Heartbreaker

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Heartbreaker

by deathbycoldopen

Summary

If you ask Yuuri, he'll say that he's never been on a date, or even been asked on one.

If you ask anyone else, they'll burst into tears.

***

Alternatively titled "Five times someone tried and failed to ask Yuuri out on a date, and one time they didn't have to."

Notes

*sings the song of my people* this was supposed to be a oneshot lala laaaaaa

Quick note about the underage tag: both Phichit and Yuri are underage when they meet and
develop their crushes on Yuuri. It's not reciprocated for either of them, and while I'm sure these teenagers have all sorts of dirty thoughts because they're teenagers, none of it is written into the fic.

See the end of the work for more notes.
Phichit

5.

The first time Phichit saw Katsuki Yuuri, he skated into a wall. He’d known that the former Junior World Champion had signed on with Celestino, that was the ridiculous part. His rinkmate Laura had been talking about it nonstop since they found out, to the point where she’d even come to practice early that day to catch a glimpse of her idol. So he really shouldn’t have been surprised when he turned his head halfway through his warmup, and Katsuki Yuuri skated past him. Except that Yuuri had a sweet little smile on his face, his hair messy and in his eyes instead of slicked back, his form elegant and emotive as he slipped into a perfect layback spin, his eyes- Which was when Phichit crashed into the wall, tripped over his own skate, and fell on his ass. Right in front of the most beautiful man in the world, the 2010 Junior World Champion, and Phichit’s new rinkmate. The universe must be punishing him for that tweet about the Twilight movies, it was the only explanation.

“All right,” he muttered. At least Celestino was talking with the rink owner and hadn’t seen him eat ice. He winced as he tried to get he feet underneath him. Really, it was too early in the morning to be dealing with this.

“Are you okay?”

He almost fell again at the sound of Katsuki Yuuri’s soft, accented voice. He took the hand Yuuri offered and let Katsuki Yuuri, Junior World Champion, pull him to his feet. He hoped beyond hope that the blush he could feel burning his cheeks wasn’t visible.

“Ah, yeah, I’m fine,” he said, wiping snow off his pants. “Thank you.” Impulsively, he pressed his palms together and offered Yuuri a wai. “I’m Phichit, I’m going to be training with you!”

Yuuri looked startled. He returned the wai with a Japanese bow instead. “Good- ah, I’m- my name is Katsuki Yuuri,” he said, stammering a little. The English words sounded heavy and unfamiliar on his tongue. “It’s very nice to meet you.” He glanced behind him, where Celestino had finished his conversation and was waving Yuuri over. “Oh, I have to-” He bowed again and skated away, as graceful in his skating as he was awkward in his mannerisms. Phichit watched him for a while, before realizing with a start that he was supposed to be warming up as well. He pushed off and returned to practicing with vigor- if he was going to be rinkmates with someone as talented as Katsuki Yuuri, he needed to up his game.

Later, as he looped around the rink, Yuuri caught his eye and gave him a tiny, perfect smile. He very nearly fell on his ass once again, his heart pounding way harder than was healthy.

“Oh no,” he thought to himself.

“He seems kind of full of himself, if you ask me.”
Phichit paused in lacing up his skates, following Andrew’s gaze out to the solitary figure drifting aimlessly across the ice. “Yuuri?”

“Yeah,” Andrew said, leaning back on his hands. He and Tish had already finished their ice time ten minutes ago, but he always dragged his feet to their off-ice conditioning, using any excuse he could. Today, that excuse was gossiping with Phichit- not that Phichit minded. He loved gossip. “Celestino put him up in my building, but he hasn’t said a word to me, even when we pass in the hall. The other day I asked if he wanted to carpool to the rink, and he just gave me this look, like he was offended I’d even thought of it.”

Phichit frowned. Yuuri had started doing compulsory figures out on the ice, his gaze down and focused. Phichit didn’t know anyone who did figures at all, and Yuuri was skating them as if they were still the main brunt of a competition. “Don’t tell Laura that, she’ll be heartbroken,” he said.

“Oh, she knows,” Andrew said. “She was crying to Tish the other day about how Yuuri turned her down when she asked for his autograph.”

“He did?”

“Apparently he just said ‘Why?’ and walked away.”

Phichit considered this. He hadn’t spoken with Yuuri again after the embarrassing crash, but the other skater had been kind to him, and smiled so nicely- Phichit cleared his throat. “Maybe he’s just shy,” he offered, remembering the awkward way Yuuri had bowed and skated off. “It’s kind of weird when your rinkmate wants an autograph, you have to admit. He skates with her every day.”

Andrew shook his head sagely, as if being four years older meant that he automatically knew better than Phichit. “I doubt it,” he said. “Oh well, I guess that’s why they tell you to never meet your idols, right?” He got up and stretched. “Anyway, I should go. Tish would kill me if I dropped her because I’ve been skipping conditioning.” He gave a full body shudder, either at the thought of conditioning, or his tiny but formidable partner. “See you!”

Phichit waved, then returned to lacing up his skates. Or at least, he tried to. It took him at least five minutes longer than it should, his eyes drawn to the ice and the junior world champion lost in thought and figure eights. He’d only spoken to Yuuri for a second, but something about Andrew’s assessment didn’t seem right to him. Maybe the gold medal really had gotten to Yuuri’s head- but if it had, why did he look so lost? Why had he smiled and helped Phichit to his feet, when falls were so common on the ice than they barely warranted a glance? Why was he here now, when his ice time didn’t start for another half hour, and why did he stay long after everyone else had left?

Phichit hummed. All this contemplation made his head hurt. He’d rather take action than sit and think circles around himself.

Decided, he finished tying his boots and stood with determination. Gossip was one thing, but he’d be damned if he let people gossip without knowing the truth.

He joined Yuuri on the ice, just smiling in acknowledgement and starting his warm up in silence. Celestino was on his lunch break still, so the two of them were more or less alone on the ice. Perfect. He went through the motions of his warm up, watching Yuuri out of the corner of his eye.

When they’d been skating in silence for long enough, he glided over to the barrier and grabbed his phone. He made a show of looking around- well, only part of it was for show. Celestino would probably yell at him for distracting himself with his phone yet again, so it was best if his coach didn’t see him do it.
“Hey,” he hissed when Yuuri passed nearby. “Is Ciao Ciao around?”

Yuuri stopped, head tilting in confusion. “Who?”

Operation: Talk to Katsuki Yuuri was a go.

“You know, Celestino,” Phichit said. Yuuri just looked more confused. “Like how he says ‘Ciao Ciao’ at least twenty times a day?”

Yuuri stood stock still for a moment- and then something magical, **miraculous** happened. He smiled, small and shy but growing bigger. “Oh,” he said. “Oh my god, he *does.*”

Phichit willed his heart rate to slow, and failed miserably. He laughed at the look on Yuuri’s face. He’d made him *smile.* What a day. “You hadn’t noticed?”

A hint of red shaded Yuuri’s cheeks. “Not- not really.” He looked around the rink, peering at the front door. “I think he’s still outside, though. He said we could warm up while we wait for him though.”

Phichit waved a hand. “We’re warmed up enough,” he said, secretly thrilled by the ‘we’. Katsuki Yuuri just said *we.* “He yells at me when I do this.”

“Do what?”

Phichit put his finger to his lips and pulled up Instagram. He winked at the camera and snapped a quick selfie. “Hmm,” he said, eyeing the picture critically. “What do you think, Amaro or Mayfair?” He held up the picture for Yuuri to see.

Yuuri just stared at him blankly. “I- what?” he asked. “Sorry, my English-”

Phichit gasped dramatically. “You don’t know about Instagram?” he asked, mock affronted. Mostly. Some of it was real. “It’s been around for a *year* now, how do you not have one? It’s almost better than Twitter, *definitely* better than Facebook.”

“Um,” Yuuri said awkwardly. “I don’t really use… those.”

Phichit had to wonder if Katsuki Yuuri was actually an eighty year old man in an eighteen year old’s body. “That’s it, give me your phone.”

“Huh?”

“You can’t be an international figure skater without any social media,” Phichit told him seriously. “How else will your fans follow your career?”

This time, Yuuri’s entire face turned bright red. “I don’t have fans?” he said uncertainly.

Phichit thought about Laura crying because he wouldn’t give her an autograph and stared at him. The longer he talked to Yuuri, the more he was sure Andrew had the wrong idea. “Okay,” he said slowly. “Well, what if you do, and you just don’t know it because you don’t have any social media for them to follow?”

Impossibly, the blush deepened. “Why would they want to?”

“I don’t know, Mr. Junior World Champion, you tell me.”

Yuuri scratched at the back of his neck. “That was two years ago,” he muttered. “Besides, it’s
juniors, the field wasn’t very deep. Everyone good switched over to seniors that year so they could qualify for the Olympics.”

Phichit gaped at him. Andrew was dead wrong, apparently. Yuuri was the least full of himself person Phichit had met in his life.

He needed a different tactic. Appealing to Yuuri’s fanbase was going nowhere fast. “Well, what about your family and friends back in Japan?” he said. “If you make an Instagram or Twitter, they can know what you’re up to, and you can keep in touch!”

That gave Yuuri pause. He hesitated, pulling his phone out of his pocket but not handing it over yet. He turned it over in his hands, frowning, then finally held it out. “Okay,” he said. “But don’t make it anything embarrassing.”

He held in a whoop of success, and accepted Yuuri’s phone with an acceptable amount of dignity. It was quick work downloading the Instagram app- Yuuri hadn’t even connected to the rink’s wifi yet, which was shocking in and of itself- and setting up an account for him. He chose the professional and reasonable y-katsuki as the handle, and set the camera up for the profile picture. “Smile!” he said, snapping the picture with no more warning than that. And yet, Yuuri was so unfairly beautiful that even with his mouth half open in surprise, the picture turned out perfectly.

“Oh god, I have three chins,” Yuuri said when Phichit showed him the picture. “You can’t use that, it’s awful-”

“You can change it later,” Phichit told him. He set the camera into selfie mode. “Okay, selfie time! Your first official Instagram post!”

He leaned in to get both of them in the frame. Yuuri smiled hesitantly at the camera- which meant that when Phichit snapped the picture, his own face looked blatantly awestruck. Dammit.

“That one’s okay,” Yuuri said. “You look good, anyway.” Luckily, he was absorbed in his phone, and didn’t see the raging blush on Phichit’s cheeks. He tapped hesitantly at the screen, frowning at the different filters. “So wait, what are all these?”

Phichit walked him through the posting process, showing him the best filters and how to tag him in the picture. He nearly fainted when Yuuri went to his profile and followed him.

“Ah, I’ll have to ask Yu-chan if she has an account,” Yuuri muttered, half to himself. “Who else should I follow?”

“Well, Laura and Andrew both have accounts-” because Phichit forced them to, but Yuuri didn’t need to know that- “so you could follow them.”

“Oh,” Yuuri said, his shoulders hunching a little bit. “I don’t really know them- wouldn’t it be weird?”

Phichit waved his hand. “No, no, Instagram isn’t like Facebook, you don’t have to be friends with people to follow them. They’ll probably follow you back, though. They are your rinkmates, after all.”

“Ah, okay,” Yuuri said, though he still looked uncomfortable. “How do I find them?”

Phichit took his phone and searched their rinkmates. Laura was going to be thrilled when she saw her new follower. After he found them, he started searching some of the other skaters he followed himself, since he wasn’t sure what other interests Yuuri had.
“Um,” Yuuri said after a moment, peering over Phichit’s shoulder. It was very distracting. “Does Viktor Nikiforov have an account?”

“Ah! I knew I was forgetting someone,” Phichit said. He navigated to Viktor’s profile, then glanced at Yuuri. Yuuri was staring at the selfies and videos on Viktor’s account with wide, starstruck eyes. “Are you a fan, then?” Phichit asked, nudging Yuuri’s shoulder.

Yuuri squeaked, sounding unnervingly like one of Phichit’s hamsters. The blush was back in full force. “-I mean, he’s the Olympic gold medalist, and the world champion, and his quad flip is- he’s just-”

“He is pretty hot,” Phichit agreed, making Yuuri yelp again.

“Phichit-kun,” Yuuri hissed. “Not like that!”

Phichit filed away the honorific to look up later- he didn’t know enough about Japanese culture to know what it meant. He focused instead on the flustered look on Yuuri’s face, and raised his eyebrows.

“Not just like that,” Yuuri amended reluctantly. “He’s the reason I’m skating competitively,” he admitted. “I always thought if I got good enough, maybe I could skate on the same ice as him someday.” He ducked his head with a self-deprecating laugh. “Isn’t that silly?”

“It’s not silly,” Phichit said. “We all need our idols, Yuuri. They help keep us moving forward.”

Yuuri looked at him thoughtfully. Abruptly, Phichit realized how close they were standing, close enough that Phichit could see little flecks of gold in Yuuri’s gorgeous brown eyes.

“Um,” he said intelligently.

“Phichit Chulanont, that better not be a phone in your hand!”

Phichit winced. Operation: Talk to Katsuki Yuuri was successful, but Operation: Don’t Get Yelled At by Celestino for Taking Selfies had failed miserably.

“Sorry, sorry!” he said, skating to the boards and setting his phone back down. “I swear, we were warming up.”

Celestino just sighed. “And here I thought Katsuki would be a good influence on you,” he lamented. “Go on, show me how warmed up you are.”

Phichit ducked his head. “Yes coach,” he said.

As he skated past, Yuuri smiled at him again. “I’ll try to sneak a picture of you skating for your Instagram,” Yuuri murmured, then skated away.

Phichit watched him go, his throat suddenly dry and his heart pounding. Oh no, he thought, not for the first time.

Phichit wasn’t the kind of guy to sit back and pine. He could see what it got Laura- absolutely nothing, just occasional smiles and Instagram likes- and promptly decided that he was going to take action with this Yuuri thing.
Not that his heart wasn’t *pounding* its way out of his chest when he made his way toward Yuuri one day after practice. He knew the score, here. Yuuri was three years older than him, already an internationally ranked skater while Phichit hadn’t even done his first season in Juniors yet, and more than all that, Yuuri was… *Yuuri*. Bright smiles and thoughtful silences, dedicated talent and oblivious focus. Phichit felt his palms start to sweat just thinking about it.

He tapped Yuuri on the shoulder before he could chicken out. “Hey, um, Yuuri?”

Yuuri paused in lacing up his skates. He had the whole afternoon with Celestino today, and Phichit could see him practically vibrating with the need to get on the ice. “Hey Phichit-kun,” he said. “Did you just finish?” There was a note of disappointment in his voice; Phichit felt like someone inflated a balloon inside his chest. Yuuri was *disappointed* that Phichit was leaving.

“Yeah, I have ballet class now,” Phichit said, wrinkling his nose. Amelia was a good teacher, she really was, but he hated the way she insisted on using the French terms for *everything*. He didn’t speak French. He didn’t see why he should get in trouble for thinking a Battement Fondu was a kind of cheese dish.

Yuuri noticed his expression and chuckled. The balloon in Phichit’s chest was two seconds away from floating off into the stratosphere. “Is Madame Weber giving you a hard time again?” he said. “You know, if you’re having trouble with ballet terms, I could help you out.”

Phichit might have actually died. There wasn’t any other explanation for Yuuri offering to spend time with him outside of practice. He swallowed, and remembered why he’d approached Yuuri in the first place. “Yeah, o-okay,” he stammered, hoping his blush wasn’t too obvious. “Um. Do you want to- go out? To dinner, I mean. There’s a place where Laura, Andrew, Tish, and I like to go, it’s nearby. And we can go over all that?” And hopefully make out a lot, but he didn’t add that part. Yuuri was too easily flustered to be that upfront about it.

Yuuri hesitated. Phichit felt his soul crumble into despair. *You knew this would happen*, he scolded himself, because he should have been prepared for rejection. Maybe it was because it was *Yuuri* that it hurt so bad.

“Ohay!”

Huh?

Phichit blinked. Yuuri was smiling again, still a little uncertain, but it was definitely there. “Really?” he asked. He was pretty sure if he looked down, he’d see that his feet weren’t even touching the ground anymore. Yuuri said yes. “How about tonight? I’ll pick you up at seven?”

“O-okay,” Yuuri said again. He finished tying his laces and stood to go into the rink. “I’ll see you then,” he continued, waving as he walked away.

Phichit may or may not have swooned. He was going on a date with Katsuki Yuuri. He’d never been happier in his entire life.

He was going on a date with Katsuki Yuuri. He’d never been more terrified in his entire life.

He tried on at least ten different outfits before deciding on the first one but with the sleeves rolled up. And without the tie- or maybe he should loosen the tie for a debonair look. Although really, this tie looked a lot better with the purple shirt-
He stopped himself, took the tie off, and rolled the sleeves back down. Perfect.

Yuuri lived in the same building, just a few doors down- the skate club had some sort of deal with the landlord for their international skaters, a fact which Phichit had never appreciated as much as he did now. It meant that he could leave his apartment at 6:59, and still have a minute to calm his breathing before knocking on Yuuri’s door. And roll his sleeves back up, shit shit shit what had he been thinking-

The doorknob turned. He pasted a smile on his face, hopefully a nice smile and not the manic one he was fighting down. But it slid off his face as soon as the door opened.

Yuuri looked terrible.

His eyes were bloodshot and red-rimmed, like he’d been crying- wait, scratch the past tense. Tears were still welling in his eyes, giving him a glassy, vacant look. His face was blotchy and streaked with tear tracks. When Phichit looked down, he saw that Yuuri’s hands were shaking.

“Yuuri?” Phichit said blankly.

Yuuri gave him what could have been a smile, or maybe was just a grimace. “H-hey, Phichit-kun,” he said. “I just- I just need a few minutes, and then we can go.”

“Yuuri what’s wrong?” Phichit followed him into his apartment. It was much cleaner than his place, maybe because Yuuri didn’t have a hamster cage taking up half the living room, maybe because Yuuri lived alone and Phichit had a messy roommate, or maybe just because half of Yuuri’s stuff was still in boxes. He didn’t dwell on it for long- Yuuri was still hiccuping with suppressed sobs, and he couldn’t bear it.

“Nothing, I’m fine,” Yuuri said automatically. He opened a box and began digging through it, eventually coming out with a jacket. “I’m almost ready, I don’t want to keep everyone waiting.”

Phichit stalled on that, but he pushed it aside to consider later. “If you don’t want to go-”

“I do, I swear,” Yuuri said. The tears finally spilled onto his cheeks; his breath hitched. He crumpled the jacket in his hands, gritting his teeth against his tears. “I want to go.”

Yeah, this wasn’t happening. Not tonight, anyway.

“Hey, it’s okay,” Phichit said, trying not to panic. He had no idea what to do. How was he supposed to comfort Katsuki Yuuri, Junior World Champion, most beautiful man in the world, star of Phichit’s most wistful daydreams? “Let’s… sit down?”

He led Yuuri to the couch awkwardly. Yuuri followed without protest and immediately buried his face in his hands. His shoulders were shaking. “S-sorry,” he whispered. “It’s not- I’m not-”

Phichit hesitated, then put a hand on Yuuri’s shoulder. Yuuri twitched, but didn’t shrug him off, which was something. “Do you want to talk about it?”

Yuuri shook his head. “I just g-get like this, sometimes,” he mumbled. “It’s- I was just doing the dishes, and- I don’t know-”

“Um, okay- do you want to just- We don’t have to go out if you don’t feel up to it.”

The relief was obvious in the way Yuuri’s shoulders slumped. “But I’m trying to be- to be better, about making friends- Laura and Andrew and Tish won’t be disappointed?”
Phichit blinked. There is was again. What did their rinkmates have to do with-

Oh.

Yuuri didn’t know this was a date. He thought this was a friend thing. A group friend thing.

“Oh, Phichit muttered. No wonder Yuuri had been so enthusiastic when Phichit asked him. Goddammit.

Okay, no, focus. Now wasn’t the time to dwell on his breaking heart. Yuuri needed some comfort, and Phichit would be damned if he let Yuuri keep crying when he could do something to help. “It’s fine,” he said. “I’ll just text them and let them know we can’t make it, I’m sure they won’t mind.”

“We?” Yuuri croaked. Phichit wasn’t sure how a person could be so attractive when their face was blotchy and streaked with tears, and yet. Here they were.

“We,” Phichit said firmly. “I’m going to order us a pizza, grab some popcorn and *The King and the Skater* from my place, and we’re going to sit here and watch until you kick me out, deal?”

“Phichit-”

“Deal?”

Yuuri sighed, a trace of a watery smile lighting up his face. “Okay,” he said. Phichit nodded firmly and moved to get up; Yuuri caught his wrist before he could get far. “Thank you,” Yuuri said earnestly.

Phichit wondered if Yuuri could feel his pulse hammering under his fingers. “Anytime,” he said.

He had to take several deep, calming breaths once he was in the safety of his own apartment. He wasn’t sure how any of this had happened. Yuuri misinterpreted when Phichit asked him out, sure, it happened to everyone, then decided to bail on the plans altogether- but somehow it ended with a plan to watch movies on Yuuri’s tiny couch all night? The tiny couch that was barely more than a loveseat, so they would have to cuddle up close together-

*As friends*, Phichit reminded himself. This wasn’t about his crush on Yuuri. This was about helping Yuuri feel safe and comforted.

Nodding to himself, he quickly grabbed *The King and the Skater*, then on consideration, grabbed the sequel, the first season of *Friends*, and a romantic comedy he had lying around. He could watch *The King and the Skater* repeatedly for hours on end, but he knew that most people didn’t share his enthusiasm for it. Maybe someday, once he’s won more gold medals than Thailand knows what to do with, the rest of his country will take an interest. But until then, Katherine Heigl and Jennifer Aniston would have to do.

He was halfway out the door when he turned around, and quickly changed into yoga pants and a more comfortable shirt. This wasn’t about impressing Yuuri, it was about comfort.

He let himself back into Yuuri’s apartment, juggling the DVDs and his phone as he called the pizza place down the street. “Are you a fan of pineapple on pizza?” he asked as he kicked the door shut behind him.

Yuuri looked calmer now, still disheveled and red, but he wasn’t crying anymore. “Oh… no opinion? Anything you want is fine.” He turned back to his phone. He smiled at something he saw, fingers touching the screen with a gentle reverence that had Phichit *deeply* curious and slightly
“Yeah, a large Hawaiian for delivery please,” Phichit ordered. “535 Fremont Street, Apartment 2B.” He listened absently as the employee repeated the address, caught up in watching Yuuri smile. It was a nice smile, even if it wasn’t directed at Phichit.

“Pizza’s going to be here in twenty minutes,” Phichit said once he hung up. He plopped himself down on the couch next to Yuuri and spread out the movie choices on the coffee table. “What are you looking at?” he asked. Yuuri was still staring at his phone, that same tiny smile on his face.

“Huh?” Yuuri asked, blinking. He blushed. Phichit thought about trying to snap a picture of the pretty pink flush, then thought better of it. Yuuri probably wouldn’t appreciate that, not so soon after a breakdown. “Oh, um. Viktor posted a selfie with his dog.”

As far as Phichit knew, Viktor Nikiforov posting a selfie with his dog was an almost daily occurrence. Even when the man was away at competitions, he posted pictures of his dog from an apparently endless cache, all with captions along the lines of “Miss my best bud (ㄒoㄒ)”. It wasn’t an event deserving of such a soft and loving smile from Katsuki Yuuri.

Phichit felt like his heart had slipped out of his chest and fallen bruisingly hard on his shoes. “Oh,” he said faintly. He cleared his throat and leaned forward to grab the DVDs. “So, which do you want to watch?”

Yuuri was mostly silent through the movie. Whenever Phichit glanced over, he was still watching—but as the night went on, the pizza arrived and was devoured, and they made their way through *The King and the Skater* and then four episodes of *Friends*, Yuuri’s eyelids began to droop. Phichit nearly had a heart attack when Yuuri’s head drifted down to rest on Phichit’s shoulder.

“Phichit?” Yuuri murmured quietly as the *Friends* theme started playing. “Thank you.”

Phichit took a deep breath to prepare himself, and wrapped an arm around Yuuri’s shoulders. He was about two seconds from dying, and what a way to go, with Katsuki Yuuri *cuddling* with him. “Of course,” he said.

“You’re a good friend.”

*Fuck.*

Yuuri was looking at his phone again, scrolling aimlessly through Instagram. He stopped again at the picture of Viktor Nikiforov hugging his poodle. “Do you think Viktor has anyone to do this with?” he said. He sounded half asleep.

“Hm?”

“He never posts about anyone else…” Yuuri mumbled. “I wish…”

He trailed off. Phichit waited, but Yuuri didn’t say anything else. He glanced down—yeah. Yuuri was asleep.

Phichit swallowed and turned back to the show. Ross was trying to ask Rachel out, but instead she was fawning over some Italian guy, and it should have been funny but instead it was just depressing. Phichit had never liked Ross much, but right now he couldn’t help but relate.
Andrew and Tish

Chapter Notes

Please note the change in rating. The sex in this chapter is basically fade to black with a little bit of flashback (nothing super explicit?) but I figured better safe than sorry. Since I've upped the rating, there might end up being some more explicit sex later on, depending on how close I stick to my outline...

*throws some OCs at you and runs away*

See the end of the chapter for more notes

4.

Tish sighed and rested her cheek on her fist. The motion forced her elbow more deeply into her thigh, catching on an old bruise that still hurt, apparently. She hissed and sat up straighter.

“Coach Leslie isn’t even here yet,” she complained, settling back on the bench instead. “Why are we here so early, again?”

Andrew leaned forward as she leaned back, his eyes fixed on the rink. Tish didn’t see anything out of the ordinary- Tim and Karen weren’t even here yet, and Andrew considered them to be their biggest threats in competition.

Tish scoffed to herself. As if any other pair could compete with her and Andrew. They were the US Nationals silver medalists this past season, barely missed the podium at Worlds; Tim and Karen hadn’t even placed top ten at nationals. Of course, if they were training against Chen and Xing, then she might be just as invested as Andrew in keeping an eye on them.

All of that was moot at the moment, of course, because it was all Coach Celestino’s and Coach Nina’s singles skaters right now. Tish personally felt that she could wipe the floor with any of these skaters if she competed against them directly, but that was neither here nor there- Andrew obviously wasn’t scoping out competition. So what the hell were they doing here?

“There,” Andrew said, pointing at a figure down on the ice. His eyes were wide and dumbstruck. The press liked to paint him as the prettier of the two of them- figures they would call the only black figure skater currently competing “plain”- but right now he looked like an idiot. “That’s him.”

She squinted down at the ice. The figure Andrew pointed out was vaguely familiar, in the same way that most singles skaters were only vaguely familiar. “Katsuki?” she said as she worked out which competitions she’d seen him in. “Junior World Champion a couple of years ago- he’s the one Laura’s been pining over, right? What about him?”

She glanced back at her partner and sighed. Andrew was practically drooling. Figures that something would come around to distract him right when they were poised to have their best season ever. She loved Andrew with all her heart, but right now she kind of wanted to strangle him.

“Our…” she said, somewhere between irritated and resigned.

“No, no, just look at him,” Andrew said, catching her arm. The guy was fucking twitterpated. Tish
wondered how much illicit ice cream and cheap rum it was going to take before Andrew got over this one. He’d spent weeks crying on her shoulder about the last one- her sweater had only just started to dry out.

“Weren’t you just telling me what a shame it was that Katsuki is a dick?” she said, then winced. Maybe she shouldn’t have said *dick* and *Katsuki* in the same sentence, because Andrew’s cheeks were now mottled red. “For fuck’s sake, have some dignity.”

Andrew sighed the sigh of the heartsick. “I lost all my dignity, I’m too gay for him,” he said. “You know that night you fell asleep instead of meeting us all for dinner?”

“Oh…”

“Yuuri was there,” Andrew said dreamily. “He’s just shy, I guess, because after a few beers…” He trailed off, reliving what was apparently the best night of his life. Tish snorted.

“You have a crush on this guy because you got drunk with him?” she said. “Wow, that’s sad. Even for you.”

“It is sad,” he said mournfully. “I’m sad.”

“He hasn’t even rejected you yet.”

“Of course he’d reject me, he’s the most beautiful boy in the world, and I’m a sack of potatoes.”

“I mean, you are, but he doesn’t know that. Just ask him out and stop moping.”

“Tish! I can’t do that!”

At least with all this irritated sighing she was doing, she was getting enough oxygen. “Why not?” she asked, as patiently as she could. She signed up to be the best pairs skater in the world, not to be Andrew’s therapist, and yet here she was.

“I just-* look at him!*”

She was looking at him. She watched as Katsuki ran through the same step sequence over and over again, a frown on his face. She had to admire his dedication- Celestino hadn’t said a word to him in the entire time she’d been watching, and yet he seemed to know exactly what needed fixing in his technique. That didn’t mean she understood what had Andrew in such a tizzy. Sure, Katsuki was attractive, all big brown eyes and soft, mussed hair, but Andrew wasn’t usually as shallow as that.

She stood up and stretched, every single one of her joints popping. “Get a grip,” she said kindly, patting her partner on the shoulder before making her way out of the stands. If she was here early, she might as well put on her skates and get some practice in.

She glanced up at the rink a few times as she was lacing up, watching Katsuki as he skated past. *Definitely attractive,* she mused, then shook her head. Andrew really needed to get his priorities straight.

As she watched, Phichit slung an arm around Katsuki’s shoulders and whispered something in his ear. Katsuki bit his lip against his smile; another whisper, and he *laughed.*

The sound echoed around the entire rink like the purest expression of joy. Tish froze, staring at Katsuki’s dancing eyes and bright smile.
“Amy, I’m bored,” Tish said, thumping her head against the freezer door.

Amy didn’t even look up from her trashy magazine. “You could restock the ramen,” she said.

“I just restocked it five minutes ago.”

“It’s the ramen aisle in finals week, I guarantee it needs to be stocked again.”

Tish slumped, then pushed herself off the freezer to check the ramen supplies. The student store had an entire aisle dedicated to the stuff- which wasn’t saying much, since the whole store was only about the size of Tish’s shitty bedroom- and yet, predictably, half the shelves were somehow empty. She was honestly a little concerned about the sodium intake of the student population.

She checked which brands and flavors of the processed crap they needed, and went to the back room to grab more. Before she started this job she never would have thought that the Lime Chili Shrimp flavor would be so popular considering it tasted like bathroom cleaner, and yet. The things you learn in retail.

“How do people even put this shit in their mouths?” she called as she kicked the door open behind her, her arms full of prepackaged noodles.

“If you add an egg and some green onion it’s not bad,” someone who definitely wasn’t Amy replied.

She turned around and nearly dropped her armful, because Katsuki Yuuri, aka Andrew’s-big-gay-crush and Tish’s-more-than-a-passing-attraction, was standing in the ramen aisle holding three packets of classic chicken flavor to his chest defensively.

She did end up tripping over her own feet a little, but hopefully it wasn’t noticeable. “Oh,” she breathed. Katsuki was wearing glasses. She wasn’t sure if she’d ever seen him wear glasses. She definitely wanted to keep seeing him wear glasses. “H-hey Katsuki.”

A blush crept over Katsuki’s cheeks. Unlike Andrew, who blushed in uneven, blotchy patches, the tinge of red on his cheeks only made Katsuki more attractive. “Oh, hi,” he said. “You’re Andrew’s partner, right? I didn’t know you worked here.”

“Oh,” she breathed. Katsuki was wearing glasses. She wasn’t sure if she’d ever seen him wear glasses. She definitely wanted to keep seeing him wear glasses. “H-hey Katsuki.”

A blush crept over Katsuki’s cheeks. Unlike Andrew, who blushed in uneven, blotchy patches, the tinge of red on his cheeks only made Katsuki more attractive. “Oh, hi,” he said. “You’re Andrew’s partner, right? I didn’t know you worked here.”

“Um,” she said intelligently. “Yeah, I do. Gotta pay those coaching fees, right?”

His answering smile was uneasy. He stepped out of the way so that she could put the ramen boxes down and organize them on the shelves. He had a basket hanging from his elbow, she saw now. She raised her eyebrows at the contents: a bag of sour cream and onion potato chips, a box of licorice, a jar of Nutella, three packages of Slim Jims, a box of lactose pills, and the same trashy magazine that Amy is reading up at the register. It had Viktor Nikiforov’s face splashed across the cover, looking disheveled as he left a club with some gorgeous but trashy woman on his arm.

Katsuki noticed her looking, and somehow his blush got even darker. He swung the basket behind his back, as if that would erase her having seen the contents in the first place. “Um,” he said.
Tish fought the smile trying to take over her face. “Is all that on your approved diet?” she asked.

“I’m- it’s for a friend,” Katsuki blurted. “It’s not-”

She laughed. “Don’t worry, I won’t rat you out,” she said. “Andrew and I always sneak ice cream over the summer, so I don’t have a leg to stand on.”

Katsuki relaxed a little. “I can’t eat ice cream, or it’d be in here too,” he confessed, looking around like someone might overhear. “I’m supposed to be studying for a test, and… I don’t know, this stuff makes it better, I guess.”

“Red Vines and Nutella?” He hunched in on himself and she rushed to clarify. He looked so sad when he withdrew like that, which was unacceptable. “No judgement! Once after a bad competition I ate an entire bag of marshmallows dipped in Sriracha, so I get it.”

Okay, wow. That was an attractive tidbit to throw out there. At least that wasn’t the weirdest thing she’s even eaten- her period had always given her awful cravings until she got on the pill. But still, she didn’t want Katsuki to think she was some disgusting pig-monster who ate-

He was smiling. Shit shit Katsuki was smiling. At her. It was like the sun had come out, right in the middle of the fluorescent lighting of the student store at eight pm.

“Was it any good?” he asked, still grinning.

She had to clear her throat before she could get any sound out. “Uh,” she said. “Surprisingly decent. Spicy and sweet, it’s an okay combination.”

He hummed. Then, before her very eyes, he turned and grabbed a bag of marshmallows and a bottle of Sriracha, and put them both in his basket. “Good enough for me,” he said, his eyes twinkling.

This was turning into a problem.

He waved while she just stared like an idiot. “See you around,” he said, making his way toward the register. Amy had already noticed him and was staring at him with the same awestruck expression as Tish. “Say hi to Andrew for me!”

“Will do,” she replied weakly. She watched Amy ring him up, and kept her eyes on him as he left the store with his bag clutched to his chest like a dirty secret. At least three people did double takes as he walked past.

“Wow,” she breathed. Andrew was going to be so jealous that she got to have that gem of a conversation with Katsuki Yuuri.

Andrew. Fuck.

Andrew, her partner, who had a crush on Yuuri that was visible from the moon. Andrew, who annoyed her to no end but who she would beat someone up for if need be, who deserved good things in his life. Andrew, who would be heartbroken if he found out that she was quickly falling for Yuuri as well.

Briefly, she considered being magnanimous and letting Andrew go after Yuuri first. The two of them were closer, and Andrew had seen him first. It would only be fair.

She turned the notion around in her head for all of five seconds before discarding it. She wasn’t sure she was capable of conceding a competition like that, especially when the prize had such a nice smile
and strange eating habits.

Maybe if Yuuri was into it, she could be persuaded to share with Andrew—except. No. She could play at the sexy couple thing with Andrew in their programs, but she didn’t really want to think about what Andrew was actually like in the sack. And if they had an arrangement with Yuuri, she’d inevitably have to think about what kinds of things Yuuri liked, if he wanted something that Andrew was giving him that she wasn’t—which would mean comparing notes with Andrew, or asking Yuuri, and—

Yeah, no. Not going there.

Well, there was only one option then. She smiled to herself and cracked her knuckles like the goddamn UFC fighter she was in her heart.

She was going to kick Andrew’s pasty butt.

Andrew adjusted the rolled up cuffs of his shirt, double-checking his reflection in the shiny elevator door. He didn’t usually put much work in his appearance, but Tim was always rocking some kind of look, and he hated showing up to one of his parties without at least making an effort. A white button down and nice jeans was hardly going to beat him, but he wouldn’t be the worst dressed bi guy who ever existed, and that was something.

And maybe, just maybe, somebody he wanted to impress would be there.

He brushed a hand through his hair and headed to the stairwell. He shouldn’t wait around hoping that Yuuri would come tonight. Aside from the one low-key dinner that Phichit had organized, Andrew only ever saw Yuuri at the rink, or occasionally in passing in the hall. He was pretty sure that aside from training and classes, Yuuri never even left the apartment complex.

Speaking of which…

“Youuri!” he said, stopping at the top of the stairs.

Yuuri fumbled with the textbooks in his arms, but recovered pretty quickly. He smiled up at Andrew, and Andrew had heart palpitations. “Hey,” Yuuri said. He resumed course up the stairs, stopping at the landing. “Are you heading out?”

Shit, Andrew was sweating through his white shirt. What kind of idiot wears a white shirt when his crush might see him? “Yeah, I promised Tish I’d show at Tim’s party,” he said, aiming for breezy. “Are you going?”

Yuuri smiled ruefully. “Ah, no,” he said. “I’m not big on parties. Have fun though!” He turned to leave, which Andrew had one hundred percent anticipated. So he wasn’t sure why he felt so disappointed, or why he reached out to grab Yuuri’s sleeve.

“You should come!” he said. He was definitely blushing now. He wished he had the courage to slide his fingers down to hold Yuuri’s hand instead of just his sweater. “It would be so boring without you.”

“Huh?” Yuuri said. “I’m pretty sure it would be more boring with me there.”

Andrew wondered how the hell he’d thought Yuuri was arrogant. “You’re both underestimating
yourself, and also Tim’s ability to talk about himself *constantly,*” he said. “Seriously, at least if you come I’ll have a buffer to keep me from throttling him.”

“So your main argument for me to go is that the party will be boring?” Yuuri asked, smiling a little. Andrew’s heart dropped.

He laughed and rubbed the back of his neck to cover up his disappointment. “Yeah, not super convincing,” he admitted.

Yuuri glanced at the stairwell door, worrying his bottom lip with his teeth. Andrew stared at the red blossoming under the skin. He wondered if it would be warmer than the rest of Yuuri’s skin, if he would taste like the ice he spent so much time on, if he bit his lip when he was in the throes of pleasure as well as-

“Okay,” Yuuri said.

Andrew nearly yelped. He swallowed and cleared his throat. “What?” he squeaked.

Yuuri shifted his weight nervously, but there was a determined set to his jaw. “I’ll come to the party,” he said, his voice wavering just a little bit.

“You will?”

This was the best day of Andrew’s life. Not only was Yuuri coming to the party, he was coming to the party *because Andrew asked him to.* If he died right now, he’d consider his life well spent.

Yuuri nodded firmly. “Um,” he said. “Would you mind waiting for me? I need to change my clothes, but I don’t want to go alone…”

Andrew smiled at him. “Of course!” he said.

*I’d wait forever for you,* he thought.

The party was in full swing by the time they got there, but Andrew really couldn’t spare a glance at the drunken antics of his rinkmates and fellow students. He was far too occupied with staring at Yuuri in his simple jeans and t-shirt getup. He never would have thought an outfit as plain as that would catch his attention- but when it was on a work of art like Katsuki Yuuri, all bets were off.

He could’ve sworn he saw the entirety of Yuuri’s sixpack under the white shirt.

He swallowed and loosened the collar of his own shirt.

“*Andrew,* thank god, I thought I was going to have to partner with Laura for the beer pong-” Tish stopped mid-sentence, her mouth falling open at the sight of Yuuri next to him.

“Guess who decided not to be a hermit,” Andrew said lightly, wrapping an arm around Yuuri’s shoulders. This close, he could smell the tang of citrus in Yuuri’s shampoo.

“Hey,” Yuuri said awkwardly.

Tish’s eyes flicked down to Andrew’s arm holding Yuuri, then back to Yuuri’s face. Something in her eyes made Andrew nervous. It was the same expression she’d had before their free skate at Worlds last year, coming in from thirteenth place, only to skate a perfect program and finish just off the podium. It was the expression of someone who would die before she lost a competition.

“Yuuri, I’m so glad you’re here!” she said, suddenly all smiles. Andrew could still see that glint in
her eye, the one that spelled trouble even if he didn’t know what it was about. She linked her arm in Yuuri’s, pulling him away from Andrew so subtly that he barely realized until his arm was swinging back down to his side. “Do you want to be my beer pong partner? Tim is setting up a tournament and I’m going to win it.”

Andrew blinked. “Hey, what about me?” He and Tish always partnered for beer pong- for everything, really. Something was off here.

“What’s beer pong?” Yuuri asked, frowning.

“You’ve never played?” Tish said in surprise. “You really have been a hermit. Don’t worry, I’ll teach you.”

Something was really, really off here. “You’re partnering with a noob?” Andrew asked incredulously. He looked down at where Tish’s hand was wrapped possessively around Yuuri’s forearm. Suspicion shivered at the back of his mind, just half a thought that he didn’t look at too closely- it was too painful.

She waved a dismissive hand. “I’m sure Yuuri will catch on quickly,” she said. “C’mon, let’s go.”

She dragged Yuuri away without so much as a glance in Andrew’s direction. Yuuri gave Andrew an apologetic smile as he went, leaving Andrew standing awkwardly in the foyer.

“Fuck,” Andrew muttered. “Fuck.”

Tish liked Yuuri too.

Goddammit.

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Yuuri, it turned out, was fantastic at beer pong.

It didn’t seem to be related to his level of sobriety, either. Andrew watched in fascination as Yuuri drank his way through an entire pyramid in his practice round with Tish, and then proceeded to sink every single one of his shots in a redemption that gathered half the party around the table to cheer him on. He was a little glassy eyed by the time they set up an overtime round, and yet by a strange twist of fate that had Tish fumble a shot, he managed to win to a swell of applause. On a practice round.

Andrew and Laura exchanged terrified looks. With Yuuri and Tish on the same team… they were so, so screwed.

“Reset for round one!” Tim shouted, raising his solo cup in a toast.

Since there were only five teams, it was decided that instead of traditional tournament they would use “Grand Prix bullshit,” as Tim put it, to decide which teams advanced to the final round. The teams would each play against each other, and whichever two teams won the most games would play against each other one more time to determine the winner.

“Which means we have to go against them,” Laura whispered to Andrew, staring in fear and awe at Yuuri and Tish laughing together. “Probably twice.”

Andrew shuddered.
The first rounds went by quickly. The other three teams- Tim and Karen, then two teams of their university friends- were no match for Andrew and Laura together, or the deadly combination of Tish’s precision and Yuuri’s high tolerance. By the time they got to the final round, Andrew and Laura up against Tish and Yuuri, everyone was considerably drunker than they were before.

“I’m gonna kick your ass, Blumfeld,” Andrew snarked at his partner as they lined up the final pyramid.

Tish snorted, leaning heavily against Yuuri. “In your dreams, Newton,” she drawled.

Yuuri giggled. Andrew nearly knocked over his own cup at the sound. “We already beat you once,” Yuuri said, staring deeply into Andrew’s eyes. Andrew felt himself leaning forward unconsciously, drawn like a magnet toward Yuuri’s dark eyes. “Maybe you should just forfeit.”

“Now look who’s dreaming,” Laura said, but she sounded as breathless as Andrew felt.

It suddenly occurred to him that they were at a disadvantage here, and not just because of Yuuri and Tish’s skill. Tish knew it too, if the smug look on her face was any indication. Fuck, she did this on purpose.

He took a deep breath and kept his eyes on the table, away from the hypnotic temptation that was Katsuki Yuuri swaying in place to the music. He could do this. He could do this.

The game went by quickly. For every shot that he and Laura made, Yuuri and Tish made one too. The room was spinning a little bit, but Andrew had the practice to keep his hand steady every time he lined up a shot. They could win, they could, all he had to do was focus.

One more shot. If he could sink this, he and Laura could wipe that smug smile off of Tish’s face. Tish and Yuuri had already cleared their pyramid, but if he could make this shot they could still beat them. He squinted at the lone solo cup with a critical eye, trying to ignore the way Tish was whispering in Yuuri’s ear, the way Yuuri giggled and glanced his way.

“Andrew,” Yuuri said, his voice low and sultry. Despite himself Andrew looked up, entranced by his voice and his eyes and his smile. "頑張って.”

Andrew took the shot, and missed.

“NO!” he shouted, and yet it was barely audible under Tish’s shriek of celebration. His legs collapsed from under him, and he let himself fall to the floor in shame. Maybe it would open up beneath him and swallow him whole, save him from the embarrassment of losing just because his crush batted his eyelashes. Well, that, and spoke in another language, which was a guaranteed way to make Andrew lose his shit.

He blinked blearily when a hand presented itself in front of his eyes. He took it, only realizing as he was pulled to his feet that the hand was attached to one Katsuki Yuuri.

“Sorry,” Yuuri said ruefully. He was completely disheveled, his hair mussed and his eyes so unfocused Andrew was surprised he’d made any shots at all. “Tish said it would distract you.”

Of course she did. Andrew glanced over to find Tish staring at them even as she accepted a drink from Tim and nodded along to whatever he was saying. She narrowed her eyes at Andrew, not nearly as triumphant as he was expecting. “I think that counts as cheating,” Andrew said, frowning at his partner. He turned back to Yuuri and gave him what he hoped was a winning smile. At least his face was already flushed from the alcohol, so Yuuri probably couldn’t tell that he was blushing.

“Dance with me to make up for it?”
Yuuri lit up as he nodded. Andrew led him into the living room where some partygoers were already wrapped around each other. The lighting was dimmer in here, casting alluring shadows over Yuuri’s face, highlighting the curve of his body gently as he began to move. Andrew stumbled over his own feet as he rushed to match Yuuri’s smooth, pulsing movement.

Yuuri laughed, pulling Andrew’s hands to press on his waist, looping his own arms around Andrew’s neck. “Not so graceful off the ice, are you?” he murmured, eyes twinkling.

Andrew nearly stumbled again. “You think I’m graceful?” he stammered. He tried to lead Yuuri into something like a dance to the sultry beat. His hands where sweating; he could feel every shift of skin underneath Yuuri’s shirt.

“Mm, sometimes,” Yuuri said, slipping into a rhumba step without a thought, hips swirling hypnotically beneath Andrew’s hands. Andrew swallowed and tightened his grip. He’d never seen Yuuri so loose and relaxed, peering up through his lashes in a way that seemed specifically designed to drive Andrew crazy. “You move through your lifts so easily- you’re a good partner,” he continued. “I’ve always admired pairs skaters- you do everything a singles skater does, but you do it with lifts and death spirals and while being perfectly in sync…”

Andrew slid his hand up Yuuri’s side, then down his arm, and led him into a spin. “I could show you,” he said breathlessly. “I think you’d be good at it.”

Yuuri spun back in and ended up even closer than before, his leg slipping between Andrew’s for a close hold. He chuckled; Andrew could feel the rumble in his chest. “I’m nothing special,” he said, almost into Andrew’s ear.

Andrew couldn’t breathe. Yuuri was pressed so close to him, his nose practically brushing against his cheek as they danced. If he tilted his head just a little, moved just an inch towards him, he could close that last bit of space between them, taste the cheap beer on Yuuri’s lips-

“Mind if I cut in?”

He looked up to find Tish standing not even a foot away, her eyes fixed on Yuuri’s face with a hungry expression. He fought the urge to yank Yuuri even closer- the impulse risked injury if nothing else, since Yuuri was already so close.

Yuuri didn’t even bat an eye at the sudden interruption. He turned in Andrew’s arms, his eyes half-lidded as he looked Tish up and down. “Yes, I mind,” he said petulantly. “But you can join us, if you want.”

Andrew kept his hands firmly on Yuuri’s hips as he met Tish’ eyes. She raised her eyebrows, asking silently if he would back off. He smirked at her instead. If she wanted to compete over Yuuri, then he’d give it everything he had. Like hell was he going to step back.

Yuuri was still dancing, swaying to the music with his hand snaking up behind him to wrap around Andrew’s neck. Tish only hesitated for half a second before stepping in to join their dance. She rested her forearms on Yuuri’s shoulders, a convenient place for her to pinch Andrew’s chest painfully without Yuuri knowing.

The music changed at that moment, a latin beat driving relentlessly forward, goading them into movement. Andrew nearly stumbled, not sure who was meant to be leading- and yet Yuuri seemed perfectly at ease, one hand on Andrew’s neck and the other wrapped around Tish’s back. He swung his hips again, bringing them into a lopsided cha-cha, moving sensually against both of their bodies. Tish caught on quickly, Andrew following behind both of them, until the three of them were moving
as a unit pressed up against each other.

From this position, Andrew’s face was practically buried in Yuuri’s hair. The light citrus smell- the shift of Yuuri’s body against his own- the movement of Yuuri’s fingers on his neck- He was going crazy from it all. It almost didn’t matter than Tish was there too, getting just as much of Yuuri’s attention and his sensual dancing. Almost- except that they were all so close together that eventually, one of Andrew’s hands had somehow found its way to Tish’s hip, underneath where Yuuri curled his fingers around both of them.

Tish glanced up at him. The thrumming excitement in his gut didn’t lessen at her familiar brown eyes. Instead, everything seemed to click- Yuuri and Tish, both dancing with him, hot and close and beautiful.

Huh.

Andrew took a deep breath, closed his eyes, and kept dancing.

Things with Andrew were… weird, after the party.

It wasn’t that anything had changed- not that Tish could tell, anyway. They still skated the same, had the same banter they always had, the same teasing relationship. By unspoken agreement, neither one of them mentioned that night, or talked about Yuuri at all. So it was all normal, except for the part where it wasn’t.

Tish sighed as she finished lacing up her skates. This was why she hadn’t wanted to share Yuuri in the first place. She and Andrew had had a great partnership, and yet somehow one night of drunken dancing and fumbling in the dark had made her rethink all of it. For fuck’s sake, she’d barely even noticed Andrew when Yuuri had bitten a mark into her neck, when he’d brushed his fingers between her legs without even taking her pants off first, when he came from both Tish’s and Andrew’s hands wrapped around him. It wasn’t like she’d been watching what Andrew was doing with Yuuri, not on purpose anyway.

Fuck, what a mess.

She felt better once she was on the ice, absently skating around the rink. She had the place to herself for the moment. Technically the rink was open to club members already, but most of Celestino’s skaters had a rest day today, and Andrew and Coach Leslie weren’t due to arrive for another half an hour.

Which apparently didn’t mean anything to Andrew. She bit her lip when she caught sight of her partner lacing up just behind the boards. She’d come early for some alone time on the ice. Surely Andrew knew her well enough now to know she needed that.

Except when she glanced up again, Andrew wasn’t stepping onto the ice alone. He was with Yuuri.

She sped up to catch up with them. Who needed alone time when Yuuri was there?

“Yuuri!” she said, crashing into him on purpose so she could wrap her around around him. “I thought you had a rest day today!”

His face was fire engine red, she noted. She was pretty sure he hadn’t been a virgin before the party, but maybe a fumbling threesome was a little much for him. It was certainly a first for Tish, and she
was older than both Yuuri and Andrew by two years.

“H-hey,” he said. “Um, yeah, it’s Celestino’s day off, but… Um.”

“I was going to teach Yuuri some pairs moves,” Andrew cut in. He was also blushing, but his eyes were sharp as he sized Tish up. This was the first time the three of them were in the same room together since the party, and Tish wasn’t sure herself whether they were still in competition with each other. She wasn’t about to back down, not now that she knew what Yuuri tasted like, but maybe Yuuri would be expecting them to all share again.

Not that she wanted to. Share, that is. She set her jaw: the competition was definitely still on.

“Fun!” she said, leaning more heavily on Yuuri. “Although isn’t it a little weird to practice when you’re both guys?” She looped her arm through Yuuri’s elbow and dragged him forward. “Here, we can practice together, and Andrew can tell you what to do.”

“O-okay,” Yuuri said with a slight smile. Tish resisted sticking her tongue out at Andrew as Yuuri came with her willingly to center ice.

“What are we doing first?” she said. “Lifts? Oo, do you want to try a twist? Those are my favorite.”

“What?” Yuuri squeaked. The terrified look on his face was almost comical. “I can’t- I don’t know how to throw you in the air-”

Tish waved a hand. “The throwing is the easy part, it’s the catching that’s harder,” she said. She laughed at his expression of pure fear. “Okay, okay, we can try a pairs spin. Those are pretty similar to solo spins, except you just have to pay attention your your counterbalance.”

She led him into a sit and catch-foot layback spin, the same one she and Andrew were using in their short program this season. Andrew gave pointers every once in a while, demonstrating with Tish twice before passing her over to Yuuri once again. Yuuri clearly had never done any pairs moves before, but she knew for a fact that he’d taken ballroom classes along with his ballet, and it showed in the strength of his hold around her waist.

“Awesome!” she said as they exited out of the spin. Yuuri’s eyes were bright and excited, his cheeks flushed with the exercise. They had stopped moving, but his hand was still on her waist, gripping the fabric of her shirt ever so slightly. She desperately wanted to kiss him. “How about we do a throw jump next?”

“Hang on,” Andrew said, skating over. Yuuri dropped his hand from Tish’s waist immediately; she glared at Andrew since it was his fault. “Why don’t I throw Yuuri? Since the actual jump is closer to what you’d do in singles, and the throwing can be tricky.”

Tish glared even harder. Andrew had a point, but that wasn’t why he’d suggested it and she knew it. He just wanted his chance to put his hands all over Yuuri. Asshole.

“What’s your favorite jump?” Andrew continued, shooting Tish a tiny, barely noticeable smirk.

“Um,” Yuuri said, glancing between them. “Triple axel, sort of.” His phone chimed in his pocket. He took it out, glanced at the message on his lock screen, and frowned. “I think I have to go, though,” he said reluctantly. “This was really fun! I’ll see you guys later-”

“Wait, Yuuri!” Tish blurted, completely involuntarily.
He paused. “Huh?”

She took a deep breath. Screw passive aggressive competition with Andrew. She’d already had a taste of Yuuri, she needed to know if she had a shot at the whole package.

“How about we get dinner sometime?”

“Can I take you on a date?”

She froze, then slowly looked over at her partner. Her partner who had asked Yuuri out at the exact same second that she did.

Yuuri cleared his throat and shifted his weight. All of Tish’s attention snapped right back to him, her heart pounding its way out of her chest. She didn’t know what she would do if Yuuri picked Andrew over her. Sob into a pint of Half Baked, probably- if Andrew could steal her crush, she could steal his damn ice cream.

“I-I-” Yuuri stammered. He smiled apologetically- at both of them. “I’d love to get dinner with you two, but I’m just not sure… I don’t really want to be a third wheel on your date,” he said. “I’m not here to get in the middle of your relationship.”

Andrew choked next to her. Tish was personally having an out of body experience. “Our… relationship?” she heard herself say.

Yuuri scratched the back of his neck. “I’m sorry about the party, too,” he said. “I know you probably didn’t want some guy butting into your time together.” He cleared his throat. “Anyway, I have to go. I’ll- I’ll see you guys later!”

He skated away, leaving Andrew and Tish alone together, confounded and heartbroken.

Two days later, Phichit found them both staring forlornly out at the ice, where Yuuri was skating in perfect, oblivious figure eights. He took one look at their faces, and plopped down on the bench between them with a heavy sigh.

“Tell me about it,” he said wistfully.

Chapter End Notes

This is the song Andrew and Yuuri dance to.
This is the song the three of them dance to.

For the record, I hc that Andrew and Tish eventually get their heads out of their asses and end up together, at which point Yuuri is horribly confused because he thought they were already a couple.

Thank you guys for all your comments, kudos, and subscriptions! It makes me so happy to know you are enjoying heartbreaker!Yuuri as much as I am.
Chris

Chapter Notes

There are a few time jumps in this chapter. The first part is in 2008, when Yuuri is fifteen, then it skips to when he's nineteen, then twenty. Just to make it more confusing for everybody, including me.

Please enjoy the glory that is Christophe Giacometti and his beautiful ass

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

3.

“A lot of people are expecting you to win this weekend. How does that make you feel?”

Chris smiled at the reporter and winked. “Not nearly as exciting as having such a beautiful woman before me,” he said, pitching his voice as low as he could.

He heard his coach face palming even from across the room. Josef had told him repeatedly over the past year that it wasn’t good for his image for a seventeen year old to be flirting with people twice his age. He had no idea why- most of the reporters thought it was darling, considering he still looked about twelve. He couldn’t wait until he got into seniors and they had to start taking him seriously as an adult.

The reporter looked halfway between uncomfortable and flattered. Eventually, she decided to just find it adorable. He sighed internally. Just because he looked young didn’t mean that he should be treated like a kid.

“This is the last event you’ll be competing in as a junior, are you worried about going into seniors next year? Excited?”

“I’m ready to kick some ass,” Chris said pleasantly. "Maybe chase some too, depends how I'm feeling."

“The field is pretty deep at the senior level. Do you think you’ll get your technical scores up to the right level before the Grand Prix series?”

“It's deep, but I'm pretty sure I'll measure up,” he said with a smirk. "I'll do better than just rise to the occasion. You'll be surprised how big I'm going to get." He knew exactly how much work he needed to do, not just to get his scores to match the low end of the senior level, but higher. All the way to the top. “I’m winning gold in seniors, just you watch. Nikiforov won’t know what hit him.”

The reporter smiled patronizingly. Oh well. Nobody believed him when he said that, but it was true. He was going to beat Russia’s Living Legend whether anyone was rooting for him or not.

Eventually, Josef pulled him away from the reporter to head to public practice, the last before Junior Worlds officially kicked off tomorrow. His last event as a junior.

He felt full of nervous energy- not for this competition, but for the future. Junior Worlds felt like a joke at this point. There was nobody here who could really challenge him. The Italian kid, Crispino,
could maybe give him a bit of a challenge if he focused enough to actually get a good PCS, but he was only fourteen. The odds of him beating Chris were infinitesimal.

He skated a few laps around the rink to get his feet under him, then started his practice in earnest. Josef gave him some direction, but for the most part, this practice was just to keep him warm and limber before the short program tomorrow, not to pull out all the stops. Josef was strict about not getting Chris too tired out the day before a competition.

