What Lies Beneath Our Feet

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Summary

At the YoI Farm, all animals are given the happiness that they deserve. When ex-battery chicken, Yuuri, comes to the farm one day after being set free, he relearns what it means to be a happy animal with a life ahead of him.
Yuuri, the chicken

Chapter Notes

A personal, mini-project because I like farm animals.

What lied beneath their feet was a wire mesh. Thin metal squares sliced and bruised their feet if not careful. Ample space in each centre that easily broke toes and tripped a bird in the mass capacity. Along the floor, twenty to thirty birds crowded in a single space. Stacked, side by side, with other cages that housed twenty to thirty birds. Bright lights burning from the ceiling as hens toppled and climbed over each other for air, food, and security. The darkness that so many craved came all at once. In an instant.

Beating wings, trampled feet, and the ungodly stench that curled one’s nose but you couldn’t look away. One moment, a bird was on top. The next moment, the bird was at the bottom, suffocated with a snapped neck. In what little space the hens had, the dominant ones always had first access to the food and water that came through metal pipes. Dispensing the goods into shallow red trays. The others had to scramble. Witches’ claws digging into the open flesh of another. Beating wings and chipped beaks fought for the leftovers.

And in the night when everyone was supposed to sleep, no one slept. The infernal lights swinging above their heads never burned out. Night was always Day, like how Day was always Day. No distinction between the Passage of Time. Many birds simply tucked their heads under their wings for escape. Still more simply passed out from exhaustion and risked getting trampled anyway.

In the midst of the nightly chaos, hens hunkered down to rest before laying the usual egg. Sometimes, the eggs were brown with spots. Sometimes, they were white but with flaky shells and a starch pale yolk. Sometimes, the eggs got destroyed because the shells were too feeble. But for one chicken, they never laid an egg in their life.

Up in the rafters, was an unusual chicken named Yuuri. Deep red comb, lopsided to one side of the head with every turn. Large wattles that hung directly under the beak, wine red from the heat. A poof of tail feathers trailing behind. In any other condition, the tail feathers would’ve dragged. In this situation, the feathers remained unbearably short, but still long enough to hide the bare bald spot that any bird would love to peck. A “mane” of feathers ran down the neck, but they were unbearably short as well.

From the first glance, it appeared that the bird was like any other hen. He wasn’t a hen. By a twist of Fate, this young rooster managed to escape the box of death that killed all his other brothers. He didn’t know about that.

At the time of the Great Divide between female and male chicks, a Human made a risky grab. Plucked the baby rooster and tossed him into the box of female chicks. The chick the Human was trying to grab stayed peeping on the conveyor line with the other male chicks until her doom was sealed.

Seven months later and in a crowded cage, the baby rooster grew into a young adult. Maybe he would’ve crowed after the morning sun and fought with the spurs behind his feet. Not today. As he grew older in these cramped conditions, he grew quieter and stayed near the back so that Humans
wouldn’t recognize him.

Humans came in occasionally. Shovelling out the dead and ripping old hens from the cages for a better life beyond the metal doors. Hens thrashing and screeching for help because they were grabbed by their feet and hung upside down. Gone, never seen again. Replaced by a new pullet that had to learn the ropes to survive long enough until Judgement Day.

Yuuri happened to be huddled in a corner of the cage when Humans came in. Humans with latex gloves over their hands as they carefully opened cages and lifted crippled hens from their own filth. The feeble birds tried to fly away, but their bodies were tired and broken. Set down in cardboard boxes with cut out holes, more Humans came in to replace the full boxes with empty ones. Yuuri rose from his corner and stretched his neck, easily towering over all the hens in the cage with him.

The metal doors were thrown open. A bright, softer light faded in with a gentle breeze that enticed the body and mind. Yuuri’s cage was too far away to breathe in the fresh air, but he saw the closer hens rile up and cluck about a life that was beyond what they knew. In Fate’s hands, Humans came to the cage. Snapped the wire doors open and softly plucked fragile hens with care.

Perky hands inspected Yuuri’s eyes, his weak plumage, and the considerable crop that bulged from his chest. Murmurs surrounded Yuuri as he was placed in a box all to himself. Away from his cage-mates and away from the other hens. Beak poking out from one of the breathing holes, Yuuri looked out and saw a green and blue and brown on the other side of the metal doors. Yuuri wanted to see more, but his box was placed on the back of a pickup truck. He cooed softly so that the weary hens could calm down, but they were excited. And scared and terrified and any other word that would fit the situation.

Hundreds of factory birds liberated from their grueling work was a blessing. They all went to happy and warm farms. Some went to this farm. Others went to that farm. Yuuri watched as the hens that he grew up with slowly disappeared around him. They each had names, but Yuuri already forgot their names when their boxes disappeared and were dropped off at the local, organic farms and homesteads. Everyone was gone, except for Yuuri.

Huddled in a corner by himself, Yuuri lifted his head when the pickup truck stopped one last time. Someone lifted his box. Yuuri tumbled from side to side and thought it best to sit down until his box was set. Looking out a breathing hole, Yuuri saw the same blue, green, and brown but they were different somehow. He breathed in the crisp air, heard soft clucks from chickens behind an electric poultry net, and saw the husky bodies of dogs and cows before he was finally lifted and placed on the ground.

Toes curling over the squishy soil and grass. Feet digging into the ground, searching for the familiar wire mesh but it wasn’t there. Yuuri flapped his wings. More than enough space for him to stretch out them out fully, exposing the bare patches of skin loosely hidden under what feathers he had left. A Human petted him. Yuuri reared his head back to bite, but he was offered handfuls of grain and a little bowl of water before the Human stepped back. Waiting to see what Yuuri would do.

The rooster looked around. No competition. No busty hens that pecked and growled for the same needs and wants. Yuuri spun around and lunged at invisible birds from all directions before feeling safe enough to lower his head. Tentatively pecking at the crumbly grain. Snagging bits of grass, feeling the fleshy plant matter roll over his tongue. Burying his beak into the dirt and feeling the sun-baked warmth. Dipping his beak into the bowl of water. A sudden chill that caught him off guard. The water was so clear that he could see the bottom.

Fed and watered, the Human still stuck around when Yuuri was done. He tilted his head to the
side. What did they want? No matter. Yuuri strolled across the squishy grass and found shade beside a fat cabbage in the garden patch. Hunkered down, Yuuri hid his head under his wing and slept.
Animals seems to somewhat understand each other but we, humans, don't understand animal speech very well. So instead, we study their behavior and how they respond to things in their own little ways.

Tuft of fur crept down Yuri’s right ear as the cat sunk low to the ground. Belly dragged along the dirt, quiet steps littering the gravel road. Tail poised in the air like a compass, tip pointing to the feathery mass huddled by a fat cabbage. It was around midday when the feline found the body. Mangled, feathers pointing in every which way with the head missing. Yuri approached the body. Cheerfully scampering down the gravel road before easing into slower steps. He pounced on a nearby rock. The feathery mass didn’t move. The cat hissed. No movement.

Strolling closer, Yuri batted his paw at it. Scratchy feathers itched his paw, but the body was warm. Maybe a recent death. Yuri sniffed the bird. No movement. He poked its chest. No movement. Green eyes twinkling, the cat bit down on the bird and dragged it away from the fat cabbage. Scrapply feathers ripped from it and Yuri was thrown back. Coughing out feathers, he got back up and pushed the bird with his head. Too much work.

If Yuri wasn’t stubborn, he would’ve scampered back to the barn to ask a tom cat for help. But if he did that, the crows would get to his kill first and crows always traveled in a murder. With what lives Yuri had left, being murdered by a murder wasn’t on his bucket list. Perhaps, he could ask one of the local dogs, but they would steal his kill and claim it as their own. And who would believe that a little kitty took down a bird by himself? Ears folded back, Yuri hissed at the idea.

Or maybe, he could just eat the bird. Right here, right now. That wasn’t a bad idea, but Yuri had no idea how to get all the feathers off. There had to be an easier way than yanking them with his teeth. Yuri had standards, and he rather not dirty his palette with something greasy like a mouthful of feathers. Pacing back and forth, a light bulb hovered over his head. He could push the body into the local pond! The water will loosen the feathers, and all Yuri would have to do is bat the excess off before dining. Perfect.

Except, there was one fatal flaw to Yuri’s plan. The local pond was on the bare outskirts of the farm, hidden within tangled grass and itchy twigs. Not only that, the pond was home to a very territorial goose, whose name was as vicious as his bite. Viktor. Yuri shuddered, but he needed the water. Yuri couldn’t carry a bucket of water by himself and even if he could, it would draw too much attention. The local pond was the perfect place.

To get chased and bitten by a goose, or to feast on cat chow from a glorified metal bowl? As long as Yuri got to taste blood, that was what he wanted. Running back into the garden patch, Yuri gathered leaves and littered them over his kill before running down the gravel road to the local pond. If he was going to push his kill all the way there, Yuri wanted to be absolutely sure that Viktor wasn’t there.

When the tiny feline disappeared from sight, Yuuri slowly lifted his head from under his wing and ran. He didn’t know where to go, but he couldn’t stay out in the open. Legs unsteady from the sudden sprint, Yuuri slammed into another garden patch and bruised his body against a developing
pumpkin. Soft clucks and a distinct laugh came from behind him. Yuuri didn’t need to lift his head to know that some farm chickens were entertained with his antics.

The delicate chatter from the hens with their chicks gave Yuuri enough strength to drag his body around and behind the pumpkin. Pushing himself back onto his feet, Yuuri peeked from around the fruit. A few hens paused their browsing to catch a glimpse of him. Bright orange eyes studying his features before the motherly hens chirped something to their chicks. Yuuri retreated behind the pumpkin. A loud crow and cackle shot a bolt of lightning up Yuuri’s legs. He jumped away from his hiding spot and attacked the pumpkin. His wings barely left a dent on the fruit.

Yuuri looked over the pumpkin and saw a handsome rooster strutting in from the other side of the poultry run. Beautiful white wings sunk low to the ground. Not a speck of imperfection tainted what was pure. The rooster crowed again, beating his wings against the air. The hens admired the show before lowering their heads to peck at the dirt.

Yuuri knew he should’ve looked away, but he couldn’t. A bright red comb rode over the rooster’s head like a crown. His claws tore into the dirt’s flesh while soft cooes alerted the hens that he found a nice treat. Rich green tail feathers followed behind the bird like a flag banner, showcasing his high rank and stature on the pecking order. The rooster was about to feed, but he felt Yuuri’s stare and glared at him.

Yuuri looked away. The rooster puffed out his chest and marched to the edge of the poultry run. Beak so close to the electric net that it was dangerous. He motioned Yuuri to come. Feet reaching up to scratch his neck shyly, Yuuri pecked the ground. As if he found a nice, fat grub for a treat. An audible growl came from the dominant rooster, and Yuuri marched over to the electric poultry net. Standing there under the rooster’s gaze, Yuuri trembled like a chick that was in trouble with its mother.

Yuuri lowered his head submissively before the rooster. Head down, he couldn’t dodge the swift peck that pierced his comb. Bits of the electric net contacted his skin, and Yuuri jumped as thousands of volts shocked him. Collapsed on his side, Yuuri feebly flapped his wings to attack but he wasn’t attacking anyone except himself. Staring down at Yuuri coolly, the rooster resumed feeding and ignored him.

Clucking encouraging phrases to himself, Yuuri managed to get up. His feet failed, but he had to keep moving. It was quite clear that he wasn’t welcome. With the dead feathers and the exposed skin on his back, chest, and wings, it was hard to take Yuuri seriously for the bird that he was. It didn’t matter that the dominant rooster didn’t know what kind of Hell Yuuri went through. To a chicken, if you couldn’t defend yourself, you were worth every tragedy that life threw at you. Yuuri tried to get up, but his comb stung and his wings hurt.

Yuuri looked around for a Human. He wanted to go back home. Back to the place that had all the rules that Yuuri knew. Back to the dodgy cage that made every chicken equal to another. A place where status meant survival than this harsh embarrassment that gripped Yuuri’s crop. No Human in sight. Either way, Yuuri told himself that he had to find a safe spot. Soon. The local farm cat was going to return shortly, and Yuuri wasn’t ready to die.

Despite all the hardships, Yuuri wasn’t ready to quit. If he was ready, he would’ve died long before he came to this farm. There was a world beyond a cage and a burning light bulb, and Yuuri wanted to see it. Right now, he needed rest and he was hungry too. Limping past the pumpkins and the towering sunflowers, Yuuri found himself on a familiar gravel road before passing out.

When he woke up, he felt the cool shade of a barn. Soft hay cushioned his bones and a cob of corn rested not too far away from him. Yuuri blinked. Where was he? He looked around with his good
eye. He was in a building. Away from the harsh sun and the elements. Laid down over clean hay with food nearby. Yuuri knew that already, and he figured that he wasn’t alone. A lone tail swayed back and forth as a striped cat looked hung over the edge of a wooden fixture. Wait a minute. Was Yuuri on a different level?

Rolling onto his feet, Yuuri hobbled over and sat next to his rescuer. He didn’t know what to say. He had never talked to a cat before. Would it understand him? Well, Yuuri chirped a few things and touched the cat’s back with his wing. Affectionately, or he tried to. The cat meowed, never looking in Yuuri’s direction. Feeling less skittish, Yuuri introduced himself and looked down. Realized that he was on the second floor of a storage barn.

Bags of corn and dried peas nested in a corner while hay was everywhere. Yuuri clucked softly in amazement, and his cat partner complained about how hard it was to drag Yuuri up the ladder to the second floor. The cat rubbed his mouth with his paw. Trace bits of black feathers still hung to his tongue. Yuuri questioned the cat at first, but the cat hissed that his name was Yuri and that he wasn’t just some cat. No, he was Yuri. The cat in charge of the grain storage. Stalking rodens and scaring off the forest birds from the corn bounty.

Yuri made it very clear that if the rooster got nosy around the corn bins...Well, Yuuri wouldn’t want to find out the consequences and the ex-battery bird believed him. After all, the cat did want to eat him. But why did Yuri risk his time to save a broken like him? It was something that the cat didn’t want to talk about, so Yuuri kept quiet and helped himself to some corn on the cob before nuzzling himself back into the soft hay nest. He wondered if Yuri slept here, but the feline was already gone. Probably down the ladder. Probably saw a rogue mouse lurking near the dried peas.
Chapter Notes

More animals to come, but we got to introduce the Humans that /actually/ tend to the farm

What lied beneath her feet were the wooden floorboards that made up the bedroom. Blanket sliding off from her torso as the Human eased out of bed. Grabbing a hair tie from the darkness and loosely pulling her hair back into a ponytail. Her wife continued to sleep, chest fluttering every now and then from a sudden lapse in breath. Slipping into socks, the Human passed by her wife’s side of the bed.

Pulled back her hanging bangs and kissed the top of her wife’s nose before gliding out of the bedroom. Tiptoeing down the stairs to not wake up the children. Hand at the metal fridge door as a pale yellow light seeped into the dark kitchen.

Cardboard egg container set aside on the kitchen counter, following a block of cheese, and some herbs harvested from the garden last evening. Peppers parked in their usual spots as the Human grabbed a knife and began dicing. Thin red strips blossomed over the cutting board, followed by yellow and green. Next were the herbs, minty flavor mixed with the kick of the peppers. Everything raked into a metal bowl.

The cheese can be grated later. Time for the eggs. As soon as the Human opened the egg container, a faint blue emerged into the kitchen from the neighboring windows. Two spotted eggs stared up at the Human. She didn’t sigh. The Human didn’t have to travel very far to her market. Abandoning the kitchen for now, the Human opened the front door and walked directly under the wooden overhang. A perfect place to to dry vegetables and watch the rain without getting wet. Inspecting the inside of her boots, the Human slipped into her “vehicle” and “drove” to the market.

A brisk thirty second walk transferred the Human from her house to the electric poultry net that guarded the chicken coop. Turning the net off, the Human swung her legs over. She didn’t have the usual kitchen scraps on her at the moment, and she apologized to her birds when they followed her around. Peeping and beating their wings to get out of the coop. Mental note, remember to carry the scrap bucket. This was the fourth time this month.

Circling behind the coop, the Human pulled back the nest boxes. Stretching out the hem of her baggy t-shirt, the Human deposited the coop eggs there and inspected the hay. Good, the chickens had ample amounts. Probably two more days into another refill. The Human cooed at her birds and told them that she would be out to feed them very soon. Hurrying back to the house carefully, the Human entered the house and saw that her wife was up. Cast-iron pan ready to cook the eggs.

“Let me take charge of breakfast-duty, sweetheart. I think the chickens miss you dearly.” She pointed to the bucket of kitchen scraps. Full and ready to deposit into the feed dishes.

And so, one Human took charge of the kitchen and whipped up a big breakfast while her wife tended to the animals’ breakfasts. Let loose the chickens and fed them, fed the cows and milked the mothers, unhooked the doors to the goat barn and watched the mingling of animals browse through the morning hay. Fed the pigs and rubbed their bellies and snouts while they squealed around for
an old-fashioned hug. Finally, feeding the barn cats and herd dogs with their fill before collapsing on the usual spot at the kitchen table.

A new record. Everyone fed in thirty minutes. Make that *thirty-one* because breakfast came in and the children, smelling the food, bolted down the stairs for their fill. At thirty-three, the table was silent. The only sounds were the clink of silverware and chewing. Chatter about the day and what was to come. Enthusiastic boasts from the children, telling their parents that they wanted to help around the farm too. The Humans, Joey and Lina, glanced at each other while their children spoke. Soft smiles over their lips when breakfast was done.

There was still much work to do on the farm, and Joey brought her munchkins along. The family herd dog wagged her tail and bolted from the nest while her mate tended to the wobbling puppies that chewed on their father’s paws. Receiving her daily belly rubs, Yuuko weaved around her owners’ feet and nudged the front door open. Descending down from the overhang and onto Mother Nature’s usual carpet.

Out in the distance, wobbling along the gravel road, was the ex-battery chicken from yesterday. Finally, a tight knot in Joey’s chest untangled itself. The little rooster didn’t get eaten after all. The little rooster was peeping down the gravel road, a familiar striped cat leading it to the chicken run.
The Art of Confidence

Chapter Summary

Yuri, the cat, teaches his rooster roommate a thing or two about confidence

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

There was an art about being a chicken. Strutting down the grass or the squishy dirt with bright, healthy plumage. An array of feathers decorating head to toe with some of the fluffiest material on earth. Well, Yuri thought that the fluffy material tasted greasy, but that was his opinion. Sitting near the poultry net, Yuri poked his paw towards one of the chickens. Yuuri sat behind the cat, trying to compress himself so that no one would see him. Batting his tail at Yuri, the feline jabbed towards the chicken run and meowed. Yuuri didn’t move.

By now, a few interested hens had crowded towards the two. Not really paying attention to them, but interested in what antics the two had in mine. Yuri wanted the rooster to return to his kind and be somewhat of a proper chicken. Yuuri didn’t want to go. After being humiliated and attacked yesterday, Yuuri was surprise that he had the courage to stand this close to the poultry net. He never forgot the shock that burnt his flesh when the dominant rooster attacked, pulling the net to Yuuri’s comb and setting it on fire. In the inside.

Clucking softly, Yuuri buried his toes into the ground when Yuri jumped behind him and tried to nudge him closer to the chicken run. Yuri hissed and threatened to scratch him, but the rooster stayed bolted to the ground. Feathers puffing up in distress at each nudge from Yuri. Annoyed, Yuri paced around the rooster, wondering what he could do to persuade the bird. Threats weren’t going to work, and the chicken was too stubborn to be led by force. Finally, Yuri curled on top of the rooster and watched as Yuuri squirmed and flapped his wings so that the feline could get off.

Beady orange eyes shone with betrayal before Yuuri hid his head under his wing. Fur on edge, Yuri examined the ex-battery chicken. Okay, Yuuri may’ve looked dirty and weak because of his feathers, but he was a chicken at heart. Shoot, Yuuri was a chicken, and chickens banded together. Chickens were prey animals that were weak and scared and...A hint of shamefulness gripped Yuri’s middle.

The exact opposite could be said about cats. Felines were seen as independent and loners for the most part, but there was always an exception. Always. Tense at his paws, Yuri poked the rooster until Yuuri finally lifted his head from his wing. If Yuuri didn’t want to associate himself with other chickens, that was fine. Perfectly fine. Yuri meowed and motioned Yuuri to follow him. The rooster didn’t get up until Yuri walked down the familiar gravel road to the familiar wooden barn where the two spent the night. Perked up, Yuuri followed after the striped cat. Peeping along as his legs grew stronger from walking.

Hopping onto a haystack, Yuri hissed when Yuuri tried to jump onto the haystack too. Shying away from his new friend, Yuuri sat in front of the haystack instead. Okay, there were a few things that the rooster needed to know and learn if he wanted to be a proper farm animal. One was confidence. Sitting up straight and poised, Yuri couldn’t puff out his chest like a chicken but he did something very similar. Head tilted upwards, looking up at the sky with some sort of magical wisdom with a
prim expression.

Yuuri blinked.

Yuri, the cat, held that posture until the rooster finally copied it. It was sloppy at best, but it was some sort of progress. Yuri asked why they were doing this, but Yuri didn’t reply back. He wasn’t going to let Yuuri sit on the haystack with him until the rooster pulled off a confident pose without trying. So, Yuri tried.

Even at his best, Yuuri still didn’t look very confident. He had the right posture and the right glint in his eyes, but Yuuri was self-conscious about his feathers. A few parted from him when he tried to puff out his chest, and Yuri watched as the rooster spiraled into a meltdown and felt shy again. Hopping down from the haystack, Yuri grabbed the fallen feathers with his mouth and patted them back onto the rooster. The saliva helped a little bit with the stickiness, but the feathers could never come back. Once fallen, they were fallen for good.

But if Mother Nature found herself naked during Winter, she clothed herself in fresh green and flora during the Spring. The bare patches of skin popping over Yuuri will clothe themselves eventually, and Yuri wondered if the rooster knew that or not. Did he equate his feathers to confidence? Well, the other chickens were fully feathered and pretty content with themselves. Yuuri, the rooster, was neither of those things, so it was pretty easy to feel unconfident when you weren’t like everyone else.

But, Yuuri wasn’t like anyone else. Before yesterday, he was just another chicken trying to survive in a factory and if he made it this far, Yuri could imagine how the rooster will be at full health. In a bout of nerves when you still didn’t know your own strength, being happy with who you were was the secret to being confident. And Yuri wanted the rooster to know that. He couldn’t say it outright, but the cat was willing to help Yuuri realize that.

Yuri talked about Spring and how a lot of farm animals had to leave their feathers or fur behind to get a new coat for the new year. He talked about the farmland that suddenly became barren in Winter, but flushed with new green every Spring. Maybe the stories weren’t helping because Yuuri never saw them with his own eyes. That was fine, Yuri knew a few animals to talk to. More specifically, he knew a few birds. Motioning Yuuri to follow him, the striped cat led the rooster down the local pond at the edge of the farm.

Wading through thick grass and whacking dragonflies out of the way, Yuri flinched when his delicate paw touched the cold water. Shaking the wetness off, Yuri told the rooster to stay put. Yuuri extended his neck towards the cat, orange eyes flushed with confusion. Was the feline serious? Yuri reassured the rooster that nothing bad was going to happen. Yuri just needed to talk to someone real quick. A distress call crept from Yuuri’s throat when Yuri disappeared into the tall grass. Yuuri kept calling until he couldn’t hear the rustling feet of the feline anymore. Hunkered down, Yuuri extended his wings and flattened himself out to better conceal himself. He was near a pond and his reflection shone clearly. There was nothing concealing about that.

Minutes passed. All Yuuri heard were the buzz of dragonflies as they hovered over the water and landed neatly on lily pads. Digging his beak into the muddy sand, Yuuri held a pebble for comfort. Contrary to the fear that he had, the pond was quite relaxing. A gentle lull nudged him softly, and Yuuri felt himself at peace as he counted the ripples in the water. Suddenly, the ripples came by so quickly that Yuuri couldn’t count them all. Something was in the water.

Yuuri flattened himself to the best of his ability, but he ended up lifting his head when he saw an orange beak dip into the water. A dark goose drifted serenely over the pond, churning the water in front of him before he swam faster. Wings extended out like in a private show, the goose swam like
that before beating his powerful wings. Slapping the water and scaring the dragonflies away. With expert precision, his orange beak plucked a dragonfly in flight. Crushing the insect until the gooey parts ran down his throat. Chewing on the wings like gum at this point.

Yuuri watched in awe. The goose plucked more dragonflies. He made it look so easy. Beating his wings, it disturbed the insects and the goose used his speed to immobilize a dragonfly as if it wasn’t moving to begin with. There was an art to that. The splashes of water that coordinated with the goose’s wings as if he was in a dance, and the dragonflies were the roses that a dancer caught between his teeth. It mesmerized Yuuri and when the goose looked at him, the rooster didn’t look away. Wings folded at his side, the goose approached Yuuri and laid a dead dragonfly before him on the sand.

Instincts told the goose to honk at Yuuri. Instincts told Yuuri to back away. The goose was a lot bigger than him, stronger than him, and just more aggressive. Yuuri didn’t back away. He only sat straighter, puffing what feathers that he had left to make him seem bigger. A growl escaped from Yuuri. His beak was a lot smaller than the goose’s and he wasn’t as fast, but some sort of boneheaded stubbornness overwhelmed his fear. Yuuri was scared, but he wasn’t going to let a dominant bird get the best of him. Not again.

Jumping to his feet, Yuuri attacked first. The goose blocked with his wings, but it wasn’t enough to stop the witch claws that Yuuri sported. Angry red marks ran down the goose’s good wing before Yuuri fell over and landed on his back. Wiggling back to his feet, Yuuri tried to scratch again but the goose’s beak was at his neck and the bird was on top of him. Yuuri closed his eyes, but the goose’s beak didn’t bite down over his neck. Instead, the beak ruffled his feathers and “kissed” Yuuri’s skin patches.

Yuuri opened his eyes, meeting the teal gaze of the goose. The bird helped Yuuri up and little Yuri waded through the pond water with disgust plastered over his face. Shaking his fur, Yuri fluffed up like a cotton ball. He introduced the goose to Yuuri.

This was Viktor.

Chapter End Notes

There is a beauty around birds and speed. It's an art that birds capture so well that it's mesmerizing to witness it in action, right before your eyes.
Chapter Summary

Viktor, Yuri, and Yuuri troop back to the farm and they meet a very enthusiastic herding dog.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Weird things happened around the farm all the time.

Sometimes, a chicken decided that she or he didn’t want to live anymore, so they would drop down in the strangest places. Tangled up in the electric poultry net? Escaped the chicken run and torn to shreds in the corn field? Journeyed too far into the cow pasture and was squashed by heavy hooves? Maybe, a snake got into the broody nest boxes and suffocated a hen to death before swallowing the fertilized eggs.

When Death wasn’t making a big show of its power, other oddities sometimes happened around the farm. Perhaps the gentle dairy cow decided to kick the bucket, spilling all the yummy milk across the milking stanchion. Maybe the goats and sheep decided to riot, broke down the wooden fence, and grazed amongst the corn and cabbages and other vegetables in the kitchen garden. Maybe the crops decided that they didn’t want to grow anymore and remained small, or perhaps the weeds decided to take-over the garden space and choke the life out of the veggies.

