Gunned Down Butterflies
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Summary

Everyone's lives revolve around two names - the name of an enemy, and the name of a soulmate, both tattooed on their wrists.

But for Yuuri, his fated soulmate and enemy are the same person. One name tattooed on his skin.

After years of believing it meant only unhappiness and pain, he begins to bandage them up and hide them from the world. He even begins to forget about them - until he meets a new client in need of a guard against the Russian mafia.

Nothing can hide him from fate - not bandaging the names, not forgetting about them, not even moving on without them. The owner of the name on his skin will find him eventually.

Notes

The idea for this story came from this picture here and from a friend on tumblr called kuronikkichan who first showed me the picture and has helped me create this, as well as helped with the overall plot and beta reading! Without her, this would not have been a story.

And here we go! Another story from me, and this is promised to be quite a bit darker and more drama, angst, all that than the last ones I've done. It's certainly a new branch, and I'm having way too much fun exploring the genre! XD The archive warning of violence is for
the future, not yet come in. But please, do consider it if you are a reader that doesn't like violence.

The update schedule will be every Saturday, I hope! Without further ado, please read and enjoy!

For more updates, you can find me on tumblr here
Yuuri breathed in deeply through his nose. It seeped in heavy, hot, sweaty. Around him, echoing punches slammed through the air. Grunts accompanied them, but he eased them from his ears.

He raised his own fists, feeling the tightness of the bandages against his knuckles. The punching bag swayed lazily before him, bright red against a sea of cream walls, dented and dirtied. With a steady second of thought, he pulsed all his power into a right hook. His fist landed with a thud against the hard skin of the bag, a wave of energy coursing up his limb. Feeling the adrenaline beginning to fill his bloodstream, he punched it as quickly and as forcefully as he could. The muscles in his arms and stomach burned, sweat beading along his forehead. He felt the drops drip between his eyebrows, along the bridge of his nose, slipping from the edge of his chin. He concentrated on his breathing.

All other sounds of the training room drifted away as he narrowed his focus on his own fighting. The punching bag jumped up, falling quickly back down to meet his knuckles. His skin felt tight. The air was burning hot around him.

It was a good minute before he stopped and steadied the bag before him. His lungs breathed in deep gulps of air as he wiped away the sweat from his face. The bandages of his hands and wrists were dirty and wet, sticking unpleasantly to his clammy hands. He picked up his towel and wrapped it around his neck.

The training room was alive with Saturday clients. On each apparatus, big burly men and lithe women worked up a sweat. Some familiar with Yuuri nodded his way, a wordless greeting they had exchanged for the months he had been coming here.

He noticed the absence of one, a smaller man with muscles the size of footballs, someone he had gotten along with beyond greetings. Sometimes they would ask questions of one another in the changing rooms. Sometimes they would allow small pieces of information of their lives to slip by their lips. But that man would not come again. He’d been killed on his last job.

The training room was a specialised centre, used for bodyguards – any company, any job, the only requirement a full bodyguard licence. Yuuri liked this training centre, it was one of the few he had come across that didn’t ask questions.

He left the training floor to enter one of the three locker rooms the centre provided. The tiled floors were wet with shower water, blue mats placed to provide some steady ground. Blue lockers lined each wall and every corner, fluorescent lights on the ceiling. Yuuri noticed one flickering.
He removed his sweaty clothing. It was one of the most unpleasant aspects of training, in his opinion. He loved the training itself, the feel of his endorphins flowing through every vein, making his head light, the burn of his muscles. But the sweat soon turned cold on his skin, his hair clinging to the back of his neck, and the smell soon turned sour to his own nose.

The last thing to remove were the bandages on his hands. He peeled those off easily, placing them in his bag ready to clean. The skin of his knuckles and fingers were tinged red, but it wasn’t what he noticed.

Another reason he didn’t much like training was because he also had to remove the bandages around his wrists. If it was his choice, he would tie bandages around them and glue it shut forever. Just so he didn’t have to see the names along his skin.

Alone in the locker room, he allowed himself one second to look, one second to burn with old hatred. The names looked as if they had been inked willingly. They were dark and bold, just as they had been the day he was born. On the right, the name of his mortal enemy was displayed. On the left, the name of his soulmate. Just as everyone in the world had, two names of the most importance. Two names that would change their lives for the better, or for worse. It depended on who was met first.

For Yuuri, it wasn’t so simple.

He had the same name on both wrists. The same name, scrolled in a language he didn’t understand. His was a special case, a rare case. As a young boy, he’d scoured the internet to see if there were any like him, with the same name inked on both wrists. As far as he knew and the internet was concerned, he was the only one. The only person in the world whose soulmate was their enemy.

Виктор Никифоров laced both wrists. As a young boy, Yuuri had even spent hours upon hours staring at the name, just in case he had seen one wrong letter to suggest they were two different people. But he was in doubt. He didn’t need to know the language to know that they were, in fact, the same person. It was in his teens, when all his friends took to the internet to figure out the names on their wrists that he decided he wouldn’t. He could translate the name and find his enemy and his soulmate that way. And he had been tempted when all his friends began to find their loves and settle, or find their enemies and best them.

But they were the same person to Yuuri. He’d made the mistake of showing a friend in school once. It had been a steady rumour, but travelled with power. From one person, it spread like wildfire until the whole school knew.
“Yuuri’s soulmate might end up killing him.”

“Did you hear? His enemy and soulmate are the same person. Isn’t that weird?”

“What sort of person is he stuck with?”

“That’s disgusting. His soulmate is probably some serial killer.”

“He’s never going to be happy.”

It was around this time he decided to bandage up his wrists and never show them to the world. Never see the names, never find them, never have anything to do with the fate that so many others seemed so infatuated with. While his friends found their happy endings, he found himself. He made do with himself, grew in himself, and became the person he would rely on. He didn’t need his life to be dictated by the ink on his skin.

But old anger burned inside of him every time his gaze trailed over the cruelty. Everyone else was so normal, straightforward. Why did it have to be him with this? Why did he have to be the one doomed to a life where his enemy was the same as his soulmate? Doomed to hate his soulmate, to love his enemy.

He was trained after years on how to ignore this pain. At twenty-four, he had plenty of time to grow used to it. He took a quick shower, filtering his fingers through his hair to be rid of the sweat. As soon as he was out, he took out some clean bandages from his bag and began to tie them around his wrists.

After years of concealing the names, muscle memory kicked in. He tied them expertly, all the while thinking of his last job.

He’d been free for a week now, between jobs. He’d need to find another soon, or the money he had saved would not stretch far. He hoped to find one better than the last – accompanying a spoiled pop star across the country was not his ideal job. The pay had not been worth it, but he had a rule – finish what you started. So he had, and he’d hated the six month long job. He wanted to be pickier, but he knew he couldn’t be.
He changed into some jeans and a shirt, hoisting his training bag over his shoulder. He’d drop by the company again later today and see what had come through.

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Yuuri had steadily grown used to ignoring how others proudly displayed their names on their wrists. Some purposely wore short sleeves to show them off, some tattooed borders to draw attention, and some wore jewellery to frame them.

It had bothered him once how people had been so proud, even of the name of their enemies. While they showed the names to the world, he hid his away in long sleeves and bandages. He used to be conscious of people staring, wondering why he chose to hide them.

But that had been years ago. He even wore short sleeves now, not caring that the bandages elicited some not-so-subtle whispers from the crowds. With each year, he grew wiser. He would never be able to throw away the name, the person behind the ink, or his fate if he concentrated on it. Others told him he should be focusing his life on them. But it wasn’t important. Not to him. Not anymore.

He’d managed to get through this long in his life without it. And most of his friends had killed their curiosity with one question upon their meeting. Why? Because I don’t want this to be the focus of my life, he’d reply. And then they would leave it and never ask again.

The boss of his firm had been a little more imposing. Within his first year of employment, his boss would ask him the same question over and over again every time they came face to face, regardless of if they were alone or if they were in the middle of a busy room.

“What are the names?”

Each time, Yuuri would reply, “It doesn’t matter.”

And then they’d move on to other conversations. At first, it irked him. Then it became a new greeting, no need for a polite ‘hello’. His boss stopped asking when he saw them though.

They’d been training, and Yuuri thought he was alone when he was changing the bandages. He hadn’t noticed his boss there until he’d heard his low whistle.
“Same name? Never seen that one.”

Yuuri had panicked. Words of his classmates ebbed into his ears again, of how he would never be happy, never find his match of hatred or love. He’d never be equal, never be normal, forever a drifter between enemy and soulmate. Forever stuck.

But his boss had simply chuckled and said, “Makes it easier to avoid when it’s only one person.”

They didn’t talk about it again. And yet the words had rolled around his head for months after. In just a sentence, it was as if the man had known all Yuuri’s turmoil. They didn’t talk a lot. They kept their relationship strictly professional, rarely speaking outside of their work. And when they did, it was about jobs. And yet, after that, the air around them had been lighter.

Yuuri walked into the office with a small smile on his face, welcomed by the familiar smell of citrus in the air. His boss loved his lemons, slipping it into every glass of water he had. He’d found it odd once – now he found it comforting.

“Hey, boss,” he greeted, clicking the door shut behind him. The man in question was sat behind his expensive mahogany desk. Everything about him was expensive, from his clothes to the entire glass wall behind him, the tropical plants in the corner of the rooms, and the art lining the walls. Yuuri moved to stand in front of him. “Any jobs come in for me?”

The man glanced up over the frame of his glasses, regarding Yuuri. He crunched a mint between his teeth. “Actually, this time, yes.”

Yuuri refrained from showing his excitement. “And?”

“It came in this morning. It’s a high rank one, Yuuri. I think you’re the only one I can really trust with it.”

The excitement was too much. His eyes widened, hands tightening into fists at his sides. “Me?”

“You’re going to be guarding a witness.”
“A witness? What sort?”

“The client is in meeting room one. I’ll let him explain the details.” The boss tapped his pen against the table. “This has no time frame. He’s being hunted, Yuuri. It’s not a normal stalker or death threat.”

His breath choked in his throat, a lump forming as he tried to swallow around it. He couldn’t tell if it was from anticipation or slight fear yet. “Hunted?”

“He saw something he shouldn’t have. Now a very unpleasant group are after him.”

Well, it was certainly more interesting than a bratty pop idol, Yuuri thought. Unless it was a selfish brat who witnessed something on purpose. He’d had one of those before, a stalker that had witnessed their target bribing a high-flying politician. He’d only been hired because the stalker wanted the attention of the target. “What group?”

His boss waved the question away. “He’ll explain it to you. It’s going to be a long meeting.” The man paused for a moment, gaze travelling over Yuuri’s features. Yuuri refrained from looking away. “You don’t have to accept it. It’s a big job, and I might end up needing to hire more bodyguards than just you. But that’s your call. Listen to everything he has to say, and ask all the questions you want. Then decide, alright?”

Yuuri nodded reluctantly. “Alright,” he replied, all the while feeling something inside of him tie tightly. Anxious energy sparked up his spine, brought on by the hesitancy he saw in the man’s eyes. He knew that it was an understatement calling this a ‘small job’.

The man stood, adjusting one of his golden cufflinks before he rounded the table. “Well, I’ll show him to you now. He’s a small one, a little skittish. He’s really been spooked.”

The witness was sitting at the end of the long table, glaring down at the surface as he fiddled with his fingers. He looked small against the tall leather, lithe under a fitted blue shirt. Short dark hair sprouted from his head, framing dark features. His tanned skin was slightly pale, a full lip worried between his teeth, eyes wide and flicking about the table. His head snapped up when they entered the room.

He scrambled to stand, his shoulders hunched.
Yuuri’s boss stopped Yuuri at the door, holding a hand out before his chest. “Hello, Mr Chulanont. Sorry to have left you alone. This is Yuuri Katsuki, one of my best employees. Do you mind if I leave him alone with you so that you can discuss the job?”

The client’s gaze flickered to Yuuri, eyebrows knitted together as words tied themselves inside his mind. Yuuri observed him, figuring the man was perhaps a little younger than him. By four years maybe? Just out of his teens, Yuuri thought. He was slightly taller than the client, a little bulkier with his muscles.

The client nodded his head. “Yeah, that’s fine. Can you leave the door unlocked?”

Yuuri’s boss gave a nod and a soft smile. “Of course.” He left, casting a warning look at Yuuri, before he clocked the door shut.

The clock on the wall ticked loudly in the large room, the sound of the city blocked from the windows. Yuuri remained standing, seeing the way the client was closed off, standing in a way ready to bolt, watching Yuuri suspiciously. After a minute of not talking, he moved to take the closest seat, looking away as the client flinched.

After a second of hesitation, the client sat back in his seat. He never took his gaze away from Yuuri, wariness coating every muscle in his body. Time ticked between them. Yuuri leaned back in the seat, waiting, watching.

The client took a deep breath, words stumbling from his mouth. “You don’t look like a bodyguard.”

Yuuri stopped himself from sighing. Every client said the same thing. “I’m sorry, sir.”

“N-No, I wasn’t criticising. I just… I was expecting someone a little taller, muscly, looks like they spend every minute of every day in the gym.”

Silence fell between them again. Yuuri watched the man move, the careful grace. He tried to figure out what sort of man his new client was. He was small, moved with precision, toned muscles underneath his clothes. Even if he had been hunched when standing, his back now stood straight against the seat. A dancer, he guessed. He hadn’t had a dancer as a client for a long time.
“Uh, I guess introductions is a good place to start,” the client chuckled humourlessly. “My name is Phichit Chulanont.”

“My name is Yuuri Katsuki.”

“I am – was a figure skater.”

Ah, Yuuri thought, that explained it. He’d been interested in the sport once, a long time ago, when he was younger. He and his best friend Yuuko had loved to watch it after coming home from school and training.

Phichit continued, “But that was before. I’m not able to continue it now.”

“Because of something you witnessed?” Yuuri didn’t want to push. He knew more than anyone that some things were better left unsaid, or better kept hidden, for the sake of everyone or themselves. But it made it difficult with his job, where it was important to know the details of the cases.

Phichit looked out of the window, to see the high rises and the skyscrapers. His jaw clenched as he found his words. “Yeah, because of something I witnessed. I should be getting ready for the Grand Prix Series with my coach but… he doesn’t know where I’ve gone. No one does.”

Yuuri glanced to stare at the wall behind the man, taken suddenly by the gripping desperation he saw in that gaze. His chest constricted. He empathised too easily – his sister always said it was a weakness for the job he was in. “Who are after you?”

“Russian Mafia.”

The words echoed between them. Yuuri took a moment to let them replay in his mind, sure he had heard them right. “Excuse me?”

Phichit turned to him, his throat bobbing as he swallowed away nerves. “Yeah, I know. I know it sounds like a lie. I never expected it myself. I’m not involved with that sort of life.” He looked down at the table again, combing his trembling fingers through his hair. “I just wanted to be a
skater. I wanted to make Thailand proud. I made one mistake and now I’m on the run and I’m being hunted by the Russian mafia.”

“What did you witness?”

“I…” Phichit paused, glancing around as if he expected someone to be listening in. “I don’t want to say. I don’t believe it myself. I shouldn’t have seen it.”

Yuuri knew better than to push. But the question lingered at the back of his mind. Something he had witnessed from the Russian mafia. A dealing? A bribe? Where did a figure skater tie in with that? “That’s alright, sir. You’ll need to tell me at some point though if we’re going into this contract together.”

“Please don’t call me ‘sir’. I’m younger than you. Just call me Phichit,” he huffed, the tiniest smile pulling at his lips. “I don’t know what to do. I just know I need protection. Does this die down? If I lay low for years, do they give up?”

No, Yuuri thought. He hadn’t had dealings with Russian mafia before, but he had with other groups. Being a bodyguard, he’d been in and heard of some cases such as this. No one ever returned to the life they were torn from, even if they survived it. “Perhaps.”

Phichit’s glare snapped up at him. “Answer honestly. I don’t need lies right now.”

Yuuri paused for the briefest moment. “It depends on what you witnessed. If it was something big, I doubt it. You might need to understand that the witness protection programme is an end goal you need to work towards.”

Fear sparked in the man’s eyes. Yuuri saw as the air around Phichit chilled, his breathing stop in his lungs. “No, that means I have to go to the police. I can’t take this to the police. I can’t, Yuuri. Please.”

Yuuri held up his hands, trying to calm the client down. “Alright, we won’t.” It was lucky they were a private company then. They were used to clients coming under the radar. “Is there something specific you have planned? A destination? A plan?”

“No,” Phichit said, shaking his head as his body relaxed again. “I can’t go home. I can’t go back to
my coach. I don’t know what to do, where to go. I don’t know. I just need protection.”

Something inside of Yuuri was tugged. He felt it constrict his chest as he saw Phichit’s eyes fill with unshed tears. Despite the severity of the situation, knowing that having his face mixed with Phichit’s would draw unwanted attention to himself, he already knew he wanted to take the job. If he didn’t, he would be worried over the man he saw before him now. Phichit would be on his mind for a long time, the question of if he survived his ordeal, where he was now, if he had changed his name.

But Yuuri had a plan. He knew just what to do. He leaned back in his chair, the creaking alerting Phichit before him, and said, “I have a safe house that I can take you to. You can stay there for as long as you want, and we’ll figure more out once we get there, alright?”

Phichit sat up slowly, his mouth gaping open as he nodded his head hopefully. “Yes. Yes!” He quickly ruffled about the papers before him, things Yuuri hadn’t noticed in his observation of the man. He took the pen and scribbled something down on the paper. Once he was done, he pushed the slip of paper across the table to hand before Yuuri. “I can offer you this much. It’s… probably not as much as you’d ask for this type of job. And I know I’ll need to find more since this is open ended. But it’s all the money I still have from my sponsors.”

Yuuri scanned the number, eyes raking over the zeros. It was a lot more than he’d received from the last job, and his mind began to wonder just how much skaters received. “That’s more than enough for now,” Yuuri said. “Before we discuss contracts, I need to make sure you’re aware of the situation. In order to protect you, I may need to do things that you find uncomfortable. Are you claustrophobic?”

“No.”

“Can you swim?”

“Yes.”

“Are you allergic to anything?”

“Not that I know of?”
Yuuri memorised the answers. “We have a form for high-danger jobs that you’ll need to fill out. I need to know what you’re willing to do.”

“That sounds fair.”

Yuuri started at the man, trying to convey the severity of the situation. “You’ll need to listen to everything I say, understand? No room for questioning. In the case that I’m injured or killed, you need to know a backup plan.”

“K-Killed?”

“I’m not immortal, Phichit.”

“Y-Yeah… Yeah, I know. No one is.”

“You might need to handle a gun. Are you comfortable with that?”

“I-I will if I have to.”

Yuuri nodded. His eyes glanced towards the ink displayed on Phichit’s wrists. It was only a quick flick of his gaze, trained from years in this job. Only a second, but he knew Phichit’s names were different. His enemy and his soulmate, two different people. As was normal. “I need to know if you have anyone close to you. Anyone they could use against you?”

“Um, no? The only one they could would be my coach. But he doesn’t know anything.”

“And your soulmate?”

Phichit looked down as he turned his wrist upwards, eyes scanning the familiar letters. “Haven’t met them yet.”

“Did they see the name?”
“No – I mean, I don’t think so.”

“And your enemy name, is it familiar? Anyone in the mafia?”

Phichit’s gaze moved to the other wrist. “Again, I don’t think so. I’ve not met them either.” Phichit grazed his finger over the ink. “Do you think this is when I’ll meet them?”

“I can’t say so,” Yuuri replied, though hoping with everything he had that this man would not find either during this ordeal. It was hard enough without such a chaotic situation. He stood from the chair, thinking over the checklist he had now. The same one, every single new client. Paperwork. Contract. What to do next. “I’m going to be getting some things for you to fill out and sign. Lock the door behind me, alright?”

As Yuuri passed, Phichit stood so suddenly, the chair scraping behind him. “How do I know it’s you coming in again?”

Yuuri wanted to say that there were few places that were safer than a building full of bodyguards, but refrained. He gave the man a gentle smile, seeing Phichit calm almost immediately. “I’ll knock three times.”

He heard the click of the lock almost as soon as he closed the door, knowing that Phichit stood shaking on the other side. Something about the younger man appealed to his sympathetic nature, tugging on his heart strings. He found himself thinking of the safe house, of ways to get there, how he could disguise the man so that they would be safe. From the Russian mafia. He allowed himself one second of broken composure, sighing out the breath that had been caught inside of his throat. Perhaps, someday down the line, he would regret taking this job.

Because it wouldn’t end once the contract was terminated. Once he was recognised by the mafia, that was it, he would always be familiar to them. He’d be watched, hunted, approached. The semi-calm life he had had before would change drastically, and he wasn’t sure how much by yet.

But the image of Phichit shaking entered his mind, voice cracking whenever he mentioned them, how he refused to say what he had seen. He needed help, and Yuuri could never refuse someone’s safety. It was his job. But it extended beyond that too.

He entered his boss’ room again to collect the paperwork. The man looked up, feigning ‘business
with his pen raised against empty paper.

“So?” he asked.

Yuuri replied, “I’ve decided to take it.”

The man nodded, as if he had predicted it. “When I first saw him, I thought he was coming in to be protected from some sort of stalker. He has that face that stalkers like to go for. As soon as he said he was running from the Russian mafia, though…” He took out the forms from his draw, filing them together for Yuuri to take. “What made you decide to take it?”

“Probably because of what you said. He’s not the typical person we get running from gangs. He’s not some corrupted politician, or a husband with a massive gambling debt.” Yuuri took the papers, filtering through to make sure that everything was there. “And he seems nice. He’s too young to be involved with this. It wasn’t his fault he witnessed something he shouldn’t have. Case of wrong place, wrong time?” And he had dreams. Phichit had seemed so forlorn when talking about his past career.

“Or he could be acting innocent.”

“Or that.”

“What are you planning to do? This one doesn’t have an end date.”

Yuuri shrugged. “I thought about taking him to my safe house.”

His boss’ eyebrows shot up. “You haven’t even identified the threat yet. He could be paranoid about the severity of his own situation.”

“Then he’ll be extra safe for something that’s not going to come.” Yuuri knew the man’s hesitation. Each specialised bodyguard had a safe house somewhere in the world only known to them. Some liked to use them too much, taking most clients to them in the face of a miniature danger. In Yuuri’s years as a bodyguard, he’d only ever had to use it once. “We’ll stay here tonight, if you don’t mind. Spend some time thinking of a proper plan.”
“Of course, that’s fine. Any particular room of the apartments?”

“I’ll decide later.” He waved the papers. “Thanks. I’ll get him to fill these out now.”

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The door unlocked almost as soon as he finished the third knock. He gave the man a smile, concealing his surprise and placed the papers on the table.

Phichit locked the door again and sat back at his seat. “This is… a lot.”

“We need to be thorough,” Yuuri explained. “It’s alright, you can take as long as you like. We’ll be staying in the apartments at the top of this building for tonight, and then heading out tomorrow. Is there anything you need to get?”

Phichit shook his head, directing Yuuri’s gaze to the small rucksack beside the chair. “I grabbed everything I needed before I came here.” He uncapped the pen and began to fill in the mound of papers.

Yuuri let the silence fill the space as he watched. Phichit scanned the words carefully, furrowing his eyebrows and biting the top of his pen. Yuuri hid a chuckle behind a well-placed hand and feigning a cough. He wanted to say how it wasn’t a test, Phichit shouldn’t look so stressed, but stopped himself. The more the other man wrote, the more relaxed he became, slumping in his chair.

Yuuri felt his gun lining his ribs, secured in his holster beneath his jacket. His fingers itched to touch it. After some years and all that he had faced, he found some comfort in it. And, if he had to say so himself, he thought he was a good shot. He’d trained and trained again to make sure he could provide the best security for his clients, and he earned the respect of his colleagues through it. Not one client of his had left unsatisfied with his job, or dead. As he watched Phichit’s tapping fingers on the table, his dark eyes flicking carefully over the paper, Yuuri promised that this one would not end differently.

While he waited, he thought about plans. He didn’t know the severity of the situation – as his boss had said, Phichit could have been paranoid. Perhaps the Russian mafia didn’t value his witness as much as he thought they did. Or perhaps the other way around, and it was far more serious than even he was portraying it as.
Yuuri knew he needed to treat this carefully, treat the job as the latter. Act as though the mafia would storm the building any second or try to snipe through the bulletproof windows. He needed to take every care he could to keep his client safe.

The apartments above the building were the safest that they could be made, with codes given out only to the inhabitants, a lift that reached only their floor, and a key with no duplicates. There would be locks that only Yuuri could get passed, cameras, panic rooms hidden behind walls. There, they could rest while he bought plane tickets and thought up routes. Perhaps even decoys. He’d be up all night.

“I’ve finished.”

Yuuri snapped his gaze back to Phichit. The younger man was pushing the papers back towards Yuuri over the table surface. “Thank you, I’ll have a quick look at these before I file them.” He scanned the pages, taking in the neat handwriting, clear and concise answers.

“So is… is that it?”

Yuuri took the pen and scribed his name on the contract, no hesitancy in his form as he wrote. “Now it is. I’ll keep you safe, Phichit.”

Phichit cracked a small grin, brighter than any expression he had worn in Yuuri’s presence so far. Relief washed over his body, the tension leaving quickly, as he sighed out a breath Yuuri had seen him holding for hours. “Thank you. I… Thanks, really. I know this is going to pull you into some trouble as well.”

Yuuri shrugged, picking the pieces of paper into a neat pile. “I’ve been in trouble before. Comes with the job.” As he rose, his sleeves pulled up his arm, just enough for the bandages around both wrists to be seen. He paused. Phichit’s gaze snapped towards them, eyes widening just a fraction.

Usually, at this point, people asked Yuuri why he did it. Most loved the names on their wrists, even the names of their enemies. They didn’t comprehend someone like Yuuri, who hated the ink with his very being. But Phichit’s gaze then rose to meet his and he smiled.

“Thanks again,” Phichit surprised him by saying. “I feel a lot safer already.”
Yuuri gave a nod, words dying in his throat before he could say them. He left the room to file the contract and paperwork, making a copy to hand to his boss and for himself to study tonight.

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The lift rumbled around them, gravity pulling them down in the cubicle. In the enclosed space, the air was tinged with heat and a stale smell. It was rarely used, unless people wanted apartment two – the smallest of the in-building apartments.

The lift opened up with a ding to a small hall, leading to one door. Yuuri held Phichit’s bag, despite the client having asked to carry it himself. After the paperwork, Phichit had gone through a health check. He’d gone through an extensive background and bag check before he’d met with Yuuri. It might have been unnecessary, but their company prided themselves on the security of their guards just as much as their clients.

He unlocked the locks, entered the passcode and disabled the alarm before they stepped into the apartment. It was Yuuri’s favourite, and while he didn’t often bring clients here, he used every opportunity he could to book it.

He switched on the lights, chasing away the darkness that lingered in the room since its last occupants. On the other side of the room, a wide window displayed the silhouette of the city, dark against the rapidly setting sun. The apartment was plain, with cream walls, tanned leather chairs and sofas, a flat screen against the right wall, and some plants dotted around the corner of the room or on the wooden tables. The floor was a light wood, easy to clean. To their right, two doors were closed. Yuuri knew from experience that one led to the kitchen while another led to the bedroom. To their left, a door to another bedroom was closed.

“This is nice,” Phichit whispered in the still air, stepping in to explore the space with his gaze.

“Why can’t we just stay here until this dies down?”

“There’s not enough to house every client we have. And it’s not hidden. We’d need to leave eventually, and anyone you’re hiding from would be waiting outside. It’s much safer for me to take you to the safe house.”

Phichit moved to stand before the window, placing a hand carefully against clean screen. “How safe is this safe house? How many people know?”
“In the whole company, only I know about it. It’s my own personal safe house.” Yuuri placed Phichit’s bag on the sofa alongside his own. He wasn’t sure which bedroom the man would want to take yet. “And about how safe it is? Well, out of all the clients I’ve taken so far, none had been found there. No one but me and another select few that I trust with my life know about it.”

Phichit nodded, seemingly happy with the answer. “No one even knows which part of the world it’s in?”

“They don’t even know a continent, let alone a country or area.”

Phichit chuckled. “That sounds pretty safe.”

“You’ve had a busy day,” Yuuri said, moved to stand beside Phichit. The lights of the city flickered to light under the cover of darkness. “You go sleep, and tomorrow we’ll start off.”

Phichit looked ready to argue. The hour was still early, the sun having just barely crossed the horizon. But as the weariness began to settle in his limbs, he nodded. “Yeah, that sounds like a good idea, actually. I feel like I could sleep for a year.”

Yuuri laughed. “Well, I suppose that’s one way of slipping under the radar.”

Phichit cast him a small smile before he bid goodnight and entered the bedroom closest to the kitchen. The door clicked, lock engaged, and sound slipped into silence. Yuuri wondered if Phichit had just collapsed on the bed and fallen asleep as soon as his head hit the pillow.

Yuuri prepared immediately. He took out his laptop and set it on the table before the sofa. He had a lot of research to do.

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It was as the sun was rising once more that he finally finished his work.
He stretched his aching back, massaged his neck, and yawned away the sleep. There wasn’t a massive amount he could do without knowing the threat completely, but he had done what he could. Currently, five different versions of Phichit were travelling all over the world, by every sort of transport, some hotels booked with his name or thinly disguised personas.

He’d bought their plane tickets with fake names that the company provided, personas that had been built over years, background checks just as real as any other person. No stone unturned, Yuuri thought. He would protect this client as if it was the world itself after him.

He’d done as much research as he could on the Russian mafia, and what they had involved with the figure skater. But he could find nothing. No names, no pictures, no dodgy dealings, only articles on how the crowd favourite skater Phichit Chulanont had gone missing, and his coach Celestino Cialdini was desperate to know how he was.

The articles led Yuuri to watch Phichit’s skating programmes, from his junior years to his senior debut, before he fell off the map for apparently no reason. Yuuri didn’t know much about the sport, but he could see the potential lost. And each and every picture was filled with Phichit’s bright, beaming smile, many selfies, and fans dubbing him the social media king. He barely went a day without some update, but now it seemed he hadn’t updated in a week. It worried people.

He rubbed the sleep from his eyes, cursing himself. He was used to some sleepless nights, but it seemed the job had worn him out more than he expected it to. Just the thought of the future had him weary.

It was in the middle of the morning when Phichit stepped out of the bedroom. His hair was a mess, the clothes he had worn the day before ruffled and wrinkled, eyes drooping from sleep. When his eyes fell on Yuuri, he narrowed his gaze. “Have you been there all night?”

Yuuri gave a nod, doing the last of his preparations. With a click, he’d set a path for another fake Phichit to travel to London, buying a room of a hotel in the centre. “Yes, I needed to do some things.”

“Did you not get any sleep?”

“I didn’t need to. And I have more important things to do anyway.” Satisfied that he had done all he could for the moment, Yuuri closed the laptop. “Our plane heads out tonight. It’s an airport in the next state north, and to get there we’ll have to put you in a disguise. Are you alright with that?”
Phichit nodded quickly. “Yes, of course.”

“We’ll have some breakfast first, then I’ll talk you over the plan.”

The kitchens in the apartments were stocked with basics. Plain cereals lined the cupboard, milk in the fridge. Yuuri made two bowls and set them on the table. Phichit seemed a little hesitant, the nerves unsettling his stomach. With little encouragement from Yuuri, he began to eat slowly.

“They don’t know what I look like, but I’ll put on a disguise anyway. Just a wig and filled clothes,” Yuuri began.

“Why?”

“It’s precaution. Just in case down the line, they’re able to connect the dots and find you through me.” They had a disguise locker at the last few levels of the building. It wasn’t a brilliant variety, not many bodyguards decided to disguise their clients – or, if they did, it wasn’t to the degree Yuuri wanted to disguise Phichit. Just a wig would do for them. Yuuri needed much more. “When we finish breakfast, I’ll take you down. Our makeup artist does wonders.”

Phichit nodded along, swallowing away his anxious thoughts.

“I’m going to hire a car from the local rental, and we’re going to make the drive to the next state, alright?”

“Does this company not provide cars? Even bulletproof ones?”

“They do, but they’re not unmarked or nearly as subtle. Anyone searching for you could track the car if they found out which one we booked.” Yuuri bit his lip, lists of cars going through his mind. It would be best for them to have a small one, perhaps even an older model. Look anything like a normal couple of people travelling together, as far away from bodyguard and client as they could go. “It’s a long drive, and we can’t take many breaks. If we do, I’ll go into any shop if we need food, and we try to stay out of cameras. I’ll pay by your persona’s account – I’ve already requested it from the accounting team. I’ve already paid for the plane tickets through it, nothing to tie us. Catch the plane, and I already know the route I take to the safe house. I have all that prepared. Once we’re close, we’re in the clear-”
“You’re rambling.”

Yuuri looked up. Phichit was grinning, his eyes sparkling. Yuuri asked, “What?”

“It’s nice to know you have a solid plan, but you’re rambling.”

Yuuri rubbed the back of his neck. “Yeah, I do that quite a bit.” He swallowed the words away and replayed the plan again in his head. It was important that he had it memorised, because for the security of his client, he could not write it down. When they had both finished their food, he took their bowls to place them in the sink. The cleaner would deal with those. “Come on, let’s get you disguised before we head out.”

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A few other bodyguards and their clients were in the locker when they got there. One woman slipped a wig on her client, a singer trying to travel without hordes of their adoring fans following. Another was sat getting their makeup done, a CEO who had received death threats. Yuuri encouraged Phichit to sit on the makeup chair.

“This is Donna,” he introduced, calling over his favourite makeup artist. She was known as the best, reserved for high case jobs. “She’s going to look after you while she puts a face on you. While you’re in here, I’m just going to get some things ready for our journey, alright?”

Phichit looked a little panicked, gaze following Yuuri carefully.

“I’ll be back soon,” Yuuri assured. Phichit gave a slow nod, as if trying to convince himself, before he turned his focus on the makeup artist.

Yuuri felt a little reluctant leaving the younger man.

The first thing to do was to make sure he had enough bullets for his guns, a duffel bag in order to hide them, paperwork, fake documents, and all of those things. He sped through the task with familiarity. The second was to say goodbye to the boss. Just in case.
“How is he today?” his boss asked as he slipped into the office.

“Much better,” Yuuri replied. “But still jittery.”

The man behind the desk nodded, tapping his pen against the table. “It’s to be expected. Do you have your plan in order?”

“Yes. He’s getting disguised now, then we have a plane to catch.” He wasn’t specific. Even if this man was his boss, they never conversed details. Not for fear that the man before him was untrustworthy, but because you never knew who was listening.

“Just as efficient as ever.”

“Always. We’re heading out as soon as he’s finished.” He bowed low. “So goodbye, and thank you.”

“Good luck, Yuuri.”

Their goodbyes were always simple. Neither man really knew what to say, especially with the weight of their situations. Yuuri had always come back from a job, and over time it made their goodbyes shorter. It didn’t mean it meant any less. Instead, it meant more, because neither knew which job would be the one Yuuri wouldn’t return from.

Phichit’s face was almost unrecognisable when Yuuri returned. The artist had made his skin lighter, contacts in his eyes, a fake beauty spot on his chin, a scar drawn along his collarbone as an added feint. He and the artist were engaged in a cheery discussion, both laughing as she worked. Yuuri walked in just as they were donning the light brown wig on his head, the hairs just long enough to cover his darker ones as they were pushed into a net.

“Yuuri! How do I look?” Phichit asked.

“… Very different,” Yuuri replied. He placed his bag down on the seat beside Phichit, heavy from the bullets, guns and documents.
Phichit laughed. “Isn’t that the point?”

Soon enough, it was done. Phichit was given some clothes to change into, a plain shirt and some jeans. Yuuri urged the boy to wear a bulletproof vest beneath it, similar to his own. It would be uncomfortable, but it could save him. Phichit didn’t need much encouragement. Yuuri quickly threw on a similar wig, throwing on some blue contacts and his prescription glasses.

And with that, they were done. Yuuri placed some food in a bag besides the guns, knowing that one of them would get hungry on the long journey. He checked his watch. They had ten hours before the plane left, eight if they counted check in time. If he didn’t take any breaks, they’d be there with two hours to spare.

“The car rental is just up the street,” Yuuri informed as they stepped over the threshold of the building. Phichit was a little hesitant, wild eyes scanning the streets and the crowds as they passed by. Yuuri’s gaze snapped over everything, from the windows on the other side of the street, to cars as they rolled by. He’d been trained to spot any threats, but it seemed clear.

They melted with the closest group, a flock of business men on their way to work. Their voices were killed between the group’s chatter, droned on phones with their agitated voices. Phichit’s hand gripped Yuuri’s top tightly.

The sky above was stained grey, promising the downfall of rain soon. Buildings rose high, pigeons swooping down to catch some crumbs on the floor. The morning rush had passed, the last dregs of workers storming down the streets. Taxis waited beside the buildings with bored cabbies waiting at the front with day old newspapers and some with fags in their mouths. Sellers stood at every street corner, loudly calling the pros of their merchandise, or throwing out coupons for their products, attempting to drag anyone into conversation.

Phichit was hunched and Yuuri advised that he stand straighter. “You look suspicious,” Yuuri whispered. “Back straight, look forward, keep moving. People won’t suspect you if you look normal.”

Phichit gulped his nerves and did as was told, though his face looked paler even under the makeup.

It was just as they were two hundred yards from the rental shop that the crowd around them dispersed. Business men stopped in the cafes for a late morning coffee, the smell wafting through the open door to lure them in. Yuuri felt his own stomach growl at the promise of freshly made bread and cakes, the temptation of icing or soft crumbs in his mouth strong, but he held it off. Phichit was still tense beside him.
Yuuri felt his back shiver. Suddenly, he was aware that something was wrong. He had been trained in instinct, taught that it was very rarely wrong. His heart began to thump louder in his chest. Feigning to look at the man who had bumped into him on their crossing, he turned to look over his shoulder.

It didn’t take long to notice what it was that set his hairs on end. A little further down the road, rolling slowly and with purpose, was a black, tinted, unmarked car. No number plates, windows dark, and what Yuuri suspected was bulletproof. He observed everything he could before he looked away again, not wanting to draw attention.

“There’s an unmarked car on the road,” he whispered to Phichit. He threw an arm around his shoulder, pulling him in for a side hug. “Don’t look back, and don’t panic. They’re going slowly. I don’t think they know where you are, they’re looking for something.” They must have seen Phichit go into the company, Yuuri thought. They must have followed and been waiting. He thanked his own paranoia that he had taken measurements to secure his connection with the younger man.

They listened as the purr of the engine moving closer, time ticking by so slowly. The noises around them seemed to increase in volume, almost burning their ears. Temptation whispered for them to turn around and look at the car, but Yuuri stopped them both as he pointed out a colourful and intricately decorated cake in the display of a shop window.

The car passed. Every second slowed, the car paced at a creep. Yuuri glanced out of the corner of his eye. He couldn’t see anything through the window, but something about the way it seemed to slow down again made him almost convinced that they were being watched.

“Oh my god, those shoes look amazing,” he cheered loudly, grabbing Phichit and hopping into the store. His heart was thumping hard against his rib cage. Phichit was frozen beside him.

Yuuri picked up a pair and showed the man, planting a fake smile on his face, aware of how the car still rolled slowly by the store doors. He faced Phichit away. “Phichit, pretend you’re excited about them.”

“I-I don’t think I can be,” Phichit whispered back, his voice wavering as he took the shoes anyway. They weren’t remarkable, perhaps something only enthusiasts would have liked.

The car stopped before the store. Yuuri felt his heart give one massive thump in his throat.
The back door opened and Yuuri watched as a pair of legs dressed in expensive loafers and grey suit trousers stepped out.

Phichit flinched with every sound, seeing the reflection of what was happening in Yuuri’s glasses. Yuuri quickly glanced around, eyeing an emergency exit behind the tills.

With the legs, the rest of the body was revealed. A tall man, dressed in an expensive suit and a brown coat, black leather gloves covering his hands, stepped out. He was impeccably dressed, with a handkerchief triangle placed carefully in his breast pocket, tie neatly placed below his throat.

But what struck Yuuri more than anything was how the man himself looked. Pale skin, jawline chiselled, high cheek bones, with bright blue eyes framed by long eyelashes. His silver hair was cut short, with a fringe covering part of one side of his face, gelled to curl towards his ear. He moved with grace, closing the car door behind him.

His eyes snapped up to connect with Yuuri’s. They were cold, bright blue and sharp. Tension whispered through the air between them the moment their gazes found one another, Yuuri’s body trembling underneath the pressure. Something pained his chest.

“Remember what I told you, Phichit?” Yuuri whispered. “Whatever I tell you to do, you listen to me, right?”

Phichit nodded, his lips trembling. “Right.”

The cold man’s hand trailed over his side, a movement Yuuri knew well. He’d made that gesture many times in his career – the assurance that his guns were still hidden safely beneath his clothes.

“When I tell you to duck and hide behind me?”

“I do it.”

“That’s right, Phichit.”
Those blue eyes trailed over Phichit’s back, his thin lips drawing into a thin line. He took one more step closer, almost upon the threshold of the shop. His hands trailed over the outline of his weapons again, almost reaching between his jacket and shirt.

Yuuri made the same movement, more of a warning than assurance. He saw the way the man eyed his hands, closing in on his clothes, probably thinking the same. Yuuri wasn’t prepared to see a smirk pull at the man’s lips.

He couldn’t have been thinking of pulling a gun on them in the middle of a crowded store, right? But Yuuri didn’t disregard the notion. “Ready, Phichit? On ‘go’.”

Phichit nodded, his grip held tightly on Yuuri’s top.

Just warn him off, Yuuri thought. No need to make careless actions. But just as the words played in his mind, the man pulled out the gun from beneath his jacket with swift precision. Yuuri pulled Phichit down to cover behind the tables before the man could shoot. When the first scream rose, a wave of others followed, ringing shrill in the shop as customers ran for cover. Boxes of shoes cascaded off their shelves in their panic.

But no shots. The man hadn’t pulled the trigger. Perhaps even he had a conscience.

Yuuri used it to his advantage, shielding his client as they rushed behind the tills and out the emergency door. The shop assistants cowered behind the tills, screaming as they rushed by.

As they entered an alley behind the shop, Yuuri felt his heart freeze. It was empty and open, a long way down before the corner, the walls high. Perhaps that was why the man hadn’t pulled the trigger – he intended to push them to an easier place to shoot.

Yuuri turned and pushed himself up against the door, seeing nothing else to barricade it with. “Phichit,” he called to the shaking client standing before him. “Run to the bottom of the alley. Hide somewhere. I’ll come for you in a short while.”

“But, Yuuri-”

“What did I say?” Yuuri snapped as he saw the handle rattle. “No questions, you do what I say!” A weight pushed itself against the door.
Phichit didn’t argue again. With the briefest hesitation, he rushed off, disappearing around the corner of the alley.

Yuuri knew these streets well enough. Even if the man on the other side of the door had accomplices, they could not be able to navigate the alleyways faster than Phichit could hide himself. He’d been made to memorise the maps during training, for this reason precisely. Clients always came first.

A weight crashing against the door almost propelled him forwards. He gasped and continued to push his body up against it. He prepared himself for another, but none came. He breathed and listened for any sound on the other door. Some screams were still filtering off, shaky as people rushed out into the street.

It was then that a bullet flew passed his ear. It missed by mere centimetres. A bullet hole in the door curled outwards, the metal broken and bent. From the hole, Yuuri could hear a low chuckle that sent shivers along his spine.

It was the first time Yuuri wondered what he had gotten himself into. It would not be the last.
The blood in his veins rushed faster than he had ever felt before. It thumped and echoed inside of his ears, time slowing and the world blurred. The bubble around him closed in, sounds harsh. He’d been placed in dangerous situations before, and he’d even been shot at before, but something about that chuckle stood the hairs on his arms at end.

There was a step on the other side of the door. It rang louder to Yuuri’s trained adrenaline kicked hearing, sparking nerves all along his skin. There was another low chuckle, the crinkle of someone’s jacket, the click of the trigger.

Yuuri’s trained body moved before he could recognise the signs. He threw himself down, covering his ears just as another bullet pierced the door. The door groaned as another hole was bent. It would have been where Yuuri’s back was pressed against the surface.

He pulled out his own gun, hands surprisingly steady, as he took his cover in the corner and aimed ready for the man to open it.

There was a minute of silence as Yuuri steadied his position. He took shallow breaths, eyes glued to the metal, finger on the trigger. Through the door, he heard nothing – no shuffle, no click, no chuckle. He knew the other man was listening just as intently.

In the far background, sirens rose above the panic. With every second, they crept closer and closer, the saviours come to the scene.

The handle of the door shifted. Yuuri held his breath.

In his mind’s eye, he remembered the man’s height. Tall, just a few inches above Yuuri. He raised his gun, aiming the sight at where the man’s head would appear around the frame of the door.
The handle connected and the door gradually opened, the man on the other side just as cautious. Step, step, slowly taken, the alley appearing empty now to the attacker. Through the bullet holes, Yuuri saw the man’s moving body. Yuuri aimed the gun at the door, ready to have the man take a taste of his own medicine.

But as he pressed his finger on the trigger, he felt something stop him. His heart lurched in his throat, body turned cold, and just at that moment his eyes followed as the man appeared in view. On this side, his profile was visible, silver hair tucked behind one pale ear. A scowl was prominent on his features, eyes glaring down the alleyway, scanning every nook and crevice that he could.

It was just as the man turned to look behind the door that Yuuri aimed the gun and pulled the trigger.

The man’s eyes snapped open in surprise, teeth gritting together as he prepared to move out of the way. But not in time. The bullet shot towards him, slicing the upper part of his left arm, cutting through the jacket as easily as butter. Yuuri didn’t allow himself time to wonder how he had missed – him, a trained bodyguard, one of the best shots in the company. Instead, he pushed himself up and with all his might, he slammed the door closed. The man tried to push back, but the shock and injury on his arm made him weaker. With a frustrated shout, he was pushed back into the empty shop.

Through the bullet holes, Yuuri heard what he thought was a curse, a barked word of another language he didn’t understand. Drops of clear, red blood were pooled on the floor where the man had been stood, Yuuri’s eyes catching them quickly. He turned to press himself against the right wall as he picked his bag up again and ran as fast as he could down the alleyway, gun gripped tightly in his hands. He kept glancing over his shoulder to watch the door for it to open again.

But it didn’t. The sirens were too close. He could almost see the red and blue flashing above the building, reflecting off the hundreds of windows of the street. If the man really was Russian mafia, he would not want to be caught.

Yuuri rounded the corner, out of sight. He knew he had been lucky to get out of it without injury. Just a few centimetres to the side, and that first shot could have injured him badly. He should have been more careful.

As he slowed to a walking pace, glancing around for anywhere Phichit might have been hiding, a thought occurred to him. He had been careful. He’d taken extra measures that he didn’t think were needed. He’d not only disguised Phichit until he no longer looked like himself, he even disguised his own unfamiliar existence. And somehow that man had picked them out without a doubt from a
street of busy commuters.

He found Phichit hiding behind some of the store bins. Yuuri contained his worry – he’d need to teach Phichit how to hide. Had he not been so confident in the maze of streets, Phichit could have easily been found.

“Is he gone?” the shaking man asked.

Yuuri pulled his client up, nodding his head. “He’s gone, chased away by the police.” He wiped away some of the dust from Phichit’s form, crinkling his nose at the smell of the rubbish. “Was he familiar to you?”

The other man was silent for a moment. His eyes glanced to the side, avoiding Yuuri’s. He gulped away his nerves before he replied, “Yes.”

“Is he one of the Russian mafia?”

Phichit attempted to reply, but the words died in his throat. Instead, he gave a shaky nod.

“Do you have any idea how he recognised us, even with the disguises?”

Phichit stuttered, “I-I don’t know. I really d-don’t. H-He…”

Yuuri said, “I’m going to have to touch you, is that alright? He might have planted something on you.” Tracking devices weren’t rare in his line of career. Stalkers especially liked to drop things in the bags of their targets. His client nodded and Yuuri began to pat him down. The clothes were new, so there was nothing there. He checked his hair, checked his skin, asked Phichit to check the most intimate places.

“I-I’d have known if they did that, wouldn’t I?”

“Then have you consumed anything they gave you?”
“No, Celestino stopped me if they ever wanted to give me something.”

“Did they try?”

“Only once, at a banquet. We were eating. But it wasn’t anything they could hide anything in, right? It was just a piece of cake. Can it fit in that?”

“Was it before or after you witnessed something?”


Yuuri sighed. He doubted the man was tracked then. That was not how they were found. Yuuri wracked his brain to figure it out. The direction the car had come had been the company, which led him to believe they’d seen Phichit go in the day before. They’d been waiting. But they clearly hadn’t known it was Phichit when he’d come out disguised, otherwise they would have attacked outside the building rather than give them time to find cover.

Which made him think two things – they’d either hacked the cameras and been delayed, or someone had told. Before he could think any more on those, Phichit tugged his top and pulled him from his thoughts.

“We need to get out of here. If they found us once, they can find us again, right? Do we take the disguises off?”

“No,” Yuuri said immediately. “It’s still safer to have them on. We’ll make changes to them once we’re somewhere safe.”

Wherever ‘safe’ was.

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They took a tense taxi ride to the outskirts of the city, where another car hire was. Every car that pulled up beside them had them on edge, words a rarity between the two. Yuuri kept his eyes out for any unmarked black car, but saw none.
He threw away his idea of an inconspicuous car to take Phichit in. Instead, he hired a fast sports car with blacked-out windows, paying much more than he would have liked. But as soon as they were inside, the thought of the money slipped away. The blacked-out windows made Phichit seem more relaxed than he had been for hours.

There were still some sirens making their way to the centre of the city when they left it. Word was already passing through the streets of what had happened. Gun shots, they whispered, someone was shooting. Of course, rumours grew like fire. According to the word spreading, five people had been killed. A criminal group were trying to rob the shoe store. The police tried to debunk the panic as quickly as they could.

Yuuri didn’t breathe properly until they were on the road, speeding down the highway with the purr of the engine beneath them. The radio played low between them, jamming an old rock song, the guitar strumming underneath the powerful vocals. Yuuri wasn’t really listening. Instead, he watched the mirrors and kept his eyes on the road, playing through the plan in his head. He wondered if going through with it right now was a good idea, if the mafia would be waiting for them at the airport. He thought taking a flight from the state over would be safe enough – perhaps they’d need to go further.

Phichit was sitting still in the plush leather seat beside him, staring out beyond the road. He’d been the one to turn the radio on, and yet Yuuri noticed how he hadn’t been listening. The adrenaline was taking its slow course out of their bodies.

The bag of weapons was strapped into the back seat, every turn and slight bump ricocheting the guns until the radio was drowned out by the scraping of metal. Yuuri noticed the way Phichit would flinch every time.

Their other bags were in the boot, clothes and other essentials locked safely away.

It was a further hour before the silence became too deafening. The weight of the situation hadn’t quite hit Yuuri yet, not even after having been shot at more than once. It would soon, he knew. There would come a moment where he would realise just what he had gotten himself into. He knew himself well, and he knew it would come when he would be alone, alone in a room and alone with his thoughts, when he gave them time to crash into him. Then the thoughts of a dark future would surface.

But until then, Yuuri would push those thoughts away. Phichit needed all the attention he could give, his client more important than his own worries.
He broke the silence when he asked, “Are you hungry? It might be a good idea to get some food now. We have a long drive.”

“We do?”

Yuuri nodded, taking the next turn for the services. He kept an eye out for any cars that could have been following. “I was thinking of going to a different airport. They probably don’t know our original plan, but I want to be sure. We’ll buy some more tickets once we’re at another airport.”

“Okay.”

“So, are you hungry?”

“Famished.”

Yuuri wasn’t sure what drive thru they had come to – to him, they all seemed the same, the same greasy food, same fast meals, same menu. But Phichit’s eyes sparkled when the food was passed through their window, and the man dug into his bag almost as soon as it landed on his lap.

“Slow down a little there,” Yuuri said, one huff of laughter leaving his lips. “If I’d have known you were that hungry, I’d have stopped earlier.”

“I wasn’t allowed this type of food when I was training,” Phichit mumbled around his mouthful. “It was a strict diet, and I missed it so much.”

Yuuri popped some fries into his mouth, savouring the salt. In his own training, he wasn’t allowed much of this either. But oddly, it seemed the skater had been through more intense diet regulations than he had. Strange, he thought.

“What is skating like?” Yuuri paused for a second, suddenly realising that the question might have been imposing or brought a memory to his client that the man didn’t want.
But Phichit chuckled around a mouthful of fries, dark eyes shining under the high light of the afternoon. “Beautiful. It’s hard, and it takes years of training to be able to do proper programmes, but the sense of achievement you get is addictive. And you feel so free out on the ice.”

“I don’t think I’d feel so free after falling on my face.”

Phichit barked out a laugh. “As long as you get back up, you’ll be fine. Everyone falls on their first go.”

“My friend used to like it a lot. She’d talk to me for hours about names I didn’t know.” She’d probably know about you, Yuuri thought. But he kept the words to himself. “Then she has good taste.” Phichit polished off his fingers, licking them of the salt before he turned to the burger. “One of the biggest things I’ve missed since this too is not only skating, but being able to update social media.”

“Oh? Did you do that a lot?”

“All the time. I don’t think I went a day without updating something. I liked the aspect of being able to talk to fans and seeing what others were doing. It started as a way to show my family what I was doing while I was studying and training in Detroit. Then I became addicted.” The man paused for a second, chewing the bite he had taken. “I haven’t been on any of them since. They probably can’t track me through the sites, but I’m still worried.”

“Only if you updated a picture with location on,” Yuuri replied.


Yuuri turned his face away, covering his mouth as he felt a bubble of laughter rise from his chest. Yes, he thought, he certainly hadn’t ever had a client like Phichit. “While you’re at it, put our real names and a hashtag of our plan.”

“Perfect, they’ll never find us.”
Maybe it wasn’t something that they should have been joking about – in any other job, he wouldn’t. He hadn’t joked about stalkers before, or rabid fans or abusive partners. But there was an ease in the air with Phichit, one that was slowly beginning to settle with each hour that passed between them. Perhaps it was the idea that they knew they couldn’t go back. It was only the beginning, and yet both knew it would not end with the same life they had had. Yuuri had known that when he took the contract. He, unlike Phichit, hadn’t had that much to leave behind anyway.

Phichit finished off the last few bites of his food while Yuuri had only just finished his chips. After a few minutes, he shuffled in his seat, sighing. Without food to occupy him, it seemed his restless nature grew bored. “So, why are you in this sort of job?” he asked.

“Because I wanted to protect people,” he answered.

“From the mafia especially?”

“Not normally. You’re a special case.”

Phichit paused for a second, fiddling with his fingers. “What about your family? Aren’t you worried for them? Taking this job could put them in danger.”

Yuuri swallowed his laughter. The question was only funny to him though. “No. They won’t be able to find my family. I don’t have any ties that the mafia could pull on.”

“O-Oh,” Phichit mumbled, looking away.

Yuuri could tell from the man’s expression that he had made assumptions. Yuuri didn’t feel the need to correct him. He wiped the salt from his fingers and said, “We’ll head out again now. Let me know when you’re hungry again.”

Phichit nodded, but as they drove, Yuuri noticed the way the man’s eyes would shift to where the bandages around his wrists were peeking from under his shirt. More assumptions were swirling around his mind, painting pictures from puzzle pieces Yuuri hadn’t given. Some pity passed the man’s features, only for a second, and Yuuri found he didn’t want to correct him on that either.

Whatever Phichit was thinking of was probably far better than the reality – the man would pity him more if he found out he had one name on both wrists. He was doomed for an unhappy ending.
On their next break, while Phichit used a station’s toilet, Yuuri used his company phone to call his boss. He quickly informed the man of what they had been through, leaving no detail out of what had happened at the shoe shop.

“Ah, so that was what the fuss was about,” the man hummed. “There was a specialised team because of that.”

Yuuri rubbed the back of his neck. “Yeah. We got away without injury though. I even managed to wound the attacker.”

“Really?”

“I don’t know how deep it was, but my bullet grazed his arm—”

“Grazed? Yuuri, normally all of your shots are accurate.”

“I was hurried,” Yuuri pushed out the white lie. “There was some blood on the floor after he retreated. We had to take extra precautions to make sure they didn’t follow.”

“Do you have any ideas how they still managed to recognise you?”

“I don’t have any solid ideas yet.”

“You’re still on your way to the safe house though?”

“Yes, but needed to make some corrections to the plan.” He didn’t elaborate – plans were never spoken about for security reasons, especially not over the phone. From the corner of his eye, he saw Phichit making his way back towards the car. “We need to hit the road again. Thank you, I’ll check in when I can.” He hung up and turned to welcome Phichit back.
The man was fiddling with the back of his wig, grimacing as he did. “I think it came a bit undone when I went to the toilet. It’s tugging on the hairs at the back.”

“We’ll fix it in the car.” Yuuri cast a subtle side-glance towards the cameras of the station. So far, he had managed to keep both of their faces away from the recording. He hoped to keep it that way.

Phichit was ushered in and inside Yuuri inspected the back. “Just a few hairs have been caught with the netting,” he informed. He gently pulled them free. “We’re going to be on a long stretch of road before we reach somewhere to sleep for the night. Is there anything you want to get to occupy yourself?”

Phichit waved at the company phone Yuuri had placed on the dashboard. “I’ll just download some games on that. I was used to killing time during competitions.”

Yuuri bit back his comment how his company phone was not for games. He reminded himself that the client was always right, always first. “Okay.”

The ride was long, hours behind the wheel until Yuuri’s eyes began to sting with the concentration. The sky painted streaks of red and orange as the sun set over the hilly horizon. Flocks of sparrows soared overhead. The late work traffic was beginning to slow the main roads. Phichit lay sleeping besides him, face pressed against the leather of the seats, phone still shining in the low evening gloom.

They’d not talked much in the hours since, but the silence had been comfortable. Little comments about a particular car passed between them, or when they pulled in for food, but not much else. Yuuri’s curiosity had almost pierced through a few times, wanting to ask the man how he had become involved with such a dangerous group. But he stayed back, kept quiet. He didn’t want to scare his client as much as he already was.

Yuuri occupied his time with keeping vigilant. His eyes scanned the road before him and behind through the mirror. In his mind, he feared to see the same unmarked black car making its way close behind them, to see a hand reach out from the window with a gun aimed at them. Or pass with the weapon and shoot on the way. Or to stop in front and cause a crash. He didn’t really know how they worked, and he knew that they had more to research once they were stopping somewhere for the night.

He checked the clock. Late evening. It was about now that their original flight would be taking off, jetting into the sky with its destination clear. Yuuri wondered if the mafia had been waiting there, or if his caution had made them one day later from reaching the safe house.
He had made a decision though, a decision he thought was best. He didn’t want to risk it.

Flashes of memory burned within his mind. The sound of the gunshot, the smell of static in the air. Those blue eyes, boring into him so intensely. His voice, the laughter through the bullet holes. The dark intention in his gaze. It brought a chill through Yuuri’s body, running down his spine like cold fingers tickling. Looking back, he realised how he couldn’t remember many details. His body had pushed him into the fighting instinct, doing everything he could to remain a shield between the man and his client. At the time though, death had not been a thought, not even as the bullets flew.

The man’s blood had been bright against the grey of the floor. He’d only seen a quick glance of it, and yet it resided deeply within his memory. He couldn’t explain why. Just as he couldn’t explain why he hadn’t shot the man properly. He had such a good advantage, and yet he had missed, only grazing his arm.

He gripped the steering wheel tightly. The thought burned anger inside of him. He calmed himself with other thoughts.

They were nearing a service station, a motel built close. It wasn’t the best of places, but it would make do. And, if he chose the right one, they wouldn’t ask too many questions.

He roused Phichit from sleep.

The room itself was clean, if bare. A generic picture of a coast hung from the wall, looking like any other picture. The wallpaper was hideous with a mix of yellow and green, patterned with diamonds, the same as the covers of the bed. He urged Phichit to fall back asleep, and the man did just that with the wig still on his head.

The lack of sleep from the previous night had begun to wear on him. His eyes were harder to keep open, the eyelids drooping over stinging eyes. But he got out his laptop once more and scrolled through it.

He searched for any picture that resembled the man he had seen. He searched on everything he could, even some of the company’s documents, but could find nothing. The only thing he could find was an older man with greying hair, a hat to cover the bald spot Yuuri suspected he had, dressed in an expensive suit that resembled the man he had shot – there were some allegations that this man was involved with the mafia, though the article couldn’t quite find how integrated he was. He was shorter, bigger, with a scowl that could have scared the devil away. Yuuri was about to move
passed the picture until he noticed something in the background.

The man was standing before a rink centre, seemingly just having left it. In his hand was a briefcase, filled with documents Yuuri would love to have looked at.

Yakov Feltsman. Yuuri memorised the name and searched online. But he could find nothing more about it. He was a suspect for underground dealings, but on the surface he was a well-known businessman in Russia. In some photos, Yuuri saw a young woman with flaming red hair standing beside him, glossed lips pulled into a sweet smile. But none of the man Yuuri had seen.

Yuuri changed his tactics. He glanced over at Phichit, seeing the man turned away and breathing deeply in sleep. He quickly typed both names into the search engine. Up come one photo. Phichit seemed a little younger in it, perhaps seventeen or eighteen, with a silver medal hanging from around his neck and resting against his glittering blue costume. Mr Feltsman stood beside him, a hand on the boy’s shoulder, both smiling at the camera.

It was the only picture of its kind. It was attached to an article congratulating the young skater of earning a silver in his Junior Grand Prix Finals. It made one mention of the man stood beside him, of his name and his business in Russia. Otherwise, there was nothing to tie the two together.

It was a clue, Yuuri thought. But nothing solid. There was nothing to suggest that Mr Feltsman was Russian mafia, or that he was tied with Phichit in any way besides a picture, or that the shooter from the store was tied to either of them. A triangle of loose strings, and it only helped to confuse Yuuri more.

He closed the laptop and rubbed his face. His skin ached with weariness. He pushed himself to sit against the bed headboard, careful of the man sleeping beside him, and settled to sleep.

The door was locked and barricaded. Yuuri slipped into a light sleep, waiting for the moment that the door handle would rattle.

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Yuuri wasn’t sure how many times he woke up in the night with a start.

The couple next door returned late into the night with roars of laughter, stumbling against their
door and taking a good ten minutes to finally get into their own room. The phone in the room on the other side of them rang through the thin walls. A drunk man rattled their door handle thinking it was his.

Yuuri hadn’t slept well, moving to sleep in a chair facing the door with his gun loaded in his hands. He needed to start thinking up sleeping schedules, he decided. He readied his gun facing the wood, finger on the trigger, and steadily faded back into sleep.

They set on the road early in the morning. If all went well, they should be reaching the airport in the afternoon, ready for an early evening flight.

It was around eleven when he noticed there was a car following.

It wasn’t blacked out, nor unmarked. It was small and red, sleek in its paint. It almost blended with all the other cars on the busy road and Yuuri almost overlooked it. Had it not been for the car overtaking a lorry at a dangerous point to keep them in their line of sight, Yuuri would have thought of it as another commuter on their way to lunch.

“Don’t look now,” Yuuri whispered, catching the attention of his client who was playing a game on his phone, “but I think someone is following.”

Phichit’s body froze instantly, fingers halting from their rapid movement. The game chimed, calling him back, but any thoughts of streaks was long lost in his mind.

“They’ve gone for a subtle car,” Yuuri continued. “They learned from their previous attempt.”

Or perhaps this was more about stealth than to leave a message, Yuuri thought. Perhaps this was to follow, not to attack. Yuuri cursed under his breath. How did they keep finding them? He cast the question aside before it could drive him insane.

The car was keeping at a distance, far enough away that Yuuri could only just make out a dark silhouette at the front of it. It always stayed three cars back, within eyesight, too close for him to be able to make a turn and hide properly.

“What are we going to do?” Phichit asked, gripping the phone tightly in his hands.
Yuuri overtook another car, and watched as the following car jumped the queue as well. Definitely following. It wasn’t the first time this had happened – only his last contract, a manic stalker had followed his pop idol client all the way to their hotel. But there was something about a stalker that was much easier to handle than the mafia.

“Our turn is coming up soon,” Yuuri replied. “See if they follow. If they do, you need to hold on to your seatbelt.”

The phone dropped from Phichit’s grip as he clutched at the belt.

Their hearts thrummed inside of their chests, thumping until their rib cages threatened to break. Yuuri’s arms were coursing with energy, ready for him to make the sudden turn on the wheel. As their turning came up, he felt the tension pulse in the air.

The car behind them turned with them, the one following them turning after that.

“They turned, Yuuri,” Phichit gasped. “They turned. They’re coming. They’re following us.”

“Phichit, remain calm,” Yuuri urged. He kept at the pace, not wanting to appear panicked. He eyed the junction ahead. The light shone red. “We’ll find out who they are now.”

They rolled to a halt before the junction. Behind them, the car pulled in close, an elderly woman with her shopping glaring with narrowed eyes through the window. Behind her, their following car stopped.

Yuuri stared, but the sun blocker was in the way of the upper portion of the man’s face. Yuuri could tell from the lower part of his head though that he was neither Mr Feltsman or the shoe shop shooter. Over their body they were a thick coat. Underneath that was an unmistakable expensive suit.

As the light turned green once more, Yuuri rolled off, wondering what the next course of action would be.

“Does that mean they’re waiting at the airport?” Phichit asked.
“No. If they’re following, it means they don’t know where we’re going,” Yuuri replied. To throw
further suspicion, he turned away from the airport and onto a long straight road. The old lady
behind turned off on their next left, leaving a long gap between them and their stalker.

The follower pulled back until he was once again just an blurry form in the front of the car. Yuuri
took a deep breath and tightened his grip on the steering wheel. Before them was an open road, few
turns, few buildings, few obstacles. Perfect conditions. He could lose them easily. But just as he
was pressing his foot onto the accelerator, the follower turned off the road.

“W-What?” Phichit squeaked, turning in his seat to peer out the back window. “They’re not
following anymore. Did we get it wrong?”

No, Yuuri thought. There had been an air surrounding the man, around the car. They were
followed, and yet he had pulled back and turned away. “Yeah, maybe,” he chuckled, his grip still
tight. His knuckles were quickly losing colour. “I’ll take the long way to the airport just in case.”

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The unease didn’t leave him, not even as they dropped the car off in the airport rental. They hadn’t
seen the car or the man again, but there was a sense around him that felt like they were being
watched.

But every time he glanced around, there wasn’t anyone looking. He bought a baseball cap from one
of the stores and placed it on Phichit, pushing his head down until even his disguised face couldn’t
be seen.

They rushed through the airport lobby to check in, Yuuri’s gaze checking every person who
passed. The shooter wasn’t likely to be here, he thought, and even if he was he wouldn’t want to
shoot in such a crowded area.

The building was about as busy as Yuuri expected. Rushing forms passed without so much as a
glance his way. People chatted loudly on their phones, tired passengers pulled their luggage closely
behind them, families screamed as they ran through the crowd. It was easy to hide in the throngs of
people, for both them and whoever was following.

They bought their tickets quickly and slipped into the check in line. Yuuri pulled out his
documents, passing the bag of weapons beside him as fakes to be used in a movie set. Accompanying them was a document of his license. The last thing they needed was to be held off at the airport for another day. Phichit’s eyes scanned over their destination and the tickets in his hand, mouth gaping as he took in their information.

“Japan?” Phichit whispered beside him. “We’re going that far away?”

“Yep.”

“Is the safe house there?”

Yuuri shushed him, his voice carrying far too loudly to unwanted ears. “Yes.”

“I thought it was going to be like… on the other side of the States. I didn’t know we were going to Japan.”

Yuuri glanced up at the hesitancy he heard in the other man’s voice. “Is that going to be a problem?”

“No, no. I’ve just… Not really been there for any reason besides competitions before.”

“We’re not going anywhere near where you would have been before. It’s a little place we’re going to, somewhere they’ll never find you.”

Phichit didn’t look any more assured.

It wasn’t until they were in the waiting room for the plane that they visibly relaxed. Their bags checked in, only hand luggage beside their feet, and some expensive sandwiches in their hands, they eased the tension from their muscles and stretched their aching limbs.

Outside of the airport windows, the planes parked, the sound of their roaring engines ringing through the glass. It had turned out to be a bright day, with the sun shining down, unobstructed by the rare clouds. Around them, all sorts of people were sat, from business men, to families and elderly couples. No one suspicious – at least, none that Yuuri had seen quite yet.
“I’m going to get so bored on this flight,” Phichit sighed. “I’m getting bored of playing the games on your phone.”

“Install some new games.”

“I think I’ve exhausted them all.”

“Then I’m sure they’ll have inflight films.”

“They’re always terrible, or ones I’ve seen before.”

“Why not buy a book from one of the shops?”

Phichit groaned. “Fine.” He wandered over to the book shop a little away from Yuuri.

The bodyguard watched his client like a hawk, waiting for someone to make the slightest suspicious movement. His body gun was in the bag with the other weapons, probably already being put on the plane. But as any bodyguard was, he was trained in fighting with his fists just as much as he was in aiming a gun.

Phichit took a while carefully choosing his book from the table and shelves. He furrowed his eyebrows when he thought, bit his lip when frustrated, clenched his fist when two books rivalled for best in his mind. When one finally caught his interest, Yuuri watched as the man beamed and chatted with the person behind the tills, almost bouncing in his step.

Yuuri realised he had caught a glimpse of the man that was behind the terrified one he met. The pictures he had seen of his client online, all through the social media he had scoured, and even in the picture with Mr Feltsman, Phichit had been a smiley boy. His eyes shone bright, skin tan rather than pale with nerves, hair bouncy and body at ease. That had changed somewhere between the photos and Yuuri’s meeting him. In that time, the bright boy had witnessed something horrifying, his dreams as a skater torn to shreds as he ran for his life.

Yuuri felt his heart tug in his chest. Phichit turned and clutched the book tightly to his body as he made his way back to Yuuri, some of that light dying in his eyes. As if he was reminded of where
they were, why they were here.

“What did you get?” Yuuri asked, hoping to turn both their thoughts to something better.

“A romance,” Phichit replied. “About a spy saving a soulmate from his enemy.”

After so many years, the names hardly made him flinch anymore. “Something so cliched?”

Phichit glared. “Hey, don’t kick it until you try it. It’s action, and romance, and all that’s sweet in the world.” He turned it so that the cover was displayed. A typical dark background with a man in a suit, gun in hand, and a woman in the other. She was dressed in skimpy, torn clothes, a hand thrown over her head dramatically, caught in a gasp. At Yuuri’s eyebrow raise, Phichit chuckled. “Okay, maybe it’s a little cheesy and I already know the outcome. But it’s easy to read, and it’s nice to read about a happy ending.”

Yuuri could understand. During his difficult time of acceptance of his situation, he used to read and watch a lot of things that showed soulmates coming together, of loving one another until the end of time, overcoming everything in their way. He used to hope something like that could happen to him. He’d be whisked away, his soulmate’s name mistakenly on both wrists, and live happily ever after as everyone else did.

It took him a long time to realise that wouldn’t be the case.

He shrugged. “Can’t see it providing that much entertainment though if you already know the ending.”

“Sometimes it’s not about the ending, but how they get there.”

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Yuuri pushed Phichit close to the window for the flight, sitting between him and the aisle. Phichit had just obeyed and opened his book for the long journey.

Yuuri’s body was thrumming with energy, a tension settling inside of him that he wasn’t sure of
where it had come from. Images of their stalker flashed through his mind, how they had turned off before anything had happened. He tried to convince himself that it was just a busy commuter, but something at the back of his mind refused to agree – that person had been following them, he knew it. But not the whole distance.

He glanced around the plane for what seemed like the hundredth time. Beside him, on the other side of the aisle, a mother was calming her waking baby. Behind him, a business man was rifling through the inflight newspaper. A couple of tourists sat before him, dressed in everything American in merchandise.

No one was watching him, no one trying to listen in. Whoever had been following them had been left behind outside the airport. But that didn’t settle him.

His eyes scanned over every form, almost daring people to turn and challenge him. There wasn’t much either of them could do thousands of feet in the air, but at least he’d be prepared.

“Yuuri, you’re frightening people,” Phichit whispered, placing a gentle hand on his arm.

Yuuri moved to sit back against the seat, hearing the whispers of the businessmen behind. “Sorry.”

Phichit paused, the book open but forgotten in his lap. “Did you see anything?”

“No, nothing at all.” Which unsettled him more. At least if they had lost their tail, he would have been less convinced it was a trap.

He’d need to be prepared. Perhaps there would be people waiting, hidden between the crowds of a busy airport, guns under jackets. But he doubted it. They couldn’t get there any faster than Phichit and Yuuri, surely. Their bag of disguises was in the hold of the plane, not that they would help. If the mafia had seen through it once, they could do so again.

Yuuri’s hand instinctively reached the upper part of his left arm, the place he had shot the shooter in the shoe shop. Perhaps there would be another shoot off. He’d need to shield Phichit with his body. Maybe give him instructions on how to reach the safe house in case he couldn’t go. Yes, that sounded like a good idea.
“Yuuri?”

Yuuri turned, seeing the concern in his face. “Yes?”

“You’re thinking too hard. I can practically see the cogs turning in your head.”

“Oh, sorry.”

Phichit opened his mouth to say more, but something stopped the words in his throat. He glanced around, then turned back to his book. He flipped the page, but Yuuri saw the way his eyes stared beyond the paper.

It was going to be a long journey, Yuuri reminded himself. He pulled out the booklets from the pouch of the chair before him, leafing through the pages without really reading them. He couldn’t shake the feeling that there was something he should have been stopping, something he should be preparing for. He just couldn’t think of what that was.

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Somewhere along the journey, Phichit had fallen asleep with his head against the wall of the plane. Yuuri didn’t notice until the man had shifted and the book fell to the floor. He picked it up and his eyes found where the man had been reading.

It was only a few chapters in, but there was already a dramatic scene. His eyes scanned over the page, reading how the enemy had taken the main character’s soulmate. Drama and clichéd, he read over it with little interest. Inside of him, numbed and old bitterness rose against the idea of soulmate, or enemies, of a fate that people were victim to.

He closed the book a little harder than he expected, the sound making a few around him flinch and Phichit shuffle in sleep. He placed it between them.

Thoughts of the name on his wrists tried to surface again, as they sometimes did. On nights he couldn’t sleep, he wondered who the owner was, what sort of person they were to be both an enemy and a soulmate. He wondered what it meant, if he was doomed to love an enemy or to hate his other half. On his worst days, he knew he was doomed to always feel pain and heartache. On his better days, he knew he was bigger than letters on his skin. He’d made it this far without
knowing, and he could go further.

And if there came a day where he found the owner of the name, he’d ask to look at their wrists too. Perhaps there would be his name, duplicated on both sides, in his mother lettering. He’d ask if the person had gone through the same pain as him, the same thoughts suffocating until there was nothing else to think about. He’d ask what they had done in their life leading up to their meeting.

And then he’d condemn everything. He’d deny the names, deny the cruel fate, deny everything until his lungs bled with his words. He’d propose that they end their meeting there and never meet again. They were bigger than a predetermined love and hate.

If they were ever to meet. Yuuri doubted they would. He’d done everything he could in life to get away from it, taking a job to protect others from their enemies. Built safe houses. Refused people’s wrist names. Never spoke of it. Bandaged them up. That was enough.

They’d never meet. Yuuri would make sure of it.

He sighed and rubbed his face. Around him, hundreds of people carried their own names on their wrists. He glanced to the mother and baby beside him. She wore short sleeves, her soulmate name in what Yuuri thought might have been Greek, her enemy name in something he wasn’t familiar with. No one sat beside her. Her baby had smaller tattoos on his wrist, two separate names as everyone else did. For just a few hours, he was beside a normal story.

He was getting tired again. It was getting harder to chase away the thoughts of fate and destiny. He tugged on the bandages and sat back straight against his seat. He let himself drown in the sound of the engines, the thrum of the countless voices around him, clicking of the stewardesses’ heels on the carpet. No thoughts. Just sound.

***

Yuuri felt at home almost as soon as they landed. Even the air felt different, the smell more floral and light. He breathed it in as soon as they stepped out of the airport doors, filling his lungs with his home.

Words of his language were displayed along every sign, slipping from the mouths of those that passed. Colours burst in flower pots and trees, on signs and buildings. He already felt his chest lighten at the sight.
He gave Phichit a smile, the man glancing around like a new tourist. “Come on, we’re almost there,” Yuuri said, gripping the man’s top and pulling him towards the taxis. Their bags hung from their shoulders, collected upon their landing, and Yuuri already felt safer with them.

He’d slipped his guns back into the holsters underneath his clothing, feeling their press every time he breathed. He’d eased since being back home – even if it wasn’t quite close to where he had grown up. Here, he knew his place, knew his way around, and he knew that if Phichit’s chasers reached this far, he could fight against them. No one knew how to navigate his country like he did.

He glanced around to make sure that no one was following or watching, and just as he turned back to look at the long line of taxis, something bumped into him.

It was a small bump, but he found himself almost reaching for the gun underneath his jacket. He placed himself between the attacker and Phichit without a thought.

But it was just a tourist. The person he had bumped into was small, young, with bright blond hair that stood out amongst the heads of dark locks. His clothes were leopard print, blocky and bright, hood up and hair halfway over his face. He came to Yuuri’s shoulder, and was perhaps in the middle of puberty if his lanky frame meant anything.

Yuuri eased, moving his hand away from where he had been reaching underneath his jacket. He moved forward to steady the boy but stopped when he turned a glare upwards. His green eyes were powerful, almost shocking Yuuri completely.

“I’m sorry,” Yuuri said, taking his step back. “I wasn’t looking where I was going.”

The boy continued to glare, teeth grit together as he said nothing. Yuuri took notice of the lack of suitcase beside him, no tourist souvenirs, nothing but his obvious genetics to set him apart. Yuuri glanced around, wondering if the boy had been separated from his parents. But there was no one that looked similar.

“I’m sorry,” he repeated, grabbing his bag to hoist back onto his shoulder. He placed a hand on Phichit’s back and directed him away again.

His client tried to conceal a chuckle as he said, “Well, he was a little angry, huh?”
The space was wide, and the stranger must not have been paying attention either. But Yuuri refrained from saying it. “Yeah,” he replied, glancing backwards over his shoulder.

The boy was on his phone, speaking so quietly that the sound of the travellers around him drowned it out easily. Their eyes connected again for just a second before someone passed their vision. When Yuuri could see again, the boy was turned away and heading towards the doors of the airport.

Strange, Yuuri thought. But it was not strange enough for him to give more thought to it. His training had him memorising the boy’s face and actions, but he thought it wouldn’t be needed. He almost forgot about the encounter for a while.

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They took the taxi to the closest train station. On the train, he pulled out his laptop and sent more Phichit doppelgangers around the world, even one around Japan to Tokyo. A few others were travelling to China, Australia, Brazil, even one to Iceland. He bought more tickets, sent out feelers of people saying they had witnessed Phichit, created rumours online.

Phichit sat opposite, halfway through his book now. He leaned over the table, eyes scanning quickly over the pages, mouth slightly open.

Yuuri closed his laptop. “Good book?”

“Shh,” Phichit reprimanded, holding up a finger. “I’m at a good bit.”

Yuuri waited until the man finished the chapter and raised a brow when Phichit turned his attention back to Yuuri. “Well?”

“Are you kidding me? It’s really well written, even if I know what’s going to happen. Doesn’t stop the feelings thought.” He closed the book and placed it in his bag, eyes flitting quickly to Yuuri’s laptop. “How many have you sent out of me this time?”

“A few.”
“How long do we have left?”

“Just a few more stops, and then a bus and we’re there.” Yuuri knew there were easier ways to get to his safe house, even a straight plane to the closest town. But he needed to create a difficult trail to follow, and that included as many modes of transport as he could fit in. “We’ll probably get there early evening.”

Phichit nodded and turned to stare out at the country side as it rolled beside the train. Flat fields of green flashed quickly, thin trees on occasion. The clouds were dark as they seeped in the sky, promising rainfall.

“What’s the safe house like?” Phichit asked with some reluctance.

“It’s nice,” Yuuri replied. “I think you’ll like it. It’s not like you’d expect.”

“So not a cold, cement warehouse in the middle of nowhere?”

Yuuri almost chuckled at the question as he thought of how different it was. “Nothing like it.”

“And I can just… hide there? I can fit in?”

“Yes. They’re used to hiding people.”

“They?”

“You’ll like them, I promise,” Yuuri assured. “They’re the best people I’ve ever known.”

Phichit didn’t seem to believe him, a hint of scepticism in his expression as he bit his lip. He turned to watch the scenery and said nothing more. But all the while, Yuuri felt excitement beginning to curl inside of him.
He was finally returning to the place he hadn’t been for years. He’d only taken one other person to the safe house in his years as a bodyguard. That person still lived there, now a part of the community and able to speak the language. Phichit would fit in well.

Yuuri hoped he did. He was caught in a mess that refused to let him go, and because of it he would never be able to return to the life he had once loved so much. The safe house might be a permanent home for him forever now, at the least for the next few years. Yuuri knew he would grow to love it, as all the inhabitants did, but it would be hard to get used to it at first.

The excitement grew and grew inside the pit of his stomach until he could barely contain his smiles. Even as they moved onto the bus, bags slung over their shoulders, the flat fields swapped for the waving sea and the fish markets. The salt in the air brought back nostalgia until he was almost drowning in it.

He watched Phichit’s face as he stared all around him, almost pressing himself to the window to see. Phichit’s hesitation turned into awe, the suspicion long gone – swapped for eagerness.

“This isn’t the middle of nowhere,” he said, eyes glued to a large grey monument as they passed.

“No, it’s not.”

“It’s a seaside town.”

“It is.”

“This is where the safe house is?”

Everyone who was ever brought to the safehouse had the same reaction, Yuuri’s client or the clients of others. All imagined the cold walls of an abandoned building, sludge for food, dark nights and security cameras. But Yuuri knew how that was no way to hide. On the run, always worrying about the next meal, that was not how things worked. His safe house had worked that out early.

The bus dropped them off outside of a big wooden building. It was painted to attract the attention of those passing, to draw in the summer tourists and keep the locals. Outside, signs in Japanese advertised karaoke nights, sports broadcasts and happy hours. From behind one of the walls, the
steam of the outdoor baths rose like clouds into the open evening air.

The smell burned inside of Yuuri’s nostrils, the sight of it almost bringing tears to his eyes, his legs ready to walk the steps he remembered so well. Beside him Phichit was watching him carefully.

“This… this is it?” The awe in his voice had him whispering, almost choking inside of his throat. “What is this place?”

“It’s an onsen,” Yuuri replied, a smile pulling at his lips. “It’s a safe house disguised as a tourist attraction.” He turned to watch Phichit. The other man was staring at the building with unshed tears in his eyes, predetermined expectations shattered completely. “You’ll find other victims here, disguised as locals that have lived here from short term to long term. It’s a big operation, with a whole group assuring the safety of everyone who walks through the doors.”

Phichit turned to blink at him, coughing away the surprise. “Group?”

As if they had been beckoned, a middle-aged couple walked through the door. One, a woman, Phichit noticed looked like his bodyguard. They had the same face, big bright eyes that seemed to draw your gaze in, soft cheeks and a smile brighter than the sun. The other, a man, had deep wrinkles that Phichit had no doubt the bodyguard could also have when he too was older. Putting them together, the situation crashed against the client like the waves against the shore. He clutched at his chest, feeling his pulse thumping inside of his throat. For the first time in what seemed like a long while, he felt something akin to hope spark in the darkness.

The couple rushed forward and embraced Yuuri, barely coming to his shoulders as they clung to him. They greeted him in their familiar language, the woman laughing away some of the stray tears falling from the corner of her eyes, the man a little more composed but almost jumping nonetheless.

Phichit watched as his heart clenched inside of his chest.

Yuuri and his parents exchanged a few words of greeting before the couple turned towards the young Thai client. His mother was the first to speak.

“Is this him, Yuuri?”
“Yes,” Yuuri replied. He’d not been able to say a lot to his parents about his client’s situation, not when anyone could be listening over the phone. Their safety precautions forbade them from speaking names, or detailed situations, or relationships. And yet as soon as he had seen his client for the first time, how young he was, how he shook, Yuuri knew that meeting his mother was exactly what Phichit needed to feel safe. “This is Phichit,” he said, swapping to English.

His mother rushed to clutch Phichit’s hand, a mix between a handshake and a comforting gesture. “Hello, Phichit. Welcome.”

His father clapped a hand on the young one’s shoulder, beaming up at him with his eyes sparkling behind thickly framed glasses. “Welcome.”

Yuuri grinned at the awestruck young man as his gaze flitted from the building to their faces, unable to take everything in. “Phichit, these are my parents, and this is Katsuki safe house.” He took hold of Phichit’s arm, and together, they began to lead the victim towards the welcoming open doors, where beyond the threshold laughter was booming, bright lights flashing, music streaming through the air. “There’s not a safer place on earth.”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for the response last chapter! It was honestly so much more than I was expecting, so thank you to all who left comments, kudos, those who subscribed, and just those who read it! Thank you!

And just to let people know, the update schedule of this will be every Saturday - no times have been set, as it depends on the when chapter gets done, but it will be every Saturday unless I say otherwise on here or my tumblr.

For updates and other things, you can find me on tumblr

here
Unwanted

Chapter Notes

This chapter was beta read by whynikkiwhy, making sure that I don't spiral off into descriptions that don't really make sense to anyone but me and my insomnia-riddled mind.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Everything about Yuuri’s childhood home was bittersweet.

The same locals still drunk away their evenings before the television in the main room. They swayed as they sat on the floor, familiar chatter flowing through them nearly as easily as the alcohol did. They gave Yuuri shaky smiles and greeted Phichit, seemingly uncaring that he couldn’t understand. Tourists wore their complimentary robes, coming to join in with the locals for the full experience the onsen provided. The smell of food filtered through the air, a heavy scent Yuuri would always equate with his family.

His sister was cleaning the bar when they walked in. She rushed over and clapped a hand on Yuuri’s shoulder, much like their father had done, and gave a small smile. She didn’t say many words, not needing to when they weren’t needed. A simple smile was enough to show how much she had missed her brother.

She turned to Phichit, holding out her hand. “Hello, Phichit. Nice to meet you.”

Yuuri turned away and allowed them to make introductions, almost completely taken with the slam of nostalgia hitting him. He took their bags and began to walk down the familiar halls he had walked thousands of times. Each and every step brought images of memories flashing in his mind, some painful, others lovely, a few sad.

As he continued along the hall, the noise from the main room began to fade behind him until it was only background noise. Outside of the window, the trees brushed together, the wind whistling through their leaves. He walked by a few doors until there was only one left before him.

He hadn’t stepped foot inside of his own room for five years. He hadn’t even ventured in when bringing the client to the safe house years ago. He’d avoided it. Because there were painful memories inside those four walls.
It was around the time his ideas of soulmates and enemies came crashing down that he decided to become a bodyguard. Guard those who had no choice of who their enemies were, who possessed the names on their skin, as if they were owned. With his determination on a new career, venturing away from the assumption that he would join the safe house group of his family, he’d set out to America within the month. Old memories lingered in his room. Thoughts that he didn’t want to face. Broken hopes.

He retreated until he was before one of the other rooms of the hall. This wing of the onsen had been made specially for those brought to the safe house, sort of a lodging for them all. It was safe, with cameras in the corner of the halls, bulletproof windows, double locks, panic rooms. He opened the door, and inside was a bare space, futon rolled up, empty drawers and cupboards, ready for someone to move in.

It was a big space, with enough light coming in through the window, bare walls ready to be made into something beautiful by the occupant. Yuuri dropped Phichit’s bags down beside the window.

“Yuuri?”

Yuuri turned to the open doorway, almost feeling a grin split his face when he saw who it was.

Yuuko was just as he remembered, almost not having aged in the past five years. She rushed forwards and jumped into his arms, holding him tightly.

“It is you!” she gasped into his shoulder, giggling away her relief.

“Hello, Yuuko,” he greeted. He’d almost forgotten just how small the woman was though, or how much he had grown in the time he hadn’t seen her. “It’s been a while.”

“A while? Yuuri, it’s been five years!”

“Yeah,” Yuuri replied, unsure on what else to say. Yuuko was aware of the safe house status of the onsen, having been a family friend for years and a part of the group that looked after the place. She was also aware of the reason why Yuuri left. If anyone knew Yuuri’s grievances surrounding the names on his wrist, she did.
“Have you brought… someone?” Yuuko leaned back, her eyes scanning over Yuuri’s face.

“Yes. His name is Phichit.”

“And he’s here for the long term, right?”

“Yes. He needs protection,” Yuuri replied. He didn’t say much more, knowing that those who came through these doors left their issues behind unless they wanted to express it themselves. Yuuri’s parents treated each guest the same, never asking questions. It was the agreement.

Yuuko nodded. “I saw him on the way in. He seems like a really nice guy.”

“He is. He’s just been through a bit of a hard time at the moment.” Yuuri paused, rubbing the back of his neck and looking away from Yuuko’s face as he pondered how to ask it. He’s never asked anything of his childhood friend before, and it felt weird to do so now after so long. “He’s…”

“Yeah, I know.”

Yuuri should have known. Of course, it anyone knew who Phichit was, it would be Yuuko.

Yuuko continued, “The whole skating world is looking for him. No one knows where he went.”

Yuuri nodded. “He witnessed something he shouldn’t have, and he’s going to have to lay low for a while. I can’t say much more, Yuuko.”

“I know.”

“I was going to ask if… well, considering what he was, would you let him skate a little when you have some quiet hours?”

“He’d need to be snuck in, but yes, if he wants to.”
“I’m only asking because he might like the distraction, or it would be good to return to something familiar during this.”

“I get it. I’ll ask him when he’s more settled in.”

“Thank you.” Yuuri leaned against the frame of the window, feeling the cool glass pressed against his clothed back. He liked falling into easy conversation like this again with his childhood friend, where not a wasted word passed. No feigning small talk, nothing that didn’t need saying. And he knew that with people like Yuuko and his parents, Phichit was going to be as safe and as comfortable as he could be.

“Yuuri… How long are you staying this time?”

It was a question he had been hoping to avoid. This house held bitter sweet memories, past pains and loves. As much as he loved coming home, he wanted to leave too.

“I need to go soon,” he replied honestly. “I can’t stay long, not with Phichit’s safety on the line. I’ll wait a few days for him to be settled in and comfortable, and then I’ll head out and direct his… stalkers away, far away from here.”

Yuuko leaned against the wall beside him, her arms crossed and eyes never once looking away from Yuuri’s expression. “You’re not getting yourself into too much trouble, are you?”

Yuuri waved the comment away. “I’m fine, it’s nothing I can’t handle. I’ve been trained for things like this.”

“It doesn’t make it any less dangerous.”

“I know.”

“And your parents worry for you.”

They’re in just as much danger, owning a safe house, Yuuri thought. Who knew how many criminals would kill to know this location? His family weren’t even able to use their real names.
“Yeah, I know.”

Yuuko knew not to press much more. “As long as you know,” she replied. “Why don’t you show him his new room? We could go out to the shops tomorrow, take him so that he could buy some things to colour it up a bit?”

As if beckoned, Phichit appeared around the corner, reluctant as he glanced around. “Oh,” he gasped when he saw Yuuko standing beside Yuuri. “I’m sorry, am I interrupting something?”

“No, no,” Yuuri assured him, pushing himself from the window. “We were just talking about you. Come in.”

Phichit did as was told, taking in everything around him. “You were talking about me?”

“This is your room,” Yuuri explained. “It’s big and spacious, and Yuuko was saying that we could get some things to buy tomorrow for you to decorate it.”

“My room?”

Yuuri hesitated, taking a deep breath before he replied, “Yes. Unless you don’t like it?”

“N-No, it’s just…. Empty.”

“Yes, it is, but we can get some things to fill it.”

“Yeah, that sounds… That sounds nice.”

Yuuri knew the difficulty – almost every person who came to the safe house had the same reluctance. This wasn’t their room, their room lay comfortably somewhere else, far away in a place they couldn’t reach anymore. This was an empty room hidden away where not even family could come. It was cold, new, and frightening. But it would become something like home after a little while.
Phichit made to move toward his bag, but Yuuri stopped him. “You don’t have to,” he quickly said. “We can do that together later, if you want.” As Yuuko moved in his peripheral vision. Yuuri jumped quickly to say, “Phichit, this is Yuuko. Yuuko, this is Phichit.”

They both exchanged a handshake, Yuuko making careful care not to mention she knew who he was.

With a few more words of conversation, Yuuri moved Phichit back to the main room, and together they ate and passed the time in the middle of a noisy crowd, no room to think. Their eyes followed the television, the blurry colours distracting their wild thoughts, noises drowning out their heart beats. Yuuri pushed one alcoholic glass towards Phichit, encouraging him one to relax himself, and with the burn of the buzz Phichit smiled easier.

Laughter and music rang through the open space until it was forgotten why they were there. Yuuri eased back into a personality he had not touched since his leaving, and he saw a side of Phichit he was glad to have protected. Food was brought by his parents and they nibbled away the hours, Yuuko giving stories to Phichit about the town, the people, the things the boy would need to look out for.

But then things began to wind down as the late hours came in. The tourists took to their bed early, and the locals stumbled to their homes. As the noise burned away, their thoughts came back.

Yuuri wondered where it was that he was going to sleep for the next few days. His bed waited for him, still set with the covers he had left on since the day he walked out of the onsen, his old posters and decorations up. But his thoughts were cut off when Phichit spoke.

“You know,” he whispered, staring down at the wood of the table. “If I was a tourist, this place would be amazing. I’ve loved the atmosphere, what little of the town I have seen, and I like your family and friend. But knowing what it really is, and why I’m here, I don’t want to be here.”

Yuuri, unsure on what to say, nodded, watching as his sister cleaned away the empty glasses on the other side of the room and switched off the television.

“How long do I have to stay here?” But before Yuuri could say anything, Phichit cut him off by answering his own question, “Oh yeah, until this all dies down. Which it never will.”

“You’ll get used to it.” It wasn’t the best thing to tell him, but Yuuri didn’t know how else to say it.
“I know I will, but I don’t want to have to.”

Yuuri urged Phichit to go to bed, pulling him up and to his room for a good night of sleep. He set up the futon for his client, spreading out the covers until they looked as comfortable as he could make them, and set out some pyjamas the place provided for Phichit.

But as he turned away, Phichit stopped him with a tug on his shirt. “I’ve gotten so used to you being close when I sleep, I just… please don’t go. The futon is big enough.”

Yuuri didn’t need much convincing, thinking of his own dark room. They didn’t change into pyjamas, and they didn’t slip under the covers. They slept on the top, staring up at the panel ceiling, side by side until sleep claimed them.

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“Is there something else I can wear instead of wigs,” Phichit sighed as he sat on the chair, facing the mirror as Yuuri tugged his hair into the net. “Because this hurts, they’re hot and itchy, and I want to take them off as soon as they touch my head.”

Yuuri apologised again as he pulled Phichit’s hair a little too hard. “For the moment, we have nothing else. But you’ll get used to it, or you can buy some better ones.”

“Buy? With what money? All the money I have is going to you.”

“No one comes into the safe house with any money,” Yuuri assured. “My parents will provide you with something. If you help around the onsen too, you’ll get a wage.”

“Really?”

“Yeah, but only if you want to. They don’t make every safe house occupant work. It’s only if they want to.” Only if they want the distraction, Yuuri refrained from saying. “You’ll meet a lot of people in situations like yours. Not exactly, but they’re all running from something.”
“How is this place even still up?”

“How hiding right under people’s noses,” Yuuri replied, a smile tugging at his lips. He remembered years growing up among these halls, getting to hear stories of people, meeting different personalities from all sorts of backgrounds, passing among people’s lives for the duration of their stay. He’d grown up knowing danger and learned early what the world was, what it could do to innocent people. He’d been taught ways to protect himself and what to do if the safe house had ever been found – but equally, he’d been taught what good they were doing for the people who needed help. That thought had been instilled in him since an early age. Help those that need it. Save people.

Phichit chuckled. “You’re even welcoming in tourists, and no one has any idea.”

“Nope.” He pulled in the last pieces of Phichit’s hair into the wig, looking over to make sure he hadn’t forgotten anything. “It’s a hard business. But it’s worth it.”

“So, you grew up in the middle of this?”

Yuuri moved Phichit’s face to the left, dusting on some quick makeup to lighten the man’s face and hide the bags jetlag had caused. “Yes, I did.”

“And is that why you wanted to become a bodyguard? You said it was to protect people. Was it people like the ones you saw walk through these doors?”

“That’s right.”

Phichit gave a small smile. Yuuri paused, momentarily struck by the warmth in that smile, how it reached his eyes and made them sparkle like nothing Yuuri had ever seen before. Phichit, not noticing Yuuri’s pause, said, “You and your family are some amazing people.”

Yuuri moved to mess with the makeup, turning away to hide the blush that spread on his cheeks.

Not noticing that either, Phichit moved closer to the mirror, fingers grazing over his skin as his eyes scanned over his face. He could hardly recognise himself. “Do your parents allow pets?”
“Pets?”

“Yeah. Like animals.”

Yuuri turned, a sarcastic roll of his eyes cast towards Phichit. “What sort of pets are you wanting to have?”

“Hamsters,” Phichit replied immediately.

Yuuri paused, surprise written plainly on his face. He’d expected the request for a dog, or a cat, or perhaps something completely out of the box. “Uh, yeah, that should be fine if you want to get some.”

“I want three.”

“Okay?”

“My university accommodation didn’t really allow pets, and I was always so busy training that I wouldn’t have really been able to get some anyway. But if your parents are fine with some hamsters, I might finally be able to get some.”

Yuuri nodded. “I’m sure it’ll be fine, as long as you know how to take care of them.”

Phichit chuckled and waved the comment away. “I know everything there is to know. I practically researched it all when I was this close to buying some before my coach stopped me.”

“Well, maybe we’ll find some in town,” Yuuri said, gathering their things in their bags and holstering his weapons underneath his jacket. “Yuuko is waiting for us, so let’s head off.”

Phichit’s hand slipped up to once again touch the strands of fake hair on his head, as if still somewhat conscious of what going out in disguise meant. Nerves still rattled his mind, the idea that they’d been seen through again coursing through his thoughts. Yuuri distracted him by looping their arms together and dragging the man out.
Yuuri pushed as much cheer as he could into his voice as he said, “And you’ll get to know more of the town, maybe pick up some Japanese along the way.”

Phichit groaned. “Language is not my best subject. I barely got to grips with English, and that took years.”

“You’ll pick it up quickly.” You’ll have to, he thought.

The town was busier than Yuuri had anticipated, bodies of locals and tourists creating a crowd along the main paths. Fishermen sold their fresh fish on the bridge, calling out their prices to the passing, busloads of tourists calling out greetings from the windows, stalls in the market set up in colour.

Yuuko was waiting for them just on the other side of the bridge, before they reached the centre of town. She waved with her hand high in the air and a gleaming smile, as if already she accepted Phichit as a long-time friend.

Yuuri couldn’t help a chuckle however, as he noticed a handprint of yogurt on the woman’s shorts. He pointed towards it, drawing her attention to the mess. “I’m guessing the girls had yogurt this morning?”

Yuuko cursed under her breath, sighing out her slight frustration. “They did,” she replied, attempting to rub the mark from the material. “It must have been Loop – she was trying to get my attention all morning, even tried climbing me.”

At Phichit’s confusion, Yuuri explained, “Yuuko has triplets, aged six.”

“I don’t have children, I have monsters,” the woman laughed, having gotten rid of most of the handprint.

Phichit chuckled with her. “I’m sure they can’t be that bad.”

“They’re old enough to know now that they outnumber me and my husband. They take full advantage of that fact.”
Despite Phichit’s earlier reluctance, the young man managed to find boxes upon boxes of things to buy to decorate his new room. He’d been hesitant to use the money Yuuri had, despite Yuuri saying how he always bought his clients’ things while they were under his wing, but soon eased into it. As the worry of someone recognising him also faded away, Phichit grew more comfortable.

He rushed between stalls, eyes wide and personality child-like as he took in the colours, the materials, the patterns of everything from curtains to posters and pictures. And while the man was distracted, Yuuri picked up a little present for his client. He hadn’t known what came over him to buy the camera, but as he looked at it in the store window, Phichit’s voice had rung in his mind, reminding him of when they spoke about Phichit’s love of pictures and social media.

Social media couldn’t be a part of his new life. But taking pictures didn’t have to be.

It was a small camera, not too cheap, but great for beginners. He wasn’t sure what model, only that the assistant had claimed it was brilliant for amateur photographers. Yuuri didn’t know if that was what Phichit was, but perhaps it would provide him something to do while he was here, something other than wallowing in his room, remembering the life he had left behind. He had it boxed and kept secret, joining Phichit before he noticed Yuuri was gone.

Yuuri knew he would need to leave soon, and seeing Phichit moving around freely and speaking with a smile to Yuuko brought him some assurance that his client was going to be alright without him. Phichit would be safe here, amongst his family and friends who he trusted with his life and others, while he travelled the world drawing the mafia as far away as they could go.

He took his thoughts away from that track as soon as they settled on it. He placed the boxed camera in his backpack and followed as his client rushed to another stall, where every genre of book was settled onto the shelves.

Needless to say, Phichit bought every single one that caught his interest. And of course Yuuri was made to carry them.

“Well, you are meant to ensure his safety,” Yuuko giggled. “And books can be dangerous.”

While they settled in a little café for food and Yuuko and Phichit spoke, Yuuri scrolled through the
internet. He hoped for some sort of update, perhaps even a little clue to help him understand what it was Phichit was really in. Anything linking Yakov Feltsman to the shooter in the shoe shop, or anything more about the shooter himself.

Something did pop up, though it wasn’t quite what Yuuri was hoping for. Articles on what had happened in that shoe shop had surfaced online. The only photos were of the shoe shop after it had been shot at and evacuated, most of the damage from when the customers had run out and toppled the shelves. But there were two bullet holes in the door, small slivers of light filtering in through them.

There was no photo of the car, none of the shooter, and none of him and Phichit. The most the police thought it was, was a local gang wanting to raid a store for money. The name ‘mafia’ hadn’t crossed any of the articles, not even in rumours. Descriptions of the shooter was kept to a minimum, describing him as a man of six foot, with nothing else to say. Yuuri began to suspect that they had been paid to keep quiet.

Yuuri looked for any sign that the mafia might be following one of the many decoys he had sent out, but with his limited resources he couldn’t find anything. He didn’t know if they had been effective, or if there was something he was missing. He moved with anxious energy inside of him, eager to leave Phichit safely here and find out himself.

He was distracted by his thoughts when they left the café and Phichit happened upon a shop selling animals. Yuuri was dragged in so quickly he worried his arm might pop out of place. Phichit didn’t stop, not until they were stood facing the little cages Phichit had been hoping to find.

The hamsters were zipping around their homes, balls of fluff with twitchy noses.

“Look at how fluffy they are,” Phichit gasped, cupping his face with his hands as his voice rose higher with each word. “I want them all.”

“There are like ten of them. I don’t think you can have them all,” Yuuko laughed.

“I want them all,” Phichit repeated.

“You wanted three this morning, remember?” Yuuri said.
“Yeah but that was then, this is now.”

“Pick three.”

Phichit groaned, almost seemingly in physical pain from being made to choose. And it took a while, but three were finally picked out, given to Phichit in a clean cage, new supplies and care packages bought in bulk already.

They walked back into the hot springs with arms loaded with shopping. Phichit spoke to the hamsters the whole way, giving greeting to Yuuri’s parents quickly before he rushed to settle them into their new room.

Yuuri couldn’t complain. In one day, his client had seemed much more comfortable than he had hoped for. If buying the boy three hamsters did it, then he would do it all over again. Yuuko left to pick up her children, and Yuuri moved everything else back to Phichit’s room. He helped the occupant to decorate it and help set up the new house for his pets. He was almost unable to contain his smiles as he saw how the man interacted with them.

It was early evening when they finished, and Yuuri proposed a short walk along the beach. Something to do before dinner.

Out of the window, the sunset gleamed in the sky, painting the usual blue with stripes of dark reds and oranges, seeping and mixing like watercolours. Yuuri saw the way Phichit gazed at it, momentarily lost in the beauty.

“It would look so beautiful in a photo, wouldn’t it?” Yuuri said.

Phichit nodded, agreeing. “It would.”

Yuuri grinned, bending to pick up the boxed camera from the table he had set it on. He held it out to his client, unable to contain the smirk that pulled at the corners of his mouth. “Lucky I got this then.”

Phichit narrowed his eyes, his movements laced with suspicion as he slowly took the box. “Should I be worried?”
“When have I ever given you cause to worry?”

Phichit looked ready to argue, but said nothing more. He gently tore open the box and gasped as the camera came into view. It was small in his hands, but seemed to fit perfectly, fingers slotting around the technology as if it was made to be. He turned it to look at it properly, taking in every fine little detail until he’d memorised the whole thing, then held it to his chest.

“Y-Yuuri?” Phichit stuttered, eyes gleaming with unshed tears.

Yuuri rubbed the back of his neck. “Well, you said you liked to take photos. I know you can’t put these online, but it’s something for you to continue, right?” He began to wonder if he had made the right choice, or if this would send Phichit along a path of deeper regret.

There was a click that tore him from his thoughts. He glanced up, seeing the camera turned to him, flash dim in the evening light. Yuuri was momentarily struck as Phichit settled the camera back down and flung himself at his bodyguard, trusting that Yuuri would catch him.

Yuuri did. He opened his arms to catch his client, caught in the middle of a tight hug. Phichit pulled him closer until his ribs ached with the pressure, then let go but stayed close.

“Thank you, Yuuri,” Phichit whispered, taking the camera back from the table and tinkering with the buttons. “Honestly, this means a lot. I know I can’t do a lot with it, but… I don’t think you quite know what you’ve done for me. You didn’t even have to.”

Unsure of what to say, Yuuri smiled and said, “It’s fine.”

There was a moment of silence as Phichit fiddled with some of the components of the camera, taking experimental photos of the room. Then he suddenly turned, grabbing Yuuri’s arm and pulling him out of the room. “Come on, before we miss the sunset!”

The beach was always busy in the evening. The crowds wanted to watch as the light of the burning sunset caught along the waves of the ocean, glittering under their rays. The stalls around the beach would open their doors to entice the people, smells of the fresh food battling with the salt of the sea.
Phichit rushed to the front, dragging Yuuri until their feet were sinking into the sand and the water
was up to their bare ankles. Yuuri wiggled his toes, a rush of nostalgia slamming into him as he
remembered the days of summer he spent just like this.

Phichit took countless photos of the sunset before them, his camera clicking as he mumbled to
himself about the next best angle, gasping as the sky darkened as time ticked by.

Crowds whispered behind them as they all basked in the glow. Yuuri was used to it by now, having
seen the same sunset from his birth. He never forgot how beautiful it was, but he didn’t stare as
others did. As a child, he spent most of his time watching the crowds rather than the colours of the
sky, finding their reactions more interesting than anything.

“You know,” Phichit hummed as he took another photo, “maybe I could get used to this place.”

Yuuri smiled, feeling something inside of him ease. He’d been worried about leaving Phichit when
he was still so unsure, still so new and scared of the life he was being forced to live. But his client
had eased after meeting his parents and seeing the place, even made his room his own much faster
than Yuuri had thought he would. At least now he knew he’d be leaving Phichit in good hands.

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The day came when Yuuri needed to leave. He’d told his parents and Yuuko that he was only
staying for a few days, just to make sure that his client settled and that everything was cared for.
As a safe house, they understood the need to leave as soon as possible. It didn’t make things easier
though.

He was packing his bags in Phichit’s room, having slept there since their arrival. Phichit didn’t
want to be alone, and Yuuri didn’t want to step foot in his room.

Phichit was watching carefully from where he sat beside the window, fiddling with his fingers and
not having said a word since Yuuri’s packing began.

Yuuri didn’t say anything to break the tense silence either. He wasn’t sure what there was to say.
Goodbye, he supposed, but that sounded too final. He’d be back to check on Phichit, and be in
contact with him when he could be while he directed the trouble elsewhere. He’d already given
Phichit a talk on safety, of not accepting any strange calls on the phone Yuuri had bought for him,
only to use it to contact Yuuri, no location, don’t go out of Hasetsu, if he needed help then to ask
Yuuko or Yuuri’s parents, or the woman who owned the dance studio and bar called Minako. Only them, no one else. Keep his head down, don’t talk to strangers, be wary of the tourists and don’t go online. He’d repeated the same words over and over again until Phichit could recite them off by heart.

But it still didn’t make Yuuri feel any better. He knew this was the safest place Phichit could be, and he’d made sure of that. His parents would care for him, his friends would keep him safe. But Yuuri wanted to be close, just to make sure that there wasn’t any sort of trap or any tourist in disguise. Dark thoughts crossed his mind, worries of what would happen as soon as he stepped a foot far enough away. The shooter would come back. Phichit was in danger.

But Yuuri had to remind himself that his client was safe. As his departure loomed closer, he needed to remind himself of it more and more often, even speak the words out loud to assure himself.

As he dropped his last gun into the bag, something made him pause. He took out the small pistol again, checking its magazine and taking out a box of ammo. He gently placed it beside Phichit.

“What are you doing?”

“My sister is a pretty good shot,” Yuuri began, the words slipping out slowly. “She’ll teach you how to use it properly.”

“Why do I need to?”

Yuuri gripped Phichit’s hand and opened it up for him to place the gun in his grip, moving his client’s fingers around the handle. “You won’t need to,” he assured. “But just in case. I’d rather you be prepared for something that’s never going to come, than vulnerable for something that is.”

Phichit opened his mouth to say something, but swallowed back the words. He nodded and traced his thumb along the metal, hesitant in his touch. “It is the Russian mafia, after all,” he laughed without humour.

“Right.” Yuuri began to point out the mechanics of the gun, showing the safety, the trigger, how to take the magazine out and where the sight was, how to clean and how to quickly use. “Mari will teach you more, but just so you know early on.”
“Do I need to sleep with it under my pillow?”

Yuuri shook his head. “If anyone is going to attack the safe house, they’re not likely to make it to your room before my parents put bullets into them.”

Phichit’s eyes widened, a gasp leaving his lips. “Your parents use guns?”

Yuuri chuckled. “Yep. Mum’s a sharpshooter, and dad’s better with melee weapons but is also pretty good at short range guns.”

“Wow. Your family is badass.”

“And you have this badass family protecting you.”

Phichit smirked. “Hell yeah.” He placed the gun back down gently, as if it would explode if given too much force, and asked, “So what are your plans? What are you going to do?”

“Disguise myself as you and travel the world,” Yuuri answered honestly. It was the basic of the plan, anyway. Draw out the shooter, direct their attention, and hopefully cut off the mafia’s interests in Phichit.

He knew how dangerous that sounded. He knew he was getting himself further into trouble, perhaps back himself into a corner until he couldn’t escape. He’d lain awake the night before wondering if this was where it all ended, if this was the last job he’d ever be able to take. But he’d promised to look after the person next to him, and something inside himself compelled him to jump down this rabbit hole with everything he had. He couldn’t quite explain why though.

“You’re going to get yourself killed,” Phichit hissed.

“I’m a professional, Phichit,” Yuuri assured. “I know what I’m getting myself into, and I know how to get myself out of it. I can protect myself.”

“While I’m here sitting comfortably?”
“That’s the plan.”

“Why don’t you lay low here too? They don’t know your face. They don’t know where you are. They’ll lose interest, and we can both just stay out of the way!”

“If I can convince them to stop chasing after you-”

Phichit shot up, scowling with all his might as he stormed to stand in front of Yuuri. “You won’t! I witnessed something, and they won’t let me go just because you ask them to. I asked you to guard me, not to die for me!”

Yuuri almost told Phichit that that was what a bodyguard was. As soon as he signed the contract, Yuuri had acknowledged that Phichit’s life was more important than his own, and he had willingly done it. If a rain of bullets came their way, Yuuri would not hesitate to place himself in front of Phichit and stand there until the bullets stopped. He’d known of others in the company that had passed on a job – it was a dangerous career path, but Yuuri had known that the moment he thought of the career choice.

“I’m not going to get myself into that much danger, Phichit,” Yuuri said instead. He pointed to where the phone he had given his client was sitting on the table, beside the camera he had also bought. “If there’s a problem, you know my number. You only accept calls from that number, got it?” He waited for Phichit to nod. “If I am calling from another phone, I won’t leave a voice mail. I’ll call you until four rings have passed, hang up, and do it once more on four rings. On the third call, then you can pick up, alright? That’s the signal if I’m on a different phone, okay?”

Phichit nodded every time Yuuri said something, his teeth clenched until his jaw was trembling. “Okay.”

Yuuri moved forwards and placed a hand on the other’s shoulder. “I’ll call you as often as I can, and I’ll update you on everything. This will all be over before you know it.”

Phichit wanted to argue, but turned his head away and nodded. “Okay.”

“You’re safe here, Phichit. You don’t have to worry anymore.”
“I’m going to be worrying about you this whole time now!”

“I’ll be fine.”

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Yuuri didn’t spend a long time saying goodbye to his parents. A quick hug and a promise of returning soon, he left to take a train towards Tokyo to begin the preparations for his plan. Yuuko and Minako were busy – they were used to him leaving without saying goodbye by now.

He changed into a shaped wig resembling Phichit’s at Tokyo station, wearing the clothes Phichit had worn the day they met. Glasses off, hood up, slinking his frame until he was hunched. He looked around with intention, making sure the cameras caught his nerves, flinching every time someone passed.

Under his jacket, his guns pressed against his ribs. More weapons were hidden in the bag slung over his shoulder, fake documents in a folder between them.

It wasn’t long until he felt eyes watching his movements. Yuuri felt their unmistakable spark, the unease he had when they raked over his form. He hadn’t expected it so soon, and it worried him that there were people already waiting in Tokyo. How they had known he and Phichit were in the country, he didn’t know. But it meant he could draw them away much faster than he had anticipated.

He glanced backwards, keeping most of his face under the shadows of the hood. He couldn’t see anyone watching, no one rushing through the crowds towards him. But that didn’t mean anything. The whole hallway was crowded until he could barely elbow a path through. Anyone could be looking without him seeing.

He turned back forwards and fought his way to the mouth of the hall, anticipation in his step as he walked at a brisk pace. He listened for any following footsteps, but anything that could have been was drowned out with the chatter of all those around him, the hundreds of feet thumping against the tiles already, the swish of clothing. Cool air whipped above their heads as he drew closer to the exit, gripping his bag tightly in his clenched hands.

What were the odds that there was someone waiting outside? He wondered. High, he thought. He doubted they came in ones, but at least twos. Adrenaline coursed through his blood, and his steps
picked up the pace. He raced up the steps two at a time, stumbling as someone who hadn’t been trained would. He looked back just to see if anyone was following.

A man was. He had a hood over his own head, pale face shrouded in the darkness of his hoodie as Yuuri’s was, face cast up to watch him carefully. He followed the same path, and paused as their eyes connected. Yuuri wasn’t sure if he recognised him – he wasn’t the shooter in the shoe shop, but could he have been the one following from all the way back in Detroit? Yuuri didn’t linger on the question for long.

He turned back and ran as quickly as he could up the steps, breaching the mouth of the hall and out into the street. A few cursed at him as he pushed passed, sure that he had elbowed some. The sky opened up overhead, grey over skyscrapers, dots of rain falling. He glanced quickly around, prepared for a fight if anyone was waiting. But there was no one.

Loud footsteps thumped behind him, drawing closer. He dashed off again.

Tokyo was busy, the late morning drawing out the lunch hunters, business men and women littering the pavements. Yuuri weaved his way around them as he rushed in any direction, his breath puffing before his face in his haste.

He could still hear the chasing footsteps behind him. About the same distance, but no longer hiding. People cried after them, angry words rising in unison above them.

Yuuri quickly glanced over his shoulder, catching the moment his pursuer crashed by a couple in his chase, keeping his shrouded gaze on Yuuri’s back. As he shifted, his coat snagged on the holster at his belt, displaying the pistol hiding on the inside of his trousers. He was slowly getting closer with each step, his long strides overtaking Yuuri’s, the bag on Yuuri’s shoulder weighing him down slightly.

He turned back around. New plan then. He wasn’t as well acquainted with these streets as he was with those of Detroit – what he had done in the shoe shop would not work as well here. Best not to get cornered in an alley, he thought.

A street crossing flashed green for walkers before him, the cars revving ready for when they could go. Yuuri slowed, keeping his eyes trained on the light of the walking man. It flickered to amber, warning stragglers, and he pushed himself to sprint once more.
The cars slowly rolled forwards just as Yuuri reached the road. He kept his gaze trained on the street before him, body poised for the one driver that was going too quickly as he dashed before the cars. Horns beeped loudly, breaks screeching. He glanced back once he had reached the other side, the man following stuck on the other side as the cars sped off once more. He slammed the button on the light post, waiting for a gap in the cars.

Yuuri’s heart thundered against his chest, his lungs aching with his breath. He didn’t stop. He ran as fast as he could down the street, eager to close the distance between them.

He didn’t stop until he’d been running for half an hour, ending in the lobby of a hotel. He’d not seen the pursuer since the crossing, but he knew it would not be the last he saw of him. If he was mafia, as Yuuri suspected, then they might hijack some of the cameras around the streets to search him out – perhaps they didn’t even do that. Perhaps it was something that only happened in movies and stories. But he didn’t want to take any chances.

He paid for a small room on the second third floor in a persona’s name, hoping to take a quick break and search his laptop for more clues and leads. See how the multiple Phichit’s all over the world were doing.

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A quick break turned into something longer, up until the night began to descend outside and the neighbours on either side of his room were leaving to search for an evening meal. Police sirens blared through the thin window, countless footsteps clacking against the pavements stories below.

He sat in the darkness, the glare of the laptop illuminating his face as he scrolled through his database. His Phichits were doing well, though he felt suspicion lace up his spine when one had been cut off in America. That particular one had been hiding low in Detroit, and had used Phichit’s card just the day before. Now it was gone, the hotel room it had booked been taken by another, card lost. So the mafia had caught up with that one.

He didn’t let himself think that it meant they were safe. Just because one Phichit had been caught didn’t mean that the mafia weren’t also travelling here. Whoever had chased him through Tokyo station clearly thought he was Phichit, and the sighting would bring them here. Unless Phichit had angered another group, then it meant one thing – the mafia were on the way.

He’d need to lead them away again. Let them find him in Tokyo and perhaps getting onto another plane, set far away. By the time they figured out he wasn’t Phichit, Yuuri would have them on the other side of the world with no clue of where he was.
His parents safe house never advertised their name, Katsuki not a name existing in the Hasetsu region, known only by a select few who would guard it with their lives. His parents and sister had changed their names and burned their past years and years ago, when the safe house had first come into existence. Yuuri had adopted it again as a bodyguard, knowing that any of his clients wouldn’t be found if taken to his family. He was glad of it, because after seeing Phichit spend a day and a night in the company building, they would suspect he had a bodyguard. The shoe shop shooter must have suspected it now after their exchange.

They’d never find Phichit. Yuuri would do everything he could to make sure of it.

He hadn’t called Phichit yet, not since leaving. He knew the man must have been pacing and worrying and waiting by the phone for a call. Yuuri wished he could calm his nerves, but Phichit’s assurance wasn’t worth his life.

He sent out another Phichit, taking a plane right at that moment and heading to Australia. It wouldn’t play decoy for long, but it would stop them from looking elsewhere for a while.

He yawned and stretched his arms above his head, feeling his joints pop. Perhaps it would be worth laying low for a little while and sleeping while he could.

He made sure the door was locked and his guns on the bedside table before he lay down on the bed, clothes still on and the covers barely moved, and slipped easily into a light slumber. The noises outside didn’t completely die, a couple giggling outside the door jerking him awake, or the sound of the room service trays clinking down the hall breaking into his dreams.

The adrenaline coursing through him still created difficult dreams. Shots sounded around him, dulled in his slumbering state, as if he was submerged in water. The chuckle he had heard from the shoe shop through the bullet holes whispered beside his ears, blood trickling to the floor from above his dream self. He looked up, only to see a void of darkness and nothing, with no end in sight. His wrists burned. He looked down.

The bandages slipped off, the letters on his wrist pulsing and slithering along his skin, growing until almost his arm had been taken up. Even after years, he still didn’t know what they said, what name it was in his fate, and he didn’t want to know. These letters could erase themselves for all he cared. He scrambled to replace the bandages, an urgency coursing through him – he didn’t know why, but he knew he couldn’t let the letters grow enough to reach his heart.
He tore his shirt off, bare foot touching the pool of blood, and tried to scratch the name away as it curled around his arm, reaching his chest.

His heart hammered, almost as if it was about to explode, thumping harder every inch the name grew.

The chuckling around him grew until it echoed louder than the drops of blood, images of those blue eyes blinding his vision until he didn’t know he was scratching anymore.

His movements were slow, the names growing faster, and he knew there was nothing he could do. He moved to shield his ears instead, not wanting to listen to the shooter as he laughed at his pain. The darkness around him seemed to be closing in as the name crept along his skin, centimetres away from touching his heart. He could feel it sliding underneath his skin.

He awoke just as the names hit his heart, a shockwave of adrenaline. He jumped up, sweat on his brow, skin pale and cold. He glanced around the room wildly, only to see he was alone, door still closed, still dark outside.

The digital clock beside the bed read 2:23, a little later than he expected. He rubbed his face with his clammy hands and urged his heart to calm down. Looking down, he saw that the bandages were still in place. He gave a little peek beneath them. The names were still inked on his skin, still the same size that they had always been.

He tightened them again and moved to the bathroom, closing the door behind him. He didn’t bother switching on the bathroom light, instead leaving the room to be illuminated by the glow of the light above the mirror. He braced his hands against the sink and hunched down, calming his breathing and his racing heart for a moment. The sweat on his skin turned cool and bumps formed on the surface, sending a chill through his body. He ignored it.

He hadn’t had a nightmare about the names for a long time. But he hadn’t slept well the past few days, and with his worry of his new client and the situation, he wasn’t surprised he’d had one now. He’d taken careful preparations, and yet it was twice now that the mafia had found their location somehow – the first at the shop, and second in Tokyo station. There was a way that they were keeping ahead, and Yuuri couldn’t quite figure out how.

Something made his heart thump once loudly, his breathing stop. His muscles locked. Only for a second, one second of preparation as if he was ready to fight something he hadn’t seen. He didn’t have time to wonder before there was a loud crash.
His head snapped to the bathroom door, seeing it still intact. Beyond that, he heard the splinter of wood and the crunching of glass. There were multiple footsteps, stomping their way into the room, the click of a trigger, angry words spoken in another language.

Yuuri covered his mouth, evening out his breathing, as he crepted backwards to press himself against the wall behind the toilet.

It was a small room, with a shower, a toilet and a sink, nowhere to hide, no lock on the door. The door touched the wall when opened, so he would not be able to hide behind it as he had done before. He moved to stand on the other side of the toilet, out of the way if they decided to rain bullets through the door.

There was silence for a moment, the only sound his own shallow breathing and the ruffle of his clothes. Then someone stepped on glass, shards broken underneath the weight, and he heard the sound of his guns sliding over the wood of the bedside table as someone took them, the keys of his laptop pressed.

He’d backed up everything he had, and made sure the most important ones needed passwords. They wouldn’t find out much, he thought, and they wouldn’t find Phichit anywhere on those files.

There was a single word in what Yuuri thought might have been Russian. He didn’t know the language, but knew enough of what it sounded like to be able to recognise it. Somehow they had found him again. He thanked everything he was that he had left Phichit at the safe house.

He listened to the footsteps, counting them. Three pairs, he thought. One had smaller strides, one walked slowly, the other a lackey if his rushing after every barked order meant anything. The wardrobe doors were harshly opened and closed, drawers thrown open, window broken. Sprinkles of glass rained down onto the carpet.

Yuuri knew it wasn’t long before they decided to search the bathroom. They were probably distracted with his laptop, trying to find anything that could link them to Phichit rather than the bodyguard he had hired.

Something was said in Russian again, a chuckle followed.

Yuuri’s body stilled. He recognised that voice, had only dreamed it minutes before, would forever
remember it. He pushed himself harder against the wall, frantically searching for somewhere to hide or to get the advantage. He moved closer to the right wall. If the shooter was going to do the same as last time, bullets would pierce the door any moment.

A few seconds passed before he heard slow footsteps. Shadows moved under the door until two columns blocked the light. Someone was standing before the door. Yuuri hunched a little, prepared to protect his face for when the bullets and the splinters of wood came.

But it didn’t. He didn’t hear any click of a trigger, no scrapings of metal. There was a tense second as he waited, all sound on the other side dead, no shuffle in the shadows under the door. Yuuri wondered if he had made some sort of mistake.

Until he heard the ruffle of clothes. If it was the shooter, he’d be wearing an expensive suit, perhaps the same jacket and three piece he had met the man in. The door handle clicked as the man grabbed it, and it turned slowly, each judder of the metal making Yuuri’s heart stutter.

And then the door opened. Light cascaded in just a slither until it opened up more, slowly, almost teasingly. For a moment, Yuuri couldn’t see the man on the other side, only a silhouette as his eyes adjusted. He narrowed his eyes and shielded his face, desperately searching for where the gun would be aimed.

But there was no gun. As Yuuri’s eyes made out the form, he saw the shooter without his gun, standing tall and proud in the doorway. A smirk rested on his lips, blue eyes sparkling through the darkness as they bore into Yuuri. Behind him, two men Yuuri vaguely recognised moved about the room, cleaning and blocking the room’s only exits.

Yuuri turned back to the man before him. He moved from his hunch to stand tall, to glare back at the man with all his might, made stronger without the fear of being shot immediately. He gripped his hands into fists, eyes connecting as he stared the man down.

The chuckle sounded, sending sparks down Yuuri’s spine as it echoed against the tiles in the small space. The other man’s eyes raked over his form, hand gripped tightly on the handle of the door, knowing that he stood between Yuuri and any hope he had of escaping.

He should have taken the guns, Yuuri thought. He should have kept them in their holsters or taken them to the bathroom. At least then he could shoot the grin right from the man’s face, taking away his cocky attitude. For some reason, it made Yuuri’s blood boil more than anything had. His gaze snapped to the man’s upper arm, seeing a coat intact and no blood. Underneath that, he wondered what the wound he had given him was like, how deep it was, if the bandages were enough to
become a nuisance.

The man before him cocked his head to the side, his silver fringe fluttering against his pale skin. He opened his mouth, showing perfectly straight white teeth, and spoke in a voice that had Yuuri both shivering and burning with rage.

“Found you.”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for reading this chapter and I hope you liked it! There's a promise for some drama and foundation for the real angst to come after this :3

If you'd like to keep up with updates, you can find me on tumblr

here
Names.

Chapter Notes

Chapter beta read by whynikkiwhy, who encouraged me to write this as quickly as I could so she could read it.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

They tied him to a chair, hands locked behind his back, joints already beginning to ache. The cuffs had begun to dig into his skin, almost rubbed red raw from the metal where his bandages didn’t cover. The door had been closed, unable to lock from the bullet they had used to break in. One stood in front of it, the man Yuuri suspected might have been the man running after him through the Tokyo streets.

The other lackey was small, and Yuuri knew he’d seen him before. He wasn’t quite sure where, only had an image at the back of his mind, blurry. As chance meeting, he suspected, lasting only seconds. He had blond hair tucked under his hood, standing in the corner with his hands in his pockets and head bowed away.

But the man Yuuri was paying most attention to was the one sat in a chair opposite him, one leg crossing the other, leaning his elbows on the arm chair and staring just as intently at Yuuri. He said nothing. He hadn’t said anything since he’d cuffed Yuuri, seconds passing slowly in his observation.

Yuuri said nothing either, only engaged in the staring competition that had started between them. Even as his joints began to ache, he didn’t move to relieve the pain, knowing the man before him would find pleasure in Yuuri’s discomfort, perhaps see it as a weakness.

The boy in the back was the one to break the silence, exhaling loudly before he shouted something in Russian. The man before Yuuri broke their eye contact as he turned to see the younger man.

Yuuri observed their exchange though he didn’t understand anything that came out of their mouths. They seemed familiar with one another, but the younger man was getting angrier with every word from the silver haired man’s mouth.

With one final order from the man before Yuuri, the blond huffed and retreated back to his corner.
When the shoe shop shooter turned back to Yuuri, he broke the silence between them. “Do you speak English?”

Yuuri contemplated not replying for a while. He wondered what the other man would do if he acted as though he didn’t, if it would lead him out of this mess or get him killed. He decided it wasn’t worth the risk. “Yes.”

The man nodded, as if he approved of the answer. His gaze scanned over Yuuri once more, weighing the situation. “Where is he?”

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

Yuuri flinched, expecting some sort of attack for what he knew was an obvious lie. Guns lay on his table, a bag filled with them underneath the bed, a heavily secured laptop – of course he knew something. But nothing came. No slap across his face, no punch to the nose, no tipping of his chair, no gun shot. Instead, the man before him smirked.

The silver-haired man leaned forwards in the chair, placing his elbows on his knees as he got close enough to gaze properly into Yuuri’s eyes. Yuuri didn’t look away.

“We’ve gone about this all wrong,” he said, his breath ghosting over Yuuri’s face. “Let me introduce myself. My name is Viktor Nikiforov. And you are?”

“Not stupid.” The answer made the man falter, and Yuuri rushed to speak, happy with the advantage he had gained himself. “I don’t care for your name, and you don’t care for mine. So get to what you want.”

Viktor raised an eyebrow, leaning back in his chair as he contemplated the situation. “Do you like the sport of ice skating?”

“No particularly,” Yuuri replied.

“A skater has gone missing.”
“Shame.”

“His name is Phichit Chulanont.”

“And you’ve tied to me to a chair because a skater’s gone missing?” Yuuri chuckled, rolling his eyes. “Do you think I took him?”

Viktor’s eyes sparked, the blue narrowing as his mouth set into a frown. Good, Yuuri thought, he was annoying the man. He knew that it would bring more danger to him, but he could push Viktor into making a mistake. Perhaps he could get the Russian to reveal something.