“Let’s go through the step sequence from your short program,” Josef told him. “You’ve been getting a little sloppy on your footwork. Just because you don’t see anyone here as a threat doesn’t mean-”

“Oh, okay,” Chris sighed. He couldn’t afford to be sloppy, he knew that. At the very least he didn’t want to get into the habit right before he got into seniors.

He pushed off from the boards and started the step sequence. His theme this season was innocence, a theme he’d fought against tooth and nail. He’d lost eventually, and his choreographer had given him this saccharine routine to a song that he’d already hated before he was forced to listen to it over and over and over again. It was hard to get himself into a headspace to skate this stupid thing like it was meant to be skated, but he had to do his best with it. Viktor Nikiforov never had any problems getting into character for his programs, no matter how ridiculous the theme or the routine, so Chris couldn’t let himself be defeated by a sickly sweet piano and cello duet.

Halfway through his step sequence, he glanced up to check Josef’s expression- and promptly crashed into another skater.

He fell to the ice with a hard thump. He managed to catch himself on one hand, but pain was still radiating from his ass- and not in a fun way either. Damn.

“Chris, are you okay?” Josef said, skating up next to him.

He nodded, blinking rapidly. One of his contacts had been forced off center, making the whole room blurred and doubled.

Nearby, he could hear another coach speaking in rapid Japanese. When his contact finally slid back into place, he saw that the other skater was the Japanese kid, Kat-something. The kid didn’t look injured, just a little stunned from the impact.

“If you’re okay?” Chris asked him in English.

The kid turned away from his coach to stare at him. He was tiny, with round cheeks and even rounder eyes, but Chris thought he remembered that the Japanese skater wasn’t that much younger than him- fifteen, sixteen maybe?

He stared at Chris for long enough that Chris wondered if the kid didn’t speak any English, which would make this difficult since Chris only knew how to say “hello,” “thank you,” and “did it hurt when you fell from heaven?” in Japanese.

The kid’s coach said something to him, and he squeaked. “I’m so sorry!” he stammered. “I’m sorry- I didn’t see you, I’m so sorry- are you injured?”

Chris got to his feet. His hand was probably bruised from catching himself, and he ached all over- but when did he not? “I’m fine,” he said, offering his hand to the younger skater. The kid took a second, then let Chris help him to his feet. “It was my fault, I wasn’t paying attention.” He eyed the younger skater. “It’s Katsake, right?”
“Katsuki Yuuri,” the kid corrected, bowing again. He glanced behind him at his coach, who was watching them with clear impatience.

Chris could take a hint. This kids obviously had a lot of work to do before the competition- more than Chris, who felt like he could sleepwalk through and still get gold.

“Good luck in the short program, Katsuki!” he said cheerfully. “I’ll see you around.”

He waved and skated away to let Josef fuss over him. He thought maybe Katsuki stared at him as he went, but he didn’t turn back to check.

As expected, Chris knocked everyone out of the park in the short program. His score missed the junior world record by a point- so close, but of course Nikiforov’s record was still untouchable three years later- but it didn’t matter in this competition, anyway. The Crispino kid was a good eight points behind him, and didn’t have a high enough base score in his free skate to top Chris’.

“You just have to skate a clean program,” Josef told him as he warmed up. “I know you want to break Nikiforov’s record, but I don’t want you to get caught up in something you probably won’t achieve. Focus on your technique.”

Chris pouted at his coach, popping up from his splits. “Coach, you know I do better when I have real competition,” he whined. “You saw them skating out there, the only rival I have right now is that dumb world record.”

Nearby, the Crispino kid sat upright in obvious outrage. Chris winked at him and turned back to his coach.

Josef shook his head. “Fixating on the record isn’t going to help your skating, Dreikäsehoch,” he said. “Leave that to next year, when you’re actually fighting Nikiforov for a spot on the podium.”

Chris rolled his eyes and opened his mouth to respond, when someone cleared their throat behind him. He glanced back to find Crispino glaring at him with all the force that a fourteen year old kid could muster.

“You’re an idiot if you think you don’t have any competition here,” he snapped in Italian. “Even if I don’t beat you, that guy might.” He jerked his thumb at the TV showing the current skater, and stormed off.

Chris frowned and looked at the TV. He didn’t think there was anyone here who could top his score- Crispino was just trying to prove a point, probably. The few times Chris had seen him at competitions, he seemed like a prickly kind of kid, especially whenever conversation turned to his sister. Maybe he was just pissed that Chris hit on her a couple of times.

The skater on the TV landed a perfect triple axel, and Chris was forced to reconsider.

“Who is that?” he asked, gaping.

“Yuuri Katsuki, I think,” Josef said.

“The guy I collided with at practice?” Chris said, surprised. Katsuki had never left much of an impression on him in other competitions- and yet he was skating beautifully now, landing all his jumps and executing his step sequences with a musicality that left Chris a little envious. Where was
this skater yesterday?

“What was his score in the short program?” he asked urgently. Katsuki’s technical score had already caught up to the current leader’s score, and he still had three jumping passes and a combination spin to go. If his PCS was as good as Chris was betting, Katsuki might break that same record Chris had had his eye on for the past year. And if his short program score was high enough…

“60.78,” Josef said, reading off his phone. He looked worried in a way he hadn’t all weekend, not even when chastising Chris for focusing on the wrong things. He glanced back up at the TV, where Katsuki was just finishing his last spin. “A point and a half behind Crispino. You’ve got a little bit of cushion, but not much.”

Not enough. Katsuki looked astonished as he ended his program and the arena erupted into applause. Whether he actually broke the record or not, it was close enough that Chris felt sweat beading on his brow. Whatever happened next, Katsuki just bought himself a spot on the podium.

Well. Chris had wanted a rival, and he definitely got one.

He threw himself back into warming up. He glanced up when Katsuki’s scores were announced—just a half point away from breaking Nikiforov’s record—then focused on his preparations. He didn’t pay much attention to Crispino’s free skate, just enough to note that Katsuki’s perfect program had galvanized the Italian skater as well. It was Chris’ last year in juniors, and like hell would he let his gold medal be stolen out from under him.

He stepped onto the ice just as Crispino’s score was announced. Below Katsuki’s, as expected, but high enough that he would be joining Katsuki on the podium. Bronze or silver, though—that depended on Chris.

Chris made a quick circuit of the ring, basking briefly in the applause. The audience was excited now, in a way they hadn’t been during the short program. Katsuki was keeping everyone on their toes, it seemed.

He bowed his head and prepared for his free skate. He had a clear goal in sight now, not just Nikiforov’s unbeatable record, but an actual person he needed to outscore. If he got anything less than 130 points in this program, he would lose to a guy nobody saw coming.

The music started. He exhaled slowly, and began to move.

He won gold by half a point.

(Four years later)

Chris flopped back against the hotel pillows, thumbing absently through Instagram. He’d only been in Japan for two hours, most of that spent collecting baggage and getting from the airport to the hotel, and he was already bored out of his mind.

The problem was that he didn’t know anybody at this competition. Normally, he’d text Viktor or Javi, or even Mikhail, and persuade one or all of them to come paint the town with him. But Javi had withdrawn from the Grand Prix series this year and would probably be retiring for all his protests that he could still compete; and neither Viktor or Mikhail were assigned to the NHK Trophy this year.

He pulled up his messaging app and scrolled through his contacts. Not a single one of them was even close to Japan, which was far too inconvenient. He sent a message to Viktor instead, ignoring
the fact that Viktor was probably already at practice, gearing up for the Final in two weeks.

Viktor didn’t respond, which made it that much worse. Sometimes it felt like both their rivalry and their friendship was really just Chris trying to catch up to Viktor, instead of a mutual respect and competition. Chris sighed and tossed his phone onto the bedside table. Now that was a depressing thought.

Maybe he should just go to sleep, like Josef undoubtedly would want.

An even more depressing thought.

Enough of this. He sat up decisively and picked his phone back up. He didn’t need other skaters around to have some fun before a competition. If none of his friends were there to enable him, he would just have to enable himself. Maybe he’d even make some new friends. He always loved getting to know new people.

He got dressed quickly and made his way down to the hotel bar. Not the idea place to party, but there was always a chance that another skater or one of the friendlier reporters would want to come clubbing with him. There might even be an attractive fan or two, although that was always trickier to navigate. Either way, though, he had been practicing his Japanese pick up lines, and he was determined to try out at least one of them before the night was over.

The bar was fairly crowded for an overpriced place right off the main hotel lobby. Chris could see a few of skaters in the crowd, which would explain the crowd- the hotel was bursting with fans and skaters and reporters, most of whom wouldn’t be adventurous enough to venture outside of the comfortably international hotel. He made his way through tables, winking at a few fans who recognized him and waved. Maybe he would join them after he got his drink-

Scratch that.

He nearly tripped over his own feet, too caught up in staring at the man sitting at the bar. A truly beautiful man.

Holy shit.

The man was sitting quietly, set apart from the rowdy foreigners next to him, sipping his drink in contemplative silence. He was a local, probably, or at least more local than the rest of the international crowd- a fan then? Or maybe just a traveler who happened to end up at this particular hotel the weekend of a major international competition. He didn’t look like someone on a night out: his hair fell messy over his forehead, his glasses partially his eyes, his sweater was big and shapeless. And yet there was some pure magnetism about him, an allure that was indefinable but undeniable. Chris couldn’t look away.

He smiled to himself and sidled up to the bar next to the man- the stunning, gorgeous man. He kept his eyes front, as impossible as that was, to catch the bartender’s attention. “A cosmo, s’il vous plaît,” he drawled, winking. On a normal night, he might have started flirting with the bartender- he was pretty cute, and sometimes a good flirt could get him discounts- but tonight, he found that he didn’t want to look at anyone but the stranger next to him.

He shot the man a side glance. From this close, the man was even more beautiful, though perhaps a little younger than Chris thought. His amber and chocolate eyes were entrancing even when they
were fixed firmly on his phone.

The bartender set the cosmo down on the bar. “Merci beaucoup,” Chris said, pitching his voice as sultry as he could as he passed his credit card over. He glanced at the beautiful man again- damn, still not looking up. Sometimes just speaking French did the trick, but it was far from the last ace up his sleeve- or in his pants, as the case may be.

He reached out to grab his drink- overreached- accidentally on purpose losing his balance so that he stumbled into the beautiful man and spilled half of his overpriced cocktail onto his sweater.

“Oh- je suis tellement désolé à ce sujet, I’m so sorry! Gomen’nasai- I didn’t mean-”

“Sorry!”

Chris paused with a handful of napkins already outstretched. “Why are you apologizing?” he asked. “It was my fault.”

The man blushed, a pretty pink that looked utterly delicious. “No, I just- s-sorry!” He looked down at his sweater, wiping at the soaked patch over the front. “I mean- ah, it’s okay, it happens.” His English was quite good, with barely an accent. An American, then? No, that was definitely Japanese on his phone screen.

Good. It meant he could try out one of his new lines. “Let me make it up to you,” Chris purred, leaning closer.

“Eh?” the man said, still frowning at his sweater. “No, that’s not necessary-”

Chris ignored that and moved close enough that he could whisper hotly in the beautiful man’s ear. “Poketto-ni futon-ga hait-teru,” he murmured.

The man froze halfway through taking his glasses off. He turned to Chris slowly, his expression- not promising, actually. He looked less turned on and more confused. “You- you have a futon in your pocket?” he said, utterly lost.

Oh, shit. That’s what that meant?

Chris fixed a weak smile on his face. Strike one against googling pickup lines in other languages. Shit, how could he turn this around- make it into a joke, maybe, like he meant it to be bad- yeah that could-

The man finished taking his glasses off and grabbed at the hem of his sweater- and suddenly, Chris recognized him.

“Yuuri Katsuki?” he said incredulously.

Yuuri’s blush deepened. “Um,” he said, not looking at Chris. He pulled his sweater off, revealing a plain black shirt underneath that showed off the impressive curl of his biceps. He shoved his glasses back on his face, turned to Chris, then froze as he looked at him fully for the first time. “Christophe Giacometti?” he sputtered.

Chris grinned. “How long has it been- four years?” he said. He leaned in to kiss Yuuri’s cheeks, a little more familiarly than he normally would with a non-european skater- but, well. Yuuri looked unfairly gorgeous in just a t-shirt, and that blush was too much to resist.

“Ah, yeah, I think so,” Yuuri said, shifting in his seat.
“Ever since you came up from behind and almost beat me at Junior Worlds, right?”

“I didn’t almost *beat* you,” Yuuri corrected. “I’m surprised you remember.” He still looked embarrassed, almost nervous. Oddly enough, it made Chris want to find a replacement sweater and a blanket to wrap him in- while he also wished he’d spilled enough of his drink to get Yuuri out of his shirt as well. It was more than a little off-putting, considering what he remembered of the tiny fifteen-year-old kid who nearly challenged him.

“You were only a few points away from it,” Chris reminded him. He sat down on the stool next to him, sipping at the remainds of his drink. “I can’t believe I didn’t recognize you- you’ve certainly grown up a lot.” He dragged his eyes appreciatively over Yuuri’s torso.

“You too,” Yuuri said, smiling a little. “I watched you in Skate America, your programs have changed a lot since we were juniors.”

Chris winked at him. “Sexy, no?” he said. “I started pole dancing so that I could really capture the feeling in my short program.”

“Pole dancing?” Yuuri stammered. “Is- is that fun?”

Chris tilted his head so he could look up at Yuuri through his eyelashes. “Very pleasurable,” he said. “Oh.”

“And what about you?” Chris asked, finishing off his drink. “I didn’t see you in any of the other GP events.”

Yuuri shook his head. “No, my scores weren’t high enough,” he said. “The only reason I was invited to the NHK Trophy is that the JSF wanted more Japanese skaters here, and Oda Nobunari was already assigned to other events.”

Chris frowned. True, he hadn’t been following Yuuri’s career in seniors, but Yuuri had been good, really good, when they faced off at Junior Worlds. And he was pretty sure that Yuuri had won gold at Junior Worlds just a few years later- so why was such a good skater just here on invitation from his own federation?

“Well, I’m glad you’re here anyway,” he said, putting it out of his mind. Not everyone was able to make the transition from juniors to seniors as smoothly as he had. “I don’t know anyone else here, I was about to go insane from boredom. Can you think of something exciting for us to do?”

Yuuri fiddled with his straw, eyes downcast. “I doubt I’ll be able to help with that,” he said ruefully. “I’m a very boring person.”

Chris raked his eyes over the cut of Yuuri’s figure, the enticing way he curled his lips around his straw. “Not at all, darling,” he said earnestly.

Yuuri looked confused again. It wasn’t exactly encouraging, but Chris had never been one to back down without a fight. Especially not when the prize was so delectable.

His phone buzzed in his pocket before he could deliver the most perfect line- in English this time- to get Yuuri Katsuki to jump into his bed. He pulled it out and frowned- Viktor had finally responded to his text with a video. From the thumbnail, it looked like the video was taken while he was at practice.

“Sorry,” Chris said to Yuuri. “My friend just sent me a video…” He pressed play, and groaned.
Viktor was skating Chris’ short program. It was unmistakeable even with the music cutting in and out from tinny speakers. He was skating Chris’ program, and he was skating it better than Chris.

Chris groaned again when Viktor effortlessly changed what was supposed to be a triple flip to a quad flip, and merged it seamlessly with the step sequence that took Chris three weeks and four sessions in a pole dancing class to get down.

Viktor ended the routine there, not bothering with the last spin and jumping pass. He skated up to the camera with a smug grin on his face and winked. “See you at the GPF!” he said cheerfully, and the video stopped.

“What a dick,” Chris muttered. He punched out an angry response mostly out of the middle finger emoji and his favorite French and Russian curse words.

“You- you’re friends with Viktor Nikiforov?”

Chris glanced up. Yuuri wasn’t looking at him, but staring wide-eyed at his phone, where the thumbnail of Viktor winking at the camera was still visible. He was blushing again, this time not nearly as confused or flustered as when Chris flirted with him, and he bit at his bottom lip in the purest picture of arousal Chris had ever seen.

Oh.

Chris swallowed down the odd surge of bitter jealously in his throat. He was rivals with Viktor on the ice, he could be rivals with Viktor to win Yuuri’s attention, too. And in the meantime, it meant he could admire the shape of attraction on Yuuri’s face, the way his eyes widened and his jaw clenched.

“Oh of course,” Chris said airily. “He’s the only person around who challenges me, and I him.” He didn’t mention that he’d never managed to beat Viktor to gold. Yet. Not yet. “We’re very good friends.”

Yuuri looked starstruck. Chris spared a moment to feel sorry for him- he’d felt the same way about Viktor, once. But while Viktor was always perfectly pleasant to his fans and fellow skaters, he was always a little untouchable, always looking at the ice more than any one person. Chris had given up on his little crush pretty quickly and settled for a friendly rivalry, but the look on Yuuri’s face said it would be hard for him to accept that.

Well, Chris was more than happy to comfort Yuuri when he realized Viktor’s true devotion was to the ice. He might be a little sour that he was always following behind Viktor, lover to Viktor’s leftovers- but Yuuri was special. Chris barely knew him, and even he could see that.

“What’s he like?” Yuuri asked eagerly, all of his earlier hesitation and fluster gone.

Chris swallowed. As good as Yuuri looked with an embarrassed flush, he looked even better with that shine in his eyes, and redness blossoming around where he bit his lip. “Oh, you know,” Chris said. “Camera whore, drama queen, competitive asshole- pretty much everything you’d think from all his interviews. He’s probably the most ridiculous person I’ve ever met in my life, so he’s pretty fun to hang out with.”

“Really?” Yuuri said, leaning forward.

Chris hesitated. On the one hand, it wasn’t exactly ideal to be talking his friend up to the guy he’s trying to hit on. But on the other hand, he was pretty sure this was the first time he’d had Yuuri’s full attention all night, and he meant to capitalize on that. “Oh yeah,” Chris said. He leaned forward as
well, pretending to impart some great secret. It wasn’t actually a secret how Viktor lived in his own fantasy world and got everyone around him caught up in it, but apparently Yuuri didn’t know that. “Did you hear about the time he got arrested for public indecency?”

He wasn’t surprised when Yuuri nodded. Even though the charges had been dropped, the entire skating world had heard about that. Annoyingly enough, most of the tabloids seemed to think it was more hilarious than scandalous- Chris was convinced that Viktor could kill a man and the world would immediately forgive him for it.

“What you didn’t hear about is how we were both naked,” Chris said, waggling his eyebrows. "It was during the Rostelecom Cup..."

Yuuri hung on to every word as Chris spun the tale of how he and Viktor got drunk, got into an argument over who could withstand the cold better, stripped naked, and visited as many of Moscow’s landmarks as they could. Chris still wasn’t sure how they’d avoided getting frostbite. He also wasn’t sure how Viktor talked his way out of getting charged for swimming in the Druzhba Narodov Fountain, let alone the public indecency charges- he was just glad that he’d decided to put his coat back on right when the police arrived.

“The last I saw was Viktor passed out on a cop’s shoulder while they dragged him over to the car,” he finished. “And the funny thing is, I was expecting him to call me the next day and yell about how I encouraged him to strip- but instead, he called and asked if I wanted to go clubbing again!”

Yuuri burst out laughing. Chris found himself staring mesmerized at his smiling lips. He wanted so desperately to capture that smile with his own mouth, drag noises far less innocent than laughter from his throat.

“Sounds like fun,” Yuuri said, eyes twinkling. “I wish I had the confidence to do something like that.”

Chris raised his eyebrows. A thousand dirty replies about how they could get naked right now rose to his tongue, choking each other until he couldn’t get even one of them out.

Yuuri realized what he’d said far too quickly. “Oh! N-not the getting arrested and running around naked thing!” he stammered. “Just- uh. Letting loose, having fun- I guess? I’m always so worried about what other people will think.”

“You’re not having fun with me right now?” Chris pouted. He moved closer and put his hand on Yuuri’s knee, pitched his voice as sultry as if would go. For most people it was enough to make them come. “We could go let loose together, if you want,” he murmured in Yuuri’s ear. “I especially requested a soundproof room upstairs, so you can let loose as loudly as you want.”

Yuuri’s leg twitched violently under his hand. “C-Chris!” he squeaked. "That's not- I didn't mean-" He pulled away, sliding off the bar stool to take a full step back. “I- I should go to bed- to sleep, um, I have to be at my best for the- the competition.” He nearly ran into the man behind him in his haste to get away.

Chris laughed, despite the twinge of disappointment aching in his chest. “Of course,” he said. “Go get your beauty sleep, Yuuri. I’ll see you tomorrow.” He winked and blew a kiss. Yuuri’s face was so red he looked like he was about to explode.

“Y-yeah, okay,” he said. “Goodnight!”

Chris watched him stumble away with a cheeky smile. As soon as Yuuri disappeared into the hotel
lobby, though, he let the smile slip off his face, replaced with a bitter scowl.

He wasn’t even sure why he was so disappointed. It wasn’t like this was the first time he’d ever struck out- it wasn’t even the first time he’d struck out because his rejector was already half in love with Viktor. And yet this time, it stung so much more than any of the others. Sure, Yuuri was beautiful- but so were so many other people that he had a much better chance with. Plenty of fish, and all that.

He sighed and gestured to the bartended to grab his attention. If he was going to feel like shit because Yuuri didn’t want to sleep with him, he was going to do it while wasted, and hopefully find some other beautiful person to occupy his attention.

He couldn’t stop thinking about Yuuri Katsuki.

It wasn’t a constant thing, not in the way romantic comedies made it seem. Chris wasn’t spending every moment of every day mooning over Yuuri’s laugh or his blush, and he wasn’t reliving their conversation every night before he fell asleep. It was just that every once in a while, when he was skating or making dinner or chatting up a fan, he’d be struck with the thought of Yuuri, a wistful impulse to see him again, a touch of rejection when he remembered Yuuri walking away.

It was ridiculous.

Maybe it was because Yuuri had said no- something about the challenge of wanting someone who didn’t want him back. But that didn’t really make sense. Chris had been rejected plenty of times, and he’d never found himself idly wondering what those people thought of his performances, if he’d see them again anytime soon and what he would say if he did.

Ridiculous.

Whenever he found his thoughts drifting toward Yuuri, he did his best to squash them. He didn’t need this dumb crush distracting him, not when there were more important things he should be focusing on. Like kicking Viktor’s ass and proving to the world and one particular Japanese skater that Chris was just as good as better than that smug Russian bastard.

He honestly thought he was doing pretty well with that. Sure, he kept coming back to thoughts about Yuuri, but he didn’t dwell on them. He threw himself into his training instead, harder than he had in a long time. He pointedly didn’t watch Japanese Nationals despite opening a tab specifically for that purpose. He did watch Four Continents, fresh off the heels of losing to Viktor again at Europeans- but that was just research, keeping an eye on his competitors. If he kept a close eye on one underdog Japanese skater- well. That underdog skater came up from behind to steal gold from Cao Bin, so his attention was justified.

He was definitely only excited for Worlds for the chance to beat Viktor. Not at all because he would see Yuuri Katsuki again.

He clung to that thought until the short program. He waved at Yuuri when they passed each other in the hall, of course- no need to be rude. And he set himself up in front of one of the TVs to watch the competition just in time to see Yuuri’s program- just a coincidence. He even pat himself on the back when he only ogled Yuuri’s ass for half a second before moving on to watch Yuuri’s technique.

But in the next second, he forgot all about his resolution to avoid thoughts of Yuuri Katsuki, the man. Because right now, all he wanted to do was protect him.
Yuuri was crashing and burning.

He fell on two of his three jumping passes, despite his perfect triple axel at the beginning of the program. His last fall, a bad ankle twist on the first jump in his combination, was bad enough that he wasn’t able to finish the jumping pass, stumbling to his feet and making a half-hearted attempt at his last combination spin before finishing the program on a lackluster pose.

It felt invasive, how the camera lingered on him in the kiss and cry, showing in every detail the tears falling freely down his cheeks. Chris clenched his fists, wishing he could march out there and tell off the cameraman, force him to turn away so that the rest of the world couldn’t witness Yuuri’s obvious pain. He wished he could wrap his arms around Yuuri and hold him until the tears stopped, and Yuuri could laugh again because it was just one competition, one moment of pain that they’ve all endured, and Yuuri would come out of it brighter and more beautiful than ever—

_Merde_. Apparently he wasn’t as over Yuuri as he’d thought.

He didn’t have a lot of time to worry about it. His group was right after Yuuri’s, and his slot was near the beginning of the lot. He focused on his skating during the warm up, letting long months of training take over where his brain wouldn’t focus. But he couldn’t afford to be distracted, not when Viktor was warming up only a few meters away, looking even more polished than at Europeans.

The rest of the short programs went by in a blur. He did well in his, not as good as it could have been, but well in the range that he needed to be to overtake Viktor. Viktor himself hadn’t even taken first in the short programs, although at this point, it was almost as if he did that on purpose, just to make it more exciting when he inevitably won gold. Asshole.

He let himself relax a little as the crowd began to disperse, and the ice resurfacer made its slow way around the rink. There was a full day between now and the free skate, long enough that he could breathe for a moment, sort some things out.

Or…

“Yuuri!” he called, spotting the familiar tousled black hair and blue rimmed glasses standing near the wall, out of sight of the reporters still gathered by the exit.

Yuuri flinched and curled even further into himself. Chris’ heart went out to him even more than during his disastrous short program. It was hard to shake off a skate like that- and here, Yuuri wouldn’t even get the chance to redeem himself in the free skate.

“H-hi Chris,” he said, not quite looking up.

Chris hurried over. He was determined now: he needed to make Yuuri smile again. Even if just for a second. He’d be damned if he let Yuuri dwell on his own mistakes.

“Yuuuuri,” he purred as he approached, thinking quickly. Yuuri thought that other Japanese pickup line was funny, right? He cleared his throat. “_Boku-wa aisu kurimu-o issho-ni taberu hito-ga inai-no._” He slung and arm around Yuuri’s waist, letting his hand dangle right over the curve of Yuuri’s ass.

Yuuri blinked at him. His eyes were still red and puffy, and his face was blotchy from crying. “What?” he said, and miraculously, he did smile. It was watery and hesitant, but still. Chris made him _smile_, even at a time like this. “Where the hell are you getting these lines?”

“The internet,” Chris said with a nonchalant shrug. “Why, what does that one mean?”
“Um- that you don’t have anyone to share ice cream with?” Yuuri said. “Wait- you don’t even know what they mean before you feed them to random people?” His smile widened, incredulous but real.

“I think the website had translations, but I forgot,” Chris said. “Oh, but I like that one. I don’t have anyone to share ice cream with- unless you would like to join me?” He couldn’t help it- he dropped his hand down to squeeze Yuuri’s perfect ass.

Yuuri squeaked and ducked away- but he was laughing. Chris’ heart felt too big for his chest. “Chris!” Yuuri protested, swatting his hand away. “Stop doing that. Besides, I can’t eat ice cream, I’m lactose intolerant. And it’s not exactly part of my approved diet.”

“C’mon, cheri, it’s the end of the season,” Chris said without thinking. “There’s no harm in a little indulgence.”

Oh, no. He saw the exact moment his words reminded Yuuri of what happened. Scheisse, that was the opposite of what he wanted. God, he was an asshole.

“Yuuri-” he began, trying desperately to think of a way to backtrack.

“It’s fine,” Yuuri cut him off. His smile looked pained, now. “You should go enjoy yourself, you deserve it. I’m going to go find my coach- excuse me-”

He hurried away before Chris could get another word in.

There was a couple sharing an ice cream sundae at a table directly in Chris’ line of sight. He tried not to stare at them, but it was next to impossible when they kept cooing at each other and feeding each other spoonfuls of whipped cream. He was pretty sure they were playing footsie under the table. It was disgusting.

“Your ice cream is melting.”

Chris jumped. Viktor just raised his eyebrows at him, already halfway through his own waffle cone. Chris glanced down, and- yep, he had rocky road dripping down his hand. A significant amount had already pooled onto the table without him noticing. “Crap,” he muttered, grabbing a handful of napkins and wiping at the mess.

Viktor licked at his ice cream lazily, and watched him with narrowed eyes. “It was your idea to get ice cream,” he said. “Having second thoughts? Worried Josef will find out and kill you?”

Chris glared at his asshole of a friend. “Yakov will kill you too,” he pointed out. “He’s much angrier than Josef ever is.”

Viktor shrugged. “Yakov yells at me anyway,” he said. “But as long as I keep him rolling in gold medals, he can’t do anything about it.” He quirked one perfect eyebrow. “Is that why you invited me, to make me break my diet? Stooping to sabotage, are we?”

Chris sighed. Normally this was the kind of playful competitiveness that he thrived on. But right now… Inviting Viktor to get ice cream had been a bad idea. He should have just gone back to his hotel room. Because now not only was he forced to watch a sickeningly romantic couple doing exactly what he’d wanted to do with Yuuri, he was also confronted with the guy he was pretty sure Yuuri wouldn’t have turned down.
“Seriously, Chris, what’s going on with you?” he said. “You look like someone kicked a puppy right in front of you.”

“It’s…” Chris began, then stopped. He and Viktor were friends, sure, but they weren’t exactly confidants. Viktor never told him anything about his personal life, so Chris wasn’t sure if he should share his.

“Did someone break your heart?” Viktor asked idly, playing with an unused napkin. He began folding it into a flimsy paper fortune teller. He glanced up at Chris, and something in Chris’ face gave him pause. A smile broke out across his face, utterly delighted. “Wait, did they? Chris, are you in love?”

“Shut up,” Chris muttered, sinking deeper into his seat.

“You are! Who is it? Another skater? A reporter? It’s not Josef, is it?” Viktor paused, looking around the ice cream shop. “Wait, is it me?” he said his smile faltering a little. He recovered it quickly, sending Chris a sultry wink. “Why, Chris, you know all you had to do was ask-”

“It’s not you,” Chris said, glaring at his friend. Viktor’s smile became a little more genuine at that, which irritated Chris almost as much as the teasing. If Viktor asked, Chris would probably jump into bed with him without a second thought, and it was infuriating that Viktor knew it. “And it’s not funny, it’s awful.”

Nothing about Viktor’s expression was sympathetic. “I disagree, I think it’s very funny,” he said.

“Just because you’ve never had any lasting relationships,” Chris grumbled.

If he didn’t know any better, Chris would have said that Viktor flinched. But Viktor was always perfectly happy using people and discarding them, only giving his love to the ice, so of course Viktor would find Chris’ plight amusing. He would never be so stupid as to fall in love with a person. Especially not someone as perfect and apparently unattainable as Yuuri Katsuki.

“Mm, you’re right,” Viktor said, putting his finger on his lips like it was some great revelation. “It certainly gives me an advantage, doesn’t it?”

“It’s not like I asked for this,” Chris said with a sigh. “I think maybe if I could just screw him I could get it out of my system, but he doesn’t seem interested.”

“Do I know him? Maybe I could talk to him for you, play at being a wingman. That could be fun!”

Chris froze. He thought of the way Yuuri lit up when Chris mentioned Viktor, and the fact that there were clearly elements of Viktor’s skating in every single one of Yuuri’s programs. Viktor never took an interest in anyone, even when they were throwing themselves at him- so maybe if Viktor rejected Yuuri, Chris would have a better chance. And yet… some part of him didn’t want Viktor going anywhere near Yuuri. He could compete with the idea of Viktor- God knows he’d done it before- but if Viktor actually took an interest in Yuuri?

Ridiculous. Viktor wouldn’t do that, not to himself, and not to Chris.

“Um,” he said. “It’s… Yuuri Katsuki.”

Viktor hummed, his face blank. “Which one is he?”

Chris raised his eyebrows. “The Japanese skater?” he said. How could Viktor not even know who Yuuri was? “He won gold at Four Continents this year- you really don’t know who he is?”
Arrogant bastard didn’t even pay attention to his own competition. Chris was sure that in a year or
two, provided Yuuri skated a clean program, he could beat both Chris and Viktor- and yet Viktor
hadn’t even heard his name.

Viktor shrugged. “Doesn’t ring a bell,” he said nonchalantly. “So he’s good?”

“Yes and no,” Chris said honestly. He thought of Yuuri’s face in the kiss and cry today and
winced. “Inconsistent, mostly. When he’s on, though, he could give the both of us a run for our
money.”

“Attractive?” Viktor fished his phone out of his pocket, and started typing into the search bar.

“Extremely,” Chris said. Attractive didn’t even cover it. Objectively, he knew there were better-
looking people in the world. But when Yuuri was in the room, the brightness of his soul was too
much to look away from.

God, this was getting pathetic.

Viktor frowned at his phone. Chris heard the music from Yuuri’s short program, and swallowed.
Viktor was just playing at being a wingman. That was all. If Chris asked him to back off, he would,
no harm done.

“His jumping technique is terrible,” Viktor commented. “I’m surprised he didn’t injure himself more
seriously on that triple flip. I’m guessing he hasn’t made it through to the free skate?” Chris shook
his head silently. “This is the guy you think could beat both of us?” Viktor asked, raising his
eyebrows.

“Watch his free skate at Four Continents,” Chris blurted. It felt even more invasive than before to
have Viktor Nikiforov looking down on Yuuri for a fumbled short program. Yuuri deserved better
than that.

His own phone chimed just as Yuuri’s free skate music started playing. He glanced at it and winced-
Josef was not happy that he’d disappeared.

“I have to go,” he said, getting to his feet. He tossed his mostly melted ice cream cone in the trash
and wiped his hand off as best he could. “See you on the ice, Nikiforov.”

Viktor nodded at him absently, eyes still fixed on his phone. Chris waited a second longer, a shiver
of trepidation chilling him more than the ice cream had. Eventually, he forced himself to leave, and
not glance back at Viktor still watching Yuuri skate with narrowed eyes.

The summer came and went, and the new season began.

A new season, a new Christophe Giacometti, and a new determination. Last year at Worlds, he
learned a lesson: if he was going to be pathetically into Yuuri Katsuki, he had to fight with
everything he had for him. If Yuuri was going to play hard-to-get, then Chris was just going to have
to try harder. His butt was too glorious to half ass anything anyway. Romance included.

So obviously, an intimate evening together in Paris was in order.

He took a deep breath, hoping to calm down the racing of his heart. It didn't help. He kept glancing
at the doors even though he knew it would be another minute or so before Yuuri arrived. He really
was pathetic. He was supposed to be good at seduction. Before Yuuri, all he had to do was bat his eyelashes and there would be a line of people begging to sleep with him. Now he was one of the people begging.

A minute went by, and he spotted Yuuri skulking around a crowd of fans walking toward the rink. He didn’t look relaxed, exactly, but not nearly as stressed as the last time Chris had seen him aside from posts on his friend Phichit’s Instagram. According to Phichit’s videos and copious selfies, Yuuri had his eye on the Final this year. He’d been seeded in the Trophée de France, and invited back to the NHK Trophy- and from what Chris had seen, his programs this year pushed to the limits of what Yuuri could do. It was going to be an interesting season.

“Yuuri!” he called.

As usual, Yuuri looked surprised that anyone had noticed him.

“Chris, hi!” Yuuri said, smiling at him. Chris’ heart literally skipped a beat. Pathetic. “Do you have more bad pick up lines for me?”

Chris shook his head. “Not this time,” he said seriously. He fell into step next to Yuuri, opened his mouth- and no sound came out at all. His throat was so dry he could barely breathe, let alone speak. He swallowed. “Yuuri- after the competition, do you want to go to dinner with me?”

Chris didn’t think he’d ever been this nervous in his life, not even at his first competition as a novice.

Yuuri raised his eyebrows in surprise. “O-oh!” he said, adorable as always, and completely oblivious to the nerves setting Chris’ heart on fire. “Okay!”

Okay?

Okay! He said okay! Chris thought he might have a heart attack from happiness.

“Great!” Chris said, unable to contain his grin. “I’ll pick you up in the hotel lobby tomorrow- around seven, maybe?”

They’d reached the rink, where both of their coaches were waiting for them, as well as Yuuri’s friend Phichit. Chris hadn’t even realized Phichit had been assigned to the Trophée, he’d been so focused on seeing Yuuri’s name on the list.

“Sounds good,” Yuuri said with a smile. He waved as he headed toward his coach. “Good luck!”

Chris waved back. As soon as Yuuri’s attention was elsewhere, he pulled out his phone, his hands shaking with giddy excitement.

He had a reservation to make.

Yuuri looked stunning.

He was always beautiful, to be fair. Chris had yet to see a bad picture of him, a bad angle, a bad expression- even while skating, a feat that not even he managed to achieve. But right now, sitting in a comfortable armchair in the hotel lobby, wearing a simple white button down with his hair slicked back and his glasses nowhere to be seen- his looks were truly lethal.
Chris straightened his cuffs, ruffled his hair, and approached with goddamn butterflies hopping around his stomach. “Come here often?” he drawled, sliding his hand along Yuuri’s shoulders. The cheap material of his shirt rasped under Chris’ fingers; he longed to rip it off Yuuri right there and then.

Yuuri rolled his eyes affectionately. “That’s barely even a line anymore,” he said, smiling. “Get a better one.”

Chris laughed and dropped his hand to the small of Yuuri’s back, guiding him forward. “Your wish is my command,” he said, smoldering at Yuuri through his eyelashes. “Ready to go?”

He hailed a taxi for them outside the hotel, a difficult task when he couldn’t keep his eyes off of Yuuri. Yuuri seemed surprisingly relaxed, considering he’d missed the podium today. He still had a slight chance of making the final, but not much of one. With how excited he’d been to finally make it only to fail, Chris had expected Yuuri to be a bit of a mess, not like this. Not teasing, smiling, happy.

Maybe… maybe Yuuri was just as excited about this date as Chris.

The restaurant wasn’t anything over the top, just a quiet place near the river with outdoor seating under a wisteria-laden trellis. The night air was brisk but not freezing, and the heaters made the air downright cozy as they settled into their seats.

Chris didn’t even glance at the menu before he ordered them an expensive bottle of cabernet sauvignon. Yuuri frowned at his menu as they waited for the wine, unfairly adorable in his confusion.

“I hate the roman alphabet,” he sighed. “English is fine, but as soon as it gets to other languages I’m totally lost. What does this say?”

He held his menu up. Chris took the opportunity to scoot his chair in and lean far closer than was necessary to read the large print. “Bouillabaisse,” he said smoothly, letting the French roll of his tongue in the sexiest way he knew how. “It’s a fish stew.”

“And this?”

“Quiche lorraine- ah, an egg tart with ham and cheese.”

Yuuri nodded in recognition. “What about this one?”

Chris looked Yuuri up and down and leaned in closer. “Coq au vin,” he drawled.

“Co- what?” Yuuri said, jerking away. “You’re making that up,” he accused. He sounded exasperated but fond, and Chris wanted to hear that tone from Yuuri for a second date, a third, a fourth, a fifth, in his bed and the shower and in public places where they might get caught.

"I'm not making anything up," he said seriously. "Their coq au vin is apparently very good- though not as good as mine."

"Chris-"

The waitress appeared with their wine halfway through Yuuri’s protest. She poured a tiny amount for Chris to taste- divine, of course, how could it not when it cost more than the meal would. Chris smiled at her, and she poured them both generous helpings and left them to peruse the menu further.
When he turned back to Yuuri, Yuuri had already downed an entire glass.

“What- Yuuri, you’re meant to sip it,” Chris said, amused. He poured another glass for him, even though it was downright criminal to gulp such a nice wine without savoring it. “This is France, they take their wine very seriously here.”

“Sorry,” Yuuri said guiltily, looking around. He sipped at his wine, still drinking a little more than he should. “I’m just… I guess I’m still a little frazzled, from the competition.” He leaned forward as if imparting a great big secret. “I already did a few shots in the hotel room, actually,” he said. This close, Chris could smell it- though Yuuri still seemed fairly sober, aside from the red blooming on his cheeks. “Just to deal with the nerves, you know?”

“You, were you nervous to have dinner with me?” Chris asked, delighted.

Yuuri glared at him. “Because I got fourth place,” he clarified. “I thought I was doing so well during the free skate- but I guess my best isn’t really good enough. Not to get to the final.”

“You still have a chance though, don’t you?” Chris asked, frowning. “You still have the NHK Trophy left.”

Yuuri waved a dismissive hand. “I’d have to win gold,” he said. “And with Cao Bin and Georgi Popovich there…” He sighed.

“You’re a beautiful skater, Yuuri,” Chris told him. “You’ll make it someday- though I can’t say I’ll let you win gold,” he added with a grin.

Yuuri shook his head. “I’ve never even made it past the short program at Worlds,” he said. “I think your gold medals are safe.”

Chris frowned. “Your score at Four Continents was higher than my score at Worlds last year,” he said. “You nearly beat me the year we competed in Junior Worlds together, and you won gold there two years later. What makes you think you can’t challenge me?”

Yuuri just shrugged, as if none of that meant anything. Chris stared at him incredulously- was still staring when the waitress came back to take their order.

“So,” Yuuri said once she left, in an obvious attempt to change the subject. “Do you want to learn some real Japanese phrases?”

The dinner went by quickly. Chris wasn’t sure if he was glad how fast the time passed them by, leading toward what he hoped would be an even more enjoyable night together in his hotel room- or if he wanted time to slow down, to be savored like an expensive bottle of wine. Yuuri taught him stock phrases in Japanese, refused to repeat anything Chris said in French- and to be fair, it was all filthy- and laughed when Chris imitated the Parisian accent versus the French he learned in grade school. They talked about living in foreign countries, how different the west was from Japan, how strange it was to know so many people from all over the world, the ways that English failed them both when they needed it most.

Chris insisted on paying, swiping the bill away from Yuuri before he could even begin reaching for it. “Thank you,” Yuuri said as they got to their feet. “Not just for paying- for dragging me out tonight.”

“Much more fun than moping, isn’t it?” Chris said with a gentle smile, guiding Yuuri out of the restaurant.
They didn’t hail a taxi immediately, instead opting to walk along the Seine for a little while in comfortable silence. The Eiffel Tower was lit up on the other bank; Yuuri paused to look at it, his eyes shining.

“It’s beautiful here,” he said.

*You’re beautiful,* Chris almost said. He kept the words to himself— they felt too much, too heavy for a first date. Too much like admitting his own vulnerability.

Instead he reached out, touched Yuuri’s cheek. Yuuri jumped a little, but didn’t pull away when Chris leaned in and stole a kiss.

He could taste the wine on Yuuri’s lips. He deepened the kiss with parted lips, trying to taste more, the warmth of Yuuri’s mouth, the smoothness of his tongue.

It took him a moment to realize that Yuuri wasn’t pulling away or resisting, but he wasn’t kissing him back either.

He swallowed and stepped away. Yuuri looked frozen, without any of the elation that was currently deflating in Chris’ chest. Where had he gone wrong? “Sorry,” he said, for lack of anything better to say. He wasn’t sorry— Yuuri was too amazing to regret kissing him— but he didn’t want Yuuri to look like that. Like his whole world had tilted on its axis, and not in a good way. “Was that too much?”

They’d been having such a good date. Kissing Yuuri in front of the Eiffel Tower seemed like a natural continuation of that, a romantic end to a romantic evening. How could it be too much?

Yuuri finally moved, smiling sheepishly. “Uh, yeah,” he said, rubbing the back of his neck. “Could you… not do that?”

Chris nodded, pretending that his heart wasn’t breaking. He didn’t understand. Yuuri seemed to be enjoying their date, and part of dating was kissing and maybe more— he didn’t understand.

“Whatever you want, cheri,” he said.

Yuuri started walking again. He looked relaxed again, which was even more confusing. Was he really that cruel, breaking hearts left and right without a care in the world? It made sense, Chris supposed. Yuuri was beautiful, and charming, and adorable— no doubt he was overwhelmed with options, of which Chris was just the latest.

“You know, you’re going to get yourself in trouble someday,” Yuuri said.

Chris swallowed. “Oh?” he asked weakly, trailing after Yuuri like a lost puppy. *Pathetic.*

“If you keep hitting on everything that moves, at some point, someone will get angry.”

Chris stumbled over his own feet.

Yuuri… thought he was just hitting on him? Like he took everyone on an intimate date and kissed them in the most romantic city in the world, just so he could get in their pants—

Wait.

Did Yuuri not realize this was a date?

Chris thought back over the night, struggling to figure out what happened. He’d asked Yuuri out to dinner, and Yuuri had said yes. He hadn’t said it was a date, because it should have been obvious-
just the two of them, a candlelit restaurant, surrounded by couples. But if Yuuri thought he was just flirting harmlessly, that he flirted with everyo like that, then…

He rubbed at his temple. His head hurt, to match the aching in his heart.

They rode back to the hotel in silence, Chris still puzzling over what Yuuri meant, Yuuri looking contemplatively out the taxi window. When they got out of the cab, Chris wondered if he should even walk Yuuri back to his hotel room like he’d been planning, or if he wanted to save himself more potential humiliation until he understood what exactly happened tonight.

“Thanks again,” Yuuri said as they walked into the lobby. He still looked beautiful, maybe even more so than before- his hair was slightly mussed from the breeze outside, and his cheeks flushed from the wine and the chill. “Tonight was fun, we should do it again sometime.”

Some of the despair lifted from Chris’ chest. “We should,” he said, stepping closer and putting his hand on Yuuri’s hip. The smile didn’t falter on Yuuri’s face. Would he pull away if Chris tried to kiss him again?

“Yuuri!”

“Hey Phichit!” Yuuri said, turning his smile to his friend.

Phichit looked them over, taking in Chris’ possessive hand on Yuuri’s hip, and Yuuri’s oblivious smile. “How was your date?” he asked, narrowing his eyes at Chris.

Yuuri coughed. “Date?” he sputtered. He glanced down at Chris’ hand, then stepped away with a blush. “Oh, no- Phichit, do you know Chris?”

“Hi,” Phichit said, his voice hard. He sized Chris up with a critical eye, his expression one part protective, one part jealous- if Chris was reading him right. Apparently he was having trouble with that today.

“It wasn’t a date,” Yuuri continued breezily. “That’s just how Chris is- handsy.”

Well.

That.

There that was.

He was glad Yuuri wasn’t looking at him. If he was, he’d have seen the heartbroken look of Chris’ face, and that would be so much more humiliating than it already was. At least this way, Yuuri never had to know just how much Chris had wanted this, and how much it hurt that Yuuri didn’t feel the same way.

Phichit was looking at him. His eyes softened- something about his expression said he knew exactly how Chris was feeling. “Uh-huh,” Phichit said, turning back to Yuuri. “Well, Celestino was looking for you, he wanted to make sure you have your boarding pass for the flight on Monday.”

Yuuri frowned. “I thought he had it still?” he said. “I’ll check in my bags, but-” he cut himself off, turning back to Chris with an apologetic smile. “Oh, I’d better get back to my room,” he told him. “I’ll see you at Worlds!”

Chris swallowed and did his best to smile. “The Final,” he corrected. “I’ll see you at the Final.”
Yuuri shook his head and waved. Chris watched helplessly as he and Phichit walked to the elevators, barely even noticing the pitying look Phichit sent his way.

Pathetic. There was no one else on earth as pathetic as him.

He sighed and made his way to the hotel bar. He needed to be drunk, now.

Chapter End Notes

First chapter: 4k. Manageable.
Second chapter: 6k. A little long, but okay.
Third chapter: 9k what the hell
Fourth chapter: ?????????? who knows probably like a billion

When will my brevity return from the war...

I could have sworn I saw something somewhere about which languages Chris speaks, but could not find it for the life of me, so I just had him speaking (Swiss) German, French, Italian, and English ¯\_(ツ)_/¯ Also, headcanon that he and his coach speak to each other in English because Josef is German, not Swiss, and can't understand Chris' Schweizerdeutsch to save his life.

Thanks everyone for reading!
Chapter Notes

This chapter is almost as long as all three previous chapters combined.

Please enjoy this 17k offering of Viktor Suffering™

See the end of the chapter for more notes

2.

The second Viktor stepped into the arena, all eyes were immediately on him.

He gritted his teeth into a smile and waved at the reporters hovering by the boards. One of them honest to God swooned- must be new, then- which might have amused Viktor on any other day. Or maybe not any other day- yesterday he would have felt just as mildly irritated at the sight of a grown man clinging to someone’s shoulder just because Viktor smiled. The day before that, too. Maybe the day before that- he wasn’t sure. The days were all a little hazy, lately. Must be the stress of the competition.

He laced up his skates and listened to Yakov’s scolding without paying it much mind. It was just white noise at this point, comfortingly grating. Yakov barely had to coach him these days anyway- their repartee was more like a tradition than a necessity.

The staring was even worse once he got on the ice. Even the other skaters were craning their necks to catch a glimpse of the defending world champion. Three consecutive wins wasn’t that unusual- but everyone here, including Yakov, expected him to get a fourth, hot off the heels of his fourth consecutive Grand Prix win. Viktor could feel their expectations building up on top of him until he was sure they would crack the ice with the added weight.

Damn. He shouldn’t have come to the public practice after all.

He shot the swooning reporter a grin and a wink, playing the part they expected him to play. The flirt, the natural genius, the sure bet. Expected, predictable, boring.

He did a quick lap of the rink, dodging the other skaters with ease and ignoring their stares with less success. He ended up back in front of Yakov, but didn’t wait for direction, just segued into one of Yakov’s devilish crossover exercises to warm up. They’d done this so many times that he knew without being told what he needed to work on before the short programs tomorrow- and besides, Yakov had Georgi to worry about. Georgi who was getting too invested in his emotive performance and consistently messing up the entry into his sit spin- but that was Yakov’s business, not Viktor’s.

He looked away from where Yakov was yelling at Georgi to work his spin again, and tapped his finger on his lips. He didn’t think he needed to run through his programs today. He knew them inside and out, including the changes he made- with Yakov’s grudging permission- specifically to shake things up for Worlds. No, he didn’t want to give away whatever surprises he had left in him- so fundamentals it was.

“Wondering how to best show off?”
Viktor turned with a smile, more genuine than the one he’d been wearing for the sake of the press. “Chris!” he said, clapping a hand on his friend’s shoulder. “I was wondering when you’d show up. Do you have a real challenge for me this time around?”

Chris grinned. “You won’t know what’s hit you,” he promised. His smile faltered a little as they fell into step next to each other, warming up side by side. Not like they used to, having their own private competitions before the main event even started, but friendly, gentle.

“Hey, I’m sorry I haven’t been around much lately,” Chris said abruptly, pitching his voice low enough that the reporters nearby couldn’t hear.

Viktor blinked. He doesn’t remember Chris not being around much- at least, not more than their differing schedules and competitive natures usually separated them. Sometimes, Viktor wondered if they were even really friends, or if they were actually just friendly competitors. “Well, you had that injury,” Viktor tried, wracking his brain.

It was Chris’ turn to be surprised. He frowned at Viktor. “That was last year,” he said. “And it didn’t even take me out of Worlds.”

“Oh.” Now that Viktor thought of it, he vaguely remembered seeing Chris around at Worlds last year. But… Chris was right, they hadn’t seen much of each other for a while. Not since the Sochi Olympics last season, and even then Chris had been a little more reserved than Viktor had expected. That’s right- he’d wondered whether Chris was alright back then, but apparently forgot about it as soon as Chris was out of sight.

“I suppose I’ve been pretty focused on my skating the past few seasons,” Viktor said, aiming for nonchalant. It didn’t ring exactly true. Looking back, he couldn’t really remember much skating either. The whole year was a bit of a blur, if he was completely honest. But it was good enough for Chris, who laughed and shook his head.

“Like that’s new,” he retorted. “No, it’s my fault. I got a little caught up in some personal stuff.”

Viktor raised an eyebrow. “Personal stuff?” he said, smiling a little. He did remember Chris’ little confession two years ago, about his crush on the Japanese skater. The first time he’d ever seen Chris get hung up on someone, actually, which was probably why he remembered it in such detail. “That wouldn’t have anything to do with Yuuri Katsuki, would it?”

Chris flinched, all traces of a smile vanishing from his face.

Oh, crap. Viktor really was a terrible friend. “Oh no, Chris I’m sorry,” he said hastily. “I’m guessing it didn’t go well.”

Chris recovered quickly, waving a hand like it was nothing. “Not really,” he said. “Mostly he just didn’t realize I’d asked him out. But, it’s okay, I’m over it. It was more than a year ago, I’ve got better things to do than pine. Better people, too,” he added with a wink.

Viktor laughed. At least Chris was his usual self, crush or no crush.

“You know,” Viktor said thoughtfully, remembering the rest of their conversation in the ice cream parlor. “The offer still stands. I could be your wingman, talk you up to Katsuki.”

Chris paused, looking at him was an expression that was almost uneasy. Viktor couldn’t think why- sure, he’d never been someone’s wingman before, and he didn’t exactly have a lot of experience with love, but he could at least try. He and Chris weren’t all that close- apparently- but Chris was still his friend. His only friend, really. He could do this for him.
“Ah, don’t worry about it,” Chris said, cheeky again. “Like I said, I’m over it. I’d much rather focus on kicking your ass this weekend.”

"Keep dreaming," Viktor said airily.

They separated soon after that, Chris heading over to his coach for direction, Viktor returning to his fundamentals practice. It was nice, though, to have someone he actually liked around. It didn’t make the burden of everyone’s expectations any lighter, but at least Chris was around to make hideously inappropriate jokes to distract from it.

Viktor glanced over at Chris surreptitiously as Chris started a mark through of his short program. He looked good, his performance well-honed and his techniques better than ever. He might even give Viktor a pretty good fight for gold this time around. Viktor felt a little thrill of excitement at the thought. Just a little thrill, an echo of the old days when he’d had to fight tooth and nail to even get a place on the podium- but then it was gone. Even if Chris finally beat him, he didn’t think it would feel the same- and the fact of the matter was, no matter how good Chris was this season, Viktor was always inevitably better.

He sighed and was about to turn back, start work on his spins, when he paused. Chris was still marking through his program, but he stopped and stumbled halfway through a step sequence, distracted by something on the other side of the rink. Viktor frowned and followed his gaze, trying to find- ah. That’s what had caught Chris’ eye.

Yuuri Katsuki was running through part of his program at the opposite end of the ice. It would have been hard to identify him from this distance if he was standing still- but Viktor would recognize that particular musicality in his movements anywhere. And apparently, so would Chris.

He looked back at Chris and saw that his friend wasn’t even pretending to practice anymore, staring openly at Katsuki until Josef shouted his name to catch his attention. Viktor heard him mumbling some excuse about Katsuki’s step sequences, which Josef seemed to buy- but Viktor didn’t.

Viktor hummed to himself and skated over to the boards, using the excuse of a water break to steal another glance at Katsuki. The other skater had started work on one of his jumps- quad toe, it looked like, but Katsuki kept under-rotating, falling, or both. It was too bad, really, that such an artistic skater was forced to add in an element that he clearly wasn’t comfortable with just to keep his technical score up to par with the rest of the field. Sometimes Viktor wished he’d never landed the quad flip all those years ago, spurring everyone else to suddenly add one, two, three quads to their rosters, and ignoring all the artistry that made this sport great.

Well. Not that it was any of his business if Katsuki landed a quad toe or not. He was more concerned with the yearning look on Chris’ face, and his expression when Viktor had mentioned Katsuki’s name. Clearly, he wasn’t as over his crush as he wanted Viktor to think.

Viktor contemplated it, chugging his water and absently watching Chris skate. He really had been a terrible friend to Chris lately. Maybe if he’d been more available, Chris would have felt comfortable telling him about what actually happened between him and Katsuki, maybe even when it actually happened.

Better late than never, though, right? He could still be Chris’ wingman- at least judge if Chris even had a chance with Katsuki. Katsuki struck him as a quiet, withdrawn kind of person, so maybe Chris’ brand of… enthusiasm wouldn’t mesh well with him. But that was something Viktor could find out for himself.

Yeah. Viktor could do that. Make up a little for being distant and forgetful. And it wasn’t like he
needed to work too hard at winning a gold medal this weekend.

He returned to his practice, keeping one eye on Chris and the other eye on Katsuki. Worlds was always such a circus that now would be his best chance of approaching Katsuki, but he didn’t want Chris to figure out what he was doing. If Chris wanted to pretend he was over Katsuki, then he wouldn’t take too kindly to Viktor meddling.

He ended up staying later at the public practice than he’d originally intended, waiting for his chance. Chris and most of the other skaters had already left by the time Katsuki’s coach said something to him and he left the ice. Viktor hurriedly left as well, slipping on his skate guards and heading for the locker room. He timed it perfectly: he and Katsuki reached the room at the exact same time.

He didn’t approach Katsuki right away, pretending to mind his business taking off his skates and putting his shoes back on. It was just the two of them in the locker room, a fact that Katsuki seemed determined to ignore. He didn’t once look up at Viktor.

Viktor waited until Katsuki was almost done taking his skates off before speaking up.

“Hey,” he said conversationally. His voice echoed a little bit against the metal lockers. “It’s Yuuri, right?”

Katsuki froze halfway through lacing up his sneakers. Slowly, he looked up, his face pale under the fluorescent lights. “Huh?” he said- or maybe he just breathed heavily in question.

“My rinkmate has the same name,” Viktor said conversationally, leaning back on his hands. “He’s in the junior division still, even though he acts like he’s already competing in seniors- Yuri Plisetsky. Do you know him?”

Nothing. Katsuki didn’t even breathe in response, just stared. It was a little uncomfortable, actually, the same weight of someone’s eyes on him with all the expectations and pressures he hated.

For Chris, Viktor reminded himself.

“Your step sequences looked pretty good out there,” Viktor continued. “You aren’t-”

“Yuuri?”

Katsuki squeaked at the sound of his coach calling his name, more of a response than Viktor had gotten out of him. He tied his shoes and jumped to his feet, eyes darting around the room nervously. He babbled something- Viktor was pretty sure it wasn’t in English- and bowed in Viktor’s general direction, before sprinting out of the room like it was on fire.

Huh.

Viktor stared at the empty space Katsuki left behind. He hadn’t had the chance to even mention Chris. Damn.

He sighed and finished packing his skate bag. He would have other opportunities, he supposed. If Katsuki was intimidated by him, it might make it harder to play wingman, but he would manage. Most of his gold medals came from being too stubborn to back down, after all. He’d just have to find another chance to talk to Katsuki.

