epic chandelier above the elongated breakfast table.

"Whoa, this place is pretty fancy."

Yuuri smiled at each skater already sat around the table. There was Chris, JJ, Yurio (their conversations must've been terrific fun...) and... Otabek?

"Wait, Otabek, where were you in the short programme?" asked Yuuri, confused.

It had turned out that Otabek hadn't made it to the Grand Prix Final that year; following his rink's temporary closure there had been little time to optimally practise, leaving his base score lagging behind the rest of the competitors' totals. Still, in moral - and perhaps, well, physical - support of his 'best friend' Yurio, he'd decided to cheer on the Russian skater at the final in place of his ailing grandfather, who was currently in hospital.

Phichit, showcasing a glimpse of his usual self, giggled as he pointed to Yurio's neck, "What's that under your scarf?"

Lying under the Russian's strategically-placed woollen coveting was a distinctive mauve-coloured imprint, about the size of Otabek's beautifully plush, rose-coloured lips. It didn't take a genius to infer what had happened between the two the night before the meet-up.

"Whatever," Yurio said gruffly, although trying to stifle a somewhat proud smirk, "I'm hungry, are you guys ready to eat yet or what?"

When all were seated, an intricate gold menu card was brought out by a team of decorated
hostesses. Yuuri read through the dishes as he felt his stomach drop.

'Pancakes? Carrot cake? Chocolate waffles? You've got to be fucking kidding me.' The Japanese boy thought to himself, 'Is there nothing inclusive for those of us who don't want to end up ridiculously obese? Ugh...'

Eyes growing weary from the endless speed-reading, Yuuri finally breathed a sigh of relief as his gaze met the bottom of the rose-bordered page. It appeared this establishment wasn't for the wholly gluttonous after all."

"I'll take the fruit platter," Yuuri said to the waitress after his tedious inner debate.

"But aren't you going to want something way more nutri-" Phichit began, then silenced by Viktor's index finger.

"What are you doing? Do you want him to perish out there on the ice?" The Thai boy hissed under his breath.

Viktor shook his head, murmuring in response,
"Hey, at least he's eating. I don't wanna push him too far; he might then refuse everything altogether..."

Phichit sighed, nodding his head as the group waited for their breakfast to arrive. Yuuri, who was feeling relatively calm at the prospect of a low-calorie platter (and the water-based fruits that would be reasonably easy to regurgitate) sat peacefully in silence as the competition's chattered across the silken tablecloth, but the blood rushed from his face when his dish was eventually unveiled.

However, all was too good to be true. As Yuuri twiddled his thumbs in anticipation for the healthy breakfast that awaited him, the skater nearly burst into tears as the food was placed in front of him. The apples had been smothered in peanut butter, the strawberries suffocated by creamy chocolate pudding - even the poor watermelon pieces had been mercilessly drowned in treacle. No fruit has been spared from this cruel and inhuman treatment of tyranny. It was enough to make Yuuri begin to panic on the spot.

"Wow," exclaimed Viktor, "doesn't that look good!"

"Haha, oh yes," lied his quivering partner, "I'm going to take it slow as I want to, er, savour the deliciousness...."

Unsurprisingly, in the end Yuuri ate nothing at all. As the others tucked into hearty plates of bacon, eggs (and in Phichit's case a bowlful of ice cream), the Japanese skater stared into space, shifting his gaze from the mounds of dripping lard and fatty cream surrounding him. For a while, his competitors were too engrossed in conversing and eating to take notice of this deliberate avoidance, with Viktor only taking an occasional glance as he chatted with friends, but eventually, after all but one plate had been cleared, the room fell silent, with five concerned states locked onto Yuuri's untouched platter.

"Hey, is that pineapple?" Asked Viktor, intentionally trying to coerce his husband into taking a bite. By now he'd realised that a harsh approach was far from effective when it came to dealing with Yuuri's disorder.

Phichit, who was becoming increasingly anxious, chimed in,
"Aren't you going to eat anything? You need to eat - if you don't eat you won't do well - don't you want to do well? Do you want to l-"
The Thai skater stopped himself before proceeding anymore with this futile rant. He knew that Viktor was right, that he should lay off. He didn't want to push Yuuri any further away.

"Hey, Yuuri," said Chris, "why don't we share the platter? You can feed me if you like..."

Viktor short the Swiss skater a look of ridicule.

"- oh, and you'll eat too! But if it's too much, we'll help."

Phichit facepalmed.

JJ interjected,
"Well, I've learned that the best way to combat your fears is to face up to them, y'know, show them who's boss... show the food who's boss!"

"I'm fine, honestly," said Yuuri, "you guys keep talking, I'd rather just sit here.."

Yurio said nothing - there wasn't anything more than he had mentioned on previous occasions that could have improved the situation. Instead, he just smiled, with Otabek providing a hopeful thumbs-up in addition as the couple tried to be supportive.

"Yuuri... Yuuri, please.." pleaded the older Russian skater, gently pushing the platter, which earlier had been shoved aside, back towards his doubtful husband, "you need this, you know you need this, why don't you just eat for us?"

Viktor gestured to the rest of the table,
"For all of us?"

 Tears began to form in the corners of the Japanese skater's eyes, but he remained resilient. He couldn't ruin his progress, not on competition day. Yuuri knew he needed to be as light as possible in order to properly complete his new, original move, and that nobody, not even the love of his life, was going to stand in his way.

"Viktor," he stated through loud, blubbering sobs, "I'm not going to eat it, I'm sorry - to everyone, but I can't. Tomorrow? Sure. But not today."

Yuuri knew he was lying. He didn't want to eat tomorrow either.

"You can't keep this up forever," interrupted Phichit, whose eyes were starting to moisten, "we love you, Yuuri. We don't want you to die."

The others nodded in unison, agreeing with the Thai skater's response - that is, all except Yurio, who was growing agitated by the continual attack on the Japanese boy's eating habits - he knew this rapid fire approach was ridiculously ineffective, and could see the distress manifesting in Yuuri's manic gaze.

"This isn't going to work, guys..." the Russian muttered under his breath, also attempting to repress his tears, "I'm sure Yuuri will eat in his own time..."

"But what if he doesn't? What do you know about anorexia? I'm his partner, I've spent months loving him, and I understand him!"

"I've got to agree with Viktor..." Phichit added, "we can't just leave it alone forever. Do you want him to die? Is that what you want?"
"Holy shit, SHUT THE FUCK UP," roared Yuuri, slamming his fists on the table as he immediately rose from his seat. The skater wasn't quick to anger, and was actually tearing up deep inside, but had decided that rejection was far less humiliating than outright wailing in front of the entire selection of competitors. He had to be angry; it was the only way to conceal how sad his life had truly become.

"Yuuri..." Viktor smiled, "why don't you come back to the fruit and eat it in let's say, an hour...? Let's talk - let's go outside, come on..."

The skater shook his head, unwilling to upset his husband in the outburst, but continued to press forward with his own, self-deemed declaration of independence.

"I am 25 years old, and capable of making my own decisions-

"-but Yuuri..." said JJ.

"-no, guys," the skater said through gritted teeth, "I am an adult, so start fucking treating me like one. Maybe I can't control myself, maybe I am in the wrong. But none of you, I repeat none of you, fucking own me, so I will do as I please. Yeah, supposedly I hate what I've become, it's no fucking picnic, but none of you understand at all how I feel, so leave it, okay? I'm not going to eat now - I'm not going to eat ever-

"Lapochka-

"-no, Viktor, as much I love you, I want you to listen to me - in fact, all of you listen up. As much as I appreciate you, fuck off. This is my disorder, not yours. None of you understand anything I do! Yurio, bless him, tries to make an effort, but the rest of you are sending me insane!"

Phichit went to touch his best friend's shoulder.

"Stop it! Leave me alone!"

"Fine!" Phichit snarled back, deeply hurt by his friend's rejection, "but if you want to keep killing yourself, don't expect me to just let it slide!"

Viktor stood to interrupt, but quickly returned to his seat as his husband yelled across the room.

"You know what? I hope I die. I hope that my heart stops beating and that I die quick and painlessly, and that all of you are there to watch. Then, and only then, will you feel the utter trauma that I experience on a daily basis!"

The skater stormed towards the door, opening it with a ferocious swing.

"Yuuri, wait!" Cried Viktor.

But Yuuri didn't wait. With a final salute of his shrivelled middle finger, he slammed the door behind him, leaving the room behind him in an aura of stunned silence. Viktor sighed, and Phichit simply burst into tears.

"Ugh, shit."

"Oh my god, why did I do that?" Cried Phichit, "I'm sorry, I'm a monster, I got too upset and I-

Viktor tried to smile, "It's fine, I've learned by now that these arguments are nobody's fault. We're all too headstrong,
emotional, and all suckers for confrontation. Now all we've got to worry about is finding him before the competition starts. Without anything in his system, he simply won't be able to function..."

'Weak? Haha, I'll prove them all wrong.' Yuuri thought as he sped out of the establishment, crying his eyes out as his short-lived anger faded to utter despair.

Yuuri spent the rest of the day riding the local subway, gazing out of its musty windows at the darkness of an opposite brick wall as the train rolled around the city's busy underground. He was tired, scared, hungry and alone. Yearning to be alongside his friends, Yuuri sighed into his handful of crumpled, soggy tissues, disgusted by his own humiliation. He hadn't meant to lash out at his competitors; truthfully he relied on the other skaters more than he was ever willing to admit.

Naturally, the skater responded how any like-minded individual would have done. He retreated to the comfort of an abandoned public toilet, swallowed a handful of diet pills and extra-potent caffeine capsules; scrolled through the dingy depths of anorexic tumblr with a mouth full of bloody spit and reopened some old scars for good measure. All in good taste, of course - he was extremely nervous.

Needless to say, Yuuri was unimaginably late to the competition final that afternoon.

As Yuuri bolted (well, more likely stumbled) through the stadium entrance, his bag in one hand and a suspiciously empty drinks can in another, there was no time to stop and smell the sweaty stench of swarming journalists and practising competitors - well, all except for the skater's parents. Striving to avoid eye contact with his older relatives as he made his way towards the competitor's lounge, the Japanese skater sighed in defeat as he was stopped by his mother's hearty embrace.

"Yuuri, there you are! We were beginning to worry where you'd gotten to; all your friends arrived hours ago."

"It's true," his father continued, "I'm sure they're looking for you right now."

Yuuri was puzzled. Why would any of his rivals waste precious time and energy on someone who'd previously shouted in their faces? The skater was heavily embarrassed by that morning's reaction, and was reluctant to influence any more devastation if possible.

Yuuri forced a chuckle,
"It's fine, dad, I was er - I was at the gym, training and all, you know?"

The skater's mother looked rather puzzled. Tapping at his arms and chest and inspecting his neck and jaw, she shook her head as her son tried not to writhe in discomfort. There was no doubt she'd seen this before, perhaps many years ago, but decided not to directly pursue such a delicate subject - it would only push Yuuri in the opposite direction.

His father vaguely understood what was going on,
"Hey, Yuuri, wanna go get cheesesteaks after your big event? You always used to eat them as a kid, and..."

As the older male trailed on, his speed faded to the background as Yuuri stared down at his own unsightly middle.

"Yeah, I better not..." the younger thought allowed.

"Huh, but you loved them when you were young?"
Yuuri shook his head in an attempt to shake the idiocy out of himself, "Shoot - yeah - sorry, I'm super tired..."

"What I meant to say," the skater lied, "was why only go for cheesesteaks, when we should think bigger? When I win the competition, I'll take us all to Disneyland with the money I earn!"

Yuuri's parents cheered as they nodded in approval, not understanding enough of the dynamics of the skating world to question his sudden proposition, and not quite grasping the extent of his condition to rationalise against his aim to win the competition.

Yuuri glanced up at a clock overhead; the first routine had already begun.

"Shit, shit, shit..." muttered the anxious skater.

His mother raised an eyebrow, "Excuse me?"

"Sorry, I'm super late for the event, I've got to go super quickly now sorry byeeeee!!!!"

Yuuri's father wrapped a comforting arm around his wife, hugging her close, "Let's just hope he's okay..."

Yuuri was okay. Well, that was until he ran into the other skaters. They hadn't exactly forgotten the scene the Japanese boy had made that morning in the restaurant, and Yuuri could feel his head screaming as 10 suspicious eyes focused on his centre, watching as he trembled and tumbled through the door to the waiting room.

Fortunately, none had felt to aggrieved not to offer him a smile as their pupils caught his gaze. Viktor had spent much of the morning revealing parts of Yuuri's backstory, asking for sympathy as the others gradually understood where he was coming from. There were talks, tears (mostly Phichit's) and disgruntled moans when it was to be decided who would pay for the skater's discarded fruit platter, but eventually all had been forgiven. Yuuri, on the other hand, was still yet to initiate a declaration of peace.

Well, it was now or never anyway. Yuuri didn't particularly want to be perceived as an asshole whilst in the middle of the final anyway, it rather ruined the fun of the competitive atmosphere.

"I'm sorry for my behaviour this morning..." the skater said sheepishly, speaking to the small number of competitors gathered on the sofas, "what I did was wrong; I lashed out and never meant to hurt any of you, I'm sorry."

Phichit began to slowly clap, followed by a succession of praise and a round of applause from the rest of the skating group.

"It took a lot for you to admit that," smiled Viktor, taking his husband's hand as he slipped into the chair, "thank you for returning. Are you feeling okay? Have you eaten anything?"

The Japanese skater nodded, pulling a crumpled empty wrapper from his back pocket, "I bought myself some chocolate earlier."

"Hehe, well, it's not much, but it's better than nothing I suppose - I proud of you Yuuri."

Yuuri didn't have the heart to tell his partner that the wrapper belonged to an extra-potent bottle of laxatives he'd used prior to their reunion. Still, as long as Viktor was happy, that was all that mattered. Yuuri's health had been second in priority for a very long time now.
"I should let you know that I've got to go out there in a minute," said Viktor, gesturing towards the ice, "you'll be okay, right?"

Yuuri nodded, slipping his mottled blue fingers into his husband's slender tips, "I'll be fine, you go on, recapture your glory."

As the klaxon sounded and his name was called out on the stadium's blaring megaphone, Viktor exited the competitors' lounge as he stepped out onto the polished sea of white.

The Russian was never nervous when it came to performing his routines, on the contrary Viktor delighted in showcasing his talents and flirting with the idea of twirling weightless across the ice, like a beautiful swan in flight, motionless in face but ever so alive in his frame.

All began according to plan; Viktor glided around the rink, arms fully extended and legs reaching up into many an arabesque as the breath-taken crowd cheered in adoration. The Russian has always been an audience favourite - whether it was his dazzling blue eyes, charismatic smile or simply the way he chose to carry himself, whatever move the skater pulled off left the audience in awe-struck tatters.

Pulling of the jumps was easy for Viktor. He's been doing this for as long as he could possibly remember, and every twirl, curl, flip and jump came as naturally as being alive. After a myriad of many successive and elaborate quads, Viktor spun into his step sequence, treading elegantly to the banging tune of a classical violin, the audience pumped up and cheering non-stop as he continued to shine out on the ice.

Yuuri smiled as he watched the performance from the television sat in front of him. His husband was possibly the most beautiful man alive.

Images of Yuuri also began to slip into the Russian skater's mind. Viktor pictured his partner smiling, his now dull eyes once again lit up by a happiness that once was, his smile, although stretched and faded, cheering him on like no audience ever could.

Viktor felt a little guilty. He was out there in front of an enamoured crowd of fans, whilst his partner was likely festering in his own anxiety in the stadium's backroom, fighting (and likely losing) for a seat on the sofa as a no doubt sleepy JJ took an impromptu nap. He could feel his confidence begin to wobble as he pictured Yuuri in his present state of devastation, body flailing a tad as his confidence began to drain.

'Keep it together, for Yuuri's sake,' thought Viktor as he struggled to pull another quad, propping himself up with his fingers as he couldn't quite stake the proper landing.

'Shit - they're going to knock points off for that for sure-' 

In a way, Viktor cared very little about winning gold. He was a five-time champion of the Grand Prix Final, a gold-medal Olympian on multiple occasions, and had finally found somebody that he could share everything with.

However, that somebody was in grave danger of falling apart.

The Russian couldn't force the image of his sickened partner out from his mind - worry had taken its toll, and by now the best Viktor could manage was to attempt to stay upright as he pulled through a list of the most basic moves possible, striving for more points as he tries to prevent tripping completely.

The judges were in shock. Never before had they seen such a drastic contrast in ability in a single
skater, and witnessed their success diminish in such a short space of time.

By now, Viktor was all but ready to give up completely. He'd secured a decent number of points in the first half that may have allowed him to slip onto the podium, that is, if no other skater did exceedingly brilliantly, but he could feel his body aching with despair with each completed jump, and was ready to give up.

"What the hell are you doing?" Coach Yakov roared across the ice, "pick up the pace and finish the rest of your routine!"

His speech was interrupted as a tall, slender woman placed a delicate hand on his tense, frustrated shoulder.

"Yakov," said Lilia, "we've seen this both before. Let Viktor have some peace while it lasts; he'll have his ailing partner to attend to after this. There's always next year."

But Viktor knew there probably wasn't going to be a next year. By the time he'd recovered his losses he'd likely be reaching the grand old age of 29, mere days away from his 30th birthday. He was getting on quite a bit, and when reflecting on the consequences of his husband's conditions, could not predict whether he himself could make it another year either.

All this thinking had become a major distraction. Viktor, completely dazed by his own emotions, lost control of his balance, swinging out from a wobbled triple axel whilst witness all aspects of containment slip from his silken hands. Soon after, the Russian came crashing towards the floor.

Yuuri, eyes having been glued to the screen for the last three minutes or so, could no longer bear to watch. It was too painful, knowing that Viktor's visible distress was likely entirely his fault; the Japanese skater has been selfish, hadn't hidden his illness quite sufficiently enough - now his unfortunate partner was paying the price.

"Sorry, I've got to get out of here," muttered the skater as he pushed past the gaggle of competitors.

"Where are you going?" asked Chris, a solemn voice having replaced his typically camomile tone, "What about when he's finished? Won't he need you, Yuuri?"

Yuuri didn't want to think about it; he finally understood how it felt to watch somebody flail into self-destructive misery whilst unable to intervene and help the vulnerable out of their situation. The skater knew he couldn't possibly be of any formidable help when his husband came off the ice, as he was too useless, too cold, so he entrusted Chris with the tempestuous task of doing so.

"Sorry, Chris, I don't want to ruin everything. I'm going to sit out on the balcony so I don't cause anymore damage."

"But-"

"I know," the younger skater sighed, "I truly am a terrible person, and I'm sorry... but please, send Viktor up if he feels like it.""

Chris continued to protest, but eventually gave in. He recognised both parties were probably too frazzled for a charged emotional scene immediately after Viktor had just humiliated himself in front of thousands of live spectators, so left Yuuri be, warning him that he'd have to come back down after a while.

The Japanese skater tip-toed up the stairs to the rather out of place Juliet balcony hidden around the back of the stadium, positioned facing the west as Yuuri could watch the sun, although hidden behind multiple rain clouds at a time, glide across the sky. It was all so serene, Yuuri felt as though
he didn’t quite deserve the peace the scene had brought him. Sure, it was also a perfect time to reflect on the events that had passed earlier that day, but the skater didn’t want to think. He didn’t want to feel. In that moment, all Yuuri yearned for was to gaze into the clouds forever, never having to return to reality.

Of course, such an aspiration would have been impossible to achieve. The Japanese boy couldn’t simply forget about Viktor, not when his partner had come crashing down centre-stage in what might’ve been his last public display. Yuuri thought of the past, and of the present. His heart ached with physical and emotional exhaustion, and the skater was beginning to wish there’d never be a future - not one where he was hurting all his friends and family, anyway.

Suddenly, Yuuri heard a subtle crack and the shining perspex doors behind him gradually slid open. A pair of polished loafers slipped through, followed by two elongated legs in a crisp set of trousers, and a stiff, grey blazer shortly after.

‘Only one fool would get so dressed up for such an active and informal situation,’ Yuuri thought, smirking as the figure snuck onto the balcony.

“Hey Viktor.”

The Russian smiled; he’d gained a black eye and a bloodied lip from a couple of risky tumbles out there on the ice, but the moment he saw Yuuri all his worries simultaneously dissipated.

“Hello, Lapochka.” Viktor replied with a smile.

Yuuri slid a comfort hand against his partner’s face, caressing his wounds as he placed a tender grasp against the scrapes along his jawline.

“You’re hurt?”

Viktor shook his head, laughing a little,

“Not really, just a scratch. And you?”

Yuuri’s arm hurt like a bitch. The wounds across his wrists stung like icy fire from an intense session earlier that morning when the skater was festering in his own self-isolation, but now was hardly the time to complain. Viktor was hurt, and for once in his life, Yuuri recognised that another was perhaps suffering slightly more than him.

“I’m okay,” chuckled Yuuri, “well, for an anorexic dumbass, anyway.”

The elder skater began to cry, but smiled through his tears as he reciprocated, placing a comforting palm against the younger’s withered cheek.

“You’re not a dumbass, Yuuri. You’re beautiful.”

“Sure?” He giggled, grappling at a chunk of hair before it finally ripped from his scalp, “Haha, tada!”

Viktor laughed too, unsure of how to respond in the presence of such unprovoked self destruction. After a while, it all died down, with the skaters left to slowly sniffle as the hilarity of their situation faded into nonexistence.

“Shit....” said Yuuri under his breath, “I just ripped out a chunk of my hair...”

“Ahaha.... fuck...” squeaked his partner.
Both skaters, emotionally unstable, were beginning to succumb to vague insanity after months of torrid suffering were finally taking their toll.

“Viktor, are we going to make it out of this alive?”

Viktor smiled through his tears,
“Nobody makes it out alive - life’s just about trying to outrun your fate, I guess. Some people are probably better at it than others.”

Yuuri nodded,
“I love you, you know that?”

“Yuuri, my love, I’ve always known. And that’s why I’m going to ensure you’ll survive. You’re too precious to let slip away, I promise.”

Mid-hug, a klaxon sounded and the Japanese boy’s name boomed out of the loudspeakers.

“Looks like you’ve got to go.”

Yuuri gulped,
“I can’t.”

“Why not?”

“Because...” he sighed, “...well, because of what’s just happened to you. How am I meant to strut out there, barely half-alive, supposedly win this thing and capture whatever so-called glory there is to be found whilst you’re left here, defeated and alone, fallen at your last performance? It’s not fair, why should I do that to you when you’ve always been so wonderful to me?”

“Go,” his husband whispered, pride in his glistening azure eyes, “I’m an old skater, I’ve my fun. People will remember me for my victories, for my challenges - for my youth. Who would want to focus their energy a sad, clumsy, emotionally drained old has-been like me? Trust me, Yuuri, people will only remember you for the great things you have done. But they won’t remember you for the things that you haven’t. Now go, make history, even if, like me, it’s for the last time.”

The couple shared a passionate kiss, the backdrop lit up by the pleasant peach of the afternoon sky as fireworks went off inside their hearts.

“Will you be there with me?”

Viktor smiled,
“Forever and always.”

Yuuri slung his kit over his shoulder and rushed into the changing room. His costume was now baggier than ever before, flapping with each movement like a recklessly unruly duvet, impeding many of his more technical moves altogether.

‘This is bullshit,’ thought the skater, ‘I need to be faster, I need to be freer on the ice...’

With the leotard attached to his body, Yuuri grabbed a load of safety pins from writing the dark depths of his kit bag and fastened them around his shrunken frame. There weren’t nearly enough there to make it even remotely form-fitting, but at least it was now possible to vaguely make out the shape of his body, and that was the best he could do.

The skater glanced across his chest at the billowing sleeves either side. Now a long time ago, those
sleeves were once completely filled and almost bursting from the flab they’d been commanded to contain, but not anymore. Having been transformed into empty caverns in which only shrivelled bones now inhabited, these hollow fabric tubes had become rather ruinous, posing a threat to both the skater’s speed and technical performance.

Yuuri knew they had to go; it was the only way he’d ever have a shot at climbing to the podium. Shutting his eyes, and with a mighty inner strength, his arms bent sharply, splitting the fabric open as a cacophonous sound shot across the room.

*RIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIP*

“Well, fuck.”

That sound hadn’t been the tearing of the fabric.

That sound was Yuuri’s arm.

The skater screeched in pain as all his scars simultaneously split open, blood gushing out as he scampered for tissue in the nearby bathroom.

“Fuck, fuck, fuck-” Yuuri muttered to himself as he swilled his arms in the sink, desperate to fix the situation as his name was repeatedly blared out by the stadium’s obnoxious speakers.