In the past three years of her life, Yuuko had seen it all. Being a herding dog with protective instincts for all farm animals, Yuuko always had a tinge of sadness deep in her heart when she couldn’t protect the very food that the animals and her Humans needed. Even though protecting vegetables wasn’t part of her routine, Yuuko felt that she could’ve done something. Every day, something had to die for another to live, and the crops died in vain. It wasn’t a good feeling, but the least Yuuko could do was snap the necks of the pesky rodents that wanted an easy meal. After all, the storage barns were hard to sneak into with all the farm cats milling around.

On this particular day, the farm wasn’t strange because something died or something weird happened. Quite the contrary. Yuuko fed her three pups, licked her mate, played with the little Humans in the house, and ran out the front door to begin her daily routine. Inspecting the chicken run, making sure that all the birds were present and accounted for. Strolling by the pig pens, watching thirty to fifty pounds of young pork rolling in the mud or digging through the morning scraps. Running her nose down to the cow pasture and eyeing the lean beef that browsed through the teenage grass. Finally, Yuuko took a quick visit to the goats and sheep before running through the routine again.

Following one of her Humans, Yuuko’s ears perked up when she heard a familiar honk down the gravel road. Emerging from the distance were three shadows. The long, slender neck from Viktor poked out from the horizon like a thorn, the goose honking and flapping his wings to signal his return from the wilds. Beside him was the skittish shadow of the ex-battery chicken from a few days ago. Beside the poultry was the uptight feline of the grain barn, Yuri.

Yuuko’s booming barks replied back to Viktor’s honks, and the two animals broke from their
parties and met in the middle. Yuuko, wagging her tail and hopping from side-to-side. Viktor extending his long neck and honking louder than before, stretching his wings out and flapping. Brave enough, Yuuko tore into Viktor’s protective bubble and sniffed the goose. Viktor stayed still, but his eyes followed Yuuko. Beak ready to strike in case the dog decided to do something funny. Yuri did his usual hissing and tried to break past Yuuko, but the maternal dog jumped towards the skittish feline and licked Yuri’s fur clean. Keeping the most neutral face possible, Yuri had to endure the “torture” until Yuuko was satisfied with the cat’s appearance.

Curious, Yuuri ignored Yuuko completely and pecked Yuri’s head. The cat hissed and batted a vicious paw before breaking out from Yuuko’s grip. Ears reared back, Yuri was going to escape but Viktor cornered him and honked in his face. Oh, the cat knew that Viktor was doing it on purpose. Instinct or not, the goose was having way too much with this, and Yuri wanted out. But he had to stay and endure while Yuuko sniffed the timid Yuuri and nudged the rooster’s comb with her wet nose.

Yuuri shook his head and fluffed himself. Not to be confident, but to look adorable so that Yuuko wouldn’t eat him. Yuuko gave Yuuri a slobbery kiss and told him that she’ll never eat him. She can’t eat what she has to protect, and Yuuri went along with it to keep things less awkward between them both. Yuuri learned Yuuko’s name, and Yuuko learned Yuuri’s. She was a bit confused because now she knew two animals who had the same name, disregarding spelling.

In a moment, she dubbed Yuri as Yurio to keep things simple and the feline protested. It was too late now because Yuuko had to go, and she barked her farewells. One for Viktor. One for Yuuri. And one for Yurio. Holding back his bitter meow, Yuri waved his paw fondly at Yuuko when she had to return to her Human.

With that out of the way, Viktor and Yuri paraded down the gravel road like two masters while Yuuri trailed behind as their pupil. Bobbing his head along while Viktor and Yuri had a heated discussion about... something. In all honesty, Yuuri wasn’t fluent in cat or goose. He just knew what Viktor and Yuri meant by their actions than whatever came out of their mouths. But knowing their time was equally important, so Yuuri stayed quiet and listened to it all. Then again, Yuuri wasn’t all that fluent in body-language either, so it was hit or miss. Either way.

They were probably going to teach him a thing or two about confidence, and it looked like Viktor disapproved of Yuri’s teaching methods. Perhaps, it was because Yuri was a cat and knew next to nothing about birds. On the other hand, Yuri sounded like he was badmouthing Viktor’s approach because said bird was a goose, and geese were naturally more confident than chickens. At least, they expressed that confidence more than chickens.

Bickering back and forth, the two animals finally struck a deal. They would both teach Yuuri the ropes, and the rooster can decide who he learned better from. Yuuri suddenly felt their eyes on him, and the chicken only hoped that he wouldn’t lose more feathers in the process.

Chapter End Notes

Who will Yuuri pick as his teacher? Stay tuned.

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On another note, I guess people do like casual reads. I like farm animals and chickens are my favorite, so I’m just marrying two concepts that I like. YoI and chickens.
Confidence from the Past

Chapter Summary

Viktor and Yuuri having a heartfelt chat on a wooden fence by the cow pasture.

Step One for confidence: Viktor knew next to nothing about Yuuri, except for the fact that the chicken needed a trim. For his feet. Those claws hurt. So Viktor helped Yuuri in the only way he knew how, and that by scratching through the kitchen garden for grubs and worms. Stripping some fleshy, young leaves from a cabbage plant, Viktor observed how Yuuri scratched. The rooster wasn’t bad, but his technique was awkward. Step and rake to the right, step and rake to the left. Yuuri pecked the ground because he was supposed to, but he completely missed the gooey grubs that crawled all around him.

Putting his cabbage leaves aside, Viktor came around Yuuri and scratched the dirt with the chicken. He showed Yuuri where all the bugs were and plucked a juicy worm for the chicken to eat. Yuuri inspected the worm first, poking it with his beak before taking it from Viktor. How was he going to eat something wiggly and squirming like this? Common sense told Yuuri that he needed to break the worm up.

Dropping it to the ground, Yuuri stepped on the worm and pulled off segments with his beak. Swallowing the squirming parts hold and shuddering when he felt the wiggles in his throat and crop. Yuuri fluffed his wings for comfort, but he didn’t stop eating the worm. He finished it up and scratched the dirt again, actively looking for another squirmmer. The worm had no flavor, but he liked the texture and it made him feel a little funny.

Viktor eyed Yuuri carefully and didn’t give him another worm. Just to make double-sure that Yuuri wasn’t allergic to worms or something. Nothing funny happened, so Viktor decided to commence to Phase Two. Yuuri’s witch claws will eventually file down with enough dirt scratching. Onwards! Viktor waddled out from the kitchen garden while Yuuri bobbed his head along. The morning was young, and there was still a lot to do before they both had to retire for the night.

Viktor perched on a low fence and asked Yuuri if he wanted to join. The rooster looked up and flapped his wings. Using his feet to climb up the fence bars until he reached the top to sit with Viktor as equals. Yuuri gave the goose space, and both birds looked out to the cow pasture with a sense of harmony between them.

If Viktor wanted to tutor Yuuri, he needed to know a thing or two about the bird. Honking like he usually did in the morning, Viktor shook his tail feathers and fluffed up. All to be comfortable as he eased in with some simple questions. Yuuri chirped about his past, about his time at the egg-laying factory. Yuuri recalled how he had to be quiet so that the Humans wouldn’t notice that he was different from all the other hens. Recalled how he wasn’t comfortable with darkness because there was always a burning light. Yuuri fluffed himself and nuzzled against what was left of his chest feathers.

He would never forget the egg-laying factory. The tight space that made it hard to stretch one’s wings. The never-ending chirps and complaints from ancient hens and their skeletons. The sudden fear that gripped his breast when a Human came in, approached the cage, but then snatched an
elderly hen and took her elsewhere. Never to be seen again. Yuuri always huddled in a corner when a Human came in. He didn’t want anyone to see him. If one did, they would take him and he would never come back. Ever again.

Before Yuuri realized it, he spilled his darkest fear to Viktor and only hoped that the goose wasn’t fluent in chicken. Viktor wasn’t totally fluent, but he knew enough since he always teased the chickens in the chicken run. Tilting his head to the side, Viktor asked Yuuri why he was afraid of the dark. Was it because of Death? Yuuri fidgeted uncomfortably over the fence.

Perhaps, that was one of the reasons. If a battery chicken couldn’t see the burning lights, it meant that they were crushed to death. Trampled with all their worth and left to rot away as mere bones until shoveled out from the cage by a Human. That was the worst.

Trying to brighten up the mood, Viktor asked Yuuri if he had always lived with hens. Yuuri nodded. He didn’t know he was a rooster until he started crowing one day out of instinct. A little voice in his head told him to crow, but a good hen that raised him told him to stop it. If he didn’t, a Human would take him and he would never be seen again. Yuuri would never forget that. He wondered how the hen was doing, but he forgot her name. She was a pale hen with a whimsy comb and chipped beak. All the chickens had a chipped beak. Shoot, Yuuri had a chipped beak too.

As chicks, the Humans would cut part of their beaks with a hot blade and douse the burning beak in cold water before throwing the poor chicken into a box for shipment. Viktor ran his beak down Yuuri’s back, smoothing out the coarse feathers.

After a long while, Viktor covered Yuuri with his wing. Confidence wasn’t wishing for a life or a set of characteristics that you didn’t have. Confidence was being proud with who you were and with what you already had on your tool belt. Not that chickens wore belts, but Yuuri knew more about the meaning of survival than any chicken on the farm.

Viktor just had to help Yuuri see the accomplishments that were already before him.
Living on the Edge

Chapter Summary

Yurio takes Yuuri under his "wing" and trains the rooster to become stronger.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

After a long day, Yuuri finally came back to the grain barn. Having meditated with Viktor on the cow pasture fence, Yuuri felt at peace when he cuddled against a haystack. Prepared to rest for the evening, but his eyes snapped open when a familiar striped feline pounced onto the haystack next to him. Curled over the squishy straw, tail wrapped around his front paws, Yuri leaned down and poked Yuuri’s comb with his nose. The rooster looked up, and the cat dropped a bloody mouse right in front of him.

The body bounced over the floor. A fresh stream of blood trickled down from its neck. Yuuri backed away from it, but Yuri told him to eat it. Yuuri shook his head but when his barn mate started hissing, the rooster protested that his crop couldn’t possibly break apart a mouse. Yuri didn’t say anything, but he did jump off the haystack to meet Yuuri at his level.

If Yuuri was to grow stronger, he needed to put on weight. The rooster was the very definition of “skin and bone”, and even a little chick could beat him up if they wanted to. If Yuuri wanted to be confident, he needed to be willing to work for it. To work for it, he needed energy. Not that grain stuff or those squishy worms, but lean and mean protein. The only protein that Yuri knew how to catch was right in front of Yuuri, and the rooster rejected the meal without a second thought. Yuri pushed the deceased mouse closer to Yuuri. The rooster flapped his wings threateningly.

Picking up the dead mouse by the tail, Yuuri hurried out of the barn and tossed it. Yuri ran after his kill, held it by the scruff, and tossed it back to the rooster. Yuuri wasn’t by the haystack. By now, he was roosting on the ladder that led up to the second floor where the two usually slept. Circling under the ladder, Yuri meowed and told the rooster that he needed to eat. Now.

Clucking softly to himself, Yuuri buried his head under his wing and went to sleep.

The next morning, Yuuri was a little scared to leave the roost. His barn mate wasn’t skulking around. Actually, he didn’t know where little Yuri was, but that made him more afraid. The cat was probably dragging along ten mouse bodies towards the farm. Right now. Nervous, Yuuri leapt down from the ladder and wandered around. There was some rustling outside, and Yuuri heard the distinct echo of corn and dried peas hitting a metal pail. Poking his head out from the barn, Yuuri saw his barn mate bend the lip of a grain bag, effectively tipping corn and peas into a little bowl for Yuuri to eat.

Such a heartwarming gesture quickly turned suspicious when Yuri didn’t stop pouring into the little metal bowl was filled thrice over with grain. Corn and peas spilled from the sides, littering the ground. A blossom of dust rose from the dry grains, and Yuuri found himself pecking at the bits on the ground until his barn mate meowed. Yuuri tilted his head to the side.

He had to eat all of this?
Yuri purred. If Yuuri wasn’t going to amass energy through a simple little kill, then he would have to stuff himself with grain until the corn and peas came out from both ends. Yuri left the rooster to his breakfast, and Yuuri pecked slowly. It was hard to get grain because of his chipped beak, but he was making some progress. By the time he was full, there was still a lot of grain left. Thinking the best of it, Yuuri tipped over the metal bowl and scratched the grains into the ground. Maybe a new corn or pea plant will sprout up. Only time would tell.

Going down the gravel road, Yuuri decided that he wanted to explore the rest of the farm. Maybe take a detour to where the Humans lived, or maybe check out the pigs. The goats and sheep were pretty scary for a little guy like Yuuri, but pigs were closer to his eye level and cows were there too if there was enough distance between him and them.

Bobbing his head along, Yuuri stiffened when he saw Yuri sitting on a fence post, obviously waiting for him. Yuuri approached the feline slowly, and Yuri hopped down from his spot. A real, living mouse squirmed in his jaw. The poor rodent trying to scurry away, but its scruff gripped between Yuri’s teeth.

Yuuri hoped that he didn’t have to the kill mouse, but that wasn’t today’s objective. Search and seize the mouse before it escaped from the property. Simple enough, and Yuri made sure that the rooster was fed damn well before this exercise. Tail flicking to signal a countdown, Yuri tossed the mouse into the air and it bolted. Yuri hissed and Yuuri, the rooster, ran after the rodent.

Weaving past crops and jumping over toys left behind by the little Humans. Narrowly missing one of Yuuko’s pups when the mouse climbed over her and her mate to shake Yuuri off. Yuuri crowded apologies when he climbed over the dogs, feeling his claws dig into their fur and flesh. Bolting down porch steps and wiggling through a loose spot in the electric poultry net, the mouse sprinted past bystander chickens. Yuuri flew over the net and climbed over chickens while on the pursuit. Whacking his wings over the dominant rooster and slapping the bird in the face.

Out the chicken run and into the pig pen, where Yuuri fluttered over the pig slop. A spotted gray pig dug his snout into his food, felt a mouse run and jump over his head, and he gnawed on a feather from Yuuri when the rooster feebly fluttered his way along the journey. Out of the pig pens and through the grazing pasture for the sheep and goats. Weaving past trampling hooves and thick bramble, Yuuri got stuck in some branches but he broke through.

The cow pasture was the last place, and the grass was tall. A snake could lunge out if you weren’t careful, and Yuuri couldn’t find the mouse. Trudging through the dense vegetation, Yuuri was forced to give up. He had no leads, and the mouse must’ve already cleared across the pasture and out into the forest for safety. Put off, Yuuri flapped his wings and jumped. Hovering over the tall grass for a moment to find out where he was. He didn’t recognize this side of the pasture.

There weren’t any grazing cows. Did the humans let the cows out yet? So did that mean Yuuri was in a pasture, all by himself? Yuuri had to stay calm. Think, he could retrace his steps and make it back to the farm. All he had to do was jump up and hover until he recognize the gravel road. Easy.

Treading slowly, Yuuri clucked soft encouragements to himself. He didn’t realize it, but he was already at the edge of the pasture. Close to the forest, where wandering foxes can stumble out from their holes for a swift kill. And no one would ever know about it.

It didn’t take long before Yuuri heard a very separate heartbeat lurking on the edge with him.
Yep, Yurio should've thought of this exercise better. In his defense, the cat didn't expect Yuuri to journey this far from the farm. He initially thought that the rooster would give up.
Otabek, the pig

Chapter Summary

Otabek comes to save the day, unknowingly showcasing his own brand of confidence.

Chapter Notes

Oink oink

Fox runs weren’t common, but they did exist. The sneaky pests were slippery like snakes, slipping under fence posts and into coops or barns to drag an animal to the kill. It started off with a tremor of silence before a different heartbeat synchronized with your own. Crouched for the kill, the fox would pounce and snap their jaw around a neck, fighting for the kill until the inevitable last breath before victory.

Otabek used to be a good pig once. A stout one with creamy spots splashed across his gray skin. The signature curled tail and floppy ears pronounced his docility while his snout buried into a familiar layer of slop. A gruff of a beard creeping its way down his chin during breakfast. On the day of the fox attack, Otabek was safely in his pig pen. Snacking on an apple core. A rustle from the tall grass nearby didn’t deter him, but Otabek wrinkled his snout. On edge.

Pawing his hoof tentatively, Otabek lifted his head. Just in time to see a fox lunge its jaw through the fence to grab his neck. Otabek didn’t die that day, but he carried the scars to this day. Whether he meant or not, the hundred-and-fifty pound bacon dispenser jabbed the fox with his hoof, killing it in an instant. That was the first time Otabek had ever killed another animal, and it was enough of a warning to keep the future foxes away from this side part of the fam.

So when Otabek lowered his head for breakfast one fine morning and heard that a fox was in the area, the stout pig lifted a wooden beam from his fence and escaped. Trekking into the tall grass that married the edge of the forest where the wilderness reigned. Yelps from a cat and honking cries from a goose in the distance kept Otabek’s fur on edge. Sniffing the ground, a loose scent trail of a chicken crept into his mind and Otabek was on the pursuit. Hurrying to the edge of the forest before the fox reached the chicken first.

Lifting his ears, Otabek circled around. In the past, the pig pen was his ruling domain. Out here in pasture territory, foxes had the upper hand. Otabek couldn’t be a Hero of Justice if he got killed on duty. He had to remain alert for his own safety as well but with every second, it was a second closer for another life to be claimed by a fox. Sniffing the ground one last time, Otabek journeyed onwards. Breaths quick and short. Stomping the ground to scare off anything that he could mistake as an enemy.

Suddenly. Flapping of wings and crowing. Squealing, Otabek sprinted. A patch of orange and gray fur hovering over a blurred, black chicken. Otabek charged and slammed the fox off the bird. Yelping, the fox stumbled back onto its feet but clearly shaken. Otabek squealed at the fox, pawing his hooves into the ground for another attack. The fox lunged and Otabek acted as the barrier
between it and the frightened chicken. The rooster charged between Otabek’s legs and left his
scratch marks over the fox’s face. Tearing it away from its one good eye.

Retreating into the tall grass, the fox whimpered in its trot.

Yuuri fluffed himself and growled at the tall grass. Jumped into the air to scratch at it with his
witch claws before going over to thank Otabek for saving his life. Otabek oinked that he was just
doing his duty and offered to escort Yuuri back to the farm. The chicken happily flew onto the
pig’s back and the two crossed the great cow pasture back to the farm.

When Yuri and Viktor saw the duo, the cat and goose leapt into the air and thanked Otabek.
Oinking like usual, Otabek walked back to his pig pen. Yuuri stared at the pig quite fondly,
ignoring the lecture Yuri was receiving from a very annoyed Viktor.
Bonus Feature: The Role of an Animal

Chapter Summary

Some animals live a life of servitude while others earned theirs while on the dinner table.

Chapter Notes

I've been packing up for a trip so I apologize for not updating this fic. I'll be busy next week, so I wanted to add a chapter before I left.

Now the farm had a few funny characters in it. Alongside with the Humans and their little offsprings, there was Yuuko and Takeshi and their litter of pups. The two herding dogs licked their pups every morning and took turns keeping them dry and warm throughout the day. In the chicken run with all the feathery dinosaurs, there was a proud white rooster by the name of Chihoko because he was strong and the dominant male bird of the flock. Wattle always getting wet when he drank water because he wanted every bird to know when he took a drink.

On the tending side of the farm, there was the little striped cat by the name of Yuri. Patrolling the grain barn for mice and one of the teachers for a familiar ex-battery rooster. The other teacher was a goose named Viktor, and it scared Yuri when the goose showed up at the grain barn one night and took residence on top of a haystack. When the infernal sun came up, Viktor’s honking echoed throughout the farm. Just like the crows from the chickens. Yuri threw corn at the goose, but Viktor just honked happily and flew up to the cat’s nest to wake him up.

Usually on those mornings, Viktor would nuzzle against a little Sleeping Beauty by the name of Yuuri and wake up the rooster with soft “kisses”. Squirming, Yuuri would fluff himself before opening his eyes. Beak poking Viktor’s feathery chest before the shy rooster hid his head under his wing again. Sick of all the softness, Yuri hissed and kicked the birds out of his nest. Or tried to before Viktor tugged some fur from his tail.

Waking up from the yelps and honks from the grain barn, Otabek rolled onto his belly and oinked contently when a Human came over and dumped scraps and some corn into his bowl. Poking the food with his snout, Otabek oinked and nibbled at the Human’s fingers before tearing into his food and dragging an apple into the mud with him.

And those were the funny characters on the farm and though no defined role was ever given to them, these fine animals enjoyed a good, safe life for the most part. But, there was a prospect that every farm animal had to cross at some point in their lives. Butchering.

Yuri, Takeshi, and Yuuko didn’t have to worry about it. Viktor almost didn’t have to worry about it, but goose meat was delicious. Well, it wasn’t like the Humans were going to eat Viktor at anytime soon, but it was a possibility if the goose decided to snag bits of grain. Chickens were usually a toss up. Either they died a noble death from ripe old age, or were baked at a hundred and eighty degrees in the oven after plucked, boiled, and cleaned of their organs during the butchering.
Yuuri was glad that he didn’t have to go through that. Being a bony bird, he wasn’t going to get eaten anytime soon, but the chicken will never forget his near-death experience at the cow pasture the other day. If it wasn’t Otabek, Yuuri would’ve been fox food.

But what about Otabek? Nothing was stopping him from becoming bacon, and the oinker was a hundred and fifty pounds and still growing. However, Otabek was a lovable pig that was too friendly to become bacon. From an outsider’s view, it seemed that way.
The Bird He Couldn't Control

Chapter Summary

Chihoko had every bird on the farm under his control, except for one.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Sometimes, the Humans at the farm allowed the animals to roam loose. Whenever the kitchen garden needed a trim, a Human would emerge from the house and pluck up the electric poultry net. The scratching and peeping chickens from the other side dove under the net. Trooping down the farmland like soldiers as claws dug into the loamy earth. Leading the army of domestic dinosaurs were the three roosters of the flock. The lessers of the three perched on a sunbaked rock while the dominant rooster swerved his head, keeping track of all the hens and their chicks. Beyond the poultry net was a cruel and dangerous world. Beyond the net, thieves and hunters prowled through the tall grass and by the edge of the woods.

As a rooster and as the flock’s leader, Chihoko’s wings were heavy with responsibility. Cheeping, he nibbled on a fleshy worm. Picking it up and dropping it repeatedly, telling the nearby hens that he found a tasty treat. His favorite hen, with her clutch of chicks, came over and took the worm, holding it out for one of her chicks to eat. Among the fluffy yellow and lovely spots, there was a little chick that strikingly looked a lot like Chihoko. From the peculiar curve of the beak down to the soft feet, where tufts of feathers had already extended down. In about a year, the little chick would grow into a very handsome bird but until then, the little one still needed guidance from Mom.

Clucking softly, the mother hen dangled the worm over her clutch and watched. Little chicks scrambled to get the worm, but their Mom kept the worm just out of reach. Still fairly young, the little chicks were still weary about testing out their wings, but one brave bird leapt into the air to grab the worm from his mother’s beak. And that chick was the one that bore Chihoko’s resemblance. With that, Chihoko was satisfied. This little chick, though young, had the marks of a leader and Chihoko was proud. Puffing his chest, Chihoko flapped his wings and cried out to the morning sun.

Pecking at the leftover crops in the kitchen garden, some chickens dispersed and ventured to other parts of the farm. Sometimes roosting on the cow pasture fence, yawning and staying comfy. Sometimes frolicking down the gravel road to steal grubs from the pigs. Sometimes pecking their way into the pasture where the goats and sheep grazed. Fluffing up in hay and sitting there. And if one bird felt particularly saucy, they would scurry to the barns and steal tidbits of grain before a farm cat went to steal their life.

On this fine day, Chihoko decided to leave the safety of the kitchen garden and venture to the outskirts of the farm territory. As the dominant rooster, it was his job to scout the area and look for fresh grains and grubs. Dragging his claws along his feet, Chihoko walked quietly down the gravel road towards the farm pond. He rarely ventured that far from home, but Chihoko knew that food was plentiful there. All he needed to do was chase off a stubborn fool of a goose that lived there, and all the hens and their chicks can come over for a spot of fishing. Fishing for dragonflies.
good chance for Chihoko to show off his speed and marksmanship along the edge of the pond.

But as Chihoko drew closer to the water, he heard a commotion. Honks of laughter, hisses and sharp meows, and the cautious clucks of a chicken as feet leapt into the air and fell back onto the earth with conviction. Poking his head from the greenery, Chihoko’s orange eyes followed the flapping Yuuri that leapt into the air and caught a dragonfly with his beak. The insect still squirming, Yuuri quickly crushed it down the middle and stepped on it for good measure. Viktor wagged his tail feathers in admiration and groomed Yuuri’s feathers when the chicken bent down to eat his kill. Yuri was lazily draped over Viktor’s back, enjoying the sun while his paws remained dry.

Yuri hissed that Viktor was going too soft on Yuuri, but Viktor countered that the rooster needed to eat. Catching food for yourself made the difference in survival and if Yuuri couldn’t feed himself, how would he be a strong and confident animal then? Yuri bit his tongue and glared at Yuuri as the rooster leapt into the air again, plucking another dragonfly and downing it in one gulp.

Healthy black feathers emerged over Yuuri’s skin patches, dressing him in a fine suit. His comb grew a rich red, and his eyes didn’t look as cloudy as before. They were still some things that couldn’t be corrected, like the permanent limp and the chiseled beak. There were some things that didn’t need to be corrected, like the warmth of Yuuri’s personality and his motherly clucks when he dragged a lily pad onto the sand so that Yuri could curl under it.

Chihoko saw all of this from his hiding space. Claws tearing into the squishy sand, grasping for something to hold. Despite the warning he gave Yuuri on the first day, the ex-battery chicken was acting like he owned the farm. Acting like an ambassador to all the farm animals because he had a phony goose and pathetic cat as friends. The feathers along Chihoko’s neck puffed out, giving the rooster a miniature lion’s mane. Bright orange eyes focused on Yuuri. Chihoko couldn’t reveal himself just yet. Not with the goose.

Chihoko didn’t care about Yuri. As far as he was concerned, the cat was a fool that would never amount to anything. Viktor, on the other hand, was a threat. With the long neck and harsh wings, it wouldn’t take long before Chihoko was begging for mercy under a stubborn, duck-billed goose. No, Chihoko had to wait until Yuuri was alone. Only then, could they fight. Only then, Chihoko could show Yuuri where he stood in the pecking order.

The number of supporters behind you meant nothing in a one-on-one duel, and Chihoko was confident that he would have Yuuri begging for mercy again, just like on the first day. Relaxing a bit, Chihoko left the pond and wandered back to the farm. Back at the kitchen garden, a few hens asked him where he was and Chihoko lied, chirping about he needed some time to himself. The hens bought the lie, and Chihoko was fortunate. His subordinate roosters held suspicious gazes, but they couldn’t say anything. Unless they wanted a bloody eye or a broken leg.

Fear gripping their necks, the other two roosters turned their heads away and came a lookout while Chihoko proudly strutted across the garden. He had every chicken under his control, except one.

Chapter End Notes

If y'all would like some dialogue in this story, let me know~
Bonus Feature: Viktor, the goose

Chapter Summary

Viktor's pretty content that he doesn't know how to fly.

Chapter Notes

Yuuri Klucksuki
Viktor Goosforov
Yuri Meowsetsky
Oinkbek Altin

Some cute names.

