**Between Sixes**

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<td>BDSM, Explicit Consent, equestrian AU, Dom Victor Nikiforov, Sub Katsuki Yuuri, Tags May Change, Psychological Drama, Angst, Fluff, Smut, References to eating disorders, Depiction of Discomfort while Eating, Impact Play, Facials, Masturbation, Dirty Talk, (slut whore dirty... stuff like that), Slow Burn ish? Depends on what you're burning for, Oral Sex, Sex Toys, Bondage, Edging, Sensation Play, psychological punishment, Exhibitionism, Party Play, BDSM Play Party, Orgasm Control, Minor Violence, Corrupting of the Innocent, Virgin Katsuki Yuuri, Biting (not breaking skin), Nude Photos, Explicit Video, Anal Fingering, Marking, Fear Play, Sounding, Suspension Bondage, Kinbaku, PTSD Trauma, Binge Drinking, Panic Attacks, Attempted Purging, Violet Wand, Kink Shaming, Wax Play, Intercrural Sex, BDSM Slave Auction, Needle play, Furries, Attempted Mind Fucking, (this one sounds a whole lot scarier than it is., It's not a psychological mindfucking., It's a BDSM term, where the sub is in a predicament type of set-up, one of the milder tags in here actually.), Serious Animal Illness, Rimming, Anal Sex, Rough Sex, CBT, Mentions of rough sex leading to injury, Intense Interrogation Scene, Character speaking about graphic animal death, Pony Play, Floor Licking, mindfucking, (again BDSM term), stun gun, Marking (tattoos)</td>
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**Summary**

When Yuri Katsuki is hired as a caretaker for an elite competitive stable owned by Viktor Nikiforov, he knows he's in for trouble with his stunningly handsome new boss. When he makes a major mistake on his first day, he learns just how far Viktor is willing to go to ease his guilty conscience.
The ever lovely Clarinda0110 is my beta for this and is also the artist for the stunning art found below. Thank you, my dear! If you like her artwork please like/reblog on Tumblr!

If you're just starting this, I highly recommend downloading a copy now. I'm very likely to pull it down soon, and I don't want to do that on someone in the middle of the story.
(1) You ever do something you're certain is a terrible idea from the very beginning? Yuri couldn't be more certain the silent whisper screaming this was exactly what he was doing was completely right as he shook the steady, warm hand extended out from brilliant Caribbean Sea eyes—aqua blue with flecks of green—beneath a shimmering fringe of platinum hair and above the most charming smile ever placed upon the face of a man with his own clammy, weak hand, eyes wild with his faltering attempts to present himself with the barest hint of dignity.

It doesn't go well.

Though that shouldn't have been a surprise at that point. He wasn't sure why this was a terrible idea, but he felt the certainty of his pending destruction straight through his bones into the deepest reaches of the universe they were created from.

Maybe it was because half his pathetic grasps at dignity were thwarted by the skin-tight, snow-white breeches hugging the sublime ass of the man whose hand he'd been shaking for far too long now.

He should let go. He doesn't.

He continued assaulting the man with what had to be the worst handshake he's ever experienced as Yuri contemplated that perhaps it was the knee-high black leather boots and dressage whip hovering just inches away. That whip striking the calf of those leather boots had been taunting him with a sound that went straight to his cock with every crack over the past hour as he followed the owner of the sublime ass on a tour of the exquisite stables. The whip had built from the occasional, accidental swing tapping against his boot as he held it casually in his hand as they walked to something much more... purposeful.

Maybe it was the way the offer of employment extended in that handshake in no way matched up to the stumbling, clipped, absolutely idiotic answers he had given to every single question asked of him right up to, and including, his very name, which had only come out of his mouth after a pause so lengthy the owner of the sublime ass had said, "Forgotten it, have we? It said on your application it's Yuri Katsuki?" which he had answered with a slow nod before words finally tumbled out. "Ye—yes. Katsuki—I mean—Yes. Yuri Katsuki. That's, uh, me."

That had been the critical moment when this had gone from a relatively simple interview which should have given him only minimal nerves over the most basic questions required to ask someone if they know how to throw food and water to a horse and clean up their shit to possibly the most humiliating experience of his life. Maybe second.

Or, more likely, that critical moment had come when the man rode up, looking every bit of a prince in shining armor, to greet him from the back of an elegantly fine-boned, yet still sturdy, dapple gray warmblood—Dutch, if he wanted to judge by the refined head—in a crimson polo shirt that hugged his trim waist, stretched over his broad chest, and exposed the thick (but not too much) muscle wrapping his arms down to gentle hands cueing his fifteen hundred pound horse to halt with all the balance and lightness of a ballerina with a tiny squeeze of his fingers, smiling so brilliantly, the man looked like he ate diamonds for breakfast.

Every question past that first had spiraled him further into this hell-sauna of anxiety and mortification.
He'd only been on one interview before in his life, but he had to think questions about his favorite places to hang out and his personal hobbies were well outside the scope of typical interviews. He was certain that, "How many lovers of yours will I have to make security passes for on a weekly average?" was not something included in your typical interview. Though, he maybe had a valid reason for asking as he would be living on the premises. The twitch of a smile on the man's face when he blurted out a horrified, "None!" made him doubt the validity of that question's inclusion.

Or maybe it was because: even though his mind had wisely decided to jump ship and abandon him there with his stupid expression and still shaking the hand of the most gorgeous man on the planet, Viktor Nikiforov (owner of the stable and the sublime ass) had not stopped shaking his hand either.

An interview is supposed to go both ways. The employer must ensure the candidate is a suitable, competent person for the position, and the candidate is supposed to determine if they will be comfortable working there and the position won't cause them undue stress. As he thanked the man profusely for the offer and accepted it with an agreement to move into the cottage behind the stable on Sunday and begin work the week after through yet another mess of words, he knew they had both failed spectacularly in their tasks.

"It was such a pleasure to meet you, Yuri. I look forward to working with you." He finally released his hand with a smile that was almost a smirk as they stood by the gated exit.

"Thank you, sir! I look forward to serving you!" He bowed and wished he could go all the way down to bury his head in the dirt as the man gave a chuckle that said he in no way missed the second way that could be interpreted.

"Please," he placed his finger under his chin as he rose from his bow, lifting his eyes to meet his, "call me Viktor. At least when we're in public." He gave him a heart-stopping wink then turned on his heel and walked away with a hard crack of the whip on fine Italian leather as a parting gift. Yuri had no choice but to watch him and his sublime ass until he disappeared from view into the stables.

Finally released from the encounter, he turned around and blushed through every inch of his body as the security guard sitting in the box by the gate raised his eyebrow and smirked as he pushed the button to open the gate.

This was—without a doubt—a terrible idea.
The numbers in the fic correspond to songs on a little playlist on Spotify I made if you want to check it out.
1. Heartland by Tom Walker

Also, heads up! The comment section is not spoiler-free! Things in later chapters are discussed in comments in earlier chapters.
Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

Yuri moves in. With help.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

(2) "This is a horrible idea," he reassured himself as he drove his rusted red beater of a car from the early nineties, nothing more than a flattened rectangle on wheels, through the wrought iron gates.

The security guard had opened it and given him his code to access it himself only after checking his ID and the paperwork he had on him at least ten times. This was clearly not the same security guard from yesterday who would not have forgotten his humiliation that easily.

Just the fact there was a security guard stationed there twenty-four seven was enough to convince him he in no way belonged there; not even to clean up shit.

The presence of a security guard made sense. The cheapest horse in here was worth about as much as a luxury car with many closer to the cost of a luxury house on the coast. Plus, the lure of prize money also lured plans of sabotage, and Viktor Nikiforov wore the biggest target of anyone competing on the circuit today. Yuri's presence, however, made absolutely no sense as evidenced by the security guard's searching for any reason not to open the gate to him.

Had he known this was Nikiforov's stable, he wouldn't have even applied. The sparse Craigslist ad he had replied to in no way indicated... this. Maybe the fact an actual living wage on top of free room and board was being offered should have clued him in to something being way off here, but the lure of an actual living wage on top of room and board assured he didn't look that Trojan horse in the mouth.

His last job had offered a small "converted apartment" in the hayloft that paid him a "weekly stipend" rather than an actual salary. The stipend was roughly enough to pay for groceries and gas and a bit of toothpaste, and that was about it. And when that job ended suddenly with no savings in the bank, he had found himself up shit creek without a paddle.

The weakened engine mounts he'd been warned about months ago rattled through his teeth, getting closer to dropping his engine right on the tree-lined cobblestone road with every length of gray stone he gained. He drove past acres upon acres of pastures lined in white flex-rail fencing curving around the corners filled with once peaceful horses. Viktor had taken such care and expense to protect his horses, yet here he was disturbing their peace and rattling their nerves with his mere presence.

He'd managed to avoid this on the interview by parking his car outside the gate, but now his comings and goings would be marked with the snorting horses in the pastures who were on guard and assessing to see if this monster would strike.

Turning at the hill overlooking the expansive stables covered in ivory stone blocks, he took the second path leading to his misguided destination.
He pulled up to the small yellow cottage he would be living in, and the final blow of: this is a horrible, terrible, certain to end in disaster idea, struck him over the head with the sight of Viktor Nikiforov waiting at the front door, again in those cruel white breeches and black boots and a sapphire polo. His car limped to a stop in the driveway, and Viktor stepped forward to greet him with his hand extended—for some ungodly reason—and a smile that flickered with his eyes being drawn between him and the car he drove up in.

Viktor clasped his hand and smiled brightly. "Welcome, Yuri! I'm so excited you're here. I hope you're just as excited to be here."

"Uh, yeah."

Their hands bobbed stupidly up and down.

"Great! I'll help you unload your things and get settled in, Yuri."

"That's really not necessary!" He finally jerked his hand away to thrash his hands in front of him as his voice squeaked into the cracking found on pubescent teenage boys. "I can do it myself!"

"Nonsense, Yuri. The job will go faster with two of us, yes?"

"Ye—yeah. But it's okay! Really! I don't mind it taking longer! I'll do it myself, please!" Dear god no.

"Ah, but Yuri, teamwork is so important to me. I like to establish with my employees early on that any job they can do as a team is highly encouraged as it's almost always done more efficiently that way."

With no way out, he squeaked his acceptance to Viktor's approving nod, cringing as the man opened the door to his backseat and grabbed two of the trash bags he had shoved his clothes in with only a slight hesitation of his hand. He turned back around with his beaming smile intact and headed for the front door.

Yuri peered into his car. An open sleeping bag and pillow splayed over the backseat, messy stacks of books crumpled on the floor, scattered bags of junk food in various stages of being consumed filling the rest. It looked exactly like what it was: someone's temporary home.

He grabbed the sleeping bag and pillow and his bag of toiletries and the remaining bag of clothing and followed him in. He paused at the door to remove his shoes just as Viktor was coming back out from what must be the bedroom.

"Ah! I'm sorry." Viktor glanced sheepishly down at his boots on the hardwood floors. "You're Japanese. I should have guessed this would be rude, but these are so hard to take off and put on, and we're going in and out and..." The helpless look on his face as he trailed off transformed his aura in an instant from one of domineering confidence to something closer to a child seeking forgiveness of innocent sins.

His shoulders dropped a little away from his ears as he gave him a small smile. "No, it's okay. You're right it's kind of a pain when you're going in and out like this. It's just a habit for me." He slipped the sneaker hanging halfway off his foot back on and stepped into the house. He had to admit it felt as wrong as a wool sweater two sizes too small, but the smile that returned to Viktor's face made the discomfort a little more bearable.

He followed Viktor back to the room he had placed the bags in. On the white dresser was a large bouquet of pink peonies, coral and apricot ranunculus, and red and yellow poppies with white fluffs.
of baby's breath filling the spaces. Next to it, an equally large gift basket full of ridiculously expensive gourmet foods.

The rest of the room had been fitted with an elegant but cozy décor. Soft white bedding and a dove gray blanket folded across the foot of the large bed and taupe shiplap walls gave it an inviting softness. A yellow and gray paisley wingback chair tucked into a nook created by two large open windows jutting out at an angle overlooked a garden of wildflowers and the back pastures with horses grazing on the lush grass of spring. He took a deep breath of the fresh air ruffling the white curtains. Even with his eyes closed, he could picture the scene perfectly with every note kintling through the scent.

When he opened his eyes again, a blush touched his face as he saw Viktor staring at him with a bit of a silly grin on his.

"Are the accommodations to your liking?"

"Uh, yeah, um. It's great. Thank you." He shifted the armload he still hadn't set down as he had no idea where to put it that wouldn't make its outofplaceness painfully obvious.

Viktor walked over to the closet and opened the door. "Would here work, Yuri? I don't think you'll be needing a sleeping bag anytime soon unless you're fond of camping." His tone shifted ever so slightly from his smirking lilt that seemed to be the default to one a shade darker—a bit more insistent.

"Ah, no. I mean, yes. The closet works." He placed the bag of clothes next to the dresser where Viktor had set the other two then shuffled over and dumped the sleeping bag and now superfluous pillow onto the closet floor.

They made another trip out with Viktor grabbing the books from the floor and stacking them neatly on the seat while Yuri hurriedly shoved bags of junk food into his arms with his face blushing hard as Viktor watched him. He couldn't tell if his expression was one of judgment or concern with how little it expanded beyond interest.

One of the bags of Cheetos on the top of his mound tumbled off. Viktor grabbed it and set it back on top of the pile with his mouth open like he was about to speak, but then shut it firmly. He was probably second-guessing his desire to say, 'You know, you'd be a little less tubby if you laid off these snacks and ate some real food instead.'

He'd be right, of course. He’d gotten a bit out of shape since his last job ended, and he had no way to purchase or cook real food. It'd been three months since he started living in his car, and while he held back most of the bulk his body would have loved to cling to with daily trips to the gym to shower and work out his stress, his lack of any sort of real nutrition had softened him past anything you could call defined.

Viktor shifted back out of the car and repositioned himself to grab the wall of books he had stacked on the seat. He took them all in one go, making those flawlessly toned arms ripple around the deep stacks. Was he trying to show off? Whether he was trying to or not, he certainly was as he walked into the house with that sublime ass tightened even more to brace against the weight. Yuri followed with his far less impressive armload of snacks braced against his soft stomach.

He deposited them on the kitchen counter while Viktor brought the books to the bedroom. He was going to have a roommate here, and his stuff had claimed parts of the living room with a large flat screen tv, gaming console, and a copy of The King and The Rider on the coffee table. Looked good so far. Only a vast movie collection to add to that list. No dirty clothes or other... weirdness.
He grabbed the few pairs of shoes left in his car and left them on the shoe rack at the front door then headed back into the bedroom where Viktor was placing the books on the bookshelf after inspecting each cover. He was so absorbed in his task he didn't notice Yuri come into the room and stop just inside the doorway.

He recoiled at the invasion of privacy before curiosity took over and made him observe. And really, is a book collection really such a private thing? Yes. Nothing could be more revealing about a soul than what they choose to fill it with. Why was Viktor so interested in his?

He picked up the next book and ran his fingertips over the cover as he read it then smiled and placed it on a random spot on the shelf. The next one he flipped through, stopping at a few points to read a little deeper then placed that one in another random location as well. What are you doing? You can't just put them wherever you feel like. There has to be an order.

His body tensed more and more as Viktor kept loading the books onto the shelves in completely random locations. His hand paused as he reached for one of the last books in the stack. Flushing at his ears and the back of his neck, he picked it up and read the cover intently. What was so interesting about this—Oh no. Viktor turned to the nightstand and opened the drawer to deposit the book he had entirely forgotten he possessed: The Gay Man's Bible to Self-Love and Mind-Blowing Sex.

Part self-help primer; part how-to according to the back cover, his old coach had given him it after he came out to her for both practicality and the utter delight she had at watching his face turn sixty shades of red. How was it in that stack of books? He hadn't seen it in years, and it wasn't there when he moved his stuff into the car. Viktor had stretched under the front seat to grab some books that had gotten shoved under there. Oh god. It must have been stuck under there this whole time until Viktor unearthed it. Is jumping in his car and leaving never to return an option here?

Viktor turned back and blushed hard upon spotting him. "Yuri! I'm—I'm so sorry. I really didn't mean to... All of this, actually." He locked eyes on him with a deflated expression. "I thought I was just being helpful and getting to know each other a little, and I didn't realize I was... invading your personal life so much. I thought you were refusing my help because you didn't want to be impolite, and I didn't think about the fact that you might have had specific reasons for refusing.

"I wanted to apologize at the car, but I didn't know if it would be better to pretend like I didn't know or to apologize, and well, you know which one I chose. And again, here, I didn't mean to invade your privacy. I was just curious as to the type of books you read and, again, trying to be helpful. I'm very sorry, Yuri."

His hands tightened at his sides as mortification boiled over into anger. "You should be sorry! What kind of monster puts books on a shelf with no order?"

"Excuse me?"

"I was watching you. You put the fiction and non-fiction all mixed up together, and some of them are just lying in stacks, and I know there's no way that could be alphabetized with how little you looked between the covers as you put them in place. And... and I am gay, but that book is not mine! Well, it's mine, but I didn't buy it! Someone gave it to me, and I forgot I even had it as I haven't touched it in years! And I haven't even read it! And I thought I lost it somewhere, but apparently, you found it and..." His rant run out, his anger subsided to let mortification resume its natural lead.

"Hold on. You seem to be very mistaken about something, Yuri." He grabbed the last few books and shoved them into his disorder on the shelves. "Okay, come here, Yuri."

He walked over to the shelf and stood next to him. The books had been arranged by color, and the
neat stacks lying on their sides created bookends where the books would have otherwise flopped over. It wasn't clean and logical, but it was... pretty. With its own unique order.

"I'm no monster, Yuri Katsuki. I won't stand for such false accusations." That insistent tone returned as he gazed down at him.

He pushed his glasses back up that had slipped down his nose. "I... I apologize."

"Apology accepted." Right back into that smirk that ran straight through his voice up to his eyes with only a slight pause on his lips. "Those open spaces I left are perfect for filling in with photos of friends and family and knickknacks and such; those little things you collect throughout your life that don't fit anywhere but here."

"I don't collect things. And I don't have any framed pictures or anything like that."

"Really? How do you collect nothing throughout a life? How do you see the people far away from you? Or does everyone important to you live close by?"

"There's no one close by, but I have pictures on my phone. I don't need to get them printed."

"When's the last time you looked at them?"

"Huh?"

"Where's the confusion? That seems like a pretty straightforward question to me."

"Umm... I don't know."

"More than a year?"

"Yeah. I see the new ones they send me, but I guess I don't look back at them."

"That's what I figured. Most of us never do. That's why the framed ones are needed to be there to remind us even when our lives get too busy to look back. You should consider getting some of your favorites printed."

"Maybe."

"Is there anything else that needs to come in? Anything in the trunk?"

"No. This is it."

"This. Everything you own is what we carried in in two trips." Viktor looked around the room in shocked wonder.

"Yeah, this is it."

A frown crinkled his face for a moment before his bright smile flashed back on. "Well then, I guess now we have time to go for a ride, yes? What level are you at and what style of riding do you do? I have plenty of horses that should suit you."

"I don't ride." His voice dropped in every area where a voice can be measured.

Confusion settled on his face. "Yes, you do."

"No. I'm certain that I don't." His hands contracted again.
Viktor gestured to the books. "Rider Biomechanics. For the Good of the Horse. For the Good of the Rider. Ride With Your Mind," he listed off titles from the shelves. "Shall I go on?"

"Those are old. I don't read them anymore."

"You carry nothing through your life but the clothes on your back and old books you don't read on a subject you don't do?"

"I don't ride, Viktor. I'm a little tired. Can I have some time to settle in, please?"

"Right, of course." His toe kicked at the honey-colored wood floors as he glanced down. He looked back up, his domineering confidence in its natural place. "We agreed you were starting next Monday. Is that correct, Yuri?"

"I can start tomorrow if you want."

"I thought you wanted time to settle in, Yuri."

"I'll be settled by tomorrow."

"Okay then. Tomorrow it is. Come meet me in my office at six a.m., and I'll go over the procedures with you, Yuri."

"I'll be there." Six a.m. The worst part of his job.

They stared each other down in awkward silence before Viktor cleared his throat. "Right. Six a.m. I'll see you then, Yuri. Let me know if there's anything you need. I'd like you to feel comfortable here. Enjoy the rest of your day, Yuri." He nodded once and turned for the door.

"Viktor?" he heard himself call out as he turned to watch him go.

He stopped and turned back. "Yes?"

"You... You use my name a lot. When you're speaking."

A bit of that warm smile returned to his face. "Oh. That's because I wanted to make sure you remembered it this time. It's too beautiful to let it be forgotten."

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Chapter End Notes

Spotify
2. Buried Alive by Dave Not Dave
Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

Yuri gets to know his new roomie.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

He spent the rest of the afternoon unloading his clothes into the dresser and washing the dirty ones in the luxuriously convenient washer and dryer in the hallwa...
hope my little manual here will satisfy that curiosity. Now granted, this is all from my experiences and research, and the one thing you can be certain of is that everyone's experiences will be different, but I have poured as much care as I can into making this a good jumping-off point for people who can then fill in their own details along the way.

The first thing you should know about gay sex, it's almost never a smooth introduction for the newly awakened gay into this richly fulfilling world. So, gays are like little chicks hatching from an egg or something? Straight sex can be an awkward delve into the waters as well, but at least they have the support of an entire culture approving of their actions as the most natural thing in the world. For many gays, it doesn't happen like that. So, that marks our first detour from the world of sex into the world of gay sex. It typically has a lot more baggage to carry. How gay men carry this is, of course, a personal matter, but again, to give you that starting point: let's categorize it somewhat.

"I'm gay, bitches!" This category is the one I fall into. We're here. We're queer. Get used to it. It's this group of gays who screamed that slogan at the top of their lungs from the depths of their sequined booty shorts. A war cry against all that tries to shame and silence them for being who they are; they'll shove it in your face so hard you have no choice but to embrace it or run in horror. They're bold. They reject your social standards for what it means to be a man. They talk about their incredibly gay sex lives with gusto. (See what I mean about this being my category?)

The upsides? They are the champions of the gay community, making us known, forcing social agendas to open and accept us, making us impossible to shove away in some dusty closet and keep books like these from the shelves.

The downsides? Being gay tends to be their main identity. "What are you doing this weekend?" "Being gay." "What's your favorite book?" "The Gay Man's Bible." (Why thank you.) "What are your dreams for the future?" "To be gayer." It can be hard to get to know them as just a person for their lovers, friends, and themselves. My advice if you're in this category? Don't forget you're a person first and a gay person second.

Definitely not this one.

The closeted gay. Oh, this category just makes my heart ache. These are the ones who have chosen to hide their gay identity. How deeply they hide it depends on the person, but it can range from: "I'm just not telling anyone," to "I hate the gays so much! Abominations all of them!" This deep end of the spectrum goes past any advice I'm capable of giving, and I wish them much soul-searching, but these are often the ones who've made the intro into being gay so rough for many of us. While I doubt any readers would recognize themselves here, if by chance you've picked up this book to throw it in the bonfire and it just so happened to fall open to this page and you recognize yourself in this deep end of the spectrum... Get help. Please. For our sake and yours. Life's too short to spend it with so much hate.

For those on the lighter end of the spectrum: How are you navigating this world between your "real life" and your "gay life?" Are your lovers forced into some form of denial as well to appease your need to hide? Do you simply not have any lovers and stick to casual hookups that can leave one feeling a bit empty without that connection? Do you neglect this part of yourself and leave yourself feeling unfulfilled and living only half a life?

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There are no upsides. Denial of one's self in any form is poison to a fulfilling and happy life. You don't have to start screaming it à la category one (unless you want to), but you should consider opening up the truth of a major part of your identity with those you trust. He wasn't in the closet. His family knew, and he wouldn't deny any questions about it. So why did this last part feel... so close to home?

The party gay. Who's got time to be serious? Life's meant to be enjoyed. They're all about loving
being gay. They don't scream quite as loud as category one, but they're there in the second line, living it up and drinking it down. Friends with most due to their enthusiastic nature and willingness to lead the group to the best of times, they make being gay seem like such a joy. They make straights sigh with a wisp of envy that they can't be so wildly fabulous.

The upsides? They shine such a happy light on this world. They make us seen as, not just easy to accept, but people to make your best friend and go shopping with.

The downsides? Life is inevitably going to get tough, and without that shimmering bubble, their life force fades. Connections built at parties and over glasses of champagne can be too weak to hold the real stuff. My advice is to make sure you have something substantial in your life you can rely on and make sure you nurture it too. If you don't, you might look back when you need it and find it withered.

The married couple. One of them is quiet and down to earth; one of them is fabulous. Both are always down for a morning of antiquing followed by brunch. They have dogs or their beautiful adopted/surrogate children that they attend to with a devotion unlike you've ever seen. They're just your normal, average couple living their lives with a little more flair.

The upsides? When you see this couple cooing over their beloved dog or fighting to get their children access to the best of life, it's hard to see them as anything other than love.

The downsides? They can cling to that "ideal married couple" image a little too hard. Their flaws get reflected out to every other gay couple, and they know it. Bless you, gentlemen, for trying so hard for the sake of all of us, but keep in mind you don't have to be perfect. Acceptance based on a false image isn't acceptance at all.

The "I'm not like other gays." Their identity isn't all about being gay nor do they deny it. They just live their lives either quietly surprising their friends and colleagues with their gayness or having them shout "I knew it!" when he casually introduces his boyfriend depending on how gay he appears to them.

The upsides? They're often well-rounded people with many hobbies and interests. They make being gay look so... normal. Like it's just one of those variations of life that have no real bearing on who a person is any more than their name or age or gender or eye color, but still helps define them all the same.

The downsides? It can be a little lonely here. You're not entirely in either community, and those who relate to you and who you relate to yourself are rare. There's a sense of alienation from both as you're right on the line. My advice? You don't need to relate to everyone, but seek out at least one deep and meaningful connection that makes you feel understood.

Of course, this list shouldn't be used to shove everyone into a neat little box nor is it exhaustive, but I think most of you will find some connection with at least one of them. You might notice there's no mention of queens or twinks or bears. Those will come in later. How you relate to being gay is more important than—

(3) A door shut and someone walked in. He tucked the book back into the nightstand and went to investigate.

A young man with caramel skin, dark gray eyes, and black hair was slipping off his shoes. He gave him the friendliest smile he's ever seen on a person's face as he waved. "You must be Yuri! Viktor told me you'd be coming in today. I'm Phichit. It's so nice to meet you." He stuck his hand out with his smile getting even wider. Geez, he can practically see the sunshine spewing from his mouth.
He grasped his hand and tried to return the smile in kind, but knew he could never match that level of friendliness. Though, something about him did make his smile quite easy to find. "Yeah, that's me. Yuri. It's nice to meet you too. So, I guess we're going to be living together, huh?"

"Yeah, I'm so happy. You look so normal."

Yuri laughed. "Normal? Was your last roommate not normal?"

"He never smiled. Not once. I swear to god. I lived with him for two years here. Not one smile. It was creepy. I mean, he was a good worker and very neat and quiet, but I was a little afraid he was going to murder me in my sleep for no reason other than he got bored."

He laughed again. "Well, I promise I won't be murdering you in your sleep because I'm bored. Maybe if you wake me up a single second before five forty-five a.m., but not because I'm bored."

Phichit laughed with far more enthusiasm than his joke deserved. "Not a morning person I take it?"

"God no. What would it take to inspire homicidal tendencies in you; just so I know what to be on guard for."

Phichit put his finger to his chin while he thought. "My hamsters. Don't mess with my hamsters."

"You have hamsters? Cute! Can I see?"

Phichit tossed his arm around his shoulders and led him to his bedroom. "Yuri, this is the start of a beautiful friendship. As long as I remember that five forty-five rule that is."

"Yeah, that'd be a terrible way to end this."

They played with the hamsters on the floor of the living room forming a circle with their feet pressed together so the three gold, silver, and bronze hamsters could run around a little. With both of them on the eye out for escapees, they chatted and got to know each other better, and his first impression of this kind, happy boy only deepened further. Phichit seemed to be delighted as well to have someone to help keep his mischievous charges in check and a roommate who most likely wouldn't murder him in his sleep.

"Viktor said I'd like you, but I wasn't too sure as he also said that about the last guy. But he did seem much more insistent this time. I'm so glad he was right. I'm thrilled you're my new roommate. Oh! We should have a party to celebrate."

"A party?"

"Yeah, with the other guys who work here. This is the only cottage on this end of the stable, but there's a cluster of a few more on the west end. I'm not sure if you saw that yet. They're all really great. There's Mila and Emil who live together—but they're not dating at all with Emil being oh-so-very gay—and Leo and Georgi who are the other set of roomies. I'll text them to come over. I'm sure they'd love to meet you."

