Time and Hearts Will Wear Us Thin

by lunar_peach

Summary

Maybe it was the impact of the fall, and the numbing action of the ice, but he felt weightless. He felt conquered by cupid and the sting of his arrow right in the middle of his chest as he looked up at Yuuri, who held a blank expression on his face.

Somewhere in the distance, though it seemed like a different dimension to Victor, a timer went off. The music stopped.

You could hear it in the silence then.

Victor’s heart was going one hundred miles an hour.

Or the one where Yuuri Katsuki, scented candle aficionado, and self-proclaimed hot mess,
never intended to capture the attention of one eligible bachelor, Victor Nikiforov, but sometimes the universe has its ways of making things happen. Amidst inner battles with their demons and themselves, they find a world in one another neither quite expected.

Notes

I really hope you guys like this! Feedback is always appreciated :)

See the end of the work for more notes.
There was just something about the feeling of being in a bodega at the ungodly hours of the night that made Yuuri feel like he could conquer the world. He felt like he existed in the sense that he could just roam around for a couple of hours and fool around with his friends, even if they were ignoring him to kiss each other. Yuuri felt like he had died and was peacefully transitioning to heaven as he lazily walked down the baby section of the store, ‘awing’ at the tiny clothes and pastel toys. He started to think that maybe all he wanted in life was to be a dad.

Or maybe it was just the tequila in his system blurring all of his senses.

He shook himself free of the oversized jean jacket that decorated his shoulders and started to dance around to the music being played in the overhead speakers of the store. Leo and Guang-Hong were still tongues deep in each other's mouths, but they managed to pick Yuuri’s clothes up from the ground and remind him not to do anything stupid. Yuuri shrugged them off and asked what kind of Doritos they wanted.

They didn’t answer, and so he went across the aisle to where the snack foods were displayed. He inspected the wide variety of flavors closely, debating between cool ranch and original. He leaned in closer to the bags as if that would help him in making his decision, but tipped over, hitting his chin on the shelf on his way down. A groan escaped his lips, hands gently rubbing the affected area. A giggle like windchimes came from behind him.

Yuuri turned his head with the fury of a million burning suns in his eyes, ready to wreak havoc on whoever decided it was nice to laugh at him.

A drop-dead gorgeous man dressed in blue jeans and a white Hawaiian shirt stood a couple of feet away from him, hand clasped on his mouth and a bag of assorted chocolates cradled in his arm. He had silver hair, a slightly crooked nose, and resembled someone between John Cameron Mitchell and Anderson Cooper. Younger, of course. Not a single wrinkle was apparent on his ridiculously symmetrical face. Although he didn’t look enough like the man for anyone to make the comparison. But to Yuuri- that poor drunken, broadway obsessed fool- the stranger looked just like John Cameron Mitchell himself. So much so that he got up and stumbled all the way towards him, clinging for dear life on the shelves to his right. He blinked a couple of times, trying to make sure that he was right in noticing the resemblance. The stranger stumbled back in response, still staring at the drunken mess in front of him with amusement. He offered him a hand to get a hold of his balance, much to Yuuri’s delight.

“Are you John Cameron Mitchell? I loved you in Hedwig and the Angry Inch. It was such a masterpiece!” His words were slurred and slower than intended, dancing with his prominent Japanese accent, but the message came through either way. The stranger played with the grin on his face, settling on a smirk that made Yuuri want to hold his perfect little face.

“No, I think you have me mistaken.” He extended a hand out to Yuuri, wanting to make an acquaintance of him. “My name is Victor.”

Yuuri shook his hand, sighing heavily. “I’m Yuuri.” Even drunk, Yuuri knew it was impolite to sound so disappointed upon greeting someone, so to spare Victor’s feelings he added, “I’m sorry, I just really loved Hedwig and the Angry Inch, and you looked so much like him I got a bit excited cuz ya know- he’s really amazing. Not that you’re not! I’m sure you’re lovely, but I was expecting John Cameron Mitchell.” Victor tilted his head to the side, chuckling softly. Yuuri swept a hand through his hair and stood there awkwardly, hand on his hip. Guang Hong and Leo peaked into the aisle and asked Yuuri if he was ready to go. He nodded yes, casually turning to Victor with a grin.

“Hey, I have an idea. Why don’t you come out drinking with us? Those two are all over each other
and you don’t seem to be doing anything.” Victor’s face turned quizzical as he casually placed a finger on his lips. He pretended to question whether he was available to go with Yuuri or not, to which Yuuri responded by saying, “Okay, Have a good night.”

Stumbling to catch up with Yuuri before he got away, Victor dropped his items off on a nearby shelf and accepted his offer. Yuuri clapped his hands, radiant with excitement. “I’m just warning you though when I drink, I don’t stop until morning,” he warned Victor. They followed Guang-Hong and Leo to the self-checkout counter and waited by the door while the lovers paid for the two cases of beer and six bags of Doritos in their cart. Yuuri poked Victor’s side with a mischievous look in his eye. “Also, we already pregame, so you might be a bit behind. But don’t worry, I have a bottle of tequila in my car. And before you say anything, Leo’s driving.” He giggled a bit. “He’s the good boy tonight.”

Victor stared at Yuuri in adoration. He didn’t know what to make of him. Hell, he didn’t even know why he was following him around at 1 AM, but he was at peace with it.

The quartet bounced around from party to party and bar to bar as the hours flew by like bullet trains. Victor wasn’t drunk, or even buzzed since he had a high alcohol tolerance, but he got sillier as each minute passed with Yuuri by his side. They danced for what felt like hours and Victor found himself having a genuinely fun time out with Yuuri and his friends. The night was warm and smelled like youth to him, something he had long forgotten even though he was only 27 years old. He got reminiscent of the past for a brief period of time, but Yuuri snapped him out of it with his laugh and surprisingly rhythmic dancing. He couldn’t keep his eyes off him, scared he’d disappear at any moment just as he had arrived. As the night went on, Victor found himself growing incredibly attached to Yuuri.

Yuuri who told Victor that he thought his shirt was ugly. Yuuri who asked Victor his zodiac sign and proceeded to smack his lips when he learned Victor was a Capricorn. Yuri who accidentally spilled his beer all over himself and started crying as a result until Victor offered him his ugly Hawaiian shirt. Yuuri who asked Victor to give him a piggyback ride through the park near Guang Hong and Leo’s apartment after they dropped them off at 4 in the morning. They created a whirlwind of escapades, but he liked it that way.

So they ran around the park, dancing to the music coming from Yuuri’s phone. The trees rustled around them as if they were dancing to. Victor could just barely make Yuuri’s features out under the dim light of the moon and street lights as they waltzed around in pure bliss. Yuuri’s head was resting on his chest, his right hand on Victor’s waist, the other intertwined with his hand. Yuuri looked Victor over every 5 seconds, trying to read the thoughtful expression on his face. He wanted to ask him what he was thinking, but he felt it would be an invasion of privacy on his part. He just pulled him closer, sensing that whatever Victor was thinking about was making him sad. They took a seat on the grass after Yuuri’s phone ran out of battery. They tossed around topics of conversation, feeling like they had an entire lifetime worth of chatting to catch up on. They laughed and giggled nonstop as the sun crept up on them, peeking over the silhouette of tall buildings and water towers.

Sunlight touching his skin, Yuuri felt soft and warm cradled in Victor’s arms. He had no idea how they ended up in that position, but there they sat. Happy and sleepy.

Yuuri turned his face ever so slightly until they were locked on each other’s eyes. The sun made Victor’s eyes look like a war between fire and water, filling him with a longing to be the only thing those eyes ever wanted to see. He absentmindedly placed a soft kiss on Victor’s lips, pushing him back to lay back onto the grass. Straddling him, Yuuri left hungry kiss all over Victor’s face and neck, with Victor returning the favor. It felt like a fairy tale to the both of them, lying there making out for minutes upon minutes, like teenagers, until Yuuri passed out with a fond expression on his
Victor picked him up as gently as he could and carried him to his car. He placed him in the passenger seat and strapped him in. Taking the driver's seat, keys in hand, he looked for Yuuri’s wallet to check for his address on his license. He found it stuffed between the backseat, shuffling through his i.d.s and membership cards until he found what he was looking for. He read the address out loud and tried to picture where it was. He gave up, being new to the city, and typed it into his phone.

They drove down the roads in silence, casually looking at the sleeping beauty at his side when they came across red lights. It felt domestic for him to be driving him home like they had been together for years and this was a thing Victor was accustomed to. Victor really wanted to get accustomed to it. They reached the building at 5 o’clock. Yuuri shook himself awake when Victor parked the car and shut the door as quietly as he could. A Tiny smile spread across his smug face as he closed his eyes, pretending to be asleep again. Victor opened the door and slipped his arms under Yuuri, picking him up again. He closed the door and reached the front door where a keypad awaited for him to enter a six-digit code. He swayed trying to decide whether or not to ask Yuuri for the passcode. In a sleepy voice, Yuuri grumbled, “1-1-4-9-7-7”. Victor giggled and thanked him, pressing in the numbers.

“Third floor, number 47. Sorry there isn’t an elevator, I can walk-”

“It’s fine. I’m strong,” he whispered, an act that sent a rosy blush over both of their cheeks. He put to use years and years of consistent gym visits and squats as he trekked up the three flights to Yuuri’s apartment. He tried not to shake the man in his arms to harshly, scared he’d protest to being carried any longer. He made it up in no time, taking a left turn and searching for apartment 47. He found it at the end of the long hall, inserting the key and turning the lock. The sweet smell of cinnamon and scented candles washed over him like a summer breeze. The walls were white, probably due to the fact that it was rented, but covered in beautiful abstract pieces of art, some of them resembling the young man in his arms. The furniture looked worn but cared for nonetheless. The space felt like a home more than anything else. Victor closed the door behind him and walked over to a red velvet love seat adjacent to a large window that let out into a small balcony. It was only visible due to a parting in the thick blackout purple drapes. Victor walked to the couch and set Yuuri down, grabbing a plush pink blanket from the floor to cover him in. Yuuri opened his eyes sleepily and took Victor's hand and pet his face as he turned to leave. “Stay with me.” It was a simple request, short and brief with no particular emotion, other than a slightly whiney toney, but to Victor, it was so much more. It made his entire world spin uncontrollably as he shook his head and said “Okay.” Yuuri got up, still quite drunk, and took Victor by the hand. They walked in silence down a tiny hallway and turned into a door on the left. Yuuri twisted the doorknob, opening the door. He slipped out of his clothes invited Victor to do the same. Victor hesitated, trying to avert his eyes from Yuuri’s plump body.

When Yuuri saw Victor’s hesitation he just sighed and asked for a glass of water. Victor turned his back on him and walked to the kitchen. He opened about three cupboards before finding the ones with cups in them. He pulled a clear glass from it and placed it under the tap. He filled it to the brim and shuffled back into Yuuri’s room, where he found him kneeling on the bed, hands gently rubbing the tops of his thighs in anticipation. Victor walked towards him, heart almost beating out of his chest. He extended a shaking hand holding the glass of water to Yuuri, scared to get any closer than he already was. Yuuri reached out and took hold of the collar of Victor's shirt to pull him closer, a sloppy lip bite insinuating just what Victor wanted to avoid. It was Yuuri’s plan to pull him into a kiss, but just as any drunken mess would, he spilled the water all over Victor instead. Victor gasped at the cool temperature of the water and jumped back. Yuuri hung his head in defeat and fell back onto his bed, which had somehow managed to evade every single drop of water from the glass. A tight-lipped smile came over Victor's face, followed by a fit of giggles. He took off his jeans and shirt, asking Yuuri for a pair of shorts. Yuuri pointed to a dresser, a hand shielding his eyes in embarrassment, Victor rummaged for a pair that seemed big enough to fit him. He settled on a pair of black Nike shorts stuffed at the bottom of the drawer. He changed, in silence, humming the tune of a
song Yuuri didn’t recognize. Once he was done, he turned to leave for the living room, when Yuuri spoke up.

“This bed is a queen. You can sleep here if you want... Promise I won’t pull anything.” Victor turned to look at him before walking and settling in the spot next to Yuuri. He laid on his side to face him. Yuuri gave him a timid smile as he tenderly touched his face. “You’re so pretty.” It was whispered and slurred, but still incredibly endearing. Victor debated how to respond. Yuuri smiled at him and closed his eyes before Victor could make a decision. As Yuuri fell asleep and the orange tinge of the sun slipped in through the blinds of Yuuri’s bedroom window, Victor could only think of one thing to say. With trembling lips and a breathy voice, he said,

“You’re beautiful.”

Yuuri Katsuki woke up six hours later with a horrible pounding in his head. He remembered only fragments of the previous night. Entering a bodega being his last clear memory. Everything after that seemed like a vision or a dream. That’s what he cast it aside as… A dream.

Frantic kisses. Blue eyes. The soft-blow of a midnight wind. It was like some sort of romantic film was playing out in his head. And god… it was beautiful.

He rolled over onto the other side of his bed, laying on his back. He could still feel a faint heat on different parts of his body like someone had been touching him. He tried to relish in it, even if he could just barely remember. The light from outside pierced his eyes as they tried to adjust to the sunlight. He draped his forearm across his eyes in an effort to shield himself. A quiet sigh escaped his lips as he reached for his phone. 11:34 am. He groaned and dialed Guang Hong, thinking that surely they’d be up as well. Guang Hong answered on the second ring, his sing-songy voice sending a pulse of pain through Yuuri’s frontal lobe.

“Yuuri, you little prince charming you. How did you wake up?” He was practically screaming into his ears now.

“Um… I’m fine.” He chuckled a little bit. “Actually, I had such a weird dream where this Russian guy with such a heavenly accent took me dancing. Ha! Can you believe it? What did we even drink last night? I swear to god that’s the last time I drink so much.” He laughed a bit to himself, swinging his legs over the edge of his bed. He looked at his bare thighs, tilting his head at the sight, questioning why he was only in his underwear.

“Yuuri. I don’t know how to tell you this, but the Russian man was real. You left with him after he dropped us off.” Yuuri blinked once, twice, three, then four times. Running a nervous hand through his hair, he tried to register just what his friend was telling him. “Are you still there?” Gaining more and more lucidity, he picked up on the sound of his toaster dinging. A soft humming was coming from the kitchen, accompanied by a slight clinking of dishes and silverware. Yuuri tried to swallow the lump in his throat, ending the call with Guang Hong once he heard laughter from the other side.

The dancing, the tequila, their warm and sweaty hands intertwining with each other… “Jesus fucking Christ” Yuuri thought, looking for something to put on his body. “We really made out then. oh, good god, I hope that’s all we did.” He picked up a pair of sweatpants of the ground, almost screaming at the pair of pants laying on his floor that he didn’t recognize as his own. Yuuri kicked them aside and debated whether he should make his way outside or wait for the man in his kitchen to leave.

He didn’t have to debate long. Footsteps were inching in closer and closer to the kitchen.
Yuuri jumped back into bed, covering himself with his duvet and pretended to be asleep. A slight knock came from the door, followed by a quiet “Good morning.” He was terrified to peak out from his duvet, even as his bed sunk down on the right side, causing him to roll over. Yuuri looked up at the man sitting next to him. He had kind eyes and a gentle smile, shaped almost like a heart, something Yuuri didn’t think was possible on humans. He offered the man a weak smile and propped himself up on an elbow. A plate of scrambled eggs, roasted tomatoes, and toast were generously offered to him. He took it and thanked the man,

“Did you sleep well?” was the first thing out of his mouth. It was the same voice Yuuri had been playing over and over in his mind. He took a spoonful of egg to avoid answering the handsome smiling man in his room. He nodded and broke their gaze. “Do you like the eggs? It’s my Mama’s special recipe, although I think she got it from—” Something was crawling up Yuuri’s throat as he tried to concentrate on not freaking out over how ridiculously hot the guy on his bed was. He thought it was gas, but realized just in time that it was something much worse. He slammed the plate into the hands of the stranger and ran as fast as he could toward the restroom, just barely making it to the bowl. He clutched the rim so tightly his knuckles turned white. He heard some shuffling coming from his bedroom and shut his eyes in embarrassment. He was both sad and relieved, thinking the man was making his way out of his apartment.

Victor walked into a mess. Yuuri was pathetically sat on the pink tile floor, draped over the toilet bowl emptying the contents of his stomach. He took a bathrobe from the door and hung it around Yuuri’s shoulders. Yuuri reacted to the gesture with a weak thumbs up. Victor took a seat on the bathroom floor as well. Yuuri felt compelled to lift his head from the rim of the bowl once he was done, but he couldn’t bear to look at the man beside him. It was an incredibly unsanitary situation to be in, but he was more embarrassed than he was disgusted with himself. He couldn’t remember the man’s name, even as he recollected more bits and pieces about what had happened the previous night.

With every memory that came back into Yuuri’s head, he felt tingles in every place Victor had touched him. He could feel the warmth of their bodies pressed together when Yuuri wrapped his legs around Victor. His hands on Yuuri’s hips and legs. Their lips melting into each other with each passing moment. Yuuri could remember every gasp for air and sweet finger in his mouth…every peppered kiss… every piece of skin Victor had kissed.

Yuuri tried to shake the thoughts away before arousal made his predicament even more awkward. Victor moved in closer, causing Yuuri’s body to numbs when his calf brushed against his leg. He leaned back with him and apologized for the theatrics of just minutes before. He smirked and pressed a hand to the nape of his neck. He was sweet.

At the very least he hadn’t brought home an utter and total dickhead.

“I’m gonna sound like a ditz, but I can’t remember anything about last night. Did we… uh… you know?” Yuuri asked shyly. Victor looked perplexed for a moment, then turned the brightest shade of red Yuuri had ever seen. Yuuri let his hair slightly fall over his eyes as he played with his fingernails, chipping off lilac nail polish little by little. It was embarrassing to think that he might have had sex with a decent guy and not remembered it. Victor pat his hand and shook his head.

“No. You were pissed drunk, and-- even though you were very enticing...” Yuuri felt his body overcome with heat. “What kind of man would I be if I did that?” Yuuri looked at him and bumped his shoulder with his. He then asked him why they were half-naked. “We woke up like this because you decided to try and seduce me as I held out a glass of water for you to drink. We didn’t do anything. Well, actually we did make out a little. For a while. It was nice.” Yuuri’s eyes traveled up to his, taking in the beautiful rosy blush taking over his face. “You’re really good at it.” Yuuri tried to keep himself together. Victor cleared his throat and cracked his knuckles. “But that was at the
park, not here. Anyway, if you don’t remember that you probably don’t remember me. I’m Victor.” He extended out a hand for Yuuri to shake. Yuuri gripped his hand tightly, the only way he knew how to shake hands. Something his dad had taught him.

“I’m sorry you had to take care of me, Victor. I usually try not to get that drunk.” Yuuri explained, changing the subject. Victor said he was used to taking care of drunk people and went on to tell Yuuri about his college days. He told him story after story, only stopping to listen to Yuuri’s hypnotic laughter, as Yuuri sat there intently listening. He tried not to stare so hard at Victor, but it was so difficult to pry his eyes from his moving lips.

“And then there was the time in 2010 when I had to herd back a group of drunk Russian hockey players to their hotel rooms. You were nothing compared to that experience.” Yuuri asked him how old he had been, hoping to be able to calculate his current age from whatever answer he gave.

“I was about 22, maybe 23.” Yuuri sighed in relief, laughing a bit. That would place him in his late twenties.

They got up off from the bathroom floor after some playful banter. Yuuri brushed his teeth and headed back to the kitchen after Victor. They made a fresh batch of eggs and ate in the living room in silence. The clock struck noon when Victor got a call. He took it in the kitchen, staying there for some time. He came back out with a disappointed look on his face, explaining to Yuuri that he had some business to attend to. He ran back into Yuuri’s room to finish dressing. Yuuri stayed sat cross-legged on the living room couch, actually twiddling his thumbs. Victor emerged in blue jeans and an old battered white shirt Yuuri recognized as his. “Is it alright if I wear this out? I couldn’t find my shirt.”

“Yeah, it’s no problem.” Yuuri stared blankly. Victor gave him a sheepish smile, and Yuuri’s heart grew with fondness.

“I’m probably gonna need your number to return it later on.”

“Oh. you don’t need to bother. I don’t really wear-” Yuuri noticed Victor start to smirk. It then hit him that Victor wanted his number for more than just returning the shirt. “Oh!” He scrambled to get his phone out, practically throwing each digit out at Victor as he added Yuuri into his contacts.

Yuuri walked him to the door, hands in his pockets and eyes on the ground. Victor leaned down to kiss Yuuri’s cheek and left with a shy smile.

At approximately 12:20 pm, Yuuri received a message that read…

Let’s do this again Mr. Katsuki.

Yuuri clutched his phone to his chest and retreated back into his room.
Tee Shirt

Chapter Summary

A day in Victor's life

Chapter Notes

I wrote the start of this to tee shirt by Birdy.

Hope you guys enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Victor ran down the three flights of stairs, elated about how he had left the situation upstairs on good terms. He spread out the shirt on his body, not wanting to crease it. God, this smells just like him. He tried to restrain himself from pulling the bottom up to his nose and inhaling every last bit of Yuuri’s scent from the fabric. He knew it was creepy. He knew he probably shouldn’t be so excited about some random guy he spent the night with, but he felt high on the past couple of hours. Victor hadn’t felt like that in a long time. It was like lighting was running through his bloodstream, alerting every blood cell to move as quickly as they could in the wake of something amazing. It made him feel even happier knowing that Yuuri probably liked him too. That never really happened to Victor.

Most of the time, when he had one night stands, he got overly affectionate and was practically pushed out of the other person’s living quarters once morning came, but Yuuri was different. It hadn’t been a one night stand. They danced and kissed, and then Yuuri fell asleep in Victor’s arms. Victor barely slept at all. He couldn’t bring himself to. He had this gnawing fear in the back of his mind that if he shut his eyes when he’d open them again, Yuuri would be gone. Instead, he took in every crevice, nook, and cranny in Yuuri’s face. He studied the three little moles that dotted just above his left eyebrow, the tiny indentation right about his lip, the way his bottom lip jutted out and quivered whenever he let out a tiny snore. He even tried to imagine how those little features would alter with different facial expressions. Happiness. Sadness. Surprise. Everything. He tried to calm himself, but it was really fucking hard to reel back in all of his emotions.

“Remember what Christophe said,” He thought to himself as he pulled up the Uber app on his phone. He put out a request and waited for a response from a driver in his area. He needed to be driven back to his car. “You jump in too quickly. You have to let the other person catch up before you’re waist deep in a one-sided relationship.” His phone buzzed. Someone would be there in five minutes. Victor tried to fizzle out his emotions for a bit, taking a deep breath after deep breath. He didn’t want to freak Yuuri out. He liked him, so he wanted to be careful in how he went about getting to the next tier of their relationship, which, consequently, was starting one.

His uber arrived and he got in, greeting the driver, an older man with a thick, scruffy beard and beady eyes, with a sleepy hello.

He tried to think about his new job at the university. It was a big deal for him since they rarely hired people his age. His parents had some ties with a department head at the university, so when their
mythology professor died in July, he was the first person they called. Victor was a published author and often gave lectures in mythology, traveling across the world to do so. He was qualified and ready for a change in scenery, so he packed up all of his things, flew first class with Makkachin for 12 hours, and left St. Petersburg for the big apple. He had lived in the United States before, but usually in quaint towns with prestigious private colleges, not big cities with more rude people than he could count. On his first day in the city just three months ago, someone hit his luggage as he was boarding a taxi and proceeded to try and make him pay for the damages done to their car. He had been screamed at and catcalled more than any other time as well. Culture shock couldn’t even begin to describe his experience.

But Victor was tough. Growing up in his family, he had to be. With six older brothers and a weightlifting father, he couldn’t afford not to. He had the athletic build of Michael Phelps and stature of a model, something he owed to his mother’s genetic makeup. He could punch you out like a lumberjack-prima ballerina and walk away unfazed, but most of the time though, all he had to do was turn around and glare at whoever was causing him trouble. He could ice out anyone with just a single prolonged stare, digging through a person's innermost fears. Victor’s closest friends always used to joke that he could stare down Putin and take over the government with a simple glance. He didn’t know how much he believed that, but he was aware that his eyes had the power to work quite a number on certain people.

He snapped out of his thoughts and pulled out his phone. Pulling up Yuuri’s contact, he began to think about what he should say. A couple of corny one-liners ran through his mind, but something told him that subtle flirting wouldn’t do with Yuuri. With a soft grin on his face, he began to type.

*Let’s do this again Mr. Katsuki.*

Yuuri replied in seconds, with a simple, *Will do.*

He shut his eyes for just a moment, mentally traveling to a place between sleep and consciousnesses. The sun was bright and burning every inch of his eyes. He started to feel the effects of running on three hours of sleep, struggling to stay awake. He gave into the softness of the Sandman in his mind whispering promises of peaceful dreams to his ears, wrapping his arms around himself like the world's saddest blanket. He dozed off for mere minutes before his phone started ringing. He groaned and answered the call in a gruff tone.

“Hello?”

“Where the hell are you? You’re late.” It was Lilia, his aunt, and present divorce attorney. “Luca is fuming that you’re not here. Do you want him to file for alimony?”

Victor rubbed his temples, a low moan escaping his lips. The throbbing in his head, which had been small all morning felt like it was ripping his brain to shreds. He had completely forgotten about his divorce settlement. It completely slipped his mind.

“I’m hungover...in an Uber. In Brooklyn. Where are you?” The effects of being with Yuuri all night had completely worn off. He was a shell of who he had been the previous night.

“Why are you in fucking Brooklyn?” She was angry but whispering, signaling that she was near Luca’s lawyer. She cleared her throat. “Can you get here as soon as possible. I’ll fend them off for now, but hurry.” She hung up, leaving him to try and gather himself.

Victor made it to his car at 12:40 pm. He thanked the driver and begrudgingly walked into the parking garage in search of his car. He held his keys high up in the air and pressed the lock button, hoping to track it down. He remembered he parked on the ground floor, but couldn’t quite recall which wing it had been. He circled the ground floor twice before locating his *oh-so-luxurious* sports
car. He hopped into the front seat after collecting the parking ticket that was stuck to the windshield.

Greenwich village was approximately 20 or so minutes away from where Victor was. He sped along the city streets, taking whatever shortcut he could and pushing the speed limit as close as possible before he was breaking the law. He drove in silence, having barely any time to stop and think about what they would be disputing over today. His beach house in Bora Bora? The two boats he kept docked at said beach houses? Was it the black Porsche he kept in France? Or was he still trying to take Makkachin from him?

Their divorce shouldn’t have taken this long to settle. They had only been married for 129 days, after all. Victor hadn’t even been happy in that time, just too proud to admit to himself and his family that he had made a mistake. He had stayed by the playboy’s side, putting up with his bullshit. The overcharged credit cards, cheating scandals, vacations paid on Victor’s behalf… He put up with all of it, just to not have to walk back to his parents, with his tail between his legs like Makkachin after having done something to a pair of expensive leather shoes. When the day finally came to do so, Victor couldn’t look at any one of his family members in the eyes for weeks.

He and Luca had married in Las Vegas the night same-sex marriage was legalized in the United States. Victor had been in town for one of his lectures at the university Luca was a student of. After he finished his lecture, some of the faculty invited him out for a drink in the city. One drink turned into fifty, and suddenly Luca, a tank top wearing, pampered boy from the valley, was husband material. They were both blackout drunk at the time, so the next morning they promised each other a quick separation. But then they had lunch, and Victor grew fond of him. He didn’t know why. It wasn’t like Luca was fun, or good at conversation. Maybe it was the fact that he listened to Victor in spite of whatever he had to say. It was praise in a sense, but it felt like love and at that point in his life, that was all that Victor wanted. They decided to stay together and see how things worked out between them. “Hey, maybe we’re soulmates!” Victor had joked with him.

God, he had been a fool.

Now he was paying the price of his actions. Quite literally, as well.

He parked in front of his apartment complex, practically sprinting from his car to the front entrance. Rushing up to his penthouse, which used to belong to his mother, Victor started to strip as soon as he entered the foyer. He kicked his shoes off, ripped his jeans from his legs, and then took his time in removing Yuuri’s shirt and gently leaving it folded on his coffee table. He noticed that Makkachin hadn’t come bursting down from the upper level and assumed the dog walker had gotten his message requesting they come on Sunday. He then ran to his bathroom, almost tripping over all of the crap he still hadn’t unpacked. He made a mental note to take care of all of the boxes just pointlessly shifting from place to place in the apartment, as well as finally settling on a color to paint the bare walls. He jumped into the shower and quickly got to work, lathering himself in a body wash his mother had sent him as a housewarming gift. It filled his bathroom with the scent of lavender and honeysuckle.

He stepped out of the shower, drying off as quickly as his body would permit. Victor wrapped the towel around his waist and scampered up to his bedroom leaving tiny drops of water scattered about as he walked upstairs. He pulled out a dark grey semi-casual suit from his closet and started to dress. He traded the blazer in for a vest and left his white collared shirt unbuttoned at the top instead of wearing a tie. He trusted the heat of summer would dry his hair on his way to the courthouse.

He slipped on a pair of shoes, he spritzed himself with cologne and walked back downstairs. Sighing deeply, Victor picked up his keys once more and rushed to his car, ignoring the storm of calls incoming from Lilia.
He made it to the courthouse in thirty minutes. Lilia was stood outside of the courtroom, hand on her hip, and a very thick Manila folder in the other. She looked like she wanted to hit Victor as he strode in, arms open, with an apologetic look on his face. She tapped her foot as he walked to her and entered the courtroom once he was a short distance away. His heavy, hesitant steps rung throughout the antique building. He followed Lilia in, leaning in close to her ear and whispering, “I met someone.”

Lilia stopped walking and stared Victor down with the fury of a million rabid dogs. “Good for you, but we’re here to undo just what sentences like that lead to. Alright?”

Victor didn’t care for her response, he had been waiting all morning to tell someone about Yuuri. He brushed off her comment, continuing to tell her about his encounter. “He took me out all night and we ended up at his place, but we didn’t do anything. We just slept. He is so cute. He sleep talks and he grumbles little sentences in Japanese! Can you believe it?” He went on, lowering his voice as they approached their table. Luca was sat on the right side with his team, a frown on his face. Victor averted his eyes from him, scared to let him in on his newfound happiness. He shuffled into the seat next to Lilia’s and shut his mouth, waiting for the judge to begin.

“I’m glad you could join us, Mr. Nikiforov. Hopefully, we won’t keep you too long.” The judge walked in with a tight-lipped smile, obviously annoyed by Victor’s tardiness. Victor apologized, keeping his eyes fixated on the table in front of him. Lilia let out a knowing sigh as if telling Victor this was what she was afraid of. “Alright, Mr. Mikhailov-Nikiforov, you and your team have the floor. What are we dealing with this time?”

“It’s the matter of the dog, your honor.” Victor rolled his eyes.

“Again? I thought we laid this matter to rest.” The judge questioned, shifting her eyes from Luca’s lawyer to Victor.

“We have new evidence that shows the dog would be in better care under my client.”

“And what would that be?” The judge asked, obviously tired of dealing with Makkachin’s custody.

“His work schedule, actually.” The lawyer, a stout balding man, staggered up to the judges stand and presented her with a piece of paper. “This is Mr.Nikiforov’s new work schedule. Now, he barely had time for his husband when he was unemployed, and now that he is employed through New York University, Mr. Mikhailov-Nikiforov feels this will lead the dog to be denied proper care.”

“He’ll only be working about 30 hours per week if I’m reading this correctly. That seems like a very manageable schedule for both him and the dog. This is nonsensical, Mr. Gallo.” The lawyer, shutting his eyes, took a deep breath as if the judge had just stated what he had known would be the response. He opened his mouth to speak again, but she intercepted. “Mrs. Baranovskaya, Mr. Nikiforov, how do you respond?”

“First and foremost, I would like to take this time to make it clear to everyone in the room that Makkachin is a service dog, making him a non-negotiable asset.” She stood and turned to face Luca and his team. “It’s becoming a burden having to defend my client's mental ailments in order to justify why the dog needs to remain by his side. Since my arguments against that are already on file, I’ll simply deal with the matter at hand. My client, in addition to having built his schedule around the fact that he has a dog, has a sitter in place to take good care of the dog through the hours that he will not be able to do so himself. Also, the university allows service dogs on campus. That means that Mr. Nikiforov will be able to bring the dog to his place of work. The idea that the dog would be neglected is completely bogus.” She pursed her lips, smoothing out the skirt of her jacket. “I rest my
case, your honor.” Lilia sat down with a neutral expression of satisfaction. This had been the sixth time she had had to disprove all of the radical claims Luca had put together in hopes of taking Makkachin from Victor.

Victor had been with Makkachin for seven years prior to his escapade in Vegas. When the divorce process began, Luca claimed that Makkachin should have been put in his care and that he was too emotionally attached to the dog to let him go. Time after time that the issue was brought up, the Judge denied him custody. Victor didn’t know why Luca wanted Makkachin so badly, other than to spite him one last time.

The case continued with request after request of alimony and estates being denied left and right. Victor and Luca did not speak a single word all three hours. They sat back and let their lawyers say everything they were thinking. Victor let his mind wander as everything was discussed and divided. When their time was over, Lilia informed him that they only had one more date in court, this time dealing with his last name. Luca had taken it when they got married and refused to give it up. Lilia and Victor both knew the reason.

Victor’s family held quite a bit of prestige in Russia and most of Europe. Simply being a Nikiforov opened doors to opportunities beyond most people's wildest dreams. His last name had been doing just that for Luca; giving him access to fashion shows, clubs, and five-star restaurants just about everywhere his family had business ties.

Victor and Lilia made their way outside, basking in the warm late summer sun. Victor felt his need for sleep start to drag him down as they walked down the stone steps of the building. Next to him, Lilia pulled out her phone and tucked Victor’s file into her briefcase. With a deep sigh, she asked, “Alright, tell me about him.”

“Hm?” Victor responded, suddenly snapped out of his trance.

“The person you were going on about. What's he like?” She was smiling at him now, her business side shutting off, turning her back into his aunt.

“Oh, Lilia... He’s amazing. His name is Yuuri, like our Yuri, and he’s so beautiful and warm and soft.” Victor’s face mellowed, melting into a fond expression at the sheer mention of Yuuri.

“How did you meet him?” Lilia questioned as they walked to their cars.

Victor blushed, embarrassed that their story was so close to that of his and Luca’s. “Eh... does that really matter?” He laughed the question off, shifting his focus back to Yuuri. “He cooks really well, and his bathroom looks like a set from a Marilyn Monroe movie. And, get this, he has a huge collection of scented candles. I mean, they're everywhere!” He babbled on about Yuuri all the way to Lilia’s car. She listened intently, not putting in her opinion. She knew Victor enough to know that whatever she thought would surely sway him in how he went about dealing with his new crush.

He hugged her goodbye and made his way to his own car, the need to crawl into his bed growing with every second that passed.

He couldn't wait to get home and talk Makkachin’s ear off about Yuuri after a long nap.

----

When Victor got home, Makkachin was waiting for him on his bed in the kitchen. He greeted him with a few kisses and ran up the stairs, sensing Victor’s exhaustion. Victor slipped out of his clothes and into his bed, Makkachin following closely behind him.
“I think I found someone to be your new daddy, Makkachin.” Victor yawned. Makkachin tilted his head to the side, tongue out and panting. Victor scratched behind his ears and snuggled closer to the poodle. He looked happy to Victor as they both fell into a deep slumber. “Papa has a possible new boyfriend…” Victor said in a sing-songy voice before falling into a deep sleep.

He woke up at 5 o’clock to the sound of Makkachin whimpering, asking to be taken out to relieve himself. He pulled on a t-shirt and jean shorts and reached for Makkachin’s leash on his dresser. He attached it to his collar and they made their way out of the apartment, water bottles and doggy bags in Victor’s hands. They walked downstairs, riding down the elevator with grins on their faces. Victor decided to walk as long as Makkachin wanted, hoping for the walk to help clear his head.

The day was still bright, despite it being later in the afternoon. Multiple people were out walking with their pets and children. Victor said hello to a couple of his neighbors and stopped when a mother asked him if her son could say hello to Makkachin. Victor gleefully obliged and instructed Makkachin to sit, in order to make him seem smaller to the five-year-old nervously approaching. The small boy kept his eyes on the ground and his arms stiffly at his sides. A shy, tiny hand reached up to stroke Makkachin’s fluffy ear, causing the dog to wag his tail. The boy noticed and giggled. The mother and son pair thanked Victor and continued on their way.

The poodle attracted small children everywhere they went, making it fortunate that both he and Victor didn’t mind company. Back in St. Petersburg, Victor would visit hospitals around the city with Makkachin and his mother, both to get him out of the house and to give Makkachin more time with other humans. They made rounds around the children’s ward and went on walks with those who could. Makkachin spent most of the time chasing after chew toys and helping kids going through tough times by cuddling with them, while Victor sat back and read them stories.

Victor and Makkachin did two laps around the block before he got a call from Mila, his cousin. She lived in the city with her brother Yuri and worked as a junior editor for a magazine in Manhattan. Thanks to her busy schedule, Victor barely got to see either her or his baby cousin.

“Victor,” She sang into his ears. “How’s my favorite cousin of all time?”

“I’m your only cousin.” Victor stated as he started to make his way into his complex. “What do you need?”

“So, I have a date and Yuri, your favorite person on the planet, has a fever. I know you get sick easily, but Victor, if you saw this woman, you’d faint.” Victor rolled his eyes.

“Yuri’s sick?” The last time he had seen the little man was two weeks ago. He had seemed fine then, but then again two weeks was a long time. “How did that happen?” Victor began to worry. Yuri really was his favorite person. He was the last thing connecting him to his Aunt’s side of the family since she passed, and he valued that quite a bit since he had been very close to her. Not only that, but he could hold entire conversations with the five-year-old at any given time. They were usually very insightful and quite blunt, on Yuri’s side, something Victor considered invaluable since everyone else was too afraid to hurt him. The rest of his family walked on eggshells around him most of the time, and that made Victor susceptible to just ignoring them entirely.

“I’m thinking he caught it about three days ago. We went out and it got a bit chilly. But it could’ve been anything. You know how toddlers are.” She waved it off. Victor heard some shuffling about in the background, as well as some soft giggles from Yuri. Mila laughed and shushed him. “So, can you watch him?”

“Yeah, no problem. Do you want me to go pick him up?” Victor stepped into the elevator and pressed the button for his floor. Makkachin sat by his legs and flashed his big puppy eyes at him,
signaling hunger in the pup. Victor placed a gentle hand on top of his head and stepped out of the elevator once it reached his floor.

“Nah,” She dragged out the word, laughing nervously. Victor turned the corner and spotted his cousins waiting at his doorstep. “But you could open your door.”

Yuri turned back to look at him at the sound of Makkachin’s feet running to them. A toothy grin spread across his rosy cheeks as he took off running in Victor’s direction.

“Vitya!” He squealed, passing Makkachin, much to the dog’s dismay, and jumped into Victor’s arms. Victor hugged the boy, kissing his cheek with as much emotion as he could possibly conjure.

“Kotyonko!” Victor exclaimed in his native tongue. “Your sister tells me you’re sick. How did that happen?” He placed the young boy on his hip and walked to his front door, handing Mila the keys for her to open it.

“I licked a rock.” Mila covered her face with her hands, walking hurriedly into his penthouse to avoid any further questions. “And Balthazar.” Balthazar was his cat. He held up three fingers and giggled. “Three times.”

Victor smiled at Yuri and walked into his home. “Mila, why are you letting him lick his cat?”

“Victor, you don’t know him like I know him. He’s a little demon when you’re not around.” She sat at the breakfast counter and poured herself a glass of wine. “I think he’s plotting my murder.” Victor knit his brows and set Yuri down, sending him off to play with Makkachin.

“Look at you, having kid problems like a real mom.” Victor said, standing on the other side of the island, pouring himself a glass as well.

“I might as well be.” She took a sip, letting her eyes fall down to the brim of the glass. In a softer, more quiet voice, she told Victor the news about Yuri’s grandfather. “He’s getting worse every day, you know? Your Papa told me he might not make it to Christmas this year. I’m thinking about flying back with Yuri before something happens.”

Victor nodded in agreement, keeping a sober eye on Yuri playing just feet away from them on the ground. He had a little suitcase with him filled with stuffed animals and Lego sets. He saw a couple of books and some puzzles as well, letting Victor know that the night would be a long one.

They talked for a few more minutes until Mila said it was time for her to go home and get ready. She scooped Yuri into her arms and blew raspberries on his cheeks and stomach. She ran around with him on her back for a bit while Yuri kicked and screamed at her to put him down. It wasn’t until he ripped out a sizeable chunk of red hair from Mila’s head that she set him on Victor’s couch. Yuri stuck his tongue out at her, a gesture she returned with a smile. She dropped the playful act and hugged him tightly, asking for him to be a good boy. “I love you, Yuri.”

“I love you too.” He whispered into her hair.

Mila and Yuri shared a bond greater than anything he had ever seen between two people. Yuri came into Mila’s life when she was just 20 years old, as the product of her father’s second marriage. She flew to Russia to meet him the day he was born, not stopping to rest a single time, driven by the sheer excitement of having a baby brother. Mila had told Victor the story of how she first saw Yuri countless times. How she had walked in, face red from the cold, and found Yuri cradled in his mother’s, screaming like he had been born angry at the world. She said she approached with caution, but Victor had seen the videos of her storming in and practically stealing baby Yuri from his
mother’s arms. He had stopped crying the minute Mila held him, and from that moment on they had been inseparable. Especially once Yuri’s mother and father passed. It was hard on both families, but especially for Mila. But that didn’t stop her; She knew she had to protect and care for Yuri above anything else.

Mila had taken it upon herself to raise Yuri, and so they filed for Mila to become Yuri’s primary guardian and six months later he was back with her in New York. That had been two years ago.

“Well, I’ll see you guys tomorrow. I’ll call if I won’t be in. Goodbye, my loves.” She kissed Vicor’s cheek and walked out of the apartment.

Victor put on a movie for Yuri on the t.v. and headed off into the kitchen to cook them something for dinner. He settled on making ravioli as he searched through his pantry. Yuri trotted over to him and sat on the floor with Makkachin’s head on his legs. He had a book with him and sat reading silently, coughing every now and them. Victor took it upon himself to make hot chocolate for the five-year-old.

He handed him a sippy cup, many of which Victor had in his possession after the millions of times he had watched Yuri throughout the summer. They sat on the floor together, waiting for their meal to finish cooking.

“Aunt Lilia told Millie that you’re being stupid again.” Yuri sipped his chocolate and raised an eyebrow at Victor. “What did you do?”

Victor cleared his throat and tried to think of an answer. What had he done? “Nothing they wouldn’t do.” He pondered the thought and tried to think back to the morning, which seemed like eons ago. Images of Yuuri lying peacefully asleep beside Victor played like a film in his head.

His chest filled with a warmth that was becoming more and more familiar to him.

“I met someone. And he made me a little crazy.”

Yuri nodded along, wiping snot from his nose onto his shirt sleeve. Victor made a sickened expression and reached up for a napkin from the counter. He handed it to Yuri, but all Yuri did was wave it away.

“Is it a good crazy?” He began to whisper then. “Or is it Georgi crazy?”

“Definitely a good crazy.” Victor got up from the floor and turned off the stove. He began to plate the food and asked Yuri where he wanted to eat. He decided on eating right there on the floor. Victor sat back down, plates in hand.

“It’s good that you’re being stupid then.” He picked up a ravioli with his form and stuck it in his mouth. “You look a lot happier.”

Chapter End Notes

This is somewhat of a filler chapter. I really wanted to give insight into what Victor's life is like apart from Yuuri. I really hate it when, in fics and like shows or whatever, the protagonists meet each other and their lives turn into these very love-centric existences, with no room for anyone or anything else. I love fluff as much as anyone else, but I
really want to show the dynamic aspects of Victor's (and Yuuri’s) lives with and without each other in them. Hopefully, this does it well.

follow me on Tumblr!:

rainbowvictor
A Change of Heart

Chapter Summary

That’s just the kind of thing crushes did to people. They made them into selfless, idiots at the disposal of the person receiving their affection.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Yuuri woke up late in the afternoon on Monday with a smile a mile long across his face. His mood had lifted drastically from what it had been just days before. He felt like a sprite as he pranced around his apartment, putting to use years of ballet lessons. Tchaikovsky was blasting from the speakers set up in the living room as he cleaned up the mess he had made in the kitchen and bathroom. He felt lighter and new like he had shed his old skin and been evolved into a more carefree version of himself. He grabbed a broom from the closet at the end of the hallway and began to sweep up the kitchen floor. A crown of sweat formed around his hairline, but Yuuri didn’t mind.

The day outside was sunny and brilliant, with a vibrant blue sky shining above the city. He opened all of the windows in the apartment and let the soft breezes of summer’s last weeks spread around their sweet natural scents all over him. He was elated, for more reasons than one, as he pirouetted around on the plush carpet.

He had just received a call from his school counselor, letting him know that if everything went well his fall semester, Yuuri could be out of school by January with just his in-class internship left before he could become a licensed school teacher. Just five months and Yuuri would be able to pick up everything and do what he had been dreaming of since he was twelve years old. He had taken classes through summer breaks and studied his ass off (This isn’t figuratively speaking. For a period of time, Yuuri’s perky bottom dissipated due to long hours spent sitting in his room with his nose stuck in a book), just at the opportunity to get out of school early. The classical music blasting from his system ended, and Power by Kanye West began its eccentric and intrinsic, power trip of a journey around his apartment. He tried his hand at breakdancing, playing out a couple of moves Phichit had taught him. He felt it was a blessing for him that the apartment below his was empty.

The second bit of good news came from Seung Gil, who told him that Phichit would be returning two days earlier than had been planned from his trip home.

Yuuri’s heart nearly burst when he told him that.

He moved on to the living room once he finished with the kitchen, grabbing a bottle of Windex and an old rag from under the sink. He wiped off the dirt and grime from the sliding doors of the balcony apartment, taking note that he needed to water Phichit’s ferns and peonies before going off to shower. Yuuri needed to make sure that everything was perfect for Phichit’s return in the afternoon. Seung Gil would be picking him up from the airport, making it Yuuri’s job to see that he returned to a clean home and prepare a warm meal. “Think of it as a vacation from his vacation. You know how much his family stresses him out.” Seung Gil had argued, trying to guilt trip Yuuri into doing something he would’ve done anyway. Yuuri would do anything for Phichit.

That’s just the kind of thing crushes did to people. They made them into selfless, idiots at the disposal
Yuuri knew it was delusional for him to feel the way he did toward his best friend. After all, Phichit was in a very committed and happy relationship with Seung Gil and had been for the past three years. It became a very messy, painful ordeal for Yuuri to deal with, having them constantly flirting and kissing around him. He learned to deal with it, leaving the room when they kissed or turning up the volume on his headphones when they spoke on the phone. He had been living in his own mind for the past three years, with no one to talk to about all of the things he felt, whether pain or pleasure, from the situation.

Yuuri, behind his kind and gentle demeanor, was truly an exceptionally jealous person. He hated seeing Phichit with Seung Gil and would go out of his way to make sure that they never spent too much time in the apartment with him. To not seem too rude, he always used the excuse that he had to study. He didn’t quite hate Seung Gil, but he didn’t like him all that much either. He was too dull, too reserved, and too detached from most romantic feelings toward Phichit. In true longing-for-what-I-can’t-have passion, Yuuri was patiently waiting for the day that Phichit would end things with Seung Gil and maybe see Yuuri as more than a friend. So he sat back and let Phichit cry on his shoulder when he needed, lending himself in Seung Gil’s place when he wasn’t there, and staying completely neutral when the couple fought. He wasn’t trying to break them up, but he did genuinely try to make Phichit happy, even at his own expense.

He fluffed some pillows on the couch and found an ugly, pink Hawaiian shirt scrunched up in one of the edges of the couch. He scrunched up his nose, thinking back to the guy he had brought home two nights before. “Victor.” He thought, throwing the shirt into an empty hamper in the hall. Victor had texted him to “do this again”, but Yuuri had no intention of doing so, despite texting him back “will do”. He seemed like a nice guy, and from what Guang Hong told him, Yuuri had a genuinely good time with him, but it was a one night stand. Those never lead anywhere good. Just lustful sex, a realization that love was a farfetched idea for all those involved, and a complication of emotions. Yuuri didn’t have the time to deal with all of that-- school was taking up too much time for him.

Once he was satisfied with how the apartment looked and smelled, Yuuri went off into the kitchen. He had done his shopping on Friday, so there was plenty of food for him to make something delicious for dinner. He picked up different vegetables and meats, then realized all he knew how to make was katsudon, and that was because it was his favorite meal. He stared down at the food in the fridge and sighed. Scratching his head, he pondered on what Phichit would like after having eaten home cooked meals for three weeks. Yuuri pursed his lips and smiled when his eyes landed on the menu card for their favorite pizza place. He reached for his phone and put in an order for three large deluxe meat lover’s pizzas. He also asked for four orders of boneless buffalo wings and a party platter of their garlic bread. The girl on the phone sounded concerned and sympathetically asked if he would like a discount on the order. “Sure,” He thanked her. “When should I expect my order?”

Phichit made it home just ten minutes after the pizza arrived, giving Yuuri enough time to hang up a Welcome Home! banner above the television.

He entered the apartment with open arms, bronzed and beautiful like some sort of sun god. Phichit wrapped his arms around Yuuri and hugged him so tightly Yuuri thought he was going to explode. He took in the banquet on the table and clutched his heart, jokingly stating, “This is all for me? Oh, I feel so loved.” He kissed Yuuri’s temple, something Yuuri was used to, and promptly sat on the couch, sighing deeply. “God, it’s nice to be back.” Yuuri couldn’t help but smile at him like a fool. Phichit tilted his head to the side, smirking, and pat the seat next to him, gesturing for Yuuri to sit. Just as Yuuri sat down next to his best friend, Seung Gil came into the apartment with two suitcases.
and a backpack. He looked at the two, then at the food, rolling his eyes. Yuuri guessed he was displeased with the food Yuuri had “prepared”, but he didn’t care. He knew Phichit would love it a lot more than anything either of them would have made.

Phichit got up and said he’d be taking a shower before Leo, Guang Hong, and Yuko all showed up to welcome him back. He grabbed his backpack and shuffled on down the hall into his room. Seung Gil smiled down at Yuuri, who was still sunken into the couch with a peachy mien on his face.

“Pizza? I asked you for a home cooked meal, and you buy pizza?” He sounded annoyed, placing his palm on his forehead and taking a deep breathe in. Yuuri shrugged, shifting in his seat, uneasy under the other boys gaze. Seung Gil exhaled and grabbed the rest of Phichit’s luggage, hauling it off in the same direction his boyfriend left in. Yuuri sighed and turned on the television, promptly trying to calm himself down from having Phichit so close to him.

A knock came from the door. Yuuri got up and answered the door, groaning. Leo and Guang Hong flooded inside with a tin of what Yuuri recognized as tamales, obviously from Leo’s mother’s kitchen. They handed him the tin, which Yuuri placed on the table, mouth watering at the scent.

Phichit burst out of the bathroom upon hearing their voices, hair still dripping, but clothed in sweatpants and a grey cotton t-shirt. They bounced up and down, squealing at meeting once again after almost a month of being apart. They took seats on the couch and the floor, talking about what they had all done in the past month. They moved from topic to topic, frantic in listening to each other’s stories. Yuuri got a box of pizza from the kitchen and set it on the coffee table along with drinks and chicken wings. Yuko arrived sometime later and it took no time to fill her in on the conversation.

Eventually, the conversation came full circle, back to Guang Hong, who had a mischievous look on his face as Yuuri poured himself another glass of coke. He brought his own cup up to his lips, drank for a bit, and then asked, “So Yuuri, what happened to Vladimir?”

Yuuri went a deep shade of red, almost choking on the pizza he was chewing.

“Who?” Phichit asked with a raised brow and an intrigued smile.

“Yuuri’s supermodel Russian boyfriend. He met him on Saturday night and they were all over each other.” Leo laughed. “They even slept together.”

“Boyfriend? So soon? I thought I was the only man in your life, Yuuri.” Phichit pretended to cry, making Yuuri laugh and roll his eyes.

“No, he’s not my boyfriend. And, to set the record straight, we didn’t do anything other than sleep in the same bed. That’s it. End of story.” Yuuri finished his pizza and wiped his mouth clean with a napkin.

Phichit knit his eyebrows. “Why? What was wrong with him?”

“He-” Yuuri started.

“Nothing was wrong with him. He was really nice, Yuuri just likes to fuck himself over.” Leo spoke up from behind Guang Hong. The group collectively looked at him in surprise. “What? You know it’s true. He meets these amazing guys and he seduces them, or whatever you do to them Yuuri, I don’t really understand it...and then you never call them back.” He shook his head and sighed. “I swear, you could’ve been married ages ago, but you play yourself like a damn fool every time.”

“Look at you, honey. Spilling tea left and right.” Guang Hong giggled and kissed his cheek. Yuuri
looked down at his hands, speechless. He couldn’t think of what to say, or how to defend himself.

“I don’t… want a relationship. I’m okay being by myself.” was all he could utter.

“Bullshit. You were fucking crying on Saturday about how you hated not having someone.” Guang Hong leaned in closer to his face, pressing his forehead against Yuuri’s and whispering, “You hate being alone, my dear. It quite genuinely worries me how much you try to deny it.”

“Well, not a single person I bring home seems to want more than a hookup.” Yuuri leaned back and wrapped his arms around himself. He could feel his ears heat up from embarrassment.

“Vladimir did.” Guang Hong answered in a challenging tone of voice.

“No, he didn’t. He just… I don’t know. And his name is Victor, not Vladimir.” At that moment, Yuuri’s phone lit up on the table. His head snapped up, hand rushing to grab it. Guang Hong saw him scurrying to get his phone and reached for it before Yuuri could get his hand on it. Yuuri hoped and prayed that it wasn’t Victor, unable to take being exposed one more time.

“Speak of the devil.” Guang Hong said. “Hey, do you want to maybe have coffee tomorrow? ” He read the text in a low, Russian accent. The group laughed at Guang Hong’s impression while Yuuri tried to fight him for his phone back. As they laughed, a series of dings erupted from the phone. “Or not.

We can do anything you want.

If you even want to do it tomorrow.

I’m free all week after 12 so whatever works for you.

Oh, god I sound so stupid.

Just pretend you didn’t read this. “

Guang Hong’s mock voice dwindled down to his regular one as he read each message. “Jesus Christ Yuuri, what did you do to him?” The notifications continued to come in as they all stared at Yuuri in wonder.

“No-nothing! I swear I just made him breakfast and sent him on his way!” Guang Hong handed him his phone back and situated a displeased look on his face. Yuuri took his phone and, avoiding Phichit’s curious eyes as well as everyone else’s, walked to his room, slamming the door behind him. His heart was almost beating out of his chest. “Great, now he thinks I spend my free time seducing random men.” Yuuri thought as he unlocked his phone, ready to read the cornucopia of texts Victor had sent him. “Fuck.” He let slip out as he read text after text. Victor had seemed so cool and collected that Sunday morning. The person texting Yuuri now was a shell of a man, just as anxious and awkward as Yuuri used to be around Phichit. Something tugged at his heart as he read through each word, blushing quite harshly from second-hand embarrassment. He took a seat on his bed and stared at the wall for a minute, contemplating the conversation from before.

“Maybe I should give him a chance.” He closed his eyes and balled his fists. “It’s not like Phichit is gonna be single anytime soon.” He chuckled to himself, feeling hot tears around the corners of his eyes. His heart felt heavy with sadness. He had been pining over his best friend for the last five or six years, hoping and praying for an opportunity to ask him to be his, finally. But Phichit was never alone; that was just who he was. Someone was always in love with him, making Yuuri feel like what he felt for his friend was as common as an affinity for a sports club or band. Everyone liked it, making him nothing special. Just another face in the crowd.
He wanted to let go of his infatuation, but every time he felt he could something pulled him back in, like a scarring wound that never healed properly. He got so close to being free from his heart's clutches only to be yanked back by something as trivial as how he combed his hair or ate his breakfast. Yuuri knew he would eventually have to move on or confess to Phichit because something told him Seung Gil wasn't about to let go of his golden boy. “Who would?”

A soft rapping came from his door. Yuuri tried to blink away his tears removing his glasses and wiping his short sleeve over his eyes. It was still noticeable that he had been crying, but all of his friends had seen each other cry so it didn't really matter.

Phichit came in with a slice of pizza and a lamented smile on his lips. Yuuri couldn't meet his gaze, scared of his eyes betraying him and revealing what he had done such a good job in hiding. Instead, he looked to his shoes and held his breathe as Phichit kneeled in front of him and poked at his cheek lovingly. “Hey, I’m sorry they did all that. You know it comes from a good place.” Yuuri nodded and took the pizza from him, setting it on his bedside table. His curtains were drawn, but a beautiful orange shadow cast itself upon Phichit’s face, sharpening his every feature. Yuuri gulped and looked away. “And, you should go out with that guy. I don't wanna leave you knowing you're not gonna have someone to cuddle you when life gets hard.” Yuuri felt his heart stop and hands go clammy. “Not that I'm gonna leave anytime soon, but you know, you should have someone there for you when I'm not available. It's important to have those types of relationships.” Phichit took Yuuri’s hands into his own and kissed his knuckles. “I know he hurt you Yuuri, and I know it's hard to trust someone like you trusted him again, but you need to take these steps to recover.” The memories were still too alive, too real. He started to cry, shoulders shaking with every gasp for air. Phichit wrapped his arms around him and Yuuri wanted Phichit never to let him go. After some time, and eventually getting tired of crying, Yuuri broke their embrace. He saw Phichit’s worried expression and wanted to say something, anything to ease his mind. “He was an awful person, but there are good men. You shouldn’t give up.” It was a whisper so low Yuuri could barely hear him.

“That sounds fake… but ok.” Yuuri said, an effort at lightening the mood. They shared a smile filled with dimples and teeth and crinkled eyes.

Yuuri’s phone dinged again. “Please answer him. I can feel his pride breaking bit by bit and I've never even met the man.” Phichit joked with a sigh, handing Yuuri his phone.

Yuuri sighed and read through the messages one more time until he reached the five new ones Victor had sent.

_I hope you don't think I'm a freak or something, I just really like you._

_I'm really not usually like this_

_I would understand if you didn't message me back_

_Not gonna hold you to replying to me. I wouldn't even reply to me._

_Sorry about the tirade. It was nice meeting you._

“You really do pull quite a number on men, Yuuri. What kind of dark magic are you playing with? What was it that Leo called it? Burjeria?” Phichit mused on, reading the texts for himself. “He’s a little weird, but I think you should do it. Weird is good sometimes.” Just then, Seung Gil beckoned Phichit from the living room. Leaving with a pat on Yuuri's knee, Phichit left just as he had entered. Yuuri’s heart ached with the need to be near his friend, sending a numb feeling from the center of his chest up to his brain and down to his legs.
He picked up his phone and pressed the phone icon. Clicking on Victor's name in his contacts, Yuuri's breathing steadied. It took one ring for Victor to answer and half a second for him to start babbling about how sorry he was for blowing up Yuuri's phone.

“You must think I'm crazy. I am so sorry if I scared you.”

“Victor, it’s fine. First of all, you’re too attractive to be crazy, so stop calling yourself that.” Yuuri coaxed with a sudden air of confidence. Victor stopped talking and took a deep breath. “Secondly, I would love to have coffee with you. Does Thursday at 1 work for you?”

“Yes-yeah. Yuuri, I'm really not like this. I don't know to understand why I'm being so erratic.”

“I’m just too beautiful, Victor. It’s like this with everyone.” It was meant to be a lighthearted joke, but Yuuri wasn’t lying. It wasn’t always to Victor’s extent, but there was something about Yuuri that made people crazy for him.

“I can tell.” Victor’s voice was calmer now, taking its recognizably easy tone once again. “I can’t wait to see just how mad you can drive me.”

With every word spoken, Yuuri’s confidence deflated and his throat went dry. His heart picked up pace, letting a shaky laugh escape his lips. “Well, I’ll see you on Thursday then. Bye Victor.”

“See you soon, Лапушка.” Yuuri knit his brows, not understanding the last word Victor had said, but the call had ended before he could ask. He squirmed in his seat and set his phone back down.

From behind the door came a quiet ‘aha’, before he heard Guang Hong scream,

“Yuuri’s getting dicked down on Thursday everybody!”

Yuuri groaned and looked at his clock. It was 6:45 in the afternoon, and it might have been too early for a nap, but he laid his head down and covered himself in his duvet either way. He didn’t want to move. He didn’t want to speak. He didn’t want to see or hear anyone for the next two days.

He hated dates. And yet he had set one up with a charming and eccentric, slightly deranged, Russian man on Thursday. Yuuri didn’t understand himself sometimes. He would’ve been perfectly alright refusing to answer Victor if it had been anyone but Phichit that had come in to appease him, but it wasn’t anyone else, it was his best friend. He couldn’t let Phichit worry about him. So he did was he as suggested and was going to give Victor a chance. That terrified him.

Not Victor himself, something about him genuinely intrigued Yuuri. Victor couldn’t be scary to Yuuri even if he tried. Physically anyway.

It was what Victor represented; love. Giving yourself to someone in your most vulnerable state and asking them to love you regardless of your past and your pain. Relying on someone who could easily turn your life upside down if they wanted. He had done it all before and all of his woes were taken advantage of. He was manipulated and tossed aside like play-doh that had dried too quickly. Yuuri wouldn’t be able to stomach another heartbreak. There was no telling what damage Victor could do to him.

And that was what scared him. Yuuri couldn’t handle another breakdown. He was finally alright after three years of reeling back from happiness and pleasure, due to the fact that he felt like he didn’t deserve anything good in life. It had taken only one person to tear him down, and all of his family and friends to build him back up. Victor seemed stable. He seemed nice. He seemed like he wouldn’t hurt a fly. But was that a chance Yuuri was willing to take? And what if he did? Did he even like Victor like Victor obviously liked him? Was there enough of Yuuri left over to be shared with
someone else? He wasn’t sure and the last thing he wanted to do was hurt someone like he himself had been hurt.

There were too many ‘what-if’s’ in Yuuri’s head as he tried to fall asleep. He tried to banish them from his mind by telling himself that a date didn’t mean that Victor was in love with him or that it would lead to anything serious. "It’ll be fun.” He told himself. “He’ll tell me I’m pretty and then I’ll get a free meal. No big deal.” His stomach felt like it was full of bugs, each crawling best as they could to escape through his mouth. “Oh god, what if he kills me? I don’t know anything about him, but he knows where I live.” He could feel the phantom bugs starting to tickle his throat, making his skin crawl with discomfort. “Calm down.” He whispered to himself. “Be rational about this.” He took a deep breath in and counted to twenty before exhaling. Laughter drifted into his room from outside, somewhat bringing him back to reality. “You only think he’s gonna kill you because you’re still idiotically in love with someone who is most likely never going to reciprocate those feelings. But that’s okay, it’s a rational fear at least. Moving forward; he’s nice, seems smart, and has a fucking six pack. And you, well, you have three empty chocolate pudding cups and a half-eaten pizza slice on your nightstand. Let’s not mention all of that emotional baggage you lug around.” Yuuri groaned and picked up the half eaten pizza, taking bite after bite until it was all gone. So it was him after all. The realization struck a chord with him. Now he was anxious and insecure about Thursday.

He felt restless.

Yuuri got up and stretched. Reaching to the ceiling, standing on his tippy toes and then touching the ground with his palms. He was fat, but the flexibility yoga and ballet provided didn’t fade with as time went on and his sizes went up.

He cracked his back and stepped out of the room, ready to join his friends once again. “Are you ready to apologize or do I have to cry again?” he joked as he took a seat next to Guang Hong, draping an arm around his shoulders.

“Well that depends, are you going to tell us what happened after we left you two alone on Saturday?” Leo asked with a raised brow and amused tone. His brown eyes flickered from face to face in the room, as if asking for support. Mostly everyone encouraged Yuuri to tell the story.

“It’s kind of embarrassing. I mean, I barely remember much of it myself.” Yuuri explained. Memories of that night made their way to the front of his mind, asking to be recounted. In all honesty, while Yuuri was uncertain on what he wanted, or if he wanted, from Victor, the story of how they met and spent one unforgettable night together was pretty romantic. He giggled, shimmied a little bit where he was sitting, and tried to keep the smile on his face to face in the room, as if asking for support. Mostly everyone encouraged Yuuri to tell the story.

Sitting across from him, in his loving boyfriend’s arms, Phichit was holding back something in his chest. It burned like fire and numbed him like ice water. He didn’t know why he felt like he did; Yuuri was an adult and they were nothing to each other. Phichit never once thought of him as anything other than a friend, or a brother. But sitting there, looking at the way his best friends big, shining, doe eyes lit up at the recollection of his night with some random man he picked up in a store, he felt jealous. He felt ready to explode and tell Yuuri that no one truly deserved him, not even Phichit himself. He wanted to stand up and make everyone leave and tell Yuuri just how he deserved to be treated and loved. He wanted his undivided attention and love. He craved it like a drug.
Seung Gil dipped his head down and kissed his cheek, bringing him back to the present time. Phichit smiled at him and swallowed his longing. "You're not thinking straight." Phichit told himself.

But that didn’t matter. His feelings remained the same.

Chapter End Notes

I honestly don't know how this fic is gonna end up, but I'm just gonna roll with it. Leave some feedback please!

follow me on Tumblr!:
rainbowvictor
You Can Hear It In The Silence

Chapter Summary

They stayed there, motionless. The music kept going, and they knew time did as well, but their worlds came into one and stopped momentarily.

Chapter Notes

Okay, well this is much longer than I expected it to be, but I guess I can't do anything about that now. Hope you guys like it :)

A good song for this chapter would be Begin Again by Taylor Swift, because I'm trash, so you could give it a listen if you like.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Victor laughed to himself, voice wavering as he turned to look at Georgi and Chris, phone held to his chest. He had been happy just an hour before, telling his friend and family about Yuuri and how excited he was to have met him when and how he did, but now the mood had turned sour and there was nothing much that anyone could do about it. Georgi and Chris were sitting on his couch with Yuri in between them, panicked with apologetic expressions on their faces. Victor was almost rocking back and forth on his heels, a result of both embarrassment and anger. Mila cackled from the kitchen, holding her sides to comfort the pain her strained laughter brought on. A deathly silence overtook the penthouse, Mila’s laugh being the only thing ringing through its high ceilings and long hallways. Victor’s face contorted into anger as he took a step forward. Yuri said ‘uh-oh’, slipped off the couch and left the two men to their own defenses. Victor pat his head on his way out, handing Yuri the remote for the tv from off the chimney.

Chris and Georgi shared a look of panic as Georgi let out shaky laughter.

"Victor, it was his idea. I swear to God. You know I would never do—" Chris started, standing up and raising his hands up as a peace offering. Victor gave him a cold look, which sent him sitting back down again. Georgi remained on the couch as he nervously played with the strings of his hoodie.

"Why did you text him?" He asked him calmly. In a louder voice, he asked Chris, “And why did you help?” He placed a hand on his forehead and started to pace about the living room, at one point stepping out onto his balcony simply to scream, curse in Russian, and to kick a patio chair. Mila continued to laugh, pouring herself another glass of wine, toasting to Georgi’s stupidity and Victor’s almost neurotic attitude towards the situation. With a swift hand, she raised the glass and drank. She tucked her vivid red hair behind her ears and tsked her tongue at the men in the living room. She turned her attention to Yuri playing down the hall to make sure he wasn’t doing anything dangerous. He was sitting on Victor’s bed with a book and Makkachin at his side. She smiled and turned to sip her wine once more. As she turned her head she saw Victor climb onto the balcony ledge. In the turn of a second, Mila sprinted across the kitchen, living room, and balcony patio terrified that if she didn’t get there in time, Victor would actually fall to his death.
Whipping past all do the furniture, unpacked boxes, and odd marble statues in Victor’s living room, she took hold of him by the back of his shirt and slammed him into the ground. He took a sharp, deep breath and clutched his chest. The fall had knocked the wind out of him, something that obviously caused him a great deal of pain, but Mila didn’t care. Instead of checking on him, she started a lecture on how dangerous it was for him to do things like that. “I don’t care if it was for dramatic flair, Victor. It’s fucking reckless.” Georgi and Chris walked out, panicked by the sight of Victor on the floor. After a couple of judgemental looks from the men, Mila rolled her eyes, helped Victor up and walked him inside. Promptly sitting him on the couch, she asked him to stop being melodramatic.

Victor frowned. He had only been playing, sort of. He read back through the messages Chris and Georgi had exchanged with Yuuri, pretending to be him. A burning blush spread from ear to ear as he groaned with each word he read. Chris took a seat next to him and leaned his head against Victor’s shoulder. Georgi stood at the balcony door and stared at them on the couch. Victor took the next couple of minutes to ease the pain on his back and in his lungs from the fall. He was motionless, staring blankly at the tv mounted on the living room wall.

“I can’t believe you would do something like that, Chris.” He finally spoke when Chris got up to use the restroom. He looked betrayed, scrunching his eyebrows into an incredulous expression. “You sabotaged my love life.”

“I saved your love life. And why are you blaming me?” Chris pointed to himself like he couldn’t believe what he was hearing. “Georgi’s the one who sent the first message, panicked and sent literally 10 more in a span of three minutes. And then you’re the one who sent the five following his. I played it off. Sort of.” Victor closed his eyes and cursed under his breath. Chris wasn’t lying. He had panicked and sent a slew of messages trying to fix what Georgi had done. Each message worse than the one before.

“I was just trying to help him!” Georgi countered from the entrance. He crossed his arms and turned to face the city skyline as the sun set.

“My love life isn’t one of your cheesy romance novels!” Victor screamed from the couch. Georgi was a hopeless romantic and a New York Time’s bestselling author, making him susceptible to thinking that he had every right to play the role of Cupid in other people’s lives. A Pain in my Heart (and Other Places), Young and in Love, and I thought I Loved You, and I was Right. They had all risen to stardom amongst both soccer moms, lonely gay men, and teenagers, which was definitely telling of what content Georgi produced every year.

Victor’s words stung Georgi, and unable to take critique, he whipped his head around to stare him down. “You wish your love life was as good as my novels.” With that, he stepped out onto the terrace fully and sat on one of the patio chairs. Mila tsked, pouring herself more wine.

“At least you got a date with him,” she pointed out.

“I didn’t want to look desperate. I haven’t known him for three days and you idiots set me up to see him on Thursday? That gives me two days to get my shit together!” He grabbed a decorative pillow and pressed his face into it. “And aren’t you the one always telling me to take it slow?” He said regarding Chris, face still in the pillow. “This is not slow.”

“I’m sorry, okay? It got out of hand.” Chris tried to sympathize with him. “But at least you really like him. So, it’s not that bad in perspective.”

“This still isn’t the best way for me to make an impression on him,” Victor said, running a hand
through his hair. “He probably thinks I’m gonna lock him in my basement and kill him or something.” Mila pointed out that Victor didn't have a basement.

“Listen, Vitya,” she continued. “The guy sounds like he didn't mind. He joked about it even. And he called you handsome. For all you know he's just as enamored and nervous as you are right now. Don't let your self-doubts get in the middle of something real here. This will all just be a funny story in the future if it goes anywhere. It's not a big deal.” Her voice was soft, maybe because of the wine or maybe because she genuinely cared and wanted him to feel better. Victor nodded along, whatever the reason, even though his feelings didn't change. She had to see that he was making an effort to be alright. So he smiled and apologized to Chris, who had gone to the restroom and returned while Mila and Victor chatted. He turned to look outside at Georgi, who was still hurt over his earlier comments and decided to wait until he calmed down to avoid any conflict. That moment came moments later when Georgi came back in and gave Victor a tight squeeze, oozing apologies all over him.

Everyone left by 8 that night, signaling the day's end for both Makkachin and Victor.

After a quick shower and cleaning up the mess his visitors had made, Victor snuggled into his bed with Makkachin at his feet. He was exhausted from the day's events, ridiculous as they were. It was stupid how he reacted to things; people had spent their entire lives telling him that. Victor tried to change, to think things through and keep a cool head, but his heart was much too impressionable and frail. He felt deeply and ardently, always looking for something to blow his mind and send him into a frenzy. His mother called him passionate, that trait was what Victor owed his immense success to. He was persistent and painstakingly diligent in all he did. It was his ability to feel so deeply that allowed him to stick with whatever was the object of his attention. Most of the time this personality brought him good fortune and happiness, but there were times, like today, that it made him irrational and impulsive, giving him no time to evaluate the situation or to think of a good plan.

Victor scrolled through his Instagram feed and sighed when pictures of all of his friends on dates and honeymoons started to pop up. The end of summer was always filled with weddings, engagements, and so much love that Victor felt he was drowning in it. Time is fleeting, were all the photos told him as he liked the images aimlessly before he closed the app and stared at his phone screen with a broken expression. The looming loneliness he had felt since Chris, Yuri, Mila and Georgi left culminated into heavy tears that brimmed in his eyes and slipped out through his waterline. Crying was a ritual he couldn’t seem to break the habit of doing. His heart felt empty and shallow, like an estuary that ran dry and no longer held life in its center, but instead dead foliage and small puddles of murky water. He blinked hard, pushing, through the tears, and stared into the black emptiness of his room. Makkachin trudged up to him and licked his cheek. Victor held him close, burying his face in the dog's soft fur. He let out muffled cries and reached for a tissue to blow his nose. He had felt like this, so empty and numb, for some time.

With a resentful look in his eyes, he stared down the silhouette of his pill bottles on his dresser.

It had been weeks since he had taken them. Weeks of feeling like a soulless zombie just existing for no particular reason at all. He hated not taking them, but the side effects outweighed the benefits when it came down to which one he would rather live without. Being able to eat and actually keep his food down was far too rewarding for him to bring himself to take the tiny blue pills. The lack of insomnia was also a bonus, but the fatigue was still the same. Sometimes he wondered if he was doing more damage than not by refusing to take them, but he reckoned it wasn’t doing any damage so long as no one but him was affected. It was stupid and reckless, and quite actually fucking him up on levels he couldn’t even begin to understand, but Victor didn’t want to analyze the situation like that. He turned his attention back into the darkness of the room before him.

Almost instinctively, as he had been doing for the last two nights, he opened his camera roll and
smiled at the first couple of pictures that caught his eye.

They were pictures from Saturday night. Yuuri had gotten hold of his phone and took upwards of 80 pictures of them dancing in various parts of the city. The scenery and color pallets in each one were different and mostly blurry, but there were a couple that were absolutely beautiful. Yuuri had taken quite a number of selfies, some with Victor and some alone. There was one picture in particular that Victor was fond of. It was of him and Yuuri at the entrance of a bar he could barely remember the name of. They were leaning into each other, Yuuri’s head on Victor’s shoulder. Victor looked at himself in the picture and felt a tug in his heart. In the picture, his eyes were solely fixated on Yuuri, while Yuuri looked on into the camera mid-laugh. Smiles sat on both their lips, complementing the rosy shades they both wore on their cheeks. Yuuri’s bright eyes were shining like the stars on a clear night; their shimmer was subtle, but beautiful nonetheless. His eyes were crinkling at the corners, a telling sign of a real smile that was the product of undoctored happiness.

Victor had kept every picture Yuuri took that night, and told himself that he would only get rid of them if things went wrong, or on the off chance that things went well and they grew to love each other and form a relationship (he would need all the storage on his phone for all of the pictures he’d take of Yuuri then). Taking one last look at the photos, he turned on his side and wished Makkachin a good night. He closed his eyes and hoped and prayed to dream of Yuuri that night.

____

Tuesday and Wednesday went by in the blink of an eye.

Victor spent them finishing his syllabus and lessons plans for his six-week classes. The start of the school year was vastly approaching and, while he was excited, he felt a little overwhelmed and unprepared. No lesson plan seemed perfect, even if he had models to go by and schedules to follow. Every story he chose to focus on seemed to have no relation to the topic and seemed completely bogus, providing little learning opportunities for the students he’d be teaching. He worked on the lessons tirelessly, until he was somewhat satisfied with them. After that, he’d walk Makkachin and cook something up for himself to eat while he watched the news.

In an unexpected turn of events, Victor unpacked most of the boxes that were scattered about his apartment. It was finally time for him to surround himself with memories of home and the ridiculous busts of marble he bid on and won at his parent's charity events. There wasn't a doubt in his mind that it would help him brighten his mood to see only the happy times in his past. Those two activities helped to pass the time until he had to meet Yuuri on Thursday.

On Thursday he woke up early in the morning with a little smile on his face. His nights and mornings felt like they were going change for the better. He'd have someone to look forward to seeing, a job to keep himself busy, and a reason to take better care of himself. It might have been unhealthy to think that Yuuri could give him that, but, when nothing else would, it might have been more of a blessing. Sometimes, to better yourself, you had to have people to keep you going. To have someone… to love someone. Things like that were what gave Victor the motivation to keep going. And while he had his family and friends, he needed someone for himself. Mila and Yuri had each other. Chris had his husband. Georgi had his dates and imagination. Victor felt like, while he had an amazing support system of people who loved him dearly, he didn't have anyone to be there for him on more intimate levels. That didn't necessarily mean sex. Sex was trivial to him; he could get it whenever and however he wanted. That wasn't an issue. It was domesticity and companionship. Those were the things his life lacked most. It drove him crazy to see just how easily some people could find those things… and how hard it was for him to do the same.

Victor got in touch with Yuuri at eleven. After much convincing, Victor got Yuuri to agree to have
Victor pick him up at his apartment. They agreed not to dress up too much, since it was just coffee. They stayed on the phone, talking about things like the weather until Yuuri told him he had to get back to work. Victor had almost wanted to ask him where he worked and what he did on his free time and where he saw himself in ten years but decided against it. So he swallowed his excitement and said goodbye.

Victor didn't know what to do with himself for the next two hours. He paced around his apartment, finding little things to do here and there. He fed Makkachin, made his bed, spruced up the living room and unloaded his dishwasher. He even tried to read and watch tv, but he was too excited to focus on any one particular task. It wasn’t as if Yuuri would be his first date in months, but he would definitely be the first not to be a son of his parent’s friend’s. There had been so many of those. Each more boring than the one before. The level of attraction between them dwindled as their net worth and prestige went up. Those awful, snot-nosed, thirty-something, daddy’s boys only cared to get into Victor’s pants and maybe even marry him just to have him on some pedestal as a trophy husband. There was never any substance to anything they had to say. They threw their money around like it was nothing as a weak way to show power. They were rude to the staff in whatever establishment they dined in. And worst of all, they patronized Victor and all of his accomplishments. Some even tried to teach him about his own line of specialty at times.

An hour or so after their call, Victor began to get ready. He washed up in the bathroom, lathered himself in lotion and blow-dried his hair all in the span of thirty minutes. He opted for a simple look of a loose, white, linen dress shirt and blue jeans with the cuffs rolled up. Simply. Relaxed. Unlike what he felt like inside. He walked downstairs and filled Makkachin’s food bowls just in case his date took longer than he expected. Makkachin looked like he was grinning as he walked Victor to the door. Victor pet him goodbye and thought about every shitty man he had ever gone on a date with again. There had been so many in the span of just a couple of months, all of them coming from his parents.

It wasn’t like his parents were trying to marry him off into a rich family or anything; It was quite the opposite actually. They wanted him to marry whoever he wanted, just as long as he gave them grandchildren at some point in the foreseeable future. They were well off enough themselves, so the only reason they only set Victor up on blind dates with rich men was because that was the only demographic of men that they knew. There was no hidden intent behind it, other than a dire need to see their son married with children. His brothers were all married, many with kids already and the rest expecting. He was their family’s last bachelor and that placed quite a bit of pressure on his mother. Victor knew she’d feel like a failure if her son wasn’t married before the age of thirty-five. How Victor’s inability to marry reflected badly on her, Victor didn’t quite know. But she felt it would, so Victor had to feel it would too. Hell, even without his mother’s overbearing pleas to have him married, Victor would panic if he wasn’t with someone by the time he turned thirty-five.

He thought about how fast time was passing for him as he drove to Yuuri’s apartment building. There wasn’t much time left for him to settle down with someone. With that in mind, he brought the car to a stop at a red light and turned on the radio. Some new popular rap song that Victor didn’t quite understand began and ended as the light turned green again. While his English was impeccable, Victor sometimes had a hard time listening to music where the words were slurred or spoken too fast. They merged into each other and blended in with the background music, making it hard for him to enjoy and understand. Victor switched it to another station and was met with a much slower, more enunciated, love ballad. He hummed along as he familiarized himself with the tune.

The day was cloudier than Victor had expected it to be, only revealing the sun every once in a while through the thick clouds thathovered over the city. He almost wanted to hit himself for not thinking to check the weather before he left his apartment. He wasn’t sure if he had an umbrella or a jacket, so if rain decided to pour down on his date he’d have nothing to protect them with.
He looked at his reflection in his rearview mirror as he approached Yuuri’s building. He looked good, better than he had anticipated. *Too good,* he thought, eyes squinted at himself like his own genes were trying to make a fool of him. He and Yuuri had agreed to look “good, but not too good that one of us feels like we’ve let the other down.” Those had been Yuuri’s exact words. So Victor ruffled up his hair a bit and pinched his cheeks. It wasn’t enough. But he wasn’t worried. He knew Yuuri would look just as beautiful, if not more than, he did.

He pulled into a parking space and got out of the car. Looking the building once over, he felt his heart start thumping against his chest. He walked up the flights of stairs calmly, each step heavier and heavier as he went up each floor. He reached Yuuri’s floor faster than he had the night he carried Yuuri up and knocked on the maroon door with ardor. He heard some shuffling on the other side of the door, followed by an echoed ‘coming’ from a voice he didn’t recognize as Yuuri. The locks clicked as the door was gently opened. Victor was expecting to see Yuuri but was instead met with the intimidating gaze of a short young man with dark eyes and bronzed skin. He couldn’t have been more than 19 or 20 years old, but something about the way he looked at Victor made him squirm. A simple “hi” was all Victor could muster up to say. “I’m here for Yuuri.” He was stumbling in his speech. He cleared his throat and tried to refine his voice. “My name is—”

“I know who you are.” His words were like fire, making Victor flinch back in response. “Come in. He’s finishing up now.” He turned and led the way inside. Victor stepped in and closed the door behind him. The apartment was much cleaner than last time but just as charming. More paintings of Yuuri were set out, as well as landscape scenery of the city. They were beautiful, one, in particular, catching his attention.

It was resting against the right wall of the entrance. It was Yuuri’s eyes, surrounded by clouds and bursts of color. A dark rosy brown and muddy white surrounded his brown eyes, shadows cast over the left side of his face. The lighting was made to show every little brown hue of Yuuri’s iris, reflecting it wherever it was needed to. The painting was absolutely enchanting; it was like the eyes were sentient. Victor stopped to stare in awe. The boy who led him in cleared his throat and asked Victor to take a seat on the couch. Victor did as he was told, not wanting to overstep the very strict boundaries the young man had set for him. He sat in the middle of the love seat with his back straight and knees together.

“My name is Phichit. I’m Yuuri’s best friend.” Phichit took a seat on the coffee table in front of the love seat. He extended out a steady hand for Victor to shake. Victor didn’t particularly like shaking other people’s hands. It felt brash and abrasive, with little to no sentiment. He was more of a hugger, but he didn’t hesitate to shake Phichit’s hand. The atmosphere was frigid. He didn’t feel welcome or wanted, unlike he had just days ago when he and Yuuri shared breakfast on the very couch he was sitting on. Phichit gave him a patronizing smile as he watched Victor react to his hostility. “I’m only going to tell you this once, so listen closely, Mr. Nikiforov. If you hurt him, I will not stop until your life is in shambles. Yuuri’s been through enough already, so don’t fuck up.”

“I wasn’t planning on—” Victor started to argue. He felt insulted that Phichit would think that Victor would at all ever think about hurting Yuuri in any way. He also didn’t understand why he was being badgered by him upon first acquaintance. He started to think that maybe those text messages that had been sent to Yuuri freaked out his friends and that they now some him as a predator. The situation wasn’t looking good to him. Yuuri’s friends hated him without even knowing him.

“I don’t really care what your intentions with him are, but if I so much as see him shed one single tear because of you, I will put my foot so far up your ass you’ll—” Just then Yuuri popped up from out of his bedroom with a nervous smile, fumbling to put his glasses on his face. Phichit had been speaking low enough that Yuuri didn’t hear what he had said, or what he was about to say, but he took one look at Victor’s face and read the situation.
“Hi, uh... Good to see you guys are getting to know each other.” He stood at the entrance, smoothing out his shirt. Yuuri strode from one side of the room to where Victor and Phichit were sitting. Victor wanted to sigh in relief, but he held it in, not wanting to show just how uncomfortable Phichit had made him.

“Yeah.” Phichit smiled gaily and laid his right hand on the small of Yuuri’s back. Yuuri almost jumped in surprise but kept a friendly face. “Victor was just telling me about how drunk you were on Saturday.” He let out a seemingly innocent laugh as he glared at Victor. Victor raised an eyebrow at the boys in front of him and stood up to face Yuuri. Phichit rose as well, hand still placed on his best friend.

“Jesus, no one is ever gonna let that story go, huh?” Yuuri separated himself from Phichit and made his way to Victor’s side. Taking his hand, he said, “Shall we go?” He looked up into Victor’s blue eyes and smiled. Yuuri squeezed his hand, almost as if saying that Phichit wasn’t usually so mean. Victor smiled back. “Bye, Phich. I’ll see you later.”

“Bye-bye, my love,” Phichit said in a sing-songy voice as they walked to the door, Victor and Yuuri hand in hand with Phichit trailing behind. Upon closing the door, Yuuri let his hand go and looked at Victor, almost as if checking that he was still there.

“You look really great,” Yuuri said with a smile. Victor was glad Yuuri didn’t think he had dressed up too much. If anything, Yuuri was the one who had gone above and beyond.

“You look amazing” was as all Victor could utter back, which made Yuuri laugh. They walked down to the lobby of the building. They both blushed as they looked into each other’s eyes for a little too long. Victor’s heart was pumping blood faster and faster with each second that passed. His hands felt numb like they had been stuck in a bucket of cold water. He was paralyzed by Yuuri’s sheer presence in front of him. A wind had picked up, sending their hair swirling around as they walked toward the parking spaces across the street.

Yuuri wasn’t talking much. He seemed quite nervous, showing it in the way his eyes would dart back to the ground when Victor catching him stealing glances at him. The conversation was being primarily carried on by Victor, who kept fumbling with his keys as they walked outside. He unlocked the car and opened the passenger seat door, offering Yuuri to sit down. Once Yuuri was situated he closed the door and jogged over to the driver's seat.

“Your car is really nice,” Yuuri spoke timidly from next to Victor. His hands were clasped together in his lap, as he looked out into the street they were driving.