Powerful. Extravagant. Enchanting. As a tiny gosling in a gaggle-- *a funny term for a group of geese*-- Viktor never imagined that his yellow, downy feathers would transform into slender white feathers. As a chick, Viktor could only crane his neck up towards the sun and hope that one day, he would be cool like all the other geese around him. With their speed and beating wings, the adult gaggle embodied everything that Viktor wanted to be. Sure, the gosling swam out in the local forest pond for kicks and giggles-- *no pun intended*-- but Viktor didn’t view himself as a true goose until he could fly.

A thrill of adrenaline silenced the forest when geese flew. Not a quiver in the woods, except for the beating wings that captured the breeze under them. Thrusting a bird into the air until a faint dip of the shoulder rubbed the stars. In the little family gaggle, Viktor and his other siblings flapped their stubby wings and ran around in a meadow, feebly trying to fly. Their mother calling after them to not stray too far from the nest. Viktor didn’t listen and when he did, he pretended that he didn’t. Each day, his feet and wings grew stronger until he managed to fly six inches off the ground for at least a full minute.

A mere fraction of what his siblings could do. Seeing them soar into the Heavens with the other older geese tarnished Viktor’s pride, but he worked hard. Waking up early to train and returning to the nest long after the sun went down. He became the fastest goose alive in those woods, but he couldn’t fly. So when his family decided to leave the woods for a migration-- *Viktor still had no idea why they left*-- the newly-fledged Viktor stayed behind and wandered around a bit before finding a cozy pond on the edge of a farm. Where he spent his winter with frost between his toes, where he spent early spring with bug larvae, and midsummer with two of his favorite animals. Yuri and Yuuri.

The former, Viktor knew ever since winter struck and the cat was so kind to let him nest in the grain barn. Though, Yuri did try to eat him a few times, and Viktor gave the striped feline something to be scared of. The former, a recent acquaintance that became a blossoming student. Viktor was quite fond of Yuuri, and it was probably because of the feathers. Roosters had pretty
feathers and soft ones too! Running his beak through Yuuri’s feathers, Viktor couldn’t help but preen the chicken.

Every time the session began, Yuuri’s wings jolted and Viktor braced himself for the inevitable hit, but it never came. Deep down inside, Yuuri regained control of his wings and curbed his anxiety just enough so that Viktor could preen him. Delicate strokes through the feathers to maintain proper health, disregarding the ragged and unhealthy ones that served no use. During the first time, Viktor honked and backed away from Yuuri when the rooster started shaking. Was he preening too hard? Viktor ran his beak over his own wings, checking the pressure. He eventually found out that Yuuri was sensitive about losing feathers.

But even so, Viktor made extra-sure that he was gentle when he preened Yuuri and eventually, the rooster grew to be comforted by the touches. Resting his head over his ample chest, snoozing under a patch of sun or under the full moon. Late at night, while Yuri prowled downstairs for a rodent. These quiet moments made Viktor feel good.

He did miss his family. A lot, actually. He wondered if they ever came back from the migration and if they did, he wanted them to meet Yuri and Yuuri. Share dinner and perhaps laugh about good old times together. Something sweet like that, and Yuri would purr for once and Yuuri would be adored for his soft feathers. As the gander-- male goose-- in the relationship, Viktor would take care to make sure that his companions were on their best behavior during the family gathering. Ready to nibble their legs if one was causing too much ruckus.

But right now, in the present, Viktor could save that daydream for another time. Before his eyes, he watched a blossoming Yuuri venturing into the pond to catch dragonflies. For a chicken, Yuuri was unafraid of the water. He ran through it like it wasn’t even there, and he snapped his beak in every which way as dragonflies took to the air.

Yuri was on Viktor’s back, absently watching the whole scene with a shred of respect. All the physical training he made Yuuri do improved the chicken’s jumping height. Not to mention, it made the rooster more assertive. But just below that strong surface, a fragile bird with a heavy mind settled before Viktor’s eyes. The little chicken, that was so skittish a few days ago, was finally opening up. Eyes brightening up with a childish glee as water flew into the air with beating wings. The affectionate purrs creeping from Yuuri’s throat when he turned to look at his teachers.

Yuri purred back, quietly. Hiding behind Viktor’s extended wing, Viktor, puffing his chest and honking encouragements. Extending a wing and draping it over Yuuri’s back, pulling the chicken closer for a light embrace.

Viktor didn’t know how much time Yuuri had left. He knew that he and Yuri would live for a long, long time. For Yuuri, Viktor wasn’t so sure. A protective lens fogged Viktor’s eyes and he led Yuuri out of the water to dry. Shaking his fluffy body, Yuuri chirped a thanks before scratching into the dirt. His claws were still long, but they were slowly grinding down. A Human would have to trim them soon. That’d be a sight to see. Viktor was sure of it.

Viktor wasn’t a fool. One day, it’ll just be Viktor and Yuri again. Until then, Viktor wanted to see a sight he had never seen before. He knew that Yuuri was strong, so he wanted to see that strength with his own eyes. While Yuuri was still hunched over, Viktor plucked a nearby pond flower and dropped it gently over Yuuri’s comb. The chicken froze, but he didn’t shake the flower off. Yuuri simply looked up and softly clucked a few things before looking down.

Viktor had no idea what Yuuri said, but it was most likely something affectionate. Judging by the shy response.
In a way, the goose was glad that he didn’t know how to fly.
Bonus Feature: A Mama's Love

Chapter Summary

Sometimes when Otabek slept, he remembered the soft caresses and pokes from his mama.

Chapter Notes

A brief background of all the major animals:

Yuuri - descendant from an old cockfighting breed [a type of a chicken that has increased stamina and power for combat]
Yuri - the “runt” of a winter litter, a tiny striped cat that still looks like a kitten
Viktor - a domestic goose that was somehow raised in the wild
Otabek - a sturdy, old breed oinker. Destined for foraging and guardsmanship. Guilty pleasures include apples and watermelon

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Warning: Chapter contains brief horrors of the conditions that animal mothers [particularly pigs] experience in factory-styled settings. Animal stress and a death scene is also included. Proceed with caution.

Once upon a time, in a factory far-ish away, there lived a gray piglet with pink spots. Curly tail bouncing when he ran, the piglet was named Otabek. His mama was a tough sow with jagged teeth and fleshy pink ears. For you see, Otabek’s mama used to have a larger litter. Nuzzled against her belly, there used to ten squirming piglets. Fighting for a place to suckle their milk. The ones born first or the stronger ones got the best places to suckle while the rest fought for what was left. Being the youngest, Otabek chose the tit with the least amount of milk. Even when his siblings disappeared, he never left his suckling place. Already conditioned to it, it was his fate and Otabek stayed small and sickly for a long time.

His mama never left the nest. Right side digging into the fresh hay, the sow closed her eyes and grieved. She had tried so hard to defend her litter, but they were all gone. Except for Otabek. Because Otabek was so small, it was easy for him to hide behind his mama while Humans snatched the rest of his siblings and took them away. Otabek never found out what happened to his siblings, but he figured that they “graduated”. Moved on to something more exciting than an iron pen with mama. Otabek wanted to see his siblings again, but he wasn’t heavy enough to meet the standard. Unknown to Otabek, his mama didn’t want him to leave the pen.

In the little cavity that she called a heart, the sow didn’t want Otabek to leave. Call it maternal intuition if you want, but Otabek’s mama knew that a little piglet needed the company of a mama. The sow missed her own mama. Stricken with guilt and pain, thinking back and realizing that the only memory she had was when her own mama squealed in agony when her babies were taken away from her. Those squeals haunted Otabek’s mama, but at least the Humans didn’t take all of
During the night, the sow scooted Otabek closer to her and she licked him to keep clean. Otabek squirmed and oinked weakly. Nuzzling close to his mama, pawing her chest softly with his hooves. Dreaming about a sunny place beyond the iron pen, where he could run around with his siblings and see them again. Alas, that was only a fantasy.

When Otabek grew a little bigger, his mama had to be taken away from the iron pen. His mama squealed and tugged against the ropes and leather that dragged her closer to a truck. A truck full of other mama pigs, squealing and running into the sides to escape. Otabek’s mama fought as hard as she could. Pounding her hooves into the ground, snapping her jaws at Humans and being a brute. Hidden in the hay, Otabek watched but kept silent. If he oinked, the Humans would know where he was. His mama told him to keep quiet, no matter what. But for the trembling young pig, how could Otabek do it when Humans were manhandling his mama?

Grunting, Otabek scratched the ground with his hooves and charged to the first Human he saw. Though small, he knocked the Human back and stomped on the others. Snapping his jaws around their ankles and trying to rip the ropes off of his mama. Rough hands seized him around the middle. Otabek squirmed until the Human was forced to let go. His mama broke free from her bonds and told Otabek to hide behind her. Otabek did. His mama lunged, sinking her teeth into a Human.

Tearing flesh off. Otabek ran his mama, keeping the other Humans away. A veteran Human grabbed a rifle from the trunk. Locked and pointed on the running Otabek. Finger at the trigger. Ears perked, Otabek’s mama ran. Otabek tried to hide, but the Humans boxed him in. Mouth of the rifle aimed for his head.

Squeals.

Otabek tossed back from his mama’s kick. His mama took the bullet on her right shoulder and continued to fight. Howling sequels. Otabek had to run. Far, far away. Now.

How could Otabek do it? He couldn’t leave his mama. He wanted his mama to taste the sun and roll around in grass with him and the rest of the litter. Otabek refused, his mama urged him to go. Another gunshot as his mama tore into someone’s leg. Another gunshot on the leg, the back, the other shoulder. Pulsating blood running down the sow until the finishing hit. Gunshot to the head.

The sow collapsed. Body shaking the earth and then silence. Silence, except for the scampering hooves of a little Otabek when he escaped the factory. Rushed into the forest and never looked--

Something small and fuzzy climbed onto Otabek’s back.

Otabek oinked in his sleep, kicking his hooves into the mud. Opened his eyes and felt tiny feet walk over his back. A tail dragging along his skin. A familiar striped cat meowed and poked Otabek’s floppy ears with his paw. Otabek rolled onto his belly, and Yuri hissed when mud splashed up. A short chuckle escaped from Otabek, and Yuri simply hopped onto the wooden fence around Otabek’s pig pen and glared at the hog.

Rising onto his hooves, the hundred and fifty pound bacon dispenser took a drink of water. Snout poking at his reflection while his tongue tore into the silky complexion of the water’s edge. Dull eyes and great big spot over his left eye. Just like his mama.
Digging his claws into the wooden fence, Yuri asked Otabek if he wanted to hangout in the cow pasture. Otabek tilted his head to the side but kept drinking. The two were already together so why go somewhere else to “hangout”? Yuri didn’t explain much, but he wanted to be around other four-legged beasts. Hanging out with birds was troublesome, and they had such fickle lives. While Yuri complained, Otabek snacked on some apples that the little Humans left for him. Teeth sinking into the crunchy flesh and gnawing on the apple cores.

Yuri thought it was disgusting but then again, he caught and killed mice for a living so it evened out. After the snack, the pig and cat left the pen. The Humans never came around to reinforce the weak wooden beam in the pen, or maybe they never noticed it. Either way, it was one of the few escapes Otabek had. Pushing the beam up, he managed to squeeze his round self out of the pen and Yuri hopped onto his back.

Walking down the gravel road, the two barged into the cow pasture and trooped through the grass. The cows didn’t mind as long as they weren’t spooked. Tails wagging as they munched through grass with their calves by the side. Otabek liked licking the calves when he met them, and Yuri enjoyed sitting on their backs for a mobile nap. The cows like the company and stories were swapped. Yuri didn’t understand cow-language, but he enjoyed hearing the happy grunts and oinks that came from the usually stoic Otabek.

A new calf was on the pasture. A little girl with brown, creamy spots. The mama allowed Otabek to sniff her, and Otabek oinked cheerfully when the calf approached to sniff him. The mama cow was bright-eyed and proud with her daughter, and Otabek wagged his ears to entertain the little calf. By now, Yuri had hopped onto the mama cow’s back and was snoozing under an afternoon sun.

After the little meeting, Otabek found a nice patch in the pasture and rolled around in his grass. Warm sun kissing his skin. Soft grass tickling his hooves. Otabek closed his eyes. When he was a piglet, he often dreamt about an open field. Where he and his siblings could roam around, where his mama could finally rest and nibble on grass and twigs.

Otabek opened his eyes and watched the new calf and her mama wander around the pasture, nibbling on grass and enjoying the afternoon sun.

Hints of nostalgia watered Otabek’s eyes before he went to sleep. Grunting a little lullaby that his mama used to sing. For his siblings and for him, Otabek.
A few weeks had passed since Yuuri first came to the farm.

For one, his feathers were growing back. Thick black feathers sprouted up over his bare patches, and Yuuri admired his reflection in the water. Sometimes, he tugged his new feathers to check if they were real. When he accidentally plucked one, Yuuri didn’t let it discourage him. He simply ate more and hoped that more feathers would sprout up soon.

For two, his claws were trimmed down. Not too long ago, a big Human chased him around the farm property. After ten minutes of playing cat-and-mouse, the Human cornered Yuuri in a cow stall and plucked him off a haystack. Holding the fragile rooster in her arms, the Human trimmed Yuuri’s claws so that they were healthier and so that he can use them more efficiently. After setting Yuuri down, the Human petted the rooster’s back and stroked under his beak before leaving him alone. Fluffing himself from the experience, Yuuri chirped down the gravel road and exercised his “new feet”.

For three, Yuuri was growing stronger. He could run farther, fly higher, and his speed was increasing from all the dragonfly catching back at Viktor’s pond. It was hard to imagine that a few weeks ago, Yuuri was a stumbling chicken that couldn’t walk all that much. Nowadays, Yuuri was running with the farm dogs, keeping up the pups as they chased after Yuuko and Takeshi in the squishy grass. Nowadays, Yuuri could reach to the top of a fence post without having to scrape and climb his way to get there. Just a few flaps and he was on top of the world!

For four, the little rooster was a social chicken. Beginning to feel more confident and comfortable on the farm, Yuuri took days off from Viktor and Yuri and explored the farm on his own. Poking his head into the pig pen and digging for worms while Otabek gnawed on an apple core. Both animals oinking and chirping, even though they didn’t understand each other’s language. Just having each other for company was good enough, and at least they had someone to listen to. Sometimes, Yuuri visited the sheep and goats. Roosting on a fence post, Yuuri watched the interactions between each animal. Tilting his head to the side when the goats headbutted each other for dominance.

Most of the time, Yuuri like hanging out with the cows. They were much bigger than him and could easily squish him if he wasn’t quick enough. But even though they were bigger and stronger, they were so gentle and nice. Whenever Yuuri came over, they took to notice where he was at all times. Nibbling through the grass, they would point out where the bugs were and Yuuri happily gobbled them all up. Sometimes, Yuuri roosted on a bull’s horn and kept the flies away. Sometimes, a mama cow allowed him to approach her calf and the baby would slobber all over Yuuri’s feathers. Yuuri didn’t mind. He thought it was cute and gently pecked the calf.

And finally for five, Yuuri was... a mother?! Long story short, Yuri woke up one morning and saw
Yuuri huddled in the corner. Puffed up and squatting over something. When the feline approached the rooster, Yuuri puffed up even more and hissed at Yuri. Backing away slowly, Yuri climbed down the nest and called for Viktor. Two seconds later, Viktor flew up and honked. A morning instinct of his that he couldn’t control. Bobbing his head, Viktor tried to approach Yuuri but the chicken hissed at him too. *Something* was definitely off. Yuuri was a rooster, right?

Yuri and Viktor glanced at each other. Not sure what to do. After a while, Yuuri stood up and rolled over a spotted egg. A tiny little thing. A fraction of a chicken egg’s size. Did Yuuri really believe that he laid an egg? The rooster was showing very broody signs. A temper, puffed feathers, squatting over an egg, and glaring with beady orange eyes. Yuri looked at Viktor as if he had some part in this. Viktor squawked, saying that he didn’t think geese and chickens worked that way. Yuri became even more puzzled.

Thinking it was better to ask than speculate, Yuri approached the broody rooster anyway and meowed. What was up with Yuuri and why was he sitting over a tiny egg? Yuuri mumbled something, but his feline companion barely understood a thing that came out of Yuuri’s beak. Then again, the rooster did live with hens all his Life. It was probably a hen-thing he picked up, but where did the egg come from?

While Viktor freaked out and honked at every little thing that moved, Yuri leapt onto his hind legs and looked around for a bird’s nest. With luck, he noticed a little bird’s nest over on a tree branch near the grain barn. Did an egg really roll down a branch, fall through a crack somewhere, fell onto a haystack, and Yuuri *happened* to find it? If that was the case, Yuuri was a good chicken. If there was an egg that needed to be sat on, Yuuri stepped up to the nest and sat on it. Yuuri wanted the baby bird inside to have a good Life, so he kept it warm. But, the baby bird definitely wasn’t a chicken and Yuuri needed to give the egg back to his parent.

Yuuri clucked to the little egg he sat on. Viktor passed out somewhere. Yuri, the cat, wondered if he ate a bad mouse or not. Either way, he was going to go sleep. Hopefully, all of this strangeness will be gone tomorrow.

Chapter End Notes

Do you enjoy non-dialogue stories? A story with Humans? A story where awkward dialogue isn't an issue because body language carries what words can't say? A story with a suave but dorky Viktor with his cuddly baby, Makkachin? A polite but assertive Yuuri with a dream?

Check out

Victors with a Price
YoI Homestead

Chapter Summary

A more detailed introduction to the YoI Homestead and we get to meet a cute little critter!

Chapter Notes

I am so happy right now! I didn’t know but Yowamushi Pedal has a new “season” thing for the new generation peeps and they’re 22 episodes in! Oh my gosh...When I found out, my face got really warm and my heart started fluttering. Is this how people feel when one of your favorite shows updates? I’m going to binge watch that thing to the grave. This is why I love summer. You see cool surprises that make you feel like a little kid again.

And I found a cute anime about this boy who can see spirits. It seems very easy-going, slice of life-ish so I’ll try it out and see how it goes. It kind of reminds of the anime Kimi to Boku [You and Me], and that stuff is cute and refreshing. Because I’m bursting with joy, y’all are going to get a cute, not-so-random chapter. Yesterday was funny, today will be cute!

I want to introduce the Humans of the YoI Farm a little more.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

When a farm came into someone’s mind, they usually thought of hundreds of acres of plotted land. Corn stalks growing against the breeze while the seasonal crops rotated from plot to plot. Animals grazing from the gravel road to the horizon in the east. Huge tractors and machines lugging wood and feed to the big animals. Red mansions in the distance for the poultry, and trucks shipping out meat from the old and young for nuggets, burgers, and sausage.

Farms like that do exist. For a certain percentage of the Human population, people simply wanted to eat food from organisms that were raised by their own hands. To know how your veggies were grown and to know that you raised a seed into a profitable crop for the dinner table and wallet was something magical. To know that a tiny chick or a suckling piglet became the eggs and bacon for your breakfast plate was a journey. These Humans took it upon themselves to discover and build relationships with the food they were growing. Corn and beef weren’t just food anymore, but companions that supported the Human with knowledge, abstinence, and Love.

So on the YoI Homestead, there lived five Humans that took it upon themselves to grow their own food. Two mothers who had day-jobs that could be done on the computer while the mornings and evenings were reserved for the farm. Three children--ages from eight to four--as the little nuggets that helped out with the daily chores. Feeding the animals, harvesting the crops, and being cheerful little kids in Nature’s backyard.

The oldest, Tom, tackled the bigger animals. He wasn’t old enough to lead the cows to the grazing
pastures yet, but he had a good thumb for milking. And when his mama was on a tight schedule, it always brightened her up when Tom woke up early to help the mooing cows. Kind of like the flock leader for his siblings, Tom oversaw all the mini projects and made sure that his brothers were safe.

The second oldest, Vlogel, handled the crops. Making sure that each plant was happy in its space out in the garden. Collecting worms in a little pot to mass-produce an army of wiggly worms for the soil and for the chickens. A bit of a mad scientist that wanted to rule the soil kingdom, but Vlogel’s eccentricness went away when he had to help out with the animals. Even the chickens made him uncomfortable, and he didn’t like touching them all that much. But even so, Vlogel was willing enough to hand out grain and scrap veggies to the chickens and to the pig when someone had to.

The youngest, Jerry, was an excitable kid. Hugging everything that moved. From the squirming puppies at home, to the grumpy cats skulking around the farm, to the fluffy chickens, and to the sweet cows. He tried hugging Otabek, but the pig was too big for him to hug. Jerry tried hugging the sheep, but their wool made him itchy and he didn’t like that. He didn’t try hugging the goats because their eyes scared him, and the goats were kind of mean. The older ones, at least. As the “chicklet” in the sibling flock, Jerry didn’t have a specific role to play on the homestead. He was the little helper that followed behind his moms and brothers, chirping like a chick and fluffing up when he found something to hug.

Those were the little Humans. The chickens feared them, the cows enjoyed them, the sheep were skeptical, the goats were indifferent, the pig oinked at them, the dogs loved them, and the cats didn’t like hugs. That was the general reaction from all the animals.

The old Humans had a bit more respect in the animals’ eyes. Joey and Lina. Two moms with a homestead and a little flock of Humans hugging their legs and middles every morning, night, hour, when it rained, and when it was sunny out. Joey usually spent more time with the animals and plants while Lina stayed at home, homeschooling the boys and crafting delicious meals from scratch. That was a plus!

And in their cottage-styled home out on the farm, in the distance came a familiar minivan of close colleagues from the town next door. Yuri was snoozing quietly in his little space up in the grain barn when a toot from the minivan startled him. Hissing, Yuri climbed up to the barn window and looked through it. Green eyes following the gray minivan that shook along the gravel road. Somewhere downstairs, Viktor was flapping his wings and honking. A painfully weak rooster crow echoed from across the barn, and fluffy Yuuri emerged from a haystack. Wondering how in the world he got here.

Leaning over the barn’s window sill, Yuri was pretty glad that the weird events of the last chapter were in his dreams. Must have been a bad mouse he ate or something. Stretching his body, Yuri leapt and climbed down to the first floor to stalk for breakfast. Viktor poked his head out from the barn and argued with the sun before ripping up grass to eat. Yawning, Yuuri flapped his wings and hopped down from his haystack. A lone goose feather trailing down his back, making Yuri question what happened last night. Probably a bird thing, better to not ask.

Meanwhile in the Humans’ domain, the big Humans hugged each other and caught up on stories while the little Humans surrounded a plastic, clear ball. Huddled inside and sniffing up at them was a guinea pig. A fuzzy, roundish thing with dark eyes and the fluffiest fur that they had ever seen. And the thing made little “chu chu” noises when he sniffed up at them.

“His name’s Phichit,” said the owners. Jerry immediately wanted to squish Phichit. Vlogel shied
away, but he had to admit that the guinea pig was kind of cute. Tom asked a few questions about Phichit, wondering if they could pick him up. The kids couldn’t, but they felt warm inside when Phichit rolled his plastic ball over the wooden floor. Sniffing everywhere and bumping into chairs and cabinet doors because he wanted to. A furry thing, with a big nose and brown and black fur. A creamy white over his round belly.

When Yuri snuck into the house for some breakfast, his ears perked up when he saw Phichit. Before him wasn’t a friend. Before him was breakfast, but this breakfast was in a hard egg and pushing the ball into a pond wouldn’t soften it up. Approaching the guinea pig slowly, Yuri raised his tail and pawed the plastic ball. Phichit turned around and sniffed at where Yuri’s paw was. Little “chu chu” noises chittering off his teeth. Yuri meowed at him, batting the ball with his paw. Phichit wasn’t scared! The guinea pig simply rolled his ball over Yuri’s tail and jogged away when the feline hissed.

Sneaking out of the house and onto the farm property, Phichit stood on his hind legs and stretched. He was in a new playground now, and it was time to officially explore. Bumping his nose against the trap door on the ball, Phichit broke free and rolled down the grassy hill to the chicken run. Admiring the birds and sniffing at the ones that got close, curious as to what this furry round thing was. Phichit tried to get close, but the net squares were too small for him to squeeze through and he didn’t want to dig.

Moving on, Phichit stopped to nibble on some grass. Perking up when he heard clucking behind him. Turning around, he bumped into a scraggy rooster and looked up.

Yuuri looked down, wondering what the heck was this.

Chapter End Notes

I wrote Phichit in because someone was curious as to what animal he was~
Chapter Summary

Chihoko's word was law in the chicken run. It was easy. Break the spirits of the rebellious ones, and everyone learned from the examples. But there was simply one bird that lived a free life beyond Chihoko's touch. A little troublemaker by the name of Yuuri. Chihoko won't kill him yet. There was still more fun to be had.

Chapter Notes

I wrote this chapter with a very distinct style. Let me know how y'all feel about it~

See the end of the chapter for more notes

There was only one rule that governed the chicken run. Submit. If a resident poultry bird refused to bow its head, Vice-Captain and Treasurer were on pursuit. Dragging tail feathers with their beaks and slashing their spurs into the bird’s back. The chicken could flap and cry all it wanted to, but no one came to stop the roosters from carrying out corporal punishment for the flock’s leader. Chihoko, a rooster that was as lethal as his glare. The punished poultry bird would be led back into the coop to receive a private session with Chihoko—something that even Vice-Captain and Treasurer didn’t want to risk their necks on. Trooped outside like a couple of bouncers, the submissive roosters couldn’t allow any of the hens or baby chicks to come inside.

Even if a hen needed to lay eggs, even if the sun or rain was unbearable, even if it was cold and drafty, or an elderly bird needed distance from the younger pullets. No one stepped foot into the coop until the private session was over. The punished chicken—either a pullet or rebellious hen—would come out. Scorned with blood oozing down their back, feathers plucked, wings mangled, and with a distinct flesh hole dug into some part of their body.

The chicken in question would obviously be noticed by a Human and treated with care before reentering the flock as a healthy bird. Doomed and exiled to the lowest rank in the pecking order. Forced to lower her head in fear from the click of claws that scraped across the chicken run. Chihoko. The son-of-a-cock held his head high, strutting down the run with his minions— or lack of a better term— his colleagues by his wings. Vice-Captain keeping his distance, still nursing a wound that terminated his chances of ever being a father. Treasurer chirping when told, only saying what Chihoko wanted to hear. As a smaller breed, Treasurer had no hopes of taking down Chihoko, unless he wanted to be an example for a horrible, horrible death.

For almost an entire year, the flock had lived in fear. Some hens looked past Chihoko’s faults and followed his lead willingly. Those were his favorite hens, the ones that always got the best grain and grubs first. Some hens plotted out schemes to bring upon his demise, but their fighting spirits were cut short after Chihoko’s private session. All the other hens lived in fear and told their own chicks to live the same way. The old flock leader that everyone had known passed away last June, leaving behind an intolerable son that killed his own brother for the throne.
But hope fluttered throughout the flock when a new chicken arrived to the farm, one fateful day. A scraggly little thing, worse for wear. Comb and wattles a pale pink with the ugliest feathers any chicken had ever seen. A rooster, at that. For a moment, there was a glimmer of hope. The hens saw it and passed on that hope to their chicks. An outsider was going to join their ranks, a rooster that could break the shackles of Chihoko’s tyranny. Understandably, the new rooster met his match when Chihoko went on the offensive and schooled him on the first day. Ever since, the new guy disappeared.

Hope wasn’t lost.