"Oh. Um... I'm a little tired tonight..."

"Oh, right. You just moved in. Of course, you're tired. Sorry. I didn't even think about that. Next weekend then? Then we can plan a real party. I mean, you'll meet them before then obviously, but you probably won't have much of a chance to get to know each other yet."

"Uh, yeah. Next weekend should be fine." He tried to show real enthusiasm for Phichit's sake, but it
was a tough act to put up.

Phichit's smile dampened as he read his lack of enthusiasm. "Do you not want to? That's fine too."

"No, no, it sounds great! A party. I'll admit I don't go to many parties, but I'd love to get to know you all, so it sounds like it'd be a lot of fun." That was a blatant lie, but when you have a choice between lying and kicking a puppy... what's one to do but smile and lie through their teeth?

"Okay, great! I'll text them now to give them a heads up. Can you do double duty on watch for a second?"

"Sure thing." He picked up one of the little fuzz balls and brought it up to his face to give little scratches on his tiny, chubby cheek. The distinct shutter click of a phone camera sounded, and he looked up just to hear it close again on what must be the stupidest expression he's ever made. He's certain his mouth was hanging open at the very least.

"You're so adorable. Let's get one together so I can post about my new bestest roomie." He gathered up the other two hamsters and handed one over then came next to him and held the phone out at arm's length with the third hamster between their faces. "Smile!"

Yuri sucks at smiling on cue. Phichit learned this after what was supposed to be a simple selfie snap turned into a fifteen-minute photoshoot trying to get one photo that wasn't Phichit looking adorable as all hell and Yuri with a stupidly slacking face that looked like he didn't even understand the concept of a camera.

"Oh, I know. Hold still." Phichit held his camera out and held his hamster up into frame, kissing Yuri on the cheek as the shutter snapped. Phichit grinned and held up the phone for him to inspect. The photo had Phichit with his adorable scrunched up kissing face and Yuri's eyes wide with surprise, a hint of a blush and a smile. "See? Perfect."

"Yea—yeah." He gave a small smile. "It's cute."

Phichit beamed. "I'm glad you think so. I was taking a bit of a risk there. Let's try another now that you know how to smile." He held the camera out again and this time managed to capture them with their heads pressed together and surrounded by hamsters and that same blushing smile still on Yuri's face. He posted them to his social media accounts and then spent another hour setting up Yuri's own accounts and teaching him how to use them after spending the twenty minutes before that gasping in horror that they didn't already exist.

With his "internet presence" now loaded up with pictures of him, and his family in Japan somehow connected to Phichit, chatting with him like they were old friends and horrifyingly sending old pictures of him to have a lifetime supply for posting to something he called, "Throwback Thursdays," Phichit's reality was comfortably back in place while Yuri's was left reeling.

"I don't know about you, but I'm getting hungry. What do you say to pizza and a movie?" Phichit asked.

"Uh, I'm not all that hungry right now. I've got a gift basket though from Viktor that we can share if you want. It looked like there was some good stuff in there." Plus, it's free.

Phichit's eyes widened just a little. "Viktor gave you a gift basket?"

"Yeah. I kinda thought it was a welcome to the team type thing? Is that not something he usually does?"
"Um, not that I know of." His mouth formed into a little pout that twisted to the side as he thought. "But, yeah, let's do that. Do you have a preference for movies?"

"Whatever you like is fine with me. Why don't you put it on, and I'll grab the food."

"Yeah, sounds good." He collected his hamsters to put them away, still seeming to be thinking over something.

He went into his bedroom and grabbed the heavy basket, pausing at the bouquet of flowers. If a gift basket wasn't his standard dealings, the flowers certainly weren't either. He decided not to ask Phichit's confirmation of this and closed the door behind him. He set the basket down on the coffee table as Phichit rummaged in the kitchen.

"Do you drink wine?"

"Not very often, but yeah."

"Red or white?"

"Um, whatever you want."

"I have both open. Just tell me which one you want."

He eyed the ripe pears. "White. Thanks."

"Is there chocolate in there?"

"Yeah, lots of it."

"Awesome." Phichit came back out with his beaming smile leading the way and a glass of white and red in his hands. He handed the white over to Yuri and took a sip of his own to bury the surprise on his face as he spotted the basket. He gulped his sip down, pressing the glass to his chest. "Wow. That's huge. You must have really impressed him on your interview."

"I so very highly doubt that." He took a sip of his wine then set it down to start tearing off the clear cellophane. "I honestly have no idea how I even got the job. I was such a wreck."

"Really?" Phichit grabbed the remote and sat next to him.

"Yeah," he laughed, "I got so flustered, I couldn't even tell him my name; he had to tell me. And that was the high point."

"Was it the eyes or the ass?" He had the same smile, but his voice had a funny little glitch when trying to match it.

"No, neither! It—it wasn't like that at all."

"No? You'd be the only one then. It was the eyes for me, but I was at least able to remember my name."

He sighed. "The ass."

Phichit nodded. "He does have a nice ass. I should ask him what his exercise routine is."

"Why? Yours is more than fine."
Phichit's eyes widened along with a startled smile.

"Uh, I mean... I didn't mean to say that."

"Oh. That's disappointing."

"No! I mean, it's—it's a nice ass. I just didn't mean to say it."

"Don't be such a tease telling someone they have a nice ass and then trying to back out of it. That's just playing cruel games." He smiled and took another drink.

"Okay, yeah. You're right. You have a very nice ass, and nothing needs to be done to it."

"Well... I wouldn't quite say nothing... I can think of a few things that could be done..." He winked, and—as Yuri choked on his blush—grabbed a box of chocolates and popped one into his mouth. "Mmm... so good. Want one?"

"Uhm... I think I'm gonna start with the pears." He snatched one from the basket and bit right into the rosy blush that gave way to a creamy center flooded with juice dripping down his chin into the hand he lifted to catch it. The fresh sweetness seeped over his tongue, and his eyes rolled back as he moaned. "So good. Oh my god, that may be the best thing I've ever eaten other than katsudon. I'm such a mess. Sorry." He tried to slurp up the juice before it got on his shirt, but that didn't work out so well for him as most things tend to go.

Phichit's eyes were fixed on him with an intensity that made him blush as he glanced over.

"No, no, it's okay, Yuri. I'll, uh, get you a napkin." He went to the kitchen, coming back a moment later with a roll of paper towels and the bottles of wine, flipping off the lights as he went except for a small lamp next to Yuri he left on so they wouldn't stumble through the dark. He gave him a sweetened smirk. "I didn't know if you were going to need more than one."

"Probably. These are insanely good. You should have one." He took another bite of the best thing he's eaten in years. "So good."

"No, I think I'll save them for you." He popped another chocolate into his mouth and picked up the remote with his eyes staying rather intent on him. "Have you seen *The King and The Rider* yet?"

"Nope."

"It's my favorite. I think you'll like it." He grabbed the coffee table and dragged it closer so they wouldn't have to reach for the food and drinks, making them both have to lift their legs and sit sideways on the couch. "Mind if I use you as a pillow? It's a little awkward trying to sit up like this."

"Um, no that's fine. I'm still kinda a mess though."

"I don't mind. Really." He nestled into the space between Yuri's legs and the couch and leaned against his arm.

"Better?"

"Yeah, thanks. You make a great pillow."

He bit his lip. "Yeah, I should work out more and lay off the junk food."

"No, that's not what I meant! Not at all! I'm so sorry. I didn't mean for you to take it like that. You're so hot, Yuri. I just meant that you're comfortable. It feels easy being close to you."
"Um... did you just say..."

"That you're hot? Yeah, I did. And I meant it. I won't be as cruel as you were." He smiled and nudged his side with his elbow.

"Right. Um. Movie?"

"Yeah. So, I'll do my best to stay quiet, but I apologize if I start saying the lines with the actors."

He laughed. "It must really be your favorite. How many times have you seen it?"

"Oh god. It can't be counted. I could recite this entire thing from memory."

"Ah, I'm looking forward to it then if it comes with such a high recommendation."

Phichit smiled brightly and hit play. He gave up on his promise about fifteen minutes into the movie and started muttering the lines under his breath which gave way to full-on mimicking of the actor's facial expressions and gestures as the wine bottles and food disappeared into their now bloated bellies. Yuri couldn't help but laugh as Phichit became more animated, and his antics became a part of the movie itself making it so much better than the original. Not that the original was bad, but Phichit was sweet and adorable the whole way through making his version rather charming. At some point, Yuri's arm ended up around Phichit and Phichit had his head rested against his chest as they munched on the chocolates perched on Yuri's stomach and stupidly polished off the wine.

The last song of the movie played out, and Phichit stretched back across him, looking up at the ceiling, his fists thrust into the sky as he sighed. "Such a good movie. I love it so much!" He dropped his hands back down and turned to look up at him. "Tell me you loved it."

Yuri smiled. "I liked the movie, but I loved your version of the movie. It made it so much better."

Phichit contemplated him with a creased expression. "I'm not sure if I'm pleased with that answer or not. I mean, I love that you loved my acting, but you only liked the movie?"

"I loved the movie. I was just trying to say I loved watching it with you adding to it even more."

"Oh. That is a much better answer. That... that is a swoon-worthy answer."

He laughed. "Swoon-worthy? Nothing I say could ever be called that." He rummaged for a chocolate, bumping into Phichit's hand on the way. "Oh, sorry. I think there's only one left. You take it."

"No, no. You take it."

"Are you sure?"

"Absolutely."

He would normally protest a little harder, but the chocolate was too good to pass up. He popped it into his mouth and bit through the shell into the luscious center.

"On second thought..."

Yuri learned that second kisses were nothing like first kisses. First kisses tasted like chlorine and someone else's spit and felt like a live fish in your mouth flopping, searching for a way into your throat. Second kisses tasted of the thousands of flavors buried within a chocolate: berries and vanilla and toasted almonds. Second kisses had hands clutching gently and surprise. Second kisses felt like a
caress and a question and an answer of more. He liked second kisses, and if he had enough sense, he
would have asked for it to be a little longer when Phichit pulled back to smile. Turns out though,
third kisses are also pretty nice and last a little longer and taste a whole lot like sunshine and smiles.

"Um, I'm really glad I met you." Phichit gave him a hesitant smile. "I really like you, if you can't
tell."

"Yeah, uh, I think I got that." He blinked with wide eyes for a moment to process what had
happened then looked down and smiled, brushing his cheek with his hand. "I like you too." Something about him had felt easy right from the start, and their kiss only brought that feeling
deeper. He felt... comfortable. He gave him a gentle kiss and smiled. "We should go to bed. Early
morning."

"Yeah," Phichit nodded, "you're right, sadly."

They got up and climbed over the coffee table, leaving their mess for tomorrow. Phichit blushed and
waved as he turned to his room. Yuri went to his, barely having enough sense to turn on his alarm
before his mind shut down and passed out until the wicked crack of dawn.

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Chapter End Notes

Spotify
3. Slow Life by Of Monsters and Men
Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

Yuri reveals his deepest desires.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

(4) The blinding sun dropped Yuri's stomach like a rock. "Oh no. Oh god no. Please no." He scrambled for his phone and glasses and confirmed his life was going exactly as expected with the time reading eleven fourteen a.m. "fuck."

His heart joined his stomach as he flew out of bed and threw his clothes on and sprinted to the door. He slipped his boots on and flung open the door, slamming it shut behind him as he tore down the gravel pathway leading to the stable. He raced straight into Viktor's office without stopping to knock, and of course, (why wouldn't he be?) he was on the phone. Viktor jolted in surprise, and Yuri dropped to his knees, bowing so hard and so fast, he prayed he would knock himself out just to get a little relief from his nightmare of a life.

"Uh... I'm going to have to call you back." He tapped off the phone and watched for a moment as Yuri repeatedly dropped his forehead to the ground. "So, what is this, Yuri?"

"I'm so, so, so, so, so sorry! I swear I set my alarm, and I don't know why it didn't go off, and I am so incredibly sorry!"

"Yeah, I'm getting that you're sorry, but what is this?" He swirled his hand toward his prostrations.

"Um, it's called dogeza. It's something we do in Japan when we couldn't possibly be sorrier, and really it's not done much anymore which I think shows just how sorry you are when you do it, and I'm so sorry!"

"I see. Well, perhaps in the future a little less wine and kissing in the evenings will help you get out of bed in the mornings." His voice regained that darker tone only this time far less subtly.

Yuri froze on his knees, staring at Viktor with yet another stunned, wide-eyed expression. "Um... How—how did..."

"How did I know? Your new roommate loves sharing on social media and doesn't seem to mind that I'm on his list too. I'm glad you two are getting along so well." He sounded anything but glad.

"Oh my god. I knew about the photo of him kissing my cheek, but he shared photos of the other kisses too?"

He sat back in his chair. "Other kisses? I was referring to the one with him kissing your cheek. There were other kisses as well?"

His face heated to five thousand degrees. "Um..."

"I see." The darkened look on his face bored a hole straight through his chest. "Well, you wasted no
"No! It's not like that at all! He just kissed me! That's it! We didn't—I haven't even—Nothing happened!"

He held his hand up. "I don't want to know about the details of your sex life with Phichit. I have no official policy against it, so I'm not going to stop you from doing what pleases you." He ran his index finger over the back of the gold horse statue next to his laptop. "I want you to be happy here, Yuri." He looked back at him, and the gentle look in his eyes knocked the wind out of him.

"I don't have a sex life with Phichit! It was just a kiss! I wasn't expecting him to do that!"

Viktor's expression hardened as he sat up in his seat and leaned onto his elbows. "Did he do something you weren't okay with? Do I need to address this with him?"

"No! I—I didn't mind the kiss! Don't—I'm not trying to say he did something wrong, just that...

"Just that what, Yuri?"

"Just that... I'm so sorry!" Because things weren't quite 'Yuri's life' enough already, he burst into tears and started sobbing on his knees, not hiding his face at all.

"Yuri!" Viktor jumped up and ran over to him then froze in front of him with his hand stuck in the air like he was second-guessing an impulse to use it to comfort him.

"I'm so sorry, Viktor!" His words sputtered through his tears, and he lifted his arm to wipe his face across it.

"What exactly are you sorry for?"

"For being late. For—For... For I don't know, but I'm so sorry!"

Viktor stood back studying him. "How can you be sorry for something when you don't even know what it is?"

"I don't know, but I am! Please..."

"Please what? What is it you'd like me to do? Forgive you?"

He shook his head. "Punish me." He looked up in time to see Viktor's composed expression fall apart. "Punish me, Viktor. I need to make it up to you."

"Make what up to me?" His voice: breathy, cautious.

"Every—everything."

"Being late?"

Yuri nodded.

"Interrupting my phone call?"

He nodded again.

"Kissing Phichit?"
His head gave a slight jerk as he stared down at his hands clenched on his knees.

"What else?"

Fresh tears started from eyes cast up, riveted on him. "Everything."

Viktor stepped closer and bent down to lift his chin with his fingers. "What else is there to forgive?"

"All of it." His voice trembled. "All of it. I'm so sorry. Everything. I'm so sorry for everything."

Viktor stared at him with his intensity bringing more tears to the surface. "You're quite a sight like this, you know."

"Sor—sorry." He moved to wipe his face across his arm, but Viktor grabbed it to stop him.

"I didn't say it was a bad sight."

They stayed watching each other with Yuri's heart pounding while Viktor thought over his next move.

Viktor stood back up to study him again with his index finger pressed to his lips and his elbow resting on his folded arm. "Okay, Yuri. I'll punish you."

Relief pulsed through his veins as he bowed his head. "Thank you." He watched him as he decided on his punishment, utterly helpless to his whims, knowing he'd accept whatever it was he decided on.

Viktor handed him a tissue. "Wipe your face, and join me for lunch."

He clutched the tissue in his fist and studied it for a moment before he looked back up. "Huh?"

"There are some things we need to go over if you truly want me to punish you. If you just want a slap on the wrist: you can consider this an official warning of which you get three before you're terminated."

"What—what do you mean by, 'truly punish me'?"

"That's what needs to be discussed. How badly do you need this, Yuri? Will the warning suffice, or are you joining me to discuss how far to take this?" He offered his hand.

He stared at it then tested its strength, slowly pulling himself to his feet. Viktor held steady with a slight smile at Yuri's first hesitant grasp. He couldn't make sense of whether that smile was predatory or soothing. Viktor handed him another tissue before letting his hand drop and walking past him to the door. "Come with me, Yuri."

He hesitated before following him, scrubbing at the tears on his face.

(5) Viktor walked without looking back to see if he was following up to the house sitting high on its peak overlooking the stables nestled in the hills rolling out of the Smoky Mountains, carried by the fog to wash over the land their sinuous, rippling texture.

Castle was the only appropriate word to describe the building Viktor led him to. With a stone front and turrets and the bulging roofs of ancient Russian castles, the house looked like it had been plucked straight from the hands of a long-dead Czar without care for his potential wrath. Viktor opened the door and gave him an amused smile as Yuri froze, staring up at the towering building from several feet back.
"Forgive my father." He gestured vaguely to the building and its contents that lay beyond the door. "I've inherited his dramatics in both house and personality. Though, I don't think mine are quite as bad as his. Come in, Yuri." He noted his continued hesitation. "I assure you, it's safe. I only want to speak to you and have you fill out some forms."

"Uh, okay." He stepped into the towering white foyer slathered in gold swirls and marble statues of naked men and women and removed his boots.

Viktor gave him a crooked smile and strode into the house, his boots clicking across the wooden floors made of large, honey-colored squares lined with thick bands of deeper toffee around the edges. "This way." He hooked his finger and led him to a room with espresso wood walls and beams arching over drops of crystal strung up in chandeliers. Tapestries hung over a gilded fireplace alongside oil paintings of historical figures. An arched window covering most of the back wall lit an ornately-carved mahogany desk. Leather wingback chairs flanked a lush fern bathed in light giving a breath of fresh green in the overwhelming space.

"Sit, Yuri." He gestured across the desk to a chair: burnished sienna leather, two carved lion heads topping the posts. Viktor sat in the rolling wingback behind the desk and opened his laptop. "Give me just a few minutes here." Clicking a few buttons, he printed out several sheets of paper then picked up the top one and frowned. He grabbed a pen and started writing in some new lines.

After a moment of consideration for the rest of the top page, he handed over the stack of papers. "Please fill these out for me. The top one is a guide for which activities you're comfortable having me do to you. Start by marking that one with a zero in the space next to the activity if it's a hard no for you; you will not do it with me under any circumstances. A one if you might allow it under the right conditions which we will discuss. A two if you think you might enjoy it or will tolerate it. A three if it's something you desire or have a strong interest in."

His eyes jumped first to the sections that had things like 'anal plugs' and 'anal fisting' and 'anal sex' down to 'dildos' and 'swinging.' His eyes widened as he read over the page. "What is this?"

"You said you wanted to be punished; I need to know what exactly you mean by that."

"I—I don't know how I want you to punish me. I... didn't think I'd have to tell you what..."

"Oh, don't worry. I will decide how to punish you. This is just to help guide me in the right direction and make sure I don't go too far and do anything damaging to you."

He looked back to the page down to where Viktor had written in his own activities including 'Horseback riding—jumping, Horseback riding—on the flat, Horseback riding—on a lunge.' He picked up the pen and wrote a zero next to jumping and on the flat and started the first curve of the zero for 'on a lunge' then glanced up to Viktor who was watching him with casual interest that hardly felt casual at all with the sheer power of his being. His pen flicked down in a straight line drawing the one with his eyes still locked on Viktor.

Looking back at the page, that solitary, wobbly line made his head spin.

He looked back to the top that had another section labeled 'Torture' which began with 'beating' through various other forms and tools and locations. His heart clamored. He had no idea how to interpret that. Whether it was the cool clench of fear or... something warmer.

"Don't think too hard on it. It's not set in stone. We can always adjust it as needed. These are just your limits and desires for right now. And if you're ever uncomfortable with an activity either before we start or during, you'll be free to end it."
"What... I don't even know. I haven't... anything."

"Are you a virgin, Yuri?"

He ducked his head and blushed.

"That's not an answer. If you want me to punish you, you have to be willing to communicate with me. I'm willing to punish you—not abuse you—and without your honesty, the line between those is too blurry for me to proceed."

He looked back up with heat burning the tops of his cheeks and ears. "Yes. I'm a virgin."

"In every sense of the word or do you have some experiences?"

"Um. Two kisses. Or three, I guess. One when I was thirteen and then two last night. That's it."

"Thank you for your honesty. That's a little surprising, but I can work with that. Give that back to me. It needs some more editing." He slid the paper back, and Viktor started scratching out sections of the paper, looking it over carefully, drawing a few more lines through other scattered items, and writing in a few more items. With a final glance over the page, he slid the paper back across the desk. "Don't worry about the parts I crossed out. Those don't apply in our situation just yet."

He looked over the list that had most of the sexual items crossed out, though, a few tamer ones remained. "Would—would I be... naked for these?"

"If you note, I did add a few more items at the bottom including your comfort level with full nudity. Mark it as you desire. If you mark it as a zero or a one, all of these would be done with you only stripped down to your underwear except for the cold shower and self-pleasuring, both of which would require full nudity for obvious reasons. And as you can see there, you can choose your comfort level with having me observe them or not." He pointed to the page where the options for either alone or being watched written next to it in his own hand.

His heartbeat flooded into his throat as he wrote a three next to 'being watched' and a two next to 'unobserved' for both the shower and pleasuring himself. He looked back up. Viktor made no change in his casual interest expression. He added a three next to the nudity question and started marking down the most accurate numbers he could going off nothing but his imagination through a list that was far more extensive and included items way beyond anything his imagination had ever considered. His pen hesitated next to 'electrical stimulation.'

"If you don't know what something is, ask."

"This?" He tapped at the word, and Viktor leaned over to read it.

"Ah, that would be an electrical current applied to your body with various strengths from mild tingles up to sharp zaps or deep pulses. The sensation could be described as anywhere from ticklish to pleasurable to intensely painful. The intensity would be modulated according to your comfort level as is true for all of these. The location will vary, though, you can always set limits on where if you mark it as a one so we remember to discuss them. I'll be avoiding any direct contact with your asshole or genitals for all of these, however, so if that's your only limit, feel free to mark it as you wish."

His blush hardened again. "What—why..."

"Why would I avoid those areas?"

He nodded.
"Because you have no experience there, and I don't want your first experience of someone else touching you to be something potentially unpleasant. I don't have non-exclusive sexual relationships of that nature, so I'm not willing to offer that first pleasant experience until you have a better idea of what it is you want."

"Until? You mean if I... If I figure out what I want... You'd be willing to..." He trailed off and looked at Viktor for help who only observed him placidly, waiting for him to continue. "You'd be willing to..." his eyes cringed shut, "have sex... with me?"

"If I am what it is you want exclusively... Then, yes."

"Why?"

Viktor's eyes creased as he jerked back. "Why not? I find you extremely attractive as well as interesting. You're definitely the most exciting person I've come across in... ever."

"Liar." His lip curling, his voice hardened as he shoved the papers away from him. "I may be a virgin, but I'm not stupid. What kind of a game are you playing here?"

Viktor's eyes widened in surprise then his face softened with an amused smile. "I'm not playing any games. You are. You're the one who asked me to punish you, and I agreed and am only trying to define what that will mean for both of us so we don't come away from this worse than when we started.

"This scenario is quite unusual for me. I don't typically work with such restrictions and with partners who have so much to hide, but I love a challenge, and you've given me quite a fascinating one, so I'm willing to push my comfort zone here."

"You're comfortable with whipping people and torture and public sex?"

"Don't take everything on that list as my own personal limit. I include things I may not be comfortable with, but which the other person might be because if there's too much of a disconnect on either end, the relationship won't work. But the things you listed, yes, I am comfortable with those." He leaned across the desk, the glimmer in his blue eyes crystalizing. "Two things, Yuri: I am no monster, and I will never lie to you."

He sat captured in that gaze before he reached for the list again and continued filling it out. He handed it over with trembling hands for Viktor to dissect while he began filling in the rest of the pages which consisted of personality and aptitude tests along with an extensive list of questions about things like, 'What skill would you like to master?' and 'What is the most annoying habit other people have?'

"Do I have to answer all of these?"

"You don't have to do anything. If you don't though, I won't have enough information to feel comfortable with proceeding. I'm going to be messing with your mind, Yuri. I need to know what's in it and how it works before I start poking around in it."

"Messing with my mind? That seems dangerous."

"It is, but people do it to each other all the time. Do you think that every interaction you have doesn't have some effect on your mind? Every time a teacher scolded you, they were messing with your mind. Every bit of guidance your parents gave you shaped your personality. Every time someone was nice to you or mean to you altered your perceptions of this world and yourself. Every glance from a stranger altered how you think others view you.
"Just about everything you are now is a result of people messing with your mind with both of you having very little conscious awareness of it. I'm just aware that I'm doing it, and I may push it to extremes, so I'd like to be sure that I'm shaping it in the best way possible for you. In the same way I wouldn't take a Shetland pony and try to make a Grand Prix jumper out of him, I wouldn't want to take who you are and try for something that's just impossible and possibly damaging."

He studied the questions again that probed his life and who he was. How did he make something like that sound so comforting? How did he make being punished sound like such a relief? How did a man whose hobbies included beating people feel so reassuring? What the hell was so twisted in both of them that made this discussion come about as though it were the normal process of starting a new job?

His eyes caught on one question. 'What is your biggest source of shame?' Fat, hot tears collected in his eyes. "Do I have to answer every single one?"

"Which one are you stuck on?" He leaned over to see where Yuri pointed. "Ah. That one. The whole reason we're here." He pressed his index finger to his lips as he thought. "Okay. You can leave that one blank for now. I'll proceed with much more caution than you may like though until I know that answer."

"You think I'd want less caution than what these lists indicate you intend to deliver?"

"You may be surprised by how much less caution you truly desire. Come on, I'll get us some lunch while you fill those out." He handed him another tissue then stood and walked away, again without checking to see if he was following.

He gathered the papers and the pen and jogged to catch up to him in the kitchen where Viktor gestured to a table next to a wide window overlooking the stables. He sat at the antique, toasted almond table. The kitchen was a blend between high-tech gourmet, with shiny black modern appliances, and old-world with a massive brick wood-fired oven dominating the wall opposite the window. He scratched at the paper with his pen while Viktor commanded the kitchen.

"Do you mind if I put on some music, Yuri?"

"No."

"What kind of music do you like?"

"It—it depends."

"On?"

"My mood. What I'm doing."

Viktor smiled and pressed a button on a remote to begin playing some gentle piano music, humming while he worked. Yuri went back to his task, filling in the answer to: 'What takes up too much of your time?' which was 'thinking.'

He was about halfway finished when Viktor set a plate in front of him of pasta carbonara alongside a crisp salad and a small glass of white wine with a beaming smile.

"Enjoy."

"Tha—thank you. This looks delicious." He finished the salad in record time with his stomach now rumbling from skipping breakfast and the energy drain of unusual conversations and tears then
picked at the pasta, trying to slow himself back down. After a few bites, he put his fork on the plate.

Viktor put down his fork and frowned. "Do you not like it?"

"No! It's very good! It's just... a little rich for me."

"You haven't eaten anything yet, I'm guessing, with your rush out here?"

"Yeah."

"And you intend to do manual labor the rest of the day, and you're trying to do that off a single salad and a few bites of pasta?"

"Umm... I guess so? I mean, it's not like I need the food." He bit the inside of his lip.

Viktor pursed his lips. "Do you have an eating disorder?"

"No. I don't typically live solely on junk food like you saw. When I can, I try to eat much healthier."

"That's not the question I asked. How often do you eat the bare minimum while pushing yourself physically?"

"As often as I need to. My body likes to hold onto extra weight as I'm sure you noticed. I'm not usually this out of shape. I promise I'll make every effort to keep myself healthy and get back to where I should be."

"I see. Eat the food, Yuri. You still have a lot of work to do today. You need fuel for that if you are to perform at your best. You do want to do your best for me, yes?"

"Yes! Absolutely! I just... look at me." He gestured to the bulge of fat hanging over his waistband. "I really don't need it."

"Eat what I served you, Yuri. Unless of course, you don't trust me to be acting in your best interests; in which case: do as you like." He picked up his fork again and resumed eating, watching him from the other side of the table.

He picked up his fork and took a bite with his heart racing and a bit of sickness starting in his stomach. He kept his eyes on his plate and took another bite with a slight tremor in his hand.

"Very good, Yuri. This won't work if you don't trust me. And you need to eat three meals a day regardless of anything else, especially if your job requires physical labor. That's just common sense." He took a sip of wine and gave a surprisingly sweet smile.

He nodded and tried to get the rest of the food down past his nerves straining to hold it back. Viktor finished before him and waited patiently for him to clear his plate. He finally scraped up the last bite and put his fork down with a sigh.