“Thanks. I’m thinking about trading it in for something better though. Makkachin doesn’t like sitting in the front seat.” Victor smiled at Yuuri and tightened his grip on the steering wheel.

“Makkachin?” Yuuri questioned with a glint in his eye. “Is that your dog?”

“Yeah.” Victor rejoiced with a grin two miles long. Their conversations had been pretty dry up that point, but now Yuuri seemed genuinely interested in what he was saying. “He’s a poodle.”

“No way! I have a poodle! Well, not here...he’s back in Japan with my parents.” His voice faltered as he dropped his eyes down to his lap. Victor took his eyes off the road for a second to see what had gone wrong with him, but before he could pinpoint it, Yuuri was speaking again. “But I facetime him every once in a while. I don’t think he can see me, but I like to talk to him anyway.”

“As long as he can hear you, I bet he feels like you’re right there with him. Dogs have a knack for things like that.” Yuuri nodded and continued to ask Victor all types of things about Makkachin. He started with how long he’d had him. “I got him when I was about 18, maybe 17. My Grandmother’s
poodle had just had puppies, and since I was spending quite a bit of time alone,” Victor bit his tongue, deciding not to tell Yuuri about his mental ailments just then. “Uh, since I was studying at a school far away from home, she gave him to me. He’s been with me since then.” He went on to talk about his life in Russia. How he had grown up, what his favorite home-cooked meals were, what his favorite places were to visit. Victor would try to throw each topic back to Yuuri, egging him on to talk more about himself, but Yuuri didn’t let on. He decided that Yuuri was a reserved person, and didn’t like to share his life story on the first date. It would take time to know him, and Victor was willing to put in hours and days and weeks to do just that.

“So, what’s the plan for today? Coffee and…?” Yuuri beamed at him with his beautiful brown eyes twinkling in the sunlight that had miraculously peeked through the gray clouds that covered the sky. Victor stared at him blankly, and then with horror once he realized Yuuri was under the impression that they would be doing more than that. Victor panicked in his seat and kept his eyes on the road to shield himself from Yuuri’s gaze. He thought all Yuuri wanted was coffee. He hadn’t orchestrated an entire, real, date for them.

“It’s a surprise. You’ll just have to wait and see.” He laughed to ease the weird tension and confusion that had taken over the atmosphere in the car. Yuuri looked at him, an eyebrow raised, with an impressed look on his face. They shared a smile and continued on with their conversation.

They reached a little coffee shop Victor frequented near the university. He had found it when his department chair, Dr. Feltsman, had given him a grand tour of the campus and its many buildings. Yuuri seemed to recognize it, telling Victor that he and Phichit had had lunch there a few years back when they had just moved in together.

The coffee shop was dimly lit by a dew industrial era light bulbs and string lights that hung from corner to corner of the ceiling. The booths and tables were all a type of walnut wood, giving an extra oomph to the dark enchanted ambiance of the space. On the walls, records and abstract art were hung freely, as well as photos of authors and celebrities that had visited and frequented the shop. Patrons lingered around, some sitting and others conversing off to the sides. Ferns, in handcrafted wooden baskets, hung from the ceiling, above of every booth and table. A soft, slow, baroque pop type of song moaned its way throughout the room, almost as if bouncing from whatever surface it touched. It gave Yuuri a warm and fuzzy feeling to be in a place that had such a relaxed atmosphere.

Victor led Yuuri to a booth located in front of the front window of the building. He told him to sit and asked what he would like. “Surprise me,” Yuuri stated dreamily. Victor winked at him and made his way to the front counter.

“I could take him to a museum. Or to the movies. I could even take him out on a walk of the city.” Victor was still trying to figure out what else he could do, but nothing seemed good enough. Yuuri was a local and had most likely done everything he could think of. He walked up to the barista and placed their order. “Two large caramel iced mochas, please. And, could I get a grilled cheese sandwich and a BLT, please?” It was around lunch time, so it made sense that they ate something. He didn’t know if Yuuri had eaten before, but Victor didn’t think he’d deny a grilled cheese if it was offered to him. He waited for his order to be called up, swaying from foot to foot, glancing back at Yuuri anxiously checking to see if he was still there. Yuuri noticed him looking back every time, and would promptly give him a slight wave of the hand to let him know that he wasn’t leaving anytime soon.

The barista called his name and handed him his order. He walked back to the booth and set it down into the middle of the table. He took the seat across from Yuuri and smiled.

“This place is really pretty,” Yuuri said, putting his phone face down on the table. “I like the
aesthetic they were going for.” He looked around admiration in his eyes.

“Yeah, it’s always really calm here,” Victor added taking a coffee from the tray. He sipped it through the straw and watched as Yuuri inspected every inch of the space.

“So,” Yuuri said, turning to face him. “How do we do this?” He laughed and ran a hand through his hair followed by an adjustment to his glasses. “I haven’t ever really been on a real date before.”

“Well, I reckon we can start with getting to know each other.” Victor leaned in closer to his side of the booth. “Tell me about yourself.”

“Well, there’s not much to know, really.” Yuuri said in a dismissive tone. He tilted his head and gave Victor an innocent smile. “How about you start and I’ll follow? Do you have any brothers or sisters?”


Putting his hands up, saying he needed a moment. Yuuri asked, “You have six older brothers? Six?” He let out a soft ‘wow’ and slumped back into his seat. Victor nodded with another wave of laughter. Yuuri placed a hand on the back of his neck, sitting up properly once more. “Well, I only have an older sister. I do have plenty of cousins, though.”

“What’s your sister’s name?” Victor asked taking a bite of his sandwich.

“Mari,” Yuuri told him about her and how close they were for some time, digging into his own food between sentences. He recounted every time he had helped her dye her hair in the early hours of the morning behind his parent’s backs, how Mari had snuck him into countless concerts before he was even allowed into the venues and the story of how she accidently stabbed him in the leg with their mother's sewing scissors. “I could show you the scar sometime, it’s unbelievable.”

Yuuri started to tell him about the things he used to do in Japan as Victor finished his BLT. “I used to figure skate, among other things. I was pretty good and even won a couple of national titles, but it was nothing major. I ended up giving it up to focus on school and that landed me here when I was 18.”

“My mother is obsessed with figure skating. She goes to any competitions around St. Petersburg that she can find.” Victor added. Yuuri told him how free he felt out on the ice and how sad he was that he never seemed to find the time to skate anymore. Victor got the idea as soon as the words came out of his mouth. He thought back to the drive to and from Yuuri’s apartment. He was sure he had seen an indoor skating rink somewhere around the area, but couldn’t quite picture where. He excused himself mid-conversation and made a beeline to the restrooms. He entered the small room and locked himself in the middle of three stalls. He leaned against the stall door and pulled out his phone, looking up local ice rinks. There was one near Yuuri’s apartment, but it was seasonal and wouldn’t be open until late fall. Below that one was one in the outskirts of the city that was used as a home rink for professionals. He dialed the number listed on their google page and listened to the ringing, waiting for someone to pick up.

“Sky Rink, my name is Mary. How may I help you today?” Rang out a cheery voice.

“Hello, Mary. I was wondering if I could ask about your policy for public skating? Do you guys have certain hours where non-competitive skaters are able to use the rink?” Victor kept his voice low, just in case Yuuri decided to make his way inside.
“No, I’m afraid not. We do, however, rent out the rink for parties and private practices.”

“How much would that be?”

“It would be a flat rate fee of $200 for an hour and a half. Each fifteen minutes gone over would add $20 dollars to the bill.” Victor bit his lip and debated whether it was worth it to spend so much money on his first date with Yuuri. He was silent for a couple of seconds. “Are you still there sir?”

“Yes-” The bathroom door creaked open. Victor placed a hand over his mouth. No one called his name, so he assumed it wasn’t Yuuri. “I would like to book the ring for today if that’s possible.”

“We have a slot open in thirty minutes, but I’m afraid we like to have at least a two hour notice time before booking anything.”

“Mary, please. I have a beautiful date waiting for me outside. I want to treat him to something amazing, and this is it. I really don’t want to let him down. Can you please help me?” She seemed hesitant to help Victor. Victor decided it was time to bring out the big guns. “It’s just- I’m recently divorced and this is the first guy I’ve really liked in a long time, and all I want to do is-” He fake sobbed into to phone. Mary mumbled ‘you poor thing’ sympathetically and told him that she would help him. She asked Victor for his name and scheduled him. Victor scurried out of the restroom and told Yuuri it was time for the second part of their date.

“Already?” Yuuri asked, eyes wide. He gathered his things and stood up, ready to leave with Victor.

“Now, I’m not gonna lie, I thought of this in the spur of the moment, but I think you’re gonna love it.”

“I’m sure I will.” Yuuri said gleefully. A hesitant hand enlaced itself with Victor’s as they made their way out into the parking lot. They walked in silence, both too scared to disturb the peace they hands had created.

It felt really nice for Victor to see Yuuri put his guard down. Watching him widen his eyes when he told him something dramatic, or use his hands to explain exactly how something had gone down made Victor feel so fond of the man holding his hand. It took him back to a time in his youth when he used to write poetry about how in love he was, or how the morning sky looked on summer days. There was something like love in his heart when Yuuri looked into his eyes and burst into absurd laughter that made the other people around them stare at them. Yuuri was real, and there, and he looked like he was having a great time. Victor wondered why he had been even the least bit nervous about their date. He should have known that it would have been nothing less than perfect. He was happy without happy pills and felt alive just by sitting in a coffee shop with someone he had only just met days before.

He was caught up in the moment and it was beautiful.

Half an hour, and a joyous car ride, later, Victor and Yuuri walked into the Sky Rink building, amiable smiles on their lips. Yuuri had practically started bouncing up and down once he saw where they were headed. “What? Victor. No way! Olympians train here.” An opulence of curse words left his mouth after that sentence, some in English, others in Japanese. Victor couldn’t help but smile at his joy as they walked up the steps to the main entrance of the building.

Mary quickly recognized Victor by his voice. She gave him a hug at the entrance and smiled fondly at Yuuri as she asked for their shoe sizes and walked behind the counter to where the skates were
Yuuri gave Victor a suspicious look, but Victor just shrugged. Mary came back and led them through a long hall. She unlocked a door that opened into the rink and told them to have fun. “Oh! Before I forget, we have an audio system set up near the stands if you’d like music. Just plug in your phones.” She smiled at them one last time and left the room. Yuuri took a seat on a bench nearest the double doors that led into the rink and began to excitedly put his skates on. Victor watched him as his fringe spilled out onto his glasses, which were only barely staying on his face. That warm feeling in his chest returned, turning him into a pile of mush right there in the locker room. He put on his skates as well, forgetting that he had never really been skating before. They walked out, Victor stumbling most of the way. Yuuri walked over to the audio setup, put the aux cord into his audio jack, and pushed the play button.

Victor grabbed onto the ledge of the divider and stumbled onto the ice. Yuuri entered after him and did a couple of loops around the rink. Victor couldn’t seem to take his eyes off him for one second. It was colder than Victor had anticipated, but he paid no mind to the temperature. He took a couple of glides, going clockwise. Yuuri came up behind him and linked their arms together. “I take you’ve never skated before?” "Can’t say I have.” He giggled as Victor clung to his side. They skated closer to the barrier and set Yuuri’s glasses down. After that, they picked up pace, doing circles around the rink. Victor’s legs were trembling, for more reasons than one, and, on more occasions than he cared to experience, he had come close to falling flat on his bottom. Each time though, Yuuri would take a tighter hold of his waist and whisper, “I’ve got you, I’ve got you. Don’t worry.”

Yuuri was a different person on the ice. He was more elegant and refined, alluding to his higher training and professional background in the sport. There was a dangerous glint in his eye like he wasn’t afraid of anyone or anything. It almost gave Victor a heart attack when Yuuri first looked at him with that look in his eye. He wasn’t soft and innocent anymore. He was the embodiment of all of Victor’s wildest dreams come to life in a person. The pure and the tainted mixed perfectly into one soul. The duality of man was being realized before his very eyes.

When a new song started for the fourth time, Yuuri placed Victor on the east side of the rink and asked him to watch him. “I won one of my last competitions with this routine. I’d really like it if you saw it.” Was all he said before heading out into the center.

He placed his hands up above his head and moved them with fluidity around his upper body, landing them in front of his chest. He skated back and looped around in the shape of an infinity symbol. He did a spread eagle, followed by an intricate step sequence that Victor had no way of identifying. He couldn’t have even if he could, there was no room in his mind for thoughts, just Yuuri, and the music.

Yuuri approached Victor and smiled at him as he skated away. Victor’s heart was going crazy, imitating a beating drum with every movement Yuuri made. Yuuri stretched himself into a biellmann spin and crouched down to touch the ice with one leg out, as he continued to spin.

The soft piano behind the music became more prominent as the singer's voice drowned in each heavy note. The song was coming to an end, something Victor wasn’t ready for. Victor was in awe of the man in front of him. He was sure he had never witnessed something so beautiful and heartfelt performed. He felt like latching onto Yuuri as he watched him skate to his side. The song was over now. Yuuri was out of breath and sweating.

Victor was breathless.

“That was the worst performance I’ve ever given. Guess, I’m rustier than I thought.” His eyes crinkled at the edges as he looked to Victor for a reaction.

“Yuuri...that was... amazing,” Victor exclaimed coming back from the trance Yuuri put him in. He
placed a hand over his heart and let out an exasperated “Oh my God!” Yuuri laughed and told him he was just being nice. “I’m serious! Why did you ever quit?” He retracted, speaking more seriously. “I mean, I know you said it was because of school, but you’re... really talented.”

“Well, it wasn’t fun anymore. I was always stressed and crying when I didn’t do well. It was costing me my sanity, so I stopped.” Yuuri lowered his eyes, turning back into the soft angel he had been. Tugging at his shirt sleeves, he shrugged and Victor nodded, not wanting to push him to remember anything too painful. They had thirty minutes left in the rink, time Victor planned to use well.

He asked Yuuri to teach him how to skate. Yuuri beamed at him and took his hands. The music was much more upbeat than before, allowing them to have more fun. Obnoxious laughter rang out through the ice rink, sending vibrations through them both. Victor took a tight grip of Yuuri’s forearms as he dragged him along the ice. Despite being much taller, he felt so tiny with Yuuri holding him like he was the most precious thing in the world. His heart still hadn’t calmed down but was pleased to notice that Yuuri’s now matched his.

Yuuri let him go on his own for a while. Victor was semi-able to keep himself standing, moving only when he pushed himself to. His knees were bent and his arms out, reaching for Yuuri. He got more confident as time went on and decided to put one foot forth to move faster. It didn’t go as planned and sent his wobbling backward. Yuuri reached his hands in time but was still not able to keep him standing. Instead, he landed on top of Victor, making sure to place his arm under Victor’s head to prevent a concussion.

They stayed there, motionless. The music kept going, and they knew time did as well, but their worlds came into one and stopped momentarily. They stared into each other’s eyes, taking in every shade and ridge. Yuuri’s chest rose up and down while Victor’s didn’t even dare to inhale, terrified of ruining the moment. He thought back to the story his mother had told him about how she knew his father was the love of her life. “I saw myself in him, even if we had only known each other for a couple of minutes. In him, I saw the rest of my life...my children, my old age, even my own death. I knew it was him because I saw him with me through it all.” Victor thought he was dreaming, but something similar to what his mother had described was happening to him then. Maybe it was the impact of the fall or the ice pressed against his back, but he felt weightless. He felt conquered by cupid-- the sting of his arrow right in the middle of his chest as he looked up at Yuuri, who held a blank expression on his face.

Somewhere in the distance, though it seemed like a different dimension to Victor, a timer went off. The music stopped.

You could hear it in the silence then.

Victor’s heart was going one hundred miles an hour.

Chapter End Notes

Disclaimer: I don’t have a single clue as to how to describe a figure skating routine. Hopefully, it came out well enough that you guys could picture it. The song Yuuri skated to is No One Ever Loved by Lykke Li.

Let me know what you think in the comments :)
follow me on Tumblr!
rainbowvictor
Chapter Summary

“I’m fine Phichit. I’m honestly just worried about you.” Yuuri spoke up and leaned his head to the side. “What brought on the fight?”

Chapter Notes

This chapter is a mess. I apologize in advance.

---

Yuuri ran up the stairs of his apartment building, having left Victor outside with a soft kiss on the cheek. He hadn’t even properly said goodbye, he just took off running too scared to look back. Yuuri’s face was bright red and he found himself sweating profusely, mostly from the running, but he had a tendency to get sweaty when he did something stupid. He stopped up the second flight of stairs and clutched his stomach, looking down at his shoes. “That was really fucking reckless, you asshole. You told yourself you weren’t going to see him again.” He lectured himself. Screams from an apartment on the floor rang out through the staircase. He flinched at the sounds of things being thrown about and hurried up to his floor. Upon reaching the landing, he was met with the sound of a slamming door. Seung Gil followed, angrily stomping past him with a shove and without a single word. Adjusting his glasses, Yuuri ran the rest of the way to his apartment door and opened it.

There was a mess of paints on the floor, not an unusual sight for him. Phichit wasn’t fond of picking up after himself, so most of the time they would lay out until Yuuri got too annoyed not to store them. Multiple sketchbooks were lined up in an arched manner, signaling that someone had sprawled them out before them. That someone was Phichit, who was sitting on their couch sniffing into a pillow. His eyes were red and puffy, making him look like he did every night his homesickness got to be too much. Yuuri stood there in front of him, sure of what to do, but not of how to carry it out. He put his phone down on the coffee table and kneeled in front of him. He wrapped his arms around his roommate and let the silence wash over them. It felt like it was the only way for Phichit to start his healing process; lots of hugs and the white noise of their apartment and the city outside. It was four in the afternoon. The day wasn’t even close to being over, but it was for them. They wouldn’t move anymore, not until the very next morning. The pain in Phichit’s heart was too great and too fresh to be handled. Yuuri didn’t want to say something wrong or push Phichit too far, so he just held him for as long as he needed. And even if everything wasn’t good or at all fine, at least Phichit didn’t feel as alone.

---

Phichit watched Yuuri walk out of their apartment next to his replacement. That was what Victor
would be to him now. He would likely be the new person to care for Yuuri like he used to. Victor would remind him to eat and do his assignments. He would exchange cute messages with him throughout the day. He’d go out to see new movies with Yuuri. He’d be his boyfriend. The thought made Phichit shake with an energy he hadn’t known before. Phichit wiped the thoughts out of his mind and told himself he was being ridiculous. Yuuri had every right to go out with people and start a life of his own. Phichit certainly had and Yuuri hadn’t been broken up and rotten about it like he was being now. He told himself to let Yuuri grow into his age. If anyone knew that Yuuri deserved a healthy relationship, it was Phichit. He had held Yuuri’s hand through his break up with Eli. He knew the guts it had taken for Yuuri to even step out of his bedroom just minutes before. Somewhere deep inside him, he was incredibly excited for his friend. But closer to the surface, his skin was crawling with jealousy. He couldn’t wrap his head around it. He had everything he could ever want with Seung Gil. He was happy, he felt appreciated. He was in love. He knew he was in love. But there was still doubt in his mind that he was missing out on something with Yuuri. That whatever he felt for Seung Gil, he would feel a million more times for Yuuri. It made him furious. He felt like he was wasting everyone’s time. Like everyone’s futures depended on him finally sorting his shit out.

Which was a stupid idea, thinking that if he kissed Yuuri and figured everything out everything would end up peachy keen. The reality of it would be him ruining two of the most important relationships in his life in the hopes of starting one. Phichit didn’t want to think about it. He walked to his bedroom and opened the top drawer of his desk. It contained about six sketchbooks and a case of lead pencils he had bought for the upcoming semester. He flipped through one of the sketchbooks, greeted by sketch after sketch of Yuuri and the beautiful curve of his lips. He thought back to when he drew them. They had been in central park on a walk after class. Yuuri suggested they get ice cream to celebrate the end of finals week and so they did. They found a little cart owned by an old man who promised them it would be the best ice cream they had ever had (it wasn’t, but it did give them diarrhea) and took a seat on a bench near a pond. They spent that afternoon laughing over pointless things and talking about their goals for the following semester. Yuuri spoke and Phichit sketched, which made Yuuri blush and urged Phichit to keep going. They were dynamic; everything one did, the other had an adequate response. That had been months ago. Phichit looked up from the sketches and came face to face with a photo of Seung Gil and him in front of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. They looked so happy in the picture, arms tenderly wrapped around each other’s waists. That was the day Seung Gil told Phichit he loved him. It had been a heartfelt declaration, something that was hard to come by when it came to his boyfriend. They didn’t have too many lovey-dovey moments, but when they came around it felt better than anything in the world. He looked at their smiling faces so long that it filled him with guilt. He took it off its stand and placed it face down on the desk. Phichit stepped out of the room and returned to the living room. He sat on the floor and sprawled out the sketchbooks before him. He had an exposition with the university coming up, meaning that he had to prepare at least five new paintings to put on display. He flipped through each book individually and found nothing good enough. They were good concepts, but drawing Yuuri in the same innocent positions had lost its charm. His professors were growing tired of them. An hour passed by him. Phichit had looked through every book and found nothing of use. He even tried to incite creativity by taking out his oil paints and painting, but that just irritated him. He started to get angry at Yuuri’s face at the same time he got angry at himself. That led him to wonder what he was up to on his date, which made him sad at his inadequacy to decipher his emotions. It was an awful cycle of thought. He wandered about the apartment for two hours, looking over every little detail. He thought that maybe he would be able to find something to inspire him. He sat in odd positions and tried to picture each nook and cranny as a possible painting. There were sights all around him, but nothing exciting enough for him to paint. It didn't take long for him to give up. Phichit turned on the television, hoping to take his mind off things. Thirty minutes into an episode of Grey’s Anatomy, Seung Gil walked in with his suit jacket in his arms. His sleeves were rolled up and his hair pushed back, messy and tossed like he had just woken up. Phichit remembered that he had been working since 8, preparing and training more volunteers at the Brooklyn office of the campaign he was working on. Seung Gil took a look at the apartment and sighed. “You're busy?” He inquired taking
a seat behind him after removing one of the sketchbooks. He stared at the picture of Yuuri and tossed it off to the side somewhere on the floor. “Can you not do that? The pages are ripping…” Phichit got off the couch and picked up the notebook, carefully returning it to its place with the others. Seung Gil rolled his eyes at his boyfriend’s annoyed tone and crossed his legs. He watched Phichit organize his supplies, sorrowful eyes trailing every motion. They hadn’t seen each other in days, not since he got back from Thailand. Their work schedules conflicted with each other, making it virtually impossible for the two to have any time alone. He just wanted to hold him and talk to him, but every time he tried Phichit would just brush him off. He kneeled on the carpet, wrapping his arms around him. He laid his head on Phichit’s back, searching for a heartbeat...any sign that he was right there with him. With shut eyes, he whispered, “Do you still love me?” He wasn’t being dramatic. They were Seung Gil’s true feelings. He had felt like that for some time but had always been too scared to ask him. The repercussions the answer could bring always held him back, but he needed to know. He couldn’t keep- “You know I do.” Phichit softened in his arms, shoulders slumping down. It hurt him to know that that was something Seung Gil had to ask him. “Am I the only one?” This time the words sounded more venomous as Seung Gil whispered them into his ear. Phichit turned to stone, unable to speak. His heart rate sped up. He wanted to lie, to say yes, but lying to him would hurt him more than the truth and the truth was something he would not be able to say. He remained silent, pretending not to hear the question. Seung Gil took his silence as an answer and detached himself from Phichit, hot tears welling up in his eyes. He sat back on the couch and inhaled. Phichit didn’t move, he didn’t speak, shellshocked by the enormity of the moment. “It’s Yuuri isn’t it?” Seung Gil spoke quietly. He had always wondered if what he speculated between the two was true or not. He knew they had a past, but it was never brought up by either of them, like it was too painful to talk about. He felt like a fool, like he’d been cheated. Anger grew in his chest as he wondered, ‘Had he cheated?’. Phichit wasn’t answering him, there was no way to know. He asked once more, this time yelling. “Isn’t it!?” His voice cracked, forcing Phichit to look back at the broken man behind him. Seung Gil lost every ounce of pride and dignity that he had when he saw Phichit staring into his soul. Five, ten, fifteen minutes passed in tense silence, neither of them wanting to be forced to say something they’d regret. Phichit started to move things around, sending Seung Gil over the edge. He felt tossed aside and like his feelings didn’t matter to Phichit. He felt ignored once more. “Am I not enough for you? Is that it? After everything- I’m not enough?” Phichit stood up and faced him. “That’s not it. You know I love you-” He started with a voice that sounded like he was underwater. “That’s bullshit. I’ve asked you to move in with me, I’ve proposed to you. I’ve asked you countless times to meet my parents! For god sake, we’ve been together for three years and you still haven’t met my family. What’s so wrong with committing to this- to us? I have. I’ve turned down internships. I’ve stayed at your pace. I’ve given us all I can- Why can’t you do the same?” He ran both hands through his hair in a fidgeting manner. Phichit didn’t know what to say, so he kept his silence. He felt tears streaming down his face. With a nuanced gentleness, he stepped closer to Seung Gil, who was fully crying into his hands. He was sobbing like a child; inconsolably and too loud for anyone not to notice. Phichit grabbed his wrists, pulled his hands down and looked into his eyes. His plan was to kiss him, but Seung Gil pulled away. “I can’t do this. I can’t be your backup plan.” With that, Seung Gil picked his jacket up from the table and walked to the door, slamming it shut on his way out. Phichit’s lips quivered as he fell back onto the couch and cried his eyes out into a pillow. He wallowed in self-pity until a familiar voice held his hands and asked, “What happened?”

Yuuri woke up the next morning with a crick in his neck the size of a golf ball. A plush pink blanket covered his body, something he guessed Phichit was responsible for. He felt around beside him without fully opening his eyes, trying to salvage what last he could of the 10 hours of sleep they had both gotten. Nothing.
He opened his eyes and Phichit was nowhere to be seen. He reached for his glasses on the coffee table and found a sticky note attached to the lenses. It read, **Went out for some breakfast and a walk. Be back later. -P**

Yuuri sighed and got up to go shower. He plugged his phone in to charge in his room and checked the time. It was 9:45, which meant he had to be at work in about three hours to start the midday shift.

Yuuri worked in the library, alongside Guang Hong and Yuko. During the summer, when not many people were taking classes, the days moved slowly and tediously with every passing minute. He didn’t look forward to work for any reason other than being surrounded by books all day. He’d usually find someplace to sneak off to and read when things got slow. That part was fun and useful since he used that time to do homework for all of his different classes. He’d hovel off into a study room with a pretty view and read and study and listen to music for up to an hour almost every day. His supervisor didn’t mind, mostly because they did the same thing.

Yuuri tried to think about what could have possibly happened between Seung Gil and Phichit to cause such a big fight between the two. He had heard them bicker before and seen the annoyed, almost angry, looks they exchanged at times, but he had never see Seung Gil look so angry before. Yuuri knew he had a temper, but it still surprised him to be shoved like he had. Seung Gil had actually gotten physical with him. He felt his stomach do a somersault as he pondered on the thought as he wondered, *Did he hurt him?*

He walked into their bathroom and started to undress. Taking his shirt off, he stared into the mirror focusing on his chest. The bruises were finally gone from his arms and shoulders, but the three-inch scar that ran along his clavicle persisted, rendering itself an ugly pink and brown patch of skin that went against everything Yuuri wanted to be. He had always been one to heal slowly, in every sense of what that meant, so it didn’t surprise him that it was taking so long for it to fade. Two years it had been since it happened, and still, every day, Yuuri was forced to relive it when he entered the living room or kitchen. The pain had eased over somewhat, but the memory remained. It hurt him to think that Phichit might have gone through the same thing. He felt annoyed with himself for not asking as soon as he’d walked in.

He turned on the bath faucet and waited for it to fill before throwing in a bath bomb. He needed to relax, and a steaming bath was always one of the best ways to do just that. He plopped it in gently and then slipped into the warm, welcoming waters. He wanted to be rinsed clean, his soul to be perched on a drying rack and folded neatly back into place. He wanted to be able to hear a sudden loud noise and not flinch back in fear. He wanted to be able to trust men again, to love them like he used to. Be it Phichit or Victor, or anyone else that could come along, he knew he would have a difficult time surrendering himself wholly. That was just the way he was.

He detested it.

He tried to remember the good times he had with Eli. He tried to trick himself into thinking that if those good memories overpowered the bad, that he’d find something within himself forgive him or move on from the situation. But in reality, he hated himself for not seeing the signs that could have avoided the predicament fate put him in. He put himself and Phichit in harm's way being blinded by love. He tried to remember that love sometimes, but all that came to him were flashes of memories he wanted to shove so far back into his mind he’d never have to worry about them again. But they weren’t forgotten or in the back of his head...they were front and center right there between his eyes.

Eli screaming at him in the kitchen over a message Yuuri hadn’t solicited. Yuuri’s attempt at a breakup. Dishes hitting the ground. Him being pushed against the fridge, a gruff hand taking hold of his jaw...his body hitting the ground before being picked up by his arms. Things only got worse from there. *“They’ll call it a crime of passion… the news will say I loved you too much.”* Eli had said as
Yuuri pressed his back to the wall. ‘He would have done it…’ Yuuri thought to himself as he sank lower in the bath. ‘He would have killed me.’ But he hadn’t, thanks to Phichit, who tackled Eli to the ground upon entering the apartment. The knife only managed to cut Yuuri’s clavicle, and for that, he was thankful, even if Phichit broke an arm trying to pin Eli down.

What was worst was Phichit’s blood-curdling scream when the bone in his arm was broken. His memories were too vivid. They hurt too much. He still felt the same pressure in his chest. He blamed himself. If it hadn’t been for his nosey neighbor and her son, he wasn’t sure either of them would have made it.

Yuuri squeezed his eyes shut and sunk deeper into the water, letting it rise all the way up to his nose. The relaxing aroma of roses and lilies melted into his skin. He knew he was crying. Crying always felt safe when he was in the bathroom. There were no eyes to judge him.

He stood up and reached for a loofah, ready to scrub off the grime of the past day. He worked on his upper body for some time, humming the tune of a song he and Victor had skated. His mind lingered on Victor for a second, wondering why he hadn’t called or texted him. He was interrupted by a soft knock on the bathroom door. “Yuuri?” It was Phichit.

“One moment,” Yuuri called out as he rinsed and dried himself off. He put on a bathrobe and stepped out, jumping back as he found Phichit leaning against the wall opposite the bathroom. He wore a somber countenance on his face, arms crossed, and teeth biting down on his bottom lip. The hallway was dark, but some rays of light made their way in through the living room and touched down on both their faces. Yuuri took in a deep breath and relaxed.

“Sorry,” Phichit whispered an apology for scaring him. He cleared his throat and straightened his back. He started to rub his arms, a telling sign that he was uncomfortable. “Um… he didn’t do anything. We just fought. The worst thing he did was slam the door.” The words fell out of his mouth like water, almost like they had been sitting on the tip of his tongue for a long time. Yuuri nodded and tightened the bathrobe around himself like a safety blanket. “Hopefully yesterday didn’t bring up any... memories. I know how easy it-”

“I’m fine Phichit. I’m honestly just worried about you,” Yuuri spoke up and leaned his head to the side. “What brought on the fight?”

Phichit scrunched up his face. Yuuri knit his brows and told him he didn’t have to talk about it if he didn’t want to. Phichit thanked him and walked off into his bedroom without another glance back at Yuuri.

Yuuri’s heart felt heavy, carrying its weight all the way into his room to get ready for work.

_____  

Phichit had the day off.

He wallowed in self-pity from the time Yuuri left till the time he returned. They didn’t speak much and when the time came, they ate dinner in silence. They sat at the dinner table, shuffling their lentil stew about with their spoons, only intermittently taking in mouthfuls. The news was playing in the background, filling and somehow enhancing their awkward silence. Phichit wanted to ask how his date had gone with Victor, but that made him want to puke right there in front of him. The little green monster perched on his shoulder wouldn’t let the words come out of his mouth, even if he missed Seung Gil. It had only been a day passed, but he was so used to receiving messages from him hourly, that the day felt empty without them.
Yuuri was the first one to speak. “So, how was your day?” He didn’t even look up from his food, just kept stirring as the words came out. A police car could be heard driving past outside.

“It was good. How was work?” Phichit responded nonchalantly. Yuuri pursed his lips and set his spoon down to take a drink of water from the glass in front of him.

“The freshmen have arrived. I wasn’t able to sneak off during my shift, so it put me in a bit of a mood,” Yuuri huffed. He pushed himself back from the counter and walked to the fridge. He brought out a corona, offering Phichit one as well. He capped them off and sat back down, planting one in front of his friend. He wasn’t much of a drinker, neither of them was, really, but when things got rough or stressful, they always kept a 12 pack of coronas in the fridge just in case.

They started off slow, sipping only between sentences. The beer tasted bitter, it was an acquired taste, but it acted as a relaxant for the conversation and their bodies. They picked up the pace once they started to joke around like they were used to. They had each drank about five or so beers by that point and ended up on the living room floor talking about the past.

“I remember my first night at the university. I was so scared,” Phichit started with a large inhale. He watched Yuuri with wonder, as he drank another beer even though he was already shitfaced. “But you were there with your Link Crew i.d and a trolley for all of my bags. God, you looked so handsome.” Phichit sat up and leaned back on his arms. A smirk played upon his lips as Yuuri blushed harder than should have been humanly possible. Yuuri let himself fall back onto the carpet and draped an arm over his face.

“I was not.” Was all he said.

“Yes, you were, which is why I was so happy when you asked me out,” Phichit said, crawling over to him. “That’s why I kissed you before you kissed me… why I did the things I did…” His voice got quieter as he got closer and closer to Yuuri. Phichit tried to tell himself that he was drunk and unaware of what he was doing. He told himself that he wouldn’t remember anything the next day to regret it. He knew Yuuri wanted him, It was evident as he placed a hand on his lap. “That’s why I was so jealous yesterday. I thought about what I did to you, and how he would do them instead.” Yuuri’s hand fell from his face and to his side. Their eyes met igniting something in the both of them. Phichit was practically in Yuuri’s lap when Yuuri reached up to pull him down onto him. They stared at each other, breathing heavily. Phichit scooped his head down to kiss him. It was tiny at first, but he kept doing it. Each one was deeper than the last like he was trying to prove something.

And he was.


But he didn’t. And he wasn’t sure why he kept kissing him, but he did.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry it's so short, finals are coming up and I don't really have the time to write lengthy chapters. May will be a better month for updates to be completely honest. Let me know what you think in the comments :)!
Victor straightened his tie and sat up from his chair as Judge Martinez walked in for what seemed like the millionth time that summer. She smiled at both groups and took her spot front and center in the courtroom, taking an extra few seconds to coo at Makkachin who was proudly sat by Victor’s side with his tongue hanging out. It was a statement from Victor’s side that read, *You can take my money, but you can’t take what I love away and that means you can’t hurt me*, something he was tired of having Luca try to do.

The message wasn’t received well as almost immediately, he heard what sounded like someone crying from Luca’s side of the courtroom. It was bullshit. Victor knew it, Luca knew it, everyone knew it, but the crocodile tears kept pouring on out as they began. It lasted about an hour and half and Victor only had to speak twice, but he felt exhausted at the end nonetheless. Luca walked away with nothing like he did most times and left as soon as the judge allowed them to. Makkachin lifted his head to look at him but benevolently put it back down once they met each other's gaze. Luca’s face softened and walked out without a word, his team of lawyers right behind him. Victor helped Lilia organize all of the documents they had presented and signed into her briefcase. Makkachin trotted around the courtroom, sniffing just about anything he could get close to. Once everything was in place, he and Lilia set out for their cars. They were supposed to meet with Georgi, Mila, and Yuri for their monthly family luncheon at the Teremok. They had discovered it early on in the summer and fell in love with its homey atmosphere. It was a branch of a restaurant in Russia the reminded the small broken family of their homeland. Yuri was especially fond of the old woman who managed the restaurant and spent every second chatting with her.

They drove in separate cars. Lilia wasn’t fond of Makkachins fur getting all over her custom velvet seats.

It was a quiet ride for Victor, with the windows down, letting the wind sweep through his hair. He kept a smile on his face the entire time, finally happy with the direction his life was going. He was weeks away from finalizing his divorce, his apartment was semi-clean, and he was possibly dating the most beautiful man he had ever seen in his entire life. The sun was shining and his skin was glowing. There was no trouble in the world.

He reached for the volume dial on the dashboard of the car and turned up the happy tune playing on the radio. Makkachin stuck his head out the window, sending drool out the window and possibly onto the side of his car, but Victor didn’t mind.

He thought back to dropping Yuuri off back home. Walking him to the front door of his building, the moment of silence they shared with the door open, neither of them wanting to leave. He remembered Yuuri getting on his tippy toes to kiss Victor’s cheek. It had been the sweetest thing he had ever felt. It made him blush with its innocence and tenderness. Yuuri had rushed off before Victor could have said goodbye. He was left standing there, the door still opened, hand on the handle. He couldn’t move or speak, he was shellshocked and exhilarated. It had taken him some time to get back to his car and recuperate from the day’s occurrences. That night he had a battle with his senses, trying to
keep himself under enough control not to immediately text Yuuri. His flimsy wall was down. Yuuri had knocked gently on it and now had gained entrance into Victor’s life. He couldn’t leave now, not without tearing Victor apart.

That was the thing about Victor. He was so goddamn fragile. Anyone could stumble on into his life and wreck him and he’d just deal with the pain. It happened with friends, family, stranger, and, of course, romantic partners. There wasn’t a thing or person in the world who couldn’t get to him. His father called it a curse and his mother a gift. “That means you’re full of love, sweetheart.” She’d say. But he wasn’t. Victor barely had any love to spread around, even for himself. Affection, he had plenty of. But love... love was sparse. Christophe was the next person to try and decipher his tendency to let other people hurt him. According to him, Victor wasn’t past his “intimacy vs. isolation stage.” Victor responded suitably by reminding Chris that just because he took a psychology course in college didn’t make him qualified to go about labeling people randomly with different issues. Chris shrugged it off and told him it was plausible.

Victor didn’t care much for how many times he had been torn down in the pursuit for something real and true. That cursed trait brought him closer to Yuuri and that wasn’t something he would ever regret. He placed a hand on Makkachin’s back and drove down 54th, directly behind Lilia. Their cars were separated by a red light. It wasn’t the end of the world, Victor practically knew the city like the back of his hand, so there was no way for him to get lost. He watched as Lilia disappeared from view and tapped his fingers against the steering wheel, waiting for the light to turn. The sun shone brighter where he was stationed, reflecting off the glass windows from the surrounding buildings. He put on a pair of sunglasses he kept in his car and started to drive after Lilia when the light turned green.

____

“Glad to see you finally made it! We’re starving.” Mila laid her hands down on the booth table they were sitting in. Victor slid in next to her and opened a menu in front of him. He skimmed it over as Mila nagged on about how long they had waited for them. He apologized and called Yuri over from where he was sitting on the floor with Makkachin. He sat the boy on his lap and asked what he’d like for lunch, They spent the next ten minutes or so going over all the items on the menu, Victor pinching the boy’s cheeks every now and then just to tease him.

After they ordered and the food made its way to their table, he found himself staring off into the distance at times, something that wasn’t too out of character for him. He usually kept a blank mind when he zoned out, and it was much different then, except for the pair of big brown eyes he kept picturing. Mila had to bring him back to reality when he trailed off mid-conversation. Their

“So, how did your date go?” Lilia asked nonchalantly. She smiled at him, something that was rare to Victor.

“It was good.” Victor kept his reply brief, not sure what Lilia’s motives were in asking. She wasn’t one to try and pry open someone else’s business, unlike his mother, so he suspected that she was up to something. Mila stopped eating and eyed Lilia all the same. “I had fun.”

“You spent quite a bit of money.” She started.

“Jesus fucking Christ, Lilia,” He mumbled under his breath. With narrow eyes, he looked at her and put down his fork. “How did you even get a hold of my statements?”

“Your mother called me. Don’t forget you have joint accounts.” She wagged a finger at him and sat back, legs crossed. “She wanted to know why you rented out an entire ice rink in the middle of August.”
“Please tell me you didn’t-” He started with a rough tone. Yuri looked to Mila with a confused look at the turn in mood. Mila shrugged and started eating again, but keeping her attention still on the conversation happening next to her.

“Of course I didn’t. I know how she is.” Lilia brushed off his hostility. “I told her you took Yuri skating.” She looked him up down with a disapproving eye. “Which isn’t a complete lie.”

Victor relaxed, but only for a minute. He knew when Lilia was about to give a lecture. She wore an astute and sour face, lips pinched and eyebrows furrowed. He braced himself for it.

“You can’t just blow your money like this Victor. Especially on some new boy toy you’ve just only met-”

“No, don’t call him that. His name is Yuuri and he’s not like-”

“You don’t know that.”

“Yes, I do- I’d appreciate it if you stopped talking about him like that. We just went on our date and that’s all. Nothing else happened.” He lowered his voice, quickly glancing around the restaurant. Other tables were looking their way, eyes shifting back to their own conversations when Victor looked them in the eye.

“Victor, you have a tendency to think that money can buy love,” she sighed. ”And it can’t. But it can land you in a hasty marriage and cost you hundreds of thousands of dollars. Trust me, I know. I’m the one cleaning up your messes.” Victor slammed his fist on the table and stood up. The rest of the restaurant quieted down as he gathered his things and put down a 20 dollar bill on the table.

“That was a low blow,” He noted, voice wavering. Lilia asked him to sit down in an annoyed voice, something that just made Victor angrier. He was tired of everyone always trying to tell him what his faults were. He knew what they were. He was capricious and needy and too trusting. He knew what was wrong with him. Victor didn’t need Lilia to tell him all over again, especially in a crowded restaurant. He turned his back on his family and walked out with Makkachin.

The sun hit his eyes, hurting his pupils. He felt disoriented for some time as he walked down the street. Makkachin whimpered beside him, gently nudging his nose against Victor’s knees. He stopped to pet the dog, confirming that he was okay. Or at least better than Makkachin assumed. He was a pariah as he made his way, feeling people’s eyes locked on him as he tried to keep himself together. It brought back memories from his school days, when he’d isolate himself from other’s, thinking he was hiding his shame. Countless times Victor had run home crying, his long locks of silver hair tucked under a beanie or baseball cap. He’d run into their kitchen and hide his face in his mother’s shirt and sob like a baby until he felt better about the teasing. That’s what he felt like doing then, but it was impractical for a grown man to fly across the world just for a hug from his mother. He sucked it up, deep into himself, and unlocked his car. He opened the passenger seat door and let Makkachin climb in.

It had been so long since he had fought with anyone in his family. The last fight he remembered was with his father over his vegas marriage. Victor had been in the wrong, of course, he knew it even then, but pride was something he didn’t lack and he’d be damned to admit he made a mistake. He looked into his rearview mirror and wiped away the tears in his eyes, telling himself to man up.

The rest of the day was quiet for him. He slept until six in the afternoon and spent the night with Makkachin by his side, reading, writing, waiting. For what, he didn't know. Chris, Mila, Lilia
herself, and even his Mother all tried to get in contact with him. It was a purposeless task, they would get no answer from him. He still felt rather spited and insulted. Victor also felt ignored.

He sent Yuuri a message when he woke up, deciding that enough time had passed for it to be normal and not too clingy. Yuuri took his time in replying, not messaging back until 8 o’clock that night. It was a very dry conversation. Just a couple of ‘hellos’ and trivial small talk. Yuuri seemed to be in some sort of rush, which only played into Victor’s worries that Yuuri hadn’t had fun and had decided not to continue with their relationship. He’d have a heart attack every time the three grey dots would pop up on his screen, predicting the worst of things from them. It was one message from Yuuri that calmed him, which read, “Sorry I’m taking so long to answer. At work and my boss is nosy”. Victor let himself calm down, reminding himself that not everyone had as much free time as he did. At around nine thirty, Yuuri let him know that he was out of work and free to chat.

“That’s good,” Victor typed with a smile. “Now I don’t have to worry about getting you fired.” He hit send and got up from his place in bed, determined to make himself something to eat.

“I’m truly blessed.” Yuuri replied within seconds. “So, what are you up to?”

“Currently cooking and playing with my son.” Victor typed with a smile as Makkachin ran up behind him with a toy in his mouth. “You?”

“I’m walking home. You have a son? Or is that something you call your dog to freak cute boys out?” Victor smirked at Yuuri’s reply and pulled out a frying pan from his a cabinet in his kitchen.

“Only the ones I really like.” He decided to play it cool as he had with so many others. Victor was self-aware enough to know that things tended to go wrong when he placed people on pedestals, so in order not to sabotage himself he was going to be the type of guy teenage-Victor dreamed of dating.

“That’s good. I love kids.” Yuuri joked back. Victor took a packet of frozen Thai food from his freezer and turned on his stove. Setting the pan down, he poured in a tiny bit of oil and waited for it to start sizzling. He wanted to scream as soon as he read the message but all he did was bite his lip and give Makkachin a thumbs up. Victor got the idea to send Yuuri a picture of Makkachin, certain that it would only help his cause. He snapped a picture of the poodle and sent it with the caption, I’m so glad he takes after me. A plethora of heart emoji’s followed suit.

They spent the rest of the night texting, and at some point started a game of i spy by sending pictures back and forth to each other of their surroundings. Yuuri was winning by a longshot, but Victor didn’t mind. The night was warm, allowing Victor to make his way outside and occupy a chair on the terrace. He looked up from the dark east to sun setting in the west, and in the middle where they met and mixed into the most beautiful, purple-ish pink patch of sky. He could see the lights of helicopters flying in the distance and pretended they were stars. Victor felt warm in a way that he hadn’t for a really long time. Stability was just within his grasp. They’d date for two or three years, move in together in their fourth year, and get married the fifth. It was a five-year plan. It was sane and paced and no one would be able to pass judgment on it because he was being smart and careful.

Yuuri himself was soft, creamy, and safe. There was not a single edge on the man. Everything from his voice to his lips, to his hair, to the way he smelled like a flower field enticed Victor. But it was the crown jewel of Yuuri’s being that made him feel a deep, passionate, yearning for him. It was his eyes. They were so round and hazel, and live with joy that they could bring a smile even to the sourest of faces. Every time he thought of them Victor’s heart skipped a beat. Yuuri was ethereal. Too beautiful to describe. Too immense and breathtaking to take in in one go. It took time to appreciate him completely. Victor wanted to give him all of the time he had left, however many years that was.
His voice was like honey, dripping with the laziness and comfort of a sunny spring day. But Yuuri wasn’t like the daytime. “No,” Victor thought, toying with Makkachins right ear. The dog licked his hand and wagged his tail with glee. Victor took to the sky for his next thought and smiled. “He’s a cool summer night. Dark, mysterious, and gentle. Welcoming in every sense.” He uttered the words out loud, endearment flowing through his tone. Victor his phone buzz again and looked to its screen. Six simple words were typed out in front of him. Short and sweet, straight to the point. They should have made him yelp in excitement, but he did, scaring Makkachin to the point of making him bark. He apologized and shoved the phone in the dog’s face, eager to show him the message.

*When can I see you again?*

Chapter End Notes

Leave a comment and let me know what you think :}!
I Am Not Broken, I'm Not Crying

Chapter Summary

Yuuri pictured every way their conversation could go down. Different permutations of the same situation, each painful and rigid, almost icy, as he conjured them up in his brain. Yuuri was on his floor before he knew it, debating whether or not he should turn back around. His body, soul, and mind all cried yes, but his mind, the true ruler of his being, urged him onward, telling him that if not now, it would be later.

Chapter Notes

So...this chapter happened...I'm starting to think I'm putting too much of my own characteristics into Yuuri but there's no going back now.

“So, you’re really going to try and date him then?” Guang Hong asked as he and Yuuri walked along the streets of the city, phones, and coffees in hand. They were on their way home from work, having just been let out. The night was warm and breezy, something that was unusual to them, making it feel eerier than it was. Yuuri hummed a little tune as he typed away on his phone, texting one Victor Nikiforov about how cute his dog was. Yuuri kept pushing his glasses up from the bridge of his nose, as they kept sliding down from looking down so much as he walked.

“Well, yeah. It’s not serious or anything though. Just fun.” Yuuri smiled at his friend and put his phone in his pocket. “I can’t be hung up on the past forever, and no one else seems to be interested, so yeah, I’m gonna go on a couple of dates and see where that takes me.”

“Obviously I’m gonna date around. Victor’s nice, but what if I get attached? What if he decides I’m not what he was looking for? Nuh-uh, I’m not taking that chance.” Yuuri shook his head and pulled his phone back out upon hearing a ding! come from his pocket. “He seems like your typical, well-off, smooth talking, Only-wants-to-fuck, bachelor anyway. Not my type at all.” Yuuri unlocked his phone and let out and endeared sigh. “He does have a beautiful dog though, I’ll give him that.” He flashed Guang Hong a picture of the poodle and pressed a hand to his chest dramatically. “Have you ever seen a creature more precious? Jesus, I’ll marry him if it means I’ll get to see that dog on the regular.” They laughed together as they reached a street crossing. Discussing how Yuuri should respond to Victor, they waited patiently for the light to change, eager to get to each other’s homes before they dropped from exhaustion. With Guang Hong there to egg him on, Yuuri asked Victor out on a date again, this time for him to plan. A message came in from Victor just minutes later that he would love to and let him know the details of it later. Yuuri responded by asking him out to dinner the following Saturday.
“Did you hear about Jessie?” Guang Hong asked as they crossed.

“No,” Yuuri stated, the question arousing his intrigue. “What about her?’

“Coleman and Jeff fired her and a couple of other seniors. Apparently, they’re downsizing the department.” Jessie was a girl they worked with. She was a History major, graduating with Yuuri in December and had been working with them in the library for about two years. The boys didn’t know her personally, but she was friendly and a diligent worker from what they saw at work. “It’s a shame. She hasn’t found a job for after she graduates, so she broke down in tears when they told her.”

“Jesus Christ” was all Yuuri could say. They shuffled closer together as they entered a shady street.

Yuuri took tight hold of his keys and slipped each one between each finger. It didn’t happen often, but every once in a blue moon people would try to give him and Guang Hong trouble. The keys served as a sense of comfort, that if anything happened to them, at least he’d have a weapon. He lowered his voice, trying to not attract any unwanted attention. “So, uh… how’s Leo? I haven’t seen him in a couple of days.”

“He’s okay...still in love with me for some odd reason.” Guang Hong laughed as Yuuri hit him lightly in the back of the head. They joked around for the remainder of their walk to Guang Hong and Leo’s apartment. The wind had picked up by the time they arrived, stringing along a slight drizzle. The temperature dropped to a chilly 40 degrees Fahrenheit. Guang Hong offered to have Leo drive Yuuri home, but it was late and Leo was always tired after work in his Mother’s deli. He turned down the offer, not wanting to impose.

Half joking, he pat his stomach and said, “I’ve gotta work off these last twenty pounds anyway.” Guang Hong rolled his eyes.

“Oh come off it, Yuuri. You’re not modeling anymore, let yourself go.” Yuuri cringed, thinking back to the two, total, photo shoots he did for the Japanese Skating Federation. It had been in an effort to bring more people and fans into the sport, although it only semi-succeeded in making Yuuri popular amongst boys and girls alike on social media. Guang Hong laughed at his reaction and bid him adieu with a simple wave of his hand, promising to see him at work later on in the week.

Yuuri walked off in the direction of his apartment building. He had a lot on his mind. It was hard for him not to, considering that only twenty-four hours had passed since he and Phichit had rekindled what he thought were the dying embers of their relationship. He blushed just thinking about their naked bodies writhing around their living room floor. He couldn't stop feeling like they had made a grave mistake in going as far as they did. He hated himself for not having enough self-control to stop it. If it hadn't been for Yuuri clumsily hitting his head on the glass table next to their couch, he was sure they would have done something too serious to brush off as them simply fooling around.

And that was just what they had done. Nothing more and nothing less than a couple of kisses. It was just two boys, lost in the heat of the moment. "Phichit was heartbroken and drunk. He didn't know what he was doing.” Yuuri told himself trying to find a good excuse for what they had done. It was the only thing he could think to do to stop the flood of emotions caged in his chest from breaking loose in a frenzy of excitement. His heart was screaming “IT HAPPENED! HE STILL LOVES ME!”, but his brain knew better than to let himself be fooled by a stupid, drunken mistake.

He thoughtlessly walked out into the street before checking for incoming traffic. In the blink of an eye, Yuuri was staring down the front of a car, which had luckily stopped just in time not to hit him. The old man in the car yelled at him to ‘watch where you’re fuckin’ going, you stupid piece of shit’. He apologized profusely, rushing off to the other side of the street. Yuuri held his chest for a moment, waiting for his soul to return to his body.
A slight drizzle started above him. A glum demeanor took hold of his face and remained there as he continued on his trek home. He was definitely going to get sick, that was a given. It stressed him out because he'd be returning to school in just a week of days, and going back sick would only dull his senses. But that was the least of his problems. He was on his way home to a boy who made his brain turn to mush. What would he even say upon Yuuri’s arrival? Would he ignore what had happened between them? Phichit was confrontational, everyone who knew him knew that fact about him, but he also hated admitting when he had done something wrong. And what they had done was one of the worst things Yuuri could think of. Despite their fight, Phichit was still together with Seung Gil in some sense. It hurt to admit that, but it was the truth. Yuuri had drunkenly aided Phichit in cheating on his boyfriend. God, that made his stomach coil around itself, like a snake trying to shed its skin.

“I f*cked up.” He kept thinking as he approached the train station. He scanned his pass and practically skipped down the steps and into the depot. He was so glad the university provided its students with free transportation, especially since he worked such late nights.

The station was mostly empty, except for a couple of exhausted looking twenty-year-olds in suits and a shady character who was hunched over a pile of something putrid on the floor. The lime green lighting of the station made Yuuri feel weird, existential almost. Like all that existed in the five minutes, he stood there waiting for the next train was the station itself. A wave of relief came over his body, making him sway lazily on his heels as the train came to a screeching stop. He boarded and sat in one of the first seats available. The twenty-minute ride passed quickly. He started east, in the direction of his building. He dragged his feet along, desperate for something to happen, good or bad, to stop him from making it home so quickly. Yuuri hated confrontation. He hated it so much he wanted to beat it to the ground, incinerate it, and dance on its ashes.

Confrontation and heartbreak were all that were waiting for him at home. Phichit would be waiting for him, eyes glued to the floor, a solemn expression on his face. Yuuri would try to slip past him, his body practically pulling him to his bedroom where he would be safe and okay for just one more night. But Phichit would deny him that. He would quietly call Yuuri’s name, just the way Yuuri loved, and he would ask him to sit and Yuuri would comply because the last thing he wanted was to hurt Phichit.

Yuuri pictured every way their conversation could go down. Different permutations of the same situation, each painful and rigid, almost icy, as he conjured them up in his brain. Yuuri was on his floor before he knew it, debating whether or not he should turn back around. His body, soul, and mind all cried yes, but his mind, the true ruler of his being, urged him onward, telling him that if not now, it would be later. But as Yuuri unlocked his door, he wished he had turned back and ran because Phichit was standing on the other side of the door looking just like a deer caught in headlights.

A duffel bag hung from his shoulder.

He looked surprised to see Yuuri like he hadn’t pictured him getting home so early as he tried to make his way out. Yuuri took in the situation completely. Their apartment was actually clean after a day of Phichit idly lying about. It had been cleaned and tidied, but-

“Where are the rest of your paintings?” He asked in a whisper as if someone was listening in on a conversation he was having with himself.

“Yuuri- I uh- I wasn’t expecting you’d be home- uh,” Phichit hiked up the duffel bag and bit his bottom lip. Yuuri’s eyes shifted about noticing the disappearance of tiny things, like pictures and books from the room. “I’m um, I’m going to be staying with Yuko for a little bit.”

Yuuri tried to not look hurt. He pressed his tongue against the roof of his mouth to resist the urge to
Phichit wasn’t even going to try to figure things out this time. He was just going to leave him, alone and confused in a now ugly, dull, apartment with just his feelings to keep him company. He wouldn’t have anyone to eat with anymore. No one would push him to go out and enjoy himself. No one would tell him that it was okay to fail a quiz or forget an assignment. No one would remind him to take his anxiety meds or to pay his bills. Worst of all, he would be alone. It felt like a punch to the stomach to think that that would all happen because he couldn’t keep his feelings for Phichit inside like a normal fucking human being. Yuuri’s sadness turned to anger and suddenly all he wanted to do was punch a wall.

“It’s not definite, I just need some time to think about things. Okay?” Phichit pushed his hair back and bit the inside of his cheek. He sounded sincere but Yuuri knew all that meant was that he was still looking for somewhere to live on his own. “I put all of my paintings in my room and some of my other things too. Phichit took a couple of steps toward him and gently, but without affection, hugged him before leaving. He didn’t say good-bye, or even shut the door behind him. He just...left. He left and the room felt cold and distant, completely unfamiliar to Yuuri and all he knew. A burning hot feeling rose in Yuuri’s throat as he spun around and slammed the door shut so hard the wall and the frame shook.

Yuuri let the bass and rhythm of each song blasting through his headphones carry him another mile around the city. He had circled five blocks in diameter around his apartment twice now, his body felt sore and drugged up on more endorphins than it should have, but his mind was alert and begging him to go once more time. He huffed and puffed one more time, running past pedestrians and cars alike. It had been a full week since Phichit had left and he was doing alright.

Yuuri went through a transformation, to say the least.

The night Phichit left, Yuuri promised himself that it would be the last time his feelings and lack of an ability to exist without the love and care of another person would get the best of him. He picked up running again, a hobby he let go of a bit after leaving ice skating, and started to read more, something he missed doing with a passion. He fed himself regularly and tried to cut back on fatty foods and sodas.

His skin, which had a tendency to speckle with acne at any sign of stress was clearing and thriving under his new diet and exercise regime. He was doing okay, if you ignored the sudden lapses of judgment he’d have, like going clubbing out of the blue by himself and buying three hundred dollars worth of new clothes on a limb at three in the morning. And who could forget the walls he put up around himself? Yuuri hadn’t contacted anyone in his friend group. Not Yuko. Not Leo. Not Minami. And especially not Phichit, who stupidly enough, tried to contact him on more than one occasion. He hadn’t even spoken to Guang Hong, whom he worked two shifts with at work. He had tried to talk to Yuuri about it, but each time Guang Hong approached him he’d run off, pretending to do imaginary work their supervisors had assigned him.

Everyone was somewhat worried about him, to the point of contacting his sister, who in turn called him just to check that he wasn’t on the brink of some mental breakdown. Yuuri explained to her that she was simply trying to ‘get over what happened’ and ‘find himself without everyone’s influence’ in him doing so. That wasn’t a complete lie, and it reassured her that he would be okay alone, but it didn’t stop her from demanding that he call her at least once a week. Yuuri entertained the idea and obliged just to get the space he needed from everyone around him.

Yuuri needed them all to know that he didn’t hate them. He hated himself and was working on being
a better person. “The new and improved Yuuri” He thought as he reached a crosswalk. He jogged in place even then, determined not to let himself stop. His breathing paced, dropping to a resting heart rate as the light took longer and longer to change.

Yuuri didn’t want to admit it to himself, but he resented Phichit for leaving him. That was a given. Yuuri had never been one to easily forgive betrayal. And that was what it felt like to him; complete and utter betrayal on Phichit’s part. It was so easy for him to just pick up his things and leave after everything they had been through, as a couple and as friends.

Yuuri pushed himself to run harder than before when the light finally changed. He wanted to sweat the pain away, to cleanse himself of all of the toxins that plagued his body.

He closed his eyes and ran faster, not caring about how stupid he might look.

The song finished off and he slowed down, noticing just how exhausted his body felt. With hands on his knees and the feeling of blood rushing to his face, Yuuri leaned back to rest on the wall of a flower shop. The haunting starting notes of "Runaway" by Kanye West started as a closed brushed over the blind summer sun in the sky. He felt dismal, an emotion that only slipped into his system when he stopped moving. Working himself into a crying mood, Yuuri turned up the music and took a deep breath in, ready to start again.

Just as he cracked his back, a hand made contact with his shoulder, causing him to jump back in alarm.

“Shit, sorry!” Yuuri turned to face Victor, who had one of the most apologetic looks stapled to his face, both hands up as a signal that he meant no harm. Yuuri let out a sigh of relief and took his headphones out. “I didn’t mean to startle-”

“It’s fine.” His words came out angrier than he expected, but he just went along with it. “I’m fine.”

“Uh, okay. I just- I just um- I saw you out here and thought I should say hello.” He pointed to the flower shop, obviously hurt by Yuuri’s tone. Victor knit his brows in contemplation, wondering why Yuuri was acting so frigidly towards him. “Are you alright? You seem on edge?” His voice was soft. As soft as his accent would allow anyway, but the sentiment carried through regardless. Yuuri reminded himself not to be such a dick. He had ignored Victor since the night he promised to take him out to dinner, and despite Yuuri’s active attempts to ghost him, Victor was seemed concerned and somewhat relieved to see him again. He deserved to be treated with respect, no matter what Yuuri was going through.

“Jesus, I’m sorry. I’ve been under a lot of stress lately with school and work.” Yuuri was good at acting. As a kid, especially as a teen, and now as an adult, he could put on whatever front he pleased in the face of any situation. “I’ve just- it’s been so hard lately.”

“Yuuri, you don’t have to lie to spare my feelings. If you don’t want to see me anymore that’s fine.” He acted so nonchalantly about it, letting the words stream out like it was something he had practiced one too many times. Yuuri squinted his eyes, refusing to be beaten at his own game.

“I’m not lying. I really am sorry. I’m actually quite taken by you,” he persisted. God, he sounded so stupid, but he was acting, and if his senses were telling him that speaking like an old victorian lady would help him, goddammit, Yuuri would do it. Not that it helped him any. Victor was seeing through the bullshit Yuuri was throwing at him. It made Yuuri want to punch him in the face, the way that Victor bit his lip and shifted his eyes from Yuuri to behind him like he was trying to get away. Yuuri felt defiance rising in him, annoyed that Victor would challenge him like he had and then try to get away. It was a reminder to him, that all men leave. He wasn’t going to be left, not this
time. With Victor and the rest to come, he would be the one departing. To push his point across, he added, “Understand?”

“Yeah, I guess so.” Tension, for some reason, formed around them. Victor’s complete disregard for their conversation made Yuuri, once again, feel like hitting him, especially when Victor checked his wrist watch for the time, even though his phone was in his hand. He was letting Yuuri know that he had places to be.

“So be ready for Saturday. I’ve got a busy schedule,” Yuuri clarified. The words came out before Yuuri could come to the realized that the date he thought he canceled with silence was back due to his stupid mouth. He felt a deep blush creep onto his face as Victor’s mouth turned into a jaunty smirk. The blue in his eyes darkened as he clapped his hands to signal the end of their encounter.

“Yeah, alright. I’ll see you tomorrow then.” Victor walked away with a wave of his hand after running it through his hair, leaving Yuuri speechless.

“So, those are your true colors then, asshole.” He let his lips twist into a small smile, happy that Victor wasn’t as nice as he had once thought. It would be easier to leave him that way. Their date would turn into a one night stand, and after Victor fell asleep, he’d sneak off out of his apartment (he was damn sure not taking him home. This time—the last and first time—would take place in Victor’s own home). He'd walk home, and delete Victor's number. Yuuri planned to do this often, with different people of course. It would help him heal. Hell, it might even help him trust other people again. Yuuri took off down the street once more. The cycle would repeat itself as many times as Yuuri needed.

The daunting idea that their date would end with sex turned Yuuri’s empty stomach into a whirlpool of self-consciousness. His every sense was fighting against his stressed gay agenda of angsty healing. Yuuri told himself it would be okay, he was good in bed and in semi-decent shape. Victor was handsome. Victor looked healthy and responsible. There were no possible repercussions to result from one night of sex with a random Russian foreigner.

He thought about it, and it eased his nerves. Trying to rationalize his behavior, he told himself that he needed a way to de-stress.

He made it to his building but didn’t stop running. The song playing as he ran was too good to pause.

——

“I’m really worried about him, Guang Hong.” Phichit placed his face into his hands as Guang Hong sat next to him on Yuko’s couch. She was at work, and Phichit wasn’t working until later that night, finally giving them the proper amount of time to discuss everything that happened to lead to Phichit practically moving out of his and Yuuri’s apartment. Guang Hong rubs his back, trying to be sympathetic to the situation. “What if Seung Gil doesn’t want me back—” Guang Hong dropped his hand as soon as the name comes out of Phichit’s mouth. “Are you fucking kidding me? Phichit—Yuuri is losing his shit and you’re thinking about him?” He scoffed and hit Phichit in the back of the head. Phichit told him that Yuuri was fine, which made Guang Hong let out an indignant sigh. “That’s just not true, Phichit. At work, all he does is stare off into space. No emotion, nothing. It’s like he’s walking around without a soul.” He counts on his fingers as he lists every change he’s noticed in Yuuri. “His wardrobe? It’s been black for the past couple of days. His hair? It’s messy and textured now. And I swear to god, I saw him googling tattoo ideas. He’s not wearing his glasses and he’s disrespecting some of the students we’re showing around. He’s losing his shit! And you’re worried about Seung Gil? Jesus Christ.” He let out a puff of air and lays his head down on the table.
Phichit kept his face in his hands, completely frozen by a feeling somewhat like guilt.

“What?” Guang Hong asked as the silence dragged on. “Do you feel bad or something? Cuz I think it might be too late.” Phichit started sobbing then. Guang Hong rolled his eyes and pulled him into a tight hug.

“I- I didn’t mean to do- do it. I ju-ust want to see if I w-as still in- in love with him.” He was ugly crying. Giant tears were rolling down his cheeks so fast GuangHong swore they were fleeing from his tear ducts. Guang Hong tried his best to calm him down, but each time they even got remotely close to emotional stability, Phichit would get this trembling look on his face and breakdown all over again. After fifteen minutes, and a bowl of frosted flakes, Phichit looked at Guang Hong with the most apologetic expression he had ever seen. “Okay, I’m ready. But, please, don’t hate me. Okay?”

Guang Hong knits his brows and stared at him intently. “Okay, I promise.” Phichit nodded and took in a deep breath of air.

“I might have almost, somewhat drunkenly, tried to have sex with Yuuri...” Guang Hong let out a groan. “...a day after Seung Gil broke up with me.” Guang Hong threw his hands up in the air and cursed in what sounded like Chinese. It was a full-time job being in their group of friends sometimes. It was like it was up to him to bring everyone together to sort their shit out, and most of the time he succeeded, but he wasn’t sure that would work this time.

“Why?” He let out, obviously exasperated by the situation. “You guys broke up ages ago. Why go and do that now?”

“I know! Fuck.” Phichit snapped and wiped snot from his face onto the back of his hand. Guang Hong handed him a tissue and scrunched up his face at the sounds Phichit was producing. Wet and sloppy, like the disease control wing of a hospital. He slid away from him just a bit to ease his disgust. Phichit didn’t notice and continued. “I fucking know. But it’s been on my mind for some time...and Seung Gil asked me about him and I didn’t know what to say so I didn’t say anything and then he accused me of cheating and he left and I was so lonely and he was so pretty. I-” He was rambling. Only bits and pieces of what he was saying were making sense to Guang Hong, who’s attention was stuck on a booger hanging on the brim of Phichit’s left nostril. “- I didn’t feel anything at all. I fucking myself over on a whim and now I’m suffering the consequences. I lost my boyfriend and my best friend, and I’ve probably just ruined our entire friend group. And Yuuri... god I finished what Eli started, Guang Hong! I left him without answers and he’s turning into some recluse-” Guang Hong rubbed the nape of his neck and tried to think of something to say as Phichit get ranting. A crack of thunder exploded outside, silencing them both. The sounds of a busy city and heavy rain loomed over them as Phichit rubbed his eyes clear of any tears that were left over.

“Yikes.” Guang Hong uttered the word without taking to account how Phichit would take them.

“You said you wouldn’t judge me.” Phichit sounded defeated like crying had cleared him of all of the backed up, toxic feelings he had bottled up inside him.

“I’m not judging. It’s just... Yikes, you know?” He passed a hand through his hair and chewed on his bottom lip. He wanted to comfort Phichit because, while had brought on the situation, he wasn’t at fault, entirely. “I think you... should stop feeling so sorry for having cleared that from your system.”

“But-” Phichit started.

“But nothing. Phichit, it seems rational and normal for you to develop feelings for your ex, especially since you spent so much time together in the years after you broke up. It got confusing for
you, and that’s okay. And, yes, Yuuri may be in a dark place right now but people are supposed to go through times like that. You’ve been there for him for the past six or so years,” Guang Hong effused. “It’s time he spent some time alone. It might not have been the best way for you to leave, but it’s not going to hurt him as much as you think it will. Okay?” Phichit gave him a grateful smiled and dove into a deep hug with his friend.

Guang Hong hugged him back, sighing in disbelief at what his life had become. He considered, for just a moment, changing his major from English to psychology.

Outside, the rain persisted.

Yuuri was sat in the living room with his laptop propped on his lap and twenty different tabs open. All of the lights were off in the apartment and a cold cup of hour-old tea was placed in front of him, barely touched. He was in the middle of a showdown with Youtube and his subscription bar. Yuuri located the name he was looking for and contemplated his next action. He clicked on the name and was taken to the home page for the account. An all too familiar voice greeted him with their latest video.

“Hey guys! It’s Phichit back with yet another haul video. Unlike the others, this one is special because, once again, after months of begging, Yuuri’s back!” He watched as Phichit brought his body into frame. The boys on his screen looked so happy and lively, bumping shoulders with each other like there was no problem in the world. He felt his heart swell with a longing to once more be in such a situation. His hands started to shake just above his keyboard confused on what to do. “You guys loved it when we did the my-best-friend-does-my-makeup tag and so we’re back. Say hello to the masses Yuuri.” He watched himself let out a shy hello, almost collapsing in on himself as Phichit wrapped an arm around him.

The video, titled Watch My Hot Roommate Model the Clothes I Picked Out for Him, was recorded just before Phichit had left for Thailand. It had around eight hundred thousand views, making it one of the most popular ones Phichit had posted. Phichit’s Youtube channel was his pride and joy, above any other social media platform he had. With a whopping 957,002 subscribers, Phichit was well on his way to becoming a prominent figure in the Youtube community. Yuuri, according to Phichit at least, played a huge role in getting his name out there. The small fan base he accumulated as a figure skater followed him to the states and found him in Phichit’s videos since the first day he appeared in one. They grew infatuated with their relationship and spread word of them throughout the internet. While most of their following was in Asia, they had started picking up an American following at the start of the year.

Yuuri exited out of the video and looked off into the emptiness of the apartment hallway. He couldn’t stop seeing his face all around him. It was haunting him, slipping in between the cracks of reality and Yuuri’s imagination. Every time he closed his eyes, he was there, as young and beautiful as he had been when Yuuri first saw him.

When he and Phichit first met, Yuuri was instantly taken by him. Their age difference held him back from doing anything, and they were friends from the start, but Phichit had other plans. He shamelessly flirted with Yuuri. He stole his hoodies, sat on his lap, and ate from his plate when the situation permitted and actively tore him away from any possible romantic partners. It was a running joke in their Yuuri was oblivious to it all for quite some time, until Guang Hong came into their lives and let Yuuri in on just what he had been missing. At the end of Phichit’s freshman year, Yuuri conjured up the courage to ask him out.

He did it at the top of the Empire State building at sunset. He remembered Phichit telling him that he
hadn’t found the time to visit any cliche New York landmarks and instantly knew how he would do it. He gave Phichit a little speech on all of the things he loved about him, Grey's Anatomy style, and asked him if he’d like to try having a relationship with him. The rest was history. For a year and five months, they were together, laughing and crying and trying to start a life together. They moved in together around their one year anniversary and wore mock engagement rings to signify their commitment to one another. Things were good for them. They made a good team and most importantly they felt happy around one another. It wasn’t until they started to notice just how boring life had become for them both. They woke up one morning and noticed that the spark between them was gone; extinguished by the passing of time. Mutually, Yuuri and Phichit decided to break up. It was amicable. They respected each other's choices in moving on and loved one another all the same. It wasn’t until they both began to date seriously that things started getting awkward.

Yuuri took his glasses off and tossed them off to the side. Closing his laptop, he got up from the floor and made his way onto the couch. There wasn’t anything for him to do in particular. The apartment was clean, his clothes were washed, and he had eaten so all he could do was sit and stare at the wall until he had to make his way into work. He groaned and tilted his head back to look at the ceiling. Off in the distance, he heard his phone ring, signaling a new text message. Yuuri tried to ignore it and close his eyes, but the thought that it could have possibly been Phichit sent him practically running to his bedroom.

Except it wasn’t Phichit, it was Victor.

Yuuri opened his phone and glanced down at the message.

So, should I dress up or keep it casual tomorrow?, the message read. Yuuri rolled his eyes and considered calling off the entire thing by making up that he had gotten sick in the mere hours since he had last seen him. The last thing he wanted to do was spend an afternoon trying to pretend like everything was okay while on the inside he was crumbling faster than century old ruins. He wanted to stay in and watch t.v. until the sun came up, but he was committed to starting new. That meant going out with people and doing things his mother would smack him for. The following night, he’d put on his tightest jeans and don his finest shirt and pair of shoes, spritz himself with cologne and walk down the busy streets of New York with Victor by his side.

Without thinking, he began to type.

“Dress up. We’re going dancing,”

Chapter End Notes

Leave me a comment telling me what you think, please! It’s the only way for me to know if I should keep updating or not :)
Summer's Hot But I've Been Cold Without You

Chapter Summary

He wanted to place Yuuri in a field and cover him in all kinds of flowers, none quite measuring up to his beauty. He wanted to present him to his mother and father and tell them that Yuuri was who he’d be spending the rest of his life with. Victor fantasized about their wedding and buying a little house in the countryside where he and Yuuri would live out the rest of their days. He pictured oodles of children and puppies running around with flowers in their hair and the blinding shimmer of happiness in their eyes.

Chapter Notes

Finals are next week and I've been writing this rather than studying but oh well, life is meaningless anyway.

Hope you enjoy this chapter!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“So, deli food and drinks at two gay bars? That's our date?” Victor asked incredulously as he walked into a crowded building that smelled like dead dreams and marijuana smoke. A dingy bar was placed at the furthest point back of the room, accompanied by what Victor assumed was their sound system and DJ. A large glass dance floor was sprawled out in the middle of the room. The place was mostly empty, which was weird for a Saturday night, and that should have put him off on as to what type of establishment it was, but Yuuri was there so he thought it probably wasn't as bad as he thought.

“Hey, I also said we were going to dance, and dance we shall.” Yuuri was dressed like he came straight out of an episode of a daytime soap opera, everything from his shoes to his hair. He looked cute, but in a weird way, Victor couldn't explain.

His glasses had been traded in for contacts and the quiet undertones of his voice were gone, replaced by an outlandish laugh and a too-comfortable way of speaking. Yuuri stepped into the middle of the dance floor, grabbed Victor by his hand and pulled him closer, pressing their bodies together. Victor smiled at him and tried to rest his chin atop Yuuri's head. Yuuri, rather than stay that way, placed his arms on Victor's shoulders and connected them behind his neck. They song they were dancing to was solely dependent on an obnoxious repetitive beat, making it hard for them to waltz like Yuuri was trying to do. He gave up on the waltz and brought Victor's hands to his hips, stirring them rhythmical upon the first touch. It was something like a tango.

At that moment, Victor's throat went dry and all of his senses were failing him. A loud thumping began in his ears, accompanied by a deep burning sensation all over his body. Yuuri kept on gyrating, looking at Victor every couple of seconds with nothing but intent to sin in his eyes. He dipped down and came back up in mere milliseconds, kissing Victor's fingers all the while singing along to the song. It felt like a dream for Victor to see Yuuri acting so out of character. Every move his body made looked like something out of a movie; perfectly choreographed and tactile. Yuuri was
using every curve and slope he possessed to numb and stimulate all of Victor's senses. With every hitch of breath in Victor's throat, Yuuri was encouraged to go one step further.

The lights around them were dim and hazy, giving off the flow of different colors in the semidarkness of the room. Yuuri asked Victor something along the lines of ‘Can you lift?’, to which Victor responded to with a tight nod and disoriented gaze. Yuuri laughed, stepped away from him, keeping their hands enveloped until he absolutely had to let go, and counted down with his fingers, mouthing the numbers without breaking eye contact. Victor glanced around the room, scared of what was going to happen next. He found multiple sets of eyes glued to Yuuri as he ran from his side of the room and into Victor's hands. It hit Victor that Yuuri was trying to recreate the lift scene from Dirty Dancing as he came closer and closer. “That’s a little cliche, but I’ll go with it.” Victor thought. Almost instinctively, Victor took hold of Yuuri’s tiny waist and lifted him into the air as gracefully as his strength allowed. Once he was up, Yuuri let out an intoxicatingly wonderful laugh and spread his arms out in excitement. The lift had been messy and Victor had barely moved a muscle, but the patrons of the bar clapped and wooed at them, some even going as far as whistling and asking for more. Victor felt drunk, and he was, technically, as Yuuri hugged him and kept right on dancing.

The night had started out so oddly, with them getting a bite to eat at some deli where everyone apparently knew Yuuri, to getting drinks at a semi decent bar, and then finally arriving at a place where it seemed all Yuuri wanted to do was dance. They had barely had any time to talk in the three hours they had been together, and even when they did it was usually about the weather or recent events in the news. Not that Victor minded (Yuuri was a very insightful person), but Victor wanted to get to know him. He wanted it to be like their first date; sweet and paced with no one but them around. Instead, they were in a club with twenty other men who were too old to be anything but pervy, and it seemed all Yuuri wanted to do was drink and dance, two things he was presently thriving at. They were both intoxicated and sweaty from the lack of ventilation in the room, which sent beads of sweat down their faces and backs. It felt a little gross, but once Victor started to let loose it didn’t seem to matter.

Yuuri turned himself around and pressed his backside to Victor's front, lazily reaching up to touch his face and neck with gentleness like that of a million roses brushing against his skin. Victor, stuck in a dream like state, gave into his touch and started to ease into the easiest dance moves he could think of. Despite having taken ballroom lessons in his youth, thanks to his mother (not that they would have helped anyway) dancing wasn't something he did often. He thanked every spiritual being watching over him that Yuuri had decided he would be the one leading all of their dances, letting him off on making a fool of himself.

They went on for a solid hour, dancing song after song without a care in the world. Victor was reminded of his college days when he and Chris would sneak out of their dorm room with guys who were much too old for them in a spur of the moment whim of youth spontaneity. They’d stay out all night and wreak havoc on the streets of Paris, too drunk and too young to care that they could be spotted by any of their parent's friends or business partners. All the trouble he had caused for himself in his youth came flooding back over him. He cringed at how idiotically defiant he had been as a teen and asked himself why he was falling back into those habits. Victor reminded himself that he should be at home, preparing for the first day of class on Monday and spending time scrapbooking or knitting or whatever it was that mature people did. He told himself that he needed to act his age, but then his eyes would travel down to Yuuri’s and he’d be reminded of why it was that he was out so late nearing his first day of work.

Yuuri looked angelic under the technicolor lights flashing around them. His fringe kept flipping back and forth around his face as he bounced about in front of Victor. There was a type of disorganized elegance to his drunk dancing, like his body couldn’t let go of some type of training Victor assumed
Yuuri picked up from his brief career as a figure skater. Victor closed his eyes and smiled, thinking back to all of the videos he had found of Yuuri skating in competitions. The night of their first date, Victor went straight home and spent about three hours cuddled up to Makkachin on his couch with his laptop just browsing about online for any and all things Yuuri. The first thing to show up was a video of Yuuri and his friend Phichit on Youtube. He spent a decent chunk of time going through all of Phichit’s channels for any sign of Yuuri. There were so many videos to watch. Once Youtube caught on to who Victor was interested in watching, Yuuri’s competitions started to pop up and the next thing Victor knew was that it was midnight and he had yet to shower.

It was a little creepy, as Chris had noted when Victor told him what he had done, but not weird. It was normal for him to want to know who he was dating, even if he spent way too much time looking him up online. And even though they had only gone on one date, but that fact was minor. Victor’s heart felt like it had known Yuuri’s for centuries.

Yuuri slowed down and pulled Victor off to the bar. Victor’s legs felt heavy, something he blamed on the alcohol content of his blood. Yuuri seemed fine though, despite tripping over his own feet multiple times. Making their way to the bar felt like it took an eternity, and upon reaching it, it felt like a chore to find a good place to sit. They chose a place off to the right with no people near it and took a seat on the stools placed before the counter, smiling whimsically at one another as the bartender took their orders. A gin and tonic was placed in front of Victor and a bloody mary was given to Yuuri with a wink from the mixologist. Victor placed his hand on Yuuri’s knee to let him know that they were together.

“Are you having fun?” Yuuri leaned in closer to him, smiling as he put his hand atop of Victor’s.

“Yeah, I am,” Victor replied, smiling down at their hands which were now fumbling together in an attempt to be held. “Uh- have you always been so good at dancing?” Victor asked, his voice flickering in elation.

“Yeah, I took ballet as a kid and then uh...um... I took some other classes when I was a teen too.” Victor nodded along and took a sip of his drink.

“So, tell me about yourself. I feel like I don’t know anything about you,” Victor noted, sloshing his drink around the glass as cool as his coordination allowed him impaired.

“Not much to know, honestly. I’m just a guy in New York,” Yuuri queried with a playful tone.

“I don’t believe that. Tell me about yourself. What’s your favorite food?” He inquired, leaning an elbow against the counter and resting his chin on his fist.

“My mom's homemade katsudon.” His reply came with a shy smile, reverting him back to the soft boy Victor had met. “That or my friend's moms empanadas.”

“The ones we had?” Victor mused, lowering his voice once a slow song started to play. Yuuri nodded. “Those were delicious.” Their conversation lagged for a moment as more and more people came into the bar. That was odd, as Victor noted since the bartender had called out for the last round of the night. “What about any ex-lovers? Anyone I should know about?”

“No. No one.” Yuuri was curt, shutting Victor’s playful conversation down.

“We should probably get going. I’ll get an uber.” Yuuri took his phone out and whistled as he put out a request. It was picked up by someone ten minutes away. “Do you wanna step outside and talk or do you want to stay in here?”
“Are you sure it’s not-” Victor started but was interrupted by a gruff voice and a large hairy hand placed on Yuuri’s shoulder. They both turned their attention to an older man with a long beard and scarred face who has all of his attention placed on Yuuri.

“Can I buy you a drink, pretty boy?” His voice makes Victor’s stomach lurch with slight anger. He watches as his grip tightens on Yuuri’s shoulder. He moves to get up but Yuuri places a hand on his leg telling him to stay seated.

“No thank you, I’m alright.” Yuuri smiled at him brightly and brought up his drink to show that he already had one. The man didn’t leave and Victor looked to Yuuri to see if he wanted him to intercept.

“What about a dance then?” The man persisted coming around from behind Yuuri and stepping in front of Victor. Yuuri’s hand remained on Victor’s leg, despite the wall of a man between them.

“I’m actually with someone, so if you don’t mind could you leave us alone?” Yuuri protested with an edge in his voice. The man scoffed and pulled him up by his wrist. “Hey, leave me alone.”

“Come on, don’t be so stuck up.” The man pulled him away from the counter and Victor was up faster than he could even register what he was doing.

Victor grabbed the man by his shoulder and turned him so that they were face to face. “He doesn’t want anything to do with you. Leave,” He snarled. The man laughed and dropped Yuuri’s hands from his own. A calloused finger pushed at Victor’s chest, but he kept his ground.

“And if I don’t?” The man goaded. Victor smirked and brushed the finger from off his body.

“I don’t think you want to find out,” Victor threatened. Yuuri made his way to his side and wrapped his arm around his waist, half protectively, half to keep him back in case a fight broke out.

“Victor let’s go, it’s not worth it.” Yuuri’s voice cut through the air like a knife. The atmosphere was stiff and several other men, whom Victor assumed to be his friends, had started to inch closer to the situation. Victor looked down to Yuuri and noticed the frightened look in his eyes. Begrudgingly, he stepped back and put his arm around Yuuri. Just as they turned to leave, the men let out one last comment so vile that it sent Victor over the edge.

The man must have been at least a foot taller than him, but Victor didn’t care. He whipped around and let his knuckles collide with his jaw, the sheer impact landing him on the ground. Victor gripped his hand and watched as he lay dumbfounded on the ground. The man started to laugh, coaxing him to do more, and maybe it was a trap (it most certainly was) but Victor leaped on top of him anyway and started to send hit after hit of pent up anger that he didn’t even know he had into the man’s face. He faltered in listening to Yuuri’s voice screaming at him to stop and let the man beneath him get a punch in. His nose collided with a fist and blood started to pour out almost instantaneously. He wiped it off and kept on hitting him. He felt a pair of arms wrap around him, much too big to be Yuuri’s, throw him on the ground. A foot met his ribcage over and over as Victor fought to stand back up. He finally managed to and dove into another fit of erratic punches. His eyes jumped to Yuuri, who was frantically fighting against a barricade of bodies surrounding Victor. He wiped his terrified expression from his mind as he kept on fighting whoever stepped in front of him. He felt so angry, irrational and submerged in a level of rage he didn’t even know he was capable of feeling. The words of his father filled his mind, all of the advice he had ever given him on how to win an unfair fight finally coming to use. “Keep good track of your surroundings. Use anything at your disposal. Keep all of your limbs near you. And, for the love of god, don’t try to take more on than you can take.” Victor kept moving as swiftly as he could on his feet, striking shins and guts as often as he could.
He saw Yuuri approach frantically with the bouncer from outside. The bouncer broke up the fight, giving Yuuri a chance to retrieve Victor from where he was standing and take off in the direction of the exit. He held Yuuri’s hand in his own as tightly as he could, trying to bring himself back into reality from the immense rush of adrenaline he had just undertaken. Once outside, the cool night air whirred past both their faces as Victor kept his eyes on the sky above him. He felt so completely weightless then, running with Yuuri, wild in the night. It wasn’t until they stepped into an alley that he noticed Yuuri was crying. “What is fucking wrong with you?” Yuuri seethed, bringing his hands up to his face to hide his tears. Victor stepped closer to him and cupped his face tenderly, letting a number of ‘I’m-sorry’s slip through his bloody lips in Russian. A deafening ringing in his ears started once his heart rate slowed, sending him staggering back in pain. Yuuri stopped crying and asked Victor if he was okay. He replied in a combination of Russian, English, and French. Yuuri cursed, starting to cry again, remembering that someone had hit Victor with a bar stool over the head, so the possibility that he was suffering from some kind of brain injury was likely. He pulled his phone out and dialed 9-1-1 as he sat Victor down and frantically tried to keep him awake.

“911, what’s your emergency?”