‘It’s no good,’ Yuuri thought, ‘I’ll just have to present as I am. As the bloodied, battered bastard that I am.’

Splattered in red, with skeleton arms and legs on display as his costume more than hung from his walking corpse, the skater strode onto the ice, Viktor positioned by the fence to flash his husband a reassuring smile.

But Viktor did not smile. Nobody smiled. The entire room fell quiet as Yuuri walked to the centre of the rink, the expected rounds of cheering having been replaced by stunned silence. The skater accepted this was how it was going to be. They expected a shock, and as long as it was down to him, a shock they would undoubtedly receive.

{A.N. Remember, Yuuri’s free skate is to the instrumental of ‘The Light Behind Your Eyes’ by MCR, a very emotional song! Put it on now if you want to amplify the cry!}

Drip, drip, drip. The skater could hear the subtle splashing of his own blood droplets splattering on the ice, staining it a crimson red. What an embarrassment! Yuuri would have to start skating soon, should the whole rink flood with his own pathetic fluids. The lights dimmed, music began to play, and he breathed a steady sigh of breathless relief.

It was all on him.

Shit, it was all. on. him.

Heart pounding through its own demise, Yuuri slipped out of his typical anxiety and into the trance of the routine. Sliding across the ice, his muscles on fire and stomach swirling as he went, the skater was no longer afraid. He felt this overwhelming peace engulf his flailing body, elegance streaming through his veins as adrenaline coursed along the nerves across his spine.

Everything suddenly felt so smooth. Double flips, triple axels, even a quadruple salchow - nothing appeared restricted or out of the skater’s painful reach.

The music was intense, the drums and guitar hamming up the heat whilst Yuuri’s vision blurred
and doubled, tripling as his motions increased in intensity. He was oh, so tired, but oh, so ready to complete what he came for. Yuuri knew very well that he may not make it out alive, so was determined to give the performance of his life.

Crazed smile on his face, he slinked up towards the judges aligned by the podium and placed his hands onto the palm of the female in front. She recoiled as his leathery skin met her own cotton complexion, blood running across the table as his arms continued to weep, before Yuuri retracted and slid into a quadruple toe flip - well, the judge couldn’t complain, he pulled off the quad impeccably. Flashing a wink and a smile back in their direction, the judges slowly clapped in an uncomfortably combination of fear and awe as they encountered a side of the skater previously unseen by the profession.

Despite his renowned lengthy stamina, the skater’s mouth was swirling with traces of what little blood that still remained inside of him and his vision was beginning to fade altogether. Skating across what now resembled strawberry swirl ice cream, Yuuri’s trembling feet dazzled in the step sequence as he tapped and trod across the ice like a prime ballerina. Phichit, who had just finished getting changed, walked out to sit with Viktor by the bleachers, but met a far cruelly sight.

“What’s going on?” He asked, shocked as he tugged on Viktor’s sleeve.

Viktor quivered, shaking his head whilst biting his lip for some amount of comfort, “I don’t know, but somehow, I knew that this would happen all along. It isn’t safe for him out there, and everybody knows it. They’re going to hate us - he’s going to hate us. That is, if he makes it out alive.”

“At least he looks vaguely happy?”

“No, I think he’s going mad.”

Phichit said nothing, muttering in vague agreement as he clasped his hands together and prayed for guarantee of his best friend’s safety. The Thai skater didn’t know exactly what he should be praying to, but his mind was so caught up in the mess of it all that he was desperate for Yuuri’s sanctuary, which in turn would hopefully return his sanity.

Yuuri, on the other hand, was having a whale of the time. Now half-blind and incredibly dehydrated, the skater laughed uncontrollably as he repeatedly completed a line up of dastardly complex quadruple salchows, completing them all perfectly as his body grappled for survival. Nobody knew what was pushing him on, and doubted that they wanted to. Torn between the sickness of dying and the calm of release, Yuuri screamed inside as his lungs tore themselves apart, agonised with every skip, leap and jump into the biting winter air as his bones creaked with each breaking impact.

The Japanese boy narrowed his eyes, steadying his dizzying head for a few mere seconds as he attempted to concentrate on the overhead scoreboard. With Viktor stuck in third place despite his miraculous terrible free skate, Yuuri lagged just behind his other Russian rink mate’s impeccable score as he lay trapped in second. There was only one way for him to top it, and man, would it hurt.

Yuuri took a deep breathe, inhaling sharply as he felt a thousand crystal knives plunged into his chest. With a rumble of his muscle, he shot up into the sky, hands grappling with his bony, fatless thighs as his body began to rotate backwards.

Eyebrows raised in the direction of the camera, Yuuri bit his lip as he flung himself backwards. Whilst spinning in mid air, he could feel the soaring wind tickle his neck and back, for a moment soothing his aching joints before it was time for him to finish was he started. Just before he hit the
ground, Yuuri managed to capture a second rotation. He hit the ice with knees bend and head tucked downwards for protection, but without any visible wobbles or falls the skater had finally completed the move. His secret weapon had been massively unleashed.

“Was that... was that a double backflip...”

Viktor turned to the younger skater beside him,
“I suppose so, but I’ve never seen one in the flesh.... or at all, for that matter.”

The stunned silence of the crowd finally erupted into roaring cheers as the judges scrambled for the rulebook. Backflips had long since been banned for the risk they posed to the safety of the athletes, and Yuuri’s risk could have seen him disqualified altogether.

“Ugh, Yuuri, what if they exclude you?” Viktor muttered to himself, fingers pressed to the centre of his forehead as he worried for Yuuri’s success.

“Surely they’ve got to allow it! That was incredible!”

Viktor shrugged his shoulders,
“I guess we’ll just have to wait and see.”

His energy depleted, Yuuri swirled into the final stages of his routine, twirling on the spot for good measure before finally steadying himself to a sudden halt in the centre of the ice. His heartbeat was indiscernible as the muscle pumped at an unimaginable rate, lungs feels as though they may collapse as his organs struggled for air. The stadium lights shone down on his emaciated frame, their warm glow scorching his exposed, pallid skin as the crust of his scars flakes off onto the ground. They had stopped bleeding, but the wounds remained open and weeping inside.

Marvelling at the unimaginable amount of applause received, Yuuri sank to his knees, sitting on the ice as he screamed and wept in response. Having created a small puddle of blood and pus around his huddled, shivering body, the skater soon clambered to his feet. Thanking the judges, he trudged off the ice and collapsed into the kids and cry, laying in Viktor’s arms as he was hastily covered in a jacket, both smiling but utterly dead inside. After a distinct absence of camera flashes the couple then realised nobody actually wanted to photograph Yuuri; by now he appeared far too sickly for even the media to exploit.

“Did I do good?” Yuuri mumbled, slipping in and out of consciousness as Viktor hastened to wrap a blanket round his husband’s shoulders.

“You did wonderfully, but please, you need to rest. We’re all deathly worried about you, it’s time for you to slow down and relax.”

“What about the awards ceremony?”

“They haven’t talked up the official results from the two skates yet, but I heard it’s close. I’m sure they’ll bring us all out any minute now.”

“That’s good,” said Yuuri, “because right now, I can’t see anything at all.”

Viktor was taken aback, heartbeat beginning to accelerate as the meaning of such a declaration dawned upon his aching mind.

“...what do you mean?”
Yuuri shrugged, clinging to the blanket,  
“I don’t know; everything’s gone sort of, well, dark–“

The Russian was about to reply, when the notice for the awards ceremony blared out from the overhead speakers.

“Are we gonna go now?” Asked Yuuri.

“Better wait till they call out our names; I’m not sure if they’ll even let you in after that stunt you pulled at the end of your free skate...”

The pair turned to face the exit as Phichit came rushing down the hall.

“The judges have allowed it!”

“Huh?” said Yuuri, trying to decipher where the voice was coming from. Viktor grew increasingly anxious by the minute, wishing the event would finish so he could get his partner to a hospital.

“The judges have allowed your double backflip!”

“How come?” asked Viktor.

Phichit, out of breath, said between pants:
“Well, they banned the backflip, that’s for sure. But nobody’s ever completely a double before; I’m not sure whether they knew it existed. They’ve allowed it mainly out of shock, and well, let’s face it - pity - but the important thing is you’re allowed back inside.”

As the awards were being prepared, the three skaters walked back over to the ice, with Yuuri guided by Viktor’s hand against his back. He couldn’t see a thing and was growing weary of the entire endeavour, wishing for nothing more than a medal and some decent sleep.

The announcer revealed the results as a stadium of competitive skaters and their devoted supporters cheered for their achievements.

“In sixth place....” boomed the speakers, “Jean-Jacques LeRoy...”

JJ nodded; after his struggle with anxiety he was thankful to simply be there at all.

“....in fifth place... Christophe Giacometti...”

Chris winked and blew a puckered kiss into a gaggle of cheerleaders, who giggled and swooned in delighted response.

“...in fourth place.... Phichit Chulanont...”

Phichit hugged his best friend, grateful he was still alive to be there.

“...in third place.... Viktor Nikiforov...”

Viktor smiled and shrugged.

“You win some, you lose some,” he said aside to his husband, “I’m just glad we were able to take this journey together.”

“...in second place... Yuri Plisetsky...”
Phichit gasped, 
“That means...”

“...in first place, winning the Grand Prix Final and the glory of a gold metal...” the announcer drew to a close, “Yuuri Katsuki, from Japan!”

Yuuri couldn’t believe.

He’d won.

He’d actually won!

Giddy with ecstasy, Yuuri felt the room spinning as his vision briefly returned, flashing intermittently as it flickered back and forth to dullest black.

“Yuuri, you did it!” exclaimed Viktor, hugging his partner as he embraced him with a kiss.

Yurio smiled,
“Congratulations, Katsudon. You deserve it.”

The Japanese skater, although still basically unable to visually detect what was happening around him, instinctively smiled back, hugging the other two skaters as they stood gloriously on the podium.

“See, Yuuri,” said Viktor, “this is what living is about! Isn’t it beautiful?”

But the champion couldn’t concentrate. Consciousness came in waves, and his insides writhed as though they were possessed by the curse of a lethargic demon, unable to function as his head clattered and his lungs clamoured for air. He felt his chest tighten, snap and shake before he fell out for the count.

“Haha, this is pretty good, right?” said Yurio, parting the shoulder of his competitors.

Viktor nodded, beaming with pride for his husband, but Yuuri had suddenly turned mysteriously silent. The confetti falling from the ceiling and the cheers surrounding them suddenly felt like a thunderstorm, with panicked hail shooting down from above and roaring that failed to cease even when the victors themselves had stopped celebrating.

“Yuuri?” Viktor panicked, shaking his partner’s shoulder with vigour, “Yuuri, are you okay? Don’t sleep now - look where we are!”

No response.

Viktor nodded to Yurio and spoke through gritted teeth,
“He’s not responding, what the fuck do we do?”

The younger skater’s skeleton trembled in horror; he’d seen it all before, an athlete in their prime, having basked in the glory of their well-deserved success, only to fall at the podium, rendered defenceless against the repercussions of their own fateful doing.

“What do you mean he’s not responding?”

Viktor held up Yuuri’s arm,
“Look, shit, he’s gone all floppy!”

Viktor accidentally stumped, and Yuuri’s limp, lifeless body shot toward the ground.
“Fuck!”

Spectators gasped in astonishment and grief. Yuuri’s parents ran from the bleachers to the rink’s entrance, but were blocked by officials as medical staff swarmed to the ice.

“What do we do, what do we do?” cried Viktor.

“I don’t fucking know!” wept Yurio, “Viktor, this can’t happen to me, not again! I’ve seen it all before and I’m not ready for another round, it’s too painful, Viktor please don’t say this is it-”

A medic tapped the Russian on his shoulder.

“Don’t you fucking touch him!” roared Viktor, shielding his husband from the supposed attackers as his younger counterpart learnt against the Japanese boy’s nose.

“Viktor, he’s not breathing..”

“What?”

“I said....” he wept, “...I said I can’t find any signs of breathing.”

Shaken to his core, Viktor quivered as he clambered over his husband’s cold, clammy body, tossing the blanket aside and listening into Yuuri’s chest as Yurio swatted the rink workers away from their precious treasure.

“Yurio, let them in.”

The Russian sighed, “What? I thought you wanted no one near him?”

“I said let them in, now!” the older skater growled.

“No, I don’t see why-”

“His heart’s not beating.”

A look of terror swept over the younger skater’s already paralysed expression, “...wha...what..?”

Viktor rose from Yuuri’s chest, crying out to the paramedics as floods of tears streamed down his face.

“HIS. HEART’S. NOT. BEATING.”
With little hope for survival, Yuuri was bundled in an ambulance as quick as possible, with Viktor sat to one side and his parents to another.

The paramedics had removed the skater's clothes for easy access purposes, having hung the gold medal to the side as they desperately tried to restart his damaged heart. Medical workers lay to the side of Yuuri's torso, unable to work above his body in fear that they may break his shrunken bones, performing CPR and constantly checking his essential vitals as the entourage desperately sought for any signs of life.

Yuuri was cold, so cold. Hiroko reached out to put a shaking hand against his cheek, but retracted it almost immediately. Her son didn't move, didn't breathe, didn't do anything. She feared that his lifeless body may not do anything ever again.

"It's okay," said Viktor, with complete disbelief held in his tone, "I'm sure he'll wake up; Yuuri's a real fighter when it comes to stuff like this."

The mother nodded, suspicious of his words, and continued to half-heartedly dry her tears as Yuuri's father let her rest against his drooping shoulder. Both were imaginably distraught that this had happened to their son, their only son, but neither were particularly surprised.

"I guess we should be lucky he made it this far..." said his father, shuffling out of the way as more paramedics descended upon the scene from the driver's cabin.

Yuuri's mother nodded,
"Yes, but I wish it were to never happen at all. Why does he have to be like this? All his teenage years we spent fussing over his health, his medication - hell, I even had to stop him from attempting suicide myself. I wish he could be happy, if not for us than for himself..."

Viktor's Japanese wasn't wonderfully polished, but he figured he could vaguely understand the gist of the parent's conversation. With tears welling up inside their tired eyes, the three figures held hands and prayed to some unknown deity for their loved one's salvation, hoping that one day he'd finally open his eyes.

But Yuuri wasn't totally asleep. He awoke with a shudder, as though wriggling out of a former skin, and was thrust into an endless patch of alabaster white. The skater rationalised that he was merely asleep, as Viktor nor his parents were nowhere to be found - that is, until Makkachin came bounding up to him. Yuuri, now seemingly free of any harmful ailments, bounded over to the dog, but it vanished into thin air. This was enough to send Yuuri into a panic, as now everything had become completely unknown, and he sank towards what was apparently the ground - although the skater didn't know for sure, as everything was simply white.

After a while, Yuuri figured he was probably very dead. He couldn't remember the ending of the Grand Prix Final, and this didn't particularly look like an ordinary hospital, so the rational conclusion was that he had either died on the ice or been ravaged by an insulted former competitor,
neither of which were spectacularly appealing concepts to grapple with.

However, everlasting loneliness in what seemed like a pretty uneventful afterlife seemed comparably better than the supposed 'life' the skater had wasted down on Earth.

'Hmm.. I suppose it's not so bad,' thought Yuuri as he wandered in circles, 'maybe I should have killed myself a long time ago.'

The Japanese boy wasn't exactly sure as to where he was. His situation didn't appear particularly hellish, but it certainly wasn't heavenly. Where were the crowds of angels, refilled bowls of zero-calorie cheesecake and pasta salad that didn't taste like feet - where was Makkachin?

'Oof, maybe I am in hell.'

If this was hell, it was certainly very dull. Satan wasn't even there to purge his sins, and there was a distinct lack of flaming pitchforks. Where were the sacrificial virgins, eh? Yuuri couldn't locate anything even remotely devilish in sight. It was almost disappointing; as much as the skater would rather not have had a red hot poker thrust into his corneas, it seemed substantially more interesting than the current events of this mysterious location.

Yuuri eventually supposed that he had been placed in some extremely bland interpretation of purgatory. He understood that during life he hadn't exactly been a saint, but he hadn't done anything drastically outlandish, so guess that he wasn't good enough for the fiery depths of hell, either.

'I guess I did steal my sister's Super Nintendo when we were kids...' he rationalised,
"still, it is a bit harsh, isn't it?" he said, looking upward at the supposed consciousness that surrounded him, not expecting a conclusive reply.

Meanwhile, back in the ambulance, Yuuri's mother shrieked in hysterics as the paramedics still failed to bring life to her deceased child. They reassured her that they were doing everything they could to try and awaken him, but that it was a dire situation - an undernourished brain, coupled with a starved and damaged heart, plus atrocious blood work, wasn't exactly the perfect combination for success, or even vague recovery to a semi-vegetative state. The batteries to the defibrillator were drastically low, and the ambulance caught in a mass of traffic; it looked as though there would soon be no hope as the machine finally ran dead, with little else available to bring Yuuri back to life.

"How far are we from the nearest hospital?" Viktor asked the paramedic, heart pounding as he realised that time was running out.

"About two blocks away - I'm sorry sir, we're doing all we can."

Viktor bit his lip. Sure, when contained in the ambulance they were able to constantly measure Yuuri's heart rate, temperature and oxygen levels, but if he were to stay permanently dead then it hardly seemed to matter at all.

"How likely is his chance of survival if we get him to a hospital?"

The paramedic shrugged, sighing,
"Incredibly slim, even with medical intervention.."

"But better than, say, being trapped in here..?"

"Well... obviously, but I'm sorry Mr. Nikiforov, there nothing we can do to shift the traffic except ham up the sirens, and even then it's highly in likely these unsympathetic idiots will actually make
way for an ambulance..."

Debating what to do next, Viktor leant over to Yuuri's parents, whispering in their ears as they nodded solemnly. They didn't particularly appreciate this proposed conclusion, but it was substantially better than losing their son forever.

Swiping away at the myriad of tubes and wires attached to his frozen husband, Viktor rolled up his sleeves and hoisted Yuuri up out of the stretcher, carrying him in his arms as he burst out of the ambulance and pelted down the crowded street.

"What the fu-" called out the paramedic, "-come back, you idio-"

Mrs Katsuki placed a quivering hand upon her shoulder, then gesturing to herself and her husband, "It's okay, it's what we would have wanted. Viktor is going to get help."

As the ambulance continued to make progress en route to the hospital, Viktor ran for his (and his husband's) life, pushing past strangers with a reckless shove as he bolted through the city streets, searching for their sanctuary. It was late after, the sun beginning to set as heavy rains sloshed against the ground. Viktor's chest heaved as blood foamed up inside his mouth, body aching grievously as though his rib cage might tore apart. Finally, he caught a glimpse of the hospital from the end of the street, speeding down the pavement, powering through crowds of groaning, inconvenience commuters, annoyed that a dying man had interrupted their walk across the street to the bus home.

Viktor cleared the front desk as they clattered into A&E, vomiting upon arrival as the Russian tried not to hyperventilate, then rolling his silent partner onto the countertop and demanding he be seen immediately.

"His heart's not beating!" Viktor screamed at the receptionist as she scrambled for a team of doctors and nurses before Yuuri was rolled out into intensive care.

His husband tried not to vomit once more as he witness frustrated doctor's pound his loved's chest into an uncomfortable hospital bed, shivering as the cracking of multiple ribs at a time echoed through the corridor and into his ears. The heart monitor continuously flatlining, Viktor and the deceased's parents (who, half an hour later, had finally managed to push through the ridiculous level of traffic) had no choice other than to loiter on the sidelines as they prayed for a miracle. Their eyes twitching as the threesome witnessed the sparks produced by the defibrillator on its highest setting, Yuuri's mother buried her head in her husband's chest as Viktor squeezed her hand for support, their own hearts beating faster with every unsuccessful second that passed.

Suddenly, a subtle beep emanating from the heart monitor could be heard echoing across the hallway. The team of medical attendants briefly paused, assessing the condition on the screen, before continuing their ritual with increased intensity, unwilling to give up on their patient. It may have been one tiny beat, but it was finally, finally a sign that all life might not have faded from the skater after all.

Yuuri, on the other hand, was seemingly trapped in what appeared to be an off-brand version of purgatory. He didn't particularly mind that it was rather uneventful in nature; the Japanese boy enjoyed the peace alone, and if he were to spend all eternity festering in blank nothingness, so be it.

However, as time progressed, something odd started to happen. Yuuri, although still standing, felt what was supposedly the floor liqudise underneath his feet as a subtle darkness began to creep above his head. His surroundings began to tear apart like tiny shreds of paper caught up in the fabric of space and time, and eventually everything had faded to black.
'Welp, guess I'm in hell after all,' thought the skater as he grappled with the concept.

After a few successive beats, his relatives and the medical staff at the hospital were sure they were bringing him back. Sure, his heart rate was drastically low, probably too extreme for a person that technically should be living, but it was better than having not remained at all. The team worked tirelessly for an hour or so, continually compressing the skater's now pretty devastated chest, until all of a sudden, his body seemed to flick on like a light switch and he sat up almost instantaneously in the ruffled confines of the hospital bed.

"Yuuri!" cried Viktor, stepping forward before he was cautioned by a member of the paramedics. The Russian nodded; his husband was still greatly at risk from harm.

The Japanese skater wasn't in hell, heaven or purgatory anymore. He felt as though he was descending down an invisible staircase, or perhaps a pole (although that was likely from spending too much time with Chris), eyes throttled by the darkness as he opened up his body to the forces of the universe.

Yuuri’s parents winced, albeit joyfully, as their son took his first gasping, extremely pained breath in about two hours, his rib cage rendered essentially useless as he screamed and contorted in agony, broken bones piercing into his creaking lungs.

The skater, rather disappointedly, acknowledged that he had probably returned to the physical room. He couldn't open his eyes and felt rather as though he had been imprisoned in his frame (not for the first time, but this instance was no longer psychological), but reluctantly came to the conclusion that he probably wasn't dead anymore.

"His eyes!" Cried Viktor, pointing to his husband's vacant expression, "Why hasn't he opened his eyes!?"

The medical staff didn’t answer. Instead, eyes locked onto the heart monitor, the head of the team of doctors grabbed an injection and thrust it into Yuuri’s wrinkled flesh, with Viktor stammering in response.

“What was that for?”

Yuuri then had a seizure.

“What the everloving FUCK was that for?”

The skater’s father had to muster the true extent of his strength whilst holding back the Russian as he attempted to dash forward and interrupt the team of doctor’s eventually collapsing to the floor in defeat as he witnessed the nurses, faces greatly troubled, whisk his husband away to intensive care.

“Doctor, is he going to be alright?”

The woman, no older than 30, turned back to the distraught skater and and solemnly shrugged, “I’m terribly sorry, but we just can't predict how Mr. Katsuki is going to come out of this. As you saw, I’ve just placed him in a medically-induced coma for the safety and recovery of his body, which should vaguely aid in trying to stabilise his condition - but you must understand, Mr. Nikiforov, that his condition is incredibly dire, in fact it’s probably the worst I’ve ever seen in my career as a doctor. He’ll remain critical for quite some time, and if he fully wakes up - which, to be honest, we can’t predict for sure if he will without suffering incomprehensible brain damage as a result of oxygen starvation - he’ll need constant care for quite some time. Truthfully, he will be lucky if he wakes up with all of his cognitive function remaining.
Viktor stepped back, thanking the doctor as he returned to explain to the skater’s parents. Without him even finishing the first sentence, the look on their faces showed that they completely understood. The three relatives wept as they were ushered towards Yuuri’s destination, unsure of just how long he’d have, and even if he did have long, whether he’d be mentally present for any of it.

There was nothing they could do but wait.
i am very very tired

After what had seemed like years, Yuuri finally awoke.

Lifting his droopy eyelids and sliding upwards in the uncomfortable metal bed he'd been automatically placed in, the skater stretched as he enjoyed the pleasure of listening to his cracking joints. Yuuri, however, was not particularly appreciate of the immediate searing pain that ensued from the bottom of his chest, and, shifting his hospital gown to inspect the site concerned, was alarmed to find it littered with sutures. Yuuri screamed.

Instantly Viktor came running in, expression panicked as he dashed over to his wailing husband.

"Yuuri!" He said, frightened but with the largest and most miraculous smile across his voice - he was finally awake; "Yuuri what's wrong?!"

The Japanese boy stammered as he timidly removed his shirt, shaking as he pointed to the myriad of stitches plastered across his chest,
"What the fuck are these??"

Viktor chuckled, "Hehe, keep your voice down, the nurses will hear you-" he then adopted a serious tone, "Yuuri, you collapsed at the competition. Your heart stopped, and well..."