"Thank you. It was very delicious."

"You're welcome. Do you have issues eating in front of people?"

"Um. Occasionally. It depends."

"On?"

"My—my weight. Them sometimes. You... you're perfect, and I'm..."
"Where does that come from?"

"I don't know. I guess I was pretty chubby as a kid, and I got picked on by this one guy a lot for it. Sometimes by the other kids too, but Nishigori really liked making jokes about it. He still does."

"Still?"

"We're friends. He married my friend Yuko, and now we're pretty close."

"But he still picks on you the same as he did when you were kids?"

"Only sometimes. They're in Japan, so I don't see them really. Just on video chat."

"I see. Yuri, on your chart you marked a two for degradation based on your weight. Why?"

"Well, I guess because I'm used to it; it wouldn't bother me that much."

He sighed and grabbed the paper that had his numbers listed all over it. "You're really making this a challenge for me."

"Sorry."

"Don't apologize for that. You're being honest to the best you're capable of, but I don't think I've encountered anyone who knows themselves so little before. I've never once suggested that someone change their responses to these, but here... You should have marked this one a zero." He tapped the paper over the word 'weight.' "Just telling you that goes way outside of normal here, but I truly can't believe that you'd genuinely be okay with me insulting you based on your weight after what I just saw and what you just told me."

"I wouldn't like it, but I'm used to tolerating it, so I wrote a two."

"Yuri, it's not just what you can endure; it's what's going to damage you if you are forced to endure it. You could probably endure almost all of these as you've not marked any health issues, but a good portion of them might leave lasting physical or psychological damage if you did. That's what I'm trying to avoid here. I want to punish you; not abuse you. My ultimate goal is to make you better than you are now. Here," He returned the paper. "Look it over again, and this time think carefully on what effects the activity might have on you if you were to endure it."

He looked down at the paper with the section titled 'degradation' and crossed out all the twos listed there and wrote zeros except for 'sexual humiliation' which he wrote a shaky three next to. "Um... I didn't know if this one applies based on what you said earlier, but it wasn't crossed out so..."

"It wasn't crossed out. Keep going. Look over all of them."

He nodded and went back to the list, adjusting a few numbers up and down as he went. He handed the paper back, and Viktor analyzed it with a smile.

"Very good, Yuri. This looks much more accurate to the picture I'm getting of you, but I'm going to treat these numbers as one less than what they are until I get to know you better. Keep going." He nodded at the rest of the papers he still had to fill out.

"Aren't I keeping you from your work?"

"Do you know my schedule better than I do?"

"No. I'm sorry, I didn't mean to overstep."
He smiled again. God, that thing is blinding. "Thank you for the apology, Yuri."

He turned to the papers and spent the next hour filling them out while Viktor typed at his laptop which he had pulled in from the office.

Some of the questions were funny, and some made him plunder his soul for answers, while others felt like he had no answer to give at all. Those were the hardest. Every time he failed to answer them with anything resembling a real answer, he felt like he was disappointing Viktor which felt oddly intense for how little he really knew him. Finally, he answered the last question. Sighing with relief, he handed the papers over.

Viktor smiled. "Thank you, Yuri. Do you have any questions for me before we complete the last steps?"

"Um... yes." He cringed as his heartbeat thuddered through his head. "You... you said you'd be willing to... Um, willing to..." He glanced up to where Viktor was waiting with a patient smile then stared back at the table. "You said... about my first time, and you... were willing to..."

"Are you trying to ask me if I meant what I said when I said I was willing to fuck you?"

He nodded.

"Of course I meant it. I told you I'd never lie to you."

"What... how would I... ask?" He picked at the nail of his thumb.

"Just tell me I'm the one you've chosen whenever you're ready to."

"What... what would it be like?"

"Gentle. Caring. As close to an ideal first time as I can get it. Though, your feelings toward me will affect how close I can get to that."

He cringed. "So, it'd be like... a favor."

"It'd be like everything else I'm doing here: Something I want to do with you because it brings me pleasure and enjoyment to do so."

He lifted his head to peek at him, his face turned away in a cringe. "You could enjoy having sex with me?"

Viktor's smile slipped to the side into a seductive smirk. "I would very much enjoy it."

His breath picked up into small heaving pulses as he considered the truth of this statement.

"Anything else?"

"What do you get out of this? I mean, you said you liked it, but why?"

He gave a pleased smile. "That is an excellent question. And very little hesitation too. I'm proud of you, Yuri." Satisfaction pricked at Yuri's heart. "I enjoy the depth of connection it brings. To do it well, you have to focus on your partner and learn as much as you can about them. The stakes are higher, so laziness and inattention can't be tolerated. I prefer having the deepest bond possible with someone, and this is something that allows me to find that."

"How do you plan to... train me?"
Viktor smiled again bringing another sting of satisfaction. "That was phrased very insightfully. Exactly what you said. I intend to train you. I'm obviously familiar with that. Some of the techniques I will use come directly from my experience with horses.

"I will first give a clear command so there is no room for misunderstanding with the expectation it will be followed with only that gentle touch. If it's not, then I 'show the whip' so to speak, giving a slight tap to remind of its presence. In most cases for humans, this is a verbal warning.

"If that isn't heeded, a firmer correction will be applied with a slight sting. If this is still ignored, a firm smack will be used to remind of the pain of disobedience. If that isn't effective, any further steps tend to only go toward abuse and away from learning, so I step back and reevaluate my methods, what it is I'm asking, and where you're at to measure out a better method of gaining compliance.

"Praise and rewards are also used and are my preferred method of modifying behavior.

"The fundamental principles are the same; the actual application sometimes varies from humans to animals based on the difference in understanding and ability to consent. For example, sometimes with people, I will skip a few steps as I have a higher expectation of their learning capacity. Also, I am far gentler with my animals than I typically am with people." His smile darkened ever so slightly.

He swallowed down a thrill of energy he couldn't identify the meaning of.

"Anything else, Yuri?"

He shook his head.

He slid another paper to him. "This is a contract for you to sign. It covers a lot of things that aren't currently applicable but might be in the future. I also added a clause that states I never used my position as your boss to coerce you into any of this. I'd like you to sign that one directly below it as long as you feel it is a true statement as well as at the bottom after looking it over. This isn't legally binding in any way, but it does have some limited protection for me as it states clearly that you were fully informed of, and consented to, our activities."

He nodded and signed his name in the two locations along with the date and handed it back.

"Excellent. Now, safewords. I'd like you to choose a word which is easy for you to remember as the word you can use to stop any activity at any time."

"What about stop or no?"

"Those are valid options. They're not ideal as you might say them and not really mean them. I am more than happy to go with them though if that would make you feel comfortable."

"So, it should be something I likely wouldn't say when you're beating me?" That sentence fell from his lips far more casually than he would have ever guessed it could have two hours ago.

"Exactly."

"Katsudon."

"Katsudon. Foreign word. Harder, but not terribly difficult. Okay, that works for me. Katsudon. What is that?"

"It's a dish my mom used to make me when I was a kid."
He smiled. "Comfort food. That's a good choice then. It's likely your favorite then, yes?"

He nodded.

"What was that flinch for?"

"What?"

"Before you nodded, you flinched. Why does something that should be a warm thought for you cause you to flinch?"

"Um, well, I haven't had it in a long time, but that's probably for the best. It's very fattening."

"How long is a long time?"

"Um, about five years or so."

"Wow. That is a long time. Is that how long it's been since you've been home?"

He nodded.

"Why so long since your last visit?"

"Japan is really far away, and it costs a lot to get there."

"I see. Why don't you try to make katsudon yourself?"

"I did try a few times, but I can't. I mess it up."

Viktor's lips stretched into a straight line. "I see. So, a few last things. I'd like you to get a blood test for any infectious diseases. I know we won't be doing any activities requiring that yet, and you're a virgin, but I'd like to have that out of the way in case things do progress that way; you could have something that wasn't contracted through sex. For your own peace of mind, you should know I get myself tested every three months. I'll email my most recent results to you. As I said before: I don't have penetrative sex with anyone I'm not in an exclusive relationship with, and there's no one I am currently dating, so I don't expect any significant risk for changes in my status. I do frequently engage in oral sex with partners who have been tested within the last six months without exception.

"I'd like you to get tested now and at least every six months should this continue that long as well as use condoms for any penetrative sex you may have with anyone else. Fair enough?"

He nodded.

"Good. Get an appointment scheduled today." He sent him a text with an address and a phone number. "This is the place I use, and they're usually prompt. Have them email me the results. If they can get you in today, even better."

"I, uh... I don't have..."

"Money, yes?"

He nodded again.

"Don't be afraid to ask me for what you need. I'd rather not have to fill in the blanks myself all the time. Wait here." He got up and went back to his office then came back and slid a check for a thousand dollars in front of him along with a credit card. "Here, a signing bonus. But I don't want
you to use that for the test. Put the test on my card."

"But—"

He held up his hand. "Time to go over the rules. If I give you an order, I expect you to follow it. If
you have an exceptional reason not to or some information I might not have that might affect the
order, you may present it to me by saying: Viktor, I believe I have information that will be useful to
you. May I share it? To which I will either consent or deny. Do you have something you'd like to
present to me regarding that order?"

He sucked in a deep breath. "No."

"Excellent. Moving on. From the hours of six a.m. to six p.m. every day except Sunday, you're
mine."

"Huh? Aren't I already? Those are the hours we agreed to, right?"

"You weren't listening very well, Yuri. Your duties have changed. I'll find someone else to cover the
cleaning and feeding you were supposed to do. You are my new personal assistant. You're my
personal groom and errand boy. You'll do whatever it is I want from you during the hours that you're
mine.

"After that, you're free to do as you wish. Go fuck your roommate senseless if it pleases you. If you
decide to lose your virginity to him or whoever else and ask me to then expand your limits, that's an
option you may choose, but here..." he leaned in closer from behind him, his breath leading the
words shivering down his neck, "here, you are mine, and my wish is always your command."

A blush spread through him from head to toe. "Ye—yes, sir."

"Ah-ah. You don't get to call me Sir yet. Not until you've told me what it is you truly want
punishment for. Until then, this is just playing games."

"Okay."

"Yes, Viktor."

"Yes, Viktor."

"Better. Don't wait too long to decide on what it is you truly want, Yuri. I've never much cared for
games. I find real sports much more satisfying." His lip curled around the purr in his voice, his finger
dragging a shivering trail over the back of his neck.

He came around to the side. "For your first duty, you're going to prepare to make our lunch
tomorrow. This favorite food of yours—katsudon—are the ingredients hard to find?"

"No. They're pretty basic. There's only one you might need to go to an Asian grocery store for."

"Perfect." He handed him a set of keys. "Take my car, go to the store, and pick them up putting the
cost on my card. On the way, hopefully, you'll be able to get that blood draw in."

"But, Viktor—"

"Are you already forgetting the first rule?"

"No."
"No, what?"

"No, Viktor." He stared at the table flecked with age into varying tones. "Viktor, I believe I have some information that will be useful to you. May I share it?"

"Yes."

"I don't know how to make it. I'll mess it up."

"How is that information I didn't have? You already told me you believe you'll mess it up. Tread carefully with that one, Yuri. If you waste my time too much with it, I'll remove it as an option for you."

"Yes, Viktor."

"Good. Come here, Yuri." He backed up a few feet and pointed at the ground in front of him. "Kneel here."

He knelt on the hard tiles, keeping his eyes fixed on them as he settled back on his heels.

Viktor lifted his chin to meet his eyes and pressed against his back to straighten it. "Here. Like this. Every morning except Sundays you are expected to be in my office at six a.m. on your knees just like this. You don't need to knock. Just enter and kneel. If by chance I have a visitor in there, stand in the corner quietly until they leave and then kneel. Understood?"

He nodded.

"Words, Yuri. Practice speaking to me."

"Yes, Viktor."

"Better. This is an important one; listen carefully. If you are ever late again—even by a minute—I'll relieve you from your position as my personal groom, and you'll return to your regular duties. Is that understood?"

"Yes, Viktor."

"Good, Yuri." He smiled and pressed his hand against his cheek making a hitch in his breath. "I really hope you keep that one. I'd hate for this to end prematurely."

"Yes, Viktor. I will do my best."

"Excellent. If you do decide to end this, you may at any time and return to your regular duties. Just tell me if that's ever the case. Or, just show up late."

"Yes, Viktor."

"In exchange for your service and submission to me, we will spend the final hour of our time together satisfying that need of yours to be punished. How that will play out is to be determined and adjusted as we go by me. Does this sound acceptable to you?"

"Yes, Viktor." He bit his lip and Viktor tugged it back out with his thumb as he studied him with a gentle smile. "Thank you, Viktor."

He gave that brilliant smile again. "Very good, Yuri. Never hesitate to share your thoughts or questions with me as long as they're not to argue against my orders. As I said before: My overall goal
is to improve you." He leaned over to bring their faces closer, his hand still under his chin. "I have to see what it is I'm trying to free before I can find the right keys to unlock your cage."

***

Chapter End Notes
Again, the artist is Clarinda0110. If you like her artwork, please take a second and let her know over on Tumblr! Thank you!

Spotify
4. Unsteady by X Ambassadors
5. Dark Side by Bishop Briggs
Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

Yuri gets his first taste of punishment.

Chapter Notes

NSFW warning on the art! Obvious BDSM themes though not overly graphic. Art on this chapter was again done by Clarinda. Thank you!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The wheels of the shopping cart clattered injudiciously over every bump in the floor, scattering out at random, trying to run from the abuse. The rod nailing them in place gave no choice but to face the next assault. A cotton ball was still taped to his arm for no reason other than he hadn't gotten around to removing it with all the other thoughts giving him far more concern than a little fluff of cotton.

What the hell had he gotten himself into? This was a terrible idea. He should quit now before the pain lurking behind him—now loomed over his head as a promise—hit and destroyed him irreparably. That was Viktor's whole intent. To change him. To make him someone else. And he had no qualms about using the force necessary to beat that change into him.

Viktor would get his way if he laid himself down before him. That was no question. The only question was why he was here listening to god-awful music under fluorescent lighting instead of running far, far away. The only answer he had was another question: Are you honestly that attached to your current self?

He picked up the package of pork cutlets sliced to perfection, waiting for him to fuck up into an irreparable mess. "Sorry," he whispered as he stuck the package in the cart. This was the unlucky pig whose life would be wasted under his hands.

He gathered the rest of the ingredients and stopped back at Viktor's house using the keys he'd been given to let himself in and put away the groceries as he'd been instructed. Sitting at the table, he opened the laptop and logged into the account Viktor had set up for him to research how to make katsudon. It was a pointless exercise. It wasn't the first time he'd done this, and it'd come to the expected results of a spectacular mess. Only this time, he didn't have any choice but to do pointless tasks to achieve disastrous results.

Of course, you have a choice. Viktor made that perfectly clear.

He shushed the voice away to stay in the fantasy that made this bearable as he clicked on another link.

***

The steady thud of Viktor's boots across the wooden floor drew his gaze, but he wasn't sure if it was
acceptable to watch him while ignoring his assigned task. He decided to err on the side of caution and looked back at the screen before he came into view around the corner.

"Excellent. You're back and doing as I said. That's very good, Yuri." He stroked a gentle finger down the back of his neck as he gave him that bright smile, sending a conspicuous shiver through him. "What kind of progress have you made in your learning?"

"Um... Not very much."

He withdrew his hand and frowned. "No? That's disappointing. I was hoping for better from you."

The stab of pain he felt was wildly out of proportion to that tiny loss of his warmth. "I mean, I have been learning! I just don't feel like I'll be able to do what I learned."

"Oh? Why not?"

"Because I'll mess it up. Just knowing what to do won't prevent that."

"How many times have you tried to make this?"

"Um. Maybe two or three?"

"That's it? Two or three times and you've determined you're a complete failure at it and will never be able to successfully apply anything you've learned?"

"Yeah... I guess so."

"Is that how you answer yes or no questions?"

"No, Viktor. I mean. Yes, Viktor. Is the answer to your first question." He flinched and stared at those flecked tones on the table again.

"Better. The answer I mean; not the fatalistic view you have of yourself. Close the laptop and come with me."

He led them through the maze of historical artifacts he lived in, and down an endless, winding staircase to a black door with carved flourishes and a large brass lock. He slipped the key in, opening it with a soft clunk. He held the door open for him, closing it as he stepped through.

Blood red fabric dripped a soft arc over the ceiling, gathered pleats pulling up in the center above a crystal chandelier. Black and gray damask wallpaper marched along the largest wall across from the door. Two narrow, crimson walls in front of it created passageways to both ends of the room. A red velvet, tufted sofa pressed against the center of the damask wall.

Smoke wooden chair in the corner: interlocking ribs forming a cradle for the seat crossed below, inverting their bend to create a smaller ribcage for the base. A large black rubber spike stuck straight up in the center of the seat. A riding crop laid across the arms.

Next to it, a rack along the short end of the room, rows from floor to ceiling filled with whips, paddles, chains, feathers, fur... More implements than he could name or even describe.

An enormous wooden X stood against the other wall. Flanking the chandelier in the middle of the room below blood spilled fabric, two tables. One: an X lying flat. The other: rectangular, solid hickory wood, and padded leather top. Every few inches around the edge, anchors of twisted iron lashed in x's held solid rings in place.
Paled wooden planks nailed with dark iron rivets buried flush against the wood ran under his feet.

Yuri's heart gave a wild buck at the sound of the lock being latched much louder than it had a right to. This was a horrible idea. What if Viktor was a psychopath? How would he even know if he should trust him? He just met him. Found him through some ad on Craigslist.

I'm going to be brutally murdered. Sorry, mom.

"You're going to be fine, Yuri. I won't do anything we haven't discussed."

"Yeah, what we discussed is already pretty concerning." Glinting spikes implanted in wooden paddles winked.

He laughed, a bright, surprised laugh, and examined him with a bit of puzzlement as Yuri glanced over. "That was rather bold of you."

"I'm sorry, Viktor. I didn't mean to say that."

"Why are you sorry?"

"Um... because... I don't know really. I'm sorry, Viktor."

"I told you to share your thoughts with me. You should never apologize for following an order. I'm proud of you for saying what's on your mind. I don't know what movies you've seen about this, but I like interacting with my subs. I don't want to turn you into a blank robot."

He flinched. "You have more like me?"

He smiled wider. "Oh, is that jealousy already? We haven't even played yet." Leaning in, he touched the lightest kiss to his neck and dropped his voice to a low whisper. "There's no one like you, Yuri."

Gasping, a violent shudder ran through him.

Viktor pressed his hand against his low back, keeping his voice low. "Take off everything except your underwear and put it in the basket by the door." He gestured to the black wicker basket perched on a small table.

"Yes, Viktor."

He walked over to the basket while Viktor sat on the padded table to watch him. Yuri's skin flushed hotly as he unbuttoned his jeans and let them fall to the floor, stumbling as his foot caught in one of the legs. Viktor jumped up to catch him even though he had already caught himself against the wall.

"I'm sorry." He cringed, but Viktor just sat back down and waved his hand for him to continue.

He pulled off his socks and folded his pants, placing them in the basket. His glasses went in the corner. His world now fuzzy, his hands shook as they gripped the back of his shirt. He turned to face the wall, but Viktor made a displeased growl.

"Face me, Yuri."

"Ye—yes, Viktor." Turning back, eyes clenched shut, he yanked the shirt off, folded it, and placed it with the rest. He turned back to Viktor with his eyes on the rivets below him.

"Come here, Yuri. Stand in front of me with your feet spread apart and your hands behind your head."
He shuffled toward him.

"Stop. Go back and try again. This time make sure you're looking at me and walk to me like you're proud of being mine. Shoulders back, chin up."

He went back to the basket and crossed the floor again, forcing his eyes up and his back straight. It felt like he was resisting chains clamped around his neck yanking him down to do so, but he made his shaky way there the best he could, hoping it would be enough. He stopped, laced his fingers behind his head, and opened his stance, keeping his eyes on Viktor's that now held a hint of blue flame.

"Very good, Yuri."

He walked around him, eyes penetrating every inch. His hand brushed down his arm, over his chest, and down to the soft flab covering his stomach. He flinched as Viktor caressed his stomach with both hands, but Viktor moved on to drag his palms up his chest again and across his other arm. Viktor disappeared behind him, but his hands bored deep into his body through the featherlight touches down his back. Dropping down, he wrapped his hands around his thick thigh and down his calf then moved to the other leg to do the same.

He circled him again, this time selecting pieces of him to lay down gently sucking kisses that left red marks behind. Viktor admired each one with a satisfied smile before moving on to the next.

Finished leaving a multitude of kisses over his low back and thighs, he stood and grasped the front of his throat, forcing his chin up higher, pressing his other hand against his stomach. Lips burned against the back of his neck, lingering, while Yuri's breath and heart raced to see which would give out and kill him first.

"You're beautiful, Yuri." Viktor's voice purred low in his ear. "So beautiful." His thumb ran shivers along the side of his neck.

"You—you don't mean that."

Stepping back, he let the cold air take his place. "You dare to accuse me of lying to you?" His voice lashed. "I know I still have to earn your trust, but I would have hoped you'd give me at least enough credit to not insult me."

"I didn't mean to insult you! I'm so sorry, Viktor! I just... I didn't... How could you... mean it?"

He came back into view in front of him and grabbed his hands, pulling them back down. "I forgive you, but don't ever accuse me of lying to you again unless you have actual evidence to prove your case, or you will regret it."

"Yes, Viktor."

He smiled and placed his hand against his cheek. "Good, Yuri. I'm glad you understand me. I know you're still getting to know me as I am getting to know you, but one thing I promise you will find to be true about me is that I won't go easy on you. So, if you hear me telling you something kind or gentle, you can bet your life on it being the deepest truth I can give you. Understood?"

"Ye—Yes, Viktor."

"Very good." He let go of his hands. "Kneel."

Yuri dropped to his knees and sat back on his heels looking up to his clear blue eyes, straightening
his back as he'd done thousands of times before. At least this part was easy.

Viktor smiled. "I've always admired the way the Japanese hold themselves with such respect during their everyday lives, but I've never seen it in person. Getting a chance to see it in you is quite remarkable. I've seen plenty of people kneel before me, but none have ever done it quite like you."

A rush of tingling heat brought his words swelling into his chest. "Th—thank you, Viktor."

He smiled and gave a slight nod. "Lay down on your stomach." He tapped the padded table and strode to the wall of tools, leaving him to obey his order.

He wriggled on the cool table to adjust himself and have something to do with the choking nerves while Viktor gathered whatever it was he intended to hurt him with. He returned a moment later and laid out a row of tools on the X table next to them and removed one of the magenta silk scarves from around his neck.

"In addition to your safeword of katsudon, we're also going to use a backup of the color system. I'll check in with you and ask you, 'Color?' If everything is good and you're feeling okay to continue, say green. If you need me to back off or we need to change something, tell me yellow. If you need to stop right now, tell me red. You can also tell me these colors anytime you need to, and I'll respond to them. If you say yellow, I'll stop and ask what we need to change to make everything good for you again. If you say red, it will act like your safeword, and we'll stop immediately. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Viktor."

"What does green mean?"

"Everything's fine. Keep going."

"Good. Yellow?"

"Slow down, or something's wrong."

"Good. And red?"

"Stop."

"Excellent. And you'll use these words anytime you feel you need them. That is a direct order. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Viktor."

"And what is your safeword again?"

"Katsudon."

"Very good."

"I'm going to tie you to the table at your wrists and your feet. Color?"

"Green."

"Give me your hand."

He slid his hand away from his side where it had been clamped under his thigh and offered it to him, tasting the metallic tinge of blood rising at the back of his throat. Viktor grasped it firmly but gently
and pulled it up over his head to the corner of the table. The silk lashed around his wrist and held it in a firm embrace as Viktor tied it to the table, taking the tension up until there was a gentle connection between his body and the table. A tiny smile formed on Yuri’s face as he realized it was the perfect tension of communication held through an ideal rein on a responsive horse.

Viktor moved to the other side and bound his right hand as well. Evening out the pressure on his body, he lashed his legs to the corners. Yuri tested out the strength of the silk, playing with soothingly steady tension giving him enough elasticity to breathe but still holding him firm in Viktor's skilled hands.

Viktor's voice held his dark smirk. "Try all you want. You're not getting free until I release you."

Yuri in no way doubted the truth of what he said. He was now Viktor's to shape as he pleased, and he had no idea what that shaping process would bring. If his current life was any indication of what he should expect, the nerves rising bile in his stomach were more than justified.

Viktor stood back and watched him while his chest strained against the table with his deep breaths trying to keep himself calm. "Color?"

He turned his face to the side, resting his cheek on the table, watching Viktor to gauge his mood before responding. "Green."

"Are you sure? You hesitated."

"I'm sure. Green."

"How are you feeling being restrained like that?"

He bit his lip as he thought. How does he feel? It should be a simple question to answer, but nothing in his body made sense right now. "Um... embarrassed... uh... scared..." He stared at his hand clenching and unclenching on the silk.

"Is that everything?"

His eyes turned back to Viktor; his voice lowered to a bare whimper. "Um... a little... um... turned on." He squirmed on the table as if he could run away from the blue eyes watching him without so much as a hint of surprise.

"Very good, Yuri." Viktor's voice trilled into his pleased purr as his finger stroked down his neck. "Thank you for being so honest." He turned to the table behind him and selected a small golden tool that looked like a western spur, spikes flaring out from the tiny wheel. "I'm going to start with this and gradually increase the pressure so I can gauge your pain tolerance. Color?" He flicked the wheel with his thumb sending it spinning around its axis.

"Green."

He rolled the spikes across his lower back making neat little rows of pricking pressure, increasing the pressure with every pass. They started to draw little dotted lines of pain on his skin, but not bad.

"Color?"

"Green." He answered easily, his body relaxing onto the table.

He pressed harder on the next pass and again harder on the following until the pain made him flinch ever so slightly, and Viktor called out, "Color?"
"Green."

He moved the wheel up along the side of his spine, and a soft moan escaped Yuri's lips before he could stop it.

Viktor chuckled. "You like it?"

"Um, yes, Viktor."

The next pass up his back was decidedly more painful than the last, and he squirmed under its touch, pulling against the silk as he gasped.

"Color?"

"Green."

"Do you still like it?"

"Um... it—it hurts, but... yeah—yes, Viktor."

"Good, Yuri." His voice purred low as he ran another sharp pass alongside his spine harder than the last. Fingertips leading the way with illumining touches, he continued rolling the spikes over his back, drawing paths of pain for him to follow. Heat rose then sank into his body, spreading with Viktor's praising words till it seized control.

Writhing on the table, pressing his hardening cock against it, he cried out. He gasped and clamped his lips as if he could take back the sound. Oh god. Why did he have to go and get that turned on now? It's not supposed to be like that. Pain is supposed to make you want to run away, not beg for more. And his voice... oh god. He whimpered as the thought alone made his cock harden further, and he impulsively pressed it harder against the table trying to contain it or get some relief or—

Viktor moved to the other side of his spine and rolled the spikes up his back again, his pressure deepening more along with his voice. "So good, Yuri. I love it when you give me such honest responses. You look so pretty when you writhe like that."

His body heated to scorching, and he turned his face away to whimper out, "Yellow."

Viktor pulled back. "What's wrong?"

"I... um... I'm getting... too close to..." He whimpered again in lieu of the words he couldn't bring himself to say.

"Getting too close to what, Yuri? You have to talk to me."

He whined again, trying to form the words until the pressure exploded. "To coming! I'm going to come, damn it!"

Viktor chuckled. "Well, I typically would make you wait longer, but considering it's your first time and you have some extenuating circumstances, I'll allow it. Come as many times as you please. Thank you for telling me, Yuri. That was very good. Exactly what I want you to do."

He gasped. "You mean... this... what I'm feeling is... normal?"

"For a masochist, yes. Some people only take the punishment because it pleases their Dom, but some people take the punishment because they enjoy it. You're the second."
"Their—their dom?"

"Their Dominant. Master. Sir. It goes by a lot of names which have some different meanings attached to each one, but overall, it's what I am to you. I dominate you; hence, Dom."

"I... I see. So, what am I to you?" He twisted back to watch him as he responded.

Smiling, he cupped his hand around the side of his neck. "You're my submissive." He bent down and kissed his cheek then ran his thumb over the spot he kissed as he pulled back.

His heart skipped a beat as the heat from Viktor's touch thundered through his body.

"Are you ready to continue?"

"Um... my... my underwear. If I..."

"Ah, right. I'll leave that one up to you. You can just cum in them, and I'll get you a fresh pair after, or I'll take them off."

"Take—um, take them off. Please, Viktor?"

"Oh, Yuri," he reclaimed the side of his neck with his warm touch, "you asked so nicely without me even having to prompt you. I'm so pleased to hear you speak to me that way so naturally." He leaned closer again, moving his hand just enough to get his lips against the skin below his ear. "You're so beautiful when you plead like that."

