The Next Five Years (Otabek)

by AuthorMAGrant

Summary

The sequel to "The Last Five Years (Yuri)."
Now that Otabek has found his way back into Yuri's life, he intends to make every moment count.
Life began in the depths of winter. Otabek Altin was now sure of that.

When they returned to Saint Petersburg, Otabek saw everything in a new light. He’d visited Yuri there before and the sights passing by the taxi windows as they drove were one part comfort, one part fascination. This was his new city. This was home for the time being. Years ago, when he’d watched Yuri climb to the highest step of the podium at one of their competitions, he’d had a terrifying realization: no matter how much he loved his home country, no matter how much he valued the sacrifices made for him to rise to prominence there, he would walk away from it without a backward glance if Yuri asked. That was when he knew he was in love.

Somehow, despite everything, he was here. A miracle.

As if he knew where Otabek’s mind had gone, Yuri squeezed his hand. Otabek stared down at his knee, where their clasped hands rested. Yuri’s knuckles were lightly dusted with nearly invisible hair, his pale, slender fingers entangled with Otabek’s own tan, callused, shorter fingers. Another miracle.

“How’s your knee?” Otabek asked quietly. “That flight was fucking exhausting.”

“Fine with me,” Otabek assured him. “How’s your knee?”

Yuri didn’t say anything. He just grunted and let his head rest against Otabek’s, which meant he was in a hell of a lot more pain than he was willing to admit. He was too tall and the cab was too small for him to adjust to snuggle in to his favorite spot against Otabek’s neck without disturbing his knee, but that was fine.

They’d have the rest of their lives for that.

A final miracle.

Otabek chuckled.

The movement jostled Yuri, who drew back enough to give him a curious look. “What?”

“Just glad to be out of the plane,” Otabek lied.

“Liar,” he grumbled.

They drove in comfortable silence. When the cab finally pulled over outside the apartment building Yuri lived in and Yuri launched into rapid Russian with the driver, Otabek got out and looked up at the sky. For a moment, the clouds parted and he caught a glimpse of stars and his heart swelled again.

“Beka—”

He turned back and smiled at Yuri. “I’ll get the bags.”

He ended up getting the bags and his boyfriend. He really needed to think of a different word—a better, stronger, more permanent word, for their relationship—and together they made their way
upstairs. Yuri flushed a little when they stepped out of the elevator onto the landing. He fumbled for
his keys and kept muttering something under his breath about not cleaning and Lilia being right
about preparing for every eventuality. His hand shook so badly he couldn’t get the key in the lock, so
Otabek reached out.

Yuri stilled when Otabek’s hand settled over his.

Otabek stepped closer, his lips brushing Yuri’s jaw as he asked, “Together?”

For a moment, nothing. Then Yuri’s flush deepened and he took a shuddery breath and nodded.

The key slipped in the lock. The tumbler clicked and, together, they opened the door.

The doorway was too narrow for them to enter side by side. Part of Otabek wanted to lift Yuri in his
arms and carry him into the apartment, but he doubted he would live through the experience. Instead,
he hung back and watched as Yuri limped his way inside, flicking on lights and snagging detritus as
he passed in a misguided, belated attempt to clean.

When he figured out he wasn’t being followed, Yuri turned and looked back at Otabek. “Why are
you hanging around out there like a moron?”

“I was enjoying watching you.” Funny how easy it was to be honest about everything now. He’d
spent too long lying—to himself, to others, to Yuri—and he had no intention of living that way
again.

Yuri rolled his eyes. “Get inside.”

He obeyed and closed the door behind him, taking in everything he could. The apartment reminded
him of his set-up in Almaty. It was small and functional, which didn’t surprise him. He and Yuri had
often talked about Yuri’s decision to use his government sponsorship to support his family instead of
himself. Even the payments from his more lucrative contracts didn’t see the light of day. It had taken
Otabek years to finally convince Yuri to set up a private account for a small percentage of his
earnings, and that only happened when he’d gotten Nikolai in on it.

Judging from the apartment, Yuri hadn’t chosen to dip into his savings yet. The carpet was worn
threadbare in most places. The walls were an aged shade of white and there weren’t many pictures
up. A few, in small, worn frames hung in the hallway near the front door. Yuri and his grandpa. Yuri
and his Japanese “family” at the onsen. Victor and Yuuri had given Otabek a copy of that one years
ago. It was one of his favorites, with his Yuri looking vaguely pissed off and confused at the
affection, while everyone else ignored his ill-temper.

Otabek’s breath caught when, amidst the frames of family and skating friends, he saw a different
photo. It was small, clearly taken with a phone on the sly, and he wondered why Yuri had never sent
him a copy.

It was them, a lot younger, a lot stupider, laughing backstage after Yuri’s exhibition skate to
“Welcome to the Madness.”

He remembered the exhibition. He remembered the night before when Yuri worked himself to a
point of manic exhaustion as he reworked every element of his program to fit his music and his
vision. He remembered Yuri purchasing that outfit in Barcelona, the smirk he’d given Otabek in the
dressing room mirror when he’d caught him checking out the ripped shirt from the back. He
remembered the roar of the crowd when Yuri had taken to the ice. He remembered slipping inside
the rink while the lights flashed and focused on the other end and forgetting that there was anything
outside that world of ice and light and fire while he watched Yuri skate. He remembered the taste of leather and frost and Yuri’s skin when he ripped off the glove with his teeth. And, he remembered their elation afterward, Yuri’s pride and excitement and how his strong, lean, lithe body felt when he jumped into Otabek’s arms and hugged him while they tilted their heads back and laughed their triumph.

That was the moment frozen behind the frame and having it there, where Yuri would see it every day, reverberated through him like the shock of landing an impossible jump.

Movement at his back and Yuri’s familiar tch of disgust. “Milla,” the Russian said as if that were explanation enough.

“I want a copy,” Otabek said, turning to look back over his shoulder.

“Why?” Yuri’s brow wrinkled in confusion. “Do we really need two copies in our place?”

He would never tire of seeing Yuri blush. The pink spread over his skin like watercolor, dipping into every delicate hollow and ridge. Otabek intended to spend the rest of his life reminding Yuri just how in love he was so he could watch that blush spread again and again.

“Our place?” Otabek teased.

“Shut up.”

“No.”

Yuri was a few inches taller. He’d grown into his body. He was thicker now, stronger, and instead of mourning the loss of the delicate boy he’d once known, Otabek reveled in the fact that this was a man who could keep up with him.

He’d intended the kiss to be sweet, to be thanks for Yuri’s vulnerability. But, as he’d learned from everything Yuri-related, it quickly took on a life of its own. They ended up pressed against the wall, Yuri moaning softly against his mouth while Otabek greedily claimed everything he offered.

“Bed,” Yuri gasped during one of the rare moments they came up for air. “My knee—”

“Where?” When had his voice become this raspy?

“Left.”

He wouldn’t be able to make it. The thought of releasing his hold on Yuri for even a second was so painful it would kill him. The thought of not feeling Yuri’s skin under his now that Yuri was his would kill him.