“Where is he?”

“Like I’d know where a missing ice skater is.”

“Where is he?” Viktor repeated.

“I don’t know.”

“Where is he?”

Yuuri glared with all his strength, subtly pulling at the hand cuffs around his wrists. They pushed at the bandages, he could feel them slipping slightly. The cuffs weren’t loosening. “I don’t have anything to do with his disappearance.”

Viktor sighed and took out his gun from the holsters underneath his fitted jacket. He aimed the sights at Yuuri’s head, placing his finger against the trigger. “Yuri, check the man’s bags.”

Yuuri flinched, hearing his name on the man’s lips. But he felt his heart jump as the young teen from the corner of the room grumbled something and moved towards where the bags were littered on the hotel bed. Yuuri eased the expression from his face, hoping that the man hadn’t seen anything.
Viktor didn’t seem to have noticed the reaction from Yuuri. Instead, he played with the gun in his hands, keeping it aimed at Yuuri as he waved it and swapped hands.

“What am I looking for?” the boy behind Yuuri asked.

“Anything to show us where Phichit is, or the name of our guest.”

It didn’t take long for the young Russian to find the documents in Yuuri’s bag, loaded with fake passports, fake licences, certificates and tickets. None held Yuuri’s real name, those real documents stashed safely away in his computer, locked under password upon password.

The younger Yuri began to place the fake identities on the floor before Viktor, dozens of Yuuri’s faces staring back from the paper or plastic. Viktor spent some time glancing over them all, though Yuuri wasn’t sure what about them would mean anything to him.

“Which one of these is your real name?” Viktor asked.

“Why do you want to know it so badly?” Yuuri countered.

“Why do you have so many fake identities?”

“What does it matter?”

“Did you give Phichit this many fake documents?”

“Why do you think I know him?”

Viktor paused, gritting his teeth. He waved the gun again, drawing Yuuri’s gaze back to it. “You know, this could go badly for you.”

Yuuri shrugged as best as he could with the cuffs on. “It’ll go badly anyway. I don’t have the answers you’re looking for.”
Yuuri contained a shiver running up his spine as Viktor stood, making his way to the bags on the bed. He moved so that he was on the other side, facing Yuuri, watching him as he opened the zips. Yuuri refrained from showing any expression on his face, even as he saw the bag Viktor was opening.

“Strange,” the man said, pulling out a wig. “Because this seems like the exact wig Phichit was wearing just a few days ago, outside your company building.”

Yuuri didn’t reply. The room fell into silence as he thought about the situation, of how he could get himself out of it. He attempted to loosen the cuffs again, but stopped when they chimed and echoed in the room. Viktor smirked, one eyebrow raised.

“I’m going to be honest,” he told Yuuri. “All we know is that Mr Chulanont retreated to your company building, and you came out with him disguised. You’re his hired bodyguard, yes?”

Again, Yuuri didn’t reply. Instead, he schooled his features until there wasn’t anything passing his expression. He’d had enough training in it, knowing that some situations could be diffused with a lack of response.

“And yet here you are,” Viktor continued. “Without your client, alone in a hotel room, facing against some very dangerous people. Your client has told you about us, yes?”

Yuuri remained silent.

“Then you know who we are. Are you really prepared to stand between us and your client?” Viktor dropped the wig and ran his hand through the bag, exploring the different disguises, some that had already been used and others that had yet to be. Yuuri knew if he escaped this, that bag was useless to him now. “He’s just a client to you. Why would you need to place yourself in danger for some stranger?” Viktor took Yuuri’s phone from the bedside table, scrolling through it. Yuuri knew he’d not find anything – he’d memorised Phichit’s number, and knew to delete it from his history if he ever did call his client. The most the man would find would be the number to the train station when he called to secure some tickets. Viktor dropped it on the bed. “Don’t you have a family?”

Yuuri watched the man carefully, keeping their eyes connected, as Viktor slowly made his way back around the bed. His gun was still aimed at Yuuri, the barrel closer than he liked it to be. Viktor sat back in his chair, resting against the back of it and crossing his legs.
“Parents?” he asked, tilting his head to the side. “Friends?” His eyes flickered to Yuuri’s arms, not quite able to see his bandaged wrists from where he sat. “A partner? A soulmate?”

Yuuri wanted to curse at himself – even in this situation, at this exact moment, the word ‘soulmate’ burned rage within him. He fought hard to make sure it didn’t show on his expression.

“Have you met your soulmate yet? Are they waiting for you at home, ready for your return with a table full of food?” Viktor’s voice chimed cockiness, deep and swirling all around Yuuri’s head. “What are they going to think when you don’t return home? Are you willing to ruin someone’s life just for a stranger?”

Yuuri took deep breaths, pushing all the words out of his mind. Soulmate. Enemy. His soulmate likely wouldn’t care. Who knew? Perhaps what people had said was true – perhaps eventually, he’d be killed by his soulmate, or he’d kill them instead. He stared back at Viktor, keeping the biting words from his tongue.

“He keeps his names bandaged,” the younger Yuri muttered from the corner of the room, accent heavy. “I don’t think he’s found either of them.”

Viktor took a moment to process the information before he said, “So you’re willing to ruin someone’s future with their soulmate for a client instead. I think that might be more cruel. Destroying someone’s chance of love and happiness for something so small.”

Yuuri could contain it no longer. He felt the words bubbling from his chest before he could stop them, his voice dripping with venom as he said, “They wouldn’t care.”

There must have been something in his voice, or something about the words, because Viktor almost seemed to pause, eyes wide as he repeated them over and over in his head. Tension slipped heavily into the air, a silence so deafening that Yuuri could no longer hear his own heartbeat. Years’ worth of feeling lacing only three words, so powerful that it hitched his own breath. If anything, he thought, he was saving someone’s future. He was saving three people – Phichit, himself and his unknown soulmate and enemy. He threw himself into danger to save three people. He could be proud of that. Prouder than others would have him believe.

There was a brief moment, a flicker of time that Yuuri confused himself. He witnessed as Viktor’s own gaze flashed quickly to his own wrists, covered underneath the long sleeves of his suit jacket and shirt, cufflinks keeping them closed tightly. But it was so quickly Yuuri couldn’t be sure he
had seen anything at all. At the back of his mind, he wondered that if it had happened, what it meant. Perhaps Viktor had someone waiting for him at home, counting the hours until his return with food on the table. Or perhaps he didn’t have anyone at all, someone yet to meet as Yuuri had. But as the thought struck him, Yuuri threw it away. It wasn’t any of his business what this man had. He didn’t care.

Viktor tapped his free hand on the arm of the chair, thumping a rhythm that bounced off the walls throughout the room. “Fair enough,” the man muttered, almost to himself. “Those situations can be… complicated. I’ll ask once more. What’s your name?”

Yuuri said nothing.

There was a second of hesitation before Viktor rose from his chair sharply, almost making Yuuri flinch. “Yuri, guard him,” he said, followed by a few words in Russian. He turned back to Yuuri, his eyes once more cold and narrowed. “I have some things to do. When I’m back, I expect you to answer all my questions.”

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Yuuri wasn’t sure how much time had passed, only that it had gone by so slowly. With nothing more to do than sit in a chair and stare at a small Russian guard, there wasn’t much to distract his rapidly tiring mind.

The room was quiet, and it had been for a while. His guard, another Yuri, hadn’t said anything. He dragged a chair before the door, and must have gotten bored after some time because he took out his phone and began to play on it. Yuuri wasn’t quite sure what – he could have been gathering intel or playing a game for all he could hear.

He’d tried to drag the guard into a conversation, more for the promise of some information than to try and trick the boy. He’d asked who he was, where Viktor had gone, even asked what was to become of him once Viktor came back. From what he could observe, Yuri wasn’t mafia like the others – or, at least, not a full-fledged one. The others had been on their guard and were trained. Little Yuri hadn’t even cast his eyes towards Yuuri for what seemed like hours.

It was how Yuuri slowly got the cuffs looser and looser as time slipped by. Ever so carefully, he moved his wrists and fingers until he could feel the bonds and the metal bending underneath his strength and persistence. In turn, it was digging into his skin, and he could feel the warmth of blood. The bandages would soak it up, he knew, but as time passed, it became more painful.
He was breaking into sweat from the effort and he had to resist groaning in pain with every twist of his wrist. He wasn’t sure how close he was to being able to slip out of them either – without being able to see the situation, he couldn’t gauge it. But he persisted.

“You’re not like them,” he said once he knew his voice wouldn’t give away what it was he was doing. After what he thought was hours, he’d tried every method he could without giving himself or Phichit away. Perhaps another path was better to explore. “You’re so young. How old are you?”

The little guard didn’t look up, but Yuuri knew that his words got to him. His lips pursed and he glared down at his phone, the first response Yuuri had managed to get since he had started.

“So small too,” he pushed. “You probably can’t do much. Is that why you let him walk all over you?”

The other Yuri didn’t say anything still, but he was tapping the screen with more force than he had before. Not trained, Yuuri thought. He hadn’t been taught on how to control his expressions, how not to let words get to him. A trainee perhaps? But then why was a trainee guarding what they thought was an important prisoner? There lay a lot of trust between them, Yuuri knew. He’d seen it in the way they spoke to one another, in the familiarity Viktor spoke Yuri’s name. A younger brother perhaps. Or a long friendship.

“Do you always let him order you around?” Yuuri paused. His guard didn’t reply, but he saw the way his bottom lip twitched, as if ready for a bellow. “I don’t know who you both are, but even I can tell that he’s treating you like his dog.”

Finally, the boy looked up, his fringe obscuring one half of his face. He glared with an intensity Yuuri knew was reserved for teenagers, baring his teeth like some beast. “Shut up,” he spat.

“Why? He’s got you guarding a man who can’t escape. Anyone could do it. He could even leave me alone in this room and come back days later, knowing I’d still be here. You’re a little useless, then, aren’t you?”

Yuri stood suddenly, the chair flying backwards until it slammed against the wall. “I said shut up!”

“I don’t even know why you’re guarding me. I haven’t done anything,” Yuuri goaded, spitting back until his voice was low enough to vibrate though the air. “I don’t have time to waste with you.
I have better things to do.”

“You’re hiding a target. Don’t even try to fucking deny it.”

“Oh, language, Yuri,” Yuuri chuckled. “Don’t they teach you not to talk like that in school?”

The boy opened his mouth to shout something, but closed it and decided to storm over instead. He stood in front of Yuuri, shoving their faces so close until their noses almost touched. At this distance, Yuuri could see how green the boy’s eyes were, how much rage burned inside of those flecks, how his pale skin almost seemed to freckle over his cheeks, how soft his thin blond hair was. As he placed a hand on the back of Yuuri’s chair, Yuuri couldn’t help but follow his wrists, seeing a flash of black ink, hidden under loose sleeves.

“I fucking told that idiot my idea,” he spat, almost loud enough to pierce Yuuri’s ears from this distance. “I told him that we should look at your wrists and hunt down your soulmate and see then if you can decide between your client or your soulmate. I said that’s the best way to deal with someone like you.”

Yuuri hid the sickening feeling rising in his stomach, his wrists itching at the mention. To be touched in such an intimate place, a patch of skin he had not touched save changing bandages for years – he wanted to throw up at the thought.

“But he thinks we can get through to you with words. He thinks we don’t have to go through so much effort to track someone like that down when we could deal with you right here. But I still think it’s a good idea. So, what’ve you got hiding beneath those bandages?”

Yuuri felt his heart racing as the Russian boy moved to stand behind his chair. The sweat on his brow broke, pouring down his face. He couldn’t contain his fear anymore. He gritted his teeth and pulled at the cuffs, trying to break free. They wouldn’t break.

He felt Yuri’s hands touch his wrists, a mutter about the blood, and the air brushed his skin as he felt the bandage moving.

He stood up as quickly as he could, a surge of adrenaline breaking him from his bondages, the cuffs cracking under the force. He jumped from the chair and spun to stand before the retreating teenager.
“Don’t you dare touch them!” he shouted as loudly as he could, cradling his wrists to his chest and making sure the bandages were secured.

The teenager retreated until he was stood on the other side of the bed, a glare replaced with shock and fear.

Too preoccupied with his wrists was he that he hadn’t noticed the hotel door open again.

“V-Viktor!” Yuri called.

Yuuri glanced up, holding tightly onto the bandages, throwing a glare towards the Russians at the door. Their eyes connected for the briefest of moments before Viktor’s gaze flickered down to where Yuuri was cradling his wrists, some of the dried blood clinging to the tight bandages. He turned back to the younger Yuri and growled something in their language.

Yuuri could almost hear the anger inside the words he didn’t understand. They bounced off the walls and the power in the man’s voice almost made him want to cower. But he remained strong, attempting to calm down his heart as he watched the three men in the room with him. His names burned on his skin, throbbing along his muscles as the sweat beaded around his temples. The bile at the back of his throat began to ease away.

Viktor and Yuri argued, the teen’s voice rising until he was almost screaming, while Viktor’s stayed at the same level. Yuuri took the moment to retreat, to look around and catch sight of his weapons. They glittered under the sunlight of the morning, cascading in through the window. But they were too far away, on the bed beside the boy. Viktor’s gun shone in his grip. Yuuri knew it would take only a second for the man to aim and shoot, much less than it would take for him to run across the room and take his own guns and aim. Even with their distraction.

Perhaps if he took the younger one hostage, worked his own way out of the room with his gun aimed at the young boy. He wasn’t sure how close these two were, but there must have been some conscience in Viktor.

“Sit down.”

Yuuri looked up, flinching slightly when he saw Viktor’s gun already aimed at him. So the plan wouldn’t be worth much now, he thought. He hesitated, thinking over everything. They’d likely make his restraints stronger this time. He wouldn’t be able to escape. He glanced out of the
window. Three floors up, and with his wrists cut and aching, he’d likely break something on the way down. The guns were too far away. Viktor’s was already aimed at him. There wasn’t anything strong enough in the room that could withstand a bullet, so he had no shield. One against three – he could probably take on Yuri easily, but the other two had guns, and Yuri could probably grab his own before Yuuri could.

“Sit down,” Viktor repeated, the command in his voice not leaving much more for Yuuri to think.

Yuuri obeyed, and sat still as they tied new cuffs around his already hurt wrists. They were tightened until they were even more uncomfortable, any movement rubbing against irritated skin.

Yuuri could almost suffocate in the tension that weighed heavily above him. He wasn’t sure what they had argued about, only that he wondered if it was about the name on his wrists. He didn’t care if they hunted the person down – anyone who was his enemy could take care of themselves. But he didn’t need the mafia pitying him as well, didn’t need anyone to see his life story because of a few letters. He didn’t want anyone to see them. Never again.

Viktor sat before him once more, keeping the gun carefully aimed the whole time, his blue eyes roaming over Yuuri slowly as timed ticked by.

It was only as the man sat down that Yuuri noticed a file in the man’s free hand. It was plain brown paper, with white sheets inside. Yuuri had seen plenty like it in his time in the company, but this one seemed surprisingly lacking. However, the more he looked, the more he noticed. He felt his blood run cold when he saw the picture that was looking back at him.

It was himself. He stared back at him, glasses along the bridge of his nose, the same dark thick hair on his head, face expressionless and his posture straight. He recognised it immediately as the profile picture he took when he first entered the company five years ago.

He turned his glare back up at the man sitting before him. There wasn’t a smirk on the man’s lips as he thought there would be, only a dying anger from an earlier argument.

“Yuuri Katsuki,” Viktor said, the words slipping slowly as if he wanted to savour the taste of the name. He opened the file, showing a document that looked similar to the one he had filled out in his training in the company. Complete with his name in English, date of birth, and a list of his clients, past and present. Yuuri felt both relief and anger burning inside of him – anger that they had somehow taken the information so easily, and relief that the only document they could get didn’t include some more intimate details, such as his birth place, the full agreement between him and his client, and anything before his life at the company.
At best, all Viktor knew now was his name, his age, and that he and Phichit were in fact connected. No details on his life, no details that could lead them to his client. But Yuuri still wondered how the man go it.

“I’m sure I’m pronouncing that wrong,” Viktor added, turning to the teen. “Another Yuri! How fantastic.” The teen grumbled something and glared harder at Yuuri. Viktor turned back. “Japanese, I’m assuming? Though you speak English very well.” There was a pause as he read over the little he had been able to get. “Where were you born?”

Yuuri grit his teeth together, saying nothing.

“Were you first generation American? It says nothing about your family. Did they pass away?”

Yuuri glared harder. That wasn’t important, was it? Why wasn’t Viktor saying anything about the fact he had obviously lied? Phichit’s name was right there, under current clients, and yet this man hadn’t said anything about it yet. Yuuri decided not to say anything either. If the man wanted to play, then that Yuuri would play too.

“According to this, you didn’t have a life before the company,” Viktor continued. “We could find no birth certificate, no one called Yuuri Katsuki anywhere. Well, there was one, living in the slums of Tokyo. But his death certificate came up with his name. I don’t suppose you died three years ago, did you? You certainly don’t look eighty years old.” He waited for an answer, but when none came, he moved on. “Before your initiation into the company, you didn’t exist.”

Yuuri could feel relief burning within his lungs. He knew that the destruction of their past would be efficient – his parents wouldn’t have been able to form such a successful safe house if it wasn’t for brilliant security. But it still felt good knowing that his life and anything connecting to the safe house was long gone, untraceable.

“Were you a child of the streets, perhaps?” Viktor asked. “Maybe you were abandoned by your mother at a young age, no idea who your father was, left to wander the streets until someone at the company picked you up?”

How wrong he was, Yuuri thought. Yuuri had been brought up the best way he could be, with a warm home and loving family, food always on the table. But he wasn’t about to tell this man that. He swallowed away his words.
Viktor said, “Not that it matters. You’re a very good bodyguard.” He traced the names on the list with his finger, reading each one carefully as if he knew every single one in person. “In your five years, you’ve had twenty-three clients, the longest for a term of nine months, the shortest for three hours. You completed all of them. Why haven’t you gone into a more permanent contract? Surely you must be the target of quite a few influential people by now? If we hadn’t met in such a way, I might have hired you.”

Yuuri took a deep breath in through his nose, stopping himself from telling Viktor he wouldn’t have accepted it. To guard such a man, someone who hunted down innocents and did who knew what? No, he wouldn’t have done that, would never do that.

“Though, you’ve not accepted a job like this before. This is quite a bit more dangerous.”

Finally they were getting somewhere, Yuuri thought. Finally Viktor would ask about Phichit. Yuuri readied himself.

“It’s ideal, isn’t it? With no information on your past or your family, no one can hurt them.”

Yuuri faltered, feeling his heart stutter inside his chest.

Viktor closed the file, placing it on his lap as he looked back up to meet Yuuri’s gaze. “We can’t do anything against anyone you love,” he said. “We have no blackmail, no threats, nothing we can do to coerce you in such a way. Not that I would, it’s such an underhanded method. Why do that, when I can get you to tell me everything I need with you before me?”

“I’m trained to withstand torture,” Yuuri decided to say, knowing he no longer needed to hide it.

“Oh, I’m sure. But that wasn’t what I was thinking. Well, beyond this, of course.”

Before Yuuri could understand his words, Viktor pulled the trigger. The bullet flew through his arm, slicing through his top and his flesh, burning its way through until it came out the other side and stopped in the wall. Yuuri cried out, curling himself into the wound, unable to cradle it as he wanted to with his hands cuffed. He could already feel the blood sliding down his skin, warm against his cold skin.
“Now we have matching wounds,” Viktor chuckled.

It wasn’t the most painful thing Yuuri had ever endured. It hadn’t gone completely through, only grazing his skin as his own bullet had done with Viktor. But movement caused a sharp pain to slice through him, his muscles tightening to try and stop it.

“Has Phichit told you why it is we’re hunting him?” Viktor asked. “Has he told you who he was? How about how we’re connected?”

“I don’t care,” Yuuri hissed through gritted teeth.

“Where is he, Yuuri? It can’t be worth going through this to hide him.”

“I’m never giving him up to you.”

“Why? Because he’s a client? Do you honour contracts that much? I’ve heard of idiot bodyguards giving up their lives before, but I thought that was just myth.” When Yuuri didn’t say anything, Viktor asked, “Or is it more now? Has he become a friend? Or is he the soulmate you want to protect?”

Yuuri almost wanted to laugh. If that were so, it would be so much easier. If only it had been Phichit’s name on his left wrist, there for him to admire as everyone else did with theirs. It would make his job much easier, his desire to protect the man much more understandable.

“No,” Viktor answered for him. “You said your soulmate wouldn’t care. From what I know of Phichit, he cares very much for people.”

“You’re not going to find him. I’ve hidden him somewhere you’ll never be able to get to.”

“Is he there alone? Or is he surrounded by people like you?” Viktor asked.

“You’ll never be able to touch him.”
“Perhaps I don’t need to.” When Yuuri faltered, Viktor smiled. “I’ve managed to chase him away into a lifetime of hiding, forever. You didn’t see him when he was a skater, did you? Or perhaps you did. He was so happy with his life, with a promising future, with coaches fighting over him, and a fanbase so loyal they would do anything for him. And then he made one mistake.”

Yuuri watched the spark inside of the man’s eyes, feeling sick at just how much glee he seemed to carry at the notion.

“How’s torn from everything that ever made him happy, from his family and friends, constantly looking over his shoulder. He probably has nightmares of me now.”

“So that’s all you want to do?”

“No, no, Yuuri. When I do find him, I will kill him.”

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It was getting harder to remain calm. As the hours ticked by, as the sun rose high in the sky and descended once again, the wound in his arm started to throb more and more. Every movement aggravated it, sending sparks along his side. His wrists were pulsing in their pain, the cuffs tightly against his skin, and his arms began to numb after such a long time in the same position.

He wasn’t left alone with the young Yuri again. Someone was always watching him. There was always a gun aimed at him.

He should have taken the chance, he thought. He shouldn’t have blown his only chance at freedom. He’d pulled away when Yuri had moved closer to the names on his skin, shown how he’d freed himself. He should have let the boy occupy himself with the names and attacked while he could. He wasn’t given another opportunity.

He’d demanded to know why Viktor was so intent on killing his client. Now that their connection was known, taken from a slip of paper in a document Yuuri knew should never have fallen into Viktor’s hands, there was no use in hiding it. But Viktor didn’t speak to him again. He sat in the same chair, dragging the table to stand before him so that he could do some work while he kept an eye on Yuuri. After many failed attempts, Yuuri huffed and stopped trying.
He knew he’d need to get himself out of this. No one had come running to rescue him when the bullets had gone off, not when the Russians had used them to break in, nor when Viktor shot Yuuri’s arm. No one had come, as if the people of the hotel were deaf. He suspected the man before him had paid a hefty amount for them to ignore whatever sounds came from this room. Perhaps the rooms around them had even been cleared, just in case someone heard and called for help.

But Yuuri was used to getting himself out of situations. Often, he was the one that placed himself into them. But in those other times, he knew what would happen. He knew the risks, knew what his enemies or his clients’ enemies wanted. Everything he had thought about the man before him had turned out untrue, and it was that unpredictability that scared him.

So, he waited silently in the chair, ignoring the way that the teen watched his every move, the way the stranger he had yet to know the name of guarded the door, and trying to contain the anger inside of himself when he realised Viktor was ignoring him as well.

His arms had begun to numb, pain throbbing at the back of his legs, his shoulders and his back ebbing away slowly as time wore on. He knew that was a bad sign, blood finding it hard to filter through his muscles, but he couldn’t ask to be moved.

It was when Viktor closed some documents he had been reading that he finally paid Yuuri some attention. Yuuri wasn’t able to explain why, but when their eyes connected, his body eased. As if he was relieved, though he didn’t understand what he was relieved about. He glared back, keeping his words at the back of his mouth.

His stomach growled, loud in the quiet room, rumbling like a siren. He hoped with everything that the Russian hadn’t heard, but Viktor’s gaze slipped down to his stomach.

A smirk pulled at his lips. “Hungry, Yuuri?”

A shiver ran up his spine, as it did every time Viktor used his name. Now that he knew it, the man said it as many times as he could. Yuuri kept his words to himself, knowing that it wouldn’t get him far.

Viktor leaned back, splaying his hands on the table as he stretched his own sore muscles. “We can be civil with each other,” he said, nodding to the man guarding the door. “I give you some food, and you answer some of my questions. Doesn’t that sound like a good deal?”
Yuuri shook his head. “I’m not telling you anything about Phichit.”

Viktor waved the comment away. “I wasn’t going to ask about him.”

Yuuri faltered. “What?”

Viktor cupped his face in his right hand and fiddled with a pen in the other, smiling at Yuuri. If Yuuri had to describe that smile, he wasn’t sure he could. He’d seen smirks and frightening grins from the man before him, but this seemed gentler. If he saw only the smile, Yuuri would say this man was a kind man, a man that was gentle and soft. But then he looked up and saw the way Viktor’s eyes danced, a spark of menace inside his pupils, a dare resting beneath the darkness.

Viktor said, “It’s not often that I meet someone like you in this line of business. We place a lot of weight on honour and loyalty. We’re like a family, and we ask for the lives of our people in return for a place in the world. It’s rare that I see someone like you, loyal only because of a slip of paper. What if I were to offer you a large amount of money to leave Phichit to me?”

Yuuri glared harder, the assumption making him feel sick.

“And now you look like I’ve personally offended you,” Viktor chuckled. “That would have swayed a large number of people. What would it take to sway you?”

“I’m not letting you have Phichit,” Yuuri repeated.

“You’ve caught my interest, Yuuri. I’d like to know more about you.”

Before the man could say much more, the guard returned with a tray of steaming plates. Yuuri hadn’t seem what was on them yet, but already his mouth watered. He swallowed it down before Viktor could take pleasure in his weakness.

They were placed on the desk between them. Meat and vegetables, some soups and bread lined the plates, looking fresh and newly cooked. The smell wafted in through Yuuri’s nose, heavy in the chilled air. He felt the scent fill his body, and he could almost taste the food on his tongue.
“It’s going to be a bit difficult for you, Yuuri,” Viktor said, tucking a napkin into his shirt neckline to cover his chest. “I’m not able to let you go to eat, so you’ll just have to wait until I’m done.”

Yuuri narrowed his eyes. “Until you’re done?”

Viktor threw him another smile. “So, I can feed you, of course!”

Yuuri almost jumped out of his own chair, wanting nothing more than to retreat away and escape before it came to that. Out of everything Viktor had said so far, that seemed the most frightening. “You don’t need to feed me.”

“Then how else are you going to eat?”

“Untie one hand?”

Viktor raised one brow. “You’re a trained bodyguard, who was almost able to escape with two hands tied. I’m not letting you have one free.” He took a fork and knife and began to eat the food before him, humming around his forkful of meat. “This is very good.”

“It’s not like I could do much while I’m being watched.”

“I don’t want to underestimate you.” Viktor took another bite, graceful fingers working quickly with the cutlery. Yuuri couldn’t help but watch those slim pale hands, unsure why his gaze followed so intently. “You’re trained, and clearly very good at what you do. I’m going to treat you as a competent opponent.”

Yuuri leaned back against his chair, tearing his gaze away from Viktor’s hands. “Right.”

Viktor took an agonising amount of time finishing his meal, going so far as to give some out to the other two Russian men in the room before it was finally Yuuri’s turn. Viktor moved to sit atop the desk.

“Ready?” he asked, placing the plate carefully on his lap as he gathered a chunk of meat on his fork. “It’s had time to cool, so you don’t need to worry about that.”
“I can feed myself,” Yuuri made to say before Viktor’s hand moved forward, almost shoving the fork into his mouth. Yuuri opened it and swallowed down the food before it could choke him.

“Nonsense. I already said I wanted to get to know you better, and what better foundation is there than this?” Viktor said, taking the fork back to load it with more food.

“Why do you want to know anything about me?”

“As I’ve said, you interest me for some reason, a reason I can’t explain. I am a victim of my whim, so I’ll do as I please.”

“You don’t interest me at all,” Yuuri replied, reluctantly opening his mouth once again as Viktor pressed a fork to his lips. As the words left his mouth, he felt something cramp inside of himself. He threw the thought away, discarding the pain as tension and stress.

“I’ll have you interested in me in no time.”

It took an agonising few minutes, but Yuuri was finally finished being fed. The plate was empty, the food warm in his belly, and Viktor was wiping away some of the fallen juices from his chin. He stubbornly continued to glare at the man, though Viktor showed no fear. He dabbed the napkin against his skin and pulled it away, moving to sit once again in the seat opposite Yuuri.

Yuuri asked the question that had been on his mind for a long time. “You’re not going to torture me. You’re not going to threaten my family. You’re not going to even be tempted to look at the names on my wrist to try and find my soulmate. What are you going to do to me?”

“What am I going to do with you?” Viktor repeated, as if he hadn’t even thought about it.

“Yes. What are you going to do with me? I have the information you want,” Yuuri said, growing increasingly frustrated. “I know where Phichit is, I know where your target is, and you’re not doing anything to extract that information. What do you want?”

Viktor fiddling once more with the documents on the table, taking a pen and signing one sheet before he turned back to Yuuri. “What made you want to go into bodyguarding?”
“What?”

“Everyone has a purpose for doing something. What was yours?”

“Why is this important?”

“I was born into what I’m doing, crafted for years until I fit this mould. What happened in the years leading up to your career choice?”

Yuuri sighed and bowed his head. This unpredictability was what scared Yuuri. This man could go from asking questions that anyone could ask, to pulling a gun on Yuuri and shoot him. The burning wound in his arm reminded him of that. He answered honestly, seeing nothing else to do, “I want to protect people.”

“At the expense of your life?”

“If I do a good enough job, it doesn’t have to come down to that,” Yuuri replied. Though he knew how dangerous this situation was. He should have been more careful. He should have hired more than one room in Tokyo. He should have planned a proper escape route. When it came to him alone, no client with him, he became a little sloppy.

“And you really have no one that would care if you went missing one day? No one that would come looking for you?”

Yuuri lifted his head to glare at the man. “Why? Are you thinking of how ideal that is?”

“Not at all. Everyone has connections. It’s strange that you don’t.”

“Yeah, well, that’s just me.” He glanced around, seeing that the guard was growing wearier as the night wore on. He was beginning to slump, the gun that was originally aimed at Yuuri now aiming at the floor of the hotel. Yuri had grown bored ages ago, finally looking away from Yuuri’s bonds. He was on his phone, laying on the bed with the glare of the screen illuminating his face. He didn’t seem to be paying attention at all to Viktor and Yuuri’s conversation. Outside, the night life was beginning, the honking of traffic filtering through the window. Neon lights of the main strip lit up
to fool the darkness, groups of people getting ready for the night laughing in the rooms levels above.

“So you want to protect others. Is it because you think so much of other people, or because you think so little of yourself?” Viktor asked.

With the other two distracted, Yuuri began to move his fingers behind the chair. His hands were numb, no longer feeling the biting of the cuffs against his skin. The wounds around his wrists were tight, tugging every time he moved his hands. He began to try and work his way out of them again as slowly as he could go to not alert anyone. “I think people deserve chances when they’ve gotten themselves into a mess they can’t get out of.”

“And you’re there to guide them out.”

“No, I’m there to protect them until they get themselves out.”

Viktor sat back, casting his gaze over Yuuri as he regarded him for a moment. Yuuri stared back, feeling his hart skip a beat at that gaze. There was something softer in the man’s face, the menace only subtle behind his features now, and Yuuri could almost fool himself into believing that they were sitting and having a civil conversation. But the ache in his shoulders and the sparks that throbbed down his arms reminded him of where he was, of how uncertain his future was.

Yuri moved on the bed and he stopped his hands from moving, hoping that the teen hadn’t seen what he was doing. With one cast look his way, he saw that Yuri had turned away, his screen open for Yuuri to see a game was being played. Yuri moved to look at the guard at the door, seeing him watching the colours outside of the window. He continued to move his hands, holding back any flinches that rocked his frame every time the metal cut into exposed, raw skin.

“A selfless act,” Viktor continued, still with his gaze glued to Yuuri as if he could look nowhere else. “I don’t get the chance to meet people like you.”

“I’m not surprised,” Yuuri replied, hoping his words would distract the man from the small movements of his shoulders. “I don’t reckon you’d meet a lot of selfless people in the mafia.”

Viktor laughed. “You’d be surprised there.” He nodded his head towards the teen on the bed, lowering his voice so that only he and Yuuri could hear. “Yuri here, he technically isn’t one of us. His grandfather had connections with our group, but only friendship wise. And then his parents
passed away.”

Yuuri rolled his eyes, though something made him pause. He glanced quickly to the teen on the bed, sifting through games as if none could hold his interest. Yuuri wondered how old he was – young, he thought, perhaps mid-teens, fifteen if he had to give a guess. The awkward time of the in-between, still considered a child to some, made to act like an adult for others. Yuuri had grown up with the fear that his parents might be killed one day because of their line of career, that in the dead of night, enemies would storm the onsen and inflict damage to Yuuri’s life that could never be repaired. He was older now, and they were still fine, but the worry still laced his every thought. But to be young, to be fifteen, caught in the middle of child and adult, and to have gone through it without parents? His chest constricted.

He turned back to Viktor and asked, “And what? Out of the kindness of your heart, you accepted him into a fold of murderers and corruption to grow up in?”

Some of the softness had leaked from Viktor’s expression, making way for the hard lines and the spark of anger to filter in. “He had nothing. He’d have ended up on the streets.”

“How about giving him more of a chance and give him to a nice family instead?”

“He was better staying with familiar people.”

“And now he’s here, in a hotel room with someone you’ve tied up and-”

“I’ve not been uncivil to you, have I?” Viktor asked, his voice deeper, ice sharpening every word. “I’ve not tortured you. I’ve not threatened you.”

“You shot me,” Yuuri hissed through his teeth. He worked harder at the bonds around his wrists, wanting nothing more than to free himself from this man before him.

“Because you shot me first.” Viktor’s hand moved to stroke his arm, over the place that Yuuri knew bandages would be tied tightly. “You know, you had the perfect opportunity. For a trained bodyguard, you should have been able to fatally wound me. I was right there, before you, my chest turned to you and my head open. But you missed.”

Yuuri burned, feeling his cheeks pink as his jaw clenched. “You took me by surprise.”
“That shouldn’t have made a difference.”

Yuuri said nothing more, hating himself. He should have shot better, should have shot the smirk from the man’s lips easily. Shot away the problem right from its source, and made sure Phichit was safe. Instead, something had stopped him, something had made him falter and panic and he’d missed, only skimming the man. He couldn’t explain it himself, and he didn’t want to dwell on it.

“So, what made you miss?” Viktor asked. “I saw your face. You looked scared. Like you’d never shot a gun before.”

“I won’t miss next time.”

“Neither will I.”

Yuuri smirked back, mirroring what he hoped was the smirk Viktor had given him countless times. “So, what made you miss? You could have shot at the door more than twice, and in quicker succession. But you gave me time to run and duck for cover. What’s your excuse?”

He must have hit a nerve, because Viktor’s expression stiffened until all feeling was stripped away. After a second, one eyebrow raised. “We were in a crowded area.”

“But that didn’t stop you from shooting the first time,” Yuuri pressed, courage burning inside of him as he finally felt the slip of the cuff. He quickly caught it with his fingers, loosening it more. “You could have gotten rid of me and had freedom to chase Phichit without any interference. But you paused.”

“I don’t pause.”

“But you did.”

“I didn’t.”
“Then what? You decided to give your prey a chance? Thought it might make a better game?”

Viktor’s jaw twitched, his expression barely concealed thunder. “I don’t play games.”

Yuuri looked around himself, pointing out all that he could with his pointed stare. “Then what am I doing here? You’re playing a game right now. If you want what I know, torture me!”

“No,” Viktor hissed.

“Why?” Yuuri pushed, something inside of himself wanting to egg the man on. He knew his position, knew that it was dangerous to rile up a powerful and influential man – at least, who he thought Viktor was. Either way, Viktor was good with a gun. He shouldn’t have been pushing the man, but he couldn’t stop himself. “By now, other groups would have torn out my nails. Why don’t you?”

Viktor paused, flinching slightly at the description. He looked a little shocked at his own reaction, but threw that away. After a breather, he replied, “I’m not going to do that.”

By now, they had gathered the attention of the other two Russians, though Yuuri was glad to see that their gazes were on Viktor’s face and not what Yuuri was doing behind his back. The metal grew less and less constricting, slipping from his bandages. “And why is that?”

“I can’t.” Viktor said it so suddenly, he seemed to take even himself surprise. He took another deep breath, closing his eyes and clenching his fists as if he was in pain. “The idea of torturing you makes me feel sick.”

Yuuri rolled his eyes and leaned back. “Right. You’ll say that now, and then the longer I keep the information from you, you’ll get over it.”

“No, it’s not like that. I don’t think I can do it.”

Yuuri saw the way that the guard at the door and Yuri shuffled, keeping their gazes locked on Viktor as if he had said something that neither could believe. Yuuri wondered then what it was he was hearing, what to trust. He wanted to believe that Viktor was playing a game, try to lull Yuuri into a lie that would bring his information out. If he felt comfortable, he might find it easier to let things slip. No, he wouldn’t let it happen.
He answered, “You’re being unusually honest for a mafia man.”

Viktor looked up at Yuuri, taking a few seconds to stare at every inch of his expression. “Aren’t I just?”

Yuuri shivered at the way the man said it, a sigh of defeat, as if he didn’t completely understand what it was he was saying either. He shrugged his shoulders, waving the comment away. Something about the way the man acted had Yuuri’s chest tightening, but he didn’t think too much into it. He shook his head, feeling the cuffs loosen completely. He held them tightly in his grip, thinking of something to say to distract those around him. The first thing to come to his mind rolled out without his knowledge, “How can a man like you have a soulmate?”

Viktor didn’t say anything for a while. His gaze flickered down to his left wrist. Whatever name lay on his skin was covered underneath his shirt and jacket. From this angle, Yuuri couldn’t even peer underneath. He halted when he saw Viktor’s gaze flicker quickly to the other wrist too, to his right, with just as much pain in his expression. But it passed for only a short time – one spark of a second before he looked back up and his face was hard again.

“Everyone has one, I suppose, regardless of what kind of person they are.”

“And they’d be fine with someone like you?”

Viktor paused, a smirk pulling quickly at the side of his face. “They wouldn’t care.”

It was at that moment that Yuuri knew there was mercy for him. Viktor’s phone rang, breaking the tension of the room and jolting all four of its inhabitants. Gazes turned toward the phone as Viktor removed it from his pocket to view the number.

Seizing his chance, Yuuri put his plan into action – or what little plan he did have. Get out. Grab a gun. Go from there.

The sound of the cuffs hitting the plush carpet was the first warning the Russians had. But they were too slow. Yuuri pushed himself off of the chair so quickly that it was thrown backwards, slamming against the bedside table. Knowing he had little chance of getting out with his own guns, not when there were two guns aimed towards him, he snatched Viktor’s.
The man gasped, his phone falling from his grasp mid-answer. The guard beside the door lifted his aim, but refrained from firing as Yuuri placed the barrel of Viktor’s gun against its owner’s head.

It had only been a second, but the panic was still throbbing in the air. Viktor was still in front of Yuuri as the Japanese bodyguard took shelter from the guard behind him, finger placed on the trigger. The guard looked from Yuuri to Viktor, awaiting orders. Yuri was half off the bed, wide eyed and terrified.

“You,” Yuuri said, pointing towards the teen. “Yuri, get everything I have into the big black bag there on the bed. Do not forget the laptop and the guns, hear me?”

Yuri cast a look towards Viktor, only moving when Viktor nodded his head.

Yuuri nodded towards the guard at the door. “Put the gun down, kick it over here. Do you have any other weapons? I’ll know if you’re lying.”

The guard did as was told and shook his head.

Yuuri could feel Viktor chuckling just as much as he heard it, as if the gun aimed at his head didn’t worry him. “And I thought we were having such good conversation, Yuuri. Did I offend you at any point?”

Yuuri ignored the man, turning to the teen on the bed. “Hurry it up,” he barked, seeing the young one stalling for time.

There was another voice, cut off with occasional static. The phone. He looked down, not seeing a name but just a number, with the occasional gruff voice speaking Russian. He pressed the gun harder against Viktor’s head when he saw the man move to answer. “Don’t say anything.”

“As you wish, Yuuri,” Viktor replied.

Once Yuri was almost done, Yuuri picked the guard’s gun from the floor and threw it over. “Put that one in as well and bring it over here. Keep your hands where I can see them.”
The bag was brought over, and he quickly threw it onto his good shoulder, the weight jarring to his arm as blood pooled back to the limb. He kept his gun aimed at Viktor while he watched the others. They stuck their hands in the air, but Viktor watched Yuuri with a smirk.

As Yuuri disappeared over the threshold, the wall cutting off the aim he had on Viktor, he heard the Russian beginning to move again.

“Yes, Yes, Yakov,” Viktor’s voice rung, sending shivers down Yuuri’s spine. “Just ran into some complications.”

Yuuri closed the door with a slam, seeing the dimly lit hotel hallway empty. Keeping his front to the door, he began to backtrack, thinking constantly of the name of the man on the other end of the phone Viktor had said so easily.

As he crept closer to the stairs, his heart thumping loudly both in his throat and ears, he heard the creak of the floorboard beside the door. From the other side, Viktor called his name, loud enough for it to carry down the hall.

“Yuuri, it was lovely meeting you. I have a feeling we’ll be seeing each other again very soon.”

Yuuri took that moment to turn and run as quickly as he could down the stairs, out of the hotel lobby doors, and into the Tokyo streets.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for reading and I hope you liked it!

For further updates, you can find me on tumblr

here
First half beta read by whynikkiwhy, which means the first half will be well edited. The second half was edited by myself, so if there's any mistakes, it is entirely my fault and my good-for-nothing eyesight.

Yuuri didn’t stop running for a long time, not even as his shoulder ached, from both the wound and carrying his heavy bag, not even as his heart threatened to jump out of his chest. His calves ached, the skin stretching over his muscle, breath burning along his throat.

It wasn’t until he was safely hidden behind a department store, between two rubbish dumps, that he stopped. He glanced around, surveying the way to his right and left before he dropped the bag and leaned against the wall, taking deep breaths until his lungs were filled with the toxic air.

Once he felt his heart beginning to beat to the same rhythm as before, he moved to clutch at the wound in his arm. His blue top was stained dark where the blood had seeped, the fabric torn from the cut. He pressed his arm against it to stop the flow, slowed down to a small trickle now. The skin burned under his touch, pain shivering up his flesh.

Every time he closed his eyes, Viktor’s face haunted his view, dancing on his eyelids. His laugh echoed inside of his mind, and as he clutched the side of his head and gritted his teeth, he realised it would never leave him. It became louder and louder the more he tried to ignore it, Viktor’s voice shattering any other thought, his eyes staring back into his own. He wanted to throw up, he wanted to run, he wanted to turn back.

Yuuri stopped breathing, eyes snapping open. Turn back? Why turn back? Back to the room? Back to where that man was? He shook his head. One conversation set over hours with the man had messed with his brain. He knew he didn’t want to turn back, but the man had affected him in a way that he couldn’t describe.

He should have been stronger than this, he thought. He’d met a range of people in his career, and Viktor wasn’t that different from some. He had handled those easily, not risen to bait, not allowed himself to become so affected like he was. But there was something about Viktor that wiggled inside of him until his attention was centred around the Russian. Every time Viktor spoke, he was hanging off of every word. Every time he stared, Yuuri wanted to stare back. Every time the man was close, he took Yuuri’s breath away. And now that he had gotten away, he wanted to do
something to get the man looking again.

He sighed, standing up straight against the wall again. He cast his thoughts away, knowing that Viktor was trained. He probably wanted this reaction, knew exactly what words to spin to cause Yuuri to feel so desperate. Yuuri knew the longer he ignored it, the sooner he would forget about it.

He hadn’t given anything away about Phichit. His client was still secure, hidden away in an area of Japan that was often overlooked. Yuuri might not have succeeded in getting the mafia far enough away, but he managed to hide everything he could while being in the same room as the mafia for a day. Not many people could say that.

Now to plan, he thought. Now to figure out what to do next. Viktor’s voice rang in his mind once more.

Yes, yes, Yakov. Just ran into some complications.

Yakov. Yuuri ran a hand through his hair, taking care that it wasn’t the one with his blood. There was sweat clinging to the ends of his hair, his scalp sensitive to the touch. Yakov. He knew who that was, had seen a picture of him and Phichit together. He knew he needed the connection between Viktor and Yakov, knew that they were somehow together in what happened to Phichit. He thought he would need to do some digging, but it turned out that Viktor would give him that information willingly – and unknowingly.

Yakov Feltsman.

Yuuri knew it was good that he memorised the name.

Yuuri pulled up his phone, seeing it still unlocked from when the three men had searched it. They’d not found anything, though Yuuri knew they wouldn’t.

He inputted Phichit’s name, searching through the news articles about Phichit’s disappearance and the lengths the police were going through to find him. Thousands of worried and distraught fans begged for his safety, and his coach desperately asked that if anyone knew anything, to step forwards.
Celestino Cialdini.

If he wanted to find anything more out about Yakov, Viktor, and to an extent Yuri, then that was the best way to go.

He closed the phone and decided to search for a better place to hide, somewhere he wouldn’t likely be found or cornered.

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An abandoned warehouse provided him with the cover he needed. He locked himself into the old offices, with multiple exit points, some already planned in his head. He set his things in the corner of the room, perfect view of everything else, and readied his phone for a call.

He’d found Phichit’s coach’s number online, the man having willingly handed it out for any information on his missing student. Yuuri called it with dread in his chest, knowing that he would only worry the man more.

The rings echoed in the room, loud against his ear. He didn’t breathe as he waited, knowing what damage he was about to inflict. The man picked up on the third ring, his deep voice almost hollow.

“Hello?”

“Celestino Cialdini?” Yuuri asked.

“Yes?”

Yuuri swallowed away his hesitation. “I need to ask you some questions, Mr Cialdini. It’s about your student.”

“Phichit?” Immediately, Yuuri felt guilt at the hope he heard in the man’s voice. There was ruffling on the other end, a smothered voice of the man on the other line as he pressed his hand to the receiver and moved to another room. “What about Phichit?” the man asked, his voice loud once again. “Is he alright? Where is he?”
Yuuri halted the coach before he could work himself up. “I just need to ask some questions, sir. Please remain calm-”

“Who are you?”

Yuuri paused. “I’m a friend of his. Please, I can’t say much over the phone. I just have a few questions I need you to answer, if that’s alright? Are you alone?”

“Where is he? Do you know where he is? Is he alright?”

Yuuri gulped away his hesitation and replied, “Mr Cialdini, he’s fine. He’s fine, I promise. He’s safe.”

“Safe? Where? How do you know?”

“Are you alone?”

“Yes, I’m alone,” he bit, almost annoyed. “Where is he?”

“I’m his bodyguard,” Yuuri replied, biting the bullet and confessing early. He didn’t know the man on the other end, knew he probably should have researched a little more before he dived first in. Asked Phichit what the man was like, seen online how the man would respond. He’d been prepared for such an influx of questions however, and knew that coming forward was best for the both of them. “Phichit hired me a few days ago, and I’ve made sure he’s hidden well in a trusted safe house. I’m sorry, sir, but I can’t tell you where that is.”

“Bodyguard? Phichit hired a bodyguard? Why? What happened?” The man was growing angrier by the word, his tone snappish. Yuuri didn’t feel like it was directed at him though.

“I can’t say, Mr Cialdini, but-”

“Call me Celestino,” the coach cut him off. “Please, just… who are you?”
“I’m his bodyguard-”

“That means nothing to me. Your name. You could be tricking me.”

Yuuri paused for the slightest second, heartbeat jumping in his throat. He weighed the pros and the cons quickly in his head, but was reminded of Viktor’s voice, tasting his name as if it was something rare and delicate. He replied, “Yuuri Katsuki. I have a profile up, showing the company I work with. It won’t show you my clients or anything. You won’t find Phichit that way.”

There was a pause on the other end as the man on the other end quickly searched it. Yuuri didn’t try to cut the silence. This, he knew, meant a lot to Celestino. If Yuuri had any doubt before that he loved his student, he had proof of it now.

“You’re only young,” Celestino muttered on the phone. “And you think you can protect Phichit?”

“I know I can,” Yuuri replied confidently. “As I’ve said, he’s hidden in a safe house right now. Nothing can touch him.”

“I want to speak to him.”

“You can’t.”

“I don’t care,” Celestino boomed, voice growing until Yuuri had to move the phone away from his ear. “He disappeared without a word! Do you know what I’ve thought in the little time he’s been gone? I’ve thought he was dead. Killed by some crazy fan or kidnapped by someone wanting money. I’ve thought he was dead in an alley somewhere, or buried in some woods in a grave we won’t find for decades. Or in someone’s basement being starved and tortured. Or in a hospital after suffering major injuries and won’t wake up, or amnesia, or got stuck somewhere and couldn’t get back, or taken by a drug ring, or just vanished off of the face of the earth. And now you call telling me he’s alive and fine, that he needed to hire a bodyguard for whatever reason, but you won’t let me talk to him?”

“You could bring his enemies to him. Understand that you contacting him could place him in danger,” Yuuri replied, hardening his voice just as much. “If you contact him, all those things could happen to him. He could be kidnapped, drugged in someone’s basement, starved, and then killed and taken to be buried in some woods that no one knows about.”
“You’re exaggerating.”

“I’m not,” Yuuri bit back. “Phichit has gotten himself into a lot of trouble. He witnessed something he shouldn’t have and now a very unpleasant group want to see him dead. If you contact him, they’ll get what they want.”

That seemed to silence the coach on the other side. Yuuri listened, keeping his words to himself, and listened to the man breathing. He knew they were harsh words, and he was going to make sure that Phichit never ended up like it. Phichit was safe, and he would keep it like that – even if it meant dealing with the problem at the source.

After a moment, Celestino asked, “What do you want to ask?”

“Before I ask anything, I need to make something clear. I don’t know a lot of the details, Phichit has kept them from me. Anything I tell you now, you need to keep to yourself and not act on any of it, understand?”

“Yes.”

“And anyone I ask about could be involved or they might not be. Any name I ask about, don’t immediately assume that they’re involved with his disappearance. Understand?”

“Yes.”

“Good. Otherwise, you could cause a lot of problems for Phichit.” Yuuri knew it was a bit of a low blow, using his student to reign the coach in. But after the temper Yuuri had heard from across the phone, he needed to know that the mafia wouldn’t hear of this. If Yakov was involved as part of the reason for Phichit’s trouble, then the last thing Yuuri needed was for him to disappear before Yuuri could get anything on him.

“Right.”

“Phichit was pretty popular, wasn’t he?”
“Very much so. He was the fan favourite. And he loved it. They’re all very worried and frightened for him.”

“How good of a skater was he?”

“Very good, very promising, the first of his country to make it so far. We had the whole season planned. He was going to use the songs from his favourite film.”

Yuuri nodded, though he wasn’t sure what good the information was to him. But he didn’t stop Celestino. The man probably wanted to say something. He ranted about his student the same way a relative ranted about their deceased loved one.

“A lot of money then, I’m guessing?”

“He had a lot of sponsors, very wealthy sponsors,” Celestino corrected.

“Sponsors?” Yuuri paused, thinking of the picture he had seen of Phichit and Yakov. The man had been described as a wealthy business man of Russia, with no ties to skating other than the one photo. Yuuri asked, “And was one of these sponsors a man called Yakov Feltsman?”

Celestino didn’t answer for a while, but when he did, a hint of rage burned within his reply, “Yes. Is he involved?”

“Please remember what I said, Celestino,” Yuuri urged. “Just because I say a name doesn’t mean they’re involved.”

“Right.”

“Was he one of Phichit’s main sponsors?”

“No, he was new. He was only just going to be sponsoring for this season. He’d never sponsored a skater before, but he said he wanted to take advantage of the growing popularity of the sport to endorse his business.”
“And what was his business?”

“I don’t really know. I think they mostly did expensive suits? But they might have done a lot of clothing.”

“They?”

“Yes. He would often come with two other people – a woman called Mila and a man called Viktor.”

Yuuri felt his heart race in his chest again, thumping hard. The pulse inside of his head ached against his temples.

Celestino, not knowing his condition, continued, “I think they were his assistants or his children or something, they never really said. But we met them a few times.”

Yuuri took a deep breath, attempting to calm the blood that rushed through his body. “And how was Phichit with them?”

“He was fine. He was kind to everyone. Very thankful to Yakov for such generous donations and sponsorship. Without Yakov’s help, we wouldn’t have been able to get the costumes we did. Phichit didn’t speak that much with Mila and Viktor though, they were always in the background. Very nice though.”

Yuuri wouldn’t quite use ‘nice’ for Viktor. He had yet to see Yakov and Mila, but he suspected the same for them. Anyone involved with Viktor, Yuuri didn’t want to know. “Thank you, Celestino.”

“Come to think of it, the day Phichit disappeared, Yakov, Mila and Viktor were visiting.” Celestino paused, his voice a soft mutter as he said, “They’ve come to see me since. They offered their condolences and hoped that Phichit was found soon.”

“Don’t think any more on it,” Yuuri pushed.
“So, they did it?”

“I have no proof. It could easily be someone else,” Yuuri lied, not wanting to ruin the man’s life more than it had already been damaged. He knew this call was bad for the man, should have just left him thinking that Phichit had vanished off of the face of the earth. It was certainly easier to forgive and forget than knowing that Phichit was hidden away, hiding from mafia that wanted to kill him. Now Celestino Cialdini would worry more for the student he hadn’t been able to protect.

“I always thought they were sketchy,” Celestino continued. “There was always something that was wrong. Yakov would have a lot of calls that had nothing to do with his business. They never said anything more about themselves than that they were business men and women wanting to expand on their target groups. If I tried to ask about them, they’d find a way to not answer.”

Yeah, Yuuri thought, I know what that’s like. Viktor had tried to counter many of the questions he had asked.

“Thank you, Celestino,” Yuuri said, trying to press off the subject before the man became fixated on some sort of revenge. “I’ll look into it. I’ll keep Phichit safe, you don’t need to worry.”

“And you’ll bring him back to us once all of this has blown over?”

Ideally, Yuuri wanted to promise he would. Realistically, he knew that Phichit, like all the other victims hidden in the safe house, wasn’t likely to be able to return to the life he once had. But he wasn’t going to say that. “I’ll try.”

“Try-?”

“Goodbye, Celestino,” Yuuri said. “Don’t try to call this number again, and please, stay out of it. If there’s anything else, I’ll be in touch.” He hung up just as the man on the other end made to say something more. He waited for a few moments, wondering if Celestino would try to call him again. But his phone remained silent, not a call coming in. It eased him to know that Celestino had listened to his words. He just felt guilty that he had had to give such awful news and such suspicions over to the man.

He slipped the phone back into his pocket, one thought on his mind. So Yakov had been a new sponsor, and that explained why they had only appeared in one photo together. Perhaps it was for some sort of publicity.
Phichit had met Viktor and a woman called Mila as well. Mila. Yuuri hadn’t had any sort of
description of her, but he suspected she might have been the young woman with red hair he had
seen in a photo with Yakov before. Were Viktor and Mila Yakov’s children? Perhaps. He couldn’t
deny they had similar hair colours, despite Viktor’s young age. A wealthy company in Russia
selling clothing, known best for suits, if Celestino meant what he had said.

Yuuri took out his phone again and searched Yakov’s name, finding a page linking to the company
and Yakov’s work. Once again, among them were articles of how some suspected there might have
been more lurking under the surface, suspicions that had never been proved. There was one
congratulating Yakov on expanding his business into skating, and even going so far as designing
Phichit’s short programme costume, while paying greatly for the other.

Somewhere between Yakov’s decision to sponsor the boy, and Yuuri’s meeting Phichit, something
had gone wrong. Phichit had witnessed something, either from Yakov, Mila or Viktor, something
he hadn’t meant to see. Yuuri wondered if Phichit had found proof of their underworld dealings.

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“Yuuri?”

Yuuri’s chest tightened, hearing the other man’s voice. Phichit sounded worried, voice filled with
hope at the call.

Yuuri hid himself more under the cover of the airport lobby, hood hanging over his head as the rain
drops dripped down to pool in the folds of his coat. He’d called Phichit with his burner phone, a
desire to hear that the other man was well after his encounter with Viktor and speaking to Phichit’s
coach. He knew he shouldn’t have been calling, not with the danger, but he knew it was safe
enough to do it. So he’d called his client, taking care to take security measures, just to hear that he
was alright.

“Yuuri?” Phichit asked again when there was no response.

“Hey, Phichit. How are you?”
“How am I? How are you?” Phichit replied, voice stronger. “What’s been happening? Is there a problem?”

“No, no, Phichit. Nothing. It’s alright. I just wanted to call to make sure you’re settling in alright.”

“You haven’t gotten in any trouble, have you?”

Yuuri paused. “No, don’t worry about me. It’s been pretty boring this end.”

“Really?”

“Yes,” Yuuri replied. Then he changed the subject before Phichit could hear the lie in his voice. “Phichit, I need to ask you some difficult questions, if that’s alright?”

“Is it to do with who are after me?”

“Yes.”

“Then shoot. But Yuuri, what are you going to do? When I give the answers, I mean.”

“I just need to understand something. Phichit, I’m going to give you a few names, and you need to tell me who they are. Does that sound like something you can do?”

There was a pause on the other end, but when Phichit replied, “Yes,” his voice sounded stronger than Yuuri had heard from the other since they met.

Yuuri glanced around, taking care to spot anyone watching or listening on. But the groups around him were shaking the rain from their clothes and umbrellas before they rushed inside. The only person who seemed to be paying attention to him was the bored taxi driver that occasionally looked up from his newspaper, but the rain killed any sound from Yuuri before it could reach the man’s ears. Lowering his voice still, Yuuri asked, “Phichit, who was Yakov Feltsman?”

“I…” Phichit’s voice died for a moment as the other tried to think of something to say. Yuuri heard
an audible gulp before Phichit continued. “He was a new sponsor. He seemed really nice. Strict, but nice. And he didn’t care about the expenses on some of the things I needed. He even designed one of the costumes. It was so beautiful, Yuuri.”

Yuuri nodded with the wavering he heard in the other’s voice. “And, Phichit, is he one of them?”

“Yes.”

“Did you know that before? Or did you find out the day you witnessed something?”

“When I witnessed something. Before that… I had no idea. He was so nice. He hosted a lot of our banquets.”

“And then he changed.”

“Not really. He was the same person, but there was something different about him. The atmosphere around him just got really dark, really heavy. For the first time, I was scared.”

“Was he part of the thing you witnessed?”

“No. He wasn’t there until it was too late.”

“Alright. What about Viktor Nikiforov?” Yuuri moved on, hearing the trauma lacing every word. Bringing up painful memories was not what Yuuri wanted to achieve.

“Yeah. He was always with Yakov. I think he was his assistant, someone that was going to take on the business after him. At the time, I thought that meant the company they worked in. But I guess it means mafia now.”

“And what was he like to you?”

“He was nice too. I didn’t get to speak to him a whole lot, he had a lot of calls and a lot of things to do whenever we were close. But he always had all the skaters and coaches swooning for him every
time he stepped into the room.”

“Phichit, was he involved in the thing you witnessed?”

Phichit paused again, and Yuuri could hear his light breathing as Phichit calmed himself. There were no other voices behind him, so Yuuri guessed he was in his own room, away from the lively living room, likely now filled with the evening drinkers – local and tourist alike. It took a while for Phichit to finally reply. And when he did, he spoke in a voice that almost broke Yuuri’s heart. “Yes.”

Yuuri felt rage burning within him. He lowered the hood further over his head, attempting to hide the angry scowl on his face. If he had known before, he would have pulled the trigger when he had the gun to Viktor’s head. Splashed his blood across the wall and ended Phichit’s pain there. But, he reminded himself, there had been a young boy in the room, and something stopping him from shooting the silver haired man.

“It’s okay, Phichit,” Yuuri assured his client, his voice far softer than his expression and his thoughts. “I won’t ask you about it.”

“Thank you. I know how frustrating I must be-”

“Nonsense. It’s alright. You need to just concentrate on relaxing and throwing all your worries away while you’re there.”

“Thank you, Yuuri.”

“No worries, Phichit. Just one more name, is that alright?”

Phichit took a deep breath, as if preparing himself. “Ready.”

“Does the name Mila mean anything?”

“Yes. She was Yakov’s assistant too. Red hair and quite tall. Looked like a super model. She was lovely, and we had a lot of jokes between us. She was really nice too.”
“Is there anything you can tell me about her and Yakov?”

“I didn’t really know anything about them. Not as sponsors or as what they really are.”

“That’s alright, Phichit. That’s more than enough, thank you.” Yuuri quickly checked his watch, noticing how his flight would soon be departing. He’d need to go through the checks and the security first. “I’ll call you again soon, Phichit. I hope you’re doing well where you are.”

“Wait, Yuuri-”

Yuuri ended the call before Phichit could say more. He knew what would be coming, a plead to not get into trouble, to call often, to make sure he didn’t do anything stupid. Yuuri had heard it before, from parents and friends, and now he had Phichit to add to the mix. But Yuuri knew now what to do after hearing the fear in his client’s voice, of knowing exactly where that trauma stemmed from. But more importantly, now he had proof that all three were linked, and all three were part of the group hunting Phichit down.

Hiding Phichit away would not be enough. If he wanted to honour their contract, he’d need to go further.

He walked into the rain, feeling the drops jump off of the hood of his head and the material of his shoulders. Pitter patter, a chorus of dripping surrounding his head. He walked to the bin outside of the airport doors and broke the burner phone in two, making sure to break the card inside as thoroughly as he could. He took the cheap lighter he had bought on the way to the airport and burned the card further until it was chipped and black, completely unreadable. Once done, he dropped it into the bin.

The taxi driver was watching him with wide eyes and a gaping mouth, assumptions of Yuuri’s career running through his mind. Yuuri gave him a quick smirk before he secured his bag on his shoulder and strode through the doors.

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Beneath his hoodie, he had a wig with the same colouring as Phichit. He’d removed his glasses, used the little makeup he had to shape his face, and went so far as to use Phichit’s name in everything he could. He knew it seemed like an obvious ploy. Viktor wouldn’t fall for it, knowing
it was some trick. Phichit wouldn’t be going around with his own name. But Yuuri had found that one of his decoys had been caught, this time on its way to China. They were chasing his decoys, despite their obviousness.

So he’d pretend to be his own decoy, and they’d find what they first thought was Phichit. By then it would be too late. He’d have them chase him all around the world until they wouldn’t even know where they were, let alone where Phichit was.

But there was something to do before that.

As Yuuri stepped out of the taxi, he caught the lights of the city sparkling in the night. The architecture was old and beautiful, brick building well-crafted buildings, reaching high up until even the dark sky almost melted with the rooves. Street lights blinked, fluorescent lights filtering out through the rooms beside him, stumbling groups of locals wandering beside him.

The taxi drove off, the driver playing the radio until the harsh Russian voice was fading into the background. Yuuri heard the language all around him, spoken through the mouths of those passing, seen in foreign letters around on the buildings and on sign posts.

At the very back of his mind, against a current of doubt and denial, his thoughts took a turn. He recognised some of the letters, a familiarity he had spent many years of his youth reading across the skin of his wrists. But the thought crossed very briefly before he cast it aside, closing it tightly in a jar at the back of his mind. That recognition ebbed away until nothing more came of it.

Saint Petersburg was beautiful in the evening. Yuuri hadn’t ever been here before. The closest he had come was to Moscow with a client on her tour of Europe. At the time, Russia had seemed like a large country with very different customs to what he was used to. Now it seemed like a dark place, hiding people like Viktor and Yakov, flaring their fires until they took the innocence of people like Phichit.

In his research of Yakov Feltsman, Yuuri had come across something interesting. Despite the disappearance of Phichit, the man still claimed to be a devoted sponsor for when the skater came back. He backed up Celestino, sponsoring his other skaters, and continued to follow their competitions and helped with banquets. This weekend, one of those competitions was happening in Saint Petersburg, with a banquet to follow, both of which Mr Feltsman was coming to.

Yuuri knew that the best way to find out more about him and Mila, who he knew followed Yakov like a hound, was to meet them face to face. Or, well, face to disguise.
He checked into his hotel, hood pulled up but not hiding anything completely. He hoped that the cameras could pick up who he looked like – figuring that if the Russians were watching anything, it was their own security. If they were worth anything, they’d find him soon enough.

With the little time he knew he had, he set up the cameras in the corner of the room, running the programme through his phone before he stripped himself of his Phichit disguise and placed them in the bath for the Russians to find.

It took only a few minutes. As soon as it was done, he escaped through the fire exit, new hoodie pulled tightly over his head and bag slung over his shoulder. He’d scouted out the place before checking in, seeing that there were no cameras in the alley behind the hotel, no windows for anyone to peer, and backed up onto a busy street for him to melt into the crowd.

He had an alarm ready for when the room was broken into, as it would inevitably be. He hoped that his bait would bring a certain Russian scampering to the city, chasing the obvious lead. Phichit seen on the cameras, returning to the only thing he knew – skating, where his coach and friends would be. As obvious as it was, he knew someone worth their title would not let such an opportunity to slip from their fingers. And with Viktor here, he’d most likely join Yakov and Mila in the competitions and the banquet.

It was a risk, especially as Viktor knew his real face. But Yuuri didn’t mind. If he was going to save Phichit, he needed to make sure he knew the extend of things his client wasn’t telling him, and what the mafia were really like.

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Yuuri hadn’t ever been to an ice skating event before. He’d never really thought about it beyond what Yuuko used to tell him, and despite her encouragement to begin getting into it, he didn’t share her enthusiasm. Ever since taking on Phichit, though, he did begin to think about it. Phichit’s dream was to be a skater and to get as far as he could, to win competitions and to make his fan base proud.

One of the things that Yuuri hadn’t anticipated was the popularity of the sport. Beyond Yuuko, he hadn’t heard anyone speak of it. Come the Olympics, it was sometimes passed around, but it never caught his attention. But it was wildly popular. Yuuri found that out before he’d even entered the building that hosted the competition.
He’d managed to buy a ticket in the name of one of his personas. They hadn’t been cheap, he found, the company managing to rake up the ticket prices as this competition seemed to be an important one. He adopted his persona, dressing in a light wig to fade into the crowd, and dark clothes to melt in shadow. With a slight slump, he could fake his height.

He joined the queue to get into the building, stuck behind what seemed like dozens of people, all holding posters and some toys, almost jumping in excitement. A few he saw were holding posters with Phichit’s face on them, some looking sombre with their messages of luck for the boy. Other posters held the number of the police, begging that if anyone knew anything to come forward and help find the missing skater. Security seemed heavy at the doors, checking all bags and tickets, while journalists loitered to watch at the side lines.

Yuuri didn’t have a lot to go on, but he suspected that not every competition was like this. Phichit’s disappearance must have sparked something, sending out a wave of unease through the fans and the officials alike.

He kept careful watch all around him, even as he handed in his ticket and had his bags searched. His guns were stuck to his sides, hidden in their holsters beneath his hooded jacket. If needed, he had a permit and permission to hold such a weapon. But they didn’t conduct a body search, allowing him through as they handed him back his bag.

No one around him caught his attention. Families eagerly walked to their seats, fans squealing before the competition had even begun. So it was in this sort of atmosphere that Phichit had excelled, Yuuri thought. This sort of place that Viktor and Yakov had stained.

He found his way to his seat early. He could have snuck around the halls and attempted to find what he was looking for – anything that might help him understand Phichit, or where the Russians were. But he refrained. Just for today, he was going to be a spectator and watch, meld himself in with the skating community and gather more information on how things worked before he stormed in.

He had yet to see Yakov or Mila. Experience of other sports told him they were at the back somewhere, either speaking business or encouraging other skaters, perhaps even talking to Celestino. Somewhere among their conversation, Viktor’s name was probably being spoken.

His hands traced over his phone in his pocket, slight agitation lacing his thoughts. It had been a few hours, and the alarms had not yet gone off. By now, his hotel room in Tokyo had been ransacked and him tied to a chair. But the hotel in this city had yet to be touched, his cameras safe, disguise still settled on the floor, door unlocked. Perhaps Viktor had seen through it. Perhaps he hadn’t come running.
He was surrounded by fans all with their posters and their toys. Many languages were spoken around him, many kinds of people, and quite a few mentioned Phichit’s name. He wondered what they were talking about. Perhaps they all thought it would be like in the movies – Phichit would be back just in time for the competition, back from wherever he had disappeared to, and would take the gold. Yuuri had read a few articles on the plane over to Russia and found it surprising how many of his fans thought it was really going to happen. Some denied that he was missing, saying it was some publicity ploy for drama and to get attention.

The stands began to grow until almost every seat was taken up. The crowds were a wave of movement, each person dissolved into lines of colour and flickering bodies, a cloud of sound almost deafening above them.

And then, all of a sudden, the music seemed to rise above. The voices began to die until there was enough space for the commentators, one in English and the other in Russian, welcoming all of the fans in the stands to the event, and thanking those watching online or on the television. Yuuri let the voices wash over him as he kept an eye on the rink and the barrier below, gaze searching for the familiar forms.

But he couldn’t see Yakov, Mila, Viktor or even Celestino. As the skaters began to come out into the rink, many covered in jackets and listening to music on their headphones, Yuuri watched them all carefully. At the back of his mind, the reminder that Phichit had spoken to some of these skaters lingered.

It wasn’t until just before the competition began that Celestino appeared. He came out from a set of doors, followed by a little skater that wasn’t familiar. And behind them came the familiar head of red hair. Yuuri leaned forward in his chair.

Mila and Celestino were speaking, though Celestino didn’t look happy to be in such a conversation. He tried to place some distance between them, a gentle hand on his skater’s shoulder, but Mila wouldn’t let up. She smiled sweetly, taking advantage of the attention of the crowd on something else, and moved closer and closer until she could almost touch the coach. She followed them right to where Celestino urged his skater to sit.

Yuuri leaned back, facing his head towards the skaters beginning to fill the ice for their warm up, but his gaze never left where Mila was standing beside Celestino. No doubt about it, he thought. Celestino was being watched, and obviously so. They either knew about his interaction with the coach, or suspected that he or Phichit would be in contact soon. Yuuri smiled to himself. They’d been too late. He’d already gotten to the coach.
He watched them all through the competition, cheering and clapping his hands when the crowd around him did, standing when the ones before him did. But his gaze never really left Celestino and Mila down beside the rink. They barely spoke again, but Mila followed as Celestino’s skater moved to take to the ice. The coach was encouraging the young boy, patting him on the back and turning away from Mila, who had followed him gracefully despite them moving only a few feet away.

From a distance, it might have looked as if she was an assistant, or perhaps a friend, a colleague or the skater’s sister. Knowing what was really up though, Yuuri watched with an edge of anxious suspicion.

She followed as he stood against the barrier to what his student skate on the ice before the audience. She even followed as he welcomed his skater off of the ice and moved to the Kiss and Cry, standing off beside the stand to watch over them. Yuuri observed her, watched the way she walked, how she applied the lip gloss to her lips, how she stepped carefully, was aware that at least one person was always watching her, how she flipped her hair over her shoulder and how she eyed the crowd carefully.

There was something about the way she moved that reminded Yuuri of Viktor. She surveyed the crowds with a gaze that screamed suspicion, as if she knew someone like Yuuri was watching, that someone was always watching. He glanced down at the suit jacket, fitted for women, and tried to catch the shape of a gun underneath. But he couldn’t see it from this distance. He thought it was best to assume that there was a gun on her rather than not.

They retreated back to the bench they had previously occupied and stayed there while all the other skaters took their turns in the competition. Yuuri continued to mimic the crowd, and watched Mila as well as looked out for Yakov. Celestino had told him that Mila was never far from Yakov, the man who Yuuri believed was the leader, or something like it. He must have been near.

All too soon, the men’s competition was over and Yuuri watched as Celestino walked his skater back to the doors leading to the lockers, Mila in tow. Yuuri rose and left during the break, thinking over his options.

He hadn’t learned enough. He only knew that Mila was here, not anyone else. No Yakov, no Viktor, not even Yuri. He needed to take careful steps.

As the women’s competition began, he wandered around the halls, listening to the roar of the crowd in the rink. He refrained from pulling up his hood as he knew it would seem more suspicious with it. Celestino and Mila would be walking out soon, wandering somewhere. He kept an eye out, he didn’t want to bump into them.
Celestino didn’t know his face, and as far as he knew, Mila didn’t either. But Viktor hadn’t meant to know, and neither had Yuri. He’d put enough makeup on to appear different, but that didn’t mean he wanted to accidentally walk into them on the way out.

He kept an eye out for them, his heart pumping up as he walked, the blood running quickly through his veins. All he needed to know was that Mila wasn’t the only one here. There was still the competition tomorrow, he reminded himself. Yakov could be there. And it was already guaranteed that Yakov would be attending the banquet.

He scoured the building, but found nothing. Celestino was still in the locker room with his student, Mila most probably waiting outside or even inside. There was no whisper of Yakov anywhere, nor Viktor. And the phone in his pocket remained silent, no alarm, no indication that anyone had fallen for his trap.

He thought he’d been a step before them all. No one knew he was here, and he’d figured out their names before they knew his complete involvement. He had come here disguised and hidden, jumped into the lion’s den, and thought he could catch them before they knew anything of it.

But the first day had been and gone, and as the women’s skate wound down to an end, Yuuri knew he had to be patient. Nothing was going to fall into place right in his lap on the first day. Tomorrow, he promised himself, tomorrow Yakov would show himself and he would have a better handle on what he was going to do.

He made his way back to his new hotel, one he’d made sure was secure, with an escape route, hacked cameras for him to watch, and bought the workers to make sure that if anyone asked, he hadn’t come through. Phichit was waiting for him back in Japan, waiting for the life he wanted to get back – this life, here, where he should have been in the middle of competition and between friends. He shouldn’t have been miles away, hiding from the world as if he had done something wrong.

Yuuri grit his teeth and clenched his hands. He’d make sure that Phichit would get to skate on the ice once again, in the centre of the attention he loved.

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The next day wasn’t much luck. The men took to the ice again, Celestino’s other student warming up as the nerves took over him. They danced on the surface, forms in the centre of all the thousands
of gazes of the audiences. Celestino waited on the rink side, seemingly calm if Yuuri hadn’t seen
the way he gripped the skate guards tightly in his hands.

Mila was nowhere to be seen. Yuuri looked around, but didn’t see any familiar red head in the
audience. The competition flew by quickly, and he watched as the men ascended the podiums in
winning order, music filtering in through the system, Celestino’s student one of the few that hadn’t
made it. Not even then did one of the mafia arrive.

Yuuri thought it was best to take this opportunity and follow. He slipped from the stands and wove
through the hallways to find the locker room. There was a guard at the other end of the corridor,
asking for passes before anyone could be allowed through. Yuuri leaned against the wall, pulling
his hood tighter over his head, blond hair of his wig peeking out from the bottom of the material.
He knew Celestino and his student would head this way to get to the exit.

It took a little longer than he expected, however, before they rounded the corner and passed the
guard. Celestino was whispering to his downtrodden student, the boy with his head bowed and
teeth gritting together. For the smallest second, Yuuri saw the boy as Phichit, being comforted by
his coach after a difficult competition. He wondered how many times that had happened. He’d
need to ask Phichit about his career, he decided. Having been to the competition now, curiosity
burned within him.

He followed from a safe distance, melting in with the dissipating crowd of fans waiting for their
favourite skaters. Celestino and his student slipped through easily, much to the clear anger of the
boy. A few reporters stopped Celestino, asking about Phichit and if he had heard anything. From
the distance, Yuuri only heard a few passing words. Celestino pushed through, saying ‘no
comment’.

Yuuri glanced around. With how close Mila was sticking to the man yesterday, he felt suspicious
that no one was following this time. He extended the distance, the thought of a trap crossing his
mind. But no one stood out. He saw no red hair, he saw no one that resembled Yakov, and Viktor
was nowhere in sight. Not even little Yuri was close. Other guards, he thought. There was always
more, it wasn’t just them.

After a few more failed attempts at speaking to Celestino, the coach dragged his student into a taxi
and they sped off, even as the reporters continued to shout after them.

Yuuri stood waiting outside of the building, staring off at the road that the man had disappeared
down, the crowd around him beginning to disappear. He contemplated just for a second following,
but he decided not. Here, he was surrounded by innocent bystanders. If he continued after the
coach, he could be isolated and, if it was a trap, he could be caught once more. After his last
attempt, he doubted that he would be able to escape.
He’d received the information he wanted. Celestino was being watched, and for whatever reason, he had been left alone today. They knew someone was trying to speak to him, be it Yuuri or Phichit. Only problem was, Yuuri had already managed it before they suspected it would happen.

Yuuri paused. Or not. For another second, a dark thought lingered. Why would they need to protect someone who hadn’t known anything? Why guard Celestino when the man had no connection? Not that Yuuri had known that originally. They could have known and could have been listening into their conversation, making sure the man didn’t give anything away. Perhaps they thought he’d follow to speak to the man himself, guarding him in wait for Yuuri.

Yuuri felt his heart race in his chest. They could have been guarding him yesterday with the full knowledge that they knew Yuuri was there, watching, leaving the man today to make Yuuri think that the threat was gone. He didn’t need to worry it was a trap, because he had already followed. Guard down, Yuuri had tailed Celestino outside. He glanced around, eyes scanning over the multiple families and bodies to search out someone watching him. But there was no one.

And then the red blink of a light caught his attention. He turned to look at the cameras over the doorways, a curse flickering through his mind. It was turned his way, surveying the lobby outside the rink, wide enough to catch the crowd.

It would have caught Celestino and his student weaving their way through the reporters and into a taxi, and it would have caught a shape following from a distance within the same frame. It would have caught the moment Yuuri stopped and watch the car go, and when he turned and spotted the camera. It would have caught on that he was not an innocent fan.

He quickly rushed through the crowd and out of the camera’s view, pressing himself against the wall and breathing back the air in his lungs. He could have been thinking too much, he assured himself. Could the mafia hack their way into such good security and hijack their cameras just to catch the off chance that Yuuri might have come all this way? Could they really have been in the security room waiting for him? No, surely they wouldn’t go through so much trouble.

Leading him here wouldn’t help them find Phichit. The best thing they could do would be to try and convince him Phichit was in danger, and follow as he rushed back.

He shook his head, rubbing his temples as a headache slowly began to form. No. He was overthinking it. He had to be. They would lose a lot of their time just to draw him closer here. There would be no gain for them. But he’d refrain from contacting Phichit and Celestino for a while, just to be sure.
There were some important functions that Yuuri had to attend that came with being a bodyguard – his client might be a business man or women, and so he needed to accompany them to important meetings or events in order to protect them, or perhaps his client was a celebrity and needed to be guarded at a high-flying dinner. There was an endless list of important functions that Yuuri had needed to attend in his five years in the career, all just as boring as the next. If it was his choice, he wouldn’t have bought suits, but he needed them.

One of his clients had been a fashion designer, needing protection for a week from the hordes of fans outside of her own fashion show. Yuuri hadn’t had a decent suit then, instead used a little of his salary to buy the cheapest but best suit he could find. Apparently, it hadn’t been good enough for the fashion designer. She’d given him a wardrobe of tailored, fine, expensive suits, just for him, for free. He would forever remember her face when he walked in with his ill-fitting cheap suit, as if he had personally offended her. He’d tried to give them back to her once their contract had finished, but she insisted he keep them.

So, he had. It had been four years since then, and every suit still fit him well. If it didn’t, he had enough money to go get it fitted once more. He wore one to the banquet after the ice skating competition, a dark blue suit, sitting fitted against his waist, lapels thin and black, with a tie to match. The lines along the crease of the trousers made him look taller, legs toned and long, waist tight and shoulders standing as straight as his back. A pocket watch hung from his breast pocket, the chain gleaming silver in the low light of the banquet hall. The room was illuminated by the low hanging chandeliers, curtains draped over the windows to hold off any light seeping in from the slowly setting sun.

Yuuri hadn’t anticipated how grand this banquet would be, nor how well dressed the people were, or how gold the room was. He could have convinced himself he was back in one of the fashion galas, or celebrity get-togethers he had been dragged to with clients.

But skaters mingled with the upper class around them, three with their medals hanging from their necks as they shone brightly. Champagne was slowly making its way through the crowd, glasses almost empty by the time a waiter had come to Yuuri with his tray. He took a sip, slow, allowing the bubbles to burn their way down his throat before he tasted the sweetness on the back of his tongue. He would restrict himself to one, he thought. It wouldn’t do to be drunk tonight. Not with what he had planned.

The banquet was in high spirits, all those who were important having already arrived. Voices rose like a choir towards the ceiling, laughter ringing through the forms, conversation flowing easy and Yuuri knew it would flow easier still as more alcohol was consumed. There would be plenty of
drinks.

He struck close to the buffet table, watching as people came and went, taking the finger food with curious interest. On his head, Yuuri had his lighter brown wig, glasses on the tip of his nose, makeup and contacts to make him look anything but Yuuri. But at the back of his mind, he wondered how good it was. Viktor had managed to find them even as they wore the best of their disguises, or hidden away in the hotel. Perhaps there was something more at play, and Yuuri was curious how Viktor was figuring it out.

So far, no one he recognised had come up to the buffet table. He hadn’t seen Celestino or his student, nor anyone of the mafia. But the swell of the crowds made it hard to see beyond – they could be on the other side of the room and he would not know.

He finished his drink and placed it on the table, feeling his stomach burn hot at the alcohol. It coursed through his veins, not enough to make him feel much yet, just some courage burning at the back of his head. He took his first step forwards, ready to explore the room.

There had been a few who glanced at him, obviously not recognising him. He wondered if it was the same people year in and year out that came to these things, or if they were just adept at recognising someone who was out of place. But the majority never paid attention to him, their attentions on the forms that danced in the middle of the floor.

He made his way to the other end of the room, subtly looking around him. He knew they were here somewhere, they had to be. Yakov, as a sponsor, had to be here unless there was something more important that cropped up.

As time wore on and the room became louder, Yuuri’s fingers itched for another drink. He refrained, knowing it wouldn’t do well if the party decided to come in late.

And it was as he was thinking that that they arrived. Celestino first, a hand to the back of his student, who looked less than excited at being here. There was a minute gap, as the coach took his skater to the corner of the room to speak to a group they seemed familiar with, before in strode the mafia.

The first was Mila, hair curled and lips puckered red, a dress that outshone those around her, and a confident smile. Beside her, an older man strode in, dressed in a dark suit and jacket, not a thread out of place. On his head was a dark hat, covering the top of his silver hair. On his face, his expression was a storm, frown deep and eyes hard as they scanned the room. As they turned towards him, Yuuri turned to one of the waiters nearby, not wanting to be caught staring.
He allowed himself a few seconds before he turned back. Yakov had turned away and Yuuri felt relief flood through him. So he hadn’t been recognised, even through the disguise.

But then strode in another man, one Yuuri knew very well by now. He was dressed in a different suit again this time, a dark blue much like Yuuri’s own, with a white handkerchief poking out from his breast pocket and his black coat draped over his arm. He was smiling, speaking to Mila as they both turned to look at where Celestino spoke with his group.

Yuuri burned with anger, though he wasn’t completely sure why — perhaps with the way they looked and clearly spoke of the coach, or because Viktor didn’t look at all phased by their last interaction. Yuuri grit his teeth and clenched his hands, feeling the pressure beginning to burn his wrists.

Viktor jumped a little, as if someone had given him a small shock, before the smile slipped from his face and he turned to scan the crowd once more with wide eyes. Yuuri only had a second to question why before their eyes connected. Unlike with Yakov, Yuuri didn’t look away, finding himself unable to. He was captured by those blue eyes, feeling the energy churning in his chest.

Viktor didn’t look away either, but a smirk began to grow on his lips, the mirror image of what he had worn in their last interaction.

Yuuri knew then Viktor could see right through him. He didn’t know how, but Yuuri then knew the danger of the situation. It seemed that no matter where he was, how he disguised himself, Viktor would always be able to find him.

Chapter End Notes

I'm really sorry for how late this is today! Work was hectic, and I had some things to do when I got home and allllllllllllllll that jazz. But hey, it’s still saturday! (it’s 10pm here in the UK).

I hope you like it! Not a lot really happened, but it’s creating a base for what I hope will be an interesting few chapters... hehe which I am veeeeeereeeeeeery excited to write haha

If you want to keep updated, you can find me on tumblr here
But Viktor didn’t act upon it for a long time. Yuuri stood in the corner of the room, taking another champagne flute as a waiter walked by with it, and felt his hands beginning to slicken up with nerves.

Viktor didn’t immediately walk towards him. He joined in conversation with the two beside him and laughed, complimenting those around him, his gaze occasionally flickering towards Yuuri. Yuuri, however, was at a loss of what to do. The exit was at the other side of the room, and between them was a swell of dancing, tipsy skaters and sponsors, and Viktor. He could feel the adrenaline coursing through his veins, knowing that he had been trained for this. If spotted, he had always been taught to leave as quickly as you could. Before you fell into a trap. Before your escape was compromised.

But something was stopping him. He came here knowing Viktor might be too, and he came to gather information. Yakov was only half a room away, unassuming, unknowing, and Yuuri could gather what he needed from the man. He could free Phichit here and now, or get the ball rolling ready for it. He could do just as much damage to the man as he had done to Yuuri’s client. But Viktor was sticking close, and Viktor wouldn’t likely let him near to what Yuuri assumed was his boss.

He just couldn’t wrap his head around why Viktor was keeping Yuuri’s identity a secret.

It was that curiosity that made him pause, made him stay close to the corner and stand instead of slowly making his way towards the door. Every time Viktor turned to look, Yuuri would see and he would stare back, unsure himself of why.

He waited. He wasn’t sure what he was waiting for, but he did it all the same, his instincts rooting him to the spot for something to happen. Yuuri often listened to instincts, despite his doubts. He listened to them this time too.

Before him, colours spun and twirled on the dance floor, glitter shining and shimmering material
complimenting the low light. The dancers were enjoying themselves, some not even stepping to the beat of the slow music filtering in through the air. Almost every single woman wore short sleeves or sleeveless dresses, baring their tattoos to the world. Every time they reached for drinks or spun before him, the black would catch Yuuri’s eyes. So unashamed, so open, so confident in their names were they, everything he wasn’t. Underneath his clothes, the tattoos burned and itched. The men sometimes rolled theirs up, just as comfortable with their own. Not one wore bandages as Yuuri did.

Even as the room began to grow hotter from the closed windows and the countless bodies, as women and men shed layers to combat the heat, Yuuri kept everything on. The more layers he could use to cover the ink on his skin, the better.

It was only as the night grew darker outside that Viktor finally ventured over. As he strode, eyes boring into Yuuri, reminding him of a predator with prey, that Yuuri wondered if he had made a mistake. Perhaps he should have left, perhaps he would regret staying. A conflict of emotions tugged at his chest, almost making it harder to breathe. He found himself stepping away before he could think.

A hand wrapped itself around his arm before he could take more than a few steps, stopping him where he stood. He didn’t look back, knowing there was some sort of smirk on Viktor’s lips, the type that made him want to shoot it right off.

“Where are you going?” Viktor’s soft voice asked, chilling Yuuri’s hot skin. “We’ve not had a chance to talk yet.”

“What do you want?” Yuuri bit back, glancing over at Viktor’s colleagues. Yakov was speaking to a group of older men, immersed in conversation. Mila was nowhere to be seen.

“Just to speak.”

Yuuri turned then and tore his arm from the man’s grip. Viktor’s eyes never strayed from Yuuri’s face, the slightest smirk on his lips but not as Yuuri expected, hair groomed and styled beautifully, cheeks slightly red from alcohol. Yuuri whispered, “You know who I am. Why didn’t you tell them?”

Viktor tilted his head. “I don’t have to tell them everything.”
“But I’m a threat to you. Doesn’t Yakov want to know where Phichit is?”

Viktor’s smile slipped for a second, his eyes growing hard, the blues turning to ice. “It’s not any of his business what I decide to do. If I don’t want to tell him who you are, I won’t.”

Yuuri said nothing, but all the while he wondered if that was a good decision on the man’s part. He held all the information the others wanted. Mila went so far as to follow Celestino around during the competition, to make sure he didn’t speak to anyone without their knowing. Viktor could be damaging their chance of finding Phichit, and for what reason?

“How are you finding Russia, Yuuri?” Viktor asked, the smile returning, if a little strained this time around.

“You’re not going to ask why I’m here?”

Viktor shrugged. “Celestino’s pretty heavily guarded.”

“That’s not what I’m here for.”

Viktor faltered for a second, as if he was so confident in his own idea that he hadn’t contemplated any others. He blinked, eyebrows raised. “There’s another reason?”

Yuuri huffed, unable to contain some of the annoyance that bubbled inside of his chest. “You think I’m so predictable?”

“Of course not. Rather, I don’t think things through.”

Yuuri narrowed his eyes, turning his body to completely face Viktor. As much as he hated to admit it, Viktor interested him, his actions unlike anyone he had ever met before. “Don’t you think that’s a big weakness? And you’re admitting it to me?”

Viktor grabbed a flute of wine as it passed, taking a sip and watching Yuuri from the lip of the glass. “Maybe I’m interested to see what you do with that knowledge.”
Confusion laced through Yuuri. What he was going to do with it? Was there something Viktor expected him to do? No, Yuuri thought. That felt more like a trap than anything. No man would willingly give up a weakness like that, especially to someone in their way, someone who had already taken away their target. Viktor was planning something.

“And if I did nothing with it?”

Viktor shrugged again. “It’s your choice.”

Yuuri swirled his drink, wondering what to say next. Everything about the situation confused him. He was unsure how to proceed, and he was never unsure. “I don’t know what you expect of me, but I’m not going to be it or do it. I’m simply a bodyguard to a target you’re trying to get to. I’m not going to play in any games.”

Viktor took another sip before he replied, “And I said I don’t play games. I follow my whims, and right now you’ve taken my interest. Nothing more. No underlying plans.”

“Somehow I can’t believe that.”

Viktor mimicked his movement, swirling around his glass and licking his lips of the wine droplets before he said, “You know, you’re very handsome for a bodyguard.”

It took a second before the words registered in Yuuri’s mind. As they did, a blush bloomed on his cheeks before he could stop it, his eyes widening until his pupils were circled by the white.

Viktor continued, “I expected someone massive, with more muscle than brain, scars all over his face, guns on show, says nothing but one word a day sort. You know?” He paused to let Yuuri speak, but as Yuuri stumbled over the words in his mind, Viktor moved on. “But you’re quite the surprise. You’re beautiful, and with a fiery personality as well. A fitting nemesis.”

Yuuri shook his head, trying to get to grips with it all. “What do you want?”

“How about a dance?”
Yuuri froze. “What?”

Before he could say anything more, Viktor grabbed his hand and pulled him towards the groups in the centre of the room. Yuuri wanted to pull back, to tear his hand away and to run. But Viktor’s hand in his was warm, sparks shooting up his arm and he found himself unable to do anything but follow.

They joined midway through a song, but Viktor didn’t seem to care. He turned Yuuri to face him once more and placed a hand on his hip, taking their hands to hold high beside them. He encouraged Yuuri to place his other hand on Viktor’s shoulder, and Yuuri did so reluctantly, keeping his hand just short of completely resting on it.

Yuuri was caught between wanting to see where this would go and running away, his nerves on edge. He couldn’t look away from Viktor’s face, his gaze drawing Yuuri in so expertly. A voice inside of his head told him this was a mistake and he was falling into something he shouldn’t be, but it was drowned out by another voice that told him he was stronger than that, to indulge in this and enjoy the sparks of excitement that it set off inside of him.

After their last meeting, this seemed easier, more relaxed, as if they had known each other for far longer. Something about Viktor drew in Yuuri, and he was sure it was curiosity. He couldn’t explain it, no matter how hard he tried.

“I do like your disguise tonight,” Viktor said, taking back Yuuri’s attention. “But I think I prefer your real dark locks, your brown eyes, tan skin. Though, the glasses look good on you.”

Yuuri calmed the raging blush on his cheeks, reprimanding himself for being momentarily struck by the words. This man was his enemy, or, an enemy to Phichit. Suddenly, a thought struck and he wondered if this man’s name appeared on Phichit’s right wrist. He’d need to ask about that. “How could you see through it?”

Viktor paused for a second, seemingly hesitant for the first time. After a pause, he replied. “A feeling. I’ll always be able to tell it’s you.”

Yuuri wanted to ask him again, knowing that that wasn’t the real reason. Viktor couldn’t have possibly just known, just had ‘a feeling’ when Yuuri expertly disguised himself. Even his parents couldn’t see it was him if he did it well enough. However it was that Viktor knew, he knew he needed to be careful. Phichit was safely far away, hidden and secured, with no potential for Viktor to see through his disguise. If it was just Yuuri, he knew he could survive.
“And is that a threat?” Yuuri snapped as they stepped to the sway of the music, the flutter of dresses around them, heels on the polished floor, whips of wind from spinning couples around them. He let Viktor dictate the movements, following the man’s lead. He wouldn’t admit it, but Yuuri hadn’t danced much before. He used to enjoy some of Minako’s classes when he was younger in order to keep fit, especially as he was leading up to his application into the company in Detroit, but that had been so long ago. He’d not danced since.

“No, it’s a promise.”

Yuuri glared up at the man. He saw the smirk on his lips, and rage filled Yuuri’s lungs. What was it about this man that could bring such emotions? He trained for years to conceal his expressions, and yet a few words from Viktor tore all of his efforts apart. Yuuri asked, “How is the bullet wound?”

Viktor’s arm jerked, as if the question brought the pain back. “It’s doing well, healing slowly. How about yours?”

Yuuri felt his own burn. If he moved too much sometimes, it opened and seeped blood again. It too was slowly healing. “It’s doing well. I don’t think it’ll even leave a scar.”

Viktor’s eyebrow twitched. “Oh? Isn’t that good.”

“It’ll fade, and I’ll soon forget about it.”

The smirk slipped and Viktor almost halted them on the dance floor. “You won’t soon forget our meeting though.”

It was Yuuri’s turn to smile, spotting an opportunity to tease the man as he had been teased. “Oh, I will. I’ve been in many dangerous situations during my career. Meeting you was only one of them. It’ll fade into a story I’ll sometimes tell.”

“Have I not made a lasting impression on you?”

“I don’t think you could. My impression of you so far is an incapable member of the mafia.”
“Incapable?” Viktor’s grip on his hand tightened a fraction.

“Yes. You’ve done nothing to try and get my information, allowed me to escape, and you’re not letting your colleagues know who I am. Incapable.”

Viktor said nothing for a while, and Yuuri wondered if he had taken it too far. The man’s eyes stared hard into him, and Yuuri felt compelled to turn away. But he continued as if he hadn’t said anything at all, dancing in step with the music, a dare dancing in his own eyes. All around them, the banquet continued, as if they were completely unaware of the danger lurking in the middle of the dance floor. Yuuri could feel it pulsing in the air between them. It made the hairs on his skin stand on end, his heart race, and his lips almost wanted to pull up in a smile. He refrained, wondering why he felt such a way.

But Viktor smiled back, back to the icy smirk he loved to give. “And you’re anything but incapable. How you managed to hide Phichit from us, I don’t know. You’re quite the capable bodyguard.”

“And you hate it.”

“No. I find the challenge thrilling.” Viktor leaned forwards until his mouth was besides Yuuri’s ears, his fringe brushing lightly against Yuuri’s skin. Yuuri froze, heart skipping a beat, as Viktor whispered, “I’m going to enjoy this. I’ll find a way to find Phichit, don’t you worry. And when I do, I’m going to make sure you’re there with me. Yuuri, we’re going to have a lot of fun.”

Yuuri contained the shiver that rushed up his form, feeling anger and something else burning brightly inside of him. He wasn’t sure what the other thing was, but knew he must have been mistaking it when he thought it was excitement. “And I’m going to try harder and harder to make sure that you won’t find him. You’ll get so frustrated, that grin is going to be wiped right from your lips,” Yuuri promised, taking the lead in their dance. He pulled until Viktor had no choice but to follow, almost falling gracelessly on his own feet. Yuuri pulled him among the forms, towards the edge of the floor. “You’re going to be so lost, years passing by before you even get a whiff of where Phichit is. You’re going to be begging me to let you know. Or you’ll finally think that it was worth torturing me for that information. And when you decide that, I’ll vanish too. You say you’ll be able to find me wherever I am. Shall we test just how good you are?”

Yuuri felt Viktor’s hand tighten again, and Viktor’s blue eyes widened just a fraction. Yuuri wasn’t sure if Viktor was angry at the challenge, or excited by it. But they said nothing for a moment as they danced, their hair fluttering about their faces as they spun in place, their grips tight on one another. Viktor’s hands were warm, his palm fitting so well against Yuuri’s hand – not that Yuuri
realised. At the back of his mind, he registered it, a spark of something setting off. But that was as far as if went, he was too preoccupied with how captivating the man’s eyes were, how he could almost understand the meaning of ‘the eyes were the window to the soul’. In Viktor’s, he could the darkness the man harboured inside of himself.

He didn’t know what the man could see in his own. Perhaps Viktor could see the resilience and the stubbornness that he had often been teased for having when young. Perhaps he could see the hatred Yuuri harboured for Viktor. Or perhaps he could see the complete opposite that Yuuri was to himself.

But whatever Viktor might have been thinking was cut off quickly. Out of the corner of his eye, Yuuri saw the movement of something dark. It wasn’t until it was closer that it drew Yuuri’s full attention, his eyes cutting towards the movement. Yakov was making his way onto the dance floor, gaze flickering between them.

Viktor stopped them before Yuuri could. He pulled away from Yuuri quickly, but didn’t step away. Around them, dancers continued, the music blaring, alcohol flowing like a tap. But Yuuri’s world stopped.

Yakov was speaking to Viktor in Russian before he’d even reached them. He placed a hand on Viktor’s shoulder once he had, voice harsh and gruff. Yuuri wondered if the man smoked. This close, Yuuri could almost see each individual wrinkle, deep set like a map in Yakov’s face. His skin was slightly tan, verging on red. He was groomed, with the tiniest hint of a shadow after all day, wisps of greying hair peeking from under his hat.

Yuuri had to stop his observations when Yakov turned to him. His gaze ran over Yuuri completely, obviously sizing him up. He asked something in Russian again, still staring at Yuuri. Viktor replied with a hint of bite in his voice. Yuuri contemplated sneaking off, but Yakov turned his questions on Yuuri.

“Who are you?”

Yuuri opened his mouth, voice dying in his throat. The words faded away, all of his careful planning disappearing as Yakov’s eyes stared hard into him.

Viktor stepped forwards, almost placing himself in the middle of Yuuri and Yakov. “He’s just a sibling of one of the skaters.”
Yakov didn’t look away from Yuuri, eyes narrowing the smallest fraction. “Really?”

“Yes. He got curious about our company, Yakov. I thought we could dance while we chatted.”

“And he knows that we’re not free to sponsor any other skaters, does he?”

“I’ve already explained that.”

“Good. Then you can stop speaking to him.”

Yuuri could hear the suspicion lurking underneath the man’s words. He wasn’t sure if Yakov was always suspicious, or he knew as Viktor had. Either way, he didn’t want to be here anymore. Viktor looked about ready to argue, but Yuuri cut him off.

“I was heading out anyway,” he said, taking one small step back and almost backing into a dancing couple. “Thank you for speaking to me, Viktor. I’ll keep what you said in mind.” He could barely contain his smirk as he turned and heard Yakov ask what it was Viktor had said.

He wove his way through the dance floor, bumping into crowds of people. The back of his neck sparked under the stares of Yakov and Viktor – he could almost hear them talking about him. He walked out of the front door. The cold night air crashed into him, cooling his flushed skin immediately. He shivered.

The question of why Viktor had lied for him sprung to mind as he walked down the road. The music of the banquet faded quickly, but it still rang inside of his head, echoing as he knew it would for hours to come. He wondered if Viktor didn’t like Yakov, or if their relationship was tightly strung. He’d already mentioned that he didn’t want to tell the man who Yuuri was, and then lied to his face. He’d even lied the last time they met on the phone to Yakov. Yuuri rubbed his forehead, feeling a headache coming on. He didn’t know a lot about Yakov, but knew enough that if Viktor became serious and told the man everything he knew, he would be severely limited in what he could do. Perhaps even Russia itself would be off limits to him.

He discarded his disguise in a trash can as he passed the back of a restaurant, knowing it was useless now. He didn’t have his kit to make changes to them, and Viktor and Yakov had seen him in it. He was safe enough without one, Viktor was the only one who had seen his real face and he didn’t seem at all compelled to say anything.
He’d need to figure something out. He needed to know more about Yakov. With Viktor there, he
knew he couldn’t do much. He’d need to find another way.

As he let himself back into his booked room, a thought occurred to him. It could be so simple. All
he had to do was schedule an interview. The man was the head of a leading clothing company in
Russia. He was hidden in plain sight, with nothing but vague rumours following his tail. It meant
meeting with the man was easier than any other underground mafia leader.

Yuuri locked the door and pushed the drawer in front. A simple bullet to the lock wouldn’t open it
this time. They’d need force, and by the time they had it open Yuuri would be out of the window
and down the street. He opened his laptop and began to search for Yakov, reading over the details
of the company and the work they did.

Endless pictures of the man popped up, some with him smiling, others with the same hard look
Yuuri had witnessed himself. There was a number to call one of his assistants to request an
interview, Viktor being one of them, but a month waiting time. Yuuri scratched his head. He
needed one sooner than that, and he could slip in Phichit’s name to bring it closer, but that would
alert the man. Yakov would most likely bring Viktor to the meeting, and have others waiting
outside for him upon his arrival. Yuuri didn’t need that, not when the outcome was so unclear.
Unlike Viktor, Yuuri was sure Yakov would go through some great lengths to get the information.
Even through all of his confident words and his bravery, Yuuri knew he wouldn’t be able to
withstand some of the horror stories he had heard about their torture methods.

He’d need something else. With something in mind, he began to call. The nameless assistant asked
what he wanted, and Yuuri asked for a meeting. He slipped in Yuri’s name. The boy wasn’t a part
of what was going on with Phichit, Yuuri suspected, and as Viktor had said, wasn’t a proper part of
the mafia either. He was a friend of Yuri’s, he said, and he was concerned about something. He
didn’t specify, saying he wanted to speak to Yakov himself, alone. The assistant was all too eager
to bring the meeting to an hour slot in the man’s schedule for tomorrow.

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Yuuri’s heart was beating inside of his throat. He checked himself in the mirror once more, seeing
how pale his face was. The back of his head was tense. His mouth was dry.

So many things could go wrong today. Who knew how many of the company were mafia? Who
knew what he was walking into? He certainly didn’t, and it went against everything he had been
taught. Don’t take risks. Only go into something if you knew what was going to become of it, what
you were immersing yourself in. He didn’t. He shouldn’t be doing this. But he was. For Phichit.
He called a taxi to take him to the company building, finding it in the centre of the city, rising high above other buildings. It was different from ones Yuuri had seen before. It didn’t try to mimic the modern glass architecture as cities in America tried, or flashed bright lights as those in the major cities of Japan. It feigned old architecture, as if it had been built hundreds of years ago, as those around it might have done. The windows were small, the walls made of tanned brick, with etchings and detail along the doorways. It wasn’t as high as Yuuri was expecting either, but it was high enough.

It towered over him as he started up at its lines. Looking at buildings such as these, Yuuri understood why they were called sky scrapers. He began to regret his decision again. But more so as he was lead through the building and was told to stop outside of Yakov’s office after a long hallway walk.

It was old wood, his name engraved in a metal plate just at Yuuri’s eye level. Even the handle seemed polished and brand new. Money was thrown about a lot here, Yuuri knew. He’d been told to wait, and as he did, he felt his palms begin to turn slippery from his nerves. He could still turn back. But he knew he was in luck – no guards beside the door, and the assistant hadn’t acted strangely. No one had checked him. No one had found the recording device inside of his pocket. He couldn’t help the suspicion that coursed through him, but pushed himself through it.

It wasn’t long that he had to wait. After a few minutes of psyching himself up, he began to calm, his heart mellowing to a slow beat. The sweat was drying on his forehead and palms, and his skin was cold against the air filtering in through the AC system. His thoughts were cut off by a gruff voice on the other side of the door.

“Come in.”

Yuuri took a second to think about that voice. It was just as he remembered hearing. Deep, slightly croaky. But the most important was that it sounded normal, calm. Yuuri had learned to notice the different intonations in a voice. His suspicions still lingered, but it didn’t sound as if Yakov was concealing anger or was eager for Yuuri to walk into something he shouldn’t have. He reached for the handle and opened the door.

It was an open office on the other side, with wide open windows that made up the back wall and cascaded the room with light, directly behind a large mahogany desk and a tall red chair. The other walls were solid and dark wood, with art pieces perfectly aligned. Two black leather sofas sat facing one another in front of the wooden desk, with a low table in the middle. It was bare.

Sat in the chair was Yakov, his desk covered in pieces of organised paper work, some open and already looked through, some closed and untouched. A pen was still in the man’s hand, Yakov having not even looked up when Yuuri entered. He was scribbling something down, head bowed
over the work, back straight and looking everything like the powerful leader that Yuuri suspected he was.

Yuuri understood what Celestino and Phichit had meant when they said that despite how nice the man had been, how charitable, there was something, just something small lurking underneath. It wasn’t how the man seemed to rarely smile, or how his eyes were stuck in a glare, or how his calloused fingers hinted at something more than business management. It was the air in which he walked, sat, moved in, created. Yuuri could feel it all around him, breathed it in, heavy against his frame and the tension was palpable. The man had yet to look up, and yet Yuuri already knew that this was not a man to cross. He’d felt it to a degree at the banquet, but he’d been distracted by Viktor – who, to some degree, radiated the same air. But not like this.

If Yuuri wasn’t so used to strong personalities, he might have been intimidated by it. Instead, he took a moment to breathe in through his teeth, glance around to make sure no one else was in the room, and then steadied himself.

Before he did anything, he reminded himself of what this man was. There would likely be cameras all around the room, and it was one call away or one button press away from a storm of armed mafia men invading the room. Yakov himself probably had weapons stashed away throughout the room. He needed to be careful – not become complacent because they were both alone.

Confident. Be confident. Just as he had been with Viktor. He strode forwards and stood in front of the desk, looking down at the man as he continued to scribble away. Yakov still didn’t look up, and Yuuri decided he would not be the one to break the silence.

But it surprised him, Yuuri thought as he stared at Yakov who worked away. Without his hat, Yuuri could see that the man was balding at the top of his head, the hair growing thinner and noticeably greyer. Yuuri wondered how old the man was, how long he had been in the business. How he had survived this long.

Finally, the man finished signing something, dropped his pen, leaned back in his chair and turned his hard gaze on Yuuri. He said nothing for a moment, crossed his arms and regarded Yuuri the same way he had at the gala. Yuuri stared back. He knew he didn’t need to make introductions, not when he had reached this interview using Yuri’s name. They’d be passed formalities.

It was as Yuuri was thinking that that Yakov finally cut the silence. “What has he done now?” His voice was low, somewhere between a whisper and speaking at a normal volume, and yet in the
silence it seemed to shatter and echo.

“Yuri?” Yuuri asked, momentarily stunned. Yakov asked as if it was a normal occurrence.

“Who else? Tell me what he broke, and I’ll compensate you for it.”

Ah. Yuuri thought back to the boy he had met, not surprised. He did seem like a boy that would lash out and break something. “That’s not what I’m here for.”

“Then what did he do? I’ll pay whatever you want for you to forget it.”

“You have quite the soft spot for him, don’t you?” Yuuri asked, careful with his words. He remembered how Viktor had said that they took in the little boy when he’d been orphaned. As much as he found it disgusting that they dragged in a child to their world, he knew that Yuri seemed well cared for, free, if a little troublesome.

Yakov paused, eyes growing harder. “Just tell me what he did, get your money and be on your way.”

Yuuri reached out and tapped the desk, feeling the indentations of the wood underneath his fingertips. “I’m not actually here because of him. I only said it because I knew you’d see me sooner.”

There was a tense second as Yakov said nothing, gaze roaming over Yuuri again – but this time, in a new light, as if he was sizing Yuuri up as a threat. Yuuri found he liked that look, liked that he managed to change Yakov into considering him as something more than a nuisance. He wanted to be the threat nipping at Yakov’s form, the revenge that came back from the life Yakov had chased Phichit into. If Phichit couldn’t do it himself, then this was where Yuuri established himself as the payback these men deserved.

“Then why are you here?”

Yuuri thought over his words first, trailing his fingers against the wood and feeling the excitement thumping in his chest. “See,” he began, hoping he had Yakov hanging on his every word. “I’m a man that tries to help a lot of people. I save some, protect others, and make sure that anyone trying to get to them never manages to.”
He watched as Yakov narrowed his eyes in confusion just for a second, before the last few words finally meant something. He clenched his jaw, eyes boring into Yuuri. “I see.”

“And it’s come to my attention that a certain client of mine has been harassed by you and your company.”

Yakov’s eyebrow twitched. Only the slightest bit, the tiniest fraction. But Yuuri caught it, feeling a triumphant smile trying to turn his lips. But he refrained. Gloating now would only bring him pain. He needed to be careful, ever so careful.

Yakov grit his teeth together, so hard that Yuuri could almost hear the grinding. “And what are you going to ask me to do?”

“I’m not going to ask you to do anything. I want you to stop hunting him.”

“And you think I’ll listen to what you want?”

“No. But I don’t want you to listen, I want you to do.”

“Is that meant to convince me?”

Yuuri took his moment to regard Yakov, mirroring some of the traits Viktor had. He remembered how worried he was every time Viktor regarded him so, wondering if there was something bigger in mind. Yuuri opened his mouth, but let Yakov hang on every second of silence before he replied, “You have quite the soft spot for Yuri, don’t you?”

Something in Yakov’s face darkened and he began to tap his finger against the table. Yuuri could almost feel the annoyance in the air, thumping against his ear drums. He knew if he pressed much more, two outcomes would come of it – one, he’d get what he wanted and Phichit would be free, or he would never be able to leave this building. At this point, he suspected that the second was the most likely.

“Try it,” Yakov thundered, glare almost stabbing at Yuuri. “Try and use him to blackmail me. What do you plan? Detail it to me, tell me how you’ll kidnap him. Tell me what you’ll do to him.
How are you going to starve him? Are you going to kill him outright? Are you going to rip out his organs one by one until not even you know how he’s alive? Tell me. Give me fuel. Anger me more.”

Yuuri tried to contain the shivers that ran up his spine and tried to maintain the calm expression on his face. But it was hard. He almost wanted to cower. Unlike Viktor, Yakov seemed very capable of hurting him and very willing to do so. But this was the only way he knew how. He’d never hurt the boy, but Yakov didn’t know that. He said, “Why give you that power of knowing? Why, when I could leave it a mystery? I could have you worrying over him, regretting your decision to push me away.”

Yakov stood up suddenly, crashing the palms of his hands against the wood, filling the room with the deafening sound. Yuuri didn’t flinch, though his hands clenched tightly together as his nails dug into his skin. He worried for the smallest second that the man might have seen, but no grin crossed his features. This man was far more frightening than Viktor could ever be.

Oddly enough though, Yuuri found himself almost reaching for his guns. In his mind, he played himself shooting the man in the chest, the thought not as sickening as it had been with Viktor. He almost felt encouraged by it, as if his body was compelling him to do it.

“How is that any better than what I am doing?” Yakov said, his voice deeper with each word, sending shivers of fear down Yuuri’s skin. “How are you protecting people? How can you stand before me and say you’d willingly hurt a child for the sake of someone who has done wrong?”

Anger burst inside of him. “He didn’t do anything wrong,” he grit out, stepping forwards. “All he did was witness something you didn’t want him to see. And now, because of a second spent stuck in a mistake, you’re hunting him down! How can you sit before me and hunt down an innocent for him doing one thing wrong?” he threw back at the man.

“You act like I have the same conscience as you. I do not. If someone does something wrong, I will correct it.”

“It was an accident!”

“And you expect me to do what? Just let him go? He saw something he shouldn’t have, as you said. Viktor asked me to deal with it, and I will do that. You expect me to take pity on a man I met a handful of times? Over my own chosen trust?”
“I’m asking you to have some mercy upon a man that had a bright future, upon a man who would do anything to make sure he is safe, to be happy. He won’t ever tell anyone what he saw.”

“You can’t promise that. Curiosity is a dangerous thing. He might tell the other what he saw.”

A thrill raced up Yuuri’s chest. “The other?” he pressed, unable to keep out the surprise in his voice.

Yakov paused, the red of his face fading. “He didn’t tell you?”

“Tell me what?”

Yakov moved to stand straight again, the anger inside of him bubbling into confusion and wariness. Yuuri almost cursed at himself. He shouldn’t have pushed. He should have acted as if he knew what was going on – perhaps then he might have urged Yakov to continue.

Yakov shook his head. “Viktor asked that I deal with Phichit. So, I did. He won’t be telling anyone anything now.” Yakov sat back down now, the rage burning away until he looked slightly weary. “The pros of continuing to hunt him far outweigh the cons.”

Yuuri only just managed to suppress his grin. His hand trailed over his pocket, in which a recording device was woven secretly between the fabric and the lining of the pocket, sensitive enough to pick up their voices with the microphone that was peeking from his trouser lining. He refrained from making any movement that might hint to Yakov of its existence. He almost felt like gloating to the man how easily he had managed to see through his armour, how easily he managed to bring in such a device and his gun. He supposed that that was the risk of running a company that many thought was innocent – two fronts, two stories, with no room to take the security measures that was needed. Had the outside world knew what really lurked among these halls, he knew he wouldn’t have been able to even walk the lobby.

“Why not leave Viktor to deal with it himself?” Yuuri asked, almost stumbling over the name for a reason unknown to him. “Or does he have to come running to you to deal with everything? What sort of man is that – is he really taking over from you?”

“You’re treading on thin ice, boy.”
“I didn’t come here for a fight,” Yuuri replied, deepening his voice as Yakov was doing. “But I’ll fight with everything I have if I have to.”

“And so will I. I can guarantee who will win.”

Yuuri knew the truth of that as well. He was alone, against an army of mafia who knew killing better than he did. But a voice reminded him that the only one who knew who he was, was Viktor – the same man who had already said he didn’t want to tell Yakov about him. Whatever the reason, Yuuri didn’t care, but Viktor had placed him in a brilliant position. Yakov didn’t know him, didn’t know his name, what company he was with, whether he was with a legal one or a rival mafia group. Yakov didn’t know anything but the fact that he and Phichit were connected.

He tilted his head to the side, regarding Yakov once more, noticing the way the man’s hand was positioned. His arm was along his thigh, fingers spread over his knee, itching ready to reach for something. Yuuri could have bet his entire life on the fact that there was a gun or two, fully loaded, waiting underneath the table for their owner to use. And Yakov seemed almost compelled to use them.

He took a deep breath. “I’m not so sure about that. Mr Felstman, you have no idea who I am, do you? Nor what group I am with. But we know everything about you. Haven’t I proved that by mentioning Yuri’s name? He’s not one of your kind – you adopted him after his parents passed away,” he said, regurgitating everything he remembered Viktor telling him. If there was anything that Yuuri could do, it was memorise. “You were close friends with his grandfather. You took him in because you felt guilty.”

If Yuuri thought that Yakov’s face held a storm before, it raged one now, the red of his cheeks brightening until they made the whites of his eyes pop. There was barely held back fury in his frame. His hand almost reached for the gun underneath the table. Yuuri made a point of reaching for his as well, opening his jacket to show the gleam of the metal on the holster. Yakov paused.

“I wouldn’t advise you doing that, Mr Feltsman. Something could go wrong. What are poor Yuri, Viktor and Mila to do when you’re gone?” He thanked his whole being that much of the information he needed had been given to him.

Yakov pulled his arm away and rested his head in his hand, as if there was a headache slowly coming on. “Where was it you said you were from?”

“I didn’t say anything about it,” Yuuri replied.
“So, tell me now.”

“I don’t think I need to.” As Yuuri said it though, he knew he had said something wrong. The rage burned away in Yakov’s face, wide eyes closing slightly into a relaxed blink. Any hold he might have had on the man before was lost now, and both men knew it.

“Anyone worth their threat to me would tell me exactly what group they were from. They’d want to know that they had bragging rights.” His hand drew away further from the gun, and Yuuri felt anger rise at the blatant disregard the man now held for him. “Yet here you stand alone, with hesitation at naming your group. That leaves two options – you either operate alone, or you’re working for a much smaller group that I could crush in a second and you need to protect them.”

Yuuri refrained from speaking. He should have thought more of it, he realised. Of course someone such as Yakov would be able to see the slip up easily. With just a few misplaced words, he had shattered the illusion Yuuri had held. Anything more could mean death.

“So, which one are you, young man?” Yakov continued. “Are you alone? Do you work for some small dogs?” When Yuuri still didn’t say anything, Yakov almost smirked, a smirk Yuuri had seen on Viktor countless times. “Would anyone even know you were missing if you never left this office?”

The way the man asked had Yuuri holding his breath. He made sure he could feel his gun, that he knew where it was and how easy it was to reach. He opened his jacket just a little more to make his next move plain.

“There are many people waiting for when I get back,” he said, trying to keep the waver from his voice.

The smirk on Yakov’s face grew feral. In the smile, Yuuri could see Viktor, see the same gleam in their teeth, the same predatory way they glared. He wasn’t sure why he was thinking of the similarity now, but he found it striking for all the wrong reasons.

“That usually means no one is waiting.” Yakov stood, reaching for his gun and holding it tightly in his grip. Yuuri stumbled back as it was aimed towards him, drawing out his own to aim at the powerful man behind the desk. “It was a brave thing to do, you know. To face me, in my own domain, and demand things of me. I do have to commend you for it, maybe even respect. But as much of a bravery it was, it was also stupid.”
A warning shot was fired. Yuuri jumped out of the way, hearing it ricochet off the wall beside him. Thick walls, he observed. Thick walls and a thick door, down a hall from the populated office. Far enough that no one would be able to hear this, or hear his pleas for help if he made any. Enough space and time for them to dispose of a body. Wood floors. Easy to clean up. The windows behind were most likely one way. Yuuri bet there would be cameras around somewhere.

Yakov let the moment pass, gun still aimed, slight smoke still rising from the barrel. “Your involvement has only made me more interested in finding the missing skater. What are you to him, I wonder? Where is he?”

Yuuri didn’t feel like going through this again. He backed up until he was near the door, going slowly so that his movements didn’t encourage Yakov to shoot. The metal of the gun was slick against his sweaty palms, but he held it tightly and took deep breaths. He’d made a big mistake. He shouldn’t have come. He’d learned nothing, done nothing more than put himself in more danger – and now he’d lost the one saving grace he had, that Viktor wouldn’t tell this man anything about Yuuri. But now Yakov knew his face.

“If you shoot again,” Yuuri warned, “then I’ll shoot too. I’m a good aim.”

“You think you’d be able to shoot faster than me? You’re not willing to hurt me, not before I hurt you first. You’re not like me.”

Yuuri felt the challenge rise in his head, anger lacing the words as they echoed in his mind. How dare Yakov made insinuations to who Yuuri really was – how dare he assume. Yuuri, for a moment, saw Viktor once more, mocking, cold, smirking. He felt himself drawn to the idea of proving them both wrong.

He shot.

And unlike with Viktor, Yuuri shot exactly where he was meant to shoot. He aimed at the man’s chest, and the bullet followed the path he had set out for it. But Yakov moved to the right, directing the bullet instead into the flesh of his left-side ribs, slicing through the material of his shirt. The man groaned and fell forwards against the table, the blood spurting out quickly between his fingers as he grabbed it. He aimed the gun and shot.

Yuuri ducked just in time. Another bullet lodged itself into the wall, sputtering out a puff of dust and splinters of wood. Yuuri allowed instinct to take over. He rushed to the door, yanked it open
and hid behind it, taking security in the thickness of it.

He could hear Yakov panting on the other side, scrabbling for something as he moved his way around the wound Yuuri gave him. There was a press of a button, a dial tone that was quickly picked up. Yuuri was rushing away before he could hear the words exchanged.

As he ran, he pulled his hood up, covering the best he could of his face and placed the gun back in its holster beneath his jacket. It had already been seen, and every camera in the vicinity had already caught him. Had he walked into any other company and shot at their CEO, he’d be hunted himself by the police and special forces. But he knew Yakov couldn’t afford that, not with the certainty that the hunt would bring up some of the less-innocent aspects of his company.

It was the only thing that was saving Yuuri. And he knew that well. He would use it to his full advantage, making sure that any legal attack on him would bring down the company too. Yakov had underestimated him. He was going to make sure that the man regretted it. Just as he would regret ruining Phichit’s life.

He ignored the stares and the shouts thrown at him from all the employees of the building, two security guards going so far as to try and tackle him. But they were not bodyguard level. They were not as agile, as trained as Yuuri was. He managed to spring passed them with barely a sweat broken on his forehead as they stumbled around.

He crashed through the glass doors of the entrance, surprising the group of tourists loitering outside. The adrenaline was coursing through him like thick sludge, pumping through his veins until the sounds of the busy street could not reach him. His breath was loud in his head, his heart in his throat.

He expected to hear the sirens of the police chasing after him, ready to prove him wrong with what he thought of Yakov. But the smoky city air was clean of any such sound, filled only with the honks of horns, engines purring and the crowds of walking and talking people, all completely unaware of what had transpired so close to them.

Yuuri didn’t think much as he ran. His mind was still stuck on the mental image of his bullet cutting through the man’s suit, blood pouring out as it did. He knew that this would cause more problems than it had solved.

If Phichit had known what he was prepared to do for the skater, he’d have fought harder to keep Yuuri back in Japan.
The first thing Yuuri did when he arrived at the hotel was leave. He gathered everything he had and disappeared out of the window without a plan. No idea of where to go, where he could hide, how much of the city Yakov really had under his grip. He just knew he needed to be far away from the hotel he had spent the last few days in.

It wasn’t until he managed to find an abandoned warehouse that he slowed and allowed himself a breath. He leaned against the wall and dropped all of his things, almost flinching at the echo of the crash. He slid down the wall, breathing hard, allowing the dusty air to fill every inch of his lungs. He could almost cough up the layers he was inhaling, but for the moment it was cleaner than the air of Yakov’s office. Who knew how many dealings had gone on in there, many that had ended up with deaths. How many people had been murdered in that room?

He didn’t allow himself too long to think about it before he tore open one of his bags and pulled out his laptop. He made quick movements, taking out the recording device from his pocket and connecting it to his laptop. The file was brought up, and he did the first thing that came to his mind – he sent it to his boss as a backup drive.

*Don’t do anything with this yet, he sent the man. Keep it secret. If anything happens to me, send it to everyone you know. Any company, any news agency, any country. Anything. Spread it around.*

Short, sharp and simple, he thought. There wasn’t much more he needed to say, and yet something inside of him turned sour as he read through his own message again. What had he gotten himself into? He knew other bodyguards who had sent around the company something that they called a ‘Backup Plan’. Just in case something happened. Yuuri used to pity them, and wondered how they had become so integrated into a job that they worried for their lives. When he first started in the company, he thought they were lacking in skill if they got into so much trouble. Now he understood.

He remembered how a few had needed that backup plan. A few had called in desperate times, and for some it still wasn’t enough. They still passed away, their life work gone in the blink of an eye.

With that in mind, he sent it to his boss, desperation hinted in his words. It would be enough. He’d mentioned Yakov’s name, and Yakov had admitted to his hunting down Phichit. As far as evidence went, it would be enough. Upon his disappearance, or worse – should they ever find Phichit – then that file would be his backup. The world would see what kind of man Yakov and his assistants were, what they were capable of.
The true story would come out. Phichit, the innocent, had figured something out about his sponsor. Just a little after, the skater went missing. It would be enough to damn the mafia. No amount of money could buy silence enough to calm the storm it would bring.

He closed his laptop and placed the device back in the bag, switched off. He rested his head back against the wall and listened to his veins pumping in his body. He felt slightly sick, as if the stress of the day was finally gaining on him. He was going to lose his hair, he thought. He was probably paler than he had ever been before. Sweat was pouring from his body, wetting his top until it clung to his skin. His mother would have given him mounds of food at seeing him like this.

He wiped the sweat from his forehead with his top and wondered what it is he should do next. His Backup Plan had been sent, ready to be thrown out into the world if Yakov decided that he was worth hunting down too. The next best thing to do would be leave Russia, leave Europe entirely. Comfort told him to return to Japan, but being Phichit’s bodyguard meant that that was an impossibility now. He’d need to go somewhere else. Maybe back to America. Anywhere was better than here.

And yet curiosity was pouring into him, the wonder of it he could unearth more. Perhaps there was something else he could send as a Backup Plan, something that would ensure that Yakov went away. At this moment, even if his recorded drive was released, Yakov still had influence. He could continue to hunt Phichit even within the bars of jail.

Perhaps he could slap something in Viktor’s face while he was at it.

Viktor. The name resounded in his head, sending chills down his spine. Viktor could still be his way out of this. The man seemed reluctant to tell Yakov about Yuuri, for whatever reason, and Yuuri suspected there might have been some animosity between them.

He searched online, finding the same company page he had searched yesterday. Listed underneath as Yakov’s assistant was Viktor, with a few other names. He typed the number up on his burner phone and called, each dial tone like a lifetime.

It didn’t connect for what seemed forever. But finally, Viktor’s voice spoke through his receiver, tone deep and sharp. The man was in a hurry.

“Hello?,” he asked.
Yuuri froze. For just a second, the question of what he was doing ran through his mind. This was stupid. How could he be calling Viktor at a time like this? What made him think that Viktor could save him? No, no, no, not save him, could help him. But why was he doing this? And yet he couldn’t help but feel how his body relaxed when the voice spoke into his ear.

“Hello?” Viktor called again, his voice louder this time, close to a hiss. “Answer.”

Yuuri prepared his words and opened his mouth to say them, but the only thing to come out was, “Viktor?” He paused at the way he said it, his voice once so strong when he met with Yakov now hollow and almost exhausted. He cursed himself.

When Viktor spoke again, the animosity in it was gone, the man sounding just as tired as Yuuri felt. “Yuuri?”

Yuuri hated how he felt at his name being spoken by Viktor. He curled in on himself, holding the phone tightly to his ear and feeling his breaths wrecking his lungs. He wanted to shout at the man, to scream and to demand things and show his hatred for his kind. But instead he felt tears spring to his eyes. He pushed them back, disgusted with himself. He hadn’t cried in so long. Why did it have to be now, with Viktor on the other side?

“Yuuri? Is that you?” Viktor asked, voice a little clearer. “Yuuri.”

“Yes, it’s me,” Yuuri ground out, attempting to make his voice stronger this time. But it just made him sound as if he was in pain.

“Yuuri.” Viktor almost sounded relieved, but Yuuri was sure he was hearing things. But what might have sounded like relief suddenly turned to anger as Viktor asked, “It was you, wasn’t it? You met with Yakov. You shot him.”

Yuuri almost laughed then. Of course, this was a stupid idea. What he might have thought was animosity between Viktor and Yakov was no longer there, and it was proof enough in the way Viktor spoke. Yuuri could hear the desperation and the worry, the slowly-burning rage directed towards him. They were closer than Yuuri had expected.

“He shot at me first.”
“He did?”

“Yes, he did!” Yuuri bellowed. “He shot at me twice. I was defending myself!”

“Were you hurt?”

Yuuri rolled his eyes. “Why? Would you be disappointed if I wasn’t? Because none of them hit. I’m fine, thank you.” There was a sigh on the other side, and Yuuri almost paused at how genuine it sounded. Before he could stop, he asked, “How is Yakov?”

“I think he’ll be fine. You got him good, but he’s a stubborn old man. He was shouting at me the whole time they were placing him in the ambulance.” Viktor gave a low chuckle as if he knew of a joke that Yuuri wasn’t quite getting. “If he hadn’t moved out of the way though, you really would have gotten him.”

Yuuri refrained from commenting “Shame” as he wanted to. But something told him not to, that it wasn’t the time and place. An apology almost slipped out instead, and Yuuri felt shocked by it.

“Where are you?” Viktor asked.

Yuuri looked around. He hadn’t had a proper look around the warehouse since he had stepped foot into it. The windows were broken or were already fallen out, the doors ripped off and the walls covered in graffiti. A chill swept in and he rubbed his arm with his free hand, feeling the wind cool his hot skin and wet eyes.

“I don’t really know,” he found himself saying.

“You’re not in your hotel?”

“Why does it not surprise me that you knew where I was staying?” he snapped.

“I don’t. I just know that you’d get a hotel.”
Yuuri threw that comment aside. “No. I left it. And why should I tell you anyway? I just shot and almost killed your beloved boss. Do you want to find me and finish the job you started? Hit my heart instead of my arm this time?”

Viktor snapped, “No. Stop being stupid. You don’t know this city.”

“I can find my way around just fine.”

“Stop being stubborn and tell me where you are.”

“I have a gun too, you know. I have yours. I’m armed.”

“Yes, yes,” Viktor sighed. “And I know you know how to use it. I’ll come unarmed, okay? I won’t hurt you this time.”

Yuuri paused, feeling a headache coming in. Why were his emotions in such turmoil? Why was he worrying? It should have been so clear-cut. “I shot your boss. Why don’t you want to kill me?”

“It’s complicated, Yuuri. I don’t know for certain. But I’ll see if I’m right when I meet you.”

“Right about what?”

“Nothing. Where are you?”

Yuuri groaned, the chaos of emotions rolling inside of him. He knew what he should do – hang up the phone and never contact the man again, rush away to another country, hide for a while and gather power before he went against the mafia again. But he wanted to follow his curiosity. And, for once, his curiosity and instincts seemed to be in tune – both wanted him to accept the consequences and allow Viktor to find him, to tell him where he was and see what came of it. It was stupid.

“I don’t know. It’s an abandoned warehouse. I followed the south street for a while. I don’t think I
turned. It was a long time but—"

“It’s okay, I know where you are. Wait there, and I’ll be there soon. It’s getting dark and it’s going to start getting cold, Yuuri. Find a shelter inside the warehouse and try to stay warm. I’ll call your name once I’m inside so you know it’s me, okay?”

