This Isn't a Fairytale so Be My Hero, Cinderella

by hinatella

Summary

When Yuuri is tasked with training an ex-villain—his old arch-nemesis and the general thorn in his side—to become a hero, Yuuri gets exactly what he expects: an all-out challenge. Slowly, though, the challenge becomes less and less about teaching Victor how to be a hero...

Victor’s just full of surprises, and Yuuri is internally burning. Literally.

Notes

this is a full continuation of the first four oneshots in the series, so please read those first before proceeding for less confusion! (i didn't realize i would make this a multi-chaptered fic when i started but things happened and now here we are, eight pages of outlines later.)

See the end of the work for more notes.
Capture me officer, I’m out of line

Chapter Summary

Yuuri and Victor get busted for accidentally committing a crime, punishment ensues, and cue another training montage.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

_Hh, huff, huff._

The heavy breathing of a dog.

*Tic, toc, tic, toc...*

The blaring sound of a clock ticking, and there aren’t even clocks in this room.

_Huff. Huff. Whiiimper._

Mr. Feltsman taps his pen against his desk, _click click clack_, as he stares at the three in his office with hard, immensely unamused eyes. His glare is enough to turn anyone to stone. Though he doesn’t seem to know who he wants to immobilized into stone-cold acquiescence first; Victor’s dog Makkachin or Victor himself. The fact that he isn’t looking at Yuuri right now just makes Yuuri shake like a nervous leaf.

When Yuuri gulps, it sounds deafeningly loud in his ear, like the crash of a wave against his shuddering shores. He hopes he’ll sink under, never to be seen again.

If there’s one thing he can take solace in, it’s the fact that Victor seems just as frozen (_ha_) as him.

“I trust I don’t have to mention the reason why I’ve brought the two of you here?” Mr. Feltsman says icily. Makkachin whines loudly, like she knows he isn’t including her in that sentence, and Mr. Feltsman’s eyes twitch with mild annoyance. Yuuri _told_ Victor not to bring her in here. But does Victor ever listen? Of course not.

“You… want to meet the most lovable dog in the world who is one-hundred-percent worth rescuing and definitely nothing to get punished for?” Victor tries, an unsure infliction to his voice, and it’s a valiant effort, really. But Mr. Feltsman just looks more annoyed than he did ten seconds ago, if that’s even possible.

“In case that fried memory of yours has forgotten, Victor, I’ll read through the list of rules you’ve foolishly broken.” Mr. Feltsman picks up a sheet of paper, and reads, “performing a mission while off duty, wasting other staff member’s times with said unofficial mission, unauthorized usage of organization vehicles and equipment, setting a building on _fire_—”

“—okay to be fair, that one wasn’t entirely our fault,” Victor cuts in.

Mr. Feltsman ignores him and continues. “Revealing your hero ID before it’s ready, and bringing a pet into the building despite there being a strict no-pet policy.”
Each listed item is like an arrow through Yuuri’s chest, and he kind of wants to cry.

Victor, however, seems fine enough to joke around when he says, “technically, no where does it say that I can’t bring a poodle. The rules only list cats, snakes, hamsters and bearded dragons.”

Yakov looks at him, and Victor’s smile immediately drops.

“It was entirely my idea and my fault, Yakov and Yuuri had nothing to do with this,” Victor says in one breath.

“Why am I not surprised?” Mr. Feltsman sighs, pinching the bridge of his nose. “Regardless, it is Yuuri’s responsibility to look after you so you don’t do anything unorderly.” When he mentions Yuuri’s name, Mr. Feltsman turns his eyes at Yuuri, and, oh, he was wrong. So, very wrong. The Stare™ is definitely ten times worse when directed at him than not being acknowledged at all.

Yuuri wonders how hard it would be to burn a hole straight through the floor and fall right through, right into the second circle of hell where the fire would be a much better comfort than the way Mr. Feltsman gives him that disappointed boss look.

“I-I’m very sorry, sir,” Yuuri says, voice low and shaky and shy. He can’t even meet Mr. Feltsman’s terrifying stare right now. “I shouldn’t have gone along with it.”

“No, you shouldn’t have. I would never have expected this from SUCC’s top hero.”

The disappointed boss words to match the disappointed boss look is a downright K.O. to the chest. Straight through the heart. His pride is lying dead on the floor.

“This will not go unpunished,” Mr. Feltsman says. Yuuri swears he doesn’t whimper along with Makkachin just then.

“But… seeing as the circumstance have turned out the way they did—that is, you did save the dog and all blame towards the cause of the fire was pointed to the villain who just so happened to be fleeing the scene of the crime—I will be lax in that punishment.”

Yuuri could sink to the floor with how boneless he suddenly becomes. Beside him, Victor also seems to relax a little.

“Yuuri, you will continue Victor’s hero training as planned. Though, instead of moving forward with the altered field experience I’ve prepared, you will go on with the heroes-in-training’s reduced field experience instead, and you will accompany Yuri Plisetsky in the next week.”

“Yes, sir.”

“And Victor,” Mr. Feltsman says, shifting his eyes to Victor. He smiles, and it looks menacing. Oh, no. “Because you’re so eager to make your hero debut, I will allow you to use your hero alias from now on.”

“Really!!” Victor exclaims, wide, heart-shaped smile on his face. Yuuri looks from Mr. Feltsman’s slight, covert grin and Victor’s brilliantly, excited one and thinks that something isn’t quite right here…

“You will be going on missions for training purposes so you’ll need a costume.”

“My costume is ready too?!” Victor quickly rounds the desk and wraps Mr. Feltsman in a hug, and Yuuri doesn’t think he’s ever seen the aged man look so disgruntled and uncomfortable in his life.
He’d smile if this were any other situation.

“Not quite,” he says.

Victor immediately lets go to look at him. “What do you mean?”

“Your costume is not ready, therefore you’ll have the privilege of wearing the exact costume you were wearing on your impromptu mission yesterday.”

Victor gawks.

Mr. Feltsman looks self-satisfied.

Yuuri can’t help it; he bursts out laughing.

When Yuuri retells their meeting to Phichit and Chris in the lounge a few minutes later, they’re laughing too. Fists against the wooden table, clutching their stomachs like their insides will burst from the force of it, the whole thing.

“I don’t see what’s so goddamn funny,” Victor mumbles, arms crossed, his lips pursed. He’s turned one of the chairs of the table to petulantly face away from them. Makkachin gently nuzzles his side.

“It’s fucking hilarious, and it serves you right. You broke like, five laws and ten organization rules in one day,” Phichit says, wiping laugh-filled tears from the corners of his eyes. “That has to be some sort of record.”

“To be fair, Mr. Feltsman could’ve been a lot harder on us,” Yuuri chimes in with giggles clinging to his lips still. He had to promptly leave Mr. Feltsman’s office when the laughter started. “I think you were right after all; bringing Makkachin into the office definitely softened the blow.”

“Softened?!” Victor says incredulously, turning in his chair to face them. “He wants me to wear that godawful, ill-fitting outfit and you think there’s something worse?”

“He could have had you training under me,” Chris says with a wink. Yuuri and Phichit visibly shiver. There’s an innuendo in there somewhere…

“Is that suppose to be worse?” Victor asks.

“I would work you to the bone, my dear,” Chris replies.

Victor still doesn’t seem to care. “Anything is better than wearing that. It screams grandma’s-knitted-sweaters blue.”

“Perfect!” Chris claps. “It’ll go nicely with your head full of gray hair.”

Yuuri and Phichit clutch at each other to keep from falling over, they’re cracking up so hard. Victor is sputtering and crossing his arms again like a crabby child. “It’s silver and you know it.”

“Sure, Jan.”

“I can’t believe I have to go on some lame ass mission with you lame ass fuckers. What did I do to
deserve this? Why is Yakov punishing me too?” Yuri P. grumbles to himself as he paces the length of the HOLE.

“Aw, Yura, it isn’t a punishment if I get to spend time with you again,” Victor says. Yuri P. glares at him, and Victor just throws him a tight smile in turn. Odd.

“You’re annoying.”

“What’s annoying is this costume.” Victor tugs at the neck of the bright blue thing with distaste written all over his face. “It feels even tighter than last time.”

“It’s one-size-fits all,” Yuuri informs.

“One-size-fits-all my ass. This is the most uncomfortable thing I’ve ever worn.”

Yuuri reserves himself to the fact that his week will be filled with those complaints. He won’t even bother trying to console him; the costume is awful, notoriously used and reused by every hero here at the start of their training and mentee days until their costume requests are finished. Yuuri kind of gets how he feels right now.

“Your face is the most uncomfortable thing I’ve ever seen.”

“Yura, are you going to be this rude to me the entire time?” Victor says with a pout.

“Yes.”

“Aaanyway,” Yuuri cuts in. “We’re just going to be catching a couple of vandals who are writing on police cars, right?” he asks Yuri P.

“Yeah, which is lame. I haven’t done something so stupidly simple in like eight months. I blame you two,” he huffs.

“Sorry about this,” Yuuri says genuinely.

Then they’re riding in a borrowed government car, painted to look like this city’s blue and white law enforcement vehicles. The wait will probably be long, so they pass the time with a game of twenty questions. Though, it’s less twenty questions and more Victor has a million questions and Yuuri and Yuri P. are being forced to answer them, with no real way to escape.

“What’s the point in doing stakeouts midday if everyone can probably see us?” he asks one time.

“This is just practice. It’s not very perfect,” Yuuri says.

“Why are we even doing a job that simple police people can do? Are the vandals superpowered?” he asks another time.

“No, but it helps mentees and trainees to do simple jobs at first so they get used to pursuing low risk bad guys,” Yuuri answers. “So please don’t use your powers on them if you can help it.”

“Will you capture me if I get out of line, officer?”

“Fuckin’ gross. Don’t make me sit through your bad flirting, thanks. Go make out when I’m not around.”

Yuuri crosses his arms and stare out of the window, ducking low to attempt to hide his face (and forgetting for two seconds that he has a mask on). “We’re not.”
“We’re not?” Victor says, sounding disappointed, like there’s something to be disappointed about.

“I swear to god—”

“How come Yura’s costume isn’t even a costume? It’s just some outfit you could put together at Urban Outfitters or Hot Topic,” Victor asks.

“Fuck you, my outfit is special made and everyone says it looks cool,” Yuri P answers.

“It looks very cool,” Yuuri assures him. It’s not something he’d personally wear—shredded, distressed shirt and shiny, leather pants—but it fits Yuri P. in a weird teenager-in-the-middle-of-a-phase way.

“Cinderos gets me! Your opinions suck.”

Speaking of— “Remember, Cryo-Frost, we use hero names while in costume.”

Yuuri can hear the grin on Victor’s face before he sees it in the rear view mirror. He absolutely refuses to acknowledge it. Victor is probably being ridiculously giddy over the fact that Yuuri is saying his hero name for the first time, and Yuuri can hear him now. *Aw, my name sounds cute in your voice.* No, no, he’d be more outrageous about it. *Aw, my name sounds lovely spilling from your sweet lips like that.* Yeah, that sounds about right.

“Aw—” Victor starts.

“Don’t,” Yuuri and, surprisingly, Yuri P. interject.

Pursing his lips, Victor leans against the back seat. Then he speaks again after less than a minute of silence, when the ambient noise of the downtown area barely has time to sink into the car space. “I never asked. Yur—Ah. Uh. What was your hero name again?”

Without pause, Yuri P. answers, “Ultrasonic Teenage Edgelord.”

Victor blinks. Leans into the space between the two front seats. Peers at his younger brother. “I’m sorry. I didn’t catch that?”

Yuri P. turns to him and enunciates it like he’s a five year old. “Ultrasonic. Teenage. Edge. Lord.”

Yuuri sees it—the way Victor has to hold in the laughter, fails, and opens his mouth to let it out—and he slaps a hand over Victor’s mouth before that can happen. “Shhh. Don’t say anything. He picked it out himself.”

“Ah,” Victor nods in understanding when he sits back again. “That explains it.”

“Explains what?!”

No one says anything, and it’s a good thing the car and its passengers succumb to the silence, because the sound of a spray paint being used nearby is loud and clear in their ears. Yuuri looks at the rear view mirror outside and, yes, there they are. Their targets.

“They’re here! Go get ‘em!” Victor says, tapping Yuri P.’s arm.

“Don’t tell me what to do,” Yuri P. says, but he gets out of the car anyway, though not before placing a pair of sunglasses over his eyes.

“You have to go too, Cryo-Frost. I’m only here to supervise so you don’t do anything out of line
Victor sighs, drawls, “Fine,” in a way that Yuuri would only expect from Yuri P. (And that’s one point of similarity. He’s been trying to draw up more ever since the revelation was made that they’re siblings. It’s still very hard to believe.)

He watches Yuri P. back one of the vandals up against a brick wall, two of his many knives in hand—it’s an organization legend that Yuri P. has impossibly deep pockets where he keeps them all, like Mary Poppins and her magical bag—before throwing the two knives and effectively pinning the vandal by the shirt to the wall. On the other side of car, Yuuri watches as Victor makes a show of throwing the other person to the ground, sweeping them onto their ass, producing a pair of cuffs from that hideously large utility belt, and clasping them around the assailant’s wrist. And he regally waves at passersby while he does it, in true Victor fashion.

Yuuri supposes that this really was too easy. But it’s the price to pay for breaking the rules.

He steps out of the car to help arrest the vandals, though not before reading whatever spray painted message was left on the side of the car first.

*Welcome to My Twisted Mind*

Incredible.

Yuuri was not looking forward to this day because this day meant facing off with Victor in the Arena. The Arena being the training room, where the press of the button next to the light switch pushes the floor apart. Out comes an entirely new space from underneath, which reveals shock absorbing pads all around the perimeter. It too-closely reminds Yuuri is an insane asylum room. He’s got to stop watching horror movies.

The Arena is a great way to practice using powers without the need to suppress much of it, because training to be superheroes without the use of superpowers is pretty counterproductive. Yuuri remembers having to use this room often during his trainee days, and he vividly remembers dreading it every single time. But this is solely a one time thing when it comes to Victor, because he’s more than capable of using his powers. This is just training protocol.

It’s training protocol to have his ass handed to him this time around, and Victor grins while he stretches out his limbs in that muscle tee again because he probably knows it—because where Yuuri is worlds better at hand-to-hand combat for various personal reasons, he accepts that Victor is insanely talented at commanding his powers with both hands tied behind his back.

(This is one-hundred-percent true; Yuuri’s seen Victor manage that exact feat before on a mission once.)

He’ll never admit any of this to Victor, lest he risk giving the ex-villain a bigger ego than he already has.

“You should tell him anyway, Yuuri! I bet he’d love to hear it!”

Yuuri whirs around and sees Phichit seated at the edge of the Arena, safely behind a wall of Ion Glass, sharing a bag of popcorn with JJ. “What the hell, Phichit! What are you two doing here?!”

“We’ve got a bet going, you see. And I didn’t want to miss out on this sick entertainment.” Phichit calls. “I’m rooting for you, by the way. You’ve gotten much better and you’ve got this, babe!”
“Are you kidding?” JJ is shouting so Yuuri and Victor can hear that obnoxious voice Yuuri has grown used to. “Victor’s power control is almost as great as mine. There’s no doubt that he’ll have Yuuri on the ground in two minutes flat.”

“You’re truly a man with a good eye!” Victor calls.

*Please don’t interrupt us,* Yuuri thinks so only Phichit hears. He sees his friend waggle his eyebrows while he stuffs his face with popcorn again, and he wants to bury that lovable face in the buttery tub if that’ll stop the unnecessary teasing.

They’re circling each other, like they’ve done a million times in spar training, unsure of who’s going to make the first move. Yuuri’s hands are alight with his fire, and Victor is casually walking around him, hands behind his back, waiting for the perfect moment to conjure his ice. This is all too familiar, a flashback to only a month ago, when Yuuri was cornering Victor as Flash Freeze in the middle of a crime scene. How the times have changes.

“Oh, how the tables have turned. You aren’t confident that you’ll beat me?” Victor says nonchalantly. He always starts casual conversation when he’s trying to get Yuuri’s guard down, and Yuuri won’t fall for it.

“I’ll keep trying until I do.” Yuuri doesn’t sound too sure, even to his own ears.

“What are you waiting for?” Victor stops, holds out his hands. A challenge. “Come and get me.”

What an obvious, dumb ploy to get Yuuri where Victor probably wants him. Yuuri stops moving, stands his ground, and in a beat, fills the floor with his fire, three feet high and blazing bright.

When he suppresses them, Victor is nowhere to be found.

He looks behind himself, turns back again, looks at Phichit and JJ in confusion, and sees that Phichit is discreetly pointing upward. JJ smacks his arm and mouths *that’s cheating!*

Yuuri looks up, and oh, there’s Victor. Comfortably seated on a platform of ice. He waves before dropping down, using the ice like it’s a pliant third arm to trap Yuuri in it, and Yuuri can do nothing but bang his heated hands against the surface in the five seconds it takes for the countdown to finish and Victor to claim his first victory.

Victor smiles, full and proud.

He’ll swear that his fire isn’t burning hot enough.

“Best three out of five,” Yuuri huffs, blowing the hair that falls in his eyes.

Later, Yuuri presses his lips together and plops onto the ground, drinking from a water bottle to cool off.

Victor had mercilessly outdone him this time. He expected it, Victor expected it, hell, even Phichit expected it. Yuuri is sure Phichit only betted on him out of pity. It’s like sweet retribution for last week, when Yuuri ruthlessly kicked Victor to the ground over and over again during combat practice, and Yuuri hadn’t felt sorry about it at all.

He’s only a little sorry now.
JJ collects his ten dollar bill, and Phichit frowns and clings to it like he doesn’t want to let go.

“Looks like I’m the victor.”

“Ha ha, very funny,” Yuuri deadpans. He places the emptied water bottle to the side, where it joins two others, and stands. “Let’s go one more time.”

“Wow, Yuuri, do you ever get tired?” Victor pants. Yuuri hadn’t noticed till now that Victor is breathing a little harder than when they started—Yuuri peers at the clock on the wall—an hour and a half ago.

“Oh, do you need to rest? We can go again later,” Yuuri says.

“I think I’d rather sit here and catch my breath. If it’s okay with you, I’m done for the day.”

“That’s fair.”

They leave the Arena and press the button on the wall to retract it and return it to the training room setting, then laze around in it while Phichit and JJ talk about who knows what, and Yuuri is halfway through yet another bottle of water when Victor speaks up again.

“Yuuri, why was I a four on the five star system?”

Yuuri stops drinking to regard him. “Hm?” “On SIB. Remember? The first day I was here, it said I was a four. Why not a five?” he asks.

“Well, it’s not exactly a good thing,” Yuuri replies. “It means you were dangerous, but not dangerous enough to kill heroes and civilians. But you came pretty close a bunch of times.”

Victor hums at that, and Yuuri can’t begin to understand what that means. He can’t begin to understand the fact that he’s talking about a former villain to the former villain himself like this is normal, like this is an everyday occurrence that just happens to people. Yuuri has gotten used to having Victor around now, but this is still really, really weird.

“Is there a system that rates heroes too?” Victor finally says. “Like a heroes star rating? Yelp, but for heroes. Hero’s Yelp.” He pauses, and Yuuri raises his eyebrows. “Please tell me it’s called help.”

Yuuri outwardly groans at that. “No. Rating heroes like they’re restaurant reviews is an awful idea. That was unofficially done before, and no one cared about it.”

“But there’s that one bi-annual awards ceremony.”

“That’s different.”

“Okay…” Victor stares at him, appraising, and Yuuri would probably break out in sweats if he weren’t already sweating from all that fire he used a few minutes ago. “If there were a sort of ‘help’, you’d be number one on the list, wouldn’t you?”

“What.”

“I saw your files on SIB,” Victor casually reveals.

“You searched me?”

“The fact that you’re the best in the organization isn’t a surprise at all. SUCC is the best in the country too, isn’t it? So that makes you the best in the country, yeah?”
“Wh—*no*!” Yuuri sputters. He swears Victor has suddenly gotten much closer than he was thirty seconds ago. Victor certainly feels close, even though he’s about an arm’s length away. “I couldn’t care less about ratings. Besides, I’m sure the only reason for that is because half of my missions were wasted on your capture attempts and neutralizing your useless crimes.”

“Useless?” Victor places a hand to his chest. Yuuri absentely notes that he does that a lot. “**Yuuri, I’m hurt.**”

Ignoring the fact that Victor is unfairly rolling the *r* in his name in *that* way, Yuuri steps forward and pokes a finger against Victor’s chest as he retorts, “Oh, yeah? Last year, what was one of the most infamous villains in this country doing robbing some rundown gas station in a seedy neighborhood, scaring the cashier and the store’s customers? Was that really not useless to you, or were you trying to gain something from me? Was it a trap?”

“Would you believe me if I told you that I just wanted to see your beautiful masked face again?”

Yuuri does *not* blush. No. He bites his lip and contemplates carefully before he speaks his next words. “I’d say you were full of shit.”

Victor has definitely gotten close this time. Or maybe it’s Yuuri who’s gotten close, because Yuuri has to look up to meet Victor’s eyes, and it’s the most annoying thing in the world. Having to look up. Into his incandescent blue eyes. *Unfairly* blue eyes. Yuuri thinks he sees liquid silver swimming in them.

Yuuri is so enraptured (for no reason at all) that he doesn’t notice that Victor has removed the finger that Yuuri still had pointed against Victor’s chest until he has Yuuri’s entire hand held in his own. They’re so cold. Yuuri gasps softly, wide-eyed and *burning*.

“Contrary to popular belief, Yuuri, I don’t flirt with every hero I see.” Victor tightens the hold on his hand, and Yuuri is going to combust. Right there in this spot. “Just the one that caught my eye.”

Admittedly, Yuuri *does* blush that time. Full force. Full bodied. He accidentally ignites with the strength of it and Victor suddenly steps back like he just touched fire.

Yuuri sees the steam coming from his own hand. Oh.

“I’m so sorry, Victor, *ohmygod*—” Yuuri covers his mouth sheepishly as Victor shakes his right hand in the air to alleviate the pain.

“It’s fine. It didn’t hurt too badly,” Victor says meekly. That isn’t reassuring at all.

“No, seriously, I wasn’t controlling it and I just—I—I’m really sorry. Let me see,” Yuuri grabs the hurt hand and inspects it carefully, and he sighs in relief when he doesn’t spot any awful, raging third degree burns. Victor’s pale palm is only reddened from it.

“It’s fine, Yuuri, really. I can just ice it,” Victor reassures him.

“Okay. Right, okay, I’ll get the ice—”

“**Yuuri.**”

“**Yeah? Do you need something else?**”

Victor gives him a soft, amused smile as he conjures a ball of ice to clutch in his right hand. Yuuri feels the tips of his ears burn in embarrassment.
“Right... You. Right.”

There’s laughter suddenly, and Yuuri curses under his breath because he’d forgotten Phichit and JJ are here.

“How! I don’t know why I bother paying for shows when this is literally better than anything on Netflix,” Phichit laughs.

“Right?” JJ says, laughing along with him.

Yuuri chucks an emptied bottle at them—which is useless, because Phichit stops it midair with his damned telekinesis even with the laughing fit—and shouts, “Shut up!”

“How are trainees allowed to do something so dangerous?” Victor asks, a few night later. They’re outside of a rundown warehouse on a Tuesday, in a neighborhood that probably breeds villains and bad, regrettable morning-after behaviors.

“Please, it’s not even dangerous. These scumbags don’t even have powers. I’ll kick their sorry asses,” Yuri P. says.

“You aren’t immune to guns, and I’m pretty sure Minako says they have guns, Yu—Ultrasonic Teenage Edgelord.”

“I can take them! I’ll slice their dumb bullets with my knife.” As if to prove his point somehow, Yuri P. removes one out of seemingly nowhere and slices it through the air in front of them.

“Can he really do that?” Yuuri whispers to the person beside him. Otabek Altin, a.k.a The Solider, another hero-in-training who’s working with them on this particular mission. He isn’t in the building very often, and when he is, Yuuri hardly notices. The guy likes to keep to himself, and he is usually found glued to the training room rather than sitting in the lounge to socialize with everyone else.

“No,” Otabek replies curtly. “But not for lack of trying. I can act as your shields if you need me to, though.”

“Ah, thank you.”

Victor and Yuri P. were assigned a drug bust, where the drugs being distributed are either power enhancers or give power highs to people who don’t know what it’s like to have them in the first place. Yuuri sincerely hopes it isn’t the latter; he knows that those are risky, with potentially permanent consequences—that is, you’ll either end up with perennial superpowers or you’ll end up dead.

As it stands, these people are only distributors, and they’re not the ones taking the risk.

So the plan, concocted by Yuri P. is this:

Go in. Kick some ass.

It’s hardly a plan by Yuuri’s standards, but Yuuri isn’t really here to run things. He’s only supervising, because Victor’s astute observation was right, this was dangerous, and heroes-in-training wouldn’t be allowed to do this on their own without having an official hero there just in case. Sara normally accompanies Yuri P. and Otabek, because she’s surprising great at understanding Brooding Teenager.
Tonight, though. Tonight, Yuuri has to look after with them and Victor combined, and he hopes they get through this in one piece.

“Let’s go,” Yuri P. stays, and he’s ready to just barge right in, but Otabek grabs him by the collar, hoists him into the air by the neck of his purple jacket, and sets him down again a few feet away from the door.

“We need to be careful about this,” Otabek says.

“Uuugh, fine.”

“I’ll calmly go in, and if they aren’t budging, then you can smash the door in.”

“What do I do?” Victor asks.

“You look forty years old. You stay back and let us handle this,” Yuri P. says.

Victor says, “I resent that!” while Yuuri snickers into his hand.

Otabek does what he says he will; he knocks on the door, and they all step back and out of sight, watching as the little eye-level mail slot is slid back to reveal a pair of dark eyes on the other side.

“I’m here for the stuff,” Otabek says.

Yuri P. slaps a hand against his forehead.

The person behind the door is probably raising their eyebrows skeptically right now, Yuuri isn’t sure. The only thing he’s sure about is that it’s really dark in there, and the person hasn’t blinked once.

They say something, Yuuri can’t hear, and Otabek says something back, and it apparently doesn’t work out since the slot gets shut in Otabek’s face. He turns to them and shrugs. “I tried.”

Yuri P. sighs, mumbles, “Do I have to do everything?” and proceeds to kick down the door with all the grace of the Hulk. There’s a shout on the other side, presumably from the person who was just at the door, because there’s definitely someone lying underneath it right now.

Yuuri, Victor, and Otabek carefully step around it while Yuri P. shouts into the interior, “All you fuckers are under arrest! Don’t even try anything; I’ll stab your guns with my knives!”

“You literally brought a knife to a gunfight,” Victor says.

“Um, correction,” Yuri P. replies. “I brought twenty-five.”

Something immediately seems off here. They’ve been inside for exactly five minutes, have made their presence known in the most bombastic way possible thanks to Teenage Edgelord, and the entire warehouse is silent. In fact, there’s no one else here.

“Maybe they’re further back,” Yuuri says, eyes darting at every corner whenever he thinks something moves. Streetlamps from outside are their only light source, and it streams in through tiny windows set into the thick walls. There’s rats crawling along the walls and crumbs building up in corners.

“No shit,” Yuri P. scoffs. “I bet they ran the moment they realized Ultrasonic Teenage Edgelord was here.”

“Christ,” Yuuri hears Victor whisper beside him. “With a name like that, they’ll have all the time in
the world to run away.”

They walk long corridors, step over scattered, low coffee tables, ratty couches, and old carpets with literal moss growing on them until they make it to a set of stairs that lead down to the basement level. The rest of the ground level has been eerily quiet and devoid of people, the only clue that anyone was here at all being the faint smell of cigarette smoke in the air, but downstairs, lights are turned on.

“Ha!” Yuri P. shouts and races down like a kid waking up to Christmas. Which, Yuuri guesses, must be true. Nothing excites Yuri P. more than stepping all over bad guys with his boots.

Yuuri prepares himself for some sort of face off as he follows the others downstairs. He expects a bunch of gun barrels pointed at their faces.

What he gets instead, are emotionless drug dealers who don’t even acknowledge their presence.

“Uh…”

“You’re under arrest!” Yuri P. says to the nearest person, some girl whom he picks up by the collar and shakes. Her head lolls from one side to the other, and when he lets go, she slumps back on a couch. “What the fuck.”

“Well, Edgeface, you were certainly right.” Victor snaps his fingers in front of another guy’s face. He doesn’t blink, doesn’t flinch. Nothing. “These missions are way too easy.”

“It’s Edgelord you—”

“This isn’t the time for arguing,” Yuuri scolds, inspecting someone for himself. There’s something irksome about the eyes… “This isn’t right. Why are they all frozen?”

“Maybe they were using the enhancers and it went wrong,” Otabek supplies, pointing at the rickety wooden table at the center of the room, where an open box of items lies.

“Maybe they’re frozen with fear,” Yuri P. adds.

“This looks like some freaky version of mind control,” Victor chimes.

“Mind control…” Yuuri looks closer, peers into the eyes that are unblinking and soulless and swirling with an unnatural purple tint. And there’s something else there too… a figure reflecting in the glassy surface… someone… someone…

“Cinderos, look out!”

Yuuri is pushed out of the way and narrowly misses getting his head chopped clean off by something sharp and lethal. Broken glass bottles.

“Royal Mind Fuck,” Yuuri whispers under his breath. He sighs painfully.

“Fancy seeing all of you here!” Royal MF greets them, spiteful grin painted on his face. He eyes the new arrivals in the room—Yuri P. has drawn about five more knives between his fingers, Otabek is staring like his eyes alone will break the villain, and Victor has a protective hand around Yuuri’s shoulders—and he laughs. “Who even are you two?” he waves at Yuri P. and Otabek, “Newbies? You won’t stand a chance against us. And, oh! Victor the traitor is here too! What a reunion! I see things are going well with the new BF.”

“I go by Cryo-Frost now,” Victor says, at the same time Yuuri blushes and shrugs Victor’s arm off
and goes, “He’s not my boyfriend.”

Disregarding them, Royal MF speaks, “That costume is the worst thing I’ve ever seen. You become a hero and that’s the best they give you?” He tuts and shakes his head.

“Oh, listen, this is only temporary and it’s one-size-fits-all anyway, so—”

“Fucking, god, stop with the small talk!” Yuri P. shouts, indignant. “We’re kicking your dumb ass right here, right now, Royal Whatever-The-Fuck.”

He tosses half of the knives in his hand, aims straight for Royal MF’s head, a near perfect hit—

But they’re sucked into a wide, black hole shadow void thing that pops their ears and instantly makes Yuuri’s eyes water.

“You...you said us...” Yuuri says, once he recovers. His left ear is still ringing. “Who...”

The room is cast in shadows, loads of them, caused by the dim and dingy light bulb lamps that reminds Yuuri of interrogation scenes in old movies, and the fact there’s no other external light sources down here. There’s shadows everywhere, but one sticks out from the rest, a dark anomaly that doesn’t mend with the grays of the others, and Yuuri watches with horror as a figure raises up from it, shifts and morphs and colorizes until they’re actually human.

Royal MF presents the new-new arrival like an announcer, arms gesturing wildly as he says, “Welcome to the stage, Shadow Knight!”

“Royal Mind Fuck, stop that,” Shadow Knight says, slapping his hand away. “I leave you alone for five minutes and you get ambushed by four whole heroes. You’re an idiot.”

“I don’t have to take that from you.”

“You’re working for me.”

“We’re affiliates, you fuck!”

Yuuri is backing away as slowly as he possibly can, and he grabs Victor’s wrist with trembling hands as he does it because Shadow Knight is here. He is here, in some dilapidated warehouse full of mind controlled people, and he’s working with Royal Mind Fuck, and they’re woefully unprepared.

Because while Flash Freeze was a four on the star system, Shadow Knight is a five.

They’re still arguing when Yuuri reaches the other two. He gestures for Otabek to grab Yuri P. so they can make a run for it. It’s fine; they’ll return to the organization, regroup with a better team of certified heroes since this is a threat Yuri P. and Otabek aren’t ready for—

But of course, Yuri P. is incredibly stubborn, and he doesn’t follow orders if he can help it. (Another similarity between him and Victor. They must be related after all.)

“We’re running away?!?” Yuri P. says, loudly, placing the two villains’ attentions on them. Yuuri winces. “That’s what a coward would do, and I’m no coward!”

“There’s nothing wrong with retreating if it means saving our asses, Ultrasonic,” Victor hisses under his breath.

Royal Mind Fuck blocks their only exit at the base of the stairs. “Running away? That’s cute.”
“Well see? Now we have to fight!”

“Because you were loud! Can you stop being so crass for two seconds?”

“This is really not the time to bicker,” Yuuri reminds them. He’s trying really hard not to panic, but that’s a wasted effort when he realizes that he’s never faced off against a level five villain without at least two other full-fledged heroes beside him. And as it stands right now, between the four of them, there’s exactly one-point-five certified heroes here.

Yuuri stares Shadow Knight down, tries not to crack under that dark, withering gaze that the villain returns. He hasn’t ignited his flames yet but he’s already feeling the heat.

“Royal Mind Fuck, we’re going to be late to our drop off. Should I toss these losers into the shadow realm?”

“Are we playing Yu-Gi-Oh?” Victor quibs. Yuuri wonders how he’s always ready to joke around like his life isn’t in some sort of imminent danger at all times. (Not that Yuuri’s life isn’t, either, but it certainly feels that way.)

Shadow Knight rolls his eyes. “Are you suppose to be Flash Freeze? My, how the mighty fall. That costume is terrible.”

“It’s temporary.”

Royal MF rubs his melodramatic hands together. “I’d kill to see you do that, Shadow Knight. But she’s waiting, and she’ll kill us if we’re late.”

“It’ll be quick.”

“Well…”

Yuri P. growls. “That’s it! I can’t stand here and listen to this, you’re all irritating! Soldier, toss me.”

Otabek picks Yuri P. up like he weighs a feather, and harpoons him—knives already and sharp and pointed—at Shadow Knight’s right. While the villain’s focus is on the teenage anger-seeking-missile, Otabek throws a couch seating three zombified people at Shadow Knight’s left. Shadow Knight dodges the couch, but suffers a shallow cut to the jaw from Yuri P.’s knife.

If Yuuri weren’t so busy planning their next move—grabbing Victor’s hand and telling him to move, and Victor being petulant and saying wait, wait I need to get this, and Yuuri shouts get what?! while they rush for Royal MF on the steps—he’d think about how dumb it is to assume that Yuri P. and Otabek can’t handle themselves. Of course they can, they’re heroes-in-training, they work for SUCC, and they didn’t work this hard and get this far for their efforts to suddenly not matter.

“Cryo-Frost!” Yuuri says once he finally has Victor’s attention, igniting his fire on his free hand. “Ice!”

Victor looks confused, but he obliges, forming a sheet of ice from thin air. Yuuri heats up his hand, burns his fire bright, and creates steam when he collides the two together.

With Royal MF temporarily blinded, Victor kicks him to the ground, and Yuuri calls for the others to, “Get out! Now!”

They’re bolting up the stairs, hurdling over furniture, sprinting out the door and two blocks away before they finally stop to catch their breaths and wheeze lung-fulls of fresh air. It was stale in there,
but the panic and adrenaline of it all made it hard to notice.

“Holy shit!” Yuri P. wheezes, hands on his knees, eyes wild with excitement. “Holy shit! Beka! We faced off against a real villain!”

Otabek is only panting a little, a product of his ridiculous strength and stamina. “That was really cool.”

“I nicked ‘em! Did you see?!”

“I did.”

“Good…” Yuuri is having a hard time catching his breath, so he throws up a cursory thumbs up Yuri P.’s way.

Victor is oddly quiet, Yuuri notices, and when he turns to look at him, he spots Victor with his back against a wall, index finger against his lip, peering at something in his palm.

“Cryo-Frost?”

“Hm?”

All three of them crowd around Victor. Yuuri pulls his hand down. He reveals a tiny chip resting against his ugly, bright blue glove.

“I’m not very well versed in power drugs but…” Victor holds the square thing up to a street lamp, and Yuuri reads the white, stenciled letters C.E. and E.W. on the sleek, black surface. “This doesn’t look like a drug.”

Chapter End Notes

i was super close to cutting this up into 4 parts, but i decided it would be easier to throw everything into one big longfic, especially considering i had a title in mind already. the title sounds kinda misleading for the kind of fic this is right now, but just picture victor's voice and waggly eyebrows and like, a winky face emoji next to it. i can't wait to write everything else out, and i hope y'all will enjoy reading as much as i do writing!!

thank you to chroniccombustion for beta-reading this, the next two chapters (which will be uploaded very very soon), and the subsequent ones that follow.

strap in, cause this is gonna be a wild ride (that was really lame i'm sorry.)
I’d take your heat any day of the week

Chapter Summary

Victor’s first briefing, and he spends half of it thinking about the person of his affection. Also, Victor’s mind is going wild again.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“You faced off against Shadow Knight?!” Phichit yells, loud enough that the whole building probably hears. Though, that isn’t likely; the holographic projection room is practically soundproof. Or so Victor’s been told by Christophe.

Christophe also tells him that everyone calls this room the HORE room, but Victor doesn’t bother questioning why or how; he already knows it’s the RAD Department’s doing.

And honestly, any department declaring itself to be rad probably isn’t rad at all, but Victor has yet to become acquainted with anyone there.

But anyway, Phichit is yelling, despite the fact that Yuuri is right next to him. Yura and Otabek and Sara are here too, and they’re all waiting for Yakov and Minako to arrive and brief them on yesterday’s events.

“Yes, yeah, it was insane,” Yuuri says, clutching his chest as he recalls it. “He didn’t really do much ‘cause he and Royal Mind Fuck were in a rush, but I could just feel how crazy powerful he is.”

Yura has his feet kicked up on the table. His regular clothes are hardly any different from his hero costume, but Victor doesn’t point it out. “That fucker sucked some of my knives into the void or whatever. When we see him again, I’m gonna make him give them back.”

“I’m pretty sure if they’re in the void, they’re untraceable by now,” Victor says. Yura uses his hand like a mouth to mock Victor’s words, and Victor frowns at that. Rude.

Sara is just as quiet as Otabek right now. Victor hasn’t known Otabek for long, meeting him only once before—last week when he’d wandered into the training room and saw him punch a fist-shaped hole straight through a punching bag. Victor doesn’t know Sara very well either, but he knows she isn’t usually this quiet. He wonders if they’re on good enough terms that he can ask what’s wrong, and he doesn’t contemplate long. Victor does it anyway; she’s sitting right there, and he may as well.

“Are you alright, Sara?” he asks her.

“Hm?” she answers distractedly. Her eyes are trained on the others, away from Victor, and she’s absentely playing with her hair. It takes her a few more seconds to realize she’s actually being spoken to, and she finally turns to regard him. “Oh. Oh, yeah. I’m fine. No worries.”

Victor nods and lets that go.

“Hey, Victor!” Phichit calls. “Have you ever met Shadow Knight? Y’know, when you were a rad bad mad guy?”
Victor touches a finger to his lip in thought. He tries to go back, reach far into the recesses of his hazy mind, but it’s like digging through dark, murky waters: a useless, lost cause. “No. He certainly looks familiar, but I can’t recall ever working with him.”

“How awfully convenient…”

Frowning, he says, “I didn’t ask to get my memories wiped. You sit here in my shoes and see how great it is to literally forget your pets.” Victor leans his elbows against the table and turns his eyes to Yuuri. “You believe me, don’t you? I have no reason to lie.”

Yuuri looks at Phichit before looking back at him and shrugging a shoulder sheepishly. “Well…”

Victor pouts. “Yuuuuri.”

The entrance slides open as Minako walks into the room. She’s by herself, Yakov nowhere in sight.

“I’ll be conducting this meeting alone,” she explains as she takes the seat at the head of the table. “Yakov had some things to tend to.”

“Now, we don’t normally have heroes-in-training sit in during briefings because your missions are low risk enough that they aren’t necessary, but seeing as the three of you were suddenly forced into a high risk situation, Yakov and I felt it was your right to be here. Any questions before we begin?”

Yura raises his hand.

“Yes?”

“Does this mean we get to be full-fledged heroes?”

Minako shakes her head. “Sorry, but no. Your training isn’t over yet.”

He mumbles something under his breath that Victor thinks is what a load of baloney.

“Okay!” Minako claps her hands together and a blown up projection of the chip Victor found yesterday appears, floating above the table and rotating in slow motion. The stenciled letters are on full, holographic display. “As I’m sure you all know, Royal MF is now working with Shadow Knight to conduct some sort of scheme, and it’s safe to assume they’re working with Scarlet Mask as well, because she wasn’t seen—pun intended—escaping a crime scene with Royal MF two weeks ago. They used one of Shadow Knight’s notorious shadow portals to transport themselves away.”

Yuuri and Phichit look at each other then, and Victor can only guess that that must mean they were in charge of that one.

“It seems that this chip the four of you picked up yesterday is part of whatever plan the villains are fabricating, and this, along with an entire box of them, are being delivered to someone. Who that is, we aren’t so sure yet. What we do know is that she seems to be gathering villains for whatever plot this is.”

“So we can assume that any villain we come across is working for ‘her’, right?” Phichit says.

“Phichit, please don’t interrupt my briefing monologue. It really ruins the mystery I’m going for.”

“Sorry!”

“After sending out Phichit along with a special task force to recover the power drugs and resuscitate the dealers, we were able to conclude that Royal Mind Fuck, er, fucked with their minds, so to
Minako keeps talking, everyone keeps listening, but Victor slips into a daze, because there’s something about all of this that seems uncanny, and he can’t place what it is. It’s frustrating, really. The fact that he’s had to endure something he doesn’t even remember, that leaves him in a constant state of confusion and disorientation as though he’s just woken up from a nap. In the mornings, it takes him a full ten minutes to remember his name, the current year, the fact that he isn’t in some perpetual fever dream, and another thirty minutes to realize why he isn’t in his usual apartment. The next hour is spent trying to catch his mind up on the events of the past month. It feels like having Alzheimers, like being young and old at the same time, only he’s his own case and the circumstances were forced.

(Forced how though, no one seems to know yet.)

He spends the rest of the time with his eyes drawn to Yuuri’s face, watches as his brows knit together at something Minako says, watches the way Yuuri’s teeth sink into his lips, a nervous habit that Victor notices he does sometimes. His hair is falling into his eyes, and he sweeps it back every now and again, and Victor muses about how different the look is from the usual slick-back style he dons on missions. Victor almost didn’t recognize him when they first met here, but he knows those brown eyes anywhere. He’d be able to pick them out in a sea of them, in a police lineup full of brown eyes, with ease...

Victor doesn’t snap back into attention again until there are literal hands snapping him back into attention.

“What?” Victor flits his eyes around the room and notices that everyone has gone. The doors slide shut behind whoever leaves just then. “The meeting is over?”

“Were you not listening?” Yuuri sighs, shakes his head. “You looked pretty dazed.”

Victor momentarily contemplates responding with I was lost in your eyes because really, he was, but he stops himself before he can. “I was. Sorry.” Victor stands and stretches his arms above his head, looks at Yuuri and smiles a little at the fact that he has all of Yuuri’s attention. Which, in retrospect, is an absurd thought. He has literally robbed chips from vending machines for the chance of getting Yuuri to notice him. “Catch me up on what I missed?” he asks, offering a smile.

“Okay,” Yuuri says, and begins walking out of the room with Victor trailing right behind him. “Did you catch most of the beginning?” Victor nods. “That was everything we kind of already know. The only thing that’s really worth mentioning is that the Information Sector is working to try and figure out what that chip means and who they’re being delivered to.”

Victor hums. “Helpful.”

“They’re trying their best.”

“I know. I hope it’s nothing detrimental.”

“We all do, but I can’t help but think it might be if Shadow Knight is involved.” Yuuri is anxiously biting his lip again as they walk down the stairs, heading to the lounge. “He usually works alone.”

“Really?” Victor taps his finger against his lip in thought. There’s something that’s bugging him about Shadow Knight, but he can’t place what it is… “Have I ever worked with him before? I swear I have. He looks familiar and I’m not sure why.”
Yuuri stops walking when they’re at the base of the staircase, turns to Victor—notices their small height difference with a puff of annoyance and moves up one step on the staircase, adorable—and asks. “You really don’t remember?”

Victor hides an endeared smile behind his hand. “If I did, I would’ve rattled off every piece of information I had by now. Real names, locations, the fact that Royal Mind Fuck uses foot creams to keep his soles as smooth as possible.”

Yuuri laughs with the shock of that statement. “Does he?”

“No, I don’t know. But doesn’t it sound like something he’d do?”

Hopping off the step, Yuuri lightly shoves Victor, smiling in this brilliant way that would leave Victor dazed again if they were trapped in that briefing room. “You’re ridiculous. And no, there’s no real records of you working with him. But the fact that he looks familiar to you might be because…”

“Hey!” A shout from the hallway.

Around the corner, Victor notices Sara and Yura directly in front of the lounge door. Sara looks somber, more than she did in that morning, and Yura is standing right in front of her, arms crossed over his chest.

“I could tell you were moping the entire meeting,” he mumbles, looking anywhere but at her face. “So you should, like… stop.”

“Wow. I’m suddenly feeling much better. Thanks a bunch,” Sara replies monotonously.

“I’m serious! Is it because of your brother?”

Sara flinches at that. Ah, so it must be. Victor wonders who that might be, if he’s okay. If Victor asked, would Sara tell him?

Victor locks eyes with Yuuri, who’s eavesdropping too, and Yuuri shakes his head. Victor isn’t too sure what to make of that gesture.

“Listen, forget about him! You deserve better than to sit here and whine about it. You’re a hero! Kick his ass! Make him regret ever turning his back on you!”

“That’s the thing, though! He didn’t just turn his back on me! He—I—” She sighs, hangs her head. “You really wouldn’t understand, Yuri.”

Yura leaves the hall to enter the lounge, Sara looks up in confusion, and Victor and Yuuri look at each other, equally as confused when Yura returns with a cushion he’d stolen from the couch. Then he promptly uses it to smack Sara’s face repeatedly.

“Pull yourself together!”

“Ack—Yuri, stop it!”

“I understand better than anyone! My dumbass brother did the same thing!”

“It’s different!”

“How?!”

“He—”
Victor feels a tug on his arm and looks down to see Yuuri is leading him towards the stairwell again.

“What’s happening?” he asks, voice full of concern. He’d been mentioned offhandedly yet it feels like something he shouldn’t have heard. The entire thing leaves him feeling uneasy too. His baby brother looked hurt, and Victor isn’t sure what to do about it. Waltzing up to him with a cake saying, *Sorry for eavesdropping on a private convo—that you had in the middle of a hallway, so really, anyone could’ve heard and maybe it wasn’t really private at all and does everyone know something I don’t?—but you seem upset, so let’s talk through this clear tension between us that’s been over seven years in the making over red velvet cake which I know is your favorite, didn’t seem like a good idea. For one, no cake in the world would fit all of that.*

“That’s something Sara should tell you herself, probably. It’s not really my place to say.”

“Yura said...He said I did the same thing?” Victor is searching Yuuri’s eyes as he speaks, looking for any nuances and changes to his expression, hoping he gives something away. “Did he...is he a villain?”

Yuuri’s eyes dart to the side like he’s uncomfortable, and his hold on the railing tightens.

Victor tries to push further. “Is he Shadow Knight?”

“Um…” He gasps suddenly, points over Victor’s shoulder, and shouts, “Look! A poster of me on the wall!”

Victor actually turns—he doesn’t know why he does when they were here only a few minutes ago and knows that there aren’t casual posters pinned to the walls in the stairwell—and when he turns back, Yuuri is already halfway up to the second floor.

✂

Today marks one week and a half since Victor has arrived, and no day has made him more nervous than this.

Today, he accompanies Yuuri in meeting Lilia Baranovskaya, a close partner to the SUCC organization that Victor knows next to nothing about. At least, not anymore. He only heard from Yura in passing that she’s Yakov’s ex-wife, has cheekbones that can slice your will in half, and is the reason most of SUCC’s heroes are the best dressed in the country.

Victor has no idea what to expect, but he’s hoping for the best while simultaneously expecting the absolute worse.

They’re going to meet outside of the organization before heading there, so Victor pleads with Yakov to let his designated driver stop by Express’o’Self to grab a cup of coffee for Yuuri, as per Christophe’s helpful suggestion. Chris had been true to his word, slipping pieces of advice on ways to not completely fuck up with Yuuri, and things seem to be going well. Yuuri only rolls his eyes in exasperation at him once a day now, instead of the average six. (His record was eleven, but Victor was being unfairly difficult that day.)

Victor buys him whatever sounds sweet—a caramel latte with extra vanilla that he hopes Yuuri will like—then meets Yuuri by the door at eight-fifteen in the morning.

Unsurprisingly, Yuuri looks like he’d walked off the set of a zombie movie: hair a barely concealed mess, eyes droopy and laced with exhaustion, hand covering his mouth as he yawns as wide as the ocean.
Victor still thinks he looks unfairly cute.

“Good morning, Yuuri,” Victor greets, holding out the steamy coffee cup. “You look beautiful this morning.”

Yuuri makes weird zombie noises as he blindly grasps for the coffee cup, and Victor raises his eyebrows in mild shock as the cup sleeve slips from the cup, yet Yuuri holds onto the scorching thing like it’s nothing. Then he proceeds to take an entire gulp without flinching.

“...Amazing.”

“S so early.” Yuuri blinks up at Victor like he’s noticing Victor is there for the first time today. “Oh, hey Victor.” He looks down at the coffee cup. “This is really good. What is this?”

“Caramel with vanilla.”

Yuuri takes another gulp and adorns a cute, contented smile that melts Victor’s heart into a puddle on the sidewalk. He’s so very weak. “How did you know I liked sweet caffeinated drinks?”

Chris told him. “Lucky guess. Though, it figures someone as sweet as you would like drinks equally as sweet. I doubt the latte can compare, though.”

Yuuri waves his hand dismissively and heads for the open car door. “No, no, it’s perfect,” he smiles, humming into the warm, steaming cup. “Thank you.” This early in the morning, everything seems to fly over his head.

Victor slides into the backseat after him, shuts the door, and the car starts moving. “You aren’t a morning person?”

“You are?” Yuuri mumbles back, lips curled around the rim of the cup as he peers at Victor over it. His big, beautiful, captivating brown eyes, with flecks of red that’s reminiscent of his fire is so evident when they’re seated this close, side by side, shoulders brushing in this small, tight space. He’s so cute, so cute, Victor wants to hold him tight and never let go.

“I like to get the most out of the day,” Victor responds, with the shrug of a shoulder.

Yuuri hums noncommittally as he downs the rest of his coffee at a scary fast pace. Victor knows his own poor tongue would suffer from third degree burns if he tried to drink coffee that quickly. He gets it now, why Yura looked at him like Victor had offended him somehow when Victor ate those spoonfuls of ice cream a few nights ago. “What?” he’d said, mid-shovel. “It’s hot outside.”

Yuuri looks considerably more awake now that he’s finished his coffee, but he’s still periodically yawning. “I need at least three before I really feel awake,” he explains.

“Wow,” Victor says, “Isn’t that really bad for you?”

“ Probably. Do I care though? Absolutely not.”

Lilia’s home is bigger than Victor expects, too big for someone who lives alone. But it is as clean, immaculate, as pristine as Victor imagined it would be—not a couch cushion out of place, or a speck of dust collecting on any surface, or wrinkled piece of fabric in sight. It almost feels like no one really lives here, as if the entire interior is a furniture store display, and it’s creepy.
Yakov’s home is clean too, but there’s tiny chips on walls, unruly stacks of papers on the coffee table, butt dents on well-used couches that makes the house feel like a home and not a mannequin’s dream mansion house set.

Lilia has an in-house assistant who leaves the living room area to call for Lilia in her office. While they wait, Yuuri whispers warnings and things to keep in mind.

“Please, please, don’t say or do anything to make her mad, and don’t be offensive. You can barely get away with that kind of thing with Mr. Feltsman, but Madame Lilia will literally drop you in a cauldron and cook you into the next century.”

“Is she a witch? What a weird, offensive thing to imply, Yuuri…”

Yuuri elbows him in the rib, or tries to, but nearly two weeks of living with Yura has really sharpened his reflexes against attacks like that. And he was expecting it, because that wouldn’t be the first time Yuuri has elbowed him.

“Listen to everything she says, too, because her advice is really important in helping you become the best hero you can be,” Yuuri whispers. There’s slow approaching footsteps, two sets of them.

“Is she some sort of adviser?”

“Something like that. A college adviser, only legitimately helpful.”

“Yuuri,” says a voice, and Victor looks up to see the most severe green eyes he’s ever seen. The tight bun on her head seems to pull her thin eyebrows up towards her hairline, and, yes, Yura was right, her cheekbones are probably meat cleaver sharp.

Victor inwardly curses, because he can’t get that ridiculous witch image out of his head.

“Madame Lilia,” Yuuri greets, shaking her hand. “It’s very good to see you again.”

“Yes, it’s been far too long. I’m glad to hear that you’ve been doing very well.”

Victor is in the midst of trying to figure out if she really is glad—her face is so neutral, the twitch at the corners of her mouth is hard to decipher—when she turns her eyes to him. Just as sudden as her attention on him comes, that headache-inducing haze clouds over his mind, and Victor tries not to wince in fear that it might count as an offensive gesture.

“Vitya.”

Her voice is like her facial expression, sharp and cutting, and for whatever reason, the sound of it is grating in his head. The headache grows stronger. He’s not sure if he’s attempting to remember something, or attempting to forget. She calls him by nickname, must know everything about him, but Victor can’t recall a thing about her.

“Hello, Madame Lilia,” he says, putting on a smile he hopes is amicable but feels awfully forced.

“I cannot believe Yakov really took on a villain in his organization. That man is a fool and has no idea what he’s doing,” she sniffs in distaste as she stares Victor down. She’s shorter than him by a head, yet Victor feels tiny in her presence. She tilts her chin up as she addresses him again. “You were hardly passable as a villain, what makes you think you would do well as a hero?”

“I have great motivation to be,” Victor says.
“And what is that?”

Victor glances over at Yuuri, sees those brown eyes pointed in rapt attention at him, and continues locking eyes with the person of his affections as he says, “I hope to join the great Cinderos at the top, then surpass him one day.”

Yuuri’s jaw drops a little with disbelief. Victor smiles in satisfaction.

Lilia looks him up and down, hums in thought, then says, “That costume you’re currently wearing certainly won’t help. Your image needs to reflect your heroics, and presently, it only serves to emphasize how mediocre you are.”

Victor’s face falls.

“My costume isn’t ready yet. Yakov is forcing me to—”

“After you foolishly broke the law. Yes, I heard. He should’ve dropped you the second news of that occurred. But I suppose it’s a good thing he didn’t. We’ll have to wait and see about that.”

Yuuri takes a step forward, placing a warm hand on Victor’s shoulder, and Victor thanks him a million times in his head that Lilia’s overbearing gaze isn’t on him anymore. “With all due respect, Madame Lilia, Victor has potential to be a great hero, and I think he’ll do very well in the future.” Victor has no time to smile at that, because Yuuri slides his hand to Victor’s back and pushes him forward. “He’ll be in your care.”

While Yuuri waits in the living room, Victor is led to her office, laid out much like Yakov’s with a desk up against a tall window, one plush chair at one end, two other chairs at the other, and every piece of office supply in their place. Victor suspects that half of them are there for show, like the rest of her home. The bookshelf along one wall looks completely untouched too, and he swears the books are made of cardboard.

The books are evidently fake, and the whole office is fake, and everything is an illusion, because Lilia presses a button underneath the corner of her desk which reveals an eye scanner in the bookcase, and that reveals a hand scanner, and that reveals a voice recognition module that finally lets them into a small space that Victor imagines the inside of a small safe of a broke person looks like.

Because it’s metallic and empty.

“Follow me,” Lilia says, and walks into the...room? She turns, glances at Victor’s perplexed expression, and raises a thin eyebrow. “Are you coming, Vitya?”

Victor timidly steps in, expects an invisible shield to be there that transforms the space inside the moment he steps through. But it’s still blank. “Uh.”

Lilia produces a extendable pointer out of seemingly nowhere and taps one end onto the wall, and a tiny circle makes an indent as it’s pressed back. The room, which Victor realizes is an elevator, closes, and they’re descending.

She begins speaking as soon as the elevator moves (jerks, actually. Victor clutches onto the air when they shift down without warning). “I usually give guidance and advice on appropriate hero names, but seeing as you’ve went ahead and decided that yourself, we’ll move on to other matters.”

Something isn’t right about this, and it takes the dinging of the bell to indicate that they’re on their desired floor for Victor to realize that the elevator has no elevator music.
That, and the fact that he has no idea what Lilia really does.

The ten meter tall underground walls and gigantic textile machinery gives a good indicator, though. The glass walls and fluid pods, however, do not.

They finally arrive to their destination, and a set of doors slide open as Lilia comes forward. She removes her boots then walks in first, and Victor does the same, entering after her. The room looks eerily like the Arena in SUCC’s training room, but smaller, compact, and spotless. Victor is very afraid.

“I will need to test your vitality first to ensure that your costume is perfect for you,” she announces. Her pointer looks intimidating in her hand.

“Okay. What does that entail, exactly?”

“Brace yourself,” is all she says in warning.

Victor is confused, has no clue what to brace himself from. He blinks, and Lilia is gone, and he twirls in place looking for her.

In the moment he finds out that she’s behind him, he’s suddenly sent flying to the ground when her pointer sweeps him off his feet.

“Holy—”

“No hero will use that language in my presence,” Lilia interjects. “Get up! Again.”

Victor spends the whole of the hour being sent brutally to the ground, and he loses count on the amount of times Lilia tells him to get up again, repeating the words Stand up straight, look confident! Impose authority onto your enemies! like a stern mantra. He’s in an absolute daze while Lilia tells him everything wrong with his fighting stances.

The memory haze is ever-present too, and it seems to get worse whenever he locks eyes with Lilia, so he tries not to do that. But it’s hard when she demands his undivided attention, and it’s even harder when he ends up on his ass because he doesn’t give it to her.

His ego, like his ass, is a bit bruised after that.

When he recounts all of that to Yuuri on the car ride back, he sulks in the back seat of the car, and Yuuri pats his shoulder in consolation while sipping from another cup of coffee. Victor doesn’t ask where he’d gotten that from.

“To be honest, I think she likes you.”

“What is with you and your warped perspective of how people’s fondness of you? Did you have college advisers literally fight you to see which classes are right for you?”

Yuuri scoffs, sips his coffee, and continues. “I mean it. She was definitely tougher on me. I think I cried my second appointment.”

“So she’s that hard on everyone?”

Yuuri nods. “I think it’s meant to test your tenacity as a potential hero. You know, if you can’t handle being grilled, roasted, and brutally served by Lilia, then you don’t stand a chance against villains.”
“I really don’t appreciate the imagery that a witch wants to cook me to test my tenacity.”

“What, can’t take the heat?”

Victor pauses. Stares at Yuuri.

“Maybe not, but I’d take your heat any day of the week.”

Yuuri is slow to grasp what he says, because his cheeks burn like the flames that flicker in his palms, and Yuuri frantically waves his hand in front of him as he sputters, “That’s not what I meant.”

Victor conceals his laughter by biting his lip, and he’s overjoyed at getting Yuuri to blush, because there’s nothing cuter than a flustered Yuuri.

Besides a confident Yuuri, a shy Yuuri, a smiling Yuuri, a pouting Yuuri, a tired Yuuri before his obligatory three coffees in the morning…

Apart from those, there’s nothing cuter.

✂

“Yuuri! Victor!” Phichit says, on the other side of the entrance of the lounge when the door slides open. He’s in his costume. “How did things go with Lilia?”

“Just about what you’d expect,” Yuuri answers vaguely, and Phichit nods his understanding.

“At least,” Victor grumbles. “An aged woman shouldn’t be able to literally toss someone around like that,” Victor complains.

“Lilia isn’t your average aged woman. She isn’t like produce that goes bad when you leave it out for too long. She’s like… wine! She gets stronger and her cheekbones grow sharper with age,” Phichit says sagely.

“That’s… not how wine works,” Yuuri says.

“That’s how Lilia brand wine works!” Phichit says. “I’ll be right back.” And he leaves the lounge.

Victor isn’t feeling right again. He’s been feeling off kilter since they left Lilia’s place. His head is yelling and he doesn’t know why. He doesn’t know a lot of things right now. It’s frustrating.

Yuuri notices his silence, turns to him and asks, “Are you alright?”

“I… Yes. Yes, I’m fine.” Victor frowns and rubs at his temples with the pads of his fingers. It doesn’t really help. “It’s just my head again.”

“Are you remembering something?” Yuuri places a gentle hand on his arm in concern. “Or are you getting sick?”

“No, no, it’s definitely a memory thing.”

“Do you know what’s causing it? Is it wine? Or… what were we even talking about?”

Victor shakes his head, smiles a little in amusement. “I don’t think it was wine. I think it has to do with Lilia.”

“Oh!” Yuuri exclaims. “Ah, that makes sense! She’s Yakov’s ex, and you knew Yakov, so you must have memories of Lilia too, right?” He pulls his phone from his pocket and frantically taps the
“What are you doing?”

“You suddenly recalled all of your memories of Makkachin because her barking triggered it, didn’t it? And how did you regain your other memories?”

Victor thinks back to a little under a month ago, when he was lost and confused and deposited outside of his apartment building with no recollection of how he’d gotten there. He hardly remembered his name, had to ask the woman at the front desk for it, and the poor lady looked puzzled when he did. Victor only knew his apartment number because the keys in his pocket listed them. “The things in my apartment jogged most of my childhood memories, I think,” he answers.

“So they’re recovered through visual or auditory sensory. Or something. I’m not sure if this’ll work, because it’s only a picture, but…” Yuuri turns his phone screen over and a picture of Lilia is displayed on it, tight bun and severe, green eyes and all. “Maybe looking at her will help you remember.”

As he stares, and the haze swirls in his mind like a dancer with two left feet, Victor considers telling Yuuri that it’s not quite the same. It isn’t like the Makkachin situation, the memories aren’t curling around the tip of his tongue. It’s like something is physically tightening its hold on his throat instead, cutting off his words, forcefully pulling the lost memories far and out of reach.

Victor stares, and looks at her digitalized green eyes, and his head screams.

“Would hearing her name help?” Yuuri tries, when he notices that Victor is struggling. “Lilia Baranovskaya?”

“Yuuri, I don’t—”

“Lilia Baranovskaya.”

“Yuuri.”

“Lilia Bara—!”

“Um.”

They turn.

Lock eyes with Phichit, who’s standing at the doorway, eyebrows knitted together.

“I don’t know if I just walked in on some weird elemental mating call or the world’s most screwy roleplay scenario.”

Yuuri is blushing, Victor is embarrassed, Yuuri is absolutely dying, as he stammers, “Oh, it’s not—we, um—he just—memories and—”

“We’re only trying to recover more of my lost memories,” Victor supplies, glancing at Yuuri as he pockets his phone. His cheeks are painted this flattering red color, and Victor muses about how adorable it looks. (He muses about how many times he can get Yuuri to blush in one day, now, because it’s a great look on him.)


Victor catches Phichit’s eyes for a split second, startles a bit, when he realizes the grey flashes purple
with mischief, and Victor looks away, sinking into the couch cushions, because Phichit had
definitely heard his thoughts about Yuuri, and this is what mild embarrassment feels like.

Oh.

Chapter End Notes

what's this? an update last than two weeks after the last one??

it's always a joy writing victor's pov because it's a nice breather from yuuri's headspace
and his victor? liking me? it's less likely than you think! deal. like, i know what's
happening and i couldn't be more frustrated. but i brought this on myself and i'm
dragging all of you down with me [rubs my gay hands together]

the next chapter is a fun one, and assuming nothing comes up for me in the next week,
it'll be a fairly quick update too! wooo!!
Your looks could kill

Chapter Summary

Victor won’t have to put up with his awful borrowed costume much longer, and embarrassing bar conversations ensue at the expense of Yuuri’s clarity and his big, drunken mouth.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The SIB System’s announcement is like an adrenaline rush that surges through Yuuri’s veins. Because, one week later, one week of grueling training, and things have finally come to this. This isn’t even his final hero-in-training mission, and yet he can’t remember the last time he was this nervous.

