Bound to Please

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Bound to Please

by paxton1976

Summary

By a small twist of Fate, Viktor and Yuuri meet in the Katsuki's secondhand bookstore 'Bound to Please'. Friendship comes fast as they offer something the other has never experienced before. As they strengthen and grow individually, they realize the other holds the pieces to make them whole.

“And there’s your ‘Ode to Aphrodite’,” Yuuri said, smiling at the man.

“That was somehow…” Viktor said, touching his chin with a lithe finger as he thought, “disappointing.”
“Disappointing?” the young man echoed, confused.

“Yes. I thought it would take all day to hunt it down. Spend all day in the store, poring over every volume in the place. This was the third store I’ve been to,” Viktor explained, “I don’t often get the pleasure of visiting used bookstores, but I like to make the most of my visits.”

“Oh,” Yuuri said, feeling the tops of his cheeks heat in an embarrassing blush, “If you really want to stay, we can look for a book I know we don’t have.”

Notes

This is the first chapter of 'Bound to Please', a reader-contributed series. A bunch of readers and I come together each Saturday on Twitch to discuss ideas, proofread the chapter I've come up with and start on the next. It's been so much fun. We've been at this for three weeks now. This is the beginning of what I think will be a beautiful exploration of self and whole. If you'd like to be a part of it, we'd love to have you! I stream on Twitch every Saturday at 5:00PM EDT (GMT-5). If you need help figuring out what time that is for you, hit me up in comments or message me on tumblr.

This fic is going to be entwined with so many alternate universes, but the dominating theme will be soulmates. I want to warn you now if this isn't your thing. Yes, it's bookstore, modern setting with a hint of university/college thrown in. I really think this is going to be unlike any Soulmate AU you have ever read.

These amazing readers are my co-authors: Radish_of_Doom, Minatomano, vinylholmes, imaginary_dragonling, mugirmu, V, fuzzyspys, Chieri, tibiris, mobilegirlm, and barechu. Thanks for your input into this work so far :)

There are A LOT of notes, so bear with me:
1) This fic is based in Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA. The school Viktor teaches at is University of Michigan. GO WOLVERINES!!
2) 'Ode to Aphrodite' is a lyric written by the Greek poet/lyricist Sappho. Her work is great yet fatalistic. Not much of it has survived.
3) Instead of inner thoughts like I used in 'Met by Accident', I've decided to use literary quotes. They are credited to the following:
   a) The first quote is Author Unknown.
   b) The second quote is from Alexander Pope.
   c) The third quote is also Author Unknown.
4) West Park is on Miller Ave, which is why Viktor lives so close to it! The bookstore, Bound to Please, is situated on Main Street which intersects with Miller Ave. Close proximity is great.

Since I want to do this one right as well, this will be a slow build/slow burn fic. So please be patient while we lay the foundation of the story.

I think I speak for everyone involved when I say thank you so much for reading.

Hope you enjoy 'The First Page'.
“Would you like cash or trade credit, Mrs. Calibri?” he asked, smiling at the frail, elderly woman.

“Yuuri dear, how long have I been coming here?” the woman asked, patting his hand gently, “Always trade credit. Your shop is my library. I’ve made a promise to myself that my time won’t be up until I’ve read everything here.”

“We get new books every day, Mrs. Calibri,” he replied, looking to the door when the bell chimed, “Welcome to Bound to Please! I’ll be with you in a moment.”

“Precisely, dear,” she grinned, “I’m going to live forever. Be a dear and go help that nice gentleman that just walked in.”

“Of course, Mrs. C,” Yuuri agreed, smiling at the woman before walking around the counter and heading to the man wandering aimlessly around the shop.

The man was taller than Yuuri and dressed stylishly. Though he had his back to him, Yuuri could see the contours of broad shoulders through the tweed of his jacket. The goldenrod scarf around his neck set off his light grey hair beautifully, making the man appear angelic. Yuuri stopped a few feet short of him, opening his mouth to greet the new customer. His presence must have been sensed, however, and he turned just as Yuuri was about to speak.

“He had beautiful blue eyes. The kind you could get lost in, and I guess I did.”

The man’s face was flawless. Skin like porcelain, high cheekbones, the hint of perfectly white teeth through slightly parted lush, pink lips. But his eyes, his eyes were the deepest pools of an arctic sea, the most beautiful shade of blue Yuuri had ever witnessed. Once focusing on him, the man smiled and took a few steps to him.

“Hello,” he said in accented English, looking down at the tag on Yuuri’s blazer, “Yuuri. I’m wondering if you happen to have a book in stock.”

“What are you looking for, sir?” Yuuri asked, gesturing for the man to follow him to the counter at the front of the store.”

“It’s Viktor.”

“Viktor? Is that the title or part of the author’s name?” Yuuri asked, typing on the keyboard to enter
his inventory program.

“That’s my name,” he said, smiling softly when Yuuri looked at him, “‘Sir’ makes me feel old.”

“Oh, ok,” Yuuri said, nodding at him, “What book?”

“Ode to Aphrodite.”

“I don’t get many requests for Sappho,” Yuuri observed as he entered the title into the computer, “A little light reading?”

“No,” Viktor replied, chuckling, “I was challenged by a student. I have to find it in an actual book.”

“Oh?”

“I teach Slavic and Russian literature. One of my students asked if I had read ‘Ode to Aphrodite’. Greek poetry is not my area of expertise, so of course I haven’t. He dared me to find it and read it. If I can’t, I have to pass him regardless,” Viktor explained.

“That’s quite the bet,” Yuuri mused, “I’m guessing he isn’t a star student?”

“Ha! Far from it. I’ve never seen anyone so unmotivated in my life. He thought this class would be an easy credit,” Viktor stated.

“He thought wrong?”

“Did he ever,” Viktor muttered, watching Yuuri scroll through the screen.

They chatted about a highly-acclaimed piece of Russian literature, Viktor quickly dominating the conversation as he explained how it was a jab at the regime of that time. Yuuri listened to Viktor speak, enjoying the lilt of his voice and the trill of certain words. He reminded himself to focus on the words in front of him, but realized he enjoyed Viktor’s company.

“And here we go,” Yuuri said, turning the monitor and pointing at a line, “We don’t have the lyric itself, per se, but it’s in a collection of poetry. I can help you find it, if you’d like.”

“After you,” Viktor said, smiling as he gestured for Yuuri to walk ahead, “What kind of poetry are we talking?”

“Greek and Roman mainly. Some Minoan, maybe a little Mycenaean.”

“Interesting. Sounds like I’ll be busy for a while. You know, light reading?” Viktor joked, grinning when he laughed.

“I’d hate to see your serious reading list,” Yuuri replied, turning to walk along a stack of shelves.

Tracing a finger down the rows upon rows of books, he skimmed the titles as he drifted further down the aisle. He was in his element among the stacks, knowing each and every tome in his shop as if they were close friends. He immersed himself in the history and plot as he read the spines. When he reached the shelf where the collection should be held, he crouched before the heavy oak case. His fingers danced along the tops of the books, searching with sight along with feel. He found it within moments, pulling it gently from the shelf and handing it to Viktor.

“And there’s your ‘Ode to Aphrodite’,” Yuuri said, smiling at him.

“That was somehow…” Viktor said, touching his chin with a lithe finger as he thought,
“disappointing.”

“Disappointing?” Yuuri echoed, confused.

“Yes. I thought it would take all day to hunt it down. Spend all day in the store, poring over every volume in the place. This was the third store I’ve been to,” Viktor explained, “I don’t often get the pleasure of visiting used bookstores, but I like to make the most of my visits.”

“Oh,” Yuuri said, feeling the tops of his cheeks heat in an embarrassing blush, “If you really want to stay, we can look for a book I know we don’t have.”

Viktor laughed at the bookseller’s suggestion. He wasn’t exaggerating when he informed Yuuri his store was the third stop on his short list. He was glad the previous shops didn’t have the lyric in stock as he wouldn’t have found this gem. While he thought the name tacky, the atmosphere of Bound to Please was warm and inviting. The minute he opened the door, scents of old leather and cinnamon welcomed him. The aesthetics of the small shop was appealing as well. Somewhere between an eclectic array of clutter and classic décor, he felt compelled to spend hours within the cozy store. He had looked up when the young man greeted him, smiling at the bookseller. The charm of the atmosphere intensified when he was joined by Yuuri, noticing how easy on the eyes he was.

He found himself tossing excuses in his mind to stay in Yuuri’s company. He wasn’t spellbound like most, enthralled by Viktor’s personality or stunning good looks. Viktor was certain it was Yuuri’s customer service skills that prevented him from fawning, but he still appreciated it. He wanted to stay longer, he felt like he needed to stay longer.

“Do I smell coffee?” Viktor asked, lifting his head lightly to sniff the air.

“Yes,” Yuuri replied, “We have a small coffee nook in the back. Would you like a cup? On the house.”

“How can I turn down free coffee? Lead the way.”

Viktor followed Yuuri around a maze of chairs and shelves, winding their way to the back of the store. When they emerged from a large row of bookcases, Viktor halted immediately as happiness flowed through him. The area before him was open and inviting, but that’s not what had grabbed his attention.

“What kind of coffee would you like? We have Hawaiian or Columbian. We also have decaf. There’s…” Yuuri said, frowning when he turned around, “Everything alright?”

“You have a…” Viktor gushed, barely able to contain his excitement, “you have a poodle!”

Yuuri smiled and walked to the couch after he made Viktor’s coffee, sitting beside the dog. Handing the coffee to Viktor, Yuuri giggled when the pooch barked a couple times before licking his face. Throwing his arms around the dog’s neck, he hugged his furry friend and spoke gently to him. When he looked back at him, Yuuri beamed when he saw pure joy on Viktor’s delicate features.

“This is my dog, Vicchan,” Yuuri said, holding out one of the pooch’s paws so Viktor could shake it.

“Nice to meet you, Vicchan,” Viktor crooned as he shook the dog’s paw, laughing when the dog’s tongue washed across his face, “My poodle’s name is Makkachin. He looks almost like Vicchan, but Makka is bigger and lighter than this cute boy.”
Viktor hurriedly patted the pockets of his overcoat until he found his phone. Pulling the device out, he entered his code and pressed the icon of the app he wanted. His finger slid across the screen rapidly, face brightening when he found what he was looking for. Smiling, he handed the phone to the bookseller.

“That’s Makkachin,” Viktor said, eyes crinkling and mouth falling into a heart shaped smile, “He’s my pride and joy.”

Yuuri gazed at Viktor for a moment longer before turning his attention to the screen. The dog appeared to be so easy-going, so happy. He reminded Yuuri of Vicchan, but the dog on the screen was bigger. He felt a smile creep onto his face and reached out to touch the image of the pooch’s nose. Flinching when the picture disappeared as his finger hit the screen, he looked up to hand the phone back to Viktor. Seeing the happiness on Viktor’s face made his heart leap, exquisiteness radiating from him in his delight.

“Beauty, frail flower that every season fears, blooms in thy colors for a thousand years.”

“He’s adorable,” Yuuri stated after clearing his throat, gesturing to Viktor to sit in the chair opposite him, “If he’s anything like Vicchan, you’re both lucky to have each other.”

“I love him to pieces,” Viktor replied, pulling the picture up and smiling at it, “I try to take him everywhere I can. I love spending time with him and he loves to explore the town. We go to West Park all the time. Great place for dogs.”

“Really?” Yuuri asked, perking up immediately, “That’s usually where Vicchan and I walk! It is right around the corner, after all.”

“How far is it from where you live?”

“You’re looking at it,” Yuuri replied, laughing when Viktor appeared perplexed, “My sister and I live in the apartment upstairs.”

“Wow, that’s really neat!” Viktor proclaimed, “I don’t live that far away either. Hop, skip and a jump away from the park. I live on Miller.”

“That is really close,” Yuuri agreed.

“Close to your shop as well,” he observed, “I’m going to have to visit more often. It’s an amazing place.”

“That would be great,” Yuuri said, smiling at Viktor as his heart skipped another beat, “I love repeat customers.”

They talked a little longer until a woman joined them, huffing at Yuuri when she stood in front of him. Her blazer bore the same style of name tag that Yuuri was wearing, Viktor assuming was his sister.

“We have customers in the shop. I have paperwork to finish and invoices to pay. You don’t have time to sit and chat, Yuuri,” she grumped before stalking to the back of the store, disappearing through a heavy door.

“That would be Mari,” Yuuri said, feeling pricks of heat dance across his cheeks, “She’s my sister. She runs the business side.”

“Ah,” Viktor replied, taking another sip of coffee, “I should stop monopolizing your time so you can
I've enjoyed chatting with you, Viktor," he said, smiling as he rose from the chair, "Take your time though."

Viktor nodded and watched Yuuri wind his way to the front of the store. Even though finding Bound to Please had been a fluke, Viktor was delighted by Fate's hand in the events of the day. Yuuri was kind, smart and humorous. Having a poodle was a point in his favor as well. What intrigued Viktor the most was Yuuri treated him as a person, not an object or a means to an end. Granted, they had just met but his initial impression was this was who the young man truly was. He had to come back.

Viktor finished his coffee, placed it in the plastic bin for dirty dishes and shoved several dollars into the tip jar. Walking up to the counter slowly, he flipped through the pages of the book, his eyes falling upon poems from Theocritus and Solon. He groaned and let his head fall, knowing he was in for some very dry reading.

Two customers were ahead of him when he reached the counter. As he bounced on the balls of his feet, he watched Yuuri assist those in front of him. He was extraordinarily kind, asking them about their day and what brought them to the store. Viktor felt a sliver of disappointment as he watched the bookseller interact with his customers. He thought Yuuri had treated him that way because of him, the unique person Viktor was. He was subdued when it was his turn, gently placing the book on the counter as Yuuri entered information into the computer in front of him.

"Thanks for helping me find this, Yuuri," Viktor said, giving him a weak smile as he dug his wallet from the back pocket of his pants.

"It's no problem," he replied, giving him a bright smile, "I really enjoyed talking with you and hope you come back."

"I bet you say that to everyone that walks in here," Viktor half-joked, plastering a fake smile onto his face.

"Nope, only the ones whose company I really enjoy," Yuuri countered, holding Viktor's gaze.

"Then I shall take that as a compliment," he said.

Viktor handed his credit card to Yuuri and waited as he completed the transaction, signing the slip and handing it back to him seconds later. He tilted his head when Yuuri continued to hold on to the book; Yuuri grabbing a flyer off to his side and placing it within the cover.

"We have a poetry reading here every Friday night at eight. I think you'd enjoy it," Yuuri said, handing Viktor the paper shopping bag.

"What kind of poetry?" Viktor asked, interest spiking.

"All types. Classic, abstract, modern. Some people share what they've written," he explained, "That and I'd love the chance to talk with you again. It's not often I get to speak with someone who loves literature as much as I do and owns a poodle."

"You're on," Viktor replied happily, feeling the unease dissipate from him, "See you at eight on Friday?"

"See you then," Yuuri agreed, grinning and waving as Viktor headed for the door, "Maybe I'll run into you at the park!"
“That would be great,” he replied, “Oh, thanks for the coffee!”

He exited the store and strode down Main St, a lightness in his step he hadn’t had in a long time. He was content, looking forward to a few days from now. He was pleased he had something new to do outside of work. It did fall under the category of his career, but it would be enjoyable. The best thought he had was he had found someone who wanted to get to know the true him, perhaps become a real friend. He found himself looking forward to Friday.

“Another day that passes is another day closer to seeing you again.”
Rhyme or Reason

Chapter Summary

The night of the poetry reading has arrived, Viktor and Yuuri learning facets of the other and wanting to explore them further.

“Serial robber, eh?” Yuuri asked, “You don’t strike me as the type.”

“You’ll never know,” Viktor teased, returning the young man’s grin.

“I like to think I’m a decent judge of character.”

“Ok,” Viktor said, thinking for a moment, “I could be a con man.”

“I seriously doubt that,” he countered.

“Maybe you need to get to know me better,” Viktor said, “How about West Park on Sunday afternoon. As long as it stops raining. You can meet Makkachin.”

Chapter Notes

Chapter Two - Rhyme or Reason

This is the second chapter of the Twitch series, 'Bound to Please'. We continue to have a ton of fun with it. We continue to evolve our initial ideas, add new ones and expand upon others. This chapter is about the poetry slam Yuuri invited Viktor to on the first meeting. It's funny, it's sweet, it adds the slow hint of hope. I think you're going to like it.

'Bound to Please' will be updated every Saturday evening or Sunday morning barring any unforeseen complications. Want to join us and help write a chapter? You can find us on Twitch every Saturday at 5PM EDT (GMT-5). Need help converting the time? Hit me up and I'll help you out.

A couple notes:
1) I mentioned this in the previous chapter, but Viktor's rental house is on Miller Ave and Bound to Please Bookstore is on Main St. This is based on Ann Arbor, Michigan.
2) Candide is a French satire written by Voltaire. It's one of the most sarcastic yet philosophical novels I've ever read. Check it out. It was banned for a while.
3) Tom Kha Gai is Thai Chicken Coconut Soup. It's pretty tasty, not spicy at all. You can find the recipe here.
4) I wrote the poem Seung Gil recites. Yes, it sucks. You'll see why he's so bitter later on.
5) West Park is in Ann Arbor, MI. It borders Miller Ave.
6) The literary quote at the end is from Roy T. Bennett.
I think I speak for my co-authors when I say thank you so much for reading and hope you enjoy it.
The weather hadn’t cooperated the past three days, not giving them the opportunity to run into each other in West Park. Viktor had been watching the clock all day, groaning in frustration as the minutes crept by. Deciding he couldn’t wait any longer, he said goodbye to Makkachin, grabbed his jacket and dashed out the door.

Rain poured down the entire time, turning the twenty-minute walk into a ten-minute run. He shook water out of his hair when he ran through the door and shrugged out of his jacket, hanging it on a coat tree.

“I think you need this.”

Viktor turned when he heard an amused voice pipe up behind him. Wiping stray drops away from his face, he smiled when his gaze fell upon Yuuri. Though he decided the young man was handsome days before, the cheerful grin Yuuri gave him was stunning. He walked down the few steps and took the hand towel Yuuri held out.

“Thanks,” Viktor said, enjoying the softness of Yuuri’s skin as their fingers brushed against each other.

“Why didn’t you drive? The parking lot behind the building is free after six,” Yuuri asked, chuckling at the man.

“I don’t own a car,” he replied.

“Oh,” Yuuri said, surprised, “You walk everywhere?”

“Yep. I teach in one of two buildings each semester and they’re on this side of campus,” Viktor explained, “I even rented a house on this side of town.”

“Pretty smart.”

“It works so far,” he said, smiling at him, “It gets a little tricky when I have to leave the city though.”

“I can imagine. Come on. I want to introduce you to my sister,” Yuuri said, gesturing for Viktor to follow him.

Viktor followed Yuuri to an open corner in the back of the store. He was surprised he didn’t see this during his first visit. The area was a comfortable hodgepodge of mismatched furniture and lamps. A
worn rug covering the faded hardwood floor dominated the space. A strip of lights switched on, illuminating two large speakers against the brick back wall. The woman that had scolded Yuuri a few days prior was adjusting the microphone stand that sat between the speakers.

“Mari, remember when I told you about the book of Antiquity poems I sold?” Yuuri asked, jogging her memory.

“Yeah,” the woman replied, not looking at her brother.

“This is Viktor,” Yuuri said, shifting to face him, “He bought it.”

“Nice to meet you,” Viktor greeted, holding hand out.

“You too,” Mari replied, continuing to twist the metal pole without looking up.

Viktor looked at Yuuri, unsure of what to do next. Yuuri was frowning at his sister, arms crossed in front of him. The woman was oblivious to her brother’s displeasure, however, and continued to set up for the event. The small area was becoming crowded and conversation buzzed around them.

“Mari, you’re being rude,” Yuuri chastised.

“And this is why you’re in customer service,” the woman grumbled as she looked up, “Fine. Hi. Nice to meet you. Viktor, was it? So glad you’re here. Blah blah blah. Happy shit. I’m busy. Chat later.”

“Mari!” Yuuri yelled.

“It’s ok,” Viktor assured him, “She’s busy.”

Yuuri led Viktor to the back of the area, gesturing for him to take the chair next to him. Viktor removed a coaster from its holder before gently placing his water bottle on the table between them. He saw several of his students, greeting them when they came to say hello. Yuuri watched in wonder as Viktor interacted with the young adults, further in awe. He man was charming, giving everyone the dazzling smile he had seen days before. He saw a change in Viktor’s demeanor, however. Viktor seemed to put up an invisible wall. He was kind as he spoke, but he was distant. After his students left to join their friends, Viktor turned back to Yuuri. The wall had disappeared immediately. Yuuri was confused yet intrigued at the same time. He wanted to ask Viktor about it, but it really was none of his business. They had only known each other for a few days.

“How have you been?” Viktor asked, giving Yuuri a sincere smile.

“I’ve been well. Business has been slow since it’s rained so much. It’s given me time to check inventory, so that’s a good thing,” he said.

“Give me an example,” Viktor prodded, sitting back into the chair and propping a leg on his knee.

“Well, I’d been wondering if we had a copy of Candide. I hadn’t seen it in a while and things do have a habit of disappearing from our system,” Yuuri explained.

“Ah, Voltaire,” Viktor said, “Very sarcastic and controversial. Did you find it?”

“Yep. Took me a day but I did. It was in the wrong section.”

“Where was it?” he asked.
“In with the automotive repair manuals,” Yuuri said, grinning when Viktor laughed.

“That’s priceless,” Viktor mused, “Maybe Voltaire repaired cars in his spare time.”

“Possibly,” Yuuri said between laughter, “Though it was probably carriages.”

Viktor laughed at the mental image, looking around as the stream of people continued. It had grown so crowded some were sitting on the floor. His eyes caught Yuuri’s profile when he looked back at him. He looked uneasy, almost anxious.

“Everything ok?” Viktor asked.

“Yeah,” he answered, “I never get used to this. We don’t usually have this many people in the store. It’s overwhelming.”

“Do you not like it?”

“I like the poetry, but not the social aspect of it,” Yuuri admitted.

“But you’re in customer service,” Viktor stated.

“I am, but I can focus on one person at a time. Would you believe that I’m actually quite shy?” Yuuri asked, looking at Viktor.

“That’s interesting,” he said.

“This is tiring, but I love my store. We do get busy at times. Those are the days I’m usually fighting a panic attack.”

“Do you get them often?” Viktor asked.

“Usually after this,” Yuuri confessed, nodding towards the stage.

“I’m sorry,” Viktor said, smiling softly, “Is there anything that helps? Anything I can do?”

“No,” he said, “I usually go to bed and sleep at least twelve hours. Mari runs the shop for a few hours. The nice thing about Saturday mornings is we aren’t that busy.”

“Really? I figured you would be,” Viktor said, “With people being off work.”

“They visit bookstores, just not used bookstores. We cater to college kids, looking for a book for college but can’t afford a new copy. That or they need extra money. College kids tend to sleep in,” Yuuri explained.

“I have to say they have good taste,” Viktor said, loving the slight blush creeping along Yuuri’s cheeks, “I’ll be sure to send my students here.”

“Tell them to come one at a time, please,” he teased, enjoying the melodic laughter from Viktor.

Their conversation was interrupted when a man plopped on the floor in front of Yuuri’s chair. He poked Yuuri until his attention turned to him. Exasperated, Yuuri turned to the new arrival and thumped him on the head.

“You know, for the one bringing you dinner you treat me awful, Yuuri,” he whined as he handed the plastic bag over.
“You’ll get over it,” Yuuri joked, “Viktor, Phichit Chulanont. Phichit, Viktor…I’m sorry, I never got your last name.”

“It’s ok,” Viktor said, shrugging his apology away, “Nikiforov. Nice to meet you, Phichit.”


“Phichit’s family owns a Thai restaurant a few blocks away.” Yuuri explained, “He brings me dinner since I don’t have time to eat between closing and the reading. That and his mother would kill me if I skipped a meal. What’s on the menu, Phichit?”

“Tom Kha Gai,” he said, “I brought enough so you’ll have leftovers. I brought some fried chicken balls also.”

“You’re the best, Phichit. Thanks,” the bookseller said, smiling at his friend.

Viktor and Phichit chatted about the upcoming event. Phichit mentioned he had never missed one. Viktor listened to him rave about it, but when the scent of Yuuri’s dinner hit him his stomach chose that moment to growl loudly. Yuuri looked up and raised a brow when meeting Viktor’s gaze.

“When was the last time you ate, Viktor?” Yuuri asked.

“Um,” he said, tapping a forefinger against his lips, “I had a protein bar a few hours after breakfast.”

“And then?” he implored.

“Apple juice as I was walking home.”

“What time was that?” Yuuri asked.

“Around three,” Viktor admitted.

“It’s almost eight,” he stated, rising from his chair, “I’ll be back in a minute.”

When Yuuri disappeared around the corner, Phichit got off the floor and slumped into the empty chair. He scanned the crowd, telling Viktor about the people that usually shared works. When his eyes fell on a slender, dark-haired man, he groaned.

“Man, I was hoping he wouldn’t be here,” Phichit whined.

“Who?” Viktor asked.

“See that guy with the dark hair and permanent scowl frozen on his face?” Phichit asked, pointing to a man leaning against a wall, “That’s Seung Gil. He makes emo look like a ray of sunshine.”

“That bad, eh?” Viktor said, giving him a half-smile.

“That bad. He writes his own material also. Poe has nothing on him.”

“Wow, then I can’t wait,” Viktor teased.

“You’ll regret saying that by the end of the night,” Phichit muttered.

Yuuri came back minutes later and ordered his friend out of the chair. When he sat down, he placed the mug he was carrying on the table and filled it with soup. He dug in the bag and pulled the container of chicken balls out, opening it and putting two on a napkin. After he put the spoon in the
mug, he slid both over to Viktor.

“Eat,” Yuuri insisted.

“This is your dinner,” Viktor protested, “I can’t.”

“Call it personal liability, then,” Yuuri said, grinning, “If you fall and hit your head on the floor when your blood sugar crashes, my shop will have to pay for your doctor bills.”

“When you put it that way, how can I refuse?” Viktor joked, giving him a half-smile.

He blew on the spoon before taking a bite. Flavors burst along his tongue, each taking a turn revealing themselves. He tasted the lemongrass first, followed by the cilantro. When he bit into the meat, the juiciness of the chicken flooded his mouth. The coconut made itself known after he swallowed.

“This is really good!” he exclaimed, “I thought all Thai was spicy.”

“That’s a misnomer,” Phichit explained, “Most of it is, but Yuuri isn’t fond of spice. Mom makes mild food or leaves the spice out for him.”

“Please tell your mother this is absolutely delicious. I need to visit your family’s restaurant, and soon,” Viktor declared.

“I’ll make sure you get VIP treatment,” Phichit promised.

“Oh please,” Yuuri muttered, turning to Viktor, “That just means he’ll give you a straw for your drink.”

“Hey!” Phichit whined, ignoring their laughter.

They chatted about Phichit’s day at the restaurant and Viktor’s classes that morning. Viktor explained the mid-semester classes would begin soon and he promised to teach one on Russian classics. He was pleased when Yuuri asked several questions about the reading choices and what his lesson plans consisted of. He was almost done describing what the class entailed when he heard the whine of the microphone.

“Hey! Can I have your attention please?” Mari asked, removing the microphone from the pole and speaking into it.

The crowd died down a little but was still too loud for the woman’s liking. Putting the microphone between her knees, she placed her forefingers in her mouth and whistled sharply. The din died down immediately. When all eyes were on her, she lifted the microphone and spoke again.

“Thank you so much. Here we are. Another Friday is upon us and you know what that means,” she said, holding the microphone to the crowd.

“Poetry night!” the attendees yelled.

“That’s right,” she said, grinning, “I see quite a few new faces so let’s go over some rules, shall we?”

While Mari rambled through the requirements of etiquette and crediting of works, Yuuri told Viktor his sister loved the get-together though she would never admit it. Viktor had to admit she was a wonderful MC. Yuuri had to fight to keep his laughter from bubbling over. Mari was not a people person, no matter how hard she tried.
“Hey! In the peanut gallery!” Mari yelled, looking at them, “Going over some important info here.”

Viktor looked over to see Yuuri blush and sink further into the chair. When Phichit handed his friend a pillow, Yuuri lifted his legs and hugged the pillow against him. Viktor felt bad for him and slightly annoyed at Mari. She had to know Yuuri didn’t like unwanted attention directed at him.

He frowned at the woman as she read from the schedule for the night. Eight readers were going to share works with the crowd, some famous, some original. He looked to Phichit when he groaned. Seung Gil would be reading a new poem.

They finished their meal as they listened to the participants. Some were good, others needed to learn how to grasp the emotion of the work. Viktor tried to stifle the critical eye of the professor within him, but it proved to be difficult. Yuuri would ask what Viktor thought each time someone left the stage. Viktor gave him his honest opinion, surprising the him. He was complimentary to some but made points of how the others could improve. Yuuri teased him, calling him Professor Viktor.

When the next reader took the stage, Phichit fell backwards onto the floor and groaned. The man noticed, his eyes narrowing even more as he glared at the Thai. Yuuri nudged his friend and ordered him to sit up, stating he was being rude. Since Phichit had warned him about this man, Viktor concentrated on him.

“I wrote this poem a couple weeks ago. It’s called ‘Black’,,” Seung Gil said, taking the microphone from the stand and sitting on the stool. He cleared his throat before beginning.

“Black as the night you left,
Black like the hole in my heart,
Black as my soul when you shredded it into tiny pieces,
Black like my love that has shriveled for you,
Black, all that’s left is black.”

Contained rage was on the man’s face when he looked up at the silent crowd. He sneered as they continued to stare, but was shocked when he heard a single person clapping. Viktor’s face was unreadable, but he was applauding the man. Others looked around uneasily, joining in the applause hesitantly. Seung Gil nodded once to the crowd and left the stage. Without another word, he looked at Yuuri and jerked his head to the front of the store. The bookseller rose from the chair and disappeared for several minutes. When Yuuri returned, Viktor looked at him questioningly.

“He always leaves after he finishes his reading,” Yuuri explained.

“That’s a little rude,” he said, amazed at the audacity of the man.

“That’s Seung Gil in a nutshell. That guy’s a jerk,” Phichit stated, “How you can cheer for him is beyond me.”

“He’s pretty good for an amateur, though I have read better. You can feel the emotion in the delivery of his words, though it’s very dark,” Viktor clarified.

“That was a really bad pun, Viktor,” Yuuri groaned, raising a hand to his forehead and shaking his head.

“It’s true,” he laughed.

“He’s still a jerk,” Phichit chimed in.

They quieted down when a young woman took stage, reading a poem from Emily Dickinson. It was
one of Viktor’s favorite works by the poet. Though it was brief, it was quite profound. The young woman did an extraordinary job with her interpretation of it. The crowd thought so as well, cheering loudly when she finished minutes later.

A few more people shared poems before the evening wrapped up. Mari let the guests dawdle for an hour before ushering them towards the door, wishing them a good night and hoping to see them next week. Phichit waved at his friend and teased Mari on his way out. The woman glared at him and warned him he’d better bring dinner for her next week as well. When she turned around, Viktor was speaking with Yuuri.

“It’s time for you to leave, too,” she said, unlocking the door again.

“I’ll let him out, Mari,” Yuuri said, “Go on upstairs. I’ll close.”

“Don’t forget to fill out the night deposit slip and put the bag in the safe. You left it under the counter last time,” she explained, waving as she went to the back of the store.

Viktor followed Yuuri to the counter. He watched as Yuuri methodically counted the drawer down and wrote the numbers delicately into a notebook. Viktor glanced at the paper, appreciating his writing. When Yuuri had finished, Viktor looked up and smiled at him.

“You have beautiful writing,” Viktor said, delighting in the light blush on his cheeks.

“Thanks, but it’s nothing special,” he said in disagreement.

“Sure, it is. But since compliments make you uncomfortable, I have a question,” Viktor said, “How do you know I’m not a serial robber?”

He was pleased when Yuuri laughed at his ridiculous question. He waited for him to double check the deposit and check the math on the slip. He stayed at the front of the store while Yuuri went into the office to lock the deposit for the night. Yuuri was grinning when he returned to the checkout counter.

“Serial robber, eh?” Yuuri asked, “You don’t strike me as the type.”

“You’ll never know,” Viktor teased, returning his grin.

“I like to think I’m a decent judge of character.”

“Ok,” Viktor said, thinking for a moment, “I could be a con man.”

“I seriously doubt that,” he countered.

“Maybe you need to get to know me better,” Viktor said, “How about West Park on Sunday afternoon? As long as it stops raining. You can meet Makkachin.”

Yuuri’s mouth opened slightly at the invitation. He hadn’t expected Viktor’s directness, but he found him refreshing. He briefly debated the suggestion in his head. His introversion begged for him to decline, but curiosity and the hope of making a new friend won out. He smiled and nodded at him.

“That sounds great,” Yuuri said, “What time?”

They finalized their plans and exchanged numbers, promising to text if anything changed. It was still pouring when Yuuri opened the front doors to let Viktor out. Asking Viktor to wait a minute, he
darted down the steps and walked around the corner. He returned seconds later with an umbrella in hand.

“It’s dark. It’s cold. You can’t get sick before Sunday. We have a date,” Yuuri explained, eyes widening when his choice of words hit him.

“I won’t. Thanks for the umbrella,” Viktor said, smiling softly at him, “I’ll return it on Sunday.”

“No rush. I have plenty. See you on Sunday?”

Viktor nodded and walked out the door, thanking Yuuri yet again for the wonderful evening and sharing his dinner with him. When Viktor was out of sight, Yuuri shut the doors behind him and locked up for the night. He leaned against the doors and looked at the new contact on his phone, grinning like an idiot.

“Con artist,” he muttered, “I think not, but you are hiding something.”

Viktor paused around the corner, taking cover under an awning when the rain beat harder against the pavement. He fished his phone out of the pocket and looked at the newest entry. Something stirred within him that he hadn’t felt since he was a small boy. He couldn’t remember being treated as kindly as Yuuri had with him that evening. He conversed easily with him, genuinely interested in Viktor’s work and day. He shared his meal without expecting anything in return. Yuuri wanted to spend every possible minute he could with Viktor until he had to leave. It warmed his heart. Yuuri made him feel special, wanting to know the real him.

“You don’t know what it means for me to be able to be myself, Yuuri. Thank you,” he said into the quiet night, looking up at the sky as the rain continued to fall.

“Pursue what catches your heart, not what catches your eyes.”
It's the day of Viktor's and Yuuri's "date" at West Park. After a change in plans, Yuuri lets Viktor in on a secret.

“Text me when you make it back?” Viktor asked, “Who knows what bookstore owner kidnappers are out there this late at night.”

“Viktor?”

“Hey?”

“Thanks for making me laugh,” Yuuri said, “It’s been a great day. Thanks for helping me forget about all the bad things going on.”

Thanks for checking out Chapter 3 of this series. This has been so much fun to write with my co-authors. You guys are great!

We've finally reached the day of their "date". Most of this chapter is funny, but there is a touch of angst. You'll have to read to find out, though.

I think these are the only notes:
First quote is from 'Hamlet' by Shakespeare.
Second quote is from the poem 'Silvia' by Shakespeare.
The Swedish meal they had for dinner is Gratinerad lax (salmon gratin) where you can find the recipe [here](#).
Third quote is from 'The Two Towers' by J.R.R. Tolkien.

I think I speak for everyone when I say I hope you enjoy this chapter and thanks for reading!

As much as I wish I could, I don’t own Yuri!!! On Ice.
This fic is not beta’d.
While I truly appreciate the offers, I’m not currently looking for a beta.

You can follow me on [tumblr](#). Stay up to date on latest chapters and story progress or just want to give a shout out! I follow back! You guys are what drives me, and I so appreciate every one of you.
The wind was brutal and out for vengeance.

That’s the only conclusion he could come to after the short walk to West Park. His soft grey hair was standing in every direction, cheeks chapped pink. His coat was twisted around one of his legs. Makkachin wasn’t helping either. The poodle was so happy to be out of the house he ran circles around his owner, tangling the leash around him. He had lost count how many times he had to stop and free himself from the strap.

He was annoyed at himself since he was running late. He wanted to be the first to arrive at the park. He knew he didn’t have to, but he wanted to impress Yuuri with a charming yet sincere smile the minute their eyes locked. But Fate had other plans for the day.

He ran up the hill to the center of the park, wilting a bit when he saw Yuuri leaning against a large maple tree. This was not how it played out in his mind. He was supposed to waltz in and captivate him by his very presence; but instead he was a breathless, sniveling mess.

Makkachin chose that moment to bark excitedly when Yuuri came into the dog’s view. He winced when Yuuri turned his head in their direction. He knew how horrible he must look and hoped he didn’t think less of him.

He reached Yuuri and his dog moments later, leaning over to catch his breath. He watched the two dogs spin around, sniffing each other in greeting. He hoped Makkachin would behave during this outing. He was generally a good dog but there was a first time for everything.

“Hi, Viktor,” Yuuri said, giggling at him.

“Hi, Yuuri,” Viktor replied as he caught his breath, “How are you? And what’s so funny?”


“Sorry I’m late,” he apologized, “Can you add pathetic to the list? I live five minutes away and I’m late.”

“It happens to the best of us,” Yuuri stated, holding a tissue out, “Did you have a good day yesterday?”

“It was ok. I spent most of the day grading essays on the comparison between Nikolas II and Tolstoy,” Viktor explained, pausing to blow his nose, “And yes, before you ask I am a glutton for punishment.”

“Not a word from me,” Yuuri laughed.

Viktor shook his head and looked at him. It was the first time he’d seen him in casual clothing. Even though he had only been in the store twice, Yuuri seemed to favor loose pants, button up shirts and baggy cardigans. While he admired Yuuri at the bookstore, his earlier impression of his good looks grew.

Yuuri had chosen a simple t-shirt and dark blue jeans paired with a light spring jacket. While his clothing hid his body at work, this outfit accentuated it. Yuuri was on the soft side; slight swell of his abdomen tightening his shirt, the hugging of denim on thick thighs, the roundness in his face. He was simply adorable.
“Ready to unleash the hounds?” Yuuri asked, pleased when the man smiled and nodded.

Walking to the enclosed area for dogs, the men watched Makkachin and Vicchan bound away from them. The poodles were having a wonderful time, yipping in excitement as they jumped and played with the other. Viktor motioned for Yuuri to join him at a nearby bench.

“Are you warm enough?” he asked, looking at Yuuri, “The wind is pretty chilly.”

“I’ll be fine,” Yuuri replied.

“I think I saw a guy selling hot chocolate wandering about. We’ll get some if he makes it this way,” Viktor offered.

“Sounds good,” Yuuri agreed, turning to smile at him, “Thanks for suggesting this. I don’t get out much.”

“Neither do I.”

“Why don’t I believe you?” Yuuri asked.

Viktor paused, thinking of the right words to say. He focused on his thoughts while watching the frolicking dogs play. They were exuding the happiness they found in each other that he shared with Yuuri. It was first impression joy that neither wanted to end, but wanted to watch unfold. How could he tell Yuuri without frightening him away?

“I do get out, but it’s not like this,” Viktor explained, choosing his words carefully, “The people I interact with don’t have a friendly relationship with me. It’s either professional or they’re an acquaintance. I have one friend here but I can only handle him in small doses.

“This is different. This is nice. I can be myself with you,” he continued, “I know we’ve known each other less than a week, but it’s different. I hope I’m not scaring you.”

“No, you aren’t,” Yuuri said, smiling at Viktor when he looked at him, “I understand. I usually stay home or only go out with Phichit. I’ve told you I’m shy and tend to think the worst of any situation.”

“Such as?” Viktor asked.

“When I go somewhere, I feel like people are staring at me or whispering behind my back. I’m very self-conscious about my looks,” he admitted, blushing suddenly, “I’m sorry! I can’t believe I just blurted that out the third time we’ve seen each other. Now I sound clingy.”

“It’s fine, Yuuri,” Viktor assured him, “We know what we are, but know not what we may be’.”

“Why are you quoting Shakespeare?” he asked, frowning in confusion.

“You have a certain way you view yourself,” Viktor explained, “which sounds negative, by the way. You don’t think about how you seem to others.”

“I’ll be the first one to admit poor self-esteem,” Yuuri admitted, “Ok. Since you’re going to say something like that, how do you see me?”

“I think you’re smart, funny, compassionate, and extremely kind. You’re one of the nicest people I’ve met in my life.”

“Now I know you’re full of it,” Yuuri muttered, feeling his cheeks heat up.
“Scout’s honor,” he said, holding a hand up, “You’re someone I’d be proud to call friend one day.”

“Likewise, but aren’t we doing this backwards?” Yuuri asked.

“What do you mean?”

“This conversation is a little deep,” Yuuri explained, “Aren’t we supposed to learn the others favorite color or most embarrassing moment first?”

“I think you’re right,” Viktor agreed, chuckling, “But hey! Now that the awkward is out of the way, it’ll be so much easier. You first. Favorite color.”

“Hey! That was my idea!”

Viktor laughed at Yuuri’s surprised outburst, turning to look at the poodles. They were running along the edge of the fence, barking happily. He had never seen Makkachin take this quickly to another dog, so perhaps it was another sign of Fate. He shifted his attention back to Yuuri when he finally came up with an answer. Smiling when Yuuri rambled and debated his answers, Viktor thought once again about his kindness.

‘Beauty lives with kindness’

They spent the next hour and a half interrogating the other. Questions ranged from favorite school teacher to happiest moment in their life. While the answer came easy to him, Yuuri felt a sense of sadness when Viktor had to think of his. He watched Viktor look over the park as he sifted through memories. Yuuri saw the sorrow in Viktor’s eyes when he turned to him, quietly telling him he couldn’t think of anything.

“Maybe in time,” Yuuri said, trying to cheer him, “or your happiest moment has yet to happen.”

“Perhaps,” Viktor replied wistfully, “Sorry to be such a downer.”

“You’re not,” he assured Viktor, giving him a hopeful smile.

They had finished their hot chocolate earlier. Viktor had insisted on buying, telling Yuuri it was an apology for being late. Realizing he wouldn’t be able to persuade Viktor otherwise, Yuuri thanked him but said the next one was on him. It was growing colder as the day progressed, however, and the warmth of the beverage was receding. The next gust of chilly wind ran through him, eliciting a shiver from Yuuri.

“I’m sorry,” Viktor said when Yuuri’s shoulder brushed against his arm, “Want to go somewhere else? Preferably with heat?”

“But the dogs,” he said, “We can’t take them inside.”

“Would you mind a detour to my house? We can leave them there if you’d like,” Viktor suggested.

“Vicchan’s a muddy mess. He’ll trash your house.”

“I do have an enclosed porch they’re both welcome to trash,” Viktor said, giving Yuuri puppy eyes, “They’re having fun. Hate to end it.”
Yuuri watched the dogs race laps around the enclosed area, admitting Viktor did have a point. Vicchan was thrilled to meet another dog and play for hours on end. While he took the poodle to the park every day he could, it was a brief trip since Yuuri didn’t like being out long. The exercise and interaction would do the dog well.

“If it’s not a bother,” Yuuri agreed reluctantly, “and you don’t mind me knowing where you live.”

“As long as you can deal with me being a con artist, I can deal with you being a stalker,” Viktor teased, grinning when Yuuri giggled.

“Deal.”

They rounded the dogs up, Viktor having to chase Makkachin as the poodle thought it was a new game. Once Yuuri fastened Vicchan’s leash onto his collar and tied the strap to a nearby bench, he helped Viktor wrangle his dog. Though it was tiring, Yuuri found it hilarious. Viktor’s frustration with the exuberant dog was precious. He could tell through the loving threats that Viktor cared for his dog.

“Makkachin!” Viktor yelled, “You’re giving your dad a bad rep! Come here!”

“Guide him this way,” Yuuri shouted, holding his arms out to his sides.

It took several minutes for Viktor to get behind the poodle and chase him toward Yuuri. Yuuri readied himself to catch Makkachin, but the dog wiggled out of his arms and ran past him. Viktor stopped when he reached Yuuri, shaking his head and catching his breath before going after the poodle again.

They had him the second time. Makkachin must have understood when Viktor bellowed he’d take the dog’s treats from him for a week if he didn’t stop. The poodle slowed down and sat in front of Yuuri when he reached him. Yuuri crouched and petted the dog. Looking up, he smiled when Viktor joined them.

“Bad fur ball!” Viktor growled, pushing the dog down when he tried to jump on him, “Oh no, you don’t! You’re drenched, your paws are muddy and you stink! You’re grounded, Makkachin.”

“You ground your dog?” Yuuri asked through laughter.

“A parent must teach a child how to behave,” Viktor stated, “How do you get Vicchan to behave so well?”

“I think part of it is he’s very easy going,” Yuuri explained, “and he knows he’s a dog.”

“Hey! Makkachin is more than a dog,” he whined, rubbing the poodle’s ears, “Aren’t you, Makka? Who’s a good boy? Who’s a good boy? Oh, that’s right. Not you.”

“You’re going to give the poor boy a complex,” Yuuri teased through growing giggles.

“He’s past complex. He probably needs doggie therapy by now,” Viktor muttered as he put the leash on the poodle, “Ready?”

The walk to Viktor’s house went quickly since he lived across the street. Yuuri asked for a towel to
dry Vicchan, stating he didn’t want to add to the mess Makkachin would make. After feigning offense, Viktor winked at Yuuri and retreated inside the house.

He talked to the dogs while he waited for Viktor to return. Yuuri had learned when Vicchan was young that the dog loved to hear his voice. They would often spend hours in a one-sided conversation. Yuuri tried to make sure Mari wasn’t home as she would tease him relentlessly, but she always seemed to walk in at the worst time.

Yuuri was in the middle of asking Makkachin about how he spent every morning when he felt a soft tap on his shoulder. Trying to fight the blush he felt creep up his neck, he turned and clutched the towel Viktor held out. He felt foolish for being caught talking to the dogs, hoping the man wouldn’t be condescending.

“Makkachin loves conversations about the stock market the best,” Viktor said, sitting on the floor and calling the poodle to him, “Secretly, I think he’s a financial planner and has clients come over while I’m working.”

“Financial planner, eh?” Yuuri asked, laughing, “Maybe he can help me arrange my portfolio.”

“I’ll talk with him. See if he’ll give you a discount,” Viktor joked, “You did bring him a new friend after all.”

“Vicchan is happy too,” he said, “I don’t think he’s ever had a day like this, to be honest.”

“How come?”

“You know how I said I don’t get out much?” Yuuri asked, watching the man nod, “That includes Vicchan. We come to the park, but it’s a quick lap around and then right back home. I never worried about how much my actions would affect him until now.”

“You can bring him over to play with Makkachin anytime,” Viktor suggested.

“That’s nice, Viktor, but I couldn’t intrude on your time.”

“I’m offering,” he said, staring at Yuuri, “Besides, it gives me the chance to prove what a horrible con artist I am.”

“You are horrible if you’re telling me you’re one,” Yuuri laughed.

“See?” Viktor joked, “Ready to…”

Yuuri’s eyes widened when Viktor sneezed several times in quick succession. Seeing Viktor raise the dirty towel to wipe his nose, Yuuri placed a hand on Viktor’s forearm and shook his head. He looked around the porch but didn’t find what he wanted. After asking Viktor for permission to enter his house, they went into the kitchen.

“Aha!” Yuuri exclaimed, swiping a box of tissue of a counter and handing it to him, “If you’re sneezing the last thing you need is dirt up your nose.”

“Yeah, guess you’re…” Viktor rushed before sneezing again.

“Viktor, I think you should stay home. We can go out another time when you’re feeling better,” Yuuri suggested.

“I’m fine,” Viktor protested, “Just a little sniffly.”
“Is that even a word?” he asked.

“It is now,” Viktor declared, walking into the pantry to throw the tissues away.

As he returned to the kitchen, he felt achiness set into his muscles. He groaned, hoping he wasn’t getting sick. It had rained a lot that week. Since he walked everywhere, he was caught in frequent downpours on his commute to work.

“Hey, can I ask you a silly question?” he asked.

“Yes,” Yuuri replied slowly, confused by the request.

“How do I look?”

“You look great,” Yuuri said.

“No, seriously,” Viktor said.

“Well, you look tired,” Yuuri admitted, studying the man’s face, “Your cheeks are a little pink. Are you feeling ok?”

“I think I might have been out in the rain too much last week,” he surmised.

“That’s never a good thing,” Yuuri said apologetically and walked to the door leading to the back porch, “I should let you get some rest. Will you be stopping by the store this week?”

“Yuuri, wait,” Viktor said, “Would you like to stay for dinner? I have some leftovers from the Swedish restaurant down the street. You shared yours with me the other night. It’s only fair.”

“As long as you think you don’t need to repay me,” he said, “That’s not why I did it.”

“I was hoping to spend more time with you,” Viktor admitted, “I haven’t had this much fun in a very long time.”

“We didn’t do anything spectacular, Viktor,” Yuuri muttered.

“It was perfect,” Viktor said, smiling softly, “What do you say?”

“If you’re sure you don’t mind.”

“Not at all,” Viktor said reassuringly, “I hope you like salmon.”

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The hours seemed to fly by as they ate and talked. Viktor told Yuuri he always ordered Gratinerad lax. When Yuuri asked what it was, he explained it was a salmon gratin dish. Even though it was a hearty meal, it had a hint of tang. When Viktor pulled it out of the oven and scooped a couple spoonfuls into bowls, he handed Yuuri his and guided him to the living room.

Yuuri sat on the couch across from Viktor and took a bite of fish. His eyes widened as the multitude of flavors hit him. It was delicious.

After they finished eating, Yuuri insisted on helping him wash the dirty dishes. Viktor refused,
telling Yuuri he would be an ungracious host if he made him pitch in. Viktor teased him by telling him that was reserved for the second visit.

Viktor wasn’t gone long much to Yuuri’s surprise. He explained he only had to rinse the plates and load the dishwasher. Viktor laughed when Yuuri rolled his eyes and shook his head, explaining he forgot most people had dishwashers.

“But how is sunset different in St. Petersburg than say...Ann Arbor?” Yuuri asked, genuinely interested.

At the poetry reading Yuuri had asked about his job. This time Yuuri seemed more interested in Viktor as a person. He asked about his childhood, his likes and dislikes, his favorite genres of books that didn’t have to do with work.

“I think it has to do with the sea,” Viktor confessed, “You can gaze out into openness. It’s like the world never ends when you look over the water.”

“That sounds beautiful. It sounds a lot like Hasetsu, though the sun rises over the ocean,” Yuuri said, smiling softly as memories came to mind.

“I may have to visit one day,” Viktor said.

“I think you’d like it.”

“How come you haven’t gone back?” Viktor asked.

“My parents don’t live in Hasetsu any longer. They moved a few years back,” Yuuri explained, “The economy has been bad in Kyushu for a while. The tourist industry was hit hard and the onsen were the first to go. At least Yu-topia was the holdout. My parents sold it last year. I heard some national chain took it over, remodeled it into a ryokan.”

“I’m sorry,” Viktor said softly, “What’s the difference between an onsen and a ryokan?”

“An onsen has hot springs. A ryokan is just an inn.”

“Gotcha,” he said, “Can you visit them anyway?”

“I’d love to, but...” Yuuri said, looking at the ground as he trailed off.

“But?”

“If I tell you something, please don’t say anything to anyone,” he pleaded.

“I promise,” Viktor agreed.

“Bound to Please isn’t doing well,” Yuuri admitted, “We don’t have as many customers as we used to. Less customers mean less sales. Costs are rising. Our electric bill has almost doubled since we opened. Mari and I need to come up with something to draw more people in. If we don’t, we’re not going to make it.”

Viktor felt a chill run through him. He had just discovered Bound to Please and the gem that was Yuuri Katsuki. He hated this burden was on him and his sister. He wanted to help but didn’t know how.

“Is there anything I can do?” he asked.
“Nah, it’ll be ok,” Yuuri answered, giving Viktor too bright of a smile.

Viktor saw tears shimmering in Yuuri’s eyes. The store was Yuuri’s life, it was his soul. He was so dedicated with everyone he interacted with. He had watched Yuuri during the poetry reading. He didn’t ask generic questions one would expect from a retail employee. Yuuri asked how class was going, if one person got their car fixed, another if their mom was feeling better and if she was out of the hospital yet. He was a benefit to the community. His store couldn’t go under.

“I think you should come over, make an appointment with Makkachin and we can discuss ways to drive business,” Viktor teased half-heartedly.

“He’ll do wonders,” he said, chuckling, “I should probably get going though. It’s dark out and I have to open in the morning.”

“Text me when you make it back?” Viktor asked, “Who knows what bookstore owner kidnappers are out there this late at night.”

“Viktor?”

“Hey?”

“Thanks for making me laugh,” Yuuri said, “It’s been a great day. Thanks for helping me forget about all the bad things going on.”

“Any time. Would you like to meet sometime and brainstorm together? It might help to have a fresh perspective,” Viktor proposed.

“You don’t have to worry about it, honestly.”

“That’s what friends do, Yuuri,” Viktor said softly, “I would love to help any way I can. What are you doing tomorrow?”

“That fast, eh?” Yuuri asked before chuckling.

“Yes, sir,” Yuuri said, giggling, “See you tomorrow then.”

Viktor led him to the back porch, watching him talk to Vicchan as he put his leash on. Waving as Yuuri walked away, Viktor felt happiness in his heart again. He hoped Fate was kind on Bound to Please, but more importantly on Yuuri. He was such a kind soul and deserved the best in life. He kept thinking about one of his favorite quotes from his favorite trilogy by an English author, knowing it fit Yuuri’s kindness and situation perfectly.

‘There is some good in this world, and it's worth fighting for.’
Viktor and Yuuri spend an evening together discussing plans for Bound to Please, enjoying each others company.

“Trust me, it’s worth it. Let’s call it a research project,” Viktor said, seeing the confused look on Yuuri’s face, “We’ll call it ‘Finding Yuuri Katsuki’.”

“Huh?”

“We’ll explore the town, find something you enjoy. Who knows? I could find a new hobby while we’re at it,” the man said.

“May I think about it?”

“Sure, but I think we should start now,” Viktor stated, “How about a movie? Unless you have to leave?”

Chapter Notes

We're at Chapter Four of this reader-contributed fic. We are having so much fun with this! You guys have come up with awesome ideas and I appreciate all the beta readers ;) My co-authors are great!

This chapter is about the meeting to brainstorm ideas on how to keep 'Bound to Please' alive. It's important to Yuuri, but becoming so to Viktor as well as the young man is growing on him. This chapter is cute. I enjoyed writing it and expanding on their friendship/relationship even more. We're starting to touch on the soulmates/one meant for you plotline as well. You'll see.

A couple notes:
1) The movie they watch is "You've Got Mail". Tom Hanks and Meg Ryan star in it. It came out in 1998. Huge rom-com back in the day. I actually watched this again for research. At 3:30 am. I really do love you guys.
2) The poem at the end is titled 'Simple' and is by DiamondWinters. She can't attend our Twitch streams due to other obligations yet wanted to contribute. Beautiful piece, isn't it? You'll see more from her in the future. Check out her writing as well! It's fabulous.
3) Bonjour mon ami = Hello, my friend in French.
4) Amour du jour = love of the day in French.
5) A swinger is a person who takes on several sexual partners usually in a group setting. Home parties are quite common for swingers.

If you'd like to join the Twitch feed and participate, you can join us every Saturday at 5PM EDT (GMT-4). If you need help converting that to your time, drop me a note here or on tumblr/twitter. I'll help you out.
Monday crept by for both men. Viktor continuously glanced at the clock through each class, counting down the minutes until his day ended. The second his last Russian poetry class ended, he dashed out the door and ran home. He wanted to tidy his house before his company arrived. After feeding Makkachin and cooing at the dog while he ate, he set about the task of cleaning. He finished an hour before Yuuri was due to arrive.

The day was equally agonizing for Yuuri. He attempted to be patient with his customers, but it grew trying as the day went on. When his sister came out of the office to relieve him, he ran upstairs to change quickly. He found Vicchan’s leash and fastened it to the dog’s collar before leading him downstairs. Relaying last minute information to his sister, he ran out of the shop.

Not sure how long he was going to stay at Viktor’s house, Yuuri decided to drive. He waited impatiently for his car to warm up. Deciding the car was ready, he put it in gear and pulled onto the road.

He arrived at Viktor’s house minutes later. There was a gravel parking lot nearby for residents. Viktor had told him which spot was his and suggested he park there; if not he’d be walking at least a half mile to his house. Yuuri agreed, knowing he wouldn’t be up for a hike after working all day.

He was out of breath after climbing the steep hill from the parking lot to Viktor’s house. Stopping when he reached the walkway leading to the porch, Yuuri placed his hands on his hips and bent over. Vicchan began pacing behind him and whined in excitement.

“Someone knew you were here before I did.”

Yuuri lifted his head and saw Viktor standing on the steps of the porch. He was grinning at him while holding the collar of his poodle. Yuuri smiled, patted his thigh and watched the dog bound towards him and Vicchan. After scrubbing Makkachin’s neck and ears, he let him go to play with Vicchan. The two dogs raced around the yard, yipping happily.

“The financial advisor thanks you for his payment,” Viktor said as he walked toward him.
“Vicchan was excited to get out as well,” Yuuri explained, “Two days in a row is unheard of for him. He might grow suspicious soon though, might think he’s going to the vet.”

“I guess he’ll have to visit Makka more often,” he stated, “Come on. Hungry? I ordered pizza. I didn’t know what you liked, so I hope cheese and pepperoni is fine.”

“That’s perfect. Thanks,” Yuuri said, smiling at his friend, “How much do I owe you?”

“Nothing. My treat.”

“I insist,” Yuuri stated.

“Call it payback for the coffee,” Viktor said before calling his poodle, “Ready to get cracking?”

Viktor motioned to his house with his head, Yuuri following. When Yuuri entered, he heard the soft notes of piano float through the room. Viktor had laid a tray with two glasses and iced tea on the coffee table. The dim yet warm lighting relaxed him incredibly.

“I hope you like tea,” Viktor said, gesturing for Yuuri to take a seat.

“I love it. One of the things I miss from home is green tea,” Yuuri reminisced, sitting on the couch, “My parents send a tin over every few months, but Mari usually winds up drinking it all before I can make a cup.”

“Maybe you need to hide it,” the man suggested.

“I’ve tried. I swear she has tea radar,” he grumbled, smiling when Viktor laughed, “I appreciate you offering to help.”

“Isn’t that what friends do?” Viktor asked.

“Yeah, I’m just not used to anyone going out of their way to help me like this,” Yuuri admitted, “I mean, I’m just a dime a dozen person.”

“Don’t sell yourself short, Yuuri Katsuki,” Viktor objected, “I don’t think you realize what a great person you are.”

“You’ve known me less than a week. How can you make that assumption?”

“I watched you during the poetry reading,” he said, “You didn’t treat people like customers. You treated them as individuals. That’s rare.”

“You know how well I take compliments, but thanks,” Yuuri mumbled, blushing, “Ready to get to business?”

“Sure, what have you thought of already?”

They spent the next few hours going over ideas and eating pizza. Yuuri told him about possibly having a children’s story hour one day each week. The inventory of children’s books had been growing and story time had the possibility of increasing sales. Viktor thought that was a wonderful idea.

“You have a coffee nook,” he said, pressing a finger against his lips, “Have you thought about offering pastries or something like that? Maybe there’s a bakery in the area you can partner with? I would recommend putting the nook in the front of the store, though. I think a lot of your customers may not know it’s there. Possibly a sign in a window?”
“I have a friend, Yuuko, that owns a bagel shop. She’s thinking about expanding into breakfast cakes and pastries. Maybe I can talk with her about it?” Yuuri thought aloud, “As far as the sign, we can’t afford anything like that. They cost a lot.”