He whimpered again as his voice reached places he hadn't known a voice could reach.

"Easy, Yuri. Give me just a minute to get you out of the rest of your clothes before you ruin them."

His legs released from the silk, he felt strangely loose in his body without the tension holding him in place. He wanted it back. It felt safe within Viktor's grasp.

"Lift your hips for me." He hooked his fingers into his waistband, and inched them down, sliding them down as he obeyed.

Yuri settled back on the table and Viktor pulled them all the way off then stroked his hand up his inner thigh and over his naked ass, stopping to grab the tender flesh between them.

"Oh, such a perfect ass. So delectable." His fingertips trailed back over the swell of his ass and up his back to his wrists and untied the silks on his hands as well.

Yuri whined in confusion as he had thought he was going to retie him.

"It's okay. I'll tie you back up; don't worry. Turn over, Yuri. I want to see you."

(6) Heat boiling in his veins, his body shook as he obeyed, revealing his cock proudly holding his shame on display. His face as red as it could be, he looked away from him over to the enormous X standing next to him.

"Look at me, Yuri."

Closing his eyes, he looked back, his chest churning through thick breath. He opened his eyes to an expression on Viktor's face he could only describe as dangerous. He looked ravenous, as though he would take him down on the spot and devour him.
"Oh, look at you." His starving smile widened, preparing to strike. "You're such a dirty boy already, and you hardly even know what that means."

He cried out as his cock pulsed hard, squeezing drips of precum onto his stomach. He slapped his hands over his mouth.

Viktor grasped his knee and yanked his thigh open, exposing the tender inside and cracked a quick, stinging hand against it as he growled. "You don't hide anything from me. You haven't gotten that yet? Honesty does not include hiding things from me."

He pulled his hands back and cried out again with a gasp. "Yes, Viktor! I'm sorry, Viktor!" He stared up at the red fabric smothering him between it and the heat in his body as his cock twitched fast and hard, dripping more fluid down its length.

"You're forgiven, Yuri." He moved down to the ankle of the leg he held and started tying it back to the table. "I knew you'd want less restraint than I offered. I had no intention of pushing you this far today, but you're such a dirty boy and you begged so sweetly, I just couldn't resist." He pulled his other leg out, exposing more of him and began his work there too.

"You—you like it when I beg?"

Smiling, he caressed his inner thigh, stopping short of where his body desperately wanted him to go. "Taking note of the things I like? So good, Yuri." He stood back up from where he'd dipped down to secure the silk and leaned over him, inches from his face. "Yes, I love it when you beg. The sweeter you beg, the more it turns me on."

A noise, something between a whine and a growl, escaped as his hand impulsively clutched Viktor's shirt over his tight abs. When he realized what he'd done, he dropped it with horror.

Viktor's eyebrows raised over his smile. "Oh? Having a hard time controlling your dirty, lustful desires for me?"

"Ye—yes, Viktor. I'm so sorry. I—I didn't mean to touch you."

"Yes, good, Yuri. You should apologize. You didn't ask first. Remember what I said about asking for what you need?"

"Yes, Viktor."

"Do you need to touch me?"

He nodded. "Ye—yes, Viktor."

"Ask nicely."

"Please, Viktor, please can I... can I touch you? Please?"

"What would you like to touch?"

He gulped. "Your—your stomach. Your chest. Your arms. Your thighs..." He squirmed and wanted to look away, but held his eyes on Viktor’s demanding his full honesty. "Your... your cock." His voice squeaked as he forced this last word out.

"Excellent, Yuri. I appreciate how detailed you were when really the answer was everything, wasn't it?"
He nodded. "Yes, Viktor."

"Okay, Yuri. You've been so good; I'll give you a bit of a reward. You don't get everything yet; you still have to work a little harder to earn that, but you can touch my upper body."

He untucked his black polo shirt from his white breeches and grasped the back with one hand to pull it over his head in one smooth motion. He stepped closer to the table so Yuri could reach out and run his fingertips gently over the bulges of his abs he'd seen hinted at before when the fabric of his shirt strained against him as he moved. Pressing the palm of his hand against him, he sighed as he reached for him with his other hand as well and held his sculpted body firmly between them.

"You're a lot bolder than I imagined you'd be."

He glanced up from his study of the valley of his hip leading to the thick veins running down below his waistband. "Is it okay?"

He pressed his hand against his cheek and smiled. "Yes, it's okay. Thank you for asking."

He sat up so he could reach higher and stroke his hands over his chest, his fingertips seeking out the perfect pink nipples that stood out against his porcelain skin. They budded below his touch, and he paused before grasping them gently and running the pads of his fingers around them. Viktor's breath hitched then evened back out as he observed him with a smile.

He grew a little bolder, pinching them gently and running his thumbs over the tips. A light flush started across Viktor's quickening chest. He made a note of the response then moved over to his shoulders and down his muscled arms. God, what it would feel like to have them wrapped tight around him. Either a warm hug or their bodies pressed tight and rocking together... The thoughts rushed to his face and his cock making it gush yet again.

"What were you thinking just now?"

He dropped his hands and pulled back. "Um. I was thinking about... your arms. Your arms around me in, um, a hug and... in... sex." He dropped his eyes back down to stare at Viktor's smooth, strong hand.

He slipped his finger under his chin and lifted it back up, dropping his face so close to his he could taste his sweet breath. "Do you want to have sex with me?"

"Um... Yes, Viktor, I want it but... but also no."

"Why not?"

"I'm... I don't want it... like this."

"How do you want it?"

"Feeling like... like you want it too."

He smiled and brushed his hand over his neck. "Good, Yuri. I'm glad you were so honest with both of us. You're starting to get a little better at knowing yourself. Let me tell you something about me though." He moved back to lift his chin again and whisper in his ear. "I do want to fuck you. I've wanted it since I laid eyes on you." He pulled back and let out a soft sigh. "But you can't feel the truth of that yet, can you?"

"No, Viktor."
He dropped his hands and stood back up after leaving a gentle kiss on his cheek. "That's okay. That's what I'm here for: to help you uncover truths. Lay back down."

He dropped back to the table, and Viktor took up his body again with the tension of his silks. Leaving his shirt on the table next to his tools, he picked up a riding crop. He smacked it against his boot, smirking as Yuri jumped. He gave a few more smacks as he walked around him, searching for the spot where he would inflict his damage.

Stopping at his calf, he brushed the leather popper from his ankle up along the inside of his leg. Electricity shot his nerves like he'd been tased. His body jerked off the table as much as the silks would allow, gasping as his cock clenched hard. Viktor cracked his inner thigh with a sharp slap of his hand as the whip left his body. He ground against the table seeking friction for his aching cock but found nothing but the easy slip of air.

"Ah, yes, it's a little harder to make yourself come like this, isn't it? Nothing to touch you where you so desperately want it. I wonder..." He drew his crop from the far side of his stomach over to him and up his side, just missing the head of his pulsing cock. "How far does my touch go in you? How much will you let me in?" Leaning over, he took his nipple in his teeth, biting hard enough to send pain and pleasure surging, wrapping around his cock like a stroking hand. Viktor followed the connection with his flicking tongue then pulled back and smacked the crop against the side of his stomach just above his hip.

His hips bucked seeking more of his touch. Viktor gave that hungry smile as he moved to his other side. He grabbed his knee to roll it out, exposing more of the sensitive skin inside. The crop touched down in a neat row from his knee to just below its join to his body, repeating harder down the second line.

"Can I touch all of you from one tiny part as I do with my horses? Can you feel what I'm telling you through your whole body as they do from one little touch of my hand?" He trailed his fingertips along the stinging line he drew, and his body started trembling under his leaking cock. "I want to see you perform for me. Show me how good you are. Show me how well you obey."

His hands moved over his body, alternating smooth caresses with stinging smacks. Punctuating his unpredictable rhythm, sharp cracks of the crop over every bit of him except for the place he wanted his touch the most. His cries came without restraint, writhing through the fire he held himself in, unwilling to leave the stable Viktor put him in even if it would claim his life.

Viktor's burning touch licked through him, opening unfettered access to his deepest desires.

"You're doing so well, Yuri, writhing so beautifully for me like this. I think you want more, though, don't you?"

"Ah! Yes, Viktor! Please, please give me more! Please, Viktor!"

"So sweet, Yuri." He put the crop down and picked up a thick handle with a wide fringe of thin leather straps fluttering dangerously in his grip. "So honest with me about your dirty desires. I had no idea a virgin could be so sullied before he's even tasted of sin."

Lust had consumed his barrier and words fell from his lips onto Viktor's table. "I know what sin feels like!"

"Do you now? I know you've never felt the touch of passion so what sins do you know of?" The leather straps danced above his burning skin teasing with their certain venom.
"Pain! Incompetence!" He stilled on the table, chest heaving as he locked eyes on Viktor. "Death."

"You need to feel the pain of punishment for those, don't you? Before you can let yourself feel pleasure, you need to feel real pain."

"Yes, Vi—Viktor."

"I'm going to give that to you. Color?"

"Green."

The leather drew up then cracked down over his chest, flaring its bite over the expanse of his skin. He hissed in pain. The leather struck again over the same heated spot.

He lost track of Viktor's movements and the sinking teeth of the biting fringe as he dropped into the darkness of pure sensation and found himself floating weightless, carried by Viktor's steady, smooth stride. His body gave way and joined with Viktor's movement, Viktor's rhythm, Viktor's confident strength and let him carry him wherever he desired.

Bounding, sultry pleasure filled him to the brim as Viktor's voice reached in to caress him yet again.

"That's it, my Yuri. You're doing so well for me. I'm so proud of you. You look so beautiful like this. I can see my touch all over you, and it looks so pretty on you." His force increased with every lash throwing fresh, heated waves of pain slowly sinking further into pleasure. "Come on, Yuri. Let go. You've paid for your sins today. Now I want to see what pleasure looks like on you. Show me what I've done to you. Show me how beautiful you are with my touch shaping you. Show me I can reach all of you. Come for me, Yuri." His voice trembled with excitement; his blows picking up a fevered pace. "Come on, Yuri. Just a little bit more. Come for me."

Heels digging into the table, he thrust into the hand that existed in stroking words alone, his body rending as pleasure peaked—spilled over him. With the force of a thousand galloping horses sent by Viktor's hands to reshape him into something that pleased him better, pleasure trampled the person who existed there before.

His cum spilling over his stomach, Viktor's tongue chased it off his tender skin before it could drip to the table. He moved up to claim his neck with a kiss and his hand, smiling kindly as his body began to still. "You taste so delicious, Yuri, and you look so gorgeous. My god, just so insanely beautiful. How are you feeling?"

"I, um... Incredible. Thank you, Viktor."

He winced. "Oh, Yuri. You're so sweet. So good. Just... I knew you'd be good, but I had no idea just how good. You made me feel so amazing."

"I didn't even touch you."

"You didn't have to, my darling. You let me touch you without holding me back, and that was more than enough."

"I... really?" He swallowed hard trying to calm his breath and his heart.

"You want to see what effect you had on me?"

"Please. Yes, Viktor. Please show me."
He climbed onto the table straddling him on his knees, hovering over his still pulsing cock. He undid his breeches and reached into them. "Color?"

"Green. Please green."

Viktor gave a light laugh and stroked his finger over his cheekbone as he pulled his hard, leaking cock from inside those sinfully tight breeches. He let go to let him get a good look while his precum dripped onto him, making his oversensitive cock jerk with each drop. "You want to see how close you got me?"

"Yes, Viktor. Please. Please show me. Please?" He gave him a soft smile and pleading eyes; Viktor groaned as he began to stroke himself.

His hand wrapped tightly around his cock that filled it with his thick girth and stroked along his overwhelming length, spreading his precum down his now glistening shaft.

"You're so big." His eyes widened, taking in the sight of his head darkened to a deep wine color with his arousal sliding in and out of his foreskin.

"Does that frighten you or turn you on?" His voice, breathy as he brought himself closer.

"Both."

His face twisted with pleasure as he gasped, "Color?"

"Green." His eyes fixed on the sight above him. Not the earth crumbling could tear his eyes away.

He fell onto his free hand, silver hair flowing over his face gaped with pleasure as he gasped and covered Yuri’s cock with his cum. Cries filled his voice and Yuri wanted nothing more than to hear them again as Viktor quieted and released himself to brace his trembling body on both arms letting the last few drops fall freely onto him.

Viktor closed his eyes as he let his body still then looked at him and smiled. "You did that. You made me feel that good by being so good for me. I'm so proud of you. You did amazing; you made me feel so incredible." Keeping his body still hovering over his, he dropped to kiss his throat. "I'm going to untie you now. Do you want me to clean you up, or would you rather do it yourself?"

"What—what would you use to clean me?"

"Oh!" He chuckled in surprise and sat back. "You're already thinking such kinky thoughts. I'll use a towel this time. We can consider other options once your limits have been lifted."

"Please clean me, Viktor."

With a little shake of his head, he smiled and brushed his hand along his cheek. "One session and already pushing so hard against your limits. I'm very excited to see how you grow, Yuri."

He carefully stepped off the table and returned with himself cleaned up and redressed with a damp towel in his hand. He pressed it gingerly against his reddened skin and swiped it over him. He had heated the towel, so it was comfortable. His hands were unfortunately quick and effective. Just that one little, indirect touch of his hand through the towel had him longing for more, but Viktor was done and untying his hands. He helped him off the table and led him over to another room tucked into the passageway between the crimson wall and the damask wall at the back of the room.

(7) The bathroom was covered in jade tiles with pearl inlays in rich swirls. An array of products sat...
on a shelf between the sink and a gold-framed mirror. A porcelain tub filled the middle of the room, and off in the far corner was an enormous round pillow as big as a king-size mattress and as soft as a cloud that Viktor helped him settle into. It had been covered with a white silk sheet that felt luxurious against his skin.

"Wait right here." He left and took one of the bottles of lotion from above the sink then returned, climbing in next to him and holding him in his arms against his side. "Are you still feeling okay?" He brushed his bangs out of the way to kiss his forehead.

He nodded. "Yes, Viktor. I feel so good... I didn't even know a person could feel like this." He took advantage of the closeness to snuggle a little deeper and rest his head on the broad muscle of his chest. Realizing he hadn't asked, he jerked back. "I'm sorry, Viktor! I didn't mean—"

"Shh... It's okay. Here you're free to take what you need. You don't have to ask here."

"Thank you, Viktor." He snuggled back into him, and Viktor wrapped his arms tighter around him. He sighed and breathed into his comforting pressure holding him safely next to him.

Viktor rested quietly next to him except for brief little kisses over his face and sweet words whispered in his ear. That feeling of blinding sensation and powerful motion he had in the other room settled into an easy bliss. Viktor pumped lotion into his hand and nudged him onto his back. Yuri whined at being removed from him but settled where Viktor had put him as he already had his warm hands smoothing the lotion over his tender skin. It wasn't quite as relaxing as being so close to him was but was still a welcomed version of his touch.

"What are you putting on me?"

"Liniment. It will help your skin recover faster."

He smiled. "Is it the same one you use on your horses?"

"No," he laughed, "this is a super expensive formula crafted just for me for human skin, thank you very much."

"Oh, watch out. Rich boy's flaunting his wealth here." His words came out slurred with his mouth lacking the proper energy to form them neatly. "Are you trying to show off for me?" He smirked and poked at his chest.

Viktor blinked then burst out laughing and grabbed his hand to kiss it. "You have so much hiding in there." He turned his hand over and smoothed it open to kiss his palm, lingering there with his eyes closed before giving his hand a gentle squeeze and pulling back. His eyes darkened, searching him intently. "I so look forward to uncovering it all." He brought his hand back up to kiss his knuckles before releasing it and continuing his task. "But to answer your question: I may be trying to impress you just a little."

He hummed and nodded. "You've got that seriously mixed up."

"No, I'm confident in what I'm doing here." A playful little snarl flashed on his face as he grabbed his hips and flipped him over.

His hands started in over his back and Yuri conceded his loss, relaxing onto his arms. His body already felt like melted butter, but Viktor's hands sought out any remaining connection to even the slightest tension and severed it neatly, replacing it with his own elastic connection.

"Why do I feel like this?" With his words muffled and mumbled through the pillow and his haze, he
wasn't certain if they had enough clarity, but Viktor responded instantly.

"Endorphins. Like a runner's high. When your body is in pain, it releases them, and I just flooded you with them."

"I've had plenty of pain, and I've never felt like this. And runner's high, I've felt that too, but this is different."

"You're right. It is different. This is pain connected to pleasure. It's not just unexpected pain that induces fear of significant injury or death or is generally an unpleasant surprise. That kind of pain is unwelcome for just about everyone. But for people like you, when there's pain in a setting where you can trust you won't be severely injured and is based on a sexual tone, that fear is replaced with sexual pleasure. You get both the pain-killing endorphins and the chemicals released during sexual pleasure giving you quite a potent mix."

"So, chemistry. You performed chemistry on my brain." He lifted his head and propped onto his elbows to look back at Viktor who was watching him with a strange mix of amusement and that dangerous look from earlier on his face.

"You, Yuri Katsuki—you are everything."

"Everything what? What's that mean?"

"Something there's no point in explaining to you because if I have to explain it, you won't understand it. Once you can understand it, I won't need to explain it." He glanced at the little antique clock on a white table holding fluffy towels. "It's six o'clock." His voice dropped back into his firm professionalism. "You're free." He looked back at him with his face wiped clean of expression.

You're free. He'd survived Viktor's murder basement with nothing but some tender skin and bruises and feeling the absolute best he's ever felt. You're free. Viktor kept his promise that he was no monster even as he beat him raw. You're free. He could go and do as he pleased. Watch more movies and cuddle with Phichit on the couch. Nice and easy and comfortable. You're free.

"What's wrong, Yuri? What do you need?"

"A—a few more minutes. Please?"

A warm smile broke through his mask, though only a small one. "Take all the minutes you want."

He opened his arms, and Viktor laid down next to him and pulled him in to wrap tightly around each other. Yuri rested his head on the pillow of Viktor's arm and held on tight. "Technically, I owe you several more hours."

"That's right. You do. I'm going to collect on them on Friday evening. With interest."

"Hey, it doesn't seem fair that you can make me wait to pay you back but then charge interest for the delay."

"No, the first five and a half hours you owed right from the start. The interest is the punishment."

"You might want to consider something else for the punishment. As far as I know, I'm not supposed to want it." His eyes shot open, he slapped his hand over his mouth, words he couldn't believe he uttered drawing him out of the haze. "I—I didn't..."
Viktor watched him, his eyes searching then he relaxed into a smile. “Yes, punishing masochists is always a challenge, but I have my methods. Maybe we won’t call that part a punishment and just say it’s what you owe me for testing my patience.”

"Fair enough. Five hours late on your first day is a pretty big mistake. Do I get to know what’s happening on Friday?"

"A party. You’re going to be my date."

He snapped right out of the rest of that cloud-like haze and jolted out of Viktor's arms, sitting fully upright. He pressed his hands over his naked cock senselessly though he had no sense left in general. "You can't be—Why? Why me? You must have an encyclopedia of a little black book. Why me?"

He propped himself up on his elbow and stroked his hand down Yuri's thigh. "Why not you? I go to parties like this quite frequently, but I've never brought a date. Who I choose as my date reflects on me and my reputation, and I've never found anyone suitable enough before. I know you're new at this, but I'm certain you're exactly who I want to bring."

"That answer makes even less sense than the original explanation."

Viktor smiled and sat up further. "That right there is what I'm looking for. That in someone who submits so naturally as you do. Who puts on a show so full of passion. Who kneels so gorgeously at my feet... Breathtaking."

Breathtaking. That word describing him in any way made even less sense than his offer of employment did. What is he playing here? Only way to find out is to keep playing the game. "I, uh, don't have anything to wear."

"That's not a problem. I'll have something for you on Friday."

"How many extra hours do I owe you?"

"I'll be taking the entire time off on Friday evening, so you'll be mine from six a.m. on Friday until six p.m. the following day."

"That's more than double."

"I think it's rather generous considering what you're making me endure." What the hell does that mean? He was late, sure, but he could hardly be that put out by a few hours when he wasn't even planned to start until the week after.

"Fine then. I guess I'll see you tomorrow morning." He started to climb off the pillow, but Viktor put his hand on his knee.

"Stay right there. I'll get your clothes."

"Why? I'm capable of getting them."

"Yes, but you're clearly no longer comfortable with me seeing you naked, and yet, you were just about to parade around in front of me to get them. Just wait." He got up and disappeared into his room of torture, returning a moment later with his things. "I'll wait in the other room while you get dressed."

He slipped his glasses on and nodded. Viktor left, and he stuffed his now shivering body that had grown cold the moment he pulled away from him into his clothes. "I'm done."
Viktor stepped back in and stopped at the cabinet under the sink, pulling out a bottle. He walked over to him, turning the bottle about in his hands, studying it. He looked back up after a moment with his firm professionalism on. "Are you comfortable wearing women's lingerie in front of strangers? It wasn't on the list."

"For the party?" His heart started to race.

He nodded in one quick jerk.

"Then put me in whatever you want. It's your time." He tightened his fists to hold down the shaking.

"That's not the way this works, Yuri. I'm only willing to push you in areas you're comfortable being pushed in. Are you comfortable with it?"

"Two."

He gave his firm nod again. "Fine then. This party isn't like any other you may have been to. You'll be exposed to many acts of public sex and potentially traumatic scenes of pain inflicted on willing participants. Are you comfortable with attending?"

"Two."

"Fine." He paused and glanced at the bottle in his hands then brought his hard, blue eyes up to him. "What are you thinking right now, Yuri?"

"I think it's past six, so I'm not required to share that with you."


"Can you show me the way out?"

He jerked a quick shake of his head. "Anything you need."

He led him to a door at the back of the bathroom that led into a short hallway with an old-fashioned elevator with wrought iron gates. It only looked old though. A simple press of a button closed the doors and brought them up to another short hallway leading to the foyer he'd walked into in his quest to make this the stupidest thing he's ever done.

Viktor looked over the bottle again as they stood at the front door then handed him the same sleek, black bottle with a raised V in white with flourishing swirls around it that he had used on him in the jade room below. "Here. This will help your skin recover. Use it at least once a day."

"Thanks for the suggestion."

He opened his mouth to speak then closed it with a small smile and a strange look in his eyes. "Have a good night, Yuri. Call me if you need anything."

"Goodnight, Viktor." He left into the cool spring evening, down the hill to the path leading to his cottage. He tried to make sense of all that had happened, but all he knew was that he knew nothing. He didn't know what to trust or what to think or what to feel or what to do or if he should be there tomorrow at six a.m. on his knees. He was still contemplating this one as he reached the cornflower door. He walked in and Phichit was sitting cross-legged on the kitchen counter, his face glued to his phone.
He jumped down, his phone in hand, and came over to throw them into a hug. "Yuri!"

"Ow—ow." He hissed as his sudden assault dug into his tender flesh.

He jumped back. "I'm sorry! I didn't mean to hurt you. I was just so worried about you. You were gone, and you didn't have your car, so I knew you couldn't have gone far, but I didn't know where you were because there's nothing within walking distance to be gone to for that long. I stopped in at lunch, and you weren't here, and then I got back, and you were still gone, and I just got worried."

He twisted his face with confusion. "What do you mean? I was at work like I was supposed to be. Well, I was five hours late for work, but I eventually made it there."

"Wait, what? I thought you started next Monday. And I would have seen you there. We're working together, remember?" He took a tiny step back as he tried to piece together the situation.

"Oh, yeah, I was supposed to start next Monday, but Viktor and I agreed I would start today when he was here yesterday."

"Oh my god! I'm so sorry! I knew you weren't awake, but I thought you were starting next week. I would have woken you up if I'd known."

"Don't worry. It's fine. Viktor and I worked it out."

"Was he mad?"

"Um... I... don't know."

"You don't know? Did you get in trouble?"

"Uh... No. Not really."

"Well, that's good at least. Viktor was here yesterday?"

"Yeah, he insisted on helping me move in even though I tried to tell him I didn't have a lot to move."

His head pulled back; his eyes wide. "Really."

"Uh, yeah. I thought it was a little strange too. I thought maybe he was trying to show he was a nice boss?"

"Uh... yeah. He's a good boss. Not really that friendly though. I mean, he smiles and says hi to people, but not much beyond that. Oh, sorry. I attacked you at the front door. Come in. I ordered a pizza. Want some?"

"Does it have anchovies or pineapple on it?"

"God no."

He smiled. "Then sure. Thanks. Are we going to watch another movie?"

Phichit gave his bright smile. "Yeah, I'd love to if you want to."

"Yeah, a movie with you sounds great right now."

His head dipped a little as a light blush passed over his skin. "There's a sequel to the one we watched yesterday." He brightened with his suggestion.
"Yeah, that sounds perfect."

"Yes! Best roomie ever!" He thrust his fist into the sky then darted his fingers over his phone. "Come talk to me while we wait for the pizza. I ordered it about twenty minutes ago so it should be here soon." He reached for the hand that had the lotion bottle to drag him along then stopped and pulled back. "What's that?"

"Oh, uh, just some lotion. I had, um, left it in my car yesterday." He pulled up the bottle and stared at it for a second with a subtle frown.

"Oh. Sorry for being nosey."

"It's fine. Let me put it away, and I'll be right there." He went into his room and tucked it into the drawer next to *The Gay Man's Bible* in his nightstand. He joined Phichit who was sitting in the middle of the couch, their mess from yesterday cleaned up. The remaining food from the gift basket was spread out on the coffee table along with more wine and clean glasses.

"Want some?" He held out a bottle.

"Sure, just one glass. I think that was a big reason I didn't hear my alarm in the morning."

"Yeah, sorry. I didn't mean to encourage you there."

"It's not your fault. I accepted all too willingly." He climbed over the table to sit next to him. He took the glass Phichit poured and took a sip.

"So, if you were at work, why didn't I see you?"

"Oh, um, Viktor changed my position. He said he needed a personal groom and, uh, offered me the job."

"Oh, really? Wow. I thought he hired you because we were short-handed with the new horses he brought in. And he's never had a groom before except at shows when Georgi grooms for him."

"Yeah, he said something about hiring someone else for that? Um, I'm not too sure what his plans are."

"Huh. Strange." His face scrunched with thought as he took a sip of wine then brightened back into a smile. "Well, congratulations. Being his groom must be better than shoveling shit."

"I don't know yet. I've never minded cleaning up after the horses. It's rather relaxing, and you're free to just think."

"True. At least they smell better than every other farm animal out there."

The doorbell rang, and Phichit jumped up to answer it. He came back a moment later with the pizza after waving a friendly goodbye to the driver. He set the box down on the table then went to grab plates.

"So, how does the driver get past security?"

"Oh, you just have to call down to them and tell them you're expecting them. Same as anybody you want to get in here. They check IDs for personal visits, but as long as the names match what you've said, they let them in and out."

"I see."
Phichit sat down and handed him a plate with a slice of pizza on it. "Hey, Yuri, um, were you okay with me kissing you yesterday? I didn't mean to go after you so soon, but I was a little tipsy, and you were a lot irresistible."

He smiled. "Yeah. It was sweet."

He beamed. "Yeah, it was really sweet. I'm glad you're okay with it. Um, do you mind if I use you as a pillow again?"

He sat back against the armrest and opened his legs and his arms to let Phichit settle between them using his torso as a backrest. He sucked in another wince of pain as he made contact with Viktor's touch.

"Sorry!" He started to get up, but Yuri wrapped his free arm around him to keep him in place.

"You're fine."

Phichit looked up at him with his eyebrows drawn together. "Why are you in pain? I didn't think I landed on you that hard either time."

"Um, I'm just a little bruised... I tripped when I was running down to Viktor's office."

"Oh, are you okay? Can I get you anything?"

"I'm fine."

"If you're hurt, I shouldn't be lying on you."

"I'm fine, Phichit. Let's just watch the movie." His voice snapped a little harder than he intended making him flinch back. "I'm sorry. It's been a bit of a rough day." He put a smile on. "I'm fine. Really. Just lay back."

He nodded and gently laid back against him and started the movie. They ate and drank their one glass of wine each and munched on some of the caramel popcorn still left from the gift basket after their pizza. Phichit was pretty quiet through this movie, only making the occasional commentary of little trivia bits along the way. Every time he moved or wriggled against him, Phichit's touch lit the shadow of Viktor's lurking in his body.

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Chapter End Notes

The gorgeous art above is again a work by the lovely Clarinda0110. Please show your appreciation for her work by liking/reblogging on Tumblr!