“My um-my uh, friend he’s hurt and I think he’s blacking out from a concussion.” His voice emulated fear and worry, sloppy with tears. The operator asked him what happened and if Victor could talk. “He got into a fight with a couple of guys, and I think? He’s speaking in a couple of different languages but his eyes are closed. He’s not responding very well when I speak to him.” She asked for their location and instructed them to step out to where the ambulance could spot them. Yuuri stayed on the phone with her as he stood Victor up and helped him out into the street.

Victor snuggled up to Yuuri, smearing his blood all over his shirt and skin. He kept on mumbling as Yuuri tried to keep him awake and talking.

It took ten minutes for the ambulance to reach them. They propped Victor down onto a stretcher and asked Yuuri if he’d be riding back with them to the hospital. He nodded immediately and made his way into the back of the vehicle behind Victor. The paramedics began to work on him, taking his vitals and checking his perception and hearing. They asked Yuuri about everything he saw happen to Victor. He told them about the bar stool and the kicks to the abdomen he had taken. They also asked him how much he had to drink and if there was anything he was allergic to. “He had like… three shots of vodka and a gin and tonic. I don't know if he's allergic to anything, I don't know him that well.” They asked him to calm down and step back to let them work. He did as he was told, fighting back fat tears of fear and a lump in his the size of his fist. The cool temperature of the bench he was sitting on served as a wake me up for him, somewhat alerting his senses once again. He took in deep breaths and let them out as slowly as he possibly could. His therapist would have been proud if it weren’t for the dry heaving and crying he was still trying to put under control. Victor, coming from a place of both consciousness and unconsciousness, eyes rolling back and forth from the back of his head to the front, called out to him from an in a sleepy haze, offering his hand to Yuuri as a form of comfort.

“It's okay, I'm okay, моя любовь. Не волнуйся.” Victor felt like every one of his five senses had been completely wiped clean of everything he had known in his life. He peered at Yuuri from the stretcher with a swelling eye and kept talking to him in what he thought was English but was really Russian.

Yuuri sobbed the entire way to the hospital. He cried even harder when they took Victor up to get a scan and proper check up. He didn’t even stop when the nurses in the emergency room cleaned him up and asked if he had been hurt. He hadn't thankfully. The only thing he had left from the ordeal were bruises in the form of a hand around his left wrist and a bruise on his back from all of the shoving that had occurred.
Once everything had calmed down, him especially, a doctor asked Yuuri if he knew of anyone the hospital should call for Victor. Yuuri wracked his brain, trying to recall Victor's cousin's name. Mimi? Marissa? Makayla? He thought back to the conversation they had earlier in which he mentioned her. “Mila! That's his cousin. She should be in his contacts somewhere.” He let the doctor know and asked if Victor was awake.

“He is, but the pain killers we gave him made him a bit loopy. You're welcome to go see him.” Yuuri thanked the doctor and made his way up to see Victor, where they'd be keeping him overnight for monitoring.

Victor's room was at the end of a very long hallway. Yuuri thought back to the last time he had been in a hospital and shuddered at the thought. He rushed down the hallway and found Victor's room, rushing in and slamming the door behind him. Victor jumped up at the sound and looked bewilderedly at Yuuri, who blushed at the loud noise. “Sorry.” He whispered.

“It's okay, I was falling asleep anyway.” Yuuri watched him as he tried to sit up, wincing at the pain he felt every time he moved any part of his body. He walked over to Victor's side and gently pushed him back down. He gave him his best smile and sat down in the chair next to his bed. Victor returned the favor, crinkling both his eyes even though one of them was bright red and swollen. Yuuri looked him over once, twice, and then three times, blaming himself for the state Victor was in. A brand new stream of tears started at his eyes as Victor ran his tongue over the part of his lip that had been busted open during the scuffle. Victor stopped, panicked, and asked Yuuri what was wrong.

“Why did you have to go and get yourself almost killed? Do you know how stupid and reckless that was?” He started to cry into his hands again, hunched over in one of the most pathetic positions Victor had ever seen. Yuuri looked awful. His hair was a mess, his clothes were bloodied, and his eyes were puffy from all the crying he had been doing. Victor's eyes took to the bruises on his body and his blood went cold.

“You were hurt?” He inquired, a worried tone taking his voice over. “Yuuri I'm so sorry they hurt you I thought I-” Yuuri interrupted him by throwing his hands up into the air and laughing in despair. Victor looked up to the ceiling of the hospital room and sighed. He knew that laugh anywhere. “I'm sorry I made you worry. I'll think twice before I do something like that again.” That was a line he had told his mother more times than he ever should have. Yuuri choked back a couple of sobs.

“It's okay, I'm just- I was just really worried. I didn't know how to make them stop and you were bleeding so much I panicked.” He wiped his face of any tears and went over to Victor's bedside. “They uh- they contacted your cousin. She should be here at any minute but I can stay if you like.” Victor winced at how much shit he would get from his family, Lilia especially, but smiled at Yuuri nonetheless. “I’d like that very much. Thank you, Yuuri.”

Yuuri placed a hand on his battered face and retreated back to his seat, crossing his arms and watching Victor, embarrassment taking him over once he realized that Victor had gotten hurt because of him. That was two people who had done that now, and the realization struck him with a sense of self-loathing. He checked the time on his phone and told himself that he had to stay awake no matter what time it was. He tried his best to stay awake, but after fifteen minutes he was curled up the small hospital couch with a blanket, provided by one of the nurses.

Victor watched him sleep in awe. Even as Yuuri let out little snores, he looked just as beautiful as he did when he was awake, hair a mess and all. He didn't regret the fight then, as he watched Yuuri mumble little words in Japanese and English. He felt something like pride, that he was able to protect the soft prince resting by his bedside.

He wanted to place Yuuri in a field and cover him in all kinds of flowers, none quite measuring up to
his beauty. He wanted to present him to his mother and father and tell them that Yuuri was who he'd be spending the rest of his life with. Victor fantasized about their wedding and buying a little house in the countryside where he and Yuuri would live out the rest of their days. He pictured oodles of children and puppies running around with flowers in their hair and the blinding shimmer of happiness in their eyes. God, looking at Yuuri made Victor want to give everything up right that second if he had to. The money, the clothes, the European sports cars, everything. He wanted to escape and go off somewhere with him, where they could start over without pending divorces and judgmental relatives criticizing their every move.

It was a pipe dream.

Victor knew it was stupid; he barely knew Yuuri after all, but it seemed so real to him. It felt so within reach that Victor wanted to cry at how far away it really was. He knew that even with Yuuri in his life there were still issues he had to face alone...Problems that Yuuri couldn't fix completely. That made him want to scream, and he would have, but he was in a hospital and that would have gotten him in trouble. He was so damaged and fragile, he hoped he'd never have to let Yuuri on just how deranged Victor could be. He didn't want Yuuri to seem him at his worst, crying into his cup of coffee early in the morning when all hope seemed lost and life felt meaningless.

He continued to daydream, filling himself with nice, warm feelings of love and endearment as he kept watchful eyes on Yuuri's steady breathing. The moment didn’t last long.

Victor snapped out of his daydream upon hearing Mila’s shrill voice coming from just outside the door. She burst in with tears streaming down her face and a trembling bottom lip, red hair tied back with a fuzzy pink scrunchy. Little Yuri came trotting in sleepily behind her, as did both Georgi and Lilia. Victor glanced back to Yuuri, who stirred awake due to all of the sudden noise in the room. Yuuri rubbed his eyes with the balls of his hands and stared at the strangers in the room with wonder. They didn’t even notice him at first, their first instinct being to rush to Victor’s side and snuggle up to him as affectionately and carefully as possible. Yuuri watched attentively as Victor is suffocated by his family, something like fondness growing in his chest. He tried to make his way out of the room without calling too much attention to himself, but Lilia, a tall, slender, older woman, with the fire of hell burning in her eyes, stopped him before he could go anywhere. Yuuri’s eyes widened as he struggled to speak.

“So you’re the little man responsible for my Vitya’s fighting, huh?” Victor wanted to scream. Lilia let her accent come out, something she only did when she sought to intimidate whatever poor bastard dared to cross her. She turned back to Victor and said, “Not much, I don’t understand the fuss over this Поросенок.” Usually, Victor laughed along, but the poor bastard who crossed Lilia was Yuuri and that wasn’t going to end well for anyone.

“Excuse me?” Yuuri asked with an insulted tone to his voice. Victor said something in Russian and carried a spit fire conversation with the woman as Yuuri looked on with knit brows and squinting eyes. Victor let Lilia know that if it wasn’t for Yuuri’s quick thinking, his condition could have been much worse. She turned from the conversation and looked Yuuri up and down.

“Thank you.” She told him through clenched teeth. Yuuri accepted her thanks and turned to leave again.

“You're leaving?” Victor's voice came from behind him.

“Yeah, I uh, I don't want to intrude. Plus there's a five person limit to this room and right now I'm counting six.” He motioned to everyone and sighed. “I don't- there isn't room and there has to be room for- for safety reasons. So, I'll go. And uh, I'll check up on you tomorrow. Okay?” Victor watched Yuuri start to fumbling with his keys and phones, a reaction caused by both anxiety and
awkwardness. He ran over to Victor one more time and placed a gentle kiss on his forehead. It felt intimate, even with Victor's family there. Yuuri grew red and rushed out of the room. Before completely closing the hospital room door, he looked at the family and gave them a fickle smile. “Good night, it was nice to meet you all.”

“But you didn’t meet. You’re leaving before I can introduce you to anyone.” Victor thought as Yuri climbed into his lap. The small boy placed a hand over the place Yuuri had kissed him and tried to wipe it off, mumbling something about cooties. Victor laughed and gave him a kiss on the cheek, to which Yuri responded to with a giggle and screech.

“Well, he seems nice,” noted Georgi with a weak smile on his face. “And he’s just as cute as you said he’d be.”

The family sat in silence as Victor hummed along to a song Yuri had started singing. The motion activated lights in the room had turned on when everyone came in and the white walls and flooring of it were accentuated. It hurt Victor to see a room so bright, causing him to have to lay back down completely. He closed his eyes for a moment and waited. Seconds went by and he thought that maybe, just maybe, he wouldn’t be lectured this time.

“What in-” Mila, surprisingly, spit out like she had been holding in the thought for some time. Georgi took Yuri off Victor and rocked him to sleep as Mila and Lilia looked to each other, trying to figure out where to start. Victor groaned and rubbed his face with his hands anxiously. Mila looked at him like he was the most despicable human being alive then, taking forceful steps to his bedside. “How dare you act like this is somehow inconveniencing you?” Victor gestured to the hospital room and the iv in his arm.

“Why did you ever think you could win a fight?” Lilia interjected with a voice so gentle it freaked Victor out a little bit. They were all looking at him like he was a toddler. Much too impulsive and immature to take proper care of himself. “Your mother is worried sick, Victor. She wouldn’t stop crying when I told her.”

“What? You called her? Why?” Victor demanded, passing a hand through his hair in frustration. He cursed under his breath and shut his eyes, letting it sink in that more likely than not his mother was on board a plane right now, desperate to see her son.

“Because the words ‘head trauma’ aren’t things anyone should take lightly!” She exclaimed. “She’ll be here later tomorrow. And don’t look at me like that, you’re the one who decided to go and start a fight for the fucking fun of it.”

“And your little boyfriend didn’t give the hospital my information until an hour after you got here. You could have died and you would’ve been alone.” Mila crossed her arms and choked back tears. “Do you know how scary that is? To get a call in the middle of the night telling you that your cousin is in the hospital? I ripped Yuri out of bed and I just kept thinking that I was too late.” Georgi walked over to Mila and wrapped an arm around her shoulders.

“I’m sorry, alright? I just...there was a very disrespectful man in the bar and I didn’t mean to fight them all, but they were so vile-” He started in his native tongue.

“Them? More than one? Are you kidding me? Vitya-” Lilia started her thought and took a couple of seconds to collect her thoughts, tentatively holding the bridge of her nose. “She’s going to drag you back home. Are you aware of that? She’ll take one look at your face and drag you back and put you to work as a CEO for one of their companies…” She rambled on and on, pacing about the room and making Victor dizzy.
Victor looked at the wall in front of him and caught sight of himself in the reflection of the hospital window. He looked like hell and felt like shit, even with the painkillers in his system. There was an emptiness, a hole inside his heart, as he thought about going back home. Yes, he was a twenty-seven-year-old, grown man but his mother had a way of getting whatever she wanted, and if she wanted him back, he would certainly put up a fight, but it was most likely that he would end up returning with her.

Alyona Nikiforov was a special kind of woman. Warm and loving, yet strict and inspired, with a courageous character and perfect diction. She was the perfect anomaly of what it meant to be a mother, instead of acting as a best friend and comrade in the battle of life, for Victor. She was everything Victor had ever wanted to be. She represented a strength that was only able to be accumulated by the best the earth had to offer. His father was the same way, but flawed. Of course, his father’s faults in no way compared to Victor’s. Sometimes he wondered if he was really their son, not because they differed in appearance but because of how weak Victor had ended up being when it came to dealing with his emotions and stress. He cracked under any kind of pressure, and it took the littlest things to get under his skin. He felt so dissatisfied with how he had turned out. Letting countless lessons and training sessions go to waste, never quite being able to reach his potential in the great number of areas he ventured into. For most, he had the talent to be the greatest, but failed to meet the staminal requirements. Mentally, anyway.

Fencing, swimming, boxing, painting, photography, acting, piano… the list went on and on, tiled as all of his greatest failures.

“Victor, I can convince her to keep you here, but you have to help me, okay, my love?” Lilia put a delicate hand to his face and Victor felt young once again. Not untrusted, but protected and cared for. He kissed her hand and shook his head ‘okay’.

Each member fell into a deep slumber as the hours went by, but Victor couldn’t sleep. Off in the distance, he could see the sun rising, painting the New York City skyline with the mystical colors of blue and pink, erasing the darkness of the night before. He tried to feel something, anything. But his chest was empty that dawn. Void of sadness and happiness, and anger and love. It was as if he had been drained of any emotive abilities he held, exerting himself too much in his ventures of the night. It was like he was floating in a still sea, waiting and waiting for a wave to come by and sway him, even if it was just a little. All other feelings, Victor realized, he preferred over feeling nothing. It was always worst when he went numb because he knew there was something wrong, and usually knew what it was specifically, but it was as if he was helpless to do anything about it. He wanted to break away from the anguish of being a soulless, daunting, shell of a man just laying there peering out into the sky, hopelessly waiting for his sense of existence to come back.

Off to the side, cuddled up with Lilia, Mila, and Yuri, Georgi stirred awake and smiled at Victor. “You okay?” He mouthed not wanting to wake anyone up. Victor nodded with a gentle smile. The sun burned his eyes and reduced him to ashes. Rays of sunshine fought their way inside and illuminated his surroundings. For the first time, he saw clearly just how bruised his arms were, blotchy with red, purple, and blue. He felt his face drop as he did and immediately shook his head no. He couldn’t understand what was wrong with him as tears began to pool in his eyes. Maybe the morphine had worn off and he was just then feeling everything that had happened. He didn’t regret the fight or his injuries. It wasn’t that. He would do it a million more times if he had to.

That in itself was his problem.

Victor didn’t think of the consequences and the effect his actions could have on everyone around him. Time after time he wrecked his life and multiple members of his family were called in to help him. They did it selflessly and without question. They stopped their lives to watch over him and he
just did whatever he wanted.

He hurt himself. He picked fights. He purposefully didn't take his medications. He trusted too easily. He fell in love when he was lonely…. But they were there each time.

Victor knew he needed to change. That had been clear to him all of his life. He tried, he really did. Oh god, he tried so hard to be like his brothers. To put his parents at ease about his future and give them something to be proud of. But each time he'd revert back to his old behavior, sometimes worsening.

He wiped a couple of stray tears from his cheeks as Georgi looked at him with a sympathetic look in his eyes. Georgi tried to move and get up to hug him, but Victor motioned for him to stop. Both pairs of blue eyes shared a single stare as Victor tried his hardest to smile and fix himself up a bit. He gave Georgi a thumbs up and sank down into the bed, turning away from his cousin to pretend to sleep and that everything was okay.

____

Alyona Nikiforov arrived at Victor’s apartment in the afternoon with red eyes and three suitcases.

Much like Lilia, Alyona was tall and slender, but unlike her, she was broader around the shoulders with platinum hair and dazzling gray eyes. And she was loud, much to Victor’s dismay as he suffered through a migraine from the injuries he suffered. “Мой СЛАДКИЙ МАЛЫШ!” She slammed the door behind her and ran to Victor’s side where he was sitting on the couch. Victor couldn’t have braced himself enough for the impact his mother’s body made against his. He winced in pain as her hug squeezed whatever strength he had left in his body. She was practically absorbing him as she coated him in kisses and endearments. She called for Makkachin once she was done with him and placed herself on the floor with him.

Mila and Lilia, who were in the kitchen fixing lunch for everyone, came out and greeted Alyona with nervous smiles and tired eyes. Yuri, who was the apple of Alyona’s eye, was off in Victor’s room catching up on the sleep he missed the night before. She got up and hugged Lilia and Mila, crushing them as well. Georgi, who had been in charge of picking her up from the airport, pushed the rest of her luggage inside and knelt down to his knees to catch his breath. Makkachin scampered over to him and acted as a crouch almost until he was back on his feet.

They all took a seat in Victor’s living room, patiently waiting in silence for Alyona to announce Victor’s return to St. Petersburg. Shifty eyes roamed about the room as Alyona stroked Victor’s hair and held him a little too close.

“Vitya…” She whispered in a creamy voice. “Would you care to tell me what you were doing fighting in a bar on a Saturday night?” Victor tensed in her arms and realized that Alyona didn’t know, and would not know about Yuuri. Not then and not until he built a steady foundation in their relationship.

“Mama, I was just out having fun.” He avoided Lilia’s burning stare and kept his eyes on Mila, who looked terrified (she wasn’t close to Alyona and Victor’s mother was intimidating even to those close to her). “There were some guys making trouble and I had to step in.” She took hold of a lock of his hair and yanked down, softly at first, but then more forcefully.

“Why are you lying to me, my love?” Her voice was playful, but her eyes burned like ice and pierced his soul.

“Eh- I-I’m not. It’s the truth. They were trying to get rough with a boy at the bar and you know how
Papa taught me about chivalry and all that, so I took it upon myself to help him.” She looked into his eyes and let go of his hair.

“Oh…” She groaned, sadness overcoming her. “Look at your face. My poor baby, you’re too good for this world.” She coiled around him even more and placed her chin on top of his head. “You should come back home, sweetheart. I can’t bear to have you out of my sight.” Victor removed himself from her side and took a deep breath in.

“I appreciate your concern but I won’t be leaving.” He stood his ground and added an edge to his voice to make sure that she knew he was serious.

“You won’t even consider?” She gave him a hurt look and sat cross-legged on the couch. Lilia cleared her throat and egged Victor on.

“I will not. I’ve become quite accustomed to the city and it would be unprofessional to break off my engagement to the University.” He was being cold on purposeful. Professionalism was something his mother responded well to, she understood it best too. It was something Victor learned growing up following her around from meeting to meeting. “Alright?”

“I-” She started with a finger in the air.

“Victor you're too irresponsible to stay here. It's best if you go back with your mother. Run a company of theirs or whatnot. You'll be secure in your future back home.” Lilia stated with a monotonous voice. Victor stared at her in awe, confused in why she was taking his mother's side and not his. Alyona scoffed in amazement at Lilias words, promptly crossing her arms defiantly.

“Excuse me, Lilia?” Alyona asked, taken aback by her sister's comments.

“You know how he is. He's barely started working and he's already quitting. Plus, look at this place. There are boxes everywhere- And the dust! I'm surprised he didn't hurt himself here before he did out there.” Lilia tisked and turned her attention to her phone. Victor blinked, just as shocked as his mother.

“I'll have you know that Victor is completely competent enough to fend for himself here. As a matter of fact, he's earned everything he has.” She raised her eyebrows and closed her eyes like she was offended that Lilia would even think one of her kids wasn't prepared for the real world. “And Victor, if you must, you'll remain. But I will stay here for the time being.” She took his hand into hers and suddenly Victor understood exactly what Lilia had been playing at. Alyona, above everything, had raised her kids to be champions and leaders, not little babies who ran home to mommy when things got tough. Her pride as a mother ruled over her concerns.

Victor nodded and agreed with his mother, peering at Lilia with a knowing smile. For the time being, he would remain in the city and in the States. He hadn't fucked up badly enough to be taken back to the social cesspool that what St. Petersburg. It felt like an anvil had been lifted up from his chest, finally breathing freely for the first time since Lilia told him his mother would be coming.

“Well, don't look so happy Victor. I thought you'd want to leave this trash heap of a country anyway.” She went on to talk about the dying cultural art scene of the United States and how it compared to St. Petersburg's. Victor entertained his mother’s rambling as he looked out into his terrace, searching for a patch of sky to distract him.

Outside, the last flames of summer were dying with each minute that passed. Birds were chirping,
flowers remained in bloom, and children were playing but an unexpected, unforeseen metaphorical chill spread over Victor's body. The cold was coming for him, he could feel it. At any other time, he would have been filled with anguish for the autumnal and winter seasons, but this time, deep down, he knew there was a flame out there to help keep him warm.

Chapter End Notes

Would you guys be interested in me making a playlist of all of the songs I listen when I write? Let me know down in the comments along with any other thoughts you have:)!
i try my best and all that i can to hold tightly onto what's left in my hand

Chapter Summary

He looked at the wide eyes around the room (even the toddler in the room made an ‘ohhh’ face from Mila’s arms) and let out a puff of air. “Well, it's late, so I'll be going now.” He picked up the basket and gave Victor a kiss and hug goodbye, draping his arm around his shoulder and stood on his tippy toes, just to be petty. Yuuri left with a smile and vomit working its way up his throat.

Chapter Notes

Sorry, I took so long to update! Finals week drained me and me barely just now got to write again. Hopefully, you all enjoy this chapter even though it's so short. I wrote the start of this chapter to Addict with a Pen by twenty one pilots because that good ol' depression hit me hard randomly as I wrote it so now we ALL suffer.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Sunday came around, and Yuuri had yet to sleep, still shaken from the night before. The sun blinded him and any noises coming from in or out of the apartment made him crazy. It was the exhaustion. He knew that, and he should have forced himself to sleep, but it was impossible. Every time he closed his eyes, the image of Victor being beaten to the ground only to stand back up all too quickly to keep on fighting would pop into his head. The blood, the screams, the yanking at his body to keep him back from stopping it all. He kept thinking about what possible damages Victor could have taken in the fight and it made his heart clench. It was a telling sign of an oncoming anxiety attack. He hadn't had one in so long but the familiar knotting of his stomach was something he could never mistake for anything other than what it was.

It hit him when he entered his bedroom and sat down on his bed. The moments before it struck him he smiled at the ceiling and laid down, pondering on just what his life had become, but as soon as he did it was like a giant invisible hand had taken hold of his chest and squeezed him to the point of not being able to breathe. He spent what felt like an eternity trying to get his body back under his control, and even longer trying not to feel like a complete mess because it had been the first time in years that he had to go through it alone and it had taken him longer than it should have for him to feel like he wasn't near the brink of death.

He didn't know what to do with himself and so he didn't do anything. Yuuri just kept his eyes on the wall opposite his bed and tried to keep his mind as empty as possible. Sleep wasn't a reality for him, neither was companionship and so he filled the emptiness in his chest with nothingness and self-hatred. He wanted to call Phichit and ask him for advice, and maybe a hug or two. Yuuri wanted everything to go back to the way it was. Before they dated, before they kissed, back to when they were just friends. He wouldn't mind seeing him with Seung Gil if he could do things over. He would deal with his emotions properly and keep his mouth shut, and even if Phichit came onto him he’d refuse because their friendship was worth so much more than any romantic relationship they could
But life didn’t come with a redo button.

Yuuri felt so alone. The pain grew when his phone rang to signal the arrival of morning. Still having not moved from the spot on his bed, Yuuri sighed in desperation, feeling more weighed down than ever before. The rest of the day, he spent staring at the walls of his apartment from the different doorways inside.

He thought about calling Victor but could never quite conjure up the courage to execute the action. He knew that their conversation would feel empty due to his mood, and Victor deserved better after what he went through. He was a good guy, and Yuuri wanted to honor what he did for him, as stupid as it was. A call wouldn’t do him justice and neither would a text. To Yuuri, it felt like there wasn’t much he could do to thank him. Not in any way that didn’t end with him dating Victor. It wasn’t a horrible thought, but at the moment it seemed scary.

Victor really liked Yuuri, and that kind of terrified him. He could see it in his eyes from the moment they went on their first date just how much Victor was pining for him. At first, he didn’t understand. Yuuri was chubby and nearsighted and he smelled like books and forgot to do his laundry and, yet somehow a handsome, established, an intelligent Russian man was sending him cute photos of his dog and texting him at ungodly hours of the night. But then it hit him that things like that happened to him more often than anyone would ever expect. They were never as enamored with him as Victor was though, and that confused Yuuri in terms of how to deal with the situation. He thought about giving Victor some space and time to pace himself in his emotions, but Yuuri liked him too. Maybe not in the same arduous manner, or with the same intentions, but he was fun to have around and as endearing as the sun was certain to rise every morning. So he kept texting him with the intentions of just having a fling.

That is until everything with Phichit happened. After that all Yuuri wanted was to, in Guang Hong’s words, “get dicked down”. He felt quite shitty about that, seeing as Victor was practically willing to die for him at the hands of six men.

Yeah, Victor’s feelings for him ran too deep, too early and Yuuri didn’t know how to react to the level of attention he was receiving.

He turned on the television in the living room and covered himself in a blanket that was neatly folded and resting on the floor. The voices of bitchy housewives rang out through his walls as his eyes struggled to stay open for four hours straight. His first day of school was the next day and while he had everything ready to go, he couldn’t seem to shake the feeling that it was going to suck harder than anything had ever sucked before. He’d have to see all of his friends and make up lies as to why he hadn’t been in contact with any of them. The very thought of that exhausted him and made his bones ache. Then again, maybe the bruises on his body were deeper than they seemed. He told himself to suck it up, sure that whatever he was feeling was nothing compared to what Victor was going through. Upon having the thought he let out a damning “shit” and looked at the clock on his phone. The time was 5:27 pm exactly.

More than 12 hours had passed since he told Victor he would check in on him and he had failed to that incredibly simple task. Instead, he spent all day lounging around his apartment while a man lay alone in his apartment aching because of him. Yuuri whipped his phone out and contemplated asking Victor how he was doing then, but a better idea popped into his head. For the first time in weeks, Yuuri got up from the couch excitedly and headed to the kitchen determined to make the best meal Victor would ever have.

Pulling out a worn notecard with instructions on how to make his mom’s famous katsudon and
searching for the ingredients in his fridge, Yuuri hummed a happy tune and even shook his butt a little, excited to see Victor’s reaction. His heart swelled, rejuvenated and fluttering with love for both the scent of home to coat his home and Victor to get a glimpse of what Yuuri grew up like. He straightened out his glasses and got to work on Victor’s meal.

The rice went first and usually took a while to simmer, so Yuuri decided to pop into the shower for a quick rinse down of the past night’s mistakes and to contemplate what he would do if Victor’s family was there with him. Gazing at his feet, he decided he would have to make more katsudon than he expected. He fled the shower after five minutes and returned to the kitchen in a pair of gray sweatpants and an old t-shirt. He started over with larger quantities and worked on the small feast for about two and a half hours, sweat building around his face from all of the steam in the tiny kitchen. Once everything was finished and everything had been plated and packaged he sent Victor a message.

“Aren't you home? Can I see you?” It was simple and innocent and Yuuri hoped and prayed Victor saw it as such. No more than five minutes later he wrote,

“Yes. But you don’t have to come all the way out here. I’m fine just chatting.” Yuuri refused and asked for his home address. Victor, after two minutes of having the gray bubble with three dots pop up, finally sent him the address to his apartment and Yuuri practically choked as he recognized the affluent neighborhood he’d be driving his lower middle-class car into. With a smack of his lips, he pulled on his old class hoodie, packed everything into the picnic basket and made his way out to his car.

The drive to Victor’s was quiet and unnerving. Yuuri broke into a nervous sweat about both the food being good and Victor’s scary, tall, aunt as he zoomed past building after building, drawing nearer to his destination as the sun set behind him. He didn’t know how’d he greet them. He didn’t know how long he’d stay. He looked at the basket and thought of the extra bowl he’d packed in. With a smack of his lips, he pulled on his old class hoodie, packed everything into the picnic basket and made his way out to his car.

Victor’s building was tall, sleek, and elegant, much like himself and intimidated Yuuri as he watched the type of people who came and went from his car. With one deep breath, he pulled the picnic basket into his lap and exited his car with all of the confidence he could conjure. He walked into the building like he belonged there and casually passed by at least three supermodels he recognized from magazine covers without a word, simply cuddling his wicker basket full of katsudon. He made his way into an elevator labeled “Nikiforov” and punched in the 8 digit code Victor gave him. The entire way up, Yuuri couldn’t help but try to decipher just how much a penthouse in the building would be. The numbers in his head rose up into the millions and Yuuri felt like fainting because Victor was seemingly becoming more and more out of his league as time went on knowing him.

The elevator doors opened and revealed a tiny hallway that led to an ornate door with golden designs on the frame. Yuuri gulped as he pressed the doorbell and waited for an answer. Some shuffling could be heard on the other side as Yuuri swayed from one leg to the other, trying to ease the weight of the basket.

Victor opened the door with a grin a mile wide and ushered Yuuri inside eagerly.

The inside of Victor’s penthouse looked like some kind of a mix between modern times and the renaissance era. Art littered the walls and floors, some just pinned up with nails and others cased in intricate golden frames. The giant gray sectional sofa that covered most of his living room was
decorated with multi-colored pillows and throws and showed to be well worn, with pronounced creases all over it. Rugs were a big part of the decor as well, one laying on almost every piece of floor Yuuri could see. The high ceilings and open windows lit the room beautifully as the sun outside lowered itself further and further into the New York skyline. Yuuri gaped at the aesthetic beauty of the apartment and complimented Victor on his taste.

“Thanks,” A proud smile played on his lips as he invited Yuuri to sit on the couch. They sat awkwardly for a moment as Yuuri gazed about the room some more. Victor finally broke the silence by asking, “How are you feeling? You were pretty shaken up last night.” Yuuri shook his head free of his idle thoughts about Victor’s choice in curtains and adjusted himself to face him completely.

With a smile, he said, “I’m okay, but I’m here for you, so why don't you tell me.” Yuuri nestled into himself and smiled fondly. Victor sat back and folded his hands over his chest. His face was still swollen and red, with a slight sprinkling of purple over his left eye. The smirk on his lips accentuated the gash on his top lips and made him look like some kind of macabre Shakespearean character. He looked like death but goddamnit, he was still one of the most attractive people Yuuri had ever seen.

“I'm doing okay, still kinda sore.” His voice was whispered and groggy like he had just woken up. Maybe he had just woken up because his hair was tousled and his clothing couldn't have been something Victor wore just to lounge around. Or maybe Yuuri's perception of who Victor was when he wasn't wooing him was completely warped. “I'm sorry we didn't get to dance longer. Or talk. Everything got really messed up and I can't apologize enough for making you go through that.”

“It's okay, Victor. It was my fault anyway. I knew how crazy that place could get and I suggested we went anyway and-”

“No, no. It's not your fault. I should have just left everything be-” Victor etched in.

“Well if we hadn't been there none of this would have happened,” Yuuri motioned to Victor's tattered state and laughed incredulously. Victor shook his head and rubbed his temples.

“Let’s uh- let's agree to disagree, okay?” Yuuri nodded and they sighed in unison. The room filled with a dusty orange color as the sun lived its last moments for the day. Dusk was upon them, present like it belonged there in the room, breaking through their thick silence, egging them on in their conversation.

They both spoke at the same time and closed them mouths to let the other speak. Yuuri gave Victor the floor and rubbed the nape of his neck, embarrassed.

“So, you went to NYU? That's so cool, I'm teaching there now. What class were you?”

“This year's. I'm graduating in the winter, hopefully. You're uh- you're teaching there? You're a professor?” Yuuri let out a shaky laugh and held his head in his hands like a madman. “Oh boy. That is not good.” He took off his glasses and wiped them down with the sleeve of his hoodie.

“No, I reckon it won't look good if it ever got out that we're involved but it's not like you'll be in my class. Right?” Victor cocked an eyebrow and tried to laugh off the situation.

“I don't think so, I didn't see your name on my schedule at all but-”

“So we should be alright. Yakov didn't say much about student/teacher relationships but I'm sure I could ask him-” Victor kept on talking about the regulations on the different types of relationships and how they were to be disclosed both to and on campus and Yuuri started to feel like everything had spiraled far too out of control. He took a deep breath in and placed his hands flat on his lap.
“Wait, Victor. I actually wanted to talk to you about us. Um… I don't think we- I mean, I like you, I do. It's just...we're moving really quickly with this and I don’t think we’re on the same page in terms of what we want out of this.” An absent look overcame Victor’s face as Yuuri finished his sentence, drowning out his eyes which were sparkling and full of light just moments before. Yuuri felt something in his chest that he could only describe as the feeling he felt when he accidentally stepped on his dog’s tail as a kid. He caved into himself in guilt, sorry for having been the cause for the frown on Victor’s face. Yuuri reached over to Victor and placed a warm hand on Victor’s ridiculously cold one. “Um, it’s not to say that I’m not attracted to you because I am. I think I’ve made that clear, but it’s moving a little too fast. I would like to be friends and…” Yuuri thought carefully about what he’d say next because it could either make or break them. Victor’s ears started to perk up as he looked deeply into Yuuri’s eyes. Yuuri gulped and struggled to speak clearly. “Eh-uh...um, I’d like to be friends for the time being and see where that takes us.” Victor smiled and enveloped Yuuri’s tiny hand into both of his, clasping down on them coyly.

“I’d like that very much.” He brought Yuuri’s hand up to his lips and planted a playful kiss on his knuckles. Yuuri let the pleasant smile adorned on his face fall to the floor and pulled his hand away. “No, no more of that. Friends don’t do that,” Yuuri protested. He held up a finger to ward off anymore more kisses from Victor and laughed when Victor pouted. They laughed a bit and settled into the slightly more comfortable aura of the apartment. Yuuri inhaled and remembered the katsudon, which was exuding its scent out of the basket. “Oh, um. I made you dinner. For both you and your family. Here.” He dragged the basket closer to them and opened it to reveal each bowl. Victor made an “mmm” sound and rubbed his hands together as Yuuri picked up a bowl from the top and placed it in front of Victor. He retrieved a packet of wooden chopsticks from the basket as well and handed them to Victor, who accepted them graciously. Victor snapped them apart, removed the lid and dove in, taking seconds to inhale the savory aroma of the pork, rice, and egg. “It’s my mother’s special recipe. It always makes me feel better and I was hoping it would do that for you too,” Yuuri explained sheepishly.

“Vkusno!” was the first thing out of Victor’s mouth after taking his first bite. Yuuri felt warm inside watching him eat, happy that his hard work was the reason Victor looked so happy. They shared friendly smiles until Yuuri asked where he could place the rest of the bowls for his family. Victor told him he could leave them on the dining table in near the kitchen. Yuuri nodded and go up from the couch to do so.

He gently placed them each in a row and then felt it would be better stack the five in pairs. Then he thought about the fact that Victor had a giant dog with a supposed knack for getting into anything that smelled even remotely of food. He set them into a square on the table and placed the fifth one at the top of it. He thought about Makkachin again as he placed the chopsticks down on each prospective container. “Hey, where’s your dog?” Were the last words out of his mouth before Victor’s family, as well as Makkachin and one other, entered carrying bags full of home care goods and bath towels. Yuuri flipped around to face them at the sound of the opening door and was pinned to the table by their strangely intimidating presence. Victor tried to get up as quickly as possible but Makkachin got to him before Victor even got the chance to take a step forward.

The giant, furry goofball would have knocked him over if it weren’t for the table behind him. Yuuri let his guard down and kneeled to pet the dog, before composing himself and extending his hand out to greet everyone. The new addition to Victor’s family, a woman in her mid to early fifties who looked too much like Victor to not be his mother took his hand in hers and shook it delicately with a stern ‘hello’. “Hi, uh...I’m Yuuri. You must be Victor’s mother?” He asked. It was a shot in the dark, but the chances that he would be wrong were slim. He waited for her to correct him but she never did, and instead introduced herself.
“You can call me Alyona. It’s nice to meet you.” Her English was broken, but not much worse than his own parents so he had no trouble in understanding her. She gave him a cool but welcoming smile and kissed him on both cheeks as Victor took her side. Yuuri bit his lip and anxiously scratched his forehead.

“Hello everyone.” He remembered the rest of Victor’s family behind them and gave them a shy wave. A nod, a smile, a wave of small fingers, and a verbal ‘hi’ greeted him as he stepped away from the table.

“So, how do you know our Vitya?” Alyona questioned as she wrapped an arm around her son’s waist.

“Um, we... are friends,” Yuuri told her with a smile. He heard a snort from one of Victor’s cousins and turned a bright shade of pink. “Well, it’s getting late. I think I should-”

“So, how do you know our Vitya?” Alyona questioned as she wrapped an arm around her son’s waist.

“Um, we... are friends,” Yuuri told her with a smile. He heard a snort from one of Victor’s cousins and turned a bright shade of pink. “Well, it’s getting late. I think I should-”

“And what’s this?” Alyona walked over to the table and picked up one of the containers, inspecting the contents without opening it.

“I- um, I made Victor- and all of you- a dish my mother made for me when- Uh, it's comfort food.” Yuuri scrambled to piece his thoughts together. He absolutely hated meeting new people, under any kind of circumstances, and the fact that everyone in the room was absolutely beautiful and dressed in stylish blouses and expensive shoes only added to the shit fire that was his life. “It’s called katsudon. It always makes me feel better and I thought it would help him.”

“How considerate. But, the fat content of this must be awful. I understand it makes you feel better but food isn’t love, honey. Vitya needs cuddles and pain killers, not diabetes in a bowl.” Yuuri gulped and ran a hand through his hair.

“Mama, come on,” Victor pleaded as she placed the bowl back down onto the table. Yuuri, in that moment, was happy he and Victor decided to be just friends. “With a mother like that” Yuuri thought, “No wonder Victor’s single.”

“Well, he’s already eaten it so not much we can do about that now.” Yuuri realized it was disrespectful but he didn’t tolerate being made a fool of. It just wasn’t in his character to take shit from people he didn't know. Especially clingy mothers who had no right to insult the very essence of his being: katsudon.

He looked at the wide eyes around the room (even the toddler in the room made an ‘ohhh’ face from Mila’s arms) and let out a puff of air. “Well, it’s late, so I’ll be going now.” He picked up the basket and gave Victor a kiss and hug goodbye, draping his arm around his shoulder and stood on his tippy toes. Yuuri left with a smile and vomit working its way up his throat.

____

Yuuri told himself that he needed to reinvent himself again as he drove back home. He plugged his phone into the spare aux cord he kept in his car and dialed his psychiatrist, Dr. Naomi. He had been seeing her since his first year of college and stopped each time he felt even remotely better. Therapy was his crutch. It was the one place he could go and vent when things got tough and no knew one else would understand. He had never gone to her voluntarily or with any other intentions than to change his prescription.

“Yuuri? To what do I owe the pleasure? Everything okay?” She answered. He tapped his fingers against the steering wheel and stared up at the red light ahead of him.
“Eh… it’s been good.” Yuuri spoke happily as he watched the clouds above him start to disappear into the darkness of the sky. He reminded himself about what he was calling about and cleared his throat. “Actually, that’s a lie. Things got really messed up and now I’d like to heal. Like, properly ’cuz I tried to do it on my own and I almost killed a man.” Silence follows from the other line and Yuuri bites his lip.

“Should I be calling the police?” She asked, the sound of rustling papers carrying over with her voice. Yuuri cursed and continued driving when the light turned green.

“What? No.” He rubbed his forehead with trembling fingers. “Do you remember when you told me that my self-destructive tendencies didn’t hurt just me? And that if the pain they caused me wasn’t enough to get me to stop, the pain it caused others should? Well, it has and I want help…to stop…being… so… ridiculous.” He took his time in speaking because it hurt him to admit just how badly he treated the people around him in trying to make himself feel better. He wanted to hurt less when he heard loud noises and accept change gradually, not just rush into just to brush over the pain. He wanted to be healthy in every aspect of his life. He wanted to love without a doubt and give himself fully to those who wanted him. He wanted to forget haunted memories and sleep like he looked forward to every day. Yuuri wanted all of these things and for the first time in a long time, he felt like he could accomplish them. “When can I come in?”

“I have…let me have a look.” She whistled while Yuuri waited. “Ah, here we are. I have a free slot available next week, on Wednesday at 9 am. It’s a little early in the morning but I’ll be there if you are.” Yuuri told her he’d take it and thanked her for her time. “Yuuri, just to put your mind at ease until then… You’ve been through some rough things in life. Those tendencies, as bad as they are, have helped and you shouldn’t feel completely awful about that. You’re just trying to stay afloat, it’s instinct. So, don’t beat yourself over it. Okay?” Yuuri snorted and promised her he would try. They said their goodbye’s and Yuuri kept on driving.

“Yuuri?” Guang Hong dragged out his names lazily as he rapped on Yuuri’s apartment door. Yuuri rolled his eyes from where he was standing down the hall from his friend and proceeded on down the hall, deciding he had ignored him long enough.

“What’s up, asshole?” He greeted with a smile, pulling out his keys from the pouch of his hoodie. Guang Hong screamed when Yuuri bumped him to the side to get access to the door. “Why are you harassing my door?” As soon as Guang Hong met his gaze he threw himself at Yuuri like a lion after its prey.

“Oh thank god! You’re still alive.” Guang Hong kissed his cheek and forced him into a hug that was much too tight to be comforting to either of them. Yuuri giggled uncomfortably and pried Guang Hong from his body, staggering back with his basket in hand.

“I don’t know,” His voice turned sheepish as he took a seat in Yuuri’s living room and laid back on the couch, looking to the ceiling for a way to move the conversation. Yuuri put down the basket and stood next to the couch, watching how easily Guang Hong slipped into the couch crease he and all of his friends had created. His heart swelled and realized just how much he hated being without them. Guang Hong reached for his hand, recognizing the familiar love in his eyes, and held it as gingerly as he could. “I missed those big, doe eyes of yours.”

Yuuri smiled and took the seat next to him. “I have- I mean it’s only been a week, but- it’s just- I feel
like it’s been five years since I last saw you.” His voice expressed just how truly exhausted he felt on
the inside. “I reinvented myself like five times and I think I actually drank my weight in vodka. I
haven’t been sleeping properly- and -and I feel so guilty all the time. For everything. For ghosting
you guys, for breaking up Phichit and Seung Gil, for taking my anger out on everyone that crosses
my path- it has been rough. So very rough.” Yuuri took in a deep intake of air and reached up to
wipe away a couple of stray tears. “I just wanna say I’m sorry, ‘cuz you’re all the best friends I’ve
ever had and I’ve been a dick for so long-” His voice drifted off into unintelligible moaning and
grumbles as Guang Hong brought Yuuri’s face to his chest to attempt consolation.

“Yuuri, come on. Don’t cry.” Guang Hong pleaded, fighting back a lump in his throat. They held
each other until Yuuri finished crying and then proceeded to sit in silence, still in each other’s arms.

“Did Phichit tell you what happened?” Yuuri asked out of the blue. Guang Hong hummed a ‘yes’
but didn’t say much else. “How is he?”

“How do you think?” Guang Hong sighed, flashing back to all of the long talks he had had with
Phichit. Hours and hours of listening to his dissertation of the situation between him and Yuuri. “He
lost his best friend and he hates himself for trying to pull what he did on you. Yuuri, I want the best
for both of you, so please, I’m begging you… sit down and talk things out with him. Please.” He
rested his chin on top of Yuuri’s head and closed his eyes. Yuuri looked off into the darkness of the
hallway that led to their bedrooms. His mind took him back to pillow fights with Phichit and sheet
masks in their pajamas. Burnt toast and roast dinners. Dirty laundry mixed in with the clean. Bright
and gleaming smiles early in the morning no matter what they day had in store for them.

“I will. Not right now, I’m a little messed up in the head currently, but someday. We’ll patch things
up and be like we used to be.” An immense pressure lifted itself from his shoulders because he meant
it. Whether it be romantic or not, Yuuri wanted to fix things with Phichit and gain back the once
stable relationship they had in the past. He would move on and find a nice man to settle down with.
He’d teach and retire at seventy then travel the world with his spouse. No kids, no commitments. “I
just need some time, and I’m sure he does too. But I’ll still hang out with you and Leo and Yuko and
everyone else. Just not Phichit, for now.”

“Ohkay, that’s reasonable.” Guang Hong bumped his shoulder and asked Yuuri to sit up. He turned to
him with a smile and Yuuri knit his eyebrows. “So, all of this aside, what have you been doing
without us making you go out clubbing?” Yuuri blushed and placed a hand over his eyes. “What? Is
it that bad?”

“I started running.” Yuuri blurted out, flustered and scared to bring Victor up at all. Guang Hong
gave him a suspecting look and crossed his arms. “A-and I rearranged my room and washed all of
my clothes and...and I finally got around to listening to Frank Ocean. That’s it, pretty much.”
“I can’t believe you’d keep things from me.” Guang Hong settled back into the sofa and gave Yuuri
a disappointed look. Yuuri felt like a deer caught in headlights. On one hand, he wanted to tell
Guang Hong everything that happened to him, all of the drinking, the not sleeping, the fighting and
the not eating properly, but on the other it would just make him worry about Yuuri and they would
all start taking shifts to be with him again, like the last time things got bad for him. Yuuri started to
panic, trying to think of something he could tell him because Guang Hong was already going on
about how much weight he’d already dropped and there was a steely look in his eye as his eyes
moved over Yuuri.

“You caught me,” Yuuri laughed and smacked his palms on his lap to make it more convincing. “I
went on another date with Victor last night. Turns out!” He was screaming at that point, trying to
play up the situation. “He’s a professor at NYU. So, we decided to just be friends.” Yuuri left it at
that. He didn’t mention the promise he made of being more than friends with Victor in the future. He
thought it would just jinx him, so he kept the deadly butterflies in his stomach to himself and glazed over their relationship with ease and nonchalance. There was no point in making a big fuss over someone who he wasn't ready to love like they deserved. Yuuri had to get better before anything like that happened between them.

“Was it mutual or did you make him agree to it?” Yuuri rolled his eyes. Guang Hong tried to convince Yuuri to keep seeing Victor and told him about all of the pros of dating a professor for the university. As they spoke, a shadow moved across Yuuri’s apartment as the sun declared its final goodbye. Come the next morning things would be better. Yuuri had his friends again, minus one and added another. Things were perfectly in balance, aligned for him to make the most of his life. Things would be better from then on. They had to be.

Chapter End Notes

PLEASE PLEASE PLEASE! Leave a comment. It's one of the only ways I know to keep writing. Let me know what you think :)!!
Chapter Summary

A little wave of nausea passed through his body. Victor felt like it was his first day of school all over again. It scared him, even if he was a hundred pounds heavier and had cut his hair up to an “acceptable” length. He touched the short strands of silver, just to make sure he was right and no longer a target. Reverting back to an anxious 13-year-old, Victor shut his eyes tight to ward off loose tears and searched blindly for the comfort of his loyal companion.

Chapter Notes

Pluto- Sleeping At Last

“Take it that was the boy you got pummeled half to death for?” Alyona popped open a bowl of katsudon, speaking fatuously, inviting everyone else to take a seat at the table with her. She sat down at the head of the table, Victor taking the seat to her right. He helped pass around the rest of the plastic bowls and cleared his throat as he did. He placed a tiny bowl in front of Yuri’s high chair and took notice that Yuuri had taken the time to cut the pieces of pork in that bowl in particular smaller than the rest. Waves of tingles flowed through his heart with every pulse as he wondered what he had done to deserve someone like Yuuri in his life.

“In my defense, I would have done that for anyone. Also, we really are just friends.” He kept a cool and collected tone as eyes around the room exchanged glances with each other, specifically Lilia and Alyona.

“Oh, Victor stop it. I could see it in your eyes the moment I walked in. Don’t pretend.” Alyona dismissed his negation with a swift wave of her hand, sighing deeply. “You’re definitely your father’s son. He had a thing for women who could put him in his place and it seems you do too. That Yuuri’s a little spit fire, hm?” Victor tried to stop a smile from forming on his face as his mother gleamed at him with a mix of pride and fondness.

“Once again, Mama, we’re not involved.” He ran a hand through his hair and helped Yuri into his high chair. A swarm of butterflies collected in his stomach, tickling him a bright shade of pink, as Mila shot him a smile. He tried to remind himself about what Yuuri had told him in regard to their relationship. The words ‘just friends’ made his skin crawl, but he kept it below the surface, right with every other negative emotion he’d been fighting all his life. He could win Yuuri over, that was for certain. Victor would just have to calm himself down whenever they saw each other and give Yuuri the time he requested. The idea that they would someday be able to start a relationship wasn’t farfetched; it was as real a possibility as Victor was Russian. He’d just have to stay close to him for as long as was needed. With that thought in mind, he turned to his mother and offered her a pair of chopsticks. She took them with a smile and dug into her food.
“He’s a bit snippy,” She continued with a piece of pork in her mouth. “But he’s a great cook. I’m going to have to run six miles just to burn this off.” Once she started to eat, the others did as well.

Victor kept himself at the table as they discussed what they would be up to the following week. The following day would be Victor’s first day and oddly enough, he was felt quite tranquil about that fact. He wasn’t sure how he’d explain the bruised and busted lip to his students, but he doubted any of them would even try to question him on the first day of school.

Georgi was the first to leave, and after a movie cuddled up against Alyona, Mila and Yuri left as well. Alyona asked for Lilia to stay longer than she planned to just to catch up. Victor took that time to give Makkachin a bath and then himself. Makkachin would be accompanying him to his lectures every day until the end of the academic school year, and first impressions were incredibly important to both him and his owner.

When the clock struck nine, Victor received a text message from Yuuri apologizing for the way in which he spoke to his mother earlier in the afternoon. Victor let his mother in on the apology when she marched in behind him, complaining about the water pressure of the shower.

“Yuuri wants you to know he’s sorry for speaking to you how he did earlier.” Victor smiled down at his phone and kept his eyes on the screen as he replied. He missed his mother staring at him from across the living room with relief and happiness in her eyes as her youngest son smiled down at his phone with so much love on his face that cartoon hearts could have started to pop up around him. She collected her hair into a loose ponytail and folded her arms across her chest.

“Tell him it’s fine, just to not do it ever again.” She leaned against the wall next to the television, fondness growing in her chest. Victor looked like a teenager again, when he’d have periods of complete and total elation. She remembered him not having many moments like that when he was younger. It hurt her to think of it back then and it still pained her chest to think of it in present time. A part of her blamed herself for not helping him sooner, for not sending him off to Paris where he was free to celebrate and find himself without the judgmental and watchful eyes of Russian elites. She wondered how Victor’s life would have been different if she had just let him leave her side a tad bit earlier. “Tell him I’m sorry as well and that the katdong was delicious.”

“It’s called katsudon, Mama.” Victor told her, finally looking up with an amused look in his eyes. She crinkled her nose at him to show that she was mocking him and Victor laughed, slightly waking a sleeping Makkachin near the terrace entrance.

“I think you should be getting to sleep, Vitya. You have a big day tomorrow.” Victor watched her disappear into the hallway leading to the guest rooms and bathroom with a soft, loving goodnight. Victor headed his mother’s advice and made his way upstairs into his bedroom, calling Makkachin up with him.

The night treated him well, laying him into a deep slumber almost immediately. His aching body almost melted into the plushness of the mattress as closed his eyes and cuddled Makkachin close to him. It felt good not to have to move and to finally let himself be drawn out into a state of complete unconsciousness. The humming of the street below him drowned out his thoughts and the softness of Makkachin’s fur eased his nerves. Victor promised himself he’d face the next day with positivity and not doubt his abilities to teach others about what he’d taken the time and care to learn for the majority of his adult life.

Things would be better...calmer. They would flow more easily and allow him to rest easy. That was what he wanted and all he hoped for.
The sound of the world in motion woke Victor up in a haze of both fear and confusion as Makkachin licked at his face for him to take him out on his morning walk. He groaned as the cars and people of New York City made it clear to him that the day had begun and sleep was no longer an escape from the uneasy feeling in his stomach. Despite the air conditioning in his penthouse, the air still felt hot and sticky, something it had not been since mid-July that summer. He wiped off tiny beads of sweat from his forehead and top lip and he swung a foot over the left side of his head and sighed, realizing that despite his first class being at 12 in the afternoon, he would have to show up to go over every rule and regulation of the university once again with Dr. Feltsman, director of the arts department and Lilia’s ex-husband.

A little wave of nausea passed through his body. Victor felt like it was his first day of school all over again. It scared him, even if he was a hundred pounds heavier and had cut his hair up to an “acceptable” length. He touched the short strands of silver, just to make sure he was right and no longer a target. Reverting back to an anxious 13-year-old, Victor shut his eyes tight to ward off loose tears and searched blindly for the comfort of his loyal companion.

Makkachin scampered over to him excitedly as if telling him “it's okay! I'm right here and I love you!”. That's what Victor liked to think went through his mind when things got rough for him, anyway.

So much time had passed since all those things had happened to him. Years and years had gone by yet he still felt too compromised and wounded to even try to move on and try to grow his hair out again. Even in America, even as a grown man, even with the times being as they were… he felt like doing any of the things he used to enjoy would place a bullseye on his back. Dating men openly… that was so much more different than being himself. It was common and some people, even back home, had come to terms with the fact that some people were gay and that didn't make them any less human, but growing one's hair out and painting one's nails was something men shouldn't do. His own parents took time in accepting that but even once they did, Victor's father insisted he cut his hair to stop the teasing and violence. Victor obliged, scared for himself and the image his family held in society.

He valued that more than he cared for his hair, but didn't know what that said about him since he felt his hair was a part of him. He was able to betray it, chopping it all off by his lonesome as a teen.

It had been quite the break down when he did it. He was fifteen with hair more long and beautiful than anyone else at his preparatory school, with dazzling blue eyes and lashes to match. Victor had snuck down into his mother's art room one Sunday night and stolen a pair of scissors from her sewing kit. He hid in the safety of his bathroom, scrawny and cold because winter had just started and their house was so old the furnace was barely able to heat every room. The lights in the bathroom were bright and everything was quiet as he faced himself in the mirror with the sharp, albeit worn, black and grey metal scissors. Life felt frozen for him, like all that existed were him, the scissors, and the ominous sound of their antique grandfather clock ticking away the minutes until three in the morning with him. He dared himself to cut for some time, too scared each one.

His hair was his livelihood. It was what represented him best at that age, something that connected him to his mother's family, who were nothing more than pictures on the walls and stories he could only memorize. His mother's parents and sisters had perished in a fire when they were young, leaving his mother an orphan for ten years or so, until she found Victor's father and became his wife. He was the only Nikiforov child not born with his father's looks, instead inheriting his mother's eyes, face, build, and most importantly, her hair. He knew how important those things were for her. Part of that being the reason it was so hard for him to cut away all 20 inches of luscious silver locks.

He loved the way her eyes shined when she looked at his hair, and how close he felt to her when
she'd brush and braid it, but he detested the absolute pain in her eyes when he came home bruised, or
crying, or so disheveled he'd have to miss days at a time from school just to put himself back
together.

Those were the thoughts that drove him to make the first silent cut that night: the pain in his mother's
eyes. The fire of anguish in his chest from that first cute drove him to make the next and the next and
the next and the next until there were no more beautiful ringlets of silver to vanquish from his head.
He styled, or tried to style, an undercut and ran hot water over his head, lowering his head down to
the sink and faucet. When Victor emerged from the scalding waters he looked into the mirror and
saw nothing. He might as well have been a caricature of himself, empty and boring, just like
everyone else.

When his mother saw him that next morning all she could do was kiss the top of his head and ask
him what Victor wanted for breakfast. The answer that morning was normal, but as both his parents
and brothers noticed, nothing about Victor was ever normal. He was exuberant and dreamy and
nothing he ever said was lackluster. He had been made over overnight, as had his hair.

Victor tried to smile then, in present time, as he recalled how awful he felt every day after that. It was
a feeling worse than any bullies could administer to him. It was worse than crying and feeling like an
outcast. At least then he knew the causes of his pain. But as a kid, how could he know he felt so bad
because he had traded an immense part of himself for peace and social acceptance?

A voice called from downstairs telling Victor to get ready for the day ahead. He looked down at
Makkachin and thanked him for being such a good dog, promising a vanilla cone from the campus
store during their first break at school. He headed off to his bathroom and began to groom himself
into something that didn't look like a blushing corpse.

Victor and Makkachin walked through union square, basking in the shimmering sun above them,
which coated everything in an ever evolving heat and light too delicate and beautiful to describe.

He noted the states he was attracting from people of all kinds as he made his way to the building his
class would be held in. Victor had tried to keep his outfit as minimal as possible donning grey slacks
and a breezy navy blue linen top. His satchel hung from his shoulder and dark sunglasses covered his
face. He looked professional, even if his outfits cost just as much as the heavy books students all
around him seemed to be carrying. Makkachin trotted alongside him wearing his favorite collar- a
blue bedazzled number with gold flowers stitched in. They must've been quite the sight, but Victor
didn't mind. He was a fan of attention just as long as it was the right kind.

He kept on walking until he spotted Yakov who was stood against the building he was head to,
angrily glancing at his watch and impatiently tapping his foot. Victor offered him an apologetic smile
and waved when they locked eyes. Yakov brought a hand up to his eyes and sighed, poking down at
his shoes in disappointment. Victor hurried in reaching him, not wanting to keep him waiting longer
than he already had.

“Hi, I'm sorry I took so long in getting here. Traffic was awful and Makkachin took longer than
usual to get ready today. Have you been waiting long?” Victor explained himself, jokingly, and gave
Yakov a sincere smile of apology.
““What happened to your face?” Yakov questioned him with an edge to his voice.

“Well, you see I tried to- it’s a funny story actually-” Victor struggled in his speech, debating
whether or not to tell the truth.
“It doesn’t matter,” Yakov rolled his eyes and started up the stairs. “Come on then, Nikiforov. Let me show you to your room. We’ve still got to complete your payroll packet.” Victor and Makkachin followed Yakov inside, relishing in the air conditioning climbing into an elevator with the cranky old man.

They walked down a long, well lit hallway with room doors on both sides. A few students and even some professors stopped to greet Yakov and introduce themselves to Victor. Mostly everyone was inviting, shaking his hand and smiling at him as they passed and made their way to their own destinations, but a few gave him cold gazes and even ignored, but Victor didn’t let that affect him too much, because they seemed to treat Yakov the same way.

No one questioned Makkachin or even commented on him, but they did pet the dog fondly as they stopped to talk with people. Makkachin, a good boy with a duty to his owner and love of his life, stayed humbly by Victor’s side and barely reacted to the cuddles so graciously being offered to him.

They finally arrived at Victor’s room, number 317, which resided in a remodeled biology lab with large open windows and gigantic blackboards surrounding the room on almost all sides. A smart board was placed at the front of the room next to a podium and desk. The walls were bare and the desks scattered but Victor liked the ambiance nonetheless.

He set down his satchel on one of the tables and took a seat at the front of the classroom. It was weird for him to be on the other side for the first time.

Yakov pulled out a stack of papers from his own bag, as well as a black pen. They discussed everything that needed to be gone over and signed everything that needed to be signed. Yakov showed Victor how to start up and connect his laptop to the smartboard, directed him to where the bathrooms were, went over the fire exits and told him that there were water fountains down the hall. “For the dog, or for you. It can get hot in here and the last thing we need is a lawsuit.” Victor thanked him and took a deep breath in. “Are you nervous?”

“Yes, naturally. But I can handle it.” Victor tried to give him a reassuring smile, relaxing back into the swivel chair he was in.

“It’s not too much?” Yakov persisted. Victor rolled his eyes then.

“I’ll be fine. Now, get going to your own class. I have things to prepare.” Victor and Makkachin walked Yakov to the door and closed it behind him. He had at least fifteen minutes to prepare until people started to arrive and he was going to spend every single one making sure everything was good for him to go on and start off the semester. He finished earlier than he had expected and walked off back outside to give Makkachin one last opportunity to relieve himself and for Victor to ease the anxious feeling cradled in his chest.

They paced around union square, headphones plugged into Victor’s ears blasting the most calming songs he could think of. He hummed along to the sleepy tune of his favorite at the moment, dreamily making his way back to his class.

When he arrived, students were already sitting inside, paper and pencil sprawled out before them, eager to learn. He walked in and greeted everyone with the brightest smile he could conjure, Makkachin emulating the same happy vibe. The students looked at him like he was just some random crazy man with a large poodle walking into their class until they saw him reach for the power button for the projector. They gave each other doubtful looks, some even motioning to the bruises on his face. Makkachin seemed to be the only thing to make anyone even remotely excited to be taught by someone as young as Victor. They were all probably wondering why he had the dog, but that was a mystery they would have to live with because Victor wasn’t planning to open up like
that to people he would only know for six weeks tops.

He took a seat at his desk and stared out into the small group of students in his class. Victor counted fifteen faces and took a deep breath in, then sighed in relief. Fifteen people... that wasn’t so bad. He could teach fifteen twenty-somethings no problem.

“Holy fucking shit.” His eyes darted to the doorway, where he found two of Yuuri’s friends standing, mouths agape. A dumbfounded Phichit was the first person he met eyes with, followed by Lindor (Leno? Victor wasn’t positive on his name) who looked more at ease with seeing Victor in the room. “I can’t believe you were telling the truth.” Phichit whispered as they walked in with their heads down and sat in the very back of the room, continuing to avoid Victor’s gaze.

With pursed lips, he welcomed everyone to the class and started up the powerpoint he constructed that took an in-depth look at the syllabus and the class. He reminded everyone that they could print off the official syllabus from their online school account and began to read of and explain each slide. Makkachin took a seat near Victor’s feet and remained vigilant with every second that passed. Victor didn’t feel on edge or weighed down with stress and exhaustion. As a matter of fact, he felt quite airy and content as he read through everything without so much as a stutter, even managing to throw in a well-received joke every now and then.

He ended the presentation by giving them his ‘office’ hours and letting them know what email they could use to reach him. “I’m here to answer any questions for you guys. No matter how big or how small, I will not deny you an answer. If you ever need extra time, or a break from class, I won’t go crazy. Just let me know, alright? I know how stressful this can all be, so I’ll understand.” With a delighted clap of his hands, he asked, “So, any questions?”

A lone tan arm shot up from the back and Victor was tempted to dismiss the class then and there. Instead, he held his ground and called on Phichit. “Yes?” he asked as cordially as possible. He still hadn’t forgotten or forgiven him for the way in which he treated Victor when they first met, but he was his instructor now, so their relationship had to be at least be civil.

“Um, ya, what happened to your face?” A devious smile spread on Phichit’s face like Victor had spread his avocado on his toast that morning. The people at the front shared uncertain glances with each other and looked to Victor for an answer. Makkachin perked up in sensing Victor’s heightened stress, yawning as he crept closer to him and placed his head on Victor’s lap.

“I actually don’t think-” Victor started with a nervous chuckle.

“Oh, c’mon. You said we could ask you anything.” Phichit challenged him and his friend looked like he wanted the world to swallow them both whole.

Victor mentally called Phichit every bad name he could think of in all four languages that he knew and took a deep breath. He mauled over an answer, trying to formulate something that would make sense, even if it was a lie. Seventeen pairs of eyes looked to him as he tried to think of something to say. Finally, he decided on the truth. “I’m gonna try to relate this to mythology alright?” Victor joked and covered his eyes with his hand, flabbergasted that he was actually doing this. “We’ve all seen Hercules the Disney movie right? Okay, good. So picture this, I’m on a date with the most beautiful man I’ve ever seen and we’re having fun and we’re dancing and he looks so ethereal- I mean absolutely out of this world- and we’re vibing. Suddenly this giant man comes up to him and he’s your typical overcompensating macho man so we try to ignore him and decide to leave when he just starts spewing the vilest shit I have ever in my twenty-seven years of being alive have ever heard. This is where it ties in with the movie, though. Remember the scene with the centaur and Meg? That’s basically how things went down for me...except he had like two other goons to back him up.” He smiled as the people in the room nodded along to his story. Victor smiled at Phichit, who seemed
more fazed than he had anticipated. “Does that answer your question?” Phichit nodded and settled further into his seat. “Anyone else have any questions?” Some hands sprang up in the air. Victor sighed. “Do any of them have to do with the course material?” Several hands lowered themselves. “Alright, you, with the blue hoodie, tell me your name and ask me whatever.”

The thing about natural lover’s is that they think everything is an act of fate.

The way the stars are positioned. What they had for breakfast. Where they met someone. How they find themselves falling in love. It all seems like an act of God. Grandeur drips from their eyes and they fall for the idea that sometimes life can be like a movie; a fairytale so beautiful they have to take a step back and admire it.

Victor was one of these people, unfortunately, but not surprisingly. He lived for romance and destiny and thrived off love and being in love. Pair that with everything else going on inside him and Victor was turned into prose writing machine. He’d sit for mere minutes and walk away with half a page droning on about the slope of his lover's nose, or the way in which they smiled, or how their hair looked like the perfect resting place for his cheek. Warm fuzzy feelings would fill him and ooze onto his laptop, or the notes on his phone, or any piece of paper that was just lying around near him.

The current object of Victor’s affections just so happened to be so beautiful Victor had been busting out five hundred words rambles on just how amazing and enchanting Yuuri was. That was the very reason he found himself sitting in a Starbucks down the street from his classroom, laptop open and fingers typing so fast he must have looked like a college student with a deadline. He moved on from topic to topic like Mila did from girlfriend to girlfriend as poems and declarations of love left his body in a frenzy.

“Victor?” He looked up from his laptop screen and met eyes with a smiling Yuuri, eyes crinkled at the corners decorating his face with decadence and innocence.

“Yuuri!” Victor said, happiness springing from his voice as he hurriedly slammed his laptop closed. “Hi, how are you?” He crossed his arms over his chest in an attempt to be casual, eyes darting to Makkachin who was already sniffing Yuuri to confirm that it was, in fact, the person he’d been smelling on Victor for the past two weeks.

“I’m doing okay, just grabbing coffee with Professor Cialdini before class.” Yuuri gestured to a tall, tan man with a ponytail making his way to them with two coffees in hand. Victor knit his brows, but smiled nonetheless.

“No, you dweeb. I’m his TA.” Yuuri’s eyes crinkled again as he laughed at Victor’s dodgy reaction. Professor Cialdini came up behind Yuuri and handed him his coffee. Yuuri introduced them to each other and the two men shared a hardy handshake.

“It’s nice to meet you, Victor. Yakov has told me quite a bit about you. You’re his nephew, am I correct?” The older man gave him a sincere smile and slid down to pet Makkachin with his free hand.

Victor nodded but shrugged. “Technically, but he and my aunt divorced, so he’s more of a mentor
now, more than anything.” The three of them nodded in awkward agreement, staring at each other’s coffee cups until Professor Cialdini cleared his throat.

“Well, it’s been a pleasure meeting you Victor but I’m afraid Yuuri and I must be on our way.” Makkachin groaned from his place on the floor and Victor couldn’t relate more.

“It was a pleasure to meet you as well, Professor Cialdini.” Victor looked to Yuuri then, trying to memorize the way he looked in that moment; fresh and sweet and beautifully filled with nothing but dimpled grins and crinkled eyes.

“Call me Celestino, Victor. We’re practically coworkers.” He pat Victor’s shoulder like he was some kid and made his way out of the cafe with Yuuri before Victor could say anything. He just watched as Yuuri gave him a shy wave ‘goodbye’ and scampered behind the older man.

Fueled by brand new images of the curve of Yuuri’s lower back, Victor returned to his laptop. No more than ten minutes went by before his phone began to ring from its place in his satchel. He reached in, annoyed he had to stop midway through describing how Yuuri filled the deeper dark pit in his stomach with creamy emotions and rose petal sensations.

“Hello, Victor speaking.” He took a swig of his iced mocha and placed his hand onto the back of his neck, which was still stiff and aching, despite however many pills he took.

“Victor, it's Chris.” Victor cradled the phone between his ear and his shoulder, not wanting to stop his writing for a conversation with Chris that would surely lead nowhere.

“It’s about time you called,” Victor chastised as he tried to recall just how golden Yuuri’s eyes looked when the sun light struck them at just the right angle. “I was starting to worry I pissed you off or something.”

“No, never you sweetheart.” Chris stated sarcastically. “Not this time at least. I’ve just been busy. I have that fundraiser gala next month for the Trinity Place Shelter and there’s still quite a bit to do.”

“Look at you, I’m so proud.” Victor stopped writing and praised Chris’s work. For the past five years or so, Chris had used his public influence and fortune to turn into one of New York’s biggest activists when it came to LGBT issues. He helped to organize the annual pride parade, took part in restoring the Stonewall Inn, and opened three different homeless shelters across the city. “Is there anyway I can help?”

“Yes, of course. Always, but that’s not what I was calling about actually. I was actually wondering when the fuck you were going to tell me that you were in the hospital?” Chris took off, lecturing him about how stupid he was to think he could take on so many people. Victor tried to interrupt him multiple times to let him know that he had been scolded enough by everyone else who knew and didn’t need to be yelled at by him, but Chris barely let him get a single word in. “And to think I had to hear of this from your saint of a mother, jesus fucking christ, Victor. I’m surprised she hasn’t beat you senseless.”

“That makes two of us.” Victor exhaled and checked his watch for the time. He’d have to make his way back to soon for his last afternoon class, only after that he’d be able to leave. “I’m sorry I didn’t call or text you, it happened late at night and I was exhausted the day after. Listen, I have to get going, but let’s meet later and we can talk everything over, okay?” They agreed to meet for dinner and said their goodbyes. Victor packed all of his things and left for class once again, eager to meet more of his students. He and Makkachin shared knowing smiles as they made their way back to the classroom.
Things were good and they would only get better.

That much Victor knew.

Chapter End Notes

This chapter took so much longer to write than I expected but I've finally finished! Hope you enjoyed it:

The next chapter will take place three or two months in the future and things will start moving a lot more quickly then on.

Leave a comment if you're looking forward to more :)!
Chapter Summary

Yuuri peered up from the camera and found Victor’s crystal blue eyes fixated on him. A sheepish expression came over both their faces, smiles creeping in like companions. There was a pause in time, Yuuri was sure of it because Victor’s eyes didn’t move an inch and sound seemed to escape him.

Chapter Notes

This is the first and last time I post something this long (unless you guys like it?) so don't expect it.
I'm so sorry it took so long to post! I've been really busy with the ACT and work, but I'm mostly free now so chapters should be up more frequently. Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Yuuri took the paintbrush out from between his teeth and smiled at Victor, who was holding his camera as carelessly as Yuuri was posing. A shadow came over them as a heavy cloud drifted past the sun in the sky. They tried to fight past the feelings of lust and heat, not wanting to make a scene in front of Chris and his husband. A fluttering feeling took over Yuuri’s stomach as Victor snapped one last picture of Yuuri against the glass sliding door that lead onto the terrace. Victor got too close, leaning in to show Yuuri the pictures they had taken.
He tried to keep his eyes on the pictures shown on the small screen, but the proximity of Victor’s lips to his slowed down his thinking and freed the canary in his chest that barely ever got to fly. The world, for the first time, bloomed in color, even in a season in which everything was dying. The orange and brown colors of the fall only popped more in a dizzying flood of scenery. Everything looked warm and beautiful, but the real statement piece of the afternoon was Victor’s eyes, which hadn’t left Yuuri’s since the moment he arrived.

Yuuri prayed they never would.

It had been weeks since it happened, and things should have been messed up and ruined but they weren’t. Yuuri was safe and Victor had been so gentle and patient with him. For the first time in a long time, Yuuri felt like he could take on the world for the person by his side.

No, things weren’t official between them and both of them had more problems within themselves than anyone should ever have, but they were happy. And they felt at home in a world where ‘home’ was a dream and all people did was hurt you. They were damaged but that was a concept both understood too well. When one was at their lowest the other understood and did what needed to be done to help the other. There was a sense of whimsicality and benevolence simmering between them there on that terrace. It was time for them to figure out what happened between them now that each man had laid out their intentions, but not quite there emotions. The summer had gone and now they were in the dead of autumn. It was time to be brave and tell each other what they had been showing for weeks.
Yuuri peered up from the camera and found Victor’s crystal blue eyes fixated on him. A sheepish expression came over both their faces, smiles creeping in like companions. There was a pause in time, Yuuri was sure of it because Victor’s eyes didn’t move an inch and sound seemed to escape him. It was Thanksgiving and there was noise all around them, especially since Georgi was actively trying to light the small stone fireplace on the terrace. Daylight was fleeting and stars were dancing with the last rays of sun of the day. It was busy all around them. He should have been tired of all of the noise, but it was quiet as he stood there looking into the most beautiful eyes he had ever had the pleasure of laying his very own eyes on.

Oh, God. Yuuri felt lost at sea, floating by on the safest boat known to man. He was no titanic, no warship, but he was sturdy and loyal and loved the time they spent alone. The boat kissed him out of nowhere and beat up bullies and let him know that it was alright to cry. The boat appreciated the trust placed in its strong structure and its ability to build itself up back up after taking a hit or blow in critical places.

Yuuri was sailing blind. He had no destination or route but he loved the fucking boat and how it made him feel. He didn’t care that the turkey leg and mashed potatoes Victor served him at dinner was the first full meal he’d had in three weeks. He was in love and it filled him to the brim. It didn’t matter that they were both broken because they could become the bond to help keep them together.

Without thinking, without taking into account Victor’s family, friends, and coworkers, Yuuri kissed him on his cheek, so sweet, so tender, cupping his face gently and closing his eyes, inching his lips onto Victor’s to fully take in each line on his lips. Each indentation, each ridge, and mound. It was long and sweet and he knew that if Victor could react, somehow overcoming the shock, he’d have that stupid, amazing look on his face that he got whenever something absolutely wonderful happened.

He felt like a stone; smoothed out by the erosion of problems, solved with words and rounded out in all the right places.

Victor physically melted in his hands. Yuuri yanked him closer, moving back to the origin of his kiss and smiling into his cheek, triggering the same response from Victor as he formed his all too familiar dimple under Yuuri’s lips. It was then that Yuuri knew he was dreaming. It had to be a dream because this was too perfect to ever happen to him. He had made it from point A to point B without destroying himself or the other person in the process. It had to be a dream...It had to.

But it wasn’t.

He realized this when Victor broke Yuuri’s rose petals lips from his face to quiet down his dinner guests, who were now clapping around them and breaking out into surprised laughter, urging them for a real kiss.

After Victor got them all to return to their attempt at starting a fire, he looked down at Yuuri and wrapped his arms around him like he was the most precious thing in the world. True in Victor’s eyes and reciprocated in Yuuri’s, who held him just as warmly. It proved not to all be a dream when Victor kissed the top of his head and asked him whether he’d prefer coffee or hot chocolate, entangling their fingers together when Yuuri answered. They pranced back into the penthouse and poured their drinks in the kitchen, in the emptiness of silence, of course. Yuuri couldn’t be dreaming. He felt too peaceful to be asleep.

They looked at each other in between sips and the steam of their drinks, blush dusting both their faces.

Yuuri felt so content standing with Victor.
To think Yuuri thought Victor wouldn’t want him just weeks before.

September

The morning Yuuri woke up for his appointment with Dr. Newman, a petrifying migraine found itself in between the folds of his brain, picking like a nuisance at his fleeting attempts at remaining positive and trying to figure himself out. His motivation to do all of the things he promised he would, dwindled in the time between making the promise to himself and the date of the appointment. It was harder than he would have ever liked to imagine to keep up that attitude.

He dressed professionally, having to attend one of Professor Cialdini’s classes just after his appointment was over. A taupe jacket, white dress shirt, and tight fitting blue jeans found themselves in his hands and pretty soon he was out the door regretting ever putting on the ensemble. His regular backpack was switched for a Tuscan leather messenger back and his morning tea would soon be exchanged by a dark roast coffee. His day would be busy today, between attending his own classes and assisting in Professor Cialdini’s, then going to work for eight hours. He would also be showing a group of high school students around NYU’s giant campus. He’d barely be able to find time for himself and needed all the energy he could get. Once he was in the coffee shop, he ordered a cup for Dr. Newman as well, remembering their old habits.

After the coffee shop, Yuuri hailed a cab and made his way to his doctor's office. She wasn't far, no more than ten minutes from the shop, but he felt so tired from all the running and excitement in his life, he felt it best just to pay the five dollar fee than to exert himself.

“Yuuri!” Dr. Newman greeted him with a hug when he walked into her office carrying two cups of coffee and his bag. He’d be walking to his first class from her office and since he had taken a cab, leaving it in his car wasn't an option. He handed her a cup and set his bag down near the door. “How are you?”

“I’m fine. Little nervous for today, I’m taking a couple of high schoolers on a tour of the campus... Thank you for seeing me so early. I know you like to keep those slots open.” He took a seat on the couch she kept opposite her desk and waited for her to sit in her usual chair near the window. He sipped his own coffee and crossed his legs.

“Oh, it’s no problem. So, what’s on your mind?” She settled into her chair and drank from the cup Yuuri handed her. Dr. Newman was quite the juxtaposition against what a stereotypical psychiatrist was. Her practice was in her home and she made it clear to her patients that she was available whenever they needed her. She wore knit sweaters no matter what the temperature was and never failed to make her patients feel like they were a top priority. Best of all, she reminded Yuuri of his grandmother and always made him laugh.

“Do you remember Phichit? My friend? He dropped me off here a couple of times…?” He dug his fingernails into his palms and tried to keep a neutral face as he spoke.

“Your ex-boyfriend? Mhm, I remember him.”

“Well, something happened between us.” He proceeded to fill her in on everything she didn’t already know.

...His harbored feelings for Phichit: “It’s been going on for some time. I mean I thought I was over it when we broke up, but then one day I just looked at him and everything came flooding back.”
...Seung Gil’s reaction to the mutual attraction between Yuuri and Phichit: “He pushed me, but honestly I wish he would have done worse. Maybe he should have punched me.”

...Yuuri’s short-lived attitude towards sex and its role in his life: “I thought that maybe if I just slept with whoever came in front of me, I’d be able to detach my emotions from the action but that plan never quite took off. It was mostly married men who wanted that and I’m not morally corrupt enough to do that.”

...Victor’s involvement in everything: “He’s really nice but he got into a fight and all the yelling and blood-” He had to stop himself for a minute. Airing everything out like that was doing something to him. It was a mixture of both cathartic release and evanescent pain that seared the inside of his mouth every time he let out a single word. “I thought about Eli and he scared me because I saw what he could do then. I left him. I made it out onto the street. Something made me turn back. I don’t know why…”

He even brought up things he hadn’t noticed before, like his possible fear of love and being loved: “I was so cold towards him and I still don’t know why. I’d like to think it was because of my mental state at the time, but I think I would have acted just the same even if I had felt okay that day. Does that make me a bad person?”

Everything he could think to bring up was brought up and more, and surprisingly enough for both him and Dr. Newman, Yuuri managed not to cry. He sniffled a bit, but not much else happened. She listened to him intently and took notes of their conversation on her notepad. At the end of his tale, Yuuri rubbed his arms nervously and waited for her to weigh in. After an elongated silence on her side, Yuuri asked her for advice in desperation.

“It’s not quite my job to give you advice. But I can help you figure out the source of all of this agitation.” Yuuri nodded and waited for her to speak again. She pursed her lips and brought her hands together as she leaned in closer to him. “Well, first of all, you’re not in love with Phichit. Your romantic feelings for him have been gone for a while-”

“But.” Yuuri started.

“Hear me out. When did you first start to feel something for him again?”

“Right around the time he started to date Seung Gil.”

“And when was that?”

“After-” Yuuri stopped mid-thought upon realizing just what she was playing at. She raised an eyebrow as he came to terms with what she was saying. “I don't think that caused this. I mean-”

“Your brain made a connection between Phichit and safety and love. That bond, when you saw it become threatened by Phichit’s attention being given to a different relationship, was turned into a romantic one because if it was romantic, it would be on the same playing field as his relationship.” She stated almost matter-of-factly. Yuuri felt his eye twitch at how simple she had made it all seem.

“But what if I was just jealous and that helped me realize that I still loved him?” Yuuri argued.

“That sounds possible until you look at the fact that you two dated copious amounts of other people before he settled down with Seung Gil. From what I understand you weren’t jealous then, were you?”

“Well, no. But, maybe seeing how happy he was with him-”
“It’s possible that scared you. You were used to Phichit being yours and yours solely because of what happened with Eli, and along came this other person in his life who was taking up more and more of your time with him. I know this might be hard to take in, but you just told me yourself that you felt bad for wanting Phichit to be with you, and that’s not how romantic jealousy works. When it’s romantic, humans have a tendency to rationalize and incentivize their behavior. What you were doing was understanding your own selfish, subconscious needs and fighting against them because you felt bad for trying to come in between them.” Yuuri’s mouth stayed agape the entire time she spoke. It made sense, as much as he didn’t want it to.

“Well, then… what about the fact that I kissed him? Or that he kissed me?” He raised an eyebrow and made a face saying ‘explain that with your charlatan ways’.

“He probably built something along the same lines of a bond with you as well, except he seeks to protect you. You dated after Eli, not seriously, but you did nonetheless. And hadn’t you just gone on a date with- what was his name?” She checked her notes and made a face. “…Victor. From what you told me you and this guy have been moving pretty fast and that might have pushed some of the feelings he was debating up to the surface. Hence why he kissed you and then regretted it. He realized he didn’t feel anything more for you other than probably something brotherly.” Yuuri nodded along and tried to pretend like it didn’t hurt to have one of his largest fears confirmed.

“But I still feel like I-” He stopped to try and form his emotions into clear thought. A thumping started in his chest as he looked at his doctor. Suddenly, all the words he knew failed him. “So why- why does it still hurt?” The words finally slipped from his mouth, low and slow, dripping like molasses.

“Well, he left at a time where you were confused. You never got closure and you want closure, naturally.” She leaned in. Yuuri collapsed in on himself and evaded her eyes. “He caused all of this and you were left to deal with the wreckage alone. It’s not fair and you should feel hurt. You’ll feel hurt for some time, maybe even after you talk things out. It’s natural and it’s completely valid.” Yuuri continued to nod along as she spoke. “Now, before we go on, I have to ask: how has your anxiety been? Still taking your meds?”

“Yeah. Well, no. I try to take them, sometimes I forget. But, um, overall I take them pretty much every day.” He sipped his coffee, keeping his eyes on the floor.

“And do you still have the attacks?” She crossed her legs and looked at him, an etched look of worry playing on her face.

“Over the past month…um, I’ve had two? Two and a half? I think I pushed through one but that seems impossible…” A desultory countenance came over his already downcast face, but he paid no mind.

“That’s…well, that’s a bit worrying.” She pinched the bridge of her nose and removed her glasses. “It’s understandable, this month seems to have been pretty wild for you.” They discussed the causes of the attacks and tried to make a plan on how to better reduce the number of times they occurred and how Yuuri dealt with them. It took longer than expected and felt a little redundant, but Yuuri learned new pieces of valuable information in regard to how to deal with his anxiety. “Does that all make sense?” She asked him once they went over everything she felt was important. Yuuri nodded and finished his coffee. He got up to throw it away, thankful to be able to move from the sole place on the couch he had been occupying for just over half an hour. “Now, let’s talk about this Victor person.” Yuuri’s head whipped back to look at her with the most outrageous look of surprise.

“Oh, why?” He quickly returned to his seat and gripped a pillow against his body for protection. From what? He wasn’t sure. “We’re just friends now, so I don’t think it’s that important.”
“Well, yes. But you said he scared you.” Dr. Newman said.

“Well, yes, but it was only because of the circumstances of the moment.”

“But he scared you.” She pressed her pen to her lips and tilted her head to look at Yuuri. “I hate to bring this up again, but I know you’re strong enough to handle it okay?” Yuuri nodded, hesitantly because he knew exactly where the situation was headed. “We have to talk about Eli. Again.” Yuuri felt his face go pale as soon as the words left her mouth. He could never quite brace himself enough to hear his name or even the suggestion of remembering just what went wrong. A myriad of emotions flooded his being, rendering him frozen in the moment. Dr. Newman crossed her arms.

“When we spoke last, you told me you barely thought about him or what happened. You told me that I shouldn’t worry because you had most certainly moved on. This doesn’t sound like moving on.”

“Well, I’m trying. I think that counts for something.” He laid his cheek against the softness of the pillow and sighed. “It’s only loud noises and fighting. And screaming.” It sounded pathetic but he was past the point of caring. To ease her concern, he reiterated with, “I’m dating again! I can step into the kitchen without adrenaline shooting through my body! I saw his sister like two months ago and I was fine.”

“It’s still holding parts of you back Yuuri. This Victor guy, he was trying to do something.... good. Mind you, it was stupid, but his heart was in the right place. And it’s not just the fight or him. Yes, you’re dating, but you end up pushing everyone away one way or another.” She clasped her hands together. Yuuri tried to talk her out of getting back into the mess with Eli, but his efforts, which went on for a good fifteen minutes, were to no avail. “It’s going to take a long time, but I’d like to keep seeing you discuss this entire thing. Eli can’t keep holding you back from finding happiness.”

“You think Victor’s my happiness?” He exclaimed in disbelief. He let out a nervous chuckle and looked at the clock perched on her desk.

“I’m not saying it’s him specifically, but someday-” She started with a tone of conviction.

“Would you look at the time!” She turned her head and asked Yuuri, who was already up and out of his seat, to take a seat again.

“I won’t charge you for the extra time, okay? This is really important Yuuri-” Yuuri flashed her a smile as he placed a hand on the doorknob.

“You see, I would. But I have a lot to do today and I have the feeling I’m a little late for everything already.” He waved goodbye and practically ran out the door, bag in hand.

“Call Cheryl and reschedule Katsuki, or I’ll personally call you to make another appointment!” She screamed at him as he disappeared out of sight.

Yuuri skipped down the front steps of her home and put in his headphones on his way to class, slipping in and out of consciousness with each note. It didn't take long for him to reach the square again, a place where most NYU students gathered between and before classes.

His mind was full to the brim of uncertainties and new information, making it hard for him to concentrate on much else other than his own breathing and the music in his ears. He hummed along quietly to the song, aware that he probably looked like a lunatic to the people around him. Yuuri didn't care. On more than one occasion he'd witnessed people have breakdowns in broad daylight.

He took a seat near the fountain and ran a shaky hand through his hair. “This is a lot to take in,” He
thought. A breeze picked up around him, swaying the trees and their leaves gently. Yuuri looked at
the clouds and graying skies above him.