That didn’t seem like too much of a chore.
It was comforting, and stifling, to compete in Russia. Here, he could speak in his native tongue- no matter how comfortable he was with English, it never felt right coming from his mouth, like he was speaking with someone else’s voice. Here, he didn’t have to worry about foreign customs and idiosyncrasies, about accidentally offending the host country, or maybe just getting another lecture from Yakov and the FFKK about representing Russia abroad.

But here, in his own language, his own culture, his home country- he never felt so lost as when he was competing in Russia.

“Viktor!” a reporter shouted, catching sight of him before he’d even set foot inside the lobby. Her call brought a wave of reporters over like a flock of birds- Sir David Attenborough would feel quite at home commenting on the migration patterns of the Russian Press.

Viktor gave them a smile and a wink over the edge of his sunglasses. He was tired- not from jet lag, since his flight had only been a few hours, more of an ache in his soul that never seemed to let up these days. But. This was the job.

He used to love this, he remembered as the press jockeyed for position, trying to get their perfect soundbite.

“How do you feel coming into this year’s final?” the first reporter asked. She was vaguely familiar, probably someone who’s name he should remember.

“Ready to win,” he said cheerfully.

That put the reporters in a tizzy, even though they knew- they knew- it was true. Viktor hadn’t missed gold in years. No reason for him to start now.

“The field is pretty deep this year,” someone else said. “There were a lot of surprises in the qualifiers- Christophe Giacometti unveiled his quad lutz, Jean-Jaques Leroy took gold in all his competitions- do you think one of them might break your streak?”

Viktor gave them a pleasant smile, specially crafted over the years to reveal nothing. “It’s a talented bunch,” he said, trying to think who else had made it to the Final. Chris, obviously, and whoever this Jen Jack guy was- he couldn’t think of anyone else. Had he even checked, or had he just assumed he’d gotten in and ignored the announcement altogether? “I always love a challenge, so I’m excited for them to give one.”

“What about the rumors that you’ll be retiring soon?” another reporter asked. Viktor didn’t recognize this one, which didn’t mean much, but from the way the other reporters glanced at her, he guessed she was new. The rest of the press had given up asking him that particular question years ago.

“And miss out on all the fun?” he quipped, smiling slyly at her. “Never.”

Some commotion near the door drew attention away from him for just a second. A few reporters peeled off the main group to harass another skater who had just arrived. Viktor took the opportunity to move his sunglasses to the top of his head, carefully arranging his bangs so that his forehead was still covered. He hardly needed the sunglasses now that the press had already seen him and trapped him in the lobby.

“Tell us about your theme this season,” somebody asked him.
He opened his mouth to answer, then paused, finally glimpsing the other skater who had just arrived.

Yuuri Katsuki.

He blinked in surprise. He really must have forgotten to check the lineup for the competition. He would have noticed that Katsuki was on the list, surely.

Katsuki was talking quietly with his much smaller group of reporters, his shoulders hunched and posture screaming that he didn’t want to be harassed like this. Viktor’s heart went out to him. Katsuki was probably more exhausted than Viktor after a much longer flight- but the press didn’t care about that. They probably preferred it, actually: a tired and irritated skater made for more interesting interviews and breaking news than the usual bland answers they were given.

“Viktor?”

He jumped a little. “Sorry,” he said, bringing his attention back to the circle of reporters watching his every move. “What was the question?”

“Your theme this season,” the reporter repeated. “You usually choose very narrative themes- is there a reason you chose something more personal this year?”

“Um,” Viktor said, stumbling a little over that. More personal?

What was his theme, again?

“No comment,” he said with a wink that hinted at more. If they thought his theme- whatever it was- was something personal, then that would give them enough ammunition for the entire competition, maybe the whole season. “And- I’m so sorry, if you’ll excuse me, I need to check in and put my luggage away.”

The reporters left him reluctantly, some still clinging to his side as he approached the front desk, taking pictures and asking questions he didn’t bother answering. He didn’t need to give his name at the front desk- the concierge already had his keycard ready with a professional smile.

He shot the remaining press a smile and a wave and headed over to the elevators. They finally left him alone, then- at least, they shuffled back to take pictures from a distance rather than unflattering closeups. He smothered his sigh of relief under another bland smile.

Poor Katsuki though. The reporters that Viktor had shed were reattaching themselves to the nearest target. Katsuki looked utterly overwhelmed by the attention, stammering and shrinking in on himself. Viktor almost considered going back over there, drawing some of the attention back onto himself- but before he could decide, Katsuki had already managed to brush the press aside and hurry over to the front desk with a harried expression.

The elevator dinged as the doors slid open. Viktor pushed his bag inside, hesitated, then pressed the button to keep the doors open. Katsuki looked like he needed a quick escape.

He was right. As soon as he was done talking with the concierge, Katsuki hurried into the elevator without even looking up, clutching his skate bag to his chest.

“What floor?” Viktor asked, letting the elevator doors close.

Katsuki jumped so violently his back hit the railing along the inside of the elevator. He stared wide-eyed at Viktor, apparently speechless.
Viktor raised his eyebrows. That was right- he’d forgotten, but Katsuki hadn’t been keen on talking to him at Worlds last year, either. It made disappointment churn in his stomach, but then again, plenty of the younger skaters avoided him as well. Either they resented him, or they were intimidated by him, it didn’t really matter.


Viktor liked the soft sound of his voice. He wasn’t sure he’d ever heard Katsuki speak.

He hit the button for Katsuki’s floor and his own. The elevator jolted, then began to move. They stood in silence, just the whirr of the fan and the rumble of the elevator to break it. Out of the corner of his eye, Viktor could see Katsuki staring at him, but any time he glanced over, Katsuki was looking resolutely forward.

The look in his eyes was fierce, determined. Viktor smiled to himself. It was a good look on him, much better than the awkward, shy expression he’d worn just a minute ago.

The elevator stopped at the third floor, the doors slid open, and Katsuki maneuvered his luggage out the door.

“Good luck in the competition,” Viktor said impulsively.

Katsuki paused. The elevator doors began to close, then opened again when Katsuki’s luggage blocked the way. He looked stunned- but there, so tiny Viktor almost didn’t catch it: a smile. “You too,” he mumbled, a blush lighting up his cheeks. At that, he hurried down the hall, hunching his shoulders to hide- unsuccessfully- the way the blush traveled all the way to his ears and the back of his neck.

The elevator doors closed again, leaving Viktor alone for the first time since this morning. Oddly, it wasn’t a relief. The silence with Katsuki in the elevator, as awkward as it had been, was more comfortable than the claustrophobic air around him now.

Viktor sighed and rubbed at his temples. Maybe Chris was around already, and would want to get a drink or two or five. The actual competition didn’t start until the day after tomorrow, so he couldn’t be opposed-

Oh. Crap. Chris.

Viktor was supposed to help Chris hook up with Katsuki, and he’d just missed another chance.

The elevator trundled to a stop on his floor. He walked down the hallway absently, only realizing when he reached the fire exit at the other end that he’d missed his room. He turned around, guilt still weighing down his steps.

He hadn’t even tried, this time around. He hadn’t had any qualifiers with Katsuki- he didn’t think- so that was a reasonable excuse, but he’d had the perfect opportunity to gauge Katsuki’s interest in Chris just now, and yet he’d completely forgot about his promise. He had to try harder, be a better friend. Chris deserved that much.

He opened the door to his room and shouldered his way in. Maybe trying could start now. He’d been going about playing wingman haphazardly, but that wasn’t really his style. He was always methodical in how he constructed his programs, weaving together story and technique and performance. He just had to do the same thing here.

First step, find out everything he could about Yuuri Katsuki.
He dumped his luggage by the closet and sat down on the bed, already pulling out his phone for some reconnaissance. Katsuki’s skating seemed like a good place to start.

He played the first video that came up- Katsuki’s free skate from the NHK Trophy this season. The commentary was in Japanese, so Viktor missed whatever his theme was- until he started skating, gentle and quiet. With every movement, his theme was as clear as if Katsuki had shouted it in every language known to man. Longing.

Viktor bit his lip, entranced. There were mistakes- Katsuki stepped out of a quad toe, popped a flip, wobbled on the landing of a combination jump. But it didn’t matter: every single movement Yuuri made, mistake or not, was as graceful as a wave gliding over polished sand, dynamic and breathtaking. He’d seen it before, the beauty in Katsuki’s skating that was wholly separate from any technical ability- but that was years ago, when Katsuki was still unsteady on his feet, unsure. Now, Yuuri was beginning to bloom into his full potential- and Viktor wanted to see more.

The program ended to a roar of approval from the crowd. The video cut off there, so Viktor hunted down the scores from the competition.

302.62. Not particularly close to Viktor’s personal best for his combined score, but close enough that if Yuuri skated cleanly, he could prove to be real competition. Close enough that if Yuuri skated like that in a competition without Viktor there, he would probably win. And if the program components score counted for more, like Viktor sometimes wished it would, Yuuri would grind everyone into the dust.

Viktor smiled, and searched for another video. The smile stayed on his face- until four seconds into the program, when Yuuri crashed spectacularly on what was meant to be a combination.

He glanced at the video description. This was the free skate from last year’s Worlds, just a few days after Viktor tried talking to Yuuri for the first time. It was like watching a different skater- the grace was still there, a dancer’s grace, but it was buried under all the technical issues in the performance. It wasn’t the worst program Viktor had ever seen, but when he looked up the scores from Worlds, Yuuri’s combined score was a full thirty points below what it had been at the NHK Trophy this year.

He moved on to the next video, the next, and the next. The pattern was visible almost immediately.

Yuuri would be amazing in smaller qualifiers, the lesser-known competitions, even occasionally Four Continents. His scores were usually high enough that they could rival the top skaters in the world- until he actually had to compete against them. As soon as he was in a competition with a deeper field, like Worlds or occasionally a Grand Prix qualifier, he choked. And technical scores that were already struggling would suddenly tank, leaving him off the podium where he clearly deserved to be. This was the first year he’d ever made it to the Final, a fact that was baffling until you looked at his scores at the bigger competitions.

Viktor set his phone down, chewing on his lip. Yuuri clearly had an issue with nerves, and with confidence. He seemed to be doing better this season, making it to the Final even though he’d been up against Chris at the Cup of China earlier- so Viktor might actually have to step up his game this competition.

Chris. Right. He wasn’t researching his competition, he was researching Yuuri to figure out how best to set him up with his friend. He did another search on his phone, this time opening up interviews and articles, absorbing the details of Yuuri’s life as well as his skating.

He was watching a video in Japanese with incomprehensible subtitles when his phone buzzed with a message from Yakov. He swiped the message away, frowning at the video. He had no idea what
was going on, but this was the first interview he’d seen where Yuuri actually looked comfortable, smiling and even laughing at the interviewer’s questions. Maybe it would be worth learning a little Japanese, just to see what could make Yuuri light up like that.

His phone buzzed again. He sighed and paused the video to read Yakov’s angry texts.

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Yakov
Remember to get to the rink early tomorrow to help Yura with his program

Yakov
You’d better not be awake still

Viktor rolled his eyes. Even if he had been asleep, Yakov’s texts would have woken him anyway. He fired back a quick reply and navigated back to YouTube to finish watching the interview. It only occurred to him after the video finished playing to check the time.

Huh. Maybe he should go to sleep. He’d already been watching videos of Yuuri for two hours, and he had promised to help his junior rinkmate tomorrow.

He bit his lip, and pressed play on the next suggested video. One more interview, and then he’d go to bed. Just one more.

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Viktor slid easily into his front splits, and breathed deeply through the stretch. Sometimes he felt his age, and it was never pleasant when it happened right before a performance.

He glanced up to as he settled further into his stretch. The green room was filled with press and the skaters not currently on the ice. The Italian kid was interviewing, his free skate already done, and judging from the cheers Cao Bin was taking to the ice. The obnoxious Canadian- JoJo, maybe? - was hovering nearby, looking like he wanted to talk to Viktor. He ignored him, glancing over at Chris instead- Chris was in a similar stretch as Viktor, shooting him grins every once in a while as they silently competed to see who could get a deeper split. Chris won, of course. He’d always been more flexible than Viktor.

Viktor craned his neck to look more fully around the room. He hadn’t seen Yuuri all day. Not that the skaters were obligated to warm up in the green room, but it was convenient and good for publicity. He wondered if Yuuri was okay.

More cheers- Cao Bin had just finished. Yuuri was up next, if Viktor remembered correctly. He eased out of his splits and got to his feet so he could follow Chris to the TV.

“Worried about your standings?” Viktor joked, reaching up to lean an elbow on Chris’ shoulder.

“More worried about yours, cheri,” Chris said lightly. He was frowning at the TV, though, the good humor slipping off more than it should in front of the press. Viktor angled his position so that neither of their faces were visible to the enterprising cameraman nearby.

“So kind of you,” he said. “And here I thought you were only concerned with a certain skater who may of may not be about to perform.”

Chris looked around, but nobody was close enough to hear them. His shoulder slumped a little
under Viktor’s elbow as he turned back to the TV. “He doesn’t look good,” he said quietly.

Viktor glanced at the screen and paused. The camera had just switched from covering Cao Bin in the kiss and cry, and now showed Yuuri skating uneasily around the rink. His face was pale and his eyes bloodshot- even during his worst performances, he’d never looked this bad.

Yuuri took position at center ice. His music started, and Viktor knew from the video of the NHK Trophy, his choreography started out with a gentle sweep of the arm and slow turn- except today, Yuuri faltered, wobbled, and paused doing something even a beginner could do.

“What’s wrong with him?” Viktor asked, shocked. He’d watched a video series titled “Yuuri Katsuki’s Worst Fails” in the interest of getting a balanced view- and yet those performances were at least musical and skilled beyond the mistakes. Yuuri had only just started this skate, and it already looked like he wanted to be anywhere else but on the ice.

He could feel Chris bristle at his tone, but he didn’t say anything. Yuuri was just entering his first jumping pass, and Viktor could see before he even took off that he was going to fall, badly. He winced in sympathy at the resulting crash.

The whole performance was like that. It was as if Yuuri had become an object trapped by inertia, unable to begin moving and unable to stop once he started. By the time the second half came around, he looked exhausted. Not from skating, but from life. It was as if there were weights holding him down and making every movement a challenge.

Viktor swallowed around the sudden tightness in his chest. There was no reason for the expression on Yuuri’s face to be familiar. He hadn’t failed in competition so badly since he was a Junior- so why did he understand that crushing despair and frustration so intimately?

He patted Chris on the shoulder and went back to warming up. He needed to focus on his own skating, not on the troubles of an up and coming competitor.

He glanced at the TV one more time. Yuuri was just finishing, his expression almost angry now. There were tears in his eyes- more visible as he approached the boards, barely waving at the cheering crowd. He shrugged off the comforting hand of his coach and wiped his eyes, but the tears kept coming. Whatever score he got, it would be worse than anyone else’s by far, that much was obvious.

Chris was still staring at the TV, even though he should be getting ready for his own skate after Jerm-Jude Whatshisface. He looked like he was about five seconds away from rushing into the kiss and cry with a blanket and a cup of tea. Viktor understood the impulse.

Viktor took a deep breath and started his hip flexor stretches. There was nothing either of them could do to comfort Yuuri Katsuki, not until after the competition was over. No use worrying about him until then.

He let himself get lost in his warm up routine, ignoring the cheers of the crowds with practiced ease. He was almost surprised when Yakov tapped him on the shoulder, indicating it was time to go.

He followed Yakov down the hall that led under the stands. People didn’t usually linger under here- but there was Yuuri, standing against the wall and staring into space with his coach nowhere in sight. Viktor paused, wondering if he should say something. But Yakov cleared his throat meaningfully, and Viktor let himself be pulled forward. When he glanced back, Yuuri was hurrying away, his shoulders hunched under whatever weight he was carrying.
“Keep focusing on your techniques,” Yakov told him firmly. “You don’t need to pull out all the stops to beat this batch of skaters. Keep your energy for Worlds, understand?”

Viktor hummed as he took his jacket off. Yuuri’s expression was haunting him- loss and sadness and anger. He suddenly remembered what his own theme was this year: abandonment. Something about the way Yuuri had skated clicked with that theme in a way that he hadn’t been able to this season. Maybe he could use that.

“Are you listening to me, Vitya?”

He waved a hand. “Always, Yakov,” he said with a smile. He sent a wink over to the kiss and cry, where Chris was waiting for his scores, and stepped onto the ice to the sound of the stadium exploding in cheers.

He did a quick lap of the ice, waving at the cheering crowd but turning his focus inward. He couldn’t just get by with only his technical scores, no matter what Yakov said about pacing himself. He had to do more, do better, surprise everyone.

He stood at center ice, bowing his head in wait for the music. The crowd hushed, waiting for whatever he gave them. They were ready for something amazing, something heartfelt and personal. He didn’t know if he had that to give them, but God help him, he was going to try.

With the first three notes of the orchestra, he lifted his head and began.

*Sento una voce che piange lontano
Anche tu, sei stato forse abbandonato?

Have you been abandoned as well?

He thought of Yuuri Katsuki, skating his heart out and falling, falling, falling. The loneliness of it, of trying and failing and having nobody there to catch him. He pressed that feeling into every step, every turn, every jump- crying out for someone, anyone to look back and see him.

*Stammi vicino, non te ne andare
Ho paura di perderti

I’m afraid of losing you…

He remembered Chris’ face, watching Yuuri skating from far away, too far. More loneliness, desperation, loss- still wishing, still hoping for one person to notice. That had been in Yuuri’s skate this year, too, even if Yuuri hadn’t managed to keep his feet, even if it wasn’t part of his theme. Reaching- always reaching. Always trying to be better, achieve more- notice me, see me. Not the person flying through the air, scoring deep lines in the ice with his skates- see the person behind the costumes, the hearts laid bare on the ice in the guise of an athletic competition.

The only thing he had left was loneliness.

As he finished the program, crossing his arms over his heart to keep from reaching out one more time- he didn’t know anymore if he was thinking of Yuuri, or himself.

Another gold medal. Another world record. Just another day.
He smirked at the cheering crowd and kissed his medal. They went wild, like they always did. Didn’t they ever get tired of cheering for him? Surely they wanted to see something new, something that wasn’t just a gold medal hanging on his neck year after year after year.

But no, they kept cheering. Would keep cheering, apparently, even when he used someone else’s emotions to fuel his own performance, even when he was cruel enough to springboard his own success off of someone else’s failure.

He wondered if Yuuri was watching, if he knew where Viktor had gotten the inspiration for today’s free skate. God, he was an asshole.

The medal ceremony, the press conference, the usual circus after the Grand Prix final- it all went by in a blur. He found himself trailing after Yakov and Yuri Plisetsky at some point, the music from his free skate playing somewhere nearby- or maybe it was just in his head on an endless loop. He shook his head to clear it and hurried to catch up to his rinkmate.

“Yuri,” he chided, forcing himself out of his own head. It was easy to fall back on critiquing the kid’s technique- Yuri was bursting with natural talent, but he had no idea how to use it properly. Viktor thought he remembered that feeling. “About your step sequence, it could have used more-”

“Whatever,” Yuri said, with his perfectly crafted teenage indifference. “I won, didn’t I?”

“Yura!” Yakov said. “Just because you won doesn’t mean you can dismiss what Vitya has to say-”

Viktor sighed and tried not to cover his ears. The combination of Yakov’s yells, Yuri’s attitude, and his stupid free skate music ringing in his ears was a little too much to handle. He glanced around for a distraction, then paused, surprised.

Yuuri Katsuki was staring at him.

Viktor swallowed, and pasted on a perfect smile. “Commemorative photo?” he offered. Maybe he could take the opportunity to actually talk to Yuuri for once. He couldn’t exactly apologize for using what he’d seen on Yuuri’s face in his performance- he couldn’t even explain to himself why it made him so guilty, let alone to someone else. But at least he’d have the chance to get to know Yuuri a little better, outside of whatever public persona Yuuri had in his interviews. He’d like that, actually. “Sure!”

Yuuri stared at him for a second longer, his face collapsing into a frown. He turned away without a word- not running awkwardly like he had the past few times Viktor had tried to talk to him, but avoiding him with purposeful intent.

Oh.

Viktor watched him walk away, feeling lost.

Obviously Yuuri wouldn’t want to be around him- he’d finished over a hundred points above Yuuri, there was no way that didn’t hurt. But it still felt like a personal dismissal. Like Yuuri didn’t want to talk to Viktor- not because of their scores, but because of Viktor himself.

It made sense. He’d never wanted to talk to Viktor any other time they’d been in the same room together. Viktor had thought it was because Yuuri was a fan, or at the very least just intimidated- but now, he wondered if he’d misread him. If really, Yuuri had just seen through the fake smile and the charm, to the nothingness underneath, and decided he wanted nothing to do with it.

Viktor didn’t blame him.
“Wow,” the other skater breathed. “Just… wow.”

Viktor smiled, perfectly charming and not at all uneasy at the attention. “I’m glad you think so,” he told the skater- Andy, maybe? He and his partner just won a GPF gold for the first time, and they were both more than a little tipsy in celebration. The guy was standing close enough that Viktor could smell it on his breath.

Andy- or was it Aaron?- opened his mouth, maybe to continue gushing over Viktor’s free skate, when his partner sidled up next to him and patted him on the cheek. “Shut up, dude,” she said affectionately. “You’re making the poor guy uncomfortable.” She reached out to shake Viktor’s hand. “I’m Tish, and this is Andrew. I swear he’s usually a normal guy. Mostly.”

“I’m sure he is.” Viktor wasn’t sure, actually, but then again, his definition of normal was a little skewed. Especially when everyone he met these days was a little bit star struck around him.

“You guys were amazing this weekend,” he continued, still smiling. His cheeks were starting to hurt. Had he even watched the pairs skating this time? He had no idea.

Tish preened anyway. “Thank you,” she said, linking her arm in Andrew’s. “Well, I was going ask this oaf to dance, but I might trade him in for a better model.” She smirked at Viktor as her parter rolled his eyes.

Viktor laughed. “Thanks, but I’ll pass,” he said. “Wouldn’t want to get in the way of your partnership. Besides, dancing seems like a bit of risk with a DJ this bad.”

It was true- as the night went on, the DJ seemed to be selecting songs at random, hardly any better than someone’s music library on shuffle. Some of the more adventurous junior skaters were dancing, but they were the only ones. The adults and older teenagers all hung back, sipping at their drinks and chatting stiffly with one another. Another year, another banquet.

Speaking of the junior skaters… Viktor glanced around the room, searching for the familiar ball of blonde Russian fury that he was meant to be keeping an eye on. Yakov was feeling queasy- from illness, or maybe just from dealing with his skaters all weekend- and charged Viktor with keeping little Yuri out of trouble. Viktor wasn’t really sure why he chose Viktor for the task. They both knew Viktor was more likely to egg Yuri on than calm him down. But. Well. He should at least try.

He caught sight of his rinkmate nearby, chatting with a FFKK representative. He looked distracted, constantly glancing over to a table off to the side, but he wasn’t exploding, so that was a win.

Viktor craned his next to see what Yuri was looking at. A table, littered with empty champagne flutes- oh.

Yuuri Katsuki. He seemed miserable, standing with his back to the room with a glass of champagne in his hand and his head bowed. Viktor had seen him come in with his coach, but now Celestino was nowhere in sight, leaving Yuuri all alone, looking lost.

“…Viktor?”

He jumped and turned back to the pairs skaters. “Sorry, what was that?”

Andrew looked nervous. “Can I get a selfie with you?”
“Sure!” Viktor chirped.

They arranged themselves so that Tish, at least a full head shorter than both of them, would still be in the frame. Andrew’s phone clicked, and he broke the pose to check the picture. “Awesome,” he said, grinning from ear to ear. He shot the smile at Viktor. “Thank you,” he said earnestly. “Man, our rinkmate’s going to be so jealous.”

“He might already have gotten a selfie,” Tish reminded him. “He’s around here somewhere, I saw him come in.”

“Your rinkmate?” Viktor asked politely. He couldn’t remember for the life of him where these two trained- they sounded American, and he couldn’t think of any other American skaters here this weekend.

“You know how people say that they’re so-and-so’s number one fan, but there’s no way to know for sure?” Tish said, her eyes sparkling with humor. “He’s your actual number one fan.”

Viktor hummed, glancing back over to Yuri. Yuri’s face was getting red as he glared at the representative- okay, time for some interference. He knew that look, and they had about five seconds before the whole skating world would be witness to Yuri’s temper.

“You probably already know him, he’s-”

“I’m so sorry, please excuse me,” Viktor interrupted hastily. “My rinkmate is about to have a meltdown, I have to go contain the explosion.” He hurried over to Yuri before hearing Tish and Andrew’s response. They would probably think he was an asshole now, but better that then Yuri ruining his relationship with the federation.

“Yura!” he said, wrapping an arm around the teenager’s slender shoulders. He nodded at the representative politely. “Can I have a word?”

Yuri transferred his glare from the middle-aged man in a cheap suit over to Viktor. Good. At least if he blew up at Viktor, Viktor could handle it. “Yeah you can have a word, how about f-”

“Excuse us,” Viktor told the representative cheerfully, forcibly guiding Yuri away.

“What are you doing, old man?” Yuri snapped, wriggling under Viktor’s arm. Viktor tightened his grip almost into a headlock. “Get off, fuckwad!”

“Yura!” Viktor gasped. “Such language! What would Yakov say if he heard you?”

Probably curse even harder. There was a reason Yuri’s mouth was getting fouler by the day, and it wasn’t his kindly grandfather’s influence.

“You’re such a fucking dick,” Yuri said, worming his way out of Viktor’s hold. Viktor let him. Yuri was pissed enough at him that he’d keep yelling at Viktor for a while, and they were far enough from the bulk of the crowd that Yuri could shout to his heart’s content.

“True,” Viktor said. “But I’m also supposed to keep an eye on you, so you’re stuck with me. It’ll be fun!”

“Fuck you.”

“Aww, I’m touched you feel so strongly!”
Yuri gave him a poisonous look. The funny thing was, Viktor knew behind the foul language and the glares, Yuri really did look up to him. He just had a tendency of expressing his affection with shouting rather than kind words.

“You really should try to be nicer to people,” Viktor told him. He wasn’t really pulling off the whole serious scolding thing, but he was trying. “You get grants from the federation to support your grandpa, right? They might not be too happy if you curse out their representative.”

Yuri looked away, still scowling.

“Stuff like banquets, they like to pretend they’re parties, but it’s still a professional event,” Viktor continued. “You’ll get a lot more support if you have some decorum.”

Yuri scoffed. He looked like he was about to say something, but he got caught looking at something nearby- the same place he’d been glancing at all evening, the table where Yuuri Katsuki had been standing. A dusting of pink appeared on his cheeks. “Yeah, well, tell that to this idiot,” he said, jerking his chin toward the corner. “You want me to have decorum when this asshole is getting wasted?”

Viktor glanced over. Sure enough, Yuuri was stumbling away from the wall he’d been clinging to the whole night, and making his way toward the crowd. His tie was dangling from his fingers, his glasses lying abandoned on the table with the more incriminating champagne glasses, his top buttons undone. He seemed to be wandering a little bit- but then his eyes met Viktor’s, and he stopped dead in his tracks.

Viktor swallowed. Hazy from the alcohol or not, Yuuri’s smoky amber eyes were piercing. Something in the air between them felt charged with electricity, more potent now than yesterday when Yuuri had run away. Something different, something exciting.

“You!” Yuuri shouted suddenly.

Viktor nearly jumped out of his skin. His jaw dropped open- then it fell even further when he realized that Yuuri wasn’t pointing at him, but at Yuri.

“Oh, shit,” Yuri said, the tiniest hint of guilt in his voice.

“What did you do this time, Yura?” Viktor said, fighting a smile. Yuuri had begun advancing on them in earnest, still pointing at Yuri with an unsteady finger.


“You are an angry, angry child,” Yuuri slurred. He was still pointing at Yuri, kept pointing until he was right in front of him and this finger pressed the tip of Yuri’s nose. “Boop,” he said, then burst out laughing.

“What the fuck?” Yuri snarled, swiping at his nose as if Yuuri’s finger was still there. “Get away from me, pig!”

Viktor felt himself grinning. Screw Yakov and his orders to keep Yuri out of trouble, this was far more entertaining. “C’mon, Yura, what did you do to him?” he asked, wrapping his arm around Yuri’s shoulders.

“The idiot was crying in the bathroom, okay?” Yuri snapped. “I just told him the truth about how pathetic he is.”
Yuuri stopped laughing abruptly, standing up straight and looking Yuri dead in the eye. “Little Yuri, I’m going to tell you a secret,” he said seriously. He put his hands on Yuri’s arms, holding him firmly in place. “I am very pathetic.”

From this close, Viktor could see that Yuuri’s eyes were red-rimmed, and not from the alcohol. Viktor ground his teeth against a sudden surge of protective anger. How could Yuri have seen someone like Yuuri crying in the bathroom, and yelled at him instead of comforting him? He knew Yuri well enough to appreciate his yelling as the gestures of affection they were- but Yuuri obviously didn’t.

Yuri gaped at Yuuri, obviously stymied by Yuuri actually agreeing with his insults. “What- you- shut up!”

The faint blush had returned to Yuri’s cheeks. Viktor’s anger dissipated immediately. Yuri was just a kid, after all- and it was obvious where all his vitriol was coming from, in this case. Gestures of affection indeed. Ah, to be young and infatuated.

“You’re practically pulling his pigtails on the playground,” Viktor mused thoughtfully, putting on an air of nonchalance despite the teenager writhing under his grip. Yuri was a few seconds away from resorting to biting, scratching, and licking to get out- plenty of time.

“Pigtails?” Yuuri said, stumbling a little with Yuri’s struggles. A slow grin spread across his face, lopsided and beautiful. He leaned forward, and with careful solemnity, he tugged on a clump of Yuri’s hair.

“Ow!” Yuri hissed, even though Yuuri barely pulled. He finally wrenched himself free of Viktor’s grip, glaring at both of them. “That’s it, asshole,” he spat. “I’ll fucking kick your ass, just try me.”

Viktor took half a step forward. Yuri was serious- he was just young and angry enough to get into a brawl with someone in the middle of a banquet, and just wild enough to inflict some real damage if he did. “Yuri-” he started.

“You want to fight?” Yuuri said, clearly amused. “Okay, okay, let’s go- dance battle, right now.”

Too late. Yuuri spun around in a pirouette, his form perfect and gorgeous despite his obvious inebriation. As he landed, he reached out and grabbed a full bottle of champagne apparently from nowhere, and began drinking straight from the bottle while performing a series of pas de bourrées into a petit jeté.

Holy shit.

Viktor fumbled in his breast pocket for his phone. He managed to get it out and open the camera app just as Yuuri began doing a series of full Italian fouettés while pouring champagne into his mouth- holy shit. Viktor had never been a fan of ballet, but he thought he could get on board if this was what it was all about.
Yuuri paused halfway through a turn and nearly fell over. “Whaaaat,” he said, stumbling forward. “Are you taking pictures?” He leaned forward and promptly made the most ridiculous face Viktor had ever seen at the camera.

“Yuuri!” Viktor laughed, snapping pictures as fast as his finger would allow. “What are you doing?” Yuuri contorted his face into another absurd expression, then another. “Hey- hey, look, I’m a model,” he said, shooting an exaggerated blue steel at the camera.

Viktor giggled—giggled, he never giggled, what the hell?—and imitated the strange crouching angles of a professional photographer. “Beautiful, beautiful, darling,” he said through his laughter. People were starting to take notice, point and stare, but he honestly couldn’t give a damn.

“Hey!”

Viktor jumped, and so did Yuuri. Right, the little tiff between the two Yuris. Viktor had forgotten about it from one second to the next, too caught up in Yuuri’s drunken but musical movements.

“You want to dance battle, then let’s battle,” Yuri snarled. He looked even more pissed than usual. “Or are you too much of a coward?”

“Yes! Dance battle!” Yuuri shouted cheerfully. He drank more of his champagne, then passed the bottle to Viktor. “Guard this with your life,” he said seriously, looking deeply into Viktor’s eyes.

Viktor swallowed, feeling stunned. As Yuuri walked away, he lifted the bottle to his lips and drank deeply to soothe the sudden burning in his chest. It didn’t help, just reminded him that Yuuri’s lips had been on that very surface just a moment ago. He set the nearly empty bottle on the ground instead.

“Dance battle!” Yuuri called again, gathering even more onlookers toward him.

The DJ seemed to hear him, or was just magical—either way, Viktor took back everything bad he’d said about the DJ earlier as he switched to a club song, and Yuuri immediately began breakdancing.

What the hell.

Viktor and Yuri both gaped as Yuuri launched himself from a six step into a goddamn jackhammer. It only took a few seconds for Yuri to recover and start dancing as well, doing his best to keep up with the driving beat of the music. Viktor laughed, feeling breathless, and pressed record on his camera. Like hell was he going to settle for just pictures of this.

“Go Yuuri!” someone called from the growing crowd—Chris, cheering along with some of the other skaters. A group of junior skaters started cheering as well, shouting triumphantly when Yuri managed to copy Yuuri’s skillful leap into the air and full body roll. It was impossible to tell who was cheering for whom, but it didn’t matter—in a matter of seconds, the entire atmosphere of the banquet had changed. God bless this terrible DJ and the degenerate influence of champagne.

“Amazing!” Viktor called as Yuuri slid to the floor and did several flares in a row. Yuri stumbled at the sight. Poor kid never had a chance against someone so fluid and musical—and obviously experienced.

“Viktor, what the hell?” Chris said, appearing next to him. Viktor kept the camera up and recording, inevitably pointing it more towards Yuuri than his competition. “How did this happen?”

Viktor let out another delighted laugh as he watched Yuuri dance. “I don’t know!” he said. “One
minute Yura was yelling as usual, and then—” He shrugged, grinning as Yuuri did more flares.

“Who would have thought Yuuri had it in him?” Chris said, laughing.

“Right? He seems so quiet in his interviews.”

“I thought he was!” Chris said, clearly thrilled at this new information— but there was a touch of pain there, hidden in his smile.

Viktor swallowed, his own smile faltering. Was it weird, that he’d spent so much time this weekend thinking about Yuuri? He’d said it was to help Chris— but even now that he’d had a chance to, he hadn’t done anything about that, just gotten lost in the whirlwind of Yuuri’s drunken antics.

It was just that… He hadn’t laughed this hard in a long time. Long enough that he couldn’t even remember laughing like this, enjoying himself this much. That wasn’t wrong, was it?

Cheers distracted him from his thoughts— Yuuri somersaulted into a handstand, his toes pointed expertly, and then rolled out of it as if it was nothing. Viktor cheered along with Chris, laughing as Yuuri stumbled into a bow. As soon as he stopped moving, the alcohol hit Yuuri like a train, making him sway on the spot. It was amazing how someone as drunk as that could be so balanced and poised in his dancing.

“You cheated!” Yuri sputtered as the song came to an end and transitioned into something else, a more latin beat.

Yuuri ignored him, bowing again and then tripping over his own feet. Viktor was close enough that he managed to catch him before he fell over completely.

“Oh!” Yuuri said dazedly. “Did I win?”

“You definitely won,” Viktor said, helping him to his feet. Yuuri didn’t stand up completely, opting instead to lean against Viktor heavily. He didn’t mind, honestly.

Yuuri turned to stare at him with wide, glassy eyes. “Viktor Nikiforov?” he said incredulously. “When did you get here?”

Viktor laughed, wrapping an arm around Yuuri’s waist. For support. Obviously. “I’ve been here the whole time, don’t you remember?” he said.

“Oh,” Yuuri said. His eyes widened even further. “Ohhh.” He laughed, bright and magnetic. Viktor could feel the echoing rumbles in his own chest, right where Yuuri was pressed up against him. “I’m gonna go dance now, Viktor!” he said, cheerful except for an odd light in his eyes. Something shockingly alluring.

Viktor swallowed and made himself drop his hand from Yuuri’s hip.

The music changed again, a modern flamenco incongruous with the club music that had been playing before. Yuuri didn’t seem to care, stepping into this new dance style with the same ease that he stepped into ballet and breakdancing. The strong, passionate movements suited him, seductive without even trying.

“Let’s dance!” Yuuri shouted, apparently to the room at large— but he turned his head, looking straight at Viktor with sultry, half-lidded eyes. His mouth moved, the words inaudible under the sounds of the crowd and the music, but Viktor could have sworn that Yuuri’s lips were caressing his name.
Nobody else was dancing—either mesmerized by Yuuri’s movements or scandalized by the scene. Yuuri began an complicated footwork sequence, completely unbothered or unaware that nobody had joined him. That wouldn’t do.

“Olé!” Viktor shouted, and stepped onto the dance floor in his best impersonation of a flamenco dancer. It was admittedly lacking—he had no idea what the specific steps were, not the way Yuuri apparently did. He improvised anyway—a stomp here, a shuffle step, a dramatic leap to the beat of Yuuri’s clapping. Yuuri hadn’t noticed him dancing yet, but it was okay—he pulled on his own tie to step into a lunge.

“What the hell are you doing, old man?” Yuri shouted from the sidelines.

Viktor laughed and spun inelegantly. He didn’t bother spotting, and nearly fell over as a result. “Dancing, little Yuri!” he called in response.

Nearby, Yuuri whipped around to stare at him in surprise. Then, a grin slowly spread across his face, like a sunrise breaking the horizon. “Viktor!” he said happily, using his momentum to continue his spin. He kept his eyes on Viktor as he turned, only taking them off to whip his head around to stare again.

Viktor grinned at him and imitated a move Yuuri had done earlier, a kind of jump dramatized by the Spanish flair of his wrists. He glanced back—Yuuri was doing the move as well, in echo, in tandem, in answer.

One step, and another, another—and they were facing each other. Yuuri with skill and technical knowledge, Viktor with only the beating of his heart to guide his feet, a reversal of their lives on the ice. They circled each other, the flamenco shifting to something else—a paso doble, a partner dance that was half a seduction, half a battle. Viktor took his suit jacket off his shoulders in a dramatic sweep, swinging it to the music. Yuuri smiled, dark and dangerous, and took the cue to become the bull, stamping his foot rhythmically—then gliding in so suddenly Viktor barely had a chance to snatch the jacket out of the way and put it back on.

A hand snaked around his hip and he stumbled. Yuuri caught him easily, guiding him into an even closer partner dance.

“Fancy meeting you here,” he murmured quietly as his hand slip up to press at the small of Viktor’s back.

Viktor choked on his own breath. He looked up to find Yuuri’s chocolate eyes mere inches away, the heat of his body enveloping Viktor in sizzling electricity.

“Oh,” Viktor said intelligently, following Yuuri’s lead automatically. His fingers clutched at the rumbled fabric of Yuuri’s shirt—when had he put his hand on Yuuri’s shoulder, anyway? Their free hands lifted and touched, Yuuri’s wrapping securely around Viktor’s in a perfect ballroom hold. Yuuri was smiling at him, leading the dance as if it was as natural as breathing. Viktor smiled back helplessly.

“Come here often?” Yuuri breathed in Viktor’s ear. In his voice, accented and drawling under the weight of the champagne, the stale pick up line sounded revolutionary, brand new and so effective Viktor thought, wildly, that Yuuri could tell him to do anything right now and he would do it, no questions asked.

“I can’t remember,” Viktor replied, pitching his voice low as Yuuri led him in a spin. He spun back and ended with his arm wrapped more securely around the back of Yuuri’s neck, much closer than
was appropriate for most ballrooms. “You’re the only thing I can think of.”

Yuuri’s mouth fell open a little. He licked his lips and smiled, a private smile for Viktor alone.

Viktor smiled back, then laughed as Yuuri turned them and guided Viktor into a basic lift. He carried Viktor’s weight easily, a deceptive strength in his lithe frame. He pulled out of the lift just as easily, and they danced, danced, danced. They were connected by more than just their hands - their breath, their heartbeats, the heat of their bodies, it was all joined together in a beautiful harmony. Viktor had never felt more present in a single moment than he did right now, with Yuuri’s eyes and hands on him, both of them laughing as the song came to an end.

Yuuri stepped forward and dropped Viktor into a dip, their faces inches apart. His thumb caressed the inside of Viktor’s thigh, and his other hand held Viktor’s head gently, almost lovingly.

Viktor looked up into Yuuri’s beautiful brown eyes, his laughter catching in his chest. He wanted to kiss him. He should kiss him. It would feel real, he was sure of it, real and connected, and so hot that it would melt all the ice in Viktor’s life. He never wanted anything as badly as he wanted this right now, in this moment.

“Yuuri!” someone shouted nearby.

The moment broke. Yuuri lifted Viktor back to his feet - and disappeared.

Viktor blinked, completely dazed. Someone else had grabbed Yuuri and was dancing with him, to more cheers and wolf-whistles from the gathered crowd. The crowd who had been there the whole time.

For the first time in his life, Viktor didn’t give a crap about the crowd, how surprised they were or whether they enjoyed his performance. He just wanted Yuuri to look at him again.

Yuuri spun in the arms of his new partner, still laughing. He was the picture of pure joy, a perfect contrast to how he’d looked at the beginning of the evening. His partner said something to him, and then he was stolen by someone else, passed between partners as the most coveted prize of the evening. Nobody here could care about gold medals when Yuuri was there, the physical embodiment of music.

Yuuri glanced over and met Viktor’s eyes. He smiled. Something eased in Viktor’s chest. There was the connection, between them and only them, even as Yuuri danced with someone else.

A hand closed around Viktor’s arm. “Viktor.”

He jumped. Chris’ grip was hard, even painful, as he glared at him.

Oh.

Shit.

“Chris?” Viktor said. It came out almost as a squeak.

“What the hell?” Chris hissed. Viktor had never seen him this angry, not even when Viktor beat him for gold by less than a point a few years ago. Viktor flinched. What the hell was he doing? He’d said he would be Chris’ wingman, not the competition for Yuuri’s affection.

Yuuri glanced over again and winked. Viktor’s heart stuttered, even with Chris fuming at him.
“I didn’t-” he began, dragging his attention back to his friend.

Chris dropped his arm and turned away. Viktor stayed where he was, watching helplessly as Chris stalked over to Yuuri and stole him from his current partner. But instead of dancing, Chris leaned in to whisper in Yuuri’s ear, grinning sharklike in Viktor’s direction.

Yuuri draped himself on Chris’ shoulder, nodding at whatever Chris was saying. He stood on tiptoe to whisper something in reply, lips brushing Chris’ cheek. Chris dropped his hand to rest on Yuuri’s hip, perilously close to groping Yuuri’s ass. He smirked at Viktor, let his hand slide the rest of the way down- and Yuuri laughed, joyful and free.

Fuck.

Viktor swallowed against the sudden lump in his throat.

Yuuri peeled away from Chris and headed over to the DJ. He tripped over nothing and leaned heavily against the table, once again looking infinitely drunker as soon as he stopped dancing. The DJ nodded and fiddled with his headphones and computer.

Yuuri turned back to Chris and gave him a thumbs up. “Dance off!” he shouted.

Nearby, Yuri flinched, looking like he thought Yuuri wanted a rematch and was terrified at the prospect. But Yuuri was looking at Chris and- And- Yuuri took off his pants.

Holy shit.

Dimly, Viktor registered that Chris was taking clothes off as well, stripping down to his underwear. That was about all he could process past the static in his brain as Yuuri began unbuttoning his shirt, revealing a sculpted torso over killer thighs. He glanced around and met Viktor’s eyes. His fingers stilled on the buttons; instead, he stumbled over to Viktor, nearly collapsing into his arms.

“Viktor!” he said happily. God, he was drunk. It hadn’t been as apparent when they’d been dancing together, but now, it was all too clear. Yuuri’s eyes were clouded, his cheeks bright red, his movements sloppy where he- where he- He rolled his hips against Viktor’s body, seductive and far too enticing for someone as wasted as he was. “My family owns a hot spring- you should come visit!”

Everyone was staring. Chris appeared next to him, apparently trying to catch Yuuri’s attention. Yuuri barely paid him any mind, and neither did Viktor, too caught up in Yuuri’s big brown eyes.

“If I win this dance off, will you be my coach?” Yuuri asked him- pleaded him. He threw his arms more tightly around Viktor’s torso, burying his face in Viktor’s chest. “Be my coach, Viktor!”

Yes, please, anything.

“Yes, please, anything.”

“Yuuri!” Chris crooned, tugging at Yuuri’s arm. Yuuri went reluctantly, dragging his hand down Viktor’s arm like it was physically painful to leave him. And it was. Viktor nearly reached out to grab him, to hold him there. Yuuri.

The music changed abruptly, and Yuuri lit up. He let Chris lead him to the edge of the crowd, where
there wasn’t actually that much space to dance, the floor broken up by a pole- Oh.

Yuuri grabbed the pole and rolled his body sensually against it.

Oh.

Viktor stared. He couldn’t look away if his life depended on it, even as his slacks became uncomfortably tight, even as Chris smirked triumphantly at him, even as Yuuri snarled something and stomped away. Yuuri was pole dancing. *Yuuri was pole dancing.*

Viktor spun and grabbed a glass of champagne from a stunned waiter. He drank the whole thing in one gulp, and grabbed another glass for good measure. It didn’t help. He turned back to watch Yuuri skillfully straddle the pole in a way that accented every gorgeous, perfect line of his body. He barely noticed when Chris joined him and they began to dance together, too caught up in the music of Yuuri’s body.

He was in so much trouble.

“Viktorrrr,” Yuuri purred. He slumped against Viktor even further, finger playing with the hem of Viktor’s shirt, his eyes bright and shining as he rested his head on Viktor’s shoulder. He giggled, bright and bubbling. “Viktor,” he said again, singsong now. “Viktor, Viktor, Vikutoruuuu…”

Viktor stumbled a little under the added weight, his head spinning with champagne and delicious drag of Yuuri’s fingers along his skin. He shivered. “C’mon, just a little further,” he said. “We’re almost there.” He hoped they were almost there. Yuuri hadn’t been particularly convincing when he slurred out his room number.

Just to get Yuuri to bed- to sleep! Nothing else. Chris was already angry enough with him- ah, but with Yuuri wrapped around him like this, he couldn’t think about Chris for very long. Yuuri had chosen him to cling to, after all.

“Almost where?” Yuuri said, turning his head so that his nose skimmed along the skin of Viktor’s neck. The position made it even harder to walk than before. Viktor could feel each puff of Yuuri’s breath, the hint of moisture as his lips brushed his skin. He tightened his grip around Yuuri’s waist and tried to keep walking.

“Ah- your- your room,” he stammered. His eyes closed despite himself. He forced them back open- almost there, almost there.

313, 315, 317-

“Aha!” Viktor said triumphantly, stopping in front of room 319. “Found it!”

“Mm, congratulations,” Yuuri mumbled into Viktor’s neck. “What d’you want’s a prize?”

Viktor wished he’d brought another bottle of champagne, because his throat was suddenly drier than Yakov’s sense of humor. Yuuri peered up at him through his glasses, all kinds of promises in his eyes.

He cleared his throat. “Key,” he blurted. Yuuri blinked, confused. He rushed to clarify. “Your room key- do you have it?”
Yuuri hummed and dropped his head more fully on Viktor’s shoulder. “Back pocket,” he said dreamily.

Viktor waited, but Yuuri didn’t move, just arched an expectant eyebrow at him. He tried to even out his breathing. Okay. He could do this. He slid his hand into Yuuri’s back pocket, trying desperately to ignore the fact that he was basically fondling Yuuri’s ass.

A fact that was considerably harder to ignore when Yuuri ground back on his hand and moaned like a goddamn pornstar.

“Mmm, so forward,” Yuuri panted, with an evil glint in his eye. “Shouldn’t you buy me dinner first?”

Viktor grabbed the keycard and snatched his hand away. His hand shook as he swiped the key through the slot. He had to try three times before the light turned green and he could open the door.

Yuuri took initiative suddenly, grabbing Viktor’s tie and leading him forward. Viktor stumbled over the threshold, but didn’t have a chance to catch his balance before Yuuri shoved him against the wall and kissed him.

Yuuri was kissing him.

His lips were sloppy and wet from all the champagne, but soft- so soft, so soft. Viktor kissed back helplessly, tilting his head to deepen the kiss, his eyes falling closed as he pulled Yuuri closer. Yuuri hummed in appreciation and opened his mouth, his tongue licking filthy circles around Viktor’s.

Yuuri pressed his body close, impossibly so, slotting his knee between Viktor’s legs. His thigh brushed against Viktor’s crotch, the faintest hint of pressure. Viktor whined into the kiss, shivering. He wasn’t hard, not fully, but it every swipe of Yuuri’s tongue and brush of Yuuri’s fingers drove him higher, closer, without ever touching him where it mattered.

“Viktor,” Yuuri whispered, pulling away from the kiss minutely. He tilted his head, tasting Viktor’s skin with lips, tongue, and teeth as he worked his way down Viktor’s jaw and the column of his throat. Viktor brought a hand up to cradle Yuuri’s head, knotting his fingers in Yuuri’s hair as he whimpered.

Fuck. What kind of devil was this? Yuuri was like a force of nature, or a creature only found in the darkest myths- unstoppable, irresistible, drowning Viktor with every touch.

Wait- this wasn’t- he didn’t- 

“Yuuri,” he gasped at the pleasure-pain of Yuuri biting into his neck. The hickey would be obvious to the whole world, bright and garish on the exposed skin of his throat- he didn’t care. Let them see, let them know that Yuuri chose him.

Yuuri hummed his approval, gasped into the fresh bite mark. He was hard against Viktor’s hip, grinding against his thigh like it was the only thing in the world that mattered. Viktor didn’t disagree.

Abruptly, Yuuri yanked on his tie again, sending him tripping over the plush carpet and toward the bed. Yuuri shoved him roughly onto the bed, leaping up to straddle him before Viktor could even figure out what happened. “Viktor,” Yuuri moaned. “I want you so bad.” He pushed Viktor down to lie on the pillows and covered him with his body. He kissed his way down Viktor’s chest, undoing buttons as he went. “Fuck me, please- please I need you, I need you to fuck me-”

“Shit,” Viktor swore, his hips pistoning without his permission, seeking friction, anything to soothe
the fire under his skin, the need burning in his gut. “Yuuri-”

No- shit, he wasn’t supposed to-

Wait-

“Wait,” he managed to gasp. Wait? Why wait, when Yuuri was running his hands down Viktor’s stomach and brushing over his cock- shit, stop.

This wasn’t why he’d brought Yuuri to his room. They shouldn’t do this, shouldn’t be kissing and grinding like teenagers- there was a reason why, a good reason, and he couldn’t remember it for the life of him.

“Yuuri, wait.”

Yuuri stopped and looked up at him through heavy-lidded eyes. “I’ve been waiting for you for years,” he said, low and husky.

“Fuck-” Viktor groaned. He couldn’t help it- he pulled Yuuri back up to kiss him, savoring the taste of him, the warmth. He wrapped a leg around Yuuri’s, and with a generous heave, flipped them both over so he could pin Yuuri to the bed.

Yuuri gasped, his eyes rolling back into his head. Viktor caught the gasp in his own mouth. Years, Yuuri said- well, Viktor’s been waiting for years, too, ever since that day in the ice cream parlor, watching Yuuri skate for the very first time-

The ice cream parlor- fuck.

Pulling away from Yuuri was the hardest thing he’d ever done in his life. He could barely move half an inch away, just enough space that they weren’t kissing anymore- and it took every inch of his resolve not to dive right back in, drowned in the sweet and filthy kisses, sweat and movement and a happiness he couldn’t remember ever feeling before.

“Stop, please,” he said, pressing his forehead into Yuuri’s. Yuuri’s fingers stilled where they were twisting in Viktor’s hair and tangling in his half-unbuttoned shirt.

Their bodies were pressed so close together that Viktor could feel Yuuri swallow. “You- you don’t want-” he whispered, then stopped himself. “O-okay, sorry-”

He sounded so lost, when just a second ago he’d been the picture of confidence, of sex. Viktor kissed him despite himself, trying to keep it soft and chaste. “It’s not that,” he said, barely managing to pull away before he deepened the kiss into something else entirely. “I want to- you have no idea how badly I want you, Yuuri- I just. We can’t, not like this.”

“Like what?” Yuuri mumbled, eyes darting down to Viktor’s lips.

Viktor nearly leaned back in, only just stopping himself. “You- you’re drunk,” he stammered. “I don’t want to take advantage-”

“You can take advantage of me,” Yuuri said quickly. “Please, I want you to-”

Viktor shook his head, moving a little further back. Yuuri looked so disappointed- fuck, he never wanted to see that look on Yuuri’s face again, but he had to. He had to pull away. “It’s not- it’s not
that simple,” he said. He thought of Chris, pining after Yuuri for years and getting only heartbreak in return. He couldn’t be the cause of more-

No, he could. If Yuuri was sober and asked him, he’d do anything. But right now, with champagne swimming in Yuuri’s eyes- no. They couldn’t start anything off a drunken fuck in an impersonal hotel room, and god Viktor wanted to start something. He wanted to see Yuuri skate and dance and smile every day, wanted to learn everything there was to know about him, everything he kept to himself in interviews.

“A date,” he blurted, then flushed at his own bluntness. “Tomorrow,” he continued, steeling himself. “Let me take you on a date tomorrow, a real one. We’ll- we’ll get lunch, and we can talk about this. Us. If you want this when you’re sober.”

Yuuri stared at him. For a moment, Viktor worried he would refuse- that he only wanted a one night fling, that the idea of dating someone as empty as Viktor was-

“Ohay,” Yuuri said, a smile spreading across his face, slow and blindingly bright. “Okay.”

Viktor let out the breath he didn’t know he’d been holding. “Okay,” he murmured.

He couldn’t help it. He leaned down and kissed Yuuri again, gentle and soft. Yuuri kissed back hesitantly, as if he hadn’t just been begging Viktor to fuck him.

“Stay?” Yuuri whispered as Viktor pulled away again. “Please.”

Viktor looked down at him. The alcohol and exertion of the evening was finally catching up to him, it seemed- his eyelids were drooping, his tongue tripping over itself even worse than before. “I can’t,” Viktor said regretfully. He’d never regretted anything this bad in his whole life. “I’m supposed to keep an eye on Yuri- he’s just a kid still, I can’t leave him alone all night-” He stopped, the disappointment in Yuuri’s eyes cutting him off. He pressed their foreheads together, closing his eyes and sharing Yuuri’s breath. “I’ll be back tomorrow, I swear,” he said. “We’ll go on that date- anything you want. I’ll be your coach, if you still want, or your boyfriend, or- anything for you. I promise.”

Yuuri didn’t say anything. Viktor waited a moment, then opened his eyes and pulled back again. Yuuri had fallen asleep between one breath and the next, at the start of Viktor’s confession or the end.

Viktor swallowed. He took a breath, and another, and began the difficult process of untangling himself from Yuuri without disturbing him. Yuuri only stirred once, when Viktor moved his hand out from beneath his shoulders, mumbling something that almost sounded like Viktor’s name, and rolling onto his side.

Viktor sat on the edge of the bed, watching Yuuri sleep. His chest felt like it was filled with the same champagne that loosened Yuuri’s inhibitions- bubbling and sharp, and oh so thrilling in it’s unfamiliarity. Everything felt so real right now. The scratchy duvet cover beneath his hand, the dry air blowing past his cheek, the sting of the love bite on his neck. Was the world always this sharp and in focus? He felt like he’d been living in a fog, and it was only this evening spent in Yuuri’s arms that the fog had begun to lift.

Yuuri was still wearing his glasses and his shoes. Viktor smiled, and got to work making him more comfortable. He removed his shoes carefully, then his glasses, set them aside where Yuuri would easily find them. He found an extra blanket to lay over him, a glass for water, a bottle of painkillers for the morning. There was a pad of paper and a pen on the bedside table- he grabbed them and
began to write.

Yuuri,
Call me when you wake up, and we’ll go on that date <3
-Viktor
+7 812 56 12

He put the note on the bedside table, right next to the water, where Yuuri couldn’t miss it. He hesitated, then brushed a tendril of hair out of Yuuri’s face. Yuuri looked so peaceful, enchanting even when he was dead asleep.

He sat there for a while longer, just watching Yuuri’s sleeping face, unable to force himself to move. He wanted- god how he wanted- to stay, to wrap himself around Yuuri, feel Yuuri’s heart beating under his head. It was almost impossible to stand up and walk away- but he managed it eventually.

Tomorrow. He’d see Yuuri tomorrow, and they could find out if this was real. If that connection between them was just a profound, just as life changing, in the light of day.

He already suspected that it was.

For the first time in ages, Viktor woke up before his alarm, bursting with energy. He fumbled for his phone, wincing when he nearly dropped it. In the next bed, Yuri grumbled in his sleep and turned over- in true teenage fashion, he probably wouldn’t wake up for another few hours. Which gave Viktor plenty of time to plan his date with Yuuri, and pass responsibility for his rinkmate back to their coach.

He turned his phone on, excitement making him dizzy. It was still early, but maybe Yuuri was just as excited about this as he was.

His phone powered on way too slowly. He jiggled his knee, ruffled at his hair, smoothed out the rumbled duvet. Finally, finally, the lock screen appeared, buzzing angrily at him when he tried to use his thumbprint. He groaned and mistyped his password three times before he got it right, and could at last navigate to WhatsApp to check for new messages.

Nothing.

Nothing?

Oh.

He set his phone aside and chewed on a fingernail. It was still early, and Yuuri had been way drunker than him- he was probably still asleep. He smiled at the thought- Yuuri had looked like an angel last night as he fell asleep, even with his mouth gaping open and body twisted strangely. Yeah, he needed his rest. Viktor would just have to be patient and wait for him to wake up.

Decided, he bounded to his feet- ignoring the slight throbbing of his head when he stood- and made his way to the bathroom to shower. He felt energized in a way that felt almost completely unfamiliar. The last time he’d felt this excited- he couldn’t even remember. Maybe his first gold medal at Worlds? It was all still a bit of a blur, and that was far too familiar. He hadn’t even realized everything had gotten so out of focus until last night, when everything came back in sharp detail.
He luxuriated in the warm water as memories flooded through him. Who would have thought two
days ago that Yuuri Katsuki, who finished last at the Grand Prix Final with a look of such despair on
his face, could become the life of the party? It was surprising- Yuuri was surprising, astonishing,
unexpected. And Viktor had always loved surprises.