“Okay.” Yuuri grit his teeth at how weak it sounded, coughed away the bile in his throat and tried again. “Okay. If you do anything suspicious at all, though, I will shoot.”

“I know. See you soon, Yuuri.”

Yuuri stopped himself from saying it back and hung up instead. A storm of regret raged inside of him, almost stopping his breathing. He broke the phone, tearing the card inside, and threw it into the corner of the warehouse.

He did as advised though and walked towards the far corner, where most of the windows were still intact. He curled himself against the wall, pulling his jacket closer to his body and his bags on top of his feet to warm them.

As time ticked by, he wondered what mistake he had made this time and how this day would end.

Chapter End Notes

Ooooooh more drama and angst to come.... Who said the build up to this was going to be slow huh? I much prefer the "throwing into the deep end" technique myself XD

I hope you all liked it!!! Thank you so much for reading, and for those who have left comments and kudos. The response to this has been amazing, thank you all soooooo much! I look forward to every single update because of you!

As always, you can find me on tumblr for updates

here
Chapter Notes

Chapter beta read by whykikkiwhy, who honestly read and edited this so fast (and so well) that I'm starting to think she's inhuman.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

He regretted his decision with each passing second.

The scene played over in his head over and over again, his bullet striking Yakov in his chest, the blood, red and bright, falling over the table. He’d almost taken the man’s life. And yet Viktor seemed to want to see if he was alright, not to come and murder him for what he had done. Two voices raged inside of him – one saying that Viktor was lying, that he was cunning and had somehow rewired all of Yuuri’s feelings into accepting the meeting, and the other saying that Viktor had sounded so genuine, so worried for him. He couldn’t understand why.

Unconsciously, he scratched the bandages on his wrists. The warehouse was staring to get cold, a chill seeping in through the open windows and doorways. He remembered reading somewhere that Russia could get very cold at nights, especially this time of year. He wished he hadn’t rushed so quickly into an exposed place.

He could still leave. He didn’t have to be here when Viktor arrived, whether he came with murderous intent or genuine, mysterious concern. Viktor could walk into an empty place, with no trace of where Yuuri had gone. He could end this here.

He thought it sounded like a good idea. And yet he couldn’t get himself to move. It was too cold, and something in his body was stopping him from standing. He had to admit to himself that some part of him was curious to see what would come of this. Viktor seemed interesting, in his own sort of way. Yuuri was never interested in danger before, but something about Viktor sparked excitement inside of himself. Perhaps it was because he knew they could so easily be evenly matched. Was this what others said? Finding someone else who could challenge you.

He rested his head on his crossed arms, curling in against the creeping cold. What had he done? The question continued to plague him. Mistake after mistake after mistake piled up in his mind and he wondered how he had come to this point in his life.

His thoughts were interrupted as he heard the unmistakable scuffle of feet on the concrete floor. A
second later, a familiar voice echoed through the empty building.

“Yuuri?”

Viktor. Yuuri was caught between standing up and listening for the cock of the gun, the trigger being pulled. But there was nothing like that, just the man walking around trying to search for him outside. Yuuri rose and waited.

“Yuuri?” Viktor appeared through one of the open doorways, the light of the setting sun bathing his back as he glanced around the corners Yuuri wasn’t occupying. His hands were covered in black leather gloves, free of any weapon. He had no bag, only his pale brown coat hanging from his frame. Around his neck was a warm scarf, and Yuuri instantly grew a little jealous of it.

Feeling a little more confident that he would not be killed immediately, Yuuri made his way towards Viktor. As he drew closer, Viktor turned, eyes wide and blues filled with what Yuuri might have thought was concern. He looked tired, exhausted, as if the last few hours had taken years off of his life. Yuuri supposed that was what happened when your boss was almost murdered.

“Yuuri,” Viktor sighed, pacing quickly towards the Japanese man. He stopped as there were only a few inches between them, gaze roaming over Yuuri’s face. Yuuri’s face was pale, skin almost white, and between them their breaths began to seep out in a small fog. Without asking Yuuri first, Viktor raised his hand and placed his palm on the other’s cheek. “You’re freezing.”

Yuuri could almost relax his head against that palm, but decided to instead tear his head away. “I don’t really have anything but this to wear,” he said, pointing to his jacket. “I didn’t expect to be outside in this Russian weather.”

Viktor tutted, clicking his tongue against the roof of his mouth. He began to unwind the scarf from around his neck, throwing it onto Yuuri’s before the other could make any sort of argument. “Wear this then. It’ll warm you up a little more.”

“I don’t need your scarf,” Yuuri snapped, trying to take it off, but Viktor’s hands gripped his wrists to stop him. All around him, Yuuri was encompassed by Viktor’s smell, imprinted in his mind from the scarf – but he ignored that fact, just as much as he ignored how it made him feel. “Seriously, Viktor, you shouldn’t be giving me mercy. Why are you doing this?”

“Shut up, Yuuri. Don’t make this complicated,” Viktor huffed as he helped to arrange the scarf.
around Yuuri’s neck, much to Yuuri’s chagrin.

“I’m not. You’re the one making things complicated. You should hate me. I’m in your way.”

“I do hate you,” Viktor said, but there was a lack of bite in his voice. “But there’s more than that too.”

“I shot your boss.”

“He’s going to pull through.”

“But what if he hadn’t? How would you treat me then?” Yuuri pushed, feeling the anger beginning to rise. Complicated. Everything was so complicated. Why wasn’t he feeling just hatred towards Viktor? Why was he curious about the man?

Viktor replied honestly. “I don’t know. Maybe the same. Or maybe I’d do what you thought I’d do anyway, bring a gun and murder you. Or maybe I wouldn’t have come at all. I don’t know, Yuuri. Just don’t ask stupid questions.”

“It’s not a stupid question.”

Viktor pulled away after having finished the scarf and crossed his arms before his chest. “And what would you do if I found Phichit? If I managed to shoot him in the chest, and he was going to pull through. What would you do?”

“I’d go after you and hurt you back.”

“Are you sure about that?”

The question made Yuuri pause. “Yes,” he replied, but he didn’t sound as certain anymore. Inside his mind, he played the thought. The image of Yakov collapsing against the table was replaced with Phichit, and he found his blood burning hot with rage at the concept. The first resolution that came to mind was hunting down Viktor and doing whatever he could to pay him back tenfold, and yet his mind was filled with the way Viktor was looking at him right now – conflicted, concerned,
emotional, desperate. It didn’t make him rethink his decision, but it continued to make him pause.
“I won’t let you get anywhere near Phichit though.”

“I know.” Viktor glanced around, gaze falling onto the bags Yuuri had stashed in the corner.
“Come on, it’s too cold here. Why don’t we head somewhere else?”

“I’m not going anywhere with you.”

“Yuuri, I know this place better than you-”

“Exactly. How would I know if you’re leading me into a trap? You probably own most of the city
too. Viktor, I’m not going.”

Viktor narrowed his eyes and his fists clenched into tight grips. He looked about ready to drag
Yuuri away, despite his argument, but after what seemed like a battle with himself, he sighed and
relaxed his frame. “Fine. You’re going to freeze here though.”

Yuuri turned to sit back in his corner, pulling the bags over him to keep some sort of insulation.
“It’s fine. I trained for this.”

Viktor’s facial expression screamed that he didn’t believe him. “I’ll be back. I have some blankets
in the car.”

Before Yuuri could grow suspicious, Viktor left the building and came back with two fluffy
blankets. He threw one almost roughly to Yuuri, and Yuuri quickly tugged it over his shoulders and
underneath to keep him off of the cold cement. It was thick, and already began to warm him. He
would have made a comment how a mafia man like Viktor had fluffy blankets in his car, but
refrained, knowing it wasn’t the place or the time. Viktor settled his own over his shoulders and sat
a foot away from Yuuri.

There was silence for a moment, in which the sounds of the whistling low wind filled, with some of
the loose window frames crashing against the walls to accompany. And then Viktor broke it with
what Yuuri knew must have been a question that had been replaying in his mind for hours.

“Yuuri, why did you go see Yakov?”
“To stop him from hunting Phichit,” Yuuri replied.

“You mentioned Yuri’s name.”

“I did.”

“That was a dangerous move, Yuuri.”

“I realised that part way in.”

“He’ll never say it, but Yakov feels like he’s taken over from Yuri’s grandfather. He’s very protective of him.”

Yuuri sighed. “It was better than going in with Phichit’s name. Or yours. I’d have had mafia on me in seconds.”

“Yes, you would have.” Viktor paused for just a second before a small grin planted itself on his lips. “It must have been a sight to see though. You storming into a mafia boss’ office and demanding that he stop hunting your client.”

Yuuri wasn’t quite finding it as humorous as Viktor was. He burrowed himself further into his blanket and replied, “I didn’t know what else to do.”

“You’re employed just to keep him safe, right? Why are you facing off against us, when your job doesn’t entail it? You could end up getting killed.”

“He doesn’t deserve this, Viktor. Phichit doesn’t deserve what you’ve done to him. I feel… I don’t know, I feel protective of him. I want you to stop hunting him so he can continue with what he loved.”

“I can’t do that,” Viktor whispered, his grin long gone now. “He’s not as innocent as you think. He didn’t just witness it. He was going to take action too, action that would have hurt people. I had to
stop him.”

“Hurt people, or hurt just you?”

Viktor paused. “I would have been a part of it, yes. But it wouldn’t be just me. He hasn’t told you that, has he? He’s told you he was the little accidental victim, that walked in on something he shouldn’t have, and then suddenly we’re the bad guys. I wouldn’t kill him just for silence. I’d offer a large amount of money – it works most times.” He turned to stare hard into Yuuri, his eyes now devoid of anything but pushed gloating and a small plea. “I offered him that, you know. I offered more sponsorship money, costumes, more everything. But he refused it all and decided he wanted to tell everyone what he saw. But he didn’t tell you that either, did he?”

Yuuri felt something lodge itself in his throat. At the back of his mind, slight agitation directed towards Phichit sparked. He asked Phichit more about the case, but the younger man had been reluctant. He hadn’t really understood why, unless what he had witnessed was something even he didn’t want to talk about. But perhaps it was more, perhaps he was ashamed of how he had handled it. He’d probably threatened to talk to people about what he had seen before understanding that the person bribing him was Russian mafia. Perhaps he thought he had been spiteful, like a child. Or perhaps, at the time, he thought he was doing something right. Whatever it was, it made Yuuri’s mind begin to doubt. But only slightly.

“I don’t care. I’m still going to protect him. He regrets it, but you won’t give him the chance to tell you that, will you?” Yuuri replied, an edge creeping into his voice. “You don’t give him a chance to apologise and keep quiet. You just want him dead for one mistake.”

“Yuuri, you barely know him-” Viktor tried to argue.

“I barely know you too, but you’re trying to convince me of something as well!” Yuuri shouted, making Viktor jump. “You’re not the innocent either. I’ve chosen my side, and I’m happy with it.”

“That’s going to be the end of you, you know.”

“Only if you’re the one to pull the trigger.” The comment seemed to make Viktor recoil, as if Yuuri’s words themselves had been a bullet. Yuuri ignored his own surprise and the bitter taste it left at the back of his mouth. “If this is how I die then… then I guess that’s how it is. But I’m going to fight every second of it.”
Viktor turned his head to glance down the warehouse, watching as the open doorway opposite them began to shine bright from the upcoming moonlight. He rested his head against the wall. “I guess that’s all we can do.”

Yuuri furrowed his eyebrows, a little confused by Viktor’s comment, but Viktor asked something before he could say anything.

“Why did you ring me?” Viktor narrowed his eyes at the doorway, as if the question was just coming to him. “You could have called anyone in the world after what happened, but you called me. Why?”

Yuuri kept the real reason close to him, that in his fit of fear, Viktor had come to him as his helper – or, as much as he hated to admit it, his saviour to some degree. Out of everything, Viktor seemed the most likely to get him out of it. “What’s going to happen now?” Yuuri asked instead, suddenly feeling the weight of what had happened collapse onto him. He had shot and injured a mafia boss. He’d heard stories about it. He wasn’t likely to survive. There were films about stuff like that, based on real stories. He’d seen some as a kid.

Viktor exhaled deeply through his nose, pulling the blanket closer to his form as another chill swept in. “He’s pissed. Not only did you threaten Yuri, you shot him.”

Yuuri felt a bark of nervous laughter rise from his chest. He swallowed it down. “So that’s it? He’s going to come after me? I need to get out of Russia as soon as I can.”

“You don’t need to do that.”

“Yes, I do.” This time, he couldn’t stop a small bubble of laughter. “Now I have to guard myself.”

“Yuuri, no, you don’t need to do that,” Viktor said with more force.

“Why? Because you’re going to protect me?” When the other man was quiet, Yuuri scoffed, “Oh, come on Viktor. I know you said you were a creature of whim, but this is too far. I’m more than just something to entertain you.”

“It’s not like that.”
“Then how is it? Because you’re doing a horrible job of explaining it. Or maybe you’re playing some sort of trick. You said you don’t play games, but I’m starting to think otherwise. There’s a difference between not telling Yakov about me, and then actually shielding me from him.”

Anger burned inside of Viktor’s blue eyes. He turned, whirling his glare on Yuuri. “And what good did that do? I kept your face and name a secret from him, even the fact that Phichit had a bodyguard. And once I told you that, you go storming into his office? You landed yourself in this. Don’t go blaming me for trying to get you out of it.”

“I’m not!” Yuuri yelled back, voice rising with power. “I just don’t understand why. You said it yourself, you hate me! And I hate you!”

“Then why did you call me?” Viktor bellowed back. “If you hate me so much, why did you call me?”

“Because you were the only option! Otherwise I wouldn’t have,” Yuuri replied. The anger was making his blood rush all around his body, the heat of their words warming his cooled skin. He found himself sitting up, further from the wall, stance ready to jump up. Viktor seemed to copy.

“Then don’t bother next time.” Viktor’s pale skin was beginning to turn red along his cheeks and forehead. He began to rise, as if the anger was expanding inside of him and sitting down was containing it uncomfortably.

“I won’t,” Yuuri spat back, rising to join a little too quickly. As he did, something fell out of his pocket, landing against the concrete and the sound ricocheting off of the thick walls. Yuuri glanced down, his heart stopping completely in his chest. Down, in plain sight, was the recording device. It had been switched off since his adventure into Yakov’s place, but it didn’t seem to matter. Conclusions would be immediately drawn. He glanced up, hoping against everything that Viktor hadn’t seen it, that he was still blinded by his anger that it distracted him enough.

But Viktor was looking down, eyes wide, mouth slightly agape, face turning pale again. The anger ebbed away for a second, before it began to trickle back. He slowly glanced up, meeting Yuuri’s eyes again, fear embedded deeply in his expression.

Yuuri felt the blood inside him run cold again.
“Is that why you rang me?” Viktor asked, his voice barely above a whisper.

“No, that’s not it—”

“What did you want me to say? What were you waiting to incriminate me with?”

“Viktor, no, it’s off—” Yuuri tried to make amends, though he wasn’t sure why. The words were rolling out in their desperation. Concern beat in his chest.

“Did you record Yakov? Did you record shooting him?” Viktor asked, voice steadily growing. “And you think I’m the evil one?”

It struck Yuuri then that he had. The shots would be recorded on the file given to his boss, Yakov’s grunt as the bullet struck, perhaps even the droplets of blood against the table as they left him. He almost recorded himself taking another man’s life – even if it was in defence, there was something wrong about that.

“I needed evidence,” Yuuri said, his voice considerably lower that Viktor’s. “I needed evidence that he was hunting Phichit.”

“Well you got it!” Viktor boomed, taking a step forwards. “Do you need my declaration too? I can speak it nice and loudly into the mic if that’s what you want.”

Yuuri quickly bent down and picked up the device, holding it tightly in his hands. “It’s off, Viktor.”

“Then switch it on. I’ll make sure it’s worth your while,” Viktor replied, stepping closer.

Yuuri stepped back and clutched it to his chest. “Viktor, if you come any closer, I’m going to shoot at you.” He made sure to reach his right hand towards his gun underneath his jacket, hand on the metal ready.

“Like you shot Yakov.”
“Like I’ve shot at you once already,” Yuuri snapped back. “Remember what I said? I won’t miss this time.”

“Give it here, Yuuri,” Viktor ordered, holding out his hand.

Yuuri took another step back. “It won’t be any use. I already sent it out to people.”

“Yuuri,” Viktor tried again, voice deepening. “Give it here.”

He shook his head, staring just as intently at Viktor. Before he knew it, Viktor was reaching forwards, grabbing his left wrist and yanking it towards him. Yuuri shouted out from the shock, a slight twinge running up his arm as he felt Viktor’s fingers circle around the one place he never wanted anyone else to touch.

In his attempt to yank his arm back, the device fell to the floor, clattering once more. But it didn’t register in his mind. All he could see was Viktor’s fingers closing in, circling around his wrist, pale skin against light bandages. The loose jacket sleeves were rolling up as he tried to pull his arm out of Viktor’s hold.

“You didn’t just want to get into trouble by turning up to a mafia’s place, but shoot him, and record it?” Viktor laughed humourlessly, shaking his head and oblivious to what Yuuri seemed to be doing. “I’ll start thinking you have a death wish.”

Yuuri yanked harder, but Viktor was stronger than he had expected. “Viktor, let go of my arm,” he said, voice wavering just a little.

“Why? So you can take your recorder again?”

Yuuri felt his heart beginning to beat harder in his chest as he felt the bandages shift. With his free hand, he tried to pry Viktor’s fingers from his arm. But Viktor tightened them more. Yuuri tried yanking it once more, but it pulled the bandages further down. Yuuri gasped, eyes glued to the newly exposed skin. A foreign letter was clear.

But Viktor hadn’t noticed yet. He still shouted something, but the words weren’t reaching Yuuri.
Around him, a bubble of panic was rising until everything else was muffled to his ears. His eyes could only see the ink, the way Viktor’s grip was pulling the bandage further down. He used his free hand to try and pull the bandages back into place, but it was loosening them further.

“Viktor!” he shouted, desperation not hidden in his voice. “Let go, Viktor!”

He glanced up at Viktor briefly, taking notice how under his haze, Viktor had stopped yanking but was instead staring down at half of the already exposed name, eyes wide and mouth silently agape. Yuuri wasn’t sure what it meant, his mind only thinking of how he had seen it, how someone had seen it after years of it being hidden.

He tried yanking once more, but all it did was pull down the bandages further until almost the whole name was on show, letters that Yuuri had never wanted to translate. At the back of his mind, he remembered that they were Russian. Viktor could probably read them, but he wasn’t thinking about that. His one drive, one desire, was to cover them once more. Viktor might have muttered something, but Yuuri didn’t hear. His hearing was only filled with the sound of his own shuddering heart and heavy breathing.

Relief came when Viktor finally let go. Yuuri didn’t care why, only that he rushed to conceal it again, weaving the bandages into a mess around his wrists. But panic rose once more as Viktor began to peel the bandages from his other wrist.

He got halfway before Yuuri splayed his hands on the man’s chest and pushed him away with all of his might. Viktor stumbled backwards, almost falling completely, but Yuuri didn’t see that. He wove back the bandages, rushed fingers desperate, cold forgotten as his hot skin broke out in sweat.

Only once the bandages were finally back in place and his sleeves were rolled down to secure them did the rush of noise inside his head begin to calm. They were loud like the crashes of waves against rocky cliffs, thunder striking above. He took a moment to cover his face with his hands, to breathe in until his lungs were filled completely, until they ached with the air.

Viktor had seen the name.

That realisation grew slowly in his mind, until the sentence raged louder than even the waves had. Bile began to rise in his chest. He didn’t want to look at the man, didn’t want to see what sort of expression he had. Pity. He knew it already. There would be pity. As everyone else gave him. Pity because now he knew that his enemy and soulmate were the same person. Viktor would know that even without the mess he was in now, he was doomed to a dark future.
“They’re the same.”

Viktor’s voice was quiet, and yet it was still louder than the voice in Yuuri’s head. It made him flinch.

“Yuuri, do you know what it says?”

Yuuri stepped back, still hiding his face with his hands, feeling them tremble against his skin. With a shaky voice that almost sounded like laughter, he asked, “What are you going to do now? You’ve seen them, or well… it. Same name on both. Same person, as both soulmate and enemy. What are you going to do with it? Pity me? Doesn’t it make you curious? What does your whim say about this?”

“Yuuri, do you know what it says?” Viktor repeated, harder this time.

Yuuri lowered his hands, but kept his head bowed. “No. I don’t. Why would I want to know?”

“Because it’s your destined person,” Viktor said reluctantly, as if his own answer wasn’t one he believed in either.

“Yeah. Destined soulmate. Destined enemy.” He glanced up at Viktor, not even trying to conceal the pain in his own eyes. Viktor, to his heavily unfocused eyes, looked upset about something. “Have you heard of anything more messed up than that?”

“Messed up?”

“I used to be bullied as a kid. They’d say my soulmate would end up killing me one day. I’d never be happy. I’d never have a love like everyone else was deserving of.” He glanced down again, feeling a wash of years’ worth of pain crashing into him. He gripping his hands tightly, palms facing upwards, and didn’t even care who was listening – didn’t even care it was Viktor. Everything came falling down, and he found he couldn’t stop it. “I’m doomed to love and hate my destined person. And they’re doomed to do the same to me. Can you blame me for never translating the name? I don’t want to.”
“Do you not want to meet them?”

“I did, once. That was a long time ago, back when I was curious what kind of person they were and I was filled with hope that we could overcome it. But things turned sour the more years I thought about it. Every single time I reached for a computer, or an alphabet or anything to help translate, I would hesitate. What’s the point?” He could feel all of the emotions behind his words, everything he had never even expressed to himself. It seemed so easy to tell Viktor. Standing here, in a cold, empty warehouse after the man had uncovered his tattoos, it seemed like the easiest thing he had ever done.

“I didn’t want to meet mine either.”

Yuuri didn’t register the words until he heard something ruffle. He glanced upwards. Viktor was biting his lip, and he was peeling off the gloves on his hands and rolling up his sleeves. Viktor turned his hands to face downwards for a moment, and took a deep breath before he continued to speak.

He said, “You know what sort of world I was brought up in. I couldn’t drag anyone into that. Especially not when I had the same name on both sides too.” He glanced up, meeting Yuuri’s eyes.

But Yuuri didn’t notice that. Inside his mind, the words rang over and over again, filling him with numbness until they seemed to click. He stood up straight, the pain gone, something like hope springing in his chest as he thought that finally, finally, finally he’d met someone who was like him. It didn’t even matter that it was Viktor. Honestly, he thought, it might have better explained these conflicted feelings he had for the man. Perhaps he had just known they were the same.

“The same?”

Viktor nodded. “I have the same person for my soulmate and for my enemy.”

Yuuri stepped forwards again, looking down at Viktor’s exposed arms. Viktor kept them facing down, and Yuuri couldn’t help but feel a little annoyed by it. “Phichit?”

Viktor gave one huff of laughter.

Yuuri glared at the man. “I meant it as a serious question.”
Viktor shook his head. “No, not Phichit. Why did you think so?”

“Because you seem so intent on finding him. I thought it was more than just because he saw something. I thought, at the very least, he was your Enemy.”

Viktor shook his head again, harder this time. “No, that would make things quite a bit easier.”

“Easier?”

“Yes, much easier.” Viktor paused, seemingly caught between biting the bullet and showing Yuuri the names, and continuing to speak, to postpone. As if he was afraid. For just a second, Yuuri wondered what that meant. But before he could think, Viktor said, “I had the same sort of treatment. I hadn’t ever heard of someone with one name on both sides before. People thought I was weird, that I was going to have an unhappy life. I agreed. And with my job, it wasn’t going to make things easier.”

Yuuri nodded. He thought he had had it hard, but he wasn’t involved in some ruthless group. His soulmate and enemy wasn’t likely going to be attacked by a rival group to get at him, unlike Viktor’s. All of his anger at the man was forgotten, and he found himself understanding Viktor a little better.

“I didn’t translate it because I didn’t want anyone knowing who it was. I didn’t want to know either.”

“Why?”

“Because then I could never use it against them. If I don’t know who they were, no one else can,” Viktor explained. “I kept these hidden underneath suits and coats. Not under bandages like you. I kept them away from everyone and myself, so that I could protect that person. After years of doing it though, I couldn’t help thinking of what this person was like.”

Yuuri nodded. “Yeah, I can understand that.”

“What sort of person was my destined soulmate and enemy? Why? What made them like that?
What made the lines blurred like that? In my head I started to come up with a person. I imagined, if we should ever meet, what I would say, how I would act.”

Yuuri found he had never understood a person more before than he did Viktor. Every word that came out seemed to be the mirror of what he himself had thought, and it tugged at his rapidly beating heart. Brought on by courage, he began to uncurl the bandages from around his wrists again and rolled up his sleeves, exposing them once more to the cool air. For the first time in years, he willingly turned them up for another to see. And for the first time in years, he examined them properly.

He heard Viktor gasp lightly, more by Yuuri’s willingness than by the actual names.

“It’s Russian, isn’t it?”

“It is.”

“Is… Is the name familiar to you?” Yuuri was scared of the answer, but asked anyway.

“It is.”

Yuuri felt himself almost choke on his breath, and he shuddered out a sigh to calm himself. He nodded, as if he had expected it.

“I had this idea of who this person was,” Viktor continued. “And somewhere along the way, I began to both fall in love and hate the idea I came up with. It became so clear, like something was telling me what this person was. I couldn’t ever see them. I didn’t know what they looked like. But they were nice, strong, independent, and I knew they were gorgeous because they fit me. But at the same time, I knew they were my polar opposite, my fighter, my enemy. So I loved and hated my own perceived destined partner.” Viktor paused, took a deep breath, and spread his fingers so that he was softly clutching Yuuri’s wrists again. “But then I met them. They were so alike and unlike the vision I had created. Everything got so complicated. I thought I had a clear-cut view, but it was shattered the moment I met you.”

Just as the last word hit Yuuri, Viktor turned their wrists so that his was on show beside Yuuri’s.

Yuuri’s eyes immediately found the letters and characters written upon Viktor’s skin, a very
familiar language. His eyes read over them easily, seeing his own name staring back up at him, exactly same way on both sides. On both right and left, on enemy and soulmate. His breathing stopped. He’d seen it hundreds of times before, perhaps thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousands and millions of times. He’d written it himself enough. Seen it on paper. on documents. Spoken aloud by his friends and family, so ingrained into him now that he would never be rid of it. His name. There. In black upon Viktor’s skin. Twice.

Viktor trailed his hands upon the names along Yuuri’s wrists. As his finger passed the letters, he pronounced, “Viktor Nikiforov.”

Yuuri’s world slowed right down. He could almost see the blood rushing underneath his skin, underneath the ink on his wrists. His skin was turning paler. The pulse was thumping up against the letters. Every hair on his arm rose.

“I didn’t really know it was you until we were in that hotel room,” Viktor admitted, though his voice was barely reaching Yuuri. “Though there were hints. I suspected. And then I got someone to translate the name and there it was, your name, where it had always been. Where you had been connected to me since I was born. And I both loved it and hated it.”

There was something rushing in Yuuri’s head, the words Viktor had spoken haunting his mind. He closed his eyes against the emotions, not able to place one right now. His chest was hurting. The signs were aligning in his head. Unable to properly shoot Viktor, even the first time that they had met. How he could become so agitated and yet crave Viktor’s attention. How he always knew if Viktor was around. Why he felt like he needed to reach out to him after today’s events.

“Is that how you could find me? Even when I was disguised?”

“To a degree. We have ways of finding you. We’re a big organisation. But yes, no matter what you wear, how you look, you can’t hide from me. Just like I can’t hide from you.”

Everything come to this. All those agonising years, of worrying over who was on the other side of the ink, what sort of person they were. It all came down to this, to Viktor standing before him, their tattoos next to one another. Yuuri never expected to see his own name staring back.

Something began to burn in the numbness inside him.

“I know it’s not ideal. Not with our problems. I don’t know what to do, Yuuri.”
Fear. Anger. Relief. So many things passed Yuuri’s mind. He looked around the warehouse, unable to concentrate on anything.

“Yuuri?”

He turned back to Viktor. Viktor’s face seemed different now. Knowing it was his soulmate’s, Yuuri could see the softness, the pale complexion that settled into wrinkles in the corner of his eyes despite his younger age, how soft his hair was, how his eyes held a gentle air. Knowing it was his enemy’s, he could see the pale scars on his face, along his skin peeking out from his collar, how his blue eyes could be hard and threatening, how when his lips were set into a line he seemed powerful and uninterested. Two sides of the same man. Yuuri choked on his breath.

Viktor’s hands cupped his cheeks, and Yuuri felt both disgust and comfort from it. He wanted to cry, punch Viktor, hug Viktor, scream, all at the same time. Everything outside of their bubble seemed so dead.

“Yuuri, I need to know what you’re thinking.”

“You’re both?” His voice seemed so hollow to his own ears.

“Yes, Yuuri. I’m both.”

“You?”

“Yes, me.”

“And me?”

“And you.”

“How can you be so calm?”
Viktor huffed a laugh. “Calm? Wow, you must really be panicking if you think I’m calm right now.”

“You’re not?”

“How can I be? There’d be something wrong with me if I was.”

“I don’t know what to think,” Yuuri admitted.

“It’s okay. Neither do I.”

“You?”

“Me,” Viktor repeated, not seeming at all annoyed by Yuuri’s rambling.

On some level, Yuuri could appreciate that. Viktor was helping him keep on steady ground. But he hated that idea too – it really did mean they were destined. Viktor could handle him. He could handle Viktor. That was proof enough.

“I can’t be here anymore,” Yuuri muttered. He moved slowly away from Viktor, feeling the cold rush to where Viktor’s warm hands left his skin. He rolled his sleeves up and shoved the bandages in his pockets. “I need to go. I need to think.”

For just a second, Yuuri thought he saw something like pain cross Viktor’s face. But Viktor hid it quickly and nodded. “I think we both need to think about it.”

Yuuri picked up his things and rushed off before he could drown himself in his feelings. He could feel Viktor watching him the whole way, eyes boring into the back of his neck. Now he understood why he felt such things.

But before he could hide it completely, a sob wracked his form. Pain shattered the numbness inside of him. Viktor. Mafia. He was soulmates with a man of the mafia, enemies with his soulmate, caught between that and Phichit. Phichit. He used to think that they were enemies, Phichit and Viktor. He used to think that was complicated.
How simple things had been only an hour ago.

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The more he ran, the more he thought about it. The more he thought about it, the more it hurt.

His chest constricted. His vision swam behind rivers of unshed tears. There was a dull throb at the back of his head. For the first time in his life, he became acutely aware of everything connected to what he had been ignoring – The inks on his wrists were burning, Viktor's image ingrained in his mind, the barely healed bullet wound on his arm pulsing. He could almost feel the distance he had placed between himself and Viktor, as if every single step he took tugged on something inside of himself. Now he knew what that was. Now he knew why he had such conflicting emotions towards the man.

Because Viktor Nikiforov was his soulmate. Viktor Nikiforov was his destined enemy. Viktor Nikiforov was mafia.

It hurt to think about it. He knew. He knew all those years ago that these curses on his wrists were going to be the death of him – it was why he stopped anything to do with them. He didn’t translate the name, didn’t obsess as others did. He wanted so bad to forget, though he knew he never could. Now he would never get the chance to again.

*Yuuri’s soulmate is going to kill him.* Yuuri had wanted those who had ever said it to be wrong – he was going to prove to the world that the twisted destiny he had been given wasn’t going to be the end of him. He walked right into what they expected.

He slowed when he came to the furthest hotel that his legs could carry him to. He didn’t bother looking at the name, didn’t care where it was. Viktor had already said that wherever he was, he could find Yuuri. Yuuri suspected it was for the same reason why he had always been able to find Viktor, regardless of if they were in the same room or not. Before they had broken into his hotel room, he had sensed it. In the banquet hall, he had sensed it. Now he knew why.

So he booked a room, not caring about the escape routes, and collapsed on the bed as soon as he arrived. His bags crashed to the floor, and the warmth of the room stung against his cold skin.

He had told Viktor he’d think about what was going to come next. He guessed that meant that
there would be some sort of open-ended agreement to meet and talk about it. Viktor seemed to leave it like that.

Yuuri paused and thought about it. His idea of Viktor had changed so much in the last two hours alone. It left a sinking feeling at the pit of his stomach. Something inside him was telling him that he should stay and get to know the man who was so tied with him, but years’ worth of pain and hatred towards the fate on his wrists was stronger.

No. He would leave as quickly as he could. He didn’t need to see Viktor. They’d go their separate ways, and Yuuri would guard Phichit in a less direct way. Especially as he already had the mafia after him now, having shot and injured Yakov.

He’d really messed up.

A sob wracked his form once more. He swallowed it back down, breathing through it. He found himself reaching for his phone before he could stop himself, craving the comfort that only a family could right now. He didn’t care if it made him seem childish. He needed to hear the voice of his loved ones. They had been there during the trying teenage years, when he cried and obsessed and destroyed himself over the tattoos.

He managed to calm himself down just as his mother picked up on the first few rings. He could hear by the silence on the other side, with the lack of the usual ruckus of the bar attendants, that his mother had picked up their secure phone. In his madness, he hadn’t been sure which one he called. He almost wanted to slap himself.

“Hello?”

His mother’s voice was hard and professional, very unlike the voice he had been brought up with as a boy. “Hi, Mum.”

Immediately, his mother’s tone softened as he asked, “Yuuri?”

“Yeah, it’s me.”

“Yuuri! What’s going on? What’s happened?”
Yuuri opened his mouth to speak, but felt the words die in his throat. Just when he felt like he had a hold of everything, it all came crashing right back down onto him. He held the phone to his ear and took a deep, shuddering breath.

“Yuuri?”

Yuuri curled himself on the bed. “I found him.”

“Found who?” His mother asked, sounding a mix between concerned and wanting to push Yuuri to say more. “Yuuri, what happened?”

“The names – or, well, name. Because there was always just one. But put on twice. Two times, one on each side.”

“Yuuri, honey, you’re rambling.”

“The names!” Yuuri gasped out. “The owner. Both soulmate and enemy. I found who it is.”

There was silence on the other side. Yuuri knew the impact of his words were hard. His mother had been there, cradling him when it came to his panics over destiny and fate, feeding him when the world became too much, being a mother to a destructive son when she had so much more to worry about. She had done everything for him before he’d even knew he needed it. She knew the extent of Yuuri’s pain surrounding these very letters on his wrists.

“Really?” she asked, seemingly unable to believe it herself.

“Yes.”

“And what is he like?”

Pain erupted inside of Yuuri’s chest. Flashes of every expression he had seen Viktor wear crossed behind his closed eyelids, pressing more tears to the corner of his eyes. He could still remember his
voice, his hands. He could still smell him. With a skip of a heartbeat, he realised he was still wearing the man’s scarf. He clutched at it, ready to throw it far away. But instead he held it closer, inhaling it, disgusted with himself. Hesitantly, he admitted, “He’s the one after Phichit.”

“After?”

“The one he saw doing something he shouldn’t have. The one hunting him down. The one that wants to kill Phichit.”

“Oh, Yuuri.”

Yuuri could hear the devastation in his mother’s voice. She, like so many others in his life, was curious about what kind of person was destined for Yuuri. But she kept it to herself, because she knew, as so many had forgotten, that Yuuri was valued much more than some tattoos he had been born with. Yuuri was her living and breathing son, a son that had needed her so much in his growing years. She had thought he was over it. He knew he was worrying her again with this, but he couldn’t control it.

“What are you going to do?”

Yuuri rubbed at his eyes, wiping away the unshed tears and hoping that it got rid of the image of Viktor he had. “He says we should talk about it. But I don’t want to. I never wanted this. I thought I got away from ever finding him. I don’t want this. What should I do?” He didn’t even bother keeping the whine from his voice. He was a grown man, and yet he didn’t bother acting like it. Everything hurt too much. Everything was too constricted.

“I know, dear. I know.”

“I thought I got away from ever finding him. I don’t want this. What should I do?” He didn’t even bother keeping the whine from his voice. He was a grown man, and yet he didn’t bother acting like it. Everything hurt too much. Everything was too constricted.

“Yuuri, maybe you should tell Phichit.”

The thought brought on a throb in his temples. Phichit. How could he tell his client that the man he was so scared of was his soulmate? Not only that, his enemy, but that was easier to understand. “No, I can’t. He might think I’ll leave him to the mafia now that I’ve found out.”
“You never would.”

“No, I never would. I’m not like that.”

“I’m sure he understands that.”

“But he might convince himself I am. It’s not simple anymore.” It was never going to be simple again.

“It’ll be alright.”

“But it won’t be. I shot his boss.”

There was another pause. “You what?”

“I almost killed Viktor’s boss too. I have to leave the country.”

“Where are you going to go?”

“I don’t know yet. I might go back to America or something.”

“Yuuri, I really think Phichit should know—”

Yuuri shook his head, sitting up. The room around him spun. “I’ll tell him,” Yuuri assured. “Just not right now. When I have a better handle on the situation, alright?” When he himself knew what it was that was going on. When he knew what to do with the mess of his life that had just exploded all over the place.

“Okay, Yuuri. If you feel that’s best.”
He didn’t. “I do. I’ll explain everything when it’s not so messy. How has he been, by the way?”

“He’s settled in well. He helps Yuuko with the rink after hours,” his mother said, a hint of strained laughter in her voice. “He’s much more comfortable than he was when you first brought him. A lot happier.”

Yuuri smiled, feeling the movement almost tearing away the desperation that had settled onto him since finding Viktor. He’d known Phichit would settle in well, it was why he had known to take him to their family safe house straight away. It sounded like Phichit was moving around freely, that he was happier than when Yuuri had left him. Yuuri didn’t want to break that. Not with what he would have to tell his client.

Perhaps Phichit wouldn’t see it as a betrayal, but Yuuri would. Out of all the people that Phichit could have found as a bodyguard, of all the ones in his company and in others, he had found Yuuri. He felt like he’d be betraying Phichit if he came out and said that the one who was guarding him just happened to be so tightly tied to the one hunting him. Phichit might have forgiven it, but Yuuri could never forgive himself.

“Thanks,” Yuuri replied, standing up and already feeling better having spoken to his mother. “I’m going to go, get a flight and just leave. I-I need to think. I need to be away from here. I’ll contact you when I can.”

“Okay, Yuuri. Be careful, please. You sound like you’re getting yourself into a lot of trouble.”

“I’ll be fine, don’t worry,” Yuuri assured. Now that he was better in himself, less panicked, he began to barricade his room by pushing the drawer across the door. Once that was done, he picked out his laptop and immediately began to scroll through the flights leaving for America, booking the closest one he could. “I’m going to be alright. Make sure you’re alright too.”

“Will do, Yuuri.”

“And look after Phichit for me. Please don’t tell him anything.”

“I won’t. Just please be careful.”

“I will. I promise.” Yuuri hung up soon after, sitting down with his laptop in his lap and trying to
maintain the calm he had been able to crawl into. But it was getting harder and harder as time passed, his mother’s influence quickly fading away, replaced by Viktor’s voice. Over and over inside his mind, Viktor’s words, Viktor’s expression, Viktor’s everything.

He’d told Viktor he just needed to think about it. He did. But he also needed to create some distance between them and maintain it. Preferably for forever.

***

He wasn’t prepared for how much it hurt to be on the plane though. Now that he was aware of their connection, the further he flew away from Viktor, the more he felt it tug on him.

He’d heard of instances like this though. If someone met their soulmate, it was as if the planets themselves aligned, as if the stars sparkled for them. They became aware of everything they did, and it became painful to be too far away from them for a long time. It wasn’t dangerous, it didn’t kill, but it took its toll on their emotions. Yuuri could already feel that aspect of himself, as if something was telling him to turn around and run back to the man. But it wasn’t as simple as that anymore.

Another part of him wanted to run back and fight the man, to scream in his face and to defeat him like the enemy he was. He’d heard of stories of people meeting their enemies too, of how it could be anything from a rivalry between two different store owners, or politicians of rivalling countries. Enemies could be anything, small or large. But it always drove them into wanting to fight, even if it was just to shout at one another in the street. Yuuri pictured shooting Viktor, just as his enemy side wanted, but his soulmate side wanted him to stop. Such conflicting feelings, and they felt as if they were tearing inside of him.

Viktor probably knew what was happening. He’d said he’d give Yuuri time to think about things. Then he would be able to feel Yuuri growing further and further away. The man wasn’t stupid. He’d know exactly what it was that Yuuri was doing.

Yuuri wondered briefly what the man would do; chase after him, or would he leave it as it was? Would this be where it ended? Perhaps Viktor would stop hunting Phichit now, just for the sake of leaving whatever this connection was of theirs alone.

But Yuuri knew it didn’t change much. If Viktor continued to hunt Phichit, Yuuri knew where his loyalty lay. Even if Viktor was just his soulmate, just something so simple that others took for granted, he would continue to side with his client. He picked Phichit. Just because there was some ancient, predestined path for him and Viktor, it didn’t mean Yuuri would follow it.
He rested his head against the plane wall, feeling the rumble of the engines against his skull. Around him, passengers chatted away, a baby crying somewhere behind Yuuri, the attendants rolling up and down the aisle with their trollies offering everything they could cheaply. But none of it could pierce the bubble Yuuri had surrounded himself with. Not even the passenger eating too loudly beside him, chewing on their sandwich with clacking teeth and slurping at their drink as if their mouth was a vacuum. Yuuri didn’t hear any of it. Every once in a while, Viktor’s voice would whisper in his mind.

Going after the mafia was a mistake, he knew. Not only had he angered a powerful man like Yakov, he had found out something about Viktor he never wanted to know. He should have stayed out of it, felt confident in his hiding of Phichit, and waited it out. But his mother and father had always said he had a big heart. He never expected it to be a weakness before.

He'd hide somewhere in America, he decided. They’d come and chase him, but as long as Viktor didn’t come, they wouldn’t find him. They’d assume he was returning to Phichit, forgetting that their suspicions once thought he was hidden in Japan. Yuuri would send out more Phichits around the world, some easier to catch than others, and send the mafia on a wild goose chase. But from the side-lines. He didn’t fancy being in their sights again.

He pulled up his hood once the plane had landed, dragging his bags with him. He kept an eye out, looking for anyone watching him. He knew the mafia wouldn’t have been able to get to him faster than he could arrive in America, but he was vigilant nonetheless, his training kicking in heavily.

His hairs stood on end. He felt less confident in himself now that he knew Viktor could find him wherever he was, despite disguises. He used to know all the tricks, knew how to get away without being found again. He was always so confident in what he could do, that he was good at his job. For the first time, he felt like that wasn’t enough anymore. He was just glad he had dropped Phichit off in the safe house before Viktor could find them, before Yuuri lead him straight to his target. What a stupid thing that would have been.

Once he was outside, he set down his bags and leaned against the wall. He wasn’t a smoker, many of his colleagues weren’t either. They had to be at the top of their fitness if they were to do what they did. But what he wouldn’t give to be able to pop open a carton now and place one between his lips, inhale the smoke and the heavy ash, to be able to take a drag and let it seep into his lungs. It would relax him, even a little. It would allow him a second to think of something other than the tug in his chest, the vision of Viktor’s face swimming behind his closed eyelids every time he blinked, of the burning on his wrists. They had been doing that for a while, the tattoos. As if now that he had found their owner, they wanted to remind him of every pain filled second. To douse his body in memories of hours ago, where it felt like his whole life had come to an end. They cursed him for running away.
But there was nothing else he could do. To be tied to a man like Viktor – he doubted he could do it. As he thought it, he felt a tug on his chest, making him grimace for a second. He raised a hand to his chest and clutched at his jacket.

He wouldn’t need to do it. It would be harder to forget this time, he knew, with the constant reminders in his chest, wrists and head. But he’d do it. He’d forget about Viktor, save Phichit from a distance, and get on with life. It would be far easier this time to avoid a man he knew by more than just an untranslated name.

Chapter End Notes

Weeeeeeeeeeeeee I hope you liked that... haha As you can probably see, some of the real angst will come into it now. For that I’m slightly sorry and also excited XD

As always, if you'd like to find me to talk or to keep up with updates, you can find me on tumblr

here
Enough

Chapter Notes

Chapter beta read by whynikkiwhy, whom I have confirmed is not human. Save me.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It got a little easier.

Easier to handle, easier to ignore, easier to forget. But it took a while before Yuuri could confidently say he could handle it.

A week had passed since he retreated back to America, a week since he found the owner of the names on his wrists. Each night was filled with memories of the event, some as crystal clear as it had been during the reveal, and some with their own twists and turns constructed by his tired mind. One of the most recent dreams he had, he had accepted his fate and followed Viktor wherever it was he wanted to go, throwing away his career and his client. He woke up panicking and with sweat pouring down his cold forehead.

He woke up easier from each as time wore on. Just the night before, he woke up easily. He rubbed his face, took a sip of the drink beside his bed, and sighed away whatever emotions the dream had left. He stood up and moved on.

It became easier to ignore the tugging in his chest, or the way his wrists burned. It was easier to ignore the images of Viktor behind his closed eyes, or his voice imprinted in his mind. Viktor’s scarf was hanging up in his wardrobe, untouched since the moment he had placed it there.

The first few days on his return to the country, he had skipped from state to state until even he didn’t know where he was going anymore. But no one came after him. There were no unmarked cars following, no men in suits copying his steps, no suspicious neighbours in his hotels. With little sleep and hours of torment, he had decided this was not the way he wanted to live.

He wasn’t stupid. He knew that just because they hadn’t come in the first few days that they weren’t coming at all. At some point, Yakov would be well enough to send out all that he could to hunt Yuuri down. Perhaps Viktor would come with them, leading them as revenge. The man had had enough time to figure out his allegiances.
He’d messed up. Yuuri knew that. Something had blinded his judgement and he had rushed into things without thinking about them. He wouldn’t do that again. It was why he had called his boss again to make sure the man knew the rules – no one saw the file he had sent unless something happened to him. But it was also how he had come up with a plan.

Running around was only going to get him into a bigger mess. If he didn’t know where he was going, he couldn’t be prepared. So he delved back into his basic training, settled on one area, and made plans.

He settled on New York. The layout of the city was simple, easy escapes, plenty of covers, and easy to memorise in a short amount of time. He rented out a small apartment in the basement of a complex in the name of a persona, sent out more Phichits all around the world, and covered his walls with plans. He immersed himself into what would be a new life for his duration in the city, building up a website for freelance physical work, created past clients that were tied to other personas for his company, and formed himself a shield. Anyone looking into him would see the persona, unless they knew what they were looking for.

Viktor would. Viktor would be able to see through it easily, and with him came the mafia. It wouldn’t help much, but it was all Yuuri could do.

In his spare time, he memorised the maps and the plans, took tourist leaflets and allowed their information to seep into his mind. He’d have liked more time and less of a rush but this was the best he could do.

He had called Phichit once in the time he had been hiding. He didn’t tell the man what was happening, despite his mother’s pushing. Phichit was doing well, even sounded happy on the phone. He said he loved the place, got along well with the other victims, tourists and locals. He was even learning some Japanese and tested out some sentences with Yuuri on the phone. Yuuri had left the call with more determination than ever, more reason to do what he was doing.

Viktor made it seem like it was easy to leave a client, a stranger, and give him up to people like the mafia. But it wasn’t. Phichit had been more than just a client and a stranger for a long time, perhaps for just as long as they had first met. Yuuri couldn’t ignore the click they had had between them, just as much as he couldn’t ignore how they were steadily growing closer. Yuuri might even call him friend, even if it was only reserved for his own thoughts.

There wasn’t anything Viktor could do to break that, even if he was his soulmate and enemy.

Compared to Hasetsu, and even compared to Detroit in some way, New York was far busier and
fast paced than Yuuri expected. He hadn’t expected to become so lost in the crowd – and despite it being a good thing with people like the mafia on their way, it made him feel a little lonely. He pushed that off though, thinking it was the tug of his soulmate making him feel so.

On the morning of the seventh day since his escape from Russia, he’d received a call from an elderly couple in his neighbourhood asking for his freelance skills. They needed their couch moved from their living room out into the street to be picked up, and any other company was too expensive. Yuuri was eager to comply, giving him something to do other than stare at maps all day.

He dressed in the cheap work clothes he had bought on the first day of his living in the city, donned a blond wig, and placed a cap on top. Compared to some of the cold winds of Russia, the humid air of a tight packed city was refreshing to Yuuri, finally able to wear a t-shirt without freezing, though he had droplets of sweat pouting from under his wig.

The jobs were coming in sporadically. There hadn’t been any until his second day after setting up his freelance website. There had been three on that day, then two on the next. Then only one, the one of moving the couch. Yuuri was just thankful that he wasn’t depending on their income.

The elderly couple were lovely, heavy accents and always bringing out pictures of their grandchildren to show Yuuri. Yuuri humoured them, laughing at their stories and encouraging their behaviour – they reminded him a little of his own parents, and what they might be like one day if they ever had grandchildren. Afterwards, Yuuri put on a jacket and did what every other worker he saw in New York doing – went to grab a coffee.

The city’s coffee shops were far more extravagant than the ones he was used to in Detroit or the ones of Hasetsu. In his home town, they were small and quaint, focusing mostly on the home-made brew than the aesthetic of the shop. In Detroit, they catered to the popular market of those who came for coffee, signing their fair trade and filling the walls with art and pictures from all over the world. New York was a whole other level – plants were covering one of the walls of the shop, ivy even growing along the red bricks, open umbrellas hanging from the ceiling, the tables mismatching and made to look decades old, more piercings in the baristas than there probably was in a tattoo shop. Yuuri had gotten used to the aesthetic of this particular shop, ignored some of the other orders around him – some sounded more like a delicate operation than coffee – and ordered his own straight black coffee. For all the faults of the place, their coffee was their saving grace.

Yuuri settled into the same corner table he had been occupying for the last few days, placed his laptop on the table and sipped at his drink. For just an hour a day, he limited himself to taking care of things. He sent out more Phichits using the shop’s free wifi, and checked on those he had already sent. Out of curiosity, he had settled one in a hotel in Saint Petersburg. Within ten minutes of his checking in, that Phichit had been compromised, the hotel room kicked into. Empty. And whoever had done it had not left a trace, the hotel cameras mysteriously missing footage for the
time frame. But Yuuri didn’t need to see proof, he knew who it was.

It left him wondering if the mafia had left at all yet. Perhaps they were waiting. Or perhaps they were setting traps to make Yuuri think they hadn’t left yet, but were on their way. Yuuri shook his head, knowing he shouldn’t be thinking too heavily about these things. It was good to think of all the possibilities, but not when he absorbed himself too much into them.

He sent out another, having Phichit checking into a hotel in Moscow. Yuuri found himself curious about just how much of Russia the mafia controlled, how much Viktor would inherit. He knew it was important information to know, but he couldn’t lie to himself too much – he wanted to know what sort of man his soulmate was, and what he was to become.

He tore himself from that too, taking another sip of the coffee. It burned the back of his tongue, but he ignored it, feeling the steam of the cup rise into his nostrils, the heat sliding down his throat. His belly warmed.

The bustle of the coffee shop circled around him. Their voices, both low and high, were normal to Yuuri’s ears now, even the traffic outside didn’t faze him anymore. He inhaled the bitter scent of the coffee shop and typed up on his laptop, glancing up every time someone walked through the door.

He wasn’t sure who he was waiting for. Perhaps it was even Viktor. Perhaps, in his soulmate mind, he expected the man to come bursting in and like some romantic story, would declare himself no longer a mafia man and no longer hunting Phichit down. But Yuuri, a realist, knew that would never happen, and he was more than likely waiting for anyone mafia to come striding in, gun in tow, a desire to kill.

But just as the other days had passed, no one walked through that door other than tourists looking for New York coffee and the locals all meeting someone for lunch. All completely unaware of the problems that were arising in the corner, of who Yuuri was and what he had done. He supposed everyone had secrets though. Who knew what the woman who sat on the sofa besides him, drinking with her friend or colleague was keeping a secret, or the elderly man in the corner reading the daily newspaper, or the barista who seemed as if she hadn’t had enough sleep last night, or the taxi driver outside waiting for someone in the shop?

They didn’t know about Yuuri, and Yuuri didn’t know about them. Just as he hadn’t known about Viktor’s life, despite convincing himself he did.

He guessed that now everything boiled down to that in the end – everything reminded him of what
he so desperately wanted to forget.

His mother had sent a few pictures through a secure network, and Yuuri scrolled through them all. Phichit sat in his room – now no longer a bare room but filled with posters and colours and little memorabilia – with his three hamsters, one on his lap, another on his shoulder and the last on his head. He was glancing up at the camera with a bright smile, eyes devoid of any sadness or panic. Yuuri had never seen the man so relaxed. Another was in the rink, Phichit with borrowed skates midjump on the ice, Yuuko clapping and in the middle of a cheer. The third was of the beach, the setting sun and the rays bouncing off of the shimmering water – in the email, his mother mentioned how it was taken by Phichit himself, with the camera he had given his client. The last was taken secretly, Phichit in Minako’s ballet studio, the teacher standing next to him. Phichit was concentrating as he tried to mimic Minako’s stance but couldn’t quite do it.

Yuuri couldn’t contain his smile. He deleted the photos and the email, closing his account as quickly as he could. He would have liked to keep them, but security forbade him.

He’s thought more on what his mother had advised him – telling Phichit would be the best way to go about it. If the man should ever find out any other way, it would cause more problems than if Yuuri had told him to begin with. But every time he thought of the man, of what Yuuri had done in his time, what he had figured out, the words died on his tongue. His chest constricted, panic rose. He wanted Phichit to remain blissfully unknowing for as long as he could, because Yuuri didn’t want to be the one to hurt him this time.

Over time, Yuuri had to begin to admit something. What was once an interesting client was now a close friend. It dawned on him suddenly, just as everything seemed to be doing these days, soon after his worry of what he should tell Phichit. He wasn’t looking at this as a bodyguard should – he wasn’t scared of telling Phichit because he was a client and he worried for their contract, but he was scared of telling a close friend that the man trying to kill him was Yuuri’s soulmate. He worried what rift it would make between them.

He wasn’t worried about losing a client. He was terrified of losing a friend.

Every time he thought that, it made him pause more.

He left the coffee shop with his head bowed, his shoulders tense and his mind trapped in thought. Yuuri had never had the issue of determining what was to come before – it was always the simple rule of following what was taught. Guard, follow rules, end contract successfully. This was more. This was so much more.
Gratefully, he had been given a week to come up with a plan, to lay low and think. It had not been enough time, but Yuuri had come up with something.

In his short time, Yuuri had made some connections. As he walked down the busy main street, evading the storms of business women and men, he took out his phone and began to dial a number he had called every day for the past three days.

Through a colleague, Yuuri had managed to find a man, an informant broker, that could just about find anything you ever wanted. Yuuri hadn’t ever met him, only knew his number, his name and his job. But even then, they had managed to form a strong connection. Already, a smile was pulling at one side of his face as the phone rang.

As per their secret pattern, the phone rang five times before it was picked up, three seconds of silence, before a deep, foreign voice asked, “*Time?*”

“Currently eleven fifty-one here in great New York,” Yuuri replied, already feeling his steps slow on the pavement to a stride. He glanced around, making sure that no one was listening in – not that anyone would be able to understand their conversation. Informants were even more secretive than bodyguards could ever hope to be.

“And it’s five fifty-one here in sunny Interlaken,” the voice replied, their serious tone beginning to fall away with every word. “*Yuuri, I was beginning to wonder when you’d call.*”

Yuuri dipped into a busy department store, glancing backwards in a feign to view some racks but watching out for anyone following. There wasn’t anyone, just the cross of busy commuters and shoppers. He continued into the large store, pressing the phone between his shoulder and ear. “I’m sorry that it was a little later than usual, Chris. I had a job.”

“*Job? Career or freelance?*”

“I did freelance in the morning, and then some career in a coffee shop,” Yuuri replied, well versed in their small secrets now. “I had to help with an elderly couple remove their couch for the freelance, and nothing much has changed in my career. Only that one of the packages seems to have disappeared in Saint Petersburg.”

There was a hum on the other side as Chris jotted something down. If there was anything Yuuri learned about Chris beyond his name, number and job was that the man loved to take notes. And
that he was a flirt. Never forget that aspect of the man.

“And was that the only place it disappeared?”

“Yes, every other package I’ve sent out remains intact. I’ve sent another to Moscow to see if there’s anything wrong with the delivery,” he heavily hinted.

“Do you want me to contact the post office?” To anyone else, the conversation might have been as it sounded, and yet Yuuri could hear the teasing hint in Chris’ voice.

“No!” he said far too quickly. “No, there’s no need to do that. We don’t need to contact anyone about the issue.”

“Are you sure? I know of a particularly good Russian company that deals with delivering goods-”

“Chris.”

“Alright, alright,” the man on the other side laughed. “The main package though is still safe?”

Yuuri nodded, thinking back to the photos his mother had sent him of Phichit, completely safely hidden away and living some of the relaxed life he should have always had. “Yes, very safe. There’s not been any issues.

Chris had been a freelance informant for their company for a while – not that Yuuri had known. Chris’ condition was that he be kept a secret from even the bodyguards until anyone should desperately need him. Surprisingly, even in their career, that wasn’t common. The idea of having an informant came to Yuuri the same day he had moved to New York, and so he reached out to a few of his colleagues who had mentioned they’d had one. Yuuri found out they all had had the same one and his boss put him in contact with Chris.

One of Chris’ conditions to enter into a contract to become Yuuri’s informant was that Yuuri tell him everything. The moment the Swiss man found out that Yuuri had known something and not shared it, Chris would leave with no warning and Yuuri wouldn’t ever be able to contact him again. He had been assured Chris was worth the money Yuuri poured into him, and so Yuuri had told him everything. Everything. All but his own condition – that he would not tell where Phichit was, and Chris not look for him.
It meant having to tell the informant about his relationship with Viktor, though. That had been a painful conversation, though only on Yuuri’s side. He’d admitted to his growing up with the names on his wrists, of how he had hated them, and his conflict in the position he was now. Chris, surprisingly, had been accepting and not judgmental, saying that they could work with it. The man knew how painful it was for Yuuri to admit to something like that. But now that they were much better acquainted, Chris liked to tease Yuuri about the unfortunate circumstances he had found himself in.

Chris had heard of this branch of Russian mafia before, having been hired to look into Yakov’s dealings by a previous client years ago. Nothing had come of it – even the evidence Chris had found only amounted to rumours once the police had been paid off.

“So, you’re the one that shot him!” Chris had said on their first phone conversation after Yuuri’s admitting it, and proceeded to burst into laughter until he finally calmed five minutes later.

Chris certainly had been worth the money so far, Yuuri thought. In three days, the man had managed to find out that Yakov had been discharged and was at home, recovering, despite the public still saying he was in the hospital. Viktor had disappeared for a short while after Yuuri’s run away and Yakov’s injury, but had resurfaced days later sneaking around Yakov’s building. Mila was on her way to Australia to conduct business on Yakov’s behalf, and Yuri was with Yakov, caring for him. Celestino was back in America, training with his student before the next competition. But most importantly, Chris had found out that the mafia were nowhere near finding Phichit.

Yuuri had worried that in his panic of finding the man behind the names on his wrists, he might have let something slip. He wasn’t sure where or how, but that was what scared him. He had concentrated so much on himself, he wasn’t sure if he had given anything away. He never wanted to do that again – his client was far more important than he himself was.

“Good,” Chris continued. “We can afford to lose a few little packages here and there as long as the main one still rests safe.”

“Have you found anything else that I need to be concerned about?” Yuuri asked. He asked similar questions every time Chris was on the phone, for fear that the other man might forget to say something. He wouldn’t, it was his job, but Yuuri still worried.

“Actually yes,” Chris stunned him by saying. “It just cropped up in the last hour or so, I was waiting for you to call to explain it.”
“Yes?” Yuuri could feel his stride slow until he was almost pacing across the shop floor.

“Mila’s plane arrived in Sydney about an hour ago,” Chris informed.

“Oh?”

“And she wasn’t on it.”

Yuuri ground to a complete halt, feeling the blood in him run cold. Mila was the one he wasn’t sure about, the one he had yet to converse with or know the potential of. “What?”

“The seat was booked, and she apparently checked in with luggage but she didn’t get off. Her bags have arrived, but she never boarded.”

“So she tricked us?”

“No, she tricked you. She thinks you might be keeping an eye on them all.”

“Do you know where she is?”

“I have surveillance footage to show she was at the booking desk and checked in her luggage, but the camera just mysteriously cuts off for an hour after. I’ve been trying to find her again for the last hour until you called, but I’ve not come up with anything.”

“What about the cameras outside?” Yuuri whispered, taking himself off to a corner and pretending to browse through clothing. “She must be on those, right?”

“Some don’t work. She’s not on the ones that do work either.”

“Do you think they know where I am? Or where Phichit is?”
“I can’t say for sure, no. I’m going to keep looking.”

“Please do.” In his mind, he hoped it was just a coincidence, that perhaps Mila had been called away on an emergency and didn’t have time to take her bags back, and the cameras needed rebooting or something. But he knew that was a lie. So he began to hope she was after him instead, and not hiding the fact that she was on her way to Japan.

“It doesn’t say that she’s had to pull out from the business function. So I’d be wary, Yuuri,” Chris warned. “She’s going to know that you know she’s not in Australia now. She’s going to be even more careful, and you don’t know who she’s after.”

“Yeah, I know,” Yuuri sighed. Once again, he found himself hoping it was him Mila was after. After what he had done to her precious boss, it could have been either. Perhaps she was out for vengeance against him directly, or wanted to hurt him by getting to his friend. “Keep an eye on it Chris, and tell me if you see her heading towards America.”

“Or anywhere else.”

“Or anywhere else,” Yuuri agreed. Especially Japan, he wanted to add, but kept it to himself. Sometimes, he thought, secrets could hinder just as much as they saved. “What about… What about Viktor? Do you know anything more about the days he vanished?”

“No, only that he’s beside Yakov now and going to work in his place. Other than that, Viktor’s been pretty quiet.” Chris paused on the other side, and Yuuri heard him shuffling some papers around. “He’s got a few meetings today, should have just finished his last one. He’ll be leaving work soon. I’ll keep an eye on him to see what he does. Maybe it’ll give us a hint as to where Mila has gone too.”

“You don’t think he’s pulled the same trick? Maybe he’s not actually at his meeting?”

“That’s what I’m going to be looking for. Maybe he’s on the way somewhere with her. I don’t know. But I do know he walked into that office building this morning after visiting Yakov, and the cameras haven’t shown him coming out.”

But there was something niggling at the back of Yuuri’s head, something he was unsure of. He scratched his forehead, deep in thought, and asked, “Do you think Mila might be acting on her
own?"

“As in she’s checked in for flying to fool not only you, but them?”

“I mean, it’s just odd that it’s only her that’s disappeared.”

Chris hummed and Yuuri heard the typing of laptop keys. “You think she might be going solo?”

“I don’t know. Maybe? If they were planning something, don’t you think Viktor would have disappeared too?”

“But he already did. He disappeared for a few days before this. Maybe it’s all part of the same plan.”

Yuuri didn’t like the sound of that. He’d not met Mila properly yet, and to hear that she had vanished unnerved him. Especially if Viktor was helping. Perhaps this would be where the enemy connection of theirs was to come in. Perhaps he had angered Viktor by running away rather than staying and talking it out as the other man wanted. Perhaps now the man didn’t want anything to do with him, and they had already planned his demise.

“Mila,” Yuuri began, rubbing his forehead again, feeling a slight headache beginning to throb at the back of his eyes. “What is she like?”

“I’ll find information for her now for you.”

“Thank you.” Yuuri listened to the clacking of keys, Chris humming as he searched, and allowed the noise to take away any wandering thoughts that might panic him. He’d been so on edge this last week, he barely slept, and any meal made him wonder if it would be his last. It might most likely be.

“She’s eighteen,” Chris began, surprising the both of them. “And she’s considered their assassin.”

Yuuri could almost collapse onto the floor, feeling the world spinning around his head. “Assassin?”
“Yeah.” Chris paused, tutting his tongue against the roof of his mouth. “You might want to be careful.”

“Careful? I think that’s an understatement.”

“I agree.”

Yuuri nodded, mostly to himself, almost resigned to the fact that he might need to face off against an eighteen-year-old mafia assassin at some point, regardless of if she was going for Phichit or Yuuri. But Yuuri couldn’t help but concentrate on the fact that Viktor had disappeared for a few days, and there was something about that that worried him. It had happened just after their revealed connection. He found it hard to forget about Viktor when he did things like that.

“Is there anything else that you want to tell me?”

“I’ll keep in touch if anything comes up.”

“Thank you.” Yuuri hung up and began to walk back to his apartment, a heavy heart resting in his chest. He’d done everything he could to remain hidden, and perhaps he would be undetectable from someone like Mila. But Viktor had disappeared, gone, vanished for a few days. He could have been anywhere. He could have found him, and decided that Mila was the best person to deal with him.

How could he fight against someone like Mila when he knew nothing about her? When he’d barely ever been in the same room, let alone conversed? When not even someone like Chris could give him more than a careful warning? He wove his way through the crowds, inhaled the fumes from the cars in the air, and tried to cast his thoughts away.

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The dreams were some of the worst Yuuri had been experiencing. Since meeting Viktor, some of the ones he had had in the past began to make sense. The tattoos as they began to wind around his form, growing and growing like panic, seeping until they consumed his entire being – he’d heard people say before that there was no escaping fate. But he’d heard so many times about people missing their soulmates by an inch as they passed one another on the way to work. Some lived their whole lives without ever meeting them. He’d hoped he’d be the same.
But everyone always met at least one name on their wrists – be it their enemy or their soulmate. Everyone met one of them. Some were lucky enough to meet the both. No one missed the both in their lives.

Yuuri hoped he’d be the first, just as he’d been the first to have two identical names tattooed on his wrists.

But instead, he had more of a chance of finding the person on the other side. He didn’t just have two to meet, he had the one. And he’d definitely met him. He’d met Viktor.

And since, the dreams had become more vivid. He could feel it curling in on him as he settled to bed, when the darkness fell and his nerves were on end for the minute someone tried to invade his temporary home. His tattoos itched. His heart throbbed, as if he was beating for two now. He could feel Viktor, a whole world away. And even then the distance wasn’t enough.

As he settled down that night, he could feel the burning inside of his head, the energy under his skin that let him know he was going to have one of those dreams this night. He didn’t know why it was only some nights – he’d looked it up online, and some speculated that it was the connection he had with his soulmate or enemy, that if they were thinking of him, as he was thinking of them, then his dreams would try to connect them. He didn’t believe them, but couldn’t help but think about it. He had no doubt that Viktor was thinking of him.

Even if Yuuri was trying his best to forget.

As his eyes slipped closed, his world burst into colour behind his eyelids. Sleep settled in, his tattoos burned, his heart thundered inside of his strong chest. In his dream, he stood in the middle of an empty room. Cement walls, cement floors, cement ceiling, no windows, no doors, but a swinging light above him. It flickered on and off, and a low strumming song was filtering in from somewhere. The first inch of floor was covered in water, and as he stepped around to explore, the puddle soaked into the skin of his bare feet and into the material of his jeans.

His emotions were strengthened in his dreams. He could feel his panic, his fear, his worry, and something more. Curiosity, he supposed. But underneath, he knew what it was. He’d felt it with his family when he moved away, with Yuuko after knowing he wouldn’t see her for a long time, with Phichit slightly when he left his client in his safe house.

As much as he wanted to hate it, his soulmate side missed Viktor.
He could feel his emotion amplified in his dreams, the way his chest constricted as he realised how he missed Viktor. He wanted to be sick and hope that it got rid of the emotions inside of him. But he knew it wasn’t that easy. It never was.

In the dream, the tattoos did as they did before, grew along his arms until they began to cover every piece of skin on his being. It didn’t scare him like it did before, not now that he knew what it meant. He couldn’t escape it. But he would try.

So he stayed still in that room in his dreams, waited for the dream to play itself out. It was a different setting each time, sometimes a void of nothing, an empty room like this, a field, and sometimes the warehouse where he had heard the truth from Viktor. He had run around trying to find a way out days ago, now he stood and waited for the tattoos to cover his body whole.

And when it did, he woke up. There was a sudden jerk as he woke, his heart shuddering for a second before he shot up in bed and figured out where he was. He rubbed his face and breathed in deeply. He reminded himself that he wouldn’t let this be the only path for his life.

He let it play in his mind over and over, throwing away the image of Viktor before it surfaced again. With the job he had, it was hard to completely forget about the man. His dreams reminded him of that. But that didn’t matter. He would deal with Viktor indirectly, act like he was nothing more than a man hunting Phichit down.

He couldn’t forget Viktor. But he could forget their connection.

He rose to a new day, Chris’ words still in his mind. He’d been worried that Mila might have invaded his home in the middle of the night, or that his parents or Phichit might have called with some worry, some panic that someone had found them. But nothing. It had been a calm night. Yuuri knew he was just waiting for that night though, that day, that something was going to go horribly wrong.

He knew he was just buying time until it did.

Yuuri went about his morning routine and opened his laptop, searching for anything new. No. It was quiet. Nothing. Days’ worth of suspicions began to pile on his shoulders, tugging tightly until he couldn’t relax. It was just waiting to snap.
It didn’t take long before it did.

Yuuri was going about his same routine, sitting in the corner of his new favourite café, a drink still warm in his cup beside his laptop. His fingers wrapped around it, feeling the steam of the drink warm his chilled fingers.

The room was the same bustle it was every day, filled with the same regular customers, same faces, some of which even greeted Yuuri with a smile. The same baristas, the same tired expressions, the same atmosphere of rushed workers. Yuuri watched them all as he fiddled with his laptop, sending out more Phichits all around the world.

Out of curiosity, he even sent out some of himself. He felt his heart beat one powerful thump as he sent out the first, wondering how quickly that would be intercepted. Perhaps they had redirected their attention to him instead. Only one way to find out. For every three Phichits he sent out, he sent one of himself.

He waited in the café for an hour, until the last dregs of his coffee had turned cold and the regulars of the shop had circulated. Lunch passed and the crowds moved away, the place now filled with only a few here and there. The noise had died considerably.

It was the reason he had heard the chime of the doorway so loudly. Unconsciously, he glanced up from over his laptop, seeing a new patron walk in, and glanced back down.

But something about the person was wrong. In his time as a bodyguard, he had become very observant, knowing that the life or death of his client sometimes rested on his ability to see things. In a split second, he identified that the patron was young, a woman, nearly an adult. That alone had alarm bells ringing at the back of his skull. He glued his eyes to the screen, not wanting to alert the person, but looked over the memorised image in his mind. Young, brown hair, a cap over, sunglasses, hoodie, bag that looked filled.

Out of the corner of his eye, he saw the blurred image of the woman make her way to the opposite corner and settle down. She didn’t take off her cap or her sunglasses, and didn’t take anything out from her bag. No cup of coffee was sat before her, nothing on the table. She sat and stared his way.

She wasn’t being subtle.
Yuuri could almost laugh at that, but he knew that would alert the other and cause problems he wasn’t ready to deal with. Remembering her image, he speculated that the hair was fake – he had seen enough wigs in his time to tell the difference between real and fake, regardless of if it was made well.

Thinking back, she hadn’t been subtle when she was following Celestino. To think that the mafia’s assassin was someone like this, a young woman who didn’t seem to care about hiding her intentions.

Yuuri paused. A though occurred to him – why did she need to be subtle? The point of her following Celestino was so that he knew he couldn’t contact anyone. Perhaps she wanted Yuuri to know she was watching.

Yuuri wanted to test his theory, so he turned his head and stared directly at the young woman watching him from the corner. He observed her further, noticed the tiny bit of red hair that was peeking from her forehead, wig placed on without care. Her eyes were covered, but she was pointedly staring at him. Her clothes were plain and baggy, but Yuuri saw the flash of what must have been Russian letters along the right sleeve of her hoodie.

She wanted him to know.

His theory was further confirmed when she titled her head to the side and smirked, tipping her cap in greeting. She stayed where she was, but crossed her legs to relax, and Yuuri got the feeling she would stay just as long as he did.

It had taken Mila a number of days to find him. Yuuri suspected longer than she was anticipating. It had been a while since her plane had arrived without her, by which time she should have already been in America. Unlike Viktor, she had no way of finding him. Somehow she had though, and it hadn’t taken long. Yuuri wondered if he hadn’t been as secure as he thought he was, if he’d let something slip.

He wouldn’t be surprised if he had. The first few days of his travels, he’d been so immersed in his feelings and what had happened with Viktor that he’d not paid attention to even the most basics of his training. He owed himself to the fact that the mafia had been too distracted by what he had done to find him. Otherwise, he could have found himself here, right now, with an assassin on his tail far sooner, back when he was not prepared.

He could feel his gun underneath his jacket, loaded and safely in its holster, ready for him to take. It almost seemed to make his ribs throb with the knowledge, trigger finger itching, Yakov’s
shooting replaying in his mind. He wondered how Viktor would react if he shot Mila.

He shook his head. He didn’t need to think about that, not right now. Or, preferably, not ever. He closed his laptop and made a show of gathering his things. He chugged down the cold liquid from his cup, almost retching at the collective bitterness, and rose with his bag over his shoulder.

Mila rose with him.

She followed six feet behind, not bothering to hide, and he left the shop. He didn’t bother to try and get rid of her, instead guided her towards where a massive shopping outlet was built. They entered and sat on the seats of the lobby, watching as the busy shoppers rushed by, money being thrown needlessly at things that caught their fancy.

Mila sat two feet away, sitting back against the cement pot plant behind them, and made no move to say the first word.

It wasn’t long before Yuuri became too curious to keep quiet. However, Mila was the first to speak, taking a deep breath before she delved into her own words.

“You’ve got some balls,” she said, a hint of a laugh underneath her voice.

Yuuri turned to glance at her, eyes connecting as she tilted her head to the side once more. The movement made some of the red strands of her hair settle on her cheek, so bright next to the dull brown of the wig. “I do?”

Mila smiled, though there was something strained about it. “You have the gall to walk right into our company building and shoot our boss, then leave and harass another employee. And now you’ve invited me to meet you, knowing fully well who I am. You do, don’t you?”

Yuuri nodded. “I do.” He couldn’t contain his thoughts of how beautiful the woman was though. Her red hair was bright and eye-catching, especially beside her sparkling blue eyes. At the back of his mind, as Yuuri caught those eyes behind the darkened glass of her sunglasses, he momentarily compared them to the blue of Viktor’s.

“Viktor warned me that nothing really slipped passed you.” Mila sighed, turning to look at the wall instead. Around them, groups and families were too taken with the products on show to care about
their conversation, or how they sat with weapons hidden underneath their clothes and in bags, the weight of lives hanging on their words.

But Yuuri was too preoccupied with the way Viktor’s name sounded on someone else’s lips to realise it. Each letter made him shudder, made his tattoos itch. “He did?”

Mila turned back to him, the smile slipping. “Can you speak more than two words at a time?”

“I can.” Yuuri shook his head, trying to contain his own sigh. “I mean, yes. Viktor warned you?”

“Why? Interested in what he said about you?”

“Of course not. I’m more interested in why you’re here and he’s not.”

The young woman turned her body until she was resting better on the seat, turned completely towards Yuuri, and pushed her sunglasses to rest on her cap. “Are you disappointed that he’s not here?”

Yuuri hoped that the blush he could feel rise wasn’t as obvious as he wanted it to be on his cheeks. Anger laced his blood. “More suspicious than anything.”

“Viktor has some things to deal with at home,” Mila said. “He’s busy cleaning up the mess that you made. So he sent me in his stead.”

“He sent you?”

Mila took a moment to glance over Yuuri’s expression. Yuuri tried to read her expression, but there was something trained about it. He could read nothing.

She replied, “He did.”

Yuuri could feel something drop in his chest. So running away had come to this. He hadn’t stayed and spoken to Viktor, and perhaps that was enough to completely destroy whatever it was that
could have been made between them. He had run away. And now Viktor had sent their assassin after him.

Yuuri opened his jacket just the tiniest but, until the metal of the gun shone under the blinding lights of the shopping hall. He watched as Mila’s eyes flitted to it, how her body tensed immediately and how her hand began to curl towards her own beneath her hoodie. “Why did you want me knowing you were watching me? You could have made a hit when I wasn’t prepared.”

Mila looked up again to connect their gazes. “Because I wanted to meet the man that managed to shoot Yakov, scare Yuri and have Viktor so fixated. So far, I can’t say you’re anything special.”

“I’m not.”

“You’re meant to be. You’ve hidden Phichit so well that not even our tracker can find him. Do you have any idea how hard that is?”

“I’m doing my bit for an innocent man.”

He fully expected Mila to argue, just as Yakov and Viktor had. But instead she shrugged her shoulders.

Yuuri narrowed his eyes. “You’re not going to argue about the innocent part?”

“I don’t really care. I do what Yakov tells me to.”

“Do you know what Phichit did?” Yuuri’s heart soared with hope, that finally someone would tell him. But it died the moment he heard Mila’s reply.

“I don’t know what he’s done. I just know that Viktor wants him, and Yakov is helping.”

“You’re not even curious?”

“It sounds like you’re more of the curious one. Do you know what your client did?”
Yuuri had an argument ready on the tip of his tongue, but it died as he paused. It sounded so unprofessional that he didn’t know, and he really should have. Not knowing could have been dangerous, not just for his own life but for Phichit’s as well. But he’d become complacent in the fact that Phichit was safe enough to have such mercies as to not say something that hurt him so. But he decided he should ask, had a right to know. He’d ask when he knew it was safe.

“You don’t? Wow. I thought that was why Viktor was so gung-ho about finding you.”

Yuuri paused. Normally, he’d let that go, but something about it had him thinking. As Mila spoke, he felt a tug in his chest, a pain he recognised he had been ignoring. “Finding? You’re not here to kill me?”

Something crossed Mila’s eyes then. She narrowed them, and her expression darkened, eyes stone cold and icy. “Don’t get me wrong. I wouldn’t mind wrapping my hands around your throat right now. If it was up to Yakov, you’d be drowning in your own blood. But he’s not in any position to make decisions right now, so I listen to Viktor. And he’s told me to find you.”

Yuuri flinched, but kept their gazes locked. In just a second, the woman had turned from young adult to something terrifying. But within a blink of an eye, she was back to normal, gaze soft and smirk on her lips.

Yuuri knew that this was not someone to mess with. Young though she may be, Yuuri knew that age sometimes didn’t matter, nor did it factor into someone’s personality. He didn’t let it get in the way of his job.

He asked one of the questions out of the many that echoed in his mind, “So now that you’ve found me, what are you going to do?”

Mila reached into her pocket, startling Yuuri for a split second before she brought out a phone. The screen was black, switched off, but her fingers were already in position to wake it once again. “I’ve already informed him. He’s probably getting ready to come.”

“It’s a long flight,” Yuuri replied, trying to kill the excitement that wanted to rise in his chest. “By the time he’s here, I’ll be gone.”

“Viktor wants me to keep an eye on you,” Mila admitted, replacing the phone back into her pocket.
“If you try to run, I’ll be behind you, making sure he’s updated every step of the way. Believe me, you can’t run faster than I can keep up.”

Yuuri said nothing for a while and turned to stare at the wall, a fight of emotions filtering through his mind.

The loudest was how tired he was. The road ahead of him, the future, scared him a little – forever doomed to run and be chased because he got himself into a mess he didn’t know how to get out of. And among that, he’d found the one man he never wanted to find, the owner of the pain he had been living for years. He’d been so strung up, so completely filled with colliding emotions and fear than his body was weary. Perhaps that was why he had even confronted Mila like this. He was tired of being in the darkness, tired of not having the answers. He knew if he had them, he could have avoided so much of this.

For just the smallest second, he wondered what running away would do. He’d run away from Viktor once, with the intention of hoping to kill this connection between them. But perhaps Viktor wasn’t getting the message, would never get the message. Running would do nothing in that case. It would only tire him out much more.

But what would confronting Viktor mean? What would that come to? How would that save him? He didn’t know what Viktor even wanted. Was he trying to find him so that they could talk about this? Was he hoping that they would try to get over it, and try to fall into their comfortable preconceptions of their connection? To be an enemy or a soulmate? So many questions that Yuuri had tried to avoid and he knew he could not come to their conclusion without the other man, as much as he hated to admit it.

But it would hurt. It would hurt him so much. He feared that pain.

He worried that he would begin to grow close to Viktor, despite whatever it was they were. That, one way or another, they’d grow close until he would fear to be alone. But with a connection like theirs, it would happen one day. Enemies were made to come together for a short time before one was defeated, and then it ended. Soulmates were made to spent their lives together forever.

How did that work if someone was both? How could they pass one another and be in their lives until death?

Yuuri wrung his hands, thinking. Any move he made now, he knew would make the path he would have to walk down. He’d run away once. Now, was it time to turn and face Viktor, or to run until his legs could no longer carry him?
And it wasn’t just him to think about. Phichit was waiting for him, his life on the line in exchange for Yuuri’s. Yuuri had promised he would save his client, but could he do that running away? It would divert their attention, but not forever. He’d called Viktor once to save him, perhaps he could do it again.

It felt like he was thinking for an eternity. The planets were being born again in his mind, a clash of stars and light exploding before he finally came to a conclusion that he was determined with. Happy with? No. He doubted he would ever be happy with his conclusions. But he decided that whatever he chose, he would chase it with everything he had.

He stood suddenly, making Mila jump. “Fine,” he said, almost wanting to exhale every inch of breath from his lungs. “I’m going home. Follow me if you want to, Mila. I don’t care.”

As he turned away and walked through the lobby, Mila rushed to chase after him, taking large steps where Yuuri’s long legs took little ones. It was here Yuuri finally noticed how their heights were quite different, the young girl a little shorter than him.

“Does that mean you’re not going to run?” she asked, eyes wide, expression just as readable as an open book. She had expected to give chase. Yuuri wondered if she liked chasing.

“Do you know where I’m currently living?” Yuuri asked.

“Give me a few minutes and I could easily find it,” she replied.

“No need. I’ll show you.”

“O-Okay.” The confusion was clear in her voice, heavy in her stutter. “So you’re going to stay put?”

Yuuri walked a little faster, taking a tiny bit of amusement when the woman had to rush to keep up. It was childish, he thought, especially after what she had said about keeping up no matter how fast he ran – but if this was the only revenge he could take, then he would take it, no matter how small.

“When we get there, give Viktor the address. Tell him I’ll be waiting.”
It was in the very early hours of the next day that there was a knock on the door.

Yuuri hadn’t slept, knowing that the inevitable visit would be coming. So he sat up, with a few lights switched on, and a tumbler of whisky beside him. He didn’t normally drink the stuff, but he had felt like some hard alcohol, something he could sip, take his time drinking and feel it slip down his throat. Whiskey warmed the stomach, and he needed something to settle it right now.

He’d been staring at the same part of the wall for hours, as the early morning ticked by. Outside, the same noises filtered through. What they said about New York being the city that never slept was true. Time didn’t seem to matter here.

He’d spent hours thinking. Thinking over everything, from his choices, his past, the tattoos on his wrists. Just for Viktor’s visit, he had taken off the bandages and worn a short-sleeved T-shirt, just to acknowledge their connection.

It had taken a lot of bravery on his part to do it. Years of covering them up had almost stopped him.

He thought about how he was a bodyguard, that he should push through his own pain and do this for his client. It took many hours for him to admit that this was the best thing he could do for Phichit. Perhaps if he catered to Viktor enough about their connection, then perhaps he could get the man to stop hunting his innocent client. Every road he could think of saving Phichit began here. Right here, in the darkness with the illumination of the lights and a tumbler of whiskey, waiting for fate to knock on the door.

When it did, Yuuri was so ready he didn’t jump. He sighed, inhaled deeply, and set the tumbler down. Everything passed slowly, his body reluctant to rise as he made his way to the door.

The knock came again, a little more impatiently this time.

Yuuri pushed down his annoyance.
He opened the door, everything seeming to numb around him, sound dulled. But Viktor seemed to be enhanced, his image ingrained so heavily in Yuuri that it was as if they hadn’t been away for more than an hour. He seemed tired, breathing heavily, as if he had run here as soon as his plane had landed.

“Yuuri,” he whispered, as if his voice could change Yuuri’s mind.

“Hello, Viktor. Been awhile.”

Chapter End Notes

In case no one guessed yet, I love cliffhangers.

Also, I had a weird obsession with listening to Bonnie Tyler's 'Holding Out for a Hero' while writing this, and I honestly couldn't stop laughing at the sheer difference of tones between them. And technically that obsession hasn't ended. You ask, am I listening to it right now? Why, yes, yes I am. 'I can feel his approach like a fire in my blood'. How apt XD

As always, you can find me on tumblr for updates and chat

here

Thank you!
Yuuri could feel every cell in his being jump, some out of happiness and some out of fear, conflicting over just what Viktor was to him. The break, the fight, the combat between their connections, tearing itself through him. He could feel it tighten in his chest.

He didn’t want Viktor to see his expression, so he turned away and walked into the darkened house, leaving the door open for the man to walk through. His ears listened for when Viktor stepped in and shut the door behind him, movements slow and quiet as if he was still worried of breaking whatever peace there was between them.

Yuuri walked into the open kitchen, setting aside two glasses for them to drink with. For the briefest moment, he wondered if it would be a good idea to pour some alcohol for them. He still had some whiskey, along with some stronger stuff as well. Some of his clients had decided that vodka was a good payment for his freelance work, and that bottle had been placed at the back of his cupboard.

But he knew that it wouldn’t be good for him. As trained as he was to withstand some things, alcohol was not one of them. A high tolerance, yes, but once he started, he didn’t plan to stop – especially if there was something he wanted to escape. This was the perfect example of why he wanted to run. Alcohol right now, while Viktor was visiting, was not a good idea. Who knew what his instincts, his fate, had in store for him if he did. With no walls and limitations, he might do something he would regret come morning.

So he poured them some water from the bottle he kept in the fridge, not too keen on the water from the tap.

He glanced out of the corner of his eye. Viktor was still standing in the middle of the living room, coat still on, still staring at Yuuri’s back. His mouth opened and closed, as if he had words he wanted to speak but didn’t want to say.

Yuuri turned away again, hoping that he could prolong this silence for as long as he could. He knew he had allowed Viktor to find him for one reason – to get to the bottom of this and stop this
war, stop this hunting and searching, and he knew he needed to make some hard sacrifices to be able to do it. One being the sacrifice of his pride, to allow the tattoos on his arms to be the boss for just this evening and talk about what was to come, what they would do. As much as he didn’t want to, he knew he had to.

It wasn’t just about him anymore.

He did his best to avoid Viktor’s gaze as he moved back into the living room, setting their drinks on the table between their chairs, hiding his eyes behind the frames of his glasses. He didn’t look up until he was sat down, comfortable in the chair he had been waiting in before the knock. He turned his gaze on Viktor with a raised eyebrow, a question of if the man was going to join him prominent in his expression.

It seemed to charge Viktor into moving. He slipped off his coat and set it up on the hooks beside the door, where Yuuri’s was hanging. Then he sat on the chair opposite Yuuri, not wanting to tear his eyes from Viktor even for a moment. If there was anything that saved the moment, Yuuri thought, it was the fact that Viktor looked just as conflicted as he did.

“What did you want to talk about?” Yuuri asked, breaking their silence.

“Yuuri,” Viktor began, but his voice died. He leaned forward to grab the glass and take a sip, letting the water swill in his mouth before he attempted to speak again. This time, his voice was stronger, more like the man Yuuri had come to know as mafia. “You ran away.”

Yuuri restrained the sigh that wanted to slip from his lips. “Can you blame me?”

Viktor paused, setting the glass back down on the wooden table. “No. I’d have done the same thing in your position.”

“You are in my position. You also have one name on your wrists.”

“But I had time to process it, to think about it and to come to terms with it. I just sprung it on you without really thinking about how you would feel.”

Yuuri wanted to make some snide comment about how the man had been doing that to Phichit too, how he’d done it since they had first met, but kept that locked behind his teeth. The last thing they
needed was to fight as well. “It’s been done now.”

“I don’t blame you for running away, no,” Viktor continued. “It’s a lot to think about. Especially when it’s something you’ve been trying to avoid all of your life. You have a lot of hurt surrounding those names – surrounding my name.”

Yuuri stayed silent, but couldn’t stop the way his hands constricted into fists. He should never have admitted to Viktor how he had been treated, how he hated everything to do with the names, with the cursed fate that the world had bestowed upon him. He didn’t like to think of it, but he had sometimes thought – in his worst moments – that someone else deserved this. If only he could pass it onto someone else, someone deserving of the pain. How selfish. How cowardly.

Viktor moved on as if he hadn’t seen. “And obviously, springing it on you like that wasn’t going to do any good. I don’t know what I was thinking.”

“Careful, Viktor. It almost sounds like you’re apologising.”

Viktor continued to stare at Yuuri, splaying out his hands and shrugging. “Would you not accept it if I was?”

Something about the words made Yuuri’s chest constrict again. The stress was too much. Running away hadn’t done anything to alleviate it. “I didn’t accept you here for an apology, Viktor. I don’t need or want one.”

“That doesn’t matter. I’ll still apologise.” As Yuuri went to say more, he placed his open palm before him, silencing Yuuri. “I’m sorry. I didn’t think about you, only about what the names were and what they meant. I didn’t think about your pain, I only thought about my excitement at finally finding you.”

“Excitement? How could you be excited with our situation?”

Viktor sighed, finally breaking their eye contact and glancing down to his lap as he interlaced his fingers. “Like I said, I was worried about what my partner would go through if I found them. That was the primary reason I never looked. You know the world I’m in. It would hurt them. But that didn’t stop my curiosity, my interest. I already told you I spent years making you up in my mind, of how you would be, what would happen if we would meet. The only thing stopping me from finding you was my job. If that wasn’t in the way, I’d have hunted you down regardless of the fact that your name is on both of my wrists.”
Yuuri replayed the words in his mind, unable to understand. How could someone have such conviction? How could Viktor willingly want to meet someone who was both enemy and soulmate? How could he want to find that person, fully knowing that it would only end in pain? It just didn’t make sense.

Viktor said, “I didn’t think you about how wouldn’t see it the same way. I’m sorry.”

“I don’t want your apology.”

“Have it anyway. At least let me say the words. If not for you, then for myself. I have pride too.”

Yuuri said nothing, taking another sip of his drink and watching the man before him. Time ticked slowly and Viktor sat up straight again, reforming eye contact and seemingly lighter now that he had said the words he had been holding in for a while. Yuuri had hoped that they could get right down to business and discuss what was to come, but it seemed that Viktor wanted to talk about their connection first. Yuuri thought it was best to get it over with, and yet he was still reluctant.

As if he sensed Yuuri’s discomfort, Viktor said, “I just want to talk about it. Maybe then it won’t be so confusing. We can deal with it.”

“It’s always going to be confusing.”

“It doesn’t have to be.”

“How can our situation be dealt with, Viktor? I’ve been trying to avoid talking about it, but maybe you have a better idea of how it works. What have you come up with?”

He must have said something wrong, because Viktor narrowed his eyes, gaze turned hard suddenly. “I can’t do it alone. I have your name too. And you have mine. As hard as it is, you’re also in this, Yuuri.” He clenched his hands together, jaw jutting out as he gritted his teeth. “If anything, you’re the one that has made this more complicated. You just had to shoot Yakov didn’t you?”

“Then why don’t you let him get to me? At least with me gone, you don’t have to deal with this
“Because you’re my soulmate too. I couldn’t shoot you myself, let alone allow someone else to get rid of you. I could never do that.”

As much as Yuuri wanted to deny it, he too couldn’t allow something like that to happen. On one side, his enemy bond wanted him to get rid of the man before him, beat him and overcome the obstacle that fate had placed in front of him. But the other side of him wanted to see Viktor well, to make sure that he was fine and healthy and out of danger. Something had stopped him from shooting the man. The idea of standing by and allowing something to happen to Viktor hurt him just as much. At the back of his mind, that connection reminded him of how much he hated Viktor being mafia – not just because of the morals and the position, but because of the danger Viktor was placed in. His soulmate side was not pleased with the idea.

“So you’re going to go against Yakov and protect me?”

“I’m not going against him. It’s not like I’ll be betraying him,” Viktor huffed, almost seeming to deflate in the chair. Yuuri could tell by the bags underneath his eyes and the weariness in his frame that Viktor had thought long and hard about this, wracked by stress and guilt. “I’ll just be… keeping you two away from each other. I’ve explained the situation to Mila too. She’s not best pleased, and she really doesn’t like you, but she’ll help me.”

“And Yuri?”

Viktor waved the comment away. “It’s not like he can do anything. He’s just a teen with a massive bank account given to him by Yakov. That kid wants to travel the world more than he wants to be one of us.”

“So he’s not been told?”

“He doesn’t need to be told. He probably wouldn’t care.”

Yuuri thought back to the young boy he had met in that hotel room, how he seemed to be comfortable with Viktor, with the situation, how indifferent he seemed to be with what was going on. Yes, Yuuri thought, he could believe that. Yuri hadn’t seemed at all interested in being what Viktor was.
But Yuuri asked, “And you don’t think that what’s happened to Yakov has changed that? What if I’ve given him his motivation?”

Viktor was silent for a while, mouth open as he thought seriously about what had been asked. Finally, after a few minutes, he replied, “Perhaps you would have if Yakov had died. Maybe a murder would have ruined Yuri, and the boy would swear revenge. But Yakov is fine. Yuri is fine. I don’t think you changed anything.”

“I don’t think you changed anything. It might have been something comforting said by Viktor in an attempt to calm Yuuri, but to Yuuri it rang like bells inside his mind. He had met with Yakov hoping to change things, and it hadn’t helped. He had done everything to change things for Phichit. But Viktor was right – so far, Yuuri hadn’t changed a damn thing, and it was a hard thing for him to think about.

“We have some time to properly think about this,” Viktor continued, unknowing of the pain he had given the man before him. “With Yakov still injured, you’re safe for the time being. We have some time to really work things out.”

“But what happens when he’s up and ready?”

“I could talk to him, explain things. If I tell him you’re my soulmate-”

“And your enemy,” Yuuri interrupted, a humourless laugh slipping from between his lips. “Don’t forget that side of things.”

Viktor titled his head and glared, showing his lack of amusement at Yuuri’s comment. He continued as if he hadn’t been interrupted, “If I tell him you’re my soulmate, he’ll have to take things into consideration. I’m like a son to him and he knows my past surrounding your names. He’ll have to rethink his plans.”

“‘Sorry, Yakov, the one that shot you was my soulmate.’” Yuuri grimaced. “Somehow, I don’t think that’s going to go down well.”

Viktor sighed, rubbing his temples, as if a headache was slowly beginning to settle in. “Yeah, I don’t think it will either. He won’t let go of the fact you shot him easily.”
Yuuri fiddled with his fingers, catching onto something Viktor had said, something small that might have slipped by him had he not already thought about everything else a thousand times in the last week. He paused, hesitating, before he asked, “So Yakov isn’t your father?”

Viktor paused too, glancing up with wide eyes, confusion slipping by his face before he said, “Oh, no he’s not. Did you think he was?”

“Yeah, I did, sort of. I was wondering what your connection was, and sometimes you look and act similar, and you seem so close, so…”

Viktor’s expression eased a little, and the smallest smile graced his lips as he shook his head. “No. I’m like Yuri – Yakov took me in when I was young. I’ve spent so much time with him that I guess I’ve grown up with some of his mannerisms.’

Something inside of Yuuri’s chest began to light, his heart skipping a beat. He swallowed it down and leaned back in his chair, trying to cast his thoughts away. But he couldn’t get rid of it. Their connection was beginning to grow inside of him, he could feel it becoming more pronounced, some of those confusing emotions beginning to develop names. He could feel why it was fluttering right now – his soulmate side was happy to have learned some new information about their partner. His blood rushed and his head spun, excited that his other half had decided to share something so personal. His enemy side thought how this was something good to use later on.

“I suppose I can understand why you would think we were related, though,” Viktor said, running his hand through his fringe to slip it back into place beside the apple of his cheek. “A lot of people have thought we were.”

Yuuri wanted to ask if their lack of blood relation still meant Viktor would take over from Yakov if the man did pass away, but decided to keep that to himself. Conversation was finally flowing away from topics of their connection, and Yuuri wanted to keep it like that until he had his head on straight and his heart stop skipping beats. So instead he asked, “Does Yakov like taking in children?”

“He gave us a chance when no one else did.” Viktor’s smile grew a little, softer than Yuuri had ever seen before. His eyes glazed, as if memories were playing before his gaze. “He wasn’t able to have children himself, despite wanting them. Even if he did, I think he’d bring in orphans. He’s strict and can be scary sometimes, but he’s not heartless.”

Yuuri felt a pang in his heart, and for the first time he wondered what the death of the man he had shot would mean – more than just his own hunting, beyond his death by revenge of the mafia, but
as a connection to those he had known. Viktor had insisted that Yakov was alright, and had said it more than once to Yuuri. Yuuri had taken it as fact, but now he wondered if it was also partly Viktor’s wishful thinking or gratefulness that Yakov was pulling through. Had the boss not moved, and Yuuri’s bullet had hit its target, how would Viktor be right now? The question hurt him to think about.

Viktor chuckled suddenly, making Yuuri jump. The Russian said, “To be fair, though, if anyone was going to recover from being shot in the chest, it was going to be him. I’m starting to think he’s immortal.”

Yuuri was at a loss of what to say, knowing that anything he said could destroy the ease in the air between them. He found himself craving it, just wanting a moment of peace after what he had done, a moment that he didn’t have to worry about what was going to happen next. It was odd that he found that with Viktor, but he supposed that shouldn’t have come as a surprise. To prolong it, he said nothing. He watched Viktor’s face, gaze flitting over his soft expression, and kept his words locked behind his teeth.

Viktor continued as if he was talking to himself, “He’s been through a lot in his time anyway. It’s not like it’s the first time he’s been shot. He’s stubborn, in all aspects of the word. I’ve always told him that and teased him about it. And in stubborn fashion, he insists he’s not.” There was a sudden beep outside, morning traffic beginning to create walls of vehicles, and the sound brought Viktor out of the place his thoughts had been travelling. He glanced up, eyes wide as he found Yuuri again, as if he remembered where he was. “Oh, sorry, I’m mumbling on about stuff.”

“It’s fine,” Yuuri said, surprised by how honest it was. His own gaze scanned over Viktor’s face, taking in the bags and the pale complexion. “You look tired.”

Viktor’s smile disappeared. He stood back up straight, his expression losing its softness. “I haven’t slept very well in the last few days, and jet lag is never a pleasant thing to experience. I’ll be fine though.”

“Viktor, why don’t you sleep?” It was meant to be an innocent question. But as soon as he asked it, Yuuri realised that he had said the wrong thing for both of them. Theirs’ wasn’t a simple connection. They weren’t just soulmates, they were enemies. And Yuuri knew that you never fell asleep with your enemy nearby.

Viktor immediately tensed, and the ease in the air was suffocated by tension. He didn’t say anything, but watched Yuuri as if he was trying to see what the other would do next. Yuuri wondered if Viktor thought he’d pull a gun out here, do as he had done with Yakov. Yuuri kept still to try and calm Viktor again, but it didn’t seem to be helping.
Viktor asked, “Do you feel one stronger than the other?”

Confused, Yuuri muttered, “What?” as he gripped the arms of his chair. He’d known he’d be the one to break the ease, he just hadn’t realised it would be so soon. He needed to start thinking before he talked – he always thought he did, but talking with Viktor proved him otherwise.

“Your enemy side or soulmate side, do you feel one stronger than the other?”

Yuuri blanked. The question took a moment to register in his mind, and the first question was if such a thing was possible. All this time, had he been feeling one of them more than the other?

Viktor asked, “If being your soulmate didn’t stop you from shooting me, would you do it, knowing what I was? If you could shoot me now, would you do it?”

The first thing to come to his mind was if it was to protect Phichit, he would. There was slight hesitation, but he’d do it.

Viktor must have read his mind, because he said, “Take Phichit out of the picture. That never happened. We met normally, but I’m still what I am and you’re still what you are. All you have to do is shoot me. Would you do it?”

“Would you?”

“I know my answer, Yuuri, but I want to know yours.” Viktor’s voice was steadily growing stronger, words weighing heavily, as if the question had just occurred to him but now meant everything to him. “If you could, would you shoot me?”

Yuuri opened his mouth, so sure of his answer being yes, but he stopped. This time, he couldn’t blame the connection they had. It pained him to think of shooting Viktor, the image in his mind jarring his thoughts. The blood that dripping from Viktor would make his heart stop, breathing judder. He probably couldn’t, not without good reason. But he couldn’t find the words to say it. He felt like he was falling in a trap. The answer hurt him, knowing that he couldn’t shoot a man of the mafia just because of a predetermined fate.
But his hesitation seemed to ease Viktor some. He leaned back into the chair, still tense but breathing with more ease than before. “Your pause gives me some hope, at least.”

“What do you mean, do I feel one more than the other?”

Viktor shrugged. “I mean, we’re the first case of our kind that I’ve heard of. I was wondering if it was possible to still have an imbalance.”

“You wanted to know if I was telling you to sleep so I could kill you?”

“Well, you’ve not been overly receptive to me.”

Yuuri nodded, thinking that was fair enough. “I promise you, Viktor, I won’t kill you. I won’t hurt you. I only asked if you wanted to sleep because you seem so tired.”

Viktor watched Yuuri’s face, and there was a tense second in which the clock ticking filled the silence. As the truth came, Viktor eased and almost seemed to melt into the seat. He rubbed his face, eyes slipping closed. “Alright. I might need to accept that invitation then. This seat is so comfortable, I had been thinking of sleeping here.”

“No, Viktor, I was going to offer you my bed.”

Viktor paused, and as the words struck him, a smirk began to grow on his weary face. “Oh, Yuuri, you should have said that from the start. I’ll graciously accept-”

“Without me in it,” Yuuri insisted, though he couldn’t contain the blush that rose on his cheeks.

“Ah,” Viktor replied, but the smirk remained. “I’ll still accept.”

Yuuri showed Viktor where his room was, and watched as the scary mafia man crawled under the covers and curled into a cocoon. He hadn’t taken off his suit, only felt the need to take off his shoes once Yuuri had prompted him. Yuuri switched off the lights and turned to leave, avoiding how his thoughts were straying towards the man in his bed.
But Viktor’s voice caught him before he could leave the room. He sounded young, weary and secure, voice almost muffled by the quilt that he had pulled up to his chin. “Thank you, Yuuri. I am sorry.”

Yuuri turned to look at the man, thinking of what to reply. But Viktor’s eyes were already slipping, breathing steady, and Yuuri was sure that Viktor wouldn’t hear him even if he did speak. So he turned back and closed the door.

He stared at his house, and for the first time in a long time, he wondered what he should do next.

His whole existence recently had been paved by steps, knowing exactly what needed to be done to avoid things coming. But now he stood before his quiet apartment, where the sun was slowly beginning to rise above the skyscrapers and cascade its rays into the dark room, where the clock ticked idly on the wall and his things were still unpacked in the corner, and where his soulmate and enemy now slept behind him in his bed.

For the first time in a long time, he didn’t know the next step.

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It was only a few minutes into being alone that Yuuri realised he hadn’t asked for Viktor’s response to his own question. Viktor had said he had an answer to if he would shoot Yuuri or not, if he felt one side stronger than the other, and Yuuri remembered that he hadn’t asked. He planned to ask the man when he woke up.

But it was a long time before he did. Hours slipped by easily, and Yuuri waited with every second, time passing so slowly. He made himself coffee, knowing it was likely going to be a very long day. He could already feel it in his bones, the dread and the weariness of knowing that this day would go far slower than any day had gone before.

He sat and tried to distract himself, pulling out his laptop. None of his Phichits had been taken for a while, and none of himself had gone missing either. He supposed it wouldn’t happen now that Viktor had found him.

He wondered where Mila had gone. He almost wanted to welcome her into his home as well just for the distraction. His thoughts kept straying to the man in his bed, and the blush would rise to
dust his tanned cheeks and reach his collarbone. He couldn’t contain them sometimes, knowing that it was his soulmate side that liked the idea of Viktor being catered for, sleeping in their warm bed, almost trusting enough to completely shut off. It was almost loud enough to drown out the enemy side of him telling him that he should take advantage.

The voices had never been so loud before. Sometimes they would rise, especially during his training sessions when he would have to unwrap the bandages and rewrap them to keep them clean. As he stared at his tattoos, he heard whisperings in the back of his mind, but they were easy to ignore. Now, his gaze was far from them, and yet the voices screamed in his head. Now they screamed “Viktor.”

Yuuri, out of curiosity, peeled back his sleeves and peeked under the bandages – something he hadn’t done properly since he had last met with Viktor. He’d been afraid to, though he’d been tempted. They itched and pained him. They brought back the memories of when Viktor had traced the letters and read his name.

Yuuri slowly wound the bandages off, eyes never straying from the letters, his heart beat stuttered in his throat. He had always known they were Russian, something telling him all those years ago that they might have been, and knowledge afterwards helping him recognise it without being able to read it. He wondered how many other signs he had missed. Perhaps, if he had been listening carefully instead of trying to avoid it, he might have found Viktor before this mess.

But that brought the question of how he would have reacted had Viktor told him he was mafia. And then the worry of where the enemy side of their relationship would come.

In any reality, in any way they could have met, Yuuri knew they would face problems. It didn’t matter how, or in what time, if they were children, adults or elderly, nothing could change the fact that having one name for both sides brought problems that could just not be thrown away.

He shook his head. It wasn’t the time to be thinking about these things again. He got up and decided that it was time to do something else to distract himself, the laptop wasn’t working anymore.

His stomach growled and he held it. Breakfast. Yes, breakfast sounded like a good idea right now. He paused, wondering if Viktor had had any yet. He turned towards the bedroom, taking a step and stopped again. The man probably hadn’t, and yet another thought voiced itself in Yuuri’s head, saying that the man could make his own food. He had bombarded his life, Viktor could do the rest himself. But Yuuri turned towards the kitchen, ears listening to the silence of the apartment, torn.
He pretended to ignore the sides battling themselves inside of him, but in the end, he made too much breakfast for himself – enough for one other person. He refused to admit that it was a conscious decision.

It was just as he was setting it out that Viktor emerged from the bedroom, jacket off and crisp white shirt now creased where he had slept on it, trousers a little ruffled and one sock slipped lower than the other. He rubbed his eyes with the palms of his hands, yawning away the sleep still creeping in his frame.

Yuuri set the plates on the table, opposite one another, close on the small structure. There hadn’t been anywhere else to eat, and he refused to think about how awfully domestic it seemed. He didn’t look at Viktor as the man began to pad over, so unlike the fearful mafia man Yuuri had first known him as. Now he looked like an overgrown, tired child.

“Is one of these for me?” he asked, his voice quiet and rough with sleep.

“You don’t have to eat it if you don’t like it,” Yuuri replied, beginning to clean some of the pans in the sink with his back turned to the man. He couldn’t stop the blush on his cheeks – it was too red for him to try and push down.

Unbeknown to him though, Viktor sported his own blush, accompanied by a smile as he stared down at the food. Viktor said with a light laugh in his voice, “This all looks beautiful, Yuuri. Thank you.”

“I made too much, so I thought I might as well feed you too.”

“A bed and breakfast? Yuuri, you spoil me.”

“Just sit down and eat.”

Yuuri listened to the sound of the chair being pulled along the floor. There was a hum as Viktor took the first bite, and Yuuri wanted to destroy the bit inside of him that cheered at that sound. Once he thought he had conquered the blush enough, he turned and sat himself opposite, sitting far enough away that their knees didn’t touch. He refused to look up at Viktor, though he could feel the other man’s gaze on him.
It felt stronger than all the other times Viktor had stared at him. Yuuri’s tattoos were throbbing, his chest pulled tight, and before his gaze a shimmer swam, as if the connection pulling them together was made visible for the first time. Everything in him right now was telling him that the table should be moved, that it was in the way. He ignored it and continued eating, noticing the way Viktor was pausing every now and then. He knew what whatever he was feeling about their connection, Viktor must have been feeling the same.

Yuuri was too deep in thought to realise that the silence stretched as both pondered thoughts. It wasn’t until Viktor broke it that he realised they must have been brewing in quiet for a while.

“This really is nice, Yuuri. I haven’t had a breakfast this good in a while,” Viktor complimented, his voice soft and drowning in ease.

Yuuri paused and thought, wondering just how much he really knew Viktor. Could Viktor cook? What did he actually eat? Was he rich enough to have a chef? Did he have one at all? What did he live like? His thoughts swam so much inside his mind, that he almost completely forgot that Viktor had spoken at all. A swell of questions rose, and in that moment he wanted nothing more than to have them answered.

The words slipped passed his lips before he could stop them, “So the food is alright? What sort of food do you like? Do you cook?” He stopped himself before a string of questions could push passed his defences, ashamed at just how desperate his voice sounded. He continued to stare down at his plate.

If Viktor thought it odd, he didn’t make any show of it. Instead, his voice dripped with pleasure, as if he was happy that Yuuri was asking anything at all. “Yes, I cook. I love it, it really helps you think, you know? I can make a lot of things, but obviously Russian cuisine is my best. Or anything European, really. Yakov used to have this Italian chef when I was younger, and she showed me how to make all sorts of dishes after I’d finished my studies. I continued to teach myself then on the foundations she gave me after she moved to work somewhere else. I love learning to cook new dishes.”

Yuuri ate slowly, ashamed by how much he hung on Viktor’s words. He wanted to act like it meant nothing to him, but both sides of him, enemy and soulmate alike, ate up the information for their own reasons. And it was as if Viktor had heard every question in his head, because he answered more than Yuuri had asked. Yuuri wondered then if it was possible to hear one another through the connection, but he doubted it. He’d never heard of that, and he couldn’t hear Viktor. He was being paranoid again.

But he felt a smile wanting to pull on his lips, his chest feeling light. Something akin to euphoria sparked and thickened inside of him. He glanced up at Viktor, seeing the man smiling as he ate and
continued to talk about his favourite dishes. Yuuri had heard about emotions being felt through strong connections before, and his mind was taken back to the times that he and Viktor had fed off of one another’s anger, off of each other’s hatred, how they had known where the other was. Yuuri could feel if Viktor was in the same room, or coming close, and Viktor could find him through any disguise.

It was only going to get worse, Yuuri thought. The more time they spent close to one another, the harder it was going to get.

“But that’s enough about me,” Viktor said, pulling Yuuri back from his thoughts. “What about you, Yuuri? What are your favourite things to make?”

Yuuri shrugged, looking back down at his food, finding Viktor’s smile almost blinding. “I only really know how to make Japanese and American dishes.”

“I’ve never really tried Japanese cuisine. What’s your favourite meal?”

Yuuri felt a blush rising on his cheeks once again, and he stared even harder at where his fork was playing with the eggs on the plate. “Uh,” he began, feeling like a child again. He knew his favourite well, but hadn’t been allowed to have it for a long time. With his job and harsh training routine, there wasn’t room for such a high calorie meal. He could almost hear his mother urging him to eat more, but his training instructor telling him no. “It’s something called katsudon.”

“Cat’s Udon?”

Yuuri surprised himself by almost snorting a laugh. He locked it behind clenched teeth. “Uh, no, it’s called katsudon. Or pork cutlet bowl in English.”

“Oh. That already sounds really nice.”

“It is.”

There was a shuffling, and Yuuri was drawn to the movement across the table. From his pocket, Viktor had drawn out his phone, and for one small second Yuuri worried about what the other man was going to do. Was he calling in for backup? No, surely he wouldn’t have waited until he finished breakfast to do it. But Yuuri’s panic was slowly rising, paranoia bursting in his veins.
Until Viktor turned the phone to show him a picture.

“Is this the dish?” Viktor asked.

Yuuri could feel the saliva pooling on his tongue at the sight of his favourite dish, google searched. “Yes, that’s it.”

Viktor took it back and gave it a proper look. “That actually looked delicious.”

“It is.” I’ll have to make it for you one day, Yuuri thought. The words made him falter, almost dropping his fork. He swallowed down his surprise and threw the thought away, not wanting to dwell on such an unforeseeable future.

“So you can make this?”

“Yes, I can. I haven’t made it for a while though.” Once they had finished their food, he took their plates and washed them up in the sink. Conversation had filtered off, and as the quiet loomed in, he knew that they were thinking about the same thing. They were pushing off the inevitable, the reason they had come together. Yuuri finished washing the dishes and gave himself time to think, to try and pick all the words he was feeling now and had felt for the passed week, and decide on which ones he should tell Viktor. There was so much. He didn’t know where to start.

He moved to sit opposite Viktor again, knowing that this was a better conversation to have face to face rather than him facing another way, just as he really wanted to do. In his career, he’d had to face bravely against things no other person could. Those had been easy compared to what he was doing now.

“Viktor,” he began, going over the words again and again to make sure they were the right ones. “What do you want to come of this?”

Viktor turned serious immediately, placing himself more comfortably on the chair. On the table, he folded his hands and sat straight, moving his gaze to stare directly into Yuuri’s face. “I assume you mean our connection?”

“Yes,” Yuuri replied, mimicking Viktor’s position. He breathed in carefully, feeling each breath fill his lungs, and convinced himself to treat this professionally. Perhaps as if it was a contract, as if
this was yet another client. It wasn’t, but he told himself it was. It would make things easier.

“Honestly, I don’t know. I’ve told you, I never intended to meet you. But Yuuri, now that I have, I don’t want you to disappear from my life.”

The words almost drew Yuuri’s breath away. “But I ran away.”

“I didn’t realise until you did. Before that, I thought that maybe it would be best if we were to return to normal again. If we just separated, maybe it would be fine. Every time I thought about leaving you alone, I couldn’t though. I wasn’t strong enough,” Viktor said, not at all ashamed by his words, not trying to stop them as Yuuri did. “You were though. You ran and created distance when I couldn’t. It made me realise I never want to go through that again. I don’t want a day to pass without seeing you.”

In any other situation, it might have been romantic. But Yuuri could feel the same emotions swirling in his own chest, and it was how he knew it wasn’t just the soulmate part of him that wanted the same thing. As his enemy, Yuuri wanted to know exactly where Viktor was too. In the passed week, that part of him had been so paranoid, wondering where his enemy was, where he would pop out from. He wouldn’t admit it, but he was thankful he had some warning that Viktor was coming to find him from Mila. His soulmate side wanted to be close to Viktor because the romance was meant to be formed, but his enemy side wanted to know where the threat was at every waking moment. Yuuri knew that Viktor was feeling the same. It was clear enough in his words.

“Right,” Yuuri sighed. “That’s going to create problems. With how we met, and everything we are… I don’t know what to do.”

“How about we don’t think too much about it?” Viktor proposed. “Just do what we want, whatever we feel like. Don’t overthink things. We’ll never come to a conclusion if we do.”

“What you’re saying is that we get even more involved in a mess,” Yuuri countered. “We don’t have the leisure of just deciding as we go. We have other people counting on us. You think Yakov is going to be fine with this?”

Viktor grit his teeth. “I… know him far better than you. I know how to go around him.”

“And I have Phichit. Viktor, if we’re going to form any sort of connection, I need to you stop
hunting him,” Yuuri pushed, feeling the words like razer blades against his tongue. He wasn’t sure why it hurt so much, this was what he wanted. But it sounded like he was striking a bargain with his soulmate, his enemy. He doubted that this was what fate had in store for him.

But Viktor surprised him by replying far quicker than Yuuri expected.

His eyes hardened, though they still sparkled under the bright light above them, his lips pulled into a thin line, his back straight as he nodded. “Fine.”

Yuuri froze. “Fine?”

“Yes, fine. I’ll stop.”

“That…” Yuuri’s words died. There was a sense of pride inside him, a pleasure, as he realised that perhaps there could be something to come of this. Was their connection that important? So important that he could stop Viktor from hunting his client? “I thought hunting Phichit was important to you. You’re really willing to stop that?”

Viktor reached over slowly, taking Yuuri’s hand to lightly hold over the table surface, giving the other plenty of time to pull back if he wished. But Yuuri didn’t, curiosity stronger than his worry. Viktor’s touch sent sparks all along his skin. Viktor said, “Of course it is important to me. I don’t make hunting people a habit. But I told you I want to see you every day, even if it’s just a glimpse. I don’t care for the reason, whether it’s because you’re my soulmate or my enemy. I just want to see you.”

“So, Phichit is safe?”

“From me, yes.”

“From the rest of the mafia?”

Viktor paused, and the pause caused Yuuri’s heart to drop. “I’ll need to talk to Yakov. He’s… he’s very protective of me, understand. He doesn’t let go of things easily, especially when it comes to my wellbeing, or Yuri’s, Mila’s, Georgi’s, any of us.”
Yuuri, between his steadily growing panic, reminded himself to remember the last name. Another mafia, another person like Viktor and Mila, another potential threat. He said, “So, he might continue after Phichit?”

“If he thinks it’ll be best for me.”

“Even if you tell him who I am?”

“… More so.”

Anger laced through him. Hours of confusion, endless facts slipping by his gaze, the situation making him suffocate further – he didn’t know enough. He needed to know everything. “I’m going to ask Phichit what he saw.”

Viktor’s grip on Yuuri’s hand tightened, panic rising in his eyes. “He’s just going to tell you his side, and he got it wrong. He thinks he saw something he didn’t, I promise you. I-”

“I’m going to ask him first, and then I’ll ask for your side of the story,” Yuuri replied, tone harsh and leaving no room for excuses. “You’ll have your chance at explaining, just like he will too.” Because somewhere along the line, he had become a pushover. He didn’t want Phichit to recount something that obviously brought him distress, and Yuuri let it go because he thought it was something obvious, small. He thought it might have been a dealing gone wrong, witnessed talks of plans, or something along those lines. But as he moved on with what this was, and he found out more about the man sitting before him, it became clearer that he was at a disadvantage for not knowing.

For every minute that he didn’t know, and everyone else did, he lost the battle. He was losing time, losing advantage, and he needed to fix that. He was sick and tired of people beating around the bush with this.

“You could always ask for my side now-”

“I want to hear it from Phichit first,” Yuuri insisted. As what Yuuri thought was pain flashed over Viktor’s face, Yuuri rushed to say, “He was the first one to come to me with this. I want to know why he was so frightened, his story first. And no offence Viktor, even if you are my soulmate, I trust him more right now.”
“Are you going to let that factor into your decision once you hear both sides?”

“No,” Yuuri replied honestly. “I want to ask Phichit when I know nothing, because I don’t want to ask any awkward questions or push him in any directions he doesn’t want to go. Then I’ll come to you with the questions.”

Viktor looked ready to argue, but must have decided not to. He gulped down his words and nodded. “Okay. That sounds fair.”

“And I’m not going to call Phichit and ask with you here.”

Viktor nodded again. “That sounds fair too.”

Yuuri could almost feel a weight beginning to lift from him, as if things were finally beginning to align. But his muscles were still tense, still ready for when something was going to go wrong. Viktor seemed to lenient, and there was a voice, probably belonging to the enemy side of himself, that was telling him this was a trap. Perhaps Viktor was trying to lure him into a false pretence, all in order to find where Phichit was and using their connection as a ways in. But Yuuri wasn’t going to let that happen.

Despite the warnings though, he could feel himself breathing easily. Either way, he had Viktor’s promise that he wouldn’t hunt down Phichit anymore, and he was one more step forwards to getting his client the life he deserved. Something akin to relaxation was beginning to slip into his stream, almost making him want to smile, as if a hurdle had passed.

He found his gaze scanning Viktor’s face, taking a better look than he had seen before. He could see the bags, darkened to a blue, with wrinkles beneath that aged the man. His blue eyes stared back, and Yuuri could almost see his own reflection staring back, captured in the deep and dark pupils. Viktor’s fringe looked soft from his distance, fluttering just a little every time his head moved or when his breath bounced back.

Yuuri found himself reaching to touch his fringe before he realised it, fingers lightly skimming over the thin strands, mind wondering if they really were as soft as they looked. He didn’t realise until he had some caught between his thumb and pad of his middle finger, amazed by the texture.

He moved to take his hand away, surprised by his own move. But Viktor’s hands shot up and grasped his, smoothing his hands gently over the back of Yuuri’s hand.
The touch sent sparks up his arm, down his spine, and he wondered how he had never suspected what Viktor was to him up until now. Every touch, every gaze, every word made Yuuri feel like never before. Viktor either frustrated him to no end or made him feel happier than anyone else – or no, happy wasn’t the word, Yuuri thought. Lighter, stronger, more confident than anyone else had. Winning a challenge against Viktor had him feeling like a new Yuuri, and he knew why that was now.

He wanted to take his hand away, but Viktor kept his gaze and smoothed his fingers across Yuuri’s skin, slowly, as if he worried Yuuri would skitter like a shy animal. Curiosity laced Yuuri’s thoughts, excitement accompanying it.

He watched as Viktor turned his hand over, displaying the tattoo on his right wrist, the side of the enemy. Keeping eye contact, Viktor lifted it up and bowed his head until he could kiss where the tattoo met his pulse. It left Yuuri’s skin feeling cold once Viktor moved back. He turned to Yuuri’s other wrist, taking it in his right hand and turning the soulmate side over. He kissed the tattoo in the same place, gaze glued to Yuuri’s the whole time.

It took Yuuri’s breath away. Tears almost wanted to spring to his eyes, and he had no idea why. He swallowed them away, fighting against the waves of emotion crashing into him. There were so many, so powerful, so confusing that he couldn’t figure out just one. He didn’t know how he felt, only that it made his chest shudder.

“Yuuri,” Viktor whispered, as if the name was the most precious thin in the world, as if it was the answer to all of the questions he had ever had, as if the name alone was what he was made for. His breath tickled Yuuri’s wrist, making his skin break into bumps. “Yuuri.”

Yuuri would be lying if he said he wasn’t affected by it. In his own way, it felt like the questions he had been asking had an answer now too – he wasn’t sure if it was the answer he wanted, or if it was one he craved, but it was there. He supposed that was what was going to happen with having Viktor as his destined enemy and soulmate, every answer would have opposite meanings. He would grow to hate him, and grow to love him, and it would have to be both. Viktor had asked if he felt one more than the other.

Now Yuuri knew the weight of that question.

If Viktor felt his enemy side strongly, and Yuuri felt his soulmate side strongly, it would only pose heartbreak and pain. Or if it was the other way around, he would be the one inflicting the pain. If they both felt their soulmate side strongly, their challenges would never help them grow as people. And if they both felt their enemy side more, then that was a perfect love dead.
At that moment, Yuuri didn’t know if he felt one more strongly than the other. And in that moment, for the first time, Yuuri was thankful for it.

As if reading his mind, Viktor said, “I really don’t care about which side it is that’s making me feel this way. I don’t care if it’s our being soulmates that wants me to stay close to you, or if it’s our being enemies that makes me want to make sure I know where you are. I only know that I don’t want to go back to what life was like before you.”

Yuuri grit his teeth together, feeling his heart crashing against his chest, and his thoughts be completely submerged in the wave of emotions. His cheeks warmed, a blush rising. Viktor was looking at him as if it wasn’t just his name that was precious. He wondered if this was what other soulmates acted like, looked like, spoke like. He wondered if they felt this strongly, if it was like everything in the world was crashing down and lifting up all at the same time. As if there was both a beginning and an end to everything Yuuri had once known.

It took running away from Viktor to realise that Yuuri would never be able to forget about him. He thought he could, and he was proved wrong. He thought he could continue to know about Viktor but forget about their connection instead, but that was wrong too. Whatever his life had been before, it would never be like that again. Yuuri knew that now.

So maybe throwing himself into it was the best way to go. Maybe he should do as Viktor said, and allow himself to be a creature of his whims instead of having to think everything over and over before he took a step. Perhaps he needed to let his body dictate what it wanted to do, and maybe it wouldn’t lead him astray.

It went against everything he had thought being a bodyguard meant. His training said that he had to plan everything out and be prepared for whatever may come. Actions had consequences, and he had a client hanging on every action he made. But maybe there was a way he could balance them out, just as he could balance the two sides of his and Viktor’s connection.

He rose from his chair, gripping Viktor’s hand in his own, not restraining himself for once. He was damned if he walked away from Viktor, and he was damned if he didn’t. If he was being honest, he was getting sick of the way his feelings and emotions were changing constantly.

He wanted to be close to Viktor. He wanted to be far away. He hated Viktor. He wanted to draw the man’s eye. He wanted to hide. He wanted all of his attention. He wanted everything and he wanted nothing from Viktor. It wasn’t fair on him and it wasn’t fair for the person who owned the names on his wrists. In an act of rebellion against what fate had decided, Yuuri did what he wanted to do and ignored the rush of emotions.
Viktor had admitted his feelings, and Yuuri knew it must have been brave of him to do so, especially with what Yuuri had already done. If Viktor was feeling anything like Yuuri was, Yuuri understood how hard it was to admit anything in the middle of all the voices screaming in his head.

Viktor rose to meet him, stepping forwards until their chests were almost touching. Yuuri wanted to step away and create space, but surprisingly, the desire to stay was stronger inside of him. Another desire was attached, and he allowed himself the freedom to follow it.

He gently tore his hands away from Viktor’s grip and moved them to cup the other’s cheeks. Between his hands, Viktor’s face seemed paler than Yuuri had first realised, cheeks perfectly shaped against his palms, fingers splayed to sit beside beautiful eyes. His skin was warm against his chilled hands, and his fringe fell on Yuuri’s wrist.

Viktor’s hands moved to grip his wrists gently, thumb against his pulse, feeling Yuuri’s racing heart.

“Yuuri?” he asked, looking both confused and dazed with a need to do something.

Yuuri knew what it was he wanted to do. Yuuri could feel it too, feel it brewing in his blood, making his lips tingle. He didn’t think too much about it. He took a deep breath, allowed his heart to skip a beat, and leaned forwards.

He felt Viktor’s intake of breath, heard his surprise as he slipped his eyes closed, could smell the unique scent on Viktor’s cheeks this close. He felt the softness of Viktor’s lips against his own, almost seeming to fit as perfectly as his face in his hands did. Sparks raced along his body and all the voices inside of his head died just as their lips met. For once, the world finally seemed quiet. The wave of emotions gave way to one – comfort.

As if everything he had done before was coming to this one moment. It wasn’t perfect, not quite. At the back of his mind, he knew what had brought him here. He knew what he and Viktor were. But as he pulled back, and as their noses touched, as their eyes connected, Yuuri didn’t care if it was as far from perfect as anything could be.

Yuuri just knew that they’d have ended up here somehow.

Viktor smiled slowly, as if he thought the movement was going to break the ease in the air, or
whatever spell seemed to be on Yuuri. But Yuuri refused to let this bring back his pride.

He leaned his forehead against Viktor’s, not letting the worries of what was to come settle in. He pushed them away, banishing them before they could rise.

He said, “I’m sorry, Viktor. I can’t say for certain what I feel yet.” Every time he moved his lips, he could still feel Viktor’s as if they hadn’t stopped kissing.

Viktor gripped his hands tighter and nudged forwards until their noses bumped together. “It’s alright, Yuuri. We have plenty of time to figure things out.”

Chapter End Notes

Hey look! I don't think this counts as a cliffhanger, right? I mean, I could have stopped it before the kiss but... does this make up for last week? XD

Thank you all for reading! And honestly, thank you so much for the overwhelming support. This story has been going on for nine weeks already, and it seems like it's gone by in a blink of an eye. I look forward to every update day just to see what people think. Thank you all so much for your support, and for your words! I don't think anyone could understand just how happy it all makes me!

For updates, you can find me on tumblr

[here](#)

Thank you so much!
Chapter Notes

Chapter beta read by whynikkiwhy, who graces me with pictures of her cats and I feel blessed every time

Also, WARNING, there is some talk of self harming (not as a suicide nor as a pain relief but as an attempt to cover the names and tattoos) so please be wary if this is any sort of trigger for you.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Figuring things out took time though. Whatever conclusion was drawn, there would be problems from every corner. And figuring things out took energy, awkward situations, thoughts that might have been better being kept at bay. Figuring things out meant hurting people.

It’s why Yuuri wanted to have all of the facts before he made any sort of decision. He didn’t want to be swept away completely. There was a difference between following his whim and being ignorant. He needed to be careful still.

And he planned to be.

After the kiss, he told Viktor to leave him for a few hours while he called Phichit.

Viktor paused for a little bit, reluctant as he had been before, as if he worried for what Yuuri’s client was going to say. But then he nodded, flinching as if it hurt him to do it. “How will I know when you’re done then?”

Yuuri held out his hand. “Give me your phone and I’ll put in your number. I’ll call you when I’m finished.” Viktor hesitated again, but did as was told and Yuuri exchanged numbers quickly.

“And should I be worried for what you’ll call to tell me when you’re done?”

“I don’t know. Should you be?”
“If it’s his side, probably.”

Yuuri could hear the underlying fear underneath his voice, as if this went beyond anger, beyond just pride. It sparked more curiosity inside of Yuuri, as much as he hated to admit it. “It’s fine Viktor. I’ll hold off on any reaction before I know your side.”

Viktor nodded.

He left soon after, and it was as the door closed that Yuuri paced the living room floor. His phone weighed heavily in his grip, and he hesitated to call the boy. It was secure, the connection was tight, but that wasn’t what he was worried for. Whatever Phichit had seen Viktor doing, it had completely changed more than just his life. It had changed three people. Yuuri understood the weight of that, and it was why he was so hesitant. He’d just promised to work things out with Viktor, and he didn’t know how he would see the man after this phone call.

Before he could think too much about it, he inputted the memorised secure number, heart skipping every time the ring sounded. He went through their agreed pattern, hoping Phichit remembered it well enough.

A flash of worry laced his spine when there was no answer. He hadn’t heard from his parents for a while, and there was always a fear that something might one day go horribly wrong. The safe house was as secure as it could be, but that didn’t mean it was impossible to find. There was always something, always some way, to find something that was missing or trying to hide.

But there was an answer before he could panic.

“Yuuri?”

Phichit’s voice assured him. If there was anything he knew about his friend, it was that Phichit couldn’t keep his emotions a secret. He sounded tired, a yawn following his question. Yuuri cursed, forgetting about time differences.