Rain.

Groaning, he gathered his things and started for class. Once he reached the building, he pretended
not to see Seung Gil giving him a malcontented glare as he exited the building with a group of art
students. He reminded himself that things like that would continue to happen to him until he
graduated, and even after then.

The rest of the month went just as that day had. Yuuri attended his classes, helped Professor Cialdini,
worked, and tried his best to talk about himself and his issues to both Guang Hong and Leo, as well
as Dr. Newman. He had made no strides to make any kind of contact with Phichit but kept close
watch of his YouTube channel nonetheless. Awkwardly enough, he and Victor managed to have
coffee a number of times as well.

It started off with finding each other randomly at different coffee shops. They both had free hours at
around the same times, so it was easy to find each other near campus.

They built a strong foundation with each other to start a friendship. Yuuri taught Victor about video
games and comic books. Victor shared his favorite novels with him and even showed him some of
the photographs and poems he had published in indie magazines (because apparently, apart from
being a professor, he was also incredibly gifted in all kinds of arts).

They joked around and even challenged themselves to try and make their way through the entirety of
the Starbucks menu. Coincidentally, that's how Yuuri found out Victor had a peanut allergy. After
their fifteenth joint visit to Starbucks they got lunch at a nearby restaurant and maybe Yuuri ended up
being fifteen minutes late to Professor Cialdini’s class, but dammit, he was having fun and laughing
for the first time in months and having Makkachin around him reminded him of home, so the
reprimand he faced when he showed up to class, still cackling at something Victor had said, felt
minuscule.

By the time September came to an end, Yuuri and Victor decided it was time for them to start
meeting outside of school hours.

____

October 20th

“So, you haven’t been back to Japan in five years?” Victor looked Yuuri through the dark lenses of
his sunglasses and shook his head sympathetically. ‘That’s rough.’ He watched as Yuuri played
with the rings on his fingers and traced over the plush carpet samples before them. They were
shopping for new bathroom tiles and carpets to remodel Victor’s penthouse. The ones in place were
old and to the taste of his mother, so after much debating with himself, he was convinced it was time
to redo his home to his own liking. Which was why he then convinced Yuuri to come along with
Chris and himself to shop for new flooring.

Chris was there to ease the ‘gay tension’ (as he had put it).

“Well, yeah. But it’s not like I’ll never go back. I’m actually planning on taking a trip there next
summer.” Yuuri brushed the conversation off with a smile, enthusiastically pointing to a mauve rose
colored polypropylene sample. He ran two delicate fingers over the surface and asked Victor to feel
it as well. “This would look great in your room.”
Ah yes, Victor’s room. A place Yuuri had become oddly familiar with over the past few weeks. It wasn’t for particularly nefarious reasons; they were quite innocent, most of them involving Makkachin and his affinity for Victor’s bed, but they were still odd either way. It could be argued that it was weird for Yuuri to spend time with Victor at home (and it was, especially by Lilia), but the two men were friends and friends could just ‘hang out’ at each other’s homes and watch old horror movies.

Victor pulled a somewhat disgusted face at the color but felt the material anyway.

He caught a glance of Chris, who was looking at tile samples just a couple of feet from them, smirk slightly at how close they were. Victor took a step away from Yuuri and pointed out that maybe his bedroom would look better with hardwood floors. He then turned around a little too fast and almost knocked over a marble tile display. Both the patrons and associates of the store gave him side-eye stares and turned their noses up at Yuuri’s obnoxious laughter. Victor, after composing himself, started to laugh with him as well. Chris walked over to them and patted Victor on the back.

“Poor little Victor, he’s never been very lithe.” Chris winked at Yuuri and presented them a pristine, white tile, presumably for the bathroom. “This is cute, no?” They unanimously decided that it was, in fact, cute, and paired it with a toilet Victor had a screenshot of on his phone. After half an hour of arduous searching, Victor narrowed it down to two types of hardwood floors, three kinds of carpets, and five tile samples. He asked one of the men at the back of the store for the samples and five minutes later they were out and walking the streets of the city.

Chris spent most of their walk on the phone, letting his husband know what time he’d be home and complaining about Victor’s indecisiveness. Alone, Victor decided it was the perfect time for dinner. They had been out shopping all day and, while they had managed to snack on frozen yogurt halfway through, Victor doubted any of them were anything less than hungry.

“It's getting a little cold, maybe we should just go home,” Yuuri noted, wrapping his arms protectively around himself. A wave of cold air bustled around them, sending shivers up Victor’s back who, in comparison to Yuuri, was bundled up in a wool coat and scarf. He suggested dinner, making it his treat, but Yuuri wouldn't budge. “I'm not really that hungry.”

“Oh, cmon.” Victor pleaded, playfully yanking at the sleeve of his blazer. “Don't leave me.” He jutted out his lower lip and batted his eyelashes.

Yuuri took one look at Victor childlike face and came completely undone, victim to his charm. He rolled his eyes and told Victor he'd only agree to dinner if he made it. “I'm kind of socially exhausted and a restaurant would only drain me more.” Victor beamed at him, linked his arms to Yuuri's and Chris’, who was still on the phone and turned left from where they were standing. The trio walked to where they had parked their cars and drove separately to Victor's home.

The past two months had been a dream for Victor. Just as he had predicted, and anticipated, things with Yuuri were working out well. They were friends. They sent each other stupid memes and bathed Makkachin together. They gossiped about other professors and students. They even made friends with each other's friend groups, much to both of their surprise. Being his friend was amazing and unpredictable because Yuuri was the type of person who could call you up at random times of either the day or night and ask you to do the most ridiculous things (for example, Victor had gone rock climbing and played laser tag with him two weeks into their actual friendship). Albeit, Yuuri was still pretty closed off to him, but that was expected from everyone, Victor had learned. The rest of the world wasn't quite as trusting as he was.

Victor's chest went warm with fondness and the calming feeling of having Yuuri in his life. He was like a little light in a place where he had only seen and felt darkness. The comfort Yuuri provided
was lively and reminded Victor that life should be spontaneous, even if the only spontaneity was in changing your drapes or type of moisturizer.

He didn't feel like he was living inside out anymore, soft and tender flesh exposed to the elements. Rather he was all soft skin that freckled in the sun and silver hair that shone blue in the night. Radiant and somewhat happy.

Granted he was still a nervous wreck and refused to take his medication, but the pain was eased by spending time with his family and friends and painting and reading and writing and teaching and helping Yuuri decide how his hair looked best. He called his mother regularly and asked his father for advice about the best way to start outdoor fires. His brothers kept in touch with him and updated him on all of his nieces and nephews.

Life felt okay for him, even with all of the crying he did.

Victor parked in his regular spot, unloaded all of his shopping bags from the trunk of his car and waited patiently for Yuuri and Chris to join him at the entrance of the building. He switched the bags from arm to arm and bounced a bit on his heels to keep his blood flowing. The evening had taken an unusually cold turn, and not even his coat could keep him from shivering. Down the street, he spotted Yuuri walking alone, hands deep in his pockets. Victor watched as he did an awkward half-jog to reach him faster and almost trip over a tree limb in the process.

“Hey, uh Chris had to leave. Apparently, something came up last minute with his event.” Yuuri took some of the bags from Victor and opened the door to the building. “He said he’d text you later.” Victor walked inside and lead the way to the elevator. They rode in comfortable silence, both too tired to make much conversation.

“Is Makkachin home, or did Mila take him again?” Yuuri asked as they stepped off of the elevator.

“He’s home, don’t worry. You’ll get your cuddle fix soon enough.” They shared a smile as Victor opened the door and called for his faithful companion. They dropped the bags off near the door and watched as a ball of pure brown, joy darted down from the upstairs story and rammed itself into Yuuri, passionately licking at his face as had grown to be custom whenever the two met. Victor called Makkachin off of him and instructed him to sit on his doggy bed near the fireplace.

Both Yuuri and the dog gave Victor annoyed looks, but Makkachin obliged and took his place.

Yuuri was fast, but Makkachin was faster, even for his age. The ball of fur seemed like a blur as he darted about the apartment, squeezing the bear as a taunt for Yuuri to try harder. They ran around for a minute until Makkachin stopped at the base of the staircase that leads up to the master bedroom. Yuuri told him to stop, but he wasn’t his owner. Victor came back from the kitchen, a mixing bowl
and whisk in hand and arm, happily telling them not to run up the stairs. Makkachin darted at that and Victor sighed.

“Don’t worry, I’ll get him,” Yuuri told him with apologetic eyes.

Victor continued to mix and thanked him. He watched as Yuuri marched upstairs, calling for his dog. The moment felt domestic, but only for a second.

As he turned to walk back into the kitchen, Victor’s mind reminded him that he hadn’t had the time to hide his medications from his night table like all of the other times Yuuri had visited. He frantically placed the bowl on the granite countertop and ran after Yuuri. He was not ready to have that conversation, the one where Yuuri would talk to him in that stupid soft voice people used on him when they found out that Victor, like millions of others, needed help in keeping himself stable.

The first thing he saw was Yuuri, with the bottle in hand, because of course, Makkachin had decided to drop the stupid bear on Victor’s pillow, and oh god he really wasn’t ready to have this conversation.

Without thinking, Victor rushed over to him and yanked the bottle from his hands. Yuuri flinched back at the brash action, causing Victor to apologize in the quietest voice he’d ever used. His heart was going a hundred miles an hour, unable to register what was happening. Yuuri knew now because the word ‘antidepressant’ was so clearly written on the label, and Victor’s brain was ramming the word idiot over and over into his consciousness. It was like an out of body experience.

“Sorry, I just- I didn’t want you to-” he rambled on for a while, trying to come up with a decent excuse for his actions. “You weren’t supposed to know about this,” He gave a shy nod to the bottle, and rattled it with stifled laughter. “Not yet, anyway.” He sat his defeated body down at the end of the bed and let the bottle roll from his hands and onto the spot beside him. “I just didn’t want you to judge me or…”

A lump grew in his throat and the air turned thick, choking him.

The evil warped version of Victor that came out of hiding at his lowest points reared his ugly head and started to berate him in the darkness of his room, with only the dim light of his lamp to help light his surroundings. He couldn’t crack a joke, or play it off because now his greatest felt fault stood like a brick wall between what Victor used to be to Yuuri and what he was then. A loser. A weak, dumb, emotionally stunted, disappointment who-

“Victor it’s okay.” Yuuri sat down beside him and took the bottle back into his hands. In a shaky voice, Yuuri scooted over closer to his friend and whispered the words “I actually-Um, I took this prescription a while back” like it was the most precious secret in the world. And it might have been.

For someone like Yuuri (and Victor the same) keeping things like that secret, or in the dark, were a vital part of keeping themselves afloat, which was part of the reason why Victor had kept his divorce and its finalization a secret from Yuuri. The fewer people knew about their conditions or situations, the fewer people brought them up, and the less they had to think about them. Keeping everyone oblivious to the storms going on inside them kept everything on the outside normal.

Yuuri threw up the bottle gently and caught it mid-air, keeping somber eyes on the ceiling. He put down the bottle and tilted his head to look at Victor. A shy smile shown through the darkness and Victor’s heart rate slowed down to a reasonable pace. “Made me feel like shit, so I had my psychiatrist change my meds.”

“Really?” The question was choked out, sheerly out of spite for how ridiculous Victor thought he
was acting. He cleared his throat and turned his body so that it was directly facing Yuuri.

“Yeah. I got nauseous and everything felt like a chore.” Victor felt his eyes go wide because he couldn’t fathom Yuuri ever being anything other than happy and full of life. Granted, he admitted to himself, that’s how most people felt about him. “The antidepressants I took after weren’t much better, but I’ve been off everything except my anxiety meds since last spring, so I guess they helped.”

Things were silent for some time. The only thing that could be heard was Makkachin’s heavy breathing in between them, where he lay incredibly close to both of them. It was his job to care for those not well, after all.

Yuuri focused his eyes on Victor’s more serious than he had ever seen. “I want you to know that even if I hadn’t gone through the same thing -medically anyway- I would never judge you, or think any less of who you are as a person. Okay? It’s nothing to be ashamed of.” He held Victor’s hand and squeezed. “I’d also like to apologize for reading the label. It was an invasion of your privacy, and I’m sorry I didn’t wait for you to tell me. I know it can be frustrating to tell new people.”

That was when Victor hugged him. He hugged him so tight and so long and hours seemed to pass by but they were just seconds. He held back tears because frankly, depression and pride aside, crying in front of others made him uncomfortable. So he smiled and it was a real smile, because they were suddenly just shadows in that room, away from reality and the world entirely. Just souls dancing with each other in an empty space, receptive to nothing but their own energy.

He let Yuuri go and stood from his place on the bed.

“Thank you,” he said before inviting him back down to the living room. Yuuri smiled because Victor was being sincere and that was something he appreciated. Words between them didn’t need to be dragged out. They knew each other well enough to exchange hours of conversation in a simple sentence or two. He followed him down with Makkachin and took his seat on the couch again.

In the kitchen, Victor felt light as a feather, dancing along to the music playing from his phone. He was making beef stroganoff, an ode to his homeland and pouring all of the love in his heart into it. Every couple of minutes he would glance into the living room to see (or more accurately, to make sure) that Yuuri was really there and that everything wasn’t just a figment of his imagination and he was idiotically making stroganoff for two by accident. Every time he looked, Yuuri would be looking back and their lips would curl as soon as brown eyes landed on blue.

As he sat in his own mental private island, Yuuri tried to make it less obvious how much he was staring at Victor. Love had manifested in his chest and there was no turning back for him. Victor was a part of his life now and it was up to Yuuri to make sure that he took care and loved himself as much as Victor loved everyone around him and more. He wanted Victor to be healthy and happy and hey, maybe he could refer him to Dr. Newman. He would send him, even more, photos of cats doing stupid things and tell him more knock knock jokes because Yuuri loved the way he flung his head back and cackled like the world didn’t exist. Yuuri wanted to see more of that Victor and, sitting there on his couch admiring the curve of his back and way in which his hair was starting to curl at the ends since it was longer, he vowed to do everything in his power to have that happen.

They had dinner in the living room with Halloween movies playing in the background. Makkachin fell asleep on Yuuri’s lap, delaying his departure and giving Victor at least fifty new pictures of the both of them.

At around 9 pm, Victor got a frantic call from Christophe asking him to put Yuuri on the phone as soon as possible. Victor almost asked Chris how he knew that Yuuri was still there but handed Yuuri the phone rather than starting that conversation.

Yuuri answered jovially, crinkling his eyes. His face narrowed the more Victor heard Chris babble
on and on. With eyebrows furrowed, Yuuri crossed his arms and asked, “Why am I the first person you called?” followed by “That was a magazine- I don’t- I know you don’t- Wait. Give me a minute.” Yuuri gave Victor a concerned look, almost as if asking for help. He heard Chris speak one more time, saying something that made Yuuri’s eyes go wide. “How many people?” Then Yuuri started to mumble about how it was a good cause but he wasn’t sure he was qualified. “It’s not like anyone would bid on me anyway.” He gave a nervous chuckle and suddenly Victor knew what the call was about.

He gestured for Yuuri to pass him the phone and watched as Yuuri told Chris he had to go. He handed Victor the phone and shrugged. “Chris?”

“How many people?” Chris gave an elated sigh. “Thank God, please help me convince him. Two of my models quit last minute and I need to fill their spots like asap-”

“He wanted to tell him that it was awkward for him to ask Yuuri to be in his show (to be bid on by the aristocrats of upper New York City) was incredibly out of line, but then Yuuri gave him this looks of clarity and asked for the phone. “Wait, Yuuri wants to talk to you again.”

“I’ll do it. No-well, yeah. Just text me the details and we can talk later. Ye-yeah, I’ll have him text you my number. My height-? I’m not sure, I think I’m 5’8.” Victor watched, perplexed because Yuuri had no idea what he had just agreed to.

October 24th

Chris and his husband held a gala at the end of October, on Halloween night.

The Life and Love Foundation had a drawing at the start of the summer solstice for a charity to support and worked long and hard all summer to make sure it was the grandest event of the fall. It was a fairly recent tradition and had only been around for five or so years, but the turnout had never been anything less than the year previous. The event was always themed, and the present year would be no different. Chris, as well as his organizational team, had chosen Greek Mythology (Victor’s own profession being the inspiration when he told Chris he’d be teaching the very subject at NYU). While the theme was always different, certain aspects remained the same. For example, Chris gathered all kinds of models, unknown or incredibly famous, and had them walk a runway with designer fashions, once again either known or not, and then bid off both the outfit and then the models. The models would then have to spend the remainder of the night with the person who bid most for them. The majority of donations were gathered in that first hour of the night.

Only the richest of the rich and most famous people in New York made the list of people invited. It was a star-studded night and had been compared to the Met Gala by numerous news sources and magazines. Victor had only attended twice, and his mother only once, despite being a major donor.

He still couldn’t believe Yuuri would be walking in the show, even as he walked into the venue with him and Makkachin by his side. Yuuri didn’t seem nervous though, even with every famous face that crossed their paths. He was nowhere near their height, but his beauty excelled above theirs, as Victor had expected.

The trio spotted Christophe in the middle of the room and shuffled over before any of the models Victor ‘knew’ tried to say hello to him.

“Youuri!” Chris played his name greeting him with kisses on both cheeks. “Thank you again for doing this.” Yuuri blushed bashfully and asked if he should go in for his fitting. Chris nodded and handed him a lanyard with his name and role in the show. Eros, Victor read from the place beside
him. He wanted to die because there was no way the clothing he’d be wearing would be anything less than beguiling. Chris then pointed Yuuri in the direction of the backstage entrance. He left Victor alone then, giving him back the power to slam his fist as hard as he could into Christophe’s muscled arm.

“What were you thinking?” He seethed, ripping off the scarf from around his own neck and crumpling it in his hand.

“Okay, watch it. There’s no need for that type of behavior. I can do what I want and so can he so calm down.” Chris looked past Victor and asked a group of male models to head back for final fittings. “And here I was thinking you’d be thanking me. He’s going to be in the most beautiful two-piece ensemble as Eros. I could’ve given him Hephaestus if I really wanted to.”

“You know he isn’t a runway model, Chris. What if he makes a fool of himself? He hates that.”

“Victor rolled his eyes in annoyance, all the while believing it to be the truth wholeheartedly.

Chris happily asked Victor if he’d like a tour of the venue, and dragged him around even when he refused.

They walked through the large wooden floor, stopping to check in on flower arrangements and glass decorations all the same with each step. The theater had been completely renovated and turned fully into a venue with large open ceilings and an open floor. In the middle of the venue was a grand staircase that would serve as the catwalk. It lead down from the box seats and split down the middle about halfway, nesting the entrance underneath. The banisters of the staircase were painted white with gold finishings, which matched the gigantic curtains that were hung around the place. Each step had been restored, keeping the original, beautiful dark cherry wood. Multiple workers and staff persons were also moving in marble busts and statues. The tables matched the curtains in their covers as well, which might have seemed to matchy-matchy but the crystalline purple chairs really pulled everything together. A vision board with the rest of the needed decorations sat in the back of the hall, with at least twenty people huddled around it taking notes and checking things off on their phones.

Chris took the time to explain that each model would make their way down and walk amidst the tables to properly showcase their garments and then exit through two large double doors in the back before being herded as quickly as they could back up to the preparation room for their second change. It would be quite an intimate affair for spectators, one which demanded eye contact and constant attention.

Victor was stunned with what Chris had pulled together. He wasn’t surprised, but he was blown away by the aesthetic of it all because it looked like something straight out of a Hollywood movie scene. Victor tried to keep his mind occupied with what Chris was saying, but it would only rush back to Yuuri and how wonderful he’d look amongst everything.

“...We’re going to have original *Gucci* and *Crispino* designs, as well as new pieces from *Kubo* and *Dior*. Oh, I can’t wait for you to see some of the new talents I’ve found. They’re amazing!” He stopped at a table stacked high with folders and reached for a plain white envelope in between them. He smiled at Victor and placed it in his hands. “Here are four tickets. One's for you, and two are for your parents. The third is for whoever you like.”

“Thank you, but I’m not sure my mother is-” Victor started.

“She asked for them, Victor. She’ll be here whether you like it or not.” Chris then asked him if he
was going to wait until Yuuri was done and Victor nodded like a loyal soldier. “Of course you are.” Chris sighed and rubbed at the back of his neck. "Listen, not to be rude, or kill your dreams or anything like that- I'm saying this because I care about you, okay?” Victor looked him over, nodding slowly. "You know this thing between you two probably isn’t going anywhere right?"

Victor raised his eyebrows and looked at his feet.

“On the contrary, I think we’re right on track,” Victor argued confidently. “It’s going to take time, but I’ve made my peace with it.”

“But has he? I mean, Victor, come on. You’re closing in on thirty and he’s in his mid-twenties. What you need versus what he needs? Two completely different things.” Makkachin grunted in disapproval from his place next to Victor. “I’m just wondering if pursuing this is the best idea for either of you right now.”

“Isn’t Mason eight years older than you?” Victor questioned Chris with a raised brow and leaned against the wall next to the table. Chris held the bridge of his nose.

“Okay, well he’s a child. Plus we’ve known each other all our lives. You and Mr.Big Butt back there? Not the same thing. He’s still a kid and no diploma can prove otherwise.”

“Chris, he’s twenty-four.”

“And what were you doing when you were that age?” Chris pressed him, crossing his arms in defiance. Victor’s brain stopped working for a second as it recalled just how wild his early twenties had been. Chris saw his hesitance and continued, “That’s right. Body shots in Jamaica. Wanna know how I know? I was there, buddy.”

“He doesn’t do that, Chris.”

“How did you meet?” Christophe Giacometti, philanthropist extraordinaire, then turned around and started yelling for a binder someone seemed to have lost, leaving Victor with one thought in mind:

“Fuck”

____

October 31st

The day had finally arrived, just a week and some days after Chris asked Yuuri if he would walk in his event. In reality, when he and Chris got to talking about the nitty-gritty of the show, Yuuri wondered why on Earth he had agreed to do the show in the first place. He’d be so embarrassed to be arm candy all night to some rich person with enough money to buy his time. He’d be even more embarrassed though if no one bought his time, to begin with. Yuuri cursed himself out in both English and Japanese as he sat in front of a portable vanity with a makeup artist adamantly working at his face with gold paint and different kinds of brushes coated in substances he could barely recognize.

She dusted a light gold highlighter over his cheeks and nose as he checked himself out in the mirror, a little less slyly than he thought. The makeup artist giggled when he pouted his lips and gave the mirror his best ‘sexy’ look (he was Eros after all). He gave her a bashful smile and apologized for moving. “It’s okay. You look great,” She laughed, moving on to work on his contour. “I don’t blame you for feeling yourself.”

Yuuri looked himself over more closely.
He could recognize the person in the mirror perfectly, but what he felt on the inside was alien to him. It was a concoction of pride and excitement and fear swirling inside him. Pride because he was gorgeous and would be dressed to the nines in what he believed to be Gucci in less than ten minutes. Excitement because Victor was there with his parents and maybe now his mom would treat him with less contempt upon seeing how refined he could be. And fear? He felt fear because he was EROS and he’d be walking alongside world-renowned supermodels, and if that wasn’t terrifying, he didn’t know what was.

A couple of photographers asked Yuuri to pose with a group of designers and some other models, so he politely made his way out of the chair he was in, thanked the makeup artist and walked toward the group. The designer pulled him close, holding him by his waist and smiled fondly at the camera as the photographers snapped away as he threw every pose he could think of at the cameras.

He walked away from the rest of the models and went off searching for a place to relax before the show started.

The last thing Yuuri had to do was disrobe and get dressed, but that wasn’t supposed to happen for some time, and since he was ready he thought it would be alright to sit back somewhere. He pulled out his phone and plugged in his headphones, letting Lana Del Rey’s sweet, haunting voice wash over him like the waves of the ocean he used to frequent in Japan.

He found a spot void of people and settled into a chair that was backed into a corner. Yuuri realized then that he felt calm (more than he had ever expected) and confident that everything would be alright. He closed his eyes, crossed his legs, and let a smile linger on his face for longer than he cared to let anyone see him so happy and serene.

When he opened them again, Yuuri saw commotion all around him, because holy shit it’s ten minutes until showtime and apparently that fact had just settled into everyone’s minds. Yuuri stood up a little straighter watching the crowds of people move all around him. He kept his eyes above their heads to avoid panicking and saw the top of a head so silver he almost melted right then and there in his seat. He lowered his eyes and made eye contact with Victor, who had been standing around looking like a lost puppy prior to their connection. He watched as Victor bobbed over with a bouquet of yellow camellias and pink roses. Victor kept waving at him as he dodged moving clothing racks and towering models, eyes shining joyously. It felt like an eternity watching him try to reach Yuuri’s side.

Victor’s couldn’t believe his eyes when he finally saw Yuuri up close because holy shit he looked wonderful standing there in a cotton robe and cheap rubber sandals. He looked like art, dipped in gold and sunlight. Victor was breathless and could only find himself able to say one word.

“Wow.”

A beautiful gold line decorated Yuuri’s left eye in the shape of a heart and five pearls dotted his right eyebrow, all varying in size and order. He had a glow about him that reminded him of early morning sunrises and diamonds, reflecting back every single ray of light that hit his face back at the universe. Oh, he looked so beautiful with his hair let down in waves and topped with a delicate gold laurel crown. Victor was positive he was going to have a heart attack because looking at Yuuri was like running a marathon without the proper training… it was like looking at the sun for the first time in his life… it was being thrashed around the forceful waves of the ocean… Jesus Christ Victor was going to die before giving Yuuri his flowers.

He was speechless, numbed by his beauty, his grace, his aura, his eros.

He knocked himself back into consciousness. “Hi,” He stumbled upon the word by chance because
frankly, that’s how he felt. High.

Completely elated.

Yuuri giggled (he fucking giggled) and said, “Hi there.”

He pointed to the flowers and asked if they were for him in the sweetest, most innocent voice Victor had ever heard. Victor nodded like an idiot and laid the flowers in Yuuri’s arms with all of the gentleness he could muster up, fighting back the nervous laughter of a school girl confessing to her crush back in his chest. “I hope you like them. I think I read somewhere yellow camellias mean good luck.” Damn, that was a lie but he felt the need to make the flowers seem more personal than they already were.

“And the roses?” Yuuri looked at Victor with shy eyes and smiled.

“A rose for a rose.” And then fireworks, right before his very eyes because Yuuri was beaming and crinkling his nose in embarrassment. They both blushed and averted their eyes from one another until the shyness passed them both.

“They’re beautiful, Victor.” Yuuri brought them up to his nose and inhaled their scent, careful not to let them touch his face. “I love them.” He took Victor’s hand in his and held it for some time to let the gratitude transfer.

They held hands for a total of only three seconds because an angry stage manager started shouting at Yuuri, asking him to go and get changed. She physically took him by his wrist and dragged him to his first designer, leaving him the only option of making heart eyes at Victor as he disappeared into the crowd of people.

His first outfit was a suit, plain and simple, with laurel leaves decorating both the pockets, sleeves and pant legs. It was white, with deep red embroidery in the lapels and inside of the coat. The designer, Mitsurō Kubo, had told the models just days before that she tried to truly capture the essence of each Greek character best she could with the clothing she designed and judging from what Victor told him about Eros, she had done a good job. Yuuri felt powerful and sensual, something between a king and a temptress who held the world in their hands. A detail he especially loved in the suit was the rose and torch pendant pinned onto the lapel of the jacket, representative of Aphrodite and Ares, Eros’ ‘parents’. Slipping into leather loafers that, along with the short crop, ass-hugging pants he was wearing, showed off his ankles, he made his way to his place in line, behind Aphrodite, and before Hermes. Yuuri was sixth in line to walk, and that made him happy because he wasn’t quite the beginning or the end of the first part of the show. He heard the music start, something lively and regal, and suddenly broke into a cold sweat because this was happening and he couldn’t possibly back out now.

The line moved faster than it had during practice and before he knew it he was with Chris and Kubo at the front, waiting for his cue to walk. He wanted to bite his lip but that would mess up his lipgloss, so instead, he dug his fingernails into his palm to wake himself up to the fact that he was actually there.

The stage director gave Yuuri his cue and he was off.

As soon as the bright lights of the venue hit his face he turned into someone else, completely. He wasn’t meek little Yuuri from Hasetsy, he was Katsuki Fucking Yuuri and the world was his to conquer. That was how Victor saw it anyway, from his table all the way in the middle of the room.

The music turned from its classical melody into something more promiscuous and flirty, fitting for the
fashions coming down the stairs and into the crowd. The lights went red around the room, while the spotlight on the models remained the same. Yuuri, despite his height and lack of experience, looked like he belonged on with all of the models before and after him. His face was calm and collected, sensual and erotic. It was bliss for everyone in the room. Victor let his ears open up to the room as murmers began about Yuuri. He realized he wasn’t the only one completely lost in the way he moved his hips and stole the rooms attention with a simple disinterested glance. The model before Yuuri was wiped clean from their minds, despite being someone supposedly up and coming in the fashion world. Journalists, Victor recognized around him, began to type away on their phones as soon as they saw him and Victor felt so proud of his-

His friend, Victor had to remind himself.

He felt so proud of his friend.

His mother, dressed in a beautiful black velvet gown beside him, nudged both him and his father, excitedly pointing Yuuri out. His father, Alexei, gave Victor a wink and thumbs up upon seeing Yuuri, who was approaching their table, and Victor wanted to die because this was his first boyfriend all over again.

Yuuri came and went before anyone had enough time to truly take him in, causing heads to turn as eyes followed him out of the room.

Victor held his chest, thankful that he had time to catch his breath before seeing Yuuri again. His mother whispered to him how beautiful Yuuri looked as they watched the second designer introduce his line and what it meant to him (something about roses and the fleeting fire of the mighty- Victor didn’t quite get it and didn’t care about since Yuuri wouldn’t be walking for him).

Two or three more shows passed, until finally, the world got a glimpse at Yuuni again, this time in Gucci. He wore black shorts and a linen, wine-colored tunic. The look had been more simple than the first, focusing most of the attentions on the greek, golden sandals wrapped around Yuuri’s legs. His golden makeup and pearls had been switched for red lipstick and wet eyelids with smoked out winged liner. It was more serious and seemed more couture than anything he had seen so far in the show.

Camera’s flashed all around the room but Yuuri looked lost in something. Focused of course, but he wasn’t mentally present in the room with Victor.

A couple of more shows passed until he saw Yuuri again, pristine in a Crispino dress that left everyone breathless. It was a white shoulderless, vintage inspired smock dress, whose ripples flowed endlessly with each step Yuuri took. A bow, thin and delicate, tied around his waist, circled around him and spread out into lace that trailed behind him on the floor. This portrayal of Eros was soft and innocent. His face was clear of any makeup except for a holographic highlighter on his cheekbones and mascara on his bottom lashes. On his feet, were sheer white ruffle socks with a lace trim and nothing more.

The projector set up to flash the names of the looks let everyone in on the name of the number, deeming it “Requited Love”. Victor swore in that moment that he astral projected from the sheer beauty in front of him.

Two more shows passed, both abstract and breathtaking in their own right, and were followed by a mini-documentary on the great work the Trinity Place Shelter did in the community, which, quite honestly, made Victor cry.

Victor kept his eyes on the large electronic panel with the designer names flashing on it, hoping and praying that Yuuri’s last walk would be next. Chanel, Louis Vuitton, and Fendi all passed until the
final show: Dior.

He was the second to last model to walk, but it was worth the wait for Victor to see him in a crop top.

A crop top.

Dior went for a street wear aesthetic for their portion of the show, which meant blue jeans and white linen dresses and pants and sandals. It was like ancient Greece had met New York City and birthed something beautiful.

Victor had seen it all before and felt passive about the looks on the models, and maybe he was biased because Yuuri was the light of his life, but when he watched Yuuri step out in a gypsy-style crop top with a leather jacket and mom jeans he lost his shit and let out an audible gasp amongst the audience when he slid off the jacket from his shoulders, hooked it around his finger and swung it back to hang from his shoulders. His mother laughed at him of course, because Victor instantly clasped a hand over his mouth in embarrassment.

The fashion show portion of the night ended and the models were once again brought back and lined up on the staircase in their outfits from their first appearance. One by one they were brought down to a podium set up at the base and the bidding began.

People started to throw out figures as they went through the group and Victor was fighting an internal war: Would he or would he not bid for Yuuri?

Yuuri was called.

“This is Yuuri, age 24. He’s an avid soccer fan, former figure skater for the Japanese federation, and a full-time student at New York University. His hobbies include cooking, running, reading, and watching late night television…”

Several hands went up. His price started at $1000 and just kept rising as musicians, artists, entrepreneurs, and politicians all put in bids. Yuuri was obviously shaken by the obvious interest put kept a straight face the entire time. Victor had to look away because he just couldn’t make his mind up (tragically enough, it was when Yuuri shot him a pleading look to please outbid the creepy old men trying to buy his time).

It seemed appropriate. They were friends and it would be for a good cause. But what if Yuuri took it as an unwanted advance? Could Victor really be sure Yuuri still liked him that way? It would be dumb to bid on him. He couldn’t possibly do it, it would jeopardize too much. He turned back to look at a panicked Yuuri and almost raised his hand because Yuuri didn’t look like he could take any more attention.

His mother, of course, had other plans.

Alyona called over her personal assistant, Layla, and whispered something in her ear. She nodded diligently and marched up to the stage and pulled the auctioneer aside. He nodded and returned to his place. “We have $40,000.”

Victor almost choked on the champagne he was drinking and stared at his mother in horror as she smiled up at Yuuri, who unsurprisingly looked just as disturbed as Victor. Alyona, bless her heart, won the bid and Yuuri was marched back to the dressing area until the rest of the auction seceded.

Victor couldn’t believe it and neither could his father, who looked just as shocked as both of them. The outfits Yuuri wore during the show hadn’t even gone for that much.
Victor touched his mother’s hand and gave her a panicked, questioning look. She smiled and, stifling back laughter, said, “What? You weren’t going to do it.”

Victor then received two messages. One from Yuuri which just read “?????” and one from Chris which was only five laughing emoji’s and one pride flag, which Victor assumed was a type-o. He responded to both with “????????????????????????” and set his phone down, glancing to see if they were sending the models out already.

No, not yet.

He kept his composure, going as far as leaning back in his chair and crossing his legs to see if he could trick his body into truly relaxing. His mother, on the other hand, kept a jovial, toothy grin on her face as she too peaked to see if the models were being shown out as well.

Behind five different walls and one floor above, Yuuri was being wrapped into a Greek style chiton with gold embroidery that reached the floor and cinched at the waist, and forced into another pair of uncomfortable sandals. The laurel crown was placed on his head once again, but the makeup was changed into just a slight contour of the cheeks and eyes. He tried to keep still as the makeup artist tried to put lipgloss on him, but Victor’s mother terrified him and now he was going to have to spend an entire night with her.

Why hadn’t Victor bid on him? He gave him flowers but he couldn’t bid? Yuuri couldn’t believe it. He knew Victor had the money (once seeing him splurge on a $2000 watch, spur of the moment), so why hadn’t he bid? Maybe he didn’t want to spend all night with Yuuri. There were plenty of other people, more famous and more interesting than Yuuri, to keep him company, so that might have been the reason.

Yuuri toyed with those thoughts and fell into somewhat of a slump because, wow, maybe Victor was over him already. In the romantic sense of course. But he liked Victor, in a nonplatonc way that grew and grew every time he looked at his smile or counted the freckles on his cheeks (because holy shit Victor has freckles on his cheeks arranged like the stars in the sky). But Yuuri made them ‘just friends’ and Victor had accepted those terms too easily, and now he was bitter and hurt, dressed like the god of love, and Victor was probably chatting up some attractive millionaire over the filet mignon the staff was serving for $200 per plate.

“Yuuri!” Chris called him over to the portable desk he had set up backstage once he was done with a bright smile on his face. Yuuri jogged over, greeting him as pleasantly as his ferocious hunger and exhaustion would let him. “I am so proud of you. You went for much more than I expected- $40,000? That’s outrageous, still nowhere near the highest bid, but still. Pretty good for a first-timer.” Chris continued. Yuuri learned quickly that Chris’ compliments were usually backhanded, but not an attempt to offend. Chris just wasn’t fond of pumping up people’s egos too much.

“Thanks, I was shocked too.” Yuuri rubbed his forearms, obviously uncomfortable.

“Why so glum then, love? It’s all going to a wonderful charity.” Chris drew his eyebrows closer together in confusion and then eased his face when he came to a realization. “Is it because of Alyona? Yuuri, she’s a dear. She would have bid that on anyone. I’m sure of it.” Yuuri smiled at him as thanks for the assurance, even if that wasn’t the reason he was so dissonant. “Come on, Hot Buns.” Yuuri blushed at the nickname. “Go and get in line.”

He did as he was told and followed the rest of the models slipping through the curtains that led to the staircase. They were calling both the names of the bidee and the bidder to meet at the base of the staircase. Yuuri watched as young, beautiful young women hesitantly left their friends sides and slipped through to meet gross, perverted men at the bottom. He felt bad for them and thanked
whatever god was above him for Alyona Nikiforova in that moment.

“Yuuri Katsuki.” Called the announcer with vigor. Yuuri fixed his chiton and started down the stairs, keeping his eyes on the wall opposite the stairs. He let his gaze falter for a moment and ease onto Alyona, who was happily striding to the front of the room to collect her prize. She looked like a child on Christmas morning, scampering from her bedroom to greet her gifts under the tree. God, the entire thing felt so weird to Yuuri. He wanted to crawl under a rock and die because he was dressed like a fool in a room with rich snobs and Jesus Christ, his arms weren’t muscular enough for the chiton at all.

He offered Alyona his hand when she reached him and kissed her knuckles, as Chris and the other coordinators had instructed for the models to do. He then led the way to the dancefloor, where the models and their patrons for the night were to have the first night of the dance. She hooked her arm around his, keeping their hands clasped together.

“I’m so happy no one outbid me.” She whispered into his ear, leaning down a bit because the woman was almost as tall as her gargantuan son and husband. “I’ve really been looking forward to getting to know you a bit more.”

“He offered Alyona his hand when she reached him and kissed her knuckles, as Chris and the other coordinators had instructed for the models to do. He then led the way to the dancefloor, where the models and their patrons for the night were to have the first night of the dance. She hooked her arm around his, keeping their hands clasped together.

“I’m so happy no one outbid me.” She whispered into his ear, leaning down a bit because the woman was almost as tall as her gargantuan son and husband. “I’ve really been looking forward to getting to know you a bit more.”

“He never felt that way with Victor because apart from the penthouse and car, he was just a normal guy, but his mother exuded luxury and wealth. She looked and was as expensive as her wikipedia page read. “I’m really sorry about storming out like that when we first met. I was a bit on edge that day.”

He decided it was better to air out the tension of that day before their night truly started.

Alyona snorted and rolled her eyes, placing his hand on her (incredibly) bony hip. Yuuri tried to keep himself from wincing back in fear because wow she was frigid in a way a person should never be. “It’s fine, Yuuri. I was just as snarky, so no need to worry.”

“They began their waltz as the tiny orchestra to their left started with an elegant and playful tune that reminded Yuuri of the times in his childhood in which he’d spend all morning with his mother in her garden. He smiled fondly at the recollection and took a more prominent lead in the dance. He was a dancer, after all.

Alyona perked up at his initiative and swung her head in the direction of her husband and son, both of whom were avidly watching, all the while keeping pace with Yuuri. She held him much closer, and he allowed it, warming up to the woman in his arms.

“You know, this waltz was composed by a famous Russian composer. My Vitya plays this beautifully on the flute.” She crooned and Yuuri smiled because of course, Victor played the flute. It was so undoubtedly him.

“Was Victor musically inclined as a child?” Yuuri pondered, trying to be the best host he could.

“Oh yes, very. He excelled in almost everything he tried, not just music or instruments, but sports and the arts all the same.” She looked so proud talking about him. “Oh, he was such a beautiful
child, Yuuri! I’ll have to show you his baby pictures someday. And he’s so smart-Learned to speak in full sentences by age two, that one did. My brightest baby..” Yuuri was so endeared by the sugary sweet way she kept talking so much so that he wanted her on to keep on going until he knew everything there was to know about Victor, so he egged her on to talk about her youngest son.

“He certainly is something,” Yuuri sighed dreamily, looking past Alyona to a not-very-well-hidden Victor, inching closer and closer to them as they danced on. His legs started to feel like noodles that cooked for much too long, all soggy and feeble like they could come undone at any second because Victor was looking at him like he was dinner and he hadn’t eaten in three days.

The song ended and Victor swept in between his mother and Yuuri, clasping his hand onto Yuuri’s hip so tightly Yuuri wanted to faint then and there. He promised his mom to pay her back for spending the time she paid for and sent her off to his father’s side. She rolled her eyes playfully and scampered off like a child.

Victor turned back to Yuuri, prepared to waltz when suddenly the orchestra stopped their playing and a DJ started. Their limbs fell apart like puzzle pieces that didn’t quite fit as an electropop beat invaded the dance floor and floods of young people crashed against them like a tsunami. Victor held the nape of his neck and smiled bashful, speaking something Yuuri didn’t quite hear.

“What?” Yuuri screamed against the boom-boom-boom of the speakers with bass vibrations in his vocal chords. He pointed to his ears and Victor looked up to the ceiling in frustration. Yuuri laughed and took his hand, leading them out of the dancefloor. They walked up the staircase, which was no longer lit and allowed for them to easily slip upstairs and into the darkness of the dressing rooms.

They stayed quiet as they searched for a light switch, or a lamp, or something to light their encounter, and even a bit after Yuuri found the switch to one of the vanities with lights around the mirror.

Victor watched him from a safe distance, scared that if he got caught up in the excitement of the night, he would do something he’d regret.

The glow of the bulbs emitted a soft halo of light around Yuuri’s silhouette as he turned to face Victor with a triumphant look. “Let there be light.” He stated, taking a seat on one of the makeup chairs.

“That’s a great quote, Come up with it on the spot, did you?” Victor joked, leaning against a wall with crossed arms.

“Mhm, all by myself just now,” Yuuri said teasingly. He bit his lip, mood shifting slightly to something much more uncomfortable. "So, how’s your night gone? Meet anyone interesting?" Victor’s eyes widened at the question like great big lakes lit up by moonlight. Losing his balance, he chuckled nervously and tried to loosen the collar of his shirt with a shaky finger.

“No, I’m an old man now, no one’s really interested.” They shared a chuckle, letting a small bit of tension between them melt away. “Why? Did you?” Victor slid down the wall and onto the floor, extending his legs out before crossing them.

“Your mom was giving me some seriously flirty vibes.” Yuuri kid with a mischievous grin on his face. Victor pretended to puke and threw his crumpled up the program from the show at him. Yuuri caught it and held it tightly in his hands because, while he was joking about Victor’s mother, he had come across a couple of male models that seemed interested. He had brushed them off of course,
mainly because he was interested in pursuing something with Victor, but the signals he was receiving were mixed and that hurt his heart and confused his mind.

“Yikes, that really just made me want to puke just then.” Victor raised his eyebrows and shook his head wildly like he was shaking himself out of a bad dream. “I’m going to hold you accountable if I have nightmares.”

“I’ll come running just to cuddle you back to sleep if that’s the case.” Yuuri teased, uncrumpling the program and staring at the pretty pink paper’s silver writing. He looked at the very bottom of the page to find his name. A blooming feeling of pride swirled around in his chest as he took in the reality of what he’d just done. “I can’t believe I actually did this.”

“You did, and it was wonderful.” Victor gushed with stars in his eyes. “I loved every minute of it.” He held his chin in fond contemplation and ran his eyes up and down Yuuri’s body in the chair. “I couldn’t take my eyes off you for one second.”

Yuuri blushed, further smoothing out the program. He wasn’t very good at taking compliments, so it was hard for him to look Victor in the eye longer than a couple of seconds. His heart felt full, despite the shyness that had taken him over. Full of Victor’s loving stare and words of admiration. With the silence dragging on longer than he expected. Yuuri decided he needed to move the conversation on before things got too serious. “I bet you say that to all the models.”

“Once again, for the second time,” Victor leaned his head to the side, gaze still kissing Yuuri’s body with every flutter of his eyelashes, and said, “Only the ones I like.”

Yuuri’s mind raced back to August and he smiled deeply, remembering how wrong he’d been about Victor. He wanted to run over to Victor and lay in his lap and give him deep, deep, kisses until neither of them could feel their lips. Victor was just so soft and kind and he listened when Yuuri spoke and never raised his voice. Victor dropped everything to help Yuuri and helped him type up his resume. He was a dork who loved Dungeons and Dragons and Star Wars, and Yuuri never thought he’d like a guy like him, but then again he never pictured himself walking alongside the likes of Naomi Campbell.

“We should get back out there. You’re mother paid top dollar for my time.” Yuuri joked, walking over to Victor and offering him his hand. Victor took hold of it, lifting himself from the floor.

They walked out hand in hand and spent the night making eyes at each other, no matter what it was they were doing. Yuuri danced with Alyona and chatted with Victor’s father, who was a big, big fan of Yuuri without knowing him all that well. Chris made an appearance once or twice that night but was mostly busy running around, making sure everything was perfect and running as it should.

The gala ended at midnight and so Yuuri and Victor finally went their separate ways when the moon was most bright. Victor stole glances back at Yuuri when his family was being escorted out to the town car they had arrived in. Yuuri was sent back up to the changing rooms to return the chiton and collect his things. Some of the models were planning on going out to drink to celebrate and kindly invited Yuuri but he denied, too exhausted to do much else other than taking a cab home.

That night, he sunk so deep into his bed he thought it would swallow him whole, sending him to a world made of pillows and blankets.

He dreamt of the future.
November: Two Weeks Before

On the day everything happened, Yuuri had woken up to find that he’d been fired from his job at the school library, via a phone call from Guang Hong in hysterics, and an email from the head of their department. He didn’t get out of bed for a good three hours. He had nothing to do after all. All his shifts had been reassigned and he’d already studied for all of his classes. There was no reason for him to get out of bed at all, so there he remained, scorned and sulking.

He had money saved up, of course. Enough to get by on for a couple of months, but he didn’t have a job lined up for after graduation yet and it was flu season. He could get sick! He’d need to pay his rent and gas and phone bill. His utilities, groceries, toiletries... There was so much he needed to pay for and the money in his bank account would only dwindle as time went on.

The worry pinned him down to his mattress the entire day, resolute on making Yuuri feel like shit as long as it could. He wanted to call Victor, but he was busy preparing for finals and teaching his classes. Yuuri had the day off from both school and Professor Cialdini’s class, unlike Guang Hong and Leo, who were busy with both school and work. He had to face this challenge alone, but it wasn’t all that bad. He was better equipped to calm himself down alone and managed to do so well until the universe decided to throw him into a situation he wasn’t sure he could handle. For example, to ease his sadness, he texted Victor:

Guess who just got fired! I guess I’ll spending more time with you from now on lmao makkachin is gonna hate me

(╥_╥)

To which Victor responded,

Oh no! I’m in class until 1, but I’ll stop over at yours after work, okay? We can talk about it then?

Yuuri smiled at that and thanked Victor.

At around noon, Yuuri dragged himself out of bed to answer his door. Someone had been incessantly knocking, despite not receiving an answer, and it had begun to annoy Yuuri. With a big fluffy, pink bathrobe wrapped around his half naked body, he trekked through the living room and hallway to the door. Looking through the peephole in the door, he saw someone with their back to his apartment. Intrigue got the best of him and without thinking, he opened the door.

“Hi, Yuuri.” Phichit stood outside his door, a bag of greasy fast food in his hands. It was like seeing a ghost. “Can I come in?”

Yuuri tried to rub his sleepy eyes clear of whatever it could have been to be giving him visions of his haunted past. That’s what Phichit was. A memory that hurt too much to remember.

He made way for Phichit to enter and closed the door gently behind him. Yuuri felt relieved suddenly, that he had taken the time to clean just some days before. The living room was neat and vacuumed clear of any sign of life having lived in it. It was mostly due to the fact that Makkachin and Victor spent just as much time in a Yuuri’s apartment as he did at theirs and Makkachin was a fluffy fellow who let out giant tufts of fur wherever he went.

He invited Phichit to sit on the loveseat while taking the spot farthest from him in the room. Phichit smiled at his and stroked a pillow on the couch. It was a new addition to Yuuri’s immense collection, that Phichit surely wouldn’t recognize. Yuuri folded his arms over his chest and waited for Phichit to
speak, something that was taking longer than expected.

“So, how have you been?” Phichit finally asked, setting the bag of food on the coffee table. “Everything’s good?”

Yuuri made an indifferent face and shrugged. He couldn’t believe how nonchalant Phichit was being about everything. It was like the past four or so months of passive-aggressive silence between them hadn’t happened. Yuuri guessed he needed something, and whatever it was he’d refuse to give it to him or help him in any way because it wasn’t like Phichit even tried to give Yuuri a helping hand with the rent for two he’s been paying alone for three months.

“That’s good,” Phichit said. The room went silent again and Yuuri started to get even more uncomfortable.

“So, what is it you need? Your things? Or are you finally ready to talk?” Yuuri spat. He regretted saying what he did as soon as the words left his mouth. Yuuri hadn’t realized how truly angry he was at his former best friend for ending their relationship the way he did, and it surprised him to hear the venom in his tone as the world around them turned cold and placid, like they had both thoughts of having this exact conversation long and hard for as long as they had been apart.

“Alright, I guess that’s fair. And yes actually, to both of those. But I really do want to talk everything out. Yuuri, I’m sorry.” He took a deep breath and turned his attention to the floor. Yuuri felt like a small pebble caught in the middle of a giant hurricane. There was no way he was getting out of this without shedding a single tear. He was going to break down and throw a fit and Victor would walk in to see him crying and the pity party would start. “I am so, so sorry, Yuuri. I know I messed up, but I had to know. I had to make sure.”

“Had to make sure of what?” Yuuri asked in a whisper. And he was being sincere. He didn’t know what the Phichit ever felt the need to confirm.

“I had to make sure you weren’t the love of my life.” It was like a boulder had fallen on his body. Yuuri felt his heart break then. Even if he was over it, and he was sure Victor was his new love, what he and Phichit had...it had been love. Yuuri had felt it so many times, burning his skin and running through his heart. And now Phichit was negating it as if so many of Yuuri’s life decisions hadn’t been made because of it. “I had to know I didn’t love you, Yuuri. Not now, and not back then. And I know it’s my fault- it’s all my fault because I pushed you into being with me and now I’m here telling you that it was all for nothing...” Phichit balled his hands into fist and continued to talk to the ground while Yuuri was forced to look at him, whole. Yuuri listened with intent as Phichit apologized and cried and screamed at himself and then at Yuuri for a response. Yuuri drew further into himself when he started yelling and hid his face in his hands once Phichit started apologizing for yelling because, “Oh my god, I’m so sorry. I forgot about loud noises-” He wasn’t being coherent and that made it hard for Yuuri take the apology seriously. It seemed wrong that, while Phichit was calling Yuuri a victim of his actions, he was like one to Yuuri’s isolation.

Ten minutes into his apology, Phichit asked Yuuri for a hug and Yuuri knew what he had to do; he had to be the adult in their relationship once again, despite only being three years older than Phichit. Yuuri would have to comfort him and accept the weak, but heartfelt, apology he was being handed and once again be the bigger man. There weren’t many times in Yuuri’s life where he’d been given the privilege to be soft and wounded one. Many of those times were due to Phichit’s intervenience (Yuuri reckoned then that that must have played a great part in his attachment to him, as well as attraction). He had done the same thing when Eli went on trial and his family asked for Yuuri to forgive and talk to him one last time.

This time would be no different.
He swallowed his pride and strode to his friend's side, feeling genuinely sorry for him and the stress he must have been under in drawing up the courage to attempt to apologize. Yuuri wrapped both his arms around him and tried not to turn to stone when Phichit pressed him closer and cuddled his face into the soft fabric of Yuuri's robe.

“I'm sorry I turned us into a mess.” Phichit sobbed into his chest. “Seung Gil wants to apologize too, he just couldn't make it today. Yuuri we're really sorry.” And just like that what little was left of Phichit in Yuuri's heart broke away and cut him up inside on its way down.

“Seung Gil?” Yuuri questioned.

“Yeah,” Phichit sniffled and pulled back from him, a small smile tugging at his lips. “We talked everything out and- I'm actually here for my things as well- I'm uh, going to move in with him. I have U-Haul downstairs.”

Yuuri tried his hardest to pull off a happy smile for Phichit (it was a good thing that he and Seung Gil were together, after all!), but it stung him to know that he really had just been a fling. Something passive. A bump on the road to better things… it seemed to him that was all he'd ever be.

He swallowed the desert in his throat and motioned toward the hall, inviting Phichit to cut himself out of Yuuri's life for once and for all.

They both got up to walk to Phichit’s old room, Yuuri staying a couple of inches behind. “I really hope we can be friends again. Things got a little messed up, but we’re both over it now, so it shouldn’t be so hard.” Phichit laughed half-heartedly and turned on his room light. “I mean, if we can break up and stay friends, I think we can survive this.” Yuuri returned the smiled and helped Phichit carry all of his things, already in boxes, outside once he changed out of his robe and into something thick and warm to withstand the cold. It took three six trips each, but everything was cleared out in no time, oddly leaving Yuuri with an empty feeling inside.

After he put the last box in the u-haul, Yuuri decided it was time to let Phichit go, entirely this time. It hurt to look at him, and almost killed him to see him talk so freely about his plans with Seung Gil. He wanted his friend to be happy, and in a sense Yuuri was delighted that at least one of them got a happy ending (albeit not the one he was rooting for), but he just couldn’t stand to listen to Phichit drone on and on about his perfect little relationship and the babies he hoped to adopt. He’d had his fill of moments like that and as shitty as Yuuri felt about everything, it was the healthy thing to do.

He promised himself then, as he waved Phichit goodbye, that someday he’d be strong enough to be a part of Phichit Chulanonts life once again.

Yuuri climbed back into his tower and softly shut the door. He stripped off his clothes and climbed back into his bed, which fittingly, had lost all of the warmth Yuuri had relished in that morning. Things were peaceful for some time, as he watched the sun appear and disappear again and again behind clouds so thick Yuuri thought they looked just like cotton balls, done apart and thrown at the sky. Then came a tapping at his door again and suddenly he felt so stupid because he knew it wasn’t Phichit.

Phichit had come and gone and relieved himself of every ounce of grief, pain, and anger on his chest and Yuuri…Yuuri was still angry at the world because no one ever loved him properly. Not the way he wanted. And he had a chance to let Phichit know all of his frustrations...he had a chance and he gave it up to be the strong one, once again. It was all he ever learned to be, truly. His father, bless his soul, taught him how to keep his pride and head held up high, and Yuuri knew how to give a handshake like the most confident person in the world, and he knew how to calm everyone in times of distress, but dammit, no one ever taught him to let himself feel things and to be childish, or to let
someone else take responsibility.

Yuuri was taught to put other’s needs before his own and that thought, how badly it had emotionally stunted him and robbed him of his own resolutions, it hurt him so badly and turned his chest into a balloon, welling up with too many tears. Yuuri felt putrid inside. He felt- he felt- God, he felt so awful he wanted to die.

“Yuuri?” Victor’s voice cooed from inside the apartment. Yuuri suddenly regretted giving him his spare key, because fuck, Victor was going to see him cry. Pathetic and ugly.

But then a thought struck him: Victor knew how he felt.

Or would at least have an idea of what he was feeling because, even though he didn’t know too much about Victor’s problems, he knew the overall pain they had all caused him.

Victor was familiar with what Yuuri was feeling, and that filled him with a longing to be in his arms. Yuuri wanted to tell Victor everything because he knew he would just sit back and listen and understand in a way that no one had ever understood him before. He hurriedly got up from his bed and slipped into an oversized long sleeve shirt he had gotten from the campus store.

With tears in his eyes and a quiver to his lips, Yuuri opened his door and rammed himself into Victor’s warm body. He didn’t care that it was too affectionate, or that being this vulnerable was new for the both of them, he just wanted someone to hug him and tell him that everything would be alright.

Their eyes locked as Yuuri ran to him and Victor knew.

As if almost by instinct, or something he had learned to do in a past life, Victor embraced Yuuri on contact, wrapping one arm protectively around his shoulders and using the other to press Yuuri’s head against his chest. Yuuri started to bawl instantly, melting into Victor with every tear. He tried to speak, tried to explain himself, but his words weren’t forming and it only made him more flustered. Victor shushed him, rocking them back and forth to pacify the crying man in his arms. With a gentle hand, he began to pat down Yuuri’s hair and leaned down to touch their foreheads together; It was a way to let Yuuri know that he was there and to cry as much as he needed because Victor wasn’t going anywhere. Victor gave him a weak smile and tucked him closer, humming to ease the dreadful silence in the room.

Makkachin, not sure of what to do, circled around the two and laid himself at their feet.

Yuuri’s tears felt like they were drowning him, but Victor was his life vest. He made Yuuri feel like he was back on Earth, back from the cold unforgiving, open spaces of the galaxy. Grounded.

After some time, they moved their bodies, not daring to dismantle the touch between them and laid down on the loveseat. Yuuri laid his head on Victor’s chest and breathed in his scent; Honeysuckle and something else he couldn’t quite figure out. He sighed and reached out to twine their fingers together. Victor felt Yuuri reach out and brought his hand closer to ease their joining of parts. It was so intimate and pure. Sure, it was romantic and they loved each other, but it was so much more than that.

It was coming together during trying times. It was becoming one presence in the eyes of trouble. It was their hands pulsing in rhythm because they were so it was bound to happen. Yuuri’s heart slowed to match Victor’s and suddenly their bodies felt like one entity. They were no longer cells and blood and flesh. They were two souls thriving off their own tranquility, crafted from love and all of the tender things in the world.
An hour passed before Yuuri pried himself from Victor’s body and offered him a cup of tea. Victor accepted his offer and stared longingly at who he was sure was his soulmate as he sauntered off to brew a cuppa. He clung onto the fleeting impression of Yuuri’s warmth on his body as time passed. He could have held onto him much longer, loved to have made him feel safe and calm forever, but Yuuri, strong and independent as he was, probably felt like he was intruding on Victor’s personal space (and he couldn’t have been more wrong).

Yuuri returned minutes later and handed Victor a cup of chamomile tea, still steaming at the top.

“Sorry, it’s-” Yuuri started apologetically.

“It’s the only kind you drink.” Victor finished his sentence with a smile. “Well, this and green tea.”

Yuuri’s eyes crinkled and they stirred their teas in pleasant silence.

“Do you remember when you asked me about my past relationships? And I told you I never dated anyone seriously?” Yuuri asked in a soft voice Victor had never heard him use before. Victor nodded.

Yuuri fought against his every instinct to keep himself and his life private, but he owed it to himself to talk about everything with someone he loved and hopefully loved him back in whatever way that was. He needed to wear his heart on his sleeve unapologetically for once and let his guard down.

Victor watched the hesitance dance over his face and said, “Yuuri I’m not entitled to know anything you don’t want me to. It’s okay. We can just sit in silence if that’s what you want.”

Yuuri shook his head vigorously. “No, no. I’m ready. I just…” His voice trailed off. “I just need to collect my thoughts.” Victor collected Makkachin in his arms and sat up, alert to help Yuuri in any way he needed.

“I dated Phichit.” Victor wasn’t surprised, but it came as a slap in the face regardless of his mental preparation. “I dated Phichit and I got really attached to him and about twenty minutes ago I helped him move out and comforted him as he told me he never really loved me.” It was like Yuuri was reading from a script, and Victor thought that maybe, to keep himself cohesive and coherent and okay, he was.

He winced.

“I didn’t get to tell him how mad I was at him. I didn’t get anything off my chest. I had to be mature and then I realized that that’s the story of my life.” Yuuri took a sip of his tea and smiled. “I’ve been with some pretty shitty people in my life. Most of them never really cared. They wanted either a fuck buddy or a decent boyfriend to take home over the holidays. Lucky for me, I’m alone most Christmas’ so I’d be really happy when they took me to their families at that time of the year.”

“I’m fortunate in the sense that I know who to avoid now. I used to throw myself at everyone. That’s what he’d tell me.” A pause. “I think that’s why things ended like they did with me and him.” Yuuri looked past Victor and out of the open balcony windows. “He was amazing and exciting and handsome. He liked the songs I played for him and read the books I recommended.”

Victor got the sense that Yuuri wasn’t talking about Phichit anymore but kept his mouth shut because Yuuri looked like peaceful and the topic he was speaking of seemed like one that caused the opposite effect on him. The room remained silent as Yuuri stared off into space and looked into Victor’s eyes with hatred. It wasn’t for him, he reckoned, but for someone else who Yuuri never got to give the look too.
“I didn't even care because it felt like love.” Yuuri was disassociating from the situation and Victor wasn't sure of what he should do. He only ever experienced it, never dealt with it like his mother or Mila.

Yuuri's eyes flickered back to reality, a deep blush hazing his cheeks and ears. “I had a really good boyfriend once, Victor. He bought me flowers, took me dancing, and praised the ground I walked on. I swore I was going to marry him. Hell, I almost did.” Yuuri extended his left hand out and admired his fingers like he was staring at an engagement ring. “It's funny how people can change from first meeting to the day you're just another possession. Like a car or a television or whatever people own.”

Victor looked into his mug and contemplated asking Yuuri to stop because it felt what Yuuri was telling him was too personal. His words felt raw and fresh and Victor didn't know how the story ended but he knew it was painful.

“When- when they start to treat you like that- you lose yourself in denial. I mean, all my life I've told myself I would never be put or put anyone in that situation, but then he happened and that part of myself went out the window to make room for my excuses. Only there were no excuses. Not even the basic ones people use. He never drank or told me I was ugly.” Yuuri wiped a tear from his cheek and Victor gave his hand a reassuring squeeze. Yuuri smiled at the gesture and sniffled. “I was just not allowed to talk to anyone or... He didn't let me see my friends without supervision and when I went out, it was with him.” A reminiscent smile spread across his cheeks. “I loved him because he loved me. And he held me close and he bathed me with kisses.”

“I was his perfect little doll in a glass box.” A sigh escaped his lips and Yuuri's shoulders dropped so low Victor thought he'd fall right through the floor. “My parents were worried, Phichit was furious, and the rest of my friends couldn't see past the front I put up in public.”

His eyes drifted outside again and Victor's heart broke into a million pieces because this was hurting Yuuri to recount. Every word was a cut made to his heart and he looked like he ached so badly.

The story Yuuri was telling wasn't in chronological order, Victor realized. It was like he was recalling the ordeal in fragments of good, then bad, then good, then bad again.

“My heart was all the pictures and all the hardcover books without sleeves?” Yuuri reached out to pet Makkachin, thin, long fingers, twirling curls between themselves. “I was dating Phichit at that time, so any advances he made weren’t accepted or encouraged and he understood that. Then we broke up and suddenly he was there all the time. Studying during my shifts and cracking jokes on my lunch breaks. I’d find him trailing after me sometimes, like when I left class and stuff and I should’ve thought it was weird and creepy. But I didn’t.” He took a drink and then another, not caring for the temperature of the tea.

“He asked me out and I said yes, and suddenly my life was like a fairy tale.” Victor was at a loss for words. Was he even supposed to say anything? He had never been one to deal well with emotions or such openness from another person. He didn’t know what to say or how to act. How was he supposed to show Yuuri that he was there to be a source of love, support, and comfort? With words? Or kisses?

It was when Yuuri snuggled up close to him again, that Victor realized he was doing just what he needed to. He was listening and staying quiet. Giving Yuuri the peace he so desperately needed to
grasp onto.

“The first couple of months were amazing. He was a gentleman if there ever was one. But then things started to change. I was still his precious flower. I was the apple of his eye, but he made a point of letting me know that if I ever so much as spoke or was with anyone but him, I wouldn’t be okay.” Yuuri took in a deep breath and kept on going, tracing circles on Victor’s abdomen. “He never said it outright, but I knew how to read between the lines... I was scared of him, but I was even more scared to lose him. It’s ridiculous. I’m not sure how much I loved him.”

“I mostly loved the sweet words and pet names and roses. The feeling of having someone there... I was addicted, so when the snide remarks and screaming started- when he’d pull at my clothes and hold my arms so tightly he’d leave bruises, I let him. I knew that he’d bring me flowers to apologize. I don’t know why I thought that fixed things early on. It took my three months to realize that no, it wasn't love.” Victor’s arms wrapped themselves around Yuuri as he closed his eyes to avoid his tears from welling up. “I still remember the first time he hit me.”

“We had just come back from a night out with our friends and he convinced me to spend the night with him. It was something I always did, but I should’ve by his tone that I messed up. I did something he didn’t like.” The sun broke through heavy clouds outside and cast a million different shadows across the apartment. “When we got there and he closed the door, the taunting started and I felt caged in. He punched me in the face and kicked me in the stomach. He called me every name under the sun as he did it and humiliated me by stripping me down completely and shoving me into his shower, telling me to scrub the dirty away.”

Victor held his tears in, he had to be strong. He could cry later, he could scream and be angry but he had to keep it all together until Yuuri wouldn’t see him. Until Yuuri got everything out of his system first.

All he could do was bring Yuuri closer into him.

“That same thing happened two or three more times, under the same circumstances. It got to the point where I would hate going out and just decline. I was isolated and he kept yelling. And I kept crying myself to sleep because it was too embarrassing to tell anyone.” Yuuri cried into Victor’s neck, brushing tears against his skin with damp eyelashes. Victor ran a hand through his hair to calm him. Yuuri peered up at him and kept speaking, not daring to break their eye contact one.

“All the same and a selected number of people know this. Mostly my lawyers. Most people think the last time was the first time, but that wasn’t the case. The last time was just the worst.” Victor opened his mouth to tell Yuuri that he was sorry he had gone through everything alone, but Yuuri stopped him. “You don’t have to say anything. Just stay close to me. Okay?” Victor nodded.

“The last time he... we were here. Right in the kitchen.” Victor froze and let his eyes dart in the direction of the tiny area. Yuuri used his fingers to guide Victor’s face and attention back to him. “It was the first time I felt like I was gonna die.” Tears stained his cheeks and rolled down to his chin, where they would fall onto Victor’s chest. “He’d started fighting about some message I’d gotten as I was making dinner. I was so tired of being accused by that point, I started to yell too. That only made him angrier. He choked me, he hit me, he threatened to kill me. I mean- I’m sure he would have. The knife was on my neck and I was terrified, but I wasn’t going to back down. I was so fed up with the fear I lived in constantly. I tried to fight, but he was too strong. I think at some point I just accepted I was going to die, there in my kitchen at the hands of a madman. That was until Phichit walked in and we fought back until someone heard our screaming and called the police.” Yuuri lowered his voice. “The rest is history. I was in therapy for a year and spent more time in court than I should have. In the end, I let him apologize for his mom’s sake. He was handcuffed and being escorted out when he stopped near me and just- He just started crying and blubbering about how
Revulsion. That’s what Victor was feeling, sitting there listening to everything Yuuri had to say. Not at him, never at him, but at the man who had put him through all of the awful things, Yuuri was telling him.

“When people at school found out, they called me a survivor and tried to get me to join their domestic abuse prevention unit as some kind of poster boy. My classmates talked to me like I was a baby and people spread rumors that I’d made it all up somehow- It was a mess, but I expected it. I feel like- I’ve always felt- There are times when… Sometimes I wish I had more of a backbone to stand up for myself or just be my own person. I’ve always had to be a grown up, and… what happened with Eli,” Victor tensed at the name. “I wish I could have been angrier at him for making everything happen instead of hating myself for not stopping it.”

His mannerisms made sense now. How he’d flinch when Makkachin barked too loudly or jumped when a pan fell in the kitchen. His fixation on staying strictly in his own bubble of space when they went to crowded places until someone pointed out what he was doing. It made sense and sent rage flying throughout Victor’s body because someone hurt Yuuri. His sweet, sweet, Yuuri.

“I think… I think- I don’t even know what I’m talking about anymore. I don’t think I- What was the point of this?” Yuuri sat up and pressed his palm to his forehead. His mind was racing now that the tears had cleared from his eyes, and an evil voice coming from the back of his head kept telling him that Victor was freaked out by Yuuri’s tears and the past. “I just… I just talked your ear off for an hour and I had no end game. Wow, this is a new level of conceited. Even for me.”

He was trying to laugh it off, Victor recognized that weak smile anywhere.

“I don’t think it was for nothing. You needed to get that stuff off your chest.” Victor assured him with a slight squeeze of his thigh. “Sometimes it’s good to go over bad memories to move on.”

Yuuri jumped into his arms again, wrapping his own arms around Victor’s waist. More tears appeared but they seemed to be coming from a place of relief rather than pain.

Victor didn’t let go of Yuuri once that night.

Present Time

“I think we have to talk,” Yuuri said, leaning against Victor’s kitchen counter. Victor smiled at him and tilted his head to the side, taking Yuuri in in all his glory. The light hit face in just the way Victor loved, highlighting his cheeks and awakening the deep brown in his eyes.

“Mm?” Victor questioned lovingly. “What about?”

“Don’t make a fool of me, Victor. I’ll walk away right this moment.” Yuuri teased taking a step toward him and placing a finger on his chest.

“Oh, fine.” He drawled. “What’s on your mind, sweet-”

There was a loud discussion in Russian just out of view from the kitchen, making Victor turn his head to see just who it had been.

“Yuuri!” Mila sauntered into the room with glee in her eyes and a woman in her arms. “Sara, this is him. Yuuri this is Sara Crispino, you modeled her brother’s clothes at the gala.” Mila beamed and took hold of his shirt sleeve, pulling him closer to them. Turning to Sara, she asked, “Isn’t he
gorgeous?"

Yuuri blushed and separated himself from Victor’s side (who followed him next to Mila), not wanting to seem to intimate in front of everyone, suddenly.

“He is. How are you?” Sara asked, offering him a welcoming hand. Yuuri shook it and looked to both Mila and Victor for an explanation.

“I’m doing fine. And yourself?” He answered.

“Lovely, have you not seen this absolute beauty that just walked me in? Oh, hello Victor.” She waved to him and laughed, placing a loving hand on Mila’s cheek when Mila wrapped an arm around her waist. Yuuri’s lips upturned at their tenderness. Sara cleared her throat and looked to Yuuri once more. “I’m actually here on official business. I’m a photographer.”

Yuuri’s eyebrows met in confusion as she pulled a glossy, holographic white card from her suit jacket.

“I do art mostly but have done runways and magazine shoots. But that’s not the point. I’m here to see if you’d like to audition for a piece I’ll be shooting in Rome near the end of next month and through the first weeks of January. It’s a two-week job, and you’ll be paid quite handsomely.” Sara tucked a couple of loose strands of hair from her face and smiled at Yuuri like she hadn’t just asked him a completely unforeseen question.

“I-I’m not a model.” He tried to hand the card back to her, but she refused.

“Unfortunately, you don’t really get to decide whether you’re a model or not. That’s the job of my boss’ casting team.” She laughed a bit and turned to leave again. “It’s not a commitment Yuuri. Just think it over and call me if you decide to audition. Just make sure it’s before the 12th of December, alright?”

Yuuri nodded and looked to Victor for some kind of explanation of what had just happened, but he looked just as confused as Yuuri.

“O-okay.” He stuttered.

“Alright, well I’ll be going now. I’ve got my own family dinner to attend.” Sara waved goodbye and took Mila by the waist, placing a gentle kiss on her cheek. “I’ll see you, luce dei miei occhi.”

Yuuri looked down at the card in his hands and let his shoulders fall, defeated and confused. Victor put a hand on his shoulder and smiled at him like he was proud.

Mila leaned against the kitchen was and sighed, elated. “God, I am so gay.”

Chapter End Notes

It's a bit of a mess, innit?
Please, please, please leave a comment. It genuinely motivates me to keep writing and lets me know what writing style does and doesn't work.

Next chapter should be up in two or so weeks, maybe longer.
Until then! :)
Yuuri didn’t know much about him, but things didn’t feel wrong between them. Yuuri knew what he needed to know:

His full name was Victor Alexeevich Nikiforov.
He was 28 years old.
He was allergic to peanuts.
Yuuri loved him with all of his heart.

“Once I forgot I had a dinner date with someone my mom introduced me to,” Victor spread out on Yuuri’s bed and watched as Yuuri shifted shirt after shirt in his closet. They had been talking since Victor arrived, switching from topic to topic between each other like a ping pong game. “I ended up making plans with Chris that night. We did a little bit of shopping and got hungry by the time night fell.” Yuuri gasped then and Victor smiled, covering his face.

“Please tell me this isn’t going where I think it’s going.” Yuuri pleaded, looking over his shoulder to Victor writhing on his bed.

“Yes!” Victor exclaimed, blushing an awfully cute shade of red. “We walked in and there he was, wearing a scowl on his face and writhing roses in the other. Oh god, I was so mortified.”

Victor wasn’t very good with remembering things.
Never had been.

Things simply slipped from his mind and into the bottomless abyss that was his short term memory. It took him months to learn the names and locations of things if it wasn’t something he’d read or been taught. To memorize anything that wasn’t vital to his survival or well being. To remember people’s names and faces. Sometimes he forgot whether or not he had left his oven on, and that caused him an immense amount of anxiety.

Doing things was hard because of his memory sometimes, but it wasn’t debilitating and Victor found ways to deal with things. “I have to find ways to keep things in my head for longer than five seconds, so I’ve made my own methods.” He told Yuuri as he took a seat at the foot of his bed. Yuuri raised an eyebrow and asked what kind of methods. “Well, names are easy. I just make up little songs about the person.”

“That’s kinda stupid,” Yuuri laughed. “Tell me more.”
Yuuri watched as Victor sang through a couple more little jingles, the nasal voice never changing key, with fond eyes and an enamored smile. Makkachin, who had seated himself next to the bed on the floor, groaned every time Victor opened his mouth to keep on singing. Yuuri kept his eyes on Victor’s lips especially, taking in the way they moved and the plumpness of their form. It had been some days since Victor’s Thanksgiving dinner and while they had seen each other multiple times since then, they had yet to discuss what they had meant to before Mila and Sara interrupted them. Now it just hung over them, pleading to be checked off on their list of ways to advance their relationship.

Yuuri bit his lip as Victor kept talking and asked, “What about me? Did you make one for me?”

Victor pressed a finger to his lips and tilted his head back like he was thinking. “Um, not really. It’s not easy to forget someone like you.” Yuuri’s smiled and slapped Victor’s leg playfully. Light chuckles flittered through the room as Victor teased Yuuri, once again, about how crazy he had been that night. A knock came from Yuuri’s door, interrupting their banter.

“That must be the pizza,” Yuuri exclaimed before climbing off the bed and grabbing his wallet. He left the room, skidding as he turned the corner. Victor winced when he heard a crash and yelp from the other room.

“You okay?” He called out as Makkachin left the room to investigate the noise.

“Yeah, I’m good. It was just the coffee table.” Yuuri responded. Victor chuckled and made his way out of Yuuri’s room to join them in the living room.

Yuuri was in the middle of moving, and most of his furniture was sprawled out sporadically about his apartment, waiting to be packaged and put aside for the moving truck coming in three days.

His decision to move had come immediately after Phichit left, himself. The rent would be too much for him to handle alone, and with no job or viable income, Yuuri couldn’t possibly make ends meet. So for two days after the emotional fiasco he put both himself and Victor through, Yuuri searched diligently for cheap apartments in the surrounding areas in which he lived. It was a short, but arduous journey, to find a suitable living space.

He found the perfect apartment, just a couple of blocks away from where he was currently living. It was small, tiny even, but it was affordable and fit all of his things perfectly. It wasn’t like he had much to take with him. The biggest things he had were his bed, the couch, and a dresser he kept in his room. Everything else was relatively small and could be either thrown away or sold if needed. The one bedroom, balcony-less, dull apartment was like a godsend. There was only one problem.

The lease on his current apartment was up at the end of November and the new one wouldn’t be ready to be moved into until mid-December. Yuuri had scrambled to check who or where he could stay in the meantime and was both relieved and mortified when Victor offered him the guest room in his home. Yuuri was taken aback by the suggestion, but he knew it wasn’t something her neither wanted or was able to turn down. Two weeks with Victor would be fine. They were friends, and evolving into something more. He knew the penthouse like the back of his hand and had spent the night on multiple occasions. It wouldn’t be weird for him to go ahead and stay until he was able to move into his new place, though he couldn’t help but feel like it was too much too fast. Yuuri was worried both he and Victor would be suffocated by each other.

The pizza man exchanged the two boxes for the $30 Yuuri handed him and left without a goodbye. Yuuri walked back into the living room and sat on the ground, calling for Victor to bring paper plates. Victor obliged and dug them out of a half packed box in the kitchen. They smiled at each other as Victor sat down and opened the box, face going from utter bliss to absolute disgust in mere
“What? What's wrong?” Yuuri asked, flipping the lid fully to allow him a view. The pizza, a Hawaiian with extra ham, looked fine as Yuuri inspected it. He looked at Victor again and asked what the problem was.

“I'm not fond of pineapple pizza.” He shifted and let a moue expression convey everything he needed to.

“Oh,” Yuuri said, confused on why Victor looked so apologetic. “That's not a problem. I got a pepperoni pizza just in case. Here,” Yuuri smiled and opened the other box, offering it to Victor. Victor took it graciously and traded Yuuri for a napkin and plate in the process. They traded talk of pineapple pizza for Yuuri’s birthday plans, approaching quickly in a matter of days.

It was customary for Yuuri’s friends to throw each other small brunch parties for birthdays and other celebrations. They had let Yuuri know that despite everything that happened between him and Phichit, this year would be no different. Yuuri had invited Victor to the brunch once everything was set up and confirmed. Now all that was left for them to do was pick their attire and wait patiently for the day to come.

“So,” Victor said between bites. “Have you given any thoughts to Sara’s offer? Are you going to audition?” Yuuri shut his eyes and scrunched up his nose because he knew Victor had been dying to get an answer out of him, either for himself or for Sara. Yuuri wasn't very sure which one it was.

Of course, he had thought it over. He ran through it, again and again, every day since Sara had given him her card, and wasn't any closer to making a decision than he had been at the start. It was a great opportunity on one hand, but Yuuri had spent tens of thousands of dollars on his education and to throw it all away, or dismiss it for some modeling gig he picked up by pure luck was ridiculous; it seemed too impulsive and unstable. Sure, those two words were ones he used to describe himself but it didn't mean that was how he meant to live his life forever.

“Eh, I'm not sure. It's a little too spontaneous. I can't just leave the country for a month, or however long they want me to. I have to find a job. A real job. I'm graduating in like three weeks I can't just bullshit around anymore.” Victor nodded along as Yuuri looked more and more like he wanted to puke. The future terrified him, and the reality that his college days were over was really starting to hit him.

“Yeah, I agree.” Victor let on shifting from resting his weight on one side to the other.

A pause in the atmosphere, as they watched each other both aware of the topic looming over their heads.

“It's good, that you'll be here. Um, in New York. It'll be good to have you close by.” Victor ran a hand through Makkachin fur and glued his eyes to the floor. Yuuri's heart started to bounce around his chest, knocking into each and everyone one of his ribs as Victor brought his sentence to a close. “You know… just in case I need someone to watch Makkachin.” And Yuuri sighed then, audibly with too much disappointment. He couldn't help it, he’d been waiting forever for Victor to make some kind of love declaration and the day had yet to come. Each time Victor came so close but retreated back into platonic behavior like nothing happened. Yuuri didn't understand it, or maybe he did, there was no way to know because each time it happened his self-doubt and low self-esteem got in the way of his focusing on anything else other than what could be wrong with him, instead of what might have been going through Victor’s mind to make him go back.

“Yeah,” Yuuri looked out to his balcony and watched as the snowflakes scattered every time the
wind whipped through the city. The sky was gray and the day dim, but the snow gave the city an enchanting feeling. The weather felt romantic, light and fluffy like the softness and purity of new feelings. The cold set the stage for lovers to cuddle, skin to skin, heartbeat to heartbeat. A smile passed through his face, weak and fleeting like each snowflake before him.

Yuuri was going to have to be the one to make a move. He knew that from the first time he recognized his feelings for Victor. It wasn't that he didn't trust Victor to do it himself, it was just that if he left their confessions of love in Victor's hands they would stay there until Victor determined the perfect moment for them to be revealed. Nothing was perfect in life, every moment would be flawed somehow and that meant Victor would take forever to plan something wonderful out. He had to take matters into his own hands.

Their timeline was a mess, Yuuri recognized that. They had met like friends, slept beside each other as lovers, been strangers on their first date, and like family for months. Now they were meant to be a couple. At least Yuuri hoped that was what they would be. He didn't really know what was the next step for them, just that it was one they had to take.

"Hey, Victor?" Yuuri said, still staring outside. The request for Victor's attention was habitual. Something he did when he had something to say but not sure how to say it. Yuuri's heart took off like a spring and rattled all of his bones. It wasn't anxiety or fear, it was excitement.

"Yeah?" Victor responded as he sloppily tried to stop the cheese on his pizza from falling off by trying to catch it with his mouth (he succeeded, but only at the cost of a greasy mouth). Yuuri smiled fondly and leaned his head to the side.

"We need to talk. About Us." The words were heavy with love, that much they both knew.

Victor's eyes widened as he choked on his food. He coughed long and hard into his elbow, wanting to keep stalling for some reason he couldn't figure out. When he finally stopped Yuuri kept on smiling and asked if he was okay.

"I'm fine." His voice was hoarse from his fit.

"Like I was saying, I think it's time we put a label on." Yuuri started with determination before a light, but quite a noticeable ringing echoed through the apartment. Yuuri and Victor locked eyes and Victor pulled his phone from his pocket.

"Um, I have to take this. It's the university." Victor explained, looking at the screen. Yuuri's shoulders dropped as he nodded and motioned for Victor to go ahead. Victor, bright red and voice shaky, answered after clearing his throat. "Hello? Hi, Yakov. How can I help you?"

Yuuri watched as he got up from the floor and walked off down the hall and into the bathroom where only bits and pieces of his conversation could be heard. Makkachin gave Yuuri a sympathetic look, almost as if apologizing for his owner's actions.

Five minutes passed and Victor finally emerged with his coat and Makkachin's leash. "They want me to go in. There's some sort of emergency staff meeting going on. Are you alright finishing before tomorrow?"

Yuuri smiled through the pain of still having to keep his feelings harbored after such a long time of them being so obvious, and nodded. He helped Victor tied Makkachin onto the leash and walked them to the door, telling them to drive carefully in the snow.

When they were gone, he rested his head against the door and groaned, exiling all of his emotions.
into one long and drawn out sound of despair.

---

“So you just… left him?” Chris asked with knit brows. “After all this time of pining and wanting him, he makes the first move and you chicken out?” Victor hung his head in defeat and sipped on the tea Chris had provided when he first arrived in his home, both metaphorical and physical.

The staff meeting had only lasted an hour, but he decided not to go back to Yuuri’s place.

“You?” Chris stressed with a tone of voice he only used when Victor got too drunk to function. Chris’ cat cuddled up to Victor and Makkachin where they were sat on the couch, purring for treats and scratches. Chris called it over to him and kept talking. “Do you- did you lose interest in him? Is the spark just not there anymore?”

“No, it’s there. It’s still running deep. I mean, I definitely still… like him.” He tiptoed around his own words, careful not to say words like ‘love’ or the likes of it. Chris could always read Victor like a book, so it wasn’t like he had to force himself to admit his love for Yuuri out loud. It made him uncomfortable almost. He couldn’t figure out why. He loved Yuuri, he knew it every time he looked at his face or heard his laugh or even thought about him. It was something he just knew, like hunger or thirst. His body reacted to it and shook him to his core.

“Then what’s the problem?” Chris asked, more gently this time. Victor shrugged and leaned further into the sofa. “It’s not internalized-”

“No! Chris, what the fuck? I’m the proudest gay I know.” Victor exclaimed, covering his eyes with his palm. “I think it just scares me.” He finally admitted after some thought.

That was the truth, in some sense. Victor feared to solidify their relationship, calling Yuuri his boyfriend after months of pining.

Yuuri was a mix of everything Victor needed and wanted to be. He shook his life up from top to bottom and merged the night and day with cute text messages and exaggerated snorts of absolute happiness between laughs. There was never a dull moment with him around, even if the world around them was nothing but boring. Victor was brought out of his shell and bubble to experience life more closely, more personally. Yuuri was a paintbrush, and the memories he and Victor created were the paint and their lives a canvas.

Victor and Yuuri were in a place where the paint on their canvas was still wet, able to be smeared or changed if such was needed. They were still fun and the colors were above all bold and beautiful and the distinct smell of paint, like clay and rubbing alcohol, slipped between their lovelorn glances and giggles. Victor wanted to stay that way. Fun. Enticing. New.

He didn’t want Yuuri to be bored of him, to be disappointed in what Victor was beyond spontaneity and faked upbeat laughter. Yuuri knew about his troubles, knew how badly he hurt sometimes, but he hadn’t dealt with all of the sides that Victor had to him. Yuuri didn’t know that Victor was the equivalent of a twelve-sided die.

And Victor worried about how he could hurt Yuuri. The infinite ways in which he could twist his arm and drive him to tears. Unintentionally, of course, there was no way in the world he would ever voluntarily hurt someone so dear to him. But Yuuri was just as chipped as Victor, crumbling and barely holding it together. They could both destroy each other with a simple goodbye, a wave of their hand. A dismissal of what they felt for one another.
But that couldn’t happen if they were never exclusive, and yes, maybe Victor was risking keeping Yuuri by his side, but he just needed time. Yuuri just needed to see more of him. He just needed to keep Yuuri with him a little longer. With time, they could try different strokes on their wet canvas and create the most beautiful painting they were capable of.

“I just need to grow with him a while longer,” Victor explained with the realization of what he had been feeling in his voice.

Chris nodded and wished Victor his best.

The next day, at around midday, Yuuri and Victor finished putting into storage the biggest of Yuuri’s items and things he wouldn’t necessarily need when staying in Victor’s apartment. It had been hard to load and unload the truck both times since they were both dressed to brace the cold New York weather, with wool coats, thick scarfs, and plush beanies. They staggered to move everything each time, arms seemingly less functional underneath the layers and layers of clothing.

When everything was truly finished, they walked to Yuuri’s car and started for Victor’s home, where Makkachin was waiting for them patiently. The ride was silent and tense, a turn in the mood on Victor’s part. He had said the minimum words possible while the two labored away and hadn’t stopped to look at Yuuri for longer than three or so seconds. It was odd to not have Victor’s eyes on him, Yuuri recognized almost immediately. It was like he was left unsupervised, unsupported and alone in a place he couldn’t remember. It was a limbo of sorts to be without Victor’s cerulean blue eyes on him constantly.

Victor, sat in the passenger seat, staring off into the gloomy street, let out a little huff of air into the car window and wrote something in Russian Yuuri had no way of understanding on the fogged up glass.