Viktor looked as though he were about to vomit as flashbacks to the trauma replayed in his head.
"...they had to perform CPR. For a really long time, actually. You were clinically dead for at least a couple of hours."

The younger skater bit his lip; he hadn't exactly set a model example for the younger skating fans, had he? He supposed that a lifestyle of starving, purging and frequently overdosing on a variety of potent pharmaceuticals probably wouldn't land him a spot on the shortlist for that year's most inspirational athlete; Yuuri could hope he might achieve some pity points for actually dying, but aside from that he predicted little to no forthcoming gratitude.

Yuuri was also going to mention that it was likely he'd experienced some twisted form of afterlife whilst technically departed from the physical realm, but soon realised his husband had almost certainly been or through enough trauma to keep him mentally scarred for the next five years or so, and eventually decided it would be most beneficial to keep his feelings to himself. After all, what if the realm he'd experienced had actually been heaven? If so, it wasn't very good.

"I'm sorry if I scared you..." said Yuuri in a low tone, "to be honest, I can't really remember what happen beforehand. All I can recall is falling from a large height and crashing to the ice - wait, I didn't fuck up my free skate, did I?"

Viktor's eyes lit up,
"Oh, I forgot to give you this!"

The Russian chuckled as he placed a beaming gold medal in the lap of his husband, with the name 'Y. Katsuki' engraved into the front.

"You made this... for me?"

"Nope," Viktor smiled, "the officials at the Grand Prix Final did."
Yuuri gasped as he cupped the winner's medal in his palms, speechless as he gazed in awe at the way the light danced across its curve. Suddenly, everything came flooding back - the bleeding, the double backflip, the audacity of misbehaving in front of some of the most respected skating judges in the world. The Japanese boy cringed just thinking about it.

"You did it, lapochka," Viktor whispered comfortingly, droplets forming in the corner of his eyes with pride as he stared with reverence deep in his husband's beautiful brown eyes, "you won. I knew you could do it; the whole world was rooting for you."

Yuuri smiled, before a shiver of regret shook him down, "So, presumably a lot of people saw what happened to me that day?"

"Oh yes, thousands, if not even a couple of million, were watching your performance! Isn't it amazing that you got to dazzle so many avid skating fans?"

"I suppose..." said Yuuri, "although presumably, those millions of viewers also then witnessed my pathetic downfall...?"

"Well, yes, but..."

"Viktor-"

"Yes?" replied his partner, gripping his hand.

"I think I'm gonna vomit-"

And he did. Profusely.

"Oh, Yuuri," the Russian sighed, rubbing his ailing husband's back, "here, take this handkerchief of mine..."

As Yuuri began to roll from the bed, he pulled a bright red cable for support and a sudden alarm sounded. Soon enough a nurse in a purple uniform and a sparkling pearl necklace came bounding in, flustered as she propped the skater bright upright and rubbed his aching head.

"Mr. Katsuki, you're finally awake!"

Yuuri, still rather dazed, gave her a vague smile as he clenched his teeth, shaking with humiliation as he leant into his husband's tense arm muscles.

"Oh no," cried the nurse, "Yuuri, look, you've dislodged your feeding tube!"

The skater's attention was immediately diverted to small tube swinging from a single nostril; Yuuri recognised this tubule, and needless to say, he wasn't happy. Sure, he stopped vomiting, but the infuriated yelling that ensued was equally unpleasant.

"Are you fucking kidding me? A nasogastric tube?"

Viktor nodded solemnly,
"Yuuri, you're extremely ill; what did you expect?"

Defeated, the Japanese boy grunted as he stared at the brightly-painted wall opposite, trying his best to ignore the nurse at his side. Yuuri had stayed at Nagoya hospital following injury various competitions in previous years for a small number of problems, though none as serious as his most recent, and it didn't look at all like the room he was currently confined in. In fact, Yuuri was
sceptical as to whether or not this was a hospital at all. The bed he lay in was made of wood, not back-breaking metal, there was a bookshelf and television to his left, and a pre-packed suitcase bursting to be opened to his right. Furthermore, there were bars on the windows and the building lacked the rather altruistic atmosphere of a typical general hospital; this environment was all too familiar to the young twisted mind.

"Why am I here?" Yuuri grunted, scowling at the female nurse.

"You're here because you're ill and these people are going to make you better," his husband replied reassuringly.

The younger partner shook his head, "Where am I? Where are my parents? How long have you been keeping me prisoner here?"

The nurse sat on the bed, readjusting his canular with a humble smile before wiping the leftover vomit from his check, "You're back in Kyushu, Mr. Katsuki. This is a mental health unit for young adults, and this is your room. Your parents signed the papers for your section as they thought it was for the best, but unfortunately left yesterday after staying with you for a week as sadly they had to return to the hot springs, although your sister dropped off a care package a couple of days ago. The feeding tube we've inserted through your nostrils is for delivering vital nutrients into your bloodstream after they'd been so devastatingly depleted, and whilst you're still dangerously underweight, it looks as though your body's beginning to make a full recovery."

Appalled, Yuuri flared as Viktor and the nurse as he shrunk into the bedcovers. This was it - backed up against a metaphorical wall with nowhere to run or cower from the authorities, the skater would reluctantly have to endure the deplorable refeeding process he was unfortunately all too familiar with. It appeared he had no say in the matter at all; a section prevented him from discharging himself as he was now under the care of the state, although currently Yuuri wished that the government would simply let him perish.

"What's your name?"

"Haruka, I'm one of the nurses here."

Yuuri exhaled slowly, following with short, shallow breaths, "Haruka, can you take this feeding tube out? Like... right now?"

Viktor nodded his head encouragingly, indicating that perhaps they should take the skater's thoughts into account. Haruka then sighed, handing him a wad of stapled sheets as she waited patiently for him to skim through the details.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Katsuki, but that tube has been keeping you alive thus far, and if you choose to refuse food then I'm afraid we'll have to leave it in; otherwise it's 3000 calories a day, most of which is described in the meal plan I gave you."

Yuuri felt himself go giddy with terror, fearfully faint as shock and anguish raided his entire body. He hadn't eaten that much in a very long time.

"I don't want to -" the skater moaned, his nausea augmented, "- you can't make me!"

Eyes skimming through the list of various high-fat foods and condiments, Yuuri writhed in disgust as he envisioned himself packing on the pounds of repulsive flesh that had never belonged there in the first place.
"White bread... chocolate... high-fat, full cream margarine? Are you kidding me?"

"It’s not that bad Yuuri," Viktor reassured him, "we often have to eat well over 5000 when training for the major skating events-"

"-Maybe you have, yes," Yuuri grimaced, "but a fat lout like me can't afford to let himself succumb to such gluttony!"

Haruka chimed in,
"Well, you'd start with 500, then build up to the final amount; hopefully you'd have enough time to adjust to the change."

The Japanese boy gulped, shoulders hunched as he sank back down defeatedly underneath the end covers. Sure, he may have been a 26 year old fully grown adult with a freshly-won gold medal under his belt, but all Yuuri wished for was to be a child again - where ignorance was bliss and he wasn't forced to conform to the standards set by any organisation.

"I'm not doing it." A disgruntled, muffled voice grunted from underneath the duvet.

"Yuuri...." said Viktor, a hand placed on the concealed lump, "come on, you need to tell the nice nurse what you want to do - we want to help you, not harm you."

Yuuri rose from within his cushiony abode before pointing to the tubes resting in his nose, "Well, what will happen if I keep this tube in? How long would I have to keep it in for?"

Haruka hunched her shoulders and sighed, preparing for a fiery backlash from the undernourished skater, "Well, since the ng tube is currently delivering about 3000 calories a day anyway-"

"Three..... 3000 calories...?" Yuuri winced.

"Aha, well, yes... Mr Katsuki," the nurse began, "you see, the damage you've done to your body has been catastrophic... I don't know if you've read the doctor's report, but in my honest opinion, you're going to need a whole lot more than what you're currently receiving to even make a gain of a pound a week."

“But I don’t want to gain anything a week!”

And with that the skater wrapped the midsection of the gn tube around his bony hands, drastically increasing the tension by pulling on it tightly, eventually snapping the whole thing into pieces as beige-coloured formula began to spill out onto the bedcovers.

“I’m - I’m sorry...” he shook, “...I can’t do this... I can’t - I won’t - I won’t let myself become obese again...”

“Yuuri, if you don’t get better, you’re going to die.” Haruka said bluntly as she cleaned up the mess, scrawling down in her notebook the events that had just happened, “In fact, you actually did-”

“-And it wasn’t that bad!” Chuckled the skater nervously, exclaiming as he threw his arms above his head, “I’d happily do it again if it meant not having to be forced through all this bullshit!”

Yuuri turned his head and suddenly could see his husband from the end of the mistress attempting to stifle his tears. Painfully, the skater then began to realise just how selfish he was being. He’d been married for less than a month, and already was threatening to leave altogether.
'Shit,' he thought as he shuffled towards the sobbing Russian.

"Viktor, I’m sorry..." admitted the Japanese partner, “you know, I didn’t really mean it - I just fantasise about such things I would never have the courage to actually do it...”

The Russian’s dropped head sank between his shoulders; he said that it didn’t matter, and that even thinking about it showed that he had failed as a husband,
“What kind of partner am I if I can’t even keep you alive? I won’t always be here to protect you, to keep you safe...”

“But Viktor,” whispered Yuuri, trying not to cry, “you’ve already done far enough. I’ll be fine here, and I’ll hate it, and you can be sure that once I get the chance to escape I’m busting out of here and running straight back to the comfort of my old habits, but none of that is down to you.”

“It’s just, I have to go tonight... there’s only so much time I’m allowed off.”

“What about your birthday? I thought we were going to celebrate that together.”

The older skater shook his head,
“Yuuri, my birthday was a week ago. You don’t know just how you’ve been out for, do you?”

The younger shook his head defeatedly, and they talked under their breath together as Haruka monitored from across the room. It was already late in the day and night was beginning to draw close, with their conversation ended as the nurse came forward to the bed.

“Sorry, Mr Nikiforov, visiting hours are now over.”

Yuuri freaked out, grappling at his husband’s sleeve as the latter rose from the edge of the bed
“Viktor? Is she really gonna make you leave like that?”

“I’m afraid so; I guess rules are rules..”

The skater snarled at Haruka, who was already preparing another ng tube to replace the one he’d broken,
“Why are you making him go? How dare you force him to leave, and whilst you’re toying about with that horrendous machine that’ll only make me grow fatter!”

“I’m sorry Yuuri, but he’s right - rules are rules. And besides, I don’t make them, I simply have to abide by them.”

“If you really cared you’d ignore what your poncy establishment has to say!”

“No,” smiled Haruka, steadying the trembling skeleton as she reinserted his brand new feeding tube, “I care because I’m keeping you alive. Viktor can come back tomorrow, but for now he must go home.”

“Actually..” Viktor said awkwardly through gritted teeth, “I’m afraid I’m flying back to Russia tomorrow.”

Yuuri burst into tears as he flopped onto his stomach, head buried in a pillow as he wriggled his grip away from his husband’s hand,
“Viktor, no! You can’t leave me here, not alone! How will I survive without you!”

“I promise I’ll visit every week..” his partner whispered, kissing his forehead and running his silken fingers through the Japanese boy’s patchy scalp as Haruka ushered him out of the door.
“I love you!!” Screamed Yuuri as he witnessed his husband being whisked away by, in his current opinion, the devil herself, and proceeded to ensure she knew it when she once again entered the room.

“How could you do this?” He shrieked, pulling at the feeding tube before collapsing into an exhausted heap onto the bed, defeated after falling into a puddle of his own sweat, “How could you be so cruel?”

Haruka didn’t justify his accusations with a reply; she’d seen it all before - the depressed wailing for their loved ones to return, the anorexic almost contorting in shock as they were subjected to refeeding - and knew that she was truly doing what was best for them, even if at times they didn’t feel like it. Smiling, she simply tidied the agonised skater’s bed and placed a fresh jug of water at his side, leaving soon after as he crept secretively out into the corner.

‘I’m going to kill myself,’ Yuuri thought, ‘I’m going to kill myself and then they’ll all be sorry - Viktor, my parents, and that bitch Haruka, acting like she fucking knows me and everything. Well, she knows nothing about me, and now look what she’s gone and done - she’s driven me to suicide! How reckless; it’s not like Viktor did anything to stop her, why would he let her pump those dirty, greasy calories into my body? It’s almost like he wants me to put on weight, and he’s left me alone to suffer…’

Rummaging through his suitcase, the Japanese boy panicked as he found nothing that could be of use. The many sharpeners in his pencil case had vanished and the secret razor blades he’d stashed into his favourite socks had vanished - how was he supposed to kill himself with such little ammunition? The skater scoffed as he tossed the contents of the suitcase out on the floor, weeping once again once it was empty and he was forced to consider that he might actually have to stay alive.

By now, the feeding tube was pulling fairly tightly as Yuuri increased his distance from the bed. Spurred on by the heat of the moment, he grabbed a nearby pen and thrust it through the tube’s plastic casing as he smiled crazily; victory had been achieved. Sure, the skater still remained horrifically upset by the whole ordeal, but currently all had been forgotten as he left the tube to perish and slowly crawled across the floor.

However, all that excitement had rather tired him out. The skater found himself growing increasingly exhausted as he approached the pillows that had been thrown in revulsion by the side of the bed, eventually falling asleep just short of his expected resting place.

Yuuri awoke the morning after facing the ceiling after realising he’d been placed in the comfortable location of a wooden bed, confused and remembering nothing of the previous day’s events. But his bewilderment was stopped short; once again the skater found the feeding tube resting inside his nostrils, and reality kicked in as he came crashing back to Earth.

‘Shit.’

It appeared nothing had been a dream at all.
"Oh, you're finally awake," said a female voice from across the room, "you were so fidgety last night I thought you might never sleep."

Puzzled, Yuuri sat up to discover Haruka walking over to his bed with a fresh jug of water in hand, then plumping his pillows and moving to refill his ng tube as the skater called out in horror.

"Please! Don't! I don't think I can handle it anymore-"

The nurse sighed, trying to smile as she paused from refilling the feeding case, "Yuuri, you're possibly the sickest person to have come in here, well, ever; you're now on one-on-one observations, you ripped out your feeding tube last night which - heh, by the way - took forever to put back in after I'd put you back into bed, and above all, I'm your assigned nurse - I care about you."

The skater sulked, "That's because you're paid to care..."

"Ah, yes, because minimum wage can surely compensate for sleepless nights, countless therapy sessions and the traumatic death of your closest patients - trust me, Yuuri, I came into this job because I want to help people like you. However, if you yourself don't want to recover, then I know for a fact that you'll never make any progress."

"But... but I don't want to gain weight! I don't want to eat at all!" Yuuri wept, "I don't want to be here, why can't you let me go?"

Haruka exhaled slowly as she poured a glass of water and led it to Yuuri's crusty, chapped lips, "Because you're under a section, and because your husband paid far too much for you to fall by the wayside."

"How much?"

"Double what I earn in the same period of time, anyway," his nurse chuckled, a tad low in tone, "but what I'm saying is, since you're stuck here anyway, and since, despite your objections, I do genuinely care about the wellbeing of my patients, why don't you just give it a shot?"

Still for a moment, Yuuri looked pensive as he debated over Haruka's proposition. On one hand, recovery would likely provide him with sufficient energy to live a semi-decent life until he could find the motivation to relapse, and it was wholly relaxing just to spend the whole day speaking only his native language; one the other hand, it seemed futile to decimate the summation of his progress when Yuuri had acknowledged that he'd come so far, although rather childishly, the skater didn't want to lose to someone younger than him like Haruka.

"So, if I take this thing out," he said, wiggling the ng tube in front of him, "I'll have to eat breakfast?"

Haruka smiled, sighing, "Yuuri, you'll have to eat everything."

"But I'll gain weight!"

"Well... you already have.."
"Wait - what?!" Exclaimed the skater, gripping with blue nails at the corners of the duvet, "how do you know?"

Haruka explained the various techniques the centre used to assess the levels of damage in its anorexic patients, with her patient horrified to know he'd gained just under a kilogram in a few weeks. The nurse brought him a box of tissues after Yuuri had begun to sob into the pillow, pinching at his flesh to gauge for any indicators of obesity, once again tearing the feeding tube from his nostrils and discarding it onto the chill of his bedroom floor.

"Well, I mean... at least it could be reused for someone else?" The skater laughed uneasily, "I'm sorry, it's just - don't think I can do this. It's too much, how am I supposed to stay alive?"

"We'll help you," replied Haruka, pulling a folded wheelchair out from under the bed and opening it as Yuuri looked upon her with terrified curiosity. The nurse told him that without his my tube, he'd need to ingest his intake orally (a proposition met with much disgust), and since he had been weakened by the night before, he'd need assistance for the journey to the fearsome dining hall.

"It's honestly not that bad here," Haruka chuckled as she wheeled the skater through the seemingly abandoned linoleum corridors, "there are people already in the dining room, so you're bound to make some friends-"

"- I don't think I have the energy for friends..."

His nurse handed him another glass of water as they entered the dining hall, "If you're lacking in energy, then that's what the food's for. Now, where would you like to sit?"

"I'm already sitting.."

"Okay, okay," she laughed, "I should've seen that one coming - where would you like to be wheeled then?"

As they proceeded to the centre of the dining hall, the room fell silent as hundreds of pairs of eyes centred like deadly missile guiders on Yuuri's mangled frame. Patients from ages 13 to 30 whispered to one another about the unsettling aura emanating from the 27 year old, not-so-friendly faces chattering back and forth as they struggled to recall just where they recognised him from. Finally, it clicked, and within moments hundreds of camera flashes descended up on the skater's tired eyes, his pupils screeching as his fellow inmates assumed the role of paparazzi.

"Hey, it's that skater from the TV!"

Embarrassed, Yuuri sank into the wheelchair as Haruka continued to push him across the dining hall, swatting the cameras out of her path and placing him alongside the other critically ill patients of the unit. The warm smell of French toast wafted round the granite-coloured decoration of the dining room, with Yuuri sighing as their journey had finally come to a halt.

"I'm just going to fetch you your breakfast," said Haruka softly, "don't worry, I'll be back soon."

With a slight groan, Yuuri nodded as the nurse strode over to the serving desk. Scanning the contents of what, to him at least, appeared more like a prison chamber than a rehabilitation facility, the Japanese boy deduced that this residence was not, in fact, solely for anorexics. Many of its patients were happily munching down on their morning dish, some with significant lacerations, some with patches of ripped hair, and some with illness that Yuuri knee weren't visible but still equally important. This relieves the skater somewhat; he wouldn't be competing with quite as many patients as he initially though - not weight wise, anyway.
"So, what are you in for?" Asked the woman in her late teens slouches over the table beside him, her body not too dissimilar to the skater's own emaciated vessel.

Yuuri chuckled, trying to hold back his panicked tears, "Oh, you know... just a simple diet."

"For how long?"

"Um...?"

"Well, you know, how long have you been starving yourself?"

Yuuri stuttered, startled by such an outright question, "I don't know... just over a year now?"

"Well, I've been anorexic for over five years now."

"Oh..." said Yuuri, "... good for you, I guess?"

Something about this competition made Yuuri flare up with intense jealousy: how dare she insult his legitimacy as an anorexic?

'Nevermind,' the skater thought to himself, "she may be thin, but she looks like she's bordering healthy weight anyway, so technically I'm still winning by a long shot.'

The woman looked around, eyes shifty as leant towards his wheelchair, "Do you want to know how you can avoid all the pesky calories they try to shove down your throat in this place?"

Yuuri nodded enthusiastically, but his face began to droop soon after, "Well, yes, but I'd also like to be an honorary member of S Club 7's summer tour; I doubt either are going to happen."

"Watch this."

Familiarity and skill present in her expression, the patient began to scrape at the oiled, cheesy omelette hanging over the edges of her plate, and gradually nudge its contents into the sleeve of her jumper. As she imitated passing the fork to her lips to take a bite, she chewed the food on the end of its metal prongs before spitting it back into an opaque plastic cup, pretending to take a sip.

"There's a whole load of other neat tips and tricks; I'll tell you everything I know... for a price."

"I'm sorry, I don't have any money on me...."

"Oh really...?" Teased the fellow anorexic, towering over him as she stood her ground, "Well then, who's that loaded Russian oligarch I saw coming to visit the other day? Nobody here has any connections to him - nobody except you. I'm sure you could easily get the money I need to set me free-"

"Ooookay Suzu, that's enough," interrupted Haruka, for once not a total inconvenience in Yuuri's eyes, "it looks like you've finished your breakfast anyway, so you can go."

The young woman smiled and winked at the skater as she left the dining hall, with Yuuri utterly speechless as to just how she was able to pull something so skillful off.

"Sorry about her..." continued his nurse, "... that's Suzu, she likes to, er, 'welcome' most of our new
ED patients."

Yuuri smiled, remembering what he's just been taught prior to the meal he'd imminently be obliged to eat, "It's okay, I found her very interesting."

Haruka looked at him rather sceptically, but shrugged as she then placed a large platter of breakfast foods in front of the skater's quivering body.

"There you go; I'll stay here until you've finished, don't worry."

Yuuri gulped. Two slices of toxic white bread slathered in oozes of artery-clogging full fat butter and tooth-rotting strawberry jam nested adjacent to a sizzled, juicy pork steak paired with creamed and scrambled eggs, and a bowl of miso soup with pickled vegetables leant against the side.

"Oh, okay - miso soup is pretty good?"

"Yuuri," Haruka smirked, rolling her eyes, "you've got to eat more than just the miso soup."

Disappointed, the skater gingerly raised his plastic spoon and began to sip at the brew - one of the only 'safe foods' he had left under his belt - wincing as the hot liquid scolded the top of his mouth. He hadn't digested any proper food for a long time, mainly sustaining himself with caffeinated energy drinks and one too many pieces of bubblegum, and had been forcibly receiving fortified nutrition drinks the moment he'd arrived.

Half an hour in and Yuuri sighed after finishing the last few drops of soup, aggrieved at the ninety or so calories he'd invested against his will.

"Haruka, I'm so full - can't I finish it later?"

"Sorry bud, no can do."

"Ugh..."

The patient didn't particularly care about dirtying his sleeves as he thought of Suzu's impressive new trick - his medical gown was hardly Versace, and there was an abundance of plastic cups lying about the table - but feared the consequences of he were to be caught.

"Yuuri, it's been nearly forty five minutes. You don't want your food to go stale, do you?"

It looked like the skater didn't have a choice.

"Hey, uh, Haruka?" He asked politely, eyes pleading like a puppy dog, "I'm so desperately thirsty, could you get me another glass of water?"

Haruka nodded, raising from her wooden stool and walking over to the water dispenser on the other side of the room. For the majority of time the nurse had kept a strict eye on her ailing patient, but the moment her gaze slipped the skater sprang into action. Reminiscent of his days starting out as a deteriorating anorexic, Yuuri’s heart rate shot up as he shovelled spoonfuls of crust and mush down the sides of his hospital gown - a behaviour that was hardly dignified, but the patient knew that time was running out. However much his sleeves were drenched with the fatty oils of over-seasoned breakfast meat and various accompanying sauces, however much his body shivered from the cold and the many eyes still shifting sideways glanced towards his frail self, Yuuri knew that failure was not an option. There was no immediate method of escape; he would have to grin and bear it as he tried his upmost hardest to avoid gaining weight for as long as possible. For a while it
was working, with the skater catching the occasional approving smile from a fellow anorexic sitting across the room, but eventually Yuuri’s efforts had come to be in vain. The smiling anorexics’ faces soon dropped back into their typical somber expression as Haruka swiftly returned, standing close behind the skater’s back as, without noticing her presence, he continued to press on with his secretive task.

“..ahem..”

Yuuri froze. Slowly swivelling around with his jaw clenched tightly, he gulped as he caught sight of the disappointed nurse towering over him, his expression sad as he stared into his own soppy reflection in the glass of water.

“Well?”

Yuuri sighed,
“I guess I can’t really offer an excuse.”

“Well, if you’re not going to eat breakfast, I suppose we’ll have to put the ng tube back in..”

“What?”

“Look, I’m sorry Yuuri,” said Haruka, retrieving the mess from inside of her patient’s sleeves with a napkin, “but you’re not even trying to get better, are you?”

The skater smiled,
“To be honest, I think our definitions of ‘better’ differ greatly.”

“Well, if you don’t want the ng tube, then I better get you some more food before the kitchens run out.”

“Okay, fine... but can’t I get it myself?”

Haruka looked puzzled, but shrugged her shoulders,
“I guess, but remember to sit back down here with me.”

“Sure, yeah, and I’m sorry about cheating you like that - I’ll try and eat it all this time.”