“I happen to have a friend in the art department at school. Maybe I can see if his students can design one,” Viktor offered.

“I can’t ask you to do that,” he objected.

“You’re not asking. Besides, it gives the students advertising experience to put in their portfolios. Win-win,” Viktor explained, “I have another idea.”

“Let’s hear it.”

“Would you let me hold a class once a week in the poetry corner?” Viktor asked, holding a hand out before Yuuri could protest, “It will give you some exposure. You might get some more sales. I’m not the only humanities professor these kids have, so they could possibly need a book or twelve. That and we could talk more.”

“You’re serious?” Yuuri asked.

“Of course, I am,” he replied, smiling at his friend, “Maybe you could recommend some new poets my kids could check out. Possibly get Mari to watch the store for an hour and get a free class in? I bet you’ll earn an A.”

“Free class? How you tempt me,” he said between giggles, “I’ll ask Mari and let you know. Oh, I have a friend that’s writing a children’s book series. I could talk with her and see if she’ll sell them at Bound to Please.”

“That’s a great idea, but why stop there? How about having a local authors’ section? We get a lot of writers asking our department to proofread for them. I could send them your way,” Viktor proposed.

“You’re just full of ideas.”

“Comes with my job,” he said, “I have to be creative at times. But I also think your store is worth saving. I think it’s your pride and joy. I’d hate for you to lose what you love.”

“Thanks,” Yuuri said, smiling softly, “It’s all I have left. Since my parents sold the onsen, I don’t feel like I fit in anywhere. The shop is my life.”

“I commend you for building a wonderful store, but could you possibly expand what drives you? I’m not saying this will happen, but you need to be prepared for the worst. If might help if you add something else to your life. If Bound to Please goes under, I think you’re going to be lost,” Viktor said quietly.

“I know, but if I’m not working or trying to improve the situation at the store I feel like I’m shirking my duties,” he explained.

“Yuuri, you’re not. Everyone needs down time. Don’t push yourself so hard,” Viktor said, “So, on that note we have to hang out at least once a week.”

“Wait, I can’t do that! That takes away from your time!” Yuuri exclaimed.

“Trust me, it’s worth it. Let’s call it a research project,” Viktor said, seeing the confused look on Yuuri’s face, “We’ll call it ‘Finding Yuuri Katsuki.’”
“Huh?”

“We’ll explore the town, find something you enjoy. Who knows? I could find a new hobby while we’re at it,” Viktor explained.

“May I think about it?”

“Sure, but I think we should start now,” Viktor stated, “How about a movie? Unless you have to leave?”

“I don’t want to impose. Don’t you have to work tomorrow?” Yuuri asked.

“Tuesdays and Thursdays are my late days. Classes don’t start until 12:55.”

“If you’re sure you don’t mind,” Yuuri said.

“Not at all. I bought a new movie the other day,” Viktor said, handing the case over to him, “Want to watch it?”

“This is a rom-com,” Yuuri mumbled.

“But it’s about a bookstore. That’s why I wanted it,” Viktor explained.

“Alright, but if it’s lame I’m choosing the movie next time,” he warned.

“Next time, eh?” Viktor teased, admiring the blush peppering Yuuri’s cheeks.

Viktor opened the case and removed the disc gently. Rising from the couch and taking the few steps to the player, he crouched in front of the TV stand and set it up for the movie. Yuuri’s eyes fell on the V of the back of Viktor’s shirt. He could see the outline of his shoulder blades, accentuating the strong muscles that peeked through. His gaze drifted up to the back of Viktor’s head, pondering how wonderfully rare the silver-grey of his hair was.

Yuuri averted his eyes when Viktor stood, grimacing when his knees crackled. He waited for Viktor to sit on the other side of the couch before chancing a glimpse at him. When he looked up, Viktor was watching him, smiling softly. Leaning over, Yuuri lifted his glass from the coffee table and gulped the rest of his tea quickly.

“Would you care for some more?” Viktor asked, scooting onto the edge of the couch and picking up the pitcher.

When Yuuri nodded, Viktor refilled his glass. He was amused when Yuuri took another sip before placing his glass on a coaster, sitting back against the couch and twisting the hem of his shirt with a finger. Not wanting to make Yuuri more uncomfortable, he grabbed the remote between them and pressed the button to start the movie.

The film was an hour in when Viktor heard his back door open. He didn’t want the interruption of his frequent and uninvited guest this evening. He was enjoying his time with Yuuri; sneaking glances when Yuuri’s infectious laugh touched his eyes. His entire body became animated when laughter bubbled from within. Viktor loved it, thinking Yuuri couldn’t be more adorable.

“Bonjour, mon ami!”

Yuuri jumped when a new voice shouted, startling him. Viktor patted his hand, smiling before getting up and walking to the kitchen. Yuuri picked the remote up and pressed the pause button.
Viktor had mentioned he had never seen the movie before and Yuuri didn’t want him missing it. He shifted his body so he was sideways on the couch, looking into the kitchen.

Viktor was talking with a man he hadn’t seen before. He was very tan, dark brown hair though the top of his head was covered with disheveled blond locks. He was beaming at Viktor as the two men talked quietly. Viktor seemed perturbed and the other man was teasing him.

“Going to introduce me to your amour du jour?” the man asked, grinning at Viktor.

“Yuuri, remember the friend I was telling you about that I can only take in small doses?” Viktor asked, “This is him. Yuuri Katsuki, Chris Giacometti.”

Chris came into the living room, fell into an arm chair and shook Yuuri’s hand. Yuuri immediately felt overwhelmed and intimidated by the man. Chris leaned forward and rested his hands on his knees, causing Yuuri to flinch as he pressed further into the back of the couch.

“Nice to meet you, Yuuri,” Chris said, trilling his name excessively.

“Laying it on a little thick?” Viktor asked sarcastically, falling back onto the couch.

“Nonsense,” Chris objected, “What’s a nice guy like you doing in a place like this?”

Viktor scoffed loudly, put a hand over his eyes and shook his head. Chris was an incorrigible flirt and had no shame. He could usually put up with his extravagant and unnecessary attitude, but not tonight.

“I’m in the middle of something,” he said, “What do you want?”

“I see that,” Chris said, grinning at Yuuri, “Do you happen to have any merlot or pinot noir? I’m having a get together tonight and don’t have any red wine. Tragic, really.”

“Typical get-together?” Viktor asked, rolling his eyes when his friend nodded, “You know where it’s at.”

“Yuuri, you should join us some time,” Chris suggested, “I think you might find it interesting, possibly enjoy it.”


“Did you know I work with Viktor? Our offices are across the hall from each other,” Chris said.

“Out,” Viktor demanded.

“What do you teach?” Yuuri asked.

“Les langues d’amour,” Chris said, waving a hand dramatically, “Mainly French and Italian. Beautiful languages. Perhaps I could teach you a phrase or two.”


“No fun, Vitya,” he sighed, standing up, “I’ll take my leave. We’ll talk later, Romeo.”

Yuuri kept his eyes on the floor when Chris left the room. He heard the creaking of a cabinet door and the man rummaging through the content. Chris hummed when he found a couple bottles, thanked Viktor and left minutes later.
“Sorry about that,” Viktor apologized, “He’s a bit overbearing.”

“I know he’s your friend, but I am not very comfortable around him,” Yuuri admitted.

“That’s ok, Yuuri. You don’t have to like everyone you come across. See why I can only handle him in small doses?” Viktor asked, trying to catch his gaze.

Yuuri lifted his head and looked at Viktor. While most would regard him with pity or consider him weak, Viktor’s smile was sincere and reassuring. He accepted his hesitation and explanation without question. He found himself thinking Viktor was unlike anyone he had ever met before.

“What is his typical get-together?” he asked.

“He’s a swinger,” Viktor explained, “He has people over a couple times a week.”

“I wish I hadn’t asked,” Yuuri muttered, blushing deeply.

“How about back to more pleasant things? Want to finish the movie?” he suggested, “It really is rather cute.”

“Sure,” Yuuri agreed, “I didn’t think it would be this funny.”

The movie finished almost an hour later and Viktor regretted suggesting they watch it. Cringing internally, he looked to Yuuri and tried to gauge his reaction. His expression was blank.

“I’m sorry, Yuuri,” Viktor said softly, “If I would have known it was going to end like this, I wouldn’t have suggested it.”

“You didn’t know she was going to lose her bookstore,” he said, giving him a weak smile, “Besides, they did find true love. Almost like soulmates.”

“Do you believe in soulmates, Yuuri?” Viktor asked, intrigued by the young man’s comment.

“I don’t know if I believe in Fate or soulmates, but I believe certain people compliment each other so much it’s almost like destiny has touched them,” Yuuri mused, “I’m sure that sounds really tacky.”

“No, it makes perfect sense,” Viktor agreed, “I study Fate a lot in literature, and it seems too mystical to believe. I do subscribe to the theory of complimenting one another. Two halves make a whole kind of thing? The pieces of one fitting the other and vice versa?”

“Yeah,” he said, glad his friend understood what he was saying, “I think you’re the first person to ever grasp the idea and accepted my theory.”

“I’m glad we’re on the same page then,” Viktor said, smiling, “Do you have to leave?”

“Yeah,” Yuuri said, looking at the time on his phone, “Early day. I’m already up past my bedtime. I had so much fun though. Thank you so much for helping me come up with ideas. I don’t know how I can repay you.”

“Watch another movie with me soon?” he suggested, “I’ll let you choose next time.”

“You’re on. How about Friday after the poetry reading? You can come upstairs and we’ll watch it there if that’s alright. I can drive you home when it’s done,” Yuuri offered.

“It’s a date!” Viktor exclaimed, grinning when he blushed yet again, “I will be by the store before then though. Count on it.”
“I look forward to it,” he said, “I have to go. Thanks again.”

When he got home and made it to his room, he pulled the journal from under his mattress. Digging around in the nightstand drawer, he found a pen and opened the book to a fresh page. It had been a while since he had written anything, but the evening with Viktor inspired him. The movie, the man’s understanding, his agreement with his own beliefs about soulmates. It was unreal.

Yuuri chewed on the end of the pen as he waited for words to float through his mind. Closing his eyes, he focused on the joyous feeling he had all night. He couldn’t remember how long it had been since he had been this happy, when he had smiled so much. Laughter came so easily when he was with Viktor. It was unreal.

His eyes widened when the right words assaulted him suddenly. He scribbled on the paper hastily, not wanting to lose the flow. Once he deemed it perfect, he read back over his work.

_The simple things that mean so much,_
_the words of love or a simple touch._

_To be held so very tight,_
_the soft I love you during the night._

_The love in the eyes and the simple kiss,_
_the soft caress and the night of bliss._

_All these things we look for in life,_
_from a lover, husband or wife._

_All we ask from them is simple,_
_to be loved just a little._

“Hmm,” he wondered as he finished, “My one for life.”

Setting the journal and pen on the nightstand, he turned the lamp off and settled into bed. As he fell asleep, he hoped the week would pass quickly. He had something to look forward to outside of the store. Something that could interest him, did interest him.

“Viktor,” Yuuri whispered sleepily, eyes fluttering closed as he drifted to the land of nod.
Field Trip

Chapter Summary

After Mari gives permission, Viktor holds his first poetry class at 'Bound to Please'.

“It’s nothing drastic,” he assured her, “Remember my friend, Viktor?”

“The guy you’ve been seeing?”

“I’m not seeing him, Mari!” Yuuri exclaimed.

“Yeah, ok,” Mari said, “Anyway?”

“I think I told you he’s a literature professor,” he said, continuing when she nodded, “Would it be possible for him to hold a poetry class here once a week? It could give us more exposure, possible sales. Maybe they could tell their friends and we’ll get more traffic.”

“Day and time?”

“Wednesday at two,” Yuuri said.

“That’s cutting it close between the children’s story time and the class coming in,” she remarked.

“I know, but we can do it. I know we can.”

Chapter Notes

We're at chapter five of this series and a few things are coming to light that will play out in the story. This chapter is what I would call a filler but drops hints and leads to other events.

A few notes:
1) The poem Viktor reads is called 'The Prophet' by Alexander Pushkin. It's a really good piece and thought provoking. I encourage you to read the entire work.
2) Greenfield Village is a colonial replication outdoor museum in Dearborn, Michigan. Henry Ford Museum is right next door. I freaking love both of these places. If you're ever in the Detroit area and find yourself on southbound Southfield freeway, check it out. They're great!
3) The Detroit Opera house is off of Broadway in downtown Detroit. The acoustics of this place is amazing. I need to go back.
4) The art museum referred to here is Detroit Institute of Arts. It's a little bit away from downtown Detroit, being next to Wayne State University. It's definitely worth a visit though.

So that's it.
Unfortunately the stream was canceled today due to me feeling like crap, but we'll be streaming next week at 5PM EDT (GMT-4) and we'd love to have you there! You can find us on Twitch. I strongly urge you to follow the channel as I usually stream throughout the week, working on various projects. I have fun.

Hope you like 'Field Trip' and thanks for reading!

As much as I wish I could, I don’t own Yuri!!! On Ice. This fic is not beta’d.
While I truly appreciate the offers, I’m not currently looking for a beta.

You can follow me on tumblr. Stay up to date on latest chapters and story progress or just want to give a shout out! You guys are what drives me, and I so appreciate every one of you.

“Hey Mari?” he asked, tapping on the doorjamb gently, “May I speak with you?”

“Sure, what’s up?” she asked, straightening a stack of purchase orders on her desk.

“I wanted to see if we’d be able to do a couple things.”

“Yuuri,” she said, sighing, “you know we don’t have a lot of money to put into the store right now.”

“It’s nothing drastic,” he assured her, “Remember my friend, Viktor?”

“The guy you’ve been seeing?”

“I’m not seeing him, Mari!” Yuuri exclaimed.

“Yeah, ok,” Mari said, “Anyway?”

“I think I told you he’s a literature professor,” he said, continuing when she nodded, “Would it be possible for him to hold a poetry class here once a week? It could give us more exposure, possible sales. Maybe they could tell their friends and we’ll get more traffic.”

“Day and time?”

“Wednesday at two,” Yuuri said.

“That’s cutting it close between the children’s story time and the class coming in,” she remarked.

“I know, but we can do it. I know we can.”

“Alright,” Mari said, “We’ll give it a try. What’s next on the list?”

“May I have a second day off each week?” Yuuri asked, looking down at the floor and tapping his forefingers together.

Mari looked up from her paperwork, set the pen on the desk and regarded her brother. His life had revolved around the bookstore since Bound to Please opened, only spending his scarce personal time
with Vicchan or Phichit. She had hounded him about getting out more, but Yuuri always said he was needed here.

“Do you know how long I’ve been waiting for you to put yourself first?” she asked, giving him one of her rare smiles.

“You have?” Yuuri asked, surprised.

“Yes, I have, and yes you may have another day off,” Mari said, “but it doesn’t stop there. A friend of mine has a son that’s looking for a part-time job. Maybe we could give him a chance?”

“We can’t afford an employee!” he exclaimed.

“If the ideas you have work out, we can. Besides, if it helps you it’s worth it,” she stated, “Why do you want a day off now, though? I’ve pestered you to take more time for yourself and you never have.”

“I just…” Yuuri mumbled, looking at the ground again.

“Spill it, baby bro,” Mari demanded, crossing her arms across her chest.

“Viktor asked if we could spend more time together,” he revealed, “and I like the idea. I really like hanging out with him.”

He felt his cheeks heat up when Mari arched a brow and stared at him. He was about to speak when a smile broke across her face and she began to laugh. He smiled weakly at her, wondering what had amused her.

“You’ve seen him a lot for only knowing each other around two weeks. The way you talk about him it’s like you’ve known each other forever,” she observed.

“He’s an interesting person,” Yuuri said, “Very smart, funny, kind. He’s very creative as well.”

“How come you never asked for time off to spend with Phichit?” Mari asked, “He is your best friend. What makes this Viktor so special?”

“I don’t know,” Yuuri said, frustrated, “There’s this…connection there? I don’t really know how to describe it. We just…click.”

“Uh huh,” she said, grinning at her brother.

“What?”

“Think he’s your soulmate?” she teased.

“And that’s my cue to leave,” Yuuri grumbled, rising from the chair.

He was halfway out the door when Mari yelled at him, causing him to roll his eyes.

“You may not believe, Yuuri!” she shouted, “but it’s real!”

“No, it’s not!”
Yuuri had almost finished the book he was reading to the preschoolers gathered around him. He loved their reactions each time he raised his voice to read dialogue between characters or exaggerated the sound effects. After he read the last part of the worm blowing away from too much wind, Yuuri grinned when he heard excited squeals and clapping.

He looked up when he heard deeper applause, blushing when he laid eyes on Viktor. He was grinning as he made his way to Yuuri, still clapping. Yuuri gathered the books, coloring pages and box of crayons the children had used during reading hour, trying to hide his embarrassment. He kept his eyes on the floor as Viktor neared, his heart beating faster when he saw the deep brown loafers he typically wore.

“You have a knack for reading, you know?”

Finally looking up, Yuuri’s gaze caught in an intense stare from Viktor’s arctic blue eyes. He was still grinning as he bent down to help him gather supplies from the event.

“Anyone could do that,” Yuuri muttered, “It’s not a big deal.”

“Sure, it is. I couldn’t read like that,” Viktor admitted, “Especially in front of little ones. They’re a tough crowd. You had them spellbound.”

“Maybe you should give it a try,” he suggested, giving Viktor a half-smile.

“I’ll think I’ll leave that to the professionals,” he joked, “What can I help you with?”

“Will your class be here soon?” Yuuri asked.

“Nah, we still have about two hours. I figured I’d stop by, help setup and see if you’d like to get a bite to eat,” Viktor revealed, looking hopefully at him.

“As much as I’d love to, I can’t,” he apologized, “I have to relieve Mari.”

“Speaking of Mari,” the woman chimed in, walking around a large bookshelf, “It’s your lunch time.”

“But you’ve been up there for two hours. Don’t you have work to do?” Yuuri asked, confused.

“Don’t make me repeat myself,” she grumbled, narrowing her eyes at her brother, “Go. Now.”

Insisting he set the area back in order, Yuuri returned the tables and chairs back to their places. He thanked Viktor when he offered to help, smiling as he thought it would give him more time to spend with him. Taking only ten minutes to complete the task, Yuuri looked at Viktor when they finished.

“So, where would you like to eat?” Viktor asked.

“Hmm,” he thought, “We could go to the Chulanont’s restaurant. Phichit did promise you VIP treatment.”

“After you,” Viktor said, gesturing grandly for Yuuri to go ahead of him, enjoying the giggle from him.

The short walk to the restaurant was pleasant, Viktor talking about the poetry the class would be covering that day. Yuuri was impressed by the vast array he was going to present, making comments about what he appreciated about each piece. Viktor grinned at the passion he displayed.
“You know,” Viktor said, looking at him, “I think you should sit in on one of my classes. I think you’d really enjoy it.”

“Oh! I don’t know if I could do that,” Yuuri said, blushing and tapping his forefingers together, “That’s extra work for you and I don’t know if I could get the time off.”

“It’s two hours’ max on Tuesdays and Thursdays,” Viktor explained, “Will you think about it?”

“There’s another reason,” he said.

“Being around a crowd of people?” Viktor asked, “I already thought about that. This class has twelve students.”

“But being around all those people on the way? That’s unnerving. I don’t know if I could handle that,” Yuuri admitted.

“I could walk with you,” Viktor suggested, “Come by a half an hour before class and walk you back.”

“That’s too much, Viktor,” he said, blushing again, “and it rushes you.”

“It’s my first class of the day and I have an hour before my next class,” he explained, “I would enjoy having you there.”

“I’ll think about it,” Yuuri said.

They reached the restaurant soon after, Yuuri greeting Phichit’s parents and hugging his mother. When she told him Phichit had the day off, he was saddened but knew he’d see him the next day. They had made plans to get together since Phichit needed help proofreading a paper he had due in his English composition class.

Thanking Phichit’s mother when she seated them, they pored over the menu. Yuuri already knew what he wanted, but watched Viktor scan the available choices. He asked several questions about spices he was unfamiliar with, Yuuri describing the flavors the best he could.

“Yuuri, you have a gift with words,” Viktor said, “Have you ever thought about writing your own work? I think you’d be a natural.”

“I write poetry sometimes, but I don’t get that much time.”

“Can I read it sometime? I bet it’s fabulous,” Viktor requested.

“I don’t know,” he said, “It’s more of a personal thing. I’m not good.”

“If you change your mind, I’d really love to read it,” Viktor said, “Can I bring something else up?”

“What’s that?” Yuuri asked, dreading the next idea Viktor had.

“Would you consider reading on poetry night? Listening to you read to those kids was a treat. You’re amazing, Yuuri Katsuki,” he said, smiling at him.

“I definitely don’t think I could do that,” Yuuri said loudly, holding out his hands, “In front of all those people? No, can’t do that.”

“Think about it. It would be a gift to everyone there,” Viktor stated, patting the hand Yuuri had placed on the table.
Instead of appreciating the softness of Yuuri’s skin again, he felt prickles of electricity linger on the tips of his fingers when he pulled away. While he tried to keep his expression neutral, his mind drifted back to a thought he’d had since meeting Yuuri: What was it about this man that drew him like a moth to a flame?

After Viktor decided what he wanted for lunch, Yuuri got the waitress’ attention and placed their order. They chatted briefly before the woman returned with their drinks and appetizer of fried wontons. Viktor’s eyes widened and he moaned from the first bite of the wonton.

“Oh, this is so good!” he exclaimed, “I think Phichit will have a regular customer from now on, but you have to come with me, Yuuri.”

“I’ll have to see how work goes.”

“Has anyone ever told you that you work too much?” Viktor asked.

“All the time,” he replied, chuckling, “I did ask Mari for an extra day off each week, though.”

“Really?” Viktor asked in surprise, “What do you plan on doing?”

“Well,” he said, tapping his fingers again, “I thought maybe we could hang out at times?”

“I’d like that. Let me know what day and I’ll rearrange my schedule,” Viktor stated, smiling at him.

“You don’t have to go that far,” Yuuri said, “Only if it’s convenient for you.”

“It’s not a big deal, Yuuri. I really enjoy spending time with you,” he admitted.

“Can I ask why? I’m no one special.”

“Yes, you are,” Viktor disagreed, “You’re one of the best people I’ve met in my life.”

“You’ve known me a little over two weeks,” Yuuri stated, “You haven’t seen much.”

“I think I’ve seen enough,” Viktor admitted, smiling softly at him.

Yuuri was relieved their meals arrived minutes later as the conversation had become uncomfortable. He wasn’t used to compliments or attention devoted just for him. While he appreciated Viktor’s observations, Yuuri was dreading the day he’d let his new friend down.

They discussed events happening in Detroit during the university’s spring break, Viktor mentioning he’d like to visit Greenfield Village and Henry Ford Museum during the week.

“Why stop there?” Yuuri asked, “You could visit the art museum. If there’s an opera playing you could check that out, though you’d probably get home late.”

“That’s a great idea!” Viktor exclaimed, “The question is: Would you go with me?”

“What?” Yuuri asked, flabbergasted.

“Would you like to hang out in Detroit during spring break? We can go on one of your days off,” Viktor proposed.

“Are you sure?”

“Most definitely! Part of the ‘Finding Yuuri’ project,” he said.
“Alright,” Yuuri agreed, “I’ll drive.”

“That was the other reason I wanted you to come,” Viktor joked, winking at him.

“Oh, you sly dog.”

When they returned to the shop, Viktor went over his lesson plans in the coffee nook while Yuuri attended to the few customers the store had. He was glad the nook had been moved to the front, allowing him the opportunity to watch Yuuri as he worked. The smile he gave each customer was infectious, his questions kind and personal. He treated everyone like a valued friend, leaving Viktor to wonder why the bookstore didn’t have more business. He knew he had to help change that.

He looked up as people trickled in, realizing it was his students from his poetry class. He smiled as he greeted several, skimmed his notes and directed them to go to the back of the shop. Walking to the front counter, he leaned against it and rested his head on his propped arm while watching Yuuri.

“So, kind sir, can you get away for class?” Viktor asked, grinning at him and enjoying the now trademarked blush.

“Let me see if Mari can watch the front,” Yuuri said.

“I’ll be in the back,” Viktor said, winking at him before making his way to the poetry corner.

He wound his way through the students sitting on the floor and walked onto the stage. Resting his notes on the stool, he moved the stand holding the microphone and waited for his class to cease talking. Once he finally had their attention, he lifted the top sheet from his stack of papers.

“Tormented by spiritual thirst
I dragged myself through a somber desert.
And a six-winged seraph
appeared to me at the crossing of the ways.”

Continuing to read the poem, lifting his head to watch his students’ reaction after each line, he smiled when he saw Yuuri take a chair in the back. Viktor thought he blended in perfectly with his class, pleased when he saw Yuuri engrossed in the recitation of the poem. He paced the floor and used body language to project the climax of the piece effectively. When he finished and looked at his class, Viktor saw the bright grin Yuuri was giving him.

“So, who wants to tell me what that’s about?” he asked, looking between his students as they remained quiet, “Yuri?”

“Dude, I’m only here for the credit. Do you think I care what it’s about?” Yuri asked.

“And this is why you’re failing, Plisetsky,” Viktor mumbled, “Want to take this class over again? I’m dying to see you another semester.”

The rest of the class laughed softly when Yuri rolled his eyes, huffing from Viktor’s statement. When the man next to Yuri smacked the back of his head, Viktor realized he had his next volunteer.

“Otabek, what do you think?” he asked.
“Well,” Otabek said, pausing to think for a moment, “the making of a prophet. How can someone ascend and rise above humanity.”

“You’ve scratched the surface,” Viktor said, nodding slightly, “Can you expand on it?”

“Can I read it later, submit an essay and get extra credit?” he asked, smirking when the class laughed again.

“If you nail it, I’ll give you five points,” Viktor said, chuckling, “Anyone else?”

His eyes drifted over his students, disappointed they didn’t have an opinion of the poem. It was one of his favorites and he had been eager to share it with them. Viktor was close to giving up when he saw an unsure hand lift into the air slowly.

It was Yuuri.

“What’s got you, Yuuri?”

“Didn’t I tell you I didn’t have anything?” Yuri said, glaring at him.

“If I was talking to you, I’d have said ‘Oh Great Slacker of Lit 2241’,” Viktor proclaimed, grinning when the other students laughed, “I was talking my friend, Yuuri.”

“Wow, miracles never cease,” Yuri teased, “Nikiforov has a friend.”

“Otabek, I’ll pay you twenty bucks to smack your friend again,” Viktor deadpanned, “I’ll get fired if I do it. Yuuri?”

“Well, I think it’s about three different choices we can make when we’re faced with a deeper meaning of a situation: ignorance, suffering or transformation. This piece touches on all three,” Yuuri explained, blushing since everyone was focusing on him.

“How so?” Viktor asked.

“The writer of the poem has ignored everything until presented with his pain, his suffering. He realizes he must change in order to make a difference, though I don’t think he was prepared for the consequences. When the angel came down to him in the desert, it showed him the gifts but also gave him the worst. I guess a balance between heaven and earth, perhaps. To truly transform though, he had to die. Since this is a somewhat religious piece, God gave him the chance to do good, end his pain and spread hope among others,” Yuuri said, exhaling deeply when he was done.

“Hey Altin?” Viktor asked, eyes never leaving Yuuri.

“Yeah?”

“You might want to rethink that essay,” Viktor suggested, “He just nailed it.”

Yuuri’s jaw dropped when he heard the clapping of Viktor’s students, surprised they accepted his analysis. He’d always been afraid of speaking up when he was in school, but he felt reassured by Viktor’s presence. The smile on Viktor’s face made it worth it, Yuuri feeling his spirit soar.

“Magnificent job, Yuuri,” Viktor said softly, “See guys, this is how I want you to think. Ask Yuuri for lessons, twenty dollars an hour.”

“What is it with you and twenty bucks, Nikiforov?” Yuri asked.
“I like the color of the bills,” Viktor relayed nonchalantly, “and if you interrupt me again you’ll owe me one. Ok, assignment due next week. I want you to look around and find a poet that isn’t American. There are plenty of books here you can choose from and they are deeply discounted. I want a copy of the poem, your analysis and how it can apply to life today. Go!”

Viktor answered questions from a couple students, clarifying the assignment for them and giving suggestions of works that would be challenging. When they departed, he walked to the back and fell into the chair next to Yuuri. He was still blushing, which Viktor found endearing.

“Are you sure you don’t want to take my poetry class?” he asked, “Your understanding and perception are phenomenal.”

“It’s ok,” Yuuri muttered, “I’ve also read that poem before. It’s one of my favorites.”

“Mine as well. It’s very deep and not many grasp the true meaning of it,” Viktor said, “I’m impressed.”

“I am as well,” Yuuri said, smiling at him, “Your reading was great, very emotional and thought provoking. The way you interact with your students is comical.”

“Eh,” Viktor said, looking away, “Most of my classes aren’t like this. It has more to do with Plisetsky being in the class.”

“It’s still amusing. I’m glad you asked to hold your class here. It’s been fun.”

“It has,” Viktor agreed, “I am now wishing every day was Wednesday.”

“You’d get sick of seeing me pretty quickly,” Yuuri stated, tapping his fingers together again.

“That could never happen, Yuuri,” he said, catching his gaze, “I’ve noticed something. When you’re nervous, you tap your forefingers together. Why are you nervous?”

“I’m not used to people showering me with compliments or praise. You do it all the time,” he admitted.

“You deserve it,” Viktor said, smiling at him, “You don’t have to be nervous around me, Yuuri. I hope you know by now I’m not going to judge you and I’ll accept you for who you are.”

“I know, but I’m afraid that once you get to know me more that will change,” he confessed.

“Not going to happen,” Viktor said, taking his hand and squeezing it slightly, feeling the small charge of electricity again when he touched him.

Yuuri jerked his hand back, shaking it as he stared at Viktor. Thoroughly confused, Viktor’s brow furrowed, wondering what could have happened to make Yuuri react like this.

“Sorry,” he said, “You shocked me!”

“And here I thought it was just me,” Viktor teased, laughing when Yuuri’s cheeks turned pink.

“The static buildup is terrible in here at times,” Yuuri said, “though it isn’t usually bad this time of year.”

“It could possibly be the spark of attraction,” Viktor joked, holding his hands up with Yuuri appeared mortified, “I’m just joking!”
“Do you really believe in that?” Yuuri asked, raising a brow.

“Not really, but stranger things have been known to happen.”

They chatted for a few minutes later before Viktor called his class back. He needed to wrap it up sooner than he usually did since they were off-campus and they had other classes to attend. Giving last minute instructions and reminding them of his office hours if they needed help, he dismissed them, telling them he’d see them on Friday.

“I’ve monopolized enough of your time, so I should probably let you get back to work,” Viktor said, “I’ve really enjoyed this though. I’m glad Mari agreed to do this.”

“I am as well,” Yuuri professed, standing and walking to the front of the store with Viktor, “I’ll think about the class. Wouldn’t it be awkward for me to come in mid-semester?”

“Nah, not if you’re auditing. I’ll make sure they don’t charge you as well since I invited you.”

“Thanks, I appreciate it,” Yuuri said.

When they reached the front counter, several of Viktor’s students were making purchases. Yuuri joined his sister, bagging items while Mari completed the orders. While Mari wasn’t the greatest at customer service, Yuuri gave each of the young adults a compliment before leaving. He overheard a few of his students thank him, promising to return for the poetry readings.

“Mari, thanks for letting me commandeering your brother,” Viktor said, smiling at her.

“Don’t think your charm is going to work on me,” she grumbled yet giving him a sly smile, “but thank you. Your kids gave us a day’s worth of sales in fifteen minutes. I’m not opposed to letting you hold all your classes here.”

“I don’t think I’d be able to get away with that,” Viktor said, laughing at her suggestion, “How about I tell my classes about the poetry reading on Fridays? Maybe give them extra credit. Do you have any fliers?”

Mari handed him a stack before she retreated to the office, telling them she was swamped with paperwork since she had to babysit the store. As she passed Yuuri, she winked and gave him an evil grin. Fighting to remain calm and composed, Yuuri smiled at Viktor.

“I should be going,” Viktor said, sliding the fliers into his briefcase, “Thanks again. I really enjoyed it. You can join us anytime.”

“I really liked it,” Yuuri proclaimed.

“I’m glad. So, Detroit in a week and a half,” Viktor said, another plan popping into his head, “Hey, you want to come over for dinner tonight? I make a wicked stroganoff.”

“Really? We had lunch together!” Yuuri exclaimed.

“I know, but I really enjoy spending time with you,” Viktor declared, “Can I say something without sounding like the creepy con-artist I am?”

“Sure,” he said through giggles.

“I feel this connection and acceptance I never have with anyone before. I find myself wanting more of it, wanting to spend more time with you,” Viktor explained, wondering what was going through
Yuuri’s mind, “I hope I’m not out of line.”

“I get it,” he said, an embarrassed smile gracing his soft features, “I was just telling Mari the same thing the other day. She teased me about soulmates, knowing I don’t believe in that nonsense.”

“So, soulmates, eh?” Viktor said, amused.

“Yeah,” he grumbled, “Don’t they have like complimentary marks or can read the others thoughts or something?”

“Not necessarily,” Viktor said, “There are many references in literary works throughout time where people click or their personalities and flaws complement each other perfectly. But you’re right, it’s probably just a ridiculous theory.”

“Yeah,” Yuuri agreed, “What time would you like to have dinner?”

Viktor grinned when he accepted, looking forward to their evening together. After figuring out a time, Yuuri waved at him as he left the shop and sighed. It was a relief to realize he wasn’t the only one that saw their friendship in the same way he did. He thought he had been overreacting and overanalyzing the situation as he usually did.

“Yeah, I’m right,” Mari said loudly, leaning against the doorjamb leading to the office, “Soulmates.”

“Don’t you have work to do?” he asked, rolling his eyes when he heard his sister’s famous cackle.
Hello, Motown!

Chapter Summary

Spring break has arrived, as has the time for Viktor's and Yuuri's excursion to Detroit. They had less than two hours before they had to make their way to the opera house, so Viktor suggested they ride the People Mover after making sure Yuuri wasn’t afraid of heights. Yuuri told him he wasn’t, but it was fine if they explored Trappers Alley instead. Though Yuuri wouldn’t admit it, Viktor knew his reserves were running low and he wanted Yuuri to enjoy the rest of the day. Not able to come to a compromise, they settled it like men.

“Rock, paper, scissors?” Yuuri asked incredulously, “Really?”

“Yep, settling scores since the beginning of time,” Viktor said, smiling as he raised a fist, “Ready?

“Fine,” Yuuri grumbled, lifting his own.

Chapter Notes

First of all, I want to thank everyone for their patience and understanding. I've had to cancel two Twitch streams and this chapter is late since my body is being tormented by a kidney stone. I pretty much feel like I'm dying at this point, but I'm not (thank Baby Jesus).

The time has come for spring break and the trip to Detroit. While writing this, I decided I'm going to need to go to Detroit within the next two weeks. You'll see why in the notes.

Now it's time for the notes. I dread writing these as there are soooo many.

1) Liberty is a street in downtown Ann Arbor near University of Michigan. The cafe is based loosely on Sweetwaters Coffee & Tea. They have pretty awesome sandwiches as well.

2) I-96, also known as The Jeffries, is a freeway that runs across Michigan. The part they'd be on coming from Ann Arbor picks up just outside of Plymouth, MI. Potholes galore, but that's a Southeast Michigan thing.

3) Livonia is a city in the Metro Detroit area, also my birthplace. Holla, Livonia! Yeah, not really.

4) Slurpees are frozen concoctions from the gods. I love that stuff! You can only get them at 7-11, one of the few things I miss about Michigan.

5) Southfield Freeway is M-39, another freeway in Michigan. The part they go through is in Dearborn, which takes them to...

6) GREENFIELD VILLAGE!! I freaking love and miss this place. It's an outdoor museum that has replicates of colonial and homestead towns. It highlights how the villages would be set up, day to day life and interactive displays. It's so much fun.

7) Detroit Institute of Arts is near Wayne State University on Woodward Ave. They have so many exhibits I can’t even mention them all. If you ever get a chance to visit, GO!
8) Greektown is a must see if you go to Detroit, especially the restaurant I featured. It's called The Golden Fleece and they are famous to Detroiters. The place is the best. Their gyros and salads are to die for.
9) Even though they didn't go, Trappers Alley is a shopping district adjacent to Greektown. It's crazy.
10) The People Mover is Detroit's answer to a subway, though it's above ground. It runs high above the city and you can ride anywhere you want for seventy-five cents. The employees watch you though, so eventually if you hang out too long they will kick you off. I know from experience :P
11) The Financial District is where most of the bank headquarters are for the Metro Detroit area. It's also the closest People Mover station to the...
12) Detroit Opera House! Beautiful building, wonderful acoustics. Go if you love opera. And since it's opera and most of you know I love opera...
13) The opera they see is Cyrano de Bergerac. I truly think this one is underrated. It's so wonderful. I love it so much. Watch it. Seriously.
14) Hart Plaza is a huge open area near the Detroit River which is in front of..
15) The GM Renaissance Center. Detroit Marriot at the Renaissance Center is the middle building of the complex. Personally, I think it's the prettiest building.
16) The Shakespearean quote is from King Henry the Fourth, Act 2.
17) The poem is once again from DiamondWinters. I thought it fit the feeling of this chapter well. She also didn't know I was using it so surprise, Diamond!
18) Haiga, Renga, and Senryu are lesser known types of Japanese poetry. They're very beautiful.

I never want that many notes in another chapter as long as I live. Phew!

I really hope you guys enjoy this chapter, especially my co-authors since I had to go it alone again :/ Here's hoping next week we can get the stream going again and get back on track! We have so much to discuss! If you want to join us, follow me at Twitch. You'll get an email every time I go live, but we meet on Saturdays at 5 PM EDT (GMT-4) to work on BtP. If you need help converting the time, hit me up in comments or message me on Twitter or tumblr.

Thanks for reading and hope you like 'Hello, Motown!'

As much as I wish I could, I don’t own Yuri!!! On Ice.
This fic is not beta’d.
While I truly appreciate the offers, I’m not currently looking for a beta.

You can follow me on tumblr. Stay up to date on latest chapters and story progress or just want to give a shout out! You guys are what drives me, and I so appreciate every one of you.

The next two weeks flew by before they knew it. Viktor tried to stop by the bookstore every day, though his schedule didn’t cooperate like he wanted. He really looked forward to his Wednesday poetry class at ‘Bound to Please’. It was a very relaxed environment, his students enjoying the atmosphere along with the coffee. Mari handled customer service so Yuuri could join Viktor’s class,
happy her brother had found something outside of the store he looked forward to.

Wednesdays quickly became Yuuri’s favorite, counting the minutes until Viktor would arrive as children’s story hour drew to an end. He found it difficult to concentrate on the book he was reading when Viktor rounded the large bookcase separating the area from the rest of the store, whistling quietly before sitting in a small chair next to a child. He’d quietly confer with them, face dropping in surprise when the child would giggle from his question. It made Yuuri’s heart flutter with fondness, yet something more he couldn’t describe.

The Wednesday before classes stopped for spring break had a few children lagging, trying to finish coloring the pages Yuuri had printed for them. He was talking with one of the mothers, answering questions about books she requested for him to hold if they came in when he looked over and saw Viktor lying on his stomach in front of the woman’s son. His head was propped on a hand and was chatting with the boy as he helped fill in the bear’s belly with a tan crayon. Viktor lifted his head and looked at Yuuri, giving him a sweet smile that made Yuuri’s heart melt.

When the last straggler completed her work and gave Yuuri a tight hug around his waist, he set about straightening the area. Viktor had declared a tradition in the making, stating they must have lunch at a nearby restaurant before his class started. Yuuri had been thinking for days where he wanted to go since it was his turn to choose the restaurant. There was one café he wanted to try, but thought Viktor might be displeased with his selection.

“Have you decided what you’d like for lunch?” Viktor asked, bending over to put loose crayons in a bucket.

“Well, kinda,” Yuuri said quietly, tapping his fingers together.

“You don’t need to be nervous, Yuuri,” he explained when he saw Yuuri’s anxious habit resurface, “Anywhere is fine with me.”

“You know that tea house on Liberty?” Yuuri asked, “The one with the outdoor café?”

“Yes, is that where you’d like to go?”

“Please,” he said, “I hear they have an amazing avocado sandwich. You sure you don’t mind?”

“Not at all,” Viktor said softly, smiling as he walked to Yuuri and handed him the bucket of crayons, “It is your turn and this is part of ‘Finding Yuuri’.”

“I think you’re taking your mission too far,” Yuuri mumbled, taking the bucket and walking to the front of the store.

“There’s no such thing as too far when it comes to you,” Viktor said, smiling when Yuuri stopped in his tracks, turning to stare at him.

Viktor followed him to the front of the store, finding himself admiring the tightness of Yuuri’s pants around his thighs as he walked. He found himself thinking about not only Yuuri’s kind personality and intelligence late at night before falling asleep, but his mind had memorized every soft line and curve of his body, replaying them in his head every chance he had. Viktor had to question himself, though. He had been attracted to many people in the past, but none so quickly nor as intense as his fascination with Yuuri. He decided to keep it to himself, not wanting to crush him if he realized it was a flight of fancy or meteoric allure.

Lunch passed quickly, along with the class and the rest of the week. They promised to drive to Detroit on Sunday since a French opera they had both been interested in was closing that night.
Yuuri arrived at Viktor’s house a little after eight that morning, waiting for him to finish getting ready before going out for breakfast. They stopped at a small family-owned bed-and-breakfast that allowed diners that weren’t staying to eat there. Viktor said one of his students had told him about it years ago but he never got around to trying it out, telling Yuuri he was happy he was sharing the new experience with him.

Chatting about their excitement for the upcoming day, Yuuri saw the sparkle in Viktor’s eyes that always entranced him. He realized he could watch and listen to him talk for hours, enamored by Viktor’s zealous animation and overwhelming emotion he poured into things he held dear. Yuuri realized Viktor’s enthusiasm was infectious, becoming interested in subjects and ideas he had never contemplated nor had the courage to tackle on his own.

It had been a while since he had been to Detroit, grumbling to himself when he remembered how atrocious traffic was on I-96. Several lanes were closed due to upcoming roadwork, but it did nothing to the potholes the locals called craters. His patience grew thin as he weaved between the pits in the road and tried to avoid cars near him. The last time he screamed obscenities at a driver, he felt a warm hand pry one of his from the steering wheel.

“Time to calm down a little,” Viktor said softly, “Want to take the next exit? I’m in the mood for a Slurpee.”

“We’re only in Livonia,” Yuuri grumbled but felt the tension within him evaporate, “It’s not even eleven yet. Isn’t it too early for a Slurpee?”

“It’s never too early for a Slurpee,” Viktor declared, begging him to take the next exit.

When they pulled into the convenience store on the corner and got out of the car, Viktor ushered Yuuri to the front of the building and held the door for him. Yuuri chose a small cup, put the lid on it and decided upon which flavor he wanted for the frozen drink. When he had the cup filled halfway, Yuuri turned when Viktor clucked his tongue, seeing him shaking his head.

“What?”

“Has no one taught you the art of Slurpees?” Viktor asked.

“There’s an art?” Yuuri asked, rolling his eyes when Viktor nodded.

“Yes. First, you don’t get a small cup,” he stated, taking the cup from his hand and pouring the contents into a larger one, “Second, one flavor? Really, Yuuri? You have to choose at least three.”

“That’s disgusting,” Yuuri muttered, reaching for his cup before staring at Viktor when he held it over his head.

“You just don’t have a refined palate yet,” Viktor replied.

“Refined palate? It’s a Slurpee!” Yuuri exclaimed, exasperated.

“Come on, what flavors would you like?”

“There’s no getting out of this, is there?” he asked, sighing when Viktor shook his head, “Cherry and lemon-lime.”

“That’s only two,” Viktor said, filling the cup with the frozen drink, “What else?”

“Um…” he said, looking at the other choices, “blue raspberry.”
“You, dear sir,” Viktor began, grinning when Yuuri giggled, “are a connoisseur.”

“Or I’m just a natural,” Yuuri said, laughing when Viktor groaned.

Viktor grabbed the largest cup available and filled all seventy-two ounces with every flavor available, Yuuri looking at him questioningly. When they made it to the counter, Viktor insisted paying for their items much to Yuuri’s dismay. Since telling him about the predicament the bookstore was in, Yuuri felt like a charity case. Though Viktor told him he enjoyed his company immensely, the thought plagued him frequently as their time together grew.

Leaving the store after paying for their purchases, Yuuri turned onto Schoolcraft and took the ramp to the freeway, merging into the fast-flowing traffic. When they arrived at the Southfield Freeway interchange, Yuuri had to cross several lanes of traffic to reach their exit. He didn’t talk much once they joined the southbound traffic, gripping the steering wheel tightly.

“Are you ok?” Viktor asked, looking at the taut line of Yuuri’s mouth.

“I don’t like driving in Dearborn,” he said tersely.

“Would you like me to drive? I’m sure I could learn really quick,” Viktor said, smiling when Yuuri glanced at him.

“You don’t know how to drive?” Yuuri asked, chuckling at Viktor’s dorkiness.

“Nope,” he replied, grinning, “but got you to laugh.”

“You did,” Yuuri said, smiling as he glanced at him again, “Can you help me find the exit for Michigan Avenue?”

“Sure. Where are we going first?”

“Greenfield Village,” Yuuri said, laughing when Viktor jumped in excitement.

“Really?” he asked enthusiastically, “I’ve never been here before!”

“So, you said,” Yuuri said through laughter.

This was a new side of Viktor he knew he could easily come to love. His excitement over their plans buoyed Yuuri’s spirits through a trip he knew would be fun yet nerve-wracking. While he wasn’t looking forward to the crowds and rushed atmosphere that Detroit put forth, he would be sharing it with Viktor, that alone making it worthwhile.

The outdoor museum wasn’t busy since it was Sunday, the crowds sparse and Viktor promising to go as slow as Yuuri wanted. When Viktor suggested sitting at a bench when he became overwhelmed, the feeling he’d felt in his heart surged forth yet again. Yuuri tried to discern what he felt while Viktor went to get drinks at a nearby stand, smiling when he returned with two coffees.

“Half and half, loads of sugar for you,” he said, handing Yuuri the cup and almost dropping it when their fingers brushed against each other.

“Ouch!” Yuuri shouted, switching the cup to his other hand and shaking the one that had just been shocked.

“That’s the second time that’s happened,” Viktor stated, “I don’t think it’s the bookstore.”

“It is really dry out here,” Yuuri said, looking down, “and I’m sitting on a metal bench.”
“Could be,” he said before sitting next to him.

After their coffees were gone, they walked leisurely around the grounds of the replicated village. Viktor insisted on trying every demonstration they came across, from churning butter to milking cows. Yuuri laughed when Viktor rolled his sleeves up and let the tip of his tongue touch the corner of his mouth, concentrating on dipping candles in a vat of tallow. When he lifted the wooden rod with the wicks tied to it, his shoulders slumped in dismay when a thin line of wax clung to the wicking.

“I think I would have perished in less than three days if I had to homestead,” Viktor grumbled.

“Possibly, but you could have been the teacher on the frontier,” Yuuri said cheerfully, patting Viktor’s back, “Everyone takes care of the teacher.”

“And this is why I like you,” he confessed, smiling when Yuuri blushed, “You’re a genius. What’s next on the list?”

“Um…” Yuuri said, digging his phone out and looking at his notes, “Institute of Arts. Ready to go?”

“After the gift shop,” Viktor stated, “I need to add to a collection of mine.”

“Collection?” he asked.

“You’ll see.”

Everywhere they went, Viktor had to buy at least five postcards to his collection. Yuuri had to bite his lip to keep from laughing when he explained he’d been collecting them for almost twenty-five years, his first ones from his aunt when she went to Italy. Viktor described the copies of Renaissance art on them, promising to show him when they returned to Ann Arbor.

The art museum as fun though they had to contain their goofiness. Viktor claimed he had to imitate the poses and emotions of most of the works they saw. It started with the copy of “The Thinker” near the entrance, Viktor begging Yuuri to take his picture. His pose was nearly perfect, but the scrunched face and crossed eyes made Yuuri giggle. By the time they were done, Yuuri had enough pictures on his phone for a new album.

“This one’s perfect,” Viktor declared when Yuuri showed him his Van Gogh impression, “though I think we need to edit it and black the ear out.”

“You’re horrible!” Yuuri exclaimed through laughter.

“It’s Van Gogh! It’s a requirement,” he explained.

“That’s not even the right picture!”

“So? It’s still Van Gogh,” Viktor said, eyes widening when his stomach chose that moment to growl, “The stomach midgets are rioting and I know the perfect place for lunch.”

“Lead the way, garcon!” Yuuri shouted, reduced to giggles when Viktor spun on his heel and stared
at him in dramatic shock.

“Do I look like a waiter?” he asked, holding a hand over his heart, “And are we in France?”

“No, but we did just visit an Impressionism exhibit,” Yuuri stated as he walked past Viktor, “Close enough.”

“Touché,” Viktor replied, following him and leaving the museum.

It took longer finding a parking spot than it did to drive to Greektown. The city was finally waking up and the crowds were thickening. Viktor could feel the tension radiate from Yuuri as they snaked their way through other pedestrians. When Yuuri froze in the middle of the sidewalk, Viktor placed a hand on his elbow and guided him to stand next to a building.

“Do you want to call this quits?” Viktor asked, leaning closer to Yuuri so he could hear him over the noise of the crowd.

“I’ll be ok,” Yuuri said, giving him a weak smile, “I know you’re hungry.”

“We can always go for fast food,” he suggested, meeting Yuuri’s eyes, “It’s not a big deal.”

“It’s fine. I know you’re hungry and I’ve never had a gyro.”

“Wow!” Viktor exclaimed, “Really?”

“Really,” Yuuri replied, grinning at his surprised look, “Let’s go feed your tummy minions.”

“They’re stomach midgets, Yuuri.”

“Whatever.”

There was a line when they reached the restaurant Viktor told him about. The smell of lamb and various spices wafted through the air, making Yuuri’s mouth water instantaneously. They chatted about what to do between lunch and the time the opera started, deciding upon wandering around Trappers Alley or riding the People Mover and talking until they got kicked off. It was their turn to order but when Yuuri opened his mouth, panic hit him yet again.

“Can we get two gyro platters, please?” Viktor asked, resting his hand on Yuuri’s back and nudging him slightly before speaking to him, “Tomato, onion and tzatziki sauce alright?”

“Tzatziki?” Yuuri asked.

“Cucumber sauce,” he explained, “I recommend it.”

Yuuri agreed to try it and the cashier rang their orders up, Viktor digging his wallet out of his back pocket and paying before Yuuri could protest. He guided Yuuri to a table in a corner, helped him into a chair and returned to the counter. When their number was called, Viktor thanked the man and returned to the table, setting the plates on the surface and grabbing their cups to fill them with soda. Filling them to the brim and placing the lids carefully, he made his way back to Yuuri.

“Hope you don’t mind lemon-lime,” Viktor said, sitting in the chair across from him.

“That’s fine,” Yuuri said weakly.

“Are you ok?” he asked.

“Yeah, just a little jittery,” Yuuri explained, “I really don’t do well around crowds.”
“I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have suggested we come to Detroit,” Viktor stated, regret in his voice.

“No, it’s ok!” he objected, “I’m having fun. Seriously. I knew it would be a little rough, but I still wanted to come here with you.”

“I’m glad, but if it gets to be too much let me know,” Viktor said, spreading tzatziki on his gyro.

“Is that how you do it?” Yuuri asked, pointing to Viktor’s plate.

“Yep, though you should probably try the sauce first,” he suggested, “See if you like it.”

Yuuri agreed and tore the plastic band around his silverware bundle, lifting the spoon and dismayed when he saw spots on it. Viktor looked at him before taking a bit and put his food back on his plate.

“That’s not a very good impression,” Viktor said, pulling his spoon from the napkin and checking it before dipping it into the sauce container, “Open.”

Yuuri’s eyes widened slightly when Viktor held the spoon in front of him, waiting for him to try the sauce. Letting his mouth fall, his gaze locked with Viktor’s as he took a bite, the arctic blue orbs unreadable. He closed his eyes, concentrating on the flavors erupting along his taste buds, ultimately deciding he liked it.

“This is really good!” he proclaimed happily, grinning when Viktor’s eyes crinkled as he smiled.

“I’m glad you like it,” Viktor said, patting his hand before picking his gyro up, “Another place we’ll have to come back to soon.”

“Definitely,” Yuuri agreed.

They spent a leisurely lunch at the restaurant, talking about anything that came to mind. Viktor told Yuuri about growing up in Russia and what a culture shock it was when he came to America for college. Yuuri agreed since came over for school as well, but wound up staying. When he remembered why he hadn’t returned, he immediately clammed up and asked Viktor if they could change the subject, grateful when he agreed without question.

They had less than two hours before they had to make their way to the opera house, so Viktor suggested they ride the People Mover after making sure Yuuri wasn’t afraid of heights. Yuuri told him he wasn’t, but it was fine if they explored Trappers Alley instead. Though Yuuri wouldn’t admit it, Viktor knew his reserves were running low and he wanted Yuuri to enjoy the rest of the day. Not able to come to a compromise, they settled it like men.

“Rock, paper, scissors?” Yuuri asked incredulously, “Really?”

“Yes, settling scores since the beginning of time,” Viktor said, smiling as he raised a fist, “Ready?

“Fine,” Yuuri grumbled, lifting his own.

Yuuri accused him of cheating when he won two rounds in a row, Viktor laughing and asking him how does one cheat at the game. They walked to the building that led to the above-ground subway, walked the stairs and waited at the station for the next train. The track around the city wasn’t long, but it would give them a view of Detroit and a controlled area to chat. While they waited, Yuuri had to admit he was grateful of Viktor’s consideration towards him. He had never had a friend like Viktor and though it was overwhelming at times, it was wonderful. Yuuri found himself thinking of him often throughout every day, wondering how he was or what he was up to. It didn’t take long for his happiness to wilt, coming to the conclusion he was looking too much into their friendship as that
is all it would ever be. It was confusing and difficult to separate his emotions from logic since he had
never felt this way for anyone.

It was hard to subdue himself around Viktor. The man brought out everything good and exciting he
never thought possible, making Yuuri feel larger than life. He found that the more time he spent with
Viktor, the more he never wanted to let go. Yuuri enjoyed his company, found himself starting to
yearn for it. It scared him.

They rode around the city for an hour before a station employee told them they had to leave. They
had to admit it was fun circling the city and chatting. Viktor could tell Yuuri had withdrawn a bit but
tried to attribute it to the taxing day. He was learning to pick up on Yuuri’s quirks and personality
traits, so he felt there was more to it than stress. Viktor didn’t want to spoil their day, so he decided
to bring it up to him later.

The walk from the financial district was brief, arriving at the opera house within minutes. Yuuri was
relieved there weren’t many people attending that evening as his nerves were frayed from the long
day. Viktor spoke with ticket master and led him to the entrance of the theater, waiting their turn for
an usher to help them to their seats. When they found their row, Yuuri counted the seats until he
spotted the numbers matching their tickets, falling into one and sighing deeply.

“You alright?” Viktor asked, taking his hand and squeezing gently before a jolt of electricity flashed
through him.

“Jesus!” Yuuri yelped, snatching his hand away, “That’s the second time today!”

“That one was painful,” Viktor said, flexing his fingers, “I didn’t realize it was so dry lately.”

“Me neither, but yes, I’m ok. It’s just been a busy day and I’m a little tired.”

“I think you’re more than a little tired,” Viktor stated, giving him a soft smile, “How about we stay in
the city tonight? It’s going to be close to midnight by the time this ends and then it’s another hour
back home.”

“I’ll be fine,” he protested.

“You,” Viktor said sternly, “Remember what I said a couple weeks ago about pushing yourself too
hard?”

“That had to do with work.”

“No, it has to do with everything in life. I think we should stay here tonight,” he repeated, “I insist.”

“Thing is,” Yuuri started, sighing deeply before looking at him, “I really can’t afford anything
around here.”

“Then we can either split the cost of a room or I’ll pay for yours,” Viktor said, holding a hand up
when Yuuri opened his mouth, “And you can pay me back later.”

“I’m not going to win, am I?” he asked.

“No, it’s a Nikiforov thing,” Viktor joked, “Which one?”

“We can share,” Yuuri grumbled, sitting back in his seat when the lights dimmed.

The performance was wonderful, Yuuri’s anxiety evaporating as he watched the tale unfold before
him. He had seen a movie based upon this opera, but it was surreal watching it in person. His entire being hung on every scene, feeling each emotion and laughing at every joke. He felt sadness envelop him when the man trying to woo the main female character died, drawing a shaky breath when the woman fell to her knees and the curtain closed before the next act.

“That was intense,” Yuuri said breathlessly.

“It was. This opera blends comedy and tragedy together so well,” Viktor agreed, “I think that’s why it’s one of my favorites.”

“I’ve only seen the movie,” Yuuri admitted before yawning.

“I think someone’s getting sleepy,” he said, raising a brow.

“I think you’re right,” Yuuri confessed, “Sorry for complaining about it before. I don’t want to be a charity case to you.”

“Charity case?” he asked, confused.

“You do so much for me and always want to pay for everything. It seems like since I told you about the bookstore’s problems you feel like you need to take care of me,” Yuuri said, looking down and tapping his fingers together.

“Yuuri,” Viktor said, grabbing his hands so he’d look at him, “You aren’t a charity case. I’d never do that to you. I enjoy your company like I never have with anyone before you. I do things for you because I care. I try to pay because you’re my friend and I like hanging out with you. I’m sorry if I made you feel that way and I promise I’ll let you do the same. Just remind me because I find myself wanting to do so much with you.”

“Next time we go out, I want you to choose and I want to pay,” Yuuri stated, “Deal?”

“Deal,” Viktor said and smiled at him.

Viktor had been right, the opera ending close to midnight. Yuuri was dead on his feet when they left and let Viktor decide which hotel to stay at that night. He leaned against Viktor as they walked towards the river, feeling warmth flow through him when Viktor placed his arm around his shoulders. It felt so good, so right.

When they reached Hart Plaza, Yuuri’s jaw dropped. There was only one hotel in the area and it was far beyond his budget. He pulled on Viktor’s arm as he stopped, getting his attention quickly.

“We are not staying at the Ren Cen,” Yuuri stated.

“Why not?” Viktor asked.

“I really can’t afford this,” he said, “Do you know how much a basic room is here?”

“Around $300 a night. Don’t worry about it and no, I’m not doing this as charity,” Viktor declared, turning Yuuri to look at him, “I’m doing this because you need to rest and this is the closest hotel. If you feel you have to make it up to me, we can figure something out later.”
“I’m too tired to argue,” he admitted, shuffling through the plaza to the large tower in front of him.

Yuuri lied on a couch in the lobby while Viktor booked a room. He blushed when he overheard the desk clerk ask if they wanted one king or two double beds, relieved when Viktor didn’t hesitate in answering with the latter choice. He rose from the couch and staggered to the counter when Viktor said he needed his identification, waiting for the reservation to be complete and the employee to go over a few guidelines.

“It’s a good thing you aren’t afraid of heights,” Viktor said, gripping Yuuri’s upper arm as he led him away from the desk.

“Why?”

“We’re on the fifty-second floor,” Viktor relayed.

“Oh,” he said, suddenly standing upright as they reached the elevator, “Um, Viktor?”

“Yes?”

“I don’t have any pajamas,” Yuuri said quietly.

“Ok,” Viktor said, looking at him to continue.

“We’ve been out all day and my clothes feel kinda gross,” he said, looking at the floor.