Yuuri didn’t let his attention linger on him for too long. The traffic was heavy, with sloshy roads and sleek patches of black ice hidden among the commotion. He had to be careful with each light that stopped and leads him closer and closer to Victor’s place. Yuuri turned on the radio and lost himself in the music. Purposefully he sang along with each song, trying harder and harder with each that passed to memorize the lyrics. He had to occupy himself somehow. He couldn’t obsess over why Victor seemed so pissed off or what he had done to cause his mood. Yuuri kept his head up high and swayed along to the melodies of the top 40 hits streaming in his car.

The fifth song started as they sat in traffic and Victor placed his hand on the volume knob, muting the music and making Yuuri tense in response. “I’m sorry, I’ve got a headache.” He explained. A tired look flashed over his face and Yuuri understood.

“Are you okay? You look a little stressed.” Yuuri inquired, both hands on the wheel and eyes staring straight ahead. Victor gave Yuuri his best smile and winked at him.

“You know me so well,” he said almost in a whisper like it was a thought that had slipped through his teeth. “Um, I’ve got to get my final copy for the final exam ready by tomorrow. That’s what the meeting was over yesterday. They wanted us to be prepared because of some fiasco last year.”

Yuuri snorted, his odd laughter perking Victor up. “I remember that. The president and supervisors were so mad. Guang Hong and Phichit passed two finals by default because a couple of professors ran late with printing and didn't have enough for every class. It was great.” The snow began to really calm down as they shared a laugh in the car, drowning the atmosphere in white and gray swirls. Yuuri checked to see if the line of cars was moving along at all and was met with disappointing
news. He could see red and blue flashes of light a couple of yards away, a sign of an accident or burst pipe, or any number of incidents really. That meant there would be a delay in their already long trip to Greenwich Village. He groaned, placing his forehead on the wheel.

“What's wrong?” Victor asked, still giggling from Yuuri's anecdote about the past year.

“It seems we're going to be here longer than expected.” Yuuri explained, nestling into his seat and turning his head to face Victor. “I would get comfy if I were you.”

Victor laid into this seat and unbutton his coat. The car was already starting to become stuffy, as Yuuri had his air conditioning on and the layers Victor was in were incredibly thick. Yuuri watched him with a smile, as he peeled off each piece of clothing before reaching a white sweater that seemed to be the last of his apparel. Victor watched Yuuri watching him and asked, “What?”

“I'm sorry you can't go home immediately. Especially with your headache and everything.” He said after pulling himself out of the enamored trance Victor had placed him under. “Um, I think I have some Tylenol in here somewhere.” Yuuri began to search through the entirety of his dashboard and all of the surrounding compartments before finding a tiny bottle of Advil where he kept his registration. He handed it to Victor and watched as he chugged two pills down with a hot chocolate they'd bought on their way to the storage facility.

“So, have you gotten any job offers?” Victor looked off into the distance of the city as he spoke, distracted by something.

“Um, no. I haven't. But I think something good should come along any time now.” Yuuri tapped his fingers against the armrest of his seat and looked to Victor again, taking in the perfect slopes of and angles of which his side profile consisted. “I should be good.”

“It's a tough market. Teaching isn't something that has new jobs added regularly. It'll be hard to find a job especially with all of the schools closing.” Victor spoke so nonchalantly, with no regard for the fact that Yuuri already knew everything he was saying and that it hurt him, all the same, to have it repeated like it didn't matter.

The car went silent and stayed that way until traffic started moving again when Victor let Yuuri know, even though Yuuri was already driving down the road.

Yuuri tried not to take it personally. They'd both had off days before. It was normal for the both of them and they had grown somewhat accustomed to what worked in terms of how to help each other in those situations. Yuuri liked to be cuddled close and lulled into peace (by Victor at least), while Victor tended to want to be left alone with his thoughts. That's what he would say anyway. Really, Yuuri noticed, he'd want to be distracted from them if they got too dark or put him in a mood he couldn't easily get out of. That was usually when Yuuri would ask Victor if he wanted to go walk Makkachin or shopping or even just down to the park down the street from his building. It worked sometimes, but Yuuri was still refining his ways of helping Victor.

When they arrived, Victor helped Yuuri with one of his two suitcases and led them both upstairs, where Makkachin was waiting anxiously, ready to be let out to relieve himself. Yuuri offered to walk him and told Victor to take a hot shower before finishing his final copy of his final exam. Victor heeded his advice and dragged himself up to his room.

Yuuri's first night with Victor was uneventful. They had a silent dinner, watched a new movie, played with Makkachin and went off to bed in silence. It helped Yuuri with the awkwardness to know that he already had a situated room in Victor's home, so there was no need for Victor to show him the ropes of living with him. He had his place in every aspect of Victor's life, and in his home, it
was the guest room and not in Victor's bed where he belonged. It was in the guest room, where he'd already spent plenty of nights after their movie nights ran late or Victor insisted Yuuri stay. Yuuri felt pushed aside all evening and most of the night.

Yuuri almost wanted to cry, but he had to remind himself that not everything was about him and that people had off days and that Victor loved and wanted him there. Yuuri knew that, but he fell asleep feeling unwanted, in a plush bed with stuffy pajamas pinning him down into his own body.

Victor was no different that night. He felt absent. Unfulfilled. Empty. He paced around the entirety of his apartment and couldn't pacify himself enough to sleep. The snow filled the space outside his apartment and all he could do was picture St. Petersburg and his childhood. Some memories haunted and others gifts to him. He didn't know what was wrong with him, like always. And he felt selfish for being so cold towards Yuuri but he told himself it was alright to be selfish.

Victor waited until he was sure Yuuri was asleep. He made sure to listen for his soft snores and whimpers before opening the door to his room and just watching him. He didn't know why. He wasn't particularly sure of any reason he could think of. It didn't even help him.

It made him feel worse.

“Yuuri, I'm divorced.” Victor declared the very next morning at breakfast. Yuuri almost choked on his coffee when Victor told him but kept his composure. Makkachin shifted his eyes from Yuuri to Victor to Yuuri again as the room was robbed of all noise.


“I just, uh, have some papers lying around and just thought I'd let you know. Didn't want it to catch you off guard.” Victor explained, lying through his teeth. It had been an attempt to get Yuuri to know him. To tell him fragment by fragment about his life and how he lived it. All night long Victor thought about what would make him feel better. He didn't know why, but he felt like he was keeping secrets from Yuuri. He didn't know enough about him and that scared him. He didn't feel like himself, fully. But actually telling Yuuri things about himself didn't help fix or even control the storm going on inside him.

“Okay, I wasn't planning on snooping, if that's what you're worried about.” Yuuri laughed, letting a hurt tone slip through each decibel of his giggle.

“No, that's not what I meant. You know that.” Victor voiced, almost annoyed. The words came out much harsher than he expected and suddenly Yuuri looked indignated by it all. He didn't mean for Yuuri to be insulted by it. He just needed an excuse to make his confession much less conspicuous. The room seemed to shrink around them as they stared at each other, brown eyes on fire and blue ones too frigid to move.

“Yeah, I know.” Yuuri sounded defeated and after minutes of unfiltered silence, he excused himself, going off to get ready for school. He spent ten minutes getting ready and emerged with red around his eyes, but Victor didn't see the crimson tint past his glasses. “I'll see you tonight, yeah?” Yuuri asked, masking a snuffle as a cough. Victor mumbled a ‘yes’ without looking up and continued to eat his cereal as Yuuri exited.

At the door, Yuuri took one more glance at Victor sipping his coffee and slipped out of the door with a knot in his chest.
They both spent their day spiritless, for one reason or another. Hours seemed to drag on and on through each lecture they both sat through or taught. The snow crumpled under their feet as they walked different paths. The wind made them feel alone, empty. Life seemed to move like a blur in a Polaroid picture. Yuuri wanted to go home, to go be alone where Victor couldn’t look at him like Yuuri was forcing himself into his life. All Victor wanted to do was sit down and talk.

Not about anything in particular. He and Yuuri never really sat down to talk about things preplanned. Victor wanted to know if Yuuri believed in God, or loved the stars. He wanted Yuuri to ask him what St. Petersburg was in the summer time and what his favorite kind of Girl Scout cookie and Victor wanted to tell him that St. Petersburg shone like a diamond during the summer and that he couldn’t choose a favorite cookie because they were all good for him to have just one. Victor wanted to shit talk and watch reality tv shows again, so that he could hear Yuuri’s commentary on just why Nene Leakes should have left the Real Housewives of Wherever earlier than she did. He wanted to read him poetry and act like they were in France. Victor wanted Yuuri to tell him his shirts looked like he picked them up on vacation on a cruise.

Most of all, Victor wanted to feel like Yuuri wasn’t growing far from him. Even if they had only been living together for less than a day, it was apparently all they both needed to look at each other differently.

Maybe it was Victor’s mental state or Yuuri’s inability to voice his grievances, but things felt dark between them.

And it pained him.

____________________

Victor’s mood lifted by the time of Yuuri’s birthday. Things weren’t so tense with them anymore. The atmosphere had cleared and Yuuri noticed that the shimmer in Victor’s eyes had returned, as well as his clinginess.

Clinginess in a good way, the way Yuuri loved. Clinginess in the sense that Victor draped himself around Yuuri and touched his face and hair and danced with him when they cleaned. He was sweet again, like a ripe peach or, more appropriately, the bowl of Froot loops Victor prepared for him each morning.

On Yuuri’s birthday, a Tuesday and test day for them both, Victor woke him with blue and silver balloons and a plate of crepes so beautiful Yuuri almost started crying when he saw Victor burst into his room, Makkachin following happily behind him.

“Happy birthday to you,” Victor sang as he placed the crepes on the bedside table and enveloped Yuuri in a hug so warm he almost forgot it was winter. Victor kissed his cheek and ruffled his hair with so much love Yuuri almost exploded.

“Thank you, Victor. You shouldn’t have.” Yuuri sat up in bed and picked up his glasses from where kept them. Placing them on his face, he turned to Victor and smiled at the painfully tired man in front of him. He looked like he hadn’t slept at all, hair a mess and clothes sprinkled with flour that was, Yuuri guessed, from the crepes. Wiping the smile from his face, Yuuri asked him, “Did you sleep at all?”

“No, not really. But that just means I was awake to make you breakfast.” Victor sighed heavily and brought the plate of crepes to Yuuri’s lap. They were folded into triangles, some stuffed with whipped cream and strawberries and others with Nutella and bananas. Powdered sugar coated their outside like snow, accompanied by rainbow sprinkles. Yuuri bit his lip and looked at Victor’s heavy under eye bags.
“You need to sleep,” Yuuri told him gently. “It’s been days and you look exhausted. Victor, I’m worried.”

“I’m okay, Yuuri. I’m not really affected by it.” Victor argued, handing him a fork and settling into the bed beside him.

“You know that’s not true. You’ve been really distant for a couple of days. You’re not doing well. You need to sleep.” Yuuri explained, lifting the covers for Victor to slip in comfortably.

“Okay, okay. I’ll make sure to get some sleep before work today. Now eat, I spent a long time making these.” Victor leaned into him and yawned. Yuuri picked up the fork and grinned because the moment felt pure and full of love, the type that had always existed between Yuuri and Victor.

They shared the crepes, one taking bites after the other. When they were gone and the plate was put aside, it didn’t take long for Victor to close his eyes and fall into a deep sleep. Yuuri thought about staying there with him, tucked into the warm covers all day, but he had too much to do, and as much as he’d like to, it wasn’t possible for him to stay and cuddle. Getting out of bed as gently as he could without waking Victor, Yuuri called Makkachin up to the bed to replace him. He watched him sleep for some time after he was changed and ready to go, back pack strapped to him like any other day. Yuuri was overcome with something like happiness, but more genuine. Something white hot and tender it made the butterflies in his stomach, which had for too long felt like worms, flutter around. Maybe it was the snow outside his window, or the blue glow the balloons were giving off, or, more likely, it was the sweet little noises Victor was letting out as he cuddled himself closer to Makkachin.

Lively, with a heart full of love, Yuuri did something out of character.

He walked to Victor’s bedside and stroked his silver fringe from his face and forehead, careful not to wake him. Victor looked so snug, and peaceful; like an angel. Pure and pristine, deserving of the ceilings of the Sistine Chapel.

Yuuri leaned down and tried to memorize Victor this way.

Trembling lips found his forehead. The same one Victor was so ashamed of. The same forehead Yuuri loved so much because Victor looked so good with his hair pushed back.

Yuuri cupped his cheek and pretended like he wasn’t blushing. Before pulling away, Victor opened his eyes and caught his hand, kissing it gently. Yuuri was startled, but Victor, as was in his nature, made it seem like the most normal thing for two ‘friends’ to do, saying, “Have a good day at school. I’ll see you tonight alright?”

Yuuri gulped and nodded, giving Victor a reassuring half smile, sending him back to sleep. Yuuri staggered back and practically ran to the door. Calming himself, he closed it softly and left for his morning class.

“Fuck, you guys are really in love, aren’t you?” Guang Hong stated, covering his mouth with one hand and holding Leo’s with the other. “I mean- Forehead kisses? We didn’t even do that until our-what? Our fifth or sixth month. My dude, Yuuri, bro, I mean- just tell him you love him already.”

The librarian shushed them with a scowl on his face and Yuuri rolled his eyes. The people around them didn’t seem to mind their chatter, after all.

Yuuri turned his attention back to their conversation and rolled his eyes at Guang Hong this time, sighing into the philosophy book before him. The trio was studying. Or more accurately, Yuuri and
Leo were helping Guang Hong study for a class he had only gone to four times the entire semester. Yuuri had taken the class two years back, and Leo one semester, so each were taking turns placing sticky notes where what they remembered was in the final was located in the book. It was an effective way of studying, and technically not cheating since they were not giving him the answers.

“First of all, love is too strong a word for you to be using it so lightly, you little dweeb.” Yuuri spat at him playfully and placed a bright pink sticky note labeled must know on a small passage in the text. “But, yes. I’m approaching that point a lot more quickly than I thought I would. I mean, in perspective, I’ve only known him for four months. That’s too fast, isn’t it?”

“That’s up to you, Yuuri,” Leo said, speaking up for the first time on the matter. “How do you feel about it all?”

That was a good question. Truly, it was because Yuuri, in his falling head over heels for Victor, hadn’t stopped to think whether or not things were happening too quickly between them. For fucks sake he was living in his home and he didn’t even know Victor’s birthday. He didn’t know what he wanted in life. If teaching was his end game. He didn’t know Victor’s blood type, despite having been covered in it at some point in time. Yuuri didn’t know much about him, but things didn’t feel wrong between them. Yuuri knew what he needed to know:

His full name was Victor Alexeevich Nikiforov.
He was 28 years old.
He was allergic to peanuts.
Yuuri loved him with all of his heart.

Those were things… that he knew about him. Yuuri wasn't sure just what information he was supposed to have. Everything could come after, he was sure he would love Victor regardless of anything that could surface later on. At least he hoped. No, he was sure he would because Victor was too good to be bad. Even his negative characteristics were redeemable and held some value in themselves. Victor was a mystery and Yuuri liked to figure him out. He liked to deduct and infer as to why and how he did things. Yuri liked to lie awake late at night with a sparkling in his heart because Victor looked or spoke to him a certain way and now it was all he could think about and God what does it mean?

It was an adventure and it was wonderful because of his own parents, married for thirty years and counting, were still finding things out about themselves to this day and that was what Yuuri wanted. It was too forced to sit down and just spill each other’s essence to one another. It had to be natural for it to work. Love had to be organic and unintentional, like the stars.

Yuuri realized he had been using the word ‘love’ freely as he thought about Victor and the blush from the morning returned to his face. He broke out into a grin and held his face with both hands, trying to contain himself from squeaking like a man too in love.

“I don’t think it’s too fast.” Yuuri said, finally answering Leo’s question after getting sidetracked by his undeniable love for a certain man who just happened to love him too. “I feel like I’m attached to him somehow- I don’t know how to explain it, but everything we do just feels right. Like it’s meant to happen.” He said.

“Well, then you’re good. If it doesn’t feel wrong to you- if it comes naturally- then there’s nothing wrong with it.” Leo responded as he and Guang Hong smiled fondly in Yuuri’s direction, like parents watching their child maturing before their very eyes.

Yuuri laughed it off and told them both to focus on the task at hand. They spent the next hour or so going over the book, revising and revising until they couldn’t do it anymore. Yuuri was glad they
didn’t insist on talking about Victor and him, his brain felt like it was buzzed. Thinking about Victor for too long always made him a little light headed because the possibility of happiness and unconditional love was so close to him. He just had to say three little words and he’d have it. It was too much to think about.

The group parted ways with a promise to see each other for Yuuri’s breakfast brunch on Saturday.

Yuuri made his way home in silence, contemplating the perfect way to confess to Victor.

“...You don’t think it’s awkward that I’m going to be the oldest person there?” Victor asked as he straightened his sweater out under his coat and smoothed out his hair. Yuuri looked at himself in the car mirror and smiled at his own reflection. They were both dressed to the nines, in tight fitting slacks and over the top sweaters, courtesy of Yuuri’s good taste and a store on 5th avenue. They matched, oddly. Yuuri in a rose gold, cashmere crewneck, and white pants, and Victor in a golden, beige cardigan, a crisp white shirt underneath, and blue jeans to tie it all together. They looked good and gay and frankly, like a couple. Which they were.

Practically.

“Nope.” Yuuri answered, popping the ‘p’ for emphasis. “Yuko’s 26 anyway, you’re not that much older. And honestly, the oldest person there is like...20 years older than you.”

They were sat in Yuuri’s car, in front of the restaurant where a small party in honor of Yuuri’s 26th birthday was being held. It was on Staten Island at one of the more pricier establishments the group had ever booked before. Guang Hong, the coordinator for the event, had taken the pleasure of sending out a last minute warning to everyone reminding them to dress up best they could, which sent both Yuuri and Victor running to the nearest shopping center for new outfits.

“Are you sure?” Victor continued with a worried tone of his voice. “I'm ancient compared to most of your friends. I've taught two-” he stopped and thought again. “Is Phichit going to be there?”

“No,” Yuuri teased. “He said he couldn’t make it.”

That was a relief for both of them because Yuuri hadn’t had to endure the awkwardness of Phichit’s presence and Victor wouldn't have to pretend to have him there.

“Either way, I’ve taught Leo. I was his teacher. That's weird. I mean, I’ve seen his rating of me in Rate My Professors.” Yuuri laughed when Victor said that and stepped out of the car, ducking his head back in and inviting him out too.

“They'll love you. Don't worry. If we're friends,” Yuuri told him. “They shouldn't have a problem with you either. You're charming, in any case. So stop worrying.”

They looked at the building before them, Victor sighing as he slipped an arm around Yuuri’s waist. “The Traveler,” he read the restaurants name with uncertainty. “That's an interesting name.”

“They're really good,” Yuuri told him. “That's what Guang Hong said anyway, he kept going on and on about their hot cross buns.” Victor smiled at him as they walked inside, where the warmth of the interior allowed them to remove their coats.

Yuuri walked to the hostess at the front of the restaurant and told her their names. She welcomed them, wished Yuuri a happy birthday, and invited them to follow her to the private room their party was situated in. They followed her in after handing another woman their jackets.
The restaurant was beautiful as they walked through it. It had pink walls and big open windows, with flowers on every table and corner. It had a seaside view and homely vibe to it. Most of the people in the front part of the building were older women, eating with their daughters or nieces, though there were plenty of what seemed like bachelorette parties going on nearing the back.

Yuuri looked at the white table cloths and vintage furniture with a sparkle in his eyes, grateful for the friends he had because everything was so beautiful and thought out. This would be one birthday brunch to set the standard for all others.

“Here you are, gentlemen. Have a wonderful meal.” The hostess said to them as she opened the glass doors that lead into the room.

Victor hadn't expected so many people.

Sure, he knew Yuuri was a wonderful person, coming from both Professors and students who had him as a university guide their first year in college or sought his help in whatever class they had trouble in, but as he looked out into the crowd of at least 20 people, something told him that he had deeply underestimated just how strong the bonds Yuuri had with people were.

Yuuri had called it a quaint get-together, but this was looking more and more like a birthday party. The room erupted with glee when they spotted them walking in and all rushed at once to meet them at the door. Victor's hand quickly dropped from Yuuri's waist, as he leaned in to speak to him before they all reached them. “I thought you said this was just going to be your closest friends.”

“I'm close to all of these people.” Yuuri defended, nervously like he wasn't sure what most of the people in the room were going anyway. “One way or another.” Yuuri looked at his face and saw the panic starting to build. “Hey, you'll be okay, alright? I'll be by your side the entire time. No worries.”

And with that, a flood of hugs and kisses and sweet hellos came before them. Victor was shaking more hands and giving more hugs than he could deal with, all the while trying to remember everyone's names. Faces and faces, one immediately after the other, came to him the entire way to their table at the head of the room, where all of Yuuri's actual group of friends was sat. Yuuri sat him down with a reassuring smile in the seat next to him after they were done greeting everyone. Victor gave him a weak smile and tried not to act like the first five minutes of his time there hadn't drained him completely.

“It's nice to finally meet you, Victor.” Yuko, a sweet looking girl with red hair and green eyes said, taking a seat next to Leo. “It's nice to finally put a face to the name.”

“Yeah, you too.” And Victor didn't know why he said that because Yuuri had never brought her up in the time they knew each other.

“Yuuri’s been really good at keeping you to himself,” She said like she was reprimanding them both. “But Leo tells us you're a professor. That's interesting.”

“Not as much as you'd think. It's a lot of work.” Victor laughed, easing into the conversation, trying to avoid thinking about Yuuri's friends talking about him behind closed doors. “I think I'm doing alright for it being my first year, though.”

“Oh?” Yuko’s voiced perked up again as she leaned in from her seat, elbows on the table and hands together, ready for him to go on. “And what did you do before?”

“Well, I published a couple of books, wrote some papers, traveled lecturing at different colleges, and worked for my parents for some time. It's all kind of boring.”
“And what do your parents do?” She pressed.

“They shareholders, but they own a publishing company in St. Petersburg. That's where I worked, mostly.” Victor smiled at the table and looked to Yuuri, who was looking at him with warmth in his eyes. “But enough about me. We’re here to celebrate our Yuuri.” He said as he wrapped an arm around his shoulders and pulled him closer.

That made Yuuri blush profusely because all of his friends were now giving him that stupid look they gave each other when someone hit on him and Yuuri was oblivious to it. Except for this time, it wasn't that Victor was hitting on him, it was that they were both so open and willing to accept it as something normal that happened between people who were just ‘friends’.

Luckily the staff came into the private room and began to take orders, taking away some of the attention away from the lovers. Yuuri scanned the menu quickly and settled for a dish of spinach frittata, poached eggs, with a side salad of mixed fruits. Guang Hong took the liberty of ordering them all mimosas, which Yuuri gladly drank because wow, it was like he was bringing someone home to his parents.

They spoke and ate and both genuinely enjoyed themselves as time went on. Yuuri's friends, despite their ages, were welcoming and easy to get along with. Victor lost his edge twenty minutes in and spent the rest of his time walking around with Yuuri as he greeted everyone more personally after their meal.

“It's so nice to see you've found a boyfriend, dear.” Janice, a fifty-nine-year-old woman Yuuri knew from the admissions office at the university told him, taking Yuuri's hand into her own and looking at Victor, who was stood next to him.

They both turned pink, quickly trying to assure her and everyone around them that they weren't in any way involved. “He's my best friend.” Yuuri argued with a certain cadence to his voice that made it seem like he was lying. “Like a brother, right Victor?” Yuuri didn't know why he was spewing such utter bullshit. Maybe it was all of the eyes on them, and the panic that ran through Victor's own as he tried to delegate against the idea of dating Yuuri.

“Y-yeah, just friends.” Victor stuttered, picking at his sleeve.

They got weird looks from everyone in the room and saw Guang Hong visibly roll his eyes in frustration, but things eventually went back to normal.

On their way back to their seats, Victor made sure to let Yuuri know that he thought the idea of them dating was absurd by keeping a foot's distance from his side. He felt cold suddenly, in contrast to the toasty temperature the room was kept.

“It's time for presents!” Guang Hong called out as he invited everyone to pay attention to their table in particular, as the one with all of Yuuri's gifts was wheeled to his side. The cart (or table, Yuuri couldn't tell), pushed Victor further from him than he was, all of the to the wall to his right. They kept watchful eyes on each other as Yuuri tore through golden and ornate wrapping paper and bags. There were some envelopes filled with money and gift cards, but most people had gotten him clothing or books, or even some house warming gifts since most were aware he had moved out of his apartment and would be living alone.

Yuuri thanked everyone from the bottom of his heart as the brunch came to a close, sending them all home with well wishes and kisses only Yuuri was capable of giving. The heard of pastels (a color schematic everyone but he and Victor seems to have agreed to) left once dessert had been served and devoured. Guang Hong and Leo walked out with them once they thanked the staff and paid their
Victor and Yuri found themselves at the entrance of the establishment, Victor helping Yuuri into his coat when someone called to him. Victor's head whipped up at the sound, a mixture of terror and repulsion clouding his eyes. Yuuri looked to where Victor was staring and met the green eyes of a man dressed in a full khaki suit, surrounded by women. The man waved over to them, or Victor to be more precise and excused himself from his group to jovially bounce his way over to where Victor was standing next to Yuuri.

“Well, well, well. Long time no see.” The man came on defiantly, slanting his eyes to seem more serious. “I guess you really meant it when you said you never wanted to see me again.”

“That's kind of the point of divorce, is it not?” Victor fired back as he slipped on his own jacket, then placed Yuuri's scarf around Yuuri's neck like nothing had changed and they were still on their way out.

“Divorce, in” Yuuri thought, “Victor is divorced and this must be his ex-husband.”

Yuuri watched as the man flinched back at Victor's comment, eyes darting to Yuuri who was stood there frozen, unsure of what to do. This wasn't his fight, so extended a hand to introduce himself, since Victor obviously wasn't going to do it himself. Smiling and with sweaty palms, Yuuri shook the man's hand. “Hi, I'm Yuuri.”

“Luca.”

“It's nice to meet you.” Yuuri continued shyly. Victor's hand returned to the place just above the small of his back as it pulled him closer to him.

“Are you his newest?” Luca asked him without reserve. “Or are you just some sort of escort?” Yuuri's face went red and his world started to crumble. The people around them, snot nosed old women and their posh families mostly, gave them all dirty looks and let their eyes linger on Yuuri's face especially.

“Excuse me?” Yuuri asked, voice showing how obviously insulted he was. He didn’t know what had warranted the comment, but he was sick and tired of people making those kinds of assumptions about him. For months now, people had been making snide remarks of that sort when they thought neither of them was listening. Yuuri usually made a point of disregarding them, but to have something like that suddenly said to his face was different. “What the fuck is wrong with you?”

Luca rolled his eyes at Yuuri and crossed his arms, a sign of defiance. “If you’re here with him,” He gestured to Victor, “I could ask you the same thing.”

It left a sour taste in Yuuri’s mouth to hear just what Victor and Yuuri looked like to the untrained eye.

“That's enough.” Victor stepped in and pointed a finger at his chest. “That was completely uncalled for, Luca.”

“So was taking your name back, but you didn't seem to have an issue doing that.” Luca rebutted and Yuuri wanted the earth to swallow him whole because this really wasn't his battle to wage, but he was still somehow in the middle of it. The front entrance was silent as the face off went on and Luca and Victor started an argument in Russian. Hands went flying with uncultured gestures and wagging fingers that seemed to blame everything on who ever was on the receiving end.

“I don't have time for this.” Victor stepped back, speaking in English again. “Today's been good for
me, and I won't let you spoil one more day of my life. Come one, Yuuri.”

Victor took his wrist and led them out with a huff of anger each step he took. Yuuri glanced back as Luca shouted something to them; something only Yuuri seemed to be able to catch.

“I hope you run this relationship into the ground too, you fuck.”

Yuuri wanted to cry, suddenly.

_______

“Do people think I’m some sort of sugar baby when they see us? Is that a thing people think about us?” Yuuri asked when they walked through the door into Victor’s apartment. “I mean, I’ve heard the comments people make, but Jesus fucking Christ Victor, does it really look like I’m mooching off of you?”

Yuuri strips himself from his coat and hangs it on the coat hanger near the door. Victor lingered beside him, arms crossed and leaning against the wall after putting down all of Yuuri’s gifts, staring at Yuuri like he’s spewing incomprehensible bullshit. Yuuri looks at him, raising an eyebrow.

“Well? Do people tell you things like that too, or am I the only villain in people’s eyes?” Yuuri continued sparring with himself over something Victor thought didn’t matter. “Victor, can you answer my question?”

Victor took in a deep breath and exhaled, holding the bridge of his nose because people had made comments about the nature of their relationship, but they were usually made against Yuuri. Lilia, Yakov, other professors, his brothers (surprisingly), and business partners of both his and his parents when they saw Yuuri and Victor out and about. Victor always made a point of defending Yuuri, above anything else, but news traveled fast around his more elite circles, and the whole of Europe's young socialites were under the impression that Victor had some twink in the city and was going through his quarter life crisis. There wasn’t much he could do about it, except ignore it and refute it when he got the chance.

“I’ve… had some comments.” He admitted, moving closer to Yuuri.

Yuuri gasped and asked who from.

“Is that really important?” Victor asked. A silence so deadly it sent a shiver up Victor’s spine coated the room. Yuuri’s eyes went dull, losing all shine and luster, as he told him that yes, it was important. Victor looked to the floor and sighed before looking back up. “It was a couple of professors and some of my old college friends. And a couple of business partner’s of my parents. But obviously I told them that nothing of the sort was going on between them was going on and they understood. Well, until Thanksgiving when… um, well you know.”

Yuuri looked like he was going to faint. He looked soulless, absent of all thought in that moment. Victor thought that maybe he’d cry and his heart broke for him because this was not how his birthday was supposed to go. Clouds passed in front of the sun outside, casting a shadow around the livingroom. Makkachin moved to drink from his bowl near the kitchen, sending the sound of his lapping throughout the silent penthouse.

“That’s why they were staring at us so much? From the minute I walked in, they all recognized me as your concubine- Oh my God!” Yuuri exclaimed, thinking back to Victor’s Thanksgiving dinner. All of those people he shook hands with- Oh God, Yuuri wanted to puke. “Is that what your mom
thinks about me?"

“No! Yuuri, no, of course not. Mama loves you.” Victor took one more step towards him, closing the distance between them. They were face to face, as Victor looked down to him and took Yuuri’s chin between his index finger and thumb. “The people who think that about you are irrelevant to what we are, luchik.”

The growing repulsion in Yuuri’s chest is soothed. He loses himself in Victor’s eyes momentarily, taking in the hues in his eyes and subtle movements between Yuuri’s eyes and his lips. He loosens up as the tension leaves his shoulders. But then he plays back what Victor said and pain washes over him. The people who think that about you are irrelevant to what we are. There were too many problems with that sentence for Yuuri to sit there and analyze what kind of thinking Victor’s id was doing but it hurt him because Victor was separating Yuuri’s tainted social standing in his world from their relationship, like it was something he didn’t want to be associated with him, personally. Yuuri stepped back and turned to look at the floor.

“What are we, then?” He prompted. He asked him this, not because he wanted to know the answer, but because he wanted to see how Victor would react when it was just them, alone in the comfort of their- his own home.

“We’re just friends, right?” Victor answered, posing it as a question. Yuuri’s face turned into a blank canvas as he grabbed his gifts from the floor and turned his back to Victor.

“Yeah, of course,” Yuuri responded.

Yuuri was thinking about Victor at an inopportune time. He was sitting in his counselor’s office, going over his next move and his future, but he couldn’t seem to be able to concentrate on what was coming out of her mouth. His eyes darted from corner to corner of her small office and he thought about the previous night. He and Victor had a dispute, on Yuuri’s part at least, and it had left him feeling empty inside and confused. After he stomped off into his room, Victor took his time in searching for him, a smart move on his part because if he had sought Yuuri out immediately, things would have only escalated to screaming and neither of them was prepared to have that happen.

No, Victor waited until nighttime, when Yuuri was dozing off, to come to his door. He came bearing cake and an invitation to watch a movie, but Yuuri told him he had a headache, sending him back to whatever he was doing before, cake and all. They didn’t speak all of Sunday either, Yuuri spent it running and working out, while Victor visited Mila and Yuri for the first time in a couple of days. The next three days after that weren’t great for them either. They spared glances to each other when they passed one another in the halls of Victor’s home and smiled at breakfast, but not much else happened between them. Yuuri was hurt, incredibly so. He felt dirty somehow, like a secret, except he wasn’t. Or maybe he was. Maybe what other people thought about him made Victor not want to make things official. Maybe that was why they weren’t together.

But Victor wasn’t like that, Yuuri thought. Victor didn’t care about the public or other people’s opinions. He wasn’t like that. Victor moved to the beat of his own drum and didn’t let other people influence what he did or who he loved. Surely there must have been another explanation for why he would keep calling them just friends. There had to be.

But the conclusion that Yuuri came to, that Victor didn’t want to taint his own image by making his relationship with Yuuri official because it would prove some point to the more important people in his social life, as damning and painful as it was, made sense and seemed to be the only plausible reason for his hesitance in forming and true and loving relationship with Yuuri.
“Yuuri, you’re cutting it pretty close to graduation and you still haven’t received any offers.” The
 counselor brought his attention back to her as she took his hand into hers. “Dear, I hate to tell this to
 graduates, but I’d like for you to consider finding an intermediate job, just until you can find one in
 teaching. Have you looked at maybe working in publishing? I know you minored in English so
 maybe—”

“What if—” Yuuri started with a shaky voice. He was stuttering because he couldn’t believe he was
 really going to bring this up. “I have an uh, an opportunity coming up and I’ve been on the fence
 about it. I’m not sure it’s the thing for me, but I’m also not sure it’s not. It’s risky, but so is staying
 here and waiting for a position to open for me isn’t it?”

The counselor knit her brows and let go of Yuuri’s hands. “That depends, what is this opportunity?”

“Modeling. It’s a small project from what I’ve been told, but it’ll pay well.” Yuuri noticed the lack of
 moving air in the room suddenly, breathing heavily through his nose. “I-it’s not like it’s been
 guaranteed for me, but they want me to audition for it and I’m not sure if I should.”

“Yuuri, if you feel like this is something you should venture into, I think you should do it.” She
 smiled at him and looked for something in his file. “Here it is. You’ve modeled before, for an art
 class here, right?” Yuuri nodded. “And you did that charity thing, right?” Yuuri flushed and asked
 how she knew. “Students talk, and so do the professors. But back to my point, did you enjoy the
 experiences?”

“They were a little nerve wrecking, but I felt fresh. New. Like I was me, but more confident.” Yuuri
 had done an inordinate amount of thinking about a possible career in modeling, all inconclusive. He
 felt too short for it and had a somewhat wobbly walk, but as Chris had told him once during practice,
 it gave him an edge the others didn’t have. Yuuri didn’t have to be a runway model exclusively
 either. He could do catalogs and magazines and ad campaigns for different types of things.

“If you liked it, honey I think you should take a chance. Go audition and see where it leads you.”
 Yuuri’s heart ached when she said that. His chest concaved as he exhaled, letting his shoulders to
 close into his body. It was damn good advice; Yuuri knew because he’d already given it to himself
 multiple times. Hell, even Dr. Newman had given him the same advice in his last session of therapy.
 He was held back then, in promising to go and audition, by Victor.

Victor was his anchor. He was the only reason Yuuri was still in New York and not pursuing jobs or
 other opportunities abroad or in other states. He spoke English for god sakes; even as a history major,
 he could find some kind of job in Japan or Europe. But he had been tethered to New York City by
 Victor. Because Yuuri longed to be with him. He wanted a relationship and commitment and
 everything that came with loving someone; the good and the bad. But Victor wasn’t looking for that,
 or he wasn’t ready. Yuuri wasn’t sure what it was. He just knew it wasn’t going to happen anytime
 soon. As much as it hurt him to have to face the truth, he knew he’d have to.

Yuuri thanked his counselor and left her office, pulling out the card Sara had given him just weeks
 ago. He called her as she walked outside, in the middle of a heavy snow shower. The flurries stuck
 in his hair and on his glasses, fogging them a little. The line rang three times before Sara answered.

“Sara Crispino, how may I help you?” Came a cheery voice from the other side.

“Hi, um—” Yuuri wasn’t sure what he was going to say. He hadn’t even thought about it. He just
 knew he needed to call her. For one reason or another. “Sara, it's Yuuri. I've given it some thought
 and I'd like to audition.”

“Yuuri! That's such great news! I was actually going to give Victor a ring and ask for your number.
The audition has been moved back a couple of days, a week or so. They've had some trouble putting together a casting team, but that's not important. What we have to do in the meantime is get you set up with an agency. I'll give you the name and number of my own agency, okay? It's nothing permanently they should help you out with this first job. After that, you'll have to decide whether or not you'll sign a long term contract.”

The snow began to fall harder and faster, filling the streets even more of the white flakes. People around him shuffled and struggled not to fall, Yuuri doing the same as he walked and talked at the same time. The sun broke through the clouds in the sky as the snow continued to fall. The sky seemed to shimmer as the sun and the snow played with each other in the atmosphere. Cars passed him with a vengeance to reach their destinations, as did the people around him. Every single person on the street seemed to be in a hurry. Everyone but him.

Sara went over the details of everything but the information wasn't sticking. Yuuri asked her if she could instead text him everything he'd need to know. She agreed and told him to expect a message later in the evening. “I'm so glad you've decided to do this. It's not always we get a face like yours in our business.”

“Thanks, but Sara, can I ask you a favor?” Yuuri asked, crossing the street toward his car.

“Sure, Yuuri. What's up?”

He took a deep breath and stopped to lean against a wall.

“Don't tell Victor about this.”

Yuuri looked at the ceiling of his room as he laid on his back with Makkachin sprawled across his chest. He allowed himself to be absorbed by the darkness of the room. Yuuri had drawn the blinds and turned all of the lights in the room off. He had some serious thinking to do, and the only way he could concentrate would be by shutting out all of his senses and cuddling something. Makkachin proved to be a lot better at cuddling than his body pillow, but the dog made him sad because it was like he knew something was wrong with him, which, the more Yuuri thought about it, the more he realized it was his job to know those things.

Yuuri turned to his side and brought Makkachin with him, listening for something, anything, to happen inside him. He wanted to be angry, or sad, or betrayal. He had sabotaged himself. He made plans to do something that would not only impact him, but Victor and his new landlord, and his parents (somehow). Yuuri did something to make himself happy, and suddenly all he could think about was how much of an inconvenience it would be for everyone around him. He had people who counted on him, and he willingly made plans to possibly disrupt that trust in case he actually was chosen to model.

He regretted calling Sara for that reason, but he didn’t regret much else. Yuuri had never been to Europe, and to go as a model of all things would be an incredible experience for him. It would open doors for him and the money would help his loans.

But Yuuri was getting ahead of himself. He was overthinking everything that would happen if, and only if, he got the job. The chances of that alone were minuscule because there were better-looking people out there that actually looked and talked the part of a model. He was just some guy Sara thought was pretty enough to photograph. He barely stood a chance. Which was why he had decided against telling Victor. There was no need to tell him and get him involved if it would, in the end, lead to nothing. He had to keep as many people out of the situation as possible, to avoid getting his own
hopes up in the process. Yuuri had to be cautious and mindful of what he told others. He would have
to construct a lie to cover up all of the things he’d be dealing with until the audition, and only after he
found out whether or not he’d gotten the job or not would he let anyone know.

Makkachin groaned as he trotted off the bed and scratched at Yuuri’s door.

Yuuri groaned himself as he got up to let him out. He heard shuffling outside, hurrying to leave the
hallway before Yuuri opened the door. Victor had been eavesdropping, but it was fine. He was most
likely worried about Yuuri, and it wasn’t like Yuuri had said anything. He had just been on his bed,
breathing heavy because panic had set in. Victor was just worried about him because above
everything, they were friends. They cared about each other regardless of the anger between them.

Yuuri walked out, sweat pants and dirty t-shirt on like armor. He watched as Makkachin ran into the
living room, out of his view. A soft giggle washed over the silence in the room, as he heard Victor
told Makkachin ‘down’ in Russian. He knew certain little phrases that Victor had said enough for
Yuuri to ask him what they meant, as well as some other ones Yuuri asked to know just for fun.
Victor had taken the time to teach him a little Russian when he could. Yuuri, in exchange, taught him
a couple of phrases in Japanese.

He stepped into the living room, lit by the dull sun outside. Yuuri smiled at Victor, lazy and
unmotivated to do much else. “Hey.”

“Hi.” Victor nestled further into the couch and turned his attention to the television. “Were you
sleeping?” He asked without looking back to him. Yuuri watched his demeanor; cold, cut off and
hurt. Yuuri's plight had done a number on both their attitudes. After a certain day, Victor stopped
showing much interest in making Yuuri talk to him. Instead, he turned to keeping to himself again.
They were ghosts, drifting past each other in the halls of the penthouse, hands tracing walls, leaving
paths for one to follow the other.

“No,” Yuuri muttered. “I was just thinking. What about you?”

“I've been Keeping Up with the Kardashians,” Victor joked. Yuuri looked at the television screen
and cracked a smile. “All. Day. Long.”

“How've they been?” he asked as he swept through the empty space between them and took a seat
on the far end of the couch, with only Makkachin between them.

“Kim just got divorced. Big mood there.” They laughed together but the silence washed over them
again. They both felt a need to say something. To make things better. More lighthearted.

Victor spoke first. “Listen, Yuuri. I'm really sorry people think that about you. About your intentions
with me. I wish there was something I could do, but this happens every time anyone sees anyone
outside of their financial circle. God knows people thought that about my mother, and before that my
grandfather. It's a part of existing with me; it's another world with those people. They have nothing
better to do so they busy themselves with stupid rumors.”

He was still avoiding talking about them in terms of anything serious, but at least he acknowledged
that there was something between them. It didn't fix everything, but it was up to Yuuri to let him
know what was really wrong before he could apologize for everything.

“Victor, I need to know what's happening here. It's weird not knowing what to tell my friends, my
family- I can't even blame the people who look at us like that because if I was on the outside looking
in, that's what it would look like.” Victor's face went red and Yuuri winced. He jumped him with the
topic; caught him off guard, but it had to be done. “If you're okay being just friends, I'll be too. I just
need to know.” An ambulance passed through below them, the sirens filling the silence with a reminder that they weren't dreaming. It was finally the moment of truth. “What are we, Victor?”

Victor stuttered every sentence that came out of his mouth, none quite coherent enough for Yuuri to understand what it was that he was trying to say. He jumped from word to word and even broke down to using Russian instead of English. Yuuri knotted his brows in frustration because even now, that they were face to face and attempting to have a real conversation about their future and he was still trying to halt it. Victor saw his frustration and placed both his hands on Yuuri’s thighs, clamoring over Makkachin to reach him. “Yuuri, I love you,” He said. “You know that, but this is happening too fast. We’ve barely known each other six months.”

Yuuri flinched back from him, chest rising and falling because holy shit Victor was rejecting him. He was actually being rejected by the one person he never thought would. By the man who only a few months back blew up his phone with messages and asked him out on too many dates to turn down. Victor who looked at Yuuri like he hung the stars in the dark night sky and cried freely in front of him when they watched Marley & Me. Victor, who understood Yuuri better than his own mother and made him crepes for his birthday.

A lump rose in his throat as did tears in the corners of his eyes. A prickling pain started in his heart, picking at him like thorns with each beat. He cleared his throat and pulled back from bot Makkachin and Victor. “Yeah, uh- Yeah, you’re right. I don’t know what I was thinking. Wow! I just made this really awkward, huh?”

“Yuuri, listen. I’m not saying it’s impossible-” Victor started. His breath catches in his throat as he grabbed Yuuri’s wrist to bring him closer to him.

“No, I know. It’s just not going to happen. Listen, I’ve been through this Victor. It’s cool. I’m fine, you’re fine. We’re all doing great. I just- I need to go for a walk because I’m starting to gain weight again, and I can’t have that. So! I’ll be back in an hour or so. Do you need anything from the store, or? Are we good on food? Yeah? Okay, I’ll see you later then. Bye.” Yuuri was off the couch and stuffing his feet into his shoes before he could even think to grab a coat. He took his wallet from the counter in the kitchen and left without looking back at Victor, who was scrambling to get to his feet.

“Yuuri, wait. Don’t do this, let’s talk, alright?” Victor chased after him all the way to the door, but by the time he reached it, Yuuri had disappeared into thin air.

A slamming door woke Makkachin from his light nap, as Victor stomped from the foyer up to his room, where a loud scream was heard, muffled by what appeared to be a pillow. The dog's ears perked up as he climbed his way up to Victor’s room.

Victor, red in the face and angry at himself, was dialing away on his phone, trying to reach someone, anyone, to help him. Or yell at him. He didn’t know which option he felt more of a longing for. What he did was stupid and maybe it came out the wrong way, but it was all he could think to say without thinking there was a chance of it blowing up in his face. But he was wrong so very wrong and he hurt Yuuri.

He dialed Mila because she was very practical and Victor needed someone to tell him that all of his mistakes were reversible and there was no need for him to panic. She picked, voice hot and breathy, staggering almost like she’d been running.

“Victor! What a surprise, what’s up?” She sounded cheery like she’d been laughing. Victor heard voices behind her, along with the sound of a whistling kettle and popping popcorn.
“Is it a bad time?” He asked in a clear voice, suddenly trying to cover all of the shitty emotions he called to vent off. “I can call back.”

“No, no. Sara’s over and we’re just watching a movie with Yuri- Coraline, which is a little crazier than I would expect for a children’s movie. Yuri seems to really love it though, which is ridiculous ‘cuz I can barely stomach it. It is so creepy, Victor. I can’t believe they would rate this PG! PG!. I’m completely astonished.” Victor pressed his lips together in a tight frown when Makkachin jumped up onto his bed, ready to cuddle. “Oh, I’m sorry. I’m rambling. What can I do for you?”

“Mm, I was just checking in with you guys,” he lied. “Well, I’ll let you go. Hopefully, the movie doesn’t get any worse for you.”


“I’m fine, I’m fine.” Victor assured her, laughing a bit. He laid his head on his pillow and looked at his ceiling. “I’ll talk to you later, okay? I think I’m going to bed now.”

“Alrighty then. Sleep well, okay? I love you,” Mila cooed over the phone. “Oh and tell Yuuri and Makkachin good night from me too. Bye.”

And with that she was gone.

Victor didn’t try to reach out to anyone else, mostly because he was actually tired, somehow drained from ruining the one genuinely good thing in his life, and also because it was later than he expected and most people would not answer his calls or texts. So he stared at the four walls that surrounded him and contemplated his options. He thought about every possible way he could fix, or undo, what he had done. It wouldn’t be easy and it would take a lot of talking and maybe some arguing, but he could do it. Maybe.

From the look in Yuuri’s eyes, he didn’t think so. It was his fault partially, for wanting everything that came with a relationship without actually being in one, or hinting at the possibility. Which there was, he forgot to tell Yuuri, there definitely was a 99.99% chance that they would end up together if it were all up to Victor. He just forgot to mention that small fact to the one person who should have known it.

Yuuri didn’t make it back home until midnight that night, cold and shivering from being out so long without the proper clothing. Victor heard the door click, even if he was asleep, and almost wanted to walk down to the bathroom, where he heard the shower start to run and assure Yuuri that he loved him. He loved him as more than friends and family. He loved him in the kind of way that made people want to start families. The kind of love where he could kiss him early in the mornings even before either of them got the chance to brush their teeth. He loved him like his father loved his mother, in the sense that they couldn't exist without being by each other’s sides. He loved him in all of those beautiful, wonderful ways that were crafted from all of the crazy and stressful, painful moments they shared together in the short time they spent together. He loved him to the moon and back, as cheesy and cliche as that saying was. But it was true and it felt original and real to him now that what he had was.

The attraction they shade, the magnetic force that brought them together, was so great it scared Victor, but it didn't mean he didn’t love it with every bone in his body.

Sometimes the most terrifying things in life led to the most beautiful things the world had to offer.

Victor wanted to reach that. He wanted to get over that irrational fear of having something so real it could hurt him he had, and enjoy it as it was.
He hoped Yuuri didn’t change in his feelings for him and would wait until Victor was secure, both mentally and emotionally, enough to support the both of them and himself. He hoped Yuuri didn’t hate him and understood what Victor was feeling, even in the smallest sense, because Victor was close. He was so close to being ready he could feel it.

The morning winter light seeped into the living room and dining area through slivers in Victor’s blinds. He sat at his kitchen island with a spread of breakfast foods, cold and no longer appetizing. They were meant for Yuuri, as had the past five similar breakfasts he had prepared, but like the present one, they all remained untouched. Victor had for the past couple of days, tried to prepare grand breakfasts’ to ease into a conversation with Yuuri. He hoped that over pancakes, waffles, eggs, ham, or hash browns they would be able to ease the tension between them and solve their issues. He didn’t know why he thought eating would help have the heartfelt conversation he needed to have with Yuuri. Victor just knew Yuuri loved food, and so maybe it crossed his mind that if Yuuri was happy eating, he’d be open to having that talk with Victor.

God knows he tried everything else, and Yuuri still wouldn’t budge.

The past couple of days had been...awkward between them, to say the least. Yuuri wouldn’t say more than two words to him. He’d wake up, glare at Victor with a sad look in his eyes that Yuuri thought Victor didn’t notice, go take the last of his finals, come home and glare at him all over again. They didn’t eat together anymore, mostly because now Victor was the one who wanted to talk about them, all the while Yuuri looked like he wanted to hole up somewhere and die. Victor would back off then and re strategize.

Victor couldn’t understand just how everything went so wrong for them. They were holding hands and being touchy with each other one minute and the next one of them was being distant and cold to the other. Victor knew it would be unfair to pin everything on Yuuri when he had spent so much of his own time locked up in his own room contemplating what it meant to be in love with someone and what that meant for him. He didn’t even know if he could love someone else wholeheartedly and himself at the same time. He knew he loved Yuuri, and that Yuuri loved him, but he didn’t know if he could give himself entirely and still stay afloat mentally. He didn’t want Yuuri to be his sole source of love and happiness. He needed to find those things within himself first.

Maybe, he thought, that’s what he should have told Yuuri because it was much more clear and understandable than what he had said.

A rapping came from his door, followed by a familiar whistle he could only recognize as Christophe coming to find out just why he hadn’t spoken to him in three days.

Victor slid off his stool and shuffled over to his front door, Makkachin following him loyally by his side. He looked through the peephole to make sure that it was, in fact, Chris and not someone he wouldn’t like to see him in the state he was in. Disheveled, at the brink of tears, and greasy at the lips because of all of the butter he had slathered on his toast. Victor looked like a hot mess.

“Jesus fucking Christ, what in the hell happened to you?” Chris asked him as he stepped inside. He picked up a corner of Victor’s robe and looked him up and down. “What? Did Yuuri keep you up all night?” He snorted and Victor made a face. “That was a joke, Victor. Just a joke.”

Victor sighed and walked back over to his depression breakfast island, padding the floor as gently as he could, afraid to make too much noise for some reason.

“Why did you make so much food?” Chris asked, taking a seat on the opposite side of him. He
picked up a bagel and began to nibble at it while Victor stared off into the nothingness of his ceiling. Chris watched him, confused and worried. He hadn’t seen Victor like this for some time, and to see him go back to mannerism of times he was at his worst was terrifying for more than just the dead look in his eyes.

When Victor went into one of his, what he would call, episodes, he gave up all hope of the future and good things. He’d shut in on himself and let himself go. He’d pick up drinking and eating out instead of cooking at home, something he enjoyed deeply. Chris had seen it first hand, and he wasn’t going to see it again.

“Are you alright? Do I need to call someone?” He asked, more worry playing into his question.

Victor shook his head gently and picked at the strawberries in front of him.

“What’s wrong then? Is it your medicine? Have you been taking it regularly, or is it just the winter? We could go to France if you-” Chris blurted out, pulling out his phone, ready to look at flights and hotels in the french riviera.

“No,” Victor admitted. He closed his eyes and retracted. “I mean, yeah I’m taking my medicine but it’s not anything like that.”

“Then what’s the matter?” Chris’ voice was soft and sweet. Not condescending, but loving. He had made the mistake of talking down on Victor like a child when they had these kinds of discussions, and he really didn’t want to do it again. Victor refused to share anything with him the last time he did.

“I’ve messed everything up with Yuuri. He won’t talk to me. And I keep making him food to get him to love me again, but he won’t!” It was phrased more as a question than a statement like he was asking Chris was he could do to effectively get Yuuri to love him again. He seemed distressed, and knowing the way Victor and Yuuri’s seemed to bounce off each other emotionally, Chris could only guess Yuuri was off worse or just as badly.

“W-what did you do?” Chris stammered. Victor looked like he was just about ready burst into tears.

“Here’s the thing,” Victor spoke slowly, the mood turned more serious as the seconds passed between them. Chris narrowed his brows and settled into the stool. “We’ve been weird for a couple of weeks now. Tense, almost. He was been trying to talk about us, what we are in particular, and I- I mean you already know how that makes me feel, so I panicked and it freaked us both out. I kind of told him things were moving too fast but I think the way I said it made him think that nothing was going to happen between us.”

“That- that’s really confusing. For the both of you,” Chris said. “But I don’t blame him. I mean, you spent five months looking at him like he was your entire world. Then, out of nowhere, you turn him down.” He pressed his lips into a tight frown. “There’s a lot of miscommunication going on here. Try to talk to him.”

He said it with such ease, such calmness as if it were the easiest thing to do. “I tried. He won’t talk to me. I thought that making all of this food would help him open up again, but he just bolts out of the door every morning. He doesn’t even have anywhere to go. His classes are over, Chris. Yuuri just hates being here.”

“I’m sure he doesn’t hate it.” Chris looked at him with sympathy and reached to hold his hand. “Yuuri loved you so much, this is just a bump in the road. You’ll get through it. Especially if he has to see you everytime he wakes up.”
“Tonight’s his last night here. Tomorrow we’re moving his stuff into his new place.” A sudden darkness washed over him. “At least I think I’m still helping him.”

Victor took a bite of an apple from off a bowl in the center of the island and placed a scowl on his face.

“Victor,” Chris drawled. “This is passive, okay? Yuuri will turn around at some point. Don’t look so depressed.” Both Chris and Victor cracked a smile at that last remark. It was an ongoing joke between the both of them whenever Victor got dark, to ironically remind him not to be something he physically (chemically) couldn’t help. “There’s that smile,” Chris noted with a grin.

“There has to be a way for me to fix this,” Victor said.

“You could kiss him,” Chris suggested.

“Or I could buy him a dozen roses for each month we’ve known—”

“Victor, no. Don’t.” Victor’s sudden burst of excitement left him as fast as it had come. Victor bit his lip, trying to think of something to say. The room grew silent. After some seconds he decided on dropping the matter, starting on something different. “So, how’s your life, Chris?”

His friend raised an eyebrow and tried to hide a smile that lingered on his lips momentarily. Victor smiled at him and chided him, asking for him to go on and tell him. Chris let out a squeal of happiness and held his phone tightly in his hands.

“Oh, I’ll tell you, but just because you’ve absolutely forced it out of me, alright?” Chris joked. Victor knit his eyebrows in joyful confusion and placed his phone facing downwards on the table. “We’ve started the paperwork to adopt a baby. Nothing’s certain yet, but the social worker we’re working with thinks we have a really good chance at finding a baby soon.”

Victor let out an ecstatic laugh as he reached over the table for Christophe’s hands. They bounced in elation because they both knew how long Chris and his husband had thrown around the idea of adopting an adorable little baby into their small family of two. For years, Chris had whined about not having a little one to raise and love more than anything in the world. They had both cried over it under the influences of too many wine spritzer sin their youth and debated getting surrogates to birth them little versions of themselves. Of course, that never worked out; they both were married not long after having those nights. Victor had given up the idea until Yuuri came along and was starting to give it up again, but it gave him some peace of mind to know that Chris might get his wish of having a little person to watch after.

“You’re going to be a great father, Chris.” They smiled at one another again. Victor pretended to wipe a (semi) fake tear from his eye. “My baby’s having a baby.” He exclaimed.

“Don’t jinx it!”

“So, how have you been?” Yuuri smiled at Phichit, as they walked into the McDonalds they agreed to meet in.

“I’ve been good. School has been stressful, but other than that I’ve been fine,” Phichit opened the door for them and offered Yuuri go in first. “I’ve seen you’ve been good. Why didn’t you tell me you started modeling?”

Silence ensued because even though they were both making an effort to return to normal, certain things couldn’t be ignored. They stared at each other and smiled shyly.
“Right,” Phichit continued. “Well, in any case, you looked great. I should have known you’d end up famous one way or another.” Yuuri rolled his eyes as they made their way in line.

“Oh please, as if I’m famous. It was a small job, they barely even showed my face in the pictures.” They laughed a bit and took to the menu, trying to decide if an entire meal was a good idea. “That’s not really something I’d be interested in anyway.”


“No, I like the modeling. I meant the fame,” Yuuri dug his wallet out of the pocket of his jeans when he decided what he wanted and waited for the man in front of them to finish. “It’d be too much for me.” He realized how melodramatic he sounded and quickly added in, “But it’s not like that would ever happen.”

“Yeah, you’ve always been private,” Phichit said in a reminiscent voice.

“So,” Yuuri continued, not wanting to let their conversation die out. “How’s your art coming along? Did you start working on your pieces for the spring exhibit?”

“Jesus, don’t remind me.” Phichit put two fingers to his temple and rubbed. “I’ve been completely unable to come up with anything good. It’s hell for me right now.”

They ordered their food and made their way into the back seating area, where the booths could be found. Lucky for them, there weren’t too many people around them and they would be able to speak freely. Once they sat down onto the McDonald’s booth and laid their phones face down on the table, an old habit they had formed to show that they were both listening with intention, Phichit narrowed his eyes and crossed his arms.

“So, what’s wrong? Something’s bothering you, I can tell,” asked Phichit in a serious voice. Yuuri tensed every muscle in his body and then relaxed, realizing he couldn’t put anything over Phichit’s head without being caught. “Come on, out with it. As much as I like catching up, I’m well aware you wouldn’t want to meet so soon if there wasn’t something you needed to get off your chest.

“Um,” Yuuri paused in his thinking and picked at his fries for a moment. “Well, technically I asked Victor to be my boyfriend basically—” He didn’t know if that’s what he would label the question he asked him, but it was what matched closest.

“That’s great news! When’s the wedding?” Phichit smiled from ear to ear, genuinely happy for his friend.

“Okay, well, first of all, I said boyfriend, not husband,” Yuuri put a finger up and then another, “Second of all, he said no. So, yeah.”

Phichit deflated in his mood, coming down to something close to displeasement.

“Damn. So, Russian doll turned you down then?” Phichit looked at him and then to the ceiling, sternly. “Guess that means I’m gonna have to kick his ass.”

Yuuri smiled into his coffee and sunk lower into the booth. “God no, I feel like I’ve already hurt him enough.”

Yuuri didn’t know how or why he called Phichit of all people, seeing as things were still quite awkward between them. But ever since that night he ran out of Victor’s apartment and into the streets, wild and not thinking correctly, all he’d wanted to do was sit down and shit talk with his best friend until the sun came up. He’d tried to restrain himself from it and just rant on Tumblr like any
other loser might have, but his emotions and nostalgia got the best of him. He called Phichit two
days later and asked to meet him for coffee. He figured it would be awkward, but he needed to vent
to someone. Preferably, someone, he trusted.

Phichit was still that person, despite everything.

“So, how’d he do it?” Phichit asked perching his head on his fist.

“He told me we were moving too fast, but that’s beside the point, not what hurt me the most,” Yuuri
clenched his fists and shut his eyes, inhaling the air in the room was fleeting. “What really hurt is-”
Yuuri stammered in his speech. “I think he’s ashamed of me.”

Phichit’s eyes widened in disbelief, examining Yuuri’s face thoroughly to make sure he wasn’t
joking. Yuuri’s stomach began to twist around itself, playing along with the numb feeling in his
chest. He felt like he was sitting at the bottom of a pool, far off into the deep end, where he couldn’t
scream or move or try to go up for air. His face turned red and blotchy; Saying what had been on
his mind for weeks, finally, made it just that more real.

“He’s ashamed,” Yuuri repeated with more conviction.

“How do you know? I mean, Yuuri, Victor doesn’t seem like the type-”

“He told me people think I’m with him for his money, like some gold digger,” Yuuri said, spitting
the words out like venom on his tongue. “And I noticed something about what he said after that- He
um, he referred to me, singularly, when it was negative and to us when it was positive. He separated
us when he’d tell me about what his rich friends thought about us, you know, versus what he liked
about us and how perfect ‘we’ are together. It was like he was keeping my bad parts away from that
other part of his life. I mean, I know he’s an oligarch, you know? And I know those aren’t my
intentions, but I just feel like he’s not doing enough to let those people know what we’re like. They
don’t know we want something serious from each other, and he won’t tell them. And it’s not like I
can tell them,” Yuuri ranted. “I don’t know, it just hurt. It snowballed and now it’s all I can think
about.”

“Have you tried telling him, maybe? I’m sure he didn’t mean it like that Yuuri. People say stupid
shit, and half the time it doesn’t convey the message they wanted to get through.” Phichit tried to
reason with him but to no avail. Yuuri just shook his head furiously and focused in on the table before him.

“What if he did mean it that way? What if he really just doesn’t want to stain his good family
name?” Yuuri closed into himself, something Phichit had seen him do countless times. Unlike most
people, Phichit liked close spaces; there was something about feeling smothered in his own air that calmed him. He guessed that was why Yuuri liked to be cuddled so frequently. “What if that’s why he doesn’t want to be official?”

“Didn’t you tell me he’s introduced you to all of his friends and acquaintances? And aren’t you
living with him? That doesn’t sound like he’s ashamed of you Yuuri, maybe things really are moving
too quickly.” Phichit tried to reason with him but to no avail. Yuuri just shook his head furiously and
focused in on the table before him.

“Here’s the thing, those people were all really condescending. Except for his family, but I mean,
they’re just nice people,” said Yuuri. “But people comment on us all the time and I thought maybe I
was the only one hearing it, but that’s not the case. He hears it too, people flat out tell him. Victor
just doesn’t do anything about it.”
“I don’t want to talk to him. I’m embarrassed and all he’ll do is make me cry.” Yuuri frowned deeply, accentuating the pudginess of his cheeks.

“Has he tried? To talk, I mean. Has he tried to do anything?” Phichit took a sip of his coffee.

“All he does is cook breakfast,” Yuuri’s sighed, obviously exasperated. “Every. Single. Day. I don’t know what he thinks waffles are gonna fix, but it’s not this, that I can assure you.” Yuuri rested his head against the window next to the booth and looked at the birds that had forgotten to leave for the winter stomping around the dirty ground, searching for even the tiniest morsel.

“So you’re not talking, and you’re not letting him talk either?” questioned Phichit. “That seems counterproductive.”

“Tell me about it.” Yuuri huffed. Phichit looked at the food in front of himself, half devoured and nearly gone, and compared it to Yuuri’s, all intact except for a bite he had taken out of his sandwich. He tilted his head to the side and narrowed his eyes as he watched Yuuri, stirring his coffee without taking a drink. “What?” asked Yuuri.

“Is there something wrong with the food? You haven’t eaten,” Phichit pointed out.

“Oh, yeah. I don’t even know why I ordered, I’m on a diet,” Yuuri told him with a shy smile.

“Why? You look fine to me,” Phichit crossed his arms and the situation felt all too familiar.

Yuuri had… problems in the past when it came to dieting and food. It came after Phichit and through Eli, even a while after.

“It’s just a diet, no harm in it.”

“Are you sure, or is this another-”

“I’m sure Phichit. I’ve got an audition for another job and I need to lose some weight so I’m on a diet.” A silence grew between them. “I promise.”

Yuuri looked at Phichit through his glasses, low brown eyes innocent and barren, like a desert. They shared knowing glances and smiled at one another.

“I missed this,” Phichit admitted. “I’m glad we’re okay now.”

“Yeah, me too.”

A rare ray of winter morning sunshine emerged Yuuri’s room in a ghostly tint of yellow. The flowers in the vase beside his bedside, wilted and bruised from having been touched too many times, popped in the luminously lit room, hungry for just a bit of light to feed their dead bodies. The sun shifted from side to side as clouds passed in front of its form in the sky.

Yuuri looked to the window and frowned. In one quick motion, he walked from his bed to the window and shut the blinds, resentment building in his chest for the bright and sunny day that would take him from Victor.

Yuuri packed the last of his things into his duffle bag and finished making his bed. When he left Victor’s home, he’d sworn to himself, he would only leave memories and traces that he had been there. It was the best he could do for them both; erase himself from the room and try with all his might to put some distance between them. Distance made the heart grow fonder, he had read so
many times, and he was finally ready to put that saying to the test.

In two days he had his audition, bright and early right there on Park Avenue in an office near to the one where his current agency was located. It was exhilarating and vigorously tiring at the same time. All of the pull ups he had to do, all of the running and the manicures and face masks. And the teeth whitening! Jesus Christ, Yuuri hated the teeth whitening with a passion. But it was what he had to do in order to assure he got the job, which he'd definitely profit from when it came down to it. Yuuri looked into the mirror and pictured all of the money he'd make if he got the job. Sara's shoot paid by the day, each rendering $300 at the end of every one. If the shoot ran the whole month she promised, he could make upwards of $9000, god willing no shoot days were canceled.

With that kind of money coming in he could live comfortably for some time until he found a teaching job or another modeling gig. His plan wasn't foolproof, plenty of things could go wrong, but it was all he had.

Yuuri smiled to himself, forgetting for a moment where he was standing and what he was doing.

A knocking came from the door frame, where Victor was standing arms crossed, a somber look on his pallid face. “Are you sure you don't need any help?”

They'd been discussing Yuuri's move all morning, though it was mostly Victor who had an interest in it. He'd been insisting to at least accompany Yuuri to his new place and help him get acquainted, even if he had a moving company already hired and ready to go. Yuuri declined each offer and gently explained to Victor that he had already made too much trouble for him in the time he'd stayed with him. Victor, of course, would laugh and scoff and assure him he had been no trouble.

Their conversations were foreign and empty; like those between strangers who were trying all too much to be polite to one another. It stung, for the both of them, to treat the other like they hadn't been through more together than they should have ever. Victor had made peace with Yuuri's silence but refused to quiet himself nonetheless. He'd talk and talk and talk until he saw a glint of response from Yuuri's face. He was still trying to make things better, but the more he watched Yuuri and how he acted around him, the more he felt defeat rising from the horizon of the end of their relationship. Yuuri was gone from him.

He was leaving.

“I'm fine.”

Two words.

That was more than he had gotten in the past two days. Maybe the emotional turmoil of the day had gotten to Yuuri as well.

Yuuri struggled to get the duffle bag securely on his shoulder, staggering back unbalanced. Victor took a couple of steps toward him and offered to carry his things down. Yuuri grunted in response; a decline. Victor brought his hands to his sides and stepped out of the doorway.

“I'll miss you,” he admitted as Yuuri walked past him and into the hall. He didn't know why, but it felt like a final goodbye. Like Yuuri was really leaving him forever. His voice caught in his throat as he kept on speaking. “Makkachin will too.”

“Victor,” Yuuri stopped at the end of the hall and spoke without bothering to look back. “I'm not dying. I'll be minutes away.”

“I know, but it just feels odd to see you go,” he admitted. “Especially on the terms, we're on.”
Tension. He sensed it as soon as the words spilled out of his mouth. Victor never really knew when to stop talking.

“And what terms would those be?” Yuuri questioned, just barely turning his head to spot Victor out of the corner of his eye. Victor froze in his place, lips quivering as his mind worked tirelessly to form a sentence good enough to carry on the conversation somewhere good.

“We both know what they are. I’m not sure what I’ve done wrong, but I’ve got an idea.” Victor started taking large strides to Yuuri’s side. “I’d like to apologize for that, but you won’t let me speak. You’ve recoiled from me this past week, and it’s done damage to us both. I can see it in your eyes.” Hands reached out to touch his lover’s, fingers barely meeting the man’s arm. When Yuuri didn’t pull back, he pressed his body to him, wanting to melt into him so they’d never have to part.

Victor’s face delved into the softness of Yuuri’s hair as the world around them softened. Their hearts beat at the same pace for a moment, both too scared to move or breathe out of synch.

It was the closest they had been in a long time. The familiarity of each other’s body never forgotten to their own. It was always a peaceful transition, from being individuals to becoming one being; four legs, four arms, two heads, two hearts. Arranged to complete and complement each limb provided by both parties. No one was superior or inferior, they were the same. They felt what the other did and thought each other’s thoughts.

Yuuri’s shoulders fell in ease with each breath the two took. His guard was down. He was vulnerable. But as he felt Victor’s hands lead down his arms, a search, an expedition to find Yuuri’s soft hands, with a mission to intertwine, he realized Victor was just as he was. He was baring himself unprotected and unprepared before Yuuri. Neither one of them was at an advantage.

“Everything happened too fast. I was scared you’d change your mind and leave me.” The words slipped out of Victor’s mouth, like honey, into Yuuri’s ears. They were sincere and they hurt more than Yuuri thought they would. “There wasn’t anything the matter with you, Yuuri. It was me.”

“Victor,” said Yuuri.

“Stay with me.” Victor hugged him tightly and dug his face into his collar bone. “One more night.”

One more night was one too many.

“It’s not what you’ve said, Victor. It’s what you haven’t.” Yuuri’s words hit the floor like stones, hard and cold. He took a step away from him and kept his eyes on the floor. He felt terrified and defiant of everything his mind and soul were telling him to do. But his body kept moving toward the door and his lips kept painting a picture for Victor. “And I don’t hate you for it. I could never hate you. It’s not in me to, but if you can’t figure out what’s gone wrong, I’m not sure I’m ready to have anything more to do with you.”

Yuuri put a hand on the doorknob and turned it, unlocking it, leaving him free to go. A pounding started in his chest, rampant and eager to turn back.

“Tell me then,” Victor said, greyvoice breaking. “Tell me so I can fix.”

“There are somethings…” Yuuri paused when Makkachin rubbed against his leg and tried to bite onto his pants, almost begging him to stay. He looked at the dog with sadness in his eyes and pushed him back gently. At that moment, tears brimmed both of their eyes, like tiny rain drops begging to fall from the sky. Yuuri wiped them away and opened the door. “There are some things we have to figure out by ourselves Victor.” Yuuri stepped out and turned back to look at him with meek eyes
and a quiver smiling.

“Good bye.”

The days before his audition passed much too quickly for Yuuri’s sake.

He spent them training, whatever that meant usually he just stood in front of his bathroom mirror and made faces until he couldn’t think of any more to do. He also went on a cleanse to help clear his skin and lift his spirits, which was not a good idea because all it did was make him cranky and have to use the bathroom frequently.

He was settling into his apartment nicely, arranging furniture and unpacking whenever he found any free time. Which wasn’t often. Yuuri was actively trying to fill his days with trivial activities in order to pass the time and avoid thinking about Victor.

An easy task, when he put his mind to it.

He had to stop the urges to run back to him frequently, his mind never resting, not even for a second. Yuuri occupied his every second spent awake to ensure his ground was kept and so was the distance between them. But sometimes, before bed, when he was alone and all was quiet, all he could picture was Victor, alone as well, in that giant penthouse filled with memories they’d made together.

Yuuri at least had the luxury of being in a new untouched place; one where Victor had never existed. It eased the pain of not seeing him every morning, but his longing grew in response.

There was no way for either of them to know how the other was doing. Both had refused to initiate contact since the day Yuuri left.

On the day of his audition, Yuuri woke up bright and early, eager to start the day. He showered and prepped his skin for the day ahead. Pam, the person overseeing his file and book, had told him to keep his skin clear of any makeup. The most he would be allowed to do would be mascara and moisturizer, maybe even a little bit of highlighter if it was discreet. She also reminded him to wear plain clothing for this particular audition. “That means black, white, and grey. No colors,” Yuuri remembered her telling him. “And keep your hair out of your face, that’s quite literally your money maker.”

Yuuri had nodded hesitantly and walked out of that office with a giant list of things he needed to do and practice before the audition took place. By the time audition day came around, he had everything down well enough to fake it in front of the judges.

So Yuuri gelled his hair back and took his portfolio with him down to fifth avenue, where he was met with a room full of tall and bulky male models among other men who shared Yuuri’s physique. They barely took the time to look him over, because the line was moving more quickly than Pam had told him it would. He thought he was late for a second, but realized that all of the men being called in and exiting were the more macho, muscular ones. The men were categorized into two groups, most likely according to the description given of them when they made made the audition appointment.

Yuuri sat into one of the chairs provided off into the side of the long room and crossed his legs, careful to keep his eyes on the floor and stay quiet. He needed to be in his own head to prepare himself and remain positive. Yuuri knew that if he looked up and saw the much thicker portfolios and better looks the others had, he’d begin to psyche himself out. He’d done it as a skater and a student, and it never led anywhere but dead end and stagnation.

“Is this seat taken?”
Yuuri was taken from his trance and made to look up into gray eyes of one of the muscular men. He smiled a pearly white grin at Yuuri and motioned to the empty seat next to him. He looked to rough to be a model, but Yuuri decided to pay no mind to it.

“No, you’re good.” He responded with a half smile, shrinking into himself as the man took a seat beside him.

“So, are you here to audition?” The man asked him. Yuuri looked him over and nodded, eyes squinting from his lack of eye glasses. Pam had recommended he get contacts, but Yuuri had an irrational fear of getting things in his eyes and contacts just didn’t seem realistic, so he was toughing it out.


They shared a smile and looked out to the floor of the room. “Yeah, I bet. I don’t think I’d never be able to do what you guys do,” The man told him. Yuuri tilted his head to the side to look at him and frowned in contemplation.

“You’re not a model?” Yuuri asked him. The man let out a loud laugh and slapped Yuuri’s back as he did so. Yuuri watched him as he bent over in obnoxious laughter, making Yuuri crack a smile because wow his laugh was really ugly.

A couple people around them gave them dirty looks, making Yuuri turn red in the process of trying to quiet down the man next to him.

“Oh, that’s a good one,” the man continued, wiping a couple of tears from the corners of his eyes. “That’s flattering, but I’m actually here with my friend. He needed a ride and I offered to get him down here after our shift. We’re firemen.” Yuuri nodded and turned his attention back to floor. “I’m JJ- well, Jean Jacque actually, but that sounds a bit pretentious doesn’t it?”

Yuuri shook the hand that was offered to him and smiled at the stranger next to him. “I’m Yuuri.”

“That’s a beautiful name, what’s it mean?”

JJ liked to talk, quite a bit, whether or not Yuuri responded to him or not. It wasn’t unbearable conversation, but it was definitely more than Yuuri was prepared to have in a place where no one seemed to be talking.

It was only when JJ’s friend came out that they ended their talk. He left with a shy wave goodbye from Yuuri and a confused look from his friend. Yuuri felt relieved to finally be alone again.

An hour passed, until finally it was Yuuri’s turn to slip into the dimly lit hallway with the intern in all black. He tried not to stare at all of the piercings on her face, but she seemed to notice his affinity with her septum piercing in particular as he handed her his portfolio. “It didn’t hurt. A lot of people think it did, but it didn’t,” she told him with a pop of the bubble gum she was chewing. Yuuri just nodded along and followed behind her, intimidated by the long hallway.

They stepped into a white room with bright lights, spotless with the exception of a table of five people near the furthest wall from him.

They waved him over and ordered him to the center of the room, where an ‘x’ laid taped on the floor. He walked over confidently and stood in front of the table, which consisted of three women and two men, one who clearly appeared to be the artist in charge of the campaign. He had soft brown eyes, but a sharp face. Dressed in baggy, designer clothing, Yuuri didn’t doubt for a second that that was the person he’d be modeling for.
“Name?” the woman, a middle aged ginger with thick eyebrows and dark lipstick, called out to him as his portfolio was handed to them.

“Yuuri Katsuki.” He responded.

“Age?”

“Twenty-five.”

Eyebrows raised around the room as one by one they took turns looking at him, then on another, and then his portfolio.

Yuuri knew he was like...fifty! In the modeling world, but men usually had a longer shelf life than women did when it came to the industry; it also helped that he looked much younger than he actually was, but it didn’t stop him from feeling like a dinosaur as they looked him over with judgemental eyes.

“Can you walk for us? Up to the table and then back.”

Yuuri did as he was told and walked to them, chin up and shoulders relaxed. He let his hips lead the way for the most part, and focused on keeping his arms as natural as possible.

They took notes as he did and had another intern, there were five total, take polaroids of him. He stood still for a headshot and kept his eyes dull, dead almost, until one of them almost lost their and he had to reach out to catch her from falling to the floor. She apologized to him and thanked him, before continuing to capture his movements.

He posed at their command and did whatever they told him to, as off as the request was. At some point, one of the people at the table called him over and measured his arms and checked his teeth. Yuuri became uncomfortable then because he had a tooth on his bottom line that turned inwards.

Near the end, when he was spinning around for them for the third time, he heard one of the women ask, “What do you think Jaebum?”

The questioned was followed by a grunt, neutral and indecipherable.

“Thank you for coming, Yuuri. We’ll be in touch,” one of the women told him with a smile.

The entire ordeal lasted longer than he expected, longer than some others had. It could have been a really good thing, or a really bad thing that it took so long, but he decided to push those thoughts to the back of his mind as was escorted out by one of interns. She thanked him one last time and told him to have a good day before calling someone else up.

Yuuri left with a smile on his face, because he felt confident that things would turn out well for him.

Once he was out the door, Yuuri almost pulled his phone from his pocket to call Victor and tell him all about it, smile on his face and sun in his eyes. His face fell immediately when he realized he couldn’t. A sorrow so deep it physically hurt him filled his body, but Yuuri decided it wouldn’t get him down.

He instead ran home and treated himself to a hearty bowl of katsudon for dinner.
I'm so sorry this chapter took so long to post, I've been stuck in a rut in terms of writing for about three weeks or so. Hopefully, this chapter didn't disappoint anyone, and if it did, I hope I can make up for it at some point.

What does everyone think about Phichit being back? And what about JJ? I'm still not sure what his role is going to be going forward, but I really like writing him for some reason.

As always, remember to leave me a comment with your thoughts on the chapter. I take very well to constructive criticism so don't be afraid to tell me what you really think :) 

p.s: did anyone notice the little cameo made this chapter? ; )
i lost myself when i lost you

Chapter Summary

Victor had a deadly grip on his mind and soul, occupying all of the space Yuuri had in his heart to love someone with the romantic vigor it took to love him. He wouldn’t be able to date again- not until Victor was only a distant memory. A name whispered into the wind.

Chapter Notes

I apologize in advance.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Victor looked at his mother through the screen of his computer and tried to put a smile on his face for her sake. She was going on and on about his birthday party later in the month, one she'd be attending and planning on her own, with help from Chris and, as she had said, “Yuuri, if he's not too busy.”

Victor winced when she said his name, unable to bear remembering how he had left him. There was a hole in his heart the size of a lake that begged him to stop thinking about Yuuri's smile and eyes and the way his nose crinkled when he laughed too hard; it begged him to forget, once and for all, because Yuuri didn't want him. He'd ruined them, and Yuuri had decided to move on.

“Victor, will Yuuri be able to help or should I ask Mila to instead?” Alyona, suspicious of her son's mood, questioned him. “Are you two fighting?”

Victor's smiled faltered for a minute, but just for a minute because the next thing he knew, a new smile was on his face, brighter and bigger than ever. “No, but he's been working himself to the bone these past few months, so I'd rather not bother him with things like that,” he lied.

Victor looked past his mother and to the hallway that led to the guest rooms. It was dark and empty, and from his place on his couch, Victor felt intimidated by the way in which it felt to lead into another dimension; a better one with Yuuri in it, filled with life and love and laughter. One where he hadn't pushed him away and split them apart with his indecisiveness and fear.

Victor's breathing stopped as tears caught in his eyes. He was foolish and a coward to have let him walk away so easily. He felt like a failure when he thought about how many times he called them "friends” and said that things were too complicated for them to work out. He failed Yuuri and he failed himself. There wasn't anything anyone could say or do to stop him from thinking that; not even Yuuri himself.

A gasp sat in his throat, throbbing and aching because he wanted so badly to cry and tell his mother what he had done. But he bit down on it and forced it down his throat, unable to admit another one of his fuck ups.

All he wanted was Yuuri and there was nothing he could do to get him to his side. There was
nothing he could do to fix it. His heart's longing was something he would have to deal with alone.

“I'm thinking we should have rosé and champagne. Pink is your favorite color, after all, so rosé is a must. Champagne is debatable. What do you think?” Alyona continued, jotting things down on her phone.

“Rosé is fine. Either is actually,” he said putting as much effort into acting like he cared as he could. “But we'll definitely need one of those champagne towers. I've always liked those.”

“Good idea, those are beautiful,” she smiled at him. “Peonies or orchids?”

“Neither,” he answered almost immediately. “Gardenias and baby's breath. Any other filler flower is good too.”

“I love baby's breath, it's so beautiful,” he remembered Yuuri telling him. Victor had always thought it was an ugly wiry plant, thin and wild with no use other than to fill empty spaces, but Yuuri had made him see them in a different light. “People brush it off sometimes, but it's such a resilient flower. Once everything else is dead, often it's the only thing left over. And that's when it thrives…”

“Alright, I'll see how I can make that work.”

Victor and his mother stayed on FaceTime for an hour, until she ordered him to go to bed. While it was early in St. Petersburg, it was late in New York. The sky was pitch black and cloudy, with furious snowflakes whipping about the skyscrapers and buildings outside. He waved goodbye and blew her a kiss as she disconnected with one last smile.

Victor remained on his couch for some time after she was gone, the laptop still on his lap and Makkachin by his side. He only got up to fetch a bottle of whiskey he hadn't touched in months. It sat in his living room, next to the television with a set of crystal tumblers. He took one of the tumblers and deposited two ice cubes into it, followed by the whiskey itself.

He gulped it down like he was in the middle of the desert and there was no water around. It washed over his tongue, prickling initially, burning in his throat, but passed smoothly, leaving the oaky flavor to linger. Makkachin watched with sorry eyes as Victor poured himself glass after glass until he couldn't see in front of him and his senses were blurry.

He began to stumble back and fell to the floor, Makkachin rushing to his side to make sure he was alright. Victor clung to the dog and cried into his fur like he used to when the kids at school would tease him and push him around. He cried like he cried when his grandfather died. Victor cried like he did the first time he lost Makkachin. There was no stopping his teardrops from falling like stars in the sky dipped behind morning light.

He fell asleep there on the floor and dreamed about Yuuri and their first date when he'd seen him skate for the first time. Victor remembered the slope of his back, the light in his face, and the way his hair looked like it was floating as he circled around him in a graceful frenzy as clearly as it had happened. Victor could hear Yuuri's whispers telling him all about the proper way to land a jump or build momentum.

But his dream was different because Yuuri wasn't skating on ice, he was skating on water. And he looked more forlorn than Victor had ever seen Yuuri in reality.

In his dream, Victor took a step back and looked at him, only to find out that they were not at an ice rink at all, but in a vacuum; dark and infinite, like space. He was wading in the pool Yuuri skated on and found that he couldn’t move his legs. Sound also seemed to escape him with his ability to speak.
He tried to yell, to scream, to ask Yuuri for help but his efforts were useless. Yuuri kept skating, dancing, waving his arms effortlessly as Victor began to sink into the water.

When Victor’s voice finally broke through, Yuuri stopped moving to look in his direction and fell into the pool, swallowed up the vast water that surrounded them.

Seeing him fall, out of his sight, petrified him and caused a thunderous pounding in his chest.

Victor woke up immediately, with his alarm ringing in his ear. He was drenched in sweat and crying.

Yuuri jogged up the stairs of his building, huffing, and puffing, heart bouncing in his chest. He had been running for quite a long time, starting at six in the morning and finishing just then at eight. He was drenched in sweat beneath his winter running clothes, every pore alert and active, working harder than they ever had to cool him down. Yuuri pushed on to his floor and greeted his neighbor, an elderly woman who lived alone with her dog and three cats, as he moved on to his apartment. She smiled at him and wished him a good day.

Yuuri walked into his apartment and fell onto his couch without a care in the world. His knees hurt and his leg muscles ached but he smiled nonetheless because he’d just finished a twenty-three mile run in two hours; his new personal best.

He looked out into his apartment, tiny and kept, lit dimly and airy, like it had been in his other place. It was incredibly smaller and smelled like smoke (something that would take at least six candles all over his new home lit for a minimum of four hours a day to wash away), but it was his very first apartment that he owned himself, and maybe it was dark and dingy at points, but Yuuri liked it and he thought that was all that mattered.

He picked himself off his couch and looked at how bare everything looked without Phichit’s artwork to fill in the empty spaces of his walls. Phichit had taken most of his paintings with him, leaving Yuuri with only a couple of portraits he had done of him, all which seemed too shallow to hang around his home. He thought about putting them up in his bedroom, but that seemed creepy, to have himself watching him as he slept. So he put them all away in his bathroom closet, behind the cleaners and spare loofahs, where no one would know they existed but him.

He walked to the bathroom and started a bath, feeling the need to relax his muscles with nothing less than bubbles and fragrant oils. Yuuri left the water running and walked down the hall to his room, where he rummaged through his dresser drawers for underwear and some pants to wear as he lounged for the rest of the morning. Yuuri gathered his things and walked back to the bathroom, where the tub was filled with warm water, ready to be soaked in. He stripped and settled into the water after pouring in the rose scented bubble solution.

Yuuri sunk deep into the water, just before it reached his nose, and stared into at the tile before him, long and hard because bath time for him was silent and aching.

His first thought was Victor and how he was doing now that school was out for winter break and Makkachin was the only one at home with him. Yuuri hoped he was alright; he prayed for it every night before he went to bed and it was the first thing he thought when he woke up in the morning. He took his medication after his cereal and wished for Victor to be doing the same thing, something they had done together when he lived with him, now that Yuuri was gone.

He thought, maybe, once he was out of the bath, he could text Victor and remind him like nothing had happened and maybe they could at least communicate that way. But Yuuri knew that was impossible. If he even gave in just a little, he’d be back by Victor’s side like the love struck fool he
was. If things were different, he wouldn’t mind at all. He’d gladly swoon over Victor every day for
the rest of his life, but things were too complicated. He could finally admit that. Victor didn’t
understand just how damaging the things he didn’t do were, and Yuuri doubted he ever would.

Victor didn’t understand how disrespected he felt. Victor hadn’t even detected it all those times his
friends and colleagues made those kinds of comments. He was aware of the things they said, heard
them all and called them false, but Yuuri knew there was a worry in the back of Victor’s mind, an
icky voice that told him that Yuuri was ill intentioned, or too putrid to be with him on the world
stage. Victor was too nice to think of it consciously, but Yuuri could see those thoughts lurking
behind his eyes.