(Yes he can. The last time he was this nervous, he was faced with the prospect of fighting against the very person he’d been training.)

It’s funny how things work that way.

It’s funny, how only two and a half week ago, he was ready to literally deep fry Victor until he’d leave. It’s funny, how quickly he’d grown used to having Victor around.

It’s hilarious, how at ease he feels when Victor is without his villain get-up, and Yuuri can quickly forget that the person he suddenly has to work with wasn’t actually his archenemy a few weeks ago.

Current Yuuri would tell past Yuuri about this if he could, pull up a chair, because he knows he’d have to sit down for this joke. So your archenemy walks in to SUCC...

But, right. Yuuri is nervous. It’s kind of like a parent sending their child off to preschool in a way. Or what he images a teacher feels like after watching their student graduate after four long, painful years of fighting over etched-into wooden desks. Only, the preschooler he’s sending off, the student he’s had to deal with—against his will, and he’d enjoyed exactly none of it, is what he’ll tell everyone for years (despite the fact that it had gotten fun after a while)—is Victor, and Victor finally graduates from hero-in-training to full-fledged hero.

That’s if he survives this mission.

There’s a loud thump, a body hitting the floor, and disembodied laughing that’s coming from said floor, and Victor and Yuuri look from each other to the laughing floor and back again.

“Scarlet Mask…?” Victor tries hesitantly. He looks like he’s trying to decide on whether it’s a good idea to grab something to poke at her, just to be certain she’s really there.

She is there, though, because Royal Mind Fuck is lightly elbowing someone’s invisible side while he points a jeering finger in Victor’s direction.

“I know right?” he’s saying through bouts of excess laughter. Yuuri puts out his fire, hands on his hips now, and rolls his eyes to the ceiling.
“You look great, Cryo-Frost! Hahaha!”

Victor runs his hands down his face in exasperation, and Yuuri has to say, this, replacing the permanent smirk Victor usually has, looks kind of attractive. A little. Just a smidge.

“Can we forget about how bad this costume is? Yes, this costume is so bad, it’s the worst thing you’ve ever seen. We get it. It’s the most hideous thing. I know.”

“You—” the disembodied female voice sucks in a breath. “You have underwear over your crotch, holy shit.”

“He doesn’t even have a cape!”

“The initials on the front say H.I.T. Me! Haa—!”

“See?” Victor gestures wildly, turning to Yuuri. “Capes are good!”

“That’s seriously some terrible villain’s stereotype. And anyway, nothing stopped you from getting a cape as a villain. Shadow Knight has one, so I don’t see why you’re complaining now.”

Scarlet Mask seems to get up then, because Royal MF’s costume bunches at his shoulder, which Yuuri guesses is her hand using him as leverage to stand up again. “Whew. I haven’t had a laugh that good in at least two weeks. Thank you, Victor!”

Yuuri nervously glances around the expansive room, an automated treasury full of machinery and an assembly line, and sighs when he affirms that there’s no one in here.

Victor frowns in what he thinks is Scarlet Mask’s general direction on Royal MF’s right. “I really don’t appreciate the fact that you probably know everything about me, but I’ve forgotten everything about you two. Isn’t this a little unfair?”

“On the contrary,” Scarlet Mask says, and her voice is actually behind them now. She’s carrying a bag of what Yuuri assumes are cards from the shapes being imprinted on the sides. “You really liked to keep a lot of things to yourself.”

“Okay, let’s start over. Hi, my name is Cryo-Frost! And you are?”

“Scarlet Mask,” she answers, entertaining him.

Yuuri sighs, shares a look with Royal MF that screams why are they like this. “Please stop enabling him.”

Victor ignores him, as per usual. “And your real name?”

“Yakov Feltsman.”

“Very funny.”

“I try.” The bag shifts up, which Yuuri guesses means that she’s shrugging.

“Okay,” Yuuri interrupts, “seriously, enough of this. Please come quietly and we won’t hurt you.”

“Not a chance! Royal Assbutt, catch!” Scarlet Mask tosses the bag right over their heads and Royal MF catches it with a glare in her direction.

“Then we’ll have no choice but to use force,” Yuuri says, igniting his hands, and Victor creates a
ball and chain flail of ice, swinging it around to appear intimidating, but Yuuri gives him a look because he knows medieval weapons isn’t Victor’s fighting style and Victor mouths what?

“Force this!” Scarlet Mask shouts. Yuuri whirls around at the sound of her voice, blinks and brings up his infrared vision, and spots Scarlet Mask with her hands on either side of Victor’s—

“Cryo-Frost, look out!”

There’s a tug on his pants.

And silence.

“Oh,” Scarlet Mask clicks her tongue. “I was high-key hoping this was a two piece costume.”

Victor transforms his flail in an instant, dropping it like water to the ground and pulling a row of razor sharp stalagmite ice that reaches for the i-beams on the high ceiling, and Yuuri watches Scarlet Mask’s red-orange form plant her hands to the floor, throw her legs to the air, and flip away from the attack.

Royal Mind Fuck is slowly inching away with the bag, so Yuuri tosses a line of fire to the ground to block his path from the doors.

Victor uses his ice to slide pass, tells Yuuri that he’ll take care of Royal MF, so go after Scarlet Mask, and Yuuri nods and rounds on the invisible villain who’s not invisible to his eyes. He swings at her with fists full of fire, and she expertly dodges away, throwing stray objects at him as they move.

There’s a crash, an explosion of ice, and Yuuri looks up in time to see the bag Royal MF had been holding pierced through with an icicle like a steak to the heart. Victor is rounding on the now empty-handed Royal MF, who’s looking around the room for a means to escape.

A metal something misses hitting Yuuri’s head by a thread when he turns back around and he bends over backwards to dodge another projectile.

“Scarlet! Get the bag!” Royal MF shouts.

It’s an unmitigated frenzy for the bag as Victor, Yuuri, and Scarlet Mask race for it.

But Yuuri stops, because Royal MF’s eyes have gone glowy purple. And he realizes, nearly forgets, why they try not to fight Royal MF in a room full of machines.

Because human minds aren’t the only things he can control.

The sorting machines whir to life then, and Yuuri has no time to think as he grabs Victor’s shoulders and pulls him down and out of the way of the skin-puncturing objects that fly at them all at once. Scarlet Mask is untouched as she scales the small ice tower to get to the bag.

“Cryo-Frost,” Yuuri speaks low. “Go and distract Royal Mind Fuck. He can’t keep this up if he’s not in full concentration.”

Victor nods, shifts his ice tower just as Scarlet Mask jumps away, and uses it as a shield as he runs towards the other villain. “Hey! Your eyeshadow is just as bad as the costume I’m wearing!”

Royal MF’s eyes dim as he turns to Victor, affronted, hand on his chest as he sputters. “Okay, first of all—”
A crackle in the air makes everyone halt.

Scarlet Mask reveals herself, costume and mask dark as night, red hair pulled into a ponytail with her side shaves on display, smirk wide and wolffish as she looks up.

A sound like silverware on glass *grates* Yuuri and Victor’s ears. They cover them as, to Yuuri’s horror, a shadow portal appears above her. Victor moves, but Yuuri doesn’t see where, can’t concentrate, when Shadow Knight’s anomaly of a power is tearing through his paper focus.

“Later, losers!” Scarlet Mask says.

It shrinks and *pops* right out of existence.

Yuuri lets go of his ears, runs his hands through his hair, and *breathes*. His shoulders are heavy with the sudden tension.

They’ve escape. Again. He let them escape. *Again*. What kind of hero is he, to let these supervillains slip from right under him a third time—

A grunt sounds nearby, and when Yuuri turns to the noise, he blinks. Gapes. And grins.

Because Victor is sitting, cross-legged, right on top of Royal MF’s back.

Victor scans his nail, pretends to file them down and inspect his cuticles, all while Royal MF squirms underneath him and shouts, “Let me go, you *bastard!*”

“Nope!”

“Oh, my god, Cryo-Frost, I could hug you right now,” Yuuri says.

“I’ll take you up on that offer later, Cinderos,” Victor winks.

Yuuri rolls his eyes, but he’s still smiling. He’ll let that one go, just this once.

When Royal Mind Fuck is taken away with shouts of, *I’ll be back sooner than you think! You’ll see!* *Don’t get your hopes up!*, Victor holds out his arms, expression soft and smile soft and the pout of his lips soft and eyes hopeful, and Yuuri is weak to it as he indulges him and hugs him tight.

Yuuri is reluctant to admit it, but he’s grown a little fond of him. It’ll be odd to not have to accompany him on missions once he becomes a full-fledged hero.

Victor’s hug lasts about thirty seconds before Yuuri warms his hands to get Victor to yelp and jump out of his embrace. Yuuri sticks his tongue out at him cheekily, and Victor does it right back.

“What does your costume even look like?” Sara asks Victor in the lounge two days later.

“Well for starters, it’s white and gray. I’m still undecided about adding blue to it.”

“You requested a cape, didn’t you?” Yuuri asks.

Victor doesn’t meet his eyes, whistling innocently. Yuuri shakes his head. “If it gets caught in a tornado or plane turbine or something, I’m not saving you.”
“Capes are classic for heroes. What’s a hero without his cape?” JJ chimes in from his spot on the couch.

“Yes! Exactly! Capes look heroic, I couldn’t not have one. I’m sure your cape looks great, JJ.”

“Oh, no I don’t have one. Too cliche for me.”

Sara shakes her head, too. “I don’t have a cape either. Bad idea, man.”

“Why are you all so sure that a cape will literally kill me?” Victor questions, genuinely confused.

“Did something happen here? Did a past SUCC hero get sucked in by the cape?”

Yuuri, Sara, and JJ all groan, pained by how dreadful that pun is.

“I’d sooner die from Yuuri’s killer glare than by a cape,” Victor says.

Yuuri shoots him the Look™.

Victor dramatically throws a hand over his head, falls back from where he’s perched on an armrest and onto the couch, and drapes himself over JJ and Sara’s laps.

“Victor, please.”

“Can’t hear you, your looks killed me.”

Yuuri narrows his eyes, presses a hand against his cheek to hide the blushing smile that’s blooming on his face. Knowing Victor, that statement probably means something else entirely. He’s ridiculous.

The doors to the lounge slide open, and Phichit steps in with grandeur, arms raised, Christophe in tow. “Everyone, if I could have your attention please!”

Victor gets up, and they turn to regard Phichit.

“Now, I know what you’re all thinking, literally. Whoa, okay, don’t throw your thoughts at me all at once! It was just a harmless pun.”

“Get on with it!” Sara says.

Chris sits himself on the other armrest. There’s amusement sparkling in his eyes. Yuuri can’t begin to guess what’s going on, but if it’s Phichit, he might have the idea…

“Right,” Phichit nods. “I have some good news, some bad news, and some pretty okay news that really isn’t a big deal at all but I guess might be interesting.”

“What’s the pretty okay news that isn’t a big deal?” Yuuri asks to humor him.

“I heard from the Costume Department that Victor’s costume is being completed tomorrow! So with that, he’ll become an official hero.”

Everyone in the room claps and cheers. Christ whistles, and Sara pats Victor happily on the back.

“Wait a minute,” Yuuri pauses to knit his eyebrows together. “What’s the good news then?”

“Let’s go out for drinks to celebrate!” Phichit announces, and the room goes wild in assent.

Yuuri isn’t so sure he wants to go for drinks, though. At least, he doesn’t want to drink enough to
end up regretting something afterwards.

“What’s the bad news?” Yuuri asks, and they fall silent as they stare at Phichit expectantly.

Phichit sighs. “You guys really should’ve asked for that first, ‘cause really, who asks for good news first? But anyway, Royal Moldy Fuckface was broken out of jail again, and we think Shadow Knight did it.”

Yuuri’s shoulder slumps, along with his mood. Victor locks eyes with him then, and he looks just as sad, crestfallen. Yuuri understands that feeling too well, working so hard to capture someone who’s a thorn in the side, only to hear that all your efforts are thrown right out of the window.

“Aw, you guys, it’s okay. We can focus on the good now, and think about that later.” Phichit walks over to them, tugs on Yuuri’s hand, then Victor’s to get to their feet. He grabs JJ and Sara too. “C’mon, let’s go! We gotta celebrate!”

“Phichit,” Chris says, raising an eyebrow. “It’s one o’clock in the afternoon.”

“Oh,” Phichit says, pursing his lips. “Later then. But none of you are allowed to be sad today, okay?” He looks at Yuuri specifically, and Yuuri darts his eyes away. “Okay?”

Yuri P. had heard about celebrating with drinks, and he wanted to tag along, for whatever reason. He brings Otabek with him.

They decide to go to a bar and grill.

“All right, you youngins go and order something at the restaurant,” Chris says, waving his hand. “The rest of us will be at the bar.”

Yuri P. grimaces, arms crossed. “Youngins? Are you fifty?”

Phichit throws an arm around Yuri P. and Otabek’s shoulders. “This place has the best burgers! Ten-ten, highly recommend.”

“Ha, youngins,” JJ teases.

“JJ, you’re sitting with them, too,” Sara reminds him.

“I can join you guys, if you’d like,” Yuuri offers.

The pout Phichit turns his way is hard to look at directly; Yuuri knows he’ll cave from it. “Yuuri, why? You can’t back out, this is your student’s celebration party!”

“But…” Yuuri starts. He feels an arm thrown over his shoulder, and turns to see Victor mere centimeters away from his face. His stomach does something weird and wild to his insides.

“Do you not drink, Yuuri?” Victor asks him.

“Well, yeah, but…”

Another arm slings over his shoulders, on top of Victors, and Chris says, “Then join us, Yuuri.”

Yuuri feels trapped here. An ex-villain and a hero who’s ambiguously depraved methods are practically crimes themselves. He looks at Phichit for help.
“You wanna avoid all those scandalous situations from literally every time you’ve gotten drunk? It’s fine, Yuuri! I’ll make sure you don’t go overboard this time,” Phichit promises.

Yuuri sighs in resignation. “Fine.”

He goes overboard. Which he absolutely should’ve seen coming the moment Chris orders shots of *A Kick in the Crotch* for everyone while yelling, “throwback!”

They’d only started out with rum based drinks, but things escalated from there, and Yuuri isn’t sure how it happened.

One drink, he said, after he ducks his head in embarrassment while everyone toasts him after Victor, and he clinks his small glass with the other four.

One drink, he said, when Phichit orders more, and has to slap Yuuri’s hand away because the blue color is tempting, kind of like Victor’s alluring eyes. Yuuri pleads with his former roommate, his partner, his friend who he loves very, very much that he’ll be fine, he swears, and it’s not as though he’s a lightweight.

*One more* drink, he says, when Victor orders a shot of something sweet and tells Yuuri that he bets he’ll finish it before Yuuri can, and Yuuri cannot say no to a challenge.

Just one more, and Yuuri can hardly say the words *one more*, can’t even think it, because his mind is slush and his cheeks are warm and he can barely focus on more than one thing at a time anymore.

Phichit is giggling to his left, and Chris, Sara, and Victor are hanging on his every word with rapt attention.

“—so they climb into Royal What’s-His-Face’s hair, y’know cause it’s so big, and he freaks the fuck out and starts smacking his own face, and Scarlet Mask is there—at least, I’m pretty sure she was—laughing her ass off and going ‘why are you hitting yourself’? I don’t think she realized that my hamsters were even there. Royal Whatever thought they were rats.”

Yuuri has heard that story a million times, but he still smiles at it, because he was there. Victor is clinging to his right and laughing in his ear and the sound is nice, like his favorite song. Yuuri laughs. That’s a funny, cheesy thought.

“What’s a funny, cheesy thought?” Victor asks.

Phichit looks over his head at Victor and, with waggling eyebrows, answers. “The sound of your laughter.” *Traitor*. “I can hear you clear as day, Yuuri!” Phichit gasps, covers his mouth with his hands. “Oh, no, you’re drunk, aren’t you? Oh, my gosh, some friend I am, I didn’t even realize—”

“It’s fiine, Phi,” Yuuri drawls. “Totally fine. I’m okay, see? I won’t do anything stupid this time, I promise.”

“You think my laugh is cheesy?” Victor is saying. Why is he talking about that now? What does that even mean? Can a laugh even be edible?

“You want to—Yuuri you aren’t making any sense.” Victor turns his head, and it takes Yuuri a moment to realize that Victor’s index finger is underneath his chin. And, oh, Victor is smiling. That’s nice too. The others are teasingly going *’ooo’* like they’re children, and his face is burning. Yuuri doesn’t understand.
“I didn’t say anything,” Yuuri protests. “Are you reading my mind?” he gasps. “Are you a mind reader like Phichit? Why didn’t you tell me!”

Someone is stifling laughter nearby, and he turns away from Victor’s gentle grasp to glare at Chris and Sara and Phichit, in that order. “You guys knew?!”

“No, you dork.” Sara laughs.

“You’re speaking out loud, Yuuri,” Chris grins, stirring a glass in his hand.

“You guys are only in on half of the nonsense. His thoughts are pure gold.”

Yuuri pouts and pushes at Phichit’s shoulders, but Phichit hardly budges on his stool. “Stop that.”

“I really can’t, you’re a literal open book and basically tossing your thoughts right at me.” Phichit shrugs, smile apologetic.

Yuuri stands up then, and takes his half finished glass of something—he’s not sure, lost sight of what they were ordering ages ago—and announces, “I’m gonna go and get some fresh air on the roof.”

“Wait,” Victor stands with him, plucks the drink out of his hand and places it back on the bar (Yuuri frowns, reaches for it, and Victor takes his hand to keep it out of reach). “How do you plan on getting on the roof? This is a one story building.”

“I’ll...” Yuuri looks around the place, spots Yuri P. and JJ arguing in a booth and Otabek looking pained, and sees a back door. “I’ll climb the side.”

“Um, no you won’t,” Phichit says, tugging at his other hand. “You’ll fall and hurt yourself. Sit back down, Yuuri.”

“Let me get fresh air? At least? It’s so stuffy in here, Phichit, and I’m dying.”

“I’ll come with you,” Victor suggests.

Yuuri nods and grabs Victor’s hand, then tugs him down and whispers into his ear once it’s within reach. “Let’s go on the roof! You’ll come with me?” Victor is shivering. Yuuri wonders if he’s cold. He must be, all the time. Ice and all.

“Yes.”

Yuuri beams, overjoyed, because at least he’ll let him. “Come, come,” he urges, pulling Victor by the hand towards the back entrance.

When they get outside, Yuuri let’s go, stretches his arms into the air and tries to get to the roof as if it’s within arm’s reach, but it’s so far away.

“Here, let me—do you mind if I carry you? I can get us up there,” Victor answers, which is weird, because Yuuri didn’t even asked. But he was going to. Is Victor precognizant too?

“No, last time I checked,” Victor laughs.

What is he laughing at? Was he—oh, is he thinking out loud again?

“Damn it.”

Victor laughs and nods anyway and Yuuri beams, overjoyed, because at least he’ll let him. “Come, come,” he urges, pulling Victor by the hand towards the back entrance.

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“No, last time I checked,” Victor laughs.

What is he laughing at? Was he—oh, is he thinking out loud again?

“Yes.”
“Ah, sorry,” Yuuri says.

He remembers what Victor asks him, remembers that he never gave a response. He holds his arms in the air and waits for Victor to carry him to the roof, but squeals when he’s hoisted up by the shoulders and backs of his knees instead. Victor uses his ice to slide up there, and they sit on the edge, hanging their feet over the side.

Yuuri turns to Victor and pokes his arm lightly. “You aren’t s’pose to use your powers outside like that. You’re a rebel,” he whispers, a secret, like the word itself is a scandal.

“Am I?” Victor smiles in amusement.

“Yes. You do what you want a lot of the time. Is that a villain thing? An ex-villain thing.”

Victor shrugs. “As long as I’m not hurting anyone, who cares if I use a little ice in the dark. I don’t think anyone saw anyway.”

Yuuri looks around just to confirm that there really is no one here, but it’s an alley, and who would just wander here? Besides, well, him. Them.

“Are you always this talkative when you’re drunk?” Victor asks, and he sounds amused, and Yuuri frowns because it’s not that amusing at all.

“I don’t mean to be. But, oh, I’ve said some really stupid things before, according to Phichit and Chris.”

“Like what?”

“Like…” Yuuri stops, tilts his head, looks up at the sky that’s just a dark, black canvas from here. He wonders if the stars are just hiding. He contemplates if it’s worth it to reveal all the ridiculous things he’s said. They’re mostly about Victor; he probably shouldn’t.

“Just one thing?” Victor wheedles, bumping his shoulders against Yuuri’s. “Please?”

“Mmm…” Yuuri isn’t sure he wants to.

“I’ll tell you one secret if you tell me one drunken thing you’ve said about me.”

Yuuri perks up at that, convinced. “Okay, okay, um.” He bites his lip at his thinks, and Victor stares at him as he waits for a response. “One time, I… I said I’ll capture Flash Freeze if it’s the last thing I do and Chris asked ‘When you catch him, what will you do?’ and I kind of said ‘him with a spoon’—”

There’s a tiny flush high on Victor’s cheeks as he giggles. Must be the alcohol. (He also looks bewildered as hell, but Yuuri is in no state of mind to decipher that.) “Wow, Yuuri, aren’t we a bit kinky?”

“That’s not what I meant!” Yuuri shoves him by the shoulder a bit too roughly; Victor nearly topples right off the roof. Yuuri grabs him by the arm before he can fall, doesn’t let go in case Victor ends up falling again. “Sorry!”

“It’s okay, I would’ve caught myself either way,” Victor assures him, though there’s a hand on his chest from the split second scare.

“Okay, now you.”
“Me?”

“Tell me a secret.”

Victor places a finger to his lips, looks out into the distance of low rooftops (not the prettiest five star view, but oh, well) and peers down at Yuuri, who finally lets him go. Victor seems a little dejected about that. Maybe he thinks he’ll fall again. “What do you want to know?”

Leaning close, Yuuri asks the question he didn’t know he wanted to hear the answer to till now, but it’s suddenly burning the back of his mind. Something he’d been curious about but too afraid to ask in case that territory was off limits. But he really, really wants to know. “If you want to be a hero so bad, what made you become a villain in the first place?”


Nothing about the way Victor says that sounds right. Uncharacteristically quiet. His gaze, which Yuuri usually has trouble getting away from him, is drifting away, down into the dark alleyway like there’s something interesting there to find. But all that Yuuri sees are stray boxes piled on top of a garbage bin.

Isn’t he more interesting than a garbage bin?

(He hopes Victor thinks so.)

“Oh,” Yuuri pouts. “I guess that isn’t so bad, right? No chances of you turning bad again or anything.”

A moment passes. Two. “Yeah.”

Victor looks conflicted, sad. Yuuri’s heart gets sad, because Victor shouldn’t be sad; it isn’t a good look for him, doesn’t belong on a face that Yuuri associates with smiles and slyness and smirks and laughter and—

This is a celebration, and he should be ecstatic about it, because he’ll finally be a real hero with a real costume and a real cape like he wants so badly.

And he’ll go out on missions without having to be told what to do by Yuuri anymore (not that he listens a third of the time anyway). And he won’t have to suffer crushing defeat at the fiery hands of Yuuri in the training room. And he won’t have to deal with having Victor around twenty-four-seven like he’s his goddamn babysitter.

Great. Now he’s sad too.

“Why are you sad?” Victor questions with concern. He touches a hand to Yuuri’s shoulder.

“Because it was a lot of fun having you around. And now you’re going away.”

Victor blinks. “I’m not going anywhere.”

“Yes, you are,” Yuuri insists.

“No? No, I’m pretty sure I’m not.”

“Yes! Yes you are! It’s okay, you don’t have to comfort me or anything. But I think I’m gonna miss
you,” Yuuri cries, and without thinking, throws his arms over Victor’s shoulders. He feels Victor go tense.

“Christ, Yuuri, you’d think I’m going to die in a few days.”

Yuuri snaps up and stares at him with wide eyes. “You’re going to die?! Oh, my god, we have to—we have to go back in and tell everyone. Does Mr. Feltsman know? Did the villains do this to you? Maybe we can reverse it, the RAD Department is super smart and—”

There’s laughing. Victor is laughing, full-on giggles that Yuuri doesn’t understand.

“Why are you laughing?”

“Because I’m fine, Yuuri. I’m not dying. I’m not going anywhere. I’ll be a hero and I’ll be working with you and everyone else.” Victor grabs his hand—Yuuri wonders how many times that is, he isn’t counting, only mesmerized by how soft they are, which is weird, because Victor’s ice is jagged and rough in comparison—and he holds them tight, squeezing. Reassuring. So, so soft. “I’ll be in your care.”

“But you’re not,” Yuuri sighs, exasperated, because Victor doesn’t get it.

“What do you mean?”

“We won’t be working together much anymore. I already have a partner. Unless…” Yuuri gasps, smiles wide, because of course, of course. Why didn’t he think of this sooner? “You can be my partner!”

“What?” Victor breathes. His mouth is agape. Yuuri laughs and closes it for him.

“We can be superhero partners,” Yuuri reiterates. Victor seems to relax at that, for some reason. “We can work together!”

“But...isn’t Phichit your partner?”

“I bet Phichit won’t mind. Or maybe he will. I should ask first, shouldn’t I? Or, ah! We can all work together! We’ll be the three musketeers. Or the terrible three. Or the,” Yuuri bangs his fist into his open palm like a gavel. “Fearsome threesome.”

Victor chokes on air.

“So? Will you? Please, Victor?”

“I—Yuuri, as much as I’d love to be in a threesome with—wait, that did not come out right.”

Yuuri blinks at him expectantly.

“Maybe we can discuss that when you don’t look like you’re about to sway right off this ledge?”

That is not the answer Yuuri is looking for. He grabs Victor hand again, stares at him with pleading eyes. “Be my partner, Victor?”

Before Victor can respond, the back door opens, and Yuri P. and Youngins Co. step out into the alley.

“Where are they?” Yuuri hears JJ say.
“Up there,” Otabek points.

“How did you—Get down here!” Yuri P. shouts at them. “Everyone wants to go home!”

Yuuri laughs, which makes Yuri P. scowl.

“What’s so funny?” Victor asks him.

“Yuri P. looks even tinier from up here. Like an ant. Yuri Plisantsky.”

Victor lets his laughter slip at that.

✂

“Sir,” Minako knocks on Yakov’s office door and enters when she hears his affirmation. She hovers SIB’s screen in her hand, opened confidential files reflected on the holographic surface. The screen pictures the chip Victor and the others recovered from the warehouse last week.

Yakov leans forward in his seat and rests his folded hands on his desk. “What have you found?”

“We don’t know what C.E. means yet, but we do know that E.W. are the initials of a former villain that was thought to be out of commission.”

Bringing a hand up to his chin, Yakov stares at the luminescent screen and the image of the chip, the inscribed letters, the descriptions that crowd the 2D surface. It seems to click when his eyes widen, though the movement is so subtle, Minako isn’t sure that she sees it.

“It couldn’t be…”

Minako nods solemnly. “It may not be. We don’t know for sure. None of these crimes match her usual patterns, but…”

“Don’t utter a word of this to anyone unless we’re one-hundred-percent sure that it is,” Yakov tells her.

“Of course.”

Chapter End Notes

this chapter was so much fun to write! i hope you guys enjoyed it! and a heads up, things will start to get heavy from next chapter onward, and i’ll be adding tags to accommodate that next time.

it_is_a_mystery.mp3

(there won't be a shortage of bad jokes though.)
I’m wearing gloves ‘cause you’re too hot to handle

Chapter Summary

Yuuri’s old monsters arise in the face of new ones, and he’d rather not deal with any of it.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

The new SUCC hero is on the scene once again, accompanying Hard-on as the two take down the tag team terrible duo of General Dong and Private Donger, both of whom are level three villains.”

“That’s right, Jack. And neither of them are any match for the combined icy hammer of punishment dealt by the two heroes.”

“Cryo-Frost truly broke the ice when he first appeared, training under top hero and national heartthrob, Cinderos. But it looks like Cryo-Frost is after that title. What do you think, Susan?”

“Oh ho, Cryo-Frost is certainly nice on the eyes!”

“Hahaha!”

“He’s snow cool.”

✂

It goes without saying that Victor is taking the entire country by literal hail storm, but it seems like that’s all the news outlets are discussing, have been discussing for the past month. Yuuri expected the attention to die down by now, but he supposes that seeing Victor in action is captivating to watch.

He’s honestly just glad he’s not the forefront of the news, being picked apart with their gossipy mouths like scavengers hungry for hero scandals.

(Like, heartthrob? Really? No one thinks that. That’s beyond ridiculous, and no one cares.)

“On the contrary, my dear Yuuri,” Phichit says in a feathery light, sing-song voice as he plops down on the couch beside Yuuri. “A shitton of people think that, and a shitton of people care.”

“Name one person,” Yuuri challenges. He picks up the remote and mutes the Channel 7 news, his limit on the number of ice puns he’s willing to put up with well and truly reached by now.

Phichit smiles, sips on a cup of hot chocolate, murmurs into the liquid, “Victor.”

Yuuri’s mouth forms around a no out of pure reflex, but then stops, because maybe that’s true but it’s also not a guarantee. He swears, Victor likes getting a rise out of him even to this day. Two years of constant embarrassing pick-up lines and bad flirting has made him fluster-proof. Mostly. He might turn a little red on occasion…

Without really thinking about it, Yuuri blurts, “Victor isn’t a person.”
His best friend raises his eyebrows.

“He doesn’t count,” he corrects.

Phichit stares at him impassively as he points out, “Yuuri. He brings you coffee almost every
morning. With attached sticky notes if he can’t hand it to you himself.”

Yuuri remembers the one he’d gotten just that morning and it only said ‘Have a great morning,
cutie!’ featuring a tiny doodle of Victor himself, adorable heart-shaped smile and all… He squirms a
little in his seat. “...Your point?”

“He doesn’t use bad pick-up lines seriously on you anymore either!”

“That must mean that if he had any interest before he definitely doesn’t now.” Yuuri is fully aware of
the fact that Victor had some sort of infatuation (whether it was a ploy or not he can’t be bothered to
ask). He’s also painfully aware that that’s fizzled out like a lifeless candle as soon as they started
working together. Like seeing Yuuri and not Cinderos is some sort of wake up call.

Not that that matters to him.

No, not at all.

Sighing, Phichit lays a hand on Yuuri’s shoulder. “Yuuri, I love you. You’re like my platonic
soulmate. But you’re also my platonic idiot who needs to stop undermining himself in the face of true
I—”

“No!” Yuuri yelps, throwing his hand over Phichit’s mouth and causing him to spill a bit of his drink
onto the floor. “That’s just the way he is! It’s just nice gestures!”

Phichit purses his lips. “He doesn’t bring me coffee.”

“You don’t even like coffee. You only drink it because you’re just as addicted as I am.”

“Why are you being so difficult—” An exasperated sigh. “Okay, fine. Fine! Me. I think you’re a
heartthrob.”

“You’re suppose to say that because it’s a friendly thing to say.”

“I swear on my collection of eyeliner, Yuuri Katsuki—hey, what’s happening there?” Phichit points
to the T.V. screen, where Victor and Chris are shown handcuffing the villains and dragging them
away. But while they’re doing this, Victor has one hand clutching the cuffed villain’s arms, and the
other nose deep in his phone as he frantically taps at the screen.

Yuuri’s brows crease in confusion. “What is he…?”

Phichit pulls the remote into his hand with his telekinesis and turns up the volume.

“—have successfully captured the evil duo and are taking them into custody of the special villain’s
task force. But, oh! It seems that Cryo-Frost is taking a commemorative photo! This is his first level
three capture after all, shadowed only by his capture of Royal Mind (bleep) two weeks ago.”

Yuuri’s phone buzzes.

Phichit shoots him a look.

“It’s just a coincidence,” Yuuri says as he picks it up to check his notifications. “There’s no way that
it’s him.”

But it is. It is him. Right there on the screen, the new notification reads:

*1 new message from Victor*

**Sent: 10 seconds ago**

Yuuri lets his frustrated breath sink him into the couch cushions. He doesn’t bother hiding the screen when Phichit peers over his shoulder to look at it. Just as he guesses, it’s a photo of Victor with his cheerful face smushed up against Private Donger’s disgruntled face, and the camera angle is held above them. The stark contrast between the two in the photo would make Yuuri laugh if he hadn’t watched it happen, hadn’t known that this isn’t a thing heroes do.

Then again, Victor isn’t a conventional hero.

Not that anyone needs to know.

The picture from Victor is accompanied by some text.

**Victor Nikidorkov**

*Caught another one again today! I’ll take Phichit’s place as number two in no time ☆ ~ (ゝ。∂)
Then, I’m after yours. ♥*

Phichit scoffs. “Tell him, ‘not a chance, babe’. We’ve got years under our belt. Why are you blushing, Yuuri?”

“I’m not blushing,” he defends, while blatantly blushing. “And I’m not enabling him.”

“There’s no rules that say you can’t take pictures of villains you capture.”

“Yakov is already planning to add rules on account of Victor being here,” Yuuri mumbles as he types out a reply. “I’m pretty damn sure he’s going to add that one in the next week, too.”

**Me**

*Why are you texting during a mission?? That’s bad!*

Victor responds almost immediately. He’s still on the news along side Chris in a little corner on the top right while the newscasters drone on and on about his debut, like that hadn’t already happened.

**Victor Nikidorkov**

*Oh? You’re watching me?
Did I look good? (^_^)*

Yuuri is beyond confused because how does someone with such a blatant disregard for rules, the actual definition of chaotic good, seem so innocuous and maybe a little sweet and a step above tolerable? It doesn’t make sense at all. Then again, when has Victor ever made sense?

“Tell him he looks great, followed by a bunch of heart-eye emojis. And the sweat emoji,” Phichit suggests.

Yuuri jumps a little because he’d kind of forgotten for five seconds that Phichit’s chin has made its home on Yuuri’s shoulder. “No,” he answers curtly.

“Laaame.”
Me
You look like you need to stop loitering with Chris and get back to the organization or I’ll kick your ass.

Victor Nikidorkov
Yuuri, let me have thisdjdsdj

“Uh.”

He darts his eyes back to the T.V. screen, jostling Phichit in the process, and watches as Chris grabs Victor’s phone. “At least Chris is sensible—” His phone vibrates again. On screen, Chris is typing. “Nevermind.”

“What did Chris say?” Phichit grabs Yuuri’s hand to peek before Yuuri gets the chance to, and when he does, he falls over on the other end of the couch to press his laughter into the cushions. Now Yuuri is too scared to check. But morbid curiosity wins out. (It isn’t a hard-fought battle.)

Victor Nikidorkov
is that a threat or a promise (Face Throwing A Kiss ) (White Right Pointing Backhand Index ≅ Backhand Index Pointing Right) (Ok Hand Sign ≅ Ok Hand) (Splashing Sweat Symbol ≅ Sweat Droplets) (Splashing Sweat Symbol ≅ Sweat Droplets)

Yuuri doesn’t know how to respond, and he doesn’t have to when another text pops up again, buzzing along to the tune of Phichit’s giggles.

Victor Nikidorkov
That wasn’t me!!! Chris took my phone!!

Yuuri knows that, of course. He watched it happen.

But he decides to mess with him.

Me
Really...how do I know you aren’t just placing the blame on him?

Victor Nikidorkov
It was on TV wasn’t it?? The camera is still on us!!!

Me
Hm. Likely story. I’m not even watching anymore. You could be lying.

Victor Nikidorkov
Yuuriiriiiiii!!!!!!! °.°(° ˘ ˂̣̣̥ ⌓ ˃̣̣̥ )°.°

He doesn’t respond afterwards, checking the T.V. screen to see Victor’s reaction in real time, but the newscasters have moved on to another topic all together, so Victor and Chris are no longer there. The two are probably on their way back now.

“Geez, Yuuri. You’re so mean to him. What did he ever do to you, make you sit through months of pain and suffering while you attempted to capture him as your ex-nemesis on multiple occasions?” Phichit leans back as he shakes his head like that isn’t the case. Yuuri stares at him. “Cut him a little bit of slack. He’s trying.”

“It’s not like I’m trying for payback. I don’t want to be mean... Is this too mean?” He glances at his
last message, inklings of panic settling in, and he looks back at Phichit when he snickers into his hand.

“What?”

“You’re literally the densest person I know. And that’s saying something ‘cause JJ exists.”

Yuuri frowns. “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

Yuuri wouldn’t say that he *misses* spending all of that time around Victor. It was only about three short weeks.

But they certainly don’t work together anymore, which is jarring because Yuuri is used to walking into the building and having Victor right there, like an excitable companion who’s ready to start the day, and he can’t help but think about how much it reminds him of coming home to his own dog with his tiny feet pattering against the hardwood floors and his even tinier tail wagging enthusiastically behind him…

It had taken ages to unlearn and unwind the tensely coiled spring that curled in his shoulders whenever he heard Victor speak. And now he has to to unlearn having to hear his voice at all which is… *weird*.

He feels odd. Displaced. Can’t figure out what it means when sudden butterflies in tiny metal hats decide to wage war on his insides until he’s left battered and clutching and confused.

Yuuri tells himself that it’s nothing. He’s clearly overreacting. (When his sole reasoning is the fact that butterflies don’t wear hats, Yuuri knows that he really, *really* needs to get more sleep.)

Three and a half weeks into Victor’s official hero status marks the first time Yuuri works with him again as co-workers and not insufferable student and jaded, done-with-his-shit trainer. The SIB system warns Yuuri, Victor, and Phichit that level four and five villains are likely to be on the scene, and because Chris is out on a solo mission, Victor ends up accompanying them.

Without the pretense of that dynamic, Yuuri is suddenly thrust headfirst into the number one reason why he’s currently not crying to Yakov about being Victor’s partner.

Victor is a major distraction, whether he realizes it or not.

Yuuri doesn’t blame him, of course. He’s ninety-five percent sure that Victor doesn’t realize how Yuuri’s mind is a blazing hellstorm for *no goddamn reason* as Victor grips his hand to hold him steady while they glide on ice to propel forward, Shadow Knight and Scarlet Mask ahead of them, and Phichit riding a large piece of discarded metal to their right.

And Victor will *not* stop squeezing his hand. The heat that’s meant to manifest in his hands just rushes to his face instead, and he can’t concentrate, *god*, what’s wrong with him—

There was an explosive here, the reason they’re running after the villains in the first place, but the fact that they seemingly have nothing to gain from this besides luring them in has Yuuri on edge.

He tries to summon his fire to thwart Shadow Knight and Scarlet Mask, but through the fabric of his gloves, his clammy hands remain unlit. His thoughts are a whirlwind as he think-yells *C’mon, c’mon, c’mon…!*
The last thing Yuuri recalls is Phichit’s head turning towards him in slow-mo, head moving through molasses, mouth opening to form a word.

And next thing he knows, they’re all pulled under… nothing.

The void?

It’s like a freefall ride at an amusement park, only it’s black everywhere and Yuuri isn’t sure what’s up and what’s down and where the others are.

Yuuri stares into the void, and the void stares back in the form of Shadow’s Knight’s menacing smile, disembodied and terrifying. He wants to throw fire into his face, tries to do just that, but realizes that there’s nothing here to start one.

He realizes that there’s no oxygen.

Then, he faceplants into concrete ground.

Yuuri stands, stretches and cracks the tightness in his back, and when he looks around, he realizes he doesn’t know where he is.

Definitely not the abandoned building they were running through a few seconds ago. This looks like an entire heap of concrete walls that leads nowhere. And when Yuuri walks further, turns left, right, left again, he realizes that’s exactly what this is.

A dark labyrinth made of concrete.

“What the hell,” he whispers, because this seems incredibly over-the-top. Did they seriously take the time to make this? This is unbelievably extraneous if they’re planning on capturing them. Then again, Royal Mind Fuck exists, and everything he does oozes ‘extra’. He’s the kind of villain who would go into five minute monologues to explain a plan, or add a self destruct button just in case, or take two minutes before doing anything because his evil laugh didn’t exactly turn out right the first time.

He’s definitely behind this, too.

It’s a wonder Royal MF manages to maintain a level four status at all.

Yuuri attempts to use the headpiece he keeps in his pocket and curses when he finds that there’s no signal, just static. He tries to ignite his flames to consider blasting through the walls instead, but he panics because it’s still not working. Why isn’t working? It always works it has to it—

“Cinderos!” he hears a voice call from close by. Victor’s voice. “Neuroseeker?!”

“Cryo-Frost!” Yuuri calls back. He’s never been so comforted by the sound of his voice. “Keep talking, I’ll track the sound of your voice!” Yuuri makes an attempt at igniting his fire again and sighs in relief when a small one bursts into existence. It’s just enough to light his way.

“Shall I compare thee to a summer’s day?”

Yuuri nearly faceplams with the hand holding the flame. The butterflies are back in town.

“Thou art more lovely and more temperate!”

They’re setting up camp in his stomach lining. “Cryo-Frost. Something else, please.”
“When in the chronicle of wasted time, I see descriptions of the fairest wights, and beauty making beautiful old rhy—”

“Something that’s not Shakespeare.”

“Once upon a time there lived a girl named Cinderella who lived with her stepmother and two evil step sisters...”

Victor immediately stops when Yuuri bumps into him. Yuuri holds his fire up to his face so Victor sees the put-out expression he’s making. “You’re ridiculous.”

“You didn’t specify what I had to say,” he smiles with a shrug. “Have you run into Neuroseeker?”

“No,” Yuuri sighs. “I have no idea where he is. I have no idea where this is. I’m guessing it’s a trap, though, so we need to be careful. If anything, Minako will track us and know that we aren’t where we’re suppose to be. For now, let’s try and find Neuroseeker and see if he’s okay.”

Victor nods thoughtfully. “And... are you okay?”

Yuuri stares up at him cautiously—silently laments the fact that Victor’s new white, gray, and blue costume features a bit of a platform on the boots, as if he needs the added height—watches the way his fire catches on the shoulder chains Victor now wears, and he says, “What do you mean? Why wouldn’t I be?”

“You seem... anxious about something.”

Yuuri sucks in a breath, ready to deny deny deny like his wellbeing depends on it...

But Phichit’s voice is a sudden piercing and distressed interruption that captures their attentions.

“Cinderos! Cryo-Frost! Where are you guys?! ”

“Neuroseeker!” Yuuri yells. His voice bounces off the walls in echoes. “Are you okay? We’re coming for you!”

“Help! I’ve fallen and I can’t get up! Help! I’ve—”

He takes off without looking back to see if Victor follows as he slips through the maze in the direction of Phichit’s voice. He doesn’t sound right, something is off, and Yuuri is worry personified as he searches for him.

“Cinderos!” Victor shouts from behind him. “Slow down!”

Distraction, distraction, distraction.

“Neuroseeker might be in trouble!”

Victor forces him to halt when he grabs Yuuri’s hand and tugs him backward. Yuuri’s fire, a weak thing that didn’t stand a chance, fizzles out. “This is a—”

Trap, is what Victor was going to say, Yuuri belatedly realizes, as they find themselves tied together in flexible metal rods.

“Oh,” Yuuri says weakly.

“That wasn’t his voice. There wasn’t an echo.”
“Oh…” Yuuri slumps his head forward, hopes that Victor doesn’t comment on the fact that Yuuri’s head is now resting on his shoulder. He can’t bring himself to care. “I’m really sorry.”

“Don’t apologize. Let’s just focus on getting out of this.” Yuuri feels Victor wiggle against him as he attempts to shake away the metal that’s holding him in place, but it doesn’t budge.

“I can try and melt it, but I don’t want to hurt you in case this has a really high melting point.”

“Try it anyway. We need to get to Neuroseeker and get out of here as soon as possible.”

With a nod, Yuuri closes his eyes and focuses on igniting his fire along the length of his gloves so the metal touching the fabric heats up. One minute passes as Yuuri slowly raises the temperature to well above reasonable, then two, and by the fifth, he peeks up at Victor and can see him sweating in effort to shift away from the fire. But they’re hardly millimeters apart; there’s nowhere he can go.

Yuuri stops and breathes in frustration. “There’s no way I’m doing more than this, Cryo-Frost. You’ll end up getting burned. It’s bendable and has a high melting point… I think this is thotium.”

For once, Victor concedes without a fight. “Thotium?”

“It’s one of the strongest known metals in the world. Susceptible to heat and heavy blows. Soldier can take an entire building down with his fist, but he probably wouldn’t be able to cause a single dent in this. It’s used for underwater structures, too,” Yuuri explains.

Victor whistles. “I’m assuming we aren’t getting out of this one very easily then.”

“Not unless Neuroseeker can come here and use his telekinesis to unbend this. It’s hard to form unless you’re crazy strong, and Neuroseeker’s mind lifts everyday, basically.” It’s a bad attempt at humor, but Yuuri’s trying so hard to focus on something other than the fact that this could be their demise. Wrapped up in the world’s thirstiest strongest metal, body pressed up against Victor, butterfly mercenaries now forming bases in his worry-wracked brain. (Victor offers a pity smile though, so he’ll take it.) “That, or we wait on Minako to send others for help.”

Victor hums. “Well, since we’re stuck here for the time being…”

“Please don’t make me sit through something dumb.”

Yuuri secretly hopes he’ll make him sit through something dumb, because Victor as a distraction is the one thing he could use right now. Something to clear his head, something to make him forget the predicament they’re currently in (that’s entirely his fault).

“No, not this time. I’d like to know what’s bothering you, if you’ll please tell me,” Victor says.

Yuuri blinks up at him nervously and notices how serious Victor’s features are, which is an expression Yuuri has seen on him only a handful of times.

“I have no idea what you’re talking about,” Yuuri lies.

“I think you do,” Victor insists.

“Do not.”

“Do too.”

“Do not.”
“Cinderos,” Victor breathes it like ice down his spine and it makes Yuuri go rigid.

Yuuri bites at his lip. “It’s nothing, really. There’s nothing wrong.”

“You really think I wouldn’t notice?”

Yuuri goes stock still again. He doesn’t breathe. His palms are sweaty, his knees are weak, and his arms feel heavy.

Victor frowns as he continues, “Your fire has been weak this entire time. Earlier, you weren’t even able to summon it.” Yuuri relaxes, and he isn’t sure why that realization Victor makes is calming, doesn’t know why he’d gone so tense in the first place. “I’ve known you long enough to know that your fire is connected to your emotions.”

He can’t bring himself to lock eyes with Victor when it feels like Victor’s icy eyes are reading him, reading through him, can see every single stupid thought he’s ever had in his life.

“You haven’t known me for that long,” Yuuri mumbles at the dark space surrounding them.

Victor’s arm twitches as though he means to move it, forgetting that it’s trapped and bound by metal rods. “Two plus years is, in fact, a long time.”

“We spent most of that time fighting. At no point did we have time to sit down and chat over coffee while you wrecked havoc.”

“Not that I haven’t tried,” Victor mumbles. “But that’s not the point. You’re nervous about something, and that affects your ability to ignite fire, yeah?”

Yuuri meets his eyes and pauses before he reluctantly nods.

“Is it me?” Victor chances a guess.

Yuuri wants to say yes, because that feels like an easy answer that requires far less explanation. In fact, it doesn’t need explaining at all. But Victor doesn’t make him nervous, and that isn’t the truth.

He spends too long contemplating the answer, so Victor speaks again. “You don’t have to be nervous around me, Cinderos. We need to be comfortable around each other if we want to be partners—”

Yuuri snaps his head up so fast he accidentally headbutts Victor in the chin, and almost gets whiplash in the process. “Wait, what? Did you say—”

“Ahh!” An echo resounds, meek and far off.

“Hello?” Yuuri shouts into the maze.

“There you guys are! Well, there your voices are. I was walking around this mess for, like, thirty minutes. Geez, you’d think they’d come up with a better plan to capture us, but this has Royal Misrepresented Fool written all over it. He trapped me in thotium as if I can’t just mind bend my way out of it.”

Sighing, Yuuri slumps against Victor’s shoulder again, because he’s so glad to know that Phichit is okay. He raises his head again when he hears woeful whining noises. “Oh! I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to hurt you.”

Victor pouts as he says, “I think I’m starting to get used to being accidentally mauled by you, and
I’m not sure if that’s a good thing or not…”

Yuuri smiles sheepishly at that.

郤

They get out of the maze after wandering through it aimlessly for another thirty minutes when The Soldier bursts through the ceiling and forcibly makes a way out.

It turns out that they weren’t in some far away location in an arid desert, kilometers away from civilization like Yuuri had originally thought. They were underneath the building that Scarlet Mask and Shadow Knight led them to the whole time. And the two villains weren’t the two villains in the first place; Minako had found a hologram system that projected them running down the hallway.

Yuuri is extremely grateful of the fact that they never faced off against them, because honestly, he wasn’t very sure they’d have survived. Not when his powers decide to act up against his will.

And speaking of his powers acting up…

Victor makes it pointedly known that he hasn’t forgotten their unfinished conversation, and he doesn’t intend to let Yuuri forget either.

Because for the next four days his coffee now comes with sticky note doodles that feature tiny cartoonized versions of Cryo-Frost and Cinderos in that thotium trap in the maze, only the metal rods surrounding Cinderos’s body isn’t metal. It’s cartoon Cryo-Frost’s noodly arms snaking cartoon Cinderos’s body while a speech bubble says coffee jokes and lines in varying degrees of terrible.

*Iced coffee? Cool beans!*

*Always expresso yourself!*

*You look brewtiful this morning!*

*I told them to hold the sugar, ’cause you’re very sweet. (And as an aside: Not really, this one is triple chocolate with whipped cream, I hope you like it!)*

Yuuri rolls his eyes in exasperation at all of them, but he can’t hate them, not when Victor thinks that Yuuri’s nerves are because of *him*.

And they’re endearing, in a weird way.

Phichit thinks they’re horrible too as he stands on the tips of his toes to peer at one from over Yuuri’s shoulder. “Jesus, did he find these on a Pinterest board?”

“I wouldn’t be surprised if he did. They’re kind of awful.”

“That last one is *sweet* though,” Phichit snickers, elbowing Yuuri playfully in his side.

“Phichit, stop, oh my god,” Yuuri mumbles into the rim his latte which is more sugar than it is coffee. But it’s also really, really sweet. Perfect.

“Did something happen at the maze?” Phichit asks. “’Cause it was really interesting seeing you two tied that close together in that trap. I mean, that didn’t look comfortable, but neither of you were complaining.”

Yuuri wants to strap himself down on the tracks of denial again until the train of truth eventually runs
him over and releases him from this conversation he doesn’t want to have, but he knows he can’t lie to Phichit. Screw him and his mind reading and his ability to read Yuuri without the mind reading after knowing him for years.

“Maybe,” is what he answers, because that technically isn’t a lie.

Phichit gestures with his hand to urge him to continue.

Yuuri sighs, stalls by taking another gulp of his coffee, realizes with a frown that most of it is done already, when did that happen, and says. “You know how... how sometimes I freak out when we’re up against level five villains?”

“Did that thing happen again?” Phichit wraps him in an air-tight hug, trapping Yuuri’s arms and keeping him from taking the final sip of coffee he was just about to take. “Oh, Yuuri, you know you’ve got this! You’re the great Cinderos! Conquerer of villains and crusher of men’s fragile hearts, and a shoe-in for the best hero award, too.”

“Phichiiiiiit,” he whines, flushing in embarrassment.

“Sorry, sorry.” Phichit lets him go. “Go on.”

“Well,” Yuuri continues. “Victor knows how my powers work. Or at least, he figured out the basics. And he noticed and now he thinks he’s the cause even though I don’t want him to think that I’m nervous around him because that thought is dumb, I mean, why would I be nervous around him? And he thinks I shouldn’t be cause he wants to be my partner and, ohmygod, I haven’t had the time to ask him about that one, like, what does he even mean by—”

“Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa,” Phichit interrupts, placing a finger against Yuuri’s mouth and going shhhh. “I think I got the general gist of that and the only word of advice I have is to go talk to him? You really wouldn’t want this to turn into an avoidable miscommunication trope. ‘Cause as enjoyable as those are to read, I’ll literally die of frustration.”

“Right,” Yuuri nods, making to turn, forgetting that Victor isn’t in the building yet. But he’s determined. “Right, I’ll just go—”

“Hold the phone,” Phichit interrupts a second time. “Did you say partners? Partners as in...?”

“Uh,” Yuuri shrugs. “I don’t know. I accidentally headbutted him before he could finish.”

“Damn, Yuuri. Headbutting, fire play, is there something you’re not telling me?”

Yuuri covers Phichit’s eyes so he doesn’t see the blush that forms across his nose. “You’ve been hanging around Chris too much.”

✂

“We need to, um. Talk,” Yuuri says as soon as Victor and Chris steps out of the HOLE. He’s been waiting for all of ten minutes, and he feels like he’s worrying for no reason, because this is just a little mix-up and surely Victor will be happy to know that he’s not the root cause of Yuuri’s qualms.

He’s only the cause of like, half of them.

“Oh?” Chris says, raising a cheeky brow. “Trouble in paradise?”

“What about?” Victor asks.
Yuuri pointedly looks at Chris, and when Chris shows no sign of moving, he forcibly pushes him away and drags Victor by the wrist back into the HOLE.

“Okay,” Yuuri breathes. “You’ve got it all wrong.”

Victor darts his eyes away and back again.

“Sorry. I’m not great at this talking thing.”


“I’m not nervous around you. Far from it, actually. After spending two plus years learning your tricks and wanting to kick your ass, I’ve built up enough courage to handle the things you’ve thrown at me.” Conveniently, Yuuri doesn’t mention that he doesn’t know how to deal with the curve-ball surprises that Victor is tossing his way now, but that’s something to think about some other time.

“Okay,” Victor smiles, soft, but not quite reassured. Uh oh. “So what are you nervous about?”

Don’t bite your lip, Yuuri says, as he thinks about all of those barely used chapstick tubes he goes through in a year. But he bites his lip, because he doesn’t know how to answer.

“You don’t have to tell me if it’s too personal,” Victor says, and that sounds reassuring, and Yuuri releases his poor bottom lip with a sigh. “Like you said earlier, we haven’t known each other long. I know Cinderos, but I don’t know Yuuri.”

Nodding—because Victor gets it and Yuuri is beyond relieved—Yuuri opens his mouth to say something else, but Victor, always full of surprises, a constant distraction to Yuuri’s streamline thoughts, takes Yuuri’s hand in his, and Yuuri short-circuits.

It takes all of his willpower not to accidentally ignite again. But his face is flushing like crazy.

“I want to get to know you, Yuuri. And I want you to promise me something.”

“W...what?” Yuuri stammers, high-pitched and cringe-worthy.

“You’ll have faith in me, and more importantly, faith in yourself.”

This is too much, too much, it’s exactly what he needs to hear for a problem Victor doesn’t even know he has, and Victor is squeezing his hand like before, and Yuuri inadvertently lets his control slip and winces his eyes closed in fear when he thinks Victor will pull away again—

“Thank god I’m wearing gloves,” Victor says in place of the shout Yuuri was expecting.

Yuuri opens one eye to peek at Victor. “Why...?”

“Because.” Victor grins, sly and familiar. “You’re far too hot to handle.”

There’s a snorting sound. It takes Yuuri too long to realize that it came from him, and when he does, sudden laughing fit subsided, he pulls his hands away to cover up his face.

Victor looks at him incredulously. “You just—”

“I didn’t.”

“You—”
“No!”

When he hears laughter spilling in a way he hasn’t heard before, Yuuri opens up his fingers and startles when he realizes that, yeah, that’s Victor, and oh, that’s a sound that he can make, and, wow, it’s mesmerizing.

He could get lost in it.

“You’re adorable, Yuuri,” Victor laughs.

Yuuri is so far gone, and he hadn’t even realized it until this very moment.

Chapter End Notes

me: this chapter has the first serious scene in the fic that'll help further the plot and really introduce character conflict so please don't fuck around
inner me: sneak in as many jokes and memes as you can.

please take note of the new added tags! if anyone wants it, i can add a warning at the beginning of the chapter that the NDE happens so y'all can brace yourselves. it's very short lived and not too bad. maybe but like, no major character death tag is an absolute guarantee because i just can't do that. i am weak.
Chapter Summary

[Announcer voice] Introducing, the new SUCC mentee!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The epiphany Yuuri makes is a stagnant one, a slow roast that simmers over night…
..and into the next week.

He should have addressed this unexplainable butterfly problem sooner, because now he doesn’t have time to. Interruption comes in the form of a new addition to SUCC.

Yuuri walks into the lounge after speaking with Minako, where she told him to meet her in ten minutes, and he’s greeted by an odd sight.

There’s a wayward kid rummaging through the lounge refrigerator, Victor is standing right behind him in confusion, and Sara and JJ are watching from the couch, hiding in what looks like a sad excuse of a pillow fort made up of the only three pillows in the room.

“Who is this child and why is he in here?” Victor asks the two shielding themselves with furniture upholstery.

“I’m seventeen, dude! And I need—” A head of blond and red hair peaks out of the fridge, and big, brown eyes peer up at Victor, wide and overflowing with an energy that’s exhausting just looking at.

“Do you guys have anything with sugar? Cake, cookie, coke—the kind that’s bad for you and filled with sugar, not the other kind—heck, fruits will work too! Please? Pretty please?!”

“Are you sure you didn’t have sugar before coming here?” Victor quibs.

Sugar Kid shakes his head.

“Don’t do it, Victor,” Sara whisper-shouts from the couch. “That kid will run circles around you. You don’t want to do it.”

“We hid all of the food,” JJ adds. He locks eyes with Yuuri then. “Oh, Yuuri’s here.”

“What’s going on here…?”

“There’s a kid loose in the org,” Sara replies, poking out from underneath a pillow.

“Ahhh!”

All of the heroes turn their heads towards Sugar Kid, who’s dropped an ice tray on the ground and now has his mouth open as wide as his eyes in complete awe. And he’s looking in Yuuri’s direction.

The intense gaze makes Yuuri uncomfortable. He looks behind him, wondering if Phichit has walked in after him, but all that’s there is the corner between a blank white wall and the automatic
Yuuri turns back around carefully and asks, “Are… are you alright?”

“It’s… it’s…!”

“Did he crash?” Yuuri hears Sara whisper to JJ. Victor waves a hand in front of Sugar Kid’s face, and Sugar Kid manages to keep his awestruck expression on Yuuri without blinking.

Then, in a single beat, with switch-flipping speed, Yuuri is suddenly engulfed in arms and legs and he nearly tips over as he clutches tight to the small body wrapped around his like a koala. And he’s so, so perplexed, because he hadn’t even blinked, yet Sugar Kid seems to have appeared right there in a flash.

“Cinderos!” he screams high-pitched excitement directly into Yuuri’s ear. “I can’t believe I’m actually meeting you in person! Oh, my god, holy shitholyshitGuang-hongwon’tbelievethis,he’llbesojealous—”

Yuuri shuffles his feet and looks to Victor for help. “I… hello?” Victor walks over to tug the kid away, but his grip is like a vice, and it’s proving extremely difficult.

“I’m your biggest fan! I swear it, I’m the admin of the official Cinderos Fanpage and everything!”

Victor stops his failed attempt at prying him off to ask instead, “Really? The Admin? CinderosFanBoy1?”

“Yeah, yeah!” He bounces excitedly, and Yuuri breathes heavily through his nose at the weight shifting against his body. He doesn’t know what’s happening— “Holy crap! Are you on the site, too?”

“Of course! I frequent it often.”

Sara and JJ are pressing their lips together in amusement, Victor is enthusiastically chatting with this new, random arrival to the organization, and said new arrival is hanging off Yuuri’s body like a toddler, and they haven’t even confirmed that he’s supposed to be here.


What the actual fuck is happening?

Minako walks in during all of this, head dipped down to view a translucent page on SIB. “Okay. Yuuri, you—”

The room grows quiet.

“… Well then. I see you’ve already acquainted yourself with Kenjirou.”

Sugar Kid—Kenjirou—finally lets him go and snaps his hand up to his forehand, straight like a soldier. “Yes!! I met him—oh, I didn’t introduce myself properly. I’m Kenjirou Minami, and it’s really, really nice to meet you, great Cinderos!”

“I…” Yuuri is absolutely reeling, doesn’t know how to handle all of this praise that’s suddenly being splashed his way. This is nothing like hearing about himself on the news, where there’s a disconnect that he can brush off. Here, in the middle of the SUCC lounge, in full costume, he’s drowning.
“It’s… it’s nice to meet you too. Just Cinderos is fine.”

“Right, now that intros are out of the way, let me quickly brief you on what this is about,” Minako says, tapping the screen in front of her. A picture of Kenjirou is pulled up along with information that pertains to him, and Yuuri realizes for the first time that there’s a little canine that’s peeking out from his close-mouthed smile. He looks from the photo, to the real Kenjirou, and back again for comparison.

“So,” Minako begins, scrolling through the information screen. Yuuri stands beside her to skim the words, too. “Kenjirou is interested in our mentorship program, and while we usually assign them to heroes we know are accepting, he was very adamant about being your mentee.”

“I hadn’t noticed,” Yuuri mumbles in mild embarrassment, eyeing Kenjirou curiously. The teen’s attention is darting every which direction like he’s having trouble focusing on one thing.

“Of course, I can’t force you to take on a mentee. That’s something you’d have to decide on your own. A few things to keep in mind before you make your decision, though. Kenjirou would be seeing you two to three times a week, and you’ll be helping him lay down the groundwork for being a hero, you know how it goes.”

Yuuri nods curtly.

“Oh, and he needs to focus primarily on self-control. By that, I mean he’s only allowed to intake fifty grams, or ten teaspoons, of sugar a day, and only gradually rather than all at once to keep his powers in check.”

Yuuri eyes the text on the SIB screen more closely as he searches for the answer he needs. He thought his power was teleportation, but no, it’s…

“I haven’t had too much, Ms. Minako, I swear!” Kenjirou pleads. “And I have great self-control!”

“Oh, yeah?” Sara calls from the couch as she holds out a packet of Skittles. She smirks in challenge. “Resist the rainbow, kid.”

“Sara,” Minako warns. “Please don’t.”

Kenjirou looks oddly impassive as he stares at the treat Sara waves in his field of vision with razor focus, a cat with string. Yuuri thinks nothing will happen, because he guesses this must be the epitome of self control right here, but he’s proven wrong when one moment, Kenjirou licks his lips. And the next, he’s reaching for the Skittles that Sara places in a water bubble, a head above his reaching arms, goading and teasing as she tells him, “C’mon! Where’s your control?”

Super speed.

“Gimme! Gimme it!”

“Nu-uh.”

“Pleeasee!”

Minako sighs in defeat.

“Oh, my god,” Yuuri whispers at no one.

“Will Yuuri be training him like he did me?” Victor asks. Yuuri doesn’t know when Victor came to
stand beside him and rest an arm leisurely on his shoulder. He doesn’t shrug him off.

“No,” Yuuri answers. “The mentor program is different. It’s mental training for H.I.T. physical training.”

“So, Yuuri,” Minako address him. “Would you be up for it? Kenjiro has already filled out all of the necessary forms, non-disclosure and all, so he’ll be ready to start next week.”

Yuuri doesn’t answer right away. He bites his lip in thought.

“I know you haven’t taken on a mentee before, but there’s a first time for everything. Besides, Kenjiro is a good kid, and he won’t be too hard to handle. He’d listen to everything you have to say and take your word like it’s the Holy Scripture.”

“I personally think he’d make a great mentee.”

“Then you mentor him,” Yuuri says.

“Sorry, but he wants you. Not that I blame him,” Victor replies.

Kenjiro gives up on trying to grab the candy and forlornly makes the walk of shame back to the little group by the door. Sara dissipates the water bubble and hides the candy in her pocket.

“Good effort,” JJ snickers.

“Maybe I need a little self control training… My mom has to lock up the pantry and everything.”

“Noted,” Minako says, typing something into the SIB system. Then she turns to Yuuri, expression expectant. “Well? How about it? Are you willing to mentor him?”

“Please, Cinderos?” Kenjiro clasps his hands together and bows his head. “I promise I’ll behave and be the best mentee in the history of mentees and I’ll listen to everything you have to say and I won’t reveal your identity to my fanpage and and and—”

“Okay!” Yuuri cuts in, holding up his hand. Kenjiro literally talks ten thousand kilometers a minute, and it’s really hard to grasp. But he seems amiable and nice enough… “Okay. Okay, I’ll do it. I guess this could be good learning experience for me too.”