“Beka, bed. Now.”

He nuzzled his nose against Yuri’s throat. “Are you up for it?” Another kiss, one that made his knees weak when Yuri bucked his hips. “I don’t want to hurt you.”

Yuri bit his lip. Hard. Otabek yelped and drew back.

Yuri, his hair tousled, his emerald eyes sparkling with lurid intent, grinned at him, the tip of his tongue caught for a split-second between his teeth. “There. I hurt you first. Now it’ll just be payback.”

Some of his earlier enthusiasm flagged. “I never want to hurt you again.”
Yuri didn’t laugh at him for the confession. Instead, he tilted his head and inspected Otabek. His expression softened. “That’s impossible. Besides, life isn’t about avoiding pain. It’s about figuring out what to do with it.”

He stepped away from the wall and took a step toward the dark hallway leading to his bedroom. Held out a hand. “Please.”

The first time was short, more about desperation and release than a careful seduction or a passionate homecoming. The second time, Otabek slowed down. This time, all their clothes made it to the floor. This time, he allowed himself to taste every inch of Yuri’s skin, ignoring the whines and pleas when his mouth and hands unraveled Yuri inch by precious inch. Much later, Otabek woke to Yuri climbing back into bed. He pulled him closer, tangling their sleep-warmed limbs together as best he could without jostling Yuri’s knee. His tiger hummed softly and pressed a kiss to Otabek’s mouth. It devolved from there.

Minutes later, hours later, Otabek didn’t know … what he did know was that his body strained for release and his world had narrowed itself to heat and sweaty skin and the sweet mewls of pleasure Yuri drew from him as his fingers flexed and twisted and learned Otabek’s body from the inside out. He was at wit’s end, panting and staring down at the breathtaking sight of Yuri sprawled beneath him when Yuri said something that rocked him with the same wave of love he’d felt watching Yuri’s free skate.

“Are you sure?” Otabek asked.

Yuri’s grip on Otabek’s hips tightened. “Please—”

He had dreamt of this, never thought it would become anything more than that. Except, every touch and breath was real. He reveled in it. In that friction of bare skin on skin. In the cool shock of Yuri using more slick after Otabek admitted how long it had been so he would never be uncomfortable. In the steady, insistent pressure of Yuri’s cock. In the way they shuddered and groaned into each other’s mouths when Otabek was fully seated at last.

Yuri was the same in bed as he was on the ice. Hungry, snapping his hips even as Otabek tried to control their pace. Evolving, adjusting the pace and rhythm to elicit the strongest reactions from Otabek. Beautiful, his hair falling against the dark pillowcase, his body rising and arching like a marble statue when he swore and gasped and cried out Otabek’s name into the darkness.

And in that small apartment, they forgot all about winter and celebrated their coming spring.
Anger burned as brightly as the summer sun. Yuri, more than anyone Otabek had ever known, had a gift for letting it glitter and shine over his skin, infusing him until he hurt your eyes with the brilliance of his rage.

A few months ago, Yuri’s rage had been directed at the world after Potya finally passed away. It had taken Otabek weeks to coax him back from that. He had a lot of experience in soothing Yuri’s anger toward others. The problem was that he still had no idea how to soothe Yuri’s anger toward him.

Two weeks ago, Otabek had tried to talk to Yuri about his future in the sport. He was still competitive, but after that terrible season when he and Yuri had been fighting, it had been a struggle to come back. He wasn’t that old, but he’d never been quite the same as the other skaters. He didn’t have Victor’s creativity or Yuuri’s grace or Phichit’s energy or Yuri’s talent. All he’d ever had was his iron will. Each practice, his body reminded him that sometimes determination alone wasn’t enough. One night, lying in a makeshift ice bath in their tub and half-delirious from the cold, he’d floated the idea of retiring after this season by his tiger.

He’d been sleeping on the couch ever since.

His punishment didn’t end there. No talking. No touching. It was as if a wall had gone up around Yuri’s heart and—for the first time in their acquaintance—Otabek wasn’t invited inside.

He couldn’t take it much longer. His mind and body were suffering from it. The only positive was that his skating had become an escape and his obsessive focus on it had helped him improve somewhat. He and his coach had finished their practice, which meant he was in the locker room unlacing his skates when Yuri came in.

“Yura, can’t we talk about this—?”

Yuri’s lips compressed in a thin line and he stalked past Otabek, slamming his bag onto a bench and removing his skates from it with far more force than was necessary.

Otabek slid on his street shoes and stored his skates. He waited until Yuri was lacing on his to scoot closer. No point risking those blades if he could avoid it.

“I’m not saying I will retire. I’m saying I want to talk to you about it. I want your opinion on it. That’s all.”

Yuri rose and headed for the ice. Otabek’s hands clenched to fists as he watched Yuri walking away. Enough was enough. He was angry. This wasn’t Yuri’s career, it was his. He was miserable. This wasn’t his idea of happily ever after. He was desperate.

“What do you want from me?” he asked as he followed Yuri into the rink.

At the wall, Yakov pinched the bridge of his nose. On the ice, Milla winced. In front of him, Yuri froze, his shoulders tightening.

“What do you want from you?” Yuri asked, his voice deadly calm. He turned to Otabek and lifted his chin with a haughtiness Otabek knew he’d learned from Victor. “I want you to stop being a coward and give me a goddamn challenge.” He emphasized the point by removing his guards and slipping
gracefully onto the ice, holding eye contact with Otabek even as he glided backwards. Talented bastard.

“Yura—”

“Beka,” he mimicked. “I won’t fuck a coward, no matter how much I love you.”

It was the first time Yuri had ever said “I love you” aloud.

It was the only thing Yuri said to him before he turned and began his own practice. In one fell swoop, Yuri destroyed his rep—Milla asked in a whisper if Otabek really \textit{bottomed} as she skated past him—and his peace of mind.

He should have known his Yura never did anything by half measures.

He abandoned the rink. Watching Yuri skate always turned him on and there was no hope of relief in sight. Besides, he had a new worry to focus on. \textit{If} he stopped skating, was there a possibility that Yuri would fall out of love with him?

The thought shook him. He decided to extend his trip home into a walk, unnerved by the familiarity of the blackness threatening to wash him away. He’d felt this way before, in Almaty when it had finally sunk in that there would be no escape from his imminent marriage. The blackness had nearly swallowed him there. He didn’t want to bring it into Yuri’s life too.

He nearly made it back to their apartment when he passed an alley and heard a faint meow. When they were younger, he and Yuri had made a game of sending each other pictures of random cats. Maybe if he tried it, he’d at least get a response back. Maybe it would open a window for slightly more communication than what he’d gotten at the rink.

The alley was dark and dingy. The trash wasn’t as bad as he expected, but there were plenty of places for an animal to hide and there was no cat in sight when he hit the back wall. With a sigh, he turned and headed back toward the street. A clump of refuse to his right quivered.

“Kitty?” Otabek called softly. “You there?”

Another quiver.