As he stepped out of the shower, he caught sight of himself in the mirror and stopped. The look on
his face was as unfamiliar as the emotion that caused it- excitement, happiness, joie de vivre. It
contrasted heavily with the pallor he hadn’t noticed creeping over him, the dark circles under his
eyes, the thin but visible lines at the corners of his mouth. If it hadn’t been for the smile dancing in
his eyes, he would have said he looked like shit.

He ran a hand through his dripping hair. This wasn’t right- he was supposed to be carefree and wild,
wasn’t he? That’s what the press always said. How had they never mentioned the tired look in his
eyes, the tremor in his hands? How had they not noticed- how had Yakov not noticed- how had he?

His hand dropped to rest on his neck, where a hickey the size of a coin was clearly visible. There
was no way he’d be able to hide it, not even with a scarf- and some part of him didn’t want to.
Yakov would be angry, but... He pressed it and smiled at the pain that echoed when Yuuri gave it
to him. He wanted more of them, covering his neck so that the whole world could see them, and
lower where they would be a reminder just for him- a reminder that he was alive, that Yuuri wanted
him.

Maybe after their date.

He got dressed quickly and grabbed his phone again. Maybe Yuuri was awake now, maybe they
could go get coffee and talk, maybe they could go back to Yuuri’s room and make out-

No new messages.

He sat down on the edge of his bed. No messages through WhatsApp, nothing through Instagram or
Twitter or even Facebook. He even checked his regular text messages, his voicemail, his recent
calls- nothing. It was still early, it was, but he couldn’t help but feel disappointment weighing him
down.

His phone buzzed in his slack hand. He jumped and unlocked it eagerly- only for guilt to churn his
stomach until he felt like he was going to be sick.

Chris

Fuck you, asshole

Viktor pressed a hand over his eyes. Shit.

He fought the urge to defend himself. He could easily fight with Chris about it, remind him that he’d
claimed he was over Yuuri- but it was a weak argument. He’d known all too well that Chris wasn’t
over Yuuri, and Chris knew that he knew. And it was all very well to say that he hadn’t meant for
this to happen, that he’d sincerely wanted to help Chris and hadn’t expected to fall for Yuuri, but that
wouldn’t make Chris feel any better-

Wait.

Fall for Yuuri?

Was that the right phrase? He barely knew him, had only talked to him once or twice before last
night- and every time he had, Yuuri had just run away from him anyway. He couldn’t say that he’d fallen for Yuuri after a night of drunken flirtation, could he?

His hand fell from his face to rest in his lap. He looked down at his phone, where Chris’ message still accused him, but he didn’t really see it. He saw instead Yuuri’s smiling face, his dancing, his skating, the way he laughed. He saw himself watching video after video of Yuuri, not just his performances but his interviews and advertisements, even the ones in Japanese with no subtitles. He saw himself staring after Yuuri when he ran away, in the locker room, in the hotel, in the rink; he saw himself staring at the banquet, wanting to approach but not knowing how.

Oh.

Oh.

He’d fallen for Yuuri Katsuki. After only knowing him through interviews and competitions and one drunken night, he’d fallen for him.

He blinked, and Chris’ message swam back into focus. But even though guilt still curdled in his gut, excitement began to creep back in. He’d fallen for Yuuri, and Yuuri seemed to return the sentiment. Chris had a right to feel betrayed- but Yuuri had rejected him years ago. If this was a competition between Viktor and Chris, then Yuuri was the judges and the prize wrapped up in one delectable package- and he’d chosen Viktor. And maybe it wasn’t fair, but Viktor couldn’t help but feel happiness bubbling in his chest at the thought.

Chris would get over it. And Viktor would find some way to make it up to him.

He took a deep breath and closed the messaging app. It was ten o’clock, now. Late enough that Yuuri should be awake- or at least, if Viktor stopped by his room with some coffee, he couldn’t complain. Right?

Decided, he scribbled a note to the still-sleeping Yuri, texted Yakov that he was leaving Yuri to his own devices- a dangerous thing, but he was on a mission- and left the hotel room. He felt like he was buzzing as he strode down the hallway to the elevator, double checking his phone as he went.

Still no messages from Yuuri, but that was okay. He didn’t have to sit around and wait. It wasn’t his style, anyway.

The cafe around the corner from the hotel was overpriced, but at least they made good coffee. He shifted his weight anxiously as he waited in line, checking his phone compulsively every few seconds. The barista gave him a weird look when he reached the front of the line, though he had no idea why. Maybe it looked like he didn’t need any more coffee to wake him up.

“I’ll have a small cappuccino and a medium coconut milk latte,” he ordered cheerfully. Yuuri had mentioned in an interview that he couldn’t have dairy- Viktor was glad he remembered that, or it would have been awkward bringing him something he couldn’t drink.

His phone buzzed in his hand as he handed over his card. He nearly dropped both his phone and the credit card in his excitement.

Mila
Thought you might want some of these.
(7 images attached)
He swallowed his disappointment and opened the images. They were all pictures from the banquet last night- most of them of him dancing with Yuuri.

He barely recognized himself, he looked so happy. He flipped through the pictures, lingering on the one of Yuuri dipping him. Yuuri looked just as happy as he did; it soothed a buzz of anxiety he hadn’t noticed was building amidst the excitement. Yuuri liked him too, that much was obvious. He hadn’t imagined it, hadn’t gotten caught up in the dancing and the champagne.

He held the image of Yuuri’s grin in his mind as he collected the coffees and made his way back to the hotel. It helped steady him against the nerves that got worse and worse the closer he got to Yuuri’s room. Yuuri liked him. Yuuri was the one who had insisted that Viktor take him back to his room, who had kissed him like it was their last night on Earth, who had wanted him to stay. He knew that Yuuri had a lot of options- even not counting Chris, he’d seen the way that people stared at Yuuri at the banquet, the way he never lacked for a dance partner- but Yuuri had chosen him. It was going to be fine.

He stepped out of the elevator, coffees in hand and a smile on his face- and then stopped.

There was a housekeeping cart in front of Yuuri’s room.

He walked over slowly, double checking the numbers on the rooms. Room 319, he was sure of it- and there was the cart, with the door to the room propped open so that the room attendant could reach her supplies easily.

He cleared his throat awkwardly. “Excuse me?” he said, hating the waver in his voice.

The room attendant glanced up in surprise where she was emptying the trash. “Sorry, sir, did you just check in? The room will be ready in a few minutes.”

“No, I-” He stopped, swallowed. He could see the unmade bed from the doorway, the messy bedside table. And there, half-hidden under a fallen pillow, was his note telling Yuuri to call him. “The guest who’s staying in this room- do you know where he is?”

She frowned at him in confusion. “The young man who was here this weekend, you mean?” she asked. “He checked out three hours ago.”

“I- I see,” he said faintly. “Thank you.”

He turned and walked toward the elevator automatically. He heard the room attendant call something after him, but he couldn’t understand the words. It didn’t matter anyway.

Yuuri was gone.

He found himself in the hotel lobby, with no idea how he got there. He probably meant to go back to his room, to throw himself on his bed and not move for a few years at least- ah, but Yuri was probably still in there, and Viktor couldn’t really deal with his teenage angst right now. He couldn’t even deal with his own teenage angst right now- help Yakov, I like a boy and he doesn’t like me back. He snorted humorlessly, and collapsed into a nearby chair.

He got a few odd looks, but he ignored them. He looked ridiculous holding two cooling cups of coffee and staring into space, he knew he did- he just didn’t care.
Yuuri was gone.

He squeezed his eyes shut. Had he imagined it? Pretended the connection went two ways, and forced himself on someone who was tepid at best? It wouldn’t be the first time he’d ignored what someone else wanted and followed through on his own selfish desires. That was what got him all those gold medals, after all.

Yuuri had seemed interested, though, he hadn’t imagined that. Maybe alcohol had played a part in that attraction, and in the harsh light of day Yuuri regretted leading Viktor on like that. But wouldn’t he have said something about leaving early, then? When Viktor asked him on a date, he’d seemed excited, not like someone who was planning on catching a flight the next day.

Or he’d just forgotten- Viktor certainly understood that. He could have been drunk enough to forget when his flight was, and hungover enough not to call Viktor right away. Maybe he’d call as soon as his plane landed, and they could- they could- Well. They could at least talk.

He took an instinctive sip of his cappuccino and winced at the lukewarm milk, the ruined foam. He set the cup down on a nearby table and rubbed at his forehead. No, Yuuri hadn’t even touched the note with his number on it. He didn’t have Viktor’s number, and Viktor didn’t have his, and they wouldn’t see each other until Worlds at the earliest.

He should have stayed. It would have been taking advantage to have sex, even if Yuuri really wouldn’t have regretted it. But he should have stayed the night wrapped in Yuuri’s arms, so that he could at least have that. There would have been no confusion- if Yuuri didn’t want this, didn’t want him, he would have said so to Viktor’s face. And if he did want this as badly as Viktor, then there would be no reason for them not to be exchanging texts and phone calls and making plans to visit each other right this second.

He should have stayed.

He sighed and glanced up. It was strange to think that only a few days ago, he’d arrived in this very lobby and seen Yuuri hounded by reporters, heard Yuuri speak for the first time. It seemed impossible that he would have fallen so quickly, for someone who ran away from him at every opportunity unless he was drunk. Viktor didn’t do things like that. The press liked to paint him as a playboy, but he couldn’t remember the last time he was interested in someone enough to even sleep with them, let alone develop feelings for them.

Nearby, the elevator dinged, and opened to reveal Chris holding his bags with a scowl on his face. Viktor swallowed. “Chris!” he called, getting to his feet.

Chris ignored him. The only indication he’d heard Viktor was the deepening of his frown. He walked past as if Viktor was a particularly uninteresting bit of furniture.

“Chris-” Viktor said. He hurried after his friend- former friend?- and caught up with him just as he reached the revolving hotel door. He stepped in front of him, physically halting his progress, if not actually succeeding in catching his eye. “Chris, I’m sorry,” he pleaded. God, this was such a mess. “I’m so, so sorry- I didn’t mean to-”

“Stab me in the back?” Chris finished smoothly, giving him a smile so fake Viktor could taste plastic. “No, of course you didn’t- you’re Viktor Nikiforov, you can do anything you want with no consequences.”

Viktor chewed on the inside of his cheek, biting back his own instinctive anger. “It’s- that’s not fair
Chris, come on.” It wasn’t like the was the only person involved- but of course, for Chris to get mad at Yuuri, Yuuri would have to actually be around.

Chris snorted, and eyed him. “Is that your idea of a consolation prize?” he said, jerking his head at the cup of coffee in Viktor’s hand.

Viktor looked down, wide-eyed and flushing. He’d forgotten that he was still holding the coffee meant for Yuuri, his own cup left behind. “It’s for you,” he lied. “It’s gone cold now, but-”

Chris narrowed his eyes, his gaze darting from the cup to the hickey clearly visible on Viktor’s neck. “Bullshit,” he said. “You got that for Yuuri, didn’t you. You don’t have to rub it in. I know I lost, alright? First gold, then Yuuri- whatever. I’m over it.”

“I’m sorry,” Viktor said again, pitifully.

Chris shook his head and stepped around Viktor towards the door. He made it a few feet before he stopped and turned back to glare at Viktor, real anger in his eyes. “You know, if you had just talked to me first I would have been fine,” he said. “I would have been happy for you, even! But no, Viktor Nikiforov just takes what he wants, doesn’t he. You just had to lie to me, pretend to be my friend and then fuck Yuuri behind my back-”

Viktor flinched. He could feel hurt painted across his face, but couldn’t do anything to hide it. It was too raw.

Chris stopped mid-sentence, some of his anger draining from his eyes as he looked at Viktor. “What-” he started, then gaped. “He rejected you?”

Viktor didn’t answer, just looked away. Apparently that was enough to tell Chris what happened, because Chris burst into laughter.

It wasn’t a nice laugh, either. It was almost cruel- or maybe that was just how it felt, with an unfamiliar ache in his chest from Yuuri’s unexplained absence.

“Holy shit,” Chris said. “That is just too perfect. He rejected you, oh my god.”

“That’s not what happened,” Viktor snapped. He looked down at the cup of coffee in his hand and suddenly felt sick. This was not how he thought his day would go when he woke up this morning, or even when he woke up yesterday morning. He strode over to the nearest bin and tossed the useless cup of coffee in. It felt like giving up.

“It isn’t?” Chris said, still amused, still taking pleasure in Viktor’s pain. “So what did happen, hm?”

Viktor rubbed his forehead. He was starting to get a headache, a delayed hangover perhaps. “We- I took him back to his room- to sleep, I swear- and he- he kissed me.” Chris raised his eyebrows, glancing down at the bruise on Viktor’s neck. Viktor sighed. “We made out, happy?”

The flat look Chris gave him was answer enough.

“But I didn’t want to… to do anything, he was so drunk, so I gave him my number and told him to call,” Viktor continued. He sank down onto a nearby chair, hardly able to lift his head to check Chris’ expression.

“And he hasn’t called,” Chris guessed, sounding a little too pleased at the thought.

“He’s gone,” Viktor said quietly. “He checked out of the hotel, didn’t call, didn’t leave a note,
didn’t-” He cut himself off. He wasn’t about to start crying in the middle of the hotel lobby. It felt like a brick had settled in his stomach, like someone had taken a baseball bat and slammed it repeatedly into his chest- but he wasn’t going to cry. He wasn’t that pathetic. Not yet, anyway.

“Serves you right,” Chris muttered, but his tone gentled, not quite as cruel as it was just a moment ago. “I think that might be the first time you’ve ever lost anything. Of course it would be Yuuri, though.”

“What do you mean?” Viktor asked with a frown.

“What, you didn’t know?” Chris said, raising his eyebrows. “I thought everyone knew about Yuuri.”

“Know what?”

Chris smirked at him. “Our Yuuri is a bit of a Don Juan,” he said, a little smug. “Apparently, he’s already broken the hearts of all his rinkmates and half the senior division, and a few ISU officials too. Most of us think he rejects everyone because he’s been carrying a torch for you for years. Obviously not the case, if he rejected you too. He must really just be that cruel, or oblivious- maybe both, who knows.”

Viktor stared at him. It didn’t seem to fit, not with the quiet and nervous skater, not with his determined focus, not even with the whirlwind of excitement from the banquet. But he wouldn’t have thought Yuuri was capable of leaving someone in the lurch the way he’d done with Viktor- and Chris knew him better than he did.

“I don’t- ” he said, looking down at his hands. “No, he’s not cruel, I don’t believe that.” He tried to be firm, but his voice wavered. It certainly felt cruel to be left here with no way to contact Yuuri, no way of knowing if this was a rejection or a misunderstanding or- But it didn’t seem malicious, even now. If anything, it felt like a mercy, like Yuuri was letting him down as gently as he could. Their connection hadn’t been both ways after all, and Yuuri hadn’t wanted to hurt Viktor by telling him that up front.

“You…” Chris began, then cleared his throat. “You really like him, don’t you.”

“Obviously,” Viktor said, then blinked. “Wait- you thought I was fucking with you on purpose?”

Chris shrugged and sat down in the chair next to him. He wasn’t laughing at him anymore, or glaring, but the air between them still didn’t feel right. “A little bit,” he said. “I’ve never seen you like this about anything other than the ice, so yeah.”

Great. His only friend thought he was petty enough to chase after the guy he liked purely out of spite. No wonder Yuuri left, if that was what people thought he was capable of. “I’ve liked him since I first saw him skate,” Viktor said quietly.

Stupid, stupid, stupid. He should have figured out what was happening sooner, found some way to guard his heart. Then maybe they wouldn’t be in this mess.

“Makes sense,” Chris said with a sigh. “I knew I never should have told you about him. I don’t know anyone who’s met Yuuri and hasn’t fallen a little in love with him, I shouldn’t have assumed you would be different.”

Viktor hummed and stared morosely at the floor. This didn’t have to be the end of it, he knew. He could call Yuuri’s coach and beg him to put Yuuri on, he could book a flight to Detroit and confront Yuuri there, he could post a video online declaring his infatuation to the whole world- but none of
that was worth anything if Yuuri really didn’t like him. If Yuuri really was a heartbreaker who never looked back.

God, he should have stayed the night with Yuuri.

“Okay, that’s it,” Chris said suddenly, getting to his feet in one decisive movement. He held out a hand in front of Viktor’s face. “We’re finding a bar and getting drunk.”

Viktor took his hand hesitantly and let Chris pull him to his feet. “It’s not even noon,” he pointed out.

“Fine, we’ll get lunch, then we’re getting drunk,” Chris amended. “Point is, we’re drinking, and commiserating over impossible crushes, and heartbreakers named Yuuri Katsuki.”

Viktor didn’t smile, but his mouth twitched. Yeah, that sounded like a good way to spend the day. He followed Chris out the door, blinking at the blinding sunlight. That was the only reason he had to wipe tears from his eyes.

Chapter End Notes

-So, to keep a running tally, this is fic number two (2) featuring the banquet, with a third in the works.......

-Apparently I had a lot more to say about Chris than I previously thought. Seriously, I never had so many emotions about this overly sexual grown man before I started writing this, but here we are. Please keep in mind that yes, he's being a bit unfair to Viktor here, but it's mostly because he's sick of losing to him and this is just the latest in a long line

-This chapter is shockingly heavy for a comedic fic? Sorry? I have Emotions™ about Viktor and his depression and they couldn't be contained

EDIT: Crap, I just realized that I forgot to add what music they dance to.
-The song Yuuri and and Yuri breakdance to is this one (okay, but also, watch that music video and tell me that little kid with the mustache isn't 100% what Yuuri thinks about when he's dancing drunk)
-Viktor and Yuuri dance to this song
-aaaaaaaaaand the pole dancing song? yeah, they dance to this

Thank you all for reading and commenting and just generally being awesome human beings, I love you
Yuri

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

1.

Yuri absolutely, positively, fucking definitely, did not have a crush on Yuuri Katsuki.

Nope.

Fuck no.

He really, really didn’t.

First of all, the guy was pathetic. Really, really pathetic. Yuri didn’t even want to think about that pathetic asshole, aka The Pig, aka The Guy Who Stole My Name and Yes Mila I know Japanese Yuuri Is Older That’s Not The Point Is It Fuck Off, aka the bane of Yuri’s existence.

Who even cared what Viktor said at the banquet about pigtails and what the fuck ever, because seriously, what does that dickwad know anyway. So what if Yuri had been yelling at The Pig, he yelled at everyone, he yelled at inanimate objects on a daily basis- and yes, that included Viktor "Idiot Jerkface" Nikiforov. Yelling at Yuuri Katsuki didn’t make him special, it just meant it was a regular old day ending in y.

Not a crush.

Okay, so maybe Yuri was a little, teensy bit intrigued by The Pig’s programs. That was just because the guy fell a lot more than people who made it to the GPF usually did. Like, a lot. And maybe he watched a few videos after watching The Pig skate- just because he was curious how someone so incompetent made it this far. Whatever. It wasn’t like he got chills watching his dumb free program at the NHK trophy, or anything. Or like, big chills at least- little ones didn’t mean anything, thank you very much.

And maybe he saw The Pig ducking into a side corridor and somehow by pure coincidence ended up in the same side corridor and the same bathroom. Total coincidence. He definitely didn’t follow him in there, thinking maybe he could ask how the hell he made falling look so graceful and emotional. He didn’t desperately want to know how to skate like that, because as previously mentioned, the guy was pathetic and Yuri didn’t need advice from someone like that. So yeah, okay, maybe yelling about how pathetic The Pig was while The Pig was crying hadn’t been like, the nicest thing to do, and maybe he felt a little bad about it and confused and wondering why the fuck he’d done that, but it wasn’t because he fucking liked the guy. It was just that he was so pathetic that Yuri pitied him. A little. Not a lot.

Fuck whatever Viktor said, he wasn’t pulling pigtails. Even though Japanese Yuuri was actually a pig and if he had pigtails he deserved to have them pulled. That wasn’t the point.

The point was, it wasn’t a goddamn crush.

And- okay, fine, he did kind of enjoy dancing with The Pig. That wasn’t like, an admission of guilt, or anything. Yuri was a goddamn gold medalist, he enjoyed competing, and The Pig was surprisingly good at dancing even though he was fucking wasted. So yeah, sue him, he waited for a chance during the banquet to call for a rematch, because like hell was he going to let The Pig beat
him.

Of course, issuing a challenge was proving to be annoyingly difficult.

Nobody left The Pig alone for one goddamn second. He always had a fucking dance partner, including- especially- Viktor, who was fucking drooling over the guy. Gross. Asshole spent like an hour lecturing Yuri about decorum, and then started panting after some drunk idiot in the next second. It made Yuri feel a little sick, the way Viktor and The Pig danced together, looking blissfully, ridiculously happy- but not because he was jealous, or anything. That would be dumb.

He felt like someone kicked him in the stomach when he saw Viktor and The Pig leaving the banquet together, drunk and giggling, but not because he cared. He definitely didn’t care. What he did care about was whether he would find them fucking in the room he shared with Viktor, because hell no.

The banquet was winding down, though, especially now that the loud and obnoxious Pig was gone and everyone was unsure what to do from there. He left without a word to anyone else, trudging reluctantly back to his room. Viktor better be alone in there, he was just saying.

When he unlocked the door and pushed it open hesitantly, the room was empty.

His stomach churned with what was definitely relief, not jealousy. He didn’t give a shit that Viktor was no doubt screwing his brains out with The Pig. It just meant he could enjoy a nice long shower in peace. And when he came out of the shower and Viktor still wasn’t there, it meant he could lie in bed and watch some skating videos without Viktor complaining about the noise. And when he did that, and Viktor still wasn’t there, it meant he could go to sleep without having to listen to a symphony of Viktor’s snores.

Real fucking great.

He woke up feeling like shit.

No, shit was too generous. He wasn’t sure there was a word for how he felt in either Russian or English. Something to capture the twisting, ugly feeling in his chest and the throbbing in his head when he looked over and saw that Viktor wasn’t in his bed, and realized that asshole must have spent the night with The Pig.

He rolled over onto his back and glared at the ceiling. He didn’t care. He opposite-of-cared. He didn’t care so vehemently that it hurt, and that was why it felt like he’s swallowed a live snake that was trying to fight its way out of his throat.

He grabbed his phone and groaned. He had six text messages and three missed calls from Yakov. He probably wanted to nag him about his step sequences, again, even though junior nationals wasn’t until February so he could afford to take half a second without training, fuck off Yakov.

His phone rang while he stared at it. He narrowed his eyes at Yakov’s ugly picture, then sighed and answered the call. “What,” he said flatly.

“Are you just waking up?” Yakov said, just as bluntly. “The flight back to St. Petersburg leaves in three hours. I want you up and packed in half an hour or I’m leaving you in Sochi.”

“I’m a minor, you can’t leave me.”

“I’ll tell your grandfather what an ungrateful brat his grandson is.”
Yuri sat up angrily. “You wouldn’t dare.”

“I’ll be at your room in twenty-nine minutes.” Yakov hesitated, breathing noisily into the receiver. “Is Vitya with you?”

Yuri didn’t glance at the empty bed. “No,” he snapped. “He probably spent the night being gross with his new friend.”

“New f- Oh, Katsuki. But he and Celestino left this morning, and Vitya isn’t answering his phone—”

As if on cue, the door clicked and Viktor stumbled in, catching himself on the wall. “Yura!” he called, way too loud. “You’re finally awake!”

Yuri took a deep, fortifying breath. “He just walked in,” he told Yakov.

“Good,” Yakov grumbled. “Twenty-eight minutes, Yura.”

“Yeah, yeah,” Yuri muttered, hanging up without saying goodbye. He opened Instagram out of spite- it wasn’t like he had that much packing to do, anyway. Unlike Viktor, who had spread all his shit everywhere. “Yakov’s coming by in half an hour,” he told Viktor absently. “You should pack.”

He nearly fell over when a solid weight collapsed on his shoulders. He yelped and tried to squirm out of Viktor’s grip. What a goddamn freak. “What the fuck!” he sputtered, then coughed at the smell of Viktor’s breath. “Are you drunk?”

Viktor slid off him and onto the bed with an undignified bounce. “Who isn’t drunk these days?” he said, sing-song and nonsensical.

“Um, most people at noon on a Monday,” Yuri said, rolling his eyes. “What the fuck is wrong with you?”

Viktor propped himself up on his elbows. He looked even worse than Yuri felt- which actually made Yuri feel a little bit better. His eyes were bloodshot and his face was even more sickly white than usual. “You know, I asked myself that very same question,” Viktor told him seriously, then giggled.

“Yakov is going to kill you,” Yuri informed him, turning his attention back to Instagram. Nobody had posted pictures from the banquet last night, not even the attention whore Chris. Whatever, it wasn’t like he wanted to see pictures of The Pig dancing with other people- or in general. He had some pictures in his own camera roll, anyway.

Viktor giggled even harder, shaking the bed with the force of his laughter. Freak. “No he won’t!” he said. “I’m a living legend, can’t be a living legend without the living!”

“No, you’re a sad old man who’s ass I’m going to kick next season,” Yuri muttered.

Viktor’s laughter turned into a snort, into a gasp, into a sob? What the actual fuck. “I am sad, Yura,” he choked out.

Yuri looked up at him in disbelief. Viktor was crying. Actually crying, with ugly snotty and very real tears perilously close to Yuri’s shin. Yuri shifted his leg out of the splash zone. “What the fuck is happening.”

Viktor tended to take his clothes off when he got drunk, not curl onto someone else’s bed and start crying. Yuri hated that he spent so much time with Viktor that he knew that, and he hated that it was
his bed Viktor had chosen to change things up in. Seriously, fuck this guy.

“He doesn’t want me,” Viktor sobbed into the scratchy bedspread. Fucking pathetic-

Wait.

“The Pig?” Yuri said hesitantly. It didn’t seem possible, not since Viktor spent the night with the guy- but maybe, just maybe…

“You,” Viktor corrected snottily. “He’s not a pig, god Yura, why are you so awful-”

“Whatever,” Yuri said, brushing the comment aside. “I thought you stayed in his room last night.”

There was a growing wet patch beneath Viktor’s face. Yuri was just glad they were leaving soon, so he wouldn’t have to deal with Viktor’s disgusting fluids. “No,” Viktor said, his voice small like a little kid’s. “I came back here- but when I went to find him this morning, he was already gone, and he didn’t text me, he didn’t call- because he doesn’t- he doesn’t.”

Yuuri and Viktor weren’t together.

Yuri couldn’t help his smile. Not because The Pig wasn’t with Viktor, though, seriously- he was just happy that Viktor got rejected. Viktor deserved it after spending years lording over everyone else. He deserved to be knocked down a peg- or two pegs, once Yuri destroyed him at the GPF next year. Mostly happy that Viktor got rejected. Part of him was still really fucking annoyed that Viktor was trying to use him as his personal tissue.

“Sucks to be you,” Yuri said cheerfully, turning back to his phone.

When Yakov knocked on the door twenty minutes later, he looked surprised when Yuri opened the door. “What are you smiling about?” he grumbled, then looked past him towards the rest of the room. Yuri swore he saw an entire clump of hair fall out in a single second. “Viktor Fyodorovitch Nikiforov, are you drunk?”

Yuri kept smiling as he closed the door behind their coach.

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Yuri was bored. Seriously bored. That was what he would tell Mila if she ever found out. Which she wouldn’t, but this was his defense. He was bored, and he had a little bit of prize money left over to spend on whatever- and he needed inspiration, that was important too. Inspiration to grind his competition into the dirt. He was bored, he had some money, and he needed inspiration- oh, and a dartboard. He’d always wanted a dartboard made out of someone’s picture, like in the movies. It always looked super badass to get a bullseye right in someone’s actual eye. So. Bored, money, inspiration, dartboard. Those were his reasons, and he was sticking to them.

He obviously didn’t buy the Yuuri Katsuki poster so he could look at it. Why would he want to look at The Pig’s face on his wall all the time?

And in his camera roll, but that was different. Those pictures documented a past competition, and if Yuri wanted to win the next one he needed to study up.

Anyway, the Yuuri Katsuki poster, where he was reaching towards the sky with a look of pure yearning on his face - the ending pose from his 2014 free skate. The only reason it wasn’t currently covered in darts and holes from pinpoint accurate dart throws was that. Well. It was kind of a nice poster, that was all. Yuri hadn’t realized when he bought it, but it came on heavy poster paper with a
beautiful gloss on it, and he didn’t really want to ruin it. He hung it up using binder clips and thumbtacks in the wall so that he wouldn’t inadvertently damage it.

The poster arrived the same day as the Japanese magazine from last year with Yuuri on the cover. The magazine was just an impulse purchase, one of those recommended things when you add something to your cart, he hadn’t really thought about it. He didn’t even open the magazine when it arrived, really- he just flipped through quickly, maybe stopping to take in the pictures for a second before scoffing and tossing it aside.

He only cut out some of the pictures of The Pig in a cozy jumper grinning shyly at the camera. And he didn’t even put them on the wall, just left them loose- well, loose in the cover of his favorite book, just for convenience.

God, if Mila ever found out, he would die.

Viktor too, but Viktor was acting weird enough lately that Yuri didn’t worry as much about Viktor catching sight of the hidden picture at the back of his locker, not like he did with Mila. Yuri wasn’t sure that Viktor would even notice if Yuri started parading around wearing a chicken suit and singing Viktor’s favorite euro trash pop music at the top of his lungs.

Like now, for instance. Viktor was supposed to be working on his short program. Yuri had heard Yakov tell him that in between lecturing Yuri on emotional musicality or some other bullshit- and yet here they were, ten minutes later when Yakov was on a break, Yuri was hanging out by the boards, and Viktor was skating something that was definitely not his short program.

It was interesting, Yuri gave him that. It was annoyingly sexual which was definitely gross, but there was something about the choreography that was different than how Viktor usually skated. Yuri couldn’t say exactly what it was, which was… weird. The steps and turns, spins and jumps all looked typical of how Viktor usually choreographed his programs- but there was definitely something, some indefinable quality that made this half-finished program a little bit mesmerizing.

Until Viktor stopped halfway through a step sequence. He didn’t look like he’d reached the end of his choreography and was figuring out where to go from there- Yuri had watched him choreograph his programs for this season, and he knew that Viktor was more likely to improvise until he came up with a sequence that worked for him, not stand stock still and stare at the ice. This was Viktor just… stopping.

Yuri opened his mouth to shout something at him- at the very least he was taking up space on the ice that better, younger skaters could be using- but Viktor stirred before he said anything. He shook his head, moved a meter to the left, and started skating an entirely different routine.

Yuri gaped at him. This was new choreography as well, with that same indefinable quality that was bugging the hell out of Yuri, but this one was almost sickeningly sweet instead of sickeningly sexual. What the fuck was Viktor playing at? They still had half the season left, plus the entire summer to be coming up with new routines for next season.

Just as quickly as he started the new choreography, Viktor stopped, once again staring into space.

“Hey, old man!” Yuri shouted. “Shouldn’t you be worrying about the season we’re in?”

Viktor barely stirred. “Shouldn’t you be practicing your step sequences?” he said, smiling lazily at him.

Ugh. What a dick.
Yuri kicked the ice in his general direction, and turned away. He had better things to do than deal with an old has-been.

He picked up his phone and navigated aimlessly to YouTube. Not for anything in particular, though, seriously. He was just bored. And it wasn’t his fault that YouTube’s algorithms thought he’d want to watch Yuuri Katuski’s exhibition program from the Trophee this year.

He frowned as the video ended and the next one began to autoplay. He’d already watched all of these videos of The Pig, including the repeats from the same competitions. Shouldn’t there be new ones from Japanese nationals by now?

He glanced behind him, but Viktor was absorbed in starting and stopping two different pieces of choreography, and Mila and Georgi were both at off-ice conditioning right now. Nobody would see him actively searching The Pig’s name instead of letting YouTube take him where it may.

He still hunched his shoulders and triple checked that his headphones were fully plugged in before he searched.

He clicked the first video that came up. He regretted it two seconds into the video- wished he hadn’t checked at all, had just left The Pig alone, because this was the most painful four and a half minutes of his life.

Whatever had messed The Pig up at the final was clearly still bothering him, but times a million. Yuri had watched a lot of The Pig’s programs over the years- for research!- and this didn’t even look like him, aside from the costume and the bare bones of the choreography. This skater was worse than the dumbass juniors Yuri was currently forced to compete against, with absolutely zero of the charisma that drew Yuri into watching him skate in the first place. He spent more time lying on the ice than skating on it. It was almost like a novice skater was trying to skate one the program of a top ten internationally ranked skater, and doing just as badly as you would expect.

“What the fuck?” Yuri muttered. He navigated away from the video before the program was even over. He didn’t need to know what kind of abysmal score Katsuki had gotten- what he needed to know was what The Pig would do next.

He scoured online news sources, fan forums, even The Pig’s defunct social media- nothing. Nobody seemed to know what The Pig was planning on doing- but almost everyone seemed to think he was retiring.

Retiring?

Yuri ground his teeth. No way. No fucking way. The Pig was too much of a stubborn asshole to retire just because of one- okay, two- bad competitions. Wasn’t he? Yuri knew first hand how competitive The Pig was, and maybe he was annoying when he was drunk and cried in bathroom stalls but he was at least good, at the very least better than most of the senior division. Yuri would crush him in competition, obviously, but if The Pig retired then he would never know for sure and that was unacceptable.

He slammed his phone back down on the barrier and skated out to center ice in a flurry of snow. Fuck that guy. If he was going to retire before Yuri had a chance to whoop his ass, then whatever. Yuri had other competition out there, other people whose world records he could smash and rankings he could decimate. He was going to win gold at Junior Worlds this year- obviously- and if he did it without quads then Viktor would choreograph a program for him, and he would use it to destroy the entire senior division.
FUCK YURI KATSUKI, ANYWAY.

JUNIOR WORLDS WAS A FUCKING JOKE, BUT APPARENTLY YAKOV HADN’T GOTTEN THE MEMO.

“Yura! Are you listening to me?”

“Yeah, yeah,” Yuri lied. He’d been tuning Yakov out for the last two years, but whatever. Yakov just didn’t get it- maybe because he was ancient and his brain couldn’t handle the awesomeness that was Yuri Plisetsky. Yuri was going to win this weekend, and then he was going to have the most historic, record-breaking senior debut ever.

Yakov started talking again, lecturing about something or another. Yuri caught the words “hotel room” a couple of times- so maybe he wasn’t talking about Yuri’s skating? Whatever, he still didn’t care. He leaned against the handle of his luggage and pulled out his phone as Yakov headed out of sight- to the concierge, or something. It didn’t matter where, it was just nice to have a moment of quiet after the constant nagging.

“Hey Yuri!”

He glanced up to find one of the ladies singles skaters smiling at him. He’d competed at events with her before, probably. Lina- or was it Layla? He didn’t know, didn’t really care about that either.

“Hey,” he grunted, looking back down at his phone.

“I can’t believe it’s Worlds already,” she said breathlessly. “I was so sure I wouldn't make it, so it’s like a dream to be here- Oh! But you’ve been to Worlds a few times, haven’t you?”

“Junior Worlds,” he muttered. Next year, next year. He was going to kick everyone’s asses.

“Right, obviously,” Lira said. “You’re transferring to seniors next year, then? God, I can’t imagine-”

She kept talking, but he used the skills Yakov inadvertently taught him to tune her out. He didn’t remember ever having a conversation with her, so why the fuck did she think he wanted to listen to her gushing about nonsense? Ugh, maybe she was one of his creepy fans that stalked him all the time, that would be awkward. And even more annoying than this interaction already was.

He scrolled through Instagram, pretending he wasn’t disappointed that there weren’t any new videos of The Pig to watch, no images of him practicing. Fucking idiot, he really was retiring.

“-with me?”

He refreshed his Instagram feed, but the only thing that popped up was a selfie from that one Thai skater, the guy who sometimes posted pictures of Katsuki. No sign of The Pig in this picture, though. He grit his teeth and shoved his phone back in his pocket.

“Yuri?”

He jumped at the touch to his elbow. Oh, right, Lala. “Huh?”

She looked ridiculously nervous. It was stupid to get so nervous before a competition- it just messed you up during the programs, which was why Yuri made a point of never getting nervous.

“After the competition- do you want to get diner with me?” she asked, blushing furiously.
Yuri stared at her.

*What.*

“You want to go on a *date*?” he asked incredulously.

Her blush got even deeper. “Yes?” she said shakily.

Why the fuck- “You don’t even know me,” he said, stepping away.

She shifted her weight and twisted a strand of hair around her fingers. “I’d like to get to know you better,” she said shyly. “You’re such a wonderful skater, and you always look like you’re thinking of something amazing, and I just-“

Her hand was still at his elbow. He shrugged it off angrily and took another step back. “Well, I don’t want to get to know you,” he snapped. “This is a competition, okay, I’m here to *win*, not go on dates. So fuck off.”

“Yura, get your ass over here,” Yakov called. Thank God, intervention into this stupid conversation.

“Coming, coming,” Yuri said, grabbing his luggage. He glanced back at the girl, and froze.

She was *crying*.

What the actual fuck.

“Why would you say that?” she stammered through her tears. “Even if you don’t want to go, you don’t have to be such a *dick* about it.”

He blinked at her. He hadn’t been *trying* to make her cry, or anything- he was just telling the truth, was all. So why the fuck was she crying?

“Um,” he said. “Sorry, I guess.”

He turned abruptly and nearly sprinted toward Yakov. At least when he yelled at Yakov, Yakov just yelled right back. None of that crybaby shit that Yuri didn’t know how to deal with.

When he glanced back, the girl was gone.

He ground his teeth and followed Yakov into the elevator. Who cared if he made some chick cry? He made people cry all the time, that was almost his *thing*. Okay, maybe it wasn’t a super great thing, but the point was, this Lulu girl wasn’t special. So why thinking about it make him want to punch his own face?

“What did you do?” Yakov asked him, narrowing his eyes suspiciously.

“What?” Yuri asked, overly defensive. He didn’t meet Yakov’s eyes, but he could still see Yakov glaring at him in the reflection on the elevator doors. “Nothing. I didn’t do anything.”

“Uh huh,” Yakov said. “So Leia Carter was crying just because?”

Yuri pursed his lips. “Probably,” he hedged.

Yakov sighed, like he was carrying the whole world on his shoulders, and muttered something that sounded suspiciously like *teenagers*. “Your attitude is going to come back to bite you someday,” he said wearily. “Someday soon, too, if you don’t work to check it.”
Yuri snorted at him, and looked down at his hands. Stupid. He’d apologized, hadn’t he? Yakov didn’t know what he was talking about.

Yakov handed him his room key as the elevator doors opened. Thank god he’d gotten them separate rooms- it was a damn luxury to have a room to himself. Yuri let the door slam behind him, cutting off Yakov’s lecture about waking up at a reasonable hour the next day, finally giving him some peace and quiet.

Well, aside from the guilt still gnawing at his gut, and the pinging of his phone.

He tried to ignore the guilt and went for the phone instead. He wasn’t here to go on dates, for fuck’s sake, or even to make friends. It wasn’t like it was about Lisa in particularly- he’d have said the exact same thing to literally anyone if they’d asked him right then.

Two of the notifications were from some dumb puzzle game he’d downloaded and forgotten about- he promptly deleted the app. There were three text messages from Mila which he didn’t read, and a notification for an article that mentioned Yuuri Katsuki.

He’d set up the alerts for The Pig’s name because he was testing it out. Not to actually read articles about him. There weren’t many articles these days, anyway, since The Pig was clearly retiring soon. Asshole.

He opened the article, and sighed in irritation. It was just a dumb summary of the season so far, not anything actually relevant to right now. The article only mentioned The Pig in a single sentence, to say that he’d bombed out of Japanese Nationals and wouldn’t be attending Worlds this year. Which Yuri already knew, thank you very much.

God, what an idiot, retiring right now, without even trying to make a comeback. If The Pig was here- at Junior Worlds for some reason? No, at the senior level, and Yuri was competing there instead- then Yuri would give him a piece of his mind. An even bigger piece of his mind than he’d already given him at the Final.

Or.

Or.

Yuri would be in the lobby of the hotel at Worlds, and instead of Lulu coming up to him shy and nervous it would be The Pig. Yeah, that was perfect. Yuri would be super cool in a leather jacket, with all the press fawning over him because obviously, and The Pig would have to wait at the edges until he got the chance to approach.

Yura, I’m so sorry I’m such an idiot, he’d say, looking at Yuri through his thick eyelashes.

No, wait, that wasn’t right. There was more The Pig would say, definitely.

Yura, I’m so sorry I’m such an idiot for thinking of retiring, and for being so drunk at the banquet, and for turning Viktor into an even more pathetic asshole than he already is.

Better.

And Yuri wouldn’t hold it against him, because he was a good person. He’d shake The Pig’s hand and smile at him over the rim of his sunglasses- because obviously he’d be wearing sunglasses- which would make The Pig look all flustered and relieved.

You’re such an amazing skater, Yura, The Pig would say. I know we’re competitors, and it’s weird
because I’m older than you, but you’re so much better than me, so… would you teach me how to do a real quad salchow?

Yuri smiled and flopped down on the hotel bed. Yeah, that was exactly how it would go- if only he was in seniors this year instead of stupid Juniors. And if only The Idiot Pig wasn’t retiring.

He wouldn’t accept right away, of course. But eventually he would agree by putting his sunglasses back on and nodding coolly. And then Yuuri would step closer and put his hand on Yuri’s elbow- just like that Lupa chick had- and he’d look at Yuri through those eyelashes, and he’d whisper, Please go out with me, Yura.

And Yuri would meet his eyes, and it would be electric, and Yuuri would lean in to kiss him like he was the only thing in the world that mattered-

Wait.

Yuri bolted upright. His heart was pounding uncomfortably in his chest, and his palms were sweating. No, no, no, no- he did not just imagine kissing Yuuri Katsuki. He did not, definitely, was not a thing that happened. And it wasn’t why he had goosebumps and butterflies and all those stupid things you get when you have a crush on someone and imagine kissing them-

Fuck.

He did not have a crush on Yuuri Katsuki.

Everything always felt lonelier whenever he came back from Moscow. He’d spent three weeks with his Dedushka after Junior Worlds, but it was almost worse, staying for so long. Everything in St. Petersburg felt so weird, no matter how long he lived there. Mostly he just wished his Dedushka could be here too- he could get off the plane and get right into Dedushka’s battered old car instead of an expensive taxi, come home to some homemade pirozhki instead of Georgi’s awful singing and the smell of something burning.

“Oh, Yura, you’re back!” Georgi said, poking his head around the kitchen door. “I thought you were going to call for a ride.”

Yuri snorted. “Fat chance, loser.”

Georgi just sighed and ducked back into the kitchen to deal with whatever abomination he was making. It was ridiculous. Georgi was supposedly the adult keeping an eye on the teenager- who was more than capable of taking care of himself, thank you very much- but the flat went to shambles whenever Yuri was away. Pathetic. Yuri couldn’t wait until he had enough prize money to move into his own place.

He dragged his bag into his room and slammed the door. He didn’t bother unpacking- Dedushka did his laundry yesterday anyway, so he could live out of his suitcase for a while anyway- just plugged his phone in and went back to what he’d been doing ever since his plane touched down.

The video.

The notifications had exploded on his phone the second he turned it back on. At least ten different alerts for Yuuri Katsuki’s name, and seven text messages from Mila. It was disturbing that Mila knew to text him with the link to the video, accompanied by a dozen winking emojis spread over the rest of her texts. At least she didn’t know that he had push notifications set up for Yuuri, but still. It couldn’t be good.
He sighed and pressed play on the video for the fifth time. All thoughts of Mila immediately flew out of his head; all he could think of was Yuuri.

The Pig didn’t look good- he was pale and overweight, clearly off his training regimen. He downgraded some of the jumps, too, changing half the quads into triples, leaving off one of the triple loops on the combination jump- but it was… It was…

Yuuri couldn’t keep his eyes off him.

Not just because of the technical skill- which was impressive, to say the least. Yuri had never seen The Pig land a quad salchow so cleanly, or look so elegant in his spin positions. It was more than that, though. There was something about The Pig’s- Yuuri’s- skating that was almost… magical. Graceful and musical and filled with so much longing that Yuri couldn’t help but feel it too.

Stay Close to Me. That was the title of the song. God knows he’d heard this music often enough, played over and over while Viktor choreographed and practiced to it. It never made Yuri feel like this before, though- like something warm and delicate was just beginning to flutter in his chest.

Yuuri clearly had no idea he was being filmed- his attention was elsewhere, toward the person whose shoulder came into view every once in a while, when the camera wobbled. It made it seem even more precious, like a quiet moment of happiness that the camera just happened to capture.

Yuuri struck the final pose, gasping for breath but alight with passion. That’s when the video shook, then cut off, like the person filming hadn’t wanted to be discovered. Yuri clicked the replay button immediately, his heart in his throat as he watched Yuuri skate, again, again, again.

Magical.

He followed Georgi to the rink in half a stupor, keeping his eyes half closed as he walked for as long as he possibly could. Fuck Yakov and his early mornings. They had plenty of time before the season started, he could afford to sleep in every once in a while, right? Especially when he stayed up way too late the night before, watching the video and reading every opinion piece he could find about it- he left more than a few angry comments on some of the articles dissing The Pig’s skill, too, and he’d been so caught up he’d almost forgotten to leave his Twitter rant in the numberoneyuurifan account instead of his official one. Almost.

But anyway. Yakov didn’t need to know about that. All that Yakov needed to know was that Yuri was tired. Oh god- it hit him as they were walking through the door that he didn’t have any programs yet. That meant that Yakov would be focusing on fundamentals today, which was even more annoying because Yuri already knew the fundamentals, thank you, he was the Junior World Champion he didn’t need to practice the basics. He could kick the entire senior division’s collective ass with his eyes still closed.

He’d sat down on a bench and pulled his skates out of his bag before he finally opened his eyes, and realized what was different today.

Viktor wasn’t here yet.

He frowned and abandoned his skates. As annoying as that bastard was, he was also the most dedicated skater Yuri knew- he was always there before anyone else, and he always stayed even later than Yakov. Yuri suspected that Viktor snuck into the rink on his free days as well, even though he could never prove it. But here they were, all of Yakov’s students here and heading onto the ice- but no Viktor.
Yuri glanced up and caught sight of Georgi just as he was stepping onto the ice. “Hey!” he said, launching to his feet and grabbing Georgi’s arm before he could skate away. “Where’s the asshole?”


“Ohh,” Georgi said in sudden understanding. And then- fucking hell, was Georgi getting misty-eyed? What a freak. “You don’t know?”

Yuri rolled his eyes. “Obviously not.”

Georgi sighed like that drama queen he was. “He’s chasing love,” he said dreamily.

What the fuck. “Ugh, whatever,” Yuri said, turning away. He should have known better than to ask Georgi. The guy was obsessed with true love, or whatever- it made Yuri want to strangle him daily, even more than Viktor.

And on that note…

“Oi, Mila!” he shouted, spotting the other annoyance in his life inside the locker room. God, why was he surrounded by so many idiots? “Where’s Viktor?”

She grinned slyly at him and wrapped an arm around his shoulders. “Oh, little Yuratchka, you’re not going to like the answer.”

He growled and shoved her away. “Don’t call me that,” he snapped. “What the fuck are you talking about?”

She waved a hand. “Don’t worry, you’ll find out. I’m just protecting you from future pain,” she said, as if she was being magnanimous when really she was being a fucking bitch.

“Goddamn it, just tell me,” Yuri said. She ignored him and walked away. He groaned and plopped back down on the bench. Fuck this noise. It wasn’t even eight am yet, and he was already about to kill someone.

His phone buzzed in his pocket. He yanked it out angrily- then froze, staring at the notification.

It was a news alert, the ones he’d set up to pop up when Yuuri Katsuki was mentioned on his favorite news and gossip sites. But this… No. No, there must be some kind of mistake. He thought this was a trustworthy website, but clearly it was wrong. There was no fucking way.

Viktor Nikiforov leaves figure skating to coach Japanese skater Yuuri Katsuki.

His hand was shaking. He noticed only vaguely when his screen started to blur, and he couldn’t read the incriminating words anymore.

His phone buzzed again with more notifications. More publications, picking up the same story. Viktor left Russia. Viktor wasn’t skating this season. Viktor was with Yuuri Katsuki.

“Why that fatso?” Yuri snarled. He squeezed his eyes shut, trying to control his breathing. “Did he forget his promise to me?”

I’ll give you the best senior debut ever. Except Viktor wasn’t here to choreograph for him, he was in Japan.

The video. It must have been the video. Viktor saw it, and thought- and thought what? That just
because The Pig was skating his program that it meant something? That he had a chance with the
guy who’d left him sobbing on Yuri’s bed after Sochi? That he could avoid the promise he’d made
to Yuri for some guy who’d rejected him?

No.

No fucking way.

This wasn’t happening. Yuri wasn’t going to let this happen. He had to- he had to do something.
Get Viktor away from Yuuri- get Viktor back to Russia where he wouldn’t be all over The Pig,
pretending to coach him just so he could get in his pants-

The thought made Yuri sick.

“Yakov!” he shrieked, loud enough everyone in the building would hear him. Let them. Everyone
should know what a gigantic, colossal idiot Viktor was. “Explain this to me!”

He stormed out of the locker room, but Yakov wasn’t around. His rinkmates were staring at him- he
didn’t care. Fuck them, he didn’t care. “Yakov!” he shouted, pretending there weren’t tears in his
eyes.

He had a plan before he left for Japan. It was a great plan. A solid plan. It mostly involved stealing
Viktor away before The Pig knew what hit him, but that was the genius of it- it was simple, effective,
and foolproof.

Apparently it wasn’t Viktor-proof though, and Yuri was forced to watch his plan get shredded to
pieces with three words.

“Onsen on Ice!”

Okay, so maybe it started going wrong before Viktor came up with that ridiculous plan. Maybe it
hadn’t occurred to Yuri that he would have trouble finding Viktor in the first place- it was an island,
how big could it be?- and that he would end up running into The Pig first. And he hadn’t expected
that The Pig would be gushing about how Viktor would be coaching him, and sound so excited
about it like Viktor had anything to offer to The Pig that he hadn’t already offered to Yuri.

He wasn’t proud that he kicked Yuuri Katsuki through a door. It definitely wasn’t part of the plan.

It was a tiny bit satisfying, though.

He probably could have rescued the plan from there, if he’d just insisted on talking to Viktor alone.
All he had to do was remind him that he was an idiot for thinking Yuuri was interested in him, and
Viktor could come home. Hell, if he wanted to be a coach so desperately, Yuri wouldn’t say no to
him- he might hate the guy, but he wasn’t a five time world champion for nothing.

It didn’t work out like that, because of course it didn’t, because the universe hated him. He didn’t get
Viktor alone until later that night, when The Pig went to help clean out Yuri’s room, and by then it
was already too late.

“It's nice here, isn't it Yurio?” Viktor asked him, sickly sweet and teasing.

“That’s not my name,” Yuri snapped. Everything was awful, and on top of it all, The Pig’s sister
gave Viktor even more teasing ammunition. He’d accept Yurio as a nickname over his damn dead
body.
“Ah, okay then, Yuratchka.”

“Fuck you.”

Viktor just smiled and took another bite of katsudon. He maneuvered the chopsticks like he was raised using them, looked comfortable sitting on the floor and wearing soft cotton robes. It was disgusting.

“You’re an idiot,” Yuri spit, slouching backwards. “Why don’t you just go back home, instead of chasing after a pig who’s obviously not interested?”

Viktor didn’t even flinch. He tilted his head, giving Yuri a smile that said nothing about what he was thinking. Yuri braced himself- that smile usually meant Viktor was about to eviscerate someone.

“Like you’re doing?” he said simply.

Yuri choked on air. He hadn’t braced himself enough- definitely hadn’t seen that coming. “What the fuck?” he snapped. “I’m not- I’m here for you, asshole, because you promised me a program!”

“Hmm,” Viktor said. “Are you really?”

“Yes,” Yuri said. “I’m not here for Yuuri- I’m not. I’m not pathetic like you.”

Viktor flicked his eyes at the door- checking The Pig wasn’t coming back, probably. Good. That meant Yuri touched a nerve.

“You’re the one who’s pretending to have some special bond with that fatso,” Yuri said, pressing a little harder. “What kind of idiot can’t figure out when he’s been rejected?”

Viktor winced, subtly enough that if Yuri hadn’t been paying attention he wouldn’t have seen. “He wants me here, unlike you,” he said lightly.

“Does he?” Yuri said. “Or is it the banquet all over again, and he’s gonna leave you again in the morning?”

That got a reaction. Viktor’s eyes snapped to his face, shocked and hurt. “What?” Viktor said, frowning. “How- how do you know about that?”

Yuri raised his eyebrows at him. “Um, you told me?” he said. “You got drunk in the middle of the day and started crying about how nobody would ever love you, like a big baby- remember?”

Viktor shifted backwards, staring into the distance as he struggled to remember. Yuri rolled his eyes. It figured that Viktor had been drunk enough to forget, while Yuri was cursed to remember forever what an ugly crier Viktor was. Gross.

Yuri turned his attention back to his food. He’d long since finished the- admittedly delicious- pork cutlet bowl, but there was still some weird pickled side dish he hadn’t tried, plus whatever Viktor had leftover in his bowl. Viktor didn’t even notice when he swiped the dish right out from under his nose.

He took a bite of cooling pork and sighed as the flavor washed over his tongue. He never ate this good back at home, that much was true. Not that he wanted to stay for the sake of the food, but he could kind of see, now, why The Pig had gotten so fat.

When he glanced up again, Viktor was still staring into space, like the secrets of the universe were
hidden in the tatami. He seemed lost- and it was an annoying look on him. Yuri sighed and rapped on the table to get his attention.

“Why are you even here?” he asked. “Do you really think you’ll get into The Pig’s pants by pretending to be his coach?”

Viktor blinked out of his stupor, transferred his stare over to Yuri as if he was suddenly speaking in tongues. “I’m not pretending anything,” he said, squinting at Yuri in confusion. “He asked me to be his coach, so here I am.”

Yuri wrinkled his nose, suddenly assaulted with the memory of Yuuri clinging to Viktor at the banquet. Disgusting. “You’re an even bigger idiot than I thought, then,” he snapped. “What kind of dumbass tries to sleep with someone by becoming a coach?”

“It’s not about-” Viktor cut himself off with a sigh, running a hand through his hair. “It’s not about what I want,” he said. “It’s about what he wants- what I can do to make him happy.” He eyed Yuri for a second, then smiled ruefully. “You’ll understand someday.”

Yuri scowled at the table. He wasn’t a child- he understood what was happening here, fuck you Viktor.

Wait. Hang on.

He looked up at Viktor quickly. Viktor wouldn’t- but then again, Yuri had never seen him like this before. Viktor still looked a little lost, but more secure in what he was saying, now, like he really believed this was all some selfless act. Fucker. Selfless would have been staying in Russia and coaching Yuri, not running away to Japan.

Yuri cleared his throat. “When I win,” he said, hearing his voice shake despite his best efforts. “When I win- are you actually going to come back to Russia? Or are you just fucking with me?”

Viktor sighed. “I’ll go back with you,” he said. “If you win. It’s not a foregone conclusion, Yura.”

Oh. Okay, good. Yuri relaxed slightly. Viktor was forgetful, but he wasn’t dishonest. If he said he would follow through on the terms of the competition, then he would.

Fine. Now all Yuri had to do was beat The Pig. How hard could that be?

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Yuri made a point of kicking one of Viktor’s many, many boxes as he left Viktor’s (temporary) room. He hated that the only room available to him was a dumb storage space that only opened into Viktor’s room- it meant that he was forced to spend even more time with that asshole. And the walls were thin enough that he could hear Viktor snoring at night. His worst goddamn nightmare.

He turned back to kick Viktor’s unopened box again. It was satisfying, if a little painful on his bare foot, but whatever. It was worth it. He wished he could be kicking Viktor, but of course the asshole was nowhere in sight.

Agape. What the actual fuck.

He seethed his way out of the room. Why the fuck did he even have to skate to some dumb theme anyway? When he listened to the music, Viktor had looked at him like it was supposed to mean something to him, when any idiot knew that competitions were won with technical scores, not artistry.
Whatever. He’d kick Agape’s ass.

“Oh, Yurio?”

Yuri paused in the hallway, turning his scowl onto Yuuri. The Pig didn’t even flinch, although he still looked a little uneasy, leaning against the doorframe.

“There’s a big soccer match on right now, so the dining hall is packed,” Yuuri says. “You might want to eat dinner up here tonight.”

“Great,” Yuri grumbled. “Who the fuck cares about football?”

Yuuri shrugged. “My dad,” he said ruefully. “The regulars.” He hesitated for a moment, looking at Yuri in a way that was… not uncomfortable, really. Just… weird.

Yuri scowled even harder.

“If you want—” Yuuri began, then hummed uncertainly.

“Spit it out,” Yuri snapped.

“Oh- um. The Makuhari Fantasy on Ice is available to stream, do you want to watch with me?”

Yuri stopped breathing. That was— He just—

Yuuri wanted to watch an ice show with him?

He narrowed his eyes. “Is Viktor watching too?” he asked suspiciously.

Yuuri shifted his weight, looking uncomfortable. “No,” he said in a small voice. “He said he wanted to explore Hasetsu a little more, and I told him, since the onsen in so crowded tonight it’s the perfect time.”

Right. Yuri was willing to bet Viktor had only told The Pig that so that he could play out some scheme to get him to play tour guide for him—so much the better that The Pig hadn’t realized, and turned him down.

“Besides, Viktor wouldn’t want to watch a dumb ice show,” Yuuri added, looking down at his feet.

Yuri’s chest felt weird. Like he’d just run up a dozen flights of stairs and couldn’t quite catch his breath, even though practice hadn’t been that hard today. Viktor was a slave driver, but he was nowhere near as bad as Yakov. “He usually performs in that ice show?” he said, accidentally turning it into a question at the end. Viktor loved ice shows. He was always performing in them and holding them and watching them.