Spotify
6. Bottom of the Deep Blue Sea by MISSIO
7. El Buho by Blanco White
Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

"Which as they kiss consume." - Shakespeare

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

(8) His body ached as he lay in bed staring at the phone in his hand reading 5:50 a.m. Ten minutes to brush his teeth, put on clothes, and make it to Viktor's office to fall to his knees at his feet. Or not. The heart banging around in his chest as he tried to decide made it hard to hear his thoughts. The minute ticked over. Nine minutes.

He raced around the back of the stable to the office on the side of the building then paused at the door to catch his breath and recheck the time. 5:59 a.m. One minute. The knob heated under his hand, and the minute gave way.

He clicked the door open.

Viktor looked up with a tiny tug at the side of his mouth as he dropped to his knees. He sat heaving, his eyes following Viktor as he walked around his desk. Viktor stood in front of him, watching. Caressing his cheek, his hand slid down to hold around his neck.

"My beautiful Yuri." His eyes softened as his voice gentled. "You look so perfect like this."

Perfect? He was pretty sure his hair was sticking up all over, and his glasses that were fogging in the warm office after being chilled in the cool morning air were sliding down his nose from the sheen of sweat he had covering him—and that's not mentioning the gut spilling over his jeans or the cheeks that gave chipmunks a run for their money. And his? He was about to argue the point when he realized: A. arguing wasn't allowed, and B. technically, as it was within the sunlit hours between sixes, he was right. He was right... His. For now, at least.

Viktor leaned down and brought his lips to within an inch of his, his eyes holding him captive. "I wasn't sure you'd be here on time."

He let out a soft gasp, trying to relieve the overwhelming closeness. "I wasn't either."

"Thank you for giving me another day with you." He brought his lips closer, turning at the last moment to land a kiss on his cheek. He held his warm, soft lips against him, eyelashes fluttering against his forehead.

"You're—you're welcome?"

Viktor smiled and released his kiss. "Yes, that sounds like a decent response."

"Decent?"

"Is there something wrong with decent?"
"No, Viktor, but... I want to do better than decent."

His eyes sparkled with his blue flame. "Oh, Yuri," he closed his eyes for a moment like he was savoring something delectable, "you're so good. Those may be the sweetest words I've ever heard." He smiled and tipped Yuri's chin up to trail kisses along his neck. "What do you think you could say that would please both of us more?" His lips brushed over his neck as he spoke.

"What about... thank you for offering me you for another day."

"Offering me? Do I give you myself?"

"Yes, Viktor. I think you do."

His lips stilled on his neck, his hot breath moving faster over his skin.

"You—you wanted me to take all of you yesterday. You didn't want me to hold you at a distance. You wanted to know how far your touch reaches."

He pulled back to watch him, a fluttering tension growing. "Yuri... that was perfect." His voice was thick in his throat. "So good."

"It's not good."

"Why do you think that?"

"You shouldn't offer me you. I—I'm not... I'm not..." He clenched his eyes and fists as he tried to find words for the churning sickness buried inside. "I'll consume you." He locked his eyes on him trying to convey his sincerity in words which only struck him with their truth after they tumbled from his lips.

His breath caught. "What if that's exactly what I want?"

"Please don't. Please don't want that."

"Are you telling me what I should or should not want?"

"No, Viktor. I'm trying to warn you. Please don't want that. I'll destroy you." He closed his eyes and dropped his head back down. How did Viktor keep drawing out these words from him—words he wanted to keep buried.

Sitting back, he narrowed his eyes as he lifted his chin up. "I've never had a sub dare to think of themselves as powerful enough to destroy me."

"It's not a power. Not at all. It's a power to be competent enough to preserve a life. It's a weakness to destroy one. You said you did this to feel a connection. You want to feel the power of perfect harmony flowing through your hands without a barrier between you. Like what you feel on your horses."

"Yes." His voice had the same energetic breathlessness he had in his room of pain yesterday.

"If—if you take up a connection with me... That harmony is destruction. That's what I offer. You don't want to feel that in your hands. It's awful." Hot tears slipped down his cheeks, and he wanted to wipe them away, but he sat frozen where Viktor had put him instead.

Viktor gathered him in his arms and sat his perfect white breeches right on the dirty cement floor and pulled him into his lap. His arms wrapped tight around him, and deep sobs started to loosen. "I want
it, Yuri. But you already know that. You're so good at figuring out what it is I want. You listen so carefully, and you're quite smart to have figured that out at all, let alone so quickly. You're the only one that's ever understood so perfectly what it is that I want, yet you're also the only one bold enough to tell me I couldn't possibly want that.”

"You wanted—you wanted honesty."

"I do. I'm not mad at you at all. I'm proud of you for being so honest. But I asked you for something that would please both of us more, and you gave me something that pleases me greatly and makes you suffer." A small breath of laughter huffed over his face. "A true masochist." He pressed a kiss to his forehead. "Yuri, you are to give all of your worries about keeping us safe to me. It's my job to protect us. That is a direct order."

"Viktor, I have," he sucked in a few breaths trying to slow his tears, and Viktor brushed his hand over his face to help him, "I have some information that may be useful to you. May," he flinched and pressed his face harder against Viktor's chest, "may I share it?"

"Yes, Yuri." He removed his glasses and smoothed his hand over his face, wiping away more tears.

"I…” He sifted through Viktor's gaze, the right path reflected in its steady warmth; with the view clear of how it'd darken, look away, his mind snapped shut, barring him from that course. "I can't. I can't share it. I'm sorry. I tried and..."

"Is the information you want to share that I don't have all the information?"

"Yes," he breathed in relief. "Yes, Viktor."

"I already know that, Yuri. I've known from the start there's something you're hiding. I also know you're not ready to share it. These are both fine with me for now. My order still stands. You're giving me all the responsibility to keep us safe. Is that understood?"

"Yes, Viktor."

"Very good, Yuri." He pressed his thumb over his lips as he dropped down to touch a kiss to the side of his mouth.

"I'm sorry." He sniffed against his trembling lips trying to stop his tears.

"It's okay. I don't mind."

"I'm wasting your time."

He gasped as Viktor shoved him away from him, holding his shoulders at arm's length. "We've been over this." His voice darkened. "I hate having to repeat myself. The only thing you need to worry about is if I say it's okay or not."

"I'm sorry, Viktor. But... I'm not trying to argue. I'm trying to understand. You said you wanted my honest thoughts. I do think I'm wasting your time."

"I do want to hear your honest thoughts, but sometimes they require punishment because they don't serve us, and I need to eliminate them. I can understand why that might be confusing, so I'll try to clarify it. Share everything. You may be punished for some of it because they need to go, but they need to be exposed to be punished. If you leave them buried inside you, they'll keep hurting you far longer and worse than I will. Expose everything, and I'll deal with it as I see fit. Some of it will hurt, but you knew that. That's exactly what you want."
"Yes, Viktor. I understand now. Thank you. I'm sorry for thinking... I'm wasting your time."

"Come here." He pulled him back in and held him tight again. "I forgive you. You're worth all of my time. You're so good, and you make me so happy. I love it when you need me."

He sniffled and pressed himself tighter to Viktor, his touch from last night aching pleasantly as he pressed harder still.

"That's it, Yuri. Take what you need. I want to give it to you. My beautiful Yuri." His thumb stroked along his bottom lip, tugging it open slightly as he kissed the top of his head.

His tongue flicked against the pad of Viktor's thumb then froze when his breath hitched. When he didn't pull away or reprimand him, he tasted him again and wrapped his lips around his thumb, sucking lightly. Releasing his thumb, he grabbed his hand, pressing kisses over his palm. Watching Viktor's breath rise, he slipped his thumb into his mouth, sucking hard to the end then pulled it back in.

Viktor let out a shuddering breath. "You need to pleasure me?"

He nodded, Viktor's thumb still in his mouth. He pulled it out with a gasp, remembering. "I'm sorry! I mean, yes, Viktor."

"Thank you for correcting yourself. It's not my thumb you want."

Warmth flooded his cheeks. "No, Viktor. I want... your cock. I need to make you feel good. Please, may I?"

He shook his head with a tight, but warm, smile. "You love pushing limits, don't you? Yours. Mine." He pushed his thumb all the way into his mouth and watched as Yuri's eyes fluttered closed and his cheeks hollowed as he sucked hard, pulling him back out slowly. "That will have to do for now. It's not time for more yet." His damp thumb pressed against Yuri's cheek as he held his face between his hands. "Did you eat anything this morning?"

"No, Viktor."

"Why not? I thought I told you that you need to eat three meals a day. It wasn't an order, but I would hope you'd listen to basic good advice."

"I couldn't. I didn't have time."

His hands fell away and rested on his thighs. "Too much wine and kissing again?"

"No, Viktor! We had some wine but only one glass, and we didn't kiss. We only cuddled."

His cheek twitched below his eye, almost like a flash of a wince. "So, why couldn't you get up early enough to eat breakfast before you came to work?"

"I can barely wake up that early as it is. I can't sleep well at night. I've never been able to fall asleep before midnight, and that's the absolute earliest. It's usually closer to one or two. But it's fine. I'm used to it."

"Yuri, are you aware there's a difference between fine and used to it? Because I'm not so certain you are."

"You're probably right. I don't know anything in my life I can't label with: It's fine; I'm used to it."
He winced quite clearly this time. "I'm sorry. That was insensitive of me, wasn't it? I'm aware your life hasn't been cushy. Mine has been obviously, and I missed seeing that as a way to adapt to your circumstances. Please forgive me." He bowed his head.

"You're apologizing to me? I didn't think this worked like that."

He looked back up. "I've apologized to you before, and I will again. I'm not perfect, and try as I might, I won't be able to prevent every mistake. You should never follow someone who can't admit it when they're wrong. That's the most dangerous type of person to follow."

"How can you bear the responsibility of someone's life while being so aware of your ability to make mistakes? What if you hurt them? Does that thought ever cross your mind?"

"Of course, it does. Especially for me. I do cause pain to the people who put their trust in me, and I have to walk a very fine line between doing it for their benefit and pushing too far and harming them in ways I didn't intend. It's that concentration on that line that gives me the satisfaction I need. I'm like you; I like pushing my limits."

"Have you ever made a mistake that hurt someone past that line?"

"Yes. I misplaced a stroke of the flogger, the tool I used on you yesterday, and the tails wrapped around his shoulder, which increases their force, and sliced open his skin leaving scars. It was when I was just good enough with it to start pushing my limits, but not quite skilled enough to prevent that."

"Did you feel bad about that?"

"Absolutely terrible. I was sick over it for months."

"You didn't hesitate to use it on me at all. How could you be so comfortable with it after that?"

"I learned from my mistakes. I'm not so quick to push my limits anymore. I make sure I can make it do precisely what I want it to do every time before I try for more. I make sure I have all the information I can to prevent mistakes like that."

"I don't mean how do you prevent it now; I mean, how did you trust yourself to pick it up again?"

"I was scared at first, but I picked it up anyway and pushed myself little by little relying on both my better education and the simple fact I knew I had no desire to hurt anyone like that. It's balancing on the line that's satisfying, not holding back from it or falling to the other side. I trust myself to hold on to that. Have I answered you satisfactorily? Do you forgive me?"

"I'm sorry! I wasn't questioning you and your ability. I was trying to understand how... how you could pick it up again."

"That's something you still can't understand even though I answered it as clearly as I could, isn't it?"

"Yes, Viktor. But I do forgive you. It really wasn't necessary to apologize to me. It was hardly an offense."

"How much force do you use in an ideal communication with a horse?"

"Nothing more than a guiding touch."

"You answered that far too easily for someone who doesn't ride." A light smirk fell onto his face. "But you're right. If I want you to respond to a gentle touch, all of them have to matter. I can't tell
you to ignore some and respond to others. That's unfair and confusing."

"Did he forgive you?"

"Yes," he smiled. "We're still good friends, and he likes the scars thankfully. I was never able to do another scene with him though."

"Scene?"

"What we did yesterday in the playroom. It's called a scene. It was too much for me at first to try it with him again, and by the time I felt confident enough, we had decided we made much better friends without the play."

He nodded.

"That you understand."

"Yes, Viktor." He nodded then smiled. "No, Viktor. I don't understand how you call something so brutal 'play.'"

He chuckled and poked at his unbruised side making him squirm. "You had fun. It's not gentle and innocent, but it's still play."

"Grown-up play."

"Very. How are you feeling today?"

"Okay. A little sore, but not bad."

"Stand up. Take off your shirt."

He obeyed, flinching as the shirt pulled over his head.

Viktor stood and took the shirt from him. "Unbutton your jeans. Let them fall to the floor and stand for inspection with your hands behind your head, your feet apart. This is the stance you'll take any time I tell you to stand for inspection. I'll specify the level of undress I want from you beforehand. Understood?"

"Yes, Viktor." He brought his hands to his jeans and let them fall to the floor and put his hands behind his head.

Viktor nudged his elbows back further and pushed his chest out then tapped under his chin to make him lift it. "Like this. Every time." He stood back to look over his damage. "What do you think of the bruises?"

"I haven't really looked at them yet, but last night they were a little uncomfortable, but here now you were pressing into them, and it felt... good."

"When exactly were they uncomfortable last night?"

"When Phichit was laying on them."

The corner of his mouth tugged into a smile. "They look lovely on you." His hand caressed his chest down to his stomach and around to his back, pulling him in close. "You look beautiful, Yuri." He kissed his neck then stepped back. "Put your clothes back on." He obeyed with Viktor cleaning his glasses on his shirt before handing them over. "I can't change your hours, but I can adjust my
schedule to make sure you get fed properly. You can plan on having breakfast and lunch with me the
days you're here. I'm a bit limited on what I can do about your sleeping as it falls outside of my
hours, but I'll look into it. Have you always had that issue?"

"Yes, Viktor."

"What are you doing while you're awake that late?"

"Random things to try to get myself tired enough to pass out or lying in bed thinking. I try to avoid
that though because that's always when I sleep the worst."

"Your thoughts are that disturbing to you."

"Yes, Viktor."

He nodded. "I find you beautiful and so sexy exactly as you are, but you'd be more comfortable with
a more toned body, correct?"

"Yes, Viktor."

"Then in the mornings, I'd like you to come dressed for a workout. Don't worry about bringing a
change of clothes tomorrow because I'll have something I want you to wear to work every day."

"Yes, Viktor."

"Come then. Let's get started." He led him up the hill to his house once again.

He slipped off his boots in the foyer and followed Viktor into the kitchen.

"Here. Eat this." He handed him a banana. "I'll feed you a proper breakfast after the workout, but
having a little energy in you now will allow you to work harder."

"I'm not really hungry."

"On your knees." His voice dropped low, menacing.

He dropped to his knees and placed his hands on them, the banana still in one fist.

"You disappointed me, Yuri."

"I'm—"

"Ah. You don't get to apologize yet. You knew you were supposed to obey my order. Stay there." He
left the kitchen, his boots striding hard across the floor, his disappointment driving deeper with
every step away from him.

Pain struck his chest, but it was nothing like Viktor's pain from his touch. This was an empty pain of
loss that brought tears to his eyes, not the rich pain of his touch that bathed him in sensation. How
did he feel such a loss from him just walking away?

His touch had barbs. As soon as he let him in, it hooked in and yanked holes in his flesh when it was
removed. What was he going to do when his touch was gone for good? Would Viktor detach himself
carefully or would he just walk away and leave him torn open as he did now? This was absolutely a
horrible idea. One day and he was already on the brink of destruction.

Exactly as he had promised.
After endless minutes he couldn't count with the pain distorting his perception, Viktor's stride echoed off the empty spaces in his enormous house though softer than before. He stopped behind him. "I'm willing to hear you now."

He placed his hands on the floor and bowed halfway to the ground. "I'm sorry, Viktor. I didn't mean to disrespect you, and I will strive not to let it happen again. Please forgive me."

"What did you feel when I was gone?"

"It hurt."

"The kind of hurt you like?"

He shook his head. "No, Viktor. Not at all. I hated it. I don't want to feel it again. I hate disappointing you."

He stepped around in front of him dressed in shorts and sneakers with nothing else. His clear face washed relief over him. "I forgive you, Yuri. Stand up and eat the banana."

He stood, and Viktor dropped to his knees, looking up expectantly while Yuri watched him trying to figure out what he was doing, until he realized what Viktor was doing was something for him to worry about. He only had to follow his order.

He cracked open the peel, and Viktor unbuttoned Yuri's jeans and let them fall. He sucked in a quick breath and took a bite of the banana; Viktor's lips went to his bruises on his inner thigh, sucking a wet kiss there, sending the warm touch of his pain spreading out through his core. His knees went weak. Holding himself upright the best he could, he took another bite. Viktor's hand drifted up his other thigh, seeking out a higher location for his kiss. His cock started filling. He squirmed, whimpering at the embarrassment, but Viktor just sat waiting for him, ocean blue eyes soft.

Yuri swallowed hard and took another bite sending Viktor's fingers snaking up under the leg of his boxers to the crest of his hip. His thumb stroked over the sensitive skin in the valley between his leg and his torso; Yuri started quivering. Viktor's lips sucked over his tender skin on his thighs and over his stomach as Yuri obeyed. He got to the last bite, and Viktor's hands moved to the top of his waistband, reaching in and tugging them down just a bit. He licked along the crease of his thigh while Yuri chewed, narrowly missing his fully hardened cock as he tugged the boxers the rest of the way down.

Exposed to the air and Viktor's eyes, Yuri gasped as his core clenched, sending drips of precum onto Viktor's shoulder. Viktor glanced at it then looked up and smiled.

"Jerk yourself off onto my face."

"What?" He gasped, pulling his hips back to restrain himself from the impulse that washed over him telling him to shove his cock straight into Viktor's slightly parted lips. "I'm sorry! I didn't mean to question you. I was just surprised."

"I know. Go ahead."

He still didn't understand and wanted to ask him if he was sure this was something he was supposed to do, but Viktor gave him an order, and his only job was to follow it. He switched the peel to his left hand and took himself in his right.

Viktor took the peel from him and tossed it onto the counter then twined his fingers with his and tugged his hand to his mouth for a kiss to the back of it. "Show me how you like it best." He moved
Yuri's hand onto his shoulder then let go and held onto his ass to help support him as his knees trembled.

Yuri moved his hand up to his mouth and started working up some spit to use as lube.

Viktor stole his hand away. "You need spit?"

"Y—yes, Viktor."

"Ask me for what you need."

"Oh god." He doubled over at the strange mix of confusion, heat, embarrassment, and overwhelming desire punched through his gut. "V—Viktor, can I ple—please have some spit?"

Viktor put Yuri's hand back to his cock as he rose up higher on his knees and let a thick stream of saliva fall from his mouth onto his aching cock. Yuri moaned and grasped Viktor's shoulder, working his saliva over his cock. His eyes screwed shut as he formed a circle with his fingers and worked the warm, slick fluid over the sensitive skin below his foreskin. Running his thumb over the head, he forced his eyes back open so he could relish the sight of Viktor on his knees, mouth open, waiting for him to cover him with his cum. It was too much. With a few more heavy strokes down his length, he came straight into that open mouth, over his cheek, and down his chin onto his chest.

"Oh god! Vi—Viktor!" He cried out and moved his hand from his shoulder to the back of Viktor's head fingerling the soft strands before weaving his fingers into them and gripping hard. He milked the last few drops over his pink tongue then held himself as still as he could through his trembling.

Viktor watched him for a moment, cum glistening on his face and over his tongue before he swallowed it then licked his lips to get as much from the rest of his face as he could. He stood and gripped Yuri's hair as he had done. "Clean me up."

"With—with what?"

"Anything you have available to you at this moment."

He considered the shirt still on his body, but then he wouldn't have it to wear. A strand of cum dripped from his chin onto his chest and ran down to his nipple. His tongue flicked out and licked straight over the tip of his nipple before he could consider his actions. Viktor gasped but made no move to stop him. He watched Viktor's face as his tongue worked over his budding nipple then up the soft curve of his pec. His chest pulsed harder under his tongue. He stood on his toes and tugged Viktor down to reach him. Taking his time, he worked his tongue and open kisses over him to clean every drop of his cum from his face.

"Have you ever tasted your own cum before?"

"No, Viktor."

"What do you think?"

"Um... I'm not sure I'd like it on its own, but on you..." He moaned and closed his eyes, bathing his tongue over Viktor's soft cheek, finishing with a kiss. "It's so good." His voice lowered to a soft whisper. His tongue slid closer to his tantalizing mouth, just reaching the corner.

Viktor's breath sped up as he grabbed his hand and held it against the side of his clean cheek. Yuri paused then took a careful taste of his lips. They parted with Viktor's soft gasp, and he slipped his tongue just barely inside his mouth, tasting the edges of that slick, hot inside. Viktor sighed and
turned his head into their hands, pulling his mouth away.

"I already got that part, Yuri." His voice was soft, his closed eyes scrunching with the effort of restraint. What he was trying to hold back wasn't clear. A scolding or... a desire. He turned as he pulled their hands from his face and kissed the center of Yuri's palm. "Am I clean?"

He pulled back a little to check. "Yes, Viktor."

"Excellent. Pull your underwear up but take your pants off and come with me."

He smiled a little to himself as he obeyed.

"What's so amusing, Yuri?"

"Um, that your commands... they're always a little strange, yet you say them with such certainty as if it were the most normal thing in the world."

The tops of his cheeks crinkled below his eyes. "I guess you're right. I can see how this is still rather strange to you."

He folded his pants over his arm and followed Viktor through his maze he knew every turn of. "Can—am I allowed to ask why you had me do that?"

"You can always ask questions if you need to, even with my orders as long as they're respectful and not just a way to argue. But to answer this one: it's because food has gotten twisted in your mind to being something that causes you distress. I'm reconnecting it to pleasure as it should be."

"What if I get turned on every time I eat a banana?"

Laughing, he opened the door to a room in the back of the house on the upper floor. "That's certainly a risk here. I'm not a psychologist, so some things may have unintended consequences. I think eliminating the distress of going through the rest of your life feeling sick when trying to eat in front of others is worth the risk of an awkward encounter with a banana or two, but if that happens and is too distressing for you, I'll find a way to correct it. Fair enough?"

"Yes, Viktor."

They stepped into a room with narrow windows, arched on top and set in a gently curved wall, stretching from the floor to just below the ceiling. Softening the bright light of day through translucent cream curtains, they brought it into a room where worn, burnt oak flooring, dark chocolate walls and ornately-carved pillars lent the other half of a deep contrast, but without the harshness found in stark black and white. Inky turned posts of a solid four-poster bed reached toward a blush chandelier joining it in the center of the space.

Viktor walked over to a large dresser matching the frame of the bed holding a collection of exotic decorations including an elephant made of teak wood and formed with joined flourishes around empty spaces allowing you to see straight through the beast and a line of Russian nesting dolls along with various other items looking like they'd been collected from around the world.

A stuffed peacock sat on a shelf overlooking the collection, its rich plumage flowing down the wall. A few pieces of art hung on the walls, but overall there was nothing that looked particularly personal until he spotted the bookshelf covering the interior wall arranged exactly as he'd done to his bookshelf at the cottage only with aesthetic objects filling the spaces as he'd suggested for him to do. Only one framed picture sat on the top shelf. He wanted to go closer to see what it was a picture of but erred on the side of caution and stayed where he was.
"Take off your shirt." Viktor turned back around from the dresser, a measuring tape, a pair of shorts, and a shirt in his hands. He took his shirt from him and tossed it on the bed and started taking measurements of his body over every surface, typing them into his phone. He paused on occasion to smile and kiss whatever part he was working on.

Yuri tried to keep himself contained, reminding himself it was all calculated to manipulate him into feeling how Viktor determined he should feel. He couldn't mean any of this the way he was taking it. He was just weak and pathetic and lonely and letting his imagination load the situation with meaning Viktor hadn't put there. This was all just a business deal for him, regardless of how intimate the contents were. Whatever joy he extracted from this process could be had with anyone who met his minimum standards. He just happened to be the one filling the role of servant to his needs.

He didn't mean the way his eyelashes fluttered as his lips pressed gently on his bruised inner thigh. He didn't mean the tender confidence in his hands running down his back as anything other than a way to convince him to trust him. He certainly didn't mean the sigh as he pulled back from a kiss to the soft flab on his stomach as anything other than a sound to conceal his revulsion.

Men who look like Viktor; men who have status like Viktor; men who have talent like Viktor; and unquestionably, men who have all three don't go for plain, flabby, boring guys like him. That's just a law of the universe written and sealed with the kiss he pulled away from.

It had been so subtle when it happened, and he didn't even know he was going for a kiss himself, but now that the flood of chemicals had settled, he was able to see it for what it was: A kiss denied.

Viktor rose from his position on his knees and studied him as he rested his hand against Yuri's neck. "What's wrong, Yuri?" He didn't mean the way his voice melted into deep concern when he said that.

"Nothing's wrong, Viktor."

"That's not true, but I'm not certain if you're aware of that lie or not. You're locking me out. Why?" He didn't mean that wince of pain in his voice as anything other than a guilt trip.

"I'm not locking you out; I'm here obeying your orders."

"That's not what I mean. Your responses are dulled. My touch isn't reaching you like it was just a few minutes ago. What were you just thinking about?" His order lacked his usual authoritative command and sounded like a genuine question. He wasn't sure if that meant it was still an order or not, but he guessed his original order to share his thoughts still stood.

He studied the full, heart-shaped lips his tongue had tasted for a brief moment and were now ruthlessly out of reach then meet his eyes with a glare. "You pulled back."

He cocked his head in confusion. "I pulled back when? I was just on my knees kissing you."

"In the kitchen. I... I went to—to kiss you, and you pulled back."

A tiny, melancholic smile turned the corner of his mouth. "You are sensitive. I tried to be as gentle as I could. I apologize for hurting you, Yuri. That wasn't my intent."

"You're okay with me cumming on your face and licking it off but not a kiss?"

"Yes. That's exactly right."

"I don't understand."
"I have limits too." His voice rasped soft and low as he twirled a piece of Yuri's hair between his fingers. "Some things push me past my control."

He can't control a kiss, but he can control everything else they did? That didn't make sense, but the question seemed too rude to ask. "So, a kiss for you is what number?"

"A kiss from you would be a one." His lips closed over his neck. Sighing, he moved to a new spot to touch it with another burning kiss.

"From me? Why would you say that specifically?"

His kiss moved higher, just below his ear, making him tilt his head away to give him access. "We have different limits for different people. For you, kissing Phichit might be a three, but kissing the woman who bags your groceries would likely be a zero, yes?"

"Oh. That makes sense. So, what would you rate a kiss from someone other than me?"

"Why are you concerned about other people when we're the only two here?" His breath rushed over his ear as he took the lobe in his mouth, sucking with a gentle bite as he released it. "Do you plan on having other people kiss me?"

He shuddered, his head turning instinctively toward him, seeking his lips. They paused within a breath of each other. He shook his head at the rush of anger to hold it down. Was Viktor right before? Was that jealousy? Was that a question he was supposed to answer or not? Caution for Viktor was erring on the side of saying something while caution for him was to keep his mouth shut.

"No, Viktor. Never. I would never... want that." He fought down the urge to grab him and hold him in his arms. "When is it something you'd do with me?"

"When it's not a question."

How can a kiss be a question? He considered asking that aloud, but the look in Viktor's eyes made him stop.

"What is a kiss from me for you? It wasn't on the list, but I think I need to know now."

His breath hitched. "Um..." He considered the burn fluttering in his chest and up his throat, spreading further when Viktor's hand went to his low back. He gulped. "Three."

His chin dipped. "Can you wait?"

"Wait for what?"

"For me."

He reached out for Viktor, his trembling fingertips resting on his smooth skin before his palm closed on his cheek. His thumb brushed over his lips. "Yes, Viktor."

He smiled gently. "Thank you." Holding Yuri's hand still, he turned his face to kiss his palm then moved his hands down to his waist. "God, Yuri, your limits... It's not a line I'm walking. It's a blazing wire wrapped tight around me and getting tighter by the second." His hands gripped him harder as his expression tightened into his blue flame. "Do you have any idea how badly I want to throw you down on that bed and suck your cock until you're a writhing, whimpering mess as a thank you? How have you made it to twenty-three looking like you do without losing your virginity on the way?"
"Am I supposed to answer the first question or the second?"

"Just the second. The first was rhetorical. I already know you have no fucking clue."

"Um, I don't know really. It wasn't a priority, I guess."

"Wasn't a priority? You do want to have sex, right?"

"Yes!" He fought the urge to slap his hand over his mouth at how pathetically eager that was.

Viktor chuckled. "Good. I was just making sure. Is it something special for you? Your first time that is. Is it something you're saving for the right person?"

"Umm... I guess so? I don't know really. I haven't thought about it much. But yeah, I guess that would be true. I don't want to do it with the wrong person. It's a memory that stays with you for a long time, right?"

"Yes. Most people would never forget it. Make sure you wait, Yuri." He smiled and brought his hands up to clasp his face. "Save it until you're sure it's the right person."