The rational part of Yuuri’s mind told him he was blowing the entire thing out of proportion, but
something deep inside him knew he was right to think the way he did. Either way, Yuuri thought, if
Victor himself didn’t think those things, people around him did and somehow that made him feel
worse about everything. He needed to make something of himself; show everyone that he didn’t
need Victor’s money or social influence. Once he assured his position in the world, he’d go back.
He’d tell Victor everything,

Yuuri scrubbed himself clean and rinsed thoroughly before stepping out of the tub to dry and dress.

The heater in his apartment hummed, low and grumbling, exhausted from so many years of service
to the patrons of the building. Yuuri’s skin rose as he was met with the almost unbearable cold of the
bathroom. He wrapped himself in his bathrobe and decided against wearing clothes altogether,
hurrying into his bedroom, where he laid down on his mess of blankets and pillows, hungry for
comfort and nothing more.

Yuuri closed his eyes for a brief moment, trying to block out the little bits of sunshine poking through
the window above the headboard of his bed. Things were too silent in that moment, too lonely and
forgotten, like a distant memory or silent film lost in years of progress. His lips began to twitch,
triggers for tears to spill from his eyes.

Yuuri hated being lonely; hated everything about it, and now it was all he ever was. With no school,
no Makkachin, no Victor. It was like his first week in America all over again. There was no one but
him.

A ringing came from his bedside, where his phone was charging.

He reached over, limp hand answering the call and turning on the speaker to fill the void in his room.

“Hello?” he answered, voice scratchy.

“Yuuri, it’s Sara. Did I wake you?” He shot up like a bullet and held the phone closer to his body.
Yuuri’s heart was beating like a drum, sending blood pulsing through his every vein like a deep,
coursing river.

“No, no. I’ve been up,” he told her, voice shaking. “What’s up?”

“I’ve just called to congratulate you,” she told him like it was something he should have been
expecting. When he didn’t speak, she elaborated. “On the project, you got in. They called you didn’t
they?”

Yuuri, throat dry and heart bouncing from every corner of his chest, choked out his next word. “No.”
A gasp came from the other line and then a laugh.

“Well, I’d keep my ringer on if I were you,” Sara laughed.
“Are you sure?” Yuuri asked her. He gulped. “That I got in?”

“Yuuri, I’ve got the list in front of me,” she said. “You’re in.”

Another call intercepted after she said that.

“Oh my god,” he let out in a whisper.

“I’ll let you go then, Yuuri.” He gulped again and could practically hear the smile on her lips. “Once again, congratulations.”

Yuuri thanked her and accepted the other call when she hung up.

“Yuuri? It’s Pam. You won’t believe the news I have for you.”

__________________

“Victor, what the fuck?” Mila, crossed her legs as she took a seat on Victor’s couch, looking at him like he’d lost his mind. “You can’t go back to Russia. You love New York!”

“I can,” he told her. “And I will. New York is old news, everything is happening in St. Petersburg nowadays.”

He fluffed a pillow in his hands and gently rested his head on the softness of the material. His eyes found a spot across the living room, where the darkened area of the penthouse met the light of outside and trained his eyes on it. He found his energy was put to better use when he stopped thinking about how pitiful he was, and rather focused on the idle.

“What about us? Yuri loves having you so close, and with his grandfather sick—” she stopped talking and looked at the child playing with his tablet on the floor; headphones in, hopefully evading their conversation from his ears. “You can’t just go. You’ve got a job here, and you know Professor Feltsman would kill you if you suddenly quit after just a semester.”

“I’m replaceable. There’s plenty of people lined up to take my place,” Victor responded, voice tormented and withdrawn like a puppy who’d been kicked too often in its life. Mila, sympathetic and motherly as she always felt she needed to be over him, wrapped her arms around his body and sighed heavily, like fighting against him was of no use. And it wasn’t; Victor was nothing if not stubborn, and getting him to change his mind was near impossible.

“Can you please think this over? Have you even talked to Katsudon about it?” Mila asked him with downturned eyes. ‘Katsudon’ was Yuuri's nickname, given to him by Yuri, who'd grown an affinity for both the boy and the dish. Yuuri had prepared a batch for Thanksgiving just for Yuri and Mila, and Victor's two cousins grew to call him that from then on. “He's not going to be happy about you going back,” Mila went on.

Victor grimaced then asked, “Why would he care?”

“Oh, come on,” Mila said jokingly. She poked at his ribs and tried to make him smile, or even look at her by teasing him about his relationship with Yuuri, but nothing came from it. “You love Katsudon. And he loves you. He’s not going to let you go that easily.”

“Well he has,” said Victor. The words placed an anvil on his chest, crushing him with every second that passed. Victor couldn't bear to look at Mila, who had separated herself from him and was now looking down at him with a look of utter confusion.
“What do you mean?” She asked. “I thought things were going great.”

“Well, they weren’t. Hadn’t been for a while,” Victor told her in a hushed voice. “The entire time he was here, we were either ignoring each other or trying desperately to get the other to talk. We haven’t spoken since he left.” An impasse in his mood occurred; ice once again took to his eyes and pain glued his lips shut. “But things like that happen all the time. It’s fine, you know?”

“No, it’s absolutely not fine. Victor, you really liked him,” she stressed with a sympathetic tone. “How are you going to give up so easily?”

Victor brushed the question off and closed his eyes. A monstrous pain, ugly and vile like every nightmare he had ever suffered through, rose in his throat unexpectedly sending his entire body into a state he knew all too well. It was his body’s way of letting him know that he was feeling things much more deeply than he cared to let Mila and Yuuri know. Soon, tears would gather in his eyes, eager for a release like birds held in their dark, mussy cage too long. Still and silent, he choked back those tears and promised them freedom when his cousins left, swallowing the lump in his throat like his pride.

“You can’t fight for someone who doesn’t want you to,” Victor admitted, both to himself and to Mila, for the first time. He had spent his whole adult life loving people who didn’t love him and letting in those who should never have had trespassed on his life. “I’d love to have him here… to be with him. But I can’t force it. If he doesn’t want this, what can I do?”

He was forcing himself to come to terms with that. Yuuri hadn’t reached out to him since he had left, and Victor didn’t believe he was in the position to make contact with him. So he decided he would sit back and wait for him, for Yuuri, to come to him. If ever.

If he did, Victor would welcome him back with open arms and propose to him on the spot.

“What can you do? Well, if you love him,” Mila said, chiding him, suddenly more lively.

“You keep trying.”

“Dr. Newman, no. I’m not wrong about this. I’m right, I know I am,” Yuuri argued, legs crossed as he sat in his therapist’s office with a cup of coffee in his hands.

“Yuuri, I’m not saying you’re wrong.” A shuffling of papers followed suit. “I just think you should have sat down to talk things out with him. He can’t read your mind, you know.”

“I should have to do that? Shouldn’t he see how wrong it is that he doesn’t do anything, or maybe figure out for himself that he thinks that about me?” Yuuri was practically screaming, slapping his thigh with his free hand and leaning into the conversation.

“Yuuri, you made a guess. You inferred. You made a shot into the dark. Shut him out without knowing for sure what was going on underneath,” Dr. Newman smiled at him and leaned back into her chair. “I’m not saying your reaction wasn’t valid- I mean, you felt insulted. It was rational, but you should have stuck around. It would’ve have been hard and awkward, but maybe you and Victor would still be friends. Or more, even.” She sipped her coffee and waited before speaking again. “Invite him to dinner. Talk it out. It’ll be good for you.”

Yuuri inhaled and put his hands together, finger to finger, pointed outwards to her. In one short breath, he said “No.”

They stared each other down in silence, one contemplating their next move and the other trying to
figure out how to turn the conversation into something else. Yuuri was not the latter of those two options. He wanted *needed* advice, and his friends were too biased to give him any that was of actual use. Dr. Newman was the only person he thought would give him that, but even she was telling him just was Phichit and Guang Hong had told him.

Yuuri wasn’t stupid. He knew perfectly well that they needed to talk things out before one of them did something stupid, like fall in love with someone else or shut the other out forever. He knew they loved one another, but a hurt human soul could crush all sensibilities and regard for others. Yuuri needed to move fast, needed a plan. A way to show Victor just why he was so cross about everything. Words would be easy, but Yuuri was only starting to get comfortable with using them and he doubted Victor was doing any better. If they tried to talk, they would only make things worse. No...he needed something else.

“Well, then. What else is on your mind?” Dr. Newman crossed her legs and adjusted her glasses.

“Honey,” called a canary voice from outside. Dr. Newman’s wife, Norma, waltzed in with a handful of photographs and letters in her hands. She stopped short of the door and apologized to Yuuri for interrupting them during his session. He smiled at her kindly and told her it was fine. Her eyes crinkled as she nodded and turned her lips into a warm smile. She turned to Dr. Newman and said, “Adelaide sent over a couple of Christmas cards and the kids wrote letters. I’ll leave them on your desk, okay?”

Dr. Newman nodded and took her wife’s hand into hers, giving it a gentle squeeze, before sending her on her way out.

“Where were we?” She asked, wiping the stars from her eyes as Norma closed the door on her way out. “Ah, yes. So, what else has been on your mind?”

“Money.” It was short and simple, and Dr. Newman must have expected something more, but it was Yuuri had really been thinking about for the past couple of weeks. What foods he could cut out from his grocery list, what luxuries he could do without, how long he could go without new clothes. All kinds of things, really, because the numbers in his bank account only seemed to go down and there wasn’t much he could do about that.

“What about money?” she questioned.

“How I can make it last,” Yuuri answered her shyly for the first time since he walked in. “I haven’t got a job, and my next paycheck is next month.”

“Are you having troubles?”

“No, but I’m worried something will happen. Like I’ll get hit by a car, or I break my arm, or I get evicted. I’ll use everything I have getting back on my feet and be left with nothing. I’m not sure why, but it’s scary not to have money coming in,” Yuuri clapsed his hands around his coffee and stared down at his shoes. A red color took over his cheeks, like a drop of blood in the water. Christmas music swam into the room over the silence. No doubt Norma was baking, or knitting, or whatever wholesome thing it was she did during the holidays. Yuuri’s heart clenched at the thought that he’d be alone, and released when he let out a staggering gust of air.

“Is that causing you stress?”

“Obviously.” Yuuri didn’t mean to snap, but he was tired and angry that he wouldn’t be able to get
his friends anything good for Christmas that year, and that he wouldn’t be able to send his parents a
gift either, and that Victor wouldn’t be with him on his lonely Christmas Eve. Everyone he knew
would be traveling for the holidays or spending it with their families, which didn’t include him. It
happened every year, and it was always incredibly depressing being the only one too poor to buy a
ticket home. “I’m sorry, it’s just—” he motioned to the space around him as if saying the world is
eating me alive and I’m not ready to be an adult even though I’ve been one for years, biting his lips
as he did so.

“I understand, Yuuri. Really,” Dr. Newman told him. She handed him a box of tissues sensing tears
and sighed. “I was a college graduate once too. Unemployed for months and losing sleep over loans.
It’s a tough situation.”

They talked about it and how he could cope extensively. Yuuri cried and cried, but it was cathartic
for him at least. He left with less weight on his shoulders than he had walked in with. It wasn’t like
he had fewer problems, but it did help to voice just how lost and useless he’d felt for some time. The
walk home was cold and brisk, and he cursed himself for not thinking to bring his car.

He walked with his head down, unable to look at the gloomy sky above him. Yuuri’s lip jutted out as
he bit the inside of his cheeks to try and stop himself from crying. He passed a salvation army
volunteer, ringing her bell outside of a small diner and placed three spare dollars he had in his coat
pocket. She smiled and thanked him as he kept walking on.

Yuuri realized how close he was to the campus and decided it would be good to walk through it one
final time; it would be good for him, to see where he had spent the last six or so years of his life. He
stopped walking for a second and crossed the street to be closer to the buildings in which he’d had
classes in.

A thunderstorm erupted in his chest; lighting and thunder cracking down on his ribs in the form of
heavy breathing and painstaking gasps to stay calm. He caught a glance of himself on the surface of
a window and almost fell into himself.

He looked awful, disheveled and destroyed. Like a shell of the bright eyed person, he had been just
weeks before. Yuuri was managing to roll with the punches, to take in each blow and live another
day. He was supporting himself best he could and nurturing his body, but the bags under his eyes
and the wayward way his hair spiked around his head told another story.

Yuuri didn't sleep anymore. He didn't rest or relax. Everything for him was one swift movement,
moving through each day without stopping, not even at night when he'd toss and turn and cry into
his pillow and feel the burning need in his chest to go to Victor and make things right between them.

They had a fatal attraction to one another; a pull so magnetic Yuuri had no doubt they were anything
but soulmates. So it pained him, every atom in his body, to rip himself from Victor's life and his
touch, to stay away and hope and pray that Victor was both simultaneously feeling the same way and
not at all.

Yuuri stopped to grip the wall, resting his back against it as people walked by him without giving
him a second glance. The pious pounding in his chest persisted, draining him of rational thought and
the ability for his body to rest, just for a minute, for the first time in days. He closed his eyes and
prayed for sleep, even out there on the busy streets of New York City.

Yuuri almost succeeded, almost gave into the exhaustion, but a voice drew him forward. He could
have sworn he was dreaming for a moment, imagining it all for the sake of giving himself a piece of
mind.
Off in the distance, he swore he could hear Victor’s loud and ridiculous laughter, the one he used when was overcompensating or trying to hide his discomfort. The low timbre of his voice filtered through the air and wrapped itself around Yuuri’s ears like chains. It beckoned him forward, to go and search him out, but Yuuri resisted.

The wind picked up around his, bustling his scarf and sending a chill down his back. Yuuri’s eyes ran from one end of the street to another, searching for a flash of Victor’s silver hair or even just a peep of his eyes. He could feel his throat start to tighten as more and more people gathered on the street, making it harder for him to spot him. Yuuri didn’t know what he would even do if he saw Victor, he just knew he wanted to. Something in his chest told him it might be months until he saw him again, and he didn’t have enough pictures of them together to prove to himself that what they had been real. He didn’t have enough pictures to remember what Victor look like. The curve of his nose, the way his eyes were upturned at the ends, the pout of his lips… It all felt like it was slipping away into oblivion.

Yuuri looked up one more time, one last time, begging for heaven to give him one last glimpse of the love of his life. One last look of adoration.

He found him.

At the bottom of the steps leading into a lecture hall, with his bag hanging from his shoulder and hair flying in the wind, Yuuri found him. Victor looked ethereal; like a renaissance painting of roses and all thing beautiful embodied into one single person.

He was wearing his favorite coat. The camel colored one with brown buttons that felt like heaven to rest on (Yuuri knew from personal experience). Underneath was a suit, which was unusual for Victor, but not too much that Yuuri thought about it too long.

No, Yuuri didn’t think about it at all. He was too busy trying to memorize every inch of the man approximately 20 feet away from him. He looked at the way he was talking with his hands, dancing them all over the space around him. The gloves on his hands covering every inch of his palms and fingers like a chocolate coating. His eyes traveled over the face of whoever it was he was talking to and crinkled when he forced out more laughter. Yuuri had forgotten how much like a machine Victor could be, how obviously rigid and programmed to be what the other person needed of him.

“Look at me, Victor. I’m here,” Yuuri found himself thinking. “Look at me and I’ll run to you. I’ll run and I’ll never leave.”

But he didn’t. Victor didn’t even glance his way and that hurt Yuuri more than he ever thought possible.

Instead of Victor’s eyes, another, more small, pair found Yuuri’s face.

It was Yuri, Victor’s cousin, who waved at him jovially and tugged on Victor’s coat for him to look over. With scrunch up mittens and a hat too big for his head, tiny little Yuri stomped his foot and tried to drag Victor away from the person he was talking to. He continued to wave at Yuuri, motioning for him to wait for him to pull Victor aside. Yuuri felt his heart break into a million pieces as he watched on, not sure why he hadn’t just darted off in another direction. Yuuri gave him a shy wave and looked down at his feet, turning around back the way he came from to make his way back home.

Behind him, his name was called just loud enough for him to hear it. Yuuri walked on and refused to look back.
“He didn’t even turn to look at me,” Victor told Chris as he sat Yuri on his lap and laid his chin to rest atop his head. The blond child beneath him grunted and tried to jump off, but Victor held on tightly to him. There were too many people in the cafe for him to let Yuri roam free and he felt he needed someone to cuddle in his time of need. “I called out to him but he just kept walking.”

“Oh come on, Yuuri’s isn’t-” Chris started before Yuri cut him off by repeating the name more loudly and then asking him to call ‘the other one’ Katsudon. Chris knit his eyebrows and held back a smile as he booped Yuri on the nose. “Alright, Katsudon isn’t like that. Victor, he probably didn’t hear you. New York is pretty loud.”

“Yuri saw him, and he waved. He saw us before I got a chance to see him,” Victor handed Yuri his phone as he spoke and settled better into his seat. “I think I have to give him up, Chris. I can’t keep thinking that I’m going to be able to sweep him off his feet again. I don’t think it’s possible anymore.”

With a heavy broken heart in his chest and cotton in his throat, Victor had called out to Yuuri on the street, getting the attention of everyone else around but him. Victor knew Yuuri had a nasty habit of having his headphones in with the volume too high, but if Yuri had been telling the truth and Yuuri really had waved to him, he had seen them and decided not to approach. A battle waged inside Victor, one of polar opposites.

He could either let Yuuri go and respect his wishes or he could fight for him and seek him out until they both got to the bottom of where it went wrong.

At the moment, eyes dry from a lack of tears, all wasted on the car ride to meet Chris, Victor felt that the best option for both of them would be the first.

“I’m going to let him go,” he said defeated.

“This just got really depressing. Toughen up and go get your man. Jesus Christ. Victor,” Chris took a deep breath in and looked him square in the eye. “You’re not a quitter- Well, I mean...yes, you are with tons of things, but not when it matters. Not when it’s love.”

“How is this love?” Victor questioned him with fire in his voice. “No one in love would do this. He’s acting differently- out of character! He-”

“He’s hurt, you fool. God, are you that dense?” Chris asked him, mimicking the same voice Victor had used. “You did something to rip him from you… something neither of us has truly reached a conclusion on. Victor...The game isn’t about giving up as soon as things get hard, it’s persevering...figuring it out. That’s what you have to do, not go home to your mother with your tail between your legs.”

Victor didn’t break eye contact, just let his lips part a little bit because Chris barely raised his voice, and on the rare occasion that he did, whoever was the cause was in for a world of trouble.

He sat up, as did Yuri on his lap, and blinked three times before clearing his throat. “Well-”

Victor couldn’t get one word out before Chris started again.

“I’m spending the night tonight. We’re- Not you, Yuri. This is going deep into the night and you’re a growing boy,” Chris told Victor’s little cousin, who had grown chipper at the word ‘we’. He deflated and went back to playing on his phone. “You and I, Victor. We're going to figure this one out. We're going to fix this.”

“Not tonight. I have some things to get in order. How does Friday look for you?” He told his friend.
“Fridays fine,” Chris said.

Victor was thankful in a sense because he was tired of going over everything alone. It was like he was running in circles. Everything led to the same dead end; the place where Victor drowned his sorrows and looked through every room of his home like a drunkard trying to find their way home. He searched for Yuuri in each room, tricking himself into thinking that Yuuri might somehow be in one of them.

“I don't know what I'll do if I can't get him back,” he revealed to his friend with faux humor. “This had happened too many times, Chris. I don't know if I can take it.”

Friday

“Yuuri, can you look at her more lovingly? You look a little stiff in the face.”

Yuuri adjusted his arm around the model at his side and tilted his head down to look at her with the eyes of a heterosexual man. He wanted to laugh because from what Yuuri knew and what she had told him about her journalist girlfriend, neither of them were straight. Instead of laughing though, he placed his index finger on her lips and spread a smile on both their faces.

“There we go. That's better,” the photographer told them, clicking away as they changed positions.

He was in the middle of a photo shoot for a JCPenny family photo promotion, whose purpose it was to appeal to millennials and new families; which was the reason for the Great Dane that laid itself in front of both models. The girl, Carmella, seemed to have a fear of big dogs, but Yuuri felt quite at home with the happy little fella sniffing at his pants. His name was Chicken, which Yuuri thought was a weird name for a dog, and he smelled like grass, something his owner had apologized profusely for.

Yuuri scratched behind the dog's ears as the photographer told them to interact more with the dog for their last set of photos. Carmela placed a gentle hand on top of his head and tried to smile through the panic Yuuri could see kindling in her eyes.

“He won't bite you,” Yuuri promised her with a plastic smile. “He's a good boy.”

And he was. At least Yuuri thought so.

Chicken reminded him so much of Makkachin, even if they were different breeds and looked nothing alike. Somehow both dogs shared this knowledge in their eyes; an alertness Yuuri rarely saw in any living thing, even humans. It was like they knew what was happening in their surroundings and respected the beings around them. He missed that about Makkachin, Yuuri admitted to himself. He missed the way it felt like someone was listening to him when it was just the two of them.

“Alright, hold that. Last one.” The photographer lay on his stomach for the last shot, red in the face and sweaty everywhere else. “Good job guys. These are going to be beautiful!”

And with that, the bright lights of the studio started to go down one by one until only the room light could show the crew and talent their way backstage where everyone would get ready to go home. Yuuri scampered back with the dog and its owner, asking all kinds of questions about Chicken, all the while he looked at him like he wanted to know the same things about Yuuri.

“It was nice to meet you,” the owner told him with a smile as they waved goodbye from the exit of the studio. “Have a good one.”
“You too! Bye Chicken,” Yuuri waved to the dog with a gargantuan smile on his face as he put on his coat and watched them disappear into the hall that led to the elevators. Carmela came to his side and asked if he wanted to walk down with her and maybe get lunch.

“You seem new and I like to meet all the new models in the city. You know, in case we work together again at some point,” she told him while adjusting her glasses on her face. Yuuri did the same and shook his head yes.

“Where do you have in mind?” He asked as they walked out after saying goodbye to the crew.

“I’m too broke for anything other than a deli. How does that sound?” She asked him with a smile.

“That sounds great, actually.”

The two made their way out into the street and traveled three or so blocks west to a small deli Carmela swore by. She kept the conversation light, bringing up things like Yuuri’s skin care routine (“I use a lot of sheet masks and cold cream”) and what his favorite places to shop in the city were (“I go to H&M the most, but online shopping is truly my calling”). Then it was Yuuri’s turn to ask her about herself, and he decided to start with her girlfriend since Carmella seemed so fond of talking about her.

“Oh, she’s the best. She’s working at Buzzfeed currently and they’re having a field day with the election results—” she chuckled a little and sighed. “Well, now that the initial shock has worn off. It wasn’t so good when the election had just ended.”

“How long have you been together?” Yuuri asked taking a bite of the Ruben he had ordered.

“Three years? Yeah, three years. I met her my second year in the city and we’ve been inseparable ever since.”

“That’s nice. It’s good to have someone,” Yuuri told her.

“What about you? Is there a Mr. Katsuki?” she asked as she shed her sweater from her body. Yuuri pursed his lips and stared down at his lap for a long minute before speaking.

“No, not anymore. There were hopefuls but life has a way of turning things upside down.”

“That’s too bad. I have a couple of friends I could set you up with if you like,” she offered with a teasing smile. Yuuri blushed and waved his hands in protest, feeling like he was somehow betraying Victor by even having something like that brought up. “Alright, alright. Guess you’re not ready to take that step then. In any case, the offer stands for as long as you like. Just in case you change your mind.”

But he wouldn’t. Yuuri knew himself well enough to know that Victor was someone it would take years and years to get over. Thinking of loving another man- seeking out someone else, it made his stomach turn and twist around itself like it was punishing Yuuri for even having the thought. Victor had a deadly grip on his mind and soul, occupying all of the space Yuuri had in his heart to love someone with the romantic vigor it took to love him. He wouldn't be able to date again- not until Victor was only a distant memory. A name whispered into the wind.

Maybe he should have resented Victor, for trapping him in a labyrinth of utter devotion and pious adoration. Maybe Yuuri should have hated him for making him feel like he wasn't worthy. Maybe Yuuri should have never gotten drunk on tequila and cheap beer and forced Leo to drive him to that Walmart that night. Maybe things would have been easier for him that way.
“Oh, shoot,” Carmela looked at her phone in frustration and stood up from their table. “Listen, I have to go. My manager booked me an audition for JCPenny- fuck!” She fumbled inside her bag and pulled out a pen, quickly scribbling a number down. She handed it to Yuuri with a faltering smile and said, “it's nice to have friends in this industry. Feel free to call if you ever wanna hang out or whatever.”

“Thank you,” Yuuri told her, looking down at the digits like they held the answer to all of his problems.

“I'll see you then, okay?” she asked him again. He nodded and gently smiled back. “Bye!”

“Good luck!” he wished her.

Across the city, lying in bed with the shades drawn, allowing what little light was left on the horizon to peep through the wall to wall windows. Victor pulled his duvet up to his bare chest and nestled further into his bed in an effort to find some kind of sanctuary between his sheets. Chris, who had arrived hours before, paced around his room, grunting in disapproval every once in awhile. They had been discussing Yuuri since he had made his way into Victor's home, producing theory after theory on what could have gone wrong.

He could feel it, realization, rattling him at his core with each word they said to one another. They were close to cracking open to the mystery of why Yuuri Katsuki left the way he did. Anticipation and apprehension bounced around his chest, knocking against every single one of his senses. It'd been long since Victor had felt something that made him anxious -fearful even.

“So, you're saying he started to change after his birthday?” Chris asked him, taking a seat at the foot of his bed. He crossed his legs and leaned closer in, closing proximity with Victor. “Did you forget to get him a gift?”

“What? No- ugh. Look, we were both pretty cold to each other for some time before that, but once his birthday came around it was like he was trying to completely shut me out,” Victor held the bridge of his nose and sighed like he had already explained everything a million times over. His heart sped up, his body's way of telling him that sharing personal things, even after eight years of friendship with Chris (or anyone really), still made him deeply uncomfortable. Seconds passed, his heartbeat, loud and clear in his ears being the only thing he was truly aware of in that moment. The stress of the past week, the sadness that washed over him every morning when he woke up, was taking a toll on him. Everything he did, even if it was just holding a conversation with his best friend, made him inexplicably tired. Victor shook himself into reality, delving deeper into his bed.

“Did anything happen? At the brunch?”

“Well- uh, we did see Luca but I doubt Yuuri’s the kind of person to let nasty comments like that-” Victor tried to answer.

“Wait, you did not tell me you saw Luca. What the hell did he say to him?” Chris asked, scrunching up his face like he smelled something rotten.

“Something along the lines of him being my newest- I don’t know. I can’t really remember,” Victor squeezed his eyes shut -an awful habit he picked up and started doing when he became frustrated-and balled his hands into fists. He ran through the memory in his head one more time, frustration
building in his chest.

All he could remember was Yuuri holding his own and walking away dignified. He could remember the blood rushing to his ears and face, making him go bright red. He fought through the second-hand embarrassment and focused on the task at hand. “When we got home, he asked me if-”

The gears in Victor’s head started turning as things fell into place and began to make sense. A riot started in his head. A bizarre buzzing in his ears disoriented him, making him dizzy as he hastily shot up from his lying position. “Chris- Fuck, I’m such an idiot.”

“What? What is it?” Chris asked him, worry playing in the tone of his voice. “What’s wrong?”

Victor, not listening to a word coming out of Chris’ mouth, yanked the duvet from his body and walked to his closet, urgency in every step.

It all made sense now- Everything Yuuri had told him, all of the dead eyed stares when they were out in public. The petty fights about Victor coddling him in public and buying him things. The understated resentment. His hesitance to go to high profile events. Everything was coming together. One thing weaving into another to form a clear picture. A tapestry showcasing a blind man leading a path to nowhere.

“Victor, what the hell are you doing?” Chris placed a warm hand on Victor’s as he reached for a t-shirt hanging in the walk in. He flinched from his touch and ran an anxious hand through his hair. He looked like a madman, standing there under low light- hair a mess and half naked, trembling like he had never known warmth all his life.

“I have to go to him,” he spoke in a low, threatening voice. “I'm done playing games- I love him more than anything in this world- He...he needs to know. I need to hold him.”

“Woah, Woah. Alright, think rationally here. Walk me through what you’re thinking. I can’t help you if I’m in the dark.” Chris spoke gently as he placed both hands on Victor’s shoulders and separated him from the clothing rack. Victor pushed back and took tight hold of Christophe’s shirt collar. The pair stared each other down, almost as if seeing how far either of them would go. Victor was the first to drop his eyes, easing his grip and removing his hands from Chris’ body.

“Look, I’m sorry. It’s just… I have to get to him. This can’t wait anymore. Chris, I have to go to him,” Victor was pleading for permission- a blessing of some sort from his friend that proved what he was doing was right.

“It's fine,” Chris brushed himself off and led Victor back to bed, where he calmly asked what Victor had figured out without him.

“He thinks I think he's a gold digger- or he thinks I don't love him or something. I don't know, it's hard to explain but it's a feeling- it's in my chest and I just want to go talk it out with him-” Victor babbled, holding his head between his hands like he'd lost his mind.

“Okay, hold on a minute. You're not ready to go and see him, much less talk. Let's gather your thoughts, okay?” Chris softened his features and touch as they nestled into the pile of pillows on Victor's bed. “What do you mean Yuuri thinks you think he's a gold digger?”

“After we came home from the brunch, he asked me if anyone had brought up the topic up directly - instead of off hand comments and gossip- and I told him that yes, they had. After he started asking me all kinds of things and I tried to brush it off but it seemed to really bother him and- I don't know, I tried my best to calm him. To let him know that no one important thought that about us but he was
just different. And then that night, he asked me again. To define us. And- and-” Victor gulped. His shoulders rose with tension. “Well, you know the rest.”

“Okay,” Chris spread the word out like butter on toast. “I'm still not- I'm not seeing the full picture.”

“I kept saying we were just friends- all day that day,” Victor whispered to himself, no longer talking to Chris. “Every time he asked, or someone else asked me, that's what I said. I called us friends-”

A groan, agonized and strained, escaped his lips. Victor threw himself fully onto the bed, covering himself with a pillow.

“I told him things were moving too fast. Chris, I told him I love him before that. I held his hand, I didn't hold back,” said Victor. “Yuuri was always cautious not to get too close, but I pulled him to me. I glued myself to his side and then just ripped him off-”

“Now, Victor, hold on. Yuuri's an adult. He knew what was happening-”

“Because I led him to believe that once one of us tried to make things official things would be perfect! I let him think we'd end up together as soon as he said the word!” Heavy breaths from his chest filled the room in places words should have been. Chris shifted his eyes to the windows, unable to meet Victor's gaze. They both knew what Victor had done was wrong, regardless of the fact that it was unintentional. There was nothing either of them could say to try and downplay the way things had happened.

“To make things worse, he thinks I care more about public image than I do about him.”

That final admittance, a soft blow to his gut, filled his voice with water and gently laid his gaze to the floor. He couldn't believe how badly he had hurt Yuuri without even noticing- how far he had driven them apart, all the while living under the same roof. The thought made his stomach turn, the way it used to when his medicine wouldn't agree with him.

“I lost him. It's over,” Victor told Chris with a meek smile.

“No, it's not,” Chris said. They looked at each other finally as Makkachin trotted into the room and jumped onto the bed with them. The lights from outside shifted around the room, creating new shadows and taking apart others.

Chris looks Victor over and notices just how hard his friend is trying to keep himself together. There are tears in his eyes, shimmering under the low light of the room. Outside, snow continued to fall with no regard for the pain Victor was in.

Away from the world, in his own head, Victor thought about heading out into his terrace once Chris left and just standing there long enough for it to kill him. Pneumonia sounded so good at that moment.

Victor wanted to laugh -suddenly- at how easily he seemed to give up his will to live.

“We can fix this,” Chris told him. “You can go and talk it out and everything should be fine.”

Victor took in a deep breath of air and brought Makkachin up to his chest, kissing the top of his head. The dog looked back at him with kind eyes, like he was letting Victor know that despite his flaws, he still loved him.

“I don't think I'll do that,” he said finally.
“Fine, we can go all out. Are you thinking flash mob or a thousand roses? I bet we could get ad space in Times Square-”

“No, Chris. I mean I don't want him back. I'm no good for him,” Victor told him, grimacing as the words left his mouth. “We're done.”

It was best if he left Yuuri alone. That was what Victor thought anyway. If Yuuri wasn't near him - with him- he couldn't hurt him. Not ever. Not again. He couldn't afford to be selfish anymore and give into his own desires to be with him. He loved him too much to take that chance.

“But Victor,” Chris started to argue. “You love him. You can't just-”

“I can and I will,” Victor told him. He shook his head. “I'm going back home. After the holidays. I can't be here anymore.” He took a deep breath to steady his chest, looking for a sliver of rationality to keep himself from losing control over the entirety of his emotions -all of which were in turmoil in his chest. “I've spoken to Yakov. He was mad, but he understood. I hope this won't affect you in any way. I know I've built something like a partnership with your events and charities.”

“It's not me I'm worried about,” Chris said.

They looked at opposite walls until they decided it was time for both of them to go to bed. Chris snuggled into the unused side of Victor's bed and closed his eyes, careful not to say anything that might seem too much for the state Victor was in. Instead, he squeezed his friend's shoulder and said, “we'll talk in the morning.”

Of course, they would. Chris would try his hardest to talk him out of leaving the country. He'd make Victor two lists: one of pro's and one of cons, and knowing Chris, the pros would definitely outweigh the latter.

Victor couldn't sleep that night. He couldn't find it in himself to physically close his eyes and drift off into a deep slumber. There was too much happening inside him. Too much trouble brewing in his chest. So he stayed up, looking out into the darkness of his room with only one thought in mind. One memory. One moment in time.

He could remember the first time he saw Yuuri, so vividly. Maybe it was because he looked so cool in his jean jacket, or maybe it was the way the light lit around him like a halo. Actually, it might have been the intense way his eyes shifted from corner to corner of the huge store looking for what he was there to find. Yuuri captivated Victor from the very first moment his eyes were met with the cheezy way he danced around his friends.

Victor had never told Yuuri that he had actually been on his way out of the store when he was him. He never once let it slip that his groceries had been bagged and in his hands on their way to his car when he saw him. He didn’t tell him that he had to make up some weird fucking excuse up for himself to go back into the store with the underlying intent to talk or see him. He knew it was weird, and a little bit creepy, but he couldn't help himself. He was a moth to a flame; fatal attraction was leading him down a hole that there was really no coming back from. In the present time, that was more obvious to him than anything else.

He played the memory forward, backward, and stopped to giggle to himself whenever he got to the part where Yuuri fell forward and hit his head. It was only months ago. Just a bit over one hundred days. One. Hundred. Days.

Who knew so much could happen in such short period of time?
This took a long, long, loooong time to finish and it's not even 10k words. I guess I've been in a rut creatively with it lmao. Anyway, thank you for all of your lovely comments last chapter (and those before!). You guys are so sweet~

I'm back at school again, so I might not be able to update as frequently but im counting on finishing this thing before finals in december, so there's that to look forward to :) 

Anyway *youtber voice*, leave me a comment letting me know what you think and remember to hit that kudos button!
Chapter Summary

*Don't be that way// Don't you pretend*

_Sitting next to Yuuri, hands neatly folded in his lap, he realized he had felt it for the past five months in their every interaction. Everything from taking punches for him, to holding him tight in his arms. He felt the warmth of love on his body when Yuuri hugged him or brushed past him with a gentle hand placed on the small of his back. Maybe there had been tears and trials and tribulations, but surely the love they had discovered was worth more than any tear either of them had shed. It had been worth it._

_Everything._

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for _notes_.

Yuuri was starting to hate snow with everything he had in him. It seemed infinite. It piled and piled on top of the ground and coated every inch of color that could possibly make him feel better. Everything was white and grey, sometimes brown. There were no greens. No blues. No reds. Not even the yellow hue of the sun could be seen at times. Everything felt like an ugly art project done by a third grader with not a single creative bone in his body. Yuuri hated stuffing his body into layers and handling scarves and mittens whose materials made his skin crawl and teeth ache. The hatred was new. So was his hair, now dyed a bleach blonde color for his first major debut in the modeling world.

He looked into his hallway mirror, fists clenched at his sides like big, fat, rocks ready to be thrown at the wall before him. He could feel his heart racing and the sickly hot tears brimming his eyes. Yuuri hated the winter and his hair. He hated snooty salons and the snickering rich women and men that sat in them with delicate hands in warm bowls of lavender infused water and foil in their hair. He hated their accents because they reminded Yuuri of him, with his beautiful silver hair and eyes like open oceans. He hated how they nonchalantly asked him if the rumors were true.

“They’re all over the papers.”

“Excuse me?”

“You know. About you and Nikiforov. Oh my God- Did he pay for this? Wow, I can’t bel-”

“I think you have me confused with someone else,” Yuuri had told her, stopping the conversation from advancing any further.

Back at the salon, he had been sitting next to a relatively young woman as he was getting his hair treated. She couldn’t have been much older than him, but definitely seemed for refined with long blonde hair and grey eyes like gemstones. Yuuri had noticed her staring for quite some time as they sat there next to each other. At one point she even pulled her phone up and turned to look at him for
some seconds, as if comparing a picture to his face.

He spent two hours sat next to her, awkwardly avoiding eye contact and trying to pretend like he couldn’t notice eyes lingering on him all over the room. Once he was out of his chair and set to go home, he kept his eyes on the ground the entire way there -an underlying feeling of shame coating his body like an illness. The drive home was worse. Sitting in silence, all by his lonesome always seemed to be.

But now came the worst part. The part where he had to look at himself and accept that just because he had let Victor go didn’t mean what people said left with him. Maybe it made him angry at the world -so mad he was turning red- but it had to be done. He had to deal with himself before investigating. And there was a lot to investigate. Yuuri probably should have called Phichit, he had always been better at those kinds of things, but it really didn’t seem something worth the embarrassment of finding something truly awful written about him.

Yuuri stepped away from the mirror lightly and sat down on the couch like he was waiting for something to happen all on its own. Minutes passed, most creating impossible scenarios in his mind where he just broke his phone and refused to deal with anything, until, finally, he took his phone from his pocket, unlocked it, and typed in two words.

Yuuri Katsuki

They were simple words. Just his name, after all. All that ever showed up for him was some old man who lived in Japan who had saved a cat from a burning building a few years back. But the last time he searched his own name was months and months back. But now, as he sat paralyzed on his couch, white knuckles flexing like his muscles during a run, he wanted to puke when his picture came up.

It was accompanied by a handful of Russian words at first, but as he scrolled down the results page, they turned to English. He picked the first one in the language and began to read.

“In a surprising turn of events, Nikiforov’s shocking relationship to Katsuki was confirmed by his estranged ex-husband, Luca Mikhailov (26), who told a Russian news outlet that the two were in ‘agreement’ and ‘quite open’ about their relationship.” Yuuri began to read out loud through the middle of the article, almost as if wanting to prove to himself that what he was reading was real and not just his mind playing some kind of sick joke on him.

The article went on:

Multiple outlets (our magazine included) have reached out to the Nikiforov's for a comment since the story broke just days ago, but they have been adamant on remaining silent on the matter. Mikhailov although, is being very vocal to gossip outlets, claiming that he “wouldn’t be surprised if they had been seeing each other while we were together.”

Katsuki will be stepping into the limelight next month, as he is listed to shoot for a high end-

That was when Yuuri put his phone down calmly and pursed his lips as tightly as he could. Taking a deep breath in, holding it for several seconds, and then hastily exhaling like his life depended on it, Yuuri dove further into the articles on him and Victor.

The gossip blogs painted their rendezvous like something out of a Lana Del Rey song. It was a thing of bored bloggers, looking for something fantastical to write. As Yuuri read, he couldn’t help but cringe at the way he was being depicted in the media.

According to them, he and Victor met in early 2015 and saw each other on and off until present day,
with Victor providing anything and everything Yuuri wanted. Some had even gone as far as taking a picture from his Instagram of him with a dozen roses in his arm (courtesy of Phichit), and claiming Victor had sent them. It was awful to see himself through such a warped lense, but at least nothing had been reported about his domestic abuse case. No one had cared enough to check. But with traction building around the story, Yuuri was worried it wouldn’t be long before someone did. And if that happened, he wasn’t what he would do.

Yuuri got up from his seat and closed his eyes, tossing his phone aside and walked to his room to change into his running gear.

He had to get his mind off of the topic, and pushing his body to the limit seemed only appropriate.

---

December 23rd

“I forbid you, Vitya. You will absolutely not talk to the media,” Alyona knit her eyebrows and stepped into the kitchen to join her husband, Victor trailing behind her. “They’ll eat us alive. I don’t want to hear any more of this. My word is final.” Her eyes shifted from side to side, wincing at the words coming from her mouth and how harsh they sounded. With a defeated voice, she further explained. “I know what he means to you, but we’ve built an empire. We can’t have this kind of bad press. It’s better if we keep you two apart for the time being.”

Victor bit his lip and looked to his father for help. Alexei, unsuspecting and in the middle of making a sandwich, widened his eyes and looked as if he wasn’t understanding what was happening. Victor urged him on with daggers in his eyes and pointed to his mother when she turned her back.

“My love,” he finally said, understanding the message. “My sweet, we have to do something. Victor’s friend doesn’t have the resources we do. Next thing you know, the paparazzi are following him and this becomes an even bigger mess. We can’t just sit here with our arms crossed.”

Victor nods in agreement and waits for his mother to speak again. Instead of speaking though, she sighs and leans against the chrome refrigerator, eyes stuck to the ceiling. This is difficult for her, Victor can see it. The way it disoriented her usually steely eyes and made her lips tremble. She could still remember then. She was still resentful of the people who said the same things about her. Adorned in a pearl necklace and a lace shirt, his mother looked like any other woman born into money. She emitted the same elegance and power -had grown into the refined ways and culture of the city of St. Petersburg. Her hair, worn in loose curls most of the time, seemed to be the same kind of loose curls of any other aristocratic woman. Victor found it hard to believe that there was a time when Alyona Nikiforova had barely had food to eat. But then he’d look long enough -when she didn't notice of course- and saw the look in her eyes that said she'd fought for everything she had. His father, on the other hand, was born fairly wealthy and carried himself more humbly, despite the three gold chains that hung around his neck and giant rings on his fingers.

“We're not famous,” she spoke more softly. “This'll fizzle out in a matter of days.”

“We're known enough, Mama. We give so much and help everyone we can- you know they've always looked for ways to slander us. Yuuri shouldn't have to be victim to whatever the tabloids have against us.” Victor walked to the island in the middle of the kitchen and placed his hands on the cold marble. He kept his eyes on the counter and sighed heavily. “I cannot do this to him. I have to fix this.”

“Vitya,” his mother laid a warm hand on his back, rubbing in the heat in circular motions. His father walked to him and did the same. Suddenly, Victor was 13 again. Thirteen years old and crying with
his parents in the kitchen for the millionth time. “If it's that important to you, we'll coordinate with our PR office to put something out. I'd rather not, but I know this won't let you live if we don't.”

He felt pathetic. Victor couldn't even uphold Yuuri's name without his family's involvement.

He wanted to crawl out of his skin when they kissed his face, going back to doing what it was they were doing before. He loved his parents - he really did - but it always hurt him how easily they seemed to move on from things. Maybe he was jealous of them, that he couldn't do the same. Maybe he wanted more attention - more emotional interactions. Maybe he just wanted to see how long they could be caring. He wasn't sure - not anymore.

“Now, let's talk about your party,” his mother spoke up with a smile. “Will Yuuri be joining us? Or is it too close to the photo shoot?”

Ah, yes. The photoshoot. The most surprising thing to come out of the entire tabloid article was Yuuri's apparent decision to take the job Sara had offered him. He had been sure it was a lie at first, but after a very long conversation with Sara, he got it out of her to tell him the truth. The truth, it seemed, hurt more to hear than living in suspense until may have been. Once again, his feelings and involvement didn't really explain why he felt so sad about that. Everything was too complicated and it was impossible for Victor to tell if he just missed Yuuri incredibly, felt betrayed after Yuuri told him he wouldn't take the job, or whatever other reason his brain could possibly make up to keep itself on the topic of Everything Yuuri.

“I'm not sure,” he answered coldly.

“Where is he anyway? I'd think he'd be here more often.”

“He's got a lot going on… just doesn't have time,” Victor tried to explain, making up any lie his mother could possibly believe. “He's still job hunting.”

“Still, it's so close to your birthday. I would think he'd at least hang around here a bit. I should call him-” Alyona pulled out her phone as Victor's head snapped up from the counter.

“No!” His voice rang through the kitchen as his mother put her phone down, squinting at him as if defying him to raise his voice at her again.

“And why shouldn't I?” She challenged him.

Victor turned red and tried to think of something on the spot. Nothing, his mind was blank. There should have been an excuse on the tip of his tongue like always, but his mind was blank. Empty. Absent and wondering why he hadn't called Yuuri yet. Why he hadn't made sure he was okay and eating well. Why he hadn't called to apologize and-

Before he could say anything, Alyona was calling Yuuri, holding up a hand to stop Victor from interrupting her.

Victor felt his lungs collapse, begging him to drop dead right then and there in the kitchen to stop his misery. There was a mirror on the wall across him, one that let him see just how pale his face had gone, drained of all life and color. He prayed Yuuri wouldn't answer. That he'd not recognize his mother's number and just let his phone ring until it stopped. But he knew that Yuuri never deleted a number once it was saved on his phone (a quirk he'd developed after he answered his RA's call with the words “if this is a telemarketer, I'm gonna lose my fucking shit”).

“Yuuri! How are you, child?” Alyona’s voice and entire body perked up when Yuuri answered, something that had the opposite effect on Victor. He stiffened where he stood and stared daggers into
his mother’s eyes, something that was quickly becoming a habit for him. He couldn’t help but turn to leave the room, but his father cleared his throat to call his attention and motioned for him to sit next to him on the island. Victor did as he was told and plopped down on a stool next to his father. “Oh is that so? I understand I’ll let you get back to him in a second, don’t worry. I was just wondering if you would be attending Vitya’s” A voice cut through the call, too loud to be Yuuri. Alyona pulled a face and removed the phone from her ear slightly. “No, no. That’s okay. As I was saying, can we count on you to make an appearance on Victor’s birthday? It’s the 31st this year since we’re in the states. Didn’t want to mess with anyone’s holiday’s- Oh? Do you leave that night? Well, I’m disappointed to hear that, but I know you’d be here if you could. And, I’d like to apologize about the unwanted attention from the media- No, I’d really like to apologize. I know how it can be. Better than you might think.”

Victor watched as his mother continued to laugh on the phone, chatting away with Yuuri like they were lifelong friends. He couldn't believe Yuuri was playing along with his own lie; acting like nothing was wrong and he really was just busy. He resented him a little bit for it as well. He didn't like the thought of Yuuri being able to just casually act like nothing happened. It made him think he just didn't care about Victor anymore.

“We’ll be putting out a statement soon, sweetheart. No need to worry about talking to them. We'd actually prefer if you just ignored anyone that tried to approach you. Okay, yeah. I'll let you go then. Yes, I'll tell him,” Alyona spoke with a smile on his face and turned to Victor, who was an incredibly bright shade of pink. “Alright, have a good day. Oh! And good luck, I'm sure you'll do beautifully on the shoot. Bye, honey. Have a good one.”

She hung up then.

He refused to take the sandwich his father was offering him and instead stood, walking out to the living room. Victor was sure that if he had stayed, he would have screamed. He made it to the couch before he had to just stop and figure everything going through his head. This wasn’t the time for him to make brash decisions or be impulsive. He had to think like Yuuri and try to understand why he was doing the things he did. Victor had to put himself in his shoes and empathize. He had to be rational.

The call caught Yuuri by surprise, he thought. He was surprised and once he heard what Alyona called him to discuss, he thought it would be better to play along because obviously, Victor hadn’t told her about anything that happened yet. He thought Yuuri knew that Alyona would have called much earlier and with drastically different talking points if she had known. So, Yuuri played along. And he apparently wanted Alyona to pass on a message from him to Victor. Now, whether that message was genuine or not would be up to him to decide, but-

A ding! echoed through the living room as he looked across to the coffee table, where his phone lay. In one swift movement, Victor moved from where he was standing to the coffee table, turning on the screen frantically to see what the notification was. There was a glimmer of hope in his chest where his heart used to be, that told him it was Yuuri. But alas, upon opening his phone he found it to be a reminder from Chris that he’d be taking a plus one to his birthday gala, in addition to his husband. He ignored the message and decided that maybe it was time for him to take a nap. His parents had only been with him for two days or so, but having them around also meant having all of his other family members around, and having so many people around him at all times was wearing him out.

Alyona walked out of the kitchen, standing with her arms crossed and a grimace on her face. “So, what happened with you two?”

“Nothing happened,” Victor quickly responded. The thumping in his chest started again, rhythmic
and painful like the saddest song known to man. He looked down, afraid to meet his mother’s gaze.

“I don’t believe that. Do you want to know how I know?” she asked him with a raised eyebrow and calm voice. His father could be heard humming in the kitchen, most likely trying to stay out of whatever it was his mother was trying to pull. “Yuuri told me to remind you to take care of yourself. He said to ‘Tell him to take good care of himself, and that I hope he’s alright’. Vitya-”

Victor’s eyes awakened, like the morning sky being lit by the sun. He gulped, taking a fumbling step toward the staircase that led to his room. Legs, tender and wobbling like an infant’s, carried him to the base when his mother spoke again.

“There’s no reason I should passing messages along. Honey, tell me what happened.”

“Nothing happened,” he told her silently as he began to climb up to his room, where his pillow awaited his cold and tired body. Halfway up he whispered to himself, voice dripping in melancholy, “Everything’s okay.”

December 28th

“Mila!” Sara called out to her girlfriend in the other room, the bathroom connected to her bedroom. An inquisitive hrrrmph? responded to her call, as Mila appeared in the doorway with a toothbrush in her mouth and frothy toothpaste on her chin. Sara’s chest went a little warm at the image but brushed it away to focus on more pressing matters. “Do you remember where I left my passport? I can't seem to find it.”

Mila took the toothbrush from her mouth and tilted her head to the side, scrunching up her nose in the process of trying to remember. She shrugged and returned to brushing her teeth. Through slobbery lips, she said, “I don’t know. Guess you’ll have to stay.”

A smile a mile wide, spread on Mila’s face, followed by a playful wink. She made her way back into the bathroom with a swing of her hips as Sara groaned jokingly and followed her in.

“Hey now, I need it back,” she wrapped her arms around Mila’s waist from behind and placed a gentle kiss on her shoulder, trying to both coax her into revealing the passports location and ease the sadness from building up in Mila. “Come on, you know I'll be back home with you and Yuri before you even notice I'm gone.”

“It’s a month, Sara,” Mila whined. “What am I supposed to do without you for a month?”

“You're going to be in Russia, my love. I'm sure you'll have plenty to do,” Sara reassured her with a smile and little squeeze.

“I wanted you there. To meet my family- And before you say anything- Yes, I did know you’d be going on this trip before that, but it still hurts not having you there. We've never been apart this long, it's going to suck,” she admitted with a loud sigh. Mila placed her hands over Sara's and looked into her eyes through the mirror. “It's going to be weird not waking up to your face for a month, even if it is all weird and groggy when you wake up.”

“I know, I know,” Sara told her in a whisper. She rested her chin on Mila's shoulder and closed her eyes, breathing in deeply. The aroma of her body wash on Mila's skin wafted around her. It felt familiar -like home- and made her want to go back to bed. But she couldn't. She had to pack. “Oh, God. I wish I could just not go.”

“You and me both,” Mila let her shoulders fall, turning around to face her girlfriend. Sara was a
 couple of inches short than her, enough to have to look up at her when faced together, and more petite as well. Mila was all broad shoulders and long legs and had a thin frame in contrast. Sara had a thing for the way Mila seemed to loom over her.

“What should we do about that then?” Sara half teased, half genuinely asked her. Mila smirked and looked down at her with a spark in her eyes. Sara let out a giggle when Mila lifted her up and carried her away to their bed.

“We are going to sleep until you absolutely have to leave,” Mila laughed. “Now, cuddle me.”

“Only if you give me my passport,” Sara teased.

As they disappeared from the bathroom, Mila let out a stifled groan.

December 29th

“I'm sorry none of us are gonna be there to see you off. I wish we could but if I leave before I'm supposed to, my mom will actually kill me,” Phichit laughed through Yuuri's laptop screen. Yuuri chuckled a little as he folded a pair of jeans and placed them gently into his suitcase. Packing day was upon him, and he wasn’t sure what kind of clothing he was supposed to wear in Rome, Italy. He decided on just taking jeans and t-shirts- Nothing too flashy, but still stylish. He also needed some more luxurious pieces for the wrap party and nights out- which Sara had told him happened often and unexpectedly.

“It’s cool, Phich. I understand. I just wish someone was around to help me lug all of this to the gate,” Yuuri chuckled nervously. “I know they’re sending a car, but I’m still stressing out. I mean, I think this might be too many clothes for just three weeks. You know?”

Phichit put a finger to his lips and squinted his eyes in contemplation. “Mm, no I don’t think so. You’ll be good, they’re paying for everything so just pack whatever and spend their money like there’s no tomorrow.”

“I’m not sure how comfortable I’ll be with that,” Yuuri laughed. “Plus it's not unending funds. At least, I don’t think-”

“Regardless, go on and have fun. You deserve this. That motherfucker-”

“Hey, now. We still respect him,” Yuuri told him. He still loved Victor too, but he wasn’t about to tout his emotions like that out loud. Phichit rolled his eyes but ultimately shrugged him.

“Maybe you still do, but after everything that happened with that newspaper -and then how you told me that random journalist showed up to your gym and then your apartment!- It's insane it took him so long to come out with a public statement,” Phichit said, his voice growing higher.

“I’m sure that wasn’t his intention. I know Victor pretty well and I’m sure there was something in the way of him getting that out. Plus, it came from their family PR team, not him personally,” Yuuri said. That made it worse, he thought, that the statement had come from someone else. That it had been crafted to appease the mass hysteria in Russia over one of their more prominent public figures, instead of to heal both of their somewhat damaged reputations. Yuuri still couldn’t go to certain places in the city without getting some wide-eyed stares. Before he had had no idea just how big the Russian presence was in the city, but it had been made clear to him that oligarchs and CEO’s and their wives and children roamed all over the city.

Yuuri gulped, stomaching all of the irrational sadness that he felt in his chest. It coated him like wax,
sticky and gooey, making a mess of everything around him.

“If you say so,” Phichit exhaled. Yuuri looked down at his hands, which had stopped folding, and tried to fight the tears brimming around his eyes. He didn’t want the tears to fall - didn’t want them to make the pain real. “Oh, Yuuri. I’m sorry. I know you guys were - uh, you were together. I know it’s hard to let go.”

“We weren’t though,” Yuuri smiled shyly. His heart felt like it was being balled up and twisted. It was like it was being molded into something that wasn’t his. “We weren’t together.”

The words felt like glass on his tongue.

“Yuuri, Jesus Christ, yes you were. I need you to tell me that you know that you two were practically married,” Phichit chided him. Yuuri let his shoulders fall and groaned. “Yuuri, he loved you and you loved him too. I don’t want you to think that there wasn’t any love between you two. Do you really think I would have left you knowing he’d be the one you’d turn to and he didn’t love you? God no!”

That struck a nerve. Not too bad, but enough for Yuuri’s head to whip up to look at the screen. A frown formed on his face as Phichit looked down in turn. He looked back up apologetically.

“I know we’re touchy about that stuff, but it’s true. He seemed like a nice enough guy. And he was intoxicated by you. Like everyone else is that meets you, granted, but he went further. I saw you two together one time, and there was a spark between you two- A magnetic pull,” Phichit exclaimed as Yuuri softened in his stature. “I don’t know how to describe it-”

He went on. Spoke for some time, some of it might have been valuable advice Yuuri could have used, but he hadn’t heard a word past that last sentence. His mind was stuck on that word Phichit had used.

_Magnetic._

He resented it, of course. That seemed to be a theme when it came to things dealing with Victor. Since they first met, it had been there. Like it or not. A tug at his soul to go wherever Victor went and never stray from him. A demand for devotion. A command for him to be a planet in rotation around his one and only sun. Even when he denounced him, Yuuri felt it. It was daunting and loomed over him on days like this, where all he wanted to do was go to him.

“It’s not like you didn’t try. Sometimes you just have to let people go, you know?” Yuuri’s brain focused back in on Phichit, who was stuffing some kind of food into his face. “Maybe someday you’ll see him in a coffee shop and he’ll be more grey than silver and there will be wrinkles around his eyes and cheeks, and maybe you’ll still have that feeling- You know? That’s what you should do. Just let it sit.”

Yuuri had no idea what he was talking about. He had no idea what was happening. But he felt it. Again, for the trillionth time. That magnetism. It was screaming at him.

“Just find him, and things will work out,” Phichit said sounding satisfied with himself. Okay, Yuuri thought, he could go with that.

And so he ripped off the dingy old shirt he was dressed in and pulled one from his dresser. It was just as distressed, but cleaner and smelled like detergent. He switched his sweatpants for jeans and slipped into tennis shoes. Phichit watched him, silently, fully aware of just what Yuuri was doing. It was the kind of things friends like them could see developing. After he was done, Yuuri turned to the
screen to see if Phichit would try to stop him.

“You can go on, but let me remind you that it’s about 11 pm over there. Might wanna check that he’s still awake,” Phichit smiled at him warmly and crossed his arms. Yuuri smiled back and nodded. “Do ya thing, then.”

Phichit waved goodbye and ended their call.

Suddenly the adrenaline started and his walk turned into a jog turned into a run turned into a sprint to his car. The drive was even more of a blur. Each and very familiar street twisted around itself and merged with every loving memory he could recall between Victor and him. It was a car chase with just himself. It was the crushing need to reach his destination. It was wanting to hold Victor's hand and kiss him for the first time if only one last time.

It was love.

There was so much love in his heart in fact, that he forgot to let Victor know he was on his way over. So when he reached Victor's building, it was surprising to not find him standing outside in the grey jacket of his Yuuri loved so much. Instead, he was met with a dark building, a small light glowing in the middle of the entrance. The doors were partially blacked out, only giving a small glimpse into the lobby. Yuuri’s breathing stilled for a moment. He was going to fix everything. He was going to tell Victor he loved him and ask-

Oh no.

Walking out of the building was Victor and a man he didn't recognize. Yuuri tried to remember everyone Victor had introduced to him. All of the people that ran in his circles. Every name. Every face. But there was no recollection of whoever that person was talking so tenderly, brushing his shoulder against Victor's. Yuuri tried to keep the panic inside; he tried to let it sit and run its course before making any rash decisions. It was always his impulsivity that made him the most trouble.

He drove him away. It was over. Everything- the past six months of reliving and reeling back from the pain. The suffering. The awful silence of empty walls and desolate hallways. The warm embrace of Victor's arms. The soft, husky smell that eluded all of Yuuri’s senses. The velvety soft ways they existed in each other's worlds. Everything was gone.

He watched as Victor rocked and back forth on his heels with a shy smile on his face as the man in front of him kept talking. Yuuri's stomach started to do flips as he watched. He had done it. He had finally pushed Victor far enough for him to find someone to take his place. That thought kept ramming itself into his head, forcing him to know and remember forever. He didn't think it would happen so soon, but there he was. Red in the face and sweating from all kinds of places. He pressed his palms against his face and did the small breathing exercises Dr. Newman had taught him when he first started seeing her. He closed his eyes tightly, enough to make phosphenes dance around the black canvas of his eyelids.

It wasn't long before the man accompanying Victor pulled him into a hug and got into a white sports car parked in front of the building. Yuuri knew he had to act. He had to do something- Anything.

The question was though, would he stay and do what he had come to do in the first place? Or would he drive back home with his tail between his legs and cry until his flight in the morning?

They both had pros and cons- none outweighed the other in terms of what could happen if anything were to happen.
Victor made his way back inside, oblivious to the emotional turmoil churning just outside of his own home. Yuuri tried to keep calm. He knew freaking out and jumping to conclusions would just agitate the pain inside him. He needed to breathe deeply and concentrate on what he had planned to do. Yuuri wanted to talk to Victor. To tell him everything was okay. Even if he did have someone else, he needed closure. A sliver of opportunity for a friend to still come out of the mess that was his romantic life. That was all that mattered. He needed to talk to him.

Determined to do the right thing, Yuuri picked up his phone and dialed Victor’s number. He picked up before Yuuri could gather himself, which only threw him off more than he had already been.

“Yuuri?” Victor’s voice echoed through the receiver, filling the silent space of Yuuri’s car. “Hello?”

“Yeah, hey. Um- I’m sorry it’s late, but I was wondering if you maybe wanted to go for a walk?” Yuuri asked him. He dug the nails of his free hand into his thigh and squeezed his eyes shut because it was nighttime and Victor was probably tired.

“A walk? It’s 30 degrees outside- Why? What? Did something happen?” Victor was rambling, Yuuri thought, which was good because that meant Yuuri still meant something to him. He wasn’t sure what it was, but it was good. Yuuri still mattered.

“No- I mean- I just wanted to talk. I’m leaving tomorrow and I wanted to see you…” Yuuri’s voice trailed off as he looked out into the snow-covered streets before him. “One last time.”

Contemplation from the other line followed as Yuuri thought about apologizing and hanging up. Before he could though, Victor started speaking.

“Of course, I’d love to. I’m not walking though, so I hope you have your car.” Yuuri could practically hear the smile on Victor’s face. He laughed a little bit and shook his head.

“Yeah, uh… I’m here. Now. Outside,” Yuuri said breathlessly. “I know that sounds creepy, but you know how I am.”

“A little impulsive, maybe a little crazy too,” Victor forced a laugh. Or maybe it wasn’t forced, Yuuri couldn’t tell anymore. The lines between them were too blurred now. It was hard for him to tell where they stood. “It’s not creepy though. I’ll be down in a minute.”

“Okay,” Yuuri let out a breath he didn’t realize he’d been holding and turned on his car.

“I’m hanging up now, okay?”

He pulled out of the place he was parked in and made a u-turn to the entrance of Victor’s building.

“Okay,” his voice was shallow. A little frightened, but excited nonetheless. He pushed past a lump in his throat, swallowing like his life depended on it, and shook himself awake from the half-dream he was in. “Bye.”

His fingers tapped along his steering wheel as he waited for Victor. Sweat lined itself around his hairline. A collective surge of different kinds of bodily impulses and jitters ran through his body. It occurred to him then that it was the first time he’d felt truly nervous to see him, of all their encounters and moments together. He had to process this new emotion. Had to think of a way to deal with it properly, so it wouldn’t hurt his ability to act like a functioning human being.

What did he usually do when he was nervous?

Eat!
But there was no food in his car. He also ran, but it was too cold and too late and Victor was already on his way down. He had a habit of drawing too, but-

A knock, sharp on his passenger window, shook him awake. He turned to look and saw Victor’s bright and smiling face, lips shivering at the bitter cold outside. Yuuri smiled back and unlocked the door. Victor stumbled into the car and let out little puffs of air as he tried to fill himself with warmth.

Yuuri turned up the heat and tried to take Victor in as much as he could. Their time together felt limited. Like they were in an hourglass and each second that passed meant they’d soon be suffocated underneath the beige grains of their own making.

“Hi,” Victor finally said once he looked up to find Yuuri staring him down.

“Hey,” Yuuri spoke, breathless. “How are you?”

“I’m okay,” Victor looked down to his hands and rubbed his fingers gently. “And you?”

Yuuri topped his eyes from Victor’s body and settled back into his seat. “I’m okay, too. How’s your mom-”

“So what is this-“

They spoke over each other and both burned bright red in the face as awkwardness filled the car.

“My mom’s good. She’s good…” Victor exhaled and strapped himself in. “Busy as ever, but that’s just who she is. Now, where are we off to?”

“Um, I thought we’d just drive. I know we have a lot to-“

“Alrighty then,” Victor smiled brightly and motioned to the road with his head. “Let’s get going then.”

His personality felt stiff. Stuffy and hard and crafted to be exactly what Victor wanted to present to Yuuri. It wasn’t raw and it stung having to feel Victor put up the wall he usually put up for the world up for him. Yuuri’s eyes started to water, for whatever reason, and he was forced to clear his throat to get rid of the lump resting in the middle of it. He started down the road, gazing at the street signs and lights as he did so. Victor was motionless next to him; frigid and closed off. His eyes were blank. Yuuri couldn’t read him, not the least bit. There was so much he wanted to say. So much he needed to explain and talk out. But with the barriers between them, invisible but all the same as divisive as any physical thing, it felt impossible starting a conversation with him. He turned the corner silently onto the main road and listened to the humming of his motor.

“So,” Victor spoke quietly. “Italy, huh?”

Yuuri’s eyes narrowed, focusing on the road before him as a tactic to not lose his mind. “Yeah, Italy.” He felt a wave of heat flash through his body as they sped down the road. He felt the urge to crack open his window, but it was too cold and if he did that he would look like a fool.

“Pretty crazy,” Victor spoke through tight lips. Yuuri’s eyes trailed his face, from tense jaw to throbbing temples. The tension between them was heavy and thick. It weighed his hopes down and drowned him in sorrow. “Pretty cool, though.”

“I guess,” Yuuri said softly. “It’ll pay the bills.”

There were still Christmas lights up on the street poles and bushes. Even some of the parks, trees,
and buildings were still extravagantly decorated. New Years was left to celebrate in the city; their biggest holiday by far. It would be Yuuri’s first one away in years. He removed his glasses at a red light and rubbed his eyes tirelessly, trying to scrub away the prickly tears in his eyes. Things were changing, much too quickly.

“You okay?”

There it was. Victor’s voice, the one that soothed Yuuri and cared for him like no one else. His heart grew a dozen sizes as the question slipped through Victor’s mouth and made its way to his ears.

“Yeah,” he finally told him, voice all dreamy and sweet. “I’ve just been doing a lot. It’s been pretty hectic.”


Yuuri shook his head and smiled to himself.

“So, what was it you wanted to talk about?” Victor asked him more warmly than before.

“Too many things,” Yuuri told him. It was the truth, plain and simple. Yuuri wanted to talk about everything with him. From the cosmos to what he had for lunch. To be more practical though, he added in, “but I think you already know.”

Victor nodded and looked ahead at the road. “Reckon I should start then.”

And suddenly their time had arrived.

“I’m sorry. For everything.”

Yuuri kept driving, hands clasped on his wheel like his life depended on it. Victor kept on talking. The buzzing he felt in his ears when he became overwhelmed started up and sent his heart into a frenzy. His anxiety, his worries, his own body- it all told him to run. To stop the car and just start walking in the direction of his home, but he fought back and stood his ground. This was what he had come to do. What he’d been craving for weeks.

“I’m sorry I didn’t say anything. I’m sorry I never defended you. I’m sorry I pushed you away…” Victor took a deep breath in. “I’m especially sorry for everything that’s happened with the media. It’s a nightmare to be hunted by them. And to think they went to your apartment like that-”

“Geoff was lovely. A little intrusive, but he was nice overall. Even let me know there was more downstairs,” Yuuri told him to lighten the mood. He thought back to the paparazzo who had knocked on his door and the memory placed a soft smirk on his face. He had been so shocked at the sight of a camera in his face. So scared and panicked. “I’m not really mad about that. I know there was nothing you could have done.”

“I’m still angry,” Victor admitted to him, eyes solemn and void. “They had no right to track you down like that. All for some silly story. Unbelievable.”

The lights from outside filtered into the car and spread over both of their faces. Crimson, emerald, and as golden as the Sun itself. It should have been the moment Yuuri felt better about everything. He should have looked over, seen the raw emotion in Victor’s eyes and felt a tingle in his chest that meant they could go back to being what they had been. After all, Victor cared. He was angry that all of this happened and he admitted he was an accomplice to it. It should have been easy, but rancor was tenacious and tricky. It had to be battled to be defeated and laid to rest. Yuuri knew he was
“ready for a fight. He just didn’t know if he had the stamina to withstand it.

“Mm,” was all Yuuri responded with. “You don’t have to be. It’s not like I’ll ever talk to them-“

“That’s not why I’m mad- Yuuri it was an invasion of your privacy. They have no right to knock on your door and-“

He placed a hand on top of Victor’s. Nervous and trembling, but a reassuring hand nonetheless. “It’s not your fault. I should have known better. People were gonna talk.”

Victor laced his fingers with Yuuri’s, squeezing them a little too tightly. He continued to drive with no destination. No end in sight. Just up and down the streets of the city. They had each other for now. Could hold each other, even if just their hands, for now.

They both knew it easy fair that they had to just accept the fact that people would talk. They knew it wasn’t fair people felt the need to talk in the first place.

After some minutes of silence, Victor slid closer to Yuuri and placed his head on his shoulder. It felt wonderful to know that is was so easy for them to melt right back into place with each other. As if nothing had happened.

Yuuri took in a deep breath through his nose and smiled. Victor still smelled like himself. Then he had to remind himself that it had only been a couple of weeks. Time seemed to warp itself, making every second feel like a lifetime, when he wasn’t with Victor.

“I had a five-year plan, you know?” Victor suddenly told him. “Still do, in a sense.”

Yuuri smiled a little and asked, “Oh? What was it?”

“Well, it wasn’t a plan to make you love me or anything like that. It was more of ideas of where you and I would be in five years. Mapped all out.”

Yuuri could feel the blood rushing to his face as he sat there with his hand in Victor’s. The nerves on his palm and fingertips were hyper-aware that they were touching something godly. Something worth more than all of the money and all of the power in the world. It was Victor. His essence and his soul.

“And where would we be in five years?”

“Married, with like, three dogs. Maybe a baby.”

The words slipped through his rosy pink lips like silk. An ocean of heat and beautiful red emotion flooded over the both of them in that car, as both their hands held each other just a tad more tightly. The car came to a stop again. Yuuri could barely contain himself from turning the engine off and jumping his bones.

“Marriage,” he thought. “MARRIAGE.”

“Five dogs would be ideal,” Yuuri wretched out through a dry throat. “Uh…”

He didn’t really know what to say after that. Victor’s words took him by storm, throwing his heart into a whirlpool of emotions so deep and so true he couldn’t help but want to make marriage between them a reality.

“That was weird. Sorry if it freaked you out, it’s just-” Victor stopped and let out a big sigh. “I just
needed you to know we were real. I was dumb and cold and I should have done more, but I wanted a future with you. I really did. Hell, I still do. But the way things are—"

“Stop,” Yuuri interjected. “Please, I already know.”

More silence.

The light turned green and their hands were still together, pulsating in perfect synch. Yuuri drove on, pulling Victor’s hand to his lips and placing a gentle kiss on top of it. He refused to let him go. He knew he needed to, but it was so hard to do. Yuuri couldn’t let him leave like what they had weren’t mattered.

“I loved you,” Yuuri told him. “Even now. I don’t know if I ever told you this, but after Eli happened I had given up on the idea of love and being happy with someone for the rest of my life. I thought I was broken. Too much work for someone to love me. Then you happened. With your tenderness and patience. You never gave up. Not once.” Yuuri took a deep breath, hoping to buy himself time in organizing his thoughts. “We both have our problems. We’re both difficult. It’s hard, but I’m willing to work for us. I don’t want to be alone—”


Yuuri fumbled to understand was Victor was telling him. His ears felt full of cotton, muffling every single noise outside of his own creation. Of all of the things he was prepared to hear, this was one he had not even fathomed. It was a blow to his gut. It through him past reality and twisted his thoughts into sharp and thorny bundles. Victor was leaving.

Victor was leaving.

“W-what? Why?” Yuuri felt his palms go sweaty with a concoction of fear and regret. There were no words, no sounds, no motions that could explain the way he was feeling- He wasn’t sure he even wanted to try.

Victor took his hand back and ran it through his hair. Yuuri’s body went cold. Forlorn and lost we’re his limbs, which longed to be wrapped around Victor. Daunting was the thought of having Victor thousands of miles away from him.

“I can’t keep hurting you like this. It’s what I have to do,” Victor explained. “It’s in your best interest that we’re not together.”

That’s when Yuuri’s tears came down on them like an impromptu rainfall. Tears like rain and voice like thunder, he parked the car off to the side on a lonely street and pressed his hands as hard as he could onto his thighs, balling them up into angry fists. Victor, voice trembling, placed a hand on his shoulder and spoke quietly.

“I have to do this for us,” he told Yuuri. There was an aching in his chest so grand he could hardly breathe, but it was Victor’s turn to be the strong one. He had to force his tears back and swallow his sadness. Yuuri could lose his mind and cry and suffer and get all of his feelings out, but Victor had to remain as stoic as he possibly could. “I don’t want you to think I don’t love you. Because I do. I love you more than anyone should ever love anyone else, but I can’t keep hurting you like this. You deserve someone stable. Someone who’s more attentive- Yuuri, I’m not good enough. I’m nowhere near what you need—”

“Can you stop? Just stop talking for a minute—” Yuuri begged him. His voice was broken, but loud and angry. Whether the anger was directed at Victor or not, neither of them knew. “You’re leaving
me? Because you're not good enough?! After I told you everything- After you made me love you! You're leaving me?!”

All Victor could do was sit there with his head down. It was the first time he had ever seen Yuuri truly mad. Doleful and pained. He hadn’t expected his reaction being so severe. So agonizing to watch.

Yuuri got out of the car and paced around with his face in his hands outside as Victor kept his seat inside. He wasn’t sure of what to do. He knew Yuuri well enough to know that he shouldn’t try to smother him in a hug, but all parts of him pushed him to do just that. He wanted to catch all of the pieces Yuuri was falling apart into.

After some time, Yuuri made his way back into the car, red in the nose and shivering. He was quiet as he restarted the car and put on his seatbelt. “I’m not mad at you, so please don’t think that.”

He watched as Yuuri rubbed his nose with his sleeve and rubbed his eyes free of tears with his other hand. His face was puffy and red, swollen lips shook as he tried to keep a straight face.

“All right,” Victor whispered. “Are you going to be okay? Do you want me to-”

“I’ll be fine. Always am,” Yuuri told him. There was a certain hint of cynicism in the way he spoke, but Victor disregarded it. “It’s funny, you know? I thought the night would end and I’d have fixed everything between us.”

Victor didn’t say anything. He didn’t know what he had expected to come from seeing Yuuri. He didn’t really know why he had agreed to see him. Victor knew it was just going to make leaving harder than it already was. Seeing Yuuri, feeling his presence, existing with him in admiration.

“When are you leaving?” Yuuri asked him, voice hushed and reserved.

“In a week or so, maybe days.” Victor turned to face him and pursed his lips to mask his desperate need to reach out and kiss Yuuri. “It’s up to me, I guess. No one is really in a hurry to get me out.”

“Oh,” Yuuri muttered. “How about we get you home then? I have an early flight tomorrow and I’m sure you’re busy. What, with the party and all.”

The conversation had ended. Abruptly, after having barely started and only having shared a small part of what he was feeling, nonetheless. It was clear to Victor that that was all he was getting from Yuuri. It hurt him not to get more. It clawed at his throat and seared his chest.

“Can we just drive?” He asked Yuuri shyly. He turned his head to Yuuri, batting delicate eyelashes to catch his attention. Yuuri softened in his posture at the sound of Victor’s voice, like he was taking in every word he said. Victor needed just a little bit of him- his smile or a frown or the simple glint in his eyes to be able to leave. He needed to know that Yuuri had been real and a presence in his life. Victor needed more time with him, even if it was just ten more minutes. “Please?”

Yuuri nodded, head bobbing up and down with a deep gentleness like he was scared to break the quiet of the car. “Yeah, okay.”

Love exists in variations. It is undefinable but understandable and presents itself to us in the most unexpected and forsaken ways at times. Victor had always dreamed who the person he’d love the most in life would be. Always tried to picture their face and guess the first letter of their name. Magazine quizzes and horoscopes fueled his idea of what a soulmate was. Novels in his mother’s personal library built scenarios he should look forward to experiencing. Love songs made up His vocabulary and took him from his body. His own poetry reminded him just how deeply he felt the
ardor and joys of romantic feels. All his life, all Victor had ever wanted to do was love and he loved. Sitting next to Yuuri, hands neatly folded in his lap, he realized he had felt it for the past five months in their every interaction. Everything from taking punches for him, to holding him tight in his arms. He felt the warmth of love on his body when Yuuri hugged him or brushed past him with a gentle hand placed on the small of his back. Maybe there had been tears and trials and tribulations, but surely the love they had discovered was worth more than any tear either of them had shed. It had been worth it.

Everything.

He had loved Yuuri and still loved him, with all of his heart. Victor also knew Yuuri loved him with the same passion. He could practically see it in his eyes. So he exhaled as they drove past Central Park, and placed his hand over Yuuri’s.

Yuuri welcomes his touch, soft and warm.

It would hurt to let him go. There was no doubt about that in his mind. It would tear them both up inside. But Victor was doing this for them. To stop hurting Yuuri. To give him a chance to find someone who deserved him. Even if Yuuri was his stars and his moon and his sun. Even if Yuuri meant happiness and comfort and a place to call home…He had to leave him be.

Victor squeezed Yuuri’s hand as they neared his building, not realizing that he’d been deep in thought through the entire ride. He looked at the dashboard and saw the time.

1:31 am

He wanted to tell him so many things. There was so much he had held back during their time together. Yuuri needed to know so much… everything. Where could he begin? What would say the most in the mere seconds they had left in the car? Together?

“Alright,” Yuuri coughed out like he was choking on something. “You’re home.”

A lump rose in Victor’s throat as the car came to a halt. Yuuri slowly removed his hand from Victor’s, patting it gently once it was gone. All Victor could do was blink. Incredulous that it was time for goodbyes already.

Yuuri extended his hand for Victor to shake. Cordial and beautiful as ever, Yuuri gave him a great, big, toothy smile. Victor tried to emulate the same smile but faltered. He shook Yuuri’s hand earnestly and turned to leave the car, moving quickly to cut the pain short. It was almost like ripping off a band-aid, except in his situation, he loved the band-aid more than anything else.

Out on the pavement, he ducked down and said one last goodbye before shutting the door and rushing to the entrance of his building. He stuffed his fists into the pockets of his coat to try and save Yuuri’s warmth for just a little longer. The wind whipped and blew around him, but Victor couldn’t feeling anything but that fleeting warmth in his palm.

He smiled fondly as he reached for the door handle. Before he could open it, he stopped to turn around. Yuuri’s voice carried to him, through the now heavy snow and bitter, howling winds. He watched as his love- his life - ran to him, hair flying in every direction. Victor saw the longing in his eyes and couldn’t help but to run to him too.

They met in the middle, hands wrapping around each other in all the right places. Yuuri buried his face in the crook of Victor’s neck, arms wrapped around his waist. Victor kissed the top of his head and nearly crushed him with the strength of his embrace. It must have looked like something from the
movies: something pure and wonderful and lovely.

“You- are...my world,” Victor whispered amid sobs. “You are all I have ever wanted. You… are…” Victor struggled to sum all of the things he wanted to say up. There weren’t enough words in the English language say everything he needed to. So, maybe, there was only one that could truly say all he needed to. “Everything.”

Yuuri’s shoulders moved rigorously in his arms as he cried, gasping for air every now and then.

“There isn’t going to be a day that you’re not on my mind, дорогой.” Victor kissed Yuuri’s temple and wiped the tears from his eyes. Yuuri returned the favor, with the exclusion of the kiss. “I love you more than you could ever imagine.”

“Then don’t- don’t leave me,” Yuuri pleaded. Their eyes locked in a longing gaze. “Victor, please.”

Victor pressed him to his body one more time, holding the back of Yuuri’s head with his right hand. They stayed for some seconds before Victor split them apart.

“I can’t,” he whispered. Yuuri’s eyes grew to the size of quarters as he watched Victor step back from him. The snow around them slowed momentarily as if being courteous to their feelings. “I have to do this. For the both of us.”

Yuuri’s eyes released a single tear as he reached out for Victor once more. Victor flinched back and turned back towards the building entrance. Yuuri retracted his extended hand and crumbled into himself, crying more heavily then. Victor opened the double doors and stepped inside, looking back to Yuuri one more time. Except Yuuri wasn’t there, he was running back to his car. That was the only time in Victor’s life he could have sworn his heart truly broke.

As they went their separate ways, the world continued to turn and time continued to go on. The snow and night sky did not waver, did not break. Yuuri and Victor were just two people after all. Powerless and insignificant to all and any outside forces. They were nothing to the world, but to each other, they were the only thing that mattered.

And their world had just been ripped apart.

Chapter End Notes

dорогой= darling

I hope you liked the update. Please, please, please leave me a comment or some feedback! Those always help :)
Yuuri saw him before anyone else did, eyes as amatory as they had been when he had first realized he loved him. He didn’t even care for the six foot five, the gargantuan man following Victor around like a lost puppy. He just wanted to talk to him, to touch him, to-

“Yuuri.” The words escaped Victor, who felt as if he’d lost self-control. They rang in Yuuri’s ears like the bells of a church. A happy melody he just couldn’t believe. “It’s nice to see you again. It’s been too long.”

I'm like... sorry for the mess this chapter turned into.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

One Year Later: Late May

“We’re here, Mr. Katsuki,” Henry, Yuuri’s private driver provided by his agency, turned back to look at him with a wide smile on his face. Yuuri smiled back, placing sunglasses on his face as he looked up to the building outside. Henry had been driving him around for some months now, allowing for them to get to know each other quite well. Henry was an older man with grey hair and dull eyes, but he was sweet and treated Yuuri like his son, despite having three.

“Thank you very much, Henry.” He gathered his purse- a quilted, black leather Gucci bag with his initials on the back- and slid out from the car. “No need to wait, I’ll be here a good while. Go and get something to eat, alright?”

Henry shook his head and waved goodbye before Yuuri shut the door. The town car drove off into the New York City traffic, disappearing before Yuuri’s very eyes.

It was a bright and sunny day, full of fluffy clouds and gentle breezes. Yuuri smiled brilliantly as he stepped forward in his brand new Chelsea boots, courtesy of Anna Wintour. She had gifted them to him after his first spread in the April issue of Vogue Paris, as a “thank you for doing such a wonderful job”. He still couldn’t believe his career was doing so well. It still felt like a dream he would be waking up from at any moment.

Yuuri opened the door to the building and was greeted by a couple of people he recognized from his agency. Yuuri learned from trial and error that people should always be greeted with a kiss and hug, no matter who it was. In the world of fashion, there were too many ways to insult and blow off someone. A handshake or wave, unless it was a CEO of some grand company, was deadly. A handshake to the wrong person could end careers. So, after having kissed and hugged every person he knew in the lobby, he was finally able to make it to the elevators, where he pressed the twelfth-
floor button. He was scheduled to meet with Pam, his agent, and plan out the next couple of months for the summer season. These kinds of meetings, Yuuri had also learned, went on for longer than most people would expect.

“Hold the elevator please!” a voice called out from the lobby. Yuuri placed a leg in the middle of the closing elevator doors and prayed they would retract. They did as he had hoped and opened for a couple more seconds. Yuuri looked down and saw that he had dropped his phone in the confusion. He bent down to pick it up and saw a pair of Tommy Hilfiger white sneakers move right in front of him.

Except they weren’t adult sneakers. They were children’s shoes.

Yuuri looked up to see a cute, little drop of sunshine with coily, brown hair and hazel eyes before him. The baby, no more than two years old, smiled at him with barely-there front teeth and cheeky dimples. Yuuri smiled back and gave him a little wave.

“Adrienne Linus Giacometti Bernard, if you ever run ahead like that again- Oh my God… Yuuri?” Yuuri looked up to find Christophe, cleanly shaved with hair slicked back, looking at him like Yuuri was one of the seven wonders of the world. “Jesus, when did you get back? Where have you been?”

Before Yuuri could answer though, Chris had already pulled him into a loving hug, one his son gladly joined in on after shouting ‘Yay’ and clapping his hands. Yuuri giggled a little bit and hugged Chris back.

“I’ve been in and out of the country for a while now. I’m sorry I never let you know. I didn’t think you would care,” Yuuri admitted to him somewhat shyly. He pushed away a couple of resurfacing memories and decided to change the subject. “Uh- Cute baby.”

Chris let him go and picked his son up from the ground with a proud smile. “Isn’t he? Say ‘hi’ Addie, this is a friend of Papa’s and Uncle Victor’s.”

Yuuri gulped hard at the mention of his name. It had been months since he’d last heard anything about Victor. He didn’t know much, just that he was back in St. Petersburg and working alongside his father and mother. It was enough for him to know that he was at least with people who cared about him. He found it best to try and forget about him. To let him fade.

“How is he?” Yuuri inquired almost impatiently. Chris’ eyes widened as the doors closed behind him. “Is he doing alright?”

Yuuri couldn’t deny he’d been dying to know. Try as he may, he loved Victor above everything and needed more. It would take time to give him up entirely.

“He’s… okay. We baptized Addie a couple of months ago, so he came back for a couple of days. He’s bored to death with the work he’s doing, but he says it’s fulfilling.” Chris smiled at Yuuri and nestled closer to Addie. “How about you? How have you been?”

“I’ve been fine. Work is easy to come by now, so that’s good. I’m happy,” Yuuri lied through his teeth, about that last part at least. It wasn’t that he was having an awful time, or even struggling, but life felt numb and waves of anxiety overcame him at times. They came before shows and during promotions. They were rare, but when they hit, they hit hard. “I’m actually on my way up to see my agent right now.”

Chris reached over to press the number for his floor and nodded as Yuuri spoke. “I saw you were featured in Pat McGrath’s new collection of eyeshadows and glitters. Absolutely beautiful photos,
you looked amazing.”

Yuuri blushed and turned a deep shade of red as he recalled the quite bright and flirty photoshoot he had done that past winter. The makeup looks they had done on him had all taken so much time to perfect for the shoots, but once he saw himself in the mirror he understood why. The primary colors she had used on his eyes worked so well with the lighting and backgrounds of the studio, it was no wonder the photos had turned out so well.

“Thanks, Chris.” Yuuri clutched his purse nervously. “For everything. You were the first person to see my potential.”

“Oh, stop. If not me, someone on the street would have scouted you,” he told Yuuri. “It was a pleasure to work with you. I’m sure all the designers felt the same way.”

“Yeah… maybe,” Yuuri said as they rose from the first floor. He reached out to pinch Addie’s cheeks and gently looked at the perfect picture of him. He wanted so much to have a family. Someone else to live with him, closer than his parents in sister in Hasetsu. But he had only gone on a few dates in the past four months and none of them ever felt right- Yuuri was struggling to believe that he would be married before he was thirty.

“Are you alright? You seem… I don’t know… odd. Tired,” Chris noted. Yuuri should have known that question was coming. It was something everybody asked him from time to time, more likely than not. His job took a toll on him, whether traveling or exercising or keeping himself on a strict diet. Yuuri barely had days off and usually had nights of five hour sleeps. His body somewhat rejected his new routine at the start but it grew accustomed, letting him at least work a little longer than before.