“Do you have enough energy to take a shower?” Viktor asked, “I’m sure there are robes you can wear tonight.”

“Don’t those cost extra?”

“I’ll add it to your tab,” he said, winking at him.

“I’m going to be in debt to you for life,” Yuuri grumbled.

“Somehow, I’m ok with that,” Viktor teased, laughing when he felt Yuuri’s fist tap his shoulder.

“You can take your shower first,” he said, grinning at Viktor, “No offense, but sweat is not the best cologne.”

“So mean to me, Yuuri!”

“Is not the truth the truth?,” Yuuri said, smiling at him.

“You’re not that tired if you’re quoting Shakespeare,” Viktor grumbled.

All Yuuri could do was laugh.

Yuuri waited until he heard the steady stream of water from behind the closed door, opening the bedside table and pulling a pen and pad of paper from the drawer. He always found comfort in a blank sheet on days he was exhausted or stressed, today being both. Uncapping the pen and chewing on the end as he thought, words floated through his mind begging to be set free. He
scribbled hastily, feeling the emotion he was experiencing ebb onto the paper.

He was almost done, anticipating the ending of his poem when the bathroom door opened. Dropping the pen on the table and slamming the pad so the writing was facing the surface, Yuuri looked up, eyes widening when he saw Viktor. He had chosen to keep his jeans on but had left his shirt in the bathroom. Yuuri thought he was gorgeous, his chest bare and pants hugging low on his hips while he ran the towel through his damp grey locks.

“Your turn,” Viktor said, sitting on the bed across from him.

“Thanks,” Yuuri mumbled, jumping up and dashing to the bathroom, slamming the door behind him.

Viktor flinched and frowned as he watched Yuuri bolt away, shrugging and wondering what had gotten into him. He looked around the room, rubbing the moisture from his hair when his eyes fell on the pad and pen on the nightstand. He picked it up, flipped through it and saw Yuuri’s delicate writing. He skimmed the words, breath catching by the beauty of them before reading them again.

*Live in laughter, sail in tears,*  
*fly on dreams, fun on fears.*

*Walk with happiness, sing with love,*  
*fly with hope like a great white dove.*

*Life is dull, life is sweet,*  
*life is romantic, it sweeps you off your feet.*

*Roam with nightmares, stand on dreams,*  
*cry for those who have none of these things.*

*Worry of doubts, search for mysteries,*  
*dig for cares, and for loves treasuries.*

*Cry to those in heaven above,*  
*to help the world to live, and for everyone to love.*

“Oh, Yuuri,” he said quietly, looking to the bathroom when he heard the water shut off.

Quickly placing the pen and paper back in place, Viktor pulled the blankets down and lied on the bed, the words he just read going through his mind. Yuuri had captured everything; most of life, most of love, most of what to hope for. The poem drew Viktor to him even more.

He looked up when he heard the door open, grinning when Yuuri stepped out wearing a fluffy white robe. His wet hair was standing on end, making him look ten years younger. Watching him scuffle to the other bed, Viktor sat up and waited for Yuuri to climb onto the mattress.

“Feel better?” he asked, smiling when Yuuri nodded.

“Better and very sleepy,” Yuuri admitted, “Thanks. For everything. This has been the best day I’ve had in a very long time. All of my worries slipped away.”

“I’m glad,” he said softly, “As did mine. Did you call Mari?”
“While you were in the shower. She’s going to cover for me until we get back, but she asked me not to be too late.”

“Do you guys need any help tomorrow?” Viktor asked, “Shelving, cleaning, dog sitting?”

“I think we’ll be ok,” Yuuri replied, laughing, “but if that’s your way of saying can I hang out at the store, the answer is yes.”

“Great!” Viktor exclaimed happily, shifting on the bed until he was lying down.

“Sleep well, Viktor,” he said, leaning over to turn the lamp off before lying down and rolling onto his side.

“You too, Yuuri. The sweetest of dreams.”

Viktor was focused on the laptop in front of him, rapidly typing last minute details into his notes as his students wandered into the room. It was the first day back after spring break, the beginning of the quarter, and the day hadn’t been without its’ setbacks. The mainframe for the university was down so he hadn’t received his updated class roster, leaving him at a disadvantage. He knew his class size had increased by three students but didn’t know anything about them.

He glanced down at lower right corner of the screen, realizing he needed to start class so they could go over the requirements and expectations for the course. He had his spiel to a fine art, thinking he could probably recite it in his sleep. He quickly took a head count, frowning when he realized he was two bodies short.

“Ok, underlings,” Viktor said loudly, smiling when chuckles filled the room, “Time for your overlord to speak.”

Waiting for his students to settle down and get ready to take notes, he started his speech on what the class was about. He told them a little about himself; his background, teaching qualifications, Makkachin and how far $20 would go to bribe him towards a good grade. Stopping when the class laughed, he walked around the podium and leaned against the desk before he spoke about what they would be reading that quarter.

“Since this is a poetry course, you might be surprised to know that we’ll be reading poetry,” he stated, feigning shock, “We’re going to be touching on a lot in eight weeks, so be prepared for your brain to turn to sludge. We’re going to start out with some ancient haiku before moving to…”

Viktor paused when the door opened, looking to the entrance. One of his main pet peeves was latecomers to class, so he planned to have a little fun at the student’s expense. He waited for the person to round the corner and come face to face with him, but when he saw who it was a grin broke across his face.

It was Yuuri.

“Hi,” he said breathlessly, bracing his hands on his knees, “Sorry I’m late. I got lost.”

“Not a problem,” Viktor said, still smiling ridiculously, “have a seat. Good to see you. Where was I? Oh! Haiku. We’re going to start with haiku and then delve into some ancient Chinese works
before shifting to Hindu pieces. Any questions so far?"

Viktor scanned the class, eyes darting among his students until he saw a hand raise slowly in the air. His smile broadened once again as he pointed.

“Regarding Japanese poetry,” Yuuri began, “is it going to be limited to haiku?”

“What did you have in mind?” Viktor asked, so pleased Yuuri was already interacting.

“Haiga, Renga, maybe Senryu?”

“I think I could find some pieces,” he said, “Excellent idea, Yuuri. Any other questions? No? Alright, moving along.”

Viktor continued explaining his expectations to his students while the feeling of immense joy consumed him. Yuuri had taken his suggestion and decided to audit the class. He had never been more excited to teach than he did now. Not only was it a subject that was dear to him and was passionate about, but Yuuri would be there to share it with him.

He found himself thinking this was going to be the best quarter yet.
In the Best of Company

Chapter Summary

Viktor and Yuuri spend most of the day together after classes resume, admitting thoughts of the other.

“It’s not an imposition, Viktor,” he said, looking at his hands resting on the table, “Would it be weird or out of line if I said I don’t want you to go? We haven’t seen each other much lately.”

Viktor slid his arm across the table and took one of Yuuri’s hands in his, smiling softly when he looked up. He was glad the feeling of electricity from the touch was a gentle frisson since Yuuri was opening up, telling him how he truly felt. Viktor knew it had to be hard for Yuuri and knew it was time for him to be honest himself.

“It’s not weird or out of line,” Viktor said, squeezing his hand lightly, “May I admit something?”

“Sure.”

“You are the first person since my parents that I’ve let see the true me. I got the impression you were different than most people, but you proved it the first night of the poetry reading,” Viktor revealed, “You treat me as a person, someone you want to know because I’m me. You don’t see and try to get whatever you can from me, you don’t want to know me because I’m okay looking. That means a lot to me, Yuuri. So yes, I’ll stay for dinner if you’ll have me.”

Chapter Notes

We're at chapter seven already! Unreal.

Classes have been back in session for a few weeks and Easter has rolled around. It's the last class of the week for Yuuri, but Viktor wants to have lunch together. One thing leads to another which opens a door for both. You'll see ;)

Notes for this chapter. They're usually huge for BtP, but here we go:

1) The lines Otabek and Yuri say (Jesus and Sweet Mary, Mother of God) are from the movie Twister. Freaking love that movie Rabbit is good, Rabbit is wise.
2) A rubric is an explanation of how projects and papers will be graded, letting a student know what is required to earn the maximum amount of points available.
3) The Symposium is a work of Plato's that introduced the modern idea of soulmates. It's his theory that Zeus split the four-armed, four-legged, two-headed human in half because it was too powerful. The divided being would thus spend the rest of their life searching for it's other half.
4) The first poem Yuuri summarizes is Sonatorrek, by Egill Skallagrimsson. He was a tenth century Icelandic poet.
5) The second poem is Laments for Lost Friends in Ancient Rome by Catallus and Horace.
So not bad for notes this time around.
Hope you guys enjoy 'In the Best of Company' and thanks for reading!

As much as I wish I could, I don’t own Yuri!!! On Ice.
This fic is not beta’d.
While I truly appreciate the offers, I’m not currently looking for a beta.

You can follow me on tumblr. Stay up to date on latest chapters and story progress or just want to give a shout out! You guys are what drives me, and I so appreciate every one of you.

“Since everyone but me has Thursday off, do you know what that means?” he asked, leaning against a table, “Anyone? You have a paper due on Tuesday!”

Groans were heard throughout the room, Viktor chuckling when he saw a few students roll their eyes. He walked back to the podium, pulled a folder from his briefcase and made his way to the first row of desks. After telling the young woman to take a sheet of paper and pass the rest of the stack along, he returned to the table and hopped onto the surface.

“Everyone take a sheet except for those that are auditing this course,” Viktor said, looking around the room, “We’ll go over the assignment in the last five minutes.”

“Auditing this course?” Yuri said loudly, stuffing his textbook in his backpack, “Who in their right mind would audit one of your classes?”

“I’m such a charming individual, Plisetsky,” he replied, grinning when several students laughed, “Some students like to learn new things but don’t want the hassle of grades. Others are repeating it for a refresher before going on to higher level courses. Maybe a few enjoy my company.”

After he finished the last sentence, Viktor looked at Yuuri and winked at him, smiling when he looked down and a fierce blush flooded his cheeks.

“Jesus,” Otabek muttered.

“Sweet Mary, Mother of God,” Yuri grumbled, “Someone’s sadistic if they enjoy your company, Nikiforov.”

“Apparently, you enjoy it if this is your second class with me this semester,” Viktor teased, grinning at him, “Don’t you feel the love, Yuri?”

“Whatever helps you sleep at night,” he mumbled.

“More like a nightmare, Plisetsky,” Viktor said, wiggling his brows when the class laughed, “Anyway, let’s get down to business since we now have three minutes left.”

Viktor went over the instructions and rubric for the assignment, telling them he wanted to read the two pieces on the page. He wanted a four-paragraph essay detailing the similarities and difference between each poem. After telling them to be sure to site their sources and they couldn’t rely on external information, he excused the class and told them to have a wonderful holiday.
“Yuuri Katsuki,” he said, getting the attention of his class and his blushing friend, “May I see you for a moment? Oh, guys! If you’re in town this Friday, make sure to stop by ‘Bound to Please’ for the poetry reading! Eight o’clock, ten points extra credit if you attend.”

Yuuri stood up, collected his bag from the floor and walked to the front of the room. Viktor said goodbye to several students as they walked by him, wishing them a happy Easter. When the door closed behind the final student, Viktor took a deep breath and turned to Yuuri.

“Hi,” he said, grinning at him.

“Hi,” Yuuri echoed, unsure of himself, “Is something wrong?”

“No, not at all,” Viktor assured him, “We just haven’t had much time to chat lately and I’ve missed it. How are you doing?”

“I’m ok. It’s been a little busier at the bookstore but I think it has to do with the holiday,” Yuuri explained, sitting on the desk next to him, “You’ll be there tomorrow?”

“ Wouldn’t miss it for the world,” Viktor replied, patting Yuuri’s knee, “I have an hour before my next class. Want to grab a bite to eat?”

“Um…well…I do, but it’s really busy on campus,” he admitted, “It’s a little daunting here.”

“I’ll be there with you, Yuuri, but if you don’t want to, it won’t hurt my feelings,” Viktor stated, smiling softly at him.

Viktor was right, they hadn’t seen each other much recently. Since the new semester started, he and Yuuri had only spent one afternoon a week together. Viktor had invited him over recently for dinner and a movie of his choosing. When Yuuri showed him the fantasy movie he brought, Viktor smiled brightly and told him it was his favorite movie, ecstatic when Yuuri told him it was his as well.

The evening was pleasant but went by too quickly. When Yuuri told him he had to leave since he had to open the store the next morning, Viktor tried to quell the disappointment rising in him. He walked Yuuri to the door, patting him on the shoulder as he told him goodnight.

“Damn!” Yuuri yelped, arching his back from the shock of electricity that rampaged through him when Viktor’s hand touched him.

“Are you pure energy, Yuuri Katsuki?” Viktor teased.

“Not that I know of,” he replied, “Why is it you keep shocking me?”

“Not sure. Is it just me, or do they hurt more?”

“They definitely hurt more,” Yuuri agreed, rubbing his shoulder.

“Maybe I need to get a humidifier,” Viktor stated.

“Possibly,” Yuuri said, smiling at him, “I’ll see you later, Viktor. Have a good night.”

“You too, Yuuri.”

Yuuri had been looking forward to Tuesday as he enjoyed the class, but he really wanted to see Viktor. His teaching style was hilarious but incredibly effective. Yuuri enjoyed the interaction Viktor required in class, not judging anyone’s opinion. When a student had an idea that didn’t touch on the reading, he gently guided them to a different way of thinking. Since Viktor made it so easy,
Yuuri thought about Viktor’s request for a minute, carefully weighing the pros and cons. Though Viktor had offered to walk him to and from class, Yuuri couldn’t in good conscience ask his friend to do that, choosing to walk on his own. It took every ounce of courage and strength for him to walk onto the busy campus, taking deep breaths as he navigated through the throngs of people. It had become a ritual for him to fall into his desk, thin sheen of sweat on his skin while he dug through his pack for a notebook. When Viktor walked into the classroom, he’d scan the students until his eyes fell on Yuuri, giving him a soft smile.

“Where would you want to go?” Yuuri asked, letting his thoughts go and returning to the present.

“There’s a shop on campus that makes a mean avocado sandwich,” Viktor answered, “I remember how much you like avocado. It shouldn’t be too busy now.”

“You had me at avocado,” he said, smiling at Viktor.

“Wonderful!” Viktor exclaimed, standing and picking up his briefcase, “Care if we stop by my office? I need to turn in some papers and give my grad student some instructions.”

“Not at all.”

Viktor grinned and gestured for Yuuri to go ahead of him. They chatted as they walked to a nearby building where Viktor’s office was housed, Yuuri listening to Viktor tell him about what they’d be covering in class soon. When Viktor apologized for rambling about his job, Yuuri told him it wasn’t a problem. He liked hearing Viktor’s accented voice speak excitedly about subjects that he was passionate about, but he would never tell him that.

They entered the building and took the elevator to the next floor, Viktor telling Yuuri to follow him. They reached his office minutes later and Viktor flung the door opening, holding his arms out to the woman inside.

“Honey! I’m home!” he shouted.

“You’re such an ass, Viktor,” she said, returning to the papers she was grading.

“You love me,” he teased, “Yuuri, this is my grad student, Mila. Mila, Yuuri.”

“Is this the guy you’ve been talking about?” she asked, not looking up.

“Yes,” Viktor mumbled, “Way to rat me out, genius. I have a million more things for you to do while I’m out for lunch.”

“You’re a slave driver, Nikiforov,” Mila grumbled.

“Isn’t slave synonymous with grad student?” he asked, “You want anything from Jeff’s?”

“Jeff’s as in person or Jeff’s as in food?” she asked.

“Food.”

“Yeah, BLT please,” she said, smiling at him.

“Did I hear Jeff’s?”
Yuuri turned around to see who spoke, becoming nervous when he saw who it was. Chris stood in the doorway, grinning amusedly at Viktor. Yuuri had only met the man once but it was embarrassing, Chris making innuendos that Viktor was interested in him romantically. The thought had crossed Yuuri’s mind many a night, but there was no possibility their friendship would evolve into something more.

“Yeah, you want anything?” Viktor asked.

“Can you get that salad I like?” he asked, digging into his back pocket and pulling his wallet out.

“Sure, what size?”

“Large. I’m going to be here for a while,” Chris said quietly, handing Viktor the money when he joined him, “Not a flavor of the month, I see.”

“Huh?” Viktor asked cluelessly.

“Yuuri,” he stated, “You’ve been spending a lot of time with him lately.”

“He’s a good friend,” Viktor said, removing his wallet from his pocket and putting the bills inside.

“I’m a good friend and we don’t hang out that much,” Chris reminded him.

“What is this? An inquisition?” Viktor growled.

“Just an observation.”

“Excuse me,” Yuuri said, Viktor looking at him when he took several steps towards them, “I need to use the bathroom.”

Chris took a step back and Viktor pressed against a stack of books, but the office was so cramped Yuuri had to squeeze between the two. He lost his balance, placing his hand on Viktor’s chest to steady himself, but instantly regretted it.

“Shit!” Viktor yelped, staggering back and knocking a pile of books onto the floor, rubbing his chest.

“My fingers are numb,” Yuuri muttered, shaking his hand as he walked out the door and disappeared around the corner.


“Shut up.”

When Yuuri returned from the bathroom, they walked across campus to the sandwich shop. Viktor tried his best to distract Yuuri with a conversation about his favorite poets, but Yuuri had difficulty focusing. Reaching over and gingerly placing a hand on Yuuri’s forearm, Viktor stopped him and searched his face, Yuuri’s eyes reflecting anxiety.

“Do you want me to walk you back to the bookstore?” he asked.

“No, I’m ok,” Yuuri replied, shaking his head.
“Yuuri, you’re shaking.”

“I’m a little nervous and feel out of place,” he admitted, “but I’ve been told it’s best to fight through it since it gets easier with practice.”

“If you change your mind, let me know.”

When they arrived at the shop, it was busier than Viktor had anticipated. The weather was warm so he suggested they eat outside after they ordered their meals. Yuuri insisted on paying for Viktor’s lunch, pushing on Viktor’s forehead as he handed the cashier his debit card. Viktor sighed dramatically, glanced out of the corner of his eye and muttered to him that next time was his turn. All Yuuri could do was giggle.

Yuuri’s mood lightened considerably when they found a table outside. They discussed the book Yuuri would be reading at children’s hour the next day, a new recipe Viktor found he wanted to try and a movie coming out soon that both wanted to see. When Viktor insisted Yuuri join him on opening day, Yuuri felt his cheeks warm and nodding as he accepted the invitation.

They finished eating with barely any time to spare before Viktor’s next class, walking hurriedly to his office. Campus traffic had increased considerably since most students took mid-afternoon classes, putting Yuuri on edge. Viktor noticed his unease, an idea coming to mind.

“Yuuri, would you like to wait in my office until my classes end?” Viktor asked, “When I get done I can walk you back.”

“I can’t ask you to do that, Viktor,” Yuuri protested, “it’s out of your way and I’ll be fine.”

“Yuuri, you’re pale and I don’t mind. I even have a book you might like.”

“I’m not going to win, am I?” Yuuri asked, peering at him.

“Nope,” Viktor replied, grinning at him.

“Viktor,” he asked, looking at him, “What was Chris talking about?”

“When?”

“When I left to find the bathroom,” Yuuri reminded him, “Spark of attraction. I heard him from the hallway.”

“Oh, that,” Viktor said, rolling his eyes, “He believes in true love, soulmates and all that superstition.”

“Please don’t ever let him and Mari in the same room with one another. We’d never hear the end of it.”

“Deal,” Viktor said, smiling at him.

Viktor helped Yuuri settle in his office, only narrowing his eyes once when he had to clear stacks of books from a chair and Yuuri giggled. After explaining how much a literature professor had to be knowledgeable about several subjects, Yuuri gave him a doubtful look and sat in the chair Viktor
cleared off. Viktor gave him three books to choose from, but none of them interested him. Yuuri’s eyes scanned the novels on Viktor’s desk, lifting one he hadn’t read before.

“I haven’t read this one before,” he said.

“If you think Plato is light reading, you’re a better man than me,” Viktor stated.

“It’s *The Symposium*,” Yuuri countered, “Look how small it is. It can’t be that bad.”

“Again, it’s Plato,” he said, grabbing his briefcase from the floor, “I have to go to class. You can tell me all about it on the way to the bookstore. Bye, Mila!”

Yuuri watched Viktor walk to the door, smiling and waving when he turned around once before walking out of the office. He spent the next hour engrossed in the book, looking at Mila occasionally when she grumbled over a paper. When she growled in frustration and dropped her pen on the table in front of her, Yuuri raised a brow at her.

“That bad?” he asked.

“Viktor has a habit of asking the impossible with writing assignments,” she said, handing him a paper, “The topic for his one was to take a frontier fiction and describe how techniques used then could help with modern technology today.”

“This has nothing to do with literature,” Yuuri stated, looking at her.

“I know! I tell him that all the time, but his response is always it lets him know if they’ve read the book and opens their minds up to creative thinking.”

“As crazy as it sounds,” he said, “he has a point. You want some help?”

“What about your book?” she asked.

“It’s gotten really stupid,” Yuuri grumbled, spinning the chair around to set the book on the desk and grab a pen.

“How so?”

“One word: Soulmates,” he stated.

“Ah, Zeus dividing a person into two and they search the world over for their one?” she asked, grinning when he nodded, “You don’t believe in it?”

“Not at all,” Yuuri said.

“I think it’s romantic,” Mila said, smiling.

“I think it’s ridiculous.”

“Who knows, Yuuri, maybe you have a soulmate out there somewhere,” she said, handing him a stack of papers.

“Highly unlikely,” he said, uncapping his pen and going over the first essay, “very unlikely.”

“You never know.”
Viktor’s classes didn’t end until six that evening and he had an impromptu meeting with a student, so they didn’t leave campus until after seven. It had grown dark and chilly, Yuuri dreading the walk back. He hadn’t planned on being gone all day and hadn’t brought a coat with him, hoping he wouldn’t be shivering too much by the time he made it home. Mari called him earlier to ask where he was and when would he be back. He told her it would be later in the evening, apologizing for being away so long. She scoffed at him and told him to enjoy his time since he rarely left the bookstore. While she wouldn’t tell her brother, she was glad Viktor came into his life and got him interested in things besides the bookstore.

Viktor returned to the office and had prepared a sincere apology for Mila since she had worked longer than anticipated, but when he opened the door he only saw Yuuri lying on the couch, reading a German autobiography. He tilted his head in confusion and asked where she went.

“We finished grading the papers around four. The copies you asked for are on your desk,” Yuuri said, “Oh, and she ordered the booklets you wanted. I think she said they’d be in early next week.”

“We?” Viktor asked.

“Huh?” Yuuri replied with his own question, confused.

“You said we finished grading the papers.”

“Oh, I helped,” he said, “I hope you don’t mind.”

“With your insight I’ve seen in class and at your store, I don’t mind at all,” Viktor said, smiling when he blushed, “Ready to go? I’m dying to hear all about “The Symposium”.”

“Trust me when I say no you aren’t,” Yuuri mumbled, lifting his backpack from the floor.

“Why am I not?”

“It’s about soulmates,” Yuuri declared.

“Ah, you’re right,” Viktor said, “I don’t think I want to hear about it.”

They stepped into the hallway, Yuuri waiting for Viktor to turn the lights out and lock the door to his office. Yuuri asked his opinion on the two different pieces he had assigned for the poetry class, but wasn’t prepared for Viktor’s response.

“Have you ever read them?” Viktor asked.

“I did while I was waiting for you,” Yuuri replied, “I’m curious what you think about them.”

“Tell me what you think. You must have some thoughts if you’re asking about them,” he said, smiling at Yuuri.

“Well, the first one explains the grief of a father over the deaths of his two sons. He ceases living and curses Odin for shattering his family, but eventually comes to his senses and thanks the god for the gift of poetry. It seems like he resumes his life like nothing ever happened. Could it be because they thought they had an exalted afterlife with their ancestors?” Yuuri summarized.

“Possibly,” Viktor said, tapping his chin with a forefinger, “What about the next one?”
“That one has the same theme but different reaction. Those left behind can still function and carry on with life, but part of their heart has died along with the person they buried. They remember their dead always, but what gets me is the involvement with their gods and the wife trying to contact her husband in the afterlife. She was even warned that Mercury doesn’t allow communication once the dead depart the realm of the living. Wishful thinking, perhaps?” he explained.

“Ok, I have one question for you,” Viktor asked, looking at Yuuri.

“What’s that?”

“Why aren’t you teaching this class?” he asked, grinning at him.

“I don’t think I’d be a good teacher, Viktor,” Yuuri mumbled, tapping his fingers together.

Viktor reached out and rested Yuuri’s hands with one of his own, getting his attention. He smiled softly at him and watched Yuuri take a deep breath. He explained to Viktor in the past he calmed himself with deep breathing until the anxiety left, though it could take a while. Viktor had experienced Yuuri on the verge of panic attacks several times since they became friends, telling him to take his time since his health and peace of mind were more important than any outing. Yuuri thanked him profusely but still hated having one in front of him, that is until he started using Viktor as his focal point.

“Yuuri,” he said quietly, “You’re an amazing person at everything I’ve seen you attempt. I know you’ve gone far out of your comfort zone since we met and I’m so proud of you. While I don’t expect you to get a doctorate by tomorrow, you’d be an incredible teacher.”

“You have more faith in me than I do myself,” Yuuri admitted.

“I always will, and that faith will overflow when you begin to believe you can do anything you set your mind on,” Viktor stated, frowning when Yuuri shivered, “Where’s your coat?”

“I didn’t bring one. I didn’t think I’d be out this late.”

“Here,” Viktor said, shrugging out of his overcoat and draping it across Yuuri’s shoulders.

“No, Viktor,” Yuuri protested, “You need your coat.”

“I dressed in layers,” he explained, “Also, do you remember where I’m from? This is summer weather in St. Petersburg. As long as I have my gloves, I’m good.”

“You better take it back if you get chilly,” Yuuri said, pointing a finger at him.

“We’ll see.”

Viktor was surprised when they reached the bookstore. Mari had closed the store early since she was going out with a friend that evening. She gave some last-minute reminders to Yuuri before she left, kissing his cheek before heading out the door. Yuuri offered Viktor a coffee before he left, smiling at him when Viktor requested decaf or he’d be up all night. They talked about their trip to Detroit a few weeks ago and how much they enjoyed it, making plans to go when the next opera started.

Yuuri realized how content and relaxed he was around Viktor, more than he had been with anyone in his life. He found himself never wanting Viktor to leave, wanting their time to last forever. This evening was no different, finding himself coming up with an excuse for Viktor to stay longer. When he heard a low rumble across the table, he had a plan.
"Would you like to stay for dinner?" Yuuri asked, "I can whip something up really quick."

“I don’t want to impose,” Viktor said.

“It’s not an imposition, Viktor,” he said, looking at his hands resting on the table, "Would it be weird or out of line if I said I don’t want you to go? We haven’t seen each other much lately."

Viktor slid his arm across the table and took one of Yuuri’s hands in his, smiling softly when he looked up. He was glad the feeling of electricity from the touch was a gentle frisson since Yuuri was opening up, telling him how he truly felt. Viktor knew it had to be hard for Yuuri to admit and knew it was time for him to be honest himself.

“It’s not weird or out of line,” Viktor said, squeezing his hand lightly, “May I admit something?"

“Yes.”

“You are the first person since my parents that I’ve let see the true me. I got the impression you were different than most people, but you proved it the night of the first poetry reading I attended," Viktor revealed, "You treat me as a person, someone you want to know because I’m me. You don’t see and try to get whatever you can from me, you don’t want to know me because I’m okay looking. That means a lot to me, Yuuri. So yes, I’ll stay for dinner if you’ll have me.”

“Of course,” Yuuri said, smiling, “But I have to argue with you about one point.”

“What’s that?” he asked, tilting his head.

“You’re more than okay looking,” Yuuri said quietly, blushing a deep crimson before rising from his chair and taking the dirty dishes.

“Yuuri?” Viktor asked, waiting for him to turn around, “Remember when you said you were conscious about how you looked?”

“Yes,” he said, looking down at the floor.

Viktor looked at him, choosing his words carefully as not to sound demeaning or too extravagant. Praying the static in the room would be kind, he lightly touched the bottom of Yuuri’s chin with three fingers, tilting his head up until their gazes met. Yuuri was staring at him, his eyes wide in shock.

“You’re a beautiful man, Yuuri,” Viktor whispered, smiling sweetly before lowering his hand, “Not only on the outside, but the inside as well. I’m such a better person having you in my life.”

Yuuri’s stare remained after Viktor stepped back and simply watched him. No one had ever called him beautiful or admitted they were better having known him, Yuuri didn’t know how to take the compliment. His heart was joyful, his soul singing from Viktor’s words but they seemed surreal, leaving him to wonder when he’d wake up from this wonderful dream.

“Um…I…” Yuuri stammered, trying to collect his thoughts, “Dinner?"

Viktor grinned and nodded, following Yuuri to the back of the store and up the stairs to the apartment. Much to Yuuri’s dismay, Viktor insisted on helping prepare the meal since it would be quicker with two pairs of hands. When Yuuri argued with him, Viktor told him the faster they finished dinner, the more time they would have to enjoy the other’s company. Yuuri reluctantly agreed.
Viktor learned how to make traditional Japanese ramen that night. While it didn’t take long to make it, he was surprised there were so many ingredients. Yuuri laughed when he blurted it out, telling him one could put whatever they wanted in ramen. When Viktor jokingly asked if he could put chocolate in ramen, Yuuri’s frowned and punched him in the shoulder.

Dinner was delicious and they promised to cook together more often. Viktor mentioned a culinary arts class for people wanting to expand their repertoire in the kitchen, but though he was joking Yuuri was truly interested. When Yuuri’s eyes sparkled at the mention of the class, Viktor said he’d get more information.

It was almost ten when Viktor decided he should go home. He had enjoyed his day with Yuuri, more than the trip to Detroit. This was every day integration into the other’s life, more special and meaningful than an outing. Viktor couldn’t wait to do it again.

He thanked Yuuri for the wonderful dinner, followed him downstairs and to the front door. Taking his coat from the stand and putting it on, Viktor waited for Yuuri to disarm the alarm system and open the door. He took a deep breath, shrugged his shoulders and smiled at him.

“I guess this is it,” Viktor said, chuckling when Yuuri leaned against the door.

“I guess so,” Yuuri agreed quietly, “See you tomorrow?”

“Wouldn’t miss it for the world,” he stated, taking a couple steps out the door before turning around, “Lunch tomorrow? My treat?”

“As long as it isn’t anything extravagant or out of the way,” Yuuri warned, having learned of his flair for the extreme in Detroit.

“Why would I ever do that?” Viktor joked, “I promise though, nothing over the top.”

“Good night, Viktor,” Yuuri said, giving him a smile that touched his eyes, “Be careful on the way home.”

“I will,” Viktor said quietly, returning a smile of his own, “Have a great night and thank you for such a wonderful day.”

Yuuri watched Viktor until he disappeared around the corner. Shutting the door behind him and resetting the alarm, he walked to the counter and leaned against it, pressing a hand to his chest. He was elated, hopeful yet scared at the same time. He’d never had these feelings or thoughts in his life and didn’t know how to handle them. He wanted to ask someone about them, wanting to know if they were because he had a new friend or if it was something one felt when they wanted something more. The only one he felt comfortable asking was Viktor, though, and ultimately decided to keep them to himself until he figured them out on his own.

Yuuri climbed the stairs to the apartment and locked the door behind him since Mari didn’t know when she’d be back. He took a quick shower and retired to his room for the night, dressing in warm pajamas since it was unseasonably chilly. He didn’t want to turn the heat on since they were trying to keep their bills at a minimum, so he grabbed a couple blankets from his closet and draped them over his bed. Sliding his slippers off and quickly climbing into bed, he wound the blankets around him and waited for his cocoon to warm up. He just got comfortable when his phone buzzed on the nightstand next to his bed. He frowned as he lifted it, but smiled slightly when he read the caller ID.

“Hi Viktor,” Yuuri said.

“I didn’t wake you, did I?”
“No, I just got in bed,” he admitted, “Have you been at home long?”

“A little while,” Viktor said, “Pretty much fell into bed after I fed Makkachin.”

“I hope you changed,” Yuuri said through giggles.

“Nope, still in my coat and everything,” he stated, loving it when Yuuri giggled louder, “Nah, I changed. It’s a pain to iron wrinkles from that coat.”

“I bet,” Yuuri said.

“Listen, I was thinking—” Viktor said, pausing when he was interrupted.

“Uh oh,” he teased.

“Ha ha, funny, Yuuri,” Viktor deadpanned, “But seriously, what are you doing on Sunday?”

“Sunday?”

“Yes, Sunday. Easter?” he asked.

“Nothing,” Yuuri said, “We don’t celebrate Easter.”

“Have you ever celebrated it?” Viktor asked.

“No.”

“Would you like to?” he asked, “You can come over, eat until you can’t move and watch a movie or talk. Mari can come along if she’d like.”

“I’ll ask her, but I’ll only go on one condition,” Yuuri said, biting his lip to keep from laughing.

“What’s that?”

“The Easter Bunny has to bring me a basket,” he said, unable to contain his laughter longer.

“I think that’s doable,” Viktor said, chuckling, “I hope I didn’t call too late. It just came to mind as I was trying to fall asleep.”

“Wait a minute,” Yuuri said, “You were thinking about me when you were trying to go to sleep?”

“Yeah,” he admitted, “Creepy?”

“Only if you were a stalker,” Yuuri replied, feeling his heart flutter from Viktor’s confession, “Is it ok if I let you go? I have to be up early.”

“No problem. Sorry to call so late,” Viktor said, “but thank you. I look forward to Sunday and see you tomorrow. Good night, Yuuri.”

“Good night, Viktor.”
Hopping Down the Bunny Trail

Chapter Summary

When Yuuri agrees to spend Easter day with Viktor, more happens than either had planned.

“That’s why I invited you for dinner,” Viktor joked, winking when Yuuri laughed, “I’m admitting my fear, Yuuri. I cherish our friendship so much. I don’t want it to fall apart like everything else I looked forward to in my life.”

“Hey,” Yuuri said softly, catching Viktor’s gaze with his own, “I know how that feels but from the opposite end. I will never do that to you, Viktor, I promise.”

“Thanks,” he said, smiling as he squeezed Yuuri’s hand, “Sorry to be such a downer. Easter is supposed to be fun.”

“I’m honored you trust me enough to share that part of you with me,” Yuuri admitted, “I’ve shared quite a bit with you, so I’m more than happy to be here for you.”

“You don’t know how much that means to me.”

Chapter Notes

Some of you have said I have a thing for Easter with these two dorks, but in all honesty it's because that's the only major holiday in the spring semester! This is American Easter this time, not Russian Easter. So there is a little variety there.

This one wasn't gone over in Twitch since my main laptop decided to puke out and the one I am currently on can't handle my streaming software without wanting to die. New HDD comes in Monday (please, Baby Jesus) so we'll be up and running next Saturday barring issues with work. I have an INSANE week ahead of me next week. Fifty-three server migrations. No, I'm not doing it alone. I'd be a raging lunatic.

But yeah, on to the notes:

1) This chapter highlights the child's view of Easter, from dying eggs to easter egg hunts to the baskets themselves. Since Yuuri has never experienced Easter, I thought it would be adorable for Viktor to show him the sweet, fluffy parts of the holiday. I think he likes it.

2) The cider mill mentioned actually exists! It's Parmenter's Cider Mill in Northville, MI. I FREAKING LOVE THIS PLACE! Best donuts and cider EVER. If you're ever in the Detroit area in October, GO!

3) The Ice Cube is actually Ann Arbor Ice Cube, an ice rink/fitness center on Oak Valley Dr. They have public skate and drop in hockey quite a bit. Awesome place.

4) The quote at the end is actually anonymous, which is sad because it's so beautiful.

Hope you enjoy and thanks for reading!
As much as I wish I could, I don’t own Yuri!!! On Ice. This fic is not beta’d. While I truly appreciate the offers, I’m not currently looking for a beta.

You can follow me on tumblr. Stay up to date on latest chapters and story progress or just want to give a shout out! You guys are what drives me, and I so appreciate every one of you.

“Yuuri! So glad you could make it!”

He looked at Viktor after he opened the door, giving him a dubious stare. He had arrived early with a bowl of potato salad he had spent hours making the previous night. Since he had never made it before, he scoured over several recipes before finally deciding on one. The first three attempts had been a disaster much to Vicchan’s delight, but it frustrated Yuuri. He had almost given up but the last batch had been perfect, Mari telling him to save the recipe after she tried it.

“Hi Viktor,” Yuuri said, smiling and handing the large bowl to him, “You look ridiculous, by the way.”

“Yuuri,” he pouted dramatically, “you don’t like my bunny ears?”

Yuuri stared at him for a moment, seeing the arctic blue eyes dancing with joy before looking at the gaudy headband Viktor was wearing. They were decorated with fluffy white fur, lined with pink satin on the inside, one ear drooping slightly. Even though he told Viktor he looked silly, Yuuri couldn’t help but thinking Viktor’s jovial attitude and the ears atop his head were adorable.

“It’s not that I don’t like them,” Yuuri explained, “They look like something a five-year-old would wear.”

“Well, my mother said I would never grow up,” Viktor mused, placing a finger over his lips, clapping his hands in excitement moments later, “I got you a pair, too!”

“You didn’t,” he deadpanned, pulling on Vicchan’s leash and guiding him inside when Viktor walked into the house.

“I did” Viktor replied, “Now where did I put them?”

Viktor placed the bowl of potato salad in the refrigerator then wandered around the living room, going through several shopping bags next to the couch. Frowning when he couldn’t find the headband he bought for Yuuri, Viktor told him to make himself at home before disappearing into his room. Yuuri sat on the couch, head jerking towards the hallway when he heard a loud crash.

“Are you alright?” he asked loudly.

“Yeah, just knocked a tower of books over.”

Yuuri shook his head and chuckled, touched by how happy Viktor seemed. He had been conflicted about intruding on Viktor’s holiday, but when he told Yuuri he would be spending it alone and would really enjoy his company, Yuuri relented. Viktor explained different aspects of the holiday
and how celebrations differed between America and Russia, telling him they would be observing the American version.

Viktor returned to the living room minutes later, grinning at him and holding a headband. When he handed it to him, Yuuri smirked when he saw it was just like Viktor’s but the ears were light blue. He placed them on his head, adjusting them so they wouldn’t interfere with his glasses. Running his hands along the furry ears, Yuuri looked at Viktor and grinned.

“How do I look?” he asked.

“Very cute,” Viktor replied, smiling softly at him, “I think we should get a picture.”

“Picture?” he asked, anxiety growing from the thought, “I don’t…”

“What’s wrong, Yuuri?” Viktor asked, tilting his head.

“I don’t really like pictures taken of me,“ he admitted, looking at the floor, “You know how they say the camera adds ten pounds? Well, in my case it’s thirty.”

“May I suggest something,” Viktor asked, continuing when he nodded, “Can we take a trial picture and see how it looks? If you don’t like it, we can delete it and that’s that.”

Yuuri thought for a minute, memories of children at home teasing him during picture day or covering up at the beach during a family photo. It had been a struggle for him his entire life and he was unsure about Viktor’s request. No one had ever given him an option like Viktor suggested, however, and it warmed his heart. Finding himself thankful once again to have a friend like Viktor, Yuuri agreed albeit hesitantly.

“You promise if I don’t like it, you’ll delete it?” he asked.

“I’ll delete it and we’ll never mention it again,” Viktor reiterated.

“Ok.”

Viktor smiled sweetly, sitting on the cushion next to Yuuri and patting his thigh. Leaning over to pick his phone up from the table, Viktor sat back and scooted closer to Yuuri, pressing their heads cheek to cheek. He could smell a light flowery scent floating from Yuuri, thinking it was pure and wonderful as the man himself.

“On the count of three, say bunny!” Viktor exclaimed, “One, two, three! Bunny!”

He pressed the button on the screen, blinking when he saw dots from the flash in his vision. Once they faded, Viktor looked at his phone and found the picture. It was perfect. Yuuri’s eyes were sparkling, the smile on his face angelic. He looked so happy, almost as happy as Viktor felt.

“May I see?” Yuuri asked, peeking over Viktor’s shoulder.

“Here,” he said, handing the phone to him, “I think the picture is great, Yuuri.”

Yuuri looked at the screen, shocked that the person smiling back was him. He hated photographs, hated being in front of a camera but thought this was the best picture of himself he had ever been in. He felt the corners of his lips tug upwards, lifting a finger to touch the screen but remembered what happened last time when Viktor showed him the picture of Makkachin. Yuuri didn’t want this one to go away.
“Can we keep it?” Viktor asked.

“Yes,” Yuuri said softly, looking at Viktor and smiling while handing the phone back to him, “Can you text it to me? I’d like to share it with my parents.”

“Sure,” he replied, sending the image to Yuuri’s phone, “I think this one should go on my social media account. Everyone was asking what I was doing over Easter weekend.”

“No!” Yuuri shouted, “I don’t know…I…”

“Yuuri, if you aren’t comfortable with it, that’s fine. I’ll respect whatever decision you make.”

“I can take a picture of you to put on your account if you’d like,” Yuuri offered.

“We’ll see,” Viktor said, smiling when his phone chimed, “You should have that picture now.”

“Thanks,” he said, “Do you want to watch a movie or talk about that book I lent you? It looks like something is still in the oven.”

“Yeah, the ham has a while until it’s done,” Viktor admitted, “but I have another idea.”

“What’s that?”

“Come with me,” he said, rising from the couch and holding a hand out for Yuuri, “You’ll see.”

Yuuri took Viktor’s hand, thanking him when he helped him to his feet. He followed Viktor into the kitchen and sat in a chair at the table, waiting for Viktor to get something from the fridge. When Viktor joined him at the table and set a carton of eggs on the surface, Yuuri was perplexed.

“Eggs?” he asked, looking from the carton to Viktor.

“Yuuri,” Viktor said, narrowing his eyes and tilting his head, “How much do you know about Easter?”

“Just what’s in children’s books. Why?”

“Then you know about eggs,” Viktor said, turning around and taking a few steps towards the counter, lifting a small box to show Yuuri, “We have to dye eggs, Yuuri. It’s Easter!”

“You’re joking,” Yuuri stated, mouth opening when Viktor shook his head, “Why are we dying eggs? That’s for kids!”

“It may be for kids, but you’ve never done it before and you can’t have your Easter basket without eggs,” he explained, raising a brow when Yuuri started to protest, “Them’s the rules, Yuuri. I think it will be fun.”

“Wait. Easter basket?”

“Wasn’t that the condition of you joining me today?” Viktor asked, grinning when Yuuri blushed.

“I was joking” he said quietly, lifting his eyes to meet Viktor’s.

“I wasn’t,” Viktor said gently, sitting in the chair next to Yuuri’s and taking his hand, “I want to show you what Easter is all about. It’s fun and I’d like to share it with you.”

“Ok.”
“Good,” Viktor said, patting the top of Yuuri’s hand before letting go, “I’ll get the bowls and water. How about you set everything up and decide which colors you want to use?”

They spent the next hour dying eggs, reduced to giggles by the time they were done. Viktor found the wax crayon that came with the kit and drew silly designs on all his eggs, telling Yuuri he’d see them once they had color. Yuuri took the crayon from him and doodled designs on a few of his own then placed them in the bowls of dye. He teased Viktor about hogging the purple dye, grumbling there were more colors he could use. Viktor threw his head back and laughed, telling him they had to be the perfect hue of violet. Yuuri responded by rolling his eyes.

“Ok,” Viktor said, checking one of the eggs with a spoon, “I think this one is ready to come out. Can you line the carton with paper towel?”

“Sure,” Yuuri replied, tearing a sheet off and pressing it into the cups of the carton.

Viktor patted the egg with another piece of paper towel, holding it in between his thumb and forefinger when it was dry. The designs he drew on stood out from the darkness of the dye and Viktor grinned. He turned the egg gently, looking at the drawings before showing Yuuri.

“That’s cute! Is that Makkachin and Vicchan?” Yuuri asked, smiling when Viktor nodded, “What’s on the bottom? I can’t see through your thumb.”

“I guess I need to reorder my invisible fingers,” Viktor teased, moving his thumb so Yuuri could see the drawings on the bottom, “It’s you and I.”

Yuuri gasped and looked at him, eyes wide and mouth slightly open. The drawings were elementary but cute, Viktor with an exaggerated heart-shaped smile and his hair drooping over an eye, Yuuri with his glasses, wide smile and messy hair. He reached out and touched the drawing of Viktor, feeling the smoothness of the wax before resting another finger on the drawing of him. He knew Viktor didn’t mean anything from it and just drew what came to mind, but it meant a lot to Yuuri.

“Do you like it?” Viktor asked quietly, breaking Yuuri from his thoughts.

“Very much,” he admitted, smiling, “Mine are lame now. I just drew zigzags and polka dots.”

“Nah, not lame,” Viktor rebutted, “Designer! We could sell them at a premium at the bookstore!”

“I don’t think a dollar would help much,” Yuuri said through giggles.

“You never know,” he replied, winking at Yuuri before looking down at the whining dog at his feet, “I think Makkachin wants out. Would Vicchan like to join us?”

Yuuri called his dog, scolding him when he appeared at the doorway of Viktor’s room. He told him not to worry about it, stating Makkachin spent most of the day on his bed so what was the harm in two dogs. Viktor opened the door and whistled, laughing when both dogs bounded past him raced around the enclosed backyard. Yuuri followed Viktor outside and stood next to him on the flagstone pavers, watching the dogs jump as they played. He had never seen Vicchan this happy as he did when he was with Makkachin. Not only had he gained a friend in Viktor, but his dog had become Makkachin’s companion. He smiled as he heard the excited yips from the dogs, playing until Vicchan stopped at a bush and sniffed at the base.

“He’s going to dig up your bushes,” Yuuri muttered, cupping his hands to yell at the dog.

“Do you want to see what he’s found? Might not be healthy for dogs,” Viktor suggested, smiling when he nodded.
Yuuri walked over to Vicchan, calling his name when he bit at the base of the bush. When he reached the dog, he squatted and pet Vicchan, tilting his head when his eyes fell on a bright green piece of plastic. Brushing the dirt aside, Yuuri lifted the container and realized it was a treat-filled egg. Cracking the plastic pieces apart, he raised the bottom half of his shirt up so the candy wouldn’t fall to the ground. He looked down at his makeshift bag, seeing a few brands of chocolate, jellybeans and a silly duckling ring. He grinned, slid the ring on his pinky and put the treats back in the egg, standing and joining Viktor again.

“Did he destroy the bush?” Viktor asked, holding his hands behind his back.

“No, he found something, though,” Yuuri informed him.

“Really?”

“Yes,” he answered, holding up the plastic egg.

“Huh. Wonder how that got there?” Viktor asked, biting his lower lip, “Guess you’re going to need this.”

Yuuri laughed when Viktor showed him the small bamboo basket he had been hiding behind him and handed it to him. He gently placed the plastic egg in the basket and sat at the table in the chair across from Viktor. Opening the egg and pouring the treats inside, Yuuri unwrapped a piece of chocolate and popped into his mouth. Searching for the next piece he wanted to eat, he saw Viktor watching him from the corner of his eye.

“What?” Yuuri asked after swallowing the chocolate.

“You’re not done,” Viktor stated.

“What?”

“You have ten regular plastic eggs and a golden one to find,” he replied.


“Egg hunt, Yuuri,” Viktor said, chuckling, “I said I was going to share Easter with you. Off you go.”

Yuuri giggled when he stood and Viktor shooed him away, waving his hands as Yuuri ventured further into the yard. He paused in the middle, drumming his chin with two fingers, eyes falling over his surroundings in search of possible hiding spots. Looking at a corner in the back of the yard, Yuuri saw Makkachin hidden behind a shrub, tail wagging excitedly. He took several steps towards the dog, throwing his head back and laughing when he heard Viktor shout.

“Hey! If you use the dogs that’s cheating!” Viktor yelled, “I’ll make you do all the dishes!”

“That’s the best you can come up with?” he shouted, petting Makkachin and thanking him when he saw a red egg.

“Makka! You’re supposed to be on my side,” Viktor said loudly, “Come here, boy!”

Yuuri laughed when Makkachin ran to Viktor, hopping into his lap with a groan from his owner. He imagined having a seventy-pound poodle as a lap dog couldn’t be very comfortable. After telling Vicchan to go to Viktor, Yuuri searched the backyard carefully, scrutinizing any possible place an egg could be found. It turned into a game, Viktor telling him when he was cold as a glacier when he
wasn’t near any eggs. He wandered around, listening for Viktor to inform him he was so close he was standing on the sun. He was still searching for the golden egg when Viktor told him he would be back in a minute after checking on the ham. Knowing he’d be on his own for the last egg, he mentally went through all the areas he’d found the previous eggs. One area he had avoided was the small birdbath in the center of the yard, surrounded with hydrangeas beginning to bloom. He placed the basket on the ground and knelt in front of the stone bath, careful not to disturb the plants as he patted the dirt around them. His fingers brushed against smooth plastic and he knew he’d found the last egg. He wrapped his fingers around it, pulled it out of its hiding place and grinned when he saw the sparkling gold egg.

“Finally find it?” Viktor asked, laughing when Yuuri nodded, “Here I thought we’d be out here all night. Ready to eat?”

“Yes,” Yuuri said, reaching the patio seconds later and smiling at him, “Thank you. That was a lot of fun.”

“I’m glad. It was for me too,” he admitted, “All I have to do is pop the rolls in the oven and steam the broccoli then dinner is done.”

“You get the broccoli, I’ll get the rolls,” Yuuri suggested.

“Deal,” Viktor said, smiling, “I could get used to this.”

Viktor patted Yuuri’s shoulder when he blushed, leading him into the kitchen. He selected a baking sheet and set it on the range, grabbing a bag of rolls from the freezer and handing them to Yuuri. He returned to the freezer, explaining to Yuuri how to set the oven while he dug around for a bag of broccoli. He found it, found a bowl in the cabinet and dumped the contents in it. Walking to the sink, he filled the bottom of the bowl with water, opened the door of the microwave and placed it inside. He pressed a few buttons, set the time and hit the start button. Leaning against the counter, he watched Yuuri pull the rolls apart and put them on the sheet.

“I think you got the easy job,” Yuuri said, smiling at Viktor.

“You’re the one that doled out jobs,” he reminded him, winking at him and loving the sprinkling of pink appearing on Yuuri’s cheeks.

“So, I did,” he mumbled, opened the oven door and sliding the sheet on the rack, “Where did you put the potato salad?”

“Oh!” Viktor said, standing suddenly and going to the fridge. He found the large bowl and bottle of wine he’d put in earlier to chill, grabbing both before shutting the door.

“Give me the bowl,” Yuuri said, taking it from Viktor and placing it on the table.

Viktor thanked him and opened the drawer behind him to look for the corkscrew. When he found it, Viktor took the few steps to the table and placed the bottle on the surface. He asked Yuuri if he could get glasses from the cupboard, telling him where they would be. Yuuri returned to the table with the glasses, Viktor thanking him and uncorking the bottle, pouring the chilled liquid in them.

They finished setting the table for dinner, Viktor telling Yuuri about his conversation with his mother that morning. While Viktor was slicing the ham, he described the latest snowstorm that had hit his hometown this past week and wreaking havoc in the region. While St. Petersburg was accustomed to harsh weather, the plummeting temperatures during the storm even surprised locals. While no human lives had been lost, the small village he was from had significant loss of livestock. Viktor
admitted he felt bad he had left the family to pursue something that would stimulate him intellectually, but he knew he’d never be happy remaining in Russia.

“Why didn’t you stay in Russia, Viktor?” Yuuri asked as they ate.

“It wasn’t right for me,” he answered curtly, Yuuri feeling Viktor’s wall go up for the first time with him.

“We don’t have to talk about it,” Yuuri said quietly, spearing a broccoli floret.

“It’s ok. They aren’t pleasant memories,” Viktor professed, “Remember me telling you that you’re the first person besides my parents that saw me for who I am?”

“Yes.”

“It’s true. Others used me for what toys I had, how fast I could run when we played tag, the fact we had a pond everyone could skate on. As I grew older it was ‘I want to sit next to Viktor, he’s so cool’ when in actuality it was ‘I want to sit next to Viktor because he gets the best grades in the class and I can copy from him’.”

“I’m sorry,” Yuuri said, brows furrowing painfully for his friend.

“It didn’t stop there. Girls wanted me to take them out all the time. I thought they liked me, but they just wanted to be seen with me and make their friends jealous. I thought I got chosen first for group projects because my classmates wanted to work with me and come up with a great project, but they wanted to skate by because Viktor will do all the work.

“Adults did it, too. I could never turn anyone down and everyone in the village knew that. If someone didn’t want to do something, call Viktor. He’ll do it. How many times did I muck out a pig pen when I didn’t want to? Or babysit the Orlov triplets because their papa wanted to go to the tavern.”

“Where was their mom?” Yuuri asked.

“She died in childbirth with the last Orlov baby,” Viktor said, “Neither of them made it.”

“Oh,” he said quietly, feeling his stomach twist in knots for his friend.

“It got a little better when I came here, but by then I’d grown used to it. I put up this wall, project this charm so people don’t see how much it hurts. I think it’s become so much of a habit I don’t even feel it anymore,” Viktor said, laying his fork on his plate and looking at Yuuri, “But then you came along and somehow you saw through all of it. How did you do it, Yuuri?”

“I don’t know,” he replied, “I treat people the way I want to be treated.”

“I understand that, but the first time we met you were extraordinarily genuine. I initially thought it was customer service, but then you asked me to the poetry reading. You had a towel when I came in from the rain, you shared your dinner, you let me chat with you while you closed. You agreed to meet with me a couple days later at the park. You haven’t asked for anything in return or expected anything. Part of me keeps waiting for the anvil to fall,” Viktor admitted.

“Viktor,” Yuuri said, reaching over and placing his hand over Viktor's's, “There is no anvil. You’re a very dear friend. I like you for who you are, not what you can do. Yeah, I like that you’re a professor, but it’s because I get to pick your brain and have stimulating conversations with you. I thoroughly enjoy spending time with you and hope you do as well.”
“That’s why I invited you for dinner,” Viktor joked, winking when Yuuri laughed, “I’m admitting my fear, Yuuri. I cherish our friendship so much. I don’t want it to fall apart like everything else I looked forward to in my life.”

“Hey,” Yuuri said softly, catching Viktor’s gaze with his own, “I know how that feels but from the opposite end. I will never do that to you, Viktor, I promise.”

“Thanks,” he said, smiling as he squeezed Yuuri’s hand, “Sorry to be such a downer. Easter is supposed to be fun.”

“I’m honored you trust me enough to share that part of you with me,” Yuuri admitted, “I’ve shared quite a bit with you, so I’m more than happy to be here for you.”

“You don’t know how much that means to me.”

After dinner was finished and put away along with a plate for Mari, they retired to the living room before Yuuri had to leave. He had explained he’d love to stay longer, but the store was opening early for a special children’s hour. His friend, Minako, had published her first children’s book and was letting Bound to Please sell it exclusively. Viktor was overjoyed for him, insisting Yuuri get a signed copy for him. Yuuri agreed, but laughed at him and asked how it would expand his literary collection.

Right before Yuuri left, Viktor told him to wait a few seconds since he forgot something. Standing and walking to the back porch, Yuuri let the dogs in and wiped their paws on the mat before letting them loose. He called Vicchan to him and hooked the leash on his collar, sitting back on the couch to wait for Viktor. Rubbing both dogs behind their ears, he looked up when he felt the cushion next to him sink.

“Happy Easter,” Viktor said softly, handing him a large white wicker basket.

Yuuri gaped at him, eyes widening when he saw the basket filled to the brim with treats, gift cards, books and coupons. The happiness he’d been filling all day rushed through him, threatening to overflow when he went through his gifts. There were gift cards to local restaurants, the movie theater, baseball games on campus, and the bowling alley. He picked up a book and saw it was a collection of poetry from Emily Dickinson. She had always been his favorite poet, loving the simple yet jarring emotion she poured into every piece. Lifting an envelope with the university logo on it, he frowned at Viktor as he opened it, gasping when he pulled the paper from inside.

“The culinary class? Really?” he shrieked happily.

“Yep,” Viktor affirmed, “You said you wanted to take it and I promised I’d look into it. So, get ready to learn some new recipes. Then we can have one night a week to practice them.”

“Is that a date?” Yuuri asked, heart fluttering.

“I don’t know,” he replied, rubbing the back of his neck, “Possibly.”

“I’m just messing with you, Viktor,” Yuuri said, smiling.

“You’re not done. There’s something else in there.”
Yuuri dug around and saw another envelope with several pieces of paper, confused when he only saw drawings on them. One was of a campfire, another of two people skating on a frozen pond, one walking on the beach as the sun set along the horizon, another sipping steaming liquid as autumn-colored leaves fell around the people.

“I don’t get it,” Yuuri said.

“These are all the things I’d like to do for ‘Finding Yuuri’ this year,” Viktor explained, “When it warms up, we can go camping at the state park. The lake there is gorgeous in early summer and the lightning bug display is ethereal. I think you’d like it. There’s this place in Northville that makes the best apple cider and cinnamon donuts in October. We can even take a couple bushels of apples home with us. The last one is prettier than it actually is, but I’d like to see if you’d like to go ice skating at the Ice Cube with me. It’s been a while since I skated and I think it would be fun to do together.”

“Why?” Yuuri whispered.

“Why what?” Viktor asked, taken aback.

“Why are you so nice to me?” he asked, a single tear sliding down his cheek, “No one besides Phichit has treated me like this and he doesn’t do things like this. You know how you said you keep waiting for the anvil to fall? I do as well. I wait for the day for you to figure out I’m not worth your time or I’m not what you think I am. That you don’t want to hang out with boring, fat Yuuri.”

“Yuuri,” Viktor said sternly, grasping Yuuri’s chin with two fingers, “Like you said, no anvil. You are worth my time. I told you Tuesday you make me a better person. My wall is falling apart brick by brick because of you. Do you know how long I’ve wanted a friend like you?”

“I think I do,” he said, sniffling and wiping his eyes with the back of a hand, “I’m sorry for breaking down. I’m emotional at times and I’m scared. Please promise you won’t hurt me.”

“Only if you promise me the same,” Viktor said, smiling sadly, “Looks like we’re both damaged goods.”

“Maybe,” Yuuri said, laughing through his tears, “but I don’t think anyone can be damaged goods. We might have some pieces missing, but maybe we can help the other find them?”

“That’s a great idea, Yuuri. So, the ‘Finding Yuuri’ project. Are we on?”

“Definitely,” Yuuri replied, grinning.

“Great! The culinary class starts next Wednesday evening. I already talked with Mari and she said she’d cover closing for you,” he said.

“You talked with Mari about this?” Yuuri asked, groaning when Viktor nodded, “I’m never going to hear the end of this. She’s already teasing me that you’re my soulmate.”

“Chris did the same thing when I was putting the basket together,” Viktor said, laughing.

“Viktor?”

“Hmm?”

“I have to go, but thank you so much for such a wonderful day. I never knew Easter could be so much fun,” Yuuri said, smiling.
“It never has been,” Viktor admitted, “You know we’ve started a new tradition. We have to do this every year now.”

“That’s a great idea,” Yuuri agreed, “Now I know what it’s about I can make you a basket. I’m sorry, by the way. I didn’t get you anything.”

“Of course, you did!” Viktor exclaimed, continuing when Yuuri looked at him in confusion, “You brought me the most delicious potato salad I’ve ever had. You spent the day with me. I love our time together, Yuuri.”

“I do as well,” Yuuri said, rising from the couch and heading for the door.