"I thought you wanted me to lose my limits sooner rather than later."

"Yes, that's what I want for selfish reasons, but what I want for you is to wait until you're ready and it's the right person."

"Is that an order?"

"Only between our sixes, it is. Between yours, it's just my wish for you to be happy."

"Yes, Viktor."

He smiled and stepped back. "Here. Put these on." He handed him the shorts and his shirt. "I don't have any sneakers that will fit you right now. Do you want to go back to your house to get some or will your boots suffice for our workout for today?"

Looking up, he balanced on one leg as he stepped into the shorts. "I can wear my boots."

"Good."

He glanced at the shirt Viktor had handed him then back at his own on the bed. "Um, may I ask why you're having me wear this one instead of mine?"

"You're going to get sweaty and will need to change. I thought you'd prefer to wear your own shirt the rest of the day." He cocked his head and smiled as he studied his reaction. "Did I assume incorrectly? Would you rather wear mine the rest of the day?"

"No, Viktor. I don't want to get it dirty."

He took the shirt from the bed and swapped them in his hands. "Change of orders. Wear this one for now. Keep mine."

"But—" He bit his lip and scrunched his face. "Yes, Viktor."

"Very good, Yuri. I'm pleased you fought that impulse to argue." He leaned in to kiss his cheek, lingering for a moment. "Let's go." He headed out of the bedroom with Yuri following behind. He turned to look back at him. "I already did my workout today, so you'll forgive me if I'm a little slow."
"Yes, Viktor." Thank god. Maybe this will only be horribly embarrassing instead of completely embarrassing. He was already dreading tomorrow when he intended to do this fully refreshed.

Viktor laughed. "That wasn't an order. That was making conversation. I'm sorry for being unclear."

He smiled lightly. "You're forgiven. Also, thank you for the shirt," his smile fell away as he thought, "and for the gift basket and flowers. I realized just now I hadn't thanked you for those yet."

He smiled, but it didn't look entirely pleased. "You're very welcome. I'm glad you and Phichit are enjoying the food." The expression he glimpsed on Viktor's face before he turned back made him curse this whole social media thing.

(10) Viktor led him to the woods that picked up at the back of his castle and to a clear dirt path winding through it. He clapped his hands with a smile. "Okay, we're going to warm up with an easy jog then when you hear the beep on my phone take off into a sprint and race me as hard as you can. When it beeps again, we go back to a walk and repeat until you hear the three beeps signaling the end. Simple enough, yes?"

"Yes, Viktor." Right. Like he's going to be able to keep up with him.

He tapped at his phone then stuck it in the armband he had put on when back in his room. "Ready?"

"Yes, Viktor."

"Good. Let's go."

Viktor took off with his long legs carrying him to an easy lead within a few strides. Yuri did his best but with extra weight and boots, this "easy warmup" felt a whole lot like the actual workout as he tried to keep up. His body ached more than usual with the bruises all over him, but soon enough his body accepted the cold burn of his lungs and the fire in his thighs and calves and eased into a steady stride. The first beep sounded, and he was left in Viktor's dust. Irritation at his weakness drove his legs harder, and he at least held their gap by the time another beep sounded and they went back to a walk. He stumbled the first few steps, and Viktor reached his hand back to steady him.

"Thanks." He tried to straighten himself under his heaving lungs.

"You're not doing too bad. A little slow, but I expected worse."

He couldn't stop the glare he gave to Viktor's chipper smile.

He laughed. "Oh, don't give me that look. You know it's true. With your age, you should be able to outrun me, especially when I'm going easy."

"Not when you have legs like a gazelle, and I've just got these thick, stumpy things."

His face hardened. "Yuri, you are not to talk about yourself that way."

"Yes, Viktor."

He nodded. "Good. I love your legs. Your thighs especially. So delicious. I might make a meal out of them one of these days."

He chuckled. "So, you lured me out into the woods and then revealed your cannibalistic desires? That's nice. I'm not concerned at all."

Laughing, he paused to kiss his cheek. "I didn't mean that literally. I meant your thighs and chocolate
sauce and my tongue might get very well acquainted soon." His phone beeped interrupting the smirk following his wink.

Viktor took off again with Yuri pushing himself to keep up. The ache in his body spread warm pleasure through him at the memory of how it got there along with thoughts of Viktor's promises for more. What did he intend to do tonight? He sought out Viktor and found him shockingly right next to him. Viktor seemed just as surprised and started pushing harder as the next beep sounded. By the third sprint, Yuri was starting to pull ahead, and Viktor was looking frustrated. By the time the triple beeps sounded, Yuri was solidly winning all their bouts. He looked back at Viktor heaving and braced on his knees with a triumphant grin.

Viktor looked up, a reluctant smile on his face. "You... you have good stamina. And you're a lot more competitive than I would have thought."

"Yeah, the end is easier for me than the start."

"I'm the opposite. I have good speed in the beginning, but endurance has never been my strong suit. Looks like this will be an excellent match. We'll both push each other in our weak points. Come on. Steady jog back home." He turned back around and this time keeping up was easy.

They arrived back at the castle, and Viktor led him to a park next to the woods that had an old metal playground set up, the kind you don't see much anymore with most of them replaced by plastic. This at least had a thick covering of trees to block out the sun so their skin wouldn't be scalded.

Yuri cocked his head. "A playground?"

"Yes. It's a good workout. I'll show you."

He walked over to the monkey bars and jumped to grab the side of it holding his body out in a perfectly straight line horizontal to the ground as he pulled himself up and brought his chin over the bar. He repeated the pull-up without letting his body waver from that flat plane. Sweat trickled across bare, flushed abs before dripping off into the shredded black rubber covering the ground. Yuri's eyes focused on every undulating drop, he didn't notice Viktor watching him until his sweetly smug voice called out.

"Like what you see?"

He turned redder than Viktor was at being caught, but his demanded answer still stuttered out. "Ye—yes, Viktor."

"Come join me."

He jumped, grabbing the bar next to him and tried to hold his body out, but all he managed was a pathetic wave as his body collapsed right back to hanging straight down from the bar.

"You don't have to go all the way right now. Just hold yourself firm and lift as much as you can while still holding it through the pull-up." He dropped back to the ground with a huff and came over to guide his body into the proper placement. "Hold your abs in hard. Those have to be as strong as possible." He poked at his belly until he sucked it hard enough to satisfy him. "Good. Now pull yourself up."

He managed five pull-ups before his abs gave out, and he fell back into a straight line, the weight of his body jerking hard on his arms. He dropped to the ground. "Wow. That's tough."

"Yeah, but you did great. When I started, I was only able to do one. Though I was only fourteen."
He grinned and poked at his side.

"You've been working out here that long?"

"Yeah, this has been here since I was a kid. I started using it to work out because it was here, and I was used to playing on it. This is just playing with a focus and a goal."

"Is that still playing then?"

"If it's fun, why not call it play? Come on. Next exercise."

He joined him through various holds, pulls, dips, and balances on the equipment and managed to surprise both himself and Viktor with how much his softened body was able to keep up—still far from anything impressive. They moved to a stack of platforms. Viktor jumped onto the stack and back down, squatting low on every landing. He took a few off the stack to let him try it. After a few jumps, he discovered just how scary it got when fatigue starts setting in. He froze on the ground with his shaking legs then looked over to Viktor.

"Uh, how do you balance pushing yourself and not biting it?"

"Just find your limit. It's okay on this one not to push your limit too hard. I don't want you getting injured. It's probably right about now for you if the stack is looking intimidating."

They did a few more leg exercises, various squats, and lunges and stretched themselves out.

Viktor wiped the sweat from his forehead and looked over with a grin. "Come on. Now that I have a partner, I wanna try something." Taking his hand and tugging him along, he dragged him back over to a high bar and stopped below it. "Come here. Climb on." He opened his arms wide.

"Climb on? As in... climb on you?"

"Yes." He took his hand and pulled his arms up around his neck then slid his hands down to his thighs and picked him up to wrap around his waist.

Pressed so close to such a sweaty, shirtless, rippling Viktor, his cock twitched in great interest, and he prayed Viktor wouldn't notice. The soft smirk in his eyes assuaged at least that aspect of his life was still going quite normally.

Viktor spotted the bar and made the little jump necessary to reach it. His arms began lifting them to the top of the bar making every muscle in his body flex against his and ran a rolling pressure down his cock pressed between them. It hardened distinctly, and Viktor's smirk grew wider as he peeked over the top of the bar between them. Viktor kissed his cheek at the top then lowered himself slowly and back up again keeping his eyes fixed on him with his gentle smile on his face.

How was he smiling through this? It took Yuri all the strength in his body to hold himself onto such a slippery surface. He had no idea how Viktor was returning to the top for a third time with all his weight on him after his second workout for the day. He was inhuman. He eased back down then dropped to the ground.

"Wow. That's tough. I'm going to be so sore tomorrow." He wrapped his arms around his waist to help hold them together. "I think I overdid it a little trying to impress you." He laughed lightly and tipped his head to the side to kiss his neck.

"I don't understand this whole 'trying to impress' me thing."
"What do you mean you don't understand it? I want to impress you. I like the look in your eyes when I do."

"Um... you like the completely manic expressions I make when you overwhelm me?"

He laughed again and moved to a new spot on his neck. "I do like those; they're cute, but I wasn't referring to those. I was referring to that little spark in your eyes when your breath hitches almost imperceptibly, and one side of your mouth melts down into a crooked little smile. That look is rarer than you think, and I do have to try to put it there. You are anything but easy, Yuri. You challenge me in every way." He tipped his head to the other side and pressed a long lingering kiss to the dip between his neck and his collarbone. "Thank you."

He eased him down, letting his cock get a nice long drag against his hard body. Yuri grabbed his arms to steady himself as he heaved forward when his feet hit the ground. Viktor waited until he stabilized then turned and walked toward the house. Yuri paused for only a second before he realized he was expected to follow and jogged to catch up. Viktor glanced back with a smile.

He led him back into his bedroom and through the door next to the bookshelf into a bathroom almost the exact inverse of the one in the basement with pearlescent tiles lining every surface and swirls of jade running through them. Viktor led him to the expansive shower holding a long line of fancy bottles on a shelf built into the long wall and a wide teak bench and turned the water on. "You did so well for me; I'll watch as you clean yourself up and pleasure yourself." He glanced down at the bulge in his shorts. "Apparently your stamina applies to many areas."

He wasn't sure if he was supposed to reply, but it somehow seemed appropriate. "Thank you, Viktor." The smile on his face told him at least those instincts were correct. He returned the smile, albeit with an embarrassed blush, as he pulled his shirt off then paused, staring at it in his hands, his lip held between his teeth as he thought. "Did—did I... do well enough to have you... join me?"

"Oh, Yuri." He slowly shook his head in a crooked line. "Yuri, so good. You're so wonderful." He stepped forward and knelt to remove Yuri's shorts. "Yes, zolotse, you did so well, and you asked so sweetly, so yes, I'll join you." He pulled off his boxers and stepped him out of them and tossed them to the side then stood to remove his own clothes.

Yuri drank in the sight before him. Viktor's skin was still slightly pink and wet from his efforts, his muscles swollen and quivering. His thick cock hung heavy over his sculpted legs under a trimmed patch of silver hair. Yuri instinctively licked his lips and gulped as the image of it hardening and sliding down his throat flashed in his mind.

Viktor raised his hand to comb through his hair and pushed it back a little, posing for him with a satisfied grin. "Are you enjoying the view?"

"Yes, Viktor. Very—very much."

He turned around and popped his ass toward him, his arms stretched up and placed behind his head, widening his shoulders and back, emphasizing the way they cut sharp lines to his waist before softening over the treacherous curves of his low back and ass. "But you're a fan of this view, aren't you?"

"I'm a fan of all of them. There's nothing on you that isn't perfection." His jaw hung open with the weight of Viktor's image dragging him down.

"Yuri! You little charmer. See? We get some of that nervous stuttering out of the way, and you're smooth as silk. Come on." He took his hand and tugged him into the shower.
If he thought Viktor naked after a workout was perfection, Viktor in the shower was enough to make him want to drop to his knees and thank the force in the universe that put this sight before him. He realized whatever force it was could be summed up with Viktor's actions pulling him to right here and found himself sinking to his knees at his feet before his self-consciousness could stop him.

"What is this, Yuri? Are you... mocking me?"

"No, Viktor." He bent forward to kiss the tops of his feet. "I just... had to. Thank you." He sat back up, blinking against the water bouncing in his eyes.

"My god, Yuri. Are you trying to ruin me?" Eyes burning, he grabbed his hand and pulled him back to his feet. He took a sponge from the shelf and lathered it with the same intoxicating scent of his lotion. Pinning him back against the cold tiles, he ran the rich lather over his own abs. Flowing into the hollow line where his abs ended and his thigh began, it dripped down his leg. Viktor grabbed Yuri's hand and put it to his own cock then lowered himself down a little to line up his abs to his cock. "Here. fuck yourself on me." He rolled his hips into him and paused before making contact, his body trembling. "Color?"

"Green." All the blood in his body rushed to his cock, his cry echoing through the hollow space as Viktor pressed into him, sliding his rippled abs down the length of his cock.

He slid his body along him, kisses biting over his chest with nips of pain to send his pleasure soaring. He thrust into the creamy lather, rich and heavy with slick lotions. His head pressed back against the wall as his hips pressed tighter to Viktor and his gasping cries flowed without restraint. Viktor laced his fingers into his free hand and pressed their hands onto the wall behind him, his body rolling along the underside of his cock.

Water droplets fell from the soaked fringe of hair hanging over Viktor’s eyes and landed on his full, parted lips. Aching, Yuri held himself back from his desire to taste him. Viktor leaned in closer and the droplets running off him fell onto Yuri's waiting lips. Seizing Yuri's neck and pulling them closer, he trembled, shivering breath falling rain. The droplets ran inside Yuri's mouth. Closing his eyes, he swallowed them slowly. His lips parted again and sparked with the slightest brush of Viktor's lips as their eyes locked on each other, heavy breath rolling in waves into his mouth and over his tongue.

Viktor made a tiny sound almost like a whimper in the back of his throat as he closed his eyes and pressed his forehead against his, pulling his lips back again. The hollow knife of loss slashed through his pleasure, but Viktor's own expression of pain when he opened his eyes to watch him again hurt worse. He needed to make it better. It was his own fault Viktor was now hurting because he didn't understand how a kiss could be a question or how to make it not be one. He was supposed to be the one hurting here—not Viktor.

He glanced down to see Viktor's hardened cock, and he had to fight the impulse to take him in his hand. Biting his lip, he pressed his head harder into the wall, thrusting his cock faster against him. "You—you too. Please, Viktor. Please use me." Saying those words piqued his pleasure enough to rush over the gaping holes and fill the wounds. "Please, please use me. I need you to."

"You first, zolotse. Come for me." His face buried against his neck with his gently sucking kisses. "Come for me, my sweet Yuri."

He pressed himself a little tighter and thrust faster to obey his rumbling voice. Splashing those perfect abs, his body quaked as his head fell onto Viktor's shoulder.

Viktor let him ride out the last of his orgasm then flipped him around and pinned his arms up over his head, one hand crossed over the other, and held them in place with one hand as he used the other to
grab his hips back toward him and lather his inner thighs. "My turn." His voice growled at his ear. "Cross your legs."

He stepped one foot over the other and Viktor yanked him back harder making his back arch and his ass tip up toward him. Was he planning on fucking him? The question made his cock jump back to attention. Why did the thought of Viktor deciding that for him bring such a rush of relief? His cock throbbed painfully even though he just came, screaming to him just how much the idea of Viktor taking him and using him for his pleasure any way he wanted turned him on.

Viktor slid his cock between his thighs, moaning as he slipped in slowly then dragged out even slower. The pang of regret he felt when he realized Viktor would never make that decision for him faded as Viktor's rasping voice whispered next to his ear.

"You feel so good. Squeeze your thighs a little tighter for me. I want to feel how much you want me." He sighed at his obedience. "Yes, that's it, Yuri. You feel so incredible."

"Please, use me, Viktor. Please, use me. I want to make you feel good. Please, do whatever you need to feel the best." He pressed back toward him, dropping his body against his arms still pinned to the wall and stretching the front of his body.

"Does it turn you on to say that?"

He whimpered and nodded. "Yes, Viktor."

His thrusts picked up the pace, his hips slapping against him. Yuri tightened further and moaned as Viktor's cock ran over his bruises, sending his pain to spread into his body and wrap around his cock. Viktor sucked a deep, bruising kiss into his shoulder, biting down as he thrust against him relentlessly.

"Ah! Viktor! That feels so good!"

"You like being used for my pleasure? You like being my little slut?"

He cried out as Viktor's words struck through him harder than his own. "Yes! Yes, Viktor! Please! Please, use me!"

Viktor's satisfied purr over the sounds of their slapping flesh trilled down his body. "Such a good little slut you are. My sweet, dirty, virgin slut." His hand on his stomach snaked up to grab his nipple and pinched hard. "Listen to those filthy cries. You're not even being touched, yet you sound like I'm fucking you blind. I didn't know such a thing existed—A virgin slut." He tweaked his nipple harder sending drops of precum dripping from his cock. "If you sound like this without even knowing what real pleasure feels like, I can't wait to see how delectably filthy you become when you feel it for real."

He moved over to his other nipple to touch it with his pain there too, kissing up the center of his spine. "You know, I'm not going to be able to hear that sweet voice of yours without also hearing these obscene cries behind it anymore. Every time you say yes, Viktor, so perfectly sweet, I'm going to hear this voice right here behind it begging me to use you."

Het let out a loud whimper as his body collapsed down into Viktor's support. "Please, Viktor. Please use me as much as you want. I want to make you feel so good. I love being your slut." He cried out again as his own words joined Viktor's to stroke through his core and make his cock pulse with pleasure. "I'm... I'm going to come again. Is it okay?"

"Oh, and there's that perfect sweetness again. So filthy and so sweet. Just perfect, Yuri." He released
his right hand and laced his fingers through his left still pressed to the tiles now heated under their touch. "Go ahead. Show me how much you like being my slut."

Whimpering, he clamped down his thighs more as his hand came to stroke his cock. He looked down to see Viktor's cock thrusting between his thighs and whined as he held back the urge to come right then. He wanted to see Viktor come first. He kept up his fast strokes over his cock even though his body begged him to either ease up or release and listened as Viktor's voice broke apart at his ear, his cock spilling between his thighs. Finally satisfied he could bring him pleasure that can't be faked, he let himself go, coming harder than the first time.

They finished in the shower with Viktor whispering sweet words in his ear as he washed Yuri's body, refusing to let him return the favor. Instead, he sat him on the bench to watch—and drool—as he washed himself.

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Yuri had no idea a t-shirt could ever feel good in a way that was anything other than comfortable, but as he slipped Viktor's soft gray t-shirt over his damp body, he wished he could wear nothing but this ever again.

It smelled like Viktor and felt like his touch and the fact Viktor had known he wouldn't want to give it back made his heart surge in a wild leap. He buried his nose into the collar to take in the scent as Viktor had his back turned. Looking back up, he blushed at Viktor's wink in the mirror facing him.

They finished dressing, and after Viktor made him eat some eggs and toast, walked to the stables with Viktor putting his hand on his low back near the house and then dropping it as they approached the first pastures, his professional demeanor resuming the lead. It was a little disconcerting how smoothly Viktor could assume different roles. Which one was the real him?

(12) "Viktor?"

"Yes?"

"Before you called me something, and I didn't know what it was."

"Zolotse?"

"Yeah. I thought my English was pretty good, but I don't know that word."

"Your English is excellent. You don't know that word because it's not English. It's Russian."

"Oh. What does it mean?"

He looked over and smiled. "It means my gold. It's a cutesy version of it though so it would be more accurate to say my little piece of gold, or my gold nugget. I prefer to think of it though as a more affectionate version of my gold because gold nugget sounds funny to me."

"Oh." Not oh. That explained what the word meant, but only brought up a new question of why he used it. Probably just one more way to bind him so his actions would affect him the way he intended. He was ashamed at how well it was working. Gold star for pathetic.

They walked down the brick aisle between pale wood stalls. A few horses stretched their necks over the open fronts to investigate the newcomer. The whole interior was painted a creamy white lending a clean warmth.
Viktor opened the door to the tackroom and held it open for him. A wall of saddles hung neatly on one side and bridles perfectly hung with the reins crossed and looped within the throat latches on the other. Wooden cabinets took up the other ends, and a few comfy chairs and a bench sat in the middle of the room.

"I assume you know how to tack up?"

"Yes, Viktor."

"Excellent. These are Toska's saddles. You'll find his bridles under his name over there." He pointed to the wall then moved to the next saddles in line. "These are Bytiye's."

He leaned closer to study the strange spelling on the plaque to try to memorize the strange word.

"Question?"

"No, Viktor. Not really. I was just trying to memorize it. Is this another Russian word?"

"Yes. Both of them are, and neither translates well. Toska is an ache of the soul. A yearning with nothing to yearn for. It has a few layers of meaning, but that's the simplest explanation. Bytiye is almost the opposite. It's an elevated state of existence, a meaningful, enriched existence."

"That's very poetic."

He laughed. "I am Russian. Poetry and drama are in the blood. We're raised on the arts, so it tends to come up in a lot of things we do." Huh. He hadn't seen that in him. He tended to be rather serious though beating someone with whips for pleasure might fall into the dramatic category.

"How do I say it? Bytiye?" The word that flowed so luxuriously from Viktor's lips got mangled on his.

He shook his head. "No, it has to be more in the throat. Russian has hard, clear constants and emphasized vowels. You can't mumble your way through it as you can in English. Push hard on the vowels in your throat and make the B and T clear but the emphasis is on the 'ye' at the end."

"By-ti-ye?"

"Closer. The first by is not actually two letters. It's a B with a soft sign which is something added to a letter that softens it. In this case, it gives it a bit of a y sound, but it's not separate from the B. Think of it more as 'buh-ti-yay' with a little more guttural sound."

"Buh-tiye."

"Yes, better. Keep trying. It will take some practice to get it right."

"Why did you pick a name that's so difficult for English speakers to pronounce? Don't the announcers get it wrong?"

"They butcher it. Absolutely mangled beyond recognition. As for why, I like the way it sounds for me, and I like the meaning. I don't care if no one else can say it."

"It does sound nice when you say it."

He smiled and took his hand to squeeze it. "Thank you."

"And Toska? Is that right?"
"Close. The S is different than it is in English. The tongue moves further back in the mouth so instead of right behind the teeth, it's more in the middle with a hollower S sound." He stretched his lips apart so he could see where his tongue was as he emphasized the breathy, almost whistling S.

"And it's the O like in 'not,' but a little softer, almost an 'ah' sound but that has to come off a hard, clear T."

He curled his tongue awkwardly in his mouth to reproduce the strange S, and a whistley sh sound came out instead.

"That's a very nice sha. It's another letter in the Russian alphabet." He played with the sound in his mouth to figure out how to describe it, and his silly facial expressions made them both giggle.

"Widen your tongue in your mouth. It comes back but doesn't curl much. It's flatter."

He tried the sound again stretching his tongue across his mouth, and while it felt strange, he managed a sound that to him sounded more like Viktor's.

"Yes! You got it!" He beamed warmly, and his praise made his heart squeeze tight. "Try it with the rest now."

"Toska." The word felt funny, but at least it was a little more natural than Bytiye.

"Excellent, Yuri!" He glanced behind him to the open door then kissed his cheek. "You're a quick learner."

He smiled and dipped his chin. "Thank you."

"Now this one, Avos, has the same S like in Toska, but even further back and breathier. It has a soft sign after it, so think of it as an even softer S. The O is the same and a long A. Avos." He dragged out the name so he could hear the sounds. "Try it."

"Avos."

"Move your tongue further back, and here it can curl a little to reach."

He tried the name again to Viktor's beaming praise even though he knew it was still mangled compared to his. "What does that one mean?"

"Hmm... like a blind faith in luck. Trusting good things will come along."

He nodded with his lips pursed. "A very foreign word." He glanced at the saddle rack which had no label. "There's no name?"

"No, this is my spare saddle. I just got him a few weeks ago, so I haven't gotten his own saddle made yet. I'm still not sure if he's going to work out or not. He's young and a bit of an asshole actually."

He laughed then covered his mouth to shut it down.

"It's okay. You can laugh at my jokes. I'm not always serious."

"I just wouldn't have expected you to describe a horse as an asshole."

"Really? You've never come across one that you've muttered 'asshole' under your breath at least once every time you worked with him?"

"Well yes, Viktor, but I guess I didn't expect you to describe him like that."
"Well, he is. A huge asshole actually. He's got a rebellious streak a mile wide, and I don't have much patience for that. I love an interesting challenge, but he's just defiant for the sheer joy of defiance. The whole rebel without a cause thing has never appealed to me, and I've found those never completely break. That's why I gave him that name. His rider will just have to trust they'll get through it together through sheer luck.

"I doubt he's dressage material with that rebelliousness which is a shame because he's one of the best movers I've seen, but he's also got a powerful jump, so he should make a decent showjumper. He could make a nice eventer if he can gain enough obedience for the dressage portion. He's bold, so he might be able to make up for a lackluster dressage performance on the courses. I have yet to gallop him full out, but he's got plenty under me, so he should have some impressive speed. So far, he's been clean over jumps which is a bit surprising with how much he fights me to them. He's just a lot of horse, and he knows it. Do you know how to lunge?"

"Yes, Viktor."

"Excellent. Toska and Bytiye don't need lunging, but after you tack Avos, I'd like you to lunge him for twenty minutes in side reins. Don't rein him in too tight because he'll throw a fit; just enough to get him in a long frame."

"Viktor... I believe I have some information that will be useful to you. May I share it?"

"No."

He whimpered in his struggle to obey against his screaming heart.

"I already know what you want to tell me. You want to tell me you can't do it, yes?"

"Yes, Viktor."

"And that has nothing to do with you being scared of the horse."

"Yes, Viktor."

"Then my order stands, and I don't need to hear anything else on it."

He bit his lip, battling himself for Viktor's desired obedience. He finally whimpered out his answer as he fought the urge to cry. "Yes, Viktor."

"Thank you, Yuri. I'll help you. Don't worry. It'll be okay. I promise." He took his chin in his hand and lifted it back up as he stroked his thumb over his cheek. "Trust me."

He sucked in a breath and tried to push his tears further aside. "Yes, Viktor."

He stepped in close to whisper down his neck, his hand gripping his waist. "That sounded positively sinful. I didn't even have to imagine those filthy cries behind that one. They were right there as you put aside your own fears to have faith in me. You're so good. My perfect virgin slut."

He gasped, choking back his cry as his distress was wound with a thread of pleasure. It shut down his ability to process anything other than the dizzying heat pouring from the man in front of him.

"Shh... Relax and let it settle. Don't run from it." He squeezed his waist tighter and brought his other hand up to press on the bruises over his chest.

The steady heat of his pain calmed the storm inside him.
"There you go, Yuri. Let my touch in. You don't need to worry. I'm here, and it's my responsibility to keep us all safe. Not yours."

He sighed and nodded. "Thank you, Viktor."

"Thank you for trusting me. I'll only have you watch today." He kissed his temple then stepped back. "Better?"

"Yes, Viktor."

Smiling, he moved his shirt out of the way to stroke the sensitive skin on his hip. "My good Yuri. Okay, let's get to work. I jump on Tuesdays and Thursdays and do dressage Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. Saturdays are reserved for teaching, but I ride my three in the mornings just for fun, usually trail riding or playing games. Grab Toska's tack."

He picked up the tan jumping saddle and found the matching bridle under his name on the wall and joined Viktor where he stood at the cabinets, hooking the saddle and pad over his forearm and tossing the bridle over his shoulder.

"Everyone here has their own cabinet. This is mine. You'll find their brush boxes labeled. For the training horses, you'll have to learn their matching owners to find the right names here. I'll send you an email with that information this evening." He opened the cabinet with a gold nameplate reading, 'Viktor Nikiforov.' "Grab his brush box and follow me." He selected the shorter crop from the ones hanging on the door and turned for the door.

He found the burgundy box with Toska's name on it and followed him out.

"You should always find the horse you're looking for in the stall." Viktor looked back over his shoulder as Yuri tried to keep up with his long stride. "They hold the morning shift in until lunch when they all come in and the afternoon horses are left in and the morning ones let out. If you can't find the right horse in the stall, someone likely made a mistake. Notify me right away and look for them in the pastures. Feel free to ask for help from someone else to locate them if you need it."

"Yes, Viktor."

He stopped at a stall with his gray warmblood and smiled affectionately as he stroked the horse's nose who greeted him with deep, quivering sniffs. He held his head and gave him some kisses on his nose and Toska bobbed his head and snorted in his face. Viktor laughed and kissed him again as he scratched along the base of his mane. "Hey, boy. I'm not going to be tacking you up for our rides anymore. I have Yuri here who's going to do it, and he's so sweet, I'm sure you two will get along great. I trust him, so you don't have to worry." He kissed him again and stepped back to wave him over. "Come say hi. You can put the saddle on the rack."