“Why is that?” Victor asks. “You’re already a hero, aren’t you?”

Yuuri shrugs, small smile curving his lips. “A hero never really stops learning.”

“Yay!” Kenjiro shouts, wrapping his arms around Yuuri again in an actual hug and not that boa-constrictor-wrap-around from before. “I get to work under Cinderos! Cinderos! This is the best day of my life! I have a name and everything, ‘cause mentees are suppose to have a name, right? Commander Hyper! It’s perfect! Right?”

Yuuri turns his head into his shoulder to keep from laughing. “It’s. Yes. Good to have you, Commander Hyper.”

✂

The first week, Yuuri meets up with Kenjiro on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday for two hours at a time, anytime Yuuri isn’t caught up with a mission.

Their meeting on Monday is just formalities—introductions, what Kenjiro aspires to do with this
mentorship, and what he hopes to achieve by working with Yuuri—all of the things Yuuri remembers being asked by his own mentor when he was eighteen and bright-eyed and full of nerves, ready to take on the world, one small fire at a time.

When he answers, Kenjirou speaks wildly with his hands, solar flare gestures, as he talks about his optimistic plans for the future. And it’s endearing, reminding Yuuri of himself when he was starting out. He figures that this whole mentor thing will be good for him, that maybe there’s something he can learn from this experience, too.

Of course, that opinion wavers on Wednesday, when a series of events has him second guessing his choices in a matter of half an hour.

The day starts like any other, now. Yuuri enters the lounge, beelining straight for the coffee that Victor leaves him now because it’s a habit ingrained into his morning routine already. But he’s stopped in his tracks when he notices that Kenjirou is there, and he’s speaking with Yuri P.

Kenjirou seems just as energetic as usual, so he must be a morning person. It’s nine in the morning. Yuuri doesn’t understand how it’s possible to do anything other than consume your weight in coffee at this hour.

Yuri P. is eyeing Kenjirou up with a scowl. “What the fuck are you doing here, kid?”

“Kid?” Kenjirou gasps, looking affronted. “I’m pretty sure I’m older than you!”

“Bullshit.”

“I’m seventeen.”

Yuri P. scowls harder somehow. His face would probably crack if he tried to deepen his frown any further. “No way. Why are you so short then?”

“Height doesn’t equal age. That’s dumb logic.”

“Don’t talk to your elders like that?”

“You’re younger than me, Edgy McGee.”

Yuuri has to cover his mouth to suppress his gasp. Phichit would have unabashedly cackled if he were here. Not many people have the nerve to speak to Yuri P. that way, but Kenjirou hasn’t been here long enough to know and show restraint.

“What did you call me—?!”

Yuuri chooses that moment to step in and stand in front of Kenjirou, blocking him from Yuri P.’s view and proverbial claws. “Okay, that’s enough. It’s too early for this and I haven’t had my coffee yet.”

“He literally started it, Cinderos!”

“Um, no, you did. You called me Edgy McGee. My name is Yuri, you dick—”

“Ookay,” Yuuri cuts in again.

“What, I thought your name was Yuuri?” Kenjirou says, looking from him, to Yuri P., and back again.
“We general call him Yuri P. to avoid confusion. And we don’t provoke the tiger with a stick,” Yuuri leans in to whisper to Kenjirou. Kenjirou’s eyes dart away and back, and he nods.

“This place is getting way too crowded,” Yuri P. mumbles to himself as he sets out of the lounge. He’s met with Victor and Chris at the door, and when Victor attempts to say hi, Yuri P. crassly hisses, “Fuck off.”

“I see Yura is in a fantastic mood this morning.”

“Isn’t he always?” Chris says. His eyes lock onto Kenjirou then, and Kenjirou is looking back and forth between the two with his mouth open on a silent squeal. “Oh, you must be the new mentee.”

“Cryo-Frost! Hard-on! This is amazing! I can’t believe I’m meeting two cool heroes in one day!” Kenjirou hops excitedly in place. He looks like he wants to run them over in an assault of limbs like he did with Yuuri.

“Oh, I like him,” Chris claps excitedly.

“Yes, I am quite cool...” Victor places a finger underneath his chin and winks in their direction. Yuuri rolls his eyes.

Kenjirou tilts his head. “Was that a pun?”

“Yes!” Victor smiles.

“That’s way overdone, isn’t it? The news outlets use that one over and over again, and it’s starting to get annoying.”

Victor’s smile drops.

Yuuri and Chris laugh out loud, and Chris says, “I really like him. How much would it take you to hand him over to me, Yuuri?”

“Not a chance, Chris. You’ll taint him,” Yuuri replies.

“Are you sure he isn’t tainted already? That was cruel. He wounded me.” Victor throws a hand over his forehead and frowns dramatically. “I’m crushed. Goodbye cruel world.”

“Stop being so dramatic, Victor. Those ice puns are getting old.” Yuuri makes to put an arm around Kenjirou. “C’mon, Kenjirou, let’s go and—” His arm meets air. “Kenjirou?”

“The Savage One is over by the counter.”

Yuuri turns to call for him. Opens his mouth. Closes it.

His eyes widen slowly.

Minako had instructed them that any and all sweet things were to be placed in a specific cabinet and a mini fridge so they could be locked away and placed out of reach of Kenjirou’s sugar-crazed hands.

What Minako didn’t account for, was Yuuri’s massive sweet tooth, Victor’s kind morning gestures, and the Chai Cream Frappuccino with extra sugar that Victor left on the counter that morning.

The counter that Kenjirou is currently leaning over.
The frappuccino that’s currently in his sneaky little hands.

Yuuri watches helplessly as Kenjirou takes several large gulps, licks his lips, and sighs with a satisfied open mouth. He looks at Victor, who’s staring with equal amounts of fear, and at Chris, who looks confused, then turns his gaze back on self-proclaimed Commander Hyper.

“Oh, fuck.”

It’s absolute chaos. Nothing could have prepared Yuuri for this.

Kenjirou is just a streaking blur that runs across the lounge in zigzags and diagonals and straight lines, up the walls, over the cabinets, knocking over pillows and plastic tupperware. Nothing is left untouched, except the three heroes standing in the middle of the eye of the hurricane, huddled together in fear, watching the speedy teen ransack the room.

“What the hell do we do?!” Victor yells.

“I don’t know! Minako never said what to do to stop his overdrive!” Yuuri yells back.

“Wait, I’ve got an idea,” Chris says.

“On a scale of one to ten, how plausible is it that it’ll work?” Victor asks.

“Zero-point-one. Fingers crossed, though!”

Chris braces himself to unlatch his grip from Yuuri and Victor. Victor tells him, “Be careful, Chris. I’ll never forget you or your Hard-on. It’ll be hard to swallow the news of your inevitable demise—”


“I’m just trying to lighten the mood.”

“He isn’t going to die.”

“I don’t need the pity of someone who can’t swallow anyway,” Chris sing-songs.

Yuuri buries his face in Victor’s cape in secondhand embarrassment, then looks up again when he hears the familiar shiiiiiiing of metal transforming the flesh and fabric of Chris’s skin and costume. Chris’s hand is placed over the stainless steel of the counter, and when he removes it, he’s a human sculpture that reflects the fluorescent light of the room. And the ‘D’ of his costume sticks out from it’s embossed design on his chest, because of course it does.

Chris attempts to follow the fast moving form of Kenjirou, predict his next movements, and proceeds to jump right into his path. With a heavy thunk, Kenjirou falls to the floor in front of Chris, who has his hands on his hips and looks worriedly down at Kenjirou.

“Are you okay, little one?”

“You didn’t kill him, did you?” Yuuri walks over to be sure he’s okay.

“Perhaps I should’ve touched a softer metal instead…”

“There’s absolutely nothing soft about you.”
“Ohhh…” Kenjirou sits up and rubs his head. “Oh… That hurt. You’re so hard, dude.”

“So I’ve been told,” Chris grins.

“I hate your hero name so much,” Yuuri mutters. He leans down to help Kenjirou up. The teen looks a little dazed from impacting Chris’s steel-hard abs, but he’s not in a frenzy anymore, at least.

“I should’ve drunk the coffee sooner. Sorry, Kenjirou.”

“Why are you apologizing? You did nothing wrong. If anything, Victor shouldn’t have placed the coffee there in the first place,” Chris points out.

“It was your idea, Chris! And I didn’t know Kenjirou would drink the coffee!” Victor retorts.

“Wait,” Yuuri says. “Did you say it was Chris’s idea?”

“Um…”

“Ah,” Kenjirou whines. His limbs are shaking. He seems to have recovered from his fall.

“Ah?” All three repeat.

“Iiit’s n-n-nooooot oveeeerrrr!”

In a light speed blur, Kenjirou carries his frantic words with him to the lounge door. But Kenjirou gets there before the automatic doors have time to open; he smacks face first right into the crease between the doors, and tumbles over when they finally open.

Then he’s gone.

A wild thing, let loose unto the unsuspecting workers of SUCC.

“We are dead,” Yuuri says, as he runs towards the doors.

“No, just you,” Victor says as he follows after.

“For what it’s worth, you’ve got to love his enthusiasm,” Chris chimes in.

Yuuri shoots venom daggers in his direction. “Now is not the time.”

Yuuri thinks, uncharacteristically optimistic, hopeful, foolish, that they can round Kenjirou up and corral him back to the lounge and lock the doors until anyone notices and wait for his overdrive sugar high to run out.

That is, before they find that he’s made it up the stairs and onto the second floor. And the Weapons Division’s door is wide open.

The Weapons Division is almost never randomly open, for safety reasons.

When Yuuri, Victor, and Chris peek warily into the room, they spy the handful of people who work in there are ducking for cover underneath tables. The head of the division, Isabella, who’s standing towards the back, seems nonchalant and unaware of the current problem, state-of-the-art noise cancellation earmuffs over her ears, tinted sunglasses over her eyes, and a new Ion Ray gun pointed at a test dummy a few meters away.
In the moment that she fires the technicolor-colored ray at the dummy, a blurred red-blond-blue figure zips past.

Yuuri doesn’t have time to step in and utter the words, “Stop!” Kenjirou is already out of the room by the time the woman pulls up her glasses and looks at the three by the door, puzzled.

There’s bits of red hair scattered at the base of the test dummy.

Yuuri is filled with an increasing amount of dread by the second.

“Ohayou,” Yuuri starts when he goes back to Victor and Chris in the hall. “So he got out of here, and I don’t know where he went.”

“I saw him head towards the RAD Department… I think.”

Chris shakes his head. “Research and Dev won’t like being interrupted.”

“What matters most is that he stays away from the Information Sector and the rest of the third floor at all costs,” Yuuri says. “Chris, you guard the entrance to the stairwell at the end of the hall. Victor and I will search for him in the other rooms.”

They separate, and Yuuri and Victor run to the Research and Development Department, where Kenjirou seems to have already started to cause chaotic clutter in the otherwise spotless, organized room, and no one there is able to place or understand what the heck is going on.

At the center of the room, the prototype of a mind device they’re working on is on display, fragile and hovering and oh-so breakable. Seung-gil, the head of this department, is working on it with his neon laser vision. Yuuri remembers Phichit chattering excitedly about it a few days ago, but he doesn’t remember what it does or how powerful it can be. He just knows that Kenjirou cannot get to it.

“Victor, can you form an ice barrier around the device there?” Yuuri points to the important mind-memory-amplifier thingy. “Just to stop Kenjirou from getting to it. Please, hurry.”

“I can do it faster than you can say dateme.”

Yuuri doesn’t get to comment on that, isn’t even sure he heard that correctly (that could’ve been bait or hate or sate and those would make ten times more sense than whatever supposedly came out of Victor’s mouth just then) because any second wasted on taking his eyes off the blur that is Kenjirou is a second lost. The barrier goes up just as Kenjirou reaches the center display.

Unfortunately, Kenjirou rides the upward momentum of ice like a wave, and proceeds to crash right into the device. It, and Kenjirou, goes down, right on top of another machine, and the mind amplifier rips through it, tears a jagged hole into the control panel, Seung-gil startles, his laser eyes wildly sweeping across the room, and a fire starts.

The sprinklers in the room go off.

Yuuri buries his head in his hands.

Victor pats his shoulder in consolation. “We tried.”

“I’m dead. We aren’t gonna catch him in time and he’ll set the entire building on fire. This is the actual worst.”
“Hey, hey, hey,” Victor places a hand underneath his chin to coax him out of hiding. Yuuri is a little too distressed to care right now. “It’s not entirely your fault. I’m partly to blame too. We’ll catch him before then.”

Yuuri meekly breathes a sigh.

Victor’s hand is ripped away from Yuuri as Kenjirou passes by them, and he heads straight for the next room. The Medical Wing. But it’s closed right now, so they should be fine. The only place he can go to now is the third floor, and Chris is blocking the way, made of the steel gray material that covers the elevator doors.

Chris braces himself again to catch Kenjirou in his arms—

Kenjirou dips down, slips right through the space between his legs, and zips out of sight.

Chris blinks. Looks behind him, and back at them. “I tried.”

“Okay, new plan,” Victor says. “If Minako asks, we’ll tell her that Kenjirou bribed us into giving him that coffee.”

“You mean like lying?”

“No, Chris, I mean like telling her the truth that definitely happened, and not the other thing that absolutely did not.”

“You can’t lie to Minako. She’ll know.”

Yuuri urgently reminds them, “She’ll definitely know if we don’t haul ass and get to Kenjirou before he—”

To Yuuri’s absolute horror, the SIB’s P.A. system comes on, announcing, “Attention. Attention. The building is now under lockdown until further notice. Please remain calm, lock your department doors until an all-clear is made, and use nearby fire extinguishers to put out any fires that should arise. Attention. The building is now under lockdown—–”

“Lockdown?” Victor starts.

“Fire…?” Yuuri asks fearfully.

In the near distance, there’s an explosion.

“There it is,” Chris whistles. He seems mildly impressed in the face of superpowered turmoil.

Minako issues an organization-wide ban on all things artificially sweetened. A list is printed up on every door within the hour.

After finally having calmed down, Kenjirou sits on the couch in the lounge, head hanging down, cheeks puffed up a little, eyes teary. “I’m sorry, I’ll never do it again!”

“It’s fine, you’re don’t have to say sorry,” Yuuri says for the fourteen time in five minutes.

“You’ll certainly give villains a run for their money when you become a hero,” Chris assures him.

The statement makes Kenjirou smile. He wipes his nose with the back of his hand and sniffles as he
replies, “Thanks, Hard-on.”

“Please, call me Chris.”

The doors slide open, and Phichit walks in, carrying a bag of something in his hands while in full costume.

“You guys! I was just at a bakery because some dumb villain was trying to rob it—like, who robs a bakery? What kind of soulless, puppy hating person does that?—and the owner gave me banana nut and chocolate chip muffins to repay me! How sweet is that!”

“No!” Yuuri, Victor, and Chris shout in unison, running up to the bag and raiding it for it’s sugary confections. They stuff their faces with them so that there’s none left behind.

“Damn. I would’ve gotten more if I knew you guys wanted them so bad.”

“Thuh noo menhee ih a ganger ho uh a’,” Victor struggles to say through a mouthful of muffin.

“Come again?”

“The new mentee is a danger to us all,” Victor repeats.

“Whaataa?” Phichit walks to the couch and sits down next to Kenjirou. “But he’s such a sweet little goober! How dangerous could he really be?” He pats Kenjirou’s head, and the tiny blond smiles and preens under the attention.

“He blew up the Information Sector!” Yuuri explains.


Yuuri meets up with Kenjirou again that Friday after what he hopes is the last mission of the day. It’s four in the afternoon now and he promised he’d take Kenjirou out to eat at a restaurant. So he removes his costume and mask, pockets his phone, and heads towards the front entrance of the building, where Kenjirou sits on a chair in the three story high foyer, swinging his legs as he waits. Victor is next to him, and they’re talking adamantly about something.

“Hi, Kenjirou,” Yuuri greets with the nod of his head. “And Victor. What were you guys talking about?”

“Hi, Cinderos! Er, Yuuri.”

“We were talking about how great you are, of course,” Victor answers.

“Right…” Yuuri says, disbelieving. “Are you ready to go?”

“Can Victor join us? He said he wanted to!” Kenjirou tugs on Victor’s arm as he stands. “The more the merrier, right?”

“I don’t know…” Yuuri crosses his arms. “Three’s a crowd, like they say.”

“That’s certainly not what you said at the bar two weeks ago,” Victor mumbles under his breath.

Yuuri’s eyes snap to Victor. “What was that?” When Victor presses his mouth together and smiles, Yuuri narrows his eyes before saying, “Sure. You can join us,” then to Kenjirou, “try not to use our
hero names in public, okay? Trying to erase memories gets really messy.”

They walk two blocks away to a diner and get a booth towards the back of the restaurant. It’s fairly empty, save for two other occupied booths towards the front and a few people seated on the stools at the counter.

Yuuri orders a burger, Victor says he’ll have the same, and when Kenjirou pleads for pie, Yuuri suggests he has chicken pot pie instead.

“So, Kenjirou,” Yuuri says. “How was your day today?”

“Great!” he immediately starts. “I told my mom to drop me off today, and she’s super excited for me and thinks it’s great that I’m doing this and, oh! Right! She wanted me to get a picture with you! In your costume, probably ’cause it would be bad if I took one of you the way you are and showed her, yeah? But anyway, school is kind of a drag, but I’m almost done with my senior year and that’s really exciting. Also—”

He goes on about it, talks high speed car crashing circles around Yuuri’s head, and Yuuri listens intently to every word, until he gets that itching sensation that he’s being stared at.

Startles, because he realizes that it’s Victor.

Kenjirou’s words—that tumble on top of each other like they’re forcing themselves to be the first ones heard—are white noise at the back of Yuuri’s head now, because Yuuri can’t look away.

Can’t help feeling the irony in how eyes like ice set fire to his cheeks...

“—dating?”

When Yuuri blinks back to reality, Victor is looking out the window, gulping down water from a glass cup like his sanity depends on it.

“I’m sorry, what was that?” Yuuri asks.

“Are you guys dating or something? Or together?” Kenjirou questions, looking from Victor beside him, to Yuuri in front of him with curiosity.

Yuuri takes his half eaten burger in hand and brings it up to his mouth to cover his cheeks. Victor looks like he’s trying to hide a smile by pinching his bottom lip between his teeth with great effort.

“Um, no. Why would you ask?”

“’Cause of the way you guys look at each other? And you’re both kinda touchy-feely too. Like, really. I noticed it Wednesday when I was going haywire. Not saying that you should, I don’t want to be awkward. I’m not that great at reading that kinda thing. But, like, you guys act exactly like the people in my mom’s soap operas.”

At “touchy-feely” Yuuri locks eyes with Victor in confusion as if to ask him, really? He honestly hasn’t noticed. Victor doesn’t show any self-restraint when it comes to physical affection, but then again, Phichit and Chris are like that too. Yuuri is pretty used to it, and he can’t see why Victor would be any different.

Kenjirou starts rambling again. “But, oh, you know what would be hecka cool? If you guys were partners.”
It’s like the forgotten floodgates at the back of Yuuri’s mind suddenly open, and a tumble of that word, partners, spills out in waves. He was supposed to talk to Victor about that. What is partners supposed to mean? What does he mean by partners?

*Partners… partners… partners…*

(He doesn’t mean romantic, right? No, no, of course not, Yuuri.)

(In the distance, Yuuri swears he hears the audible sound of Phichit slapping his hand against his forehead in disbelief.)

“Right?” Victor agrees. “We’d make the perfect duo. A power team, second to none.”

“Yeah, yeah! Plus, ice and fire would be a super cool combo to watch in action.” Kenjirou *squeals* with delight. “I’d love to see it!”

Yuuri frantically waves his hands in front of him. “I don’t think that would be a good idea. Besides, Phichit is my partner already, and he’s amazing at it.”

Victor frowns at that, looks genuinely dejected, and it doesn’t sit right with Yuuri at all.

“Oh, well. I hope you guys get to work together anyway! Neuro—I mean, Phichit is *awesome*. The way that he does the thing with his mind and lifts them and wraps them around people like it’s nothing? And I heard that he can bend thotium with his mind too, is that true? Please say it is, ‘cause that would be so cool if it’s true.”

It takes Yuuri a few moments to snap his eyes away from Victor to look at Kenjirou again. He smiles softly, nodding his head. “Yeah, he can.”

“Ohhhhhh!!”

Victor breaks away from his thoughts to chime in with a smile of his own, “His mind powers are the *brain* of Royal Mind Fuck’s existence.”

“The brain of… ah! Haha! Like bane! I get it!”

Chapter End Notes

wow, this update feels long overdue (even tho i don't technically have an update schedule, but i try to be quick about it). i was away for a week with no wifi and all suffering with nothing but my phone that loses charge faster than it takes to actually charge. but i'm back now! and i have lots of ideas lined up! (including side-stories, but those will randomly pop up in between updates).

this chapter was stupidly fun to write, i'm at least a little sorry about the gratuitous amount of dick jokes, and i need you all to know that minami is my starry-eyed son. thank you to ao3 user *Flyingsuits* for the idea of making Seung-gil the head of the RAD department, btw! Seung-gil as well as Isabella make little appearances later.

brace yourselves for next time... [ominous thunder claps in the background]
I must be a pyromantic ‘cause your fire keeps me alive

Chapter Summary

Victor can’t keep up with the emotions that he constantly feels, and they’re all caused by Yuuri.

Chapter Notes

no one asked for a warning but for my own state of mind i’m warning anyway.

!! NEAR DEATH EXP AHEAD !! continue at your own risk! no one really dies though, so........

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Victor takes a deep, lung-full of nerves as he inhales, touching his fingers on the cool surface of the knob on the door to Yakov’s office. He realizes that he could’ve done this earlier in the morning, when Yakov is a lot less intimidating in nothing but an undershirt and shorts, but Victor was spending all his time thinking instead.

Thinking about whether or not this was a good idea.

Thinking about whether this is a step in the right direction.

Thinking, maybe Yuuri wants this too. He isn’t even sure about that one. Yuuri is sending him all kinds of mixed signals.

But Victor figures that it can’t hurt to ask. See if it’s viable. It’s just a simple question, nothing concrete. Nothing to commit to. But if Victor remembers one thing about himself, it’s the fact that he’s determined to a fault, has one track tendencies and selective tunnel vision at the worst of times, won’t care about anything else until he gets that one special thing.

The only difference now, is that that one special thing is a one special person.

And the chase has been running for over a month. Or two years, technically.

But Victor would run for tens, hundreds, thousands of months more, experience bloodied feet and searing lungs and tears stinging his eyes, if it meant getting to see the happiness and wellbeing of that one person.

Victor smiles, catches his lips between his teeth, muses about how melodramatic he’s being. But it’s all true.

Every day spent on that couch in that lounge is something special, every text notification he gets, every eye roll and smile and and sweet summertime laughter…

Victor had only just gotten here, is only just beginning to integrate himself into the oddball hero
dynamic of SUCC, doesn’t know a thing about the inside jokes and well-kept secrets and the stories of the people who roam these halls.

But he thinks he’s starting to figure out Yuuri. Hopes, that maybe this is a step in the right direction. Silently prays to whatever light-clad deity up there that things will work out.

Because this is as much for Yuuri as it is for him, and he hopes that that thought will get across.

Victor inhales, exhales. Turns the knob.

Yakov snaps his eyes up at him, grunts in acknowledgement at Victor’s presence, and glances back down at the papers on his desk. “Vitya. Don’t you know how to knock? Or were your manners wiped from your mind, too?”

Victor can’t bring himself to care about the jab at his expense. He focuses on the fact that Yakov is calling him the way he used to, finally. It had taken weeks to convince the man to do so, and Yakov finally cracked, yelling it like a swear, when Victor would not shut up after saying please three-hundred-and-twenty-seven times. Not that he was counting.

Now, Victor is working up to Yura, but it’s difficult when the other person he’d quit being a villain for refuses to be in the same room as him for more than fifteen minutes.

Ah, well. Baby steps.

“Hello, Yakov,” Victor geets. “I have something that I’d like to ask you.”

“Oh, snap, boys,” Phichit bursts into the room, a few seconds after being notified by the SIB system to report to the Weapons Division to meet with the head. “Shit is getting real.”

Yuuri, who’d also been told to report here, is chewing at his lips at he watches the news on the SIB screen, something Victor hadn’t realized was a thing the system could do until now. News has broken out that Shadow Knight is on an unprovoked rampage, sucking fire hydrants, lampposts, entire cars, and loose trees into the void, and during traffic rush hour at that.

Victor can see the micro-tremors shaking Yuuri’s fingers. He reaches over to squeeze and stop the shaking, if only for a moment.

“This is a trap, clear as day,” the head of Weapons Division, Isabella Yang, says. Victor thinks she looks exactly like how he’d picture someone who works with weapons for a living. Crop top, baggy low waisted camouflage jeans, those same protective sunglasses perched in her bobbed hair, and a gun casually slung over her shoulder like it’s normal. Victor hopes it has a safety mode and that it’s currently on.

Yuuri nods in agreement at what she says. “He won’t stop until he gets rid of his target. And I’m assuming he’s after us.” He dematerializes the screen.

“So what’s the plan?” Victor asks.

“The ideal plan would be that we try and lead him away from there because it’s populated and it’s causing too much damage,” Yuuri says.

“But he’s smack dab in the middle of the metropolitan area,” Phichit points out. “Which is exactly what he wanted, I’m betting. Fire might help convince him to screw off…”
Yuuri shakes his head. “Like you said, he’s right in the middle. I doubt he’d give us the chance to coax him out that far. So one of us will help clear the area, the other will distract, and the last will use that,” he points at the gun Isabella is holding, “to immobilize him.”

“Shadow Knight has a black hole ability, right? How scary… Luckily, my team and I created this baby,” she swings the gun around—momentarily points it at Victor, at which point Victor ducks behind Yuuri to avoid getting shot or worse—and holds it in her hands. “It’s a grapple gun, and the cord doubles as a taser. Default to stun, but you can set it to paralysis mode, which lasts twenty-four hours. More than enough time to capture him.”

She scans the sleek, gray length of her creation, and while she does, something weird happens to her eyes. A scope image seems to appear and disappear within the blues of her irises, but when Victor blinks to be certain that that’s really happening, the circle and lines vanish again.

“Nice! I call dibs!” Phichit makes a grabbing gesture at the grapple gun, and Isabella hands it over. Once it’s in Phichit’s hands, he excitedly aims it at empty walls in the room with one eye closed. “Shadow boy doesn’t stand a chance against us now.”

“Okay,” Yuuri says, taking a deep breath. “Let’s go.”

The crime scene is an unmitigated disaster zone.

Victor is stuck moving civilians away from the scene, while Yuuri distracts Shadow Knight, who floats high above the road, and Phichit focuses a sheet of metal underneath Yuuri and flies him straight at the villain, propels Yuuri until he’s soaring, fiery fist aimed directly at Shadow Knight’s face. His form is something to marvel at, something beautiful, as he deals a blow that tosses salt into the wound by sweeping Shadow Knight from his invisible pedestal with a flying punch mid air.

Victor could watch for ages.

Would watch for ages, if he weren’t currently trying to save lives. But that proves to be a difficult feat when people keep stopping in their tracks to ask for pictures with him while a literal black hole is sucking the city in.

Do these people have a death wish?

The giant ice barrier he’s created is the only thing keeping them all safe, but he knows that won’t hold for long.

He forms the words, Please Get Out, then Get Out Now, then You’re Going to Die, Leave out of the ice, because he’s getting impatient and wants to help.

With the civilians a sufficient distance away from the area, at the hands of the police, Victor turns, ready to fight—

Has no time to brace himself as a body comes crashing into his, sending small chunks of ice toppling over them like hail when they land heavily on the ground.

“Jesus, fuck,” he hears Yuuri say. Yuuri pushes up, shakes the ice out of his hair, and stares down at Victor apologetically. “Sorry.”

“Need help?” Victor asks.
“Please.”

Yuuri gets up and holds out his hand to help Victor up, too. Then he says, “You remember the second half of the plan?”

He and Yuuri will ambush Shadow Knight on both sides and Phichit will drag him to the ground with the grapple gun and render him unconscious.

“Yes.”

Yuuri nods. “Great. I want you to forget it entirely. We’re executing a new plan.”

Victor tears his gaze away from where Phichit is tossing stay pieces of asphalt and concrete at Shadow Knight and he blinks at Yuuri in shock. “What? What is?”

“Create a wall of ice right in front of Shadow Knight, then throw me directly at it while Neuroseeker is fighting him,” Yuuri says.

“What? Cinderos, are you sure? That’s—”

“Trust me, Cryo-Frost,” Yuuri states, and Victor realizes in that moment that their hands are still connected, because Yuuri squeezes his with conviction. “Help us stop him.”

“Okay,” Victor squeezes back. His chest feels tight with something like desire as he lets Yuuri’s hand go, and uses his freed hands to part the cracked ice barrier in the middle like the red sea. “Ready?”

When Yuuri nods, Victor creates the ice wall like instructed, feels his fingertips chill with the movement as he raises his arms. Then he grabs the hands that Yuuri holds out to him, swings him like a carousel, sends Yuuri shooting through the air and watches him deliver a flying fire kick through the thin sheet of ice.

Bits of crystals fly everywhere, and steam blocks Shadow Knight from view.

“Now, Neuroseeker!” Yuuri shouts.

Victor can’t see Phichit amidst the chaos, but he can see the cord of the grapple gun wind around a shadowy figure in the cloud of steam, the zap of electricity that runs along it, and the body of Shadow Knight fall to the ground.

“Wooo!” Phichit yells when the cloud clears. He reigns the cord back in and throws his arms in the air. “Got ’em!”

Yuuri has his hands against his chest, letting out a heaving sigh. “I’ll be honest, guys, I didn’t think that would work.”

“But it did. You truly are amazing, Cinderos.”

Yuuri rubs his arms and smiles shyly. “I didn’t do it alone.”

Phichit claps Yuuri’s back repeatedly, and Yuuri stumbles forward with the force of it. “But you came up with the plan! You did great, Cinderos! We shadowed him!”

“I appreciate puns, Neuroseeker, but even I can admit that that was a stretch,” Victor says.

“Let’s go and cuff Shadow Knight, then head back t—”
Victor should’ve paid more attention.

Should’ve seen the way Phichit’s eyes flickered.

How the air around them suddenly grows thin.

Could’ve stopped it, perhaps, when Yuuri is suddenly lifted off his feet, and known, because Yuuri doesn’t have flight abilities.

On complete reflex, Victor grabs one of Yuuri’s flailing arms, and Phichit grabs the other, and they *pull pull pull* like the fate of the world is at stake.

But the black void hovering over Yuuri’s feet is too strong. The adrenaline that’s coursing through Victor’s veins like a power drug isn’t enough. Phichit is shouting with the effort.

The universe gives them a great big *fuck you*, when a loose *FU* from the *Funky Monkey Bar* sign smacks against Yuuri’s torso, their grasps slip, and Yuuri is sucked in.

The hysteria doesn’t quite set in. Not until Phichit speaks, and breaks the spell of shock they’re trapped in.

“Ohh, fuck. Fuck fuck fuck fuck fuck—”

“Neuroseeker, we need to stay calm and get him back here,” Victor’s voice cracks. He cracks. He never cracks. Hasn’t, not since the time he had to face the prospect of losing someone he loves. He can’t make the same mistake twice. Not again.

Not again.

*Not again.*

“Not to cause panic or anything, but there’s no oxygen in there! Didn’t you feel it? When we were sent to the maze?! *He can’t breathe!*”

Victor grabs Phichit by the shoulders, stares him in the eyes. One desperate gaze to another. “We’re going to get him out before something happens. I can’t send any ice in there if there’s no oxygen, so use the grapple gun. Then ride back to the organization as fast as you can.”

Phichit nods, breathes, takes the gun in hand and sets to work.

Victor sees Shadow Knight when he turns.

Sees red.

And when Shadow Knight smirks, Victor sees *crimson*.

Doesn’t think twice as he sends a flurry of icicles at the villain.

Shadow Knight *just* misses being struck by them as he rolls on the cracked asphalt. He stands to brush away the ice flakes, and he smirks as Victor draws near.

“When are you going to stop playing hero, *Flash-Dweeb.*”
“Oh, that’s a new one,” Victor replies humorlessly. “Did Scarlet Mask teach you that one? Because you don’t seem like the type who can think for himself.”

“Excuse me?”

Victor raises jagged fingers of ice. Threatening. “Who are you working for?”

“Oh, you of all people should know. But I guess that’s impossible when your brain isn’t there.” Shadow Knight sneers wryly. “To think, one of the most infamous villains in the country would fall. Literally. Royal Mind Fuck may empathize, but I sure as fuck don’t.”

Shadow Knight lifts his hand, and Victor assumes he’s going to open another black hole (or worse, close the one Phichit is fishing Yuuri out of) so he sends an ice attack before Shadow Knight gets the chance to act. He’s forced to conjure one to shield from the glacial barrage.

“There’s nothing good about heroes when all they care about is fame, and merch, and having cheap fansites run by naive kids.”

“How do you—”

“Stop with these games, Flash Freeze. You’re playing yourself.”

Victor is confused, filled with misplaced anger, gets distracted, again, because Phichit is racing ahead on a broken piece of concrete with Yuuri in his arms, and Yuuri’s head bobs lifelessly as they zip past. And for a moment, Victor stops breathing.

For a moment, he visualizes all of the ways he can pound Shadow Knight into the ground.

For a moment, he wonders, just how bad getting that five star rating would be.

But when he turns back, Shadow Knight is gone.

✂

Victor catches up to Phichit as they head back to the organization, and follows frantically as Phichit runs to the second floor and into the Medic Wing, a place Victor had always assumed off-limits, because it was almost never opened, and he’d never been inside before.

A woman in a lab coat greets them at the door before Phichit gets to it. She slaps her hands against her mouth, but the gasp she makes is still audible. “Oh, I felt the fear from the entrance!” She then squares her shoulders, takes on a steely persona as she herds Phichit and Victor into the room. “How long?”

“At about seven minutes,” Phichit answers grimly.

“How is he going to be okay?” Victor asks worriedly. Phichit sets Yuuri down on a metal table with sides that draw up at the press of a button to conceal Yuuri in some sort of pod. Victor’s heart feels like it’s being sent through a grater. The broken shreds are falling like feathers to the floor, and he’s weak to it.

The woman nods her head as she hooks Yuuri up to a multitude of machines and floating digital screens Victor doesn’t know the purpose of. Except one. The heart monitor. Victor thinks it isn’t plugged in because the hill-valley heart patterns aren’t there. But when she finishes hooking everything in, Victor realizes.
It is plugged in.

That’s a flat line.

Victor swears that Yuuri already looks pale, and he doesn’t know what to feel. His mind is a wildfire. Racing, ravaging, debilitating. Fearful.

“It hasn’t been fifteen minutes yet, and superpowered people can survive longer after incapacitation than people without, so Yuuri will be fine,” the woman reassures them. “Please don’t take this the wrong way, but your emotions are distracting, so I’ll need to ask you both to leave.”

The door is shut behind them without another word. Phichit sinks bodily to the floor, back against the wall.

“I do not care if Shadow Knight is her brother. I’m going to kick his fucking ass when I see him next,” Phichit mumbles to himself.

Victor isn’t sure if he’s meant to hear that, but he agrees all the same.

If there’s one regret he’ll ever have, it’s the fact that he let Shadow Knight escape.

He hopes the medic woman is a miracle worker. She must be; she seemed confident enough. But Victor’s hopes are sweeping the floors like lowly, despondent workers.

“Yuuko has healing tears. Yuuri will be fine. We got him here in time.”

Victor blinks owlishly at Phichit, says with a voice laced in disbelief, “She’s going to cry him back to life?”

Phichit’s shoulders shake with a breathless laugh—weak, pitiful, uncharacteristic—before answering. “It’s a little more complicated than that, but yeah, basically.”

Victor doesn’t ask, or say anything after that. He passes the time waiting by pacing back and forth, tries hard not to bring up what if scenarios in his mind—what if Yuuri is gone, what if she fails, what if it’s too late, what if he never gets the chance to tell Yuuri how he feels, what if he’s screwed everything up in ways he doesn’t even remember, what if—and instead, attempts the impossible feat of placing all of his hope in the hands of a person he hasn’t properly met yet.

Most of his worries turn out to be unfounded though, because the door finally slides open ten minutes later, and the woman in the lab coat—Yuuko—steps out with a big smile on her face.

Victor can infer from her disposition that there’s good news, but he takes her by the shoulders anyway and asks desperately, “Is he okay?”

“He’ll be just fine, Victor. His body is in a hibernation state now, and he’ll be out for anywhere between two hours and twenty-four,” she assures. Victor’s shoulder slump with relief. He feels numb. “You can come in now, by the way. This is probably the most calm I’ll ever feel Yuuri be. But you guys are still on edge. Would you like something to drink?”

Victor shakes his head. Phichit kindly asks for a bottle of water.

“I’m going to wait for him,” Victor announces as he steps into the room and takes a chair to sit. The periodic beat of the heart monitor is Victor’s favorite sound right now. He wants to hear that and nothing else for the rest of his life. “As long as it takes.”
“I’ll wait, too,” Phichit says, walking in after him. He takes a chair by the bed Yuuri is now on and sits down with his chin resting on top of the back. “Yuuko is right. Yuuri is never this peaceful.”

He does look peaceful, here on a bed of white sheets as soft as his breath. Chest rising and falling in tiny increments, dark eyelashes dragging over the tops of the feebly pale skin of his cheeks like he’s only sleeping and hadn’t just been a nanosecond away from losing his life. Like he’s dreaming.

Victor thinks he must be dreaming too. Or insane. (A bit of both.) To think that Yuuri still looks gorgeous this way. Peaceful, beautiful and alive.

(Gorgeous, gorgeous, gorgeous.)

“Wow,” Phichit laughs, but the laughter sounds heavy. “How are you still so sappy at a time like this?”

Victor realizes that Phichit’s words are drenched, wet and drowning, like he’s been silently crying, and he hasn’t noticed until now. Victor rarely deals with crying people; the only experience he has was when he was fifteen and Yura was three and his baby brother would wail at everything that upset him. Yura is the same now, only he yells without all the tears.

“Are you, um, are you alright?” Victor asks awkwardly.

“I’m fine. Listen, you don’t have to worry about me. But you might wanna put your mind guards back up, because I can hear everything you’re thinking, my guy.”

“I honestly don’t think I have the mental capacity for that right now.”

Phichit nods just as Yuuko reenters the room. “I’ll try not to intrude, then. It’s no fun when it’s easy, y’know?”

Victor has no clue what that means, but he doesn’t question it.

Yuuko sets the items in her arms down on a side table. “Alright, I got water for Phichit, and a few snacks from the vending machine downstairs. Are you sure you don’t want anything, Victor?”

He shakes his head. “No, but thank you anyway.”

“You feel very frazzled right now, which is understandable. And is that...oh,” Yuuko covers her mouth again. She seems to be hiding a small smile. “I heard from Minako that you had a thing for Yuuri, but gosh, I can feel the infatuation. It’s very pungent.”

“I’m....” Victor’s brows knit together as he tries to make sense of her words. “I’m sorry?”

“Why are you apologizing? I think it’s very cute! But Yuuri swears you’re just messing with him. This is tragic.”

“I know right?” Phichit sighs dramatically. “I don’t think I’ve ever been more frustrated in my life. Like, how can someone as smart as Yuuri be so romantically challenged? I’d push him myself if I knew that wouldn’t just scare him away.”

Victor blinks, feels incredibly out of place all of a sudden, and his brain is about ten seconds behind. “He thinks I’m messing with him?”

“Keep up, Victor.”

“Wait, wait, wait...what?” He’s confused. Beyond confused. Baffled, because he’d kind of
assumed that Yuuri was finally warming up to him after following Chris’s advice and not making a
complete ass of himself. But then again, he hasn’t really said anything outright…

Surely verbal proposals about taking him out is blunt enough. Not subtle in the slightest. No room for
misinterpretation, right?

Right?

(Right?)

“Oh, my god,” Phichit and Yuuko say in unison. When Victor snaps his eyes to them, he notices that
Yuuko is trying to hide her grin again, and Phichit is exasperation personified.

“You have got to be kidding me,” Phichit is saying. “Yuuri won’t understand a thing until you tell
him outright. Victor, you absolute buffoon. I called this shit two years ago.”

“This is nothing like a fairytale. This is better. Oh, Victor you have to tell him!” Yuuko claps her
hands excitedly. “I wanna see how this story ends.”

“But, wait!” Victor cuts in. “Does he even like me?”

Victor is almost scared at the silence that takes over the room. He’s even more scared when that
silence is replaced by stomach-clutching cackling.

“Is that a joke? That has to be a joke, right? Are you serious? You two are literally perfect for each
other. You’re both dense as fuck.”

Victor doesn’t blush in front of others very often, but he can feel the burn of embarrassment over his
nose and along his cheeks. He looks at the interesting, blank white wall next to him with acute
interest.

“Whew,” Yuuko wipes a tear, a tear, from the corner of her eye. “I’d better get going then. It’s
seven-thirty. Are you two going to stay here? I’ll give you guys the key.” She removes it from one of
her pockets and drops it into Victor’s hand, but she doesn’t let go of him just yet. “Oh, Victor, I’m
sorry for picking on you. I do hope things work out, though. Please eat something, too. I can feel that
you’re hungry, but you’re just trying to push it down. I don’t want to see you here for not taking care
of yourself, okay?”

She leaves before Victor can comment on the fact that he has no idea how she’s doing that. His
stomach growls. Victor is afraid.

“She’s an empath,” Phichit explains. “I think she forgets that it freaks people out at first when she
doesn’t explain it.”

“Oh,” Victor nods. “That makes sense. It’s very weird knowing you’re being read inside and out like
that. I thought she was another mind reader.”

“Nah. Besides, I’d rather deal with a mind reader than an empath. At least you can guard against a
mind reader.”

Victor hums in agreement, and they fall silent as they wait for Yuuri to wake up. That might be ages.
Twenty-four hours, like Yuuko said, but Victor will wait as long as it takes.

It feels ridiculous to be so attached to someone he doesn’t know very much about, if he’s being
honest with himself. He knows Yuuri’s name, a tiny piece of Yuuri’s power puzzle, the fact that
Yuuri can consume his weight in sweets, how selfless to a fault he can be where hero work is concerned, the fact that Yuuri loves hero movies—namely, The Incredibles—stays up late watching shows on Netflix (Victor wants to stay up late watching shows on Netflix with him. Netflix and actual chill). He knows that Yuuri is a dog person, and that fact nearly defeats every other useless fact he knows. Almost. Nothing tops the fact that Yuuri is the most beautiful person he knows.

(Gorgeous, gorgeous, gorgeous.)

And that’s all useless, because as much time he can spend learning about all of Yuuri’s little quirks and idiosyncrasies, his strengths and his weaknesses, the one thing he doesn’t know is if Yuuri really, truly, honestly, genuinely likes him.

Whether he trusts him at all.

Victor was always told that he has a knack for getting ahead of himself. Full steam ahead. No holds barred.

But waiting is boring.

When Phichit hums, Victor startles, afraid that Phichit heard all of that. But Phichit doesn’t comment on it, so Victor relaxes a little.

“I know you didn’t technically mean to, but thanks for getting my mind off of things.”

“Oh, um,” Victor replies eloquently. “You’re welcome.”

“I really thought I would lose him. Like, seriously this time.”

Victor is scared Phichit will start crying again; he shifts uncomfortably in his seat, wishes he could discreetly pull out his phone and search “how to comfort a co-worker/acquaintance who’s crying.” Is Phichit okay with physical contact? Should Victor pat his back, or is that disingenuous?

Ignoring Victor’s inner turmoil, Phichit quietly continues, “I tried to convince him to use his fire, because that would’ve helped a lot, and he probably wouldn’t be in here if he did. But he was having none of it. I can’t really ask him to do that, anyway. It’ll be just like the…”

Victor pauses all thoughts and movements as he stares at Phichit’s profile beside him. “Just like what?”

Phichit turns to him, gray eyes flickering purple as he seems to probe at Victor’s mind, but Victor doesn’t let him. Not this time.

He’s thinking back to when he saw Yuuri’s files on SIB, the digital words printed on the translucent screen. The big, bold letters standing tall over the words UNAUTHORIZED. And he chances it.

“The Wildfire Incident?”

Phichit nods.

“What is that?”

“It was…” Phichit pauses as he carefully thinks about what to say next. “An actual hellfire most people here barely know the details about, and only the ones who were actually there know the full story.”

“And you were there? You know the full story?”
Phichit nods again. He doesn’t say anything as his downcast gaze focuses on Yuuri’s face, expression open and vulnerable and full of a care that Victor could never hope to understand. He figures that topic is off limits, one of those ‘ask him yourself, because it’s not my place to’ scenarios.

And Victor makes the realization, then, that he was being too rash. Impulsive. He’d thought about it for all of two weeks, but maybe that isn’t enough time to decidedly wedge himself in Phichit’s well earned place as Yuuri’s partner. That wouldn’t be fair.

Does Yuuri even want that, too?

“God, sorry. I couldn’t resist.”

“You read my thoughts, didn’t you?”

“You want to be Yuuri’s partner?”

“You want to be my partner,” Victor clarifies. “At least, I thought so. He said he wanted to that night at the bar but…” He sighs somberly, smiles tightly. “He was drunk. He says ridiculous things when he’s drunk.”

“He’s more truthful when he’s drunk,” Phichit says. Victor perks up a little at that. “If it’s what Yuuri wants, I really wouldn’t mind. But, obligatory best friend shovel talk. If you hurt him in any way I will tie thotium so tight around your schlong you’ll be crying mercy from blue balls for three-sixty-five days a year for the rest of your miserable life.”

The gulp Victor does must be audible from the damn moon. He nods his head in a show of understanding and says, “Noted. I would never hurt him.” Then as an afterthought, “Please spare my schlong.”

Victor didn’t want to get up and grab something from the vending machine out of fear that the moment he did, Yuuri would choose that specific time to wake up. But Phichit makes him, telling him that he was going crazy at hearing Victor’s stomach cry in agony every two minutes. So Victor finally caves at three in the morning.

He picks up a bag of hot chips for the sole fact that Cinderos’s picture is printed on it, and a fruit snack because Victor isn’t actually fond of hot things.

When he returns to the Medic Wing, he stops right outside of the door, because lo and behold, Yuuri is awake, and Phichit is talking to him excitedly. He sighs, but he can’t be annoyed when Yuuri is actually awake and speaking and Victor is flooded with sudden happiness.

He’s about to step forward to activate the automatic door when he hears his name.

“Victor waited here too, you know. He just stepped out to grab something to eat. He was so sure you’d wake up when he did, so he didn’t want to leave. How cute is that?”

“Victor waited till three a.m.?” He hears Yuuri respond in his beautiful, musical voice. Victor tries to make out the emotion behind Yuuri’s voice there… light? Happy? Content? He wishes he was an empath like Yuuko.

“Mhm. He liiiikes you.”

“Stop that, Phichit.”
“He likes you enough to want to be partners, even. Which, by the way, I would be totally cool with. You guys do work pretty well together when you’re both not distracted by each other,” Phichit voice is fast approaching, and Victor scrambles to get away—

It’s too late. Phichit stands there, arms crossed, smug, and Yuuri blinks from his upright sitting position on the bed behind him.

“Hi?” Victor says weakly, scandalized at being caught. He does the walk of shame into the room and sets his snacks down on an empty table.

“Hi,” Yuuri says.

“That warm welcome back to the living deserves a grammy. A moving performance right there.”

Yuuri throws Phichit a glare.

“Can I hug you?” Victor asks, his mouth moving before his brain gets the chance to think.

In the time it takes Yuuri to answer, Victor worries over whether it was out of line to ask. But then Yuuri nods, and Victor’s shoulder sink as he exhales. He walks to the bed in one long stride and wraps his arms securely around Yuuri’s torso, revels in the fact that he’s warm, well and alive, presses his nose into soft, black hair and sighs the last of his worries away.

“Well, I don’t wanna interrupt your grossly mushy thoughts, so I’m gonna go home and sleep like the dead—shit, sorry, too soon.” Yuuri unwinds himself to glare at Phichit again, to Victor’s dissatisfaction. That hug was much too short. “Anyway, call me with the good news, Yuuri! And like, if you need anything else, anything at all, I’ll run over to your apartment in a heartbeat, ‘kay?”

Before Phichit leaves, he turns to give Yuuri what Victor expects is the millionth hug, because Yuuri huffs and tells him I’m fine, Phichit, really, go home you’re sleep deprived. When he finally exits the room, Yuuri blinks up at Victor through his eyelashes. His eyes are a gem. Gleaming and lovely.

“What is he talking about?”

Victor sweats nervously. “Welcome back, m—” my love, love, love, say it you coward, you know you want to, say love, “Muffinhead.” (He feels like he can hear the entire organization groan in annoyance. Inner Victor is doing the same.)

Yuuri raises his eyebrows. “Muffinhead? Your dumb pet names are getting very bad, Victor. Are you even trying, or did Chris tell you to use that one?”

Victor’s eyes widen. “Why do you—oh, no, that day when Kenjirou…”

Yuuri smirks, triumphant, like a cat who caught the big, dumb, love-struck guy in the big, dumb, love-struck act. “I appreciate the sentiment though, don’t get me wrong. Now, what was Phichit talking about? Why does he think we should be partners?”

For a moment, Victor’s brain seems to short-circuit. This is the exact thing that’s been on his mind for weeks now, nonstop, a constant thought amidst the chaos in his head, and his brain and words are failing him now.

So he improvises. Does what he does best. The thing he probably does in his sleep.

Gush about Yuuri.

“Who wouldn’t want to be? You’re a talented hero, exemplary in every way, a real heartthrob who
can bring any villains to their knees, and you’re amazing, incredible at combat, talented—have I said that already? I’ll say it again for good measure—talented, beautiful, gorgeous, charming, cute, dazzling, lovel—”

“Stop!”

Yuuri’s face is on fire. His hands, are literally on fire. He’s burning a hole through the white sheets that he’s clutching onto, and he doesn’t seem to notice. “Please stop. I’m not that great at all. You’re getting your hopes up for no reason.”

Victor smiles, small and tender. “How are you this amazing, top hero, yet unable to see how amazing you really are? Where does your confidence come from?

“I have confidence that I can contain my powers when the time calls for it,” Yuuri answers.

And it’s… not the answer Victor is expecting. All these years, he’d known Yuuri as this self-confident hero who had the ability to wield fire, one of nature’s most untamable elements, like it’s natural to him, and Victor saw him as amazing for it. “Hold on, that’s all? That’s what you do? What about controlling it?”

Yuuri looks genuinely puzzled when he says, “It’s fire, Victor. Have you ever tried to control fire?”

“Have you?”

Yuuri seems thrown off by that. He stammers and stutters before replying. “O-of course I have!!”

“Really?” Victor presses skeptically.

Yuuri chews on his bottom lip instead of answering. His eyes are turned down, the red of his cheeks fading underneath Victor’s curious gaze.

“Who trained you? How were you trained?”

“I… I was mentored and trained under Celestino Cialdini, who’s hero alias was Chin-meister, and I learned to contain and suppress my fire so I’d do the best I can to save people without hurting them in the process.”

Victor takes a seat beside Yuuri on the bed, one leg on top of the thin mattress and the other dangling over the side to face him. His hands hover in the air between them, and he thinks on whether this will be okay, whether Yuuri will pull away. He thinks, fuck it, a moment later as he cups either side of Yuuri’s face in his hands and makes Yuuri look back up at him. “Yuuri, I am not messing with you when I say that you are incredible. If there’s anyone who can learn to tame a troublemaking flame, it’s you. Trust me on this, I’m living, breathing proof.”

“You’re not a troublemaking—well…”

Victor frowns and looks at him impassively. “Seriously, Yuuri. You’re amazing as is, but you have the ability to be even better. A hero never stops learning, like you said, right?”

“I can’t believe my own words of wisdom are backfiring on me like this,” Yuuri mutters, but he’s smiling.

“Instead of containing it, why not let the fire do what it does best?”

Yuuri stops smiling. His teeth start attacking his lips again. Victor chances the thought of kissing
Yuuri every time he does that, wonders if he’ll love the sensation of chapped lips, knows that he will, because they’re Yuuri’s.

(But right, right. They’re having a serious discussion. Now isn’t the time.)

“I can’t…” He says quietly with a crestfallen expression.

“Wildfire Incident?” Victor asks.

Yuuri snaps his eyes back up again, like he’s scared, fearful, as though that’s the last thing he wants to be discussing right now. It’s this great big organization secret that Victor wants in on the more it’s brought up. “How do you know about that?”

“I saw it listed as unauthorized in the SIB system,” Victor says vaguely, and doesn’t press further. Now doesn’t seem like a great time to find answers. And besides, Yuuri isn’t obligated to tell him when Victor himself won’t reveal his big secret, too.

Yuuri sighs. “Well, Victor, thanks for your words and all, but this won’t help me become a better hero. I’m doing okay as I am.”

“How do you know if you don’t try? I could help you, you know.”

“You think becoming partners will help?” Yuuri sounds unconvinced. Victor makes it his mission to convince him.

“The best thing about being a villain is the ability to use your powers with reckless abandon.”

“You’re telling me to become a villain?!?” Yuuri squeaks.

Victor waves his hands in the air in dismissal. (The thought of a villainous Cinderos is an amusing one, but it’s also a little appealing…) (He’s very, very glad Phichit has gone home.) “No, no, no. I mean use your powers like a villain.”

“Uh?”

“Stop trying to contain it. Trust yourself, and let it go. Control it. In other words,” Victor can’t help himself. He tries to say it with a poker face, but he’s already cracking before the words are out of his mouth. “Make the fire your bitch.”

“Victor!” Yuuri laughs into his hand, wheezing that it hurts to laugh, and it’s such a nice, infectious sound.

“I’m serious!”

When Yuuri finally stops, wiping tears from his eyes, he says, “I guess Yakov was right. You do have something to add by being here.”

Victor stares at Yuuri cautiously. “So you’ll…?”

“Yes,” Yuuri smiles as he nods. “Yes, I’ll be your partner.”

Victor could pass out from the happiness he feels. He probably will from the roller coaster of emotions he’s felt today alone. He’s full with them, overflowing, and awed at the fact that one person can make him feel so many things at once.

He wants to keep Yuuri close, and never let go.
There’s something nice about being in Yakov’s office and knowing that it’s not because Victor has broken fifty rules again.

It’s probably a bit much, then, that he brings Makkachin into the office too, but he didn’t get the chance to give his dog her evening walk after last night’s events, and walking to the organization seemed like the best time to do it.

Yuuri told him to leave her in the lounge with Phichit, that it would be a bad idea to bring her along, all while Yuuri pet and cooed at her during the elevator ride up.

He hopes Yakov won’t twitch his eyes out.

“And you’re okay with this, Yuuri?”

“Yes, sir,” Yuuri replies.

“I see.” Yakov makes a grunting sound, which Victor guesses is his thinking grunt, though it sounds a lot like his content grunt too. “Then, Victor, you will help Yuuri fix his controls with his powers. I agree that you can better yourself, and this is a good opportunity to do so, Yuuri.”

“Oh, the student becomes the teacher,” Victor says cheekily. Yuuri lightly elbows him in the rib.

“And Victor, you can stand to learn some self-control. You’re a hero now, act like it,” Yakov says. Victor sighs. “Yes, sir.”

“I’m serious, Victor. This is not training, this is a chance to grow. If there’s anyone who can reign your unwieldy attitude towards rules, it’s probably Yuuri. Use your time wisely.” Yakov taps some things on the screen in front of him. Victor can see his eyebrows twitch again when Makkachin whines, and Victor quiets her with pats to the top of her head. “You will work together for three months. That will be subject to change should no significant improvements are made.”

“Yes, sir, Mr. Feltsman,” Yuuri says. “Thank you, sir.”

Victor knows that he’ll spread Yakov thin, but he thinks Yakov deserves a proper gesture of gratitude for putting up with Victor’s antics and outlandish ideas. He leans over the desk, places his hands on Yakov’s shoulders, and kisses the man on either cheek. “Thank you, Yakov.”

Yakov looks stunned, and Victor would be lying if he said he weren’t delighted by that. Then Yakov grunts in acknowledgement—his thinly veined happy grunt—and tells them that they’re dismissed.

“I’m letting you keep your dog in the building, but do not bring her into my office again.”

“Sure,” Victor says before closing the door behind them.

“You… really love playing with fire, don’t you?” Yuuri asks him as they step into the elevator. He bends down on one knee to ruffle Makkachin’s fur, and Makkachin happily obliges him. Victor smiles at the precious display.

Victor opens his mouth to answer. Closes it. Smiles.

Yuuri shakes his head in something like mock horror. “Don’t. Please. I swear to god, Victor—”

“I must be a pyromaniac, ’cause I love playing with your fire.”
“Stooop.”

“Your fire keeps me alive, Yuuri.”

“I didn’t come back to life for this,” Yuuri says through giggles as Makkachin licks at his face. Infectious. He’s addicted to the sound like a pyromantic is addicted to fire.

The sound of Yuuri’s laughter is gorgeous, gorgeous, gorgeous.

And Victor is in love.

Chapter End Notes

once upon a time this was a dumb, simple au that i started past 1am on a saturday.

hahahaaaaaa

(pls don't tread on me)
This isn’t even my final form

Chapter Summary

A lesson in powers by Yuuko, some backstory that isn’t the one you’re looking for (yet), and Yuuri and Victor work some things out. Or at least, attempts at working things out are being made.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

“I’m going to go and see Yuuko to thank her,” Yuuri says when they walk into SUCC that day.

“Will she be here?” Victor asks. “That wing never seems to be opened.”

“Of course she will. Yuuko is always here. She just tends to stay in there in case she’s needed, but in the off chance that she isn’t there and there’s some sort of emergency, she usually comes in.”

They walk towards the sterile metallic doors that leads to the Wing, but Victor doesn’t step in front of them yet, because there’s two separate voices speaking on the other side. Victor can’t quite make them out when they’re this far from the entrance. Yuuri seemingly doesn’t take note of that as he continues walking forward until the doors slide open.

Sara’s voice drifts out into the hallway as Victor follows Yuuri inside. “I wish I could tell him without fear that he’ll do something rash, you know?” She’s telling an empathetic Yuuko, who’s nodding her head while rubbing circles on Sara’s back. “Like, I know he just wanted to protect me, but this is too far—”

“Ah, Yuuri and Victor! Hello!” Yuuko greets them.

Sara stops speaking when they enter, and she looks from Yuuri, to Victor, and back again, then hops off the chair and immediately wraps Yuuri in a tight hug. “Yuuri! I’m so glad you’re okay! When I heard that you were here last night I freaked out and thought the worst.”

“I’m, um,” Yuuri is flushing from the shock of the sudden hug as he awkwardly wraps his arms around Sara and pats her back. “I’m okay. Please don’t worry about me.”

She steps away from him to look him in the eyes, and her expression is grim as she says, “I feel like this is my responsibility, somehow.”

“Sara, don’t be ridiculous. This is in no way your fault. I mean, you weren’t even there,” Yuuri assures her, patting her shoulder to comfort.

Victor finds this whole thing weird, and he can’t begin to make sense of what they’re implying. He debates asking for clarification—like, surely this has something to do with the fact that Shadow Knight is her brother, and the fact that even though he figured it out, that still doesn’t explain whatever big secret everyone is apparently in on. But Victor has his doubts. He’s a certified hero now, so does that make him qualified to be in on those secrets? How does he become qualified? What sort of tests does he need to go through to be considered a part of the Cool Kids Club?
Is he not a high level Cool Kid yet? If so, what level does he need in order to unlock the Big Secrets?

“Victor, you’re in absolute turmoil right now,” Yuuko says, breaking through his spiraling train of thoughts. “You’re giving me a headache.” Then, she stage-whispers in Sara and Yuuri’s direction, “Does he know?”

“Know what exactly?” Victor asks.

“The...y’know…” Yuuko says vaguely. Victor looks at her, confused, and Yuuri and Sara share matching expressions, so she continues with gesturing hands and fumbling words. “The uhhhh. The, gh, you know. Hadow-say Night-kay’s Dentity-um-ee-ay? That sounds off…”

“Yuuko, Pig Latin isn’t exactly hard to figure out,” Victor says.

“Ohhh,” Sara drawls when she figures it out. “Mickey’s identity isn’t a secret. But,” she turns to Victor, “I guess you should know his whole deal, since you’re with us now and all.”

Victor almost punches the air in triumph knowing that he is a part of the Cool Kids Club now, and he gets to know. He wonders what other things he can find out with this new found figurative access card. Maybe Chris will tell him about the secret pole that’s allegedly found in the HORE room if you press a series of buttons on the SIB interface there…

Yuuko pulls up two more chairs from another room for Yuuri and Victor to sit on before Sara starts.

“Okay, so. Shadow Knight is my twin brother, let’s get that one out of the way.”

Victor blinks at her, urging her to continue, but Sara doesn’t. She only stares at him, mild shock present in the way her eyebrows rise. “You’re not surprised?”

“He kind of figure it out a few weeks ago,” Yuuri says. “Not that it’s hard to. You two look alike, and he doesn’t even wear a proper mask. Those Cyclops Glasses don’t exactly hide your eyes.”

“...Okay. Anyway, once upon a time, Mickey wanted to be a hero. It was his dream, and he was that typical kid who’d ask our parents for every comic book and every badly made superhero action figure with the lopsided faces that he laid eyes on.

“Powers usually show up anywhere between the ages five to ten, and you know how it’s rare for them to appear beyond that, so when Mickey had already gotten his, it started to become clear that I wouldn’t have any.”

“Wait a minute—” Victor starts.

“Please hold all your questions until the end, thank you,” Sara cuts him off. “Anyway, Mickey made it his business to vow to become a hero, train in this very organization, and become the best there is all so he could protect me.

“At seventeen, around the time he signed up to be a mentee, there was a terrible accident. Two very strong villains were being assholes and wrecking this area in the city that’s two blocks away from an old factory, and I happened to be hanging out there with two friends at the time. I didn’t tell Mickey where I was because I knew he’d freak out. When the attack was happening, Mickey called me to ask where I was to make sure I was safe, and I told him to stop worrying so much, I’m fine. But then he told me what was happening and I got scared because I clearly wasn’t fine. My friends and I were in grave danger.

“So Mickey ran to the factory while the heroes were fighting those two villains, and Mickey couldn’t
get anywhere near without seriously injuring himself. He shouted for the heroes to save me and my friends, because they were the only ones who could.

“Unfortunately, we were blasted off a platform that was right over a conveniently placed vat of radioactive waste. Only one of my friends were saved by the heroes. Me and the other person fell in.”

Victor gasps, enraptured by the story. (He wishes he had theater snacks.) He asks, “What happens next? Did you die?”

Sara blinks at him, says in a monotonous voice, “Yes. I died. It was so tragic. Mickey cried at my funeral and my ghost watched the whole thing happen.”

“Okay, I get it. I’m just showing my interest,” Victor frowns.

“I said no questions yet, now shush,” Sara says sternly, glaring at him with a finger over her lips. “As I was saying, we fell in. I survived and gained powers, and was immediately taken in by the SUCC family. Mickey doesn’t know this, though, because he blames heroes for the fact that they didn’t bother trying to save me. And he can’t know. Yakov and Minako fear that, now that he’s a villain, he’ll use me and sell me out to the others he’s working for.”

There’s a long pause. Victor asks, “Are you done now?”

“Yeah, I’m done.”

“Okay, so I have a lot of questions. How were you not born with powers? Powers are genetic, right? Or, sometimes they’re gained from lab experiments, too, yes?”

Yuuko hops up from the small table she was using as a chair. “Oh, Victor, you usually learn this during your mentee days, since superhero-ing isn’t something you’re just taught in school.” She claps her hand together. “Settle down, child, while I give you a very quick crash course in how powers work in twins, because it’s very interesting.”

“The mentee program includes classes?” Victor turns to Yuuri. “Why didn’t you tell me? I would’ve killed to have you as my teacher.”

“Like you would’ve spent that time paying attention. Victor, please,” Yuuri mumbles.