Everyone in the flock could see it. Chihoko was on edge. The usually cool leader was pacing back and forth behind the coop, scheming horrible plots that nobody could imagine. Except him. There was no question as to why Chihoko was nervous. A new rooster showing up from a distant land? A fresh competitor that was willing to fight for the throne. Chihoko hated that. He won the throne fair and square, and there was absolutely no reason for him to share. Chickens were birds, and birds needed order. Mother Nature designed the painfully simple pecking order to keep that order in check, and Chihoko viewed that he was destined to lead the flock to greatness. That was what his father had in mind before he died.

The old rooster looked at his only children-- his two sons-- and instructed them to leave a lasting legacy over the flock. Chihoko couldn’t disappoint now. With the flock’s population at least fifty percent bigger since last year, Chihoko wondered if his father and brother were looking down at him in pride. This was his legacy. Building the family tree to train an excellent bunch of soldiers. Chihoko had at least eight chicks between his favorite hens. Enough for an army and once the chicks were strong enough, Chihoko saw through that it was his responsibility to nurture and teach them. That in Life, there were only two kinds of animals. The ones who were privileged, and the ones left scrambling to their feet.

Yes, Chihoko was going to take down the newbie rooster. These past few weeks were long enough, and Chihoko stalked from the chicken run. Orange eyes following Yuuri’s every move when he played and had fun with Phichit, the guinea pig. The furry rodent was a perfect hostage. Guilliable, squeamish, and with a plastic ball for endless hours of entertainment. Yes, Chihoko liked his odds. A simple scrape of his beak against the coop drew Vice-Captain and Treasurer’s attention. Scrambling to their master’s side, both roosters bowed their heads. Chihoko told them to rise, and so they did. Though Chihoko had a civilized look in his eyes, his words were anything but civilized. If anything, Vice-Captain and Treasurer were risking their lives over a petty jealousy. Vice-Captain couldn’t say anything. Treasurer trembled when Chihoko rested a wing on him. Those beady orange eyes staring down into his soul, Treasurer wished that Chihoko struck him dead instead. Anything was better than an all-seeing eye, glaring down at you from a glorified perch of power.

After the orders were said, the submissive roosters followed through with the mission. Chihoko decided to take a nice stroll around the run, meeting his chicks and greeting them. The one chick that bore his stark resemblance-- Crest-- fluttered up to Chihoko, asking his father if he’ll one day inherit the throne.

If you sacrifice everything and anything for the flock’s well-being, the throne is yours.

Plant a seed in a mind while it’s still young. Let it cultivate and blossom into something for greatness. It was a shame that Chihoko’s father and brother didn’t live long enough to see the all the good Chihoko had done for the flock.

While the rooster’s methods were sketchy, Chihoko was undeniably a good leader. The flock was
always safe, no prejudice of any kind. If you followed the rules, Life was easy and carefree. Not a worry to gain. No one was ever hungry, cold, or lonely. Everyone was here together, and Chihoko made sure that not a grain of talent was wasted.

Yuuri was an annoying exception, but Chihoko held some level of respect for our protagonist. After all, Chihoko was a host and as a host, one had to treat his guest to a surprise.

Meanwhile outside of the poultry run, Yuuri and Phichit were having a good time. Bonding over stories, nibbling on grass, and just being cuddly with each other. Though both animals didn’t understand the other’s tongue, it didn’t matter. Having a good time with someone and understanding them through action said a lot more than what words could convey. On his hind legs, Phichit gave his own version of a hug. Stunned, Yuuri nudged his neck over Phichit, nuzzling his beak against the guinea pig’s fur to rid a bad itch.

In the distance, Yuri and Viktor watched. The goose broke a nice breeze with his wing, trying to hide his growing excitement over the fact that his pupil made a new friend. Yuri pretended to not care, but his green eyes never left Yuuri. Fixed on the growing chicken, the feline was pleased of how Yuuri was developing. So pleased that Yuri felt no guilt when he took a nap. Viktor left the cat to his own devices and decided to head back to the pond. It’d been awhile since Viktor last stayed there, and it was better to not have a grumpy duck ransack his home!

Viktor didn’t want to leave but part of being a teacher was to watch your student grow. The goose couldn’t always count that he’ll be by Yuuri’s side, but the very least Viktor could do was trust in his pupil’s abilities. The first step towards independence was crucial for a happy Life, and Yuuri deserved one. Just like how every other animal had a happy Life.

When cat and goose’s backs were turned, Phichit disappeared. Yuuri was nibbling on same grass, like how chickens usually do. Clucking to himself while he did and when he lifted his head, Phichit was gone. Vanished into thin air. Yuuri called out for the guinea pig, but Phichit didn’t come. Where did he go?

Unknown to him, Phichit’s hunger led him away from his new companion. A small, docile rooster approached him with a yummy strand of grass. Flapping his wings, the small rooster led Phichit to a beautiful patch of grass. Phichit thanked the rooster and gnaed half of his weight in food before a thought told him to bring Yuuri here too. The little rooster advised it was best for Phichit to graze alone. Saying that Yuuri didn’t particularly like greens, and Phichit felt self-conscious. Thinking that Yuuri only nibbled on grass because it was polite. Sniffling, Phichit chewed slowly. Not noticing that he entered his own trap.

It was too late. Phichit walked into his plastic ball, and another rooster swooped on to seal the exit. Scrambling, Phichit threw his body against the door. The roosters were persistent. Instead of using their bodies as restraints, the simply pushed Phichit’s plastic ball down a hill. The guinea pig squealed all the way down and rolled right under the electric poultry net in the chicken run. Held up by a cooperative band of chicks. Why weren’t they shocked? Vice-Captain turned off the generator that kept the net alive and powerful.

It was simple. After observing how the Humans switched it on and off, it was only a matter of time before Vice-Captain scratched the switches a certain before they did his bidding. Running back to the chicken run, Vice-Captain asked Treasurer if he held up his weight in the mission.

What kind of fool do you paint me as?

Vice-Captain gave his sincere apologies, and Treasurer told him to zip it. They only had a brief window of opportunity before a sudden rooster was at their tail feathers. They had to move. Now.
With Part A over, Part B came to play. Now, Chihoko was a player in the game and his spurs were ready. Ready to scratch into fresh meat. Puffing up his chest, Chihoko looked up to the hill where Yuuri was, watching the rooster make his way down as he followed the distinct trail from Phichit’s plastic ball.

Yuuri froze. Chihoko was staring at him. Yuuri had to calm down. A perfectly charged net was in between them. As long as Yuuri didn’t come close, he was safe. Just walk around, take a peek inside. If Phichit wasn’t there, fine. If Phichit was there, it was only obvious that Yuuri had to save him. New or not, Phichit was a friend and a supporter. If deep down, if deep down Yuuri had the ability to save a Life, he wasn’t going to let it slide.

Sure enough, Phichit was on the other side of the net. Cowering in fear and trembling. His only exit was guarded by a bloodlust rooster and his goons. Chittering his teeth, Phichit tried to work out a negotiation. Chihoko negotiated. With his feet.

Yuuri’s feathers puffed on edge. Phichit tried to hold his stomach while Chihoko kicked him around like a football. While the flock leader has his fun, Vice-Captain and Treasurer kept their beaks down. They had no permission to look at Chihoko while he was having fun. They tried to ignore Phichit’s squeals, but Treasurer was trembling so much that the little rooster didn’t stand a chance. He ended up fainting, but woke up when Chihoko kicked the the plastic ball to him. That was right. Treasurer didn’t have permission to sleep. He had to stay awake and listen to Phichit’s squeals. All to make a man stronger but honestly, the only bird that was getting any joy out of the lesson was Chihoko.

Vice-Captain shifted his eyes to the side. Not daring to look up, but daring to look right. A helpless creature caught in Chihoko’s snare. Was this what the old flock leader wanted? Was this what Chihoko’s brother wanted? Vice-Captain didn’t buy the cock-and-bull story that a predator suffocated the older brother to death, but he couldn’t say anything. Any chirp against Chihoko was evidence for corporal punishment, and Vice-Captain couldn’t let Chihoko steal everything that he Loved. Daring to look right, the rooster caught sight of his mate. A spotted hen with a simple appearance, but she shouldered a bigger burden over her wings. It was only moments like this, when Chihoko was distracted, that the dutiful hen could be a mother. Her eyes caught sight of her mate, and both chickens gave slight nods to the other.

As long as Vice-Captain stood down, he could preserve what little piece of paradise he had left to cling on. The rooster gulped, only looking up when Yuuri fluttered over the electric net. Claws digging into the wood chips that littered the chicken run. Chihoko stopped playing. A sinister undertone shading his feathers when he knocked Phichit back. The guinea pig rolled right under the coop.

The option was simple. Let Phichit go.

Chihoko’s retort was simple. Fight for it.

Yuuri braced himself. He had only fought Chihoko once, but he knew the rooster was crafty. During their first fight, Chihoko used the electric poultry net to subdue Yuuri. The spunky newbie wasn’t going to fall for the same trick twice. Far from the nets, Yuuri stretched out his wings and flapped them. Intimidating Chihoko wasn’t going to work. As far as Yuuri knew, the rooster had no fears, no weaknesses either. There was only one thing to do. Fight until one bird was standing.

Feathery manes puffed out for battle, Chihoko and Yuuri circled each other. Eyes never leaving the other. Vice-Captain, Treasurer, and the rest of the hens and chicks vanished from Yuuri’s line of vision. All he saw was Chihoko, and the cocky bird lunged first. Yuuri flew out of the way. Managing to scratch Chihoko’s wing, but a little scratch was nothing compared to a piercing peck.
Yuuri dodged, but that was too close for comfort. His chest feathers were on edge. Back facing the coop, Yuuri flew in and kicked. His wings weren’t powerful, but his feet weren’t just for show. Yuuri had spurs.

Landing a blow, Yuuri dashed behind Chihoko and tugged one of his tail feathers. Chihoko tossed his body to the side, dragging Yuuri with him. Yuuri held onto the tail feather, anchoring his claws into the ground. Whipping around, Chihoko used his own spurs. Bloodying one of Yuuri’s eyes nicely. Not a deep cut, but bad enough so that Yuuri could only use one eye. Hissing, Yuuri wasn’t prepared for the wing thrashes that came his way. Chihoko wasn’t even trying. Lively on his feet, Chihoko skipped side to side. Landing blow after blow over Yuuri’s crumbling body until the rooster couldn’t get up.

All the commotion woke Yuri up, and the feline screeched. Telling the birds to knock it off! Pissed, Yuri turned his back. Ready to rush to the Humans so that they can stop the fight. No can do. Treasurer stuck his neck through the net squares and grabbed Yuri’s tail. Dragging the feline’s behind towards the electricity, shocking Yuri. A yelp echoed across the farm. Loud enough for the grazing cows to hear.

A feeble crow slipped from Yuuri’s beak. Get away from him!

Yuuri tried to stand, but Chihoko came crushing from behind. Foot keeping Yuuri down for the count. Yuuri thrashed his wings but each beat earned him another sharp peck from Chihoko’s subordinates. Until a bloody hole emerged over Yuuri’s side, and Chihoko stomped his foot deeper into Yuuri’s face. Clucking like a maniac. Chihoko’s eyes were red.

Yuuri had seen eyes like that before. Back when he was at the egg factory, the dominant hens had that look in their eyes when a weaker competitor was under their feet. With resources and space so limited, you literally had to claw your way to the top. Those that couldn’t see the blinding factory lights were good as dead. No question about it. Yuuri saw his mother in that pile. The hen wasn’t really his mother, but she raised him up ever since he was a squeaky chick. Taught Yuuri all that he knew to survive. Even though Yuuri had the strength to save her, he couldn’t and that haunted look kept Yuuri awake whenever he tried to sleep. He had the ability to help, but he couldn’t. Another Life sacrificed for his behalf.

Yuuri didn’t survive that godforsaken egg-factory by being submissive.

Chihoko was the lordly lion with a roar to match his bite while Yuuri was a python ready to strike.

Each attempt at lifting his head wasn’t futile. He saw where Vice-Captain and Treasurer stood and knocked them down with his feet. Torso free, Yuuri tackled Chihoko and freed his head. Twisting and turning, Yuuri struggled on top of Chihoko. Dodging the furious pecks and restraining the uncooperative feet. With Chihoko upside down, he couldn’t flap. Yuuri had him pinned. Now for the final strike. Lifting his beak, Yuuri struck down. Chihoko turned and threw Yuuri into the electric poultry net. Wings caught in the squares, Yuuri thrashed. Forced to let go, Yuuri could barely lift his head when Chihoko stared him down.

Like what Nature always said. Wolves have eyes on the prey, cows had eyes on the hay.

Yuuri was a beast of burden meant to be taken down by an apex predator. Here in the chicken run, Chihoko proved himself as said predator. Barely any wounds on him while Yuuri nursed his own. Where shall Chihoko strike? The neck? The chest? The feet? The other eye? Too many options, not enough time. Eventually, Yuuri slipped out from the electric poultry net. Wings singed to the bone. Bloodied, crippled, and could barely lift his head.
Yuuri was good, but not good enough. *Weak, pathetic, and an insult.* To live in humiliation was a fitting death for now. Chihoko gave Yuuri that much but next time, he won’t be so kind.

Turning his back, Chihoko called for his subordinates to kindly escort Yuuri and his furry companion out of the chicken run. Phichit couldn’t wait to leave. He didn’t need an escort. The guinea pig barreled his way through the electric poultry net and out to freedom. Treasurer rubbed his beak over Yuuri’s neck to wake him up. Vice-Captain sat next to Yuuri and tried lifting the chicken with his supporting wing. Anything to give the injured rooster comfort and a helping wing.

Yuuri stood on his own, thanking the two roosters for their sincere kindness.

Chihoko turned his head.

*If I win the next fight, you’ll let me live a happy Life.*

Chihoko stared at the offer, dead in the eye. He couldn’t say “No” to a challenge, and Yuuri looked so sure of himself. As if the *insult* had a chance, but Chihoko didn’t become a leader because he couldn’t listen. He honored Yuuri’s proposal.

*We’ll fight with our bodies. No strings attached.* Chihoko gave Yuuri his word as flock leader. To say the least, he liked this idea. It’ll be delicious to see the determination leak from Yuuri’s spirits.

In the chicken run, there was only one law. *Submit.* And here Chihoko was facing a chicken that denied and defiled the very law that kept the flock at peace. If Chihoko didn’t know better, he saw the splitting image of his older brother in Yuuri. Oh well, his brother was *dead.* Yuuri couldn’t back out now.

Chapter End Notes

And thus, a childhood story became a hero’s struggle within a few paragraphs. If y'all have questions about the birds or the chicken society, I’ll answer them~!
After the fight with Chihoko, Yuuri was scooped into a loving Human's arms and rushed inside the house for treatment. As an outsider and teacher, Yuri couldn't come in to stay by his student's side. Perhaps, what pained the feline even more was that he had to tell Viktor what happened. How can Yuri tell the truth without it ending in disappointment?

Knives in his heart, Yuuri spent the rest of the sitting on the front porch steps. After the fight with Chihoko, the rooster couldn't move all that much. Everything ached. Meanwhile, Phichit got the attention of a few Humans and they rushed outside, pale in the face at sight of Yuuri’s mangled body. The rooster clucked loudly, head bobbing from left to right. Feathers puffing up when someone approached him. One of the bigger Humans scooped him up carefully and took him inside. For the best of health and recovery.

Stalking outside the door was Yuri, and the cat scratched the door frame. Trying to get inside to be there for his friend. The feline could jump onto the window sill, but his legs and tail were still stiff from the electric poultry net. Nothing Yuri could do about it. No one was going to let him inside. Not with a hurt bird on the other side. Forced to wait, Yuri slowly slipped down the porch steps and limped his way down the gravel road. Barely making eye-contact with the birds in the chicken run.

A few hens glanced at him with deflated appearances, but Yuri didn’t care. Where were the roosters? Where were they? Nowhere to be found. Most likely under the coop, scheming or something. They had to be. No one was going inside the coop, and the whole situation felt strange. Yuri cursed him at himself. If only he was bigger, he could’ve protected Yuuri from Chihoko’s plan. If he hadn’t slept, he would’ve noticed Vice-Captain and Treasurer sneaking off with Phichit. Nasty taste over his tongue, Yuri licked a few rocks along his way. Something salty to scrape off the grime he couldn’t let go of.

Tail between his legs and ears bending down. What was he going to say to Viktor? The goose wasn’t stupid. He’ll quickly find out what happened, and Yuri knew what the goose was going to ask. Unknown to Yuuri, Viktor and Yuri had made an unspoken promise. If Yuri was gone, Viktor was there. If Viktor was gone, Yuri had to be there. Viktor was gone, and Yuri sure didn’t hold up his end of the deal. Their shared pupil was hurt and on the edge of Death’s door. What explanation was Yuri going to give?

Viktor had to know that Yuri was napping when he left. Maybe the goose won’t get mad. Maybe he’ll understand Yuri’s situation and not blow up. On the other hand, the goose might explode and drag and dunk the feline into the water until Yuri was thrashing for mercy. Both prospects had the same result. Disappointment. Was going to the pond worth it at this point? No, Yuri had to go. Better for Viktor to hear the news from an old friend than a complete stranger.

Brushing aside the tall grass and easing into the squishy mud, Yuri heard slapping nearby. Viktor was alone, slapping his wings against the water’s surface. But when the goose noticed his old friend, the slapping ceased and Viktor swam up to the bank and waddled over to Yuri. The cat kept
his distance, but he had to be open. Viktor honked at him, like he usually did. Yuri gave an interesting meow. Viktor wagged his tail feathers, so he was still in the dark.

Yuri gulped.

Pawing into the mud slowly, Yuri felt like a kitten all over again. An annoying, squirming kit that was left behind because he couldn’t do anything wrong. The feline tensed up, barely knowing where to begin. Should he start from the beginning when he woke up? Should he narrate Yuuri’s fight before speaking about his own? Yuri couldn’t bring himself to look at Viktor, and the goose was looking down at him. Was Viktor mad? The goose definitely knew that Yuri had something to say, but Yuri couldn’t find the right words or expressions that wouldn’t give away that he did absolutely nothing while their pupil got beaten up.

Then, Viktor rested one of his wings over Yuri’s head and back. It wasn’t the slap Yuri had hoped for. It was a gentle touch, something to ease his anxiety. Viktor moved slowly and like a parent, he cradled the cat close to his side. Keeping Yuri safe and calm before popping a question. Viktor didn’t ask about the events or what happened. He simply asked if Yuri wanted to stay under his wing. Yuri curled closer to Viktor.
Chapter Summary

Yuuri and his ex-factory sisters reunite after weeks apart. Chicken madness ensues, and this is the first time Yuuri’s had a healthy interaction with a group of chickens since he got rescued.

Chapter Notes

It probably sounds like I'm a chicken-hater, but chickens are one of my favorite animals. I've raised around 10 in my lifetime and since I've gotten to see some quirky traits from my birds, I wanted to give the poultry animal a spotlight in this farming-fic. Also, I think someone commented that this story is motivating them to be vegetarian, and I don't know where that came from. /shrugs/

Thanks for enjoying this cute and really random AU (some of y'all have commented that to me!), and let's see how Yuuri recovers from the Chihoko fight. Let's hope that next time, Chihoko fights clean. Not dirty.

***44 pages into this madness***

***Not a lot thought has been put into this story, but peeps enjoy it***

Reunions were worth celebrating. Meeting old colleagues again after a tough week, or embracing friends and old faces that passed by in a blur in one’s memories. For every reunion, there was food and water. A pail of water laid out over the grass. Clear enough to see the bottom of the pail, and fresh enough to make an animal feel youthful again. Partnering with the pail of water was a plate filled with soldier fly larvae. Black, squirming little bugs. Wiggling around across the black plate. Oblivious to the dangers that hovered over their soft, squishy bodies.

The meal was set. The guest were coming in. Humans from all across the state drove to the same space, carrying cardboard boxes in their arms. Purring hens and curious heads poked through the breathing holes. Seeing the green grass, the orange sun, and the triple blue sky. Out from the boxes, the hens stretched their wings and fluffed up. By fluffing, they shook their little bodies until their feathers were puffed out. Bobbing heads and lofty acquaintances met in the middle, eyeing each other. Combs flopped back and forth on some birds while other hens assumed dominance with flared manes.

Amongst the ladies was a limping Yuuri, huddled next to an old cage-mate from the egg-factory. The hen leant a wing for support, and Yuuri chirped his gratitude. Hopping around to greet the frisky hens that he survived with. He recognized them. Recognized their walk and talk, but his mind was clueless in remembering their names. It was a blur. Yuuri had spent almost his entire life with these hens, and he couldn’t remember their names. No worry, the hens didn’t remember his name either. So all around, the ex-battery chickens reintroduced themselves and asserted friendly
dominance over the other. Their Humans huddled farther away, admiring the mingling flock of birds.

Someone noticed the food and water. A trumpet of chirps echoed from the first bird. Every hen and Yuuri glanced at each other. Tentative feet scratching into the ground before an army of chickens dashed to the food and water. The soldier fly larvae didn’t stand a chance as thirty beaks dipped down to snatch a grub. The bigger hens bumped the smaller ones out of the way, but everyone had at least one grub down their throat when all the food was gone. Next was the water, and not many hens fought over water.

Most just rolled around in the dirt, tossing cool soil over their backs and into their feathers to cool off. Chilling with each other, beak slightly open and all up in another’s face. Yuuri was painfully shy. Clucking softly as he passed by hens and sat somewhere. A few hens followed Yuuri with their eyes, fluffing themselves to get his attention. You know, when a hen didn’t have to fight for food, water, or space on a daily basis, there was more time to check out the eye-candy in the flock. Granted, at least ninety percent of the birds in this reunion had never seen a rooster since they were all rescued. Most of these hens were raised with other hens and saw the rise and fall of matriarchies during the past month or two.

To see a rooster for the first time got the hormones flowing, and several hens sat around Yuuri and chirped happily with him. Yuuri clucked back before preening his chest feathers. As a rooster who grew up with hens, Yuuri’s instincts were rusty. He acted more like a hen than a rooster, but all the other hens found that very endearing and he was like a “sister” in the flock. Just like them. Yuuri loved that, and he gossiped with the hens and shared his battle scars.

All in good fun. Happy ex-battery chickens basking under the sun with each other’s company. Preening each other, hugging each other, and sharing the latest gossip. Because deep down, they all knew that they would forget this experience as soon as they were gone. They would forget each other’s names, lose this painfully beautiful interaction, and slowly forget the past that united all of them together. These were the survivors. These for the strong chickens that had each other’s backs.

Yuuri asked his sisters for some advice. He told them about Chihoko and his reign of tyranny over the local chicken flock back at home. Beating his wings, Yuuri asked his sisters about what he should do. He told them the promise and deal he made with Chihoko. He shared his skepticism on whether Chihoko was truthful or not when he said he wasn’t going to fight dirty. Yuuri shared his fears and his dreams for a happy life. His sisters nodded along, chirping that Yuuri was a good chicken and that they hope that his wish comes true.

Tossing dirt over his back, Yuuri wiped his beak against the teenage grass. How was he going to fight Chihoko? The dominant rooster had more experience, and he was a born fighter. Yuuri? He could fight if he had to, but he didn’t have Chihoko’s steadfast confidence or strength. One of the hens-- Tilly-- rested a wing over the small of Yuuri’s back. Clucking that the rooster didn’t need to be like Chihoko in order to win a fight. Just be yourself and develop your own fighting-style. Yuuri deflated, wondering what was his fighting-style.

Did he remember how he fought? The memory was a blur to Yuuri, but he remembered the ending. His tail feathers got owned by Chihoko. He remembered getting pecked by Vice-Captain and Treasurer while Chihoko slammed his face into the ground. Yuuri shuddered.

Tilly chirped that Yuuri needed to find his own, personal strength. Chihoko was strong because of his influence over the flock and because he could scare anybody to his bidding. The rooster’s strength relied entirely on manipulation and fear. That wasn’t true strength. Yuuri tilted his head to the side. He couldn’t just stroll into the chicken run and wish joy for Chihoko. Tilly agreed, but
there was an advantage in being nice to the enemy. If Chihoko viewed Yuuri on friendlier terms, maybe a clucked negotiation will establish between both birds. Building a trust chain that they can latch onto.

Yuuri shook his head at the idea, but maybe Tilly had a point. Far too soon, Yuuri’s Human picked him up to take him back home. Yuuri waved his wing at his sisters and they waved back. Watching him sink into a cardboard box before stowed away in a minivan. On the drive back to the YoI Homestead, Yuuri paced back and forth in his box. There were a lot of animals on the farm. Each with a unique fighting-style. An idea dawned on Yuuri in that box.

Fighting aside, the local flock needed a new leader. It clicked to Yuuri. If he could establish himself as the better leader, he would’ve already won the fight.

Chapter End Notes

Where everyone lives

Otabek: personal pig pen with mud, lots of shade, and tons of warm dirt to roll around in

Viktor: previously, it was the neighboring forest and the local farm pond. newest resident to the grain barn, where he sleeps in a makeshift nest of hay with Yuuri and Yuri

Yuri: proud owner of a makeshift hay nest in the grain barn. hates the feathers that his nestmates shed

Yuuri: previously, in a wired cage at an egg-factory. currently sleeps under Viktor's wing at night.

Chickens: in a hardy coop protected by an electric poultry net fence

Cows: in the stalls underneath the main house

Goat and Sheep: co-share a barn with each other, fence divided in the middle

Dogs and Humans: in the upper portion of the main house. a humble wooden cabin/cottage.

Cats: anywhere and everywhere.
Nice Guys Finish Last

Chapter Summary

Viktor subjects Yuri to goat prison and Yuuri learns what it means to be a leader.

Chapter Notes

Will I ever write a M-rated fic? No. One, I'm not comfortable with it. Two, it will be the most /descriptive/ violence I will ever write with /heavy/ language. And three, do you know how stressful writing that stuff is? I love this farm story because it's so gentle and easy-going, and it de-stresses the situation. Oh man, if I had to type ultra-violence for every other day, it'll start to do something to the brain. Best to leave it in my thoughts than out on paper.

Just answering a comment that got deleted by the original commenter.

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Okay...Since I'll be roleplaying with a friend tomorrow morning and I have another fic to update tomorrow, I'll be updating this farm story early~! AND, I'm introducing a new background character! Mila, the Nubian.

Short and easy: Nubians are a breed of goat that have long, floppy ears and the females give around half to a full gallon of milk if bred. [That's a lot of milk, and it's got a rich, buttery taste] They're pretty gentle from what I've noticed, but I've seen a few "Queens" in the barn before. They've got a "royal" feel to them, like gazing up to a pharaoh.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Nice guys finish last. Simple rule of Nature. If one wasn’t quick enough, the chances of fathering tiny versions of yourself were slim to none. Case in point, Yuri had a story. Gather around the feline. Not too close now. The cat hissed when Viktor scooted himself close to Yuri. Yuuri, the rooster, kept a respectable distance between him and his furry companion. Yuri appreciated that. Hacking up a hairball, the cat rested on a fence post and stared up to the sky for dramatic lighting.

A few months ago, during the spring, there was this tom cat by the name of...For privacy sake, Yuri made up a name. Georgi. Yes, there was once this tom cat named Georgi. Yuuri raised his wing, asking what a tom cat was. Yuri shushed him and continued with his story. So, Georgi didn’t like being lonely and wanted a lady friend. He eventually found one on the farm named...Anya. So Anya and Georgi were a thing, and they liked to cuddle with each other by the Humans and all that cute and nasty stuff. Viktor, who was drinking water at that moment, sprayed Yuri with spit. Honking if the cat was even old enough to be telling this story. Yuri batted a paw, telling him to shush it.