“No problem, and thank you.”

But Yuuri had different ideas. After lifting his tray and cruising towards the dreaded destination of the breakfast station, the skater rapidly changed pace as he slung all the dishes from the main table, pots and pans cascading towards the ground and shattering into thousands of china pieces whilst the dazed anorexic made a break for the door.

“Yuuri!” Haruka called out across the dining hall, but deep down she knew he wouldn’t listen. As she rang through to the main office, the patient sped out along the corridors and towards the exit, which was of course locked to all residents, but Yuuri hardly cared - he’d find a way to escape this hellhole somehow. It had only been a day, but anymore more and the skater knew he’d be doomed to an early death by suicide anyway, regardless of how much he chose to starve himself. Fluorescent ceiling lights and clueless other patients passed him by as his own vision began to dull, yet the skater still pulled through; he had to get out of this hellhole.

As the skater grappled at the bolts on the side exit, a team of nurses and inpatient security began to pace the halls in search for the missing resident, rapidly encroaching as he felt their startling presence near. Time was running out. Panicked, Yuuri ran into a nearby broom cupboard and
hastily locked the door. But he wasn’t alone. Upon throwing himself amongst the coats and cleaning brooms, the skater was started by a sudden, rather disgruntled moan and a following vomiting sound.

“What the hell?”

“Excuse me? What the hell yourself! I was clearly in here first, get your own vomiting cupboard!”

Yuuri flicker the light switch to find another skinny young man with his face buried in one of the head nurse’s tote bags.

The fellow anorexic grinned,
“Don’t worry, she deserved it.”

“Oh, no, I wouldn’t…”

An awkward pause ensued, broken by the intrigued rasp of the slightly younger-looking patient.

“Yuuri... right? That famous skater, once a high-flying, star-spinning athlete turned haunted anorexic?”

The older boy chuckled uncomfortably,
“I suppose if you put it like that.. well, yeah, that’s pretty much my life summed up in a sentence.”

“It’s cool, I respect your decision - you’re looking pretty decent for a resident as this obesity factory. I’m Jun, by the way. I’ve been here for two years now, so I guess I kinda know how everything works around here.”

“By vomiting into a Gucci purse?”

“This is Gucci?” Jun laughed, “haha... well, shit!”

By now, the building’s alarms were on full alert, with the remaining residents confined to their rooms as the search for Yuuri was fully underway. Sirens blared and flashing lights lit the corridors as though someone had set fire to a runway in a maximum-security prison as the guards hunted down the infamous new truant.

“It sounds pretty severe.”

“Hah,” replied Yuuri, “tell me about it; nobody seemed this bothered when I tried to kill myself.”

Jun didn’t know exactly what to say, so swiftly moved the conversation forward.

“I hope you get out of this okay dude, I bet your nurse is super livid right now...”

“Yeah... I should probably get going.”

Jun reaches out to put a hand on Yuuri’s boney shoulder, a tad jealous as they made contact,
“I’ll see you tomorrow yeah?”

The skater smiled,
“Yeah, I’ll see you tomorrow. Good luck with the er, vomiting, and that... I know how tricky it can sometimes be..”

“Hehe, yeah.... bye for now.”
Yuuri was about to reply, but was prised away by the strong mighty arms of Haruka and the army of guards and matrons pacing behind her. The skater was soon once again incarcerated and with an NG tube forcibly rammed up his nostrils.

“I’m sorry it had to come to this Yuuri,” said Haruka, “but I trusted you, and you broke the rules, so I’m afraid this is the way things go...”

The patient nodded, with a subtle smile painted across his face. He was too busy dreaming up new schemes in order to bend the rules and take advantage of his new allegiance with June, the veteran anorexic.

“Yeah, I’m sorry too, I guess.”

Yuuri wasn’t sorry at all. All in one day he had felt enraged, panicked, rebellious and comforted, but not once had he felt even a trickle of remorse. In the skater’s eyes he had absolutely nothing to be sorry for; the unit’s regulations were both cruel and unfair, and saw it fit that someone as old and wise as him set the staff there straight, even if in secret.

“Well, Yuuri, if we take the tubes out after your morning snack feed, do you promise you’ll absolutely eat all of your lunch?”

His heart pounded at the thought of another forced meal, but Yuuri managed to keep his cool, “Yes, but under one condition.”

“Fine, as long as it doesn’t involve you gallivanting out across the corridors again, I’ll allow it.”

“Good...” said Yuuri, smoothing the matter patches of hair ruffled on his scalp,”

“... I want to sit next to Jun.”
Distempered by the grievance of being force-fed shovels of food at breakfast for the second day in a row, Yuuri paced the floor in socks worn from previous exercise sessions with an acrid scowl pasted across his mouth. There had to be some way of burning these pesky calories, even if it meant forcing himself to keep moving for the majority of time spent awake.

It was Haruka's day off, and whilst the skater had temporarily been assigned another nurse, this new model wasn't nearly as involved in his case (a factor that Yuuri was currently largely grateful for) as his previous caregiver, only returning to the patient's room for feeds and the twice-daily dosage of his various new medications. Sure, he had been placed on one-on-one observations, but that day the unit had been terribly understaffed - besides, Yuuri wasn't complaining; he was finally free from the nagging concern of the young nurse and able to exhaust himself to his struggling heart's content.

"Psst, Yuuri!"

"Huh?" The patient murmured as he swung round to face the door, "Jun?"

The younger resident strolled across the room and up to the skater treading on the spot in the corner, rolled cigarette in one hand and a bandage wrapped around the other.

"Finally, they let you wear some normal clothes - you were beginning to look like an asylum patient in that weird-ass gown they had you sporting."

Yuuri chuckled,

"Well, looking at myself, I suppose I'm practically insane anyway. What's that in your hand?"

"Oh, this?" Said Jun, smiling as he raised the cigarette to head-height, "I was just going to go into the garden and smoke this whilst the other nurses are busy doing rounds, wanna come?"

Out of all the terrible, abusive substances Yuuri had ingested over the course of the last year, the skater hadn't actually used a cigarette once. He'd snorted cocaine, injected speed and abused countless other questionable substances in his fun, drug-riddled quest of self-discovery, but not once had he actually physically smoked anything. Yuuri thought it wouldn't hurt to try, curious as to how the sensation would feel.

"Um, yeah, sure - but won't the security cameras pick it up?"

Jun winked,

"Not if you know their blind spots."

A master of trickery, the younger patient led Yuuri out to a patch of dried grass obscured from the watchful eye of various security cameras by a large bush of red roses. Far too cold for any blossoms, the majority of the floral decoration consisted of frozen crimson petals that hadn't managed to fall from their thorny occupancy, the skater having wrapped himself a blanket as he too felt the bitter chill of the winter cold.
"Did you say you wanted a cigarette?"

Yuuri reached out to take one of the sticks but flinched in apprehension as he saw Viktor's saddened face pictured in his mind. Having succumb to the talons of both anorexia and drugs, the least he could do was refuse the few substances he was able to resist.

"I'm sorry, I shouldn't..." he said, voice trailing off nervously, "I broke a rip a while back, and I think I fucked up my lung pretty badly - but, hehe, if you've got any DNP then sure, hit me up all you like."

Jun took a casual puff from the cigarette wedges between his fingers, a curious expression having overcome him,
"DNP? What is that, like DMT?"

"It's a weight loss drug, I think - you take it and it stops your body absorbing the calories - or something like that."

His companion's eyes spread wide like tennis balls,
"DNP? Interesting..."

Yuuri chuckled,
"Yep, it's a pity I've never tried any myself though... I could really do with the help, especially in a place like this."

Jun then snubbed his cigarette in the ashy winter soil with sudden disinterest;
"Oh, okay - I suppose I can get it easily enough once my section's finally up and I'm released from this prison - although, hehe, from what you've told me I think I need to teach you a few tricks to survive in here first.".

"Oh, god, yes. Haruka's nice and all, but.... her rules are practically intolerable."

"I get you, I've hated all of my nurses too - besides, considering your size, no wonder you need to change quickly."

This comment took Yuuri by surprise; sure, Jun was an anorexic just as he was, but the skater had never felt the audacity to comment on a fellow sufferer's weight. He sighed as he subtly poked at the slight rise that had formed in his midsection, regretting that weeks of progress had been undone due to his own body's sheer incompetence. Having gained around 2 kilograms since he'd first been admitted, Yuuri was struggling with the side affects of weight gain - the uncomfortable night sweats, the unpredictable muscle spasms, and the distress of the extreme hunger that overcame him as he continued with his secretive exercise and attempted to battle through each meal. The skater knew he was disgusting, and it was obvious that Jun could see it too.

"Don't look so down, Yuuri," Jun smiled, "I only want to help you, I promise."

"But, well, not to be rude... but don't you technically have a higher BMI than I do anyway?"

The younger patient chuckled,
"Yeah, but I'm okay with staying as I am. As long as I continue to purge and starve, I should remain sickly thin enough to be satisfied, yet not so dire that I attract attention from the nurses. You, however, appear to be pretty distressed with your current situation, and since you're my friend I thought I'd try to help you out."

Yuuri smiled. He had really made a friend!
Still, negative thoughts began to rapidly multiply within the cavern of the skater's mind, "Do you really think I'm fat?"

Jun sighed as he placed a hand on his shoulder, "Yuuri, I like you, so what I say is only to protect you - for your body shape and your desired goal, I've gotta say, you are getting far too pudgy for your own good."

Yuuri knew that Jun was right. He could physically feel the dreaded mounds of fat clinging to his once prestigious skeleton. The pair had joined each other in conversation a few times in the weeks leading up to this unexpected meeting, and the older patient realised now how utterly disgusted Jun must have been by his growing mounds of flesh. It certainly didn't help that the nurses were now force-feeding him a daily intake of up to 5000 calories since the lining of his digestive system had become so harshly shrivelled, and Yuuri was forced to contemplate the mess he'd made.

"So, what's your BMI now, anyway? I knew it was 11 or so when you arrive - you invoked quite a large amount amount of envy from the fellow wasters here."

Yuuri shrugged, laughing at his own grotesque form, "Um - ugh- probably about 12 right now."

Jun tutted as he shook his head, "Yuuri, Yuuri, Yuuri - how could you let this happen?"

"Well, Haruka kind of forces me to eat every crappy morsel put in front of me, so I can't really refuse."

Attempting to comfort the older patient, Jun offered him another cigarette, but his companion politely declined.

"Yuuri, may I examine you?"

"....pardon?"

"I meant, you know, assess the severity of the situation."

The skater chuckled, surprised by the ominous nature of his new friend's sudden request, "What does it involve?"

"It's simple; I just need to pinch the flesh by your collarbones."

Yuuri nodded, and Jun began to firmly grasp at his shoulders with his thumb and forefinger, umming and ahhing as he fumbled with the skater's skin.

"Well, what does it mean?"

Jun shook his head in a rather solemn manner, "I'm afraid I can already detect a slightly lipid layer forming underneath your skin..."

"Oh god, really?"

"I'm afraid so - in fact, you may be past the point of redemption..."

Yuuri gasped, shocked that it might be too late. He began to tremble with fear as he sank back against the rough nip of the bricks behind them, and Jun was also beginning to shake - but, strangely, it appeared he had additionally started to laugh.
"What is it?" Yuuri sulked, puzzled.

"Nothing," Jun roared with laughter, "oh man, you should have seen the look on your face! I can't tell shit from rubbing your shoulders, I was just messing with you - I mean, gaining weight is nothing to be proud of at all, but you need to learn to chill out a bit - I promise I'll teach you everything I've learnt here and you'll be all good."

Yuuri's panic slowly began to subside,
"You mean it?"

"Haha, of course I do - guys like us have to look out for each other in a place like this."

The skater smiled,
"Well, thank you... just please, don't scare me like that again! I think I'd rather have my eyes plucked out than having to come to terms with my own rising gluttony."

Jun nodded, popping a piece of sugar-free chewing gum into his mouth as he withdrew another cigarette from its ashy pack.

"You sure you don't want one? They're expensive, and I've got nobody else to share it with."

Yuuri thought for a moment then nodded his head; he had no other aspects of his already shattered health to lose.

"Like this?" He asked, hesitantly puffing at the end.

Chuckling, Jun helped the patient fix the position as he snuck a subtle arm around the skater's shoulders. Yuuri recognised this was a tad unorthodox considering the dynamic of their friendship, but soon continued to think little of it, as overall he enjoyed being in the company of a fellow anorexic that understood his needs.

Yuuri never smoked again. Not because the event had substantially impacted him in a negative way, he just disliked the taste of tar and ash as it began to foam in the corner of his mouth. He did, however, continue to stick around with Jun for the foreseeable future; it was a profitable friendship for both parties in the isolated hellhole of the unit and Yuuri was glad to be learning a trick or two.

For instance, mealtimes had become significantly less stressful since the pair had sat together. Yuuri had managed to convince Haruka to allow him independence at mealtimes, and after a few short weeks his intake had already plummeted to a fraction of his designated plan.

"But just how do you hide it like that?" Yuuri asked his younger friend one glum winter's morning, "every time I try a nurse usually discovers what I'm up to and is quick to ram an NG tube up my nose once again."

Jun grinned,
"It's simple - watch..."

The skater gazed intently at his companion, who currently was hard at work disposing of the fatty meal that had been so disgracefully shoved in front of them. Jun, who was sitting cross-legged on the bench as Yuuri watched in awe, began stuffing the contents of his plate inside the heel of his oversized Dr Martins, poking the mush with his forefinger into the ankle-hole once all other accessible areas had been adequate filled.

"Pretty impressive, right?"
"I'll say," Yuuri beamed, "but, well, there's still a quarter of you plate left... what are we supposed to do about that?"

The younger patient grinned and began to stuff spoonfuls of the meal's greasy contents into his mouth with suspicious ferocity.

"What the hell are you doing?" The skater hissed, "Aren't you gonna gain weight?"

Jun swallowed and shook his head,
"Go on - you do the same. I promise we'll get rid of it after we leave this lipid hellhole-"

Haruka's concerned gaze loomed over Yuuri's clouded head from across the room as he gingerly began to nibble at the meal in front of him. Eventually the anxiety soon subsided as she turned away to assist with other patients; only then could the skater repeat the knowledge he'd recently gained. Yuuri wasn't wearing boots, in fact the older boy was sporting a rather uncomfortable pair of converse so generously donated as a cast-off from his older sister, but little could stop this impressive feat of determination and resilience.

"Can you see anything?" Asked the skater, frantically tapping a his heel."

"No, but shhh - the bitch has returned from her coven."

Jun gestured to Haruka as she emerged from the nurse's office, smiling nonchalantly at her as she approached their table.

"Wow, you guys ate that super quickly - you must have been very hungry!"

"We sure were, weren't we buddy?"

The young patient widened his eyes with an open smile as he gently nudged his friend in the side.

"Oh, haha, yeah-" chuckled Yuuri with a distinct lack of certainty "-but I'm soooo full now, can Jun and I go back to my room to hang out?"

Haruka put her hand on her hip,
"Hmmm... I don't know... Jun, can I trust you to make sure Yuuri keeps his food down?"

"You sure can!" Beamed Jun, lying through his teeth as Yuuri gazed with awe.

"Okay," she smiled, "as long at you guys are relaxing, I suppose that's fine.."

As the two boys wandered through the endless maze of corridors back to the seclusion of the skater's bedroom, Jun began to roll yet another cigarette as Yuuri couldn't help but shiver at the thought of the copious amounts of mashed-up foot swilling in the back of his heel.

"You okay there?"

"Yeah," said Yuuri, a little pale, "although I think I'm gonna throw up-

Jun smirked,
"Then it seems you're already perfectly prepared for what is next to come.."

It was then that the skater realised just what his younger companion had in mind.

"But Jun," he chuckled, "you're aware that I already know how to throw up on cue, right?"
"That's very true - but if you want to survive in here, with bat shit crazy nurses parading around with the audacity of prison officers, you've got to learn to hide it properly."

Yuuri shrugged. He supposed his technique could always do with improving.

As they entered the room, Jun boldly opened the cupboard door and proceeded to kneel on the ground, producing a suspicious plastic bag from the depths of his back pocket.

"Huh?"

"Well? Do you want me to puke onto the floor?" Jun smiled with sarcasm.

"Just teach me all you know, O gracious one.." was his friend's equally sarcastic response.

Jun, however, said nothing in return. This was, of course, due to the fact that he was currently vomiting into the wrinkled depths of an old plastic bag in the dingy depths of an old closet, but Yuuri rather appreciated watching the expert in action. It appeared his starved counterpart had a course of action for each stage of the purge, and all the skater was responsible for was to gathering information from his master.

Stomach now empty, Jun neatly packaged up the bulging container of vomit and discreetly placed it under a rogue floorboard towards the back of the closet.

"Are you ready to give it a try?"

Yuuri nodded, keen to emulate the impressively expansive skill set of his companion.

The older boy slid two skeletal fingers to the back of his throat with chilling familiarity, a flood of harrowing memories inundating his vision as the warm, acidic broth erupted from his mouth.

"Shhh... shhh, it's okay," whispered Jun, gently rubbing the skater's back, "now - you need to try with four fingers if you want to maximise your success."

"I don't think I can fit that in my mouth..." doubted Yuuri, retching multiple times as he spoke, spittle lapping against the corner of his lips.

The younger patient smiled, "Just trust me."

Shrugging, the skater took the final plunge and dug deeper into the ravaged depths of his oesophagus. Within seconds, sick and sputum ejaculated from his mouth and nostrils, sickening beige transforming to crimson blood and colourless bile as Yuuri emptied all that remained inside of him. Briefly, everything had felt like old times - glorious.

"Holy shit dude, that's amazing; all you've gotta do now is bag it up."

Jun produced yet another crinkled bag from his pocket. Yuuri was slightly concerned by his friend's preparedness, questioning in his mind the reason as to why Jun carried plastic bags on his person, but half-admired his dedication to the cause so proceeded to seal the vile contents before hiding them under another floorboard.

Out of breath and fingers drenched in bodily fluids, Yuuri pushed his glasses back up against his nose and wipe his hand against his boney thigh.

"Why under the floorboards?" The skater chuckled, intrigued by Jun's strategy.
"Well, duh,’ the other joked continuing to caress the skin between his jagged shoulder blades, 'those bitchy nurses perform spot checks everyday, and we have to go to every length to conceal who we truly are."

Yuuri nodded, smiling.

"Well, thank you for helping me today - it's real great having someone on the inside who can help me with this - I really appreciate it."

"It's no big deal - besides, you've been my favourite 'pupil' so far."

"Haha, thanks, although water loading at weigh-ins is gonna become a pain in the ass once these pounds start slipping off."

"Well, I think you look perfectly emaciated - don't let anyone tell you anything different-" smirked Jun, his hand gliding towards Yuuri's chest as his face edged closer to the skaters lips.

"Wow, I can feel each and every indent of your ribcage - just beautiful..."

"Well, haha, I guess I worked hard for it-"

The patient was silenced abruptly as he felt Jun's lips press against his own, caressing his shrivelled frame and protruding ribcage as he leaned in passionately.

Yuuri wasn't quite sure what was happening. On one hand, willingly continuing with such intimacy would bring about immense guilt and the internal (and eternal) shame of cheating on the one true love of his life, however Jun was clearly a mastermind at what he did, a 'jack' of all disordered trades and a skilled dieter Yuuri could surely learn great things from. In a split-second decision, the skater pulled away, smiling uncomfortably as he feigned arousal, tentatively placing a hand on his friend's taught shoulder.

"What's wrong?" asked Jun in a manner bordering on outrage.

Yuuri shook his head,
"I'm sorry, I'm just not-"

"No, no, I get it - why date a fuck-up like me, why touch somebody so idiotic and crazy, so damaged? I'm sorry Yuuri - I should have known not to do this to your - you're too pure, too precious.... and far skinnier than me.."

"N-no no no, that's not what I meant by that at all!" Stammered Yuuri, scrambling to produce a vaguely believable lie, "it's just - I'm afraid, that's all. Trust issues and that. Give me a few weeks and I'll be fine, haha."

Jun smiled shyly,
"Promise?"

Heart pulsating from the guilt writhing in his body, Yuuri slowly smiled back with fingers crossed inside his pocket,
"Haha, yep... I promise."

Suddenly Jun's face lit up, and Yuuri was relieved (partially for his own sanity) that his friend's seemingly good mood had been restored. It did not, however, appear to be the optimal time for the skater to break the news to Jun about his current husband, Viktor.
The skater knew that soon enough he'd have to reveal the barrier to their supposed relationship; he loved the Russian and their marriage with all his heart, and knew he himself would fall apart having cheated on him for a second time.

"You know, Yuuri, ever since you arrived I could tell there was something special about you... you're just so thin, so pure and perfect. It's okay, I understand if you want to take it slow. Fuck, look at you, you're making me all sentimental!"

Perhaps it was the crippling lack of libido or the extreme extent of his starvation talking, but Yuuri simply couldn't feel any passion for his younger counterpart, regardless of the lack of emotional attraction. Sure, he appreciated the benefits of their friendship/allegiance, but on a spiritual level he just could not connect at all.

Walking away from the closet as the two patients shuffled towards Yuuri's bed, their mouths dry and stomachs empty, Jun withdrew a piece of crinkled paper covered in directional scrawls and waved it in front of the skater's face, an expression of pure deviance in his eyes.

"Sorry dude, I've already found something to throw up in," joked Yuuri, "what's that for anyway?"

Jun grinned,
"An escape plan."

The older patient's eyes lit up like bright fire as excitement brimmed inside of him,
"Are you serious? When? How?"

"It's going to take some decent planning, plus perhaps a few practice runs in the garden, but I reckon we could have it done within the next couple of months - if we're lucky."

Taking the paper and smoothing its curled edges to the corners, Yuuri inspected Jun's meticulously drawn out course of action; it was indeed a rather admirable piece of work. The younger patient has obviously spent many hours crafting their escape route to the finest detail, and it showed, with clauses for a ample range of unexpected occurrences during the breakout, and arrows paired with instructions detailing the patients’ every moves. Sure, the older boy was becoming rather uncomfortable at the thought of getting cushy with his new companion, but on the positive side, he’d no longer be attached once they’d been freed from the the metaphorical shackles of 1 on 1 observations and unbearably difficult meal plans.

Also, he didn’t want Jun killing himself in a fiery rage and intense jealous upon Yuuri’s eventual rejection.

The skater knew he couldn’t keep this up forever. With his younger compatriot’s new, impressive advice and headstrong spirit to shake enthusiasm into his creaking bones, he felt briefly unstoppable - even if Yuuri collapsed in exhaustion onto his bed soon after (as was to be expected). He wasn’t gaining weight - in fact, he was actually steadily losing - and was becoming increasingly aware of the dangerous position he was consciously putting himself in with the nurses. Regardless, the patient cared little for his own physical and mental being. The primary cause of concern had always originated from his crippling fear of losing Viktor, his beautiful knight in shining armour, and being constricted by the menacing medical forces that encircled around him.

“Yeah, good, this is good.” Said Yuuri, smiling.

Jun grinned, a slightly condemning twinkle in his eye,
“We’ll do this - together - we’ll show them our power and strength..”
Uneasy, but able to muster the courage to disguise his true feelings of aversion as excitement, Yuuri simply nodded in agreement as Jun ran his spindle fingers across the skater’s collarbone. He was deeply uncomfortable, yes - but simultaneously Jun was his friend, and currently his greatest ally; it would be a shame to recklessly lose his devotion so early on in their relationship.

The skater vowed to ring Viktor that same evening, begging for his partner to visit him in the inpatient unit.

“Please, Viktor, I’m losing it in here - nobody understands me like you do.”

“I don’t know if I can - what if it harms your recovery?”

“Viktor...” the Japanese boy pleaded, “without you, and without your love, I’ll never truly know if I’ll be able to recover...”

Sighing, Viktor gripped the phone and reluctantly agreed. Any possibility of Yuuri deteriorating frightened him incomprehensibly, but at the same time, he couldn’t just allow his husband to fester in the darkness of a hospital.

“So... do you think you’ll be able to come in for next week?” Asked Yuuri hopefully.

Viktor bit his lip, a little unsure,

“Only if I can work out the flights going from Russia, but sure - any time I have off, I’ll be down to see you as soon as possible.”

For the first time in forever, Yuuri felt a little giddy from love again. A spark, though minute, began to flame within his heart - something that could never have happened when the skater was with Jun.

“I love you so, so much.”

The younger partner felt a sentimental tear roll down his cheek.

“I love you too. Promise we’ll be together forever?”