“You know how it is,” was all he said. It sounded just a tad sad, Yuuri realized. He quickly backtracked and gave him a dazzling, confirmation of a smile that everything was okay. “But it’s all worth it in the end.”

Chris nodded and looked at the floor numbers displayed above the elevator doors. He adjusted a satchel Yuuri hadn’t noticed and sighed, disappointed. “Well, my floors coming up. I’d love to catch up though, is your number still the same?”

“Yeah, just give me a call and we can set something up,” Yuuri nodded happily. “I haven’t had the time to do much lately, but this week is quite bare since I’m between seasons, so I should be good for most days.”

“Alright, I’ll make sure to call you then.”

The doors opened and suddenly Chris and Addie were gone, with a single wave goodbye. Yuuri inhaled, letting the cold air of the small compartment fill his lungs. His heart was beating like a battle drum. There was a ringing in his ears- high pitched and squealing -that he took as a warning from his body that a warning would have been good before submitting himself to those kinds of situations.

The doors closed, he was alone again. Back to thinking about what he should make for dinner. He had a couple of frozen dinners stocked in his fridge and some Chinese leftovers from the last time he went out with Phichit and the gang. There were also brussel sprouts he could saute, but that seemed like to much work. Same thing went for the salmon and tilapia in his freezer. Yuuri just didn’t feel like he had the energy to do much anymore. His body betrayed his mind.

He took in his reflection in the chrome of the doors and sighed. The gleam that had existed in his eyes walking into the building was gone. Now his red oak gems seemed dull and vacant.
Yuuri reached his floor and almost wanted to collapse from a mysterious exhaustion that had washed over his body. There was a strange pain in his chest, low and growling, that wanted him to lay on the floor and sleep. But that all changed when the doors slid open to reveal a smiling receptionist and team of people collectively whispering amongst themselves in the office. Yuuri forced himself to smile like a pageant girl and walk like the model he was. Sure, he was tired and dead inside, but there were people who counted on him being the best version of himself. The version crafted by public relations specialists and managers.

“Hi, Ellen,” he greeted the receptionist as he laid his sunglasses on her desk. “Is Pam ready for me?”

“Pam will be ready in just a couple of minutes. Jessica is in there and I don’t think it’s going very well. You can have a seat if you’d like, while you wait.” Yuuri thanked her and walked to a section of leather couches and mini tables with chic bowls of flower petals and terrariums on them.

He delicately crosses his legs and pulled his phone from his pocket, where it had remained the entire elevator ride up. A nagging voice in his head herded him towards his search engine and begged him to type in his name. The one he had fought thoughts of off for more than a year. The one who let him drive home crying in a maddeningly pitiful rage. The one who he still loved despite it all.

It had been months since Yuuri felt the need to look and see what Victor was up to. Usually, he was able to distract himself with work or partying and events, but there were times when it was just him, inside his own head praying that Victor was alright and happy in his life.

His skin itches, fingers looming over characters that meant so little but so much at the same time. Yuuri could give in and see and be content with what he found, as always. That was the easiest thing to do. There was though, the paralyzing fear he had that someday he would look and see the worst. He didn’t quite know what that was, but he didn’t ever want to know anyway.

With feelings on the matter unresolved, Yuuri looked up from his phone as a door slammed somewhere just beyond the reception desk. Several bodies tensed as the click-clacking of six-inch heels stomped toward the front of the office followed by the padding of flats on the wooden floor. Surely, Yuuri guesses, things hadn’t gone well between whoever “Jessica” was and Pam.

“Alright, Jess, just call me and let me know what you decide then?” Pam told a tall blonde as they neared the elevator doors. An angry huff of air was her response, followed by an even angrier prodding of the buttons.

“Go to hell,” were her last words as she boarded the elevator.

When she was gone, the air around the office relaxed, as if it knew that the problem was gone. Pam even sighed and smiled at Yuuri like it was a small victory for her to see him there. “Hey, sweetheart,” she drawled in her thick southern accent- one Yuuri had yet to grow accustomed to. “Why don’t we head on back?”

He followed her back, with a wave goodbye to Ellen, who was fumbling with some papers on her desk.

He walked through the now familiar white halls of the agency, saying hello here and there when they came across people he knew. He almost couldn’t believe it had already been more than a year. No matter how much he thought about it, it still felt surreal. Yuuri had to grip on to reality as he walked down runways, went on set, or even did something as mundane as visiting Pam in her office.

“How has your mini vacation been treating you?” She asked him as they walked into her office. Yuuri followed her to her desk, where he took a seat and waited for her to situate herself.
“Pretty well,” he told her. “I’ve been sleeping more than usual. That’s always good.”

“Good, good,” she whispered to herself as she opened a filing cabinet next to her. Pulling out a large stack of papers, Pam smiled at Yuuri in an almost apologetic way. “You’re gonna need a lot of energy, sugar.”

Yuuri examined the stack and almost physically felt the need to cry. It wasn’t that he hated what he did- he enjoyed it enough - it just felt like work was all he did, and looking at the stack of possible jobs in front of him only made him feel like it was all he would ever do.

“Oh, man,” he slouched in his seat and sighed. “Are these all auditions or did they request me?”

That was usually the first question he asked in these kinds of meetings. It let him get a feel for which ones he could turn down and let go.

“About 60 or so percent are requested. The other forty are a mix of auditions and events, so it’s not all work. There are certain events happening this summer that I think would be really good for your image.” She folded her hands over her chest and leaned back. “Which is another issue we’ve seem to run into.”

“What issue?” He asked. “My image? What’s wrong with my image?”

“Well, as you know, you’re doing great in Japan and Korea and Thailand, and even here, but you haven’t been able to truly tap the European market,” she said hastily. Pam always hated confrontation. “People don’t really think you’re all that credible as a model because of everything that happened with Mr. Nikiforov. The public keeps connecting you to that scandal and designers and magazines don’t really want much to do with that. I’ve planned a couple of things to help with-“

“Woah, wait. What?” Yuuri said straightening himself in the chair. “Connecting me to it how? It’s been such a long time-”

“Yes, but it happened just as your career began. It’s not like you had time to cultivate a reputation. Your first campaign was huge, and with that came a lot of attention and speculation. I don’t have to remind you about the media circus that followed, do I?” she asked him with a somber countenance. Yuuri shook his head no as he remembered the probing questions and paparazzi that followed him all over Europe when he first started. Even when he was supposed to be promoting certain products all people seemed to be able to focus on were those stupid rumors that he was mooching off of Victor and that his career had been bought. No number of statements were able to put those thoughts to rest for months.

“Yeah, no. I remember,” he told her. Pam gave him a pursed smile and leaned forward.

“We think it would be best for you to date someone. If people see that you’re just a normal 27 years old, you know- in a serious and stable relationship who’s working hard and earning his success, I think it would really help.”

“What? Where am I supposed to just find a boyfriend?” He asked her a little incredulous.

“Yes, but it happened just as your career began. It’s not like you had time to cultivate a reputation. Your first campaign was huge, and with that came a lot of attention and speculation. I don’t have to remind you about the media circus that followed, do I?” she asked him with a somber countenance. Yuuri shook his head no as he remembered the probing questions and paparazzi that followed him all over Europe when he first started. Even when he was supposed to be promoting certain products all people seemed to be able to focus on were those stupid rumors that he was mooching off of Victor and that his career had been bought. No number of statements were able to put those thoughts to rest for months.

“Yeah, no. I remember,” he told her. Pam gave him a pursed smile and leaned forward.

“We think it would be best for you to date someone. If people see that you’re just a normal 27 years old, you know- in a serious and stable relationship who’s working hard and earning his success, I think it would really help.”

“What? Where am I supposed to just find a boyfriend?” He asked her a little incredulous.

“Well, you told me you were dating right? Just pick one and stick with him for a good six months or so.” She said it so nonchalantly, Yuuri almost felt he could do it. In reality, though, it was nearly impossible. The only people Yuuri had gone on dates with were a couple of models from Milan, a doctor he met on the subway, and JJ, who he hadn’t seen since he’d arrived back in the state.

Yuuri told her all of this and they both created a pros and cons list for each prospective candidate.
“The doctor-” she started with a pencil at her lips. She pointed the eraser at him and squinted her eyes. “How old is he?”

“He’s- uh… he told me he was 40. But he looks young!” Yuuri tried to defend not just him, but his own private reputation within the agency. He didn’t need people thinking he had some kind of kink for older men.

“That’s too old. We’ll just be back where we started. Those models won’t work either, it just seems odd. This JJ guy, are you in contact with him?”

“Not really? I mean, the last time I saw him was about three months ago.”

“He’s a firefighter?”

“Yeah…”

“Well, I think we’ve found your beau, darlin’,” she smiled at Yuuri and clapped her hands.

He bit his lip, scared to say anything that might sound like he was against her plan. Which he was, but he needed to trust Pam. If a forced relationship was what she said he needed, there was no reason for him to doubt her. It was better for him to separate himself from Victor’s narrative anyway.

“So, what do I do now? Just ask him out?” Yuuri asked, stuffing the odd feeling in his chest as far down as he could.

“Well, I would like for you to do this voluntarily. Really like him, you know? But if you don’t, we could find someone to go under contract. It wouldn’t be hard-”

“No, I can date him. I can like him,” he assured her. The idea of hiring someone to be his boyfriend felt worse than forcing a genuine relationship with someone.

“Alright, well, try to get in contact with him and we can go from there,” she told him happily, writing something down on a notepad. “Now, we have Men’s fashion week coming up in June, and so far you’ve been booked for every city. You’re the longest day is the 13th…”

Yuuri let Pam’s voice drape itself around the room, unable to focus on what she was saying. There was a pit in his chest where his heart should have been. Something in him though told him that that emptiness was not recent. It was just accentuated by the reality that whether he liked it or not, he would have to move on. It would be mandated.

“Gucci wants you at the after party, which runs until late that night. I don’t doubt we could get you out by midnight though,” Pam kept talking, lips parting and touching and vowels and consonants spilling out one after the other like water. A knot began to form in Yuuri’s stomach, edging him on to the point of wanting to scream to ease the pain.

“Pain?” Yuuri asked himself. “Why does it hurt?”

“July 23rd…hm, let me see. Oh! Yves Saint Laurent also wants to know if you’ll be attending their St. Petersburg show-”

“Russia?” Yuuri asked hopefully.

“Yes, what other St. Petersburg do you know?” Pam laughed a little and continued to scribble in her notes. “Anywho, I want you to invite the firefighter to join you at one of the shows you’ll be spectating. It’ll be good to expose the relationship. So you have your choice of Saint Laurent, Dior,
or Crispino. You don’t have to answer now, but we’ll need one by the time the shows are closer…”

Yuuri uncrossed his legs and leaned forward, hands coming together in between. “That’s a month. You’re giving me a month to get this guy to fall in love with me?”

“I never said he had to fall in love,” Pam argued. “Just...you know, eh- look it.”

Yuuri fell back gently into his chair and spent the rest of their meeting speaking as little as possible. Pam didn’t seem to notice the shift in his mood. She never really noticed things like that, so Yuuri got away with it most of the time when it happened.

When it came time for him to leave, he slipped out of the building without anyone really seeing him. Human interaction was something he wasn’t really hoping to get too much of after that meeting.

Henry asked him if he was alright when he slipped into the town car and suddenly it was time for Yuuri to turn on his smile and charisma. With a flash of his front teeth, he laid Henry’s worries to rest and was off to his home, where he’d have to call JJ and ask him on a date.

A date.

Just one.

Except that ‘one’ would turn into a full-blown romantic rendezvous between them. Real to one and not the other.

________

July 21st
St. Petersburg

“You looked absolutely beautiful up there,” JJ picked Yuuri up, grabbing at his thighs, and carried him across to their king bed in the hotel room. Yuuri giggled into the crook of JJ’s neck and draped tipsy hands over his boyfriend's shoulders. They had just returned from Yuuri’s last show of the day and the small after-party that followed it, where Yuuri managed to down 9 or so flutes of champagne.

“Aren’t you glad I got you a ticket?” Yuuri teased him, awkwardly slurring his words in the process. “Good thing it wasn’t so close that I could see you. Your eyes would have distracted me…”

JJ laughed as Yuuri wrapped his legs around his waist a little tighter. He tried to put him down on the bed, but Yuuri wouldn’t let him go. He groaned and moaned and protested and even got a little frisky each time JJ tried to deposit his body on his side of the bed.

“Sleep with me,” Yuuri whispered. He crooned a little longer, “Let’s stay like this.”

“Your in a $4,000 suit and so am I. Let’s get changed, yeah? Then we can sleep all we want.” JJ negotiated. Yuuri continued to protest but ultimately let go of JJ and sank into the bed. “Is it okay if I undress you?”

Yuuri blushed a little but nodded. He appreciated JJ asking for permission, especially since they had only been together a little over a month and a half.

It was funny how they started. It was a publicity campaign for Yuuri, but JJ seemed genuinely interested in him from the first time they had dinner together. Sure, he was a little self-absorbed and centered around himself, but he was nice and he taught little baby children fire-safety and Yuuri loved the way he looked after a long day of work when sweat was dripping down his chin and Yuuri
surprised him at work-

Needless to say, there was a subtle attraction between them. It culminated through multiple dates and late-night make-out sessions (sometimes more, but that was all Yuuri was willing to say). Yuuri didn’t hate spending time with him, so it was easy for them to become a couple, even if just for the cameras at times.

JJ unbounded Yuuri from the tight-fitting suit he was in, delicately, as Yuuri battled himself to stay awake. He undid buttons with ease and rolled soft fabric from his body just as gracefully. Yuuri turned his attention the white walls with ornate, gold trimmings as JJ lifted his shirt from his body. His mind was taking him other places. Places far, far, far away from his hotel room in a small apartment in New York where something similar had happened. Except he had been the one taking off his clothes. Out of nowhere, bursts of memories like fireworks set his chest aflame.

Blue eyes. Milky skin. Lips so pink he wondered if maybe he was wearing lipgloss. Gentle kisses on wet grass. Silver hair. A concoction of perfection that only seemed to occur once in a lifetime.

Victor Victor Victor Victor Victor Victor

His brain chanted the name until Yuuri’s eyes started to brim with tears. Something deep inside him wonders if maybe he was somewhere in the city thinking about the same thing.

Those were awful chances. Victor hadn’t bothered to keep in touch. He had been the one to break them apart. The chances that he still cared were slim.

Yuuri watched as JJ removed his suit jacket and began to undo his tie. A fire lit inside of him, something unlike anything he’d ever felt. Before he knew what he was doing, Yuuri walked across the room and placed a warm kiss between his shoulder blades. JJ turned around and smiled slyly, cupping Yuuri’s face gingerly before placing a kiss on his lips. Yuuri’s hands explored his chest and abdomen, going on until they found the button to his pants. Thin fingers worked all over to get his companion undressed, careful not to make eye contact as the kisses got rougher and the air became thicker. He thought his body would numb from the sensory overload.

They stumbled to the bed and spent the night wrapped in each other’s limbs. Fingers on lips. Skin on skin. Moans and pleads for more. The night was only ended when JJ fell asleep from exhaustion, as they both lay breathless. He had pulled Yuuri close into an embrace just before that, whispering all kinds of sweet things that anyone would have loved to be told. Yuuri wanted to relish in it. To kiss the words and say the back to him.

But he just hummed and nestled into him.

It was hard for him to get much sleep that night. Once the adrenaline wore off, he was back where he started. Empty in his feelings and his mind.

When the sun rose that morning, he smiled at the idea of having a busy day ahead of him. Press conferences and events would take up all of his time. Not a second would be spared for unneeded thoughts. Not a single second.

_______________

the following evening

Yuuri straightened out the lapels of JJ’s jacket as they crossed the pavilion to the Yelagin Palace, which had been rented out for the show happening in just minutes. There were photographers and journalists everywhere, and Yuuri couldn’t risk being seen with someone who wasn’t put together
and dressed impeccably. Not that Yuuri cared much about that, but his employers did and that meant he had to. Besides, JJ hated looking unkempt. Maybe slightly more than Yuuri’s agency hated when Yuuri stepped out in sweatpants.

For that very same reason, Yuuri had spent any spare second he had grooming himself in front of various reflective surfaces. His hair, his pants, his satin top and floral decorative bow. They all had to be perfect. Not an inch out of place.

“Yuuri!”

He turned to face behind him. Immediately he recognized Mila and Sara, walking toward him hand in hand, beautiful linen dressed billowing in the wind. He waved to them with a smile and called JJ’s attention to them as well. The sun set patiently behind them as they came to greet him, clouds red and orange with fever dreams of summer.

“You look so gorgeous! God, I’m so glad you decided to come,” Mila gushed as she pulled him into a tight hug. “And who is this? I don’t think we’ve met.”

JJ smiled at the pair and reached a hand out amicably. They both shook it with toothy grins and bright eyes as Yuuri stepped between them and began to introduce them.

“This is… my boyfriend,” he said the words slowly, thinking each one out thoroughly. The words seemed to numb his tongue like cough medicine. “JJ, this is Sara and Mila. They’re friends of mine.”

Mila shot him a wide-eyed look and let her smile falter for a moment.

“Boyfriend?” Mila asked without skipping a breath. “Since when?”

Yuuri felt guilty suddenly. Why he wasn’t sure, but something in his chest told him he should be ashamed of holding JJ’s hand in such a public setting. Like it was disrespectful.

“Just over a month,” JJ answered happily, unable to read the tone of the situation. “One happy… long… month.”

He gave Yuuri’s hand a squeeze, flashing him sparkling eyes before turning back to Mila and Sara. They seemed stunned- frozen in time with crooked smiles.

Time began to move slowly then, as Mila and Sara gave hasty goodbyes with weak excuses as to why they had to leave, and moved through the crowd of stars, models, and photographers as fast and seemingly normal as their legs could carry them. Yuuri felt like something had just gone wrong. So incredibly wrong in fact that the sun ducked behind a cluster of clouds, dimming the outside like it was seeking shelter.

A couple of photographers approached them and asked them to pose. JJ pulled Yuuri close, arm wrapped around his waist like a boa constrictor in the process of killing its prey.

They moved on into the venue and mingled with small groups of people as they made their way deeper and deeper into the building, where seating was set for the show to begin.

Night and Day seemed to collide in the open space of the runway, with wildlife and flowers scattered about the room. Natural light filtered through pink bulbs, providing the facade of early morning sunrises. Pink and blue brocade fabric spread over giant windows as curtains, separating the outside world from the new and beautiful exclusive world of indoors. JJ made a comment about the scent of roses with a scrunched up nose, but to Yuuri, it smelled divine. Like oils and bath salts he used to soak in. A humming… a remembrance of times passed... they swept him away into a wonderland of
soft eyes and sweet kisses.

“Here they are,” JJ declared with a smile as they looked down at their seats, close together and colored red. Their names, golden, were inscribed to the fabrics on their chairs. Delicate and frail. “Now, why don’t you have a seat and I’ll go get us drinks.”

Yuuri nodded at his suggestion and took his seat gladly. Events like this always wore him out, whether he was on or off the runway itself.

People began to filter into the room more quickly. One after the other like ornately dressed toy soldiers, filling each row to its capacity. Yuuri began to worry JJ wouldn’t make it back in time for the show to start and started to actively fiddle with his phone. An itching feeling covered his body. It was what he pictured spidey senses would feel like. Alarming and coaxing for one to act.

He just didn’t know why.

Yuuri sent JJ a message, asking him if he’d gotten lost on the way back with a mess of anxious looking emojis.

He put his phone down and looked out across the room, past the catwalk and to the first row of seats, searching aimlessly for something to ease his mind. Of course what he found did no such thing.

It was his eyes that he saw first, present and awake as ever. Long cascading fringe followed, much longer than before, and shiny and silver like brand new earrings. Parted lips, lost in emotion. A suit so well fitting Yuuri could practically see how much it cost. By the way, his eyes were blown wide and still, Yuuri could only guess that Victor saw him too.

Bells chimed in his chest, celebrating the revival of feelings hidden too long. He wanted to leap across the room and land in his arms. Every single muscle in his body begged him to. Urged him to. Plead. He lurched forward, caught in the moment, but stopped himself before his legs could order him to stand. Victor watched him with soft eyes at first, but they quickly narrowed and looked at the area around him inquisitively.

A hand, large in size and familiar in manner, landed on Yuuri’s shoulder. He looked up and saw JJ smiling at him, offering a glass of champagne.

“I know you try not to drink at these things, but this is genuinely all they had,” JJ told him. Yuuri smiled at him and told him to sit before the show began.

Across the room, Mila placed a hand over Victor’s as she watched him look on in front of him.

“I should have seen this coming,” Victor whispered, fully aware that she was going to either lecture or console him. “I actually… I should have known it would happen. I just didn’t think he would move on so quickly.”

“You have,” Mila stated, deciding it was up to her to defend Yuuri. “You’re here with Mark. He can bring someone if he wants to, too.”

Victor’s heart wrenched when she said those words. “I know. It still doesn’t feel- Well, it’s not anything I guess. What’s his name?”

“Yuuri told me his name is JJ.”

He watched as Yuuri nestled into “JJ’s” arms and kept his eyes on everything it but him. Every single person but Victor. He even waved to Mila and Sara at some point.
“Do you know how long they’ve been together?” Victor pressed her.

“How long who’s been together?”

Victor turned to see Mark, his date, and prospective new boyfriend, walk up to their little group with his phone in hand, having just finished a phone call with investors in France.

“No one important,” Victor told him, patting the seat beside him. “Just gossip. How are our dealings going? Did they agree to our offer?”

Mark shook his head, defeated, and took a seat. “They told me they would get back to me Monday, but by the looks of it I think they’ll try to talk us down.”

Business seemed to be all he and Mark ever really talked about. Well, that and what to have for dinner. Not much else though, but really, what could have Victor expected from dating one of the company’s top executives.

“Well, there are ways around that. We could tell them we’ll start negotiating with the Chinese. That should push them enough, right?” Victor suggested.

Mark smiled at him and placed a finger to his lips. “Yes, but we’re not working right now. We’re out and having fun, so let’s leave everything off until Monday. Now, how long until the show starts?”

Victor laughed nervously as he glanced around the room to see if by any chance Yuuri chosen the absolute worst moment to look at him. When his eyes landed on Yuuri, he saw that yes, Yuuri was finally watching him, face blank and white as a sheet. Victor watched as he tried to leave, eyes frantic and frightened. His ‘boyfriend’ pulled him back down from his standing position as the lights dimmed and music started. Yuuri complied and sat down, shoulders heavy and head down.

The designer emerged on stage and was greeted with reverence and applause. He introduced himself and the line, citing falling in love in the summertime with summer wine and wild cherries as his muse. Victor came in and out of consciousness as he looked across to Yuuri, who was not so subtly look his way as well. The designer fled the stage and a video began to play, flashing pictures of men prancing about a garden with roses and daffodils all around. A sweet voice began to recite a poem, one Victor immediately recognized as ‘Her Voice’ by Oscar Wilde. He glanced to and from Yuuri and the screen as it played, trying desperately to not call too much attention to them both.

And there is nothing left to do
But to kiss once again, and part,
Nay, there is nothing we should rue,

Yuuri finally took him in entirely, breath visibly catching in his throat when their eyes locked on one another.

I have my beauty,—you your Art,
Nay, do not start,
One world was not enough for two
Like me and you.

The video ended, fading into an electropop song, with a choir vocalizing in French in the background. The models began to pour out from backstage, handsome and princely as the clothes on their backs. Yuuri tried to look away constantly from Victor as if it were his job to pay attention to
each outfit that came out instead. Maybe it was, but Victor couldn’t be sure. He’d only ever heard of Yuuri’s modeling, not of any editorial job he might hold for some magazine. He didn’t doubt that that was something Yuuri could do though- Yuuri was incredibly smart, after all.

He watched his eyes through the legs of models and heads of photographers as they moved around the catwalk. Victor could just barely read his expression, a lost and tired painting that bore the human soul. There was shame on both their faces. Victor knew that for sure, even if the test was not as clear. They both had dates- good men who liked them enough to deal with their baggage -and there they were; making eyes at each other like lovelorn teenagers at the prom.

He looked at his watch to check the time, becoming impatient with the number of outfits they had decided to show. The faster the show ended, the faster the after party would begin, and as soon as the after party began he could approach-

“I’m really glad we came to this. I know we don’t do much else other than work, so this is really nice,” Mark told him in a whisper, leaning into Victor and placing a hand on his thigh. Victor shifted in his seat and smiled at him.

“Yeah, I’m really enjoying myself.”

Maybe it was a lie, and maybe Mark didn’t deserve to be lied to, but Victor didn’t know what else to say. It wasn’t exactly like he could just get up and walk over to Yuuri, pick him up and run away, far into the busy city of St. Petersburg and be gone forever. There were plenty of photographers around them, even some higher end gossip magazines. If he did anything out of the ordinary to try and talk to Yuuri… to try and do anything to get closer to him… someone would notice and Yuuri’s career would be on the line. No, he would have to find a natural, nonchalant way to speak with him-

He stopped smiling at Mark, turning back to face the catwalk.

What if Yuuri didn’t want to speak with him? Victor had been the one to walk away, after all, it would be completely possible and rational for Yuuri not to want to talk to him ever again in his entire life. Why did Victor want to speak to Yuuri anyway? Hadn’t leaving New York been just to not have to see him? To be away and keep Yuuri happy? Hadn’t that been the point? Jesus Christ, maybe he should just go straight to dinner after the show-

Clapping, polite and elegant, erupted around him. The show was over. All of the models were walking out one last time, designer at the end with regal smiles, all lips no teeth. He looked across the room to where Yuuri was standing, clapping like all of the other high profile models, which seemed weird to Victor. Seeing him all dolled up and animated. Like a toy almost. Victor joined Mila, Mark, and Sara in standing, keeping his eyes on Yuuri the entire time. It felt natural, watching him.

Like magic, Yuuri’s eyes flickered onto his and he smiled at Victor, a little nervous and unsure, but it was a smile no less.

“Alright, now,” said Mark smiling at the group. “Let’s go eat!”

“Wait, uh-” Victor interjected. “Why don’t we mingle for a while? We can work out an appetite.”

Mila and Sara gave him an unamused look while Mark nodded.

“Sounds good,” he told Victor. “Um, oh look! Mila, isn’t that Elric?”

He began to move through the crowd that way. Finding whoever it was that he recognized and chatting them up, just to move through the crowd more inconspicuously. He kept an eye on Yuuri every once in awhile just to try and figure out who he needed to talk to next. It was tedious, and he
could clearly see that he was getting on Mark’s nerves every time they began a conversation with someone new. But it needed to happen.

“Mila, I thought I wouldn’t be able to catch you before you left.”

Victor’s head turned slowly toward the voice behind him, hand tightening its grip on Mark’s. Somehow, he’d forgotten they had been holding hands the entire time, but now it was too apparent. It felt like too much.

“You almost did. We had dinner plans but um, we decided to stay,” Mila explained to Yuuri. She looked at both him and Victor, sighing heavily as Mark turned to look at Yuuri.

“I hope this isn’t going to be awkward for you,” he whispered into Victor’s ear, hot and heavy. Not in a sexual way, his breath was just warm. “I know you two have a weird history with the media. We don’t have to say hello if you don’t want to.”

Victor knew Mark didn’t know better. How could he? Victor tried to avoid talking about Yuuri usually left the room if his name was brought up. There was no reason Mark should think he’d want to talk to him. But the words still made his blood boil, because all he existed for was Yuuri. Of course, he’d want to speak to him.

“No, I’ll be fine,” Victor gave him a gentle slap on the shoulder, disconnecting their arms and pranced to where Mila and Yuuri were standing.

Yuuri saw him before anyone else did, eyes as amatory as they had been when he had first realized he loved him. He didn’t even care for the six foot five, the gargantuan man following Victor around like a lost puppy. He just wanted to talk to him, to touch him, to-

“Yuuri.” The words escaped Victor, who felt as if he’d lost self-control. They rang in Yuuri’s ears like the bells of a church. A happy melody he just couldn’t believe. “It’s nice to see you again. It’s been too long.”

“Victor,” Yuuri said with no afterthought. He was silent, not sure of what else he wanted to say. There were no words in his mind. It was an empty scap of heartbeats and shared fond looks.

The group- Mila, Sara, JJ, Yuuri’s assistant, and Mark -looked on around them as both Yuuri and Victor stared at each other too long to make them anything but uncomfortable. JJ was the first to clear his throat, standing just a little closer to Yuuri than before. He extended a dilatory hand out to Victor and waited for him to shake it. Victor did so reluctantly, looking to Yuuri for introductions.

“JJ, this is Victor.” Tense smiles appeared on both the men’s faces, daring the other to say what was on everyone’s minds. “Victor, this is JJ, my boyfriend.”

“Pleased to meet you,” Victor practically hissed through tight lips, squeezing JJ’s hand as tightly (maybe even more) than JJ was squeezing his. Mark came from behind him and stood by his side, smiling at both Yuuri and JJ, and then looking down at him. Victor sunk into himself a bit and then said, “Hello, darling. Yuuri, JJ, this is Mark. We work together.”

Mila, transparent as always with her emotions, winced a little at the words Victor had chosen to describe his relationship with Mark.

Yuuri reached out a hand to Mark and whispered a deathly silent ‘nice to meet you’ as Victor looked
on with dread in his eyes. He had managed to make everyone feel awkward, some of them physically cringing because, of course, everyone knew that he and Mark were on a date, but he hadn’t thought about that and the words just started falling out of his mouth and-

Mark started to move away from him, head down and cheeks red. An all-consuming, painful feeling of apologetic feeling washed over him. It was too late to say anything to fix it. The damage had been done.

Mark’s phone began to ring, snapping everyone out of their silent spell. He excused himself and pat Victor’s shoulder as he left. Mila and Sara looked at each other for help in how to help the conversation move on. The crowds around them moved along, out to the bigger portion of the palace, where refreshments were being distributed and the music was being played.

“How about we go dancing?” JJ suggested to the group, but really it was mostly to Yuuri, as he refused to look in Victor’s general direction. Yuuri nodded and asked the rest of them if they would be joining them. They all nodded in agreement and trailed behind the happy couple as they walked to the ballroom. Victor paced himself to walk a little faster to catch up with them, but Mila and Sara pulled him back, taking each of his arms in theirs.

“What was that all about, you psychopath?” Mila hissed in a hushed tone. Victor groaned and shut his eyes as tight as he could muster. “You’ve really hurt Mark’s feelings.”

“I don’t know, it was a gut reaction,” he said. “I really didn’t mean it, it just came out.”

Sara groaned and pressed her head against his shoulder, “What are we going to do with you, hm?”

The group waded through the crowd, making way for their small group amidst fashion royalty. He hung back with Sara and Mila, under Mila’s instruction, to give Yuuri room if he needed it. That was the best thing for him to do. He could come on too strong and cause the opposite reaction he wanted in him. It was the last thing he wanted. So he danced with Mila, and then Sara, and then watched them dancing from the sidelines of the ballroom, champagne in hand, eyes dim and down.

It occurred to him that even though he hadn’t seen Yuuri for over a year, and that they hadn’t communicated in any way, the feelings he had felt for him were still present and strong as ever. It didn’t come as much of a surprise- a love like theirs didn’t die easily. His eyes still shook him to his core and his voice made his bones feel like they were hot, silky, liquid. He and Yuuri were all about cause and effect. There wasn’t one thing the other could do that wouldn’t cause a reaction in the other. It was a gift for them when they were together, it was a curse when they weren’t.

Victor grew tired of watching the dancing bodies all around him and made his way out to the back garden, where fairy lights lit up the ever expansive landscape. Bright summer tulips shone in the light of the magic hour, where the sun lingered and night entered. The sandstone steps and walkways felt light under his feet as he stepped onto them, delicate to not damage the atmosphere with too much noise. It was peaceful outside, as well as much cooler than it was outside. When a cold breeze hit him, Victor realized he had been lacking fresh air.

His eyes focused on the garden before him, following and counting every bird in sight. The sky was a painting. Blue, yellow, orange, pink, purple...

“Victor?” called a voice. It sounded so distant, like a whisper. It sounded like-

“Yuuri?” Victor turned his head to the left, where Yuuri was standing next to a potted tree like he was hiding. “Hi!”
He was overly excited, but could anyone blame him? They were alone. Finally alone.

But Yuuri was wiping at his eyes like he used to when he didn’t want Victor to know that he had been-

“Are you crying?” Victor asked him, taking sweeping steps to be by his side. “What happened? Did someone do this to you? Was it your-”

Yuuri placed a palm on Victor’s chest to calm him down, something he had done in the past, and stepped back once he realized that they were much too close. “N-no. I just get like this. Jesus, I don’t see you for a year and you completely forget about my crippling mental illness,” Yuuri joked with him. He even forced out a chuckle just for Victor to try and seal the lie.

And Victor knew it was a lie, because, while Yuuri did cry at random things sometimes (they both did really), he knew his tears usually came when he was alone. Whatever it was that was truly bothering him was being concealed by a mask of blaming it on his depression. There was something else going on. Something Victor couldn’t figure out.

“Are you sure?” Victor pressed him. “You don’t usually...cry in public. It’s out of character.”

Yuuri looked him up and down, squinted eyes curious and careful not to give away too much. The birds in the garden began to call to one another, beckoning each other’s attention. The sun continued to set, softening shadows and washing away all of the bright colors around. Victor stepped back, following Yuuri’s lead and bit his lips nervously.

“I don’t really know what my character is anymore,” Yuuri admitted to him, voice clammy and on the brink of tears. “It’s like I’ve been playing dress up for the past couple of months.”

Victor was tempted to reach out. To hold his hand to his face and promise him that things would be better. He wanted to tell Yuuri all of the things he wished he believed himself when he fell into a slump. But he doubted Yuuri wanted to hear any of that. He probably felt the same way.

“I’m sorry you’re going through this,” Victor whispered. “I know it’s tough to work when...well when you don’t even want to wake up sometimes. It’s hard.”

Yuuri lowered his eyes and softened his stance. Victor wondered if that had been the right thing to say. There was no way for him to know unless he asked, but that would be weird. He was always actively trying to avoid being weird.

“Thank you, Victor. I needed to hear that, I think.”

They smiled at each other and turned to face the garden. The silence, for the first time in a long time between them, felt comfortable. Breathable. Unrestrained.

“Have you been well?” Yuuri asked him, scooting just a bit closer to him, but still keeping his eyes on the scape before him. “Chris told me you’re working with your mother?”

“You met with Chris?” Victor asked him.

“Yeah, but... I mean, I asked him not to tell you. I know you wanted distance and I just felt like I needed to respect that,” Yuuri explained to him. They both shifted in their place and kept their eyes glued to the open space before them. “I’m sorry I was so dramatic...when I left. The words just kept falling out and-”

“I think I’m the one that has to apologize. I should’ve been more adult about the entire thing.
Running away seemed easier than actually dealing with things. Seems like that’s going to be the biggest mistake of my life,” Victor told Yuuri. He played around with a pebble on the ground, kicking it from foot to foot, idle to make himself feel more at ease with being so open about his emotions. “I mean, look at you. You’re dating—”

“You’re dating too,” Yuuri cut in quietly. Victor turned his head to look at him and raised an eyebrow. Yuuri sighed and laughed lightly. “I’m not stupid, Victor. You were right there in front of me.”

Victor took a deep breath in, assuaging the tightness in his chest.

So, he was as transparent as everyone told him. Not a surprise, but it was awkward for Yuuri to know just how quickly he was to drop whoever he was with for him. It made him feel vulnerable, but in a good way because it was Yuuri, and Yuuri would never take advantage of knowing things like that.

“You’re going to have to send him at least a dozen roses to apologize for tonight,” Yuuri whispered. “It was pretty rude.”

“I think it was worth it,” Victor blurted out the words mindlessly. He stepped closer to Yuuri to the point where they were just a couple of inches apart, lips so close together they were both tempted to kiss. “As long as my message got across, of course.”

“Victor…” Yuuri turned away from him, wrapping his arms around himself. So he did know what Victor was trying to do by disavowing his relationship with Mark. Victor swept a hand through his hair and sighed.

“What is it this time? ‘Cuz that’s the thing with us, right? We never get the timing right?” Victor’s voice rose, to both of their surprises. He flared his nostrils and looked back down, eager to hide his anger. Yuuri balled up his fists and clenched his jaw, just as eager to make his annoyance known.

“Oh, I don’t know… I’m dating somebody!” Yuuri practically hissed at him. “It’s kind of hard to do what I want when I’m with someone already.”

They turned away from each other and looked to the sky for answers. A dazzling twilight blue took over the heavens, dancing with the last traces of the sun and clouds.

“I’m not going to keep doing this—” Yuuri let his shoulders fall, turned to leave, and was left stunned as Victor took a grip of his arm.

“So you’re leaving me now? What? Is this like revenge or something?” Victor accused him. Yuuri’s eyes grew wide with horror at the words coming out of his mouth. They were bitter and hurt, emotions he was no stranger to, but it made his stomach turn hearing them coming from Victor.

“This is so like you! To just completely ignore what I’ve-!” Yuuri paused in his words. He ripped his arm from Victor’s touch and pressed a firm finger against his chest, face red and patchy. “I would never do that to you. The fact that you would even think I would makes me sick.” Victor met his eyes, downcast and apologetic. “I know you didn’t want to go, I know you feel awful, I know you want us to just drop everything for one another and live happily ever after, but life doesn’t work that way! We have obligations and partners to respect- God! I know you’re hurting and reeling and you hate the decisions we’ve both made.” Yuuri’s voice was watered down and wobbly, like the tears in his eyes and pain deep in his soul. “I know it’s hard for you, but it’s hard for me too. It hurts me too! I would never wish that pain on someone else, especially you!” He ended his speech by wiping his teary eyes and straightening out his jacket, hands light, but trembling all the same. Victor gaped at
him and moved to speak, but Yuuri stopped him. “So don’t try to make me the bad guy here. You mean the world to me, but things are-”

“Yuuri?” JJ approached from inside, feet quiet but taking long strides to him. Victor stepped back from Yuuri and ran a hand through his hair. “Is everything alright? I lost track of you inside,” JJ continued, wrapping an arm around his waist, pulling Yuuri into his body protectively. He took his thumb and ran it under Yuuri’s eye to wipe away the tears. Victor tensed and averted his eyes, looking to the sky once again.

“I’m fine,” Yuuri sniffled, followed by a clearing of his throat. “Can we please go back to the hotel?”

Victor watched as JJ nodded and led Yuuri back inside, hands still clasped on his hip and eyes burning holes into Victor as they exited. All Victor could do was sigh angrily and stomp down to the grass, intent on going for a walk to calm himself down. Hands pressed to his face, he tried to wipe away the agitation and marched forth, noticing a flashing in the distance. He moved toward it, curious as to what it might be, but stopped in his tracks when he heard Mila calling to him from inside.

Inside him, a strange fire, ravenous and searing, began to burn away at something Victor didn’t quite understand.

______________

Three Days Later

“What? Are those pictures photoshopped? I don’t think so Yuuri!” JJ ripped his suitcase open and began to stuff his clothes into it. Yuuri tried to hold on to him, wrapping his arms around JJ to hopefully slow him down. To get him to stop, to listen to him and let him explain the magazine that now lay crumpled in the middle of their hotel floor. JJ broke loose from Yuuri’s grip and held the bridge of his nose, before covering his face with his hands. Tears slipped down his cheeks and hands, body shaking like he had lost all control. “I can’t believe you would do this to me.”

Yuuri tried to reach out to him, to hug him, but JJ refused. All Yuuri could do was stand and watch as he continued to pack, intent on catching the next flight out of Russia.

“I didn’t kiss him,” Yuuri sobbed. “We didn’t do anything more than talk— JJ you have to believe me, I would never do something like what they’re saying!” Yuuri wrapped his arms around himself, a pathetic attempt at comfort, and looked on wistfully, hoping that words would be enough to change JJ’s mind.

“Those pictures are angled oddly—” Yuuri tried to explain.

“It’s kind of hard to do what I want when I’m with someone already,” JJ spoke softly, zipping up the suitcase and placing it on the ground, ready to leave. “How am I supposed to take that, hm? How am I supposed to not feel like I’m holding you back from being happy?”

“You do make me happy!” Yuuri screamed, voice breaking, “Not like him! Never like him!” JJ shouted back act him. He pursed his lips and pulled on a jacket. “I have never seen you look at me like that— like you looked at him -once. Not once, Yuuri. How is that fair to either of us?”

Yuuri walked up to him, breath shallow, and pressed his forehead to JJ’s. Neither of them moved, neither of them spoke. A cobweb of silence covered them, so dainty both were scared to do anything.
“I’m sorry,” JJ spoke softly. “But we’re done.”

And in less than thirty seconds, JJ was gone from the hotel suite, leaving Yuuri to relentlessly wonder how things could have gone so wrong.

He fell apart on the messy king size bed, drooling and crying and trying his best to not completely lose his mind. It wasn’t realistic, Yuuri thought, he was going to go crazy and scream and get drunk and-

He climbed out of bed and practically ran to the middle of the room, where the crumpled magazine lay. Yuuri picked it up delicately, smoothing out the cover to see what had set everything off one more time. With red eyes, he looked over the gloss cover.

On it was Victor and him, in that garden, under low light. The image was taken in such a way that it looked like he and Victor were kissing. That was what caught JJ’s eye in the lobby downstairs. Under the picture, something was written in Russian, but Yuuri didn’t read Russian, so there was no way for him to know what it said. Surely, it was something awful and accusatory, as it included both his and Victor’s name.

He flipped to the back of the magazine to where the story was written and more pictures were posted on the pages. Each looked more and more awful than the one on the cover somehow. It looked so personal… It was so intimate. Yuuri’s tears and anger were so apparent. Luckily, for Victor, there was only one picture with his face in it. In the lower corner of the page, Yuuri guessed it invited readers to head to their website for the video of them together.

Yuuri dropped the magazine and reached for his phone, where sixteen missed calls existed ignored. He’d have to answer someone eventually, but he wasn’t ready yet. It would take one hour at least. Or until his breathing steadied.

He opened google and put in his name. The first article to come up was from People magazine, with the title,

*He Just Can’t Let Him Go!*

Chapter End Notes

Leave me a comment to let me know what you think :)!
Suddenly, Yuuri was walking towards them, determined to meet the person who had taken a place he’d never occupied. It stung more than he expected, he thought as he extended a hand out to him.

One Month Later

“How do you feel about the controversy that surrounds you? It hasn’t held you back, but I doubt it’s easy to deal with on a day to day basis,” the interviewer said. She crossed her legs and leaned in as if it made the interview more personal.

As if it made it easier for Yuuri to answer that question.

Yuuri rubbed his forearm and raised his eyebrows because, of course, she would ask that. “Well, I feel like it’s just something that comes with the job. People catch you at the wrong times…they listen in on personal conversations…” The people in the studio laugh amongst each other. With him, hopefully, but it doesn’t really matter. Pam had been the one to advise him long ago to make jokes. Jokes made things less intense. Both for him and the crowd. Yuuri didn’t know how to true that was. “Uh…sometimes papers don’t have the entire story. Tabloids lie to sell their magazines. Controversy is inevitable when things like that are so prevalent in the media. Just because it’s there doesn’t mean it becomes me. I’m more than just someone with a ‘fun’ job and a ‘messy love life’, as they like to say.”

He eased himself into a more comfortable position in his chair and smirked. “As long as I have loving, loyal people by my side I’ll be fine. No one or nothing is more important than that.”

He went too far. Much too far. It was past a joke now, the crowd became hushed and he went pink in the face as they did so.

Everyone knew Victor’s response to the leaking of their conversation in that back garden years ago. How he denied even really being involved with Yuuri and wrote him off as someone stuck in the past when people asked about him. A feud-like indirect correspondence over twitter started just days following the leak and lasted for about five days. Things got shady, especially once each other’s friend circles got involved. Phichit especially ran his mouth, not willing to let anyone in Victor’s circle have the last words or insult his best friend. Words ran rancid among them and didn’t attempt to reconcile. To say Pam was angry with him was an understatement, but they decided to just run with it. Yuuri would be unapologetic and a spitfire.

Brazen and Wild.
That was what he was being marketed as.
Not a soft, sweet, angelic boy anymore.

“I guess that leads me to my next question,” the interviewer spoke slowly, unsure of what he would
say. “I have to bring up Mr. Nikiforov-”

“Do you? I mean, I’ve said all I have to say on the matter. What happened was months ago. It’s a new day,” Yuuri steered away from the topic of Victor whenever he could. He couldn’t hear or say his name without choking up, which was definitely not good for him- bad boy image and all.

“Well, I guess I’ll move on to my next question,” she laughed nervously and turned to her next card. “You’re on the cover of Vogue Japan this month. How incredible does that feel, being it your native country?”

Yuuri smiled and stood a little straighter, digging his nails into his palms as hard as possible. The interview was going to feel like it went on forever.

Three Days Later

“I know it’s sudden. I just wanted to give you a good stretch of time to get everything in order. I know it would just be worse the later I told you.” Yuuri crossed his arms and sunk into the chair in Pam’s office, face red and blotchy from crying so much. “I’m so sorry, but I have to do this.”

Pam nodded empathetically and let him cry it out right there in front of her. She wasn’t going to fight him on his decision. Something deep in her always knew Yuuri was miserable anyway, and there was no denying that now. She was just going to be supportive and hold his hand through all of the paperwork and make sure that he left the limelight in the least rocky way possible.

“It’s fine, dear. Yuuri, it’s going to be fine,” she told him as she left her side of the table and ran to hug him. “We’re going to make sure you’re okay.”

A world away, in Paris, France, Victor Nikiforov was backstage in a theatre, accompanied by his mother and cousin.

“Have you spoken to Chris?” Mila asked him, grabbing him by the elbow and leading them to a place more secluded.

“No, it’s been a couple of days. Why? Is something wrong?” Victor asked, drinking from his flute.

“No, it’s Yuuri,” she said in a quiet voice.

“What about Yuuri?” Victor asked her, voice growing with intrigue.

“He quit. Apparently, he ran to his agent as soon as he made it back from London and asked her to wrap up all of his dealings.” Victor’s eyes went wide in surprise. “No one has any idea. The only reason Chris knows is that his secretary is friends with an assistant from Yuuri’s agency.”

Victor tried to think it wasn’t his fault. That’s what he told himself, but he couldn’t help but feel like he was responsible for Yuuri’s decision. It had to have stemmed from the public backlash he faced from their fallout. Yuuri had received most of it, as his break up and some of the things his people said in his defense riled up most of the people invested in their story.

Maybe it was Victor. He had initiated the fight after all. Maybe he pushed too hard. Maybe he was too much.

“Mila? Mila Babicheva is that you?” A blond man with eyes as grey as the moon walked around Victor, coming from behind, and embraced Mila, who looked as happy as he sounded to see him. Victor stepped back and let the two friends reunite.
After some fretting over how much each had changed, Mila turned to Victor and introduced him.

“Victor, this is Sergei. We attended the same university,” said Mila. Victor extended his hand and smiled. “Sergei, this is Victor, my cousin.”

“Oh, I would recognize those eyes anywhere,” Sergei said taking Victor’s hand. “The most famous, non-famous man in all of Europe.”

Victor gave him a tight-lipped smile and backed away just a little more. Sergei watched him and chuckled.

“I’m kidding, of course.” Victor softened in his stance. “Mila posts you and Yuri on Instagram more than Sara,” Sergei laughed. “How’s Makkachin by the way, I saw the little baby hurt its paw?”

Victor smiled from ear to ear at the mention of his dog. The conversation only kept moving from their, and he found it was the first time in months he felt happy to be outside socializing.

They greeted performers and mixed with the rest of the crowd backstage, sipping on champagne and eating all of the hors-d’oeuvres their bodies could handle. They had just finished watching a play based on Leo Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina*, and the director had invited him, Mila, and his mother to meet the actors, all of whom were lovely people, lively and happy as they said hello. Of course, Sergei caught Victor’s eye- blond and sweet and beautiful with eyes that crinkled when he laughed with his entire body. Victor didn’t know how he could have avoided being glued to him the entire night.

___________

*three years later*

“Jeanie, put that down. We’re not giving haircuts today,” Yuuri took the bright pink safety scissors from his tiny student and handed her a crayon instead. “Why don’t we draw some turkeys instead. We’ll hang them up for Thanksgiving, okay?”

She nodded, annoyed, but did as she was told anyway. Yuuri smiled at her and made his way back to his desk, where he took in the mess of scribbling children before sitting down and returning his attention to the lump of papers on his desk. He took hold of a red pen and started again, making corrections and annotations on each paper. Even if some had mistakes, he took the time to draw a smiley face atop each one, acknowledging their efforts.

Time did not slow down much after Yuuri let Pam know he intended on quitting. He finished whatever business he had left in the modeling world and became more of a recluse, skipping after parties and events. Slowly, but surely, even if it pained him, Yuuri began to disappear from magazine stands and storefront campaigns on 5th avenue. No longer could his face be found on the jumbotrons of Time Square. He faded from the fashion world’s memory in a matter of weeks after his last campaign that December. Of course, some designers and photographers called, wondering where fashions “wonder boy” had gone and if he would ever be coming back. Yuuri let Pam deal with those calls. He was no longer the person they called for, so it was only right he does not answer in his place.

He had only existed as him for a little over two years. That wasn’t enough time for Yuuri to feel like it had truly been him.

As soon as his modeling career was officially over, Yuuri applied to every teaching position in New York. From Brooklyn public schools to the posh private school of the upper east side. He had a teaching degree. He was approaching his 30th birthday and living off the money he had made modeling. He had to do something with his degree. Had to do what he always wanted to.
A month in, Yuuri found a job, miraculously enough through Chris, who had mentioned Yuuri to the headmaster of Addie’s primary school. He interviewed and, through his friend’s strong recommendation, was hired to teach third-grade history. The day he got the phone call, he had called Chris to promise him naming rights to his first born child (something to do with a slight inside joke they had between them).

Once Yuuri began teaching, he found peace within himself. Quiet and steady and sweet. His life finally had a routine. He woke up every morning at 6 in the morning, ate a balanced breakfast, and made his way to school just in time for class to begin. He then spent seven hours making his eight-year-old students laugh harder and harder each time he impersonated a president. He went home just two hours after they did, having graded papers and planning for the following day. Once he was home, he ran if he could and cooked himself a warm meal. Then he would read and watch television until his body asked him to sleep. On the occasional Friday, Yuuri would receive an invitation from Phichit and Seung Gil and the rest of their group, most of whom had graduated, and danced the night away. It was a cycle, and maybe his friends felt it was too boring, but Yuuri loved it.

His phone buzzed from its place in his pocket, signaling a message. He took his phone out and unlocked it to read the message. To his delight, it was Chris, who he’d grown immensely close to in his time adjusting back to normal life.

The message read:

“You’re still coming to Addie’s birthday party right?”

Yuuri answered:

“Yeah, I can help you while I’m there too :)

Three dots popped up and remained for some time. Yuuri raised an eyebrow and set his phone down, returning to the task at hand. After two papers, his phone buzzed again, this time with a paragraph from Chris, starting with: I know it’s super late notice and we’ve been planning on you being there for like months and I’ve been putting off telling you this for a while but it’s time for me to tell you since it’s this saturday and following with: Victor’s coming because duh he’s addie’s god-dad and I know you two have seen each other since the whole ordeal in russia because I’ve found ways to get you in the same room and I know you’re still a bit not okay with him and I know you’d be okay most of the time if he was the only one coming but he’s coming with someone and he’s engaged and I just didnt want you to be ambushed by all of this information come saturday so I guess this is your warning please don’t hate me ive been beating myself up over this for the past three months

Yuuri placed his phone facedown on the desk and dropped his face into his hands. That was a lot for him to take in. It was so much. Barely anything made sense. Maybe he read it incorrectly? Maybe he was tired?

He picked up the phone again and read through the message twice more. It didn’t change anything. The words were still the same. He pursed his lips and sighed, easing further into his chair. He should be feeling something, Yuuri thought. He should want to cry, maybe? There were no tears in his eyes though, he couldn’t cry even if he wanted to. He was a teacher now. If his students saw him crying it would be a mess of eight-year-olds trying to comfort him. That wouldn’t be good. Maybe that’s what was keeping him together. It wasn’t that he didn’t feel anything- he felt sick to his stomach at the thought of Victor being engaged -it was that he couldn’t break down. He had to stuff the pain deep within himself for now and let it unravel later. Like other days, so it wasn’t much of a change.

He texted Chris: Am I uninvited then?

To which Chris responded: No, but you don’t have to go if you think it’ll be too much.

Yuuri sighed and typed: It shouldn’t be. I’ll be okay. Just a little awkward.
It would be okay, surely. Yuuri had seen Victor thrice before. Once at Chris’ Christmas party a year and a half ago, then at his *End of Summer* barbeque the following summer, and finally just months ago at his Chris’ husbands birthday party. They never spoke...never did much more than giving a simple head tilt to one another in passing. They both pretended like everything that happened between them didn’t and moved on with themselves. It was what was best for both of them.

But this time it was different.

Victor was engaged. Yuuri wasn’t even aware Victor had been dating, much less seriously enough for him to propose or be proposed to. It was like a punch to the gut.

“Mr. Katsuki, I’m done with my turkeys,” Shyanne, a quiet girl who usually kept to herself, placed three paper turkeys on his desk gently and looked up at him through heavy bangs. Yuuri smiled.

“They’re beautiful, Shyanne,” he placed them into the bin on his desk and turned back to her. “Do you want to make more or-?”

“Can I read my book?” she asked hurriedly like it had been all she’d planned to ask him in her venture to his desk. “Please Mr. Katsuki, I finished all of my work and no one else is doing anything and I won’t be loud I promise-”

“It’s okay, kiddo. You can go read,” he smiled at her again and motioned for the bookshelves placed at the back of the room. She thanked him and ran to the back. Soon, more and more kids came up with their projects, asking for other tasks. Yuuri decided it was time for recess not much after that, letting his work take over his mind and shutting out everything else.

---

Saturday

The day of the party came faster than Yuuri could have wanted. Before he knew it, he was hanging streamers and setting out snacks and drinks as Chris rushed to finish the last of the cleaning he had to do.

Most people would think Chris would hire a cleaning service or party planner to do all of those things, but he prided himself in giving Addie the most normal and humble upbringing he could. That meant Addie cleaned up after himself and helped his parents with chores every now and then.

“Yuuri, can you make sure Addie’s all done getting dressed? I’ve got to finish wiping of these tables,” Chris asked him from the other side of the room. Yuuri nodded and walked to Addie’s room where he was sitting on his bed, tying up his shoelaces.

“You need any help?” Yuuri asked him, kneeling before him, staring down to the jumble of knots on the boy’s feet. Addie gave a frustrated sigh and lifted his feet up to Yuuri. “Are you excited for today?”

“I guess,” he mumbled. “I get to see all my friends today-”

A knock on the front door resonated throughout the house just as Yuuri finished tying his laces. Addie was up and running to the foyer where his first guests were being welcomed. Yuuri followed him out, carefully shutting any open doors as he made his way out. Of course, he knew who it was. He could hear his laughter clearly, as quiet and far as he was from him, so he was a little more prepared to see him when he turned the corner, arm around a short dark haired man who looked less than impressed being there.

Victor locked eyes with Yuuri but quickly turned them to the floor when his ‘fiancé’ looked in his
direction. Suddenly, Yuuri was walking towards them, determined to meet the person who had taken a place he’d never occupied. It stung more than he expected, he thought as he extended a hand out to him.

“Sergei, this is Yuuri,” Chris introduced them to one another, as Victor was too busy inspecting his shoes.

“It’s nice to meet you,” Yuuri smiled kindly as they shook hands.

“It’s a pleasure,” Sergei responded. He took in Yuuri’s face, scanning it as if to affirm that this really was the man who had caused Victor so much trouble. Finally, he settled on Yuuri’s eyes. “That is such a beautiful shade of brown in your iris.”

The sentence felt more whimsical than anything, so Yuuri just kept smiling and thanked him. He took his palm back and looked to Victor.

“Hi,” Yuuri said to him, somewhat curtly.

“Hi,” Victor responded in the same manner. Chris broke the silence with a simple clap of his hands. He invited them to the kitchen for tea and took the gift Victor had brought for Addie. It was a large box, purple with a large silver bow on it, and Yuuri wasn’t sure how he could have missed it behind him.

He followed behind them, Addie by his side, and tried to keep his mind from wandering too far from reality. Yuuri wanted to leave. The atmosphere was too cold. He felt out of it. But, both Addie and Chris were counting on him to be there. It would be incredibly transparent to leave so quickly as well.

No, Yuuri couldn’t leave. He had to stay.

“Yuuri?” Chris looked at him from across the counter with wide and worried eyes, holding a teapot in one hand and cup in the other. “One lump or two?”

Yuuri smiled bashfully, “One is fine.”

Victor and Sergei looked down to the counter, tea untouched, as Yuuri settled into a stool across from them. Needless to say, the room was thick with awkwardness. Unrelenting and determined to keep Yuuri so deep in thought he’d look like he’d gone crazy.

“So, how was the flight?” Chris asked, pulling Addie onto his lap. “Good, I hope.”

“It was. You know how these new planes are,” Victor spoke with a more incisive tone. “We had an entire cabin to ourselves. Bed and everything. Couldn’t complain.”

Chris nodded along and started on about Addie’s recent school production of Goldilocks and the Three Bears. “Yuuri took it upon himself to head the entire thing as the director. It was wonderful, he made sure everyone had role who wanted one. And the stage looks gorgeous. Everyone loved it—Madeline Johnson especially. And she is an absolute nightmare to please…”

Once the conversation grew more comfortable for all of them, Yuuri and Chris both had their phones out, showing all kinds of pictures from the different activities they had put together for the school.

“This is from the science fair last year. Billy Noegel won with a tectonic plate replica that moved in proportion to the real things,” Yuuri said smiling from ear to ear. Billy had been one of his favorite students and hadn’t failed to surprise him a single time. “She spent so much time researching
everything. I was so proud.”

“Do you enjoy teaching?” Sergei asked him.

“Yeah, it’s what I’ve always wanted to do,” Yuuri smiled fondly at his phone screen and put it face down on the counter. “I’m just sad I didn’t start earlier.”

“I’m sure that’s not true,” Sergei said. “You were one of the best male models the industry had seen in a long time. It couldn’t have been all bad.”

Yuuri shrugged, crossing his legs. “Well, no. But I like this a lot more.”

A knock came from the door.

“That must be our other guests,” Chris said.

Yuuri stood from his seat and walked with Chris to greet everyone. A couple of parents had arrived in groups. They handed Yuuri their gifts and greeted him, the children especially, excited that “Mr. Katsuki is here!”, even if most had only seen him in school.

Soon, party guests filtered into the party and the music started. Sugary pop music bounced from wall to wall in the house, spreading like a disease. Kids were running around like crazy, playing with balloons and toys. The adults gathered in the kitchen and sipped on wine, keeping an eye on the playing children. Yuuri tried to congregate, he really did, but there were cupcakes that needed passing out and juice boxes that needed to be opened. And, yes, maybe he didn’t want to listen to them all cooing at the rings on Victor and Sergei’s fingers, but that was beside the point.

Yuuri could make it through the party if he could just avoid them both entirely. Sergei seemed nice enough, and he and Victor had no bad blood between them, but it still felt unbearable to see so clearly the future that had meant to be his. It was like having all of his regrets and mistakes shoved in his face when he saw them kiss, or embrace, or talk about the orchids that would decorate the pews of the church they would make that sacred promise in. Yuuri didn’t need to be reminded of just how different things could have been for him if he had just communicated with Victor. If both do them had. His life wasn’t a mess. It wasn’t awful. He was happy. He was fine. But his heart was still tied to someone he could never have.

Not anymore, anyway.

But that didn’t matter anymore. They both built their lives well, even if they had nothing to do with one another.

Yuuri shut those thoughts out of his mind and focused on making sure everything was going well. He scanned the room, checking on everything he could see. Food, drinks, gifts. Even if the parents in the kitchen still had enough to drink. They didn’t, so he took it upon himself to go down into Chris’ wine cellar/studio/gym to get more. Two more bottles should do, Yuuri thought, it was almost time to cut the cake anyway.

He left the first floor, making sure to let Chris know where he was going. The older people thanked him, tipsy already, and he smiled, nodding and telling them it was no problem. He skipped down the hall and down the stairs, wiping the anxious sweat accumulating on his forehead off. He reached the basement and turned on the lights, taking just a second to breathe and bask in the silence of the downstairs. He approached the wine cooler and opened the door. If he remembered correctly, the bottom row was for friends and the rest-

“Need any help?”
Yuuri almost dropped a bottle he had picked, startled by the sudden noise, but held it tightly to his chest. He turned to the stairs and smiled apologetically. It was just Sergei, no one to be scared of.

“No, I’m fine,” Yuuri responded, showing him the bottle. “Just getting more wine.”

“Well, in that case,” he walked toward Yuuri and took a seat on a nearby couch. “Do you mind if we talk?”


“Nothing sinister,” Sergei put his hands up. “I just want to know who I’m replacing.”

It was a joke. That much he could recognize.

Yuuri gave him an uncertain smile and put the bottle back in the cooler. He walked to Sergei and took the seat opposite from him. They looked at one another for a while, before he started speaking, analyzing one another. Not in a malicious way, just to understand what the other was feeling. Yuuri, as they both understood, was extremely nervous.

“So,” Sergei tried to sweeten his voice. To be more welcoming. Yuuri could tell he was trying, but it still freaked him out. “How did we get here?”

Yuuri raised an eyebrow and looked at him, just a little confused. “I don’t understand-”

“Victor won’t tell me. He won’t talk to me about you and neither will anyone else. And I don’t want to judge you from what I find on google Yuuri because I know it’s not true. Or, I hope more like,” Sergei told him with a much lower voice as if it were a deep dark secret between friends. “Please.”

“I might be overstepping my bounds if I told you. I don’t know how comfortable I am disclosing those details if Victor himself hasn’t-”

“But I’m getting married to him. How am I supposed to not want to know?”

“Did you tell him about your own-”

“Yes.”

Yuuri pouted and looked down at his shoes.

“At least tell me that you weren’t with him because he was rich because we might have to fight,” Sergei kid (Yuuri hoped). “It would explain a lot about why he is the way he is, but you don’t seem like the type.”

“I’m not,” Yuuri said, more defensive. He straightened his back and pushed his shoulders back. “I didn’t even know he came from money… nothing happened between us anyway. That’s all you need to know.”

“You slept-” Sergei started, but Yuuri cut him off, standing up.

“I did not sleep with him. Not once,” Yuuri assured him. He had had to defend this fact before, to far too many people. “I don’t know where you got that idea, but we only ever kissed. That was it.”

“I was going to say you slept in his home, but alright. That’s good to know.” Sergei crossed his legs and leaned back. “I’m trying to figure out what you are to him, Yuuri. I really am. It’s been three years, but you’re still present. Still alive in him. Somehow. I just want to know why. I need to know how to fill the void you left. How to help him move on.”
Yuuri didn’t know what to say. The words swirled along in his head, drifting from lobe to love, aimlessly. “I didn’t leave a void. I can assure you that you wouldn’t be engaged if I had.”

“We both know that’s not true.”

Yuuri grew red in the face and walked to the cooler with his head down. He took two bottles from the bottom row and marched himself back upstairs without looking back at Sergei once. Once he delivered the bottles, he faked a stomach ache, hugged Addie and Chris goodbye and left. There wasn’t a chance in hell he’d be staying after that conversation.

____________________

Hours Later

“Where did you go off to halfway through, Seryozha? I was playing with Addie and couldn’t find you,” Victor noted without looking up from the files and piles of pages spread over his bed. Sergei was in the restroom, brushing his teeth, towel wrapped idly around his waist, having just stepped out of the shower.

“I was having a chat with Yuuri,” he said with a foaming mouth. Victor’s eyes widened in a mix of both surprise and something like fear. He put down his papers and sat up. “Oh come on, it wasn’t bad.”

“What did you uh...what did you talk about?” Victor asked, gulping at every other word.

“Not much, really. He’s as closed off as you are,” Sergei admitted. He rinsed his mouth and wiped it off. He later appeared, dressed in silk bottoms with no top, and sat next to Victor on his side of the bed.

Victor didn’t move and hadn’t moved, for quite some time. He looked at Sergei, eyes calm and steady, not sure if he should proceed or not with the conversation. Victor collected the folders and papers on the bed, stacking them up neatly and placing them neatly on his bedside table. He decided it would be better to leave the matter alone. There was no point in bringing Yuuri up, not when he was supposed to be moved on. Engaged, no less.

“You’re not even going to ask?” Sergei asked him, siding beneath the sheets. “Vitya?”

“Only if you want to tell me, darling. I won’t press the matter otherwise,” Victor told him, fixing himself into the sheets as well.

“Ask me.” Sergei turned to him, head on his pillow, eyes dreamy and coated with sleep.

“What did you chat with Yuuri about my love?” Victor asked, entertaining him. In the two years, he had known and come to love Sergei, one thing was certain, and that was that Sergei loved the dramatics of everyday life and craved for someone to play along with him. It was childish in its innocence and flare and definitely pointed to his theatre background.

“I asked him about you two,” Sergei yawned. Victor raised an eyebrow and laid his head down, staring straight up, peering into the ceiling and beyond. “I wanted to know all of the things you won’t tell me.” Victor sighed, and Sergei intertwined their fingers together. “Like why he’s not the one with the ring.” Victor groaned at that point, making Sergei laugh. “Hey, stop. I’m serious. I just wanted to know what happened. I feel like I only know the story in fragments.”

“Can I ask you why you want to know?” Victor asked him, genuinely, voice soft. “It’s not relevant.”

“You know what I’m like. It’s just intriguing to me,” Sergei snuggled up to Victor and placed a
finger on his lips. “Tell me? Please?”

Victor smiled at his touch.

“Not much to tell,” he lied. “We wanted to be together for some time and it never worked out when we tried. Happens to the everyone at one point or another.”

Sergei nodded and sighed. “That’s not everything though. I mean, Mila talked about you two like you were living through the greatest love tragedy of the twenty-first century. It was the reason she told me to not get my hopes up with you. There’s more to this than you’re telling me.”

“Well,” Victor paused to think of a good response. “It’s too much… To think about it. Brings back too many memories. Good and bad. We went through a lot together… Knew things about each other that left us pretty vulnerable. Yeah, I mean… it’s kind of hard for me to go through and recount all of our memories together. I’m sorry, honey.”

He was being sincere, and as he had come to learn, sincerity in relationships was key. Sergei practically climbed onto his lap and kissed his cheeks.

“I’m sorry I pushed you,” his fiancé admitted, wiping something away at Victor’s cheeks. “And for making you cry.”

Victor hadn’t even realized there were tears in his eyes. He tugged at a smile and kissed the top of Sergei’s hair. They held each other in soft silence, hearts slowing down until sleep took them both.

That time came for Sergei much earlier than it did for Victor, who wallowed in something like regret.

He loved Sergei. He liked his bright personality and positive outlook and the great, shining way he moved through life. Victor was taken by him, truly. But there was still something holding him back. It could have been Yuuri. It could have been his own deep fear of commitment. It could have been anything. But it didn’t really matter. Because it was keeping him from basking fully in the happiness Sergei could give him.

He looked at his fiancé, wrapped in his arms, and his heart ached. Deeply, because he felt he wasn’t giving Sergei as much as he was taking. He felt he was a fraud. An imposter who hid behind fake boasts of confidence and cool. Sergei knew of the illnesses he suffered from, but not the extent of which they could affect him. Daily, he’d tell himself that he had to tell Sergei. Let him know. Ask him for help.

But there was a wall. And it wasn’t that there was barely much trust. Victor just couldn’t bring himself to talk about those things. Yuuri was the first person he ever felt truly comfortable discussing them with.

Yuuri.

Victor shut his eyes tight and tried to get his face out of his mind. His freckles, his eyes, his lips, his cheeks. The tiny dimple that appeared when he laughed too hard. He tried to erase it all from his memory. Victor wanted to lose him to the passing of time. He wanted to leave him behind where they couldn’t hurt each other… Where they wouldn’t pass in awkward silence and finally break free from their love. It was the only way for either of them to live.

They had fucked each other over too many times for Victor to want to try again.

But that little voice in the back of his head wanted ever so badly to talk to Yuuri again, like it did every waking minute of Victor’s life, though it was different just this once because Yuuri was close. So close he could practically feel him- the softness of his skin… the way his hair felt like silk.
Victor gulped and looked down at the man sleeping in his arms. This was bad. It was awful. To be thinking of another person while his fiancé was right there, sleeping and unaware of what Victor was thinking. He tried to rationalize his thoughts.

The only real reason he was thinking this way, Victor guessed, was because he and Yuuri never had any real closure. Their last correspondence was through tweets. Mean, nasty, jealous tweets.

Victor slowly removed himself from Sergei and picked his phone up from his bedside table and a robe from a chair nearby. Walking downstairs and through his living room, Victor tightened his robe and walked out onto the terrace, bracing himself from the cold night. The sky was dark, twinkling with far-off stars and planes every now and then. He wanted to take a seat on the benches and lawn furniture, but his body, uneasy and shaking, begged him to keep himself moving.

He unlocked his phone and messaged Chris, asking for Yuuri’s number. Chris, to Victor’s surprise, didn’t question him and answered in a matter of minutes, adding just a second later that he’d want details the following day when they met for lunch.

Victor dialed the number and waited.

Yuuri took so long to answer Victor almost hung up, but at last, he did and Victor was left feeling breathless.

“Hello?” Yuuri answered. Victor felt his breath catch in his throat, tight and mean. Words were lost on him. All three languages he spoke mixed with each other and dumbfounded his mind. “Hello? Is anyone there?”

He couldn’t focus- couldn’t find the right words to say. There was so much he wanted to say. So much he couldn’t say. The pressure-packed on so quickly. All he could do was listen to Yuuri quickly losing patience on the other side of the line.

“Alright,” Yuuri huffed, frustrated. “I’m hanging up-“

“Wait,” Victor spoke hastily. “I’m sorry, it’s me. I panicked.”

Yuuri didn’t say anything, just sighed and waited.

“That’s alright. I had a feeling,” he responded. Victor hung his head and looked out to the city before him from the terrace. “Can I ask why you’re calling?“

“I wanted to apologize for Seryozha. I know he cornered you and- He doesn’t mean any harm, he’s just...different. Not good at reading moods, you know?” Victor walked to the ledge and placed a hand on the cold brick. “He was just curious.”

“Seryozha…” Victor felt his ears go red as Yuuri repeated the name. “I understand. It wasn’t a problem,” Yuuri told him. He heard some shuffling in the background and guessed that Yuuri was sitting up and likely in bed. Victor looked at his watch and winced. It was 11:30 pm. He’d woken him. “Victor, I don’t want to intrude, but I think it would be good if you told him. Or at least answered his questions. It doesn’t seem healthy to keep him in the dark about things he wants to know.”

Victor smiled slightly and said, “Yeah, I’ll try.”

A police siren sounded in the distance below him.
Victor didn’t want to hang up. He knew it was time to- he had said what he needed to after all -but there was something soothing about Yuuri’s voice so hushed and sleepy in his ear. Just a few more seconds of it was all he wanted-

“He seems like a great guy,” said Yuuri, voice thick through something Victor couldn’t name. “You’ve got yourself a great guy.”

He was reiterating, but why, Victor wasn’t sure.

“Yeah,” Victor agreed. “But still. He shouldn’t have tried to get you to talk about us. There are lines he shouldn’t cross, and that was one.”

“I didn’t mind, Victor,” Yuuri assured him, voice lifting in spirits. “Really. I would have wanted to know if that were me.” An ambulance sped right by underneath him, loud and furious. “Are you outside? Victor, it’s freezing-”

“I’m fine, I’m fine,” Victor told him. “I’ve got a robe on.”

Victor wasn’t sure, but he could swear he heard Yuuri stifle a chuckle. In that moment, his heart grew twice its size.

“You’re going to get sick,” Yuuri warned him. “Go inside.”

“I don’t want to wake him,” said Victor. “He’s a light sleeper and he might hear me.”

Upon the arrival of a deafening silence between them, Victor decided that maybe that wasn’t the best thing for him to say. Their conversation felt like it was tainted. Dirty and wrong because Sergei wasn’t aware it was happening.

“That’s- um, maybe I should go then,” Yuuri told him. “You should get back to him.”

Victor knit his brows and frowned. “No, Yuuri-“

“I have to go, Victor. Say hi to your family for me, okay? And-“ Yuuri choked on his words, swallowing hard to pass them through. “Remember to take care of yourself. Goodnight.”

He hung up before Victor could say anything.

the next day

“And then I misunderstood him and what he was asking and told him that I never slept with Victor and- and I could see it in his eyes- he was judging me and I don’t think I blame him for it I acted a mess,” Yuuri sunk into Seung Gil and Phichits bed, between them like a child. The couple shared a concerned look between them. Phichit spoke first.

“You...you never slept with him?” he asked Yuuri cautiously. Yuuri groaned and covered his face with his hands.

“That’s really what you want to focus on?” He asked them, voice muffled. “Out of everything?”

“Well, I mean, I always thought you and he went at it like rabbits-”

Yuuri groaned more loudly and Seung Gil laughed. They both gave him a squeeze on his shoulders, as a sign of reassurance that he could proceed with his story.
“Anyway, he called me. Late at night,” he told them. “And he apologized for his fiancé and then we kinda joked around. But then he told me that he was outside on his terrace because he didn’t want Sergei to know he was calling me and it just felt really wrong to be on the phone with him so I said goodbye and hung up.”

“So he still wants you?” Seung Gil spoke up from the papers he was reading. Yuuri looked at him and squinted.

“Wha-what? I can’t bel- Seung Gil you- Can you believe? N-no!” Yuuri struggled to form a rational sentence, stumbling through about six different ones to try and form one coherent one. “Can you believe him, Phichit?” He went red in the face and sat up. “Wow- ‘so he still wants you?’ Jesus Christ! Can you believe this guy?” Yuuri said mocking him. Phichit and Seung Gil looked at one another and sighed simultaneously.

“Yuuri,” Phichit started.

“I know what you’re going to ask and yes, obviously there are still feelings there,” he said jumping to conclusions. “But there isn’t anything I could do about it now- he’s getting married for Christ’s sake.” Yuuri frowned and looked up to Phichit and Seung Gil. “I’m being crazy aren’t I?”

“No,” Phichit said.

“A little bit,” Seung Gil said at the same time. Phichit hit his arm lightly. “Alright, maybe not. It is before breakfast though and you’re being a little intense.”

“How am I being intense?”

“You burst into our home with the spare key we gave you for emergencies, ate my breakfast through tears, and demanded we get back to bed to talk it out,” Seung Gil said. “I have no problem with any of the other stuff, but I worked really hard on that french toast, Yuuri. I really wanted to eat it.”

Yuuri looked at him, perplexed and sat up. After some a couple of tense seconds, Seung Gil cracked a smile and laughed. Yuuri rolled his eyes and laid back down.

Seung Gil kissed Phichit and pat Yuuri’s cheek as he got up from bed. “I’m going to go make more french toast. I’m no good at this advice thing.”

Yuuri asked for extra powdered sugar, and Seung Gil only smiled, almost as if saying he already knew.

He turned to Phichit and took Seung Gil’s place. They sat in the warmth of the bed without speaking. Phichit and Yuuri never really had a use for words between them. It felt good to Yuuri to be able to just sit and think with someone beside him.

“I kinda hate myself,” Yuuri admitted, seemingly out of nowhere. “I think I really do.”

“Why’s that?” Phichit asked him, laying his head on his shoulder.

“I’m jealous,” he answered with a wavering voice. “Of him and his drop-dead-gorgeous thespian fiancé and their perfect little life in Paris- Did you know they bought a home together in Paris? Apparently, they spend every summer there? Up and down Parisian streets with all white outfits and Makkachin on a cute little pink leash- God!”

“You googled them?”
“Just because Sergei googled me! I wasn’t going to initially but then I got to thinking and thought it was just fair that if he felt the need to learn all about me, so could I.” Yuuri bit his lip and tried to keep the tears in. Now that he had started, there would be no stopping the word vomit spewing from his mouth. “I’m pretty sure I still love him? I love him? So much? And it really hurts- like, right in my chest- because he’s getting married!” That last sentence was followed by incomprehensible crying and hiccups. Phichit took Yuuri into his arms and tried his best to comfort him. It wasn’t much, but having Phichit there pulled Yuuri back in if he went too far into his own thoughts. There was no telling what could happen to him if he reached his limit.

“It’s okay, let it all out,” Phichit smoothed his hair out and laid his cheek on the top of Yuuri’s head. “You’re gonna be okay.”

There wasn’t anything he could do now. Yuuri had lost the only possible love of his life to someone else.
Someone more deserving.

More willing to be Victor’s completely.

Someone more than enough. More than he was.

Yuuri closed his eyes and fell further into Phichit and the bed, hugging his friend tightly.

He was closing in on 30 years. 30 long years. Yuuri was old. Five years back he thought he’d have his shit together...living somewhere with someone he loved more than anything and building a family. If he wanted, of course.

But instead, he was laying in bed, in his friends home, waiting for his boyfriend to make them breakfast, and crying about someone who was as much his as was a long past dream of stability. Things weren’t ideal. He needed to change.

Yuuri needed to move on.

Chapter End Notes

Let me know what y'all think :)

Sorry it took so long to update too, school’s been stressful :/
friends (((won’t love me like you)))

Chapter Summary

There it hung, beneath a plant hanging in a macrame pot, leaves and vines dangling just above his eyes. Victor’s breath caught in his throat each time he saw it. Heart clenched and blood boiled with passion.

Chapter Notes

Yes, I know it’s 1:34 am.
Yes, I know I updated like a week ago.
Yes, I know this chapter is short.
I’m sorry

See the end of the chapter for more notes

May: the following spring

In his dreams, Yuuri found Victor every single night. Draped in moonlight, or before the halo of a blinding sun. Sometimes in gardens and sometimes on the beach. Once, he even dreamt they’d found themselves at the MET gala, even though Yuuri hadn’t attended one since he quit the business. They danced the night away in between stars. There was a longing in his subconscious unbeatable by any kind of meditation or command from himself to stop thinking about Victor. But his mind persisted and put Victor into every crevice of his dreams. It said something about what Yuuri was feeling.

They hadn’t seen each other in months, but in an attempt to reconcile, Yuuri and Victor decided to try and keep in touch, even if just through texts and social media. All with Sergei’s consent of course. The last thing Yuuri wanted to do was affect their relationship in any way.

Even with these intentions, Yuuri couldn’t help but remember just why he fell in love with Victor. Sometimes it felt like the first couple of months they knew each other. Back when they were both single and nothing was quite as messy as it had turned out.

It happened when Victor sent him a silly joke or pictures of Makkachin running through St. Petersburg (God, Yuuri missed him so much). His heart fluttered especially when Victor would remember their time difference and text Yuuri in the morning, telling him to go to bed. Sometimes Yuuri wouldn’t be awake when Victor texted him and the other way around, but there was an understanding between them both, that they were never intentionally being ignored.

Another good thing to come out of their rekindled friendship was that they had shoulders to cry on again, even if not physically. They had long and introspective conversations about their current states and vented whenever necessary. Sometimes Victor would just send Yuuri one long “ughhhhhhh” and all Yuuri could do was send a meme back to make him laugh or even respond with the same thing, if that’s how he was feeling. It all made Yuuri feel like a teenager again. Staying up late...texting his crush all night long. Except, you know, it all led to nothing. No big reveal of emotions. No big rejection or acceptance. Just jokes until the end.
Until the wedding.

That's where things began to be awkward for Yuuri.

In getting to know Victor again, Yuuri inevitably had to get to know Sergei. Accepting that they were a package deal now wasn’t the weirdest thing for him. No. The weirdest thing was realizing that Sergei would always be there. When they spoke. When they texted. When they facetimed. One of his worst moments realizing this was during that past Christmas break, when Yuuri got an incoming facetime from Victor during their little holiday party in Paris. Everyone was there. Chris and his family, Mila and Sara, Alyona and Alexi, and all of Victor’s brothers and their wives and children. Victor told him he called to check in and make sure Yuuri was enjoying his Christmas with the Lee-Chulanonts and the rest of their gang, but Yuuri could see it in his eyes. The same longing he’d looked at Yuuri with since they met. He missed him, as far as he was. Yuuri couldn’t help but wonder if Victor had been missing him all this time. Wanted to look at him like that. The same loving, destined look…

It had never gone away. Not once.

Regardless of that little fact, they chatted away with one another, separate from each of their parties giggling like fools and drunk on hot wine. He remembered thinking where Sergei was. Maybe he was sitting in front of Victor or next to him. Maybe he was sitting with his back to him, but listening intently. It freaked Yuuri out. Even though he knew Sergei was “completely fine” with it, he couldn’t help but feel a little guilty. Of what, he didn’t know. But he pushed those feelings to the back of his mind and kept acting like a lovesick fool. Thinking back on it, Yuuri should have laughed, about how foolish he acted when he spoke to Victor.

While he was taking a sip of his wine, Yuuri said something to make him laugh and Victor half choked on the liquid. His face went red and his coughs were hollow, like they hurt him. Yuuri laughed at first, but then real concern grew in him when it began to take Victor too long to get himself back under control. He asked him if he was okay, still mid laugh, but was cut short by Sergei, who was instantly by his side, lovingly patting him on the back, speaking so softly in French Yuuri couldn’t have made out what he said even if he’d spoken English. He watched as they looked at each other with nothing but love and adoration between them. He should have said goodbye and hung up then, but for some reason Yuuri didn’t. He just watched them from the weird angle Victor had left him in on a nearby table and tried his hardest not to make a single noise to disturb their peace. Eventually, after peppering kisses on each other, Victor remembered Yuuri was still there and apologized, blushing like a child caught in the middle of doing something he wasn’t meant to.

Yuuri thought about that occurrence all the time. Especially on days, like the one he was having, when life seemed pointless without love.

He was in the middle of a date, with some guy who owned the catering company Chris used for all of his events. DJ, that was his name (one Yuuri hated), was nice enough, but all he knew what to talk about were sports and food. Also, he smelled like expensive cologne, and usually Yuuri wouldn’t have minded (he loved him a good cologne), but on that particular night he was feeling on edge and it annoyed him. DJ hadn’t noticed Yuuri’s attitude yet and was going on, conversing with him about the different kinds of garlics there were and the best uses for each.

Needless to say, Yuuri wanted to ram his fork into his own arm and excuse himself from the date by going to the hospital. It would be easy, but not very practical.

“Dicing can be done in so many ways- Like this! Look at this beautiful sauce!” DJ exclaimed, pointing to the tiny bowl of sauce next to Yuuri’s meal. Yuuri entertained him dn made big eyes at the bowl, shaping his mouth into a little ‘o’.
Yuuri loved to think of Victor in times like this, purposely excluding Sergei and everyone between them.

He looked out of the window behind DJ and past the hostess greeting people at the door of the restaurant. Yuuri pushed his glasses back to a more secure place on his nose and held in a sigh. Outside, a couple bundled themselves up before heading off into the rainy New York night. He noticed the coat on one of their bodies and thought back to years ago, when he had agonizingly been pushed away from Victor. He had been wearing one just the same…

An approaching body brought him back to the table and away from the past. A young girl, no older than 17, smiled at him, eyes wide like the moon. “Uh- um… Hi. You’re Yuuri Katsuki, right?”

Yuuri smiled back at her and nodded. “I am. How can I help you?”

She squealed a little and bit her lip in excitement. “Oh my God! I’m a really big fan- I’m a model too and you’re like- wow! You’re so amazing. I followed you from the beginning. Ever since that first campaign-You were my inspiration! Still are- I can’t believe I’m meeting you. Can I get a picture?”

Yuuri nodded happily and got up, giving her a hug before posing for a selfie, and then a full body picture taken by his date. The girl hugged him one more time, then excused herself, running off to her own booth in the restaurant.

When Yuuri turned back to his dinner and his date (in that order), he noted the discerned look on DJ’s face. He raised an eyebrow, as if asking if there was a problem and pulled a smile from tight lips.

“Yes?” Yuuri asked when he didn’t say anything. “What is it?”

“Does that happen often?” DJ prodded at his pasta and looked at Yuuri as if he were from a different planet.

Yuuri laughed. “Pfft! No! That’s… crazy…”

It happened every once in awhile. Not often, but it wasn’t rare for him to go out for milk and have to take a couple of selfies every now and then.

“Sometimes,” Yuuri reiterated. “But not a lot.”

“Oh,” DJ said, eating a little.

They didn’t talk much after that, and Yuuri didn’t mind.

After they had their dinner, they each hailed different cabs and went home, awkward goodbyes with kisses on the cheek as their last memory of each other. Yuuri was sure they would never see one another again.

When he got home, and after getting his mail, the first thing he did was call Chris to tell him how everything went. It was only 9:30, so he doubted he was asleep.

“So? How was it?” Chris asked him, skipping all formalities. “Not good, I’m guessing?”

Yuuri put the mail down, took his shoes off one by one at the door, phone between shoulder and ear, arm holding him against the wall. “Why would you guess that?” Yuuri asked him, smiling at the wall informó of him.
“Well, if things had gone well you would have waited until the following morning,” Chris said, then paused. “If you know what I mean.”

“Yeah, I get it.” Yuuri tossed his keys onto a nearby table and sighed. “I just don’t get it. They all seem so nice in the beginning and then the date falls apart halfway through. I mean, is it me? Am I the problem?”

Chris, Yuuri figured, pondered the thought in silence. “Could be. Then again, they’ve got big shoes to fill. Plus, it’s hard for you to get along with most people right off the bat. You didn’t call me Chris until we knew each other for a couple of months and we were just friends.”

He shuffled all the way to his room, past the kitchen and living room, and only briefly stepping into the bathroom for a makeup wipe. He rubbed one side of it over his face, focusing on the brown eyeliner and bronze shadow on his lids. “Yeah, that could be it. I think I’m just going to let things be the way they are. If someone comes along, that would be nice, but it’s exhausting trying so hard to fall in love.”

“Oh no, I had so many more friends to introduce to you!”

“That sounds a little sarcastic,” Yuuri told him, laughing faintly. He plopped down onto his bed and turned on his back. “But I think DJ was the last one for me. My friend Jed is single, though. Maybe we can help him out?”

“Wouldn’t be the same…” Chris moved about on the other end of the call and sighed. “I think I want another baby, Yuuri.”

“Hey, that’s great!” Yuuri said, sitting back up, engaged. “Addie would love another baby in the house.”

And just like that, Yuuri spent an hour talking about babies and nursery furniture and whether or not he would adopt this time around (he would), rather than get another surrogate. Then Mason, his husband, got home and Chris told Yuuri he had to go talk things out with him then. Yuuri said his goodbyes and hung up.