Yuuko pulls up a big screen the size of a whiteboard. It makes Victor feel like a student again. Using her finger, she starts drawing white stick figures against the blue screen that Victor guesses represents a pair of twins, and two more stick figures at the top to represent parents.

“Sorry, I’m no artist. My daughters inherited that one from my husband. Okay! As you already know, powers are generally inherited through the genes needed to manifest powers. The kind of powers you gain have nothing to do with the kind of powers one or both of your parents have.”

She circles one of the stick figures at the top, and draws lines around the circle to symbolism sparkles. “Having only one superpowered parent means there’s about a 40% chance that the twin offspring will gain powers.” She mimics the design on the other parent. “Having two increases those chances to 80%. Of course, powers can still show up if you had grandparents with powers and that gene skipped your parents, but those chances are very miniscule.”

Arrows are drawn connecting the parents to the two twins at the bottom now. “Let’s say this is Sara’s family tree. She had two superpowered parents, so her chances at getting powers were high. If she had gotten powers the conventional way, they would’ve worked with her brother’s in two
ways.” A bold, scratchy plus sign is added between the twins. “Addictive, meaning, they’d need to touch to activate them. Like, Shadow Knight would be able to use his black hole ability, and Sara might have used the same, but to conjure the shadow portal, they’d need to touch.” She extends the their little stick arms so they’re connected now, and draws a scribble at the bottom to depict a portal.

“They can also multiply. The black hole ability, but *stronger.*” An angry, scribbled hole is drawn in the white color that she’s using. It take up half the board. “Sometimes, twins gain completely opposing powers, too. Like fire and ice, shadows and lights, freezing time and speeding up time, etc etc.

“In Sara’s case, though, she didn’t gain any powers, and that’s very very rare in twins. I’m talking one in two million. The genes for it were there but inactive. Seeing as she had the genes in the first place, she survived the tiny 2% chance you have from getting powers from radioactive waste, and now here we are!”

By the time her long-winded explanation is over, the blue screen board is an absolute mess, and Victor can’t decipher what any of the enthusiastically made lines mean anymore. “Why do you have water powers then, and not something similar to Shadow Knight’s?”

“Because, radioactive waste doesn’t exactly give a fuck about your family ties. It’s like spinning the wheel of fortune. I could’ve ended up being a hideous teenage mutant or something.” Sara shivers at the thought of it.

“Whoa, look at the time. I have things to do, guys! Everyone out now!” Yuuko says, shooing them away with her hands.

“Wait, wait, Yuuko, I wanted to tell you something!” Yuuri says, standing up from the chair. “I wanted to say thank you, and talk to you about something else…”

Yuuko seems to get it as her lips form an ‘o’ and she nods her head. She looks at Sara before she leaves and tells her, “You can come by again later, okay?” Then back to Yuuri. “Now, what was it?”

“Um. Well.” Yuuri says nothing, and like the two of them connected at the mind, both pairs of brown eyes turn to Victor. “Can we please be alone?”

Victor is curious but… “Oh, sure. But you’re not getting rid of me that easily, Yuuri. Don’t forget about our little power training session later!” Victor reminds him. He’d been texting Yuuri about it all through the weekend, and he’s beyond excited about getting to play the teacher this time.

There’s visible gears turning in Yuuri’s head, Victor sees, the way Yuuri looks like he’s contemplating something, how his eyes sparkle in the fluorescent lights, before he steps in front of Victor, places a finger against his chest, and proceeds to coax him back towards the door.

“Of course I haven’t forgotten,” Yuuri says, and he looks up at him through the underbrush of lashes that frame his droopy eyes, and Victor nearly assumes that Yuuri is just tired. But Yuuri *bats* them, *what*—Victor can’t breath suddenly. “I’m looking forward to being in your care this time, Victor.”

The door is shut right in his face. Victor doesn’t remember being pushed out of the room.

He spends the next fifteen minute trying to remember how to use his lungs again.

✂

“Oh. My. God.”
“I—Ohh, Yuuko, l. I didn’t. I’m. That was so embarrassing,” Yuuri murmurs into the white clinic bed that he’s face down in. It’s more of a means to calm himself than it is to hide, because Yuuko can feel what he’s feeling whether he’s protected by plain white sheets or not.

“Yuuri!”

“Phichit said to take more initiative and that’s what I’m trying to do!”

(That conversation over the weekend was a whirlpool. Phichit immediately jumped to questions by asking whether they were going to be partners for real, then immediately asked if anything interesting happened, all with the wagging of his bushy brows and the cheekiness of his smile so Yuuri couldn’t try to pretend he didn’t know what Phichit was talking about.

Yuuri had told him, “I think I really like him.” And Phichit proceeded to squeal directly in his ear for ten minutes straight. No breaths in between. He was more excited than Yuuri realized he’d be.

The next hour was spent dumping questionable advice and seduction tactics into Yuuri’s lap.)

“Yuu-ri,” Yuuko squeals with delight.

Yuuri takes a chance, peeks an eye out of his comfortable sea of white sheets where he doesn’t have to face anyone, and sees that Yuuko is futilely hiding a great, big grin behind her two hands. He fails to see what’s so amusing when he’s literally going to die of spontaneous combustion in a few moments, and Yuuko’s healing tears can’t heal against that.

“Yuuri, I could still feel Victor on the other side of the door while he was walking away and he’s just about dying too. You killed him, Yuuri. You really are the crusher of men’s hearts, wow, Phichit will freak out if he—”

“No, no, no! Don’t tell Phichit anything! He’ll never let me live this down!”

“Counselor’s honor,” Yuuko promises, locking her lips with an imaginary key. “So you’re finally admitting that you like Victor?” she asks, appearing as if it’s hard to stay calm even though they’re talking about something mundane.

If it’s so mundane, though, why does the mere mention of ‘like’ and ‘Victor’ adjacent in the same sentence make him so flustered?

“I…” Yuuri is exhaling heavily as he turns his eyes to the very interesting painting on the wall drawn by her kids and, wow, she wasn’t kidding. They were pretty nice. Definitely Refrigerator Hall of Fame worthy. “I guess? Maybe. It’s getting out of hand. The butterflies have swords now, Yuuko.”

“The…” Yuuko’s brows are knitted together in confusion. “Yuuri, you’ve dated before. You know what a crush is like.”

Yuuri mumbles into the sheets, barely loud enough for Yuuko to hear, “I’ve never crushed on someone who almost tried to kill me, but yeah, sure, I suppose there’s a first time for everything.”

“Phichit told me he didn’t because he liked you? Yuuri! How did it take you so long!”

“Would you believe a villain who told you they liked you? Or that they mysteriously gave up their villainy to just, uh…” Yuuri makes vague gestures at the air, face burning as he does so. “What was it that Royal Mind Fuck said that one time? He left for….for um.” He looks to Yuuko as if she can help him remember, but she just patiently waits for him to continue, so Yuuri purses his lips and runs a hand through his hair until the words come to him, and when they do, he pauses.
Burns brighter.

Is probably causing a hole to singe through the sheets again.

He’d completely forgotten about that.

Yuuko puts a hand to her chest and heaves a long breath. “Whoa, Yuuri, your heart is beating fast.”

“He said… Victor left to chase after the person he loves? But that’s not…” Yuuri takes a deep breath to calm himself, mostly for Yuuko’s sake more than his own. His thoughts are an absolute whirlwind. “There’s no way that’s me. That’s…”

“If Phichit were here right now, I bet he’d say something like,” Yuuko clears her throat, adopts her voice into something chipper to match Phichit’s. “That had better be a joke, Yuuri Katsuki, or I swear I’ll lovingly kick your ass.”

“Wow,” Yuuri blinks at her in mild interest. “That was actually really good.”

“Thanks! I’ve been practicing my impressions. Minako says my Yakov impression is pretty good, too. Look,” she grabs a hair cap to place on top of her head—Yuuri guesses that she’s pretending to be bald, and he snickers at the detail—and Yuuko clears her throat again, makes a grimacing, displeased expression like she sucked on a lemon for a full hour before speaking. “Yura, you will not take the organization motorcycle out for a joyride or so help me I will ground you into the next century. And you can forget about being a hero in this lifetime.”

“Oh!” Yuuri claps. “That was basically him!”

“I can do Chris, too! Ahem, mon cher—”

“Nope.” Yuuri interrupts. “No. That’s enough. No more imitation games.”

Yuuko pulls the hair cap off her head and sighs. “Getting back on track here. Yuuri, I really don’t see how you’d think that what Victor feels for you is anything less than intense and grossly ardent feelings of like, and that’s putting it lightly. I’ve literally felt what he feels for you, and I’m not saying that it’s affection or any word synonymous to that, but…”

God, Yuuri’s heart can’t take this. He wants to combust. Explode. Shout into the sheets and scream about how flustered he is. To think anyone would seriously think that way about him is near unfathomable. Yuuri perks up a bit as her words, though, because something caught his attention, and he treads cautiously as he asks, “…What…what does he feel, exactly?”

“Sorry, I shouldn’t tell you. Counselor’s honor.” She does the same ‘locking her lips’ movement again and places the imaginary key in the pocket of her lab coat.

Yuuri frowns. “You aren’t even a real counselor.”

“Sure I am! Everyone comes to me for guidance and venting, ‘cause what better person to empathize with than an actual empath? I’m basically SUCC’s Unofficial Counselor. Er, the S.U.C.”

“Amazing.”

“So? Is this what you came here for? To talk about your obvious feelings for Victor?”

“Well, kind of but I—” Yuuri pauses to pout at her. “What do you mean obvious.” When Yuuko only shrugs with a sly little smile, Yuuri continues. “I wanted to ask for better advice that isn’t
Phichit’s well meaning but embarrassing ones. He told me to ‘take Victor back to my place and seduce him with pictures and videos of Vicchan’.

“Well. That certainly would work.”

Yuuri grabs the pillow that fell on the floor and clutches it to his chest, rolls around on the tiny, narrow space of the bed while whining. “Noooo.”

“Okay, then. Real advice. Communication is key. The worst thing that could happen is that Victor says, ‘no’, which is literally impossible at this point. So, really, you have nothing to lose.”

He buries his face into the pillow—it’s pancake flat and very uncomfortable, but it’s good for hiding his blush. Not great, however, when hiding his feelings are useless in the presence of an empath. Yuuri sighs into the pancake pillow.

“Okay…” he mumbles.


“Now,” Victor says when Yuuri enters the training room-turned-Arena, after changing into his workout clothes. “Let us begin, my dear student.”

Yuuri is only just figuring out how bad this is. Not the need to level up his powers, but the fact that he’ll be working with Victor to do it. And that means spending more time with Victor. Looking at Victor. Being close to Victor. Having the constant thought that I actually like Victor, Victor, Victor on the forefront of his mind every time Victor says something.

A distraction.

An awful, terrible, bad, horribly corny, sweet, nice, kind, friendly, handsome, helpful…

Yuuri loses his train of thought.

This feels so sudden, except no, if Yuuri really admits it, this was months in the making and he’s only fully acknowledging it now.

He’s going to lose his damn mind if he doesn’t say something soon.

“What are we doing, then, Professor Nikiforov?”

Victor seems caught off guard by the name, pausing in whatever hand movement he was about to perform to glance at Yuuri. And he’s… is he blushing? Yuuri always assumed the red on his nose and cheeks were due to the ice, but hindsight is twenty-twenty, like they say.

(He can get Victor to blush? Him? What?)

“We, ah. First, we’ll try some meditation.” Victor sits down, legs crossed, on the padded ground and waits for Yuuri to do the same.

Once Yuuri sits, he asks Victor, “And how is meditation suppose to help me control my fire?”

“Would you like the truthful answer or the white lie?”

Yuuri raises his eyebrows and smiles, small and amused. “Surprise me?”
“I know exactly what I’m doing.”

“So you have no idea what you’re doing.”

Victor rubs at the length of his thighs as he shrugs sheepishly. “No. I found an article online that was titled, ‘How to Unlock Your Powers’. I thought it might have some useful tips, even if they’re mostly nonsense. At the very least, this is a good way to get to know each other better as hero partners.”

Yuuri nods and hums. He’s still not too sure about any of this, or that this will help him in any way, but he’s willing to give it a shot. “So we just close our eyes and relax, right?” he asks as he does just that.

“Right,” he hears Victor say. He peeks his eyes open to see if Victor has closed his own eyes, but when he notices Victor’s piercing blue gaze looking directly at him, examining him like an art piece, he quickly shuts them again. Then Victor says, “focus on your breathing. Don’t think about anything besides the way your chest rises and falls,” in a low, rumbly voice that Yuuri can admittedly sleep to.

“So do you do this a lot?” Yuuri asks.

“Mhm,” Victor responds. “I used to, when my powers first manifested and I sucked at controlling them. Yakov made me sit in my room to relax everyday after I turned his swimming pool into a jagged ice rink by accident.”

At the imagery of that, Yuuri laughs a little. “So you’re positive that this will help me, since it helped you with your ice?”

“Well, elemental powers are fundamentally the same, right? They require a great deal of confidence to wield. I know that much.”

“Wait,” Yuuri opens his eyes to find that Victor’s are closed. He looks calm this way. It’s refreshing. “Are yours controlled through emotions too?”

“Kind of, but not to the same degree as yours. My powers will work no matter what I’m feeling. How well it works depends on my emotions, though. That’s just the tip of the iceberg…” A pause. “Pun not intended.”

Yuuri huffs a breath, gives Victor a look.

“Don’t look at me in that tone of voice,” Victor says.

Yuuri narrows his eyes and smushes his lips together to keep from laughing.

“What about you? How does your power work? Is there more to it than emotions? Does your infrared vision hurt your eyes?” His face lights up when he asks, peering at Yuuri like a child seeing the world for the first time. It’s kind of endearing. Cute. (Yuuri’s heart doesn’t know how to handle this.)

“Um. That’s...that’s hard to answer in a short way. Yes? And no, it doesn’t hurt.”

“What more is there to your fire?” he asks.

Yuuri contemplates answering that. It’s something that only Phichit, Minako, and Yakov know. Something he doesn’t exactly tell people. Something hidden from the entire world even, but he figures it can’t hurt to give Victor a snippet of the info. He doesn’t have to share any of the uncomfortable parts, right? “The fire you see...isn’t even my final form.”
“Oh?”

“Yeah… It’s—it’s red like most fires tend to burn. But if I try hard enough, I can manage orange and white flames, too. Blue is theoretically possible, but I’ve never conjured that color before.”

“Ahh,” Victor says in genuine interest. “Oh, I’ve never seen anything from you besides the red.”

“It’s not something I try to do often, really. It takes too much concentration to form them, anyway.”

“Well,” Victor moves to plop himself a few centimeters in front of Yuuri, their meditation session long forgotten in favor of talking. Yuuri feels too wound up now to even consider focusing on his breathing to relax. Not when Victor’s knees are brushing up against his. Not when Victor is looking at him like that. “It would take a lot of concentration if you don’t use it enough. Practicing makes your powers become second nature, right?”

Yuuri nods.

“That’s another fact that’s the same across all elemental powers. See, I know a thing or two about this.”

“Mm, but I still don’t see how this is going to work out. Sure, I can practice that, but…”

Victor, always always always full of surprises, slides his hands along Yuuri’s arm to take his hand, and Yuuri expels the last bit of the breath he has in his lungs.

He doesn’t breathe.

Can’t breathe, when Victor does something Yuuri is sure he hasn’t done before—gingerly lace their fingers together, entwined like a bow, and the present is the soft, encouraging smile that’s on Victor’s face, and Yuuri’s heart in set on fire.

“All it takes is a bit of confidence, Yuuri. You have every right to be confident in your amazing abilities.”

Yuuri’s brain is a trainwreck mantra of confidence, confidence, concentrate, concentrate, don’t don’t don’t, because he’s getting unbelievably flustered, and his heart is beating fast enough to shoot off into the sun, and he doesn’t want to accidentally push Victor away again because he doesn’t have a handle on his raging emotional hell he calls his fire.

“See? This is just the first step.”

“What?” Yuuri practically squeaks. “You’re doing this on purpose?”

“Partly self-indulgence, actually,” Victor says casually, like he isn’t two second away from making Yuuri’s heart burst and causing his fire to ignite. He’s using Yuuri’s weakness against him. Unbelievable. “Conjure your fire, Yuuri.”


“Just do it.”

Yuuri tugs at his hand, but Victor’s grip is tight. “You’ll get burned, Victor. Let go.”

“No.”
"Victor."

He’s just smiling like the thought of getting burned is the most entertaining thing in the world. Yuuri would very much like to if it means wiping that smug look off Victor’s stupid, beautiful face.

But then Victor leans in close, sliding his other hand along Yuuri’s cheek, which is, oh, familiar, but Yuuri is burning with the effort of trying not to freak out over the soft touch. It’s nearly a step away from the cliff dive into too much, too much, too much.

“Concentrate, Yuuri,” Victor says.

(He cannot breathe.)

“Concentrate,” Victor reiterates as his fingertips ghosts over the line of his jaw and slide across his—Oh. Oh, god. That’s his bottom lip, what the f—“No one in the whole world knows your final form, Yuuri. Won’t you show it to me?”

Yuuri tries.

He tries so hard.

(Oh, my god does he try.)

But it’s too much, too much, too much.

The word concentrate is a small, unassuming thing in the back of his head, and all he can think of now is to not burn away the palm of Victor’s hand as his red flame ignites, eyes closed tight, hand squeezing, because he doesn’t want to see the aftermath.

“Ahh—”

“I’m sorry! I said to let go! What the hell, Victor, are you asking to get burned?!” Yuuri frantically babbles.

“No, Yuuri—”

“Are you okay? I’m really sorry, I need a better handle on my emotions but I couldn’t help it when you’re being that way, and I—"

“—Yuuri—”

“—can’t believe I did this again, god, what kind of hero am I if I can’t even do something so simple still, like it’s been over two years, you’d think I could control it by now? But I still feel like I can’t properly control my dumb emotions!” Yuuri wails. “I’m sorry, Victor, but I’ll just continue to hurt you. I’m fine with the way things are and I’ve been doing well for myself anyway and this is a waste of t—”

“Yuuri!”

Yuuri’s eyes snap to Victor, and he’s smiling—why is he smiling?—and his face is shadowed by a soft red glow.

“What?”

“Look,” Victor says, holding their joined hands up. They’re still tightly wound together, and Yuuri’s hand is very clearly on fire, but…. Victor isn’t pulling away.
Gasping, Yuuri looks from their hands to Victor and back again. “How are you doing that?”

“I’m not doing anything. This is all you, Yuuri.”

“Really?” he says in disbelief, slides his hand away, feels the way the temperature seems to drop in his hand, and watches in shock as his fire collapses in the center of his palm, a small, red thing that danced around Victor’s hand a moment ago. He finally gets it, what Victor means, and he breathlessly says, “I didn’t know I could do that.”

“Of course you can. That’s controlling your fire.” Victor is looking at him with a sort of dandelion softness that Yuuri can probably melt himself in. And Yuuri makes the realization that, he’ll be confident enough for the both of them. “I was just expecting you to not ignite at all out of your intrinsic need to protect people, but this is more than I could have expected. It’s almost as if you’ve done this before.” Victor smiles at Yuuri like he’s proud of him and this teeny, tiny accomplishment. “You’re more amazing than you give yourself credit for.”

Yuuri has to physically shake his hands to put out his fire, because simmering it down on its own is impossible when the blush won’t leave his damn face. “Thank you,” he says, his voice timid and shy. He sounds ridiculous to his own ears, because he’s never this meek. Hates it, in fact. The feeling of sounding weak.

But Victor makes him feel weak.

He always has, in hindsight.

The meaning of that just happened to change underneath Yuuri’s nose, and he was too far in his head to make the connection.

Yuuri gazes at Victor’s sparkling blue eyes, down at the hand that’s now loosely gripping his wrist, and he takes a breath. Now or never.

“Victor.”

“Hm?”

“I need to tell you someth—”

The door to the training room opens.

Phichit walks in.

“You guys, Minako wants to… Uh.”

Yuuri gives Phichit a desperate look that he hopes says why? followed by please leave?

“I clearly interrupted something here. But this is super important. She wants everyone to meet in the HORE room in a few minutes for an emergency meeting. You guys can get back to your love confessions when the meeting is over.”

“Phichit!”

Phichit sticks his tongue out and leaves the room before Yuuri can do something, like throw the nearesting object at his retreating back.

Victor seems to have missed the last part of what Phichit said because he’s staring off into space while he thinks out loud. “Phichit would be a pretty big help in our training, I think…”
“Victor?”

“Ah, sorry, what did you want to tell me?” Victor smiles, easy and reassuring, urging Yuuri to continue.

Yuuri opens his mouth to just say it, then closes it. Opens. Closes. He feels like a damned goldfish. Eventually, he decides that the determination has sapped right out of him. “I’ll tell you some other time.”

每个人都在。克里斯，萨拉，JJ，正在训练中的英雄，以及亚科夫，他坐在圆桌的最上位，与美奈子坐在一起，还有那熟悉的芯片在桌子中央旋转的全息图。

“我们无法解读C.E.的含义。也许它是这些芯片的个人密码名称。但是，我们确实知道E.W.是曾经失踪，但现在活跃的恶棍的名字。她是我们三个恶棍之间突然结盟的幕后推手”，美奈子宣布。

“那么？是谁呢？”JJ说。“请不要让我们悬而未决！

“它…”一个戏剧性的停顿。“翡翠女巫。”

整个房间都静了下来。沉默跟随。Yuuri看着桌子周围困惑的脸，问，“是谁？我们不认识她。”

“翡翠女巫。她的M.O.涉及在幕后工作，让别人代替她做脏活。”

“我从未见过她在SIB系统”，萨拉指出。“如果她是个大坏巫婆，为什么不在那里？”

“因为她喜欢不在网上，所以我们对她了解很少”，美奈子解释。“我们只有猜测她的能力是什么，甚至。如果我们有，她最接近的是，她有一些可以控制人们为她工作的力量。”

“所以…思维控制？”萨拉猜测。

“不是思维控制。她的受害者总是清楚的，而且她通常针对拥有超能力的人。思维控制对他有超能力的人来说更难使用。”

“芯片？”Victor问。

“可能是控制思维的东西。”

“但你刚才说她没有思维控制能力。那是什么鬼？”Yuri P.说。

亚科夫瞪着他，严厉地嘶嘶地，“Yuri Plisetsky, language,”并继续解释。“她没有思维控制能力，但这些芯片含有的频率是Royal MF使用思维控制能力的频率。”

“因为它们有好几个”，美奈子补充，“翡翠必须需要它们来控制人们的大规模。例如，好几个超级英雄。”

第二声叹息像一场过度戏剧化的音乐剧一样席卷整个房间。
“It’s just speculation.”

“But your speculations are almost always right, Minako!” Phichit shouts. “We gonna be fucked if that’s true!”

“Not if we take them down as soon as possible and keep our eyes peeled.”

“Why does he get to swear and not me?”

Yakov completely ignores Yuri P. and says, “So I need all of you to remain diligent while we work to capture Emerald Witch, Shadow Knight, Scarlet Mask, and Royal Mind Fuck.” Yuri P. throws up his hands in exasperation. “You are dismissed.”

They get up to leave, but Yakov speaks again. “Except Phichit, Chris, and Yuuri. The rest of you can leave.”

“Uh oh, are we in trouble? I honestly I didn’t mean to hide the stain on the couch but Chris made me swear to—”

“You rat, you said you wouldn’t say anything,” Chris grumbles.

“There’s a stain on the couch?” Yuuri asks, afraid.

“Enough,” Yakov says. “This is not about your weird shenanigans in the lounge.” Then he whispers into Minako’s ears, “Remind me to order a new one later this week.”

“Now, I’ve called all of you here as my most trustworthy heroes, and this organization’s top three.” Yakov pauses, regards them with careful eyes. Watches the way they fidget under his scrutiny while they wait impatiently for him to continue. “We may have a traitor amongst SUCC.”

Phichit and Chris gasps theatrically.

“How do you know?” Yuuri questions slowly. “And who is it?”

He doesn’t mean to, but his mind immediately lands on one person without having to think about it. But that can’t be right. Not when he wants to help Yuuri be the best hero he can be out of the sudden goodness of his heart. Not when he brings him coffee in the mornings. Not when he only uses dumb pick-up lines now to solely get Yuuri to laugh because he knows it works and Yuuri can’t help himself. There’s no way. No way.

“It’s not Victor, is it?” Phichit asks, because of course he’s reading Yuuri’s mind and saying what Yuuri can’t ask out loud. It’s probably written all over Yuuri’s face in big, black, bold sharpie.

“We’re not ruling him out, but we cannot pin it on him either,” Minako says. “During the fight with Shadow Knight yesterday, Victor says that Shadow Knight vaguely mentioned Kenjirou. He said, ‘cheap fansites run by naive kids’.”

“Rude,” Chris says.

Yuuri gasps this time, softly but with feeling, because that’s not something that anyone should know, much less a villain. A mentee’s details as the mentee of a superhero is always kept under lock and key since they don’t possess the proper training to defend themselves should a villain attempt an attack.

“It could be Victor. But it may very well be Sara, out of guilt of keeping her secret from her brother.
Or perhaps Kenjirou. Maybe he accidentally let some information slip. That would be the best case scenario, but we must assume the worst until this Emerald Witch business is solved,” Minako explains.

Yuuri’s skin starts crawling. Tiny parasites underneath goosebumps. He glances at Yakov’s face like it’s meant to be some sort of solace, a reassurance, and he finds that it’s indecipherable.

He tries to keep the rose-colored glasses he’s been wearing from falling.

But it’s slowly shattering.

“Hey,” Phichit whispers, squeezing his shoulder. “We don’t know the details yet. That might not be the case, okay? Have a little faith.”

Faith seems impossible when the timeline clicks this conveniently. Victor enters, Shadow Knight comes into the scene, nearly kills Yuuri, and now this?

But Victor has been so genuine all this time. There’s no way he can be the traitor (but he was before). A double-crooser (he’s an ex-villain). A liar.

(No way, no way, no way.)

It could be the others. It could be Sara, although Yuuri hopes not. She’s too nice, a good friend, and she’d never sell them out like this out of fear of endangering them all. Yuuri has no doubts about that.

Yuuri hopes it’s just a case of Kenjirou accidentally spilling information online. That would be easier to deal with. At least in that case, no one realizes who he is outside of his fanpage.

It can’t be Victor. It can’t be.

“You’re dismissed. For real this time,” Minako says. “Remember, keep your eyes peeled. And don’t tell this to the others until we’ve cleared everyone in the organization.”

(No way.)

Chapter End Notes

WOW sorry for the lengthy wait!! i had to physically stop myself from writing this to focus on finishing my rough draft for a big bang event i’ve joined, and i’m preparing to move back into my dorm in uni. that’s already a stressful disaster and the semester hasn’t even started yet;;; but writing this series is a really good stress reliever, if only temporary ♥
i made a small change to a tiny detail in the story! the ~mysterious~ initials E.W. and M.H. are now E.W. and C.E. (i went back to change that in the two times that was mentioned before). trust me when i say that this change is 100% necessary. i can't say why, though. it_is_still_a_mystery.mp3.

*the plot thickens*
Chapter Summary

Phichit and Yuuri work together to find out if Victor is the traitor. Things go wrong, as usual.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Yuuri walks into Yakov’s office, sinking into the Cushions of Apprehension™, radiating so much worry it shakes him a little in his chair. He hasn’t been able to stop thinking about the whole traitor business since it had been announced the previous day, and Yakov and Minako are already working to weed out where the information is being leaked.

He hasn’t gotten the chance to properly speak to Victor after that dramatic reveal, and right now, he’s not sure he wants to. Not when he’ll look at Victor and see Flash Freeze in all his annoying, smirking, menacing-eyed glory, but also see Victor and think about his crush that’s more than a crush, and he’ll be so conflicted he’ll freeze in place.

Phichit is in here, leaning over the desk beside Yakov, who’s sitting in his high and mighty chair that oozes seriousness and no funny business. Phichit has his hands curled around a glass of water, and he thrusts it in Yuuri’s face.

“Here,” he says, “You’re gonna need this.”

“Um. Okay,” Yuuri replies, unsure, as he grabs the glass tentatively. He has no idea why he’ll need water, but he trusts Phichit enough to know that whatever they’ll be discussing here, it’ll end up being a necessity.

“Drink up, Yuuri. Hydrate yourself. You seem tense,” Phichit says. He seems oddly serious, big brows knitted, lips in a thin line, fingers tapping his cellphone, which sits on the desk along with a bunch of seemingly important papers. Yuuri doesn’t like this situation at all. He only starts drinking out of fear that he’ll pass out from the anxiety of it.

“Oh, Yuuri spit takes. Full waterfall at the wall, right underneath the stock photo portrait of city skylines Chris had gifted Yakov ages ago.

He hears a camera shutter.

“Uh?” Yuuri wheezes, coughing into his fist. “Phichit, what the hell! Why!”

Phichit is snickering into his hand as he takes pictures of Yuuri, and Yuuri is not amused. “Sorry Yuuri! I needed a good picture of you doing a spit take for this year’s funniest hero photo entries!”

So that explains why he was asked to come here in full costume, too. Yuuri frowns loudly.
“The awards aren’t for another two months!” Yuuri looks at Yakov for help, and Yakov is pointedly looking away like he was in on this.

The man coughs into his hand. “There’s an office make-over prize involved and it would be great for the organization. Apologies, Yuuri.”

Great for the organization my ass. Yuuri feels like Victor when he places both hands against his chest, feeling betrayed and played by his best friend and boss. “I can’t believe this. You called me in here for this?” The Cushions of Apprehension™ suddenly don’t feel as terrifying as they should.

“No, actually. I’m being serious. We need you to go to Victor and—”

“No, no, no, no, no!” Yuuri shakes his head vehemently, “I’m not seducing Victor! What the heck! We haven’t even—! Um. We haven’t.” Yuuri’s mind is back tracking, tripping, stumbling all over itself. Yakov blinks at him, and Phichit smiles like some sort of all-knowing, unfairly omnipotent deity. Yuuri huffs. “I’m not doing that.”

“Yuuri, we don’t need you to seduce Victor,” Yakov assures him. Yuuri says in relief, sinking into the too-soft cushions. He almost feels like he’s being swallowed. “We are going to use you to access his mind so we can see if he’s made contact with any villains in the past few weeks.”

“And we’re using Phichit for that?” Yuuri asks, looking from Yakov, to Phichit, and back again. “And how exactly am I going to help? You can’t just access Victor’s mind and memories when he constantly has them guarded.”

“Ah!” Phichit blurts as though he’s been waiting for Yuuri to mention it. He walks over to Yuuri’s chair and sits himself on the armrest, placing his arms over Yuuri’s shoulder. “That’s where you come in, my dear, wonderful, best friend in the whole world who would still love me no matter what!”

Yuuri side-eyes Phichit suspiciously. He doesn’t trust this at all.

“As you know, there’s only two ways to get into someone’s mind. Sedation, or coercion.”

Yuuri gawks at him, then at Yakov. Back to Phichit. “You want me to what now?”

“No, silly, it’s not what you think. You’re not gonna tranquilizer dart him in the ass when he isn’t looking or something. We’re not villains. Anyway, as you also know, the only time Victor drops his mind guard is when he’s thinking gay thoughts about you.”

The burn that sears Yuuri’s cheeks just then could slow roast marshmallows, which is exactly what he needs to stuff his mouth with to drown and leave. This is embarrassing. But Yuuri is curious. He can’t help asking. “He… he does?”

“Oh, yeah! You didn’t know? That’s what I meant when I said you two had something in common.”

Yuuri buries his face in his hands and makes a weak noise. Embarrassing, embarrassing, embarrassing.

“Phichit, please get to the point,” Yakov’s gruff voice says.

“Right! So, Yuuri, you need to seduce—I mean, distract Victor with your cute face long enough for me to invade his memories and see if he’s chillin’ with the villains.”

“This is the easiest method we could come up with, Yuuri,” Yakov chimes in. “Will you aid us?”
Yuuri chews at his bottom lip until it’s red with worry. “I don’t know. This feels like a crime, somehow…”

“It isn’t a crime if it’s for the greater good of SUCC! Besides, do you really think this would work if we ask him? I’m not saying he’s the traitor, but if he’s the traitor, and we give him a piece of paper that says, Are you spilling info about us to your friends? Check ‘yes’ or ‘no’, not only will he check no, he’ll know we’re onto him and it’ll become impossible to track.”

Phichit is right—

“Oh course I’m right.”

“Don’t interrupt my internal monologue, please.”

“Sorry.”

*Of course*, he’s right. Any common sense Yuuri has would lead him to that same conclusion. It’s best to get this out of the way before it becomes a bigger problem later. Yuuri supposes that he’s just afraid of the possible outcome. But he hopes, hopes, *prays* that Victor is trustworthy after all.

“Oh, cool, Yuuri is in!”

Yuuri frowns. “I didn’t even get to say it.”

Phichit sighs, gestures with his hands. “Are you in?”

“Yeah, I’m in.”

“This the plan,” Yakov begins...

✂

Yuuri could probably burn a straight line in the mats with how he’s pacing back and forth on them. Phichit tells Yuuri to chill about four times.

“You’ll be fine, Yuuri! Just act like it’s one of your usual dates—whoops, sorry, ‘training sessions’,” Phichit adds, air quoting teasingly with the last two words.

Yuuri rolls his eyes. “Easy for you to say. You’re not here being purposely deceitful. This still feels *wrong*.”

“Yuuuuuu,” Phichit drags, exasperated, rolling *his* eyes twice as hard like this is some sort of competition. “Be a little chaotic good for once. Remember, if SUCC goes down, it’s probably a matter of time before every other org out there goes down, too.”

Sighing with slumped shoulders, Yuuri nods his head, conceding. It’ll be fine. As long as things stay according to plan, Victor won’t even know that Phichit was here and invading his mind in the first place. In and out. Simple.

But if there’s anything Yuuri has learned upon being a hero for the past few years, it’s that nothing ever happens according to plan, and that Murphy’s Law is constantly out to get him with a chainsaw. He’s practically immune to surprises at this point.

He’s doesn’t even flinch when he hears barking on the other side of the automatic doors.

“What the fuck,” he hears Phichit say from atop his perch on the second floor balcony. The plan was
to get Victor to agree to use the Arena because it would be easy for Phichit to hide behind Ion Glass. But if Makkachin is here, that isn’t going to happen. “Okay. We can work with this, it’s totally fine. Just act natural.”

Yuuri’s body moves before his brain catches up as he lays down on the blue mats and pushes his hair out of face and sits there like a dumb, glorified magazine ad. At least this way, Victor will be distracted and not suspect a thing. Maybe. Hopefully. He’s running on caffeine and baseless hope at this point in time.

He just hopes Phichit lets him live it down later.

“Yuuri!” Victor says when he steps inside, clad in a blue muscle tank, his dog’s leash in his hand and not connected to her collar. “Makkachin wouldn’t stay away from me this morning and I felt bad about leaving her home so I just had to bring her along. I hope you don’t mind… I—”

“Hi, Victor,” Yuuri greets with what he hopes is an appealing smile on his face, but it feels wobbly and unconvincing. “I’ve been waiting for you.”

His eyes are staring so hard, as if he wants to physically drink his flames to quench his thirst. “I hope I didn’t keep you waiting for too long. Makkachin made me a few minutes late, so sorry about that… Are. Is everything okay?” Victor is looking at him intensely like he’s not quite sure Yuuri is actually Yuuri, like he can’t quite look away still, and Yuuri is sweating because of it.

Act natural, act natural, act natural, distract.

“I’m just. Stretching,” Yuuri says, and proceeds to stretch his arms over his head. Then he sits up, knees to the ground, feet pushes together, and smiles fondly at the dog wagging her tail beside Victor. “I don’t mind if Makkachin joins us by the way, but what if she gets hurt? I don’t want to accidentally set her on fire…”

“I guess we’ll just have to focus on light exercises then.” Plan ruined. “We can start where we left off last time.”

“Meditate? Will I unlock secrets that way?” Yuuri asks to be playful, but he realizes a second later how suspicious that sounds. But, wait, of course it isn’t suspicious, Victor doesn’t know that they’re onto him. Not that there’s anything to be on to. This is fine. He’s fine. Yuuri is totally acting natural.

He just needs to fight his ever-present urge to look up at Phichit. At least that’s going well. The same can’t be said for how clammy his hands are getting from his nervous thoughts. He’s probably giving Phichit secondhand anxiety right now.

It doesn’t help that Victor looks so good in that dumb muscle tank that shows off his amazing biceps and his hair has that wind-blown aesthetic and his face looks flawless—

“Well, at the very least, it’ll calm help you down.” (Ha.) “We can continue getting to know each other too. I’d love to know what drove you into becoming a hero, Yuuri.”

Yuuri takes a few deep breathes to relax himself, and he nods while Victor sits down across from him, back facing Phichit. Makkachin trots over, and Yuuri runs his hands over the soft fur on her head, and she shows her appreciation by licking her slobbering tongue all over Yuuri’s cheek.

“I don’t think I’ll be able to concentrate on anything if she keeps kissing me,” Yuuri giggles. Makkachin is the calming beacon he really needs.

“Come on, girl,” Victor coos. “Let’s go over by the platform so you don’t bother Yuuri.” He stands,
and Yuuri goes rigid. Phichit is well hidden, sure, but Yuuri gets the feeling that Makkachin will notice that he’s up there.

He stands along with Victor, takes his hand—cold, like he spent the morning with his hand stuck inside Santa’s ass—and tugs him down to sit where he previously was. “It’s fine!” Yuuri blurts. “I like her company.”

“Oh...okay,” Victor blinks, confused and unsure. “But she really likes you. Are you sure? I can’t guarantee that she won’t assault you with affection.”

To keep from doing something stupid and suspect, Yuuri opts to scratch Makkachin behind her ears and listen to the comforting sound of her excited panting. “You wanted to get to know each other right? We can skip the meditation,” he dismisses, waving his hand in front of himself. This way, he won’t fidget noticeably like he knows he will.

Victor pouts his lips, crosses his arms, appearing like an overgrown child. “I can’t believe this. Betrayed by my own pet. How dare you steal Yuuri from me, Makka?”

That’s not fair. At all. How can he just say things like that and not want to die of embarrassment?

“How can you just say things like that?” Yuuri asks aloud, blush on display.

“Because it’s true! I wanted you all to myself today, Yuuri, and now Makkachin has all your attention. Look! She’s laughing at me right now!”

Yuuri has to remove his hands from Makkachin to keep from accidentally singeing her fur. Victor is ridiculous. But his heart is singing. (But it’s also guilty, because he can’t allow himself to get sidetracked by how silly and charming Victor is when this is technically an undercover mission. Things would be so much easier if he could hide under a false wig and mustache.)

He laughs anxiously. “What was it you wanted to ask me? Since we’re apparently playing a game of twenty questions now.”

“Oh, twenty questions? I’ll start!” Victor clears his throat and sits up straighter, and Yuuri braces himself for something cringe-worthy. “Do you think the moon landing was faked?”

Yuuri bursts out laughing. “What? I thought we were trying to get to know each other!”

“Okay, a more personal question then. What’s the worst thing you’ve done with a roll of toilet paper?”

Yuuri purses his lips. “Not TPing if that’s what you’re asking. I wasn’t some demon child when I was younger.”

There’s coughing in the direction that Phichit is in, and before Victor can turn his head towards the sound, Yuuri makes coughing sounds to cover it up and says, “That’s a really shitty question, Victor.” And to Phichit, shut up, thank you.

“Did you just—”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” Yuuri says innocently, looking up and away with a cheeky little grin.

“I’ll take that to mean that I’m rubbing off on you,” Victor grins right back. There’s something giddy about the way his eyes sparkle in the bright lights overhead that makes Yuuri’s heart sparkle under
the lights, too, set on fire by the heat of them. This feels wrong in some way, but god, he has it bad.

He bites at his lip to keep from whining in agony at not being able to say what he wants to. The timing of things is absolute BS.

“Okay, something serious this time. What made you want to be a hero?” Victor asks, absently stroking Makkachin’s side while she reclines beside him with adorably droopy eyes.

“I don’t really have a grand backstory,” Yuuri shrugs, eyes downcast as he twiddles his thumbs in his lap. Victor’s undivided stare feels heavy from where he’s sitting less than a meter away. “I wanted to be like the heroes that I always read about in comics. I just wanted to help people out, and use my fire for something good. Show the world that fire isn’t only something that destroys and causes a big inconvenience. It can help, too. I can help, too.”

“Yuuri…” Victor says, and Yuuri chances a glance up because Victor hasn’t said anything past that…

And everything stops momentarily. His breathing, his thoughts. His heartbeat. His brain is smog from the smoke of the residual burn on his face, because Victor looks soft. Enamored. Fond, like he’s looking at his favorite childhood toy. Yuuri can’t take this.

It was obvious, so obvious, right under his nose—or, above his head, atop his eyelashes when he has to look up at Victor—and Yuuri begins to question how he ever doubted in the first place… But.

Focus.

Now isn’t the time.

(Yuuri is in pain.)

“That’s admirable all the same, Yuuri. You want to help people and that’s wonderful. Far better than my shameless reasons.”

Victor is speaking quietly, which he almost never does, and it’s driving Yuuri haphazardly up the walls, running traffic lights and stop signs, out of control. This isn’t fair.

“And…” Yuuri has to lick his lips. His fire is practically burning him dry underneath his skin. “And what reason is that?”

“It was a family business thing. A sort of obligation, you know? When Yakov became my and Yura’s legal guardian, it was kind of expected that we would work in his organization. When my powers manifested, I knew that I’d become a hero. But.” He pauses, eyes flickering, breaking whatever relaxed trance he’s in, and Yuuri almost misses the way a frown curls his lips. He wonders if Phichit can read his mind now, if he knows why Victor is reacting that way. “After certain events happened… You’ve become my motivation to become a hero.”

Yuuri knows that, remembers what Royal Mind Fuck said all those weeks ago. But Victor keeps talking, so Yuuri keeps listening.

“You and Yura, as a matter of fact. I remembered how disappointed Yura was when…”

He stops.

Doesn’t say a word, doesn’t move or make an indication that he wants to continue.
Yuuri isn’t sure if he’s allowed to push, and he doesn’t want to.

He’s about to lean forward to place a hand over Victor’s in comfort, but he freezes when he hears an audible sound in Phichit’s direction.

Victor jerks his head back and asks, “What was that?”

“Uh,” Yuuri replies. He needs to think fast, improvise, peel Victor’s attention away and get him to focus back on Yuuri. Phichit hasn’t given a signal yet, so he doesn’t have what he needs from Victor’s mind. Yuuri grabs Victor’s face in his hands, squishes his cheeks together in a comical way that distracts him from the fact that he’s never been this bold before (and Victor seems to realize that too because now he’s blushing. They’re all blushing. This is one big red, blushing circlejerk.) And Yuuri completely loses sight of what he wants to say now, so he eloquently says, “I. Um.”

“Yuuri?”

(Wow, wow, wow, slay him, Victor’s never looked so cute.)

“Uhhhh…”

There’s another sound, suspiciously something close to scoffing, then the sound of a hand slapping skin, and Yuuri is imagining that Phichit is putting a hand over his mouth in fear.

Fear, because Victor doesn’t dismiss it that time. He stands to try and peer over the platform, and when he doesn’t see anything, and when Yuuri thinks they’ve gotten out of this scot-free, Makkachin decides that she wants to help look, too. The excitable dog runs to the metal beams and poles holding up the platform and paws at one of them, whimpering and whining to get their attentions.

Oh, no… Yuuri thinks out loud.

Phichit is slowly backing away to the automatic doors, and he’s right there, they’re sliding open—But Victor has formed an icy staircase to climb on and see Phichit clearly. He looks beyond confused, and Phichit looks beyond suspect, eyes wide, caught red-handed.

“What are you doing here?” He asks. Then slowly, “Were you here the entire time…?” Victor looks from Phichit, to Yuuri, to Makkachin bodily panting, back to Phichit.

“What’s going on.” It isn’t a question.

Oh, Yuuri wants to get sucked into the void again and stay there.

Yuuri looks down, unable to meet Victor’s piercing gaze. Phichit stays quieter than usual. He knows he should say something to diffuse the situation somehow, but he’s frozen, ability to speak withered away.

“Why has everyone been acting so odd around me lately? First Yakov, then Chris. And I thought Yuuri was being weird this entire time. But I seriously attributed that to you finally opening up… Was I wrong?”

The mere sadness in Victor’s voice is like a spearhead through Yuuri’s heart. The silence makes it worse, shoves it deeper. No puns in the world would make this situation better. Yuuri can’t tell the truth, but he doesn’t want to leave Victor hanging and second guessing. He feels stuck.
When Victor laughs, it’s a touch humorless. It sounds wrong. Wrong, wrong wrong. “I thought I was cool enough to be in on whatever secrets everyone here has, but I suppose I was wrong about that, too.”

_Ouch._ The spears _hurt._

Yuuri’s guilty eyes meets Phichit’s, and Phichit is chewing at his nails, a habit he hasn’t succumb to in ages. This is _bad._

“Come on, Makkachin,” Victor says, coaxing her away. She doesn’t seem to want to leave though; she beelines straight for Yuuri and Yuuri falls flat on his back with a yelp. “No—_Makka_, come here. You’re ruining my dramatic exit, _you traitor._”

When Yuuri finally manages to pry Makkachin away and stand, Victor places the leash on her collar and drags the uncooperating dog to the door.

He leaves, and Yuuri is struck with the realization that Victor hadn’t met his eyes the entire time.

“So,” Phichit says, cutting through the thicker-than-a-bowl-of-oatmeal silence. “That didn’t go according to plan at all.”

Yuuri crawls to the floor, lays down face first and screams into the mats.

✂

It’s one in the morning, and while Yuuri usually doesn’t sleep at this time of night because he’s caught up watching pre-recorded shows or whatever looks good on Netflix, he doesn’t sleep now because he _can’t_, not when the guilt is using his brain like a beanbag chair to jump on while banging pots and pans together and keeping him up.

He wants to sleep, very very badly, to escape these heavy, conflicting emotions, but it’s impossible when every time he closes his eyes, he sees the downcast, crestfallen, _heartbroken_ face Victor made before leaving the training room. So he sits up instead and grabs his laptop to distract himself.

Yuuri clicks the power button.

It doesn’t turn on.

He clicks again, and nothing.

Because why stop there, at making it hard to sleep, when the universe can say _Fuck You_ and remove his means of distraction. But he’s overreacting; it’s only out of charge.

His last resort is his toy poodle, normally an overactive, enthusiastic thing, who’s currently curled up in his little dog bed at the other side of Yuuri’s room because, unlike Yuuri, he actually has a decent sleeping schedule. Vicchan looks so peaceful there, and so tiny, flooding in the soft cushions. Yuuri has never been more jealous in his life.

There’s a knock at his front door. Yuuri guesses that it’s Phichit, because no one else visits him at ungodly hours like this.

He walks into the living space and perches himself against the wall next to the front door. “What is it, Phichit?”

“Can I come in?”
“Ehh…”

“I’m coming in, anyway,” Phichit announces. He shoves the spare key into the lock and lets himself in. (The spare key that Yuuri had given him for emergencies only, but leave it to Phichit to consider any tiny inconvenience an emergency and an excuse to waltz into Yuuri’s apartment. Like that time he’d come in to raid Yuuri’s fridge for food for his hamsters because he was out of food and couldn’t be bothered to go to the store a few blocks away. “It is an emergency!” he’d said. “What if Hamlet, Hamburg, and Hamsterdam died!”)

“I brought you a tub of ice cream because I figured you’d be moping and I thought that we may as well go for the full experience. All we’re missing are the sad romance movies.” Phichit holds up a grocery bag, and the “Thank You ☺ Have a Nice Day!” feels like some sort of ironic joke.

“Thank you,” Yuuri says, smiling for Phichit’s sake more than his own. He takes the bag and sets it down on the coffee table, and grabs silverware from the kitchen.

Phichit already makes himself at home, sitting cross-legged on the couch and taking the tub of Dirty Vanilla ice cream from the bag. “I wonder when they’ll start printing Cryo-Frost’s face on these,” he says.

“I bet it’ll be before the year is over. Everyone loves him,” Yuuri says. He sits down, back against the opposite armrest, and hands one spoon to Phichit. “Not that I blame them for it.”

Phichit looks at him with the spoon resting against his lip. “Are you saying you love—”

“Please, Phichit. Not right now,” Yuuri whines into the small tub.

“Okay, okay. But we can’t avoid talking about Victor.”

That’s the last thing I want to talk about right now, Yuuri thinks.

“I know it is, but we gotta address some things. It's important, okay? Good news, I promise.”

He whines again in mild interest around a mouthful of ice cream that he’d absently taken. His mouth melts it down to slush before it has the chance to give him brain freeze.

“So I know it’s completely against what Mr. Feltsman wanted, but I spoke to Victor about the traitor situation and told him exactly why we were acting the way we were this morning.”

Yuuri chokes. “You did what? You kept telling me that’s exactly what we shouldn’t be doing, and you did it yourself?!”

“Oh, no, here me out. I didn’t get the information we needed while we were in the training room, but I did get a buttload of other things that lead me to believe that Victor is the decent guy we all hoped he would be. It’s why I accidentally revealed my location, by the way. I saw some interesting things.” Yuuri wants to ask, but he lets Phichit finish. “So I took the risk and figured that it would be okay if I told him. And the risk paid off, ’cause he let me into his memories from the past three weeks.”

Yuuri’s eyes go wider than the moon. The spoon in his mouth slips away and splatters to the couch. “Really?”

“Really.”

“Seriously?!”
“Seriously!”
“He just let you—”
“He did!”
“And you just—”
“Yeah, I know right?”
“Well, what did you see?” Yuuri says more than asks; he’s floored by the news. “I’m guessing he isn’t the traitor after all?”

Phichit nods his head excitedly. “He’s clean! He hasn’t been up to anything bad since way before Kenjirou joined us, but he does have some weird bathroom habits. Like in the mornings, he spends thirty minutes on his hair alone. He stands in front of the mirror sometimes, too? For no reason at all. To admire his reflection, maybe. And don’t even get me started on what he does in the shower—”

“Okay!” Yuuri curtly interjects. “Why are you so shameless, Jesus Christ.”

Phichit waves a hand dismissively. “The important thing is that he’s cleared and you can rest easy, ‘cause I know how nervous you were around him all day yesterday and today.”

Yuuri wants to be ecstatic at the news, let it carry him to sleep so he can finally get something more than four hours, but there’s still an awful tug that sits in his chest and won’t leave.

And it’s Victor’s awful, heart-achingly sad face, and the expression that’s burned into Yuuri’s head.

“It’s fine, Yuuri. I’m sure he understands why you had to do that. He seemed okay when I explained it all to him.” Phichat pats his shoulder in consolation.

“Yeah, but… What if he doesn’t? What if he hates me for the rest of his life and wants to stop being my partner, Phichit? He just looked so upset and it’s even worse ‘cause I caused that and I feel so bad about it…”

Phichit presses a finger to his mouth and says, “Shhh. That’s just the anxiety talking, sweetie. Just apologize to him! He won’t hate you for this, trust me. That man has got it too bad to let a real org threat stain the way he thinks of you.”

Yuuri bites his lip, shuffles in his seat, doesn’t even bother denying it even though it’s his first instinct. It’s like he can’t allow himself to have good things for one day.

“You deserve the world, Yuuri Katsuki. Don’t you dare doubt that or I’ll lovingly kick your ass.”

Yuuri smiles a little. “Yuuko’s impression of you really was spot on.”

“Huh?” Phichit asks in confusion.

“Oh, it’s nothing.” Yuuri takes a few more bites of Dirty Vanilla before shyly asking Phichit, “What things did you see in the training room? What was Victor thinking?” He pauses, staring at the tub of ice cream in his hand, and he realizes that he’s been hogging it this whole time, though Phichit doesn’t seem to mind. He also realizes that it’s starting to turn to liquid faster than it should. “Are they good things?”

“Oh, boy, are they ever,” Phichit sits up straight, ready to spew all the things he’s learned, eyes shiny with the excitement of it. “Did you know that he spends a shитton of time thinking about how
amazing you are? Like *everything* about you. You’d think you were an actual angel that fell straight outta heaven. It’s *gross,*” Phichit starts with a smile.

“Really?” Yuuri says, smile small and shy and giddy. Victor is blunt to a fault, so Yuuri doesn’t even have to ask for confirmation. He’d need every hand in the organization to count the amount of times Victor calls him amazing in a day.

“And another thing. He *loves* your eyes. Like a lot. But that isn’t surprising, ‘cause that’s the first literal thing he commented on when you guys first met. If I had a dollar for every time he thought about your eyes, I could be Bill Gates’ Sugar Daddy.”

“Phichit.”

“You think I'm kidding, but it’s actually borderline obsession.”

They talk until three in the morning, the ice cream becoming a tub of milkshake several minutes ago. Phichit is blinking the sleep from his eyes; he’s not as dedicated a night owl as Yuuri, and Yuuri is eternally grateful of the fact that he has a friend who’s willing force himself to stay awake for the sake of cheering him up.

When Phichit finally leaves, Yuuri tries his hand at sleeping again, and he knocks out before his head hits the pillow.

Usually, when Yuuri dreams, they’re generally nightmare fueled, straight from hell. Burning hellfire and all of that, like some weird circumstance that comes as a Buy One Get One Free deal with the fire powers. But tonight, he dreams of swimming in oceans made of Dirty Vanilla ice cream with Victor in a cherry shaped pool floatie, Makkachin and Vicchan dog paddling in between, and both dogs are made of whipped cream and happiness.

He dreams, and thinks things will be okay.

Chapter End Notes

i've moved into my dorm, woo! sorry in advance if updates take longer than usual because of classes starting. writing has been really hard for the past week while i prepared to move back in, and it might be even harder now, but i'm sure i'll still find the time.

i still can't believe how grim things get in this story sometimes and i'm the one writing it. like, it wasn't supposed to be this way, but i got too invested and oooh boy did things get Serious.

also, i just need to say that next chapter is my absolute favorite chapter in this entire series and i can't wait to post it!
You were an addiction

Chapter Summary

Yuuri and Victor talk. And talk. And talk. And then—they don’t.

Chapter Notes

this is nearly twice the length of the usual chapters cause i got carried away aha.
eenjoy.

Yuuri feels like his life needs a narrator to say things like things are not, in fact, okay.

Because things are not, in fact, okay. At all. Not a bit.

Yuuri had assumed things were fine now. Everyone who’s in on the traitor deal seems to know that Victor has been cleared, because they’re being perfectly friendly with him, and Victor is being friendly right back. But he’s giving Yuuri the cold shoulder. And it burns.

It burns more knowing that Victor is acting that way to him and only him. It leaves Yuuri with a conflicted soup of emotions because he doesn’t want Victor to act that way towards him, but why is he unfairly singling him out as if he’s the only person who’d done this? It isn’t fair.

But maybe Yuuri isn’t trying to see things from Victor’s perspective. Or maybe there’s nothing to interpret; maybe Victor hates him now—oh, god—maybe he’s going to waltz into Yakov’s office in that ridiculous dramatic flurry of his and announce that he no longer wants to be Yuuri’s partner. Yuuri can see it now, how everyone in the org will start shunning him one by one, and soon his hero status will drop and he’ll have to live a lowly life on the streets known as the dime-a-dozen hero who’d fallen because he made the dumb mistake of doing wrong by someone who’d liked him for years and, wow, he was so mean to him, all those painful months of never taking Victor seriously, even beyond his arrival, and god, Yuuri feels like he’s sixteen again in the midst of high school drama, and this is probably dumb but Victor probably, definitely hates him now—

“Yuuri?” Kenjirou’s hands are waving in front of Yuuri’s face, and his big, brown eyes are wide with concern.

Yuuri snaps back to attention, and he feels consumed with a different kind of guilt all over again—that’s all he’s seemingly felt for the last two days, like he’s standing in mind court in front of a Neuron and Synapse Jury that’s supposed to be unbiased but secretly hates him and Your Honor Judge Brain strikes the gavel against his head every second, so hard it causes a headache, and they’re all chanting guilty! guilty! guilty! to the beat of it—

Anyway.

Yuuri forgets that he’s with Kenjirou, sitting across from each other in a coffee shop (after changing
their plans to originally meet in the lounge because he can’t stand the possibility of getting ignored again, and they’re meant to be discussing plans of Kenjirou’s eventual Hero Cram School.

Kenjirou had been cleared of possibly leaking information by accident, so that’s a bright side Yuuri can focus on.

“Are you okay?” Kenjirou asks, sitting back down in his seat. His hands are trapped in between his knees because there’s sugar packets on the table, and he’s trying so hard not to reach for more to add to the tea Yuuri bought him. Bless him.

“I’m, yeah,” Yuuri closes his eyes and shakes his head to rid it of his bad thoughts. “I’m okay. Sorry about that. What… what were you saying?”

“I was saying how I can’t wait to become a real hero and get a partner as great as Victor! You two were so awesome when you did that flying combined attack thing and made the Hash Slinger Basher slip and fall! It was sooo cool!”

Ah. So that’s how Yuuri’s thoughts sprawled. Inadvertently done in by one of Kenjirou’s fanboying spiers.

“Yeah,” Yuuri laughs nervously. He doesn’t bother mentioning the fact that their missions have been going kind of bad in the last two days. Maybe that’s because the bad hasn’t been captured on camera, and the villains aren’t worth mentioning. At the very least, Yakov hasn’t heard about that yet, so maybe it isn’t all bad. (Yuuri dearly hopes he didn’t just jinx that. He discreetly knocks underneath the wooden table.)

“At first as I kinda ehhh at the idea of more school, ‘cause like, I’m almost done with school? Or at least high school, which was hell ‘cause everyone hates everyone and everyone has that weird ‘dead inside’ attitude, but this is something I’ll actually enjoy! I’ll study everyday and pay extra attention in class and I’ll be the best student to ever student and my mom will be so proud—"

Yuuri is nodding his head in agreement at everything Kenjirou says because he doesn’t think he’ll get a chance to squeeze in a word until he’s finished talking. Kenjirou can fill the quiet with fast-moving words for at least ten minutes. Really. Yuuri has sat through it all, and he’s pretty sure that’s thousands of minutes he’s never getting back. But Kenjirou is a good kid, so Yuuri doesn’t mind it too much.

When he finally takes a break from talking to breathe, Yuuri says, “I’m sure you’ll be the best hero we’ve ever had.”

Kenjirou’s eyes sparkle like fireflies trapped in jars, and he inhales audibly, and Yuuri flies off his seat to press his palm against Kenjirou’s mouth to mute the high-pitched, ear-shattering squeal he knows is coming.

“Mmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm!!”

Yuuri doesn’t let go until he’s absolutely sure Kenjirou gets that out of his system, and he sighs and sits back down.

Kenjirou is vibrating in his seat like busy buzzing bee. “This is the best day of my life! I swear to god!”

Smiling in amusement, Yuuri says, “I thought the last seven meetings were the best days of your life?”
“They are! And this! Everything! They’re all great and nothing can top them!”

Yuuri leans over again to ruffle Kenjirou’s head. The teen smiles and preens from the attention. “I’ll be rooting for you, Kenjirou.”

✂

Yuuri sits in the lounge later that day with Phichit, and he’s sulking, he knows he is, but he can’t shake the day’s feelings away. Yuuri hates putting Phichit through that, but he’s awful at guarding his mind when it’s nothing but worry worry worry Victor worry Victor worry worry.

“Yuuriii, my brosicle. My bromeo. My brotato chips and dip. My bromo sapiens.” Phichit punctuates each dumb nickname with a poke to Yuuri’s side, right where Yuuri is ticklish, but Yuuri is nothing if not steadfastly stubborn. He crosses his arms and bites his lips and continues to sulk while thinking-yelling at Phichit to stop.

“No way, brosé. Not until we talk.”

He doesn’t answer. Yuuri just buries his face into the cushions and grumbles.

“You can’t be sad forever,” Phichit says.

“Yes, I can,” Yuuri counters.

“You have no reason to be sad, really.”

“Yes, I do.”

“Victor doesn’t hate you.”

“Yes, he does.”

A sigh. “Are you going to come out of there and talk?”

“Yes, I—wait, no, no, I’m not—”

“You said yes so now you have to!” Phichit says, tugging on Yuuri’s shoulders so he’s no longer buried in pillows like an ostrich with its head in the sand. “I’m going to start by apologizing,” Phichit begins.

Yuuri stares at him, bewildered, like Phichit has just informed him he hates cute animals to his face. “Why are you apologizing? You did nothing wrong!”

“Well neither did you, but you seem awfully convinced that someone here is to blame. And anyway, I’m the one who made you go through with this in the first place, and Victor started shunning you as a result, so if you’re gonna be mad at anyone then you can be mad at me.”

“Wh—no!” Yuuri grabs Phichit’s shoulders and shakes him like he’s insane (he is 100% insane). “I went through with it, Phichit! I knew the risk and I went along with it anyway thinking things would go okay but they never do and I guess I should’ve realized that. But I didn’t expect Victor to ghost me even after knowing why we did that and—”

And Yuuri wants to be mad at Victor for making Phichit spew crazy talk, for ignoring him without a reason, for refusing to sit in the same room, and he wants to be mad at himself for agreeing, but it’s irrational. There’s no one to blame. It’s all just one great, big, unfortunate clusterfuck that Yuuri wants to avoid dealing with for as long as possible, if possible.
Phichit raises his eyebrows at Yuuri, having read all of his thoughts. “See? If you’re so certain that I couldn’t control what happened, why won’t you cut yourself some slack too?”

Leave it to Phichit to call Yuuri out on his discrepancies.

“And FYI, you’re totally allowed to be mad at Victor,” Phichit says, patting Yuuri’s shoulder. “I probably would be to.”

“I can’t be mad at him though,” Yuuri sighs. “As much as I want to, I can’t. I just wish I knew what he was thinking.”

“I tried getting into his mind but it’s like, locked with some maximum security level stuff. Barbed wires, electric fences, laser alarms, the whole thing.”

Yuuri starts sulking into his seat again, sliding his back down like he plans to get sucked into the cushions, and Phichit grabs his shoulders and shakes him so he doesn’t slip bonelessly onto the ground. “Talk to him! Work things out! And in case things end badly I’ll be here with open arms ready to console you and take you back as my partner, ‘cause really, do you know how awkward it is to shout ‘Hard-on’ every other sentence during a mission?”

Biting his lip to keep from smiling—because he’s brooding damnit and Phichit isn’t allowed to be funny, what the hell—Yuuri responds with, “I don’t envy you at all.”

Just then, the doors to the lounge open, and Victor walks in. It’s the first time Yuuri has seen him in two days excluding missions. And that thought kind of hurts.

It’s hurts even more when Victor looks over in their direction, opens his mouth to say something, closes it again when his eyes land on Yuuri. Something indiscernible flashes across his face, and Yuuri has no time to read it before it’s wiped away.

Literally.

Victor wipes out. Trips over the leg of the wooden table. Falls on the floor.

Yuuri does not laugh. He presses his lips together like glue as Victor sheepishly gets up again.

Phichit nudges Yuuri’s side and looks from him, to Victor, and back again, raising his brows and gesturing vaguely, telling Yuuri to get on with it.

But—, Yuuri thinks.

Phichit swipes his hand in front of his neck. No buts.

Yuuri sighs. Opens his mouth to speak. “Vic—”

The SIB systems crime alert screen pops up in front of Yuuri and Victor, and Yuuri groans in resignation. So much for that.

✂

This has to be on Yuuri’s top five list of worse missions he’s ever been on. Weighing in at number three, beaten only by that time he and Phichit were lead on a wild goose chase by Luck Luck Goose, a villain whose irritating powers could jinx anything around her, and that other mission where Yuuri’s fire went out of control and is forever dubbed Mission-That-Shall-Not-Be-Named in his mind.
But this one almost takes the cake, despite the fact that it’s two against one and they’re fighting Royal MF.

They keep running into each other, getting in the way of attacks, not communicating, and Yuuri knows he’s half to blame but this is so irritating—

“Cryo-Frost, don’t let him get away!” Yuuri shouts as he attempts to slip from the grasp of mind controlled pedestrians without burning them.

“Shouldn’t I be helping you first?” Victor yells back, throwing down bars of ice to stop the droves of people in their path. This is so odd; Royal MF’s powers generally don’t reach this far. It shouldn’t be able to affect this many people at once and yet—

“Ugh! No! It’s not like I can’t handle myself! Just go!”