“Hello, Phichit,” he greeted, trying to keep it cheery. He wrestled with himself, wondering if it was best to just throw himself into it and ask, or to carefully construct his questions before he hurt Phichit.
“Is there something wrong?”

“No, Phichit, not really,” Yuuri replied. “How is it going? How have you been?”

There was a movement, Phichit shuffling to sit up, the click of a light switching on. When he answered, his voice was almost verging on a smile, though he seemed to want to hold himself back. “It’s been really fun. Yuuko is really good company, and her triplets love me, Yuuri. Though they’re little rascals too. They love the internet, huh?”

Yuuri sighed and rubbed his face. “Yeah. They’re only just beginning to understand that being friends with a safe house occupant means they can’t say anything. Yuuko keeps an eye on their internet access though, so you’ll be safe.”

“I was worried at first, but yeah, I know they’re not a threat now. They just want me to do private exhibitions for them in the ice rink.”

Yuuri couldn’t contain the little laugh that left his lips. “Yeah, that sounds about right. My parents and sister treating you right?”

“They’re honestly so lovely, Yuuri. They’re treating me like I’m another son.”

“So you’re happy?”

“Much happier than I was. I mean, of course I miss my old life. I would give anything to get it back. But I’m also so comfortable here. I really thought my life was going to end, but this isn’t bad at all.” His comment was followed by a chuckle, but Yuuri heard there was a small bit of strain at the end of it.

“Of course, Phichit. I promise you I’m doing my best to fix things for you.”

Phichit hesitated, and Yuuri heard him swallow and gulp. “And how is that going? You’re not getting into too much trouble, are you?”

Yuuri avoided the question. “I’ve made some progress.”
“Really?” Phichit gasped, hope prominent in his voice. “You have?”

“Yes.”

“Oh my god, Yuuri. What have you done? What’s happened? What happens now?”

Yuuri clenched his hand, feeling more nauseous with every question. “Phichit, I just need you to be quiet for a little while, alright? Some things have happened, and I need to ask you some painful questions to be able to make this work.”

“Some things have happened?”

“Yes.”

“What things? Are you alright?”

“I’m fine, Phichit. Don’t worry about that. Remember what I said when we first met? I told you might have to do things that you’re uncomfortable with.”

“Yes, I remember.”

“I haven’t asked you some questions because I was worried that it might hurt you, and you wouldn’t be able to settle in. You had enough to think about. But I can’t make things better for you unless I know the facts, right?”

“Right.” By now, he knew Phichit had figured it out. His voice was quiet again, his answers lacklustre, but Yuuri continued on.

“Are you alright with this, Phichit?”

A long silence as Phichit breathed into the receiver. “Are you sure this is going to make things
better for me?"

“Yes, Phichit.”

“Then okay, I’m fine with it.”

“We can’t stop halfway through, Phichit,” Yuuri said softly, trying to really hit the point across. Years of having to be careful around clients, for their safety as well as his own, helped with situations such as these. Phichit was reluctant, and Yuuri knew the problem. Keep him calm, Yuuri thought. Keep the client calm, and keep them assured. “If I ask something, you need to tell me the truth. I don’t mind you telling me your feelings, but don’t lie to make it sound better, okay? And if you want a break, we’ll stop. But we have to continue. Understand?”

“Yes.”

“I need you to say you understand, Phichit.”

“I understand.”

“Good, very good, Phichit.” Yuuri moved to sit on the kitchen chair, running his hand through his hair. The stress was slowly beginning to pile on – he could feel it throbbing in his temples, pulsing behind his eyes. “How much does Celestino know about you disappearing?”

“Um, probably not much. I don’t know. I haven’t seen or spoken to him since that day.”

“Did he ever suspect anything?”

“I don’t think so?”

“And did you suspect anything?”

“Of Viktor and Yakov? No, not really. They were always so busy, and sometimes they would say weird things.”
“Weird things?”

“Yeah. Like one day, Mila was with them. I was talking to her, and Viktor walked passed. They were talking in Russian and they seemed really…” Phichit paused, sighing when he couldn’t find the word. “I don’t know, like really agitated about something. Viktor looked really tired. Mila went from being chatty to defensive. She told me that sponsoring a skating competition was hurting their reputation more than making it. At the time I thought they meant as a company, now I guess as mafia? Though I don’t know why they went into sponsoring me in the first place. But they said things like that, and changed personality really quickly, and just seemed to be completely different people depending on the day you saw them.”

“And you started to think that was weird, when? From the start?”

“No, at first I thought it was just the stress of running a big business. I thought they might have taken on more than they needed with sponsoring me. I thought they did it because their business was going through some trouble, and they needed the publicity.”

“What made you start getting suspicious about them?”

“Uh, about a week before… before I saw that thing. Mila was the one that made me suspicious. Someone came to the locker room. I thought they were nice, and they were asking after Yakov, so I guessed it was a business partner or something. But Mila came storming in. She tried to hide it, but I could tell she thought this person was a threat. And when it was clear he wasn’t going to leave without speaking to Yakov, she pulled out her gun.”

Yuuri heard something waver in the other man’s voice. “Phichit, you can have a break if you want it.”

“N-No, it’s fine. She tried to convince me that business is dangerous in Russia, and that they had some dangerous clients. She was a bodyguard, she said. I believed it at first. But I don’t know, something about it wasn’t right. Yakov didn’t seem to bat an eye, and no one seemed to care that I was witness to it. Mila acted like pulling out a gun was a normal thing, that I should have been used to it too.”

Yuuri nodded. It was clear to him, as a bodyguard, that there were clear red flags there. But to someone like Phichit, young and only thinking of his career, things like that slipped under the radar. “So, you started to get suspicious. What did you do?”
“Nothing at first. I was too worried about my competitions and training. But I started to pay more attention to them, and things started to click in my mind. For people who were having trouble with their company, they always had new things. They didn’t really have the same clients coming to speak to them, and they didn’t really exist in the same business circles that other sponsors stuck to.” Phichit stopped, chewing on his lip as he thought of what to say. “People think that skaters don’t hear much at galas and banquets, but we do. I overheard some of their conversations, and most businesses had heard of Yakov, but none had done dealings with him. I just thought that was weird.”

“It would be.”

“It was. But then there was a meeting I overheard during one of the training sessions. Someone else had come in to see Yakov, someone I had never seen before. They were whispering, keeping to busy places. Mila and Viktor were being subtle, but I saw them guarding. Looking closer, I saw guns underneath their coats. I knew Viktor wasn’t a bodyguard. I knew something was wrong then.”

“And what did you think they were then?” Yuuri held back from trying to push the other, feeling the impatience thumping in his chest. But he refrained from firing out questions.

“I don’t know, really. I never suspected mafia. I just thought that they had something to hide, and I like my gossip. I was curious. For once, there was something other than skating to think of. It was really stressful, and I guess I was using this suspicion to have something else to do.”

“Now that you suspected them of doing something, what were you planning on doing?”

“I didn’t plan anything. I was just curious and going to keep observing them. But during training, Viktor looked agitated. He kept scratching at his sleeves and he seemed on edge, and he just wanted to be somewhere else. He and Yakov had a few arguments that day, and I heard Yakov telling him to keep his head on straight, or they were going to miss out on a good deal. I don’t know what was happening. I just thought it was interesting. So when Viktor looked like he had had enough and left… I-I followed. I said I was going to the toilet, and I followed.”

Yuuri heard Phichit fade out, voice slowly growing quieter. In his mind, he imagined it all, small, curious Phichit, playing spy as Viktor rushed off. Scratching his sleeves. Something lurked at the back of his head, and he began to suspect something – he thought he knew where this was going. But he threw the thought away, not wanting it to influence his idea of the picture just yet.
He gave Phichit time to catch his breath and figure out the right words. He knew it mustn’t have been easy for the other man, and there wasn’t much that he could say to console his client. He said, “It’s okay, Phichit. Take your time. I’m not going to rush you.”

“I thought I was doing the right thing. He was going to do something he regretted. I thought they were pushing him!”

“Phichit,” Yuuri urged, sensing the panic rising in the man on the other side. “Phichit, breathe. I don’t know what you’re talking about. Take a break, and start again, okay?”

He could hear Phichit panting on the other side, taking deeper breaths, less jarring as the seconds ticked by.

Once enough time had passed and he could hear Phichit breathing properly, Yuuri said, “Start again, Phichit. So you followed him. Describe to me what the hall was like. How did you feel? Tell me what was happening. Was it cold?”

“What?”

“Just take your time, Phichit. Tell me details.”

“Is that to calm me down?”

“Yes. How long was the hall?”

“It was long.”

“And?”

“A-and it had a turn at the end. There were posters all over the walls. Uh, one of the lights weren’t working. It was empty, because everyone was in the rink for training.”

“Good,” Yuuri said, pushing as much comfort as he could into his voice. “And how were you
feeling? Tell me everything.”

“Um, nervous, I suppose. And tired. Celestino had me training some of the more difficult components of our programme. Hungry too because I hadn’t eaten lunch yet.”

“It was getting to midday?”

“Yes, I think. We’d been training for a few hours, so I think that would be about right.”

“What else did you feel?”

“I, uh, guess excitement? And a little guilt. I didn’t know if following Viktor was the right thing, but my body took me there. Looking back, I’m surprised. I didn’t think I’d follow someone, but it was like I just had to, you know? I was so curious. I really wanted to know what it was I was missing.”

“So you followed him. How far away did you follow?”

“I think I stayed like thirty feet away, maybe more. I don’t know. I didn’t really pay attention to the distance.”

“And what happened next, Phichit? You walked in on something. Did he hide somewhere? Did he turn the corner and you walked into him?”

“He went into a room. I don’t know what it used to be, but it was used for storage at the time.”

“Why did you decide to walk in?”

“I didn’t for a while. But Viktor had this odd look on his face when he was walking away. He looked really distracted. Normally he was aware of his surroundings, but he wasn’t this time. He didn’t even see me.” Phichit paused again, giving one shuddering breath. There was a shuffle as he moved again, and Yuuri listened carefully. “And he was doing weird things. Like, I don’t know how to describe it. But I’d seen him for months, and even if we didn’t talk a lot, I just got his mannerisms, you know? I could tell something was off. And he kept rubbing his wrists over his sleeves, and he looked worried. And just… I don’t know. He looked upset – or as upset as he could look anyway, he was reserved.”
“Did you get worried for him?”

“Yeah. I thought maybe something had gone wrong with his soulmate or something. I don’t know. I just thought he needed help.”

“But it took a while for you to go in?”

“We didn’t really speak, and I wasn’t sure he wanted to talk about it. He took himself off for a reason, obviously. But I thought I was doing the right thing.”

And because you’re a kind person, Yuuri thought in his head. Because Phichit was too kind, offering to help even a man he had been suspicious of only hours before. Because Phichit was far too kind to leave a man he thought needed help, and got himself into a mess he couldn’t get out of. Yuuri clutched at his chest, feeling his mouth suddenly dry.

“I thought maybe he needed help, so I knocked on the door. But I don’t think he heard, because he didn’t say anything. I couldn’t hear anything either, and I got really worried then. So I went in.”

“And was it just Viktor in there?”

“Yes, no one else. Viktor was alone.”

“What was he doing Phichit?”

“He…” There was another shudder of a breath, and Yuuri waited. Phichit continued to stumble over words, restarting the sentence over and over again until even Yuuri was lost. “I… He-It. There was… I don’t.”

“Phichit. Calm. What was he doing? Was he sitting down? Was he standing up?”

“He was standing up. It… was dark, and I couldn’t see properly. I switched on the light. And he was in the corner with a knife. And the door closed and I froze and I didn’t know what I was seeing
“until he noticed me and froze too.”

“A knife?” Alarm bells began to ring in his head, and even Yuuri’s heart began to race inside his chest. He leaned forwards, pressing the phone harder to his ear, the flashes of his imagination sparking the image before his eyes. “What was he doing with the knife, Phichit?”

“He had his sleeves rolled up, Yuuri. There was already some blood. He looked scared and confused and he was pressing it down. It hurt me to look."

“He was cutting the names?”

Phichit didn’t answer right away. Instead, he sniffed on the other end of the phone, filling their silence with unshed tears. Then he whispered something so quietly that Yuuri asked him to repeat it. He whispered again, but a little louder this time, “Name.”

“Name?”

“Not names. Name.”

Yuuri felt his blood run cold. He sighed and rubbed his temples. He should have known that talk of this would bring on a headache. He could feel it throbbing at the back of his skull, making the backs of his eyes ache with every movement. His stomach rolled. “He had one name.”

“Yeah. I-It was put twice. Twice, Yuuri. How? How is that possible?” His voice began to rise, an edge of panic and desperation filtering into it. “Have you ever heard of that before. Yuuri, it was one!”

“Do you know what it said?”

“No. No, I couldn’t read it. I only recognised it as one before he turned away. But he was cutting around it. There was blood on the floor. It was on his sleeves.”

“You really don’t know what it said?”
“No. Does that mean someone else has one name twice too? Is it real? Can that really happen?”

“Yes, Phichit, it can.”

“I’ve never heard of it before.”

“How much had he cut, Phichit?”

“Uh, not a lot. It was just deep, I think. But why would someone do that, Yuuri?” On the other side, Phichit began to sob, Yuuri’s name hitched into the beginning of a cry. As Yuuri soothed him, the tears began to run faster, Phichit mumbling out words that Yuuri couldn’t pick out. After a few failed attempts, he stopped trying to speak and instead rushed to get a tissue and blow into it.

“Phichit, it’s okay. Just breathe.”

“I don’t know what he was trying to do,” Phichit coughed through the sobs. “It looked like he was trying to cut it off. Why? Why? I thought maybe someone was pushing him to do it. Maybe… I don’t know, Yuuri. I thought maybe Yakov was telling him to cut them off.”

Pain laced through Yuuri’s wrists, his names aching at the thought. He’d heard of a few stories like that, of people ruined by the names on their wrists maiming them to be unrecognisable. It was a shameful thing to do – in a world that valued the tattoos that people were born with, to ruin them was a disgraceful thing to do to one’s own body. Yuuri had to admit he had thought of doing it himself, in a dark time where he was desperate for anything to take away the fate that had been given to him. But he hadn’t. He’d never done such a thing, because at the bottom of his heart he wondered if one day he met the person so destined for him. If he ever did, he didn’t want to show maimed wrists, to show how ashamed he had been of the other person, how much he had hated everything to do with them. He might one day regret it. It was much easier to hide them behind bandages.

“You wanted to help him,” Yuuri said.

“Why would someone even try it?” Phichit asked desperately. “I know it must have been weird having one name, but Yuuri! I just… Cutting them off? Why? That’s another person! Of course I wanted to help him. How could someone be driven to do just a thing?”
“What did you do?”

“I asked if he needed help. He wouldn’t speak to me. I thought he might have done it because of only having one name, so I offered to help. I offered to help find them, whoever they were. And… I guess I said something wrong. He snapped. He brought out the gun from his jacket and aimed and...he looked scary, Yuuri.”

Yuuri breathed deeply through his nose. He cast away any thoughts coming to him, not wanting to listen to the screams and the whispers, the biased impressions, the visions swimming through his head. He felt his stomach roll again and his wrists continued to throb.

“I just wanted to help him. But he looked like he wanted nothing more than to have me dead. I thought he needed help, so I told him I’d tell others. I said I’d help find the owner.”

“Phichit, tell me what you said exactly. Maybe he misunderstood something.”

“I-I said. Uh. I think I said ‘I’m going to find them.’ Or something like it. I don’t know. I said I’ll get others to help.”

Yuuri ran a hand down his face, no sigh large enough to empty the agitation in his lungs. “Did he start trying to offer you things?” He remembered what Viktor had said, that he had desperately offered Phichit money and sponsors and everything he could to stop the boy. Somewhere along the way, something that could have been avoided started. His heart ached. Suddenly, he understood what Viktor must have been thinking.

“Yeah. Yeah, he did. Money and stuff. I told him I didn’t need it.”

“Didn’t need it?”

“Yeah. I don’t need those things. I didn’t want him to think I was helping him just for money.”

Yuuri curled into himself, wanting nothing more than to punch something. His hands clenched, teeth gritted, and with everything he had, he cursed his friend and his soulmate/enemy for their stupidities. He might just punch Viktor when he saw him next. But he supposed he couldn’t blame
them. They had both acted out of pure terror.

“And then?”

“He kept offering me things. I said I didn’t want them. His hand was shaking, and his gun wasn’t aimed very well. I was really scared. I offered to tell the police on Yakov. I offered to get in touch with anyone I could to help find the person who owned the names. He started acting weird, and getting angry, and then Yakov and Mila walked in. They saw the gun and the blood and Mila trapped me against the wall, gun to my head and Yuuri… Yuuri I’ve never been so scared!”

Yuuri soothed the boy as he began to sob louder on the other side, crying muffled as he hid his face into the pillow. Yuuri wanted nothing more than to be in Japan again, to hold Phichit close and soothe him properly, hand stroking his hair and calming words properly heard. But he wasn’t. He was in America, trapped between a war that could have been easily avoided.

But it was too late now. Misunderstandings had been made, and the pain had been given. Viktor had been accepting of Yuuri’s condition, but now he worried he had harmed things beyond compare. Even if Yakov figured out that Phichit had never meant harm, Yuuri had shot him. Yuuri had meant harm, and now Phichit would be seen as the one who ordered Yuuri to do it.

He’d made a terrible mistake.

He wondered if he had damaged any sort of resolution that might have been made. Yuuri knew Viktor had been upset about what he had done to Yakov, and that it was only their connection that was saving his life really. Had they just been enemies, or of no connection at all, Viktor would have hunted him down as well. The man seemed conflicted enough as it was.

Once Phichit was calm enough once more, Yuuri urged, “Take deep breaths, Phichit. What happened next?”

“I-I don’t really know. It all just… it’s not very clear in my memory anymore. I was too busy thinking about the gun to my head, and I was watching Mila’s hand for when she pulled the trigger. I think they were speaking Russian. They seemed panicky. There was a lot of shouting. I don’t really know from who. I think I might have been screaming. Yuuri, I don’t know.”

“It’s okay. Just try to think back. How did you escape?”
“I panicked. They were distracted. There was some blood. Yakov and Viktor were arguing. I thought someone outside might have heard, but they didn’t. No one was around.” Phichit paused again, trying desperately to remember. Yuuri didn’t say anything, deciding that instead his friend needed the silence to concentrate. “I think I just thrashed. Mila dropped me. There was shouting and I don’t really know, but I think there were shots. I don’t know. I just know that I wasn’t injured. And I think someone was trying to grab me. There was so much noise all around me and it hurt my head but everything was moving so fast… I remember getting outside. I don’t think they were still following me at that point. I think people were asking if I was alright. But it all feels like some nightmare and nothing’s clear.”

“I understand, Phichit,” Yuuri encouraged. “It must have been hard. What did you do next?”

“I-I thought it would all go if I just went back to my hotel room. It took me ages to get there without a car. There were people waiting in the hall. I was so tired. I walked passed them and they grabbed me and Yakov was there.” Phichit stopped suddenly, breath hitching where he would have said more. Yuuri waited, but the boy didn’t continue.

“And was that where you found out what they were?”

“Yeah. He told me who they were, and that I wasn’t supposed to see what I did. Yakov said they had to deal with me. I was begging, but he didn’t even care. He looked at me like it was normal.”

Yuuri’s heart lurched. In his mind, he remembered the straight face that Viktor had worn on their first meeting, drawing out his gun so familiarly in a crowded shop, not even bothering to look at the reactions of the customers around them. At the pit of his stomach, anger began to burn low, ready to light brighter for when he next saw the man. Phichit was probably shaking on the other end, tears still slipping from his eyes, skin pale and light from his eyes gone. It didn’t matter what Viktor was to him – there were questions that needed to be answered.

“I thought that the cameras might have been able to pick up what was going on,” Phichit continued, voice barely above a whisper now. “But no one came. Not even when they started tying me up. No one came to save me.”

They must have disabled the cameras, Yuuri thought, but thought it best not to say it aloud. “They tied you up?”

“Yeah. Really thick rope. It really hurt.”
“How did you escape?”

“There were voices. I think one of the room owners was coming up, I don’t know. They were laughing I think? But it distracted the ones tying me up. It was loose enough for me to struggle out of and I screamed. I screamed as loud as I could and ran when they were trying to shut me up. I’m… I’m not really a fighter. I never learned. I didn’t think I needed to.”

“If you want to, you could ask my sister for some lessons in self-defence.”

“Yeah. I-I might do that.”

Yuuri swallowed down his guilt. Phichit would probably need to learn how to fight now, with everything that was going on. He wished he had been able to meet the poor innocent boy back when he had been as bright eyed and smiley as he seemed in the photos Yuuri had seen, back when the biggest problem of his life was the next competition and how to appease the crowd, how to get better and better for them. That was long gone. And Yuuri had made it worse.

“So you escaped. What happened then?”

“I wanted to go to the police. I made my way to the nearest station. But I don’t know Detroit that well, and by the time I got to the nearest depot there were black cars outside.”

“No phone?”

“I left mine with Celestino.”

“Did you not want to ask anyone for theirs?”

“I was worried all of them worked for Yakov.” Before Yuuri could say anything about it, Phichit rushed to add, “I know it sounds stupid. And looking back it was such a mistake. But I didn’t know what to do! I thought anyone I asked would grab me and take me away before I could escape again! It took me ages to get to the nearest station – not just because I didn’t know where it was, but I was avoiding all main roads. I got lost in alleys and small roads. It was dark by the time I got there.”
“And they were already waiting there?”

“Yeah. I stayed awake all night and watched from a fire escape for when they would leave, but they didn’t. And they were wandering around. I couldn’t even go after a patrol car for help, because they were watching. I was worried they’d murder me before I got close.”

“You stayed out in the cold all night?”

“Yes.” Phichit gave a humourless laugh then, almost choking at the end on the tears that were still falling. “I had my jacket. But it wasn’t enough.”

“Was it the next day then you came to our company?”

“I knew they weren’t going to leave then. They’d been there all night, and they were swapping shifts. I just happened to walk passed the company. I felt like it was fate, that finally there was someone who could save me. I didn’t know what to do, so I found someone who did.”

It explained so much about the behaviour of the other when they had first met. Pale complexion, tired, scared half to death. All the twitches, the careful words, the distance between them maintained every step. The boy had worried he was walking into another trap. Yuuri had never considered himself a hero, but he must have looked like one that day when he offered to help.

“Do mafia normally maim the tattoos?” Phichit asked, hesitant as if the question had been plaguing him for a while. “Is it… normal to want to destroy such a treasured connection?”

“I don’t know,” Yuuri replied, putting the question on a list of things in his head to ask of Viktor next time they met.

“It makes who you are. The names, or I guess name in some circumstances. To get rid of them is like getting rid of the other half of you. Going without your legs or your arms or your head. Yuuri, do you think maybe it was to protect the other person?”

Yuuri rose and began to pace the floor again. The clock on the wall ticked, increasing his headache every time it did. “I don’t know, Phichit. But whatever reason he did it, it doesn’t matter. He hurt you. Do you feel sympathy for him?”
“N-No. I don’t think so. I just wonder what made him feel like he had to do it.”

“I understand.” His wrists began to ache. He pressed the phone to his shoulder and scratched at them, knowing that their conversation was making him more aware of their existence.

“Yuuri... How are things? Are they settling down?”

The loaded question had Yuuri halting. Pain erupted inside his chest, and the words died on his tongue. The silence was answer enough, but Yuuri reluctantly said, “Phichit, there have been a few problems on this end.”

“Problems?”

“Yes.” Yuuri halted, gripping the phone once more, biting his lip in thought. Phichit allowed him his silence to think, which Yuuri found was more than he deserved after what he was going to say. “It’s not going to settle for a while. But I’m making progress.”

“What’s happened?”

Yuuri sighed, closing his eyes and hating himself for what he had done. He decided then and there to tell Phichit everything. If he wanted forgiveness, then there was nothing he should keep from his client. Phichit was safe and hidden, and the boy could continue to stay in his parent’s safe house even once their contract was dropped. He’d miss Phichit, miss talking and worrying about him, but he supposed that was the punishment he deserved.

“I’ve been meeting with Viktor,” he said.

He heard the squeak of the bed as Phichit shot up, his heavy breathing, the silence as he tried to replay the words over and over in his head again. “W.... What?”

Yuuri coughed away the hesitation in his voice and said louder, “I’ve been meeting with Viktor. I think we’re coming to an agreement for him to leave you alone?”
The gasp on the other side of the phone was one of the heaviest Yuuri had ever heard before, so reluctant and filled with what seemed like both hope and concern. “Wait, wait, wait,” Phichit stammered. “Agreement?”

“Yes. I think I can get him to stop chasing after you.”

“R-Really?”

“I’ve asked him once and he seemed willing.”

“But... But, Yuuri, how? He didn’t seem like anything would stop him! He was going to hunt me to the ends of the earth and nothing could stop him and... Really? How? How have you done that? How are you meeting with him?” There was a pause for a second, before anger began to lace Phichit’s voice. “I told you not to get into so much trouble for me. What are you agreeing for in exchange?”

“For us to see each other more.”

“What? But... why? Why would he want to see you more?”

Yuuri took a deep breath, pushing out the words before he could regret them. Before he could think about them too much, before they began to lose power in his mind. “Because we’re soulmates.”

Yuuri wasn’t sure he had heard such a deafening silence more. Any movement on the other end was gone, and had he not been listening carefully he would have thought Phichit hung up the phone. But he could hear breathing, ever so slightly, almost completely lost under the quiet.

It continued on for a long time. Yuuri waited, knowing that there wasn’t anything else that he could say to make up for what he had already said. His heart hammered faster and harder than it ever had with a client before, even when faced against an army of stalkers or a man with a gun. He found he valued Phichit’s word more than he had valued a friend’s before. Strange, he thought. He’d been so far away from Phichit, and yet he had felt closer to him with each passing day.

It took a while, but Phichit did finally find his words. He whispered, “B-But he had one name.”
“He does.”

“That would mean…”

“We’re enemies too.”

More silence, but there was mumbling as Phichit tried to speak again to follow. “Yuuri,” he said. “Yuuri, I’m so sorry.”

Yuuri sat down again, feeling the weight suddenly press on him. Exhaustion overtook him, sapping the energy from all of his muscles. “Phichit, there’s nothing to be sorry for.”

“Yes there is! If I hadn’t walked in on Viktor, if I hadn’t walked into your company building… If If I just hadn’t done a lot of things!”

“It was fate, Phichit. You can’t run from fate.”

“I know but… There must have been something I could do.”

“There wasn’t anything. And I should be the one apologising.”

“What for?”

“I’m your bodyguard and yet now the one who is hunting you happens to be my soulmate and enemy? Phichit, I’m so sorry. But I want you to know I won’t let this get in the way. I’m still going to protect you. I’m not choosing his side-”

“Oh, I didn’t even think of that. I didn’t think you were that sort of person.”

Yuuri could almost slump and burst into tears over the relief he felt at that. He almost laughed, but he held it in, knowing that it would have come across very odd. “So, you don’t hate me?” He flinched at his own wording, hating how childish he sounded.
“Of course not. How could I? Were you worried I would?”

“Terrified.”

“Oh, Yuuri. I don’t. I…” Phichit paused, as if a sudden thought had occurred to him. He took a deep breath and asked, “Does that mean you also have one name?”

“Yes. I have Viktor’s name twice.”

“Oh my god, Yuuri. Did you know before?”

“No. I didn’t translate the name from Russian. I didn’t want to know.”

Yuuri didn’t say much more. Though he had told himself he would tell Phichit everything, he didn’t want to say that. He didn’t want to go into the pain of what he had experienced as a child. He hoped that that was enough for Phichit to understand, that he didn’t want to say anything more on it. Phichit seemed to understand, because he said nothing more about it.

“So,” Phichit began, sounding far better than he had before. “Because you’re both soulmates, and enemies obviously, he’s willing to stop hunting me in exchange for seeing you more?”

“Yes.”

“And how do you feel about that?”

Yuuri couldn’t contain his bark of laughter at the question. “Are you my therapist now?”

“Of course. Now tell Dr Chulanont what it is you feel.”

“I don’t know,” Yuuri replied, rubbing his neck and feeling the embarrassment as if Phichit were in the room himself. “I’m going to agree to it, of course. But Viktor makes me feel so angry and
lighter, both at the same time."

"I guess that comes with being an enemy and soulmate."

"Yeah."

"You know you don’t have to agree. Don’t do it just because you think it’ll make me better."

“I’m doing it, Phichit.”

"Thank you, Yuuri. Really. Thank you so much."

“I said I’ll save you, and I’m going to do everything to do it.”

Phichit was quiet for a moment, and Yuuri could almost feel the guilt radiating through the phone. But Phichit asked something else instead, “You said there were problems. What were those?”

“Ah.” Yuuri cursed himself. He had almost forgotten all about it. He sighed out his frustration and answered honestly, “Even if I make this agreement with Viktor, he’s not sure that it’ll stop the hunt completely.”

“… Why not?”

“Because Yakov is still determined.”

“Why?”

Yuuri winced before he replied, “Because I shot him.”

“You…” Phichit paused. His voice was quiet, monotone, as if he couldn’t understand. “You… Shot him? You shot him?”
“Yes.”

“Yakov.”

“Yes.”

“Head of the mafia.”

“Yes.”

“Oh my god.”

“Yeah.”

“What have you done.”

“I don’t know.”

“What kind of bodyguard did I hire?”

The question pulled a smile out of Yuuri, relief washing through his frame once more. Phichit gave a small chuckle on the other side. He wasn’t sure what about it was so funny, but he guessed it was the case of if they didn’t laugh, then they’d cry. “A bad one.”

“Clearly,” Phichit said. “So what happens now?”

“I’m going to ask Viktor’s side of the story.” He could hear Phichit’s gasp on the other side, and he rushed to add, “I’m pretty sure you’ve both misunderstood each other somewhere along the way. I just want to get a full picture before I go into this agreement with him. I want him to know just how you felt when the idiot was hunting you.”
“Idiot?”

“Well, he is one.”

“You’re already giving him nicknames, how lovely,” Phichit said, trying to make light of it. “When you speak to him, give him a punch from me, okay?”

“I was already thinking of it.”

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Yuuri hadn’t quite told Phichit how much he had felt during their conversation. There were so many strong emotions that were pulsing inside of him, he wasn’t sure how to describe them. And though he had promised himself to tell Phichit everything, there were some things that just weren’t right to tell.

And one of them was how angry with Viktor he was.

He felt the rage brewing every time Phichit spoke, with every hitch of breath, every gasp, every tear. Yuuri had felt angrier and angrier at Viktor by the second. What an idiot, he thought. What a stupid bastard. He had yet to feel the emotions an enemy was supposed to feel, until now. Now he felt something akin to hatred for the first time – the hatred he had felt towards the man when all he knew was a name, a face and a motive paled in comparison.

He called for Viktor to come and talk about the issues. He tried to make sure that the anger was lacking in the way he spoke, not wanting to scare Viktor off before they had a proper talk. But there were some words that had an edge to them, sharp and biting. He knew Viktor must have picked up on his emotions, if not from the words then perhaps his anger was strong enough to be felt through their connection.

It wasn’t long before there was a knock on the door. Yuuri stopped pacing a hole in the floor and stormed to the door, unable to contain the caged rage inside of himself.

He flung the door open and glared at the man, making Viktor flinch backwards a step.
“Yuuri.”


Viktor physically gulped, but accepted the invitation and stepped in. He rushed to take a seat without much push. He kept his head bent, hands clenched at his sides, and he jumped every time Yuuri moved and the floorboards creaked.

If Yuuri wasn’t so angry, he might have found it funny, seeing a mafia man such as Viktor reduced to a child before him. His enemy side was pleased with the display, though his soulmate side saw something animalistic in it and wanted to correct it. But the anger burned above any connection inside of him, something he took notice of.

He sat himself before Viktor, taking deep breaths through his nostrils to calm himself down. He didn’t want to blow up immediately. He knew that wasn’t fair on Viktor. He deserved a moment to explain himself too. But Yuuri wanted the man to tell him quickly. He didn’t think he had much patience at the moment.

“So?” he said, voice tinged with the hint of venom. All he could hear was Phichit crying, imagined his tear stained face and body shaking. A sweet skater, drawn into something that he didn’t want, with no move to turn back, no conversation to make sure that he was alright. Just a gun to his head and a promise of death. “Explain.”

“What did Phichit tell you?” Viktor asked after some hesitation, looking up from his eyelashes to stare at Yuuri. He didn’t take his gaze away.

“Does that matter right now? I just want to hear yours. I’ll answer your questions afterwards.”

“You’re so angry.”

“Of course I would be,” Yuuri replied, cutting off his explanation there. “Start with why you were agitated that day. Why were you scratching your arms? Why were you worried?”

Viktor opened his mouth, presumably to ask how it was that Yuuri knew that. But he decided
against it, for the best, and said, “I don’t know. There was this energy, this worry inside of me. I didn’t know what it meant, but it kept making me on edge. And my tattoos burned.”

Yuuri couldn’t help it. He tried to cast his memories back to see if he had felt anything similar. Now that he knew that their names were connected, he wondered how many things he had missed between himself and Viktor, how many emotions he had felt that weren’t quite his own, how many times his tattoos burning wasn’t just his consciousness of them but a fateful encounter.

But nothing sprang to mind. There was not a day where it burned more than normal, where he had been forced to acknowledge his hated feature. Perhaps he had cast it aside, thinking nothing of it and forgotten it.

“I told Yakov I just needed some time alone,” Viktor replied, voice sounding hollow but there was an underlying shudder with the last few words. “I was starting to think that something was coming, and I was getting scared and excited and I couldn’t concentrate. Truthfully I… Yuuri, I didn’t want to meet you. Not there, not right then. We were busy and there we weren’t sure if anyone could be watching and… It wasn’t the right time. It might have been for fate, but it wasn’t for me.”

“You took yourself off then?”

Viktor waved the comment away. “This was a week before the thing with Phichit. It started a week before that. That’s why I was so agitated. I hadn’t slept properly. Everything was hurting and I was on edge and just… I wasn’t in a good place. I was constantly worried that our enemies would find out. That the moment I met you, you’d be taken away.”

“So you decided then that the only thing you could do was…” Yuuri stopped, not wanting to say it himself. How Phichit had described it was enough. Blood and a knife, terror, pure and consuming fear.

But Viktor nodded and continued from where Yuuri had finished. “I decided to protect you by destroying the tattoos.”

Yuuri felt cold, a chill running through his veins. He thought it would be easier to hear it from Viktor, but it wasn’t. He thought he wouldn’t ever care for anything his soulmate or enemy did. But it turns out he had been wrong, so very wrong. His wrists ached from even the thought, and something inside of him clenched tightly.
“It was the only thing I could do,” Viktor rushed to say, a hint of desperation in his voice. “There are some in the mafia that do tattoo over them, or cut them out through surgery, or cut and scar it to hide it. You have to understand, in our job, it’s dangerous to have soulmates. Enemies are what make you strong – you hunt them down and eradicate them, however it is fate wants you to do. But soulmates are a weakness. Anyone can use them.”

Yuuri clutched the front of his shirt, feeling his heart racing as tears began to spring to the corner of his eyes, unshed.

“Yakov… he’s maimed his soulmate side. He knew who it was, even met them, but he threw her away just for her safety and to destroy any sort of rumours going around. I couldn’t do it. I wanted to meet you. I wanted to know who was meant for me, who could deserve to be my soulmate and my enemy. I was sure that I could protect you, or you could protect yourself. But I got more and more worried when I thought it was coming and I got paranoid!”

Yuuri grit his teeth, understanding to a degree. But he couldn’t quite – he knew how dangerous it was to be in the job that Viktor was, but not fully. He knew he would never be able to understand completely.

“I thought it was best for me to destroy any chances than for you to be hurt. So I thought about scarring the tattoos so no one could ever read them. I knew that just because I couldn’t read it, didn’t mean that no one else could either. I walked off that day, and I took a knife with the idea of scarring the tattoos to prevent anything befalling you.”

Yuuri rubbed his tattoos through his clothes, imagining what it must have been like, to be pushed into doing something like that. The thought had crossed his mind once, he had to admit, back when his feelings were complete chaos. But that had been selfish, and he had resorted to hiding them behind bandages instead of doing something like that. But it was different for someone like Viktor – someone who probably made enemies every day, had to be conscious that one decision might destroy everything he had ever worked to achieve. Paranoid. Viktor had said he got paranoid when he was sure that something was closing in, and he had been driven into thinking of doing it. Yuuri couldn’t imagine that.

“I cut it, just a little. It wasn’t deep. It was just a little, a tester I suppose. I didn’t want to do it,” Viktor said, gaze glued to Yuuri’s, as if he was desperately trying to convince him of something. “It wasn’t self-harm or suicide or anything like that. It wasn’t. Phichit might have thought it but it wasn’t, I swear. I just thought of scarring them to make sure no one could read them. It wasn’t that deep, but it hurt so much. And I started to worry that maybe it was hurting you too.”

“It didn’t,” Yuuri replied before he could stop himself. As the words left his mouth, he nodded, feeling the need to assure the man. “I didn’t feel anything like it. You’d think I would, but there
wasn’t anything odd about the few days before I met you.”

Viktor shrugged. “I think, looking back, what I was feeling was Phichit and what was to come. My paranoia, the worry about finding you, it was actually that moment, where Phichit walked in to see me starting the scarring. If I hadn’t been so weak, if I just had stuck through it, it wouldn’t have happened.”

“There’d be another way,” Yuuri said. “If that moment hadn’t happened, there’d be another way. You can’t escape fate.”

“No matter how hard you’ve tried?”

“I’ve tried many times.” Yuuri witnessed the pain that flashed through Viktor’s eyes then. He swallowed it down and Yuuri didn’t mention it again.

“I don’t think I’d have gone through with it,” Viktor continued, glancing down to where his wrists were covered by sleeves. “It hurt too much, and the thought that I might have been hurting you was worse. And I got scared. Despite me trying to never meet you, I really wanted to. I thought that once I made sure everything was stable, and that I was stronger, I’d find you. If I scarred my tattoos, I wouldn’t be able to translate them. I hesitated, and I thought about it more than I had before.”

“And that was when Phichit walked in?”

“Yes. And I saw it in his face. He saw the tattoos, saw the blood, saw the knife, the same name on both. And he jumped to conclusions before I could stop him. I wanted to rush and explain but he started panicking and telling me he could get help. I got scared. I tried to stop him, but he started saying how he’d go and get Yakov, or Mila.”

“They didn’t know what you were doing?”

“No! I couldn’t tell them what I was planning!” Viktor gasped, head snapping up to gaze at Yuuri again. “Yakov regretted ever scarring his. He thought it was a moment of weakness, and he should have been stronger. It would damage everything if he found out! He’d have hunted you down just so that you could be in danger, so I’d learn from my mistakes and become stronger. I couldn’t let that happen to you. We have some dangerous enemies, Yuuri. You’d have been in their sights.”
“And Mila?”

“She’s very protective of us. She’d have been better, but you’d still be in danger. And if she thought for a moment that you were a threat to me, she’d take you out.”

“Even if I was your soulmate?”

“She’d hesitate, but in the end she’d weigh you against me. I’m more important to her, while you’re just a stranger.”

“A stranger that is your soulmate.”

“She knows I’d have been destroyed, but I’d be alive.” Viktor shook his head and sighed out the tension that was seeping into his form. “I couldn’t let them know. That would bring so many more problems than I was ready for. So when Phichit said he’d go and get them, I panicked too. I begged him to stop. He started saying how he’d get the police, and he was backing away. He was babbling, but he said they’d put me away. He was saying things about you, saying it was messed up.”

Yuuri grit his teeth. Through the connection, he felt something akin to white fear, slowly seeping into his form. Viktor had been terrified, already strung up from fear of losing a soulmate, and then a threat had begun to show itself. The anger Yuuri had felt just a few minutes ago began to dissipate.

He said, “Phichit was only asking if you needed help.”

“No, he was threatening me, Yuuri. He’s not innocent—”

“He thought that Yakov might have been pushing you to cut the tattoos.”

“Why would…” Viktor paused, rubbing his forehead with his hands. “He was going to get the police. He said he was going to tell everyone. Get it online. He said he was going to find my soulmate.”
“He just wanted to find me. He thought you desperately wanted to find me too.”

“He sounded so threatening. Yuuri, you should have heard him. He was spitting words at me and backing away.”

“He was getting scared. You were shouting at him too.”

Viktor narrowed his eyes as he stared at the floor, mouth open to speak, but unable to find the words. Memories flashed before his eyes, and Yuuri knew he would begin to doubt what he had thought.

“You got scared of him telling everyone about your situation, and worried that that would reach your enemies. Everything you were doing to protect me, you thought he was going to destroy. So you aimed a gun at him.”

“I thought that was the only thing I could do. He seemed so determined to hurt me, to hurt you.”

“And before you could both talk about it, Yakov and Mila came in.”

“Yes. And they saw everything that was happening and jumped to conclusions too.”

“They thought Phichit was threatening you too?”

Viktor shook his head. “They thought he hurt me. They saw the blood and the knife. They thought I wrestled it from him before he could hurt me properly.”

Yuuri felt the weariness beginning to seep further into his bones. He had the basics then, the massive miscommunication and the misunderstanding, the foundation of what had caused this mess. The anger began to seep back, but this time it wasn’t directed towards Viktor. It was an old hatred, the same he had been feeling for years, directed towards the tattoos and the fate that everyone else seemed so besotted with.

A misunderstanding leading to pure fear, death threats and destruction – that was how his fate started? This was how he was meant to meet Viktor? What happened to the stories of others, where someone dropped something and their soulmate picked it up and it was the fateful moment of eyes meeting? Or a friend introducing people? Or where enemies met over a school competition, or
rivals in an interest? Why did his have to begin with blood and guns? Was it because of who they were, what they were involved in? Or was it because of their being soulmates and enemies?

Too tired for words now, Yuuri raised himself from his chair, slow and sluggish. He reached for Viktor’s arms, wanting to see it for himself. He picked the right side first, enemy side, and saw no cut there. Just his name staring back, immortalised in black ink. He swallowed and moved to the other, Viktor obeying his wordless command.

On his soulmate side, a faded pink line followed the outside of the tattoo, thin. It would heal completely within the next few months, to disappear before anyone suspected a thing. But Yuuri knew, and so did four others.

Yuuri’s throat clenched, the backs of his eyes tickling from the tears that wanted to spring.

“I’ll never do it again,” Viktor whispered into the still air, leaning forwards to be closer to Yuuri. “I couldn’t think of any other way to protect you. Now I know what sort of person you are, and I know you’re more than capable of protecting yourself. You don’t really need me.”

Yuuri tore his eyes from the cut to glance up at Viktor’s gaze, knowing his answer right away. He hesitated for a moment before he replied, “I’ll always need you, Viktor.”

Chapter End Notes

So here's the reveal of what Phichit saw and why there's such animosity between him and Viktor! Some had already guessed that there was something to do with the names, and I had to hold myself back from being like "Yes..." XD But I hope this answers some questions people have been asking!

If this was a trigger for anyone, for that I'm sorry and any talk about it later in the story will be limited (any talk of the act itself).

I hope you all enjoyed it! It's up a little earlier this time because I had no time later today XD But I'm not sure anyone would be complaining about that haha

You can find me on tumblr for updates and feel free to speak to me!

here

Thank you!
Chapter Notes

Chapter beta read by whynikkiwhy, who has helped me so much in beta reading that I've started to make less mistakes, which seems to be annoying her. I'll make mistakes purposely from now on, I promise.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

I’ll always need you, Viktor.

Those words had been spoken hours ago, and yet they continued to ring in Viktor’s ears over and over again until they grew louder. Due to the stress, Yuuri had taken himself off to sleep after their conversation, despite the time of day. He now lay sleeping in his bed, only just unoccupied by Viktor himself.

Viktor was at a loss of what to do. His heart swelled with emotion, and he wondered if he had really made a mistake. There were so many things to think about, endless sentences that wanted to be known in his head. He hadn’t risen from the seat since Yuuri had left, the weight of his mistakes crashing down on him.

In just an hour, his whole world had been turned upside down in a way he thought it never could, not since meeting Yuuri.

Had he made a mistake? Had he really mistaken Phichit’s intentions? Yuuri sounded so true, but his memories played before him once more and he knew what he had heard. Phichit, threatening for the police, saying he could be locked up, that he could find his soulmate easily. But he remembered the fear in Phichit’s face too, growing his eyes wide and teary and the way he cowered against the wall and attempted to grasp for the door handle.

But he’d been so blinded. Where he had cut a shallow slice throbbed while he listened to Phichit through a haze of fear, his breathing too loud for his ears, mind concentrating on only the words that were a threat to the one person he wanted to protect more than himself. Yakov, coming in, making assumptions, guns pointed everywhere, words crushing him.

Had he really made a mistake? Phichit had seemed so nice when they had barely spoken before, where all the boy knew was that Viktor was a fellow sponsor, where Phichit was just another skater. But that had been dashed when Phichit threatened him. He’d felt rage, destruction lacing his
actions, wanting everything to go back to how it was before his paranoia seeped in. And when he heard Phichit had a bodyguard, then all he wanted to do was kill the boy. He just wanted his soulmate to be safe, and yet Phichit kept getting away and kept being saved.

But he did find it odd that after days of Phichit being free, nothing had come. No enemy turning up out of the blue saying that they knew his soulmate, that they had them tied up and wanted something of him. Phichit had the freedom and the reason to release all the information he had. Even if he hadn’t known the names, he could have done a massive amount of damage. People had tried to force the information from him before. As a young assistant to Yakov, he had even been kidnapped just so a rival group could find his weakness. They hadn’t gone far. Yakov had stormed in like an angel of retribution and destroyed any threat before it could form.

Viktor leaned forwards in the chair, resting his head in his hands. Maybe he had made a mistake. He’d been so blinded, believing that everything was a threat. Maybe Phichit really had just been concerned with seeing a man with a knife and a bloody wrist and made assumptions. It wasn’t anything like that, but the young skater didn’t know that.

Once, this miscommunication might have been the end of things. But not anymore. Yuuri had revealed what he was to Yakov before shooting him. Yakov would think Phichit sent him, strengthening his idea that he had hurt Viktor.

And, even while understanding things now, Viktor still held some hatred for Phichit. He’d spent hours upon hours trying to find where he was, trying to sleep when dreams of murdering him before he could hurt his soulmate plagued his mind. It couldn’t just go away, not yet. And despite good intentions, Phichit had still set the ball rolling. If it was not for the young skater, Yuuri wouldn’t be in this mess. So yes, he still harboured some hatred for the boy that would not go away any time soon. But it wasn’t quite murderous anymore.

He was so tired. Viktor could feel the energy draining from him. He wanted nothing more than to join Yuuri in the bed, cuddle him close, and not think too much about what was to come once they opened their eyes. He didn’t want to think. Didn’t want to act. He and Yuuri had enough as it was, trying to figure out what this connection meant and where they’d go with it. He suspected, at some point, they might have to decide between the enemy or soulmate side. They couldn’t live with this imbalance, fate wouldn’t allow. But right now they had everything else to deal with.

He had told Yuuri they had plenty of time to figure it out. He had lied. Time was against them. Yakov was getting better. And if Mila had been able to find Yuuri, then Yakov could easily do so too. He wasn’t safe. He needed to talk to Yakov first.

He glanced at the clock and wondered what time it was in Russia. Perhaps Yakov would be awake – what was he saying? Yakov was always awake. He doubted that the man slept. Viktor could
count on one hand how many times he had seen Yakov doze, and they had all been years ago, when their empire was much smaller than it was now.

Maybe he could nip this in the bud now. Maybe he could stop this.

He rose slowly and took his phone from his pocket. He didn’t really want to make the call, not with the way his head was in a mess, and the fact that he couldn’t think straight. He’d make a mistake, he knew it already. He wouldn’t know what to say. But it was better now than later, to not give Yakov time to fester over his thoughts and get angrier and angrier with Yuuri.

He called Yakov’s private phone, and it only took a few rings for the other man to pick up.

“Viktor?” he asked. He sounded angry, an edge of a shout to his voice, but he was trying to keep it contained. “Where are you? Where have you gone this time?”

Viktor rubbed his temples, feeling the tiredness aching at the back of his eyes. “I’m in America.”

“Is Mila with you?”

“Yes, she is.”

Yakov sighed deeply, a sound Viktor had heard a lot in his time growing up. He was a creature of whim, as he had told Yuuri many times. Yakov was not. They clashed often.

“I need you two to come back. We have a few issues that I need you to deal with while I’m doing the Tulise deal-”

“I can’t yet.”

There was silence on the other side, and Viktor knew he had caught Yakov while he was in a bad mood. He had been continuously in a dark mood since the shooting – he didn’t want people to know, much less Viktor and those close to him, that he was in pain. But Yuuri saw it in the way he sometimes flinched, or how he sat carefully to make sure that it wasn’t weighed on the side he had been shot. He’d been in a bad mood for a while now, the pain becoming aggravating, and the lack
of ability to do anything about it. Yakov was a very mobile person and liked to be in charge and able to do things, and in the position he was, he didn’t want to be seen as weak. But Viktor knew that some of the smaller rival groups had begun to take notice, despite their attempt to keep the shooting a secret. There were just some mouths that you couldn’t shut.

“Why? Viktor, what are you doing?”

Now or never, Viktor thought. *I’ll always need you, Viktor.* He hoped so. He hoped with everything he had that Yuuri hadn’t said it as a spur of the moment thing, that he truly cared for Viktor. He knew he had no reason to be – Viktor hadn’t done much to warrant such a reaction from Yuuri. He had done nothing but hunt for his client and inflict pain. But he hoped to change that.

“I have something more important here right now.”

“*More important? What could possibly be more important?*” Yakov sighed again, and Viktor knew exactly how the older Russian looked. Hunched to relieve the pain in his side, with a crease in his brow from glaring so much, face almost blood red from barely-concealed rage. “Viktor, get back here now before I send Georgi over to drag you.”

“I can send Mila over, but I’m not leaving here yet.”

“*Viktor, I swear,*” Yakov began, but paused. “*Is it anything to do with Phichit Chulanont?*”

Viktor wanted to deny it, but kept silent instead. Yakov might have been angry and serious all the time, but people underestimated how observant and intelligent the man was. Their rivals thought he had made his way to the top by chance and connections, but that wasn’t so. Yakov had waited in the side lines for years, doing odd jobs that no one else would have ever wanted, with ambition lining his actions. He waited. And he acted when the perfect opportunity presented itself. Within two years, Yakov found himself standing at the top of a mafia group that was only going to grow, taking over most of Russia before Viktor had even come into the group. He had fought for it, bested his enemies for it. Viktor knew that all too well, and it was why he knew people had to be careful around Yakov with what they said. A single word could alert Yakov. And before anyone knew how to fix their mistake, Yakov was five steps ahead.

“It is,” Yakov hummed. “*Well? Have you found him?*”

“No,” Viktor replied. There was still an edge to the confession. After hours of hunting for Phichit,
it annoyed him to think he still hadn’t found the boy. “I haven’t.”

“Then what is it?”

“I found my soulmate and my enemy.” Viktor admitted, not pausing to give himself enough time to hesitate. He knew the best thing would to be to say it outright. Yakov didn’t tolerate those that beat around the bush, and it would give Viktor no favours. Now or never.

“What?”

“I found my soulmate and my enemy.” Viktor repeated, gritting his teeth. “The one behind the name on my wrists. You know the one.”

“And what are they like?”

Viktor felt a little guilty then, hearing the anger slip into concern in Yakov’s voice. Despite the man’s short temper and lack of mercy, he was still a good person. He had taken in Viktor when no one else had, given him chances no other person got to have, given him the world when the world wanted nothing from him. Yakov had been just as concerned with Viktor’s predicament surrounding his fate as Viktor had been, sometimes more so.

Viktor answered, “He’s… so different than what I imagined. He’s very strong. He’s very worthy.”

“He?”

“Yes, he. He’s a very fitting enemy and a fitting soulmate.”

“And what does he do?”

Viktor paused, rubbing where the pale, healed cut still lined the name on his wrist. “He’s a bodyguard.”

There was silence on the other side again, and Viktor knew then that Yakov might have held
suspicious. There was some movement, slow, and Viktor knew Yakov gave him every bit of his attention now. “A bodyguard?”

“Yes. And a very good one.”

“Does he have anything to do with Phichit Chulanont?”

No use in lying, Viktor thought. And this was what he had been aiming for as was. But he couldn’t stop the nerves from sparking inside of him. He had no idea where this was going to go, and that was where the danger came of it. “Yes. He’s his bodyguard.”

“Viktor,” Yakov both sighed and snapped.

But Viktor couldn’t stop the weak smirk that tried to rise from the corner of his mouth. “I just have to find the most complicated things, don’t I?”

“I think you mean it finds you.”

“That too,” Viktor agreed. But all the past problems he had made for Yakov before didn’t compare to this moment. Guilt continued to wrack him, and he took it one more step to say, “And he was the one that shot you.”

The silence Yakov gave him then was the heaviest Viktor had ever heard, weighing as if the world was pressed to his chest. He waited, listening to the static of their phones, feeling the pulse inside of his head counting down the seconds. His mouth ran dry, his gaze scanning around to find anywhere to stare at while he waited. It was awkward and he didn’t know what to do, and if it wasn’t for Yakov’s breathing on the other side, he would have guessed the connection had been broken. But it wasn’t. And Viktor worried for what was going to come next.

It seemed like an eternity before Yakov finally spoke, and his voice was strained, trying to hold back a wave of shouting Viktor knew was tugging at his throat.

“The one that walked in, demanded things of me, threatened Yuri, and then shot me?”
“The very same,” Viktor said, flinching at his own humourless comment. This was not the time to wave off Yakov’s angry comments and questions as he always did. All the other times, when he’d travel the world and ignore the responsibilities Yakov had made for him, or taken over one of Yakov’s deals just because the deal seemed intriguing to him, been selfish in his ideas of what he should have been doing. Yakov could call him selfish now, accuse him of taking a predetermined connection and place it of higher importance than the family he had grown up with – but Yakov would be wrong. He felt so unselfish now. He felt like giving his all to this connection, submerging himself in his whim and drive, to see Yuuri’s face every day even if it was in a glare or scowl. But even then, there was no one more important than the other. He loved Yakov, he was family, but he also loved what he could get with Yuuri. He looked forward to the future, something he hadn’t done in so long.

“Viktor,” Yakov began, but stopped. There was a grunt, and Viktor knew the man had moved a little too quickly, aggravating the wound in his side. Yakov didn’t mention anything though, and neither did Viktor. “Of course. As you said, a fitting other half for you.”

Viktor, despite the tension, couldn’t help but smile at the comment. Yuuri was a fitting half for him, a perfect side, regardless of if that side was enemy or soulmate. He was brave and strong willed, not at all afraid to fight against Viktor despite knowing who he was. So many people were afraid to speak to him, and Viktor had wished that his soulmate wasn’t a shy, silent, boring person. But Yuuri wasn’t. He was adorable, fearless, and everything Viktor had ever needed for both roles.

“Isn’t he?” he said, unable to contain the coo in his voice. “I mean, only my soulmate would waltz into our company building alone and threaten you. He’s a brilliant fighter too. And he’s such a good bodyguard, with a heart of gold and so much love to give.”

“He must be a very good manipulator too to be able to make you speak so fondly of him.”

The comment made Viktor’s blood run cold, and his smile slipped from his mouth. He swallowed, knowing that an argument was soon to come. He said nothing back, but waited for Yakov to make his point clear.

“He takes on a contract with Phichit Chulanont, and then shoots me. You think someone like that could so easily love you?”

“What do you mean?”

“He’s clearly picked his side, Viktor. He sees you as nothing but an enemy.”
“No, he doesn’t. I’ve spoken to him more than once. I’ve asked him that question too.”

“And you believed him?”

“Of course I do!” Viktor snapped, feeling he rage beginning to rise in his chest. He had been brought up by Yakov after all, and if there was anything he had learned from him, it was his tempter and planning. “I saw his face. I heard his words. I know he’s speaking the truth.”

“He can’t be with you and Chulanont’s bodyguard.”

“Yes he can,” Viktor insisted, but it had been something he was thinking too. He’d come clean to Yuuri about what they were, given him time to think about it before Viktor found him again. Yuuri seemed fine with meeting with him, even if it had come with a condition. But the other man didn’t seem at all keen on letting go of Phichit. Viktor had wondered how that was to work out.

“No, Viktor, you know as well as I and him that he can’t. It doesn’t work that way.”

“It does if he’s my enemy as well. This was what drew us together. I’m sure we’ll work a way out!”

“You were enemies before you were soulmates.”

“What?”

“You were enemies before you were soulmates,” Yakov repeated, a little more clearly this time. “Had it not been for Phichit doing what he did to you, you would never have met. Before you met, all he knew you as was the man trying to hurt his client. All you knew of him was a man between you and your target. It was only after you’d played enemies that you found out you were soulmates. Viktor, doesn’t that mean anything? Your enemy side is far stronger.”

“No it isn’t!” Viktor barked back, then flinched at the volume of his own voice. He stopped for a moment, listening to Yuuri in the bedroom. When there was no stir, he whispered with a hiss, “Just because it was that order, it doesn’t mean that that’s the strongest. Maybe that was the only way we could ever meet.”
“Soulmates from across the world have met. They didn’t need to be enemies first.”

“Everyone’s a different story,” Viktor pushed.

“You don’t think he’d have hurt Yuri if he had the chance?”

“No! Yuuri wouldn’t. It was a bluff, I’m sure.”

“You haven’t known him that long. He could be a very good liar.”

Viktor sighed loudly, bending forwards and pressing the palm of his hand against his forehead. He wanted to explode. He had known Yakov would be a difficult barrier, the man emotionally closed off about the topic of soulmates and enemies since his past history. And the stubborn man wouldn’t ever look passed it, or care for anything more than the close family he had created. If someone threatened Viktor or Yuri or any of the other children, then that was it, that was all Yakov was concerned for.

“He’s not,” Viktor replied through gritted teeth. “I know if he’s lying or not. I just know, okay, so don’t ask why.”

“That doesn’t get rid of the fact that he still values Phichit even with what he did to you. You can’t lie to me and say that it doesn’t bother you.”

Viktor wanted to, to argue and say that there was nothing wrong with a friendship. But it wasn’t ideal. And he’d seen how much Yuuri liked his new friend, how much he’d be willing to risk for Phichit. The same things he’d never risk for Viktor.

“Viktor, is there any use with this? He’s going to end up choosing Phichit over you, and you’ll see that enemies were all you were ever meant to be.”

“Really? Because then why do I already feel like I could love him as much as I could hate him?” Viktor asked, feeling something lodge itself in his throat. “Is that how you’re meant to feel towards someone who is just an enemy? Because if so, then I don’t understand how so many people beat theirs. I don’t ever want to hurt Yuuri. I couldn’t shoot him properly when I had the chance. And
that was before I even knew what we were, in the time you say we were just enemies.”

“I don’t know, Viktor. But I’m sure he’s lying to you.”

“He didn’t even know who I was when he attacked you. He thought he was getting rid of the problem for Phichit. If he had known we were soulmates and still went after you, then it would be different. But Yakov, he didn’t. He didn’t find out until after.”

“You’re making assumptions that being both someone’s enemy and soulmate could work out.”

“And you’re making assumptions that it won’t. Yakov, you told me anything was possible. You managed to drag yourself from the pits of the mafia to rule it and make it better. But now this comes up, and you’re immediately telling me it’s going to fade out into nothing?”

“I’m worried it’s going to kill you.”

“Your climb could have killed you too. But you still took it.”

“This isn’t about me. And I was alone then. It’s not just you this time.”

“He won’t kill me,” Viktor hissed. “Yuuri wouldn’t-”

“But Phichit will try again. And your enemy has taken his side-”

“Yuuri hasn’t taken sides! And Phichit didn’t try to kill me! I’ve explained this to you-”

“His name is Yuuri? Viktor,” Yakov sighed, becoming heavier with every breath. “Of course his name would be Yuuri. Of course. But I don’t care. Because you need to pull the wool from your eyes. You’re blind to this new feeling. You’re being stupid. Use that brain and think about this!”

“No,” Viktor snapped, standing from the chair. His free hand was gripped tightly, fist shaking, veins pulsing in his neck. “You’re the one not thinking! I have been thinking about this. I’ve spent every waking moment thinking about this. You seriously think I would just jump into it? I have
gone over everything in my mind a hundred times, and a hundred times after that! I don’t sleep, Yakov. I don’t use a moment to think about anything other than this mess and what I want from it, what will come, what I’m missing. Every second is taken up with these thoughts, of piecing everything together until I know I’m not making a mistake.”

“And what have you come to?”

“I’ve found out I don’t care. I don’t care if I’m missing anything, or if I’m making a mistake. Because it doesn’t matter whichever side it is, both want me to be close to Yuuri, and they want me to never leave. I don’t care for the reason. I don’t care if he had bad intentions, though I don’t think he does. I don’t care, Yakov. This is something my life has brought me to, and I am going to jump into it because I want to. I want to lose myself in this. As angry as Yuuri makes me, he makes me equally happy.”

“And if his allegiances lie closer with Phichit than you?”

The thought made his chest pang in pain, and he clutched at his shirt. “Then there’s nothing I can do. But he wouldn’t hurt me.”

“There’s more than one way to hurt someone, Viktor. You should know it’s not always physical.”

“I know he wants to see me just as much as I want to see him.”

“Whatever you say.”

“He does!”

“Of course, Viktor.”

“He’s the perfect fit for me, my perfect soulmate and my perfect enemy. I see my future in his eyes, regardless of how it will turn out. I want nothing more than to spend every day after every day with him, to make sure that if he ever needs me, I’ll be there. I want to be here when he needs me, or if he hates me, or if I turn out to hate him or need him too.” Viktor paused, feeling the emotions running through his body, making his skin shiver and his head swim. He should have known explaining it to Yakov was going to be a hard thing to do – the man had gone for far too long without a soulmate or an enemy to understand what the connection was anymore. The maimed
tattoos on his body no longer meant anything, left cold after years of ignorance. “That’s why I want to retract my request for help.”

“What?”

“I don’t want you to hunt Phichit anymore. I don’t need to do it.”

“You’re just going to go back on what he did to you? Because his bodyguard asked you to? He did, didn’t he?”

Viktor could not deny it.

“He’s playing you. He’s using you for his own means.”

“Then he can use me all he wants.”

“Viktor,” Yakov hissed. “I won’t be here for you to run crying to when everything goes wrong. This is your mistake to make.”

“This is my future to build.”

“No matter how heart-breaking the future will be?”

“We’re enemies, Yakov. Odds are, I’m going to hurt him just as much as he’s going to hurt me.”

“Then you’ve made your choice. Just hope he hasn’t already made his.”

“I retract my request for help. You need to stop hunting Phichit.”

“No.”
Viktor had expected it, but it still didn’t prepare him for the blow he received. No. Of course no, because Yakov had already made it quite clear he viewed the man as a threat to Viktor. Of course he wouldn’t stop. Because the man wasn’t like that. “No?”

“Our conversation has only made it more apparent he needs to go. If you don’t want Yuuri making the wrong choice, then eradicate one of the worse options.”

“Yakov-!” But before Viktor could say anything more, the connection was broken, Yakov having already hung up. Viktor had to contain his need to throw the phone against the wall, hand shaking as he gripped it. He wanted nothing more than to fly back now and corner Yakov, to stop the man before he could do anything. But what could be done? Yakov liked to call him stubborn, but Viktor known where he had gotten that trait. Yakov was the very definition of stubborn.

Viktor quickly peeked around the bedroom door, seeing Yuuri still sleeping under the covers. He must have been knackered, Viktor thought, to have slept through some of the shouting Viktor had done. At the back of his mind, he worried about Yuuri’s safety. If someone crashed through the apartment when Viktor wasn’t here, would Yuuri be safe? Or perhaps his voice had become to known to Yuuri now that it wouldn’t wake him.

But he needed to leave, if just for a moment. He scribbled a quick note for Yuuri to leave on the side of the bed he’d been sleeping on. Then he slipped out of the apartment, making sure that the door was locked behind him. And he set out to find Mila.

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If anyone was able to help calm Viktor, it was Mila. She had a temper herself, but their tempers seemed to counteract each other and calm the other down. The woman had always been someone Viktor could come to when it came to the stress of the job, or worries over things Yakov had asked of him, or when the world was crashing in on him. It happened more often than people assumed.

He paced her hotel room floor, hands clutched in his hair, so tempted to tear out his already thinning strands. He wanted to shout at the world, to stop everything from happening, stop time and figure everything out at the click of his fingers.

He’d explained everything to Mila, as long as it had taken. They’d had to stop a few times and he needed to repeat his words, knowing that in his anger, he hadn’t explained very well. The girl had been quiet for some time, somewhere after Viktor had admitted to who Yuuri was. She’d not
spoken a word since, but watched him pace and mumble about the problems.

“He refuses to listen, Mila,” he sighed. “I already told him that what he assumed happened in that room wasn’t right. Phichit hadn’t touched me. I explained it. You believed me, but Yakov won’t! Does he think I’m protecting him? Because I’m not. I won’t protect him, not unless Yuuri asked me to. It was my problem to begin with. When I say I want to go back on it, why won’t he let me?”

Mila didn’t reply, but watched him, the curls of her hair bouncing with every movement.

“I’ve already warned Yuuri that he might not stop. I said it, but I said it was the worse case scenario. Now he’s actually refused and I can’t go back and tell him that it’s all my fault. I’m the reason his friend is going to be killed and there’s nothing I can do. It’s going to ruin any chances we have as soulmates if it happens.”

He stopped pacing and sat down on the chair, cupping his head in his hands. Yuuri was most probably waking up now, to the note placed carefully on the bed. He wondered if Yuuri would jump to conclusions, or if Yuuri would take it in stride – as much as they had talked, they’d not made much progress. They were still bodyguard and mafia, still with suspicions between them.

“If Phichit dies, then that’s it. That’s any chance we have, and we’re just enemies.”

Mila stood and placed her hand on top of his head, running her slim fingers through his hair. It immediately calmed the throbbing headache that pummelled the back of Viktor’s skull, like the beat to a strong song. She knelt before him, compelling him to look into her eyes.

“You’re thinking of the worse-case scenario’s, Viktor. Yuuri’s done a very good job already of hiding Phichit. Maybe Yakov won’t find him.”

“Yakov won’t stop until he does, and that could take years. He’ll find him eventually. It’s easier to keep looking than keep hiding.”

“I’m sure it’ll be alright.”

“And if it’s not?”
“You need to talk this through with Yuuri. I’m sure he has all the answers you want.”

He did, but Viktor was worried that Yuuri would be as clueless as he was. The same question of what the world would bring in the future, still trying to figure it out. The world had given them both the same chaos and mess, so Viktor didn’t really have any hope that it would help sort it out. He doubted Yuuri had even sat down and thought about the possibility of Phichit dying, or if the mafia continued to hunt him without Viktor’s help.

It felt like the future was a wall just waiting to crash into them, with no way around, over or under. An unavoidable wall that would crawl closer and closer with every step they took, no chance of turning back, no way to get away from when it inevitably crushed them.

Because if fate had done anything, it was making sure that they both fell together.

“Yakov should listen to me more,” Viktor said.

Mila sighed. “I’ve heard that before. That man doesn’t listen to anyone but himself. Why do you think you and Yuri have so much fun fighting against his big plans for you? No wonder you turned out rebellious, and why Yuri’s followed in your steps.”

“How is Yuri?”

“Still not speaking to you.”

Viktor rolled his eyes. “Of course not.”

“Hey, you were the one who disappeared without letting him know.” Viktor was about to speak, but Mila shushed him with one upturned finger and a raised brow. “I told him before we left that I had to go away. I warned him. You left him in his grief. The boy was scared. You left without giving him a reason.”

Viktor rubbed his face. “I’ll text him then, once I’m calmed down a little more.”

“No, Viktor. Call him. He needs to hear your voice. He’s only fifteen, and he’s not like us. Of
course he was going to be scared of Yuuri. He thinks Yuuri’s going around murdering, or attempting to murder, anyone involved with Phichit. And he was. He’s worried we’re all going to be killed.”

“I know.” Viktor sighed. He and Yuuri had really made a mess of this, hadn’t they? Fate had brought them together, and here they were, causing the chaos that they had both worried they’d make. He’d assured Yuuri that there would be a way out of this. Now he wasn’t so sure. “I will call him and I’ll explain things. I just need him to keep it a secret though.”

Mila gave him a strained smile. “I know, Viktor, I know.”

“If it wasn’t for the shooting then I’d just keep this a secret because who knows what’s going to happen now? If I tell too many people I have a soulmate, it’s going to spread. And all the people who want to get to us will gun for Yuuri. Mila, this isn’t going to end well.”

“Viktor, it’s going to be alright.”

“What a mess,” Viktor huffed, running his hands through his hair. “I need to get serious. The news is going to spread, because of course it is. How will it not? It never stays a secret. So I’m going to get a handle on the situation, and make sure that I’m one to be feared. I can’t do anything about Yakov, but I can eradicate all of our other enemies.”

“And Phichit?”

“Yuuri wants me to stop hunting him. I will as long as I can keep seeing Yuuri, I don’t mind doing anything for him. And as long as Yuuri keeps Phichit well hidden, then there won’t be a problem for a while.”

“Right. So you’re going to… what? Leave that behind and storm the Russian front?”

Viktor could feel a rising determination inside of him. As much as Yakov had annoyed him, with refusing to cease his hunt for Phichit, Viktor knew he wouldn’t hunt for Yuuri. He wouldn’t ever hurt Viktor like that, despite his clear contempt towards the man – Viktor supposed there was a good enough reason for it. Yuuri had shot him after all, caused a mess for Viktor and scared Yuri. It didn’t leave a good impression really.
But their other enemies were the problem. They would not hesitate. And as well as Yuuri had handled them already, Viktor knew he would not be able to fight against multiple groups trying to aim for him. Some would attempt a kidnap, some torture, others shootings, and some outright murder. Viktor had many enemies, just as he had as many friends and allies. And even some of his allies would want to know about Yuuri for assurance, and some friends through curiosity. There was no way around it.

Viktor needed to make sure he had a firm grip, a handle on the situation. He needed to make sure that he was the enemy people feared to face, and that his soulmate was the one they feared to touch. Retribution would rise. Revenge lacing his veins.

The thought made Viktor’s heart hammer. People would hunt him, as he had done Yuuri once. That would not happen.

One side of him wanted to protect Yuuri because of their soulmate bond, the other because he wanted to make sure only he bested his enemy. Only he could hurt Yuuri. Only he could be the one to destroy him.

Viktor grit his teeth, a sickness rising to burn his chest. His veins pulsed in his temples.

Hatred burned inside of him, curling around his heart, making his tattoos throb against his skin. He fought against it. It didn’t feel like his, didn’t feel like something that would come on so suddenly. Yuuri was up, and he’d read his note.

“Yes,” Viktor replied after his period of silence. “I’m going to become the heir that Yakov has always wanted.”

Mila’s eyebrows knitted together, concern plain on her features. “Viktor, you need to think about this. You’ve fought against that for so long. If you commit to becoming heir, you know this is going to be something you can’t get out of later, right? Commitment, Viktor.”

Viktor nodded his head. “I know what it means, Mila. But what else can I do? If I’m going to protect Yuuri, I need to make sure anyone going for him will fear me.”

“But why do you want to protect him?”
Viktor narrowed his eyes. “Because we’re connected.”

“No. Viktor, you’ve spoken to him now, spent time with him. Why do you want to protect him?”

“Because he’s my soulmate and my enemy. Because I don’t ever want harm to come to him, and because I want to be the only one that could harm him.” The contradiction made his head hurt, but it was the best way he could put it.

“Is he worth protecting? It doesn’t matter why, then, just is he worth it?”

“Yes.” The answer came immediately to him, and Viktor placed himself behind it with his whole being. “He is worth it.”

Mila shrugged. “Then protect him.”

Viktor just needed to make the painful call to Yakov, informing him that he was finally going to be what Yakov wanted him to be. He was going to do everything an heir needed to do, even all the boring things Viktor had never wanted to be a part of. And in return, Viktor wanted to know just how Yakov managed to rule with such fear and respect.

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As time passed, he could feel the anger increasing inside of him. He rubbed his face, feeling his temples pulsing with burning rage, a bubble attempting to try and conceal it. Yuuri was very angry, and Viktor prepared himself for it. He already knew what he was going to be confronted with.

He raised his hand to knock the door, but before it landed, the door flung open, and there stood Yuuri, eyes ablaze with anger, cheeks red. There was a small second in which nothing happened, where Viktor’s hand was still raised, and their eyes were connected. But when Yuuri didn’t say anything, Viktor dropped his hand and gave the man before him a smirk.

“Honey, I’m home,” Viktor commented, loving the flush it brought out on Yuuri’s cheeks, and the wide eyes accompanying a gasp to follow. Yuuri might have been a bodyguard, but the man didn’t know how to hide his expressions properly. Every thought crossed his features, layered in his eyes.

After the initial shock, Yuuri narrowed his eyes in a glare, gritted his teeth, and grabbed Viktor’s
top and pulled him so suddenly that Viktor stumbled. The door slammed behind him and he almost found himself sprawled out on the floor, had it not been for Yuuri’s strong arm holding him up. Viktor thought for a moment about Yuuri’s strength, and how much there was in that smaller body.

Yuuri let go of him and spun on his heels, fixing Viktor with his glare as he crossed his arms before his chest. “Where were you?”

“Talking to a man about a dog.” Viktor replied, finding himself wanting to tease the other man, as well as try to evade the question. He didn’t want to let Yuuri know his finding, that Yakov wasn’t going to let up, that he was going to integrate himself further into the mafia to be able to protect him. Not that it was any of Yuuri’s business, that second part. Viktor could feel himself feeding off of the anger inside of him, the softness of the soulmate side suddenly gone, leaving only his feelings as an enemy.

“What?”

Viktor rolled his eyes, tearing away his gaze from Yuuri. He began to take off his coat and bag, placing them on the hooks beside the door. “It’s only been a week since you found out we’re soulmates and already you’re acting like the intrusive spouse.”

“Yes, Yuuri?” Viktor asked, just as much meaning in his mind when he spoke Yuuri’s name, the name he had wanted to know his entire life, the name he wanted to know forever.

“Viktor.”

Viktor liked the way Yuuri spoke his name. It didn’t sound like anyone else’s voice, didn’t sound like anyone else pronouncing it. Yuuri couldn’t quite pronounce it the way he had become used to with his Russian friends and family. There was a Japanese twist to it, a weight on the word like it meant so much to Yuuri, as if the whole past and future of their connection settled behind the letters. As if years of not knowing it when it had always been tattooed on his skin had come to this.

“Yes, Yuuri?” Viktor asked, just as much meaning in his mind when he spoke Yuuri’s name, the name he had wanted to know his entire life, the name he wanted to know forever.

“Where did you go?” Yuuri asked, moving to stand in front of Viktor’s gaze again. Yuuri’s movements always caught Viktor’s eye, though, something Viktor doubted the man knew.

“I had to talk to a few people,” Viktor answered truthfully but vaguely. By now, he knew Yuuri had noticed his evasion. Yuuri’s eyebrow raising and head bowing slightly, glaring through his eyelashes. “They were private conversations.”
“Viktor, who were you talking to?”

“Clients.”

“And does any of that have anything to do with Phichit and what we were talking about?”

“Why? Do you think I’ve gone back on our agreement?”

Yuuri stepped forwards until he was stood in Viktor’s space, face close and breathing in Viktor’s air. “Do I need to remind you what we are? Soulmates, yes. But also enemies. As much as I want to trust you, I also am suspicious. Who knows what you’re really thinking. And like you said, it’s been only a week. Even if you were my soulmate, why would I trust you in such a short amount of time?”

Viktor swallowed down his argument, knowing he had no place. Because he understood. He really did. He too felt it. As much as he wanted to keep seeing Yuuri, he knew that some of that motivation was to keep an eye on him. “I was speaking to Yakov.”

Yuuri’s glare turned to hope, and Viktor’s words died in his throat. “Really? And how did that go?”

“It…” Viktor paused and rubbed the back of his neck. It was a nervous response that Yakov had even tried to get him out of, but sometimes it returned, as it did now, when he was too stressed to remember. He looked away when he saw the frown beginning to rise on Yuuri’s lips. “He’s not going to stop, Yuuri.”


“Partly, yes, but also it’ll feel like a defeat to him. Yakov doesn’t take blackmail.”

“It’s not blackmail. I’m requesting, because I’m your soulmate.”
“But it still feels like he’s giving in.”

“Wait, does he know? Who I am now?”

Viktor nodded. “Yeah. I told him.”

“And what does he think about it?”

“He thinks you’re going to use it against me.”

Yuuri’s glare returned, and his face burned with rage. Viktor felt it throbbing inside of him, his own anger rising to meet Yuuri’s.

“So that’s it?” Yuuri asked, voice dangerously rising with each word. “I’ve changed nothing?”

Viktor kept silent, not wanting to say anything. He watched as Yuuri turned away, hands clutched in the middle of his head, gripping his hair as if he was ready to tear it out. Pain sparked in his chest. He reached for Yuuri, saying, “I’m sure it’ll be okay. You’ve hidden him well-”

Yuuri spun around again, pinning Viktor with his stare. “But that’s all. I want to save him. I want to give him back his life. I want to tell him that the mafia have stopped completely – not just you, but Yakov too. I don’t want to tell him that I’ve managed to stop one, but the strongest is still chasing him. Do you have any idea of how that feels? I haven’t changed anything.”

Viktor took back his hand, growing agitated. Slowly, sparking inside his mind, the thought of what he really was in Yuuri’s mind began to grow. He wanted to tell Yuuri he had changed something, that he’d managed to get someone like Viktor on his side. Viktor wasn’t nothing, he wasn’t something that hadn’t changed, he wasn’t some weight that changed sides because of nothing. Or, no, he hadn’t changed sides. But he was helping Yuuri, and that didn’t come as nothing. But he held it back, the agitation slow to be pushed down. Yuuri was scared, he reminded himself. Of course he was. And people said strange things when they were scared. As he recently found out.

“Can you speak to Yakov again?” Yuuri asked, desperation almost at the edge of his voice, peaking between words. Viktor wondered if Yuuri was keeping tight control on himself.
“It won’t change anything, Yuuri,” Viktor replied reluctantly. “You shot him. He thinks Phichit instigated it. He thinks you’re using me, so he won’t listen to me about this topic.”

“But you’re important to him.”

“And that’s why he won’t listen,” Viktor replied, trying to hold off the bark in his voice. He could feel it rising, the pulsing power inside of him, born of the anger they both bore, mixing with his agitation. The energy of the room was tense – he’d felt it a few times since their meeting, when they both aimed guns at one another and tested each other with their words. It was their enemy side leaking out.

“Then maybe if I speak to him-”

“I think you’ve done enough. I won’t let you see him again.”

“And why not?” Yuuri asked, voice slipping dangerously low as his arms fell to his sides, glare back in his gaze. “I thought you were going to help me.”

“No. The agreement was to back off of Phichit. I went above and beyond trying to speak to Yakov, and it didn’t work.” Viktor stepped forwards until he was closer to Yuuri, almost in his space, their energies bouncing off of one another. Almost touching, but not quite. “And who knows what might happen this time. Yakov isn’t young, he might not survive another shooting. And as much as I’ve agreed to stop my hunt, I won’t let you hurt a family member.”

Yuuri’s eyes sparked, and Viktor took a moment to think about how much he liked that look, the deep anger, the power, the strength behind his dark eyes. Yuuri moved a little closer again, just an inch from touching. “I wouldn’t shoot him again. I just want to talk.”

“It won’t change anything,” Viktor spat the words back at Yuuri, identifying it as the other man’s weak point. “He didn’t listen to me, and he’s even less likely to listen to you, let alone talk to you after last time. Don’t bother.”

“Then what am I meant to do?”

Viktor shrugged, his training in stoic expressions flying out of the window, as it always seemed to do when Yuuri was around. “Why are you asking me? I don’t know what to do for myself, let
alone you. I’m not your decision-maker.”

Yuuri rolled his eyes, crossing his arms before his chest. “I wouldn’t want you to be either.”

Viktor’s conversation with Mila crossed his mind, his decision of his next step, the indecision about the future lacing up his spine. He knew there were many risks now that they had found one another, and though right now, they were fighting, his gaze scanned over Yuuri’s body – over his soft face, his darker complexion, silky hair, beautiful eyes and a body that Viktor would gladly die for. Though he bit at the man and fought, though the energy and the anger coursed through his body and made him want to shut the man before him up, he knew this was the man he wanted to protect with everything he had.

He needed to call Yakov up, let him know he was going to become the heir he had always wanted.

Yuuri leaned forwards again, catching Viktor’s attention once more, and continued, “Don’t think that for one minute, just because you’ve agreed to stop, that I’m going to. I don’t need to speak to Yakov to stop him.”

“What? You have a whole artillery or something.”

A smirk was pulled on Yuuri’s mouth, and Viktor had to pause for a moment, finding it more stunning than his own could be. “I have my secrets. So, don’t get in my way.”

Viktor raised an eyebrow and tilted his head to the side. “Or what?”

There was a second where nothing happened, where, had it not been for Yuuri’s sporting smirk, that he might have wondered if Yuuri didn’t know where to take it. But instead it created a space in which they both promised something, the ticking of the clock filling their empty silence, gazes alight with something that hadn’t been there just seconds ago. And then Yuuri broke that frozen moment, grabbing Viktor’s shirt and pulling him so close that their noses almost touched.

“There’s a threat under that, Viktor heard. It was obvious. And he’d heard more elaborate. But there was something more about Yuuri’s, a sense that it was nothing like an empty threat, that
Yuuri would very well use it if need be. And Viktor had no doubt about that. He’d seen some of Yuuri’s strength and he knew there was more to come.

But instead of scaring him, the prospect excited him. Adrenaline began to beat inside him, chilling his skin, time moving faster as he smiled down at Yuuri. The grip on his top was tight, growing tighter each time Yuuri gripped his fist, pulling closer, centimetre by centimetre.

“I like the way you speak,” Viktor found himself saying, the words escaping before he could properly think about them. They slipped passed his lips without thought, without knowledge, but he saw as Yuuri’s eyes widened and eyebrows shot up, smirk still on his lips.

Viktor could feel the same adrenaline radiating off Yuuri. The tension burst. A second of breath, and then Viktor broke it.

He decided to be the one to begin it this time. Without hesitation, he gripped the fist Yuuri had in his top, and leaned forwards, pressing his lips to Yuuri’s. It was not as hesitant as the kiss Yuuri had given him, more fit for the mood, hungrier. He found he missed the seconds his lips were not touching Yuuri’s, be it in a passionate kiss or a delicate one, or when their bodies were not touching, when they were not close. It aggravated him, made him unstable, worry, all thoughts on the man he was not with.

He supposed that was what people spoke about when they talked of their soulmates. But he suspected it might have been stronger with them, with their connection as both soulmates and enemies. Every thought was consumed with the other, every second of every day.

He was not prepared though for when his back hit something. He opened his eyes, of which he had not known he had closed, when pain erupted up his spine. He gasped against Yuuri’s mouth, feeling the man’s weight on his front. It was then he began to piece together what had happened, that Yuuri had pushed him up against the wall.

It should have worried him or stopped him. But instead it made the adrenaline burn faster in his veins, making his heart race and pulse throb. Instead, it made him far more excited than he had expected.

Yuuri’s hand in his shirt pushed him further against the wall, trapping Viktor until he couldn’t move. He didn’t fight back though, instead gripped Yuuri’s wrists and felt the man’s pulse underneath his skin, pressing against the tattoos Viktor knew were there. The kiss pressed harder against his lips until he was forced to tilt his head to accommodate, which Yuuri took advantage of.
Yuuri’s tongue swiped across his bottom lip, and Viktor smiled against Yuuri’s skin, a bubble of deep laughter rising from his chest.

Cute was never enough to describe Yuuri. Nor was beautiful, nor dangerous, nor immensely important. Yuuri was all of that combined into one word that could never be described or said, something that was so purely Yuuri, no one else, could be used in no other context. Something made just for him.

He kissed Yuuri back hard, pushing himself off of the wall and holding tightly onto Yuuri’s wrists, pushing with all his might until they were stepping backwards.

He pushed until Yuuri’s back was pressed against the table, forcing him to bend backwards, every inch of their bodies pressing together. Viktor pulled back to breathe, but kept their foreheads touching, both breathing heavily into the small space they had left.

“Was that meant to be a challenge?” he gasped out, never so breath-taken with a kiss before. No one had ever made him react like this, not with a touch, not with a kiss, not with words and not with a threat. No one had ever made him feel so powerful before.

Yuuri surprised him with another grin, eyes burning and pupils larger than they had been before. He seemed to be feeling just as much, breath coming out quick, not wanting to pull away despite his awkward angle. He replied, “A challenge assumes you’re on my level.”

Viktor allowed himself to chuckle, completely taken with the husk in Yuuri’s voice, imaginings of how it would sound somewhere else entering his mind. Deep, a whisper – it would sound good in the darkness of the bedroom. “I assure you I am.”

“You have yet to prove it.”

Viktor paused, biting his lip. He had never been so excited by the prospect of a challenge before. It flared in his blood, any boredom long gone before it could ever rise. He grinned at Yuuri, even more excited by the press of Yuuri’s guns against his arms, hidden beneath his clothing. Viktor’s own were touching Yuuri’s arms, something he knew Yuuri hadn’t missed.

“Then I’ll just have to show you.”
Yuuri tilted his head to the side, his kiss-wet lips drawing into a bigger smile. “Anything you show me won’t surprise me.”

“Oh, I assure you it will.”

Yuuri surprised Viktor by tearing his wrists from Viktor’s grip, the strength Viktor had thought about making its show once more. He gripped Viktor’s chin, turning his head any way Yuuri wanted, a subtle threatening gesture that Viktor might once have found demeaning, now found thrilling.

“Then show me,” Yuuri breathed against Viktor’s lips, centimetres from touching. “Show me what a bad mafia man you can be. Show me that power that has people cowering, that calculating gaze that has people pausing, that reputation that has people talking. I am your enemy as well as your soulmate, aren’t I? Then show me how you can mix the two together.”

Viktor, among all the excitement and the fire burning within, could feel that the anger and the agitation had yet to properly disperse. It was fuelling him and Yuuri both, rising under their skin, the foundation of all that they were feeling. Their first kiss had been hesitant and sweet, as a soulmate’s should be.

But tonight, while their suspicions and stress ran high, it was time for the passion of enemies to take charge.

Chapter End Notes

First of all, I'm sorry this was a day late. As I posted on my tumblr yesterday, I was involved in a car accident. I'm completely fine, come out with only a little whiplash and some scrapes and bruises, and I'm much better today after some sleep. But I needed to deal with insurance and the other party and recovery yesterday, and I wanted to take the rest of the day after that to just relax and get over it.

I'm sorry for it being late, and I hope some Viktor POV will make it better! As well as some interesting cliffhanger here... hehehe Thank you for your patience, and as I said on tumblr too, this doesn't change the update schedules from now on. They will all still be Saturday, barring any other interruptions!

If you'd like to keep updated, you can find me on tumblr here
Chapter Notes

Chapter beta read by whynikkiwhy, who got very excited for the prospect of hate sex. She's been wanting this since the start.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

If Yuuri had to describe what they did next, it was crashing into the bedroom. He wasn’t one to use hyperboles, to exaggerate a story for the effect, but when he said crashed, he meant it. Viktor threw him against the door, springing it open until it slammed against the door, making an almighty sound. They hadn’t separated yet, lips still locked, clumsily tripping towards the bedroom, through the door, into the darkened room, arms grabbing at clothing.

Yuuri could feel his previous rage still burning inside of him, his suspicions that Viktor had been off to speak to Yakov, gone back on his word without telling Yuuri. He’d been worried, waking up, seeing a note with Viktor’s tidy handwriting, telling him that he would be back soon. Immediately, he had jumped to conclusions and fed himself on his anger until his rational mind began to chase suspicions.

He knew he shouldn’t have been so unfair to Viktor. The man had not hesitated to agree to his terms, and he knew the man spoke the truth when he said he wouldn’t hunt Phichit. There was just something about the way he had said it, something that assured Yuuri. But he was still scared, still doubting, because his career taught him that there was always something to be careful of.

He supposed that all of that nervous energy was finally coming out. He used to be able to get rid of it in training, or running the beach of Hasetsu, burning it all off until he could think rationally again. But he couldn’t do that now. Instead, that energy wanted to come out in one way, and that way was to throw himself at Viktor. He knew he should have been doubting that as well, but in that moment, as the first kiss had been, it felt right.

Viktor was allowing him some of the control, allowing Yuuri to direct the other man around the room until he could push Viktor against the back. The mattress hit the back of his knees, and Yuuri pushed his palms against Viktor’s chest. Viktor allowed himself to fall, bouncing against the cheap springs of the bed, eyes never leaving Yuuri’s face.

The lights outside managed to illuminate some of the dark room, peeking in through the closed curtains. Yuuri could see one side of Viktor light up, the rays catching on Viktor’s grin and his stunning eyes. Yuuri took a moment to appreciate the view as he stood, breathing heavily into the
still air. His lips felt wet, and he raised his fingers to touch them, pressing as Viktor’s lips had. It didn’t feel the same, and already he missed the heat of their kiss. Viktor watched his movement.

He kicked the door behind him, crashing it closed once more, locking them in their own little world. His heart was thrashing against his rib cage, and there was a wave of blood in his head. He’d never felt like this before. It was intoxicating, addictive.

He moved slowly towards the bed, feeling the electricity run through the air. Viktor was waiting, watching, wondering what his next movements were. Yuuri wasn’t one to take control a lot, unless it was his job. But when it came to relationships with families or friends, he liked the decisions to be left to them. The anxiety as a child never really went a way, and Yuuri knew he worried more than he should. But as he stared at Viktor, wondering what was going to happen next, he found he liked the idea of being the next to move, the next to surprise the man below him.

So he made a move without thinking too much about it. He slowly crawled on the bed, maintaining eye contact, and straddled Viktor’s hips. Viktor’s hands immediately found purchase on Yuuri’s thighs, slightly hesitant for a second, but then gripped the flesh over his trousers.

Yuuri knew where this was going. Soulmates did this sort of thing all the time. But not enemies. And soulmates didn’t do it with feelings as they did now, with anger and challenge, with threats consuming the air around them. But even knowing that, Yuuri couldn’t stop himself. A desire stronger than he had ever felt began to flow through him, seeing Viktor beneath him with the same look in his eyes, and he felt something spurring him on.

He leaned forwards and splayed his hands on Viktor’s clothed chest, hands sparking with the touch. He could feel Viktor’s toned muscles underneath, skin shivering every time Yuuri moved. As his hands moved outwards, he felt the cold metal of the guns secured in their holsters beneath Viktor’s jacket. He moved the jacket aside and tore his gaze from Viktor’s to peer at the guns.

For just a second, reality hit him again and made him pause. He remembered where they were, who they were, and why he had been angry. But it wasn’t enough. He reminded himself he had promised to jump into what he felt, knowing it would be the only thing that would help this mess of a situation, to be honest with himself. And what he felt right then was that he didn’t care, not right at that moment. He slowly began to unbuckle the holster, moving his gaze to connect with Viktor’s again, seeing the nerves in Viktor’s rise.

Once the buckles were undone, he pulled for Viktor to sit up against him. He slowly slipped his jacket off and threw it on the floor, uncaring of where it would land, and then began to pull the holster from his body, guns still inside. He did it slowly to show Viktor he meant no threat, and as time wore on, Viktor looked less nervous and more excited again, moving so that their chests pressed together.
Yuuri blushed slightly, realising their position. He was sat in Viktor’s lap, legs open and splayed on either side of Viktor’s hips, not an inch of the front of their bodies not touching. The warmth against him had him gasping, and he threw Viktor’s guns to the floor with the jacket. He stuttered on his breath when Viktor began to do the same for him, removing his own jacket and holster.

But when Viktor noticed something, Yuuri stilled. There was a moment of pause, before Viktor’s face broke out into a smirk. He took one of the guns from the holster, and held it to the side, admiring the weapon.

“I wondered what you did with it,” Viktor whispered, turning to press his lips against Yuuri’s jaw, leaving small butterfly kisses against his skin. “I had hoped you were taking care of it.”

“I am,” Yuuri replied, staring at the gun he had taken from Viktor, from what seemed like a lifetime ago, while its owner left a trail of kisses up to his ear. “It’s become one of my favourites.”

Viktor chuckled against his ear, leaving nips as he went, and threw the gun down to the floor where his own lay, and finished tearing the holster from Yuuri’s body.

Once that was done, Viktor moved to place his hands underneath Yuuri’s top, but Yuuri stopped him, pushing Viktor back down on the bed. He wasn’t ready to relinquish his control yet, not yet having shown Viktor the power he had. Viktor fell with a surprise, but no fight, staring up as Yuuri made himself comfortable atop Viktor, hands before him splayed over Viktor’s chest.

Yuuri could tell Viktor liked the view. His eyes darkened, mouth slightly agape, a flush across the bridge of his nose. And Yuuri had to agree, he liked the view from this height, seeing Viktor’s chest rising and falling against the white of his shirt, eyes trained solely on him. Yuuri found he liked having Viktor’s attention only on him, to never stray to something else. Only him.

He began to unbutton Viktor’s shirt with steady hands, taking a paused moment as each came undone, a promise in his movements. Viktor stayed still, hands splayed on Yuuri’s hips. It was only once all of the buttons had been undone that Yuuri looked down to see what he had uncovered. He pushed apart the shirt, and drunk in the view.

Yuuri didn’t really care for the body image of others. As someone who had fluctuating weight himself, he’d only been concerned with his own, though that had worn off after some years. He didn’t look at others and think of their bodies, and he hadn’t properly thought about Viktor’s since knowing him, only a passing thought that the man must have had some big muscles for his job. But
now, in the low light of the room, he admired the way that the filtering light from outside danced on the skin of his chest, licking down his abs until it was swallowed by the dark material of his trousers. The skin looked warm, pale, and Yuuri found himself running on the desire to touch. So he did.

He slowly trailed his hands up the chest, feeling Viktor’s dips and curves, warmth meeting his palms. Viktor’s stomach twitched every time his fingertips stroked, Viktor flinching slightly.

“Ticklish?” Yuuri grinned, gaze rising to meet Viktor once more. The man gave a glare back. But Yuuri continued, fingers dancing over his skin as the light did. Viktor’s body was beautiful, and it lit the excitement inside of him. He pushed the shirt off until Viktor was lying without a shirt, exposed to Yuuri’s gaze. He took advantage and memorised every inch that he could, breathing heavy.

So distracted was he that he didn’t notice as Viktor’s hands gripped his hips tightly, surprising him by spinning around until Yuuri was the one on the bottom, underneath Viktor.

“What-” Yuuri began, glancing upwards, but was interrupted by a desperate kiss to his lips, just as heavy as it had been before, hungry against his. He wrapped arms around Viktor’s neck and roughly pulled him further down, pressing Viktor’s naked chest against his clothed one. His back arched as Viktor moved to trail kisses along the side he had missed, nipping the skin slightly between his teeth.

Yuuri gasped, feeling one cold hand beginning to trail up his stomach, pushing his top as it went. This time he didn’t fight and helped to remove it, wanting desperately to feel Viktor’s skin against his own, to return some of the warmth that had been lost with Viktor’s touch. Once that had been thrown away with the pile of clothing beside the bed, Viktor ducked lower, biting Yuuri’s collarbone.

Yuuri crossed his legs behind Viktor’s back, locking the man in, and cupped Viktor’s face. He pulled it up to face him, a little roughly, but Viktor didn’t seem to mind.

“Take off your trousers,” Yuuri ordered, surprised by the way his own voice deepened, how it sounded as it whispered through the bedroom.

Viktor’s smirk returned between Yuuri’s hands, and shuffled down to the edge of the bed. Before he rose, he used one hand to undo the way Yuuri’s legs locked behind him, and took one of Yuuri’s hands and turned it so that he could kiss his palm, eyes dark. He drew back and stood before Yuuri, hands slowly moving to his belt buckle.
Yuuri rose onto his elbows, bending his knees as his gaze trailed down Viktor’s exposed chest to where his hands were moving. He couldn’t tear his eyes away, not as the buckle came undone and Viktor slipped it free of the belt loops, then threw it away. He watched as Viktor undid the top button, slowly pulled down the zip, and popped it open so that Yuuri could see dark, expensive, underwear.

Yuuri felt his body heat, his breath coming out fast form his nostrils. His mouth dried and he licked his lips, only to be torn away from the view when Viktor chuckled. It made his skin rise.

“What?” Yuuri asked, glaring.

“I like the way you’re looking at me,” Viktor admitted, pushing down his trousers until he stood only in his underwear. He left his shoes, socks and trousers in the pile of clothes they had managed to gather, then crawled to begin to take the rest off of Yuuri. He began with Yuuri’s laces, popping his shoes off with little care, socks to follow, before he slowly rose to grip Yuuri’s hips.

As Viktor’s fingers pulled his trousers, underwear to follow, Yuuri counted down the seconds. He allowed himself to become exposed to Viktor’s gaze, watching as the Russian’s eyes darkened impossibly more once every bit of clothing had been removed from Yuuri’s body. And as Viktor moved to cover Yuuri, to crawl above him, Yuuri gripped Viktor’s shoulders and spun them until he was above once more, sat on Viktor’s hips, considerably less clothing than there had been before.

Yuuri took a moment to appreciate the surprise on Viktor’s face before he asked, “You didn’t think you’d get to take control, did you?” He didn’t let Viktor respond however, not before he was bending, until his face was level with Viktor’s crotch. He grinned more when Viktor gasped, hand moving to run through Yuuri’s head.

Yuuri stroked Viktor’s hip and thigh, feeling muscles pulse underneath his touch. Slowly, he moved to bite the band of Viktor’s underwear, careful to only scrape his teeth against Viktor’s hip bone. A gasp left Viktor’s lips, and Yuuri kept eye contact as he pulled Viktor’s underwear off by his teeth. He threw it to the clothes pile and stood for a moment, drinking in the view before him, appreciating that not one inch of Viktor’s body was covered.

But impatience began to curl in the pit of his stomach, and with every second that he let himself be consumed with desire, the hotter his body became. In a short amount of time, he had already become addicted to Viktor’s touch. He crawled to straddle once more, a little loser this time so that he could touch Viktor’s hips, hands dangerously close to where Viktor seemed to desperately want it.
Viktor made to move again, seemingly wanting to take control, ready to throw Yuuri down once more, but Yuuri stopped him by taking hold of his penis. The sudden move had Viktor gasping and pausing, eyes glancing down, control taken back by Yuuri.

Yuuri stroked once, feeling it harden more than it had already been, memorising its shape. It was hot against his hand, but seemed to fit perfectly, just enough for Yuuri to handle. He wanted to laugh, wondering if this was an attribute to being soulmates, if even fate made this.

“No, Viktor,” he whispered, moving his second hand to help his first, stroking a little faster now and loving the way it made Viktor’s hips buckle slightly underneath him. “I’m the one taking control. Just sit there and enjoy.”

“Yuuri-”

But Yuuri shut Viktor up quickly, leaning forwards to press a hungry kiss against the lips he had memorised as well, intoxicated by their heat and taste. Between their bodies, Yuuri moved one hand to support himself and the other rubbed along Viktor’s shaft, exploring and experimenting. He had a desire to figure out how Viktor worked, to see what made Viktor excited and what made him lose control, what he liked best and what he didn’t. He wanted to know everything about Viktor, and at this moment, there was nothing he wanted to know more than the man intimately.

He kissed along Viktor’s cheek as he rubbed the head of Viktor’s penis, feeling it pulse, kissing to his ear and taking it between his teeth. Viktor’s whole body jumped, a whispering gasp close to Yuuri’s ear. Yuuri sucked the skin of Viktor’s neck between his teeth, a need to leave his marks along the pale column of skin, mind lost to the desire he felt.

Anything happening outside of the room no longer registered in his mind. He was surrounded by Viktor, scent, sound, touch, taste and sight, all the senses focusing only on his soulmate and his enemy, the man that had made and broken his life. The apartment could have been burning down and Yuuri couldn’t care less, only wanting to be as close to Viktor as he could be.

As he bit Viktor’s jaw, the man beneath him gasped and finished, spurting across Yuuri’s hand and stomach, body thrumming with energy. Yuuri focused on the sound of Viktor’s heavy breathing as he stroked the man through orgasm, replaying the sound over and over in his head. He knew that was going to be dangerous, in times where he was alone in a dark room in the future. But he memorised the sound anyway.
It was a minute before Yuuri took his hand away, knowing Viktor would be very sensitive. But as soon as he moved, Viktor sat up, pushing Yuuri up as well. He gasped and held on to Viktor, almost propelled off of the bed. Viktor’s right arm wrapped around his waist and pulled him closer still, and Yuuri gasped as his own erection stroked against Viktor’s stomach. Viktor glanced down, and Yuuri didn’t miss the way he licked his lips.

Viktor took Yuuri in hand and watched as he stroked as Yuuri had between their bodies. Yuuri couldn’t contain his gasps, but they seemed to spur on Viktor more. No touch had ever made him feel so much, as if Viktor seemed to know all of Yuuri’s good spots, as if they had been together for years and knew every inch of their bodies. Viktor’s free arm stroked down Yuuri’s spine and Yuuri moved closer to Viktor, muscles tingling from the stimulation.

“Don’t start thinking that this is all we’re doing,” Viktor chuckled, moving his head again to kiss along the side of Yuuri’s mouth. “I’m not done yet. You said you wanted to take control, right? You said you wanted to see what I can do. Then you need to prepare, because I’m not letting you go for hours.”

The promise made Yuuri gasp and the energy in his body rush through his veins, heart hammering against his chest. As he drew close, he couldn’t contain the way his body rocked against Viktor, chasing after every touch, wanting more. He clutched at Viktor’s back, scratching the skin, drawing another shiver from Viktor’s body. He couldn’t stop the little noises that left his mouth, gasps and mewls pressed against Viktor’s ear, energy coursing through him harder than it had ever before.

And when his climax came, he clung harder onto the body before him, taking joy in the warmth of Viktor and how his everything seemed to be surrounding him. He couldn’t escape, was completely encompassed by Viktor, by the man his fate had drawn him to. At the back of his mind, he thought that if this was what he had been running away from for all these years, then he had been wrong. But he pushed that thought away before he could think too much about it.

Viktor continued to stroke him through orgasm and beyond, slowing down the pace, pressing small kisses and complimentary words to Yuuri’s neck.

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“Gorgeous,” Viktor whispered, his voice set in a low growl. “Absolutely stunning.”

They didn’t completely register with Yuuri’s mind, flying through one ear and out the other without much conscious decision. He pressed himself closer to Viktor, feeling the thrum of desire beginning to break through again, far from satisfied. He leant back slightly, cupped Viktor’s cheeks and turned him up to look. He stared into Viktor’s eyes, his brown scanning the blue. He understood what people meant when they said a person’s personality was in their eyes, an open book, and it was never truer than when he looked into Viktor’s. It calmed him, settled his unease,
the nerves rattling through his body. He found he never wanted to look away.

He leaned forwards for a kiss, pressing a hungry kiss against Viktor’s lips. The anger was still at the background of his thoughts, and he could feel it in Viktor’s as well, showing in the hard press of his hand against Yuuri’s spine, or the way he pressed just as hard against Yuuri’s lips.

The kiss lasted a while, Yuuri pressing against Viktor’s naked body, Viktor pressed against his own, any small space of air between them too much. Yuuri might have thought it was what they were and what they had, but he had never felt so connected to a person in such a way before. He knew he might feel differently another time, but at this moment, he wanted to spend eternity as he did right now.

But something had to break it.

It took a while to notice, but slowly they became aware of something beyond their bubble. A high, shrill tone of a phone, calling, shattering their peace. As they took notice, tearing from one another, it became louder, almost painful.

“Is that yours?” Viktor asked, a bite in his voice, as if ready to destroy it if it was.

“I…” Yuuri glanced around. The call was coming from another room, from where he had left his previously. “I think so.” He readied himself to move, but he found his body didn’t want to, not helped by the way Viktor’s arms clamped tightly around his waist. “Viktor, I need to go.”

“It can’t be anyone important.”

“It is,” Yuuri reasoned, knowing it was. He recognised the tone as the one he used for his work number, the one only a few people had. Worry began to replace the rage, images of something having gone wrong in Hasetsu.

Suddenly, that worry killed the feelings he had been immersed in, the warmth, comfort, connection gone. He eased Viktor’s hands away and rushed to place on his dressing gown from his wardrobe. He didn’t look back at Viktor as he walked into the living room, closing his bedroom door behind him.

He picked up and pressed the phone to his ear, awaiting a response.
“Hello?”

But when it was only Chris’ voice, Yuuri calmed immediately, setting himself down to sit at the kitchen table. “Hello,” Yuuri replied.

“Are… you alright? I called for a while. There wasn’t any response.”

Yuuri moved to rub his face, but stopped when he realised what he had on his hand. He stroked it on the material over his stomach. “Sorry. I was… distracted.”

“Oh?” Chris’ voice immediately dropped to the teasing tone he liked to use with Yuuri. The man was a flirt, and loved some good gossip. Yuuri supposed that made for a good informant. “Do tell. Met someone in New York?”

Yuuri sighed, thoughts straying to the naked man currently on his bed. A blush bloomed on his cheek, his body still thrumming with energy and desire. “You could say that.”

“Yuuri! Do tell. He? She? Gorgeous? Where were you before I called? How far in?”

Yuuri rolled his eyes, the blush flaring deeper. “Oh my god,” Yuuri gasped, whispering so that Viktor couldn’t hear from the bedroom.

“Well?”

“It…” Yuuri bit his lip, still feeling how they were swollen from the kiss, wet from Viktor’s lips. Whispering lowly, he replied, “It’s… Viktor. He’s, uh, here. In my apartment.”

“Oh my god, Yuuri,” Chris gasped, a chuckle at the end. “And one of the reasons I was going to call was to let you know he’s been spotted in New York. Mila has been seen too. Turns out you already knew.”

“Yeah, he came to mine as soon as he touched down in America. And Mila’s somewhere else, but
I’ve spoken to her.”

“Somewhere else? Did you want Viktor all to yourself?” Chris chuckled and took a bite of something, eating before he made the comment, “So, where in your apartment is he? Fully clothed and sitting in your living room? Or naked in the bedroom?”

Just when Yuuri had thought it was impossible to blush any more, his whole face burned harder. He leaned over the table, trying to hide it from the world. He kept silent, but knew that that was enough for Chris to understand.

“Yuuri, you naughty boy. Gone from running away from him, to him chasing you and you taking him to bed. Well, well. How romantic.”

Yuuri groaned, a beg to get Chris to stop, but the man didn’t.

“So how was it? Oh, did I interrupt it at the good part? Should I hang up so you can go back to your lover and continue?”

“Please stop,” Yuuri said, allowing the beg to show in his voice, but it only made Chris chuckle harder.

“I bet you didn’t beg Viktor that. Or perhaps ‘please’ might have been in it somewhere.”

“What did you want to talk about?” Yuuri demanded, cutting Chris off before he could say anymore. “Was it just to let me know they were here? A little late, may I add.”

“Ooh, did I strike a nerve?” Chris joked, but then his voice became serious, back to the professional conduct that he had first introduced himself with Yuuri as. “That was part of it, but there’s something else. You should know that Yakov’s hired someone outside of the company, someone like me. They’re trained to find and hunt for people, and they’re good, Yuuri.”

Yuuri gulped, sitting up to listen properly. The blush had faded now, embarrassment replaced with his bodyguard demeanour. “Have they already started?”
“Yes. He’s beginning with America.”

“What do you mean?”

“They’re going over the countries that they’ve found you in. So, they’re starting with America, and then they’re going to move onto Japan and Russia to try and find your package. I think they’re concentrating on America at the moment, because they think that that’s where it most likely is.”

Yuuri felt his heart race increase. A fluster of thoughts rushed through his head, the question of if he should travel to another country to expand their search and to put off their search of Japan. He doubted that they’d find Phichit, not with how well he’d hidden him.

A flash of something crossed his mind, stilling his breath. Bright day, outside a station, walking into someone. Young. Blond. Japan. He groaned, feeling the panic beginning to rise.

The memory stabbed at him. He’d walked into Yuri outside of the station on his way to Hasetsu. Phichit had been with him. They had been in disguise. But was that enough? He rushed back in his mind, trying to remember how Yuri had acted the times he had seen him. There hadn’t been any recognition. None at all. Perhaps he hadn’t remembered? He swallowed down the panic, hand clutched to the front of his chest.

“...ri? Yuuri?”

“Sorry, uh, yeah. So, America first?”

“Yes. That’s where they think you’ve hidden him.”

“Right.” He paused, thinking. The best way around this was to ask Viktor what Yuri knew, but he’d give things away that way. He doubted Yuri wanted anything to do with the chase that was happening, he’d been told as much, but if it meant getting back at the man that had shot Yakov, Yuri might just do it. “Listen, can I ask you to look into someone? Just… to keep an eye on them?”

“Sure,” Chris responded, answer slow, unsure. “And why?”
“Because I think he knows something. I’m not sure. I just need you to keep an eye on him, just in case he does say something. I’ll send you the name after our conversation.”

“Okay. Send me what he looks like if you know, and what his connection is to the mafia. Anything you can.”

“Yeah, I will. And about this person like you, any idea of who they are?”

“No concrete evidence, not really. I’ve heard multiple names, different descriptions of what he looks like. He’s pretty well hidden. I’ll send you everything I know about him, just in case. He might decide to take him anonymity to the extreme and approach you.”

Yuuri nodded, tightening his grip on his phone. He thought he had most of his loose ends tied, digital trail covered, physical trail covered, and everything in between. But he hadn’t thought of the one person he had bumped into ages ago, and who it was they were. Or if he remembered. “How good is this person?”

“I don’t know him well enough. I’ve heard things, as people of my career do. I’ve heard he’s very good.”

Of course, because the mafia wouldn’t employ someone less than that. Yakov wouldn’t, not with how much he had running on this. Yuuri bit his lip, the ease and happiness he had felt only a little while ago gone now, replaced by panic and nerves, a feeling that something was coming that he couldn’t stop. “Thank you. Please keep me updated about this.”

“I will. Take care, Yuuri.”

“Take care.”

The phone call ended abruptly, and Yuuri dropped his arm on the table, phone almost falling from his hands. The shortest and easiest way to stop this was to ask Viktor, but he already knew he couldn’t do much more. Yakov had declined his offer, choosing instead to continue to chase after Phichit. Perhaps speaking to Mila could help, but Yuuri trusted her even less.

What next step did he need to take to prepare for what was coming? What did he need to do to make sure that Phichit was safe? Warn his parents? But they were prepared enough. It would be
best to warn them for when he knew what was coming. He couldn’t talk to Yakov again. Perhaps he could talk to Yuri, but the boy was scared of him, more likely to run to Yakov than to agree to anything.

He furrowed his eyebrows in thought, feeling a headache coming on once more. They seemed to be coming often lately, of that he wasn’t surprised.

He rose to walk to his bedroom again. As he opened the door, he was surprised to see Viktor standing, back in his clothes, adjusting the cufflink on his shirt. He made to make some teasing comment, but the smirk disappeared when he saw the expression upon Yuuri’s face.

“What’s happened?” he asked.

Yuuri turned away and began to rifle through his wardrobe, words lodged at the back of his throat. He knew Viktor would be able to read his face, just as he seemed to be able to do for the other man. “Just some problems.”

“I see,” Viktor said slowly, understanding dawning in his voice. “Anything I can help with?”

“No. Unfortunately.” Yuuri began to change, all too aware of their suffocating silence and the way Viktor was staring at his back. Back to how they had been, back before they had taken the leap to connect intimately, a way that Yuuri hadn’t thought would make him feel so relaxed – even as the anger burned inside of him. But there was a wall again, one he knew he was helping to construct. But he had been rudely awoken to their situation again and couldn’t help it.

The same questions of what he could do roamed his mind. He thought there was something he was missing, something he could do to stop the next move of the mafia. A step he should have been taking. But nothing was coming to mind. This was far beyond every other contract he had ever taken, and he began to doubt if he was the right man for the job.

He jumped when Viktor hugged him from behind, the movement hesitant, as if Yuuri was a small skittish animal. Yuuri readied to fight it, but melted into it instead, taking comfort where he could.

“I’m going to need to back to Russia for a while,” Viktor whispered, reluctantly with each breath. “I don’t know for how long, or when I can next see you.”
Yuuri felt sickened by the disappointment he felt inside of himself. A voice inside of him wanted to demand to know why, to remind Viktor that it was him that had said he wanted to see Yuuri every day, that there was not a day he wanted to miss. But he kept it inside, knowing it sounded pitiful, and that it was not what he wanted to feel. He reminded himself it was peaceful without Viktor around, where he could do as he wanted and not be wracked with suspicions. But the disappointment was still there, in the very centre of his being.

“Oh,” he replied instead, surprised by the steadiness in his voice. “I see.”

“I’m sorry.”

“It’s fine.”

“There’s just some work I need to do.”

Work that you can’t tell me, Yuuri thought, but refrained from speaking it. “I see.”

They faded into silence again, and Yuuri gripped Viktor’s arms tightly in his hand. As if it could stop him from leaving. The anger was returning slightly, suspicions of what was to come. He was an emotional being as was, but he noticed he became even more so when Viktor was concerned. Emotions and feelings he hadn’t ever felt before sprung up at the mere mention of Viktor’s name, feelings he had never considered before. Perhaps that was what having soulmates and enemies did, or reserved just for them and their strange connection.

Viktor pulled him tighter, and Yuuri followed, turning around to hug Viktor properly. He wanted to ask what it was Viktor was going to be doing, what was taking him away, but at the same time he didn’t want to know. He felt like he wouldn’t be prepared, and he knew he wouldn’t have answered if the roles had been reversed.

“Are you going to be here when I come back?” Viktor asked, and the question was loaded.

Things were never going to be simple, of that Yuuri knew very well now. He had known since he noticed the name on his wrists, had known since he knew what that meant. He was never going to have that perfect ending that the books made, or the films portrayed. And having met Viktor now, he wasn’t so convinced that what the children had said when he was younger was just talk – this could very well end with the death of one.
Which side do you feel more? Enemy? Or soulmate? Yuuri knew that was an important question, and he didn’t want to face it. Either way, he was doomed.

“I don’t know,” he answered honestly. He had hidden here to get away from Viktor. Now that he had been found, he had no reason to remain. “If you could guess, how long do you think you’ll be?”

The silence that followed was enough to drop Yuuri’s spirits. He tore himself away from Viktor, looking anywhere but the man’s piercing gaze.

Viktor said after a while, “I can visit. I can take time out of work to visit and-”

“Viktor, you don’t need to bother. Your job is important.”

“And so are you.”

There was something Yuuri knew the man was keeping from him, something that lined the words Viktor spoke. There was always a second of reluctance before he spoke, but Yuuri didn’t want to ask. Pride stopped him. “It’s fine, Viktor. If you have something to do, then you have to do it.” Because in a way, Yuuri could respect that.

“Is there a way I can contact you then, if I need to?”

Yuuri paused, thinking, a voice screaming that that was a bad idea. He was an enemy, and not just an enemy, but his enemy, destined and fate-given. But another voice said that anywhere he went, Viktor would be able to find him anyway, as he already had done once. He grabbed a pen he kept on his bedside table and pushed up Viktor’s arm to write along his skin, opposite where his own name sat, before he could convince himself not to.

If the worst came to the worst, he could always get rid of the phone. His important contacts were safely recorded somewhere only he knew, so he wouldn’t lose much.

“There,” he said as he finished, pulling down Viktor’s sleeves down. “It’s my personal phone.”
Viktor was still for a moment, arm still outstretched, before he quickly cupped Yuuri’s chin and pulled him into a kiss, a press harder than it had been before. But this was not hungry, only desperate, as if they were not seeing one another for years, perhaps ever. Yuuri kissed back, gripping Viktor just as tightly.

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Viktor didn’t stay around for much longer. Yuuri sat on the chair at his kitchen table, listening to the empty space, hand tapping against the surface. He began to wonder if he should have let Viktor go, because the suspicion began to rise again.

Viktor had said he wanted to see him every day, and already he was going back on his word. Going back to the mafia. Yuuri didn’t want to think about it, because perhaps this meant this was where they stood, where they would forever be. And in thinking that, it was like he was admitting that he cared about it. He didn’t want to be like people he had known before, those who focused on their fates so much. He always thought he could be more than it. Now wasn’t the time to be proven wrong.

He felt sickened by his realisation that as soon as Viktor was gone, he was at a loss of what to do. He’d spent most of his life without the man, enough time to learn how to be by himself. He’d spent only a few days with Viktor, and already he could feel his resolve crumbling.

He quickly checked his laptop, checking the Phichits he had sent out. Not one had been touched, and there hadn’t been any sightings of any of the other mafia members since his meeting Mila and Viktor. He checked the clock, noticing only half an hour had gone.

The question Viktor had asked seeped into his mind once more. Was he going to be here when Viktor returned? No. The answer was something he already knew. He knew he couldn’t stay in one place for too long, and already he had spent a week here. He couldn’t push it, especially not since he’d already been found.

He began to play with the idea of leaving. It appealed to him more than he would have liked to admit, knowing that the imprint of Viktor already littered the apartment. The bedroom smelled of him, aftershave wafting through the living room, chair still pulled out from the table where he had sat in it before. The coat stand was on the floor, pulled down unknowingly when they had thrown themselves at one another, breakfast plate still uncleaned in the sink. Everything around him reminded him of Viktor, of how the man had managed to throw himself into Yuuri’s life so easily.

Where was the plan of meeting the owner of the names and telling them to leave him alone? He
had always thought he’d meet them and say it was best to go their separate ways. But Viktor didn’t want that, and Yuuri found himself following his idea. He liked to think it was just for Phichit, but there was a part of him that chased that feeling of needing Viktor. He hadn’t been prepared for how quickly it took him.

So he began to think about places he could go, where he could move. The mafia thought he had Phichit in America, that his travels to Russia and Japan were to throw them off. And since they already had a tracker searching, perhaps he could prolong that search. He sent out more of his tails of Phichits to the corners of America, creating a paper trail of purchased travel. He hoped that was enough to distract the man searching.

Yuuri just wished he knew more about them. Chris was very good at his job, better than Yuuri had expected. It was a difficult career choice, and the man had to maintain anonymity to make sure that he didn’t befall some hideous end. The information he had, people would kill for. Not that Yuuri was interested in that – he only cared for things related to the case he was currently on, not all the other dirty little secrets that Chris kept up his sleeves.

At the moment he was blind, a situation he didn’t want to be in. Everything was a threat to his client, and as a bodyguard, the aim was to know everything and to prepare for everything. Yuuri couldn’t help but feel like he was slowly slipping, losing grip because his mind would sometimes stray to Viktor. He needed to get his mind on one place, though he knew it wouldn’t help much. He wasn’t a hacker, he couldn’t find the identity of this tracker alone. He could fight and do some of the basic digital fighting as well, but it ended there. Anyone with more experience in computers could easily destroy his efforts with a single key.

So he’d need to do what he did best, and guard. Do everything he could to divert the attention, and as much as he hated to admit it, shooting Yakov might have been one of the best things he could have done to achieve that. Yakov’s aim was on him, he suspected, or at least diverted two ways. He was no longer just some underrated bodyguard Phichit had accidentally found. He needed to start acting like the man that had managed to scare and surprise them.

And that began with creating a bread trail that led any chasers anywhere but Phichit.

He asked Chris to help with that, hinting to other informants that he trusted, some that he didn’t, that Phichit had been seen around L.A. He gave the same vague information to a few, hoping that it was enough of a solid rumour that the tracker would search there first. Yuuri made small digital bread crumbs leading that way.

It took the better part of two days to finish it, to be completely happy with how things had gone. And in those two days, there had not been a call or a message from Viktor. Not that Yuuri was waiting, but he took notice of it. No call to let Yuuri know he had landed safely, only the pulling
sensation inside of Yuuri to know that Viktor was getting further and further away. Along with the pulling, he felt a sense of dread, misery that told him he should have stopped his other half or gone with him. Every inch of distance unnerved him, but he had grown better at ignoring the feeling.

It was once the breadcrumbs had been laid out by him and Chris that he said goodbye to the apartment. Everything cleaned, everything set away and packed, he turned his back on it. Viktor’s smell hadn’t quite faded over the last few days, and that was the one thing that had him regretting his decision to move away again. But he didn’t dwell on it. At the back of his mind, he knew he’d be seeing Viktor again, and it would be then that he could smell his unique scent again.

Not that he was looking forward to it, of course.

Chris suggested that he move to L.A to make their story more plausible. As if he was checking in on Phichit, or the Phichit that they had imagined there. Perhaps that was the way to go about it, drawing all of their attentions to one place. Yuuri was a little nervous though, knowing that he could very well be trapping himself. He was walking right into their views, and he didn’t want to think about what was going to come of it.

The first hint of something going wrong came when he was trapped in the air, thirty thousand feet above ground, flying first class across America. He’d been wary, as he always was, watching out subtly for anything following or watching. He’d been confident that he hadn’t seen anyone, despite his obviousness. It seemed that when he didn’t want people following, they were, and when he needed them, they weren’t.

But there was plenty of time for that. He and Chris had plans for when he landed.

It seemed those plans had come a little earlier than they expected, however, as he began to notice something strange. Underneath the feeling of his and Viktor’s connection being pulled further and further, he could sense someone staring. He turned in his seat, following the food cart as he surveyed the area.

He couldn’t see anyone but the child a few rows back gargling towards him, infatuated with the massive beehive of the woman sitting a row before him. Other than that, everyone seemed to be so immersed in their own conversations, some sleeping, some looking out of the windows, that Yuuri knew it couldn’t have been them. No one stuck out, no single person striking alarm bells inside his head.

He turned back around, feeling the skin tingle at the back of his head. There was something odd, but he couldn’t put his finger on it. He turned to look out of the window, seeing the expanse of
America passing beneath him, dots of clouds occasionally obscuring his view. He wondered if he was being paranoid, if this was the same feeling that had driven Viktor to attempting to cut off the names on his wrists. As the thought dawned on him, he felt the fear lace through his veins like ice.

It could have been the instinct he based himself off of for years, the instincts honed by a career as a bodyguard. There was no reason to be paranoid. No one here was a threat to Viktor. If anything, they were a threat to Phichit.

He thought the feeling might fade after some time, but it didn’t. It only grew the more he didn’t look, as if the person was slowly gaining more confidence to stare with unabashed observation. Yuuri fiddled, heart thumping, unsure of what to do.

He turned in his chair and glanced around, but once again he couldn’t find anyone. With a sudden fear, he began to follow the plane stewards and stewardesses, wondering if perhaps one of them had been planted. But none seemed to be looking either, too preoccupied with the needs of their passengers. Yuuri glanced around once more before he turned away, opening a magazine to preoccupy his wandering mind.

Useless celebrity gossip stared back at him. Shaming celebrities for their body images, disbelief for who had slept with who, rumours of the world of film and who was dating who, who was appearing in what. Yuuri had never had any interest in anything like that, but he flicked through it anyway, a desire for the words to take away the feeling that was getting under his skin. The words were refusing to be read, however, each sentence needing to be read again and again for it to finally sink in. He couldn’t think properly, and he turned to look again.

He managed to catch the eye of someone, and for a moment he thought he might have finally figured it out. But he soon deduced it was just a bored passenger, attempting to read the magazine he had been reading, anything to catch his own wandering eyes. Their eyes connected for a few seconds, the man almost daring Yuuri to break it, before he looked away at the tap of the woman beside him. Not him then, just another bored passenger.

He tried to ignore the feelings then as he continued on the journey, spending hours pushing it away. There was nothing that could be done at this point, as was. He could not run in the sky. Nor could whoever was watching make a move as they flew.

He became more wary as the plane touched down though. He stayed away from those around him, separating himself from the group as they walked. Time slipped slowly, back shivering. His heart was thrumming loudly in his ears, deafening the sound of the other passengers’ speaking. He could still feel a piercing gaze, unsure of where it was coming from. It was roaming his back. But every time he glanced backwards to catch someone staring, he couldn’t ever catch them.
He began to look for any single passenger, separated from the group as he was. It would most likely be male, but he looked through the females as well. But any criteria for a spy he had been trained to observe was not obvious, most of the passengers in a family or were young teens. They could have been faking it, even hired actors to play a family, but he doubted someone would go so far.

The lobby of the airport was busy, packed with those leaving and arriving, the bag carrousel a war to get to. Yuuri waited for it to clear before he reached for his own as it made its third spin around on the conveyer belt. He made his way to the front, the darkness of the night setting in as the lights of the airport attempted to keep it at bay. Lines of taxis waited with the purr of their engines outside, some attempting to attract the attentions of travels, others reading newspapers without a care. Yuuri quickly checked his phone, memorising the place that he and Chris had found.

Still he felt the stare, having moved from his back to his head, boring in so hard he thought he might have a hole dug out. He turned around, attempting one last time to catch the person. But once again, there was nothing. This person was good. He knew it was a good thing that he had been seen here, as per their plan, but now paranoia settled deeply within his heart. Somehow, this person had figured out where he was, and that he was catching a flight across America. Their plan wasn’t set into motion until the moment he landed, and yet his pursuer seemed to be a step further forward than he had expected.

He caught a taxi to the centre of the city, drowning in neon lights and sleepless inhabitants. Yuuri was sure that if it had been day, it would have looked very much the same. He’d never been to L.A before, but he had heard the stories, seen how it was portrayed in all of the films and the series. A grand place where anything could come true, where connections were everything and glamour walked the streets. Anything and everything could be found, and people liked to assume that only the best managed to find a life there. A harsh life, but a luxurious life if it could be reached.

It wasn’t long before he began to feel the stare again. That was when Yuuri knew it was more than paranoia. He’d lost the feeling since stepping into the taxi and for a while after he had left it. The person had spent that time finding him.

He rushed through the streets, bumping into a few people as he went. Where he was staying was just a little further ahead, around a few corners and across the bustling roads. But despite the late hour, crowds were gathering, making it harder for him to cross.

That was when he began to feel the person drawing close. He couldn’t express how, it wasn’t like when Viktor was near. With Viktor, it was more than a feeling, a pull that told him that Viktor was coming and where he was. It felt tight in his chest right now, telling him they were thousands of miles apart. This person sparked his instincts, the hairs on the back of his neck telling him that it
was getting closer but not from which direction.

He rushed to get away from whoever was following, not realising that he was walking closer to it. He walked through a pocket of calm, between a group of squealing girls and a few teenagers smoking something Yuuri didn’t like the smell of. They were distracted, consumed by their own lives. It was how no one noticed when Yuuri was pulled into an open doorway.

He reached for his guns, but something locked his hands together. He moved to scream, but something covered his mouth. So he began to struggle and kick everywhere he could, feeling his foot connect with someone’s leg. They grumbled behind him, caught off guard, but they didn’t let go. He continued trying anyway, pulling so hard until his shoulders began to ache and his lungs seemed to almost burst into flames.

The fear began to properly set in as he realised that whatever he did, nothing seemed to stop it. He heard footsteps. Two people, there were two people. He used everything he could remember in his training, pausing to lower their guard before he thrashed again, hoping to take them by surprise.

But nothing was working. Every time he struggled, the locks on his wrists began to tighten until it rubbed painfully. The hand against his mouth clamped down harder, drawing his head back at an awkward angle. There were rushed words, foreign, a language Yuuri didn’t understand. He thought he recognised some words, but the voices were hurried.

A shadow crossed the darkness beside him, small, slim. He thought for a second it might be a girl, the owner of the hand across his mouth was a man. A woman and a man, he remembered, trying to understand everything he could about the situation. Take notice of everything, his training said. Remember the smells, what they’re wearing, the place, the sounds. How tall they were, what their voices sounded like.

But then he felt the unmistakable shape of a barrel of a gun press against his side. He stilled, eyes trying to adjust to the darkness. The gun was pressed harder into his ribs, and he grunted against the hand. They exchanged rushed words once more before he felt an explosion of pain across the back of his head. He blacked out immediately.

Chapter End Notes

WOOPS
The action and danger is back! :3 And proper cliffhangers as well XD

Also, thank you all so much for the support after what happened last week! Honestly, I can't believe how supportive people are. It's amazing, and thank you all so much <3
And for those who celebrate it, Merry Soon Christmas! For those who don't, I hope you have an amazing week as well! <3

You can find me on tumblr for updates and more [here](#).
Yuuri slowly regained consciousness, brought back from the noises and smells around him.

He didn’t open his eyes, instead stayed in the prone position he had been placed in. His surroundings came to him slowly, the world blurred to his ringing ears. Voices, deep, whispering. Foreign. They were the first things that came to his aching head. Then there was a deep scent, settled over him, almost like smoke from a fire. Beyond that, he heard no echo, no other voices, no tapping of countless footsteps. They were no longer outside.

As he regained complete conscience, his training kicked in. He knew he was sat on a chair, hands tied behind him, metal, tighter than any he had experienced before. He kept his head bowed, chin pressed to his chest, feet tied to the legs of the chair. There was a small breeze, some heat to his right, the crackle of a dying flame, an open window. They were in a room, it was quiet out of the window. They weren’t in the city anymore. The man’s voice was to his right, perhaps by the fire, the girl’s behind. It must have been a small room, because they were close.

The most worrying thing he noticed though was behind him. He felt the metal digging into his wrists, but low, close, and the skin above it was exposed. His sleeves had been pulled up, his bandages taken off. His tattoos were completely on show.

He calmed himself, evening his breathing, making sure he hadn’t drawn the two with his panic. His heart was racing, forehead sweating, arms aching from being pulled back for so long. His legs were numb, the back of his head was throbbing. There was an odd light before his closed lids, red and dark. He suspected it might have only been a few hours, still in the middle of the night. Or he could have been knocked out for a very long time.