He unfolded the saddle rack hung flush to the wall and stuck the post in the hole to hold it up and placed the saddle on it, taking great care not to damage it. He hung the bridle on the gold arch next to it then looked around for somewhere good to put the brush box.

"On the floor is fine. It's just a brush box."

He set the box down and joined Viktor to hold out his hand for Toska to approve. His warm breath blew over his open palm as he took tentative huffs of his strange scent. He ran his lips over his hand seeking the tasty treats often found in such places.

"Sorry, boy. I don't have anything on me."
Viktor reached into a box hanging on the wall and pulled out a round cookie and handed it to him. "Feel free to spoil them all rotten." He smiled. "Just make sure they remember their manners."

"Yes, Viktor." He smiled as Toska took the treat from his hand with the gentlest touch of his lips over his palm then chewed delightedly, tossing his head.

Viktor pulled out another cookie and handed it to him. "That's my good boy. So sweet to my Yuri. You make sure you keep your best manners for him. I don't want him thinking I don't know how to control my horses."

The sing-song cooing of his voice as he chatted with his horse was as startling as it was endearing. The simple fact he chatted with his horse just as he liked to do twisted his heart into unrecognizable knots. The silly, heart-shaped grin on his face as he stroked Toska's neck and babbled more nonsense to him brought back that strange innocence he had glimpsed when he'd apologized for walking on his floor with boots. Viktor looked over at him with that grin still in place but softened as he studied him. "What's that look for, Yuri? You think I don't enjoy being with my horses?"

"No, Viktor. That's not it."

"Or maybe you think I'm a cold, heartless monster incapable of love." His goofy grin slid into his amused smirk.

"No, Viktor. You're just... cute."

He gave a surprised laugh. "You hear that, Toska? He thinks I'm cute. Am I blushing? What should I say?" He watched him expectantly. "Come on, buddy, I don't know what to say when cute boys think I'm cute. Don't leave me hanging out here to embarrass myself in front of the cutest boy I've ever seen. That's just cruel." Toska snorted in his face again, and Viktor laughed and scrubbed his forehead with his fingers as he wrapped the other around his muzzle. "Jerk." He kissed his nose.

He couldn't stop himself from laughing and covered his mouth, heat pouring off his cheeks. Viktor had said much nicer and dirtier things, but somehow 'cute' hit him in ways those hadn't. Maybe because it seemed a little more... possible.

Viktor studied him with a gentle smile and his horse's head buried in his arms, resting his head against his forehead. "What do you think, Toska? Is he the cutest boy you've ever seen? He must be."

Toska pulled his head free and came to Yuri to check if he'd gathered more treats for him while he waited.

Viktor scoffed. "Toska! Betrayer! I thought we were family. You've wounded me." He clutched his heart with a pained expression. "This is a mortal wound you've inflicted. Betrayed by my loyal steed. I've already got enough competition, you jerk." He sighed. "That's what I get I guess for talking up the cute boy before I've staked my claim."

He giggled. "I thought you did stake your claim. We are in your hours, right?"

Viktor smiled. "That's right. The cute boy is all mine. You hear that Toska? He's mine. Find your own cute boy."

He laughed. "I think he's just interested in the treats."

"That is so true." He reached into the bucket and Toska abandoned Yuri to poke at Viktor's shoulder eagerly. "You cookie whore. You'll love anyone who touches this box. I used to feel so special that..."
you always greeted me so nicely, but you just do it for the cookies. I mean, I knew that, but I hate having it pointed out so clearly with your fickleness." He held the treat just out of reach, and Toska grew impatient and stretched his neck out, flapping his lips to try to grab it. "Ah-ah. You know better." He put the treat back in the box, and Toska huffed at him. "Don't sass me. You know the rules."

He waited until Toska relaxed then pulled out the treat again and teased him with it until he was certain he wouldn't try grabbing it again. "There's my good boy." He offered him the treat slowly, making sure Toska was still obeying as he should. "Good boy." He scratched his neck as Toska chewed happily. "Alright, I think you've gotten spoiled enough. Time to work. Put him in the crossties and tack him up."

"Yes, Viktor." He took the leather lead from the door. "Do you put the chain over his nose?"

"No, he doesn't need it. Avos does though."

He clipped the lead to the ring on the bottom of his halter and opened the door to bring him into the crossties. He clipped the elastic cords hanging on the wooden beams to either side of his halter and took off the lead then grabbed the rubber curry comb and started lifting the dirt and loose hair in vigorous circles. It drifted in a cloud around him and settled on Viktor's shirt, and he cringed at the realization he'd have to wash it and take away Viktor's scent.

"What's wrong, Yuri?"

"Um, just that... I realized I'm going to have to wash your shirt." He pressed his lips together and leaned harder onto the curry comb as Toska stretched his neck into it to tell him he was getting a good spot.

"Yes, that's generally how these things work. What's the issue?"

"That um... that it smells like you, and if I wash it... it won't."

"You like the way I smell that much?" His voice regained that breathy, cautious tone he had the other day as he took a step toward him away from the stall he had been leaning against.

"Yes, Viktor. I thought... you had... caught me?"

"Yes, but finding it pleasant is entirely different from regretting even the idea of it being gone."

"Oh. Yeah, I guess I can see how that might be... different." He moved to Toska's other side and away from Viktor's intense stare. He brushed Toska's mane to the other side of his neck and started the brisk massage again with Toska groaning his delight.

Viktor stepped around to the same side with a smile. "He likes you."

He smiled and moved to his shoulder pressing deeper through the muscle and easing over the bony parts. "I like him too. So... earlier you said something to Toska," he pronounced the name slowly, trying to replicate the way Viktor had to his approving nod, "about how you won't be tacking him up anymore. You didn't have a groom before?"

"No. I've used grooms at shows to help keep things running smoothly, but I limit the number of horses I take so I can do it all myself here."

"Oh. Why?"
“Same reason I like doing what I do with you. It builds a connection. I can inspect them for any injuries and get a sense of their mood for the day and generally just play with them and bond. Just hopping on and riding is so impersonal to me.” He poked at Toska's lip that was hanging loosely from his relaxation making Toska twitch it a bit without losing his relaxed state. Viktor smiled and scratched underneath his cheeks.

"Then why... why are you having me do it?"

"You needed it.” His voice was unusually soft.

A confused ache rushed through him. He gave up something he likes doing for him? "Won't... won't you miss that connection?"

"Maybe. It's too soon to say yet.”

He stretched up on his toes to reach Toska's tall back better. "What would make you not miss it?"

"If I can use that time to build a stronger connection. I love my horses more than I can express, but I know they don't feel the same for me. They might appear to, but their eagerness to see me is for the treats I offer; not me. As long as their needs are being met, they're equally happy with anyone who's providing that. I'm sure you've seen that any time a new horse comes in how quickly they adjust. I've raised Toska since he was a baby, but if I sold him, he'd just go to his new owner and in a day or so be poking at his shoulder for treats."

"How do you know they're really okay? Maybe they have no choice but to get used to it. Maybe they do miss home, but life keeps going on so they do too. Maybe every time he poked at that new guy's shoulder he'd feel a small pain wishing it was yours.” He tossed the curry back into the box and grabbed the hard brush to work over his body again this time with short flicks of the stiff bristles.

"It's fine; I'm used to it. Yes?"

"Yes, Viktor."

Viktor watched him intently as he flicked more dust and hair onto Viktor's t-shirt. "I never considered that."

"Can I ask you a question?"

"Of course. You don't need to ask first."

He nodded. "Okay, if you groom all the horses you ride, how do you look spotless and wear white breeches?" He wiped away some hair tickling his face and the smudge of dirt across his forearm told him there was likely one across his cheek now too.

Viktor laughed and brushed at his face to clear it then used his thumb to wipe away the dirt from his cheek. He leaned in to whisper and the thrill of his sudden closeness swept down his spine. "Blood magic."

Yuri wriggled with the energy flowing through him with a small laugh. "I don't doubt it."

He finished brushing Toska and put his saddle and bridle on still not learning Viktor's real secret, though, blood magic seemed the most likely explanation. Yuri took the reins over Toska's head and led him to the arena passing a few people who watched him with interest along the way. One tiny blond-haired kid scowled at him as he passed. He looked to Viktor, confused as to what he'd done to inspire such wrath, but Viktor just laughed.
"Oh, ignore him. He's just a little punk. He does that to everyone. He's Avos's human counterpart. He's pretty new here too, but he is quite loyal to his horse despite his nasty attitude. He comes in every morning before school just to play with him. If it weren't for that, I would have kicked him out already."

"Really? What's he done?"

"Nothing too major. Just his personality which you saw. It's very disruptive. He's spoiled, and his mother is so indulgent I'm afraid it's a permanent fixture of his personality at this point."

He smiled. "You mean you can't train him?"

He laughed. "Have you ever ridden a horse you don't get along with? You know how to ride, and you know how to make a horse behave, but the personalities clash, and it's nothing but frustration and butting heads?"

"Yes, Viktor."

"That's us. Training isn't a formula or a push-button thing. There's chemistry involved, and the slightest off balance can cause an explosive reaction. Plus, I'm limited on how much I can do with him. I wonder... One second." He ducked back into the tack room and came back with a helmet. They started forward again and walked out through the wall of light covering the arched opening at the end of the aisle, squinting into the bright sun. "When you used to ride, what style of riding did you do?"

He cringed. Viktor had of course successfully peeled away that layer, and now he was required to answer questions he didn't want to answer. "Eventing mostly."

His eyebrows flicked up. "Eventing. Seems bold for you. What level were you at when you stopped?"

"Um, it depended on the horses I was riding. Most of them were intermediate and under, but I had a few competing at advanced."

Viktor stopped dead and turned back making Yuri skid to a halt, but Toska had almost seemed to anticipate it and paused gracefully next to him. "Yuri. You're capable of riding at the highest levels, and you don't ride?"

"No, Viktor. I don't ride."

"How long ago was this? Did I ever ride against you?"

"No, Viktor. I didn't do any starred events, and I was in the Midwest. I didn't come to the East Coast until last year. That's when I stopped riding."

"None of this was on your resume."

He bit his lip as he watched him to determine how mad he was. He could fire him for the lies he had filled in that time period with. "No, Viktor."

"I asked about your experiences with horses, and you said not a lot beyond grooming and cleaning. You lied to me." His mouth pulled down in obvious displeasure.

"Yes, Viktor."
"How much of your resume was a lie?"

"All of it except the last position I was in."

"So, you weren't just riding as a hobby. You were a professional rider."

It wasn't really a question, but he answered as if it were. "Yes, Viktor."

"You know most people lie on resumes to inflate their experience, not deflate it."

"I didn't want to answer any questions on it."

"Is this the only lie I'll ever have to hear from you?"

"Yes, Viktor."

Viktor nodded and started forward again toward the outdoor arena. "Back when you rode, if I put you on Toska, could you do a four-star with him?"

He didn't even want him to apologize?

"I don't know. Maybe."

"Why weren't you my competitor, Yuri? Before you quit."

"I didn't do the more hyped-up shows where you compete. I didn't like the pressure." He tried to open the latch to the gate but couldn't figure it out.

Viktor revealed the right knob to lift, and the gate swung open. They walked onto the pale-yellow footing—one of those new fibers designed for optimum traction and ease on the joints. The enormous arena was lined with the same white flex-rail as the pastures, but taller to discourage horses from seeing it as just another huge fence they were supposed to jump.

Professionally designed to match the stable and the land it sat on, an elaborate course spread over the arena. The blocks used to create a fake stone wall were the same ivory stone as the stable. A set of standards painted with the rolling fog-covered hills at daybreak; soft gray and green banded poles stretched between them. Another set of standards: two Russian nesting dolls of the same size standing guard over a line of smaller ones sweeping down to the smallest one in the middle and holding the double set of red and white poles painted in a classic Russian design over the tiny dolls. Another jump was supported on two turrets plucked straight off his castle with two more stolen turrets behind holding more poles to create a wide spread between them.

"I see. If you were capable of riding them though, surely the owners who hired you would have asked."

"I specialized in training horses to new levels. As soon as they were solid enough for the owners to start asking, I turned them over to someone else and began with someone new." He released the gate, and it latched neatly all on its own.

"If you were training horses to the advanced level, the answer to my four-star question should have been a definite yes, and you should have known that." He studied him with narrowed eyes as they walked into the center of the arena. "The self-confidence is that low, huh? Even before you experienced whatever it was that made you quit."

It sounded almost like something he was supposed to answer, but as it wasn't actually a question, he
kept his mouth closed as the breeze picked up around them.

Viktor studied him another moment then nodded and put his helmet on. "Give me a leg up."

Yuri pulled the stirrups down on both sides of the saddle then came back and took Viktor's left shin in his hands. With a quick one, two, three from Yuri, they synchronized the move with Viktor jumping as he tossed him up. Yuri held firm for a moment for Viktor to land softly in the saddle. He picked up his stirrups and reins and took Toska out at an easy trot.

Yuri had received no further instructions, so he guessed his only task now was to watch him as he rose and fell, his thighs and that sublime ass flexing neatly with every stride, his ass brushing supple English tan leather. With the matching, perfectly patinaed boots and a deep teal polo, he looked like he was posing for a photo shoot for Horse Illustrated. It could have been Vogue with how overwhelmingly gorgeous he was, if he were doing everything wrong and posing in ridiculously dangerous positions. Yuri was grateful it wasn't Vogue. Viktor exuded competence in everything he did, and that was the biggest turn-on of all. Fashionably sexy had nothing on the way Viktor's every movement was performed with care and precision. Toska's ravenous strides ate up the ground as Viktor moved him into an easy canter.

There was one other rider in the arena, which Yuri only noticed after she breezed him trying to turn for the next jump. He startled and decided the other side of the rail was probably the best place to watch from instead of still dumbstruck in the middle of the arena where Viktor left him. He scurried to the rail and slipped through the slats.

Viktor set up his first jump over spring green and white birch poles and sailed over the four-foot fence as well as Yuri's rationality yet again as he damn near drooled over the perfection and easy grace rolling through his body over the jump.

This couldn't possibly be what Viktor intended to pay him to do.

Viktor's light hands turned Toska to the next fence without any gaping of his mouth or straining against a noseband cranked down to prevent any attempts at escape from the pain of rough hands or any twisting of his neck so often seen on horses as riders yanked their heads around. Instead, Viktor checked his stride to rock him back onto his hind end for an easier pivot and held the inside rein steady to give him the cue and support as he pushed and supported through his outside leg to help push his body through the turn, keeping his weight balanced to make himself an easy load to carry.

Toska moved into the space between the pressures Viktor created and found a clear path to the next jump even through the sharp turn.

As Yuri watched him take the course, he could see exactly what it was that Viktor enjoyed and appreciated. Toska wasn't always perfect and sometimes the rhythm would be lost or a takeoff slightly misjudged, but no matter what forces they encountered or how difficult a question Viktor asked of him, his energy always went to finding a way to be where Viktor's pressures put him. He didn't mind the challenge of imperfection or fighting outside forces as long as they were fighting them together.

That observation was driven home as he watched him work Avos who spent every stride finding a way to fight against him. More effort went to escaping the pressure placed on him than it did to the jumps which he took with a shocking amount of ease for how terrible the setups were. If that raw talent could be polished, he'd be explosive. As it stood, Viktor had to keep him over much easier fences than he could rightfully take just due to that personality glitch.

(13) Viktor trotted over, his face pink over his cheeks from his fight with a three-quarter ton animal
over fences. And that was after two strenuous workouts. He still looked like perfection, and Yuri had no response to give but unadulterated awe.

"What do you think of him?"

Yuri smiled. "He's an asshole."

He laughed. "Yeah. A complete asshole." He patted his red chestnut neck affectionately. "Have you ever ridden any like him?"

"Worse."

"Really." He tilted his head and smiled. "Successfully?"

"My ass didn't hit the ground too many times if that's what you're asking."

"Did you take any medals on them?"

"A few."

"Did you like riding them?"

His heart quivered as he spotted the setup for where Viktor's line was taking them. "Yes, Viktor."

"Did you prefer them?"

He bit his lip and nodded. "Yes, Viktor."

"Why?"

"I liked..." He took a deep breath and held it till his lungs burned, letting it out as he spoke. "I liked that I could work with them when no one else could. The more difficult, the more riders they had tossed, the more I liked them." He pressed his lips together to hold back the tears threatening his eyes.

Viktor watched him blink hard against his tears then kicked his feet free of the stirrups and jumped down. "Come here, Yuri."

His tears welled up higher as he stepped through the slats and into the ring.

Viktor pulled his helmet off and raked his fingers through his dampened hair. "Define one for me. For riding on a lunge. What conditions need to be met?"

He stared at the gleaming red horse behind Viktor he had every intention of putting him on, calculating how fast and how far he could run before their raging fires joined.

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Chapter End Notes

Credit for the art this time is me.

Spotify
8. Beggin for Thread by Banks
9. Like Real People Do by Hozier
10. Run Baby Run by The Rigs
11. Fantasies by Sara Kendall
12. Even if it Hurts by Sam Tiennesz
13. Bad Dream by Ruelle
Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

Things you will find in this chapter? Dora. Things you won't find? Smut. Wait! Where are you going? Please stay. It'll be in the next one, I swear!

Chapter Notes

Just to give you guys a little info here and so you can understand better what they're doing... Imagine a sport where the Olympics are NOT the pinnacle of the sport. There are 6 events harder and more prestigious than the Olympics. This sport is marked on a national level with absurdly understated levels (what Yuri mentioned with intermediate and advanced. Advanced would be about as hard as the Olympics.) and with stars on an international level. They go from 1-4 stars. Olympics would be a 3-star event, Badminton, Rolex and 4 other events held around the world would be 4-star events. This sport is called eventing and that's what Viktor competes in (as did Yuri).

It consists of three phases. First is dressage which literally means training and is a test of the horse's obedience and athletic condition. It has much in common with dancing and people who compete strictly in dressage will sometimes perform it set to music and choreographed to be an actual dance. The next phase is cross country which has horses galloping over solid obstacles in an open field. They have to jump over ditches and down drops. Into water. (Horses hate water) Over solid natural obstacles like fallen logs and over the craziest things you can imagine. Massive picnic tables, a giant's violin half-buried in the ground, giant salmon... people get creative. (apparently, I just described the aftermath of a giant's picnic party?)

Fun fact here: most of the jumps don't knock down meaning if the horse doesn't clear it, there's a good chance you're both going down. Sometimes with the horse on top of you. It's mandatory to ride with your medical information strapped to your arm for this sport. I wonder why... It requires insane amounts of bravery for both horse and rider. The third phase is show jumping (also called stadium jumping) which is basically jumping over fences in an arena. All of these must be completed with the same horse and rider team. It's meant to demonstrate a horse that is well-trained and obedient, brave and trusting, and has endurance and soundness of body. The people who compete in it? They're freakin' crazy. Just google eventing cross country jumps if you wanna know how crazy. And Viktor at 27 is just entering the peak of his competitive career in this sport. It's reasonable to expect him to compete until he's in his fifties and could go longer.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

(14) "I need an answer, Yuri."

He couldn't run. He couldn't move at all held between Viktor's will and his own. His caged body found just enough room to turn his eyes to Viktor's as he struggled to find his answer. Fought to find
the yes he was looking for through the panicked no screaming inside him. His only hope for escape was with Viktor's help. What would make his body unlock enough for Viktor to grasp?

"That... that I have no control."

"How difficult is this for you if I meet that condition?"

"I'd rather you do every item on that list, even the ones I marked zero and the ones you crossed out, than do this."

"Why did you mark it a one then?"

"Because you wanted me to." His tears spilled down his cheeks, his breath rising into the hands of panic that strangled it before it could reach him.

Viktor looped the reins over his arm to free his hands and wiped them away. "I didn't say a word."

"You know body language speaks just as well."

"Yes, I do know that. We speak to our horses just fine without words and hear them speak just as easily. That's why I tried to sit as still as I could and make no expression."

"Eyes say a lot," he gasped, fighting for the air to respond as Viktor wanted, "and they're far less tamable."

Viktor glanced around to make sure they were alone then stepped closer, holding one hand on his lower back and the other pressing into the bruises on his chest helping him gain control of his breath again. "You're willing to push your hardest limit just because I desire it?"

"Yes, Viktor."

Viktor closed his eyes and heaved over to rest his lips against his neck, pulling him in closer, kissing gently between words. "Perfect, Yuri. I mean that in the absolute sense of the word. You deserve the biggest reward I can give you for this. What do you want? Anything. Tell me anything you want, and I'll do it."

"I... I don't know what I want.” His heart slammed into his chest seeking escape.

He brought his head up to watch him. Taking his neck in his hands, he brought their lips closer. "Do you want me to kiss you?"

"No, Viktor."

"No? I thought you desired that. I'm offering gladly. Why would you not want it?"

"Because it would hurt you. I don't want to hurt you. Don't offer me things that would."

"It..." He closed his eyes and sighed. "You're right. I wanted to tell you it wouldn't, but I also promised never to lie to you. I will make tonight special for you, but I want to do more to express my gratitude.” He smiled. "I've never encountered this before. I've never been at a loss for how to reward someone. I've never had anyone do something that blew past my typical rewards.” He thought a little longer, his hands back on his chest and low back holding him in his solid strength as his lips distracted on his neck. "I've thought of something, but I'd need your agreement for more hours with me."

He gave a small, trembling laugh. "You want to reward me by asking for more time?"
Viktor brought his lips to the other side of his neck and tugged him closer. "I promise it will be worth it. I'd like to surprise you, so I can't give you any details, but if you trust me, I will make it worth it."

"You won't even tell me how many more hours you want or when?"

"No. You're too smart for that. You'd figure out my plans if I start giving you details. I promise I'm worth your trust."

"Yes, Viktor."

He laughed, his face pressing into the crook of Yuri's neck. "And now I have to reward you for that too. You didn't even ask me to give you a range. You're killing me here, Yuri. So limited for what I can do while you're making me want to give you more than I've ever considered giving another. Come here." He pulled him tight into his arms and held him, breathing deeply. "I know you're not able to feel what I'm trying to tell you right now because you're so worried about my plans for you and that horse behind me, so let's finish that, and just know you have made me happier than anyone ever has before."

Despite the panic in his mind, his body relaxed into his hold at the command of his embracing touch. "Thank you, Viktor. That's really all I need."

Taking up the tremors spilled into him, he smoothed his hair and turned to kiss his cheek. "Has anyone ever told you how perfectly sweet you are?"

"I think you might have mentioned it once or twice."

He laughed, holding him tighter to wick more dread. "I mean someone other than me."

"My mom. Every once in a while, my sister."

"It must be nice to have such a loving family."

"Is yours not?"

He chuckled. "Of course, you'd take all of two seconds to get there. They're not bad. We're not super close though. But let's not worry about me right now. I'm not going to ask for much today. I just want you to sit on him."

"You'll hold the reins?"

"Yes." He kissed his cheek and released him to face Avos and start putting the reins back.

"Wait! You said you'd hold them!"

He stopped with the reins halfway over his head. "I am. This is just if there's an emergency, you have them there. As you can see, he's not the safest of horses."

"I'd rather fall. Please, Viktor. I don't want them anywhere near me."

"Alright, Yuri." He handed him his helmet as he put the reins back over his forearm and stooped to hold his hands out below the stirrup. "Come on."

He fumbled with the clasp on the helmet with his hands shaking too hard to close it. Viktor snapped it into place then held his hands out again. Yuri put his hands on the saddle then ducked his head onto his shoulder to stifle a sob.
Viktor's voice sounded gently at his ear. "You're so brave, Yuri. I know how hard this must be for you."

"No, you don't!" He twisted back to snap at him then buried his face in his shoulder again. His apology came muffled and mumbled through flesh and fabric. "I'm sorry, Viktor."

"I forgive you. It's okay, Yuri. You're right; I don't know exactly what this feels like for you. I was trying to say I can see how much you're pushing yourself to please me, and I appreciate that more than I can express. You're so good. The best I've ever had. Come on, give me your leg."

He buried his face deeper into his arm and bent his leg back at the knee, placing his shin in Viktor's solid hands, tightening his grip on the saddle. Before he had any more time to think about it, Viktor counted to three and tossed him up. He wasn't sure if he did his part on instinct or if Viktor just lifted him enough to make up for the lack of a jump, but either way, he found himself landing heavy in the saddle. Avos darted to the side at the rude mounting, but Viktor regained control of him while Yuri clung to the front of the saddle, his chest heaving in a panic, his eyes closed tight.

Viktor put his hand on his thigh. "You're okay, Yuri. I've got him. I won't let him hurt you."

"That's not what I'm worried about! Worry about him. If you have to choose between keeping me safe and keeping him safe, pick him."

"I'm not going to do that."

"Please, Viktor. If you want me to do this, at least do that much for me."

"Yuri, I will never put the life of an animal above a human, and especially not you. I would like to honor your request there, but it goes against what I believe is right, so I'm not going to, and you're going to do this anyway because it's my order. Understood?"

"Ye—yes, Viktor." The words tasted like the bitterest of medicines.

"Thank you, Yuri. Try to relax. You're just sitting there for a few minutes today." As he said that, Avos decided to plead guilty to his rebellious charges and started dancing in a circle around him. "Woah, easy boy. Can you please not be an ass right now?" His voice dripped with honey as he made his plea and tightened the reins to pull Avos around into a tight circle around him, Avos's nose to Viktor's hip.

Yuri let go of his grip on the saddle to grab the leathers and cross the stirrups over the front of the saddle so the loose stirrups wouldn't bang his sides. He settled a little deeper into the saddle, his thighs tightening to hold him in place as he drew his toes up to prevent his lower leg from swinging around and bashing his sides as well.

"Woah. Stand." Viktor gave him a quick crack of his hand on his belly along with his deep, commanding tone to startle him back into good behavior. It worked for a few seconds before he got bored and started to dance again. Viktor held him tight to him and cracked him again into stillness. "Sorry, Yuri. Like I said, he really is an asshole."

"This is no worse than being up here at all. Walk him forward if you want. He'll probably be happier with that."

"He would, but I promised just sitting."

"Viktor, I'm not scared of the fucking horse. I'm sea—" His voice strangled his words off before he realized what he'd started to say.
Viktor's eyes narrowed as he studied him. "I'm really tempted to tell you to finish that sentence, but I won't." He walked forward with Avos settling next to him after a few steps. "We should adjust the stirrups so you can use them."

"I don't need them."

"You just saw me ride this horse and you still say you don't need them?"

"Yes, Viktor."

"You're really not afraid of the horse at all, are you?"

"No, Viktor."

"And your only condition was that you have no control; not even that I have it. I could take his bridle off and turn him loose with you on his back, and that would be acceptable to you?"

"It would be no worse than this." He struggled to find a rhythm with Avos's sway with his body locked and shaking.

"Wow. I'll be honest: I have no idea what to make of that one. I would most certainly not be okay with riding an insane horse bridleless. I could trot him right now, and you'd be just as fine as you are now?"

"Yes, Viktor."

"Okay, I'll do that then. Color?"

"Green."

Viktor jogged forward making Avos break into a trot next to him. Yuri waited through the first bounces to feel that thrust with the inside hind to rise up into a posting trot, using his thighs alone to lift himself from the saddle with every stride and lower himself gently on the second beat. The pain from Viktor's bruises lit up a rush of calm that soothed his throbbing heart and washed the warmth of memories of their creation over him as he submitted to its presence.

Viktor jogged backward so he could watch him with a smile. "You look amazing, Yuri. I'm impressed. I'm not sure I can even do no stirrup work quite that well. My thighs aren't as strong as yours. And you look so sexy on that horse. You're making me rather jealous of Avos right now. I'd like to be the one between your thighs."

Yuri choked a little and lost a stride, sitting a beat too long in the saddle and then had to wait for the next to throw himself back up.

Viktor grinned. "God, the sight you'd make riding me instead... you'd be so good at riding my cock. I'm so certain of it, I promise you that's going to be what I fantasize about the next time I touch myself."

He buckled under the punch of pleasure hitting his gut then found his rhythm again. "You know you're sending me rather mixed signals. Just earlier you were telling me to wait and now you're trying to tempt me."

"I don't think it's mixed at all." His voice and smile softened. "I told you to wait for the right person, but I'm hoping you'll decide that person is me." He slowed Avos back to a walk. "I want you, Yuri. All of you. And the second you can feel the truth of that, I want you to come running straight to me.
ignoring absolutely everything else just as you did when you first knelt before me." He scratched Avos's neck as he took Yuri's hand in his and kissed the back of it. "How are you feeling up there?"