Viktor followed him, holding Vicchan’s leash as Yuuri slid his shoes on and grabbed Mari’s plate from the ottoman. Taking the leash from Viktor, he smiled and took a deep breath. He always hated leaving, never wanting the evening to end. He’d been contemplating something for the past month every time he left and finally decided to follow through on it.

“Text me when you get home?” Viktor asked, opening the door and leaning against it when Yuuri passed him.

“The minute I walk through the door,” he said, fighting his raging nerves, “Thanks again.”

“Anytime. Tuesday?”

“Tuesday,” Yuuri agreed, “Good night.”

“Good night, Yuuri.”

He took a few steps towards the edge of the porch, pausing before he went down the stairs and turning as Viktor was shutting the door.

“Viktor!” he said loudly.

Viktor looked up, opened the door and froze when Yuuri strode towards him. Placing a hand lightly on Viktor’s chest, Yuuri stood on tiptoes and softly pressed his lips against Viktor’s cheek, lingering for a moment before pulling away.

“Good night,” Yuuri said again, taking a step backward and turning around slowly, walking down the stairs and jogging the short distance to his car.

Viktor watched him settle Vicchan into the vehicle, lifting his arm when Yuuri waved one final time and pressed a hand against the spot Yuuri’s lips had touched minutes earlier. The usual jolt of electricity hadn’t startled him, but instead a gentle tingling spread along his skin and throughout his body. The feeling brought him back to a quote Mila had shown him earlier in the week when he asked for some regarding flaws and acceptance he needed for a class. He had mocked her about the quote specifically, but it made sense the minute he’d felt Yuuri’s soft, warm lips against his cheek.

True love is knowing someone’s fault, and loving them even more for them.
Found Out

Chapter Summary

Viktor's and Yuuri's friendship is questioned when it's made public while Yuuri begins to figure out what this feeling is.

“I guess I should let you get back to work,” Viktor said.

“Yeah, I'm sure Mari is famished by now. See you in the morning?” he asked.

“Of course. We have the culinary class tomorrow evening as well,” Viktor reminded him, taking Yuuri’s hand in his own, “I hope your day gets better, Yuuri. If you need anything, I'm just a call away.”

“Viktor, I can’t do that. You’re busy and still have…” he said, pausing when Viktor hushed him with a finger against his lips.

“A call away, Yuuri. I mean it,” Viktor repeated, “If I’m in class, I’ll text you the moment I’m free. It’s what friends do.”

“Alright,” Yuuri agreed hesitantly, “but promise me something.”

“What’s that?”

“If I’m ever a bother, let me know,” he said, holding Viktor’s gaze.

“I promise you that will never happen,” Viktor answered, smiling at him.

Chapter Notes

This chapter eluded me for a few days as this week has been extremely rough and I've had a hard time focusing. I hope you enjoy it nonetheless. This chapter is very subtle but so very powerful. While you're reading it, connect it to past chapters. It will help make sense.

A few notes:
1) Renoir and Monet were French artists in The Impressionism Movement. All the pieces I've ever seen from The Impressionist period are exquisite, though Toulouse-Lautrec is usually an acquired taste. Check them out.
2) Novosibirisk is in Siberia, Russia and it is VERY cold. Annual high temperature is 68F/20C and the low is typically around -12F/-24C. I think I've found the place I want to move to.
3) I based the blizzard on the April Super Snowstorm of 1886. It's the largest blizzard on record for Southeast Michigan (Metro Detroit/Ann Arbor/Downriver).
4) The whitewashing term in this has nothing to do with racism, but a term we used frequently in Michigan. It simply means pushing someone face first in the snow and rubbing their face in it. You would do this to people you really don't like :P
5) A hawker is a person who stands outside a store trying to get people to spend money. They're just promoting sales.
6) I wrote the poem, which I'm calling "Shining Armor". Please be kind. I suck at poetry.

So that's it as far as notes go.

If you want to join us in Twitch and help with this fic, join us on Saturdays at 5PM EDT (GMT-4). If you need help converting your time, hit me up on tumblr, Twitter or in the comments. You can find my Twitch account here.

Hope you like this chapter and thanks for reading! Update next Saturday! New character, so I'll leave everyone to wonder who that is.

As much as I wish I could, I don’t own Yuri!!! On Ice. This fic is not beta’d.
While I truly appreciate the offers, I’m not currently looking for a beta.

You can follow me on tumblr. Stay up to date on latest chapters and story progress or just want to give a shout out! You guys are what drives me, and I so appreciate every one of you.

“Everyone have a good holiday?” he asked, glancing around the room, “Did the Easter Bunny bring you everything you hoped he would?”

Chuckling when his students groaned, he scanned the room and frowned when he realized Yuuri wasn’t there. He hadn’t told him he was going to be late or miss class, leaving Viktor to wonder where he was. Digging his phone from his pocket, he sent a quick text.

Everything ok?

“While you were stuffing yourselves with ham and green bean casserole, I assigned a wonderfully stimulating essay for you to work on,” Viktor said, “I’m hoping everyone got the email I sent telling you only the rough draft was due today?”

“Are you for real?” Yuri asked loudly, glaring at him, “I finished the damn thing and you want a rough draft?”

“Not my fault you didn’t check your email, but if it’s ready I’ll give you extra credit,” Viktor offered.

“How much?” he asked.

“Five points.”

“I think you might want to revise it, Yuri,” Otabek interjected, “Even with the five points I think you’ll get a higher grade if you work on it a little more.”

“Whose side are you on, asshole?” Yuri growled.

“What do you think?” he asked, smacking the back of Yuri’s head, “Don’t ask me to proofread next time if you’re going to be a dick.”
“Lovers’ quarrel over?” Viktor asked, smirking when the rest of the class laughed.

“Go to hell, Nikiforov.”

“Can’t. Satan said the last spot is reserved for you,” he joked, “I wanted you to…”

Pausing when his phone buzzed against the desk, he lifted it and read the message that popped up.

On my way.
I’m sorry I’m late.
The senior center decided to visit today and we were swarmed.

It’s fine.
How far away are you?

I’ll be there in five minutes tops.
I’m entering the building now, but need to catch my breath.
See you in a few ;)

“What happened to the no cell phone policy?” Yuri asked, leaning forward on his desk.

“I think you forgot I’m the overlord. Rules don’t apply to me,” he stated, “I want everyone to get in groups of three and proofread your papers together. If you have any questions, come see me.”

“We’re not even for three,” Otabek stated, “The genius isn’t here.”

“Yuuri? He’ll be here soon,” Viktor explained.

“How do you know?” Yuri asked.

“I’m psychic. Come on guys, we don’t have all day.”

“More like psychotic,” Yuri grumbled under his breath.

“ Heard that, Plisetsky.”

Viktor walked around the desk, sitting in the chair and propping his feet on top of the wooden surface. He leaned back, closed his eyes and took a deep breath. He had stayed up too late the night before, texting Yuuri about an exhibit opening at the art museum that weekend, wondering if he’d like to go with him. The invitation turned into a conversation about their favorite artists and what they liked about them. While he was pleased Yuuri’s favorite period was Impressionism, Viktor teased him about preferring Renoir over Monet. When Yuuri mentioned it was close to one in the morning and he needed to be up in five hours, Viktor was shocked time had flown by so quickly. He apologized to him, wished him sweet dreams and said he’d see him the next afternoon.

He opened his eyes when the door swung open and Yuuri rushed in, pausing to catch his breath again. Smiling at him, Viktor waved him over to the desk.

“Are you alright?” he asked.

“Yeah, just don’t like being late and rushing around campus,” Yuuri admitted, “It’s unnerving. What are we doing?”

“Paired up and going over the rough draft. Sorry, but you get stuck with Otabek and the ray of sunshine.”
Viktor knew he was intimidated by Yuri and hated pairing him up with the outspoken student, but he didn’t have a choice. Giving him a sympathetic smile, Viktor watched Yuuri walk down the aisle next to them and sit at the desk across from Otabek. While Otabek was a kind soul and civil to everyone, Yuri could make the most patient person in the world want to wring his neck. Viktor found him very trying and bit his tongue multiple times when Yuri shared his opinion in class. Knowing how sensitive Yuuri was, Viktor vowed to keep tabs on their group.

“Well, well, we get the teacher’s pet,” Yuri sneered when Yuuri joined them.

“Chill, punk,” Otabek said, “Hey Genius, how are you today?”

“Fine, thanks,” Yuuri replied uneasily, digging his folder and notebook out of his bag before looking at the floor.

Yuri listened to Otabek and Yuuri go over the outline for the assignment, watching Yuuri carefully. He had never seen him on campus before but was always at Bound to Please when the Wednesday class was held there. When he joined the mid-semester class, Yuri wondered why he appeared suddenly, specifically in this class.

“Hey, Nikiforov?” Yuri asked loudly, getting Viktor’s attention.

“What?”

“Can you refresh my memory on your tardy policy?” he asked, staring at Yuuri, watching him blush and look at the ground again.

Viktor narrowed his eyes as he looked at the group, noticing Yuuri’s anxiety from the question. He frowned when he saw the nervous tapping of Yuuri’s forefingers, his gaze dropping to his shoes. Rising from his chair, Viktor walked over to the group and sat at the desk in front of Yuri’s, turning around so he could face him.

“Three unexcused tardies until you lose two points from your participation grade each additional tardy, unless you have extenuating circumstances. Why?” Viktor asked.

“I thought he could use the reminder,” Yuri said, jerking his thumb towards Yuuri.

“I’m just wondering why the class has one set of rules and he has another,” Yuri retorted, challenging him.

“I already know his circumstances, which frankly are none of your business. Every person in this class falls under the same rules,” Viktor said, “Get back to work.”

Standing and stretching, Viktor winked at Yuuri before weaving his way around the room, checking on the other groups and answering several questions. His heart wasn’t in class since Yuuri had been singled out. He decided when it ended, he would invite Yuuri out for a late lunch and assuage any nerves he had developed that afternoon.
The remainder of the hour went without a hitch, Viktor attributing it to keeping an eye on Yuuri’s group. He gave last minute instructions before his students left and told them he’d see them on Thursday. His heart broke when he watched Yuuri pack his belongings in his bag, his shoulders slumped and biting his lower lip.

“Yuuri Katsuki?” he asked, getting his attention, “Can you stay after?”

Yuuri walked slowly to the desk and joined him, Viktor waiting until the stragglers left the room. Taking a deep breath, he turned his attention to Yuuri and smiled softly. He looked utterly defeated from listening to Yuri complain about him.

“I’m sorry,” Viktor said quietly, placing his hand on Yuuri’s forearm and feeling a slight tingle from the contact.

“It’s not your fault,” he said, “I can’t expect everyone to be kind. Life doesn’t work that way.”

“Yuri knows better. This is the second course he’s had with me and knows I expect civility from everyone I teach. Do you want me to talk with him?”

“No,” Yuuri said, shaking his head, “It would just make things worse. Viktor?”

“Hmm?”

“Is he right?” he asked, “Do you treat me differently than the other students?”

“I treat you different than students that are taking this course for a grade,” Viktor admitted, “but I treat you the same as any other person auditing one of my classes.”

“Would you tell me if you were?” he asked, not liking that he was doubting him.

“Definitely. I promise I’m not treating you differently, Yuuri,” Viktor reiterated, “It would ruin my credibility as a professor.”

“Ok,” he said, looking at the floor, “I should get going. I have a few things I want to take care of today and I know you’re busy.”

“Yuuri,” Viktor said, grabbing his hand, “Join me for lunch.”

“I don’t know if that’s a good idea,” Yuuri said, desperately wanting to spend time with him but not wanting to attract more ridicule from his classmates.

“Please,” he pleaded, “Don’t worry about Yuri. He’s an outspoken brat who needs to be taken down a notch. I think you need some mood-boosting and besides, I haven’t seen you smile yet today.”

Viktor was rewarded with a shy upturn of Yuuri’s lips, patting his shoulder when Yuuri agreed on one condition: they ate off-campus. He didn’t want to run into any of his classmates and invoke further ire. When Viktor suggested the Chulanont’s restaurant, Yuuri perked up and agreed.

On the walk to the restaurant, Yuuri told him he hadn’t seen his friend in a few weeks and had missed him. They had both been so busy with work their schedules didn’t allow for them to meet. When Viktor asked if he had been monopolizing his time and keeping him from his friends, Yuuri insisted that wasn’t the case. He told him Phichit understood he wanted to spend time with Viktor and encouraged their outings. Viktor made a mental note to pull Phichit aside and thank him.
The rush of lunch hour had just ended by the time they arrived at the restaurant. When they walked through the door, Phichit greeted them enthusiastically and seated them in a corner booth, telling them whatever they wanted was on the house. When Viktor protested, Phichit told him it was part of the VIP treatment.

“Is he really going to comp our meals?” Viktor asked when Phichit left to turn their orders in.

“More than likely, but he does it so you’ll tell everyone you know how great the food is here,” Yuuri said, taking a sip of water, “Thanks.”

“For what?” he asked.

“Everything. Defending me in front of Yuri, calming my nerves after class, having lunch with me. It means a lot.”

“I’ll do anything I can to help,” Viktor admitted, “You’ve become important to me.”

“You have to me as well, Viktor,” he said, looking at the table and stirring his water absently with his straw.

“Youu, Viktor,” Viktor said, winding his fingers through Yuuri’s, “What he said really bothered you, didn’t it? The courage and confidence you had on Sunday is gone. It hurts to see my dearest friend like this.”

Yuuri frowned and nodded, tears pooling in his eyes. He hated feeling so weak, so pathetic when confrontation arose. Situations like this reminded him why he never put himself out there, but he had been so excited to take one of Viktor’s classes he hadn’t considered the possibility of something like this happening. When Viktor squeezed his hand gently, the frisson that coursed through him was strangely reassuring.

“I’m sorry,” Yuuri said, wiping his eyes with the back of his hand.

“It’s ok,” he said, “What can I do to help?”

“Be patient?” Yuuri suggested, “I’m out of my element here and don’t know how to act. I know I need to grow a backbone, but I really don’t know how.”

“I don’t think you do,” Viktor admitted, smiling when he jerked his head up and stared at him incredulously, “I think you need to be you. You’re a wonder just the way you are. Don’t ever change, Yuuri. It’s what makes you so refreshing.”

“Thanks.”

The rest of lunch passed quickly. While Phichit didn’t let them pay for their meals, Viktor left him a hefty tip. Insisting on walking Yuuri back to the bookstore, Viktor let him talk about what the rest of his day held and what he had planned after the shop closed for the night. While Viktor would have loved to have spent the evening with him, but he had a staff meeting that would last for a while. When they reached the store, they stood outside in silence for a few minutes.

“I guess I should let you get back to work,” Viktor said.

“Yeah, I’m sure Mari is famished by now. See you in the morning?” he asked.

“Of course. We have the culinary class tomorrow evening as well,” Viktor reminded him, taking Yuuri’s hand in his own, “I hope your day gets better, Yuuri. If you need anything, I’m just a call
away."

“Viktor, I can’t do that. You’re busy and still have…” he said, pausing when Viktor hushed him with a finger against his lips.

“A call away, Yuuri. I mean it,” Viktor repeated, “If I’m in class, I’ll text you the moment I’m free. It’s what friends do.”

“Alright,” Yuuri agreed hesitantly, “but promise me something.”

“What’s that?”

“If I’m ever a bother, let me know,” he said, holding Viktor’s gaze.

“I promise you that will never happen,” Viktor answered, smiling at him, “I have to get going. My next class starts in forty minutes and I need to stop by my office.”

“I can’t thank you enough,” Yuuri said, catching Viktor’s gaze, “but thank you so much for being my friend.”

“Anytime,” he replied, squeezing Yuuri’s hand before letting go, “and thank you. I’ll text you tonight, see how you’re doing.”

“Ok. Bye Viktor.”

After a nod, a smile and a wave, Viktor turned and walked down the road until he reached the corner. Yuuri watched as he waited for the light to change, walking across the intersection when the signal switched. When Viktor was out of sight, Yuuri felt a small smile bend his lips upward. His mood had improved since he had rushed to class and been belittled by Yuri, but Viktor’s words and presence evaporated his discomfort.

“Have fun?” Mari asked as she joined him outside, watching the pedestrians mill around the street.

“Yeah,” Yuuri said, thinking about the short hours spent with Viktor, “I did.”

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*Did your day get better?*
Hope it did, you were on my mind all afternoon.
Again, I’m sorry.

Again, it’s not your fault.
One cannot control another.
It did get better, thanks to you :)

I didn’t do much, but glad I could help.
I know it’s late, but I wanted to check in.
Looking forward to seeing you tomorrow.*
“I’m so sorry I’m late. I had a student that needed clarification on a source analysis.”

Yuuri looked up from the book he was reading, smiling at Viktor as he burst through the doors. He could tell Viktor rushed to get here as he was out of breath, cheeks pink and hair disheveled. Children’s hour had ended early that day since the weather was forecasted to worsen as the day progressed.

“Windy enough?” Yuuri joked, placing the book on the table next to him.

“I didn’t blow away, so I guess not,” Viktor replied, grinning at him, “It’s getting really chilly out. Do you think we’re going to get as much snow as they say we will?”

“Doubt it,” he answered, “We might get a few flurries, but nowhere near what everyone is saying.”

“You never know. I, for one, could go for a blizzard,” Viktor admitted, grinning slyly, “I’m behind on grading papers.”

“So, don’t return your texts until you’re caught up?” Yuuri asked, returning the grin.

“Touché, and please don’t do that,” he said, falling into the chair next to him, “I’m too late for us to grab a bite to eat. Sorry.”

“I have a Plan B,” Yuuri said, rising from his chair, “Come with me.”

Viktor stood up and grabbed his briefcase from the floor, chatting with Yuuri about his morning so far. He told him he had a bet with his first class that if a blizzard hit Ann Arbor, he’d give everyone an A on their next quiz. While he was the one betting against the storm, he told Yuuri he secretly hoped it would happen so he didn’t have to grade all weekend.

Yuuri opened the door leading to his shared apartment and climbed the stairs to the upper level, Viktor following close behind. Telling Viktor to make himself at home, Yuuri stepped into the kitchen and opened the fridge, pulling the leftover chicken vegetable soup from the night before. He filled two bowls and placed them in the microwave, setting the time and pressing the button before walking to the living room to wait for lunch to finish.

“That smells really good,” Viktor said, smiling when Yuuri sat in the chair across from him, “Thanks, by the way. Today has been a little hectic and I haven’t had a chance to eat yet. I wasn’t savoring the thought of starving until dinner.”

“My pleasure,” he replied with a smile of his own, “Honestly, I think we should have lunch like this more often. It’s getting to the point I can’t afford to go out that much anymore.”

“You know I don’t mind paying,” Viktor said, watching Yuuri frown, “but I understand. Want to swap? Lunch here, dinner at my place?”

“Every day?” he teased, laughing when Viktor nodded.

“Sure!”

Lunch passed in relative silence since they were pressed for time, knowing Viktor’s students would be arriving soon. Yuuri waited for Viktor to finish, amused by the slurping noises he made as he downed the rest of his soup. Standing up as Viktor handed him his empty mug, he felt the vibration of his phone in his pocket.

“Can you get my phone?” Yuuri asked, balancing the mugs as he shifted his hips towards Viktor.
“Yeah,” he replied, urging his heart to slow as he dipped his fingers in Yuuri’s pants pocket, pulling the device out, “Do you want me to read the message?”

“Please.”

“‘Afternoon classes starting 2:05PM or later 4/5 are hereby cancelled. Stay tuned for further announcements,’ Viktor read, looking at Yuuri when he finished, “Early day. Want to come over for dinner tonight?”

“You just ate, Viktor,” Yuuri observed, giving him a wry look.

“I’m still hungry,” he stated, “but seriously. I have some chicken Kiev that is dying to be shared.”

“Let me see how busy the day is first,” Yuuri said, chuckling, “I’ll let you know. Are you going back to campus when class is done?”

“Yeah, I need to pick a few things up before I go home.”

“Would you like a ride?” Yuuri asked, not pleased with the idea of Viktor being out in this weather, “I’m sure Mari won’t mind.”

“I’d love that,” Viktor admitted, smiling at him.

After Yuuri washed their dishes, they returned to the main floor and saw most of Viktor’s students had arrived. The door leading to the apartment was in view of the poetry nook, Viktor seeing Yuri glare at them when they emerged from the stairwell. Returning his look with a stern stare, Viktor held his gaze until Yuri looked away. He finished his conversation with Yuuri and patted his shoulder before stepping onto the stage, placing his briefcase on the stool and digging his notes out.

“Ok minions, we have a short class today since we’ve been granted a mini-vacation,” Viktor began, clapping his hands together to get his students’ attention, “Anyone have any questions before we start?”

He scanned the area, waiting a few minutes before beginning. He saw Yuri’s head turn towards the edge of the nook, staring at Yuuri and glaring. Viktor was relieved Yuuri didn’t notice, knowing he would be uncomfortable with the unwanted attention. Clearing his throat and waiting for Yuri to look at him, Viktor frowned at him.

“No questions? Good. Let’s go over those song lyrics. I don’t want to hear the word ‘emo’ in your summaries either,” Viktor warned, “Who wants to go first?”

By the time the class ended, the wind was howling and large flakes of snow were blowing through the air. A few inches had accumulated in the time Viktor had arrived and the weather service had changed the winter storm advisory to a blizzard warning, informing the area the storm had shifted which would increase the total snowfall by several inches. When Yuuri saw the white powder clinging to the roads, he was worried about Viktor walking back to campus before heading for home.

“I don’t know if it’s a good idea for you to leave,” Yuuri said anxiously when they both looked out the front window, “It’s coming down really fast.”
“It is,” Viktor agreed, “I’ll be ok. It gets much worse in St. Petersburg.”

“The wind chill is below zero, it’s gusting and the snow is going to pelt you. I think it would be best for you to stay here until it calms down,” he said, looking at Viktor, hoping he’d agree.

“I’ll be home before you know it,” Viktor said cheerfully, looking at him and seeing the concern on Yuuri’s face, “If it would make you feel better, I’ll stay.”

“Thanks,” he said, exhaling a sigh of relief, “I’ll let you take my bed and I have some sweats that might fit you. They might be a little short, though.”

“That’s ok,” Viktor replied, smiling softly at him, “Thanks, Yuuri. It means a lot to me. I haven’t had anyone care this much in years.”

“You’re welcome,” he said, blushing before turning to walk to the sales counter, “You can head upstairs if you want or hang out here. We’ll probably be closing early since the storm is already this bad.”

“I can help out if you’d like. Shelf books, dust furniture, sweep, hawk outside,” Viktor said, grinning when Yuuri giggled.

“Want to make copies of the poetry fliers and fold them? We’re mailing a batch out next week, hopefully drum up some business,” he said.

“Whatsoever you say, boss,” Viktor said, saluting him when he took the paper from Yuuri.

The store only remained open an hour longer, having no customers since Viktor’s class left. After flipping the sign on the door and locking up, Yuuri stretched and returned to the counter to tally the sales for the day, knowing they would be dismal. He tried concentrating on the task before him, but his eyes kept drifting and lingering on the coffee nook, falling on Viktor. The man had settled into his menial job easily, humming to the classical music with a smile on his face as he folded the stack of fliers.

Yuuri was still staring, spellbound by Viktor when he finished and looked up, smiling brightly when he realized he was being watched. After tidying the flyers into two neat stacks, Viktor stood and made his way to the counter, leaning against it as he waited for Yuuri to finish counting the drawer. It had been a while since he watched Yuuri perform his end-of-shift duties and though he had only witnessed it once, he remembered how much he loved his beautiful handwriting.

“Yuuri?”

“Hmm?” he asked absently, scrawling numbers on the deposit slip.

“Remember when I told you how much I liked your writing?” Viktor asked, seeing a hint of pink on Yuuri’s cheeks.

“Yeah.”

“Would you write something for me?” Viktor asked, Yuuri’s head whipping up seconds later.

“Why? What would I write?” he asked, anxiety tainting his voice.

“Anything you want. Thoughts, an idea, your shopping list,” Viktor rambled, “poetry.”

“I don’t know, Viktor,” Yuuri mumbled, tapping his fingers against the worn wood of the counter.
“It’s alright, just a whimsy on my part. Don’t worry about it,” he said, patting Yuuri’s hand, “Almost done?”

“Just need to total everything, lock the money up and we’re done,” Yuuri said.

Yuuri finished minutes later after checking his math again, thanking Viktor when he took the till and followed him to the office. Mari was still going over paperwork when he entered, looking up and grinning when she saw Viktor. Yuuri closed his eyes and waited for his sister’s teasing.

“Viktor,” she said, taking the till when he held it out, “I thought you left hours ago. How are you going to get home?”

“Yuuri was kind enough to invite me to stay since the weather is horrible,” he explained.

“That’s so sweet of him. He must really care for you,” Mari said, glancing at her brother, “a lot.”

“Shut it, Mari,” Yuuri said under his breath.

“Go on up. I have a few more hours of work, just save me something to eat,” she stated, winking at Yuuri.

When Yuuri turned around and brushed against his chest when he passed, Viktor could see deep crimson creeping up his neck. He knew Mari had been teasing him lately about their friendship, but he hadn’t realized how much it affected Yuuri. While he wanted to know why Yuuri reacted this way, Viktor didn’t want to put him on the spot.

Viktor jogged up the stairs after Yuuri, sitting on the couch next to him and pulling his phone out of the pocket of his blazer. He needed to call Chris since he wouldn’t be home that night, asking him to take Makkachin to his house until the storm passed. After he agreed, Chris teased him mercilessly about staying the night with his one true love, telling him to enjoy himself. Viktor cursed him in three languages, growling when his friend laughed. When he finally hung up and dropped his head in his hands, Yuuri asked what had happened. Viktor just stated it was a difference of opinion.

Dinner had only come off the range when the lights flickered overhead, the room plunging into darkness seconds later. The howling wind pierced the stillness of the night, shrieking like a chorus of banshees. Letting his eyes adjust to the dark, Yuuri stood and told Viktor he was going to find a few candles. Viktor rested his head on the back of the couch and closed his eyes, listening to Yuuri shuffle around the apartment. When he heard him return and place a glass dish on the table, Viktor opened his eyes and watched him light the large pillar candle.

“Is Mari still downstairs?” Viktor asked, seeing him nod, “Do you know if she has a flashlight down there?”

“There’s one in the filing cabinet behind the desk,” Yuuri answered, putting the lighter on the table and sitting next to him, “She’ll be ok.”

“This is nice,” he said quietly, glancing at Yuuri out of the corner of his eye.

“It is,” Yuuri agreed, “I’m sorry you can’t go home right now, but I’m glad you’re stranded here.”

“Me too. This reminds me of the times the power would go out in Russia,” Viktor said, “It was always on the coldest nights of the year. We only had around seven hours of daylight so not only was it very cold but it was very dark. My parents and I would huddle together and try to keep warm. My father would tell stories about how it wasn’t that cold, cold was growing up in Siberia.”
“Siberia?” Yuuri asked skeptically, looking at him.

“Yep. He was raised in Novosibirsk. It gets really cold there,” he explained.

“Must be cold if you say it is.”

“Dad would never let us visit in the winter. Can you believe the high in mid-January is a balmy eight degrees Fahrenheit?” Viktor joked.

“Wow, summer vacation,” Yuuri replied, laughing.

“Don’t forget to pack your swim trunks,” he said, smiling as he continued telling Yuuri about his last winter in Russia.

The night grew colder with no hint of the electricity returning. When Viktor asked why the building didn’t have gas heat like most in the area, Yuuri explained they converted to electric heat since it was environmentally friendly and cost-efficient. Yuuri was telling him about the last spring he spent in Japan before studying in America when Viktor noticed he was shivering.

“You’re cold,” Viktor stated, taking Yuuri’s icy hands and rubbing them between his.

“I’m ok,” he said, teeth chattering.

“No, you’re not. Where are your blankets?”

“I can get them,” Yuuri replied, scooting to the edge of the couch before he felt a tug on his arm.

“Yuuri…”

“On my bed,” he muttered, pointing to his room.

Viktor stood and picked up the lighter from the table, pressing the button to light his way to Yuuri’s room. When he entered, he found it delightfully cozy. Shelves of books lined the walls, a desk with several notebooks, a can of pens and a few pictures were pushed against the wall with a large window overlooking the street below. The bed was well made, Vicchan sleeping on the blankets piled at the end. Viktor patted the dog, smiling when he woke and wagged his tail. He called softly to the dog, waiting for Vicchan to hop off the bed before he could grab the blankets.

He returned to the living room and sat next to Yuuri, feeling him shiver so much it vibrated through the cushions of the couch. Scooting closer, he draped a blanket around them and wound an arm around Yuuri. When Viktor felt him pull away, he held Yuuri tighter.

“I don’t know about you,” Viktor started, “but I like the idea of shared body heat right now. Your freezer is probably warmer than the room.”

“Y-you’re right,” Yuuri said, unable to control his trembling, “If it bothers you, let me know.”

“You’re fine, Yuuri,” he said.

They remained silent, welcoming the warmth from the other, cocooned within the blanket. As the night grew colder, the gap between them closed until they were pressed against each other. The low whistling of the wind and snow hitting the window lulled Yuuri to sleep, Viktor following soon after. They were resting so peacefully they didn’t hear the door creak open, Mari entering the apartment and smiling when she saw them huddled on the couch. Yuuri’s head was resting on Viktor’s shoulder, body leaning into him and one hand on Viktor’s chest. Viktor’s arm wrapped
tightly around Yuuri, holding him against him while his cheek pressed against the top of Yuuri’s head.

“Not your soulmate, my ass, Baby Bro,” she muttered, pulling her phone from the pocket of her skirt.

Finding her camera app, she focused on the sleeping duo. She pressed the button to capture the moment, waited for the flash to go off and looked at the image. Smiling when she found it was satisfactory, she blew the candle out and went in her room. She changed into her pajamas quickly, pulled the blankets back and hopped into bed.

“I hope you figure it out soon, Yuuri,” Mari said quietly as she uploaded the photo to her social media account, tagging both Yuuri and Viktor, “He’s perfect for you.”

“You’ve got five minutes before class starts. We have a lot to cover so do what you need to do now. No one is leaving once we begin,” Viktor warned, watching a few students leave the room.

It was the university’s first day of classes in nearly a week, the blizzard grinding the city to a halt. Forecasters said the storm rivaled one that hit over a hundred years ago. Viktor had been unable to go home for two days since crews couldn’t clear the streets until the blinding snow ceased. By the time the storm ended, they had received a record-breaking twenty-four inches of snow.

They made the best of it, however. They spent hours sipping hot chocolate and reading in companionable silence, building snowmen, playing chess, talking about dreams and goals. The time together offered a fresh perspective for both, leaving them with a deeper understanding and fondness for the other.

When the time arrived for Yuuri to drive Viktor home, he was saddened. Though Viktor had only spent two days with him, it felt right, almost perfect. He was shocked he had formed a connection to Viktor that quickly in a daily routine, but he knew he was going to miss it. He couldn’t tell Viktor though, fearful he would appear clingy and possibly drive a wedge between them.

Viktor looked at the door as the last students arrived, greeting each one as they passed the desk. Checking the clock at the back of the room, he walked around the desk and leaned against it. The door opened a final time, Viktor smiling brightly when Yuuri walked around the corner. He nodded at him, watching as Yuuri took his usual seat.

“Everyone have fun?” Viktor asked, smiling when a few students told him about the massive snowball fight in the quad, “Yeah, I saw a few pics and the video on social media. Thanks for tagging me, by the way, Alex. That was great. Who was the one getting whitewashed?”

“Plisetsky,” Alex said, grinning when Viktor laughed.

“Aww, Yuri, are you pure as snow now?” Viktor teased.

“No,” Yuri grumbled, reaching for his phone and touching the screen a few times, “Speaking of social media, I was wondering if you could clear something up for me. I’m a bit confused.”

“I’ll try my best,” Viktor said warily.
“Remember when we talked about teacher’s pets?” he asked, looking back at Yuuri.

“What about it?” Viktor said, voice low in warning as his eyes narrowed and shifted to Yuuri, taking in his blanched face.

“Well, you said everyone has the same set of rules in class and you treat us fairly,” Yuri said, holding up his phone, “but I don’t see you cuddling with me on a cold, stormy night.”

“Let me see that,” Viktor demanded, marching to Yuri’s desk and looking at his phone.

When he saw the image of Yuuri and him huddled beneath the blanket on the couch, his heart sank. While it didn’t bother him, Viktor knew it would affect Yuuri immensely, possibly causing him to withdraw from the course. Several thoughts ricocheted in his mind, wondering how to approach the topic effectively yet assert his authority in the matter without singling Yuuri out amongst his classmates.

“How many have seen this?” he asked, twirling Yuri’s phone in his hand, watching a few hands shoot into the air, “Ok, scrap the lesson today. We’re going to have a talk on fairness and equality.”

“About damn time,” Yuri muttered.

“See me after class,” Viktor said tersely as he put the phone on the desk.

He walked to the front of the room, leaned against the desk and pinched the bridge of his nose. Trying to gather his thoughts, he took a deep breath before he spoke. He caught Yuuri’s worried gaze and smiled weakly.

“Sorry,” he said quietly, watching Yuuri nod, “Ok, since my credibility is being drawn into question I guess this discussion is necessary. Everyone knows Yuuri?”

Viktor watched most of the students nod, looking at Yuuri.

“He and I have been friends before this course started. He owns a used bookstore with his sister. I’m sure you heard of Bound to Please?” he asked, smiling when several nodded, “It’s a great place. Check it out. But we’re not talking for a sales pitch. I suggested Yuuri audit this class because we share a love for literature and poetry. Did you catch the keyword there?”

“Audit?” one student asked.

“Yes, Jules, audit,” Viktor said, glaring at Yuri, “As in not graded. As in he’s taking this class for his own personal enrichment. As in he doesn’t get favorable treatment. You have a few other classmates auditing as well. Do you guys mind if I mention who are you?”

When he received affirmation, he pointed out three other students.

“Matt, Tom and Becky are auditing as well. I treat them no differently than Yuuri, but I do allow them certain leniencies as they aren’t being graded.”

“Why do they turn essays in and take quizzes?” Yuri asked smugly.

“Can one of you guys answer that?” Viktor asked, pleased when one student raised his hand.

“I want the challenge. I’m not being graded, but I want to push my critical thinking to the limits,” Matt stated.

“Thanks, Matt,” he said, looking back at Yuuri, wincing when he saw fingers wound in his black
locks, “Anyone else have questions?”

The rest of the hour was spent in a question and answer session, almost everyone participating. Viktor was appreciative the majority of the class was understanding and agreed auditors didn’t fall under all of the policies a student taking the course for credit did. By the time class ended, Viktor thanked them and told them he’d see them on Thursday.

He still had one loose end to tie up, though.

“Yuuri?” Viktor said, getting his attention before he left, “Can you wait outside for me, please?”

“Yeah, sure,” he mumbled.

Viktor winced as he watched Yuuri shuffle outside, his body language projecting humiliation and defeat. When the door slammed shut, he directed his attention to the other side of the room and waited for Otabek to leave before speaking.

“I told you,” Otabek grumbled, smacking the back of Yuri’s head as he passed him, “You should have kept your fucking mouth shut.”

Viktor stared at Yuri for a moment after Otabek left, took a deep breath and walked to the desk in front of him before sitting. He narrowed his eyes as he saw the insolence on Yuri’s face. He knew Yuri was a bright kid but had a chip on his shoulder, knowing inevitably this day would come but enraged it involved Yuuri.

“That was very uncouth of you, Yuri,” he started, “Do you remember the policy about civility and decency?”

“What about university policy of equality and fairness?”

“I understand you had questions, but there was a better way to handle it,” Viktor explained, “What did you hope to gain from your stunt? Do you hate him that much?”

“I don’t like the guy,” Yuri growled, “He comes across as this perfect person.”

“You don’t even know him. Have you even given him a chance?” Viktor asked.

“He’s a stuck-up snob!” he exclaimed furiously.

“Yuuri is insecure and intimidated by you,” Viktor countered, smirking when the smugness on Yuri’s face fell, “That’s why you need to get your facts straight before speaking. You think you know everything and you aren’t even close to the truth. I’m going to give you one warning before we drop this.”

“What is it?”

“If you don’t approach me privately about something like this again, we’re going to have problems,” Viktor warned, “Like taking the class under another instructor.”

“Fine,” he mumbled, crossing his arms against his chest.

“Furthermore, if you continue to harass Yuuri in a classroom setting or on campus, I’ll have you in front of an advisory committee so fast your head will spin,” Viktor threatened, “I’m not saying that as his friend, I’m saying that as a professor. I won’t tolerate anyone belittling any of my students. Understood?”
“Perfectly,” Yuri stated, eyes flaring in silent rage, “May I go now?”

“Go.”

Viktor stared at the floor while Yuri packed his belongings, knocking into his desk as he walked by. He took several breaths after Yuri left, trying to control his anger before he went into the hallway to speak with Yuuri. Deciding he was calm enough, he put his notes in his briefcase and walked out of the room. Yuuri was leaning against the wall, twisting his mittens in his hands. Viktor couldn’t imagine what was going through his mind, but he was certain it wasn’t good.

“I’m sorry,” Viktor said, placing a hand on Yuuri’s shoulder.

“I think I should withdraw from the class,” he blurted out, looking at him.

“If that’s what you really want to do I won’t stop you, but I don’t think you should,” Viktor said, “Most of your classmates are fond of you and appreciate your contributions to our discussions.”

“What about Yuri?”

“Yuri is an asshole and he’s been dealt with,” Viktor said, lifting a finger when Yuuri opened his mouth to protest, “I didn’t step in as a friend, I stepped in as your instructor. I would have done the same for any of my students. You’re my best friend, Yuuri, and I’d do anything for you but I didn’t give you special treatment. I promise.”

“Are you sure?” Yuuri asked, smiling weakly when Viktor nodded, “I’ll stick it out, see how it goes.”

“I’m glad. I’d suggest lunch but I’m guessing your nerves are shot,” he said, “Would you like me to walk you back to the shop?”

“No, but thanks. I think I want to be alone right now. I hope you don’t mind.”

“I understand,” Viktor said, “I’ll text you later to check in. If you’re up to it, want to order a pizza and watch a movie at my place?”

“I’ll let you know. Oh, I have something for you,” Yuuri said, digging through his bag and pulling a folded sheet of paper out, handing it to Viktor.

“What’s this?” he asked, confused.

“Something you asked about last week,” Yuuri said vaguely, “I have to go. Have a good afternoon, Viktor.”

“You too.”

Viktor watched Yuuri walk down the stairs until he faded from view, leaving him standing in the hallway among the rush of students. He looked down at the paper, unfolding it and scanning the lines. He immediately knew the intricately beautiful penmanship was Yuuri’s and focused on the words, lips parting as he read each line, touching the inner recesses of his heart.

I was alone, lost in the darkest of night  
Destined to solitude for eternity  
The faintest of light forever out of reach  
A reflection upon metal appeared,
a strength within light.
A champion,
A guardian,
A victor

Darkness penetrable,
ray of light shining through.
United with another,
friendship alike.

My solitude faded away when I found your light,
my happiness an aura for all to see.
Might to share,
walls to crumble together.
Forever.

He was frozen to the spot, unable to move or think, just feel. His emotions were in turmoil after he read the brief glimpse into Yuuri’s soul, touched he felt this way. While Viktor found Yuuri his ray of hope and understanding, Yuuri thought of him as his strength and everything, his champion, his victor. The declaration caught him off-guard but found it welcome, leaving him wanting to do much more for Yuuri. His chest heaved as emotion threatened to overwhelm him, closing his eyes and pressing the paper against his chest. While he was prone to being moved by literature, he had never been rocked to his very center like he had with the piece Yuuri had written.

Viktor took a few deeps breaths, composing himself enough to walk back to his office. When he walked through the door, he dismissed Mila for the afternoon and slunk into his chair, reading the poem again. He wanted to leave campus immediately, burst through the doors of the bookstore, take Yuuri in his arms and hug him fiercely.

He settled for the next best thing.

That took a lot of courage, Yuuri.
Thank you so much.
Since you’re my understanding, may I be your guardian?
I know we’ll stand together forever.

He sent the message before he could change his mind, unsure about exposing his innermost thoughts and feelings even though it was to Yuuri. Bouncing a leg as he contemplated between relief and regret for sending the message, he jumped when his phone vibrated in his hand.

I’d like that.
I don’t know what it is about you, but I’m not alone anymore.
You’ve already protected me though you didn’t have to.
For that, I thank you.
We will be friends forever.
Dinner tonight?

When his phone chimed, Yuuri smiled when he read Viktor’s exuberant acceptance of dinner together. Viktor told him Chris was giving him a ride home and if seven would be alright, asking
Yuuri which restaurant he’d like to order from. When he replied with his favorite Italian bistro, Viktor was over the moon as it was the best in town. He put the phone on his nightstand, laid back on his bed and folded his arms under his head.

His feelings were beginning to clear and he was learning what they meant. While he was frightened as it was undiscovered territory for him, he knew he was in good hands with Viktor. He had battled the thought that no one could develop fondness for someone this quickly, but it almost felt like it was meant to be. He still didn’t ascribe to the soulmate theory his sister badgered him about, but he did admit the planting of a seed of the feeling he had started calling love.

“Possibly?” he whispered to himself, closing his eyes and thinking of the evening ahead.
Chapter Summary

Viktor assigns the class an atypical assignment and Yuuri blows him away with his interpretation.

Viktor finished handing out the essays and turned around, digging through his briefcase. He found the folder he was searching for and pulled it out, leaning against the desk and opening it. He looked around the class and saw the expectant yet hesitant stares of his students. He was known for being the professor inundating his students with the most work within the department, but he always retorted with he wanted to challenge his classes, expand their minds.

“Anyone here not listen to music?” he asked, grinning when a few students laughed, “No? Good. I want you to thank your lucky stars when you leave because this will be the easiest assignment you’ll ever receive from me. I want everyone to choose a song that applies to your life right now. Something that holds meaning, something that describes what you’re going through, something you feel. Choose the verse that means the most to you and tell me why.”

Chapter Notes

We’re at Chapter 10 already! It feels like yesterday we started this project. It’s been so much fun to work on with everyone that joins the Twitch stream.

First of all, I want to apologize for cancelling the Twitch stream today. Most of you know I’m going through a PTSD relapse and one of the really yucky underplayed side effects is getting sick within the first couple of weeks. Your body is pushed to the limit, abused beyond belief until it can’t take it anymore hence getting sick. So yeah, Pax has the flu. I’m posting this and going back to bed for the next 24 hours or so. If I disappear, I’m still in bed :P

A few notes but I’ll link the songs used in the assignment at the end:
1) Michigan is split into two peninsulas: Upper and Lower. Ann Arbor and Detroit are in the Lower Peninsula, or the mitten.
2) The Symposium was mentioned in a previous chapter, but it’s Plato's take on the modern theory of soulmates.
3) The quote used at the end unfortunately is credited to unknown. It fit SO perfectly with this fic, especially this chapter. I’ve been saving it since chapter 2.

Hope you like ‘Teardrop’ and thanks for reading!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

As much as I wish I could, I don’t own Yuri!!! On Ice.
This fic is not beta’d.
While I truly appreciate the offers, I’m not currently looking for a beta.

You can follow me on tumblr. Stay up to date on latest chapters and story progress or just want to give a shout out! You guys are what drives me, and I so appreciate every one of you.

“I’m going to hand your comparison essays back and then we’re going to go over the next assignment,” Viktor said, tapping the stack of papers against the podium and smirking when he heard the chorus of groans, “Come on, guys. It isn’t that bad.”

“Says the guy who doesn’t have to do these crap papers,” Yuri mumbled, yelping when something hit the back of his head.

“Shut up, dumbass,” Otabek said.

“See me after class, Otabek,” Viktor said, “I’ll give you twenty bucks.”

“What is it with you and twenty bucks, Nikiforov?” Yuri asked, glaring at him.

“We went over this before,” he said, rolling his eyes, “I like the color. Now shut up. I have papers to hand out.”

Viktor called each student up to collect their essay, making comments on every paper. He gave praise to the essays that were well-written, making gentle remarks on how others could be improved. When he called Yuri up, he sighed before looking at him.

“What’s going on, Yuri? A five-year-old could write better than this,” Viktor said, tapping the paper with the large “D” slashed in red.

“Didn’t really care about the assignment,” he muttered, snatching the essay from his hands.

“Or did you not understand it? You know there’s no shame in asking. I’m sure you could find someone that would help you,” Viktor said quietly, making sure no one overheard.

“Whatever,” Yuri grumbled, stomping back to his desk and falling into it.

“I told you that you needed to ask for help,” Otabek said, leaning forward in his seat.

“No one asked you, dumbass.”

Viktor continued handing out the essays, smiling when he came to Yuuri’s. He called him up, watching him walk slowly to the front of the room as pink crept up his neck.

“Great job, Yuuri,” he said, grinning at him, “You nailed it.”

“Of course, he did!” Yuri shouted, “He’s a fucking genius!”

“Be quiet, evil minion,” Viktor said, glaring at him before looking back to Yuuri, “Can you wait a few minutes after class? I need to ask you something.”

“Sure.”

Viktor finished handing out the essays and turned around, digging through his briefcase. He found
the folder he was searching for and pulled it out, leaning against the desk and opening it. He looked around the class and saw the expectant yet hesitant stares of his students. He was known for being the professor inundating his students with the most work within the department, but he always retorted with he wanted to challenge his classes, expand their minds.

“Anyone here not listen to music?” he asked, grinning when a few students laughed, “No? Good. I want you to thank your lucky stars when you leave because this will be the easiest assignment you’ll ever receive from me. I want everyone to choose a song that applies to your life right now. Something that holds meaning, something that describes what you’re going through, something you feel. Choose the verse that means the most to you and tell me why. Yuuri?”

“What if the song doesn’t have a chorus?” he asked quietly, eyes fixed on Viktor.

“I’ve never heard a song without a chorus,” Yuri said, “Why are we doing an assignment on a song? I thought this was a poetry class.”

“This is why you need to pay attention, Plisetsky,” Viktor said, frowning at him, “Can anyone tell me what a lyric is?”

Viktor looked around the class, pointing when he saw a hand raised in the air.

“A poem,” the young man said.

“Thank you, Adam,” Viktor said, “Can you tell me what songs have?”

“Lyrics?”

“Yep,” Viktor said, smiling and turning to Yuri, “See, this is what happens when you listen to my lectures. Maybe Adam will give you tutoring sessions.”

“Let me guess, for twenty bucks?” Yuri asked.

“Of course,” he said, smirking, “Back to the assignment, verse and chorus. If the song doesn’t have a chorus, put two verses in your essay. Tell me why this song means something to you. Oh, and since this is going to be a presentation make sure you bring an mp3 or something. I want to hear the song, get a feel for it.”

“Seriously? A presentation?” Yuri asked disbelievingly.

“Yes, a presentation. It’ll take two or three classes to get through everyone, so that should give your mind time to settle down, focus on the next assignment,” Viktor said, “And since Yuri whined, I’ll choose a song as well and show the evil minion how it’s done.”

“Screw you,” Yuri muttered under his breath.

“You’re not my type,” he countered, not missing a beat, “Any questions? No, good. I need to make a sacrifice to the gods since it’s dark overlord day, which means you guys get out of class early. Be good, work on the assignment. It’s due a week from today. See ya.”

Viktor knew they would be happy since class had been cut short. While he loved to joke around in class, he had a presentation later that week he needed to prepare for. He had been procrastinating but now that the deadline was looming and time to get to work.

“Hi,” Yuuri said, smiling when he reached him.
“Hey,” Viktor said, “How has your day been?”

“Alright. Kind of slow. Mrs. Calibri came in today, wanted some new romance novels.”

“She cracked me up when I met her,” he said, “She’s a little spitfire.”

“That she is, but when you get to know her she’s an absolute sweetheart,” Yuuri stated, “What’s up? I’m a little bummed you ended class early.”

“I think you’re the only one that holds that sentiment,” Viktor teased, “I have a presentation I need to put together. It’s the deciding factor if I get funds for the project I want to work on next year.”

“What project?”

“Can I tell you over lunch?” Viktor asked, smiling.

“Sure,” Yuuri agreed, “We might be able to go a little farther today since we have more time.”

“Actually,” Viktor started, “I have the rest of the day off. Cancelled my classes since I wanted to get started, but I have another idea. Want to go somewhere fun? Part of my other project?”

“Huh?”

“Finding Yuuri,” he said, smiling softly.

“Do I get a hint?” Yuuri asked.

“No, but I know you’ll love it.”

Viktor insisted on a light lunch, telling Yuuri it would he didn’t need anything heavy before their next stop. They went to a local sandwich shop and ordered two house salads, commenting on how wonderful the homemade dressing was. The atmosphere was warm and inviting, the employees kind and helpful and the food delicious. They made plans to come back that weekend.

“Do you have any idea what song you want to use for the assignment?” Viktor asked after putting an address in Yuuri’s GPS app.

“I do,” Yuuri said, starting the car and backing out of the parking spot.

“Which one?”

“You’ll see,” he replied, smiling nervously at Viktor.

“Ok, I can’t wait,” Viktor said, interest piqued that Yuuri wouldn’t share, “Want to hear about my project?”

“Sure.”

“I want to take the next year off on sabbatical. I’ve been wanting to write a paper on the comparisons on Slavic literature while complementing and influencing each culture’s literary works,” Viktor explained.
“That’s very ambitious,” Yuuri said, glancing at him before looking back at the road, “How are you going to pitch it?”

“Not sure yet.”

“When is your presentation?” he asked.

“Friday,” Viktor said, smiling sheepishly when Yuuri looked at him.

“Friday?” Yuuri barked, “That’s in three days, Viktor! How long have you known about it?”

“A few months.”

“Viktor,” Yuuri deadpanned, “you waited until three days before you go before the committee to put your presentation together?”

“Yeah, I know, bad idea. I know I should have focused on it, but I’ve found more enjoyable things to occupy my time,” he said, smiling at Yuuri, “It’s not necessary to my job, however. It’s something I would like to do.”

“How come you didn’t tell me about it before?” Yuuri asked.

“I was in such wonderful company it slipped my mind,” he said, “I’m at the point if it happens, it happens but if it doesn’t I’m ok with it.”

“How much do you want this project?” Yuuri asked.

“Quite a bit,” Viktor admitted.

“We’ll spend an hour at wherever we’re going,” he said, holding up a hand when Viktor started to speak, “Then we’re going to your office to work on your presentation.”

“I can’t ask you to do that, Yuuri. This is my responsibility,”

“You’re not asking,” Yuuri stated, “I’m offering. It’s what friends do.”

Viktor thought for a few minutes, wondering if he should accept Yuuri’s offer. He had been thinking about being published for a few years, wanting to spend time in an in-depth study. When the department granted him an audience to present his idea, he’d been ecstatic. Though he had been extremely busy when the appointment was made, he had set aside time in his schedule to work on it.

Then Yuuri Katsuki came into his life and everything was pushed aside.

Time passed so quickly Viktor forgot about the committee until Mila brought it up that day, rolling her eyes when she saw the blank look on his face. He was known within the department to be flighty, often forgetting details or promises he had made. He was forgiven due to his repertoire with his students along with his methods of teaching, but didn’t think the committee would be impressed with him declining after fighting so hard to get the appointment.

“Alright,” Viktor said, “Two sets of eyes are better than one and I’ll be in fabulous company. I’ll even buy you dinner.”

“You don’t have to bribe me, Viktor,” Yuuri said quietly, “If it’s something you really want, I’m more than happy to help.”

“That settles it then,” he said, grinning so much his eyes crinkled, “We’re almost there. See the big
parking lot on the right? Pull in there.”

“You brought me to an ice rink?” Yuuri asked, feeling his heart beat faster.

Yuuri had dreaded going to the Ice Cube when Viktor mentioned it, hoping to speak with him about his concerns. He wasn’t one for athletic activities since he’d been teased relentlessly in the past. Thinking back to his childhood gym classes made him anxious and he didn’t want to get back to that place. He knew Viktor was excited about coming here and wanted him to have fun, but he didn’t know how much he’d be able to handle.

“Viktor?” he asked quietly, tapping his forefingers together.

“What’s wrong?” Viktor asked, frowning when he saw Yuuri’s nervous habit.

“Would it hurt your feelings if I said I wasn’t looking forward to coming here?” he asked, looking at him sadly.

“No, but may I ask why?”

“It’s physical activity,” Yuuri explained, “Look at me. I’m not exactly made for it. When I do try to walk more or play basketball with Phichit, I get teased. It’s not a very good feeling.”

“Hey,” Viktor said softly, taking Yuuri’s hand in his, “We don’t have to do this if you don’t want. I thought it would be a change of pace and try something we haven’t done. We can go back to the store and play chess for an hour if you like?”

“I know you were looking forward to it,” he said.

“That takes a back seat to your comfort level, Yuuri,” Viktor declared, “I will tell you that I know a couple people that work here and they don’t tolerate that kind of behavior. There might be a couple hockey teams playing a pick-up game and possibly a skater or two. If you don’t want to go in, I’m ok with that.”

Yuuri stared at Viktor in awe, overwhelmed at how attuned to his feelings he was. He didn’t push him, he didn’t mock him or guilt him into doing something he didn’t want. Viktor met him where he was and then some. He’d never found anyone like Viktor and found himself wanting to hold onto him forever. Each time Viktor offered him a choice or admitted he was fine with a change of plans, the fluttering in his heart linked with the emotion he hadn’t completely figured out went into overdrive. He knew he was getting closer though and the thought scared him.

“Just an hour?” he asked.

“Yep, and you don’t have to skate if you don’t want to.”

“Can you help me?” Yuuri asked, “I’ve never really done this before.”

“I’d be honored.”

The hour at the rink was amusing yet pleasant. They ran into Mila after they rented their skates, Viktor not surprised to see her. Her best friend, Georgi, was a skating instructor at the rink and she visited often. When she saw Viktor walking her way, she stopped in her tracks and turned quickly,
taking several steps in the other direction.

“Mila!” Viktor yelled, pouting dramatically when she spun around, “Is that any way to greet a friend?”

“You’re a slave driver, Viktor!” she exclaimed, “And a forgetful idiot! Why are you here? Don’t you have a ton of work to do?”

“Yes,” he said when he stood in front of her, “I’m taking an hour to skate with Yuuri and then we’re going back to the office. Want to help?”

“Oh, hell no,” Mila said, holding her hands out, “I’ve nagged you about this for weeks now and you kept ignoring me.”

“Weeks, eh?” Yuuri said, giving Viktor a dubious look.

“You reminded me on Monday,” he said, confused.

“I hope you know what you’re getting yourself into, Yuuri,” she said, looking at him.

“We’ll have fun,” Viktor said, throwing an arm around Yuuri’s shoulder.

The familiar, intense jolt of electricity sparked at the point of contact and coursing through them. Viktor jumped and yanked his arm away, Yuuri jumping and stumbling forward. Mila watched them in disbelief, crossing her arms as she waited for them to recover.

“What was that?” she asked.

“You shocked me again!” Yuuri yelped, rubbing the back of his neck.

“Isn’t that the second time it’s happened with you two?” Mila asked, narrowing her eyes as she looked between them.

“No, more like two hundredth,” Viktor stated, attempting to shake the numbness from his arm.

“Uh huh,” she said, chuckling, “The Symposium?”

“Get lost,” Viktor muttered, praying he wouldn’t shock Yuuri again when he grabbed his arm, “Let’s leave this vile woman to her own devices and put our skates on.”

They walked to a row of benches, ignoring Mila’s hearty laughter. Viktor was explaining different ways to balance and what not to do when they took the ice. Yuuri took his shoes off and lifted a skate, shoving a foot inside the boot. He laced and tied them as tightly as he could, repeating the process with the other. When they were ready, Viktor helped Yuuri to his feet and they made their way to the ice. Yuuri wobbled terribly and fell against Viktor several times as he tried to maintain his balance, finally seeing Viktor frown.

“Yuuri, sit on the bench for a minute,” he said, pointing to the wooden surface behind them.

Viktor crouched in front of him and grasped the back of Yuuri’s calf gently, a pleasant tingle spreading from the contact. He held his breath when Viktor slid two fingers between his ankle and the boot, tugging at the leather. When Viktor looked at him, he prayed to the gods he wasn’t beet red.

“Your skates are too loose. They need to be extremely tight or you can hurt yourself,” Viktor stated, untying the laces and tugging on them firmly.
“I told you I didn’t know what I was doing,” Yuuri muttered, biting his lip when insecurity washed over him.

“There’s only one way to learn,” he said, lifting his head and smiling at him, “You have to start from the bottom.”

Yuuri felt the doubt melt away from Viktor’s smile, the ice blue eyes and dazzling grin encouraging him. Though Viktor complimented him often, each one took him by surprise, the feeling he had begun calling love grow stronger. This time was no different.

When they reached the ice, Viktor took Yuuri’s hands and glided backwards to the center, pulling Yuuri with him. They went slow since Yuuri had a hard time keeping his balance but they finally reached the center. When Viktor let go of his hands, Yuuri felt himself wobble and panicked, reaching out to grab Viktor and clinging to him.

“I’m sorry,” he apologized when he felt Viktor’s hands on his sides to steady him.

“I think I should be the one apologizing,” Viktor said, “I let go before you were ready.”

“Please don’t let go,” Yuuri begged, holding Viktor’s stare as he fought to stay on his feet.

“I promise I won’t,” he said softly.

“Need some pointers?”

They looked to the rental area, seeing a man skate towards them. When he reached them, he smiled and greeted Viktor. He introduced himself to Yuuri, telling him his name was Georgi and he’d heard about him from Mila. Viktor raised a brow from his comment, looking at the edge of the ice to his grad student, knowing they’d be having a talk later.

“Oh,” Yuuri mumbled, blush dotting his cheeks.

“All good things, Yuuri,” Georgi said, “I promise. Would you like some pointers?”

Yuuri looked at Viktor as he contemplated the question. He didn’t want to leave Viktor; didn’t want to let go of the comforting warmth of his hands. When Viktor smiled softly and nodded, Yuuri reluctantly removed his hands and looked at Georgi.

“Ready?” Georgi asked.

“You’ll do great, Yuuri, better than I could show you. He’s the best instructor in the lower peninsula,” Viktor said.

“I don’t know about that,” Georgi said, laughing.

“You are, admit it,” he repeated, looking at Yuuri, “Do you mind if I warm up and try a couple things I haven’t done in years?”

“No at all,” Yuuri said, “Have fun.”

Viktor sped off, leaving him in Georgi’s care. Georgi was kind and patient as he instructed Yuuri, letting him set the pace. He still felt out of place, felt like the few people on the ice with him were staring at him, judging him. Georgi picked up on his reluctance, helping him to the rail so Yuuri could rest.

“You were doing so well but then got sidetracked. You can’t do that out there, Yuuri. You’ll get
hurt.”

“I’m sorry,” he apologized, “I just…”

“What changed?” Georgi asked.

“I got really self-conscious,” Yuuri explained, “Maybe I’m not meant to do this.”

“How so?”

“It felt like everyone was watching me. I’m not exactly skater material,” he muttered.

“May I say something?” Georgi asked, continuing when he nodded, “No one was watching except the other instructor. She’s a spotter just in case something happens. Who cares what anyone else thinks. You’re out there trying and for that you have my respect. Don’t let one thought get stuck in your head and fester. I expect to see you out there again soon. I’ll even throw in a free lesson or two. Now watch.”

Yuuri’s eyes followed Georgi’s outstretched arm to where Viktor was floating over the ice. Yuuri was in awe of his fluidity, how lost in the moment Viktor was. His steps were intricate, emotion pouring through him as he glided around the rink. Yuuri held his breath when Viktor launched from the ice, rotating several times before landing.

“Wow,” Yuuri said breathlessly.