One thing he was sure of – these people had planned this. As he listened to their chatter, unable to understand anything, he listed the evidence in his head. They had followed him in the plane, all the way to L.A. One. They had set ahead and pulled him into an open doorway as he walked by. Two. They must have a. had others helping to drag him away without anyone noticing or b. planned it all in advance. Either way, this was not a typical mugging or kidnapping. And if his exposed wrists
meant anything, he suspected it would have something to do with the mess he had found himself in.

They weren’t speaking Russian, he knew. It sounded more fluid, more western European. Spanish or Italian, perhaps. But he wasn’t sure. He was going by the few times he had ever heard either, in TV series or spoken with comedic effect by friends and colleagues. For all he knew, it could have been German even, but he doubted it.

What did they have to do with Viktor and the mafia? If that was their motive. Perhaps they were involved with Phichit. Maybe they were some of the enemies Viktor had been worried about.

Had they been waiting to see Viktor go? Had they been watching for a long time? Yuuri didn’t let it get to him, though he hated the thought of someone watching from a distance for so long and Yuuri hadn’t even noticed. But he reminded himself that it wasn’t something he had been trained in - He was used to stalkers of his clients, not his own.

As time passed, it became harder and harder to remain ‘unconscious’. His neck was aching, his ass in desperate need to be moved, limbs growing cold. The two in the room hadn’t noticed his rousing yet, but continued to speak, some words laced with anger. They walked around, and rustled in what Yuuri thought might have been his bags. Anger began to rise above the panic at the thought.

The holsters underneath his clothing were empty. He could feel it when he pressed his arms closer to his sides. His guns had been taken.

Perhaps his anger had shown through some. Perhaps his breathing had become uneven, perhaps he was glaring, or perhaps he was just releasing that sort of aura. Because all of a sudden it was quiet, his two kidnappers pausing mid conversation, every step stopped. Yuuri didn’t let it get to him, but he knew he had done something wrong.

There was one step, one warning before he felt a hand lace itself through his hair and pull painfully until his head was pulled back, head almost bumping against the back of the chair. He grunted, his scalp flaring in pain, eyes opening and almost tearing up.

A woman was staring down at him, face hovering over his upside down. He did everything he could to memorise it, saw the delicate features, tanned skin, small nose, big purple eyes and the way her dark hair cascaded over him. She had long lashes that touched her cheek when she blinked. It would have been beautiful had her eyes not held so much hatred.
For a few seconds, they stared at one another. Yuuri decided he would not be the one to break the silence, keeping his lips locked. The girl was the first to look away, turning to the other kidnapper in the room and speaking harsh words. Her hand did not unlace itself from his hair, and he breathed through his nose to relieve some of the tension.

When she did finally let go, he quickly moved his head to sit straight again, feeling the gush of oxygen rush back through his windpipe. He gasped, his lungs filled to the brim once more. Standing before him was a man, taller than the woman, with the same tanned skin, same delicate features, same purple eyes, but his hair was lighter, cut and styled shorter. There were striking resemblances, and he wondered if they were siblings.

In the man’s hands was a gun, facing the floor but finger on the trigger, ready to pull. His clothes were dark, tight, just as he had seen from the glimpse of the girl. As his boss sometimes liked to call them, they were sneaking clothes. He didn’t remember them from the flight though, perhaps he hadn’t taken notice of them. He cursed himself, knowing he needed to do better.

From the corner of his eyes, he noticed that they were in the middle of what seemed to be an old hotel room, long stripped away with a barely working fireplace and graffiti on the walls, darker than he had thought it might be. He wanted to look around more, see how the window was open, if it was easy to escape through. But the ties around his ankles and wrists were tight and he didn’t want to be the first to break the stare he and the man before him were having.

He could almost laugh at the man, now able to say that his stare was nothing like Viktor’s. Viktor held power, an aura of danger surrounding him, and his stare was a scary and intimidating thing. This man’s gaze paled in comparison. He almost let a smirk slip at the thought.

The girl, whom Yuuri thought might have been the man’s sister, moved to stand beside him, a gun in her own hands. Hers was a smaller pistol, safety on and trigger finger lining the barrel. She was more careful, Yuuri thought. Her body language was looser, walk like a catwalk, aware but not overly worried. The man was different – he was closed off and standing consciously, wanting to make an impression on Yuuri that really wasn’t happening.

The girl drew his attention, waving something in the air. Three passports were held in her hand.

“Which is your real name?” she asked, her voice high and sweet, but with an underlying power.

Yuuri did almost smile at that, a deep sense of deja vu striking his thoughts. Not long ago, he was in the same situation, hands tied behind a chair, Viktor lining his documents before him and demanding to know which was real. Just as it had been then, they were all fake.
The two exchanged glances and the woman dropped the passports to the floor, a tut clicking her tongue against the roof of her mouth. She moved to a table beside the wall, one leg shorter than the others and supported by a mount of rubbish. Yuuri’s bags were opened and messed atop it, his things lying out in a pile. She flipped through them again, throwing things to the floor and shoving others aside. Documents, important and not important, scattered onto the floor, making Yuuri wince. None of it was dangerous for others to know. Yuuri knew how to be careful. But it would be difficult to make more copies.

She spoke over her shoulder at the man, back to their mother tongue, and the man replied, then conversation died.

After a while, she must have found something she wanted, because she moved away from the bag once more. In her hands was one sheet of paper. It was his confirmation of travel between New York and L.A. He didn’t think it was that important, but the woman was reading it over as if it was the most crucial thing someone could ever find.

But, he guessed, it could have been. It confirmed where he was, where he had come from. If they really had followed him, evidence was there, right in their hands. And if they knew Viktor had been there too, then there was only a matter of time before they figured out who he was. Yuuri felt the air of the outside skim across his exposed arms, and reminded himself they probably already knew.

No, no they might not have known his name. But they knew who he was connected to, and they knew how. If they had deciphered the language, that was, but he was willing to bet that they had. As he had figured out as a teen, it was easy to translate names with how the internet was. His classmates and friends had easily translated theirs if they were in a different language – the only reason it was difficult for him was because he didn’t want to translate to begin with.

Assume they already know, Yuuri thought. Assume the worst and think of ways out of it. Assume they already know your name, and think of how to not let go of any more information. Assume they know about Phichit. Assume they know about Viktor. Assume they know everything, and get rid of it.

A fake name was on those documents still, Yuuri making sure he went to any lengths that he could to remain invisible – especially with someone like Yakov now gunning for him. But trouble always seemed to find him. Where were the days in which he was a simple bodyguard, guarding a spoiled young pop star that cared only for their hair and the labels on their back? The only threat then were squealing girls and psychotic stalkers, all the same motives, all the same easy catches. Those had been easy, predictable, and he had become a boss at dealing with those cases – it was why he had so many of them, because the same clients had heard about his specialised field. Not that he had
wanted it. Now he sat tied to a chair, contemplating how something like it had become a norm. He was much calmer than last time, and he never would have thought he could say that.

The woman spoke again, glancing up from the paper to ask, “What was New York like?”

“Cold,” Yuuri replied, figuring there was no use in denying it. Be one step ahead, he thought. Take this time to plan steps, figure a way out. Treat it carefully and wait for the perfect moments.

“Any interesting cafes?”

Yuuri let the comment slide over his head, though he could see the meaning behind the woman’s eyes. She was trying to goad him into slipping up, but he wouldn’t do that. He would be careful. “They’re all the same once you’ve been to more than one.”

“You went to quite a few.”

“And they all blended into one.” So they had been watching him, just as he had feared. And yet they didn’t know his name? He suspected that it was a ploy, or a game. There was no way they had followed that closely and still didn’t have the basic information.

“Your apartment was quite small.”

“I didn’t need much more space.”

The woman narrowed her eyes, and the hint of a smirk was trying to pull at her lips. Yuuri caught it before she managed to fight it down. “Not even when someone moved in?”

She thought she was being good. She thought she was pushing Yuuri into a corner, close to making him break. But she must not have been as knowing as she thought she was, because she didn’t know that it took a lot to break Yuuri. Words rarely surprised him, and he knew that if he had stood up against Viktor, he could stand up to her. She seemed younger, and though she didn’t seem less experienced, she struck him as the type to have to go through one thing a thousand times to become a master of it. Viktor picked things up easily, without even meaning to. Yuuri knew which one had the most potential to be frightening.
“We made things work,” Yuuri replied. If he was being honest, more than scaring him, this woman was angering him. How dare she think she can do anything she wanted, kidnapping him and probably soon to demand information. How dare she think she could play. He wondered if Viktor could feel these emotions, or if he felt the knock to his head that had rendered him unconscious. But they hadn’t felt each other’s gun shots, of which ached in his arm now from the pull of the ties behind the chair.

“Well, not just soulmate. But an enemy too. I had always wondered that, you know. Who would be the one to be his true, fateful Enemy when he has so many as is? I used to wonder if it was possible to have more than one name on one wrist.” She made a gesture towards Yuuri with her gun, making him flinch slightly. “Turns out it’s the opposite. You can actually have only one name for both. If anyone was going to have such a mess, it was going to be him.”

“Do you often invite men to share your apartment?”

“Only the handsome ones,” Yuuri replied. He glanced at the man, the one with the itchy trigger finger still settled, ready to shoot the floor. He hadn’t spoken much, and Yuuri began to wonder if he understood English or left it up to her. His gaze flitted between them, stood stock still, shoulders back and a glare that screamed practiced.

“You certainly picked the most dangerous… or, no, most exciting to be your partner then,” she said, tapping the gun against her thigh. For a moment, she paused, biting her lip and thinking. Then she commented, “But then, I guess you didn’t pick him, did you? Poor thing. To have such a man as your soulmate.”

Yuuri turned his attention back to her. “Makes for an exciting encounter, don’t you think?”

Yuri’s blood ran cold. He had prepared himself, because his exposed arms proved that they had already read them. But he had been hoping against hope that they couldn’t translate it. Once again, fate seemed to want to destroy his ideas.

“He makes such a mess of everyone else’s lives, it’s only fair,” the man said, his first words chilling the air. He spoke with such venom in his voice, deep rooted hatred clear in every word he spoke. It almost made Yuuri flinch again, just from the spit.
The girl turned to stare at him. “Quite. But he deserves a little more of a mess, don’t you think?”

The man nodded, raising his arm to aim the gun at Yuuri. Yuuri pushed himself back on the chair, an attempt at escape until he remembered the tight ties on his body. He stared down the barrel of the gun, waiting for the pull of the trigger, for the explosion of sound before he remembered nothing else. His thoughts were if Viktor would feel it, feel his fear, feel the oncoming death. But the trigger wasn’t pulled, and it took Yuuri a few moments before he realised the man wasn’t going to.

“I do feel sorry for you,” the woman continued, the smirk on her lips too hard to contain now. “You poor thing, the one tied so heavily to such a monster. I thought I’d always feel pity for his soulmate, whoever they were. I feel more pity for you now, knowing you probably didn’t deserve this.”

Yuuri glared back. He didn’t need to be pitied. He’d had enough of that as a child, when words of murder were passing the children’s mouths, saying he’d end up being murdered by the love that fate had decided for him. He didn’t need this from this woman as well, someone who had kidnapped him and was threatening him. “Believe me, I can handle it,” he replied.

She raised one brow, taken aback by his declaration. “You want to be able to handle such a man? You want to have something to do with a monster?”

“I didn’t say that. I’m saying I can handle him. It doesn’t mean anything more, anything less.”

The two before him exchanged glances, an unspoken conversation crossing their gazes. Yuuri didn’t like the look of it. He had hoped that with how different they were, that he could worm his way in the middle somehow and get himself out. But that glance told him a story, told him that they had known each other for years. They were close, and Yuuri killed his idea off before it could backfire. He couldn’t afford to make more mistakes, especially now knowing that they seemed linked with Viktor.

Enemies. Viktor had said he had many enemies, and Yuuri had no doubt that those people were strong. How he had become the only one to have his name on that side of Viktor’s wrists, he didn’t know. What made him more worthy of being a fateful enemy to the man than these people before him? He didn’t know, and he didn’t really want to ask. He didn’t want the answer.

A few words passed them in a rushed whisper, falling deaf on Yuuri’s ears. It was at times like these that Yuuri wished he had learned more languages in his school life, and as a course during his time in his career. Many of his colleagues knew other languages, seeing it as important if they
happened to get a client that didn’t speak English well. Yuuri thought he wouldn’t get anyone but Americans, and so he hadn’t attempted to learn other languages. He thought knowing Japanese and English was enough. Now he wished he had learned more, or even enough to be able to understand what language this was.

The woman stepped forwards and bent at the waist. She stared into Yuuri’s eyes, biting her lips, searching for something. Her soft hair fell over her shoulders, some slipping passed Yuuri’s nose and tickling his skin, but she didn’t back up.

“No wonder he kept his tattoos constantly hidden,” she said, as if speaking to herself more than to Yuuri. “We all knew he was hiding the soulmate side so nothing happened to them, but it never made sense why he kept his enemy tattoo hidden. People thought it was because people would search for you and join you in a massive army against him. He’s made enough enemies to make one, after all. But to think you were both sides, both soulmate and enemy. What a cruel fate to have. I’ve never heard of such things before.”

“Aren’t you chatty?” Yuuri commented, feeling agitated at the lack of structure in the woman’s interrogation. No threats, no direct questions, no demands. He wanted her to get to the point already, to do as he expected and make a move. At least with that he knew where he stood.

The woman smiled, eyes bright. “Feisty. I can sort of start seeing why you’re made for one another.”

“What do you want?”

“I want to make him pay for the things he’s done to us.”

“And those are?”

“Why don’t you ask him?”

Yuuri wanted to, but at the same time he found he didn’t. He had been prepared, getting to know Viktor involved getting to know things he had done. He wasn’t mafia for nothing. He knew there was going to be things in Viktor’s past that he didn’t agree with, and perhaps that was one way they were enemies. He thought back to the first thing he had seen of Viktor, of pulling out a gun in the middle of a crowded place, uncaring of those screaming around him. He had thought then how wrong that was. Just because he had agreed to see Viktor now, to give both sides a change, didn’t
mean he disillusioned himself into thinking that everything was a misunderstanding.

“Do you love him?” the woman asked, the question coming from nowhere. “Or do you hate him? It must be a mess of emotion considering you’re meant to do both.”

“What are you going to do to me?” Yuuri asked, attempting to ignore the question.

“I wonder how he sees it too. Does he hate you or love you? How long have you known each other? You seemed pretty close in the New York apartment.”

Yuuri ignored it again, attempting to fight down the blush that wanted to bloom on his cheeks. “Are you going to try and hurt me or kill me to get back at him?”

“It must really hurt,” she continued, ignoring him in turn too. “Such conflicting feelings. You’re a bodyguard right? You fight for the safety of people, while Viktor is normally the type you fight against. It makes more sense for you two to be enemies than soulmates.”

“He won’t care, you know. We aren’t that close. We spent too much time fighting to develop any soulmate feelings.”

“I don’t see a way for you two to work things out. Left to your own devices, you’d probably end up killing each other.”

Yuuri grit his teeth, unable to ignore it any longer. Anger rose inside of him, burning in his heart, flaming the blood that flushed through his veins. He was sick and tired of people assuming that they knew where his relationship was going. He and Viktor had yet to work things out, so why were people thinking they could assume it for them? He knew that death was likely the biggest outcome of their relationship, a higher likelihood than any other connection. But that didn’t mean it was right for people to think it was a sure outcome, an unavoidable wall that would crush everything they had worked for. He burned with rage, and he knew it showed in his eyes and his expression, because the woman straightened up and backed off. For just a second, she looked scared.

“Then why don’t you just let it happen?” he asked, voice lower and colder than he had heard before. Even in his arguments with Viktor, he had never felt such animosity in his own voice. “If you want to get rid of him so much, then let us just kill each other. Then he’s out of your way.”
“But that’s not our revenge,” she replied, as if the answer was obvious. The fear in her eyes was gone, though it left hesitancy. “We would have had no part in it.”

“And who are you?” Yuuri asked, the ice not completely gone from his voice yet. “Who is it that wants revenge against him so much?”

The woman nodded at the man, who in turn nodded back, as if silently agreeing on something. She turned back and said, “Our names are Sara and Michele Crispino, of the Crispino famiglia.”

Yuuri almost groaned, the wrong reaction to what he had already guessed. “Italian mafia?”

“That’s right. We’ll carve our names into your skin for Viktor to read when we send you back to him.”

Yuuri shivered, though he hoped that they hadn’t seen. There was truth in her words, deep and rooted. He did wonder what it was that Viktor had done to warrant such hatred, but he thought he might already know. He remembered reading in the news every now and then about mafia families at war, simply because they weren’t of the same group. Was there animosity between the Russians and Italians? Was this perhaps just history? But then again, he wouldn’t put it passed Viktor doing something to only darken their connection and bring out revenge-seekers.

Yuuri gritted his teeth, clenching his jaw. Of all the times Viktor had decided to leave, it was now. But perhaps these people had waited for that. They watched and they waited for Yuuri to walk alone, Viktor thousands of miles away. Yuuri wanted to think that it showed that they hadn’t researched him enough, because he wasn’t one to just sit during a kidnapping and allow things to happen, or wait for people to come in and save him. But as he tugged once more on his bonds, he knew he wasn’t breaking himself out of it any time soon.

“I’ve already told you,” he attempted, “that he wouldn’t care. We’ve not known each other for that long. We haven’t gotten close.”

“It doesn’t matter. You’re his soulmate, and regardless of if you two were close or not, it’s going to be a severe loss to him. He’ll feel the moment you stop breathing, the moment we carve our names into your skin. He’ll feel your fear, your pain. He’ll know the exact second it is you died. It doesn’t matter if he didn’t know you, he’ll still feel it like he’s lost a part of himself.” She thought for a moment, eyes grazing over Yuuri’s being. “Perhaps he’ll feel it more since you’re not just a soulmate.”
Yuuri could feel the sweat beginning to slip down the back of his neck. At least with Viktor, he had his information to keep him alive. But here he had nothing. His only meaning of existence to them was to kill for Viktor’s pain.

Michele, the boy, smirked at him, as if he had already seen the nerves beginning to show through Yuuri’s composure. “You really take ‘Keeping your enemies close’ to a new level, huh?”

Yuuri glared, a flush rising on his cheeks, despite his attempt to keep it down. He didn’t need people making assumptions and comments on his and Viktor’s relationship, not when they hadn’t figured it out themselves. He didn’t need that pity, that discrimination. He’d had enough. He began to think of ways that he could turn things around.

But he paused when Sara stepped forwards. Her free hand reached behind her, taking something from her back pocket, and out came a flip knife. Yuuri gasped, pushing himself back in his chair, as she opened it. It shone in the low light, almost blinding, showing off the large blade. It was clean, sharp, most probably new. Most probably bought for this one occurrence.

She stepped behind him, lightly pressing the tip against his neck, gliding it along his skin. He rose his head, trying to keep as far from it as he could, but the sweat was beading down his skin, his movements restricted. It was light, he could barely feel it, but the nerves on his skin were setting off like tiny explosions against his pulse. He’d never felt his heart beat so fast.

“I’m sorry,” she whispered, her head closer to Yuuri’s ear than he had realised. “I know you didn’t want to get caught up in this. You seem like a nice guy. But-”

She was cut off when Yuuri threw his head back. The back of his head collided with her face, feeling the crack of her nose underneath his force, the knife taken away. It had sliced his skin a little in the retreat, and he could feel one bead of blood slipping down to pool at his collarbone. But it was a shallow slice, more like a scratch than anything. He felt the relief flood him.

Michele gasped, dropping his arm and taking away the gun aimed at Yuuri as he rushed to his sister’s side. Yuuri could hear Sara gasping behind him, voice muffled as her hand covered her nose. He suspected he might have broken it, or hoped he had. He took their distraction to try and untie himself, but the cuffs were digging into his skin. The restraints were too tight, he couldn’t get out.

There was movement behind, panicked words of Italian, shuffling as Michele tried to bring his sister to stand up again. Yuuri thought he might have heard droplets against the wood flooring. He hoped it was blood. He tried to turn his head to see, feeling unsettled that they were out of view and
behind him with weapons. But any way he moved he couldn’t see them.

“I’m fine, Michele,” Sara grunted, though her voice sounded strained.

There was some argument, but it stopped when Sara snapped something. Then there was silence, and Yuuri became more unsettled. There was no shuffling, no talk, just two people breathing behind him. He could feel their stares at the back of his head, and he wondered if this was going to be the last thing he saw – the cold walls, bare flooring, graffiti, a stripped door, a cockroach in the corner of the room, before the gun was aimed again and shot through the back of his head.

The image played in his mind and he could feel bile beginning to rise at the back of his throat. For just a second, he was the most scared that he had ever been. And that involved his encounters with Viktor, and his shooting of Yakov.

But then there were footsteps again, and they were circling around to face him once more. Sara had blood streaming down her face, dripping from her chin. The red was bright against her tanned skin, framed by dark locks and dark clothes. It looked dramatic. There were some smears on her cheek from where she had tried to wipe it away, but only to be replaced with more streaming blood. She stared at him with cold eyes, gaze mirrored by the fury that Michele held in his.

Sara’s nose didn’t look broken. It looked as it had before Yuuri had crashed his skull against it. But he’d done some damage. Not that it had helped anything but his pride.

“Like I said, feisty,” Sara whispered.

“So appropriate for someone such as Viktor,” Michele added.

Their voices had grown so cold, dropping the temperature of the room. Yuuri held in another shudder and tried to glare back at them, but he was almost shaking. They were both so young, and he suspected that they were younger than him. And yet they held so much power. Yuuri wondered if this was what the mafia did to people, ignored age and made them into this.

But as Michele’s words settled into his mind, he began to get angrier. He was sick of people telling him that he was a fit for Viktor, that he was Viktor’s, that he was just something to accompany the man. Had no one considered him? Had no one thought if Viktor was good enough for him?
“Take a picture,” Michele continued, turning to look at his sister. “We can send it to Viktor. Make him feel weak.”

The words struck an idea in Yuuri’s mind. He leaned forwards and rushed to say his piece before Sara could reply. “Why don’t you use me to draw him here? You want revenge. You want him out of the way. If you get him here alone, you can set a trap.” Admittedly, it was more out of his need to survive that he suggested it. But he was also reminded of the fury Viktor had when he stormed rooms, loaded with weapons and determination. Viktor was smart, he’d know it was a trap and he’d get Yuuri out.

Michele and Sara stared at him as if he had three heads. Then Sara shook her head and said, “Viktor would tear us apart. We prefer to stay as far away from him as we can before we have complete control. He’s far stronger than us.”

Yuuri understood that. He had suspected it. “So you’re happy just getting revenge from a distance?”

“Our revenge is a long-planned thing. Cause him pain for years, before we’re strong enough to aim for him.”

“And that begins with killing me?”

“That it does,” Sara replied, drawing attention to the knife once more. She raised it, careful with her moves now as she stepped forwards, closer to Yuuri. “Michele, hold his head for me, would you?”

Yuuri began to thrash against the bonds, but Michele placed the gun back in his holster before he clutched tightly at Yuuri’s head, stopping him completely. His fingers were too far, pulled back when Yuuri tried to bite at them to stop it. Yuuri stilled again as he felt the cool of the blade back at his neck. It was pressed harder this time, intentions clear. He waited for the slice.

But it was stopped when a sound on the other side of the door filled their quiet space. All three bodies froze, gazes all turning to the door. Another thump, as if something had fallen off of the walls, before there was silence on the other side. The siblings behind him whispered in their mother tongue, an argument weaving its way in.

Yuuri knew better than to hope it was Viktor. In his mind, he played it over and over again, Viktor storming in with a kick to the door, guns in his hands and rage burning in his eyes. But his chest
told him that Viktor was far away, just as far as he’d been only hours before. Viktor was just as far
as he had been when Yuuri was taken.

Once the stillness seemed to reassure them, Sara continued to press the knife harder against
Yuuri’s neck. He felt it pierce skin again, a drop of blood landing on his chest. He began to shake,
wishing that instead they’d have shot him if he was going to die. At least then the suspense
wouldn’t have made him so scared.

But all of a sudden the knife was taken away. It was the first thing he became aware of. Then
shouts followed, a thud as someone collided with the wall, the metal of a gun scraping along the
wooden floor. A gush of wind invaded the room, and Yuuri knew the window was more open than
it had already been.

A battle seemed to rage behind him, but as he turned his head, he couldn’t see anything. The small
shallow cuts along his neck were aching, sending nerves up his spine with every movement.
Someone was scrabbling along the floor, and a gun shot exploded behind him. Yuuri might have
shouted as he curled as far as he could, but he wasn’t sure if he had. If he did, it had died among
the shouting and the noise in the air. A crash made the floor shudder, and he heard a third voice. It
was too muffled, too small, for him to identify it. Sara shouted something. Michele came into view.
He backed up against the front wall, holding his arm as blood dropped from it and a red mark was
on his cheek.

There was still scrabbling behind Yuuri, the sound of flesh hitting flesh as someone punched
someone else, a shout, grunt, another gun shot. The bullet whistled passed Yuuri’s ear to embed
itself in the wall, beside where Michele was standing. Michele had lost his gun.

Yuuri breathed hard, his lungs gasping for breath, as he stared at the man beside the door. Fear
laced his thoughts, worry that another bullet would hit him. He curled forward a little more, feeling
exposed as his back was open, tied and unable to move much. He struggled, but it cut into his
flesh. He groaned and thought tried to calm himself down.

As he was breathing, trying to calm his rapid pulse, another gun shot sounded. His head snapped
up. Michele was standing against the wall, a new gun in his hands and Yuuri’s bag open beside
him. He fired again, and in the small space, the noise ricocheted off of the walls, bullet flying to
shatter the window. Shards of glass exploded outwards, some sprinkling inwards, dancing on the
wooden floor. Soft tinkling sung through the air, somehow louder than the fighting, somehow
louder than the bullet. Some small glass shards landed beside Yuuri’s foot, to which his gaze was
drawn. It shone like moonlight underneath the lights, and a flash of red crossed it.

Something large slammed against the floor. Yuuri saw the splaying of dark hair and heard a groan,
unmistakably Sara. Michele stormed forwards, ready and aiming, but before he could pull the
trigger, something slammed into him. He fell backwards against the wall, a shout of pain as he let go of the gun. It landed at Yuuri’s feet, barrel touching the toe of his shoe.

“Mila?” he gasped quietly as he saw who it was.

She held Michele against the wall, gun pressed to his temple, arms locked in her hold. Her face was a storm, scary, with eyes like thunder. She was pressing him against the wall with a lot of force, knocking the wind from the boy. Michele’s face paled, but Yuuri had to respect how the man continued to glare, attempting to struggle free.

“You think I wouldn’t see you?” Mila snapped, her face so close to Michele’s that their noses almost touched. “You think I didn’t know you were following?”

“Mila?” Yuuri asked again, voice a little stronger. But even as silence settled, the woman still did not stir, her attention set solely on Michele.

“Why would the Crispinos send you? Sara has potential, but you?” Mila laughed, a hollow sounding thing. “Did they send you to New York without knowing I was there too?” She pressed the gun harder against the man’s temple, making him flinch in fear. “You will never be on my level.”

“Mila!” Yuuri shouted, voice cracking, shame then coursing through him at how pathetic he sounded. But it seemed to get through to the girl. She turned suddenly, eyes wide as if she remembered why it was she was here, that there was someone at all in the room other than her and Michele.

Michele used the second of hesitancy to struggle, but Mila pressed him back against the wall, trying to lock him in place again.

Yuuri then became aware of movement behind him, and by the time he realised what it was, a gun was pressed to his temple, mirrored to how Mila was treating the man. Sara’s arm wove around his neck, cupping the opposite side of his cheek, almost gently. Her hair cascaded down his shoulder as her face came level with his.

“How, now, Mila,” Sara began, and this close Yuuri could see what had knocked her down in the first place. A wound was forming on her forehead, already beginning to bruise and bleed. A bad knock to the head, and yet she had gotten up from it again. “No need to be hasty.”
Mila turned so that Michele was before her, almost as a shield. He stayed still, head tilted at an odd angle as he attempted to get away from the gun. He was watching Sara, a plea in his face, mixed with the desire to attack his trapper.

“Let Yuuri go,” Mila demanded.

Sara smiled. “Does Mr Nikiforov want him back?”

“Sara, drop the gun.”

“You drop it first.”

“Don’t make me shoot you,” Mila barked.

“If you shoot me or Michele, this bullet is going straight into Yuuri’s brain!” Sara replied, pressing it painfully against Yuuri’s head. “You were meant to be on the flight back to Russia with Viktor. Did he ask you to follow Yuuri instead? Keep him safe?”

Mila ignored the question, instead saying, “He’s just a bodyguard, Sara. He didn’t do anything to you. He got wrapped up in this and he doesn’t have a place.”

*Doesn’t have a place.* Yuuri knew it wasn’t the time and place, but he dwelled on that thought. Again, it was as if Mila knew exactly what it was that Yuuri worried about, everything that rose in his mind, every question he had ever asked and contemplated. Every issue he had ever thought of. Doesn’t have a place. Yuuri knew he didn’t. Their story wasn’t like business colleagues or meeting in school. Their world wasn’t an easy one. Of course he didn’t have a place in Viktor’s world, just as Viktor didn’t have a place in Yuuri’s. No place.

“He’s tied to Viktor,” Sara argued, voice too loud beside Yuuri’s ear.

“He didn’t ask to be.”

“But it still means something. It still means they’re suited for one another. It still says something about this guy.” She pressed it against Yuuri’s head again, making Yuuri jump and gasp.
Yuuri wanted to ask why they were talking as if he wasn’t there, though he knew it might have made him sound like an elderly parent. But he hated that others were speaking of his future without his input. They hadn’t asked once what his thoughts were on his situation.

“He’s Viktor’s enemy as well. You haven’t even tried to see what his side is yet.”

“I wouldn’t trust his word.”

Mila glared, her eyes almost blazing red. “The family really shouldn’t have sent you. I don’t want to have to kill you two, Sara.”

Yuuri’s breathing stopped. Killing. There was still talk of killing. He thought Mila might have come to save him and they’d be out of there, only having knocked the two out and left them. But killing? Every time someone mentioned it, Yuuri realised just how apart their worlds were.

“Wait, n-no,” he stammered, cutting off their arguments. “Killing? Mila, no-”

“No?” Mila asked, outrage plain in her voice. “Yuuri, they were ready to kill you.”

“But…” Yuuri couldn’t form an argument. He wanted to say how killing was bad, and as weak as it sounded, he never wanted to think about it. As a bodyguard, he was only ever taught that killing was in self-defence, his own of his clients’ protection. But as the words formed in his head, he felt them die on his tongue. Because he realised how hypocritical he sounded. He’d shot Yakov hadn’t he? And as much as he wanted to say it was for Phichit, Phichit hadn’t been in the room when it happened. As far as his training had taught, that was an assassination attempt. He deflated against the chair, staring down at the floor, the weight of it crashing into him. How could he tell Mila not to kill when he himself had almost killed her father-figure?

But there was a silence to follow, and as Yuuri looked up, he saw the conflict in Mila’s eyes as she stared at him. It lasted only a second, but she seemed to come to a quick decision. Barely enough time for the Italians to think of taking advantage. She grunted, as if hating her own decision, before she threw the gun towards Sara with such a force, Yuuri hadn’t realised it had been thrown until he felt the wind whistle beside his face, fluttering his hair. It slammed into Sara’s hand holding the gun, making her shout out in pain and drop the gun on reflex.

Mila threw Michele to the floor, knocking the wind out of him, before she crashed into Sara and...
fell down to the ground with her.

Yuuri felt the sweat dripping down his neck, heart thumping in his ears, head throbbing. He knew how close he had come to death, how close it was to Sara pulling the trigger or slicing in. Fear was stronger inside him than it had been before, and he had been wrong about the difference between Viktor and these siblings. Viktor had meaning, had an intention when he threatened. He wanted information. These people went straight to the act of murdering without wanting to know anything.

What had he done? What had he walked into?

There was a scuffle behind him, Michele trying to stand up again in front of him, but Yuuri’s attention was on his wrists though he could not see them. He wondered if this was what fate wanted of him. He was always meant to walk into this, always meant to find a life of danger. It had tied him so closely to Viktor, and this was all he was ever going to be known as – the other half of Viktor Nikiforov, a big target now painted on his back forever.

The fighting was done before he knew it, and Sara and Michele were dragged to sit together, Mila aiming her gun at them to keep them still as she unlocked the bonds on Yuuri.

The first thing he did when he was free was rub his wrists. There was a horrid red line where the cuffs had cut and chaffed, one of them crossing the soulmate name. At the back of his mind, he wondered if that was a sign. He decided against it. He’d never listened to them before, he wouldn’t now.

Mila was talking to him, but he couldn’t hear. He gathered his things and just as he was being ushered out of the door, he stopped and turned to look at the siblings. Mila was pushing his back, but he refused to go. They met his eyes, and all he saw was hatred there. Before, there hadn’t been any for him, only for who he was connected to, for who he was in fate. But now their glare was directed at him, the blood under Sara’s nose beginning to dry and cake on her skin.

Mila pushed him harder out of the door and their gazes were cut off. Yuuri didn’t fight it and walked down the hall, ignoring the building. Around him, the walls were peeling, lights swinging and many were broken. Tags and names were written along the walls, mice darting from one hole to another. It had been abandoned a long time ago, and Yuuri was surprised that such a place existed in this town.

Mila was talking, and it was only once his heart had calmed some that he managed to hear her. “… together, like, never before. Seriously. He’s an idiot. A fucking idiot.”
“What?” Yuuri asked, throat aching a little from the pressure of his voice now.

Mila turned to look at him, and that must have been when she noticed the cuts on his neck. She gasped, pressed her hand against them, but the blood had already begun to dry. She thought for a moment before she pressed them on. “I’ll have a proper look at that when we’re safe somewhere. I should have knocked them out. But maybe their injuries will distract them some while we get away.”

“They won’t come after us?” Yuuri asked, glancing over his shoulder.

“They know I’m far stronger than them. If they did, they wouldn’t see tomorrow.”

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Yuuri didn’t know where they were, only that outside was alive and busy again. They must have been closer to a city or town again, nestled in a grand hotel room, several floors up. Mila had settled him to sit on the bed and pressed a cup of hot coffee in his hands, encouraging him to inhale the fumes and drink some.

“You’re so cold,” she had muttered to herself after touching his cheek. “Probably shock.”

Shock. Was this shock? Yuuri doubted it. When people portrayed it in films, they were crying and shaking all of the time. But Yuuri didn’t think he was shaking. And he didn’t feel cold. He was just a little unfocused. He pushed his thoughts back, knowing he’d been taught how to deal with shock in training. He’d had many clients that had suffered shock, curling in a corner and crying. But he wasn’t doing that. He took a sip of the coffee, barely feeling it as the bitter taste slid down his tongue. The steam fogged his glasses, heating his skin.

Mila turned away, fixing some of the things that had fallen out of Yuuri’s bag when she threw it on the bed. “Fuck,” she muttered under her breath, so much venom accompanying her harsh movements. “It had to be you. If anyone is going to walk right into danger, it’s always him, so of course it had to be you too. You both are a perfect match.”

The words weren’t quite reaching Yuuri. He was too busy watching as the steam from the mug rose to meet his nose, a light kiss against his skin, warming it. It almost felt too searing, too hot, but he didn’t move away. Maybe he was cold. Maybe he did need to warm up.
“They were watching. Did you not notice them?” Mila asked, turning to Yuuri. But she soon noticed that he wasn’t listening, and she huffed, “Yuuri. This is serious.”

“I’m sure it is,” Yuuri replied, feeling separated from the person who answered Mila. He hadn’t known the words were going to come out, only when they had left. He tore his gaze away from the steam, and saw the lack of patience in Mila’s eyes. “I forgot he might have other enemies.”

The anger in Mila’s face seemed to dissipate almost immediately, melting into something akin to pity. She sighed loudly and rubbed her face, hesitating a little before she moved to stand in front of him. “I know. You were so concerned about Phichit and Viktor that you didn’t think about anything else, huh?”

“I suppose,” Yuuri replied.

“We’re not… on good terms with the Italian mafia, much less the Crispino family. And they really don’t like Viktor.”

“Why?”

Mila sat down next to him, causing the bed to shake for a moment before it settled. Her shoulder was close to his own, almost brushing, but she seemed to want to keep the distance. “This is Viktor we’re talking about. He didn’t really care for all the social interactions, so he didn’t mind creating problems.”

“Problems?”

“He wouldn’t follow protocol. He didn’t respect those that didn’t respect him or deserve respect. A lot of people took offence to his actions.”

“Is that all?”

Mila smirked and turned to look at him, repeating, “This is Viktor we’re talking about. He says things without thinking.”
Despite himself, Yuuri couldn’t stop a smile too. Viktor’s name brought a warmth to his chest that he hadn’t noticed was cold to begin with. He tried to fight it, but found himself too tired. The tugging of their connection pulled and made him feel wearier. “And what did he say?”

“He said he’d kill the Don.”

Yuuri’s gaze snapped to Mila, his smile gone suddenly. “What?”

“He wasn’t being serious, of course. He was bored, and I think Michele had pissed him off somehow. Maybe said something about Yuri, or Yakov, or something. Viktor got pissed, and said he’d eradicate their family. I don’t know all of the details, but either way, he really ruined a lovely banquet and Yakov has spent the last few years trying to patch things up. But things only got worse.” Mila sighed again, resting her head in her hands. “And if the Italian mafia are anything, they’re obsessed with family. He really punched them in the gut with his declaration. No other threat would have caused such a reaction.”

“So, Sara and Michele want to get back at Viktor because they think he’s going to kill their family?”

“And after he finds out about their attempt at your life, then it won’t be an empty threat anymore.”

The words brought Yuuri back from his shock, and he felt his heart beginning to leap dangerously in his chest. He turned to Mila, taking a hold of her arm in a desperate clutch, and said, “Don’t tell him. We can’t tell him.”

Mila narrowed her eyes. “Can’t tell him? Yuuri, they held a knife to your throat and a gun to your head. If I hadn’t followed, you’d be on your way to Viktor in a box.”

Yuuri’s skin shivered at the thought, but he pushed through. “They just need to talk. Viktor needs to apologise.”

“He won’t. The time for apologies has long gone. He’s done things since then. They hate him.”

“But if he kills them, then that’s only going to bring more hate and violence.”
“Yuuri, you’re a bodyguard. You must understand that some things are too far gone. You can’t stop an obsessed fan from loving your client, can you? You can’t stop a stalker with a restraining order. You can’t stop a revenge-seeking psychopath from hitting a politician. Some things you can’t stop.”

“But if they make a truce—”

“Yuuri, no such thing.” They were interrupted as Mila’s phone rang. She picked it up quickly, barking an answer in Russian.

Yuuri stayed silent, but curiosity made him listen, despite not understanding. He watched her facial expressions, the way her eyes seemed to flick to him every now and then. For a moment, Yuuri wondered if it was Viktor on the other side, but the voice was deeper, but lighter than Yakov’s. A new voice.

It was a few moments before Mila put it down again. She closed her eyes and rubbed her forehead. “Right. I’ve got a job to do.”

“Oh, well—”

“And you’re coming with me.”

Yuuri paused. “What?”

“You’re coming with me. Viktor asked me to look after you while he’s gone. Or, well, to keep an eye on you, but I may as well be your babysitter.”

“I don’t need a babysitter,” Yuuri began, but Mila cut him off.

“Clearly. Just like you didn’t need a saviour with the Crispino twins.” She stood up, pulling him so harshly he almost dropped his coffee. She glanced down at his clothes. “We’ll need to buy a new outfit for you.”

“Why?” Yuuri asked hesitantly, taking a step back. “Where are we going?”
Mila grinned, a light in her eyes sparkling. “We’re going to a party.”

Chapter End Notes

Get strapped in, people! Things from here on out are going to be intense and winding up to the climax (Not to say that it'll end within the next few chapters, not yet, not by far, but we're at the part now where it starts getting interesting) :3 Be prepared!

People wanted to see more Mila... well, here I am, delivering people's wishes with just a hiiiiint of angst and tension. hehehe

Also, I hope everyone had good holidays! And happy new year to everyone too, since the next chapter will be next year (Go ahead and groan at the overused joke). Roll on 2018! May everyone go into it with care and good feelings!

For updates, you can find me on tumblr
here
Chapter Notes

Chapter beta read by whynikkiwhy, who I promise to that I will steal your cat one
day.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Yuuri felt so out of place. He stood in the corner of the room, fiddling with the collar of his suit, a
drink in one hand.

The room was alight with laughter and expensive personas. He could almost see the fog of lies
hanging above them, worded knives ready for backstabbing, a painted-on expression like a mask.
He felt sick as he stood beside the rich buffet, filled with foods he had never even heard of. Golden
walls surrounded him, long curtains hanging from the tall windows that were probably worth his
home back in Detroit, chandeliers that glittered under the lights. Everything about the place
reminded Yuuri that he didn’t belong here.

As promised, Mila had taken him shopping. He was kitted out with an expensive suit – too many
zeros attached for his liking – and given a makeover that Mila reminded him these people went
through every day. His skin felt almost raw from the amount of products placed on them, though
he admitted his training-worn complexion felt much softer because of it.

Mila had looked beautiful, donned in a long glittering dress, stuck to her figure as if it had been
painted. Her hair had been curled and made to be the envy of every woman in the room, makeup
beautifully painted. Mila was gorgeous – dangerously gorgeous and gorgeously dangerous.

As soon as they’d entered the party, she’d shown him where the drinks and food were kept, and
told him little about their reason here.

“I’ve got to find someone,” she had told him. “I won’t be long. I know which group he frequents.
Stay here for me to come back.” She’d rushed off before Yuuri could ask more.

He felt the cold air on the back of his neck, and he began to wonder if he should have come at all.
True, he had not had much choice. But he knew what Mila was, what she did. He didn’t know if he
could wait around for her to do her job, but he couldn’t help thinking of how she would do it. He
wondered if she had a knife concealed somewhere in her dress, or a packet of poison up her sleeve.
Perhaps she would choke him out, or take him somewhere quiet and hit him over the head. Maybe
she’d make it look like an accident. Maybe she planned to frame someone. Yuuri waited to hear the chaos and the sirens as they found a body, but it had been close to an hour now and nothing had happened.

He dropped the hand that was fiddling with his tie and began to take another sip of his drink, feeling as the bubbles burned down his throat. No one had tried to talk to him yet, though he caught a few people watching him. He watched as people recognised one another, all familiar, all in the same groups. He wasn’t sure what this party was for, but he knew he wasn’t ever a part of this world. They knew it too.

He kept sipping the drink, an attempt to hide behind it, though he sipped slow and less often than he would have liked. He knew this was not the place to get drunk. Mila could, at any moment, grab him and order him to run for whatever reason. Or there might have been something he needed to be aware of.

In social interactions such as this, most of the time he had a client to be looking after. He didn’t need to find anything to distract him because he had a job, and he didn’t need to worry about people watching because most of the time they were wondering who it was he was guarding. But this was different. He wasn’t here for anything but because he had been dragged here, and he was only here because Mila had a job to do. A job he was not involved in, a job he didn’t want to have any part in. He was waiting for Mila to finish a kill, and he felt horrible doing it.

He contemplated just walking out. If there wasn’t any need of him, he might be better in a hotel room, sending out more digital Phichits to cover the tracks of the real one. He might be better doing his actual job. But the close run in he had with the Crispino’s had made him falter some. He hesitated, worried that this would be the time he wouldn’t walk away. And being close to Viktor had just brought more problems than it had solved them.

There was no point in walking away. All he could do was wait. He continued to feel sicker with each passing second.

He decided he needed to have some fresh air. Staying and suffocating in the putrid air of the prideful rich and staying stuck under their gazes was not good for his health, he decided.

He soon found himself at the front of the building, standing on the entrance steps. Outside, valets were huddled in a corner, talking with easier smiles than the patrons inside. With the party in full swing, many of the late arrivals had been and gone. There was one person beside the bushes, smoking before they returned to the merriment.
Yuuri went to stand on the other side, half-covered by the overhanging willow trees, out of the reach of the parking lights.

The cool air kissed his skin and reddened his cheeks, and already he felt better. He poured the rest of the drink on the grass, not wanting to think of how many hundreds of dollars he was losing in doing so. He’d overheard a group all estimating the value of the food and drinks as they ate and he’d never heard of so much money wasted before.

He thought he’d only be out for a few minutes, enough to clear his head. But he didn’t want to go inside again. Every time he thought he should go back, his feet would not move. And so he stayed until his toes began to numb from the cold and the air was more freezing than bracing and fresh.

There was a crunch of a branch underfoot, and Yuuri turned. A man stood a little ways from him, shorter than Yuuri, hands in his suit pockets. He was staring at Yuuri, mouth in a flat line, eyes not looking away when they connected.

Yuuri raised an eyebrow, taking in the man. He was young, Yuuri suspected, perhaps just a little under his own age. He looked slightly out of place in his suit, though it was just as expensive as the others he had seen in the party. In a way, he thought it looked a little like a child playing dress up, even if it was well.

The man was not out to have a smoke or some fresh air, however. He was turned towards Yuuri, standing as if he wanted to say something, or was waiting for Yuuri to speak first. His gaze stayed glued to Yuuri, and the black strands of his fringe were swaying in the breeze. Yuuri stared back and readied his body, muscles tightening for the fight he was sure to come.

A chorus of questions plagued his mind in one second. Was this a Crispino? Was it someone Viktor knew? Or was this a curious party participant? Perhaps he was drunk, but Yuuri thought the half-lidded eyes might have just been a feature rather than intoxication.

“Yes?” he asked, voice still and solid. He had no patience, and the flashbacks of having a knife pressed to his neck invaded his mind. He would not fall into another trap.

“Yuuri Katsuki.”

The man was not asking. He knew, knew Yuuri’s name as easily as if Yuuri had told him himself. Yuuri swallowed down his voice, trying not to rise to the bait – whatever the bait was. Now he was
sure this was not some stumbling party patron.

“You’re here with Mila Babicheva. Why?”

Yuuri clenched his hand into a fist by his side, aware of how his breathing had sped up. More watching. But he hadn’t felt it this time. It wasn’t as obvious as when the twins had followed, and this man had not taken the advantage to attack him. But somehow, that didn’t settle him. He asked, “Why what?”

“Why are you with her?” he asked.

Yuuri felt like it was a loaded question, the answer important to the other man, and yet his voice was just as deadpan as if had been before, little expression passing on his features. “Why do you want to know?”

The man tilted his head and regarded Yuuri for a slow minute. “I just didn’t think it would happen and I’m curious.”

Yuuri wanted to think it was a lie. Even in his job, before meeting Viktor and all of the problems that had arisen because of it, people rarely spoke their minds so openly. But there was something in the man’s voice that had him pausing. “Do you know Mila?”

The man shrugged, movements slightly lazy. “You could say that. I’ve not really spoken to her though. I only know her by name and some pictures.”

Yuuri tried not to let the surprise show on his face, but it was hard to hide it. His mind rushed with explanations, plots running wild in front of his eyes. Perhaps this man was like Mila, another assassin, trained to target her. Or perhaps he was looking for revenge. Or a stalker. Did assassins get stalkers?

Yuuri stepped back one step, gaze flickering over the man’s body. He looked for any concealed weapons, how his hands were kept in his pockets. He didn’t like that. The man could have throwing knives, or a small gun hidden. “Does she know you’re here to see her?”

“No. I’ve arranged to meet her soon, just didn’t know when.”
“So you decided to drop in while she’s here?”

“Yes. But then I saw you.”

“And how do you know about me?”

The man took a hand out of his pocket and Yuuri flinched. But it was empty. He moved a strand of fringe out of his face and then re-placed his hand back into his pocket. “Who hasn’t heard about you by now? Yuuri Katsuki, soulmate and enemy of Viktor Nikiforov. Also the man to shoot Yakov Feltsman. And now you’re going to a party with Mila Babicheva. You’re quite heavily ingrained in the Russian mafia now, aren’t you?”

Yuuri clenched his jaw together, feeling the frustration and the panic beginning to rise. The word was spreading, despite his attempts to hide it. He had hoped that their connection would stay between him and Viktor for as long as they could keep it. They had enough things to figure out without the interruption of others, but it seemed that their time was more limited than they had expected.

“What do you want?”

The man said nothing for the longest time and his dark eyebrows knitted together as if he hadn’t expected the question, or even thought of it. “Correct me if I’m wrong, but,” he began, phrasing his words very carefully, “you are the one that’s guarding Phichit Chulanont as well, aren’t you?”

The more the man spoke, the more of an accent Yuuri heard. It was unlike any other he had heard, heavy with certain words, pronouncing his consonants roughly. Yuuri couldn’t place it, though he doubted it would have been any use. He glared at him, suddenly the name of his client changing his demeanour. “And if I am?”

There was no reply for a long time before the man nodded and said, “Nothing. I just wanted to gather some information.”

“What for?”
He shrugged again. “It’s always good to know.”

Yuuri paused, watching him. There was something niggling at the back of his mind, and for the life of him he couldn’t remember what it was. Something was telling him that the words were suspicious, and he began to piece what he knew together. Perhaps Mila would know. Then something struck him. “Do you work for Yakov?”

“I wouldn’t say that.”

“He’s hired you to do something, then.”

“Yes.”

Information. Chris always liked to tell Yuuri how important information was – not just for himself, but for the good of everyone playing a game. It brought advantage, power, a way to turn the tables when it was needed. It was the difference between life and death, and it was why he made a life on it. He found the information, others paid for his services. There were others like him though, one of which Yakov had hired.

“Are…” Yuuri began, though his voice died a little. He was careful with his words, knowing that he could not give anything away. Anything he said would be dissected carefully, torn apart by this man to find the truth and sent straight back to Yakov. Anything they could do to find Phichit. “Are you an informant broker?”

The man shrugged. “Whatever you want to call it really. So, I suppose.”

“You followed me here?”

“No,” the man replied. “I came to speak to Mila about her time in New York. You just happened to be here too.”

To speak to Mila. About her time in New York? Was Mila going to really say everything? Yuuri cursed himself – Mila wasn’t like Viktor. She had no reason to keep it a secret. Not that there was much to say as was. She didn’t know where Phichit was, and all that she could say, Yuuri suspected that the man already knew. Yakov must have told him what Yuuri and Viktor were.
Before he could say anything, he noticed a figure standing in the light of the ballroom. Her features were obscured, but Yuuri knew it was Mila immediately. For a second, he was scared, reminded of what she was. She stood straight and powerful, silent in her approach, watching carefully. She finally moved to join them when she noticed Yuuri had seen her.

“Yuuri?” she asked, her gaze only on him. She looked a little concerned, though Yuuri couldn’t believe all of it. “How long have you been out here?”

“Is your job done?” Yuuri asked, feeling as if there was something at the back of his throat. He needed to swallow passed it, but it was hard to do.

“Yes,” she replied hesitantly as she came close.

“Did you kill him?”

“What? No.” She paused, eyes flickering to the man before them. Yuuri saw no recognition there and it eased his heart some. “The job was to just interrupt one of his meetings with another business man.”

“Oh,” Yuuri whispered back. Relief was evident in the way his tense shoulders slumped, and he hated the fact that the two could easily read it in him. “Can we leave?”

“Yes. Viktor wants to speak to you when we’re secure too.”

There was a tug in his chest. He tried his best to ignore it.

The informant broker took a few steps towards them, drawing the attention of the other two. Mila moved to take a closer stance beside Yuuri, to which Yuuri glared at. He didn’t need a protector. He didn’t need a bodyguard when he was one. He already knew how to protect himself.

“And you are?”

The stranger held out his hand ready to shake. “I’m the informant Yakov hired, Otabek Altin.”
Yuuri watched as Mila’s eyes widened, the suspicion gone as quickly as it had come. She took his hand, gaze flickering to Yuuri very quickly, before she greeted, “Oh, yes, he told me you might drop in. I didn’t expect it to be here.”

“I was in town.”

It was the first lie Yuuri had heard from the informant broker. His suspicions were set alight once more, and he replayed the warnings Chris had given him in his mind. This man was dangerous, strong, knew what he was doing. And he was hired to find Phichit. If he really was anything like Chris, then he would do it to the best of his ability. He hadn’t ever known someone going through this method, revealing themselves to the guard of the target. But Yuuri knew to be careful.

Otabek and Mila were talking, but Yuuri interrupted their chatter by placing him in front of the informant broker. He sized him up, noticing how the boy barely looked out of his teens. Yuuri knew that had no impact on his intelligence, but it did have one on his experience and wisdom. He might have been good, good enough to be hired by the Russian mafia, but Yuuri didn’t care. He hadn’t come across someone like Yuuri.

“So you’re paid to find Phichit.”

The boy didn’t try to deny it. “I am.”

“Don’t you think it would have been better to use the advantage of secrecy? Why did you tell me?”

“I’ve already done everything I can to find him. You’ve left hardly any trail.” His eyes flickered very quickly to Mila behind Yuuri before they settled closely on Yuuri once more. “The only piece of evidence I can find to suggest where he is, is a minute of footage outside of an airport in Tokyo. You were with someone. But I can’t say for sure it’s Phichit, and anything after that is gone.”

“You think asking me face to face is going to work?”

“No, I just wanted to know what sort of person you were. You’ve created a rift between Viktor and Yakov. No one can do that, but you did. And there isn’t anything I can’t find normally, but you’ve hidden Phichit well.”
“You’re incredibly honest for an informant broker,” Yuuri muttered, biting his lip. In his career, Yuuri had known many, and each and every single one had been secretive. It unsettled him that this one wasn’t. “You won’t find Phichit though. You’ll never find him.”

“We’ll see.”

It was said almost nonchalantly, with a voice lacking any sort of threat, but it still sent shivers up Yuuri’s spine. There wasn’t arrogant confidence, but confidence founded by successes. That was what set Yuuri on edge, a doubt of if he had done everything he could have. Phichit, hidden away in Japan, guarded by his parents and sister. It was the most secure a man could ever be, at least it was in Yuuri’s opinion – but the surety in Otabek’s eyes made him falter and worry clawed its way into his heart.

“Yes,” Yuuri replied, voice filled with determination. “We’ll see.” He’d just need to take precautions. He’d been sloppy in Japan, allowing a camera to capture them. He’d need to hire one of their company actors, dress up as Phichit and be seen somewhere else. Subtly, discreetly. But something to draw this man’s gaze away from the real target. But he’d need to leave it a while. If something came up now, after Otabek had told him what he’d found, it would be too suspicious. It wouldn’t draw him away. Plans and thoughts began to flood his mind.

But Mila grabbing his arm tore him out of his headspace. “We need to go,” she cut in. “I’ll speak to you another time, Altin.”

“Why is he with you?” the boy asked.

Mila froze. “Why do you want to know?”

“Keeping an eye on the bodyguard of the target was also my job. I expected to find him with Viktor every now and then, but never with you. Has Viktor asked you to watch him while he’s away?”

“How is that any of your business?” Mila asked, turning to the man. There was a dangerous sparkle in her eyes, and Yuuri found himself wanting to step away. He’d seen it once, during his first meeting with the woman, when she’d made it clear that she was not one to cross.

“Is there an internal war in the mafia? Have you taken Viktor’s side?”
Yuuri gasped when Mila tightened her grip on his arm. It wasn’t too tight, not as tight as Yuuri knew Mila wanted to grip. He could feel the frustration and anger coursing through her, but she was doing well to keep it at bay.

“No,” she replied, voice hard. “There is no internal war. And there’s no sides to be taken. I’m doing a favour for a friend. One thing you have to learn while working for us is that Yakov and Viktor are always getting into fights, always arguing. On the outside, it might seem horrible, but it’s quite normal. They’d never actually mean harm to one another though. You’re going to see a lot of those fights.” She paused, breathing carefully drawn, controlling her anger well. “But I care for the both of them. They both deserve happiness, and I’ve seen what Yakov’s been through because of soulmates and enemies and everything fucked up with it. I won’t let Viktor go through it too.” She let go of Yuuri’s arm, stroking where she had gripped as a form of apology before she ushered him to move towards the cars. “So note that down for information and do whatever it is you want with it. But don’t make wrong assumptions before you ask the questions.”

Yuuri allowed himself to be pushed away, knowing that Mila wanted the conversation to be ended. In a way, he did too. He knew he was careful with his words, but he didn’t want to let anything slip. He’d been careless once when speaking to Yakov. That had been dangerous enough. But he couldn’t allow himself to be anything less than perfect with an informant broker. One misplaced word could lead Otabek to Phichit.

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It had taken the best part of the evening for Mila to feel secure enough to settle. That seemed to include the hijacking of the cameras in the hotel, other cameras placed around the perimeter, bribed staff, and more. It was close to midnight when they finally settled down.

Yuuri’s fingers were itching to get out his laptop and check the progress of his real job and to send more phichits out. But he couldn’t, not with Mila so close, and not with her security so close either. He wondered if this was also a reason for her to watch him, a roundabout way of making sure there was nothing more he could do.

But what she had told Otabek rung hard in his mind again, going over and over and over again until he remembered each word, each phrase, each indentation of her voice. She wanted to protect him for Viktor, not because she’d been asked. He didn’t know how to feel about that, honestly. He knew he could take care of himself, and yet he knew that without her, he would have been dead and sent to Viktor in pieces.

She was muttering to herself as she checked her cameras once more, and Yuuri thought it looked a little odd. She was still wearing her sparkling gown, makeup still flawless, not a hair out of place on her head. Beautiful wasn’t a word to describe her, it didn’t do her justice.
With all the courage he could muster, he said, “Thank you, by the way, for saving me.” The words came out slowly, because he still felt a little odd thanking someone who he saw as a small enemy. But he needed to be grateful nonetheless. He needed to remind himself that it must have been hard for her too, to guard someone who had shot her father-figure. “I don’t think I did thank you. So I’m telling you now, because I am grateful.”

She paused what she was doing and glanced over at him, a thoughtful gaze on her face. “It’s fine. Just don’t get into more trouble, okay? Saving people is pretty much the opposite of my job.”

Yuuri bit the inside of his cheek at the reminder. “Thank you anyway.”

“Thank Viktor when you speak to him.”

“Does he… Does he know? What happened?”

“Only the small details. I didn’t tell him much,” Mila said carefully. “If I did, he’d be heading back right now.”

“And you can’t afford to let that happen?”

“He can’t. He has too much work to do.” She straightened up and stretched out some of the knots that had begun to grow in her back, muscles aching. “So when you speak to him, might be best not to let him know all of the details, okay?”

Yuuri had already thought about that. He nodded. “Okay.”

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Yuuri wasn’t quite prepared for how he handled the call when it came though. Mila had said she was going to check the halls, but really it was to give him some space while he spoke to Viktor.

He called, and Viktor picked up quickly.
“Yuuri?”

Yuuri curled a hand to his chest, feeling the tug there pull painfully at the sound of Viktor. The distress made him feel even worse, especially knowing it had been him that caused it. “Hey, Viktor.”

“Are you alright?”

It was quiet on the other side. Yuuri suspected the man might have been in his office, or home, or whatever places he had in Russia. He didn’t know what he expected really, but deep down he wondered if Viktor would answer a call if someone was being ‘interrogated’. He wondered what he would do if Viktor did.

Yuuri calmed himself, ignoring the vulnerable soulmate side that wanted to dwell in Viktor’s attention and admit everything. Instead, he concentrated on the enemy side of him that wanted to appear strong and okay, the one that didn’t want any sort of weakness.

“I’m perfectly fine. It really wasn’t that bad,” he replied, surprised by the strength in his own voice. “Quite exciting really.” He could still feel the sharpness of the blade against his neck, so close to slicing open.

Viktor was quiet for a moment, his breathing the only sound on the other end. “You were scared.”

Yuuri felt another tug in his chest, and he wondered just how much Viktor had felt. “Of course I was. I’m not going to be calm during a kidnapping, Viktor.”

“You were terrified.”

“Well, I’m not used to those sorts of things. But I’m fine.”

“They hurt you.”
Yuuri couldn’t find anything to reply to that, so he kept quiet. His hand was curled tightly against the phone, jaw clenched painfully tight, a steady flow of anger and distress flooding into his system. He knew he needed to be careful. He knew stories about wars between mafia groups, and what it could result in. Murder. Cold killing.

There was only one way that Yuuri knew how to turn the direction of the conversation. And he didn’t want to do it, but he allowed himself to, consuming the anger rising. “You hurt me, Viktor,” he snapped. “Remember? You shot at me. You threatened me. You can’t act any different now.”

As low a blow as it was, it worked. He could feel Viktor’s anger rising on the other side, fuelling his chest. Viktor replied, “That’s different.”

“How is it any different? I was in the way of something you wanted to get to, so you kidnapped me to get information on it. That’s what they were doing too. You can’t say that was different.”

“It’s different now,” Viktor pressed. “I wouldn’t do it again.”

“You can’t say that. We’re still enemies. You have no idea what’s going to come.” As Yuuri had always worried about. Which side was strongest? Perhaps it wasn’t clear now, but it might be in the future. Maybe one would fade with time. Maybe they could never be balanced.

Viktor tutted on the other side, unable to argue. His breathing was erratic, teeth grinding together. “This isn’t the time to talk about this, Yuuri.”

“Then when? Because we’re both stuck in this. We can’t wipe it under the mat.”

“You’re the one that’s usually trying to evade the conversation.” Viktor paused. “But you want to talk about it now. Are you trying to distract me?”

Yuuri wanted to grunt out his frustration. He hated the fact that Viktor, a man who had known him only a few weeks, could already read him better than many people. He supposed that was what being soulmates meant. “No, I’m not. I’m thinking about the fact that news about our connection has gotten out.”

“I didn’t tell anyone-”
“I know, and neither did I.”

“Things like this just get out, Yuuri. I just happens.”

“Well, it’s a dangerous thing to ‘just happen’. How many enemies do you have, Viktor? How many people am I going to have to look for when I glance over my shoulder?”

“It’s… It’ll be handled.”

“No, I want to know. What does being connected to you mean?” He wished for the simplicity of what it had been like when all he was, was a bodyguard to a runaway.

“Mila’s there. She’ll protect you.”

“I don’t want to be protected. I am the protector.”

Viktor sighed heavily, expelling some of his frustration. “I don’t want to talk about this now. I’ve got things to do. I promise I’ll see you soon.”

Yuuri almost said something biting, something he knew he would have regretted. He was close to saying that he didn’t want to see the man, that if they never met again, he’d be happier. But it wasn’t how he really felt. It would have been a lie bred in the anger he currently felt as an enemy. So he swallowed it down. “Fine.”

There was silence on the other end for a second before Viktor spoke again, his voice a little calmer this time. “Yuuri?”

Immediately Yuuri felt calmed too, easier to fight against the rise of rage. He took one deep breath before he asked, “Yes?”

“I’m glad you’re okay. I do trust you to protect yourself, I’m just worried.”
He didn’t need to say much more. Yuuri understood it all, and it deflated any anger he had had to begin with. He felt the tension in his muscles wilt. “I know,” he replied. “I worry too.” He knew he didn’t need to say much more either.

“I’m figuring it out, Yuuri. It won’t be complicated for long. See you soon.”

“See you soon.”

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Viktor was fuming with anger. He felt it beat in his heart, throb in his chest, steam from his ears. He had tried to downplay some of it while speaking to Yuuri, and somehow he had convinced himself that he wasn’t as angry as he was. But once they hung up, he felt it begin to brew again.

He was sitting at his desk, leather chair comfortably sat in, mahogany table clean and impeccable. He’d felt the stress slowly growing for days now, the tug in his chest never so powerful as it had been on his retreat from Yuuri. It hurt. All he could think about was the man, dream about him, see him behind his eyelids. In some hours, it was because he missed his soulmate. In other hours, it was because his mind told him he needed to know where his enemy was at all times. Sometimes they conflicted so heavily, it left him distracted and confused.

But it hadn’t compared to the moment Mila had told him Yuuri had been kidnapped. By the Crispino twins no less. He knew they’d become trouble, and for all of the arguing he and Yakov had had, Viktor knew that apologising would never gain back ground with that particular family. It was done for, and he knew he had made some mistakes. But that didn’t matter. They had never angered him as much as they had with this.

As soon as Mila had told him, he had sent out some of his best to keep an eye on them while Mila couldn’t. Keep tabs on the family he had seen as just a nuisance before.

He was glad to know Yuuri was alright though, and if he had the energy to argue with Viktor, then he was better than Viktor had feared. Flashes of fears rushed through his mind, of Yuuri bloodied and bruised, near death, limbs hacked off, barely breathing. In every fear he had, Yuuri always blamed him. Always. Over and over, resenting the fact he had ever met someone like Viktor.

Viktor never thought that someone saying it could ever hurt him so. There had been some that had said he was nothing like they expected, but he hadn’t cared. They weren’t worth his time. Now he
feared for the day that Yuuri would say it. When the mere thought scared him, he knew he was in deep.

He was thinking of ways to make the twins pay. The easiest thing to do would be to go to Yakov. He would know what to do, and he had a lot of resources that Viktor didn’t. But the man was too distracted by his pursuit of Phichit to care. And it would seem too much like a weakness, giving the job to someone else. No. Viktor wanted to deal with it himself. It was a strike against him, and he would make sure he reciprocated.

There was a knock on the door and it pulled him from his thoughts. Without his reply, the knob was turned, and immediately he knew who it was. Only one person would dare walk into Viktor Nikiforov’s room with so much disrespect.

“Old man, I’m bored.”

Viktor tried not to sigh as Yuri walked in through the door, his beloved cat following along his heels. The door was slammed behind him.

“I’m working, Yuri,” he replied, but the anger had dissipated from his voice. He couldn’t ever be angry with Yuri. He wasn’t involved with his job, didn’t know some of the things that happened within these walls.

The teen stopped in front of his desk and crossed his arms, narrowed eyes glancing down at the lack of papers on the table surface. “Yeah, really working hard.”

“Business calls.”

“One of them really tick you off?”

And as much as Viktor wanted to claim the boy was innocent, he wasn’t. He was too observant. He knew things Viktor wished he never had to know. “How could you tell?”

“Your wrinkles are getting deeper.”
Viktor stared at the boy, ignoring as Potya jumped up onto the table and brushed up against his arm. He was more of a dog person really, though he hadn’t had much of a chance to have more than guard dogs in his career. He didn’t have the time to look after one, and he wasn’t home enough to give it the care it needed.

“And your hair actually gets greyer,” Yuri continued, running his hand through his fringe. “I didn’t even think it was possible.”

“Why don’t you play with some of your friends if you’re bored?”

“Friends? I have acquaintances, not friends. And they’re all studying or training.”

“Maybe you should be doing the same.”

Yuri glared. “I’m bored enough now. That would probably kill me.”

Viktor rolled his eyes and took one of his many pieces of paper work to place in front of him, intent on doing some reading to quell the rising tide inside of him. The anger was still loitering, the desire to crush the twins throbbing at the back of his mind. But he knew being in this state was no time to make such rash decisions. If Yakov had taught him anything, it was to be calm and collected for decision making. Any other time, you could be as angry and emotional as you wanted.

“Who was it then?”

Viktor looked up. Yuri was playing with some of the pieces of paper on his table, tearing off the corners to make them fall like snowflakes on his cat. “What?” Viktor asked.

“Who was it on the phone?”

Viktor paused for a moment, knowing the hatred Yuri had for the other Yuuri. He’d been scared by the man, but he disguised it with a thinly-veiled sense of hatred and anger. But Viktor saw through it. “It was Yuuri.”

Yuri stopped, hand mid-dropping the pieces of paper. “Yuuri? Your soulmate and enemy Yuuri?”
Yakov had been talking. “Yes.”

Yuri was silent for a moment, gaze flickering between Viktor and glancing far off. An expression that Viktor had never seen before crossed the boy’s features, a thoughtful look. But that was quick before he turned a glare on Viktor again. “Why don’t you just cut him off then if you only argue?”

“We don’t only argue.”

“But you’re enemies. Of course you’re going to argue.” Yuri stepped forwards and stroked his cat’s fur. Yuri behaved far softer with Potya than Viktor had ever seen him act with anyone else. “I don’t think it’s worth it. He’s just going to keep causing you pain.”

Viktor sighed and rubbed his face, feeling the stress continuing to mount. “I’m not talking about this with you, Yuri.” He’d had enough of this conversation with Yakov.

“But it’s not worth it, really, is it?” the teen continued, each word feeling like a press on Viktor’s nerves. “Why would you bother sticking with him, when it’s just going to annoy you all the time?”

“Yuri,” Viktor snapped, voice a little darker. “I’m not talking about this with you.”

Yuri stopped for a moment, eyes wide. Viktor knew what the boy was thinking – Viktor hadn’t spoken to Yuri like that for a long time. Viktor had a lot of patience for the boy, something that Yakov and others did not. An awkward silence followed, and Viktor felt like apologising. But he knew the boy needed some discipline, and he was not going to talk about the conversation just because Yuri wanted to.

“Are you talking properly with him now?” Yuri asked, cutting the silence.

“What?”

“Yuuri. Last I knew, you two were fighting and on different sides. Now you’re on the phone to him.”
Viktor sighed. “It’s… It’s just very complicated right now.”

“I bet. But then, what are you doing here? If he’s off somewhere else?”

“Complicated,” Viktor repeated, not because he didn’t want to explain it to Yuri, but because he didn’t know how. The more time he spent back in Russia, the more he became acutely aware that Yuuri wasn’t with him. The tugging in his chest was growing more painful, and it had almost given him a heart attack when he’d felt Yuuri’s white fear through it. He was so close to catching a plane back, almost on the steps of their jet to go. But then it had disappeared and Yuuri was calm again, and he’d gotten the report from Mila. It had been like cold water poured over him again, reminding him of why he was here, what he was protecting. Every new day in Russia reminded him what he was doing, and it also reminded him of what he was away from.

“You playing the fucking martyr or something?”

“You know, I think I saw one of the guard’s kids running around here some hours ago. Why don’t you find her and play something?” Viktor asked, attempting to wave Yuri away.

But the teen wasn’t having any of it. “Of course you’d have a soulmate like that though, huh? You attract trouble, and he walks right into it. It’s like you were made for one another, which, I guess you were.”

“Yuri-”

“Why don’t you bring him here? Lock him up in your bedroom or something. He’s out of danger and you get to do whatever you want with him.”

Viktor turned a glare on the boy, though he knew he hadn’t put any real fire behind it. He had thought about that, in some of his most fearful moments. As he was almost stepping onto the jet, he had contemplated grabbing Yuuri and never letting him go. But Yuuri wouldn’t want that. Viktor didn’t want to cause him that harm.

“You’re right. He’d probably just break out anyway,” Yuri sighed. “Maybe he’d shoot you and Yakov again.”

Alright, Viktor thought, perhaps complicated was too much of an understatement. A fucking mess
might have been better suited to their situation. And between that and the sudden appearance of the Crispinos, it only got worse and worse.

“He’s really got to be something if he’s got your attention like this.” Yuri grabbed his cat and cuddled her to his chest. He kissed her head, stroking through her fur as gently as he could. But then he glared and Viktor, completely taking the older man by surprise, before he said, “You’ll have to let me meet him sometime. I need to pay him back for the last few times we’ve met.”

Before Viktor had the chance to reply, the boy turned and strode out of the room. Despite the agitation and the anger still lacing his blood, he couldn’t help but smile at Yuri’s antics. Sometimes, Yuri amused him just as much as he annoyed him.

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Becoming an heir to a large mafia empire had its downfalls. Far too many for Viktor’s liking, but he had to get through them if he planned on protecting Yuuri. One of those downfalls seemed to be how many meetings he had to attend.

Yakov had played them out as if they were incredibly important and interesting, but Viktor found it just a meeting of old men who wanted to reminisce about old times over a bottle of whiskey. Viktor played along, despite his constant need to groan and leave the table. Yakov seemed to appreciate it, if his smile meant anything. It was enough to keep Viktor there, more so when he noticed Yakov had some trouble moving now.

He’d been discharged from the hospital a while ago after the shooting, but he hadn’t listened to the doctor’s advice that he should stay in his home without work for a month before he was safe to go out again. He’d gotten bored and didn’t want to sit around. Some days were worse than others – if he slept awkwardly, the wound ached more, and the pain medication was making him tired far more than he liked. But he was making progress.

He’d been in this particular meeting for hours now, the third of its kind in a few days. If someone asked what it was about, Viktor would find difficulty in telling that person the truth. There might have been some interesting talk of weapons exchange and money laundering, but that was only ten percent of the initial meeting. The rest was nothing short of boring.

Viktor contained his groan of relief when the meeting finally ended. Yakov said goodbye to the other business men, and Viktor followed suit, shaking hands with the men whose faces he knew he would forget tomorrow. He was too busy concentrating on the energy inside of himself, something that kept pulsing, forming, a need and desire to do something. As the door closed, he said nothing,
and the expression he had worn for hours slipped. He waited for the sound of the footsteps of their retreating guests disappeared.

“Viktor?” Yakov asked, but the tone of his voice suggested he knew Viktor wanted to say something.

Viktor waited a little longer, caution accompanying the energy ball inside of him. He clutched his fist into a tight ball at his side, breathing increasing. “Mila told me something.”

“Mila?” Yakov sighed, standing from his chair and wincing slightly as his wound ached. They had been through the conversation about the girl – Yakov had been disappointed that she hadn’t come back with Viktor. Even with Viktor’s explanation that he had asked her to protect Yuuri, he hadn’t been happy. “Is it about her job?”

“No, it’s about Yuuri.”

Yakov grunted, obviously not happy with the conversation.

Viktor resisted from arguing. They’d been through this enough too. He’d explained his position, and Yakov had explained his distrust and need to keep an eye on Yuuri for Viktor’s safety. Viktor had let it go with the condition that Yakov do nothing against Yuuri. He thought he’d be able to deal with it later, that they’d be able to work something out once things had calmed down. When they calmed down. Or if they did.

“Yuuri met the Crispino twins.”

That had Yakov’s attention. His head snapped towards Viktor. “What?”

“They kidnapped him. They were going to kill him.” With each word, his voice was growing in volume, aggression rippling through his form. “They were going to send him to me in pieces!”

“Viktor-”

“He would be dead, Yakov. He would be murdered had it not been for Mila.” Viktor stepped
forward, fingers aching from the way he clenched his hands so tightly. “My soulmate-”

“And your enemy,” Yakov interrupted.

“My *everything!*” Viktor snapped back. “What I want to keep was taken from me and almost destroyed! By the fucking Crispinos.”

Yakov was silent for a moment. Viktor watched as a familiar expression crossed his face. Eyes turned hard, calculating, as he thought through the situation. What was the best thing to do? What happened now? Viktor knew it was a mess now, and Yakov was trying to think of ways out.

“What do you want to do, Viktor?”

Viktor’s answer came too quickly. “I want to crush them. How dare they even attempt it. How dare they move against me. Yuuri is *mine.* My soulmate to protect, my enemy to destroy. If they want to get to me, then come to me. Don’t use a shield!”

Yakov reached up, an attempt to calm Viktor. “It’s thoughts like that that started this. Of course they’re going to try and get to you. You threatened them.”

“I merely said some stupid things,” Viktor huffed, turning away. The breath in his lungs was getting harder to draw in. “If every family took a young man’s empty, bored words as a threat, then they wouldn’t have any shortage of enemies.”

“You didn’t say empty words, Viktor. You threatened them in the most effective way you could. You knew how much importance they placed on respect, and you threw it in their face.”

“This isn’t the conversation!” Viktor spat. “They were going to kill Yuuri. He hasn’t done anything to them.”

“Don’t be the first to start a war, Viktor-”

Viktor turned, his face a storm of anger. “*They* made that choice when they took Yuuri!”
Yakov swallowed down his words and let the air settle a bit before he spoke again. “Is he alright?”

“He is, thanks to Mila. She’s keeping an eye on him.” He paused, jaw clenched. “What if they try it again?”

“Mila is stronger, she can protect him.”

“But she’s not invincible.”

“And you can’t crush them without having the rest of the Crispino famiglia coming after us. You can’t kill them all.”

“You should know better than me that there are some things worse than death.”

There must have been something in his eyes, or something in the way he said it, because Yakov almost seemed to flinch. Viktor immediately softened, but the determination still lingered inside of himself.

Yakov asked, “An eye for an eye? They almost took your soulmate.”

“Then maybe taking theirs would teach them something.”

“Find another way!” Yakov shouted suddenly.

Viktor didn’t reply, knowing he had hit a sore topic. Since his own, Yakov hadn’t liked any sort of talk about soulmates, much less harming one.

“If you want to get to them, then target them. Don’t stoop to their level.”

“Then I want you to help me.”
Yakov sighed. “Viktor-”

“We have enemies now,” Viktor interrupted. “They’ve already targeted Yuuri once. They won’t stop now, and they won’t hold back. You always taught me to kill off a threat before it could form.”

“True,” Yakov gave in. “You just need to be careful. Think about what you’re doing. Getting into a war with the Crispinos will draw more attention from other families, and that means more people will notice Yuuri. You might put him in more danger.”

Viktor had thought of that too. Despite what Yakov thought of him, Viktor did think things through. Even if he let himself be dictated by whim, he wasn’t completely spontaneous. Everything had a consequence, and Viktor did think about that.

And that was why he decided to start a war secretly. Raise a storm before anyone noticed the darkening sky.

Before too long, Yakov was called into another meeting. This one, Viktor hadn’t been pulled in to. He used his free time to start planning. He locked himself away in his office, one hand on his papers that surrounded a laptop, the other hand toying with his new gun. He wanted to pull the trigger, diffuse the energy inside of him with some needless shooting.

Instead, he spoke with some of their rats and operatives scattered around. They didn’t have nearly as many at their disposal as their enemies thought they had – another one of Yakov’s plans, of convincing their enemies that they were covering the globe. They had a few scattered in other mafia groups, turncoats loyal to Yakov’s mafia group. At first it was just for information, but now Viktor wanted to use them for a better means.

He wanted to know everything, all the information he could get on the twins. Bide his time until he could trap them. If Yakov had taught him anything, it was that patience was what got people the results they wanted.

But Viktor knew one thing. When it came to finally trapping them, right where he wanted them to be, then he would be the one to pull the trigger. He would be standing before them, gun in hand, watching as they cowered. And he’d shoot them after letting them know exactly why he was doing it.
Viktor never really had nightmares. For the things he had done and for the person he was, he slept easier at night than a lot of his enemies thought he did. For all the blood he had spilled, none of it leaked into his dreams.

Not until now.

Now, images and scenarios doomed his sleep, playing behind his eyelids. Yuuri, splayed on the floor, limbs jutting out, blood soaking his clothing, staring back with dead eyes. Yuuri, screaming, running to him, asking for help. Yuuri, damning him for everything he was, not wanting to see him anymore. Yuuri, hurt. Yuuri, regretting their existence. Yuuri, wanting to damn everything about their connection.

Yuuri, dead.

Viktor tossed and turned in his sleep, unable to breathe, never feeling nearly as much pain as he did until those dreams.

He woke up alone in bed, sweat pouring down his forehead and chest. He rubbed his face and fought back the pains, but they kept escalating, pumping through his head, images flickering of Yuuri hurt. He felt sick.

He needed to do better. He’d come close twice, twice to losing Yuuri. Once by the twins, and once by his own hands. Had it not been for something bigger stopping him, he could have lost Yuuri before he knew what he had lost. But now he did know, and with each passing day it scared him more and more.

He needed to prepared. Needed to get everything ready. Needed to make sure that before the world figured out what who Yuuri was to him, that Viktor would crush anyone that tried to hurt him. No one was to touch him, no one was to come anywhere close to him. If he needed to, Viktor could lock Yuuri away and make sure he was safe that way, but he knew that would not be something Yuuri wanted. It would hurt not only him, but everything Viktor was fighting for.

And Yuuri was too concerned with Phichit as was. Viktor didn’t want to tell him what he was planning, because he knew how Yuuri would react. There would be no way Yuuri could be torn
from his client.

At the mention of him, Viktor began to steam with agitation again. Phichit, poor, sweet, young Phichit, pulled into something he could have easily avoided. The boy who had said things they shouldn’t have, miscommunication, knocking Viktor down further and further until there was no calm inside of Viktor left. That had been a threat he was ready to destroy, before he had even done anything to a soulmate that Viktor, at the time, didn’t know.

Now it was different. He had used everything he could to hunt Phichit down. He needed to do the same to the Crispino twins, but he needed to be harder, better. His plans for Phichit’s death was nothing in comparison for Sara and Michele.

He breathed, allowing the air to fill his lungs. He wasn’t going to let this go.

He rose and went to stand to look out of his wide window, the lights of the city flickering below. Their penthouses were at the top of the building, overlooking the empire Yakov had created for years. It was safe up here, away from the dangers, away from the threats. Viktor used to look down and wonder if his soulmate and enemy might ever be looking back. He knew it was most likely not going to happen. Those sort of things only ever happened in stories, told on a screen by romantic directors, written in words by hopeful authors.

His was a more painful story, and it had only just begun. And if he wasn’t careful, then it was likely to be ending soon as well. One more slip, one more wrong person finding it out, and Yuuri wouldn’t be getting out of his next kidnapping.

Viktor used to think having a lot of enemies was a good thing. It proved how strong a person was. As long as he could keep his own against them, then the more enemies there were, the more people who feared him and wouldn’t do anything against him. But now? Now his idea was an entirely different one.

More enemies meant more threats to Yuuri. More people imagining a target on his back.

Viktor breathed hard through his nose, eyes following the night lights, dulled by the reflection of his own image on the glass.

Then he just needed to get stronger and stronger. He needed to become a person who could take on entire armies and destroy them before they could even imagine hurting Yuuri.
Thank you so much for reading! Yeah.... Viktor's not happy....

I'm sorry for the lateness of this too, but my shift really pushed me on to a late time XD But it's up now! And It will most likely be earlier on Saturdays from now on!

For updates, you can find me on tumblr here
Fall

Chapter Notes

Chapter beta read by whynikkiwhy, who has asked multiple times to be nice to the characters every now and then in between the angst. Did this chapter satisfy that?

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The clouds rolled over the wings of the plane. The engines rumbled around him, a familiar sound by years of travelling, some soft comfort taken in the expensive first class seats. Viktor leaned his head on his hand, watching as the scenery thousands of feet below blurred into blocks of colour.

He hadn’t told Yakov again that he was leaving, only left a note to inform him. The man would understand. Viktor had promised on the note he would be back soon to continue his duties, more than he had ever done for the man before. He had dedicated himself to becoming the heir, and he would continue that dedication. But meeting upon meeting wasn’t teaching him anything about becoming heir. He needed more. He needed to learn how to hunt properly. And he knew exactly where to practice it.

And he missed Yuuri. His heart clenched every time he thought of the man, and his dreams were becoming more vivid with every night they weren’t close. He began to think it might be a premonition, that if he didn’t protect Yuuri himself, it would become real. He trusted Mila with his life and Yuuri’s. But no one could do it as well as him.

The plane journey was already lagging though. It was long, and he knew that he was going to spend every minute feeling the tug on his chest becoming less. Yuuri would feel the distance shrinking too. He wondered what Yuuri would think, how he would feel. Would he be excited? Or would the distance be what Yuuri wanted? Either way, Viktor just wanted to see him right now.

But there was something distracting him. He was becoming increasingly aware that someone was watching him.

At first, it had concerned him. He didn’t want to lead someone to where Yuuri was. But then he became familiar with the stare, recognising it as a watchful look that had been following him for years. When he realised who it was, it brought a calm smile to his strained face.

He rose from his seat and walked down the aisle, already able to pin point the location of the stare.
Yuri was trying to curl himself as small as he could in the back seat, hiding under his hoodie and sunglasses, hand covering his face subtly as he stared out of the window. He froze when Viktor came level with the chair and turned.

“Yuri?” Viktor asked, though it came out as more of a statement than a question.

Slowly, Yuri turned, biting his lip. “I was already on my way to America. I’m not following.”

“Of course,” Viktor replied, though he could tell the lie in Yuri’s voice. “And you just happen to be heading to L.A as well?”

“Yeah. I, uh, I have a friend there. They invited me over.”

“If I had known we were catching the same flight, we could have had seats next to each other,” Viktor played along, an eyebrow raised. “Why are you hiding back here?”

“Because you’d think I was following you. Which I’m not, by the way.”

“Okay. I didn’t say anything.”

“I’m not.”

“Okay.” Viktor sat in the empty seat beside the boy, pushing his bags onto the floor. Yuri was about to argue, but stopped when Viktor turned to look at him. “So you’re not going to come with me to see Yuuri?”

The boy glared, reminding Viktor of a small, angry kitten. Well, he thought, they always say pets begin to look like their owners. Or perhaps it was the other way around.

Yuri spat, “Why would I want to go and see that idiot? He’s a piece of shit.”

“He’s your enemy too.”

“I’m aware.” Because everyone had to just keep reminding him.

“One side of yourself must love it when people talk shit about him.”

Viktor contained his rising aggravation. “You don’t understand, do you? Fateful enemies, we don’t want anyone but us talking shit about our other halves. No one can destroy them, no one can harm them, and no one can talk about them but us.”

Yuri flinched slightly and took a moment to think about it, and then turned away to view out of the window. He whispered, “Alright, whatever. You should be at home anyway, doing what Yakov wants. Why are you, legendary mafia Viktor Nikiforov, at the beck and call of a lowly bodyguard?”

He really didn’t understand, Viktor thought. Someone like Yuri didn’t look outside of the box, but Viktor doubted he would until he himself met his soulmate or his enemy. Viktor understood that at least. He had underestimated the power it held until he had met Yuuri. It filled his every thought, stopped him from doing things, made him contemplate other things that he had never even considered. He couldn’t yet say that he was a better man for meeting Yuuri, but he could easily say he wasn’t a worse one. He used to worry it would make him into something he wasn’t.

He leaned in his chair and stared outside too, at the same clouds rolling by, as he replied, “Because that’s just how it is. When Yuuri feels scared, I do too. When he feels happy, I do too. And I know when he needs me, because I need him too.”

“Gross.”

Viktor smiled a little, but it was true. He’d needed Yuuri since before he had ever met him. And that need had only increased in the time that he had gotten to know him. He was serious when he said he wanted to see Yuuri’s face every day, it was why he had jumped to readily at the conditions. He didn’t want to spend another day without Yuuri in his arms, waking up alone, so far away from Yuuri that it took so long to get back. He wanted to be right there, next to him. And he would be soon.

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Yuuri convinced himself it wasn’t really happening. But as the hours drew on, he knew it wasn’t just his imagination. Slowly, very slowly, the tugging in his chest was getting less and less. It didn’t feel so suffocating, hardly painful anymore.

He rolled in his bed, finding it easier to breathe, and wondered what it meant. Or, really, he knew what it meant, but doubted that it was what was really happening. Viktor was away in Russia, probably making some sort of deal that Yuuri really didn’t want to be a part of or ever know about. He gripped the pillow and buried his face in it, gritting his teeth together. He knew what Viktor was there for, and he really didn’t like it. But what could he say?

It was late at night when he finally began to realise that his assumption was correct. His chest was light, breath rolling in easier than it had for a long time – ever since Viktor had left. Their connection, pulled across a sea and thousands of miles, was easing now.

The realisation dawned on him quickly, propelling him from the bed with a gasp. It was dark in the bedroom of the hotel, the lights of a city that didn’t sleep illuminating some of the room. He clutched at his chest, as if it would give him his answers. Viktor was getting closer, he was sure of it.

He stood from the bed, clad in his oversized shirt and shorts, bare feet padding against the lush carpet. He moved to open the bedroom door, the need to tell Mila rising inside of himself. But he stopped when he heard her voice, low and whispering through the door, as someone walked around the living room on the other side. Yuuri thought for a moment, wondering if she was on the phone, and moved to open the door anyway.

But then another voice came through. Deep, almost emotionless, and Yuuri knew who it was immediately. Otabek Altin, the other informant broker, speaking to Mila. Yuuri paused, pressing his ear to the door, almost trying to peer through the hole beside the hinges. But he could see nothing but light.

“…ing a mistake,” Mila said, voice getting a little louder as she paced to Yuuri’s door. “He’s dealing with too much.”

“But I’m almost there,” Otabek replied, Yuuri straining to hear. He figured that the boy must have been sitting in the chair closest to him, but his deep voice was making it hard to understand. “I just need a little more time.”
“But this thing with the Crispinos takes priority,” Mila said. She said more, but her voice died as she paced, sentence finished by the time her footsteps brought her back.

“I wasn’t hired for it.”

“That doesn’t matter.”

“It does. I’m not going to go against Yakov and change what I’m doing.”

Yuuri grunted and pressed his ear closer to the door to hear Mila’s reply, but she was too far away. Her voice was dulled against the wood, too much of a whisper to make it through to him.

“Just a little more time,” Otabek continued, voice lowering again, making Yuuri focus harder. “I’m close. Doesn’t he still want it?”

“I don’t know.” Mila stopped before Yuuri’s door, her voice a little louder than he expected. He flinched, quieting himself. “He hasn’t said anything about it for a while. He used to only think about it.”

“I guess now he doesn’t think it’s a threat anymore.”

“But Yakov does.”

“It’s what I’m paid to do.”

They were quiet for a moment, and Yuuri tried to piece together what it was they meant. But the slumber was still fogging his mind, and he knew he had missed important information. He burned it all in his memory, but kept getting distracted by the flutter inside of his chest. He wondered where it was Viktor was right now. He’d probably been flying. Was he still on the plane? Had he touched down yet? Was he outside the hotel? The thoughts had Yuuri getting a little excited, much to the disgust of himself. He cursed himself when he realised he hadn’t been paying attention as Mila spoke again.

“… close are you?”
“One more day. I think I’ll have it in one more day. What are you going to do when you find out?”

“Go there myself, I suppose. Find out everything before Yakov…” her voice trailed off again as she paced away from the door.

“Just be careful. The Crispinos might not be as strong as your family, but they have their ways. Everything electronic leaves a trace.”

As you should know, Yuuri thought.

“It won’t be any use to them anyway,” Mila snapped, voice a little louder than before as the anger got to her.

“Of course it is,” Otabek replied. “It’ll be when you’re arguably at your weakest. The best time for them to strike is when you’re distracted. And no one will be more distracted than Viktor.”

“And that’ll be what they’re counting on.”

Yuuri’s blood ran cold. He remembered the hatred, the animosity in the twins’ eyes when Viktor’s name came up. The hatred they had for him just because they were connected. Were they planning something. Had Otabek found something out about the Crispinos that might allude to some planned murder? Yuuri’s hand clenched the top before his chest tighter. Viktor might be walking into a trap.

“So we find him, and then we deal with him quickly,” Mila said.

“Preferably without telling Viktor.”

There was some movement on the other side as Otabek rose from the seat, and more hushed whispers of deals and goodbyes. Before long, the door to the hotel room closed with a soft click and there was only one set of footsteps sneaking on the floor.
It was five minutes before Yuuri heard the click of the other bedroom door, Mila settling into her room to do some more work. She insisted on staying up late to protect Yuuri, despite the numerous cameras she had placed all over the hotel. Yuuri wondered when she slept.

But that wasn’t important. Yuuri rushed for his phone on the bedside table, shaking fingers dropping it. He snatched it from the floor and dialled a number from memory.

Chris answered quickly. “Yes?”

“Otabek Altin,” Yuuri whispered immediately, not having time to dwell on their usual subtle conversation. “That’s the name of the other informant broker, the one Yakov hired.”

There was noise on the other side as Chris typed, setting to work immediately.

Yuuri felt his heart racing. He felt like something big was about to crash into him, that there was something he had missed. It was an odd feeling. It crept and slammed at the same time, an urge underneath his skin that he couldn’t quite be rid of. It was almost consuming, setting him on edge. He wondered if he had accidentally overheard an uncovering of a plot against Viktor’s life, something he felt like he should have been a part of the discussion for. It was his soulmate that was in danger. He should know about it.

But Otabek had continued to say something about what he had been hired for. Yuuri knew that that was to search for Phichit. Yuuri hadn’t heard enough to convince himself their conversation was about his client, but there was something nagging at the back of his mind. And where did the Crispinos come into this? What distraction were they looking for? With no answers, Yuuri knew his best bet was Chris. He wanted the answers now, before he was even more behind.

“Found him. What do you want me to do?” Chris asked, voice devoid of the purr he usually had. Yuuri suspected the man could hear the rush and the worry in Yuuri’s voice.

“Tell me about him. What do you know?”

“There’s not a lot about him. Nothing concrete anyway. He’s young, but you probably already know about that. Some rumours around that he’s the best. But I doubt that, people obviously haven’t heard of me.” The comment was followed by a deep chuckle, but lacking the humour Yuuri expected. “There’s only one picture I can find. Hardly anything on his life. I only know a little about him, and it all came out only a few years ago. It’s like he didn’t exist before that.”
“Is that normal?”

“*For people like us? Yes. Don’t want anyone finding out about us and our loved ones, do you? Aren’t you the same?”* 

Yuuri waved the comment away. His life didn’t really exist before his introduction into the bodyguard institute. He’d done it to protect his family, and in turn for them to protect him. He did understand, but now he understood how annoying it could be. “What does it say then?”

“There’s hardly any trace of his activity. So he’s good. But not good enough.”

“You’ve found something?”

“A little. I’ve found some of his travel history, I think. Currently in America?”

“Yes, that would be right.”

“How did you learn his name? And how did you know for sure he was the one hired by Yakov?”

“He showed himself to me, told me everything.”

“That’s…unprofessional. Unexpected.”

“He said it was to gauge what type of person I was?”

“I don’t like that. I really don’t like that. He wouldn’t have had any reason to reveal himself to you unless…” Chris stopped and there was wild typing on the computer. Yuuri felt every hit of the key as if it was controlling the pace of his heart. “*Yuuuri, did you give anything away?*”

Yuuri almost felt appalled at the accusation. “Of course not. I was careful with my words.”
“Yuuri, I can have a look at his flight log. I need you to tell me which country the package is in.”

Yuuri’s agitation grew. “What?”

“You—”

“No,” Yuuri snapped. “That’s the one thing that’s keeping it safe. No one knows where in the world he is, and I’m not about to say it over the phone.” Electronics always leave a trace. Anyone could listen in.

Chris didn’t argue. “It’ll take me a while to get the information you need then. I don’t want to accuse you of anything, Yuuri, but the only reason he’d reveal himself to you, when he’s tried so hard to keep himself a secret up to this point, is because he thought it would give him something. You need to think about what questions he asked you, what he said, how you acted when he said something. Are you a closed book? Were you expressionless? Did you give something away? You might have given him something without even knowing it.”

Yuuri breathed in deeply, suddenly feeling as if a massive wave had slammed into him. He thought back, but it had all gone by so quickly he couldn’t remember every single word that had passed them. He tried to think of any moment Otabek’s face might have slipped, alluding to it being the point Yuuri gave anything away. But no expression sprung to mind. He was sure he had been careful. But it made sense. An informant wouldn’t reveal themselves otherwise, not when they were at risk.

“What can you find out?”

“I can find his travel logs, see where he’s been travelling. I might be able to tap into some conversations he’s been having with Yakov too, but that’s only if they’ve messaged. I can’t pick up on calls that have already been made, understand?”

So if he had given anything away and Otabek had told Yakov, there was no proof. Unless this was why Viktor was on his way here. Yuuri gulped down the anxious energy, hand shaking slightly. “Please do that.”

“If he makes any more calls, I’ll try to listen in. But he might have some code, or know when I’m listening in. I can’t promise anything concrete.”
“That’s fine, just do the best you can.”

They hung up soon after, and Yuuri sat on his bed, head clutched in his hands. Had he given anything away? Had he really been so careless? He’d done everything he could, but he was a bodyguard. He was prepared to fight the physical, and he was lacking when it came to electronics. It wouldn’t be impossible that people like Otabek and Chris could find what he had hidden. He just wished he had caught it before it started.

***

He stayed thinking like that for a long time, wracking his brain for things that might have given anything away. He remembered Otabek mentioning the camera outside of Tokyo, catching Yuuri with someone he wasn’t sure was Phichit or a decoy. Had he given anything away then?

He had said he needed one more day. Did that mean what Yuuri thought it meant? Was he really so close to unravelling everything Yuuri had done to keep Phichit hidden? All of his hard work, gone so quickly?

No, there was no talk of Phichit. His name hadn’t come into conversation – at least not the parts that Yuuri had heard. Perhaps they were talking about something else. Maybe there was a part of the contract between Yakov and Otabek that Yuuri didn’t know. There must have been something he was missing. He hoped so at least.

The concern had almost drowned out the tugging feeling he was having in his chest. But only almost. Every now and again, there was a twinge that alerted him to it once more. And every time he remembered it, it felt closer and closer. His heart raced, images of Viktor flashing behind closed eyelids.

It was early morning, as the sun was rising, that he felt it. He could almost feel Viktor’s rapid footsteps thumping inside his skull, Viktor’s heart beating with his own, harsh breaths pressed against his ear.

He stood up and raced into the living room, eyes glued to the door leading into the hallway. Mila stormed out of her room, asking something. But her words fell on deaf ears, Yuuri’s entire being slowly becoming more and more concentrated on the body he knew was feeling the same, on the other side of the door.
“Yuuri? What’s wrong?” she asked, but she realised that nothing was getting through.

Yuuri could feel her eyes on him, careful. Perhaps she was already reaching for her gun, or maybe she was preparing to launch herself in between Yuuri and whatever threat was coming from the other side of the door.

Yuuri wasn’t sure what he felt though. On some level, it was excitement. He could feel his arms itching to reach around Viktor’s neck and hug him tightly. On another level, his hands were gripping tightly, ready to punch that smug face when he first saw it. For the moment, he listened out as he heard the rushing footsteps stop in front of the door.

He paused for only a second before he opened the door, allowing a gush of cold wind settle in.

And there was Viktor, cheeks a little red, breath rising and falling out of his chest through open lips. His hair was a little messy, coat still mid-fall from his run. Everything about his composure had gone, screaming that he too had rushed as Yuuri had. His blue eyes sparkled and shined like stars caught on the surface of the ocean when his gaze fell on Yuuri. A small smile pulled on his panting lips, and Yuuri felt everything about his own composure fly out of the window too.

He was engulfed in a hug before he knew what he was going to do. Viktor’s arms swung around him and hugged him close almost painfully, thumping heart beating against thumping heart. Yuuri curled his own arms around the man’s body and hugged him painfully back, the action calming both his soulmate and enemy sides.

He was ever so slightly aware of other things going on around him. For example, there was someone else behind Viktor, someone smaller. He was speaking to Mila, words a mess in the air, unheard by everyone but them.

Yuuri was too distracted by Viktor’s smell, something he had forgotten. It was like everything he liked, rolled into one body. His heat warmed the parts of Yuuri he didn’t know were cold. Breath pressed to his ear, a comfort he hadn’t known he had missed. But most of all, the pain in his chest from their tugging separation – a pain he had become used to – was no longer there. His chest had never felt so light, all paranoia leaving his body so quickly. He hadn’t realised how much he had missed Viktor until it came to the moment they met again.

“Yuuri.”
And his name had never made him shiver as much as it did when Viktor spoke it. He clutched harder, almost smiling when Viktor grunted from the added pressure. “Viktor,” he replied.

All of the stress of what he had been through melted away, the kidnapping, the worry that he had lead people straight to his client. Even if only a few weeks ago, Viktor was the reason for that stress. If it was possible, he wanted to stay here forever, finding balance finally in both the sides of himself that constantly screamed. This seemed to be the only time his soulmate and enemy sides were happy.

He didn’t know what that meant. He just knew that with every moment he saw Viktor, spoke to him, spent time with him, he was falling harder and harder. But he supposed it was already too late. He didn’t know what the best way to figure this out was, or what they should do to be able to do so. So many people seemed to want to give them their own input, which Yuuri was a little annoyed by. No one understood, no one ever would, not like him and Viktor.

He took note of how he felt then, in that hug, and memorised it so that he could take it apart another time, help himself figure out what it was that was going on. He didn’t like to admit it, but he felt like they were running out of time.

Viktor reluctantly pulled back, though kept his arms around Yuuri. With a mix of a smirk and a smile, he pressed a kiss to Yuuri’s cheek, leaving a hot mark on the man’s skin. Behind him, a young cry sounded out, along with the sounds of retching.

“Viktor,” Mila said, voice a little angry as if she had been asking for a while. “What are you doing here? And Yuri too.”

Viktor took his time replying, pulling in Yuuri tighter as if he never wanted to let go. Yuuri grunted at the added pressure, but he pulled Viktor in just as tightly. It was beginning to strain his arms, staying like this, but he continued anyway.

“I think the answer is obvious,” Viktor replied, voice rumbling against Yuuri’s chest.

Yuuri slowly became aware of the room again, and he cursed himself for getting so lost. Something had overcome him, his connection to Viktor filling his mind. Was that how it had always been had he hadn’t noticed it? Or had the separation made it stronger? He peered over Viktor’s shoulder, seeing the familiar little blond with his arms crossed leaning against the door frame. He was scowling down at the floor, having just shut the door with a soft click. As if he had
felt Yuuri’s gaze, his eyes flitted upwards, glances connecting.

He gritted his teeth and almost seemed to hiss, glaring at Yuuri. Then he tutted and turned his head away. Yuuri almost wanted to smirk at the reaction, but he didn’t.

He was the first to let go, much to Viktor’s very obvious reluctance. He almost didn’t let go of Yuuri, but finally did, keeping a hand clutched around Yuuri’s waist. Yuuri didn’t argue – he wanted to say it was for the good of the man, but he knew that some part of him wanted that physical connection after so long of not having anything. He almost blushed at the thought, remembering their last connection and that his body already craved it, but screamed at himself to keep it at bay. He didn’t know how he managed it, but he did, and for that he was thankful.

“You should be in Russia,” Mila pressed, looking a little agitated by the sudden appearance. She crossed her arms, drawing attention to the guns beside her ribs. “You left me here to take care of him. If you’re going to come rushing back at any small threat, it’s just going to void all of your efforts.”

“But it wasn’t any small threat,” Viktor replied, tone cool and eyes sharp.

Yuuri remembered his conversation with Mila, the promise to not tell Viktor all of the details. He wondered how angry Viktor would be if he did know, if he knew every word that had been spoken, how the twins had acted. The small cuts along his neck. Yuuri froze just for a second, hand itching to raise to the small bandages there. Viktor hadn’t clocked it yet, having been distracted by Yuuri’s first appearance and Mila’s words. But he couldn’t hide it forever. It was only a matter of time, and when he did see, Yuuri hated to think of the expression he would wear.

He turned his head away, hiding the side that had the plaster, hoping to prolong it for as long as he could. Viktor and Mila were arguing – he could feel the force of their words vibrating in the air. But he couldn’t hear it. At the back of his mind, he wondered if the conversation Mila had had with Otabek was something Viktor would know about. For just a second, he felt the anger rising. Viktor’s promise of not hunting Phichit down rang in his mind, pulsing against his thoughts. He knew his agitation was felt by Viktor, who had stopped talking and had turned to him, so he stopped and let it slip away. There must have been an explanation, so he tried to convince himself.

“And, yes,” Viktor said, obviously in the middle of saying something before Yuuri’s interruption. He paused for a moment, but he must have seen something in Yuuri’s face, seen that he didn’t want to talk about it, and continued talking. “Yuri’s here because he has a friend that invited him.”

Mila raised an eyebrow, turning her gaze to the teenager beside the doorway. “Oh? And which
friend is this?"

“You wouldn’t know him,” Yuri rushed to reply, not giving eye contact.

“Try me.”

“I’d rather not.”

Mila smirked, the earlier tense air gone. Yuuri wasn’t sure when that had happened, but somehow Viktor and Mila had somehow resolved their dispute. But it still sat stagnant, as if ready to continue at a later date.

“Well,” Mila almost sang, eyes sparkling, “I think someone just wanted to see Yuuri.”

Yuuri blinked in surprise, turning to peer at Yuri behind Viktor again. The teen looked about ready to kill the woman though, hoodie halfway across his head, mouth open to show bared teeth, eyes alight with rage. “Are you kidding me?” Yuri almost exclaimed. “Who would fucking want to see him?”

“I think you’re a little quick to protest-”

“Fuck off,” Yuri snapped, turning to grab the door. “I’m out of here.”

“I’m sure Yuuri wouldn’t mind if you stayed for a little while,” Viktor stopped the teen, rubbing Yuuri’s shoulder in apology. “It’s been a while since you two saw one another.”

Back in the hotel room, when Yuuri had been a hostage to Viktor instead of the twins. Back when things had seemed so much less complicated.

“Like I care.” But Yuri had paused and hadn’t opened the door.

“It’s very early,” Yuuri said. “Your friend might not be up yet.”
“I don’t want to be in this room while you two are going all googly eyes at each other and trying to suck each other off right in front of us,” Yuri decided, flinging the door open.

Mila grabbed her coat from the hanger beside the door, stepping to keep up with the teen. “I’ll go with you. Maybe we can do some bonding over shopping.”

“Your idea of shopping is going until our arms fall off.”

Their voices began to fade as they disappeared down the hall and the doors closed. Little by little, Viktor and Yuuri were left alone in the room, and Yuuri became painfully aware of what that meant. So many things needed to be spoken about, so many topics, subjects, some almost life-threatening. But both of the conflicting sides of himself wanted to disregard that and hug Viktor tight, kiss him, punch him, fling him on the bed, fight. All at once, it seemed.

Viktor turned to him, pulling him by the waist until their chests touched. His hand reached to cup Yuuri’s face, eyes roaming over his expression.

“Are you alright?” he asked.

“I’m fine, Viktor,” Yuuri assured, feeling as if for the first time the words were true.

Viktor was about to say something else, but his hand rubbed against something on Yuuri’s neck. He paused and took his hand away, seeing the plaster there. Yuuri tried to pull back, but Viktor’s arm around his waist stopped him. Yuuri stopped trying to get away, knowing it had already been seen.

“What’s this?” Viktor asked, voice small, finger tips brushing up against the plaster.

“It’s nothing,” Yuuri insisted.

“What happened?”
Yuuri wanted to argue again, but Viktor’s tone left no space for it. Either way, Viktor was telling him that he would get his answer, and Yuuri didn’t want to push it. It wouldn’t be worth it.

“Sara had a knife,” he decided to say, knowing it would be enough.

He witnessed as a storm overtook Viktor’s face. Yuuri wasn’t sure he had ever seen the pure rage behind Viktor’s eyes, and the air almost seemed to spark underneath his anger. Yuuri’s eyes widened, heart hammering. He felt horrible admitting it, but there was some part of himself that found it oddly attractive.

Viktor’s hand stroked the side of his neck, almost wanting to peel away the barrier and have a look. “How deep?” he asked.

“Not very deep at all. It was barely a scratch.”

He kept fiddling with the edges, but didn’t pull it off, knowing that if it wasn’t healed, it would only hurt Yuuri.

“A knife?”

“Yes.” Yuuri’s skin felt as if it was alight, sensitive to every touch from Viktor. “Viktor, can we not talk about this?”

Viktor seemed about ready to fight, but instead he sighed and gave in. “Okay, if that’s what you want.”

“What are you doing here?”

“I wanted to see you.”

Viktor seemed to calm a little as they spoke, and Yuuri took advantage of it, asking him questions. “Is that alright? Can you do that?”
Viktor waved the comment away. “I told Yakov this time.”

Yuuri chewed the inside of his lip. “Are you aware that Yakov’s hired an informant broker to look for Phichit?”

Viktor’s eyes narrowed slightly in confusion. “I’m sure he’s taken measures. I did tell you he wouldn’t give up. Why?”

“Do you know who that person is?”

“No,” Viktor replied, and Yuuri just knew he was speaking the truth. “Yakov thinks its in my best interest not to know.”

“Just in case you tell me,” Yuuri guessed. At Viktor’s nod, Yuuri almost felt like laughing. Of course. He should have guessed really.

“Why? Are you concerned about this person?”

“Aren’t you going to ask how I know?”

“You’re pretty resourceful.”

Yuuri supposed so. He was able to hold his own against people like Viktor, but this was different. He had initially heard it from Chris, but the rest he had heard from the source itself. Now that he knew why Otabek had done it, it made him feel sick. “Yeah,” he replied. “I think he’s close to finding Phichit.”

Viktor said nothing for a while, and Yuuri knew why. He didn’t know why he was telling Viktor, it’s not like he wanted the man to do anything – not that he could anyway. He had already tried. But he could tell from Viktor’s eyes that he still felt something negative towards his client, made obvious by every time Yuuri mentioned his name. Perhaps, at this point, it could have been something like jealousy.

Yuuri swallowed down the reluctance and said, “Look, I’m not expecting you to do anything. I
know telling you isn’t going to help. I just needed to let you know.”

“Because the moment that it seems like people are drawing in close to your client, you’re going to need to leave,” Viktor finished for him.

“Exactly.” He felt a little guilty saying it, but he pressed it out anyway. “I can’t just let Yakov find him.”

“But you already have so much to worry about here,” Viktor tried to say, but Yuuri continued.

“This is what I started. I have a client that needs me. I can’t just let something happen to him.” Viktor’s expression said that he could. But Yuuri pulled away and this time Viktor let him. “If someone looks like they’re going after Phichit, then I’m going to go and protect him. It’s not just a contract, Viktor. I like Phichit.”

Viktor’s jaw clenched, but he didn’t say anything. He didn’t like the sound of it. Perhaps the word ‘friend’ had struck a nerve.

“And I think someone is close,” Yuuri said. “So I’m grateful that you’re here. But if I need to leave at a moment’s notice, I have to go.”

“I… understand,” Viktor said, sounding as if the words were thick on his tongue. He stepped forwards and pulled Yuuri in again, close enough that their noses almost touched. Yuuri noticed that Viktor liked doing that a lot. “Then you don’t mind if I make the best of the time we have together?”

Before Yuuri could reply, Viktor’s familiar lips were pressed to his, making the nerves around his mouth spark. He melted into the man’s embrace, a sigh almost escaping his mouth, overtaken by how much he had missed this connection.

His heart hammered in excitement, body wanting to press closer. Viktor was hungry, pressing his lips against Yuuri’s until their teeth almost clacked together. Yuuri couldn’t complain, knowing he was the same.

He could almost feel tears beginning to press in the corners of his eyes, overwhelmed with the swirl of emotions inside of himself. He wanted to curse himself for such a reaction – it wasn’t so
long ago that he hated Viktor with the entirety of his being, and now he was clutching at the man, kissing as if his life depended on it. And yet he couldn’t feel guilty, even his enemy side refused to be so.

“Remember that promise?” Viktor asked, pulling back to rasp against Yuuri’s lips. “We got interrupted before. But now I’m making good on it.”

“My lips might come back at any moment,” Yuuri countered, though there wasn’t any fight in them. Mila probably knew that it wouldn’t be safe to return any time soon, and Yuri, being the teen he was, probably never wanted to come back.

Viktor tore the tie from his neck with one hand, pushing Yuuri until they were retreating back into Yuuri’s room. He slipped the tie around the knob before he placed his hands on Yuuri’s chest, pushing him to collapse back on the bed. He kicked the door closed with a smirk.

Yuuri raised to his elbows, a dangerous smirk on his own lips. “A tie on the door? We’re not in college, you know.”

“Better to be safe than sorry.”

Yuuri crawled backwards on the bed, feeling the unmade folds from where he’d been lying only a little while ago. It was darker in the bedroom than it had been in the living room, and while his eyes adjusted, Viktor’s outline against the light peeking through the door was the most he could see. He watched as it stalked closer, each step careful, made to ignite the electricity in the air. Before Viktor reached the bed, he rose his arms up and began to unbutton the shirt he had on.

It was only now that Yuuri was noticing Viktor’s clothes. They were smart, just as he’d seen Viktor wear before, a casual suit he supposed some would call it. But he found he didn’t care. His eyes were too busy trailing over the new skin of Viktor’s chest that was slowly being revealed.

For a moment, he felt underdressed with his pyjama shirt and shorts, already wrinkled from sleep. But as he saw the way Viktor’s eyes roamed over the bare skin of his legs, some thigh on show as the material of the shorts slipped, Yuuri wanted to tease the man some more.

When Viktor’s shirt hit the floor, Yuuri rose his own, slowly, hand sliding over the skin of his stomach and chest. As a nipple peeked under the material, Viktor began to crawl the bed.
Yuuri’s eyes adjusted, and he could see the predatory look in Viktor’s gaze. It made him shiver as he lowered himself on the bed, allowing Viktor to crawl over him.

As Viktor stopped above him, two conflicting emotions burned inside of Yuuri. His soulmate side loved the view, loved the idea of being protected, seeing only Viktor above him, his sight, smell, touch, hearing all taken completely over by this man. But his enemy side felt a little threatened. It wanted him to turn the tables, fight as they had done last time, roll until he was the one above and he had the advantage. He fought that down. Right at that moment, he wanted to be the one underneath. He couldn’t explain why.

Viktor lowered his head and kissed along the side of his neck, around the plaster. He was still thinking about it, and he felt as Viktor’s hand caressed his hip and tightened when his lips touched the bandage.

Yuuri raised his arms, exposed tattoos blurred in the darkness, and circled them around Viktor’s neck. He hoped it was some comfort, an assurance of some sort, but he wasn’t too sure. He knew the man would be thinking about what had happened for a while. Viktor had gone to extreme lengths to protect a soulmate he knew nothing about. Yuuri could only imagine the fright it had given him knowing the one he did know now had come so close to being murdered.

It had certainly scared Yuuri. But he felt safer with Viktor here, the tug in his chest long gone.

When Viktor spent too much time on his neck, Yuuri pulled his face to give him a kiss on the lips, hoping to distract. It wasn’t good to dwell, he thought. Not when he had his other half in his arms like this.

Viktor kissed hungrily again at his lips, and Yuuri knew he had done a good job. But he needed to go further, feeling the hunger inside of himself also beginning to light up. It had been a while, and he wanted nothing more than to be close to Viktor – if that was because he was a soulmate or an enemy, he found he didn’t care.

He began to fiddle with Viktor’s belt, pulling and tugging it through the loops until it was made looser. He threw that as hard as he could onto the floor, and moved onto the zip.

“You’re not happy with me just being topless?” Viktor chuckled against his ears, sending a shiver down Yuuri’s spine.
“I’m not happy until you’re completely naked and sweating above me,” Yuuri replied, feeling the blush form on his cheeks from such forward words. But he said them anyway.

Their last time had been fast and angry, something akin to hatred still burning in their lungs. He wasn’t sure why that had been, perhaps because he had been angry with Viktor’s disappearance, or they’d seen too much of one another. But now he felt something softer, a desire that drove him to want to touch Viktor any way he could, start off slow, take their time and savour. Perhaps separation did make the heart grow fonder, even with enemies.

Viktor moved so that Yuuri could push his trousers and underwear down. Once done and thrown away, Viktor moved to take his spot back. His hands were placed on either side of Yuuri’s head, encasing him in, a smile on his lips.

“One step closer,” Viktor whispered, a hint of a tease in his voice. He lowered himself once more to kiss Yuuri, slow and careful.

Yuuri couldn’t explain it, but he liked this way too. Last time had been thrilling and exciting, but this time he felt like he was being cherished, as if every breath he took was a treasure to Viktor. As if he was thankful for the fact Yuuri was still here at all.

Yuuri placed his arms around Viktor’s neck again, feeling exactly the same. He needed to be more careful, he knew. He kissed Viktor, hoping to show his own relief through it, hoping he too was showing as much treasuring as Viktor was. Because while there were parts of Viktor he didn’t like, his career being one of the most prominent aspects, there were many things he did like. He liked Viktor’s smile, the way his eyes seemed to hold every emotion when his expression was stone cold, the way his hands were careful, the way he spoke, the way that he had embraced fate so fully. Yuuri wasn’t like that, but he respected it. He knew that if they were going to try and make this work, he needed someone like Viktor to guide the way. He wasn’t confident enough to do it.

But Viktor must have been growing impatient. His hand wove down Yuuri’s body, slipping under his shirt, pressing it up as Yuuri had just done. There was some separation, some quick movement, and before Yuuri knew it his shirt was being thrown on the floor as well.

“I have a desire to see you bare and sweating too,” Viktor said, kneeling back on his knees and staring down at Yuuri. His hands took hold of the waistband of Yuuri’s shorts, but he paused, staring into Yuuri’s eyes before he did anything. “I want to take things slow this time. Properly savour you, spend hours exploring this body that was made for me. By the end of tonight, there won’t be a part of you that I don’t know or haven’t left a mark on.”
“It’s morning,” Yuuri replied, feeling the burning inside of him sparked by Viktor’s words.

Viktor smirked slowly, eyes alight with tease. “Oh, I know that, Yuuri.”

The bush formed on Yuuri’s cheeks again, blooming until he could feel the blood pooling underneath his skin. He fought the desire to hide it. And before he could dwell on the words and think more about their meaning, Viktor was ripping his shorts from his form, leaving him exposed to the dark light and Viktor’s roaming gaze.

Viktor’s hands began to map out Yuuri’s thighs slowly, taking time to pinch some skin lightly, gliding over his skin. Yuuri gasped as they got closer to his crotch, but Viktor would move them away again.

“I didn’t have time to say it last time,” Viktor huffed into the air, massaging the muscle underneath his touch. “But I was thinking of all of these things when I first saw you with no clothes. I was thinking of how beautiful you were. How eagerly you responded to my touch. You moved in a way that had me desiring more, lighting a fire inside of me I hadn’t known was there. I have never wanted something so much. Every bit of skin I saw made me hungry. Every expression you made, every gasp, every word you spoke, it made me drunk. I could very easily get addicted to you, Yuuri. I think I already am.”

Yuuri was about to reply, his heart fluttering against his chest, but Viktor leaned down and bit into the flesh of his thigh, making him gasp into the warm air.

“Every time I see you, I want to eat you,” Viktor continued, glancing up Yuuri’s body to connect their gazes. “I want to leave marks on you so everyone knows who you are connected to, and I want you to do the same to me. Tattoos aren’t enough. I need to be the one to leave something on you.”

“Then do it,” Yuuri goaded, feeling the place where Viktor had bitten him twitch. He could see some of the red marks rising, skin slightly slick with saliva. “What are you waiting for?”

Viktor smirked before he bit another mark into the other thigh, keeping eye contact, pressing a little harder. Yuuri gasped again.

Viktor continued until there were a dozen red marks rising on Yuuri’s skin, littering his thighs and around his crotch, little constellations along his thighs, rising until not even his chest was left
alone. By the time Viktor rose to meet his lips again, lips swollen from the attention, Yuuri was burning.

“Don’t you think you’ve done enough teasing, Viktor?” Yuuri asked, pleased that he had kept the tremor from his voice.

“Not nearly enough,” Viktor replied.

Yuuri grit his teeth together and clamped his legs around Viktor’s waist, pulling him down until he could bite his own mark on Viktor’s throat. The man above him shuddered and gasped, and Yuuri felt pleased with his decision.

“Then move on to another sort of teasing,” Yuuri encouraged. Viktor seemed about ready to fight, but he must have been just as eager. His hand reached to touch Yuuri’s crotch, where his penis had been standing for the majority of Viktor’s teasing. But before it could connect, Yuuri grabbed Viktor’s wrist and pulled it down further, to between his legs. “Not there, here, Viktor. We didn’t get to do this last time, and I really need it.”

Yuuri felt his heart thump one massive jump as he saw the small bloom of blush against Viktor’s percaline skin, illuminated by the lights peeking in through the window. Viktor wasn’t the only one that could tease.

“I’ll be right back,” Viktor declared before he scrambled from the bed and rushed into the living room.

Yuuri waited with a smirk, his legs kept open for when Viktor returned. He hadn’t known Viktor was returning, and so he hadn’t prepared anything at all. He had hoped Viktor had been prepared, and it seemed he was right. Viktor was back in the room, objects in his hand that he then threw onto the bed. Before Yuuri could properly see what they were, Viktor was back on top of him, kissing his lips with hunger again.

Yuuri almost chuckled. It seemed he had pressed a button. That was a good thing to know for the future.

He curled his fingers into Viktor’s hair, loving as each soft strand seemed to kiss his skin just as eagerly as Viktor was. He was aware of Viktor’s slight movements, the sound of the cap of something popping, Viktor warming up something in his hands. Then the hand glided over his
Yuuri shuddered under the attention Viktor's lips were giving him, mixed with the way his skin cooled immediately, and his heart pounded the closer Viktor's hand got. Breath escaped him as he felt it touch between his legs, the gel warmed now by the heat between them.

“I’ll go slow,” Viktor promised, sealing it with a kiss to the side of Yuuri’s mouth.

“Please,” Yuuri agreed, but knew he had said the wrong thing when Viktor moved backwards and grinned.

“Begging already, Yuuri?” Viktor asked, pressing his slick fingers a little harder against Yuuri’s hole. “I’ve barely done anything. I must just be that good.”

Yuuri tilted his head to the side, blinking slowly as he said, “Or I just want you to get on with it.”

His comment resulted in Viktor’s finger slipping in, taking his breath away. He arched his back, feeling the sensations curl in the pit of his stomach.

“You were saying?”

“I s-said,” Yuuri said, taking pride in how his voice was loud, even if there was a stammer, “get on with it.”

Despite Viktor’s challenge, to which Yuuri knew the man had accepted by the raise of his eyebrow, he took his time stretching Yuuri with one finger before he moved onto the next, carefully slipping in the second.

Yuuri bit his lip, feeling a little of the burn. But it wasn’t painful, instead it felt something better. He couldn’t explain it, but it felt like slowly, ever so slowly, they were getting closer. The fire in his chest was growing with each kiss they shared, every word spoken between them. He pulled in Viktor close and kissed him, overwhelmed by the pure need he had for the man.

He hadn’t realised when Viktor had placed in a third, or when he had felt like it was enough. His
other hand was teasing Yuuri’s nipples, leaving indents in his hips, pressing on the kiss marks he had already left. Yuuri felt sparks light inside him as Viktor withdrew his fingers, and the prospect of what was to come made his face burn.

Viktor leaned back on his knees and began to pick the condom he had thrown on the bed. As he did, their eyes connected, just as much fire in Viktor’s as there was in Yuuri’s. A breathless second passed, and then Viktor raised the packed to his mouth, ripping it free with his teeth.

Yuuri felt his cock twitch at the sight, blood rush through his body. His breath almost escaped him. He watched avidly as Viktor placed it on himself, feeling a little put out.

“I was kind of hoping I could put it on for you,” Yuuri said, eyes glued to Viktor’s penis. He hadn’t really had a good look yet, but now he did, and he couldn’t tear his eyes away. The thought that it would soon be joined with him thrilled him in a way the thought of sex never did before.

“Oh? Then next time.” Viktor took hold of one of Yuuri’s knees and pulled Yuuri’s legs open a little more. He stared, and Yuuri felt the need to hide under such a gaze. But instead he stayed as he was, restraining himself, knowing that there wasn’t any need.

Viktor was staring as if he had never seen anything so beautiful before. His gaze roamed over every kiss he had left, over tan skin, every shiver of muscle and drawn breath.

“Viktor,” Yuuri interrupted.

As an apology, Viktor pressed a kiss to Yuuri’s knee. “Relax, Yuuri. It’s only going to hurt at the start.”

Yuuri rolled his eyes with a grin. He curled his legs around Viktor’s waist, pulling him in encouragingly. “I know, Viktor. I don’t mind if it’s a little rough.”

Viktor mirrored his grin, moving to hover over Yuuri. His fringe tickled Yuuri’s forehead. “Then a little rough it will be.”

Yuuri’s entire body arched as Viktor slowly slid in, the stretch completely intoxicating. Something began to completely overtake Yuuri – he felt it in the way his heart was fluttering, the way his
body burned brighter than it had before, the peace of both his soulmate and enemy sides.

Viktor held on top of him, the first beads of sweat beginning to roll down his forehead. “Are you alright?”

“I’m not fragile,” Yuuri assured. “You can move.”

Viktor pressed the hundredth kiss against Yuuri’s mouth, softer than all the last, his taste lingering on Yuuri’s. Then he gave an experimental thrust of his hips. Yuuri gasped, hands clutching onto Viktor’s arms, nails already digging in. Seeing nothing but the beginnings of pleasure in Yuuri’s face, Viktor thrust again, harder this time.

It was on the fourth thrust that Viktor found something. The stars aligned before Yuuri’s eyes, sparkling against the dark backdrop of the ceiling. His blood rushed through his ears, sparks of pleasure igniting on the surface of his skin. All the while, Viktor was gazing into his eyes, panting above him.

Yuuri let out little breathless moans, and encouraged, Viktor continued to angle and hit the same spot, loving every expression that passed through Yuuri’s face. Their chests felt light, open, aware. So used to the tugging of separation, this felt completely different. Yuuri could almost hear every beat of Viktor’s as if it was beating in his chest, alongside his own. As he reached to circle Viktor’s back, scratching lines down his skin, he began to wonder where he ended or where Viktor began. Everything else melted away.

There was nothing beyond that hotel room. The outside lights, the morning commuters and the honks of the cars meant nothing. Every sound but Viktor’s breathing and whispered words were gone. Any thought of anything but Viktor and everything they had been through disappeared from his mind. He knew Viktor felt the same, because the man’s eyes were lidded and staring lovingly at Yuuri’s face, hand caressing away Yuuri’s fringe. They caught on his glasses, to which Viktor chuckled as he removed them for him.

If asked, Yuuri wasn’t sure where they landed, only that they were gone.

Bliss. Peace. Beautiful. Yuuri wasn’t sure how to describe the feeling. Perhaps elation, or euphoria. But he knew that it felt like everything he had been working towards had come to this moment, everything he had done, everything he had missed. It all lead to this one perfect moment.
Perfect. Perhaps that was the best way to describe it.

No screaming sides. No one saying he would be killed by the man whose names were on his wrists. No mafia. No judgemental stares. Just Viktor. Just the man that fate had so fully given him.

Whatever they were, their souls were connected. And now their bodies were too.

He bit the juncture between Viktor’s neck and shoulder, leaving his own mark once more, wanting to show Viktor how he was feeling. But words escaped him.

Viktor took hold of him and began to stroke his cock, slowly and first, but then timed with his thrusts. It wasn’t long before Yuuri finished, stilling underneath Viktor and clutching harder. Viktor was soon to follow, only a few thrusts behind. He let a moment of panting pass before he slid out carefully and slowly and discarded the condom.

Yuuri lay on the bed, waiting, chest rising and falling in a steady rhythm. Viktor moved to lay next to him, circling his arm around Yuuri’s waist and pulling him close.

They didn’t speak. It was as if words could not do it justice, could not describe what they were feeling. Instead, they stared into each other’s eyes and Yuuri splayed out his hand to begin mapping out Viktor’s body, beginning with the press of his fingers against Viktor’s face. Every so often, Viktor would nip, grinning.

Yuuri wasn’t sure what had happened, honestly. It was beyond sex, but a connection. A soul connection. Perhaps, he thought, this was what they were meant to do. Disregard what they were, and just connect on any level they could. It didn’t matter about hatred or love, just that he and Viktor were together. Yes, he thought. He liked the sound of that. Far less worrying.

He gave Viktor one more kiss. Viktor pressed one back.

Chapter End Notes

REUNITED WITH SOME SMEXY TIME

Through the whole of writing this chapter, I was listening to the song -

Forevermore by Broken Iris
And it's quite honestly the most loving and beautiful song about sex I've ever heard.

As those who follow me on tumblr know, I do have a vague playlist I listen to while writing this story, because it helps with atmosphere and pacing. This song really helped with the last scene, and I really encourage people to listen to it because it's just gorgeous and is such a beautiful way to talk about sex between people who love each other. Plus it talks about two souls coming together to become whole and I'm like "Well, isn't this fitting?" XD

And as always, you can find me on tumblr for updates

[here](#)

Thank you for reading!
In

Chapter Notes

Chapter beta-read by whynikkiwhy, who has an adorable cat, almost as adorable as my own.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

They must have fallen asleep, Yuuri thought. It was a few hours later, the light of the midday sun filtering in through the window, lighting up the once dark room. Viktor was holding him tightly, arm splayed over his hip, head tucked in Yuuri’s chin and chest. He was breathing onto skin, raw skin that Yuuri could already feel. Some spots were aching, and he knew exactly why that was. His cheeks blushed.

Yuuri hugged Viktor closer too, inhaling the unique scent of the body beside him. Viktor’s skin shone underneath the sunlight, drawing attention to his lines and curves. Yuuri’s gaze raked over every inch of exposed skin. Yesterday, it might have been in lust and desire. But now it was something more. Their hearts pounded next to one another, chests touching. Yuuri felt like there was something bigger than them now. In his view, his own tattoos were dark against Viktor’s pale skin where his arm was resting, catching his attention.

He raised his arm, gazing intently at it. He looked from it to Viktor and for the first time in a long time, he didn’t recoil at the sight of the names. The foreign letters now had a name, a being, a body, a personality. They had for a while, but today seemed different.

Perhaps separation did make the heart grow fonder.

There was a creak from the living room, followed by a harsh whisper, familiar. Yuuri cuddled in with Viktor again. It sounded like Yuri and Mila were back.

There was the low hum of a television, the occasional laughter soundtrack sifting into the room, the ping of a microwave. Once he knew that there wasn’t a threat, he turned his listening to Viktor, hearing the soft breaths that touched his skin, the thumps of his heart, the sheets move as he stretched a leg.

It wasn’t long before Viktor woke too, fluttering open his eyes long eyelashes kissing his cheeks every time. He took a moment to wake, turning over to gaze around the room. He seemed a little confused at first, but when his eyes fell onto Yuuri lying next to him, he beamed. Eyes brighter and
smile bigger than Yuuri had seen in a long time, and it had his heart almost skipping a beat right then and there.

“Morning,” Viktor said, voice a little rough from sleep.

“I think it’s more afternoon,” Yuuri replied. “Where was your promise of having me for the full day and night, huh?”

Viktor groaned, pulling Yuuri in and pressing his face to Yuuri’s chest. “I hadn’t slept properly for days. I will make do on the promise and more soon.”

Yuuri rolled his eyes, but couldn’t hide the smile forming on his chapped lips. “Excuses.”

Lying together like this, he could almost forget what the world was outside. He could forget about what Viktor was, what he was, and very nearly forget about his client and the situation. All he could think of was the way Viktor was looking at him, how at that moment, he didn’t need anything else.