“Don’t be ridiculous, Cinderos. We never leave each other behind. Didn’t you say that once?”

“But he’s going to get away—!”

“Muahahahaha!” Royal MF laughs maniacally. “You two have made this too easy! Soon the Villain Alliance will complete their quest, and there’s nothing any hero can do about—”

“Shut up!” Yuuri and Victor shout simultaneously, effectively cutting off a distraught Royal MF.

Eyes wide in shock, Royal MF throws his hands up in a placating gesture like he doesn’t want to get in their way, and Yuuri and Victor continue bickering.

“The whole reason we go on these missions is to capture the villains, Cryo-Frost! Someone as lame as Royal Mind Fuck should be easy for you; you’ve done it before.”

“Hey?” Royal MF says, offended, but he gets ignored.

“Am I supposed to just leave you here? What if you were caught by Shadow Knight again?”

Royal MF gets one of his mind controlled minions to grab him a bucket of stolen popcorn from the movie theater they happen to be right next to, and uses the backs of another two to sit on while he watches them like they’re paid entertainment. Victor doesn’t even notice that he’d being held down by Royal MF’s temporary minions now, too.

“I don’t need saving, and these people aren’t Shadow Knight! They’re just harmless civilians. What are they gonna do, bite me?” Yuuri half expects one of them to bite him right now just to rub it in.

“I don’t mean that you can’t handle yourself. Of course you can! You’re a top hero for crying out loud. I just wish you’d fucking trust me to—”

It’s like the air stills with unsaid words hanging in the air. It’s thick, weighs the molecules like paperweights against Yuuri’s shoulders. Guilty! Guilty! Guilty!

“Awkwaaaard,” Royal MF sings, breaking the heavy silence. Victor and Yuuri snap their eyes towards him, and they finally notice the ridiculous situation they’re in right now: arguing in the middle of the street, held captive by a bunch of glowing purple-eyed civilians, all while Royal Mind Fuck sits on a small throne of two people with a bucket of buttered popcorn in one hand, and he’s speaking through a mouthful of it. Yuuri flushes a little in embarrassment.

“Listen, I don’t know what’s going on between you guys, but I certainly didn’t begrudgingly let
Victor leave all so you two can stand here fighting while I run away with the goods,” he teasingly holds up the bag of green jewelry in his hands. “If you’re not going to get together, what was the point?”

“Eh… excuse me?” Yuuri blinks. He’s struck with the sudden realization that everyone seems to know. (Does the entire country know, too? The world? Of how Yuuri’s more-than-a-crush on Victor is so big it’s enough to fill at least five magazine volumes? He vaguely remembers Kenjirou talking about “CinderFrost” and how popular it had become in the media, but he waved all of that to the back of his mind, never to be heard from again. Until now.)

Yuuri glances at Victor from his peripheral, and he’s staring at Royal MF in this unsettlingly uncharacteristic, silently seething way, like he doesn’t want to be talking about this with a villain. And really, Yuuri can relate.

“You guys clearly have an issue you need to work out. I’ll be your couples counselor,” Royal MF says, clearing his throat, taking on a more serious persona. “What seems to be the problem?”

“I am not doing this right now,” Victor says.

“Agreed,” Yuuri agrees.

“At least you’re agreeing on something!” Royal MF fistbumps the air. “Wow, I am great at this. Take that, Scarlet.”

Yuuri and Victor look at each other, then at Royal MF, completely unamused.

“If you let us go, can we never speak of this again? Please?” Yuuri pleads.

“What’s in it for me?”

“I won’t set your ass on fire on your way out.”

“Deal,” Royal MF says, snapping his fingers to make his minions release Yuuri and Victor. “We still aren’t on good terms, and you’re still a traitor, Cryo-Frost!” Victor twitches a little at that last statement, and Royal MF cackles his over-the-top villainous laugh as he runs away.

“Victor.” Yuuri’s palms are clammy, sliding together with sweat, because he’s nervous, but he knows they can’t let this fester any longer or risk jeopardizing their current mission to stop the Emerald Witch’s plans. So far, they aren’t doing a very good job of that.

Not responding, or making any sort of indication that he’d heard Yuuri, Victor frustratingly swipes his hand through his disheveled hair—that manages to still look great despite being all out of place which is so unfair, what the fuck—removes his mask from his face, and doesn’t stop walking as he leaves the HOLE, treks down the hall, pass the lounge and the lobby and into the second floor.

It becomes increasingly obvious that Victor is trying to avoid Yuuri when they walk in two full circles and pass the lounge twice, and Yuuri is getting annoyed. He doesn’t want to talk to Victor when he’s annoyed, but Victor is making this hard—

He puts his foot down, blurts out, “Victor;” empathically, stomping his foot onto the ground to cause a line of fire to curl and flare around Victor’s feet, stopping him in his place. When Victor finally turns around to regard him, and Yuuri finally gets his attention, Yuuri pulls on his hand and leads them into the lounge which is, thankfully, empty. Phichit must be away on a mission.
Yuuri realizes, when they’re finally alone, suddenly faced with the fact that this is the first time they’re getting to really talk in forty-eight hours, that he was being impulsive because he doesn’t have a game plan and has no idea what to say.

So Yuuri closes his eyes tight, pushes his mask up into his hair, avoids looking Victor in the eyes, and lets the word vomit spill. “I’m sorry. I’m really sorry, Victor. It wasn’t my intention to hurt you and if I did I’m really, really sorry, and I completely understand if you don’t want to speak to me again and if you don’t want to be partners anymore because we don’t seem to work well after all, and—”

“What?”

Slow, like he’s afraid Victor will fade if he opens his eyes too fast, Yuuri lifts his head and looks at Victor and he’s...

Oh. Oh no. Is he—

“Are you… are you crying?”

“...No. Ah.” Victor bites on his lip to keep from talking. He touches his finger to his face like he’s genuinely shocked at the concept of crying.

Yuuri steps forward, grabs Victor gently on either side of his face so he can get a better look at the water that’s formed in Victor’s eyes and freefalling down his cheeks. And he wants to be mad at that, too. Because Victor is damned beautiful when he cries, just like he’s fucking heart-stoppingly beautiful when he’s wielding his ice or smiling or laughing or just sitting still like a renaissance masterpiece.

(Victor is also cold. More than usual. More than should be healthy, even for an ice elemental. And with a startling, bone-chilling realization, Yuuri understands that to mean that Victor is trying to keep his powers in check in the face of the inner turmoil that’s raging in his mind. Just like Yuuri does, constantly.

Controlled by emotions.

They really are more alike than either of them realize.

Or maybe Victor knew this all along, and that’s what he’d been trying to tell Yuuri, but Yuuri wouldn’t listen, just like he wouldn’t listen to his own mind shouting at him to like Victor like you mean it!

“You are crying,” Yuuri states. He doesn’t mean for that to sound like he’s marvelling, even if it is kind of a spectacle. He hadn’t realized Victor was capable of crying in the first place. “Why?”

“I—” Victor is at a loss for words, which is so, so rare. He never runs out of things to say. Everything here is wrong. It feels like they’ve walked into an alternate universe. Where Yuuri is the ex-villain, and Victor is confident but fragile-hearted hero. Where Chris isn’t a dirty joke on legs. Where Yuri P. is a dog person.

Yuuri is only decent at dealing with crying people when it’s someone he’s known for years, and dealing with a crying Victor makes him loss for words, too. This is such a mess.

Gingerly, Yuuri clutches at Victor’s hand and leads him to the couch, and they sit on either end, two awkward, pining, confused people who both suck at handling emotions.
Victor finally breaks the silence by sighing. “You don’t have to apologise. I understand why you did what you did.”

“Then why have you been avoiding me for two days?” Yuuri asks, looking at Victor covertly out of the corner of his eye. It hasn’t even been five minutes yet, but Victor’s nose is red enough to lead Santa through Christmas fog.

“I was upset,” Victor hesitantly admits. “That out of everyone here, I assumed that you, at least, trusted me. It hurt to realize that you have no actual reason to.”

(Guilty, guilty, guilty, whisper the Jury in Yuuri’s head.

Shut up, Yuuri whispers back.)

Yuuri wants to say I do trust you, of course I do, but he pauses to chew at his bottom lip when he realizes that there’s doubts lingering in his mind, and that realization makes him wince.

He wants to trust Victor. He does.

Victor continues speaking. “I realize that I haven’t really given you reason to trust me, especially when I lied to you about my one biggest secret—”

“Wait, stop.” Yuuri stares at Victor, dumbfounded. “You lied about what now?”

“The…” Victor is reluctant to answer. Yuuri urges him on by patting his hand. “The reason why I became a villain in the first place. I figure you, if anyone, deserve to know. I haven’t even told this to Yakov or Yura—”

“Wait a minute. When did you mention that?” He knits his brows together. “When did I ask?”

“At the bar? Back when we were celebrating my becoming a full-fledged hero. Are you saying you don’t remember?”

Yuuri shakes his head regretfully.

“You don’t remember anything from that night?”

“Well. I remember everything before my fourth shot of whatever-the-hell we were drinking.”

Victor is crying again, small hiccups that turn into loud sobs, and Yuuri frantically flails his arms, he has no idea what to do.

“D-don’t cry! It’ll be okay? Uh… I’m sorry! I tend to get blackout drunk when I drink too much!” He’s going to cry, now, god. “Please, please stop crying, Victor, I’m really sorry.”

“I’m not crying,” Victor giggles. But there’s fresh tears clinging to his lashes, so he really had Yuuri fooled. “I can’t believe… No wonder you kept giving me mixed signals about wanting to be partners. You really didn’t remember suggesting it.”

Yuuri’s face is burning at the prospect of everything else he might have said to Victor that night. He doesn’t want to ask. To move the topic back on track, Yuuri says behind the hands covering his face, “You don’t have to tell me your big secret if you don’t want to.”

“I want to,” Victor says, conviction written all over his face when Yuuri peeks at him to see. “I want to never give you a reason to doubt me again.”
Yuuri’s hands slide down into his lap, expression soft and understanding, and he nods at Victor. “Okay. If you’re sure.”

For some reason, Victor insists on resting his head on Yuuri’s lap, and Yuuri doesn’t deny him, not when that secretly crushing middle schooler side of him flips with innocent excitement. But he lowkey regrets it when he’s internally yelling at the fact that Victor’s head is in his lap, oh, god, his head is an undeniable weight that’s warm, present, and there. He’s like a giddy kid.

Yuuri feels like a stiff scarecrow with the way his hands are clutching the cushions as if he’s scared of doing something dumb and rash. Like accidentally brush Victor’s hair out of his face. Or not so accidentally.

And why the hell won’t his heart stop hammering in his chest? His brain is literally shouting noise complaints.

“Disclaimer: my memories are still spotty, but I think I remember enough to tell the full story. So it all began when I was sixteen…”

Yuuri’s brows fly up to his hairline. “Really? Ten years ago? Why did you only show up recently?”

“All will be revealed,” Victor assures him. “As much as I can, that is. Our family has always been ingrained in hero work, to the point where we were home schooled since, as you know, heroes and powers aren’t taught in regular schools. Our parents—me and Yura’s—got into an accident, and they were killed by some villain I don’t remember anymore.”

“I’m sorry,” Yuuri says with a frown. His fingers are twitching with the need to comfort somehow. To, maybe, run his hands through Victor’s unnaturally natural silver hair like he’s craving to.

“It’s okay. We were doing our best to deal with it. Yura’s grandfather wanted to take us in, but seeing as we wanted to continue with our hero studies as well as our normal ones, Yakov and Lilia offered to step in. This was before they divorced, by the way.”

“Oh,” Yuuri says with a nod. His hair looks so touchable. Yuuri bets it’s as soft as the look that’s currently on Victor’s face. He wants to touch so bad, so—

“We were both very excited about this new opportunity handed to us, even in the face of grief, because working under Yakov meant being able to work in his organization. I was working towards being a mentee, I think. Yura looked up to the fact that I was chasing after both of our dreams, and he wanted to do the same when he was old enough.

“We were those kids playing hero and villain in the backyard. Yura was the villain a good portion of the time because I was the older brother and I made him.” Victor laughs a little at some hazy memory that Yuuri can’t see. “He was always so mad, but he would do it anyway. He was so adorable as a child, Yuuri. You’ve gotta see the photo albums. Yakov still has a few.

“Then.” Victor pauses to sigh, and something in his demeanor changes, and Yuuri thinks, this must be it. “I was seventeen when it happened. When Yakov and Lilia divorced. And things were so hard, then. I vaguely remember the house Lilia currently lives in being the home that Yakov used to lived in as well. They had disagreements; Lilia thought that Yakov was too invested in his work, and Yakov thought that Lilia could never quite see the bigger picture beyond thin seamlines.”

Victor starts doing that thing where he screws his eyes shut and he holds a hand to his temple, like there’s forks scraping against his mental glass barriers. Yuuri gives in; he reluctantly lifts his hand and hovers for a while before running it through Victor smooth, soft, silver hair, It’s cool like the rest
of him. Victor hums to the feeling of it.

“Lilia wanted to keep me, though, because she wanted to take me under her wing. She was going to be my mentor, I think. But then. But then—” His eyes are quivering with the effort to remember.

Yuuri runs his blunt nails gently down his scalp in the way he knows is soothing to himself, so maybe it’ll help calm Victor down, too, even if this isn’t something he’s experienced for himself. “But then?”

“Someone propositioned me. They used the fact that Yakov wasn’t around as protection, and Lilia left me to my own vices a lot. I don’t remember who, and I can’t for the life of me remember anything about them, so I’m assuming they messed with my mind. But what I do remember is that they threatened to hurt Yura if I went against their wishes.”

Yuuri draws in a soft breath, his hand pausing its ministrations in Victor’s hair. “No.”

“I was at a lost of what to do. I didn’t want Yura to get hurt, but I didn’t want to give up becoming a hero. But somehow… Somehow my doubts and reluctance was enough to let them in. Somehow… they completely changed the way I think. The way I feel. My dreams and aspirations were replaced. Almost as if… they altered my mind.” Victor pauses dramatically. Lets the sentence hang in the air as he looks at Yuuri.

“Almost as if she altered my mind.”

Yuuri’s eyes are wide like the sky with the way they’re staring at Victor. “Are you saying Lilia altered your memories?”

“What?” Victor shakes his head vehemently. “No, no, no. I mean, and this must sound insane, I think Emerald Witch did it. Right after that briefing we had when Minako told us about her, I couldn’t stop thinking about how everything seemingly fits together. It’s uncanny, to say the least.”

“Right!” Yuuri shouts, bouncing his legs and accidentally jostling Victor’s head. “Because your old villain friends are working for her, and she’s able to change a superpowered person’s mind despite the fact that they have complete control…” He gasps. “I think you’re right! We’ve gotta go and tell Minako—” Yuuri stands.

And Victor face plants and kisses the tiles.

“Ow.”

“Sorry!” Yuuri helps Victor up; his nose is really, undeniably red now. “I got overexcited.”

“You’ve clearly been hanging around Kenjirou too much,” Victor teases, rubbing his nose and flinching. “I’d rather we wait to do that. It’s a revelation I’m only just coming to terms with, and I don’t want to just give her information in case it’s wrong.”

“Right, okay,” Yuuri nods, sitting back down and patting the seat beside him so Victor sits too. When he does, Yuuri smiles and tells him, “Thank you for telling me that. You really didn’t have to.”

“I felt bad about lying, and since we’re partners, it would be best to be open with each other, right?”

“You… still want to be partners?” Yuuri asks, slow and unsure.
Victor gives him a look, which would be hilarious in hindsight, because Victor never gives him deadpan looks. But maybe Yuuri deserves it this time for being so unreasonably difficult. “Why wouldn’t I? I would want nothing more than to be your partner.”

Yuuri smiles wider with the relief that stretches through his lips.

“I could name a few things I’d want more…”

One erratic heartbeat. “Like what?”

“Ah. Nothing.”

(Yuuri deflates like a sad carnival balloon animal, and he’s not quite sure why.)

(But that’s a lie. Of course he knows why. Who’s he kidding? He knows too well, and it’s too difficult to ignore the obvious way Victor keeps staring at him like he doesn’t know how to stop. The obvious way Yuuri must be staring at him, too. He wants to bring it up, but he doesn’t know how, so he’s hoping Victor brings it up, first.

But he doesn’t, damn it, you spineless, icy coward.

Yuuri is some kind of awful hypocrite.)

Instead of bringing it up like his mind (that suspiciously sounds like Phichit) is telling him to, Yuuri changes the topic. “Since you told me something so important. I feel like I should tell you something important, too.”

He blurts it out, speaks before his mind can really catch up on what he’s saying, and by the time he realizes what he’d said, Victor is staring at him with full interest and Yuuri is starting to panic. Because what could possibly measure up to an origin story? Yuuri’s origin story isn’t that interesting, and Victor already knows it.

“Can I make a request?” Victor asks.

“Please do.”

“Can you tell me about the Wildfire Incident?” Victor asks, no tip toeing his way around the question. He jumps right in.

And yeah, that probably qualifies.

Yuuri doesn’t want to talk about it, because that means reliving those memories, and he almost envies the fact that Victor has lost some of his. But if they’re partners, then Victor has the right to know why Yuuri dreads facing level five villains.

“Okay,” Yuuri says with a nod. “If you really want to know…”

“Only if you really want to tell me. I won’t force you to, Yuuri.”

Victor looks sincere, and it’s reassuring enough to give Yuuri the extra push he needs to start speaking. “I was on a mission—”

“No, wait,” Victor cuts him off.

Looking up at Victor curiously, Yuuri blinks at the fixed look that Victor is making, then down at his lap where he’s rhythmically patting his hand. "Oh," is what he says when he connects what Victor is
"Don't worry. I won't drop you."

One part of Yuuri wants to shout Nooo, thank you!, but the nicer, appealing part with good, albeit indulgent ideas tells Yuuri that he should absolutely go for it. So Yuuri does, carefully shifting on the couch so he can rest his head in Victor's lap. He takes it slow, like he's dipping his toes in glacier water, and he squeaks a little when Victor immediately goes for his hair, mimicking Yuuri's actions of running tightly-trimmed nails soothingly over his scalp. Yuuri wonders if his abnormally warm body heat is radiating off of him and onto Victor right now. It must be, with how flustered he feels.

He waits a few moments before starting again. "Almost three years ago, I was on a mission with Phichit at a campsite. The villain we were up against was a level five called Morning Wood."

Yuuri hears and feels rather than sees how Victor cracks up at that; Yuuri snaps his eyes to Victor, and Victor pretends to sit up straighter. "You are literally twelve years old."

"Oh, come on. You can't tell me that never made you laugh."

"Okay, I'll admit Phichit and I kind of died a bit." More than that, Yuuri remembers the tears clinging to his eyelashes and Phichit cackling so hard his stomach started hurting. "Morning Wood's powers involved getting wood—"

Victor starts giggling again.

"Victor, you aren't going to laugh the entire time I tell my tragic backstory, are you?"

"No," Victor clears his throat. "Sorry, please continue. I'm listening."

"His powers involved getting wood," Yuuri pauses to ensure Victor's giggle fits won't interrupt him again, "and absorbing it into his body, then shooting them out of his hands like branches or splinters. So he thrives in wooded areas, and that's where he was when we found him.

"Our top priority was to get the campers to safety, but Morning Wood got his level five rating for a reason; he wouldn't let us carry out our mission that easily. So while Phichit tried to get the campers out of the way, I had to handle Morning Wood. But he was way too strong and way too overwhelming, and I knew I had to use my fire in order to stop him, but fire and wood wasn't a good combination, especially with people around to get hurt."

Yuuri has to pause to take a breath, because he's beginning to reach Kenjirou-level speeds of chatter, and he needs a moment to calm down before he inadvertently implodes from the unwanted ghost of anxiety that'll rise in the wake of this recall. He has no desire to open those old anxiety-ridden wound again. Then again, they never really left.

Victor says nothing as he waits for Yuuri to continue. His hand keeps stroking Yuuri's hair, a constant warmth, and Yuuri sighs into it.

"I got overwhelmed. I wanted to save everyone and at the same time I wanted to stop Morning Wood. I was only using small contained fires to burn up projectiles but that did nothing to stop the attacks. They were constant. He wouldn't stop. He didn't give me a chance to breathe and I panicked."

Fingertips, cool to the touch, press against the space between Yuuri's eyebrows, as if silently coaxing him to unwind the tightness that has unknowingly taken over. It helps relax him.
Yuuri looks Victor in the eyes when he speaks next. "I lost control. I burned too hot. The fire was orange, then white, it charred the surroundings in seconds, I..." His hands fly over his face like a dam to hold the rush of emotions in. All of the guilt that he hasn't quite let himself let go of yet.

"Oh, Yuuri..."

"I gave Morning Wood third degree burns. I nearly killed every camper on the site. I could’ve killed Phichit. I was out of control, and I panicked, and I almost killed Phichit."

Yuuri isn't crying. He can’t cry. The wetness in his eyes aren't tears that he refuses to let fall because he hates feeling weak to the feeling. He's not weak. He knows that.

But he feels that way when Victor suddenly scoops him up onto his lap and into his arms, hugs him tight like he wants to help hold Yuuri together, too. And Yuuri wants to pull away because he hates hates to be pitied, but Victor surprises him in true Victor fashion.

"You almost did, but you didn't. You have far more control than you let yourself realize. You're amazing, Yuuri."

And Yuuri can't help it.

He laughs into Victor's neck, and Victor startles from the shock, and that makes Yuuri laugh harder. Laugh until he's red in the face. Laugh until there's tears in his eyes. Laugh until Victor's laughing too, and Victor just looks bewildered while he's laughing, which only reduces Yuuri to wheezing cackles.

"What's so funny?" Victor asks through mirthful giggles.

"I don't know!" Yuuri grins wildly. "You're just so. So," he wipes at his eyes before gesturing vaguely in the air like that explains everything. "So you!"

Victor blinks. Once. Twice. A few times. He looks like an owl. Yuuri holds back more of his oncoming giggles.

"Is... is that a bad thing?"

"It was at first, probably." When Victor pouts, Yuuri puts his hand on either side of his cheeks to make him smile, and wow, wow, wow, he's just casually touching Victor's face like this is normal. (But this is normal. They've been touchy-feely for weeks now, according to Kenjirou and at least half of the organization. Maybe even half of the world.) "But not anymore. Definitely not anymore."


Yuuri realizes he should probably move, but he doesn't want to. He likes the contrast of Victor's cool-warm temperature against his own warm-warm body, even while they're still in their costumes. He doesn't plan on letting go anytime soon, so he rests his head against Victor's shoulder again and asks, "Can I have a follow-up question to your tragic origin story?"

"Mhm," Victor hums more than speaks. Yuuri can feel the buzz against his skin and wow, they're so close. This is so, so nice. Yuuri didn’t know he was craving this until now.

"Why haven't you told Yuri P. about this? Surely he'd want to know? It might help ease the bad tension you guys have going on."

"Ah," Victor sighs. It isn't a nice, content one that's soothing to Yuuri's ears. And just like that, the
happy atmosphere is broken. *Good job, Yuuri.* "I'm not even sure he'll listen. He can only stand to be in the same room with me for more than five minutes if someone else is in the room, too." Victor lays his head right on top of Yuuri's and whines like a kicked puppy. "I heard about him being a Hero-in-Training while I was still a villain, and that brought some old memories back, and my 'desire to be a villain' started to waver and crack... I'll tell him when the time is right."

Nodding his head, Yuuri decides that that's an issue he shouldn't press further.

"May I ask a follow up question, too?"

Yuuri tenses up, but he nods again like he's on auto-pilot and his body isn't his to control. He feels like he's said enough of what he wants to say on the Wildfire Incident, and he can't imagine what else there is to ask about.

But Victor, always always always full of surprises, completely sidetracks Yuuri by asking, "Have you had any lovers?"

Cautiously, Yuuri lift his head so he can stare Victor in the eyes, and the cool hand Yuuri hadn't realized was on his shoulder blades slides down to the small of his back. "Why do you want to know?"


"Well..." Yuuri starts, biting on his lip. "I had three. The first two were a complete disaster because I had to keep making up excuses as to why I would always be gone for long stretches of time. Heroes dating outside of the hero industry rarely works out, like they always say."

Victor thoughtfully nods his head. "Was the third one a hero, then?"

"A weapons specialist at another hero organization." Yuuri scrunches up his nose, and Victor's eyes flicker down to catch the action. "He got annoyed at how invested I was at my job. He thought I wasn't being fair in giving him some time, too. And maybe that's true, but this job doesn't exactly let you have freetime any time you want it. You'd think he would know that."

"Well," Victor says, his eyes continually glancing downward at something that's catching his interest. "He was an idiot to not see the great person he had right in front of him."

Somehow, there's some hidden meaning in that statement. Somehow, it's like the universe is trying to tell Yuuri something. Somehow, it's like the universe is trying to tell Yuuri something.

Somehow, there's great, big, blinking, obnoxious signs, all pointing right at Victor, all saying *HE'S RIGHT HERE, DUMBASS! HERE! RIGHT HERE! IN FRONT OF YOU! TAKE A HINT!*

Yuuri wants to bat them all away because he knows, *god*, he knows. He's always known. He's only just started to allow himself to read the signs that have always been there in neon lights that blind his eyes.

He realizes that he's been staring too hard and too long at Victor without a response. Realizes that his heart is hammering against his chest like it's trying to expand the space to make room for something *more*. Realizes that he's sitting in Victor's lap like this is completely fine and normal and something partners typically do. Realizes that Victor has been staring at his *lips* this entire time...

Oh.
Oh.

(Oh.)

"...Yeah."

(God, he wants to kiss him.)

But Yuuri decides to mess with Victor a little, just 'cause he can. Just to test what kind of effect he
has on him, like everyone is convinced he does. Prolong this a little longer to calm his fast beating
heart down.

"Victor," Yuuri hums. Licks his lips in that way he knows is enticing. And Victor follows the sweep
of his tongue like some kind of thirst enthusiast. "What about you? Did you date anyone?"

"Hm..." Victor responds dazedly. "What? Oh. One or two. I was about sixteen the first time, and
somewhere past my twenties the second. I hardly recall them, not when your adorable face all over
news outlets and magazine spreads made me forget them all."

No one seems to realize that Victor has that effect on Yuuri as well, because he's blushing something
fierce. The only bright side is that Victor is blushing, too.

"I have to apologize for constantly committing stupid crimes to get your attention. It was literally the
only way I knew how, because once I saw you, I got addicted. You were an addiction; I couldn’t get
enough."

"Oh, my god," Yuuri whispers more to himself than to Victor. He's going to burn a hole through the
shoulders of Victor's costume at this rate.

"I don't think I've adored a person more in my entire life, and I'm incredibly grateful for being here,
and I'm grateful that you gave me the chance, and I'm grateful that you grace me with your beautiful
face every morning."

"Oh, my god," Yuuri whines. "How do you say things like that and not die a little on the inside?"

Victor looks honestly confused by that question, as if the answer should be obvious. "Because,
Yuuri, I like you."

"I know that."

"No, Yuuri, you don't understand. I like you."

Yuuri is staring at him in confusion now. "Yes? Yes, Victor, I know. I like you, too."

“No,” Victor shakes his head fervently, grabs Yuuri by the shoulders, stares at him with a comically
severe expression. “Yuuri, I like you. I’ve liked you for two years now.”

Yuuri nods slowly. “Yes. I know that now. And I like you, too,” he huffs. Is there something they’re
not getting here? Is this the infamous misunderstanding trope Phichit was talking about before? The
kind that leaves people frustrated? Because Yuuri is frustrated as hell at the moment.

Victor places his hands on either side of Yuuri’s face, gentle like he’s something fragile, just like that
time in the Medic Wing when Yuuri had woken up after six hours of sleep, and Yuuri had sworn to
himself Victor was about to kiss him. (And it was that moment, when he realized that he kind of
wanted Victor to kiss him, that he knew just how badly he was pining for it. Just how far gone he
His eyes are as blue as always, pretty and striking like blue flames, sparkling with some kind of determination Yuuri doesn’t understand. But there’s nothing to determine. He’s confessing, isn’t he?

“Yuuri,” Victor says. “I didn’t want to tell you this because I didn’t want to scare you away, but you have to know so there’s no confusion.” Yuuri’s heart is beating fast, fast, faster again, tense with apprehension. He expects Victor to drop a bomb.

“I love you.”

And he does.

There’s an explosion in his body. White nose in his ears. His brain is foggy with the aftermath.

“What?” is all he manages to breathe, like all the oxygen in the air isn’t enough.

Victor looks worried, knitted brows and all, which is ridiculous, because who gets worried after confessing something like that.

Then the worry turns to panic the longer the silence stretches. His hands slide away from Yuuri’s face, and Victor starts babbling. “I’m sorry, Yuuri. I shouldn’t have said that. It was too much, wasn’t it? I was being too rash too soon—”

“Shhh,” Yuuri places a finger against Victor’s mouth to shut him up. “It was just surprising is all. If anything, it makes me feel bad for not realizing sooner.”

“You don’t have to feel bad…” Victor murmurs against Yuuri’s single finger.

“No, shh, let me talk,” Yuuri says, dropping his hand back in his lap. He’s blushing again, has been blushing this entire time. It’s perpetual. It won’t stop. “I don’t know if I feel that way yet,” he feels breathless. He’s burning, “but I do know that I want to hug you all the time. And watch dumb movies in my apartment. And cuddle. And. And kiss you. So, so much.”

Scratch burning; he’s dying.

But Victor looks ecstatic all of a sudden, big, dumb heart grin taking over half of his face, toothy and blinding and endearing.

Yuuri would gladly burn his retinas off to stare at Victor’s smile forever.

“Oh, Yuuri, I’m so happy! You’ve made me so happy!” Just like an excitable puppy. “Can I kiss you?” An excitable puppy that jumps straight to the point because he knows what he wants.

Yuuri shakes his head, and Victor’s smile drops. (Yuuri is snickering on the inside.) “I’m sorry, Victor, but I don’t kiss until the first date.”

He knows he’s being a cheeky little shit, but Victor decides to play him at his own game, because his hand flies to his chest like the melodramatic dork he is.

“Yuuri. Are you saying you don’t consider all this time we’ve spent together as dates?”

“We were busy fighting villains! That is not a top ten date idea. And don’t even cite the last couple of years either because you know that doesn’t count.”

“I, for one, cherish all two-hundred-and-seventy-six of our past dates.”
Yuuri stares at him. “You did not actually count all of that.”

Victor’s perfect poker face cracks. “I didn’t,” he grins slyly.

Yuuri kind of hates how much he really likes Victor’s smirk. Ugh. He wants to kiss it off. He wants to go for it. Wants to lean in close, close, closer—Victor is leaning in, too, oh, they’re both leaning in.

“Hey,” Yuuri interjects when they’re millimeters apart. He’s buzzing with excitement, feels it in his palms and the tips of his toes. In the quickness of his breath and the pounding in his chest. “Wouldn’t it be hilarious if someone came in right now to interrupt us?”

“Yuuri,” Victor deadpans.

“Like, really. Isn’t that how this goes?”

“Yuuri, you’re going to jinx it.”

He’s stalling so bad, palms a sweaty mess, and they’re clutching tight to Victor’s shoulders like he’ll fall right off if he doesn’t hold tight.

“I’m just saying. No one’s been inside the lounge this whole time...”

Ohhh, this is what Yuuri has been missing out on his entire life.

This is what people mean when they say sparkles fly.

This is what feels like to be simultaneously weightless and grounded where Victor’s lips are the only anchor keeping Yuuri from floating away.

And, god, god, they’re so soft against Yuuri’s chapped lips.. So cool against Yuuri’s warm. So satisfying to sigh into, over, and over, and over over over again, because this feels right. This makes sense. It’s peck after peck after slow, chaste, sweet, peck.

There’s an aftershock explosion in this chest. White noise on the fingertips that cling to Victor like he’s desperate, even long after they pull apart.

Yuuri wants to lay here, with his forehead against Victor’s and their giddy little smiles pressed together and Victor’s arms wrapped around his body.

He has no idea when his hand came to rest against Victor’s cheek, but he lets it sit there to trace the shape of his sharp cheekbones.

He’s glowing. Searing. On the inside and out, all over the place. His cheeks are on fire, and his chest is on fire, his hands, his toes and fingertips. Everything is up in flames. He think he’s never been so happy.

Yuuri opens his mouth to say this, can feel Victor’s breath against him—

But he stops.

Because the lounge doors suddenly open.

And a waterfall of people suddenly splash to the floor.

“JJ!” Phichit is saying. “I told you not to lean so far forward, goddamn!”
“Sorry!” JJ says. “I wanted to hear!”

“We had SIB’s camera on for a reason, you fool,” Sara hisses.

“Guys, they can hear us,” Chris points out.

Their conversation is slowly catching up to Yuuri, who has to drag himself out the fantasy reverie and back into the real world.

He burns, ignites, fully, brightly, makes Victor jolt with the heat.

“Yuuri, ouch, that hurts, ow ow ow—”

“You guys were listening?” he shrieks.

“Yuuri, buddy, pal, angel, platonic love of my life. We didn’t want to interrupt! And we only came in after that part where you said that you don’t kiss after the first date—” Phichit babbles.

Yuuri glares.

“Congratulations?” he tries sheepishly, telekinetically pulling the party poppers Yuuri just notices floating in the air. They leave a sad trail of confetti on the floor.

“Get out.”

“Please spare us,” Chris says.

“Out!” Yuuri points a threatening flicker of fire in their direction, and they scramble to their feet. “Out out out!”

When they finally leave, Yuuri sits back down again, right on top of Victor where he’s made his temporary home, and he buries his face in one hand.

“I’m going to put up an ad on Craigslist to search for a new best friend.”

Victor doesn’t answer, so Yuuri peaks up at him, and immediately notices that there’s something wrong. “Victor? Are you okay? What’s that…? Is something burning?”

“Only my desire for you.”

Yuuri rolls his eyes and looks down and— “Your costume is on fire!”

Tearing up, Victor wheezes weakly, “I know. Help.”

Chapter End Notes

THEY DID IT, BOIS! i hope the wait was worth it!

i’m a fluff monster at heart and i would apologize but next chapter is slightly longer than this one and 10x more tooth rotting so. prepare yourselves.
Made of boyfriend material

Chapter Summary

Yet another training montage featuring Phichit’s possible demise, and an attempt at dating is made.

Chapter Notes

jesus christ, the draft was only 10k. what happened.

(fluff happened.)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Somehow, the media catches on far faster than Yuuri and Victor expected them too. Then again, the fact that Yuuri absolutely insists on holding his hand while Victor has to wave at nearby camera crew on crime scenes probably has something to do with it. And Yuuri lets it happen because he kind of likes the way Victor’s hand feels clutching against his, and he likes knowing that other people know.

So really, maybe it isn’t that big of a surprise at all.

It takes less than a day for the headlines to appear on online magazines.

CINDERFROST: CUTE NEW HERO COUPLE CONFIRMED?! 5 New Hot Pics That Will Melt Your Icy Heart!!

HOTTEST HIBER-MATING HERO HUSBANDS

CINDERFROST IS CANON, CONFIRMED!

Cryo-Frost Likes His Men Like He Likes His Loins: Sizzling And On Fire

HOW CINDEROS BLAZED HIS WAY INTO CRYO-FROST’S HEART

A few of the workers at SUCC had to find out from news sources first, because they're just that hellishly quick.

The rumors are untamable. But Yuuri doesn't browse social media enough to bother finding out about them himself. He gets to hear from Phichit about how "Cinderos and Cryo-Frost" were caught sharing nose kisses on a rooftop in broad daylight (which isn't even true, that blurry photo was about as believable as a sketchy photograph of some urban legend cryptid—which Yuuri happens to enjoy reading about every now and then, so maybe he can't fault people for believing in some lame photograph of his and Victor's supposed hero personas.)

Victor has to forgo the top layer of his costume for a few days while the Costuming Department makes repairs. Yuuri apologises every time Victor slips into his costume ("I am so sorry, Victor, I
can't believe I actually set you on fire again—") and Victor says, "It's okay, Yuuri," or "It's fine, darling," or "Don't worry about it, love," and Yuuri just about dies every single time. At some point, he starts apologizing solely to hear Victor call him something cute again.

By the time the Costuming Department fixes his costume, it looks like new again, as if Yuuri hadn’t burned a hole through the first decorative layer and singed the surface of the second, protective one. Had Yuuri burned any longer, Victor would have needed to visit the Medic Wing.

It didn't take Yuuri long to forgive Phichit and the others for eavesdropping on their private conversation, especially when the forgiveness bribe involved pastries, but Yuuri is still beyond embarrassed about it.

And Victor must know that, which is the only explanation Yuuri can think of as to why Victor would suggest something as insane as this.

They're in the training room again, padded and glass interior of the Arena up, and Phichit is here will them, too. Yuuri is confused by this, so he asks Victor what's going on...

"I want you to send a bright flame right at Phichit's face."

"Excuse me?!" Yuuri shrieks.

"Whoa, whoa, whoa, wait—" Phichit stammers. "I didn't sign up to be burnt to a crisp! I'm too cute to die! Is this about last week because I'll give you more pastries but please don't kill me," he says in one hysteric, hurried breath.

"Calm down!" Victor says, hands patting the air like that's enough to soothe them. Yuuri has his arms protectively around Phichit while he glares at Victor, wide-eyed and bewildered.

"Um, explain?" Yuuri says.

"I'd like to help you utilize your powers to their maximum abilities, and because Phichit is very close to you, I think it would be a good idea to use him as a guinea pig to control your fire while at max heat capacity at the same time."

Yuuri blinks at him. "Victor this is an awful idea, what the fuck."

"No, it's perfect!" Victor insists, grinning wide while he begins to explain. "See, during the Wildfire Incident—"

"He knows about the Wildfire Incident?" Phichit interjects to whisper at Yuuri.

Yuuri nods while Victor continues. "You said you used the brightest color you know how to, white, right? And you weren't in complete emotional control, yet you managed to leave the scene without dealing extreme bodily harm to Phichit or the campers. So I think, deep down, you have the ability to control your fire enough to protect the people you care about."

Phichit purses his lips and nods his head slowly. "He's got a point."

"Yeah..." Yuuri reluctantly agrees. "But what if I accidentally burn Phichit? I don't want to hurt him."

"Yeah, wise guy, why aren't you using yourself as the guinea pig?" Phichit asks.

"As much as I'd love to be Yuuri's guinea pig, I honestly think Phichit has a higher chance at
surviving than I do when you two have known each other for so long. And you've done this before, whether you were aware of it or not," Victor says. He puts a hand on Yuuri's shoulder and squeezes. "If anything, I'll be right here to put up an ice barrier if the fire looks like it's getting too close to Phichit."

Yuuri looks to Phichit first to get his confirmation that he's willing to do this, says, Do you? in his mind, and when Phichit gives a little nod, Yuuri looks back at Victor, and says, "Okay. Fine, yeah. This will be good for me."

Phichit takes his position at the center of the Arena, while Yuuri stands at one edge. Victor is off to Phichit's side, ready and waiting for Yuuri's fire to strike.

"Geez," Phichit says, "When you told me I'd be the willful third wheel to one of your infamous training dates, this is not what I had in mind." He places a hand over his forehead and pretends to faint. "This is how I die. Done in by Freezy McGay and Hot Hot Tater Tot."

Yuuri snorts. "Oh my god, Phichit, shut up."

"Ready when you are, babe," Phichit says, wiggling his shoulders while he stands there like he's taunting Yuuri.

"Start with a red fire, Yuuri, and we'll work from there," Victor instructs.

Red fire. Okay, simple. Yuuri can conjure a red fire in his sleep. He's done it before in his teen years, even, when his powers were still so new he barely had a grip on them. His parents had to invest in quite a few new bedsheets back then.

Conjuring a red flame is easy. It's the fact that Phichit is his target that isn't so easy. Though, Phichit isn't technically his target, he just happens to be in the way, and Yuuri needs his fire to bend around him. It's cool. This is fine. Yuuri has done this before. He's got this.

"You've got this!" Phichit reiterates like the annoyingly lovable mind reader that he is.

Yuuri closes his eyes as he takes a deep breath, holds his palms out to light them on fire, makes it grow onto his bare forearms so it's one, large, ravaging thing. Then he opens his eyes, stares at the place he wants to direct it, at Phichit—no, not at Phichit, behind Phichit—and he lets go.

Watches as it bursts forward and twists on the ground and through the air like a snake. Then it coils around either side of Phichit while his friend curls in on himself and covers his eyes.

Yuuri jumps up and clasps both hands in front of his mouth as he looks excitedly at Victor.

"Am I dead?" Phichit asks, peeking through his fingers. "Did I die? Is this purgatory?"

"Yuuri! You did it!" Victor cheers, running up to him, wrapping his arms around his waist and spinning him in circles. "I knew you could! As amazing as always!" He drops Yuuri back down again, but he leaves his hands, a warm, encouraging reminder, on his hips. "You did a good job controlling the trajectory of your fire! But," his smile drops, a complete 180, "it was quite sloppy, and slow, and I sprung forward three times because I was sure that it would hit Phichit so you need to get out of your head and stop overthinking it otherwiseyou'lloverthinkyourselfintoa PANICKED FRENZY AND—"

"Okay! I get it! It needs work!" Yuuri says, waving his heads in front of Victor's face to shut him up. (He almost considers using his lips because that's a thing he's allowed to do now. But Phichit will bring it up till he's dead, and Yuuri doesn't want the lifetime embarrassment.)
"Whoa, Yuuri! I didn't know you could do that!" Phichit calls from his spot once he's done patting himself down to make certain he hasn't turned into a ghost. "That was too cool."

Yuuri beams at him. "Want to try again?"

"As long as you don't singe my jacket this time." Phichit tugs at the elbow of his jacket, where a tiny trail of smoke is still lingering.

"Oh, no," Yuuri gasps, hand thrown over his mouth as he winces. "Sorry!"

The second time Yuuri tries it, Victor has to use his ice barrier because the fire comes a little too close to Phichit's head. The third time is better, but the tips of a few of Phichit's hair strands end up a little fried. By the seventh attempt, Yuuri thinks he has a good handle on controlling his fire enough to not hit Phichit. He's never dreamed he could get this far with his power, and he's beyond ecstatic about it.

"Now," Victor says during their short ten minute break. "We're going to add a new challenge to the mix."

Yuuri is starting to sweat; he chugs an entire water bottle (while Phichit, who's sweating far more than him, is poking his side and making thirst jokes at him) before he speaks, "What do you have in mind?"

"I want you to try the same thing, but with an white flame."

"I rarely use an orange flame let alone white!"

"Yes, I know, but challenging yourself by going beyond what you know will make an orange flame as easy to conjure as your red!"

"I mean, he's not wrong?" Phichit says, but he sounds incredibly unsure of himself, most likely because he knows he'll be on the receiving end of that white flame.

"Okay," Yuuri says. "Let's say we try this. How do I even do that when I can hardly conjure one for fun? It's hard enough to concentrate on starting one in the first place."

"Well, I'm glad you asked my dear Yuuri," Victor announces with a flourish of his arms.

"Ha, he sounds like me," Phichit snickers.

"I noticed through firsthand experience that your fire burns brighter when you're angry."

"Sorry about that."

Victor waves the apology away. "I told you, it's fine. Anyway, I'm assuming very concentrated strong emotion is the key to unlocking the other colors. Anger is quick and easy, so for this training exercise, I'd like you to channel your anger while simultaneously trying to protect Phichit."

"So basically," Yuuri says. "You want me to channel my inner hulk."

"Basically," Victor confirms with a nod.

Channeling his inner hulk isn't easy. Orange flames flicker back to red every time Yuuri attempts to create them, and no amount of angry thoughts he feeds his mind is enough to make them stay.
Thinking about Vicchan ruining his laptop keys or peeing all over his couch does nothing when he remembers how cute his dog actually is; remembering that Royal MF is annoyance personified does nothing when he thinks about how absurd he is; not even thoughts of that time Phichit showed up drunk with another guy and kicked Yuuri out of his own apartment helped because who can stay mad at Phichit?

"Okay, this clearly isn't working," Victor astutely observes.

"Clearly," Yuuri huffs, plopping down onto the padded floors and crossing his legs. "I need a better stimulus."

"Maybe we can help?" Phichit helpfully supplies. "Quick, Victor, dig into your inner fuck boy and flirt with Yuuri."

Yuuri raises a doubtful eyebrow as Victor clears his throat. Then he flashes a lame smile at Yuuri that screams unwanted dick pics and wink face emojis and the phrase, "without me?"

"Tell me, Cinderella, do you like dancing? 'Cause I have a long and hard pole you can dance on, and his name is Prince Charming."

Yuuri bursts out laughing.

Victor frowns. "That was not the desired effect."

"Sorry!" Yuuri apologizes, wiping a stray tear from his eyes. "I can't take you seriously. That was awful."

"Okay, now my turn," Phichit says. He's grinning devilishly. It wipes Yuuri's smile off his face.

"Phichit..." Yuuri narrows his eyes. "Don't you dare."

"Okay," Phichit shrugs. "I won't tell Victor about the fact that you thirsted after him even during his villain days, or the weird shit you've said while drunk, or the fact that you weren't an innocent elf and were, in fact, a delinquent child behind your inno exterior. Remember that time during our mentee days when you set fire to one of the hero’s shoes because they—"

"Phichit!"

Yuuri gets up and conjures an orange flame without thinking about it, has no time to think about it when he's running after Phichit to lovingly kick his ass.

"Ahh!" Phichit yells. "This isn’t what I signed up for! Victor! Stop your boyfriend before he kills me!"

"You're doing amazing, Yuuri!" Victor claps his hands like he's proud. "Now conjure a white flame!"

"Whose side are you on!" Phichit shrieks. He jumps the Ion Glass barrier wall and runs out of the training room.

Yuuri shakes his hands to put out the fire and smiles blindingly at Victor, arms thrown up in the air. "I did it!"

"You did! I'm so proud of you," Victor smiles back. It makes Yuuri's heart sing sappy love songs.

"If you gay lovebirds are done," Phichit interrupts, head cautiously poking out from the side of the
door frame. "I'm gonna opt out of the rest of the training because I don't feel like being burnt to a deliciously golden brown crisp, thank you."

They make plans for their first actual date mid-mission.

“Are you doing anything on Thursday?” Victor shouts as he dodges an attack from a villain named Dr. Adequately Evil, whose brain is so big it weighs him down. It’s a wonder how he manages to stay up in the air.

Yuuri throws balls of fire that the villain uses as counter-attacks, and Yuuri back flips away like the badass he is, and *wow*, Victor can admire his amazing fighting style forever.

“No,” Yuuri shakes his head, panting a little. “Then again, it isn’t a matter of what *we’re* doing, but if the villains will let us catch a damn break.” Swiftly, he pulls Victor to his side, and Victor throws up a cursory ice wall to deflect the brain wave attack that comes their way.

“True,” Victor says. “We can try for something earlier in the day, when everyone is asleep.”

“Are you joking? I like you, Cryo-Frost, but if I had to choose between you and sleep, well…” Yuuri pretends to hold his hands out like a scale, weighing his options.

Victor’s heart does loop-de-loops across his rollercoaster veins. He cannot get over that. Yuuri genuinely *likes* him. *Wow!* (Of course that’s the only thing his brain really zooms in on. Everything else flies right over his head.) “But you hardly sleep at night.”

“Yes, but I’m not *nocturnal*. I get tired, too. And you know I can barely keep awake in the mornings.”

Flying overhead, Dr. Adequately Evil sends another brain wave attack at them, upturning the sidewalk they’re on, and Yuuri hops with light feet on the flying pieces of concrete to get to him, dealing a nimble kick to his gigantic head that causes him to fall to the ground like a swatted fly. Victor runs and catches Yuuri in his arms before he lands as harshly as the villain does.

“I’ll get Yakov to give us an hour of free time,” Victor suggests, holding Yuuri close, warm and giddy at the fact that he has this *wonderful, wonderful* man here with his arms around Victor’s shoulders and he’s *allowed* to hold him like this now.

Victor wants to kiss him here in broad daylight. Give the public an actual scene to talk about.

“I kind of doubt he’ll let you, but yeah, okay,” Yuuri shrugs, smile small yet as bright as his fire. “If you can get Yakov to agree to that by some miracle, I’ll go out with you on Thursday.”

Victor gets Yakov to agree through a promise he hopes he remembers to keep, and Yuuri seems surprised that Yakov even complied; he clearly underestimated Victor’s willingness to do just about anything to spend time with him.

On a complete whim, they decide to go to the nearest tea shop a couple of blocks away, because they’re limited to one hour.

Yuuri looks absolutely adorable. He’s wearing his glasses and his hair falls over his eyebrows and his warm hand keeps squeezing Victor’s when they cross streets which heats Victor’s already warm
heart even more.

He loves him. Loves loves loves him.

Loves him so much, in fact, that he nearly runs into poles and pedestrians at least ten times on their walk to the shop. He doesn’t mean to be so dazed, but he just can’t take his eyes off Yuuri.

“Victor,” Yuuri huffs after the twelfth time, when he tugs Victor away from a woman carrying a baby stroller. “Remind me to never, ever let you drive if we’re in the same car.”

“I’ll have you know that I’m a careful driver,” Victor says. “Only one person has ever ended up in the hospital while I was behind the wheel.”

Yuuri raises his eyebrows in alarm, but he’s smiling, close-mouthed and precious. “You know it’s hard to tell when you’re joking.”

Victor blinks at him now. “Joking? I’m serious.”

Before Yuuri can say something past the jaw-dropped expression he’s wearing, Victor spots a man on the other side of the street selling flowers. He tells Yuuri to wait here a moment, don’t move, I need to get something—please Yuuri I’m trying to be romantic, before he crosses the street to the flower seller.

Without any sort of preamble or normal-human-decency, Victor takes the bouquet of green and white carnations, turns to leave, remembers that he actually has to pay for these, oh, right. So he quickly turns back to the man who looks ready to tell him off, opens his wallet, and throws a fifty dollar bill at him without thinking, then he leaves.

Victor crosses the street back to an amused Yuuri with his brows raises and that small, soft grin on his lips. He pretends to hide the bouquet behind his back, as if Yuuri hadn’t seen him buy it a few seconds ago.

“I’ve got a surprise for you,” Victor says.

Yuuri mimics Victor’s hands-behind-his-back gesture and plays along, tilting his head as he asks, “Oh, really? And what would that be?”

Victor produces the flowers with a flourish, singing, “Tada!”

And oddly, Yuuri looks stunned for a moment, and Victor is scared that he’d done something wrong. Did he get ones that Yuuri is allergic to? Are there bees flying around the petals, or worse, wasps? Did he accidentally get an assortment that says you fucking suck in flower? Because flower meaning are a thing, right?

But then Yuuri adopts this wider smile as he takes the flowers into his hand and says a shy little,”Thank you.”

Victor’s heart melts under the intense, fiery light of him. He slips his hand into Yuuri’s free one, and they start walking again. “I realize this is unconventional. I should’ve brought them to your door so you’d be able to place them in a vase or something.”

“Victor, there’s nothing conventional about this,” Yuuri grins. “But that’s okay. I’m starting to like unconventional.”

He agrees wholeheartedly.
They finally make it to the tea shop, Cutea, and line up next to the sign labelled *Queue Tea*. Victor places his hand on Yuuri’s shoulder, whispers low on Yuuri’s ear. “Isn’t this funny? A cutie standing in line at the queue-tea in a Cutea.”

Yuuri holds a hand over his mouth to hide a smile, elbowing him lightly in his side. “That sentence was not my cup of tea.”

Victor’s lips twitch with the effort not to laugh and disturb the quiet atmosphere of the shop. “What are you getting, Yuuri?”

His shoulder raises in a shrug. “Mm, I dunno. Surprise me?”

“Okay,” Victor nods. “But if I’m ordering for you, you order for me, too.”

“But I don’t know what you like.”

Victor shrugs. “Surprise me.”

Yuuri gets him something so sickly sweet Victor could gag, but he drinks it anyway, because he’s too enraptured by the happy little hums Yuuri makes when he sips at his drink with the tapioca pearls.

“How did you know I liked bubble tea?” Yuuri asks while chewing.

“That was an honest guess,” Victor answers. “I just got something as bubbly as you.”

Yuuri ducks his head, holding his hand in front of his face, which is cute cute cute. “And do you like your Spiced Black? I don’t know if you like sweet things, but…”

“I’m not really fond of sweet things,” Victor says bluntly. Yuuri’s face falls a little, so he quickly adds, “but this is alright.”

“I can get you something else?” Yuuri says, about to stand, and Victor is ready to stop him when his phone rings.

Not many messages come his way, and the person he speaks to most is Yuuri, so this can only be Yakov. Victor is dreading what he’ll say when he answers.

“Yakov?”

“Vitya,” comes his grumbly voice. “I need you to come back here, get dressed, and meet Phichit and Christophe. They’re fighting a level five villain.”

Frowning, Victor locks eyes with Yuuri, who’s idly sipping on the rest of his tea while he watches Victor with concern. He pulls his phone away to look at the time; it hasn’t even been thirty minutes yet.

“Are you sure they can’t handle themselves?” Victor whines. “You promised me an hour.”

“I made no such promises. I said I’ll give you an hour if nothing comes up. Something has come up. Get back here and help the others.” Yakov hangs up.

Victor sighs. “We have to go. So much for a first date.”

“It’s okay,” Yuuri says, already standing up. “We’ll try again another day.”
Another day involves going on a stroll in the nearby park the next Monday. It's nice because not many people are found wandering the park on a windy Monday afternoon like this one, so Victor will, theoretically have Yuuri all to himself. Yakov lets him take one of the hoverbikes when he promises Yakov that Yuuri will be the one driving. It's perfectly fine by Victor, because he'll be able to wrap his arms around Yuuri the entire time. (He's done that before, but there's something different about it when the implication comes like a packaged deal at the fact that they're also dating.)

But Victor says theoretically, because Kenjirou ends up tagging along. Yuuri has to move their Tuesday meeting up to this Monday since Kenjirou has a dentist appointment. He apparently has to have those three months a year instead of two like everyone else.

Victor is all for hygiene and what not, and he likes Kenjirou, really, but he just wants to have at least one successful date with Yuuri. Just one. It's all he asks. Victor doesn't ask for much, so he thinks this tiny request isn't unreasonable.

Kenjirou ends up clutching to Yuuri on the hoverbike, and Victor has to sit in the detachable side car because Kenjirou hates having his legs trapped; it makes him feel antsy. Victor would have objected to this, stay steadfast to his astronomical need to wrap his arms around Yuuri's perfect waist, but then those two throw puppy eyes at him. At the same time. It's not fair. Should be illegal and outlawed in all 169 countries.

So Victor grumbles with his knees tucked under his chin while Yuuri drives them over to the park, and he has to sit down and listen to Kenjirou talk so fast he's practically speaking a new alphabet. Victor wants to be a little petty, slap his hand on the teen's mouth while he holds all of Yuuri's attention, but Victor knows he's better than that. Kenjirou is just an excited kid, so who is he to rain on his parade.

At the very least, he gets to hold Yuuri's hand, and feel Yuuri squeeze his fingers, and he isn't listening to a thing Kenjirou says while he grins lovingly at Yuuri's enraptured expression. Had Victor been listening, he would've realized that Kenjirou has suddenly gone quiet, for no apparent reason. All he cares about are Yuuri's eyes—big, beautiful, ocean deep eyes that he'd gladly drown in...

"Victor?" Yuuri calls, amused as he waves his hand in front of Victor's face.

"Hmm?" Victor says, dreamily.

" Aren't you going to answer Kenjirou's question?"

"Yeah... wait." Victor blinks a few times and looks at Kenjirou, who looks ready to pop off like a rocket and hurl into the sky, straight at the sun, explode like fireworks. "I'm sorry. What was your question?"

"I wanted to ask you if H.I.T. training is hard—"

Yuuri whispers under his breath, "Hero in training training." Victor stifles his giggle.

"—but now I have a different question! You guys are totally dating! Right? Like for real this time? Oh, man, I thought the rumors were wrong but it's true! It's like, I'm clairvoyant! You know, my mom is clairvoyant, which is why I can't hide anything from her. She knows I'm going to steal the good stuff, the sweets, waaay before I actually get to it—"
"Mhm," Victor hums along to everything he says, just like Yuuri, and rubs his thumb along the lines on the back of Yuuri's hand the whole time.

"Can we try to go to the movies?" Victor asks Yuuri.

Yuuri hums thoughtfully before answering. "Nah. Phichit swears off of going to the movies as a first date. We don't get the chance to talk. It's dark. And what if we sit in front of a bratty kid who kicks the chairs, or behind someone with hair the size of the moon?"

Victor nods his head in acquiescence. "Good point. But there's one good thing the movie are for."

"Mm? And what might that be?"

"Three words," Victor holds up three fingers to punctuate this. "Make out sessions."

Yuuri makes a noise comparable to a dying pterodactyl, dips his head to hide the little blush on his nose. Victor absently muses about how his hand suddenly grows so warm. Come winter, he'll never want to let go of them. "That's—no! I'm not making out with you in a theater no matter how tempting the idea of kissing you is."

"Okay then," Victor pouts. He starts throwing suggestions at Yuuri. "Beach?"

Yuuri shakes his head. "Too far."

"Grossly cliche but really cute coffeeshop date?"

"I already drink enough as it is. Besides, too similar to our failed tea shop date."

"Roadtrip?"

"Not with hero work to deal with."

"Laser tag? Paintball?"

Yuuri scrunches up his nose in a heart-wrenchingly cute way as he hums in thought. "I would love to kick your ass in any of those. But we'd need more people than just the two of us."

Victor sighs in defeat. It feels like every first date attempt they'll try will get ruined by some unforeseeable force, like a first date curse is inflicted on them. Maybe Victor accidentally dropped an ancient cursed artifact that time he robbed a museum, and it's only coming back to bite him in the ass now. He just wants one good, perfect date with Yuuri, one that they'll look back on in a scrapbook on their fifth wedding anniversary—

But he's getting ahead of himself.

It's ridiculously late. One in the morning, to be exact, because they had to help both heroes and Fire & Rescue in an attempt to save some people from a building that was near collapse, after the Hash Slinging Basher's crew of underlings came to wreck havoc and taunt them in revenge.

Victor is exhausted. He wants to go back home—to Yakov and Yura's home—and collapse like those buildings and sleep for five years.

But he's offered to take Yuuri home, because the little in between moments might be all they have right now when the number of crimes are on a high-pitched crescendo. It’s tense, and there’s a dark
omen cloud hanging over their heads, waiting to burst windows and crack glass any minute now.

This is nice, though. Walking with Yuuri with the ambient sound of sirens and honking cars, rustling leaves and bustling outdoor restaurants through the late summer night.

It's too bad, then, that the nice atmosphere is ruined by the sound of thunder overhead. Because Victor needed his parade to be rained on. This is like, preemptive karma, and Victor will not stand for this.

Yuuri seems to have the same thought, because he tugs on Victor's hand and starts running for his apartment building. They make it inside the lobby just in time; the drizzle that Victor felt in his hair is now a light downpour.

"Well," Victor says. "This is convenient."

"Convenient how?" Yuuri blinks at him owlishly. "Unless you plan on going out there in the rain to go back home, you're basically stuck..." he trails off. His eyes sparkle a little at the epiphany he makes. "Oh."

Victor smiles sheepishly when he asks, "May I crash at your place while we wait out this storm together?"

Yuuri has to contemplate his decision, chewing his bottom lip as he stares at Victor. Then he nods, and says. “Okay.”

He timidly slides his hand through Victor’s to link their fingers together and leads him to the staircase, where they walk six flights of stairs before going to the lit hallway of the third floor. When Victor asks him why he didn’t take the elevators, Yuuri tells him that he doesn’t trust them. “I got stuck in them once. It took an hour before the fire department got me out, and I ended up being late for work. Never again.”

“Sorry about the mess,” Yuuri says, slipping the key into the lock and opening the door to the dark apartment. “I didn’t think I’d be bringing you in here, and I haven’t cleaned in a few days.”

Yuuri removes his shoes by the door, and Victor does the same. Then Yuuri turns on the light, and Victor curiously peers at the small, quaint residence. It isn’t as messy as Yuuri makes it out to be. There’s one or two hamster print coasters lying on the coffee table, books on the square dining table next to the kitchen, a few plates in the sink that Victor can see, and the cushions on the single couch are disheveled. It’s small and cozy, but Victor figures it’s perfect to house Yuuri when he’s the only one living here.

There’s barking in what Victor suspects is Yuuri’s bedroom.

Victor gasps, stares at Yuuri excitedly as he opens his door to let the cutest dog in the world out.

“Puppy!”

The tiny, miniature Makkachin immediately jumps up to Victor to sniff at his feet and paw his leg, and Victor crouches down to rubs his back, delighted at the way the dog wags his tail. “He’s adorable, Yuuri!”

“His name is Vicchan,” Yuuri says, smiling at them. “He’s the cutest.”

“He definitely gives you a run for your money,” Victor quips as he coos at the small dog. “How old is he?”
“Four years old.”

“He’s so small,” Victor says in wonder. Vicchan curls around Victor’s socked feet like the petting tired him out.

“Mm, yet he sleeps like a puppy. It is pretty late, though.” Yuuri scoops Vicchan up and carries him into his bedroom, which Victor assumes holds the dog’s bed too. When Yuuri returns, he’s dressed comfortably in a loose shorts and a graphic Tee that reads “[funny phrase here because I was too lazy to come up with one]”.

“You can, um. Make yourself at home. Do you need anything? Something to drink? A towel, maybe? Er.” Yuuri shuffles awkwardly in place. “I’m sorry, I don’t have guests over often that aren’t Phichit.”

Victor takes a seat on the couch, smiling brightly at Yuuri. “It’s okay. Just water is fine, please.”

Nodding his head, Yuuri walks into the kitchen and opens the fridge which, Victor can see from where he sits, has an entire shelf just filled with water. He knew Yuuri likes to stay hydrated, but that seems excessive.

His eyes sweep across the rest of the kitchen that he can see from here, and he spots half full spice jars, a cutting board propped up on the counter against a wall, a small, decorated cake sitting on the counter, and a cookbook with dog-eared pages.

“You cook?”

“Mhm. Baking mostly, when I can find the time. My parents taught me.” He hands the ice cold water bottle to Victor then sits on the free space of the couch. “I haven’t in awhile with how hectic things have gotten.”

After he takes a small sip, Victor responds, “I never had the time to learn. The best I can do is brownies in a mug, and the microwave nearly exploded.”

“You can’t be that bad,” Yuuri says. “You know…” He pauses like he’s trying to decide if whatever he’s thinking will be a good idea of not. “I could teach you.”

Victor perks up. “Really? Right now?”

Yuuri blinks a few times. “Well, not now, but I mean I guess we have nothing better to do for the time being. I don’t think I have enough ingredients for anything special.”

But Victor is hardly listening. He’s already beelining for the book, throwing a cursory, “May I?” at Yuuri before taking it in his hands, and when Yuuri tentatively nods, he’s flipping through the pages to find the perfect thing to bake with Yuuri right now. His hand stops on the first thing that looks good. He doesn’t care what they make, because he’ll be making it with Yuuri.

He brings the page close to Yuuri so he can see. Yuuri scrunches up his nose. “I don’t have any more peanut butter.”

Who would Victor Nikiforov be if he let some measly jar of peanut butter stop him from baking with Yuuri?

He sets the book down, open on the peanut butter cookies page. “There was a store few block from here, right? Does it stay open late? I think it was still open when we passed it—” Victor is already walking towards the door.
“Wait, hold on, Victor you’re not walking out there, it’s still pouring!”

“Yuuri,” Victor says, pausing in the doorway to stare Yuuri directly in the eyes. “A little bit of rain won’t keep me from having this impromptu baking date with you.”

He leaves, and the last thing he sees before closing the door is Yuuri’s dropped jaw and the flush on his face.

Victor should have thought about this a little more. The makeshift umbrella he’d made out of ice did nothing to help the literal ocean dropped on him on his way to the store.

Because he’s soaked through to his underwear.

“You really shouldn’t have done all of that for the sake of a tiny jar of peanut butter. We could’ve chosen literally anything else,” Yuuri chides him, tossing Victor a spare towel that he took from his room. Victor uses it to wipe most of the water from his hair, and Yuuri uses his flames as a fireplace to dry off the undershirt and shorts he was wearing underneath his clothing. His shirt and pants are hanging in Yuuri’s bathroom to dry.