“He’s good, isn’t he?” Georgi said.

“Very,” he agreed.

Viktor joined them minutes later, breathless from the vigorous workout. Thanking Georgi when he handed him a towel, Viktor wiped the sweat from his face and took several deep breaths. Mila walked up to the rail and leaned against it, telling Viktor his hour was up. While he didn’t want to go he knew Yuuri was probably at his limit. He thanked Georgi for helping Yuuri, which the man stated was no problem. After exchanging goodbyes and a promise from Yuuri to visit again, they returned their skates and left to head back to campus.

“What do you think?” Mila asked, watching Yuuri and Viktor leave.

“I think you might be right,” Georgi said.

The rest of the day passed quicker than they thought, night had fallen before they knew it. The afternoon had been spent going through stacks of books to support Viktor’s thesis statement. Yuuri brought up points and ideas he had never considered, leaving him appreciative of his offer to help. What angered him was the tricks his mind was playing, wondering what Yuuri wanted in return for his assistance in the project. While he knew Yuuri wasn’t like that, his former habits and the wall he held for so long threatened to intrude on his friendship with Yuuri. He found himself lost in thought so many times Yuuri began to notice something was amiss.

“Are you sure you’re alright?” he asked, looking at Viktor, “That’s the millionth time you’ve spaced out.”
“Yeah, I’m caught up in all of this and hoping I can make the deadline,” Viktor explained.

“I have tomorrow afternoon free and then Thursday off from work. I can help then. I can’t do a lot but I can look up sources, write down notes, make copies?” Yuuri offered.

“Why are you doing this?” Viktor asked suddenly.

“You’re a friend,” Yuuri said, “This is something you really want and I’m more than happy to help you achieve it.”

“I know we’ve talked about this before, but I’m not used to this. I keep wondering what you want in return, what payment you’ll exact,” Viktor admitted.

“Well, you did promise me dinner,” Yuuri teased, giving him a lopsided smile.

“Yes, I did,” he said, “but I’m serious. Deep down I know it won’t happen, but I’m so afraid you’re going to turn out like everyone else in my life.”

“Viktor, you’re my guardian. While you understand me, I understand you. You’re my dearest friend and I will never do anything to jeopardize that, I promise,” Yuuri stated.

“Please be patient if I have doubts,” he pleaded, “I’m not used to it.”

“I’m not either, so we’ll take it as it goes.”

“Thanks,” Viktor said, “Let’s get out of here. It’s after nine, I’m tired, I’m hungry and have to be back way too early.”

“Sandwiches at my place?” Yuuri suggested.

“Perfect!”

Yuuri was talking with a young girl about the story he just read for children’s hour when he felt a presence next to him. He looked up mid-sentence, smiling when he saw Viktor. He continued the conversation about the pig in the story while his mind wandered, thinking how happy he was each time he saw Viktor. Wednesdays had quickly become his favorite day of the week. After children’s hour, they would have a pleasant lunch before Viktor’s class started. Most days Yuuri would sit in on the lecture, always amazed at the view Viktor presented on each piece. He was held captivated by each word, enlightened by each thought. It was wonderful.

Class would end and Viktor would say his goodbyes, promising to return after his last class ended. They had the culinary course Viktor enrolled them in that evening, both looking forward to it immensely. They had a lot of fun at class as they learned new dishes and ways of preparing them. They failed more often than not but they laughed about it, enjoying the experience together. They also vowed to keep practicing the recipe until they arrived at the perfect dish.

Yuuri would drive Viktor home and stay a while longer. Sometimes they discussed events happening in the world, other times a new book that had come out. One time they had watched a movie, Viktor smiling when he saw Yuuri had fallen asleep. He stopped the movie, lifting Yuuri to lay him down on the couch and covering him with a light blanket. He watched the peaceful
expression on Yuuri’s face for a few minutes, eventually retiring to his own room.

Unfortunately, Mari had woken up feeling under the weather that morning. Minako had taken her to the doctor where they discovered she had strep throat and would be unable to work for a couple days. Yuuri had been worried he would miss his Thursday class, but Minako and Minami promised to run the store. Mari had talked with Minako when Yuuri requested an additional day off a week, the woman agreeing. She’d be damned if Yuuri gave up his free day.

“Lunch?” Viktor asked when the girl packed her belongings and running to her mother.

“I can’t,” Yuuri said, disappointed, “Mari is sick. I’m not going to be able to sit in or help with your project this afternoon either.”

“It’s ok, Yuuri,” he said, patting his hand, “How about I run out and get something to eat? Sounds like you’re going to be busy and I don’t want to hear you’ve passed out.”

“That’s a wonderful idea,” Yuuri said through giggles, “You choose.”

“One chocolate ramen, coming up!” Viktor exclaimed, heading to the door.

“Viktor!”

Yuuri kept his eyes on the clock as he waited on customers, wondering what was taking Viktor so long. Several of his students had begun to trickle in and Yuuri told them to head to the back, Viktor would be there shortly. He had finished waiting on a man, telling him to have a wonderful day when he laid eyes on his next customer, heart sinking.

“Genius.”

“Hi Yuri,” he said nervously, “How are you today?”

“Oh, just wonderful,” Yuri grumbled sarcastically, “Another day in the presence of Nikiforov. How he brightens my day.”

“Well, I hope your day gets better,” Yuuri said, “Can I help you with anything?”

“Yeah, I need your help.”

“I’ll try my best,” he said, heart pounding, nerves unraveling.

“Will you help me with the lyric assignment?” Yuri asked, “I’m sorry for being a dick to you but I’m not good at this shit. I’d ask dumbass but I’d never hear the end of it.”

“Who?”

“Otabek,” Yuri explained.

“Oh,” he said, quickly pondering Yuri’s request.

Yuuri was reluctant to help him since he was so intimidated, but at the same time he was touched Yuri had asked for help. Figuring it took a bit of courage to swallow his pride and ask, Yuuri came to a conclusion with a stipulation.

“I’ll help you, Yuri,” he said, “but please don’t bring me to the center of attention in class again. It makes me really uneasy.”
“Already not happening, Genius. Besides not wanting to get kicked out of college, you seem like an ok guy. Totally misjudged you, man. Sorry,” Yuri said, smirking slightly.

“Yeah, ok. What time is good for you?”

They hashed out the details, deciding to meet Sunday evening after the bookstore closed. After exchanging phone numbers and Yuuri’s promise not to tell anyone, Yuri nodded and made his way back of the store. Yuuri smiled softly, happy with the change in attitude from his classmate. It was a barrier he thought he’d ever break with Yuri, always wondering if he’d be the butt of his jokes or scorn. He caught Viktor out of the corner of his eye, walking to the counter.

“He wasn’t being an ass again, was he?” Viktor asked, slightly annoyed.

“No, quite the opposite,” Yuuri said, “but I’m not allowed to say anything. I do have to keep Saturday evening free, though.”

“He finally asked for help?” he asked, flabbergasted.

“Sworn to secrecy,” Yuuri repeated, greeting a woman entering the shop.

“Gotcha.”

Viktor winked at him before turning to join his class, Yuuri smiling as he watched him walk away. A classical piece piped through the speakers in the shop, Yuuri whistling along as he went through sales receipts from the past week. He heard Viktor begin to speak, groaning when he made out the words.

“Where’s the real Plisetsky and what have you done with him?”

I just got out the committee meeting.
They said they’re going to come to a decision in about an hour.
I’m so nervous.

I know you did great.
You worked so hard on it.
Your presentation was flawless when you went through it.
I’ll cross my fingers.

Thanks, but WE worked hard on it.
I couldn’t have done it without you.
Dinner regardless of the outcome?

I’d love to join you for dinner.
If you get the grant, I’m buying.

I GOT IT!!
I can’t believe this.
One year off paid, publication after peer review.
I can’t believe we did this!

I’m so happy for you :)
You did it.
I merely researched.
Think about what you want for dinner.
No fast food!

Oh wow, just wow.
Did I mention I can’t believe this?
Do you know what this means?
Going to Europe!
Poland, Czech Republic, back to Russia.
You have to come with me!

Wait...trip?
I think we need to talk about this more.
Maybe when you calm down?
See you tonight.

Viktor was on cloud nine before class started, happily greeting students as they entered. It had been a wonderful week. He had been given grant approval for his sabbatical and dove into the project, staying up all night Saturday devising a tentative outline. Everything else had fallen into place, Viktor thinking the stars had aligned to give him the best of luck that week. The weather was pleasant for his walks to campus, his students were mild-mannered, conversations with Chris were tame.

He saw Yuuri at least once every day.

Viktor stopped at the bookstore on his way to campus, popping in to wish him and Mari a wonderful day. They texted throughout the day, describing something that happened to make their day interesting. They were in an unofficial contest of who could come up with the most applicable literary quote for the day. More often than not, Viktor found himself in front of Bound to Please every evening. Some nights they went out for dinner, one they stayed at Yuuri’s apartment and ordered pizza. The evening after culinary class Yuuri drove Viktor home, both disappointed in their dish that night. They had attempted a quiche that turned out like rubber, the instructor rendering it inedible.

“Sandwiches?” Viktor asked when they reached his house, smiling when Yuuri agreed.

Making simple ham and cheese sandwiches, Viktor suggested they go outside and eat on the patio. A few stars were visible over the light pollution of the city, the calls of crickets and frogs from a nearby creek filling the air. A gentle breeze floated by, carrying the scent of mid-spring flowers.

“This reminds me of home,” Yuuri said quietly, “without the crickets.”

“No crickets?”
“Not that I can remember. This is nice,” he said, looking at Viktor, “Thank you. I really enjoy doing simple things like this with you.”

“I do, too,” Viktor said.

Viktor smiled to himself as he remembered the night before, the hug Yuuri gave him before he left for home. Yuuri had become slightly affectionate towards him, a light touch here, a quick hug there. While they were few and far between, not reaching the kiss from Easter, Viktor loved it. It increased his feeling of acceptance by Yuuri, that he liked him for who he was. He looked at the clock and clapped his hands a couple times, getting his student’s attention.

“Ok minions, sit down, shut up. We have a busy day today and an introduction. The English department has a new grad student and he’s sitting in on the class today,” Viktor said, pointing to a tall, dark-haired man, “His name is JJ, he’s earning his masters this year in something. I don’t remember. Feel free to ignore him. I do.”

Most of the class laughed when JJ scoffed, mouth dropping as he stared at Viktor. The time in class was set aside for the presentations Viktor assigned the week before. Viktor chuckled when most groaned when he asked for volunteers, completely surprised when Yuri raised his hand.

“Really, Plisetsky? I’m coming to believe aliens kidnapped the real you,” Viktor teased.

“I just want to get this over with,” Yuri grumbled, talking to the front of the class and shooing Viktor away, “I did more than we were asked to, so I expect extra credit. I used three verses plus a chorus. So, everyone shut up and listen.”

Yuri plugged his phone into the speakers Viktor brought, pressing his screen a few times until the song started. He smirked when a few students laughed, recognizing the song and commenting it fit him well. He moved to the rhythm of the song, waiting for it to end.

“Ok, the first three parts are the verses and the last part is the chorus:

Special
You think you're special
You do
I can see it in your eyes

I can see it when you laugh at me
Look down on me
You walk around on me
Just one more fight

About your leadership
And I will straight up
Leave your shit
Cause I've had enough of this
And now I'm pissed

Yeah
This time I'm 'a let it all come out
This time I'm 'a stand up and shout
I'm 'a do things my way
It's my way
My way, or the highway
“How this song fits my life right now is how everyone has pushed me around in life, not really giving a shit about what I want or what I need. They think they’re better than me and I’m over it. So now it’s what I want since I’ve hit fuck it. I’m going to do things my way. If anyone has a problem with it, too fucking bad.”

Yuri bowed when the class cheered and clapped enthusiastically, returning to his seat. He grinned when Otabek glared at him and shook his head, turning around to look at Viktor.

“Yuri, thank you so much for the colorful presentation,” Viktor said, shaking his head and chuckling, “I’m glad you got in touch with your inner fuck you. Good job.”

“Thanks, man,” Yuri said, looking at Yuuri and grinning.

“Who wants to go next?”

A few students went next, one choosing a popular country song and the others choosing mainstream rock tunes. While Viktor thought they were good presentations, they didn’t connect well to the situation each person experienced. He gave them generic comments but wrote detailed remarks on the grade sheet how they could improve in the future.

“I guess I’ll go next since I told you guys I’d do this assignment also,” Viktor said, plugging his phone in, “Listen to the lyrics the best you can. Let them sink in. When it’s done I’ll share my interpretation with you.”

A piano in a minor key started, the haunting notes piercing the relative quiet. When the man began to sing, several students smiled when they recognized the song. Viktor scanned the class, watching their reactions to the lyrics. It was an evocative song, the singer’s pleas poignant. This song was the one that made him decide to assign this project, the lyrics rocking him to his core when he thought about his current situation. When the song ended, he unplugged his phone and stood.

“What did you guys think?” Viktor asked, nodding when he heard approval from the class, “I think Yuri copied off me as I, too, used more verses as I think it’s critical with how it applies to me now.

An act of kindness  
Is what you show to me  
Not more than I can take  
Not more than I can take  
Kindness is what you show to me  
It holds me 'till I ache  
Overflow and start to break

Oh I, got a feeling this will shake me down  
Oh I, kind of hoping this will turn me round

And now it follows me every day

“I’m going to split the lyrics up a little for more impact. I’m not going to go into much detail, but recently I’ve felt more at ease by kindness shown to me. I’m not being expected to do something in return, I’m not being led along by what someone can get from me. I’m being accepted for who I am. The not more than I can take part is a lie though since sometimes I feel overwhelmed by the generosity shown me,” he said, looking at Yuuri, “but it’s such a beautiful thing. Sometimes it really does hurt but in the best way. It’s making me a better person, changing who I am for the better. It doesn’t follow me every day, I chase it for everything I’m worth.”
He paused and stared at Yuuri, watching the recognition reflected in his eyes. Yuuri knew he was talking about him albeit indirectly. This is what had been on Viktor’s mind since he heard this song a couple months ago, especially with each brick Yuuri removed from his wall. Yuuri was his understanding, his clarity, his acceptance. He’d hold onto it forever.

“Here’s the last part and this is how I really feel:

Oh my back's up against the wall
I feel guilty, I feel guilty
You want nothing in return
I feel guilty, I feel guilty

“This isn’t a bad thing, it’s just something I’m not used to experiencing. I’m suddenly faced with the situation of being treated like a person without the demand of return. It’s unsettling, it’s scary, it’s magnificent. So yeah, there’s my presentation. Who wants to go next?”

Viktor looked around the class, waiting a few minutes for someone to raise their hand. He was always amused when he asked for volunteers and most of his students realized how interesting their shoes were. He was about to assign the next person to present when Yuuri’s hand shot in the air.

“May I?” he asked, walking to the center of the room and plugging his phone in, “This song has become important to me. Please listen to it.”

Viktor could tell not many had heard the song, the looks of concentration from most giving it away. He recognized it the minute the harpsichord faded in, his heart lurching and head whipping up to look at Yuuri. He didn’t know if they were on the same wavelength, but it made sense.

The woman sang in accented English, the simplicity of the song entrancing everyone. It had been a long time since Viktor had heard it, but listening to it now took on a new meaning. He was ready for it to be over, ready to hear how Yuuri interpreted it to relate to his life. The harpsichord wound down, the last chilling notes of the piano sounded and the song ended. Yuuri’s eyes were wide as he fought his anxiety, swallowing before speaking.

“Love, love is a verb
Love is a doing word
Fearless on my breath
Gentle impulsion
Shakes me, makes me lighter
Fearless on my breath
Teardrop on the fire
Fearless on my breath

Water is my eye
Most faithful mirror
Fearless on my breath
Teardrop on the fire
Of a confession
Fearless on my breath
Most faithful mirror
Fearless on my breath
Teardrop on the fire
Fearless on my breath

“This song doesn’t have a chorus, so I chose the two lyrics that apply the most right now. Someone
entered my life earlier this year that has become very important to me,” Yuuri said, locking gazes with Viktor, “I’ve been uneasy about opening up with them since I’ve been hurt a lot in the past, but they’ve been genuinely caring and wonderful with me. They like me for who I am, they encourage me to push my boundaries. It’s been difficult but it’s also been so much fun. They’ve made me feel things I couldn’t describe and it’s been unsettling at times, but I think I’ve finally figured it out.

“I’ve decided to call this feeling love. I’m not sure if it’s friendly or romantic, but I think that’s what it is. I feel their strength, I feel their courage even when I’m not with them. I look in the mirror, see the reflection of my eyes and realize they aren’t empty or fearful any longer. Yeah, I still have moments I’m nervous or unsure of myself but they’re my guardian. They’re always there. I don’t ever want to let it go.”

Yuuri nodded once, glancing at Viktor once again before returning to his desk. Viktor was speechless after listening to Yuuri. While he was tearing his wall down, Yuuri was building his but in the best of ways. He was crawling out of the pit he’d hid in for so long, using the bricks taken from Viktor to build a stairway.

Viktor felt the flutter in his chest he hadn’t felt since he saw his mother years ago, closed his eyes to stave the tears threatening to fall. No one had ever said anything like this to him, about him. He knew his feelings for Yuuri were slowly shifting and growing, but this declaration had them racing to the forefront.

“That was great, Yuuri,” he said quietly, trying to maintain his composure as he walked to the front of the room.

Several other students gave their presentations, Viktor half-listening as he was distracted. He replayed Yuuri’s words in his mind, each time the same quote came to mind. He saw it a couple weeks ago on the department memo and thought it was good, but couldn’t really relate to it. Now he could and the recognition made his heart sing, felt another brick fall away.

“The higher you build walls around your heart, the harder you fall when someone tears them down.”

Chapter End Notes

Here are the songs listed by presentation.

Yuri: My Way by Limp Bizkit
Viktor: An Act of Kindness by Bastille
Yuuri: Teardrop by Massive Attack
While away on a camping trip with Viktor, they realize their feelings are growing. The excursion is cut short by a situation that shatters Yuuri.

Yuuri tapped his fingers against his other arm, waiting impatiently for the woman to pick up. He called again when her voicemail picked up, huffing as he counted the rings.

“Hey Yuuri!” Minako exclaimed, “Having fun?”

“I am. What’s up? I’m off this weekend. Mari’s at the store if you need something,” he said.

“Actually, I wanted to see if I could speak with Viktor,” she said, Yuuri whipping his head up to look at him, “I needed to ask him something.”

“It can’t wait until we get back?” he asked.

“No, you know how my memory is,” Minako replied, “I’ll forget.”

“Fine, but make it quick,” Yuuri said, holding out the phone, “It’s for you.”

Viktor flinched but took the phone, pressing it against his ear before speaking.

“Hello?”

“Viktor, it’s Minako,” she said.

“I know,” he replied, “What’s up?”

“I need you to be calm for Yuuri,” she started, Viktor feeling a chill race up his spine, "Something’s happened."

Now we get to the plot twist, but in the next few chapters you'll see why. Yes, we planned it this way. Please don't kill us.

Two notes that I can think of:
1) Sugarloaf Lake Park is in Chelsea, MI. It's part of the Waterloo State Park system and I personally prefer Sugarloaf. It's amazing.
2) The panic attack Yuuri suffers is one of the most severe someone can have. Along with the panic attack, he has acute disassociation which is scary and miserable as hell. I have these kinds of panic attacks several times a year. It's absolutely horrible.

Hope you enjoy this chapter and thanks for reading!
You can follow me on tumblr. Stay up to date on latest chapters and story progress or just want to give a shout out! You guys are what drives me, and I so appreciate every one of you.

“You have everything you need? You double checked?”

“Yes, Mari, I’m sure. Triple checked.”

“Medicine? Extra pair of glasses? Do you have somewhere to charge your phone?”

“There’s an information cabin. I’m sure I’ll be fine.”

“Insurance card? Emergency contact list?”

“Mari.”

She fixed her worried gaze on him but knew he was right. While she was happy for her brother, this was the first time since they came to Michigan he was embarking on what he would call a “risky adventure”. She had been camping several times with friends and left Yuuri alone at the shop, but this was different. He was never an outdoor person, opting to stay in during the most beautiful weather. The only time his parents could drag him outside was when they went to the beach and even then he stuck close to them.

Yuuri had decided to take Viktor up on his offer of camping for one weekend, describing it as his ‘Finding Yuuri’ project. Mari loved that Viktor held Yuuri in such high regard and was helping him climb from the pit of despair he’d been in for so long, but she worried Yuuri might be moving quickly. She didn’t have much to base her concern on, however, since Yuuri never had the confidence to explore this side of himself before. She had decided the night before to have a chat with Viktor and share her worries with him along with a gentle warning that if he messed this up, he’d have her to deal with.

“Youuri!” Minami yelled from downstairs, “Viktor’s here!”

Yuuri looked from the stairwell to his sister, smiling softly before embracing her. Even though Mari teased him relentlessly, Yuuri knew she had his best interests at heart. They had been through so much together and she had become his pillar. He had been concerned she would be upset that he had been spending more time with Viktor and leaning on him for support, but she was thrilled for him.

“Have fun this weekend. Bug spray, watch where you walk and gaze at the stars. Do all that mushy stuff soulmates do,” Mari teased, hugging him tightly.

“Give it up already,” Yuuri grumbled, pulling away from her.

He bent down to lift his bag from the floor, waved and went down the stairs, disappearing from her
Classes had ended for the semester the day before and Viktor wanted to relax for the weekend before immersing himself in final exams. While he appreciated Yuuri’s offer to help grade them, Viktor had to decline but told him he could come over to lend moral support. Yuuri laughed but agreed, told him he’d pack a bag and stay as long as necessary.

The drive to Chelsea passed too quickly, not giving them time to talk much. When Yuuri navigated the car onto the rough dirt road, he wondered what Mari had gotten them into. She had suggested the area, telling him it was beyond beautiful and they would enjoy it. The road was dilapidated and narrow, Yuuri praying another car wouldn’t come from the other direction. Wincing each time the bottom of the car scraped the cratered road, he sighed in relief when they entered a clearing.

“Wow,” Viktor said quietly, leaning forward to look out the windshield.

The area was dominated by a large wood and stone building, a plethora of blooming trees and flowerbeds surrounding it. The sun beating off the water behind the building looked like shimmering diamonds, the cool breeze coming off the lake inviting. The sound of children could be heard from the nearby playground, Viktor smiling when he watched several in a game of tag.

“I know you were doubtful, but we are going to have so much fun,” Viktor said.

“I hope so,” Yuuri said, “I’ve never really been camping.”

“It’s been a while since I have, but I’m sure it’ll come back to me in no time,” he explained, “but if we have a problem we can come to the main house. Didn’t Mari say there’s someone on duty all the time?”

Yuuri nodded and pulled into a parking spot, putting the car in park and shutting off the engine. He rested his arms along the top of the steering wheel, taking in his surroundings before climbing out of the vehicle. Walking around the front of the car, he rested on the bumper and watched the boats on the lake. It was peaceful, quiet save for the excited shrieks of children and the geese honking as they flew overhead before descending onto the water.

“This is wonderful,” he said when Viktor joined him.

“It is,” Viktor agreed, “Remind me to thank your sister.”

“I think we’ll be thanking her in unison,” Yuuri said, grinning as he nudged Viktor’s shoulder.

“Let’s go check in and see where they’re putting us. I hope it’s near the lake.”

Yuuri nodded and followed him into the building. There was one recreation officer working that afternoon and had several campers to attend to. Yuuri walked to a wall filled with pictures and took in the details of each one while Viktor sat in a rocking chair. He eased the chair on the rockers and watched Yuuri, seeing his facial expressions change as his eyes moved between pictures. Viktor loved watching Yuuri take in new things, observing him when he learned something new. His openness and willingness to experience the unknown peeled the slightest layer of Viktor’s mask.
away, feeling himself grow along with Yuuri. It was a wonderful feeling and he never wanted to let it go.

“May I help you?” the officer asked, looking at them.

“Hi, I called a couple weeks ago and reserved a site for this weekend,” Viktor said, rising from the chair and walking to the counter.

Viktor waited for the man to go through site assignments on his computer, asking questions about what he and Yuuri would like to do during the weekend. They had discussed the trip the night before, telling the other what they were looking forward to the most. Viktor wanted to swim in the lake, ride bikes around the park and visit the Audubon center. Yuuri hoped to sit on the shore and watch the wildlife, chat while making smores and catch lightning bugs. When Viktor told the officer, he thought their plans sounded splendid.

“Very romantic,” the man said, “It takes a truly special person to enjoy the simplicity of nature. Not many appreciate it.”

“Thanks,” Viktor said, taking in Yuuri’s red face when he joined them, “but we’re friends. The semester ended yesterday and we needed a breather.”

“Congratulations,” he said, smiling, “how do you guys think you did?”

“I was just auditing the class,” Yuuri muttered, tapping his fingers together.

“I’m a professor,” Viktor stated.

“Interesting,” he said, “Well, have fun and relax. Sugarloaf is definitely the place to be.”

After giving them the site assignment and a map, he wished them well as they left the building and climbed back into Yuuri’s car. They were situated near the back of the park and Yuuri steered the car along the long and winding road, avoiding potholes the best he could. Viktor read the highlights from the map while Yuuri concentrated on driving, speaking excitedly at points.

“There are three different swimming areas, Yuuri. Three! We should visit all of them, see which one we like best,” Viktor said.

“We’ll see,” he answered, growing anxious by the suggestion and hoping Viktor wouldn’t notice.

But he did.

“Yuuri?”

Hmm?” he asked, stopping at an intersection and looking at the map.

“What’s wrong?” Viktor asked, “You shut down.”

“I’m fine.”

“Yuuri,” he said, voice low, “I’m learning when something is wrong with you or you’re not comfortable with it. What’s wrong?”

“Swimming,” Yuuri admitted, glancing at him before turning left.

“What about it?” he asked.
“Remember the talk we had when we went ice skating?” Yuuri asked, jogging his memory, “I look hideous in swim trunks.”

“Yuuri, I know it’s easier said than done but as long as you’re having fun what does it matter? I’m not sure if that’s the right thing to say, but I don’t care what you look like. I’ve already told you I find you beautiful.”

“Thanks, Viktor,” Yuuri said quietly, feeling tears well at the corners of his eyes, “But you don’t know how much it hurts when you overhear someone calling you names. Do you know how horrible it feels to be called a beached whale? Or Blubber Boy?”

“Stop the car.”

“What?” he asked, glancing at him in confusion.

“Stop the car,” Viktor repeated.

“I can’t! What if someone comes along? There’s not enough room for me to…”

“Stop the car.”

Yuuri sighed and slowed the car, putting it into park when the vehicle came to a halt. He looked at Viktor, perplexed when he opened the door and got out. Walking around the hood, Viktor opened Yuuri’s door, leaned over and unfastened his seat belt.

“Viktor, what are you…”

“Out,” Viktor said, tugging on Yuuri’s arm.

Yuuri climbed out and yelped when Viktor grabbed his hand and pulled him to the edge of a nearby creek. He pointed to the bank, telling Yuuri where to stand and walked behind him. Yuuri shifted his head, trying to look at Viktor but felt fingers on his chin, moving his head to look at the reflection on the surface of the water.

“What do you see?” Viktor asked, Yuuri trying to contain the shiver threatening to escape when hot breath hit his neck.

“You and I. Birds flying overhead. A bug gliding over the surface,” he said.

“Look at yourself, Yuuri,” Viktor instructed, “What do you see?”

“My face.”

“Just your face?” he asked.

“No, my face, my chest, my arms, part of my legs.”

“Is that all? Think about literature, Yuuri, think about poetry. Tell me what you see,” Viktor elaborated.

“I see plain, boring, fat,” he whispered, lifting his glasses and wiping at his eyes, “Can we go back to the car now?”

“No,” Viktor replied, “Do you want to know what I see?”

“What?”
“I see beauty,” he said, smiling when he saw Yuuri’s shocked reflection in the water, “I see innocence, patience, wonder. I see a work of art, Yuuri. It’s not finished yet, never will be but I think it’s the closest to a masterpiece I’ll ever witness.”

Yuuri was too stunned to move, to speak. He stared at the reflection and watched Viktor draw closer, resting his head on his shoulder. He felt Viktor’s chest against his back and his hands grasp his upper arms, squeezing gently. The frisson that flowed through him when they touched was comforting and lent him strength.

“When you’re in doubt or hear someone talk badly about you, find me, Yuuri. I promised I’d be your guardian,” Viktor said, turning him and lifting Yuuri’s chin with his fingers, “You have my strength, Yuuri.”

“I think you took more of my understanding,” Yuuri said quietly, staring into Viktor’s icy blue eyes.

“Possibly,” he admitted.

“How do you always know what to say?” Yuuri asked.

“Promise not to laugh at me?” he asked, continuing when Yuuri nodded, “When I’m with you I know I can be honest, so I listen to my heart.”

Yuuri stared at him for a moment longer, closing his eyes and resting his forehead against Viktor’s chest as he enveloped him in a hug. Viktor always knew what to do, had the perfect words at the perfect time. He felt a hand on the back of his neck, warm tingling dancing down his spine as Viktor rubbed his neck. Leaning further into him, Yuuri turned his head and inhaled deeply, smelling the calming scent he had come to associate with Viktor.

“Thank you,” Yuuri whispered, pulling back and smiling.

“You needed to be reminded of the truth,” he said softly, “Those that say unkind words only have half the story. They can’t make an informed opinion, can they?”

Viktor smiled when Yuuri shook his head, winding an arm around his shoulder and walking back to the car together. He could feel the tension had evaporated and saw Yuuri was more relaxed. Viktor hated he had so much doubt and had been teased ruthlessly in the past. It made him want to defend Yuuri with every fiber of his being and truly become his knight in shining armor. As they neared their camp site, Viktor silently vowed to always be there to help and protect Yuuri.

It took longer than either had anticipated to set up camp. Viktor had ordered a tent shortly after Easter but hadn’t looked at the dimensions so it was smaller than they thought. After struggling with the many poles and ties for over an hour, a friendly couple from a neighboring site took pity on them and helped them pitch the tent. Dusk had arrived by the time the tent was finished, not leaving them enough time to dig the sand from the fire pit. Viktor had to rescind the invitation for dinner to the good Samaritans and felt guilty when they offered a meal of hamburgers and chips. Yuuri accepted, thanking them for their gracious offer and promising to make dinner for everyone the following evening.

The sky was completely dark save a plethora of twinkling stars by the time they finished unpacking. It was hard work and Yuuri was exhausted from all the activity, but he reminded himself it was
worth spending this time with Viktor. He loved every minute they had together and felt more comfortable than he had with anyone else, felt like he belonged.

He was nervous though, having dreaded this moment all day.

They had decided to call it a night after laying in the grass and talking as they gazed at the stars. Yuuri had fought to stay awake as he listened to Viktor speak about a book the department head was writing. When he felt a gentle tap on his shoulder, he opened his eyes and saw Viktor watching him.

“I think someone’s tired,” Viktor said softly.

“I’m ok,” he answered, “What were you saying?”

“I said you were snoring,” Viktor teased, sitting up and standing before holding a hand out for Yuuri, “Time for the prince to sleep before he turns into a pumpkin.”

“Prince?” Yuuri asked, feeling heat flood his cheeks, “Pumpkin?”

“Cinderella,” Viktor explained.

Yuuri laughed as he was pulled to his feet and teased Viktor about the comparison. Viktor retorted by telling him it was the perfect analogy. They exchanged playful banter while walking back to camp, unease slinking into Yuuri as they neared the site. He was sweaty and dirty from the late spring heat and getting camp organized. He needed to clean up and change into a fresh shirt and shorts before going to sleep.

That meant getting undressed in front of Viktor.

While he was more comfortable with Viktor than he was anyone else, he was mortified about Viktor seeing his stretch marks, uneven skin and plentiful rolls of extra fat on his body. Yuuri tried to anchor himself in the fact Viktor thought he was beautiful, but he hadn’t truly seen him. Fighting back a panic attack the best he could, Yuuri didn’t realize Viktor was speaking until he called his name.

“I’m sorry, what did you say?” he asked.

“I’m going to head to the outhouse and walk around a little,” Viktor said, smiling at him in the moonlight, “Give you a chance to change and settle in.”

Yuuri watched Viktor grab a bag from inside the tent and disappear among the trees a minute later, speechless that Viktor was so in tune with him. He had taken a moment Yuuri had feared the entire day and simply brushed it away like it didn’t exist. The anxiety dissipated in seconds, replaced by the gentle warmth he’d felt each time Viktor bolstered him that day.

Walking to the edge of the lake, Yuuri dipped a washcloth in the cool water and made his way back to the tent. He crawled into it and zipped the flaps, his heart pounding from the thought someone might venture past the site and see him changing. He took a deep breath, undressed quickly and hurried through wiping the grime from his skin. He sped through patting the moisture from his body, yanked a t-shirt over his head and pulled it down before sliding into a pair of cotton shorts. He was unrolling his sleeping bag when he heard the zipper of the tent pierce the night, Viktor crawling in moments later.

“Better?” Viktor asked, smiling at him.

“Much, thanks,” Yuuri replied.
“I figured you might like some privacy. Do you mind if I change here or would you rather I go somewhere else?” he asked.

“Well…here is fine. I can roll over.”

Yuuri yanked the zipper of the sleeping bag down, hurrying into the light cocoon. He shifted so his back was facing Viktor and squeezed his eyes shut when he heard the faint rustle of clothing. While his feelings for Viktor increased, so did his attraction. Yuuri knew if he caught the smallest glimpse of skin, he’d ogle Viktor shamelessly, embarrassing himself further. He was finally honing on the feeling he felt for Viktor, but figuring out the attraction was something entirely different. He had never been physically drawn to anyone before. While he enjoyed it and liked how it made his stomach flutter, it scared him to death. He didn’t know if it was normal experience or if something was wrong, but he was petrified to ask anyone for guidance. Nighttime searches online hadn’t helped, leaving him to his thoughts and trying to rationalize it on his own.

“Did you have a good day, Yuuri?”

“I did,” he said quickly, eyes darting in the darkness, “You?”

“It was wonderful. You can roll over if you’d like,” Viktor said, “I’m dressed.”

Yuuri turned to lay on his back and looked at Viktor, seeing a ray of moonlight fall on his face. He was glad he followed through with camping, debating for several days whether he should or not. The smile on Viktor’s face, the man leaning on a propped arm as he watched him was heavenly. Yuuri’s eyes drifted down to his exposed chest, gulping when his heart slammed against his ribcage.

“I’m sorry the tent is so small,” Viktor apologized.

“Again, it’s ok,” Yuuri said, reassuring him, “It reminds me of the summer when I was five. My father and I hiked up the mountain and spent the night on it. There’s a plateau near the top and I loved visiting. It was so peaceful, I could leave the world behind and all its worries. I had just started school months before and the kids were already brutal with their bullying.”

“I’m sorry,” he said quietly, lying down and settling on his side.

“Thanks,” Yuuri said, smiling sadly, “The bullying was horrible, but the times with my dad when he knew I hit my breaking point was wonderful. I wouldn’t trade them for the world. Viktor?”

“Hmm?”

“I wouldn’t trade this trip for the world,” Yuuri admitted.

“I wouldn’t either, Yuuri,” he agreed quietly, running a hand down Yuuri’s face until his eyes shut, “Close your eyes, sweet Yuuri. Dream of the stars. We have all the time on earth to talk tomorrow.”

Yuuri smiled and nodded, burrowing deeper into the bag and drifting to sleep.

Viktor woke early the next morning, hearing birds chirping happily and feeling a comforting warmth pressed against him. He inhaled deeply, brows furrowing when he smelled the intermingling scents of earth and herbal soap. The last time he remembered the fragrance was almost two month ago, the
night he stayed at the Katsuki apartment when the blizzard was rampaging through the city.

Opening his eyes slightly, he looked down and saw Yuuri lying next to him, head on his chest. Viktor felt his heart flutter when he felt the gentle movement of Yuuri’s breathing, the small puffs of air against his chilled skin. Though he could feel a small pool of drool trickling from Yuuri’s mouth, feel the arm draped over him twitch, Viktor was overjoyed and wanted to cherish this moment forever.

He jumped when he heard the high-pitched scream of a child nearby, grimacing when he felt Yuuri stir beside him. Moving his arm from behind his head, he lowered it and let it rest on Yuuri’s back, lightly tracing circles on the fabric covering it.

“Good morning, sleepyhead,” Viktor said softly, smiling when Yuuri opened his eyes.

Yuuri looked around, acquainting himself with the unfamiliar surroundings. He lifted his head slightly and looked at the bare chest in front of him, his eyes following the expanse of pale skin before meeting Viktor’s gaze. His eyes widened and he sat up quickly, scampering backwards and holding the sheet from his sleeping bag against him.

“I’m sorry,” Yuuri said quickly, looking at the floor of the tent.

“For what?” Viktor asked.

“Sleep on you, drooling on you,” he rambled, “intruding on your space.”

“Do I look bothered?”

Yuuri lifted his head and looked at him, trying to avoid his eyes. Once their gazes locked, Yuuri felt heat rush through him from the intensity of Viktor’s stare. He shook his head, crawling to the door of the tent and unzipping the flaps before exiting.

Viktor sighed and followed him, stretching when he got to his feet. The morning was chilly and he wished he had donned a shirt, but he was more concerned about Yuuri. He walked to the car, lifting the lid of the cooler while Yuuri dug through the bag containing their non-perishable food.

“It’s alright, Yuuri,” he said.

“I just…” Yuuri stammered, pausing to gather his thoughts, “it’s embarrassing.”

“It’s no different than the blizzard.”

“It is, Viktor,” he whined, growing flustered, “The power was out and I wasn’t sprawled all over you. I drooled all over you!”

“Not all over,” Viktor teased, becoming serious when Yuuri threw his hands in the air, “Can you do me a favor?”

“What?” he asked.

“Enjoy the moment,” Viktor requested, “I did.”

Yuuri searched the icy blue eyes, couldn’t believe what he was hearing. Expecting further mortification, Viktor turned the situation into something beautiful yet again. Yuuri found himself thinking that if Viktor kept reacting this way the entire weekend, he would completely fall in love with him by the time they returned home.
The thought thrilled him but scared him at the same time.

“What do you think?” Viktor asked, giving him a lopsided smile.

“Ok,” he whispered.

“Good,” Viktor replied, grinning, “How about bacon, eggs and grilled apples? I’m starving.”

They prepared breakfast together, Viktor lighting the fire while Yuuri got the food ready. They talked about their plans for the day while breakfast cooked, Viktor checking it often. They had decided after they ate they would wander around a nearby nature trail until they reached the birdwatching center. Yuuri told him he wanted to get pictures of several birds known to the area that he hadn’t captured before. When Viktor asked why, he explained he had a scrapbook filled with pictures of birds from around the world he’d taken and promised to show Viktor when they went home.

The morning passed quickly, Yuuri excited about the new images saved on his digital camera. Before they walked back to the tent, they rested on a boulder and Yuuri showed the pictures to Viktor. Though he acted oblivious to the nearness of Viktor and the way his chest brushed against his arm, his heart was beating frantically. When he showed Viktor the last picture, Yuuri stood quickly and asked if he was ready to go back.

When they made it back to camp, Viktor suggested they go swimming since it had warmed considerably. Yuuri turned his head and looked at the shore, taking in the families dotting the narrow strip of sand. He didn’t want others to see him, didn’t want to give them the chance to make fun of him. He was debating his options when he felt a finger trace his cheek.

“There’s a spot further up the lake,” Viktor said, moving his hand and pointing, “No one is there. Does that look like a good place to swim?”

Yuuri followed the length of Viktor’s arm and squinted, seeing the section of beach he mentioned. It was secluded, empty, perfect. Yuuri looked at him, smiled and nodded once. Viktor let him change first and told him he’d find the towels in the car. He had to unpack the car, growling in frustration when he found them in a bag on the floor. When he turned around, Yuuri was walking towards him. Viktor froze and took in the sight, his lips parting when he realized Yuuri wasn’t wearing his glasses. Viktor had never seen him without them and thought he looked beyond beautiful, no words could describe what was going through his mind. The soft swell of his belly pushed against his shirt, Viktor seeing the curves of Yuuri’s sides molded by the fabric. The swim trunks he was wearing hugged his thighs, revealing a thickness that made Viktor’s mouth water. While Yuuri’s body wasn’t perfect and he was on the chubby side, Viktor thought he was perfect for him.

“Hey, space cadet,” Yuuri teased, “Your turn.”

Viktor nodded, tearing his eyes from him and walking to the tent. His attraction to Yuuri had been growing yet he had been fighting it. Yuuri had grown so important to him and he cherished their friendship more than anything in life. Yuuri accepted him as a person, appreciated him for who he was. He didn’t want to risk losing the only person besides his parents that viewed him that way.

He slid the zipper around the door and pulled the fabric down, crawling in and sitting on his sleeping bag. He was conflicted, different options warring within. He hadn’t known Yuuri very long and couldn’t possibly feel something real nor lasting towards him. He had dated before and it took much longer to get to a quarter of the comfort level he had with Yuuri. He had never been attracted to anyone like Yuuri, which left him wondering if it was a whim or a meteoric fancy. He tried to maintain a voice of logic and a semblance of sanity, but his heart told him otherwise.
He was afraid to listen.

Viktor looked up when he heard the tinny sounds of a piano chime, eyes falling on Yuuri’s phone. He lifted the phone, looked at the screen and crawled to the opening.

“Yuuri!” Viktor yelled, waiting until he looked at him, “Minako is calling you.”

Yuuri walked to the tent and knelt on the ground when he reached it, taking his phone from Viktor. He pressed his screen and a flash of annoyance crossed his face.

“She’s called me seven times,” he muttered, pressing her number and lifting the phone to his ear, “She knows I took the weekend off. Why doesn’t she call Mari?”

“Don’t know.”

Yuuri tapped his fingers against his other arm, waiting impatiently for the woman to pick up. He called again when her voicemail picked up, huffing as he counted the rings. He was about to give up but the other end answered.

“Hey Yuuri!” Minako exclaimed, “Having fun?”

“I am. What’s up? I’m off this weekend. Mari’s at the store if you need something,” he said.

“Actually, I wanted to see if I could speak with Viktor,” she said, Yuuri whipping his head up to look at him, “I needed to ask him something.”

“It can’t wait until we get back?” he asked.

“No, you know how my memory is,” Minako replied, “I’ll forget.”

“Fine, but make it quick,” Yuuri said, holding out the phone, “It’s for you.”

Viktor flinched but took the phone, pressing it against his ear before speaking.

“Hello?”

“Viktor, it’s Minako,” she said.

“I know,” he replied, “What’s up?”

“I need you to be calm for Yuuri,” she started, Viktor feeling a chill race up his spine, “The building inspector is at the store. He’s shutting them down. The upper floor is close to caving in. He said the joists running through the bathroom, Mari’s room and most of the living room are rotten. Since it’s a place of business and they live there, Mari and Yuuri have to find somewhere else to stay until repairs can be made.”

“Can you repeat that?” he asked, heart hammering in his chest and forcing himself not to look at Yuuri.

“The building is being condemned until they can get it fixed,” Minako said, “Can you just bring him back and we’ll tell him when you get here?”

“I’m not going to lie to him, Minako,” Viktor said, lifting his head and looking at Yuuri.

“Yuuri needs to stay calm until he gets here, Viktor.”
“He needs to know instead of being blindsided,” he argued, “I think it’s best you tell him. He already knows something’s going on. He’s right next to me.”

“Give him the phone.”

Viktor took a deep breath and patted the spot on the sleeping bag next to him, waiting for Yuuri to sit down. He handed the phone to him and took his free hand, holding it between both of his.

“Minako,” Yuuri said, voice small with worry, “What’s going on?”

“Yuuri, honey, remember when the pipes in the upstairs bathroom burst last winter?” she asked.

“Yeah, what about it?”

“Well, since you and Mari were gone for a while the water did more damage than anyone thought,” she said hesitantly.

“Ok, what does that mean?” he asked.

“The wood is rotting, Yuuri. The building inspector is here.”

“How much is the fine and how long do we have to fix it?” he asked, removing his hand from Viktor’s and pressing it against his forehead.

“Yuuri, he’s shutting the store down. The building is condemned until you and Mari can get it repaired and he comes back.”

The world stopped for Yuuri that moment, numbness assaulting him instantly. He was in a dream, he had to be. The store was his livelihood, it was his life. He’d be lost without it, knowing it was the only thing he felt successful at in life and here it was, slipping through his fingers.

“This isn’t funny, Minako,” Yuuri growled, “Did Mari put you up to this?”

“I’m not joking. You have until midnight to get what you need out of the apartment.”

The phone slid from his hand and hit the ground with a thud. He couldn’t think, he couldn’t breathe. He needed to get out of there, needed to anywhere but where he was. He needed to be at home. Crawling out of the tent, he scrambled to his feet and ran to the car, falling to his knees when he reached it. He felt the rush of blood in his ears and the painful vice on his chest as he fought to stay in control.

“Yuuri, look at me!” Viktor yelled, Yuuri looking at him and wondering when he got to him, “Breathe!”

Yuuri stared in his icy blue eyes, trying to focus and lose himself in them. He felt disconnected, like he was floating out of his body and looking down on himself. He could tell Viktor was scared and didn’t know what to do, but still tried to help him. He listened as Viktor spoke into his phone but it felt as if he was watching a movie, waiting for the plot to unfold.

Memories from the bookstore flashed before his eyes: favorite customers, reading books to the children that came every Wednesday morning, the relaxed atmosphere of the poetry readings. The smell of books, talking with Vicchan as he shelved new arrivals, spending time reading a new novel he came across. It was gone. He’d never get it back.

Yuuri didn’t realize he had fallen to the ground until he saw Viktor looming over him, phone pressed
against his ear as he frantically asked how to help him. He knew he was having a severe panic attack and didn’t know how he’d be able to counter it without his medication. He hadn’t brought it since life had been going so well. He should have known better.

“Come on, Sunshine,” Viktor said, helping Yuuri sit up and pushing his knees apart before pressing his head between them, “Minako said I need to do this so you don’t pass out. What else do I need to do, Yuuri? Help me help you.”

There was nothing Viktor could do, Yuuri had to let the attack run its course. It was horrible and sapped him of his energy, but there was nothing he could do at this point. As he fought the panic building that came with each attack, he thought how ironic it was that he had everything he ever wanted in life only for it to be yanked from him.

He had never felt so lost in his life.

The attack passed several minutes later, leaving Yuuri exhausted. Viktor helped him into the car while he grabbed their bags before returning, climbing in and starting the engine. He shifted the car into gear and drove as fast as he could down the bumpy road.

“We left the tent,” Yuuri said, slurring his words.

“I’ll have Chris get it later,” he said tersely as he dodged a crater in the road.

“What if someone takes it?”

“Then I’ll buy a new one,” Viktor replied, “It’s just a tent.”

Viktor’s words reminded Yuuri of others he’d been told for years: It’s just a store. Almost everyone he knew had uttered the phrase at least once. While he laughed and agreed at the time, inside he was angry. It wasn’t just a store, Bound to Please was his life. It was the product of his blood, sweat and tears. He had devoted himself to it’s success and was content with what he had achieved thus far. Now it was being taken away, leaving him falling down his broken staircase into the dark pit once again.

By the time they reached the shop, Yuuri had completely retreated into himself. Viktor was worried on the drive back when Yuuri fell silent but attributed it to his panic attack. Mari knew otherwise, telling him Yuuri was spiraling into a deep depression. She was beside herself, not only rushing to get her own belongings together but gathering what she thought Yuuri would need for an indefinite amount of time. After leaving Yuuri downstairs with Minako, Viktor went upstairs and helped Mari pack Yuuri’s belongings.

“Does he have anywhere to go?” Viktor asked as he shoved books into a box.

“He can come with me to Minako’s, but it won’t be ideal for him right now. He needs space and quiet,” she explained, “It’s going to be a while until I can find a cheap apartment for us. We can’t afford a hotel room. Don’t even get me started on Vicchan. I don’t know what we’re going to do with him. God, this is a fucking mess.”

“I can’t imagine,” he said, “Mari?”
“What?” she asked, taking a bundle of clothing from the closet.

“He can stay with me for however long he needs,” Viktor offered, “I have an extra bedroom and he can keep Vicchan with him. I think Yuuri will need him right now.”

“Are you sure?” Mari asked, stopping to look at him.


“You need to know what you’re getting into. It’s been a while since something this bad has happened to him and it’s not going to be pretty. He’s going to be sullen, probably sleep a lot and eat a lot. He won’t talk much, but when he does he’s going to be so wrapped in his thoughts they won’t make much sense to you,” she advised, “Viktor, he’s going to get mean.”

“He’s my best friend, Mari. I’m not going to abandon him.”

“Ok,” she said, sighing deeply, “I was going to tell you this when it was time, but thanks for being there for Yuuri. You’re good for him. I’ve never seen him this happy as he has been these past few months. He’s got a long road ahead of him and is going to need everyone’s support, especially yours. If you mess him up even worse, you’re going to have to deal with me. Got it?”

“Perfectly,” he answered.

“Good, now let’s get this done. The inspector said we can only be up here forty minutes at a time.”

It was close to midnight when they finished packing, Phichit and several of Viktor’s former students helping. He knew it was a long shot when he emailed his classes, but they needed the extra hands desperately. He was touched by the turnout, but none more than when he heard someone shout his name.

“Nikiforov! You owe me twenty bucks for this!”

He placed a large box into the moving truck, wiped the sweat from his forehead and turned in the direction of the voice.

“Plisetsky,” he said loudly, grinning when Yuri joined him and shaking his hand, “I’ll give you five of them. Hey Otabek, thanks for coming.”

“It’s for Genius,” Yuri stated, “Are they really shutting this place down?”

“Yeah,” Viktor answered, “until they can get it fixed. They don’t know when that will be.”


“He’s inside, but leave him alone. He’s not doing very well.”

When everything was loaded into the trucks, Viktor thanked his students for coming and they’d get together next week for lunch, promising to email them the information. He went into the bookstore, made his way to a reading area and found Yuuri. Viktor hurt for him, hated he had to see his dream shatter into a million pieces. Viktor knew he and his sister would come out on top and Bound to Please would be stronger for it, he just didn’t know how at this point.
“Hey,” he said softly, kneeling in front of Yuuri and taking in his blank stare, “Ready to go?”

“Where am I going?” Yuuri asked, mumbling the words.

“Are you ok with staying with me?” Viktor asked, “You’ll have your own room, Vicchan can stay with you. It’ll be quiet.”

“Why?” he asked, eyes filling with tears before looking at Viktor, “Why is this happening? Is Fate telling me I’m not meant to be happy? I’m not supposed to have a decent or fair life?”

“No, Yuuri,” Viktor replied, resting a hand on Yuuri’s knee and using the other to clasp one of Yuuri’s, “This is a trial. Life is full of them. It’s Fate’s way of finding out how strong you can be before she bestows gifts upon you. Once this is behind you, I see great things for you.”

“I see nothing but darkness,” Yuuri declared, rising from the chair and patting his leg for Vicchan to follow him out of the building.

Viktor made sure the truck was locked and the cargo door secured before retreating to his house for the night. He had shown Yuuri the room he’d be occupying and went through where everything was in the house. Yuuri nodded absently, Viktor wondering if he heard anything he was saying. They were almost done when Yuuri left suddenly, going into his room and slamming the door behind him.

Mari had told him to expect this, but it was difficult experiencing it. Gone was his sweet, carefree and innocent Yuuri, replaced with a shell of a person. He was cold, distant and devoid of life. Part of Viktor shattered watching him process the nightmare he’d walked in to.

He looked up from the couch when he heard the door open, Vicchan being shoved into the hallway seconds later before closing again. Frowning when the dog whined, he called Vicchan’s name and patted the couch next to him. When the poodle jumped onto the cushion, Viktor put his book on the table next to him and gave him his undivided attention. Vicchan was feeling the stress and confusion from the sudden change and needed reassurance as well. Viktor knew the dog needed Yuuri, but he was in no condition to help him.

Viktor spent the next hour talking to Vicchan while he petted him. The sporadic sobs of grief that escaped the room tore at Viktor’s emotions, but he knew Yuuri needed this time to himself. He wanted nothing more to go to Yuuri, gather him in his arms and hold him as long as he needed.

Deciding it was time to call it a night since his helpers would be there by nine, he let the dogs out to use the bathroom one final time. After they took care of their business, he ushered them back inside and locked the house up. He walked down the short hallway and paused in front of Yuuri’s door, knocking gently. When there was no answer, he turned the knob gingerly and entered the room.

Yuuri was fast asleep, laying on his side with an arm outstretched. The soft light in the room accentuated the puffiness under his eyes from crying, the pink blotches on his cheeks from overwhelming emotion. Viktor sat in the chair near the bed and watched him sleep, hoping Yuuri wouldn’t be interrupted by nightmares. He was thinking of how to help him when he saw the scrap of paper Yuuri was clutching in his hand.

Gently peeling Yuuri’s fingers back, he removed the paper and unfolded it. The words were hastily
written in angry strokes from a pen, barely recognizable. When he read the lines, Viktor’s heart plummeted further.

_Yanked away_  
_Snatched from my grasp_  
_Reason for living_  
_Don’t know how to go on_

_Don’t know what to do_  
_Hurt so much that you’re gone_  
_Purpose rendered useless_  
_How?_

_Don’t know what to do!_  
_I feel so…_

Lost

Viktor lifted his head and looked at Yuuri, a million thoughts going through his mind. He knew he had to help him, be his strength. Yuuri needed his protector more now than ever before and Viktor was more than happy to step into the role. He knew the days ahead of them would be rocky but they would get through it together. Yuuri was his best friend and he’d do anything for him.

“Lean on me, Yuuri,” he whispered, reaching out to lightly caress his cheek, “I’ll always be here for you.”
Melancholia

Chapter Summary

In the days following the closure of Bound to Please, Yuuri's emotions are awry but he begins to take steps to start the recovery process.

Viktor smiled sadly, wishing Yuuri would look at him, acknowledge his presence. Though it was hard to support him while he was like this as he didn't know what to do, he vowed to keep trying. He stood and looked at Yuuri for several seconds before walking to the door, stopping when he heard Yuuri’s voice waver.

“Viktor?” he asked, barely above a whisper.

“Hmm?”

“Can you…” Yuuri said, choking as he began to cry, “Can you please stay here tonight? I don’t want to be alone right now.”

Chapter Notes

While the last chapter was hard to write and read, this one is rough but not as bad as the last. It's short, but I wanted to set the foundation of Yuuri’s decision to try to regain some semblance of his own normalcy.

Here are the notes:
1) While most people think depression is only extreme sadness, that's not the case. It can manifest itself as irritability and forgetfulness as well.
2) Kanashii Kokoro is Japanese for sad/sorrowful heart.
3) Prepodavatel is Russian for teacher.
4) The poem in this chapter is called Despair to Hope. It's written by Mayonaka_No_Tenshi. I strongly urge you to read her work. It's incredible.
5) Xanax and Ativan are rapid acting anti-anxiety medications in the benzodiazepines family. They have a lot of side effect and withdrawal from them can be horrible. I've been on them and hate them with a passion.

While this is the beginning of Yuuri's recovery, it will take a while. I know many of you will relate to it and hope I portray it accurately. I'm relying on my own experience, but each person reacts differently.

Thanks for reading and hope you enjoy this chapter.

As much as I wish I could, I don’t own Yuri!!! On Ice. This fic is not beta’d. While I truly appreciate the offers, I’m not currently looking for a beta.
You can follow me on tumblr. Stay up to date on latest chapters and story progress or just want to give a shout out! You guys are what drives me, and I so appreciate every one of you.

The night had been long and plagued with terrors, making him jolt awake. He scanned the unfamiliar surroundings while the nightmare settled back in, crying softly as reality hit hard. The depression and hopelessness seeped into his soul, leaving him wailing like he hadn’t since he had been in high school. Strong arms would envelop him most of the time but no words would comfort him. He welcomed the silence as nothing could make the situation better save for rewinding time.

When he woke up for the last time, the weather matched his mood. The soft rumbling of thunder could be heard over the tapping of rain on the roof. Viktor had told him the night before some of his classmates were going to help unload his belongings that morning but he wasn’t in the mood to help. He really didn’t care if he had anything. He just wanted his store.

It killed him to leave Bound to Please. It was not only his home but his solace. feeling safe there like nowhere he had before. He hated being separated from Mari as well. It was the first time since he was a child he’d been away from her and he was scared. She truly understood him and knew how to handle him when he was in this state. He only hoped Viktor could as well.

He didn’t look up when he heard the door open, the soft footfalls on the carpet reaching the bed moments later. He felt the mattress sink as Viktor sat next to him, heard his sad sigh. While he was thankful Viktor offered him a place to stay, he just wanted to go home.

“Yuuri,” Viktor said, resting his hand on his calf, “I made breakfast.”

“Not hungry,” Yuuri mumbled.

“I know,” he said, “but you haven’t eaten since yesterday morning. Can you try? I don’t want you getting sick.”

“Don’t care.”

“Please. At least a piece of toast,” Viktor pleaded, “I’ll leave you alone after that.”

“Fine,” he said, sitting up.

Viktor clasped his hand, squeezing slightly before rising from the bed and leaving the room. He knew he needed to take care of himself more than ever but it was so hard to care about anything. He wanted to disappear, wallow in his misery, huddle in the dark abyss he found himself.

Yuuri got up and dug through his bag, pulling out a couple bottles of medication and opening them, taking the pills he did every morning. He knew he would need to make an appointment with his psychiatrist soon to get a prescription for fast acting anti-anxiety medication. He didn’t like taking them as they affected his memory, but he knew it was a necessity at this point.

He dragged himself out of the room and walked into the kitchen, falling into a chair. Resting an elbow on the table, he rested his head in his hand and watched Viktor finish the preparations for their meal. Viktor’s shoulders were slumped as he stirred the eggs in a pan, Yuuri telling he was exhausted when he turned around and spooned them into a bowl on the table. He hated his melancholy affected him so much, but was touched he was willing to tolerate him during this dark time.
“Thanks,” Yuuri said, lifting his gaze to meet Viktor’s.

“For what?” he asked.

“Helping me,” Yuuri admitted, “I can’t tell you how this is going to affect me or how I’m going to act, but thanks for everything.”

“You’re my best friend, Yuuri,” Viktor stated, sitting at the table and resting his hand on Yuuri’s, “I’d do anything to help you.”

“I’m really scared,” he whispered, feeling his eyes fill with tears as images of the store came to mind.

“I know,” Viktor said softly, “I am too.”

A pounding sounded at the door and Viktor got up to answer it. He had emailed everyone that promised to help, asking them to come over earlier so he could feed them. Even though he was paying everyone, it was the least he could do. Students trickled in and Viktor decided to leave his door open instead of answering it each time someone arrived. When he heard a familiar voice from the living room, he chuckled and shook his head.

“Couldn’t even get dressed, Nikiforov?” Yuri asked.

“Long night, evil minion,” he replied, “Grab a plate and help yourself.”

Viktor handed a saucer with a couple pieces of toast to Yuuri and told him to eat what he could. He made a plate for himself and sat in the chair next to Yuuri. He cut a pancake into small pieces and took a bite, watching from the corner of his eye as Yuuri nibbled on his toast. Mari had told him Yuuri usually neglected to take care of basic necessities while he was in this state and it wouldn’t improve until he started counseling again. She warned Viktor he’d have to remind Yuuri of simple things like eating and showering, telling him to ask him about his medicine a few times a day as well.

“This tastes like sawdust,” Yuuri complained, dropping the toast onto the saucer.

“Can you finish that piece?” Viktor asked when he saw Yuuri had only taken a couple bites.

“I don’t think so,” he said.

“Try?” Viktor asked, resting his hand on Yuuri’s again.