A blush bloomed on Yuuri’s cheeks. “I know, I just meant… He couldn’t be in it this year, because of me, so I thought…” Yuuri trailed off, then shook himself. “Anyway. Do you want to watch?”

Yes. Yuri almost blurted it out, but caught himself at the last second.

“Who’s in it?” he asked instead, feigning disinterest. Well, he was disinterested— in the ice show itself. Not in sitting in Yuuri’s room for two hours, probably huddled together, maybe even touching—

He hoped he wasn’t blushing.
“Um, a lot of people,” Yuuri said. “Lambiel, Oda Nobunari, Christophe Giacometti, Sara Crispino—there’s a lot this year.”

Yuri cleared his throat and shrugged. “Sure, whatever,” he said.

Which was how he somehow ended up sitting on Yuuri Katsuki’s bed, a teriyaki bowl in his lap, with Yuuri frowning at his computer barely an inch away from him.

What the hell.

“That’s a better version,” Yuuri said, clicking through to a different stream. Yuri barely noticed.

Yuuri’s room was really warm—too warm, how could The Pig stand it? It was especially warm along Yuri’s left side, right where Yuuri’s arm kept threatening to brush his.

The stream started in a lurch of distorted audio and pixelated images, but it resolved into better quality almost immediately. Yuri squinted at the screen, trying to focus on the skaters—but Yuuri was making it difficult, leaning forward to watch just as intently as he was.

The announcer said something in Japanese, and the commentators picked up the thread of it to keep talking while the first skater took the ice—some nobody from Japan, it looked like.

“That’s Minami Kenjiro,” Yuuri translated. “They’re talking about how he won gold at Japanese nationals this year.”

Yuri whipped around to stare at him. So. That would be the guy who took the title Yuuri could have won if he hadn’t choked. Yuuri’s face was expressionless as he watched—but it couldn’t feel good, could it? Yuri shifted in place and turned his attention back to his food. Whatever. It wasn’t like he was the one who fucked up, so he didn’t care.

He toyed with his chopsticks, then with the soft cotton of his leggings, then with the blanket. They should open a window, or something, the air was so stuffy in here. Stuffy and warm and weird. He kept his eyes glued to the screen, avoiding looking at Yuuri even when he murmured some translation of the commentators, or some comment about a program. He could still see him, out of the corner of his eye, watching the ice show like it was riveting. Yuri couldn’t really agree—the real show was the play of emotions across Yuuri’s face as he watched.

He shifted his weight, trying to move away from where he’d been—completely unintentionally!—sliding toward Yuuri. It was the dip in the mattress, that was all. Yuuri weighed so much more than Yuri, so of course he would end up falling closer.

As he moved, something crinkled beneath the mattress. He paused, frowning, and leaned forward to peer under the mattress. There was something poking out between the box spring and the mattress—a piece of paper, it looked like. No, wait, several pieces of paper. He moved so that his weight wasn’t crushing them and pulled them out.

Yuuri glanced up. “What are you—”

Yuri stared.

It was a stack of posters. Of Viktor.

At least ten of them. Some of them looked like they were as old as Yuri, and some looked brand new.

“Hey!” Yuuri said, snatching the posters out of Yuri’s hands, his face bright red and his eyes wild.
“That’s- those are-”

Yuri couldn’t breathe. It was worse now than before, except now it wasn't good-weird, it was just bad-weird, painful, awful. Like someone was physically forcing air from his lungs. “I have to go,” he snapped, sliding off the bed. He didn’t know what expression he was wearing- he didn’t even know what he was feeling. Something bad, obviously, but why?

Yuuri grabbed his arm. “Yurio, wait-” Yuuri said.

He shook off his hold violently. He could still feel the touch even after Yuuri held up his hands in surrender.

“Please, don’t tell him,” Yuuri said. “Please. I don’t want him to think… Just. Don’t tell him?”

Yuri stared at him. Tell Viktor? Why the fuck would he tell Viktor that Yuuri was a fan? Why would he give that idiot even more ammunition for his dumbass fantasy? If Viktor knew that Yuuri was a fan… Yuri shuddered.

“Fine,” he grumbled. “I won’t tell him how pathetic you are. Fucking pig.”

Yuuri flinched at the insult, but the tension in his shoulders relaxed. Yuri ground his teeth and shouldered his way out of Yuuri’s room, scowling to himself.

So what if The Pig was a fan of Viktor? So was half the world- for no reason. Viktor was an idiot, a big whiny baby who got ridiculous ideas in his head and expected everyone around him to follow along with them, and he was going bald. Sure, he was a good skater, so whatever, Yuuri was allowed to admire Viktor’s skating. But why would he have so many goddamn posters?

“Yurio!”

Yuuri flinched at the door to Viktor’s room. Goddamn it, Viktor was back, and lounging on the sofa he’d dragged in here- like he was planning to stay in Japan long enough to need a sofa.

“What?” he snapped at Viktor, stalking through to his own room. Was it too much to ask for some goddamn peace and quiet?

Viktor raised his eyebrows at him. “My, you’re especially prickly today,” he said, lowering his book and leaning back more comfortably.

“You’re especially annoying today,” Yuri grumbled.

“Is this because I assigned you Agape?”

Yuri opened his door and glared over his shoulder. He wouldn’t tell Viktor about Yuuri’s posters even if he was dying. Viktor could stay in the dark forever, as far as Yuri was concerned.

“Fuck you,” he snapped, and slammed the door behind him.

He collapsed onto his bed and buried his face in his pillow.

Stupid, stupid, stupid. Why would The Pig have those stupid posters? Yuri was twice the skater that Viktor was, and yet there weren’t any posters of him lying around Yuuri’s room. It wasn’t fair. It wasn’t fair.

He screwed his eyes shut and tried not to scream.
It wasn’t fair.

The upside to being in Japan, not that Yuri would ever admit it out loud, was the onsen. He still didn’t use it when there were other people there- gross, he did not need to see some old man’s junk while he was trying to relax- but when there was nobody around? Hell yeah, he was going to soak his aching muscles. And the outdoor spring was so much bigger and nice than the hot tub he’d used when he first arrived.

He sank into the water with a sigh. He turned to rest his head on his arms, floating peacefully in the warm water. Maybe when he got back to Russia he could hunt down a Japanese-style onsen that he could go to. Viktor would definitely want to find one, and he would probably be able to convince the FFKK that they should fund it. Like physical therapy.

If Viktor came back with him.

He sighed into his arm. He was doing better than The Pig, he was, he was. No matter what Viktor said, sending him to a temple where some asshole kept hitting him wasn’t a reasonable training technique. It was just a distraction- keeping him from actually working on the program so that The Pig would get the upper hand. Well, the joke was on Viktor, because Yuuri seemed to be having even more trouble with his program, no matter how much extra time he got.

“Hey, Yurio.”

Yuri did not jump out of his skin, but it was a near thing. Shit. This was why he hadn’t wanted to go in the public spring, because he definitely did not want to hang around a bunch of naked old guys- or Yuuri Katsuki, as the case may be.

He grunted and pointedly didn’t look up at The Pig stepped into the spring next to him. It didn’t matter- he could still see Yuuri’s shoulder and most of his bare chest out of the corner of his eye. Fuck.

And no amount of looking away could shield him from the long, drawn-out sigh Yuuri let out, the one that was very nearly a moan and set Yuri’s ears on fire.

“Rough day for you, too?” Yuuri asked as he settled deeper into the water.

Yuri grunted again and buried his face further into his arms. The onsen was supposed to be relaxing- but instead here he was, tenser than ever. “At least I can do a quad salchow,” he mumbled. “Unlike some people.”

The water shifted around Yuri’s skin as Yuuri moved. Yuri swallowed and tried to ignore it.

“It’s not the jumps I’m worried about,” Yuuri sighed.

Yuri snorted in disbelief. Of course it was the jumps. The Pig could land them- he’d seen it, in the video, a quad salchow. It maybe wasn’t +3 GOE or anything, but at least didn’t end with him sprawling. But he’d yet to see it in person, and he’d watched Yuuri try it ten times in a row that day.

“It’s not,” Yuuri insisted. “It’s… I can’t capture Eros. Not the way I need to.”

Hold the fuck up.

“What?” Yuri snapped. He lifted his head to gape at Yuuri- which- oh no, bad idea, bad idea, abort- “What the fuck are you talking about?”
Yuuri’s face was flushed with the heat of the hot spring, his hair messy and damp, his eyes half-lidded with exhaustion in a way that only made them more alluring. He leaned against the edge of the spring like a fucking *adonis* who was currently *naked*—and Yuri had *seen* him pole dance, okay, he knew that Yuuri’s Eros wasn’t confined to whether he was wearing clothes or not. So what the fuck?

What the actual fuck.

“You really think you can’t get Eros? *Seriously*?” Yuri blurted.

Yuuri stared at him.

He stared back.

And then his words hit him.

Oh.

Oh. Shit.

Shit.

*Shit shit fuck take it back take it back*—“N-not that—You’re not Eros, fucking pig,” Yuri said, moving backwards, away from Yuuri, away from this conversation. He was probably blushing with his whole body at this point, which Yuuri would be able to see because *they were both naked oh god oh god*. “I just— it’s pathetic, is what it is, that you can’t figure it out, you’re pathetic and I’m going to kick your ass—” no, nope, don’t think about his ass, don’t do it—“just you fucking wait.”

Yuuri blinked at him. Yuri held his breath—maybe he could just duck under water and never come back up again. That sounded better than sitting here while Yuuri stared, slowly figuring out what Yuri had just inadvertently admitted to.

Admitted, even though it wasn’t true, okay? He didn’t think The Pig was sexy. He didn’t— he *didn’t*.


Almost anything. “Huh?”

Was it him, or was The Pig *smiling*?

“You’re right, I’m pathetic for not figuring out Eros,” Yuuri said. “But Yurio, you can’t figure out *Agape*. So what does that make you?”

He turned away, resting his head on his arms and sighing again.

Yuri could only gape.

——

“Katsudon! My Eros is katsudon!”


Yuri glanced at Viktor as The Pig— hmm, maybe he should just call him Katsudon now— darted out the door, looking like he’d appreciate the earth swallowing him up. Viktor had an indulgent smile
pasted on his face; it slid off as soon as Katsudon was gone.

Yuri snorted. “You wanted him to say it was you, didn’t you?” he said.

Viktor didn’t answer, just returned to shoveling food into his mouth. Yuri knew that expression, though. That was the face Viktor made when he had trouble with a jumping pass with a difficult entry. That was the face Viktor made was he was thoroughly disappointed.

Served him fucking right. “Ha! You did! Is that why you assigned him Eros in the first place? For one of your disgusting fantasies?”

Viktor didn’t glare at him- he smiled. That was infinitely more sinister. “Drop it, Yurio.”

Yuri grinned, showing his teeth. “How does it feel to have him choose a pork cutlet bowl over you, huh? He really is a pig.” He took a bite of his own food, suddenly reenergized. “Hang on, does this mean you’re ready to give up on your stupid scheme to get into his pants? I bet we could get a flight back to Russia for tomorrow…”

He trailed off at the look on Viktor’s face. It wasn’t the dangerous smile anymore- it had softened into something more genuine, if a little sad. Ugh, what the hell.

“You still don’t get it,” Viktor said. “I told you, it’s not about getting in his pants, or tricking him into a relationship- I’m here for him. If you took a second to actually think about Agape, you’d understand.”

“Whatever,” Yuri grumbled. “I don’t need to understand Agape to beat that asshole.”

Viktor raised an eyebrow at him. “Don’t you?” he said lightly.

“Scores are based on skill, not interpretive dance,” Yuri snapped. “And if you used your eyes you’d see The Pig doesn’t have any skill.”

Viktor hummed around a mouthful of katsudon. “Oh Yurio,” he said. “That’s why Yuuri will beat you. Because even if he’s struggling, he still gets it. Emotion in skating is just as important a skill as the jumps are.” He set his bowl down and leaned forward. “If you don’t want to think about Agape, then think about this for me,” he continued quietly. “Why are you really here?”

“I told you-”

“You don’t want me as your coach,” Viktor said. “Choreograph a program for you, sure, but you obviously don’t like the way I coach, and I think you’d rather compete against me than actually listen to me- am I right?”

Yuri didn’t answer, just stabbed a chopstick through a piece of broccoli.

“So why are you here, hm?” Viktor asked. “To get me back to Russia as a coach- or to get Yuuri’s attention?”

Yuri gaped at him.

Viktor leaned back again, picking up his chopsticks and finishing off his katsudon like Yuri wasn’t staring in shock. What a fucking asshole.

"I'm!" Yuri squeaked. Nope, back up, too pathetic. He cleared his throat and tried again. "I'm not here for... that. Fuck you, I'm not."
Viktor hummed around his mouthful of pork, but didn't reply.

Yuri slammed his bowl down on the table and stormed off. He could still feel Viktor's eyes follow him, with that goddamn ridiculous knowing light when he didn't know anything, because there was nothing to know in the first place.

Absolutely nothing.

The old man was crazy.

It was the only thing that made sense. The only explanation for why Viktor was shouting at Katsudon to imagine the juiciness of the pork like that was a reasonable thing to tell a skater. It was obviously the only reason he was driving Yuri so hard today, as if Yuri didn’t already have the program more or less polished for the competition in two days. Sure, he could probably get better speed in his combination spin- but Viktor wasn’t even drilling him on that. Just pushing him through the step sequence in the second half over and over and over again, until Yuri threw a handful of shaved ice at him.

Viktor didn’t even flinch, even though a clump on ice landed on his eyelashes. “Hmm,” he mused. “Maybe a waterfall would help.”

“What?” Yuri shrieked.

Yeah, the old man was crazy. Why else would he take Yuri and Yuuri on a stupidly hot hike to a stupid waterfall for some stupid reason nobody could figure out?

“Okay!” Viktor said, clapping them both on the back. “You two will stand under the waterfall, communing with nature, until you get in touch with your inner Agape!”

“What? Why me too?” Yuuri sputtered. He was blushing a little- Yuri couldn’t tell if it was from the exercise, or Viktor’s hand still resting on the back of his neck.

Yuri scuffed at the dirt under his feet.

“We can all learn something from communing with nature, Yuuri,” Viktor said cheerfully. He stepped away with a wave. “See you two in a few hours!”

“Hey!” Yuri shouted. “If nature’s so great, why aren’t you standing under a waterfall?”

He wasn’t sure, but he thought he saw Viktor wink at him with a knowing grin. Knowing what, Yuri had no idea. The guy was an idiot.

“C’mon,” Yuuri said, tugging on Yuri’s elbow. “We should at least try.”

And that, Yuri thought as he gritted his teeth, was probably why Viktor told Yuuri to do this too. So that Viktor could go galavanting about town, and know that Yuuri was enforcing his insane activity.

Yuri let Katsudon lead him under the water, even though he could run away if he really wanted to. His only consolation was that Yuuri didn’t look happy about this either.

“What kind of ridiculous…” Yuuri muttered as the spray hit them.

Yuri forced down a smile, and stepped into the water.

It only took him ten minutes in the waterfall to snap. “I’m gonna kill him,” he growled. It was a hot
day, but the water was freezing, and it pummeled his shoulders like the worst massage ever. He had water in his eyes and dripping down his face and he had never been this angry in his life.

Yuuri wasn’t faring much better. He’d managed to stay still longer that Yuri, but he was scowling. “Why me too?” he mumbled.

“Who cares?” Yuri snapped. “And who the fuck cares about Agape? Fuck them. Fuck all of them.”

_Yuratchka, mind your tongue._

He blinked water out of his eyes. That was what Dedushka always said. Dedushka was always scolding him like that, telling him not to yell- but he came to all of Yuri’s competitions that he could make it to, no matter what. Even though after Mama and Papa were gone they didn’t have the money for Yuri to keep skating, Dedushka somehow made it work with a smile and a gruff word of encouragement. He was always there for him. Even when Yuri screamed and cursed and acted like a brat, Dedushka was always there.

Agape.

Unconditional love.

“…Yurio? Hey, Yurio!”

A hand wrapped around his wrist, tugging lightly. He opened his eyes and blinked the spray out of his eyes. He hadn’t realized he’d closed them in the first place.

Yuuri. He was practically holding Yuri’s hand, peering at his face with a worried expression.

“Are you okay?” Yuuri asked. “Let’s call it a day.”

The mist from the falling water gathered in a cloud around Yuuri’s shoulders. The late afternoon sunlight caught on it, enveloping him in a gentle glow that matched the warm light in his eyes. He looked like a painting, one of those religious ones Yuri never cared about, with divine light making him even more beautiful than usual.

But he should be smiling, not worried. He should be bright and happy and alive, not frowning. For a brief second, Yuri wished Viktor was here- Yuuri always smiled to himself when Viktor was around. Yuri wanted that for him.

“O-okay,” Yuri said, looking away.

What the fuck.

He swallowed, sniffed as the cold from the waterfall got to him. He definitely _didn’t_ want Viktor around Yuuri- but still. If it made Yuuri smile…

He shoved away from Yuuri and walked down the path by himself. Whatever. He didn’t care.

Viktor was late.

Normally, Yuri would care a lot more about that. But today, after a night of restless sleep and thoughts that made his head spin, he was glad of the extra time to lace up. Yuuri was always quiet in the mornings, unlike the stupidly energetic Viktor, and that suited Yuri just fine.
Fucking Viktor. It was his fault Yuri was so tired today. Not from the practice yesterday, but from the rest of it. Agape, or whatever.

He got it now, maybe. Unconditional love. Like Dedushka always loved him. That wasn’t what was throwing him- it was the other thing, the weird bubble in his chest when he’d stood next to Yuuri under the waterfall. That feeling he really, really didn’t want to examine too closely, because every time he tried, it started to hurt.

“Yurio?”

He glanced at The Pig. Yuuri looked uneasy- and there was that weird feeling again. Yuri shoved it down and got to his feet.

“What?” he asked.

Yuuri hesitated, then bowed. “Would you teach me how to do a quad salchow?”

The fast, dizzying pace of Yuri’s thoughts screeched to a halt.

Everything screeched to a halt.

He was pretty sure his heart stopped beating. He definitely stopped breathing, which was never a good sign.

Fuck.

The wording wasn’t exactly what Yuri had imagined- shit, shit, don’t think about that now, not when Yuuri was looking at him so hopefully, like he really wanted this- fuck, this was not that damn daydream, this was real, and Yuuri was expecting an answer-

“Okay,” Yuri blurted.


Yuuri’s heart started beating again, kicked into overdrive. His face felt like it was on fire with the force of his blush. He felt- he felt-

Happy.

For about five minutes. Then he came crashing down to Earth, much like Yuuri kept crashing into the ice, jump after failed jump.

“What the fuck is wrong with you?” Yuri snapped. Three times. He’d shown Yuuri how to do a quad Salchow three times, and Katsudon had tried it six. And yet here he was, still sprawled out on the ice like fucking Bambi. “Here, watch me one more time.”

No wonder Viktor had started spouting nonsense about pork cutlet bowls at The Pig. Apparently showing him how to do it was completely ineffective.

Speak of the devil…

“Morning!” Viktor called in a hoarse voice. “Oh, what are you two practicing?”

Abort. Abort.

Yuri skated away from Yuuri as quickly as he could, and hoped Viktor didn’t see his blush.
Somehow, skating Agape didn’t feel like a chore today.

He mulled it over as they headed back to the onsen- walking, thank God, since not even Viktor was crazy enough to make them run back after a full day of training. He still hated the music, even more so now that he’d listened to it a billion more times, but the program itself felt… not natural, exactly, but like it could be natural. Not like he’d cracked a puzzle, but like he’d just noticed that the puzzle existed in the first place.

Because of Dedushka?

He was still considering it when they sat down to dinner and Minako brought up the topic of costumes.

“Uh,” he said.

He hadn’t even thought about it. Well, it wasn’t like he’d planned to get into a one-on-one competition with Katsudon when he’d flown here- he was lucky he’d even brought his skates and some workout clothes. Why would he have brought a costume with him?

He glanced over at Yuuri. Surely he had some costumes lying around, right? And if it was from his junior days, it would probably fit Yuri- maybe that blue and white one with the flowing sleeves from his Princess Mononoke program...

And there was that weird feeling again, where he felt like he’d swallowed too much air and was about to burst.

“Don’t worry,” Viktor said, flashing Minako a grin. “I’ve got it taken care of. I had all my old costumes sent over for them to chose from.”

The bubble in his chest popped- and not in a good way.

Yuri grit his teeth. Fucking Viktor, ruining everything as usual.

The pile of costumes was huge. Of course it was, Viktor was an old fart who had been doing this forever, so he had about a billion costumes to match his billion years skating. Yuri opened the box nearest to him and recoiled- there was that costume from last year’s exhibition, with the weird see-through top and long flowing skirt. Like hell was he going to wear that—forget trying to skate in that skirt, not to mention the fact that it would be way too big on him anyway.

Hang on. Why had Viktor sent for such a recent costume anyway? Yuri poked through some of the other boxes- some of them were older, it was true, but there were a ton from the past few years, and what the fuck? Neither he nor Yuuri would fit in anything of Viktor’s unless it was from his junior seasons- and yet.

“Wow!” Yuuri gasped, interrupting Yuri’s suspicions. He held a costume up to the light, awe shining in his eyes brighter than the sunset outside. “This is the one from your Black Swan program—ohhhh, and the one from the Don’t Stop the Music exhibition, and, and!”

Yuri stared at him. He looked like a kid on Christmas morning in those dumb American movies- Yuri was half worried that Katsudon would give himself a heart attack in his excitement.

He tore his eyes away from Yuuri eventually, in time to catch the delighted look on Viktor’s face.

Of course. Viktor must have figured out that Yuuri was a fan, and sent for all his costumes, even the
ones that wouldn’t fit either of them, just so he could show off for The Pig. It figured. Viktor was worse than a fucking peacock. Showboating dick.

Except…

Yuuri seemed… happy. In the week that Yuri had been there, he hadn’t seen Yuuri look as happy as this. He was grinning from ear to ear as he looked through the boxes, exclaiming about Viktor’s past programs without stopping to be embarrassed. And Viktor—his smile wasn’t triumphant, like Yuri would have thought. There was a dusting of pink on his cheeks and nose, and there was almost as much awe in his eyes as there was in Yuuri’s.

Maybe… maybe Viktor hadn’t done this to show off, after all. Maybe he’d just done it to make Yuuri happy.

“-one!” Yuuri said happily, clutching a costume to his chest. “I choose this one!”

Oh, right. Yuri was supposed to be looking through to find a costume for himself, not gaping at The Pig.

He went through the boxes listlessly as Yuuri left to try on his new costume. Viktor followed him, like the overgrown puppy that he really was, leaving Yuri alone with piles of costumes that he didn’t even want.

He fidgeted with the bent edge of one of the boxes, tearing away the damaged cardboard with his fingernails. Why couldn’t they have used some of Yuuri’s old costumes instead? If Yuri could wear one of those… It sent a shiver down his spine.

But Yuuri had looked so happy to dig through Viktor’s old clothes. He wouldn’t have been that happy to dig through his own old costumes—indeed, Yuri thought maybe it would have made Yuuri distinctly unhappy. Yuuri always deflected whenever anyone brought up his old routines, like they were something to be ashamed of. Which—okay, so maybe Yuuri fell a lot, but there’s a lot of good things in those programs as well. Even Yuri could admit that much.

So if Yuri would rather do something that made Yuuri unhappy—what did that make him?

His finger slipped on the damaged box. He hissed as the cardboard sliced a shallow cut across his index finger. It wasn’t deep enough to draw blood—but it hurt like goddamn fucking hell.

He breathed out through his nose and squeezed his finger tightly.

Was he really a bad person? All he wanted was to win this stupid competition and all the competitions—that wasn’t a bad thing, right? Okay, so maybe he’d made a few people cry, or yelled at them when they were already crying, but it wasn’t like he set out to hurt people. He just wanted…

He wanted to make Yuuri smile.

He wanted Yuuri to smile because of him, not because of Viktor. He wanted—god, he didn’t want Viktor to stay here while he had to go back to Russia, so that Viktor and Yuuri could bond and laugh and smile together without giving Yuri a single thought. He wanted Yuuri to look at him, see him, and smile just because.

Stupid.

So stupid.
He swallowed and turned back to the costumes strewn around the room.

“Yurio?”

Yuuri stood in the doorway uncertainly. Yuri lifted the costume closest to him, just so he could say he was actually doing something. Definitely not holding back what was definitely not a sob.

“What,” he grunted.

“Do you need help picking something out?” Yuuri asked hesitantly.

“No,” he said, but his voice shook a little. Hopefully Katsudon didn’t notice.

Yuuri stepped inside the room anyway and knelt by a pile of costumes. He didn’t exclaim over them this time, just sorted through them quietly. Yuri could still see the reverence in his hands as he folded each costume, but at least he was quiet and serious now. The smile from before was nowhere to be seen; Yuri didn’t know if he was glad or upset about that.

Yuri turned back to the costume in his own hands. It was some gaudy thing from a couple of years ago, a program he barely remembered Viktor skating. He probably won gold in it, probably broke a world record or two- it didn’t matter. He didn’t care.

“What about this one?” Yuuri asked after a moment of silence.

Yuri glanced over and swallowed. The rhinestones on the outfit reflected light onto Yuuri’s face, turning it into a kaleidoscope of color, highlighting everything beautiful about it. Yuri never would have guessed before he came here that he would think another person was beautiful- but Yuuri was. He was so beautiful.

“Yurio?”

He blinked and looked away from Yuuri’s face, down at the costume. “Uh,” he said, trying to focus. The costume was white with patterns of grey down the sides and ruffles over the shoulders like wings.

“It should fit you, and it’s kind of… angelic, don’t you think?” Yuuri said. “That works with Agape pretty well.”

Yuri’s eyes slipped back to Yuuri’s face. He would probably look like a pigeon in that outfit, but whatever. Yuuri thought it was angelic. Yuuri thought he should wear it. He would wear anything if Yuuri asked him to with that look on his face.

“Are you okay?”

Yuuri looked worried. But Yuri was fine. He was definitely fine. So what if he felt like he was in a trance, with that weird bubbling feeling filling him up, spinning his head so fast he couldn’t think. He was fine. Yuri opened his mouth, to say so, or to snap something scathing, or maybe just to shake off the concern.

“Willyougooutwithme?” he blurted instead.

What?

What?

He slapped a hand over his mouth. Who the fuck said that? Was he possessed, or something- no
fucking way he was the one who said those words, he knew better than to ask Yuuri out, he wouldn’t want to ask Yuuri out, it was a demon or something that got into his body and- and-

Yuuri stared at him.

Okay, okay, okay- he’d said it quickly, maybe Yuuri hadn’t understood him. Maybe the language barrier was finally going to be useful. Maybe he could pass it off as a joke, or demonic possession, or-

“Yuri,” Yuuri said quietly, and a little awkwardly. And that. Shit. He used his real name. That was- shit. Not good. “I’m- I’m really flattered, but… You’re a little young for me. It’s not- it’s not your fault, but… I can’t.”

Had it gotten really windy all of a sudden? No, that didn’t make any sense- but then why was there such a loud roaring in Yuri’s ears, like a storm had let loose directly over his head? Well, at least if it rained, it might put out the wildfire blush overtaking his entire body.

“I’m so sorry- I’m happy to be your friend, though,” Yuuri said. He paused, his expression pained. “Yuri?”

The laugh surprised Yuri as much-more- than it surprised The Pig. “Ha! You thought I was serious?” he said, his voice shaking. “Fucking idiot. I’m going to wipe the ice with you tomorrow, just you wait.”

Yuuri didn’t say anything. He just sighed, almost like he pitied Yuri. Fuck that.

Yuri snatched the costume out of The Pig’s hands and scrambled to his feet. The stupid blush still wouldn’t go away, but he could get the fuck out of this room. “See you on the ice, asshole,” he spat, and stormed out.

Yuuri didn’t follow him, or call out after him, thank God. Yuri kept his face down as he ran through Viktor’s room into his own, slammed the door behind him.

When he collapsed on the bed, he couldn’t help the tears that leaked out to stain his pillow.

Yuri didn’t sleep well that night.

He wasn’t like, crying, or whatever. He didn’t give a shit that Katsudon turned him down, or that he’d been so pathetic that he’d asked in the first place. So maybe he’d had a plan (he’d had a lot of plans that the asshole and The Pig had ruined this past week) and he was going to be so cool that Katsudon had to come to him- but whatever. It was fine. It was fine.

He finally drifted off when the sky was just beginning to pale. His alarm went off four hours later, jerking him rudely out of a shallow doze. He threw his phone to the other side of the room and closed his eyes again.

“Yurio!” Viktor’s voice was always grating, but it was particularly grating when he was asleep. “Wakey wakey sleepyhead!”

Yuri didn’t bother to answer him, just rolled over and buried himself further under the blankets.

The next thing he knew, the entire surface of the bed was shifting underneath him- no, wait, that asshole was just lifting him up to toss him on the floor. He flailed, getting more tangled in the blankets. Finally, he managed to tear them off his head and glare at the fucking dick who got them
all into this mess. “What the fuck, dickwad,” he spat.

Viktor pressed a hand to his cheek. “Aww, a grumpy kitten!” he said cheerfully. He already looked groomed and polished- he must have been awake for fucking hours dealing with his goddamn mascara. “How cute!”

“I’ll show you cute,” Yuri muttered.

“Hey, is that any way to get into the Agape mood?” Viktor said. “You have a competition today, in case you’d forgotten.”

He clenched his fist. There was no way he could forget about the competition- it was the only thing between him and going back home, Viktor or no Viktor. Right now, all he wanted was to curl up on his own bed, with Potya purring in his lap, with no more reminders of pitying smiles and gentle rejections.

“Whatever,” he said. “Don’t I have like five hours? Leave me alone.”

Viktor tilted his head, the annoying smile fading a little bit. “You’re even angrier than usual,” he noted. “Did something happen?”

“Maybe I just don’t like you in my space first thing in the morning,” Yuri snapped. “Fuck off, alright?”

Viktor hesitated, then shrugged. “Whatever you like,” he said, sing-song like a fucking child. “There’s breakfast if you deign to descend to our lowly level, your highness.”

“Fuck. Off.”

He slammed the door behind Viktor, and collapsed again on his bed.

He didn't leave the room until he absolutely had to.

He snuck food from the kitchen a few hours later without anyone seeing him, before closing himself in his room again. He wasn't hiding, or anything- why would he even need to hide?- but he did have to pack up all his stuff so that he would be ready to leave with Viktor right after he won the competition. Obviously it would take Viktor a million years to pack his shit, but it was good to be prepared himself.

He didn’t meet anyone’s eyes when he finally emerged for the competition. Viktor and Yuuri were both quiet anyway, nobody saying a word as the three of them made their way to the rink to warm up and get ready before the crowds arrived.

If he felt like scolding himself for anything, it would be for his timing. What kind of dumbass asked someone they had zero chances with out on a date the night before an important competition? Whatever, he was over it. Rejection or not, sleepless night or not, he was going to kick Katsudon’s ass.

He marked through his program to warm up, and gritted his teeth at the stiffness in his limbs. It wasn’t all because he’d slept badly, he knew that- he wasn’t in the right mindset to perform Agape, not the way he’d been able to yesterday. Thinking about Katsudon, about what happened yesterday and what was at stake today- it just made him stiffer, angrier, less focused. He couldn’t skate like that.
Focus on Dedushka. That was all he had to do. He’d figured out what Agape was to him, now he just had to focus on it.

Yuuko pushed them off the ice half an hour before the competition was supposed to start. She led them to the locker room to wait while the crowd got situated- but she held Yuri back just before he went in, a worried expression on her face.

“Are you okay?” she asked quietly.

He rolled his eyes. Why did people keep asking him that? “Shouldn’t you be asking Katsudon that?” he asked. “He’s your friend.”

She gave him a calm, level look. “So are you,” she said. “And you look like someone stepped on your heart.” She hesitated. “Did Yuuri say something to you? He can be insensitive sometimes, when he gets inside his own head.”

He shook her arm off. “I’m fine,” he snapped. “Go deal with the dumb competition.”

“Okay, as long as you’re sure,” she said. “Давай, Yurio!”

He waved a hand as he opened the door to the locker room- but weirdly, he did feel a little better.

Just a little bit, though. Everything else still felt like shit, especially walking into a room with the two people he least wanted to be around right now.

He kept warming up, focusing on his exercises with more force than he usually did. Better than looking up and seeing Katsudon in Viktor’s old costume- the one Yuri knew for a fact was inspired by bondage- or seeing Viktor leaning pensively against the wall, as if he was reconsidering the terms of the competition. Yuri wouldn’t put it past him. Even once he won- and he was going to win- he had no way to force Viktor back with him.

No, stop. He was going to win, and Viktor would follow through on his promise. That was the only option. The alternative, that he would lose to Katsudon today less than twenty-four hours after humiliating himself in front of The Pig, and Viktor would stay here to make heart eyes at The Pig and ruin everyone’s careers- that didn’t even bear thinking about.

He clung to that- the certainty that he was going to win. He held onto it even as he heard the crowd gathering, most of them here for Katsudon, not for him. He held onto it even as he glanced at Viktor and saw him frowning at the ground. He held onto it as Yuuko called him to the ice, as he walked through the crowd with Viktor behind him, as he took his place center ice.

He was not going to lose. He was going to win, and get Viktor away from Katsudon, just like he’d planned from the beginning.

His music started- shit, Agape. He was supposed to be thinking of Agape, about Dedushka and unconditional love. He could do it. Agape. Agape.

There it was. That same thing he’d felt yesterday, where it felt less like a struggle, more like floating, flying across the ice. Pure, innocent. Dedushka tucking him in at bedtime and reading him a story, one about fairies and a brave prince. He’d never admit it to anyone except Dedushka, but he loved that kind of story.

It’s kind of angelic, don’t you think?

No, no- don’t think about that. He had to focus. He had his quad toe loop coming up- he put all his
attention on it, coiling the energy inside of him- and jumped-

Nailed it. The step sequence now, the one that Viktor made him practice over and over and over again. He could feel sweat dripping uncomfortably, the cold air biting on his overheated skin. Come on, come on- he could do this, he could finish it, he just had to focus- inside edge, bracket turn, not his best but he was getting there, just the last combination spin-

He flung himself into the turn. His position was okay, but he had good speed-

Shit. Agape. He’d fallen back on old habits, thinking about the technical score when Viktor would be watching for something else. That intangible thing he’d only managed to grasp for a second before it slipped away. He could do it, he could- but this wasn’t it.

Dammit. He was better than this.

He finished the program sweating and panting, the furthest thing from angelic he could think of. That was it. His only chance at bringing Viktor back to Russia with him, and he’d given that performance. Fucking hell.

He bowed to the audience and skated back to the boards. It hadn’t been terrible, exactly. He’d done well technically, at least, and if it had been a month ago he would have been happy with that program. But this wasn’t the Junior World Championships- this was more important than that.

He glanced at Katsudon as he put his guards on. The Pig was hovering by the wall, staring unseeing at his own feet. He looked… he looked terrified, actually.

Yuri’s chest tightened painfully. He looked away for a second, just a second, to even his breath.

Maybe The Pig would be too nervous, and would completely tank. The way he had at the Grand Prix Final, and countless other competitions. Yuri could still win this, even if he hadn’t skated his best.

It felt cheap, to win like that. But better than the alternative.

He glanced back at The Pig. Viktor was there now, looking at The Pig with a concerned expression as The Pig started to shake. It was going to be the Final all over again. Yuri could see it in Katsudon’s face.

Until Yuuri launched himself forward to hug Viktor.

Yuri stared blankly. It took Viktor a second to respond, but then he was hugging back, whispering something in Yuuri’s ear. Like there was something between them, something more than just coach and student. It was just like the Final- but not like Katsudon’s disastrous free skate. It was the banquet, with Yuuri and Viktor so wrapped up in each other they barely noticed the rest of the world around them.

They looked… happy.

Yuri barely had a chance to process what was happening, before Katsudon was pushing away from Viktor and stepping onto the ice. Right. The competition.

Katsudon struck his opening pose. The music started, and he started to move.

Viktor whistled.
Yuri lost.

He saw it before Katsudon was even a third of the way through his program. Something had changed in his skating. It wasn’t perfect- god knows it wasn’t perfect, not when he was falling and wobbling even on clean landings- but there was something about it. The something that had been missing from Yuri’s skate.

Heart.

Yuri turned away, pushed his way through the crowd to the locker room. He couldn’t watch anymore. It was too painful, fresh off the heels of his rejection, to watch Yuuri skate like that for someone else. Like his whole heart and soul were on the line, with heat and want and need that was reflected perfectly in the way Viktor leaned forward on the barrier.

He should never have come to Japan. That was what Viktor had been trying to tell him the whole time, talking about selfless love and innocence and purity- if he wanted to skate Agape the way it was meant to be skated, the way he knew he could skate it, he couldn’t stay here. He couldn’t keep selfishly grabbing for Viktor’s attention, for Yuuri’s attention.

It didn’t matter that in a real competition, Yuri would have beat Yuuri by a wide margin. It didn’t matter what the score was at the end of this. He’d lost before he’d even gotten on the plane.

He finished pulling his skates off and paused, breathing deeply. Out in the rink, the crowd was going crazy for Yuuri’s Eros.

Fine. Whatever. He would go back to Russia and keep pushing himself, work harder than he’d ever done in his life. And next time, when he was up against Yuuri and coach Viktor, he’d be ready for them. He may not fully get Agape now, but he would. He’d be bursting with it by the time he saw them next.

He didn’t figure it out until later, much later. He thought he had, by the time Rostelecom rolled around and he was about to face off with The Pig for the first time since Onsen on Ice- but later, that was when he finally saw it. When he watched Yuuri send his coach away just so that Viktor could be with his sick dog, even though Yuuri needed him there. When he watched Yuuri almost fall apart on the ice without anyone there to catch him, then grit his teeth and keep going. When he was standing on a bridge in the middle of winter, watching Yuuri eat a pirozhki and smile at him.

Oh.

Unconditional love.

Agape.

Chapter End Notes

I thought this chapter would be shorter than the last one- which it is! ...by just 2k oops

Quick reminder- as is the case with everything I write but especially this angry 15 year old, the views expressed in this work of fiction are not necessarily my own. And please be gentle with this poor smol angry child, he's a little confused and angry and trying way too hard to be cool.
EDIT (I'm bad at remembering to add these notes, damn): Yuri’s fan handle comes from this fic by counterheist

Thanks so much for reading!
Yuuri (part 1)

Chapter Notes

This chapter turned into an absolute monster, so I've ended up splitting it in two. Which kind of breaks the whole five+one times thing I was trying to go for, but... eh. So this chapter and the next one will be Yuuri's POV and mostly Victuuri.

Please note the rating change, since these horndogs couldn't keep it in their pants long enough for me to write a scene.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

0.

It started like this.

Yuuri standing on one side of his family’s hot springs, gaping as his very naked idol stretched out a hand.

“Yuuri! Starting today, I’m going to be your coach!”

Maybe it started like this. Yuuri, overweight and out of shape, skating to the center of his hometown rink and bowing his head. Yuuri, listening to the cue of unheard music, beginning to skate a program he’d only borrowed for the night. Yuuri skating his heart out for the sole benefit of his oldest friend- and maybe himself, a little.

Yuuri, caught on camera and posted online, inadvertently catching the attention of the last person he expected.

Or maybe it started like this. Yuuri, finishing last at the most important competition of his entire life. Trying to hold back tears as he walked toward the door, seeing heads turn with pitying smiles and hating it. People staring at him like he was a trainwreck they couldn’t look away from, like an animal crying out in pain for their amusement. He hunched his shoulders and tried not to think of anything, which of course meant he thought of everything.

Vicchan.

His career.

Viktor.

Viktor who was walking past, saying his name but not his name- because Viktor would never notice him, because he didn’t deserve to be noticed by Viktor, because he wanted so, so badly in this moment to be noticed by Viktor.

And yet…

“Commemorative photo? Sure!”
He didn’t even deserve that much.

Maybe it began in an elevator, just a few days earlier. “Good luck in the competition!” following him out into the hallway, settling around him as if it wasn’t just an empty pleasantries. Or it could have begun in a locker room, with a casual introduction, even more casual small talk that Yuuri never ever responded to. It could have been Worlds two years earlier, the first time Yuuri saw Viktor skate in person, every movement hitting him like a baseball bat to his chest. It could have been any number of times over the course of Yuuri’s life.

It probably started when he was twelve years old, his eyes glued to a grainy image on a crappy old television, his heart pounding its way out of his chest at the sight of Viktor Nikiforov. Russia’s living legend, the best figure skater in the world both then and now, the most beautiful man Yuuri had ever or would ever lay eyes on.

It probably started then.

But maybe he wasn’t as pathetic as that. Sometimes he tried to fool himself, say that it happened much later than all that. That it started not when he was twelve but when he was twenty-three and sitting on a beach, shaking his coach’s hand, feeling the moment sinking into his skin as if it was a permanent, monumental change instead of a fleeting gesture. Or that it happened standing in the center of the rink at the Chugoku, Shikoku, and Kyushu Championship, seeing Viktor’s arms outstretched, for him. Or that it had started with Viktor’s lips crashing against his, in a moment so intimate despite being so public.

At least, that was when the rest of the world realized it.

“When did you and Viktor become romantically involved?”

“Was the student-coach relationship a ruse to cover up your torrid love affair?”

“Does it bother you that you stole Viktor away from skating just to sleep with him?”

“Are you paying Viktor’s coaching fees with sexual favors?”

“Did Viktor kiss you as a publicity stunt?”

It was like staring down the barrels of five camera-shaped guns, accompanied by seven microphone-shaped knives. Everything had been too hot and close with just Viktor herding him through the stadium. Thousands of questions had already been swarming around him, needling at his skin and poking holes in what confidence he had left after his performance. Now, with the press swarming around him, he couldn’t breathe.

“U-um…” he stammered, taking a step backward. The press just followed him, cornering him against the wall.

“Excuse us, please.” Viktor appeared suddenly by his side, flashing his emptiest press-ready smile. He didn’t touch Yuuri, but Yuuri could feel anger radiating from him like a frigid wind. The reporters flinched away under the force of it. “My student has had a long day, and will not be answering any more questions at this time.”

Yuuri’s mouth went dry. He barely noticed it under the sudden twisting of his gut.

His student.
His student.

The press wilted away, several of the reporters looking as faint as Yuuri felt. It was only once they’d all disappeared that Viktor sighed and wrapped his hand around Yuuri’s elbow.

“Грифы,” Viktor muttered darkly. When Yuuri glanced at him, he was glaring at the last straggling camerawoman. She was the one who suggested their coaching arrangement was a lie to cover up a romantic relationship, by far the easiest to bear of the assumptions the press made. And yet Viktor was scowling at her like she’d torn up his Makkachin tissue box right in front of him.

Because she thought they were together?

But Viktor was the one who kissed him. Yuuri had been fine with the way things were going between them. Well, maybe not totally fine, not when he’d spent the run up to his free skate crying in the parking garage because Viktor could be an idiot sometimes. But the intimacy they’d built over the past few months, the fact that he’d said the word love, heard Viktor say it back- even if they’d never specified what kind of love that was- that intimacy was good without adding kissing and labels into the mix.

Then Viktor went and kissed him. It had been thrilling in the moment- the best kiss he’s ever had, even if their teeth had clacked together and it only lasted a split second before they hit the ice. But now… Yuuri felt faint from all the questions that were no longer just needling him, and were now stabbing him in the gut.

Was this real? Did Viktor kiss him because he wanted to? Or was it a strange coaching technique, a reward for not crashing and burning in his free skate- like offering to kiss him in the garage, like telling him it was the only thing he could think of to surprise him. Or maybe it had nothing to do with Yuuri at all, it was just a stunt to get attention just like that one reporter suggested. That… made sense. More sense than Viktor suddenly changing the entire nature of their relationship just because Yuuri almost landed a quad flip.

A touch at the small of his back made him jump. He looked up to find Viktor watching him in concern.

“Are you alright?” Viktor asked quietly.

A little of the tension freezing his spine melted off. Viktor cared about him. That wasn’t up for debate, no matter what his anxiety tried to tell him. Maybe he’d wanted to kiss Yuuri just to kiss Yuuri, or maybe he regretted it- either way, Yuuri wasn’t about to loose his coach.

Probably.

“Just tired,” Yuuri said. He hesitated. “Viktor-”

“Well, that’s what happens when you don’t sleep right before a competition,” Viktor admonished. He used the hand still on Yuuri’s back to guide him toward the door- the exact same amount of touching he usually did, no more and no less. With the way Viktor was acting, Yuuri might have thought what happened that day- the parking garage, the quad flip, the kiss- was just a dream, a fantasy like the ones he’d had as a teenager of finally meeting his idol. “Let’s get you back to the hotel for a good night’s rest,” Viktor continued, opening the door to the cold night air.

Yuuri chewed on the inside of his cheek. He didn’t want to talk about the kiss. If they talked about it, then Viktor would tell him definitively what it meant- and if it was that it meant nothing, then Yuuri would rather not know. But the way Viktor was acting, like nothing had happened at all…
that was almost worse.

“Viktor,” he said, stopping in his tracks. Viktor paused halfway through hailing a cab, his hand still pressed steadily on Yuuri’s back. “About what happened, earlier—”

“Yuuri,” Viktor interrupted again. He made an odd gesture with his free hand, almost like he was reaching out to touch his face but thought better of it. Except that made no sense, because Viktor never had a problem with touching Yuuri’s face before. “We can talk later, yes? When we’re not standing in the cold.”

Yuuri opened his mouth to say something- maybe ask why Viktor didn’t want to talk about it, maybe to agree, he wasn’t sure which- but the arrival of a cab interrupted him anyway. Viktor grabbed his skate bags to put in the trunk, and opened the door for Yuuri to slide in. Yuuri couldn’t read anything from his behavior, or from the carefully crafted smile on his face.

He sighed and sank into the slippery leather seat. He could be patient, he supposed.

The cab ride was short and quiet. Viktor didn’t say a word aside from giving the driver the hotel address; Yuuri kept completely silent, watching Viktor out of the corner of his eyes. Viktor seemed restless, tapping his finger on his lips, jiggling his knee every once in a while, smoothing his fingers over his leg whenever he caught himself doing it. It was uncharacteristic of him to fidget- he got bored or distracted easily, but usually he would just jump into an entirely new activity with his whole self, not sit and stew in it.

For a second, Yuuri wondered if Viktor was nervous. But that was ridiculous. Viktor Nikiforov didn’t get nervous.

And yet… When the cab stopped and Viktor counted out change to pay the driver, he kept counting wrong and grabbing the wrong bills, until he eventually swore under his breath and handed too much over. He stumbled over his own feet getting out of the car. He forgot to push the button to call the elevator- it took Yuuri a second to realize, and push the button himself. He shifted his weight while they stood silently in the elevator.

What the hell?

Viktor touched Yuuri’s shoulder to guide him onto their floor, a gesture he’d done a million times before- and yet, Yuuri could have sworn he could feel Viktor’s hand trembling. Yuuri glanced up at him as Viktor struggled to unlock their hotel room door. His normally pale cheeks were flushed red- maybe from the cold, but maybe not- and he was chewing on his lip absently.

Holy shit. Viktor Nikiforov was nervous.

All of Yuuri’s own nerves disappeared instantly. Well, maybe not all of them- but seeing Viktor scared of this, of whatever their relationship might change into, it was comforting, humanizing. Viktor was just as invested in this as Yuuri. So whatever happened next- at least they would go through it together.

The silence between them was even more obvious inside the hotel room. Even their footsteps were hushed on the soft carpet.

Yuuri dropped his skate bag on his bed, while Viktor set the bag with his costume neatly off to the side. Normally, Viktor took the costume out immediately to hang it up, probably while giving Yuuri an unnecessary lecture about taking care of expensive costumes. But now, Viktor just stared at the bag, fingers toying absently with the flap of his coat pocket.
Yuuri swallowed. “Viktor,” he said quietly.

Viktor startled out of his fugue, pasting on a brilliant smile. If Yuuri didn’t know Viktor so well- and when had that happened?- he might have been taken in by it. “Sorry- got distracted,” Viktor said cheerfully. “Did you want to order room service-”

He trailed off, his eyes widening as Yuuri walked into his space. The hand that had been fidgeting with his coat lifted up, brushed the air above Yuuri’s cheek- then stopped, withdrew to rub the back of Viktor’s neck instead.

Yuuri’s whole body hummed with anticipation. He felt impossibly bold, stepping even closer so that he could feel the uncertain tremble in Viktor’s exhale. He touched Viktor’s cheek, completing the gesture Viktor had aborted. “Is this okay?” he asked. The words came out cracked and hesitant, but he knew before they’d left his mouth, before Viktor’s eyes closed and he nodded. This was what they both wanted.

He pressed his lips against Viktor’s. Soft, gentle, a featherlight contrast to the bruising force of their first kiss.

Viktor exhaled and came to life. He lifted his hand and rested it on Yuuri’s neck, his fingers cold despite the gloves he’d been wearing all day. He sighed into the kiss, pulling Yuuri just a little bit closer.

“Yuuri,” he breathed, smiling too much for their gentle kiss to continue. A laugh burbled out of his throat. Too quickly for Yuuri to follow or predict, Viktor grabbed Yuuri’s waist and lifted him into the air.

“Viktor!” he giggled. “Put me down!”

“As you wish,” Viktor laughed. He set Yuuri back down onto solid ground- or maybe not so solid, it would seem, because Yuuri looked up into Viktor’s eyes and felt like he was flying again. Viktor’s laughter died slowly, his smile fading into something darker, needier. His eyes were so blue, so blue even in the dim light. They shone with so much more life that Yuuri ever expected, all those years staring up at his posters and yearning.

He didn’t know who moved first, if the yearning overtook him completely and pushed him to kiss Viktor again, if it was Viktor who broke the stalemate between them- or if they came together more naturally than two magnets unable to remain separate. One second they were staring into each other’s eyes- and the next they were kissing, deep and needy and wonderful-

Viktor whined into the kiss, the vibrations trembling through his lips and into Yuuri’s. He pulled Yuuri impossibly closer, one arm wrapping securely around Yuuri’s waist and the other tangling in Yuuri’s hair. He licked into Yuuri’s mouth almost desperately- it made Yuuri feel drunk, drunk on Viktor, drunk on Viktor needing him. He kissed back in a haze, everything narrowing down to just the heat of Viktor’s mouth, of his hand pressing hard against his hip through three layers of fabric. Somehow his own hands had found their way underneath Viktor’s coat and jacket to clutch at his shirt, searching desperately for skin.

Damn clothes were in the way. He paused in trying to untuck Viktor’s shirt to tackle the offending coat and jacket- god, how many layers did Viktor even need? He tried pushing the coat off Viktor’s shoulders without breaking the kiss, his hands slipping on the fabric every time he got a good grip.

He felt Viktor smiling against his mouth, the curve of his lips breaking the kiss whether they wanted
“Easy, золотце,” Viktor whispered into his skin. “There’s no rush.”

Isn’t there? Yuuri wanted to say. They only had a few short weeks until the Grand Prix Final, the looming endpoint to whatever their relationship was. And even if there wasn’t a countdown bearing down on them- Yuuri knew, remembered from too many attempts at a one night stand, that if he didn’t rush, more than likely his partner would lose interest. He didn’t want that with Viktor.

He didn’t say any of that. Instead, he nodded, relaxing his shoulders under Viktor’s gentle touch. He tilted his head back, let Viktor reinitiate the kiss. Slower now, like Viktor was savoring the taste of him- no, that was ridiculous. It was Yuuri who was savoring Viktor, trying not to come apart at the seams as he kissed the man he’d looked up to for most of his life, the five time world champion, the best skater who ever lived.

Shit, what the hell was he doing? Who was he to hoard Viktor’s attention like this- kiss him like this was something real and permanent, and not just a fleeting moment of happiness-

Viktor paused again. He rested his forehead on Yuuri’s, his breathing a little heavy for what was ultimately a too-short make out session. “Yuuri,” he said. He moved his hands off Yuuri’s shoulders, trailed them down his arms to catch at his fingers. “We don’t have to do this.”

The words hit Yuuri in the chest with more force than if Viktor had punched him. He pulled away, staring up at Viktor in shock. If he hadn’t already cried his eyes out in the garage earlier, he might have choked on a sob- as it was, he could feel a hint of tears stinging in the corners of his eyes.

“What?” he said. It came out too soft, too broken. God, he’d known that slowing down was a bad idea, that if they weren’t caught up in the heat of the moment Viktor would start to rethink everything. “You don’t want to- I. Okay, if that’s-”

Viktor’s eyes widened. “No!” he blurted, louder than the sliver of space between them warranted. “That’s not what I- I want to. I’ve wanted to for- I just. I don’t want to pressure you. If you don’t want this- it’s okay. I didn’t kiss you just to- um.”

It was the least articulate speech Viktor had ever given, Yuuri was sure of that. But the pressure in Yuuri’s lungs eased slightly, even if his heart rate still hadn’t returned to normal, and his eyes were a little more watery than usual. He squeezed Viktor’s hands- they were warm now, heated by Yuuri’s own skin. “I know,” Yuuri said quietly. “I want to do this. I swear.”

Viktor searched his face for a moment- then his expression broke into a smile. “You do?” he said, so hopeful it nearly broke Yuuri’s heart.

“Since I was fifteen years old,” Yuuri said without thinking- and ah, that was the problem, wasn’t it, that he’d wanted this for so long, with so much of his heart. The pressure was suffocating, the wanting and hoping and fantasies that built up for so many years that he couldn’t possibly push onto Viktor. Viktor deserved better.

Viktor didn’t notice his hesitation. Delight lit up his face at Yuuri’s admission, like it was flattering that Yuuri had been obsessed with him for years. “Yuuri! For that long?” he said.

Yuuri swallowed. He didn’t want to have this conversation- any conversation, not right now. He wanted to kiss Viktor again, make him moan, make him forget how to speak altogether, up to and including his own name. Because then maybe Yuuri could forget too.

He didn’t bother answering Viktor with words. Instead, he kissed him again, sucking Viktor’s bottom lip into his mouth and biting.
Viktor whimpered.

It was the best sound he’d heard in his entire life.

This time, he didn’t fumble when he reached for Viktor’s coat. He slid it off easily, kissing Viktor so thoroughly that Viktor didn’t even notice. He’d gotten the jacket off and was working on the buttons of Viktor’s shirt before Viktor got with the program and reached for the zipper of Yuuri’s track jacket. Even with the heater on, the air was cold where it hit his chest; he crowded in closer to Viktor to catch his warmth.

Viktor’s breath was growing ragged, more quickly than Yuuri would have expected. He pushed Yuuri’s jacket off and jerked impatiently at the hem of Yuuri’s shirt. Yuuri ignored the gesture for the moment, too intent on memorizing the taste of Viktor’s tongue.

He felt the irritated grumble resonating in Viktor’s barely-clothed chest. “Yuuri,” he said petulantly, barely pulling away from the kiss. “Get this off.”

Yuuri rolled his eyes, but did as he was asked. Viktor didn’t hesitate a second- once the shirt was off, he dove back in, trailing hot, biting kisses down from Yuuri’s lips to his jawline to the column of his neck. Fuck- Yuuri twitched and whimpered as Viktor began sucking a mark there that would be visible from the other side of the galaxy.

“Viktor,” he moaned, trying for disapproving and missing the mark by a few miles. “My family is going to see that.”

Viktor pulled back a little to admire his handiwork, not looking the least bit apologetic. “I already kissed you in front of the whole world, I think they know,” he said cheerfully. Even with his hair mussed from Yuuri’s hands running through it, his lips swollen from kissing and his shirt half unbuttoned, he looked like a goddamn model. Maybe even more so now. “Besides, Mari gave me the hurt-my-brother-and-I’ll-kill-you talk months ago, and I think that means we have her blessing.”

He bent back down to kiss the hickey with surprising tenderness, considering he was the one who bit it into existence in the first place. Yuuri couldn’t even bring himself to complain any further, not when Viktor seemed intent on sucking another mark into his collarbone. The thought of everyone seeing the results of tonight so plainly on Yuuri’s neck shouldn’t be appealing- and yet arousal burned through him at the thought.

Let the whole world know that Viktor claimed him.

He tangled his fingers in Viktor’s hair and yanked him back up to kiss him. They made out hot and desperate for a while, heat building up between them until even the barest spaces between them were unbearable. Yuuri was achingly hard, and he could feel Viktor’s erection pressing into his hip- and yet somehow, they hadn’t done anything about it yet.

“Viktor,” he gasped, fingers scrabbling for a grip in Viktor’s hair, on his skin. “Bed.”

Viktor didn’t waste a second. He moved his hands from Yuuri’s back to wrap around the backs of his thighs, and heaved. Yuuri jumped up without breaking the kiss and squeezed his thighs around Viktor’s hips. The position put the slightest bit of pressure on his erection, forcing a moan out of his lips completely outside of his control.

It took altogether too long for Viktor to carry him the few feet over to the nearest bed. By the time Viktor stumbled over and set him down, Yuuri felt like he was about to implode from want. “Viktor-” he mumbled, pawing at the folds of Viktor’s shirt, trying to drag him on top of him.
Viktor resisted for a moment. He just looked at him, eyes tracing over Yuuri’s features with an expression Yuuri didn’t even know how to categorize. It almost looked like awe, or wonder- no, that couldn’t be right. Maybe it was confusion that Yuuri was so into this, when it barely registered on the scale of Viktor’s experience.

No- no, he was not going to freak out. He had to make this good for Viktor, make sure it measured up- oh god don’t think about size- to all the droves of people Viktor had surely slept with. He had to make Viktor forget about all of them.

“Yuuri?” Viktor said, his brow wrinkling slightly. He brought a hand up to cup Yuuri’s cheek. “Are you sure this is-”

Yuuri surged up and cut him off with another bruising kiss. Viktor grunted at the impact, but he let Yuuri pull him down onto the bed, gasped when Yuuri swung his leg on top of him and scraped his teeth over his pulse point. “Блять, Yuuri,” he moaned as Yuuri worked his way past Viktor’s collarbone and down his sternum. His chin scraped against Viktor’s shirt- damn, he’d meant to take that off earlier, before Viktor distracted him with the hickey. He growled under his breath and went back to work on the buttons, following his hands down Viktor’s abdomen with his mouth.