A little bit of separation and his feelings of the man had changed so drastically. But that was very much Yuuri, overthink things, spend energy on them, until things changed. And he supposed too that that was what being soulmates and enemies meant – it didn’t matter which one, but both made sure that lives changed so quickly. It only took a few weeks, and yet now Yuuri couldn’t think about every returning to the life he had had before.

He reached to cup the side of Viktor’s face, and Viktor turned his head to press a kiss to his skin there. Along with this new feeling came the odd melancholy emotion that spiralled inside of his heart. Because they couldn’t be like this forever. Something, somewhere, was going to go wrong. He could already feel it in his bones. But he could cast that away right now, because Viktor’s presence managed to convince himself that it wasn’t the time.

There was a small knock on the door, and it tore them from their atmosphere.

Viktor grunted a reply, looking nothing less than annoyed by the interruption.

“Viktor,” came Mila’s voice on the other side, a smirk obvious in her words. “Just wondering if you’re finished up in there?”
“And if we weren’t?”

“Then keep it quiet and have mercy on the room. I don’t want the cleaners to be traumatised when they come.”

Viktor rolled his eyes, hand stroking down Yuuri’s side. “What do you want?”

“We need to talk about something.”

Mila’s tone changed immediately, reluctance in her words. Yuuri narrowed his eyes and gazed at the door, where he knew she was standing behind.

“And what’s that?” Viktor asked, watching Yuuri’s face carefully.

“It’s about Yakov and… Viktor, I’d rather speak to you about it alone.”

Yuuri bit his lip, suspicion lacing his every thought. He instinctively knew it was about Phichit. He sat up immediately in bed, making Viktor flinch beside him. It was as if cold water had been poured on his head, chilling all of the good feelings he had been feeling only minutes ago. His heart hammered, so differently than it had been doing for the last few hours, striking pain in his chest.

It reminded him all too suddenly of what was going on. He shouldn’t fool himself into thinking that just because he had gotten Viktor on his side, or that Viktor was close to Mila, that everything had stopped.

No doubt Mila was talking about her conversation with Otabek. And if that conversation was about Phichit, as he suspected, then Mila wasn’t on his side. She wanted to talk about it alone. Without Yuuri there.

That meant one thing. Otabek was right. They were getting close.
Viktor was asking him something, but he was already out of the bed and slipping on his clothes and securing the guns in their holsters. His skin was cool, the warmth of Viktor’s body and the sheets quickly draining from him. It was only once he was fully clothed and making his way to the bedroom door that Viktor’s calls were finally getting to him.

He turned. Viktor was sitting up in bed, a worried expression on his face. He had an arm reaching out to Yuuri, but it dropped when he noticed the look on Yuuri’s face.

“I just need to make a quick call, okay?” Yuuri assured. “I need to go, but I’ll be back in an hour or so.”

“Why?” Viktor asked, voice slow as he tried to piece it together. “Is it to do with what Mila wants to talk to me about?”

Of course, Yuuri hadn’t meant to overhear. It was in the middle of the night, during the time that Mila and Otabek didn’t think anyone would hear. They’d whispered, done all the things they could. Mila couldn’t leave the room, not when Viktor had given her a job, and so it meant Otabek had to come here. They had done everything right, and it was only chance that Yuuri had overheard.

“I need to go and make a call,” Yuuri repeated. But perhaps he needed to make two. “I’ll be back in a bit.”

He rushed to open the door, surprising Mila as she stood on the other side, caught between embarrassment at having caused something, and an urgency to speak. Yuuri pushed by her, perhaps a little too harshly, and made for the front door.

Yuri was sitting on one of the living room sofas, turning away from the tv to watch as Yuuri stormed through. Yuuri slipped on his shoes and pulled on his jacket, not once looking around. He didn’t want to see their faces right now, not when fear was rushing through his body.

They were mafia. They were aiming for his client, a man he considered a friend. He hadn’t lost sight of that, but the threat had been dulled some. He shouldn’t have let it.

They were shouting after him, voices rising as he closed the door. He didn’t listen.
As he waited in the elevator of the hotel, his hand itched to take out his phone but he refrained. He’d need to be in a safer place. So he waited until he found a small alleyway home to rats and some discarded furniture to make the call.

As always, Chris picked up quickly. “Hello?”

“It’s me,” Yuuri replied, voice harsh as he paced the alley. In the confined space, he could hear the sound of the cars in the background, someone singing from one of the windows above, laughter as loud pedestrians walked the cement around the corner. “I think Otabek’s close.”

“Close? What makes you think so?”

“He was talking to Mila yesterday about being close to finding something. He didn’t say my client’s name, but I just know they were talking about him.” Yuuri felt the urgency slip through his bloodstream, adrenaline pumping.

“Okay. Okay.” Chris paused for a moment, looking over something. “He’s not been on the phone to Yakov since we last spoke, so I haven’t been able to tap into anything. Are you sure he was talking about your client?”

“I just know it. I know they were talking about him. The way they were talking, about how Yakov wanted to know where it was and how Viktor didn’t seem to care about it anymore. And Otabek kept saying how it was what he was being paid to do. So far, all we know is that he’s paid to find my client.”

“So there’s a possibility that it might not be your client they’re talking about?”

“Yes, but I don’t think it could be anything else. Mila’s talking to Viktor about it now. She didn’t want me there to overhear.”

“She told you that?”

“Pretty much.”

“Odd that she did that when you were there rather than when Viktor was alone.”
Yuuri waved the comment away, understanding the issue. “She probably didn’t think Viktor would be alone any time soon.” After the Crispino incident, Viktor wouldn’t like him walking around alone. Yuuri paused, glancing around himself, suddenly all too aware of just how alone he was. He pushed himself into a corner, running his hand over the holsters underneath his jacket.

“But you’re alone now. Yuuri, you’ve given them that space to talk.”

“They won’t say anything that I didn’t already overhear.” Every shadow caught his eye, suddenly remembering the knife against his skin.

“Perhaps after their talk, Mila or Viktor might call Yakov. I’ll tap into those and tell you what they say.”

“Please do.”

“Funny you should call me, though. I was going to call you soon. Otabek Altin’s travel logs have come through. Want to know where he’s been?”

“Yes,” Yuuri replied, keeping an eye on the mouth of the alley. Instincts were flaring inside of him, and he knew it had been stupid of him to rush out without even thinking about the people currently after him. But the thought then made him pause. Did it matter? He was prepared for ambushes, had been trained. He didn’t need people like Mila. He could hold his own.

“I don’t know since when he was hired, so I’m going back two months, just to make sure. He’s been to America three times in that time, one in New York, one in L.A and one in Austin. He’s also been to Russia four times, all in one month, all to St Petersburg. He’s been to Britain once, to London, a month ago. And he’s been to Japan twice, both time to Tokyo, in the space of a week, and that was last week.”

Yuuri felt his heart almost stop. He swallowed down a lump that began to form in his throat, making it harder and harder for him to breathe. Japan, Tokyo. Twice, in one week. So recent. Paired with Otabek’s comment of how he’d seen Yuuri on CCTV with another person.

The world swam before his eyes, a vein pulsing at the back of his head. Japan. Japan. He rubbed his face, cursing himself. Somehow, some way, he had given Phichit over to Otabek, and in turn over to Yakov. He didn’t know how or when, but he knew now that he must have done something
before his meeting with Otabek. The informant broker was toying with him that night, or looking for some conformation.

“Yuuri?” Chris asked, voice a little rushed. “Is any of that a worry to you?”

Only one day away from finding what it was that they wanted, Otabek had said. One day. Was he safe to assume then that Otabek only knew it was Japan, but not where? No details, no precise location. It had been difficult for him, clearly. At that, Yuuri felt some pride swell. But Otabek had sounded so sure of what he could do.

“Yes,” Yuuri replied. Chris was quiet on the other side, and Yuuri knew the man wanted to ask a question. But Yuuri didn’t tell him the answer. “I can’t tell you which one, Chris. Not until I know for sure that Otabek’s found it.”

“I understand. But keep me updated.”

“I will. I just need to make another call.” As per, they barely said goodbye before they both hung up. Yuuri quickly typed in the first half of the call to his parents, but stopped as Otabek’s words rung in his mind again. Anything electronical can be traced. Anything. Yuuri looked down, finger almost pressing the next button, hand frozen.

Traced. Anything could be traced. Yuuri cleared the number and placed the phone back in his pocket, breathing steadily. That couldn’t have been how Otabek had found them – it would have given him a direct location. By the time he had been hired, it was probably too late. But Otabek had admitted to his job involving watching Yuuri, in hopes it would send him to Phichit. No doubt his phone might have been tapped now, and then he was glad he hadn’t told Chris.

He ran a hand through his hair, wondering what his next step should be. Locate Otabek. That was one concern. He couldn’t go rushing to Phichit without the worry of Otabek following. Unless he sent out copies of himself to distract. Viktor couldn’t help, not with his connections to the mafia.

He needed to think fast. It was risky going to Japan himself, that could be what Otabek wanted. Perhaps he had even intended for Yuuri to overhear their conversation in hopes it would direct Yuuri into action. But now he couldn’t contact his parents. If it was a bluff, then he risked Otabek and Yakov sending their army to Japan and gaining precious time.

He eyed the mouth of the alley again, watching as the shadows of the crows passing the corner
danced on the concrete. He’d need to leave without any obvious show. Lose Otabek if he was following. Use all of his knowledge to get as far away as he could. He began to pace the alley, feeling as if every second was ticking away, weighing down on him until he couldn’t think anymore. Now that he suspected that Phichit might be found, he needed to be careful.

No calling. No texting. Nothing to hint where he was. But he needed to get there and warn them. He could get Chris to warn them, but he had no idea if they were listening to his phone calls. There would be no surer or safer way.

Of course, his parents had their own securities in place, being a safe house. They had people watching, informants of their own. They had coded messages, disguised targets, and much more. But none of that was sitting well with Yuuri. He wanted to be there for his client, do everything that he could to save him.

But before he could think of that, a shadow was rushing down the alley way. He reached into his jacket, hand on his gun, but relaxed when he saw the familiar shape of Viktor. Behind him, Mila followed closely behind.

Viktor’s expression was desperate, eyes widening when they fell on Yuuri. He ran over, and Yuuri suddenly felt the tightness in his chest, a pain he knew he was feeling from Viktor. Worried. No, more than worried. But before Yuuri could think of a proper word to describe it, Viktor slammed into him, holding him closely to his chest, breath harsh against Yuuri’s ear.

“What the hell were you thinking?” Viktor demanded, voice a little too loud. “You know people are out to get you and you go out alone? What if you had been kidnapped again?”

Yuuri felt himself beginning to shake, overwhelmed with Viktor’s anxiety. Mila was standing behind, allowing them to dwell in their silence, though she looked worried too. Less so than Viktor, but as Yuuri’s gaze met hers, he couldn’t understand it. Mila worried for him. Or, perhaps, it was more appropriate to say she was worried for what happened to him, for Viktor’s sake.

Yuuri wanted to ask her if she had told Viktor. He wanted to demand what it was she had been told by Otabek, what they were planning, if what he had overheard was actually planned. He wanted to ask a lot of things, but he kept his mouth shut. Because he had given too much out already. Perhaps, he thought, he had been blinded by Viktor and what they were. Perhaps he had lost sight a little of what he had been hired to do, what he had started before ever meeting Viktor. What had drawn him and Viktor together, starting off their enemy connection.

He hugged Viktor back, suddenly closed off. He needed to assume that Viktor knew. He needed to
think that Viktor had been told about Phichit, and that, worst case, he was now aiming to find him as he had done since the start. He needed to assume the worst of everything, and plan accordingly.

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Viktor fought back a demon the whole way back to the hotel. He could feel it rising in his chest, curling around his heart. He kept a firm grip on Yuuri, and Yuuri kept close beside him as Mila steadily guided them back.

They hadn’t said much more. He knew he had sounded a little too harsh to Yuuri when they found him, hidden in the corner of an alley, looking frightened. But it had all come crashing into him again. He had come back to protect his soulmate, but that person had run out into danger as if he didn’t care. Viktor didn’t want to say it, but he needed Yuuri to understand it wasn’t just about him anymore. They were both in this.

But he could understand why too. He could understand why Yuuri had rushed off and hidden away. Mila had told him.

Viktor had been more than furious. He knew Yakov was still searching for Phichit, despite Viktor having asked him to stop. But he didn’t think Yakov would have kept to it – or really achieve it. Viktor had had enough of a hard time when he was hunting. But it seemed he was wrong.

He hadn’t known they’d hired a new informant broker. He hadn’t known how good the kid was. The first he heard of it was from Mila, who said it was only a matter of time, less than twenty-four hours, before the target would be found. His fury wasn’t for that though. He didn’t care if they found Phichit, or really care that Otabek had been hired without his knowing. What he did care about though was how this affected him and Yuuri. Already he could see their relationship straining.

Yuri was sitting watching the television when they got back. To an untrained eye, it might have looked like he hadn’t moved since their leaving. But Viktor noticed the tension in the boy’s body, his gaze turning to look at them out of the corner of his eye when they came in. His phone was settled on his stomach, where it hadn’t been before. The curtains on the window were moved ever so slightly. He’d moved, and he’d watched them leave the hotel.

Despite what Yuri said, he was concerned about the whole thing. He asked questions and observed, but Viktor tried to keep as much as he could from the boy. This wasn’t the situation he needed to draw him into the mafia. It was dangerous enough, and who knew what the Crispinos would do. If they couldn’t reach Viktor’s soulmate, then perhaps they would try to go for Yuri instead.
Viktor couldn’t help but wonder what the call was that Yuuri had had to make. By the time they found him, the call had been finished. He wondered if it had been to Phichit, to warn him about what was to come. Perhaps once Otabek found where he was, the place would be empty. In a way, he hoped so.

Viktor led Yuuri into the bedroom, closing the door. Mila had been about to ask something, but Viktor shut his head before the door slammed. Now wasn’t the time.

Yuuri pulled away from him, going to stand beside the window and stare outwards.

Viktor could feel the tension in the air. He swallowed it down, understanding. He had hoped that their reunion had brought them closer, and for a short time it had seemed so. But now it felt strained, almost back to how they acted before they knew their connection. He could feel Yuuri’s suspicion, his need to ask if Viktor knew. If asked, Viktor knew he’d be honest. He knew that their informant broker was close. He knew Yuuri wanted to be anywhere but here right now.

Yuuri had said he would leave as soon as there was even a hint his client might be in danger. But he hesitated. Perhaps he wanted proof. Perhaps he didn’t want to lead them straight to it. But either way, Viktor didn’t want to push. And that meant not asking weird questions.

He could hear Mila and Yuri whispering in the living room, Russian so low that even he couldn’t understand over the hum of the air-conditioning. It was too uncomfortable. It felt like all their progress was for nothing.

It was a long time before the silence was broken, and it was Yuuri’s words that broke it. He didn’t turn around, didn’t stray away from the window. He continued to watch the crowds below, their sound unable to break through the thick glass and he asked Viktor a question with a voice devoid of emotion.

“Do you know what my parents used to call me when I was younger?”

Viktor bit the inside of his lip, feeling as if this might have been a trap. He’d never heard Yuuri mention his parents before, and thought they had passed. He’d assumed so, anyway. He’d learned in his profession that if someone didn’t mention a family member, or family at all, they were gone. “What?”
“I grew up seeing the good in everything. I was an optimist,” Yuuri said. “They called me an angel. Despite things I saw as a child, I believed something good would come.”

Viktor said nothing. It was so different than what he had been told by Yuuri before, but he supposed that that was what was coming next.

“That disappeared, of course,” Yuuri continued. “Especially when I came to understand what having one name on both wrists meant. And when you had people staring at you, assuming you were going to get the worst in life because of it, then you start to lose that optimism. Even when it got harder for me to get out of bed, or when I began to cover my wrists with bandages, they still called me an angel. Because even if I didn’t find the good in myself, I was still finding the good in others.”

The words pained Viktor in his chest, making his heart thump, and he wasn’t sure if he was the one feeling it, or if it was coming from Yuuri anymore.

“I saw good in Phichit when he first came to me. I saw an innocent man that had stumbled into trouble he didn’t want. I guess you could say that reminded myself a little of me. Maybe that’s why I accepted it.” Yuuri paused as he watched a scuffle between business men start outside on the main street. Just some pushing, some angry words. And then it was over. “It took a while, but I started to see some good in you too.”

Viktor felt the pain in his chest again, his mouth go dry. The words were weighing down on him, and already he felt like there was going to be something to crash into him. He waited for Yuuri’s next few words, ready for their impact, knowing that no one could cut him nearly as deeply as Yuuri could.

“But, Viktor, I can’t see the good in this. I can’t keep optimistic. I don’t know what’s going to come, and I’m scared.”

Viktor stepped forwards, engulfing Yuuri in a hug before his mind could tell him it wasn’t the best idea. But Yuuri melted into it, despite some reluctance. Yuuri didn’t speak again, but Viktor held him close, because he knew Yuuri well by now. Yuuri was the type to think many things, but wouldn’t say them. Viktor knew that hundreds of words were passing through his head at that moment, words Viktor couldn’t protect him from, words that he would dwell on and start to believe. Viktor didn’t want to say it, but he was thinking the same too.
Yuuri had a lot of people painting him with targets, and while he could protect himself, he didn’t understand Viktor’s other enemies like Viktor did. Yuuri, being a bodyguard, knew that sometimes he would have to be the shield for his clients, and that any contract could be the last. But Viktor had already planned to be that shield for Yuuri. It was the first time in a long time that he wondered if he was going to make it out alive.

Perhaps he had made one enemy too many. Perhaps he had made too many selfish comments. And perhaps he had been too sure he would never meet the owner of the names on his wrists.

***

Mila was pacing the floor, wanting nothing more than to interrupt Viktor’s and Yuuri’s solidarity in their bedroom. There was something off. She had been reluctant to tell Viktor what it was Otabek and Yakov had told her, but she had said it anyway, and now she knew she had made a mistake.

She felt like she had set a ball rolling that no one could stop. She knew Yuuri knew, though she didn’t know how. The man seemed to be able to do that though – he was observant, and just like Viktor, he seemed to know things he had no business knowing.

She hated when Yakov and Viktor were fighting. She hated being the one to take sides. And she felt like she had to now. Viktor didn’t want to hunt for Phichit, Yakov did. She’d stuck with Yakov, and now she wasn’t sure if this was such a good idea. She could have been the one to break a fated bond, and that ached in her chest.

“You’re going to pace a hole into the floor,” Yuri muttered, turning to stare at her as the blurriness of the television images flashed. “What’s done is done. You can’t stop it now.”

“You don’t even know the extent of it,” she said a little too harshly.

“I don’t need to. I can feel the tension even as an outsider.”

“Then why are you here, Yuri?”

A blush formed on the young one’s pale cheeks, and he glared as he sat up straight. “None of your business.”
“Even if you say you don’t want to know, you come here anyway.” Mila had told him more than once to stay out of their business. It had been agreed upon, between her, Viktor and Yakov a long time ago, that Yuri stay out of what they did. It made things easier, it protected him. But their actions had consequences. People always walked in somehow, and it was now that Mila was beginning to understand just how bad that was.

“Shut up. I told you, I have a friend here-”

“Yuri, no you don’t. Admit it, you’re just as curious about Yuuri as we are.” And as much as Mila hated to admit it too, she was curious about where this was going to go. Something about the situation made it feel heavier than anything else she had ever done.

She had killed people. She’d foiled plans that could have destroyed a country. She had saved hundreds of people.

She’d made it to the dawn on days that she should have been lost to the dark.

But something about soulmates and enemies and fate made this feel more inevitable and destructive than anything else before. She felt like she should be running, far away until she couldn’t run anymore. But loyalty stuck her here, to where maybe, finally, the dawn wouldn’t come.

Yuri stood. “Interested? In that pig? You’ve got to be kidding me. There’s nothing about him I’m curious about!”

A lie. Of course it would be. Yuuri seemed like that – uninteresting and plain at the start, a person they had come across a thousand times. When she had first met him, she wondered how someone like that could be tied to Viktor so completely. They were opposites, and so undeserving of Viktor. But she had been proven wrong so quickly. Before she knew it, she was saving him, and not just because Viktor had asked. She knew this man held the happiness of her friend, and soon enough, she realised Yuuri held Viktor’s future as well.

“You should be back in Russia, Yuri.” Away, where it was safe. Where the dawn always came back around. “Yakov’s going to be so annoyed that you ran away again.”

“Like he cares. He gives me money so I can travel. I’m travelling.”
“This is different and you know it.”

“Shut up, you hag,” Yuri snapped. “Don’t treat me like I’m innocent or naïve.”

Mila said nothing more, instead turning to the door and peering through the peep hole in the wood. The hall was just as quiet as it had been before, and yet she felt like the next time she would look through it, there would be an army waiting on the other side. Paranoia was beginning to creep into her body, and she wasn’t sure why that was.

She was usually cool and calculated, the calmest of the higher mafia if she was going to be honest. Yakov couldn’t calm himself even if he was blackmailed to be, Viktor was, well, Viktor, Yuri was a moody version of Yakov and Georgi had a drama to cry about every five minutes. No one could do her job. No one could calmly plan out something and view it from every angle possible, be patient enough to wait for it to fall into place. No one, and that was why she was trained for it in the first place.

But since the interruption of the Crispino family, she felt on edge. She’d known Sara and Michele for years, more so by name and reputation than facial recognition. And every time they had been in the same room, it was during a gala or a banquet, where they exchanged pleasantries, made sure the other knew what it was they could do, and then parted ways. She knew the feud between the Crispinos and Viktor though, had been there when Viktor had made one stupid mistake, but hadn’t thought much of it. Them? Against their Russian mafia? No, Michele and Sara and their family couldn’t hope to ever win.

Not until Viktor’s soulmate surfaced.

Now Mila was worried. They were unstoppable, but with someone like Yuuri, they had a very clear weakness. If they got to him, Viktor fell too. And with Viktor, Yakov and Mila were distracted and trying to pull the pieces back together. The Crispino famiglia knew that now. They’d already tried it once. And with how close they had come, it would only fuel their desire for it more.

She wanted to turn Otabek onto that pressing matter, but Yakov’s job overruled her own. He’d promised he’d help, somehow, when he had time. But nothing had come of it yet, and that worried her. She’d set their other informants on it, ghosts that were scattered across the world for surveillance. Nothing yet.

Something told her though that they were still in the same city, somewhere, thinking, planning.
They needed to be ahead. But she felt like she was the only one thinking of this as a very real threat.

There was a small thump from the bedroom, and Mila turned, listening. When nothing more came, her hand dropped from where she had been reaching for her gun.

“I swear,” Yuri hissed, “if they’re doing anything in there while we’re in here, I’ll slit both of their throats.”

Mila rolled her eyes. “It’s what soulmates do, Yuri.”

“Yeah well, it’s disgusting and I wouldn’t expect Viktor to think of us, but Yuuri better had.” Yuri slipped on his headphones, turning on a song so loud that even Mila could hear all of the words.

Right, Mila thought. Conversation dead then. She moved to the kitchen and began to make herself a glass of water, unsure what to do. She wanted to be relaxed like Yuri, to not overthink things and watch some television. But adrenaline was pumping through her chest, heart hammering. Something was tugging, her arms warm. She had perfected her expressionless face, and so she knew on the outside she must have looked very collected. It was one thing people said about her – she was not an open book. But it was how she had been trained, how she had to be. Inside, she was just as emotional as other people. The only people who really knew her were her close family, consisting of Yuri, Viktor, Yakov and Georgi. They were all that mattered.

She sat at the table and placed her gun on the surface. She began to dismantle it and clean it, feeling some assurance in the intricate familiarity. Dismantle, clean each little piece meticulously, until her reflection shone back, until the time began to move a little faster. And once it was done, she began to place new bullets into the magazine, making sure it was fully loaded and nothing was jammed. Once that was done, she did it again, took parts of it apart, and fitted them back together.

It was how her trainer had had her pass the time for hours years ago. Until she knew every component of her gun and could dismantle it, clean it, and look after it in her sleep. Until she dreamed it. Over and over again. Now she did it in her spare time because of the calming aspect of it and the nostalgia, the memory of being alone in the room and doing as she did now. It had been a good training method. Now, any issues she had with her gun, she knew how to fix immediately – though hardly any issues ever arose with it.

The sound of the metal sliding, clicking, the weight of the joints and the pieces in her hand. The faint smell of iron and steel, of some little hint of gunpowder in the air. It made her heart return to a regular beat once more, her blood calm.
But that was until there was a knock on the door. She placed the finished gun in her hands and slowly moved to open the door, careful to avoid any gunshots. She threw it open, but it was only Otabek on the other side.

He had rushed over, cheeks slightly red, eyes wide, more emotion on his face than Mila had seen for a long time. Behind her, she heard Yuri take of his headphones.

“I’ve already called Yakov to let him know,” Otabek panted, stepping into the room and closing the door.

“Let him know what?” Mila asked. But she already knew. She could already feel the weight of the words pressing on her, rushing her heart up again.

“I’ve found him. I’ve found Phichit Chulanont. Hasetsu, Japan. Yakov is already on his way.” Otabek stopped, glancing around the room. “Where’s Viktor?”

***

Christophe Giacometti was in the middle of a nice glass of wine and a film when he got the notification.

He wanted to rest and pamper himself tonight, donned in his favourite purple dressing gown, some slippers, and his beautiful cat sleeping next to him. It had been a long few weeks.

He was halfway through his favourite film, a smile pulled on his lips. He’d even switched off the lights to his apartment, allowed the room to be illuminated by the low glow of the television screen. In the room next to him, door open, another few screens were permanently on, the whirring of many computers a constant white noise of the background. In that room was where he made his magic, where many of his clients’ lives were documented, where their hopes lay. He’d spent more than enough time there for today, he thought, listened to phone calls, hunted down CCTV footage, chased rumours.

He raised the glass of red wine to his lips, the reflection of the television dancing on the expensive glass. He allowed the dark taste of the beverage to fill his mouth before he swallowed it down, a tiny bit of burning down his throat. Already, it made his blood buzz, body relax.
His cat purred next to him as he ran his hand through her fur, tail twitching ever so slightly every now and then.

A peaceful night. The first he had had in a very long time. It had been so busy lately, so filled with demanding clients, and far too many secrets that anyone had any business knowing.

He was only halfway through his peaceful night when an alert sounded in the room next to him. He turned to business immediately, setting his glass down and pacing to the room.

Lights flickered, one main laptop in the middle of the room lighting up the back wall. Chris set himself in front of it, watching the soundwaves as it began to record something. He placed the headphones carefully on his head and listened.

It opened with a rustle, something being shut. There was a familiar hum, much like the monitor of his own computers. Too familiar. Along with it, someone was breathing. No sound on the other side, and Chris was wondering what they were waiting for.

Then there was the sound of a phone being moved, and Chris knew that the caller had finally reached the phone. “Yes?”

“It’s Otabek Altin, sir.”

“I told you to call my personal phone, Altin.”

“I fear it might be compromised.”

The man on the other side was quiet for a moment, and internally, Chris cursed. Otabek Altin likely knew that people like Chris were listening into Yakov’s personal phone. He leaned back in his chair, watching as the computer documented their words, recording. The soundwaves were spiked and piercing, following the deepness of their voices. He wondered if this was the conversation he had been waiting for, for a long time now.

“Compromised,” Yakov repeated, as if he didn’t quite want to believe it, but knew he had to. “And you think this phone line is better protected?”
“I think so. Otherwise someone would need to sift through all your company calls to even find this one.”

Chris grinned to himself. Oh, Otabek was underestimating him. He thought him an amateur, but Chris had been doing this since before Otabek even knew what a phone was. He’d grown with the changes in technology, while Otabek had had to learn it at the beginning of business. There were many tricks up this Swiss man’s sleeve.

“No need for codes then? Is this a delicate issue?”

“Delicate enough,” Otabek replied. He was rushing somewhere, Chris could hear the breathless punch to his voice, though it was silent of any background noise but his feet on the floor. “I found him, sir. It was difficult. But I did it.”

“Difficult, how?”

“Electronically, it was easy. Yuuri Katsuki hid him the old-fashioned way, away from any cameras, in a place that seems lost with time.” There was a small smile in Otabek’s voice.

Chris rested his head in his hand, placing a finger to his mouth as he listened intently. His heart skipped a little faster.

“Yuuri Katsuki had a good understanding of how it would be easy to find Phichit electronically. So he made sure to avoid anything like it. He took Phichit to a rural town, no cameras, hardly any other surveillance, no trail from Tokyo to the town.”

“Altin, where is he?”

“A seaside town called Hasetsu, Japan. There’s a bathhouse, the last one in town. He’s hidden there.”

Chris jotted down the name on a piece of paper, knowing he had already butchered the spelling. Japan, of course. He knew it might have been, not only for the fact that Yuuri had seemed to go quiet after their last call, after he had told the boy Otabek had been there twice. He guessed. But he
also knew that many of the clients that he helped hide often returned to their mother land. Familiarity. Nostalgia. An understanding of where they came from. They felt more comfortable there.

“Good work, Altin,” Yakov replied, sounding far happier than the other times Chris had recorded him before. “I’ll send my people out immediately. I’m leaving you up to telling Mila and Viktor.”

“Yes, Sir.”

“And tell Viktor I expect to see him there with us. And if he decides to bring his Yuuri Katsuki too, then the more the merrier.”

The phone cut off, and all communication was lost. But Chris was already typing in Yuuri’s number before the laptop let him know it had finished recording.

It took a moment before Yuuri picked up. But when he did, he sounded a little reluctant. For just a moment, Chris wondered if Yuuri already knew, if he felt the imminent news.

“Hello?”

Chris swallowed down his words before he said, clearly, “The package has been compromised. Yakov knows where it is. Exactly where it is. Hasetsu, Japan, in the only bathhouse the town has left.”

***

Yuuri was hugging Viktor close to him, a part of his soul wanting to never let go. And he was almost compelled not to.

Viktor hugged him back, slowly rocking their bodies as if they were dancing to a slow song too faded in the air around them. No words had passed them for some time, but their peace was interrupted when Yuuri’s phone began to buzz in his pocket.

Yuuri separated himself, and eyes widened when he recognised the number. “Sorry, Viktor, I need
to take this. Uh, could you… Well-”

But Viktor seemed to understand. He nodded and moved to the other side of the room, far enough away that a whisper would be just a jumble of hissed words. He began to fiddle with his guns, taking them out and dismantling them. Yuuri, for just a moment, thought how easy it would be to shoot Viktor right there and then. But he pushed that thought from his mind.

“Hello?” he greeted. When Chris was silent on the other end for just a moment, Yuuri felt his heart drop.

“The package has been compromised. Yakov knows where it is. Exactly where it is. Hasetsu, Japan, in the only bathhouse the town has left.”

“W-What?” Yuuri gasped, swaying a little. He clutched at the wall, not meeting Viktor’s eyes when the man turned around.

“Otabek called Yakov. He’s on his way to tell Mila and Viktor now. And Yakov’s already sent people out. They’ve found your client.”

Yuuri replayed it in his mind. Hasetsu, last bathhouse the town has left. They knew, and they knew exactly where it was. Oh god. Oh god.

“Yuuri, you need to go now. If you have any hope of getting there before Yakov, you need to go right now. It’ll take him an extra hour longer on a plane. But you have to go now.”

“Okay. Okay,” Yuuri muttered, unsure of what he himself was saying anymore. One hour more. One hour. Only one hour? That wasn’t enough to get Phichit away, or to warn his parents. It wasn’t enough time to pack up and leave without a trace. It just wasn’t enough time! “Thank you.”

He hung up the phone and began to pack, feeling adrenaline beginning to course through his veins. His heart was racing, and not the good kind of racing when he was with Viktor. This felt crushing, consuming, as if every breath was going to bring him nothing but pain. There was too much bile at the back of his throat. He wanted to be sick.

“Yuuri?” Viktor asked, gently, ever so sweetly. He moved towards Yuuri slowly, and Yuuri knew he saw the wild look in his eyes. He must have been concerned.
Yuuri didn’t reply though. He began to push all of his clothes back into his small bag, most of his things lost from his hotel to hotel changes. It was funny, he thought, but he lost a lot of things when he was on the run.

“Yuuri,” Viktor repeated, reaching out slowly to pat Yuuri’s arm.

The man stopped and stared down at his bag, seeing that where he normally folded his clothes neatly, they were stuffed in. None of his usual organisation, none of his careful planning. All crammed in within a moment’s worth of urgency.

“Yuuri, who was it? Who upset you?”

He looked up at Viktor, but noticed how his outlines and the background was blurry. Only his eyes were in focus, and Yuuri didn’t like what he saw there. Viktor, looking just as he always had. Piercing blue eyes. A man of the mafia.

In some sick moment, Yuuri wondered what it would be like when he sat here, watching as Otabek told him that Phichit had been found. What would he do? What would he think? What side would he take? But what would Yuuri do in turn? He didn’t think he wanted to know. He didn’t want to be here. He glanced around the room, Viktor’s repeating of his name falling on deaf ears.

But Viktor couldn’t let him go. Not when a threat was still out there. What should Yuuri do next then?

His decision was made for him when he heard the door open faintly. A minute later, there were three voices in the living room, an extra set that hadn’t been there just moments before. Yuuri glanced back to Viktor, seeing the man’s head turn towards the door with a questioning gaze.

Gun. Yuuri could see his own set on the table. One of which was Viktor’s own. How ironic, he thought. How ironic it would be to use it on the owner himself.

Viktor glanced towards him, said something about going to see, and moved away.

Yuuri moved so quickly that he hadn’t noticed he had moved. He clutched Viktor’s gun, the one he
had stolen from him what seemed like a lifetime ago, and crept behind Viktor’s back. His heart ached already. His hands were shaking. His soulmate side didn’t want him to do this.

“Viktor,” he whispered, voice lower than he had expected. The man before him stopped and turned around, standing at the edge of the bed. Perfect, Yuuri thought. His fall would be quieter. “Otabek is here to tell you he found Phichit. Yakov’s already on his way to Japan to kill him.”

He watched as Viktor’s expression fell, eyes widened. The colour drained so quickly from his face, and Yuuri wondered how such a man could get paler than his natural complexion. Viktor moved to say something.

But Yuuri beat him to it. He raised his gun, hand shaking ever so slightly, and said, “Viktor, I’m really sorry.” And before Viktor could register it, Yuuri slammed the barrel over Viktor’s head.

Viktor was out cold instantly, and Yuuri encouraged him to fall onto the bed. He lay him down comfortably, making sure to wipe away the hairs where he had struck him to check for bleeding. And then he gave him one kiss on the cheek before he closed his bags, gathered his weapons, and opened the window, eyeing up the fire exit only a few windows down.

***

It was very early morning when Phichit woke.

It had been a mix of early rises and late slumbers recently, blurry-eyed in the morning with bags under his eyes. He supposed that was what happened when someone was on the run – or, well, not on the run but in hiding. He had bad dreams most nights, of Viktor reaching out from the darkness, or Yakov’s hands clutched around his throat. He woke up in a cold sweat, with pain lacing down his spine.

But this time, it wasn’t like that. He rose well rested, stretching his arms in the air and yawning away the little sleep. He hoped that this meant something good, that perhaps he was steadily getting over this. Or perhaps, somewhere far away, Yuuri was settling things. He smiled.

Someone was already rushing by his room. The thought brought an even bigger smile to his face, and he threw the covers from over him.
Yuuri’s parents and sister were always up so early, catering to the mix of guests and the other safe house occupants. Such hard workers, Phichit thought. Such brilliant people. Yuuri had been right when he said they’d care for him.

He quickly showered in the joining en suite, then dressed himself, donning the same wig he had been wearing for the duration of his stay here. Yuuri’s parents had assured him that he could blend in, and even those of the town who didn’t know anything of the safe house were quiet and stuck close. But he wanted the extra disguise.

The sun was only just reaching over the glimmering sea, painting its blue an array of oranges and reds. Phichit took a moment to appreciate the view, greeted his sleeping hamsters good morning, before he moved towards the food hall, stomach aching for breakfast.

He didn’t make it far before he walked into Mari, who was cleaning the halls with a fag in her mouth. She gave Phichit a nod before she greeted, “Morning. Couldn’t sleep again?”

That was one thing Phichit liked too. He hadn’t liked it at the start, but now he did – how caring they were. They asked him every day how he was, if he needed any help, and they took notice of his habits and tried to make his living here more comfortable. He liked that, liked them. And every day was making him like them more. But he still missed his old life. He missed it with every beat of his heart. “No, I just woke up and felt really awake. I thought I’d get an early breakfast, and maybe help Yuuko with the rink before it opens.”

“She’d appreciate the help again,” Mari nodded.

Phichit helped a lot with the rink. He’d steadily grown closer to Yuuko, and received all sorts of funny stories about Yuuri as a child in the process. He chased after them, wanting to know more about the man who was out there, risking his life to save him. And helping with the rink calmed the cravings he had, the longing for the ice that ached within his bones.

He bid Mari a goodbye before he turned towards the smell of breakfast. He inhaled it, trying to figure out what it was. Something meaty perhaps. No, that wasn’t meat he was smelling, but perhaps a meaty stock. His mouth watered at the idea.

Breakfast was splayed out on the tables that were occupied, some occupants already digging in.

“Morning!” he greeted Yuuri’s mother as she danced passed, plates of delicious Japanese cuisine
balancing on her arms.

“Good morning, Phi!” she chirruped, the same big smile on her rosy lips. “Sit down and eat! Warm yourself up.”

Phichit smiled back and accepted her invitation, sitting beside the one other person he recognised as a safe house inhabitant. She was young, perhaps a few years older than him. He didn’t know her story, just as she didn’t know his, but they often talked about their shared love of animals. He’d even shown her his new three hamsters.

Yuuri’s mother set down breakfast plates before them. Phichit eyed the soup, inhaling the salty taste of the meat stock, mouth watering so much that the back of his tongue tingled.

“And what are both of your plans today?” she asked, setting down a dink for them too.

“Walk the beach,” the woman beside him replied, the same as she did every morning.

“I’ll probably help Yuuko again with opening up the rink,” Phichit replied, already dipping in his spoon. He watched the liquid pool the dip before he raised it. Steam rose, tickling his nose, and he poured it into his mouth. The light soup burst the taste buds in his mouth. “Terrific food again, Mrs. K.”

Yuuri’s mother giggled, her cheeks blushing red. “You’re welcome. And Yuuko would be lucky to have you this morning. I think there’s a morning class.” She greeted a customer as they passed, grins for everyone, before she turned back to them and said, “Have lovely days, you two. Call in whenever you’re hungry!”

Phichit and the woman fell into silence as they began to eat.

It was often their morning routine, or their evening routine if they missed one another in the early hours. Sit together because of the familiarity, because they knew unwanted questions wouldn’t pass between them. Comfortable silence, a moment of peace, while they ate. And then they’d separate and go about their day, to come back and have a proper conversation in the evening. When they both had made it though another day.

Phichit hummed around his mouthful of soup, feeling it warm him from the inside out. Every
mouthful was better than the last, exploding his mouth with perfect delicious taste. He didn’t think people would understand how comforting a stable meal was to people like them. No need to worry where their next would be from, and he had something to look forwards to three times a day, a reason to wake up and get out of bed. Over time, he had more reasons, more people to think about, more joy in the days he had felt were so bleak before.

When he woke, he didn’t feel like it was going to suffocate him. He would have a delicious breakfast in a quiet hall, with chatting occupants. Then he’d either help Yuuko with the rink and the classes, or he’d walk down the beach and greet the locals. He’d take the camera Yuuri had given him and take photos of everything that could be captured. Then he’d have another delicious lunch. He’d read a few books that he was engrossed in, speak to some of those that shared the same roof, and help Yuuri’s parents with things, and then a delicious dinner.

More and more reasons to start to like the days as they came. And as he ate, almost able to see the bottom of the bowl already, he felt like this was going to be another good day.

Chapter End Notes

WOOPS another cliffhanger! This time perhaps it's a little... more dangerous.

I did say it was the calm before the storm. But this isn't a storm. This is chaos.

Strap in guys, and prepare yourselves. All the elements that have been in this story up until now are about to crash, collide and explode. I hope you like it!

You can find me on tumblr for updates and chat

here
“Morning, Phichit!” Yuuko greeted with the same big, gleaming smile she always donned.

Phichit waved back, a smile pulling at his own lips. “Morning, Yuuko.” He walked up the steps to stand beside her as she opened the front doors to the rink.

“You’re up early. I told you, you didn’t have to help. If you don’t sleep well, you should get a rest in the morning,” Yuuko said. But she nodded him in, nowhere near shooing him off as he expected her to do. “We have a five-to-ten-years class this morning. It’s going to be tiring.”

Phichit shrugged, neck twitching as the movement made the wig tickle his skin. “I like it when it’s lively. Passes the time.”

“Well, they’ll look forward to it. The kids love you.”

“Only because I can do tricks.”

“You encourage them. Little Akiko wants to become a famous skater when she’s older.” Yuuko closed and locked the door behind them and placed their bags behind the counter. “They needed someone like you helping them. And their parents are more than happy with it – it burns off their energy and gives them something to do!”

Phichit blushed a little, allowing himself to dwell in the compliment. He’d thought it would be difficult to enjoy skating again, but slowly Yuuko and Yuuri’s parents had encouraged him to take it up again. Little by little, he gave in and returned to the ice without the overwhelming pain in his chest. It wasn’t competitive level, and he knew his coach would have fainted from how sloppy he had become in such a short time, but it was peaceful – a happy place that he was able to reclaim. After so many competitions, he had lost sight of his love for it. If there was anything good he
could take from this, one of them was that he had found his love for it again.

He began to help Yuuko with placing the skates in their allocated slots. Most had been done the night before, before the rink had closed. But he tidied them up all the same, placing some of the lost and found in their cardboard box and setting the single skates next to them.

It wasn’t long before the morning light burned away into a blue sky and the doors were opened. Eager little kids began to crowd the lobby, parents trying to calm them down. With a smile, Yuuko and Phichit dispersed the borrowed skates. A few asked Phichit what it would be he’d help teach today, to which he replied the same every time – Yuuko was the teacher. He was there to observe and to join in occasionally.

Phichit liked to see the kids. He liked the light in their eyes, the awe as they held the guarded skates, their gasps when they saw the newly cleaned ice. Many did it for the experience and the hobby, but some he could see taking it as a serious consideration as a career. In them, Phichit saw himself. He saw the drive he once had, the visions of glittering costumes, of custom music, of dancing in front of a crowd. Before that thought could turn sour, Phichit found himself wishing those people the best that they could achieve.

He stood behind the barrier as he watched the students begin to crowd the ice. They followed Yuuko, the regulars more sure-footed, the newer ones holding tightly onto the wall as they took their first few steps. More than one slipped, but no one laughed. Phichit helped a few up and was glad to see that no one wanted to stop.

One particular little boy caught his eye. He must have only been about six, perhaps even five. It was his first time, and his mother encouraged him as she laced up his skates. He looked nervous, but his eyes gleamed as the surface of the ice did. He glanced to the shine every now and then, watched as the other kids skated small circles. There was a determination there that Phichit loved to see.

He slipped the first time he stepped onto the ice. But he got up and did it again. Slowly, ever so slowly, he skated to the centre to stand in the middle of the crowd before Yuuko, staring up at her as if she held all the answers his little mind could ever think up.

Keep an eye on him, Phichit thought. Who knew? Perhaps in a few years’ time, he would see the boy skating the same ice he was on.

If he ever returned to it.
He cast the thought aside, ignored any thought of it as he had been doing since his arrival here. Yuuri’s sister had told him to, said that it wouldn’t do any good to dwell on something he couldn’t do any differently about now. Not until he felt he was ready. Then, and only then, did he think about things, when he knew he could handle it. That wasn’t yet.

Instead, he lost himself to the sounds of the children shouting and the very vague music filtering in quietly through the system. Parents loitered and chattered around the barriers, watching their children. None had really approached Phichit in his time at the rink, nothing more than the casual greeting. At first, he’d been concerned that someone might be able to recognise him. From what he knew, so far no one had. But he still disguised himself – if not only to make himself feel better.

It was the second half of the class when Yuuko encouraged him onto the ice. He accepted without much of a fight. He laced up his own borrowed skates – that he had steadily become more used to though they were nothing like his own – and stepped onto the ice.

The world always melted away when he was on the ice. All he could hear was the scraping of his blades on the surface, the cold against his skin, his muscles moving differently. His body moved without thought, hours of training taking over. His body moved fluidly. Even moving from the corner to stand beside Yuuko, his movements enraptured the parents and the children. Many would say he skated like an angel on ice. But Phichit only skated as he loved to do, because nothing could make him happier than skating.

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Yuuri knew running through the airport wouldn’t get him on a plane any sooner. The lines were still long, and he couldn’t rush to the front of them. They’d all end up on the same plane anyway, and he couldn’t make it leave any faster. He didn’t have any authority as a bodyguard to do anything like that.

It crossed his mind that he should just hire a jet instead, but by the time he found one, it would be leaving around the same time as a passenger plane anyway. So there was nothing he could do but run, feel the adrenaline gushing through his blood, head aching inside his skull, and hope that it was going to be enough.

And hope with everything that the plane wasn’t going to be delayed.

An hour. He had one hour in between his arrival in Tokyo before it was followed by Yakov and his
men. He had an hour difference to make it down to Hasetsu before them, and to hide Phichit away or to steady the safe house for an invasion.

There was only one thing he could do in preparation for it. He dialled his parents’ number, hands shaking. The emergency phone. They had to pick up. They had to. And that gave them twelve hours to prepare before he or the Russians landed.

As he rushed from check in to security, angering more than one traveller, each call of the phone made his heart beat harder and harder. It felt like an eternity, and he knew he’d call again and again until his parents picked up.

But it was the third ring when his father finally picked up. With a cold, serious tone adopted, he asked, “Who is it?”

“Dad,” Yuuri panted, weaving in between the bodies and rushing up the steps. The weight of his bag on his shoulder began to ache, less so now that the other bags had been checked in. “Emergency,” he huffed out. “There’s an emergency.”

“Yuuri?” His father’s voice softened immediately, but still held his professional air. Yuuri could already imagine his face, narrowed eyes, thin lips in a frown, probably already reaching for his gun. “What is it?”

“Phichit’s been found by the Russians. They know exactly where he is, they even know about the onsen. Yakov is heading over right now with men. I don’t know how many. I’m about to get on a plane. If there isn’t a delay, I’ll be there an hour before him.”

“They found Phichit,” his father repeated. The weight of the words lay heavy with the both of them, but for different reasons. Phichit was Yuuri’s client, and it meant a great deal to him that he had been found. But to his father, it meant that their safe house was compromised. A lifetime of care was likely gone now. And as important as Phichit was, there were other people in that safe house that were being hidden. “We’ll get preparations ready. When is your ETA?”

“The plane is twelve hours. I’m heading to security now. I’ll be there towards midnight tonight your time.” He stopped in the security line, thankful to see that this time, the line didn’t seem so long. “I’m sorry, dad. I tried my best. I did all I could to keep it a secret. I-”

“Yuuri, it’s fine. Things happen. And we’ve planned for things like this. We’ll be alright until you
get here. We’ll protect Phichit.”

“Tell him I’m sorry too.”

“You can tell him that yourself. Make sure to keep us informed if there are any changes.”

“I will.” Then the phone line was dead and Yuuri knew what was happening next.

The onsen was most likely going to enter its first stages of lock down. His father was going to tell his mother and sister and the rest of the staff, pull out their weapons from their vault, lock everything, and reveal their bathhouse as a safe house. They’d push out the tourists and they’d drag the safe house occupants to the depths of their security. He could already imagine it all.

He’d seen some of it before, during the off-peak tourist season and in the middle of the night when they ran drills and made sure everyone knew what to do if such a time came. His parents were avid believers of preparation. Despite never being found, they tried to run drills as often as they could.

For once, Yuuri was glad that as a teenager, he had been dragged from his bed in the early hours of the morning and made to run them too. At the time, he hadn’t liked it and hadn’t seen much of the point for the regular practices. They knew what they were meant to do. They could leave it at that. But now that there was someone inside there that was really at threat, that his family was going to act as a shield between them, he was thankful.

It was another hour before they boarded the plane. No delays so far, and that managed to settle him into some ease. But as the plane began to manoeuvre onto the runway, he knew he had twelve hours of helplessness. Twelve hours of waiting as he thought of how much he’d like to be there already, to be landed, that some miracle might get them there faster. Twelve hours of constant shaking.

He didn’t ease up any more even as the plane left the land and glided through the air. As the plane got higher, until the land was nothing but block of colours, his breathing didn’t settle. Instead, he began to pick at his fingers, tuning out the chatter of the other passengers around him. He stared out of the window, wishing to see the familiar skyline of his own country. How lucky, he thought, that he hadn’t been further. How lucky that Yakov’s plane wouldn’t arrive before him. An hour wasn’t a long time, but it was better than nothing at all.

One of the stewards asked if he was a nervous flier. He thought it would be easier to tell them he
Phichit danced on the ice and felt alive. The brush of the air against his skin, the way his limbs seemed to defy gravity for a moment, how his body knew the ice as if it was a way of living. He was so glad he didn’t have to give this up, his peaceful, happy place.

He stopped in the middle of the rink and gave a grateful bow to the children clapping his finish. He chuckled as some of the parents whistled.

He wasn’t nearly as good as he had been during his competitive life. In such a short time, he had lost many of the hours he had trained. Jumps were harder than he seemed to remember, and he knew he wasn’t nearly as graceful as he had once been. He supposed that was good in a way – if he seemed too much like a professional, some might begin to question his identity. After all, he knew that the profile of Phichit Chulanont, missing figure skater, was still in circulation through the internet and news.

Yuuri’s family and Yuuko hadn’t allowed him any access to the internet. He knew why, it was for their protection as much as it was his. He could easily lead people here by accident. But not only that, he wasn’t sure he wanted to see what they were saying about him. He didn’t want to see what Celestino was saying, or what his fellow skaters were saying, or what they supposed happened to him. It might have been selfish, but he knew it would break him. He preferred to wait for Yuuri to fix all of this, when he knew for sure he could return, before he caught up on what he had missed.

For the hundredth time that day since he had woken up, he cast those thoughts from his mind. He stood up and smiled at the many watching him. One of the little girls was trying to do some of the moves he had done, but could barely stand on one leg, let alone attempt a split.

The doors to the rink crashed open, and all heads turned towards it. Phichit felt his heart stutter for just a second. He was still jumpy, he knew.

But he knew something was wrong when he saw Mari there, panting as if she had just run miles. She was still dressed in her onsen uniform, eyes wide, searching out for Phichit.

There was just a second, one moment in suspended time, that as their eyes connected, Phichit knew something had gone horribly wrong. It felt like the peace had shattered, and he wasn’t sure why.
There was something about the way Mari’s eyebrows knitted together, how her mouth opened as if she wanted to say something but stopped. Reluctant.

Yuuko was beside him in an instant. She must have understood it faster than it seemed Phichit could grasp it. She whispered, “Phichit, you need to go.”

“I do?” He wasn’t sure what he was saying.

“Yes. Follow Mari now. We’ll see each other soon, okay?”

“Okay.” He didn’t like how definite that sounded. He skated off of the ice, casting one look at Yuuko over his shoulder. She was smiling, but it seemed more sombre, sadder. Phichit, slowly and reluctantly, came to an understanding.

He took off his skates at the barrier and moved to place them in the office, but Mari stopped him with a hand to his shoulder.

“Leave them there. We don’t have a lot of time.” She didn’t say anything more, knowing that there were a few within ear shot around. “Just grab your shoes quickly.”

Phichit nodded and quickly slipped them on, feeling as if everything around him was suddenly falling apart. His expression was like stone, nothing showing yet, and his thoughts were the same. A wall was built, keeping things at bay. He didn’t want to let it crumble yet.

It wasn’t until they were walking along the pavement, heading towards the onsen, that Mari spoke. Around them, locals were few and far between, many out fishing on the calm ocean or playing on the beach. No one to overhear.

“They’ve found you,” she said, no beating around the bush. “Yuuri just called to tell us. He’s on the first plane here.”

“But?” Phichit asked. The information registered, but he didn’t think too much about it.

“But Yakov and his men are coming too. Yuuri says he thinks he’ll be here about an hour before
they arrive, tonight towards midnight. It’s not a lot of time, but we have twelve hours before that comes.”

“So, what do we do?”

“We need to discuss whether what’s best for you. We’ve tried contacting Yuuri again, but he must be in the air. We could send you away, so you’re not here when they arrive. But that’s leaving you out in the open. Or we can hide you in the safe house, underground and protect you that way. But that means a stand-off.”

“Oh.” Talking about his life and the things they could do to save it. It didn’t quite register yet either. And yet his heart was hammering in his chest, and if it alone understood what was coming. “Twelve hours. Maybe thirteen. Is that enough time?”

“More than enough. We’ve run drills and planned for instances where we only have a few minutes notice. Yuuri’s done well in giving us half a day.” Mari glanced down at Phichit through the corner of her eye and settled a hand on his shoulder. “No one’s getting through us. You and all the others we protect, we’re trained to save you.”

Phichit shuddered. He wasn’t sure what it was he didn’t like about that information – the fact that he knew people were going to stand between him and the mafia, endangering their lives, or that he had brought this on them.

“What about Viktor? Is he… Is he with Yakov? Or is he with Yuuri?” He knew so little. He wanted to call Yuuri and ask so much, and had wanted to do it for a long time. He hated that Yuuri was risking his life out there, and was unable to call. He doubted thirteen hours was enough to prepare him.

“I don’t know. Yuuri hasn’t said anything about him.” Mari’s tone seemed almost to darken. Phichit didn’t ask anymore. “When we get to the onsen, you have to listen to everything we say, understand? We’ve trained for this. We know what to do.”

“I understand.”

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Yuuri breathed to ease the rushing nerves. In through the nose and out of the mouth. In, and out again. In, and out again. Over and over.

There was nothing he could do while he was in the air. He just had to wait half a day, occupy his mind for that long. And then he needed to rush as soon as his feet were on the ground again.

Right about now, his family would be locking everything down and dragging Phichit to the depths of the secured onsen. Phichit would probably be terrified, unable to think of anything but what was waiting on the other side of the door. If Yuuri had anything to do with it, it would be him waiting there.

His hand tapped on the arm chair as he bit his lips. The attendants watched him carefully, worried that they’d need to care for him soon. They’d brought him classes of water and pointed out where the sick bag was for him. He thanked them and didn’t say much more.

He’d already switched his phone back on when the attendants said he was able to. Missed calls. One from his family, but it was followed by a text saying that everything was fine, preparations being made and Phichit was safe. But there were a number of missed calls from Viktor. No text. Yuuri didn’t have the heart to call back or send a message.

Viktor would be rousing from his unconscious state. He’d be looking for Yuuri, but know exactly where it was he had gone. That didn’t matter – what did was what he’d do from now on. Otabek was there, and Yuuri suspected Mila would follow Yakov into anything. So where would Viktor stand? Where would he be in all of this? He’d checked the flight times after his as well. There was another flight from L.A to Tokyo an hour and a half after his own. If they did intend to follow, they’d arrive after Yakov.

Viktor had stopped trying to call five hours into the flight. Yuuri wanted to stop noticing it, but he did. It didn’t help when he could feel the tug in his chest again, heavy, his hands still slightly shaking from the force it had taken for him to knock Viktor out at all. A part of him had so desperately wanted it, while the other never wanted to inflict pain on him. It was too late. Perhaps now Viktor would rethink their whole mess of a relationship.

Just as Yuuri was finally starting to accept it.

He sighed and ran his hands down his face. Waiting. That’s all he seemed to do recently. He checked the flight time again. Three hours before they landed. Three long hours left. He could already feel the exhaustion slipping in. He hadn’t had a brilliant sleep, not with Viktor in the room, not after what they had done. Their connection wanted him to stay awake and devour every
moment he had with Viktor, just in case. He needed to sleep. But he didn’t know when he would get the chance. He couldn’t sleep on the plane.

Right about now, Phichit should be secured and his family were waiting with their weapons. All safe house occupants were sheltered, shaking in the dark. Hasetsu would know now what the onsen really was. The news would catch hold of it. They’d need to move the occupants and hide them again after all of this was done. But that was already planned. His parents were nothing if not thorough.

He needed to be careful on his travel down from Tokyo then. Would it be worth him sending out doubles? No, Yakov would see right through it. Perhaps it was worth tipping off the police. But there wasn’t much they could do. Perhaps he could move Phichit in that time, but he knew that would be endangering his client.

There was nothing to do but survive the imminent war.

How many men were accompanying Yakov? How good were they? He could call some of his bodyguard colleagues, call his boss, and ask for assistance. But that would be placing people in the line of fire who had no need.

“Sir,” came a call. Yuuri’s head snapped up, glancing at a young female flight attendant. She smiled down at him and said, “We’re almost there now. Is there anyone waiting at the airport for you?”

“Oh, no,” Yuuri replied. Did he really look that helpless? “I’m traveling a little further out to visit family.”

“Lovely, sir,” she replied, practiced speech making itself known. “I’m sure you’ll feel much more comfortable once we’re on the ground.”

“Yes,” Yuuri replied, but he doubted it.

“Is there anything I can do to make you more comfortable? We have some bigger pillows if you’d like to use the last few hours to sleep.”

“No, thank you. I don’t think I could sleep,” Yuuri chewed the inside of his cheek and gave her a
smile. “I don’t suppose you’d know war strategies, do you?”

She gave him a polite grin, though her eyes narrowed. “No, sir. Unfortunately, I do not.”

“Shame.”

“Are you sure there isn’t anything I can do to make you more comfortable?”

Yuuri glanced down at his phone again, seeing the black screen that reflected the fluorescent lights of above. “No, sorry. But I’ll be alright in a few hours.”

She nodded and walked off. Yuuri breathed through his nose again. Just a few more hours. He just needed to wait a few more hours and then he’d be on the ground and heading towards his family and Phichit.

As a child, this was the sort of thing he had nightmares about. Being a safe house, it was as if they were daring people to find them. He worried about being ripped from his bed in the middle of the night before they needed to prepare, for him to grab the gun underneath his bed and aim into the darkness. Unfortunately, it seemed it was his own actions that had brought on the downfall of Kastuki safe house.

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Phichit wasn’t sure what was really going on.

Mari had pushed him through so many doors, through so many hallways, that he wasn’t even sure if they were in the onsen anymore. It was dark and it was colder than what he had been used to. There were no windows, and he could only just manage to remember that they had come down some stairs.

He wasn’t the only one down there. Many of the other people he knew were safe house occupants were down hiding with him. Some huddled, while some stood beside the door to listen in. There were guards on the other side, apparently. Phichit could hear them shuffling every now and then.
They were alone for the moment. Mari had told him they wouldn’t be telling any of the other hiders who it was that was coming. It would cause a revolt, and she wasn’t sure that some wouldn’t offer Phichit up just to save their own skins. So while he sat in the corner, knowing it was him, that he was the target and the cause for this, many of the others around him shook and thought it was them.

He glanced down at his watch, seeing that it was getting close to midnight. Just an hour to go. It had been a long day, some parts passing quickly while others dragged. The last five hours had dragged. There wasn’t much to do in this large space.

He knew it was only a small drag until Yuuri arrived though. And a little after he arrived, then the chaos would begin. Under the cover of night, those hunting for him would appear. Bullets would fly. Corpses most likely would drop. Who knew who would make it to the dawn?

He shook his head and stopped himself from thinking about that. It wasn’t good. People were going to survive. Something would be reached, and perhaps it only took a conversation to settle it all. Especially as Yuuri had told him he and Viktor were soulmates now. It shouldn’t have been too complicated now, right? That should have cleared some things up.

At least, he hoped. He didn’t know what had happened between them in their time outside of Japan. He reminded himself that they were enemies as well. That was a side of them that they couldn’t easily throw away.

He breathed in deeply and rubbed the back of his neck. Tick. Tock. The clock struck inside of his head, the ticking from his watch loud in his ears.

There was something settled at the bottom of his stomach, and he couldn’t quite figure out what it was. It was urging him to do something, moving his hands, calming his heart beat. He wasn’t sure why. The more he thought about what was to come, it made him more anxious, but it seemed to settle something else. He tried thinking more about it, hoping that it would make something clear. But nothing was coming. He decided to throw the thought away.

“We’ve been here for ages without an answer,” someone snapped. It was one of the men beside the door. He hadn’t said anything for hours now, but Phichit had seen the crease between his eyebrows. A time ticked on, it only seemed to become more prominent in his agitation. “What the hell’s happening?” His accent was heavy Cuban, Phichit thought.

“Someone’s found us,” one of the woman from the huddle in the corner replied. She seemed oddly calm.
“Then why don’t they just say that?” the man asked again.

Another woman replied this time, one of the ones standing against the wall beside the door, “Maybe because there wasn’t any time.” American, Phichit observed.

“Has anyone heard anything yet?”

Murmurs began to rise from the crowd, so many voices that Phichit couldn’t see who was talking anymore.

“Like what?”

“Gunshots?”

“Or maybe bombs or something.”

“What if they’ve already killed everyone and they’re just trying to find us?”

“We’d have heard that.”

“Not if they had silencers.”

The panic was slowly rising with their voices, and Phichit wanted to slap them all.

“The next time that door opens, it’s probably armoured men with guns.”

Phichit tried to ignore their voices, but in a bare room with only echoes, it was difficult. It was all he could hear. He wanted to shout at them and tell them that they were all safe, that if anyone was coming in, it was for him. He should be the one panicking. He should be the one that worried about what was coming. But he was the only one who knew what it was. He supposed he couldn’t blame them for being scared.
He checked his clock again, annoyed that time had barely passed. Everything beyond this room seemed so quiet. Beyond their voices, he could hear nothing. He began to wonder that if a war was waging above them, if they’d hear it at all. If guns were shooting, if bombs were falling, would they ever even know it?

Up there, Yuuri and his family would be fighting. Fighting for his freedom, his life, for his mistakes. Something inside him burned at the thought. They’d be facing off against Yakov, waiting for the shadows to move and reveal men with guns. They’d be facing the darkness. They’d be hurting.

Phichit’s hands gripped tighter. He’d been sitting and waiting for too long. He’d done nothing in the time since he had walked into Yuuri’s company and requested the services of a bodyguard. He’d been talked through the process, made sure to know that there was a threat of his bodyguard dying. He was hiring Yuuri to be that, to be a shield. But now it wasn’t sitting well with him. It made him feel sick.

And not only had he placed Yuuri in danger, his family were at threat of being wiped out.

Phichit fiddled with his fingers, wondering what to do next. He only had a few hours left.

But his trail of thought stopped when the guard opened the door, gaze landing immediately on Phichit. “Phichit Chulanont. Come with me.”

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Yuuri couldn’t count the amount of people he had pushed aside in his haste. As soon as the plane had landed, he fought the need to clamber upon the seats and get to the exit first. He resisted the desire to push them all aside and rush through the security. He killed his want to beat people out of the way when they stepped in front of him at the baggage claim.

Despite his efforts though, as soon as he saw the exit, he did run. His elbows collided with people, and he left a string of affronted shouts in his wake.

He jumped to the front of the queue to get a taxi. He paid the man more to get him down to Hasetsu faster than any other form of travel could take him. He gave a little more again to encourage some ignorance to laws.
He knew there was nothing more he could do as he sat back in his seat, heart thundering. It felt tight, but he knew why that was, and he refused to think about it. As the car sped down the roads, as quickly as they could go without endangering anyone, he settled a little. He’d done the best he could. The darkness flashed beside them, strips of light creating patterns in the shadows, everything beyond that consumed by black.

It was late. The sun had set during his travel. His time was running out. Soon, very soon, Yakov would be seeing exactly what Yuuri was.

Perhaps he would take the same road. What would he be thinking? As he travelled, what would cross his mind? Perhaps excitement. Perhaps he would be unable to contain himself, with the thought of what was to come. Perhaps he’d be filling his guns with bullets he hoped would make it to its intended target.

Yuuri calmed down his breathing, noticing when he was beginning to become agitated again. On the other end, he felt worry. He closed that off.

It took too long. They hit some traffic on the main roads, and while it hadn’t been stand-still, it made the minutes feel like years. Yuuri couldn’t breathe as he sat forwards, willing the traffic to part ways and open up for them. But by the time they managed to get out on the other side, precious time had already gone. Yuuri glanced down at the clock on his phone. Yakov would be soon to land. Yuuri hoped that the man had the same problems with the travel.

They sped away again, but by the time they got to Hasetsu, it had passed the time Yuuri expected to have arrived. The taxi dropped him off beside the market, usually busting with life but closed and deserted at this time of night. He took a moment to glance around him, to prepare himself for the potential that someone was already waiting for him, someone Yakov or Otabek had sent that was closer. But everything was quiet. Yuuri couldn’t feel anyone watching. He slung his bags onto his shoulder and took out his gun, cocking it ready.

He loved Hasetsu – it was the town of his dreams, of nostalgia, of comfort for him. He grew up in this bustling sea-side town, with the smell of salt in the air, and the memory of how the sand from the beach could be found in all houses. But with this promise, when he knew there was a terror coming to invade, it felt a lot more like war zone than the home he had known.

The sea sparkled black, the moon’s rays almost piercing the surface. The closed market stands always seemed so warm in the day, but the wood was painted dark greys and blacks. The wind whistled through the chimes hanging from their rooves, almost like whispers in the still night air.
As he walked, he heard only his own footsteps, such a difference from the crowds that walked these pavements every day. No other voices. No other bodies banging into him. Only him, among the market stalls that seemed too far apart with only him walking them. Above him, the clouds began to loom, darkening until they almost cut off the moonlight beating down.

He quickened his pace, checking around him for moving shadows. The sea crashed beside him, memories flooding his system, thinking of the thousands of times he had heard that very same sound. It had always felt so calming then, but now it felt like the crashing of war drums.

It wasn’t long before the onsen was in sight. He stopped and stared for a moment, noticing the lights were off, any life gone. He knew better than to assume the worst. He knew the plan, set in motion years ago and practiced regularly by his parents and their employees. No doubt he had already been spotted, and he probably already had many sights aimed his way.

He didn’t see anything obvious though. No burning. No hidden figures. Yakov hadn’t made it before him. He began to walk again.

He didn’t get very close to the onsen before something jumped out before him. He stopped again, raising his hands up to the sky. He recognised the stature of the person, the walk she had as she stepped forwards.

Mari stepped out into the moonlight, dressed all in black, a fag still hanging from her lips. Her gun was aimed at Yuuri, expertly held, finger on the trigger – until she saw him. She dropped her stance and gave him a smile.

“Bro,” she chuckled, taking the cigarette from her mouth after a long drag. She dropped it to the floor and stepped it out. “You’re a little later than expected. We feared you’d been intercepted.”

“Traffic,” he replied. His gaze caught other figures in the corner of his eyes. The other marksmen settled when they recognised him.

“Well, let’s hope the enemy is having the same problems.”

“Yes, let’s.” Yuuri stepped forwards, entering the onsen and Mari following. It was dark inside, the tables moved to create an open space in the middle. Tricks and traps lay scattered around, hidden by the lack of light, and the furniture was organised in a way that someone could hide behind it.
From the scuffles he heard, people already were. “Where are our parents?”

Mari nodded her head towards the door. “They’re patrolling for the moment, keeping an eye on the roads in and out of town. Nothing suspicious so far.”

Yuuri felt himself breathe freely for the first time. “I need to see Phichit.”

“He’s already been taken to a separate room for you. Follow Taka.”

Yuuri thanked his sister before he started to follow the guard that came at the call of his name. He gave confident strides, managing to avoid the traps without much thought. Yuuri knew every person here had been shown such things, made to memorise and lay them out during training. His parents only hired the best. And Yuuri didn’t need to see where the man stepped, having been taught the same things.

They descended stairs that was hidden behind one of the bar stalls. It was clean and well worn, lights subtly illuminating the place. After a while, it began to level off, forking into a small maze that settled underneath the structure of the onsen, some venturing as far out as some of the lower levels of buildings close by. The first hall though, the first made by his parents many years ago, wove underneath most of the town, escaping into the country side as an emergency exit. That one hadn’t needed to be used in a long time, though it was often cleaned and checked in preparation for such an occasion. Yuuri wondered if this was it.

The halls were not small, nor were they made of earth. But they felt heavy, as if you could feel the weight of the land above. The air was almost stagnant, though they did the best that they could with the little air-conditioning they allowed.

Finally, he was shown to a hallway that had a simple wooden door at the end. Yuuri nodded at the guard, and he opened the door for Yuuri.

Inside was simpler, with only two chairs, and a table in the corner. He knew this place from childhood, in which he used to hide with Mari when they wanted to avoid working on chores their parents assigned. As he grew, he began to realise that it was as close to an interrogation room as they were going to get in a safe house.

Phichit was sat in the corner, biting at his nails as he stared at the floor. When the door opened, he glanced up. His eyes widened an impossible amount when he realised who it was.
Yuuri closed the door behind him, locking the room in the light swinging from a single bulb from the ceiling. He smiled in greeting and said, “Hello, Phichit.”

The boy dashed towards him, springing a hug on Yuuri before he knew what was happening. But he supposed that skaters had to know speed, and their agility was something else. Yuuri hugged the boy back, realising he had almost forgotten what it felt like to have him in his company. Phichit’s warmth returned to his memory, and he felt a little surprised to remember they were almost the same height. For some reason, he always thought he was smaller.

“Yuuri!” Phichit gasped, pulling back. His eyes were slightly red. He’d been crying, or trying to hold it in. “You’re here. Oh my god, you’re here. Does that mean…”

Yuuri dropped his bags down onto the spare chair and holstered his gun once more. “Yakov hasn’t arrived yet. There was some traffic, and I’m hoping that’s going to keep him away for a bit.” Yuuri paused, not wanting to say what he was going to, but knew that at this point, there wasn’t any need to keep anything a secret. “Unless he gets a helicopter. Then we should be expecting him soon.”

“Would… A helicopter? Yakov…” Phichit sighed, clutching at the sides of his head. “I don’t know. Will I know when… when he gets here?”

Most of the place had been made soundproof, made by measures of his parents, and by the amount of earth between them and above ground. “You won’t hear anything.”

“But will I be informed?” Phichit asked, voice much more pressing.

Yuuri paused again. “Why would you want to know?”

“Yuuri, the reason this is all happening is because of me.”

Yuuri rolled his eyes, more agitated with the whole situation than anything Phichit was saying. As time had gone on, and as he settled properly into this contract, he began to realise that there was nothing that could have been done in the first place. Phichit had acted out of fear, and Viktor had acted out of suspicion. If it hadn’t happened like that, something else would have happened. Something else to make Yuuri and Viktor meet, enemy and soulmate.
“It’s not just you,” he said instead. “I made mistakes. I should have made better decisions. This was beyond my expertise and I should have given you to another bodyguard as soon as I realised my own personal connection to this.”

“You can’t be blaming yourself—”

“I am. But not just myself. There’s a lot of fault in this, and it belongs in equal shares to everyone.” He took out a small pistol from the bag, making sure that it still moved well, that the magazine was loaded. “You shouldn’t have said those things to Viktor. Viktor shouldn’t have jumped to conclusions. I shouldn’t have underestimated others. Yakov should have listened to Viktor. Otabek shouldn’t have been so loyal. Chris should have been faster. There’s a lot that could have been done. But you know what?” Yuuri turned to Phichit, holding out the gun for his client to take.

Phichit glanced down, reaching out but flinching when his hand touched the metal. He paused, his hands just an inch away from touching it again. “What?”

Yuuri opened Phichit’s palms and made sure that the boy’s grip was tight around the handle. “Even if all of us had done something differently, I don’t think anything would have changed.”

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The first thing Yuuri did was teach Phichit how to shoot.

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He expected Phichit to be reluctant, and at the start it certainly seemed like he was going to be. He shook as he held onto the small pistol, eyes wide and unable to glance away from it. Yuuri thought he was going to deny it or drop it. But instead, he took one deep breath and then began to look it over, turning it in his hands to get a proper feel.

Yuuri took out a marker he had taken from upstairs and drew a small dot on one of the walls, and with that he began Phichit’s shotgun lesson on guns. Very quickly, he explained the components, the parts, the mechanics of a killing machine that could fit in a pocket. He showed the safety features, the sight, the way to stop it from jamming and how to fix it if it did. Every situation that could happen passed through Yuuri’s mind, and he made sure to show Phichit exactly how to overcome it.

Phichit seemed all too eager to learn. Yuuri wondered if the boy had grown some in their time apart – if, finally, the situation was making Phichit into something more than he used to be. He had been
introduced to a world that was a mystery before, perhaps even a fairy tale made for the big screen. But now he was very much submerged in it, and Yuuri was both eager and slightly worried that Phichit had learned to adapt.

After the lesson, and after Yuuri switched the safety on, Phichit finally spoke where his silence had been the norm during Yuuri’s instructions.

“I didn’t think I’d ever need to learn how to use a gun,” the boy muttered, almost as if he didn’t know he was saying it. “It’s not really what a skater needs to do.”

Yuuri’s heart clenched once more, as it always did when he was reminded of where Phichit had come from. At least Yuuri had known of such a world. Phichit had walked into it, and was reminded every day that he was lucky to have survived. The pain in his chest reminded him of the tug he felt too, strangely becoming less as time passed. Just as he had expected, Viktor was following.

“It’s always something good to know,” Yuuri replied.

“How to kill?”

“How to defend yourself.” If Yuuri had more time, he wanted to teach Phichit some of the hands-on defences. He knew his sister had been teaching him some moves, hand to hand fighting style, but in his return he had yet to ask how that had gone. He could see some muscles on Phichit that had not been there before, while some had gone as well – he supposed that was what happened when a figure skater wasn’t skating every day. He looked leaner, skin a little softer due to the lack of restrictive diet, some weight where it hadn’t been before, but not much. He looked just a little fuller, and that had gone to fighting muscle. He repeated, “It’s always something good to know.”

“Self-defence,” Phichit repeated, glancing down at the shine of the metal in his hands. “How much time do we have left?”

Yuuri glanced down to the clock on his phone. The hour after his own return had been and gone. He’d not heard anything of Yakov’s plane being delayed. They were probably gathering themselves, preparing for the assault. “Severely limited,” Yuuri answered.

“Yuuri,” Phichit began, but seemed unable to continue.
Yuuri turned to him. A cross of conversations and potential issues flashed through his mind, anything that Phichit could be concerned about. He saw it in the way the boy rubbed the back of his neck and how he avoided Yuuri’s gaze that it was a difficult topic.

“Yes?” Yuuri pressed, patience wearing a tiny bit thin from the thought of oncoming danger. Severely limited time. They had perhaps only seconds.

“Uh,” Phichit hesitated. “When it comes to… well, your soulmate, enemy, whatever. Viktor. What side is he on?”

Yuuri breathed carefully, not wanting Phichit to know he had been wondering the same question. “I left him back in Los Angeles. He didn’t have any clear side then.”

“So, is it possible… that he’s with Yakov? That he’s going to fight… us, fight you?”

He doubted it. Even if he did side with Yakov, Yuuri doubted that Viktor could fight against him. They’d established that they could hurt one another, but they couldn’t kill. Hurting the other hurt themselves too, emotionally and it broke their balance. They could fight, they could inflict damage, but at the cost of their own stable mind.

“He’s promised me he won’t hurt you,” Yuuri replied instead.

“And you trust that?”

“I do.” Yuuri didn’t try to explain it, hoping that Phichit would take some romantic meaning to it. Soulmates, trusting the promise of another. Or enemies, dealing with promises around blackmail. But he couldn’t say how he knew, because he knew no one else would be able to understand it. “It doesn’t matter what side he’s on. He’s not going to hurt you. And besides, he’d have to find you first to even do it.”

“Find me?”

“As long as you stay down here, no one is ever going to come close to you,” Yuuri assured, feeling for the first time, a stronger truth than anything else he had ever spoken. “I’ve kept you hidden this long. It doesn’t matter that they know where you are, because they still won’t find you. I’m going to make sure of that.”
“You’re going to stand as a shield.”

Yuuri turned away, locking his gun in his holster and grabbing more weapons from the bag on the table, before closing it and throwing it over his shoulder. “I’m going to go upstairs and see what the situation is. Stay here. There are dozens of the best fighters between you and anyone who wishes you harm.” He opened the door, but stopped when he heard Phichit call his name. It was cracked, the idea of shields still raw in Phichit’s mind. He turned back and replied, “All bodyguards know what we are. It’s in the name. I’ll guard you with my body against anything. I was always a shield, Phichit. It’s what you hired me for. It’s what I’ve been brought up to do. It doesn’t mean I’m going to go down easily.”

He knew he shouldn’t have left it there. Phichit was a worried mess, with a gun in his hands and a room to himself. He’d be thinking all sorts of things, of the war happening above him and the blood that would be inevitably shed. Yuuri wanted to assure him with all the words he could think of, but there were more pressing matters. They didn’t have time.

He secured the weapon’s bag in one of their hidden safes, locking it up. Should anyone make their way down here, then there were backup weapons for the guards if they needed it. Everything was placed as planned, everything thought through, traps set, cameras everywhere. A lifetime of planning by his parents had led to this.

He found his parents patrolling the front of the house, guns in their hands. His father had his infamous sniper rifle, while his mother preferred the closer shotgun. They patrolled one lap before they parted and his father went to find a hidden perch to snipe from, his mother hiding behind the walls of the garden, ready. His sister, Mari, was standing out the front, her own rifle in her hands as she glanced out at the road, peering into the darkness.

Yuuri went to stand beside her, the sound of the marches of other patrolling soldiers thumping in the air like war drums.

She was smoking again. The cigarette was lit red in the dark, the smoke hovering in the air like some ghostly apparition. It passed Yuuri’s face, a swirl of grey.

“Spoken to Phichit?” she asked.

“He’s secured,” Yuuri replied, taking out his guns from his holsters. His left hand stroked the metal of the gun formerly belonging to Viktor, something the owner had yet to ask for back. “I’ve left
him with a pistol to defend himself.”

“That might be more harm than good,” Mari hummed. “In untrained hands, that might be
dangerous.”

“I’ve taught him the basics.”

“But you know that’s not good enough.”

“It’s better than nothing.”

Mari paused for a moment. She never took her eyes away from the darkness. “You think he’ll use
it?”

“He’s changed since I last saw him,” Yuuri confided in his sister. He’d noticed the changes in his
client. He seemed more confident than he had before, eyes much more alive than they had been.
He stood with more strength, didn’t shake as much. And speaking about what was coming, his
voice didn’t waver. “He wants this to stop.”

“And you think he’s going to take more action this time around to stop it?”

“I think he’ll be very different this time around with the mafia than he was when they first met. If
he ever is face to face with Yakov or Viktor, I don’t think he’s going to break down. He’ll take
action.” Yuuri wasn’t sure what to feel about that, but the image of Phichit firing the gun kept
coming to mind. It was one of the reasons he had given it to him in the first place – something told
him he’d need it. He always listened to instincts. “I think he’s had enough. He’s going to fight if
push comes to shove.”

“And if he does come face to face with Viktor, and if he does hurt him, what are you going to do?”

“If who hurts who?”

“Does that matter?”
Yuuri faltered in his answer. Once again, he reminded himself of how much easier this had been only a few weeks ago. In such a short time, things had changed so much. “I’ve made Viktor promise me he won’t hurt Phichit. And I’ve told Phichit that too. No one should be hurting anyone.”

“But if it does happen, and one of them gets hurt, what are you going to do?”

“I don’t know.”

“Need to be prepared, Yuuri. Things happen. They happen all the time. You can’t stop it, but you can handle how it changes you.”

Yuuri knew his sister was speaking in concern. She had been the most worried of their family when they found out Yuuri’s problems – one name on both sides. She had promised to find the person and beat them up, get rid of them for good. As tough as she was, she was still a big sister. Even after finding the owner of the name, her concerns only grew. Especially with the situation it brought.

But before Yuuri could say anything, the alarm rose.

It began with one man on the roof, calling out one word in Japanese. “Sighted.” Then it began to grow, a low whisper that stalked the night air, filling the lungs of all who saw the shadows moving in the darkness. They grew closer, and then Mari and Yuuri could see them too.

All in place, the onsen looked quiet save for Mari and Yuuri standing at the front. All else hidden, it seemed as if they had been the only ones left.

Slowly, the figures began to emerge. Yakov was at the front, clad in his suit and hat, scarf wrapped around his neck. When he breathed, a plume of cold breath left his lips. Behind him, dozens of men Yuuri had never seen before walked, armed with an assortment of guns. Their footsteps were slow, methodical, thumping almost as hard as Yuuri’s heart was. They echoed across the sea, seeming heavier than they really were.

Yuuri gripped his guns harder every step they took. His sister took aim besides him, her breathing even.
It took what seemed like hours before Yakov finally stopped. He stopped twenty feet away, close enough that Yuuri could see every detail of his suit. Underneath, he wondered if the man was still covered in bandages, left from his shooting.

Their eyes met. Yuuri breathed carefully. Yakov glared with hatred.

By now, Yuuri knew the man knew he was his precious heir’s soulmate. That had all come out, and Yuuri wondered how it affected the man’s judgement. Would he hesitate? Would a word about it ever cross between them?

He decided to be the first to speak. He tilted his head and gave Yakov a smile. “Yakov Feltsman,” he said with the kindest tone he could. Inside, he was pleased to see that no other face among the man’s entourage was familiar. “Pleased to see you after some time.”

Yakov clicked his fingers. As his men aimed their guns, the air was filled with the crackle of moving metal – a sound Yuuri used to like as he fixed and catered to his own guns. Now it sounded so intimidating.

“Yuuri Katsuki,” Yakov greeted in turn. “Let us skip formalities. Where is Phichit Chulanont?”

Chapter End Notes

Am I a tease? Am I an evil woman? XD

I hope you all liked it!

If you’d like to keep up with updates, you can find me on tumblr

here
There were many rules to negotiations. Yuuri had learned them all during his training, just on the off chance one of his clients might be kidnapped, or held for ransom, or for any potential deadly situation. But there were only three that Yuuri was really concerned about.

Number one was to always be the first to start negotiations. Being the first to start always held more power, had more potential to sway the argument in their favour. In any negotiation, that was one of the most powerful movements anyone could make. Gain control.

Number two was to remain calm. Any expression or emotion could sway a negotiation in favour or against the person, and therefore, it lost control. When someone could not be manipulated, or if someone was unfamiliar, such an unpredictable issue could ruin all hard work. Remain calm, make sure the other party didn’t know how important the negotiation was to you, and keep yourself separated. Do not give up control.

Number three, keep fighting. Never give in to the first offer. It showed weakness. Often, the first offer was a test, to gain information on the morals of the other party. Never give in, keep fighting, never surrender. Often times, the first offer would be a lie on the tongue. There was no truth in it, just a series of words in hope of making you give up. Show control.

It was all about control. It was a powerful tool to have, and both parties liked to imagine that they held it. It could swap sides easily, and it could change the situation for the better or for the worse. Gain control, keep it, and show it. Negotiations were rarely about anything else.

So when Yuuri stood before Yakov, he was reminded of his training.

Beside him, Mari was carefully holding her gun, outnumbered by the multiple Russian mafia before her, and yet she showed no hesitation, no fear. Her hand was steady, her glance down the sight still, not a drop of sweat down her skin. Negotiation number two, never show emotions.
And Yakov had given him number one. Always start negotiations. Where was Phichit? Well, that opened up his position, his start. Yuuri could almost smile, though he didn’t. Yakov might be intelligent, and he might be ruthless, but it seemed he let emotions get to him too much.

He stepped forwards, not allowing the hesitation show as he heard the clicks of the guns cocking before him. It rose in the air like a wave, reminding him he was just a word away from a storm of bullets. He stopped when he knew he had almost pressed his luck.

“I agree,” he began, hoping to stall as he began to think through the best way to do this. Even if unknowingly, Yakov had given him the better position. He needed to make use of it. “Formalities never was a thing we held, was it?” He watched Yakov’s expression as he glared, jaw tightening at the reminder of the shooting. “What are you going to do to him once you find him? Viktor has already asked that you back off.”

Yakov stepped forwards a few steps. “Do not mention his name. I don’t want to hear it, not from you.”


“Are you denying it?”

Yuuri paused for a moment, reminding himself of all the times he had known Viktor would be closer to his side because of what they were. He thought of his position, of how he had tried to gain Viktor to his side, knowing he could stop Viktor by agreeing to Viktor’s seemingly small demand of seeing one another often. He supposed that was slightly manipulative. “No more than you are.”

Perhaps that wasn’t the right thing to say. Yakov’s face burned a bright red, though he attempted to compose himself. “I don’t manipulate him.”

“No, you just helped convince him that Phichit was a threat. You saw what you saw, and you convinced Viktor that it was what he saw as well. None of this would have happened if you had backed off.” Yuuri fought to keep his voice steady. Don’t let your expression show, he thought. Don’t let him think he has control. He had given in once, allowed Yakov control the first time they met. Shooting him had made Yakov even more blood thirsty. He needed to be more careful this time.

“The boy hurt him.”
“My client did nothing but fear for a man he thought was trying to hurt himself,” Yuuri replied. But he didn’t say anymore, he knew that Yakov wouldn’t listen. “What are you going to do to him if you find him?”

“He’s been allowed to run around for too long. Even if he didn’t do what he did, he knows too much now.”

“So you’ll kill him?”

“That’s the obvious choice.”

Yuuri knew he was about to ask something dangerous. He shouldn’t be asking, not as dozens of guns were aimed his way, but he had to. “Then what about me? I know just as much, if not more. What are you going to do to me?”

It was the first time he had seen Yakov properly hesitate. His glance scanned over Yuuri’s body, and Yuuri could almost read his thoughts. He was thinking of what Yuuri was, of his connection with Viktor. Perhaps he was weighing up the pros and cons of shooting Yuuri, and how it would damage his relationship with Viktor. But it was a tense moment. Yuuri could feel his heart inside his chest. He kept eye contact with Yakov, not wanting to show weakness, but it was hard. He wanted to look at the guns, show his fear, but he knew he had control here – at least in words.

“If you do not get out of the way, I’ll shoot you down.”

Yuuri felt the sentence strike him. Negotiations started then. Do not give into the first offer, no matter whatever that offer was. Never give in. Keep fighting. “If you give up on Phichit, then I’ll stay away from Viktor.”

He had thought long and hard about that negotiation. He knew Yakov’s weak spot was his family, and he knew that Yakov didn’t see him as anything good for Viktor. He’d made it clear many times, to Viktor himself too. But Yuuri never planned on sticking with his offer. Perhaps he would have a few weeks ago, but he had come through too much now to leave Viktor properly. If Yakov was worth anything, he’d know that too.

But he paused. Yakov regarded him again, glancing over him once more, before he replied, “You both walk away alive?”
“We also give our secrecy. Neither of us will say anything to anyone about you or anyone involved with you.”

“You’ll slip. There’ll be a moment you give in and tell someone. Drunk, or curiosity, or be forced to. As long as the both of you live, we have no secrecy.”

Playing games. Yakov knew as well as Yuuri that it was not just Yuuri and Phichit that knew by now. Mari stood beside him, and his family and the safe house knew. Otabek knew. Chris knew. There were more than just Phichit and Yuuri, but Yakov knew that.

“We’ll change out names, disappear. You’ll never see us again,” Yuuri said.

“Still no assurance for me.” Yakov stepped forwards once more. “But you have just as much to lose as I do. We could both lose our families tonight.”

Yuuri felt a shudder run down his spine, though he kept his expression still. Just how much had Otabek figured out? And how had he done it? Next time he saw him, Yuuri planned on demanding it from him.

Yakov continued, “And where is Viktor? I thought he’d be here with you. I expected him to bring you, so that you could see what I’d do once I found your client. I wanted you to see as I burned this place down, as I lit up the night sky with the flames. And yet here you are, but no heir of mine. No Mila either. You left them behind.”

The tug in Yuuri’s chest was decreasing with every moment they spoke. He knew that that meant Viktor was close, perhaps even already landed. He’d follow soon. “What importance does that have?”

“Viktor would have me believe that you’re inseparable, perfect for one another. At the first sight of a problem, I’d thought you’d both come running together. But you’re alone. Why is that? Has Viktor perhaps chosen a side?”

Yuuri was slowly losing control. He had started the negotiations, but he was slowly losing it. He decided to gain it back. “I didn’t stop to ask. I knocked him over the head, and I left. I got here before you, and I made preparations. Sorry to disappoint you, Yakov, but taking Phichit won’t be as easy as you expect it to be.”
Yakov tilted his head, a challenge rising in the air. “It would be easier for you to give him up, Yuuri. What is more important to you? A client? Or your soulmate?”

“Is that what this is about?” Yuuri asked, almost letting a glare slip onto his expression. He calmed it down, taking deep breaths to steady himself. “Do you think I’m neglecting my time with Viktor for a client? Do you think I’ve chosen a side?”

He could tell from the man’s expression that yes, this was what it boiled down to. All the wrongs he had done in the man’s eyes, it was because he saw Yuuri as nothing but a man who manipulated Viktor and had no desire to settle with him. Yuuri knew he had done nothing to get rid of that image of himself. Perhaps, at moments, Viktor felt the same. His chest ached at the thought.

“Give him up, Yuuri. Hand Phichit over to us, and you and your family will live to see the dawn.”

Yuuri knew there was no room for negotiations. He had been trained to spot a hopeless situation, and he had known going into this that this was what it was going to be. Control, in this instance, was who had Phichit. The boy hadn’t wanted to be, but he had become the object hunted. If Yuuri could maintain his hiding spot, then he had control. If Yakov found him, then he had it. Now it was time to see if control changed hands, and Yuuri was sure he wasn’t going to let it happen.

But the rules didn’t just apply to negotiations. It applied to war. Be the first to make a move. Never let the enemy see weakness. Keep fighting.

He knew the negotiations were dead from the start. He could ask Yakov questions in the form of a plea to turn the man around until he was blue in the face, but it wouldn’t have ever worked. He didn’t need it to. All he needed to was to kill time until he was sure that they weren’t outnumbered.

An owl call sounded in the air, fooling even the most trained ears. Everyone was in position. The building was secured. Almost as soon as the call finished, sights were aimed on the men holding guns. Little red and blue dots flickered on their chests and foreheads, three on Yakov’s own. It didn’t take them long to notice.

Yakov glanced around, but saw only darkness. Beyond the building, no bushes were shaking, no man-shaped shadows, no glares of reflections. To Yakov, there was no one but Yuuri and Mari. He had expected a small safe house, not the well-oiled machine that was the Katsuki family security.
“I know you didn’t want formalities, Mr Feltsman, but I still haven’t welcomed you.” Now feeling much better, his heart thumping back to a regular rhythm, Yuuri bowed. “Welcome to the Katsuki safe house.”

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Phichit was having a hard time. He stood still, as he had since the moment Yuuri left. His heart was thumping faster than he could draw breath. The pistol felt heavy in his hands.

He couldn’t stop staring at it. He wanted to drop it, but at the same time he wanted to clutch it harder. He couldn’t stop thinking about shooting it at Yakov or Viktor – but his imagination cut out the moment the bullet came within a foot of the target. He knew what would happen. An eruption of blood, collapsing, and death. He’d seen enough films about it. He felt disgusted with himself at the thought, but it kept replaying in his mind.

Above him, he knew Yuuri was standing his ground and preparing for a fight he never should have been involved in. He had said being Phichit’s shield was what he had been paid for, and it was only then that Phichit realised the extent of those words. Every time Yuuri took up a contract, he was preparing for a death. And Phichit had hired him for the most dangerous of all.

He might have been able to convince himself by thinking that fate would have worked some other way into it. Yuuri and Viktor were destined to meet after all. But Phichit never wanted to be that catalyst.

He paced the small room, almost hoping that any sound above was loud enough to boom and echo. He wanted to know what was happening. He wanted to know if the war he had begun was already raging, or time was slipping away. This was his fault. This was all his fault.

He paced and paced until his calves began to ache with the pressure. He knew he was worrying the guard outside – the man had already opened the door and peered in every now and then, all the time with the same confused expression. But he never asked anything. He made some sound before he turned away and closed the door again. But he couldn’t stop. Phichit couldn’t do anything but wait, and he didn’t know how long he was waiting for. He wanted to do something, but he didn’t know what.

He glanced at the gun again. Potentially, all of his answers were there, in his hand, ready for him to take back control. He could do this, do as his thoughts were dictating.
But there was something that stopped him. He would be destroying all of the efforts Yuuri had gone through for the past few weeks. Yuuri had been trying everything to get him back to the life he had loved, and if he killed someone, Phichit would be sooner seeing a jail cell than the ice he longed to skate again, set before the audience as the lights beamed down. He’d be the skater that killed someone after going missing for weeks. He didn’t want Yuuri’s effort to come to nothing, and he didn’t want Celestino to see him like that. He didn’t want to wrong all of the fans that he had gathered.

He wanted to return to the life he once had, and he knew he’d never be able to do that if he did what his hand wanted to do.

Calm. He breathed through his nose. Calm. Think. Yuuri and his family were at threat. Yakov marched upon then. Guns would be triggered. He’d only get in the way.

He sat back down and repeated it over and over again. He’d only get in the way. Yuuri knew what he was doing. Phichit would only get in the way.

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Yakov did not look pleased. Yuuri knew the man was beyond furious, if only for the fact that the man’s face returned to its original colour.

The red faded, and his jaw unclenched. To anyone else, it might have looked as if he was calming down. But Yuuri saw the storm behind his eyes, the death threat that never needed to be spoken. Yuuri was the sole attention in that gaze, and he could almost see the images of his own death flickering Yakov’s irises. Perhaps it wasn’t only the gunners that was stopping him, but the knowledge that Yuuri held Viktor’s happiness.

“Coward,” Yakov muttered. “If you want to fight, then fight me. Don’t use hidden guns.”

Yuuri narrowed his eyes. “You came with an army, knowing you’d outnumber us.” He didn’t want to sound childish and say it was truly him that was the coward, but the words were insinuated. “Back off.”

But Yakov didn’t look like he wanted to do such a thing. He tilted his head, and there was a tense second in which it seemed like Yakov was thinking about things. Yuuri knew there was only one choice to make, but it seemed that there was a second, more impossible, one too. And that was the
one Yakov chose.

Mari saw it before Yuuri did. The subtle foot movement, a half step to the side, before Yakov raised his hand just to flick his wrist. Mari stepped in front of Yuuri just as Yakov’s own guards did the same. It took just a moment, the sound of the scraping of stones under feet. It was the only warning they had before a rain of bullets came down.

It began with Mari. She saw the warnings, heard the movement, knew the signs. She dragged Yuuri down behind the wall as Yakov’s men retaliated, shooting their way and up at the alcoves and places someone would be able to hide. The hidden fired back. A wall of bodyguards between them and Yakov. Yakov was pulled away and secured.

It took moments. Only a few. Less than too many. Yuuri blinked and next thing he knew, the storm of bullets stopped. The air was filled with the smoke of barrels and the ringing stuck in their ears, but it seemed so surreal – the silence seemed too artificial. Where Yuuri and Mari were standing, the dents in the stones were only left. Where Yakov had been, all that was left there were little bullet holes in the wood and the concrete, silver sparkling in moonlight. There was some blood, but no bodies.

It had begun.

“We need to move,” Mari hissed, checking around.

Yuuri agreed. He wasn’t sure where Yakov had gone, but that fact unsettled him. He listened to the darkness, hoping for any indication as to where the man might have been. But just as they were, the other side was just as quiet. Mari gripped his shoulder, nodding towards the overgrowth on the left side of the onsen. Behind it, a strong metal wall had been made, for covers during incidents such as this. From the outside, the onsen looked beautiful, covered in flowers and bushes and almost as if it was hidden inside a walled garden. Many thought it was made to draw the attention of possible paying tourists, but it wasn’t. Everything about the place had been made to provide cover, to hide their men, to protect their lives. Nothing was made for the look of the place – it had all been made for war.

Yuuri followed her, sticking close to the ground, waiting for the clouds to roll before the moon for more cover. They were quiet, knowing the best places to walk to be silent. They had practiced this enough. Behind them, nothing stirred.

Yuuri wondered how a small army of men, who were not familiar with the place, could be so quiet. But Viktor had told him before, Yakov was an intelligent man when it came to fighting. He might
not have been the calmest or the most composed, but he knew when to fight and when to hold back. In any aspect of life, his patience wore thin – but for this, he had an endless amount.

Once they were behind the wall, Mari all but pulling him behind the cover, they had a chance to breathe. Above them, one of the planned hidden shooters was resting, invisible to them even this close.

“Something tells me this man isn’t to be reasoned with,” Mari muttered. “No wonder you’ve had a hard time with him.”

“Yeah,” Yuuri agreed. “I’ve tried.”

“He really doesn’t like you. Why?”

Yuuri rolled his eyes, though he couldn’t say much. He understood where it was Yakov was coming from. “He thinks that I’m bad for Viktor, that I’m only going to end up hurting him. I think he suspects Phichit and I are only manipulating Viktor into doing what we want.”

“He really thinks Phichit meant him harm?”

Yuuri nodded. “Yeah, he does. And Viktor’s even tried speaking to him, but I don’t think Yakov wants to take the risk. He thinks getting rid of Phichit and then finding out he was innocent, is better than leaving him go and finding out that he was right all along.” He just wanted Viktor to be okay. And Yuuri could understand that too. If his parents were more inclined to that side of the argument, after years of seeing Yuuri tearing himself apart over the tattoos on his wrists, then they could have thought the same. They could be the ones welcoming Viktor with a gun aimed at his head, or trying to convince Yuuri that such a man was only pulling him along. And they had every right to think that – with what Viktor was, and how they had met.

“Massive family man, huh?”

“Exactly.”

Mari sighed, fiddling with the gun in her hands. “So he’s going to be pretty gung-ho about this.”
“I doubt that man would go into anything without giving it his all.” Yakov didn’t strike him as someone who only put in a small percentage of himself into anything he did. And from what he had heard from Viktor and Mila, it only seemed to strengthen that idea.

“And here I thought we’d have an easy time tonight.” She gave Yuuri a smirk. “But of course, you just had to bring someone worthy to fight. I was beginning to get rusty.”

Almost as soon as she finished speaking, a rustle from the undergrowth caught their attention. It was careful, a footfall in the wrong place, the pushing of a branch that had gotten in the way. Someone who wasn’t familiar with the layout. Yuuri steadied the gun before him, aiming at the patch he had heard the movement from. Mari followed, peering over the wall. Yuuri breathed carefully through pursed lips, silent in the night air. He listened, waiting for the foot falls of the Russians sneaking in, locating more than one. None sounded heavy enough to be Yakov, and Yuuri doubted the man would be one of the front lines. They probably suspected they were coming in through the back, hiding in cover that might appear behind the hidden gunners. Or perhaps they were willing to threaten themselves to make way for the real attackers.

Either way, Yuuri watched as the branches began to bow under the weight of the approaching men. Slowly, ever so slowly, an attempt at sneaking making it difficult for them to be silent. Yuuri pressed his finger on the trigger, ready, waiting. He aimed low, aimed where their legs would be when they came into view. They might be defending, but they didn’t need useless bloodshed. Bodies littering the road when they could avoid it wouldn’t be desirable. They would probably need to move after this as it was. Once their location had been compromised, and once the services were called after the town woke up to the sound of gunshots, there wouldn’t be much more that they could do.

It took another moment, but soon enough, the first form pierced the shadows. Beside him, Mari told him to hold, waiting for the whole line to present themselves.

Two men and one woman. They glanced around carefully, their guns raised and ready for aiming. They couldn’t see Yuuri and Mari where they were hiding, and they were talking into ear sets in heavy Russian accents. Yuuri wasn’t quite sure if they were speaking English or Russian, though he guessed it might be the latter.

As they took their steps out and left the cover of the undergrowth, it became clear it was only them. Mari held her hand up, waiting, urging Yuuri to wait too.

When they were close, almost upon Yuuri and Mari, she flicked her wrist, a signal Yuuri had come to know in his years of living in a safe house.
Yuuri fired the first shot, watching as the bullet pierced the first man’s right calf. He shouted out, collapsing immediately. The other two snapped to where the bullet had come from, but soon to follow was Mari’s bullet to the woman’s foot. Yuuri took the next second to shoot the last remaining man’s hand, throwing his gun away. They all fell to the ground, holding their fresh wounds as the blood began to drain from them, black under the dark light.

The woman raised her gun in one last bid to fight though, shooting at the wall that Yuuri and Mari were hidden behind, in a hope that it might penetrate through. But it didn’t. The safe house had been prepared for attacks like that. Mari shot the gun from her hand, sending it flying further away than the woman could walk.

Mari shouted up at the marksman above them, demanding cover. Then she nodded at Yuuri, and together they rushed out from the cover of the wall to grab at the three fallen Russians. The first man Yuuri had shot tried to fight back, but Yuuri crashed his gun against the man’s head and knocked him unconscious. Mari grabbed the woman, covering her mouth and locking her in a tight hold.

“You might need to knock that one out as well,” she said, nodding to the man that was shielding his shot hand. He glared at them both with fire in his eyes, speaking lowly into the headset. It wasn’t any use though. The gunshots had been heard, their hidden spot compromised as it was. He could scream their location, and it wouldn’t do any good. Not once they moved somewhere else. “It’ll be easier to carry them.”

Too bad the man didn’t seem to understand Japanese. He stopped his mumbling as Yuuri walked towards him. For just a moment, Yuuri allowed himself to bask in the concealed fear he saw in the man’s expression. He was trying desperately to keep it at bay, but Yuuri had seen enough of it to pick it out. Then he crashed his gun against the man’s skull, and watched as he collapsed, his eyes closing slowly.

“We’ll move them to interrogation room one,” Mari informed him, holding the struggling woman as if it was barely any effort for her. “It was so kind of them to volunteer themselves.”

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“Viktor, calm down. We’ll be there soon,” Mila encouraged, though she didn’t look calm herself.

Viktor could feel a storm rising in his chest. An overwhelming amount of emotions was busting in his heart, and he wasn’t sure anymore if it was his own or Yuuri’s. No doubt Yakov would be there already, and he hoped it was a good thing that he hadn’t felt any pain coming from Yuuri yet.
Perhaps they had been able to work it out. Or perhaps Yakov was laying in wait for something to come.

They sat in a taxi, speeding down to Hasetsu. He was sat in the front with the driver, while Mila, Yuri and Otabek were squashed in the back. The whole car was settled with an urgent energy, and Viktor suspected that that was why the chatty driver had seemed to stop speaking English after they had started off, or the reason why he was driving a little faster than he really should have been. Viktor had given him some motivation, in the form of a stack of money, but it seemed that the awkward atmosphere was more of an incentive.

He didn’t want to be there soon though. He wanted to be there now. He wanted to know how Yuuri was, and if he could convince Yakov to back off. He didn’t want this happening. And he knew he could have stopped it somehow.

If only he’d done this, and not done that, and said this, or dared to do that. There were so many things he could have done differently, and the endings wouldn’t have been this. He could have led them somewhere else. But he supposed that this was what it should have been. If he had done everything he could, and it still came to this, then he supposed that was fate. This was where the enemy side came into.

In his opinion, there had been to many times that their enemy side was at the forefront. He wanted more peaceful times, where he and Yuuri could spend being only soulmates. He wanted the happiness he saw others live. And he hoped that fate provided that. Perhaps this was only the start. Get all the enemy things out of the way first, and then live happily for the rest of it.

He bit at the inside of his lip again. It sounded too hopeful. That would only ever happen if the both of them could survive this one night.

When they did arrive, the taxi driver dropped them off on the far end of the town. The town curved around the angle of the beach, and over the water, the taxi river pointed to the darkest part of the town. Beneath the shadow of a mountain, he explained that that was where the last onsen sat.

Viktor glanced over it, not sure what it was he wanted to see. There were a few twinkles of light, but cast by the lamps over the pavements. He didn’t hear as the taxi left.

“It’s not far,” Mila said, coming to stand beside him. “It doesn’t look like anything has happened yet. I don’t hear anything, and no one is out of their homes. Maybe we’ve caught it in time.”
“Or it’s already over,” Yuri muttered behind her.

Mila turned to bark at him, and he seemed ready for it. But all words stopped as flashes of light, barely visible, very small, sparked where the taxi driver had said the onsen was. A few flashes, and then nothing. It took a few seconds, but finally the sounds of quiet gunshots echoed over the surface of the water, chilling Viktor’s body completely. It caught his breath, made his hands shake. He watched carefully, but nothing more came. A quick succession of shots and then the place was quiet again.

“Viktor,” Otabek began, but stopped, knowing there was nothing that could be said.

Viktor knew it was childish, but he hadn’t spoken to the informant broker since he had woken up. When Yuuri had told him Otabek had found Phichit, his heart had fallen. Not because Phichit was in danger, but because it meant Yuuri had to go away. He had told his soulmate he understood that, he knew the reason, and he knew the responsibility Yuuri held. He knew, but he had hoped that they could talk a little more about it. He’d tell Yuuri that he was willing to come with him – make some last bid to Yakov to stop.

But he hadn’t understood, not really. This never was about just a client like Phichit. It wasn’t about a contract binding them, it wasn’t about something that had gone wrong.

Otabek found out the significance of this particular safe house to Yuuri. It wasn’t because it was in his home country, but because his family ran in. This, Viktor thought as he stared at the outline of the onsen, shrouded in shadows, This is Yuuri’s home. This was where he had grown up, where he’d learned the things that grew with him, where he ate his mother’s cooking and ran on the beaches. This was where he mingled with the locals, where he kept all of his hopes and dreams. This was where he suffered when he figured out how important the tattoos on his wrists really were.

This was where he had chosen to hide his client. His parents ran a successful safe house. It had been running for years and years, and had not needed to move. No one had found them. Not until now.

And Viktor had helped. It wasn’t just about Phichit. It was about Yuuri’s family and his home. With barely any words about the situation spoken between them, Viktor could understand why Yuuri had knocked him out. Why waste words when he was so sure Viktor couldn’t let him go? Why waste words when every second was precious to his family?

It was childish of him to not speak to Otabek, he knew. And it seemed that the man understood
what he had done as well.

Flashes of what had happened struck his mind. He remembered the way Yuuri’s voice had cracked when he called him to face him, only to be holding his own gun, aimed straight for Viktor. In one sickening moment, he thought Yuuri was going to overcome their soulmate connection and shoot him. It had lasted a second before he convinced himself the man wouldn’t do it, not after all they had come through. He supposed that hitting him over the head with it wasn’t much better, not relationship wise. He still had the bump on his head to prove it. But that didn’t matter.

He wanted to assure Yuuri. But he knew he was caught in a dangerous game. He couldn’t pick sides. He couldn’t go against Yakov and he couldn’t go against Yuuri.

He didn’t know what to do.

“Let’s go,” he told them, beginning to move towards the onsen. He didn’t take his eyes away from it, moving almost too quickly for the three behind him. Normally, Yuri would complain, but his lips were sealed shut.

Instead, it was Mila that spoke. “Viktor, we don’t know what we’re going to find. Yakov got here before us-”

“And?”

Mila seemed about ready to snap, but swallowed it down, understanding his agitation. “I mean, you need to be ready for whatever we see.”

“He’s not been here much longer than us. And Yuuri can hold his own.” He should know, he’d fought against Yuuri more than once.

“I’m not saying he can’t, Viktor,” Mila pressed. “And I know that Yuuri and his family were prepared too. They had plenty of time if he called ahead. But this is Yakov we’re talking about. Viktor, he always has a plan.”

They weren’t walking fast enough. His calves ached, his thighs burned from being sat down for so long, but he wanted to be there now. He needed to be there. He began to run. The others picked up the pace to follow.
He didn’t feel any pain. He could still breathe. That meant that Yuuri was okay, didn’t it? That meant he was alive and well and that anything Yakov had done hadn’t struck him. Yet. Yet. They still had time. Viktor shook his head, feeling the panic rising. He’d heard stories about soulmates being torn from each other, one dying far too quickly. How cruel fate would be if it decided that should be how they end too. He ran as fast as he could, almost leaving Otabek and Yuri behind him. Mila caught up quickly.

It was too far away. They didn’t make it in time before the next round of shots lit the night sky.

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Interrogation room one was being used as a storage closet. Years and years’ worth of clutter lined the walls. The single light swung from the ceiling, attracting two small moths. Mari restrained their captives, throwing two of them against the back wall while the last was tied to an old, rickety wooden chair.

The woman continued to fight, while the other two slept on.

“We need to inform mum and dad,” Yuuri said, securing the man to the chair with tape.

“I’ve already sent someone to do it.” Mari left for a moment, then came back in with a bucket of soapy water she had been using to clean the floors that morning. “You go continue to hold the fort down. I’ll find out everything we need to know about these bastards.”

Yuuri had always had a bit of a weak stomach when it came to interrogation. His sister excelled at it- most of the time she just needed to stand there and intimidate them with her lack of words, and they’d talk out of fear. But if on the few times they didn’t, his sister knew ways of making them talk. That was for when Yuuri was out of the room.

He raised his gun and carefully walked through the halls. He knew that Yakov and his men hadn’t gotten in yet, but it was better to be safe than sorry. Expect everything, his parents had told him. If they didn’t, then anyone could take them for fools.

He diverted along a fork in the hallways, walking along a hallway that ended with a ladder. That, he climbed and pushed open the door to the roof.
Three men were lying on their fronts, pointed in different directions with guns in their hands. One of which was his father, giving him a subtle nod but not looking away from his scope.

Yuuri crawled along the roof, moving to the front to peer over the wall. The lights of the house illuminated a small portion of the front, showing where it was Yakov had stood not long before. But it was empty now, the occasional bug flying passed. He glanced to the overgrowth on either side, and beyond to where the main road was obscured by the darkness. Somewhere, Yakov was hidden, his men slowly scouting out the perimeter of their building to look for the holes in their armour.

“Seen anything?” he whispered to his father. The sound of the waves crashing was enough to kill the sounds of their voices.

“Nothing yet. The gunshots earlier, I’m guessing it was you and Mari?”

“Yeah. We caught three of them. Mari is interrogating them in room one.”

“Shouldn’t be long before we know something then.” He breathed calmly, surveying the furthest part of the main road. “We’ve seen a few movements here and there. But nothing that indicated it’s them. They’re being careful. They have the disadvantage here.”

“And they know it,” Yuuri returned. When asked why they continued to stay here, when other safe houses moved often, his father had always said it was more of an advantage to stay in one place. Blend in with the locals, ingrain yourself into a community and become so one with them that no one could distrust you. Become so familiar with the surroundings, that any turn of a stone could alert you. Always be further ahead than your enemy, know your surroundings better, make the land work with you. And you’ll never need to move.

“The longer they hesitate, the more of an advantage we have,” his father added. “It’ll only be a matter of time before our scouts find them. Where can a small army of Russians hide?”

Yuuri surveyed the darkness, eyes adjusting to the low light. Underneath his shirt, the bulletproof vest itched his skin, making it hard for him to lie on his stomach for too long. How his father and the other men around him could do it for hours, he didn’t know. But his father had been trained for sniping, and how to completely tune out distractions. It had been obvious that Yuuri was not apt for that sort of training from a very young age.
Yuuri didn’t like this waiting around. They might have had the advantage, but somewhere, Yakov was planning too. And he was worried about the surprising lack of a pull in his chest. Viktor was very close, very, very close. It made Yuuri’s heart race, and he wasn’t sure why. He didn’t want Viktor running into this.

Before he could think anything more of it, however, there was a shout on the right side of the building. It was too guttural to identify, too loud to see if it was Russian or Japanese. And before anyone could try to make sense of it, a gunshot followed soon after. Yuuri snuck to the side of the building, peering over the roof lip.

A lone Russian was hiding behind the wall Yuuri and Mari had hidden behind earlier. She was turning around and attempting to shoot the two Japanese footmen that had happened upon her, but it seemed one of them had already been injured. He lay on the floor, bullet in his stomach, but still trying to shoot at the wall. The other was standing over him, protecting him as he too shot.

Yuuri felt like there was something wrong. As he and the man beside him began to shoot at the same wall, trying to urge the woman away, another gunshot was heard on the other side.

“Yuuri,” his father barked his way. Yuuri stopped his shooting and crawled to his father’s side. “They’re trying to distract. They’re sending in small groups to scout and purposely engage us in a small fight on all fronts. Go down and tell the guards in the kitchen to check the baths.”

Yuuri nodded, not trying to pick apart his father’s logic. The man had years’ worth of knowledge and wisdom on his side, and so Yuuri did not argue. He crawled to the hatch and climbed down again, rushing through the halls.

Inside, the bullets sounded so fake, as if they were from coming from somewhere far off. It distorted his direction. He knew the first round of bullets were coming from the west, the new ones coming from the east. But they echoed in the chambers and rooms, thumping against his ears. Someone cried out. He could almost hear the gushing of blood – or was that the blood rushing through his head? The closer Viktor got, the more agitated he became.

Once he arrived at the kitchen, he recited what his father had told him. Check the baths. They didn’t ask questions, raising their guns and finger on the trigger ready.

But it didn’t take long for Yuuri to realise what it was his father must have been worried about. Distractions on all fronts, all but the outdoor baths. There, the springs were still warming the cool
air, heat fogging up the area. They had guards patrolling outside, but it was too much of a
disadvantage for them to stay inside. Without being able to see, they’d be picked off. But if a small
bomb was left there, thrown over while the distractions drew their attentions away, then it could
easily be missed.

Yuuri watched as the guards rushed down the hall, as the building shook, seconds before a noise
ripped through the air. And he watched as part of the building collapsed right over the guards he
had just sent out. Smoke filled the air quickly, and the sparks of a fire began. Yuuri covered his
ears, feeling the shockwaves of the bomb crash against him. A shrill ringing thumped through his
head. He couldn’t hear anything beyond that.

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Viktor’s heart almost stopped. They were so close to the bathhouse, almost able to see the
silhouette of the building starting to gain detail. But they were too far away to stop it before it
happened.

There were gunshots on the left and right, out of sight. Viktor scanned the surroundings, wondering
what was the best thing to do. Ideally, finding Yakov should have been at the top of the list.
Somewhere around here, the man was stalking around, hiding and pulling strings from the side-
lines. But Viktor wanted to go and find Yuuri immediately, and the opposing sides was causing
some strain on both his heart and his head. He was about to propose to the three behind him to split
when something louder than a gunshot ricochet through the air.

It shook the stones he was standing on, bursting through the night in a wave. It almost seemed to
lack sound, hitting with only power. But he watched as part of the bathhouse fell away, collapsing
in on itself. It crumbled and cracked, a hidden man that had been perched above crying out as he
fell with it. Smoke rose into the air in a puff, and the sparks of a beginning flame illuminated the
floor. It grew slowly, but it devoured the new wood that had fallen.

Viktor stopped, Yuri almost crashing into the back of him. He watched as the men he knew, had
trained with, took advantage of the destruction. From their hiding places, kept behind bushes and
other buildings, they stalked forwards, guns aimed and sights at the ready. It didn’t take long for
the Japanese guards to notice and fire back, but they were too disjointed, unbalanced by the bomb.

“Viktor,” he heard someone call his name.

But he couldn’t hear it. The power of the small bomb left a dull ringing in his ears, thumping along
with his pulse.
“Viktor!”

He looked down at his own body. He couldn’t feel any pain. But maybe Yuuri was too knocked out to feel anything. Would he still feel it then? He half expected to see blood seeping from his chest, a mirror of the wound his mind convinced him Yuuri was dying from. A bomb. Yakov had set one off. It might have just been a distraction, but no doubt it had injured people. Yuuri. Did Yakov not think it was important?

Anger began to lace the fear inside of him. His hands shook. He glanced back up at the bathhouse, seeing the flickers of guns as they pulled the trigger. There were shouts. He wasn’t sure from which side.

“Viktor, we’ll go find Yakov,” Mila shouted over the chaos, pushing Viktor until he almost stumbled forwards. “You go and find Yuuri!”

Viktor didn’t need much more incentive. Yakov could go and fuck himself for all he cared right now. The man had knowingly set off something that could hurt someone so important to Viktor’s life. They would need a long talk after this, and Viktor was going to make sure Yakov saw reason. But that wasn’t on his mind. He rushed into the fray, heart leaping in his chest, not caring about the little fights happening around him.

Someone shouted at him, he thought. There might even have been a shot his way. Something slammed against the wall beside him, but he kept going. He rushed faster than he had before, almost propelling himself into the doorway when he finally reached it.

A guard tried to stop him. They shouted something in Japanese, aiming the gun at him. When Viktor stopped and said nothing, only glancing around at the numerous halls he could take, the man repeated his sentence and jabbed the gun his way.

He knew which hallway to go down. He could feel the tug of the connection in his chest, showing him the way. But this person was blocking him. And he didn’t have time to stop and explain. He didn’t want to waste his breath on this guard beside him. But he didn’t want to kill him either, Yuuri wouldn’t be happy. So as the man shouted at him again, moving his finger onto the trigger, Viktor turned to look at him.

There must have been something in his eyes. Perhaps he didn’t look quite sane at the moment. He’d heard of stories of soulmates doing odd things when their other half was in danger before,
some going manic to try and save them. He thought it was an exaggeration, but the more he thought of Yuuri, lying somewhere hurt, the more he felt control slipping from him.

“Shut up,” he commanded, voice low but sending chills down his own spine. He grabbed the barrel of the man’s gun, twisting it until the man’s wrists were aching. But the man didn’t let go. He fought back, powerful, well trained, kicking at Viktor’s shins as he did. But Viktor was better. He kneed the man in the stomach, and then took a page out of Yuuri’s book – he brought down the barrel of his own gun on the back of the guard’s head, knocking him out cold.

There were more voices down one of the halls. He glanced around, knowing that this place was well guarded. He suspected he had as little as a minute before the place was flooded again with guards, gathering back together after the chaos of the distraction.

He ran down the hall he knew Yuuri was, ready to face the voices he could hear coming towards him.

His gun was aimed ready for when he came in view of the two guards before him. He kept silent, running on the balls of his feet, and when he turned the corner, he shot the bullets faster than the men could realise that he was even there. His bullets found their feet, piercing through their flesh. Viktor hid back behind the corner before their own bullets flew passed him, lodging themselves into the wooden wall.

If it was up to him, he’d have aimed to kill. He could feel the rage and the fear inside of him urging him to do so, kill them while they were knocked down. How easy it would be. And he wouldn’t need to even think about it. But he couldn’t. These people, Yuuri knew them by face and name, probably had a connection with them. Perhaps they were even friends. He couldn’t do it, not because of the men, but because he didn’t want to face Yuuri and tell him.

Every guard he passed reminded him of that fact. He and Yuuri were walking a thin line as was between their soulmate and enemy fates, and he didn’t want to be the one to push it over the edge into a side he didn’t want.

So he waited. He waited as he heard the guards around the corner slowly lost conscience. The loss of blood wasn’t enough to do that much damage, and they’d survive it, though perhaps some would need to be rid of their foot or would have to walk with crutches. They’d never be the same, but they’d be alive.

When he couldn’t hear their crawling and their panicked words to one another, he turned the corner with his gun at the ready. They lay on the floor, cradling their injuries in sleep. He stepped
cautiously, keeping an eye on them and where their weapons were. One had stopped his in the shooting, and it had slipped too far away from him. Another had landed on his, too much underneath him for him to grab it quickly. But the third, the man closest to Viktor, still had his in his hand. His grip might have been slack, but it was already pointing at Viktor.

Viktor crept closer and closer, keeping an eye on that man, years of training slinking back into his form. Careful breathing, step by step, eyes glued to the hand with the trigger.

It was good that he was wary. The man’s eyes snapped open and with lightening reflexes, he aimed the gun and he shot. This close, and with such accuracy, Viktor didn’t get out of the way in time. The bullet flew towards him, grazing along his hip, deeper than the one Yuuri had given him on his arm. Ironic he thought – he’d just recovered from that one, and now he had a new wound too. Except this one didn’t feel anywhere near as deserving, or as forgiving.

It hurt. A flash of pain pierced his side, and he could already feel the warmth of his blood seeping into his clothes. Quickly, he made a conscious evaluation, identifying where it was, how deep it was, and summarised that for the moment, it was fine. It could wait. He shot the man’s hand, and the gun went flying.

The shooter’s face was covered in beads of sweat, skin red, pain wracking his shaking form. He slipped unconscious soon after. Viktor pressed on until he was around another corner before he stopped and gave his wound a proper look at.

The bullet had grazed. It wasn’t embedded. It wasn’t next to anything vital, missed the bone, and only in the fleshy part of his hip. It would likely bleed a lot, but it wouldn’t be anything dangerous. He placed his waistband of his trousers against the wound, hissing through the teeth when it pained him, and tugged his belt tighter until it was pressing on the injury and stopped most of the bleeding.

For the meantime, it would have to do. His heart was thumping a rhythm that he knew wasn’t his, and he knew it meant he was close to Yuuri. He couldn’t let anything distract him.

He could almost feel the time ticking. He heard more voices, further on, most coming from the hallways he had already been through. The guards were regrouping, and soon they would see the mess Viktor had left behind. He hoped there wasn’t anything else between him and Yuuri.

He moved on again, a little slower this time. His leg was paining him, hip aching every time he breathed.
It was another thirty seconds before relief lightened his body. He was stumbling through a room that was bare, with no soul close, emptied. Chairs had been broken and pushed over, mugs and food still on the tops of the tables as if the place had been abandoned. He reminded himself that this had been a bathhouse, a functioning tourist attraction before the alarm was raised. In here, just hours before, had been a normal day.

Guilt. But he didn’t have time to feel it until something slammed into him. He was mid-step, and then he was on the floor. Pain ripped through him, and he heard the body above him gasp as well. As that pain settled, he felt his chest shine bright, and he knew immediately who it was. He ignored the pain and turned around, coming face to face with Yuuri, the man’s body only inches from his own.

“Viktor!” Yuuri shouted, a little too loud for their proximity. He flinched and repeated a little lighter this time, “Viktor.”

He didn’t seem to know what else to say, and neither did Viktor. “Yuuri.”

Yuuri glanced around and pulled him up, hesitating when he saw the wince in Viktor’s form. His eyes sought out the blood darkening Viktor’s clothes, but Viktor’s gaze was for Yuuri only. He watched Yuuri’s expressions, face paler than the last time he saw him. He was a little muddy, soot clinging to his skin. There were a few scratches on him.

“Viktor, you got shot!”

“It’s just a graze,” Viktor replied, wanting more than anything to assure the man before him. He wanted to smile, just like every other time he saw Yuuri. The man, despite whatever they were going through, always brought sunshine. “I’ve got my belt pressed against it.” Viktor paused and stroked his hand down the side of Yuuri’s face, relief flooding him when he noticed the way Yuuri drifted into his touch.

“You were about to hurt yourself more,” Yuuri tutted, cupping the back of Viktor’s hand with his own, stroking Viktor’s skin with his fingers. “You’re lucky I was close.”

Viktor narrowed his eyes in confusion.

Yuuri nodded towards a loose floorboard Viktor had almost stepped on. On first look, it was as if
someone, in their haste, broke it loose. But Yuuri said, “The boards would have collapsed under you and you’d fall down a floor into the basement.”

Viktor’s eyes widened, flashes of Yuuri as he first met him entering his mind. Strong, protective Yuuri, capable of handling his own wars. “A trap?”

“The place is littered with them. I’m amazed you made it this far.”

Viktor almost laughed at that fact. Of course Yuuri and his family had had time to prepare, and they had prepared well. Now he felt as if he needed to tread carefully. “Thank for saving me then,” he smiled at Yuuri, stepping a little closer until there was hardly any space between them. “My hero.”

Yuuri smiled for just a second, his gaze glued to Viktor’s own. But then it slipped slowly from his lips, and Viktor felt a chill run through his body. Yuuri glanced away quickly, and came back, pain in his expression. Viktor felt it beating along with his own heart. “Viktor,” Yuuri said carefully. “There’s something we need to talk about, and I know you know it too.”

Of course he had. He’d thought about it through the whole travel here and it had been the first thought when he woke up after Yuuri knocked him out. It had even entered his mind as soon as Yuuri told him Otabek had found Phichit. He knew it well. But he had been hoping to avoid it.

The room was quiet, but somewhere in the distance and echoing through the halls was the sound of gunfire and shouts. It felt like a lifetime away, strangely. As if they could run away now, turn their backs on it and create their own, new story. As if it was a dream that they could wake from.

Yuuri gulped down, as if he didn’t want to say it either. But with determination, he gripped Viktor’s hand and he asked it.

“Viktor, I need to know which side you’re on. Yakov’s? Or mine?”

Chapter End Notes

SORRY AGAIN FOR THE CLIFFHANGER! This one was really mean..... WOOPS
I wanted to put this chapter up a little earlier to make up for it buuuut... then the rugby came on and I just had to watch it :3

I hope you liked it! You can keep up with updates and more on my tumblr

here
Chapter beta-read by whynikkiwhy, who I promise to, the thing we talked about, will happen. It’s in the plans now.

The first thing to come from Viktor’s mouth was, “Why does it always have to be about sides?”

He knew his voice sounded a little hollow, painful, but the question had been on his mind for a very long time – for far longer than he had even known Yuuri. It had formed the moment he noticed what having one name on both wrists meant.

When Yuuri didn’t reply, Viktor pressed, “Sides this, sides that. You or Yakov. Enemy or Soulmate. Why do sides always have to be chosen? Why can’t I just be here?” Anger began to form in his words, beating along side his heart in his chest. It wasn’t directed towards Yuuri, but at everything, at fate that made Yuuri ask it. “Why can’t I just be here to support you? Why can’t I still be Yakov’s heir at the same time? Why can’t I love the both of you without there being consequences? Why do I have to choose?”

“Viktor-”

“Why can’t I be a human being?” Viktor asked, unable to stop the words as they slipped from his mouth. “I’m more than just a name on my skin. I am more than a choice. Why can’t I choose both of you? I thought you of all people would understand!”

Yuuri didn’t say anything for a while, but his face scrunched up until it seemed as if he was close to tears. He hadn’t wanted to ask it. Viktor knew that, and Viktor didn’t want to answer it. But he knew the bigger picture right now. Yuuri’s friend was in danger, and Yakov was the one trying to get in. The bigger picture was to choose a side and then destroy the other. But the thought made Viktor sick, and he knew this nausea was not only his own.

“Viktor, I know, and I do,” Yuuri whispered before him. “I know, and I’m sorry. But you have to understand. I can’t risk things right now. I don’t want to make you chose, but what else can I do?”
Viktor wanted to both push Yuuri away and bring him closer into a hug. He felt appalled that Yuuri would ask such a question, a little voice inside of his head wondering if Yuuri was asking himself the same thing. That same voice told him Yuuri had already made the choice, and the answer was not him. But he pushed that away, because Yuuri wouldn’t look so hurt to ask it if he had already chosen Phichit.

“Yakov is outside, trying to get in. He’s already set off a bomb. He almost got in, but we’ve got good people stopping him. You know better than me what he’s going to do to Phichit if he gets him.” Yuuri’s hand held on tightly to Viktor’s own. “And I don’t want to ask you to choose, but I’m worried he’ll use you.”

The words decided Viktor’s mental insecurity, and he pulled Yuuri into a tight hug. He ran a hand through his dark locks, feeling the softness sift against his skin. Yuuri’s scent drifted up, and Viktor inhaled it deeply. Everything about Yuuri seemed to be exactly what he wanted, what he had always been looking for.

“I don’t want to have to choose,” Viktor said, his voice calmer than it had been. “I don’t want to choose because I’m worried that it’s not just choosing between you and Yakov.”

Yuuri tilted his head to glance up at Viktor, confusion filling his expression.

“I’m worried that if I choose that, I’m also choosing if I’ll be your soulmate or enemy.” It felt like fate had pushed them into this, to make a decision once and for all. And either side he chose, he’d be losing someone he cared for deeply. Yakov had made a mistake, they all made mistakes, and Viktor would need to correct it. It was his fault to begin with, after all.

“I’m sorry.”

Viktor hugged Yuuri tighter to his chest, feeling his whole body being torn apart. “And I’m sorry too. I didn’t mean to snap at you. It’s just…”

“Been a lot to handle,” Yuuri finished for him. He gulped down his reluctance and said, “I know. It’s… been a long journey. I’m tired, Viktor. I’m really tired, and we’re not even at the end yet.”

Viktor knew exactly what Yuuri meant. They had enough to handle with their strange connection, but it seemed fate wanted to throw this at them as well. Somewhere, Phichit was shaking, awaiting a death that he had been expecting for months. Somewhere else, Yakov was lying in wait, hoping
to get in. And Yuuri and Viktor were caught in the middle of it. His next words slipped out before he could stop them, “Fuck fate.”

Yuuri let out one chuckle against his chest, a sound Viktor felt lighten the mood. “Yeah, fuck fate.”

“And thanks for hitting me over the head with my own gun.”

“You’re welcome.”

Viktor let the peace of the moment fill the silence, but broke it soon after. “I’m not choosing a side, Yuuri,” Viktor said gently, stroking Yuuri’s fringe from his forehead. “I can’t. I just want to be here, and I want both of you with me. Please forgive me.”

Yuuri gave him a watery smile, nodding.

“Don’t make me choose.” It almost sounded like a beg, but Viktor moved on before it could sound too weak. “But I can fix it. I’ll try it again. I’ll speak to Yakov and I’ll fix this.”

“But…” Yuuri paused, pulling away slightly. “You already tried that. It didn’t work.”

“I’ll try it again. It’s never too late to try.” The more he said it, the more Viktor believed he could. He worried above everything else that this would end with the death of one of them, of Yuuri lying down bloody or Yakov shot dead. He’d dreamed them, and he knew it was telling him something. Fate was cruel, and it had proved itself so many times – making him dream things that could very well become real was something it would do. He was determined to do everything he could to stop it. “I’m going to speak to him again. I’ll make this stop somehow, Yuuri. I promise.” He moved to separate from Yuuri, who was beginning to look more and more distressed.

Yuuri reached for him. “Viktor, don’t promise things without thought.”