In the semi-darkness of his room, Yuuri pulled his knees up to his chest on his bed and sighed. Silence flowed from room to room in his apartment, lifeless and cold. He wished he had someone….Wished someone would have him.

An old pain ran through him, one he had felt too many times to be unfamiliar.

Yuuri brushed it off and decided to grade a couple of papers before going off to shower. He got up from bed and walked back to the living room, where he picked up his school bag and other folders. Out of the corner of his eye, on the table where he had set down his mail, among bills and pizza coupons, was a crisp, pure white and silver envelope, shimmering in the pale moon glow that filtered in from outside.

Yuuri walked to the table, footsteps quiet and nimble. The wood floors beneath his feet felt colder than they had and the air more stiff. The light and airy decor of his home felt like a cage suddenly. He knew what it was...knew it would come soon, but it was still hard for him to take in.

His face went red. Hands clammy. Heart racing.

Yuuri picked up the wedding invitation carefully. Flat on his palms. It felt heavy like a stone. Hot like an ember. All he wanted to do was rip it up, but of course that wasn’t what he did. Instead, he undid the ribbon it was wrapped in, gently, and unfolded the thick paper. It was simple and it was
beautiful. It wasn’t anything but what Yuuri expected. He ran his fingers over their names, embossed in platinum and didn’t dare read anything else. Both because he didn’t need to and because he didn’t think he’d be able to handle the reality of the way things had turned out.

He put it down and walked back to his bag and folder, set on getting his mind off of Victor’s wedding.

It was all he could do.

________________

Russia: One Month Later

The wedding was in August. It was set and planning was in motion. Victor’s mother and Lilia, as well as his father who occasionally gave them his opinion, were all working themselves day after day to make sure that the wedding would be magical and beautiful. Everything anyone could want.

But everything—from the stress of picking the entrees and desserts, to getting into shape, to wondering if this was the right thing to do—was snowballing into something too big for Victor to handle alone. Alone being the key word.

Typically, he’d complain to Chris, but he was busy with his own life and Yuuri was even an option since Yuuri wasn’t completely inept at reading between the lines. Talking to his parents would be awkward and Mila and Sara would be of no help. If he even brought it up to Sergei things could quickly take a turn for the worst.

That was why he found himself in the middle of St. Petersburg, walking with Yuri and Makkachin, discussing his life with an eight year old, eating his stress away one pirozhki at a time.

“And sometimes I wonder why I never pursued a career in sports. I was plenty good at a number of different ones. Basketball could have been good, but I doubt I’m tall enough to be a pro.”

Yuri nodded, walking along next to him. He had grown quite a bit, but was still pretty small for his age group. Victor blamed it on Yuri’s hatred for milk and meat, but Mila would remind him that most of their family was short, so that wasn’t a likely reason for his height.

“You’re not short, but I’ve seen you play basketball. I don’t think you would’ve had made it either way,” Yuri told him, biting into a pirozhki of his own.

“And why not?” Victor asked him.

“I don’t think you could have built a basketball career on dribbling alone.”

Victor pouted and shook his head. They walked in silence around the shopping mall, going into stores and stopping at kiosks every now and then. They each had a good number of bags in their arms which was most likely a sign that they should go home, but Victor wasn’t in the mood to deal with any wedding planning or Sergei’s questions on what color looked best with the cream colored roses that would line the pews of the church. It made his stomach whirl and vision cross. He was sure it was just nerves, but that was even worse than being annoyed. If he was nervous, there was no way for him to determine his actions.

“I’m cold,” Yuri told him, tugging on his coat to get Victor’s attention. “Can we go home? I wanna see Aunt Alyona before we leave tomorrow.”

“How about we invite her to dinner? I know a great place just down the street,” Victor said, hoping to convince him. Yuri motioned to Makkachin and raised an eyebrow. “I know the owner, I’m sure
she’d be fine with him eating with us.” Yuri sighed.

“Okay,” he told Victor.

They called Alyona to let her know their plans and proceeded to walk down the street to a cozy, little hole in the wall restaurant.

_The Troubadour_

The owner, Victor’s old college friend, was happy to let Makkachin dine with them, being as there weren’t many other patrons in there.

He and Yuri settled into a booth, propped open their menus, and waited for Victor’s mother. It took twenty minutes for Alyona to make her way to the restaurant, dressed in her suit having just gotten out of work. Victor and Yuri stood, greeting her with hugs and kisses. Scooting into the inner part of the booth, Yuri invited her to sit with him.

“How are you, sweetness? I haven’t seen you in so long,” she told Yuri, pressing a kiss on his forehead as she took the seat he offered her.

“M’okay, just been busy with school.”

They ordered and conversed while they waited. It was mostly Yuri and Alyona speaking though, Victor stayed silent and played with Makkachin for most of the time. He only replied with one word answers and kept a steady gaze on the red walls of the restaurant, moving from picture to picture of famous patrons who had visited once before.

He looked for it, taking his time in reaching the place the picture would surely be. Victor liked to tell himself he came to the restaurant for the food, but truly, behind five walls of denial, Victor knew exactly why he frequented the place.

There it hung, beneath a plant hanging in a macrame pot, leaves and vines dangling just above his eyes. Victor’s breath caught in his throat each time he saw it. Heart clenched and blood boiled with passion.

Yuuri Katsuki looked back at him with crinkled eyes and a tired expression, adorned in a thick wool sweater and grey hat so big it slid just past his hairline, so invested in the bowl of chowder before him he almost looked like he was drowning. He had visited _The Troubadour_ three years prior, when he was still working as a model. Not that he had told Victor. Not that Victor had even known at the time. No, he had just become aware of the picture five months prior to his present visit. His friend had invited him and Sergei for a meal to celebrate some milestone in her career, and it had been the first thing he saw when he arrived. Bright and beautiful, as it had remained each time Victor came back to see it under the ruse of hunger.

Yuri excused himself and walked to the bathroom, leaving him and his mother alone. Alyona looked him over and smirked.

“You could just ask to take a picture of it, you know. Better yet, you could just google him,” she said sipping at her drink as if she hadn’t just busted him. “I’m sure there are plenty of photographs for you to pick from.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” Victor told her. “I was just gazing at the plants.”

“Sure, sure…” she let him win. But it was never that easy with Alyona Nikiforova. “Is he coming to the wedding?”
Victor sighed and leaned back into the booth. “Yes, we just received his RSVP a couple of days ago.”

“Oh good, maybe you’ll make your last ditch effort to put an end to this.”

Victor wanted the world to swallow him up.

“Mama…” he groaned. “You can’t say things like that-”

“I can if I’m right,” Alyona told him. “I hope, at least.”

His mother had been like this from the beginning. Alyona felt deeply that marrying Sergei was a mistake- a grave one. She still urged Victor to pursue Yuuri. Told him that she knew love when she saw it and that they had it. Sergei had no idea, but those kinds of things slipped through whenever Alyona was drinking, so Victor had to be cautious in those situations.

Victor shook his head in frustration, digging his nails into his palms. “That’s an awful thing to say. Considering you’re planning this entire thing.”

“I only say it because I care.”
Victor rolled his eyes.

She shrugged and perked up at the sight of their food arriving to the table. The conversation ended there, as Yuri arrived not too long after that. They sat in silence, mostly, only taking the time to talk about the weather every now and then.

Victor went home to Sergei that night, hesitant and feeling guilty for some reason. They did nothing interesting in particular. Just greeted each other and asked how each of their days had gone. After, Sergei excused himself, kissing Victor on the cheek and going off to bed, while Victor stayed in the living room. They did nothing special that night. Nothing special at all.

If only they had known it would all come crumbling down in a matter of weeks.

Chapter End Notes

please please please, let me know what y’all think in the comments. Any ideas on what happens?
**you're way too sweet (to leave me for so long)**

Chapter Summary

Victor tried to smile, “I don’t really know why I’m crying—”

That didn’t matter.

Yuuri wiped his face clean of both tears and rain, smoothed out his wet hair and helped him out of his wet clothes and shoes, and into a hotel robe. It all felt so primal. Natural… easy.

Chapter Notes

uhhhhhhhhhhhhh im stressing out about college apps but somehow I found the time to write 8k words for this chapter. I hope you all like it, it's getting a smidge fluffier than before, so that's good!

Also, I saw some of you freaking out about a lack of an "angst with a happy ending" tag and I just want to say, I would never put either yall or myself through something like depriving Yuuri and Victor a happy ending, so no worries. I think I erased the old tag when I was adjusting some of the other tags, but it's there now so everything's gucci!

Also! I'm gonna link yall to my writing playlist for this fic. It should be in the description, so check it out, my dudes :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

**August- Paris**

Victor held Sergei’s face in his hands and planted a kiss on his nose, sweet and soft, before 20 of their 200 wedding guests. By their adoring reaction, Victor could tell that the practice dinner was going great.

He released his fiancé and raised his glass of champagne, offering a toast to their guests and his groom. Victor sat down. With a perched eyebrow, he sipped in subdued silence, conversations being held muting him out of the world. He let his happiness falter. Dipped himself into a pool of isolation and waded. The chandelier above him kept his attention since there was nothing else to do that.

The wedding was in three days. The wedding was in three days. The wedding was in three days. The wedding was in three days. The wedding-

“Victor?” Sergei placed a hand on his shoulder, shaking him awake from his trance. Victor let out a questioning ‘hm?’ and looked up at him. “Are you okay? Are you feeling ill?”

Victor shook his head no and turned back to the chandelier, idly crossing his arms. Chris was sitting three tables away. Mila was two seats down. His mother wouldn’t be good at distracting him. Yuuri
wasn’t even invited to the rehearsal-

“Do you want more champagne?” Sergei touched him again- this time in a way that made Victor’s skin crawl and tightens. It wasn’t the way he had done so, Victor just felt especially antsy that day-what with the stress of the wedding and all. He wasn’t in the right headspace to be around so many people. All of them too close and too loud. “Maybe some water? You seem a little dehydrated-”

Sergei squeezed a little tighter- meaning well, Victor was sure -but he snapped his shoulder away from his touch and said, “I said I’m fine, thank you.”

It was quiet enough for only them to hear the way Victor’s voice plucked at each word, nipping too closely at anger.

Some of the people closer to their table noticed the change in the atmosphere and turned to them, eyebrows high and mighty, ready to place judgment. Victor gave a quiet apology and excused himself from the table.

He walked out into the small balcony of the restaurant and flexed his knuckles, tightening and untightening them to see the blood wash away and back in again. The fresh, afternoon, French air danced around him. It made the trees rustle and flags and banners below and above him wave in excitement. His heart and breathing began to steady. He followed the dance of the wind. Inhale, exhale, hold it for a moment, let it all go.

Victor wondered what Yuuri was up to. He’d arrived in Paris days before, but they’d barely gotten to speak. Each was whisked away for one reason or another every time they got even relatively close. From what Chris had told him when Victor asked, Yuuri spent most of his time visiting old friends in the city and working on class planning for the following school year. Picturing Yuuri, stooped over lesson plans and graphs and charts on how to teach more efficiently, then getting all dolled up to go drinking with his high fashion friends later on at night.

Silk tops and sly smiles played in Victor’s imagination. He smiled at the thought of dancing the night away with Yuuri again, letting his shoulders and head droop, looking down to the streets. He would kill to have that again. He’d give everything up.

“Victor?” Sergei called from behind him.

Victor quickly composed himself and turned around. He made his face twist into one that presented an amused countenance to please his future husband. Heart growing cold again, he replied, “Yes, dear?”

_________________________

Two Days Later

The day had started with a fight over cufflinks.

Sergei was sure he had asked Victor to pack them for him, but there only seemed to be one in his bag. They turned their home upside down trying to find it before the wedding the very next day but came up empty-handed after a couple of hours of searching. Eventually, Victor eased the tension by telling Sergei that he could just use a pair of his spares. That only kept them happy for a short time.

The next problem was all about Victor’s inability to perfect the intricate first dance they had been trying to get right just for the wedding. It wasn’t that Victor couldn’t do it according to Sergei, it was that he didn’t want to. Those passive-aggressive comments went on for a couple of hours as they both tried to relax in separate corners of the living room. It wasn’t until Sergei walked out, then back in with two cups of tea. He placed one before Victor and took the seat opposite him. Victor thanked
him for the tea but didn’t touch it. They just looked at one another. Dead eyes in dead silence. It was like watching a silent film. The emotions expressed on their faces said everything either needed to. Still, one of the had to speak.

Sergei went first.

“I’m very unhappy,” he said, crossing his legs and tilting his head back to look up at the ceiling. Victor raised a brow, pouting. “With everything.”

“Mm,” was all Victor could offer. “Anything I can do to help?”

“That’s the problem,” Sergei said. “You can’t. Not without making me feel like I forced it out of you.”

Victor looked at the ground and frowned. It was coming, much too quickly. He’d be fine— he knew he would—but it still terrified him.

He didn’t respond, leading to Sergei getting up from his seat and marching to their room. Victor heard zippers and thumping and the rustling of hangers, as well as the hypnotic humming Sergei, did when he was feeling contemplative. After about 10 minutes or so, he emerged with a single suitcase and carry on, smile wide but worn, like he was sorry for what he was about to say.

“We’re done. I’m not going to force this,” Sergei admitted. “I should have never tried. You either. We wasted too much of each other’s time. And… I am so sorry it’s taken me this long to realize it, with the wedding and all, but I can’t do this. I can’t love you for the both of us. I’m not going to do that to myself.”

Looking at each other, each man began to cry. Not fully, but noticeably so.

The sun washed over the right side of Victor’s face, making him glow like the moon, with his eyes and the tears in them shining like stars. Big, flowing, streams and deposits of tears ran down his face. Gentle and wet. Victor let out a little sniffle and wiped at his nose with his sleeve.

“I hope you find someone,” Sergei whispered, suitcase in hand, standing in the middle of the doorway. “I know you will, and I wish it was me, but it isn’t…” he took one deep, pained breath in. “...and I can’t stay around pretending like it is. I’m sorry, Victor. I’ll send for the rest of my things tomorrow.”

Sergei waited for Victor to turn to look at him, but he remained motionless. He felt bad for the man—how lonely he was despite all of the people around him. How empty his existence seemed. Sergei wanted to stay. To be by his side. But Victor never cared to share with him just what exactly caused his ailments. There was only so much he could do from the outside looking in.

With a sigh of desperation, he removed the silver band from his finger and walked out of the penthouse and went on his way to the airport, where a plane was waiting to take him back home.

Inside, Victor crossed his legs and looked at the ceiling to floor windows in his living room. Their conversation hadn’t been dramatic. How much drama could come from something so expected? No, Victor had simply listened to what Sergei had to say and let him go with close to no protest, just a slight sprinkling of tears between them.

The sun was sinking into the skyline, inch by inch, minute by minute. He thought about getting up to close the door that led out to the terrace but decided against it. The warm air from outside was comforting. It served as a reminder that he was still there. Still himself. Slightly happier that he had been in the past two years even if he was crying and left at the altar.
Did it count as being left at the altar?

He pondered the thought and decided that, yes, it did. He got up and walked to the kitchen where his phone rested on the countertop. He had no messages. No work emails. Not even spam mail to keep him entertained. He couldn’t even play with Makkachin. He was with Mila and Yuri doing god knows what. Victor was alone. Again.

In retrospect, maybe things were always meant to turn out this way. Maybe he wasn’t meant to be with anyone. He was the exception to love. A loner. A ghost to romance. Aphrodite had not made a son of him-

That was what Victor thought the very minute Sergei uttered the words “we’re done”. They both knew it, it was just a matter of who had the courage to say it first. Victor had hoped it wouldn’t happen until years after the wedding when it would be respectable for them to separate. But a day before the ceremony? That took more courage than he had in his own body.

Victor was glad he said it. There was nothing tying him to that commitment anymore. After all, he couldn’t have a wedding with just one groom. It was off. The wedding was off and there was nothing anyone could do about it.

But he was still alone.

He put on a kettle and sifted through the tea in his cabinets. He was all out of chamomile. All out of green tea too. The only ones left were earl gray and something called a ‘seasonal medley’ - as if anyone knew what that was. He took a packet of chamomile and let it rest in his favorite mug- one that deemed him the world's best uncle, courtesy of Yuri.

Victor guessed he had to have been sitting there in the kitchen for a long while because, after some time of staring at the steam come and go from his cup, an ocean of messages and calls began to pour in from his phone. Chris, his mother, his father, his brothers… even Lilia had all tried to contact him. All asking what had happened and that they were all on their way to his home.

He had to think fast. Where could he go to get away until he felt ready to talk? Where could he just go and sleep without disturbances?

A single ding!, followed shortly by two others, came long after the multitude of messages. It was Yuuri.

So…
Uhhhhh
I heard what happened

Victor wasn’t slow in his response. Yuuri was staying at least five miles from anyone involved in the wedding. He doubted even Chris knew where he was exactly. And no one would suspect him running off to Yuuri. People thought him to be better than that.

It was the perfect plan.

He quickly messaged him back, asking

Is it okay if I visit you?

_____________

A crack of thunder rang through the world outside of Yuuri’s window, loud and clear like a church bell signaling the start of a new hour. He paced back and forth in his slippers, hands deep in his
pockets, waiting for Victor’s knock at his hotel door. He prayed to all that was good and holy that Victor would be discreet in coming to him. If anyone caught sight of them together this early after the wedding was called off, he could only imagine what stories people would come up with.

The sound of the rain outside sent chills up his spine. It had been such a beautiful, warm day just hours before. But it was nighttime now, and there was never any telling what that would be like. Yuuri tightened the waistband of his robe and leaned back against a sofa near the balcony.

A meek knock came from the door, but it was deafening to Yuuri’s ears. All could feel, all he could hear… was his heartbeat beating like a bass drum.

It might have been too early to think about things, but he couldn’t help but feel that maybe the dynamic of his relationship with Victor would change now that he wasn’t going through with the wedding.

He shuffled over to the door and bore his eyes on the face of a man beaten and hollowed by the world.

Victor was soaked from the rain, crying silent waves of frightened and anxious tears. He looked pathetic standing there, shivering and obviously shaken, his eyes trailing on the floor like they were afraid to look anywhere else. He had no coat, no umbrella… not even proper shoes. He was in house slippers, ruined by rainwater. Victor looked up finally, and in a hoarse voice, swallowed hard and said, “H-hey. Uh- He doesn’t want to get married,” Victor said as he stood in the hallway, clothes dripping wet and eyes red from all of the crying. “He’s on a plane right now and he- He doesn’t- I don’t either. I- I wasn’t sure who to turn to because everyone was so involved and busy with us it felt like- like it’d be disrespectful for me to just show up crying and asking them to go back home. So I came here. Because you love me. And I love you. And I trust you and I like the way your blankets smell when I’m in them- and I feel like a gun just went off right by my head-” he gestured to his skull, fingers pinched and then expelled from each other. Yuuri moved quickly.

He had been there before.

Victor’s breathing was erratic, like waves crashing and pulling against the sands of a beach during a storm. Yuuri pulled Victor into him, hoping to be the comfort he sought to find. In between tears and shudders, Victor, in his same gentle manner, asked Yuuri if he could stay for the night.

That was all it took for Yuuri to forget everything else. He nodded yes.

All of the doubts about the nature of their relationship and the public perception of what Victor could have possibly wanted to do with him… they were erased. Gone. Yuuri just wanted to help him.

Victor tried to smile, “I don’t really know why I’m crying-”

That didn’t matter.

Yuuri wiped his face clean of both tears and rain, smoothed out his wet hair and helped him out of his wet clothes and shoes, and into a hotel robe. It all felt so primal. Natural… easy.

Yuuri sat Victor down on his bed and rummaged through his suitcase, pulling the biggest T-shirt he had out and handing it to him. Unfortunately, it was an old NYU spirit week shirt from his first year, many years ago, and had been through just about every incident Yuuri could imagine.

He apologized as he handed Victor a pair of gym shorts and towel, directing him directly into the bathroom after, but Victor didn’t mind. He was just happy. Incredibly happy. Too happy for words. Granted, he still felt like the weight of the word was on his shoulders, but Yuuri was helping to ease
Victor simply smiled at Yuuri with wobbly lips and nodded along to all of the instructions Yuuri was giving him. There was something about being with him that just felt like home.

“I’ll order you something warm, okay?” Yuuri told him as he slipped into the bathroom. “Now, get yourself nice and warm.”

So, he did. And it felt like an eternity before he finished. When he finally stepped out, he found Yuuri sitting in bed with a tray of food-Tomato soup, crackers, a bowl of cubed fruit, and a glass of fruit juice. Yuuri pat the post next to him and Victor obliged. He took the place offered to him and dug into the food. Victor hadn’t noticed how hungry he was.

“Thank you, Yuuri.” Victor put down his spoon and leaned against the headboard. Yuuri joined him and nodded. “I don’t know what would’ve happened if they’d found me.”

Yuuri chuckled, “You would have had support? Not that I mind you being here, but I’m sure your family is worried. Maybe you should call to let them know you’re okay?”

“You know how they can be,” Victor sighed. “I know it’s a little selfish, but they’ll want me to make calls and apologize to everyone who came and I don’t think I’m ready to do that...I just need time. It hurts more than I thought it would.”

The reality of what happened occurred to Yuuri then. Victor was left just a day before his wedding by someone he loved for three years. He was overwhelmed by everything. The very last thing he could have wanted was to be surrounded by all of his relatives and close family friends. Which was probably the reason he came to Yuuri: his hotel was furthest from everyone else.

“Well, you’re welcome to stay as long as you like. Let Sergei deal with those calls,” Yuuri told him. Victor half smiled, eyes drooping, landing on his hands. Yuuri could see the sadness in his eyes. He couldn’t imagine what he had to be feeling. “You know Victor, it’s his loss. You’re a great man. Anyone would be lucky to have you.”

Yuuri laid down and crossed an arm over his eyes to avoid watching the repercussions of his words. Victor, as clear as day, felt his heart stop for a second. Quickly brushing away those feelings, he laid down next to Yuuri and cleared his throat. There was about a foot of distance between them on that bed, but it felt like nothing to them. It was unbearable to not be able to reach over and hold the other.

Victor turned his head to look at Yuuri, gazing for as long as he could while Yuuri couldn’t see him staring. Swept away, as if in a dream, Victor let himself soften. The tension he had been holding in his shoulders disappeared, leaving behind only slight traces of the stress that had been.

Yuuri could feel his eyes on him. It made him blush, really, but in a good way that made his heart feel larger than life and inspired. He slowly moved his arms from his eyes and turned to look at Victor too. They stayed that way, just making eyes at each other until Victor broke eventually, and just smiled up at the ceiling.

“I want to leave the city,” Victor told him. Yuuri looked at the ceiling as well.

“Why?”

“I don’t know,” Victor admitted. “Guess I’m running away again.” Yuuri snorted. “I can’t go home to St. Petersburg… New York would be the first place they’d look too.”

Yuuri’s gears began to turn. He turned to the side and propped himself up on his arm. He smiled at
Victor with that look in his eye he got when he thought of something ingenious. Victor looked at him and asked, “What? What is it?”

“I was going to visit my parents after the wedding… in Japan. I’m a day early, but we could go. Together. If you like?” Yuuri beamed at the thought of Victor getting to see where he grew up.

Victor shook his head, excited, and sat up. Yuuri did the same, reaching for his phone. They booked a completely new flight for midnight that night, and quickly realized something that threw their plan out of whack. “What about your passport? And… like… luggage?”

“We can stop by my house. I’m sure they’ve left already, so we should be fine. What time is it?” Victor asked.

“10:30.”

“Are you sure you want to do this? A plane? In the middle of the night? Don’t you mind?” Victor knew it had been Yuuri’s idea, but he felt a need to make sure he wouldn’t back out.

“Is it going to make you happy?”

Victor smiled shyly and turned to look at his hands again, face going red. He didn’t answer, but they both knew. Yuuri scrunched up his face, happy as could be to still be able to create that reaction in Victor.

“I’m sure,” he told Victor. Yuuri jumped off the bed and began to pack, asking Victor to help him get his things in order so they could get going.

_____________

Mila was left to patrol around Victor’s place just in case he came back. It was her duty to confront him and make sure he was alright. From there, she would turn him over to his mother. That was the plan.

It’s what she should have done when she saw him slip in through the front gate, creeping around in the dark of the night in gym shorts and a shirt that was almost too small. It was what she would have done, but then she saw Yuuri with him and it just felt wrong to think about doing anything to ruin the fun they looked to be having.

She wondered if that was the reason for Sergei walking out. It was likely, but she couldn’t be sure. What she was sure of though, was the cackling that ran up and down the street, she was parked in. Mila felt like she hadn’t heard Victor laugh like that in years.

They entered the residence and remained for about thirty minutes until they walked out with a bag rolling behind them each. Yuuri had what seemed to be a passport in hand, while Victor carried his favorite carry on across his chest. Mila deducted they were going on a trip. She just didn’t know where. Or when for that matter.

But that was best, for them at least. The less she knew, the less her family would be able to get out of her. After all, she knew what was most important. Victor was happy and with Yuuri. Of all people!

That meant so many things. All of them good.

With that in mind, Mila watched them climb into a taxi and drive away into the night, no doubt off somewhere infinitely better than Paris. She was satisfied with that.

Mila turned on her car and made her way home to tell her family just what she had learned and nothing more.
Victor slept through the entire plane ride. At one point Yuuri grew concerned because when most people who had slept began to wake up, and Victor was still deep in sleep. After nudging him slightly just to check he was still alive, his worries were alleviated.

Then the plane landed and it was nighttime. Yuuri had officially not seen the sun for about an entire day. When Victor stumbled out of the airport, entirely awake and energized, Yuuri cursed himself for not waking him up mid-flight to save him from the jet lag.

“It’s fine, Yuuri. Really,” Victor told him, holding tightly to his carry on as they hailed a cab. “You look like you need a nap though, maybe sleep through the ride?”

“No, I can’t,” Yuuri sniffled, eyes already drooping from the lack of sleep. “We’re only taking the cab halfway. We’re going to catch a train after that.”

“That’s fine, I’ll wake you up when we arrive.”

“But what if you need something tran-”

“I’ve learned a little Japanese,” Victor told him in, choppy, but coherent Japanese. Yuuri thought his sleep-deprived brain was playing tricks on him. “Impressed?”

Yuuri rolled his eyes and nodded with a smile. His hair was whisked away in the low summer breeze, making him take notice of just how long it’d gotten during summer break. Making a mental note to have Mari cut it the following day, Yuuri simultaneously spotted a cab just 20 feet from them. The pair walked with all of their luggage, Victor hauling most of it with new found strength, and asked the driver if he was on duty. The driver asked them where they were off to, and soon thereafter they were on their way to the train station.

While driving closer and closer to the coast, Victor could see the ocean glimmering under the brightness of new moon and stars, as well as the spotted ships sailing in the far off distance. Victor fell in love with the waves and the treetops, and the people riding beside the road on their bikes. He fell in love with the buildings and monuments, and even the air that filled him with something like liberation.

“Yuuri, this is beautiful-” he turned to Yuuri, voice a whisper. Next, to him, Yuuri was sound asleep, breathing in and out, head on Victor’s shoulder. Victor just smiled and turned back to look outside.

It took thirty minutes to make it to the train station. He woke Yuuri up as gently as he could, giving him a slight shake of the shoulders before opening the cab door. Yuuri paid the man, still half awake and stood almost lifeless as Victor unloaded their luggage from the trunk of the car. They said goodbye to their driver and made their way underground to the station.

The first thing they saw walking in, on a giant billboard and in posters all around, were pictures of Yuuri posing in different Japanese fashions and in different landmarks on the island. Victor had forgotten for a second that Yuuri was a world-renowned model. Or had been, at least. Yuuri, the boy who spilled his drinks after one too many and reminded him to take his medications. Yuuri who represented life and love and-

Yuuri who was gingerly digging around his carry on for tissues. Yuuri who blew his little button nose with a little shake of his head and smiled when he was done- satisfied with the goo left over on the paper.
Yuuri looked up from the spoiled tissue and looked Victor in the eye, startled. “What? Don’t judge me, I’m pretty sure I picked up that habit from you. So-“

Victor flashed an amused grin, “Not that. We both know I plagued you with that nasty habit. I mean all of this.” He spread his arms and gestured to all of the pictures.

Yuuri blushed, covering his face with his hands like he’d forgotten about the photos. “Oh Jesus, they added more,” he groaned.

Yuuri pinched the center of his brows and sighed, grinning just a little. “Well, uh, you know how Barbados has Rihanna? Um, Hasetsu has me. Not that I’m Rihanna level- because, you know… she’s Rihanna… But they’re… um… very proud… Of me.”

“As they should be,” Victor told him, walking on ahead, appreciating each piece in passing. “Come on now, we’re almost home right?”

Something about the way he said that made Yuuri’s heart lose its pace.

The station was almost abandoned, with only a couple of workers and operators littered here and there. Yuuri bought their tickets and their coffee since he was the only one with the right currency on him. They rolled their bags to the boarding area and waited for the train, set to arrive in five or so minutes.

“So, what was it you did to get them to use you as their poster boy?”

“Nothing- uh, I garnered a tiny bit of fame and the island was struggling somewhat, so I did some promotions and commercials for them. The usual, you know?”

Victor nodded, sipping his coffee. “I still can’t believe you gave it all up.”

“Gave what up?”

“Modeling. Yuuri, you were amazing. People were crazy about you. I read all of these articles and they all pointed to you being the next Naomi Campbell,” Victor tilted his shoulders back like he was stretching. “I never thought you’d quit. It was the last thing I ever thought you’d do.”

“You read about me?” Yuuri asked him, eyes twinkling like stars.

“Well… yeah,” Victor told him. He grew a little shy but managed to keep his head up. “I know we ended a little weird, but I still rooted for you every step of the way.”

Yuuri half smiled, proud, and sighed. “Well, it was lonely at the top. I never got to see my family. People always felt entitled to my life… and you know, the public was unforgiving. There was never room for me to make a mistake. I was stressed,” Yuuri told him. “I’m happier now. I found my niche in life. It feels natural.”

“That’s good,” Victor grinned. “That’s really good, actually. I’m glad you’re happy.”

They shared a smile. A private, shy little thing between them. Yuuri would have fainted from the excitement if it weren’t for the screeching noise up ahead.

In the distance, a train could be heard.

_________

Yuuri called his parents when they were walking up to the onsen steps, to let them know they had
finally arrived. He had sent them a text just before boarding in Paris a day early with someone. They had texted back a number of hearts and smiley faces, along with a message that they would make room in their home to accommodate for them.

Yuuri knocked on the door. Almost immediately, excited little steps could be heard from inside, pitter-pattering their way across the greeting entrance. The door opened, illuminating both their faces in the dim yellow light of the inside. A small woman, who Victor guessed was Yuuri’s mother, enveloped Yuuri into the tightest hug Victor had ever seen. She kissed his cheeks and fussed with his hair, and even wiped away some of the sweat on Yuuri’s forehead with a cloth from her back pocket. Victor just stood back and watched, delighted by the lovely reunion taking place before him. Behind Yuuri’s mother, a man who looked too much like Yuuri not to be his father appeared and greeted Victor, before hugging his son as well.

“Victor, these are my parents,” Yuuri said as he stepped back, giggling. “Hiroko and Toshiya Katsuki.” Yuuri then proceeded to introduce Victor in Japanese. Their eyes lit up with his name. They stretched their hands out for him to shake, and pulled him into a hug when he did.

They walked inside with all of their luggage and stepped through a number of rooms until they reached the very back of the building. This was where the Katsuki’s living quarters were. The rooms were small but very cozy and comfortable. In passing through their living room, Victor spotted a wall of photographs, trophies, and diplomas from both Yuuri and his sister, Mari. He made a mental note to get a good look at them the next morning.

Hiroko walked them to Yuuri’s room, where they would both have to stay until the following day since there was no room ready for Victor yet. She handed them blankets and pillows, wishing them a good night with kisses for each of them.

Like Yuuri, Hiroko was all softness, but the sturdy kind that let you know she could raise hell and part the ocean if she so pleased. They had that same intense glint in their eyes.

“No, come on, Victor,” Yuuri insisted. “You’re the guest here. You can take the bed.”

“Yuuri,” Victor said, dragging his name out to show his refusal. “I’m not going to sleep on your bed knowing you’re exhausted and sleeping on the floor.” Yuuri crossed his arms and plopped his pillow in the space beside the bed. All of the lights were off, except for the hallway light, making it hard for either of them to see, but Victor would have bet good money on Yuuri looking incredibly displeased. Victor sighed. “Fine, why don’t we just share? It’s not like we’ve never shared a bed before.”

Yuuri felt his body run hot. “Uh-um,” he stumbled in his response. He thanked the heavens the lighting was so poor. “O-okay. Let me go change, I’ll be right back.” He ripped open his suitcase and dug for a new pair of pajamas. Victor watched as he scampered down the hallway and into another room.

He closed the door and turned the lights on in Yuuri’s room so that he could change as well. Victor changed in record speed to avoid any other awkward encounters with Yuuri and took a seat on the bed. Taking in the room, he smiled at the thought of Yuuri growing up inside the four walls that surrounded him.
It was so loved and lived in, it made Victor’s heart flutter. Everything from the posters of Yuzuru Hanyu, to the piano, leaned up against the wall, to the books lined up on Yuuri’s desk, to the plushness of his duvet and the cactus that seemed so cared for its flowers were twice the size of any other, hinted at Yuuri’s personality. Everything smelled of him so much it made Victor’s senses go wild. It was like his very own Katsuki Yuuri Museum, full of things for him to inspect and learn about.

Victor got up from the bed and walked over to Yuuri’s desk where a couple of notebooks and novels lay flat on the table. He moved to pick one up but stopped himself. Victor was snooping...technically. That wasn’t right. If he wanted to learn about Yuuri, he could just ask him. Plus, he already knew most of the things about him...if not everything. He stepped back from the desk with a small smile on his face and instead dug into his bag for his phone. His battery was almost gone, so he made a mental note to ask Yuuri for an adapter or a spare phone charger if he had it.

A stream of messages burst at him as soon as he unlocked his phone.

339 unread messages.

Most of them came from his mother, and they really took him on quite a journey in terms of the way they transitioned in the subject matter. They started with:

_Vitya, answer my calls I just want to talk_

And moved to:

_So are you really going to leave me to clean up this mess?_

And:

_Listen, I hope you’re doing okay. I thought about it, and I think you should take some time for yourself. I’ll get S*rg*ei to clean this mess up. I’ll be here when you’re ready. Love you._

(That last one made Victor’s heart swell)

Then:

_So._

_Mila told me she saw you with Yuri._

:)  

_I’m glad you’re finally listening to mama_  

:)  

_Have fun._  

_But not too much fun._  

_Actually, go crazy._  

_If you know what I mean_  

;)

Victor, blushing like crazy at what his mother was implying, laughed a little bit to take some of the edge off and turned his phone off. Just then, Yuuri walked into the room dressed just like he used to when he lived with Victor. He studied Victor’s face for a moment, then noticed the posters on the walls. In turn, Yuuri turned red and ran to the nearest one to try and pull it down.

“These aren’t mine- My cousin lived here for some time and her- Uh-” he tore the edge of the poster in his hurry to take it down. “Fuck! Jesus Christ- Listen, I can explain!”

Victor started to laugh then, voice full and hearty like he hadn’t heard himself laugh in a long, long
time. Yuuri let the poster go, smoothing it back onto the wall, and started to laugh with Victor, quietly at first but then just as loud. It wasn’t until Yuuri heard a soft knock on the other side of the wall that connected his room to Mari’s that he accidentally jumped on Victor, landing them both on the bed, and placed a palm over his mouth to muffle out his laughter. They giggled from that point on, smirks playing on their faces. Yuuri climbed off of him, bashfully turned to get his pillow off the floor where he left it and smiled at Victor.

“I think we should go to bed,” Yuuri said. “Which side do you want?”

“I’ll take the wall,” Victor told him, scooting himself over to the edge. He fluffed his pillow and laid his head down. Yuuri placed himself down gently and waited for awkwardness to take over.

Their limbs met and fused and made the bed just a little warmer, but it wasn’t weird for Yuuri or for Victor. It felt nice, if anything, to know that they were next to one another.

“Wake me up when you do okay?” Yuuri asked him. Victor nodded. “Okay, good night.”

Yuuri fell asleep almost instantly, but it took more for Victor to find it within himself to rip his eyes off of Yuuri. Their bodies were covered in shadows. Skin almost white with the glow from the moon outside. A low hum - the wind, Victor guessed - swallowed the house whole. It was a peaceful night. The branches outside of the window rustled only slightly. Birds only chirped occasionally. Yuuri’s snores reminded Victor of gentler times.

He wished he could have been there with Yuuri under different circumstances. Sleeping next to him for different reasons. Met his parents with a different introduction. No doubt, Yuuri had to tell them that he was running from having to deal with being left at the altar. No doubt they knew about him and how he’d been involved with their son. Maybe they hated him.

No.

Victor stopped himself from thinking any further. He was just stressing himself out. There were better ways to think things through, and obsessing over them in the middle of the night when an angel was sleeping next to him was not one of them.

He nestled into his spot on the bed and turned to look at Yuuri again. A fond feeling flooded his mind.

Victor and Yuuri weren’t who they used to be to each other, but maybe that was a good thing. Victor knew, looking at Yuuri, that they would rise out of their own ashes as something new and beautiful. Something that would help them both heal.

Yuuri woke up that next morning to the intoxicating smell of his mother’s homemade miso soup. He patted the space next to him, to check if Victor was still sleeping, and much to his surprise found him missing. He rushed to the kitchen, passing his father in the hall, telling him to hurry on to breakfast. The voices of his mother and sister could be heard from the kitchen, followed by Victor’s loud laughter. He approached with caution, tiptoeing up to the entrance before peeking in. He watched them, all huddled around their kitchen table, eating and talking like they were lifelong friends.

“Youuri!” Victor greeted him. “Are you hungry?”

Hiroko and Mari looked up from their food and smiled at him. Mari got up and hugged him the proper way you hugged someone you hadn’t seen in more than eight months. She ruffled his hair,
leading him to the table with an arm around his shoulders. He took the seat across from Victor, who
was sat next to his mother, and thanked Mari when she handed him a bowl of food.

“Thank you,” he said, taking a spoonful. “How long have you all been up?”

“A couple of hours. It’s noon,” Mari told him, reaching for a bowl of rice in the middle of the table.

“Noon?” Yuuri asked.

“Yeah, sorry,” Victor smiled innocently. “I knew I said I would wake you up, but you looked so
peaceful. And I knew how tired you were, so I just...didn’t.”

Yuuri smiled at Victor, shoulders relaxing as soon as he looked into Victor’s calming baby blues.
“It’s fine, I needed to rest. I feel a lot better now. Thank you, Victor.”

Victor perked up and nodded, digging back into his food, complementing Hiroko’s cooking in the
process. Yuuri’s mother couldn’t have looked happier to be complimented in the most broken
Japanese she had ever heard. They ate in silence otherwise, only speaking when either Mari or
Hiroko questioned Yuuri about his students and life in the city. Every now and then they would ask
Victor questions too, but both he and Yuuri were quick to change subjects.

The less his family knew, the better.

_______________

Yuuri stepped into the water, toes wiggling themselves into the warm sand. He closed his eyes and
smiled. He felt so content to be back home. He had almost forgotten the way the sun warmed his
skin, just as it had when he was a child. Waves rolled in and out, animated by the afternoon breeze.
He adjusted the cap on his head and turned to look beside him. Next, to him, Victor was squatting
with his hands submerged in the water, long fingers stretching out and curling in.

“You’re so lucky to have grown up here,” Victor told him as he stood back up and wiped his hands
on his swim shorts. “It’s amazing.”

“Yeah,” Yuuri agreed. “I know.”

They had been at the beach all morning and for most of the afternoon- swimming, running and
playing together. They slathered each other with sunscreen and headed out with a picnic basket
shortly after breakfast. Yuuri and Victor had even made an attempt at building a sandcastle, but it
crumbled before they had a chance to decorate it with the shells and leafs Victor had collected.
Regardless, they were having fun. Victor was hell-bent on making the most of their vacation and
Yuuri wasn’t going to fight him on that.

“I know I’ve said this a lot the past couple of hours, but I’m really happy to be here,” Victor said
stepping back. “...with you.”

Yuuri half smiled and rubbed the back of his neck. “Yeah, me too.”

They both looked at their feet, too shy to say anything else.

This had been happening all day. Either one of them would say or do something sweet, or fond, or
endearing and they would both react by blushing like old Victorian women and looking to the
ground for some kind of haven. Yuuri, for example, had blended in a patch of sunscreen on Victor’s
cheek as they arrived to the beach and the moment had been so tender, that both of them weren’t able
to look each other in the eye for a full ten minutes.

“Should we- uh, should we head back?” Victor asked him.

“Yeah, it’s almost dinner time.”

All of their days passed by in that way.

They visited all of the places near to Yuuri’s heart and other tourist attractions in the town, giggling and eating their days away. Ice Castle. The Castle in the middle of the city (one of Victor’s favorite places). Yuuri’s favorite parks. The temple. The seaside (they went there almost daily and just strolled). They had even visited Minako, Yuuri’s mentor, at both her bar and her ballet studio. Victor didn’t have much of a dance background, but they joined in on a class anyway. Yuuri helped Victor straighten out his posture, and Minako helped the children with their steps. While all of that was fun, what really made Yuuri feel like the stars and sky were at his disposal, were the afternoons and nights they would spend together at home. They helped his parents with the onsen and shared all of their meals. They saw each other first thing in the morning and they would be the last thing they saw at night.

One night, when they had one too many drinks after sifting through the Katsuki family albums, Victor pulled Yuuri close and waltzed with him around the living room to an old record his parents kept in a record player by the television. Everyone else had gone to bed, and maybe they should have too, but they kept dancing all through the night, intoxicated by their own passion once the alcohol had passed through their systems. They fell asleep on the floor, in each other’s arms. Neither of them wanted to admit it, but when they woke that morning, they both pretended to sleep just a little longer.

The two weeks Yuuri had set apart for his trip home dwindled away faster than he had hoped, as had his time with Victor. Before he knew it, they were packing up again and booking Victor at ticket home to Russia. They would be flying back alone. Yuuri to one edge of the world and Victor to another.

“Have you seen my other sneaker? I can’t seem to find it…” Yuuri looked underneath his bed and tried to think of where else he could have left his left shoe.

“Maybe at the entrance?” Victor suggested, looking behind Yuuri’s desk and underneath the bottom of his bookshelf.

“No, I already checked- Oh! Here it is!” Yuuri picked up his shoe from a pile of clothes lying on the floor and showed it to Victor, smiling like a kid. “Alright, I think that’s everything I brought. How are you doing on packing?”

“I’m done, I think.” He groaned. “Can we just stay forever? Please?” Yuuri laughed and shook his head. “What about one more week? That’s reasonable, isn’t it?”

“I wish, but school is starting soon and you run a multi-million dollar corporation, I think I’ve kept you long enough,” Yuuri told him, giggling.

“Oh, I’m sure they can do without us,” Victor said, sitting next to Yuuri on the floor. He rested his head on Yuuri’s shoulder and sighed. “I like being here with you better than being stuck in that stuffy building with all of those soulless people anyway.”

“I’m not sure your mother would appreciate you saying that,” Yuuri noted, resting his chin on top of Victor’s head. “But at least Chris isn’t going to be hunting you down for answers.”
“Ooh, I forgot about him. Good luck with that,” Victor laughed.

The room fell silent.

“I guess we should get to bed then, huh?” Yuuri spoke quietly. Victor lifted his head and looked to the ceiling.

“Yeah, we should rest,” he agreed. Victor nudged Yuuri. “I’m gonna miss sleeping next to you. You’re like a human heater. Actually, I could really use you back home. Maybe you could—”

“I’d love to go and keep you warm all of the cold seasons, but then who would teach my children?” Yuuri said getting up. He pulled Victor up with him and zipped up his suitcase.

“We could bring them along. You know, like a season-long field trip.”

They tucked themselves into bed as Yuuri turned off his bedside lamp. Victor pressed himself a little closer to Yuuri and smiled, whispering,

“I’m definitely going to miss this.”

The Next Day—At the Airport

Yuuri stood at his gate and hugged Victor for the third time. His plane was boarding, long before Victor’s, and the idea of not seeing him so frequently anymore was finally starting to sink in. He told himself he wouldn’t cry, multiple times, but that promise to himself was becoming more and more difficult to keep. Now that they had reunited properly after years of being apart, it was hard to let go.

Victor was practically cradling him in his arms, unwilling to let him go. Unlike Yuuri, he was tearing up shamelessly. “When am I going to see you again?” he asked.

Yuuri buried his face in Victor’s shirts and offered him the muffled answer of, “Christmas? Maybe? I don’t k-know,” Yuuri said, choking up.

Behind them, Yuuri’s family watched on, perplexed and touched by the two fumbling lovebirds in front of them. Hiroko snuck in a photo of the two with her phone, intent on using it for their wedding at some point in the future. She had been doing this for the past two weeks, and each time anyone questioned her, she would give the same response: “They’ll want them someday.”

That was enough to shut both Mari and Toshiya up.

“We can facetime. When we go to bed and when we wake up. Okay?”

Mari Katsuki rolled her eyes. They were so melodramatic. So gushy about everything. She snorted as Victor picked Yuuri up, and shook her head. Yuuri dared to tell her they were just friends. She was happy for him though, from what Phichit told her, the love between Yuuri and Victor was years in the making. Even if they weren’t calling themselves boyfriends, it was apparent that was what they were. Or were going to be, anyway.

Toshiya nudged Mari, telling her to mind her face and smiled at his son and his weird Russian boyfriend. He almost wished he had asked Victor more questions about himself.

It was time for Yuuri to go, but Victor didn’t want to accept that. He couldn’t accept that. Reluctantly, Yuuri pried himself away from Victor and took a somber step back. They looked at each other with sad eyes until the last call announcement was made for Yuuri’s flight. He waved to his family and Victor, saving one last smile for the latter.
Once Yuuri disappeared into the terminal, Hiroko walked up to Victor and wrapped an arm around him, saying something about going to see him off next. Victor nodded and walked with them across the airport.

Victor knew he would see Yuuri again. The logical part of his brain told him that time from then until Christmas would go by quickly, but his heart was yearning to run after him as soon as he watched him go. Russia and the States were so far away- so distant they would see the sun and stars at different times. There were so many things Victor wanted to tell Yuuri. Things you couldn’t just say over the phone. He would have to wait. Patiently. For four or so months. He thought about it as he sat with the Katsuki’s waiting for his plane to board, eyebrows knit and stern.

If loving Yuuri would take time, goddammit, Victor had all the time in the world.

Chapter End Notes

We're so close to the end!!!!AHHH

Leave me a comment of encouragement or whatever yall want (i love reactions hint hint)
See yall next update!
when I run out of road (you bring me home)

Chapter Summary

*Love was their symphony. Even if they were a million miles away from one another, the words didn’t lose their effect on him. They never could. What they shared between them was too strong. Too much for distance to limit.*

Chapter Notes

Here this chapter be--
Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Yuuri sank into his bed, finally home after an exhausting 14-hour flight from Japan to the United States. Outside, the gentle pitter-pattering of rain on roofs and windows fought the howling of the wind. It sounded somber and strange, like a song half-finished. There was no light. The skies were covered in clouds. It was dark, even if it was daytime, but Yuuri didn’t mind, surprisingly. He thought it was nice to listen to the storm outside. It was keeping him awake when his body was begging him to sleep.

He turned over and faced his bedroom wall, covered in photographs. Phichit, Leo, Guang Hong, Minami, Yuko, and Seung Gil made up almost every single one, except for family photos. They were great, and he missed them while he was gone, but there was one face he wanted to see more than anything.

Victor.

Years ago, he had packed up all of his photos of Victor, refusing to have him be any part of his life. It was painful to look back at happy and bright times when their relationship had hurt him so. It was easier to stuff everything into an old shoe box than keep them up as some kind of sick way of tormenting himself. But so much had changed since then. He was happy again. He still loved Victor, through it all. He *wanted* to see his beautiful face littered all over his apartment.

Yuuri stood up and walked out of his room to a closet in the living room. Digging through coats, bags, and boxes, he found an old, tattered Yves Saint Laurent shoe box and opened it slowly. Inside, around 100 old photos from years passed smiled up at him, along with old gifts from Victor- a couple of bracelets and some dried, pressed flowers and books- as well as a small bottle of his perfume Yuuri, remembered himself accidentally taking. He smiled and picked up the box, walking over to the coffee table and putting it down. Before he could pick up a picture, a frantic knocking started at his door. Yuuri had no doubt in his mind of who it could be.

He took his time in walking to answer the door. Sighing deeply before opening it, Yuuri prepared himself for what was to come.

Before he could even say hello, Christophe burst into the room, dressed in overalls, paint splattered
over the majority of the jean material.

“You could have called! Or texted me—At any point in time, Yuuri! Either of you could have!” Chris almost shouted, pointing a finger at Yuuri. “You promised me you would.”

“I don’t remember—”

“It’s not the point. I was so worried about him, and then you were gone suddenly and everything made sense but Jesus Christ, a text would have been good,” Chris said. Yuuri raised his brows, surprised, and apologized. “Apology accepted.” He placed his hands on his hips and looked into Yuuri’s apartment. “Well, let’s sit. I’ve got questions.”

“Like?” Yuuri asked, leading him to the living room. They took places opposite each other.

“Like, how he ended up at your hotel?”

“He reached out to me. Well, I reached out to him. I heard what had happened and decided to check in and make sure he was okay. Next thing I know he was standing at my door dripping wet.”

“And then you dropped off the face of the earth for two weeks?”

“Pretty much. I was going on vacation anyway, so I asked him if he wanted to tag along.”

Chris looked down at the box on the coffee table, smiling ear to ear like a child. “Ooh, and now you’re back in love?” He picked up a picture, making Yuuri blush. “Okay, maybe I’m not so mad anymore. Are you two dating—”

“No!” Yuuri jumped the gun on answering. His heart rate picked up, racing like a hummingbird. He gulped and slid the box across the table, closer to him. “We—Uh, we aren’t dating. I was just there for him. As friends, you know?”

Chris looked confused, then disappointed. He put the photo down and sighed. “When are you two going to realize that everything in this universe is pushing you two to be together? Yuuri, you could have locked him down while you were alone, now it’s gonna be harder to—”

“He had just broken off his engagement. Even I know I should give him time,” Yuuri interrupted him. “I didn’t want to just be some rebound, you know?”

Chris pondered but nodded. “Yeah, I guess I understand. How is he anyway? Is he doing alright?”

“I would say so. He seemed to really enjoy hanging out with my family and—”

“Family?” Chris raised an eyebrow. Realization struck him like a lightning bolt. “You took him to meet your parents?!”

They spent the rest of their time together talking about the trip, gossiping, and eating whatever it was that Yuuri had in his fridge.

Half a world away, Victor was slipping into his bed. The sky was dark and clouded. The moon barely shining through the thickness of the clouds. Being back in his own bed, after spending a blissful two weeks cuddled up next to Yuuri in the pale, white heat of a Hasetsu summer, felt wrong. Empty. He longed for him. To be wrapped up in his body again.

He wanted to feel their hearts beating against each other again. Each pulse a gentle signal that maybe things were going to be just fine.
Victor looked around his room and sighed.

“Alone again,” he whispered into the emptiness of his four dull walls. He thought it over, smiling a little bit. “Alone for a little while more, anyway.”

The ticking of a far-off clock bounced through the apartment. Very technical and strategic in its precision. Second by second. Minute by minute. Hour by hour. He wanted to call him. He wanted to take another 14-hour flight to the New York and put together a great, big, beautiful proposal at the top of the empire state building. But he had to wait. He and Yuuri had to learn to trust each other again. They had to become accustomed to the new people they had turned into in the years they were away from each other and go from there. Victor was willing, and he knew Yuuri was too. It was just a matter of time.

Time…

What an odd concept. Only really because of a human reliance on it. A belief and trust that it would be unbiased and unfazed by all else passing.

Victor stood up from his bed and picked up his phone, dialing his mother’s number. It took three rings for the call to go through.

“Vitya! Oh, I’m so glad you called. Are you back from your vacation?”

“Yes, Mama. I came in this afternoon. How have you been? How’s the company?”

“We can talk about that later,” she told him. “Tell me all about your trip! Was it really Yuuri you were with? I had my suspicions but I want to make sure!” Her laugh rang through the phone like silver bells. Victor smiled, rubbing the back of his neck.

Victor laid back down, turning to his side to face the windows in his room. He started his story from Yuuri’s hotel room and went from there. There wasn’t a need for him to start his story from his break up with Sergei-- he was sure his mother already knew everything. He took his time gushing about Yuuri as he told his story, stopping every now and then to sigh-- delighted-- and grip his chest from fondness. At some point his father had walked in on their conversation and proceeded to ask Victor to catch him up as well, so he started again. He didn’t mind. It was nice to relive all of the memories he had made.

After two hours or so of being on the phone, Victor pride himself away from his phone, imploring both himself and his parents to sleep. He fell into his bed and slept for hours, only to wake up the very next day to thirty-six text messages, twenty missed calls, ten voicemails, sixty new emails and a number of files delivered to his home. That was all before he had his morning coffee.

Victor took a deep breath and decided to deal with all of those things after breakfast. Seven in the morning was too early to be thinking about work, even if it was a Monday and had used up all of his vacation days. So, he made himself a bowl of oatmeal and packed it full of berries. He took his bowl of mush and moved to his living room, where he picked up his personal phone and called Yuuri. There was a seven-hour time difference, but Victor knew Yuuri was a night owl, so there wouldn’t be much of a problem in having him pick up. Unless he didn’t, which Victor would understand.

Yuuri picked up on the second ring, as Victor ate a spoonful of oatmeal.

“Hello?”

Victor forgot just how sweet and tender Yuuri’s voice was. His tone, his patterns. The way he let bits and pieces of his accent peak through when he was tired. It was like music to his ears. The kind of
music that made him want to dance endlessly.

“Hey,” Victor said, swallowing the last of the oatmeal in his mouth. “It’s me. Um, Victor.”

Yuuri giggled, “I know, silly. You’re in my contacts.”
“Oh,” Victor said, blushing immediately. They shared a moment of silence before both falling into a fit of quiet laughter. “I’m sorry. I’m not really sure why I called. It’s late over there, maybe I should let you--”

“No, you’re okay. I’m glad you called,” Yuuri told him. “It’s nice talking to you. Helps me to clear my head.”

“Why do you need to clear your head?” Victor asked. “Did something happen?”

“Mm, not really. I mean, we’re supposed to be teaching with a new curriculum this year and it’s really bothering me. If you were to see these lessons… Ugh! They’re awful. And the testing? Victor, I teach children, and the education system expects them to do five state tests back to back this spring, it’s ridiculous,” Yuuri told him. He went on a bit of a rant, ending it by sighing deeply like the thought had been resting on his mind all day. Victor and Yuuri spoke at length about the ways he could both better prepare them. The conversation went on for a long time, most of which was taken up by Yuuri screaming about his bosses. “And this is a private school! They chose to teach this crap for whatever reason- and- and…! Ah! It makes me so angry.” Victor waited for him to speak again, bathing in the passion in his voice. Yuuri sighed, “I’m sorry. I’m rambling. It’s just… I hate to see all of my kids be drowned in all of this unnecessary work.”

“No, I get it,” Victor tells him. “Really, I mean… it must suck to be stuck in a place where you can’t do anything about it.”

“Yeah,” Yuuri sighed. “I wish I had just a little more power when it comes to stuff like this.”

“Maybe you could-”

Victor was interrupted by his doorbell.

“Um, I think someone’s here. I’ll talk to you later, alright?”

“Yeah that’s fine,” said Yuuri. “Have a good day, Mr. Nikiforov.”

It was an awkward thing to say. Yuuri wasn’t sure why he said it, he just did. A moment of pure silence passed between them, until, as if by connection of the soul, both men started to laugh. Outrageous and drawn out, Victor and Yuuri could barely stop themselves, even when life kept moving on around them.

“What does that even mean?” Victor asked Yuuri, wiping stray tears from his cheeks. “I’m not even-” He started up in a fit of laughter again, from the bottom of his stomach to the top of his voice. “God, I love you so much.”

More silence.

It wasn’t awkward, or bad. It was the kind of silence needed to contemplate in comfort. Yuuri, as long as he had known Victor, could never quite get used to those words slipping from his lips. They warmed him-- filled him with sweet commotion and ecstasy. Love was their symphony. Even if they were a million miles away from one another, the words didn’t lose their effect on him. They never could. What they shared between them was too strong. Too much for distance to limit.
Both men shared a smile, knowing and full of tenderness.

“Um,” Victor said. Yuuri could practically hear the smirk on his lips. “I’ll-- I have to go… uh, get the door. I’ll call you later?”

“Yeah, no. Go ahead and do that,” Yuuri told him. “I’ll be waiting for that call. Um, have a good day.” He cringed slightly at how weird he was being, but Victor chuckled.

“Alright, have a good night. Bye.”

*Months Passed--November*

Yuuri sat in front of his computer at home. It was 9 in the evening, and all around him, the world was quiet. A Christmas tree, half assembled, sat in the background along with other decorations. It was the holiday season, and the world refused to let him forget that it would be another he would spend alone.

He clicked on Victor’s icon and waited for the call to connect. It took three rings when it finally took.

“Hey!” The connection was weak, so his words came out garbled, but Yuuri could see him clearly, teeth pearly and eyes shining. Victor was dressed to go to work, bright and early, in a navy blue suit, while Yuuri dawned a pair of grey sweatpants and a dirty black t-shirt, hair a mess and eyes tired.

“Hey,” he said, yawning. “Did you sleep well?”

Victor nodded. “Of course, you wished me sweet dreams after all.”

In the whirlwind that Yuuri’s life became once the school year began, he managed to keep in constant contact with Victor. Both of them made quite the effort to do so, calling when they went to bed and rose in the morning, even if they were in opposite time zones. It was important to them, to hear and see each other whenever possible. Neither of them could go very long without hearing each other’s voices. It was a delightful thing to feel so loved and cared for, even across thousands of miles and an entire ocean. They had a way with each other that no one else could give them.

And, oh boy, did other people try.

“How did your meeting with the school board go today?”

The problem with Victor and Yuuri was that, because they weren’t exclusive or physically around each other, people around them unaware of their involvement with one another seemed to think they were fair game in terms of dating.

“Oh, it was pretty good. They had some problems with the budget, but we can work around that. Are you ready for your investor’s presentation today?”

Victor had people approach him here and there, mostly at events, but it was Yuuri who suffered under romantic pursuit most between them both. It happened in grocery stores, at school, through parents trying to set him up, his own teacher friends trying to set him up, and even most times he went out dancing with friends. Yuuri would laugh it off with Victor later on the phone, but at the moment, and even after, it was hard to come up with a valid excuse to tell his friends and suitors why he wasn’t able to concede to their courtship. As clear and beautiful as what he had with Victor was, it was just the littlest bit burdensome to have to label it. He knew it didn’t need a label, but Yuuri liked them. He liked knowing what and why and who and where and everything else about them. He also wanted to desperately ask Victor but feared it would burst their bubble of sweetness.

“I am, surprisingly. I finished the powerpoint last night after you left for work and it looks great.
Your ideas worked really well.”

It would be easy to ask Victor, and he knew the answer, but there was still an uneasiness there for him. A mysterious force of anxiety and fear. Logically, he knew it was because of their past, but that didn’t stop him from worrying. Nothing really could.

“Hey,” Victor spoke up, trying to get his attention. “You seem out of it. Are you okay?”

Yuuri perked up and smiled, “No, yeah, I’m good.”

“Do you want to go to bed? I know it’s late over--”

“No, I’m okay. Really, just a lot on my mind. Talking to you helps,” he told him, face soft and loving. “Tell me about what you dreamed of last night. That always makes me feel better.” Yuuri’s phone buzzed then, making a ruckus as it clambered around the glass-topped desk.

He excused himself, picking it up and checking to see what it was-- a text message from one of his colleagues. He was new to the school and it had been made Yuuri’s job to show him around and get him acquainted, but it was surprising for him to get a message from him, given they rarely texted each other or spoke outside of school hours.

He opened the message and immediately felt his face blush-- bright red and uncontrollably embarrassed.

“What? What is it? What does it say?”

Yuuri put his phone down-- basically slamming it against the table-- and buried his face in his hands. Work the next day would be extremely awkward.

Muffled words formed through hands as he told Victor, “… new guy from work… drunk… let me know he thinks my ass is worth the world… wants to take me out… carriage ride in central park… said he wants… ughhhh… five babies…”

Victor laughed, loudly at first, and then quieted down, unsure if he should be laughing or not. He clasped his hands together and looked at the floor, unsure of what to say.

“Um, what did you tell him?” he finally asked. Yuuri took his hands from his face and squinted at Victor who looked entirely more concerned than he should have.

“Nothing yet, but obviously I’m not going to agree to… do anything.”

Relief came over Victor’s face, but not fully.

“You know that, right?” Yuuri asked him. Victor nodded, shaking off the insecurity slightly.

“Right,” he responded. “Now, where were we?”

Yuuri smiled, “You were going to tell me about your dream last night?”

So Victor did. He told Yuuri all about his visionary underwater adventure with baby seals and seahorses until it was time for him to go off to work. They said their goodbyes and promised to call later on when they were both awake again, and at home. Yuuri almost logged on when Victor stopped him, suddenly remembering a bit of news that might have been important for Yuuri.

“Oh, um,” he said. “I have news. They’re not the greatest, but they aren’t awful either.”
“What is it?” Yuuri asked, growing slightly concerned. “Is something wrong?”

“No-- Uh… I won’t be able to come visit for a while longer. The company’s run into some PR trouble and I’ll be overseeing a lot of the efforts to fix it.” He looked ashamed. It couldn’t hurt Yuuri more. “Most likely, the earliest I’ll be able to come see you is April. If we’re lucky.” Victor sighed, straightening out the sleeves of his jacket. “I’m sorry, Yuuri. I know we’ve been planning to see each other this Christmas, but it’s not going to be possible.”

“That’s okay, Victor,” Yuuri assured him. “We’ll just see each other in April. Time means nothing if we’ll meet again eventually.”

They smiled at one another, trying to ease the pain of how much longer they would have to be apart. Yuuri fell into himself, wrapping his arms around him like it was Victor hugging him, and Victor did the same. It was a silly dumb ritual, but it was theirs and it was comforting. It was a touch they knew to be both theirs and the others-- never anyone else's.

Victor’s phone began to ring, as it always did when they went over their allotted time together. It was his office-- secretary most likely-- calling to ask how much longer he’d be. Victor sighed, “It seems I must be on my way. I’ll call you when you wake up. Until then.”

“Until then,” Yuuri responded.

The screen went black and he was gone and all Yuuri could do was tuck himself into bed and wait. Wait to see him again when he woke up. Wait to hold in April. Wait to see where life would take them.

It was something of a cruel fate, but it carried him on and that was all he could really ask for.

_________

Later-- Early December

“It’s not enough to just donate more money than we have previously-- No, what we need to do is fire this maniac for what he said and did. He is our responsibility and we can’t keep protecting him. No! No!” Victor let out a string of curses, switching from Russian to English. “I don’t care what investors think or who his father is-- He’s gone! Get his books off our press and drop him immediately.”

With that, he hung up the call angrily, slamming the conference room phone into its receiver. The board members around his looked at him like he’d gone mad-- eyes wide and wild. Victor raised a hand to his forehead and exhaled so sharply the entire room went quietly with anticipation.

“We all agree that he’s done here?” He asked switching to Russian. The room nodded. “Good. Someone make the call, get PR to put out a statement condemning his actions, and set up any interviews we need to do with the media. And for the love of god, get HR to set up a tolerance meeting with the rest of our employees-- You all included. We don’t accept ignorance or bigotry here. Let anyone who wants to challenge that fact know that they are more than welcome to leave.”

He rose from his chair at the head of the table and left, telling his secretary to stay back and make sure things got done. He was going home for the day-- entirely to overwhelmed by the horrible things he had learned that day.

A couple of members of the board tried to stop him on his way out of the building, but Victor didn’t stop to talk. He directed them all to his email, where they would surely leave paragraphs upon paragraphs of either complaints or concerns. After collecting his things from his office, he took the stairs-- fifteen flights-- down to the parking garage where his car awaited him. It was a long walk, but
it let him clear his head and avoid all of the people he adamantly did not want to see.

His day would not continue until he could call Yuuri that night, as soon as his love awakened from his sleep. For the past couple of weeks, Yuuri had been his only source of true happiness and relaxation, a codependence Victor did not mind a single bit developing. Yuuri, on the other hand, grew concerned of the growing bags under his eyes and loss of joy in his voice.

When Victor made it home, he plopped onto his couch, belly first, and let out a long and arduous groan, fitting to for the week he’d had. Laying there, Victor thought about how much he hated his job. There was no passion in it. No excitement.

A light went off above his head.

He hated his job.

He so very much hated his job and there was quite literally no reason for him to do it. The only reason he had gone back to it was that of the breakdown he’d suffered through in New York. Now everything was fine, and if anything, his job was the only thing making things not-- it was keeping him apart from Yuuri. Yuuri who he loved so much and was dying to see. Yuuri who was waiting for him. Who could grow tired of waiting. Yuuri who was alone in New York City where all kinds of people were throwing themselves at him while Victor was gone.

Oh god.

A surge of young, nuanced impulsivity covered his bones as Victor bolted up from his prostrate position and reached for his phone. With a quick text to his assistant, Victor booked a 5 pm flight to New York City. He was going to seek happiness after years of putting it on the back burner.

His love would wait no longer.

Chapter End Notes

jdncksjncksjnks sorry, so first, I'd like to apologize for the fact that it took me FOUR MONTHS to get this up. To be fair, I've been under hella stress, but still, i'm usually better with keeping a schedule. Also, this chapter is more fluffy which i love since its what I intended for this to be in the first place!! Secondly, I'm kinda sad this fic is so close to coming to an end, but like... there are more fics to come. I've already started work on a couple of ideas and even posted another one on here already!

As always, let me know what y'all think in the comments and I'll talk to y'all soon (or daily, if y'all follow me on tumblr)!
i give you my heart and all my tomorrows

Chapter Summary

$Everything$ $finally$ $feels$ $okay. $ After $months$ $and$ $months$ $of$ $unrest, $ Victor $finally$ $feels$ $like$ $all$ $of$ $the$ $pieces$ $of$ $his$ $life$ $are$ $in$ $order. $ The$ $distance$ $between$ $them$ $doesn’t$ $drive$ $a$ $hole$ $through$ $his$ $chest. $ It$ $doesn’t$ $make$ $him$ $want$ $to$ $run. $ It$ $lets$ $him$ $rest$ $easy. $ It’s$ $so$ $familiar$ $to$ $him. $ Destined.$

Chapter Notes

Hiiii

How have you been? Well, I hope. I’ve been pretty good. Kinda.

Uh. I’m back.

With the last chapter of this fic, no less.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

$t$-$minus$ $12$ $hours$

Yuuri’s morning began like any other—paced, peaceful, and practiced. He woke up to the sound of his alarm clock and birds outside of his window, pecking at the small feeder he kept on the fire escape. He stayed in bed, scrolling through Instagram and Twitter, before rising and making his way into the bathroom where he ran a hot shower and groomed himself for the day that awaited him. He dressed and ate the same thing he ate every morning—a bowl of apple cinnamon oatmeal and dark roast coffee with a side of whatever fruit he had. That morning it happened to be blueberries, tart and juicy.

That part of his morning took only an hour and a half. He always spared at least thirty minutes to talk with Victor, but when he went to do just that, his call was rejected and instead he received a text:

stuck in a meeting :(  
Sorry, talk later?

Yuuri texted him back, agreeing, and felt odd as he realized he had time to kill before going into work.

It was a Friday, which meant a quiz for his students. In the past, Yuuri would have still been preparing it that morning, but as he taught longer and longer, he found it got easier for him to be productive with his planning— which meant there was nothing for him to do. No Victor. No work. Just thirty minutes to spare.

There was always the option to just... relax

Pfft.
Yuuri was practically incapable of relaxing at that point in the year. Relaxing was meant for summer, not the middle of the holiday season when grades were due and he had to shop for everyone’s gift. Not to mention planning Christmas parties and activities— both in class and out. No. Yuuri couldn’t relax. He just had to find something to do. Anything.

So he opened a tab and began to browse for Christmas gifts (a set of new succulents for Leo, a couple of books for his sister, two sweaters for Guang Hong, the list went on and on). He spent those thirty minutes doing just that, and then he was out of the door and on his way to work. Traffic was light and the sun was out, surprisingly, as there was supposed to be a snow storm later in the evening. He basked in it for as long as he could, feeling like he couldn’t afford to let a single ray of sunshine slip from him in their lack of abundance.

Yuuri sang all the way to work and even as he walked into his classroom and started setting up for the day. Despite not talking to Victor in the morning, the universe seemed to be on his side that day, making everything just a little better than usual. Brighter, somehow.

And it stayed that way. The love in his heart didn’t waver, didn’t fizzle. It didn’t burn out by the time lunch came around and the kids were grumpier than usual. His day was a good one and a sign of more to come. Yuuri couldn’t stop smiling, couldn’t stop dancing or singing or painting and making a mess and laughing about it. Life finally seemed to be going the way he deserved. Life was okay.

Everything was okay.

By the time he left school, the snow was starting to fall. It was light and airy,

T-minus six hours

Yuuri had a couple of errands to run that night before heading home. His first stop would be the post office, to drop off a couple of Christmas cards and buy more stamps. It was a short walk there from the school, and though the weather had taken a turn earlier in the day, it wasn’t bad enough to make him drive. He’d get his exercise in for the day and some fresh air too. So, Yuuri packed in his things into his car, locked it, and began his walk down the street, heading east the post office. It was nice—peaceful. There were barely any people on the streets since it was so cold, coating the usually bustling neighborhood with a serenity Yuuri hadn’t realized he missed. Living in the city was always so loud compared to where Yuuri had grown up. Small pockets of silence always felt like a luxury.

He snuggled into his coat as a breeze ran through the street. It sent chills down his spine and made his ears ache for something to cover them. Yuuri wished he had brought something other than a coat- -as heavy as it was.

Yuuri saw the sign before he even crossed the street. It stared at him the entirety of his jog across, mocking him and his cherry red ears and nose.

CLOSED DUE TO WEATHER

He cursed at the sky, careful not to yell, but loudly enough to spook a couple walking just ahead of him. Now he would have to find a mailbox to mail the letters under his arm. Yuuri started up the street again, trying to find one near him.

The wind began to whip around him, icy and biting at his skin. His good day had taken a turn-- not a terribly bad one, but enough of a turn to make his slightly agitated. He spotted a mailbox near a crosswalk and turned his jog into a run. That was his first mistake.
As he closed in on the mailbox, he came upon a patch of black ice on the sidewalk. His feet failed to stop him, sending a pulse of pure dread and terror through his body. He’d lost control completely. It all happened so slowly, it didn’t feel real. It wasn’t until he saw envelopes flying all around him that he realized he had fallen. They looked like birds almost-- flying all around him.

In an attempt to break his fall and catch hold of his mail, Yuuri placed his arms at odds-- one behind him, the other reaching up, and closed his eyes. That was his second mistake, and perhaps the worst.

He let out one, long, drawn-out **FUCK** at the top of his lungs once he hit the ground, ignorant of how much attention that would draw to him. The currents of pain running up and down his right arm were too much to bear. Yuuri continued to let out a string of curse words as people approached him, coming from out of homes and shops, asking if he needed help. He couldn’t answer any of their offers to call an ambulance, or help him up-- what with all of the teeth grinding he was doing just to help ease the pain. He didn’t dare look down at his right wrist either. He knew it was mangled at best and looking at it might only make him pass out. Instead, he reached for his phone in his pocket, put it in his mouth and accepted the hand of a stranger to help him up.

“That looks pretty bad, honey,” said the woman handing him his mail. “Do you want me to call you an ambulance?”

Yuuri shook his head as he steadied himself, tucking his mail into his pockets and taking his phone from out of his mouth and into his left hand. “No, uh-- I’m okay. I can drive myself.” She looked at him with uncertainty. He smiled to assuage her.

He thanked the few people that remained around him and began to limp back the way in which he came. The snow was falling more heavily as he huffed and puffed all the way to his car. Once there, he sat in the driver's seat and screamed as loudly as he could from the safety of his own car. Then, as calmly as he could, and to the best of his ability, Yuuri drove himself to the hospital where it took two hours for someone to treat him. Getting the cast on took only a couple of minutes. He kept a tight jaw through it all, unwilling to cry or whine or do anything to ruin his ‘good’ day any more than it had already been ruined. Of course, the medication they had given him helped. The only downside was that he couldn’t drive on it, which made the staff force him to call Phichit to come and pick him up.

When Phichit got to the hospital, he couldn’t help but laugh at the sight of his best friend, standing by his car, cast and all with the brightest smile he’d ever seen.

“Oh Jesus, the nurse wasn’t kidding,” Phichit said.

“What? What did she say?” Yuuri asked, tossing him his keys.

“She said you looked on the brink of a meltdown.” He unlocked the car. “She was right.”

Yuuri dropped the smile and groaned, walking to the other side to get in. “Yeah, well… she wasn’t completely wrong. That fall hurt like so much… my butt is going to be sore for days.”

“Eh, still. I thought you’d gotten in a car accident when they called me, what with the snow and all.” Phichit started the car. “Good to know it was just your mail giving your wrist trouble. How are you feeling by the way?”

Yuuri sunk into his seat. “Not too bad, but kinda sad I didn’t get to mail anything out. I thought the post office all year round.”

“You’d think so, but alas…” he smiled at his friend. “But you’re all right. That’s all that matters.
Much worse could’ve happened."

“Oh, god. Don’t even joke about that. Who would teach my class? Who would finish grading their homework?”

“Who would log you into Skype so you could talk to your boyfriend every day?” Phichit giggled. “I mean, I’m up for it, but the time difference would mean I’d have to move in with you. But still, if Seung Gil could move in too, I’d be more than happy.”

Yuuri looked at him, unamused. Phichit laughed. “You-- You know what? If you’re going to openly mock me, I’ll just call Leo next time.”

“No,” Phichit assured him with a giggle. “I’m your best friend. This burden falls on me.”

Yuuri cracked a smile. “Fine. And by the way, he’s not my boyfriend, and I’ve still got one functioning hand.”

They burst out laughing then, like the old times in their apartment at the crack of dawn after pulling an all-nighter. Except they were adults with jobs and commitment in the middle of the day in traffic. A lot had changed. Yuuri was glad some things were still the same.

They didn’t say much else during the car ride. Phichit let Yuuri sulk in his seat the entire way, listening to a podcast as his best friend stirred. When they got to his building, the sun was completely set. He invited Phichit in for chocolate and ordered him an Uber to take him home. The rest of his afternoon was spent lounging on his couch in his pajamas with a plate of cereal in front of him.

His fluffiest pillow was placed under his bottom as a desperate attempt to console the bruises there. Every now and then he’d stare out his window at the full-on storm conspiring outside. It was worse than anything they’d had previously. More driven to disrupt the city. Still, it was a silent storm. He remained undisturbed deep into the night as he was getting ready for bed, having taken his medicine and washed away the day’s troubles.

One hollow, lone knock got his attention just as he lifted his bed’s duvet. He thought it was the medicine making him hear things, but was disproved when a series of knocks followed-- each more eager than the others. Yuuri put his glass back on and sighed, dragging himself all the way to his door.

“Give me a second,” he mumbled as he unlocked it.

His eyes burst open as soon as the door opened. Sleep escaped him, but he wondered if maybe-- just maybe-- he was dreaming.

Liftoff

Victor didn’t waste any time. He was sick of years and years of wasting time and Yuuri was the reason he took an impromptu trip from Russia to the United States and he loves him so much it was damn near impossible for him to even think about wasting time. So he does what’s been on his mind since the very moment he laid eyes on Yuuri Katsuki, with his soft doe eyes and pouty lips.

He cups his face with cold hands and looks into his eyes-- his soul-- and kisses him like the world was ending. Like he’d just returned from war. Like his life depended on it. Like everything had led him to this point in time, in that doorway where the light was soft and the air smelled like Christmas cookies. He kisses him so deeply and so lovingly, he’s sure the versions of them who had fallen for each other in their past lives felt it too.
Yuuri kisses him back just the same, maybe a bit more ardently. He stands on his tippy toes to reach Victor. He pulls him down and places his good hand on the back of his head. Bites his lip. Let’s his heat coat every inch of cold on Victor's face. Fireworks erupt in his chest. Finally, something is secure.

Everything finally feels okay. After months and months of unrest, Victor finally feels like all of the pieces of his life are in order. The distance between them doesn’t drive a hole through his chest. It doesn’t make him want to run. It lets him rest easy. It’s so familiar to him. Destined.

When they pull back, neither of them know what to say. They just look at each other, kinda goofy with dreamy eyes and loving smiles. Yuuri’s eyes fall heavy again, a sign of the medicine finally kicking in.

Victor isn’t sure of what he should do. He didn’t have a plan.

The ring in his pocket weighs heavy as he looks down at Yuuri, eyes roaming through every part of his body. Face, legs, arms… arms.

ARM

“What’s uh--” Victor struggles to speak. “What’s the uh--? Arm?” He fights through the worry and confusion, one word at a time. “What happened to your arm? Are you okay?”

“Huh?” Yuuri looks down at his own arm and almost laughs, starting to feel loopy. “Oh, um, I had an accident. I’m okay though, I just need to wear this for-- Hey. Wait. Why are you here? And wet?”

Victor looks down at the puddle forming at his feet. “Oh, well I had to walk three blocks to get here. The roads were closed. There was a lot of snow.”

Yuuri nods, trying his best to stay awake. His head isn’t working the way it should. It’s drowsy and clouded. He knows he should be reacting. Something important was happening. Something big. But his mouth wouldn’t form the right sentences.

“Listen… I got a lot of questions. Okay? And that was a really good kiss and I love you so much but I’m on really potent medication right now, so mind? Kinda loopy. I gotta… got to sleep.” He rubs his eyes and leans against Victor’s chest. “I’m really happy you’re here, but I gotta go.”

Victor would need to wait just a little longer. Mere hours.

“Okay,” he whispers as he kisses the top of Yuuri’s head.

“You’ll sleep too?” Yuuri asks.

“Mhm.”

“With me?”

“Mhm,” Victor hums.

“You’ll change first?”

They share a laugh, gentle in the night.

He doesn’t ask any more questions, just tells Victor that he only has basketball shorts for him to wear. Laundry day wasn’t until the next day. Victor tells him its okay and drags his luggage inside.
They close the door behind him and shuffle into Yuuri’s bedroom. It only takes them a moment to settle.

Victor watches him until he can’t keep his eyes open any longer, wanting to take everything in little by little. He tries to memorize the face that would be by his side until the end of time.

_the next morning_

When Yuuri opens his eyes, the first thing he sees is a mess of silver hair, curling and strewn about the pillow next to his. He doesn’t react at first, because he knows who it is. It takes a minute for him to think of why he should say something, but even then, he keeps quiet. He just sits back and listens to the tiny snores coming from Victor. Yuuri takes time to enjoy it.

For whatever reason Victor had ended back up in his arms, Yuuri could only guess that it was temporary. He’d be gone before he could even think of asking him to stay. All he could do was take him in. Even if just for a moment.

He looked to the window in his room for a semblance of the time. It was still dark. He wasn’t late for work. He wondered if he should call in sick. He had broken his wrist, after all. It would be the responsible thing for him to do. But his phone was all the way across the room, and his bed was pushed up against the wall, which meant he would have to climb over Victor to get it. Yuuri bit his lip nervously and decided to just go for it.

He peeled the duvet off his body and placed his leg on the other side of Victor’s body, straddling him. He wasn’t sure how to go from there since he was still learning how to work around his cast. Before he could figure it out, his phone started ringing, loud and angrier than it sounded any other morning.

Yuuri froze in his place, looking down as he felt movement. Victor looked up at him, eyes still dreamy, with a smile.

“Well, you could have just asked, you know?” He said slyly, teasing him. Yuuri turned a million shades of red and hastily stumbled from on top of him and onto the floor. He started rambling off excuses and apologies before Victor could get a word in, scrambling off the floor and toward his phone. “Yuuri…” They looked at each other as the phone kept ringing. “I was just playing.”

Yuuri let out a nervous laugh, tipping his head all the way back as he did so, before scurrying away to the bathroom to answer his phone. Victor stayed in bed, hands in his lap, listening to his muffled voice and waiting for him to come back. He looked around his room, realizing he’d never seen it before. Not completely.

It looked just like he’d expect. Clean, but a little messy. Colorful, but minimal. Pictures of Yuuri, Victor, and his friends lined the walls, some in frames and others just taped up. He had a surplus of candles all over the room as well. It was warm. A home.

Victor felt a fondness growing in his chest, swelling and pulsing with each second he spent looking around. Outside, Yuuri laughed the kind of laugh Victor loved-- deep and bellowing, like thunder in the summertime. Followed by a snort. And then three more. And he knew he was right to have flown to New York. He’d made a lot of mistakes in his life, but coming home to Yuuri wasn’t one of them. It was maybe the only thing he’d ever done correctly.

Then he realized, Yuuri was wide awake and so was he. He’d have to do it right that moment before something else happened.
Victor looks around and tries to find things to use-- to set the mood. There aren’t any roses, just daisies on the dresser, so he takes two out of the vase and scattered the petals around the center of the room. He takes the ring and his phone from the pockets of his jeans and kneels in the center.

Opening Spotify, Victor presses shuffle. Something old and slow begins to waltz over the room. Victor can hear Yuuri start to get closer. He takes the ring from the box and waits.

Then the door opens and he’s standing there with messy hair and two bowls of cereal in his hands, phone still placed between his ear and shoulder.

He’s perfect.
Wonderful.
Everything Victor’s ever wanted.

“What… um… Phichit, I have to go. I’m serious, I have to go-- No-- I’ll call you later.” Yuuri sets the bowls down and takes three careful steps inside. “Victor, what are you doing?” His voice is small like he’s scared of ruining whatever was happening. He opens his mouth to speak again, but Victor stops him.

“Do you remember the night we met?”

“No-- um, not entirely. Bits and pieces.” Yuuri looked at the ring in his hands and gulped. He had to be dreaming.

“Well,” Victor smiled. “Do you remember how you took me dancing in the middle of that park?” Yuuri nodded, already starting to tear up. “That was the first time anyone had held me so tenderly-- really listened to me and understood. I-- And you kept looking at me the entire time-- and all I could think of was how lucky I was to have found someone like you that early in my life. You were the person I knew was meant for me.”

They looked into each other’s eyes, completely entranced by the magic they had created in the room.

“I love you,” Victor said. “So much it hurts.”

“I love you too,” was all Yuuri could think to say.

“Yuuri… I want to spend the rest of my life with you. I have since the first moment I met you. I knew you were the one. And there hasn’t been a day that’s passed that I haven’t thought about doing this.” He looks at the ring and then back at him. “... even after everything we’ve been through. All the changes, all our problems… everything. It’s only made me realize that you’re the one I want.” He takes a deep breath as Yuuri kneels before him, placing his good hand on Victor’s chest and touching their foreheads. “I want to be yours forever. From now until the end. And I want you to be mine.” He lays a hand over Yuuri’s and smiles. “So, Yuuri Katsuki, would you do me the honor of being my husband?”

Yuuri wiped a tear from Victor’s cheeks and let himself fall into him, sobbingly repeating the word “yes” over and over. Victor pulled him back gently, slipping the ring on his right hand and kissing it before kissing him.

“Oh god,” Yuuri said with a frown.

“What is it, dear?” Victor asked him still transfixed on his love.

“I left snot all over you,” Yuuri told him, wiping the area around his shoulders where his face had been resting.
Victor stared at him with a confused expression, one Yuuri returned. And then they broke into a fit of laughter neither had realized how much they really needed. After a while, Victor just looked at him in the same way he always had. A lovestruck look of adoration that never failed to make Yuuri blush.

“Well, I guess we should… I don’t really know. What do engaged people do?” Yuuri asked him. “Should I call my parents?”

“Later,” Victor said taking him back into his arms. “We can do all of those things later. Right now, I just want to hold you.”

Yuuri let him, melting into his arms once again and forever. Safe and sound.

Loved.

Epilogue

“Dear?” Yuuri called out from the foyer. He slipped out of his shoes and into his house slippers. The smell of fresh bread and herbs baking in their kitchen wafted to him, slowly as the bread was rising.

“What is it darling?” Victor answered, walking from out the kitchen and into the hall where Yuuri could see him.

Victor was more grey than silver now. His skin wrinkled with laugh lines and expressions of surprise-- a culmination of forty years of happiness. He slouched more than he himself liked, but he still stood tall, dressed in a pink, worn knit-sweater and khaki slacks. On his feet, socks their grandchildren had gifted him were placed instead of the leather shoes he’d once preferred. He had changed, but he’d done it with Yuuri, which came without regrets.

“Hanako called me earlier,” Yuuri said, shuffling toward him and given him a kiss. “She wants to know who’s hosting Christmas this year. I told her we would. How does that sound?”


“Thank you, dear,” Victor said taking it from him and then his hand. “Now, come on. Let me get you something to eat. The bread is almost ready.”

They ate and talked for as long as they cared to just about anything that came to mind. The weather. Their kids. Friends. Grandchildren. Plans for vacations in the winter and summer months. Victor especially liked to talk about the new recipes he’d been trying out-- usually what they were eating. Ever since he’d retired, he’d become an avid cook, making Yuuri anything from snacks to full course meals. His food, along with age, was the probable reason Yuuri had gained so much weight in the late years of his life. But he was fine with it. Once their grandchildren had come along, he found it was much easier for him to dress up as Santa that way.

After their meal, every single day, without fail, Victor would get up from his seat and put on a song. He goes up to Yuuri, stretch out a hand, and ask, “May I have this dance?” And every time without fail, Yuuri would say ‘yes’, and they would dance. Right there. In the middle of their kitchen. It was their routine.
Because they could.
Because they wanted to.
Because they loved each other.

Chapter End Notes

I don’t really know what to say. I feel a little conflicted. This is the first thing I’ve ever truly followed through to the end. In the context of things, I’ve written anyway. I’m very proud of myself for being able to do that because it means that I can finish other projects I’m working on. But I’m also a little sad that this is over.

I’d really like to thank everyone who stuck around until the end. I know this isn’t the greatest or best put together fic out there, so it means a lot that it’s what you’ve decided to read. It’s pretty long and takes a while to get through, so if you’ve made it to the end, bless. You were integral to the completion of this story. Every comment meant so much and really encouraged me to keep going.

I have some more stories planned, so stick around for those. My other WIP should be updated sometime soon. Also, if there’s a YOI pairing or AU you’d like to see from me, don’t hesitate to leave a comment :)

Once again, thank you and love you~!

End Notes

follow me on Tumblr!:
rainbowvictor

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!