“I said no!” he shouted, not aware of the silence when the others stopped talking and stared at him, “What are you? My mother?”

“It’s alright, Yuuri,” Viktor said, “We can try lunch later.”

“I’m sorry,” he mumbled, standing up, “I just can’t. I’m going back to the guest room. Please leave me alone.”

He watched Yuuri retreat to his room, jumping when the door slammed minutes later. Though Mari had warned him Yuuri’s behavior would be unpredictable, it shocked him to experience it first-hand. He smiled at the others and told them to continue eating since he had to return the truck by noon.

Viktor finished eating and placed his plate in the sink, telling his helpers he’d be back in a few minutes. Going to his room, he shut the door behind him, smiling when he saw Makkachin and Vicchan sleeping on his bed. He chose a pair of cargo shorts and a t-shirt since it was warm and
muggy that day. While he dressed, Viktor thought to himself, thinking he hoped he would be able to support Yuuri during this dark time.

It didn’t take long to bring Yuuri’s belongings into Viktor’s house. Yuri had grumbled about the boxes being heavy and asked if he had packed every book in the store. Viktor had laughed at him but thought to himself he hoped it would distract Yuuri. When the last box was stacked in Viktor’s living room, he dug his wallet out of his shorts and paid his helpers. When Yuri refused, Viktor was shocked.

“Keep it, man,” he said, shoving the bills back into Viktor’s hands, “Genius needed help, so we helped him.”

“Do something nice for him,” Otabek said, giving Viktor the money back, “He needs it.”

“Thanks, guys,” Viktor said, smiling at them, “I appreciate it. Plisetsky, I take back every bad thing I’ve said about you.”

“Whatever,” he grumbled, “I’m sure it will change next semester.”

“You’re going to grace me with your presence yet again?” Viktor asked, raising a brow.

“Yeah, lucky me, eh?” Yuri said, “Who would have thought the poetry class counted as an elective. Fucking blows.”

Viktor laughed and waved as they left. He shut the door and looked at his crowded living room. He knew Yuuri wouldn’t be up to unpacking and he was too tired to start. He called the dogs and let them outside, hoping they’d take care of their business quickly since the rain had begun to fall harder. The dogs liked the rain as much as he did and relieved themselves before running back to the porch. Viktor wiped their paws off on the mat, rushing to his room to shut the door before they could hop on his bed. Walking down the hall, he knocked on the door to the guest room before opening it.

“Yuuri, I have to take the van back. Do you need anything before I leave?” Viktor asked.

“No.”

“Is there anything you’d like me to pick up?” he asked.

“No.”

“Would you like to come along?” Viktor asked.

“I said no,” Yuuri said, “Go away.”

“Alright. Text me if you change your mind.”

Viktor shut the door, sighed and prayed things would change soon.
The day slowly turned to night and Viktor found himself missing Yuuri horribly. He thought back to their camping trip before things took a terrible turn. Yuuri had been happy and they’d grown closer. He closed his eyes and thought about Yuuri’s warmth in his arms. Though he had held Yuuri most of the previous night, it wasn’t the same. He desperately wanted things the way they were, but he knew they would take time.

Mari had texted him throughout the day to inquire about her brother. Viktor was honest with her, told her Yuuri wasn’t eating and was very irritable. She reminded him this was normal in his depressive state and encouraged him to keep trying.

Viktor knew he needed to distract himself so he grabbed his laptop from the table and turned it on. While he waited for it to start up, he got up and went to the kitchen to make a few sandwiches. Yuuri hadn’t eaten since breakfast so he made one for him, placing it on a saucer and going to the guest room. He knocked before entering and told Yuuri he made him something to eat. Yuuri responded by rolling over so his back was facing him. Viktor’s heart broke a little more.

He returned to the living room and picked his laptop up, typing in the address to pull up his blog. He had started the project before he had met Yuuri and had neglected it when he came into his life. He checked his messages and replied to them, apologizing for taking so long and thanking the writers for the submissions. He spent the next few hours reading the pieces of poetry recommended to him, writing posts about each one with a critique and his opinion of them. The variety of pieces he read were all over the place and while he wanted to be fair and polite, some were horrible. He thought about how happy he was he made a pseudonym for his blog when he created it since he didn’t want to be traced. While the had a link to his personal blog, it was buried within several pages it rarely received any hits.

Viktor scoured his usual haunts for new poetry to review and was ecstatic when he saw one of his favorite poets had posted a new piece that afternoon. He had been following them for almost two years and had praised their work on his blog each time they wrote something new. When he read this one, his heart sank.

\begin{quote}
Darkness dawns only to more darkness
Shadows cast across spaces equally lightless
A dark tunnel of endless limbo
Empty of the promised glow
An ocean of black waves crashing against equally black stone
Silent, pitch stained memories, drifting alone
Eyes closed, trying to imagine the barest flicker
There’s nothing
\end{quote}

After he finished the last line, he scrolled down to the notes and frowned. The author typically left a reason why they wrote a specific piece but this time there was only a line telling the reader they’d finish it later. He gathered his thoughts and figured out what he wanted to say in his review, switching tabs and started to type. The critique was positive but it lacked the enthusiasm he usually had for the author. He ended the review by saying this was still a work in progress and he’d share the rest as it became available. He copied and pasted the link, saving it before closing the laptop.

Viktor wanted to check on Yuuri one last time before he retired for the night. He knocked on the door and opened it, surprised Yuuri was still awake. The soft lamp light cast shadows onto the walls and fell onto Yuuri’s face, Viktor thinking he looked beyond beautiful. Looking to the nightstand, he frowned when he saw the untouched sandwich. He sat in the chair near the bed, resting his elbows...
on his knees and pressing his forefingers against his lips.

“Did you take your medicine?” he asked.

“Yeah,” Yuuri replied, Viktor telling he had been crying as his voice was rough.

“I’m going to bed,” Viktor said, “Do you need anything before I call it a night?”

“No.”

“Ok. I hope you sleep better tonight,” he said.

“I doubt it.”

Viktor smiled sadly, wishing Yuuri would look at him, acknowledge his presence. Though it was hard to support him while he was like this as he didn’t know what to do, he vowed to keep trying. He stood and looked at Yuuri for several seconds before walking to the door, stopping when he heard Yuuri’s voice waver.

“Viktor?” he asked, barely above a whisper.

“Hmm?”

“Can you…” Yuuri said, choking as he began to cry, “Can you please stay here tonight? I don’t want to be alone right now.”

Viktor made his way back to the bed, walking around the other side and climbing onto the mattress. He was touched Yuuri was trying to reach out through the thick fog he was living in, so proud he was attempting to make progress. Viktor couldn’t imagine how hard it must be for him, but he knew he’d be there every step of the way.

Yuuri flinched when he felt Viktor’s arms envelop him, pulling him closer until his head rested against his chest. He raised his arms and put his hands against the muscles of Viktor’s upper body, clenching his hands into fists. Emotion began to overtake him, gasping several times before sobbing loudly. He had lost count the number of times he had been reduced to tears and he was worn out mentally and physically. Feeling a hand rub his back, he pressed his forehead against Viktor chest and squeezed his eyes shut as he continued to cry. He felt weak, lost and hopeless. Thinking nothing would get better, he fell into a fitful sleep.

The next few days weren’t much better for Yuuri. He had come out of the guest room and spent hours on the couch, staring at nothing while he thought about the predicament he was in. Viktor had gone to the university for a few hours each day to finalize his class list and lesson plans for the summer semester. While he missed him, Yuuri was relieved to have the time to himself.

He petted Vicchan absently while surfing the web. He had ignoring him for a couple of days and felt horrible. Vicchan had been his constant companion through thick and thin, not deserving the treatment Yuuri had given him. Though he was feeling dead inside, he owed it to Vicchan to give him love as he was undertaking this change with him.

Yuuri checked his email and was surprised he had a message waiting for him on a writing website he
belonged to. He had many followers that enjoyed his work but never received private messages. He clicked the link and frowned when he didn’t recognize the username. Reading the message, he felt tears fill his eyes by the time he finished.

Dear Kanashii Kokoro,

I read your latest piece and it filled my heart with sorrow. I’m guessing you’re going through a rough patch since your words are dark. It resonated with me as my best friend is having a terrible time with an unexpected event as well. My heart hurts for you as well. I’ve been following your work for quite a while now and feel each line you write. I hope I’ll be able to see sunshine in your words soon.

Best wishes,

Prepodavatel

He inhaled deeply as he tried to fight the sadness in him. He was amazed a stranger saw through his words and figured out he was depressed. It felt good that not only did he have the support from Viktor, he had one of his followers rooting for him as well. He wanted to reply but didn’t have the words to do so, quickly typing in another web address and hitting enter.

The website for his psychiatrist loaded and Yuuri clicked on the link to make an appointment. He wasn’t in the mood to deal with him, but he knew it was necessary. He scrolled through the available appointments for that week but was dismayed when there wasn’t an available slot. Clicking on the nurse practitioner’s name, he saw she had an appointment the next day and quickly filled out his information to reserve it. Knowing he was forgetful when he had a depressive episode, he set a reminder on his calendar. Since he had his phone in hand, he went through his contacts until he found the number for his psychologist. The receptionist answered and greeted him when he told her his name. He liked the older woman and chatted with her each time he went in but wasn’t in the mood to talk. His anxiety was eased when he found out his doctor had an opening that afternoon and quickly scheduled the slot. He didn’t know how useful the session would be, but he knew he had to start somewhere. Viktor and Mari had begun to hound him about setting up appointments to see his psychologist and he knew this was the best way to get them off his back.

Yuuri hung up the phone after thanking the receptionist and retreated to his room. He hadn’t showered in days and knew he needed one before he left. He dug through a box Viktor had brought in earlier that day and grabbed some clothes before going into the bathroom. He undressed and turned the water on, searching for a large towel. He hadn’t thought to ask Mari to pack one of his since he was so numb when they grabbed his belongings. He hated standard towels since they reminded him of how heavy he was when they wouldn’t cover his body. Not finding one, his mood plummeted even further.

He showered quickly and got dressed, brushing his hair and teeth before going back to his room to grab the key Viktor gave him. He shoved it in his pocket, walked out of the house and locked the door. Sighing deeply, he hoped the outing would prove worthy as he walked to his car.

“Yuuri!” Viktor said loudly as he laid his keys on the bookcase near the door, “I’m back.”

He was greeted by silence.
Viktor frowned and went to Yuuri’s room, surprised he wasn’t lying in bed like he had been for the past few days. He grew anxious as he thought about Yuuri’s state of mind. He didn’t know where Yuuri had gone and was concerned it might pull him deeper into depression. He pulled his phone out of his pocket and began to type out a message but heard the front door open. Walking to the living room, he smiled when he saw Yuuri.

“Hi,” he said.

“Hey. Sorry I didn’t leave a note or text you,” Yuuri apologized, “I didn’t think about it.”

“It’s alright,” Viktor said, “Where did you go?”

“I went to see my psychologist. I figured it might do some good, maybe center me so I can start focusing on getting better,” he stated.

“Did it help?” Viktor asked.

“Yeah, it did,” Yuuri said, smiling weakly, “It’s going to take some time and I still feel like things are hopeless, but it’s a beginning. I have an appointment with my psychiatrist tomorrow.”

“Do you think they’ll change your medication?” Viktor asked.

“Not sure, but I need a temporary prescription for Xanax or Ativan,” he admitted, “I’m going to go crazy if I don’t.”

“Yuuri?”

“Hmm?”

“Whatever you need, I’m here for you,” Viktor confessed, “If you need to talk, if you need a shoulder to cry on, if you need to yell at someone. I don’t care what time it is, I’m here.”

“I’m sorry you have to deal with this,” Yuuri said, locking gazes with him.

“Don’t be,” Viktor said, giving him a reassuring smile, “We’ll get through this together. I’ll support you all the way. I know you have a lot of work ahead of you and I’ll be there for you.”

“Thank you, Viktor,” he said, “I really appreciate it. I’m hoping we can get the situation resolved with the shop soon so I can get out of your hair. I just don’t know how we’re going to afford it. We don’t have an income now.”

“Yuuri,” Viktor said, walking to him and taking his hand, feeling the gentle flow of electricity between them he hadn’t felt in a while. “You’re welcome to stay here as long as you need, even if it takes a year or longer.”

“Do you know what I need right now?” he whispered, emotion filling him again when he heard Viktor’s words.

“What’s that?”

“A hug. I need to be told everything will be alright eventually,” Yuuri admitted.

Viktor tugged on Yuuri’s hand and pulled him against him, winding a hand behind him to rest on his back while cradling Yuuri’s head. He felt him inhale shakily, knowing Yuuri was close to tears. He hurt for him but was so proud Yuuri had taken this step in his recovery. Yuuri hadn’t needed the prodding Mari warned him about. He closed his eyes and tightened his grip, holding Yuuri for
several minutes before he pulled away. When Yuuri smiled softly at him and it touched his eyes, Viktor’s heart melted as it was the first time he saw a glimmer of hope in Yuuri since that weekend.

“Thank you,” he said.

“Anytime, Yuuri,” Viktor said, “I’m here for you always. Nothing is going to change that.”
Existing

Chapter Summary

Yuuri's struggle with depression continues after the temporary closing of Bound to Please, leaving him with good and bad days.

“Yuuri, I know you don’t want to be bothered but you need to listen to me,” Mari said, sitting on the edge of the bed and looking at his back, “I know your medication is being adjusted and you’re in therapy. I’m proud of you for that, but you’re going to have to work harder. I know you’re going to have rough days, but it’s time to fight through it. We’re on the verge of losing everything, Yuuri. It’s time for you to help and get our store back. I’m sure your psychologist will yell at me for this, but fake it until you make it. Pull yourself up and do something. We’re all here for you and will back you up, but laying her isn’t going to help a damn thing.”

“Go away,” Yuuri mumbled, rolling onto his stomach and burying his face in the pillow.

Chapter Notes

This chapter has been a long time coming and will probably reek of depression and desperation as that is where I am right now. I STRONGLY URGE you to read this as this describes what's going on and if I don't update as frequent. It's time to step back and take care of me to get back where I was.

But as far as this chapter goes, this is a brief glimpse of the struggle with depression and how one day is great yet another is horrible. It shows the dos and don'ts as far as support goes. It's also Viktor helping Yuuri in a positive yet constructive way that may help him achieve his goal.

Hope you like this chapter. I can't say when I'll be updating next but know I AM NOT GIVING UP ON ANY OF MY WORKS! I love them too much.

Thanks for reading.

As much as I wish I could, I don’t own Yuri!!! On Ice.
This fic is not beta’d.
While I truly appreciate the offers, I’m not currently looking for a beta.

You can follow me on tumblr. Stay up to date on latest chapters and story progress or just want to give a shout out! You guys are what drives me, and I so appreciate every one of you.
The door creaked open slowly and he closed his eyes, just wanting to be alone in the darkness. He was having a bad day and didn’t want anyone intruding on his solitude. He knew Viktor understood and was great about giving him his space, but always seem to know when the thoughts turned demeaning or destructive. Viktor would be there within minutes, asking softly if he wanted to talk about it. At times he did, opening up while Viktor listened for hours on end. Other times he wanted silence and Viktor gave him that as well, engrossing himself in a book or grading papers. Viktor’s presence was all he needed.

He was in the frame of mind that any intrusion rankled every cell of his body and made him extremely hostile.

“Yuuri,” Phichit said quietly as he came into the room, “It’s First Summer today. Mari, Minako, Minami and I are going. We were wondering if you’d like to join us.”

“No,” Yuuri said, rolling over so his back was facing his best friend.

“You always looked forward to First Summer. The free food, the local musicians, the colors and sounds. This is our thing,” he said.

“I said no!” Yuuri yelled as he turned around, glaring at his friend, “Does it look like I’m in the mood to go out and party? Am I supposed to just forget about everything that’s going on? Just… just go away, Phichit. I want to be left alone.”

Phichit nodded and left without a word. He sat in an armchair and sighed when he saw all eyes were on him. While most were expectant, Viktor’s were sympathetic. He’d been living with Yuuri for two months now and while he had his good days, today was one of the worst he’d experienced since Bound to Please closed. He had told Viktor the night before they were no closer to repairing the building when the inspector shut it down and their savings were dwindling. Yuuri feared at this point, his dream would be lost forever.

“Viktor,” Mari said, waiting for him to look at her, “I got a notice from the city the other day. If we don’t make repairs to the building within six months from the notice date, they are going to put the building on the market.”

“You’ll lose everything,” he whispered, “Yuuri will lose everything. What can we do?”

“I don’t know,” Mari said, “No one is willing to take the risk and give me a loan. I don’t have any stocks to cash in. Mom and Dad aren’t in the situation to help. I really don’t know.”

“It’s time to think out of the box,” Viktor said, sighing.

“Yes, and I’ve never been good at that,” Mari said, rising from the couch and picking up a book, “Time he and I had a heart to heart.”

She sighed deeply before walking to Yuuri’s room, opening the door and cringing when she was plunged into darkness. She’d never seen Yuuri this deep in depression and it hurt. She couldn’t imagine what he was going through, but he needed to break free from this and help save the shop.

“Yuuri, I know you don’t want to be bothered but you need to listen to me,” Mari said, sitting on the edge of the bed and looking at his back, “I know your medication is being adjusted and you’re in therapy. I’m proud of you for that, but you’re going to have to work harder. I know you’re going to have rough days, but it’s time to fight through it. We’re on the verge of losing everything, Yuuri. It’s time for you to help and get our store back. I’m sure your psychologist will yell at me for this,
but fake it until you make it. Pull yourself up and do something. We’re all here for you and will back you up, but laying here isn’t going to help a damn thing.”

“Go away,” he mumbled, rolling onto his stomach and burying his face in the pillow.

“Fine,” she said, standing up and dropping the book on the mattress, “Minako said this is for you.”

She left the room, closing the door behind her. Yuuri breathed heavily until tears streamed down his eyes. He didn’t need the reminder from his sister of the predicament they were in. He didn’t need to be told if he didn’t do something their failure was on him. He needed to be left alone.

He heard voices from the living room speak quietly for several minutes before the outer door closed. Yipping from the dogs and the pleasant voice that talked over them traveled through the house until the back door opened, Viktor taking them out to run around. Makkachin and Vicchan hadn’t been walked much recently so Viktor chose to play ball with them in the backyard a couple times a day. Though Yuuri told him he’d be alright while Viktor to walk them around the park, he told Yuuri it didn’t feel right without him.

Yuuri picked up the book Mari left on the bed and turned the small lamp beside him on. It was one of the children’s books Minako had hoped to sell at the shop, but Fate had dealt a terrible hand to him. He flipped it open to the first page and saw a little green bird with its wings over its face, tears dripping to the ground. He could sympathize with the bird, wanting to bury himself and cry until things became better. He turned the pages and felt for the bird’s situation. He had fallen out of the nest and was trying to find his mother. Each family he passed was kind to him and while his hopes soared they were his family, they came crashing further down when he was told they weren’t, the animals explaining the differences to him. He was about to give up and curl up in a nook in the dirt when he heard birdsong similar to his. Peeking out above the outcrop, he saw birds with the same green feathers as him and black shiny feet that matched his. Deciding to give it one last try, he walked slowly to the family and tweeted to get their attention. When he asked if they were his family, the mother bird rushed to him and enfolded him in her wings. She told him she had been searching high and low from the moment she realized he was missing from the nest. She had been fearful she’d never see him again, but was joyous and thankful to Mother Nature for reuniting her with her baby.

Smiling softly when he turned the last page, he realized there was an inscription at the end, he read Minako’s heavy handwriting.

Yuuri,

While I realize you are not lost from family, you are lost from yourself. One of the most important pieces of your life has been taken from you and it’s hurt you terribly. Right now, you’re the baby bird crying for things to change. You’ve taken the first steps, but keep looking. Don’t give up, Yuuri. You have family and friends that love you and would do anything for you. You’re in a safe place, especially with Viktor. I can’t imagine a better environment for you to be in at the moment. Keep your eyes open, Yuuri, keep listening. It will all fall into place.

Watch, listen.

Minako
“Was it good?” Viktor asked from the doorway.

“Yeah,” Yuuri said, giving him a weak smile, “It was. I understand that I’m going to have good and bad days, but why do they have to hurt so much?”

“I don’t know, Yuuri,” he admitted, sitting on the edge of the bed, “Somedays you’ll wake up feeling alright, other days you feel like the world is crushing you. You’ll never know what the day holds until you’re faced with it. That’s why I don’t mind if we don’t plan our days.”

“Thanks,” Yuuri said, laying back down, “No one else has ever gotten that. They don’t understand I need time to recharge or just be. I feel like I’m just existing at this point.”

“Existing is better than floundering,” Viktor stated.

“Yeah, but it doesn’t feel much different.”

“Yuuri, I can tell you’re making progress,” he said, “It’s slow, but it’s there. If anyone thinks you can do it overnight or you can change your frame of mind with the snap of your fingers, they’re an idiot. Do what you need to do to help you. As long as it doesn’t harm you, I’m with you every step of the way.”

“Viktor?” Yuuri asked.

“Hmm?”

“Can we stay here the rest of the night?” Yuuri asked, looking at the sheet laying on his lap, “In the room? I don’t want to move, but I don’t want to be alone. I don’t want to talk, but your presence and your strength helps.”

“Sure,” Viktor said, smiling softly, “Do you mind if I get some papers and a book?”

“Not at all,” he said, laying on his side and shutting his eyes.

Viktor left the room and grabbed a folder with essays he’d been neglecting to grade along with a book of Chinese literature. He wasn’t looking forward to neither, but they had to be done. When he returned to the room, he smiled when he heard Yuuri’s soft, even breathing, knowing he had fallen asleep. He knew the depression Yuuri was experiencing drained him horribly, adding to the symptoms of depression themselves leaving him sleeping more than he was awake.

Opening the folder and pulling the first essay out, Viktor spent the next few hours grading them until he fell asleep.

The sun was shining through the heavy curtains when Yuuri woke. He blinked his eyes and took a quick mental inventory, relieved he wasn’t feeling as hopeless as the day before. His mind was assaulted within minutes of what to do with the bookstore, how to get the repairs and how to get money to fix it. His mood fell slightly, but he wanted to be cognizant enough to come up with some ideas to help.

He rolled over and saw Viktor sleeping next to him. This had become a habit of his, wanting to be there for Yuuri on his worst days. Yuuri had cried so many tears into Viktor’s chest he’d lost count,
been held by Viktor’s strong arms for hours on end. He hated that Viktor had to see him this way, but was relieved he wanted to help him in his time of need. It made his feelings for Viktor deepen.

“Hey,” Yuuri whispered, shaking Viktor’s shoulder gently as he removed the papers from his chest.

“Huh? What time is it?” Viktor said, voice rough from sleep.

“Almost seven,” he said, “Don’t you have class today?”

“Yeah, and I need to get there really early. Mila is taking the summer off so I have to put everything together for my classes plus research,” Viktor groaned, covering his eyes with his hands, “I don’t like leaving you here alone that long.”

“I’ll be ok,” Yuuri said, though his heart was frantic, thinking if he had a setback he’d be lost in terrible thoughts until Viktor returned, “How long do you think you’ll be gone?”

“Probably nine or ten at night,” he said, watching Yuuri’s face fall in desperation.

“I’ll be ok,” Yuuri said with false bravado, though his voice cracked and betrayed him, “The dogs and I will go to the park and watch lots of movies. Maybe I’ll read a few books a day.”

Viktor went into the kitchen and made a simple breakfast of hash browns and sausage, wondering how he could help bolster Yuuri’s frame of mind yet keep him close. As he stirred the hash browns, his mind kept going back to Mila being gone, knowing her departure this summer was what created this predicament.

“Ah ha!” Viktor stated loudly, apologizing to Yuuri when he jumped, “I have the perfect idea!”

“Um, ok,” he said.

“Mila is gone for the summer,” Viktor reiterated, watching Yuuri nod, “I need an assistant. You need a distraction and something that might help you get closer to your goal of fixing Bound to Please.”

“I don’t follow,” Yuuri said.

“I’ll talk with the department head about hiring you until we can reopen Bound to Please,” Viktor stated, watching Yuuri’s eyes widen, “You’ll learn new things, I won’t be stuck at school for twelve hours, we can have lunch together every day, I can slip away to my office when I need a Yuuri fix.”

“A Yuuri fix?” he asked, genuinely laughing for the first time in weeks.

“Yes, but I got you to laugh,” Viktor said, winking at him, “First day starts today, so go take a shower and get ready. No offense, but you’re a little ripe.”

“Hey!” Yuuri yelled, tossing an accent pillow into the kitchen and missing Viktor by a longshot.

Viktor spooned breakfast onto their plates and hoped his idea would come to fruition. Celestino was an easygoing man but liked to keep their assistants to graduate students. Since most of their help had left for the summer, Viktor thought this was a perfect opportunity to get Yuuri hired into the department temporarily.

Yuuri showered quickly and dressed in his usual outfit he’d wear at the bookstore, Viktor smiling as it brought back memories of the first time he’d met him. They ate breakfast, Yuuri asking several questions about what he was teaching that semester. Viktor told him he had two classes that
summer. One was a basic English composition course that bored him to death but the other was a Slavic and Russian literature class. It was small but appealed to Viktor’s interests and helped brush up on the topic before going on his sabbatical that fall.

“Viktor, what if the department head doesn’t go for this idea?” Yuuri asked, picking at a piece of bacon.

“I can’t say it’s a done deal, but knowing Celestino I would stay the chances are good.”

They finished their breakfast, washed the few dishes and set them in the drainer to dry. When Yuuri went to let the dogs out for the day, Viktor told him to get the leashes so they could walk them to campus. When Yuuri stammered at the idea, Viktor told him there was practically no traffic at the campus and no one in the department minded Makkachin since he was well behaved. Since Vicchan had better manners than Makkachin, he’d become the department darling. Viktor told him the only stipulation was they’d need to be taken outside every hour. Viktor packed his messenger bag, told Yuuri to bring everything he would need for the day and out the door they went.

Celestino was a hard sell but finally relented on hiring Yuuri temporarily. When Viktor explained it would help the department during the summer semester along with hasten the re-opening of Bound to Please, Celestino signed off on the idea and gave Viktor the necessary paperwork. He told Viktor that since he and Yuuri were friends, Celestino would be Yuuri’s immediate boss. He was willing to work around Yuuri’s psychiatry and counseling appointments as long as it didn’t affect his work. When Viktor told him he’d helped Mila one day during crunch time last semester, Celestino had the utmost confidence in Yuuri’s work.

“Well, do you want the good news or the really good news?” Viktor asked when he returned to his office, falling into his chair and propping his feet on the covered desk.

“How about the good news?” Yuuri said.

“You’re hired until September 1,” Viktor said, smiling at him.

“That’s good,” he said, sighing deeply, “What’s the very good news?”

“Possibility of your employment being extended until Bound to Please re-opens,” Viktor said, grinning when Yuuri’s eyes grew, “You haven’t seen the very very good news yet.”

Viktor handed him a stack of papers to fill out and handed him a pen. It was the typical employment packet the university and federal government required before anyone could work. Yuuri had brought along his visa and Viktor took it to the break room to get a copy to attach to the packet. When he returned to his office, Yuuri was staring at a page he was holding, mouth open.

“What’s wrong?” Viktor asked.

“This can’t be right,” Yuuri said, handing the paper to Viktor.

When Viktor scanned the page, he realized it was the salary information Celestino filled in before giving Viktor the packet. He didn’t realize Celestino was going to pay Yuuri that much, but knew he must have a reason.
“This is too much, Viktor,” Yuuri said, “Seventeen an hour?”

“Want me to make sure?” Viktor asked, leaving the office when Yuuri nodded.

Viktor walked down the short hallway and knocked on Celestino’s door, sitting in a chair when the man waved him in. He waited for him to finish a phone call, reading the titles of books stacked on his desk. Looking up when Celestino said his goodbyes, he turned to Viktor.

“Yes?” he asked.

“About Yuuri’s salary,” Viktor said, “He’s wondering if you made a mistake.”

“No, I did not,” Celestino said.

“Are you sure?” Viktor asked.

“Yes, Viktor. What I wrote on his hiring summary is what the department is paying him.”

“We don’t pay grad students half that,” Viktor stated.

“I am aware of that, but grad students don’t own one of my favorite secondhand bookstores that is on the verge of becoming a memory,” Celestino said, smiling, “Please don’t tell the young man.”

“Secret is safe with me, sir,” Viktor said, grinning at him.

Viktor returned to his office and sat in his chair, bracing himself when Makkachin jumped on his lap. Vicchan had found a cozy spot in the corner with an old sheet to sleep. Yuuri was almost finished with his paperwork and signed his name one final time before looking up at Viktor.

“Was it a mistake?” Yuuri asked.

“Nope, not a mistake. Though you may have to do some work for other professors as well,” Viktor explained.

“I don’t mind,” Yuuri said, “While this is hard for me to do, hard to get out, it feels good getting out and doing something that might help bring Bound to Please back. It will feel nice helping pay for my share of things at your house also.”

“Yeah, we’ll talk about that later, ok?” Viktor stated, having no intention of Yuuri helping financially, “Shall we get to work, assistant?”

“In a minute,” Yuuri said, standing up, “Can you stand up for a minute?”

Viktor pushed Makkachin off his lap gently and rose from the chair, inhaling sharply when he felt one of Yuuri’s arms over his shoulder and hand rest on the back of his neck, the other arm wrap around his waist. Yuuri pulled him closer and rested his head on Viktor’s shoulder, hugging him. Viktor smiled and enveloped Yuuri in a sweet hug, placing his chin on the top of Yuuri’s head and breathing deeply.

“Thank you,” Yuuri whispered, “I couldn’t have done any of this without your support.”

“You’ve done all the work, Yuuri,” Viktor said, “I was just here.”

“But you don’t know how important this is to my recovery. I can’t ask for a better friend,” Yuuri said, lifting his head and lightly brushing his lips against Viktor’s cheek, “From the bottom of my heart, thank you so much.”
Yuuri pulled away from Viktor’s embrace and sat on the couch, perusing the books in front of him. Viktor mentioned he had to get to class, but would like Yuuri to go to the library and pull a list of titles to have delivered to his office along with sixty copies of a paper he handed him. Yuuri accepted with a smile and placed his bag on the couch, tilting his head when he saw the corner of his laptop peek out. He had been working on the second stanza of his poem a few days earlier and had meant to post it on his blog, but darkness overwhelmed him and he never got around to it. Reading it again for errors, he clicked the submit button, waited for confirmation of it posting and shut down his laptop before getting to work.

Shadows rise in pressing black tides

Buoyed by the swell, drowned again by the waves

A distant invisible beach, still hidden beyond the dark horizon

The struggle for another breath seems futile, a search for hope where there is none

Pushed by a current, but seeming no closer to the shore

Alone, lost, and empty. Searching, longing, for something more

One more gasping breath, one more glance to the empty, black sky

Then, finally, something to catch the eye

A streak of silver, sweeping glow,

leading home
Change in Plans

Chapter Summary

With the Fourth of July approaching, plans for Yuuri’s and Viktor’s holiday change.

“Phichit called when you were taking a nap earlier. He wants to know if we’d like to hang out downtown on the Fourth. Big festivities, free food, face painting, fireworks.”

“I’ll think about it,” Yuuri said quietly, feeling sullen.

“We don’t have to if you don’t want to,” Viktor said, immediately catching Yuuri’s change in mood.

“It’s not that,” he said, “Every Fourth since the store has been open, I’d read patriotic books every thirty minutes to the kids. I can’t do that this year.”

“Oh,” Viktor said.

“Let’s see how I’m doing on Tuesday. Tentatively let’s say yes, but we’ll see.”

“Sounds like a plan,” Viktor said.

Chapter Notes

I actually got this chapter finished two days earlier than I thought, but when the idea came together I knew I wanted to get it out in time for The Fourth. Tomorrow is a holiday in America. It is supposed to celebrate our independence as a nation, but it's pretty much a holiday for food, alcohol and fireworks. People get the day off and congregate in huge areas for a fifteen minute show of fireworks. Me, I choose to stay home and listen to music loudly so I don't hear the booms of the fireworks.

Only note I can think of is the stanza of the poem is from the ongoing poem from Mayonaka no-Tenshi. As the stanzas grow more hopeful, so does the approaching confession for our favorite pair. We are getting so close I can almost taste it.

Hope you enjoy this chapter and thanks for your patience and reading.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

As much as I wish I could, I don’t own Yuri!!! On Ice.
This fic is not beta’d.
While I truly appreciate the offers, I’m not currently looking for a beta.
He opened the door to the room, hearing the lightly accented voice addressing his class. Closing the door until it clicked quietly, he turned the corner and leaned against the wall. When Viktor saw him, he smiled before turning back to his student.

“Your assignment for Monday is a short paper convincing me, as a foreigner, why I should want to celebrate the Fourth of July. If you mention beer that’s an automatic ten points deducted. Beer pong is ok though. Beer pong will get you an extra five. Recipes are good! Nothing with pickles though. I’ll toss your paper in the trash,” Viktor explained, “Any questions? Good. Be gone, minions! Until Monday.”

Viktor said goodbye to each student as they left the room. Yuuri loved watching him interact with his class and found himself missing the class he’d taken this past spring. He wished he could join one this summer, but he wasn’t mentally stable yet to undertake a commitment like that. While the past month had been easier on him with therapy and adjustment to his medication, he still had his off days where he laid in bed and cried most of the day. He hated missing work as he knew the English department needed the help, but Viktor understood. He’d stay on campus only for classes that day before rushing home and spending the evening with Yuuri. Most of their time together was silence, Yuuri curled on his side facing Viktor while Viktor read a book or told him about his day. Yuuri didn’t care what Viktor talked about, his soothing voice was enough to calm him until the next bout of anxiety overtook him. They had been growing few and far between recently and for that he was grateful.

“Hey,” Viktor said, grinning and patting the top of the desk next to him, “Didn’t think you’d meet me here.”

“JJ came by early,” Yuuri explained, hopping onto the desk and smiling at him, “You did mention you wanted to have lunch after this class. How about beer with pickles?”

“You’re now officially grossing me out,” Viktor said, sticking his tongue out and scrunching his face, enjoying Yuuri’s melodic laughter, “Where would you like to go?”

“Doesn’t matter,” he said, looking away when Viktor frowned at him.

“You need to eat,” Viktor said softly.

“I know. It’s just so hard. I’m trying not to think about everything but the anxiety makes me nauseous,” Yuuri explained.

“Want to try that new Italian place?” he asked, “Pasta might ease your stomach.”

Yuuri nodded and smiled, touched Viktor always had an idea to help any mood he was in. It had been a trying month for both. Yuuri’s outburst weren’t as frequent and he thanked Viktor for putting up with him, but they still happened at times. When Yuuri apologized, Viktor told him he knew it wasn’t really him but the doubt and uncertainty shining through. He’d give him a reassuring hug and then his space if Yuuri needed it. More often than not, Yuuri asked to sit quietly while they each read a book or if they could watch a movie together. Yuuri was at the point he didn’t want to be alone lest his fears overtake his thoughts again. The nights by himself were the worst and his mind played tricks on him for hours on end.
Viktor packed his briefcase and slung it over his shoulder, gesturing for Yuuri to go first. They walked across campus since the restaurant was on the other side. Campus was practically empty since it was summer session and Yuuri’s nerves were incredibly grateful for it. He knew if it was swarming with full capacity, in his current state of mind he wouldn’t be able to handle it.

Yuuri was glad JJ had come in early so he would have more time to spend with Viktor at lunch. He had a counseling appointment right after their outing and would be gone for almost two hours before returning to the office. Viktor had a late class that day and Yuuri offered to work until it ended. While Viktor insisted he relax after his sessions and do what made him feel better, Yuuri liked the distraction of the mindless work.

They were seated quickly and perused the menus before the server came by asking what they would like to drink and if they would like an appetizer. Yuuri asked for water with lemon while Viktor wanted a cola. Though he wanted to try the mozzarella sticks, Viktor asked for a basket of bread since Yuuri was appearing uneasy. Viktor remained silent and watched Yuuri, knowing he was a bundle of nerves before his counseling appointments. It brought up feelings he didn’t want to deal with but needed to be addressed. Yuuri knew he’d have to sort them out before things got better, but he liked to bury his problems and forget they ever happened.

“I don’t want to do this, Viktor,” he said quietly, playing with the paper band around his silverware.

“I know, but it will make you better,” Viktor said, “Do you know what you want to discuss today?”

“We’re going to start with mindfulness exercises and then discuss ways Mari and I might be able to repair the store. She only wants to spend fifteen minutes tops on that. Then she wants to talk about how to handle stressful situations in a constructive manner,” Yuuri explained, “I just want to bury them.”

“They’ll come back to haunt you,” Viktor stated, “It will be so much worse when they do.”

“I know, but I don’t know if I can do this,” he said, giving Viktor an anguished look, “I’m not strong enough.”

“Yuuri,” Viktor said, taking his hand and lacing their fingers together, “You’re one of the strongest people I know. You got up and got your appointments scheduled. You’ve been following them like you need to. You’re working and saving every penny you can to fix Bound to Please. That takes a lot of strength.”

“I still think you should let me pay my share for living with you,” Yuuri grumbled, thanking the server when he returned with their drinks and bread.

“Absolutely not,” he retorted, “You have a goal and that’s more important than giving me a couple bucks for beer and toilet paper.”

“You don’t buy beer,” Yuuri deadpanned.

“See, don’t need it,” he said, smiling when Yuuri laughed.

The restaurant was nearly empty so their meals arrived within minutes, but they took time talking until Yuuri had to leave for his appointment. Viktor insisted walking with Yuuri to his psychologist’s office whenever he could. He knew Yuuri’s anxiety skyrocketed on the way to the office and would be a mess by the time he arrived. The distraction helped Yuuri stay focused and Viktor just smiled each time Yuuri thanked him.

“See you after class?” Viktor asked, gripping Yuuri’s shoulder gently.
“Yeah,” he said, exhaling slowly, “Wish me luck.”

“You got this.”

Yuuri nodded and watched Viktor turn around, growing smaller as he walked away. Climbing the steps to the office, Yuuri checked in with the receptionist and took a seat in the waiting room. He picked up a magazine but flipped nervously through the pages. He knew the real work was beginning today and he wasn’t ready, but knew he never would be.

“Yuuri?”

He looked up and saw his psychologist smiling at him. She was a kind and pleasant woman, but he always broke into a cold sweat when she called his name. He dreaded what each session held and it would take him at least a day to recover. She was intuitive enough to know to only schedule two appointments a week, but made him promise to work on the exercises she gave him.

“Let’s get this over with,” Yuuri said, hoisting himself out of the chair and following her into her office.

Yuuri returned to the office a few hours later, stopping to get an ice cream sundae. He knew he didn’t need it and fell back into his habit of comfort eating. He walked slowly back and ignored everyone around him, knowing they would probably be judging him. He knew he had gained more weight since the store’s closure and he was the last one that needed extra calories, but he didn’t care at this point. He knew he’d regret it later but he would deal with it when the time came.

He took the elevator to the floor housing the English and Romantic Languages departments and trudged to Viktor’s office. Relieved to see the lights off, he opened the door and turned the desk lamp on. JJ had left him a note on what he had been unable to finish and asked Yuuri to complete the list. Yuuri’s mind wasn’t on work now, he needed an outlet for the memories and feelings brought up that afternoon.

Yuuri dug his laptop from his backpack and opened his word processing program. He’d been working on a poem to try to sort out his feelings of the closure of Bound to Please. It had started out hopeless but was beginning to morph into something different. He knew a lot of it had to do with the help he was getting from his doctors, but his friends had helped as well, especially Viktor. Viktor was there every step of the way and had seen him at his worst, choosing to stick by him regardless. He knew before his world crashed down around him he had been sorting his feelings for Viktor, but this side of the man had them slowly emerging again. He knew he was too confused to act upon it, but knew once he was cognizant enough he would need to.

He thought a moment before tapping rapidly on the keyboard, typing the words that came to mind without effort. After a session was the best time to write as his emotions were raw and he could evoke the perfect feeling. He closed his eyes and waited for the images to come to him: a lighthouse, darkened seas beating him about. The feeling of almost getting there but being frustrated as the waves kept pushing him back. He opened his eyes and wrote the words that came to mind, reading over the stanza several times.

Light in the dark, bright beam sweeping across the sky
Shift back to black a moment later, as if it were a lie
But the current pushes forward, reaching for the land
The light returns, promising these dark waters will have an end
Hand over hand, dragging this heavy soul onward
Salt soaked eyes burning, the view ahead blurred
Water gives way to grit beneath fingers and toes
Body heavy on the shore, eyes to the sky that has begun to glow
I turn my head to find I am not alone

“That’s beautiful, Yuuri.”

He jumped and turned around, aware Celestino was standing behind him and looking at his computer screen. He was always self-conscious of his writing. While he published it under a pseudonym online, he didn’t let anyone he knew read his work.

“Please don’t tell anyone,” Yuuri pleaded quietly.

“I won’t,” he promised, “but that is worthy of being shared. Will you think about it?”

“I do share, but anonymously,” Yuuri shared, “I’ve been picked up by a few blogs but it’s more for me. I’m not done with this one yet. It’s documenting my progress through this time in my life.”

“May I read the completed piece?” Celestino asked, sitting on the couch next to him, “If my students had an ounce of your talent, it would make my job so much easier.”

“Poetry is the only thing I’ve really felt good at,” he said, looking at the words on the screen.

“I think you don’t give yourself enough credit,” Celestino argued, “You’re a blessing to this department, you brought joy to Bound to Please and will again soon. You’re such a kind and wonderful young man, Yuuri. I’m glad our paths crossed in this life.”

Viktor strode into the office at that point and dropped a stack of poster board in the corner before falling into his chair. Placing his hand over his forehead, he sighed deeply and looked at Yuuri, brow raising when he saw Celestino. He knew when the department head visited his office, it was usually a complaint from higher up or some appointment he’d forgotten.

“What did I do this time?” Viktor asked, leaning over to look at Yuuri’s laptop, confused when he slammed it shut.

“Nothing, just speaking with Yuuri,” Celestino said, “Should I be worried you did something you shouldn’t?”

“No,” Viktor drawled, sitting back in his chair and locking his hands behind his head, “Did I miss anything good?”

“Not really,” Yuuri said, shoving his laptop into his bag, “Ready to go?”

“Sure. Want to order something for dinner tonight? I’m tired and I’m guessing you’re not up to stopping at a restaurant,” Viktor suggested.

“I’m not really hungry,” he said.

“I think I can muster enough energy to make turkey sandwiches when we get home,” Viktor stated, knowing they were one of Yuuri’s weaknesses.

“Ok, but if I don’t want it I’m feeding it to the dogs,” Yuuri stated.
“At least someone will enjoy my gourmet delicacies.”

“Yuuri, I don’t know how you put up with him,” Celestino said as he rose from the couch, patting Yuuri’s shoulder, “Have a good night, guys. See you Monday.”

“Why are we even having class when we have the next day off?” Viktor asked.

“It’s because I like to make your life hell, Nikiforov,” Celestino said, walking out of the office and his footsteps retreating.

“You’re so good at that,” Viktor said, grinning at Yuuri when he laughed.

“I heard that!”

The weekend was uneventful and went by slowly. They took the dogs to the park several times and watched them run in the fenced area. Yuuri opened up about his latest counseling session and shared the techniques his psychologist wanted him to try. She suggested he write down the points he thought about his situation and counter them with rational thoughts. When Yuuri asked if Viktor would look over his lists from time to time and get an outsiders view, Viktor agreed but told Yuuri he had to do the work. Viktor would tell him what he thought about what he had already written, but wouldn’t expand upon his list. Yuuri understood and admitted he only wanted support, which Viktor was more than happy to offer.

Sunday was a rough day for Yuuri. It rained that afternoon and that always set off his depression when he was in this state. He chose to spend most of the day in bed and stare at the pillow next to him, only looking up when Viktor entered. When Viktor laid down and rested his head on the pillow, Yuuri was surprised. He usually sat up and let Yuuri have his own space, but this time was different.

“Do you want to talk about it?” Viktor asked.

“No, maybe…” Yuuri said, sighing, “Yes. Rainy days always remind me of the patter of the drops in my apartment. I could curl up on the couch with a blanket and a good book for hours. I don’t have that now. I feel empty inside and miss it so much.”

“I’m sorry, Yuuri,” he said, brushing back a stray hair that had fallen across Yuuri’s glasses.

“Don’t get me wrong. I don’t mean to sound ungrateful. I’m so happy you’ve opened your home to me and have been there for me. I don’t know what I’d do without you, but I miss home. I miss my routine. I miss my store. It’s part of my life,” Yuuri admitted.

“You’re already getting better,” Viktor said, smiling softly.

“Huh?”

“A month ago, you would have said the store was your life,” he explained, “Now it’s a part of your life.”

“Really?” Yuuri asked, unaware of the change.

“Yep. Now you speak about the dogs, working on campus, getting the building fixed. There’s still
a lot of downtime, but you keep letting me in,” Viktor admitted.

“Do I really do that now?” he asked.

“Yeah, you do,” Viktor said, smiling, “I’m proud of you.”

“Thanks. It means a lot coming from you,” Yuuri said.

“How so?”

“You’re the best friend I’ve ever had,” he admitted.

“And you’re mine,” Viktor confessed, squeezing Yuuri’s hand, “Turkey sandwiches for dinner and then let the muttles run in the backyard? I’m guessing you’re not up to the park?”

“We’re going to turn into turkey sandwiches soon,” Yuuri teased, “and no, I’m not up to the park.”

Viktor made triple-decker turkey sandwiches while Yuuri watched the dogs play in the backyard. They had grown so close it was like they’d been together their entire lives. They napped together, explored the same areas at the same time and played constantly. Yuuri knew Vicchan would be heartbroken when they returned to the store, but promised silently they’d visit Makkachin all the time.

“Here you go,” Viktor said, handing Yuuri a saucer with the heaping sandwich.

“You act like I’m starving,” he said, lifting the sandwich and taking a huge bite.

“Well, since you’re only eating turkey you pretty much are. I added tomato and lettuce this time so you’re getting your vegetables.”

“I taste this,” Yuuri said, mouth half-full, “Thanks, mom.”

“Hey, don’t sass your mother,” Viktor teased, “Phichit called when you were taking a nap earlier. He wants to know if we’d like to hang out downtown on the Fourth. Big festivities, free food, face painting, fireworks.”

“I’ll think about it,” Yuuri said quietly, feeling sullen.

“We don’t have to if you don’t want to,” Viktor said, immediately catching Yuuri’s change in mood.

“It’s not that,” he said, “Every Fourth since the store has been open, I’d read patriotic books every thirty minutes to the kids. I can’t do that this year.”

“Oh,” Viktor said.

“Let’s see how I’m doing on Tuesday. Tentatively let’s say yes, but we’ll see.”

“Sounds like a plan,” Viktor said, scarfing down the rest of his sandwich and patting his belly, “That was good but tomorrow let’s eat something different.”

“Ham sandwiches?” Yuuri suggested, giggling when Viktor rolled his eyes.

“Smartass.”
Tuesday morning arrived and Yuuri awoke feeling empty yet anxious. His chest was heaving the minute he opened his eyes and felt the tears filling them. Memories of the past few holidays flashed through his mind and he was deeply saddened he couldn’t continue the tradition this year. All he could think of was the day Minako told him the store was being closed. The tears raced down the side of his face and he sobbed loudly, clamping a hand over his mouth so Viktor wouldn’t hear him. When he heard movement in the living room, Yuuri closed his eyes and hoped he wouldn’t come in the room.

Feeling the mattress sink behind him slightly, he felt Viktor lie down next to him and place a hand on his arm. He didn’t want to be seen crying as he’d been doing so much of it lately. It made him feel weaker than he was even though Viktor never complained.

“Rough morning?” Viktor asked quietly, sighing when Yuuri nodded, “When you’re up to it, tell me what you want to do today. I don’t mind changing plans at all. If you want to lay in bed all day and watch TV or stare at the ceiling, that’s ok with me.”

“Can we stay home? Maybe make some hamburgers or something?” Yuuri asked, rolling over to face him.

“Sure,” Viktor said, wiping Yuuri’s tears away with the pad of his thumb, “Is it asking too much for your yummy potato salad?”

“No,” he said, sniffing before smiling, “but you have to go to the store and get the ingredients.”

“Make me a list and I’m there. Is it ok if I invite a few friends?” Viktor asked.

“Who?” he asked, narrowing his eyes as he wasn’t up to too much company.

“Mari, Phichit, Minako, Minami, Chris if he can behave himself,” Viktor explained.

“No more than that, please,” Yuuri requested.

“No more,” Viktor promised, “If it gets to be too much, I’ll ask them to leave.”

“Viktor?”

“Hmm?”

“Thank you so much,” Yuuri professed, hugging him.

“What are friends for?” Viktor asked, squeezing him gently, “Let’s get that list made so I can get to the store.”
ingredients for potato salad, Viktor had bought chicken breasts, hamburger, bratwurst, cole slaw, corn on the cob, and a huge watermelon. Yuuri helped him unload the car but told Viktor he was making most of it. Yuuri was still feeling on edge about the impending day and was trying to brace himself for it. While he knew everyone that was coming over, he didn’t know if he had the energy to be good company.

“What’s going on in that head of yours?” Viktor asked, leaning against the kitchen counter.

“What if I don’t have enough energy for the day and snap at everyone?” he asked.

“You can always go to your room to recharge if you need it,” Viktor suggested, “I’m sure everyone will understand.”

“Good idea,” Yuuri said.

“Now help me with all this stuff. I bought a grill and have no idea how to put it together,” Viktor admitted.

“Sometimes I don’t know what you’d do without me,” Yuuri said, lifting the box and taking it outside.

“Me neither, Yuuri,” Viktor said quietly, following him moments later.

Yuuri had just set the potato salad in the fridge to chill when his sister and Minako arrived. He was happy to see them since it had been two weeks. They chatted about what was new, the temporary accounting job Mari had taken and Yuuri’s progress in therapy. Yuuri wanted to keep today on an even keel and didn’t want to discuss his counseling, but Mari badgered him about it. He excused himself moments later, left the living room and they heard the slam of his bedroom door seconds later. Mari flinched and looked into the kitchen, asking Viktor about it.

“Yuuri and I agreed that if he became overwhelmed he could go to his room to calm down,” Viktor stated, “I know you’re his sister, but he’s having a difficult time dealing with this. It takes him days to deal with his therapy sessions and the last one was particularly trying. All he asks is you understand and give him space if he needs it.”

“Alright,” she said, sighing, “Seems like you know my baby brother better than I do.”

“No,” Viktor disagreed, “I’ve just seen more of him during this bout. He still needs you.”

Yuuri emerged from his room a little over twenty minutes and saw Phichit and Minami had arrived. He was happy to see them since it had been two weeks. They chatted about what was new, the temporary accounting job Mari had taken and Yuuri’s progress in therapy. Yuuri wanted to keep today on an even keel and didn’t want to discuss his counseling, but Mari badgered him about it. He excused himself moments later, left the living room and they heard the slam of his bedroom door seconds later. Mari flinched and looked into the kitchen, asking Viktor about it.

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“Alright,” she said, sighing, “Seems like you know my baby brother better than I do.”

“No,” Viktor disagreed, “I’ve just seen more of him during this bout. He still needs you.”

Yuuri emerged from his room a little over twenty minutes and saw Phichit and Minami had arrived. When he found out Phichit had brought red, white and blue popsicles he rolled his eyes, knowing his friend got into any holiday imaginable. Minako went outside to help Viktor grill since the first batch of hamburgers came out as something that could be considered a deadly weapon. Sighing in defeat, Viktor led Minako outside before calling for the dogs. Yuuri followed them out and walked around the yard. It felt good to be outside though he could hear conversation from every direction. He tried to concentrate on the dogs and play fetch with them, but the people around them grew louder and he couldn’t handle it. He marched inside, feeling his chest tighten and his heart race. Staggering to his room, he found his medication and took two pills, hating how they made him feel and hating he had to be on them again. He sat on the edge of his bed and tried to center himself, reminding himself he was safe and try to be present in the now. He heard a soft knock at the door and a moment’s pause,
knowing it was Viktor. Yuuri couldn’t speak due to the panic attack but knew Viktor would enter a minute later. When the door opened and Viktor saw him, he looked at him sympathetically and sat on the bed next to him. Gently rubbing his shoulders, Viktor spoke to him softly until the attack passed and Yuuri could breathe again. He hated Yuuri was having a hard time with their cookout and it had only begun. He thought about calling Chris and asking him to stay home, but Yuuri insisted earlier it would be unfair to leave him out of the festivities.

“Dinner’s done,” Viktor said, “Do you want to take a few minutes to gather yourself or would you like me to bring a plate in here?”

“Give me a few,” Yuuri rasped, coughing to clear his throat, “I need to spend some time with our friends.”

“You need to do what’s right for you,” Viktor advised.

“I will. I promise.”

Viktor left Yuuri’s room minutes later and returned to their guests. He explained Yuuri was having a rough time with all the activity in the house and with the neighbors. When Minako suggested they leave, Viktor told her it wasn’t necessary and Yuuri wanted to spend time with them. Everyone piled their plates with food and gathered in the living room, talking about what was going on in their lives. When Viktor told them about the assignment he had given his writing class, everyone laughed at his creativity. It was well known in their circle that Viktor’s teaching style was unorthodox but that was what made him in high demand. Minami and Phichit had overheard conversations at the restaurant that many students were bummed Viktor wouldn’t be there next year. There was speculation he was teaching at another college for a year, one that he was moving to Tibet, another one that he was touring the world. Viktor found the Tibetan rumor particularly humorous. They were discussing Phichit’s family’s restaurant when Yuuri emerged and filled his plate with food.

“Is that all you’re eating?” Mari asked, staring at the half empty plate.

“I’m not really hungry,” Yuuri said quietly.

“Eat what you can,” Viktor said, “We can wrap the rest up for later.”

Viktor looked up to see Mari glaring at him but ignored it for the time being. Everyone was focused on Phichit, but Viktor’s heart dropped when Phichit mentioned the poetry slam that had been held at Bound to Please.

“Since he can’t rant and rave about his shit poetry,” Phichit said, referring to Seung-Gil, “he’s been hanging out at the restaurant more. He stays there for hours and just stares into space. Sometimes he scribbles something onto a napkin, other times he just glares at people. He’s killing business. You guys have got to get that shop open soon.”

“We’re working on it, Phichit,” Mari growled, eyes darting to see Yuuri pale.

“I-I...I need—” Yuuri stammered, setting his plate on the table and going back to his room once again.

“Way to go, asshole,” Mari grumbled, punching Phichit in the arm.

“Yeah, believe me. If I could stick my foot in my mouth right now, I would,” Phichit said, grimacing.

“I’ll do it for you,” Mari threatened.
“I think it would be best if we go after we eat,” Minami suggested, Minako nodding and praising him for his thoughtfulness.

They stayed long enough to eat half the watermelon but Yuuri chose to remain in his room. Viktor knew the day had been more mentally taxing than either imagined, but Viktor thought he was handling it remarkably well. Their guests couldn’t leave quick enough for Viktor’s liking, but knew when Mari stopped him at the door after everyone got in their cars he was in for a stern talk.

“You need to stop babying him,” she said, pointing a finger at him.

“I know you’re his sister and you’ve known him longer, but you’ve barely seen him this time around,” Viktor stated, matching her tone, “His counselor has suggested small steps or he’s going to fall apart completely. His plate tonight? That was very good considering what he has been eating lately. He’s either stuffing himself with junk because it makes him feel better or eating pasta and turkey sandwiches. I’m proud of every step he’s taken. Why can’t you be as well?”

“We’ll talk about this later,” Mari said when Minako tapped the horn of her car.

Viktor sighed and waved at Minako before she drove away, closing the door behind him. When he turned around, he saw Yuuri standing in the middle of the living room. His brown eyes were wide and he was standing still as a reed. Viktor couldn’t read his body language and didn’t know whether to expect extreme sorrow or another outburst. Nothing could prepare him for what he heard next.

“Thank you,” Yuuri said, voice breaking with emotion.

“For what?” Viktor asked, tilting his head in confusion.

“Sticking up for me. Understanding what I need more than Mari ever has. She thinks tough love is the way to go, but it hurts me more. Besides my dad, I’ve never had anyone understand like you. I think you get it more than my dad does,” Yuuri admitted.

“I promised I’d support you and help you through this, whatever it takes,” Viktor said.

“But I’ve screamed at you, I’ve said things I don’t mean. I’ve cried all over you and begged for you not to leave me alone,” Yuuri said, feeling his eyes fill with tears, “A friend shouldn’t have to deal with that.”

“Yuuri,” Viktor said, closing the gap between them and feeling the warm electricity flow through them when he took his hand, “You are the absolute best thing that’s happened to me. I’d do anything to help you. I’ll continue to be there for you until you decide you no longer need it.”

“What if I always need you?” Yuuri asked quietly, fearful of the answer.

“Then I’m always here,” Viktor said, smiling and looking up when he heard a loud boom, “Come on, I want to show you something. Let me grab a blanket and lock the dogs in the bedroom.”

Yuuri was curious about what Viktor had planned but trusted his judgment. He had grabbed the large sheet from his bed and led Yuuri outside. When Yuuri asked what they were doing when Viktor leaned a ladder against the house, the only answer he received was he’ll see. Viktor handed the sheet to Yuuri and climbed the ladder to the roof, asking Yuuri to toss the sheet to him before he joined him. Yuuri climbed to the roof hesitantly, trying not to think about his fear of heights. They walked across the roof until they were at the front of the house. Viktor laid the sheet on the shingles and laid down, patting the spot next to him for Yuuri to join him. Yuuri was about to ask why they were there when a burst of red followed by a larger blue one filled the sky. Yuuri had been bummed he was going to miss the fireworks and festivities downtown this year, but Viktor found a way to
make it happen and make it even better. He sighed happily and scooted closer to Viktor, finding his hand and squeezing lightly.

“Thank you,” Yuuri said, turning his head to look at him.

“You mentioned on the camping trip how much you loved fireworks. I didn’t want you to miss it, so I borrowed the ladder from Chris just in case,” Viktor admitted.

“How did you know we wouldn’t fall through?” Yuuri asked.

“Chris and I walked around when you were at an appointment last week,” Viktor said, giving him a sheepish grin.

“Even though I have a terrible fear of heights, this is magnificent,” he admitted, giving Viktor a genuine smile.

“Well, since you have a fear I’ll have to be your guardian,” Viktor said, lifting an arm until Yuuri slid next to him and rested his head on his chest.

“Thank you again, Viktor, for everything.”

“I’ll always be there, Yuuri,” he promised.

They remained silent for the rest of the display, marveling not only over the colors and magnitude of the explosions. Their relationship had grown leaps and bounds in a few days, their understanding and acceptance of one another increasing their comfort level along with the promise of being the other’s support, understanding and strength. As the finale burst across the sky, so did their happiness of being in the presence of each other.

Chapter End Notes

I wanted to leave an end note as some readers are commenting on Mari's reaction and might be missing a facet of mental illness.

1) Mari and Yuuri are Japanese. In Japanese culture, mental health isn't treated like it is elsewhere and has somewhat of a stigma associated with it. I've heard from a few that have experienced the system in Japan it's a distraction and think positively situation...or just don't tell anyone and hide it.
2) Just like there is no cookie-cutter diagnosis for depression, there is no cookie-cutter treatment either. It can differ from bouts for the same individual as well. What may have worked for Yuuri in the past doesn't this time because the situation is more traumatic. Mari is basing her experience on past events.
3) There is a TON of misinformation and ignorance on mental health no matter where you live. Some think you can go to the doctor, get some medication and you'll be better in a few days or weeks. Some think exercise will cure all (yeah..right...ok). Others think the tough love approach works and it does at times, but very rarely. Viktor has been with Yuuri this entire depressive episode and has inquired about his feelings, doctor's appointments and counseling sessions. He's heard what to do and what not to do. While Mari is helpful in her own way (even if it won't work this time), Viktor is more receptive
and knows what's going on. That and he's Yuuri's guardian.