“I’m not. I’ll make it stop. I promise. I promise with my life. I’m going to make it stop, even if I have to drag Yakov by his thinning hair.” He pulled Yuuri close one last time before he kissed the man on the lips, softly at first until the hunger consumed him. He pressed greedily until he had Yuuri breathless, and then he pulled away. “It’s going to be okay. Keep fighting. There’s always another way.”
He ran off, not looking over his shoulder because he knew Yuuri’s expression would have him turning back and hesitating. Instead, he kept his eyes forwards, and didn’t remember Yuuri’s comment about the layered traps until he was already halfway through the building. He treaded carefully then.

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Yuuri felt he shouldn’t have let Viktor go. As he watched him race off, a voice inside him told him he should have been firmer. He should have made Viktor choose, if not only for the security of the answer. But he couldn’t, because he knew he wouldn’t be able to choose either. If Viktor had begged him to choose between Phichit and him, Yuuri would have fought against it completely.

How could someone choose? How could someone decide between two lives? And what Viktor had said made sense – it did feel like it was choosing between enemy and soulmate. Perhaps this was what fate had decided all those years ago.

His head ached. He couldn’t do anything now but trust in whatever idea it was that Viktor had gotten into his head.

All thoughts stopped when he heard a gunshot close to him. He turned towards the hallway it had come from, noticing it was close to where the bomb had gone off. He cast one more look to where Viktor had disappeared, something inside of him fighting to follow, but instead he ran to where the sound had come from.

Within seconds, he was there to find his mother holding off against three Russian fighters. One was already injured, holding the shoulder that had blood pouring from it. He was leaning against the wall, heaving breath. Yuuri doubted he was going to last long. The other two, both women, were hiding behind cover and shooting with their pistols every time Yuuri’s mother stopped to aim.

“Mum!” he called, rushing beside her in cover, hiding behind the corner. She had some splatters of blood on her cheek, and more covering the material of her top. But with one glance, Yuuri could tell it wasn’t hers.

She grinned when she saw him, casting one look over him to search for injuries too. Yuuri found the picture funny – his mother, small and round with chubby cheeks and bright eyes, holding a shotgun and a few knives at her belt, blood splattered on her skin. She didn’t even look frightened.
“Yuuri, are you alright?” she asked once he had gotten close.

“I’m fine, just some cuts and scrapes. How are things going?”

His mother curled her gun around the cover and shot towards the Russians down the hall, using some of the rubble of the bomb as cover to come closer. Three bullets followed as she pulled the gun back.

“We’re fighting back. No one’s made it further than these ones,” his mother said. “Your father is still looking for Yakov on the roof though, and keeping watch on any reinforcements. Mari is securing the perimeter at the back and keeping watch for anyone hiding in the undergrowth. Everyone else is fighting along the walls.”

Yuuri bowed low to angle his shots at the feet of the women as they jumped out of cover. One missed, but his other grazed one of their shins. She cried out and fired back, but he pulled back into cover. The bullet bounced off of the floor and skipped further down the hall.

“I saw Viktor,” Yuuri confided in his mother as she shot down the hall above him. It missed, piercing holes in the wall above the Russian’s cover. “I asked which side he was on.”

“Oh, Yuuri,” his mother sighed. “And how well did that go down?”

“Not well…”

His mother placed in more bullets, taking them from a pouch that was hanging from her belt, beside the knives. The Russians used the moment to rush forward, but Yuuri turned the corner, aimed his gun straight, and fired before the two women could aim. His two bullets sliced the air, hitting one in the collar and the other in her chest on the left side. A spurt of blood flew in the air, droplets almost seeming suspended until gravity pulled them down. The women fired before they fell, but Yuuri could see the way they were going. He stood stock still in the middle of the hallway, feeling the rush of air as the bullets flew by his head.

The women fell backwards, falling unconscious before they hit the ground. Yuuri watched carefully, noticing the lack of the puddle of blood underneath them. The bullets were still lodged inside of them, saving them from most of the blood loss that would have killed them otherwise.
“Of course it wouldn’t have gone well,” his mother responded, cocking her gun. “I very much doubt it was a choice he wanted to face. Yuuri, you wouldn’t have liked it either.”

“I just… had to know,” Yuuri explained. He’d not asked it because he wanted Viktor to side with him – instead, it was the opposite. He asked it because he didn’t want to hear that Viktor had already chosen Yakov.

“And did his answer satisfy you?” His mother walked towards the two unconscious women, noticing that the third, the man, had drifted to sleep too. She checked over their bodies first, looking for anything that would provide information. When she didn’t find anything, she pressed their wounds and stopped the bleeding.

“It did,” Yuuri replied. Though it had worried him too.

“And why is Viktor not here with you? Why did you separate after such an important conversation?”

“He said he was going to fix it. He’d going to speak to Yakov. I don’t know what good it will do, though. He’d already tried it once.”

His mother raised her eyebrows, but there was a hint of a smile on her lips. “That boy really likes you, Yuuri.”

“What?”

“He wasn’t able to make a choice, but he’s still going to confront everything he’s known to fix something for you. If that doesn’t show devotion, I don’t know what does.”

“Devotion.” Yuuri hadn’t thought much of it – but he had thought Viktor might have just been swept up with the romance of a soulmate, and the stories of an enemy. He thought this was nothing more than some excitement that would die down if they made it through this problem. Some years down the line, when they were over this and everything was quiet, Viktor would see that in the end the only thing keeping them together was fate and some names. But as his own feelings had grown, as their connection grew stronger, even Yuuri began to doubt it.
Devotion. Yuuri felt his heart clench, remembering Viktor’s words. *Why can’t I love the both of you without there being consequences?* Love. Devotion. He had been too caught up in the question to really think about it and how it was the first time the word *love* had ever crossed the air between them. Yuuri turned back around, looking at the hallway he had left, where Viktor had run off to. He wondered if, after all, he should have followed. Panic rose inside of him.

“I hope it works,” his mother continued, turning around and pulling Yuuri along the hallway, away from the three unconscious Russian fighters. “Because if he doesn’t convince Yakov to stop, it’s going to be a long night.”

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Viktor found Yakov easily. He came across some of their Russian fighters and he had demanded that they take him to the man. They travelled down some of the narrow alleys of the town, further than Viktor had expected, to end up in an old garage that seemed to have been abandoned for reconstruction.

Yakov was waiting at the back office, piles of papers already littering his makeshift desk of concrete blocks and some sheets of wood. He stood beside it, fighters gathered around as he ran through plans. Mila was standing beside the door, Yuri sitting on the one leather chair there was left. Otabek stood beside Yakov, glancing around as if trying to understand something.

Viktor seemed to have walked in as the meeting was finishing. Yakov dismissed them, and the fighters rushed to leave the room. Yakov glanced up, noticing Viktor.

“Viktor, glad you could join us.” He nodded at the injury on Viktor’s hip, the blood red and drying. Concern filled his cold expression. “What happened-”

“Make it stop,” Viktor demanded. His voice was steady, harsh. It cooled the air, and he felt all attention turn to him.

Yakov paused, narrowing his eyes. “What?”

“Make it stop.” Viktor waved his hands around, drawing attention to battle strategies, to the wound on his hip. “Make all of this stop. We don’t need this anymore.”
Yakov glared. “This was your war to begin with.”

“And I want to stop it!” He stepped forwards, placing himself behind the desk so that they had some space between them. Otherwise, he felt like he could very easily punch the man he respected so much. “You told me to be careful picking battles. I was careful and I thought about it. I decided to stop this. Then why are you carrying it on?”

Yakov huffed, annoyed by the continuous resurfacing of the subject. “You’re young, Viktor. You find your soulmate, and then you’re falling at his feet to do everything you can for him. You’re being used as a fucking dog.”

“Yuuri isn’t like that. He wouldn’t ever do something like that. He’s just trying to protect someone.” He pointed at Yakov, feeling the same anger beginning to rise again. His feelings were fight, everything inside of him pulling. It was ready to snap. Weeks and months’ worth of stress was piling up and he couldn’t stop it as it toppled. “I think it’s more like you don’t know how to turn back on something. You’ve come this far, and pulling out now would make you look weak. You don’t want that, so you fire ahead. You’re willing to put so many people in danger just because your pride might be crumbling.”

Yakov fought back, slamming both hands on the table and throwing the papers everywhere. “You’re being a blind, love-struck fool. I agree that this isn’t about Phichit anymore. This is about our integrity. Already, the Crispino famiglia have noticed your attentions and they’re taking their chance. You’re being weak, and you’re going to die for it!” Yakov paused for a moment, staring into Viktor’s eyes, almost seeming to growl through his teeth. “This isn’t about pride, it’s about stopping something before it rises. Yuuri is your weakness, and he’s exploiting it. Others have noticed. If we pulled out, all our enemies would think we’ve lost our touch. Do you want more attempts on your precious soulmate? Do you want to watch him dying while you stand there, knowing you could have done something so long ago to stop it? This isn’t about you, or me, or him or Phichit Chulanont anymore. You made sure this was about something bigger!”

Weak. Why did having a soulmate have to be a weakness? Why did saving lives by pulling back have to be a weakness? Why couldn’t it be made into a strength. “Then give me this choice to pull back and let me deal with the consequences.”

“It won’t stay with you. They’ll come after me too, and Mila, and Yuri, and Georgi. You forfeited your right to make choices when you followed Yuuri Katsuki and decided to keep him. You’re still a stupid little boy who won’t learn!”

“Then what am I meant to do?” Viktor raged back. His hands were shaking. He could feel the blood souring through his body. He felt a little sick, because he already knew the answer. There always had to be sacrifices, and those sacrifices were often innocent people. Yakov was right – he
had started this. And he hadn’t realised that once he started something, it wasn’t always his choice to stop it. He had dragged to many people into it for him to work it out alone now.

“The source of all of this is Phichit Chulanont now.”

Bitterly, as Viktor bit his lip, Viktor said, “Yuuri asked me what side I’m on.”

It shut Yakov up. He flinched for a second, as the words struck him, and he stared at Viktor as if he was seeing him in a new light. “And what did you say?” he asked after a long moment of silence. His voice had lost some of its anger. He seemed more hesitant.

“I said I couldn’t chose a side. I don’t want to chose between the two of you.” Viktor wanted to stop his words, because they sounded so childish. He knew, as an heir to one of the biggest mafia groups in Russia, it wasn’t an image he should be creating. But he was so angry, and he knew that everything he tried wasn’t getting through to Yakov. People were going to die, people he had wanted to be killed weeks ago. How much people changed in only a short amount of time. He continued, “He understood. He told me he was sorry for making me choose, but he was scared and felt he had to ask, just in case. It’s weird, isn’t it? My proclaimed enemy understands me better than the man that has raised me since I was a young boy.”

The words hurt Yakov. Though it didn’t show in his expression, Viktor could see it in the man’s eyes. They almost seemed to fill with tears, tears that such a prideful man would never let fall. He’d not cried, not even as he had let his soulmate go.

Viktor thought he had done enough damage, but the words slipped out again, burning brighter with each breath. “I said I didn’t want to choose, but you’re making me reconsider. You’re making it easier for me to decide.”

The silence of the room was heavy. He wanted to take them back, because he didn’t really mean it. He would never go against Yakov, but the man needed to understand he wouldn’t go against Yuuri either. They were both making it so difficult for him, but Yuuri had understood that. Yakov pushed and pulled and tore Viktor until he didn’t know what he was doing anymore. Yakov needed to hear the words, just so he could become even a little frightened – could feel the same emotion as Viktor had been feeling for a long time now.

Yakov was never one to be stunned for too long. He had an answer for everything, and he always carefully constructed them inside of his mind. There was rarely an argument he didn’t win. But it seemed Viktor had found his Achilles heel. Yakov stood there, breathing, staring at Viktor as if he didn’t know what to say. And just as the people of the room thought he was going to finally speak,
he didn’t. Instead, he quietly walked by Viktor, barely touching the man, taking his gaze away. He clicked the door shut as he left, not the storm that they had been expecting.

Viktor stood staring where Yakov had been standing before he left, the space now cold and empty. He didn’t want to look at the faces of the others in the room, knowing he had fucked up. They were words Yakov needed to hear, and Viktor knew he shouldn’t take them back. But he also reminded himself that this wasn’t the best moment to talk about such things. He had come to fix things, just as he had promised Yuuri, but he feared he had made them worse.

He flinched when he felt a hand settle on his shoulder. Carefully, delicately, and Mila moved into view. She looked the most worried he had ever seen her.

“I’m sure it’s going to be fine,” she said, though she sounded doubtful. “Just give him a moment to think about it.”

Viktor gave a humourless chuckle. “To think about what? The fact that his heir just threatened to fight against him?”

“And would you?” Yuri asked from where he sat. He looked caught between angry and upset. He jumped from the chair, coming to stand before Viktor and staring up at him with a glare. “Would you actually leave us to go with that fucking pig?”

“No,” Viktor answered honestly. “I said, I don’t want to pick sides. I could never turn against you, but I needed to catch his attention.”

“Well you really did it.”

“Yuri,” Mila barked. “You’re not making anything better.”

“I wasn’t the idiot who made things bad in the first place!”

“Yuri!”

Viktor wanted to say they were right though. All because of that one moment in which Phichit had
walked in, jumping to conclusions, just as he had. If only he had asked more questions, or if he had tried to assure Phichit first. But it had felt like something had come over him. He acted unlike himself, and he thought it was because of the paranoia that had been plaguing him for days before their meeting. Now he thought it might have been fate – unavoidable, destructive fate. He hoped it found a way out for them to make up for the mess it had caused.

And yet, even with fate, he knew it was still his fault. He could have done so many things to avoid this. He could have hunted for Phichit himself rather than include Yakov. He could have decided a soulmate wasn’t worth the hassle. Or he could have pushed Yuuri away as Yakov had done with his own. Now that he knew his own soulmate, he knew how difficult that choice must have been. Yakov had courage and strength to do it. Viktor couldn’t.

He glanced at where Otabek stood awkwardly in the corner, unsure on what to do. Viktor had been so angry with the boy before, so close to fighting him had it not been for the worry for Yuuri that overpowered it. Now he felt only pity and regret. The boy had just been doing what he had been paid for, and if you were given a job by mafia, then no was not an answer. There had been nothing he could do and he hadn’t known the full story.

“I promised Yuuri I’d fix this,” Viktor whispered.

“You will,” Mila assured, pushing Yuri out of the way and stepping in front of his view. “Yakov just needs time to think. And once he’s cooled down, and you’ve calmed too, you can have a proper talk about it.”

And how many people would die in that time? Would Yuuri lose his parents? Would he get injured himself? Would Phichit be found and everything ended before they had a chance to talk? As if to make him feel worse, he could hear new gunshots echoing in the distance, closer than they had been before. Everything was a reminder of the bad choices he had made. Everything gone down the drain in a short time.

“I think we have more problems,” Otabek said, his low voice cutting through their silence. Viktor glanced up, a biting comment ready to be made, but he paused when he saw the way Otabek was staring down at his phone.

“What is it?” Mila asked, moving to stand beside him but stopping when she realised it would mean tearing herself away from Viktor.

Otabek turned the phone for them to see. A screen was displayed back, a little blurry and green from the nightvision. It didn’t take long for Viktor to realise the boy had video on cameras,
displaying the various surroundings of the town. Most were in the closer region, Viktor could see the shed they were currently residing in, the bathhouse, the beach. There weren’t many.

“I put up some cameras here and there,” he explained. “I didn’t have much time or much freedom to put them all over the place. I have them here for if they pick up anything unusual.”

“Just in case someone found this place?” Yuri guessed, moving to glance over Otabek’s shoulder at the cameras. He was shorter than the other boy, and needed to stand on his toes to be able to see, but he didn’t let that defeat him.

“For security,” Otabek agreed. “I thought it would come in useful. And they have.”

Viktor and Mila moved to stand beside him, glancing down at the cameras. Closer, they could see some little bits of the war that was raging on outside. One camera in particular was viewing the front of the bathhouse, where Viktor watched as a line of Japanese guards stood still. One in particular caught Viktor’s attention – she stood with a fag in her mouth, dyed blonde hair with the roots showing, and an apron still tied around her hips. An automatic was clutched in her arms. Something about her stood out from the rest, and it took a while for Viktor to realise that it was because she looked vaguely like Yuuri.

A sister. Did Yuuri have a sister? He needed to ask his partner that next time he saw him. There were so many things he didn’t know about it, and it ached him to know it. They had come this far without knowing some of the most important aspects of themselves.

But that wasn’t the camera view that Otabek was hinting at. The one he was pointing to was one of the furthest cameras, left somewhere along the pier that they had come running down on their arrival. Viktor hadn’t noticed the teen putting a camera there, but he had been preoccupied with the thought of Yuuri. It was pointing outwards, watching anything that might be coming towards them. The angle wasn’t great – it might have been placed wrong or it had slipped some, or in his rush, Otabek hadn’t had time to secure it. And that’s why it was difficult to see what it was that appeared in it.

The colours were blurry, the dark making it hard to see. In the corner, the waves washing up on shore seemed pixilated. But what Otabek was showing was the obvious movement on the pavement. It started out small, coming slowly towards them, a bunch of tall black objects becoming bigger. People.

“Did Yakov send for reinforcements?” Viktor asked, narrowing his eyes to get a better look. There was hardly any shape to the people, just a blob that might have had some arms somewhere, blurry
“Yakov thought bringing in more people would attract attention we didn’t need,” Mila replied. “A smaller operation was better.”

“Does anyone else have the authority to call for reinforcements?”

“No one. Not before they’ve gone through Yakov.”

“So,” Yuri began, pointing as the blobs came closer to the screen. As they came closer, it became easier to tell the different shapes of different bodies. There were many. “Who the fuck are they?”

They waited a few minutes, silence encompassing the room. The shapes bobbed as they walked, and as the moonlight hit them, it became easier to see the shine of their weapons. Guns and more, held within the hands of strangers.

“Maybe it’s the town’s watch,” Yuri huffed.

“I can’t imagine a small town like this would have weapons like that,” Otabek replied.

Yuri glared up at him. “This is exactly the type of town that would. Hiding pistols under their pillows, swapping clubs along with their fish in the markets. It’s like you see in movies.”

Otabek rolled his eyes. “I don’t think so.”

“The town had a safe house for years. You really think they didn’t know about it?” Yuri shrugged his shoulders. “If you ask me, I think they knew a day like this has been coming. The pig’s parents probably even warned everyone and got them ready. We probably have a tonne of angry fishermen coming after us now.”

Viktor didn’t think so though. He watched as the people came closer and closer, and their details became easier to see. Some were in suits. He didn’t know when fishermen ever really wore suits, especially not in the early hours of the morning and ready to go into a fight. Closer and closer, and just out of the corner of the camera the light of the lamp above would catch them. It would only be
a second, but Viktor hoped to see their faces in that small moment.

Mila had the same idea, watching carefully over his shoulder. Otabek and Yuri continued to talk about the possibility of the town folk rising, coming to the aid of their beloved bathhouse.

But it wasn’t them. And as they came closer, Viktor didn’t need to light of the lamp to recognise them. There was something in the way they walked, or the two that walked in the front he recognised. Her hair, his slump, their eyes. His heart stopped when the flash of their features came into the light and his suspicion was confirmed.

Mila was the first to move. She rushed to open the door.

“Warn Yakov!” she bellowed out to the guards, making them jump with the intensity of her voice. “Enemies from the South!”

“More Japanese?” one of them asked back.

“No, Italians.”

Viktor wasn’t sure what to feel. He could almost hear the anger boiling inside of him, remembering the fear that had seeped into him as Yuuri had been kidnapped, both his and Yuuri’s. Mila had tried to calm Viktor, but he had known it was close. But there was also wonder, a question of why they had come, why they thought they could take them on. He remembered Mila and Yakov warning him about his divided attention, that many would take this time to attack when they thought he was at his weakest.

“How did they know where we were?” he demanded, snapping his gaze to Otabek. The teen flinched a little, wide eyed, but shook his head. “Could they have overheard your conversation with Yakov?”

“I don’t know.”

“Yuuri somehow knew too. Yuuri overheard you, or had someone listen to you, or something. So they could have too. They know and they’re here and…” Viktor could hear the sound of thumping footsteps as Mila pushed the few fighters they could spare towards the oncoming threat. Divided. Now they were divided. The biggest threat of course was the Italians, but would Yakov accept
pulling their fighters out of the war now to face the ones from the south?

Viktor had promised he’d fix it. He had hoped that fate would intervene and help somehow.

“This isn’t what I meant,” he hissed under his breath. Otabek and Yuri stared at him as if he had gone crazy, unsure what he was saying, but he didn’t care. “You two wait here!” he ordered them, knowing Yuri wouldn’t be happy with it, but he would listen. He rushed after Mila, finding her rounding up the few fighters she could and giving them orders.

He glanced South. From where he stood, he wouldn’t be able to see them. But in the distance, under the sound of the gunshots and the shouting from the bathhouse, he could just hear the march of the Italian mafia. It could have so easily have been missed.

“We need to tell Yakov,” he told Mila.

“I’ve sent someone searching for him.” She cursed under her breath, ordering for the footmen to rush to the south, hide and wait for orders. “What a time for you and him to have a fight, and for him to storm off.”

“You were right,” Viktor admitted. The adrenaline was thumping in his veins. “They saw a distraction and they took it. They knew we’d be divided.”

“I was right. Yakov was right too. And Yuri. We were all right, but that doesn’t matter right now. You did what any soulmate would do.”

“Yes, but our situation has bigger consequences.”

“It does.”

“Do you think Yakov will pull out of the safe house fight?”

Mila sighed, rubbing her forehead. “I don’t know. I hope so. He has to see reason. We can’t win on two fronts.”
“It might give Yuuri enough time to get Phichit away.”

“It might. Or it might put them in more danger. They’re not just here for us, remember. They’re here for Yuuri to.”

Viktor knew then that it was his anger that was winning out. He felt it boiling inside of him at the mention of Yuuri, of anyone hurting him. “He hasn’t done anything.”

“He’s connected to you. In their eyes, that’s fault enough.”

“I should have killed them when I had the chance,” Viktor sighed, thinking back years ago when they had been weak. Barely a threat then, just another family that wanted to topple the powerhouse that was Yakov’s group. Another family in awe, jealous. Another family that Viktor hadn’t thought much of.

“No, I should have,” Mila replied. “I should have killed them when I saved Yuuri. He told me not to. It surprised me, reminded me of how he wasn’t like us. So I listened. I shouldn’t have.”

“You thought the fear of us would be enough to stop them.”

“Yes.”

Yuuri, scared and hurt, still asking for the lives of the two who had kidnapped him. That innocence both intrigued and annoyed Viktor. It might have been part of what pulled him in at the start, seeing something in his soulmate that had been lost from himself years ago. But it also meant Yuuri was in more danger. He had shot Yakov, and perhaps he had aimed to kill then, but he hadn’t. He had hesitated. Yuuri couldn’t afford to do that when he was Viktor’s soulmate now.

It wasn’t something he wanted to take from Yuuri. He wanted Yuuri to stay as himself for as long as he could, be the perfect person he was. But he needed to learn how Viktor’s world worked if they were to get through this.

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“What’s going on?” Yuuri asked, stepping up onto the roof. His father was in the same position he had been hours before. No doubt the waiting had begun to ache in his old bones, muscles working as they hadn’t needed to for years, but still he kept at it. A soldier and a fighter, his father never let anything defeat him – especially not age.

The fighting had suddenly stopped. There had been one loud boom of a Russian voice, one Yuuri didn’t recognise, and then the Russian fighters had pulled back without even a second glance. They’d rushed back into the shadows, stopping mid-way through a fight just to do it. Now the air was quiet and cool, the smoke from so many bullets still rising to dissipate. The Japanese were left watching, still breathing heavily, unsure on what was coming next.

“I don’t know,” his father replied, searching the depths with his sniper. “Someone ordered for them to pull back. I don’t think it’s a trap.”

“Why not?”

“They wouldn’t make it so obvious.”

“I think they called in reinforcements,” one of the other fighters on the roof intercepted. “There’s a group walking along the coastal road to the South. They’re coming towards us.”

Immediately, Yuuri’s father began to search them out. His scope was moving slowly as he caught them, watching every calm footfall. “I can’t see them, it’s too dark. Are they really reinforcements?”

“I see weapons on them when they pass a lamp. But they wouldn’t be so obvious, would they?” the other replied.

Yuuri narrowed his eyes, trying to peer over the housetops and through the darkness. But all he could see was the glimmer of the moonlight on the water, sparkling brilliantly.

“The group isn’t hiding,” his father hummed. “And the Russians pulled back.”

The cogs were working inside of his head, his lip chewed between his teeth as he always did in the
depths of thought. Every little element of what was happening was coming into his mind to draw together a picture, a deduction. Yuuri began to do the same, having been taught enough as a child to do it. He had heard the rushed first order to pull back – even if he didn’t understand Russian, he could get the overall tone of it, and it didn’t feel proud. It didn’t feel as if it had been planned. And as people had rushed off, they didn’t seem to be happy with the potential of having more fighters. Reinforcements. They could have so easily turned the tables, and it would have been more advantage to keep them a secret, to spring it on the Japanese and the safe house when they had no idea. Instead, they waltzed down the promenade.

His father drew to the conclusion before he did, but only by a second. He said, “This is a new group. They’re not with the Russians.”

And Yuuri thought he might know who it was. He glanced around, hoping their might be some scope he could look through, or some binoculars for him to borrow. He found some beside his father and pressed them to his eyes. It took a moment to find them, everything too close for him to move slowly. But when he did, he felt his heart hammer faster – it hadn’t had the chance to settle back into its rhythm yet. He doubted it had been its regular rhythm for days now.

It was too hard to see who they were, too dark. But he could see the bobbing of their silhouettes. Two stood a little further out than the others, and he could see the glitter of their weapons in their hands, even if the dark was too heavy for him to see the overall shape of what they were carrying. He searched for anything familiar, and he found it in one of the ones at the front. A woman, shorter than the one beside her, with long flowing black hair that swished every time she walked.

“Yuuri, is there another group we should be worried about?” his father asked, following the people with his sniper.


“What have you been doing?” his father asked, a hint of both amusement and genuine questioning in his voice.

“Getting on the wrong side of the world’s mafia, clearly,” he replied.

“Are they a threat to us?”

Yuuri thought back to the day he was kidnapped, their hatred towards Viktor connected to him. He
was sure that however they had found out about this night, they were here for Viktor. But when the dust cleared and the Russians were defeated, he highly doubted that Michele and Sara would turn the mafia away and leave their safe house alone. They had probably overheard the conversation on telephone, just as Chris had done. Everything electronic leaves a trace. And they thought they could take advantage of the war, the distraction. And kill off two birds with one stone.

“Yes,” he replied. Yuuri hadn’t sounded so sure of anything for a long time.

His father breathed deeply and let it slowly escape his mouth. “Then let’s eradicate it.” He aimed, slowly concentrating focus, catching the most he could in his sights.

They should have kept themselves a secret, Yuuri thought. Waiting until they were less, until the Russians were weary and then picked them off one by one. But they hadn’t, and now they showed themselves to two potential enemies, out in the open. Yuuri supposed they wanted to draw attention so that Viktor would come out and face them himself. They were only young, and Yuuri doubted that they knew how to properly handle things.

But just before Yuuri’s father could pull the trigger, a swarm of Russian fighters descended on the Italian group. There were no wasted words, just them jumping from the cover of the alleys and then a storm of bullets flew. The silver sparkled like glitter in the air as they were let loose. People fell, and even from the distance, Yuuri could hear the cries of the injured. He tried to keep his sights on the two he identified as Sara and Michele, but it was so hard to in the chaos of the fight.

His father took his finger from the trigger, watching as the crowd thinned itself. Yuuri did the same, feeling his heart inside of his chest beginning to pump a little calmer, better than it had been for some time. He wanted to say how surprising it was, that the Russians had been withdrawn. He knew Yakov wouldn’t have been able to fight on both sides, but was he not worried that perhaps Yuuri and his family might take this advantage and descend on the dregs that were left?

Yuuri caught sight again of who he thought might be Sara. The fighting stepped under the light, and Yuuri got a flash of the back of her head. He wished he could see her face, see the scar or the bandages that would still be left from his breaking her nose. Besides her, as always, Michele was fighting off a few of the Russian footmen, gun swapped for a knife for close-combat.

Get them, Yuuri thought quietly in the depths of his mind. He knew they were young, knew that they were just caught up in something that their family name and circumstances had given them. But Yuuri couldn’t give them much pity. It was their choice to kidnap him, their choice to threaten and almost kill him, their choice to try and hurt someone on empty words. He didn’t want them dead, but he wanted them to be taught a lesson.
The circle of Russians were slowly coming closer, cutting down the outer Italians. They fought well, but there was no match in skill. Yuuri began to feel like there was something wrong – why would the heirs to the Crispino family be guarded by such fighters lacking in power? He watched as one by one, they were falling, injured, colouring the pavements with blood. It would stain and dry in the sun once the dawn came, forever a reminder of what the night had brought.

“Looks like the Italians are about to be destroyed,” one of the other shooters on the roof commented. “And after than grand entrance.”

But Yuuri and his father stayed silent. It felt too lacklustre, and though the Italians in the group were attempting their best to fight, they were too easily cut down. Yuuri had seen Michele and Sara fighting someone like Mila, and though they had been defeated, they had almost been able to hold their own. Now they hid behind a rapidly falling wall, almost scared.

“Dad,” Yuuri began, about to voice his suspicions. But just as the word left his mouth, the Russians got to Sara and Michele. Michele was shot, bullet in his stomach, knocking him backwards. On his fall, he took Sara down with him.

As they were knocked down, something fell. In the dark, it was hard to tell what it was. Yuuri followed with his binoculars, but they were moving so fast. It took a few seconds before his sight fell onto whatever it was that had fallen with them. For just a moment, he felt his heart thump at the possibility it might have been a head. He didn’t know how that was possible, but it flashed in his mind.

It was hair. That didn’t calm the sickness inside of Yuuri, not as he saw the way the strands were splayed out underneath the moonlight. But then realisation hit him, and he swallowed down the rising nausea.

“It’s a wig,” his father whispered, confirming his thoughts. “Why would it be a wig?”

“Because it’s not Sara and Michele Crispino,” Yuuri whispered back, taking the binoculars from his face as he glanced around. From the sounds of it, the Russians fighting down on the pavement had figured that out as well. They were shouting, the outside circle rushing towards where they had jumped from. A distraction. Whoever the Italian group had been made of, their only job was to distract.

The Russians were soon to be ambushed, and Yuuri wasn’t sure if they were going to fall into it as well.
He raised to leave, but his father stopped him with a flick of his wrist. “We’re covered,” he said. “Besides, they’ll try to go for the Russians first. The Italians have separated them, so they have more of an advantage there than fighting us right now.”

Yuuri settled back down, but the words didn’t quell any fear inside of him. Somewhere there, Viktor was one of the ones about to get caught in another battle. By now, they would have been warned at least, but Yuuri couldn’t help but fiddle with the collar of his top, swallowing down his worries. He really shouldn’t have let Viktor rush off with a promise that could never be filled on his lips. He should have grabbed him, kept him close, and protected each other. Now he had no idea where Viktor was, and he was waiting. He kept waiting for the moment his connection would tell him if Viktor was injured, if a pain in his limbs sparked, or a bullet pierced his chest.

He felt so helpless. He was surrounded by people he needed to protect, from Phichit down in the basements, his family now fighting on the roof or along the frontline, to Viktor standing with the enemy. Most of the time, in his career, he only ever needed to worry for one. Often times, he wasn’t even someone in that equation. Bodyguards knew what they were getting into when they offered their services to the client. Yuuri himself had had many colleagues of his never return. He’d attended more than one funeral.

But this was too much. Most of his energy was going into worrying about a majority of people who could protect themselves. He couldn’t help it.

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Phichit was going to do it. He had decided.

He’d done as Yuuri had told him, raising the gun and going through everything he had been taught until he had no doubts that it was memorised. Then he took it apart and placed the bullets in himself until he knew for sure he could use it. There was a sickening heaviness to his stomach every time he touched it, but he had figured out pretty early on that he could ignore it. Right now, morals and what he had been brought up on didn’t matter. Instincts and survival did.

But he was still hesitating. He wasn’t quite sure what he could do. A little voice kept trying to convince him that he couldn’t do anything, that he would get in the way and maybe even get himself killed. Or, worse, he’d get someone else killed. He’d never be able to get over that. It would likely ruin him but he’d sat here long enough.
There had been an awful rumble not long ago. It had shaken the foundations, upset his footing and he had almost fallen against the wall in his pacing. He wasn’t sure what it had been, and Yuuri had told him that he wasn’t likely able to hear whatever fight was going on above. But it scared him. It scared him more that it was just as quiet after the boom as it had been before. He had no idea if anyone was alive after whatever it was.

Something told him it was a bomb. And once that thought came into his mind, then he couldn’t avoid it. He had images of Yakov calling in planes to drop them, or spies with C4 scattered around the place, or suicide bombers. Any kind, all kinds, all ruining the place he had spent the last few weeks living in.

Flashes of Yuuri’s face entered his mind, and with it came his family. He couldn’t just sit here and hope they survived. That wasn’t enough. Somewhere, up there, they were risking their lives for him. One or more might even be dead by now. But he threw that thought away, already feeling it bring on a pain at the back of his throat just thinking about it.

He’d spent the time he had familiarised himself with the gun also thinking about the best way around the guard behind the door. During the bombing, the guard had made the first noise Phichit had heard from him. He’d spoken into something, and static followed. There had been a tense moment before another voice called back, rushed and slightly panicked. With the limited knowledge Phichit had on the Japanese language, pressed on him by his staying here and a need to understand the country that was housing him, he heard only that there were many Russians. It had been a long conversation, but that was all he had heard and understood. Did that mean they outnumbered them? He hadn’t said that, but that was the assumption.

Other than that, the guard had been quiet. He heard a shuffle from him on the other side of the door every now and then, almost as if to assure him that he was still there. His shadow crossed underneath the door, cast by the lights on the wall. Phichit tried to think of ways to get around him, but there wasn’t anything that he could think of that wouldn’t alert others. If he pretended he was sick, the man would call others down before he could escape. He didn’t want to shoot through the door, not when the man was no threat to him. And it was the only door. Every little impossible thought had crossed his mind about twenty times already, and teleportation had certainly been a hope that had accompanied them.

But he couldn’t teleport. He couldn’t think his way out of it, so he settled on one thing. He’d need to use force. He was unlucky that the door didn’t open outwards, he could have used that as a weapon to push the guard. But he’d need to make do.

He settled his hand on the door knob, breathing carefully. He reminded himself again that this was what he had decided to do. He opened it before any hesitation could rise.
The guard hummed and turned to look at the open door, concern lacing his features. Before he could do anything though, Phichit used all of the weight he had and slammed into the guard’s back. He might have yelled sorry, but he wasn’t sure. The man’s grunt as he hit the wall deafened any sound.

It wasn’t enough to knock the man out, but it was enough to knock the air out of his lungs. He collapsed to the floor, inhaling deep and loud breaths of the stale air, and watched as Phichit stole his chance to sprint down the halls.

Just as he turned the corner, the guard gasped out his name, and then came the static to accompany his report into the phone.

Phichit suspected there might be people there on the surface by the time he found his way out, waiting for him to ascend the stairs. Or perhaps the fighting would take too much of their attentions, and there would be no one to spare.

He had memorised the way when they had taken him and the rest of the safe house occupants down. But in his panic, all the hallways looked the same. He stopped at a fork in the corridors, glancing down the both with a hope that one might talk to him. When it didn’t, he turned down the right, remembering they had made more lefts on the way down than they had right. He couldn’t afford to let his mistakes hold him back, while people fought for him above.

He didn’t know what he was going to find, and that was what he was worried about. What state would the onsen be in? What about its people? Phichit refused to think about it until he was faced with it. He raised his gun and kept running.

Chapter End Notes

Well, this isn't quite a cliffhanger, is it? So at least it's some break since lately I've been churning out cliffhangers left, right and centre XD

Also, as you may notice, I have put a chapter limit up. From the plans I have, I think this might extend to 24 chapters (much like NS). I'll try my best to keep to that limit, but if I do need to extend it, then I'll keep you updated. It won't be any less, however. So, that means potenitally, by the next five weeks, this story will be over. Which, honestly, I can't believe. I need to stop making longer stories, I get far too sentimental...

As always, if you'd like to keep updated, you can find me on tumblr

here
Moments.

Chapter Notes

Chapter beta-read by whynikkiwhy, who loves to tease me when she goes to cat cafes and sends me loads of pictures to make me jealous

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Viktor didn’t have the luxury of waiting and watching as the ploy coming from the south was revealed. He didn’t watch as the wigs came off, or time to think of how easily the group was falling. Almost as soon as their forces had withdrawn and divided to rush the Italian group in ambush, they’d fallen into a trap.

He stood with Mila, watching their footmen rush towards the undergrowth. The air thrummed around them, and Viktor kept an eye on the group. He was sure that within them, Michele and Sara were. He wanted to be one of the people to ambush, to rip the throats out of them for what they had done to Yuuri. But he held back on the orders that if the siblings were captured, then they’d be brought alive to him. No point in ruining a plan for his own revenge.

But it wasn’t to be. As they watched the footmen rush from their cover, they heard more sound behind them. It was quiet, barely audible above the sound of the whistling wind. But Mila knew too that there was something wrong. She turned faster than he could, but even that wasn’t enough.

Viktor tried turning as well, but the wound on his hip ached every movement he made. He barely had time to do anything as Mila was thrown to the ground, hand around her mouth to stop any outcry. An arm wrapped around his own neck, pulling him backwards, making his eyes water from the sparks of pain that struck up his side. A hand was pressed to his mouth – he wouldn’t have cried out anyway. It wasn’t the way he did things.

He was dragged backwards, the odd angle making the muscles in his lower back and his thighs scream in pain. One of his hands held tightly onto the arm, careful to make sure he didn’t fall, while his other pressed onto the wound on his hip. With every step, he felt the press of his guns against his chest, a reminder that there was still a way out once a window opened.

Mila was the one to provide it. As soon as their attackers stopped, she pushed up from the ground, flipping until she could kick her attacker in the face. They shouted out, hands flying to their face to stop the blood pouring down their nose. Mila quickly rushed to the one holding Viktor, kicking the legs out from underneath him.
Viktor, having lost balance, fell with his attacker. His collision with the ground ached his wound, but still he made no noise. He rushed to his feet, held out his gun and aimed at his attacker. The Italian was taller than him, though it didn’t look it while he was splayed on the ground. He looked up at Viktor with fury in his expression. His gun was in the holster beside his hip, and he itched to grab it, but didn’t. Viktor placed his finger on the trigger.

Mila mirrored Viktor’s actions with her own attacker. Though hers was too distracted by the broken nose and the cut in his forehead to care about grabbing his gun.

“And what are the bets that the group coming from the South are just a cover?” Viktor asked Mila, sighing. There was always something else, always something that they missed or fell into.

“Probably willing to bet my entire fortune.”

“Same.” Viktor didn’t like the taste that gave him at the back of his throat. “So, Michele and Sara are probably hiding out somewhere?”

“I’m also willing to bet my fortune on that.”

“Great.”

“What do we do, Viktor? We need to find Yakov, but I don’t think he wants to speak to you right now. And you’re probably too distracted thinking about Yuuri to be any use right now.”

Viktor glared down at the man lying on the floor, and though the look was meant for the woman beside him, he knew he couldn’t take his gaze from the enemy. But it must have been frightening, because the man shivered where he lay. “Hey! That’s not fair.”

“You know that the Crispinos are going to be going after Yuuri as well. They’re here for you and him. Don’t tell me you haven’t thought about it.”

Viktor stayed silent, because while he knew he could be good at lying in some situations, Mila always saw through it. Even as children, when Viktor was learning the skills of becoming a good heir, when he thought he could get away with lying to Mila as an experiment, the girl could always see through him. It used to be quite the blow, especially with their age difference – even as a very young girl, Mila never believed anything of his lies and would call him out on things – but as he
grew, he knew it was a good thing. As an heir that would one day inherit the mafia group, he needed the skills of his friends to get through the roughest of times. Mila was a very good person to have on his side.

Mila continued, “So what do we do?”

Viktor thought long and hard, thinking more with his head than what his heart was screaming at him right now. He needed someone like Mila, someone to push him in the right direction. “Yakov and Yuuri can fend for themselves. We need to go back and see how Yuri and Otabek are doing.”

Mila nodded, approving of his choices. “And what about these people here? What are the orders?”

That answer was far easier to reach. He’d been reluctant to kill before, but only because that person was a friend of Yuuri’s. This time, there was nothing stopping him. His reply was in the form of one single bullet shot, aimed for the space between the man’s eyes. Mila copied, painting the ground.

The tug in Viktor’s chest was always on his mind. The more he knew Yuuri, the harder it became to ignore. He often wondered if it had been there upon their first meeting, the start of a spark that would take over their lives. Perhaps it had been so subtle, so quiet, but it had been there. Growing steadily in his chest, until Yuuri became something he could never live without.

He sent prayers towards Yuuri, though he was not a religious man. He hoped for his safety, his health, for his happiness. He wanted Yuuri to be able to protect himself from anything while Viktor was not there with him.

It didn’t take long for them to arrive back to the shed in which Yuri and Otabek were hiding. And it didn’t take long to notice that they were not the first to arrive.

The door had been kicked down, hinges broken and the walls slightly burned from bullets to the locks. Viktor felt the rage burning within him again, roaring back from the simmer it had shrunk to for a while. Regardless of if they were not blood related, Yuri was like a little brother, and he would wade through hell to make sure he was alright. He knew he was not the only one, as Mila rushed forwards, gun already aimed as she rushed over the threshold.

Three Italian footmen were slowly stalking through the small shed, barely big enough to fit them all. They were searching behind anything that the two could hide behind, though in a second their
guns were already aimed towards the desk at the back – the only thing big enough to hide two teenagers. Their guns were aimed, sights locked, too preoccupied to notice the arrival of Mila and Viktor.

Viktor shot first, a bullet to the back of the nearest man. He cried out and collapsed to the floor, drawing the attentions of the other two.

Mila was ready to aim, Viktor moving his gun ready to take another shot, but stopped when they saw a flash cross their paths. Yuri had jumped from his hiding place and kicked the nearest attacker while his attentions had been diverted. With the rage of only a young teenager could muster, he kicked the attacker down onto the floor with such a force the man had the wind knocked out of him. The last footman, so caught between the attacks on both sides, glanced around with confusion. Before he could think of what to do, Otabek rushed from his hiding place too, barrelling into a tackle, crushing the man against the wall. In one last bid to complete orders, that attacker aimed his gun towards Otabek’s back.

Viktor might have been one to hold grudges. Most of the time it was for teasing, but even this was too much. He aimed, shooting the gun from the man’s hand before he could pull the trigger. Once Otabek let go, he fell to the ground, groaning and holding his ribs.

Viktor suspected he might have broken some of the bones, but he found he couldn’t muster up any sympathy. He walked towards Yuri, not looking where he was going and listening to the cries of the men as he stepped on their fingers and their legs.

“You took your fucking sweet time,” Yuri said, glancing up with the same glare that seemed to be glued to his expression. “I was beginning to think we’d have to fight them alone.”

Viktor hugged the boy to his chest, surprising Yuri. “I don’t think they’d have a chance against a feisty kitty like you.”

“I’m not a kitten!” he raged, attempting to slam his fists against Viktor’s chest. But there was a lack of strength there, no real determination.

Viktor knew the boy had been taught how to fight, but he never really needed to. There weren’t many that wanted to get to him, not seeing his importance in the family – but that was just as Yakov intended. Yuri hadn’t wanted anything to do with becoming mafia, and so Yakov had eradicated any importance between them on paper. He was a child that Yakov paid too much to travel whenever he wanted. Under the surface though, Yuri knew how to fight, how to handle weapons. But that didn’t mean he was still ready for a real fight. Teenagers still felt fear.
“What’s even happening?” Yuri asked.

Viktor let him go this time, satisfied that Yuri seemed alright. He quickly glanced over him, spotting no blood, and relief flooded through him. “The Italians are here, but the group from the South were a decoy.”

Yuri glanced down at the three on the ground that Mila and Otabek were dragging to a corner and tying up. “Yeah, I could guess that.”

“Alright, alright,” Viktor chuckled, drawing his hands through Yuri’s hair, much to his chagrin. “No need to be so pedantic.”

“Well-” Whatever it was that Yuri was about to say was cut short, however, when he looked over Viktor’s shoulder. His eyes widened, a small gasp still on his lips.

Viktor turned, but the pain in his side hindered him once again. He locked the gasp behind his teeth, not wanting anyone to hear. In the threshold, almost silhouetted against the moonlight, were the real Sara and Michele. They had their guns raised, and out from the cover came several more of their footmen, slinking into some of the smaller gaps in the shed.

Too many to fight. Even if Yuri and Otabek grabbed some of the guns on the floor, they had nowhere to hide, nowhere for cover. Outnumbered, defenceless, and no way out. The worst ways in which someone could be. He stepped in front of Yuri, attempting some loose shield. Mila and Otabek came to stand with them, neither Viktor nor Mila raising their guns this time.

“Viktor, it’s been a while,” Sara commented first. Her voice was just as he remembered, filtering softly through the room with the smallest hint of a song to accompany. She knew how to speak, how to make sure the words stuck in people’s minds for years to come.

“Sara,” Viktor greeted in turn. “Michele”. Her brother nodded, keeping their words to come from his sister’s mouth. “How has your family been?”

“They’ve been well, thank you for asking,” Sara replied, a small tilt to her hair making her dark hair shimmer. “Can’t really say the same for yours, though.” She paused, a smirk pulling at the
corners of her mouth. “Or Yuuri’s. Poor man has seen enough bloodshed this night.”

Viktor tried to calm the rising storm inside of himself. He’d only seen Yuuri a little while ago, and from what he had known and from the state he had seen Yuuri in, his family seemed fine. But so much could have changed in that time. Guilt began to beat in his heart, a bitter taste filling the back of his mouth.

“Viktor, she’s lying,” Mila assured, voice rushed.

Viktor knew that. But he couldn’t help but be pulled in by it.

“Maybe he’s an orphan by now,” Sara continued. Her eyes never strayed from Viktor’s, boring into his own.

“What is this meant to achieve?” Viktor asked outright.

There was a second of nothing, in which it seemed as if even Sara hadn’t thought that far ahead.

Viktor beat her to it. “You have me here, less powerful than I have been before. You have the advantage, and you know it. So use it. Stop spouting nonsense just because you finally have a say.”

Sara tried not to let her annoyance show, but her lips were strained into a line, her hands gripped tighter into fists. But she heeded Viktor’s underlying warning, and replied, “You’re coming with us.”

“Where?”

“You’re in no position to ask.”

“And if I decided I don’t want to come?”

His question was met with the cocking of multiple guns, the slicing of metal filling the stagnant air. It made the hairs on the back of Viktor’s neck stand on end. Behind him, Yuri shivered, Mila
clutched her gun tighter and Otabek gasped. Like rats trapped in cages, there was nothing that they could do against it.

“You don’t want any needless deaths, and neither do I.” The playful pride in her voice had disappeared into a cold business-like tone – in Viktor’s opinion, it was far more menacing. But she was still young, too filled with ego to take over her family just yet. Her eyes flickered ever so briefly towards Mila as she said it, and Viktor took notice of it, storing it away in his mind to keep as something to ask in the future. “So, Viktor, just follow.”

“What are you going to do with me?”

Sara’s gaze flickered back to focus on him. “Now, that would be giving it away, wouldn’t it?”

Viktor clenched his jaw. “Fine, but no needless deaths, right? Pull you fighters back and I’ll come with you willingly.”

“Can’t do that yet, Viktor. We have one more piece to collect.”

“Piece?”

“We need to get the two of you together, and then we’ll pull back our fighters.”

“Who?” Viktor asked, feeling a lump in throat turn sickly. “This is all against me, isn’t it? This all began with me. Who else do you need?”

“Viktor,” Yuri whispered behind him, a small shake in his voice as his hand clutched the back of Viktor’s shirt.

“Yakov? Is that who you need?” Viktor asked.

Yuri kept pulling on the back of his top, apparently already having reached the conclusion that Viktor didn’t want to reach. The teen could pull with some force, stronger than his small stature seemed to suggest. It pulled tightly on Viktor’s chest, digging his guns into his skin, but he felt compelled to ignore it. An odd foreboding seemed to settle in the pit of his stomach, and it rose
like acid in his throat.

“No, it’s not,” Sara replied.

“Then who?” Viktor asked again, voice verging on desperate. “Who?”

“Viktor, no more talk. Come with us, now, or we’ll shoot.”

Moments passed in a blur. Voices seemed to echo in his mind, blood rushing like a river through his ears. It seemed he waited too long, though to him it felt like barely a second passed before Sara raised her signal, wrist flicking and pointing towards Mila.

There was hesitancy, that of which Viktor knew. He saw the crease in Sara’s brow, the shiver in her arm as she pointed. She saw the colour on her cheeks pale, how she swallowed as if it pained her. As if he shouldn’t bear the thought of hurting Mila, but it had to be done. The bullet was shot, low, and it pierced through Mila’s left thigh. Viktor watched its path as his head filled with impossible scenarios. He could jump in front of the bullet, but by the time he thought it, it had already come out of the other side of Mila’s leg. He could attack the shooter, but it had already been let loose. He could push Mila out of the way, but she was already collapsing against the wall. Her gun dropped to the floor, and already beads of sweat were beginning to drip down her forehead from the pain.

There wasn’t enough space for her to move, and so she could only wait and watch as the bullet flew through her flesh. Her eyes had only been for Sara, something deeper in her expression than anyone else could understand. For the briefest moment, Viktor felt as if he had seen it before. Yuuri’s face flashed before his gaze. But it was gone just as quickly as it had come.

Blood as red as her hair dripped to the floor, invisible on her dark clothing. The material of her clothes around the bullet hole was ripped and threats of it were sticking out, like a child’s trousers once they had fallen. Otabek rushed to hold her, pressing a hand to her thigh to stop the bleeding. Yuri let go of Viktor’s top, tearing apart his favoured tiger jacket to make a strip.

But Viktor could only stare. It wasn’t his life that flashed before his eyes, but Mila’s, of all the memories they had together, forgotten words suddenly so clear as if they were being spoken again. Mila had overcome so many things in life to get here, only to get hurt because of Viktor’s stubbornness. There was so much blood. Viktor worried a vein had been ripped apart. Otabek settled her on the floor while Yuri tied the strip around her wound.
And even through it all, Mila never made a sound. She breathed harder, the pain sparking through her body, leg almost lifeless, but she never cried out, never grit her teeth even as Yuri tied it too tightly.

When Viktor spoke, the words sounded so foreign to his own ears. “When I leave, Yuri, you need to call someone in to help.”

They turned to stare at him, and even Mila had the audacity to look surprised by his advice. Yuri opened his mouth to say something, but Viktor had already turned towards Sara again, the young woman who seemed so unsure of what it was she had done.

Viktor noticed the way she moved her weight onto her right leg, left hand reaching for the top of her thigh. But he ignored it, hoping that the pain was worth it for her. “I’ll come with you.”

Her gaze turned back to him, and she turned back to being cold, though there was an unsteadiness in her form. She flicked her wrist again, and Viktor was pulled hardly towards one of the gunmen. They ripped his arms back, tying up his hands until the cords bit into his skin. Any way he moved them, it cut harder. His joints screamed in pain, and he knew he wasn’t far from having one of his shoulders dislocated. They pressed on his wound at his hip, but he didn’t cry out. Mila had been strong, and so Viktor would.

He wondered if Yuuri felt the burning in his wrists, the tug in his shoulders. Or if he felt the fear rising in Viktor’s stomach as he began to be marched roughly away from the shed.

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Phichit wasn’t sure how he managed to make it outside. If asked, he’d say it was a recipe between adrenaline, fear and guilt that wiped his mind of anything between his fighting the guard and then finding himself in the undergrowth of the onsen gardens. He had avoided every voice he could hear, not stopping to see if they were Russian or Japanese, just running.

The gun was still held tightly in his hands, feeling lighter with every step he took. It did help provide some protection – he felt better knowing he had a fighting chance. But now he didn’t know what to do. He thought it would be at least even a little bit easy, looking for Yuuri and his family and helping to fight along side them.

But this was harder than he ever expected. It was quiet above ground, the fighting sounded far off.
He wondered if they had moved away. He didn’t know why, since what they wanted was in the onsen, but he didn’t even try to understand war. Maybe it was like dancing, and without thinking about it, your feet took you somewhere else. But he didn’t spend too much time thinking about it. Instead he hid in the bushes, hoping that he was completely invisible. His heart was so loud in his chest, reverberating up his throat.

A group of fighters rushed by where he was hiding, their feet storming against the floor and making Phichit jump as he held his breath. He thought they might have been Japanese, and though they should have been safe, he didn’t want to go leaping into their arms just yet. He knew he’d be rushed right back to where he had been kept, this time with more guards.

The news was probably already out. The guard outside his room should have already reported it, and Yuuri was going to have a kitten thinking he had gone missing. All the worst things would go through his head, thinking he had been captured, perhaps already dead. Phichit felt guilty, knowing he would cause his friend such anxiety. That was why he needed to find him soon, before Yuuri could worry too much.

He wasn’t going to do that while he was hiding. He knew he needed to get up and go searching, but now that he had sat down, his legs felt like jelly. Carefully, he began to lift himself, careful to point the gun away from himself in case it decided to go off.

Once he knew that the area was clear, he raced out from the undergrowth, searching for the next cover. He cursed himself – it was quiet, the fighting barely here and he was acting like this? How would he have been if the fighting was still here, still raging around the onsen itself? A coward. He’d been called one before, and he used to think that if push came to shove, he could prove it wrong. He certainly didn’t feel like he was doing that right now.

A few feet from the next bush for cover, he stopped. He just needed to be brave. He’d had Yuuri and his family protecting him for too long now. If a middle-aged couple could fight, then he should be doing better.

He held the gun just as Yuuri had taught him, taking steady breaths. There was no use in having it if he was shaking too much to shoot anyway. So he calmed himself, imagined himself with the same steel resolve as the people who had been protecting him for so long.

It seemed that the world wanted to test him, right then and there. As soon as he felt himself calming a little down, someone strode from the bushes.

Phichit froze, and his gasp drew the attention of the woman. They paused, staring at one another,
both with pistols in their hands.

The first thing Phichit thought was how this woman didn’t look anything like a Japanese or a Russian fighter. But that couldn’t have been true. The darkness was playing tricks on him, it must have been a Russian shooter. He raised his gun and shot faster than his mind could catch up with. It narrowly missed, slicing by the woman’s shoulder. She raised her own, and Phichit felt his body run cold.

Just as she shot, he ducked, avoiding the bullet. He shot again, but cursed as it missed once more.

He was going to die here. He’d made a mistake. He shouldn’t have come out, thinking he could face off against attackers because of one self-defence lesson. He hadn’t expected the adrenaline to make him shake this much, or for the gun to be this sensitive.

He shot again, not giving the woman a chance to aim her own gun. He didn’t care where he was shooting anymore, only that it distracted her enough. But it seemed to work. She panicked and rushed off, running away from Phichit without glancing back.

Phichit stood panting, arms heavy as they stayed aiming at the spot she had left. He didn’t know how many bullets had been shot, or how many were left in the magazine. Yuuri had taught him how to check, but he didn’t want to do it – what if someone came right at that moment? He’d be defenceless. He’d have nothing, and he’d be shot down.

The ringing still thumped in his ears, like irregular waves that pulled his pulse. There was an odd taste in the back of his throat, and he could smell the gunpowder in the air. It was bitter, suffocating. But he’d made someone run from him. It sent a thrill rushing through his blood, and a small smirk wanted to pull at the corner of his mouth. Not many of his fellow skaters could say that they had been shot at, or had shot at someone else in turn. Or that they had made someone else run away. Well, thinking about it, there was a lot of his situation than no one could relate to. A lot of things an average skater should never be involved with.

He’d probably need to keep it a secret once he returned home. He’d need to think of things to say about his disappearance once he got back and was faced with the news cameras. So many questions, and he didn’t know which ones he would be able to answer.

He dropped his stance, glancing around for any other movement. There were so many places for people to hide – it had been places of security for him only seconds ago, but now he worried he could be hiding with others. He wasn’t as observant as Yuuri, and for all he knew, he could be kneeling beside an enemy. Now the shadows loomed, dancing menacingly at him, beckoning him
He backed up, and looked over his shoulder. He felt people watching, but he was sure it was only paranoia. It had been following him for a long time, this feeling, and he knew it was fake. He knew what it felt like to truly be watched, and what was just a suspicious feeling. But his mind still felt the need to introduce all sorts of sickening images, of pain and death, of injuries and destruction. Would he ever be able to return, he wondered? Would every innocent movement now remind him of his short few weeks as a fugitive? Was he a fugitive? What even was he? Not a skater anymore.

There was another shuffle from the bushes, and Phichit aimed his gun, feeling the sweat beginning to pour down the back of his throat. It got closer and closer, and Phichit felt himself shaking more.

Calm, he thought. He couldn’t afford to miss again, not when the other person had a gun. The last person had been scared and rushed off, but not everyone would be. Some would fight back, and he knew he couldn’t afford to stand and let that happen. Someone, eventually, would find him, and if he wasn’t careful then he would be leaving with more injury than he expected to be. Or dead.

A group of two broke from the shadows, fighting. They had no weapons, but there were injuries on the both of them. Blood was so mingled that Phichit couldn’t tell who it belonged to anymore, or even if it was from the both of them. They were kicking and punching at one another, throwing moves that Phichit had never seen before but in Hollywood movies. Professional, careful, with steady footing.

Phichit identified them immediately. One was a guard he had seen disguised as a restaurant hand from the safe house, one he’d passed nearly every morning since his living there. They’d never spoken, only nodded in greeting every now and then. Phichit had wondered every now and then if the man was just a local part-time employee, or if he knew what was going on underneath the surface. From the fighting, Phichit supposed he had his answer.

He was fighting against a Russian footman – at least, Phichit thought he was. Like the last woman, he couldn’t be sure. There was something oddly different about him that Phichit couldn’t place, but perhaps the Russians had brought in reinforcements that weren’t of their own family.

They were too busy fighting to notice Phichit. The Japanese man threw a punch, slamming it into the jaw of the other. The sound of cracking struck through the air, and Phichit felt it burn sick inside of him. It would leave a terrible bruise, or perhaps a broken jaw. But despite it, the fighter steadied his footing and kicked the Japanese man. It collided with his stomach and they both rocket backwards.
They looked tired. Phichit could almost see the lost speed, the loose way their limbs seemed to be, how hard it was to raise them. The Russian tried to jump to the side, but almost tripped to avoid the Japanese’s attack. They were quickly losing energy, and Phichit didn’t want to think why that was – they might have been fighting for a long time, or the blood loss was getting to them. They were panting into the air, sweat dripping from their skin, eyes hard to keep open. Adrenaline was crashing.

The Japanese man used his weight in his punch, but the Russian stepped to the side just in time, slamming down his elbow on the back of the other’s shoulders. He fell to the ground with a massive crash, knocking the wind from him.

He landed almost at Phichit’s feet. He glanced up quickly, expecting another enemy. And what Phichit saw in his eyes would always haunt him – the Japanese man, the one he had passed and nodded to and been in the same house with for weeks, looked up with a mix of determination and acceptance. He seemed ready to fight, almost pushing himself up to face Phichit, but there was an understanding that it might not be enough. Fear, but die trying. And Phichit felt that break his heart in two.

When those eyes finally saw who it was, they widened with more fear than anything, a question lurking in his face that shattered his determination. He stopped trying to get up. “Mr Chulanont?” he asked, voice far too low, too breathless, for Phichit to completely hear. But he’d heard his name often enough to recognise it even when half of it was silent.

He was going to ask more, and he might have, but Phichit glanced back up at the Russian fighter. He’d noticed Phichit, but seemed to decide he wasn’t worth worrying over. He noticed Phichit’s shaking hands, the gun pointed down, the pale face and the fear in his eyes. He was no match, no worry. In the time Phichit had been watching the man at his feet, the Russian had grabbed one of the big rocks that made up one of the garden features. It was about the size of a head, perhaps a little more. It looked heavy, if the man’s stumbling meant anything. He raised it above his head, ready to throw down on the Japanese man’s skull.

A flash of absolute terror chilled Phichit’s body. He was going to watch someone die right before him, see someone’s skull cracked open and splayed across the grass. He was going to see bones crushed underneath rock, and he’d most likely be next. He was going to have to watch a man as he stared back, beaten to death and unable to do anything. He was going to watch someone die.

The thought made his body still. He raised his arms, aimed at the man before him, point-blank, unable to miss this time. And he shot.

The Russian stumbled backwards, dropping the rock to the side. He collapsed, glancing down at his stomach where a hole had been pierced through. New blood mingled with the dry already on his
clothes, glistening sickeningly under the light of the moon. He ran his hand down, drawing it back to see the blood coating his palm.

Phichit wasn’t sure why, but he started to cry. Small, acid tears ran down his cheeks silently, numbing him.

The Japanese man jumped up, turning Phichit around.

“Is he dead?” Phichit asked, though the words sounded as if they came from someone else, outside of the bubble that was surrounding him.

There was a pause as the man glanced backwards. “No, he’s not.”

“Is he dead now?”

“No, still alive.”

“What about now?”

“No.”

As if to prove the point, the Russian cried out, power still behind his voice. There came more rustling from the trees, beckoned by the sound of bullets and fighting, drawn closer by the dying man’s screaming.

“Will I kill someone?” Phichit asked.

The Japanese man pushed him towards the onsen again, turning them around the corner by the time the Russian’s fellow shooters had broken passed the cover. “No,” he answered Phichit. “He’s going to be fine.” He didn’t sound too pleased with it though. “Thank you for saving me.” Phichit was too shocked to hear the gratitude.

It took a few minutes before Phichit realised that the man was taking him back to the onsen though.
It wasn’t until they were almost among the guards again that he did, and he stopped. The guard taking him might have been strong, but the fighting had taken so much of his energy that even Phichit managed to stop him. He turned, planting himself down.

“Where’s Yuuri?” he asked. He hated himself for forgetting his real reason, that a moment of fighting had completely shaken his resolve. “Where is he? I need to find him.”

“Yuuri Katsuki? He’s… somewhere around here.”

“Is he alive?”

“Last I saw, he was.”

“And when was that?” The shake was beginning to return to his limbs. Shock. Was this shock? Was this cold feeling what they said was a killer? Was he going to die from trauma? He quelled it down, deciding that it was his paranoia again.

His guard must have noticed that Phichit’s demands were not negotiable. His glance strayed to the gun, and Phichit pulled it back to his body. No one was taking it. It might frighten him, but it was the only thing to depend him until he found Yuuri.

“It was about an hour ago,” the man replied. “He was on the roof with his father.”

“And Mari? And his mother?”

“Same as Yuuri – Last I saw, they were all fine.”

Phichit felt relief flooding him. He almost felt ready to collapse, the stress of everything being one of the things holding him up. “What’s happening?”

“We keep fighting, while you come back to the onsen.” He reached for Phichit, holding out his hand as he would with a frightened dog. “You’ll be safe there, and I’ll get Yuuri to come and find you. I don’t know how you got out here, but you shouldn’t be here with a gun.”
Phichit took a step back. “Not until I find Yuuri.”

“Mr Chulanont-”

“No. Where is he?”

A new voice rang out behind them, saying, “I know where Yuuri Katsuki is.”

Their gazes snapped towards the new person, a young man of around Phichit’s age. He was tired too, breathing heavily. But there was no blood on his fine suit.

Phichit’s guard stepped before him, weary. “Who are you?”

The new man stepped forwards, showing himself in the light. He had darker skin than most around here, with brown hair. Not Japanese, Phichit thought – perhaps European? He could have been Russian, but he looked more like the last two he had fought, people he couldn’t quite place.

“My name is Michele,” he introduced himself, bowing but keeping eye contact. “Yuuri called in some reinforcements. I’m a fellow bodyguard from his company. I’m sorry for arriving so late.”

“Reinforcements?”

“Yes. I heard you asking where Yuuri is, and I can take you to him,” Michele said, looking directly into Phichit’s eyes.

Phichit knew the story sounded plausible. Yuuri had already told him that he would possibly call in other bodyguards if a job proved to be too much, and they would understand the need for safehouses and discretion. But something about it seemed off, and it might have been his paranoia, but he didn’t believe it. Maybe it was the way Michele’s lips wanted to pull into a smile, or how intensely he stared at Phichit. No, Phichit decided, he didn’t like the way he said Yuuri’s name. It sounded so wrong, so hateful.
“Michele,” Phichit’s guard whispered, tasting it on his tongue. “What’s your surname?”

A pause. Phichit knew he was missing something, because there seemed to be a significance to the question. Instead of answering, Michele pulled out his gun, all pretences slipping from his expression. There was something wild in his eyes, something Phichit was seeing more and more in people since walking in on Viktor that fateful day.

“Hand him over,” Michele ordered, clicking off the safety.

Phichit’s guard stood up higher, making himself appear taller despite the obvious pain in his stature. He stepped completely in front of Phichit, shielding him completely. Phichit felt sick again, knowing that yet another person was guarding him. More and more people were stepping in front of bullets for him, and he hated it. It made him feel so weak, and he was the one with the gun.

“No,” the man before him replied, the waver in his voice only from weariness than out of fear.

“Phichit Chulanont,” Michele said. He muttered the name as if it was a puzzle piece that could change something, as if it was an answer he hadn’t even suspected was there. He aimed his gun directly at the guard’s chest, taking his slow time. Confidence oozed from his form. “I’d heard your name thrown around here and there. The Russians were looking for you?”

“Who are you?” the guard asked, attempting to distract the conversation to something else.

“Viktor had a hunt for you. Everyone heard about it, and I wondered just what you were or what you did to warrant it.”

Phichit grit his teeth together, wanting to step out from behind his cover. He didn’t want to be protected, didn’t want an unarmed man to protect him when he could barely protect himself. He was tired, and Phichit was sure he had a family he needed to get back to. Why wasn’t he thinking about that? What job was more important?

“I wondered at first,” Michele continued to drone on, carefully picking his words. “Especially when we found out Yuuri Katsuki was protecting you.”

Yuuri’s name never failed to make his heart skip a beat. He’d been so scared for weeks that his friend had been killed, that he’d never return. He worried for that now, more so now that the war was on their doorstep. It didn’t calm his nerves knowing that this man, an obvious bad man, was using his name.
“Caught between those two – you must be the reason they can’t connect.”

Phichit swallowed down the ache in the back of his throat.

“They’re meant to be soulmates – no doubt they would be, and only soulmates, had it not been for you. You made them enemies, trapped in a cruel fate. Because of you. All because you decided to meddle.”

Phichit would be lying if he said he hadn’t thought about it. With weeks spent hidden in a foreign country, sleepless nights provided too much time to think. And he knew where he fell between Viktor’s and Yuuri’s relationship. He knew what he was.

“You can rectify that, though. If you come with me. Help me find Yuuri. We really are here to help.”

“You’re lying,” Phichit replied, finding his voice to throw back. He could almost taste the lies in the air, permeating from the young man before him. It tasted sickly, too sweet, burning his tongue. He glanced over his guard’s shoulder. “Where’s Yuuri?”

Michele nodded as if something was confirmed. “I know a way to find him.” He steadied his arm, and Phichit saw it in slow motion. He could see the way the man’s muscles shifted underneath his skin, trigger finger pressing tighter against the metal.

Phichit pushed his guard to the side, throwing him from the path of the bullet with barely time to spare. His guard, weak and pale from his continuous fight, collapsed easily and heavily. He crashed onto the grass and held his head, as if the world was spinning around him.

Phichit raised his gun and faced Michele, holding it with both his hands while Michele held it with one. Phichit didn’t let the obvious difference in experience get to him, though. Nor did he let the expressionless eyes of his facer get to him. He was no threat, despite how hard he tried.

“What do you want?” Phichit demanded.

In his tiredness and his worry, his guard shouted something at him, but it was in rushed Japanese
that Phichit couldn’t make sense of. He tried to stand, but his legs failed him, sending him back
down. He’d tried his best, Phichit thought.

“We need to find Yuuri, but we can’t. You’re important to him though, aren’t you? He wouldn’t
like you falling into the wrong hands,” Michele answered.

“So… So what? You’re going to hurt me to get to him? What has he done to you?”

“Haven’t I already said? He’s connected to Viktor.”

“And?”

Michele paused, narrowing his eyes. “You’re really new to this, aren’t you? I thought you
understood.”

Phichit shook his head. “Why would I understand?”

Michele took one step forwards. “Because you’re one of his enemies too.”

“Viktor’s enemies?” All of the information was beginning to curl into a tight knot in his head. It
was making his temples ache, but he fought through it. He worried that Michele knew who he was,
but he didn’t. All he knew was that he was caught between Yuuri and Viktor. “N-No,” he said,
taking a step back.

Michele threw the comment away, taking another step. “Doesn’t matter. You’ll bring Yuuri in
anyway.” He flicked his wrist, vaguely pointing with his gun at the guard still trying to get up from
the floor on shaky legs. “If you don’t come with me, I’ll kill him.”

It sounded like every Hollywood film Phichit had ever seen. The hero was caught between a
choice, of saving an innocent life and endangering himself. But Phichit was no hero – he’d caused
all of this. Any deaths that had already occurred, they were blood on his hands. He could already
feel the slipperiness on his skin. “You already know what I’m going to choose,” he replied as he
dropped his arms to his side. He felt naked now, completely defenceless as he stared down the
barrel of a gun.
“Drop the gun then.”

Phichit didn’t hesitate. He allowed the gun to fall from his slack fingers, feeling the comfort of the metal leave his cold skin. It fell to the floor with a soft thump against the thick grass.

Michele descended upon him quickly, running over and pulling his arms roughly behind his back. He cried out at the pain, feeling the string rush through his shoulders. The guard beside him was desperately trying to get up, but Michele placed a foot between his shoulder blades and pushed him down again, keeping him down.

“You’ll do just fine,” Michele said. “Yuuri can’t resist coming to us now.”

Phichit didn’t say much else, feeling as if his words would be wasted. He wasn’t smart, he couldn’t talk his way out of it. He’d probably accidentally dig himself an even deeper hole, knowing him. It was how he had gotten into this mess. He contained another outcry as Michele pushed him forwards, pressing the barrel of the gun to the bottom of his back. He didn’t look back at the guard, not wanting to see the expression on his face.

He should never have come out of the basement, he thought. He was right, he would only get in the way. And now, he was a bargaining chip meant for Yuuri. Perhaps, just like a Hollywood movie, everything would be alright. Yuuri would swoop in and save the day, the war would be over, he’d return to skating with barely a sleepless night and Yuuri and Viktor could be together, if that was what they wanted.

Somehow, living it as reality, it didn’t feel like that.

He wanted to try and memorise the way they were going. If they did make it out, he wanted to know how to get back, and how to get anywhere he needed to. But he hasn’t wandered the town in the dark before. Everything looked so different from the day, so menacing. There were spots of blood where normally flowers would be, bullet holes, scratches. It was so confusing, he couldn’t remember the way.

So caught up in his worry was he that he didn’t know how long they walked. It could have been five minutes, perhaps fifteen. No longer, though, but he wasn’t sure. The sounds of the war was still raging in the background, getting further and further away, but always there. Like a far off storm, the threat loomed. He just knew when they arrived, in a small cove where the water sounded closer than the guns did. It was dark, a single portable light to illuminate the space. It was hard, uneven ground, and Phichit found himself almost tripping more than once.
There were a few other people there, several guards outside of the cove entrance, and a woman standing in the middle of them. Phichit glanced over her, recognising her similarity to the man taking him now. Behind her, someone was kneeling.

He didn’t see who it was until Phichit was pushed down to kneel beside him. Sharp blue eyes glanced at him with fear, settling into confusion when they recognised him.

Viktor looked bad. He didn’t look anything like the proud man Phichit had known. He hadn’t looked that bad the day that all of this had started. Even as he put a knife to the tattoos on his arms, he didn’t look nearly as pale, as dim behind the eyes.

“Phichit?” he asked, voice raspy.

It was then Phichit noticed the blood at his side, somewhat dried by now, but a lot of it. There was sweat all over his skin, glistening underneath the single light, dampening his clothes. He was having trouble breathing.

“That isn’t Yuuri Katsuki,” the woman whispered harshly.

“I couldn’t find him. This is the next best thing.”

The woman turned to kneel before him, roughly pulling up his chin to look into his face. She had sharp eyes too, scary, with a confidence to rival Michele’s. “How?”

“He’s Yuuri’s client, Sara. He’s the rumoured Phichit Chulanont.”

Something sparked in her eyes then. “I see.” They shared a look that Phichit didn’t like at all. It made the hairs on the back of his neck stand on end, his breathing falter the slightest bit. She stood up, turning away as if they weren’t worth any more attention. “Let’s go spread the news then. Yuuri Katsuki won’t have any choice but to come.” She paused, and a gasp escaped her lips. Pure joy lit up her features as she turned to Michele. “Michele, I have an idea.”

The two left the cove, any talking of plans swept away with the sea wind. The guards took their places around the cove, and the sound died down. As they did, Phichit could hear his own rushing
of blood, something that had seemed so silent when his thoughts had been screaming about the gun in his hands.

“Phichit.”

How Viktor said his name wasn’t like it had been weeks ago. It was gentler, careful. Phichit knew it wasn’t just because of the pain in his side.

Phichit turned to him, still apprehensive in the man’s company. He kept thinking of Viktor breaking out of the bonds, of how this was all a plan set by Yakov and Viktor, of how he’d be killed here and now. But there was something in Viktor’s expression that assured him.

“Viktor,” Phichit replied. It didn’t matter how vulnerable Viktor looked right now though, the name still sounded like acid on his tongue.

“It’s going to be fine.”

“Who are they?”

Viktor hesitated, and Phichit didn’t expect an answer. There was still something dark lurking in Viktor’s expression, lit by the light every time he moved. It had been the same look Phichit had been wary of before he knew what they were. He expected secrecy again, a wall built. But instead, Viktor answered, “Crispino family, Italian mafia.”

The answer shook Phichit to the core. “More mafia?”

“It’s going to be fine, Phichit. It’s all going to be fixed.”

***

Yuuri had never felt so panicked. He could feel it lacing up his spine, burning in his lungs, tearing away any rational thought in his mind.
The adrenaline was numbing his feet. He knew they’d ache another time, most likely tomorrow, but he didn’t even want to think about it. Right now, his mind was completely overtaken with Phichit.

Phichit. The stupid boy that had fought his guard and escaped with a gun. Yuuri grit his teeth together, feeling conflicted with himself. He shouldn’t have given him the gun – he thought he was doing right. But at the same time, would Phichit had still tried to escape even if Yuuri hadn’t given it to him? At least now he had some sort of protection, and sometimes a gun was more lethal in the hands of an untrained, scared boy.

He rushed around, running as fast as he could, trying to find his client somewhere in the battlefield. There were still some smaller fighting going on, but the majority of it had moved between the Italians and the Russians, closer down towards the beach. He could hear their shooting like lightning strikes and thunder in the sky. Every sound made him flinch, wondering if one of those bullets was making its way through his friend.

But he couldn’t find him anywhere. He’d called Phichit’s name, growing with desperation with each time, limbs shaking and shaking until he couldn’t feel the weather anymore. He almost felt sick, felt it brewing in the pit of his stomach. With each passing moment, he knew he was closer to finding Phichit’s body, empty of life, than a survivor.

He called for his friend once more, “Phichit!” He hoped for a return, his name called back, or any response really. But there was nothing. The wind whispered passed, shouts echoing across the sea. Phichit was lying dead on the ground. His blood was going to be seeping into the ground, staining the home he had lived for weeks. He’d be gone and Yuuri had failed his contract – not that it mattered right now. Phichit as a person, as a friend, mattered more than another statistic in his career. Phichit, the one who shouldn’t have been pushed this far, the stupid boy that had probably come out of hiding because he felt like he had hidden back long enough.

Yuuri couldn’t claim to know Phichit very well – most of their relationship was spent apart. They didn’t have time to talk about small things, thoughts or feelings beyond what was happening. But he was good at observing people, it was his job to do so. And he could almost hear Phichit’s thoughts as if they were his own. He’d been weak enough, and he wanted to come out and deal with the situation himself. He probably scared himself thinking about Yuuri and what his family were doing.

He stopped running, taking deep breaths he hadn’t realised he needed. He slammed his fist against the wall beside him, crying out. If only he had placed a tracker on Phichit, or if he somehow managed to gain powers that would find him. Just anything. Or if he came rushing through the bushes, fine and safe and ready to go back into hiding again.
He stared at those bushes and willed it to happen, wanting for once for fate to listen to him and have mercy.

But it didn’t. Someone did come from the bushes, but it wasn’t Phichit.

“Fucking hell,” he cursed under his breath. It must have carried, because Sara grinned. “What do you want?”

Her brother followed soon after, coming to stand beside her. She flipped her hair, and he could already see the two readying to boast about something. Yuuri’s thought began to turn to something dark, about the exact thing they wanted to throw in his face.

“Now, now, Yuuri,” she chimed. “No need to be so feisty.”

“Where is he?” Yuuri demanded, feeling the bark in his own voice. It burned bright within his chest, and he’d never heard himself like that before.

“Which one?”

It was like dousing cold water on him. Suddenly, the icy cold wind was biting at his bones, the fire inside of him dead. His face fell, and the sickness inside of himself grew. “What?”

“It was actually easier to catch Viktor than it was to catch Phichit. Who would give that boy a gun? A stupid decision.”

Yuuri pushed himself off of the walk and walked towards them, not thinking too much about the way he stumbled. His knees buckled – he didn’t have enough awareness to feel ashamed of it. “What have you done with them?”

Michele was the one who spoke this time, flicking his wrist to wave the comment away. “We haven’t done anything, and we won’t do anything if you come with us.”

Yuuri did have enough awareness to recognise that as a lie, however. He could hear it lying heavily, crashing into him in a punch. There wasn’t a choice – don’t go, and they both die. Or go,
and try and stop the lie before they did find it fun to kill anyway. He stepped forwards as an answer, all words dying in his throat.

They pressed guns to his back as they led him towards the beach. He’d walked these steps for years, knew every wear in the floor, knew every stone. He knew where they were going, towards the cove that had been dug in the beach by the crashing of the waves. Many times he’d played there as a kid, but it never felt as sickening as this.

Their trip was quick, and he didn’t remember much of it – only that he hoped when he got there, that they had been lying just to trap him. Phichit and Viktor were safely tucked away somewhere, and he’d only willingly walked into a lie.

But it was true. Their words, they had spoken the truth. He reached the mouth of the cove, and as his eyes adjusted to the dim darkness, one little light to illuminate it, he felt the sickness burn inside his stomach.

They both stared back at him, speechless, eyes wide and fearful. They’d been tied and pushed down to kneel, and something about it made Yuuri hate it.

Phichit looked close to crying, his tanned skin pale. There was blood all over him, dried and shining black under the night. Yuuri felt his heart miss a beat at the sight, but felt a breath of relief leave him when he noticed it didn’t belong to Phichit. The boy had only escaped for a matter of close to an hour, and yet Yuuri didn’t want to think about what he had seen, what he had had to face.

Viktor didn’t look very good though. He was panting, bending over as if he was quickly losing energy. He was paler, with clammy skin, eyes that seemed to find it hard to focus. The wound on his hip that Yuuri had seen earlier seemed much the same, no bigger, no more blood loss. But he could see the pain it caused Viktor with every breath.

He didn’t have time to ask them any questions before the siblings rushed forward. Sara slotted herself behind Viktor, tugging up his chin for his head to rest on her leg. With her free hand, she pressed the barrel of the gun to his head, making the man flinch.

Michele followed and did the same for Phichit, the boy more vocal with the pain than Viktor had been.
“Well,” Sara began, nodding her head as signal for the guards to move in, to lock Yuuri in with them. “This isn’t how I imagined it, honestly. For years I dreamed of having Viktor here, beneath my gun.” She pressed the barrel harder, almost grinding it against his skull. Viktor didn’t give a reaction. “But it never occurred to me that his soulmate would come up. When we did find you, it was like a present. Finally, a weakness in Viktor that we didn’t actually have to face him for. You were countries apart and we could destroy him.”

Michele took over, tugging a little too tightly on Phichit’s chin. “But you fought back and you hurt us, humiliated us. You didn’t think of us as a real threat. Just like Viktor. Just like him. You’re just as bad as each other. So you’re an enemy to us as well.”

“But you’re far easier to torment,” Sara added, her voice almost a giggle. “So, Yuuri, we have a question to ask you. I’m curious to see if you see Viktor as one more than the other – Enemy or Soulmate?”

“Which one gets to live?” Michele concluded. “Phichit, or Viktor?”

Chapter End Notes

WOOOPS MY HAND SLIPPED AND A CLIFFHANGER HAS RETURNED

hope you liked the chapter anyway! Into the last four chapters to come now... I shouldn't really count, it'll only make me feel even more sad XD

Come find me on tumblr!
here
Chapter Notes

Chapter beta-read by me, which means there will probably be more mistakes than normal, so for that I’m sorry!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

No.

Just no.

Not this.

Another choice.

Another dealing. Another this. Another that. Just another.

Choices. Choices. Choices. Just as Viktor had told him before, when faced with Yuuri’s choice. Their whole relationship had been choices, choices before they had even met. Good or Evil. Soulmate or Enemy. Death or Life. Phichit or Viktor.

Yuuri didn’t like the pressure. He felt sick to his stomach, the fear almost switching off the emotions inside of himself. If he thought too much, he couldn’t feel anything. If he thought of the basics, he felt like the whole world had doomed him from birth.

Yuuri was so used to the slow motion that had taken the night, that he felt sickened when time pressed on at its regular pace. Hours had slipped by in a slow heart-beat, every breath an eternity. But now it settled back into the rhythm he had lived it for years, at this moment, the moment he wished it was at its slowest.

He tried to think of ways out, eyes flickering between Viktor’s and Phichit’s gazes. They didn’t press, didn’t seem to demand him to save them. They waited and they watched, pitying that this weight fell on him. Yuuri could see Sara and Michele waiting too out of the corner of his eyes, growing impatient. He willed time to slow again, so that he had more of a chance to make up
something. Fate, he thought, if you’re listening, have mercy. Please. After everything you’ve put me through, just do something.

But Fate had brought him here. There had been so many times that a choice between Enemy and Soulmate was so profound, with the potential to ruin lives. But not like this. Not with a gun to the head, with a promise of a bullet with a name on it. He almost retched.

The longer he waited, the more he knew that someone was going to die here. If he had to choose, he’d choose himself. He wanted to demand that they direct their guns at him, but they wouldn’t. And despite everything, he knew that anyone he chose, they’d for sure kill Viktor anyway. They had come so far to get him here, they wouldn’t let him go. Otherwise, it was a 50/50 chance that Phichit would leave alive too, or himself.

“Say something,” Michele cut, impatience leaking out of every syllable.

Yuuri bent a little, almost wanting to curl in on himself. He didn’t want to say anything, and he was caught between staring at the two on their knees before him, and looking anywhere else. No pressure from either, no pushing, no desperation. It almost seemed as if Viktor had settled with his death, a small, gentle smile almost pulling at his lips.

It only hurt Yuuri more. Phichit was almost in tears, shaking, but even he didn’t seem to be begging.

“You’re going to kill Viktor anyway, no matter who I pick,” Yuuri said, finding the words were slipping from his lips before he could stop them. His voice sounded so strained, as if he had been choked. “What are you even trying to achieve?”

“Hard, isn’t it?” Sara said, an attempt at a hiss in her voice but it settled into more of a pained question. As Yuuri looked at her, the flash of what she might have been like as a little girl appeared. It was gone just as quickly, but Yuuri saw the strain in her eyes. “Hard to choose. Cruel. Tears you up right from the inside, doesn’t it?” She pressed the gun harder against Viktor’s head, making him flinch. “That’s exactly what this guy did to us. But our choice wasn’t nearly as easy! Every turn, everything we did, the choice was how quickly we’d die.”

Yuuri heard the venom in her voice, and he didn’t miss the way Viktor swallowed at the words.

“If we did one thing wrong, he’d kill our family,” Michele continued for her when his sister
seemed to find it difficult to find the words. “If we did anything, he’d kill them. If we just sat back, or if we acted, or if we ignored him, he’d kill them. Our choices all ended in death, because he was bored.”

“Giving him a choice wouldn’t benefit us,” Sara said, the words coming from her constricted throat. “He’s always got a way out of something. And he doesn’t care enough for anything to make him choose between them. Power, it’s everything, and he has it all. What could we make him choose?”

Yakov and Yuuri. Yuuri already knew the answer, because he had found Viktor’s Achilles heel and asked it. He’d cut Viktor right to the bone with a question that had been plaguing his mind. But it seemed that these two didn’t understand nearly as much as they thought they did.

“But making his soulmate choose is more painful. No one wants their other half to have to choose such a difficult decision, especially not when they know it’ll haunt them for the rest of their life. Ruin a person emotionally, and you win.”

“But it’s not much of a choice if you’re going to make the decision for me anyway!” Yuuri bellowed, the power behind his voice a shock to even himself. He felt it push at his chest, burning with the slow rage inside of him.

“Which just makes it all the more painful for you. In that case, isn’t it easier to save Phichit? Viktor will die anyway, so say the name of your client. Completely turn your back on your Soulmate and your Enemy. Just ignore fate and do the best thing. And watch as Viktor realises there wasn’t ever a part of himself in you anyway,” Michele said.

Yuuri watched Viktor’s face, the way his temple was dented with the press against the gun. He was looking worse and worse, and at this point, Yuuri didn’t know if it was the injury at his side or the pain he felt pulsing from Yuuri. The emotional turmoil, his chest aching, everything inside of himself churning until he felt as if he’d never be calm again, Viktor was feeling it too. And that hurt Yuuri more.

There was something deeper than the anger that burned inside of him. Yuuri could feel it so clearly, like a pit in his stomach that had no end, swallowing up every hope and dream he’d ever had. It engulfed his thoughts, and panic rose with it. He didn’t know what it was, knew it was bad. He’d never felt so desperate before, but something about it calmed him as well. It was like a rising storm, one he could only just keep at bay, a power he hadn’t felt before. It burned and burned and burned, sucked in everything, time, thoughts, an endless void. He didn’t think too much about it though, not seeing how it would help.
He didn’t know what he was going to do. He knew he could think a way out of this, there had to be something. But he couldn’t think straight, so many variables trying to weave inside his mind that he couldn’t keep calm. Phichit and Viktor might not be pushing, but he could still feel their stares. All eyes were on him, and his hesitation was only aggravating the Italians more.

Sara sighed, “If you’re not going to choose then, they’ll both just have to go.”

“No!” Yuuri shouted, holding out his hands as if it could stop them. At this point, he wasn’t above begging. If they wanted it, he would throw himself to his knees, bow until his forehead touched the sand and the dirt, and beg with everything he had. He’d become their personal slave, would do anything for them just for the two before him to walk away from this. But he knew even that wouldn’t work. “You won, okay? You’ve humiliated us all. You won. Isn’t that enough?”

Sara turned her gaze to her sibling. “I don’t feel like I’ve won yet. Do you, Michele?”

“Not until Viktor’s blood runs down these stones,” Michele replied.

“Exactly. If we let him go now, he’ll only become stronger and hunt us.” She turned her gaze back to Yuuri, impatience clear in her expression. Yuuri didn’t have much time left. “Just answer, Yuuri. Viktor or Phichit? Phichit doesn’t have to die here. He has no part in this.”

Time was ticking far too loud. Even the crash of the waves couldn’t sound louder. The void in him was growing with every breath.

“Yuuri,” Viktor said, surprising all in the cove. His voice was strained, matching the pale complexion of his skin and drooping eyes. He didn’t look good. He needed the hospital. “Left.”

“W-What?” Yuuri asked, looking to his left. There, Phichit was kneeling, narrowing his eyes in confusion at Viktor’s words, Michele’s gun still aimed at his temple.

“Left,” Viktor repeated.

Phichit? Was Viktor asking him to pick Phichit? The concern made his heart thump harder until he was convinced it would break from his chest.
“Left,” Viktor repeated again, pressing harder.

Yuuri glanced over, and that was when he saw it. It was as if suddenly his thoughts cleared. He was still panicking, but he saw something that made his mind clear its fog. With Phichit constantly shaking and moving his head, and Michele being too invested in the little play he and Sara had set upon Yuuri, he hadn’t noticed that his aim had become dislodged. The gun was aimed downwards, skimming Phichit’s head, a much less fatal blow. If shot, Phichit would most likely lose part of the top of his ear, but not his head.

Left. Ideally, Yuuri would need to attack Michele’s left side, as he was right-handed. But the angle in which he pointed the gun guaranteed him time. Michele wouldn’t have enough time to pick it up and shoot Yuuri, and it would be harder for him to turn it back on Phichit for any sort of threat again.

In all aspects of things, with the desperation of the situation, it was the easiest way out. It would be easier to save Phichit, take advantage of Michele’s laziness and the fact that Yuuri’s own guns hadn’t been taken off of him. He doubted he had time to reach for them though, it would alert them. Sara still had a firm grip on her gun, pointed towards Viktor’s head.

But that was when Yuuri also noticed the way Viktor was sitting. Phichit was kneeling submissively, and it would take some time for him to get up. Viktor’s feet were already poised, his body leaning backwards, ready for a push.

In the moments of Yuuri’s panic, Viktor had been calm, thinking things through. He’d already put a small plan into motion, the only plan they could achieve. But Yuuri knew there was a slim chance of success.

There were still armed guards around him. It would have been far easier to battle against Sara and Michele by themselves, and it meant one thing – Yuuri had to have faith that Viktor could fight his own way out. Yuuri couldn’t protect him, couldn’t think of a way in the plan that would save him too. It pained him to think it, but it had been Viktor’s plan to begin with.

“Left,” he replied, assuring Viktor that he knew what the plan was.

“If you’re thinking of anything, I’ll-” Sara began, but Yuuri was already taking advantage of the situation.
Any powerful person liked to talk, Yuuri noticed. It was far easier when he was a bodyguard to pop stars, when the stalkers had one motive and they were quiet. They were all alike one another, but these people of power liked to talk about plans, make sure that people knew who was boss. Viktor had been the same, back in what seemed like years ago in that hotel room. He’d talked and talked and that was how Yuuri had gotten a good impression of what he was like. Talking was a powerful tool he felt they overused.

Too much talking and Sara and Michele had convinced themselves that there was nothing Yuuri could do. It had even almost convinced Yuuri too, but Viktor had been the calm head he needed.

Before anyone could understand what ‘Left’ meant, he barrelled into Michele, knocking the gun from his hand, pushing him to slam into the rocky wall and away from Phichit. As Yuuri pushed all of his weight into it, narrowly avoiding taking Phichit down with him, his client gasped.

He didn’t know where the gun landed. As long as it wasn’t near Michele, then it didn’t matter. He heard Sara shout something before there was a thump in the sand, throwing the fine grains into the wind. Yuuri allowed himself a glance, just in time to see Viktor landing on her, using his weight when his hands were tied tightly behind his back. Yuuri didn’t have time to properly look though.

He threw himself in front of Phichit, shielding him from the guards. He could talk his way out of it, tell them to put down their guns or he’d shoot Michele. He could do any number of things now that Viktor had opened up the window for him. But he didn’t. The anger he had felt for ages now burned and whispered something else, and one by one, before they really understood what was happening, he shot each one. One in the thigh, one in the stomach, one in the shoulder, depending on their sizes and body shapes. Down the line he went, and it was the last two that gathered their thoughts before they were shot. They rushed, aiming their guns, and missed.

The bullets whizzed by Yuuri’s head, one coming close enough to flutter his hair, and exploded part of the rocky wall. Shards of stone rained down like solid droplets, onto where Michele still lay, body aching from the force he had been slammed into.

All guards fell, guns dropping from their grips. But it didn’t calm Yuuri. He untied Phichit’s bonds, glanced at Michele, and then rushed to take the guns from the guards. He didn’t want them rising again once the pain had numbed a little.

He placed one of the guns in Phichit’s hands, no time for words to pass his lips. Phichit took it with shaking grip, nodding. Oddly, Yuuri noticed the way he eased as soon as the metal touched his skin. His hands shook less, he stood with a straight back, and his finger raised onto the trigger without much insistence.
He wanted to look at Viktor. He could still hear the shuffling, softened fighting against the sand, feel the grains being kicked up into the wind and catching in his hair. But he was sure Viktor could hold his own until Michele was dealt with.

“Aim it at him,” he instructed Phichit. “I’m going to tie him up.”

Phichit did as was told. With a readied stance, he aimed, both hands held tightly on the body of the gun. Once they had Michele tied up, Yuuri knew he could turn to Viktor and help then. The man didn’t look good, not with the injury in his side and Yuuri didn’t want him fighting for longer than he had to. No doubt his strength had been sapped away from the fighting before, ebbing faster now that his injury was getting to him. But Yuuri had to be careful. There was no use helping if he was only going to make the whole thing worse.

He pushed Michele, who was still winded from the crash, over and he straddled the back of the Italian’s thighs. Using the rope that the man had used to tie Phichit, Yuuri began to slowly tie it around his wrists. He was taking slow care, making sure he was doing it properly.

“Yuuri, I’m so sorry,” Phichit began, voice low and Yuuri doubted that Phichit knew what he was really saying. “I thought I could help—”

“It’s okay, Phichit,” Yuuri assured in the most gentle voice he could. He knew he would have done the same. He couldn’t sit and wait while people fought for him. “I’ve got Michele here. How are Viktor and—”

Pain.

No, more than pain. It felt like ripping. Stabbed at his side, a cannon ball through his chest. It overtook all of his senses, crushing any thought and his body froze. The words died on his tongue.

He wasn’t sure what went wrong, but it hurt so much. He’d missed something. He slowly glanced down at the pain in his side, sure that there would be a pool of blood seeping in his clothes, perhaps a hole left from a bullet he hadn’t seen pass through him. But he hadn’t heard the gunshot. His chest would be stained red, to the right side of his heart where it beat painfully. He felt the world waver before his eyes at such intensity, and he almost threw up everything in his stomach.

But there wasn’t anything there.
Below him, Michele was trying to take advantage of the falter. He was bucking, and Phichit was shouting something, moving forwards to press the gun to the back of Michele’s head. The words weren’t getting to Yuuri. His ears were strained with the sound of the rushing of blood through his veins.

Where pain was tearing through him, there were no signs that anything had happened. His left side was fine, his top still clean and crisp save the dried blood and the dirt from the fighting hours ago. His chest was still rising and falling with his staggered breath.

There wasn’t anything, and he wondered if he had just started to feel the strain of the fighting. Maybe his panic had rushed the adrenaline from the body and he was starting to feel the work he had made his muscles go through. They must have been locking. Or perhaps he had sustained injury before but hadn’t felt it until now.

But the void told him no. He was wrong. He knew the void was right, because he saw the way Phichit froze and gasped, gaze turned from Michele to the fighting on their other side.

Except the fighting had stopped. The scuffles and the grunts had stopped. The sand wasn’t being carried by the wind. He might not have heard the gunshot – something he found stupid as how close they were – but he smelled the fire in the air.

He didn’t want to look, now understanding what had happened. His breathing was too loud, thumping with his pulse, and he slowly turned his head to peer to the side.

His vision was blurry at first. He saw two forms. The first, the one he suspected was Sara by the hair and the small structure, was standing with her gun in her trembling hands, pointing downwards. He could hear her breathing too.

The other form was on the floor, barely moving. It was a mix of reds and whites and silvers, with some darkness cast by the shadow of the cove. Its breathing was shallow, restricting Yuuri’s own.

Time finally slowed. Cruel that it should do it now and not when he needed it most.

Everything but Viktor melted away. The Russian wasn’t moving, pained breathing obvious to Yuuri’s own lungs. He felt the pain in his side, in his chest. One felt like a dull throb, continuous and what he had been feeling for a while, aggravated with every movement. But the one in his chest was sharp, new, much like a bullet wound. Yuuri wasn’t sure if it was his own blood that
was slowing, or if it was Viktor’s, seeping out of his body in a sickeningly fast pace.

The world was turning to black around the fringes of his vision. Viktor’s shoulders were moving, an attempt to remain awake and get up. But Yuuri’s own strength was beginning to fade, mirroring everything Viktor was feeling. Panic. Images of himself flashed through his mind, a solemn idea that this would be what he last thought about. Pain in his heart. Life, slowly slipping.

Viktor was slowly dying. Shot. Through the chest, unable to fight because of the injury in his side. Sara had taken that advantage, and she’d shot him. Shot Viktor. In the chest.

Yuuri didn’t know he stood, but he did. It drew all eyes to him, to the dark expression on his face.

Michele stopped trying to attack. He backed up, crawled backwards until his back slammed into the cove wall as the unfinished tie around his hands came loose. Sara stepped backwards, any thoughts of finishing Viktor off losing its shine. She aimed her gun at Yuuri, hands shaking more than they had ever before.

Phichit was speaking, repeating Yuuri’s name until the name seemed to lose its meaning. He wanted to clutch at Yuuri and make him stop, to break out of whatever trance he was in. But he didn’t dare, didn’t know what a bereaved soulmate with such an expression as Yuuri had could accomplish.

Viktor was slowly losing conscience. He wished to turn himself around, for his last sight to be of Yuuri’s face, to see the man he would have sacrificed the world for. But his strength was failing, the panic inside of himself numbing with every desperate reach.

Yuuri stood for a long time, his staggered breath echoing. His eyes were wide, changing from numb and empty to a raging storm. His face was paler than was healthy.

Yuuri didn’t hear Sara shooting. She tried to stop Yuuri as he began to take slow steps forwards. But her hands were shaking too much. It flew by, disappearing into the darkness of the twilight. She was shouting at her sibling.

A little bit of it broke through the bubble around Yuuri. He saw her moving, saw as she wove around him and began to lift Michele. He wasn’t sure what they were saying, but he just knew that they were trying to get away. He saw as Phichit rushed to Viktor’s side, turning the unconscious man to lie on his back and he was pressing on where the blood was seeping out too quickly.
That was when the void inside of Yuuri engulfed him. Viktor’s face was as white as a sheet, eyes closed, chest barely rising. The blood was shining, staining his clothes red. It marked the sand, dotted the walls.

And his murderers were running away.

Yuuri had heard that soulmates could lose themselves when their other halves were in danger, or injured, or dead. They could be consumed by a darkness, a desperation, something that science couldn’t explain. Yuuri heard it made them lose control.

He didn’t feel like he had lost control. For the first time in a very long time, he felt like he had a firm grip on it. It seeped power into his numb limbs, chased away the pain when it had become too much, his tiredness gone. The world didn’t waver anymore. He saw more clearly than he had ever before.

Rage. Pure, white, rage burned inside of him. The tug in his chest, the connection he had with Viktor, was feeling weaker, and it made him think dangerous thoughts. He felt as if someone had cut off an arm, or had torn half of his body off, had destroyed half his brain. It felt like his soul was being torn in two.

Emptiness and loneliness were the first things that occurred to him. He felt them beginning to creep on him, no longer able to hear the sound of Viktor’s voice and words, the memory of his smile fading quickly.

And his murderers were running away.

He turned and he shot, a clearer view than he had ever had before. But he didn’t take his time. On one side of himself, he wanted to savour killing the two siblings – he didn’t want to speak their names. He’d call them M and S. He wanted to give them the pain they had given him, give them a choice as they had given him, tear away their thoughts until they knew what it was like. But he had been hasty.

The bullet shot through M’s shoulder, and Yuuri savoured their shouts. M’s cry, his stumble, the blood running. S grabbed him before he could fall and carried him until they were out of the cove.

Yuuri wanted to chase. Hunt the two that had hunted them. But any step away from Viktor was
hard to make, and he didn’t want to be away from his soulmate and miss his last breath.

“Yuuri!”

Phichit’s voice finally made it through to him, through the raging bubble. He turned slowly, eyes falling back on the still form.

“Yuuri, he’s still alive. It’s going to be okay, Yuuri. It’s going to be alright. We need to get help!”

The void was thickening. Help. No one could help. His soulmate had stopped sweating. He remembered that was bad. He didn’t look like he was breathing anymore.

“Yuuri, press on this,” Phichit continued, pulling him down with one bloody hand until Yuuri kneeled beside him. He placed Yuuri’s hands on the wound, pressing with uncomfortable pressure. Had Viktor been awake, he’d probably be complaining. There would be bruises. “Press on that. Keep pressing or he’s going to lose too much blood, okay?”

The blood was seeping up his own sleeves now, and he could feel it wetting the tattoos on his skin. The tattoos. Stained with Viktor’s blood. How apt, he thought. He wondered if this was what fate wanted.

When Phichit was sure that Yuuri had it, he said, “I’m going to go for help, okay? Stay here. I’ll be back in a second.” He jumped over the unconscious guards, some probably dead by now.

Yuuri forgot they were there. He had no eyes but for Viktor. With his hands pressed like this, he could see the rise and the fall of his chest, so small and fluttering. Butterfly breaths. Colourful. Graceful. Bloody. And much like a butterfly, Viktor was beginning to slip through his fingers. So delicate. Gunned down so easily.

He tried speaking. He called Viktor’s name first. He wasn’t sure if he did it in his mind, or if he had spoken it out loud. But he knew there wasn’t any response. Everything he did, every cry, every searing feeling inside of him wasn’t making Viktor’s eyes open.

Even across distances, the tightness in his chest had never been this painful.
He wasn’t sure how long had passed, but soon enough, Phichit and others were beside him.

Someone’s hands pushed his aside in pressing the wound. Smaller than his, with longer nails that were broken and muddy from fighting. Mila’s. Someone else pulled him up, smaller arms than his own too. Two sets of hands. He was standing again, and his puppeteers stood beside him. Yuri and Otabek. He didn’t look at any of their faces, his gaze still on where Mila was pressing the wound until her pale skin was washed red too. She looked in pain too. She limped a little.

Blood got everywhere.

Someone was speaking. Phichit was sticking close. It didn’t take long for Yuuri to realise.

Yakov stood in the cove entrance. Phichit, despite calling for help, was still frightened, though he was trying to contain it. He was speaking to Mila, mouth opening, but now Yuuri only had eyes for Yakov.

The void burned again. He gritted his teeth together, and before he knew it, he had Yakov pressed against the cove wall. He was pressing as hard as he could, and he knew Yakov could feel it. He was wincing, his back slammed against the jagged surface.

Yuuri leaned until his face was close enough to smell Yakov’s breath. He hoped the man could see the agony inside of his eyes, the rage that was too big to contain. He hoped Yakov could see what it felt like from his gaze alone.

“This is all your fault!” he screamed in Yakov’s face, unsure where the words had come from. But as he said them, he felt his hands shaking, tears running down his puffy cheeks behind the rim of his glasses, chin wobbling. The control was still inside of him, and he knew what he wanted to do. He wanted to slam Yakov’s head against the wall. “Your fault! He’s dying and it’s all your fault. Your fault. Your fault!”

“I know.”

Yakov’s words stopped Yuuri. He finally took in Yakov’s expression, seeing a mirror of his own agony staring back at him. Yakov didn’t cry, but his eyes were wet and shining, swallowing down a lump in his throat. New wrinkles were already forming on his pale face, eyes knitted so far together it seemed like they’d be stuck like that forever. Yuuri was the only one close enough to hear his whispered words, and it sounded like a million hearts had shattered.
It made Yuuri’s tears fall harder. “You should’ve stopped it when he asked you to,” he said. The rage was slowly burning down until it became desperation and sadness, turning the void into depression. Loneliness, he had never felt anything like it. To go through the world, knowing that there was never going to be someone to share it with – no one like Viktor. No one would ever be able to compare. No one would ever hold as much of his love, as much of his hatred. “He begged you and you didn’t listen and now we’re here and he’s dying.”

“I know.”

“You should have known before!” Yuuri cried out. “Knowing now doesn’t help anything!”

“I know, Yuuri.”

“Stop saying that!” Yuuri pushed him harder, taking some sick pleasure in the way Yakov winced. “I would kill you right now if I wasn’t worried about how Viktor would see me afterwards! I would shoot you, just like I did before. Give you as much pain as you’ve given us!”

Yakov didn’t fight it. It felt worse when he was allowing Yuuri to scream in his face and abuse him as he did. Yuuri wanted to best the stubborn Yakov he had known for weeks, the same one that aggravated him to no ends.

“You thought I was using him,” he continued to say. “You thought I was going to hurt him, choose Phichit instead. How could you? How could I? You’re the one that used him! Used his love for you to push until we came to this!” He glanced down again, watched as Mila pushed and pushed on Viktor’s chest. Someone was on the phone. He didn’t know who. Only saw Viktor’s still face. He turned back to Yakov, caught between not wanting to watch more and watch forever. He connected their eyes, staring into Yakov’s.

The control inside of him was slipping. The void was disappearing as quickly as it had come. Whatever power it was he was given, it was going away. He found himself scared of losing it, because it gave him feeling – he didn’t want to know if it took everything with it. He didn’t want to be an empty shell.

“Stop it. Stop all of this.” His voice was no longer booming or strong. “Please. Don’t hunt Phichit anymore. Don’t make this harder.”
Yakov’s eyes glanced down at Viktor, and his breath chocked slightly. “It doesn’t matter anymore, anyway.”

The words took the remaining wind out of Yuuri’s sails. A sob wracked his form and he cried harder, his grip on Yakov’s turning into his clutching on his top. He was going to fall otherwise. He felt Yakov’s arms hold onto his elbows, keeping him steady.

“Please. It already hurts. It really hurts. I don’t like it.” Another sob struck, so powerful it took his breath away. “I don’t want to be alone. Please. Don’t take him from me.”

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Yuuri didn’t remember much. After his outburst, his attentions shifted to Viktor and it stayed there. The world could have been ending around him and he wouldn’t have cared.

His world was already being torn down right in front of him.

He held onto Viktor as tightly as he could, hands gripped and intertwined. Viktor’s hand was getting colder, the pulse in his fingers weaker. The blood was drying and almost sticking their skin together. He kept his gaze on Viktor’s face, watching his expression shift in unconscious pain, mouth gaping as he attempted to breathe more normally, pale skin shaking as the shock slipped in.

He could feel someone gripping onto him. The memory was there, in his head, and for some reason he just knew it had been Phichit, trying to calm him. Whispered words that didn’t quite make it to his comprehension, warm touches that only helped to show the stark contrast to Viktor’s cold touch. There were more voices. He thought he might have heard his parents, but he couldn’t be sure. Mila and Yuri were shouting things, slurs burning in the air.

But Yuuri didn’t remember much. Even as they were moved onto an ambulance, he refused to leave Viktor’s side, refused to let go of their grip. He didn’t know if the drivers were okay with it, he didn’t listen to their words, but he wasn’t being dragged away.

The ambulance purred around him, and they drove off. He wasn’t sure where the others had gone, but was too busy watching as the people around him cared for Viktor.

He watched as the tubes were popped into his papery skin, pumping him with clear liquid from
bangs hanging from poles. His top was torn apart, exposing more blood, more curling skin, more pain. Yuuri knew he had gasped, felt the pain strike himself at seeing his soulmate’s wound. They injected him, pressed him, moved quickly, calmly gave orders to one another, treated him as another victim.

But he wasn’t. He was more than that, and Yuuri wanted to demand that they did everything in their power to save him. It was their job to, but he wanted to make sure they were doing it. He needed that assurance. But the words wouldn’t leave his mouth. He felt like anything he said would break the fragile silence.

He could still feel the desperation inside of him, fuelling the anger, the rage, the void that was still lurking. He wanted to do everything at once, hunt down the Crispinos and make them pay for what they had done. He wished he had super powers and was able to heal Viktor himself, or if he could go back in time and step in front of the bullet for him. He wished he had paid more attention.

He thought Viktor could handle it. He could. He was able to fight Sara, but Yuuri had forgotten the injury he had already sustained. The hip injury was surely what had hindered him. Yuuri should have paid more attention and saved him.

The tears didn’t stop. His heart ached more than he had ever felt, twisting until he couldn’t breathe properly. He wanted Viktor to open his eyes, sit up and be healed immediately.

He begged for Viktor to wake up, the words swirling inside of his head. He thought he might have said them out loud if the looks of the medical help around him were anything to go by. But he didn’t care. He didn’t remember much of what happened.

He’d only known that they arrived at hospital because he followed them as they wheeled Viktor away. He stuck to it, kept their hands intertwined, and he fought when they began to tell him to let go.

He didn’t hear their words, but he saw as they began to gently take his hand away. He fought. He thought he shouted that he didn’t want to. But in the end, with some force, they tore their hands apart and Viktor was taken away.

The lights of the hospital were too blinding. The whites of the wall were offensive. The smell was invading his nose and giving him a headache. This was the last place he ever wanted to come to. And it was the last place he ever wanted Viktor in.
He wanted to cut through all of the doctors and chase after Viktor. But he stood stock still as a doctor spoke to him.

White coat. Glasses. Clipboard in his grabby hands. He was saying something, addressing Yuuri straight. Operation. Something about having to remove the bullet and stitching and blood transfusion. It was going to be a dangerous time. A long time.

He could wait in the waiting room if he wanted. There were plenty of refreshments and things to distract his mind. He asked their connection.

Yuuri, for the first time, answered. He told the doctor that they were soulmates, keeping away the fact that they were also enemies. They’d probably see the same name on both of Viktor’s wrists anyway. The doctors, being Japanese, would be able to read it and they’d make their assumptions. Yuuri signed whatever the doctor wanted, answered his questions with monosyllabic answers, and followed him as he took Yuuri to the waiting room.

It was just as sickening as every other room in the hospital White walls. Bright lights. A smell that lingered between death and sterilisation. Too many voices outside of the room, people passing with worry on their expressions.

The doctor pointed out where the bathroom was. An accompanying shower was there if he needed it, and the doctor made a point to look at the clothes on Yuuri’s frame that were covered in blood, his hands red and dry. Yuuri refused it.

He was left alone and he sat down on one of the chairs. It was too used, too uncomfortable and it dug into the back of his thighs, but he didn’t move. On the wall, a generic, plain clock ticked away, echoing in the boring space. Every tick took an eternity, pumping in his head, reminding him of the time he wasn’t spending with Viktor.

He stared down at his hands. He wondered how he’d ever clean it off, if the red would forever remain stuck under his nails, faded in the wrinkles and creases of his skin. Perhaps it would be the last thing he’d ever see of Viktor. The last thing he’d have left.

The thought made him panic. He wove his hands into his hair, watching as flakes of the thinner, drier parts fluttered down onto his lap, and he pulled. Just to feel physical pain, something more than the exhaustion he was feeling in his bones, or the way his heart was going to stop.
Would he feel the moment Viktor slipped on the operating table? Would he know if he woke up? Would he feel the slices of their scalpels?

Before he could think too much about it, he heard company. There was another doctor. Phichit was the first in, sitting next to him, placing a gentle hand on his shoulder. Yuuri didn’t melt into it, but he didn’t shake it away either. He saw the bloodstained trousers of Mila as she stood in front of him, favouring one leg for the other with a bloodied bandage wrapped around her thigh, caught between listening to the rambles of the doctor and seeing how Yuuri was. Yuri, little teenage Yuri, seemed at a loss of what to do, and Otabek was trying to console him with a few calming words. Yakov listened to the doctor intently, asking many questions. Yuuri’s family, also bloodstained, gathered around him.

He didn’t know what they were saying or doing, not really. He was too lost in his own mind to feel the tension in the air, heavy between Yuuri’s family and the Russians. Just a little while ago, they had been fighting, about to kill one another. It was a thin hair between acting civil and bringing out their guns right now. Words were thrown around, accusations followed by stress and guilt. They might have ended up starting another war right there in the waiting room, if it hadn’t been for their worry for Yuuri and Viktor.

But Yuuri didn’t know this. He didn’t know it until days later when he was stable enough for Phichit to tell him. He told Yuuri about the arguments that had happened right before him, the guns drawn and threats made. The blood of their friends was still splattered on their clothes, the pain of losing familiar ones still raw and fresh in their minds. They were not civil, Phichit told Yuuri. They were not calm, they did not refrain from throwing accusations and guilt. But they didn’t kill one another, so that was a plus.

Yuuri didn’t know it though because as a soulmate, his mind was focused on one thing. Later, he felt guilty about that, but everyone he knew told him it was not his fault. He was born to feel that, assumed to act it. And they all worried for him.

The tension didn’t go, and Yuuri didn’t settle, not even as the hours passed. Much too long. Each second was spent with stress and worry. Phichit and Yuuri’s mother stayed beside him, always keeping some form of contact, and even as his mother left to use the toilet, the space was taken up by his father or his sister – he wasn’t quite sure which. The Russians took turns pacing, words dying out soon after the first hour.

There was never a moment in which Yuuri didn’t feel their eyes on him. Every second of every minute of every hour, he felt their eyes boring into him. But he could also feel the ghost pains in his side and his chest, aggravated by what they were doing in the operating room.

It ached and it burned and it sparked the nerves in his body. He gritted his teeth, and he wasn’t sure
if he made some noise or not, but he was aware of the pacing stopping. Quiet for a moment. It wasn’t until later that he realised they stopped to see if Yuuri’s reaction told them if Viktor was dead.

He wasn’t. Yuuri could still hear his heart beating faintly, as if it was beside his own. Every second made it harder for him to restrain himself and not storm his way into the operating room.

He felt the moment that the operation had finished. The injuries ached and throbbed, but a duller pain than the sharp, dangerous pain he had felt when Viktor first sustained them. The heart was more stable inside his chest, and the weight of something bigger against him had eased. The world was clearing just that little bit.

It had been close to a six-hour operation.

The sun had risen already, birds singing yet another day. No doubt, by now, the people of Hasetsu had fed their hungry curiosity of the war they had heard in the night. They’d walked the beach and find the blood, the ruined buildings, the gloom that was settled over the familiar bathhouse.

There would be no bodies. Their footmen and guards, the ones left, would have made sure of that. And Yuuri wasn’t sure what Yakov would do with his own men, or where the Italians had gone, but he suspected that they were gone by now.

They had made it to the dawn. They’d seen the light of the new day, and so far, Viktor was still alive. The doom of the dark was being chased away by the rays of light, and Yuuri felt relief at having made it with his family through one of the longest nights he had ever lived through. Now he needed more good news. He needed the doctor to tell him the operation had been successful, Viktor would wake up soon, he’d be fine and he wasn’t a threat. Simple. Easy. It was a story he desperately clung to.

He felt them moving Viktor from the operating room. The tug in his chest was getting tighter. He rose from the seat, drawing the attention of all in the room again, and walked towards the door. He met the doctor there, a new one, scaring the man a little.

“How is he?” Yuuri asked, voice a little surer than it had been before, but pushing.

The doctor looked reluctant, and Yuuri felt his heart stop. “He’s stable. We’ve removed the bullet, stitched up his injuries and stopped the bleeding. He’s been given a blood transfusion – he lost a lot
of blood. Heart beat is strong again, and his pulse has settled back into its normal bpm. He’s a fighter.”

“But?” Yuuri asked. There was always a ‘but’.

“But,” the doctor sighed, “we’re not able to say for sure he’ll make it yet. He should be waking up within the next few hours as the sedation wears off. We’ll have a more accurate idea then.” The man looked down at his clipboard. “You’re his… soulmate, correct? Yuuri Katsuki.” He hesitated with the word. So they’d seen both sides of the tattoos.

“Yes.”

“Would you like to see him?”

“Yes,” Yuuri replied, rushing off before he’d even finished speaking.

The doctor shouted the number as he stayed behind. Yuuri didn’t hear, but the doctor wouldn’t allow anyone else. Give the soulmates time, he said, and then he would allow more in. Only two at a time, no more.

There were more doctors and nurses in the room. They were settling Viktor into the crisp, white bed. He had more IVs in his skin, a machine to monitor his heart beat. There were tubes settled underneath his nose to help his breathing.

One nurse held him back as they finished their preparation, and let go as soon as it was. They left Yuuri alone in the room.

A seat beside the bed had already been placed, next to a table with a jug of water and an empty glass. Yuuri stood next to the bed on the other side and hovered over Viktor.

He looked better. Some colour had returned to his skin, though his veins were still visible. Bags had already begun to darken underneath his eyes – he wouldn’t like that, Yuuri thought. He was so conscious of image, dark circles were not what he wanted. His clothes had been removed for the boring hospital gowns, one side hanging over his shoulder.
He’d been cleaned. Unlike Yuuri, his skin was scrubbed bare of the blood. Yuuri suddenly felt dirty. He backed off from the bed, not wanting to touch the cleaned man.

He rushed to the sink attacked to the room and scrubbed with the soap they provided, watching as the red swirled down the drain. He rinsed and rubbed until every little bit of blood was gone, even the flakes underneath his nails, the red stuck in the creases of his skin. It took what seemed like a long time, but he finally finished and dried off his hands. There was still some on his clothes, but that he could forgive for the moment.

He took the seat and with his newly cleaned hands, he took hold of Viktor’s and rubbed his skin.

There was some warmth there where there hadn’t been before. Yuuri felt the tears running down his face again, this time more out of relief than fear though.

The doctor didn’t want to say that he was sure Viktor would live, and that still plagued Yuuri’s mind. Anything could go wrong. They weren’t safe until Viktor was awake, his wounds healed, and they were years down the line. But Yuuri was just glad to see that Viktor was here, breathing, out of the operating room at all.

He kissed Viktor’s knuckles, trailed up his arm until he came face to face. Viktor’s lips were dry and pale, some dry skin soon to rise. Yuuri leaned forwards and pressed a kiss there, rising to press more little butterfly kisses to his cheeks, his nose, closed eyelids and forehead. Everything he could, because he was so thankful that Viktor was here to be kissed.

The more he watched Viktor, the more stable he felt. The void in his body was closing, and the rage was burning away with it. It didn’t hurt as much anymore.

Yuuri had heard that people could still hear, even when unconscious. He wondered if that was true. He moved until his mouth was close to Viktor’s ear, and he spoke to him.

“Viktor,” he whispered. He waited for a reaction, but not even a twitch of a finger was made. “Viktor?” The lump was forming in his throat again. “Viktor, I’m so sorry. I shouldn’t have let you fight alone.” He gripped the man’s gown, the cheap material crinkling underneath his touch. “Wake up soon, okay? We need to talk about this. I need to hear your voice. I need to see you. Please.”

No response. It wasn’t like Viktor to be silent. Often, if Yuuri said one thing, the man would reply
with a hundred words. Viktor wasn’t one to hate the sound of his own voice. The thought brought some small laughter bubbling weakly to his lips. It died as soon as it had come.

There were so many things he wanted to say. All of the words were pressing on his lips, and he wasn’t sure which ones could be said first. They all spoke his heart’s thoughts, and he wanted for Viktor to hear every single one.

He’d never thought he’d be here. When Viktor had he had met, when he found out they were connected, Yuuri never thought he’d feel this way. Further than that, when he first knew the tattoos and their meaning, when he was cursed with thoughts of pain and an unsure future, he never thought he’d feel so strongly for the man that was meant for him. Enemy or Soulmate, Viktor was now everything.

“I know it’s a little late,” Yuuri began, finding the words carefully, “and I know you’ve already said it, but now it’s my turn.” He brushed his fingers against Viktor’s cheek, glad to feel some of their warmth. “I love you, Viktor Nikiforov. I love you. I don’t know when it began, but I know I do now. I want to say it when you’re awake too, so wake up soon, okay? Please. I love you. I love you so much.”

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The nurses and doctors couldn’t keep to their ‘two people per visit’ rule. Not with the Russian mafia, or the Japanese safe house keepers. It was a good thing then that Viktor’s room was a large one to be able to accompany nine people besides the patient himself.

Yuuri stuck to his chair, holding Viktor’s hand. This time, he did speak to people.

His family asked how he was, and he answered honestly. Better. Much better than he had been. Phichit told him stories of how it had been at the safe house, of the days he would go crab fishing with the triplets, helped with the ice rink, how amazing his mother’s cooking was.

“I’ve already told her she can’t get rid of me now,” he said. “I am coming over whenever she’s making katsudon.”

Yuri asked what Yuuri felt, how Viktor was. Yuuri answered that honestly too. Viktor was getting stronger.
The tension in the air was slowly dissipating, though Yakov didn’t speak. He stuck to the corner of the room, always watching Viktor, occasionally glancing to Yuuri. No one approached him. And as the air eased, the Russians and the Japanese began to speak.

Yuuri almost cracked a smile as his sister honed in on teen Yuri. She targeted him as a look-alike to one of her favourite celebrities, and labelled Yuri as Yurio to differentiate between them.

“It’s too confusing having two Yuri’s,” she said as explanation. “So, you’re Yurio.”

It might have sent the teen roaring into a fit of spitting, but it helped lighten the mood more. Yuuri watched, clutching harder at Viktor’s hand, as Yuri – Yurio – shouted at Mari, demanding that she stop calling him it. But she only laughed, pulling him into a hug and rubbing his head with her hands. He fought, but Mari was stronger, making it look easy as she held the kitten down.

Her teasing seemed to gain Mila’s approval. The two women had been very restricted and suspicious to begin, knowing that any of their friends could have been killed by the other. But that melted away into a love of teasing Yurio, taking turns to call him the name until he was red in the face and even Otabek was cracking a laugh.

It was such a stark difference from what they had been like only a few hours before, when the loom of death was heavy on all of their heads.

Yuuri wished for Viktor to wake and see it. To wake up to sounds of teasing and laughter, that would be the best healer.

And it was just as he thought that, that he felt a squeeze grip his hand.

Yuuri glanced down, thinking it might have just been nerves or a response to his own squeezing. But it happened again, and he felt the heart beat inside of himself beginning to speed a little, lulled out of the sleeping rhythm.

Viktor’s eyes were rolling behind his eyelids, eyelashes flicking against his soft cheeks as he woke. Yuuri gripped Viktor’s hands with both of his own and watched as Viktor’s piercing blue eyes narrowed against the brightness of the room. He grunted and used his free hand to shield them.

Slowly, one by one, the Russians, the Japanese and Phichit noticed. All voices died down as they
anticipated Viktor’s reaction.

Once he had grown accustomed, Viktor’s eyes immediately found Yuuri. The confusion softened into a smile, his lips pulled into the blinding grin Yuuri would never get used to.

“Hello, beautiful,” he croaked.

Relief. Yuuri cried again, standing so quickly from the chair that it flew backwards. Its crash was a dull noise behind his bubble, ears taken by the sound of Viktor’s voice, his breathing, his heart beat. He let go of Viktor’s hand to grip either side of his face, and though his touch was soft, his words were not.

“If you were that hurt, you shouldn’t have been fighting!” he shouted, surprising not only Viktor but everyone in the room with the strength of his voice. “You should have asked for help! You’re such an idiot.”

“I thought I could fight,” Viktor replied. He made to say more, but the sore throat stopped him. He moved to sit up.

Yuuri pushed him backwards, but not quick enough. Viktor winced as the pain in his chest and his side sparked, and Yuuri felt it in his own body. “Don’t get up,” Yuuri said. “You were shot. You only came out of the operation a few hours ago.”

“Operation?” Viktor asked, aghast.

“Yes, to get the bullet out. You needed a blood transfusion.”

“Oh.” Viktor blinked, clearly a little confused. He took in the pipes that were attached to his body, the heart monitor that he hadn’t heard beeping before. Then he saw the people in the room, and the realisation of the situation seemed to dawn on him. He turned back to Yuuri. “Oh my god, Yuuri, I’m so sorry. I’m so, so sorry. You must have been terrified. I don’t remember it. I remember the shot, the pain, and then I’m waking up here. Shit. I-”

Yuuri shut the man up with a kiss to his lips, not caring that there were others present. This was his soulmate, the man he had worried for over hours about, the man he would continue to worry about. “Just get better,” he said, whispering just for them to hear. “The doctor said you were a fighter.
You’re not going to leave me alone, are you?” He said it with a slight tease, because as he saw the
fire in Viktor’s eyes, he knew he had enough energy to fight it. But he needed the assurance from
the man himself too. He needed to know he would do everything, because the loneliness Yuuri had
felt when he was sure Viktor was going to die was something he never wanted to feel again.

“Of course not! Never! I promise, Yuuri.”

Yuuri shut him up with another kiss, liking the feel of Viktor’s lips moving under his own. He was
moving. He was speaking. He was awake and breathing and the blood still rushed through his
veins. As he stared into Viktor’s tired but bright eyes, Yuuri repeated the words he so longed for
Viktor to hear.

“I love you, Viktor.”

Chapter End Notes

Okay first thing is first, I kind of lived for the responses from the last chapter. They
made me laugh and feel mean all at the same time XD

But here's the chapter in which we find out what happens! So, first of all, I'm sorry.
Second of all, hey, look, it's not a cliffhanger!!! XD I was actually nice with this
ending huh? Does this make up for it? :3

As always, if you're looking for updates or just want to shout abuse at me for my
cliffhangers or chat, you can find me on tumblr

here
Phichit had never seen Yuuri like that before. Or, no, correction, he’d never seen anyone like it before.

So lost. Caught between rage, terror and numbness. The look on Yuuri’s face, he never wanted to see it on another. Yuuri had been so consumed with his soulmate, he hadn’t been able to notice the things going on around him. Phichit doubted that he’d noticed the way he had been clinging to Yuuri’s arm the whole time, or speaking to him, or the tension in the air. For hours and hours, Phichit had been worried that the war was going to continue within the four walls of the hospital.

Yuuri’s family were livid. Mari was close to punching one of the Russians – she didn’t seem to care which one, as long as one of them was within a three-foot radius of her. But she restrained.

Mila was in pain. She tried to hide it, thinking no one had noticed. But Phichit did. He noticed things while others didn’t. He saw how she favoured one leg, how the blood was still flowing from the wound in her leg – even if it was only a trickle every time she moved. After standing in one place for too long, each step was a shooting pain. Her face would scrunch up, and one of the nurses asked about it. Somewhere along the fifth hour mark, she gave in and took one of the chairs, rubbing her wound whenever she thought no one was looking.

Yakov hadn’t done anything but speak to the doctors, asking for Viktor’s condition. He’d been glancing at Phichit, and each time he had, Phichit had stared back. It took a lot of strength, but if Yuuri could get through this and be brave, then so could Phichit.

Yuuri, poor Yuuri who was consumed with the thoughts of his soulmate close to death on the bed. Yuuri who had lost himself, burned with an anger that Phichit had never seen before, back in that cove. His eyes had changed into something Phichit didn’t know how to describe, tears shining, pupils dilated, emotions crushed. He’d felt the energy in the air, saw the shift in his bodyguard.

It was common knowledge that soulmates changed when one was hurt. He’d heard stories, seen it on the news. One particular woman had hunted down a politician for his part in the murder of her
soulmate. It had been a bloodbath. In the moment he saw Yuuri lose control, he worried he’d see the same thing. But he’d calmed and he’d returned to Viktor with glassy eyes – Phichit took over then, because he’d never seen Yuuri so hopeless and lost.

It crushed him. It reminded him that he had done what he’d feared – he got in the way. Had he not been there, the Italians wouldn’t have had leverage. They wouldn’t have made Yuuri choose between them, a choice Phichit had been worried for. He knew from Yuuri’s expression that it was an impossible choice, and not just because Phichit was just a client. And had Viktor not spoken up before Phichit had found his voice, he was close to telling Yuuri to pick Viktor.

The words had been on the back of his tongue. He was ready to tell Yuuri to let Viktor live, because they had more of a future together than he did. They were soulmates, and they could get over the enemy part. They were meant to be together forever, and forever wasn’t long enough. Whatever had happened between them in the time that Phichit had been hiding, it wasn’t enough. They deserved more time.

Phichit didn’t like Viktor – still didn’t really. He knew what he was. But he also saw the way he looked at Yuuri, and no one could lie like that. He saw the way Yuuri looked back, and Phichit knew his answer.

It was why he felt so relieved when Viktor woke up, and the first thing he did was look for Yuuri and smile. He was stable, and it seemed like they were going to be alright. He, like the others in the room, were drawn to the small, private moment the soulmates were feeling. For the first time in what seemed like such a long time, Yuuri was smiling back. Viktor brought that out.

Phichit might not have liked Viktor, but after all that Yuuri had been through for Phichit and for what he deserved, Phichit would keep quiet. Viktor had backed down pretty early from trying to kill Phichit, so he guessed he could forgive to some degree. They’d probably need to talk about it, but he would put that off for as long as he could.

While relief flooded him, stress was still there too. He felt the suffocating air of the room and he left, searching out the nearest bathroom. There was acid running up his throat, tears pressing at the back of his eyes.

The bathroom was just as blinding as every other part of the hospital, just as clean. He stood in front of the mirrors and stared at himself.

He could almost laugh at his reflection. It felt like every dramatic moment of a movie or tv series. Stare at yourself in the mirror in the bathroom, see how far the journey had taken you, how
different you looked from the start. It had been an awfully long way to come, and he didn’t know where it was going to end.

He did the same clichéd thing he’d seen in all of those films and scenes, and he ran the tap to rub some water onto his warm skin. Although he’d had a shower just the day before – just the day before, funny to think when the war had felt like it had raged for years now – his skin still felt gritty and covered. The blood had already been washed from his skin – it had been the first thing he did when they came to the hospital. Every time he looked down at his hands, at his changed clothes, he felt like the blood was still there.

He didn’t feel any better after he washed his face. He just felt wet and cold.

The door creaked open, and something told him immediately that it wasn’t just another hospital visitor. He’d been on the run for quite a few weeks now, and in that time, his instincts had gotten sharper. He knew those footsteps, that breathing, the careful, quiet movements.

That was why he wasn’t surprised to look up and see Yakov Feltsman.

“Just for once,” Phichit began, feeling the anger of everything suddenly bubbling up, “leave me alone. After everything.” Phichit paused to calm himself, knowing he was close to shouting. “After everything, don’t do anymore.”

Yakov didn’t say anything. He stood beside the door. Phichit thought he might have followed him in purposely, but even the Russian looked surprised to see Phichit there. It was about the most expression he had seen on Yakov’s face that wasn’t rage. But it just made Phichit angrier. As he thought of how he was uprooted from his life, the life he had loved so, so much, scared half to death, spending each day wondering when it was he was going to die and what were the last words he spoke to the people he loved, he hated Yakov more and more.