During that spring, everyone on the farm clearly saw how mushy and gushy Georgi was over Anya, but the tom cat was torn. He didn’t know how to declare his undying devotion for Anya. On
one such occasion, near the end of spring, Georgi staked out under an apple tree and plucked up the first baby bird that fell from the nest up there. He wanted to present the baby bird as a gift for Anya’s paw in marriage or something. Yuri rolled his eyes. Meanwhile, what Georgi didn’t know was that Anya was already taken by another tom cat and that she accepted the other cat because he made his intentions very clear. So when Georgi came to the barn to present Anya that baby bird…

Yuri left the rest as a mystery, mumbling that he was too young to know the ending. Yuuri fluffed himself uncomfortably, and Viktor softly whacked Yuri with his wing. Just hearing a story like that from such a young animal was frightening, to honk or chirp the least. Hoping to change the subject, Viktor asked Yuri whatever happened to Georgi. Yuri didn’t know. He never saw the cat again, and Viktor hid his head under his wing. Wondering why his innocent, feline companion knew any of this. It was like a big Human hearing their little Human talk about things that they weren’t big enough to know about. And like a parent, Viktor wondered where he went wrong. He made sure that Yuri ate two meals a day, slept at a reasonable hour, and that the cat didn’t eat more mice than he could swallow.

Changing the subject, Yuuri chirped. Asking why Yuri was telling him any of this. The cat blinked. Wasn’t the rooster curious about what made a leader? Yuuri was, but he doubted that a tragic love story would tell him anything. Yuri leapt to the ground and patted Yuuri’s wing, like a brother. The whole point of the story was that in Mother Nature, the only way to be a leader was to be assertive. You had to make your intentions very clear to the participating party. Because Georgi was so clingy towards the idea of being a friendly barn cat, he didn’t get the girl and now Anya was currently pregnant with a litter of kits on the way.

Viktor honked like no tomorrow, pretending that he didn’t hear anything. Yuuri got worried and when the rooster was worried, he hid his head under his wing. Yuri didn’t stop pawing at the rooster’s chest until Yuuri popped his head back into the light. Like a sage, Yuri got on his hind legs to meet the rooster as equals. In Mother Nature, nice guys always finish last so Yuuri had to finish first. But because Chihoko implemented the “nice guys finish last” ideology into the local flock, Yuuri had to be the opposite. Yuuri had to be “nice guys finish first”.

In a roundabout way, Yuri taught the rooster a valuable lesson. However, Yuuri failed to see why he needed to woo hens to be a leader. Yuri shook his head. The rooster didn’t need to woo anybody for the future. That was Chihoko’s job. What Yuuri needed to do was be a friend. Be a friend to everyone in the flock. Let them find something lovable and enjoyable about you, and you’ll gain their support. Yuuri lowered his head, resting it on his feathery chest. He wasn’t looking at Yuri, and the cat demanded to know why. Yuuri clucked softly. Yuri told him to speak up.

Viktor shook his head. For an animal that knew a lot of things that he shouldn’t, Yuri was very oblivious in regards to feelings. Cats and chickens were two very different animals, couldn’t you tell? A cat technique won’t work on a chicken, much like how a chicken technique won’t work on a cat. Not to mention, Yuri didn’t know much about Yuuri, emotionally. Sure, the cat knew that Yuuri was strong and fast, but those physical attributes didn’t necessarily transfer to the emotional, rainbow spectrum better known as Yuuri, the rooster. Viktor wished he could hangout with his friends more often, but he had a pond to defend. The best he could do was lead his companions to the right direction. Help Yuuri open up a little more, and help Yuri come to terms with his feelings.

So for the day, Viktor led the cat and rooster to the goat and sheep barn. The sheep were inside for the day, but the goats were roaming around. Strange, four-legged beasts with stubborn heads and black rectangles inside their eyes. Yuri hated that. It looked creepy, and the bleating goats were annoying. Ears reared back, Yuri hid behind his feathery companion as Yuuri walked under the fence post and into goat territory. Emerging from the other side of the barn was a majestic, red-coated Nubian with clear eyes. Mila. Queen of the goats. Head as stubborn as stone, and she
enjoyed teasing small, furry things. Well, Yuri was small and furry, and the cat knew that.

He pretended to scratch into the ground and picked up pebbles with his teeth. Mila didn’t buy the chicken impersonation. She waltzed over to her feline buddy and nudged the cat over. A strained meow from Yuri. He plopped his body down and didn’t budge. Only doing so when Mila threatened to squish him with her hoof. The tables had turned. Yuuri hid behind Yuri, and the cat tried to push the rooster in front of him. Pressing his wings together so that he looked small, Yuuri clucked innocently. Batting his eyes, and his adorable comb flopped side to side with the flick of his head. Mila bent down and sniffed Yuuri’s feathers. The chicken’s face grew bright red, and he tucked his head under his wing.

Yuri scratched the ground in front of him. He introduced the rooster to Mila, and Mila bleated a greeting. Yuri poked his friend so that the rooster could lift his head. Mila bleated another greeting, and Yuuri flapped his wings and crowed his greeting. The two were hitting it off well. Time for Yuri to sneak off. Before he could, Mila blocked the cat’s way. Yuri’s eye twitched.

Viktor just left him and Yuuri here in this goat prison, and they have no idea why they were here. Something about feelings, but what were they supposed to learn from goats? They were annoying and stubborn and full of themselves.

And yet deep down, there was a real lesson in all of this. To understand another animal’s feelings, one had to subject themselves to an animal that they had no connection with. In that case, they could stop, listen, take in and learn, and express thoughtful evaluations and expressions with their company. And eventually, both parties will share a significant amount of information to signify a friendship bond in between the two very different worlds. That was the role of a “nice guy”. Not to be a back-burner or someone that failed to get something.

On the other hand, the “quickies”-- and Chihoko was a literal example for this made-up term-- were animals that did what they saw fit. Without consulting others or understanding the situation, “quickies” took it upon themselves to do everything their way. To be a leader, one had to grasp and listen to the multitude of different thoughts and opinions that went into building a harmonious society. A society dies from lackluster. A society thrives on the unpredictable. And to guide a society through the unpredictable, a leader had to be somewhat spunky and quick on their toes to evaluate and make good judgement on the differences animals had and to unite the sameness that every animal shared.

That was a leader.

Mila was the perfect animal to learn from. Headstrong but compassionate, Mila didn’t earn the title of “Queen” because she was a royal-pain. She wasn’t even the strongest or the largest goat. A medium-sized girl with a love of adventure and curiosity, Mila drew in the company of her fellow goats. Helping them question the world around them and to explore and imagine what was beyond their neck’s reach. Interesting enough, Mila was on the only goat who didn’t have a kid. All the other nannies were blessed with leaping kids and suckling newborns. Mila didn’t have any of that. So when she rose as the matriarch of the troop, Mila spent time with the younger generation and played with them. Learning what they enjoyed doing and eating. So when the Humans opened up the gates for the goats to browse, Mila led the herd to where the young, tender grass was.

And for the nannies that wanted something chewier, Mila led them to the older teenage grass. And if some goats preferred hay, Mila lugger around a few mouthfuls to share. She wasn’t the first goat out of the barn nor the last. She came out with everyone. Trekking beside her troop because she was greater than them because of her status. A leader was meant to serve the greater good and the goats she lived with were her greater good. Their well-being rested over her shoulders, so Mila
learned to be very familiar with them. Making them feel open to their own thoughts.

At the end of the day, Yuuri learned a lot from Mila. At the end of the day, Yuri still thought Mila was annoying, but *not* as much.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading, commenting, sharing, kudosing, and loving this cute story. When I originally posted this, I thought no one would be interested in such a weird and whacky AU. If you sweethearts don't mind, could you comment why you enjoy this story? Pretty curious :D

As much as I love chickens, I can't say "No" to milk~ I've heard that donkey milk is pretty good, but have no idea where to get it. Don't try yak milk. The taste never leaves you. /shudders/
**Bonus Feature: The Banished Name**

Chapter Summary

"The ones we admire the most have proven themselves in the past."

"Evil is not born, it is bred from prejudice."

The ones that we care the most leave the most devastating scars. That was the truth, and Chihoko was forever haunted by those memories.

Chapter Notes

I'm going to let y'all know beforehand, I spent 5 minutes watching roosters crow on YouTube. There was this one video where this really handsome had such a clear tone in his crow that it was equivalent to watching the opera and seeing the male lead hold a very, very long note. I found some weird videos too, I don't recommend looking further than that

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I have no idea. I kind of thought it like a dating sim where the more time you spend with it, you unlock hidden features and bonuses or something. Sadly, this isn't an app and I did this for fun. I don't know, it seemed nice to add in bonus[?] content to entertain the story and really dive into this whacky, chaotic farm world that these characters live on.

I would even count Otabek's past at the pig-factory as a bonus feature as well because it's not part of the main plot, but you learn more about one of the characters. As well as a chapter that featured Viktor's past as a gosling. So I'll be going back to highlight those chapters because I view them more as bonus[?] content that enriches the main story.

And already, a lot of bonuses[?] have been unlocked. Bonus features feel more like a story within a story that I enjoy doing, so don't really pay attention to it.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

In the chicken run, there lived a banished name. A name so vile, so traumatic that no chick was ever allowed to hold it. Chihoko reared an ugly head whenever he heard the name. Mane puffed out, prepared to strike the dimwitted bird that dared to whisper the name in his coop. Before going to sleep one night, Chihoko heard some chatter. Innocent little chatter from his favorite hens. They were talking to their chicks about the past because the little ones were curious. A little chick asked her mama about the leader before Chihoko’s age. Sadly, the hen murmured the banished name before she could stop herself.
Silence fell over the coop. The hen realized what she had done. The scrapes of Chihoko’s claws grew louder as he approached the hen. Tremblin, the mama hen lowered her head. Begged for forgiveness and compassion from Chihoko’s dark and lonely heart. Except, she didn’t call the leader’s heart “dark and lonely.” The hen only squawked praise at Chihoko’s feet before the hen silenced her with a soft brush of the wing. The chicks looked up to Chihoko, eyes wide with awe. This was the bird that could silence any storm if he commanded it to.

A brave chick stood up and asked Chihoko who was the leader before his time. The hen tucked her baby under her wing, keep her head low for forgiveness. Trembling so much that the other hens feared for her life and for her baby’s life as well.

*Don’t do it.* Vice-Captain shook his head. *Please, don’t hurt them.* The rooster couldn’t say any of that, but he could think it all. If he concentrated hard enough, another family will be spared from much trauma and live a peaceful life. That was all Vice-Captain wanted. He mentally begged and groveled at Chihoko’s feet. Clucking to the rooster that there was another way, another method to keep his dark past from crawling back from the grave.

Alas, Chihoko stepped back and ruffled his feathers. For the chicks at least, the rooster was determined to not ruin their image of him as the flock’s saving grace. He told them about a compassionate, young rooster that took the throne leadership after his father passed away from old age. Hints of nostalgia twinkled Chihoko’s eyes as he told the story. Almost as if the past-leader was standing next to him on equal ground.

What happened to the past-leader? He sacrificed his life to his only sibling, a little brother that was nearly snatched away by a possum one Autumn night. The past-leader fought beak and claw to save his only sibling, and eventually suffocated to death by the electric poultry net. That was the story. Chihoko clawed tenderly across the coop’s flooring, throwing in that *he* was the little brother that was saved in the story. The chicks loved it. They peeped and admired Chihoko even more, chirping about how brave his brother was. What was the past-leader’s name?

Oh, Chihoko couldn’t tell them that. Out of respect for the past-leader’s short life, the name could never be said again. Never to be mentioned, unless one wanted to trifle with the dead. Chihoko held a steady glare at the mama hen of the brood, and the chicken didn’t left her head until Chihoko walked away to rest. Luckily for her, her children had already forgotten the name.

On the other side of the coop, Vice-Captain puffed out a sigh. His mate nuzzled close to his chest, murmuring if the troubled hen was okay. Vice-Captain preened his mate’s feathers. Softly and slowly. Only in the darkness like this could they express their love for one another. Vice-Captain didn’t want to speak yet. Just feeling his mate’s soft feathers and having her so close brought more peace than Vice-Captain could ever imagine. He whispered back that the hen was okay, and his mate was finally at ease.

In the stillness of that night, no one in the flock slept until Chihoko was comfortable enough to close his eyes. That was when the nightmares began. It started off as voices echoing from his past. The same words, over and over again. *The ones we admire the most have proven themselves in the past. Evil is not born, it is bred from prejudice.* Such wise words were only spoken once from Chihoko’s father, Ozai.

Elder-leader Ozai was on his deathbed when his two sons approached him the coop. At the end of his life, Ozai blessed one of the brothers into a leader. The oldest son, Karma. Thick, tannish feathers coated the handsome rooster. Specks of white dashed over his body, like decorations from Mother Nature’s paint palette. Handsome tail feathers dragged along the floor of the coop, and Karma had peculiar eyes. Unlike most adult chickens, Karma wore green eyes while everyone else
carried the usual copper or orange that bled into adulthood. Ozai had a vision of this happening. The elder-leader once had a vision that his successor will bear green eyes, to symbolize the youth and change for the flock’s well-being.

Karma was the living embodiment of that vision, and Ozai’s dying breaths were used to instill the lessons he wanted to pass on. The ones we admire the most have proven themselves in the past. Evil is not born, it is bred from prejudice. Karma etched those words across his breast before leading the flock into a new age. Begone the pecking order and the prejudices it left in its wait. Begone the pecking order that belittled and bullied chickens because of their lack of strength. Begone the pecking order that has caused more harm than good.

Prejudice could not build a better flock. Strength counted in numbers, not the rank of an individual. Every voice counted in the flock, and Karma was willing to listen to them all. To build a better society to raise the future on. During his morning speeches after the death of Ozai, many supported Karma’s words and lived through them. The handsome rooster knew just what to say to get the support he needed, and he was very humble about it. Always thanking the elderly hens for teaching him all that he knew. Always supporting and helping the new adults in the flock, leading them to live well-chosen lives. Always with playing with the youth, inspiring them to be the chicken that they wanted to be.

Everyone loved Karma. There was a period where Chihoko liked Karma too. He always looked up to his brother, admiring the rooster from afar. Karma worked tirelessly everyday to solve the flock’s problems, always on his toes. Keeping a running record of the flock’s history so that the past may inspire the future to pick better choices, to think outside the box. Karma was youth-driven, and his eyes expressed that idea to its fullest value. Chihoko admired all of those things, but his brother was working too hard. Ever since Karma became the leader, he forgot all about Chihoko. Ever since Karma became the leader, it was as if Chihoko didn’t exist.

This new-age that Chihoko used to admire soon engulfed the rooster in unspeakable rage. These new values that meant so much to Karma drew a wedge in the family. Chihoko was left behind while Karma strove forward with the beck and call of everybody. Everyone was stealing his brother away from him. Chihoko took arms and combatted that the pecking order did serve a purpose. The pecking order brought justice and wealth to those that deserved it, and to banish such an order would wreck havoc over everything that the flock cared about.

For the first time, Karma saw Chihoko. Not as an adversary, but as his little brother. As a little brother blinded with rage and unspeakable anger. If Karma had stayed by Chihoko’s side and guided him, none of this would’ve happened. Alas, time couldn’t rewind. After the hate-speech, Karma approached his little brother, extended a wing over Chihoko, and asked the rooster what was wrong. Chihoko slapped Karma in response, digging his claws into the dirt with each step.

One night in Autumn, a few months after Karma’s reign, Chihoko decided to kill him. If he couldn’t have his brother, no one else could. It didn’t matter that Karma had guides under his wings. Chihoko could convert them into pawns easily. It didn’t matter that Karma had an interest on a hen. Chihoko will steal her instead. It didn’t matter that Karma was building a better future. A world without a brother’s care was meant to rot and fall in any way that it wished. It was so easy to lure Karma out of the coop. His brother was always soft, too compassionate and kind. So easy for him to drop his guard in front of family.

In the cover of darkness, Chihoko tackled Karma and fought underhandedly. Tangling his brother into the very hot and very active electric poultry net. Burning to death, Karma jerked and flailed frantically to escape. It only tangled him further until a flail-induced noose snagged his neck. That autumn morning, Chihoko limped towards the coop and lied about a possum that came into the
chicken run and how it tried to steal him, but Karma heroically sacrificed himself so that Chihoko may live. Karma successfully did drive off the possum, but was suffocated from net entanglement. Almost every bird bought that story and those that didn’t were punished accordingly. The pecking order was back and stronger than ever. Chihoko made sure of that.

And despite everything, Chihoko woke up every night because he could hear Karma’s voice. *The ones we admire the most have proven themselves in the past. Evil is not born, it is bred from prejudice.* Every night, those words haunted the rooster until he couldn’t sleep at night. Chihoko didn’t know what Karma was thinking on the hour of his death. Disappointment? Anger? Anguish? Or perhaps, was Karma disheartened that he couldn’t save Chihoko from this tightrope that he was hanging on. Did Karma harbor any regrets before his last breath? Chihoko would never know. In all the time he spent with the rooster, Chihoko never truly understood his brother.

And to never feel guilt, *Karma* became the banished name.

Chapter End Notes

As always, thank you for enjoying this story and share it with friends. I know this AU is weird, but we need some cuteness because of all the backstabbing, murdering, drama, and miscommunications that we see in fanfics these days. Like, we need more weird/cute content

Vice-Captain and Treasurer have real names. Vice-Captain's real name is Tsubaki, and Treasurer's is Kyo. The only reason why they're referred as "Vice-Captain" and "Treasurer" was that Chihoko wanted to dehumanize -- de-chickenize?-- their personalities so that it'll be easier to reshape and remold who they already were. You see, Tsubaki and Kyo were originally the helpers and guides for Karma, Chihoko's brother.

These bonus[?] features are a lot sadder and more angsty than the main story. I think it's because the emotions are more fluid and feel the most natural.
Never Far Away

Chapter Summary

While the birds are running amok and playing dictatorship, Otabek and Yuri find a soft, quiet place to talk about their feelings.

Chapter Notes

I apologize for updating lately! It's been 2 days, and it feels like forever. Was busy yesterday, uploading a new fic to my Hogwarts series for Assassination Classroom, and that took all day to finish. Could've finished sooner, but I distracted myself with "Buzzfeed: Unsolved" and that was scary.

Hey, we got 1000+ hits on this random AU! I'm surprised that a lot of people are subscribed to this fic. The more I look at this story, it feels like a farm vers. of a Korean Drama. Oh well. I hope y'all today's chapter update and thank you for the all the support.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Just like the lack of screentime, not much description goes into painting the domestic life of an oinker. Whether eating, sleeping, or poking his nose through dirt, Otabek was always oinking. Low grunts, high squeals, or hiccups in between while snacking on an apple that a little Human gave to him. Ears flopping, Otabek lifted one of the wooden braces on his fence and walked through the opening. Imagine seeing a pig roll down a grassy hill, oinking along the way. Just laying in the squishy green while the hooves paw at the sky. There was a reason why four-legged animals don't get a lot of screentime on farms.

Typically seen as the protein or milk-makers, there were just a few simple jobs that the Humans had to do. Clean the space, feed the animals, and then leave them to their own devices for a few hours before checking on them. Like dirt or hay, or the nibbles of baby grass just beyond the wooden fence. As a pig and as the only pig on the YoI Farm-- or was it the YoI Homestead?-- Otabek rarely faced any troubles. Maybe a fox was brave enough to visit him, take a crack at biting through his neck. Finish the job that a past fox couldn’t do. Otabek was determined to scare any threat back into the woods. He did save a chicken’s life about ten chapters ago and since then, no fox has ever gone into the cow pasture. Again. That was the sort of reputation Otabek had. Guard pig. No troubles.

But in a dimmer light, being alone and so distant from his friend took a toll on what Otabek could do. Far removed from the drama that ached the farm because of tyrannical rooster, Otabek didn’t know what to do for Yuri whenever the feline stopped by. Broken and tired, the cat would literally hide himself somewhere for hours at a time while the bird drama flapped and pecked around inside his mind. That was the rough part of their friendship. Yuri wanted someone to meow to, to get these thoughts and his feelings across to another animal that had four-legs just like him. Otabek tried his best, but the pig often didn’t have any advice to give.
Even though Otabek was the strongest physically, he lacked the emotional strength to lift his furry friend up. Today was just the same as any other talk. After rolling in the grass for what felt like forever, Otabek noticed Yuri and the feline beckoned for his pal to come over. The feline lounged himself over a fence brace, whiskers sagging just like his tail. Oinking, Otabek poked his pal with his snout. Sniffing Yuri and licking off the dirt and mud that caked the cat’s fur. Yuri appreciated that. Typically, Yuri would’ve been complaining right now. Complaining about Viktor’s antics and how the goose woke him up this morning with deliberate honks. Complaining about his own teaching method, worried that he was leading Yuuri—ex-battery chicken—down a bad road of choices. Complaining that the other cats on the farm were jerk-heads. Complaining about how Mila—the Nubian goat—made him stick around with the goat herd. Complaining about a too-happy Yuuko that chased him up and down the gravel road.

Right now, Yuri was quiet. As if there were so many things he wanted to say, but he couldn’t find it in himself to say all those things. Otabek lifted one of his ears and approached Yuri with it. The car meowed and petted Otabek’s ear. Still nothing. So for the first time, Otabek decided to initiate the conversation. For the first time, Yuri was doing all the listening. He lifted his head when Otabek oinked about his morning slop and the baby grass next to his pigpen. Oinked about how the cows were saints, the goats were patricians, the chickens were playing Caesar, and everyone else was a plebeian. Otabek oinked about how he wished he could’ve helped in someway to alleviate the stress off of Yuri.

Yuri purred. He appreciated it but since Otabek was so big, the chickens wouldn’t feel that it was fair. Yuri mumbled that since he was as big as Chihoko, the birds were more comfortable with his presence. Otabek stomped his hoof. There had to be some sort of compromise. Dealing with birds everyday without a break was tough, and Yuri needed his alone time. The feline needed his cat-time to go chase mice and be a normal cat for once. Otabek suggested that he could take Yuri’s part for a temporary amount of time until the cat was recharged.

And besides, Otabek wanted to learn something new. Win-win situation. Yuri was hesitant on his decision, but he firmly agreed to step aside. If his chicken pal was going to learn any leadership skills, learning from one of the toughest animals on the farm might be the right direction to go. So, Yuri handed his student to Otabek, and Otabek traded his free-time to Yuri.

Chapter End Notes

My word count goal for every chapter here is at least 1k words. Something manageable when I want to post everyday~

Kudos to you if you know what Kdrama I'm referencing to from the chapter title
To Kill a Mockingbird pt.1

Chapter Summary

Otabek is Yuuri’s teacher for a day. What could possibly go wrong?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

What makes a leader?

Mila, the Nubian goat, showed her leadership through listening and coordinating events and places to meet the needs of her herd. The cows were led by a sweet mama named Hiroko, and she was the gentle guide that poured out knowledge and little stories. Helpful little hints to spread from one generation to the next. Chihoko governed his flock with an iron beak, but he achieved stability and solved many of the flock’s food shortages. A pesky problem because of lax leadership from the leaders before him. The alpha dog, Yuuko, showed her leadership by independently leading grazing animals back into the barn stalls and chasing out deer and foxes that managed to slip into the pastures every now and then. Viktor expressed his leadership with his charisma and protective-nature, ready to to inflict a quick jab to break up fights or disagreements between animals.

And then, there was Yuuri. To say the least, the narrator has been exaggerating Yuuri’s thought-process quite a bit. The rooster has almost recovered from his fight with Chihoko, but his strength wasn’t a hundred percent just yet. He wasn’t the skittish little rooster that he used to be. Having a wager with his happiness on the line jogged a sort of seriousness into Yuuri’s mind. His cute, reluctant self was still a prevalent part of his character, but surfacing to mesh with those characteristics was pride. Pride in one’s self and in the life that one wanted to lead. Yuuri wasn’t going to let Chihoko take that from him. This journey to self-confidence and to leadership gave the rooster a purpose, and having a purpose and the sense of belonging rewarded afterwards wasn’t something that could be given up easily.

He didn’t want to be the shy, little chicken anymore.

When Yuuri woke up and fluttered down the second floor of the grain barn, he hoped that Yuri was waiting for him outside. Instead, a hundred and fifty pound oinker waited for him. Snout browsing through a bowl of dried peas. Yuuri stumbled out of his tracks, falling chest first into the ground. Right before the pig’s feet. Flapping his wings hastily, Yuuri got back onto his feet and puffed his chest up. Just like how Yuri taught him, all those weeks ago to promote self-confidence. The pig barely lifted his head at the feather show. Choosing to wiggle his ears and oink before digging extra peas out from the metal bowl. Scattering the grain along the ground. Yuuri tilted his head to the side.

Who was this?

Why were they eating his food?

Though he wasn’t fully recovered, Yuuri could still use his claws. Jumping, Yuuri unleashed his weapons. Angry scratches brightened the pig’s forehead, but the oinker barely acknowledged Yuuri. Simply kept his head low and continued eating. Should Yuuri crow? He didn’t know how to
crow, but he could try. Stretching his neck up towards the sun, a deep rumble shook Yuuri’s chest until a very weak, high-pitched crow escaped from his beak. A crack in the middle of the crow before it finished. The pig’s reaction? A simple gaze up before he brought his snout over to sniff Yuuri.

Yuuri stepped back. Even though the pig barely responded to anything, it didn’t mean that the pig wasn’t a threat. Easily towering over Yuuri, all the pig had to do was step on him and the rooster was finished. Puffing up his feathers to make himself look bigger, Yuuri taunted the oinker with his fast reflexes and sharp beak. Basically growling at the pig for a reaction.

The pig grunted. His name was Otabek and for today, he was Yuuri’s substitute teacher. Show some respect. Feathers down immediately, Yuuri lowered his head. Stuttering through apologies and clucking that his emotions got a hold of him before he could control them. He wondered if Otabek understood anything that he was saying, but it didn’t stop Yuuri’s running beak until Otabek stomped a hoof into the ground.

Not so long ago, I saved your life from a fox. You used to visit me at the pig pen. Now here you are, thinking that you’re the king of the farm.

Otabek grunted. Hoof smashing into the metal bowl with the peas. The little peas spilled everywhere, and the bowl flipped upside down. Shaking his head, Otabek turned around to leave. He only stopped when Yuuri flew onto his back and tenderly patted his substitute teacher with his fluffy wings. Yuuri continued apologizing, chirping that he’ll make-up for his rude behavior.

Please. Just one look from those beady orange eyes told Otabek everything that he never knew about the rooster. That look was the same desperate look that reminded Otabek of his mother. The look that would do anything for the clock to rewind, to have a second chance. Otabek looked forward, oinking that he already forgave Yuuri. Ecstatic, Yuuri fluttered off Otabek’s back and walked next to his teacher as they crossed the gravel road and headed towards the main part of the farm. Yuuri chirped that he wasn’t expecting a substitute teacher. And then, the chicken asked if Viktor and Yuri were okay.

Otabek paused to nibble on a twig. Viktor was okay. He was reuniting with some family in the forest. Will be back in a few days. Don’t worry. Yuri, on the other hand, was on the farm, but the feline needed a break. Yuuri lowered his neck, squishing it against his body sullenly. Wondering why his friends never told him these things. Otabek glanced down at the rooster from the corner of his eye, able to read the feathery pupil like a book. Well, the pig didn’t know how to read-read, but he could read animals and that was kind of the same thing.