Viktor’s abs were a perfect six-pack, flawless even as they twitched under the attentions of Yuuri’s tongue. He brought his teeth into play, partly because he wanted to, but maybe a little out of spite, to mess up the pristine expanse of skin.

The whimper that escaped Viktor was definitely an added benefit.

He paused when he finished with the buttons of Viktor’s shirt and hit his belt. He glanced up at Viktor. “Can I-?” he asked, a little breathless from sucking a mark on Viktor Nikiforov’s navel. He was tempted to pinch himself, make sure that he wasn’t fifteen years old again and having a wet dream.

The noise that came out of Viktor’s mouth possibly wasn’t human. Yuuri raised his eyebrows, ghosting his breath over the bulge in Viktor’s pants. Nothing like making a man incoherent to boost his ego. “Sorry, I missed that,” he said with a smirk.

“Ahh- yes- yes, it’s good,” Viktor said, propping himself up on his elbows. He stared at Yuuri with wide eyes, like he’d never seen him before. “I- really?”

Yuuri’s eyebrows climbed even higher. “Yeah?” he said, suddenly uncertain again. “I want to.”

The blush spread from Viktor’s cheeks all the way down to his chest. Yuuri bit his lip, staring at the flushed skin. He wanted to taste it again- but Viktor’s cock was mere inches away from his mouth, just begging to be touched. He turned his attention back to the clasp of Viktor’s belt, the stubborn button of his pants, and finally, finally the zipper.

“Yuuri,” Viktor whined as Yuuri pulled his pants and underwear down in one quick motion. His thighs quivered under Yuuri’s hands, the muscles flexing beautifully under pale skin. Yuuri’s inner teenager- the one who spent countless hours fantasizing about those thighs- dropped dead of a heart attack.

“Shh,” he murmured with a confidence he most definitely didn’t feel. He dropped a kiss onto the inside of Viktor’s knee. “Let me make you feel good.” And without any further warning, he licked a stripe up the underside of Viktor’s cock.

The noise Viktor let out at that was so delectable he had to palm his own neglected erection, even as
he lathered the head of Viktor’s cock with attention. He opened his mouth a little, just enough to tease Viktor with heat, then drew back again.

Viktor’s hand scrambled over to grip at his hair, just a touch too hard- but it was okay, because it was Viktor pulling on his hair, begging him in a breathless voice to stop teasing. Yuuri couldn’t help but smirk up at him, before opening his mouth and taking Viktor’s entire length in one smooth motion.

He barely avoided choking- it was a long time since he’d done this, and Viktor wasn’t exactly the smallest person he’d even blown. But Viktor keened and gripped Yuuri’s hair even harder and clapped his legs around Yuuri’s head- so maybe it wasn’t so bad as all that. He pulled back and sank down again, struggling to keep his throat relaxed as he deep throated the best figure skater of all time.

“Блять- ah-h I- shit, Yuuri, I’m-m-”

A sharp tug on Yuuri’s hair was all the warning he got. He pulled off just in time for Viktor’s back to arch with a pornstar’s moan, and for come to hit him squarely in the jaw.

He blinked, too surprised to milk Viktor through his orgasm. Viktor didn’t seem to care as he collapsed back on the bed, staring wide-eyed at the ceiling and struggling to catch his breath. “Holy shit,” Viktor said hoarsely. His hand curled limply on Yuuri’s neck, like he’d forgotten it was there. “Holy shit.”

“Was, um. Was that good?” Yuuri asked. He tried to surreptitiously wipe some of the come off his chin and neck, but only succeeded in spreading it onto his hand as well. Great.

It took Viktor a second to tilt his head down to look at him. “That was amazing,” he said, tripping over his own tongue a little. “You’re amazing.” He trailed his hand down from Yuuri’s neck to tug on his arm. “Come here.”

Yuuri crawled up the bed to meet him, dropping his head on the pillow next to his. Viktor rolled onto his side and stared at him. He looked stunned, like they’d just spent hours having the most mind-blowing sex imaginable, rather than less than two minutes of awkward fumbling and an aborted blow job. Yuuri couldn’t stop staring at the blush spreading across Viktor’s cheeks. That was something he’d never thought he would see. Viktor Nikiforov, blushing.

“Um,” Viktor said, glancing down- as if he was embarrassed, which was obviously impossible. “Sorry it was… um. I, uh, I guess it’s been a while since I. You know. Slept with anyone.” His blush darkened even further.

“Oh,” Yuuri said, blinking in confusion. He’d thought- well. Viktor had spent enough nights out drinking back in Hasetsu, it seemed obvious that he’d been sleeping around. Apparently not- unless Viktor meant he hadn’t hooked up with anyone since the summer. It had been a few months since he’d been out all night, now that Yuuri thought of it. “It’s okay,” he added, because Viktor looked a little uneasy, and that was unacceptable. “It happens to- haaa-”

Viktor’s hand was brushing against his crotch. His cock, flagging a little after being neglected, sprang back up to attention, arousal heating Yuuri’s gut.

Viktor raised his eyebrows. “Sorry, I missed that,” he purred, throwing Yuuri’s own teasing into his face. He didn’t wait for Yuuri to speak, just pitched forward to seal their mouths together as he unbuttoned Yuuri’s pants.

Oh god. Viktor Nikiforov was taking off Yuuri’s pants. And his underwear. And kissing him senseless, and grazing his fingers over Yuuri’s cock- fuck right there- and Yuuri had to bite his lip to
keep himself from making a truly embarrassing sound. Viktor pulled away, watched him with half-lidded, dangerous eyes as he took Yuuri in hand. It felt like sparks riding along Yuuri’s skin, like a supernova waiting to happen, like he was- like he was going to-

“What do you want?” Viktor asked, his voice low and hoarse and better than anything Yuuri ever fantasized as a teenager. “Tell me what you want and I’ll do it for you.”

Yuuri came.

His orgasm punched through him suddenly and unexpectedly, so quickly he barely had the time to revel in the wave of pleasure. He moaned- whined- through it as Viktor’s hand kept pumping, until the touch was almost painful on his sensitized skin. Eventually, Viktor stopped moving, pressed a kiss into Yuuri’s bare shoulder. And then, just like that, the warm presence at his side disappeared, and Yuuri was left alone in the bed.

He blinked at the ceiling, struggling to get his eyes back in focus.

Shit.

Viktor.

His traitorous body, trained from his youth to objectify and sexualize Viktor, got off purely on the sound of Viktor’s voice and a brief touch of his hand. And then- Viktor left? To go where?

Something wet touched the inside of his thigh. He jumped, startling out of his spiral to see Viktor holding out a damp cloth. “Sorry,” Viktor said. “Thought you might want to clean up.”

“Oh,” Yuuri said intelligently. He took the cloth automatically. Viktor hadn’t left. He was right there, climbing back onto the bed without even bothering to put clothes on, looking at Yuuri with a soft smile. “Thanks,” Yuuri said finally. He swiped at his chin and neck, his stomach, and then blushed his way through cleaning up his softened cock. Viktor didn’t seem to notice the awkwardness; he just collapsed next to him with a contented sigh.

Yuuri didn’t jump when Viktor’s arm draped over him, but it was a near thing. Not that he should be surprised- Viktor was tactile, he knew that. Just this afternoon Viktor had fallen asleep on top of him like it was the most natural thing in the world, and they hadn’t even kissed yet. But still. It was strange to lie naked in bed while Viktor cuddled him.

A long, elegant finger dragged across his jaw, turning his head to meet Viktor’s eyes. “Hey,” Viktor said.

Yuuri took a deep, shaky breath. Viktor was unfairly attractive, even as flushed and blissed out like he was. “Hi,” he mumbled back.

Viktor leaned forward and kissed him. It was so gentle compared to the urgency from before, sweet like Viktor really meant it. Yuuri couldn’t understand it. Surely this had just been- what, a release? Viktor said he hadn’t slept with anyone in a while, and he and Yuuri had spent so much time together lately, it was only to be expected that a little tension would have built up. No matter what Yuuri wanted it to mean, there was no way Viktor wanted it too.

Even if he had kissed him first. And seemed so vulnerable before they slept together…

“I never thought this would happen,” Viktor whispered.

Oh.
Yuuri swallowed. He’d been thinking it just a second ago, that Viktor wasn’t taking this as seriously as him, but this… Viktor hadn’t even thought about him like that. All this time performing Eros, trying to transform himself into someone sexy enough capture Viktor’s attention, and he hadn’t even spared him a glance.

“You didn’t?” he managed through the pain resonating in his chest, then immediately regretted saying anything. He should just enjoy this, not worry about what it meant for their relationship.

Viktor’s little laugh was almost delighted. He grinned dopily at Yuuri, tracing a design on Yuuri’s bare chest. “I just- you and me. I didn’t think we would ever get here.”

Yuuri frowned in confusion, but Viktor was looking down, grabbing the blanket from underneath them and struggling to pull it out. Yuuri eventually got with the program and shifted so Viktor could pull it over them both. After a moment of readjusting, Viktor leaned over and turned off the light before rolling back to sprawl half on top of Yuuri.

“Goodnight, золотце,” Viktor murmured. It was dark enough that Yuuri couldn’t tell- but he thought he felt Viktor’s lips press against his clavicle.

Yuuri’s breath seized. He tried to cover it with a cough. “Goodnight?” he said. It came out almost like a question.

He didn’t think he’d fall asleep, not with uncertainty drumming a painful rhythm in his veins. But as soon as he closed his eyes, it was like a fog came over his head. He hadn’t really slept the night before, had he… And then the competition… and…

He forced his eyes open. Viktor had shifted over- when had that happened? He was lying on his stomach, hugging his pillow. Yuuri squinted at him, then at the clock- oh. He must have fallen asleep after all.

Everything seemed soft and easy in the dark. Viktor sleeping next to him, the back of his hand brushing against Yuuri’s cheek with every breath. It was practically perfect. Except…

Except it wasn’t. Except whatever he thought it was between them, Viktor wouldn’t want that. Didn’t want that. Viktor deserved more than Yuuri, who had slobbered after Viktor for half his life, who couldn’t win gold to save his life, who cried in a parking garage and came too early when they finally slept together.

He shouldn’t get attached to this. Whatever he and Viktor had now, it had a time limit and they both knew it. Even if Viktor felt more strongly than Yuuri thought, they couldn’t let this get too deep.

He sighed. Not getting attached started now.

It took him another few minutes to get out of bed. He went as gently as he could- he didn’t want to wake Viktor, face whatever reaction Viktor would have to him leaving. He had to stop again once he was standing, aching as he looked down at Viktor. He wanted- god he wanted- but he couldn’t. They’d crossed a line, earlier, but that didn’t mean he could destroy all of his carefully constructed boundaries.

He put on his pajamas, brushed his teeth, and climbed into the other bed.

It took him a long time to fall back asleep.

He should have known then. He was already attached. The connection between them certainly
hadn’t started with Viktor’s lips pressed against his, or his sleeping form curled next to him. That was only the point of no return, the moment after which the ending became inevitable.

No matter how it began, this was how it ended:

Yuuri was in love with Viktor Nikiforov.

He let the words spin around his head, swirling them like a cup of miso soup. His skates scraped the ice in a comforting, familiar rasp, even here, on the Barcelona rink that would end everything for better or for worse. Forward inside edge- flick- backward outside edge. Then into a choctaw, a mohawk, a twizzle- he let himself stop worrying about his technique, let the rhythmic scraping lull him into half a trance. He had at least a few minutes before the others showed up, and as much as he knew he should be taking advantage of the extra practice time- he could only just keep skating, meditating on the thoughts stirring in his head with every turn.

He was in love with Viktor.

He, Katsuki Yuuri, was in love with his coach, Viktor Nikiforov.

The sixth place skater at last year’s GPF was in love with the man who won it five times in a row. In love.

He stopped partway through a half-considered step sequence, switched to the choreographic sequence from his free skate. Not technically very challenging, but something about the slow, arching movements felt right. He could practically hear the delicate notes of the piano guiding each movement.

This wasn’t exactly a recent revelation. He still felt the flush of embarrassment when he thought of what he’d blurted at the press conference at the start of the season. At least he’d only laid his heart bare for the Japanese speaking world, which at the time hadn’t included Viktor. Viktor could probably understand what he’d said if he watched it now- but Yuuri couldn’t imagine he would do that. Besides, he’d said far more embarrassing things to Viktor’s face, in English, at this point.

Just not the thing that was currently rolling around in his head.

He was in love with Viktor.

And- who was he kidding. He could pretend that it only started when he met Viktor, or kissed him, or any number of times- but the truth was, he was in the middle of it as soon as it began. He’d been in love since the instant his eyes fell on Viktor through the grainy television screen at the age of twelve.

Twelve years old and watching a stranger on the other side of the world. Twelve years old.

What a stupid, reckless, painful way to fall in love. With someone he didn’t know, had next to no chance of knowing, who would never notice him even if he did. Twelve year olds are rarely a good judge of character- he was lucky his stupid, stubborn heart had latched onto someone like Viktor, who was at least friendly and sweet with his fans, and not like so many other celebrities who let the stardom get to their heads.

He was hardly alone in falling for Viktor at such a young age. He wasn’t sure if that made it better or worse. It wasn’t just him, at least, who couldn’t look away from the ethereal beauty on the ice, the bright smiles and charming interviews off it. But it also meant Yuuri was just one of many. With
less chance than some, even- how could he ever catch Viktor Nikiforov’s eye, when Viktor had so many other options?

He glanced over to the stands. Viktor was still deep in conversation with an ISU official near the exit, laughing every once in a while but mostly just looking serious.

Viktor looked up and smiled when he saw Yuuri watching him. Yuuri wished he had his glasses on so he could see the nuances of the expression- was it the smile he used for the press, for his fans? Or the brittle smile that meant he was a second away from saying something sharp and biting and brutally honest? Or maybe it was that bright, unguarded smile, the one Yuuri saw only rarely, full of happiness and affection, that spun Yuuri’s head and made him putty in Viktor’s hands?

He smiled back and returned his focus to his skating. Maybe the warm up he’d adapted from Minako’s floor exercises would clear his head, get his heart out of his throat for reasons completely unrelated to the upcoming competition.

“Yuuri!”

He stopped, not even halfway through the first pass. Viktor had finished with the ISU official and was waving him over- so much for soothing the distracting heat in his chest.

He skated past a few other skaters on his way. Phichit grinned at him as he passed; Otabek barely acknowledged his presence aside from avoiding a collision. He could see JJ and Chris arriving as well. No more stolen private moments before the public practice, then.

He stopped in front of Viktor and accepted his water bottle with a murmured thanks. Viktor was still smiling- not his press smile, or the charming, dangerous one. It was the quiet, fond smile, meant just for Yuuri and Yuuri alone. He wasn’t even sure Viktor knew he was doing it.

“Are you okay?” Viktor asked quietly. “You seem distracted.”

*I love you.*

Yuuri swallowed his mouthful of water and nodded. “Just nerves,” he said. He looked down at his hands as they twisted at the bottle cap. It wasn’t actually a lie, he reasoned.

“Then let’s work some of them off!” Viktor said cheerfully. “I think you’re warmed up enough- why don’t you run through your short program, and we’ll go from there. Just mark the jumps for now.”

Yuuri nodded. “Yes coach,” he said, letting a hint of playfulness slip into his voice. It was worth it to see the slightest hint of pink spread across Viktor’s nose.

There was a tension in every scrape of a blade, every murmured exchange between skater and coach, that was’t usually there during public practices. It crawled up Yuuri’s back and lodged itself at the base of his skull, a mildly irritating throbbing with the potential to expand into universe-shattering earthquakes- or disappear without a trace. Probably not that second option. Not now, not for the Grand Prix Final.

Not for the gaping emptiness of retirement waiting on the other side of this weekend.

He worked through his program as best he could around everyone else, listening for Viktor’s voice through the sounds of the other skaters and coaches. He clung to the sound of it- *Watch your free leg there and Don’t lose your momentum* and, held even closer to his heart, *Beautiful, Yuuri!*
Even like this, with the pressure of the Final and the other skaters and the press, it felt like a dream. Viktor’s voice guiding him, real and present when for so long Yuuri only wished for it. They’d found their rhythm working together, all those months alone at Ice Castle Hasetsu; if Yuuri closed his eyes and listened to Viktor, only to Viktor, he could almost imagine they were back there right now. It was as close to perfect as he could even hope for.

God, he wished he didn’t have to lose this.

“That’s probably enough,” Viktor said, catching his sleeve before he could skate away again, try the quad flip just one more time. “Yuuri, we can stop now.”

Yuuri’s heart froze in his chest. He swallowed down a creaking, pitiful cry that tried to escape him-no, I’m not ready, I haven’t even competed yet, I can’t lose you- before looking up and seeing the rink was all but empty.

Oh. The practice. Viktor was done with practice, not with him. Not yet.

He gritted his teeth and dragged his confidence out from behind his panic with every inch of force he could muster. Like hell was he going to spend his last weekend with Viktor dreading the end. He was going to make the most of it, give Viktor four unforgettable days, so that even when Viktor left him behind, he would still think about Yuuri and smile.

“Take me sightseeing,” he demanded, and winked for good measure.

Viktor’s face lit up brighter than the sun. Yuuri’s chest ached with the force of it, too much to bear. It was all for the best, then. A simple mortal like him was never meant to hold on to a star as bright as Viktor. Sooner or later, he’d always been destined to get burned.

He didn’t cling. He was proud of that. He held Viktor’s hand loosely as they walked back to the hotel room, kept his grip light and noncommittal. Spending the day with Viktor doing things that a real couple would do, that was selfish enough; so he didn’t cling to Viktor, didn’t try to absorb ever ounce of warmth that he could into his skin, didn’t plead for just a little more time.

“Hey.”

Yuuri blinked and looked up. Viktor was frowning at him in concern, paused at the door to their room.

“You look lost,” Viktor said quietly. He lifted a hand to brush his fingers along Yuuri’s cheek. “What can I do?”

Oh. He thought Yuuri was nervous about the competition. Probably better than if he knew that the ache in Yuuri’s chest had nothing to do with the Final-yet-and everything to do with that fond look in Viktor’s eye, the careful way he felt around the edges of Yuuri’s anxiety. He’d learned, after that day in China, to ask Yuuri instead of telling, to be patient and grounding rather than blunt and goading. It made the ache worse, to think that Viktor had made such an effort to learn Yuuri when they both knew their time together was running out.

Yuuri touched the back of Viktor’s hand lightly. Viktor’s skin was warm from the gloves he always wore in the rink. “Nothing, it’s nothing,” he said. “I’m going to take a shower, and then we can go.”

Viktor didn’t look convinced, but he held the door open for Yuuri and followed him inside without
another word. The click of the door was too loud for the hush between them.

Yuuri hesitated at the door to the bathroom, then tightened his grip around Viktor’s hand. It pulled Viktor to a stop, reeled him back in so that Yuuri could press a kiss to his lips. He meant it to be a soft, gentle kiss- but Viktor’s momentum crashed their mouths together a little harder than he meant. It made the ache flare up into something desperate and needy, spurring him to open his mouth, press just a little bit closer, drag his fingers through the fine hair on the back of Viktor’s neck, slip his hand underneath Viktor’s sweater to seek out the hot skin beneath-

Viktor chuckled and pulled away. Yuuri whined and tried to follow; Viktor retaliated by pressing a thumb against Yuuri’s lips. “I thought we were going sightseeing?” Viktor said teasingly.

Yuuri attempted to pout against his thumb, the way Phichit assured him was alluring but he was pretty sure looked like a pathetic duck. It seemed to work on Viktor, though- his eyes widened and his thumb slipped, just enough to tug Yuuri’s bottom lip down. “Why can’t we do both?” Yuuri asked. He licked his lips, catching the very tip of Viktor’s thumb with his tongue.

Viktor sucked in a breath. He closed his eyes and dropped his hand, lips moving but no sound coming out. Yuuri took the opportunity to step closer, graze his nose along the line of Viktor’s perfect, perfect jaw. He smelled like his stupidly expensive floral cologne, and like the air from the rink still clinging to him- as if he was a creature born from the ice and never quite shook the influence.

“Yuuri,” Viktor said, putting a hand on Yuuri’s chest and pushing him away. His cheeks were bright pink. Before this past year, Yuuri never would have guessed that Viktor Nikiforov would blush so easily. “Later,” Viktor told him, a slight rasp deepening his voice. “After, when we don’t have to worry about the shops closing. We’ll have plenty of time, then.”

Yuuri deflated. It wasn’t a rejection- not with the way Viktor was looking at him, like he wanted to push Yuuri up against the wall and have his way with him for hours- but it still left him a little lost. After they went sightseeing wasn’t plenty of time; it was a deficit of time, an endpoint creeping far too close for comfort. But, well, Viktor did say that he used to sleep right until his competitions were about to start- maybe he was just used to pushing things up to the very last second.

“Yeah, okay,” Yuuri said, trying to hide his disappointment. He turned away and closed himself in the bathroom.

He didn’t hide it well enough, apparently. Viktor grabbed his hand again as soon as he emerged from his shower, still shirtless and toweling off his hair.

“Hey,” Viktor said, and pulled Yuuri in to kiss him again. His free hand snuck up to support the back of Yuuri’s head, fingers sifting through his hair to hold him firm against his lips. Not that Yuuri would pull away from the soft heat of Viktor’s mouth. Yuuri’s hand found its way to Viktor’s hip, toyed with the hem of Viktor’s shirt, stabilized him as he rose onto his toes to get the perfect angle to taste Viktor. He pressed even closer, canting his head to the side to deepen the kiss, slipping his tongue into Viktor’s mouth as soon as Viktor’s lips parted beneath his.

His fingers brushed underneath Viktor’s shirt, right on his hipbone. Viktor whimpered, just a little, enough that Yuuri couldn’t help but smile.

“Oops,” he murmured in the scant space between their lips. “How did that happen?”

Viktor tipped his head, rested his forehead against Yuuri’s, breathed a little too heavily for just kissing. “You’re going to be the death of me,” he mumbled, his eyes closed and his voice wavering.
“We really should get going.”

“You kissed me, remember?” Yuuri traced a circle on Viktor’s hipbone, inching closer to his navel and retreating. He felt Viktor shiver under his touch.

“Mm.” Viktor took a deep breath- and then to Yuuri’s disappointment, he stepped back, taking the heat of his body with him. He smirked at Yuuri, squeezing his hand before letting go completely. “Later, I promise.”

Yuuri sighed. Viktor meant it, that much was obvious- but it still felt uncertain, unstable as a wisp of smoke passing over his outstretched hands. After that night in China, they’d only had sex a handful of times. Few enough that Yuuri could name each individual day. Viktor was just so easily distracted that even when Yuuri initiated something, half the time it fizzled out before it could even start to burn. He couldn’t be sure tonight wouldn’t end the exact same way, no matter what Viktor promised.

“Whatever you want,” Yuuri said. He hesitated, then stepped in to kiss Viktor lightly on the cheek. Viktor caught him before he moved away, and kissed him on the lips, chaste and sweet this time.

Yuuri couldn’t be sure, but as he stepped away to get changed, he thought he heard Viktor mumble something in Russian. Nothing Yuuri understood, not with just under a year of studying Russian on cheap apps on his phone, except for one word.

Люблю.

Love.

He frowned and kept digging for a shirt. They didn’t have time for that now. Less than seventy-two hours to go, and they couldn’t afford love this late in the game. Viktor ought to know better.

He swallowed down the feelings burning in his chest, and busied himself with the menial tasks of getting reading.

“I thought Barcelona was supposed to be warm,” Viktor complained. “Sunbathing and siestas, right?” He moved even closer to Yuuri and tightened his grip around Yuuri’s arm, in a way that couldn’t possibly be warmer than putting his hands in his pockets, but that he’d insisted was necessary. “It’s freezing.”

“It’s the middle of December,” Yuuri pointed out. “And you’re the one who went swimming in the outdoor pool last night, don’t pretend the cold bothers you.”

Viktor pouted ridiculously. “So mean,” he said, fluttering his eyelashes at Yuuri. “I was cold the whole time last night, I’ll have you know.” He glanced away, looking around them at the wide street, the apartment buildings rising alongside. “Are you sure this is the right way? This seems like a residential neighborhood…”

Yuuri squinted at the piece of paper the concierge had given him. The man had been weirdly eager, offering suggestions for places to eat before Yuuri had even had a chance to ask, insisting that this restaurant had the best paella in the city. “He said it was off the beaten path,” Yuuri said. He was pretty sure they’d gotten off the metro at the right stop. He couldn’t pronounce any of the Spanish or Catalan words, but he could at least match the concierge’s scribbles to the street signs.

“Oh he did, did he?” Viktor said, smiling at some joke only he understood. “What else did he say?”
“Eh?” Yuuri said, barely paying attention. He frowned at the directions and at the nearest street sign-ah, this was where they had to turn. He tugged on Viktor’s elbow to steer him in the right direction, since Viktor was too busy looking at Yuuri to figure it out himself.

“What else did you two talk about?” Viktor asked again. “You and the concierge,” he clarified when Yuuri frowned in confusion. “He seemed... enthusiastic.”

“Oh, nothing really,” Yuuri said. “He just said this restaurant was his favorite, and that he wouldn’t mind going there for dinner when his shift ends.”

Viktor snorted a laugh, inadvertently jerking Yuuri’s arm. “Sorry,” he said, but he was still chuckling for no reason Yuuri could see. “Did you let him down easy, at least?”

Yuuri stopped in his tracks, forcing Viktor to stop as well. “What?”

Viktor raised his eyebrows, still smiling fondly. “I guess not, then. Poor guy.”

“What are you talking about?”

Viktor tugged on his arm. Yuuri automatically started walking, still staring at Viktor in confusion. A particularly harsh gust of wind nearly snatched the directions out of his hand, if Viktor hadn’t reached over to grab the scrap of paper right at that moment. “He gave you his number,” Viktor said, pointing at the phone number scrawled at the bottom of the paper. “He wanted you to call so the two of you could go to dinner together.”

Yuuri nearly tripped over his own feet. “What? N-no, that’s just- the hotel phone number. In case we get lost.”

Viktor looked up at the overcast sky, sighing deeply. “Yuuri,” he said firmly, looking down again. “That’s his personal number. His mobile number- Javi Fernandez told me once that only mobiles start with a seven in Spain.”

Yuuri looked down at the phone number again. It definitely started with a seven, which was definitely- okay, it was a little weird for the concierge to hand out his personal number to a random guy asking for directions. “Maybe it’s a cultural difference,” he said uncertainly. “They are really friendly here, I’ve noticed.”

Viktor sighed, long and exasperated. “Cultural difference,” he said. “Right.”

Yuuri opened his mouth to say something, ask why Viktor was so interested in the concierge and his phone number- when the next gust of wind brought with it the smell of hot food. “Oh,” he said, his stomach growling in response to the tantalizing whiff of seafood and rice. “Here it is.”

The restaurant really was off the beaten path- there were no tourists in sight aside from the two of them, and the restaurant itself was tiny, just a few tables crowded together inside, in addition to the empty ones out front. Nobody else was eating there, but the smell of paella seemed to have permeated the entire room. It was wonderfully warm inside, too, enough that Viktor could probably let go of Yuuri’s arm.

He didn’t, which really, Yuuri didn’t know what else he expected.

“Lo siento, pero estamos cerrados para la siesta,” a voice called out through the door to the kitchen. “Si quieren regresar a las cinco y media, ya.” The woman came around the corner- and abruptly stopped, in her tracks and in the middle of a sentence. She stared at them, eyes flicking over Viktor before settling on Yuuri.
Viktor shifted his weight and shot her a charming grin. “Table for two?” he said.

Her mouth dropped open. “Joder,” she whispered.

Yuuri glanced at Viktor. It hadn’t occurred to him that going to a restaurant off the beaten path might mean that the four languages they spoke between the two of them could fail them. Viktor didn’t look too bothered about it, though. He just lifted the arm he’d had linked with Yuuri’s, and settled it around Yuuri’s shoulders instead.

“English?” Yuuri said hesitantly, when it became obvious that Viktor wasn’t going to attempt to clarify himself, and the waitress wasn’t going to stop staring.

She blinked, a blush spreading across her face. Maybe she was new, or something. “English, sí, yes,” she said, her accent heavy but understandable. “Sit where you want, we will serve, yes?” Something occurred to her and she hurried back through the kitchen door with a nervous smile.

Yuuri raised his eyebrows, but Viktor didn’t seem bothered by her behavior. He took his coat off and settled at one of the less cramped tables.

Maybe Viktor was used to that kind of reaction when he went out. After all, Yuuri had been reduced to a stammering, blushing mess by Viktor more times than he could count, even after knowing him for months- no wonder the waitress seemed so flustered, getting the full brunt of Viktor’s charm with no warning.

Voices in the kitchen interrupted his train of thought. It sounded like the waitress was arguing with someone- loudly.

“-como son turistas y no saben-”

“¿Es tan guapo ese señor que quieres cocinar además de servirlos?”

“No es guapo, es un ángel. Y espero mi esposo del futuro, Esteban. Mi esposo. Miralo por ti mismo, si no me crees.”

Yuuri chewed on his lip. “What do you think that’s all about?” he asked quietly. He picked at the smooth plastic tablecloth, twisting it around his fingers. Nobody was even yelling at him- but try telling that to his anxiety.

Viktor tilted his head in consideration, but before he said anything, the kitchen door was opening again. This time, it was a man in a white apron poking his head around the door to stare at them.

Yuuri looked around. Yup, definitely staring at them. There wasn’t anybody else around to stare at. “Hello?” Yuuri said uncertainly.

The man- the cook?- began to blush just as hard as the waitress had. “Oh!” he said, stepping out from behind the door a little more fully. “You will want menus- I’ll go get some.”

He disappeared as quickly as he appeared, saying something else to the waitress. She emerged almost immediately, clutching two menus like they were state secrets. She blushed again when she handed them out.

“Something to drink?” she asked.

“Um. Just water, thank you,” Yuuri said, scratching the back of his neck.
She nodded at him, taking a second before turning to Viktor. Viktor smiled at her, but without the stunning charm from before. In fact, he almost looked annoyed. “Water’s fine,” he said.

She nodded and headed back into the kitchen. Viktor watched her go, his smile falling away into a tight twist of his lips.

“Are you okay?” Yuuri asked him. He regretted it as soon as the words were out of his mouth. He didn’t want to know. If Viktor wished they would just get the weekend over with and make a clean break, or if he was dreading the end of their partnership—Yuuri didn’t want to know either way.

Viktor glanced at him and sighed, a little sheepish. “Oh- it’s nothing,” he said. “I guess I should be used to it by now, huh?”

Yuuri blinked. “Used to…” The waitress’ blush flashed in his mind. Oh. Viktor didn’t like being stared at when he was just out for lunch. Of course. “Oh!” he said. “Well, she’ll probably settle down once she sees you’re here with me- um. Not that. Uh…”

Damn, that was not what he meant to say.

Viktor lit up, and it was like looking at the bright ice after standing in the dark. “Yuuri!” he crooned. “You want to make a public display?”

He didn’t give Yuuri a chance to answer before he scooted his chair over so they were practically in each other’s laps, and pressed a heavy, sloppy kiss onto Yuuri’s cheek.

“Viktor!” Yuuri complained, wiping at his face. He couldn’t bring himself to move away, though, nor could he keep from grinning at the happiness in Viktor’s eyes. The little voice at the back of his mind whispered don’t get attached; he ignored it. It was their last free day together. He was allowed to have this for one day.

“Here you go,” the waitress said, placing empty glasses and a pitcher of water in front of them. Her eyes flicked noticeably between the two of them. “What would you like to eat?”

Viktor lifted his arm to wrap around Yuuri’s shoulders. He smiled at her, the dangerous smile that always lured the press in just before he viciously demolished them. “We’ll have the paella for two,” he said. Yuuri could feel the temperature of the room drop five degrees with each word.

The waitress nodded and rushed off to the kitchen, a blush prominent on her cheeks. Apparently, the chill in the air wasn’t apparent to everyone.

“Viktor,” Yuuri chided, jostling the arm around his shoulders gently. “Be nice.”

“What? I’m being nice!” Viktor protested, with enough sincerity to convince the most prying journalist. Not enough to fool Yuuri.

“If you get us kicked out before we can eat, I can’t be held accountable for the room service charges,” Yuuri said nonchalantly. He reached over to pour them both water; Viktor’s arm stayed around his shoulders, even when it jerked Viktor into leaning awkwardly over Yuuri’s lap.

By the time the paella arrived, Yuuri’s stomach felt like a black hole, getting more powerful by the second. He was about five seconds away from eating the damn tablecloth by the time the waitress nudged the kitchen door open and emerged carrying a- frankly giant- cast iron pan. Its contents were still sizzling.

“Salúd,” the waitress murmured as she set it down in front of him. Her hip accidentally nudged
against his arm as she arranged the paella; he shuffled out of her way absently and gaped at the calorie-fest Viktor ordered for him.

“This is for two people?” he asked. He wasn’t sure he’d be able to eat half of this mountain, and he once ate five hamburgers in one sitting.

“It’s enough for you?” the waitress responded with a frown. “I can bring another menu, you can chose more if you like.”

“This will be enough, thank you,” Viktor cut in, dismissing her with a smile. Yuuri couldn’t bear to look away from the beautiful, wonderful, and oh god so much food dish in front of him to scold Viktor again.

“Are you sure I’m allowed to eat this?” he said. He was probably drooling. “The final is tomorrow.”

“We’ll have a light dinner,” Viktor said, though he looked a little uncertain. A moment later, he shrugged and winked. “Besides, we’ll work it off later.”

Yuuri shoved him playfully, and pretended his heart didn’t clench painfully at Viktor’s joyful peal of laughter.

As it turned out, he didn’t have to worry about not eating the whole thing. He and Viktor had to fight over the last prawn and mouthful of rice; Viktor only won when he broke out a lethal combination of puppy eyes and listen to your coach, Yuuri.

They’d barely finished eating when the empty pan was whisked out from under their noses, replaced by a plate of wiggling custard and whipped cream.

“Oh,” Yuuri said, frowning. The cook set down just one spoon to go with it and smiled at him. His face was tomato red- maybe from standing over a hot stove? “We didn’t order this, sorry.”

The man shook his head and gestured at the flan. “No, no, es gratis. Para nuestro cliente más guapo.”

Yuuri glanced at Viktor. Viktor looked torn between amusement and annoyance, for some reason Yuuri couldn’t fathom. “I think he said it’s free,” Viktor said. He picked up the spoon and scooped a healthy chunk of flan and cream. “Here, try it.”

Yuuri reached out to take the spoon, but Viktor pulled it away at the last second with a meaningful smirk. Right. Viktor wanted to make a public display so the whole world would stop hitting on him- not that people ever stopped hitting on Viktor, the most beautiful man in the world. Yuuri rolled his eyes, but obediently opened his mouth so that Viktor could feed him the rich dessert.

It tasted heavenly- almost as wonderful as the heart-shaped smile on Viktor’s face.

“It’s good,” he said, half to Viktor and half to the cook still hovering awkwardly. He shot a smile in the cook’s general direction, but couldn’t quite look away from Viktor as he took a slow, sensual bite of his own. “Thank you- uh, gracias.”

If the cook said anything else, he didn’t notice, too distracted by Viktor moaning around a mouthful of flan. Viktor was always surprising him, even now. The latest surprise: that he could make Yuuri jealous of a piece of custard.

When the waitress came back with their check, she brought with it two chilled shot glasses full of
yellowish liqueur, presented with a face almost as red as the cook’s had been.

“Everyone is so friendly here,” Yuuri remarked once she was gone. “No wonder the concierge recommended this place.”

Viktor choked on a mouthful of limoncello.

Yuuri patted him on the back as he coughed. “Oh, do you really think they’re both fans?” Yuuri asked, frowning. Granted, even people who didn’t follow figure skating knew who Viktor Nikiforov was, or at least had seen him scantily dressed in magazine spreads and smoldering in television ads. Yeah, that was probably it.

“Well, if they weren’t before, they definitely are now,” Viktor said as soon as he got over his coughing fit. He smiled like Yuuri was telling him a particularly funny joke, and jerked his head toward the kitchen door.

Yuuri glanced over to find both the cook and the waitress watching them and whispering to each other. They seemed to be arguing, both of them blushing profusely as soon as they realized they’d been seen. “Ah, sorry,” the waitress said. The cook nudged her, pushing her a few steps forward and making an encouraging noise when she faltered. “Can we- can we get a picture with you?”

Ah. Fans, indeed.

“Of course!” Viktor said, although his cheerful tone was just a touch icier than usual. The cook and waitress didn’t seem to notice, though, so Yuuri just sighed and followed Viktor’s lead to stand next to them.

He expected the waitress to take a selfie of the four of them, or maybe even shuffle him out of the picture so that it was just them and Viktor. Instead, she handed her phone to Viktor with a smile and directions to take the picture from by the kitchen door.

“Huh?” Yuuri said. The waitress wrapped her arm around his waist, while the cook claimed his shoulders. “Viktor, aren’t you-”

“Smile!” Viktor told him, and started snapping photos.

Yuuri was pretty sure he looked like a cow in most of them, blinking stupidly at the camera while the others smiled like normal people- but the waitress thanked him profusely anyway while the cook smiled shyly. Neither one of them let go of him.

“Yuuri.” Viktor said, grabbing his arm and tugging him out of the unexpected and slightly unwelcome sandwich. “Take a selfie with me?”

“Yeah, okay,” Yuuri said, still a little dazed. Why on earth had they wanted a picture with him? He doubted either of them recognized him as a skater, so what the hell?

Viktor pulled him close and planted a kiss on his cheek. Yuuri squeaked and laughed just as the camera clicked- great, another terrible picture where his face was all gross and squinty. “Viktor!” he protested. “No, don’t post that, it’s awful-”

Viktor sighed dramatically. “Okay, okay, another,” he said, lifting his phone and pressing their heads together. “One- two-”

Right on three, Yuuri kissed him.
The picture turned out just as terribly as the last one, but this time, Yuuri didn’t really care. Not with the stunned look on Viktor’s face lasting even as he pulled away.

He smirked. “You can post that one,” Yuuri said, and let Viktor follow him out the door.

Six hours later, Viktor still looked stunned. Stunned, and happy, like he’d just had the best day of his life. Which was exactly what Yuuri wanted today to be- except. Except.

The rings were definitely not part of that plan.

At least, not the ring part. Not the part where Phichit saw them and assumed- god, why had he assumed? Not the part where Viktor came back with the engagement rings line, as if they’d said anything of the sort when Yuuri had bought them, when they slipped them on each other’s fingers. Not the part where he was suddenly wondering if Viktor wanted them to be engagement rings, or wedding rings, something other than what Yuuri meant when he bought them.

He had wanted something. Something tangible to hold onto. A good luck charm, he’d said, a wish binding them together, and that was true. But really, deep down he just wanted to something to prove that this year really happened. Once Viktor was gone, his stuff cleared out of the old banquet room, his biting admonishments to wake up or keep training or go to sleep no longer pushing Yuuri further and harder, his laughter and sunshine-bright smiles no longer decorating the walls of Yuuri’s childhood home and rink- once he’d taken all of that with him, there would be nothing left. Nothing to prove that Viktor Nikiforov, the most decorated skater in history, the love of Yuuri’s life, had spent a year coaching him, laughing with him, loving him.

He just wanted something.

The rings had seemed perfect at the time. Not just a keepsake for Yuuri, but a matching pair. Two halves of a whole, down to the snowflake engraving on the insides. Maybe Viktor would treasure his ring as much as Yuuri did, would think of Yuuri every time he looked down and saw it on his finger- though Yuuri didn’t really expect Viktor to wear it for the rest of his life. Not if the rest of their lives were spent apart. But still, it felt perfect, standing on the steps of the church, to put a ring onto Viktor’s finger, and let Viktor put its other half on his own hand.

It felt less perfect now, with Phichit walking next to him in a buzz of excitement.

“I cannot believe,” Phichit said, wrapping an arm around Yuuri’s shoulders. “You are living the dream, Yuuri! Engaged to your celebrity crush- ahem- I mean your idol, proposing in Barcelona right before the Grand Prix Final- although, you’re gonna have to fight for that gold medal so you two can marry,” he added quickly, giving Yuuri a good natured glare. “I mean, I love you, and I can’t wait to be your best man, but I’m not giving up my gold medal just so you can get together.”

Yuuri swallowed. “Phichit-”

“I am your best man, right? You promised, remember, you told me if we ever get married we’ll be each other’s best men-”

“Of course you are,” Yuuri said, then cursed himself. He wasn’t supposed to be encouraging the lie that Viktor told. “But, Phichit, you have the wrong idea. It’s not- we’re not, not engaged like that, it’s…” He glanced at Viktor for help, but Viktor was barely paying any attention despite walking hand in hand with him. His eyes were fixed on the cobblestones, his grip in Yuuri’s hand lax- the weekend had barely started, and already Viktor was slipping away from him. “It was just a- a promise? I guess? That we’ll-” That we’ll remember each other, once this is over. No, he didn’t
want to say it, not yet. Maybe after it was done, when he’d cried all of the pain out of his chest, then he could talk to Phichit about it. Saying it now would just make it real, bring down an otherwise almost-perfect day.

Phichit laughed, loud and bright and in sharp contrast to the impending doom hanging over Yuuri’s head. “Yuuri, that’s what an engagement is,” he said cheerfully.

Yuuri gave him a weak smile. Maybe that was why Viktor had said it. Explaining the truth was too hard, at least right now. He let Phichit keep chatting about a wedding that would never happen as they approached the hotel- but he promised himself that he would explain. Maybe not right away, but he would. Phichit was a good friend, and he deserved that.

As soon as the group reached the hotel, Yurio bolted without a word- to escape the lingering masses of his fans in the lobby, or to escape the other skaters, it was hard to tell which. Otabek followed his lead, down to the silence. Although come to think of it, Yuuri wasn’t sure he’d ever actually heard him speak outside of brief interview clips.

“We should go to bed as well,” Mari said, tapping Minako on the shoulder. Minako barely noticed, too deep in conversation with Chris. Conversation in French. Not a good sign.

“Minako-sensei!” Yuuri hissed, grabbing her arm and physically yanking her away from Chris’ flirtatious smirk. “You should go to bed now,” he told her firmly, and pushed her toward Mari.

“Hey, is that any way to treat your beloved teacher?” she pouted, but she went willingly enough. She and Mari had only gotten in that afternoon, and no amount of horny energy could save them from jet lag. “You know, just because you can’t wait to get Viktor back to your room and screw his pretty little brains out—"

“Goodnight, see you tomorrow,” Yuuri said hastily. Luckily, she’d said that in Japanese, so only Mari and Viktor had any idea what she’d said. Phichit and Chris just looked on curiously as Yuuri and Mari herded Minako toward the elevator and away from the temptation to say something truly embarrassing.

As soon as Yuuri returned, Chris turned his smirk on him at full force. “Yuuri,” he purred, slinging an arm over Yuuri’s shoulders. “Were you jealous I was paying attention to someone else? You know that if you just ask, I’m yours, chéri.”

“What?” Phichit said, gluing himself to Yuuri’s other side and wrapping his arm around Yuuri’s waist. “Yuuri! You never told me you have an arrangement with Chris!”

Yuuri squeaked and tried to shrug their arms off him. “What are you talking about?” he said, twisting in their grips. Phichit loosened his hold, but Chris just leaned further into him, just a hair’s breadth away from being uncomfortably close. Yuuri looked over to Viktor for help- but Viktor was standing a ways off, staring into space with a tiny frown. “Come on, guys, let me go,” Yuuri complained, and ducked out of both their holds.

Chris sighed dramatically. “Fine,” he said. “Just know that you’re leaving me heartbroken and bereft.”

Yuuri rolled his eyes. “I’m sure you’ll survive,” he said. Really, it was ridiculous how long Chris had been playing the heartbroken suitor just for a laugh. Yuuri was sometimes tempted to try and call his bluff, see if Chris would drop the joke if he actually acted interested- but not tonight. Right now, all he wanted to do was get back to the hotel room with Viktor, get back to their almost perfect evening.
He walked over to Viktor and took his hand. Viktor jumped at the contact, blinking at Yuuri as if he’d had no idea he was there. “Upstairs?” Yuuri asked, a lot more hesitantly than he intended. There was something off about Viktor’s expression, something at odds with the lighthearted banter the group of skaters had been sharing all evening.

Even so, Viktor smiled at him. “Whenever you want, солнышко.” A little at odds with the whole point of the day- to do whatever Viktor wanted, to make this day unforgettable to Viktor. Yuuri already knew he would never forget it.

Yuuri nodded and tugged on his hand. “Let’s go.”

They gathered up the shopping backs, said their goodbyes, and made their way over to the elevator. Yuuri held Viktor’s hand the whole time, played with Viktor’s fingers, grazed Viktor’s wrist, toyed with the ring that matched his own- but when he looked over, Viktor was looking into the distance again, frowning again.

Yuuri swallowed and let their hands drop to their sides.

The day had been almost perfect, right? Had he done something wrong? Maybe losing the bag of nuts, even though Viktor hadn’t seemed upset about it, or maybe the rings, or maybe what Phichit said- Oh no. Definitely the rings. Viktor was wishing they’d done something else, something not so easily mistaken- or he was regretting doing getting anything at all. He didn’t want the ring after all, wanted to make a clean break without a reminder of the year he spent coaching Yuuri.

They spent the entire way back to the room in silence. Yuuri opened his mouth a few times to say something, but stopped each time. What could he even say?

As soon as they were inside the hotel room, he set the shopping bags down with a sigh. A suit that Viktor bought for him, a scarf that cost more than an entire outfit for Viktor, a bag of knick knacks and souvenirs to bring back to Japan- more than he really wanted to be carrying around for hours and hours.

Nearby, Viktor yawned and stretched. “That was fun,” he said- but there was still something distracted in his expression. “You should probably sleep now, big day tomorrow.”

Yuuri frowned as he took off his coat. Viktor was definitely distracted. He’d forgotten what he’d promised earlier- or at least, was pretending to have forgotten. Maybe he just wasn’t in the mood.

Yuuri took his scarf off more violently than he’d meant to. If Viktor wasn’t in the mood, he should just say so, rather than pretend. Yuuri knew by now that Viktor wasn’t nearly as forgetful as he acted, that most of the time it was just a way for him to avoid something unpleasant. He’d been doing it less and less as the months went by- which made it that much more irritating that he was doing it now.

“Viktor,” Yuuri said quietly. He crossed the distance between them and took Viktor’s hand again. Viktor was frowning again, looking at the bedspread like it held the secrets to the universe. “What’s wrong?”

“Hm?” The smile Viktor gave him was one he usually gave to the press: empty and committing to nothing. “Nothing, nothing. Just a little tired.”

Yuuri raised his eyebrows. That much was at least true: Viktor’s eyelids were drooping, his grip on Yuuri’s hand slack. But a tired Viktor was usually a handsy Viktor, not a distracted one.

“Come here,” Yuuri said, tugging his hand and lifting onto his toes. He kissed Viktor lightly,
sweetly, with no expectation of deepening it. If Viktor was tired, then he was tired- Yuuri wasn’t about to force him into something he didn’t want to do.

Except. Viktor startled, then kissed him back with sudden heat. His free hand came up to cradle the back of Yuuri’s head, bringing him closer so that Viktor could deepen the kiss. It didn’t seem to be close enough for him, though, because he made a desperate, whining sound in the back of his throat, and grabbed Yuuri’s hip for further leverage.

Yuuri kissed back as best he could, struggling to keep up with the sudden change of pace. It was hard not to lose himself in the kiss, open himself up to Viktor without a thought or a word- but no. Something was wrong, hiding in the tension of Viktor’s shoulders, the set of his jaw, and Yuuri couldn’t just ignore it.

“Viktor, wait,” he mumbled, finally managing to pull away from those deep, addictive kisses. He put his hands on Viktor’s face, keeping him still when it seemed like he was about to dive right back in. “Something’s wrong. Something you’re not telling me.”

Viktor blinked slowly. He looked a little dazed- from the kissing, or from whatever was bothering him. “It’s nothing, Yuuri. Really.” He glanced down at his hand on Yuuri’s hip, and gave a little laugh. It didn’t sound right. “I’m just being irrational.”

Yuuri raised his eyebrows. He resisted making a joke that with Viktor acting irrational they had no sense left between the two of them- Viktor didn’t look like he’d appreciate the humor. “What about?” he asked instead, letting his hands drop to Viktor’s shoulders. He used them to steer Viktor to sit on the bed, and sat down next to him. His hand on Viktor’s knee- not pushing, just grounding, like Viktor had done for him so many times before.

Viktor bent his head, so that his fringe covered his eyes almost completely. What Yuuri could see of his expression was downcast, nervous. Yuuri wasn’t sure he’d ever seen him look so nervous, his usual mask nowhere to be found.

“I-” Viktor began, then stopped, swallowed, continued. “You really don’t remember?”

His voice was small, so small, like a child waiting to be scolded.

“Remember what?”

Viktor took a deep breath. “The banquet,” he said quietly. “At the Final last year. You don’t remember.”

Yuuri’s mouth fell open in surprise. Of all the things he’d expected Viktor to bring up, the Sochi banquet wasn’t even a possibility.

Truthfully, he’d been purposefully avoiding thinking about the drunken spectacle he’d apparently made of himself last year. At an official event. In front of everybody. He’d seen some of the pictures Chris had saved to his phone, featuring a scantily clad and very drunk Yuuri on a goddamn pole. Nobody was supposed to know about that particular skill set, yet his drunken self thought it was a great idea to announce it to the entire skating world. And he’d lived for a year with no idea.

“I- I don’t-” he stammered. He could feel himself blushing. God, what else had he done that night that he didn’t remember? “I remember getting there, drinking a lot- a-and then I woke up in my bed. I figured I must have wandered out of the banquet and… made my way back, somehow.”

Viktor nodded, like he was expecting that. He looked away for a second, then turned to cover Yuuri’s hand with his own. “I took you back to your room,” he said quietly.
“You what?”

Viktor smiled, a strained little thing that quickly fell off his face. “You- we danced together,” he said. “A lot, actually. You danced with almost everybody there, I think- but you kept coming back to me.” Viktor’s expression was almost wistful now- not like some drunk stranger had harassed him, but like he’d been given a gift. “And then you said you wanted to leave but you couldn’t remember how to get to your hotel room, so I took you,” he continued, then snorted. “God, I should have known you wouldn’t remember. You were so drunk- but I just…”

Yuuri stared at him. He should have guessed, really, that he would have drunkenly approached Viktor. So many of his thoughts that night had focused on Viktor, pulled equally between Vicchan, his devastating loss, and feeling like Viktor was further out of reach than he’d ever been. But what he couldn’t understand was the look on Viktor’s face now- a little sad, almost self-deprecating, as if it was his fault that Yuuri had been a drunken idiot.

“Viktor,” he said hesitantly. “Why does it matter? It was almost a year ago…”

Viktor sighed. He looked down at their clasped hands, stroked his thumb over Yuuri’s skin. “Yuuri, you changed my life that night,” he said quietly.

“I- what?”

Viktor kept stroking Yuuri’s hand, a gentle caress that was almost hypnotizing. “I mean, not that I didn’t already want to get to know you,” he said. “But you were always running away, so I guess I just figured that you’d realized I wasn’t… Well.”

Yuuri frowned. His head was spinning a little- surely Viktor didn’t mean that he’d actually noticed him before that night. Yeah, there had been some idle chit chat, but it hadn’t meant anything, not to Viktor. Yuuri had been a nobody, terrified before a competition, and Viktor had taken pity. There wasn’t any universe where Viktor had been the one reaching, and Yuuri the one looking the other way.

“But then that night, you approached me, and you were so interesting and lively and- It just. Meant a lot to me.”

Oh.

“I’m sorry,” Yuuri said.

Viktor jerked his head in surprise. “What? Why are you apologizing?”

“I- because it meant a lot to you, and I forgot it,” Yuuri said. He chewed on his lip, wishing with every fiber of his being that he’d had just one less glass of champagne. Or two, maybe. Just enough that he’d remember what he’d done, what made Viktor look like that.

Like Yuuri had changed his life.

“No, no, Yuuri,” Viktor said hurriedly. He lifted Yuuri’s hand and kissed it, suspiciously close to the ring on Yuuri’s finger. “You didn’t do anything wrong. I’m the one who should be apologizing.”

“Why?”

Viktor huffed, peering up at Yuuri ruefully. “You must have thought I was insane, when I first got to Hasetsu. I acted like we already had a relationship, and you had no idea…”
Yuuri blinked. Those first few months flashed through his mind, like a movie montage. “Oh.” Viktor showing up out of the blue. Touching him, trying to get to know him. Asking if he was seeing anyone. Wanting to sleep together—“Ohhh,” Yuuri said, eyes widening. He was such an idiot. He should have seen it before—though maybe he could be forgiven for not immediately assuming that Viktor Nikiforov was interested in him. He had a hard time believing it even now. “So the video- you thought that was a- a booty call, or something?”

“What? No!” Viktor’s face was bright red, visible even in the dim light. “I mean- yes, I wanted to be with you, and I thought maybe we would pick up where we left off at the banquet—”

Oh no. “Where we left off?” Yuuri interrupted. His drunken self wasn’t particularly chaste, nor was he considerate. He’d woken up a few times in unfamiliar beds next to unfamiliar people with only vague memories of the night before- but he’d never forgotten anyone completely before. God, if he’d slept with Viktor and then forgotten about it- he was never getting drunk again. “Did we- at the banquet—”

“Nothing like that,” Viktor assured him quickly. Then paused, his blush spreading to his ears and down the back of his neck. “Um. Not entirely like that. We did, um. Make out a little?” The blush said otherwise. The blush said they’d made out a lot- and knowing drunk Yuuri, probably more. “I definitely wanted to sleep with you- but I didn’t want to take advantage. You were really drunk.”

“You wanted me?” Yuuri asked. The words didn’t fit right in his mouth- but the look on Viktor’s face spoke volumes. Viktor’s eyes dropped down to Yuuri’s lips, then flicked back up to meet his gaze.

“How could I not?” Viktor murmured.

Yuuri surged forward to kiss him.

Like he always did, Viktor met him where he was, kissing back just as desperate and needy. Yuuri canted his head to the side to allow Viktor access, to swipe his tongue into Viktor’s mouth and then suck on Viktor’s tongue in return. The heaviness of the conversation fell away quickly, disappearing under the heat building in Yuuri’s gut- faster than he’d expected, actually. But it kept ringing in his ears- Viktor wanted him, Viktor wanted him- and feeding into the fire that had started smoldering hours ago. Viktor wanted him, he wanted Viktor, and he was going to have him before their time ran out.

Viktor crowded in even closer, his hands roaming from Yuuri’s waist to his jaw to his arms, as if he couldn’t decide where he wanted to start. Yuuri decided for him: he grabbed Viktor’s hand and placed in his hair, let Viktor’s other hand wander as he pleased. The angle was a little awkward still, kept the kiss from sweeping Yuuri away into a universe consisting only of Viktor, Viktor, Viktor. He growled in frustration and pushed forward, forward, until he gave up. Better to just swing his leg over Viktor’s so that he was straddling him, kissing him as deeply as he knew how.

Viktor whined as Yuuri settled on his lap. He reached up to find Yuuri’s hand on his cheek, lacing their fingers together with a tenderness that was totally at odds with the heat of their kiss and the growing hardness between their legs- but that was so totally Viktor that it made Yuuri’s chest ache with love.

They kept kissing, deep and arousing- and yet, all of Yuuri’s attention shifted to their joined hands. To the feeling of cool metal pressing against his skin. His ring, twisting and clipping his skin under the pressure of Viktor’s touch. Viktor moved his other hand from Yuuri’s hair to his hip, slipping underneath his shirt to brush his skin. Yuuri could feel the ring there, too, the cold metal heating the fire in his gut to maddening levels.
He whimpered and ground his hips down. The friction made him gasp in pleasure, but it didn’t even begin to rival the hard press of Viktor’s ring against his skin.

*An engagement ring... we’ll get married when he wins gold.*

For a moment, he let himself forget. Let the lie overtake the truth, that these rings weren’t a memento of a time slipping past them, but a promise to stay together forever. Engagement rings, wedding rings, whichever. The lie that Yuuri proposed to Viktor tonight and Viktor said yes, yes they could get married, yes they’d spend the rest of their lives together, yes they loved each other more than competitions, more than their careers, more than skating-

Yuuri broke the kiss to gasp into Viktor’s mouth, his hips moving without conscious direction to grind against Viktor’s cock. Viktor wasn’t much better off- he was almost shaking in the circle of Yuuri’s arms, unable to do anything but drag sloppy kisses down Yuuri’s jaw. Yuuri took advantage of his distraction to take his own sweater and shirt off, a little more roughly than he was intending, but. Well. Viktor was *right there*, looking debauched and needy and who was Yuuri to deny him?

Except with the cool air now caressing his torso, it only reminded him that he was still clothed where it mattered, as was Viktor. He pressed another burning kiss into the corner of Viktor’s mouth- and another, and another- before pulling away completely, swinging his leg back around so he could stand and take his damn pants off.

“*Yuuri,*” Viktor whined at the loss. His eyes opened slowly, then widened when he saw what Yuuri was doing. He practically leapt to his feet, struggling to catch up.

Yuuri let out relieved groan as his pants dropped to the ground, freeing his leaking cock from his restrictive clothing. He crawled up to the headboard hurriedly, eager to pick up where they left off- only to find that Viktor was still standing, still working on the buttons of his shirt.

“*Viktor, hurry up,*” he huffed. Although- really, he didn’t mind *that* much. Viktor’s muscles flexed beautifully as he shrugged off his shirt, revealing the perfect slope of his shoulders, his well-defined abs, the trail of hair disappearing under his belt. Yuuri bit his lip again, harder this time. He couldn’t help but take himself in hand, squeeze at the base of his cock at the sight of Viktor stripping for him.