He waited. Street cats were often cautious before emerging. His patience paid off. After another minute, there was another faint meow and a tiny bundle of fluff emerged from the trash.

It was young. He knew that much. It was covered in dirt and debris and he wasn’t sure what it’s real color even was. Maybe ginger?

Otabek held out his hand like Yuri had taught him. More waiting. But the kitten slowly made its way toward him, mewing intermittently. It let him scratch its head and he frowned when he ran a hand over its back and felt how skinny it was.

Yuri wouldn’t be back to the apartment for a few more hours. He had some time.

He tugged off his sweatshirt and bundled the kitten up in it. Once his passenger was secure, he left the alley and made his way back to their apartment.

They hadn’t taken Potya’s things to donate to a shelter yet; Yuri had tried, but could never make it out the door before tears would stream down his cheeks and Otabek would coax him back inside and return everything to its place in the tiny hall closet. Otabek went there now. He poured a small
handful of the dry kibble into a bowl and set it on the floor in the kitchen. He released the kitten and watched with amusement as it toddled its way to the food. Then, for good measure, he took the milk out of the fridge and poured some into a saucer and set that beside the kibble.

With the kitten distracted, he returned to Potya’s things and pulled out a brush and the bottle of flea shampoo from the unfortunate incident of the previous spring. He emptied one side of their sink and filled it with warm water, keeping an eye on the kitten, who was busy decimating its dinner. Once the tiny creature finished, he picked it up and muttered an apology before carefully scruffing its neck and beginning its bath.

It didn’t go as badly as he’d expected. The kitten did its best to yowl, but its voice was too immature to bother the neighbors. And it didn’t try to claw his arms off like Potya had. Instead, it withstood the bath with dogged misery, watching Otabek as he scrubbed away the filth with giant, petulant eyes that reminded him of Yuri after a brutal practice.

He apologized to the kitten as he carried its dripping body to the bathroom, where he snagged his towel from its hook. He knelt in the kitchen and rubbed the tiny thing dry as best he could, taking extra care to move the towel around so it soaked up as much water as possible. What emerged from the damp folds of fabric was a ginger tabby, its medium length fur sticking up in odd angles, its paws too large for its body.

“Hey,” Otabek said, reaching out to scratch the kitten under its chin. “You look a lot better like this.”

The kitten sneezed on his hand and returned to its food bowl, checking once to confirm it was empty, before turning its attention to the milk.

“We don’t have a litterbox right now,” Otabek informed his house guest as he spread some newspaper down in a corner of the kitchen. “And I’m not sure you’ll be staying, so I’m not going to go buy one for you yet. Let’s avoid accidents for the time being, okay?”

The kitten lifted a milk-soaked chin and meowed at him. He smiled and rinsed out the sink.

“Good. If you need me, I’ll be on the couch. I’ll get you some more food once I know you can keep it down.”

The kitten found him a short time later. Otabek lifted his head and watched as it paced in front of the couch, inspecting how best to reach him. He didn’t intend to help, but when the kitten stood on its back feet and reached a paw up toward him with a plaintive meow, he gave in.

“Fine,” he grumbled, lifting it and setting it on his stomach.

The kitten inspected him, found his stomach wanting, and moved higher, to his chest. It curled up in a tiny ball, butting its head against his chin, and started purring.

Otabek flipped through a few stations, but didn’t find anything interesting to watch. He gave up on the TV and turned to his phone, flicking through his apps and feeds one-handed while the kitten slept. After a while, he went to his music and turned on a playlist of songs he was working on. He closed his eyes and imagined how to tweak the beats while the warm bundle of fur on his chest continued to purr.

Yuri was home when he woke up. Technically, Yuri had been home for a while since he’d already showered and changed into a loose pair of athletic shorts and a tight shirt that clung to him like a second skin. His damp hair was pushed back out of his face and he stood at the arm of the couch with a strange expression on his face.
Otabek blinked, confused until he realized that Yuri was staring at the kitten, who was still fast asleep on his chest.

“Hey,” he rasped, rubbing at his eyes. “How was practice?”

No response. He’d been prepared for that.

“Sorry about the mess in the kitchen. I’ll clean it up.”

“That’s a cat,” Yuri said flatly.

“Yeah. I found it in an alley on the way home. It was hungry and dirty so I brought it here to clean it up and feed it. I didn’t think you’d mind since we still had some of Potya’s food left over.”

“It’s ginger.”

“Yeah.” He grinned and stroked behind the kitten’s ears. It gave a long stretch and yawned as it fought its way to consciousness. “I wasn’t sure for a while, it had so much dirt on it.” He looked up at Yuri. “You want to hold it? It’s friendly.”

The war between his anger at Otabek and his fervent desire to hold the kitten waged its way through Yuri. In the end, the kitten won. Yuri came to Otabek’s side and reached out to carefully lift the kitten. It meowed once, but began purring again when Yuri cuddled it against his cheek.

“It’s so small,” he said, moving to sit on the couch.

Otabek scrambled up, making room for him. Yuri sat, body stiff, but smiling a little as the kitten butted its head against his face.

“It could definitely use some good meals,” Otabek agreed.

“I don’t know if it would get enough food at a shelter,” Yuri said.

“Especially if it were sharing a cage with others.”

“Maybe we should keep it here for a while. Just until it gains some weight, I mean.”

Otabek reached up and petted the kitten’s back. “We probably should,” he said seriously.

They sat like that for almost an hour, the room silent except for the kitten’s purring. Sitting this close together, all Otabek could notice was how Yuri had drawn himself back tightly against the cushions. He allowed Otabek close enough to pet the kitten, but there was still no contact between them. Otabek was about to excuse himself to give Yuri some time alone when the Russian gave a deep sigh and suddenly deflated, his body sagging until it rested against Otabek’s.

He didn’t move. He wasn’t sure if it was a trick or an accident, but to feel Yuri against him after the long denial was heaven. Even when Yuri shifted and adjusted his body so his back was pressed against Otabek’s chest, a little spoon who was now bigger than the big spoon, Otabek didn’t move. His passivity seemed to work.

“I’m pissed at you,” Yuri said, his words clearly directed at Otabek even if he was staring at the kitten.

“I’m not sure why.”

“How the fuck could you want to retire?”
Otabek frowned, a little irritated. “It’s not that I *want* to retire.”

“Didn’t sound like it,” Yuri scoffed.

“Yuri, remember how sore you were after landing that quad axel?”

Yuri scowled.

“I feel that way after almost every practice. I’m getting old.”

“For fuck’s sake, you’re only twenty-four. Don’t forget, you’ve never had any real injuries.”

“And you know I was never as flexible as you. I don’t *want* to retire, Yura.” He rallied his courage and reached up, skimming a hand against Yuri’s jawline, down the column of his neck, teasing lightly over his collarbone. “If I could, I would share the ice with you forever.”

“Then why are you leaving it?” Yuri’s voice was so quiet and pained Otabek almost didn’t recognize it.