Viktor smiled,

“Till the very day we die.”
Despite the dismal grey skies crowding like a sullen clouded cape beyond the bitter confines of Yuuri's room at the inpatient centre, the skater had a good feeling about today.

The elusive Japanese boy, seldom seen without Jun - his partner in crime, or in fact wandering outside of his humble and cluttered abode, had yet again managed to scrape by at another week's weigh-in with his nurse Haruka, water loading until breaking point and hiding pebbles in his boxer shorts as he begged for her suspicion to remain at an adequately low level, the number on scale then appearing to increase - as to both of their delights. Thus, Yuuri was finally allowed a visitor, racing down the corridor to the building's rather sterile reception area after his post-breakfast purge (idea courtesy of his fellow patient, of course).

Something in the air made the skater's muscles tingled with excitement. He hadn't seen his lover in the flesh for over a month, and despite not actually having put any weight on, hoped Viktor would be equally as pleased to see him too.

Yuuri didn't wear shoes anymore - inside he had no need for them - treading lightly across the ivory carpet of the main reception as he scoured the room for the silver stallion he so desperately needed to see. After a few tortuous moments of waiting, alone, the couple's eyes finally locked; Yuuri threw himself into his husband's arms, mirroring their first emphatic embrace in Moscow airport over a couple of years ago.

"Viktor! I can't believe you're here!"

The older skater chuckled, kissing his Japanese beau hastily, "Why? We've been waiting for this all week!"

"I know, but, well - it's you! You're really here! I can't be lonely anymore!"

Jun, catching a slither of this conversation from across the room, felt his heart lurch before slipping back into the shadows.

"How have you been getting along?" Asked the Russian, enthusiastic in his partner's recovery.

"It's been great - I guess that after the accident, I finally learned to let go, to recognise I need this...." Yuuri lied through his teeth.

Taking his companion by the hand, the younger skater grinned as he leaned against his tall and muscular frame, leading him into the bedroom - desperate for some alone time.

With anorexia having ravaged Yuuri of the majority of his previous sexual ferocity, there was little concern present for his team of nurses, who strictly prohibited any sexual activity anywhere on site. The couple did, however, proceed to get semi/frisky on the fresh linen bedsheets of Yuuri's single mattress. Picturing his husband's initial total rejection of the inpatient services upon arriving as they embraced one another across the bed, a wave of relief swept over Viktor's body - Yuuri really seemed to be trying his best, getting better with each day he rang. He imagined that perhaps one day, one miraculous day, his partner would be free of this eating disorder's malevolent grasp - and fall back into the guaranteed comfort of his own welcoming arms.

"Viktor", began the Japanese boy as they cuddled between the blankets, "I need you to get me out of here."
A little shaken by his partner's remark, the older boy's smile soon wavered into a worried pout, grasping Yuuri by the shoulders as he looked into his eyes.

"Yuuri, I can't - you're getting better here, what if your recovery plummets?"

"It's not the recovery, it's not the meal plan or the nurses, I promise - it's just, well - I'm just not comfortable like this."

The younger partner hadn't the heart to mention that his urgency to leave the unit was the result of an undesired romantic advance, again courtesy of Jun (who, uncomfortably, happened to be making his way past Yuuri's window as the pair discussed his difficulty). Viktor looked so genuinely hopeful and so blissfully unaware of his husband's true condition that Yuuri couldn't bring himself to snap his spell of childlike happiness, having not seen him so relaxed in a very long time prior to this twist in conversation.

"Yuuri - you must stay here."

"Viktor, no -"

Pressing a finger to his husband's chapped and rosen lips, Viktor sighed as he kissed the Japanese boy's forehead with the softness of a silken cloud.

"Lapochka, if you want to stay healthy - and eventually escape from this merciless disorder, you need to stay in treatment. I promise nothing terrible can get you here. Whatever demons you're facing, whatever hatred that monster has embedded inside your head, I'll help you defeat - but not on your own. You need your nurses and your support team. I can love you with all my heart, but I've come to realise that I can't cure you of this, and to be honest, I don't really understand it as well as any of these professionals could do. I love, and it's because I love you that I have to make you stay."

Overcome with emotion, Yuuri, for just about the billionth time, burst into tears.

"But I hate being away from you!"

"I know, I know my love - but if you don't recover, I could lose you, separating us permanently. Just do this for me, and I bet you'll be out in no time."

Yuuri sighed and shrugged as he nodded reluctantly. Fortunately, if his husband wasn't willingly to rescue him from the depravity of being crushed by the unreasonable laws of the establishment, the skater comforted himself with the thought of Jun's escape route as a back-up plan.

That was, of course, assuming Jun was willing to cooperate with the older patient, after sneaking up on him and his husband as he made his journey to propose a new element to the plan.

Jun has never been an expert at interpreting emotions, and would not be one to process them particularly skillfully now. Betrayal plaguing his thoughts, he struggled to understand just why Yuuri would lie to him about his secret husband as he flung himself into a nearby closet, purging violently. He didn't hate Yuuri, no - it would have been impossible not to tolerate a spirit quite so ethereal as him, but Jun was rather distraught at the prospect of being alone once again.

The escape plans were finally all in place. In theory, the patient was fully aware he could still scrape by without the company of his starved companion, but the operation would inevitably become far less clandestine without an extra lookout for security - and besides, this wasn’t just about Jun’s desperation, this was about his own self-esteem. Did Yuuri think that little of Jun that he’d be so assuredly willing to use him in a ploy for his own selfish freedom? The younger patient
shook upon returning to his room, replaying the interactions between the skater and his partner over and over again, their kiss burning his corneas. There would be little sense in confronting Yuuri following his husband’s departure, Jun assumed; this would descend into confrontation, and with the older patient apparently even more mentally unstable in his disorder than Jun was, the younger realised that despite his manic tendencies, the last thing he wanted was for the skater to erupt into full-blown panic.

Viktor gazed on in pride and awe as he watched his husband swallow mouthful after tender mouthful of chocolate pudding, tentatively chewing on the small tidbits of peanut crunch, but maintaining a steady pace nonetheless. His eyes creased in delight, pupils twinkling, the skater swept smidgens of cream from around the corners of his partner’s smile; they were once again on the path to their happily ever after.

Mildly uncomfortable at the thought of food swilling around in the depths of his stomach, and not the soles of his shoes, Yuuri grinned in response, already planning his evening purge for after Viktor’s exit. Still, it was nice to savour the flavour of the meal whilst it was still confined to the muscular prison of his stomach. Being full was an odd sensation, Yuuri thought - almost semi-pleasing in nature, though not at all something he could maintain in a sustainable fashion. He’d seen and learned too much in the unit, much of it from Jun, to turn his back on this way of life now, and although could indulge in the splendour of a high-calorie meal temporarily, remembered that he would have to resign himself to the reality of restriction soon after.

But for now, that cake tasted good. So, so good.
"Why so glum, sugarplum?" a shallow, raspy voice called from the doorway.

Yuuri rubbed his pair of hollow sockets and sat up on the bed. Still vaguely despondent from his husband's earlier departure, the skater had resigned himself to the comfort of a soft woollen shawl as his yellowed teeth clinked against the metal of a soda can - a contraband item that he'd had Jun smuggle in a few days prior. He'd also wondered just how he'd approach the sensitive subject of Viktor's existence to the younger patient, at risk of losing energy drink and purging lesson privileges - however, it appeared whatever turbulence had been created had (for now) settled down, with Jun traversing the littered carpet of the skater's room holding a diet pill in hand.

"Oh, sorry Jun - I guess you caught me by surprise, I'm still half asleep!" Chuckled Yuuri, "I've got to be honest, I'm feeling rather lethargic today, so if I look like a sallow old spinster that's been dragged through a thorny hedge, that's probably the reason why."

Slightly taken aback by his fellow patient's decision to conceal his prior visitor, the younger boy said nothing, just smiling and occasionally laughing away as he usually did when having to encounter Yuuri's rather extensive demonstrations of vocabulary. Still, Jun did not remain forever silent. He harboured no harmful deal of malice towards the skater - although perhaps a tad annoyance - and instead remained curious as to why Yuuri had hidden this secret lover from him all this time. Admittedly, it had pained him a great deal when considering just how willing the skater was to ditch their escape plans for some random grey-haired retiree, not to mention how appalled he'd been at Yuuri's apparent selfishness at the time, but Jun figured that it could be dealt with later, if needed. Knowing that the visitor had refused to withdraw his partner from the treatment centre allowed the younger patient to prey upon one of the skater's most desperate desires: freedom.

"Yuuri, who was that old guy you were with yesterday?"

Recalling his husband's particularly sensitivity towards his appearance and the colour of his hair, Yuuri could do nothing but laugh. Jun returned the favour, not wanting to appear out of place, but felt somewhat uneasy in playing along.

"Oh, is he your sugar daddy or something?" Jun teased, "Yuuri, I didn't know you were into older guys!"

The older patient began to howl with laughter. Which, of course, hurt like hell considering he was still suffering with the side effects of breaking multiple ribs, but found the hilarity of the moment far too entertaining to hold back his expression of amusement.

"You think..." he began, trying to contain himself, "...you think Viktor's my sugar daddy?"

"And what sounds like a Russian oligarch at that.."

"What?" Cackled Yuuri, before eventually calming down, "Viktor isn't my sugar daddy, Viktor is,
well..."

Yuuri found himself falling into quite the awkward situation.

"He's my husband." The skater finally confessed.

Jun had of course known this all along, but had been rather aggrieved by Yuuri's casual deceit at the time, and thus wanted to hear the words straight from the mouth of the perpetrator.

"I'm sorry I hid it from you for so long," he sighed, "but the truth is, I didn't want you to stop hanging out with me. Look, Jun, I'm not interested in you romantically - a-and it's no commentary on the way you look, or act, or are - it's just, my heart belongs to someone else. I didn't want to lose you as a friend. You're the only one here who seems to truly understand what I'm going through."

Sure, Jun was perhaps not as wholeheartedly essential to Yuuri's survival as the skater conveyed, but for the most part, he was speaking the truth. Of course, Viktor would always be number one, but the younger patient's company was something that - minus the unrequested sexual advances - has benefitted him greatly.

"You mean that?" said Jun.

"As your weird anorexic prodigy, would I lie to you?"

The two of them both laughed, at first a little uncomfortable, but returned to the convention of a normal conversation for the rest of their time together.

"So, you're still up for next week?"

His mind blank, Yuuri flopped backwards and stared at the ceiling, scavenging his brain as he tried to grasp this inmemorable concept.

"Next...week...?"

Jun laughed,
"You know, the day we were going to break free from this hellhole?"

The sudden realisation hit Yuuri like a ton of bricks, followed by waves of guilt, and then excitement, and then finally preparedness.

"Ah, yes. Well, I'm still in if you're still in."

"But what about your husband...?" Said Jun, biting his lip as to hide a small smirk.

Yuuri sighed,
"I guess I don't want to upset him, but he'll understand, right? I'll go to him right away - I'll get my sister to book my plane tickets - and then we can be together forever, we can be happy - and, I'll be skinny, so he'll have to love me, yeah?"

Jun hadn't expected Yuuri to be so enthusiastic, grinning in disbelief. It was all too easy, and his plan was finally falling into place. The two companions were to get out of there alive after all, defeating the dozens of disastrous medical workers and incompetent nurses and to define wellbeing on their own terms. Whilst Yuuri's attitude towards his husband still somewhat aggravated the younger patient, who - in his opinion - thought that the skater was behaving a tad ungratefully, considering he'd never even contributed to the plan, Jun knew it was something he'd be able to get past. A lifetime of freedom would definitely be worth a few years of recovery from an
uncomfortable attachment to one specific person.

"Are you sure you're okay with this?"

"Sure, what do I care? But you needn't have lied to me - if you're fine gallivanting off with that silverback gorilla, that's fine by me."

Unconvinced that any half sane human being wouldn't be unstoppable attracted to Viktor's celestial visage, Yuuri was about to retort with a sarcastic remark (as the two usually did when engaging in witty banter), but the skater soon checked himself. Realising that Jun was, in fact, doing him a massive favour by training him as an accomplice, the older patient simply smiled. For now, the best he could do would be to obey his friend's instructions in preparation for their escape, accept whatever tips the master anorexic has to offer, and graciously lap up any remaining compliments relating to his dangerously emaciated body.

In the end, Yuuri began to enjoy the experience of hanging out with Jun again. So much so that, when it came to the night of their break-out, the skater could not help but feel a little disappointed that their time together was shortly drawing to a close. Now who would so bravely guard the bathroom as he defecated violently from laxative overdose? Who would voluntarily strike him between his shoulders in a hastened effort to prolong the effects of purging? Viktor wouldn't exactly be a reliable substitute, not least because he was in opposite to Yuuri's disordered shenanigans.

"Have you got the stuff?" asked Jun, smokeless fire in his eyes, illuminated by the glow of the moon as the two friends sat by a skylight leading to the roof.

Yuuri nodded, raising the lighter clasped tightly in his hand. It turned out that flirting with other non-anorexic patients, particularly the chain smokers, had its benefits after all, even if he was now supposedly betrothed to Maki the pyromaniac. Caught up in the passion of the situation, he repeatedly flickered its scorching amber flame.

"Okay, okay," smiled Jun, "but hey, save some for the actual plan."

"Oh, I'm ready," said Yuuri, "I've got my pills, my potions... all of it."

"Good." Replied Jun, "Shall we begin?"

Raised on Jun's shoulders (the skater was far too frail for the other way around) and attempting not to fall into the crevice of his collarbones, Yuuri reached for the skylight with his lighter's flame a-glow, holding the heat to its metal bolts as they illuminated crimson red. Now warm, they expanded considerably, allowing for Jun to simply un-tighten them with a flick of his gloved wrist and a charm to his smile. With extreme confidence he lifted the panel of glass out of its usual resting place as the two patient's ascended onto the roof, and Yuuri feeling as though absconding had never felt quite so exhilarating.

This mutual self-assurance, however, was not to last - it appeared the technology in Japanese mental health units wasn't as dire as Yuuri had originally perceived. Despite their nimble movements and withered frames, the pair had managed to activate the motion sensors placed across the roof - and, in doing so, the alarm system for the entire building.

"What do we do? What do we do?" panicked Yuuri, pacing back and forth across the rooftop.

Jun sat back, shaking his head as he chuckled.

"Did you really think I hadn't prepared for something like this?"
"Have you?"

"But of course-" continued the patient, drawing closer to his older companion, "I've set up decoys in our rooms, to make it look as though we're sleeping soundly in our beds - plus, I added a little extra to the medication rounds tonight, so hopefully the sudden spike in chaos should keep the shift staff on their toes."

It was a thorough plan. Perhaps rather devilish, thought Yuuri, but still - a very thorough plan.

With alarms buzzing all around and piercing bells echoing out into a jet black sky, Jun still continued to sit cross-legged on the rooftop, a placid smile on his face that juxtaposed against the harsh and shrieking ringing that surrounded them.

At a loss for words, Yuuri finally cried out to Jun, "Don't you think we should at least get away whilst they're occupied?"

Jun shook his head, "They'll have extra security teams patrolling the premises for escapees like us. Trust me, as long as we wait until it all dies down, we'll get off without a hindraa-AAAA-"

"Jun!?"

A hand had risen through the sky light and dragged the younger patient by the ankle slowly back towards the foul imprisonment of the unit. Yuuri was shaken by surprise, but determined not to give up on his friend entirely, he resisted and pulled back, caught in a game of tug-of-war with the faceless hand using Jun for a piece of rope. The skater was losing his grip, reluctant to admit the truth that his lack of strength would mean he'd soon have to forfeit, and was on the brink of throwing it all away when an idea struck him with sudden genius. Yuuri remembered the lighter stowed away in his back pocket and withdrew it with a grin. Just before Jun slipped back into the tortuous depths of the building, the older patient brought a flame to the menacing hand, and as though it had been caught in vines of seething pain, it finally released the frantic patient.

"Jun, we need to get out of here - now!"

"Agreed!"

This heart-racing getaway across the forest floor had, unfortunately, not been planned beforehand - however the duo felt it was necessary nonetheless. There was admittedly something absolutely euphoric about running through a blanket of tree cover, face brushing against the gentle touch of smaller winter branches as Yuuri hovered just above his lowest weight, lighter than air, something that he wasn't sure he wanted to end. The skater loved his husband with every fibre of his being, yet wished it was this moment that he could savour forever. Perhaps it was the extensive long-term starvation coupled with his erratic, often dwindling heart rate, but to Yuuri, his soul had leapt from the clutches of his body and ascended to frolic in the playground of the clouds.

A familiar voice soon broke the spell- "Yuuri, come on, we've got to go faster!"

The skater turned his head at a sharp angle, glancing at Jun, who paced by his side. Visibly frustrated, the younger patient beckoned for Yuuri to quicken his running speed, but the latter simply shook his head.

"Sorry Jun, I can't - I physically can't run any faster, not like this."

"It's fine. Hey, you look tired. Let's rest by those trees over there."
Jun gestured to a small clearing, with a few logs scattered about the receded winter grasses. Too tired to protest this abrupt end to their period of exercise, Yuuri nodded wearily, and the two soon found themselves serving exile behind a damp wooden log, a tree having fallen in a vicious storm some weeks ago.

"Maybe this was all redundant..." said Yuuri, "...what's the point in trying to escape if I can't even get very far? You should go, Jun - I don't want to be a burden."

"What? Pfff- you're not a burden!"

"There's no way I can run as fast as you can-"

Yuuri felt his chest clench tight, his breathing split into irregular spasms of shallow inhalation as he was forced to lie against the floor for strength.

"Holy shit," exclaimed Jun, "you okay down there?"

The skater gave his companion a faint thumbs-up, his smile wavering as the weight of his body pulled increasingly downwards on his aching bones. Whether he fully admitted to it or not, Yuuri has to at least somewhat acknowledge that he was the rock dragging Jun down, holding him back from true freedom, and the older patient felt terrible.

"Come on, Yuuri, we didn't spend all that time planning for you to get a case of the aches and pains! I know that illness can burn calories," chuckled Jun, "but I'll get you more diet pills when we reach Tokyo!"

Yuuri bolted upright,
"Tokyo?"

"Yeah," Jun beamed, "those pesky nurses wont find us there, that's for sure!"

Sighing, the skater pushed his scratched lenses back against his forehead.

"Jun... I want to be with Viktor."

"And you can be! Just get him to come with us to Tokyo! It's fine - if you want to have sex that's okay, just give me some warning and I'll turn and face the other way!"

Yuuri didn't know quite how to reply.

"I'm sorry... but I want to be with Viktor, just Viktor - in Russia. In our apartment. Just us."

The younger patient stared coldly upon Yuuri's shrunken visage, his icy gaze piercing through the skater's soul.

"Not at all?"

Yuuri dropped his head,
"I'm sorry- I'm so sorry-"

This time Jun did not reply. Instead, he sank further to the ground, now level with his partner in crime, with a smile both acrid and desolate and a glimmer of mania twinkling in his eye.

"You know you can't just leave me, right?"

"Come on, Jun, we're reasonable adults..."
Jun sneered, "Come on, you really expect me to believe that? Were chronic anorexics with shrivelled brains and shrunken hearts, obsessed with destroying ourselves and hell-bent on doing it in the most dramatic way possible. We were never reasonable. We were daring, different - nobody could stop us, and nobody can stop us now. Are you really going to abandon me like that?"

"Again, I'm sorry, okay? It's just-"

"Just what?"

"Jun, I don't love you. And I never will."

Yuuri’s words struck the patient’s heart like a thousand barrels of gunfire. Engulfed by the deafening silence of night, neither said a word, simply staring the other down whilst the tension only continued to build.

Edging closer with a menacing glare, Jun pressed his forehead against Yuuri’s, biting his lip in frustration as his dry, chapped lips ground against the yellowed stones that hung inside his mouth.

“Don’t be so ungrateful.”

‘Why the sudden change in tone?’ Yuuri thought, considering the cordial relations shared between them prior to escaping.

“Look, I apologise - but this won’t affect anything between us, honest, I still totally respect you-”

“-And yet, you’re still totally ungrateful.”

Tears began to spout from Yuuri’s clouded ducts, his yellowed skin bruised by both the penance and the pain of this lifestyle which he’d grown to know so well.

“Please, come on Jun, don’t do this. I consider you are best friend - no, a brother-”

“Yet you’re willing to abandon me for some ancient Russian sleaze-bag? Oh sweet, sweet Yuuri. He doesn’t care for you. You know what that fucker will do to you once you’re recaptured, or you’re sent back to your prissy St. Petersburg paradise? He’s going to fatten you up. Imagine that? Thousands of thousands of greasy, sloppy calories sloshing around in your stomach, in your muscles and your blood, your gluttonous flab spilling out of your clothes and into the sadistic hands of your fetish-fuelle husband. Is that what you call love? Trust me, Viktor will never love you like I can.”

Jun was eager to continue with his rather savage monologue, but his speech was abruptly ended with the eerie squeal of police sirens carrying their siren call across the frigid winds of night. Yuuri’s ears pricked at the sound, and although the skater failed to define just what had risen within him, a great rage that he had never once experienced began to brew inside of him. The older patient had never exactly been quick to anger, and had frequently scurried away from bouts of confrontation, but something about this felt completely different and distinct from anything he’d put himself through before. Yuuri was exhausted, both physically and mentally. He was weary from the constant toil and struggle of starvation, the rampant health problems caused as a result of extensive beatings to his most vital organs, and perhaps most of all, the violent emotional devastation he’d caused for the ones he held most dear. His body craved nourishment, his heart craved true stability; his soul craved sanctuary. It was as though a light had flipped inside the skater’s shrunken and malnourished brain, one that Jun’s frequent encouragement would no longer be capable of slamming off. The life he had built for himself hurt much worse than the one he had
left behind.

And, perhaps the most shocking revelation of all - that a lifetime living freely in a mildly overweight yet nourished body, enriched with the happiness and smiles of the people that surrounded him, would be more beautiful and vivid than his current microcosm of self-hatred and doubt, in which all relations suffered.

Suddenly, Yuuri didn’t care about being skinny anymore.

Yuuri just wanted to be happy.

And, though the skater knew this positivity would never be a constant incline, and that the future no doubt still held periods of solemnity and self-repulsion, he thereby swore to himself that from this day on, he would unconditionally love himself with all his heart, and that no one - absolutely no one - would ever be able to snatch his right to live his life happily again.

“Jun, fuck off.”

Jun sneered, “Oh, wow, an insult! I’m sooo scared. Not as scared, however, as you will be once you look in the mirror after Viktor turns you into the little piggy you deserve to be!”

‘Piggy.’ The world that had started it all. It rang in Yuuri’s ears like the rattle of a rusted knell as it rolled off the tip of his antagonist’s tongue. This time, however, the skater would not cower in embarrassment. Yuuri would fight for his right to stay alive. Yuuri would finally fight for himself.

“I’m serious Jun, you can fuck right off. You’ve been obsessed with me ever since I arrived, when I was wheeled through the halls in a state that I doubt even my own husband could be attracted to, and whilst back then I appreciated the camaraderie, now I’ve realised that it’s just downright perverse. Yes, you’re sick too, but you want to know the difference between us? I never intended to hurt anyone but myself. You, however, poison the spirits of all souls you come across. I was, and am, still dying, and you did nothing but encourage me to continue to destroy myself so thoroughly. Trust me, I wanted to be friends with you. To be truthful, I thought we shared a genuine connection - but you dashed all hopes of an everlasting friendship with your bitter malice, and you ruin everything you touch. Compared to my husband, you are nothing. Yes, that’s right, Viktor is MY HUSBAND, a sympathetic angel, who, despite his own struggles with severe depression and disguised alcoholism, consistently swore to himself that he wouldn’t let me down. Whilst I ravaged our relationship, constantly sending him into a spiral of worry, guilt, and regret, he never gave up on me. And, sweet, sweet Jun, I know that he never will. So you can take your stupid fucking starvation and shove it up your boney ass, because yes, maybe I will swell like the little piggy I am, and yes, my clothes may never be able to comfortable contain me, but my fattened body will be worth a thousand times your shrivelled corpse, and I will live to tell the tale. I don’t care what you think. I’m going to recover - whether it pleases you or not.”

Jun, his face plagued with an expression of disbelief, braced himself to interject, but was cut short as swathes of angered red and suffocating blue rose up over the rolling hills and sped towards the patients’ retreat.