What should he do? Knowing much of the drama from Yuri’s meows, Otabek didn’t question Yuuri anything related to the matter. Instead, he asked Yuuri to describe Yuri and Viktor’s teaching methods and what he had learned from both teachers. Bobbing his head as he walked, Yuuri chirped and gestured wildly with his wings. Mentioning all the nice memories at Viktor’s lake with the dragonflies, all the snuggles in the morning with Yuri, all the shared meals and walks around the farm, and the kooky lessons he learned from both animals while on the road to self-confidence.

So, are you not learning to be self-confident right now?

If chickens could blush, Yuuri was. Both his comb and wattles were a bright, cheery red. Yuuri paused to peck at a pebble. Leaning more towards his right, and Otabek noticed a peculiar cloudiness in Yuuri’s left eye. Holding his breath, Otabek crept closer to Yuuri’s left, and the chicken didn’t flinch or move. Either he was comfortable with Otabek’s presence, or he couldn’t see that Otabek moved. Eventually, Yuuri turned his head and stumbled backwards. Puffing his feathers out by instinct, and Otabek apologized for getting so close.
Yuuri never answered Otabek’s last question.

Letting the rooster graze on his own in an open field, Otabek watched from afar. From what he had heard from Yuuri, his goose and feline teacher taught their lessons through a hands-on-approach. Whether it was giving Yuuri the special attention that he needed, or focusing on other aspects to make Yuuri behave more like a chicken. Emotionally, Yuuri was everywhere. Skittish one moment, dominating in another moment, apologetic for a second, and ignorant and hiding for a full minute. Physically, Yuuri couldn’t control his strength. The sweet voice of power was something Yuuri wasn’t used to back in his past, and he was drunk on the voice when the opportunity presented itself.

Otabek sighed, pawing up dirt with his hoof. Viktor and Yuri were good teachers in their own ways but with the way Yuuri was now, it felt like the goose and feline had forgotten or neglected to take into account the past that shaped the rooster to be who he was. Hands-on-approach in the beginning was a good start but during the duration of Yuuri’s stay, the goose and feline could’ve done something to help their pupil grow. Not just emotionally or physically, but mentally too. A strong mindset was the foundation for the emotional and physical base that branched off.

To be emotionally accepting and physically strong and healthy were very important things. Without a firm foundation of what one wanted to do for themselves, two positives could easily become two negatives. The conflicting tugs between both aspects made Yuuri positively unstable. Otabek couldn’t deny that Yuuri was a sweet chicken and very friendly at times. But if the opportunity presented itself, the sweet little chicken could easily become a living nightmare. To settle that conflicting war within Yuuri’s mind and body, Otabek had to guide Yuuri to a mindset of who he wanted to be.

For every animal, it was different. If Yuuri was going to be the hero of his own story, he had to discover this on his own. No short cuts. No one leading him down a gravel road with a bag of treats. This was Yuuri leading Yuuri. That was what the rooster needed to learn, and Otabek can only point to a direction that might be favorable for the rooster.

Rising to his hooves, Otabek was about to go reunite with Yuuri.

Barking in the distance. Everyone grew still.

Near the entrance of the farm, a skinny dog writhed and gagged over the gravel road. Limbs snapping in and out as feverish jaws leaked foam and saliva. Angry outbursts as the dog licked its leg, and then the sickly animal threw itself against the ground. Trying to beat out a monster that clawed its chest.

A little Human ran into the house. “Mommy, Mommy!”

Yuuko dashed out of the house, sinking her body into a streamlined fashion. Growling threateningly at the convulsing, mad dog. Its clouded eyes pointed straight at Yuuko, thick saliva dripping down its jaw. Ears wiggly madly because of Yuuko’s growls. The mad dog snarled.

As a small pig, Otabek layd his belly flat across the grass. Rolling around so that he smelled like the field. Yuuri crept up and sat next to his teacher, huddled close to Otabek’s belly. Eyes wide and chirping that Yuuko would be okay. Otabek tensed up.

A mad showdown. The mad dog lunged. Yuuko knocked the dog back, snapping her jaws. The mad dog tackled her to the ground, blindly snapping its own jaws as spit flew everywhere. Forced onto her back, Yuuko kept pushing the mad dog away from her. Punching its chest and kicking its legs, Yuuko couldn’t wrestle the beast off of her. The mad dong only sunk closer and closer.
By the time a big Human emerged from the house with a loaded shotgun, Otabek was tossing the mad dog out of the farm. Crushing its paws with his hooves and body-slamming the beast. Yuuko laid across the gravel road, bleeding from her neck. Chest thumping rapidly. Barely able to get up because of her bite-wound. On the other end of the spectrum, Otabek wore metaphorical blood over his hooves when he stepped away from the beaten and crushed body of the mad dog. Another kill on his record as a Human came in to herd Otabek away from the body, telling her wife to clean and quarantine Otabek and Yuuko immediately.

Chapter End Notes

The sick dog at the end of the chapter does have rabies. Once bitten, there really isn't a cure for the virus. One of the only "cures" is to kill the animal before it could infect another.

This is a two parter. Part 2 is the aftermath, where Yuuri learns something valuable. However, he won't understand the lesson until he sees it first.
To Kill a Mockingbird pt.2

Chapter Summary

The farm is a shadow of what it used to be. Silence has never been louder in the morning, and Takeshi--Yuuko's mate--doesn't have the courage to continue his mate's line of work. Plagued with guilt, the dog spends his first day hiding out in a cow stall, wishing that he could turn back time to protect his mate.

On the other side of the spectrum, Yuuri confronts Otabek on why he suddenly charged into battle yesterday. Did the pig have a death wish? Did Otabek seriously think he could get out of the fight, unscathed? What possessed him to fight against a mad dog? And in the darkest hour of that morning, Yuuri learned his final lesson.

Chapter Notes

Sad to say it, but this farm!AU will be ending soon. I can't say how many more chapters this story has left, but we're nearing the end. This is like the climax, this is where stuff goes down. This is when Yuuri realizes what his life and what this journey has led him to accomplish. This is when Yuuri learns what happiness means to him.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

If there was such a thing like silence on a farm, that was what the inhabitants heard. A smoking shotgun rested over the shoulder of a southern porch, blowing out smoke-rings under a hazy sky. Farm boots turned over and exchanged for town sneakers and shoes as a big Human and her little Humans got into the minivan. A poor farm dog in the back, lying across the floor with a cushion for her neck. An animal hospital ten fifteen miles away. A few sputters from the minivan before it drove off the farm property and onto civilian road.

The Humans left behind at the homestead took care of what needed to be done. Bathing and cleaning Otabek. Scrubbing his hooves thoroughly outside in a metal tub, checking Otabek’s eyes and torso for anything strange. The little Human that was left behind--the youngest--wrapped his arms around the pig’s belly. Saying nice things, and Otabek oinked back. Shaking suds and water off of him when the sterilization process was done. Otabek was led back to his pigpen, closed off from the rest of the farm. If he was infected, staying away from the other animals was the best precaution to take.

Luckily for the Human family, Yuuko was vaccinated against rabies. Yuuko should be okay because she had to be. And if, and if Yuuko’s vaccination wasn’t strong enough to fight the virus...It was better to not think about it. Keeping the mind optimistic was healthier than this doubt.

Meanwhile, there was still the matter of disposing the the dead mad dog. Even the flies refused to approach the corpse, and that was saying something. Considering the summer heat.

Telling her son to play inside and with the other dogs, the big Human went inside to get a box and a heavy pair of gloves. Carefully discarding the body inside the box, the Human dragged it to the
edge of the property. Slipping off her gloves, the Human called a few numbers. Pacing back and forth across the porch, fingers drumming along the neck of the smoking shotgun.

The next morning, a few whispers echoed across the farm. Sun wasn’t up yet, but the farm still needed someone to run to it. Except this time, Yuuko was up for the morning chores. Her mate, Takeshi, took up the role and ran down the porch steps with his owner. He and Yuuko’s pups wiggled and squirmed inside the house, squealing for their mama and papa. The little Humans cuddled with them, but it wasn’t the same. The pups still didn’t know what happened to Yuuko.

Back outside with Takeshi, the farm dog was trapped in a daze. Moving around the farm slowly, barking weakly as he led cows, sheep, and goats to their grazing pastures. Hearing their condolences and well-wishes, Takeshi tried to put up a happy front. Mama Hiroko from the cow herd called him out on it, and the dog’s tail stopped wagging and he whimpered by the cow’s side. Hiroko mooed, licking the top of Takeshi’s head when the dog stared down at the grass. Blinking his eyes so much that they began to water, but it was because of the spicy plants in the field. He had to return to his Human to finish the morning chores, but Takeshi’s body was weighed down. His hind legs were stiff, and each step rocked the dog. Side to side. Lost, Takeshi walked and hid inside a cow stall. His Human called for him, whistling afterwards to grab his attention. Takeshi didn’t leave his hiding spot, and the Human knew better than to force the dog to do anything.

For the next forty days, Takeshi will be in charge of the morning chores until Yuuko’s cleared with the vet but honestly, Takeshi just wanted to be alone. Left to his own devices. Burying his nose into the hay that retained some of Yuuko’s scent. Whimpering under his breath and closing his eyes. Wishing that he could’ve fought the mad dog instead. Wishing that he was fast enough to reach the door before Yuuko did. Wishing that he tried harder to get out of the house when Yuuko was in trouble. Belly weighed down with guilt, Takeshi stayed in the cow stall. Undisturbed for the rest of the day.

News of Yuuko and Otabek spread across the farm like a wildfire. Yuri scratched his claws against the barn wood around his nest. Absently distracting himself with the action. Rolling onto his left side and then his right when he felt sore. The feline buried himself under some hay, like he was curling up against Yuuko’s warm fur. At the lake, Viktor had just returned from a family reunion. Slowly swimming around in circles as he digested the news that he had heard about yesterday. For a goose, there was nothing he could do. There were two things that geese were weak against. A shotgun and a dog. Even if the bird could’ve been there to do something, he would just end up as a casualty and that... Viktor slapped his wing over the lake’s surface. He swam onwards and hid behind the growing cattails.

So much for calling himself a “guard goose”. How could Viktor call himself a protector if he couldn’t even protect the ones that he cared for? The goose spent the rest of the day slapping his reflection with his wing, honking at it and lashing out. Until nothing was left. Just a bunch of goose feathers floating absently across the water.

At the darkest hour of that morning, Otabek met his first visitor in the form of Yuuri. The black rooster bobbed his head as he neared the pigpen. Scratching the dirt uneasily. Yuuri crept closer and closer until the wooden braces of the pigpen stopped him. Otabek rolled onto his belly, meeting the rooster’s gaze. Silence. Who was going to speak first? Otabek sniffed the dirt in front of him, sticking his tongue out to grab a few corn kernels from yesterday’s slop. Yuuri watched Otabek with his good eye. His right one.

What possessed the pig to fight yesterday?

Otabek licked a pebble and cracked it between his teeth. If an animal had the ability and power to
save another’s life, why be idle when you *can* fight? It was all part of the circle of life. When you couldn’t defend yourself, an older, experienced animal did the grunt work. And when you’re old enough to do the grunt work yourself, you shed your shield to protect another. It was only logical to save Yuuko’s life before the mad dog killed her. Otabek spat at Yuuri’s feet. Rising up slowly, the pig approached his side of the fence just when Yuuri’s feathers puffed out.

Why didn’t Otabek stand down? The mad dog had teeth. Spit was flying everywhere. Did the pig really think he would escaped without a scratch or infection? Now he was here, biding time until the infection decides to rear its ugly head.

Yuuri shook his head. Otabek, *this small oinker that barely reached Yuuko’s shoulder*, could’ve died. Did Otabek stop to think about that? When Yuuko fell yesterday and got bitten, Otabek moved so quickly that it knocked Yuuri back. The chicken struggled to his feet just as Otabek reached the gravel road to tackle the mad dog. Why? What gave the pig so much assurance that everything was going to be okay now that he was on the battlefield? What was it? Yuuri demanded to know.

Otabek grunted. The sharp sound persuaded Yuuri to stand down.

*Sometimes you have to give-up your selfish pride to do what you know is right.*

Otabek, this nonchalant pig with heavy strength but a brittle heart, shoved aside his comfort zone to save a life. He didn’t know if a Human was going to emerge from the house quickly or not. He didn’t know if the mad dog was going to bite him or if he was going to die. That didn’t matter to the pig. If Otabek had stayed nonchalant as a bystander, Yuuko would’ve died. Could Otabek live with the guilt? No.

Yuuri didn’t understand. *How could you throw away yourself so easily to a cause? Don’t you have to think about it? Consider the options, weigh the consequences?*

Otabek oinked. In a perfect world, one could have unlimited time to think. In *this* reality, a gut-instinct was stronger than a rational mind. One hesitation and you could easily lose something forever. Rolling onto his side, Otabek pawed at the ground. So many animals were stuck inside their own heads that they failed to pay attention to the sufferings from those around them. Those were the *worse* leaders.

Yuuri’s head perked up.

Arguably, one of the hardest qualities for a leader was this: *Throw away your selfish pride and do what is right.* Because if pride, image, and a personal gain meant more to a leader, they were already corrupt from the start. It was a harsh way of thinking, but it was one of the more effective ways to help animals see beyond themselves. To see the situations of those around them. This life wasn’t just for one. This life was for *everyone*.

Take for instance the deal between Chihoko and Yuuri. Yuuri wagered his personal happiness. If he won, he was allowed to lead a happy life. What about for the chickens under Chihoko’s tyrannical reign? Was it fair for Yuuri to win a fight and not do anything to help the rest of the flock be happy? Every animal was entitled a happy life, so could Yuuri live with the guilt of not doing anything to help. Because to lead a happy life wasn’t just about being personally happy. It was about living a good life with other animals that were happy too.

The chicken flock wasn’t happy because of Chihoko. Yuri wasn’t happy because he cared about the flock so much. The feline didn’t want to admit it, but he grew to worry for the flock ever since Yuuri mentioned that he felt like he didn’t belong there. Viktor wasn’t happy because he didn’t
have the authority to change the flock. He was a wild goose, an outsider. If a Human caught him fighting Chihoko, there would be a shotgun aimed for Viktor’s head and he’ll be dinner on the dining table. Otabek wasn’t happy because his friend, Yuri, was stressed out all the time because of this bird drama.

The only animal who could do something was Yuuri. He was the only threat deemed worthy in Chihoko’s eyes. Yuuri was the only animal on the farm that Chihoko was afraid of. And why? Yuuri was compassionate, loving, and it was easy to bond with the chicken. It was easy for others to put faith and trust on the chicken. Yuuri had unknowingly broken all the rules that Chihoko placed within the chicken run, and the rooster was a spark of hope to the flock. Yuuri was the one chicken Chihoko couldn’t control, and it was all because Yuuri wasn’t like the other birds to begin with. An ex-battery chicken with a second chance at life.

Why can’t he give the flock that same opportunity? A second chance at life.

Chapter End Notes

As always, deep chapters are usually followed by something cute and fluffy but at the rate I’m going, we might not get a cute and fluffy chapter for a long time.

Learning how to drive tomorrow! Terrifying.
Happy

Chapter Summary

Happiness is when you realize you're not alone in a storm.

Chapter Notes

I'm juggling more stories than I can handle, but this story is first priority to me since it's almost finished. I don't think I'll ever write anything better than this...Will probably do a Human version of this story at one point. What are y'all's thoughts on that?

See the end of the chapter for more notes

When Takeshi woke up to lead the morning chores with his Human, he didn’t expect to see a little rooster on the porch shoulder. Walking over the skinny shoulder with his wings out for balance. Bobbing his tiny head, clucking while he did so. The rooster nearly fell when the front door opened, but he was a cute little thing. Stretching his neck out for the Human to pet, and she tickled under his beak. Reaching up on his hind legs, Takeshi sniffed the chicken. Ah, this was that newbie that came to the farm a few months ago. However, calling Yuuri a newbie wasn’t relevant anymore. Almost everyone knew the chicken, except for the other cats. Wherever they were.

Fluttering down from the porch shoulder, Yuuri wiped his beak against the floorboard. Puffing up when Takeshi’s Human stroked his tail feathers. Yuuri was still skittish around Humans, almost like a hen pausing in her tracks while a Human massaged her wing. It was a little strange that such a hen-ish reaction came from the rooster, but Takeshi couldn’t judge. He licked his fur often like a cat. Nothing wrong with that. But what was he kidding, Takeshi couldn’t distract himself now. He had a job to do.

Dashing down the porch steps with his Human, the two went to the cows first. Milking before the crack of dawn. Takeshi’s Human led out a mama cow and milked her by hand. Cleaning the udders first with lukewarm water, wiping the udders with a towel, and spraying a little bit of milk from each udder before shooting the creamy milk into a metal pail. Takeshi usually stood farther away to not upset anyone. Lying on a floor of hay and wood. Ears slicked back while lost in his thoughts. He wasn’t alone today. Yuuri followed the dog and cuddled next to him. Resting a wing over Takeshi’s shoulder. The dog nudged the rooster with his nose. Not out of annoyance, but uncomfortable with the sudden closeness between them.

Yuuri fluffed himself like a chicken would usually do before scampering away. Making Takeshi wonder why the chicken was here in the first place. No matter, having the chicken as company made the old dog feel better. Even if the closeness was short-lived.

Running across the farm as quickly as he could, Yuuri fluttered into the grain barn. Climbing his way up to the top and tackling Yuri, the feline. Yuri hissed, puffing up his fur. Attempting to swat the rooster with his claws, but Yuuri easily circled and dodged. Successfully climbing on top of the cat and sitting on him. Yuri flicked the rooster with his tail before lying down. Growling if the
rooster had eaten a bad weed or something. Why was he so...chirpy? Yuuri wiped his beak over Yuri’s fur before settling his fluffy self over the feline’s back. Clucking that he wanted to apologize. Yuri’s ears perked up, but the cat remained silent. Yuuri apologized, sorry that he was selfish and putting so much stress on a dear friend. Silence fell between both animals. Yuuri expected a meow or a faint purr. He got nothing in return.

Do you remember how we first met? Yuuri craned his neck down to peck Yuri. The rooster would never forget. They met on his first day, and Yuri wanted to eat him. But when Yuuri got hurt from his first fight with Chihoko, Yuri took the rooster up to this grain barn and nursed him back to health. Giving the chicken a cob of corn as a meal. Yuuri didn’t remember if he ever thanked Yuri for his hospitality, but the rooster was doing that now. Yuri had no reason to save his life back then, but the premature cat did it all from the goodness of his heart.

Finally, Yuri meowed. Saying that Yuuri was too late to apologize for anything, but the cat was teasing him. Off-guard, Yuuri stumbled off of his nestmate and Yuri pinned the rooster with his paws. Yuri kicked up hay and flapped his wings. Yuri batted the rooster softly with his paws and leaned over the poor bird. They weren’t friends, even if Yuuri wanted to think so. In a strange way, they acted more like brothers. Playing, wrestling, and panting heavily under a patch of sun afterwards. Yuri asked why Yuuri was here. It had to be something important since Yuuri had expressed remorse. Yuuri clucked softly. Wanting to make his friends happy after disappointing them.

Yuri looked at the rooster. What on Earth was Yuuri yapping about? Disappointment? Where did Yuuri get that idea from? No, the cat was proud. Proud to have an excitable and fun student to tease and hiss at. Yuri told his pupil all of that but frankly, it felt like Yuri was the pupil instead. He never taught the rooster anything, but the chicken taught him so much. Wasn’t even through words, but through action. Yuri wasn’t going to admit it, and he liked the chicken more than what most would think.

But Yuuri didn’t just have one friend and teacher. He had two. Together, he and Yuri strolled down the gravel road to find Viktor. They found the goose swimming around in circles. Head down on his chest as feathers sunk into the water. Yuuri tapped the water with his foot before going forward. Yuri stayed on the shore while the rooster floated his way over to Viktor. Preening the goose’s feathers gently while Viktor pecked back. Shyly. Yuuri fluffed up his chest and flapped his wings. Slapping the water, not even caring that he was starting to sink a little. He splashed water into Viktor’s face. Viktor turned around, sending waves his tail feathers. Rocking Yuuri back and forth across the water’s surface. The rooster leapt from the surface and flew about three inches over the water. Splashing water over Viktor. Viktor slapped the water’s face, splashing Yuuri. Both birds kept playing until Yuuri had to go back on shore. Wet from head to toe.

Yuri hissed when Yuuri fluffed himself, sending water everywhere. Yuri tackled the chicken back into the water, and the rooster took Yuri along with him. Now everyone was soaked. Yuri meowed for help and Viktor came over, honking at the feline’s face like he usually did. Yuri splashed water at the birds, and the birds splashed water back at him. By the end of the morning, all three of them trooped back to the farm. Soaked to the bone. Takeshi passed by them to go back to the cow stall, briefly meeting their glances and wondering why they were soaking wet. Viktor honked cheerfully, wagging his tail feathers. Wings stretched out for an embrace. Takeshi backed away, but the goose happy got closer. Shaking water onto the farm dog. Yuri pounced on top of Takeshi and sat on his warm back. Getting drier from the sun.

Yuuri weaved between Takeshi’s legs and preened the dog’s fur while Viktor poked and teased Takeshi’s ear with his beak. The farm dog was evidently very confused and ran. The animals ran after him. Running with the dog through tall grass, in and out of barns, up and over the porch by
the Humans, bobbing through vegetable patches, and rolling down a hill. Falling into the bouncy grass. Throwing leaves and tiny twigs at each other. Roughhousing one another. Takeshi bit around the bottom of Yuuri’s neck very gently, lifted the bird, and placed the rooster an inch away from him. Yuuri retaliated soft pecks and easy bites. Yuri pounced on them both, clinging onto Takeshi’s leg before Viktor rolled down the hill again and crashed into everybody.

Just a bunch of animals having fun and giving each other company. The storms that rained over their heads ceased to exist as the sun broke through and shone over their playfulness.

Chapter End Notes

Just listening to really cute music while writing this. If you haven't watched "The Royal Tutor", I recommend it. It's probably one of the cutest animes of this season. Lovely story, memorable art-style, the story was told extremely well in 12 episodes, the opening is so adorable, and the show has a mixture of things that can appeal to a wide range of people. If you haven't seen it, at least check out the trailer.

Not to mention, the AO3 fandom is /quite/ tiny, so i added a very funny fic into it. Something weird to make peeps laugh. Maybe.

But enough about that. Thank you for supporting and reading this story~!
**Bonus Feature: I Live in a World with Broken Wings**

**Chapter Summary**

Before a Human does something stupid or potentially dangerous, their life flashes before their eyes. Everything that has led them to this moment, everything that drove them this far passes by. Like a train burrowing through a thick, ominous cloud of memories.

For a farm animal, where a lifetime could pass by like a bullet train, the memories come by slower. Gentler, like the stepping stones for a bird before he can fly.

**Chapter Notes**

This bonus feature details an event that occurred almost a year before Yuuri came into the farm.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

*I live in a world with fledgling wings.*

Every day, the typical routine commences. People come down from the house with the farm dog, a bucket of scraps by the hip as a pleasant woman ventures into the chicken run. She unhooks the coop door. Before so, she admires the cage fight inside. Hens, roosters, and chicks pressed against each other and beside the door. Pressing their feathery bodies against the wired message to go outside. People have said that the coop is too small for all the birds, but the daily cage fight is simply a facade. The birds do have enough space. They just like to congregate by the door in the morning. The hens always bust the door down. The first to fly off the ramp to grab their morning portion. Straggling behind are the chicks, unsure if the world outside is safe or not. Living in a coop does something to chickens. They feel safe in a secluded world, rarely venturing out unless someone nudges them forward.

*I live in a world with love.*

I like looking outside, seeing all the farm animals in perfect harmony with one another. One of the best harmonies that a farm can have is family. Family fosters the morals and ideals that help shape the individuals of the today. We start off small, swaddled in blankets or kept warm under a belly or tufts of fur. We are fragile, like the small buds that miraculously sprout after winter. With food for nourishment and love for the heart, we grow. We change. No longer the piglets, chicklets, calves, or kids. Now we stand tall, shoulder to shoulder with those that have nourished us since birth. We hold onto each other, giving support, giving love, giving voice, and sharing the deepest understanding that can bond individuals together. Though we are different, we are very much alike. The circumstances surrounding our childhoods or how we grew up does not change the compassion that thrives in a world with love. Love is immaterial. Never to be bought or sold, but something to be shared, to be held, and to be told. Love is not all the grains of the world, but it is the water that sprouts that grain so that we can be fed.
I live in a world with hope.

Hope gives me joy. Hope is not just a promise. It is the final message that our lives will not remain miserable. This pain in my chest, the ache on your back, and the burden on so-and-so’s shoulder are not permanent. Yes, these setbacks push us down. They were designed as weights, dragging and slowing us down from this hope beyond our horizon. However, these woes are not stronger than us. They feed off of our defeat and self-destruction. We are the masters of these woes, they are not the masters of us. As trivial and as mundane as it is to drag these weights, they strengthen our desire for hope. Because in a world that is ever-changing, these setbacks are not permanent. Because as we strive ever closer to hope, the weights loosen and fall behind. They become a shadow of what they used to be. They are not scary anymore. They do not tower us, shun us, or speak ill of what we have done to come this far. Because after awhile, their voices do not influence us anymore. We can escape from what daunts us. That is hope. Hope is the final message that tell us that our suffering is done. Hope tell us that we are free to live our own lives in the best way we see fit.

I live in a world with rules.

Rules were designed to keep order. Without them, the world is thrown into chaos. Rules are the tight-knit squares that branch society. If you follow one way, you go into this square. If you follow another way, you go into that other square. Rules cut us off. Rules are part of a hierarchal system that classifies where we should go, who we are, and what privileges we do or do not have. To have a thriving society, rules are the building blocks. They tell us what we cannot do, what we can do, and what we should or should not change. But when you break the words apart and look behind the meanings, rules were designated to keep us safe. However, I see flaws in how rules were interpreted in the past. So caught up in maintaining order, we slowly equated rules to privileges. Rules were not designed to inhibit the growth of a certain group. Rules were meant for everyone to follow. No matter how high or how low one is on the social hierarchy, we all follow the same set of rules. And slowly, I began to believe that those rules were morals.

I live in a world blurred by the lines.

Why is that one individual could get away with something while another individual, who committed the same action, received a punishment? As society progressed through the decades and centuries, those at the top of the social hierarchy received more leeway. How is this possible? Rules were meant to treat everyone fairly, yet the exact opposite has sprung up more frequently than one could count. When did power and an image become the focal points of society? What happened to compassion, love, and understanding? Have we dismissed these morals and feelings because they were old-fashioned? I don’t believe so. As time goes on, I am afraid that we are entrusting the future of society to the wrong individuals. Evil is not born, it is bred from prejudice. We have forgotten the meaning of life. We have forgotten what it means to be alive. Instead of learning from mistakes, we shoulder that blame onto another.

I live in a world without a second chance.