He forced himself to breathe, to try to calm the rising panic he felt remembering the nightmare he’d had since he started skating professionally. The nightmare that was beginning to feel more and more like a prophesy. “I want to leave while I’m healthy. I don’t want to be in the middle of a routine and land wrong, injure myself past the point of recovery. I never want to be bitter about skating.” He closed his eyes and buried his face against the back of Yuri’s neck. “Besides, I could never do that to you.”

“Do what?”

“Force you to watch me eat shit in the middle of a competition. To not be able to get up again and make them come out to get me. To make you stay there in the stands or the kiss and cry or the side of the rink and try to compete when I know your heart’s breaking.”

“God, Beka—”

“I know you’re angry with me for considering it, but I’m thinking it over because even if I don’t know what I *do* want, I am positive about what I *don’t* want to happen. Does that make any sense?”

Yuri leaned back further, not arguing when Otabek wrapped an arm around his waist and held him close. “It makes sense.”

This time, the silence wasn’t as painful. Otabek let himself relax, enjoyed the sensation of Yuri’s spine and ribs moving with every breath. He savored the light scent of the expensive strawberry shampoo Yuri favored. It was one of the few splurges Yuri allowed himself, and Otabek tried his best to encourage the habit.

Yuri cleared his throat. “So …”

“So …”

“When you retire, would you go back to Kazakhstan?”

He leaned forward, trying to catch sight of Yuri’s expression. “Are you planning on moving?”

“No.”

“Well, there’s your answer.”
Yuri rolled his eyes, but some of the tension eased from his spine. “You’d stay here?”

“Someone has to take care of Leopard Honey Badger Viper while you’re away.”

Yuri spun around, clutching the kitten to his chest and glaring. “I swear to God, if you mock how I name animals one more time, you’ll sleep on the couch for the rest of your life. I was five when I named Potya.”

Otabek kissed the tip of Yuri’s nose. “It was a good name, too. What do you want to call this one?”

Mollified, Yuri looked down at the sleeping kitten. “Almatinka. Tinka for short.” A faint blush rose to his cheeks. “That way you won’t get as homesick.”

He couldn’t help it. Yuri blossomed under the kiss with an eagerness that sent Otabek’s pulse racing.

“Fuck,” Yuri whispered when they finally pulled apart, “I hate fighting with you. Does this mean we can have make up sex now?”

“Store first. Tinka needs a bed and a litter box.”

“Damn it.”

They ended up leaving her in the bathroom with some newspaper and some more food. She didn’t seem to mind when they used Otabek’s sweatshirt as a makeshift bed. While Yuri finished settling her—Otabek wasn’t sure if it was a her, but Yuri seemed convinced—Otabek went to their bedroom to grab a jacket.

Yuri waited for him in the hall when he returned, lounging against the wall and staring thoughtfully at his feet.

“What?” Otabek asked, knowing full well that something was weighing on Yuri’s mind.

“Promise me you’ll make it through this season,” he said.

“I will. I already planned to.”

“And talk to your coach about next season. Even if you don’t make it through the entire thing, I want you out there with me as long as possible.” Yuri glanced up, eyes shining with something suspiciously like tears. He gave a wicked grin, the kind he preferred to hide behind when Otabek called him on his shit. “What can I say? I’m a selfish bastard.”

“You’re my selfish bastard.” Otabek brushed a strand of blond hair back behind Yuri’s ear. “Ready to go?”

“Yeah.” Yuri reached out and clasped his hand, squeezing gently, all his summer heat and fury swept away for now, replaced with a sweetness that lingered on long after they returned home and made up for their lost time.
Fall arrived with the surprise of another skating season and a visit to Hasetsu. Victor picked them up at the station. A few new crow’s feet had settled at the corners of his eyes, but he was as beautiful as ever, the fading sunlight catching in his hair and transforming it to liquid silver. The moment he saw them, he launched into excited babble, updating Yuri and Otabek on everything he could as they walked toward the small house he and Yuuri had bought.

“I’m sorry Yuuri couldn’t meet you,” Victor said as they slipped inside the gate. “Mari came to visit and offered to help watch Irina so Yuuri could clean. I told him you’re family and you won’t care, but you know how he gets.”

Otabek smiled and nudged Yuri’s side with his elbow. “I knew you got it from somewhere.”

“Fuck you,” Yuri growled. “I am nothing like the piggy.”

The house was tucked into a quiet neighborhood Yuri seemed familiar with. As they ascended the steps to the door, Yuri informed Otabek that the rink was a short distance away, a simple run across the bridge. Short commute to work aside, Otabek understood why Victor and Yuuri would have chosen this spot to raise their family. Around them, vibrant explosions of red and orange transformed the trees into an autumnal paradise. The quiet peace of the seaside town lingered here with sweet familiarity, and Otabek felt himself relaxing already, the tension of the long flight vanishing as they stepped inside and took off their shoes.

“Yuuri, we’re back,” Victor called as he shrugged out of his coat and hung it up. He’d already toed off his shoes and he didn’t bother waiting for his guests to catch up before he headed down the hall toward a brightly lit room.

“I still can’t believe Victor and the piggy have a kid,” Yuri mumbled. “Doesn’t that freak you out?”

Otabek shrugged and helped Yuri slide off his jacket. “Not really. Kind of seems like the next logical step for them.”

“Gah. They’re so domestic.” Yuri’s scowl deepened at the sound of commotion from what must have been the kitchen.

Otabek snorted and pushed Yuri’s shoulder, urging him out of the entryway and toward the hall. “You know you love it. Now stop stalling and go say hi to your other dad.”

Yuri flipped him off, which made Otabek laugh, but obeyed. He cut a nearly comical figure—his hands stuffed deep in the pockets of his tight jeans, his shoulders hunched, his hair tied up in a messy bun since he’d decided to grow it out once again—a shadow of his formative punk years.

Otabek finished untying his shoes and hanging up his jacket, smiling when the calls of welcome and elation met Yuri. The moment he heard a bellow of shock, he knew Yuri had held up his hand, displaying the ring on his finger.

They hadn’t told anyone except Nikolai, who had gone as their witness. The ceremony was simple and fast and Otabek hadn’t really noticed the ring on his finger after Yuri placed it there with trembling fingers. He’d always felt its weight there, ever since they’d met, although it took him years to figure that out. The only difference now was that there was a physical embodiment of their
Victor popped out of the kitchen, hanging off the doorway, mouth open in shock. “You married our Yuri?”

Otabek held up his hand to show his ring. “Yes.”

“Was it under threat of death?”

A wooden spoon, launched by a testy tiger, narrowly missed Victor’s head. Otabek shrugged, which sent a retreating Victor into peals of laughter. He walked down the hall and joined them.

He found his husband sitting at the low dining table, sprawled with laconic grace. Victor sat across from him, showing off pictures of the newest students at Ice Castle Hasetsu. Yuuri was busy at the counter, plating what Otabek was sure would prove to be bowls of katsudon.

The Japanese man glanced up when Otabek entered, his eyes bright behind his glasses and his smile welcoming. “Hi, Otabek. Yurio says it’s been busy lately.”