Seconds later and the clearing was surrounded. Police officers stormed through the trees, clutching the two sickened boys as they shivered on the ground. Jun, utterly dismayed, lashed out against the workers with bared teeth and clawed fingers, but his body eventually betrayed him, and finally too weak to fight he collapsed into the confinement of a parked police vehicle. Yuuri, contrastingly, was willing to go quietly. Relieved to have finally given it all up, he rose to his feet, dignity shining from his pallid visage as he limped from the cover of the trees on the arm of a kindly officer to a
car parked opposite to Jun’s. He fastened the seatbelt, praying to whatever deity that came to mind that this would be the last time he’d have to ride in an emergency vehicle, and turned to face the window. What he then saw transformed his smirk of victory into a beaming grin of surprise. Haruka was sitting on the back seat beside him, tears in her eyes but hope in her smile.

“Yuuri, holy shit,” she wept, “I was so worried! Thank God you’re okay - I was beside myself for letting you slip away like that!”

The patient said nothing, simply nodding as flares of both extreme appreciation and sorrow flew fast into his heart. Then, as his eyes finally cried tears of happiness, he rushed forward and gripped her tight, embracing her with all the appreciation he could muster.

“Thank you...” he whispered hoarsely through the salty water streaming down his face, “thank you for never giving up on me.”

“I couldn’t if I wanted to.”

The journey returning to the unit was an emotional one. Partially as the pair were glad to be reunited on tranquil terms again, and partially since both knew that Yuuri’s stay was coming to its eventual end.

“I’ve got to admit, initially I’d assumed that the only way you’d be getting out of here was in a coffin...” said Haruka in a solemn tone, handing Yuuri a hot chocolate with marshmallows as they sat in the reception of the unit, “but hey - you’re here now! And you’re eating marshmallows, that’s something I would never have expected to see!”

The skater sat peacefully under a blanket and sipped at the creamy beverage, peacefully waiting for his taxi to the airport. The world had finally seemed to have stopped swirling around him. Whilst the guilt was almost unbearable, and Yuuri could still memorise the precise list of calories for every imaginable ingredient included, he battled through the army of demons gnawing at his brain, and nurtured his empty stomach with some urgently-needed energy.

“Yuuri Katsuki, I am so, so proud of you.”

Haruka was telling the truth. Having witnessed Yuuri festering in his disorder at his worst, she was amazed to see him finally opening up the cage which he originally had locked himself in. The skater wasn’t free just yet, but peace lingered with a smile on the horizon.

“What happened to Jun?” asked Yuuri, a little remorseful for his earlier choice of words, but adamant in his recovery nonetheless.

The young nurse shook her head, her voice faltering as she spoke, “After the police detained him and brought him back to here, he smashed his skull in retaliation against the pavement by a side entrance to the building. I’m not a senior nurse, so I’m not allowed on the scene, but from what I heard, he died pretty much instantly. I’m sorry, Yuuri - I know you two were close.”

Yuuri wasn’t quite sure how to react. One one hand, he and Jun had (although briefly) shared many happy times together before relations had turned sour. On the other hand, the younger patient had thoroughly prompted his demise, and had lead the skater to the brink of extinction. Truthfully, Yuuri could neither bring himself to love nor hate Jun’s character. When he tried to think about it, the older patient simply felt nothing at all.

“It’s okay.” Said Yuuri, “I’ll be okay.”
As the sleek black vehicle pulled up towards the entrance, Yuuri knew with a heavy heart that it was time to say goodbye. Hugging Haruka for the last time, he thanked her once again for everything she’d done, and after they’d exchanged numbers left before both parties erupted into violent sobbing messes. It may not have been the best outcome for either, but it was not Yuuri who had died that night, and for that Haruka knew she’d be eternally grateful.

Following a brief stop to bid farewell to his heavily relieved Japanese family at the airport, the skater boarded a flight straight to Russia, promising himself never to look back. Mari, who had never been one for sentimentalities, wept profusely with elation as she shared a donut with her emaciated little brother, whilst his parents gazed on with both amazement and ecstasy that their son was still alive.

His mind hugely more determined and body a little less frail, the biting yet wholeheartedly soothing chill of the cold Russian air welcomed Yuuri back to St Petersburg, his home beckoning from the moment he stepped from the plane.

The skater was a little nervous. Although it’d been mere weeks since the two lovers had reunited, their separation had felt as though it were a lifetime - and Jun’s role as a usurper had hardly helped matters. Yuuri wondered, despite that it had been merely a couple of days since he’d began eating to recover, if Viktor would notice the difference in his appearance. Anxiety now taking the wheel of the car crash that was the skater’s mind, he prayed that his husband would still find him attractive - although, in reality, he had most likely gained a minuscule amount whilst he avoided referring syndrome, the majority of it water weight anyway.

Everything about Russia felt so familiar, so homelike, and yet so utterly alien simultaneously. The skater felt as though he was looking at his surroundings through a kaleidoscope - bright and picturesque, with elements of uncertainty lurking in the shadows. Yuuri wondered if this was how it would be for the rest of his days spent in the city.

Exhausted from the journey, Yuuri traversed the airport corridors with eyes barely open and hair jutting in every direction. The Japanese boy had furthermore began to notice just how much his fluency in the national dialect had receded since his time in Japan, increasingly aware of the period in which he’d only spoke his mother tongue, but later checked himself - as a couple, he and Viktor often spoke in English anyway. At that moment, few things mattered more than being reunited with his husband, and as Yuuri caught a glimpse of the tall, slim figure in a suede brown coat turn the corner of the arrivals lounge, both his bags and his jaw dropped to the floor.

The couple locked eyes and immediately sprinted.

Nothing in life could have prepared Yuuri for the pure unadulterated euphoria that surged through his body as he galloped towards his husband. Viktor, pulled by a remarkable force of will towards his tiny partner, sped towards the Japanese boy with nothing but joy in his gait and life in his eyes, arms extended as though receiving a revelation from an angel. The universe had restored his one true blessing to his heart, and he vowed to never again let it fall from the sanctuary of his grasp. Phichit, who had flown in from Thailand and was jogging along close by, paced himself before coming to a halt. He knew that this was Viktor’s and Yuuri’s special moment, and their moment alone.

Breaking down into tears, the married men slammed into each other in a single glorious embrace, the power of their love ricocheting across the room for all to experience and gaze upon in appreciation and awe. Their Thai companion, overcome with emotion, additionally joined in the emotional display - although not quite incapacitated enough to resist videoing the scene in his mobile phone. Everything was perfect, and he felt compelled to capture it as all great videographers
Meanwhile, Yuuri and Viktor were in a world of their own. Neither had said a word to the other upon their reunification; no conversation was required - a mere glance upon their partner’s long-unseen face and both fluttered in a flurry of passionate love. Unable to withstand the urges any longer, their hug progressed into a passionate kiss - a loud and unapologetic public display of their dedication to one another for all the world to see.

Eyes closed but heart roaring in his chasmic chest, Yuuri leant against his Russian lover’s shoulder, smiling contentedly. Everything was perfect.

“Viktor, I’m home.”
High Hopes

It wasn’t getting any easier. In fact, with every pound gained and dreaded BMI percentile that crawled slightly upwards on the scale, Yuuri Katsuki’s journey back to health was growing increasingly taxing on his fragile mentality.

However, Yuuri was no longer totally alone. As he sat bent over the kitchen table, his face moistened with anxiety and guilt, his husband pulled up a nearby chair and flew to his aid, prepared to comfort his partner with as many hugs and belly rubs as required. The Japanese boy, though not quite so endangered as he once had been physically, still remained drastically underweight, and Viktor had been quick to realise during mealtimes that he himself would play a huge part in Yuuri’s recovery.

Soon to notice his husband struggling with a fresh batch of pancakes, the Russian stacked himself a plate in solidarity - after all, food had been something they both derived great pleasure from partaking in together prior to Yuuri’s decline, and he thought it was about time they revived the comfort of some old memories. Although weeping as he did so, the Japanese skater managed a half-hearted smile, pushing past the waves of discomfort to finish his meal - which, admittedly, tasted pretty freaking delicious. The outer shell of each pancake was soft yet crisped to perfection by the drizzle of oil now allowed present in their frying pan, the inside fluffy and moist, all drenched in butter and sweet maple syrup for the anorexic to enjoy.

Yuuri needed the calories, and lots of them. Whilst the doctor had warned that some of the damage to his body was unfortunately irreversible, and that he’d possibly always be burdened by a weakened heart and skeletal system, the majority of the skater’s organs additionally needed vast amounts of surplus to make their much-needed reparations. 5000 calories a day was the nutritionists’s prescription, and even now Yuuri was barely gaining over half a kilogram each week.

“I’m proud of you, Lapochka,” Viktor said as he kissed his husband on the cheek, wiping away what remained of his tears before the younger man retreated into a blanket on the couch. Yuuri gave a thumbs-up in response, groaning a little as the all-too-unfamiliar sensation of fullness consumed his conscience, but deep inside he too was proud of himself and the new-found satiety that lay inside of him.

Just over two months had passed since Yuuri had returned from the inpatient unit in Japan. Back home on Russian soil, flowers were beginning to rise from their temporary earthly coffins in the rusted plant pots that lined the city streets, songbirds once again started to flutter through the fresh spring air, and just as the other international skating athletes were beginning to train for a brand new competitive seasons in the autumn, Yuuri was forced to rest his troublesome vessel as he witnessed those he once defeated twirl past him as though left behind to bite the dust.

Still, perhaps it was for the best that he take it at his own pace. Although it pained him to think of it, Yuuri had to come to terms with the fact that his most recent victory maybe have been his last opportunity to take to the ice as a competitor, and the sad reality was that it had all been so utterly avoidable. Whilst the Japanese boy had been repeatedly reminded by both Viktor and his therapist not to blame himself for his eating disorder, a small portion of his mind consistently sought criticism, wishing he had put an end to the starvation before it was too late.

Thankfully the skater’s old pals hadn’t left him too far behind. Phichit had visited a couple of times in recent weeks to check up on his healing friend, the cuts on his own arms beginning to close as he himself reached out for assistance once he’d finally accepted the burden of his condition. The Thai
boy had never been one to stave off an incoming onslaught of tears, and when he first caught a glimpse of just how much his best friend had improved, the waterworks immediately began. Even Chris had dropped in with a couple of bars of Swiss chocolate, which Yuuri gratefully but gingerly received, and Otabek (whilst, admittedly, the primary objectives of his visits were to court his boyfriend Yuri Plisetsky) managed to roll around to check on the skater’s progress too. Yuuri greatly appreciated the effort, hoping that he was no longer so alone - however, he was also consciously aware of just how much they’d moved on in their lives, whilst his remained so disappointingly stagnant in comparison.

“But hey, I guess I can’t turn back time, right?” He said to Viktor as they rested by the fire, “Thanks for the pancakes earlier - although if I’d cooked them they’d likely be inedible.”

Viktor chuckled, “If you’d cooked them, they’d be swimming in konjac flour and low-calorie oat mush - besides, I’m getting old, I’ve got to have something to take over from my failing career as an athlete!”

Laughing in response, an additional pang of regret shot through Yuuri’s stomach. His partner, out of sheer compassion and concern for his husband’s wellbeing, had additionally dropped out of this year’s Grand Prix Final.

‘It’s one thing that I’ve ruined my own career,’ Yuuri thought to himself, nibbling his way through a mandatory morning snack, ‘but I don’t want to be responsible for sabotaging Viktor’s too.’

Viktor, on the other hand, although mildly disappointed was not particularly distraught. He derived enjoyment purely from the fact that he could spend quality time with his husband, nourishing him back to health and acting as a dependable shoulder to cry on. He was the figure driving Yuuri to much-needed therapy appointments, weigh-ins (the apartment scale had long since been disposed of) and doctor’s appointments, the grocery shopper and personal chef, and first and foremost: the utterly and undoubtedly caring husband.

Recovery, in a sense, had been odd for the both of them. Yuuri’s body was rapidly transforming for the better, but it was both parties who were left to pick up the pieces of this dramatic change. Every mouthful meant another flutter in the Japanese boy’s heartbeat, but every spoonful also meant a little more relaxation in his husband’s. Neither knew the man Yuuri would eventually become, and even at a healthy weight both knew some difficulties were bound to eventually persist. The younger partner was still paddling away in what many recovering anorexics termed the ‘honeymoon’ phase of recovery - where symptoms of the disorder were still physically obvious and weight gain so vital to one’s survival.

Food and all its many flavours were additionally a rather foreign concept to the Japanese skater in these early stages, as they were elements of life of which he had deprived himself for so long. Each bite danced along his tongue with the intensity of a thousand running horses, from sickly sweet wisps of cotton candy to the gooey tenderness of melted mozzarella sticks, and his personal favourite - katsudon! Prior to recovery, Yuuri hadn’t eaten his beloved katsudon in months, the dish having previously earned itself a spot on the skater’s list of ‘banned foods’; now the 900-calorie extravaganza had become practically a fraction of his daily intake, and something the skater joined extremely regularly. It may not have been a phenomenal milestone in the grand scheme of events in Yuuri’s life, but to his family and friends this was yet another sign that their companion was finally getting himself back on track.

Time passed, but to Yuuri, everything began to feel as though he was caught in his reflection in the mirror, eyes locked only on his own small microcosm whilst the rest of the world rushed past him. Sure, he was gaining weight - and at a reasonable pace that was neither triggering nor insufferably
slow - and yes, his list of fear foods was diminishing in size by the day, but nothing felt quite right. Yuuri appeared to be drifting through the days, not entirely content whilst not entirely dissatisfied, simply existing because that was, as he had been reminded, his basic function as a human being. He loved the people around him with all his being, but despite all the victories, the accomplishments and happiness snatched back from the gnashing jaws of anorexia, the skater still felt as though a part of him was missing.

Thankfully, Viktor was still around to remind his husband of the positives in life. Possibly the most significant factor was that the Japanese boy had wrangled with a seriously-life threatening illness, technically having died whilst lying motionless in the centre of a hospital bed, and yet still lived to tell the tale. Everything was still incomprehensible challenging, with both parties accepting that their time together was unlikely to ever be the same again, but Viktor prayed that they would someday be okay, and that once Yuuri reached a comfortable point of health, he would remain that way for the rest of his long and happy life.

“Baby steps, Yuuri, baby steps,” whispered the Russian, joining his husband for an unplanned dessert in a local French-inspired patisserie. Viktor, unlike the younger skater, had no aversion to desserts whatsoever, and in encouraging Yuuri to finish off his own plate had simultaneously chosen two gargantuan chocolate eclairs for his own consumption.

After some encouragement, Yuuri opted for a treacle tart. Its dotted design screamed at him with a thousand judgemental eyes that set their gaze upon his growing body, but in the end, the skater ate the lot. Some days anorexia would tear its boney head and scream into his ears, and some day it was rendered unusually silent. Yuuri had grown accustomed to this unconventional schedule, and as a result, had learned to take each day as it came, all the while promising to do his best to please his anxious partner.

This cycle persisted for some months, but eventually the symptoms of severe dysmorphia and food anxiety began to fade. Yuuri no longer feared venting his anxieties to a therapist in fear of judgement or confusion, and instead learned to voice his difficulties when faced with the temptation of a relapse. Once comfortable, he even broached the scorching topic of his sexual assault to Viktor’s face. Both wept, understandably, for the pain the skater had experienced and the countless hours of torment spent in recollection of the trauma he’d been through, with the Russian never truly overcoming the heaviness the news had brought his heart, but one way or another the couple had finally learned to process their anxieties, and whether for better or worse, the treatment appeared to be working.

Nothing was perfect, nor would it ever be the same again, but none of that seemed to matter anymore. Yuuri and Viktor were building a new life for themselves, constructing a palace of radiance and light from the ground in which they’d festered for so long, and when the time came for talk of their proposed wedding in the future, both recognised they finally had a strong foundation on which to some day support their healing marriage.

Now, all Yuuri had to do was reach a healthy weight. But that was easier said than done.
Taking his Time

Well, this was all too familiar. The putrid stench of one’s own vomit ricocheting off the ripples of diluted toilet water, the flaming sting of sudden reflux as stomach acid flushes into the mouth, and the fearful muffled retching as its owner desperately attempts to conceal all evidence such an embarrassing event took place.

Yuuri was well accustomed to this unpleasant experience. And after all this time, despite the lengthy process of recovery and the innumerable therapy lessons the skater had received, here he was again - his back arched towards a disapproving sky and head shoved shamefully deep into the barrel of the toilet.

The worst part was that the Japanese boy hated himself for it. Gone were the days spent flying high on the elation of an empty stomach, skin taught from shrunken flesh and brain wrecked on a concoction of chemicals from an overdose of energy drinks; Yuuri no longer wanted to suffer, and yet when it all boiled down to old habits, the skater wondered with a wistful sigh as he sat on the unforgiving bathroom floor whether or not he would ever truly be free from his own monstrosity.

What Yuuri had feared the most was not the threat of death - although to be fair, such a lingering thought was still rather unpleasant - but the concept that perhaps he’d forever be stricken in this way. Would he, as an elderly man, reflect on his life with sorrow, wishing that he had not spent his days consumed by anorexia’s scaly clutches, dying without dignity and before his time?

No.

The skater refused to suffer alone. Sure, he feared the repercussions of exposing his most recent failure to the man he held truly beloved, but in the end, there were few other alternatives - he was either to fester in the clutches of his eating disorder for yet another evening, or come clean in the hope of acceptance and a perhaps a swift reprimand from his husband.

“Viktor...” began Yuuri, in a soft and muted tone, “...I have something to tell you.”

The Russian, who currently was flicking through the couple’s latest feature in Vogue Japan, raised his head inquisitively and finished his last sip of a martini he’d prepared for the occasion.

“Sure, lyubov moya-”

Viktor looked his husband up and down, realising he was clearly torn over something pressing.

“Yuuri, what’s wrong? You look terrible..”

“I feel terrible,” replied the Japanese boy, resting on his partner’s shoulder as he bit his lip uncomfortable, “look, I’ve - I’ve got to admit something, okay? Please don’t freak out..”

“I promise I won’t be angry, whatever the news may be.”

Yuuri took a deep breath, relaxing his restless shoulders in preparation for the tension that was shortly to follow.

“Viktor... I purged.”

“What?”
The Russian skater’s face dropped instantly.

“I’m sorry, I’m so sorry - I didn’t want to hurt you like this. But I couldn’t hide it any longer, I wanted to tell you so there’d be no secrets anymore.”

Viktor remained silent for a moment, throwing his arms around his distressed partner shortly after. Neither were particularly happy with the result of Yuuri’s actions, but the older skater saw it futile that he berate the other party - kindness appeared to be his greatest weapon of encouragement, and though slip-ups such as this were fortunately becoming less frequent, he knew that to prevent any potential relapses the best thing he could give the Japanese boy was acceptance.

“It’s okay.” Said Viktor, “You’re okay.”

“Really?”

“Well, obviously I’m not going to be happy about this - I don’t want you to do this to yourself - but we have to accept that your recovery won’t be linear, that you’ll keep having some bad days - maybe for the rest of your life.”

Yuuri pursed his lips, ashamed,

“And you’re not mad at me?”

The Russian smiled, shaking his head as silver tresses danced before his eyes,

“I don’t think I could ever be mad at you as long as you promise to keep trying.”

Perhaps Yuuri was destined for an eventual retirement with his disorder lurking around every corner, however, now he knew he had a secret weapon - even in his old age, Viktor would be present, a gentle soul to cry on as the two of them likely munched away at stale bread and patties, dozing off in front of daytime television as they would gaze longingly at the trophies scattered across numerous mahogany cabinets, reminiscing over the glory days they shared when they were young.

“Still,” continued Viktor, “I’m afraid I’m going to have to text your therapist about this.”

Yuuri was struck with shock and disbelief, lowering himself onto his back and shielding his vision with the comfort of his sweater, both aggravated and upset.

“Do you have to?”

Viktor leant over him, kissing the younger skater softly on his rosen cheek,

“Yes. This is for your well-being as much as it is my own peace of mind.”

His partner reciprocated, craving the intimacy he had been so deprived of during his time engulfed by his mental illness, and the two lay horizontal across the velvet blanket, kissing and touching playfully as the amber hues of sunset soon tumbled into the indigo opaque of night.

Later that evening, following another heartfelt discussion with his beau, Viktor finally took action and mustered the mental courage to telephone his husband’s therapist. A fraction of the Russian felt wholly inadequate for relying on another man to analyse Yuuri’s feelings (and not him in his role as the skater’s partner), but ultimately that same portion of his psyche had come to realise there were just some aspects of anorexia that he was not medically qualified to tackle. In the same way that Yuuri had initially been frightened of seeking help for his disorder, his husband had been simultaneously jealous of the mental health workers for causing him to relinquish aspects of his involvement in their relationship.
Both partners had come a long way since Yuuri’s hospitalisation. The Japanese skater perhaps doing so more physically than mentally, however both were now sincerely educated on the difficulties present in his eating disorder, and equipped to deal with its difficulties whenever they should arise.

Eventually, as his weight neared a level far less critical than shortly after his discharge, Yuuri even began to campaign for causes raising awareness for anorexia in young male athletes, even if he himself was not completely healed. Compelled to make a difference in the world he was so nearly cruelly taken out of, the skater (alongside his husband, for support) often frequented charity events and spoke for the cause - a rather tasking sport when surrounded by the many patriarchal, misandristic pockets of St. Petersburg.

Recovery brought strength. Strength brought power. And for Yuuri, power brought a voice for his concerns into another element of his life where mental suffering was often overlooked - the athletic community. Not only had Grand Prix Final administrators essentially ignored his steep demise towards the end of the previous year during the competition, but furthermore, when his best friend Phichit was to model for its promotional campaign and the unsightly incisions on his wrists soon discovered, he was denied involvement in its media events altogether.

“It’s all got to change-” Yuuri said to Viktor at the dinner table that evening, polishing off a second helping of treacle tart to accommodate for his earlier purging episode. Guilt began to creep upon his face as the slight distension of his stomach grazed against the gathering of his sweatpants, but the skater soon remembered he was fighting for a cause.

“At the wedding, I should write it in my speech.”

Viktor shot him an inquisitive expression,

“Are you sure? In front of our families, and no doubt an estranged member of the paparazzi?”

Yuuri nodded indignantly -

“Sure, some way or another the events will end up being broadcast internationally - we’ve just got to accept that - why not speak publicly about our story, there can’t be anything that’s tested our relationship more than this past year or so. It’s true we’re already married, and yes, this ceremony really is all just for show - haha, like the attention whores we are - but if the whole world’s watching, we better make it special.”

Smiling, Viktor soon agreed. He could detect a certain sparkle in his husband’s eye that was beginning to make a valiant return, after lying dormant for so long. He wished for no more future purging sessions, no extra stumbles in the process of recovery - he yearned for their relationship to be truly stable, truly happy.

Nothing could, and ever would be perfect. Nonetheless, the Russian vowed to ensure that no further evils would ever harm his love again, and each week, as Yuuri gained the weight so critically required to sustain himself, hope began to stroll further across the glistening horizon.

Their lives would never be the same again, but that was okay. Now the couple could create something perfect, something beautiful - something they’d cherish for the rest of their existence, and their families forever more.
Well, Yuuri had finally done it. After just over a year of stop-and-start weight gain, as he gingerly placed himself upon the doctor's scale and held his breath nervously awaiting the number, the skater soon discovered he had finally reached a healthy weight. And to be sincerely honest, he and his husband were both flooded with nothing but relief. For the most part, and granted, with the regular assistance of a qualified therapist, the final few months of Yuuri's weight gain had been a restless slog of ridiculous meal plan increases, extensive plateaus and every calorie he could possibly consume. His body having charged into hyper-kmetabolism in order to repair his ailing organs, the Japanese boy was stuffed - constantly, uncomfortably stuffed - and was glad for the ability to finally welcome intuitive eating into his world.

Then, extreme hunger finally kicked in (as his nutritionist predicted it would). Vaguely fearful of gaining uncontrollably into an obese BMI, Yuuri initially advised himself to reign his eating habits in a little. However, something inside of the skater's head began to fight back. He'd come so far with this body, this once emaciated, lifeless yet now free and thriving vessel of blood and bone, that a small inner voice convinced him not to change his ways. Dizzied by self-construed sensations of fear and mistrust, Yuuri panicked for a moment, before calming himself with his own newly-discovered rationality. Instead of restricting his calories, and thus eventually his metabolism, the skater now vowed to trust his body, allowing it to settle into its own natural weight.

Which, admittedly, was rather frightening at first thought. However, as the Japanese boy began to eat on his own terms - and eat he did, often topping four or five meals and multiple snacks a day - he promptly discovered that their was virtually nothing to worry about. Sure, Yuuri continued to gain a little extra weight, eventually settling in comfortably at a BMI of around 19.3 - initially the skater had supposed anything over the minimum of 18.5 would be total and utter sacrilege - but having forbade himself from constant body checks whilst cocooned in the comfort of multiple oversized sweaters, he payed very little attention to his appearance, and the result of the number on the scale eventually affected him very little as it levelled off into a mere figure of measurement.