Viktor glanced up and froze, his mouth falling open. Not exactly the direction Yuuri had been hoping for, but there was something intoxicating about the way Viktor was staring at him. Like he couldn’t look away even if he tried.

Yuuri moaned and gave his cock a long, hard stroke.

Viktor made some kind of noise that barely even sounded human, then hurriedly began undoing his pants. “*Fuck, Yuuri,*” he said breathlessly. “*Do you like it when I watch you?*”

Despite the situation, Yuuri felt his face flush. “*Ah-h,*” he breathed, struggling to keep a hold of himself. It was nearly impossible with Viktor there, staring at him with hungry eyes. “*Get over here,*” he managed finally.

Viktor had the gall to smirk as he stood with a wet patch on his underwear, some ridiculous thong that left nothing to the imagination yet was still somehow *in the way.* He toyed with the waistband, watching Yuuri with a heavy-lidded gaze that was driving Yuuri crazy. He only teased for a moment though, impatience crossing his face as he finally stepped out of the stupid underwear. “*Later,*” he promised darkly as he kneeled on the bed. “*We’re definitely doing something with that later.*”
Viktor’s smirk deepened. “A little eager, are we?” he whispered. He moved up the bed practically in slow motion, barely even touching Yuuri as he went.

Yuuri would have rolled his eyes if he wasn’t so turned on. “Of course I’m eager,” he said, still stroking himself and reveling in the twin sensations of his hand on his cock, and Viktor’s eyes on him. “I’ve been- ahh- thinking about this all day- and then you- you just said you wanted me- fuck- a year ago-”

Viktor crawled up to him on his hands and knees, bracketing Yuuri’s head with his elbows without touching him. It was actual torture. Viktor chuckled a little, his eyes dark with want as he hovered just inches away from Yuuri’s face. “I wanted you much longer than that,” he murmured, then dove down to finally, finally kiss him.

Yuuri whined into the kiss, every inch of his attention focused on Viktor’s mouth, on the way his body slotted together with Yuuri’s in a mess of heat and sweat. It took him a moment to break apart from the glorious warmth of Viktor’s mouth to focus on what Viktor had said.

“Wha- how long?” he asked, barely coherent.

He could feel Viktor smiling against his skin as he kissed down Yuuri’s throat. “Mm,” he hummed against Yuuri’s clavicle. “Years.” He shifted his weight, slotting his thigh between Yuuri’s legs and groaning when their cocks lined up next to each other. He pistoned his hips slightly, rutting against him almost unconsciously, dragging another moan out of Yuuri’s throat. “I saw you-” another moan, louder this time, as Yuuri scrambled for a handhold on Viktor’s ass- “skating, you were- ahh- so beautiful, the most beautiful skater on the ice-”

Yuuri couldn’t take it any more. He wrapped a leg around Viktor’s and rolled them both until he was on top, ravishing Viktor’s skin with biting kisses. It didn’t matter if what Viktor was saying was true, it still burned in his veins and his cock until he felt like he was drowning in him, drowning in Viktor.

“So beautiful- my Yuuri-” Viktor babbled, digging his fingers into the meat of Yuuri’s hip, tangling them in Yuuri’s hair.

Yuuri surged up to kiss him, fucking his mouth with his tongue in time with the movements of his hips. He felt almost feverish, from Viktor’s words, the feeling of his cock sliding next to his, the bite of Viktor’s ring snagging his skin. He pulled away from the kiss, leaned in to whisper in Viktor’s ear in his delirium. “You wanted me?” he breathed. “Then I’m yours.”

The words burned in his throat as he said them, worsening the ache in his chest exponentially. He couldn’t take them back- didn’t want to take them back, not when they made Viktor curse and writhe so beautifully beneath him- but he wished, god he wished, that they were just a little less true. That he wasn’t Viktor’s, that he wasn’t bound to him body and soul until long after Viktor was gone, until the day he died.

He ignored the prickling at the corners of his eyes and reached down instead, between their bodies to wrap his hand around both of their erections. It felt good, too good- especially as Viktor’s eyes flew open, his body tensing and relaxing as Yuuri began to jack them off.

“Yuuri- любовь моя- ahh-” If Viktor said anything intelligible after that, Yuuri couldn’t tell. It was a mess of English and Russian and nonsense, interlaced with Yuuri’s name like a perfect summation of everything Viktor was feeling. It didn’t really matter what Viktor was saying- he could be reading
the phone book, or critiquing Yuuri’s step sequences, or insulting him, and Yuuri would be no less captivated, no less turned on.

Viktor shifted underneath him, then pushed Yuuri off suddenly. Yuuri barely had a second to feel winded before Viktor was on top of him again, kissing him so thoroughly that Yuuri doubted he’d ever catch his breath again. His hand joined Yuuri’s between them, sending sparks flying down Yuuri’s spine as he stroked his cock and murmured into Yuuri’s skin. It was one phrase, over and over, bitten hard into the crook of Yuuri’s neck and pressed desperately into his mouth— and maybe Yuuri would listen more closely, try to understand better, if Viktor’s hand didn’t twist at the head of his cock and wring a cry of pleasure out of him.

Yuuri could feel his orgasm building in his gut, spiraling spikes all the way through his toes and the tips of his fingers. He panted into Viktor’s mouth, too close to kiss him properly. Viktor didn’t seem much better, fumbling his free hand out to grab at Yuuri’s in an uncoordinated motion. “Yours—Yuuri, I’m yours—always—” Viktor breathed.

The edge of Viktor’s ring caught on Yuuri’s skin, no longer cool but warm and biting— and that was it, all it took to push Yuuri over the edge. He gasped as his orgasm wracked through him, a starburst of sensation more powerful than a firework or an explosion.

Dimly, he felt Viktor’s hand stutter on his cock, and a warm, wet spurt of come on his stomach as Viktor came as well. It all at once distant and close, too close, overwhelming in the glide of Viktor’s skin against his. He closed his eyes, struggling to breath normally, to steal his sanity back from wherever it was Viktor had taken it.

As he came back to himself, he felt Viktor drop his head on his chest. He reached up absentely to wrap his arms around him, curl closer to him. Everything floated by him in a haze, nothing as important as Viktor’s weight holding him down to earth.

Except.

He blinked his eyes open. Something niggled at him, even through the post-orgasmic daze. Something Viktor said, or did, or— he couldn’t think of it. It just sat at the back of his mind, an itch begging to be scratched but impossible to find.

He let his eyes close again, snuggling closer to Viktor. Whatever it was, he could figure it out later. Now, he had Viktor in his arms, for the night, for the weekend. He wasn’t about to waste that time worrying. He sighed and let the edges of sleep wash over him.

The nagging feeling crystalized suddenly, dragging him out of sleep suddenly.

He jerked awake. The room was dark, and his stomach clean of the mess he’d left there when he’d fallen asleep. Viktor must have gotten up after Yuuri drifted off and cleaned them both off. He was asleep next to Yuuri, his hand curled on Yuuri’s chest like he’d fallen asleep wrapped around him. Even in the dark, his ring glinted with reflected light, drawing Yuuri’s eyes to it like a magnet.

I’m yours. Always.

Yuuri swallowed. That was what Viktor said. He was sure of it. What he wasn’t sure of was what the hell it meant.

Always. Except that they both knew that this weekend was the last of their time together. Yuuri was retiring, and Viktor was returning to the ice; there was no room in that future for this furtive, stolen relationship. And yet Viktor said always like it made sense, like they had more time than they knew
what to do with. So what the hell?

Viktor knew they were ending this in forty-eight hours- didn’t he?

Yuuri turned his head to look at him. He chewed on his still kiss-bitten lip, wincing when his teeth dug into a particularly sore spot. Surely Viktor knew. What he’d said earlier- it was just a heat of the moment thing, to be discarded once the haze of lust dissipated. He was the one who had put a time limit on this relationship in the first place, the one who said Grand Prix Final with so much assurance.

Still, it nagged at him- maybe because he wanted it so badly. Wanted to hold on to Viktor, be selfish for just a little while longer. If Viktor wanted to hold on too… But no. He couldn’t think like that. Yuuri was retiring, and Viktor was returning to the ice, just as it should be. This past year had been a respite from the inevitable, not an escape.

They would just have to talk about it. They hadn’t said a word about it yet- which. Oh.

Oh no.

Yuuri had been avoiding thinking about it so determinedly that he’d forgotten about the actual leaving part. The part where Viktor would have to pack up his things, organize flights and accommodations for Makkachin, where they would have to untangle themselves from each other. And unless Viktor had been packing in uncharacteristic silence, that meant he hadn’t been thinking about the logistics of it either- and he would have to come back to Hasetsu with Yuuri after all. Go back in awkward understanding that they’d already ended things, and they no longer belonged to each other.

Yuuri wasn’t sure he could handle that. Any time he’d thought of the inevitable, he’d imagined it happening like a jump forward in time, a blink-and-you’ll-miss-it moment. One moment, Viktor would be there, and in the next he would be gone. He hadn’t thought about packing, about paperwork with the JSF, about press announcements and goodbyes.

The ache in his chest, lying dormant until now, squeezed all the air out of his chest. They would have to talk about it. He didn’t want to- god, he didn’t want to- but they would have to, sooner rather than later.

He closed his eyes and curled closer to Viktor. He pretended the dampness on his cheeks wasn’t from tears, the shiver in his bones wasn’t grief but nerves. He had one last chance at this. One last chance to show the world what Viktor meant to him, to show Viktor that he loved him.

One last chance to hold on, before he was forced to let go.

Things were both better and worse the next day.

Better, because he could watch Viktor smile, Viktor laugh, Viktor flashing his ring like it was important to him. Better because it was finally here, Yuuri’s last chance at redemption, and he didn’t have to wait in tense anticipation anymore. Better because he got to kiss Viktor in the morning, got to hold hands with him down to the rink, got to feel Viktor’s lips brush against his ring before sending him out onto the ice.

Worse because of that goddamn quad flip.

He let Viktor guide him away from the kiss and cry with meaningless reassurances. That it was still a good score, better than his personal best from last year. That he could make it up in the free skate.
That he was proud of him. Each reassurance was just as empty as the last, not when Yuuri knew the truth. He’d set out to show the world what Viktor meant to him with Viktor’s signature move, and he couldn’t do it.

It felt like a sign.

He spent more of the day watching Viktor than the ice. He couldn’t help it, drawn to the competitive spark in Viktor’s eye. The spark that said he was chomping at the bit to return to the ice, that he knew he could do better than the measly offering Yuuri had just given.

Yuuri willed himself not to cry. There was still the free skate, after all. He hadn’t lost Viktor yet—

“Youuri?”

He blinked. Viktor was frowning at him in concern, eyes no longer glued to the ice. JJ had started his short program already— Yuuri couldn’t remember Otabek finishing, or what score he’d even gotten except that it was higher than his own. And surely JJ would get a higher score as well—

-or not.

Yuuri gaped along with the rest of the audience as JJ flubbed jump after jump. It was a train wreck—like watching himself from just a year ago. “He’s breaking,” Yuuri said as JJ’s music came to an awful, inevitable close. “But- he got bronze last year, how is the pressure getting to him now?”

Viktor was still looking at him. He hadn’t looked away for almost the entirety of JJ’s program. “Winning doesn’t make it go away, Yuuri,” he said quietly. “You know that.”

The audience began cheering and chanting JJ’s name, even louder than they had when he’d won. Yuuri rubbed a hand over his chest— as if that could make this feeling go away. The cheers made it worse, somehow, a reminder of what he’d be giving up when he retired. The thrill of competing, the support of so many people who cared about his wins and his losses, the incomparable feeling of his blades cutting through fresh ice with a perfect, deep edge. He never listened to the crowd when he failed, too afraid of what they would say; did they cheer their support twice as loud when he fell?

“Youuri? Are you okay, милый?”

He nodded, bringing his jittery hands to rest in his lap. “I’m fine,” he said with a semblance of a smile.

Viktor frowned, but he didn’t comment on the blatant lie. He wrapped a warm, comforting arm around Yuuri’s shoulder’s instead, rubbing soothingly at Yuuri’s shoulders.

Yuuri tried not to tense under his touch. This made it worse, too— Viktor’s concern, his affection, when it was so at odds with the way he looked at the ice. With longing. Of course it was with longing- Yuuri knew, even if Viktor never said anything, just how desperately Viktor missed competing. Missed it more than Yuuri would. And yet Viktor kept doing this, showering Yuuri with affection when he should be starting to pull away.

Putting it off, just like Yuuri was doing. Trying to bargain with the inevitable: maybe they could wait until the end of the season, maybe Yuuri could follow Viktor to St. Petersburg, maybe Yuuri could keep competing and they could face off on the ice, maybe- maybe- maybe—

Useless. All the bargaining in the world didn’t change the fact that Yuuri was retiring, that Viktor
was going back to the ice, and that whatever relationship they’d built outside of coach and student was too fragile to withstand the change. They couldn’t push this away.

They had to talk about it. And...

Maybe the failed quad flip really had been a sign.

“You’re not in a bad place,” Viktor was saying as they stood and made their way toward the exit. As soon as they were out of the stands, he slung his arm back over Yuuri’s shoulders. “I mean, you are twenty points behind Yurio, so that’s no good, but you can make it up in the free skate. Probably. At the very least you don’t have to fight off that Janet Jackson guy—”

“Jean-Jaques.”

“And your free has a higher base score than Yurio’s—oh, unless Yakov changed it. Actually, I think I saw that he was planning on that, so maybe your base score is a bit lower. We can check that, and see if there’s something we can work on for your free?”

“Viktor,” Yuuri said quietly.

“Unless you don’t feel comfortable changing it, of course. It’ll all come down to skating it clean, I think. You know that you haven’t skated it clean all season, but if you did it would—”

“Viktor,” Yuuri said insistently. Viktor snapped his mouth shut, looking a little sheepish. “I don’t want to talk about that.”

Viktor rubbed the back of his neck. “Right, right,” he said. “Sorry. Is it the anxiety? I could distract you—”

Yuuri shook his head. “No, I just meant. There’s something I need to talk to you about,” he blurted.

“Oh?” Viktor said, tilting his head.

Oh no. He hadn’t meant now—he didn’t want to have this conversation now, in the middle of the lobby filled with reporters and skaters and spectators, less than twenty-four hours before he had to skate again. He didn’t want to have this conversation at all, but he definitely didn’t want to start extricating himself from Viktor’s life in public, where everyone would see his inevitable tears. He’d already cried for the cameras enough today.

“I—I mean,” he stammered again, stepping out of the circle of Viktor’s arm. Across the room, Chris was waving at them, making his way over with a shaggy-haired man in tow. “Later. We’ll talk later. In private.”

Viktor opened his mouth with a frown—probably to ask what Yuuri wanted to talk about—but Chris arrived before he could say anything. “Viktor! Yuuri!” Chris said, pulling his companion to a stop next to him, but keeping a gentle hold on his hand. “Have you two met my boyfriend?”

“Chris?” Viktor said, eyes widening. “You didn’t tell me you were seeing anyone!”

Chris smiled, practically glowing with new love. “We only made it official last week,” he said happily. “Viktor, Yuuri, this is Johann. Johann, this is Viktor, former living legend and world champion—”

“Don’t say it like that, you make it sound like I’m dead,” Viktor complained.
“-and of course, you saw Yuuri skating just now,” Chris finished, ignoring the interjection.

“Nice to meet you,” Johann said, his voice slightly more accented than Chris’. He smiled at Yuuri. “You are a beautiful skater. Chris’ descriptions didn’t do you justice.”

For some reason, that caused Chris to blush heavily, Viktor to smirk and sidle closer to Yuuri, and Johann to rub Chris’ shoulder as if he was reassuring him. Yuuri blinked, and elected to ignore all of that.

“Th-thank you,” Yuuri said, automatically bowing. “I’m not as good as Chris, obviously.” For that matter, he was sure Chris had never told his boyfriend about some dime-a-dozen skater he’d befriended out of pity. He politely didn’t call Johann out on the lie.

“So modest, my Yuuri,” Viktor said brightly, wrapping his arm around him once more. The affection in his voice sent a chill down Yuuri’s spine, anticipation of the conversation he’d somehow cornered himself into. “He beat Chris at the Cup of China, and he’ll do it again here.”

“Viktor,” Yuuri hissed, half-hiding in Viktor’s coat. Too much. It was too much when his head was full of Viktor and retirement and the end of his life as he knew it, to worry about Viktor’s hubris as well.

“Not without one hell of a fight,” Chris said, his eyes flicking between the two of them, lingering especially on Yuuri. He cleared his throat and pulled Johann in by the waist. “Anyway, Johann and I were about to get dinner, would you like to join, make it a double date?”

Yuuri stiffened. Not tonight, not tonight, please- The words couldn’t make it past his closed throat. Viktor’s fingers traced a soothing circle on Yuuri’s shoulder. “Not tonight, sorry,” he said lightly, as if he was reading Yuuri’s mind. “We have some strategy to go over, and an early night after that.”

Chris deflated a little, but he shrugged and clapped Viktor on the shoulder. “Of course. After the competition, then?”

“Sure,” Viktor said.

Yuuri bit his lip to keep from saying anything. Something stupid, like you'll have to have dinner with us separately, or maybe I'm letting Viktor go back to the ice, you don't have to worry. Chris would be ecstatic, Yuuri was sure. He’d been very clear that he only barely tolerated Yuuri and Viktor together, that he’d be much happier if Viktor was back on the ice with him and Yuuri was… not around.

That hurt too, just another layer to the pain ringing in his ears. He liked Chris, especially when Chris wasn’t groping him or flirting disingenuously. And now that Chris was in a seriously relationship, surely he wouldn’t hit on Yuuri so much- right when Yuuri was retiring, and would likely only see him at the occasional ice show. He was going to miss Chris- and Phichit, and everyone else-

He barely pulled himself out of his spiraling thoughts in time to wave goodbye to Chris and Johann as Viktor guided him away. He could feel Viktor’s worry in the tension in his arm, but Viktor didn’t say anything, just called them a cab and gave the hotel address quietly.

The silence in the cab was oppressive. Yuuri shrunk against the door, stared resolutely out the window- but it didn’t change the fact that they were alone now, with the upcoming conversation looming over their heads. It was going to be tonight. It had to be. The failed quad flip had been a sign, this silence was a sign. He couldn’t put it off until the end of the competition like he’d planned.
He opened his mouth to start.

Closed it.

The cab rolled to a stop. Viktor paid the driver, still quiet and slow in his movements like Yuuri was a deer about to spook. Yuuri wished he would chatter, drape himself over Yuuri like he usually did, pretend that they weren’t staring at the end of their relationship- but then, that might be worse, to pretend. Better not to drag it out. Better to get it over with.

They walked through the hotel lobby in silence, stood in the elevator in silence, made their way to the room in silence. At one point, Viktor sighed and brushed the back of his hand against Yuuri’s, but Yuuri didn’t say anything, and neither did he.

Once they were back in the room, Yuuri sat down on the bed and pulled out his phone. He stared at it without seeing it, too busy listening to the sound of Viktor breathing from across the room.

“Yuuri-” Viktor said suddenly. He hesitated. Yuuri didn’t look up from the blank screen, but he heard the rustle of Viktor’s clothes as he stepped closer. “Did I do something wrong again?”

“What?” Yuuri finally looked up at him in confusion. Viktor tensed, like he really thought Yuuri was mad at him. “No!”

Viktor relaxed a little, but not completely. “Is it about the competition? You still have a chance to win gold, you know. A good chance.”

Yuuri swallowed and looked down at his hands. “It’s not the competition,” he said. He chewed on his cheek, wishing Viktor would stop skirting around the issue and just confront it. He didn’t want to be the one to start the conversation.

“I-” Viktor began, then stopped. “Did I- Last night. You were okay with that, right?”

“Last night?” Yuuri frowned, totally lost.

Viktor didn’t clarify, just took his confusion as an answer. He smiled, a little more tension leaking out of his posture. “Nothing,” he said. “I’m going to take a shower, then we can talk, yes?”

Yuuri nodded, watched Viktor disappear into the bathroom, looked down at his hands and took out his phone.

He scrolled idly through Instagram as he waited. Most of the people he followed were here in Barcelona, except for Yu-chan and some of his old rinkmates from Detroit. It was strange to see the same landscapes and locales in the backgrounds, the same people popping up across different accounts- everyone here in time to see his last competitive skate.

He paused on a post from Viktor’s account, only a few hours ago. It was a video of him from the public practice yesterday, working on the quad flip. It wasn’t a perfect execution- he wobbled a little on the landing, pitching forward but not touching down. Still better than what had come out in his Eros program earlier, but not something he wanted replayed over and over by Viktor’s legions of followers.

Underneath the video, Viktor had commented. So proud of @y-katsuki #gpf #watchoutbarcelona, accompanied by five hearts, two snowflakes, and three gold medal emojis.

Yuuri had to smile. Just what he would expect from Viktor: confident to the point of absurdity, over the top, loving, supportive. Everything Yuuri wished he could hold onto, but couldn’t.
He glanced up at the bathroom door. The sounds of the shower had stopped already. Viktor would be emerging soon, and then…

He probably should be panicking. He’d certainly begun spiraling earlier- but now, in the quiet hotel room with just his own breathing to break the silence… It was calm in here. Not happy- definitely not happy- but simple. Like he was looking down at a still, quiet pond, and seeing himself through the crystal clear waters.

The bathroom door opened in a billow of steam. Yuuri swallowed and looked back down at his phone. He could do this. He could be gracious about this, thank Viktor for his time and his love, let him go without making a scene.

Viktor sat down on the windowsill, looking soft and relaxed in the hotel robe. He smiled at Yuuri.

“Apparently Minako and Celestino have gone out drinking together,” Yuuri said abruptly.

Viktor was crying. Crying. Like he hadn’t been expecting this, like Yuuri had set out to break his heart. Like Viktor hadn’t known in the first place.

“You were the one who said it was only until the Grand Prix Final!” Yuuri said, some of his composure cracking. He’d thought it would be a relief to finally acknowledge the inevitable. To finally stop waiting for his heart to get broken.

It wasn’t a relief, not with Viktor looking like that. He said he was mad, but really he looked scared. Small, so much smaller than he should ever look, especially not now. Not when he finally had the chance to go back to where they both knew he belonged.

They both knew it was going to end this way- so why was Viktor acting like he hadn’t seen it coming?

“I thought you needed my help more,” Viktor said, flippantly, as if he wasn’t still crying. He didn’t cry the way that Yuuri did, with his whole body. He cried quietly, helplessly, almost without realizing he was doing it. It betrayed his nonchalant performance, the perfect mask he’d crafted over years in the public eye.

“Aren’t you going to make a comeback? You don’t have to worry about me-”

“How can you tell me to return to the ice while saying you’re retiring?” Viktor snapped, grabbing Yuuri by the shoulders. His hands were too hot even through the material of Yuuri’s jacket, almost feverish. “Did this year mean anything to you?”
Yuuri lifted a hand to cover Viktor’s. He couldn’t tell if it was Viktor who was trembling, or himself, but he could hear it as their rings clicked against each other. “Of course it did,” he said quietly.

Some of the fight leeched out of Viktor’s eyes. His grip loosened; he swallowed and looked down, tears still dripping down his cheeks.

“You need to compete again, Viktor,” Yuuri continued. “You want to, don’t try to tell me you don’t. And I—” He sighed and squeezed Viktor’s hand. “This year, with you as my coach- it’s been a dream come true. But it was just a delay. A chance for you to get your inspiration back, a chance for me to prove myself before I retire—”

Viktor stood abruptly, running a hand through his still-wet hair. “I can’t believe this,” he muttered. “I thought we were- I thought—” He didn’t finish the thought. Instead, he yanked open the closet and started pulling out clothes.

Yuuri watched him wordlessly as he got dressed. Everything about this was wrong. It wasn’t- he hadn’t thought it would be easy, but this- He must have misunderstood, or Viktor misunderstood- It didn’t matter. The outcome was the same, and there was nothing he could do to change it.

“Viktor—” he tried.

“You don’t have the right,” Viktor snapped. “You can’t make these decisions all by yourself, it’s selfish.”

Yuuri exhaled slowly. Had he made this decision for Viktor? He’d thought it was for the best- it was for the best- but they hadn’t talked about it. He’d just assumed. Maybe he shouldn’t have. “You’re right,” he breathed. “You’re right, I shouldn’t have done that.”

Viktor paused halfway through buttoning up his shirt. His eyes were still watery and red-rimmed with unshed tears, his hands shaking- but he looked almost a little hopeful. “I- yeah?” he said.

Yuuri nodded, even though it felt like he might shatter his heart even further with one wrong move. “You can make your own decisions, and I’ll make mine.” He stood and took Viktor’s hand carefully. “I’m retiring, but if you don’t want to return to the ice, you don’t have to.” He stood and took Viktor’s hand carefully. “Please tell me you’ll consider it,” he pleaded. “You always meant to, right? You were always going to go back after you coached me.”

Viktor flinched. He didn’t deny it- didn’t say anything at all. Instead, he yanked his hand out of Yuuri’s grasp, grabbed his coat, and marched out of the room, slamming the door behind him.

The noise boomed in Yuuri’s head with the force of a bolt of lightning. He clapped his hands to his mouth and screws his eyes shut. Breathe. Breathe. Breathe-

The dam broke.

He choked on a sob, on another one, another. He couldn’t breathe through his tears, felt his legs collapse from under him and could do nothing to brace the fall. There was a roaring in his ears, and it may or may not have been his own heart crumpling into dust.

Gone.

Viktor was gone.
It's for the best. It's for the best. It's for the best. The words had no meaning anymore, but he kept repeating them over and over and over again, clinging to the only life raft he could find. For the best.

Gone.

“I’m sorry,” someone said. It took him a moment to recognize his own voice. “I’m sorry I’m sorry I’m sorry-”

He couldn’t tell if he was apologizing for breaking Viktor’s heart- or his own.

Chapter End Notes

-I’d say I’m sorry for ending it there, but tbh the show got there first, so \_(\^ \_\^)/

-idk if I mentioned it before, but anytime there’s a scene from the show, I haven’t been super dedicated to getting the dialogue right, just because I don’t speak Japanese and don’t always have access to each scene while I’m writing it. Hopefully I’ve stayed true to the spirit of it, anyway.

-The scene with the paella is taken more-or-less from my own life, although in my case it was three American college girls getting free stuff instead of a beautiful Japanese skater.

-Russian Translations (apologies to any native speakers for butchering your language):

Грифы (grify)- Vultures
золотце (zolotsye)- golden (literally), sweetheart
Блять (blyat)- fuck
Люблю (lyublyu)- love
Солнышко (solnishko)- sun (literally), darling
любовь моя (lyubov moya)- my love
милый (miliy)- darling

-Spanish translations:

"Lo siento, pero somos cerrados para la siesta. Si quieren regresar a las cinco y media, ya..." -"I'm sorry, but we're closed for siesta. If you want to come back at five thirty, we'll..."
Joda- fuck
"...como son turistas y no saben..." -"...since they're tourists and don't know...
“¿Es tan guapo ese señor que quieres cocinar además de servirlos?”- "Is he so handsome that you want to cook as well as serve him?"
“No es guapo, es un ángel. Y ojalá mi esposo del futuro, Esteban. Mi esposo. Miralo para si mismo, si no me crees.” - "He's not handsome, he's an angel. And hopefully my future husband, Esteban. My husband. Look at him yourself if you don't believe me."
Salúd- cheers, bon appetit
“No, no, es gratis. Por nuestro cliente más guapo.” -"No, no, it's free. For our most handsome customer."

I just started a new full time job, so it's probably going to be a while before the last chapter goes up. Hopefully it won't be as long as this one, but it's me we're talking about, so no guarantees.
Thanks for reading! <3
Chapter Notes

I wrote almost the entirety of this chapter in between taking calls in two different call centers, and in the early morning before leaving for work, so it took me about five times longer than I wanted to take. But finally, here it is, the last chapter of this absolute beast of a fic! Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

+1.

I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I’m sorry-

“Shh, солнышко, I’ve got you.”

Hands pressed soothingly into his sides, his shoulders, his arms, before lifting him with gentle strength. He blinked, once, twice, then gave up on waking. He burrowed his head in Viktor’s shoulder instead, still shaking with sobs that had haunted even his sleep.

I’m sorry-

I’m sorry-

I’m-

“I know, I know- it’s okay, I’ve got you.”

The soft mattress caught his weight as Viktor set him down. Yuuri sighed weakly, curled tight under the bedspread that Viktor laid over him. There was another weight next to him, drawing him into its gravity- Viktor, lying on top of the duvet. He stroked Yuuri’s hair, soothed his trembling hands.

“I’m sorry too,” Viktor murmured. His voice was a rumble against Yuuri’s ear, nearly unintelligible under the cover of sleep and panic. “I shouldn’t have walked away, I was just-” His next breath shook, interrupted his words. “We’ll figure it out,” he whispered into Yuuri’s hair. “We’ll figure it out. I’m not giving you up without a fight. Not this time.”

His voice faded no matter how much Yuuri clung to it. The panicked thoughts- I’m sorry I’m sorry I’m sorry- dissolved into strange shapes and images. Ice crashing into him after a fall. Sand passing through his fingers. Viktor’s back as he walked away.

Viktor…

He woke suddenly, his hands clenching around the empty sheets and clarity ringing through him like the tolling of a bell.

He squinted in the bright morning light. He wasn’t wearing his glasses, even though he’d fallen
asleep with them on- Viktor must have taken them off for him when he carried him to bed. The simple gesture made the fresh wound in his heart bleed just a little more.

He swallowed and rolled over. The two beds were still pushed together, but Viktor had shifted all the way to the other edge, as far away from Yuuri as he could without falling off. He’d curled up impossibly small, back to Yuuri, such a polar opposite to the octopus he usually was in the morning. Yuuri had thought he hated how clingy Viktor was every single day, yet now he missed it.

With every breath, the certainty grew in him. If he was seeing anything other than the carefully bland hotel room, he would be sure he was seeing into the future. Even as he looked at the tense curve of Viktor’s back, he could almost taste it.

Gold. He was going to win gold today.

He’d never just known that before. He wondered if this was how Viktor felt before every competition, like the whole world was at his fingertips, and all he had to do was reach out and take it. He thought of the version of his free skate he’d toyed with, late at night when he snuck out to Ice Castle, the one with the same technical difficulty as Viktor’s programs.

A thrill of anticipation zipped through him.

He got up slowly and began getting ready. Viktor was still asleep, even after Yuuri accidentally slammed the bathroom door, even after his alarm went off with a piercing whistle. Yuuri paused halfway through changing his clothes to watch him. He looked so lonely in his sleep. Like his dreams were as uneasy as Yuuri’s had been, troubled by heartbreak and regrets. Something about that made Yuuri’s heart speed up, on the edge of understanding- but he couldn’t catch it, the realization eluding him. He turned away and continued dressing in his tracksuit. In this new clarity, he had faith he would understand soon.

It was another half hour before Viktor woke. When he did get out of bed, it was in silence, eyes averted and pained. They moved around each other like strangers, without a word or a glance shared between them.

It was okay, though. Even with Yuuri’s heart aching, aching, it was all okay. He would skate his free program, the one that told the story of the two of them, the one that echoed and grew on everything Viktor had taught him- and everything would be okay. Viktor would see in him how much he cared, how much this year meant to him, and understand. He would win gold, and everything would be okay.

Viktor only met his eyes once, briefly, when Yuuri hoisted his skate bag over his shoulder. He looked away immediately and fiddled with his coat lapel.

“We should go,” Viktor said finally. His voice was hoarse, from disuse or from crying last night, Yuuri couldn’t tell.

Yuuri nodded. He followed Viktor to the door- but he grabbed Viktor’s hand before he could open it and let the rest of the world in. “Viktor-” he said.

Viktor paused, surprised. He didn’t move as Yuuri stepped closer and brought a hand to his face. Yuuri traced the curve of his cheek with his thumb; Viktor’s eyelashes fluttered in time with the ragged breath he took. And when Yuuri leaned forward to kiss him, Viktor- lovely Viktor, wonderful Viktor- met him halfway.

The kiss was light, gentle, sweet. Viktor’s hand shook underneath Yuuri’s, but he didn’t press into
the kiss or away from it, just let Yuuri lead the way. It teased at the corner of Yuuri’s mind again, the understanding that was still abstract, an incomplete puzzle he didn’t have all the pieces to. Not yet, anyway.

When he pulled away, Viktor’s eyes remained closed for a long moment. Finally, he smiled- shaky, unsure, unconvincing, but a smile- and opened his eyes. “We should go,” he said again.

Disappointment churned in Yuuri’s stomach as Viktor turned away. He chewed on his lip, clenched his fist tightly enough to feel the bite of his fingernails.

It was going to be okay. He knew it, he knew it. Viktor would understand once he saw Yuuri’s free program. And Yuuri would finally understand whatever it was that nagged at him, and finally everything would be okay.

He put everything he had into the program, everything he wanted Viktor to see, everything he didn’t know he still had left. He knew before he was even halfway through, arching through an Ina Bauer. Everything would be okay, after this.

See the Viktor that lives on in me.

One last jump- the quad flip. The one he touched down on just yesterday, Viktor’s signature move. He landed it with a deep, satisfying edge, a graceful sweep of his leg leading him onwards, always onwards.

He slipped into his last combination spin, elation bubbling through every movement. He did it. That wasn’t just a clean flip- not just a clean program, even. That was a perfect program. Everything he’d never dared dream of at the Final last year, everything Viktor had given him. The perfect declaration of his love.

He pulled out of the spin with gentle conviction into the last pose along with the last few notes of the piano. His right hand over his heart, ring glinting in the bright lights, and his other pointing, reaching toward Viktor. The final pose that was everything he wished he could say but couldn’t find the words.

I love you.

I don’t want to lose you.

I don’t want this to end.

Something about that gave him pause, but he didn’t have time to dwell on it. He’d done it, skated a perfect program worthy of Viktor’s time, and now he had to leave the ice to get his scores.

God, he didn’t want to leave the ice.

Didn’t want this to be over.

Viktor didn’t tackle him with a kiss this time, but he did meet Yuuri at the edge of the ice with a smile so bright it would melt their livelihoods. “Yuuri!” he called, the awe obvious in his voice. He didn’t say anything else; he didn’t have to.

Until. Sitting in the kiss and cry, listening in disbelief to the numbers, clutching at each other in relief
and heartbreak. A broken world record. Viktor's world record- now Yuuri's world record. Until- 

“Having both Yuris beat my records is the the ultimate bliss as your choreographer and coach- but it’s the ultimate diss as a competitor.”

Yuuri gasped as Viktor pulled out of the hug. “Does that mean you’ll come back?”

It felt like the world was spinning, even more than in the terrifying moments after launching into a jump he wasn’t sure he could land. Viktor was going to compete again. It was a dream come true- the Living Legend back on the ice, breaking records and hearts.

No, not the Living Legend- Viktor. Silly, overdramatic, sweet Viktor who loved Yuuri, loved coaching Yuuri, but who yearned to compete all the same. Viktor who had lost his inspiration, but who Yuuri knew had found it again in Hasetsu’s ocean, in the healing warmth of the onsen, in quiet mornings wrapped around each other.

Yuuri bit his lip to keep from crying, just nestled further into Viktor’s arms as he led him out of the rink. He didn’t want to give Viktor up. But Viktor was going back to the ice, leaving him because he asked him to. Because Viktor wanted to.

He glanced up. Viktor was still smiling, chattering aimlessly about Yuuri’s free skate, dropping phrases like when I come back and I have so many ideas and inspiring, Yuuri, truly inspiring. But despite all that, there was the tiniest crinkle in his brow, a sadness in his eyes.

It hit Yuuri with so much force that he couldn’t breathe.

Viktor didn’t want to lose this either.

For the second time in so many months, Yuuri stood on the podium with a silver medal around his neck.

The flash of the cameras was blinding, but that wasn’t why he looked down. The medal was heavy, solid, real in a way that this moment wasn’t. He tested the weight with his hand, remembered belatedly that he should be smiling for the cameras. He’d never been good at that part- that was where JJ shined, standing just a few feet away with his bronze, blocking his view of Viktor in the sidelines-

Viktor.

Next time, it would be Viktor on the podium, not him.

He let the medal drop to his sternum with a bruising thunk and smiled until his cheeks ached. Out of the corner of his eye, movement caught his attention. Yuuri, shifting his weight, glancing at him with narrowed eyes. Yuuri looked at him more fully, startled. Yuuri wasn’t one for big emotional displays that weren’t bursts of anger- but compared to his reaction to breaking the short program record, he looked downright upset.

“Yurio?” Yuuri ventured hesitantly. “Are you okay?”

Yurio snorted. He barely looked at him, even though Yuuri was sure he’d been staring just a moment ago. “Says the loser whose ass I just kicked,” he said.
Yuuri shrugged, struggling to keep his smile on for the sake of the cameras. Yurio seemed to have no such compulsion- he practically glared at the press and the cheering crowds. “Well, that’s why I’m asking,” Yuuri said. “You don’t look very happy- but isn’t this what you wanted? To win gold at the Final?”

Yurio didn’t answer. He grunted, maybe in response to the question, or maybe because an ISU volunteer was waving at them, reminding them that it was time to skate a lap or two around the rink. JJ followed her directions first, hopping off the podium immediately and reaching out to high five the fans crowding around the edge, leaving the gold and silver medalists to follow in his enthusiastic wake.

There were a shocking number of signs in Japanese, proclaiming their support- nearly as many as the ones in Russian for Yurio, and the screaming JJ fans drowning out everyone nearby. Yuuri didn’t high five them like JJ was doing, but he bowed and waved as he skated past. His face felt hot even in the cool rink air.

“Hey dumbass.”

It probably wasn’t great for Yuuri’s image that he responded to the insult without thought. “Yes?” he said, falling back so that Yurio could catch up with him.

Yurio scowled at him. “Why the fuck are you retiring?”

For the first time that day, Yuuri’s feet faltered. His right skate slipped and caught on a groove in the ice; he righted himself automatically, still gaping at Yurio.

“How did you-”

Yurio rolled his eyes, the perfect picture of teenage insolence- except for the tightness around his eyes, the way his hands were curled into tense fists at his sides. Yuuri still didn’t know what made Yurio tick, but he was getting better, at least, at reading him. “Viktor told me,” he said. “What, is it some big secret?”

“Um, no- not really,” Yuuri said. He chewed on his cheek and looked down at the ice passing beneath his skates. They probably looked like quite the pair: the gold medalist snarling like a kitten and the silver medalist flinching like a coward. Viktor was always dignified on the podium and as he lapped the rink- at least the world would have that again after today’s immature bickering.

Yurio skated in front of him abruptly, forcing them both to stop in their tracks. “Seriously? You’re really retiring?” he spat.

Yuuri glanced around, but they’d stopped in front of the skaters-only section of the rink, and the noise of the crowd was too loud for anyone to overhear them. There were still plenty of cameras pointed in their direction, though, so Yuuri shifted so that his back was to them, his shoulders blocking the view of Yurio’s face. Not the ideal place to have this conversation.

He tugged on Yurio’s elbow. “Let’s keep going, we can talk later,” he murmured.

Yurio jerked his arm out of reach. “Fuck you,” he snarled. “I can’t fucking believe you. So what- you break one stupid record, and you think you’re done?”

“Yurio-”

“I’m breaking it. The record you set, I’m going to destroy it,” Yurio snapped. Yuuri had never seen him so angry before, not when he first kicked on the bathroom stall in Sochi, not when he first
showed up in Hasetsu, not when JJ beat him to a gold medal not once but twice. He was practically shaking with it, eyes shining and- ah. Maybe it wasn’t anger after all. “And you won’t even be there to fight for it because you’re a fucking coward. Don’t you dare think that just because you got yourself a record and second place that it makes up for your bullshit last year-”

“Hey,” Yuuri said.

Yurio at least had the good grace to stop at that, to change tracks. “You didn’t even win,” he said. “I thought you and Nikiforov had an agreement, that you were going to win gold. So what, you’re going to quit before you get a single gold medal?”

Not anger at all.

“Yurio…” Yuuri said slowly. He couldn’t quite believe what he was about to say- but it made sense, didn’t it? Not just now, but always- back in that bathroom in Sochi, in Hasetsu with Yurio’s agape costume in his hands, on the bridge in Moscow. “Do you- do you not want me to retire?”

Yurio’s eyes widened. He didn’t say anything for a moment, then scoffed. Yuuri braced himself for a vehement, maybe even violent denial.

“Obviously I don’t want you to retire, dumbass,” Yurio said. He started moving again, skating away- but he glanced over his shoulder, jerked his head at Yuuri. Expecting him to follow, to continue on the winner’s loop around the rink.

It took Yuuri a moment to catch up to what was happening. Yurio wasn’t denying it, wasn’t trying to run away. It was almost like a miracle, if a moment of maturity hidden under teenage angst could count as a miracle.

“Do you really think I want that idiot as my rival?” Yurio continued once Yuuri caught up to him. He narrowed his eyes up ahead, where JJ was taking selfies with the crowd, all of them in the “JJ Style” pose. It was a sweet moment between JJ and his fans, even if the man himself was a little annoying. “Like hell am I going to keep skating with him as the only challenger.”

“What about Viktor?” Yuuri asked. “He’s coming back to the ice- didn’t he tell you? Don’t you want to beat Viktor?”

Yurio snorted. “That’s your dream, not mine,” he said. “Viktor’s a geezer. Even if he comes back now, he’s got one, maybe two years left in him. And he’s boring, no matter what he says about surprising people.”

Yuuri blinked. “So… you think I’m… not boring?” he said slowly. It was probably the nicest thing Yurio had ever said to him, even if it was indirect.

The tips of Yurio’s ears turned red. “Shut up,” he muttered. “The point it- don’t retire, idiot.”

Yuuri sighed. He looked down at his chest, where the silver medal glinted in the bright lights of the arena. It felt even heavier now, after skating around the rink with it around his neck. “It’s complicated,” he said. Yurio snorted again, as if Yuuri was deliberately lying to him. “It is!” Yuuri insisted. “Look- it’s not like- I don’t want to stop skating, I don’t- but-”

“-but nothing!” Yurio interrupted, loudly enough that the fans nearby must’ve heard. Yuuri doubted that Yurio cared. “If you don’t want to stop then you don’t need to stop!”

Yuuri shook his head firmly, more firmly than he felt. His heart was pounding, insisting that he listen to Yurio, that he keep skating always and forever- but. But. “I already made up my mind,” he
“Then change it,” Yurio snapped. “If the only reason you’re giving up your dream of getting a gold medal- of beating Viktor- is that you’ve made up your mind? Then change it.”

They’d reached the end of their second loop. JJ was already leaving the ice, hugging his parents and showing off his medal. Yuuri could see Viktor standing next to Yakov, most likely saying something purposefully stupid just to get a rise out of his former- no, his current coach.

Yuuri’s heart clenched. For a moment, he let himself imagine it. Skating against Viktor, finally meeting him on equal footing not just as a person, but as a competitor. Continuing to show the world his love through his skating, past this season and into the next, and the next, and the next. Stupid. He couldn’t let himself dream about that. He didn’t have a coach, and Viktor-

Viktor-

“Ugh,” Yurio said, startling him out of his thoughts. Yurio grabbed his sleeve, stopping them both once again. “Listen. You’re an idiot if you think that Viktor would be happier without you. Or that you’ll be happier retired without him. You gave him a fucking engagement ring, for fuck’s sake.”

Yuuri glanced down at his hand instinctively. The ring shone even brighter than his medal; a warm, comforting glow, so unlike the cold sheen of silver.

*It’s almost like a marriage proposal.*

That’s what Viktor said- not here in Barcelona, but back home, standing in the airport with their arms shaking with the need to hold each other again. *I wish you’d never retire,* Viktor had said. Then, Yuuri had assumed it was the same wistful wish he’d nursed in his own heart- *I wish I didn’t have to,* *I wish this wasn’t inevitable-* but now…

Now it sounded like *I’ll stay with you forever.*

“Don’t get me wrong,” Yurio was saying, his cheeks a little redder than they were just a moment before. “You two are disgusting together. Stupid and annoying and gross-”

Yuuri reached out and wrapped him in a hug.

Yurio screeched in protest, predictably. Yuuri didn’t let it dissuade him, just held him a little tighter. And after a moment, he felt a weak, uncertain touch on his shoulder blade- Yurio, hugging him back.

“Thank you,” Yuuri said quietly.

Yurio made a quieter, less convincing noise of protest. “Whatever, pig,” he muttered. He shoved at Yuuri’s shoulder. “Get off me.”

Yuuri laughed, surprising both of them. Impulsively, he turned his head and kissed Yurio’s temple.

The resulting shriek echoed around the entire arena. Yurio jumped nearly a foot in the air, pushed himself violently away from Yuuri, and promptly tripped over his own skates. He barely righted himself before falling on his ass. “What the fuck?” he stammered, blushing so furiously it was surprising the ice around him didn’t melt.

“Congratulations,” Yuuri said cheerfully. “Don’t get too comfortable with that medal.”

Yurio narrowed his eyes. “Wait,” he said flatly. “Does that mean…?”
“Yura!”

Both of them jumped. Yakov’s voice was always mildly terrifying, even when Yuuri wasn’t bearing the brunt of his anger. He didn’t know how Viktor and Yurio could stand it.

Yuuri didn’t focus on Yakov for very long. His eyes drifted to the side, where Viktor was standing with a strained smile on his face. He barely noticed Yurio skate off with a grunt and a suspicious, sidelong glance back at him. He smiled back at Viktor instead, his hands coming up to cradle his new medal.

His silver medal.

He glanced down at it. He’d really thought it would be gold. He’d been so sure this morning, going into the free skate, and especially after they announced the score. For those few hours, it had felt like he could see into the future- and yet here he was, holding silver instead.

He’d wanted it to be gold.

He still wanted to win gold.

And he couldn’t win gold if he was retired.

He swallowed and pulled the medal off his neck. He started skating again, crossing the last stretch of ice between him and Viktor with the medal in his hands. An offering, one that wasn’t good enough, didn’t reflect all the hard work and love he and Viktor had poured into this season. He could do it, he knew he could; he could snatch the gold out from Yurio, snatch the short program world record and then the combined as well. He could show Viktor a gold medal- not just on the sidelines where Viktor waited for him, but standing one step above him on the podium. He could do it.

He wanted to do it.

Viktor wanted to.

So… why the hell weren’t they?

“It’s not a gold medal,” he said as he approached Viktor, his heart pounding too loudly in his chest. “But…” He held out the medal to his coach- his former coach, now.

Viktor looked at the medal for a moment, and smiled. “I don’t feel like kissing it unless it’s gold,” he said cheerfully.

He pressed Yuuri back against the boards with enthusiasm both false and true. He was smiling- but even as Yuuri flinched backward under the force of it, he could see the desperation in Viktor’s eyes. What he wanted Yuuri to say.

Why not.

The silver medal went flying, slipping from his fingers without a thought as he pushed Viktor back, toppling them both over onto the ground. He didn’t care. He wrapped his arms around him, clinging to the only person he’d ever wanted to hold on to. He was holding on, dammit.

“Viktor! Please stay with me in competitive figure skating for one more year!” he said, too loud in Viktor’s ear. He pushed back, holding Viktor’s shoulders. “This time I’ll win gold for sure.”

Viktor’s eyes widened. His expression transformed slowly- desperation traded for disbelief melting
into pure, untarnished joy. “Yes!” he said. “But keep going!”

Yuuri blinked. His eyes almost watered at the brilliance of Viktor’s smile. “What?”

The smile softened. Viktor sighed happily, and reached over to grab the forgotten medal lying on the floor nearby. “Even I’m worried about making a full comeback if I’m also staying on as your coach,” he said, slipping the medal back over Yuuri’s neck. “In exchange, I’ll need you to become a five-time world champion, at least.”

Yuuri clutched at the medal. He was twenty-four years old, about to compete not only against Yuri Plisetsky but Viktor Nikiforov too, in a sport that was changing, growing almost by the day. He wouldn’t win five world championships, that was a fact.

It didn’t matter. He finally heard it. What Viktor was trying to say, what he’d always been trying to say. From the first day standing in the onsen with his hand outstretched, inviting Yuuri into a whole new world with him.

*Stay with me forever.*

Viktor’s smile blurred and distorted- it wasn’t until he felt wetness on his hand that Yuuri realized he was crying again.

“Yes,” he said.

*Stay with me.*

“Yes,” he said again, and leaned forward to kiss him.

Viktor’s hand was warm on the small of his back, even through the layers of his jacket and stuffy button down shirt. Yuuri leaned back into it, letting the pressure ground him. From the way that Viktor shifted closer to him, it seemed like it was just as grounding for him.

Another year, another banquet, very different circumstances.

“That exhibition was really something,” the woman said. Yuuri thought she might have been one of Viktor’s old sponsors, from some big brand like Gucci or Prada- she certainly dressed the part, looking almost as glamorous as Viktor did tonight. Except right now, all of her attention was on Yuuri, not on Viktor, as if Yuuri wasn’t someone who spent eighty percent of his time in sweat-stained workout clothes he bought three years ago at Target. “You two are such teases! I can’t believe you’ve been planning to announce Viktor’s comeback for so long that you planned an entire exhibition around it, and you never said!”

Yuuri choked on his ill-advised sip of champagne. “Um,” he sputtered. At his back, Viktor’s fingers tensed, even if Viktor’s smiling mask remained perfectly in place. “Yes. That is definitely. Um. What we did.”

Better than admit he’d meant the exhibition as one last farewell, not a comeback announcement. Better than admit that he and Viktor hadn’t been planning anything, that he’d fully intended to retire until about twenty-four hours ago.

They hadn’t talked about it yet. He’d collapsed in bed as soon as they returned to the hotel room last night, and today had been overwhelmed with preparations for the gala and the banquet. The only time they’d even mentioned Viktor returning to the ice was at the hastily called press conference Yakov had organized to announce it- and even then, all Viktor had done was wink, smile, and say he
was coming back to the ice in time for Russian Nationals. He hadn’t answered the thousands of questions that the press had launched at him before he’d even finished talking; hadn’t mentioned Yuuri at all, even if his eyes never left Yuuri as he spoke, even if the reporters were asking about Yuuri’s career almost as much as his own.

They should probably talk about it.

“Are you really planning on coaching on top of competing?” the sponsor asked Viktor, but her eyes were on Yuuri. “Seems like quite the handful.” She winked at him, poorly.

Viktor shifted even closer, his hand snaking around to hold Yuuri by the waist. Yuuri breathed deeply and melted even further into his side. How had he ever thought he could give this up?

“Nothing I can’t handle,” Viktor said lightly. “Ah- there’s Yakov,” he added, looking over the sponsor’s head at the other end of the room. Where Yakov certainly wasn’t standing, because Yuuri knew for a fact that he was out in the hallway lecturing Yurio for insulting an ISU volunteer. “If you’ll excuse us,” Viktor said pleasantly, leading Yuuri away with a sure and steady hand despite the sponsor’s protests.

Yuuri sighed in relief. “Thank god,” he muttered as soon as they were out of earshot. “I don’t know how you deal with all this all the time.”

“Practice,” Viktor said breezily, snatching a glass of champagne from a nearby table. “I don’t mind it, really.”

Yuuri snorted. “You love it,” he corrected.

Viktor smirked into his champagne- practically a confession- then quirked an eyebrow at him. “And you don’t?”

“What? Of course not.”

The light in Viktor’s eyes turned mischievous. “Oh really? So that wasn’t you that announced to the whole world, completely unprompted, that I was the first person you ever wanted to hold on to? Or changed your program as a message to me- not once, but twice? Or-”

Yuuri slapped a hand over Viktor’s mouth before he could keep going. His ears were burning- especially when Viktor pursed his lips, brushing them against Yuuri’s palm in a tiny, hidden kiss.

“I didn’t do all that for the attention,” Yuuri said. He took his hand away slowly, just to make sure Viktor wouldn’t say anything else completely mortifying. "I did it for you."

The smile that broke out over Viktor’s face was quiet and warm- a polar opposite to the brash press smile he handed out to anyone. “Oh?” he said.

“Viktor!” someone called from nearby. More sponsors, from the look of it. Viktor always seemed to have an overwhelming number of them- and right now, they were all clamoring for his attention.

“You should go,” Yuuri said when Viktor looked torn. “I’ll hang out over here for a while.”

Viktor twined their fingers together, his bangs falling in front of his eye as he considered their hands. “Are you sure?” he asked.

Yuuri squeezed his hand. “I’ll be fine,” he said.
“Not what I meant,” Viktor pouted.

His hand was still clutching Yuuri’s, almost too tightly. He hadn’t stopped touching Yuuri all day, not since he joined him on the ice for the exhibition. He didn’t look happy to let go now.

Yuuri’s heart clenched. He’d assumed that he was the one who’d been clingy today- but from the way Viktor was looking at him, you would think that Yuuri would disappear in a puff of smoke if Viktor stopped touching him. He gave Viktor a warm smile and pressed a quick kiss to his cheek. “I’ll be right here, waiting for you,” he said.

Viktor’s answering grin was blinding. “Eyes on me?” he murmured.

“Always,” Yuuri said honestly.

Viktor kissed his temple and walked away, glancing over his shoulder with every step. The sponsors who called him over weren’t far away, but it took him nearly twice as long as it should to get over to them.

Yuuri watched him as he greeted the sponsors like old friends, though Yuuri doubted he even remembered their names. The ring on his hand flashed brightly with every expansive gesture. Yuuri toyed with his own, twisting it around his finger, taking it off to look at the half-complete snowflake engraving that continued on Viktor’s, sliding it back on where it belonged. He hadn’t meant them as engagement rings when he bought them- that was Viktor’s lie, easier than explaining that they were meant as mementos, evidence that their time together really happened.

Except…

If Viktor didn’t want to end things- if Viktor hadn’t even expected to end things- then.

Maybe.

Maybe he really meant it, when he announced to the top skaters in the world and both Yuuri’s sister and mentor that they would get married when Yuuri won a gold medal.

_Married._

Yuuri’s breath caught in his chest. He looked down at the ring again, and back at Viktor chatting amiably with the sponsors. He wanted it. God, he wanted all of it, the cozy domestic fantasy he hadn’t let himself dwell on but that seemed so attainable now.

Viktor glanced over and winked. The sponsor next to him said something; he didn’t even turn his head to answer, just kept watching Yuuri with shining eyes as he spoke.

_“Yuuri!”_

That was all the warning Yuuri had before a solid weight crashed into him, only slightly braced by the pair of arms wrapping around his shoulders. Luckily, he had five years of experience in dealing with Phichit’s surprise tackle-hugs. He caught Phichit before they both went tumbling to the floor.

“Phichit-kun!” he complained, but he couldn’t help but laugh as Phichit squeezed him a little too tight.

“I’m so proud of you!” Phichit said, ignoring his half-hearted protestations. “A GPF silver medal and a world record! I always knew you could do it.” He pulled away to ruffle Yuuri’s hair affectionately.

Yuuri ducked his head, grinning helplessly. “Thank you,” he said. “I’m still in shock, I think. After last year…”
“Just a bump in the road,” Phichit said, waving a dismissive hand. “Besides, this means that if the pattern holds, next year I’ll get the silver medal and the world record.”

Yuuri swallowed. He’d forgotten, in all the excitement and confusion- Phichit had come in sixth, the same position Yuuri had been in one year ago.

Only it wasn’t the same, not really. Phichit had done his programs justice, skating with the same pride and vivacity that brought him to the final in the first place. At another competition, he might have even medaled. He hadn’t ended with over thirty points between him and the next skater- and anyway, it was Phichit. He would find something to be positive about no matter what the situation.

“That’s fine,” Yuuri said breezily. “Because I’m going to be standing above you on the podium.”

Phichit’s mouth fell open in surprise. It didn’t last long, though- almost instantly, his face broke into a huge, bright grin that almost hurt to look at. “Yuuri! So sassy! What ever happened to my sweet, shy roommate?”

Yuuri raised his eyebrows at him. “You once called me the most savage bitch to ever walk through the doors of the Bloomfield Hills IHOP.”

“I still maintain that old man was talking about his gross pancakes, and didn’t deserve to be called a racist turd floating in the devil’s toilet.”

“It was two am and I hadn’t eaten since noon- and anyway, the point is, when did you ever think I was sweet and shy?”

“Up to about two seconds before you eviscerated a sad old man trying to eat shitty two am pancakes.” Phichit shook his head in mock disapproval, then brightened. “Anyway, how about a beautiful besties banquet selfie?” he asked, phone appearing magically in his hand.

“I’m shocked it took you this long to ask.”

It took Phichit a moment to maneuver them into a pose and patch of light that he deemed suitable, and another long stretch of time for him to take far too many pictures from different angles. Yuuri’s cheeks started to hurt from smiling- but at least it was the good kind, smiling with Phichit for his truly ridiculous number of selfies, and not from engaging politely with strangers.

“Ah, hang on, this is what we need,” Phichit said eventually. He took his arm off Yuuri’s shoulders and swiped two glasses of champagne from a nearby table. He kept one for himself and passed the other to Yuuri, looking just a little too pleased with himself.

“Phichit-”

“No, no, it’ll be good! We’ll toast to your medal and my future one, it’s going to come out great.”

Yuuri narrowed his eyes at his former roommate. “You just want to get me drunk so that I’ll pole dance,” he said.

To his credit, Phichit didn’t try to deny it. “Well, you never let me see you pole dance, and I’m your best friend!” he said, somehow guiding Yuuri to turn despite having his hands full of champagne and his phone. He positioned Yuuri so that the rest of the party was visible behind them, touched their champagne glasses together with a smile, and snapped a few more pictures. Yuuri did his best to not look like a gaping cow.

“I don’t let anyone see me pole dance,” Yuuri corrected. “I don’t even remember doing it last year.”
“Exactly—so drink up.” Phichit nudged him with his elbow and waggled his eyebrows comically.

Yuuri sighed and took a sip of champagne—just a sip, though, just enough to appease Phichit. He had less than zero interest in a repeat of last year. Especially not the debilitating hangover, and losing all memory of the night. He was not going to forget another second of his time with Viktor.