Otabek nodded and joined Yuuri at the counter, giving the two Russians space and time to dissect coaching plans and the newest training techniques. “It was a surprise for us both to have some time off between competitions.”

“We’ve been watching every one,” Yuuri assured him. “How’s the year been?”

“Better than I expected,” Otabek admitted, knowing Yuri kept them in the loop on his career. “I’m being careful, but it’s easier to push myself when Yuri’s out there against me.”

“You might take the gold from him.” Yuuri leaned in and whispered conspiratorially, “Victor and I have a bet on it. My money’s on you.”

“I’ll try not to disappoint.”

Otabek liked this version of Yuuri. The time spent coaching younger skaters with Victor had mellowed him, given him a new creative outlet. He’d put on a little weight, mostly in his cheeks and above his hips, but it was clear that he and Victor were still active and plenty fit. And once their daughter started growing and running around, he bet that Yuuri would be back to competition weight in no time just from chasing her.

“Victor mentioned Mari was here,” Otabek said as he took two of the bowls Yuuri handed over and made his way to the table.

“She is. She loves being an aunt and tries to sneak over whenever she can. She went to get Irina up from her nap.”

Whatever argument Yuri and Victor had been having ended with the arrival of dinner. Otabek and Yuri ate ravenously, grateful for anything other than crappy airport food, and Yuuri beamed when he took their bowls and gave them each a second helping. As always, a full belly made the ice tiger of Russia more like a sleepy kitten, so it wasn’t long before stories were flying back and forth over the table along with bursts of laughter.

“I swear to God, when your daughter gets older, I’m going to show her that picture of you in the hamster hat,” Yuri told Yuuri.

The man blushed and pushed at his glasses. “Come on, Yurio. Phichit was so excited that there was
no way I could say no.”

“Doesn’t matter. You’re lucky I don’t show her the part where you and the old man did couples ice dancing in costume.”

“What about you?” Victor asked. “She’ll want to see pictures of her Uncle Yurio. Remember your junior debut?”

Yuri’s eyes narrowed. “You wouldn’t.”

“I seem to remember there being a bowl cut involved.”

“I have Giacometti’s number. I’ll call him for photo blackmail if I have to.”

Their teasing was interrupted by a baby’s cry. Yuuri started to rise, but Victor kissed his cheek and urged him to stay put.

“Be right back,” he said cheerily, vanishing into one of the halls.

“How’s he been?” Yuri asked, surprising Otabek with his concern.

Yuuri reached for the bowls, but Otabek beat him to it. He received another warm smile for his trouble. He cleared the table while Yuuri leaned back more comfortably and answered with, “He was pretty despondent when we lost Makkachin.”

“Yeah, I remember,” Yuri mumbled.

“Irina’s helped. He still gets into a funk sometimes, but, Yurio, the way he lights up when she looks at him …”

Otabek quietly made his way to the sink and began washing the dishes, doing his best to keep the clinking of pottery to a minimum. He caught some parts of the conversation, but mostly he pretended not to be listening so Yuri could ask the questions he most needed answered. His tiger tried to act so tough, but Otabek knew better. Yuri needed to know that the people he cared about would stay in his life, and after his time spent living with Victor and Yuuri, there was no denying how close the three had become. Otabek wasn’t jealous of that; he was grateful they were there for Yuri when he hadn’t been.

He heard Victor return, Mari in tow, as he was finishing up the last bowl. The two fathers cooed and murmured adorable, ridiculous things while Mari and Yuri exchanged pleasantries; Otabek called a hello over his shoulder.

“Do you want to hold her?” he heard Yuuri ask.

“I—I don’t know if that’s a good idea,” his tiger stammered.

“It’s easy. Hold your arm like this … Support here … Now, steady her head. See, Yurio? You’re a natural.”

There was a sharp, surprised bark of laughter from Yuri. Otabek hid a smile as he rinsed the bowl and set it in the drying rack. He was wiping his hands on a towel when he heard Yuri call softly to him, “Beka—”

He turned, towel still in hand, but found himself unable to move. To speak. To think.

Yuri, his Yuri, sat there, cradling a tiny bundle in his arms. His face had dropped down, a few stray
strands of golden hair escaping his bun, and his smile broke Otabek’s heart into a million pieces before scattering them to the four corners of the earth.

Yuri smiled with a joy Otabek had never seen before. Not on the podium. Not in the comfort of their bed. Not even when they’d exchanged rings and vows. He glowed and Otabek knew he would do anything, make any sacrifice, to see Yuri that happy again.

And like that, a new future opened before him, one so full of love that he wondered how he’d never imagined it before.

Yuri’s gaze flicked up to Otabek and he smiled even wider. “She’s looking at me,” he whispered. “She recognizes you,” Otabek whispered back, crossing the kitchen so he could sit beside Yuri. Mari patted his shoulder when he settled in and vanished from the room.

Otabek’s arrival did nothing to distract Irina from the true object of her affection. Her blue-grey eyes were fixed on Yuri’s face. She was still too young to focus for long before her eyes crossed and she had to squirm and readjust so she could stare at him again, but she was fascinated with him. Otabek watched, transfixed, as the baby reached up and clung to a strand of Yuri’s hair, tugging on it until Yuri laughed and disentangled himself from her grip.

He spoke to her in low, purring Russian, his questions singsong, the words dancing to a silent rhythm in his head as he swayed and rocked her. Sometimes, he would dip his face down to hers, their noses rubbing for just a moment before he lifted his head and continued his litany.

He only gave her up when Yuuri asked if he wanted to feed her; he claimed that her dad should feed her, not some random uncle. Still, he heaved a deep sigh of regret when Yuuri lifted Irina from his arms. Otabek wrapped Yuri in a one-armed hug, unable to keep from pressing a kiss to his temple.

“She’s beautiful,” Yuri said aloud to no one in particular.

Victor beamed as he prepared Irina’s bottle. At his side, Yuuri chuckled. “Let’s hear you say that when she wakes you up at an ungodly hour of the morning.”

Yuri turned his head so he could fix Otabek with a serious look. “Beka …”

“I know.” And he did. He knew that the moment Irina had been set in Yuri’s arms, something had clicked in place. The world had expanded, the firmament had been exposed in all its glory, and now that they’d seen it, they would never be able to pretend otherwise.

He leaned in close, his lips brushing Yuri’s ear, and whispered, “You’ll make an incredible father.”

Yuri shivered and leaned against him, his face buried against Otabek’s neck. “Once we retire,” he begged.

“Okay,” Otabek promised, smiling to himself as he watched the colored leaves outside dance in the breeze. “Once we retire.”
Otabek couldn’t stop sweating and it had nothing to do with the unseasonably warm spring day.

“Beka, are you okay?” Yuri asked from behind him, hoisting his backpack higher on his shoulder.

“Yeah. Fine.”

He was back in Kazakhstan. He was going to see his family for the first time since he’d broken their hearts.

“Hey,” Yuri said, intertwining their fingers and pressing a kiss to his cheek. “It’ll be fine.”