One radiant Saturday morning, as the sun's glowing ribbons entangled the swirling silver clouds and coral pink hues flushed a cool sky, Yuuri made the valiant decision to rise up from the silken bedsheets that rested against his skin and make his into the bathroom, dropping his nightclothes in front of a full length mirror and contemplating the effect of just what he would see.

And what did he see? Well, all Yuuri saw was himself. A healthy, happy young man in the prime of his life after a momentary lapse into darkness, a being of organic matter, of skin, flesh and bone - a human being. His shoulders were strong, erect and sturdy like the finest Himalayan mountains, his stomach not concave, but shapely and healthy - with subtle abdominal peaks creeping outward; his legs two sturdy wooden branches, scarred and scraped, but hardy and pumping with motion to keep him upright. He may not have been skinny, but Yuuri was finally healthy, truly healthy, and not just an idealised impression of recovery based off the minimum of a universal BMI chart. The Japanese boy didn't need some blatant lie from a supposed health website regarding strict caloric intake and idealised body masses - he was a picture of health, one that deserved to feel love, and hope, and affection, and although he wasn't teetering cautiously over the baseline of what was deemed medically healthy, Yuuri finally acknowledged that his survival and lifelong wellbeing were worth billions of times more than the validation of a lower number on the scale.

Besides, today there would be no depression, no dissatisfaction. For today was Yuuri's wedding day.
Upon releasing the news of the date to the public, the media'd had a field day. Of course, the sly fact that the couple had in fact already been married in Japan many moons ago was not to be exposed; Viktor and Yuuri delighted in the press' gullibility, with the former lapping up the attention like a king, whilst the latter took a much more sweet and bashful approach to the international praise and exclamation.

That morning, the Japanese boy and his soon-to-be-husband of the man who was, technically, already his husband, breakfasted in a vintage cafe hosted in a crystalline penthouse in St. Petersburg, sipping at rosehip and hibiscus tea whilst feeding each other heart-shaped segments of French toast - as many as their souls so desired. Viktor, as dramatic as was to be expected, was scented with honey musk, resting in the silken luxury of a velveteen-lined robe. His younger counterpart, however, had finally given in to the pleas of his partner to relinquish some elements of his humble personality, and had thus allowed himself to be festooned in all kinds of visual pleasures imaginable. A fragrant feather boa lined his neck, hiding a couple of conspicuously crimson bite-sized marks, attached to a dainty lace bolero shrug which floated down towards his waist and tied with ribbons by his elbow. This, indeed, exposed the evidence of gruesome lacerations from a grim period in the skater's life, but neither party gave the subject much thought - Yuuri wasn't ashamed of his past, for it had moulder him into his current self, and Viktor was appreciative of all the forms of eccentricity that made up the heavenly appearance of his lover's earthly body. Both men, of course, wore fingerless satin gloves (courtesy of Donatella Versace herself), partially as they scintillated well against the glistening backdrop of the morning sun, but largely just because they could. This was their special day, and the couple would be sure to spend it exactly how they'd always dreamed of.

Yuuri's parents and his sister had flown in from Japan the week prior, bearing no apparent gifts but some money reserved specifically for the day of the actual wedding - as what appeared to be custom in relation to their traditions. The Russian skater, on the other hand, had no known or living biological relatives of which he was able to invite. Born the bastard son of a half-starved homeless woman on the streets of Yakutsk, long abandoned by the baby's criminal of a father, he was left for dead in the fatal chills of the Siberian winter before being collected by the nuns at a local orphanage. It had been phenomenal luck that, one fateful winter's morning whilst Viktor had been dancing across a frozen river, rhythmic as he always was, that the young international skating prodigy Yakov Feltsman had been passing by on a visit to his father - and the rest was history.

Yuuri's father was to walk him down the aisle, but for Viktor Nikiforov, the man that was to give him away would be his coach.

Yakov had initially been somewhat hesitant to walk with his most beloved pupil know that members of the paparazzi no doubt had infiltrated the guest list, but upon hearing the faithful chime of hearty wedding bells ringing through the streets of St. Petersburg as the sun rose approvingly to its high position in the sky, decided that this was definitely the right place, at exactly the right time.

A little flustered (but still wholly appreciative) as top fashion graduates and dressing room assistants fluttered around him, Yuuri sat before a vanity mirror, decorated in a crisp black suit, tie, and with a crisp young bouquet of green carnations neatly tucked into his lapel. Although it was his typical bashful self on public display - as was usual - a secret part of the skater loved the indulgence, the attention, and the passion of it all. Perhaps it was due to the fact that Yuuri had denied himself such examples of self-love for such a prolonged period of time, but as the makeup artists applied his foundation and mascara, the skater could do nothing more than focus on his appearance in the mirror. Yuuri looked good, and he knew it.

"Can I have some lipstick?" He asked inquisitively, gesturing to a Coco Chanel container sitting upright on the pristine marble countertop.
The makeup artist smiled with a wink, "Of course, Mr Katsuki. But that's not to be your name for much longer, is it?"

Yuuri grinned, "No, not at all."

Yes, the Japanese boy was delighted that he was marrying the man who was, without question, literally the hottest specimen in the northern hemisphere, but furthermore, he was equally smug that still nobody but he and a few select members of his closest circle knew about the true details of the wedding. For in fact, his name had been Mr. Yuuri Katsuki-Nikiforov for quite some time now, but he was only to bear the full badge of honour once married whilst the entire world was watching.

Viktor reclined in the chaise lounge positioned against a velvet curtain in the room opposite, the mirror concealed as he'd specifically advised in preparation for the 'big reveal'. Unlike Yuuri, who was satisfied with the crisp cut of a sharp jet black suit and a fresh shade of coral spread thinly across his lips, Viktor had instead chosen to dress, yet again, in pure silk - only the finest white suit was to cater to his demands (besides, the ivory undertones really complimented his eyes). As did the subtle brush of ochre spread across his eyelid, and the smudge of dazzling highlight that made his cheekbones pop - all were part of a master plan, the great culmination of his creative soul, that was the construction of the wedding. Sure, Viktor could have been likened to the characterisation of a groom-zilla, as he'd seen so many times on quality daytime television, but it all boiled down to the fact that he loved Yuuri with every fibre of his mortal being, and that he needed to display that - inside and out.

Saint Isaac's Cathedral was to be the spouses' site of unification. How the couple had been able to reserve this historic building for a private function on a Saturday afternoon, a peak time in the week for tourism, the residents of St Petersburg found to be a mystery - but with Yuuri's linguistic skills and Viktor's lovable charm, they assumed that in the end it must not have been too hard. Although both men had experienced their fair share of encounters with the spirit world, neither of the men were devotedly religious; it had been quite the unexpected announcement that the wedding was to be held in a location held sacred by so many.

The couple travelled to the Cathedral in separate cars. Viktor, lounging lavishly in the back of a Rolls-Royce Phantom, and Yuuri, relaxing in the comfort of a Bentley Continental - both sipping at champagne flutes as adoring fans swooned throughout the city streets. Had Russia not abolished its monarchy, it would have been said that not even the excitement of a royal wedding could compare to the atmosphere of this monumental occasion.

The Russian was the first to arrive. Taking the arm of two of his dearest companions, Lilia and Yakov by his sides, he placed one impeccably-shined leather shoe in front of the other as he ventured up the church steps and into the grandeur of the sacred building. Viktor, being Viktor, was accustomed to his typical expectations of opulence and luxury, but this was on another level. The skater barely contained his sheer jubilation at the nature of the day whilst he was waltzed up the aisle, and as he stood ornately by the high members of the church (one, an Orthodox priest, the other a priest practicing Shintoism) nothing but pride welled up inside him. The ceremony wasn't planned as particularly devout, as it was more a cross-cultural demonstration of the love the couple had for themselves and the universe in which they were created, but rather curiously, there was an expression of sheer light that Viktor could sense building up inside of him; as each minute passed waiting for his husband, the overwhelming urge to sink into his own completion became increasingly prominent.

As it was announced that the second segment of the partnership has now descended upon his
destination, soothing classical music began to play from members of the hired orchestra and the sound of a tender violin wafted through the entrance to the cathedral. Yuuri trembled a little as his footsteps slapped softly against the entrance steps - not at all apprehensive, just so immensely blown away by this scale of grandeur on the couple's big day. The air smelt wonderful, peony undertones mingling with vanilla scent that danced across the Japanese boy's nostrils, and as the skater began to move further inwards, it wasn't merely his ears and nose that were in awe.

Golden chandeliers hung from the ceiling like beautiful trapeze artists, festooned with glowing diamond crystals and gems of all the colours of the rainbow. His eyes darting back and forth repeatedly at the mass of wedding guests, all but the grooms' closest relations robed in formal ebony attire, Yuuri couldn't help but drop his jaw as he gazed upon the traditional Russian depictions of religious figures from hundreds of years ago, their colours glistening with the illumination of a thousand precious candles. One look at the ceiling and the skater realised that he too was not only living through a moment most historical; he and Viktor were making history, accompanied by the undying power of their love and the worldly saboteurs it overcame.

Viktor was already waiting patiently at the end of the aisle, accompanied by both priests and his trusty best man - Yuri Plisetsky. The young Russian prodigy had proved himself a terrific companion as of late, both acting as an avid supporter of Yuuri's recovery and a compassionate shoulder for the couple to cry on, and his former rink-mate couldn't imagine a better figure with whom to entrust the utter prominence of his half of the best man's speech. Yuri, having been granted permission by both grooms, had decked himself head to toe in ragged leopard-print patterns, his blazer, tie and trousers perfectly coordinated. Winking through his smudged grey eyeshadow, he nodded towards Viktor as an update was received that his husband was soon to enter the room. The older skater nodded, and the roaring chatter of grand hall soon calmed into an echoed hush.

The Japanese boy's father was swept onto the scene, linking arms with his young son as they turned to face the stately wooden doors.

"I've got to admit," the elder man said softly, his look protruding in Yuuri's eye, "this time last December, I imagined the next time we'd both be dressed in black was at your funeral."

"Dad, I'm so sorry, I-"

"Please," continued the father of the groom, tearing up, "don't ever be sorry for anything, ever again. You're alive, you're healthy, you're happy - and your mother and I couldn't be more proud. Look at you - dressed to the nines in a church in St. Petersburg, about to marry a figure skating legend, whilst being a legend in yourself, looking beautiful and, well, like somebody who's finally started living."

Yuuri shed a tear, his father wiping away the excess moisture with a hasty flick of his sleeve.

"You better wait - don't want to ruin your makeup just yet."

The skater chuckled, nodding as he embraced his father one last time before being given away forever.

"Ready?"

Yuuri took a deep breath.

"More than I'll ever be."
Together, the two generations of Katsuki men flung open the doors, stunned heads rooted between church pews swivelling from their places to greet them. They waltzed arm in arm up the red carpet of the aisle and towards the beaming groom resting at its end, an adapted rendition of Wagner's 'Bridal Chorus' soaring from within the hearts of a traditional chamber choir, complimented by the melodic instrumental serenade of the finest orchestra Russia had to offer.

From Yuuri's perspective, time appeared to progress in slow motion, everything a little more celestial and skewed from true reality. The skater's head was oddly light, as though caused by a head cloud made of cotton candy; he was in disbelief that something so beautiful could ever happen to the awkward shy kid plucked from a rural coastal town in Southern Kyushu. Strangely, the sensations began to remind him of his past experience whilst clinically dead - a topic of conversation Yuuri understandably had an aversion to - his surroundings pale and ebbing in and out of fragrant alabaster, as though some immanent source of consciousness approved of the unification. Yuuri took this as a sign of great approval from the universe around him.

Meanwhile, back on planet Earth, the skater had finally reached the end of the aisle, the music ceasing instantaneously. Yuuri nodded to his father, who gingerly relinquished his touch from the young groom - it was time for letting go. As the two priests introduced the order of the ceremony, and Phichit (Yuuri's best man) and Chris (the ring-bearer) stood adjacent devotedly, a respectful silence fell as many members of the audience restrained themselves from displaying formal expressions of emotion prior to the grooms' own exclamation.

Glory shone around - both as the candlelight reflected off the historic curvature of painted wooden beams, and furthermore as the couple, who had not been in contact for many hours, finally gazed into one another's eyes.

Viktor's tranquil stare pierced his lover's corneas, the crystalline azure transporting the Japanese boy into summer skies laced with butterflies and bees, his eyelashes and winged eyeliner extending like the neck of a graceful swan. The younger skater himself, however, cast a much deeper shade upon the vision of his husband. Deep ochre tones flirted with shades of soothing coffee, hazel mingling with the mix and sharing its spot in the limelight with the most alluring hints of Amber ever to be discovered. The light illuminating the outline of his spiralling silver locks, Viktor looked as though he were an angel, but Yuuri, well - Yuuri was the most charming work of creation the world would ever have the privilege to behold.

The priests began their speech -
"We are gathered here today to unite these two young males in holy matrimony-

Viktor grinned aside to a blushing Yuuri, whispering,
"You look beautiful."

"- and to mark the essence of their lifelong commitment to one another, before the eyes of everything that witnesses this act of true devotion.-"

Yuuri whispered in response,
"So do you!"

"- Marriage is perhaps the greatest, most enduring, yet most formidable adventure of human relationships. Whether or not you all of you in this room are religiously inclined, we can agree that entering into marriage is not a decision taken lightly, nor is it defined by the conventions of a ceremony. Only your fire, your spirit - your love and perseverance - can cement this unbreakable and long-lasting bond between lovers, and with this ceremony as a witness and affirmation of your undying passion, your family and loved ones will soon behold the choice you've made to unite together as life mates and partners."
As is customary to the majority of weddings, the priests then began to read out the famous list of questions - the two men answering 'I do' to all. So far, everything about this wedding had been as Viktor and Yuuri had dreamed it; it was hard containing themselves from such levels of excitement.

"Would you like to read your vows?" asked the Shinto priest.

The couple nodded; "I'll go first if it's okay," said Yuuri, his face blushing scarlet red.

"Viktor, well, where do I begin? Let's face it, our introduction to one another was certainly unconventional, as though you had been chosen for me - dropped in my lap. Despite the humorous beginnings of our story together, even when relations took a more serious turn, you were... you were always there for me. As I scorned your attention, cast all our time together aside, and delved deeper into the disorder, you stood by me. You stood faithful and true even whilst I lay stricken on a hospital bed, unsure of whether I would live or die, and refused to leave until you saw me awake, alive again. Lapochka, I have put you through absolute hell and back, but you're still standing - we're still standing, together - and I can't think of anyone else I'd wish to spend the rest of my life with."

The crowd was on the verge of tears.

The Russian, who also had turned a shade of bashful crimson, smiled as he pulled a note on berry-scented paper from within the safety of his blazer pocket.

"You'll have to forgive me for the pronunciation-" Viktor said to his husband.

Yuuri looked at him inquisitively.

"Yu-chan, my love, my world," began the older lover, speaking in near-perfect Japanese, "ever since I first laid eyes upon you, I knew that you were the man I wanted to spend the rest of my days with. You are the shining moon and I am the morning sun, so very different in nature, but compatible together, relying on each other for existence. I've watched you blossom from a beautiful, but slightly shaken, starlet on the ice into an exquisite butterfly; everything you touch appears to turn to gold, into rose petals and melodies of sweet sweet love - and you have touched my heart. I'll admit, there have been some bad times. Your demise was not a glorious one, nor one I was initially well-equipped for. I wish I could turn back time, remind you back then that you are the embodiment of pure perfection. I remember kneeling by your hospital bed, told your lights were fading from existence, and praying for my life that you wouldn't give up on me - and you didn't, because here you are today. Through it all, you stayed strong - you stayed alive. And to be honest, there's little more I could have asked for. I would sacrifice everything for that smile on your face, because, Anata, that blushing grin has made everything worth it - you've made everything worth it. I will love you until the day I die, and when that fateful day does come, I'll be waiting for you to continue the next stage of our fantastic adventure together."

Viktor pauses for a moment, then sighed with relief, "Did I get that right?"

"Viktor, it was perfect!"

His eyes crinkling with his hearty smile, the Russian priest read from his order of service, the penultimate line being cast upon the congregation.

"If anyone present has any reason why these two young men should not be married, speak now,
forever hold your peace."

No one said a word, not a dry eye in the house.

"It is my honour to announce you as husbands, united in marriage - you may kiss the groom!"

And kiss these grooms sure did, lips curling passionately around one another as the congregation erupted into wild adoration.

As the couple exited through the grand hall of the church, a flock of doves sprung from gold cages either side of the entrance, and a flurry of ivory rose petals cascaded all around. Children and the skaters' relative tossed confetti over them as they descended down the extension of the red carpet, strips of paper in every colour of the rainbow - this was an LGBTQ wedding, after all.

Yuuri almost snorted at the extent of his husband's elaborate planning as Viktor whisked him away in a horse-drawn carriage, a Cinderella-type chaise embellished with a marbled pattern and polished silver, pulled along by four white Lippizaner stallions dressed to match.

The Japanese boy chuckled from inside the carriage, "Horses? Holy shit... you are extra - how did you manage to hide something like this from me whilst we were planning the wedding? Moreover, how could we afford something like this?"

Kissing his partner yet again, Viktor spoke softly, "Hehe, I spared no expense for this wedding - besides, when you've got contacts in the Russian dressage industry, anything is possible."

"You're crazy."

"And you love it." Replied Viktor, smirking with a handsome twinkle in his eye.

Of course he did. Truthfully, Yuuri longed to rip Viktor from his silver robes and make sweet, sweet love to him in the back of the carriage there and then, passion building inside of him like a flaming kettle ready to burst out of its hollow metal casing. Much to his momentary disappointment, the skater soon realised that he was in fact being driven to their wedding reception for a night full of celebration and festivities, the carriage slowing to a halt outside of the Winter Palace gardens and Phichit poking his head inside the couple's private quarters once news has reached the guests that the couple had arrived.

"Hey guys, we're here."

Giving Phichit a thumbs up, Viktor extended a hand enveloped in shining silk to his Japanese lover, "Shall we?"

As had been expected, the (now publicly) newlyweds were greeted by a blinding wall of flash photography the moment they descended from within the leather comforts of their carriage. Yuuri found the dizzying spells of light to be somewhat daunting, still in disbelief that the wedding was of such a spectacular scale, but his composure soon returned - instead of cowering behind his partner as he would have done, ashamed to flaunt his body to the camera, the Japanese boy now strutted through the crowds of spellbound media photographers, the crows surrounding struck with awe at his splendour and grace.

"Yuuri, tug at the button on your collar," Viktor murmured in his ear, his eyes brows raised in anticipation.
"Why?"

The Russian smirked, "You'll soon find out."

Thus, the younger skater fiddled with the fastening on his jacket collar, and immediately a jet black cape with a ruby satin lining descended from his neck and to the floor. Viktor did the same, and simultaneously a glistening bejewelled cloth flowed out from his outer garment, these two new pieces of fabric contrasting against each other underneath the spotlight of a moonlit sky.

Yuuri was certainly impressed by the level of detail, but he was equally confused, "Why the capes?"

"Again," grinned his radiant companion, "you'll soon discover what's in store."

The couple were seated at the very end of a long mahogany table, their chairs raised apart from those to their side and decorated as though fit for royalty. Whilst still taken aback by the sheer volume of crystals crowding his vision, Yuuri did rather appreciate the velvet cushions on which he did recline. Soon the banqueting area on the patio, enclosed by leafy drapery and spiralling rose trellises, was fit to burst with A-list guests and relations to the grooms, with first, second and third courses served on the finest silver platters the palace kitchen had to offer.

Yuuri enjoyed ever second of the feast. No longer fearing food, but savouring the bountiful range of flavours on offer, he tucked in heartily to scallop entrees, roasted steaks, mountains of Italian gelato - and of course, multiple rounds of caviar. Whilst Viktor munched on strawberry-flavoured mochi, his Japanese husband delighted in the taste of Russian drizzled in the finest Sevillano marmalade, and not a bite was left to stand. Fit to burst, Yuuri could sense the distension of his stomach pressing against his waist jacket, but the skater was far too happy to care. This was his wedding day, and he was to enjoy it no matter what.

The couple began their reception with a short speech, joking about their many merry pastimes, referencing their trials and tribulations, and finally, as the attention of his guests began to linger, Yuuri struck the conversation with his own pre-planned agenda. He spoke openly about his struggles with anorexia, sparing no detail, and looking straight into the eye of a camera promised all that were experiencing such difficulties were not alone. The Japanese boy promised them that life gets better, that there would always be a way out no matter how bleak the future appeared to be, and ended with a gesture to himself as he showcased the possibility of a full enhanced recovery.

"On a more light-hearted note, I think it's time for ~our~ little interference," chirped Phichit, gesturing to Chris and himself as he tapped a fork against his wine glass. "Mind if we take over?"

Yuuri roller his eyes and snorted, smiling with a blend of embarrassment and pride, "Be my guests."

The best men then proceeded to give what would perhaps be considered one of the greatest speeches of all time, jammed with rib-tickling recollections of the couple's most hilarious moments, and exploitation of their most fantastical slip-ups for humorous gain. Whilst Phichit appeared to be everywhere, excitedly ripping through each story as he punched the air like a red-hot dagger, Chris took a more laid-back approach, reclining by the fountain with a brimming glass of rosé, revealing Viktor's deepest darkest secrets and the rippling shame of his embarrassing younger self. There was to be no holding back. Though it was in good spirits, and granted, with permission from his best friend, the Thai boy even delved into the first portion of Yuuri's delightful public defecation experience. Chris reminisced over his first ice-skating camp with his Russian companion, and the hilarity that Viktor had once labelled himself straight.
"Straight as JJ's dick, that is," mumbled the Swiss skater into Phichit's ear, the latter spewing his champagne across the glistening moonlight water as a result.

Eventually, the speeches had all come to a close, and the sitting portion of the evening was finally over. The white fairy lights dimmed into a faded glow, with a single glaring spotlight cast upon a wooden deck laid in the centre of the gardens. Viktor linked arms with his husband, the pair gliding to the centre of the decking joined as one.

Phichit took the microphone -
"If you'd all like to turn your heads to face the centre stage - yes, you too, Leornardo Di Caprio - the married couple will now take their first dance.

"This is what the capes are for, my love." Said the Russian, his eyes dazzling in the sparkle of the light.

Viktor stepped forward as an upbeat piano tune began to play, accompanied by violins - part of the orchestra present at the church. Yuuri instantly recognised the tune; it was the song playing on the car radio on the journey home the day that they'd first kissed.

~ ♪ ~ Can you hear, my heart beat? Tired of feeling never enough... ~ ♪ ~

The younger skater gazed up at his husband, "You remembered?"

"Of course," said the Russian with a spontaneous twist, revealing the splendour of his cape to their audience, "how could I forget?"

~ ♪ ~ I close my eyes and tell myself that my dreams will come true ~ ♪ ~

Yuuri's heart pulsated with the spirit of a thousand winged pegasi charging upon a field of roses, and couldn't believe just how lucky he was to be standing in the centre of the Winter Palace gardens.

~ ♪ ~ There'll be no more darkness when you believe in yourself; you are unstoppable ~ ♪ ~

The Japanese boy then also turned, showcasing the deep red tones of his inner cape.

~ ♪ ~ Where your destiny lies, dancing on the blades ~ ♪ ~

The couple sang together, in unison, as their hearts beat as one - "You set my heart on fire!"

Viktor lifted Yuuri by the hand, twirling his repeatedly before extending his arms into the air, his Japanese lover flying through the sky as though they were pair skating on the ice once again. The younger skater's chest roared, having taken on a heavy lightness from all of the excitement, scanning his surroundings with utter love and disbelief that something so wonderful could happen to someone with such humble beginnings like him.

~ ♪ ~ Don't stop us now, the moment of truth, we were born to make history! ~ ♪ ~

"Viktor, my love, I hope this day never ends."

"With you in my arms, I promise it never will. We'll stay like this forever."

~ ♪ ~ We'll make it happen, we'll turn it around ~ ♪ ~
"I swear I'll always be with you." Whispered Yuuri, flown into the air yet again, his cape alighted by the summer breeze.

~ ♪ ~ Yes, we were born to make history! ~ ♪ ~

Viktor pressed his forehead to Yuuri's, kissing him again. "And you too, Lapochka. I love you."

~ ♪ ~ Born to make history! ~ ♪ ~

The younger skater said nothing, his heart presumably captured by the passion of the moment.

"Yuuri?"