Why must we be the perfect versions of ourselves? What does “perfect” mean? It is a condition that no living thing could achieve and yet, so many strive to be that way. To have the best of everything, to be the best of everything, and to scorn and laugh at those who fail to achieve that condition. I do not understand. When I was young, I had a mentor that told me this: Practice does not make perfect. Practice makes better. After all this time, I still remember how my mentor said those words. A gruff voice escaped from him, heavy with age. These strive for an imaginary perfection has long plagued the world, long before anyone could remember how it began. In the society that we have grown up in, we were taught at a young age to be someone else. Follow the
footsteps of someone great and take heed of their words. We were led to believe that if we did follow in those exact footsteps, we would be corrupted. Funny how I think of the past now. A single mistake was very easily beaten out of you, just like how an empty praise boasted the ego in our hearts.

*I live in a world with imperfections.*

I do not resent an imperfect world. It is real. It is unique to every individual. Much like how Mother Nature paints imperfections into her works, I believe we should not be afraid to painting our own imperfections. I feel that a lasting legacy comes from doing a mistake, learning from the experience, and striving to do better. Not striving to be perfect, but striving to be better. Better is more achievable than perfect. Perfect has a set of guidelines that no individual could meet. Better is obtainable because ‘better’ caters itself to the individual that it belongs to. Everyone has a different ‘better’. We do not have to strive for the exact same thing. We can strive towards what develops each and everyone of us to be a mature, wiser individual of who we used to be. We are not versions of each other. There are no updates for the living. We are who we are. We can learn from what we do and how we do it.

*I live in a world with broken wings.*

What we do today, may change tomorrow. What we did yesterday, influences who we are today. When it comes down to it, there are so many things to regret from yesterday that tomorrow is often ignored. Learning from yesterday helps shape an unforgettable tomorrow. Today is the day that we do the grunt work, where all the pieces come together to paint a bigger picture for tomorrow. My wings are fragile, can easily shatter at a single touch. My wings are broken, glued and reglued everyday to keep them together. However, I have not changed what my goal for the future is. To create a better society, a society where no one has to be afraid. A society where everyone has a voice in a matter. A society where we can all stand, shoulder to shoulder, as equals than adversaries.

It is often commented that Humans see their lives flash before their eyes before doing something incredibly dimwitted or downright dangerous. For the fleeting lives of farm animals, our lifetimes flash by like the sound of thunder from a bullet train. I am well-aware that change cannot happen overnight or in this lifetime for someone like me. But with what I can do with my life and with what I can do for the society before, in front, and after me, a better future is upon us. For our children, for their children, and for the generations to come.

Thank you for your time.

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After the speech was said, Karma fluttered off the coop. Thunderous cheers from the flock melted his heart, and the young flock leader joined in on the laughter and conversation. Hens came up to congratulate Karma for being the new flock leader, chirping that he would make a wonderful father one day. Karma scratched his head shyly, leaning his head down to talk to the hens better. Karma was never one to hold his head up high. Always leaning down to listen better, to humble himself in front of the chickens that looked up to him. He hadn’t thought about settling down, but Karma was smitten with a feisty young hen. Creamy feathers, the cutest pink comb that resembled squished berries, and the strongest wings Karma had ever felt from a bird. The hen was named Crest because of the speckled pattern across her wings and chest.

Crest approached Karma when the maternal hens left. She bumped into Karma purposely, nudging him with her wing. Clucking that Karma had a good speech. Shaky in some parts, confusing in
others, and Crest berated the rooster for using big words. Karma pecked into the ground, saying that he had to use big words. It was a speech, after all. Crest’s feathers puffed up, and she roughly pecked Karma’s shoulder. He should’ve at least incorporated easier words for her to understand. Crest spouted that if Karma doesn’t start using little words soon, chickens will go rogue and rebel. All because they wouldn’t understand a thing that Karma said.

The rooster laughed, enveloping Crest under his faithful wing. He’ll keep that in mind for the future. It’ll be bad if Crest went rogue. The rooster wouldn’t know what to do if his best friend turned against him. Face flushed red, Crest flapped her wings. Softly. Mumbling that Karma shouldn’t think of stupid things like that. And then, the hen screeched that she’ll never desert Karma because he meant so much to her. Realizing what she said, Crest’s face grew redder and Karma preened his friend’s feathers so that she would calm down. The rooster whispered that he was joking and that he was very lucky to have known a bird like Crest.

Before long, Karma had to retreat into the coop to begin his duties as flock leader, and Crest could only watch from the outside. Admiring the view and the low sweep of Karma’s tail feathers. No. Crest shook her head. There was no way that a rooster like Karma would even view her as a potential mate. The hen was near the bottom of the pecking order. She only got respect from the other young hens because she was close to Karma. But since the rooster was putting an end the pecking order, it shouldn’t matter anymore if Crest wanted to be with Karma or not. The hen knew that she shouldn’t keep her hopes up. There were other suitable hens for the rooster to choose from. Even with knowing all of that, Crest remained where she was and watched Karma. Hard at work, crafting up a new speech in his head and solving a flock problem. One by one with his advisors, Tsubaki and Kyo-- who the audience will later know as Vice-Captain and Treasurer.

Crest only turned around when she heard a familiar cluck. Behind her was Karma’s little brother, Chihoko. The younger rooster was strong. Powerfully-built, a rough contrast from his soft-spoken older brother. Chihoko asked if Crest liked Karma, and the hen shook her head. Stuttering that she was merely a friend. Chihoko tilted his head to the side, narrowing his eyes. He chirped that he could put in a good word to Karma, and Crest wasn’t afraid of pecking Chihoko. The younger rooster was pretty much like a little brother to her since she grew up with him and Karma. Growling, Crest muttered that if Chihoko said anything, she will be pecking the rooster until next week. Chihoko feigned a gasp, clucking that he would have to tell Karma that his dear friend was going rogue. Crest pecked Chihoko anyway, and the two chickens wrestled with one another.

The older hens shook their heads, chirping that some things just won’t change. The younger hens whispered with each other, judging Crest. Then hen didn’t care anymore. She was having fun “beating up” a nosy, little chirper. Chihoko got rough very quickly, easily pinning Crest’s back under his foot. Beak poised to strike, but Crest thought they were still playing. She tried wiggling out from under Chihoko’s foot, but the rooster had her pinned. Claws digging into her back. Crest turned her head sharply. A flash of fear reflected over her eyes. The struggle became real. Crest tried to flap her wings, but Chihoko had them trapped under his claws. The rooster pecked Crest’s head softly, as if he was observing her slightest reactions. The sudden jolts and flinches before the younger rooster preened Crest’s feathers with the softest touch. Anything and everything to remind Crest of where she stood on the pecking order.

When Karma emerged from the chicken coop, Crest flipped over. Sending Chihoko crashing down. Grabbing the younger rooster with every inch of her claws, she kept Chihoko grounded as she softly greeted Karma. Talking about the weather while Chihoko struggled. Foot carefully anchored over the base of Chihoko’s neck. If the younger rooster got up too quickly, certain death was waiting. Crest knew that Chihoko knew that she knew that. Confusing but ultimately, Chihoko remained still while his brother and Crest chirped with one another. Crest spouted nonsense about how she and Chihoko were playing and that she had won. She let go of the younger rooster, and
Chihoko slipped and sprouted next to his brother. Narrowing his eyes darkly at Crest. The hen ignored him, enjoying her brief moment with Karma before the rooster had to go.

Before he left, he told Crest that once the pecking order was abolished, a hen could finally become a flock leader. Crest flapped her wings in joy, congratulating Karma on the decision. Chihoko faded into the background. Only lifting his head when he heard Karma whisper: *Crest, will you stand by my side as the very first female flock leader?*

Chihoko didn’t hear Crest’s response, but he saw the aftermath. Karma pecked Crest softly, and Crest pecked back. *Shyly*. The seed of jealousy had already taken root in Chihoko, and it was sprouting. Everyone was taking Karma away from him.

And thus, Chihoko began a new age, for he lived in a world with broken wings.

**Chapter End Notes**

Thank you for reading~ Just curious, but how do you think this story will end? I have my own ending, but I like to know what the general public thinks.

Insight into the chicken world, male birds typically have exotic names--in case they become the flock leader one day. Female birds usually have normal names, easy for chicks to say and to remember.

Keeping that in mind, with a father named Ozai and a younger brother named Chihoko, Karma has a pretty normal name.
BTS: What Lies Behind the "Camera"

Chapter Summary

Working with farm animals is a lot harder than what most would think. In this update, we go behind the scenes and learn how the YoI characters got assigned their animal roles, what inspired their roles, and is this story even plausible in real life?

Just kick back, relax, and read how this cute/dramatic story came to life.

Chapter Notes

When you live in America: are those gunshots or are those fireworks?

The pressing question that plagues this writer when they try to write a farm story. I can't hear myself think. So...because writing a serious scene is next to impossible at the moment, I will be typing something /funny/ instead. I swear, this story will be back on track. Don't mind me. I'm currently typing in a bathtub because I'm scared of the sound of fireworks.

ADHD brought something new to this BTS. Something that you never noticed before. See the end of the chapter for more notes

HQ, where did the title come from?
To be honest, I have no idea where the title came from. When I originally started this story, I wasn't sure what title I wanted to use. I didn't want to call it YoI Farm. Sounds too generic. I wanted something that would grab people's attention--a trademark for any fic typer--and I wanted something that would make you scratch your head. So, "What Lies Beneath Our Feet" because the title of this story. And honestly, I can't think of a better title for this weird fic.

Originally, I was going to start every chapter with the phrase: "What lied beneath their feet..." and actually, a very similar line was used in the first chapter to describe the conditions inside of the egg-factory. Eventually, it didn't go that way, but I still kept the story title because I liked how it sounded.

As I progressed through this story and slugged at 1000 words per chapter--sometimes more if I'm on a roll--I realized that the title symbolizes something. I don't know what that something is, but it's reoccurring. Just like the phrase "gravel road". Everyone knows that there's a "gravel road" in the farm, but I keep referencing it as the "gravel road" because yes, it's funny to type but also because it marks a fine line of freedom for the animals. Significant things have happened on the gravel road.

Yuuri walks for the first time in freedom. The audience is introduced to Yuri, the cat, on said road. The trio posse of Yuuri, Yuri, and Viktor walk together on said road and meet Yuuko. And there are some other significant events, but I don't remember them at the top of my head. The last thing I remember is that Yuuko and Otabek fought to keep a rabid dog off the farm property.
When I think of chickens, they like to scratch and pin things under their feet. Pinning things with the foot is a signature move of Chihoko. It's his physical sign of suppressing an idea or an individual who goes against what he believes. He uses the tactic on Yuuri during their second fight, because Yuuri is only the chicken that's not under his control. Chihoko does the same thing in the past when he copied the same maneuver on Crest, Karma's childhood friend, so that she remembered her place on the pecking order. But other than symbolizing Chihoko's need for control and correction, the title itself accounts for all the descriptions of the terrain that the characters walk on. From metal wire on the floor, to squishy grass, to warm dirt, to the hay, to the wood board, to the squishy mud, and so on and so forth.

I like the word "squishy", so I'll use it every chance I get~

**Why did you assign the characters as they are?**

I love chickens and they're one of my favorite pets. I don't raise a lot of animals, so having a character as a chicken is already a dream come true for me. Chickens live relatively complex lives in relatively complex societies, and I wanted to explore the dynamic of what if you were different from the others in your society. I wanted to shed light on how production factories harm farm animals, which lends itself to some of the sadder aspects of this story. Seeing the conditions that factory chickens go through, I wanted to write a story where the main character--Yuuri, in this case--escapes from a bad past and creates a better future for themselves.

I chose Yuuri as a chicken I wanted to see the character go through his past struggles and build the happy future that he always wanted. Yuri's a cat because canonically, he loves cats. Viktor was a goose because I knew that geese mate for life. Now a goose and a rooster cannot be together, but they can be friends so Viktor is Yuuri's friend for life. And besides, Viktor isn't a sexually mature goose because he's only a year old. Geese are mature at the age of three, but that's Canadian Geese so working with those numbers, Viktor is still a "child", even though he's grown quite large within a year. It explains his childish behavior and enjoyment in honking.

The Nishigoris are farm dogs because they're loyal friends, and they run the story. Behind the scenes with the Humans. Without 'em, the farm would be chaos. You need strong leaders to guide herd animals and to keep the poultry in check, somehow. Not to mention, I didn't want Yuuri to have too many bird friends.

Mama Hiroko--though only mentioned a few times--is a cow because I love dairy. Not to mention, mama cows are the sweetest and most aggressive things on the farm that I've ever seen. I originally planned out for Yuuri to live with Mama Hiroko in a cow stall. The rooster would be nuzzled in the hay while Mama Hiroko keeps him warm and entertains him with old farm stories. But as I continued writing, it became very clear that Yuuri liked being Yuri's nestmate so I had to switch things up and have another character live with Mama Hiroko instead. I cannot disclose who because it's a spoiler.

Chihoko is a chicken because I wanted Yuuri to have a rival, someone who's kind of like him. Someone who challenges his happiness. Roosters have been known to fight to the death, so it adds a flair of dramatics to the whole Chihoko/Yuuri affair. Specifically, Yuuri's a descendant from an old cock-fighting breed. Which explains why he's usually running around and is described as a small bird, despite being a rooster. Chihoko is one of those fancy breeds that looks down on the "commoner" chickens. I don't remember the breed but the roosters in that breed have white manes, bushy green tail feathers, and they got feathers on their feet. That's all I got.

Otabek is a pig because...I actually don't know why he's a pig. I did watch some documentaries of the factory treatment towards pigs, so I wanted a character that could relate to the factory life for Yuuri. Not to mention, Otabek pursued his life's happiness in his own Otabek-way. Figured that if
Yuuri is going to have a teacher, it shall be the wise oinker. Really weird for Otabek to be 150 pounds. For a pig, that's small. For a pig bred for meat, that's very small. I thought 150 was big but nah.

Phichit was a one-time character and he was a guinea pig! Because they're cute, can hangout with chickens, and they're adorable just like Phichit. Another one-time character was Mila, the Nubian goat. Nubians can have very rich, red fur and it reminds me of Mila's hair. Not to mention, I've met some Nubian goats that have a very royal-personality to them. it's funny.

Why aren't the Humans part of the story?
Because they're Humans. They don't play a central role because the animals don't focus on them.

Who's your favorite character to write?
I like writing Chihoko's past so I guess I like writing for that sadistic rooster. It's mainly because I can write about the past and how the flock used to be when his brother was in charge, so I guess I like writing for Karma? But probably the hardest character for me to write was Otabek because I don't know pigs that well, and I rarely write for him so it was very new to me. I felt awkward writing for the oinker, but I slowly began to love the character because of how straightforward and honest he is. Honestly, Yuuri needs to hangout wit him more so that I can write for Otabek more.

What's your favorite scene?
I loved writing the scene where Yuuri first met Viktor. How the goose danced across the lake, catching dragonflies. That was probably one of the most beautiful paragraph I've ever written. It's straightforward, and it has a haunting beauty to it that's very romantic. Speed and a flurry of feathers splashed in water. Dancing. That looks beautiful to me, so I really enjoyed writing that. A close second would be Yuri's first interaction with Yuuri. When Yuri meets someone for the first time, he wonders if he can eat it.

Did you base the characters off of animals that you've raised?
I based Yuuri off of a hen I raised. She was small just like Yuuri, determined to lead a happy life. Never had chicks of her own, very fast hen, very smart, and she had a chipped beak. The bottom portion of her beak was chipped so she couldn't eat well on concrete. We had to pour grain in the grass so that she could pick it up. Lucy was always a small hen so she never fattened up like the other chickens. Boy, was she old. She lived through 3 generations of chickens and died at a ripe, old age.

I was there when Lucy died. I held her one last time before she closed her eyes forever. I never spent a lot of time with her so when I write about Yuuri, I think about Lucy and it feels like she's here with me.

Do you live on a farm?
No.

Why inspired this weird Au?
I wanted to read a story that I liked. I couldn't find one, so I made one. I don't think anybody has written a farm AU for Yuri!!! on Ice. I haven't checked, but I'm very sure. It's the idea that not many would dare try an AU like this that got me started. This fic was originally for me and every day, I am more surprised that people enjoy this weird story. It's just something for me to calm down when I'm in one of my "moods". Chickens are cute and fluffy. I remember one of my first narrative stories for a standardized test featured two chickens as the characters, Fluffy and Fuzzy. They were my first chickens. Fluffy had a broken leg and overheated to death. Fuzzy was a rooster so we had to get rid of him.
In a weird way, this is a memorial for all the chickens I've ever raised.

**Do you make this up as you go along?**
Yes. I originally did not intend to have an extensive backstory for Chihoko. I didn't know that he had a brother. This story was supposed to be how Yuuri learned confidence from Viktor and Yuri and became a happy chicken. Wrong! Yuuri needed a rival so that he could learn that there was more to life than accomplishing your needs and wants. I also intended for Yuuri to die after his fight with Chihoko. But after the second fight, I wanted Yuuri to keep kicking. He had a reason to be alive, a purpose for living. I couldn't get rid of Yuuri yet. Originally, Yuuri was supposed to die because of a permanent limp in his leg. However, things changed and Yuuri's alive and healthy. Yay!

**Would this story be plausible in real life?**
Yeah. Minus murder and friendship, totally plausible. Factory chicken coming to live on farm, having to fight for dominance and to prove themselves in front of their species, and live a happy, safe life for as long as they can. When you take out the dramatics, this story is very plausible. Male chicks do slip into the egg-factories sometimes. Or, hens can turn into roosters if their ovaries are damaged. And I originally wondered if I wanted Yuuri to be hen that turned into a rooster and had to learn how to be a rooster so that he could fight against Chihoko. But then, that would be too weird for people to follow, so I scraped the idea and had Yuuri as an accident chick that slipped into the egg-factory with the other female chicks.

Thank you for the continued support and regular story-updates will begin after this.

Chapter End Notes

Every time I update this story, I always try to incorporate something that I want to read. Sometimes, writers need to have some fun too, or they'll end up abandoning things and someone comes down the road two months later. Demanding for an update. Besides, animals are cute and deserve to be admired for the astounding creatures that they are.
A Chick named Karma

Chapter Summary

During a heavy rainstorm, Yuuri and his friends discover that the rooster's not the only chicken free from Chihoko's reign.

Chapter Notes

Because of how free-spirited this story is, it's possible for me to do bonus features or add a freakin' author's chapter in the middle of the story. It's like a story blog, and that gives the writer so much freedom to just write whatever in a somewhat entertaining way. Because writers aren't simply machines that churn out stuff. We got personality, and I like to ease weirdness into everything I do.

Not every day could be sunshine and rainbows. Mother Nature had a way of dampening the mood when she felt like doing so. Thick thunderclouds rolled in from the neighboring mountains, dropping their load of rain over the countryside. Puddles as big as Takeshi formed under the grassy hills and in the vegetable patches, but there were still chores that needed to be done. Animals had to be fed, hay needed to be changed, and milk and eggs were the daily harvest. Humans couldn't avoid the schedule that ran their lives and finishing the morning chores took half an hour longer than usual. But huddled inside in the warm, dry house, the Humans were able to peacefully coexist with Mother Nature’s rowdy mood. Keeping candles ready in case for a black out.

Outside, a ceiling leak ruined the nest that Yuri had slept in for months. The hay turned mushy as a sizable puddle drenched the cat from head to toe. Yuuri roosted on the ladder to keep dry, but rain water ran down the ladder. Wetting his feathers and his feet. Eventually going to flood the grain barn if the rain didn’t stop. Thankfully, the two animals were saved by Viktor. The goose stormed into the grain barn, using his wings as a cover to keep Yuri dry. Yuuri didn’t need a cover. The rooster simply bolted out of the grain barn, up a slippery hill-- where he slid and fell into a mud puddle a few times-- and safely squeezing himself into a cow stall. Under where the Humans lived.

Nice and dry with a warm bedding of hay, Yuuri fluffed himself. Shaking the water off of his feathers, giving him a “frizzled” look. Yuuri was still damp, a perfect chance for him to get sick if Nature wanted him to. Burying himself under dry hay, Yuuri only poked his head out from his “suit” when Viktor stumbled into the cow stall. Soaked with a shivering Yuri mounted on his back, desperate to not touch any puddle or slick of mud. Didn’t work out so well. Yuri’s paws were filthy, and the cat nuzzled himself against a mama cow to keep warm. She licked Yuri’s fur, getting most of the mud off of it. Yuri meowed softly, burying himself deeper into the mama cow’s warmth to keep the cold away. The cold did bother him, anyway.

Under normal circumstances, Viktor would’ve embraced the rain. Would’ve ran around the farm, honking and diving into mud puddles. Maybe flapping his wings and doing a rain-dance somewhere on a hill. Not today. This rain was crazy. It pelted from the sky like bullets, stabbing
down Viktor’s beak and hurting his eyes. His pond-home was flooded. Nest submerged somewhere or perhaps, it was swept away by the current. Lost and tangled somewhere in the woods. To say the least, it wasn’t safe for a wild goose to sleep outside. Made even more embarrassing since Viktor couldn’t fly that high, but trees were danger spots during a rain like this. Before you know it, your roof collapses and a bucketful of rain slams you down at seven miles per hour. Not good.

Mama Hiroko, the proud dam—*not like a wooden dam, but like a mama cow*—of the cow herd and the leader, didn’t mind sharing her space with three “little cows”. One was feathery and fluffy, one was furry and feisty, and one made strange mooing sounds. Viktor tried to moo, but all he could manage was a honk. Still, Mama Hiroko had a good laugh as she licked the “little cows”. Technically, Mama Hiroko wasn’t a mama at the moment since her calf was a strong heifer now, but a mama’s job was never over. There was no shame in making sure that her strong baby, Mari, was doing a-okay. No shame in that at all. Since Yuri wasn’t a full-grown cat yet, he could still drink some milk. Before a violent digestive war. But hey, the cat needed to eat and he wasn’t going to try hay or sunflower seeds. Sadly, Mama Hiroko didn’t have any milk in her udders, but she knew of some mama cows that had calves that might be willing to share.

Yuri took a peek out of the cow stall. Mother Nature was dumping watery bullets again. There was no way Yuri was going to go out and get milk now. And if he was desperate for a bite, Yuri and Yuuri already made an agreement that the cat could eat the rooster if this situation permitted so. Viktor dropped his beak in horror, staring at his oddly introverted friends with judgement in his eyes. Friends weren’t supposed to eat friends! Then again, Yuri did try to eat the rooster when they first met so Viktor had to cut some slack somewhere. Besides this would be a terrible way to kill off the main character, so Viktor firmly planted his webbed foot down and protected Yuuri from the drooling feline.

Yuri meowed. Stomach tightening up, trying to find something to digest. In the meantime, Yuri gnawed on some hay to satisfy his hunger. Eyes slightly dazed, cross-eyed. He thought his ears were deceiving him when he heard healthy chirps from a baby chick. Oh no, was Yuuri de-aging again like in that *one* dream? Yuri shifted his eyes, sniffing the air. A spotted little chick stuck its head up from a pile of hay. If Viktor had eyebrows, he would probably be raising one of them. Yuuri extended his neck, focusing on the chick with his one good eye. Yuri pounced first. Digging into the hay for the allusive baby chick, and Mama Hiroko mooed. Hooves stomping into the ground. Yuuri flew out of the way, and Viktor waddled to safety. Yuri learned a few dance moves as he dodged the hooves and climbed onto Mama Hiroko’s back, where the baby chick had been hiding all along.

The chick dashed. Yuri followed. The chick underneath Yuuri’s wet wing, and Viktor was the bouncer that Yuri needed to pass. Every time hunger surged Yuri forward, a threatening beak was thrust in front of him, pushing him back. Courtesy of Viktor. While Viktor and Yuri had a showdown of wits, Yuuri clucked softly and pecked the baby chick hiding under his wing. The docile little girl pecked Yuuri back, cheeping loudly. Her chips echoed in the cow stall, amplifying the chirps until one couldn’t hear the rain all that much anymore.

*Are you my Daddy?*

Yuuri shook his head. In all his weeks of staying here at the YoI farm, Yuuri was very sure that he didn’t have any children. The chick had the wrong rooster. Yuuri was not a father in any shape, way, or form. Sensing the rooster’s anxiety, Viktor honked. Asking if everything was okay. Yuri slipped in between Viktor’s defenses and pounced on the baby chick again. Yuuri flattened his body, shielding the chick from Yuri’s prodding paws. Hissing and flaring up his mane when the feline got too close. Growling at the cat and stabbing pecks at Yuri’s hungry paws. Viktor restrained the cat and dragged Yuri to the other side of the cow stall. Putting him behind Mama
Hiroko so that the cow can keep a watchful on the derange feline.

I want my Mommy! The chick chirped loudly, hoping that her mama could come get her. Yuuri shushed the chick softly, keeping the baby warm. Singing a little song that the ex-battery hens used to sing to him when he was little. Yuuri forgot the words, but he remembered the tune and clucked it out. Little by little until the baby chick finished the song and felt calm again.

When everyone was calm, Yuuri asked Mama Hiroko why the chick was here.

Long story short, a mama hen from the chicken run had been raising this chick in secret for a awhile now. No one knows about the chick’s existence except for Yuuko, the mama hen, the father, and Mama Hiroko. The cow had swore a promise to keep the chick safe until she was old enough to understand why her parents had to raise her like this. The chick’s name was Karma. Yuri suddenly got very quiet, making his friends worry for him. Viktor flew onto Mama Hiroko’s back and honked, asking if the cat knew something. Yuri did.

About a year ago, there was a flock leader named Karma. That was all the cat knew and it was a popular story to whisper around the farm on a hazy day, but Yuri did meow that Karma had died young before the leadership role slid to the rooster’s younger brother. Yuuri shuddered, chirping that the younger brother couldn’t be Chihoko. Right? Yuri didn’t know. The cat wasn’t born yet when the incident happened, but it was a story that Yuri sometimes heard from a few brave hens. That was all the feline knew, and he wondered if the baby chick was somehow connected to the incident. Not literally, since the chick would’ve been bigger by now.

Karma puffed her chest out, screeching that she could take down Yuri if she wanted to. Yuri would’ve loved to see Karma try. He was much bigger than the chick, could easily hold the bird with a paw without a struggle. Mama Hiroko warned Yuri not to judge an animal by their size. Little Karma had a feisty kick if you weren’t careful. But back on the situation at hand, Yuuri wanted to know more about Karma. About this adorable, little chick tucked under his wing. Her words weren’t adorable and were rather vulgar for such a young animal, but Yuuri had a connection towards her.

They both didn’t grow up normally. Yuuri was raised with factory hens, and it seemed like Mama Hiroko was more of a parent-figure to Karma than her real parents. She was proud like a young bull, ready to fight anything that dismissed her small size. Yuuri asked Mama Hiroko if Karma’s parents ever visited her. Karma’s mother would visit with any chance she had, but those moments were rare and Karma didn’t associate the hen as her mother. More as a stranger that spoke in a familiar tongue that she could understand. The father wasn’t able to visit his daughter. Tethered down to his duty as Chihoko’s puppet. Either the father was Vice-Captain or Treasurer. That meant there was a couple within the flock that did manage to live their own life, somehow. In exchange for setting their child free, Karma would never grow to associate her parents as her parents. Simply strangers that walked in and out of her life for seconds at a time.

It’s been hard on them both. Mama Hiroko mooed softly. She rested onto a pile of hay, and Karma climbed on top of her. Roosting on Mama Hiroko’s horn. They’ve already lost a family once, and now it’s like they’re losing Karma too. The cow’s moo rose by a few notes, and Karma fluttered down from Mama Hiroko’s horn and dug herself a little nest to rest on. The most I can do is try to help Karma understand that she’s not a cow.