"It was one-hundred percent worth it," Victor finally replies after he dries out his hair. He peeks from underneath the towel to smile sincerely at Yuuri. "If a little rain is what it takes to do something cute with you, I’d travel through waterfalls."

Yuuri tries to hide his blush by turning his head to his shoulder, but Victor can see the soft tinge of it on his cheeks. Yuuri's blushing is adorable. Vicchan's tiny wagging tail can't compare.

When Victor is deemed dry enough, and Yuuri has dried away the droplets on water on the floor, they finally start baking the peanut butter cookies at two in the morning. Victor should really go home and sleep, probably, but being here with Yuuri is caffeine-inducing enough to keep him awake. And besides, it's still raining outside, and he's sure Yakov wouldn't appreciate him calling in the middle of the night to come pick him up.

It takes three attempts to get it right. The first two are entirely Yuuri's fault, but Victor was being a "dirty enabler", like Yuuri had called him.

The first time, Victor takes over the mixing process, and Yuuri measures them out. It's easier this way since Victor won't risk screwing up the measurements because, no matter how awake he thinks he is, his eyes are sinking heavy like anchors in protest.

When they roll the dough into little balls, Victor won't stop laughing about it, because everything's funny past midnight.

"Can you hand me the balls?" Yuuri says when he takes out his baking tray.

"Don't fondle them too much," Victor says while biting down his snickers. "They're very fragile."

"Must be a reflection of the person who made them," Yuuri slyly says without looking up. He can't see the way Victor stares at him in disbelief at that blow. It was absolutely brutal, but it makes Victor laugh anyway.

They eat what's left of the cookie dough, and it's great, Victor can already tell that these cookies will be the best things he's ever tasted. And as Victor is hovering over the mixing bowl, eating the excess dough, watching Yuuri preheat the oven, he has a thought.
"Yuuri," he calls with effort. His mouth is a little sticky from the peanut butter. "Have you ever attempted to bake things with your bare hands? You can reach those temperatures, right?"

Yuuri regards him curiously in thought, then he eyes the tray of cookie dough balls. "That... is a bad idea."

But he tries it anyway, because he hasn't before, and he's curious if he can.

They nearly set the kitchen on fire.

The cake that was on the counter tragically didn't make it.

“Ah, well,” Yuuri sighs, “I'll just scrape the burnt parts off later.”

“Were you saving it for something special?” Victor asks as he scrapes off the charred peanut butter from the tray, because they'd completely forgot about placing a baking sheet underneath.

“Phichit brought it over, I think. I didn’t put it here, and he has the keys to my place.”

The next attempt, Victor is measuring out the ingredients now, because Yuuri seems to think that's he's capable after one demonstration. And Victor should be capable, but he can't make sense of the English language at two-thirty in the morning. How does Yuuri stay up this late and manage to be coherent?

Victor can hardly focus, and the fact that Yuuri is leaning against his side with his warm weight doesn't help at all. Victor keeps wanting to lean back against him, rest his head right on top of Yuuri's while wrapping his arm around him because he's a literal human furnace and Victor would not mind sleeping curled up next to him.

"Ah..." Yuuri says, pulling Victor from his spaced out reverie to get back to task at hand.

With a raised eyebrow and a curious gaze, Victor turns, and he sees that half the mixture is gone, because Yuuri-the-little-sugar-tooth-menace ate it all when he wasn't looking.

"Yuuuuuriii."

"Sorry," Yuuri says guiltily. Then as an afterthought, "We should scrap it anyway. The flour was kinda lumpy. Didn't you sift it?"

Victor eyes the untouched sifter like he's been caught red handed. "Yes...?"

Yuuri stares at him, unamused, and hums. "Let's try again."

By their third try, they've run out of half of the ingredients, and have to improvise and ration the last of the items to make six cookies, because that's all there's enough for. Victor bans Yuuri from going near the mixture, and Yuuri scoffs, tells him, "You can't tell me what to do in my own kitchen."

What they forget to account for is the the fact that it'll take a lot less time to bake six cookies instead of the serving size of sixteen, so they get a little burned when Victor gets distracted by Yuuri's retelling of organization holiday parties. Everyone leaves their offices and wings to mingle, which is shocking. Karaoke happens, and Chris will do a perfect rendition of Diana Ross's I'm Coming Out like he's lip syncing for his life. He hopes he'll be here long enough to experience all of that for years to come.

Yuuri grabs the tray of burnt cookies from the oven with his bare hands, because of course he can.
Victor doesn’t know why he questioned the lack of oven muffins by the oven when Yuuri doesn’t need them. He sets the cookies onto a plate and puts the plate on the coffee table in the living room to be displayed in all of its burnt-edged goodness.

He takes the first bite, and Victor watches for his reaction with bated breath as he waits for Yuuri’s taste buds to deliberate...

"They...could be worse."

Victor takes one for himself, blows on it with his cool breath, takes a bite. Immediately spits it onto into his hand. "This is terrible."

"Yeah," Yuuri agrees. He tentatively places his half eaten cookie on the tray like it'll explode if he drops it too quickly. "It's pretty bad." He smiles down at Victor from where he's perched on the armrest. It makes Victor melt. Yuuri is so beautiful from up there. "But this was fun. I'm glad you ran out into the rain for a simple jar of peanut butter."

Victor grins up at him, grabs his hand, feels warmed up tenfold by the contact. "Thank you for having me."

A flushed face is a good look on Yuuri; it makes Victor soar because he's the reason Yuuri looks so happy right now.

"Do you hear that?" Yuuri asks suddenly.

"That's the sound of my heart beating for you," Victor answers on reflex.

"W-wha—no, you dork, I mean the rain stopped," he says. And Yuuri is right; it’s a lot quieter now that the rain isn’t pounding against the windows. "You should probably get home." Yuuri almost sounds regretful when he says it, and Victor can emphasize.

"I should..." Victor says slowly. It isn't a confirmation that he will. But he is tired, and his eyes are in full picket-sign, catchy-slogan protest, but he doesn't want to leave. His body will hate him in the morning. "I should," Victor continues. "But maybe we can watch a movie here instead? I recall you saying something like 'watch things with you in your apartment', yeah?"

"Right..." Yuuri confirms. "I didn't expect that to happen so soon." Grabbing the TV remote, he slides off of the armrest, squeezes into the tiny space between it and Victor despite there being enough space here for three people. But Yuuri doesn’t complain, so Victor doesn’t move. "Are you sure? You’re not tired?"

“No,” Victor lies. Yuuri hums like he doesn’t believe him. “If you fall asleep, you’re staying on the couch.”

“I can’t believe you’re already banishing me to the dreaded couch barely a week into this relationship,” Victor melodramatically pouts.

Rolling his eyes to the ceiling, Yuuri playfully bumps his shoulder against Victor as he flips through the movie selections. "Don't fall asleep then."

"I won't, don't worry." And because Victor needed to give Yuuri a reason not to believe him, his treacherous body makes him yawn without his consent. Yuuri blinks at him, silently saying really? in a disbelieving arch of his brow, so Victor amends that statement. "No promises?"
"Victor," Yuuri sighs. "If you need to sleep, you can. You shouldn't let me keep you up like this."

"Nooo," Victor whines, wraps his arms snug around Yuuri's body, fits his head against Yuuri's shoulder. So warm warm warm. "We've never gotten to spend so much time together, Yuuri. I want to savor this short time we have..."

Yuuri groans. "Why do you constantly sound like you have twenty-four hours to live? Stop that."

Victor doesn't say anything, just continues to whine against Yuuri's neck, and Yuuri goes rigid all of a sudden like the shock of ice down his back. With Victor's sleep-addled brain, it takes him a while to realize that his lips are pressed right there, against the warmth of his skin. He nearly moves away because he doesn't want to make Yuuri uncomfortable...

But Yuuri relaxes, melts like ice under the sun, so Victor puckers his lips and presses a tiny kiss there.

"Victor," Yuuri inhales like he's having trouble breathing. But he's not pulling away. "What would it take to get you sleep? If you're really too tired, I'll let you sleep here."

"Mm," Victor hums, wonders if Yuuri can feel the vibration of it run along the column of his neck. "Would you like payment for allowing me to stay here?"

"Um... N-no, that's fine. I don't need money, Victor. I'm letting you say here as my..."

Victor's heart jumps. Flips. Trips over itself in the pause that Yuuri takes, and Yuuri looks so red and cute and flustered when he turns to face an empty wall and mumble boyfriend into his hand. Victor doesn't think he'll ever stop smiling. He doesn't want to stop.

"Nothing monetary. Is there anything else I can pay you with?" When Yuuri's eyes shut tight and his nose scrunches as a thought crosses his mind, Victor leans over him and hums suggestively. "What were you thinking of just then?"

Yuuri's shoulders square a little as he seems to resolve something in his mind; he turns around, and in one quick movement, presses his lips right against Victor's, makes Victor's eyes widen and his heart stop and his mind turn to slush. Then he pulls back before Victor can even think about reciprocating, and says, "I'll give you more of that if you sleep for me."

"Yuuri!" Victor would dead drop and sleep for an eternity of it means he'll have more of that. "I don't think I'm motivated enough... may I have one more?"

"Will you sleep?"

The need to sleep is slowly sapping out of him, but Yuuri doesn't need to know that. Victor nods anyway, hair bouncing in enthusiasm. "Absolutely."

Yuuri leans in close close closer, close enough for Victor to feel the heat of his breath against his lips; close enough that Victor has to lean back until his head is against the other armrest and his back is pressed against the cushions; close enough, that there's no space in between them as Yuuri sends his mind down the drain.

Then he says, "How can you sleep if we're just kissing?"

"You're really trying to make me suffer."

But, god, Victor would suffer a thousand times if it means being this close to Yuuri.
He giggles, and it's the sound angels make when they want to send Victor into an early grave, because really, he's going to keel over. Death by Yuuri's laugh. It's a great way to go.

While Victor stares at him like Yuuri is the only good thing in the world, Yuuri presses another kiss to his lips, and Victor is prepared this time, sees it coming, puckers his lips and just about melts against the heat of Yuuri. Each slow and sweet peck pulls Victor under, makes him drown in the feeling of Yuuri Yuuri Yuuri.

Victor wants to go back in time and curse Emerald Witch and any villain who caused him to miss out on this. He was robbed, all this time.

He feels a tug at his hair and Yuuri's mouth opens with a sigh, and Victor can do nothing but hold on tight to Yuuri's waist like an anchor. Yuuri kisses like a dream, languid and nebulous, but he's like fire, too, biting and merciless and Victor can't get enough of it, doesn't know how he spent so long without this, wants to kiss Yuuri into the next century...

Victor was, in fact, too tired.

Falling asleep mid-makeout isn’t the lamest thing he’s ever done. But it’s up there.

“Yuuri!” Victor calls. It’s nearing eleven at night, and they’d just returned from the fifth mission of the day, and they’re exhausted, and Yuuri probably wants to go home and rest, but Victor has had this surprise planned for all of two days and it’s literally perishable and has to happen now. So while the last of the workers are trickling out of the organization, Victor pulls Yuuri towards the training room.

“Wait, what are you doing?” Yuuri asks, face scrunched a little in confusion, and he looks adorable that way—nose all pressed and squished like a baby kitten—and it makes Victor want to take a picture so the image of it lasts longer in his mind.

“I’m taking you to the training room, of course,” he replies like it’s meant to be obvious. But it isn’t obvious. Victor is exceptional at keeping secrets and hiding surprises, so Yuuri won’t see this coming.

“Victor, isn’t it a little too late to be training? I’d like to go ho…”

And surprised he is as Victor opens the doors and lets Yuuri in first. Right in the center, to the left of the scorch marks that’s taken home on the mats from the training session they had this morning, sits a table that looks like it’s been borrowed (stolen) from one of the rooms upstairs.

There’s all sorts of picnic-y snacks: sandwiches and cheese cubes and homemade pies and store bought salads. Victor also took the liberty of using the SIB system to play a mix of RainyMood and Fireplace Crackles, because he made the exciting discovery that SIB can play music a few days ago when he was messing with it's settings to figure out all the things SIB can do.

(It can call tiny holograms, too, and Victor had an unreasonable amount of fun poking the little autumn leaf projections that showered his space in the lounge. He nearly added them to this little date idea, but it would have been overkill. As if the picnic blanket-turned-tablecloth isn’t overkill already.)

Yuuri blinks, eyes sweeping along the table, bottom lip caught between his teeth, and he looks up at Victor curiously. "This is... what is this?"
"A picnic-slash-dinner, of course!" Victor announces, facing Yuuri with his arms wide open like he's introducing something special. This is special, and he worked very hard on this, and he hopes Yuuri appreciates it.

He seems to by the way the corner of his lips twitch and his eyes sparkle in the dim light of the candles. Victor got scented candles titled Picnic in the Park. For the authenticity.

"How the heck did you convince Mr. Feltsman to do this after hours?" Yuuri asks.

"I didn't," Victor answers as he slips his hand down the length of Yuuri's forearm and takes him by the hand to lead him to one of the stools. Yuuri can simply plop down on it, but Victor wants to go the extra mile; he pulls the stool back by the low rung, has to kneel to do it because it's only a few centimeters from the ground, and Yuuri laughs as he sits down.

"You're unbelievable. But... this is nice. Thank you," Yuuri smiles, so wide and blindingly it's enough to burn straight through his retinas. Sunglasses and sunscreen would have nothing against the beaming, adorable, merciless force that is Yuuri Katsuki.

Victor feels lucky. So so so lucky.

He's staring. Victor realizes he hasn't said anything, only leaned his head on his palm with his elbow on the table as he gazes at Yuuri like he's the only thing in here worth looking at. "Anything for you, darling."

"Darling?" Yuuri laughs. His cheeks have gotten a little red. Cute cute cute cute cute— "So we're already on a pet name basis? Should I use one on you, too?"

"I've called you that before, I'm pretty sure. Is that no good? How do you feel about sweetheart?"

Yuuri scrunches his nose up, lips in a little pout. Victor wants to kiss it. Kiss him. Kiss his face silly —

"Babe?"

Yuuri shakes his head. "I don't mind that one, it's just more silly than cute..."

"Sugar?"

A hand gesture that means he's not too sure.

"Honey."

The cute tilt of his head like he's considering it.

"Flour."

Yuuri pauses, looks at him in bewilderment.

"Eggs."

His eyes widen a little, pulls the corner of his lips with them.

"Salt."

There's a snorting sound, the same sound that Yuuri gets flustered over, the same sound Victor absolutely adores hearing. He's grinning, proud of himself, as he watches Yuuri cover his mouth in
embarrassment, all while the laughter slips from between his fingers.

"You are too much. I think I'd rather hear you call me Cinderella again."

Victor's brows shoot up to his hairline. "Really? I thought you hated that."

"Not as much as I hate being called salt and eggs," Yuuri says, hands absentmindedly rummaging into the container of sliced fruits.

"How about honey bunches of oats?"

Yuuri throws a soft green melon slice at his head.

At some point, they scoot their stools close together so they're on one side of the square table. Victor gets Yuuri to feed him under the guise of warming up his hands between his thighs because it's too cold, and Yuuri can see right through him, knows that the cold hardly bothers him, but he obliges Victor anyway because he's far too good.

And because he's far too good, he gives Victor little kisses on the cheek every time he brings a piece of the disheveled sandwich to his lips. Victor accepts both with satisfied hums.

"You know," Yuuri starts while there's a lull in the conversation they were having about weird mission shenanigans. He has his head against Victor's shoulder, and that spot on him feels disproportionately warm compared to everything else. "Today was really dangerous. A warning through text or something would've been extremely helpful."

"Maybe, but I love surprising you," Victor says, tracing the lines of the back of Yuuri's hand with his finger. That surprise entailed setting his white fire directly at Victor, and assuming things would go well, like it had with Phichit. By the end of it, Victor's hair felt electrified and singed at the tips, there were puddles of water on the ground, and scorched marks permanently printed on the blue mats.

"If you wanted to get burned so badly, you could've just said so. I would've gladly talked about your questionable baking skills."

Victor glares at him with pouted lips. "Yuuri, I didn't know you were so mean." Yuuri looks smug, so he adds, "Icy no reason to burn me like this."

His cheeky little smile drops. "Ugh. Why. I was starting to warm up to you, Victor."

"Ah ha, I am rubbing off on you!"

"No, no, that was unintended," Yuuri swears, but Victor can see the grin hiding underneath his fake serious expression. Victor waggles his eyebrows at him, and Yuuri says, "I'm gonna have to ask you to stop."

"Don't you mean..."

"No."

"...Ashke?"

"Ugh. Are you literally made of nothing but awful flirting attempts and bad puns?"

"Not only that," Victor quibs, wrapping his arms tight around Yuuri's waist and pulling him even closer than they already were. Low in Yuuri's ear, he says, "I'm also made of boyfriend material."
The burn on Yuuri’s face will never not be gratifying. It's like he hasn't quite gotten used to the B-word, so hearing it out loud has a visceral effect on him. The last time Victor said it, Yuuri nearly burned a hole through his hand. It was worth it, though.

Yuuri purses his lips, starts to mumble, "You're lucky you're cute—" But he cuts himself off. Stills. And Victor hears it, too.

Like something above them suddenly dropped, a heavy weight that shakes the ceiling and puts the wispy candle flames out.

The sounds are clear, because it’s quiet. SIB’s screen has been shut down and dematerialized, and neither Victor nor Yuuri called it off.

"Is...is anyone here past eleven at night?" Victor questions quietly.

“I.” Yuuri shakes his head. “Only a few people bother staying late. Maybe it’s Seung-gil? Or Isabella…”

There’s another thump, louder this time, like it’s close by and drawing closer still. On the move.

“Should we go and check it out? Just to be sure.”

Yuuri nods without question. He seems tense and uncertain, so Victor knows there must be something wrong, and Yuuri is only trying to stay calm in the face of it. Victor’s known him long enough to know when he’s panicking a little on the inside.

He silently curses whoever it is that’s stomping around on the higher levels because they’ve ruined yet another date. Apart from the impromptu late nite baking, everything seems to get interrupted by some unforeseen force, and Victor wants it to stop and let him stare at Yuuri’s lovely face in peace.

Maybe planning things out isn’t the way to go. Going with the flow seemed to be working well.

Maybe the date doesn’t have to end here, either. With Yuuri’s hands wrapped tightly around his as they soundlessly stalk the low-lit halls, Victor resolves that this date hasn’t ended if he has anything to say about it.

Yuuri leads them up the stairs, because, Victor figures, taking the elevators would give them away. Away to what, though, neither of them know yet. Not until they reach the top step, tentatively round the corner onto the second floor, and spot the whisper of something purple and glittering flitting from one room to another.

Yuuri immediately bristles.

Victor gasps. “Is this place haunted?”

“Wha—no. Victor. That’s a real person. That’s…”

“Scarlet! Stop fucking around! Their security system won’t stay down forever.”

“Can’t you wait? Look at all the cool shit in here! They’ve got Ion Guns! And a T-shirt cannon?”

Something crashes.

“Nope. Not a T-shirt cannon. Whoops.”
Yuuri sucks in a breath and pulls Victor back into the stairwell just as Royal MF steps out of the room again. He stares at Victor with large, searching eyes as if he has the answers. “What the fuck are they doing here?” he whispers with breathless urgency.

“I don’t know, but we have to stop them before they cause any more trouble,” Victor says decidedly. He starts walking out into the hall, but Yuuri’s hand on his wrist stops him before he can be spotted.

“Wait, no. You can’t. You don’t have a mask.”

“What does it matter?” Victor asks confusedly. “They already know my name and my face. Which is highly unfair, by the way. It hardly puts us on an even playing field when they can reveal my identity at any time.”

“Oh, my god, Victor. Don’t jinx it,” Yuuri hisses lowly. “You might be fine, but I’m not. I need to get my costume from downstairs—”

“You heard them though, didn’t you? They’re trying to work quickly. We might not have time to go downstairs are get our entire costumes on by the time they’ve got what they need.”

Yuuri sighs in resignation, nodding his head as he concedes. “Okay. You can stall them. I’ll just go and grab my mask as quickly as possible and help stop them with you.”

“Okay,” Victor nods, taking Yuuri’s hand and squeezing it in a sort of reassurance. And, just because he can, he slides his finger underneath Yuuri’s chin and tilts his head up, presses his lips against Yuuri’s nose, makes both their insides flutter and their knees weak. Victor doesn’t know how he’ll stop the villains when he’s weak all over, but he’ll manage somehow.

The smile Yuuri sends him is a double-edged sword. Makes him even weaker, but gives him the vigor he needs to kick villain ass.

While Yuuri makes his way downstairs, Victor steels himself, squaring his shoulders, huffing internally, thinks mean, intimidating Yura-like thoughts as he steps out into the hall. Royal MF and Scarlet Mask are standing directly in front of the RAD Department doors.

“What do you two think you’re doing here?” he calls.

Royal MF screams, high pitched and embarrassing as he throws his hands up defensively, then he clears his throat and straightens his shirt as he composes himself. Scarlet Mak is giggling next to him.

"I see your sixhead is as big as ever,” Royal MF calls back in greeting.

Victor scowls. "I see you still look like you died five years ago."

Royal MF scoffs as him and asks, "What are you even doing here?"

“I asked you first," Victor says, slowly and calmly walking in his direction. "I work here."

“I asked you second. Fuck you.”

Victor doesn’t realize Scarlet Mask has turned invisible and slipped away until he hears a whisper behind him. He yelps and jumps back when she says, “Boo.”

She laughs, and Victor’s eyes wildly search for where she might have gone. Yuuri and his infrared vision would be useful right about now. Victor doesn’t think resorting to echolocation via screaming would help the situation, but he’s considering it.
“You don’t look very heroic right now, Cryo-Frost. Where’s your costume? Why are you even here after dark? Shouldn’t you be home right now like everyone else? Though I guess that’s impossible when you can’t go back.” Victor opens his mouth to say something, but Scarlet Mask continues. “I’m sure living with Yakov is treating you well, though.”

Victor blinks, slow and careful, doesn’t bother trying to search for Scarlet when he can't see her. He keeps his eyes on Royal MF instead when he asks, "How do you know that I'm living with Yakov, exactly?"

"Why, you told us, of course!"

"When did I—"

"Scarlet!" Royal MF whisper-shouts. He's making frantic throat cutting motions with his hand and pointing in some far off direction down the hall. They must be running out of time, which means Victor is running out of time, too.

Victor is suddenly pushed against the wall as Scarlet Mask's invisible body roughly bumps against his, and he hears the sharp clicks of her shoes as she tails after Royal Mind Fuck down the hall. They stop in front of the RAD Department doors.

Why would they need to be there?

He doesn't wait around to find out. Instead, Victor moves, covers the doors in a thick layer of ice before either of them has the chance to break it open.

Scarlet Masks tsks in annoyance. "You're just as irritating as ever." An Ion Gun is produced out of nowhere, like it's been hiding in one of her invisible pockets. (But that makes no sense. How was a non-invisible thing just hiding on her person? Did her powers always work that way? Victor can't remember a thing, and it's frustrating.)

She aims the gun at Victor first, and Victor ducks behind a thick wall of ice that shatters like glass when it's hit; the shards rain on him like a tiny hail storm. Then, she aims it at the door. It blasts right through the ice barrier, through the metal doors, and the gaping hole is left with an orange glow around it from the searing heat of the gun.

Before they can step through the conveniently person-shaped hole, there's a flash of fire that stops them in their tracks. Victor has never been happier to see Yuuri—

—with a brown paper bag over his head. Holes cut for eyes and all. The same paper bag that Victor had used to carry the fruits and cheese cubes.

Victor raises an eyebrow at him.

Yuuri shrugs sheepishly. "The power is down. I can't get through any doors, so I couldn't get my mask."

"...Cinderos?" Royal MF asks. "What the fuck are you doing here?"

"I could ask the same thing to you!" Yuuri counters.

"Don't bother, they'll only deflect your question," Victor says.

"Wait a minute." Royal MF blinks at them. "You two are here after dark together. Alone? What were you—"
"Nothing illegal or depraved if that's what you're thinking," Yuuri mutters. Even with the hideous brown bag over his head, it's pretty obvious that he's blushing.

"Royal Assface, will you get in here already?" Scarlet calls from inside the room. When did she get in there? "I thought you said we had to be quick about this."

"Excuse me, I was trying to get you to concentrate the whole time."

"Yet you're sitting there having a conversation with the enemy. I think I prefer working with Emo Number Two."

Royal MF throws his hands up in the air in exasperation as he steps through the opening, and Yuuri wastes no time in following after, jumping on the villain and grabbing at his ankles after he's gone through the door; they go tumbling to the ground.

"Victor!" Yuuri shouts. "Stop her!"

"I can't see her!" Victor reminds him like Yuuri's forgotten. But he hasn't. Yuuri's eyes are flickering redder than usual, like it does when the infrared vision is active, and he's wrestling Royal MF down while simultaneously tracking Scarlet Mask's movement.

"She's going after the mind amplifying machine!"

All of the machines in here look nearly identical. Finding a single one is like searching for a hero at a hero convention.

Seemingly reading Victor's distress, Yuuri adds, "It's the big green and purple machine in the center! You know, the one you-know-who nearly destroyed."

Ah, the one Kenjirou made Seung-gil drop all those weeks ago.

Victor can't see her, so he improvises. It takes too much concentration to turn the entire floor to ice, so he can only manage the immediate area around the mind device.

He hears a "woah!" and a thump, and Scarlet Mask suddenly materializes, revealing her unceremonious position on the floor.

"Okay, rude."

"As if breaking and entering isn't rude," Victor says, retracting the ice from the ground, walking towards her while she's down.

"You're no fun anymore, Victor. When did you become such a buzzkill?" she pouts. "We used to have so much fun together, you, Royal MF, and I." Victor ignores her words. At least, he makes great effort to. It all sounds disjointed like this, when everything's been wiped away. Hearing recounts feels like looking through someone's eyes instead of his own. "You made us all sad when you decided to leave, you know? Of course, you can never really leave."

He stops to stare at her. The sound of the power whirring back on in the distance becomes evident, but Victor doesn't pay attention to that. He's only looking at the way Scarlet's lipstick-red lips smile in a way that would make the Joker scream with fear.

"Once a villain. Always a villain."

The alarms belatedly blare with the return of the security system, startling them all. Then, there's the
ear-splitting, mind-numbing pressure in the air as Shadow Knight's portal hastily sucks Royal MF and Scarlet Mask out of the room, and they're gone.

Victor and Yuuri are alone in the aftermath. A gaping hole is in the ceiling in the hallway, the doors to the Weapon's Division and RAD Department are wrecked, and there's scorch marks and bits of icicle debris lie mixed on the floor along with the metal and crumbled ceiling tiles. It's a mess.

An even bigger mess, however, will be dealing with Yakov's rage when he inevitably wakes up after being alerted about the break in.

But that's something to deal with in the near future.

Victor helps Yuuri up, and Yuuri pats at his jeans to wipe away the dust and tiny ice particles.

"Are you okay?" he asks.

Yuuri nods. "I'm fine. Are you?"

"Could be better," Victor sighs regretfully. "Can't even escape work while we're at work."

"Ha. This job is unforgiving."

There might be a smile, but Victor can't tell when that bag is still over Yuuri's head. He plucks it away and—and looking at Yuuri again is like a breath of fresh air. His hair is all cute and in disarray and his cheeks are flushed from the effort of wrestling down a squirming Royal MF.

Victor hadn't realized he was so tense until now. His headache was returning, but looking at Yuuri's face is enough to forget about that for the time being.

He grabs Yuuri's hand and squeezes it. "Want to continue our date while we can?"

"Sure," Yuuri smiles, squeezing back. He's already tugging Victor towards the automatic doors, stepping over debris while they walk. "I'd love to wine and dine at our workplace to the romantic sound of security alarms."

Chapter End Notes

i'm so sorry about how late this is, ohmygod, the last month was hectic. between dealing with hurricane irma and having to double up on assignments and the general soul sucking nature of uni, it got so hard to write, and it'll continue to be hard. but rest assured i will always find the time! i won't leave this story unfinished!!

happy yoi anniversary!

it's not the 6th here anymore but it's still the 6th somewhere. it still counts, right. i'd like to take this time to thank you all so much for following this story! i never imagined anyone would reading it past like, 10 people, and i'm still shocked to this day. all of your comments and kudos and recs and kind words really puts a smile on my face and helps me keep going. i love each and every one of you ♥♥

one more important thing!! the lovely awaltzinfour on twitter created gorgeous fanart of cinderos, and i swear to god i've been yelling for 7 days nonstop. bless.

edit: when ya update at 3am and accidentally put the author's note in the summary. sleep
on time, my friends.
 Coming after your prize, darlin’

Chapter Summary

The heroes plan their next step and prepare for the awards that Yuuri completely forgot about.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

They’re headed to the briefing room, and it feels far too eerie and quiet in the building. Victor had mentioned to him earlier that everyone is meeting there, and after the disaster that was the night before, that makes complete sense. SUCC is being targeted from the inside, so everyone here is in potential danger.

However, Yuuri’s in more danger of losing his mind and melting on the spot when—upon entering the HORE room and seeing everyone there, Isabella, Seung-gil, and Yuuko included—he notices Victor has a smile on his face, too giddy to suggest something tame.

Yuuri squints his eyes at him momentarily as he walks around the roundtable in search of a seat…

“Is there a problem, Yuuri?” Victor says once Yuuri is standing next to him. Phichit is sitting beside Victor, chin in his palm, while he smiles in amusement.

“All the chairs here are occupied, so…” Yuuri brazenly points at Victor’s lap and asks, “Is that seat taken?”

He takes an unreasonable amount of satisfaction at the way Victor’s mouth opens and closes, opens and closes again like a water-starved fish. Yuuri knew what Victor was getting at when he entered, and he managed to catch Victor off guard. Phichit is biting his bottom lip and trying not to laugh.

Yuuri has to press his own lips together as he makes Victor scooch to one end of the chair while he makes home on the other end. Their sides are fitting together uncomfortably on the seat, and Yuuri’s left leg is hanging off of one end, and this chair wasn’t made to seat two people like this at all.

“If you’re going to share a chair, you may as well get hard or go home,” Chris suggests from across the table.

“Hey,” JJ chimes in. He’s sitting next to Isabella, who’s now tuned into the conversation. “I’m pretty sure the phrase is ‘go hard or go home’.”

“I know what I said.”

Sara and Yuri P. each make a grossed out face from the left side of the table, fingers in their mouths like they’re pretending to gag.

“My,” Isabell says. “You two have gotten awfully bold with your show of affection for two people who aren’t even together yet.”

“Ha!” comes Yuuko’s voice. “They are together though! They’ve been together for about a week
now. They’re practically newlyweds and it’s adorable!”

“Really?” Isabella’s perfectly sculptured eyebrows raise, looking from Yuuko to the aforementioned ‘newlyweds’. “Congratulations! You guys are cute, but you’re not the cutest couple in SUCC. You have a long way to do before you measure up to JJ and I.”

Victor raises an amused brow and smirks at her. “I beg to differ. Yuuri and I were voted cutest hero couple in the country.”

“By who?”

“By me.”

“Wait a minute,” Seung-gil interrupts. His face is as passive as always, but there seems to be confusion lingering in the slight knit of his face. “You weren’t together already?” he asks, pointing from Yuuri to Victor and back again. He sounds shocked.

Phichit cackles. “They fool around so much you’d think they were, right? I mean, what kinda newlywed couple just sneaks around the org at night to—”

“We weren’t doing anything! Shut up!” Yuuri interjects, glaring at Phichit.

“Nothing beside being an absolute threat to my lab,” Seung-gil mumbles venomously under his breath. There’s proverbial clouds swirling above his head as he crosses his arms while he sends death glares at Yuuri and Victor. Yuuri feels Victor cower a little under the gaze, and Yuuri may or may not shrink a bit in his seat.

“We were trying to stop them. We didn’t know they were after your mind machine thing. At least it came out mostly unscathed?” Yuuri squeaks, holding his hands up in a placating gesture as if that’ll help deflect Seung-gil’s lethal gaze before he ends up dropping dead.

“Mind machine thing,” Seung-gil repeats. He sounds monotonous, cold and even, yet the way he speaks chills Yuuri faster than Victor’s ice ever could. “Do you understand how devastating the cost would have been if my ‘mind machine thing’ were destroyed?”

He’s sweating. “I—”

“The blown hole through our ceiling and our trashed devices are the least of our problems. You could’ve taken more care in handling my Amplifying Subconscious Systems machine.”

“Is that a joke?” Victor suddenly chimes in.

Phichit is making shut up motions with his hand swiping at his neck, but Victor ignores him.

“You don’t peg me as someone with a sense of humor. But all of your names are kind of incredible. Did you really name your machine the ASS machine?”

“Phichit is making shut up motions with his hand swiping at his neck, but Victor ignores him.

“You don’t peg me as someone with a sense of humor. But all of your names are kind of incredible. Did you really name your machine the ASS machine?”

“‘The…’” Seung-gil frowns, thick brows weaved together like he’s attempting to work out a complicated problem. “No. I don’t understand what’s so funny.”

Yuuri wants to laugh, and he can see that Phichit wants to laugh too, because Seung-gil looks genuinely confused, and there’s something hilarious about his blatant obliviousness. But Seung-gil notices their barely put together demeanors, their tightly pressed lips and puffed out cheeks, and he
frowns louder, scowling so deep his face cracks.

"Is this a *joke* to you?"

Before anyone can answer (Yuuri sees the yes on the tip of Victor’s tongue), Minako walks in, eyes on the SIB screen that’s hovering over her hand. “Alright, sorry for the delay. I was reviewing the footage. Yakov won’t be joining us because he has his hands full dealing with the aftermath of the infiltration.”

She pats her pants down before taking a seat at the head of the table, taking immense care in looking each and every person in the room directly in the eye. Her gaze momentarily lands on Yuuri. Yuuri almost expects to be lectured.

"Now for the elephant in the room," Minako says. Wordlessly, she brings up SIB at the center of the table, and through the translucent screen, video feed of Scarlet Mask and Royal Mind Fuck roaming the halls play on loop. "This is quite possibly Yakov's worst nightmare. The organization is his pride and joy, he's worked long and hard hours into SUCC, and to have it threatened like this is the last thing he'd ever want. So we *must* double our efforts in stopping Emerald Witch's scheme before this becomes an irreparable problem."

"Why were they going after Seung-gil's ASS machine?" Victor asks. "Why are they so eager to get that ASS?"

"Amplifying Subconscious Systems machine," Seung-gil grumpily corrects. He sends another death glare at Victor's head, but it deflects off the oblivious bubble Victor has as he regards Minako solemnly.

"Considering how well it aligns with Emerald Witch's supposed powers, it's pretty safe to assume that my initial guess was correct in that she means to use it to control several superpowered people at once. Though, it's difficult to say who she wants to target specifically, and where."

Yuuri glances at Victor hard enough that Victor turns to look at him, and he wishes he were a telepath, because Victor doesn't seem to understand what Yuuri means by the micro movements of his head tilting in Minako's direction. He wants to remind Victor about telling Minako about his theory on how he was turned to a villain in the first place, thinks that that'll be useful information to her in some way, but Victor only furrows his brows and shrugs his shoulders in bewilderment.

Isabella chimes in to suggest, "If they're targeting us and trying to steal Seung-gil's ASS machine—"

"Amplifying Subconscious Systems," Seung-gil mumbles through gritted teeth. He ends up being ignored.

"—then maybe they're going after a big target? Like a whole city, or—or heroes even! What if they want to target heroes!"

"I'd like to see them try and target me!" JJ stands, fists on either side on his waist in a mock heroic pose as he grins up at the blank ceiling. "They'll have to get past me, myself, and I first!"

Isabella tugs on his arm to get him to sit back down again.

"Well," Minako sighs. She rubs at her temple, the thought of Isabella's suggestion likely weighing heavy in her mind. "That's certainly the worst case scenario." She sits up straight again and regards everyone with severity. "But that's just speculation. We'll work off what we do know for now, and what we know is that they want Seung-gil's ASS, er, Amplifying Subconscious Systems machine, so we need to do everything we can to ensure they don't get the chance to go near it again."
Minako starts speaking about the security measures they're planning to put into place, how they'll tightly lock up all essential weaponry and devices to get, in Isabella’s words, the villain's grubby hands away from them, and how they'll use the Information Sector robots’ offensive mode for nighttime security.

("Wait a minute," Victor cuts in. "They're robots?! I knew they creeped me out for a reason...")

("What do you mean by 'offensive mode'," Victor says a few seconds later. "If they're planning to run Royal Mind Fuck out of the building through insults, I have plenty of one liners I think can work.")

Yuuri kind of tunes out the rest of the meeting when the conversation shifts to something less pressing because Victor begins tracing little patterns on the palm of Yuuri's hand. He holds his breath, peeks at the faces of his co-workers like he's paranoid that someone will notice and make a big speculate about it. But no one, not even scandal-tracking-monster Phichit seems to notice, so he grabs Victor's free hand from under the table and spends the rest of the meeting drawing patterns against his skin, too.

✂

"—favorite?" Phichit asks Yuuri something a little while later while they're in the lounge.

Yuuri isn't paying attention in the slightest, has his head dipped down in his lap while he texts Victor on his phone. Victor is meant to be on a mission right now, but he's texting, because Victor has a complete disregard for hero work ethic. Yakov either hasn't had the time to make a rule against doing that yet, or he just can't bring himself to care when Victor seems to jump through loopholes like it's his business to.

Victor Nikidorkov ♥
Wish you were here!! (Revolving Hearts ) I miss you already!

Me
You were in here 15 minutes ago.

Victor Nikidorkov ♥
Right? That's far too long!

"—favorite? Yuuri?" Phichit asks again.

"Victor..." is what Yuuri answers with as he types out another reply.

Me
Consider putting your phone away so you can catch the villains and get back faster Victor!
■□ ■ : ●

His phone is taken from his hands and thrown behind Phichit's head and onto the couch cushions. "Yuuri," Phichit says, deadpan expression on his face. "I asked what your favorite meat was. Victor is not an appropriate response."

Yuuri's face burns with the implication. He waves his hands frantically in front of him like that will make the response he suddenly regrets dissipate into thin air. "I'm sorry! I wasn't paying attention!"

"Clearly," Phichit huffs, cheeks puffed up like a hamster. "I'm trying to get the whole Hero Awards business sorted since Minako put me in charge of that while she and Yakov are busy with that whole..."
Emerald Witch business."

"Hero Awards?" Yuuri asks.

"Don't tell me you forgot again. I bought you a cake and left it in your kitchen to congratulate you for your nomination." Yuuri can only stare at him blankly. He clears his mind, hopes that the guilt won't be obvious to Phichit. "...You did see the cake right?"

"Ah..." Yuuri looks at the far wall of the lounge and away from Phichit's prying eyes. "There weren't any words on it, so I had no idea, but I figured it was from you. Victor and I burned it."

Phichit frowns, so Yuuri continues with, "But! I scraped off most of the outer layer and ate the rest!"

Yuuri reassures him when Phichit's mouth drops open. "It was really good!"

"Yuuri! Seriously? I literally had a custom message on it. I gave you so many reminders—is this about you thinking you don't deserve those nominations because—"

"No! No, it honestly just slipped my mind because of everything that's been going on," Yuuri murmurs sheepishly.

"Well, Mr. Too-Gay-To-Pay-Attention, it's in two weeks, and most of us have been nominated, and we're flying out to the venue soon."

"Wait," Yuuri says. "If we're going to the Awards, won't the villains use that as a good opportunity to try and rob us again?"

"Minako mentioned that! We were literally talking about this during the briefing today! What were you even doing?"

"Uh."

"Don't say Victor was distracting you, I swear..."

"Okay," Yuuri says, sheepishly looking away. "I won't say Victor was distracting me."

Phichit gives him a blank look. "Kay, I won't embarrass you into the ground like I so badly want to right now. But I need you to know that we're going to see Lilia in two days so she can fashion us suits for the Awards. Y'know, like formal wear versions of our costumes. I'm so excited about that, by the way, she let me help with the designs!"

"Ughhh," Yuuri groans. "Do I have to? Can't I just wear what I normally would?"

"Sure," Phichit shrugs. "If you wanna go for that wearing-the-only-suit-I've-had-in-my-closet-for-five-years-because-I-can't-be-asked-to-get-another aesthetic."

Yuuri pouts at him because Phichit knows that is, in fact, the only suit he's had in his closet for five years, and now he's just picking on Yuuri until he gives in.

"Yuri P., Sara, Victor, and JJ will be there."

He hums like he's thinking on it, but Phichit can tell he's hardly thinking about it at all. As rewarding as the Awards are, Yuuri would much rather be out fighting villains and protecting the integrity of SUCC than sitting in a room with the country's best heroes and having superpowered eyes burning a hole at his back whenever he so much as breathes.

But he doesn't have a choice. And maybe having Victor and Phichit there will make the experience a
"You're right, you don't have a choice," Phichit says in answer to Yuuri's thoughts. He goes back to the paper he has in his hand. "So, back to the question. What's your preferred meat? Pork or chicken?" He peeks his eyes up at Yuuri with raised brows and an impish smile. "Don't say Victor again 'cause that's like, dessert."

"Phichit, I love you, but I'm going to kick your ass."

Phichit laughs as he checks off pork without Yuuri needing to confirm.

The meeting at Lilia's is beyond hectic.

Sara is texting whoever-the-hell while she reclines on her couch, JJ is giving Lilia suggestions to how he thinks his suit should appear, Lilia is completely ignoring him while she fusses over the maimed state of Yuri P.'s hair (she says, "I would call it the love child between a dumpster fire and a bird's nest but that is putting it lightly, Yuri Plisetsky, what have you done.").

Meanwhile, Phichit is rattling off their plans for their departure times in a week's time, and Victor has his arms perpetually linked around Yuuri's waist like a heat-seeking octopus.

It's a wonder that Lilia hasn't blown her head off with this headache inducing display. She carries on with her razor sharp measuring tape that, Yuuri's heard from Isabella, doubles as an actual weapon, and shuts JJ up by wrapping it around his mouth. Lilia has no reason to fit their faces for masks.

Victor, though, seems to have a headache coming on. He says so as he presses his face into Yuuri's neck and whimpers. Yuuri tries so hard not to shiver at the way that sends little vibrations into his skin.

"Are you alright?" Yuuri asks quietly so no one hears. They're a decent distance away from the others, towards the edge of the room, so they should be out of earshot. JJ loudly reciting his acceptance speech for his Grandest Entrance To A Crime Scene award is definitely helping with drowning out their hushed conversation.

"My head hurts again. Not in that way when I'm trying to remember something. It's... ah."

"Maybe it's the setting?" Yuuri suggests with a whisper. "Maybe whoever turned you got you here, so you're trying to remember but they wiped that part away."

Victor whines like a sad puppy. "Do you think Emerald Witch would have really targeted me in my own home? Why would she have wanted me of all people?"

Yuuri shrugs and feels Victor's head jostle a little with the movement. "You should really let Minako know, by the way. She can help you piece this together, maybe."

The arms around his waist tightens a little more. Victor is so close, and while that wouldn't make Yuuri combust now that they're openly dating, the fact that they're in a room full of people has the temperature of his skin skyrocketing.

"I'd much rather leave with you now so we can piece this together at my place."

"Victorr," Yuuri hisses under his breath. "You can stop flirting. Please. I'm dying. You're going to kill me."
Yuuri can feel the way Victor smiles against his neck.

He wishes Victor weren't such a constant distraction, because he would've seen Lilia coming with the safety hazard thinly veiled as a measuring tape coming right at them. Victor jumps away from Yuuri and narrowly misses getting his head chopped clean off.

"No canoodling in my presence," Lilia sniffs as she stares down at them along the thin line of her nose. She's shorter than both of them, yet she manages to appear tall without fail. "Now, which of you are going to be measured next?" She asks, reeling the measuring tape back into its container with whiplash speed.

Victor slides behind Yuuri and gingerly pushes him forward, and Yuuri looks back at him to glare. Some boyfriend he is. (But Victor presses about million kisses to his nose and cheeks on the ride back to the organization, much to the horror of everyone in the car. Yuuri forgives him easily.)

The time to depart for the Awards show is coming far faster than Yuuri expected it to, but when his days are currently filled with fighting villains and mentoring Kenjirou and training his powers with Victor while dealing with the oversized teddy bear known as Victor Nikiforov, it's easy to forget how the days slip past unnoticed.

The day before they have to leave, Yuuri is having second thoughts about going. He tells Minako this when he catches her in the hallway on the first floor.

"Are you sure you won't need extra help? Will Chris and Otabek be enough? I really don't mind staying behind in case things get too hectic..."

"Yuuri, for the fourth time, we'll be fine," Minako reassures him. It's actually the sixth time; Yuuri mentioned this to her twice the day before, too. But who's counting. (He's counting. He's nervous.) "Besides, this is your chance to get recognized for your achievements! These awards only come once every two years, you know. You never know when you'll get this opportunity again."

"You say that like I've already gotten the award," Yuuri mumbles through pursed lips.

"Are you kidding? As if Neapolitan Triple-Nipple and Creme de Buttkick are good recipients for the Outstanding Hero of the Year Award. You're an absolute shoe-in!" Minako says excitedly, clapping him on the back. Yuuri stumbles forward a little with the force of it. "I bet your name is already on the gold plate as we speak."

On some tiny, low low level in the depths of his mind, Yuuri is preening. He'd dreamed about getting that award for months, thought about how great it would be to hold it in his hands and wave like royalty as he smiles for the cameras for all of the nation to see. But a bigger part of Yuuri knows that he'll be a fumbling, emotional, sobbing mess, because as much as he dreamed about it, he never seriously expected he'd get this far.

He doesn't even have a speech prepared, but Yuuri knows if he ends up winning, he'll just spend the entire time thanking people.

Phichit had offered to help him write one last night, and all they managed to get down on the scrap napkin from their shared delivery food was I'd like to thank my legs, for always supporting me; my arms, who are always by my side; my eyes, for always looking out for me...

Yuuri almost choked on his pasta, he was laughing so hard.
All of this and more can happen if Yuuri only lets himself accept the fact that SUCC won't succumb to the hands of Scarlet Mask and Royal MF and the others, but he's pretty sure he'll spend the entire ceremony worrying regardless.

"Yuuri," Minako speaks softly, hands on either side of his shoulder. She squeezes them gently. "I'm going to be here while you and the others are away. Chris is more than capable of handling himself, and Seung-gil would sooner let us call his devices by their acronyms than allow them to touch his ASS." She pauses for dramatic effect; Yuuri figures it's meant to get him to laugh. He bites his lip to keep his giggle in. "Machine."

"Okay," Yuuri nods his head, conceding. SUCC didn't earn its top hero organization status for nothing. The workers are just as capable as the heroes who are employed there.

They've totally got this, and SUCC is in capable hands.

The Hero Awards venue is halfway across the country. They're taking a plane there while in full costume so they aren't questioned about the weapons and devices that they're carrying on their persons.

"Why isn't Hard-on coming again?" Victor asks while they're in line for the security check. "Surely he's been nominated for something too?"

"He was nominated for Least Destructive Hero, go figure," Phichit says. Then he stage whispers, "Ya might not want to say his name out loud in a public space. There's children here."

"He offered to stay behind and told us to accept his award in spirit in case he wins," Sara continues. "Well, I hope he takes good care of my Makkachin, because I know Yakov will forget to."

Yuuri frowns. "Minako wouldn't let me stay behind when I offered, what the hell."

"You would've stayed behind if they were running a 24-hour puppy stream, Cinderos, don't be a workaholic." Phichit wraps his arm around Yuuri's shoulders. "We're totally gonna get drinks tonight. Without Edgelord and Youngins co., of course."

"You fuckers are not leaving me behind in that hotel room with him," Yuri P. says, pointing a glare at an unsuspecting JJ, who raises his hands in defense.

Victor wraps his own arm right on top of Phichit's, as if Yuuri doesn't already feel locked in a perpetual furnace by his own skin. "Take some time to enjoy yourself, Yuuri. You deserve it. Besides," he says, slipping his finger underneath Yuuri's chin so his head is tilted up to meet his eyes, "you should enjoy your number one status while you can, because I'm coming after it soon, darling."

"Ha, not a chance Rookie of the Year," Phichit snorts. He sticks his tongue out at Victor. "You'll have to get through me first, hun. That's not happening."

"You guys," Yuuri cuts in, because they're next in line and clinging to him still, and the security at the gate is looking mildly annoyed.

They file through the gate one at a time, and it's all smooth sailing. That is, until they get to Yuri P., because he was too stubborn to place his weapons in the bin like they'd asked him to several times.

Yuri P. thought he would be fine, because his knives aren't made of real metal, just something light
and durable, so there's no way they'll catch me. But he's stopped when the lights at the top of the gates blink red, and the security personnel raises her eyebrows at him then gestures to the bin underneath the X-ray Detector.

With a jaded, vexed sigh, Yuri P. rolls his eyes, digs into the jacket of his costume, pulls out eight of his knives, and unceremoniously tosses them in the bin hard enough like he means to break the plastic thing with them. Then he goes through the gate again.

It blinks red. Again.

The security woman does not look amused.

"Oh, my god, Edgelord, just empty your pockets so we can go," Phichit voices what everyone else is thinking.

Yuri P. grumbles something unintelligible under his breath, something that could be teenager for don't tell me what to do, and he digs into his pants to take out another eight knives.

"Christ. How do you not get scratched up from that?" Victor asks. He's watching Yuri P. pull out knives from impossible places with the interest of a cat to a stick of cucumber: amazed but terrified all at once.

"I'm not stupid, stupid," Yuri P. responds. "I have them all in sheaths."

He goes through the gate again.

Red light. Again.

Yuuri presses his finger to the bridge of his nose and sighs. "Can we leave? I want to sit down, I'm tired."

"Was he even nominated for something?" Victor whisper-shouts at Yuuri and Phichit. Yuri P. glares at him as he removes a boot and pours his other knives into the bin. "Why is he here?"

"I was nominated for something. Most likely to kick your fucking ass."

While he goes through the gate for a third time, Phichit tells Victor, "Actually, it was Power-less Combat Expert and Most Likely to be Mistaken for a Villain."


When all twenty-two of Yuri P.'s knives are accounted for (he traveled light this time, short of his usual twenty-five knives) they're finally cleared to fly to their destination.

Unofficial hero capital of the country.

Accident City.

Scarlet Mask drums her fingers together diabolically. She's giddy as she sits there, Royal Mind Fuck to her left, Shadow Knight to her right, as they wait for her to arrive on their Holo-Screen. It should be four minutes, thirty-seven seconds more; Emerald is never too late and never too early.

"You look ridiculous with that look on your face," Royal Mind Fuckwit sneers at her. She sneers back, nearly sticks her tongue out at him like she always does, but she doesn't want to look too...
childish in front of Shadow Knight.

"Talk to me again when you've amassed as much mayhem as I have," Scarlet says.

"I deal plenty of mayhem!" Royal Mind Fuck argues. "I've been around far longer than you have!"

"So you admit you're ancient."

"Ugh!"

Shadow Knight rubs at his temples with his index fingers. "Can you two stop? You're giving me a headache. This is the last time I work with anyone, I swear to god."

"Look what you've done, Georgi, you've made him mad," Scarlet tsks.

"Me? You're insulting me for no reason, Mila!"

"You started it."

"No, you did."

"No... no, I'm pretty sure it was you."

"N—"

They're cut off when the Holo-Screen activates, and Emerald's face appears in front of them, topical green-ish tint to her skin and perpetual scowl on her face. It's as if her features scream *don't look at me, don't talk to me, don't even breathe in my direction or I'll kill you so hard you'll die.*

Scarlet sits up a little straighter and addresses her. (She's like the unofficial leader of this group, though Royal MF and Shadow Knight swear it's them. They're wrong, though. It's absolutely her.)

"Madam Emerald, we've proceeded with the plan and infiltrated their organization."

"Good," Emerald says, curt and monotonous. She raises one perfectly thin, manicured eyebrow. Her hand is moving off screen. Scarlet figures she must be stroking the head of the dog. "And I suspect that you failed in retrieving the machine from their Research and Development room?"

Scarlet sinks a little in her seat and elbows Royal Mind Fuck in the side. She'd rather not be the bearer of bad news.

"Y...yes," he answers timidly.

Emerald Witch's face is impassive as her gaze moves to each villain. Scarlet hates looking into her lizard green eyes. It makes her feel helpless, vulnerable, open.

Then, Emerald surprises them when she smiles. At least, Scarlet *thinks* it's a smile. The corner of her lips twitch for a fraction of a second, and for that second, she looked like the Mona Lisa's deranged, malevolent twin sister.

"Good," she says.

"What?" Shadow Knight voices what they're thinking. "Why is that good? When is failure ever good?"

"Failure is good, boy, when it is simply a means to our end. One small drop of extra sugar will not
ruin the cake."
"Huh?" Royal Mind Fuck questions.
"A stubbed toe will make the foot stronger."
"That isn't even a thing," Scarlet says.
Emerald sighs. "I wanted you to fail to proceed with the final stage, you ninnies."
"Ouch," Scarlet mocks under her breath.
"So then—we aren't going to go after the ASS machine?" Royal Mind Fuck asks in confusion.
"Oh, no, you will go after the stupidly-named machine."
"But they've up their security!" Scarlet reminds her. "We know, we've got intel!"
"I would think them foolish if they hadn't," Emerald mumbles. Then she looks at them again and says, "You will create multiple diversions. You will retrieve the machine when they're too weak to defend. You will infiltrate their workplace. " Her hand balls into a quick fist on screen. "And you will crush them."

She has that Renaissance-barely-there smile on her face again as she coos at the large poodle in her lap. "Who's excited for the destruction of SUCC? You are, aren't you? Yes you are... Makkachin."

Chapter End Notes

BOWS PROFUSELY I AM SOOOO SORRY I'M UPDATING AN ENTIRE MONTH LATER. uni is really kicking my ass!! i wanna say the next update won't take as long but god, i've already been given my final 3 projects and they're monsters. i haven't had the time to write in ages. weeps.

this chapter was so short too. aaah, i feel so bad. i hope you guys enjoyed regardless. (■_■‘。)

on another note, i can't believe i've written like 100k words and never once revealed jj's powers? i put a little hint in this chapter! who ever guesses it will get a gold star and my undying love. his powers will make a debut next chapter! woo!

also, shout out to haley and qq for giving me some unimportant character hero names and award title ideas. "Neapolitan Triple Nipple" is the worst thing i've ever typed in my life. y'all can imagine what weird powers they have on your own.

please be patient with me! i'm 100% committed to finishing this longfic. we're almost there!
Yuuri sits, stiff and awkward, on his bed and facing the window on the bed of his hotel room. He’d gone drinking earlier, like Phichit promised—made him—but he didn’t have as much to drink as he would’ve liked. Not enough to calm the rollercoaster nerves in his stomach.

So he sits, and he looks down at his open palm, where he conjures a small, flickering white flame, and relishes in the small heat it gives off. He’s been practicing a lot with Viktor, and he’s gotten a lot better at this. It only take a bit of concentration to make a white flame appear, and he’s able to make it last a while if he’s focused. Maybe he’ll be able to conjure a blue one in no time at all.

The door to the bedroom opens, and Yuuri assumes that it’s Phichit, because they’re sharing a suite. He doesn’t look up from his hand, doesn’t wanna break his concentrate, so he mutters a simple hi to his friend.

Phichit doesn’t say anything, so Yuuri thinks he must be tired. He’d drunk a lot tonight; there’s no doubt he’ll be hungover as hell in the morning.

His bed dips, which Yuuri finds odd, because there’s two beds in the room. He furrows his eyebrows. Is Phichit so out of it that be hasn’t realized which bed he’d claimed earlier in the day?

Yuuri is about to turn his head to speak to him, but he feels a sudden, icy jolt of breath on his ear—

He turns around lightning fast, fighting stance ready, hands aflame and orange, inches away from Victor’s face. Viktor looks mortified, holding his hands up with sweat already forming on his skin.

Yuuri drops his hands and puts out his fire with a sigh. “Victor, what the hell! What are you doing here? Don’t sneak up on me like that!”

“Sorry!” Victor says. “Phichit literally carried Christophe to our room, then immediately passed out on my bed.”

“So… you’re going to sleep here tonight?”

“If that’s okay with you. I asked Phichit and he told me, ‘Mmmhhurhaghruhff’.”

“Sounds like something he’d say,” Yuuri agrees with a thoughtful nod. “Yeah, okay, you can sleep here for tonight.”

“Great,” Victor says, and immediately pulls his two large suitcases from where they sat out of sight on the floor and onto the free bed. They’d all told him that they would only be here for the weekend, and Victor has no business bringing two week’s worth of clothing, but he insisted that it was
absolutely necessary. Better to be over-prepared than not prepared at all!

Victor makes quick work of getting himself settled in, putting his things neatly into drawers and side tables, and Yuuri watches him from his perch on the end of his bed, chin rested against his knees. Victor is beyond meticulous; meanwhile, Yuuri has only bothered to pull out his toiletries, opting to live right out of his suitcase. He can’t be bothered to unpack if he knows they won’t be here long.

Victor disappears into the bathroom, and in that time, Yuuri slides under his bedsheets and scrolls through his phone, waiting for Victor to return. When he does, they mumble a quiet goodnight to each other, Yuuri turns off his phone, and Victor shuts off the lights.

And for several moments, they’re shrouded in silence, the only noises reaching their ears being the constant ticking of a distant clock and clattering coming from a faraway room.

Yuuri tries to fall asleep, he really does, but it’s hard when his mind won’t stop yelling things at him. It’s even worse right now, because there’s that lame vine compilation on pets Phichit showed him earlier in the day, and now he has the song *Hard Knock Life* replaying in his head.

Victor must notice that he’s restless, or maybe he accidentally hummed the song out loud, because the silence is broken when Victor sits up and asks him. “You okay?”

“Huh? Oh, yeah. Yeah, of course,” Yuuri replies unconvincingly. “Why wouldn’t I be? I’m perfectly fine. All I have to do is relax like Phichit said. I can definitely do that while we leave the organization in Minako and Mr. Feltsman and Chris’s capable hands. I can totally relax. See? I’m doing it right now. I’m relaxing. My eyes are closed. I am sooo calm right now—”

“Yuu,” Victor says flatly. He sounds unimpressed.

“Sorry,” Yuuri mutters with a blush on his cheeks.

He hears rustling on Victor’s side of the room, and in the next moment, his mattress dips, and he feels Victor’s strong arms wrap around him.

“You need to calm down. We’ll be okay,” he assures Yuuri.

Yuuri gives a noncommittal hum; he’s not entirely convinced.

Victor doesn’t press it, so he moves onto an entirely new topic. “I saw you create a white flame earlier. You’re getting much better.” A squeeze about Yuuri’s torso. “I’m proud of you.”

“Thanks, oh parent of mine,” Yuuri drawls sarcastically. But his demeanor cracks a second later, and he laughs into his pillow. “It’s all thanks to you.”

“I only guided you a little. It was all you.”

“But you helped.”

“Barely.”

“Don’t undermine yourself like that,” Yuuri says with a frown.

“Coming from the serial underminer? That’s actually quite hilarious.”

Yuuri wears a jaded, exasperated expression, and he turns around with the express purpose of tickling Victor till he cracks. He’s not actually sure if Victor is ticklish, but he’s seen him kneel over and laughing his ass off when Makkachin barrels him to the ground to paw at his stomach and
slobber all over his face. He turns quickly, hands reaching out to tickle Victor into submission and make him take back his words.

“AHH—!” Victor screams, and the next moment there’s a thump.

He’s fallen onto the floor.

Yuuri slaps his hands over his face and apologizes profusely.

“Yuuri, I enjoy dating you and all, truly, but you’re going to cause me to die at this rate.”

“I’m sorry!” Yuuri apologizes again. He holds out a hand to help Victor up. “These are long twin sized beds. They weren’t meant for two people.”

Victor places a finger to his lips and stares at the two beds in the room pensively, like he’s trying to find a solution to this non-problem. When he does, his face lights up, and he says, “Yuuri! Help me move that side table out of the way so we can push the beds together!”

Yuuri gawks at Victor, but the man as already gotten to work with moving the thing, so Yuuri wordlessly helps him until their beds are pushed snug together, then they adjust the sheets and pillows until it’s impossible to tell that their makeshift queen beds are actually two twin beds in a bedsheet-trenchcoat.

Victor makes himself at home climbing underneath the sheets, and Yuuri hesitates before following after. And Victor, once again, curls his arms around Yuuri, and Yuuri prays that Victor can’t feel the way his heart beats against his chest.

Ugh.

He thought he’d be used to this by now. But everyday still feels like their first awkward kiss that occurred in the Lounge happened yesterday.

A hand slides over his chest. And a sigh. “I can feel your heart beating really fast.”

_Damnit._

“Are you still nervous?” Victor mumbles sleepily.

“N-No,” Yuuri stammers, because this is what Victor reduces him to daily, and he probably doesn’t even know it.

“Because you shouldn’t be,” he continues. “Nothing could possibly go wrong.”

Yuuri _gasp_, and the force of it jostles Victor awake a little. “Stop it! Don’t say that! That’s the exact words you say when you’re trying to invite trouble.”

“Well,” Victor says, grinning down cheekily at Yuuri. In the low light, his smile shines impossibly bright. “I’m so sure that nothing bad will happen, that I’ll say it three more times. Nothing could possibly go wrong, nothing could possibly go wrong, nothing cou—mm!”

Yuuri shuts him up with a kiss, because he knows it’s the one underhanded move that can cause Victor to shut down for a solid three minutes.

“You’re the worst,” Yuuri huffs, but he’s smiling, and sleep comes easily soon after.
Victor wakes up to an obscene amount of drool on his shirt. Yuuri snores when he sleeps. It’s the cutest thing on the goddamned planet.

"Heeeellooo Accident City and welcome to the twelfth bi-annual Hero Awards! This year, we're hosting over 15 prestigious Hero Organizations, and several free agent heroes from around the world! Amongst these top, best of the best heroes, is the number one hero organization in this country, and they boast a plethora of nominations, including the all important Outstanding Hero of the Year Nomination held by the much loved Cinderos!

“Oh—! Here they come now! The Heroes of SUCC!"

The only thing Yuuri hates more than the fact that he has to be here rather than helping out at the org is the fact that he has microphones shoved in his face on the blue carpet. It's embarrassing to this day, and he feels like an awkward mess while he stumbles all over his words and turns a light shade of red underneath his mask and flails his arms. The only thing that manages to simultaneously keep him grounded and make things worse is Victor's arm around his waist. It's good because it calms him down a little.

Bad, because the vulture-esque thirsty-for-gossip paparazzi and news reporters notice. And suddenly the questions shift from do you believe you're a better fit for your award then the other recipients to when did you two get together and how intimate are you and are the both of you as cute as everyone suspects you are underneath your masks? (Victor, unabashed as always, says an enthusiastic yes. Yuuri has to pull him away before he launches into very detailed explanation with multiple reasons and cited sources and all.)

The spontaneous bar party they had last night (with limited drinks, because Yuuri was not going to sport a headache on top of dealing with so many people) only served to get Yuuri's mind off of things for that single night. The little bit of alcohol was enough to make him giddy for a short period of time, but it wasn't enough to rid himself of the nervousness he feels when he thinks about SUCC and how vulnerable Minako and the others might be.

They're strong, of course they are. But he's not entirely convinced that that's enough to stop the villains should they come back to steal the ASS machine.

He started thinking about all of this as soon as he wakes up, because his mind won't allow him to catch a break. It was early in the morning, and Phichit came waltzing into the room sporting a hangover, and Phichit and Victor combined had to physically stop Yuuri from bolting out of bed and asking the nearest hero with flight abilities to take him back home.

But he's fine now, Yuuri tells himself as he walks into the large, decorated hall that the award ceremony is being held in. He can totally manage to not think about work for a single day, is what he tells himself as he walks along the aisle towards the fancy tables and chairs with snazzy reservation name cards scattered around the tops. He can enjoy himself, he lies, as he plops down on the chair Phichit graciously—telepathically—pulls out for him, because Yuuri hadn't done it himself. He was about ten seconds away from attempting to sit on air and falling right on his ass in the middle of the hall.