He turned to stare at the man. Viktor would take years and years to forgive, and the only reason Phichit would was for Yuuri. But Yakov was never going to be forgiven. He could have backed off whenever he wanted, given back a life he had ruined. He could have done so many things differently, all because Phichit had been misunderstood and walked in on something he shouldn’t have.

“Viktor almost died – he’s not even out of the danger yet. He could still die. Doesn’t that mean anything to you?” Phichit knew it did. He saw Yakov’s face every time he glanced at Viktor, the way he had stood stock still in the waiting room. He saw his nervous tick twitching his eye, looking at Yuri and Mila as if he thought they were going to be the ones to die next. “That
wouldn’t have happened if you just left me alone.”

Low blow. Phichit didn’t want to say it, but it was what Yakov needed to hear. Phichit cared for how Yuuri felt, how it had almost ruined him, but he didn’t care for Yakov. He’d throw pain and threats all he could at Yakov if it would mean the man would just listen.

But he still didn’t say anything.

Phichit shouted before he could stop it, feeling the words push at his lips until he couldn’t contain them anymore. “Say something!” Keep calm, he thought. Don’t do anything you’ll regret. But in the chaos, no one had seen him take the gun Michele had dropped. He took it out from where it was stuffed behind his belt, taken when he thought that the Italian’s would try and make use of Viktor’s being unconscious and Yuuri’s distraction. He needed to protect them, but he hadn’t had pressure to use it.

He wanted Yakov to gasp and back off, see for once the proud man be scared of Phichit. The most he did was a quick widening of his eyes, but it relaxed back into his stony face. He stared back, just as calm as he had been before.

“Haven’t you already done enough?” Phichit pressed, hands shaking as he held the gun. He didn’t really know if there were bullets in there, but his finger was so close to pressing the trigger. He had been put through so much, he knew what he wanted to do. He’d been an innocent victim. Even if it had been fate, this was stupid. He wanted to shoot Yakov so badly, and it was almost so easy to convince himself to do it.

“It doesn’t matter anymore,” Yakov finally said, voice lower than Phichit had anticipated. It echoed off the tiles, sending shivers down Phichit’s spine. “I’m not going to do it anymore. I’ve already told Yuuri. You’re a free man.”

A free man. It had been so long Phichit had wanted to hear those words. He’d wanted to hear them from Yuuri, but hearing them from Yakov’s broken voice was also enough. Though it still didn’t satisfy him. “A f-fat load of good that’s done for me now,” Phichit quivered. Tears were almost pushing at his eyes. He never was such a cry baby before, but all of the stress from what had happened made him want to cry every day. “So I’m allowed to go back home?”

Yakov nodded. “I won’t bother you anymore.”
“Good! And then what do I tell the world?”

Yakov faltered, opening his mouth, but closing it again.

Phichit took a step forwards, feeling one lone tear stream down his cheek. His breathing hitched before he continued to pummel Yakov with questions. “What the hell do I tell everyone? What story do I make? I’ve been missing for ages now. A figure skater, gone, disappeared out of the blue. What do I tell my coach? What do I tell my family? My friends? That the stress got to me? That I needed some time to travel? Or that the wonderful Russian sponsors were actually mafia and they chased me out? Did I go through amnesia?” Every word was growing in volume, making his hands shake more and more.

Yakov stared back, at a loss for words.

“What the fuck do I tell them? This is a busy hospital. I’ve seen people looking at us. Not Viktor. Us. I keep thinking it’s just my paranoia, but what if someone had recognised us? Me, a figure skater, missing for months, here in hospital with my sponsors, one of which was shot. What pretty picture does that paint, huh? What the fuck do I tell them?” He paused, trying to calm the shaking of his body. Yakov was just making him angrier, and he could hear a voice in his head telling him to press the trigger. “I’ve been so convinced since the day you found me that I’d never have to think up a story. I was going to die. Or I was going to have to spend the rest of my life hiding. I was never going to see anyone I ever loved again. So what was the point in thinking up a story or how to phrase it when I would never need it? You say I’m a free man now. Then what do I say?”

Yakov was reluctant to answer, but he did. He asked, “Why not the truth? Wouldn’t that be more of a revenge to me after what I’ve done to you?”

“It would,” Phichit agreed. “But that means it hurts Viktor too.”

“And you don’t want to hurt him?”

“I do!” Phichit shouted back. “I want to hurt both of you. I was innocent! Just a skater, whose biggest stress was dancing on the ice and getting enough points. You might not understand this, but Yuuri is everything to me. He saved me, he was there for me, he believed in things I lost faith in. He promised me he’d get me home. Every step of the way, when I was losing hope, he helped me through it. Yuuri is a good guy, and hurting Viktor would hurt him too. That’s the last thing I ever want to do.” Phichit sneered, taking another step forwards. “But you wouldn’t understand that. Viktor is important to you. But you hurt him. It came to this because you wouldn’t let go of your stupid pride and stop hurting me and Yuuri. Did you even stop to think about that? How you were
turning Viktor away from you? If you killed me or Yuuri, did you think Viktor would forgive you?”

“Soulmates aren’t everything,” Yakov replied. It might once have been a powerful statement, but Yakov’s voice was failing.

“But they still mean a damn lot!” There was a second in which he wanted to shoot. He could feel the nerves on the end of his finger, ready to press. He was so close. But he stopped. He took his finger from the trigger and he dropped his arm. “After everything you’ve done, I really want to shoot you.”

“So why don’t you?”

“Don’t tempt me.” He paused, glancing down at the gun still in his hands. “And I won’t, because I’m still innocent. I’ve seen things. I’ve done things. I almost killed someone. I’ve had blood on my hands. I doubt I’ll ever trust anyone as easily as I used to before. The world isn’t the same to me anymore. Killing you, it would get rid of everything I’ve wanted so badly to get back – everything Yuuri’s fought so hard to get back for me. I want to go home. I want to return to figure skating. I want to face the world as Phichit Chulanont again. And if I kill you, I can’t. It would hurt Viktor too, and in hurting Viktor, I hurt Yuuri. Those are the only reasons. Not for you. For Yuuri and for me.”

“I can respect you for that.”

Phichit flinched. Yakov seemed to say it reluctantly, as if he was pushed to say it. Phichit turned a glare on him. “I don’t want your respect. Just because I won’t kill you doesn’t make me a good person. Don’t get me wrong, I hope you die soon. It just won’t be by my hands.”

There was a moment of silence, and Phichit watched as Yakov’s face morphed into something more. He couldn’t explain it, but there was some hesitation there, and he glanced at Phichit as if he was seeing someone else. Phichit knew he was probably seeing the new him, the one that had come out of the journey. The one Yakov had made, to an extent. Phichit already felt different, and he wondered how that was going to translate once he got back. Would Celestino notice the difference? Would his friends notice? His family? Would the media be too blinded with his return, or would they notice in interviews how different he was? Maybe his skating would change too. His themes. His dance.

He supposed he’d never know until he was back, of course. He wouldn’t notice until he was on that ice, before the crowds, spending months training his body back into the shape it had been
before. He knew he’d be different, but he didn’t know how yet. He didn’t know if that was scary or exciting yet.

“Make your own story up,” Yakov said, a sigh on his lips. “I don’t care. Say the truth, lie, whatever you want.”

“You’re not going to help?” Not that Phichit wanted it anyway, but it had been Yakov that started all of this. At least Viktor showed a little remorse, though it was reserved for Yuuri.

“No. Do whatever you want.”

“Fine. I will.” Freedom to hurt Yakov, to ruin everything, or to get through it with a lie. It would be something he’d need to talk to Yuuri about and see his input. He placed the gun back beside his belt, eyes glancing down at the bulk underneath Yakov’s shirt. It was then he noticed Yakov had his own gun, neatly hidden away where Yakov always kept it. “I think you can understand me when I say our sponsorship agreement is done.”

“Of course.”

“Don’t come anywhere near me again. Or Yuuri, if you can help it,” Phichit said, feeling some pride in himself for finally being the one that could do negotiations. There was some power in it, an addiction. Finally, after so long of being the one to be threatened and the one hiding, he had the higher ground.

Yakov nodded. He might have been about to say something else, if his open mouth meant anything, but Phichit pushed passed him. He made sure to elbow the man, feeling like one last act of rebellion and power, before he left the bathroom. He couldn’t contain a small smile as he walked down the hallway, back towards Viktor’s hospital room.

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After Viktor had woken up, the Russians had quickly given their words, praising Viktor and hoping for a swift recovery. Yuri tried to remain calm, but gave Viktor a small, quick hug before he rushed off and out of the room, heading towards the cafeteria. Otabek gave Viktor a quick bow before he followed. And one by one, the others left too. Yuuri’s family told him they’d be outside, calling the safe house and getting ready to organise a relocation.
Soon enough, it was just Yuuri and Viktor in the room. Without the others, it seemed like such a large room, the noises of the machines beeping too loudly. Yuuri hadn’t noticed before, but now it was obvious.

They hadn’t let go of their hands, not even as Viktor was inundated with well-wishes. Every time it seemed like Yuuri was going to pull away, he squeezed it tighter.

He turned a smile onto Yuuri once they were finally alone. It was more blinding than the hospital colours, brighter than any star Yuuri had ever seen.

“You’re an idiot,” Yuuri repeated. He meant it with a tease, but he still felt the anger inside of him – lighter than it had been before, but part of it was still his own guilt. “You really should have asked for help.”

“I didn’t know it was that bad until it happened. I thought I had it under control,” Viktor replied. “It wasn’t until she punched my side and I had to stop that I realised I was in over my head. And then she shot me.”

“You overestimated yourself. You looked bad already. I should have helped.”

Viktor leaned as far forwards as he could, cupping Yuuri’s face with his free hand. “You were already against Michele. You were protecting Phichit. He needed your help more than I did.” Viktor brushed his thumb against Yuuri’s soft cheek, so caring. “Plus, I was raised by Yakov. I’ve grown up with a stubborn father, of course I’m going to be stubborn too. You think a bullet is going to kill me, when I have you to live for?”

Yuuri’s heart clenched at such sweet words. Weeks ago, he never thought he’d hear anything like them, not even from Viktor after he knew what he was. The enemy side was always going to get in the way, destroying any peace or sweetness they could get. Strange that it took Viktor being shot for him to not care as much anymore.

“Speaking of the stubborn bastard,” Viktor said, tone suddenly serious, “Is it really alright for him to be here? And Phichit in the same room? Should we call one of them back?”

“It’s fine,” Yuuri rushed to assure, seeing the spark of worry in Viktor’s eyes. The man was about to raise himself, but Yuuri pushed him back down. “My family are still looking out for Phichit. And besides, Yakov said he’s going to stop.”
Viktor paused. “He’s going to stop?”

“Well, he said it didn’t matter anymore.”

“Didn’t matter anymore? What?”

“Viktor, you were shot. He thought you were going to die. He did all of this for you, right?” Viktor reluctantly nodded, and Yuuri knew there was more to it. But the basis of it was simple, so he didn’t say any more about the reasons. “So what he was fighting for lay there dying? It didn’t matter anymore to him.”

Viktor blinked his confusion, glancing down as well as he could at the bandages around his chest. Only some of it was peeking over the gown he wore, clean and crisp and only alluding to the size of the injury by the amount of bandages. He looked so different now than he had before – clean where all of the blood had once been. He’d been washed, made to look as good as he could, all things considered.

“Yakov’s attention has shifted to you now, anyway,” Yuuri continued. “I don’t think we need to worry about it anymore.”

Viktor nodded. “Well, I promised I’d fix it somehow. Granted, this wasn’t how I was thinking, but it’s done.”

“If getting shot is your idea of ‘fixing things’, I think you need to rethink things.”

“You should see me doing DIY.”

Yuuri couldn’t contain the chuckle that rose from his chest. He leaned closer to the bed, squeezing their hands together more, and he rested his head on Viktor’s good hip. He wanted nothing more than to curl beside the man, get into bed with him. And he would, but when Viktor was better. He couldn’t move by himself right now, and Yuuri couldn’t make the man shift to the side to make enough room. “You should have seen my idea of fixing it.”

“What did you do?”
"I threw Yakov against a wall and screamed threats in his face."

One thing Yuuri loved about Viktor was the expressions he often let slip on his face. When they had first met, Viktor’s face was often impassable, a stone cold, practiced shield. But the more he got to know Viktor, the easier his expressions came.

This one was the best yet. His mouth dropped open, eyes widened, and there was a mix of disbelief and awe in his face. He glanced over Yuuri as if seeing him for the very first time.

"You what?" he asked, voice like a whisper.

"Yep. It was after you were shot. I… lost control a little."

"Like… that thing people say soulmates do?"

"Yeah. At least, I think it was. I was devoured by… I don’t know how to describe it. Like there was something eating me, a void from the inside. I lost control, and all I could feel was rage and desperation. I was close to killing the Crispinos but they ran off, and I wanted to be close to you. So when Yakov showed up, all of my rage was thrown at him.” Yuuri, looking back, saw it as a blurry memory. It was strange. He had been both in control and out of control of his actions, aware what was going on, but the thoughts hadn’t been his own. Or, they had, but magnified. Exploded until it was all he could think about, thinking of the simplest solutions. “I told him it was all his fault. Said you were dying because he was a stubborn bastard.”

"Oh my god, did you actually say that?"

"I don’t remember the words exactly, but it was definitely what I was thinking. That’s when he told me it didn’t matter anymore.”

Viktor huffed a laugh, shaking his head. “Wow, Yuuri. Every single day, with every word, and everything you do, you remind me of how you’re so perfect for me.”

Yuuri felt a blush light up his face, reaching all the way down his throat. Viktor was so easy with his words, giving out affection like it was the most simple thing to do – and yet, Yuuri felt the
weight and truth of each word. He knew he’d need to get used to it. He’d already promised himself he’d spend forever with Viktor, no matter what came. Enemy or Soulmate, whether they’d be lost in bliss one day and then screaming at one another on another day, he didn’t care.

“You’re perfect for me too,” he whispered, trying to contain his need to curl in on himself out of embarrassment. He knew that because of what fate had given them, the cruel double-edged sword, he needed to be as honest as Viktor. They’d never reach a conclusion without it.

Viktor gasped, eyes finding Yuuri’s gaze. Yuuri would always be blinded with Viktor’s beauty and how Viktor seemed to hold the universe in his eyes. Each wet sparkle was a star, each twirl in his irises a galaxy, the pupils a world that Yuuri wanted to get lost in. He could watch the universe in Viktor’s gaze forever, as it was born again and again.

“Come up here,” Viktor requested.

Thinking that there was something wrong, Yuuri moved up, glancing around to see if Viktor was in pain. But Viktor leaned forwards and pressed a kiss to his lips, soft and sweet, emotions piled into the touch. Yuuri smiled against his lips and pressed one back.

As Yuuri pulled back, Viktor frowned at him. “Sorry, but you’re still recovering. Just a few kisses here and there are enough for now.”

“But they heal me.”

Yuuri felt his cheeks blush again. “Nice try. But I can’t spoil you too much.”

“But I almost died.”

“Then recover,” Yuuri smiled. He mimicked Viktor’s action and stroked his thumb along the skin of Viktor’s hand, finding it soothing. “Recover quickly. And we need to talk about things.”

Viktor groaned, dramatically placing a hand over his face. “There’s always something to talk about.”
“I need to speak to Phichit and see what he wants to do now that he’s no longer on the run,” Yuuri said, holding up his hand to count the subjects with his fingers. “We need to talk about what we’re going to do about the Crispinos, you need to talk to Yakov, I need to talk to my parents about the safe house, and we need to talk about our future.”

Viktor peeked out from under his hand. “Our future?”

“Yes. Viktor, we’re still Enemy and Soulmate. I don’t care as much as I did about that anymore, but it’s still a factor.”

“You’re not… you’re not thinking about ending it, are you?”

Yuuri blinked, the words clicking. “No! No, I’m just saying that it probably won’t be all bliss. We’re going to argue and all. And I’m still a bodyguard, Viktor. You’re still mafia. We need to talk about where we stand, how we’re going to make this work.”

“Oh. Yeah, okay, I get it.” Viktor paused, eyes flicking over the blanket on the bed as he thought about something. Yuuri felt a twinge in his chest, but before he could ask about it, Viktor glanced back up at him. “So does this mean that your contract with Phichit is done now?”

“Like I said, I need to speak to Phichit about it. Why?”

“I was wondering if you were going to take another client then after him.” Viktor gave him a cheeky grin. “To be fair, anything after this is going to be a piece of cake, huh?”

“Anything after you is going to be a piece of cake, you mean,” Yuuri replied.

Viktor made to argue, but stopped as he thought about it. “Yeah, okay, fair enough. You won’t be taking on any other really dangerous contracts though, will you?”

He made it out like it was a tease, but Yuuri felt the underlying twinge of worry. “I’ll probably stick to guarding teenage idols for a while. I’m good at those. Or maybe models on runways.”

“Models?”
“Oh, don’t worry, I’m sure none compare to you.” Yuuri felt a shot of triumph run through his body when Viktor’s cheeks – his pale, washed out cheeks – bloomed a blush brighter than Yuuri had seen.

Viktor waved the comment away, a small grin on his lips. “Oh, they won’t. In another life, I might have been able to be a model myself. And you could have been my bodyguard. Save me from all of those fashion hunters.”

Yuuri rolled his eyes, making sure for Viktor to see. “How modest you are.”

“Either way, whatever client you have next, you need to be careful.”

Yuuri lost his smile, leaning in, feeling the seriousness in which settled in Viktor’s tone. He readied for Viktor to tell him of all the dangers, the enemies he had that would soon target Yuuri too. Would one pretend to be a client to get to him? Or the Crispinos would come back, armed. A bodyguard was good at observation, but there were some things that were so easily overlooked.

“You’re so irresistible, one is definitely going to fall for you. But you’re mine now and I’m yours, so I don’t mind making sure they know it.”

Yuuri blinked, taking the words in. He felt caught between sighing, lightly punching Viktor, and laughing. Viktor’s expression was serious, which just made it funnier to Yuuri.

“I don’t even know how you’ve managed to be single until you met me. Honestly, even if you weren’t my soulmate, I’d snap you right up.”

Yuuri decided to instead be flattered by it. He grinned down at the man, finding it a little funny but mostly outrageous. Viktor might think him beautiful and irresistible, but that was Viktor. Yuuri had come through this far in life without being drooled all over by someone, much less a client. It was more of a surprise that Viktor hadn’t been snapped up by someone.

He pressed his finger to Viktor’s lips and said, “Well, I’m yours now. I know you have nothing to worry about.”
The stress must have been too much for Yuuri, Viktor thought. He hadn’t slept properly for weeks, most likely. Into their conversations, Yuuri’s eyes had started to droop, words coming less, soon devolving into more grunts than intelligible words. He rested his head on the bed, lulled to sleep as Viktor’s hand stroked through his hair. Soon enough, he was lightly snoring, cheek pressed, glasses askew.

Viktor didn’t think he’d seen anything so beautiful. Every time Yuuri breathed, it brought more poetry to his soul, more songs to his ears, more light to a darkness he never knew he lived in. More so now that he knew how close to death he had come.

It reminded him every time he breathed, his chest aching, his side splitting. He hadn’t told Yuuri, but every movement he made brought on pain. He’d tried to keep it from his expression too. He knew it would take time to heal, but he hadn’t been lying before – his chest felt lighter now that Yuuri was next to him. Yuuri, his soulmate, his love, his everything, settled next to him and breathing with him. He used to think the most someone could do to show how much they loved someone was to sacrifice something for them – whatever that was, it could be time, energy, money, or even their life. Now he didn’t think that. He almost sacrificed his life for Yuuri, and he’d seen how much that helped – he didn’t want to leave Yuuri alone.

The best way someone could show their loved one their feelings was to live with them, walk with them, give them everything and worship them. So that would be what Viktor would do.

He wasn’t sure how long it was, but soon enough, Yakov was peeping around the threshold of the door. His gaze flickered to where Yuuri slept before he looked back at Viktor. Viktor nodded him in, and Yakov clicked the door shut.

Yakov didn’t wait long before he spoke, “It’s good to see you awake, Vitya.”

“It’s good to be awake,” Viktor replied. There was some tension between them, and Viktor knew why that was. He didn’t waste time either in apologising. “I’m sorry, Yakov. I shouldn’t have said the things I did. I didn’t mean them-”

“You were always a compulsive, emotional child,” Yakov said. Viktor was ready to rebuke, but as he glanced up from Yuuri’s sleeping face, he saw a rare smile on Yakov’s lips. “You do not need to apologise, I needed to be told. Even if they were lies.”
“I just didn’t know what else to do. You weren’t listening.”

“I know. Both as stubborn as one another, aren’t we?”

Viktor mirrored the small smile. “Well, I was raised by you.”

Yakov nodded. “I never did think I made a good father.”

Viktor rolled his eyes, knowing he’d already argued against that for years, every time Yakov’s fears rose. “Yuuri told me about what he did to you.” At Yakov’s confusion, Viktor grinned and said, “About throwing you against the wall and screaming threats in your face? His words, not mine.”

A strange look came over Yakov’s face then, one Viktor had rarely seen. Slight fear? Had he been scared?

“Yes,” Yakov said slowly. “I’ve never faced a soulmate like that before. It was… an experience.”

“Were you scared, Yakov? You? Avenging angel, head of the most ruthless Russian mafia? Scared?”

“He surprised me.”

Viktor laughed, low and quiet as to not wake up Yuuri. “He’s very good at surprising people.”

“It gave me the answer I wanted.” He paused, waiting for Viktor to look back at him. “I don’t doubt his loyalty to you anymore.”

“That was what I was trying to tell you.” He ran his hand down until his palm could cup Yuuri’s cheek. His happiness faded quickly. “Michele and Sara made him choose. Me or Phichit. Which one got to live.”

Yakov gasped, a very small thing, whispered. And even at this distance, had Viktor not been
listening, he could have easily missed it.

He continued. “He even knew that they’d kill me anyway. He asked them that. But he still hesitated. He didn’t know what to do, and he looked so lost. If you’d have seen him then, Yakov, your worries would have been destroyed. The thought of using me has never crossed his mind.”

“And then when he thought you were dead, he descended into that panic.”

“Exactly.” He stopped his stroking for a while, looking at Yuuri’s soft expression, the way his slow breathing left his open lips. “I want them dead, Yakov. Not because of what they did to me, but because of what they did to him.”

“I’ve already been making plans.”

Viktor’s eyes snapped to Viktor. “You have?”

“I thought about killing them a thousand times when I saw what they had done to you, a thousand times more when Yuuri threatened me, and a thousand times more when we waited for you to come out of the operating room. I’ve been speaking to Mila about it.”

“I better be in those plans,” Viktor whispered, barely able to contain the rising anger in his voice. “It’s my revenge too.”

“You’re injured, Viktor.”

“Then we wait until I’m not. It’s to our advantage anyway. They won’t try anything, even while I’m injured. I’m guessing you have this hospital guarded?” At Yakov’s nod, Viktor continued. “Then they won’t try anything. Give them a few weeks where they think we’re not going to do anything. Wait until their guard is down. Then, when I’m better, we go for a hunt.”

Yakov paused, wanting to argue. His gaze flickered to Viktor’s injury, to where the bandage peeked from the gown. “Fine,” he gave in after agonising minutes of waiting, knowing he wouldn’t win. “But we wait until I say you’re ready. Not before.”
“Deal.”

***

It was a week before the hospital discharged Viktor – a long, gruelling week in which the tension never really dissipated. Viktor and Yuuri tried their best to ease it, but when it soon became clear that Viktor was going to be alright, it was rare that the Russians and the Japanese were in the same room together.

It was more on the choice of Yuuri’s family, understandably. They had done nothing wrong – only protected Phichit when he needed protecting, and then their home was taken out from under them. Viktor had pushed Yakov to apologise, but the stubborn fool would never let the words slip from his lips. Locked away. Yuuri doubted his family would accept them anyway, not with the amount of friends that they had lost.

Yurio – lovingly nicknamed by Mari which had somehow stuck – didn’t seem to mind. He was about the only Russian that Yuuri’s family didn’t hate the sight of, barring Viktor. Visiting hours were divided. It helped to clear the air some though, and it had stopped any other small-scale war from raging in the week Viktor stayed in hospital.

Viktor grew healthier every day. Each day it became easier to move and breathe. He pushed himself to be healed faster, however.

“I hate having to be bathed,” Viktor admitted to Yuuri once, in the darkness of the early morning, when sleep was escaping them once again. “I hate not being able to feed myself, or move myself, or do anything without help. It’s humiliating.”

Yuuri tried to help with that as much as he could, requesting that he be the one to do the jobs. At least then he felt like he was caring for Viktor, chasing away the small guilt that lingered, and Viktor didn’t have to be fed and bathed by a stranger. One of the nurses had taught him how to change the bandages as well, and so Yuuri took that job too.

By the fifth day, Viktor could move slowly by himself, take himself from the bed and lower into a wheelchair. Yuuri couldn’t contain the way he smiled when he saw what the freedom did for the man. They didn’t spend nearly as much time in the room anymore. Viktor demanded they go to the waiting rooms, or the cafeterias, and often he demanded that Yuuri sit in his lap to make the journey. At first, Yuuri refused, but there wasn’t much he could deny Viktor when he gazed up at him with wide, sparkling eyes.
As the pain left, even Yuuri felt like he could breathe comfortably again. He slept in the bed with Viktor, no longer worried it would hurt him. He spent each night cuddled next to Viktor, thankful for each breath he drew, even if he hugged too tightly and stole the covers sometimes.

On the day of discharge, it finally felt like they had overcome their troubles. Viktor was back into his own clothes – a simple t-shirt and some leisure trousers, with new trainers bought by Yakov. The Russians had come to see him discharged.

Yuuri’s parents had said their words to Viktor the day before, wishing him a good time. Yuuri suspected they had said something to Viktor when he’d excused himself to the toilet, because there had been an odd air and Viktor seemed hesitant, but when asked, Viktor replied, “Just typical things a family says to a potential partner… it was just scarier because I know what your family is capable of. Your sister mentioned how good she was at disembowelling and cutting off balls.”

But they had to spend this day searching for a new safe house, chasing contacts, helping the safe house occupants that had been caught up in the war. And they had a few funerals to arrange and families to contact about it. There was a lot for them to do, though they’d apologised to Viktor for not being able to make it. Phichit had decided to stay with the Katsukis to help – understandably, he still found it awkward to be in Viktor’s presence. It would take some time – a lot of time – but right now wasn’t a time to force it.

Mila hadn’t eased, even as Viktor healed. As Viktor stood beside the bed, ready to leave, she urged him into the wheelchair. “It’s only been a week, Viktor. You’re still hurt. Don’t strain yourself, or you’re going to open the wounds again.”

“Well, Mila,” Viktor replied, curling an arm around Yuuri’s waist. Yuuri ignored how it was tighter than usual, using Yuuri as balance. “They said I needed to start walking again. Just sitting and lying down isn’t good for blood circulation. Besides, if you can walk with a bullet wound to the leg, I can walk with no injury to mine.”

Mila crossed her arms, and attempted to say something but couldn’t fight it. They’d had the same argument many times over, but it never came to anything.

“Can we just leave?” Yurio sighed, pulling up his hood a little more. “I’m really getting sick of seeing this hospital day in and day out.”

Yuuri was thankful to leave the hospital too. It was a good sign, a sign to tell him that Viktor was
over the worst of it, that he wasn’t dying, that Yuuri didn’t have to be alone. He hoped they never needed to walk through the doors ever again – or any hospital. He knew Viktor felt the same. As he walked slowly, carefully, out of the hospital, he felt Viktor’s elation, his squeeze of his hand on Yuuri’s hip. Yuuri smiled up at him to reassure him, and he received one back.

They were going to stay in a hotel for as long as they needed to. Yakov had arranged it, so they were all on one floor, security high. Yuuri’s family could visit, of course, but the underlying idea was that it wouldn’t be when the Russians were about.

Yuuri hadn’t really spoken to Yakov since. He didn’t know what he’d say. Sorry for threatening you? No, because he wasn’t sorry. Glad that Viktor was alright? That was obvious. He didn’t make the attempt to speak to him, so he’d not speak to Yakov. There was still too much anger on his side, a reminder of what had happened to his home because of how stubborn the old man was.

He helped Viktor to sit down once they arrived in their hotel room. Viktor told him he didn’t need the help, but Yuuri still did it – the last thing he wanted was for Viktor’s wounds to open and they had to go back to the hospital.

“How do you feel?” Yuuri asked.

Viktor took a hold of his hand and pulled him down to sit next to him. He wove a hand around Yuuri’s shoulder and drew him in to press a kiss to Yuuri’s lips. “I’m feeling so good. I’m so happy to be out of there and here with you.”

Yuuri smiled. “I’m glad, but I was asking about the pain. Do you need any of the painkillers?” The doctors had sent them off with painkillers and bandages to use, with a few instructions on what to do to help speed up recovery.

Viktor paused for a moment, and then he pressed a hand to Yuuri’s shoulder, pushing him down. Before Yuuri could do anything, Viktor rolled on top of him, until everything in Yuuri’s vision was taken over by the Russian. His fringe dropped down to tickle Yuuri’s forehead, breath ghosting against Yuuri’s skin. “I’m fine, Yuuri. Really. You should know that. You’d feel the pain if I had any.”

It was true. Yuuri could only feel a dull ache, the kind that only sparked if he moved too quickly. It didn’t throb too much anymore, or hinder his movements. Viktor was better than he had been all week, but Yuuri was still concerned. He’d been shot twice, one grazing while the other had pierced his chest. It would take a long time to heal. “But-”
“But you worry, I know,” Viktor whispered, stroking the side of Yuuri’s face. “And I hate myself for being the one to make you worry.”

“You couldn’t help it.” Yuuri bit his lip, glancing away. “You’re the one that got us out of it anyway. I… I was useless. If you hadn’t said anything, Sara and Michele probably would have gotten impatient. You’d be worse off. Probably… probably dead. And Phichit… Phichit might be dead too. And I’d have lost so much.”

Viktor pressed a kiss to the side of his neck, feeling the rapid pulse underneath the skin. “But that didn’t happen.”

“I think I’m losing it,” Yuuri admitted. He didn’t want to say it, but all of a sudden his words were spilling from his chest, all the worries that had been accumulating over the week – no, longer, beyond that, right to the moment he had first ever met Viktor, back when he felt like there was something more to this than a client. “I used to be so good at what I do. I think I’m losing my touch.”

“Why do you think that?”

“Phichit’s my client. I should be protecting him. But all I could think about was you.”

“Has Phichit said anything about it?”

Yuuri narrowed his eyes in confusion. “What? No. We’ve not had a proper talk, really.”

“I’m sure he understands – I’m your soulmate. Of course you were going to think of me when I was hurt-”

“I don’t mean when you were hurt. Since I met you, it’s been since then. There’s so many things I should have done differently with him, things I could have done had I not been so distracted. I did so many things wrong.”

“Like?”
“Shooting Yakov for one.”

“Ah. True. But you think you’re losing your touch because of it?”

“Well,” Yuuri sighed, turning his face to look away once more. He couldn’t really make sense of all the emotions inside of him. There had been so many emotions in a short time, such a drastic change in his life since meeting Viktor, that it all seemed so mixed up. “I don’t know.”

“Yuuri, you’re amazing at what you do,” Viktor assured. “Need I remind you how long it took to find Phichit?”

Yuuri couldn’t contain a smile at that. It had taken them a while, hadn’t it? He’d hoped it would take longer, but in the end, he was able to protect him too. Even if Phichit had been an idiot and rushed out. “Played you like a fiddle,” Yuuri chuckled. “I loved making you run around after nothing.”

Viktor mockingly glared down at him. “I knew you were taking some sort of pleasure out of it.”

“Of course I was. I needed to get some fun out of it.”

Viktor’s hand began to ease up Yuuri’s top, touch hot against his skin. “The chase may be over, but we can always find some other sort of fun to do.”

Yuuri wanted to. He really, really did. The closer he was to Viktor, the more he wanted him, any way possible – including physically. Having the fear that Viktor would die had only helped to enhance that. He supposed it was something to do with them being soulmates, and wanting to connect on a deeper level. The last time they had had sex, Yuuri had felt something bigger than himself, felt better than he had ever before. So of course he wanted to, because it was Viktor.

But he stopped Viktor’s hand, shaking his head. “Viktor, you’re still injured. You might just be able to walk, but I highly doubt that you’ll be able to do anything more.”

Viktor huffed, making his fringe flutter. “That sounds like a challenge.”
“No, it’s not. When you’re better, I promise. But not right now.”

Viktor seemed to want to argue, but he rolled his eyes and sighed, curling in on Yuuri instead. He placed his head underneath Yuuri’s chin, fitting perfectly against his chest. “Fine. But only because I’m tired.”

Yuuri had noticed that too. Because of the painkillers, Viktor had been drowsy more often. His eyes fluttered, tickling Yuuri’s collarbone, and soon enough, he fell asleep. Yuuri didn’t have the heart to push him off, even if he was getting a little heavy.

Yuuri hugged Viktor close and reminded himself he’d need to speak to Phichit soon. They needed to know what they were going to do next.

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It took far too long to heal, Viktor thought. He counted every day, counted the passing seconds, and tested his health every moment he had alone.

When Yuuri was meeting his parents, Viktor would be using apparatus in their hotel room to train. It began small, just walking around while he could, rebuilding his stamina, but as the days passed and his body hungered for more gruelling training, he moved onto squats, push-ups and more. He ached to be back to his peak health. He wanted to have his muscle back, his accuracy, the security that he could look after Yuuri.

And with that came the need to destroy the Crispinos. They hadn’t raised their heads again for quite a few weeks, not since Viktor had been shot. Yakov had been hunting, however, and he was close to finding them.

With each passing day, Viktor felt more and more drawn to hunting them down. Yuuri smiled more often now, appeared happier whenever they sat in the room and watched a film. These few weeks he had spent in the hotel room and sometimes venturing out into the closest town were some of the best moments Viktor had lived. He got to know more about Yuuri, the littlest details – like how much he loved food, how he was a late sleeper and early riser, how the glasses really weren’t for show, how he slept, what things made him blush, how he could be shy. And every little thing he learned about Yuuri, the more Viktor fell in love.
The more he wanted to protect that love.

He knew he was ready. The wound on his side had completely healed, only leaving an ugly scar that would fade over time. The one in his chest no longer ached, but it still pulled skin if he moved too much. Not painfully so, just notable. He knew he was ready, but he had promised not to make a move until Yakov said he was ready. They hadn’t spoken about it again, but Yakov was a man of his word.

Yuuri seemed content with his healing too. He’d arranged to go and meet Phichit to talk about what was going to come next, happy to leave Viktor for a little while now that he could care for himself. His parents had already found a new safe house, moved their occupants in – Yuuri hadn’t told Viktor. Viktor understood. Yuuri was still a little hesitant about leaving him, but Viktor assured him he’d be fine. He could bathe himself now, he could feed himself, he hadn’t needed the wheelchair for quite some time now. Not that he had been particularly opposing to Yuuri’s attentions.

Yuuri hesitated in the doorway, pausing to say goodbye and that he’d be back in a few hours. Viktor kissed him goodbye and waited ten minutes, to make sure Yuuri was gone.

He stood in the middle of the hotel room, glancing around at the signs that he and Yuuri had lived here for quite some time. The bed was still a mess of tangled sheets, left only from sleep – something Viktor was a little put out by. He’d assured Yuuri that he was fine now, that if they wanted to have some more… strenuous activities, then he could handle it. He almost wanted to prove it, but Yuuri was hesitant. Viktor understood why. He wanted to make sure completely – he never wanted to see Viktor hurt again, lying with blood clinging to his skin. Yuuri had seen how well the wound was healing, but that fear was still inside him, and Viktor wasn’t going to push. They had forever together, there would be plenty of time for that. And any moment he got to spend with Yuuri, doing anything, was a blessing to him.

Someone like him, after all he’d done, didn’t deserve someone as wonderful as Yuuri. He thanked every breath he and Yuuri shared that they had met.

He changed into his suit, feeling the soft Italian fabric against his skin once more. Ironic, he thought, that it should be Italian. The sound of the shifting material as he buttoned it up, secured the cufflinks, all brought back warm memories. His suits had always been a love of his. He planned to meet with Yakov and speak about the Italians, to see how far they had come in finding them.

But it seemed Yakov had beaten him to it.
There was a knock on the door, and Viktor knew who it was immediately. Yakov always had the same gruff, heavy knock, in the same pattern. One, two, pause, three. The pause was always the same length.

He opened it, smiling ready for Yakov on the other side. “Good morning, Yakov,” he greeted.

Yakov grunted in reply, stepping inside the room. Since knowing Viktor would make it and was healing, he hesitated less. He also took more time to listen to Viktor, which Viktor was delighted in taking advantage of. Yakov had been victim to many instances where Viktor had told him in detail how he felt for Yuuri.

Mila was behind, slipping in, face a complex mix of hesitant and defiant. Viktor didn’t ask why, but he kept it in his mind to remember.

Yakov gave him one more glance over, his gaze lingering on the part of his suit that covered the gunshot wound. “Do you often sit in here in your suits?”

“Only on special days,” Viktor replied. “I was just about to come and see you. What do you need?”

Yakov glanced quickly at Mila, who was gazed out of the wide window on the far side of the room that overlooked the Japanese town. He glanced back to Viktor. “We’ve found Sara and Michele.”

Viktor tried not to let the excitement show on his face, but it was difficult to hide it in front of the man that had raised him. “And?”

“Their defences are weak. I don’t think they managed to cluster enough security, even in the weeks of your recovery. We locked down the airports and ports.”

There was an unfinished sentence lingering though, and Viktor finished it for him, “But you think that could also be a trap.”

“Yes. I couldn’t find them for weeks. Then yesterday, it was too easy. They might be trying to lure you in while you’re still weak.”
Viktor gritted his teeth together. He wasn’t weak anymore. He’d trained. The muscle was coming back. Yuuri had even noticed, to which Viktor often enjoyed. But there wasn’t much he could say to argue against it.

However, once again, Yakov beat him to it. A proud grin began to slowly grow on his lips. “But they don’t know you – at least, not as well as they think they do. You’ve recovered well. They should have taken the advantage long before now.”

Viktor drowned in the words, understanding their underlying meaning. A grin began to grow on his own lips, mirroring the man before him. “So, we hunt?”

“We hunt.”

It was the permission Viktor had been seeking for weeks. His eyes lit up, the smile hard to contain. His hand itched for the hold of a gun. The need of a soulmate began to rise within him, seeking revenge for what their enemies had done to Yuuri.

Sara and Michele wouldn’t know what was coming for them.

Chapter End Notes

Okay, so I’m surprised by how many people cried last chapter, like wow XD I’m so glad people really liked it, it means so much to me :’) Also, I love how many people thanked me for not ending with a cliffhanger too.... Like I said to some, that really shows who I am huh? XD

So here's a bit of a relaxing chapter, just to go over some little things, reactions after last chapter, and Viktor's recovery! Tying up some small loose ends to in preparation for the last two chapters. But, as the end of this chapter promises, there's still ooooooneeee littleeeeee thiiiiiing that needs to be dealt with :P

Also, passing comment... It's weird to think that this Wednesdsay, I'll have been on Ao3 for a year... Oh wow

If you want to find me on tumblr, you can find me

[here](#)

Thank you so much for reading!
Yuuri was nervous. He knew why that was, and it was because he hadn’t spoken to Phichit much since the night of the onsen war. He’d been so filled with thoughts of Viktor’s recovery, and Phichit had been helping Yuuri’s parents, that only a few texts passed between them per day. It was more than they had done when Phichit was hiding, but it didn’t feel like enough.

He worried that in that time, Phichit would be displeased with Yuuri and how he had handled their whole contract. Maybe Phichit would condemn him, throw Yuuri’s insecurities at him, forbid anything else from happening. Yuuri didn’t want that. In their time, in their conversations, Yuuri had come to think of Phichit as a friend. He worried Phichit thought of it as nothing more than a hinderance.

They organised to meet in a café just down the road from their hotel. The new location of the safe house was only a few miles away, hidden in another town, this time a family run restaurant. His mother was happy. Had she not gone into the safe house business, a chef was her next calling.

Yuuri arrived first, as he almost always did. His heart beat in his chest, thumping painfully. It would be the first time in a long time that he and Phichit would sit down and properly talk. After everything they’d been through, Yuuri worried it would be awkward.

Phichit wasn’t long behind though, and his expression chased every dark thought from Yuuri’s mind. Phichit glanced around the café, finding Yuuri in a secluded booth at the back, and his face lit into smiles. He rushed through the shop and met Yuuri where he stood, engulfing him in a warm hug. Yuuri returned it, feeling the relief wash over him. His knees almost buckled.

Phichit pulled back, keeping his hands on Yuuri’s shoulders. “You’re looking good,” he said. “Some colour back to your face. You don’t have the bags under your eyes. It’s almost like the first time we met again.” He chuckled, encouraging for Yuuri to sit down again. For a moment, he contemplated sitting beside Yuuri, but decided it best to sit opposite. The smile never left his lips. “Does that mean Viktor’s better?”

Yuuri smiled back at his friend, his expression contagious. “Yes, he’s much better. Getting sick of
staying in the hotel room, though.”

“Oh, have you not been distracting him well enough?” Phichit winked, a giggle following.

Yuuri felt his cheeks blush, and he rubbed the back of his neck. “Ah, no, not really. I just… Every time I think of him doing too much, I remember…”

“It’s okay, you don’t need to say it,” Phichit assured, pressing a hand to the one Yuuri had laid on the surface of the table. “I understand. I’m sure he’ll be clawing at the walls soon though.”

Yuuri nodded. “How’s my family been?”

“Good! I can’t believe how quickly they put the safe-” He froze, glancing around. “How quickly they put up the restaurant. It’s amazing.”

“Yeah, well, have to get back into business.” Have to hide the victims quickly.

And it was there that the conversation died. As they pushed through the original, polite speech, their real questions lingered between them. And neither was sure on how to begin.

After a minute, Phichit started, opening his mouth and fiddling with his fingers. “So now… Now that it’s all over, and Viktor’s fine, and the restaurant is up – what happens now?”

It was the best way to begin, and Yuuri couldn’t thank the boy enough. What happens now? That was what they needed to talk about, and it was the best place to start their conversation. “Well, Yakov says you’re no longer his concern. Viktor obviously won’t hunt you. It’s your choice.”

“What about the Crispinos?”

Yuuri had to contain his anger. Anything related to them burned a fire inside of him, but he quelled it down. He’d been far too preoccupied with Viktor to worry about them, but now that Phichit raised it, the question was now lingering in Yuuri’s mind. “They won’t come after you,” he assured. “I’ll hurt them if they do.”
Phichit gave a chuckle, though it was slightly hesitant.

Yuuri moved the conversation on. “What do you want to do? I’ll support you in anything. I’ve contacted my company to update them on everything. They’re willing to help too, if you’re hoping to take your life in a different direction.” Back into hiding, or fake ID, or witness protection. It wasn’t uncommon. Even if those who had been hiding were suddenly free, many returned to disappearing. They felt safer, less in the attention of the world. They’d become so accustomed to hiding that they felt uncomfortable if people knew who they really were.

“I want to go back,” Phichit replied immediately, the determination in his voice surprising Yuuri. He hadn’t expected differently, but it still came as a shock. “I want to take back my life. I want to see my friends and family. And I want to go back into figure skating.”

Yuuri nodded. It might have surprised him, but it eased him too. He couldn’t explain it, but something about Phichit wanting to return to the life he had before assured him that perhaps, just maybe, he had done a good job. “That’s fine, we can do that. I’ll help you every step of the way. Have you thought about when, or how?”

Phichit furrowed his eyebrows. “How?”

“You’ve been missing for a long time. Do you want to return carefully, or with a statement? We can organise press conferences for your return, or we can take you back to your coach and ease you in again.”

Phichit nodded, carefully thinking over the options. “What do I tell them? About me being gone?”

“Whatever you want. Or, if you don’t want to, you don’t have to say anything. We can keep the press from you, and you can ease yourself back into it. After a while, people will stop asking questions.”

Phichit didn’t reply. He bit the side of his lip in thought, eyes scanning over the surface of the table. Yuuri had thought about it too, in the time that he’d been caring for Viktor. He had almost suggested for Phichit to come to the café without the disguise he had become so accustomed to wearing, to make his way back into the world with that – no doubt people in this shop would recognise him. It would spread quickly, missing figure skater Phichit Chulanont spotted in a café in Japan. They’d been lucky that no one in the hospital had recognised him, too distracted by the patients. But it could have so easily happened. But he didn’t ask that of Phichit, because he knew
the choice lay solely with him.

“I don’t know,” Phichit sighed out, having been holding in a larger breath than he expected. “I haven’t thought of anything to say yet. When they all ask about it, I mean. I’ll tell my coach the truth, but I don’t know what to say to the press.”

Yuuri nodded. “Do you think you want to tell them the truth?”

“No,” Phichit replied, the surety in his voice surprising Yuuri. He didn’t ask the reason though. “And I trust Celestino not to tell anyone about it either. He wouldn’t if I asked him not to. But what story do I make that will satisfy everyone else?”

Yuuri almost laughed, but he contained it. Being a figure skater, someone in the middle of attention, Yuuri was surprised that Phichit needed to ask something like that. But he supposed that someone like Phichit still had an innocent view of things like the news up until recently. Carefully, he said, “This is the press we’re talking about. They chase after stories. They’re never going to be satisfied until they strip stories to the bone for even a little scrap of something only they know. Even if you told them the truth, everything you know, they wouldn’t be satisfied. You’ll be hounded, Phichit, because of your missing case. It doesn’t matter what story you come up with, truth or fiction, they’re not going to be satisfied.”

Phichit looked as if he was ready to argue, but he hesitated. He bit his lip and nodded slowly, as if thinking over it himself. “Yeah. Yeah, you’re right.”

“But that also means you have control over this. They’re going to be chasing after your story, and it’s completely up to you how much you divulge, or what you say. Never feel pressured. They’re at your mercy.”


“Absolutely no pressure. It’s your choice on what you want to say. If you want to go back and not explain anything, then that’s okay. If you want to make a whole story, then that’s okay too. It’s your story they’re after. You can do anything.”

The words seemed to give Phichit some confidence where it had been lacking before. He breathed easier, met Yuuri’s gaze more often, and sat up straighter. “I feel like I owe people a story.”
“You don’t owe anyone-”

couldn’t care less. But about the people I care about. So I want to make one for them.”

Yuuri made to speak, but a waitress interrupted. Pulled back from their conversation, they ordered
what they wanted and waited for the girl to walk away before. They settled back into their
conversation.

“That’s fair enough. Then what do you want to say?”

“I could say that a friend needed help? I had to leave quickly to help?”

“But that doesn’t explain why you didn’t respond to messages, why you went missing and didn’t
come back, why you left everything for it.”

Phichit rubbed the back of his neck. “I know. But I’ve been thinking that every story I come up
with that explains it all, it’s going to scare the hell out of everyone.”

“It will. You went through a scary experience.”

Phichit huffed a chuckle. “That’s the understatement of the century.” He paused, biting his lip in
thought. “If I decided to keep close to the truth, and say I was introduced into the witness
protection programme, would you make a show? Like, come with me and tell them you’re my
bodyguard?”

“If that’s what you want me to do. I told you, Phichit, I’ll help you through this.”

Phichit took in the information, thinking it over. The drinks arrived, and he took a sip of his latte,
the steam rising to warm his chilled nose. “That might be the best thing, then. Because then I can
hold off on making too much of a story. I can’t say anything about what I witnessed if I was in such
a programme.”

“It’ll make a lot of questions, and you’re going to scare people. One big problem is people will ask
why you’re able to leave the programme at all. Most people who go in don’t come out again.”

“Right.”

“Something that isn’t so scary is to say that you had to…” Yuuri thought it over, trying his best to think over previous cases, his own and his colleagues’. But there weren’t any that were similar to Phichit’s. “You could say you got involved with something. Walked into a fragile situation, and we weren’t sure if you were going to be a target as well. We kept you hidden until we were sure that you were safe.”

Phichit took another sip of his drink, mulling it over. “That could work. I don’t scare my friends and family, and I don’t have to think up a full story for the press. And no one has to worry about it happening again.”

“You could be as vague as you wanted.”

“I’ll think more about it, but that sounds like a good idea.”

“When do you want to do it?” Yuuri asked, already making a list of things they’d need to get ready for Phichit’s return. There were a lot of people he needed to speak to about it, contacts he hadn’t reached for years – both from his parents and his work.

“I’m tired,” Phichit told him, giving him a slow smile. “I’ve been away from everything I love for months. Not to say I haven’t found more. I’ve come to love your family as my own now, and you bet I’m going to be visiting a load. You can’t get rid of me now.” He paused, the smile slipping. “But I want to go home.”

“So, sooner rather than later.”

“As soon as possible.”

“Then it’ll be as soon as I get everything ready.”

Phichit fiddled, hesitant all of a sudden. Before Yuuri could ask why though, Phichit flashed him a
cheeky grin and asked, “That means I should probably give you back the gun you gave me, huh?”

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“You’re not going without me!”

Viktor gritted his teeth, feeling the sides of his jaw jut out at the action. It hurt him to hear the desperation in Yurio’s voice, the fear in his eyes.

Otabek was holding the young teenager in a lock hold, stopping him from rushing to Viktor and punching him as Yurio so wanted to do. Viktor could see it in his expression, gaze never having left Viktor’s since they told the teen where they were going.

“Yura, there is nothing you can say,” Yakov replied, deciding to finally cut in. “You’re too young. You were already endangered enough in the hot spring war. You should not have been there.”

“I defended myself just fine though!” Yurio shouted, words spitting out rapid fire. He thrashed again, and Otabek held him back, straining. “And Viktor didn’t have anything to say then! He let me go!”

“I was distracted,” Viktor replied, though he hated to say it. He wasn’t one to be distracted so easily. “Yuuri was all I was thinking about. Had I been of stable mind, I would have stopped you from coming.”

“Exactly! Stable mind, which you’re not now either! You’re thinking about the siblings and how they hurt Yuuri. You’re blinded again and this time you’re not going to be so lucky. You’re going to your death. It’s a trap. It’s a plan. You know it and you’re still falling into it!”

“No, Yurio,” Viktor said for what seemed like the hundredth time in the last ten minutes. “You’re staying here with Otabek. Yakov, Mila and I are going with plenty of other guards. We’ll be fine.”

Yurio wanted to argue more, but it seemed that finally he was realising that whatever he said, it wasn’t going to make a difference. “Then what? You want me to wait around?”
“We’ll be back soon.” Viktor moved forward, ruffling his hand through the boy’s hair. Yurio glared back, almost wanting to bite off his hand. Viktor grinned down at him. “Be a good kitten and wait here for us, okay?”

“Oh, fuck off, you balding bastard.”

Viktor didn’t reply, not rising to the bait. He patted Yurio’s cheeks with a wink and walked to where Yakov and Mila were waiting for him. With a quick nod in Yurio’s direction, Yakov led them outside to where a black car waited – black body, blacked out windows, fake number plate. Yurio was still screaming behind them.

Yakov didn’t like saying goodbye. Viktor had noticed it from an early age. He doubted that the man had even said goodbye as he let go of his soulmate. Something about it seemed so final, so ending. As if it was going to be their last word. ‘And if it’s going to be my last word to someone, I want it to me more important than that’ Yakov had drunkenly admitted in one of their many night outs. Viktor couldn’t argue against that.

They sat in the back of the car, Viktor crossing over his legs. The feel of the suit against his skin felt good, bringing back a power he had missed. There wasn’t anything quite as intimidating as a man in a good suit. Beside him, Yakov wore his suits too, something he was rarely out of. Mila wore her own, fitted to hug her curves, but otherwise very similar. All from the same, trusted tailor, who knew their business and cut secret pockets into their clothing. Currently, Viktor lined most of his pockets with extra ammo.

The ride was quiet. The Crispinos were holding out in a warehouse yard beside Tokyo airport, hoping to have caught a flight out before Yakov knew what to do. But Yakov was fast, and had locked down any escape for them. A few bribes here, a few pushes there, a threat about the place and Sara and Michele’s faces were known to any authority.

The closer they got, the hungrier Viktor became. His fingers itched to take a hold of the gun and press it against their temples, as they had done to him and Phichit. Shoot as they watched one another die.

Viktor paused, glancing out of the corner of his eye to where Mila sat. She stared out of the window, far less eager than Viktor. Her hand often reached out to touch where Sara had shot her, pressing on the wound. She’d been lucky. Where Viktor had thought it had torn a vein, it had actually avoided it. There was a lot of blood, but she survived easily enough. It was another reason he wanted to hurt Sara, for hurting Mila so. But perhaps that would need more thinking about.
Michele, however, he had no reason to be kept alive. Sara was walking a thin line, but Michele had crossed it. There would be no going back for him.

Behind them, cars of guards followed, filled to the brim with people who had made it out of the hot spring war. They had lost many, as Viktor and Yakov had feared but had also expected. Lives were lost in fights, and it was a terrible thing. Yakov had already made sure the families they left were well off, given more money than they could dream of, and more. Viktor wanted to do more, but he didn’t know how to. Perhaps the deaths of the Italians would make up for it.

It was a long drive. Each second ticked by slowly, and he could feel Yuuri’s growing concern in his chest. By now, he had probably begun to feel Viktor’s emotions, his agitation, his need to burn something. By now, he had probably gone to the hotel room and noticed Viktor’s absence and seen his note. By now, he was probably cursing his name and fearing it at the same time, wondering if Viktor was going to come back.

But he’d make sure of it. Viktor was going to fight, knowing it wasn’t just his life that he was risking. Mila and Yakov had told him what state Yuuri was in when Viktor was close to dying. They made sure to let him know it would be worse if he actually died. Yuuri would likely lose himself, forever a shell of rage and desperation.

Viktor never wanted that to happen. Risks he took were no longer his own – they were his and Yuuri’s. His world wasn’t just him, but Yuuri’s too. And if he died, so did Yuuri.

One last risk then, he promised himself. One last explosion, one last fit of rage, one last destructive choice. And then he would settle with Yuuri somewhere and lead from the side-lines.

He could barely contain himself when they did finally arrive. They parked a mile down the road, overlooking the cargo bay, the hundreds of carriers abandoned in organised blocks of colours. One big warehouse lay decrepit in the middle of it all. It was easy to see that the outskirts were still used, housing some of the more fragile cargo ready to fly or sail overseas. But the inner part of the bay was left to decay with time.

And that was where the Italians were hiding out.

They’d bribed some of the workers to leave the middle alone and to not ask questions. That was where they’d been bunkering down after they’d figured out Yakov had locked down any escape they could make. And that was where they had decided to stage a very transparent trap.
From every direction, the Russians began to descend. Slowly, stalking through the metal carriers, keeping an eye out for anyone. No one was stood above, and every corner of the carriers were checked, inside and out. Nothing. But there were little hints that someone had been here.

Fresh wrappers had been left, scrapes in the dust, footprints impressed on the mud. The closer to the warehouse they got, the more there were.

Yakov held up his hand, a halting signal. Viktor and the other Russians followed suit, raising their guns in their hands. Viktor had one in his hands, the other still tucked away in his clothing. He could feel his pulse against the metal, and his mouth watered for the revenge he needed. Before them, the warehouse was standing. No doubt, if that was where the Italians were, they’d already seen them. They could have tried the element of surprise, but there was nowhere they could sneak upon the warehouse without being seen. So numbers were the way to go, descend upon them and scare the opposition into making a mistake.

He could almost feel their gazes on him. He stared back, eyes glancing from window to window in hopes of seeing someone staring back. He hoped it was one of the siblings, a burning desire in him to see the face of the ones he was going to kill. But the Italians were laying low.

A wave of metal clicking sounded through the air as the Russians readied their stance.

“Ready?” Yakov called out. He was answered by a chorus of agreement. He dropped his hand, another practiced signal.

It might have been a trap. They knew what they were walking into. But they weren’t going to be caught again by the Italians. They had proven themselves in the onsen war, successfully dropping the Russians into a trap they hadn’t seen. But today wouldn’t be the same.

They didn’t continue walking. They didn’t crash open the doors as the Italians probably suspected they would. They didn’t go around to the back door either, as the Italians wanted. They didn’t meet the line of Italians that were waiting for them.

No, instead, two lone Russians broke from the line and walked forwards. Had the Italians been watching, they’d find it peculiar. The two took out a small pocket-sized cannister and began to pour it along the parts of the metal building that gave way to the olden wooden structure underneath. Once the wood was soaked, they began to take out paper and dried grass from a bag they had taken with them, stuffing them into the cracks of the building.
By now, the Italians must have been suspecting what was happening. They’d be thinking of a way out, hoping to use the doors to escape. But there was a wall of enemies on the other side, all with a gun, ready. Tables turned so easily in war. One second of neglect, one second of thought, just one second could turn everything around. Risks, no matter how small they might have seemed at first glance, were worth the weight of a life.

Once the preparations had been made, only spanning a minute, they brought out their lighters from their pockets and began to set alight the paper and dry grass. Once done, they stepped back and threw their lit lighters into the petrol.

Without flammable materials, a room could take up to three minutes to be completely submerged in flames. An old, dry, dusty warehouse, lined with flammable material, took far less time.

It almost seemed to swallow the front of the building in a matter of seconds, the black smoke rising high into the air like a mushroom cloud. It would be seen for miles around. It licked along the walls, catching to the wood beneath the metal, leaving ash in its wake, and spread throughout the whole building.

There came coughs from inside. Someone was shouting. There were many voices, and they were all speaking Italian.

“Like rats in a cake,” Yakov whispered, spitting venom in his voice. “Smoke them out, and they come running as cowards.”

Almost as if beckoned by his words, the doors of the building were thrown open. First to escape was a plume of smoke, lifting into the air to merge with the larger cloud. Then came the bowed, rushing bodies of the Italians, coughing out their lungs. A few collapsed to the floor in their attempt to escape, spitting into the dry mud of the floor.

Viktor was watching each face, looking for two in particular. And then they came. In the middle of them all, helped by two older gentlemen. Bodyguards, he suspected, or relatives. He stepped a few steps forwards, seeing Yakov and Mila mimic it. He raised his gun, already aiming for the siblings, avoiding the other Italians rolling.

It took a moment for them to notice. Their eyes were running from the smoke, spit in the corner of their mouth, ash clinging to the strands of their hair from when they had rushed under the cloud to get out. When they did look up, they were met with the barrel of Viktor’s gun.
Their relatives around them pulled out their own guns to aim at Viktor, but were shaking, the breath in their lungs still hard to draw. The Russian mafia met them with their own, much more stable-held guns.

“A little hint,” Viktor spat, a wicked smile pulling at his lips. “When you stage a trap, do it when I’m weak. Don’t do it when I’m stronger and angrier than I was before.”

Sara and Michele stood from where they were kneeling on the ground, facing his gun with some determination. For that, Viktor could respect them – or he could have in another life. He hated cowards that bowed before his gun, talking big until he decided to return it. It was one of the things that had drawn him to Yuuri, back when he hadn’t known who he was. Yuuri didn’t falter. He faced Viktor, and not just for himself but for someone else. In another life, he might have respected these Italian siblings for the same thing. But he couldn’t. Because he didn’t think they deserved anything but his disgust.

“How did you heal so quickly?” Michele asked, swiping off some of the ash that was resting on the sleeve of his suit. Apt that they should too dress up for this fight, Viktor thought. “You got shot in the chest.”

Viktor shrugged his shoulders. He could feel the gaze of them all on him, the Russians waiting for a signal while the Italians were glancing to where his wound would be scarring. Perhaps they thought he was faking it, and that they could use it as a weakness. But they couldn’t, and Viktor couldn’t wait to prove them so wrong. “Maybe it was the will of my soulmate,” he replied. “I don’t pretend to know everything about fate and connections. There are still many things I need to learn. But I do know that he helped me through all of it. And I also know you almost ruined everything that makes Yuuri, Yuuri. I know that that angers me more than anything ever has before.”

He must have said it in a very certain way – perhaps his anger leaked out into the words more than he was allowing it to – because he saw more than one person flinch. Sara’s eyes widened, and she stepped back.

There were so many more words that Viktor wanted to throw at them, get them to feel the strength of the thoughts he had been thinking over the last few weeks. Every time he looked at Yuuri, he couldn’t help but imagine what he would be like if Viktor hadn’t held on. That smile he showed Viktor every day, he thought he might have lost it. The shine in his eyes that caught Viktor’s gaze every second would have died out. Viktor never wanted that to happen, and the threat of it was right before him. Eradicate the threat, and he would be safe.

Yakov moved forwards before Viktor could do anything more though, addressing his words to one of the men beside the siblings. An uncle, if Viktor remembered. The brother of the Don. “This doesn’t need to end in another war. Hand over Sara and Michele and the rest of you get to leave.”
As if that was going to work. They’d known it wasn’t going to before they arrived. The Italian mafia, especially the Crispinos, were a very proud family – emphasis on the meaning of family. Blood ties and relations counted for the majority of their group. Viktor, having been adopted by Yakov and brought into a family in which he had no blood ties to any of the members, could never understand it. Family, to him, was a choice.

The uncle spat at Yakov’s feet, not even flinching as the guards beside Yakov stepped forwards and presented their guns. One click and the Italians would fall.

“We reject the proposal,” he replied, his accent heavy and his English stuttered. “If you want Sara and Michele, then you have to go through us.”

Yakov sighed, annoyed by the situation. “Then that is what it will have to come to. Are you sure you want to make this choice?”

Viktor itched to pull his trigger. If he did, the bullet would fly through Michele’s forehead. It was right there, right before him, and he shook with the strain it took him to contain it. He could feel Yuuri’s concern in his chest, responding to his rage and his restraint. He didn’t want Yuuri to be worried. He wanted Yuuri to be nothing but happy. But this needed to be overcome if they were to come to it.

It turned out he didn’t need to make the choice. No one replied to Yakov’s question. Instead, Viktor noticed their movements. The uncle stepped a little more to the side, his eyes glancing back to Viktor every now and then. Each step took him in front of the siblings. And the moment Viktor noticed that his view was completely obstructed, that was when a bullet from the Italian side sped by his ear.

Flashes of weeks ago filled his mind. The searing pain in his chest, Yuuri’s crying face, the fear of death. It all came back suddenly, in a wave of terror. And while he was lost in that memory, the Russians responded in kind.

Even as the flames flickered high in the sky, some of the Italians rushed back into the warehouse to get some cover. Russians rushed back to the carriers, hiding behind its shield. As bullets were flung about, Viktor felt someone grab his arm and drag him backwards, under the cover of a carrier.

It all happened quickly. He hadn’t expected words to explode into bullets so soon. Where they had
been standing was now empty but for the few bodies that were already lying bleeding.

Little wars began around them, almost mirroring the war at the hot spring that long night a few weeks ago.

The memory pulled Viktor back to his senses. Mila, Yakov and he stood beside a carrier, their guns held tightly to their chests as they glanced around, searching for any fighters coming their way.

“Where did they go?” he asked as he pressed himself against the cover. “Sara and Michele – where did they go?”

“Their fucking uncle dragged them away somewhere,” Mila replied. “I think they went South, towards the back of the warehouse.”

“Do we have people there?”

“We have people everywhere,” Yakov replied.

“I need to go after them. I should have shot Michele when I had the chance.” A growl began to rise in his voice, the regret seeping in deeply. He had Michele right there. It would have been a bad decision, but at least one sibling would be dead.

Yakov held him back, a hand to his chest with a surprising amount of strength for the middle-aged man. “Not alone. Let our fighters get rid of the threat and corner them before we do anything.”

“As long as they keep the siblings for me,” Viktor replied. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Mila ready to say something, mouth agape and leaning forwards. But she let the words slip by without saying anything.

“You’ve made that well known.” Yakov took his hand from Viktor’s chest, turning back to where the Italians fought their fighters in the middle of the open space. “They’ll keep them for us.”

Us. Yakov hadn’t said anything about his drive for this attack. But Viktor hadn’t asked. From what he had heard from Yuuri, Yakov had been very affected by Viktor’s near-death experience –
enough to pull back against Phichit despite the damage to his previously mentioned pride. Viktor didn’t ask, and Yakov didn’t speak about it. It was how their relationship went.

They lay in wait as they watched the fighters in the open rage war. Bullets flew, and it was only a matter of minutes before the war was won. That was the danger with modern weapons – it didn’t give the fighters enough time to really savour it. Face off against an enemy, and then there was a bullet in your head. It took only seconds to make a mistake and feel it.

The few remaining Italians rushed off to save their own skins, a dishonour on their lives now. You don’t run. You face and you fight. But they ran and dispersed along the cargo carriers, probably searching for a way out. Yakov held his hand up, stopping the remaining Russians from chasing after them.

“They’re not our primary target,” he reminded them as he stepped out of the cover. There were a few injured footmen on the ground, some unconscious, some moaning in pain. But as there had been in the hot spring war, there lay some dead on the ground too. They stained the floor red, the blood seeping into the dust. By the time the smoke would alert the authorities, all that would be left would be a burning warehouse and blood in the dust. Some might be in the shape of a body. There might be bullets in the metal of the carriers. There might be some guns left around or scraps of clothing. But nothing more. They wouldn’t know what happened, but to label it as a gang war or a drug exchange gone wrong. Perhaps there would be bribes sliding across tables to make sure it went no further, or perhaps a few threatening words here or there to make sure it never made news. Either way, this was where it would end.

“Head to the South,” Yakov instructed, and in a line, they followed.

Viktor stuck to his right side, Mila to his left, and behind them their footmen raised their guns. Some wore bloody clothing, some were clear of anything, others were already tired and weary. But they were trained and ready, with families that were aware that their jobs might have led to this.

It took another few minutes to find the Italians. They checked the southern carriers, though they knew the mafia wouldn’t be so stupid as to corner themselves like that. They checked around them, and wove their way through the boxes until they hit the southern wall. Behind them, the warehouse fire was growing and growing and the building was beginning to groan as its walls were collapsing. It was loud and echoed in the air, as if the metal was feeling the pain. Soon enough, it would all fall to the ground, everything inside of it burned to a crisp or covered in ash.

It was as they hit the concrete wall on the southern side of the ground did they see the Italians. There was only a few left – the siblings, their uncle and three fighters. So little. So many less than what they had come with.
The siblings were pushed against the wall, their uncle before them, and the fighters before that. Each one had their gun raised, even Sara and Michele did, reaching around their uncle.

Yakov stopped Viktor and Mila, and behind them their line stopped as well. So many more than the Italians. In the eyes of the mafia, it was clear who had already won. But it couldn’t stop there. Not after what it was that the siblings had done.

“Put your guns down,” Yakov said, finger on the trigger of his own. “There are more of us than you. We could gun you down faster than you could us.”

“At least then we could take you and your little lackeys down with us,” their uncle spat into the air. There was a wild look about him, eyes that lit up like the flames that burned the warehouse, teeth gritted together and spit sliding down his skin to clear the line of ash on his chin.

Viktor liked this sight though. He loved to see Sara and Michele cornered, trapped against an open wall with barely a hand-full of protectors. He liked seeing the fear in their eyes, the sudden thought that this might be it. This might be where they died. They stared their murderers in the face and knew they’d never see their precious Italy again.

Because that was how Viktor had felt when he lay knelt in that cove. He felt the barrel of their gun against his head, watched as Phichit thought how he was going to die too, listened to the crashing of the waves against the rocks, realising he might never see Russia again. He might see Yuuri’s face for the last time, not smiling, but almost crying. They’d only just gotten closer, and that would be the last he saw of him, with the fear of what was to come next for his other half. In the end, it didn’t matter if he was a soulmate or an enemy. Viktor wanted to forever be with him, being whatever they were, and the Italians almost took that from him.

He hoped they felt the same fear he had felt then. The same terror that gnawed at the soul and the heart, shrivelling any hope into nothing.

Yakov sighed, glancing to the side to watch over Viktor's face. Viktor didn’t know what he was looking for, but it seemed he found it. He nodded, turning back to the enemies before them. “If that’s how you want it to be.” He shrugged his shoulders and pulled the trigger to a bluff the Italians weren’t sure he was going to take.

He pulled it twice, and the first two fighters fell. Following his lead, Viktor shot and fired at the third fighter, not giving them a chance to pull their own triggers. The bullets hit bull’s eye, piercing
their foreheads. Quick and easy deaths for those who were only following their leaders – for those who hadn’t done wrong against the Russians themselves.

Left were only three – Sara, Michele and their uncle. And Viktor loved watching their fear as their shields fell to the ground.

Viktor saw it often. In many of their fights, he’d seen instinct overcome people in such situations. He saw it overcome their uncle who glanced down at the three fallen fighters. The uncle’s chin wobbled, cogs turning in his head, until one thing came to mind. Fight or flight. Protect his niece and nephew, or himself.

It seemed the honour of the mafia was what won over. When he turned to look at Viktor and Yakov through his eyelashes, his eyes were that of a wild animal. He growled, teeth shining in the heat of the midday sun.

Instead of firing, he charged. He rushed the small space between them, not stopping even as the bullets penetrated his chest. Momentum carried him until he slammed into Viktor, and it took all of Viktor’s strength to not fall as the Italian collapsed against him. Blood was left in a swipe along his front, his grey suit ruined forever, dots and specs now littering his crisp white shirt. He really should learn not to wear suits into war, but it was what he had been brought up doing.

In the distraction their uncle caused, the siblings began firing. They aimed for Viktor first, but Viktor held up their uncle, the bullets flying into his back – it wouldn’t do much good now, the man was already dead.

Then they aimed for Yakov, aiming wildly as they fired in rapid succession. A few hit the fighters behind them, and there might have been one that skimmed Yakov’s hand. But nothing that stuck.

They might have been good fighters, and might have been good shooters. But when faced against a dozen Russians, one of which struck fear in their hearts, it was difficult to keep composure. Especially knowing that your death was what they hoped for. Going against that, there wasn’t much hope of trying to maintain some sort of composure. Why take a few seconds to line a shot, when you could have fired five in that time? Who cared where they went, as long as it scared your attackers?

Yakov raised his gun, stepping closer to where Viktor used his shield. The fighters behind them spread out, standing to intimidate not to fight. Mila stood to the side, seemingly at a loss of what to do. She wasn’t being fired at.
Viktor knew the problem then. He’d had suspicions, but it was confirmed now. He saw the way Mila was staring at Sara, and how Sara kept glancing at her. As if she wanted to be the last thing Sara saw. He recognised that glance, the same he himself had harboured when he looked at Yuuri in that cove. The last thing he wanted to die with was Yuuri’s face in his mind, to take with him to whatever came next.

It posed problems. He knew what he wanted to do, and it involved a bullet to Sara’s chest, just as she had done to him. But he didn’t have time to think.

Bullets were flying passed. He could hear them whistle beside his ears. The shield before him could only take so much before a bullet flew through into him. He wouldn’t let Yuuri feel that pain again. He wouldn’t sacrifice himself here.

An idea came to him then. He rushed forwards, shield held tightly. Blood sprayed on him as the body was shot more and more as the siblings attempted to stop him. Once he was close enough, when the fire of the gun alerted him to their closing distance, he threw the body of their uncle at them.

It was a bit of a cruel trick. They were so distracted by the face of a loved one coming towards them, they stopped firing. He heard Michele gasp, almost dissolving into a deep scream, before the body crashed against them. Their uncle was not a small man. Against small Sara and tall but thin Michele, they were no weight to stop it. They crashed into the wall behind them, knocking the wind from them.

Viktor waited. He made sure to wait until they gained their footing and saw him before he fired. He wanted the last thing that they saw to be him, barrel facing them. But just as he was about to fire, Mila pushed him.

“Viktor-”

He didn’t hear the rest. The explosion of the bullet drowned it out, shooting the bullet off in another direction.

“Mila, what-” he began, but stopped as Michele shot at him.

He pushed Mila out of the way, and this close he felt too open. Without the shield, he felt too
exposed, and it began to strike fear in his heart. He knew Yuuri felt it, could feel his fear in turn, and that was what steadied Viktor’s hand. He aimed, took a second to fill his lungs, feeling the bullet whistle beside him and flick his fringe. Then he fired twice.

The first missed, bouncing off of the cement wall and flying back. It missed Viktor, flying to his right. For a moment, he worried for Mila, but she had already moved to his left, trying to stand between him and Sara. But the second didn’t miss. The second bullet found itself flying through Michele’s neck.

Time seemed to slow. For a moment, nothing happened. Michele’s neck was cut, but not much. And then, after a breath, blood sprayed from the wound in a rainfall. His hands reached for his throat, gagging on the rising liquid as it filled his mouth. His clean clothes were suddenly drenched in red, pouring and pouring until his face was a wash of pale skin.

Viktor felt a smile beginning to rise on his lips. He heard Sara scream, but he couldn’t tear his eyes away from the sight before him. Michele lost balance, falling backwards against the wall, wiping the blood to stain like graffiti against the cement. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Sara collapse too, Mila rushing to help her down.

With all the screaming and the gurgling though, he didn’t hear the Russian fighters calling from behind. He didn’t hear another gurgle, quieter than Michele’s, but closer. So wrapped up in his vengeance that he didn’t realise until someone tapped on his shoulder.

“She’s dead,” she began, but she didn’t need to say anymore.

Turning, Viktor saw that the fighters were kneeling down. In the middle of them, Yakov lay. Viktor didn’t understand for a moment, not until he saw the blood. Red. So red. And a lot of it. Shot. In the chest. Closer to his heart than Yuuri’s shot had been.

His breathing stopped. His blood ran cold in his veins, and his body felt both heavy and light at the same time.

Yakov lay in the middle, his chest rising and falling in a bit to breathe through the pain and the blood that was rising from his lungs, a sickening mirror to what was happening to Michele. He was finding it hard to focus on anything, holding on tightly to the fighters around him as they tried to settle him into a more comfortable position.
Even in pain, Yakov looked like a proud man. He stared down at where the bullet hole had entered his chest, glaring as if the look alone could pull the bullet out and heal him.

Viktor stared blankly. He wanted to wake up now. This must have been a dream. Yakov was invincible, had stared death in the face so many times and left the winner. He was a being that reigned higher than such mortal issues.

At least, he had seemed so. He was a god in Viktor’s eyes as he grew up – a child, staring up at the immortal man that was Yakov Feltsman. And as he grew, Viktor became aware of reality – that Yakov was not immortal, just strong. But even then there was some awe in his thoughts of the older man. He ignored Yakov’s greying hair, the wrinkles on his face, the liver spots on his skin. He ignored that it got harder for Yakov to get out of bed some days, and how he needed to see the doctor more regularly than he had before. Sometimes he needed a walking stick. He was aging, and he had reached an age that mafia rarely got to. But that didn’t mean it should end like this.

Their eyes met, and that was when the glare slipped from Yakov’s eyes. Suddenly, he seemed worried, eyes moving in and out of focus as he stared at Viktor. Viktor saw as words crossed his vision, last words he wanted to say before he slipped away. But it was getting harder and harder to speak.

Seeing Yakov trying to speak broke Viktor out of the numbness. He gritted his teeth, crinkled his eyes into a glare and turned around. Sara was shaking, gun dropped, staring at her dying brother as Michele slipped quickly away. He was already unconscious, barely breathing.

Viktor stormed over to her, raising his gun. Angry wasn’t the word. Rage wasn’t it either. There was not a word he could use to describe the feeling he was immersed in, though he knew it was probably nothing compared to what Yuuri had felt when he thought Viktor was dying.

He aimed his gun at Sara’s head, feeling disappointed when she didn’t react. Her eyes were only for her dying brother. He almost pulled the trigger, but stopped as Mila stood in front of her.

“Mila,” Viktor whispered, voice deeper than ever before, “get out of the way.”

“No,” Mila whispered back, voice shaking, eyes glancing from Sara, to Viktor and to Yakov. She was on the verge of crying, probably caught between tears for her dying father-figure, lost brother and distraught soulmate.
“Mila,” Viktor warned, not dropping his gun. “Step out of the way, or I’ll shoot you too.”

“She didn’t shoot, Viktor—”

“I don’t care! She needs to die. Her and her parasite brother. Both of them need to be washed from this world. It’s because of her that I almost died, that Yuuri lost himself, that Yakov—”

“You shot him, Viktor!”

He hadn’t wanted to think about it. He knew he had done it. The two shots at Michele, the first one that had missed and ricochet back. He feared it would hit someone. And it had.

But he still flinched at Mila’s words. He could tell she regretted them immediately.

She swallowed away what might have been an apology, or perhaps more angry words. In the attempt, a lone tear slid down her cheek. “I’ll deal with her. I’ll do something. Please, Viktor. Leave her to me.”

Viktor thought about it. He did. He hesitated in pulling the trigger, but the only thing that was stopping him was the thought of shooting Mila. He didn’t want to do it. He never wanted to. She was a sister to him, a young, reckless sister that he had grown up with. He remembered the both of them as children, pulling each other’s hair in between training, playing cards with their guards.

“She always was one that was able to calm him. She knew exactly what to say, and how to say it. He used to think it was a good thing. Now he wasn’t so sure.

“Please,” Mila begged. “If you kill her, you’ll be doing the same thing to me as she almost did to Yuuri. You don’t want Yuuri to be alone, do you? So please, don’t let me be alone either.”

Viktor felt the words strike his heart. He dropped his arm, glaring down at the ground. Mila always was one that was able to calm him. She knew exactly what to say, and how to say it. He used to think it was a good thing. Now he wasn’t so sure.

“Take her out of my sight,” he replied. “I never want to see her face again. Understand?” The promise of not hesitating next time lingered in the air. Mila was always good at reading between Viktor’s lines.
“Got it, Viktor,” Mila replied, a sigh of relief leaving her mouth. She gripped Sara and pulled her up, holding her tightly to her chest as the Italian sobbed. She whispered quickly first, before she let go. “I’m going to… I’m going to speak to Yakov. And then I’ll take her away, okay?”

Viktor grunted. He watched as Mila walked behind him, towards where the gurgling was growing in volume. Rushed words, guards commenting on how there wouldn’t be much more time left. Backup was on its way, and they thought they’d kept them close. But they wouldn’t be here in time. Viktor watched as Sara leaned herself against the wall, still staring at where Michele was slumped.

He was dead. Gone in the time Viktor and Mila had been speaking. Eyes closed, spotted with blood, limp in a way that only a corpse could be.

Viktor thought he’d like seeing this image – a dead Michele and a Sara that was close to collapsing into herself. But knowing that Yakov was dying behind him, it only sickened him. Under the desperate thoughts, he could feel Yuuri prying, worrying about his state of mind. He wanted to assure him, but right now he didn’t know how. It would be a lie.

Mila was finished. She returned, grabbing hold of Sara and leading her away. Viktor watched as they disappeared around the carriers.

As soon as they were gone, he contained his need to follow and plant a bullet between Sara’s eyes, and turned to kneel beside Yakov.

He was slipping away quickly. He’d stopped struggling. He was hanging limply in the arms of one of the guards who was trying to press on the wound. They’d ripped open his shirt, exposing skin that had years’ worth of scars.

Once he was kneeled, at a loss of what to do, Yakov used the remaining strength he had to cup the side of Viktor’s cheek.

Viktor began to cry. “I’m sorry,” he said, hand holding tightly onto Yakov’s. “I’m so sorry. I shouldn’t have shot. I didn’t know it was going to bounce off the wall. I was so blinded. I just wanted him dead and—”

Yakov stopped his mumbling with a roll of his eyes. He tried to speak again, but the blood was slipping from his lips. Words were not going to make it passed, so instead he stared at Viktor.
Viktor was a firm believer that eyes were a very important way to convey feelings. It could be a way to showing emotions, of knowing who was lying, what people really thought. Eyes were the window to the soul, as people said. He believed it.

And without words, Viktor could see what Yakov was thinking. There was no hatred there, nothing that made Viktor’s regret worse. Instead, there was sadness and love. Viktor knew Yakov loved him, just as much as Viktor loved Yakov. They might not have been related by blood, but in their world that didn’t matter. Yakov had been more of a father to him than his biological one was, whoever that was. Although he hated how Yakov had shown it, going after Viktor’s soulmate and Phichit, only making things worse, Viktor knew it was Yakov’s way of showing it. The stubborn fool had been raised in a different time, where love was not spoken but shown. Erase a threat to protect a loved one, despite what that threat was, rather than tell that person you loved them.

Viktor thought of all the ways that they could have stopped this from happening. It all went back to that moment he and Phichit had misunderstood each other. To the moment he felt paranoid. To the moment he and Yakov decided sponsoring a figure skater was a good way of gaining more business, both legal and not.

But fate did it so that he and Yuuri could come closer. And he supposed this was where fate wanted to end it.

“I’m sorry,” he told Yakov once more because he didn’t know what else to say. It hurt too much, knowing he had been the one to shoot Yakov. Right beside his shot, the scarring of Yuuri’s was still obvious, underneath the blood. Viktor placed Yakov’s hand on his chest, tearing it from his cheek when he really didn’t want to. But he could feel the muscle going slack and Yakov was rapidly losing his energy.

Yakov’s eyes drifted into focus and out of it as his eyelids fluttered. He wasn’t gasping for breath as much anymore. It was almost as if he was falling asleep.

It didn’t take long for him to stop breathing entirely. And when he did stop, the fighters around them gently placed Yakov down and stood, salute raised. Honour and respect for their loved one. Viktor still kneeled, crying over the body of his father.

In the distance, the sirens had finally reached them. But they would not be here in time to catch the Russians.

***
There was only one person he wanted to see.

After they escaped the warehouse, the building still burning and the blood still staining the floor, they had begun the long process of the next steps to take. They put Yakov in a body bag and readied his transport back to Russia. Viktor helped, numbness settling in. He knew where he wanted to be, but there were things that needed to be done.

Mila had been in contact, saying she’d meet them in Russia. It went without saying that Sara would not be there with her, hidden away somewhere for Mila to return to. They both agreed that letting Yuri know what had happened was left to Viktor. Yuri was always much more likely to listen to Viktor than Mila.

So he did. And he listened as Yuri sobbed on the other side, the proud teenager trying to hold it in but unable to. Viktor explained it all, said it was his fault, and fully expected Yuri to be angry with him. But, instead, the teenager told him it wasn’t. He didn’t say much, not in between the crying. His last words were, “At least it was you.” And then he hung up.

Viktor understood. It was a constant fear that Yakov would be killed by the people he had angered in his life – his list of enemies were many. He’d beaten his fated Enemy years ago, but that didn’t eradicate the threat. Viktor, Mila and Yuri often worried that one day, when Yakov was old and weak, he would be kidnapped and tortured to death. At least it was quick, and at least it was Viktor. It didn’t make him feel any better though.

When it was all done and finished, when the time lapsed into what felt like a second and an eternity at the same time, Viktor was finally able to see the one person he really wanted to see. He’d been numb from the moment Yakov had died, but it all came flooding back when he stood outside of his hotel room door.

Yuuri was waiting on the other side. He could feel it in his chest. The door opened, and Yuuri’s storming face met him. He fully expected for Yuuri to begin raging, demanding to know where he went and how stupid he had been. But there must have been something in Viktor’s face, because Yuuri’s expression dropped.

He didn’t say anything. Only took Viktor’s hand and led him into the room, closing the door behind them.

Viktor was glad now that his guards had pushed him to shower and change. He didn’t like it at the
time, the feeling of washing away Yakov’s blood from him, the last physical thing he had, but now he was glad he wasn’t meeting Yuuri with a bloody appearance. It might have brought forth memories Yuuri didn’t want.

Yuuri settled him into bed, facing the wide window where the darkness of the late night was glittering back at him. Yuuri settled next to him, pulling him into a hug, placing Viktor’s head on his chest to listen to his steady heartbeat.

It calmed Viktor more than he could ever express. A stable, beating heart, beautiful to his ears. It made him begin to cry again, and Yuuri held him closer.

It took a while, but he finally admitted it. In the quiet of their room, his voice echoed as he whispered, “I killed Yakov.”

Yuuri didn’t gasp, didn’t ask how. He kissed the top of Viktor’s head and ran his fingers through his hair, arms holding on tightly as Viktor cried.

Yuuri didn’t speak. He didn’t give Viktor empty words. He didn’t promise anything. To anyone else, that might have seemed insensitive. Silence was always meant to be filled. But Viktor loved their quiet moment. He loved how Yuuri expressed his comfort in actions, and didn’t say anything that Viktor had already heard a thousand times.

It was almost early morning when Viktor finally felt calm and strong enough to rise again. He sat up, Yuuri following. After a day of stress and a night of crying, one thought was stuck in his mind. He ran his hand down the back of Yuuri’s neck, feeling the warmth there, the softness of skin. Yuuri had come close to death more than once. Viktor had killed Yakov. It all came down to what he was.

He stared Yuuri in the eyes and he said the one thing that was on his mind. “I don’t want to do this anymore.” And as he said it, it only grew stronger in his mind. “I want you to be safe. I don’t want anyone else to die. I don’t want to do this anymore. Let’s run away somewhere, just the two of us.”

Chapter End Notes

I hope this chapter answered some questions XD And hey, I had to nearly finish this with one more chapter of angst and drama and pain :’) And a small cliffhanger too... Because what am I if I am not this? XD And look! The character death tag! :O It finally came into it! I'm sorry for scaring some people with that particular tag in
And now just one more chapter to go.... Next Saturday, the end of Gunned Down Butterflies :( This has been a story that's taken me close to six months, hours every day, and I couldn't be more happy with how this has turned out. But I'll leave all of this for next chapter, as well as all the thanks and appreciation until then, because you better believe that I'm going to be writing a long paragraph with my thanks and all, here and on tumblr. I'm going to be gushing praise for you all until I can't anymore!

Anyway, I hope you liked it. One more chapter, the conclusion of it all! I hope you're as unprepared as I am <3

You can find me on tumblr

here
Us.

Chapter Notes

Chapter beta-read by whynikkywhy, the best beta that has ever lived. Had it not been for her, I know I would have had a much harder time with this story, from writing 9,000 words weekly and spending hours editing it in between juggling my jobs, and I would be far more stressed every week. Because of my amazing beta, I was able to leave the editing to someone else (and a better pair of eyes too) and focus on getting the next chapter written. I thank her with all my heart for 1. introducing this story idea in the first place 2. taking the editing off my hands and doing an amazing job and 3. for being an amazing person. <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“What’s that smell?”

Yuuri stopped in the door way, stopping halfway as he set his coat on the coat hook. The smell hit him, setting off the nerves in his nose, cheeks tingling. It smelled liked decay, rotting, burned. But he couldn’t see where Viktor was – probably around the corner in their kitchen, cooking up an abomination. He didn’t answer Yuuri’s question.

Yuuri sighed and placed his coat on the hook, tired after a long day of rushing around. Who knew being a part-time barista was a harder job than being a bodyguard? He didn’t train as much as he used to, so he supposed that might be some reason for it. As he moved to walk into the apartment, he felt something slip underneath his foot. Looking down, he saw a letter. He recognised the tidy handwriting immediately, the perfect way that the letters interlinked and curled. Another postcard, another picture, another check-up to see how they were doing.

He wondered where Mila was sending it from this time.

“Mila’s sent us another letter,” he called out as he walked further into their home, setting down his keys in the bowl on the living room table. “Want to place bets on where from? I’m going to guess… Mexico.” The further he walked, the stronger the smell became.

It happened occasionally. Viktor was a very good cook, had been brought up to be, and living alone had assured it. But as their Enemy side dictated, Viktor liked to compete with Yuuri, make all the dishes Yuuri had grown up with but better, and that was when he made drastic mistakes in cooking. Yuuri wondered what Japanese cuisine Viktor was trying to make this time, and how spectacularly he had messed it up.
Still no reply. Yuuri stopped where he was, knowing he probably needed to prepare himself for the state of the kitchen. He ran his hand through his hair, breathing carefully. He could feel the panic from Viktor rising in his chest – not because he knew Yuuri was soon to see, but because something was very wrong.

“Viktor?” he called, hoping his partner would notice this time that there was someone else in the house.

Viktor’s head popped around the wall, blinking away his shock. The first thing Yuuri noticed was a suspicious black streak along his nose, clinging all the way up his forehead. There were some specs of it in his silver hair. Like a child, Viktor stepped out of the kitchen, a nervous smile growing on his lips.

“Light of my life!” he greeted, stepping forward to shield Yuuri’s view of the kitchen. He placed a finger underneath Yuuri’s chin, urging it up so Yuuri could look into Viktor’s eyes. “How was work, my love? Busy? Any troublesome customers? Wow, even exhausted you look gorgeous.”

“What’s that smell, Viktor?”

“What smell?”

Answered too quickly. Yuuri raised an eyebrow, tilting his head to the side. “What’s on your face?”

“A smile because you’re so stunning.”

Yuuri rolled his eyes but couldn’t keep the smallest hint of a blush blooming on his cheeks. “What did you try making this time? What recipe did my mother send you?”

And like a child, Viktor caved. “Katsudon.”

“How did you mess that one up?”
“I swear, I’ll get it. I’ll make it so well, it’ll be better than yours.”

Yuuri patted Viktor’s cheek and swerved around the man, stepping into the kitchen. He had prepared himself, as he always did when he knew Viktor was planning on cooking something competitively, and yet it still surprised him. He set the letter from Mila down and glanced around.

His eyes landed on the mess above where Viktor must have been standing. “I know I said we should paint the ceiling, but I didn’t suggest black. And not with such chunky paint, don’t you think?”

There was something black dripping from the ceiling, a droplet falling down onto the stove. Bowls and pans were settled everywhere, some with something charred clinging to the sides, the surfaces of the counters wet, black dustings everywhere.

“Your sister said the same thing.”

“Mari?”

“I called her to ask for help. Sent her some pictures.”

Yuuri couldn’t contain the chuckle that left his lungs at the pout on Viktor’s face. “At least you tried.”

“But then I don’t win.”

Yuuri shrugged. “Nope. I win this time. Mine’s still better than-” he pointed at the charred pork in the bottom of the pan, still steaming, “this.”

Despite everything, they still had an enemy side to their relationship. It didn’t take long for them to change it from what it was though. That side used to demand to kill one another, protect their loved ones, hurt each other because that’s what their whole existence was. Now, as they settled into domestic life, it became less. No killing. Just competitions. Who could cook this better? Who could get the groceries faster? Who could run faster? Who could do the cleaning faster? Who was the best in bed?
They kept a tally in the lounge, countless competitions divided into lines on a chalkboard. So far, they seemed pretty tied.

Viktor growled, leaning forwards and trapping Yuuri against the counter, arms on both sides of the Japanese man.

“Is that another point for me? Another tally?” Yuuri teased further. He liked their enemy side if it was like this – just healthy competitions, or well, perhaps not healthy. Sometimes they got too into them. He couldn’t count the number of stalls they’d broken in the market from running and slipping on the floor. “That means I’ll be winning the whole thing.”

Viktor breathed through his nose, almost growling again. He leaned forwards until their foreheads touched, and Yuuri grinned up at the man.

“You need to keep up with me,” Yuuri whispered, feeling like his normal voice would be too loud for the lack of distance between them. He wrapped his arms around his soulmate’s neck, eyelids slipping slightly. “Want me to make it fair? You always win the cleaning competitions. Give you an easy point.”

“You’re playing a dangerous game, Yuuri,” Viktor replied, voice deep.

Yuuri loved riling up the other man. It was one of his favourite pass times, and he knew how to do it well. And as he watched Viktor’s pupils blow up, he felt his heart race. He gasped slightly as Viktor’s hand slipped along his hip, pushing up his uniform top, touching the warm skin underneath.

“I can always win at something else,” Viktor huffed, pressing his fingers a little harder into Yuuri’s skin, just at the pressure Yuuri loved. “Something I definitely always win. How about you turn around?”

Yuuri knew the insinuation. He frowned. “You do not always win-” But before he could finish, Viktor was already turning him around, pushing Yuuri down until his chest touched the counter. Viktor’s foot slotted between his and kicked Yuuri’s away, splaying out his legs.

Yuuri felt his breath leave him, all the nerves in his body sparking. All of a sudden, his exhaustion was forgotten. He could feel Viktor’s lust as if it was his, and it was only helping to grow his own.
Viktor’s hand travelled up his spine, pushing away the top, slowly but adding more pressure as it slid its way up. Yuuri felt himself shake with need. So Viktor was in one of those moods. A more dominating mood, which sometimes came up. Particularly during a competition, or when they were focused more on the enemy part of their connection. Soulmate, gentle. Enemy, rough. But both passionate, which made for interesting mixes.

After a stressful and busy day in the café, having to serve rude teenagers, passive business men, and one too many middle-aged mothers, Yuuri needed something rough.

Viktor pressed himself against Yuuri, and the Japanese man could already feel Viktor’s need too. Viktor’s lips pressed hot trails along the back of his neck, latching onto parts that he knew Yuuri craved and loved.

But just because Yuuri knew he needed this, didn’t mean he was going to lie there and let Viktor do it.

He spun around, surprising his partner, tripping Viktor until the man lost his balance. Before he could fall, Yuuri pushed him against the counter, where he had previously been, and locked him in as Viktor had done to him.

He grinned up at Viktor. “Think I’ll let you win that easily?”

As a reply, Viktor pressed a kiss to Yuuri’s lips, beginning gently, but growing harder with each passing moment.

He pushed Yuuri backwards, pressing him to the counter of the opposite side of the kitchen. As they reached it, Yuuri kicked, trying to turn them around again. Viktor caught his legs and pulled them around his waist, placing Yuuri to sit on the edge of the surface. Yuuri leaned back, amazed that Viktor could do it and not let go of their kiss.

“Oh, maybe that was just slightly impressive,” he panted, keeping his legs wrapped around Viktor.

“Worth a point?” Viktor panted back, leaning in for another kiss.

“No, but it was hot.”
Yurio labelled them as newlyweds, as did Mila, and all of Yuuri’s family. It was the first thing they called Yuuri and Viktor when they announced that they’d be moving in together. Phichit didn’t call them newlyweds, he said they weren’t quite that yet, pointing a look at Viktor when he did. Even Chris called them so, after he had informed Yuuri he would be making a visit soon (after having left his job for a man whose safety he cared too much about). Yurio didn’t say it with much affection though, especially not when he was told that he’d need to move in with them.

Yurio’s room was on the far side of the apartment, converted from a guest room. He had demanded to be put there when he realised that the other room was beside Yuuri’s and Viktor’s. “I am not sleeping in the room next door to the newlyweds. They’re going to wake me up fucking.”

Not that it mattered. Yurio was often out travelling often with Otabek, currently somewhere in Spain. They were gone more than they were here, travelling with the money Yurio had inherited from Yakov and the money Otabek had from his old job – the one he had left after the contract with the Russians was broken.

Yuuri could agree to some degree, that they certainly did act like newlyweds. Viktor almost seemed to take it as a competition in itself. One of the first criteria being to ‘christen’ every room of the new apartment. All but Yurio’s room, of course.

So doing it in the kitchen was not a first. Sometimes, late at night when they both wanted a midnight snack, it turned into a different sort of treat.

Thinking about it, Yuuri didn’t notice that he was void of all clothes until he felt the chill of the cool winter air against his skin. He glanced down to find his clothes on the floor, piled all around the room in a way that told him Viktor was impatient.

“I’m glad you put me on the clean counter,” Yuuri supplied as he watched Viktor tearing off his own shirt and slipping his belt from the loops of his trousers. Yuuri grabbed a hold of the loops and pulled Viktor closer until their hips touched. “I would not want to be sitting on whatever you were trying to cook.”

“I thought about it, don’t worry,” Viktor answered, hands drifting everywhere over Yuuri’s body, taking its time along Yuuri’s naked hips and thighs. “I’m hygienic.”

“My bare ass is on our counter.”
Viktor chuckled, kissing the side of Yuuri’s jaw with a smile. “I’m preparing it, ready for me to eat.”

Yuuri’s breath caught in his throat. His body flamed warmer, fighting off the cold.

“Besides, I have the sprays and stuff ready. I’ll clean up later while you’re recovering in bed.”

“Promises, promises,” Yuuri said, and made to say more but stopped as Viktor’s hand wove around his growing penis. His toes curled, his back arched. He definitely needed this after a stressful day.

He pushed at Viktor’s trousers, finally managing to drop them down after the third try. He laced his fingers under the band of his tight boxers, the type models would wear, and pushed those down too. Viktor stood proud, and each time Yuuri saw it, even if it were the hundredth time, it made him preen to know he had done this to such a gorgeous man. His soulmate, his partner, his love, his competitor. He mimicked Viktor and curled his fingers around Viktor, feeling the heated skin against the palm of his hand.

Viktor shuddered and huffed hot breath against his throat. Yuuri almost moaned at the sensation itself, feeling the muscles in his stomach knot. The first time they joined, it had been bliss. They’d practiced more as time had gone on, and they got better and better.

He stopped Viktor’s hand. “The angle is awkward,” he answered Viktor’s confused gaze. In reality, Viktor really had gotten better, and Yuuri knew that after a long day too, he was getting close. No doubt Viktor would count that as a victory in his favour and make another tally. Yuuri’s enemy side wouldn’t allow it. He hopped from the counter, pressing a kiss to Viktor’s chin as he grinned. Through hooded eyes, he captured Viktor’s entire attention. “Your meal is ready for preparation,” he whispered, deepening his voice into a husk he knew Viktor loved.

He turned around, putting himself into the position Viktor had placed him earlier with his elbows on the counter and back bent, ass presented. Except this time, he was naked with no barriers of cloth, nothing to stop Viktor’s eyes trailing hungrily up the expanse of exposed skin.

Unable to contain the tease, he said, “And don’t make as much of a mess of this as you did with the Katsudon, Vitya.”

Viktor tripped on the hallway carpet in his rush to the bedroom to get their supplies. Yuuri hid his
laughter behind his hand, heart swelling with how adorable his other half was. He managed to stop it by the time Viktor was behind him, uncapping the lube. There was a slightly rush, shown by the way Viktor almost all but chucked the lube container onto the counter with no care for it. But there was a hesitation. Just a second, but it had Yuuri glancing over his bare shoulder.

“Viktor?” he asked.

He had been worried, but that dissolved into anticipation when he saw the expression on Viktor’s face. He had a smirk, a flash of one, warmer than the smirks Yuuri saw when they first met. His gaze was staring down at Yuuri’s ass, hand holding the warming lube. One lone drop fell from his grip, leaving a string of it glistening as it hung.

“Viktor,” Yuuri repeated, feeling the knot at the bottom of his stomach tighten at the expression. It held promise, and if he had learned anything, Viktor’s promises were often… interesting.

That hot gaze snapped up to Yuuri, and all he could think was suddenly, he was prey. Where he had thought he was the one on top, it was lost with a single glance from Viktor. He gasped, feeling his heart race, cheeks burn.

“This is flavoured,” Viktor breathed, voice sending shock waves up Yuuri’s spine.

Yuuri’s gaze flickered to the container. “Yes?” he replied. He was confused, but that quickly left when he saw Viktor’s smirk grow.

Before he could ask, Viktor dropped to his knees behind Yuuri. The Japanese man made to stand, but one strong hand on his lower back stopped him. And that was the moment Yuuri realised what it was Viktor wanted to do. They’d done it a few times before, Viktor seeming eager to do it, but Yuuri had been reluctant. Ease into it, he thought. He’d never done rimming before, not with anyone before Viktor, and it felt like such an intimate thing to do, showing everything to the person you were with. It was only ever with Viktor that he even considered it.

A second of hesitation laced through him. But only for a second, because then Viktor distracted any thoughts. A tongue swiped up his skin, so sudden it had his knees buckling. He gasped, his elbows hard against the counter surface, his breath fogging on the tiles of the kitchen wall. Behind him, Viktor chuckled against his skin, tickling his sensitive area.

The tongue licked its way back down, pressing at his hole, not too hard. Slowly, almost teasing.
Yuuri felt the lower part of his back spasm with the sensation, breath harder to draw. He thought he might have gasped and stammered Viktor’s name, but he couldn’t be sure. Any coherent thought left his mind as Viktor’s tongue pushed harder, easing him to open. All Yuuri could think was of how Viktor’s tongue was inside of him.

It wasn’t like he hadn’t taken in Viktor’s fingers or his penis before. But this felt different. He could feel Viktor’s eyelashes fluttering as he blinked, his hot breath, his moans vibrating off of his skin. In his chest, he could feel Viktor’s excitement too, happiness that he could melt Yuuri like this, and pride that he had managed to do it. Because they both knew that while Yuuri wanted to take charge again, to lace his hands in Viktor’s hair and tear him from his work, he couldn’t. They’d been playing before, in the other times Viktor had done this – it never felt this good. Viktor was no longer teasing, but using all of his knowledge to make Yuuri moan. And it was working.

Viktor’s fingers then moved beside his tongue, using the previously forgotten lube and stretching Yuuri out until he was writhing on the top of the counter. His breath came out in puffs from his open mouth, no rhythm to them, and he couldn’t believe he was getting close again when Viktor hadn’t even touched his front.

It took him a few tries, but he finally managed to weave his hand into Viktor’s hair, stopping him. “Please,” was all he could say, not really understanding the words that were crashing in his head. If he could, he would let Viktor do this all day, and he knew the man would be happy to do so. But he needed more than that.

As Viktor rose, Yuuri grabbed his hip, attempting to pull him closer. Viktor took too much pleasure in remaining just out of Yuuri’s grip.

“Viktor,” Yuuri whined, turning to glare over his shoulder. “If you don’t fuck me now, I am going to deduct a point and turn this around to make you the moaning mess. And we both know I’d do a better job.”

Viktor’s smirk turning into a low growl, the competitive streak of their relationship lighting in his chest. He tore open a condom, quickly placing it on. Once done, he positioned himself behind Yuuri, guiding the head of his erection to Yuuri’s opening, making sure to lube it more for assurance.

“You keep telling yourself that while I make you scream,” Viktor whispered in his ear before he pressed in.

Yuuri gasped, the feeling of him and Viktor connecting making shivers run up his spine. Every
touch, every breath, every heartbeat of the man bending over him had him losing himself in their universe. He smiled against his arm between his moans, feeling his legs as they almost gave way. It was a good thing he was on the counter, he thought – a very good idea by his soulmate.

And with how wrapped up they were with each other, it didn’t take long for either of them to finish. Yuuri finished first, the worry of dirtying their cabinets a worry for only a second, before Viktor stopped thrusting to place both of his hands on either side of Yuuri’s head and kiss the back of his neck. He gasped in Yuuri’s ear, the low moan echoing. Yuuri felt his muscles ache as he drifted down from his high. He turned around and pressed a kiss to the side of Viktor’s face, smiling at the man he loved.

Viktor smiled back, just as much love in his gaze.

“I think we can call this a draw,” he chuckled.

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Once they were bathed, they moved to clean the kitchen, and it was after that Yuuri realised he had forgotten Mila’s letter. She and a select few others were the few who knew where Yuuri and Viktor were currently living. It was a very secretive thing, a decision made after Yakov had died.

After Viktor proposed that they ran away, Yuuri had been surprised. At first. But then he began to think about it, and it seemed as if it was the only answer that they could come to. Run away. Get away from their problems, and anything else that may arise. It wasn’t quite what they did, but the it was close enough.

‘Viktor’ died in that battle in Tokyo bay. He lay dying beside Yakov at that abandoned warehouse, caught between a firing match with the Italian siblings. Not only had Yakov and Viktor died, but so had Sara and Michele. As far as anyone knew. The bodies had been removed, theirfuneralsmourned, and no one had been any the wiser. What a shame, that Yakov and his heir had passed so suddenly. And the Don must have been missing his son and daughter, all wiped out so quickly. With barely any witnesses.

Not many knew what really happened, or that Viktor and Sara had escaped with their lives – much to the hatred of the other. Yuuri and Viktor moved away, keeping their whereabouts a secret but to their closest, and lived in America now, hidden in a small town in Oregon. Yuuri quit his bodyguard job, but not before he made some use of their advantages to keep them hidden, and took up a part-time job in the popular café in their town. Viktor changed his name, fake documents that Yuuri had procured from his own job, and so far lived without any hinderance.
There was still tension – a worry that someone would find them. Perhaps an old enemy of Viktor’s, the parts of his mafia that felt as if he had abandoned them, or the Italians. But before that happened, they’d need to figure out he was alive, and Yuuri was never letting that happen.

“I forgot,” Yuuri gasped, taking the letter from the counter top. “Mila sent us a new postcard I think? And a picture. The usual.”

Viktor finished cleaning the part of the pan he had been scrubbing away at for minutes now and took the letter from him. “Bets on where she is this time?”

“Mexico, I thought.”

Viktor pursed his lips. “I’m thinking Peru.”

Mila had sent them a postcard from Argentina a few weeks ago, and she never ventured too far from where the previous one had been. Too much of an explorer, wanting to know everything about the country before she left for another.

Viktor opened it, taking out the postcard and read it out. “Aloha from Hawaii. Oh, so we were both wrong.”

Yuuri moved to glance over Viktor’s shoulder, placing his chin there. “What about the picture?”

That was the part Viktor always was a little more reluctant about looking at. It was known between them that Mila was not travelling alone. Sara travelled with her, but she never appeared in the pictures Mila sent. Sometimes there were little hints of Sara’s presence, such as a part of her hair caught in the corner of the picture as it flew in the wind, or her shoulder, or her facing the other way. But Mila had kept her promise, and Viktor never saw Sara’s face again.

This picture was of Mila on a beach, expensive sunglasses donned, bikini on, one hand holding a cocktail with a little umbrella while the other held her camera. She was reclining on a beach chair with a beautiful rainbow of colours in the sky behind her. Sundown. Beside her, a tell-tale darker shoulder with darker hair sat on the chair beside her. Nothing more seen.
“She looks like she’s having fun,” Yuuri commented, trying to distract Viktor some.

“Doesn’t she?” He stared at the picture, a little too intently. Yuuri knew the man missed his friend, having grown up with her, and the knowledge that he wouldn’t be able to see her again for a long time upset him sometimes. More so when he knew he caused problems since he didn’t want to be anywhere near her soulmate.

Yuuri gently took the picture from his hands, moving to place the picture in a box with the other pictures Mila had sent them. When he was beside Viktor again, he took hold of the man’s hand and guided him into the living room.

“I’m not done cleaning.”

“It can wait,” Yuuri argued.

“But we haven’t had food yet either.”

“I can order a delivery.” Yuuri pushed Viktor so that he was lying on the sofa and he lay with him, cuddling close. “I have three days off in a row after tomorrow. How about we go travelling too?”

“Where to?” Viktor asked. His voice already sounded softer as he sifted his hands through Yuuri’s hair.

“I don’t know. It can be anywhere. We probably have to stay in the state though, we only have three days. But somewhere out of town. We could go to Portland. Have a getaway somewhere.”

“Sounds nice.” It might have sounded as if Viktor was pushing away the idea, but Yuuri knew his consideration meant he’d be spending tomorrow looking up expensive hotels and organising a sightseeing tour. “Are you looking forward to tomorrow?”

Yuuri leaned up, a smile growing on his face. “I’m so excited. I’ve been waiting for this for such a long time.”

Viktor couldn’t contain his own smile, eyes gazing over Yuuri’s expression. “And is Phichit
“He’s more anxious. It’s going to be his big returning debut to the Finals after… you know. But I’ve been watching his season, and he’s been so good.” He wanted to go to some of the competitions and support Phichit that way – he’d been out to Detroit to see him training a little in the runup to the new skating season, not just for support, but to also guard him from the flocks of mass media that were hounding him.

As they had discussed, Phichit stuck to the story they had come up with, after telling Celestino everything. There had been a press conference, a room filled with reporters asking insensitive questions for sensitive answers. Their flashes were almost blinding when Phichit and Yuuri walked onto the platform. As they had planned, they told the world a story close to the truth. A fragile situation. Scary times. Unsure if Phichit was going to get hurt. Yuuri introduced himself as Phichit’s bodyguard, clad in a disguise to make sure he would not be recognised in the future – he didn’t need Viktor’s old enemies chasing him down and finding the supposedly dead mafia heir.

They answered all the questions that they could, but as Yuuri had predicted, it wasn’t enough. Pushy questions were thrown their way, and no answer was satisfying enough. They pressed and they hounded Phichit, more so now that the skater was back out on the ice and in the competitions. It had taken so much training and mental preparation for the young skater to get there. But the media didn’t care. Wherever Phichit was, they followed, pushing for more answers. But Yuuri pulled his previous strings and his former client never needed to worry – bodyguards and hidden interceptors were always close by.

As the season wore on, Phichit became more confident in himself. The mistakes he had made at the start of the season had been ironed out now, drowned out by the numerous screaming fans of his – fans that had only become more supportive since his return. His follower count of social media blew up until not even Phichit could believe it, and he was quickly dubbed as the fan favourite.

Yuuri wanted to follow Phichit through his season, but Phichit had refused. He insisted that after spending months so focused on him, Yuuri should turn his attentions to starting a new life with Viktor.

“I’ll visit you as soon as my season is over, with a big gold medal hanging from my neck,” Phichit promised with that same cheeky grin he had been sporting more and more often. Gone was the small, terrified boy that Yuuri had first met – replaced with a bright, smiley man with a hint of new wisdom and darkness at the back of his gaze. The trauma was still lurking, making some nights harder for Phichit to sleep through than others, and he flinched if someone moved too quickly. But Yuuri had all the faith in the world that if anyone was going to get through it, it was going to be Phichit.
And after a trying returning season, Phichit had made it to the Grand Prix Finals, favourite to get a podium finish. Yuuri hadn’t been into figure skating before, but his heart bounded every time he saw the stands, the glimmer on the ice surface, every time he saw Phichit glide onto the screen.

Viktor smiled at Yuuri’s excitement, expression contagious. “It’s going to be an early rise, you know. Barcelona is nine hours ahead of us.”

Yuuri shook his head. “It would be easier for us if I didn’t go to bed to begin with.”

“Oh god,” Viktor groaned, leaning his head back against the arm of the sofa. “Right. Maybe I should have a nap this evening just in preparation.”

“You don’t have to watch it, if you don’t want to,” Yuuri said carefully. Viktor had seen little bits of the season, and he’d passed if off as a disinterest in the sport – though Yuuri knew that was a lie. He saw Viktor’s expression and felt his elation when skating came on. Yuuri liked to think that in another life, it might have been Viktor’s vocation. But it was because it was Phichit, and somewhere deep down, Viktor still felt guilt at how he and Phichit had met. They spoke about it, Yuuri and Viktor, in the first few weeks they had moved in. Yuuri wanted to clear the air, and Viktor admitted all that he could.

“No, no, I want to,” Viktor said just as reluctantly. Yuuri could hear the truth behind it. “It’s an important competition, right? And I have a feeling I’ll be seeing more of Phichit, with how close you two are, so I need to make an effort.”

Yuuri could feel how hard it must have been for his soulmate to admit it. He sat up in Viktor’s lap and bent for a kiss. “Thank you, Viktor.”

“Anything for you, Yuuri,” Viktor whispered back.

Yuuri could feel the swell of appreciation in his chest, pulling his lips into a smile. He wasn’t sure if it was his or Viktor’s, but at this point it didn’t matter. Since moving in, their emotions often mixed up like that – there were times where he wasn’t sure which one had felt it to begin with, but it often bled into the other. It got to the point where Yuuri wasn’t sure how he had ever lived through life with just himself, how he had felt something as dull as only his emotions.

“Cheesy bastard,” Yuuri replied.
Yuuri couldn’t contain the racing of his heart. As the popcorn grew in the microwave, each pop sounded like the thumping in his heart. He glanced to where Viktor was already sat on the sofa, setting up the livestream with the back of his head still ruffled from the long nap he had taken in the lead up to this.

Once the popcorn was finished, Yuuri piled it all into a bowl. He sat beside Viktor, placing the bowl in his lap, and eagerly anticipated the beginning of the competition.

The ice was clean, stands filled, commentators mentioning the talent this year. Every time Phichit’s name was spoken, his eyes flicked across the screen.

“It’s going to be okay, Yuuri,” Viktor assured, an edge to his voice from his own tension. Yuuri’s was bleeding into his own emotions, and Yuuri could see how the muscles in his back were straining from the stress.

“He’s going to be brilliant,” Yuuri replied just as much for himself as Viktor. He cupped a handful of popcorn and brought it to his mouth, leaning into Viktor’s side as his soulmate placed his arm over the back of the sofa. “I was just texting him. He says Celestino is practically pulling his hair from his own skull.”

“And Phichit? How is he feeling?”

Yuuri raised his eyebrow, pointing an obvious glance his way. “Even more nervous. He doesn’t feel like he’s done enough training, like some of the moves he had by muscle-memory before are harder to do now.”

“Understandable, after months of barely any skating.”

“I told him that. And I told him that he’s done brilliantly this whole season so far. But I think with all the expectation he has on him, it’s getting to him.” Yuuri took another handful, trying to contain his need to slap away Viktor’s hand when the Russian reached for some. “But it helps that he’s made his programmes to the soundtrack of his favourite film.”
“That should help.”

“He gets lost in it easier then,” Yuuri agreed. “And wait until you see his costumes, Viktor. They just shine so beautifully. I told him that they were just made for him. I’ve never seen clothes that better suit someone.” He paused, seeing Viktor’s glance. “Apart from your clothes, of course.”

Viktor chuckled. “Of course.”

The competition began. Yuuri leaned forward, popcorn being taken from his lap before it could fall from the floor.

The commentators mentioned Phichit’s disappearance last season and how he had been gone for months. The same rumours, the same details, spoken again as Phichit skated onto the screen and waved at his fans. His eyes were alight, taking in the lights and the flashing of the cameras. The commentators mentioned how Phichit had appeared out of the blue again, claiming witness protection had whisked him away and he had a bodyguard with him at the press conference that had crushed previous view ratings. The infamous skater hadn’t said more about it, even when pressed, since.

Yuuri knew Phichit wanted it to be a part of his past now. He didn’t want to delve into it again, and he fought harder to keep the life he loved so much now that he had it back. And Yuuri would fight with him.

Yuuri watched the other skaters with little interest, only taking notice of their names, their songs and their skill. In his opinion, none compared to Phichit. He knew that some had become quick friends with Phichit through the season, Leo and Guang-Hong being the closest. Yuuri often got pictures of them on social media from Phichit’s accounts. But Yuuri still didn’t think they compared to the skill Phichit skated with.

Phichit was the fourth to take to the ice. He basked in the lights of the stage, the red of the costume complimenting his skin tone and gold glittering so bright that it drew attention to his beautiful smile. He had his hair slicked back, something different to the wild mess Yuuri saw in his disappearance. He looked like a king, Yuuri thought, but he supposed that was the point.

As the song began, the crowd clapped and sang along. Yuuri hadn’t known the film before, but had since watched it. He clapped along with the crowd, hoping that as Phichit skated, he could imagine Yuuri supporting all the way from America.
Viktor had slowed his eating of the popcorn, almost missing his mouth as his gaze was stuck to the screen. There was something about the movements, the dancing, the way that they glided almost impossibly on the ice that struck them both. The skaters, especially Phichit, made it seem almost easy. There was just something so freeing about it. So graceful, so beautiful, so compelling.

Yuuri could see the moment Phichit lost himself in the music. His gaze looked only forward, composed, stuck on what it was he was doing. As the camera zoomed, Yuuri saw his smile, soft and for only himself.

His hard work paid off. He slipped on one jump, the commentators calling it the quadruple salchow. He slipped and touched the ice with his hands but was quickly back up without having lost his rhythm. It jarred him a little from the immersion, but Phichit made no more mistakes.

He finished with his final pose, a massive smile on his face as the sweat beaded in his forehead, chest rising to catch breath. The cameras found his face easily, and his eyes were shining with unshed tears, pride prevalent. Yuuri could see easily how such a soft, bubbly man could gain so many fans.

By the end of the Short Program, Phichit was second behind his good friend Leo. By the time it finished, it was easily two o’clock in the morning, growing closer to three. Their popcorn was finished, Viktor’s eyes gazing blurrily into the screen. Both Yuuri and Viktor had careers that involved late nights and early rises, Viktor almost becoming nocturnal for some years. But since becoming, as Yurio liked to call it, ‘domestic, they’d achieved a much more normal sleeping routine. It was already far later than they usually slept by.

“Come on,” Yuuri urged, switching off the television. “Let’s go to sleep.”

“When’s the Free Skate?” Viktor asked. He rose on shaky knees and stretched his arms above his head, yawning as his bones popped.

“That’s tomorrow. And that one is going to be an early rise for us.”

Viktor groaned. “How early?”

“Well, it’ll be in the afternoon in Barcelona. So… I’ll set the alarm for four or five in the morning?”
Viktor groaned louder, reminding Yuuri of a child.

Yuuri took hold of his hand, leading him down the hall towards their bedroom that was so loudly beckoning them. In the months that they had lived here, Yuuri was proud of how they managed to make their small space their own. Pictures lined their walls, newly taken, their clothes in their wardrobe, Viktor’s aftershave settling subtly in the air. “But once it’s finished, and Phichit has gotten his medal, we’re free to go travelling.”

“That’s some reward for an early morning, I guess,” Viktor replied.

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Yuuri was just as much a mess of nerves as he had been the day before. He clutched onto Viktor hard, eyes barely glancing from the screen, watching as skaters came and finished their programmes. He eyed the scores, wondering if it was too high for Phichit to overtake or if it was low enough for him to crush.

As Phichit came onto the screen, he held Viktor harder again, almost feeling the pain of his hold on himself too through their connection. But Viktor wasn’t saying anything, hiding his gritted teeth behind the cover of his hand. He tried to remain indifferent, but Yuuri knew his heart was hammering just as much as his own. Both hearts were pushing against his rib cage, flushing the blood through his ears.

Phichit looked stunning in his glittering blue costume. His hair was slicked back again, bright eyes finding the camera and winking. His smile was slightly strained, stress filtering into his expression. But that was soon lost as he danced into his programme.

And this one was just as beautiful as the last. Yuuri was captured, reaching for the outline of the phone in his pocket. He was ready to text as soon as Phichit’s performance was over, eager to write out the extent of his feelings.

As the programme was coming to its end, a crescendo of finishing notes, Yuuri stood up, vaguely aware that Viktor was doing the same. His breath was hard to draw, and his hands were gripping the sides of his top in stress.

There was one issue. Phichit’s stamina was not what it once was, and it was clear he was growing wearier as the Free Skate wove on. He was breathing hard, pushing harder to jump, sweat
glistening as it fell from his skin. He almost under rotated a jump. It was a close thing, and Phichit had to push to be able to finish it. But it worked. He landed with only a slight wobble, the commentator reflecting on the issue.

But Phichit finished with the booming of the crowd, voices raised in applause and claps that vibrated through the air. Phichit bowed low to them, a grin peeking from his panting lips. Yuuri wanted to cheer with them, but the anxious energy wasn’t gone quite yet.

He watched, frozen, as Phichit settled into the Kiss and Cry with his coach, a man that seemed just as stressed as Yuuri was. Celestino had been very good in the time Phichit had returned. Yuuri met him face to face at the press conference, after the man had been told everything. His only worry was that Phichit was safe, that he had all the support he needed, including a therapist to talk about the time he had been away – if he so needed or wished it. Yuuri and Celestino exchanged numbers to keep an eye on Phichit. He’d been very stressed in making sure that Phichit was alright to skate this season – he thought it was too early, take a year out to train properly, to rest from what he had been through. But Phichit wanted to return to normal as soon as he could. And here they were, Phichit eagerly awaiting his scores while Celestino was sweating out his worries.

Yuuri had to reread the numbers as they flashed up on screen. It took Yuuri a moment to notice that they were high, or what PB in the corner meant. But as he saw the wonder flash on Phichit’s face, his coach dropping his mouth open, Yuuri bit his lip to contain the scream that wanted to bubble from his lungs.

Phichit rose to first with one more skater to go.

If Yuuri was stressed before, then it had been nothing compared to how he felt now. His heart leaped into his throat, suffocating his breathing. As the last skater stepped onto the ice, he found himself settling further towards the edge of the seat. Viktor was copying his movements, almost wanting to glue himself to the screen.

Yuuri wished with everything that he could that Phichit would come out with a gold medal – something to validate the Thai’s worries he’d texted Yuuri on many late nights. After months away, he worried that his disappearance had hindered any chances of winning, now or in the future. He worried he didn’t belong on the ice anymore, not with the things he had done and seen, destroying the purity he saw it as. He wasn’t a simple skater anymore. He had almost killed someone.

Yuuri tried his best to make sure that Phichit felt valid, that this was what he had hoped to return to. There was no point in fighting for something and then worrying about it once you gained it back. Fight more. Maintain it and believe in it.
And despite the worry, it was already obvious that Phichit would come out of this with a podium win and a personal best. That was more than what Phichit had been hoping for. “As long as I don’t fall flat on my ass, or slam my face against the barrier, or accidentally decapitate one of the judges, it should be fine, right?” Phichit had asked. Yuuri couldn’t agree more.

Phichit didn’t win gold. The last skater, a proclaimed up-and-coming star that had won the Junior Gran Prix and World before ascending into the seniors, gained more points than Phichit and rocketed to the top. But Phichit didn’t seem to care. He hugged his coach harder, the confirmed second place to his name, and cried into the man’s shoulder.

Yuuri couldn’t stop the tears from rolling down his own cheeks, a sob almost trying to tear itself from his throat. And with the intensity of that feeling, he could feel it seeping into Viktor, causing the man beside him to almost tear up.

The fans and the professionals had said that Phichit Chulanont was a favourite for winning last year. But then he’d gone missing, unable to finish the competition and the season. On his return, some of those professionals became sour at the fact that he didn’t reveal much of his predicament. It was odd, Yuuri thought, as he watched them. A man had gone missing and came back, clearly not wanting to discuss too much about it. But these professionals acted as if he had insulted them, and so some of their comments cut hard – that Phichit would not make it to the Grand Prix Finals. He would fall back because of his lack of training in those months. It was a hard career, they said, and Phichit had missed too much of it to be a worthy competitor anymore – as if he had decided to leave it himself.

But the majority of his fans and the unbiased professionals commented on his hard work, believed that he could become what he once was. Yuuri hadn’t watched skating, not really, but even he noticed how far Phichit had come in the season.

Phichit received the biggest applause as he stood on the second-place podium. Flowers were thrown on the ice, stuffed plushies of hamsters (a fan favourite since Phichit had filled his social media with the three he had brought back from his disappearance), and a few phone numbers littering the sparkling surface.

Yuuri hoped that this destroyed the thoughts of any of those that doubted the boy, and helped to raise Phichit’s confidence. If so, then Yuuri felt like that he’d done something right. He’d done well in protecting the man, and he’d done well in allowing his client to decide his future. Many of his colleagues – or, well, many of his old colleagues – had the opinion that if it was for the sake of the client, that most options should be taken from them. Bodyguards knew best, of course, because they could be unbiased and blinded by the situation. But Yuuri didn’t agree. If anyone knew the best outcome, the best choices to make, it was the person who was living that life. It wasn’t his life
for Yuuri to make the decisions in, it was for Phichit – mistake or correct.

Once the competition was done, Yuuri snapped up his phone from where it was charging and called Phichit’s number. It felt odd, he thought for a second as the phone rang, that he didn’t have to go through a burner phone, or that he didn’t need to take measures to make sure Phichit was not found or that his own number was not taken. No matter how long he did this, he knew he wouldn’t get used to it.

Phichit answered with a scream. “Yuuri!”

Yuuri contained his own response, feeling it bubble up his chest. “Phichit, that was amazing!”

“Wasn’t it?” Phichit replied, excitement exploding in his words. “Oh my god, Yuuri, I got second. Second place. I didn’t even expect to get close to the podium, let alone slap bang in the middle of it!” His words began to melt into one another, unable to coordinate enough to be able to speak.

Yuuri understood. “You did it.”

“I did. Thank you, Yuuri. Oh my god, thank you. For, just… everything. I wouldn’t be here, with this, if it wasn’t for you. I don’t know how I could repay you properly for it.” On the other end, Yuuri could hear Phichit fiddling with the strap of the medal, hear the metal slide across his zips.

Yuuri felt a smile creep on his lips. “Then just keep fighting. Keep going and get better. That’s a good way of doing it.”

Phichit laughed. “Then you better be watching me in Worlds next year. I’m going to blow all your expectations out of the water.”

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There were many things that Yuuri was grateful for.

One was the life he and Viktor had been able to create. Another was the health of his family and friends. Those were the biggest ones, though there were many more. He could spend hours upon
hours listing them. But there never would be enough pages, enough space, enough time to be able
to list them all.

There were many things that Yuuri wasn’t grateful for, but that was something else. That didn’t
take nearly as much time. Fate, in the end, was the overall theme of that list.

Sometimes, there were days that he worried it would intervene again. Perhaps they had gotten off
lightly, and it would come and correct them. One of Viktor’s enemies would find them, or the
problems would come from their Enemy and Soulmate connection.

But Yuuri didn’t spend nearly as much time worrying about them as he had before. They surfaced
every now and then, mostly in the darkness of the night. But all he had to do was turn around and
see Viktor’s sleeping face, soft hair splayed over the pillow, skin shining under the light of the
hung moon, and he’d know that they’d get through it. They’d come this far by themselves. He’d
hug close to Viktor and let the calm breathing of his soulmate lull him back into a restful sleep.

Despite where they had come from, Yuuri found his calm in Viktor. He knew just what to say,
what to do, to help Yuuri through any worries he had, and it worked the other way around as well.
If Yuuri had any doubts to what a soulmate could do before, those were gone now.

He didn’t know what their future held, but Yuuri found he didn’t much mind that. Whatever came,
and whatever found them, they’d face it together.

He sighed as the thought occurred to him. He was cleaning the table, wiping away the left-over
popcorn that had escaped their bowls. Apparently, living with his soulmate now also made him a
cheesy idiot, not just a competitive partner. But it was true. He couldn’t think of how he had ever
lived his life without Viktor – it hadn’t been that long ago, barely a year back, but it felt like this
was the way it had always been. He didn’t have one beating heart but two, he didn’t have one set of
emotions but two, he didn’t plan for just himself but Viktor too.

His family were slowly warming to him, more now that the man had left the mafia. Still reluctant,
ever letting Viktor know where it was that the safe house had moved, but Viktor found different
ways of bonding with his family. Cooking with his mother, weapons with his sister, vintage drinks
with his father. Viktor was most likely going to be with Yuuri from now on, and so his family
agreed to give it a go. They warmed slowly, but they were getting there.

Yuuri’s trail of thought stopped as he heard soft music beginning to filter through their apartment.
It began lowly, but gained in volume slowly. He stood and sought it out.
Viktor was fiddling with the stereo Yurio had insisted on installing in the house. He was turning the knob until the volume was just right, the notes almost seeming to caress their skin. Yuuri turned his way, settling his hands on his hips with a raise of his eyebrow.

“What are you doing?” he asked, a hint of amusement in his voice.

As an answer, Viktor moved towards him, holding out one hand. Yuuri took it, gasping as Viktor pulled him close.

“Tell me,” Viktor whispered. “If I harvested all the sparkles in your eyes, could I light up the whole world?”

“Oh my god, Viktor,” Yuuri groaned, attempting to pull away. But Viktor wouldn’t let him. He pulled him closer until their chests touched and Yuuri’s nose almost touched Viktor’s.

“Or if I harvested the warmth of your skin, could I stay warm forever?”

As he spoke, Viktor guided Yuuri into a dance, stepping slowly to the rhythm of the mellow song. Yuuri allowed himself to be moved, curious to see where it was Viktor was taking this, all the while feeling the warmth in his chest rise to his cheeks.

“If I showed the world your smile, would everyone be as obsessed with you as I am?”

Yuuri rolled his eyes but didn’t say anything. Viktor had become more open with his feelings since his near-death experience. Sometimes, it was hard to listen to, especially if Yuuri was concentrating on things that could not be avoided – such as needing to get to work, or cooking, or cleaning as they were meant to do.

“If I paid you for every time you made my heart skip a beat, I would be bankrupt several times over.”

“Viktor,” Yuuri began, unsure on where it was he was going to take it. His words were stolen from him as Viktor twirled him around, chuckling at his expression. Before Yuuri could gain back his balance, Viktor dipped him, taking away his breath.
“Not nice, is it?” Viktor laughed, pulling him back up. “Having your breath stolen from your lungs so suddenly. But it’s how I feel every time I see you.”

Yuuri grinned, standing on the tips of his toes and cupping Viktor’s cheeks in his hand. He gazed into Viktor’s eyes, the same pair he knew he’d be looking into for the rest of his life, and said, “You’ll get no mercy from me.” He pressed a kiss to Viktor’s lips softly, loving the warmth of Viktor’s skin, his breath against his face. Once he knew he had Viktor in the palm of his hand, he held his soulmate’s hand, guiding it to his hip and holding the other in a dance. He guided Viktor into a faster dance, ignoring the way the music clashed with their steps.

For a while, they danced. They stepped on one another’s feet, giggled, basked themselves in the moment. Until, as always, Viktor decided to break that warm moment with a whim that was so common of the man.

“We should get a dog,” he hummed. Yuuri stopped, blinking in confusion as Viktor’s eyes widened. The more he thought about it, the better the idea seemed to the Russian. “Actually, why stop at one?”

Chapter End Notes

That's it! That's the end *cries in a corner*. It never gets easier to let go of a story. I've done three multi-chapter fics now and each one made me so sad when it came to the end. But I guess now it's on to planning the next adventure then!

Thank you so much for everyone that read this, left kudos, comments and supported me. It amazes me that people would take precious time out of their day to do this for me, and I never expected it, but every day I fall more in love with this fandom and the people in it. Of course, every fandom has their bad people, but they've been so drowned out by all the lovely and brilliant people I've met and interacted with, that I never noticed the bad. Everyone's been so supportive. I really feel like I grow more and more as a writer with every story because of that support.

So thank you so much! Thank you for giving me something to look forward to every week, something to work towards, something to enjoy!

I should also say sorry for all the cliffhangers... but look! Happy ending!! I promised it! I know it's been quite a few months of touch and go, but they're happy! :D And my beta pointed out that there was seven pages (!?!?!?) of smut... Does this make up for it? XD

Thank you all for everything, <3<3<3<3 (I'll stop here before before this gets too long)
If you'd like to find me on tumblr, you're welcome to come and say hi!

here

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!