He grounded himself with the solidness of Yuri’s wedding band, the reminder that no matter what happened this trip, they were a team. Yuri wouldn’t walk out of his life just because his family didn’t know how to handle their relationship.

“And if they’re assholes, we’ll get back on the plane and go home.”

Yuri’s simple solution stole a choked laugh from him.

“Didn’t you say that girl was meeting us here?” Yuri asked, looking around the airport with suspicion.

Otabek shook his head, amused by the disdain Yuri managed to use against a non-existent rival.

“Her name is Ayzere and, yes, she’s picking us up. I thought it would be easier to stay with her than with my family.”

Yuri made a dismissive sound in the back of his throat and tugged Otabek toward a bench near one of the exits. They’d almost reached it when Otabek heard a familiar call. He turned and spotted Ayzere waving and weaving her way through the crowd toward them.

“There she is,” Otabek said.

Yuri’s grip on his hand tightened and the blond took a half-step in front of him. Ayzere’s eyes widened when she spotted Otabek’s travel companion and her smile grew. He was reminded why they’d managed to make things work for as long as they had; Ayzere was gentle and kind and pretty much the complete opposite of Yuri, which was even more obvious as his husband and his ex-fiancée stood facing each other for the first time.

“So,” Yuri said in that cool, indifferent tone he was such a master of, “you’re the girl who tried to steal my husband from me.”

Otabek groaned and buried his face in his palm in embarrassment. “Yura—”

Ayzere didn’t seem upset by the accusation. “You’re taller in person than on the phone,” she said, looking at up him. “And you’re as prickly as Otabek warned. Were you always on your best behavior when we talked before?”

The moment Yuri released his hand and lunged forward, Otabek opened his mouth to warn Ayzere. It turned out to be unnecessary, since all Yuri did was wrap the slim girl in a bear hug. She stared at
Otabek from under Yuri’s arm, expression shocked, while Yuri whispered something in her ear. Whatever he said made the shock disappear, replaced with a smile. She reached up and hugged Yuri back, patting him and murmuring a response Otabek couldn’t catch.

Eventually they pulled apart, grinning at each other, and Otabek suddenly regretted ever agreeing to letting them meet in person. “Thanks for letting us stay with you,” he said, trying to interrupt their moment.

It didn’t work. Ayzere just waved him off and linked elbows with Yuri, who reached out and grabbed hold of Otabek again. “It’s not a problem. I’m on break from university right now, so you two will be a good distraction for me.”

“You’re studying to become a doctor?” Yuri asked as she pulled them outside into the heat.

“Pediatrician,” she corrected. “I want to work in countries with high-need populations. I’m hoping to get in at refuge hospitals, orphanages, places like that.”

“You want to save the world,” Yuri said, clearly impressed.

Ayzere made a face and led them toward her car. “Nothing that epic, I’m afraid. I want to help if I can. That’s all.” She gave them both a sly look. “What about you two? There’s a lot of rumors swirling. I’ve tried to keep up with the season, but I’m afraid the sport still doesn’t make that much sense to me.”

“Beka can’t beat my quad axel, so he’s upped the number of his other quads,” Yuri announced proudly. “Even the brats younger than us can’t keep up with him.”

“So he’s going to take gold from you at the end of the season?” Ayzere asked as she opened her trunk to let Yuri stuff their bags inside.

“He’s going to try.”

“And then what?”

“Retirement. For me, at least,” Otabek said quietly. Yuri squeezed his hand and lifted his chin, preparing to defend Otabek’s decision if Ayzere made the wrong comment.

“Are you going to coach?” she asked instead. Yuri stood down.

“I’m not sure. Maybe later. We’ve …” Otabek took a breath and clamped down on the nervousness that rose with the truth. “We’ve got some other plans first.”

“We want a kid,” Yuri said bluntly. “And we’re not too young or impulsive about it and I know it’ll be okay because Beka’s going to be the best fucking father in the world.”

Ayzere laughed. “I can’t argue that.” She reached out and ran a hand over Otabek’s forearm. “You always were fantastic with children,” she told him. “One of the reasons I love you.”

“Love you too,” he said, smiling a little.

Yuri rolled his eyes and opened a passenger door. “Yeah, yeah, mutual love society. Are we going back to your place or what?”

Ayzere moved to her driver’s door and held Otabek’s gaze. “Actually … your mother called me the other day. I wasn’t sure when you’d want to see them, but she said we could drop in any time …”
A cold fear squeezed the air from his lungs. Facing his mother. His father. Was he strong enough to do this?

Warmth at his back, a hand snaking around his waist. Strawberries and light sweat and a gentle voice in his ear, “We don’t have to go until you’re ready.”

He let Yuri hold him for a moment, support him, and gave himself a second to think. His inhalation was jagged, but some of the panic lessened. “Might as well get this over with,” he croaked.

Ayzere nodded and opened her door. “Okay, then. Get in.”

She and Yuri kept up a steady stream of chatter as they drove. Otabek knew it was for his benefit. Neither of them were subtle enough to hide their worry, although their shared fascination with animal rescue shows left him a few minutes of blissful peace. Dimly, he realized the inevitability of seeing his family when familiar landmarks began appearing outside the car windows.

“Almost there,” Ayzere murmured. She always seemed to know what he needed to hear before he knew it himself.

That talent is why he’d gone to the finals to find Yuri. It was why he was back here now, his husband staring out the windows in fascination as he took in the sights he’d heard Otabek tell stories about for years.

“It’ll be fine,” Otabek said aloud, maybe for her benefit, Yuri’s, his own.

Yuri glanced at him, green gaze twinkling with mischief. “Just remember, if they’re mean to you, we get to go home early.”

“I’m sure Tinka would appreciate that.”

“Milla might not. She loves that stupid cat. She already said that if Tinka doesn’t like kids, she has dibs.”

“Tinka will be fine. I’m more worried about poor Yakov.”

“Yakov will be putty in comparison to Lilia.” Yuri shuddered. “Lilia … I hope you’re ready to go to a lot of ballet lessons.”

“As long as I don’t have to participate, that’s fine.”

Yuri was distracting him on purpose, but it worked. Talking about their imaginary child helped Otabek find his center again. The reminder of what his future would be meant he was strong enough to face the present when Ayzere pulled into his parent’s driveway and shut off her car.

“I can wait out here for you,” she said.

“I’m sure they’d want to see you,” Otabek told her. “You’re not the one who broke the engagement.”

She made a face in the mirror at him. “I’ll have you remember that I was. And if I need to remind your father of that, I’ll do it with a smile. Besides, we’re both much happier now.”

“True,” Otabek said.

“Look, it’s nice for you two to argue over who’s at fault for the end of your pathetic engagement,” Yuri interrupted, “but there’s two people standing by the front door looking confused and if they’re
your parents, I don’t think it’s polite to keep them waiting.”

_Shit._

“I guess it’s time,” Otabek muttered, opening his door. “I’ll text you when we’re ready for an escape.”