"Yuu—Cinderos," Victor questions, sitting to Yuuri's left while Phichit takes the seat on his right. He places a gentle hand on Yuuri's arm as he peers at him in concern. "Are you alright?"

Yuri P. and Sara and JJ are on the other side of the circular cloth-clad table, and they're staring at him oddly.
"I'm fine, I swear," Yuuri tells them, waving his hands in front of himself. "This is just for one day. What's the worst that can happen?" He smiles nervously, feels like maybe he shouldn't have said that last sentence. It's like an invitation now that he's said it. Murphy's Law will surely reel its big, ugly head around. But Yuuri hopes that that won't be the case this time.

Distraction, at least, comes in the form of heroes coming up to their table to greet them and say hi. Some of them Yuuri knows and considers acquaintances. Others he figures are newly minted heroes. Then there's those few Yuuri isn't sure whether he's met before and forgotten. It's like meeting relatives who visited once centuries ago and turn up now and expect Yuuri to remember every little detail of that visit.

"Hello there," a hero known as Yogurt Slinger calls to them. He smells perpetually like off brand Yoplait®. "Where is Hard-on?"

"He's house sitting while we're all here," Phichit explains. "Someone had to do it, and he offered, so."

"A shame you'd leave behind the life of your entire party. Though," his eyes turn to Victor and he winks, ugh. (Yuuri momentarily wonders how discreetly he can melt the soles of his gaudy boots so they'll stick to the carpeted floor. Phichit gives him a look.) "Cryo-Frost here seems like a joy to work with. Is he good, Cinderos?"

"What?" Yuuri asks. He hadn't been listening, too busy making silence conversation at Phichit.

"Is he good?"

"I... I guess?" Yuuri answers, unsure about what he's even confirming. That answer seems to satisfy Yogurt Slinger for whatever reason, because he smirks and saunters off.

Another hero, Omelette Dude Fromage, appears and proceeds to ask for each and every one of their autographs. Even Yuri P.'s, much to his giddy embarrassment. Yuri P. signs the notebook with an awkward, begrudged scowl like he's not sure if he wants to be mad about it or not.

"I idolize you all so much! SUCC is an eggcellent organization! I wish I could work there! But I'm stuck at my lame one—they don't even appreciate my yolks! They don't get me! They all egg-nore me, and I don't know why!"

"I can guess why," Yuri P. mumbles under his breath. Sara elbows him in the rib.

Emitter comes up to them then, someone Yuuri is sure must be new to the hero scene because he's never seen this person—cyborg?—before. Sara seems to know him, though, because she starts squealing and pulls him into an airtight hug and introduces them all.

"Guys! Guys! This is the friend that fell into the vat of toxic waste back then! Emitter, this is—oh, I'm sure you know who everyone is! I thought you died?! Holy crap!"

"Ha ha ha!" Emitter zealously cackles up towards the ceiling, hands on his hips. "As if a bit of waste is enough to kill me! I lived, bitch!"

"Yay! I'm so happy! Mickey would—ah."

The table is so silence with the tension that suddenly becomes palpable.

JJ breaks it by coughing and asking, "So, why are you a cyborg?"
"My god, JJ, you can't just ask people why they're a cyborg," Phichit scoffs.

"Ha! It's fine. I wasn't always this way..." And he pulls up a chair, squeezes in between Sara and JJ, and launches into a story full of wild adventures and dangerous experimentation.

For the first time all morning, Yuuri's mind is calm.

✂

The awards are officially kicked off with the Funniest Hero Photo contest that Yuuri completely forgot about. But he quickly remembers, because his face is shown on screen, distorted mid-spit take on Yakov's Cushions of Apprehension™, eyes closed and nosey scrunched up.

The entire table, as well as the room, bursts out laughing.

Yuuri burns, and the only thing that saves him from causing a fire on the room is this altered costume that doubles as a suit. The fire resistance is amped up, so he can't cause accidental fires if he gets too flustered.

"Neuroseeker, why," Yuuri cries into his hand.

"It's for that new office makeover for Yakov! He totally deserves it since he has to deal with us twenty-four-seven. Besides, you agreed to let me do this."

"I did?"

"Yuuri, ohmygod, are you sure you're okay because your mind is literally like, anxiety if anxiety were throwing a party—"

"I'm okay! I'm cool. I'm so cool I'm ice cold."

Other pictures appear on the giant Holo-screen, shows tons of other heroes in incriminatingly unflattering angles. Yuuri can hear them groan as their pictures come up. By the time the slide show is over, the hosts announce that the results will be viewers choice.

And Yuuri suddenly remembers that this is televised, live, and the whole country is watching. Which is, ohh, fine. Yuuri can deal with that. He has constant eyes on him all the time when he's out doing hero work, so this shouldn't be too different.

He's cool. Totally cool. Completely fine with this. Nothing can possibly go wrong. The worst that can happen is that he trips going up on stage, breaks his face, and gives his half-prepared speech with a bloodied nose.

Phichit pats his shoulder, because he can hear his frenzied thoughts right now, and Victor squeezes his hand underneath the table despite not being able to hear the tornado turmoil that is his head. Victor offers him a little smile, and Yuuri smiles back, though it’s more to reassure Victor than himself.

They've begun announcing the awards now. Yuri P. is the first of the group to accept his award for Most Likely To Be Mistaken For A Villain. Phichit is the proud recipient of three awards (Most Tech Savvy Hero, Best Comebacks, and Civilian Protector), and Sara and JJ win a couple of their own.

But Yuuri has zoned out, because his mind is wandering, again, and he's worrying about the state of SUCC, again, even though he told himself he wouldn't. He wishes anxiety had an off switch. It
would make his life a little more manageable.

There's a foreboding feeling hanging over his head, and he's not quite sure what it is, or how to make it go away. Yuuri is no fortune teller, but his intuition is screaming at him.

He has to put his mind to rest, he decides. So he gets up and tells the table that he'll be outside. Phichit gets up too, offers to walk him with.

"Yuuri, seriously, you've got to have a little more faith that Minako and Chris can take care of things. It'll be okay," he insists, placing his hand on Yuuri's shoulder while Yuuri removes his phone from his pocket.

"I just need to do this one thing. I'll feel a lot better if I don't answer the phone to horrible screaming."

Yuuri dials Chris.

He is answered with horrible screaming.

"Chris?!" Yuuri shouts into the phone, his panic high-rising and threatening to drown him now. "Are you okay? What's going on?"

"Yuuri! How's the Awards going? Did Yogurt Slinger ask for me?" Chris says. He's shouting over the noise that's going on in the background.

Yuuri gives a perplexed look at Phichit, who looks at him with an equal amount of confusion, then he asks, "Yes, he did. What... what is going on?"

"Makkachin may or may not be running around with a Freeze Ray in her mouth. Nothing to worry about. I'll speak to you soon, Yuuri. Tell the others hi for me!"

He hangs up.

Yuuri blinks at the screen, then looks at Phichit with a shrug. "I guess I was worried for nothing? I mean, that's not the best case scenario, but it isn't as bad as I thought it would be..."

"What did he say?" Phichit asks.

"Makkachin has one of Isabella's Freeze Rays, I think," Yuuri shrugs. "He didn't mention how, but I guess he has his hands full."

"Ha," Phichit snorts in amusement. "I love that dog, but she is going to be the death of us, I swear. She's more mischievous than Vicchan."

"Imagine putting them in the save room," Yuuri laughs. Phichit laughs along with him as they make their way through the long hallway and back into the ceremony room. He's already feeling the weight of the past twenty-four hours sliding off his shoulders.

"They'd cause more trouble than the...wait," Phichit stops, holds out his arm in front of Yuuri.

Yuuri tilts his head to one side and asks, "What's wrong?"

"That's really, really freaky. For a moment I thought I heard—"

"—City! Sorry, but your old hosts are unable to continue. They've left the building. Luckily, we were here to replace them!"
Yuuri stares at Phichit, wide eyed, breath trapped behind his teeth.

There's no way.

It can't be.

"Royal Milf Fleas?"

Yuuri gives him a look that says, really?

"Sorry, I'm in too much shock to think up something better," he mumbles, hand blindly grabbing at Yuuri's upper arm. "Cinderos, please that me I'm wrong, and that Royal Mint Filth isn't in the main hall on stage right now."

"I'd certainly fucking hope not. If he and the others are trying to pull something, then they're in the literal worst possible place to do it," Yuuri reasons. He doesn't want to believe that this is the worst case scenario. It makes no sense. How are they here? Why would they be here, of all place? In the middle of a room filled with heroes, center stage like live targets asking to taken down?

"Let's go," Phichit says, slipping his hand down around Yuuri's wrist and pulling him towards the hall. All the while, he's shouting it can't be it can't be it can't be, why would they be here, what are they planning in his mind.

Yuuri's intuition is spot on, it turns out.

Because when they enter the room, it's eerily still.

Like everyone's been frozen in place.

Like they can't move.

Purple in the eyes.

Just like that band of power drug dealers in that warehouse, way back then.

And right there on stage, dressed for the occasion he rudely crashed, arms waving in that typical dramatic twist, stands Royal Mind Fuck in the flesh. Scarlet Mask is by his side, holding the—

—the ASS machine.

"Oh," is the only thing Phichit has to say, which is just as well, because Yuuri is absolutely speechless.

"Ohhh, look who decided to join the party, Royal Mother Fucker!" Scarlet Mask says when she spots Yuuri and Phichit.

"I wish you'd stop calling me that when we're trying to execute the plan, you fuck," Royal MF grumbles at her.

"Oh, hush."

Phichit, Yuuri think-screams at him. We need to get that machine out of their hands now.

Phichit silently nods his head once in agreement. Yuuri has no idea what's going on, what this "plan" is, why everyone in the room is frozen solid, including the other SUCC heroes, but he figures that retrieving Seung-gil's machine will be a good step forward in stopping the villains.
They watch Royal MF and Scarlet Mask closely—they're still bickering. Now is as good a time as any to strike.

But they hardly move a step before the villain's eyes snap towards them, making them freeze in place out of fear of being caught.

"Ah ah!" Scarlet jeers, wagging her finger. "You guys aren't going to stop us that easily!" She places the machine on her head—it's only now that Yuuri realizes that it doubles as a big mechanical hat—takes the stairs on the side of the stage down to the ground floor, and walks over to them. "Don't you wanna hear our monologue first? How we bested every top hero in the country—the world!—before your untimely demise?"

"Um. No?" Phichit says. He looks beyond annoyed, reading to take her down when Scarlet Mask gets close enough. Yuuri can see it—how one of the nearby empty chairs is wiggling under Phichit's telepathic grasp. "I'd like you to return the thing that isn't yours, thanks."

"No chance, Neuroseeker," Scarlet teases, sticking her tongue out. "We got this fair and square. In fact, your little RAD Department head gave it to us!"

Yuuri lifts his eyebrows. "No he didn't. That's ridiculous. He'd protect that thing with his life."

"Well, Cinderos, you've never been very good at seeing the signs—"

She's cut off by the ringing of Yuuri's phone.

Yuuri pulls it out of his pocket and peaks at the caller id. It's Minako. That can't be good.

"Sorry, I've got—I need to take this," Yuuri says, answering the call and pressing it to his ears. "Hello?"

"Yuuri, thank god, you're okay. Listen, I need you and the others to leave Accident City right now. You're all in danger—"

The phone is swiftly taken from his hand and tossed across the room like a dishrag.

"It isn't very nice answering calls mid-conversation," Royal MF says, crossing his arms. "Hasn't anyone taught you manners?"

"Hasn't anyone taught you how to not dress in the dark with your arms tied?" Phichit counters.

Royal MF scowls at him, and tells Scarlet, "Freeze him."

"What?"

Scarlet Mask sends a single look at Phichit, holds her hand out like she’s cradling a gun, yells, "Freeze!"

Phichit ends up frozen solid, arms outstretched in the air, mouth hanging open with unsaid words.

"No! Neuroseeker!" Yuuri turns his wild eyes at Scarlet Mask, palms up and out, ready to ignite his fire. "What did you do!"

He flicks his fingers, attempts to light his flame...

But nothing happens.
Yuuri looks down at his gloved hands in confusion. He isn't panicked enough to stunt his powers. Far from it; he's livid, wants to set Scarlet Mask and Royal Mind Fuck into their personal hell if he can help it. So why isn't his fire igniting?

Just how much power have they gained?

"How..." Yuuri starts. He isn't sure what he means to say. He's speechless and utterly vulnerable.

"Now that we've got everyone's undivided attention!" Royal MF says, voice loud and obnoxiously boisterous like he's addressing the entire room of seemingly catatonically frozen heroes. Which, Yuuri guesses, means they're perfectly aware of their surroundings, but their abilities to move have been removed. And that can't be good. "I'll launch into the thrilling monologue of how the Amazing Villain Alliance single-handedly took down every 'top' hero alive, and will take down every hero in existence!"

Yuuri doesn't let him continue. He refuses to sit still while danger stares him in the face, with or without his fire. With quick movements, he launches forward and grabs Royal MF by the waist, knocking him off his feet and into the ground.

"Scarlet, help!"

Yuuri knows he can't do much when it's him against two villains, and he has no way of using his fire for reasons he can't figure out. But that doesn't deter him, because he's built up his hand-to-hand combat skills for the sole purpose of minimizing his fire use. So if there's ever a good time that that's come in handy, it's now.

When Scarlet moves close enough, Yuuri stands, immediately lowers his body to sweep his feet across the floor to set Scarlet Mask off balance. But she's quick, has insane reflexes, and back flips away from Yuuri's foot. She stares him right in the eye and makes a come here gesture with her hand.

Scarlet Mask is formidable, fights with her surroundings, uses table centerpieces and metal name plates and throws them at Yuuri when her fists aren't attempting to punch Yuuri in the face. Yuuri holds up just fine until Royal Mind Fuck decides to join in.

He grips Yuuri behind his back and effectively restrains him with something strong and unbreakable behind his back.

" Took you long enough," Scarlet Mask scoffs, crossing her arms and glaring at Royal MF.

"My head is bleeding!" Royal MF whines. He gestures vaguely at his face, where there's a thin, shallow cut of blood hardly a centimeter long on his forehead. "He hurt me!"

"It's fine," Scarlet waves him off. "If you're lucky, you'll get a nice scar and actually look as menacing as you think you are."

"Listen here—"

"Anyway!" Scarlet Mask pulls out an occupied chair, shoves the nameless background hero off of it, and takes the now emptied seat. She crosses her legs and smiles wide. "I bet you're dying for us to spill the tea, Cinderos."

"Hardly," Yuuri mumbles under his breath. He's trying to keep as calm as possible as his eyes dart around the room. There's nothing he can really do right now—he's fire is useless, he's tied up, none of the heroes are responsive. Yuuri is kind of fucked.
"We're going to tell you anyway," Scarlet says.

Royal Mind Fuck grumbles something about stealing my thunder, how dare you, who do you think you are as he stands beside her, leaning against the back of the chair with crossed arms.

"It was simple, really," she begins. She rummages through a pocket and pulls out an invisible something, then begins—filing her nails? "And it was made even simpler when we had our own personal transportation system a.k.a Shadow Knight's shadow portals. It's like we were in two places at once."

"So," Royal Mind Fuck jumps in, taking her invisible nail file. He starts filing his nails now, despite wearing gloves. There's a threatening smirk on his face. "We went to SUCC first, slipped in with ease by getting Victor's dumb dog to cause a distraction. Got your RAD Department guy to give us the ASS machine, and he let us have it without question."

"Meanwhile," Scarlet hisses as she steals the nail file back. "I slipped in here undetected before all of the heroes started coming in, and I slipped her device into the ASS machine, and one into each speaker in the room."

"You can stop pretending that she's Voldemort," Yuuri rolls his eyes. "It's okay. You can say Emerald Witch. We know."

From the corner of his eye, Yuuri swears he sees something moving. But it could just be the fear and panic starting to set in again, making him see things that aren't there. Or maybe he's just hyper-aware of the things that are there, lurking in the Shadows.

"What devices are you even talking about? What did you use? And why do you keep saying that our RAD Department Head helped you?" Yuuri questions.

"We used these," Royal Mind Fuck pulls something from his pocket—the chips Victor had gotten on that mission with him and Yuri P. and Otabek months ago. The same chip Minako had been agonizing over to figure out its use. The same ones that, apparently, have the ability to freeze an entire room of heroes so they're rendered uselessly.

"Those are... Emerald Witches chips?"

Royal Mind Fuck chuckles. "You mean...the Chaos Emeralds?"

Yuuri gawks. "That's what C.E. stands for?!!"

"Actually, it stands for Chips by Emerald, but I prefer my name for them."

Something in the shadows move again. It's making the hairs on Yuuri's skin stand on end, causes his body underneath his suit to set ablaze with nerves. He thinks, pleasepleaseplease tell me Shadow Knight isn't here right now. Considering how his luck is going right now, he almost expects Shadow Knight to appear at any moment.

"Okay, lame Sonic reference aside—I don't exactly know what you're planning, but the others and I will not let you get any further," Yuuri says with conviction. He'll get out of this somehow. His knight in shining armor will burst through the walls any minute now and single-handedly take them down and save the day. His powers will finally return and he'll burn their sorry asses into the sun. He'll—He'll—

"Oh? And who, exactly, is going to help you?" Scarlet Mask stands to her feet.
Yuuri watches as she saunters over the SUCC table, where his co-workers are seated, frozen solid like statues, including Victor, his partner, his boyfriend. Yuuri's heart lurches a little in his chest when Scarlet wraps an arm around his shoulders. "You don't mean Cryo-Frost here, do you? Ah... sorry, that isn't your name, is it?"

She looks Victor in the eye then, grins as she touches his face, speaks so loudly that her voice echoes in this vast room. "Isn't that right... Flash Freeze?"

There's heroes here. They can hear.

This is televised.


There's heroes here.

*This is televised.*

Victor suddenly shoots out of his seat and takes a gasping breath like he's been trapped underwater for hours, and he gestures with his hand as though ready to conjure his ice—

But it doesn't come.

It isn't working.

That never happens. Victor's ice always, *always* works.

"What," Victor speaks lowly, veering icy sharp eyes at Scarlet Mask, then at Royal MF, "have you done." It isn't a question. He demands his answer.

"Nothing you didn't help with!" Scarlet beams. Wide, grandiose gestures with her arms as she addresses the silent crowd of heroes. "Give Flash Freeze here a round of applause of the greatest hero act of all time!"

The room is silent.

Save for Royal MF's actual clapping.

"No, wait, slower," Scarlet says. "It's got to be more sarcastic."

Royal MF claps more slowly.

"Perfect."

Victor looks confused, and scared, and *speechless* as he glances back and forth between the two villains he used to work with. Then, his shaken eyes land on Yuuri.

"You..." Yuuri starts.

"Yuu—Cinderos, I swear to god I have no idea what they're talking about," Victor pleads. "*What are you talking about?*" he asks the villains, eyes still on Yuuri.

"Your dog was the traitor all along," Royal MF snickers.

"Makkachin?" Victor questions, beyond confused.
"And you helped us retrieve the information we needed by taking her into enemy lines for us. Thank you so much, Flash Freeze," Scarlet Mask says.

"Don't call me that," Victor says. His hands are clenched to his side. He looks helpless as he stares hard at the ground. Lost and vulnerable with no way to defend himself.

"But we're your real friends, Flash Freeze," Scarlet Mask says teasingly. "We know you better than anyone."

"Don't you dare call me your fucking friend."

The temperature in the room drops. Yuuri feels it physically to the bones. He's shaking in the tense silence, but he's not sure it's if the sudden chill that's making him quiver. He doesn't know what to think. How to act. What might make that broken look on Victor's face go away.

But then, the silent tension is broken with a scream.

JJ's scream, to be exact.

Several of JJ's screams, to be more precise.

Five copies of JJ burst into the room in a flurry as they charge at the villains. Who Yuuri assumes is the real JJ helps him up.

"Lumi-nator!" Yuuri practically wheezes with the relief flooding to his veins. "Where in the world were you! Not that I'm not grateful to see you here, because really, I am extremely grateful that you're here, but it would have been good to see you—yourselves—ten minutes sooner."

"I was trying to call for back-up! Not that that's any good. Everyone at SUCC has their hands full right now fighting Shadow Knight," JJ says.

Yuuri pulls away from watching Emitter and the decoy JJs fight off the villains, and he makes a dumbfounded face at the real JJ. "It took you that long to call for back-up?"

"No—I mean I was actually calling for back-up. I was just at SUCC!"

"Huh?"

"Emitter has teleportation abilities and he beamed me to SUCC before Scarlet Mask and Royal Mind Fuck could trap me. Just like I said, they'd never be able to control me! I put one of my decoys down so they had no idea!" JJ laughs heartily.

Yuuri shakes his head and attempts to move his arms, but they're still stuck. "Please get me out of these so I can help everyone."

"I can't," JJ says with a shrug of his shoulders. "It's thotium. But if we get Neuroseeker out of his frozen state—"

As if summoned by the mention of his name, Phichit appears behind Yuuri. "Neuroseeker!" Yuuri cries with relief. "You're not frozen!"

"I was pretending the whole time, and boy was that hard. I wanted to strike at the right time! My mind-powers aren't gone like yours and Cryo-Frost's."

At the mention of Victor's hero name, Yuuri's eyes snap to him. He's frozen again, only this time, his expression looks like it's seen a thousand years of torment. Yuuri wants to get to him fast, unfreeze
him somehow, and as soon as Phichit uses his telekinesis to bend the thotium braces off his arms, he runs—

But he's stopped by sudden shadows rising from the floor, blocking his path.

"Shadow Knight!" someone yells.

Phichit grabs Yuuri's shoulder back before he can get swept in the shadows.

"We need to get as many people as we can and touch Emitter and teleport out of here," JJ informs them.

"C'mon," Phichit says, grabbing both of their arms and running to their table.

Phichit grabs for Sara and Yuuri takes Yuri P.'s elbow, because his hands are frozen in his pocket, no doubt reaching for one of his knives before he was frozen.

"Emitter, let's go!" JJ shouts. His copies jitter like computer glitches before disappearing in thin air.

Emitter touches his palm to the blue light emitting from his chest and phases through the room in short bursts until he's standing fully formed beside them. Shadow Knight is trailing right before him, palm raised dangerously, ready to call forth a Black Hole.

"Put your hands on me!" Emitter instructs.

Yuuri links his arm with the cyborg, Phichit links with his other arm, and JJ wraps both arms tight around Emitter's waist.

"Wait—" Yuuri says, as Emitter touches his hand to the blue, circular light on his chest again. The black hole is starting to form above their heads; it's sucking Yuuri's hair up from the force of its half-formed opening. But he doesn't care. He needs to get to him. He can't leave him here. He doesn't want to leave him here. "Wait, what about—we can't leave Cryo-Frost—"

"We have to go! We'll be crushed!" Emitter shouts. "Hold tight!"

The last thing Yuuri sees before they're sent hurtling through Teleportation Space is Victor.

The way his hand is stretched out towards them like he's calling for help.

The look on Victor's petrified face.

The single tear at the corner of his blue eyes, clear and frozen like his ice. It’s an icicle that cuts straight through Yuuri’s heart.

It haunts him like a frigid ghost.

.

.

(He doesn’t cry.)

Chapter End Notes
ahahahaha HEY WHADDUP IT'S BEEN LIKE 87 YEARS I AM SO SORRY....... and even worse, i came back with the world's worse cliffhanger. please be gentle with me.

i was stupid busy because i was working on a moulin rouge au for a big bang event, and also uni sucks and my schedule is unbelievably inconvenient right now. but hey! i have no more major writing obligations so i can focus on this series, and hopefully finish it up really soon! spring break starts in two days too, so more time to write! woo!

i missed this au so so much and i’m happy to be back and writing it again!! ❤️
Chapter Summary

Following the villain’s infiltration scheme, the heroes regroup and figure out their next step.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

No one has time to take a moment’s breath and think about what just happened, because the second they’re beamed out of the building—

—they’re met with the cold embrace of damp asphalt.

In an attempt to steady himself, Yuuri sinks his hands into a puddle, which is great. Just fantastic. The only thing that could make this moment more clichéd were if rain started falling right this second. (The sky is merciful; it doesn’t.)

“Uh, where are we?” JJ is the first to ask upon astute observation that they’re nowhere near the organization.

“Sorry,” Emitter heaves like he just ran across the country, hands on his knees and sweat clinging to his skin. “I can only teleport so far before I start to lose energy. Three times with that kind of distance is too much.”

“Well,” Phichit chimes, “We’re a little ways away so we’ll have to fly the rest of the way.”

Yuuri shakes his head and points out, “Phichit, you’re the only one here who can do anything close to flying. Sara could water glide us but, you know,” Yuuri looks at their frozen friend in sympathy. He wonders if they’ll be able to reverse whatever-the-hell the villains did to them on their own, or whether they’ll have to take down Emerald Witch themselves beforehand.

God, he doesn’t want to think about it. Not now. Not yet. Everything’s a scrambled mess and he’s only being grounded by the constant weight of Phichit’s hand around his wrist keeping him anchored to reality. He isn’t so sure he wants to be connected to reality, though, because frankly, reality has gone to absolute shit.

“I’ll say,” Phichit mumbles under his breath. Then, louder so he address the group, “I could ride us there by moving something telepathically, but my mind muscles are kind of exhausted from trying to fight mind control. But,” he pulls out his phone and presses it against his ear a few moments later.

“Are we—” JJ starts and is immediately interrupted when Phichit raises a hand.

“We are not piling four moving bodies and two incapacitated ones into a taxi. Maybe Minako or Mr. Feltsman has some time to send help, though. How much trouble can they possibly be in anyway?”

A lot.
They find themselves crowded in Mr. Feltsman’s living room, where the man himself is seated on a sofa, head buried so deep in his hand Yuuri expects to see handprints when he decides to look up again.

“Half of SUCC was destroyed,” Minako tells them. “It was a complete wreck. We weren’t ready to deal with Shadow Knight, and he proved to be too strong for us.”

“At least everyone managed to escape intact?” Phichit offers. He tries to fit an awkward little sympathetic smile over his face, but it doesn’t quite reach his eyes. What he does reach for is Yuuri’s hand, because Yuuri has been pacing nonstop in front of him since they had gotten there. Phichit squeezes in comfort, if only to get Yuuri’s mind to focus on anything other than itself.

He stops because Phichit is practically begging him to (he can see the please, your pacing is driving me crazy written all over his face without the need the read his mind, and so he sighs and slips into the seat between him and Otabek. (Yuuri doesn’t know when Otabek came to sit down. He’d been in the background poking frozen Yuri P.’s cheek as if that would irritate him enough to bounce back to life.)

Minako is sitting at the center of the room with Makkachin laying across her lap, and she has Makkachin’s collar in one hand and a device Yuuri doesn’t recognize in another. She says nothing as she works, hair pulled back from her face and lips pulled tight in concentration until, finally, she manages to pull a small square microphone chip from Makkachin’s collar. “Unbelievable,” Minako sighs. “To think the traitor was the dog all along.”

“But she didn’t mean to, I’m sure! It was all those evil villains’ faults, wasn’t it girl?” Chris, who’s sitting besides Minako, coos at Makkachin.

“They took advantage of our love for cute animals and they’ll pay, right Makka?” Phichit joins in, rubbing his hand along her back. “We’ll get you to pee on everything they love. That’ll show them!”

“Heck yeah!” JJ and Emitter shout in support.

Minako stands to toss the chip to the ground and crush it to pieces beneath her heel. “Now that that’s done, tell us what happened at the ceremony. Yuuri?”

“Hm?” Yuuri looks up from where his eyes were glued to the floor, counting each and every little broken piece of the chip that lies scattered on the ground. He has to blink a few times to remember his surroundings. “What is it?”

“You seem preoccupied. Understandably.”

“I’m just—worried.”

“Of course,” Minako nods. “We all are.”

“We’ve never dealt with anything this big before,” Yuuri continues. He stares at the palm of his hands with furrowed brows like whatever answer to this predicament is written into the hair-thin lines.

“We haven’t,” Minako confirms with another nod of her head.

“What if we fail? What if I fail? No one has a clue where Emerald is or what her motives are and Sara and Yuri P. are still frozen and Victor is—Victor is—” Yuuri takes a big gulp to swallow the anxiety that’s rising like gross bile in his throat. It’s what he was trying to avoid all this time, and now that they’re in this quiet little space, a clock tick tick ticking in the background, Yuuri can do
nothing but succumb and drown and sink and choke—

“Yuuri!” Chris cuts right through his near-spiral with a shout. “You beautiful fool. You’re getting way too ahead of yourself.”

With both hands placed determinedly at his hips, JJ practically shouts with enthusiasm. “You’re in an entire room of world class heroes, and assuming we’ll just fail is an insult.”

“Sorry—” Yuuri starts, but gets cut off as Phichit wraps an arm around around his neck and tugs him down into his lap.

“And don’t forget, you’re the world class hero. We’re gonna kick serious ass whether you think so or not.”

“I don’t—”

“Shut up,” Phichit takes a spare pillow and places it over Yuuri’s head.

And Yuuri can only murmur curses against the plush fabric, wriggle his limbs as he tries to grab at Phichit’s arm, think choice words so he knows Phichit can hear something, that little fucker—he thinks he might have kicked Otabek in all his squirming, but can’t see a thing, goddamnit Phichit I can’t breathe—

“Wow,” says a voice from behind, “Good to see you stupid lint lickers have time to pillow fight or whatever.”

“Yura!” Otabek says in a sort of excitement Yuuri doesn’t think he’s ever heard from him.

Phichit is pulling the pillow away just as suddenly as Otabek leaves his seat, and Mr. Feltsman is picking up his head and jumping up from the couch, and suddenly, an animated Yuri P. and Sara are being surrounded in bone crushing, air squeezing hug.

“Let go of me!” Yuri P. wheeze-shouts at the same time Sara excitedly greets them all with a happy “Hello!”

They eventually let go when Emitter, awkwardly standing by, clears his throat.

Yuuri is the first one to start asking frantic questions. Really, he’s just happy for the temporary distraction so his mind can focus on something else for a while. (But he’s also glad that Sara and Yuri P. are okay.)

“What happened? Why are you both suddenly unfrozen?”

“Perhaps there’s a timer. Maybe the distance from the award ceremony venue is rendering the effects obsolete. It could be both,” Minako says thoughtfully, shrugging her shoulders. “The important thing is that you’re both okay and able to move again. I’ll quickly do a scan to be sure you haven’t been compromised in anyway.” She’s already off, disappearing into another room to gather what she needs.

Mr. Feltsman walks back to his seat, where he sits up straight and composes himself, as if he hadn’t just ran to his pseudo son and enveloped him in a tight hug. He looks as impenetrable as ever as he rests a hand against his chin in thought. “While Minako takes care of that, we must figure out a way to stop the villains before any more damage comes to the heroes.”

“How the hell do we do that? They made me stop moving! I couldn’t do shit!” Yuri P. shouts. His
voice cracks midway like he’s restarting puberty all over again, and he stops to rub at his throat with a grimace and a mumble of, “I need water...”

“First thing’s first,” Minako returns, device in hand, as she beckons Sara and Yuri P. forward. “Let’s discuss what happened and what we know so we’re all on the same page.”

Sara speaks up first as Minako’s device scans over Yuri P. (he looks uncomfortable, having to stand still, like he’s done enough of that in the past few hours and needs to move or he’ll explode). She tells them that everything was going fine, the hosts had gone backstage after announcing the next category’s winners, and when the lone figure of Royal Mind Fuck walked onstage soon after, he was wearing a disguise.

“I think we all assumed it was another host to give the other two a break. But then Scarlet Mask materialized behind him wearing the ASS Machine on her head, and our table was the first to react because we knew what that was and recognized the fact that it didn’t belong there.”

Yuri P. chimes in when Minako gestures him out of the way. “Of course I noticed, too. And I was all, ‘What the fuck are you doing here!’ and they were all, ‘What do you mean?’ and JJ shouted that they were villains and Victor was already flying out of his seat to get to them but he ended up getting frozen first like a dumbass.”

“We tried to go after them, thinking maybe multiple people at once would overwhelm them. Most people in the hall had that idea, I think. But the moment we tried, we suddenly found that we couldn’t move,” Sara finishes.

Minako pats on Sara’s shoulder to signal that she can move again and packs her device away in her bag. “Okay, the scan was superficial because that’s all I can manage without access to my entire lab, but there doesn’t seem to be anything out of the ordinary. Whatever the villains attempted to do, they didn’t get the chance to do it on you.”

“That’s a relief,” Sara sighs, hand against her chest.

“I’m thirsty,” Yuri P. gripes again. “Sara, give me some water.”

“Say please.”

He rolls his eyes. “Please.”

“What happened then?” Minako continues, ignoring the two’s weird antics. “We know that JJ and Emitter came to us—JJ, how did you evade their attack?”

“Oh!” JJ jumps up excitedly at the attention being turned to him. He’s like peacock in a way. “I grabbed the person nearest me, who happened to be Emitter, and hid under the table! And suddenly we were outside?”

“It’s a defense mechanism,” Emitter helpfully explains.

“I suggested that we head to SUCC for help!”

“Well, your quick thinking kind of saved our asses even if it was a complete accident,” Phichit admits. “If Emitter were frozen too we would’ve never escaped.”

JJ preens at the praise. “I know right!”

“That’s around the time Yuuri called, isn’t it?” Chris asks.
“Yeah…” Yuuri sits down on the couch again. Makkachin immediately brings herself up into the space Otabek left and claims Yuuri’s lap as free real estate for her head as though she can sense his upset. As he pets her head, he allows himself to smile, small and gentle, for the first time since disaster struck. “I was with Phichit when we went into the the corridor to make the call—you said Makkachin had a freeze ray in her mouth? You didn’t even give me a chance to ask. You said everything was fine,” he pouts halfheartedly. He kind of wants to be mad, but the little licks Makkachin places on his hand are slowly melting him from the inside.

“I’ll explain that whole mess after you’re finished,” Chris promises.

“Okay,” Yuuri says, and with a breath and little nod, he explains to them exactly what happened after he and Phichit re-entered the hall. How confused he was, how it felt like his blood was boiling through this ice-like veins. His mind was thrown into hyperdrive, limbs on autopilot, ready to use his fire to set the villains ablaze but—

“My powers aren’t working.”

“Right, that’s what I was gonna say next,” Yuuri says.

“No,” Sara shakes her head, and when Yuuri turns to look at her, she sees her looking at her hands with alarmed confusion. “I meant me.”

“Come to think of it, Victor powers weren’t working when he tried to use them, too,” Phichit recalls. “Did they, like, steal them or something?”

“Oh, my god,” Yuuri sighs into the palms of his hands. “I don’t need this right now.” This can’t be happening, this cannot be happening, he’s been managing his powers so well lately he thought he was past this they can’t just be gone what is he without them canheevensaveVictorandeveryoneelse—

“Do you... not have your powers?” Mr. Feltsman asks.

Phichit takes Yuuri’s hand again—a habit he’s suddenly developing in this pass hour—and inspects them. “No, it’s just those three as far as we know. I think it’s an elemental thing? Maybe they somehow stopped every elemental in that room from using their powers?”

Sara squeaks in alarm. “Are you telling me our powers are gone?”

“My scan would’ve detected a change in your chemistry, Sara, so I doubt they’re gone. The likely conclusion is that they’re being inhibited somehow.” Minako grabs her device from her bag again to look something over, brows warily scrunched tight. “What happened afterwards?”

“Nothing really. Besides, you know, Scarlet Fuck and Royal Mini Ficus telling the entire world that we were harboring a villain all this time,” Phichit says nonchalantly.

“They what,” Minako and Mr. Feltsman say in unison.

“You...you didn’t know?”

“Everything’s a goddamn mess,” Yuuri whines, flopping onto Phichit’s lap again. Makkachin gets jostled in his own lap, and Yuuri immediately regrets moving, hopes that Makkachin will find it in her heart to forgive him.
“Will we be discussing a game plan now?” asks Otabek, who’s taken the couch’s armrest. Yuuri looks up to peer at his expression, stony and calculated like always. It’s hard to tell what he’s thinking, but he must be as troubled as the rest of them.

“Nu uh, first you guys have to tell us what the hell went down at the org,” Phichit tells them. “The villains said that Seung-gil handed the ASS machine to them! He’d never just give his ASS away! What the hell?”

“We don’t know what the hell happened,” Chris begins, frown on his face. It feels misplaced there, like it doesn’t belong. “One minute everything is fine, next thing we know half the building was sucked into a black hole.”

“We’re positive that the only possible way Seung-gil would just hand over his machine would be if he were mind controlled,” Minako continues. “Royal Mind Fuck’s power would never work on Seung-gil of all people, so…”

“You think Emerald Witch herself came into the organization to control Seung-gil,” Yuuri finishes for her. He can feel his blood running cold again.

She nods. “It’s like their goal was to create as much chaos as possible to stop us from noticing that they’d gotten to him. By the time we got things under control, Seung-gil was gone and everything was in ruin.”

The room grows silent. Yuuri bites as his lips, because he doesn’t know what else to do to stave away the bad, bad thoughts that are spilling to the front of his mind again. The doubts and despair and insecurity and helplessness that there’s nothing he—they—can do to salvage this. If the villains were able to just waltz into a room full of heroes and remain unscathed, what could they possibly do to stop them now?

As it stands, they’re a small group against a potential army of mind controlled heroes.

Sssluuurp.

Heads immediately snap up to the source of the sound: Yuri P., leaning against the far wall, drinking a glass of water through a straw.

“So, like, are we just gonna sit here and sulk like a bunch of babies?” He pulls another obnoxious slurp through the straw. “Lame,” and another, “You’re all lame. I bet Victor is glad he’s with his old friends anyway.”

Yuuri’s eyes are jerked towards Yuri P.; it feels involuntarily when he moves his mouth to ask, “What did you say?”

“I said,” Yuri P. speaks slowly, smacking his lips in some sort of show of defiance. “Victor must be glad to be back with his friends. He basically helped cause all of this in the first place.”

Wordlessly, Yuuri sits up, watches at the corner of his eyes as Phichit pinches his eyes together, turns back to Yuri P., and walks up to him very slowly. Frowns. Insides simmering on low.

“Do you really think so lowly of your own brother?”

Yuri P. looks taken aback, like he wasn’t expecting that kind of reaction; Yuuri doesn’t know what he expects besides a means to rile him up. There’s a slow-roast fire catching in the pit of his stomach, so maybe he’s succeeding.
“How can I not? He fucking sucks! He wanted to be a villain so bad and now he’s getting what he wants! He probably pretended the entire time so he could destroy everything; maybe he even pretended to like you the whole time—”

“Yuri Plisetsky, don’t you dare fucking finish that sentence.”

He promptly doesn’t finish his fucking sentence.

“Don’t you dare stand there and make gross assumptions that Victor would be that kind of person. I understand that you two have issues that neither of you refuse to work out because you won’t let go of your goddamn pride for two seconds to talk to each other, but you are not allowed to say that Victor is some heinous person when he literally sacrificed his own free will to save you—”

“Yuuri—” calls Phichit’s voice. It falls like flat notes to the ground, drowned out from the steam pouring from his ears, and he keeps going.

“You honestly think that Victor standing there with that look of fear in his eyes while his secret gets blasted to the world was a part of some plan? You think those tears he spilt were fake, because he was acting? Do you really think that he’ll happily sit in Emerald Witch’s lair like it’s some stupid villain’s paradise because he wants to be there?”

“Yuuri—” a different voice calls again. He can’t even make out who it is this time when there’s a ringing in his ears and heat in his eyes and a wide-eyed Yuri P. directly in his sights and—he’s burning.

Because the villains are awful, and Victor was thrust into this mess against his will, and he has to take being treated like a devil’s literal spawn and everything about this situation is unfair—

“I don’t care what you, or anyone in this damn world thinks about him,” Yuuri says, full of all the fiery conviction that’s searing under his skin, bursting through his pores. “I’m going to make it my goddamn mission to go in and save him myself if I have to, with or without my powers.”

“Yuuri, fucking hell, you’re burning a hole in the carpet!”

“Ah—” he jumps a foot in the air like he’s been stung, snapped out of the trance that overtook him, looks down to see the shoe shaped char marks in the light brown carpeting, and covers his mouth with his hand. “Oh, shi—I’m sorry!”

“You have nothing to apologize for!” Phichit is squealing, running into him and causing him to barrel down into the floor. “You wonderful person, you! I’m so proud of you!

“Phichit! I can’t breathe!”

Phichit finally lets go of him long enough so he can stand, and Yuuri takes a moment to wipe at his clothing before giving Yuri P. a sheepish look. “I didn’t mean to yell at you. I’m sorry. But I meant what I said.”

Yuri P. scoffs, turns his head to one side to the hide the flush of his cheeks that he thinks no one can see. “I was just trying to get you fired up because you look stupid moping around. What the hell do you mean he saved me, anyway? I don’t need saving,” he murmurs the last part with a little pout to his lips and softly kicks at the ground below.

“Well, uh,” Yuuri looks away, at the photographs plastered all over one wall (there’s a few pictures of a very tiny Yuri P. and Victor, wow, would you look at that—) and says, “Emerald took control of his mind some years back. Or so we think.”
“What,” Yuri P. answers flatly.

“I figured,” Minako nods.

“Yeah same,” Phichit chirps.

“There was some sort of ultimatum?” Yuuri scratches the back of his neck, twirls a single strand of hair between a finger. “He either had to become a villain or risk you or Mr. Feltsman getting hurt.”

“What.” Yuri P.’s mouth gapes. His now empty glass cup and straw slips to the floor. Phichit telepathically picks them up and sets them down neatly on the coffee table before they can shatter on the ground.

“You should really consider talking to Victor when we get him back.”

Yuri P. just stands there, brows scrunched, mouth open, and Yuuri fears that there was some sort of relapse and he’s been frozen again. But when Phichit comes up behind him to gently push him towards the nearest empty seat, he complies easily.

Otabek is next to him a second later, placing a comforting hand on his shoulder and offering little sympathetic pats.

Yuuri sits back down again, next to Phichit, and from here, he can see the little bits of steam coming from the carpet where he was just standing. He guilty looks over to Mr. Feltsman, who’s been quietly watching all of this happen. It’s amazing, Yuuri thinks, that he wasn’t chewed at for coming into his boss’s home and ruining his furniture.

“Sorry, Mr. Feltsman…”

“It’s,” he sighs, that same, familiar long-suffering sigh. “Fine. At the very least, I’m glad that your powers have returned.”

Yuuri glances down at his palms, and attempts to conjure a simple red flame, but nothing appears. “It’s not—I still don’t have it. Not entirely. And I know it’s not nervousness that’s hindering them…”

“Yeah, nope, mine still aren’t working either,” Sara says. “You might be willing to fight without yours but I still need mine back, thanks.”

“Alright. We need a plan of action,” Mr. Feltsman stands and walks over to the wall unit on the other side of the room. He clicks a well-concealed button, a hole in the wall opens up, and the sleek surface of a television screen slides into view.

“We’re watching TV? News?” JJ asks.

“No.” Mr. Feltsman turns the TV on and presses a button, then touched his finger tip the surface when it comes alive and writes out the words PLAN OF ACTION across the top.

“Ohh,” JJ nods his head in understanding.

“We will start by pooling in everything we know, analyze the results, and hope that the answers we’re looking for are hidden within the details.”

“Right,” Phichit stands immediately and claps his hands together. “I’ll go first.” He walks to the TV screen, stands so close his face is mere centimeters away, and writes something down while his free hand pointedly covers it up. When he’s finished, he steps away, self-satisfied smile across his lips.
His very important addendum reads:

- *emerald bitch is a f*ck

“Phichit,” Mr. Feltsman deadpans. “No.”

“Are you implying she isn’t?”

“Take this seriously, you dork,” Chris calls out from his perch on the nearby dining table.

“I am!”

It takes them about twenty minutes to fill up the digital board, and what they actually gather is this:

- powers gone. all elemental? or just sara, yuuri, and vic? who the heck knows at this point.
- villains are working with shadow knight and using his shadow portals to get from place to place.
- emerald witch controlled victor at a young(-ish) age, must have been someone close to him.
- emerald *bitch* witch has mind control powers but if mind control powers were on steroids and drank ten bottles of red bull a day
- she wants to control every hero in the country for ??? which is why she needed the ASS machine. (͡° ͜ʖ ͡°)
  - ass too powerful
- Emerald Witch was closely monitoring SUCC specifically, despite their being plenty of other organizations to infiltrate. Now, that could mean a number of things, but I believe this fact ties back to Emerald possibly being close to victor and, by extension, Yuri P. and Yako—

“Whoa, okay, Minako, relax. We’re not writing literal essays.”

“I appreciate the sentiment, Phichit, but relaxing is just not realistic at the moment.” Minako pulls her finger away from the screen regardless, and opts to stare the words down, like they’ll magically warp into a mouth and start spilling everything everyone needs to know.

“Minako’s thoughts here are really good, though,” Yuuri says, coming up behind her to peer at the list. There’s something nagging at the back of his head here that he feels should be blatantly obvious, something perched at the edge of his mind, just out of reach, and he can’t quite put his finger on it…

“Ugh, I can’t think when you’re all thinking in my personal space like this.” With his eyes firmly shut, Phichit starts massaging at his temples. “I need earmuffs for my mind.”

“You wanna step outside for a bit?” Yuuri suggests.

“Yeah. Yeah, that would help. I’ll be back in a bit. Don’t make any groundbreaking discoveries while I’m gone!”

He leaves, and they’re left in silence again, collectively staring at the board in search of the answers. Yuuri starts pacing again, and has to actively keep his fire under control so he doesn’t burn more footprints into the carpeting. He glances up for a split second, sees Mr. Feltsman seated on his couch. He looks—beyond troubled. And Yuuri immediately feels a weird sort of chill run down his spine.

“Mr. Feltsman,” he calls.

The man makes no move to indicate that he heard Yuuri, so Yuuri tries again, walks a little closer,
taps on his shoulder. When Mr. Feltsman looks up, Yuuri gets a face full of abject horror.

“Wha—”

“Do you know something, Yakov?” Minako asks. “Did you figure something out?”

Everyone in the room is looking towards him by now, waiting on his next words.

“The details… Emerald Witch’s connection to us—”

“Um,” Emitter’s voice interjects. “You guys. There’s a call incoming on the TV.”

Yuuri turns to the screen, and sure enough, Call Incoming… blinks in white text, slightly obstructed by the hastily written bullet points on top.

The troubled look on Mr. Feltsman’s face deepens. There’s crevices cutting into his skin. “No one should have the number to my direct line.”

“Oh, shit,” Yuri P. says under his breath. “Who could it be then?!?” He lowers his voice, then, as if the mysterious caller will hear, “Should we pick it up?”

Mr. Feltsman doesn’t say a thing in the stretch of silence that follows, waits for the ringtone to sound five more times (and god does it feel as though it lasts decades) before he finally says, “Answer.”

Yuuri holds his breath as he watches the screen, can only blindly grip the shoulder of the nearest person—Minako—and brace himself. In the back of his mind he thinks that this probably means nothing, but given Mr. Feltsman’s unfamiliar reaction, and the awful situation they’re in now, he’s expecting the absolute worse.

There’s static before the image clears, and they’re met with a faceless figure wearing a dark green mask that’s covering half of their face.

Yuuri blinks in confusion. Is that…?

“Emerald…” Mr. Feltsman whispers.

“Hello, esteemed Superheroes United as Champions of the Country. Good, you’re all here.” Her voice is warped, deeper than should be normal and impossible to recognize.

“What do you want, you hag!” Yuri P. is hiding behind Otabek, a knife brandished in his hand like he plans to murder Emerald Witch through the TV screen.

“Be quiet, child,” Emerald snaps. Yuuri can barely make out her expression, half of it hidden behind a mask and all, but he can tell she’s not too pleased with Yuri P.’s outburst. “Such insolence is to be expected in an organization that fails to do their own job. And harboring a villain! How scandalous. No one will believe the credibility of your little pet project again, Yakov.”

Yuuri can’t read minds, but he can tell that Mr. Feltsman is fuming with sheer anger from the simple twitch in his eye. He’s emitting so much heat that Yuuri feels like he’ll melt from the temperature. Yet when he speaks, his voice is the calmest Yuuri has ever heard it.

“What do you think you’re doing?”

“What I’ve always set out to do, of course. You brought this upon yourself, you utter fool.”

“I’m sorry to interrupt,” Chris cuts in unapologetically, “But do you two know each other?”
“You would love to know, wouldn’t you?” Emerald taunts, smirk pulling at her lips. At least, Yuuri thinks that’s meant to be a smirk. Her lips are so tightly pressed together they’ve disappeared into her skin. “You’ll do well to mind your own business.”

Suddenly, the static returns, morphing Emerald’s face along with it. She turns to yell, “What are you doing?!” at someone off screen, and her real voice peeks through the altered one. Still, it’s impossible to make it out, because the resulting contrast is grating on their ears.

“You Royal Fool, don’t touch that button!”

Her voice sounds a little more clear now, and Yuri P. is the first to say something, stepping out from behind his human shield, squinting at the screen as he says, “Wait a minute…”

“You’re absolutely useless,” Emerald Witch says, normal voice unaltered and unfiltered, and Yuuri feels like he’s been astral projected into another timeline, because no that can’t be right, what—

“Madame Lilia?” Yuuri says, slow and cautious.

“Lilia?!” follows everyone else.

“Lilia as in Lilia Baranovskaya, as in Yakov’s ex-wife Lilia?” Minako says. “You’re Emerald Witch?”

Emerald huffs and angrily removes her mask to throw it somewhere off screen. The disembodied voice of Royal Mind Fuck yelps in the distance. “This is the last time I employ you to do anything of use.”

“Wait,” Yuri P. holds his hands out to silence everyone. “Wait, wait, wait, hold on just a—hold the fucking phone—I just—huh?”

“Our divorce,” Yakov starts, getting up so he standing directly in front of the screen, staring poison laced daggers at Lilia’s image. “Occurred because Lilia did not take kindly to the fact that I placed so much of my attention to my work. She made it her mission to destroy everything I love.”

“Ahh, you were attention starved,” Chris nods his head sagely. “I’ve been there.”

Sara flails her arms, sputters in disbelief. “That’s no reason to set out to, what, destroy the world? World domination?! What even are you after?”

“It’s simple,” Lilia says, leaning closer to the screen. “I’m old, bitter, and want to watch the world burn.”

“Holy shit,” is all Yuuri can whisper in response. (Yuuri knows, that if Phichit were here, despite absolutely burning with hate for Lilia at this very moment, he would appreciate the raw savagery of that line.)

(Wait.)

(Speaking of Phichit—)

“I would love to expound to you the extravagance of my plan, but I’m not some idiot of a villain who wastes time on pointless monologues.” She moves away, back against her chair, hands folded neatly in her lap. And there’s that barely-there smile again as she regards the room with those piercing, emerald green eyes. “Just know that in twenty-four hours, every ‘hero’ in the country will be under my control, and there’s absolutely nothing you can do about it.”
She moves to interact with something, but pauses, and looks directly at Yuuri. “Ah, I nearly forgot. I’ll be wiping Vitya’s memories of the last few months, as well. Don’t bother trying to come for him. It will be a lost cause.”

The screen turns black.

Yuuri can’t feel his knees. His legs are jello; he nearly trips when he attempts to sit down.

Phichit chooses that moment to re-enter the room. He opens his mouth to say something, but shuts up again as he takes in the state of everyone’s thoughts.

“Phichit…” is the only thing Yuuri says. It’s the only thing he can manage; his mind is a whirlwind of thoughts, and it’s all Phichit needs before he briskly makes his way to Yuuri’s side and to wrap him up in a hug.

“What the fuck? I told you guys not to make any groundbreaking discoveries without me! You couldn’t, like, yell for me to come in?” He’s patting at Yuuri’s head now as he continues babbling. “Lilia is Emerald? Holy shit? She’s going to do what? Holy shit?!”

“We have to hurry. We have to… Everyone’s gonna… Victor…”

“First thing’s first, we gotta take your clothes off. Oh my god, I would’ve never guessed…”

When Yuuri looks up at him in confusion, Phichit clarifies, “Lilia created our outfits. She must’ve done something to stop you guys from using your powers.”

“Of course,” Minako sighs into her hand. “This was all so obvious…”

“We’ll nab some clothes from Victor’s room—he won’t mind, right?—then we’ll find out where she is and we’ll take her down before she gets the chance to do any real damage,” Phichit babbles on. It’s probably for Yuuri’s, and everyone else’s, sanity, but at this point in time Yuuri’s whole disposition feels so dark he’s not sure if they can do anything to stop this.

They have to. He knows that. There’s no other choice but to try, because their second option means chaos.

He has to be strong.

He has to.

“Yeah,” Yuri P. says. “That’s great and all, but we have no fucking idea where she is! How the hell are we gonna find her in time! I bet she has some weird,” he wildly waves his hand, scowl on his face, “encryption thing or whatever so we can’t trace her call. It’s not like we can tell the future to see where she’ll be and even if we could she could be stupidly far away!”

Yuuri is nodding his head along to what Yuri P. says, because he’s technically right, but…

Something suddenly clicks in his mind.

“You, that’s it! You’re a genius!”

“What.”

“We can—We can tell the future!”

“Huh?”
“Yuuri, sweetie, you’re not making any sense,” Phichit informs him.

“No, no! We can tell the future to—I mean, not us, specifically, of course not, none of us have that power—but we can get someone who does! And she can give us an idea of where Lilia might be if we tell her specific locations and narrow down our search!”

Everyone’s just looking at him in bewilderment now, but he can’t bring himself to give a damn, because this idea might actually work and they’ll save the world in time and get to Victor before Emerald Witch has the chance to screw with his mind again!

“Mr. Feltsman.” Yuuri stands, hands clenched into fists, determination sitting like a shield over his shoulders. They can do this. He knows they can.

“Yuuri?” Mr. Feltsman addresses him.

They can stop Emerald Witch.

And they will.

“We need to call Kenjirou Minami’s mother. She’s clairvoyant, and she may be able to help us.”

Chapter End Notes

so uhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh i have no excuses besides the fact that i’m awful and inconsistent and awfully inconsistent and very sorry for taking another several centuries to update kdkjfg

also, i apologize for not replying to all of the comments from last chapter like usual, i got a little busy and forgot about them and they kind of piled up and aaaaa... i still read them though, and they made me very happy and gave me the motivation and energy to finish writing this fic ♥♥ which, by the way, is done. like really, really done. i'll be posting the next chapter next week and the last one a week later.

i still want to eventually write a side story in phichit's pov featuring phichit and yuuri's mentee adventures under Celestino "Chin-meister" Cialdini but i need to find the motivation to do that. _(´ `」∠) _ maybe some day...

props to all you smart butterflies who guessed lilia!! and a gold star for everyone who chanced a guess anyway! it was lots of fun reading all of your little theories.
Chapter Summary

The Plan takes form, and our brave, brave heroes face off against Emerald Witch.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Ohhh, myyyy Gooood!!”

Yuuri doesn’t know if he’ll ever be accustomed to the sound of Kenjirou’s unfiltered shrieking. He thinks that, when this is all over, he’ll invest in some sound-dimming earplugs.

Anyway—Yuuri endures Kenjirou’s koala tight hug at his doorstep. He didn’t get the chance to say hi or greet himself or get any word in for that matter, because the yelling had started before the door even opened.

When Kenjirou finally lets go, Yuuri looks down at him and spots dried trails of fresh tears along his cheeks and—oh, he suddenly feels bad for wanting to drown out Minami’s voice because he must’ve been so worried—

“Yuuri! I mean, Cinde—why aren’t you wearing your mask? Why are you in normal clothes? They’re so big on you! What’s Phichit and Knives Edgelord doing here, too? How did you even find my address! Oh, my god, I was watching the awards ceremony and the villains broke in and everything was bad and then I found out that Cryo-Frost was really Flash Freeze the whole time and I thought everyone was gonna die and I was so worried and and and—” He starts wailing.

Yuuri’s heart breaks a little. He doesn’t know what to do here, other than stand awkwardly and babble useless words of comfort in hopes of calming Kenjirou down.

Thankfully, Phichit steps up to ruffle Kenjirou’s hair and wrap him up in a hug that rivals his own airtight ones. Yuri P. stands directly behind Yuuri, looking just as, if not more, awkward, shuffling on his feet, hands shoved in his pockets, shoulders hunched over and all.

“We can fill you in once we’re inside, but we’re kind of in a hurry,” Phichit tells him. “We’re gonna need to speak to your mother. Is she home?”

“Yeah?” Kenjirou replies with a sniffle, confusion written all over his watery face. “Why? Am I in trouble?”

“Kenjirou,” a woman’s voice calls from inside, “Will you let our guests in, please? It’s cold outside and you’ll all get sick of you’re out there a moment longer.”

“Ah—right! Come in, you guys! You can make yourselves at home!”

So they do, stepping over the threshold, toeing their shoes off and leaving them on a rack near the door frame. They follow Kenjirou into the living area and make themselves at home on an L-shaped sofa. There’s a television on and tuned into a news channel, and Yuuri fearfully reads the headline “SUCC Scandal” scrolling along the bottom before Kenjirou shuts it off and takes the couch.
Kenjirou’s mother appears in the room the next moment, and, truth be told, she’s nothing like Yuuri would have imagined. There’s a reserved air about her that Kenjirou doesn’t possess. Plus, she doesn’t have wildly dyed hair which admittedly is a weird thing to expect from her, but Yuuri figured that Kenjirou had gotten his hyperactivity from somewhere.

(Then again, their powers don’t match up at all, so Yuuri should’ve expected this all along.)

“Hello,” she greets, a warm smile on her face. She pushes a strand of unruly brown hair behind her ear before placing both hands behind her back again. “I wasn’t expecting visitors. Much less from esteemed heroes such as yourselves. What can we help you with?”

“Are we going to help you out somehow? Are you planning on stopping the villains?!” There’s actual, genuine stars in Kenjirou’s eyes as he leans forward in his seat. “Am I going to help you stop the villains?!!”

“Yes—not you, though,” Phichit points at Kenjirou, then turns to his mother. “Ms. Minami, we’re in a really big pinch and could really use your help.”

“I’d love to help, but I don’t see how I can,” she looks at the three of them in confusion, eyes wide as she regards them. It feels like Yuuri’s whole psyche is being picked apart right now. But, perhaps, that’s just the effect that anyone with mind powers have on people.

“We heard that you have the power to see the future?” Yuuri says, glancing at Kenjirou as he says this. Kenjirou suddenly sits up straight like he’s been jolted with electricity. “And we were wondering if you could use those powers to help us figure out the villain’s next moves before it’s too late.”

She shifts her gaze over to Kenjirou with a sigh. “I can see the future to an extent, yes, but…”

“Please, Ms. Minami, this is incredibly urgent. If we don’t work fast, Emerald Witch will place every superpowered person in this country under her control in under twenty-four hours.” Yuuri gets up, ready to quite literally kneel and beg if that’s what it’ll take to get her help. “She has someone very important to us under her control, too, and if we don’t get to him, soon, it’ll be too late to stop what she plans to do to him.”

“Oh, what are you doing? There’s no need for that!” Ms. Minami sheepishly waves her hand in dismissal. “I can help, sure, but I’m not sure my reach will be of any use. I can only see so much given that I don’t even know who Emerald Witch is.”

“I’ve heard of her, I think!” Kenjirou excitedly chimes in. “I heard you guys talking about her once! She’s the one behind all the weird villain activity lately, right? Did you guys find out who she is?!”

“We did,” Yuri P. answers bitterly. He hasn’t spoken much this entire time, something that’s uncharacteristic for him. But given the fact that he’s just learned that one of his guardians is evil and the reason for the giant rift between his and Victor’s relationship, he probably has a lot to mull over. Yuuri feels awful for him.

“Really?! Who!”

“None of your business, tiny.”

“Mean.”
“If I’m to help you,” Ms. Minami starts, coming over to Kenjirou’s side to pet at his hair. “I’ll need something that belongs to Emerald Witch. Something with great connection to her. An item, or—” she makes little hand gestures.

“We...didn’t bring anything,” Yuuri frowns, face falling flat to the floor.

Phichit breathes out in exasperation. “I don’t think we have much time to go to her place and nab any of her things, either. I bet she has that place booby trapped.”

“Great,” Yuri P. mutters under his breath. “Can’t anything go right for one goddamn minute? This day _sucks._”

Yuuri looks over at him, eyes narrowed in thought, and when Yuri P. turns, notices, and defensively says, “What do you want?” Yuuri faces Ms. Minami and asks her, “Would a living person work?”

“Huh.”

“Yes, actually!” Ms. Minami claps her hands together, large smile spreading across her face. She looks a lot like Kenjirou when she does so. “Alright, we can get started then. Would anyone like something to eat or drink beforehand?”

“No thanks. I don’t think I can eat anything when I’m this anxious,” Yuuri says.

“I’d like a snack,” Yuri P. says. He seems to remember himself, because he looks down, cheeks colored red, and mumbles a quiet little, “Please…”

“Coming right up!”

They find themselves in what can only be described as a psychic’s lair, round table with purple tablecloth, a crystal ball sitting at its center, fairy lights, and shelves filled with various knick-knacks and psychedelic paraphernalia.

“My mom does this sort of psychic thing as a side job,” Kenjirou whispers very loudly. “I helped her decorate!”

“Huh,” Phichit says, crossing his arms. They’re perched at a corner, away from the table so they don’t disturb his mother. “I always figured that the whole ‘psychics are just superpowered clairvoyants’ stereotype was just, y’know a stereotype.”

Ms. Minami sets herself up at the head of the table, while Yuri P. sits in a chair across her. He has his hands on table’s surface, palms facing up towards the ceiling.

“Now, Yuri, I just want you to sit here and keep absolutely still. Don’t say a word, either, okay?”

Yuri P. wordlessly nods.

Then, she looks over to Yuuri and Phichit to ask, “Just to clarify, you’d like me to figure out Emerald Witch’s current location?”

“As close to it as possible, yes,” Yuuri confirms with a nod. “If you can do that.”

“I can certainly try,” she hums. Closing her eyes, she very carefully moves her hands to place over
Yuri P.’s open palms.

They fall silent as Ms. Minami uses her powers. It isn’t really obvious as to what she’s doing, or whether this will work. She did mention that a connection as fickle as Yuri P.’s might not yield any results. They can only hope that this will help them get a big enough lead to do something rather than waiting here like sitting, moping, pitiful ducks and watching the world slowly burn to a charred unsalvageable crisp.

Yuuri watches the woman’s face, the pull of her eyebrows and the tight line of her lips and wonders what she’s seeing, if she’s seeing anything at all. He stops himself before he can go down that line of thought any further, shuts down the evil, self-deprecating, pessimistic part of his brain and pushes it towards the back of his mind because this is not the time to be thinking that way.

Ms. Minami suddenly gasps, eyes shooting open and body pressing back against her seat so hard the chair scrapes deafeningly against the tiled floor. The resulting sound makes everyone jump, and they look to her for answers.

“There’s a—satellite. And a radio tower. Directly over Dominion state. I’m sorry.” Ms. Minami looks upset, filled with regret as she regards them. “Everything was fuzzy. I couldn’t get a clear image and kept getting flashes well into the future.”

“What happens in the future?” Phichit asks warily.

“It’s best that you don’t know.”


“It might not be much, but it just might help us narrow down our search for her. Thank you, Ms. Minami,” Yuuri bows his head gratefully, then gestures to Yuri P. and Phichit. “We need to take this information to Mr. Feltsman and pray he knows what to do with it.”

“Oh, leaving already?” Ms. Minami gets up from her seat and makes her way to the door. “Allow me to see you boys out.”

They make it to the front door, Kenjirou trailing behind them like a curious puppy, and he looks like he has something to say, clearly, because he’s staring so intently at Yuuri it’s like he means to embed his thoughts into Yuuri’s head before his leaves.

“Yes, Kenjirou?”

“Can I come? Please? I can help!”

“Sorry, but you’re just a mentee.” Yuuri consolingly pats his head. ”It would be way too dangerous for you right now.”

“Whenever we have to save the world again we’ll be sure to call you!” Phichit calls. He’s already seated in the car they borrowed from Mr. Feltsman to get here.

“C’mon, hurry up!” Yuri P. yells.