“Hell yeah,” Phichit said, beaming at him. “I love drunk Yuuri!”

Yuuri rolled his eyes. “Yeah, one sip is definitely enough to get me drunk,” he said.

“It’s a gateway sip. I’ve got it all figured out, you’ll see.” He waved his phone at Yuuri’s face, close enough that Yuuri had to wonder if Phichit wasn’t already a little drunk himself. “C’mon, one more.”

Yuuri followed his direction to stand in front of him obediently—it was simpler than protesting and then getting wrestled into doing another selfie anyway. Phichit stood on his toes and wrapped his arm around Yuuri’s shoulders from behind, the other holding his phone out expertly to take a few dozen pictures at once. For the last five, he turned his head and kissed Yuuri on the cheek with a loud, exaggerated mwah!

“Yuuri?”

“Viktor!” Phichit said, turning them both to face him. “Want to join the selfie party?”

Viktor looked between the two of them, his smile not quite convincing enough. Yuuri frowned and broke free of Phichit’s hold, crossing the distance between him and Viktor with one step. “How did it go with the sponsors?” he asked.

“Hm? Oh, that went fine,” Viktor said. He was still looking between Yuuri and Phichit, his expression uncertain, almost vulnerable. It was the same expression he’d been wearing all night, just not hidden by polite smiles and Viktor’s public persona.

Yuuri only saw it for a second. In the next, Viktor’s face broke into a grin, and he draped himself over Yuuri’s shoulders, resting his chin on top of his head. He smelled like cologne and the champagne he’d downed during his conversation with the sponsors. It took Yuuri a moment to realize he had grabbed Viktor’s hand in response and twined their fingers together, the cool metal of Viktor’s ring a soothing pressure against his skin.

“What are you up to?” Viktor asked. “Any dance-offs I should know about?”

“No yet,” Phichit answered while Yuuri choked. He ran his hand up and down Yuuri’s arm in a gesture that was probably meant to be soothing. It definitely wasn’t. “Give me an hour or so, I’ll bring out that drunk, slutty Yuuri we all know and love.”

Viktor made a strangled noise into Yuuri’s hair.

Phichit laughed and let his hand fall back to his side. “Don’t worry,” he said cheerfully. “I’m not trying to steal your man. Couldn’t if I wanted to, you know that.”

From the way Viktor’s hand tightened around Yuuri’s, Yuuri wondered if Viktor really did know that. After everything that happened this weekend… well. He squeezed Viktor’s hand back, a weak attempt at reassurance over a wound that was still raw for both of them.

“Whiiiiiiile we’re on the subject, though…” Phichit continued. His cheerful expression dropped instantly from his face, leaving the determined look of someone about to verbally devastate their
former landlord into not only refunding their security deposit but also their first and last month’s rent even though hamsters really weren’t allowed according to the lease.

Yuuri flinched instinctively, even if Phichit’s lethal seriousness was directed at Viktor, not at him.

“If you hurt him, even just a little bit, I’ll be coming for you, Viktor Nikiforov,” Phichit warned.

Yuuri felt Viktor freeze behind him, and sighed. He hadn’t told Phichit what had happened between him and Viktor- but maybe he should, if Phichit insisted on giving the shovel talk to the person who least deserved it. “Phichit-” he started.

“Understood,” Viktor said quietly.

Phichit nodded and held out his hand for Viktor to shake. Viktor took it, leaning even further over Yuuri to do so- ruining the seriousness of the moment just a little- but then again, it was a ridiculous situation to begin with. Yuuri was an adult, who didn’t need his best friend threatening his… his… his coach. Especially not since Yuuri was the one doing all the hurting lately.

The unnatural severity of Phichit’s expression cleared. He sighed wistfully as he dropped Viktor’s hand, carrying on like a misty-eyed mother watching her child walking down the aisle. “I cannot believe my son is marrying his celebrity crush,” he said.

Yuuri choked again. “Cru- no, no, that absolutely was n-”

“-was exactly what that was,” Phichit interrupted with far too much glee. “Seriously, Viktor, I could tell some stories about the biggest fanboy who ever-”

“Oh look, champagne!” Yuuri said desperately. He dove for the table, barely able to keep from tripping over Viktor, downed the glass that was already in his hand, and grabbed three more to thrust toward Viktor and Phichit. “Another toast selfie!” he said, far too loud.

He pretended he didn’t see Phichit mouth we’ll talk later at Viktor.

Five glasses of champagne later, Yuuri was floating, with Viktor’s touch his only tether. He stepped even closer to Viktor’s chest, resting his cheek on Viktor’s shoulder as they danced aimlessly. The room spun slowly around them- from their dance or from the alcohol, he couldn’t really tell.

He wasn’t- it wasn’t like he was drunk. It took more than five- six? seven?- drinks to get him even close to the pole Phichit kept shooting meaningful glances at. Definitely. Maybe. Even if he did have a few moves he’d been itching to try out- no. Later.

Mm, but if Viktor wanted to join him…

“Tired, солнышко?” Viktor whispered. His hot breath brushed over Yuuri’s ear, paradoxically sending a shiver down his spine.

“No,” Yuuri murmured into Viktor’s jacket. He turned his head so that his lips brushed the bare skin of Viktor’s neck instead. “Wouldn’t mind going back to the room, though,” he added impulsively. He pressed a kiss there, just to be sure Viktor wouldn’t mistake his meaning.

If the way Viktor’s hand tightened on his lower back was any indication, the message definitely got through.

“We have to stay a little longer,” Viktor said reluctantly. He shifted, looking around the room
instead of devoting his full attention to dancing with Yuuri. Yuuri frowned and let his left hand drift upward to card through the short hair at the back of Viktor’s neck. “There are a few JSF representatives here who will probably want to talk to you, and the…”

Yuuri lifted his head to kiss the bolt of Viktor’s jaw, reveling in the way Viktor trailed off with a shuddering breath. He’d maybe had too much to drink to talk to JSF officials without getting a scolding- and besides, he liked the thought of getting back to their room, just the two of them, more with each passing second.

The last time they slept together, he’d been fighting back the ache in his chest and the tears from his eyes. There was no way was he going to let that linger like a bad aftertaste- he and Viktor needed to make new memories together.

“I don’t think I need to talk to the JSF right now,” he said, pulling back to meet Viktor’s eyes. “Do you?”

Viktor’s eyes widened. He opened his mouth, closed it, swallowed, and shook his head. “Definitely not,” he said. His left hand closed more firmly around Yuuri’s right, bringing it down and tugging him toward the edge of the dance floor.

Yuuri bit his lip to hide his grin. The song they’d supposedly been dancing to wasn’t even half over; the event organizers hadn’t even done the mandatory congratulatory speech to all the medalists yet, and the food had only just appeared on the buffet table. Their presence would definitely be missed.

Oh well.

He hurried forward until he was the one pulling Viktor along, squeezing his hand any time Viktor’s attention drifted the tiniest bit. Not that his eyes ever really left him, not even when Viktor stumbled on the perfectly smooth floor, or when someone nearby said his name. Yuuri couldn’t look away either, not when Viktor looked like that- all his charm and glamor slightly mussed, his cheeks brushed with pink, his eyes glowing with happiness.

Yuuri was so busy admiring the way Viktor’s tongue darted out to wet his lips that he had no warning before smacking directly into something tall, solid, and possibly human-shaped.

Hands shot out to steady him from both in front of him and behind. He blinked and leaned back into Viktor’s grip; the other pair of hands dropped away like they’d never been there.

“Sorry!” he said automatically.

Chris waved off his apology with a sly smile. His cheeks were a little redder than usual, probably a product of the champagne clasped in his hand- and a good indication that whatever he was about to say would set Yuuri’s own cheeks on fire. “Not to worry, darling. There’s no shame in being… distracted.”

As expected, Yuuri felt his whole face start to burn. Especially since he really had been thinking about, well, fucking Viktor within an inch of his life. “I wasn’t- um,” Yuuri stammered. “We were just. Uh. Tired. Not- not like that.”

It didn’t help that Viktor was tracing featherlight designs on his shoulders, trailing his hands down Yuuri’s arms and back up again. Chris’ eyes flicked down and back, his smile widening.

“Oh, Yuuri,” he said, shaking his head playfully. “You two are less subtle than little Yuri’s exhibition piece. More easy on the eyes though, I’ll give you that.”

Yuuri glanced around the room. More than a few people were watching them with scandalized
expressions— including representatives from both the Japanese and Russian skating federations. He felt his blush deepen—but really. What did they expect, when Viktor’s hands were on him like this? If any of them ever got caught in the force of Viktor’s smoldering glance, they’d be just as publicly smitten.

He smirked to himself. Not that any of them would ever get Viktor’s attention. Viktor was his, and everybody here could see it. As embarrassing as it was, that knowledge still sent a thrill up the base of his spine.

“Hardly the biggest scandal of the evening,” Viktor said dismissively. “I’m sure Yura is due to explode at someone any minute now. Or maybe you’ll strip and start pole dancing again, that would be a good distraction. In fact, I have money riding on you doing that, so the sooner you get on that…”

“Ah, ah, ah, you forget that I have my Johann now,” Chris said. “I’ve been channeling my skills into much more satisfying exercise than pole dancing lately. Although I am flattered that you wanted to see me strip so badly that you put money on it.”

Yuuri frowned. He reached his hand around to lace his fingers with Viktor’s. Chris was only teasing, he knew. It was just how Chris was, flirting with everyone and thriving on their embarrassment— and it only got worse when he had a few drinks in him. Knowing that didn’t make the possessive knot in Yuuri’s chest go away.

“Nobody has ever needed to pay to see you naked, or anything else,” Viktor said. “You’re so fast that you’re finished by the time they even think about pulling out their wallet.”

Chris put a hand on his heart in mock hurt. “So cruel!” he said. “I cannot believe you would slander me like this. I’ll find Johann, and he can tell you just how skilled I am.” He eyed the two of them together, lingering on their clasped hands. “Or,” he added, his smile growing sultry. “Maybe I could convince Johann to loan me out for the night, and you can get some first hand experience—”

“No.” The protest left Yuuri’s lips before he could stop it.

Both Viktor and Chris turned to look at him curiously, making heat flare in his cheeks again—but he didn’t want to take it back. Chris might flirt with everything that moved, but Yuuri didn’t want to risk him being serious. Not tonight. He squared his shoulders and summoned all the confidence he had in him. “Viktor is all mine, no matter what history you guys have together,” he told Chris, with his best attempt at teasing, bold confidence. His best attempt wasn’t all that great.

Chris just stared at him. For a moment, Yuuri let himself hope that he’d made himself clear, and Chris would let them leave without any more teasing or lewd comments—

In the next moment, Chris burst out laughing.

“Me and Vikt—” he wheezed. “That’s— what the—” He didn’t get any other words out though his laughter, choking on his own breath.

Yuuri swallowed at his mortification. “I thought—” Chris had told him at least three stories over the years about him and Viktor getting naked together, for one reason or another. And another five stories about them getting wasted in bars, flirting with each other… Every single skating forum he’d been on had only ever agreed on two things: that Viktor had the best ass in figure skating, and that he and Chris had fucked at least once. “You haven’t slept together?” he said uncertainly.

It was Viktor who answered, since Chris was still breathless with mirth. “No, we’ve never slept
together,” he said, obviously amused but making an effort not to join Chris in breaking a rib. “We’re just friends, любовь.”

“Oh,” Yuuri said, deflating. His biggest rival for Viktor’s affection- wasn’t even a rival. Huh.

He frowned at Chris, who was still clutching his stomach and chuckling. “It’s not that funny,” Yuuri protested. “Half the internet thinks you were together, you must have known.”

Chris made an effort to calm down, forcing his laughter into an occasional chuckle. “No, it’s not that, it’s just-” He laughed again, rubbing at his temple. “Yuuri, I spent five years pining after you. That whole time, you thought I was fucking Viktor?”

Yuuri froze.

Everything froze.

What.

No, seriously, what?

Chris- he had- Oh. Oh.

What?

“I… Pining? I… you… what?” somebody said. No, wait, that was him. At least some part of him brain was actually able to produce words, if not a full sentence.

Chris wasn’t laughing anymore. He just looked at Yuuri with a rueful smile. “You know, the massive crush I had on you? Literally for years?” Yuuri’s face must have looked as blank as he felt, because Chris sighed. “Yuuri, I took you on a romantic, candlelit dinner in Paris, and then kissed you in front of the Eiffel Tower, how did you not know I was into you?”

Right, that. That was- yeah.

“I, um,” Yuuri managed. He swallowed and hoped his blush wasn’t as bright red as it felt. “I mean, I knew you wanted to… um, sleep with me? But I thought… you act like that with everyone, so…”

“Well, I did want to sleep with you, if that makes you feel better,” Chris said.

One of Viktor’s arms snaked around to pull Yuuri’s back flush to his chest. The gesture was probably meant to be subtle; it definitely wasn’t, not when Yuuri stumbled a little and had to grab Viktor’s arm to steady himself.

Chris raised his eyebrows at the gesture. “Relax, Viktor, I’m not trying to steal him away from you,” he said. “I’m over it, for real this time. I haven’t felt that way about Yuuri for months now.”

At little tension left Viktor’s grip around Yuuri’s waist, but not all of it. Yuuri stroked his forearm automatically, considering Chris. He didn’t seem upset, but… Yuuri hadn’t handled Chris’ interest very well, not even if it had only been a passing attraction like he’d convinced himself. It had been easier to pretend he didn’t understand at all, but if it meant he’d hurt him…

“I’m sorry,” Yuuri blurted. “I wasn’t trying to hurt you. I just… sorry.”

Chris waved a hand dismissively. “It’s fine,” he said. “I mean, I wasn’t fine back then, but I’m good now. It’s not like I was the only one, so-”
“Chris,” Viktor said.

“It’s fine, Viktor,” Chris told him, with all the bluster of someone just a step beyond tipsy. “All bets are off now since you started dating him, anyway. And besides, I’m not interested anymore, so I’m allowed to talk about it.”

“Talk about what?” Yuuri asked, glancing between the two of them. Viktor was wearing his unpleasant-pleasant smile, the one that hid clenched teeth and biting remarks, and Chris- well, Chris just looked drunk, to be honest.

“All the people whose hearts you’ve broken,” Chris said casually, before Viktor could protest.

“All the- what?”

Was he dreaming? That probably explained this. The banquet hadn’t even happened yet, he’d just fallen asleep and dreamed that Chris had a crush on him, that he and Viktor had some kind of conspiracy not to tell him he was secretly a playboy. It certainly sounded like a dream.

Both Chris and Viktor were staring at him incredulously.

“The people you rejected,” Chris said. “You know, everyone who you didn’t want to date because you were too hung up on Viktor?”

“What are you talking about?” he asked. “Nobody’s ever wanted to date me.”

Viktor choked on air behind him. Chris continued to stare, looking just as bewildered as Yuuri felt. After a moment, he blinked and nodded to himself. “Okay,” Chris said to nobody in particular. “Okay- let me just-”

The buffet table was only a few meters away. Chris darted over, diving through the line and emerging with a knife held triumphantly in the air- and before Yuuri could say anything, he was tapping his champagne glass with it, calling the attention of the entire room.

“Excuse me,” Chris called over the too-loud clink of glassware. “If I could have everyone’s attention, s’il vous plaît.”

“Chris,” Yuuri hissed- but it was too late. Everyone was already turning in their direction to stare at Chris curiously.

“Could I get a show of hands,” Chris said loudly. “Who here has ever had a crush on our Mr. Yuuri Katsuki?”

Oh, no. This wasn’t a dream. It was a nightmare.

Yuuri moved to bury his face in his hands, but Viktor’s grip on his arms was too firm. Instead, Yuuri was forced to watch as everyone in the room fell dead silent, staring at him.

And then, with a few chuckles and glances to the side, hands started rising.

Yuuri’s soul left his body, probably.

It wasn’t everyone, thank god- but still, a baffling number of people raised their hands. Were they teasing him? Was this some kind of elaborate prank Chris had thought up? But no, Viktor would have to be in on it if that were the case, and Viktor wouldn’t do that to him. So if it wasn’t a joke…

He looked around the room numbly, a montage of thoroughly embarrassing interactions flashing
through his mind with every new person. Sara Crispino, who was always overly friendly ever since they hung out at an ice show three years ago. Ada Ripset, who made out with him for a few inadvisable times at competition afterparties. Evgeny Mednikov, who’d kept telling him for years he could introduce him to Viktor, then never did. Andrew Newton and Tish Blumfeld, his former rinkmates who he’d slept with. Not one but two ISU officials whose names he didn’t even know, but who always ended up helping him find his way or get his credentials or avoid reporters. Marisol Bryant, one of Celestino’s old assistant coaches who occasionally texted Yuuri even after she moved to California. Phichit (Phichit??), who just smiled and shrugged unapologetically when Yuuri met his eyes.

Yurio hadn’t raised his hand, Yuuri noticed dimly. His face was beet red and he was pointedly avoiding any eye contact whatsoever, which Yuuri appreciated a lot more than everyone else publicly humiliating him.

“Okay, Chris, that’s enough.”

Viktor’s voice was quiet and dangerous, cutting through the static buzzing in Yuuri’s ears. His grip shifted, pulling Yuuri closer to him; Yuuri turned his head gratefully and buried himself in Viktor’s shoulder. Maybe if he pressed hard enough, he could cease to exist as Katsuki Yuuri, and he would just be a part of Viktor, forever.

Viktor said something else, louder so that the rest of the room could hear him. Yuuri focused on the rumble of words in his chest, the heavy weight of his arms, the gentle warms of his breath, rather than on whatever else was happening. Maybe everyone was laughing at him, or accusing him of being an asshole, or-

He took a deep breath. The familiar smell of Viktor’s cologne cleared his head a little, just enough to slow the runaway train of his anxiety.

At least he still had Viktor. Despite everything, they were still here together.

“…Sorry,” he heard Chris say. “It was supposed to be a compliment, not… Sorry.”

Viktor moved his fingers over Yuuri’s shoulder, meaningless and soothing patterns for Yuuri to focus on. “That would be why we agreed not to talk to him about it,” Viktor said mildly. “I think we’ll be leaving now.” He turned them both back toward the exit, moving slowly enough that Yuuri could keep his face buried.

Yuuri took another deep breath. None of this made any sense, but…

But.

“Wait,” he said quietly, stopping in his tracks. Viktor looked surprised, but he didn’t say anything as Yuuri turned to look back at Chris.

Chris looked subdued now, his smile strained despite the flush of alcohol. Yuuri swallowed. He’d seen Chris look that way once- after a nice dinner, a walk along the Seine, and a kiss that Yuuri had pulled away from.

“I’m sorry, Chris,” he said quietly. “I never meant to hurt you. I- I’m really sorry.”

This time, Chris didn’t brush off his apology. “I know you are,” he said, his smile easing into something more natural. “You don’t need to worry, Yuuri. Nobody blames you. It’s obvious that you and Viktor are meant to be together. The rest of us are just bystanders, and we’ve accepted that.” The warm smile lingered for just a moment, and then, like it had never existed in the first
place, turned into Chris’ usual leer. “Now go have the wildest sex of your life, alright? If Viktor can walk tomorrow you’re doing it wrong-”

“Okay bye see you later!” Yuuri yelped, grabbing Viktor’s arm and pulling him to the exit as fast as he could. Viktor caught on immediately, lacing their fingers together as they rushed out the door and left the banquet behind them.

Chris’ laughter followed them all the way down the hallway.

The walk back to the hotel room was blessedly silent and peaceful. Everyone involved with the Final were all still at the banquet, and any straggling fans were respectful enough to leave them alone. Viktor didn’t say anything as they walked, just held Yuuri’s hand in a firm grip. Yuuri clung to him gratefully, and tried to sort out his thoughts.

_Tried_ being the operative word.

His phone buzzed once, twice when they got to the hotel elevator. He didn’t take it out to check who it was. Even if it was just Mari texting to congratulate him again, he didn’t want to deal with it. Not with so much spinning in his head that it was making him nauseous.

His conversation with Viktor the other night. Their rings. Winning silver. Viktor coming back to competition. All those people who apparently had a crush on him.

All in all, it was impressive he hadn’t imploded yet.

Viktor waited until the elevator doors closed before turning to him. “Yuuri?” he asked tentatively, squeezing his hand. “Are you alright?”

“I’m fine,” Yuuri said instantly, automatically; then he sighed, closing his eyes. “No, I’m not fine,” he admitted. “It’s… a lot to deal with.” He took a deep breath, taking stock of the chaos in his head, trying to find a way to explain it. Viktor never really understood his anxiety, but he tried, and sometimes that was enough.

Yuuri chose the easiest thing to confront, even if just thinking about it made his stomach clench in mortification. “I can’t believe all those people _liked_ me. It’s so embarrassing.”

Viktor tilted his head. “Embarrassing?” he asked. “They thought you were a good person and found you attractive, how is that embarrassing?”

Yuuri felt himself blush. “I just- it’s different for you, okay? It makes sense for people to crush on _you_, you’re attractive and smart and kind, not to mention a living legend on the ice- But I’m just _me_. I’m nothing.”

Viktor clicked his tongue. “None of those people thought you were nothing,” he said. “I don’t think you’re nothing.”

“That’s what’s embarrassing,” Yuuri protested. “I feel like I’m tricking everyone somehow. Like I made them think I’m this impressive, attractive person when really I’m… just me.”

“Yuuri, that’s not-” Viktor started, then stopped. He ran a hand through his hair, obviously frustrated. “It’s not always about you,” he said.

Yuuri flinched at his harsh tone. Of course it wasn’t about _him_, not the real him. People saw his persona on the ice, those rare times when everything came together and he actually felt comfortable,
confident— and they thought that was who he really was. “Exactly,” he said quietly. “Once they figure out that it’s not me they’re interested in, they’ll hate me, or— I don’t know.”

Viktor’s eyes widened. “Wait, no— I didn’t mean it like that,” he blurted, interrupting Yuuri’s spiral of humiliation and worst case scenarios. “Yuuri, of course they like you for you, you’re so—” He stopped himself again with a deep, calming breath. “I just meant, you can’t control how people feel about you,” he said, calmer now. “It’s not about how you see yourself, it’s how they see you. And what they see is someone who overcame every obstacle to win silver at the Grand Prix Final, who skated so beautifully it drove them to tears, who’s sweet and inspirational and smart— and frankly, really, really hot.”

Yuuri felt a flush creep over his cheeks, all the way to his ears and his neck and his hairline. He couldn’t tell if it was the same embarrassment of hearing himself being described as attractive, or arousal at hearing Viktor say it. Given his history of shameful sexual encounters and mortifying habit of masturbating to Viktor’s posters when he was younger— yeah, it was probably both.

“I’m not,” he said, unable to muster up much conviction. He was too distracted trying not to think about Viktor telling him he was beautiful, that he was hot, putting his hands on his body and worshipping him.

Viktor seemed to sense Yuuri’s distraction, and took advantage of it. He smiled and cupped Yuuri’s cheek with gentle fingers. “Yuuri,” he said, almost a purr. “I hate to break it to you, but you are extremely attractive. Why do you think I assigned you Eros in the first place?”

Yuuri shrugged, even as he melted into Viktor’s touch. He could still feel the anxiety and shame humming in the background of his mind— but it was muted now, with Viktor here to support him. “For the surprise?” he said. “That’s what you said.”

“Well, yes,” Viktor conceded. “But it wouldn’t have worked if you weren’t already beautiful and tempting to begin with.”

His pinkie brushed the sensitive skin behind Yuuri’s ear. A shiver flew down Yuuri’s spine, a heavier thread of want weaving its way through his gut.

Yuuri stepped closer, tipped his head to press it to Viktor’s temple. He opened his mouth to respond, to tell Viktor exactly how he should be tempted— when the elevator dinged, and the doors slid open to reveal Morooka standing on the other side.

Yuuri jumped away from Viktor so quickly he nearly crashed into the wall.

In an unexpected show of restraint and politeness, Morooka didn’t comment on it. Instead, he just grinned and clapped Yuuri on the shoulder as they passed each other, Viktor and Yuuri into the hall and Morooka into the elevator. “Great job, Katsuki!” he said in Japanese. “Always knew you had it in you!”

“Ah— thank you for your support!” Yuuri said, bowing hastily. He hoped Morooka couldn’t tell that Viktor’s hand was migrating from his lower back to his ass. He probably could.

The elevator doors started to close. Morooka threw a hand out to stop them, his expression turning serious. “You’re going to keep skating, right?” he asked. “You’re not going to retire?”

Yuuri blinked. He’d already made a statement that he was looking forward to skating at Nationals and Worlds— surely Morooka had seen it. “I’ll keep going,” he said. “As long as I can, I’ll still skate.”
Morooka smiled again. “Good. That’s good.” He eyed Viktor, definitely noticing that Viktor was groping Yuuri surreptitiously. “Take care of him, Nikiforov,” he said in careful English. “If you hurt him-”

“Goodnight, Morooka!” Yuuri said hastily. He grabbed Viktor’s arm with one hand, waved at Morooka with the other, and hurried down the hall with Viktor in tow. Morooka didn’t call after them, thank god, but Yuuri could still feel him watching them as they turned the corner to get to their room.

“What’s with that stupid speech?” he muttered as he dug the keycard out of his pocket.

Viktor leaned against the wall, lounging like a model halfway through a photoshoot. “They care about you,” he said, then smirked. “And they’re jealous that I get to have you, so…”

Yuuri rolled his eyes. “Not Morooka,” he said. The lock beeped and he pushed the door open. Viktor followed, close enough that Yuuri could feel his body heat against his back. “He’s a reporter, he talks to me to get a scoop, not a boyfriend.”

Viktor snorted and began shedding his jacket. It was unfair how attractive he was, even doing something as mundane as hanging a suit jacket in the hotel closet. Maybe they’d fallen into an alternate universe somehow, because there was no way that people were admitting to crushes on Yuuri when Viktor Nikiforov, sexiest man in the world, was standing right next to him. “Most reporters don’t travel across the country to announce a local ice show and then follow their scoops around with big puppy eyes,” he said.

“I thought you asked him to announce Onsen on Ice,” Yuuri said, frowning.

Viktor reached out to the lapels of Yuuri’s jacket, first smoothing them, then slipping them off Yuuri’s shoulders. Yuuri shrugged out of the jacket and watched Viktor put it away next to his own. “I called him, yes,” Viktor said. “But he agreed before I even got the question out. All I had to do was mention your name.”

Yuuri gaped at him. He could feel his blush returning- if it ever even left. It couldn’t be healthy for this much blood to be warming his face instead of pumping through the rest of his body.

Viktor smirked and began loosening Yuuri’s tie. “Yuuri,” he said, sing-song and teasing. “You really don’t notice when people are into you?”

“I notice!” Yuuri protested. “I notice when people are weird, or try to flirt, or- I just. I didn’t think…” He sighed. “Nobody ever said anything. How was I supposed to know?”

Viktor’s hands froze on Yuuri’s tie. He stared at him, disbelief written in the widening of his eyes and the furrow of his brow. “Nobody-?” he started. He pressed his lips together in a thin line, but it didn’t help. Viktor burst out laughing.

“What?” Yuuri asked, scowling. “Viktor- stop laughing at me- what’s so funny?”

First Chris, and now Viktor. Maybe it was something in the champagne.

“They didn’t say anything?” Viktor said, still laughing. “Yuuri, every single one of those people at the banquet has asked you out, and you turned them all down!”

“What?” Yuuri said again. “That’s not- nobody’s ever asked me out before.”

It only spurred Viktor on, giggles erupting from him like bubbles. He shook his head at Yuuri,
tutting in mock disapproval. “I can’t believe you never even realized.”

“Realized what? I’m telling you, Viktor, none of those people ever said anything about liking me or wanting to go on a date.” Except Yurio, but a confused and hormone-driven fifteen year old didn’t really count. “I would have noticed if they did.”

Viktor plopped down to the bed, bouncing a little and laughing. “They did! I know for a fact that they did!” he said, as buoyant and cheerful as a child.

Yuuri sighed and crossed his arms. “How would you know?” he challenged. “I think I know my own life better than you do, Viktor.”

That pulled Viktor up short. His laughter dissolved into a softer smile, almost bashful- except Viktor never really did bashful or shy. He was always unapologetic and big, the kind of person Yuuri sometimes wished he could be, the kind of person he pretended to be on the ice and then lost the second he stepped off it. And yet here they were, Yuuri standing over Viktor as Viktor blushed and averted his eyes timidly.

“It was- um,” Viktor said. Yuuri raised his eyebrows as Viktor floundered for an answer. Viktor shrugged and swiped at his hair sheepishly. “Phichit set up a group chat?” he said finally, his unease turning it into a question. “Like a… support group. For people who have. Um. Gotten their hearts broken by you.”

Yuuri’s mouth fell open. He lost the tension in his posture, his arms dropping to his sides, his shoulders hunching defensively. “A- a group chat?” he squeaked.

Viktor fumbled his phone out of his pocket. “Hang on,” he muttered, squinting at the screen and scrolling. “They kicked me out, so I have to find it… Aha! Here-”

Yuuri took the phone hesitantly. He wasn’t sure he actually wanted to see this, hated the idea that he hurt people- but the phone was already in his hands, the chat already open.

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*Katsuki Yuuri’s Broken Hearts Club*

**laura-esteves36**

five years late, I finally did it
I asked him out

**timothysk8ing**

seriously?? how did it go?

**laura-esteves36**

[crying.gif]
remember when I was young and stupid and asked him for his autograph and he said "why" and walked away

**anewtonian**

yeah

**phichit+chu**

yea
Laura-Esteves36
this was worse
after practice I asked if he wanted to go out to dinner with me
and he said “I’m not hungry”
it was noon
then he just like, sprinted off

Phichit+Chu
if it makes you feel better, he’s barely said a word to anyone since the gpf

Laura-Esteves36
it doesn’t
is he okay?

Yuuri exited out of the chat. He remembered that, vaguely. It had been shortly after the final, just a few weeks before Nationals last year, when everything seemed a little muffled and distant, when he’d been so focused on doing well at Nationals that he failed miserably. Laura had caught him when he’d been sneaking off to a nearby craptastic diner, ready to drown his woes in grease and watery ketchup. When she’d asked if he wanted to go to dinner, he thought she’d found him out, and panicked.

“Okay, okay, I get it,” he said, handing Viktor back his phone. “I’m an oblivious asshole, apparently.”

Viktor reached out, and instead of taking the phone, enveloped Yuuri’s hand in his own. “Oblivious, maybe,” he said, smiling fondly. “Asshole, not at all. Nobody who knows you thinks you hurt people on purpose, Yuuri.”

Yuuri wanted to argue, wanted to spiral into self-deprecation and frustration with himself- but Viktor’s hand was warm on his, his expression sincere and affectionate. Yuuri felt himself nod in acceptance. It didn’t seem right, any of it- but he trusted Viktor, and if Viktor thought everything was okay, then he believed him.

He curled his fingers around Viktor’s hand and squeezed. “So who else is in this chat, aside from my old rinkmates?” he asked, making an effort to be lighthearted. “Chris? Yurio, I’m guessing?”

Viktor’s eyebrows shot up to his hairline. “Yurio? No, he’s not in there- why do you ask?”

Yuuri blinked in surprise. “He, um. He asked me out? While we were in Hasetsu? I just assumed…”

Viktor looked positively delighted. “He did?” he said, grinning. “Wait- I thought you said nobody asked you out before!”

Yuuri wilted. Yurio was going to kill him if he found out Yuuri told Viktor. “It didn’t count,” he said. “He’s just a kid, it was a dumb little crush.”

“And?”

He frowned. “And what?”

“What did you say, when our little Yuratchka confessed his love to you?”

“He didn’t-” Yuuri stopped and sighed. Yurio had looked so small, every inch the teenager he pretended that he wasn’t. “He’s just a kid,” he said again. “I let him down gently, of course.”
Viktor put one hand over his heart, looking wistfully off into the distance. “I’m so proud,” he said, almost tearfully. “My son is almost a man. It’s better to have loved and lost-”

“Viktor.”

“I’m amazed he actually did it,” Viktor continued without missing a beat. “I thought he would just stew in angry pining for the rest of his life. Oh! I should tell Phichit to add him to the chat, I’m sure he could use some heartbreak support now that you and I-”

“Don’t you dare,” Yuuri said, snatching the phone out of Viktor’s hands before he could even type Phichit’s name. He glanced down at the screen, and quickly away again when he saw that stupid chat open, *Katsuki Yuuri’s Broken Hearts Club* splashed across the top like a rebuke.

Broken hearts.

“Come on, Yuuri,” Viktor was saying, standing and making a half-hearted attempt to steal his phone back. He pouted and sidled up next to him, one arm snaking around his middle and the other reaching across towards the phone. “It’s not mean, I’m helping him!”

“Viktor,” Yuuri said slowly, barely listening. Something in his tone gave Viktor pause; he stopped reaching for his phone and frowned at the side of Yuuri’s face.

“What’s wrong, солнышко?”

Yuuri turned the phone over in his hands, tracing his fingers over the pink and gold detail of Viktor’s *Stammi Vicino* costume. “Why were you in the chat?”

Out of the corner of his eye he saw Viktor’s mouth fall open. Viktor stiffened, letting his arm fall from Yuuri’s side as he pushed his hair out of his face. He sighed heavily through his nose.

“It’s a- a chat for people who I’ve- who I’ve hurt, isn’t it?” Yuuri asked, trying to keep his voice steady. “When did- how-”

Viktor touched his chin, guiding him to look over. He was smiling, a small, wistful little thing that made Yuuri ache even more. “Yuuri,” he said quietly. His hand trailed down Yuuri’s neck, to his shoulder, to his hand, where he played gently with Yuuri’s fingers. “I told you the other day. The banquet last year- you changed my life.”

“…And then I forgot,” Yuuri whispered, eyes widening. Understanding crashed over him in a wave, drowning him in the implications of what he’d done. Seduced Viktor and ran- no wonder Viktor gave him Eros, thought he was crazy when he said he couldn’t connect with the playboy character. To Viktor, he was the playboy.

“I shouldn’t have expected you to remember,” Viktor said hurriedly. “I should’ve tried harder to get in touch with you, but I- you had already left by the time I got to your room the next day, and you hadn’t taken the note I left, so I just assumed-” He took a deep breath, still wearing that weak smile that was convincing neither of them. “You were too good for me anyway.”

“Viktor, no,” Yuuri said. He reached out to cup Viktor’s cheek, soothe the skin with his thumb. “I’m not- I would never intentionally hurt you. How could I not want to be with you?”

Viktor stared at him with wide eyes for a moment. Then his hand reached up, touched Yuuri’s hand, and moved it from his cheek. “But you didn’t,” he said. His voice wavered. “Two days ago, Yuuri, you didn’t want to be with me. You did hurt me.”
Oh.

They hadn’t talked about it yet, and they should have.

Viktor sat down heavily on the end of the bed, so close to where Yuuri sat just two days ago and told them they were ending this. They’d pushed it aside for the sake of the free skate, and then the gala, and then the banquet—but now they had none of those excuses left.

“I’m sorry,” Yuuri managed. Uselessly. He’d already apologized, had apologized endlessly while sobbing half-asleep into Viktor’s shoulder, even as he steadfastly resolved to go through with it anyway. He looked down at his hand, so far away now from Viktor. The ring still shone, though, cheerful and warm and bright as though nothing ever happened. “I wasn’t trying to hurt you, I—I wanted to be with you, I just—I thought—” He sighed and twisted the ring around his finger. “I didn’t think it would hurt you that much, for me to retire,” he said quietly. “I thought— we’d miss each other, but I didn’t think it would hurt you as much as it hurt me.”

Viktor swallowed. “Why would you think that?” he said, his voice hoarse. He wasn’t crying, not again, but his expression was a far cry from the uncontrollable laughter that had wracked him just a minute ago.

Yuuri shrugged. He had to look away from Viktor, the brightness of him. “Because you’re too good for me,” he said quietly. “Because you deserve better than me.”

Viktor was silent for a long moment. Yuuri didn’t look back at him. He didn’t think he’d see what the insidious voice in the back of his mind insisted he would see— a realization that Yuuri was right, a sudden epiphany that Viktor was too good for him, see you never Yuuri—but he didn’t want to look all the same.

“We’re quite the pair, aren’t we?” Viktor said suddenly, and much more cheerfully than Yuuri expected. He bounced back off the bed to land in front of Yuuri, his smile warm and genuine again. “Both of us think the other is too good for us, and neither one of us is capable of talking about it! I’m amazed it took nearly a year for us to run into problems.”

His smile was infectious; it tugged at the corners of Yuuri’s mouth, despite all the weight of their conversation. “I guess we do have trouble communicating,” he admitted.

Viktor nodded, his expression turning serious again. He reached out to grab Yuuri’s upper arms, holding him out in front of him the same way Yuuri held Viktor at the airport those weeks ago. It’s almost like a marriage proposal. “Yuuri,” he said, rolling his name around like something to be savored, something precious. “I love you.”

Yuuri smiled at him, felt it tremble on his lips as he reached out to touch Viktor’s cheek. “I love you too,” he said. The weight of the words, far more direct than he’d ever intended to say them, nearly made him crumble. He forced himself to stay tall, to meet Viktor’s eyes so that there could be no mistake that he meant it.

There had been tension in Viktor’s shoulders, Yuuri could see now, because it all left him in a rush. “Thank you,” he breathed, his smile stretching back over his face like he couldn’t hold it back anymore. “I meant it, when I said I wanted these rings to be engagement rings,” he continued. “I want to be with you forever, and we don’t have to label it if you don’t want to, but I love you and I need you to understand that.”

“I do,” Yuuri murmured. “I understand now. I’m sorry that it took me so long. And- I want this to be forever too. Whether you’re my coach or my competitor or I’ve stopped skating or-”
Viktor swallowed up his rambling admission with a kiss.

It was nothing like the kisses they’d shared before. Not the hard collision of their kiss in China, not the tender sweetness or heated passion from afterward either. Yuuri could taste the lingering hurt in every touch, could feel Viktor hesitate and push forward and hesitate again. He felt himself do the same. And yet with all the residual pain, it was somehow richer, more mature than any kiss they’d had before. They kissed like they were exploring each other again, relearning familiar shapes that were suddenly changed in a new light.

And then- oh, there was Viktor’s tongue, and the hungry press of his body against Yuuri’s. They’d left the banquet early to get caught up in each others’ passion; they may have gotten sidetracked, but their bodies certainly hadn’t.

Yuuri smiled into the kiss, and gave in to the thrumming heat between them.

Exhaustion crashed over Yuuri the moment they stopped moving together. He collapsed onto Viktor’s bare chest, barely shifting to allow Viktor to pull the blankets over them both. He could feel more than hear the steady *ba-bum ba-bum* of Viktor’s heart under his ear, a rhythm more poignant than any he’d ever skated to.

“Yuuri?” It emerged as a rumble in Viktor’s lungs, barely audible except in the cavernous spaces inside Viktor’s body.

Yuuri opened his eyes- he hadn’t realized he’d closed them. “Hmm?” he managed.

“Are you okay?” Viktor asked quietly.

“Mmm,” Yuuri hummed. He stretched a little, and curled up more securely around Viktor. “More than,” he mumbled, and pressed a clumsy kiss to Viktor’s sternum.

Viktor’s breath whooshed out of his chest, lowering Yuuri’s head by an inch or so. “Good,” he said in- was that relief? Yuuri frowned, a little of the post-coital haze lifting. “That’s good.”

“Are- are you okay?” Yuuri asked, lifting his head to look at his coach- no, his fiancée. Just the word sent a bolt of energy down his spine, a renewed pool of heat in his gut.

Viktor smiled at him. “I’m great,” he said.

Something was still off about his expression, an unease that had Yuuri alert in an instant. “Viktor,” he said. “What’s wrong?”

Viktor touched Yuuri’s cheek, tracing his cheekbone and the jut of his jaw. “Nothing,” he said. “I’m just glad you’re okay.”

“Why would I not be?”

Viktor shrugged, still tracing featherlight designs across Yuuri’s face. “You know,” he said unhelpfully. “I know you’re not exactly comfortable with- with sex sometimes, so I wanted to make sure.”

Yuuri blinked.

What?
Maybe there was a translation error, something to do with their native languages passing each other by, and their shared language failing to fill in some of the gaps. Because no part of what Viktor just said was translating correctly. “Not… comfortable with sex?” he said, testing the words out. Nope, they still didn’t make sense even when they came out of his own mouth. Sure, he’d struggled with the idea of Eros, with being sexy and alluring—surely Viktor understood that was different than actually having sex. Surely. So… was it… “Viktor, you know that I wasn’t a- a virgin before you, right?”

It was Viktor’s turn to frown now. “Of course,” Viktor said, his hand dropping off Yuuri’s cheek to rest on the sheets. “Why would I think that?”

Okay, so obviously there was something else they were missing here. “Then why would you think I’m not comfortable with sex?” Yuuri asked bluntly, lifting himself on one elbow to get a better look at Viktor’s face. Apparently they were even worse at it than he’d thought.

He would have found the expression on Viktor’s face adorable if he wasn’t feeling just as baffled as Viktor looked. “Yuuri,” Viktor said slowly, a little like he was explaining a fundamental truth of the universe to a child. “You’ve been uncomfortable every time we’ve had sex. The first time, you actually left the bed to go sleep alone. The last time you cried afterward. I love having sex with you, but I don’t want to hurt you.”

Yuuri opened his mouth, then closed it. Of course. Of course. He should have seen it, if he’d only stopped to think about how Viktor would perceive it for half a second. But he’d been so worried about protecting himself that it ended up hurting Viktor—a common theme, it would appear.

“Viktor,” he said with a sigh. He leaned into Viktor’s hand on his cheek and smiled up at him as best he could. “You’ve been uncomfortable every time we’ve had sex. The first time, you actually left the bed to go sleep alone. The last time you cried afterward. I love having sex with you, but I don’t want to hurt you.”

Yuuri raised his eyebrows at him. “Viktor, I thought you were going to leave,” he said. “You’d said we would have the coaching arrangement until the Final, and then you kissed me and we slept together and I thought— it made sense that you meant our whole relationship would only last until the final. I slept alone because I didn’t want to get used to having you next to me. I cried because I didn’t want to get used to having more sex with you. A lot more. A ridiculous, indecent amount of sex.”

He could see the effect on Viktor’s body, the shift of his weight on the mattress, the bob of his throat as he swallowed, the dilation of his pupils. They would probably both be good to go again in a matter of minutes, at this rate. “Then what did you have trouble with?” Viktor asked.

Viktor stared. “You— that’s why?” he said.

“I’m sorry,” Yuuri said quietly. “I’m sorry I made you think I didn’t want you. I do- I do want you. As much and as often as you’ll have me.”

Viktor took a deep breath, letting it all out in a brush of air against Yuuri’s cheek. “Yuuri,” he said, shaking his head with a fond smile. “That’s so— ridiculous. If you’d just talked to me—”

“I think we’ve established that we’re both really bad at that,” Yuuri said wryly. He reached over to hold Viktor’s hand, rubbing a gentle circle with his thumb, then trailed his fingers upward along Viktor’s arm.

Viktor watched his progress with wide eyes. A shiver visibly moved down his bare skin when Yuuri’s fingers reached his neck and the junction of his jaw. “Well, in the interest of communication,” he said, completely casual except for the breathy quality of his voice, “I would very
much like to have sex with you again, Mr. Katsuki Yuuri.”

“In the interest of communication,” Yuuri said, leaning closer, “I would also like to have sex with you, Mr. Viktor Nikiforov.”

Viktor’s eyes shone with laughter even as his breath hitched with something else. “Well then, it looks like we’re in agreement,” he murmured. He shifted his weight onto one elbow, moving in just a breath away from Yuuri’s mouth.

The idea stuck Yuuri with the force of a lightning bolt, zinging through him and raising the hairs on the back of his neck. “Wait,” he blurted, pressing a hand to Viktor’s chest.

“What is it, золотце?”

Viktor looked worried again. Maybe he would keep looking worried in the spaces between happiness, at least for a while. Yuuri knew better than anyone how long it took for that fear to go away.

Yuuri smiled at him, touched a hand to his cheek to soothe him. “It’s- it’s stupid, but-” Childhood and teenage daydreams that never really left him, even after they came together. “Would you like to go on a date with me?” he asked in a rush. “Not now, I mean, but- sometime? I just- I’ve never been on one. I mean, that I knew was a date. So if you want...”

For one long moment Viktor just stared at him. Long enough that Yuuri started to wonder if Viktor would say no- but why would he say no? Of course he wouldn’t- and of course, he didn’t, a smile growing delighted across his face.

“Yuuri!” Viktor said, grinning from ear to ear. “Darling, you didn’t even have to ask,” he told him happily, and kissed him.
Katsuki Yuuri's Broken Hearts Club

Chapter Notes
See the end of the chapter for notes

Katsuki Yuuri's Broken Hearts Club

phichit+chu
he seriously slept with both of you?? at the same time?????

queentish
wtf andrew you told phichit? he’s just a smol

phichit+chu
excuse I am taller than you
and I’m fifteen, I’m not stupid

anewtonian
i needed 2 vent

queentish
just cry into your ice cream like a man

anewtonian
u stole my ice cream so u could cry
now im sad with no ice cream

queentish
…
we’re fucking pathetic

phichit+chu
if it helps you’re not the only ones

queentish
not the only ones pathetically in love with him, or not the only ones he’s slept with?

phichit+chu
yes

queentish
seriously????? how is that supposed to make us feel better????????????

phichit+chu
I did say /if/ it helps
phichit+chu
help me I’m an idiot
why did I do this to myself
fuck fuck fuck fuck

karebearskater
what did Yuuri do this time

laura-esteves36
are you ok?

phichit+chu
he asked if I wanted to be his roommate
and like an idiot I said YES

anewtonian
duuuuuude bad idea

laura-esteves36
seriously, he asked you to room with him????
god your so lucky

anewtonian
@laura yeah but hes gotta see him everyday
and b domestic w/ him
w/out actually BEING with bim

laura-esteves36
idc id still do it lol

karebearskater
nah dude phichit’s an idiot

phichit+chu
thanks for the support guys

Katsuki Yuuri's Broken Hearts Club

phichit+chu
[gross-roommate.jpeg]
nothing like a pile of dirty dishes to help you get over someone

queentish
ew

Katsuki Yuuri's Broken Hearts Club
phichit+chu
Everyone welcome the newest additions to our sad little group, Tyler and Brad

timothysk8ing
hey

anewtonian
hi

bradleydoolittle
i can’t believe there’s a friggin support group

laura-esteves36
tyler & brad from the hockey team??

queentish
how did you two get stuck here?

bradleydoolittle
uh…

tyler+winning
…

phichit+chu
this is a safe space guys, we’ll support you no matter what

bradleydoolittle
it’s embarrassing
so I’d talked to Katsuki a few times, but never really hung out with him even if I kinda wanted to
but one night a couple of weeks ago we saw him at a club, so we started drinking and dancing with him, and it was fucking amazing, you know? and like, he kept grabbing me to dance more even though I’m a shit dancer, and he was laughing at me but in a good way
so eventually one thing led to another, and…

tyler+winning
they fucked
really fucking loudly too, the whole complex could hear them

bradleydoolittle
/anyway/ I was expecting Katsuki to be embarrassed and shy in the morning, but he wasn’t at all, he made breakfast and was super sweet and chatty, and we even had another round
but then, when he was leaving, I was about to ask him if he wanted to date for real when he called me Chad
timothysk8ing
sh*t, that’s harsh

bradleydoolittle
it’s not even the worst part
he was like, halfway out the door when Tyler came back from wherever

tyler+winning
Harry’s apartment, since you and Katsuki were fucking so loud I couldn’t sleep

bradleydoolittle
and when Katsuki sees Tyler, he waves and says “Hey Chad”
????
he legit thinks we’re both named Chad

timothysk8ing
um… I think he might think that all hockey players are named Chad
I heard him call Mike that the other day

bradleydoolittle
fuck
he hasn’t called me back, and he’s ignoring me at the rink
and he thinks my name is Chad
fuck

phichit+chu
oops
this might be my fault
I may or may not have told him that if he forgets someone’s name on the hockey team,
he can probably just call them Chad and he’ll have a 50/50 chance of getting it right
you guys do have like five Chads on the team

tyler+winning
???? literally there was one
and he left the team a year ago?????? wtf phichit

phichit+chu
my bad!!!!
but if I tell him he got your names wrong he’ll freak out
so just… go with it?

[bradleydoolittle changed their username to bradthechad]

bradthechad
I guess I’m leaning into it now

tyler+winning
that’s pathetic

[tyler+winning changed their username to chadtyler]
[mickey-crispino joined the chat]

**mickey-crispino**
wtf is the """"broken hearts club""""?

**phichit+chu**
I told you, it’s a support group to help us all get over Yuuri

**mickey-crispino**
what are you talking about
i don’t need to get over katsuki why would you think i’d be interested in him

**phichit+chu**
I was three feet away when Yuuri turned you down just now, I heard everything
it’s okay this is a safe space

**mickey-crispino**
katsuki is a fucking pervert who creeps on my sister i was TRYING to defend her honor
i wasn’t ASKING HIM OUT why would you assume that it’s FUCKING RUDE to make assumptions

**phichit+chu**
okay it’s not a safe space to insult Yuuri so maybe stop

**mickey-crispino**
I’LL INSULT WHOEVER I WANT katsuki is a fucking CREEP does no one else get
that why else would he be so SEXUAL all the time even when he’s just standing around???????? PERVERT I’M TELLING YOU

**sarabellaskates**
Mickey calm down

**mickey-crispino**
SARA WHY THE HELL ARE YOU IN THIS CHAT DID SOMEONE FORCE YOU I’LL FIGHT ALL OF YOU STAY AWAY FROM MY SISTER

[mickey-crispino was banned from the chat]
fuck, look at his ass
so fucking tight

**bradthechad**
you’re making it weird again, giacometti

**christophe-gc**
oh hush
let me have this

**laura-esteves36**
good picture
except you can see his nikiforov poster collection in the background

**christophe-gc**
goddammit

---

*Katsuki Yuuri's Broken Hearts Club*

**christophe-gc**
kok, thisis going to b crazy
butttt justshh its gonng be fine ok bcose hes crying on my shilder

**phichit+chu**
wat

**queentish**
aren’t you still in Sochi?? it’s only noon
are you still drunk from last night?

**christophe-gc**
its newdrunk im in
noon new drunk heh
but listen,, its viktor hes crying becaus yuuuris mean by leaving to ealry adn not saying anything
i fucking hate him butt hes crying is pathetix soim gonna add him
to the chat ththing

**sarabellaskates**
are you kidding? you’re adding nikiforov???

**timothysk8ing**
dude no

**adaripp**
ho don’t do it

[v-nikiforov joined the chat]

**laura-esteves36**
NO
v-nikiforov
thi wecam taks bo yu/

jmedvedevaj
viktor? are you drunk too?

v-nikiforov
yea
yurii
msorry thought d b ok but he left i don
dont kno from how long
just wanan talk to him he doesnt wnat to talk to me im

phichit+chu
wait
yuuri turned you down???
as in, Viktor Nikiforov
?????

v-nikiforov
yedd
yes
left

anewtonian
what the fuck?

jasonbskates
how??????

karebearskater
no way

sarabellaskates
how the hell did viktor get turned down????

v-nikiforov
hs so pretty and music he damc fck good
so good too good for me

laura-esteves36
well that part is true

christophe-gc
hes cryng more now

[v-nikiforov changed their username to v-erysadorov]

phichit+chu
cmon guys, if Yuuri turned Viktor down he deserves to be here just as much as the rest of us
as long as he follows the rules it’l be fine
v-erysadorov
rules
?

phichit+chu
1. No talking shit. Not about each other or especially not of Yuuri. That’s not a good way to get over him.
2. Don’t chase after Yuuri. This chat is for people who have been rejected already, so none of us have any claim. If one of us somehow ends up dating him, that person has to leave the chat.
3. Don’t talk about fight club. Or Yuuri will kill me, seriously.

v-erysadorov
whos fighting????

[v-erysadorov changed their username to v-idontwantofigt]

[v-idontwantofigt changed their username to vi-ktormissssyuuri]

phichit+chu
…nevermind

---

Direct messages with phichit+chu and v-nikiforov

v-nikiforov
Wait
you’re Yuuri’s roommate?
Can you give him a message from me?

phichit+chu
depends on the message

v-nikiforov
Tell him how much fun I had at the banquet and I just want to talk to him again and maybe pick up where we left off, and tell him that he’s a beautiful dancer and skater and I would love to get to know him better, maybe even come visit in Detroit, or he could come to St. Petersburg and meet Makkachin? …And tell him that I keep thinking about what he asked me at the banquet and if he still wants it, I think I might want to too

phichit+chu
no.

v-nikiforov
What??? Why not?????

phichit+chu
rule number 2, don’t chase after Yuuri
if Yuuri wanted you to gush at him about the banquet, he would have given you a way to contact him
besides, he’s in a bad place right now, I’m not going to bother him with any of the
pine from this group, not even yours
you’ll just have to get over him like the rest of us

v-nikiforov
we’re not even in the chat right now
please?????

phichit+chu
just because you can do perfect quads doesn’t mean I won’t block you

---

**Katsuki Yuuri's Broken Hearts Club**

queentish
https://youtu.be/H6-eKBEHg1U
I assume everyone has seen this already

anewtonian
i cant believe he did that
in the off season 2
how is he so beautiful????

laura-esteves36
fuck I miss watching him skate at the rink
is he coming back to detroit???

timothysk8ing
he ended things with Celestino
I'm guessing no

sarabellaskates
he skated this better than viktor did
way better

christophe-gc
fuck

laura-esteves36
what?

christophe-gc
has anyone seen Viktor in the chat today?

phichit+chu
no, why?

christophe-gc
fucking hell
Direct messages with christophe-gc and v-nikiforov

christophe-gc
you’d better not be in Japan right now

v-nikiforov
...
...oops?

Katsuki Yuuri's Broken Hearts Club

v-nikiforov
He won’t even look at me??? What did I do wrong?????

bradthechad
dude you broke the rules

queentish
serves you right

[v-nikiforov changed their username to v-yuuriscoach]

v-yuuriscoach
He asked me to be his coach, and so I’m being his coach, that’s not breaking any rules
But I’m trying to build the trust in our relationship and he won’t even sleep with me???
How else are we supposed to get to know each other if not through sleepovers?
And then when I asked him if he was single and about his past lovers he just shut me
down, that’s a perfectly reasonable thing for a coach to ask so why won’t he answer??
And now he’s ignoring me again except when I tell him to do skating things, which he
does and then goes back to ignoring me!!
What should I do?????
Please help????????

christophe-gc
petition to ban Viktor from the chat

laura-esteves36
seconded

timothysk8ing
thirded

phichit+chu
agreed

v-yuuriscoach
What?? No don’t ban me!!

[v-yuuriscoach was banned from the chat]

christophe-gc
what a dick

Direct messages with christophe-gc and v-nikiforov

v-nikiforov
@minami.k. for the group

Katsuki Yuuri's Broken Hearts Club

[minami.k. joined the chat]

minami.k.
oh my god there’s a whole chat just for talking about yuuri? wow i’m so glad you invited me, yuuri is super the best mega awesome, i can’t believe i got to skate against him again last weekend when its my senior debut like!!!!! i got to see his triple axel in! person!! it was so beautiful i think i cried and then!! he told me good luck before my skate!!!! i think that was the best moment of my entire life, i mean he always inspires me to be my best self but that was just really special, you know? i feel like we have this really good connection now, i can’t wait until i skate in the grand prix series just so i can skate against him more and talk with him, and maybe hug him if that’s not asking for too much. oh, yeah, that’s probably asking too much, i’m sure he gets swarmed by people wanting to hug him all the time he’s so famous and popular and talented, but then again he knows who i am! we skated together and he wished me luck BY NAME! and then i saw him and his coach, viktor nikiforov right? and his coach put chapstick on him and then they were hugging and it looked so nice i was so jealous. OH MY GOD what if i got yuuri to coach me how cool would that be?????????? i mean he got his idol to coach him so maybe when yuuri retires he can coach me, i think i would die with happiness, oh but then that would mean he’s retired i don’t want him to retire, so maybe he can coach me on the side of skating or would that be too much? he could do it, i mean he’s a superhero so of course he could but i wouldn’t want to be a burden on him. oh well i’ll keep cheering for him now and then maybe someday i’ll have the courage to ask him, i just love him so much

[minami.k. was banned from the chat]

Katsuki Yuuri's Broken Hearts Club

anewtonian
[stupid-fucking-kiss.jpg]
the kiss heard around the world
laura-esteves36
fuckfuckfuckfuck
i can’t stop crying

queentish
maybe they’ll sleep together once and then yuuri will kick viktor to the curb

laura-esteves36
you think?

queentish
\_(ツ)_/¯
it’s what he did to half the people in the chat
why would viktor be any different?

christophe-gc
because Yuuri’s been in love with Viktor since he was twelve

laura-esteves36
fuck him, what’s so special about nikiforov

phichit+chu
c’mon guys, this isn’t necessarily a bad thing
Yuuri is happy, and that makes me happy

queentish
okay but Yuuri is super shy, he can’t possibly be happy with Viktor being a fucking peacock all over the place

christophe-gc
you haven’t seen them together
Yuuri’s different now
I think Viktor has been really good for him, much as it pains me to say

phichit+chu
I think so too
and I think this is our chance to get over him for real now
and try to be happy for them

christophe-gc
agreed

Direct messages with phichit+chu and v-nikiforov

v-nikiforov
PHICHIT please me back in the chat, I’m heartbroken and I need support
please please please please please

phichit+chu
Viktor, you and Yuuri are married
I was best man at your wedding *last week*
Yuuri texted me not five minutes ago about how well the honeymoon is going

*/v-nikiforov*
But he told me he loves Makkachin better than me!! My heart is broken you have to add me to the chat!!!!!!

*[v-nikiforov was blocked]*

Chapter End Notes

Surprise! Hopefully this is a nice little treat after the unexpected angst of the fic.

(PS spot the Easter eggs!)

End Notes

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