Ayzere smiled. “Have fun.” She pointed at Yuri. “Sheathe your claws, cat. Try to remember that not everyone’s family is as supportive as yours and that they love him in their own way.”

Yuri scowled at her, but kept his mouth wisely shut as he followed Otabek out of the car.

Otabek stood in the driveway for a moment while Ayzere pulled away and looked up the slight incline toward his parents. They both looked older than he remembered. More gray threaded his mother’s dark hair and the lines in his father’s face had deepened. At least neither were crying this time. That was promising, wasn’t it?

Yuri shuffled behind him and placed a hand on the small of his back, a gesture of comfort.

Otabek swallowed. “Hi.”

His mother moved first. She led the way down the driveway, looking nervous and scared at the same time. She halted a few steps from him and clasped her hands in front of her, her hands wringing as she looked him up and down.

There was no moisture left in his throat, so the words scratched their way up like they were fighting through layers of cotton. “It’s been a while.”

“You look … well.”

“I am.”

His father joined them, a silent shadow behind his mother. He kept looking from Otabek to Yuri and back.

His mother continued with valiant effort. “You’re very competitive this season.”

“Yes. I’ve been training hard.”

She finally looked at Yuri, who was doing his level best not to bristle. Otabek fought the urge to step between them.

“And this is … your Yuri?” she asked delicately.

A tiny spark of warmth at the title, at the way it made the possessive part of him hum in satisfaction. “Yes.”

Yuri reached forward and held out his hand. “It’s nice to meet you,” he said, the Kazakh he’d been practicing for weeks still a little stilted, but the best Otabek had heard yet.

His father gave a humph. “You’re Russian,” he said, forgoing the Kazakh and switching back to Yuri’s language.

Yuri raised a pale brow, but nodded.

“You’re that other skater?”
Otabek kept silent. Yuri and he had argued again and again about whether or not he was allowed to step in if things with his parents devolved. Yuri had won and Otabek had agreed to keep his mouth shut.

Seeing Yuri now, so calm and aloof as he stared down Otabek’s father with an utterly polite regard, Otabek wondered why he’d ever been worried in the first place. His husband didn’t just have the eyes of a soldier … he had the mind of one too.

“I’m that other skater,” Yuri confirmed.

His father frowned. “My son said he couldn’t get married because he loved you—”

“Which is why we’re glad to see you together,” Otabek’s mother quickly finished.

Yuri’s smile was tight, and Otabek silently thanked him for trying as hard as he was. Slowly, like he wasn’t sure whether it was the right decision, Yuri reached out his hand toward Otabek’s mother. “We’ll be together for quite a while. At least, that’s the intention.”

His mother gave a gasp when she spotted the ring. She reached out to take Yuri’s hand, tracing the smooth band with her finger. Her gaze darted to Otabek’s hand and he held it out silently. Her hands trembled when she took it, inspecting his matching ring.

“I … I saw them on the television at the last competition,” she said, voice catching a little, “but I wasn’t sure. And when you didn’t call, I assumed I had overreacted.”

“I didn’t know if you’d want to hear,” Otabek admitted, a little ashamed as his subterfuge.

His mother chuckled under the chin and glared at him with watery eyes. “I am your mother. Of course I wanted to know.”

“I didn’t want to cause you any more pain—”

“Otabek, we handled our shock badly. We … we have had a great deal of time to think back on what happened.” She held his hand, rubbing at the ring absently. “I can’t promise that we won’t make mistakes, but your father and I miss you. You are our only son.” She glanced up at Yuri. “You’re both our sons,” she corrected, reaching up to pat Yuri’s cheek. “We would like a chance to talk. To try to put some things right.”

“O-okay,” Otabek stammered.

“Come inside,” she urged them both, shooing her husband back toward the house. “Tell us about training in Russia.”

Which is how they ended up sitting in his mother’s kitchen, sipping tea and discussing life in Saint Petersburg. His father and Yuri got into a heated discussion about how the newer skaters had increased technical proficiency, but lacked the emotional depth necessary for truly artistic performances. He and his mother spoke quietly about his life with Yuri. He told her about Almatinka and their search for a house. Of course, that discussion led to another, one about his retirement, which led to his mother asking what his plans were since Yuri wouldn’t be retiring yet.

Part of him wasn’t sure whether to share that fragile, hopeful dream. But his mother sat there looking so desperate for any truth from him and it wasn’t like he could avoid this topic forever. So he admitted it aloud.

“We’re planning to adopt. We’ve already started some of the paperwork.”
Silence. Long, drawn out silence that made his skin crawl until Yuri reached across the table and clasped his hand tight enough that Otabek wouldn’t drift away on that ocean of fear.

Without a word, his mother rose and left the room. Otabek stared down at the table, at the scarred wood, and reminded himself to breathe. He still had his life with Yuri. He had family, even if they weren’t related by blood. He’d almost convinced himself it would be fine when his mother returned, a beautiful blanket in her arms.

She placed it on the table, smoothing its folds once out of habit, and sat back down. “You’ll need this,” she said. “I started working on it when you and Ayzere …” She cleared her throat and lifted her chin, taking her time to make eye contact with him and with Yuri in silent apology. “Every child needs his own blanket.”

From the corner of his eye, he could see Yuri reach out a tentative finger, brushing it over the fold of colorful fabric and his mother’s delicate needlework.

“It’s incredible,” his husband murmured. Otabek was grateful he could speak for them both, since his own throat was too tight and his eyes were burning.

Otabek’s father gave a low cough. “I helped pick the colors.”

Otabek placed a hand on the blanket and smiled. “It’s perfect.”

“And when you decide to have another, be sure to tell me so I can start on the next blanket,” his mother said, getting up so she could refill their tea.

He wasn’t sure when his laughter transformed into tears, but it didn’t matter. He laid his head on the table and wept. The spring sunshine danced through the room. Yuri ran a hand through his hair while his mother rubbed his back and his father patted his hand awkwardly. He was surrounded by love. His child would be surrounded by love. Someday, he’d learn to stop being surprised by every new miracle. But he was glad that wouldn’t be today.
“I’m sorry. I already checked her diaper and she didn’t want a bottle,” Otabek said over the cheers of the crowd when Yuri skated to join him at the boards. He shifted the crying bundle in his arms and tried to balance the cheetah-print diaper bag without spilling random baby things all over Yuri’s waiting fans. “Apparently she only wants her daddy.”

“No,” Yuri said, already reaching for their daughter with a wide smile. “She wants her gold medal.”

Otabek rolled his eyes, but couldn’t really argue since Yulia stopped crying the moment Yuri dangled his prize in front of her. She gave a gappy smile and reached for the award.

“Maybe we should make them into a mobile for her,” Yuri mused.

“It might help us get more sleep,” Otabek agreed with a yawn. Last night he’d finally coaxed Yuri into staying in an adjoining hotel room so he could get sleep before the free skate, but he doubted he’d be able to achieve such a coup again. His husband hated to be away from their daughter, even if just for a night.