Why go this far? Yuuri extended a wing when Karma chirped that she was cold. To keep Karma safe.

No one’s allowed to breed, except for Chihoko. Mama Hiroko shook her head, heavily. He’s torn up so many families that couples get desperate. They're willing to do anything to save their
children, even if the parents must suffer. Karma’s mother cannot form a bond with her daughter, and Karma’s father cannot provide the siblings that Karma needs so that she can understand that she’s a chicken.

Suddenly, Yuuri remembered. He remembered that before his second fight with Chihoko, one of the subordinate roosters-- Vice-Captain was his name-- glanced over, eyes meeting a spotted hen as she ducked her head and hid away. Yuuri was sure that was the couple. They were Karma’s parents. Vice-Captain and the spotted hen. Perhaps, the hen used the fighting-diversion to come visit her daughter. Yuuri needed to know. He asked Karma if she had seen a chicken before Yuuri came today. Karma mentioned that a spotted hen used to come see her sometimes when the weather was nice. The two would scratch around a bit. Not really talking. Karma wouldn’t talk, and the hen was trying very hard not to talk. Scared, perhaps? Karma didn’t really care. She thought that the chicken was weird, but the little chick was worried because the hen hasn’t been visiting her lately.

Why do you want to know, Mister? Karma tilted her head innocently.

Yuuri clucked that he was just curious before getting up. Karma didn’t know that she was a chicken, but she had all the tools that made one. So, Yuuri scratched up some hay and taught the chick how to look for grubs. Karma made a face, shaking her head when a juicy worm wiggled under some hay. A succession of clucks echoed from Yuuri’s beak as he lifted the worm and dropped it. Grabbing Karma’s attention and the chick picked up the worm. Unsure of how to eat it. Reminding Yuuri of the first time where Viktor taught him how to eat a worm.

Yuuri snipped the worm in half with his beak, advising Karma to swallow a half in one gulp. Karma tried and she gagged. The worm stayed down, and Karma didn’t like how it made her feel wiggly inside. Yuuri commented that the wiggly-sensation will end shortly, and it did. Was karma going to eat the other half of the worm. No, so Yuuri took it instead.

Yuuri wasn’t the best teacher since he wasn’t much of a chicken, himself, but he kind of knew where Karma was coming from. And to be able to teach someone the lessons he had learned made Yuuri’s heart warmer.

Chapter End Notes

I want to type a dinosaur story. Where dinosaurs are named after the characters and a Human has to come and handle these reckless reptiles.

This chapter was legit. I listened to 10 hrs. of rain for this. The psychologist will love to jot this into her notes.
Touch of a Feather

Chapter Summary

Forgiveness isn't easy for everyone but if Yuuri wants to do something right, he needs to have a clear conscious about it. He finds that inspiration through the life he's already led.

Chapter Notes

You know that feeling when you know a story is about to end. I just got that feeling. One more chapters for this work and I'll be done. Because I could drag this on forever, but the natural conclusion is coming and I can't put off the inevitable.

What did a happy life mean? Yuuri wondered about that as he perched himself over the cow stall door. Looking out to the falling rain, searching for a rainbow that could answer him. He had learned so much since he first came to this farm as a broken bird. He found happiness in so many things. Through friends, through corn, and through interacting with the different animals that he never saw before. Yuuri was grateful for all of that. He closed his eyes and felt the cold breeze strike his chest. Down below, Viktor was playing with Karma, the baby chick. Teaching her how to be like a bird than a cow. Yuri got his bit of milk from the mama cow next door and was enjoying a nice nap on top of Mama Hiroko’s back. All was calm during the storm.

Even the rain started to let up a little bit. Falling softly this time, and the animals could see through the rain. Make out the shapes in the distance and watch as mud splattered everything from the droplets. The farm was old. The earth was older. Everything had a place on the farm, and every animal had a purpose of being here. All this time, Yuuri figured that he would be an average chicken. Just a normal rooster spending the day under the sun or in a bush, looking for grubs. Figuring that he’ll live a good three years before kicking the bucket, but being here on this farm with the friends that he had gave Yuuri something to look forward to.

The selfish desire to beat up Chihoko and to make the rooster pay for all his actions melted away. There was something about the rain, and how it ran down Yuuri’s comb and down his mane. Something about it washed away an old anger, an old rage that used to make him wake up really early in the morning to train. To grow stronger, to be the aggressive rooster that Yuuri knew that he was. He could never forgive Chihoko’s actions. Never forgive the pain and suffering that so many birds had to go through every day, just to keep safe and live a seemingly normal life. Yuuri couldn’t forgive those actions, but could he forgive the bird behind them? It was hard to think about that.

Yuuri hated Chihoko so much. With every fibre in his being, he wanted to tackle Chihoko into the electric poultry net so that the rooster could get a taste of his own medicine. Ever since Chihoko took Phichit as hostage, ever since Yuri got hurt, and ever since Yuuri found himself beaten to the ground during the first encounter...A lot of time had passed, but what did Yuuri learn through all of this? Beating hate with hate wasn’t a good enough and though it motivated Yuuri, it wasn’t a simple solution. It wasn’t a quick fix. That was not the ending that Yuuri wanted, but that was an
ending that his friends wanted.

Viktor was mostly impartial about the whole thing, but he was willing to support whatever decision Yuuri wanted to do. Because ultimately, Yuuri was able to do something when a lot of animals couldn’t. For Yuri, the feline wanted Chihoko dead. Stomped into the ground where he belonged, but such violence wouldn’t change anything. There would still be hate, there would still be fear. Yuuri would be no better than Chihoko and that was scary. For a moment in his life, he thought just like Chihoko. He learned to hate someone with so much passion that he wanted to destroy them. But in the end, it was Otabek who saved him from that path in life. And now, Yuuri wanted to do the same.

It wasn’t the ultimate showdown that he had in mind a few weeks ago, but it was a healthier solution than breeding more violence. How was Yuuri going to convince Chihoko? As far as he knew, the rooster hated his guts. Why? Why would Chihoko spend so much time and energy just to crush him? Probably because Yuuri had the choice to live a life that he wanted to live. He didn’t know Chihoko’s situation, but what if Chihoko didn’t want to be a leader. What if the rooster simply wanted to fight and had no interest in leading a flock? Maybe Chihoko wanted to be a normal chicken with a brother that he could wrestle with. Every day.

Perhaps that dream never became a reality because of a few poor choices, and Chihoko was taking out his frustration on Yuuri. As if the ex-battery chicken was Chihoko’s personal punching bag. It was likely, but Yuuri would never know Chihoko’s story. Chihoko would never know his, so that they would have to tell their story through a fight. Nothing shady, no strings pulled. Just a simple fight between two chickens who’ve led separate lives. Coming together to understand one another.

When it finally stopped raining that afternoon, Yuuri flew off from the cow stall door and splashed into a puddle. Viktor pecked little Karma softly before flying over the door, and Yuri hoped out. Tripped and fell into a muddy puddle. Hissing and trying to rub the mud off onto the squishy grass. Lakes of opportunities and giant puddles were open to them, so Yuuri strolled quietly and found his grip on a familiar gravel road. Bobbing his head as he chirped along. Walking steadily towards the chicken run. The Humans will be out soon. Soon, the chickens in the coop will be free and wandering in a mushy world.

Vice-Captain will be there. On guard somewhere in the chicken run. Treasurer will be on patrol, keeping quiet as he did Chihoko’s bidding. Karma’s mother will be looking for a place to escape so that she can reunite with her little baby. Struggling to form a bond with her child because it was one of the few freedoms that she could cherish. Lastly, there’ll be Chihoko. Strutting down the chicken run with his head held high as he kicks at his reflection.

All of those things will happen, and Yuuri knew that he’ll be in the middle. The rooster had grown a lot ever since he first came to this farm. The inevitable was coming towards the end.
"I wish you can see that you're okay" + Epilogue

Chapter Summary

The third and final showdown between Yuuri and Chihoko. Two ideals, two views, two roosters, and two very different leaders fighting to see which one is in the "right". Yuuri doesn't know Chihoko's past, and Chihoko doesn't know Yuuri's. The roosters are about as different as you could think, but there's one shared-pain that's nestled deep within their hearts.

Chapter Notes

This is it. This is the last chapter. Wow. This is the first multi-chapter work that I've ever completed. I'm quite proud of how far this story has gone, and I'm fortunate that some people enjoyed the kooky journey.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

What lied beneath their feet was the smooth earth that shook with each step. Gravel emerging from deep within the soil, poking its head up to bask under the sunlight. Overturned pebbles marked a path as the competition met in the middle. Followed by his subordinates, Chihoko’s green tail feathers draped over the battle scene like a royal robe. Mud pushing out of the way as the dominant rooster flapped his wings. Chickens flapped out of the way, creating a ring around the battlefield. Necks craning to see what'll happen, hearts beating in anticipation as Hope flew over the horizon.

A crop of black feathers tore off of Yuuri’s wings when he flew over the electric poultry net. The afternoon’s sun as his sword and shield. What lied beneath his feet was the beating heart of everything Chihoko had worked so hard to achieve. This perfect system where every bird knew his or her place. This perfect system that kept the strong on top while the weak trembled at the bottom. For the first time, Yuuri noticed that there weren’t any greens inside the chicken run. The squishy grass that greeted him when he first came to the farm wasn’t here for the other chickens. They tasted their freedom when the poultry net was down. They felt their prison when the poultry net was up.

Yuuri fluffed himself. Not to look adorable. Chihoko would beat him up anyway. Yuuri knew he, himself, was weak. He was well-aware of how tempting power was, so the rooster didn’t present himself as such. Because deep down, Yuuri wanted to know how their first fight would’ve turned out if he was healthy. Because deep down, Yuuri wanted to be the same bird that he was before. He came to this farm as Yuuri, so he wanted to fight as Yuuri.

This was a cockfight. No strings attached. No help from anyone. Vice-Captain and Treasurer stood down, tails reared up to protect any civilian-bird caught in the crossfire. Viktor and Yuri remained on the other side of the electric poultry net. Beak poised to strike for any cheating, and a meow ready to shrill if things get too far. Because the only thing that could stop the fight now was Human intervention and even then, the fight wasn’t over until someone admitted that they were done.
Digging his feet into the mud, Yuuri flared up his mane. Comb flopping from side to side with each bob of head. Chihoko reared his wings back, kicking up a storm with his wings. Crisp white feathers falling faintly to his side as a sizable mane flared over his neck. Yuuri had one good eye, Chihoko had two. Yuuri was lean and hardy while Chihoko was solid muscle and power. Endurance was Yuuri’s matchmaker, and Chihoko needed to end the fight as quickly as possible. Not too quick, though. He wanted to savor the anguish that’ll be pooling in Yuuri’s eyes. Scratching his leg, Yuuri dipped his wings and puffed up his chest. Forcing himself to come forward.

Following what Yuri taught him. Strike a pose and look up to the sky. Eyes darted down to meet the opponent. Chihoko didn’t knock Yuuri back, but his wings were dangerously close in doing so. He met Yuuri’s offer and puffed his chest out proudly. Now was the time to run. Was Yuuri going to back down? He had fought in the chicken run before, so he knew how painful it was to be smacked down. Add mud and it’ll slow the chicken down.

Chihoko growled.

Yuuri didn’t flinch. A mere cluck resonated from his throat.

If he won, Chihoko had to step down from leadership. If Chihoko won, he can make Yuuri’s life a living Hell.

Yuri hissed, beating his paw over Viktor’s back because he stood there. What kind of arrangements were these? Did Yuuri lose a few screws during the rain? The cat didn’t stop fussing until Viktor shushed him. Not with a honk, but a quick bite at the ear. It didn’t hurt, but the action was enough to startle Yuri into silence. Why was Viktor letting Yuuri do this? Yuri pawed at Viktor’s neck, meowing at him to intervene but Viktor didn’t move.

*We both know how strong Yuuri is.* Viktor didn’t need to turn around to see Yuri. The feline’s pants were enough. *He wouldn’t have gotten this far if he wasn’t.*

*_We taught him nothing! We were just screwing around with him._* Ears reared back, Yuri’s claws sunk into Viktor’s feathers and the goose hissed a warning. Though the two weren’t exactly the best teachers for their pupil, Yuuri learned valuable things on his journey. Things he wouldn’t have learned if he spent his time in Chihoko’s flock.

This was the ultimate test for any pupil, and Yuuri’s teachers were watching.

Yuuri and Chihoko bowed their heads. It was customary to dart your eyes up to watch your opponent, but Yuuri simply stared at the ground. And to a rooster like Chihoko, it was very clear that Yuuri viewed him as a waste of time. Not even honoring the common code for a cockfight. Honestly, was Yuuri a rooster or not? No matter, Chihoko could always the chicken as an example.

Two seconds past before Yuuri finally looked up. Dodging a beak-strike. Flapping his wings to keep balance, but slipping into the mud. Chihoko stepped on him, grabbing Yuuri by the tail feathers and yanking hard. Not letting the rooster out of his sight. Yuuri kicked up mud, staining Chihoko’s feathers. The dominant rooster pecked down, and Yuuri swallowed his scream. Red in the face, the chicken threw himself into the mud. Chihoko lost balance, and Yuuri slipped from his grasp. Now was his chance. Jumping onto the rooster, Yuuri met Chihoko’s spurs. Slashing Yuuri across the chest and down to his middle. His scrawny layer of feathers tore, leaving bare skin to aim at.

Like a snake, Chihoko slipped through the mud and grabbed Yuuri by the comb. Shaking his head while Yuuri flapped his wings to escape. Chihoko easily broke Yuuri’s shoulder with a single hit.
Snapping the wing over and back. Exposing Yuuri’s soft underside. The one spot that couldn’t grow feathers. Yuuri grabbed onto Chihoko’s wattles, yanking him down. The dominant rooster bit down harder. Locked, one had to let go for the other to win. Chihoko couldn’t move. Yuuri tugged Chihoko down. The farther down he could tug, the more Chihoko would have to let go of his comb.

Up close like this, Chihoko noticed something peculiar about Yuuri’s left eye. It was fixed in one direction, not even looking at him. A gray film over Yuuri’s pupil. He was blind in that eye.

Yanking Yuuri over to the right, Chihoko lifted his left wing and struck down.

Like a fox, Yuuri dodged and kicked Chihoko in the chest. The rooster stumbled and splashed into a muddy puddle. Yuuri was still standing. Looking down at Chihoko. Yuuri couldn’t move his right wing. It was snapped all the way back, the outer feathers touching his back. His exposed underside vulnerable to any scratch or peck. He needed to save his left wing for escape. Yuuri had to fight with his spurs. In an open moment, Chihoko lunged for a strike. Beating Yuuri back and forth with his wings, but Yuuri was a slippery one. Envisioning himself in a pond with dragonflies, Yuuri weaved past the hits and lunged forward for a bite. Instead of Yuuri falling back, it was Chihoko. Backing closer and closer to the electric poultry net, but Chihoko knew that Yuuri wouldn’t push him in.

Yuuri was too soft. He didn’t want to hurt him. Compared to Yuuri, Chihoko was mostly dirty and throbbing-- not a euphemism for anything! Yuuri was the one with the scratches and the broken wing and the messed up eye. Under Mother Nature’s laws, Chihoko was supposed to win. The weak and kind-hearted had no place in this world. If they still wanted to live, they deserved to be crushed under the tough and powerful. That was why it was so easy to get rid of Karma. The rooster was so gullible to believe that everyone deserved a second chance. Life wasn’t like that, so there was no need to bring this false hope into the flock. You were born where you were, but why couldn’t Chihoko show that?

Yuuri wasn’t sniveling or begging for mercy. Even with a broken wing, the rooster still fought and dodged some of Chihoko’s hits. Treating himself as a living punching bag, but it was Chihoko that felt the hits. This rooster who started with nothing was fighting with everything he had. Life on the line. No strings attached. Why was Yuuri fighting so hard? During the first fight, Yuuri cried like a baby chick. During the second fight, Yuuri was a slippery monster, fighting to protect a friend. Who was Yuuri fighting for? There was no one to save. Did a happy life mean that much to him?

The roosters slumped over themselves. Exhausted. The hens held their breaths, looking back and forth to see who would fall first. Vice-Captain dug his feet into the mud, eyes locked on Yuuri. Watching the disheveled rooster breathe and wince. Treasurer stared at Chihoko, almost a breath of hope escaped from his beak when Chihoko threw his wing out to catch himself before he collapsed. Yuri meowed encouragements and yelled so many things that weren’t appropriate enough to make the final cut of this chapter’s edit. Viktor’s bluish-green gaze remained on Yuuri, watching his pupil and his friend.

This fight reminded Yuuri of his past. Climbing over sisters and elderly hens to meet his daily ration of food and water. Fighting with Chihoko like this reminded Yuuri of everything that he was not. He was weak, battered, and a pale shadow of what a rooster was supposed to be. He didn’t know how to crow, he didn’t know how to shepherd hens and chicks, and he didn’t grow up learning about the flock’s rules or the ways of life. Everything that reminded Yuuri of how weak he was also reminded him of how strong he was. No matter how many times his way of life was challenged, Yuuri refused to let go. He was willing to protect anybody, even if they weren’t his own. There were so many things that Yuuri wanted to learn about this world, and there had to be so much more than sorrow and pain. He had met so many wonderful animals on the farm, and their
leadership and bravery gave him strength.

What are you fighting for? Yuuri clucked softly. Chihoko eased off his wing and pushed himself up. If someone keeps challenging your authority, something isn’t right.

Chihoko growled under his breath. What did Yuuri know? He was just a backwater nobody that had everything handed to him. Friends, company, hope, and support. Yuuri didn’t understand the struggle of being ignored, being the second-best when you were so much better. Yuuri didn’t understand how it felt to be under someone’s shadow, or the feeling of being pushed aside while the one animal you looked up to slowly forgot that you existed. Yuuri didn’t understand how it felt to lose someone. Yuuri knew nothing, so why was the rooster trying to understand?

Enough talk, roosters fight. Chihoko charged forward. Easily able to crush Yuuri’s skull when he slammed the bird down into solid mud. The mud didn’t part, keeping together like a solid stone. Blood pooling to Yuuri’s face. Left eye on top. He couldn’t see. Chihoko positioned his toes carefully. Not hiding Yuuri’s left eye because he wanted to see it change. See it morph into fear. The dull eye stared at Chihoko, not even fazed.

You’re right, I don’t understand.

Shut up.

Yuuri adjusted his head under Chihoko’s grip.

But even so, you and I aren’t that different.

Shut up! Chihoko lifted and smashed Yuuri’s head again. The rooster went limp, drool escaping from his beak. The fixed expression over Yuuri’s left eye never changed, and that scared Chihoko more than the rooster’s voice. Broken almost beyond repair, Yuuri still spoke. However, it was evident that something was lodged in throat. More than just drool, but he was holding it back.

I never knew my family. The closest I ever had was was a sweet hen that took me in. Hints of blood escaped in Yuuri’s drool. The chicken was barely breathing. I had the power to save her, but all I did was watch. Though he was limp, Yuuri’s toes began to wiggle around. He tried to get up, but his feet fumbled and he fell into the mud again. That didn’t stop Yuuri from trying. With his one good wing, Yuuri tried to push himself up. Seeing Yuuri struggle like this reminded Chihoko of that one night where he killed his brother. Karma moved the exact same way Yuuri did. Using a wing to push himself up before he got tackled into an electric poultry net. Karma tried to tell Chihoko something.

I wish I could see that...you’re okay.

If Yuuri was dying, this was a slow death. He could still feel things. The pain in his right wing, the struggle of his feet, and the blood pooling to his head. Yuuri could barely hear anything. He couldn’t hear the other chickens, or his friends. He heard Chihoko’s pants, but that was because the rooster was close. Other than that, everything spelled that Yuuri was a loser, but he wanted to win. Blindly, Yuuri struck with his left wing. Knocking Chihoko off of him, and Yuuri was able to push himself up. Tipping from left to right as he tried to find his balance. Chihoko flew on top of him, and both rooster struggled to make it out on top. Rolling back and forth across the muddy earth.

Chihoko had Yuuri pinned with his foot. Beak ready to strike.

Vice-Captain’s eyes widened. A brief window of hesitation.
And like in his past, Chihoko was rolled over and another chicken had him pinned down. For the second time in his life. A foot placed at the base of his neck. If he moved too quickly, certain Death would follow. The only other chicken that had Chihoko positioned like this was Crest, *Karma’s sweetheart*. She did this when Chihoko challenged her worth as an animal, *as a living and breathing thing that had a place in this world*. Said chicken had already died a few months ago. Egg-bound. An egg was stuck inside of her, and she died from the complications. Crest was the last bird in Chihoko’s childhood, and she was gone. Like the leadership over Chihoko’s wings.

The rooster flinched when Yuuri pecked him. A soft poke. Totally out of place in a battle scene.

*I’m glad to see that you’re okay.*

Did Yuuri harbor any malice towards him? Why was Yuuri letting him off so easy? With everything Chihoko had done, Yuuri should’ve killed him. *At least.* Why was the rooster sparing his life?

*Chihoko, do you remember that I said that we’re not different? We’re not alike, either.* Yuuri lifted his feet and Chihoko was free. *I don’t choose to hurt others. If I have the power, I want to save them instead.* It was stupid for Yuuri to face his back towards Chihoko, but he did it anyway. Chihoko couldn’t hurt him anymore.

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*One year later…*

Some things remained the same. The Humans and farm animals woke before the sun. Food was a daily need, and water was just as important but not important *right* now while hunger clawed at one’s stomach. Takeshi woke up his Humans scratched under his belly and gave him neck rubs. His mate, Yuuko, was already up. Roughhousing with her children. Teaching the young dogs the ropes behind taking care of a successful farm. But first, a quick breakfast. The dog family ate out of their metal bowls, crunching down on kibble and sniffing each other while the big Humans brewed coffee and started breakfast. After a quick drink, a Human opened the front door and the dog family ran down the porch steps to proceed with the morning chores.

First was the chicken coop. The birds were let out, and this summer’s chicks frolicked around and pecked at a few weeds and flowers shyly. Morning scraps were scattered around, and everyone had their fill. A few roosters standing on top of the coop, crowing to the rising sun and keeping a lookout. Old and new generation roosters worked together in harmony, taking turns feeding and looking out for the flock. Leadership was divided equally amongst the roosters as they integrated family-time and flock-time fluidly.

Tsubaki and Kyo--formally known as Vice-Captain and Treasurer--hopped off the coop to join for breakfast. Tsubaki and his mate preened each other’s feathers, ever so softly. Clucking came from behind them as their *sweet Karma* ran up to her parents, asking her father is he was going to teach her how to crow. After breakfast, though. And after that lesson, Karma and the other young hens will be taking leadership lessons with the other young roosters. Under Tsubaki and Kyo’s tutelage, of course.

*I’ll make a good leader, right?*

Tsubaki rested a docile wing over his daughter’s back. *I know you will. Remember, being a leader doesn’t mean that you take on a responsibility on your own. There are always others supporting you, and they’re there when you need help.* Tsubaki was about to launch into one of his
morning lectures, but Karma escaped and had breakfast with her sweetheart. A polite, young rooster who bore a striking image to the last flock leader. Even so, his heart and gentle personality was a sharp contrast to his father’s. He preened Karma’s wings gently, and Karma pecked him in a teasing way.

*My Dad says that I can be a good leader!*

*That’s awesome.* Both chickens shared the same corn on the cob as they talked about the future ahead of them. Not too long ago, a sight like this was impossible. But now, Tsubaki couldn’t believe that he would see this much change in his lifetime. This was what the late-Karma wanted when he was still alive. Harmony and respect between all birds in the flock. Pecking at his breakfast, Tsubaki caught sight of Kyo swaggering his way across the chicken run. His mate emerging from the chicken coop with a flock of babies following after her.

Chuckling, Tsubaki placed a wing over Kyo’s back as the rooster held his head up high. A tear falling from his eyes, and both roosters embraced each other for old time’s sake.

In the pigpen, Otabek was rolling around after the goats and sheep were fed. Nibbling on an apple core. Only looking up when a familiar feline came over, resting on the wooden fence. A grown tomcat looked down at him with soft green eyes, and Otabek approached Yuri. The feline petted Otabek’s head with his paw before the pig shook his head, splashing mud over the fine cat. Yuri screeched and fell face-first into the pigpen. Covered in mud. Otabek oinked, and Yuri chased after him. Frolicking around and rolling around each other as pure bliss coursed their blood. Laying next to each other, Yuri poked Otabek’s nose with a muddy paw and Otabek licked Yuri back. What were they going to talk about today? Before Otabek could start, Yuri went on a rant. Hissing about how the rodents were brave this year, and they were coming into the grain barn in armies. Otabek listened to Yuri’s troubles and oinked some advice. Then again, Otabek could take Yuri’s job for once and scare all the mice out.

*And I get a day off? I love it!*

Viktor was off in his forest pond, dancing across the water’s edge and catching wild dragonflies. Not to eat right now. He wanted to give some to an old friend before going deep into the forest to reunite with his family. He managed to snag a handkerchief from a little Human, and Viktor placed all the dragonflies in it. Folding the ends and carrying it as he waddled his way through the water plants and up the gravel road. His friend was nowhere to be found, but if Viktor left the dragonflies by the teenage corn stalks, he was sure that his feathery friend would find it. Leaving to go back into the forest, Viktor craned his neck and honked at the dogs as they ran past him, finishing up the morning chores.

The goose thought about resting on the fence by the cow pasture, but he needed to move if he was going to meet his family in time. He can roost later this afternoon with his friend. Talk about life and fall in love with each other’s company. The good stuff. Viktor wagged his tail and honked at the sun as he wandered back into the forest. Passing by a familiar white and green rooster that was digging up worms to eat. Yuuri honked curtly towards Chihoko, and the rooster didn’t respond back. Busy living on his own. Hey, Chihoko was a busy bird, and Viktor was busy too. But the goose wouldn’t mind smacking Chihoko if the rooster tried to do anything fishy again like *last* time.

But even though Chihoko looked lonely, he wasn’t. Lost in his own thoughts and all alone, Chihoko clucked to himself as he dug up worms.

*Look, Brother. I found us a feast.* Chihoko looked to his right and imagined that Karma was giving him a sweet look. *Look, Brother. I found us a feast.* Chihoko ate slowly and scratched his
head with his foot. *Brother, what do you want to do?* He imagined Karma strutting around, flapping his wings. Chihoko looked up and saw the morning sun over the horizon. *You’re right, the sun really is beautiful today.* Locked in personal happiness, Chihoko sat down in the grass and admired the morning sun. Happy that it woke up every day.

Meanwhile back at the chicken run, things were going smoothly. A few hens were teaching their chicks how to search for good until something caught their eyes. Something was hiding behind a developing pumpkin. Orange eyes peeked over the pumpkin, and a cheery rooster flapped his wings. Coming close to the electric poultry net and greeting the hens and chicks. The rooster’s tail feathers trailed behind him, like a mark in history. His comb flopped from side to side, with every bob of the head. The rooster fluffed himself before disappearing back into the vegetable patch. Feet sinking into the squishy dirt and the warm sun baking over his strong wings.

*Mommy, who’s that?* A baby chick looked up to her mama, and the hen puffed her chest out in pride.

*Let me tell you a story about a rooster named Yuuri...*

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading and supporting this story for the past 2 months. It was enjoyable reading people's responses, and I was surprised that some people were really into the farm animals~

I still want to do another slice of life, but I don't know what. If y'all have a prompt, I'll be happy to hear~

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!