“Bye, Ms. Minami. Kenjirou,” Yuuri speaks in a hurry, taking their hands respectively to shake them. He’s turning around and already running to the car as he shouts, “Thanks again for the help!”
Preparation for their plans to subdue and extract are brisk. Mr. Feltsman calls Isabella over to provide the weapons they’ll need to stop Shadow Knight.

She came in looking absolutely hysterical, dropping her clunky bag down on the ground and immediately running into JJ’s arms, touching her hands to his face to ensure that he was fine, all while everyone else stood there and gently coughed to remind her that time was sensitive and they really need to get going.

Yuri P. wasn’t so gentle as he attempted to kick the back of her knees, and was rewarded with a suplex to the nearby couch.

“I made a new and improved version of the grapple gun,” she tells them, pulling the steel contraption out of her bag. “Same stun settings, forty percent more gapple action, a new taser setting, and,” she flips a switch, and a translucent, glowing pink bubble surrounds her person, “A force field mimic that might be able to counteract his black hole’s sucking tendencies. I don’t know if that’ll actually work yet because I haven’t had the time to test it.” She tosses the gun to Phichit, who scrambles to catch it. “There’s no better time to test it then now, I suppose.”

“Sweet,” Phichit wheezes as he shifts the thing in his arms. “Wow, this is heavy.”

When they tell Mr. Feltsman the spotty information Ms. Minami told them, he has to sit down in his designated devastation sofa again and bury his head in his hands (a vulnerable position Yuuri has seen more times from their boss tonight than he has in his three plus years of working at SUCC) as he takes this information in.

He tells them, “she’s an insanely powerful woman with insanely powerful connections and I cannot forgive myself for forgetting this fact.”

Yurui doesn’t know what to make of that, until Phichit says, “she has vacation homes around the country?! No way. Mr. Feltsman, did you get to keep any of those in the divorce settlement? Did Lilia just take all of them?”

“Yes,” Mr. Feltsman answers in this pitiful way that leaves Yuuri wanting to hug him, but that would be super weird, because he doesn’t have that sort of closeness to his own boss. But he could use one, surely. He looks devastated as each new bit of information reveals itself.

Emitter spends his time in the kitchen eating anything he can get his hands on in the fridge in order to recharge because he’s their only means of transportation, and they need to travel an even longer distance than before to get to Lilia’s possible location.

Yuuri and Phichit are currently changing out of Victor’s casual wear and into something more mission-suitable. His very flashy athletic wear that would probably be tight fitted on him, but just hangs like drapes off their shoulders.

“This is such a bad idea,” Yuuri complains. “I’m pretty sure I’ll end up burning all of his clothes by the end of this. They’re not heat resistant. He’ll hate me.”

Phichit snorts. “Really cute of you to be worried over your boyfriend’s clothes when he’s literally in danger of getting his memories erased any minute now.”

“Phichit,” Yuuri whines again.

“Sorry! I’m just making sure you’ve got your head in the game.”

As if he could spend a single second not thinking about the dire situation they’re in. He wishes he
could have a bit of time to appreciate the eccentricity of Victor’s room—it’s neat and devoid of any
dust; there’s pictures of Makkachin and him all over one wall, and a few magazine cut outs that
happen to feature Cinderos on another (Phichit will never stop talking about that)—but he can’t stop
and smile at this cute new discovery, and he’s worried sick about what Lilia will do to Victor.

“Alright,” Yuuri says, nodding his head once, mask in hand. “I’m ready.”

They head downstairs; it’s in a state of disarray as everyone else preps to leave. They’re going
to take Yuri P., Otabek, Sara, JJ, and Chris, and they’ll break off into three teams to extract Victor, take
back the ASS machine, and take down the villains. Minako and Mr. Feltsman will stay here to
provide any assistance they can. Assuming all goes well, capturing Lilia will be a breeze.

But that’s a big If, with a capital I.

“Everyone good to go?”

“You two look hilarious in Victor’s clothing,” Chris replies. When he gets a glare from Yuuri, he
smiles and says, “Yes, we’re ready to go.”

“Be careful, JJ,” Isabella wails dramatically, kissing JJ on either cheek, then pulling out a
handkerchief from god knows where to dab at her teary eyes. “You had better make it back safely.”

“Of course, I will,” JJ answers, taking one of Isabella’s hands in his own. “I’ll be sure to bring
everyone back safely!”

“That’s my JJ!”

(Yuuri can faintly hear Yuri P. attempting to coax his cat into biting JJ, but KitKat petulantly rests his
limp body right over Makkachin’s.)

“Yuuri,” Minako calls. Yuuri turns to her and gets muffled against her chest in a tight hug. “I need to
be able to sense your whereabouts, but also, please come back in tact,” she lets him go, presses her
hands against his shoulders, and looks him directly in the eye. “You can do this.”

“I can do this,” Yuuri repeats.

“Emitter! We gotta go!” Phichit yells.

“Huh?” Emitter’s head pops up from around the archway to the kitchen. He looks caught off guard,
with crumbs decorating the corners of his mouth. “Oh!” He quickly wipes his mouth with the back
of his hand and skips over to the others in the living room.

“Do you remember where we’re going?” Yuuri asks him.

He nods. “Mock City, over in Dominion state, approximately 4,500 kilometers from here. I’ve
charged up enough to get us there and back.”

“And everyone remembers their assigned roles?” Yuuri asks the whole group this time, to which
everyone nods.

“Alright, let’s go.”

They’re teleported into the middle of a quiet residential area, with houses that span across entire
blocks of streets. The landing is rough, but they’ve got freshly cut grass to break their falls this time.
Yuuri stands and holds out a hand to help Phichit up.

“Is this right?” Sara asks, turning in place. She looked comically tiny in Victor’s clothing, so she opted to wearing something from Yuri P. instead. His wardrobe, to quote Sara, is ‘like if Loki went through a emo phase.’ (To which Phichit replied, “Like he isn’t going through one still?”) “This isn’t exactly what I pictured when I thought ‘possible lair for Emerald Witch’.”

“Emerald wouldn’t want it to be obvious, would she?” Chris gets up, dusting his costume off. Yuuri still hates that giant D on his chest. “If the neighbors noticed anything, she’d probably have the police at her doorstep.”

Yuri P. huffs in annoyance. “That’s great and all, but now we’ve got to try and figure out which of these houses are hers, and that could take ages—”

“Then we gotta stop complaining and start searching. Let’s go. But quietly.” Phichit lowers his voice. “We stick out badly and can’t really use the unwanted attention right now.”

Quietly, they power walk their way in a neat, single file line around the neighborhood in search of any house that might look out of place. Everything that they’ve passed looks like generic, picturesque copies from home life magazines, though, so that plan is quickly falling apart.

Yuri P. is, of course, the first to grumble his frustrations fifteen minutes later when they’ve made no progress and traveled about five blocks by now.

“This is getting us nowhere. I don’t even see a radio tower! Is this even the right place?”

“Maybe we should fly overhead to check,” Yuuri suggests, looking to Phichit.

“Right, on it.” Phichit glances around the area, telepathically grabs a nearby trash bin cover, and uses it to propel himself several meters into the air. He hovers there as he scans the area, and when he drifts back down again, shakes his head sadly. “Nothing. Not a damn thing. This is just a really normal upper middle class neighborhood. And a really weird place to have a vacation home, to be honest.”

“Great,” Sara huffs, leaning against nothing. “Did we come here for nothing? Is Emerald Witch even here? Will we have to teleport somewhere else? Emitter can only teleport so far one more time, so we’re basically screwed—oh, god, I sound like Ultrasonic,” Sara looks down at her borrowed clothing, horrified at herself.

“I think your current clothes are so much better than your old costume, anyway,” Yuri P. says, totally unbiased, as he leans next to her.

“We can’t think like that, you guys! Positive thoughts! We can do it!” JJ cheers from the side lines.

Yuuri stands silently as he watches all of this happen, and Phichit seems to notice this, because he questioningly looks at him, then in the direction he’s looking in. His jaw drops.

“How are you two leaning against the air like that?” Chris asks before either of them can.

Sara and Yuri P. immediately stand up straight and look behind themselves, only to find a long stretch of sidewalk and stifled nighttime air. “Uh…”

Yuuri places his hand in front of himself and slowly walks forward, onto the cleanly cut lawn, and stops when something warm and solid hits his palms. “Hm?”
“Is there…” Phichit knocks his hand against this weird, invisible surface; it makes a dull, warping thud sound on each tap. “Is this some sort of force field?”

“Hold on. Let me…” Yuuri blinks his eyes together to activate his infrared vision, then scopes the area around them. There’s the normal blues and greens he expects to see outside, and the reds from the streetlamps and porch lights dotted around the streets, but there’s also…

A giant, glowing, orange dome circling half a street block and blocking their path to the next house.

“This is a holofield,” Yuuri breathes. “She surrounded her entire lair in a giant holofield.”

“Whoa.”

“How do we get in, though?” Sara asks, tapping on the field, too. “This thing is pretty thick.”

“Emitter, can you teleport us in?” Yuuri asks him. “If Shadow Knight can presumably travel in and out of this thing, maybe you can teleport in and out, too.”

“My powers are *nothing* like how black holes work!”

“Sure, but chances are she hasn’t taken precautionary measures against a teleporter.”

Emitter reluctantly concurs. He gestures to the group to grab onto him, and Yuuri braces himself as his insides feel like they’ve being crushed down to an atom’s width before he pops back into existence again. Luckily, he doesn’t fall flat on his face when they reach the other side.

Somehow, Emitter had the foresight to teleport them behind a cleanly cut hedge, which is amazingly lucky, because the first thing Yuuri notices when he finally opens his eyes are the two guards standing right outside the door.

The second thing he notices, the stainless steel exterior of the building. Definitely out of place in a neighborhood as quaint and scenic as this. The holofield suddenly makes sense.

The third thing he notices: the tall, tall radio tower attached to the rooftop, with scaffolding reaching for the night sky, and a red light blinking at the very top.

Phichit and Chris whistle simultaneously.

“We’re *in*, hell *yeah,*” Yuri P. fistbumps the air.

“We need to get rid of those guards at the front before we can get inside,” Otabek points out. “I think those are mind controlled heroes.”

“We can cause a distraction?” Phichit suggests.

“Right. I’ve got this.” Yuri P. pulls two knives from seemingly nowhere and begins to make his way out of the cover of the hedges.

“What do you think you’re doing?” Yuuri asks.

“I’m gonna kill them all. That should distract them.”

“Oookay, *no.* That’s exactly what we’re *not* going to do,” Phichit telepathically drags him right back to his previous spot. “That’s against protocol you untethered weasel.”

Yuri P. *sputters.* “Untethered—”
“Here’s what we’re actually going to go,” Phichit swings the sling around his shoulder over to his front, where the grapple gun sits snug against him. He picks it up and messes with the stun settings, then peeks over the hedges to aim it at the two unsuspecting guards. “We’re going to quietly stun them and quietly slip inside without making a scene.” With the push of a button, an electrified cord shoots from the gun, wraps tight around the guards’ ankles, and sends a shock of electricity that causes them to crash wordlessly to the ground.

With a satisfied smirk, Phichit pretends to blow on his nails. “This thing is so cool.”

“Allright,” Yuuri says. “This is where we’re going to branch off. Emitter, Hard-on, and The Soldier, you three will find the ASS machine and secure it. Hydro Hex, Ultrasonic, and Luminator, you’ll capture any villains that you come across. Neuroseeker and I will extract Victor, then we’ll go and find Emerald Witch. Got it?”

“Wait.”

Yuuri blinks at Yuri P., nonplussed.

“I want to go with you instead,” he says, looking down and off to the side, like he’s embarrassed to show his face despite the mask covering most of his features. “I… want to get Victor. I should be the one to do it.”

Yuuri blinks a second time. He’s beyond bewildered, and he looks at Phichit like his best friend will have an answer to this sudden change of heart.

Phichit wordlessly shrugs. “I mean, I’ve got absolutely no problem taking his place and kicking villain ass.”

Yuuri raises his eyebrows.

“I swear,” Phichit reassures him. “You’ve been working pretty well without me, anyway. This won’t be any different!”

Yuuri pouts his lips a little. He doesn’t want Phichit to think he’s trying to replace him—

“As if you could ever replace me,” Phichit grins, playfully rolling his eyes.

A shy little smile crosses Yuuri’s own lips, too. Phichit is just that infectious. He turns to Yuri P., and with a quick nods, tells him, “You’re with me, then.”

(As they head inside, Yuuri can hear Emitter ask, “Does Cinderos have some sort of mind reading powers, too?”)

“No,” Chris answers him. “He can just read Neuroseeker’s.”

“That’s a very weird and useless power.”)

Neither Yuuri nor Yuri P. have the slightest clue where they’re going or how they’ll find Victor in this messy labyrinth of a home. They’ve already decided that the most logical place to keep him would be a lower level room, tucked away in a basement, because that sounds exactly like the kind of thing Lilia would do. Keeping captives in underground cells has that perfect brand of villainery that Lilia “hide villain’s lair in plain sight” Baranovskaya would possess, probably.
The only problem with that conclusion is that they have no idea where the basement is. This lair-house hybrid is deceptively bigger on the inside.

“We should split up,” Yuri P. suggests lowly.

Yuuri shakes his head at that as he ducks his head around yet another corner. “If we run into more than one person, we’re going to want back-up. We don’t know who’s in here or how many people there are.”

Yuri P. huffs in annoyance. “I feel like we’re getting nowhere like this.”

“It does feel like we’ve been circling this entire area three times over, doesn’t it…” Yuuri glances around at the hallway they’re in. He swears he’s seen that oil painting of flowers five times by now, and that half table housing an empty vase looks like exact copies of the ones perched in the foyer, and the only thing that sticks out here is the randomly placed bookshelf in this tiny alcove they’ve found themselves in. Come to think of it, the interior of this house looks like… a home, and not at all like the cold interior of a lair to match the metallic finish of the exterior. And there’s no doors indicating any basements. But…

“Secret entrances,” Yuuri snaps his fingers together in realization. “We can’t see any doors because it’s hidden. That’s gotta be it.”

“I was gonna say that,” Yuri P. mumbles, already searching the walls for an out of place dent or button. “I knew that.”

“Of course you did.”

“I bet I can find the secret passage before you do.” Yuri P. narrows his eyes at him in challenge.

This is dumb, they’re on a time sensitive mission, Yuuri can’t fall into silly games like this, but—

He also hates losing. And, maybe, this’ll get them to find the passage faster.

“You’re on.”

The search for the secret passage is frantic as they shuffle around the hallway. Yuuri takes it upon himself to pull every book on the bookcase out of its place, hoping that one of them will trigger the lock, but he gets to the last book on the bottom shelf and nothing.

Yuri P. not so subtly rips every painting from the walls and tosses them to the ground, and when Yuuri gripes at him about it, Yuri P. only waves him off, saying, “I doubt she actually cares about them, so why should I.”

“You’re being too loud.”

“It’s not like anyone is coming for us! There’s no one else on this floor!”

Wish a sigh, Yuuri presses his hands against his face, but that’s a mistake, because his elbow bumps a bust sculpture that gets knocked off it’s pillar and smashes into the ground with an audible CRASH.

“Look who’s making the loud noises no—AH!”

Yuri P. disappears into the doorway that opens up behind him.

“Ultrasonic!” Yuuri runs in after him, and finds him face-planted at the bottom of a short flight of stairs. “Are you okay?!”
“I’m, ugh, fine.”

Yuuri holds out a hand, fully expecting Yuri P. to bat it away out of spite, but he reluctantly takes it instead and mumbles a little thanks that Yuuri barely hears. He wants to ask if Yuri P. is truly okay, if he’s hurt anywhere, but he knows that that would just irritate him further, so he drops it quickly.

“At least we’ve made it inside,” Yuuri changes the subject.

Yuri P. hums noncommittally.

Yuuri slowly opens the door in front of them; it’s metallic and heavy. He hopes it doesn’t attract too much attention with the way it creaks on its hinges. He manages to open it far enough to peak through a tiny crack, and he’s nearly blinded by the stark and sterile hallway on the other side.

“It looks like her lab in her and Yakov’s old house…” Yuri P. points out, and he’s right. It does. There’s an eerie similarity to the meticulous spotlessness here that makes Yuuri feels like he’s back there again, his resilience being tested so his new costume can be engineered.

They’re about to open the door wider to slip through the crack, but two figures suddenly walk pass, disappearing off to the left and out of sight. The unmistakable scent of off brand Yoplait® reaches them.

“Yogurt Slinger is here,” Yuuri whispers in shock. “Oh, my god, she brought some of the heroes here.”

“And they’re working for her? They’re idiots.”

“They don’t really have a choice considering they’re being controlled against their will.”

“This just keeps getting more and more annoying. Are we going to have to fight them all off to get to Victor?”

“Ideally, no,” Yuuri pushes the door open the slightest bit, enough so that their bodies can slip outside with ease. “We’re going to try and stealth our way to him.”

Yuri P. nods once in understanding. There isn’t much littered around the halls to act as cover, so they duck around corners to slip away from the many heroes-turned-mindless minions striding around the basement. They manage to narrowly miss being spotted numerous times, with Yuuri having to pull Yuri P. back behind corners before he’s spotted, but they make it to their destination without a hitch.

There’s a door with metal bars on the other side of the corridor, but what tips Yuuri off to the fact that Victor has to be there, is the temperature drop; it’s freezing here. So much so that he can nearly see his breath pick up pace in front of his own eyes. His heart is hammering against his ribcage, hands clammy with sweat. They’re so close…

“Boo.”

“Ultrasonic,” Yuuri whisper-shouts. “Now is not the time for this.”

“What the hell are you talking about?” Yuri P. snaps back. “I didn’t do anything!”

Oh.

Oh, no.

The next seconds are a complete blur as Yuuri’s brain kicks into auto pilot, and he turns his infrared
vision on in time to see a familiar figure twist her body in the beginnings of a crescent kick, pushes Yuri P. to the ground and narrowly misses having his nose bloodied from the force of it—

Yuuri doesn’t get the chance to catch his breath as Scarlet Mask descends on him once again, eyes murderous as she throws jab after mercilessly jab Yuuri’s way.

Yuri P., on the other hand, has plenty of time to catch his breath and yell out, “Is it that invisible villain? Where is she!” He’s pulling knives left and right out his many hidden pockets and just tossing them in any direction Yuuri’s facing and only succeeds in outlining Yuuri against one wall, pinning his—Victor’s—shirt right against it.

He gets an angry punch to the face for his trouble.

“Fuck.”


Yuri P. looks livid, drawing more knives out and aiming them at her, ready to throw.

“Get back!” comes the voice of their savior, Phichit, who comes barreling down the hall with the grapple gun in hand.

Yuuri unpins himself from the wall, tosses the offending knife to the floor, then grabs the bristled Yuri P. away from Scarlet. Multiple electrified cords shoot out of the barrel of the gun like stingers. Scarlet Masks turns invisible again, but that doesn’t stop the cords from wrapping around her legs and stunning her to the ground with a loud thud.

“Thank you based Isabella for this sick ass gun,” Phichit whispers to the sky. He then turns to Yuuri, and upon noticing the state of his nose, cringes. “You okay, Cinderos?”

“I’m okay,” Yuuri tells him. It’s not too bad, he thinks. He can still breathe just fine through this nostrils, though now that comes with the fresh, new smell of blood. Ugh. “What are you guys doing here?”

“There isn’t really anyone upstairs,” Sara explains. “We did find Royal Mind Fuck and took him down, plus a few others on the way here…”

“We just followed the trail of broken canvases to the open doorway!” JJ says.

“Okay,” Yuuri nods. “Okay, yeah. That’s good. We think Victor is here and we’re just about to go and get him. If nothing else goes wrong…” Yuuri mutters under his breath.

No one else hears him, but Phichit gives him a look, as if he’s just jinxed this whole operation. But, realistically speaking, this was never going to go well from the moment they stepped full in that dining hall in Accident City.

Yuuri just hopes and prays they all make it out intact.

“What are you waiting for?” Phichit makes a shooing gesture at Yuuri. “Go and get ’em!”

He breathes in once, turns on his heels, and marches into the stone cold hall with absolute conviction. His heart feels like it’s trying to dig a hole in his ribcage to leave his chest and get there first, and he wishes he could take a moment to calm down, but he’s terrified that any moment he spends waiting around is a moment he causes everything to go horribly, terribly wrong.
“Victor!!!” Yuri P. yells without preamble, or any sort of tact, outside the door. There’s literal icicles hanging from the door frame, tiny stalactite formations that could probably pierce right through Yuuri’s skin if he’s not careful. (He swears he sees them shake from the force of Yuri P.’s voice and thinks, this would be the worst possible way to die. Seconds away from saving his boyfriend, right outside his holding cell.)

There’s a heavy thunk on the other side of the door. The tiny barred window is too high up for either of them to see through. One of them will have to boost the other up to see.

“Victor,” Yuuri calls out to him, hand pressed against the icy surface of the door. “If you’re there, say something. Please.” He uses his fire to subtly melt the ice around the door as a sort of sign to tell Victor that it’s him. He’s here.

“Yuuri…” answers the meek, soft, unmistakable sound of Victor’s lovely, lovely voice.

“Victor, we’re going to get you out of there, okay? Hang tight.”

“Is Yura with you? I thought I heard him…” He sounds so broken right now it’s like a sharp stab of an icicle through the heart. He must be hurting. Yuuri has been valiantly trying to stay focused throughout the entire night, but now that he’s here, mere centimeters away from Victor and his tinny little voice drifting through the opening overheard, Yuuri wants to toss all his shields to the ground and wrap Victor up in his arms. Keep him safe from the vulnerability that’s got to be crawling at his skin right now.

He doesn’t reveal any of these thoughts, though. Instead, he replies with, “Yes, he’s here.”

“Yura,” a light tap on the door, “I have something important to tell you, before it’s too late.”

“I already know, and you’re fucking stupid for not telling anyone! I hate you.”

“And you’re right to,” Victor quietly answers.

Yuri P. curls his hands into angry little fists, then harshly pounds on the metal door, enough to make Yuuri jump, and crosses his arms with a scowl across his face. “Don’t just say that! You’re the worst. I could’ve taken care of myself. I didn’t need saving, you dumbass. And you had to be selfless or some shit and pretend to be a dumb villain all that time—you disappeared for years—y-you—”

Yuuri looks the other way, inspecting the shadows cast over the linoleum floors and away from Yuri P., because he knows he wouldn’t want to be seen as weak from crying in front of him. Yuuri will swear to never bring it up.

The sounds around him seem to drown away as his eyes zero in on the shadows moving along the floor. The hairs stand on the back of his neck. He reaches behind him and wraps his hand around Yuri P.’s wrist, and backs up slowly.

“What are you doing?” Yuri P. asks. He vehemently wipes at his eyes.

Yuuri gestures to the shadow creeping up along the wall.

“Oh, shit.”

Yuuri presses his hands to his ears as the shadow shapes into a portal, and Shadow Knight slinks through. He looks fucking menacing as he stalks towards Yuuri, and Yuuri continues to back away, hiding Yuri P. behind him.
“What’s happening?” Victor’s muffled voice sounds from the small window.

Shadow Knight doesn’t say a thing as he raises his hand above him. A small black hole starts to form right above their heads, pulls at the hairs on Yuuri’s scalp, and Yuuri can only think *I have to get Yuri P. out of here* as he frantically searches for an out. But they’re backed into corner.

This is a dead end.

He doesn’t stand a chance.

But he’s not here alone.

He overloads his head with loud, distressing thoughts, and sure enough, Phichit is on the other end of the hall barely a moment later, grapple gun ready and in hand, pointed directly at Shadow Knight. Yuuri is so, so grateful to have him here. He wouldn’t replacement Phichit for the world.

“Duck and cover any way you can!”

The stun cords are sent Shadow Knight’s way, and Shadow Knight has to turn his focus towards Phichit, which gives Yuuri and Yuri P. enough time to run out of the way as Phichit attempts to stun the villain.

Shadow Knight opens another black hole in front of himself, and instantaneously sucks the entire gun inside, leaving Phichit’s hands empty.

“Oh, god,” Phichit whines. “Isabella is gonna kick my ass for losing her gun.”

“I’m going to kill you all where you stand,” Shadow Knight declares. And—

And Yuuri cannot let that happen. He refuses. He’s going to take everyone here and bring them out alive and kick his ass, and Emerald Witch’s ass, and everyone other villain’s ass along the way.

He conjures his flames, relishes in the comforting, familiar warmth of them in his hands, and sees *red* as his flames burn white, and he looks Shadow Knight in the eye.

“Yeah?” Yuuri says, walking towards him. He doesn’t flinch, doesn’t bat an eye as Yuuri approaches. “So could a pedestrian. So could a well placed anvil. So could a dedicated baby. You aren’t special and frankly I’m getting tired of being afraid of you.”

Shadow Knight’s eyes might have widened a little at Yuuri’s sudden outburst, he doesn’t know, because Yuuri sends one ball of flame after another, causes him to dance around them to keep from being burned, and watches with satisfaction as Shadow Knight struggles to concentrate on conjuring another disastrous black hole.

It gives Yuri P. and Phichit enough time to work on getting Victor out of his cell.

They’re close.

They’re so *close*.

They’ll get out of here, find and capture Lilia, and everything will be *okay*.

He can do this he can do this he can do this he’ll take Shadow Knight down right here and now—

“Cinderos!”
If he’d only noticed, through his infrared vision, the orangy-red figure stalking up behind him, they would’ve gotten out of here in one piece.

Everything *would’ve* been okay.

But Scarlet Mask has Yuuri’s arms trapped behind his back—he can hear her snickering as he tries to wriggle free—

“Get rid of him,” she says.

A black hole opens up right above him.

He’s going to die here.

There’s an inhale.

.

.

“MICKEY!”

Everything stops.

The sweat that falls from the tip of his nose and scatters to his collar is like a giant bell’s chime in Yuuri’s ear.

Shadow Knight moves in slow motion as he turns his head.

There’s Sara, teary-eyed, standing at the other end of the hall.

“Shadow Knight, what the hell are you doing?” Scarlet Mask questions. “Destroy them! Really?”

“This is a family reunion, haven’t you heard?” Phichit’s voice says from directly behind them.

“Huh—”

Her words are cut short as she’s knocked to the ground. Phichit tosses the scrap metal bar next to her and wipes his hands off.

“Thank you,” Yuuri says, breath heavy against his tongue. He cannot take any more surprises tonight. He’ll absolutely lose it.

“Don’t mention it!” Phichit says cheerily. “The bars to Victor’s cell are made of thotium, because of course it is, so it took some shimmying to get him out, but—hey!”

Yuuri doesn’t let Phichit finish as he runs into the room (he sends a hurried, *I'msorrybutthisisimportant* his way as he goes inside) slips on the icy floors, and runs face first Victor with an *oompf*.

“Yuuri, oh—”

“Victor, quickly, we have to get you out of here—”

“Yuuri, wait a minute—are those my clothes?”

“Yes, Lilia was behind this the whole time and she tailored our clothes and suppressed out powers
and you need to strip right now.”

Victor blinks. “I don’t think this is the time to proposition me for—”

“I’m not propositioning you for—ohmygod, let’s just go!” Yuuri takes Victor’s hand, starts walking to the door…

But Victor refuses to move.

He turns back to him in confusion. “Victor?”

Victor is shaking his head rapidly. “I can’t—I can’t leave.”

“Why not?” When Victor doesn’t answer, Yuuri grips him by the shoulder and shakes him hard.

“Why not, Victor?”

“She. She’ll. I can’t. I’m sorry, I can’t…”

“Good boy, Victor,” a woman’s voice calls behind them.

Yuuri wants to cry. Or scream. Or both. The awful surprises just keep piling on top of each other. He just wants this night to be over.

But as it stands, he’s here with an unwilling Victor who looks terrified, and they’re facing an open doorway with stairs leading to Emerald Witch herself, standing like the chilling figure she is, razor-sharp cheekbones and stare, and an even sharper measuring tape blade in hand. Her other hand is carrying a remote.

“Did you really think I would sit here and watch my plans fall apart like this?” she says, slowly and gracefully making her way down the steps. Each tap of her heel against the metal staircase is a crushing blow to Yuuri’s mind, chipping away at his sanity, his focus, his last sense of calm. Yuuri bristles, rooted in his spot, neurons firing off in his brain as he tries to figure out what’s happening and why and how he can fix it so they can get out get out get out—

“I’m amazed you’ve all made it this far. Unfortunately for you, I cannot allow you to get any further.”

“What did you do to Victor, you bag of rotten fucking turnips,” Yuri P. yells.

Emerald Witch smiles, smug and threatening.

“I caught your little group of colleagues attempting to steal back the mind device. Naturally, I took it upon myself to lock them up here.” She presses a button on the remote, which opens another secret doorway, thotium bars blocking the way in. Chris, Otabek, and Emitter are all trapped inside, restrained in ropes and mouths covered in duct tape. “Should Victor attempt to escape, these three will not be spared.”

“You—”

“I’ve also taken it upon myself to deconstruct the mind device and download it’s program. It’s destroyed. You will not find it,” she smiles. (Yuuri thinks it’s a smile, god, he doesn’t know anymore. He’s worried, on high alert, and feels pressed back into a metaphorical corner. He’s trying so hard to keep himself under control, so hard to clear his head and think rationally, so hard to tell himself that everything will, in fact, be completely fine still, but he’s very slowly losing his last thread of sanity and descending into panic.)
“I was lying when I said there was twenty-four hours left. I was already working towards finishing the program before the video call ever took place.” She holds the remote out. It has two buttons, and for such a small thing, it fills Yuuri with fear to the point of suffocation. “I’ll have the ability to have every hero in this country under my control with the press of a button.”

Oh, fuck, oh, fuck oh fuck oh fuck oh fuck.

“And there’s absolutely nothing you can do about it.”

Think, think think think.

(Don’t panic don’t panic don’t panic don’t panic.)

“Not if I have anything to say about it!” says Phichit, and in the next moment the remote goes flying out of her hand and into the air. “Get fucked!”

Time stops, shutters, and moves again in slow motion as there’s a mad dash for the remote.
Emerald Witch’s face twists around the “no!” she shouts as she extends her hand towards it.

But Yuri P. manages to get to it first.

“Ha!” he shouts. “I got your stupid remote!”

Emerald pulls her measuring tape from it’s casing and swings the blade in Yuri P.’s direction. The shock and shhhling of the metal in the air makes Yuri P. yelp and jump out of the way, and the remote flies into the air once more.

Victor grabs hold of it this time.

“Vitya,” Emerald turns her nose up and stares at Victor down the length of it. “Give me back the remote.”

Victor looks down at the offending thing with furrowed eyebrows like he has a personal vendetta against it, then to Emerald, and back again. He glances at the pleading eyes of Yuuri, and returns his gaze to the remote and says, “Like I’d give you that kind of power, you evil witch.” He tosses it to Yuuri. “Burn it.”

“Don’t you dare!”

Yuuri raises his hands up, remote in hand, ready to conjure his fire—

But things are never that easy. Something always, always goes wrong.

Because Sara is screaming in the hallway, the light fixtures are flickering, and the air suddenly feels thin.

JJ runs into the cell, eyes wild with worry as he addresses them. “We have to get out of here right now! Shadow Knight’s black hole thing is going all haywire!”

From the hall, Yuuri can hear it, Sara’s frantic shrieks of, “Mickey, stop it! It’s me! It’s your sister, don’t do this!”

The next few minutes feel compressed into mere seconds with how fast it occurs. To this day, Yuuri doesn’t remember a thing.
The black hole forming outside the cell is swallowing everything inside like a ravenous thing, and everyone collectively knows that they will die here if they don’t leave.

Phichit and a small army of JJ’s work to free Chris, Otabek, and Emitter, and Yuri P. and Yuuri attempt to get Sara away from the black hole that Shadow Knight has created.

It takes a second for Yuuri to realize that Emerald is still in the cell with Victor, and a few seconds longer for him to run back inside, where he’s greeted by the bone-chilling, stomach-turning sight of Emerald staring down a kneeling, mindless, frozen Victor.

His mind goes blank, eyes wide with stark shock, as he comes to the realization that despite the dire position they’re all in, despite the fact that her plans are falling apart at the seams, Emerald is still attempting to take the one thing that Yuuri—and Yuri P.—care about.

And it makes him sick. Makes all the panic churning at the back of his mind spew forward like a tsunami; makes all the constricted emotions he was trying contain in a tiny box, locked away in the far reaches of his subconscious spill, a waterfall; makes him scream his heart out.

Yuuri screams, and involuntarily conjures his fire in the wake of his panic.

Everything is blue, blue, blue flames.

He burns.

Chapter End Notes

[cue ominous music here]

i needed one last cliffhanger before the end. epilogue will be posted next week! \(^{*}

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^\(^{\wedge}\)*/
Yuuri and Victor wake up.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Yuuri…”

“Yuuri…!”

“Yuuriiii!”

Yuuri shifts in his bed. He doesn’t want to move, he’s so damn comfortable here. The sheets feel cool against his heated skin, makes him feel like he’s been submerged in liquid fever for the past several days, and he needs this.

He bats his hand at whoever’s talking at him to get this point across.

“Yuuri, c’mon, you’ve got to get up. Aren’t you hungry?”

Now that Mystery Disembodied Voice mentions it, he really is hungry. Like, haven’t-eaten-in-several-days brand of hungry.

With reluctance, Yuuri cracks one eye open, sees Yuuko peering down at him with her big, brown eyes, and promptly closes his eye again with a long, drawn out groan.

“What are you doing in my room?” he thinks he says. He doesn’t actually feel his mouth move, but perhaps Yuuko will understand his unintelligible mumbles anyway.

“This isn’t your house, silly. We’re in Yakov’s and Lilia’s old home. Y’know, the one Yakov disinherited.”

“Oh,” Yuuri nods his head in complete understanding. “That makes sense.”

A minute passes. Then another.

Yuuri opens his single eye again to stare at Yuuko before asking, “I’m actually really hungry. Do you have any food?”

“I do, actually! I have to go heat it up, one second.” Yuuko leaves his line of sight. There’s the scrape of wood against the floor. She pops back into his limited vision to ask, “Would you like me to get Phichit?”

“Oh, um,” Yuuri closes his eye again with a soft sigh. “Yeah, sure. Why is Phichit here, too?”

“Because SUCC was destroyed, remember? This is our temporary hub until it gets rebuilt. I’ll be right back!”
Yuuri hears a door open and close. He relaxes against the bedsheets, feels another sigh involuntarily leave his body as he settles in. It’s an ice bath, or a cocoon, or a little bit of both, and it’s comfortable against his sore skin. He’s so sore…

What did Yuuko say again? He was in Lilia’s old home. Because the organization building was destroyed. Right, right…

But why?

Yuuri opens both eyes this time with much difficulty, and scans his current surroundings. He’s in a bed, which he’d already guessed in his muddled, mushy brain. This is a bedroom, full of warm earth tones and neutral bits of decoration. It’s definitely a guest bedroom. In Lilia’s old home.

But where is Lilia now?

The org was destroyed?

A creak sounds from the door as it opens, and a head of black hair pops up from behind it. Phichit stands there, wide grin on his face, waving at Yuuri enthusiastically. “Hey! You’re up!”


“Yeah, no shit you are. With the way you kind of blew things up a few days ago, I bet I’d be in a ton of pain, too.”

“I did what now?” Yuuri asks, head still churning, rolling over like a whirlpool of sludge. He’s still trying to work out what he’s doing here and why Yuuko said the things she said. What did she mean.

“Oh, honey, your mind is a mess.”

“I’m baaack!” Yuuko sing-songs, entering the room with a bowl of something that smells amazing.

Yuuri’s mouth starts watering on impulse before he can sit up and get his hands on the thing. It’s a bowl of katsudon. Bless Yuuko’s kind, generous soul.

“Is he feeling okay to you?” Phichit asks her while Yuuri swallows down bites of food in big gulps.

“Yeah, why?”

“I don’t think he remembers.”

Yuuri stops immediately and gives them both the Look™.

“What are you two talking about?”

“You, you’re going to want to sit down for this,” Yuuko vaguely tells him.

“I am sitting down,” Yuuri frowns.

“You remember where you where before this, right?” Phichit asks him carefully.

“Um.” Yuuri tries to wrack the unorganized mess in his mind. It’s like a filing cabinet, but with missing shelves and misplaced files and attempting to sort anything out just hurts. The last thing he remembers is being in Accident City with everyone and getting ready for the awards. Did he drink
too much at the ceremony? Is that it? Did proceed he repeatedly slam his body on the ground afterwards, too? Because that’s the only plausible explanation for the soreness ravaging his body right now.

“No,” he says.

“What, okay, so that’s a problem,” Phichit says. “I’m pretty sure you getting in between Lilia trying to erase Victor’s memories caused her powers to ricochet off of you somehow or...something. I have zero clue how her power’s work. But anyway—”


“You were out cold for two days.”

Before any panic can ensue, Phichit very quickly runs Yuuri through the events, all while Yuuri sits there with blinking, disbelieving eyes. This sounds like something straight out of a superhero’s fan fiction. And this happened to them?

—and then, oh, man, Yuuri, you used blue fire! I had no idea you could do that!”

“I… I did?” Yuuri looks down at his free hand in wonder. “Blue fire…”

Phichit’s recounting is slowly jogging his memories, he thinks. Bits of information slowly peek through the nebulous haze. He recalls meeting Kenjirou’s mother and Yuri P. arguing with Victor, who was held in a thotium cell. Phichit hadn’t told him that part, so he’s remembering things on his own again. Good. That’s good...

He suddenly blanches. “Yuuko said I blew up the place. I didn’t...I didn’t kill anyone, did I?”

“No, Yuuri, oh, my gosh,” Yuuko waves a dismissive hand at him. “Everyone was fine, albeit a little battered. The Superpowered Villains Unit took Emerald, Scarlet, and Royal Mind Fuck into custody and the heroes-turned-Emerald Witch’s minions were able to get their mind control reversed, including Seung-gil. It’s truly a wonder no one burned to death, to be quite honest. Do you know how hot fire has to be to turn blue? And you managed to contain it in a way that didn’t hurt anyone even though you were in a high stress situation! You’re incredible, Yuuri!”

“You kicked some serious ass! And you took on Shadow Knight!” Phichit pretends to wipe tears from his eyes. “I’m so proud of you. You’ve grown so much.”

Despite the blush creeping up the back of Yuuri’s neck, he bites his lips on a smile.

He did that.

He really did that.

For once, he’ll allow himself this small victory—

“Small, my ass, we basically saved the world from chaos,” Phichit interrupts with a snort.

Yuuri rolls his eyes playfully and returns to his food. He’s quiet for a while as he lets his mind slowly fill in the gaps. It’s odd—he feels like he’s swimming in headspace right now, collecting floating pieces of shredded paper and sticking them back into their places with makeshift glue.

When he’s finished eating, he sets the bowl down on the bedside table, then turns to Phichit to ask, “What’ll happen now? I mean... Lilia destroyed the entire organization. Mr. Feltsman has gotta be
devastated.”

“Oh, he was at first,” Phichit confirms. He digs into his pocket and pulls out his phone, scrolls through the screen until he finds what he’s looking for. “But he’s kind of taken to looking on the brightside, which is a bit scary when you think about it. We had to witness Mr. Feltsman smiling really big, like, what.” He hands Yuuri the phone. It’s open to the SupersTown Daily news site.

“Smiling…” Yuuri absently mumbles as he skims through the article titled *A Recap of the Events of the Past Three Days, Cinderos’s Status, SUCC’s Head’s Statement, and more!*

“Truly terrifying,” Yuuko feigns a shutter through her body as she picks up the empty bowl and disappears from the room again.

“Yeah, as thanks for saving their asses, the Hero Awards Association is giving the money from the funniest photo contest over to him to help rebuild the org. He’s finally getting his brand spankin’ new office!”

Yuuri scrolls down to the section headlined *Yakov Feltsman’s statement* and reads aloud, “‘Thanks to the actions and quick thinking of the heroes of the Superheroes United as Champions of the Country organization, and Emitter, we were able to neutralize Emerald Witch’s threat. We regret having to hide Cryo-Frost’s true identity, but due to the circumstances of his previous predicament—that is, being under Emerald Witch’s unwilling control under the alias of Flash Freeze, and later being removed from that control as a ploy to destroy the organization—we believe that we have taken the best course of action in dealing with Cryo-Frost. He is now free of Emerald’s control and will continue to work under the Superheroes United as Champions of the Country organization as of today.’”

“Scroll down, scroll down!” Phichit says, “You’re missing the best part. Someone asked Mr. Feltsman if it’s true that Emerald was his former wife and was out for revenge and called the whole thing a divorce feud and he says—”

“I appreciate the question but I am going to respectfully decline answering given that that’s garbage.’ *Haa—*”

“Right? Brutal!”

Yuuri hides his smile behind his hand as he scrolls down some more. There’s tidbits about him, the fact that he hasn’t been seen in a couple of days, and information about everyone involved, and the fact that no one’s spotted Cryo-Frost since the incident…

His eyes land, and latch, onto the words *hospitalized*.

“Phichit—”

“Okay, don’t panic.”

Yuuri’s *already* panicking. He can feel it climbing his throat. “Where’s Victor?”

“He’s totally fine,” Phichit attempts to assure him.

“This says he’s *hospitalized*? I thought you said I didn’t hurt anyone!”

Yuuko steps in then, and it takes one look at Yuuri’s face for her to connect what’s going on. “Oh, dear. Did he found out about Victor?”
“Where is he?!” Yuuri blurts. He’s suddenly filled with *dread*.

“He’s fine, Yuuri! He’s right here in this house and he’s healing up nicely, but—”

Yuuri doesn’t think, doesn’t waste any time as he gets up from the bed—

And promptly makes contact with the floor.

“Ow.”

“Yuuri!” both voices shout in unison. Two sets of hands help him up, and he’s set down on the edge of the bed.

Yuuko wags a chastising finger at him. “Be careful! You woke up not even thirty minutes ago. You’re in *no* shape for moving around like that.”

“I need to see him,” Yuuri tells her. “I want to make sure he’s okay.” He musters up the most heart-wrenchingly cute pout he can, *really* channels his inner kicked puppy. “I won’t be able to rest properly until I do.”

“Oh, you sly fucker,” Phichit snickers.

“Ugh,” Yuuko laments. “Fine! But you’re absolutely not walking over there on your own. Let me go and get Christophe or Otabek to carry you.”

“I can walk fine on my own!”

“You fell flat on your face two seconds ago, Yuuri Katsuki, you will *not* walk by yourself until I say so.”

Yuuri quickly shuts his mouth, any protests he has dying on his tongue.

It’s Otabek who comes, thank goodness. He’s here with Yuri P. apparently, helping take care of Makkachin since Victor can’t.

The walk to Victor’s temporary room is short. Otabek exchanges awkward, stilted pleasantries (“Good to see that you’re up” and “Are you doing okay?” and “You’re kind of light”), and once they’ve made it to the door, he quickly excuses himself.

“Victor!” Yuuri literally hits the ground running, stumbling along the way when he sets sight on him. Victor is wrapped in a million blankets and laying atop a million more pillows. And he does, genuinely, look fine, though a little pale. Yuuri breathes a sigh of relief.

“See?” Phichit bumps his side with his elbow. “You worry way too much.”

“I know,” Yuuri sighs sheepishly. He makes himself at home on Victor’s bedside and begins stroking his silvery hair. The ends feel singed and rough to the touch.

“He took the fire the hardest since, you know, fire and ice are the antithesis of each other,” Yuuko explains. “He doesn’t take heat very well. But your control over your powers is what saved him in the end.” A pause. “Well… mostly.”

Yuuri stops moving his hand. “ Mostly?”

“Well…” Yuuko silently meets Phichit’s eyes. They share worried looks, and *that* doesn’t bode well.
“You guys can’t keep doing this to me,” Yuuri whines. “Haven’t I been through enough in the last few days?”

“You remember what happened right before you blacked out, yeah?” Phichit asks him.

“Yeah, you told me,” Yuuri’s eyebrows knit together in concern. “I saw Lilia try to erase Victor’s memories, and so I stopped her.”

“You didn’t really succeed in stopping her, though,” Yuuko says lightly, like they’re discussing unpopular opinions on a recent TV show and not how Yuuri’s world is slowly shattering all over again.

“Are you staying that he’s forgotten everything?” Yuuri looks from Yuuko to Phichit, devastation written across his face. He doesn’t remember seeing Lilia attempting to wipe Victor’s memories, but he remembers what he’d felt. Something like helplessness and despair taking over every inch of his soul at the thought of letting Victor down, of losing every bit of progress they’d made together and starting back at square one, of Victor reverting back to the villain he isn’t and seeing him thrown in jail for it. Of. Of.

“—Of course not,” Phichit tells him. “He just...kind of forgot everything from before he came to SUCC.”

“Oh, my god,” Yuuri ducks his head down into the pillows, whispers into them. “Oh, my god.”

“He woke up in the hospital and he wouldn’t let us take him here without a fight, so we had to literally tranquilizer dart him in the ass before he decided to encase us in ice.”

“Oh, my god,” Yuuri says again like it’s the only words he knows. This is an actual nightmare. What are they going to do if they can’t bring his memories back?

...Can they bring his memories back?

Victor shifts in his sleep. It causes them to still as they watch him toss and turn before opening his eyes to stare at the ceiling.

“...Victor?” Yuuri tries.

“Mmmn,” is what he gets in response.

“Victor?” Yuuri shakes at his shoulder. His heart is in his throat. “Hey, it’s me.”

He turns his head, blinks his gorgeous blue eyes at Yuuri for a moment, then two. Doesn’t say a word. Then, “Who are you?”

Yuuri can already feel the tears prickling at his eyes. This is so unfair. That through the disaster they’d pulled themselves out of, Victor couldn’t have remained unscathed. He’d been hurting more than any one of them. He doesn’t deserve this.

“I’m Yuuri,” he tells him. “You don’t remember?”

“You...ah,” he winces at nothing, “sound familiar. Maybe I do know you?”

Yuuri wipes his eyes before any of his tears can betray him by falling, and he nods his head vigorously. “You do. We do know each other. You’re my boyfriend.”

“Boyfriend?” Victor repeats, eyes wide. “I think I’d remember dating someone as adorable as
you…”

Yuuri presses a hand against his mouth as he lets out a mix between a sob and a laugh. Ridiculous. He doesn’t remember a thing, but he’s the same flirting dork he’s ever been.

“Seriously, who are you? And where am I?”

“I’m Cinderos,” Yuuri tells him, because maybe, just maybe, that’ll help jog some memory.

And well, it certainly jogs something. Just not the desired effect, because Victor suddenly shoots out of his comfortable sheet burrito and ducks into the opposite corner of the bed, placing as much space as he can between him and Yuuri.

“You’re—You—Cinderos? What are you doing in my house? How the hell do you know my name?”

“Yup,” Phichit whistles. “A bad case of the forgetti spaghettis.”

“Phichit, I hate you,” Yuuri gripes.

“This is hardly the time for jokes, Phichit” Yuuko tsk.

“This is how I cope with hard to swallow situations!”

“Is anyone going to tell me what the actual, literal, genuine fuck is going on,” Victor cuts in.

“Victor,” Yuuri says. He opens his mouth to speak, then shuts it again. He has no idea what to say, how to remedy this situation, whether Victor will take anything they say to heart or just deflect it and try to fight them in the process. Maybe whatever feelings he had for Cinderos is still there, deep down, and he’ll listen to Yuuri knowing that Yuuri trusts him enough to reveal his secret identity to him. Maybe that’ll mean something. Maybe it’ll cause some memories to return.

This would be so much easier if they could just get his memories to return.

“I’ve dreamed about having my dear Cinderella in my bedroom, but this is not how I imagined this scenario to take place,” Victor says. “Are you seriously Cinderos? Did you say your name was Yuuri?”

“I haven’t heard you unironically call me that god awful nickname in months,” Yuuri blinks incredulously.

“Cinderella?” Victor blinks right back at him. He looks beyond bewildered. “Did I ever stop?”

“I know this is awful and all,” Phichit interjects, “But this is kind of priceless.”

“Phichit!” Yuuri throws a pillow at him, which ends up being futile, because Phichit telepathically tosses it back at Yuuri.

“Was that telepathy?” Victor gasps. “Are you Neuroseeker? For the love of god, is anyone going to tell me what’s going on?

“Okay,” Yuuri takes a deep breath. “You guys jogged my memories by telling me about what happened, right?” he looks to Phichit and Yuuko, then to Victor, expression solemn. “So, maybe, we can jog yours by telling you what you don’t remember, too.”

“You’re gonna wanna sit down for this,” Phichit tells Victor.
“Al… alright.”

They tell Victor everything, beginning with the moment he entered the organization. How Yuuri was tasked with taking him under his wing, how he’d met and reunited with his brother there, how they had to fight against his former villain acquaintances. How he’d broken at least a hundred rules with Yuuri for the sole purpose of getting his dog Makkachin back. How he’d gotten his ass handed to him several times in the training room and how, in turn, he gave Yuuri a run for his money when using his powers. How he’d become a full-fledged hero and later replaced Phichit as Yuuri’s partner, and how they’d slowly grown a bond that Yuuri would never, ever trade for the world.

(Yuuri pointedly glosses over any mention of anything remotely romantic. He does not want to give Phichit and Yuuko, his Embarrassment Cheer Squad, anything more to hold over his head.)

By the end of their long winded spiel, Victor is holding his head, face twisted into a grimace as he fights through whatever grip that’s holding his memories locked. He looks up at Yuuri, and Yuuri looks back at him expectantly.

He says, “That’s quite a story. Are you not making any of that up?”

Yuuri slumps. Head pressed into his open palms, back against the headboard, body curled in on itself.

“It was worth a shot?” Phichit says glumly.

“This can’t just be it. There’s no way,” Yuuri moans, muffled into his hand.

“Hold on,” Yuuko says. “I know that Emerald Witch’s power is the altercation of the mind. That’s common knowledge by now. And that includes wiping memories, apparently.”

“Yeah, we’re well aware,” Yuuri halfheartedly glares at her. He’s sad enough as it is without being told how this is a lost cause.

“I was never around Victor much, besides that time when you almost died at the hands of Shadow Knight. But you said he lost his memories of Makkachin, correct? Makkachin is his pet, you’d think he’d remember his own pet regardless of the circumstances.”

Victor’s mouth falls open as he stares at Yuuko, scandalized. “How dare you accuse me of forgetting my dear pet Makkachin—”

“Hush, Victor, I’m trying to have a eureka moment!” Yuuko huffs before continuing. “Except he didn’t forget Makkachin. Not really. I don’t know how Emerald Witch’s powers work, but somehow she managed to rewire his brain in a way that blocked memories of Makkachin, yet allow bits of information to crack through the block. I’m guessing that’s a flaw in her power, but maybe not…”

“She did intend to use Makkachin in her scheme,” Yuuri points out. “I doubt that was a flaw.”

“No, wait! Yuuko is onto something!” Phichit chimes in excitedly. “Remember that time in the lounge when I caught you and Victor doing that weird elemental mating call or whatever—”

“What?” Yuuri and Victor say simultaneously.

“You were, like, shouting Lilia Baranovskaya over and over because Victor’s mind went all weird every time he was around her. But he couldn’t quite remember her for some time, which was weird, right? He remembered Mr. Feltsman, so he should’ve known Lilia. Memories of Lilia were erased from his mind because she’s the one who screwed with it in the first place!”
Yuuri perks up instantly. Gasps bodily. “Her powers do have a flaw.”

“Right? Because why would she want Victor to experience *that* if that would mean blowing her entire cover!” Phichit hooks his hands on Yuuri’s shoulder, hops excitedly, bobs Yuuri forward with every jump.

“It’s a senses thing that triggers Lilia’s block to break down and memories to return, I think,” Yuuko says. “Auditory, tactile, et cetera, et cetera. *Aaand*, if I were to make a guess, I’m betting different senses have different strengths and effectiveness in terms of how important those senses are.”

“So?” Yuuri looks at her curiously. “What are you saying?”

“I’m saying you’re probably the only person who can bring his memories of his time at SUCC back considering he spent the most time with you.”

“But I’ve been talking and sitting here without my mask the entire time! Nothing’s happened!” Yuuko looks at him with a deadpan expression as she says, “You haven’t tried touch or taste.” And Yuuri has to look away to hide his blush, even though he knows that’s futile.

“Oh or we could get Yuri P.,” Phichit shrugs.

“And have him threatening Victor’s memories out of him? I think not.”

“Um,” Victor pipes up. They turn towards him. Yuuri honestly forgot he was there, despite him being the topic of conversation. “I’m right here. I can hear all of you. Don’t I get a say in this?”

“No,” Phichit and Yuuko tell him.

(Yuuri gets a weird sense of déjà vu right then.)

“No, seriously. You have *got* to stop saying that name, because it’s hurting me. What kind of power is that? Is it you?” he gestures to Yuuko.

Yuuri looks at Phichit and Yuuko, who in turn look at him with equally startled expressions.

He turns to Victor, crawls towards his end of the bed, watches Victor eye him cautiously, and plops down in front of him with his hands on his knees. Victor looks like a lost puppy right now, and Yuuri hopes that this idea that’s crawled into his head will wipe that disposition from him, bring back the easy familiarity that belongs there.

“Victor, I know this is really weird, and you must be super confused right now, but I need to hold your hand,” he holds out his own in invitation. “If you’ll let me.”

Yuuri expects him to be as hesitant and resistant as he looks, but Victor raises his own hand without question. His eyes are narrowed, though, as he lets his palm hover over Yuuri’s.

“I won’t hurt you, I swear,” Yuuri lies.

“I still don’t know whether to trust you or not,” Victor tells him. “But I guess I have no other choice, hm?”

He palm gently falls on Yuuri’s. Without a word, and without looking away from Victor’s gaze, Yuuri gradually raises the temperature in his hand, then all at once. Victor yelps in surprise and cradles his nearly burnt hand to his chest with a deep set frown.
“Yuuuuri!” he whines. “You’re so cruel. It’s very cute with you do it accidentally, but you can’t just purposely burn me without warning—oh.” Victor’s face falls slack, mouth formed around a little ‘o’.

“Are you remembering?” Yuuri asks, shuffling a little closer.

“I—ah,” Victor holds his head in both hands. His eyes are shut tight in concentration. “My head hurts.”

“It’s not enough. Do something else!” Yuuko urges him.

“What else do I do!” Yuuri all but wails at her.

“You gotta smooch him.”

“Wha—”

“Good thinking, Phichit! That might work! Yuuri, kiss him to bring his memories back! You’ve kissed each other before, right? He’ll have to remember!” Yuuko says excitedly.

Yuuri is left sputtering, hands flailing and head shaking so hard he’ll give himself a concussion. “N-no! This isn’t a fairytale! I can’t just kiss him better!”

“You’re right, this isn’t a fairytale!”

“So be his hero, Cinderella,” Phichit goads him, shimmying his shoulders teasingly.

Yuuri looks to Victor, who looks frozen in place while they’re discussing this. This doesn’t feel right, somehow. It can’t work. Nothing else has.

But what if it does? It’s something intimate and irreplaceable, and the feeling of Victor’s lips on his is something that he’ll never forget in this lifetime and the next...

“I need you two to leave right now,” Yuuri tells the two most lovable but annoyingly intrusive superpowered dorks in the world. He’ll know no peace as long as those two are here.

“Fiïne,” Phichit drawls out, heading for the door. “This had better work, okay!”

“Bring Victor back intact!” Yuuko winks. She shuts the door behind her.

Yuuri buries his reddening face in his hands. His heart is beating impossibly fast as he ponders the actions that led him to this exact moment. Somehow, the universe planted these strategically placed events that leads him to this exact instance where a fucking kiss of all things might save his one true love, or something, and oh, my god, how did this happen, this is beyond embarrassing—

“Are you really going to kiss me?” Victor’s voice breaks through his musings.

“Only if you want me to,” Yuuri tells him, peeking up at him with one eye, while his hands very obviously cover the flush of his face.

“Have we...? Before?”

“A handful of times, yeah. You, um,” Yuuri’s hand falls from his face and into his lap, toying with the hem of the shirt he’s wearing. It’s big on him. He guesses that it belongs to Victor. “You fell asleep one of those times.”

Victor groans. “That sounds like the kind of incredibly lame thing I would do.”
Yuuri tilts his head as he smiles. “You are incredibly lame. But you’re my incredibly lame boyfriend, so I forgive you.”

There’s a flush to Victor’s face, too, which makes Yuuri feels a little better about this. His eyes are glistening in this incandescent way that could probably put his blue flames to shame.

“All right,” Victor nods his head.

“Okay?” Yuuri shuffles even closer, until their knees brush and prickle with the proximity.

“What if this doesn’t work?” Victor asks. He looks more vulnerable than he has since waking up. He looks like the Victor that Yuuri has come to know and fall for. Yuuri just—looks at him and thinks, no matter what, they’ll make it work. If Victor doesn’t remember a damn thing after this, they’ll make it work.

“It’ll work,” Yuuri says like he believes it. He rests a hand against Victor’s cheek, leans in close. “If it doesn’t, we’ll make it.”

And he presses his lips gently against Victor’s.

Victor is stilted at first. Unmoving. Hands grappling onto the sheets like he doesn’t know what to do with them. It isn’t right at all, but Yuuri pushes forward anyway, as though the harder press of his mouth will forcibly cause his memories to return.

Victor pulls away far sooner than Yuuri expects, and he starts laughing.

“What’s so funny?”

“You. Your face is all scrunched up like you’re trying too hard to concentrate. It’s adorable. You’re adorable, Yuuri.”

Oh, the blush is back again, full force, making its permanent home on his face.

“I’m trying really hard, okay!”

Victor won’t stop giggling, that fucker.

So Yuuri shuts him up with another kiss. There’s some satisfaction that comes out of being able to quiet him, out of being able to take Victor Nikiforov by surprise with something as simple as this. Victor seems to remember that his hands exist then as he gingerly places them on either side of Yuuri’s hips.

Victor pulls away, again, and Yuuri huffs his slight exasperation.

“That was low. How very dare you, Yuuri Katsuki.”

“You were laughing at me you goddamn jerk,” Yuuri puffs his cheeks up, feigning annoyance. But then he gasps. “I never told you my family name. Victor, oh, my gosh.”

Victor looks surprised, too. He cradles Yuuri’s face in his hands, and Yuuri rests his own hands flat against Victor’s. “It’s working.”

Yuuri could cry with how relieved he’s feeling. His mind is light with it, as the grey clouds dissipate and leaves him feeling like he’s floating in the sunlight. He starts ecstatically peppering Victor’s face in kisses. On his forehead, against his nose, along his cheek and jaw and against the corners of his lips. “I can’t believe this is actually working. What the fuck.”
“I think I’m going to need one more kiss to be sure that I’ve fully recovered,” Victor breathes.

“Okay,” Yuuri slides his hands around Victor’s neck, lets Victor lean in to claim his lips this time. Promptly takes the nearest pillow he can get his hands on and shoves it directly in Victor’s face.

“Hey!”

Yuuri *cackles* with mirth.

“Rude,” Victor pouts.

“I’m sorry,” Yuuri says, completely unapologetic. He wraps his arms around Victor’s neck again. “Do you have any idea the roller coaster we’ve been through in the past three days?”

“Well, yes.” Victor loosely wraps his arms around Yuuri’s waist. “I had my identity spilled to the entire world *and* managed to get myself captured.”

They didn’t tell him that part about his memories.

He’s remembering.

*He’s remembering!*

“Then you know how hellish things have been, and that we need this.”

Victor tightens his hold around Yuuri’s waist, buries his face into his neck. “I’m sorry I forgot about you.”

“It’s okay,” Yuuri smiles fondly, stroking his hair. It’s still rough as hell since the last time he touched it (thirty minutes ago). He’ll probably need a haircut. “It wasn’t your fault. I’m just glad you’re slowly coming back to me.”

“You saved me.” Yuuri feels Victor’s smile pressed tender against his skin. “My prince charming.”

“Oh, so I’m prince charming now? Do I get to call you Cinderella?”

“I wouldn’t be opposed. Though, I think Ice-inderella would fit me better.”

Yuuri stops moving his hand in Victor’s hair and closes his mouth tight around an anguished sigh. “Welcome back. You’re terrible.”

⁂

“He’s back?” Phichit asks excitedly.

“He’s back!” Yuuri raises his hands in the air happily.

“Victor!” Yuri P. yells, as angry as ever. Victor stands there, expression guilty, ready to take whatever his younger brother dishes out against him… But he gets a very awkward hug instead.

“If you ever do something stupid like that again I’ll fucking kill you.”

The shocked look on Victor’s face is priceless. Phichit takes a picture for posterity.
“Hey!” Emitter and Sara greet him. “Welcome back!”

“What are you doing here, Emitter?” Yuuri asks.

“We’re going to see Mickey at the maximum security jail,” Sara informs them. “I think the fact that I’m still alive should’ve sunken in by now… Right?”

“I’m considering transferring organizations! I feel like I’ve really connected with everyone here, and I miss having Sara around, so I thought, why not!” Emitter laughs heartily with his hands on his hips. “You can call me Emil, by the way.”

“Alright,” Yuuri smiles. “It’ll be great to have you, Emil.”

“Fist me!”

Yuuri chokes on his own spit. “I—what.”

Emil gestures with his curled up hand at Yuuri in anticipation, and it takes a second for what Emil is implying to click in his head. He’s holding out a fist for a fist bump.

“Oh. That’s what you—right, god, okay. I thought... Jesus fucking christ—”

Minako and Yuuko insist on a private ribbon ceremony for the official reopening of the new and improved Superheroes United as Champions of the Country organization.

“The SUCC is back and better than ever with twice the amount of manpower!” Chris exclaims.

“You sound like you’re advertising a sex toy,” Phichit groans. “Please stop.”

“Over my dead body.”

Yuri P. very slowly pulls a knife from one of his hidden pockets, only to have his hand very slowly pushed back into place by an amused Victor.

The rate at which new villains are popping up has been relentless. Mr. Feltzman and Minako guessed that that has to do with Lilia’s actions. Her near destruction of SUCC and heroes as a whole have inspired some villains to pop up out of the crevices of the city like annoying little mosquitoes. It’s an itch to Yuuri’s side; he can’t seem to catch a break.

SIB informs them that a newly rated tentative level four villain is holding civilians for ransom. She’s known as The Reposter.

Yuuri is at city square with Victor by his side, and accompanying them are Yuri P. and Otabek. They’ve recently been promoted from trainees to full-fledged heroes.

“She’s a tricksy one,” Yuuri says. They’re hiding from sight as they plan their next move. “She’ll steal your powers without credit and use them as if they’re her own.”

“So anything we throw at her will get mirrored and thrown right back at us,” Otabek states matter-of-factly.
“Lame,” Yuri P. adds.

Yuuri looks at Victor, and Victor meets his eyes knowingly. A smile forms on their faces. “Are you thinking what I’m thinking?”

“We overwhelming her,” Victor says. “It’s four against one, after all. Hardly a fair fight.”

“Overwhelm her like you overwhelm me everyday,” Yuuri grins, bright and blinding.

Victor looks at him with that soft smile that melts his heart into a puddle on the floor and, god, Yuuri could kiss him right here and now—

Yuri P. pretends to gag as he readies himself with Otabek to perform their signature combo-throw-with-raining-knives attack.

They’re on a mission.
Right.

Kick villain ass now, kiss the boy later.

“Ready, Cryo-Frost?” Yuuri holds his hand out for Victor to take. He’ll use his ice to propel Yuuri forward, and they’ll send a swirl of fire and ice at The Reposter. She’ll never know what hit her. They’ve been practicing that move for weeks now, and it’s nearly perfected. It’ll be a spectacle. A rush.

“Ready, Cinderos,” Victor nods, taking Yuuri’s hand.

On Yuuri’s mark, they soar.

✦

Chapter End Notes

and that’s a wrap!!! 100k words later and this tiny idea turned entire universe is done! i’m actually so emotional don’t touch me sob. i’m a giant sap who loves cliches so naturally this is exactly how this fic had to end, with a kiss fairytale style. it all comes full circle and all that

anyway, i’m working on new writing projects of the magical variety now. if you have an questions for this au or anything else y’all know where to reach me! (σ’ዩ’σ)

End Notes

thank you to chroniccombustion for beta-reading, and catch me on tumblr @hinatella and on
twitter @hinatella.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!