Some days Otabek couldn’t believe this was really his life. Yuri had woken up early to get dressed in Otabek’s room, slipping into his costume and warm up layers with rare speed so he could hold Yulia while Otabek did his hair. He claimed it was good for Otabek to practice before their daughter’s hair grew out, but Otabek knew Yuri had simply wanted that physical connection again before the competition’s last round. Once the braids and ponytail were done, Otabek had stolen their daughter back and forced Yuri to eat breakfast before handing her over one last time. And now, just a few moments after winning yet another medal, the only gold thing Yuri had eyes for was his flaxen-haired bundle of joy.

“Are you tired?” Yuri asked his daughter, cradling her and spinning in a slow circle, oblivious to the fans snapping photos. He nuzzled her face and began singing, “Баю-баюшки-баю, Не ложись на краю. Придет серенький волчок, И укусит за бочок—”

“Oh, please, not that one,” Otabek lamented, shrugging the bag’s strap up higher on his shoulder.

Yuri scowled at him from the ice, absurdly graceful as he wove through figure eights, his daughter nestled in the crook of his arm, utterly content and quiet once more. Thank God she loved the sensation of skating. “What’s wrong with it? My grandpa sang it to me.”

“Have you ever stopped to wonder why you ended up so twisted?” Otabek asked. “Maybe lullabies about wolves dragging you away had something to do with it. Now, give her back. You’ve got to get back to the podium for the official photos.”

“Let me take her this time,” Yuri begged, ignoring the movement of the officials behind him as they set up for the promo shoot. “You know how much she enjoys it.”

Otabek pinched the bridge of his nose, had a flash of realization why poor Yakov did it so frequently, and dropped his hand. “She doesn’t enjoy it half as much as you do.”

Yuri beamed at him. “I know. I can’t wait to show her the scrapbook when she gets older.”

“Don’t you mean you can’t wait to show Victor and Yuuri the scrapbook when they visit at
Christmas so they can see the pictures of your little champion?”

His husband laughed, but didn’t deny the charge.

Otabek tried to hold out, not that there was a point when Yuri kept skating there in front of him, pouting and giving him sorrowful eyes. They both knew he’d cave. He did every damn time.

“Fine,” Otabek sighed. “But if she gets squirmy, make sure to hand her off to Lilia.” He waved at the stern Russian woman standing by the podium, who gave a delicate wave back and tried not too eager about seeing her favorite child.

Yuri gave his daughter a quelling look. “No squirming. If I give you to Lilia she may steal you away like Baba Yaga and never give you back.”

“Go, Yura. They’re waiting on you.” Otabek accepted a distracted kiss and smiled as his husband skated off.

He’d never get tired of this. Of watching Yuri light up like the sun while he showed Yulia off to the other skaters, most of whom were far younger than he was. Of watching him snap at the officials until they allowed him to include her in the photos. Of greeting them again moments later when the publicity was over and spending time catching Lilia and Yakov up on her newest antics. Yuri put up with sharing them for a time, but he soon grew twitchy and herded Otabek toward the exit so they could return to their hotel to pack.

They would be flying home tonight. Yuri was eager to get back to see how the contractors had finished off the new kitchen. Adopting Yulia had used up most of Otabek’s modest savings and a healthy chunk of the money Nikolai had left them for the express purpose of growing their family after his death nearly a year earlier. Once they had their daughter in their arms, Yuri decided it was time to dig into his savings so they didn’t have to keep relying on Otabek’s infrequent club appearances; he swore she would want for nothing and Otabek, who had sacrificed most of his childhood abroad to train, didn’t have the heart to fight him on that. After all, he, too, wanted to offer his daughter the world.

“Should I see if we can get an earlier flight?” Yuri asked as they packed up the room.

“No,” Otabek ordered. “You already spent too much on the tickets as it is.”

Yuri made a noise of disagreement and tickled Yulia’s toes, which made her giggle. Once she was happily waving his medal in the air, he refocused on putting away the last of his gear. “There’s no point in having money if you don’t use it,” he said.

After so many years scrimping and saving, Otabek still wasn’t used to having money. It turned out that Yuri hadn’t just set up a savings account when he was younger; he’d talked to Christophe’s partner, who had a talent with finances, and invested as well, which paid off handsomely over the years. His substantial nest egg gave them more than enough to purchase an adorable house in a safe, private neighborhood of Saint Petersburg. Of course, once Yulia had come home and Yuri had barraged his social media accounts with his new daddy trials, his endorsements had shot through the roof again, which helped cover the costs of home improvement projects and their frequent trips to Kazakhstan and Japan and Canada, where they spent time with the Altin, Katsuki-Nikiforov, and Leroy families. Nowadays, since they were no longer hamstrung by finding the cheapest flights available, it wasn’t uncommon for Yuri to cut his appearances at events shorter so he could spend more time with his family.

It was just one more reason Otabek loved him.
Yuri stepped behind him as he finished zipping up their last suitcase and wrapped an arm around his waist. A tingle of need shivered down his spine when Yuri pressed a kiss to the back of his neck and gave a gentle nip to the curve of his shoulder.

“Lilia offered to take Yulia for a sleepover once we get home,” Yuri murmured. “She was quite insistent we get a night off.”

Otabek sucked in a breath when his husband pressed his hips forward, and tried not to moan when Yuri’s hand slipped beneath the hem of his shirt, teasing the skin just above the band of his pants. “A whole night? Whatever would we do with all that time?”

“I have a few ideas.”

“They’d better involve a complete lack of clothes.”

Yuri’s laughter danced over his skin in muted huffs. “Don’t worry. None of it will create new laundry for you. Well, maybe the sheets, but it’ll be worth it, I promise.”

“Yura—”

“Think you can stand to be parted from her for a night, Beka?”

Yuri’s hand slipped lower and Otabek nearly knocked the suitcase over the edge of the bed. “Dammit … Stop teasing!”

“Should I tell Lilia yes?”

“For fuck’s sake, yes. Tell her now. Just don’t stop …”

He whimpered when Yuri’s hand left his body, strangely bereft at its absence. And then his husband was ushering him toward the bathroom and closing the door quietly behind them.

“Yuri, what are you doing?”

“She’s fast asleep. I took the medal away in case she wakes up, but I think she’ll be out for a while.” His husband grinned, all sharp-eyed, eager intent. “But you’ll need to be quiet so she doesn’t miss us too soon.”

“Me?” He hissed with want when Yuri reached for his zipper. “I’m the one who told you the next project is soundproofing the bedroom.”

“A good plan,” Yuri agreed, already distracted. “Now, shut up.”

He did. And when they emerged weak-kneed from the bathroom a short time later, he couldn’t do much more than smile like an idiot while Yuri orchestrated their escape from the hotel. He didn’t even argue at the airport when Yuri upgraded their tickets for the flight home. Instead, safely on board the plane, he curled up against his husband, their daughter sleeping peacefully between them, and let himself drift off, the promise of tomorrow dancing through his dreams like snowflakes.

Works inspired by this one

The Next Five Years [Podfic] by ItsADrizzit

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