Hope that clears up some confusion.
The role of caregiver is reversed when Viktor falls ill.

“I’m awake,” Viktor replied sleepily.

“You were snoring, Viktor,” he relayed, smiling when Viktor looked at him.

“How can I be so tired?” Viktor asked.

“You’re sick,” Yuuri answered, “We can finish it later. I’ll be here when you wake up.”

Viktor nodded and closed his eyes, humming in contentment when Yuuri continued to play with his hair. It was relaxing and reminded him of his mother, but Yuuri’s touch was softer. His mind played back memories of them together: the first poetry reading when Yuuri shared his dinner, a couple days later at the park, Easter, the kiss on his cheek. He felt the fever return to his body, making his thoughts even hazier along with his exhaustion.

“You always know how to make me feel better,” Viktor said, slurring his words as he lost his battle with sleep, “That’s one thing I love about you.”

Well, it’s been a while, hasn’t it? It took me a while to get in the right state of mind to update this fic. Between the relapse and subsequent car accident, it hasn't been a fun time. But I'm back!

This chapter has been planned for a while but I didn't know exactly how I wanted it to go. Some might think this a slow chapter, but it's huge to both of them, especially Viktor. If you think about past chapters and his fears as you read this one, I think you'll understand the subtlety of this chapter and the importance of it.

But first, a few notes:
1) The Roman military and reference to Hannibal is specifically the Second Punic Wars. Hannibal was a military genius that had a habit of decimating the Roman army, especially during the Battle of Cannae. If you're interested, I strongly urge you to check it out. I find it fascinating.
2) The fantasy book I thought of that Yuuri reads to Viktor is from Dragonlance, particularly the Chronicles series. I FREAKING LOVE IT! Read it!
3) The first literary quote is from an unknown source. Sad.
4) The second literary quote is from Steve Maraboli.

We're getting close, that's all I can say.
Viktor had never enjoyed a summer semester as much as he had this year.

Celestino had given in to his begging, letting Viktor teach an Eastern European literature class along with a creative writing workshop. While the department head thought they’d be a waste of time for summer courses, he was pleasantly surprised by the staggering enrollment, actually having to close the classes within ten days of posting them.

His students were extraordinarily bright and enjoyed his teaching style immensely. Viktor found he could joke around with them more than those in the past. While the first half of the semester was entertaining, the second half was outright hilarious.

The source of the witty amusement came from Yuri and Otabek.

When he received the updated list for his classes, Viktor groaned when he saw Yuri’s name on the roster. His relationship with the young man was precarious at best, but when he helped Yuuri during his time of need, Viktor’s perspective of him changed. As he replayed Yuri’s generosity during the impromptu move, Viktor found himself looking forward to the class.

But that’s not what made his summer so spectacular. The fact that he got to see Yuuri most of the day every day had him over the moon.

They walked to school most days, talking amicably while the dogs tugged enthusiastically on their leashes. The way Viktor taught his classes that semester differed as well since he listened to Yuuri’s suggestions. He offered a fresh perspective Viktor had never thought of, Viktor amazed by Yuuri’s in-depth perception of the material.

The time between classes was the highlight of Viktor’s day. He and Yuuri would chat about events happening on campus, go over notes for Viktor’s next class or debate differing ideas on a literary piece they had read recently. Viktor found himself most days anxiously waiting for class to end so he could retreat to his office and spend time with Yuuri.

Yuuri’s smiles had begun to touch his eyes again, leaving Viktor breathless. Seeing Yuuri pull himself from his pit of depression left him with an overwhelming respect for the man, but not only did his view of Yuuri change, so did his feelings. Viktor admired him greatly and told him often how proud he was of him. Watching Yuuri overcome the obstacles in his life slowly but surely warmed Viktor’s heart. He loved the fact Yuuri leaned on him, and it left him feeling wanted for just being him. Yuuri didn’t take his presence for granted and told him repeatedly how grateful he was Viktor was there for him.
Each time Yuuri confessed his gratitude for him, Viktor felt his heart flutter.

They had known each other for around six months now, and Viktor found it to be the best time he had ever experienced. He began to make plans for when Yuuri was feeling better, considering picnics, symphony concerts, and football games that fall. They had grown closer since Yuuri had come to stay with him and while he wished he could change the circumstances, Viktor loved his company.

“There’s a new exhibit opening this weekend at the science museum,” Viktor said as they arrived on campus, grinning when Yuuri whipped his head around to look at him, “Astronomy.”

“Really?” Yuuri asked excitedly.

“Yep. I hear there will be an interactive planetarium experience,” Viktor explained, knowing Yuuri loved anything to do with space, “Thought you might like to go.”

“I’d love to!”

The museum was the topic of conversation as they entered the humanities building. When they reached the office, Viktor listened to Yuuri ramble about the time he saw a comet while he was still in Japan. Viktor thought Yuuri’s enthusiasm was adorable, the way his eyes sparkled from his animated explanations. While he hated to interrupt, Viktor was already running late for class.

“I have to go,” Viktor said when Yuuri paused for breath.

“Oh, yeah,” he said, blushing, “Sorry.”

“Don’t be,” Viktor countered, smiling at him, “After class is done, I have two hours. I expect you to fill it with your love of the stars.”

“Alright,” Yuuri conceded, “Have fun.”

Viktor nodded, smiling as he left the office.

“Where is everyone?” Viktor asked as he scanned the room.

It was five minutes after class was scheduled to start and Viktor was confused. Over half his students were missing. He had forgotten to check his email before class, having been engrossed in listening to Yuuri.

“Flu,” one of his students said, lifting his head to speak before letting it drop back on the desk.

“Flu?” Viktor asked, vaguely remembering a memo circulating through the English department, “Wait a minute. Chris, are you sick?”

“No,” he replied, coughing after speaking.

“Go home,” Viktor instructed, “and please inform Hazmat on your way out to drop by.”

Though the others laughed at his joke, Viktor wasn’t pleased. One of his policies was if they so much as felt a tickle in their throats, stay home until they felt better. While he piled homework on his
students, Viktor was lenient as far as attendance went. He didn’t believe in the school’s required percentage of attendance and waived it for many students.

“Yuri is feeling like ass, but wanted me to let you know he emailed his essay to you,” Otabek said suddenly.

“Ok. Tell the evil minion I said I’m surprised he’s sick and I hope he feels better soon.”

Viktor was disappointed with the participation during class but knew it was to be expected. His brightest and most vocal students were absent, leaving Viktor to lecture the entire hour. Deciding he had enough, Viktor dismissed them fifteen minutes early.

“Remember, if you feel like you’ve been run over by a truck, stay home,” Viktor stated, “If you make me sick, I’ll fail you automatically then make you pay for my medicine. You might redeem yourself if it’s cherry flavored.”

He felt a presence beside him as he said his goodbyes to his students, smiling when he looked up and saw Yuuri. Yuuri leaned against the desk next to him, Viktor feeling the slight tingle when their thighs brushed against each other. It had been a while since he felt the electric contact when they touched, leaving Viktor to wonder what caused it to return.

“This is a pleasant surprise,” Viktor admitted when the last student left.

“JJ called. He’s sick,” Yuuri stated.

“Half the class was as well,” he relayed, “Can you believe Plisetsky was out? I thought he was too mean to get sick.”

“Oh, ye of little faith,” Yuuri said, giggling, “He’s human as well.”

“That’s debatable,” Viktor joked, “Want to grab a bite? I’m thinking about calling off the next class.”

Yuuri agreed to lunch but told him to think about the next class. There were only two weeks left in the semester and Yuuri knew they were the most important. Along with completing the last assignments for the course, the students had review sessions before final exams. Viktor prided himself in covering all the material they had learned, explaining it gave them an advantage during the test. Listening to Yuuri’s argument, Viktor admitted he was right and agreed to keep the last class that day.

By the time it ended, Viktor had emptied two water bottles. His throat felt rough, but he attributed it to talking so much that day. Participation for his second class was abysmal as well, leaving Viktor to speak most of the hour. He still had a couple hours left before he could go home but didn’t mind since Yuuri would be there to keep him company.

Viktor reached his office, dragging himself through the doorway and collapsing onto the couch. The day had been long and he was exhausted. He was surprised it had worn him out that much, but Viktor had been busier than usual. He and Yuuri were up late most nights talking about a multitude of subjects. Some evenings Yuuri revealed what he had discussed in therapy that day. Viktor loved hearing about the progress he was making and touched Yuuri trusted him that much to share it. Each time Viktor mentioned how proud he was of him, Yuuri would blush furiously. Viktor found it endearing.

“Are you ok?” Yuuri asked, frowning in concern.
“Yeah, just a little tired. It’s been a dull day,” he explained, “Can you hand me a water bottle?”

Not finding one, Yuuri excused himself to get a water bottle from the break room. He bought a couple from the vending machine and returned to the office. When he walked into the room, Yuuri stopped when he saw Viktor fast asleep. Smiling at him, Yuuri set the bottles on the table and grasped Viktor’s hand, frowning when he felt warm to the touch. He pressed his hand against Viktor’s forehead and felt heat radiating from his skin.

“Viktor,” Yuuri said gently, shaking his shoulder to wake him.

“Hmm?” he asked sleepily, eyes fluttering open.

“I think we need to go home,” Yuuri suggested, “You’re burning up. Are you feeling ok?”

“Yeah, I’m fine but I am tired. Let’s call it a day.”

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Morning rolled around, and Viktor came to the conclusion he had never been sicker in his life.

His throat had become painfully sore as the night droned on, eventually body aches adding to his discomfort. The temperature shifts he experienced kept him up, shaking with cold one minute and burning up the next. He tossed and turned most of the night, finally giving up on sleep when coughs started racking his body.

The part that bothered him the most was he had woken Yuuri up.

The last time Viktor looked at the clock was a little after two in the morning. He tried willing himself to get up for something to drink, but the thought didn’t appeal to him since his body was so weary. After one particularly painful fit of coughing, Viktor groaned miserably but jumped when he heard a soft voice.

“What can I do to help, Viktor?”

Opening his eyes slightly, Viktor saw Yuuri kneeling next to his bed, brows furrowed with worry. He felt bad Yuuri had to see him like this and would have to help him, knowing his friend had so much on his plate already. Taking a shaky breath in acquiescence, Viktor swallowed his pride and spoke.

“Something to drink,” he rasped, wincing as pain shot down his throat, “Maybe some cough drops?”

Yuuri nodded and left the room. Viktor closed his eyes and rested, hearing Yuri rifling through drawers in the kitchen. He was almost asleep when Yuuri returned, helping Viktor sit up to take some medicine he had found. Once Viktor was comfortable, Yuuri retreated to his room, coming back minutes later with his pillow and journal in hand.

“What are you doing?” Viktor asked.

“Staying with you,” Yuuri replied, “You might need something and I don’t think you’re in the condition to yell.”

“I can always text you. I don’t want you to get sick, Yuuri.”
“I’ll be alright,” he countered, giving Viktor a reassuring smile, “Close your eyes and get some rest. I think you need it.”

Feeling the mattress sink, Viktor rolled onto his other side and watched Yuuri shift until he was situated. Viktor thought Yuuri appeared pensive as he opened the journal, chewing on the end of his pen. He knew Yuuri was prone to write into the wee hours of the morning and today was no exception, but Viktor had never been privy to watch the process.

“Everything ok?” Yuuri asked, catching Viktor staring at him.

“Mmhmm,” he replied, “Just nice watching you.”

“Oh,” Yuuri said, blushing slightly.

“What are you writing?”

“Just scribbles,” he replied, smiling before running his fingers lightly over Viktor’s eyes, watching them close slowly, “Get some rest, Viktor. I’ll be here when you wake up.”

True to his word, Yuuri was by his side when he awoke. Viktor had resorted to single words to communicate his needs to Yuuri, his throat hurting so much he didn’t want to talk. As the hours passed, Yuuri began to anticipate what Viktor wanted without him asking, leaving Viktor touched beyond belief. When Yuuri brought him a new box of tissue or the jello he had made while Viktor napped, Viktor felt the feelings he fought so hard to control rush to the surface.

There was no question about it now. He had fallen in love with Yuuri.

Viktor was happy he was there in Yuuri’s time of need and felt blessed to be part of his support network. He had spent countless hours listening to Yuuri vent his frustrations, held him while he cried or let him scream when anxiety overwhelmed him. Viktor had learned from Phichit one day while Yuuri was at therapy that he had never opened up to anyone like he had with Viktor. When he asked why Phichit theorized Yuuri felt safe confiding in him and trusted him without a doubt. The declaration blew Viktor away.

But being on the receiving end of that care was something Viktor wasn’t used to.

The shadows had crept into the room as the sun fell below the horizon, Viktor waking from one of his many naps of the day. His eyes opened slowly and focused on the person next to him, the corners of his lips turning upward when he saw Yuuri. He was reading a book about Roman warfare and appeared to be engrossed in it.

“Studying to become the next Hannibal?” Viktor asked, wincing when his voice cracked.

“You’re awake,” Yuuri said, pressing the back of his hand against Viktor’s forehead, “You’re much cooler as well. How do you feel?”

“Like crap. Did I eat all the jello?” he asked.

“Yeah,” Yuuri replied, smiling softly when the expression on Viktor’s face wilted, “but I made some more.”
“You’re an angel, Yuuri,” he said.

Yuuri patted his hand before rising from the bed and disappearing from view, but Viktor still felt the remnants of frisson from the brief contact. He was staring at his hand when Yuuri came back, narrowing his eyes when Yuuri giggled.

“What’s so funny?” Viktor asked.

“I didn’t know a hand could be so fascinating,” Yuuri teased.

“Everything is interesting when you’re sick,” he said, taking the bowl from him, “Thank you, Yuuri.”

“It’s just jello.”

“Not just that,” Viktor continued, “No one has taken care of me like this since I was a child. You don’t know how much it means to me.”

“It’s not a big deal,” Yuuri mumbled, flipping through his book once more, “You’ve helped me more than I’ve helped you.”

“Oh,” Viktor replied, shoulders slumping in disappointment, “It’s payback.”

Yuuri reached over and placed a hand on Viktor’s cheek, gently turning his head toward him. The sadness in Viktor’s eyes hurt him and knew it was his choice of words that made him this way. Sighing from his mistake, Yuuri lightly rubbed his thumb across the soft skin of Viktor’s face.

“I didn’t mean it like that,” Yuuri explained, “My thinking still isn’t completely right, so please forgive me. I’m not helping you because you’ve helped me. I’m here because I want to be. You’re my best friend, Viktor. I care about you so much.”

“I’m bad about jumping to conclusions,” he admitted.

“I can’t say I blame you with all the experiences you’ve had,” Yuuri stated, “I’ll never do that to you. I promise.”

The rest of the evening was quiet. Yuuri read a popular fantasy book to Viktor, running his fingers through the soft grey hair when Viktor asked. Viktor’s mind went back to children’s hour, to the gentle rise and fall of Yuuri’s voice when he read aloud. His voice was so soft and melodic, Viktor felt himself slowly drifting to sleep. He fought it, wanting to spend more time with Yuuri since he’d slept so much that day.

“Would you like me to stop?” Yuuri asked, putting a finger on the page before closing the book.

“I’m awake,” Viktor replied sleepily.

“You were snoring, Viktor,” he relayed, smiling when Viktor looked at him.

“How can I be so tired?” Viktor asked.

“You’re sick,” Yuuri answered, “We can finish it later. I’ll be here when you wake up.”

Viktor nodded and closed his eyes, humming in contentment when Yuuri continued to play with his hair. It was relaxing and reminded him of his mother, but Yuuri’s touch was softer. His mind played back memories of them together: the first poetry reading when Yuuri shared his dinner, a couple days later at the park, Easter, the kiss on his cheek. He felt the fever return to his body, making his
thoughts even hazier along with his exhaustion.

“You always know how to make me feel better,” Viktor said, slurring his words as he lost his battle with sleep, “That’s one thing I love about you.”

Yuuri’s eyes widened from Viktor’s confession, looking down to question him about it but found him fast asleep. Fuzzy warmth flowed through Yuuri along with the faint electric charge he’d come to associate with touching Viktor. Easing himself down to lay on the mattress, Yuuri considered his feelings for Viktor. He’d been so consumed with his depression and getting better, he hadn’t thought about them in months. Every time he contemplated the possibility of something more with him, Yuuri admonished himself for overthinking the situation, deciding there was no way someone like Viktor could ever be interested in him.

But Viktor said it was one thing he loved about him.

Yuuri watched Viktor sleep as he willed his heart to calm. Spending most of the night gazing at Viktor, Yuuri came to terms with exactly what he meant to him. While everything had changed in his life for the worse after the camping trip, the emotions he had Viktor had only grown and blossomed into something beautiful. He knew exactly what he felt for Viktor now.

“Each day my love grows deeper, deeper than I never thought before.”

“I love you, Viktor,” Yuuri whispered, pressing his lips against Viktor’s forehead before leaning over and turning the lamp off.

It took Viktor the entire weekend to shake his illness, and while he felt better physically, he was upset. When he told Yuuri about it, Viktor frowned when Yuuri scoffed at him.

“We made plans though!” he exclaimed.

“You can’t help that you were under the weather, Viktor,” Yuuri argued, “It happens. We can go another time.”

“But it was opening weekend. They had special events,” Viktor said, slumping into the kitchen chair.

“It’s not a big deal.”

“I still feel bad,” he muttered.

“Hey,” Yuuri said, taking his hand before giving him a lopsided smile, “I’d pass up a thousand events until you felt better. You’re more important than a few planets.”

Viktor felt his heart soar when he heard Yuuri’s words. They had grown even closer during the time he fell ill, spending hours in silence or Yuuri reading to him. His calming presence eased Viktor’s discomfort, his gentle touch immensely relaxing. While it scared him a bit, Viktor had never trusted anyone more than he did Yuuri.

“Thank you,” he said softly, squeezing Yuuri’s hand before letting go, “Would you like to help me plan my classes for this week? I’m thinking maybe telling a crazy story about while I was sick and
letting them run wild with it.”

“What do you mean by crazy story?” Yuuri asked offhandedly.

“My mom always said I babbled nonsense or whatever was on my mind,” Viktor revealed, “I was pretty sick this time, so I’m sure you have some tales to tell.”

“Babble?” Yuuri asked, his head jerking up before staring at Viktor.

“Was I that bad?” he replied with a question of his own, feeling uneasy.

“No, not at all,” Yuuri assured him, “How about the night you got sick and the jello?”

“Jello?”

Yuuri relayed the story and watched pink creep into Viktor’s cheeks. He had never seen him embarrassed before but knew if he told him about his confession, it could possibly make things awkward between them. While he wanted to tell Viktor how he felt, Yuuri needed to build more courage before he did so.

“Falling in love is a wonderfully terrifying sensation.”

*It is, but I’ll overcome it because, Viktor, you’re so very worth it.*
Chapter Summary

Time is drawing near for Bound to Please to be lost forever, but Yuri and Viktor come up with a plan to hopefully save it.

“Nikiforov. I want to talk to you.”

Viktor looked up to see Yuri hovering over his desk, his usual scowl replaced with a look of concentration. He wasn’t used to seeing his student like this and knew it must be important to him. Though their relationship as student and instructor was strained, Viktor admired him more since he helped Yuuri during his time of need.

“What’s up?” Viktor asked.

“How much longer does Genius have to get his store back?” he inquired.

“A little less than three months,” Viktor said, sighing when he thought about it.

“I have an idea,” Yuri stated.

“Do tell,” Viktor said, watching Yuri sit at a nearby desk before revealing his plan.

Chapter Notes

It's now time for your third present! I'm a little early, but I'm going to become engrossed in video games later today so here it is!

It's been a little while since Bound to Please was updated and I wanted to include it in my Christmas gift to you guys. It's time for things to change a bit in Viktor's and Yuuri's friendship, and what better time than Christmas? There are A LOT of hints dropped in this chapter, so keep them in mind when the subsequent ones are posted.

The last stanza of Despair to Hope by Mayonaka_no_Tenshi are split into three different sections in this chapter. I found them fitting in a few scenes so I decided to break them up. I hope you'll understand why I did it.

No notes for this, just enjoy.

Thanks for reading and Merry Christmas/Happy Holidays to those of you celebrating today.

As much as I wish I could, I don’t own Yuri!!! On Ice.
This fic is not beta’d.
While I truly appreciate the offers, I’m not currently looking for a beta.

You can follow me on tumblr. Stay up to date on latest chapters and story progress or just want to give a shout out! You guys are what drives me, and I so appreciate every one of you.

“Nikiforov. I want to talk to you.”

Viktor looked up to see Yuri hovering over his desk, his usual scowl replaced with a look of concentration. He wasn’t used to seeing his student like this and knew it must be important to him. Though their relationship as student and instructor was strained, Viktor admired him more since he helped Yuuri during his time of need.

“What’s up?” Viktor asked.

“How much longer does Genius have to get his store back?” he inquired.

“A little less than three months,” Viktor said, sighing when he thought about it. Yuuri’s situation was growing direr each passing day, but he tried not to show it. Viktor knew he was anxious about getting the store back and his hopelessness was returning. He had mentioned how worried he was that Bound to Please was going to slip through his fingers several times in the past couple weeks. Viktor told him he couldn’t assure him everything would be alright, but he would try everything in his power to help.

He just didn’t know how to help yet.

“I have an idea,” Yuri stated.

“Do tell,” Viktor said, watching Yuri sit at a nearby desk before revealing his plan.

“Plisetsky came up with that? Is it April Fool’s Day?”

Viktor laughed at Celestino’s question. Yuri was known within the department of skating by to barely pass any class. His sarcastic wit was legendary, and it had gotten him in trouble several times with other professors.

Which was why others doubted Yuri’s offer.

“Scout’s honor. He wants to help,” Viktor assured him.

“He wants to do this during the First Week Festival?” Celestino asked, watching Viktor nod, “That doesn’t give us much time.”

“A little over a week. There’s a catch though,” Viktor stated.

“It better not be to pass him regardless,” he warned.
“No,” Viktor said, chuckling in amusement, “He doesn’t want Yuuri to find out until next Saturday.”

“Alright then. Let’s do it.”

You were the current that carried me to shore
You were the light that guided me forward
As I succumbed to the waves, your strength kept me near the surface

Dear Kanashii Kokoro,

Judging from your words, it appears you’ve found something or someone to help you find your light. I am thrilled for you and hope you continue to stay on the mend. I thoroughly look forward to the time happiness colors your poetry again.

Sincerely,
Prepodavatel

Yuuri smiled when he read the message in his inbox. He had sent short notes back and forth with the reader, always thanking him for the encouragement though he only knew them online. When he asked how they found him, they mentioned they ran a literary critic’s blog but always praised his works. Once given a link, Yuuri turned eighty different shades of red when he read two years worth of glowing reviews from the blog owner.

Prepodavatel,

Thank you so very much. It’s been a bumpy road, but I’m getting there. I hope your friend is improving as well. The verse I posted this morning is going to be split up into three parts. Its entirety will be up in the next two days, I promise.

Thank you again,
Kanashii Kokoro

“What’s that?”

Yuuri looked up from his laptop to see Phichit take the seat across from him. Balking when Phichit dragged the laptop to him, Yuuri bit his lip nervously when Phichit read the screen.

“Who’s Prepodavatel?”

“Don’t know,” Yuuri admitted, “Someone that follows my blog and critiques my poetry.”

Phichit clicked several links and scanned the reviews of Yuuri’s pieces, brows lifting in surprise from the constant praise given to his friend. He knew Yuuri’s work was amazing, but he needed the boost from a complete stranger to bolster him further.

“I’m heading to the bathroom,” Yuuri stated, “Don’t leave that site!”

Phichit continued to surf the site, selecting every link he saw. Wincing when he read scathing reviews, Phichit saw a small link in the corner. Highlighting the link and clicking on it, his jaw
dropped when he saw the homepage.

“I’ll be damned.”

“You said weeks ago you weren’t going to the festival,” Yuuri said in between breaths.

When Viktor told him he’d like them to go to the festivities on campus, Yuuri had been doubtful. He had never been to that part of campus before but had learned it sat high atop a hill. He never had been in the best physical condition and dreaded the hike to the science section of the campus.

That wasn’t the only reason.

He and Mari had received notification that an appraiser and a contractor had toured Bound to Please. The city was ready to seize the property, repairing it and putting it up for auction in a little over a month. Yuuri’s mental state had improved until he received a copy of the letter, the hopes he had for his beloved store plummeting along with his spirits.

Viktor had been there for him constantly since he read the notice. He didn’t know what he’d do without his best friend and could tell Viktor didn’t know exactly how to help him. Yuuri reminded him time and again that his presence was all he needed. Viktor simply nodded and spent hours filled with quiet with him.

The sudden change of Viktor’s mind concerned him. He had always been in tune with Yuuri’s well-being, but this time was different. Since Yuuri had moved in, Viktor had been so considerate of his feelings, asking him if he’d like to go somewhere or if there was anything he needed. Instead of gauging Yuuri’s emotions, Viktor said they were going to the fair that weekend.

“I changed my mind,” Viktor stated.

“There will be too many people. I don’t know if I can handle it,” he said, stopping and tapping his forefingers together.

Viktor halted and took a few steps back, covering Yuuri’s hands with one of his own. He hated not being able to tell Yuuri about his sudden change of heart, but he wanted it to be a surprise. He knew Yuuri had taken a couple steps back and some of his doubts had returned, but today was too important for him to miss.

“Yuuri,” Viktor said softly, stepping closer until they were inches apart, “I promise we won’t stay long. I thought it would be good for us to get out of the house and the festival is always fun. Besides, I heard Plisetsky was going to be in a dunk tank.”

“This may be worth it,” Yuuri said, grinning at him, “Can we set a time limit? I don’t want to push myself too much that it takes weeks to recover.”

“Of course. How does an hour sound?”

“Perfect.”
The festival was in full swing when they arrived. Swarms of people wandered aimlessly, leaving Yuuri to cling to Viktor. Looking down and smiling softly, Viktor wondered how Yuuri would react when he learned the real reason they were there.

He thanked an attendant when he was handed a map and searched for his department’s booths. It had cost the department dearly in fees since they were late registering, but Celestino told him it was worth it if they achieved their goal. Viktor agreed without hesitation.

When they rounded the corner and found the row reserved for the English faculty and students, Yuuri froze and stopped. He got along with most of the professors and his classmates, but this was too much. Tears filled his eyes when he read the large banner hanging over the concessions stand. It read ‘Save Bound to Please.’

“What is this?” he asked, a tear slipping down his cheek as he turned to look at Viktor.

“This is Yuri’s brainchild. He wants to help you and Mari get the bookstore back so you’ll ‘stop moping.’ His words, not mine,” Viktor explained.

Yuuri nodded absently, barely taking in Viktor’s words as he scanned the excited chaos in front of him. Otabek and JJ were at a grill wearing aprons, cooking burgers and hot dogs while Phichit took care of a long line of customers. Minako was set up under a tent, reading one of her books to a gaggle of enraptured children. Minami was handing out balloons to anyone that passed him, giggling when most of the college students acted more childlike than all the others.

Yuri had him doubling over in laughter.

Yuuri recognized several people from class, taking turns throwing balls so Yuri would plunge into the water below him. The attraction seemed to be popular since Yuri was drenched, but seemed to be in a good mood by the grin he had on his face. Feeling a warm shock flow through him when Viktor grabbed his hand, Yuuri let himself be led to the tank.

“Oh no, Nikiforov!” Yuri yelled, “Go away!”

“I have a twenty dollar bill burning a hole in my pocket, evil minion,” he teased.

“I hate you so much!” Yuri shouted, crossing his arms.

“That’s why you continue to enroll in my classes?”

Asking Yuuri to hold the basket of tennis balls, Viktor tilted his head and judged the distance of the target. Once he was ready, Viktor picked up a ball and touched the tip of his tongue to the side of his mouth as he threw the ball. He missed the target by a wide margin and narrowed his eyes when Yuri cackled at him.

“Maybe next one, Plisetsky,” he said, throwing another ball and missing yet again.

“It’s your twenty dollars!”

The target continued to elude Viktor as he desperately tried to hit it. Sighing when he only had one ball left, Viktor stared at it, willing it to take on a life of its own and drop Yuri into the water. Feeling a tap on his shoulder, he saw a grinning Celestino.
“Allow me,” he said, taking the ball from Viktor.

Closing one eye, Celestino matched the ball up to the target, winding his arm back and releasing the ball seconds later. It flew through the air, smacked the middle of the target and released the bench Yuri was sitting on. When Yuri fell into the deep pool of water, applause was heard all around.

“Not fair!” Yuri bellowed when he surfaced, “That’s cheating!”

“No, that’s immense gratification,” Viktor said, wiping the tears from his eyes he was laughing so hard.

“Asshole,” he grumbled.

Yuri climbed out of the pool and grabbed a towel, wrapping it around him before joining them. Yuuri was speechless, unsure how to thank the young man that had been so belligerent to him when they met. The knowledge that Yuri had suggested the plan to help Bound to Please left him flabbergasted.

“Like it, Genius?” Yuri asked, smiling widely.

“It’s wonderful and humbling,” he confessed, “I can’t thank you enough.”

“How about free books for a year after the store opens,” Yuri suggested, “Oh! Tutoring sessions that aren’t twenty dollars an hour would be helpful too.”

“Is that a jab?” Viktor asked, chiming in after he finished his conversation with Celestino.

“What do you think?” Yuri inquired with a question of his own.

“I’ll ponder it, minion,” he answered, smiling at Yuuri when he caught his gaze, “Would you like to get something to eat? I wanted to talk to Otabek about a research project he’s doing.”

Yuuri agreed and they walked to the other side of the pavilion. He was in awe of the sights, sounds and smells. On the way to the food stand, he caught a glimpse of a stage, Seung-Gil standing in the middle reading another of his dark creations. He wasn’t particularly fond of the young man, but he missed him nonetheless. Phichit filled him in about the times he visited the Chulanont’s restaurant, often complainng he would stare at him for hours on end.

“Lost without you, no place to go. You were there during the dark and light, but the light is gone now. Hoping you’ll come back and the smile will return,” Seung-Gil said, his voice lilting to inflict emotion on certain words, “Thank you. I wrote this for today. I hope Bound to Please reopens and poetry slam comes back.”

After nodding at his audience, Seung-Gil walked off stage and disappeared into the crowd. Yuuri was astonished. He knew Seung-Gil like attending the poetry slam every Friday, but he didn’t know how much it meant to the seemingly emotionless man. Seeing this glimpse into the man’s persona was refreshing.

“This week is full of surprises.”

Yuuri looked up and saw Phichit next to him. He assumed the shock on his best friend’s face mirrored his own, but the glimmer of interest in Phichit’s eyes amused him. He had seen that look on Phichit’s face a few times the past few years and knew what was going on in his friend’s mind.

“Found a new friend?” Yuuri asked, gauging his friend’s reaction.
“Yeah, right,” Phichit panned, his features falling to unamusement within seconds.

“Yuuri dear!”

Yuuri scanned the crowd for the one calling his voice. He hadn’t heard it since the store had been shut down and he missed the owner greatly. Seeing a short, slim figure emerge from the throng of people around him, Yuuri beamed and took the woman into his arms.

“Mrs. Calibri, I’m so happy to see you,” he said genuinely.

“And I you, dear. I’ve missed you so. I’ve actually had to go to the library for books!” Mrs. Calibri exclaimed, “This is very nice of the university to do this for you.”

“Isn’t it? I didn’t know anything about it until we got here. It’s…I just…” Yuuri said, pausing to wipe away the tears forming in his eyes.

“It’s alright to show how happy you are, dear,” she said quietly, “Just think of the tears you’ll shed when your store is back in the community.”

“That’s not a definitive plan yet, Mrs. Calibri. I think it depends on what happens here.”

“I see good things for you and Mari, Yuuri,” she said, taking his hands and smiling at him, “Have faith things will work out.”

Yuuri nodded and kissed Mrs. Calibri’s cheek before she left, joining Viktor moments later.

As I held my eyes shut, you led me with your brilliance
The light on the horizon, allowing me to see
The solid earth beneath my feet, the place I longed to be

“This isn’t real, there’s no way this can be real,” Yuuri babbled.

“It’s real. The department really raised that much money to go toward Bound to Please,” Viktor assured him.

“I am thrilled, but I also feel ungrateful,” he admitted.

“How so?”

“We’re still fourteen thousand short,” Yuuri said.

“No, you’re not,” Viktor said, smiling and continuing when Yuuri appeared perplexed, “An anonymous benefactor has provided an additional amount. You and Mari have enough to get the building up to code and have a small cushion until business picks up again. They also want to help you with advertising to speed it along.”

“You can’t be serious?” Yuuri asked, stopping in his tracks.
“I’m absolutely serious.”

Yuuri searched Viktor’s eyes as overwhelming happiness filled him. Celestino had pulled him aside after he asked about Yuri’s idea regarding the festival. Celestino told him it was Yuri’s idea initially, but the intricate details were all Viktor. Yuuri knew his feelings for Viktor had evolved into love, but he was suddenly faced at that moment with being absolutely in love with Viktor.

Not able to contain the emotion he’d felt all day, Yuuri stood on the balls of his feet, placed his hands on either side of Viktor’s face and kissed him.

The kiss was brief and chaste, but extraordinarily sweet. The rush of warming electricity in his body the minute their lips touched was welcome and he wanted to keep the feeling forever. It was over as soon as it began, Yuuri taking a step back as sudden regret filled him. He hadn’t thought about his actions and had acted rashly, not considering Viktor’s feelings.

“I’m sorry,” Yuuri said, rushing his words, “I’m just so happy and you’ve helped so much I just—”

“Yuuri,” Viktor said, taking his hands, “It’s alright. I promise.”

When Viktor pressed his lips against his forehead, Yuuri closed his eyes and smiled. Relieved Viktor hadn’t pushed him away, Yuuri was simply content in the moment. The pieces of his life were beginning to fall into place finally and he couldn’t be happier. He was getting his store back, his confidence was growing in leaps and bounds, he ventured into activities he had never considered before, but one thing outshined all of them.

He had Viktor in his life now.

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*Through the darkness and pain, the endless internal torment*

*You were there through every lonely moment*

*Let’s share this sunrise together*
Plan B

Chapter Summary

After a change in plans, the pieces began to fall into place, but Yuuri isn't sure he wants things to go back to what they were.

“Remember the Finding Yuuri project?” he questioned, waiting for Viktor to nod, “I have my own part of the ‘Finding Yuuri’ project.”

“What’s that?” Viktor asked.

“I enjoyed my time here and have really grown since staying with you. You were there for me when I needed it the most. You helped pull me out of the darkness that threatened to consume me. We had a ton of fun, and I’m really going to miss that.”

“I’m glad, Yuuri,” he said, smiling at him.

“I’m not finished,” Yuuri stated, waiting for Viktor to nod at him to continue, “I don’t want to leave.”

Chapter Notes

I finally have this one done! I had it written last weekend, but wanted to add and tweak a few things since I felt it was lacking something. This is a monumental chapter for Yuuri and Viktor.

Now bear with me as I go through the notes. There are a lot:
1) The Holocaust Center is in Bloomfield Hills, MI. It is a very sobering experience but so worth visiting. If you ever get a chance, I strongly urge you to do so.
2) The Diary of Anne Frank is just that. It's about a teen girl living in Amsterdam when World War II broke out. Since her family was Jewish, they had to go into hiding. I'm not telling you anything else, but again, strongly urge you to read it.
3) I'm going to be vague about this, but the cost of construction may seem high. It's pretty spot on considering the size of the store and how much rewiring that has to be done. I asked a journeyman electrician.
4) The first quote is from Maya Angelou's Letter to My Daughter. I found it VERY fitting and wonderful since Maya Angelou is my favorite poet.
5) When Yuuri refers to Holland, he's talking about Holland, Michigan. It's on the western side of Michigan. It's a tourist town and in the spring they have a tulip festival. I've never been to it but want to go SO badly. It's on my living list :)
6) Again, West Park is in Ann Arbor Michigan. It runs along Miller Ave, Huron and Chapin Sts.
7) Sault Ste. Marie (Soo Saint Maree) is a town in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. So is Escanaba. Lots of turquoise and copper up there.
8) The second quote is from a book I mentioned many chapters back. It's from The Symposium by Plato. I'm seriously reading this thing. I'll submit my book report in a year or so.
The heat of the sun filled the air, making Yuuri sweat as he walked to the bookstore. He and Mari had a meeting with the contractor and foreman of the construction team. It had been a few days since he had chatted with Mari, but she assured him everything was going according to plan.

A month had passed since the fair that raised the money to fix Bound to Please. Yuuri was still shocked by the generosity of the Ann Arbor community, but he had seen similar acts of kindness since he moved to the area. The estimate given to fix the store was lower than expected, and he was thankful for the financial cushion their anonymous benefactor provided them.

Classes were in full swing and Yuuri enjoyed his work at the university, but he missed Viktor terribly. Viktor was taking advantage of his sabbatical and spent hours at home or taking trips around the state of Michigan. He had dragged Yuuri along one day to the holocaust museum in Bloomfield Hills. The displays and tour left Yuuri speechless and glad he wasn’t in such a depressive state, knowing he wouldn’t be able to handle the heaviness of the subject.

Viktor made appearances in the office at least once a week, but it wasn’t the same. Yuuri had been assigned to help other professors and he found he didn’t enjoy his work as much. He wasn’t the only one in the doldrums, Mila and JJ feeling the same as he did. The only bright spot was when Viktor returned to the floor to do research, commandeering all three to help him.

After work was the time Yuuri loved the best.

He would return to Viktor’s house and a homecooked meal waiting for him every evening. They talked about current events or how their days went, often times making plans for the upcoming weekend. After cleaning up their dinner dishes, they’d retreat to the living room to watch a movie or Yuuri’s room to critique various literary works.

The night before the meeting was different. Yuuri couldn’t concentrate on the conversation about The Diary of Anne Frank and Viktor noticed within minutes. Removing the book from Yuuri’s hands, Viktor clasped them and squeezed gently, feeling the familiar frisson jolt through his body.

“What’s wrong, Yuuri?” he asked.

“I’m nervous about tomorrow,” Yuuri admitted, “Mari said everything is alright, but I’m still worried.”
“I can’t say I blame you,” Viktor said, “but I think everything will be ok. If something changes, you know we’ll work through it and get your store back.”

“I hope you’re right,” he mumbled.

Almost passing the bookstore while immersed in his musings, Yuuri unlocked the door and went inside. Mari was waiting for him, greeting him with a smile and a hug. She had been in a better mood since learning they would be able to repair Bound to Please and reopen. The store was her lifeblood as well and she’d be lost without it.

After turning the lights on in the store, he and Mari chatted with the construction crew. They were an amicable bunch of men and Mari promised them deep discounts when the bookstore was back in business. The contractor finally arrived and after quick pleasantries, the older man described how the job was going.

“I’m not going to lie to either of you,” he began, “After we started tearing everything apart, we found more damage than initially thought.”

“How bad is it?” Mari asked, taking in the fear on Yuuri’s face when she looked at him.

“The entire floor on the upper level needs to be replaced, so does the majority of the wiring on the right side of the store. We also need to rip out five walls and two foundation pillars upstairs along with two walls downstairs. That’s on top of everything we’ve already discussed,” he informed them.

“How much is it going to cost?” Yuuri asked, “Total cost.”

“We’re looking at almost forty thousand dollars give or take,” the contractor said.

Yuuri felt his very being plummet to the floor and a panic attack set in. He felt almost as lost and hopeless as he did when Bound to Please had been shut down. Looking at his sister when she took his hand and squeezed, Yuuri had wished Viktor was there, needing him more than ever.

He barely heard Mari and the contractor speaking over the blood rushing through his ears. Staggering to the counter and sitting in the chair behind it, Yuuri bent over and tried to calm his breathing. He hated feeling so weak, especially in front of so many people. Though he had made tremendous strides in therapy since staying with Viktor, Yuuri felt like everyone was judging him and coming to the conclusion he was pathetic.

“Deep breaths, Yuuri,” Mari said, lightly pushing his head between his knees to prevent him from losing consciousness, “We’ll figure something out. We always do.”

Yuuri shook his head as desperation set in and he felt his dream slipping through his fingers once again. He wanted his bookstore, he wanted one of the loves of his life back. He missed wandering through the stacks for hours each day. He craved the musty smell of older books that were traded in or bought at auction. He wished to see all the kids he spent time with during children’s hour each Wednesday. Poetry slam seemed an event of the past that would never be reclaimed. When he thought of everything together, Yuuri felt as if he was missing a piece of himself.

“It’ll be ok, Baby Bro,” Mari said gently, holding his head against her abdomen when he looked up and rocking him gently, “We’ll figure something out. It’ll be alright.”
“How did the meeting go?”

Viktor waited for Yuuri to settle in before answering his question, but he never received a reply. Frowning when Yuuri stomped past him and went to his room, Viktor assumed it hadn’t gone well, the slamming door moments later confirming his suspicions. He hurt for Yuuri. He had been doing so well in therapy and was beginning to climb a mountain that was slowly building his self-confidence, but Viktor knew today would set him back. He just didn’t know how much.

Knocking softly on the door, Viktor waited several seconds before entering the room. Yuuri was on his side, huddled in bed like he had many times in the past few months. His body shook with silent sobs and sniffing pierced the quiet every so often.

“How did the meeting go?” Viktor asked, sitting on the edge of the bed.

“How’s it going?” Yuri replied.

“OK,” he said, “I’m here if you need me, Yuuri.”

Viktor rose from the bed and stretched, taking a step toward the doorway when Yuuri reached for his hand. He felt a sharp shock course through him before he looked into Yuuri’s eyes, seeing the anguish that filled them. Sitting back down when Yuuri made room on the bed, Viktor rubbed small circles on Yuuri’s hand with his thumb.

“They have to do more work than originally thought,” Yuuri said, voice rough from crying.

“How much more?”

“The entire second floor, wiring in half of the shop and replacing some walls,” Yuuri revealed.

“Damn,” Viktor said, shifting his gaze to look at the wall, “Where does everything stand right now?”

“We’ll be losing the store,” Yuuri declared, “We can’t afford forty thousand dollars. I thought we were set. Something always happens.”

“You’re in a bad spot, Yuuri, but things don’t always go wrong. Look at us,” Viktor said, winking at Yuuri when he gave him a slight smile, “We’ll figure something out.”

“That’s what Mari said,” he grumbled.

“She’s right, you know,” Viktor said, chuckling when Yuuri narrowed his eyes.

“Can you see into the future?” Yuuri inquired angrily, “Can you tell me I’m not going to lose my store? That I’m not going to lose my dream?”

“No, Yuuri, I can’t. All we can do is try our best to beat the odds,” Viktor said, the tone of his voice turning serious, “You have time. We’ll figure something out. Maybe we can have another fair.”

“Nothing is going to change,” he mumbled, burying his face in his pillow.

“How about we let Fate decide?” Viktor inquired,” I think we should reschedule going out and spend the evening binging that series you wanted to see.”

“You wanted to go to opening night of the play, Viktor. I’ll live,” Yuuri argued.

“There will always be other days,” Viktor countered, “You have ten minutes. If you aren’t in the living room, I start without you.”
Patting the top of Yuuri’s hand gently, Viktor felt the warm tingle of energy flow through his arm. It was strangely reassuring and left Viktor with hope things would change for both of them. Rising from the mattress, Viktor gave Yuuri another smile before leaving the room. As he was walking down the short hallway, a line from a poem he had recently read came to mind. As he mentally mulled over the words, Viktor thought it fit Yuuri’s predicament perfectly. Reaching the couch, he dug in the drawer of the table next to it and fished a pad of paper and pen from inside, quickly jotting down the quote.

He was writing the last word when he felt the cushion next to him sink, looking up and seeing Yuuri inches away. His expression was a mask of desperation and rage, and Viktor wanted to take it away from him. Thinking it the next best thing, Viktor handed him the piece of paper and watched him read it. When he finished seconds later, Yuuri looked up and gave him the first genuine smile he’d seen all day.

_You may not control all the events that happen to you, but you can decide not to be reduced by them_

“I thought you were going to Holland today,” Yuuri stated, looking up from the stack of papers before him and at Viktor.

“I decided to wait until Saturday,” Viktor explained, “I have a ton of research to do here. Besides, I thought you might like to come along. We can make a weekend out of it.”

“You said this past Saturday you were running out of resource materials here,” Yuuri reminded him.

“I came up with another topic,” Viktor mumbled in defense, “That and it’s almost lunchtime. Want to grab sandwiches from the stand in the park and feed the squirrels?”

“Let me finish this essay then we can go,” Yuuri said, thankful for the reprieve Viktor offered.

The day had been long and boring thus far, and Yuuri needed a break. The professor he’d been assigned to that day had asked him to grade midterms for his introductory English class, and while he was happy for the work, it bored him to tears. He found his thoughts drifting to Viktor and the previous times that week he’d visited the office, taking him out for lunch or sitting at the duck pond enjoying the others company. The times became the highlight of Yuuri’s days.

Groaning when he finished with the essay, Yuuri placed it on the desk and followed Viktor out of the office moments later. After telling Celestino he was going out, they sauntered down the stairs and exited the building into the park that was the center of the plaza. Yuuri always found it relaxing and had spent numerous days on a bench grading papers. Sharing it with Viktor was even more special.

“Turkey or roast beef?” Viktor asked.

“Roast beef, please,” Yuuri replied.
“Provolone and extra mayo?” he inquired, grinning when Yuuri nodded and his eyes brightened, “Do I know you or do I know you?”

“I have to admit it,” Yuuri started, pausing to chuckle, “You know me.”

Viktor laughed and retreated to the sandwich stand, leaving Yuuri to watch the squirrels darting around the lush grass of the park. The leaves on the maple trees were beginning to show their fall colors, and the brown of the squirrels blended well with them, the animals seemingly playing a game of hide-and-seek. Yuuri loved it.

“What’s so funny?” Viktor asked when he rejoined him, handing him his sandwich.

“Watch,” Yuuri said, pointing at the trees.

Viktor kept his gaze on the tree and waited, wondering what held Yuuri so entranced. He was about to give up when he saw the tiny face of a squirrel peeking out from a large red leaf, twitching its head to detect danger before darting down the tree into the plaza. Viktor laughed as he watched the squirrel gather acorns that fell from the oak trees sprinkled amongst the maples. Just when he thought they couldn’t make him laugh more, Viktor was reduced to tears when the rodent bounded back up the tree at breakneck speed.

“Are they always like this?” he asked.

“During the fall, yes,” Yuuri answered, “I used to watch them at West Park when I took Vicchan out for a walk.”

“I think we’re going to have to do this more often,” Viktor declared.

“Squirrel-watching is fun,” Yuuri said.

“Not just the squirrels, this,” Viktor said, pointing at the activity in front of them, “Spending lunch in the park while the weather is still nice. When it starts getting cold, we can have breakfast and lunch at the coffee shop. I’ll save my trips for the weekend and we can go together.”

“Aren’t you supposed to be on sabbatical?” Yuuri teased though he was worried about Viktor’s time usage.

“From work, yes,” Viktor said, catching his gaze, “From my best friend? Not on your life.”

“I’ll be ok, Viktor,” he stated.

“I know, but I want you to be more than ok,” Viktor began, “I want to be there whenever you need me. If I’m halfway across the state, there’s not much I can do.”

Yuuri nodded at him, unable to speak since emotion threatened to overcome him. He never had anyone adjust their schedule to ensure his wellbeing, and it touched him immensely. He knew there was nothing he could do to repay Viktor, but knew he wouldn’t accept anything anyway. It left Yuuri in awe of how he deserved such a wonderful friend and fell further in love him.

“Thank you, Viktor.”

“Anytime.”
Yuuri sat in the booth nursing a glass of spicy tea while Viktor waited on their lunch and talked to Phichit. They were leaving within the hour for Sault Ste. Marie, Yuuri requesting next week off so he could accompany Viktor on a road trip of the upper peninsula of Michigan. Viktor had learned there was a retired German poet that lived in Escanaba and he made plans to visit the elderly woman.

“Is this seat taken?”

“It is now,” Yuuri said, smiling at the newcomer, “How are you doing, Mrs. Calibri?”

“I’m saddened, dear. I was hoping your bookstore would be open by now,” she whined.

“We hit a snag,” Yuuri stated quietly, dismay filling him, “I don’t know if we’re reopening.”

“Dear, what happened?”

Yuuri spent the next thirty minutes explaining everything that needed to be done to the building. Mrs. Calibri listened intently and asked a few questions that surprised Yuuri, wondering how she knew about the fields included in construction work. Viktor joined them as Yuuri was winding down and greeted Mrs. Calibri when Yuuri paused for breath.

“So it’s carpentry and electrical that’s put you in a bind,” she said, watching Yuuri nod, “Did they tell you how much the estimate would be for the wiring?”

“Anywhere from eight to twelve thousand dollars,” Yuuri revealed.

“I know two gentlemen at my church. They’re brothers,” Mrs. Calibri began, “They’re both journeyman electricians and are always looking for jobs to expand their horizons. I think this would be perfect for them.”

“Mrs. Calibri, I don’t want to impose—” Yuuri said before he was cut off.

“It’s not an imposition, dear,” she declared, “I’m doing this for entirely selfish reasons. I miss my library, the best coffee in the city and your smiling face. I want it back so I’m more than willing to give you and your sister an additional amount.”

“Additional?” Yuuri asked, perplexed.

“Remember the anonymous benefactor?” Viktor asked when he joined them, waiting for him to nod, “Meet your benefactress.”

Yuuri stared at the older woman as a plethora of emotions ran through him. He knew she enjoyed the bookstore immensely, but not enough to continue to give it life. Wiping his eyes and internally scolding himself for becoming emotional, Yuuri reached over the table and held Mrs. Calibri’s hand.

“Thank you so much, Mrs. Calibri,” he began, “I don’t know how I’ll ever repay you.”

“Repay me by reopening your store, Yuuri,” Mrs. Calibri said, “Breathe life into it like it has never seen. I’ve already chatted with a man at church that runs an advertising firm. He’s more than happy to help you and Mari when Bound to Please is open again.”

Yuuri listened to Viktor and Mrs. Calibri chat through lunch, being content on listening to their conversation. He felt overwhelmed and relieved, felt like he was on cloud nine. He made a mental
list of things he and Mari needed to discuss before giving the construction crew the go ahead. Looking up when he heard his name called, Yuuri focused on Viktor.

“Mrs. Calibri said she has to go. She’s reading Minako’s books at the children’s hospital,” Viktor said, smiling softly at him.

“Really?” he asked, grinning when she nodded, “That’s really cool.”

“Before I forget,” Mrs. Calibri said, pulling her wallet from her purse.

Yuuri was confused until he saw her open the small leather binder. His heart began to race as he thought about the woman’s generosity and was overcome with joy that she was helping yet again. After she finished writing, she tore the check off the pad and handed it to Yuuri.

“Give my regards to your sister, dear,” she said, “I’ll be in touch soon!”

Yuuri waved and watched her leave before looking at the paper he held in his hands. When he read the amount, Yuuri felt the breath get knocked out of him and blood rush through his ears. Focusing on the numbers on the check, he only came to when someone touched his shoulder and electricity jolted through him.

“How are you?” Viktor asked, taking the check when Yuuri handed it to him, “Twenty thousand dollars! She’s not some former mafia doll, is she?”

“No, she’s not,” Yuuri said when he regained the ability to speak, “Her husband was an executive of an automotive company. They traveled the world until he passed away. Now that he’s gone, she’s turned into one of Ann Arbor’s biggest philanthropists.”

“May Fate bless her,” Viktor said, marveling at Yuuri’s good luck, “Ready to go? We have a long drive ahead of us and a huge thank you letter to write Mrs. Calibri.”

Yuuri laughed and nodded, thinking of the love those in his life that he cared about gave him. He finally felt hopeful and his purpose was returning. He felt as if his dream would get back on track.

He felt ready for the next step.

The day finally arrived that the apartment was deemed ready for occupation. After discussing a move in date with Mari, Yuuri spent the next few weeks slowly packing his belongings. He had been dreading the day he had to leave Viktor. While it had been preempted by one of the worst times of his life, it eventually turned in to the best. He had the full support of his best friend, he had someone who was willing to deal with whatever his depression threw at them. He had someone to laugh and spend time with. He had someone to debate an array of subjects for hours on end and appreciate their point of view.

He had Viktor, and now that Yuuri knew he loved him he didn’t want to let go.

Yuuri was on the last box when he heard a knock at his door. He looked up and smiled when he saw Viktor standing in the threshold, but the pang in his heart knowing he was leaving him behind hurt Yuuri deeply. Placing the last book in the box, Yuuri stood and sat on the bed, patting the mattress beside him.
“All set?” Viktor asked as he sat down next to Yuuri.

“Yeah,” he replied, “I’m sure I’ve left something behind.”

“It’ll give you a reason to come over,” Viktor teased.

“In that case, I should dump a few boxes around the house,” Yuuri joked, giggling when Viktor poked his side, “but seriously, thank you very much. I don’t know what I would have done without you.”

“You would have persevered, Yuuri. You have strength you don’t know exists,” he said, “You just had to tap it.”

“Again, I couldn’t have done it without you,” Yuuri reiterated, “I can’t believe it’s coming to an end.”

“Me neither, but you know you’re welcome back anytime. You better not be a stranger,” Viktor warned.

“Parting is such sweet sorrow that I shall say good night til it be morrow?” Yuuri asked, cackling when Viktor rolled his eyes.

“If you’re going Shakespearean on me, it’s clear you need to stick around and learn real literature,” Viktor muttered.

“I do believe we have the topic for our next debate,” Yuuri said, looking up when he heard a car horn, “That’s probably Minako.”

“I guess this is it?”

“Yes, but it’s not,” Yuuri assured him, “We’ll still hang out all the time, but it won’t be the same.”

“I know,” he said softly, walking over to Yuuri and squeezing his shoulder, “Are we still on for Chicago next weekend?”

“You bet,” Yuuri replied, giving Viktor a smile he didn’t feel before walking out of the room.

And when one of them meets with his other half, the actual half of himself, whether he be a lover of youth or a lover of another sort, the pair are lost in an amazement of love and friendship and intimacy.

“Viktor?” he asked, turning around.

“Yes?”

“Remember the ‘Finding Yuuri’ project?” he questioned, waiting for Viktor to nod, “I have my own part of the project.”

“What’s that?” Viktor asked.

“I enjoyed my time here and have really grown since staying with you. You were there for me when I needed it the most. You helped pull me out of the darkness that threatened to consume me. We had a ton of fun, and I’m really going to miss that,” Yuuri said.

“I’m glad, Yuuri,” he said, smiling at him.
“I’m not finished,” Yuuri stated, waiting for Viktor to nod at him to continue, “I don’t want to leave.”

“How come?”

“I found something out in my heart,” he said, hesitantly looking up and meeting Viktor’s gaze, “I’ve fallen for you. I love you, Viktor.”

Walking over to him, Yuuri dropped the box on the floor before gently cupping Viktor’s face, brushing his lips across his moments later. He searched Viktor’s icy blue eyes, hoping he wasn’t misreading the love he saw reflected in them. Standing on his tiptoes, Yuuri moved his lips against Viktor’s and was about to give up in defeat until he felt hands rest on his hips, Viktor returning the kiss seconds later. Winding his arms around Viktor’s neck, Yuuri lost himself in the kiss and knew this was what was right. His entire body was filled with the gentle frisson of contentment and he wanted it to last forever, but had to break the kiss to breathe.

“Stay,” Viktor whispered.

“Does this mean what I think it does?” Yuuri inquired.

“I love you too, Yuuri Katsuki.”
Life and Love

Chapter Summary

Following the admission of their mutual feelings, Yuuri comes to terms with what he wants out of their relationship.

“Viktor, do you think we’re going too slow?” Yuuri asked one day while eating breakfast, “Should we speed things up?”

“If you want to pull a Romeo and Juliet, I’m going to have to decline,” Viktor teased, smiling at Yuuri when his expression fell to unamusement, “How can it be too slow if that’s what you’re comfortable with?”

“Well, so many people keep saying something, and I wonder if it’s unfair to you,” he said.

“Yuuri, I told you before I’m willing to take it however slow you want. I want this to work, so if you want to go out on dates and cuddle every night before committing to each other, I’m ok with that.”

“Will you let me know if you change your mind?” Yuuri asked.

“Of course,” Viktor replied, “but I’m not going to.”

Chapter Notes

I was actually in the mood to write a little this week (a week early by the way), but this chapter isn’t like the others. This one touches more on the soulmates aspect that I want the reader to understand. Most view soulmates as two people having complimentary marks or can read each other's thoughts. I'm approaching it in the more literary avenue. I like the idea of one person being divided in half because they are too strong for the gods, so they spend the rest of their life finding 'their one.' Plato's vision was man had four arms and four legs with the strength to challenge the gods, which is why man was separated. That's the vague description, but I urge you to read The Symposium. It's been very influential in this fic and this chapter especially. All the quotes from this chapter are from The Symposium.

Hope you enjoy, thanks for reading and let me know what you think.

~Pax

As much as I wish I could, I don’t own Yuri!!! On Ice.
This fic is not beta’d.
While I truly appreciate the offers, I’m not currently looking for a beta.

You can follow me on tumblr. Stay up to date on latest chapters and story progress or just want to give a shout out! You guys are what drives me, and I so appreciate every one of you.

The weather was warm enough for them to walk to the bookstore. They chatted about the day ahead, and Yuuri mentioned he was worried about how Mari would react to his decision. When Viktor assured him it was ultimately his choice, Yuuri smiled and nodded. Taking Yuuri’s hand in his own, Viktor squeezed it gently as he silently lent him his strength. He tried to remove it, but Yuuri tightened his grip and threaded his fingers through his. Grinning at Yuuri, he lifted their joined hands and kissed the top of Yuuri’s.

“I’m not sure I want to let everyone know about us,” Yuuri said quietly, releasing Viktor’s hand when they turned the corner, “I’m sorry.”

“It’s ok. I understand,” Viktor said, “We’ll take it at your pace and whatever you’re comfortable with.”

“I am going to tell Mari, though,” he admitted, “She needs to know why I’m not moving back in.”

Viktor nodded and followed Yuuri into the building when they reached the bookstore. The store smelled like fresh paint and drop cloths covered the shelves. Viktor stood in the middle of the room and took in all the changes, thinking the space classical yet with a hint of modernity. He missed the mustiness that symbolized the used bookstore but knew it would be back soon.

“Viktor, can you give me a hand?”

Viktor looked toward the door and saw Mari struggling with a large box. Rushing over to take it from her, Viktor followed her up the stairs to the apartment. The renovations to the unit were barely noticeable, but Viktor saw a few.

“They covered the support posts with brick,” he mentioned.

“Yes,” Mari said, dropping a small box onto the table before her, “You should see the bathroom.”

Mari took him on the grand tour of the small apartment, pointing out every detail the remodeling crew changed. Viktor was impressed by the changes in the bathroom. Gone was the spartan feel of it and a warm, welcoming room replacing it. The neutral colors with a splash of turquoise were inviting, and Viktor appreciated it.

“Wow, this is a lot different,” Viktor said, smiling at her.

“Right?” she asked, grinning back, “I feel like I’m moving into a new place.”

“Speaking of different, can I talk to you, Mari?”

They both looked toward the stairs and saw Yuuri standing at the entrance. It was immediately apparent he was nervous since he was tapping his fingers together. Closing the space between them, Mari took Yuuri’s hands in hers when she reached him.