~ ♪ ~ We were born to make history! ~ ♪ ~

But again, no reply.

As the chorus faded out, Viktor's heart began to race - why wasn't his husband answering him? Was he sick, hurt, or worse: was the Japanese boy's sketchy cardiopulmonary history finally catching up to him?

"Sorry - it seems I was caught in my own little bubble."

The skater's fears collapsed into a puddle of relief, his deepest worries having sank back into the corner of his mind. After all this time, and despite this being perhaps the happiest days of their life so far, the anxiety that Yuuri could be snatched away at any moment by the twisted hands of grave misfortune often crept upon the Russian's back, and determined not to let him go he pulled his husband desperately close.

"Yuuri, I'm so hopelessly in love with you - never forget that, okay?"

Viktor's partner chuckled, blushing yet again - though this was arguably contributed to by the copious amounts of red wine available at the bar,

"God, you've got me like a blushing bride! Viktor, I swear I won't forget it."

The couple would have continued to envelope each other in such strings of heartfelt promises had it not been for the culinary delight that was to come. At the end of their first dance, a brass fanfare sounded and a decorated cart was wheeled to the side of the deck, a veiled platter sitting pretty on its upper side.

"And now - drumroll please - " announced Phichit, who had somehow been granted access to the DJ's microphone, "- it's time to cut the cake!"

Envisioning the sheer amount of calories and carbs contained within the sponge-like walls of his wedding cake was nearly enough to weigh on Yuuri's conscious, but suddenly his thoughts froze over. It appeared that logic had defeated the suspicions of his once-paralysed psyche, and yearning to save this night forever as a precious memory with Viktor, the skater then decided that he simply didn't care - and goddamnit, if he couldn't eat cake on his wedding day, then when else could he do so?

"Voila!" Exclaimed Chris, whisking the satin veil away to reveal a glimmering white cake with over twenty tiers, each receding in size with height, and with a marzipan ice skate standing proudly at the top, the backdrop to a fondant sculptor of the two lovers.
Yuuri had never been so excited to tuck into a slice of cake - sure, he'd indulged in the many flavours of his husband on multiple occasions in the past, but having never found the opportunity to eat himself was greatly looking forward to biting his figure's head off. Hands folded over one other's, the athletes took a knife and cut the first slice from the dessert's pristine interior.

Splat! A fistful of cake soon met with Yuuri's cheek, crumbling down him like an edible avalanche, Viktor laughing having committed the atrocity himself. It was a tradition, after all. However, Yuuri was not one to withhold revenge. Stealing the slice his husband had cut for himself, he then smooshed it against his face, grinning menacingly as he seized the opportunity to return the favour. Now both grooms were absolutely covered in crumbs and coated in swabs of sweet Madagascan vanilla buttercream, beaming ear-to-ear as each finally chomped into their own slice of cake.

Darkness had eventually fully descended upon the party, its lighting now accompanied by the vibrant glow of saturated neon lights and the pink embers of the on-site cocktail bar. With the music transcending from disco funk, to slow, soulful Jazz, to the loud thrashing of alternative punk - a combination of Yurio's requests and throwback songs from Yuuri's days as a My Chemical Romance super-fan - there was something for everyone to enjoy. The evening passed as though it were a dream; every moment felt as though it was a memory, viewed from the distance of a third-person perspective, but simultaneously the time flew by. Yuuri wished he could savour every moment.

It was at about 11 pm, when both the guests and the married couple were suitably intoxicated, that Chris had introduced the brilliant idea of a stripper pole into the middle of the dance floor. Yuuri knew exactly what to do. An exact replication of his wondrous performance at that gala many moons ago was well received by Viktor and the rest of the guests - perhaps bar Yuuri's mother, who at that point was just about the only sober person in the room - and the Japanese boy naturally flourished in front of such an appreciative audience.

Viktor, who by now was equally as intoxicated on the champagne as his spouse, dragged his throne of a chair over to the decking to spectate. He giggled as the Japanese boy’s clothes, as they had done so in the past, began to fly off, both their faces flushed with an immense colour, but as the lights began to blur into one dizzy daydream the older skater took a step back into his subconscious. Underneath the jubilation, Viktor was filled by an overwhelming sense of peace. He could just sit back and watch the world fade into fantasy, his terror and insecurity dissipating from his head and to the depths of the Earth where they belonged. Viktor stared lovingly at his husband as he danced around the pole. He was truly happy.

The two of them together were unstoppable. Yuuri and Viktor spent the rest of their big night in a trance-like state, so utterly enamoured of their love for one another, that nothing else seemed to plague their mind - the past was the past, and the future was something nobody could forecast; all they had was this moment.

This night wouldn’t last forever and the memories were sure to one day fade, but at last the skaters found their uncorrupted bliss. And, at the end of it all, that’s all that well and truly mattered.
Chapter 45 - After the after-party

A young girl, about 14, sits silently alone in the stillness of the early morning, slouching over an ochre mahogany table top as strands of her mocha tresses sink lifelessly into the depths of an uneaten bowl of cereal. She picks at its crispy chunks, seemingly disinterested by the variety of vivid colours and textures the meal has to offer - instead shunning her usual glass of orange juice for a steaming cup of matcha tea. The day is still young, and as her little brothers lay peacefully asleep on the arms of a wrinkled family sofa, curled up contentedly by the chest of a slender Russian man, the girl turns her gaze downwards, half-stifling a sob.

But her other father is very much awake. She knows little about what he does, other than he's finishing his PhD in a science no ordinary person's ever heard of - having retired from a prosperous international sporting career before the twins were born. She assumes 43 to be a little old for returning to university, but much prefers their new schedule to the Japanese man's previous lifestyle; now she sees her Dad six times a week instead of two, and thankfully her Japanese is much better than her Russian may ever hope of being.

Though this young teenager loves her father dearly, she does so wish he'd stay in bed a little longer. Her diet has been going so well as of late, and it would be a shame should he force her to eat breakfast every morning like the head officer of a prison camp.

High school hasn't exactly been the safe haven of social status the adolescent has hoped for either; the bullies there are cold, ruthless, and with two immigrant parents in a country such as America, finding her identity has been difficult enough without the onslaught of mean-spirited jokes directed at her changing body. Despite a healthy diet growing up, abundant in dishes from all across the world - Japanese Ramen, Russian Pirozhki, Thai curry and Kazakh manti - this young girl is adamant that what her doting parents termed 'baby fat' was no longer a reliable description - she is no longer a baby, just fat, and growing up in Los Angeles surrounded by waif-like blonde women hasn't exactly helped aspects of her self-esteem.

Unaware of her approaching father's footsteps on the polished tile floor, she spoons the porridge into the garbage, and without a second thought proceeds to lay the empty bowl on the kitchen counter-top for all the world to see. There - that looks like she's finished it all, right?

"Kimiko, my darling, what are you doing?"

The girl swerves around in panic, shocked to have been discovered so soon. The man standing behind her is wearing a cable-knit sweater - dashed with a few stains of purée courtesy of her baby brothers - with a burgundy scarf and glasses, his black hair matted from a rough night's sleep, or lack thereof. Although not obviously intrusive, her father is clearly concerned by the nature of the events. This frightens Kimiko; so far she has been living under the presumption that nobody is wary of her secret plight, let alone her methods of coping with it - she fears for what her father will think, or say, or do. So young Kimiko will do what she has grown so accustomed to, lying her way through each potential confrontation.

"I was just finishing up breakfast before getting ready for school." The daughter begins, speaking in her father's native language, "Neither you nor papa were awake, and it's not like I was just going to barge in and order you to feed me when you've been up all night with Vladimir and Aleksandr."

This is true. Though genetic engineering has come a long way in providing artificial methods of conception for same-sex couples, no magical solution has yet been invented to fulfil the task of nursing. Preparing the twins' formula requires prolonged periods of mixing, cooling, and storing in
order to achieve the perfect temperature, and Kimiko can see the tiredness in the faint lines tracing her father's face. Though, fortunately, both her parents surprisingly appear far from middle-aged, the teenager doesn't wish to further burden them with her struggles - she is sure their plight is far more strenuous than hers, anyway.

However, for some unfathomable reason her father is still concentrating on the topic of the porridge. Not one for verbal interrogations, he reaches in his pocket for a discarded tissue and walks over to the garbage, secretly in search of the fast-disposed meal, and narrows his eyes as the suspicious-looking lump of oats finally comes into sight.

"Hey, did you throw this away?"

Kimiko freezes. She has not intended to be discovered quite so easily. So, she tries to lie again.

"Oh - pfft - yeah, that, you see... that was the first batch, you know, in case I got it wrong..."

Whilst his daughter chuckles nervously, the ex-skater rests his hand on his hip; he is determined for her to tell the truth.

"Kimiko, you know you don't have to lie to me, right?"

"Huh?"

"It's okay if you threw away the porridge."

The daughter sinks to a nearby stool for a moment, contemplating her available options. Is her father genuinely accepting her deliberate act of starvation, or is this all a ploy, a game of mind-trickery designed purely for the intent of extracting a confession?

It appears there is no time to think; the expression of guilt on her face has already betrayed her vow of secrecy.

"I'm sorry," she says, "I wasn't hungry."

"But you haven't eaten since last night-"

"Well, maybe I didn't want porridge-"

Her father sighs, "Just porridge?"

Kimiko, irritated by her father's suddenly invasive approach to conversation, rises from her seat and grips her hand against the hardwood table; "Fine - maybe I didn't want anything!"

This disgruntled outburst is enough to wake her snoozing Russian parent, who, cautiously untangling himself from the clutches of his infant sons, scratches at his unshaven blanket of stubble and sleepily wanders into the kitchen, unexpectedly trespassing upon the scene of confrontation.

"Hey, hey, what's with all the noise?" He asks in English, the conversation suddenly switching languages (as it so often does).

Kimiko stays silent. Whilst her younger father's tone is typically a more reserved and placid one, there are times when her Russian parent's temperament can reach the height of drama. He has never been particularly quick to anger, so to speak, but rather easy to overreact - and already
engaged in a debate with the former, she does not wish to be lectured by the latter.  
"Is everything okay, little Kotik*?"

(*Kotik = kitten in Russian)

The teenager grits her teeth and nods her head, hoping the words of her other father won't reveal her deceit.  
"I'm fine, Papa, just tired."

"Well, Kimiko, maybe you should have the day off school," interjects the Japanese man.

The Russian shoots his husband a look of disapproval,  
"But Yuuri, she's already had so many - are the school going to allow this?"

"It's private school," chuckles the former skater, "if we're paying through the nose to send her to what is essentially a small palace for children, I'm sure they'll happily accept a few days of absence. It's fine, I know you've got that meeting up in Santa Monica; I'll stay here to make sure she's alright."

Kimiko is somewhat blown away at her father's unexplained ability to masterfully bend the conversation to his own whim, wondering just where he's picked up such a talent. Still, at least she now knows where she's got the habit from.  
'That must have come in handy when Dad was younger,' the young girl thinks to herself.

Soon enough, the older man departs for Santa Monica - the spot where, as Kimiko has been told, her parents knew they had fallen in love with the city of Los Angeles - leaving the younger caring for his children, two sleeping whilst the other sits tiresome by the fire, scrolling through suspicious websites on her iPhone.

Kimiko's father isn't oblivious.

"Myproana, huh?" He asks, resuming their Japanese conversation, "Man, I thought that website got shut down years ago.."

The daughter freezes. How could her father possibly have any knowledge of this website, let alone hint awareness at the content it displays? It's not like she hasn't been cautious with her search history - private mode has, as of late, become one of her best friends - so how the bloody hell does her dad know about all this?

Cornered like a wild frantic deer, the young girl attempts an oblivious excuse.

"Oh, is it? Silly me, I must have accidentally clicked on an ad-"

Her father exhales softly, pressing the tips of his fingers to his brow - stress evident,  
"Then, Kimiko, why is it on the browser history of the family computer?"

Kimiko can't really answer to that.

The older Male laughs a little on the inside, amusement mixed with tinges of a fearful sadness as his mind tries to process the situation,  
'Wow,' he thinks to himself, 'if my younger self could see you now, I'm pretty sure he'd think you an utter amateur.'
Her father, however, does not speak this out loud. Instead he pulls up one of his husband's designer silk throw cushions - Versace of course - setting it down gently beside him, and patting it with a tender hand as he gestures for his eldest to take a seat.

The teenager gulps, anticipating a stern telling-off - such occasions are rare in this household, as relations generally remain cordial, but there's something deeply distressing about the haze in her father's deep brown eyes; she realises she must prepare for the worst.

"I'm not mad," he says calmly, "but we need to talk."

"Right now?"

"Come on, Kimiko, I've given you the day off school," chuckles her father, grasping her hand, "surely a discussion with your dad is still better than double physics, right?"

After some aggrieved mumbling, the daughter finally agrees. The tension mounting with each break in conversation, the stillness of the silence cast over the pair like night's grim shadow, the former athlete bites the bullet and chases his original thought.

"So, are you trying to lose weight?"

His daughter refuses to reply, turning her head in shame away from the concern of her father's visage. Unfortunately, the answer now is evidently yes.

"Kimiko, why would you want to do that? Your father and I think you're wonderful just the way you are."

"You wouldn't understand."

'Ah, if only you knew.' Thinks her father, his soul weighted by the clutches of many unpleasant memories.

His daughter continues,

"It doesn't mean I'm beautiful though, does it?"

"Do you want to be beautiful?"

"Who doesn't? Only the most beautiful and fair people are adored by their peers."

Taking his daughter's hand, the father smiles reassuringly, the slight indentations by his eyes illuminated by the comfort they provide. As she sheds a single tear, this hand glides upwards to catch the moistened drop, the young female giggling slightly as it swipes across her freckled face.

"Kimiko, you are beautiful, but you are also so much more. You are kind, considerate, most of the time you are honest, inquisitive and mightily intelligent - although, hey, maybe it's my genes you've got to thank for that-"

"Dad!"

"Okay, okay," he laughs, "perhaps that internship at NASA was somewhat due to your own hard work... but still, darling, you shouldn't limit yourself to your appearance. It's dangerous to place all your self-worth upon the way others perceive you - take it from me."

Kimiko winces, staring at the floor as the taunts of her childhood bullies encircle her, "But how can I be worth anything if I'm so fucking fat?"
Her father bites his lip. How had it gotten so bad so fast? He wishes he'd caught onto this trail of self-hatred much sooner, that he'd nipped it in the bud before it manifested as the same demons that plagued him over a decade ago. Still, as a father, he knows that he cannot lose face - even if Kimiko just swore to his. It's his responsibility to lift his daughter to achieve her true potential, and whilst conversations like this aren't easy, the ex-skater realises some things must eventually be discussed.

There is little point in arguing against her stance; she won't believe him anyway.

"Kimiko, how long has this been going on for?"

The young girl laughs, dryly,
"The bullying or the self-hatred?"

"Both."

"Well, I guess the bullying forever - it's not exactly easy growing up as the daughter of two cultures in a metropolis full of skinny white bitches - and my feelings? Well, I guess this past year they've been getting pretty bad..

"...and since you stopped eating properly?"

"Dad, do I have to answer this?"

Her father nods,
"I'd like you to."

"Ugh, fine-" Kimiko says, disgruntled, "maybe these past three months or so - but no more than that..

Initially unsure of how to deal with this information, the young girl's father sinks defeatedly into the softness of the family's leather recliner. Thankfully the twins, having been dropped off by their Russian parent at the daycare some hours earlier, are not present to contribute with their usual onslaught of piercing screeches and wails. It's simply the teenager and her father, hearts beating together as neither is sure of what quite to say next.

"Thank you for telling me."

Kimiko stares into her father's eyes inquisitively, scavenging for traces of the slightest disturbance. To her surprise, there is no visible anger - perhaps some disappointment, and much worry, but she's relieved to discover that chastisement is not waiting down the road.

She is about to leave when a hasty finger tugs her shaking arm back,
"I'm afraid we still need to talk about this."

"Why? What else can you say except that you're scared for me? There's no reason to be scared, you know, I'm not going to die-"

"Kimiko, let me tell you a story."

The older figure takes a deep breath, preparing to divulge the secrets of his troubled past. His daughter's growing more mature each day, and sooner a later he knows she'll eventually discover the truth.

"I was about your age when my relationship with food first took a turn."
"What?" Kimiko exclaims in disbelief, "But you love food!"

"I know, I know," he smiles, "but it hasn't always been that way."

"Honey, you know how I have always keep my arms hidden, like I'm doing now?"

"Yes, because your skin's allergic to the sunlight, right?"

Her father shakes his head, ebony locks shaking as he peels back the concealment of an angora sleeve to reveal an abundant display of healed lacerations.

"It's because of these. I too struggled with my mental health - I thought I was totally alone, that nobody, not even your father, would understand how I felt."

Kimiko couldn't even conjure a gasp. Unable to conceive just how her father has managed to hide information so haunting from her all these years, she refuses to say anything more - nothing in her short little life could have prepared her for such a display.

"It's okay, Kimiko, that's how most people react."

"And are they fully healed?"

"On the outside, yes," admits her father, "the inside is a work in progress."

"Does papa know?"

"Papa probably knows far too much - here, darling, let me tell you what happened to me when I was young. It's a long story, and a rather unpleasant one, but I promise it'll prove itself in time."

So Kimiko's father tells her everything. The self-harm, the bulimia, the chronic obesity - even the anorexia and drugs.

"When I was about your age, I began to starve myself. It wasn't a foolproof plan, and I'd binge on whatever I could get my hands on afterwards. After a while, when I could no longer purge, the weight began to pile on. In my early twenties I decided I was sick of it all - of the repeated cycle of binging, purging and starving myself. I wanted to please your father, whom I'd just met at the time, and thought the only way he'd ever love me was if I were thin like him. But nobody had ever told me that everybody's body is different, and now I know I'll never look like him - partially because he's Russian and I'm Japanese, but also because we're completely different body types. For example," he smiles, laughing to himself, "I'm growing a bit of a paunch around my waist in my middle age, but it appears your father still has solid abs of steel."

Kimiko grins with amusement,
"To be fair, papa does go to the gym most days-"

"-and I don't; I don't want to and I'm happy with the way I look just now. This paunch is a trophy of all the years I've spent dedicating my time to you and your brothers - yes, perhaps neglecting aspects of a healthy diet just a little, but I'm glad that I've invested so much time in you guys. My twenty-something year old self would be screaming at me right now. He exercised everyday without fail, and would punish himself with damaging diet pills were his workouts not deemed sufficiently gruelling. In fact, it almost killed him."

"-Wait, you nearly died?"

"Haha, well," admits her dad, an awkward smile on his face, "technically I did-"
"What?"

"That's what I'm saying; society can be so poisonous it can lead you to destroy yourself. I wouldn't wish an eating disorder upon anyone. It must have been terrifying for your father, watching me slowly shrink away into nothing - but when you're like that, you can't think, and you can barely feel. It's like watching the colour fade from a painting, as everything slips away from your control."

Droplets begin to well up in Kimiko's eyes, their glaze reflecting off the morning sun and casting amber rays upon her father's own similar lineaments, "I'm so sorry, Dad, I just hadn't though - I never knew-"

"It's okay, Kimichka," (her father often preferring this nickname despite his mother tongue), "I never expected you to. As a young girl, you've probably had it much worse than me in regards to all this body image stuff - the media is pretty brutal, even for kids your age."

"Dad, I'm not a kid!"

He smirks, teasing her, "You know what I mean! It's my job as your father to protect you, to comfort you and cheer you up when things like this get you down. I know there's little point in saying you're not fat - although trust me, you're not even close - because I know you won't believe me, but in a world where a girl like you can become anything she wants to be, do you really want to be just thin?"

Kimiko grits her teeth, saying nothing.

"I know, I know, it's hard. But beauty is so much more than skin deep. Take it from someone who spent years of his life cowering away from his potential due to his own fear of not being accepted, skinny will never be as good as healthy feels.

Remember our trips to Paris, to Sydney, to the Taj Mahal in India? Think of how happy you were there, how free the winds of a distant land felt upon your back - you know, you're still more or less that same headstrong girl, the future intergalactic space adventurer who I know will someday change the world. Hey, when you were born you certainly changed mine."

"Really? How?"

"I learned that I was no longer living just for myself. Whilst I love your father deeply, we're still two very different people, once strangers in the world - but you and I, we've been together ever since you were created, I am you and you are me, it's in our DNA, and it's my responsibility to stick around and care for you as long as I possibly can. And yes, that does include mentally too."

His daughter lowering herself onto her back, she clutches a pillow to her chest, her lips trembling a little as she speaks, "Dad, I think I'd like to see someone."

Kimiko's father's ears prick at the thought, so glad his daughter is finally deciding to seek the help she has so long deserved, "You mean a therapist?"

"Yeah, I think so. I don't want to feel like this anymore. I want to be happy; I want to be like you and Papa. Will you help me?"

"Sweetheart, of course - we'll always be here for you-" is her guardian's reply, embracing her with a gentle pat on the back, "it's been very brave of you to tell me like this. I'm proud of you, Kimiko."
"Really?"

"Absolutely. And whatever happens, I'll never stop."

In the past, Yuuri had never imagined himself equipped for the challenges of fatherhood. The skater had thought himself too reckless, too passionate and too excitable by the frivolous pursuits of youth. Born too early to encounter same-sex methods of conception at a young age, the Japanese man had never worried at the prospects of providing for a young family, and given his predisposition to mental instability had always assumed this to be a positive fact of life.

But of course all that had changed when science made its way into the headlines, as it so often does; same-sex couples could now raise their own biologically-related young, provided they make use of an artificial womb, and Viktor was one of those desperate to take advantage of the opportunity as soon as it arose. At the tender age of 28, his husband was somewhat apprehensive to plunge into the procedure - and with good reason to, his heart not yet fully recovered - but sensing the Russian's mounting paternal instincts, and yearning for the excitement of fatherhood, the younger man eventually agreed.

It was by far the best decision Yuuri had ever made. Nine months following and the couple were blessed with a bouncing baby girl, naming her Kimiko - although Russian names were promised for any subsequent births - with her fathers promising to cherish her as long as they should live. Yuuri soon forgot his past anxieties as his concentration was solely driven to fulfil the expectation of caring for his daughter, and alongside his husband following the arrival of their twins had begun to build something of a family.

Settled, but happy, the couple could finally relax. Despite having taken years to reach his current mentality, Yuuri felt more peaceful in his early forties than in any of the decades prior. Sure, his former career has fizzled out with age, but so has his friends' - everyone was progressing onto new, exciting stages of their lives, and Yuuri was so grateful to have stuck around to see it happen. He and Viktor were fast approaching their 20th anniversary, and though growing older by the day, both men felt with more physical and mental clarity than they had done in their twenties.

Kimiko's confession had shocked her father, who had never expected talk of starvation to come from someone of his own blood, but in the end he was little surprised at all. The winds of change may have continued to blow through the dry Californian air, but society had changed very little - blondness, thinness, whiteness were qualities still valued by the masses, and for someone like Kimiko, though beautiful she was, it was easy to sympathise with her when similar figures were so loosely represented in mainstream media. Finally, after both parents had shone light onto her struggles, could they move forward as a family, a pack that protected their own. In spite of their hardships, these difficulties only made them stronger.

It was when Kimiko took to the podium to give her graduation speech that Yuuri knew he'd finally made it out alive. His daughter now 18, and himself 47, he was no longer the spring chicken of his former glory days, but having been promoted to the position of professor at his university, had learned to value both the victories of youth and accomplishments of middle age. The twins, turning 5 that autumn, were just beginning their long and winding journey upon the path of life - the road ahead full of twists and turns, but ultimately a great adventure with every moment worth savouring until the end. Viktor, 51, swelled with pride as he watched his daughter deliver her acceptance speech; being torn away from his multi-billion dollar fashion empire even for a day was somewhat nerve-wracking for the haute couture designer, but the look upon Kimiko's face proved the sacrifice was definitely worth it.

At the end of the day, Yuuri could breath a huge sigh of relief. Recovery, adulthood, fatherhood -
he'd been through it all, braved every storm and had come out alive and kicking, ready to face each day no matter what the future had in store.

It had truly been proved that life does go on. Humanity is ever changing, ever accommodating to the nature of this crazy world we're living in. Bustling crowds constantly pass each other by, rarely pausing to consider the separate lives all coinciding within one tiny blue planet. Everybody has their own unique perspective, the individuality of life as they see it. The world never has, and never will be, the same as it once was.

Yuuri Katsuki was sure of this now. With many years ahead of him, and with his prospects only blossoming into new horizons, the future looked brighter than it had ever been before.

Yuuri had been given a new chance at life. Now it was his turn to live it.

{THE END}

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