“What’s wrong, Yuuri?” she asked, brows knitting with concern.

“I’m not moving back in,” he blurted.
“Alright,” Mari said, “How come?”

“I want to stay at Viktor’s.”

“If that’s what you want, I can’t force you to come back. Are you still going to work at the bookstore?” she asked, “I know you’ve been working at the university.”

“Yes, Bound to Please is part of my life,” he said, “I wouldn’t give it up for anything. There’s a reason I want to stay at his house.”

“Ok.”

“I love him, Mari,” Yuuri declared, “We’ve spent so much time together and gotten to know each other. He helped me through my tough times this summer. I don’t know where I’d be without him.”

“Are you sure about this?” Mari asked, smiling when Yuuri nodded, “Then I’m happy for you. Not soulmates, eh?”

“And with that, I’m gone,” Yuuri said, removing his hands from her grasp and trouncing down the stairs.

Viktor took several steps forward to follow Yuuri, but his path was blocked when Mari moved in front of him. Tilting his head in confusion, he saw the doubt etched into Mari’s features. Knowing he was in for a talk, Viktor waited for Mari to speak.

“I don’t know what happened between you two while he stayed with you, but he’s placed an enormous amount of trust in you,” she began, “He’s impressionable, Viktor. He’s easily swayed.”

“I know, Mari. We’ve grown closer, and I’ve learned so much about him. I love him too. I wouldn’t dream of messing this up,” Viktor confessed.

“Good, because if you hurt my brother, I’m going to ruin you,” Mari threatened, “Don’t fuck this up, Viktor.”

“Love is simply the name for the desire and pursuit of the whole.” Viktor said.

“Not soulmates, my ass,” Mari grumbled, chuckling at the quote, “Just take care of him.”

“I always will if he’ll let me,” Viktor stated.

Not much had changed since Yuuri confessed his feelings for Viktor but everything had. He returned to the bookstore once it opened and felt like his purpose had returned. Yuuri enjoyed seeing customers he hadn’t interacted with since the store closed and was surprised at the number of new people visiting the store. He attributed it to the advertising Mrs. Calibri’s contact had devised. He and Mari sat down with the man to discuss their goals for Bound to Please’s reopening and were thrilled when he came up with a plan of attack. The day Yuuri saw the half-page spread in the newspaper along with banners on campus, Yuuri knew things were looking up.

He still continued to work on campus one day a week much to Celestino’s chagrin. He thought Yuuri was overdoing it, but his complaints went unheard. Yuuri insisted on helping out and told him he enjoyed it almost as much as the bookstore. Upon hearing Yuuri’s statement, Celestino limited
Mari got her way when she mentioned that she and Yuuri would be swapping every other weekend since they had rehired Minami along with adding Yuri to their employee roster. Minami trained Yuri and while he was still abrupt, he turned out to be an excellent salesperson. He could get down on children’s level as well, often suggesting books he had enjoyed as a child. When Yuri asked to help out with children’s hour, Yuuri was hesitant at first but thought it might be a good idea to let him try.

The day rolled around, and Yuri had chosen a book about a cat meandering through its small village. When Yuri came in lugging a carrier, Yuuri’s eyes widened.

“What do you have there?” Yuuri asked though he already knew the answer.

“I brought my cat,” he answered, “What better way to intrigue the mini people then letting them hang out with Potya.”

“I don’t know, Yuri,” Yuuri said, tapping his forefingers together, “What if it scratches a child?”

“Potya is a cuddle bug,” Yuri countered, “She’s used to little kids. My sister brings her kids over to my apartment and they hang out with Potya all the time.”

“We’ll give it a try,” he said hesitantly.

Potya became a fixture after that.

The children loved Potya and commented on how loud her purring was. She loved to lick and the kids giggled about her tongue, squealing it felt like sandpaper. They loved the book Yuri recommended as well. When Yuri found out his children’s hour had been a hit, he asked if they could hold a drawing contest and let the winner have a copy of the book. Yuuri thought it was a fantastic idea.

Potya started hanging around the shop every day Yuri worked after that. While Yuuri had been concerned the cat and Vicchan wouldn’t get along, they surprised him when he found them curled up together fast asleep several times. The children that visited on a regular basis had fun searching the store for the cat as well, leaving Yuuri time to chat with their parents while their child spent time with Potya. He loved the social interaction and didn’t realize how much he had missed it until now.

That wasn’t the best part, however.

Yuuri had every other weekend off since Mari badgered him about building his relationship with Viktor. They spent some weekends galavanting around the state and others at home giggling over ridiculous books they had read recently. Just when Yuuri thought he couldn’t grow any closer to Viktor, he was pleasantly surprised when he thought wrong. Their relationship hadn’t gone to the next step, but they spent hours cuddling in bed and talking about subjects that mattered to them. Yuuri loved resting his head on Viktor’s chest while Viktor ran his fingers through his dark brown locks. Times like these no words were needed and they simply basked in the other’s company.

Even though they hadn’t officially committed to each other since Yuuri wanted to take it slow, many commented on how much closer they were. The loving looks and pecks on the cheek further instigated people’s beliefs that they were indeed an item. When asked however, both denied they were dating.

They decided on keeping their own rooms, but shared the same bed every once in a while. Yuuri still had down days and Viktor loved holding him while whispering words of reassurance to him. Yuuri would feather his fingers through Viktor’s hair while he read a book that correlated with his
research. More often than not, one would fall asleep with the other following soon after.

“Viktor, do you think we’re going too slow?” Yuuri asked one day while eating breakfast, “Should we speed things up?”

“If you want to pull a Romeo and Juliet, I’m going to have to decline,” Viktor teased, smiling at Yuuri when his expression fell to unamusement, “How can it be too slow if that’s what you’re comfortable with?”

“Well, so many people keep saying something, and I wonder if it’s unfair to you,” he said.

“Yuuri, I told you before I’m willing to take it however slow you want. I want this to work, so if you want to go out on dates and cuddle every night before committing to each other, I’m ok with that.”

“Will you let me know if you change your mind?” Yuuri asked.

“Of course,” Viktor replied, “but I’m not going to.”

“So the store has reopened, but our dear Yuuri is still at your house.”

Viktor took a sip of his tea while watching Chris. He knew this meeting was inevitable since Chris would want to know what changed. He had watched them from afar for almost a year and while he kept his mouth shut, Viktor could feel interest radiating from his friend.

“Yes, it has and yes, he is,” Viktor stated vaguely.

“Is what everyone saying true? That you’re dating? It’s no secret you’re living together,” Chris said.

“Does one have to be dating to live together?” Viktor asked in exasperation.

“Not at all,” Chris said, giving him a reassuring smile, “I see how you look at him, Viktor. I know you’re in love with him.”

“Viktor, it couldn’t have happened to a better person, but what are you waiting for?” Chris inquired.

“The harmony,” he replied.

“The what?” Chris asked, baffled.

“For harmony is a symphony, and symphony is an agreement; but an agreement of disagreements while they disagree there cannot be; you cannot harmonize that which disagrees.” Viktor quoted, smirking when Chris rolled his eyes.

“Both of you get along and have feelings for each other,” Chris stated, “That sounds like an agreement to me.”

“We don’t have the harmony yet. We have a great relationship so far, but it’s still friendship. Yuuri wants to take it slow and that’s fine with me. We’ll have our symphony soon,” Viktor said wistfully.
“This is why I don’t date anyone in the English department,” he teased, “You guys are too intellectual for me.”

“I don’t know. You could try Kelley,” Viktor suggested, “She’s a sucker for foreign guys.”

“Good to know.”

The rest of their lunch consisted of conversation about Viktor’s research and the classes Chris was teaching that semester. Even though they lived next door, they rarely saw each other since the semester began. Yuuri often passed messages between them since he saw them both on a regular basis.

“I’m glad you mentioned to Yuuri about lunch,” Viktor said, drinking the rest of his tea, “I’ve enjoyed seeing a friend again.”

“It gives me an excuse to see Yuuri as well,” Chris admitted, “He’s such a refreshing young man.”

“We aren’t going to any of your parties,” Viktor deadpanned, stopping the conversation in its tracks.

“Can’t say I didn’t try. How about an end-of-the-season cookout at my place this weekend. Faculty only, but you can bring Yuuri,” Chris recommended.

“That sounds great. We’ll be there.”

Once they were ready to leave and paid their checks, Chris stopped Viktor outside the restaurant. After giving him the details of the cookout that weekend, Chris decided to ask him the question that’s been on his mind for weeks.

“So,” Chris began, “Do you still not believe that Yuuri is your one? I mean if you’re reading The Symposium and quoting it…”

“Love’ is the name for our pursuit of wholeness, for our desire to be complete.”

“I believe you answered my question,” Chris said, grinning happily.

“I believe I did,” Viktor said, feeling a slight flutter in his chest followed by a comfortable warmth.

Chris was left standing in shock, not believing the words he had heard from his best friend.

The next month flew by quickly. The faculty party at Chris’ house was fun and Yuuri genuinely enjoyed himself. It was the first time Chris neither flirted with him nor suggested anything was going on between him and Viktor. Making a mental note to thank him, Yuuri found Viktor and stayed by his side for the remainder of the evening.

They finally took a road trip to Holland though the flowers weren’t in bloom. Viktor had found a local poet that apprenticed under a Ukrainian fellow many years back. Viktor had fallen in love with his work and asked if he could use them as examples in his paper. The man was taken aback, tears springing in his eyes when he told him he hadn’t been published in almost forty years. Upon hearing that, an idea came to Yuuri’s mind and he filed it away for later.

Halloween turned into Thanksgiving, he and Mari choosing to hold dinner for their friends and
employees. Most were far from home and didn’t have anywhere to go, so the invitations were received well. Once they were seated at the table heaping with food, Mari asked their guests to share one thing they were thankful for this year.

“I’m thankful the store reopened and I got my job back,” Minami said.

“I’m thankful I got to see all of you rise above despair and overcome all the obstacles you faced,” Minako stated.

“Spoken like a true writer,” Mari teased, “I guess I’ll go next. I’m thankful we got our store back and my baby bro has found himself.”

Yuuri blushed and lowered his head when he heard her declaration. He still hadn’t let everyone know the depths of his and Viktor’s relationship, but he was growing enough confidence to do so soon.

“I’ll go next. I never thought I’d say this, but I’m glad Genius and Mari got their store back, and I’m going to be thankful for the twenty bucks Otabek promised for coming to this shindig,” Yuri said, “But seriously, thank you for inviting me to be part of your family of misfits. It’s been fun.”

“It’s been fun having you, Yuri,” Mari said, looking at Viktor, “Your turn.”

“I’m thankful for finding this store when Yuri dared me, and I couldn’t lose,” Viktor said, grinning when the others laughed, “I found my best friend this year.”

Yuuri smiled happily when Viktor looked at him, nodding at him a moment later. His thoughts were on the same wavelength, but he wanted to make it special. He was used to being the wallflower at gatherings and was an afterthought to most that attended. He was used to escaping to his room to read because he was too nervous to socialize with their guests.

This year was different.

“I guess it’s my turn,” Yuuri said, taking a deep breath and focusing on the butter dish in front of him, “I’m thankful for finding life and love this year. I realized my life was not the bookstore, but just part of it. It’s my dream. My real life is the people in it. It took one person to make me realize that.

I think Fate knew what she was doing when she brought Viktor into the store. We get along so well and he was there during my darkest hour. He chipped in and gave me a place to stay without a second thought. I’ve never had a friend do that for me. I had been struggling with my feelings toward him even before the store was shut down, but staying with him cemented them. I love Viktor. I’m sure most of you have figured it out. That’s not all though. I’m thankful he let me take my time while I figured out what I wanted. Viktor, I know now. I think it’s time for our symphony.”

“Are you sure?” Viktor asked, completely surprised Yuuri announced it in front of his friends and family.

“Never been more sure about anything in my life,” Yuri confessed, “Can we date for real now?”

“I’d like that,” Viktor said, taking Yuuri’s hand in his and lifting it, kissing the tip of every finger.

“Isn’t that beautiful.” Minako said, resting her hand on her hands, “I knew it was coming, but that was more darling than anything I could ever dream up.”
“I thought of a few other things I want to add,” Mari said, getting everyone’s attention, “This year has been one of the hardest I’ve ever experienced, with the shop closing temporarily and Yuuri’s health issues. I have quite a few things in life that I’m thankful for this year. I’m beyond ecstatic the store is back open. I’m sure Minako was ready to kill me.”

“You have no idea,” she muttered amidst laughter.

“Seriously though, I’ve grown through watching my brother. He really took life by the horns this year and went after what he wanted. I had fully expected to be his guardian for his life, but it seems he found a new one,” Mari said, lifting her wine glass, “So here’s to reopened stores, a family of misfits, life, love and symphonies.”

The short drive back to the house was silent save for the rubbing of Viktor’s gloved thumb over Yuuri’s mitten. He felt he was on top of the world now that he asked Viktor to officially date him. He was thrilled, yet he was a nervous wreck.

Viktor picked up on Yuuri’s anxiety the minute they walked in the door. It took Yuuri twice as long to find the bowl to drop his keys into, and he knocked the coat tree over three times. Smiling sadly, Viktor held Yuuri’s coat while he shrugged out of it, hanging it up moments later.

“Come here,” Viktor said, taking his hand and leading him to the couch.

Cuddling on the couch during the late hours of the night was nothing new to them, but the way he enfolded against Viktor’s body and the kisses shared between them made Yuuri’s heart swell with love and warmth this time. Everything felt in harmony and Yuuri couldn’t be happier in that moment.

“Been reading some Symposium?” Viktor asked, breaking him from his daydream.

“Just a few pages here and there,” Yuuri admitted, feeling a blush creep up his neck.

“You’re not the only one,” he professed, “I’ve felt things changing and it makes so much sense now that I read it. I’ve never believed in marks or thoughts. They seem ridiculous, but finding your harmonious half and creating a symphony? Finding the other half of you? I love the idea.”

“How do you explain the electricity?” Yuuri asked suddenly.

“Maybe that was Fate’s way of telling us to pay attention,” Viktor explained.

“Do you think our symphony will be beautiful, Viktor?”

“It’s going to be the most magnificent symphony the world has ever seen,” he said, kissing Yuuri seconds later.
Chapter Summary

The Christmas season has arrived, Viktor and Yuuri preparing for the holiday together.

They chatted as Viktor finished breakfast, going over the plans for the day. Their time would be spent hopping from one place to another and Yuuri knew he’d be exhausted come nightfall, but he knew it would be worth it.

“So, mall first then the craft fair at the church down the street. Lunch at the cider mill. I think I’m going to get some ornaments at their gift shop. Choosing and chopping down a tree and then Christkindlmarket. After that the Handel performance,” Viktor said, going through their list.

Chapter Notes

It's about damn time for this chapter, eh? Sorry it took so long. My writing has slowed down considerably due to life and writer's block. I promise I haven't abandoned my fics.

There are some notes for this chapter, so let's get right to them.
1) The first quote, "You are my heart, my life, my one and only thought", is from Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.
2) Christkindlmarket (KindleFest) is a Christmas market in Ann Arbor. It's usually held the first weekend in December.
3) "Whatever our souls are made of, his and mine are the same" is from Emily Bronte.
4) "I do love nothing in the world so well as you, is not that strange" is from William Shakespeare's Much Ado About Nothing. This one is my favorite Shakespeare play, so I had to use it!
5) The Handel performance I hinted at is "Messiah." Part 1 is also known as The Christmas Portion.

I think that's it for notes. If I think of anything else, I'll add to it.

Hope you enjoy, thanks for reading and let me know what you think!

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“Are you sure you want to go tonight?”
Yuuri nodded and finished getting ready. He was touched by Viktor’s compassion, but he knew he needed to attend. This was the first poetry slam since the store reopened and Yuuri wouldn’t miss it for the world.

“I’ll be ok,” Yuuri assured him, smiling softly.

“I remember you mentioning panic attacks after them,” Viktor said, looking at him worriedly.

“There’s a difference this time,” he said.

“What’s that?”

“I have you by my side,” Yuuri stated, standing on tiptoe to kiss Viktor, “I’m ready.”

After making sure the dogs had food and water, they embarked on the walk to Bound to Please. It was a chilly evening, but the magic of Christmas flitted through the air. The weekend was full of holiday activities and they couldn’t wait until the next day to take part in them.

They had to get through the slam first, though.

The city had laden Main Street with clear Christmas lights and it added to the spellbound feeling of the holiday. Both mentioned earlier in the day how they wished the forecasted snow would begin while they were at the poetry slam, agreeing that it would be fitting for their weekend.

When they arrived at the bookstore, the shop was teeming with people. Yuuri had never seen it so busy and while it put him on edge, Viktor’s presence was calming. Grabbing Viktor's hand, Yuuri felt the soft tingling of electricity run through his body. It eased his anxiety quickly.

They headed to the back of the store and sat in the chairs they normally did. Being the first poetry slam since Bound to Please had reopened and from the looks of it, people were ecstatic it was back.

Viktor excused himself to get them hot chocolate. Within minutes of Viktor’s departure, Yuuri looked up to see Phichit fall into the chair next to him. He had chatted with him several times in the past week, gushing to Phichit about his relationship with Viktor and how blessed he was. Phichit was thrilled for them.

Viktor returned minutes later and greeted Phichit. They talked until Mari asked for everyone’s attention since the poetry slam was due to start any minute.

“What a crowd we have here tonight!” she exclaimed happily, “I don’t think we’ve had so many attend before. I want to thank everyone for coming. Let’s go over a few rules first and then we’ll get this show on the road.”

Mari went over the guidelines and what she expected from the readers that night. Mentioning she’d keep the store open for an hour after the slam, Yuuri hoped most would purchase at least one item. After she finished her spiel, she asked for volunteers to go first.

Phichit groaned when Seung-Gil took the stage. Yuuri looked at his friend, silently pleading for him to behave. A quick nod later, Yuuri settled deeper into the chair and took Viktor’s hand, squeezing slightly.

“I wrote a poem about Bound to Please reopening. I’m glad we have poetry slam back again and hope it’s here to stay. I titled it ‘Rebirth.’

“Darkness while you were away
Once Seung-Gil completed his recitation, the entire crowd broke out into applause and whistles of approval. He seemed taken aback, not used to such a reaction. Giving the audience a half-smile, Seung-Gil bowed and found a dark corner to watch the rest of the slam.

“I’ll be damned,” Phichit whispered, “Look who’s sticking around for the entirety.”

“Maybe he’s thawing,” Yuuri suggested.

“I think the store being gone might have softened him,” Phichit mused, “Let’s hope it sticks.”

Yuuri chuckled at his friend’s observation before turning his attention back to the readers. Most of the selections were hopeful and positive, most of the readers dedicating their piece to the bookstore. Yuuri was in awe of how much his and Mari’s shop touched everyone and it left him in happy tears. Once the slam ended, Yuuri had gone through half a pack of tissues.

“I think everyone missed this,” Viktor observed, kissing the top of Yuuri’s hand.

“I missed them,” Yuuri surmised, “I can’t believe how much our store meant to them.”

“Give it time and it’s going to be a pillar of the community,” Viktor stated, leaning over to give Yuuri a kiss.

Viktor guessed some of his students were present given the teasing hollers of the people around him. He had never shown affection for Yuuri in public and while he did it on a whim, he hoped it wouldn’t affect Yuuri negatively. Breaking the kiss, Viktor saw the smattering of red on Yuuri’s cheeks but was surprised when he leaned in for another. Viktor thought he was in heaven.

Yuuri excused himself to help Mari and Minami take care of the many customers in the store. He was shocked by the line in front of them, thinking they never had so many people waiting to be rung up before. They took care of their customers as quickly as possible, Yuuri chatting with each one as they waited.

By the time the last customer finished their purchase and they locked the doors for the night, everyone was exhausted. It was a busy night filled with fun and though they still had to count the drawer down, they knew they would have a new sales record. Everyone took a few minutes to collect themselves before taking care of their closing duties, Viktor offering to pitch in to straighten up the shelves and put away stray books. Yuuri was grateful for his help.

They finished their tasks in record time since everyone had a job to perform, Mari announcing they had the same amount of sales that hour that they normally would in a week. Shouts of cheer erupted and everyone save Mari left in a good mood.

It was late when Viktor and Yuuri arrived home, the streets nearly empty as they walked. They had planned on discussing The Symposium that night, but the evening was draining in the best of ways. Choosing instead to retire for the evening, Viktor and Yuuri kissed each other goodnight before heading to their rooms.
“Oh hey, Viktor?” Yuuri asked as he paused in the doorway of his room.

“Yes?” he replied with a question of his own.

“I love you,” Yuuri confessed, smiling softly.

“I love you too, Yuuri,” Viktor echoed, “You are my heart, my life, my one and only thought.”

The next morning arrived and Yuuri was surprised he woke before Viktor. They had a busy day planned and Yuuri figured Viktor was up most of the night, working on his paper into the wee hours of the morning. Deciding to let Viktor sleep, Yuuri sauntered into the kitchen to start breakfast.

He prepared Viktor’s favorite: sunny-side-up eggs along with English muffins smattered with strawberry jelly. Humming while he made the food, Yuuri thought about the day they had planned. It was their first official date and he was excited. Viktor came up with a plethora of activities, but when Yuuri begged to whittle the list down, Viktor kissed him gently and agreed.

Once breakfast was finished, Yuuri placed the plate on a tray and carried it down the hallway. He eased the door to Viktor’s room open, smiling when he saw him sprawled on the mattress. In the few times they shared the same bed, Yuuri was afforded little room since Viktor had a tendency to move in his sleep. When Yuuri brought it up jokingly, Viktor apologized profusely.

“Hey sleepyhead,” Yuuri whispered, smiling softly when Viktor’s eyes fluttered open, “I made breakfast for you.”

Viktor sat up and rubbed the sleep out of his eyes before yawning. Thanking Yuuri when he handed him the tray, Viktor grinned when he saw his favorite breakfast in front of him. Motioning Yuuri closer, Viktor leaned over and kissed him.

“Thank you so much,” Viktor said, handing Yuuri half of the English muffin, “You need to eat too.”

“I had some oatmeal while I was waiting for the eggs to cook,” Yuuri informed him.

“Here,” Viktor said.

He took a piece of egg onto his fork and held it out for Yuuri. Giving Viktor a sweet smile, he took the bite. He marveled at the generosity Viktor showed but chalked it up to them being an official couple now. He found the gesture endearing.

“The mall opens in a little over an hour and you mentioned you wanted to be there early,” Yuuri reminded him.

“Yes, I do. Are you looking forward to Christmas shopping?”

Yuuri loved the holiday and went all out decorating the store, but the only person he ever bought gifts for were Mari and Phichit. He wasn’t the best gift-giver, but he had so many people to buy for this year. He wanted his presents to be as close to perfect as possible. When he brought the predicament up, Viktor promised to help him select gifts for everyone on his list.

They chatted as Viktor finished breakfast, going over the plans for the day. Their time would be spent hopping from one place to another and Yuuri knew he’d be exhausted come nightfall, but he
knew it would be worth it.

“So, mall first then the craft fair at the church down the street. Lunch at the cider mill. I think I’m going to get some ornaments at their gift shop. Choosing and chopping down a tree and then Christkindlmarket. After that the Handel performance,” Viktor said, going through their list.

“I’m really looking forward to the Christkindlmarket,” Yuuri confessed, “I’ve never been there.”

“Think of everything you think you need for the holiday and magnify it by a hundred,” Viktor said, grinning when a look of astonishment appeared on Yuuri’s face.

“That much?”

“That much,” Viktor echoed.

After talking a few minutes longer, Yuuri left Viktor’s room to get ready for the day. He wanted to look great, wanted to be someone Viktor would be proud to be seen with. Deep down he knew Viktor loved him for who he was, but his anxiety was wreaking havoc on him.

He spent longer than anticipated on choosing an outfit, eventually settling on an emerald green sweater with snowflakes and a pair of worn jeans. He thought he was barely passable, but when he meandered into the living room and he heard a low whistle, he felt his trademark blush creep up his neck.

“You look absolutely stunning, Yuuri,” Viktor said, taking his hands in his own.

“Thanks, Viktor,” he said.

After letting the dogs run around in the backyard for a little while, Yuuri and Viktor climbed into the car and drove toward the mall. Christmas music piped through the speakers and they talked about the list of people they needed to buy for. Viktor mentioned he was saddened he wasn’t teaching at that moment due to the fact students always gifted him with various interesting baubles. Yuuri laughed at him.

The mall was packed by the time they arrived, many people having the same idea they did. Yuuri took a deep breath to psych himself up for the excursion, but he was still nervous. Viktor picked up on his discomfort and held his hand when they got out of the vehicle, Yuuri feeling the comforting warmth of electricity he had come to associate with touching Viktor. Feeling the sensation course through his body, Yuuri felt calm wash over him.

They wandered from store to store, purchasing many items for gifts or their home. When Viktor found his favorite candle shop, he went wild and explained he needed to buy one for everyone on his list. When Yuuri raised a brow, Viktor quickly stated it set the perfect ambiance for the holiday.

Two hundred dollars later they left the candle shop and headed for the jewelry store next to it. Yuuri wanted to buy Mari a pendant since she had a fondness for jewelry. He spent an inordinate amount of time deciding between three charms, trying to choose one. When Viktor excused himself to use the restroom, Yuuri’s eyes darted to a display holding bracelets.

“I’d like this pendant,” he told the clerk, holding one in his hand, “May I see your bracelets?”

He waited for the woman to remove the display from the case before inspecting each piece. He knew he wouldn’t be able to buy one today, but he wanted Viktor’s gift to be from the bottom of his heart. Not knowing if a gift of this magnitude would be appropriate for their first Christmas together, Yuuri decided to think about it.
Yuuri was waiting to be rung up by the time Viktor returned. Greeting him with a kiss, Viktor rambled about the decorations near the food court and insisted they view them. Yuuri agreed since Viktor’s enthusiasm was contagious. Once Yuuri had his purchases in hand, they headed toward the food court. Yuuri was astonished when they stepped through the arch decorated with fake holly. He knew the mall went all-out for Christmas, but he’d never witnessed it himself. Spinning slowly to get the full effect, Yuuri was enthralled by the area.

“You’re right,” he said to Viktor, “This is beautiful!”

“I thought you might like it,” Viktor said, standing behind him and wrapping his arms around Yuuri’s waist.

“You thought right. On to the next store?”

They continued shopping until it became too busy for Yuuri. He apologized many times, but Viktor told him his comfort and sanity were more important than a few gifts. It was lunchtime when they left and on the way to the cider mill.

“I hope their gift shop is open,” Viktor mused, “I want to get Chris some of their spiced tea.”

“He’d like that,” Yuuri stated, thinking about the man’s love of tea.

It was slightly busy by the time they arrived, but Yuuri wouldn’t miss it for the world. He loved the mill and any chance they got to visit it. Smelling the fragrance of food wafting in the air when they walked into the building, Yuuri’s mouth instantly began to water.

“That smells so good,” he said, tugging on Viktor’s hand and heading for the counter.

They both chose the homemade vegetable beef soup with a side of cornbread. Finding a table in the corner, they ate their meal while discussing what was next for the day. They were both looking forward to the market later that evening along with the symphony, but Viktor wondered if Yuuri would be able to fight his anxiety that consumed him when they were out for prolonged periods of time. The more Viktor thought about it, he offered Yuuri the option of bowing out if things became too intense for him.

Once they finished eating, they cleaned up after themselves and thanked the proprietor’s wife for the hearty meal. They made their way to the gift shop, Viktor finding the tea he wanted to buy for Chris along with a dozen of the powdered apple donuts they both enjoyed. When Yuuri reminded him they were out to buy presents for their friends and loved ones, Viktor feigned disbelief. Yuuri rolled his eyes before laughing.

The craft fair was in full swing by the time they arrived, but Yuuri was fine with it. There was plenty of room to navigate in the large sanctuary of the church. They wandered from table to table, taking in items ranging from knitted tea cozies to decorative book covers. When Yuuri’s eyes landed on the book covers, he knew he had to buy a few for Mrs. Calibri.

Viktor was amazed at the different gift ideas that were presented to him from table to table. The crafters’ creativity impressed him and he had a difficult time narrowing down the items for gifts. When Viktor mentioned to Yuuri he wanted to buy everything, Yuuri helped him by restricting his choices to two items. It helped Viktor immensely.

The tree farm in the parking lot reminded Viktor he didn’t have one at home. He wanted to make Christmas special for Yuuri and that included a tree. When he asked Yuuri about it earlier in the week, he assured him they didn’t need a tree to make it the best holiday yet. Not hearing it, Viktor
resolved to making Yuuri agree with him.

After they had seen everything at the craft fair, they meandered to the parking lot to choose a tree. Yuuri protested yet again but Viktor would hear nothing of it. When he mentioned they could shop to their hearts’ content for ornaments at Christkindlmarket, Yuuri reluctantly agreed. They spent the next hour trying to locate the perfect tree, but were having no luck. They had reached the back of the lot when Viktor gasped and dashed ahead, stopping in front of a full spruce. After inspecting it closely, Yuuri agreed with Viktor and they searched for the attendant to buy it.

Arms weighed down with a plethora of bags along with the tree on the roof, they decided to make a brief stop at home to unload their haul and check on the dogs. Letting the dogs out to work out some of their energy, they unloaded the car while Makkachin and Vicchan romped around the front yard. Once the car was empty of bags and the tree, they called the dogs back in and headed back out.

It was almost dark when they arrived at Christkindlmarket. Yuuri found the sights and sounds overwhelming but knew he’d be able to handle it with Viktor by his side. The din from the crowd was loud but the atmosphere pleasant and the fragrance from the mix of various foods mouthwatering. Realizing it had been hours since they had last eaten, they went in search of dinner.

Finding a bratwurst stand, they purchased two along with a container of German potato salad and large steins of beer. Yuuri had never tried German food and was pleasantly surprised by the flavors that burst along his tongue. He loved the potato salad the most, feeling the warmth flood through his body as he ate. Making the meal perfect, they sipped on their beers.

Once they were full, they ambled through the crowd and took in every table and booth they passed. It was busier than Yuuri could ever imagine, but he loved it. He wanted to buy several decorations, and with Viktor’s help he narrowed them down to six. The ornaments were another story, however. He and Viktor went overboard and hoped they would all fit on the tree. The bubbling lanterns were Yuuri’s favorite and requested they make it on the tree no matter what. Viktor smiled and sealed the promise with a kiss.

After sampling Black Forest cake from a nearby vendor, Yuuri and Viktor headed toward the edge of the street to watch the lantern parade. Though they weren’t participating, they wanted to be a part of it. Finding the perfect spot to view it, Viktor grinned when he saw a familiar face.

“Chris!” he shouted, getting his friend’s attention, “What are you doing here?”

“Showing Erica the joys of German culture,” Chris replied, introducing his date to Viktor and Yuuri, “Hi Yuuri. How are you enjoying the market?”

“It’s one of the best things I’ve ever experienced,” Yuuri gushed.

“That’s wonderful,” he replied, giving him a smile before turning to Viktor and lowering his voice, “This is the first date you were talking about?”

“Yes,” Viktor replied, “He seems to be loving it. I know I am.”

“I thought you hated shopping,” Chris stated.

“I usually do, but with Yuuri it’s taken on a new meaning.”

“Still don’t believe in soulmates?” Chris inquired though he knew better.

“’Whatever souls are made of, his and mine are the same,’” Viktor quoted, grinning when Chris rolled his eyes, “Everyone needs a little Bronte in their lives.”
“I’ll leave the literature to you and stick to les langues d’amour.”

Viktor laughed at his friend’s declaration and turned his attention back to Yuuri. Smiling softly when he felt the frisson from Yuuri’s hand when he held it, Viktor squeezed gently. He enjoyed the parade but even more so since Yuuri was with him. The nip in the air had them huddling closer to each other, the flurries adding to the wonder of the holiday. Viktor thought the setting couldn’t be more perfect.

After the parade, Viktor and Yuuri headed to the heated tent to make s’mores. It was one of the things Yuuri was looking forward to and he didn’t want to miss it. They had planned on making them during their camping trip last summer, but Fate had other ideas in store for them. Finally getting able to make the treat together, Yuuri smiled happily, wiping melted marshmallow from the side of Viktor’s mouth.

“Did you get it all?” Viktor asked.

“Yep,” Yuuri answered.

“Are you sure?” he inquired, relishing Yuuri’s giggles when he lowered his head and kissed him, “I think it’s all gone now.”

The market began to wind down and they made their way to the car. Yuuri yawned several times on the walk and Viktor knew he was exhausted. When Yuuri began fumbling with the keys, Viktor took his hands in his own.

“I think we should pass on the symphony,” Viktor suggested.

“You were looking forward to it,” Yuuri argued.

“You’re dead on your feet,” he observed, “We can go another time. They have concerts every weekend leading up to Christmas. How about a lazy weekend next week and the symphony in the evening.”

“Are you sure you don’t mind?” Yuuri questioned.

“Not at all,” Viktor answered, smiling softly at him, “Let’s go home.”

“I’d like that,” he agreed.

It was close to ten when they arrived home for the night and Yuuri was exhausted. He hadn’t been out for that long since he was a child and though he was anxious at times, he would do it again. He still had a few people to shop for, so he made a mental note to ask Viktor to go out again sometime soon.

Viktor sat on the couch and motioned for Yuuri to join him, easing him onto his lap when Yuuri stood in front of him. It had been too long since he’d felt Yuuri fully against him. He basked in the feeling and sighed in contentment. When Yuuri rested his head on his chest, Viktor hummed happily.

“I do love nothing in the world so well as you, is not that strange?” Viktor quoted, referring to a
play they had both read recently.

“Nothing?” Yuuri asked, lifting his head to gaze into Viktor’s eyes.

“Nothing,” he whispered in reply.

Yuuri searched Viktor’s eyes, seeing the love he felt for him reflected in the crystal blue orbs. He didn’t know what he did to deserve Viktor, but he felt his life coming full circle. He had the best gift in the world with Viktor’s love, and now that he had it he’d cherish it forever.

“And I you,” Yuuri said softly.
Chapter Summary

Christmas has arrived, Yuuri and Viktor spending it with friends and family. The best is yet to come when they are alone for the evening.

Hours later and after all their loved ones departed, Viktor and Yuuri collapsed on the couch. It was a long yet wonderful day, and they wouldn’t trade it for the world. Turning off the lamp next to him, the lights from the tree were the only illumination in the room.
“It’s so beautiful,” Yuuri whispered.
“Not as beautiful as you,” Viktor said.
“You’re biased.”
“Of course I am,” Viktor teased, “I think it’s time for our gifts.”

Chapter Notes

It has been a VERY LONG time since I posted a chapter for this. Writer's block is a terrible demon I wouldn't wish on anyone. I finally got inspired to finish this chapter this morning. It's over two months late, but better late than never.

As always, here are the notes.
1) "Marley was dead to begin with. There is no doubt whatever about that." is from A Christmas Carol by Charles Dickens.
2) "How do I love thee? Let me count the ways." is from Elizabeth Barrett Browning.
3) A dreidel is a toy played with during Hannukah. It's basically a top.
4) The inscription is a play on Elizabeth Barrett Browning's quote from above.

That's all I can think of right now. I hope you enjoy, thanks for reading, and let me know what you think!

As much as I wish I could, I don’t own Yuri!!! On Ice.
This fic is not beta’d.
While I truly appreciate the offers, I’m not currently looking for a beta.

You can follow me on tumblr. Stay up to date on latest chapters and story progress or just want to give a shout out! You guys are what drives me, and I so appreciate every one of you.

Taking a deep breath, Yuuri opened the door of the mall and stepped inside. Holiday music piped through the speakers but could barely be heard over the steady buzz of people talking. It was busier
than he anticipated for early morning, but it was to be expected since Christmas was only a week away.

He came here that morning to pick out Viktor’s gift. Viktor had offered to go with him, but Yuuri declined. He didn’t want to tell Viktor he was getting his present, but instead reminded him of his deadline he imposed on himself. Viktor begrudgingly agreed.

Yuuri wandered from store to store but couldn’t find anything that called out to him. He was ready to give up for the day when he passed the jewelry store, stopping and doing a double take at one of the glass cases. Inside was a bracelet inlaid with two diamonds and had room for an engraved message. It was elegant yet within his budget. Yuuri decided he had to get it for Viktor. Thinking of something to etch on the plate, Yuuri grinned when the perfect quote came to mind. He wanted to change it to something personal however and knew what he wanted to engrave on it.

Yuuri was whistling a Christmas tune by the time he left the jewelers. He was on cloud nine and figured Viktor would love the gift. Only stopping at a stand to buy two cranberry-walnut pirozhkis, Yuuri went outside and found his car.

The drive to the university was filled with joyful Christmas carols, Yuuri singing along to many of them. He remembered a time he didn’t celebrate the holiday. The day was like any other, but since coming to America, he realized what a wonderful event it was. While he didn’t believe in the religion, Yuuri loved to celebrate the holiday surrounded by friends and loved ones.

He was especially ecstatic that Viktor was now in his life.

Lost in thought as he pulled into the parking lot in front of the humanities building, Yuuri blinked and looked around, wondering how he got there so quickly. He promised Viktor he’d meet him for lunch since he was working in his office that day. The bookstore had been so busy recently that Yuuri didn’t have time to work at the university, and he missed it.

The minute he walked through the door of the office Mila and JJ were upon him, asking how he had been lately and telling him how much they missed him. He promised that once the holidays were over, he’d be back to help. They nodded and wished him a happy holiday since he wouldn’t be back before then.

Viktor looked up from the book in front of him and grinned before rising to his feet. He closed the space between them and took one of Yuuri’s hands, kissing the top of it while gazing into his chocolate brown eyes. Yuuri was embarrassed about displaying affection in Viktor’s workplace, but Viktor seemed not to mind.

“You don’t know how happy I am to see you,” Viktor said, leaning in for a kiss but appearing perplexed when Yuuri moved back.

“Viktor, you’re at work,” Yuuri whispered.

“So. I won’t make it a habit. I’m just in such a good mood, and it got better when you walked through the door.”

Yuuri nodded and kissed Viktor’s cheek, hoping he’d leave it at that. Viktor understood, smiling softly at Yuuri and squeezing his hand lightly before returning to the desk. They chatted about a trip that Viktor would like to take after the holidays. There was an exhibit in New York City regarding Russian and Slavic poetry, and Viktor declared they had to visit. Yuuri was unsure about taking that much time from work, but Mari told him it would be dead at the store. Upon hearing Mari’s words of wisdom, Viktor booked the trip within the hour.
They remained at the office for several hours. Lights began going off one by one and Viktor realized how late it was. He and Yuuri were packing up what Viktor wanted to take home when Celestino stopped by. Waving his boss inside, Viktor greeted him with a smile.

“Hi, Viktor. Hi, Yuuri,” Celestino said, shaking their hands respectively, “How are you?”

“Well, thanks,” Viktor said, “Just finishing up and then we’re calling it a day.”

“Don’t be too late,” Celestino stated, “It’s supposed to start snowing soon.”

“That’s why I’m here,” Yuuri said, “Drive the absent-minded professor home.”

“Hey now!” Viktor exclaimed.

“I’ll be stopping by Bound to Please tomorrow, Yuuri,” Celestino informed him, “I need to finish up my Christmas shopping, and I can think of no better place.”

“I look forward to seeing you,” Yuuri said, “I’ll make sure I’m free to help if you need it.”


With that, Celestino left the office. Viktor and Yuuri followed close behind, walking to Yuuri’s car moments later laden with books in their arms. The drive home was filled with Viktor singing off-key to the Christmas songs on the radio, and Yuuri tried his best not to laugh at him. Truth be told, Yuuri found it lovely.

When they got home, Viktor and Yuuri unloaded the car before starting dinner. It had become a joint chore when Yuuri decided to stay with Viktor. They loved creating their meals together, each of them adding something unique to the dish. This time was no different.

“I would never have thought to put rosemary on chicken,” Viktor said, taking another bite and humming in delight.

“It was basically a staple when I lived with Mari,” Yuuri said, “She loves it.”

“I have to agree with her,” he said, “It’s very delicious. Hey, would you like to decorate for Christmas this year? I usually don’t because it’s just me, but I’m feeling very festive this year.”

“Well, we already have the tree. What else do you want to do?” Yuuri asked.

Viktor went through his thoughts for decorating the house. He wanted to edge the living room in garland, wreaths, and lights. He also mentioned stringing lights outside along the roof and through the bushes in the front of the house. Yuuri listened to him go through his plans and smiled when he was finished.

“I like it!” Yuuri exclaimed, “How about we get a few silk floral arrangements to place on the tables and bookshelves?”

“Even better,” Viktor said, agreeing with Yuuri, “I’m thinking possibly a few snow globes as well.”

“How about we go to the store and see what catches our eyes?” Yuuri suggested.

Though it was dark, it was still early in the evening. The store was filled to the brim with holiday shoppers, and Yuuri felt his anxiety rising from the plethora of people surrounding him. Viktor must have felt his uneasiness, Yuuri looking down when Viktor’s hand grabbed his own. Squeezing it ever so slightly, Viktor pulled Yuuri against him and spoke into his ear.
“If you want to leave now, I’ll completely understand,” Viktor said, pulling back and catching Yuuri’s gaze.

“I’ll be ok if we make it a fast trip,” he stated, relieved that Viktor understood.

They made a beeline toward the seasonal decorations and browsed through the selection. They were both overwhelmed by the offerings and had a hard time deciding what to buy. Yuuri’s anxiety continued to grow, Viktor finally grabbing decorations on a whim. He steered Yuuri toward the front door and told him to wait in the car while he paid for their items. Yuuri nodded and gave Viktor the most thankful look he could muster.

On the way back to the car, it crossed Yuuri’s mind once again how thoughtful Viktor was. He always seemed to be in tune with him, he knew what he needed when times became rough and was there through the worst of it. Yuuri couldn’t imagine a better person suited for him than Viktor.

“Dreidel for your thoughts,” Viktor said, holding up a foil-wrapped chocolate replica of the toy.

“I was just thinking about how wonderful you are,” Yuuri said, kissing the tip of Viktor’s wind-chilled nose.

“By all means, continue,” Viktor said in amusement.

“I always do,” he said, smiling at Viktor as he started the car.

They chatted about what they would like to do on Christmas Day, and both of their plans were polar opposites. Viktor wanted to visit family and friends while Yuuri wanted a quiet holiday at home. Deciding to compromise, they agreed on inviting everyone over to their house for Christmas dinner.

“Are you sure you’ll be ok with this?” Yuuri asked.

“Of course,” he replied, lifting Yuuri’s mitten hand and kissing it, “We’ll be surrounded by our loved ones, and if it becomes too much for you, you can retreat to your room.”

“Thanks, Viktor, for the second time tonight,” Yuuri said, “You really are the best.”

“Only to you.”

It was still a decent hour when they arrived home, but the crowd sapped Yuuri’s energy. He insisted he was alright to help decorate the house, but Viktor got his way. He could tell Yuuri appeared peaked, prompting Viktor to search through one of his bookshelves for his favorite Christmas book.

“Marley was dead, to begin with,” Viktor said, reading from the book he was holding, “There is no doubt whatever about that.”

“Why are you reading ‘A Christmas Carol?’” Yuuri asked.

“It’s a quiet and relaxing activity we can both enjoy while curled up in blankets on your bed,” Viktor explained, “What do you say?”

“Only if you cuddle with me too,” Yuuri said, grinning at him before racing for his room. Viktor chuckled and walked toward Yuuri’s room, smiling when he saw Yuuri was already in bed.
He eased himself onto the mattress and kissed Yuuri’s forehead. Opening the book, he continued to read aloud, sneaking peaks at Yuuri every so often. He was held enraptured by the words, but Viktor could tell he was beginning to fall asleep. Closing the book, Viktor kissed Yuuri softly and watched his eyes flutter open.

“I think it’s time for my prince to sleep,” Viktor said, “We can finish the book this weekend if you like.”

“That’s a wonderful idea,” he said, yawning moments later, “Will you stay here tonight?”

“I can.”

“Please do,” Yuuri said, yawning once more before snuggling next to Viktor and falling asleep.

Viktor gazed down at Yuuri, loving the warmth and weight of his head on his chest. He had never felt love for someone like he felt for Yuuri. It made him feel like the luckiest man to have Yuuri’s love,

“Sleep well, my prince,” Viktor whispered, kissing Yuuri’s forehead once more and settling in for the night.

“Wow! This looks great!”

Viktor climbed down the ladder and stood next to Yuuri, viewing the work they spent the past two hours on. Stringing lights outside was more difficult than he had anticipated. Yuuri didn’t feel comfortable on the ladder, so Viktor spent the time fastening the lights to the gutters. He and Yuuri talked while they worked, and Viktor learned about Yuuri’s view on the holiday. He didn’t view it as Jesus’s birthday, but instead of spending time and showing appreciation for those that he loved in his life. Viktor loved Yuuri’s outlook on Christmas.

Discussion turned to Viktor’s birthday, the day falling on Christmas. Viktor didn’t want to celebrate it, but Yuuri was adamant. He deemed it more important than Christmas and declared they’d be celebrating it along with the holiday. Viktor knew he wasn’t going to win the argument, so he acquiesced and resigned himself to the thought of it.

Once the lights were set in the bushes, they went inside to warm up with hot chocolate. Viktor watched Yuuri prepare the drinks, enjoying his delicate movements. He loved watching Yuuri, thinking he had the grace of a dancer.

“Only a few more days before Christmas,” Viktor said, “Are you sure you’re okay with everyone visiting?”

“Yes,” he replied, turning around and smiling at Viktor, “I don’t think it’s going to be too wild, but Yuri is coming over, so we’ll never know until he gets here.”

“I think Otabek is joining him, so he’ll keep him in line,” Viktor said, “Something about his family going out of the country.”

“I’m glad he’ll be here then,” Yuuri said, handing Viktor a mug, “Drink up.”

They fell silent while enjoying their hot chocolates, the only sound Makkachin snoring loudly. The
quiet went on when they were finished with their drinks. Reaching across the table to take Yuuri’s hand, Viktor threaded his fingers through Yuuri’s before lifting it and kissing the fingertips.

“Have I told you lately how much I love thee?” Viktor said, the professor coming out of him.

“No,” Yuuri said, grinning at him.

“How do I love thee? Let me count the ways,” Viktor began, “I love the softness of your hands, the depth of the brown in your bedazzling eyes.”

“Bedazzling, eh?” Yuuri asked jokingly but feeling the blush creep along his cheeks.

“Bedazzling. I love your perseverance, your passion for life. You make me a better person for knowing you, Yuuri Katsuki.”

“And you as well, Viktor,” Yuuri whispered, before cupping Viktor’s cheek, “You as well.”

Viktor nuzzled against Yuuri’s hand before turning his head and kissing the palm. Christmas was two days away and he found himself not only looking forward to the holiday but his birthday as well for the first time in ages. While he still didn’t want to make much out of his birthday, he knew Yuuri would never agree.

“Are you ready for Christmas?” Viktor asked.

“Yes,” Yuuri answered, “and your birthday also.”

“I told you that you didn’t—” Viktor said before being cut off by Yuuri’s hand over his mouth.

“We’ve already discussed this and I’m going to win,” he said, lifting his brow and waiting to continue after Viktor nodded, “All I ask is that you experience it to its fullest, alright?”

“Okay,” Viktor promised after Yuuri removed his hand.

“We should call it a night,” he suggested, “Tomorrow is Christmas Eve and we have a lot to do before then.”

“Like what?” Viktor inquired.

“Cleaning the house, bathing the dogs, last minute shopping, wrapping gifts,” Yuuri rattled off, taking a moment to catch his breath, “Then there’s—”

“They’re coming to visit us and spend time together, not our house. We can grab some gift bags and tissue paper at the store. Let’s enjoy most of tomorrow.”

“Alright,” Yuuri said, tapping his fingers together.

“It’ll be fine, Yuuri,” Viktor said, grabbing his hands and feeling the delicious electrical sensation he related with Yuuri, “Pajama time, then A Christmas Carol time while cuddling. Last one there has to take the garbage out tomorrow.”

Without another word, Yuuri darted toward the hallway, leaving Viktor smiling at him.
“Viktor.”

He rolled over and sighed, not wanting to interrupt his dream. It was of the first time he met Yuuri, but instead of looking for a book Viktor professed his undying love for the man the minute he laid eyes on him. Yuuri was swept off his feet though the blush hinted at slight embarrassment. Gently grasping Yuuri’s hand, Viktor led him to the middle of the floor, leaned down and…

“Viktor.”

Frowning slightly, Viktor realized he hadn’t told Yuuri his name but wondered how he knew it already. The mesmerized look on Yuuri’s face disappeared, and instead he was saying his name over and over.

“Viktor, wake up.”

Viktor opened one of his eyes into a tiny slit, and he saw Yuuri on the side of the bed leaning over him. The shirt he was wearing was baggy and Viktor could see the sloping of Yuuri’s neck, the soft swell of his abdomen, the slight padding on his hips. Yuuri hated the way he looked. To Viktor, he was mouth watering.

“Viktor, it’s time to….HEY!”

Viktor reached out and tugged Yuuri down on top of him, grinning while Yuuri got comfortable. He loved feeling the warmth of Yuuri’s body on his, and Yuuri’s pajamas afforded Viktor of feeling every curve of his body.

“Good morning,” Viktor said, his voice gravelly from sleep.

“Good morning,” Yuuri said, leaning down and kissing Viktor, “Are you ready for the day? I made oatmeal.”

“What time is it?” he asked, patting the table beside his bed for his phone.

“Almost nine,” Yuuri provided.

“Almost nine?” Viktor groaned, wanting to go back to sleep but holding Yuuri tighter instead.

“I have to get up,” Yuuri said, “I’m probably crushing you.”

“Yuuri,” he said, placing two fingers on Yuuri’s chin and gripping it lightly, “You could never do that. I love it and want more.”

“Tomorrow night?” Yuuri offered.

“I can’t wait,” Viktor said, “but I guess we should get up. We should get up and get everything done. Then we can relax for the rest of the day.”

Climbing out of bed, Viktor followed Yuuri into the kitchen, wrapping his arms around Yuuri’s waist when he dished breakfast into bowls. After a quick peck behind Yuuri’s ear, Viktor took his seat and dug in. It was the perfect start to what Viktor thought would be the perfect day. He had a great breakfast, a great day planned and the best part was he got to share it with the one he loved most in life. He got to spend it with Yuuri.

“Dollar for your thoughts.”

Viktor looked up and saw Yuuri watching him in amusement. They often as the question of the
other and learned more about themselves than through casual conversation. Viktor wouldn’t trade the world for it.

“I was thinking how wonderful my life is now,” Viktor stated.

“We are not watching ‘It’s a Wonderful Life,’” Yuuri said, crossing his arms in front of him.

“It’s on later tonight,” he said, winking at him, “I’m happy with life right now. No, that’s not right. I’m content. Breakfast was delicious, we have so much fun stuff planned for the day, but that’s not the best thing. I have you in my life this year. That outshines everything else that’s gone right for me this year.”

“Really?” Yuuri asked meekly.

“Really,” Viktor echoed, winding his fingers through Yuuri’s, “I love you, Yuuri Katsuki.”

“I love you too,” he said, grinning, “How about you get a shower and I’ll tidy up the kitchen.”

“Want to join me?” Viktor asked, only half joking.

“Already took a shower,” Yuuri said, not turning around but Viktor saw his ears turn a bright pink.

Viktor rushed through his shower in record time. He wanted to breeze through their errands and spend quality time with Yuuri for the rest of the day. Yuuri was having none of it, however. He double-checked the kitchen for missing ingredients, consulted recipes he wanted to try the next day, and measure the big boxes for gift bags. It drove Viktor batty.

“Yuuri,” Viktor said, taking him by the shoulders and catching his gaze, “Not everything has to be perfect.”

“But it’s our first Christmas together,” Yuuri whined, “I want it to be perfect.”

“Sweetheart, we could be eating microwave meals and splitting a twelve-pack of beer and I’d be happy,” he said, smirking when Yuuri giggled, “Let’s get to the store, grab what we need and come home.”

“Okay,” Yuuri agreed, shrugging into his jacket when Viktor held it out for him.

The rest of the day flew by in a blur. The store was so busy Yuuri had an immediate panic attack, Viktor sending him to the store while he shopped. He made it a quick trip as he wanted to get Yuuri home. Winding through the aisles at breakneck pace, Viktor was at the checkout within fifteen minutes of arriving.

Insisting that he drive, Viktor took the driver’s seat and thanked the gods that Yuuri didn’t argue with him. The panic attack took more energy out of him than anticipated, and Yuuri looked like he was ready to collapse.

“We’ll be home soon,” Viktor said, lifting Yuuri’s hand to kiss the top of it.

“I like the sound of that,” Yuuri said sleepily, “Home.”

Viktor smiled broadly and felt the welcome frisson through his body once more. He looked over at Yuuri but saw he had fallen fast asleep. Viktor’s smile grew and he felt in bliss.

“Wake up, my sleepy prince,” Viktor said softly, watching Yuuri’s eyes flutter open, “We’re home.”
“Do you mind if I take a nap? I’m beat,” Yuuri asked.

“Not at all,” Viktor said, “I’ll even tuck you in.”

Following Yuuri into his room, Viktor waited for him to climb into bed. After sweet words of love and a sweeter kiss, Viktor pulled the blankets up and tucked them against Yuuri’s body. He stood and watched Yuuri for several moments, their gazes locking in the purest of loves.

“I’ll let you get some rest,” Viktor said, walking toward the door.

“Viktor?” Yuuri asked suddenly.

“Yes?”

“Thank you so much,” he said, “For everything. I can’t imagine life without you. Santa has brought me the greatest gift already.”

Viktor smiled brightly, blowing a kiss at Yuuri before closing the door behind him. Yuuri’s words echoed in his mind and he felt love rush through him, the warmest and wanted feeling he’d ever experienced in his life.

“Thank you, Yuuri,” Viktor said, breaking the silence.

Yuuri woke with a smile the next day. He was looking forward to what it held. He’d be spending time with family and friends. He’d be spending the holiday with Viktor.

Stretching when he stood, Yuuri looked out the window and gasped. The world was covered in a blanket of white, adding to the magic of Christmas. The local meteorologist predicted a white Christmas and Yuuri was pleased the man was right.

Opening the door, Yuuri padded down the hallway to Viktor’s closed door. He wanted to let him sleep, but he was too excited. He turned the knob and opened the door slowly, not wanting to wake his boyfriend. Creeping toward the bed, Yuuri smiled when he gazed upon the look of contentment and peace on Viktor’s face. He kneeled next to the mattress, brushed Viktor’s long bangs away from his face and lowered his head. Licking his lips once, Yuuri kissed Viktor awake.

“Happy birthday,” Yuuri whispered.

“Merry Christmas,” Viktor said, groaning as he stretched, “This has already become the best birthday ever.”

“How’s that?”

“I got a birthday kiss from you first thing in the morning,” he explained, smiling softly at Yuuri.

“What would you like for breakfast?” Yuuri inquired.

“A piece of toast is fine,” Viktor replied.

“Viktor…” Yuuri said warningly, “How about some eggs and bacon with your toast?”
“Sounds fantastic,” he answered, propping his pillows behind him and sitting up.

“Stay here. I’ll bring breakfast to you,” Yuuri ordered.

“Wow, breakfast in bed. This is the best birthday ever.”

Yuuri grinned before leaving to make their meal. He hummed as he retrieved all necessary items out of the refrigerator. Lost in thought for everything he needed to do before their guests arrived, Yuuri jumped when he felt hands rest on his hips.

“I’m sorry I didn’t listen,” Viktor said, “but I needed my Yuuri fix.”

Giggling, Yuuri flipped the eggs and told Viktor to take a seat at the table. They discussed the dishes that had to be prepared that morning and what to clean before everyone came. Their list was minimal since they decided on a potluck holiday. They were glad their guests agreed with the menu since Yuuri wanted to spend some quality time with Viktor in the meantime.

Viktor thanked Yuuri for breakfast and pouted when Yuuri wouldn’t let him help in the after-meal cleanup. Suggesting he start tidying the living room, Viktor was happy he had something to do, but it wouldn’t take long. Yuuri joined him in cleaning by disappearing into the bathroom. He wasn’t in there long since it was the easiest room to clean up.

“How about you pop in a movie while I make the sweet potatoes and your cake?” Yuuri proposed.

Viktor nodded and put the movie they watched the evening Yuuri came over to discuss the bookstore’s finances. It had become a favorite of theirs, lifting their spirits when everything worked out in the end. Yuuri could especially relate to it since the main theme revolved around bookstores.

They had just finished when the doorbell rang, signaling the arrival of a guest. Several more followed until everyone they had invited was in attendance. Dinner was spectacular, everyone loving each dish that was presented. They chatted about what was going on in their lives, how Viktor’s sabbatical was going, and mentioning how happy Yuuri appeared. It was a jovial event.

Hours later and after all their loved ones departed, Viktor and Yuuri collapsed on the couch. It was a long yet wonderful day, and they wouldn’t trade it for the world. Turning off the lamp next to him, the lights from the tree were the only illumination in the room.

“It’s so beautiful,” Yuuri whispered.

“Not as beautiful as you,” Viktor said.

“You’re biased.”

“Of course I am,” Viktor teased, “I think it’s time for our gifts.”

Yuuri nodded and got up, taking the few steps to the tree. He had noticed earlier that day there were a few more presents than the night before, and Yuuri had been pleasantly surprised to find out the tags bore his name.

Yuuri handed out the gifts and sat next to Viktor, urging him to open his first gift. Viktor tore the paper off and opened the box, thanking Yuuri for the elegant pen set he gave him. Yuuri gently removed the paper from his present and was pleased to see the books he had wanted all year in his hands.

They continued opening gifts until there were none. They had gone all out that year and they loved
everything that was given to them. Yuuri wasn’t done, however, and pulled a small box out of his pocket.

“This is for you,” Yuuri said, “I was going to make it a Christmas gift, but I find it more fitting as a birthday present.”

“Alright,” Viktor said, accepting the box from Yuuri.

He lifted the lid and gasped when he saw a bracelet made of gold and diamonds staring back at him. Gingerly removing the jewelry from its velvet display, Viktor turned it over and read the inscription.


Yuuri scooted closer to him and gasped when Viktor’s lips captured his in a passionate kiss. It seemed to last forever and both relished in it. Breaking apart only for air, Yuuri was shocked Viktor held a small box of his own in the palm of his hand.

“This is for you,” Viktor said, “Looks like the jeweler took a lot of our money this holiday season.”

“Yeah,” Yuuri said, chuckling lightly.

Opening the case, Yuuri immediately felt tears spring to his eyes and he whipped his head up to look at Viktor. The softest of smiles graced Viktor’s lips. Yuuri felt as if he were in a dream and he’d wake up anytime.

“Pinch me,” Yuuri whispered, “I must be dreaming.”

“I can assure you that you aren’t,” Viktor stated, “How about it? Will you marry me? Not anytime soon, but I believe we are destined to be. I know we talked about Fate in the past, but I think she’s had a hand in our relationship.”

“I think you may be right,” Yuuri agreed.

“To the point I believe you are my soulmate,” Viktor said quietly, pleased when Yuuri nodded, “So is that yes to soulmates or yes to marrying me?”

“Yes to both,” Yuuri said, feeling tears slip down his cheeks, “Yes a million times over.”

Viktor grinned happily and removed the ring, gently sliding it onto Yuuri’s finger. Tugging on Yuuri until he was in his lap, Viktor gazed into his eyes before kissing him. Everything felt right in his world and Viktor knew it would only get better. Holding onto Yuuri as if his life depended on it, Viktor rested his head on Yuuri’s chest.

“Merry Christmas,” Viktor said, kissing Yuuri once again.


“As I do you, Yuuri. As I do you.”

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