Um, dizzy and shaky. But... better than I would have guessed. The pain helped."

"On your thighs?"

"Yes, Viktor."

"Would you want more pain there?"

"Yes, Viktor. It... it calmed me and gave me something different to think about."

"Excellent, Yuri." He stroked his thumb over the back of his hand and looked up at him with soft eyes. "I have never seen anything more beautiful than you on that horse, and I have never said anything more honest, so I truly hope you believe me. I will never forget how you made me feel no matter what you choose so just know that you right where you are is something I'll treasure the rest of my life."

His lips turned into the smallest smile. "Are you going to frame it?"

"Yes! That is an excellent idea." He bubbled with excitement as he pulled his phone out from the hidden pocket in his breeches and stood back a little to get Yuri in the frame. "Smile!"

"Oh god."

"That upset, huh?"

"You've never seen me try to smile on cue."

"Oh? That's an easy fix. I need you to know something, Yuri. I truly, desperately need you to understand this. Can you do that for me?"

"I'll try my best."

"That's all I ask. Yuri, you've just satisfied me more than anyone ever has. I've never felt this good from someone following an order before. I have no words to explain the depth of what you made me feel, so look at me and see it and tell me you understand."

He watched his eyes, not his blue flame in them, but something warm dripping into his core. The same soft smile Viktor had slipped onto his face. "Yes, Viktor."

Viktor brought the phone closer after studying the screen with a heavy warmth in his smile, and Yuri had to admit it wasn't a terrible picture. The quiet smile on his face hinted that its roots ran deep, and from the angle Viktor had chosen and pride straightening his posture, he looked pretty decent overall.

He pulled the phone back to gaze at the screen again. "My beautiful Yuri." He tapped the phone a few times then tucked it back into his pocket. "You just needed a better cue. You can get down now."

He kicked his right leg over Avos's butt as he leaned onto his hands and jumped down in one smooth motion.

Viktor's hand pressed against his back to steady him. "How are you feeling?"

"Um. Dizzy and weak and shaky, but okay, I think."
"Okay, I want you to sit in the grass out here while I get Bytiye."

"Yes, Viktor." He left to sit in the grass as Viktor pulled the stirrups back into place and ran them up the leathers to hold them up off Avos's sides and led him away. Yuri took off the helmet and combed his fingers through his hair, sweaty from just a few minutes of riding. Flopping back into the grass, he closed his eyes to wait for the swirling in his head to slow.

He'd vowed to never get back on a horse again a year ago, and yet Viktor had cracked that right in two with his bare eyes. Was it the ass or the eyes? He had focused on his ass after one look in his eyes left him torn apart and begging for mercy as Viktor ravaged his soul. He'd wanted to run from it, but now, here he was searching his eyes for anything he wanted and offering himself in chunks torn away from bone, still unsure as to whether he intended to devour them or stitch them together into a monster of his own making. Apparently, he had decided without too much thought on the matter that either one was fine with him.

A strong puff of breath tickled his neck. Squealing, he cringed away from it. He opened his eyes to see the copper sheen of Avos's head glinting around a crooked star falling over one eye. The small white snip on his nose was all he could see as Avos poked at him, flapping his lips against the collar of his shirt to see if it was something edible. He squealed quietly again as the tickle wriggled through him then sat up.

"Are you feeling well enough to let him graze next to you while you watch?" Viktor had a smile as he tucked his phone back into his pocket.

"Yes, Viktor." He sat up further and took Avos's leather lead who dropped his muzzle to the fresh grass and started searching out the best chunks to bite off.

"Very good." He smiled again and turned Bytiye to the ring.

"Viktor?"

"Yes?"

"Is this really what you want me to be doing? I'm not questioning you, it's just that you're paying me, and I've done very little real work for you."

"I'm certain this is exactly what I want to pay you to do." He picked up his helmet from next to Yuri and clipped it on.

"But—... Yes, Viktor."

He smiled. "Thank you, Yuri. You're doing so well for me." His voice trilled sweetly as he took his hand and kissed it. He turned his gleaming gold horse to the arena, his creamy white tail brushing around Viktor with the breeze that picked up. Viktor went to the mounting block and swung onto the palomino thoroughbred and walked him out on a loose rein.

He had a stride even longer than Toska's and a massive shoulder formed with the perfect slope that screamed his suitability for anything demanding extension and power, but he was a little lazy in his step, dragging his hooves through the footing. He looked more like a pleasure horse than anything else with his head hanging low on the rein and that long, low step. Viktor took more time warming him up than he did with Toska and Avos. It looked like they were just peacefully enjoying the spring day, in no rush to get anywhere.

Avos seemed to be in sync and grazed contentedly next to Yuri as though he hadn't just tried to take Viktor straight through two fences rather than over them, only popping up enough at the last moment.
to clear them with a foot to spare. Fresh grass had a mellowing effect on even the most challenging
of horses. He held his hand out and let Avos investigate it before he scratched the deep well between
his round cheeks that horses had little way of scratching on their own without human assistance.
Avos stopped grazing to lift his head and stretch his neck, craning and twisting to guide his fingers to
the right spot. He followed his lead, landing on a spot that made him grunt. Avos rubbed his lips over
his shoulder to return the favor before he went back to his grass.

Viktor moved into a trot then a rolling canter without taking up the reins at all, letting Bytiye hang
out, looking as relaxed as he did at the walk. Then Viktor took up the reins, and that golden horse
came to life: a blazing midsummer sun. He charged breathlessly at the first fence, and Yuri was
afraid he wouldn't make it over at all with how little he collected in the approach, but at the last
second, he rocked onto his hind end and launched over, barreling toward the next before Yuri had
time to gasp in relief that only a rail had come down with his haste.

He tore around the course taking fences as though he didn't even know they were there until Viktor
pulled him to a stop straight in front of his thudding heart. Viktor dropped the reins, and the fire blew
out. His head dropped down while Viktor patted his neck.

"Good boy, Bytiye. Maybe next time, don't give me a damn heart attack before every fence." He
grinned. "He must have been showing off for you. He usually has a little more control, though not
much."

Yuri's eyes were still huge as he answered breathlessly. "He's a beast!"

"Yeah, he has speed, that's for sure. Dressage is difficult with him because of that fire. But he's not
disobedient like Avos. He tries to obey. He's just got a lot in him."

"I'll say. I don't think I've ever seen a horse that fast on the course."

"He was bred to be a racehorse and likely would have excelled there, but I claimed him, so now he's
mine to refine that speed."

"What level is he doing?"

"He just started at one-stars last season and grabbed a few medals there. Gold eludes him though
despite his color. He doesn't jump very cleanly as you can see." He glanced back at the three other
poles resting on the ground instead of cleanly in their cups. "Toska isn't as fast, but he can outscore
him any day of the week."

"Toska can outscore every horse in the world any day of the week." It wasn't hyperbolic praise at all.
Toska had won everything there is to win at the top levels with Viktor guiding him faultlessly to a
trophy room bathed in Olympic and four-star gold.

He smiled. "Yeah. He's been so good right from the start. He's one of a kind." His smile fell, but
traces remained. "He's reaching the end of his career though. This season. Maybe next if I'm lucky.
It's the worst part of all of this. You outlast them. I've spent over a decade competing with him and
building our trust in each other, and there's only a few short years of enjoying that seamless
relationship before you have to turn him to pasture and start all over with someone new." He
watched Toska out in the pasture he'd turned him out in rather than cruelly returning him to his stall
on such a nice day. "Maybe I'll just retire with him."

Yuri gasped. "You can't! You have so much time left still!"

"To do what? Win more medals I don't need? To start over how many times and only have the
briefest moments of true harmony? And that's assuming I even find that again at all. I've been through so many horses now trying to find another Toska and Bytiye's the closest I've found, and you can see how far he is from that. He'll be good, but he'll never be Toska. I've achieved everything I can on him. Why not let it end with him too?"

"You do more than win medals out there. You inspire people. You show them what true partnership with a horse looks like. Watching you ride... even on Bytiye and Avos... You're what we should all be. Please keep showing the world. It's still so far from reaching the bar you're holding, but at least you're making them try. If you drop it... there's no one else who can hold it that high."

"Wow. That's quite a passionate response for someone who has no intention to even try to reach it."

He shook his head. "Not for me. For every horse that has a rider who sees true skill and partnership are what success requires and becomes better by trying to reach you."

"You say I show the world, but you're raising my view quite a lot." He jumped down and smiled as he took Yuri's throat in his hand and used his hold to expose his neck for a kiss as the vulnerable position sent his heart racing and his body trembling. Viktor pulled back with a warm smile in his eyes. "Thank you for sharing your thoughts with me. Those are certainly ones I'll think over."

They went back to the barn, and Viktor stayed with Bytiye to untack him while Yuri brought Avos to his stall. He scratched his forehead as he unclipped the lead. Turning around from closing the door, Phichit was there tossing his arms around him and kissing his cheek.

"Ah! Phichit! Not at work!" Yuri pushed him back then cringed at the hurt look on his face.

"I'm sorry. You're right. I don't know if Viktor would care that much, but it's probably a bad idea. I was just excited to finally see you in here."

"It's okay. I'm sorry, but I have to get back. I was supposed to put Avos away and come right back."

"You can't stay and chat for even a minute? Mila was just here. I can introduce you guys."

"I'm sorry. I really can't." He cringed again at the forced smile on Phichit's face.

"Okay well, I don't want you to get in trouble. Sorry."

"Hey, what are we going to watch tonight?" He smiled.

Phichit's proper smile came back into place, and his eyes lit up. "I don't know. I'll think about it while I'm shoveling horse shit. Preferences?"

"You have good taste in movies. I trust you." He waved and walked off leaving Phichit smiling in his wake.

Viktor finally gave him something productive to do while he watched him ride a few more training horses with his dressage saddles and bridles and a bucket of water and saddle cleaning supplies. It was still utterly indulgent to sit in the grass watching Viktor ride and placidly scrubbing away dried sweat and dirt from leather, so the least he could do was a good job. He made sure to get under every flap and into every crevice then polished it all until the soft leather took on a lustrous sheen. Viktor came over with a bay warmblood to check his work.

He picked up a bridle and scrutinized it to every buckle. "Very well done, Yuri. You clearly took pride in your work." He offered his bright smile which was more than welcome as the gift that it was. "Come on. Let's put this stuff away. It's lunchtime." He took a few of the bridles while Yuri
gathered up two of the saddles, sliding the second onto his arm from the ground and a bump with his knee. He had to make another trip out to gather the rest while Viktor untacked his horse then they headed back up the hill. As soon as they were far enough away, Viktor wrapped his arm around him and held him close as they walked.

In the kitchen, Yuri stared helplessly at the ingredients spread before him for a minute then started hacking away while Viktor typed at his laptop. Twenty minutes later, he had two steaming bowls of hot mess. He placed the better of the two in front of Viktor along with a pair of chopsticks.

"Thank you, Yuri. This looks very good."

"You're—you're welcome, but I'm certain it didn't come out right. I'm sorry."

"Well, good news for you is I have no idea what right is supposed to taste like. Sit. Eat." He gestured to the chair across from him and picked up his chopsticks as Yuri obeyed. He took a careful bite. "This is pretty decent actually. I expected worse with your claims." He proceeded to make quick work of the bowl.

He poked at the sludge in front of him that looked nothing like what katsudon should look like and picked up a bite. It was dry, tasteless, the eggs tasted funny, and it was so far from his mom's it was an insult to use the same name. "I'm sorry, Viktor. I really messed it up."

"It tastes fine to me. It's not great, but it's edible."

He shook his head. "It's terrible. Katsudon is one of the best things you'll ever eat when it's right."

"Well then, I look forward to when you get it right. This will be your standing order until it's something you're happy with."

He looked up from stabbing at his mess. "What? Katsudon every day? Weren't you trying to help me lose weight?"

"I am. Just keep the portion sizes reasonable, and I'll make sure you work hard enough to burn enough calories along with a more modest breakfast."

"Yes, Viktor." A twinge of tears hit his eyes as he tried to take another bite. "I'll need to go back to the grocery store. I only purchased enough for today. I can go now and be back before the lunch break is over."

"No. You need to eat. You can go after you finish."

"Yes, Viktor." He tried to lift another bite to his mouth, but he couldn't make it go past his lips.

Viktor picked up his bowl. "Come with me. Bring your food."

(15) He followed his lead to a room layered in black marble with thin white veins and gold bands at the top frilling onto the edges of the ceiling. There were only a few small windows arched with the curve on top echoing the roofs of the castle and filled in with a crosshatch of translucent diamonds of blue, purple, and red. Soft lanterns along the walls let off a concentrated light barely giving enough light to see the stacks of plush couches spanning the room, each row raised up from the one behind it. A screen covered the wall opposite them.

Viktor took off his boots then led him to the first row and sat down, resting against the pillows over the armrest and patted the spot next to him. Yuri sat a few inches away from him. He sighed and grabbed his waist to pull him down on top of him. Yuri wriggled until he was leaning back against
him between his legs and Viktor smiled and kissed his cheek, picking up a remote from the table in front of them.

"What would you like to watch?"

"Um, I don't know. I'm fine with anything."

"Okay." Viktor dragged the word out suspiciously as he clicked on the screen and brought up Dora the Explorer from the menu and settled in to watch, taking a bite from his bowl.

"Um... do you usually watch this?"

"No, but you said you were fine with anything, so I picked the first thing I saw." Dora asked his name, and Viktor responded. "I'm Viktor, and this is Yuri."

Dora continued to stare at them.

"Um, I'm a Capricorn, and he's a Sagittarius which is so appropriate for him as he's an amazing rider who looks like he was born on the back of a horse, but to be honest, I don't really believe in zodiac signs." He paused to stare back at Dora. "Seriously, what else do you want to know? Our blood types?"

"Great!" Dora said.

Yuri was giggling like crazy. "You're so weird."

Viktor lifted his eyebrows into a surprised smile. "Hey, you're the one who said you're fine with anything. I'm just going with what you said."

"Fine. I'm okay with anything you would usually watch."

"Alright." He clicked over to a Russian show that looked to be some type of skit with a live audience.

Viktor started chuckling as a man let another man go in front of him to buy one plum at the grocery store and then had to go back to get a sticker put on the plum to purchase it. The first man had to wait, and the line grew longer through a series of disruptions to the purchase of this single plum with Viktor's laugh getting louder through every one, finally erupting into a solid fit of laughter that made him hug Yuri tighter as another man approached the line of men who had been waiting through the ordeal carrying a lemon and asked them something which made the men all tackle him.

Viktor calmed himself enough to speak. "Still fine with anything?" He lifted his bowl above Yuri's head to take a bite.

"I didn't realize you were a smartass, but yes, Viktor. This is fine with me."

He scoffed. "I am not a smartass. I just did exactly as you said. You don't even understand what's happening; how could you be fine with watching it?"

"I can get the gist of it pretty well, and maybe the more I hear Russian, the easier it will be to pronounce your horses' names. And... I like your laugh."

He smiled and kissed his cheek. "Do you want to learn Russian?"

"Um... yes, Viktor. It's a pretty language."
"Pretty? Most people don't think of it as pretty. They find it scary and aggressive. Not pretty."

"I think it's pretty, but I haven't heard it much. Can you tell me something in Russian?"

"Yeah. Yeah, I can. I want you to look at me."

"Yes, Viktor." He turned onto his side so he could watch him.

Viktor stuck his chopsticks in his bowl to free his hand to rest it against Yuri's face. "Юрий, я не могу поверить, что мы встретились всего несколько дней назад, и ты уже заставляешь меня чувствовать с такой уверенностью, что ты тот, кого я искал всю свою жизнь. Я люблю твою улыбку. Я люблю твои глаза. Я люблю, как ты говоришь мое имя. Я люблю, как ты меня впустил и показал, что наши чувства взаимны, несмотря на то что ты сам чувствуешь боль и потерю. Я люблю тебя, Юрий, и я обещаю, что, если ты выберешь меня, я потрачу столько минут, сколько ты готов дать мне сделать тебя счастливым. Пожалуйста, выбери меня. Я прошу тебя." He kissed his forehead and then his cheek and then his cheek again, lingering with his eyes closed. "Did you get any of that?"

"Not a word other than my name. It was beautiful though."

"I'm glad you think so. Understanding will come with time like everything else."

"You're not going to tell me what you said in English?"

"No. Now eat your food." He kissed his forehead and pulled him back to relax on him again

Viktor kept him distracted enough with his laughter and translating the simple show for him to choke down the food he refused to call katsudon. With the show's exaggerated comedy, it was fairly easy to understand what was going on, and Viktor managed to get a few Russian words into his brain along with the food into his stomach. He seemed pleased with both.

Viktor took their empty bowls and set them on the table then wrapped his arms around him in the silence after the show switched off. "Thank you for lunch, Yuri. I know you don't agree, but I liked it."

"You're—you're welcome." His voice was soft as he turned over to wrap his arms around Viktor as well, resting his face against his chest.

Viktor held him tighter, resting his cheek on his head. "This is dangerous. I want to fall asleep with you, not go back to work."

Yuri made a little hum of agreement.

"I could stay here forever. You feel perfect in my arms." Viktor squeezed him a little tighter.

"You do too."

He smiled and kissed his forehead. "Thank you, zolotse. Alas, we must get up."

They managed to struggle to their feet, and Viktor zipped his boots back on and brought the bowls back to the kitchen where Yuri began to clean up.

"I have to get back to the stable. You can finish that and then go to the store and meet me back at the stable when you're done."

"Yes, Viktor."
"And take your car this time." He placed a set of keys in his hands that didn't match to what he had said.

"I have my keys back at my house."

"No. These keys are the keys to your car."

"Um... I'm confused."

"There's a car in the driveway that matches those keys. That's your new car. The old one needs to be towed away before it kills you."

"What?! You bought me a car?!"

"Yes."

"Why?!"

"I believe I just told you why."

"But, Viktor! I..." Crap. He has to find some way to fight this without arguing. "But a car is a permanent thing that would fall outside of your hours. I don't think you can make me give up my own car and accept this when it would fall outside of your hours."

"Okay, you're going to be difficult about this. I should have guessed as much. Yes, outside of my hours, I can't force you to drive your new car, but I can say your old car is very disruptive to my horses, so if you'd like to continue using it, you will have to get it towed in and out of the premises."

"May I have permission to drive it out once and leave it parked outside of the gates?"

"No. I'm not going to let you park that hunk of metal for my clients to see as they come and go, and there’s no parking on the street for a few miles. So, you could park it a few miles away and walk back and forth every time. I will permit you to drive it out once if that is what you’d like to do. Or you could not be difficult and accept the new car and not make me fear for your life driving around in that old one."

"What do I say to Phichit? How do I explain where I got a new car from?"

"Say you bought it."

"With what money?"

"Does he know your current financial status?"

"Well, no. But the kind of car I own kinda says a lot."

"So, you were frugal and saved up until you could buy a new one, and or you financed it. This isn't a difficult thing, Yuri. People buy new cars all the time especially when they have ones that are more likely to explode than not at any given moment. Don't worry, I considered this, and I didn't purchase anything extravagant though I would have liked to."

"You bought me a car! How is that anything other than extravagant!"

"It's not extravagant as it was needed."

"When did I even have time to go out and buy a car?"
"Say I gave you permission this afternoon as you work during any hours a dealership would be open. Are you done with your tantrum? I'm getting bored. I don't care how you explain it to Phichit. You needed a new car, and I bought you one. It's that simple."

"But I didn't... I didn't ask for this! It's too much, Viktor!"

"Are you more worried that you don't know how to explain it to Phichit or that you don't know how to accept it?"

"I can't accept it. It's just too much. My old car is fine."

"Yuri, do you need a new car? Ignore what's happening now. If you were driving your car, would you at any point think, 'I need a new car'?"

"Well, yes, Viktor."

"And weren't my orders for you to ask me for anything you need?"

"Yes, Viktor."

"So, then you should have asked me. But I'm not going to punish you for that because it's too much to expect for where you're at now." He headed for the door then stopped and pressed his hand against the entryway, speaking without looking back. "As always, you're free to end this any time you choose. Take the car; don't take the car. That's up to you. But you can't ask me to give you what you need and then slap away my offers to do just that. That's not a game I'm willing to play."

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Chapter End Notes

* Yuri, I can't believe I've only met you days ago, and you already make me feel with such certainty that you are the one I've been searching for my entire life. I love your smile. I love your eyes. I love the way you say my name. I love how much you're willing to allow me in and how you make me feel that what I'm feeling I might not be alone in despite how hurt and lost you are. I love you, Yuri, and I promise that if you choose me, I will spend as many minutes as you are willing to give me making you just as happy as you make me. Please choose me. I beg you.

Spotify
14. Take by The Rigs
15. Dream by Bishop Briggs

The art above is a work by Clarinda0110. Check it out on Tumblr to show your love if you have a second.
Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

Yuri gets his first taste of Viktor.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Yuri clutched the keys in his fist staring at the shiny new sapphire Subaru Outback they opened. At least it was a practical car. Something he could picture himself buying if it were used to the final step before the crushing lot. Was he really the one playing games with Viktor? It didn’t feel that way. How could he be the one playing games when he was doing nothing but following his orders? Still, a nagging thorn dug at his conscience.

He hadn’t asked Phichit for a kiss, and yet he felt guilty. He hadn’t asked Viktor for a car, but here he was feeling even guiltier for hurting him just because he didn’t want to accept something so extravagant. He hadn’t asked him to give him what he needed; just to punish him for an infraction he deserved punishment for. How is that asking him to fill his needs?

‘Punish me, Viktor.’ Three words that Viktor could have used any way he chose, and he used them to buy him a car and put him back on a horse. Why did he care so freaking much? He wasn’t anything worth caring about. He wasn’t even worth a second glance. Guys like Viktor don’t fall—No one said anything about that.

Basically, Viktor gave him a choice. Accept the car and continue or reject it and end this. He pushed the button on the remote, and the car beeped open. He slid into the black leather seat reeking of new car smell that overpowered the more pleasing leather scent and spotted a business card lying on the passenger’s seat. ‘TJ’s Auto Towing. We buy junkers!’ He flipped it about in his hand and pulled out his phone.

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He passed through the busy aisles full of horses being groomed in the crossesies and people hanging around chatting, all watching him as he ducked under each elastic rope attached to the horses' halters. Apparently, new faces weren’t too common around here. Not all that surprising. A place like Viktor’s isn’t easy to find. Openings must be few and far between.

After a little searching, he located Viktor standing with the angry blond-haired kid who was finishing tacking up his horse who had the most unique coat color he had ever seen in person. The horse had a buckskin base with the gold coat and black mane and tail and legs, but some mottled sections of black had seeped from his mane onto the base of his neck, down his shoulders, and over his hips with laced dapples looking almost like leopard spots with how much the black outline contrasted the gold covering his back and sides.

“Ah, Yuri! Glad you’re back. Meet Yuri.” Viktor smiled brightly and gestured to the kid next to him.

“What?! He stole my name?!” The angry little thing turned around to screech at him, his fists quaking at his sides as his eyes seethed.
“Considering he’s older than you, I’d say it’s you who stole his name.” Viktor chuckled.

“But I was here first! Fire him! I don’t need another Yuri around here, especially not one who looks like such a piggy loser.”

“Call him names like that again and you’ll be out of here, little Yuri.” All the humor dropped from Viktor’s voice as he used every inch of his imposing frame to back up his words, glaring down at him.

“Whatever. I don’t care. I can go to any stable I want to.”

“Any stable except this one. Once you leave, I won’t welcome you back so choose carefully. I’m sure you’ll do just fine at a second-rate stable, so please, feel free to leave any time you wish.”

“Fine. Let’s just ride. It’s time for my lesson.” He growled in resignation.

“Not until you’ve apologized to him.”

“What?!! You didn’t say anything about that!”

“I just did. Go ahead.” Viktor leaned back against the stall behind him and crossed his arms.

“Fine. Sorry.” He spat the words then looked at Viktor expectantly.

“Nicely.”

“Fiiiinnee.” He rolled his eyes and huffed out his last bit of defiance. “I’m sorry.”

“Better. Take Pantera and meet me in the outdoor.”

The angry Yuri took the reins over his horse’s head and turned him around. “Get out of my way.” He glared at Yuri.

“Sorry!” He shuffled back to give him space to turn.

“Loser,” he whispered as he passed by.

“Sorry.” Viktor started following Pantera and Yuri far enough away for their conversation not to be heard.

“Avos’s human counterpart.”

Viktor laughed. “Assholes. The both of them. I’ve been tempted to put him on Avos one day just to see what would happen, but I have a feeling it would be a bloodbath.”

“Yeah, two dominant personalities don’t often get along well.”

“Little Yuri’s not dominant at all. He’s what we call a brat. There’s people who enjoy taming brats like that, but I’m not one of them. Avos, on the other hand, I’m still not certain if he’s a brat or if he’s dominant and just hates submission. I guess we’ll see how he works with you.” Viktor caught the open gate to the outdoor and held it for him. “Help me lower this line.” His finger traced a path through the jumps.

“Yes, Viktor. What are we setting them to?”

“Two nine to three and narrow the spreads.”
“Any specific fences you want which?”

“Use your best judgment.” Viktor watched the other Yuri warming up. “Little Yuri! Executive decision! I now know you well enough to call you Yura, as does everyone else here.”

“What?!” He screeched in indignation and spooked his horse making him take off galloping around the ring.

Yuri and Viktor looked over at each other to giggle at his karma.

Yura pulled his horse back to a walk and patted his neck to praise him for responding and ask forgiveness then trotted him back to glare at them. “You can’t do that! You can’t just change my name!”

“It’s not changing your name. It’s weird for me not to call you Yura at this point. As for everyone else, they know you well enough too. You make yourself quite unforgettable from the first moment they meet you.”

They continued lowering each jump while Yura and Viktor argued across the open space of the arena.

“They’re not Russian! They can’t use Russian nicknames, and you can’t just decide to change my name!”

“I can, and I did. Don’t like it? Ride somewhere else. It’s too confusing to have two Yuris, and I’ve decided that he’s earned the right to be called Yuri by any way you wish to calculate it.”

“You can’t get away with this! I’ll tell my mom what you’re trying to do!”

Viktor laughed. “Did you really just threaten to call your mommy on me? I’m quaking. Fine. You want him to go by a nickname instead? You can call him Master Yuri.”

“What?!” He screeched again louder than before but held the reins tight to keep his horse in check. “I will not call him that!”

“Then Yura it is. I’m so glad we’ve come to an agreement.” Viktor smiled sweetly. “Now, are you done, or are we going to spend the rest of your lesson time arguing, Yura?”

Yura glared at him quietly.

“I’ll assume that means you’re done. Trot him over the cavaletti.”

Yura turned his horse around and picked up a trot over the low poles strung on x’s, spaced so he’d have to step over them with every stride.

“That was impressive.”

Viktor beamed. “Thank you. I know how to deal with him. I just hate dealing with him. He’s so exhausting.” He shook his head. “I can’t believe he actually threw a fit over being called Yura. It’s such a basic nickname. Any casual acquaintance in Russia would have called him that. He just likes finding things to be pissed at.”

He watched Viktor teach the rest of the afternoon while cleaning some more tack in a semi-excited state with thoughts of their promised evening riding on Viktor’s commanding voice.

A gruff man with a fedora and old-school loose-fit tan breeches came in to take over the lessons who
Viktor introduced as Yakov. He sat down in a folded director’s chair he carried with him outside the ring after a curt nod to Yuri and waited for his pupil to arrive. Viktor and Yuri headed back up the hill to the castle yet again.

“That’s my instructor. He’s a grumpy old man, but if you ever need help and you can’t find me, ask him. He doesn’t look it, but he’s a big softie and loves being able to share his wisdom.”

“Yes, Viktor.”

Viktor smiled. “How are you feeling about tonight?”

“Um, excited.”

“That’s good to hear.” He held the door open and waited for him to take off his shoes then took him into the elevator to go down. “Were you comfortable with everything that happened last night?”

“Yes, Viktor.”

“Excellent. Have you ever played with your ass when you were masturbating before?”

“What?”

“Do you need me to repeat the question?”

“Um, no. I… got it. Um. No. No, Viktor.”

“Well, tonight should be an interesting experience for you then.” They entered the jade bathroom, and Viktor directed him to the shower where he gave his orders to wash then left.

Yuri stripped his clothes off with his body shaking harder than it would have if Viktor stayed. Left alone with his thoughts was always a dangerous place to be especially when he had something to worry about. Which was always. He scrubbed himself in the shower again with Viktor’s lusciously scented soap. What is that smell? It smelled slightly like the stable with some hints of leather and sweet hay, and maybe some vanilla, but he knew there were other scents he couldn’t identify. Whatever was in it, it was quickly becoming his favorite scent other than the actual stable and Viktor himself who somehow combined the comforting, homely scent of the stable with pure, unadulterated sex. Not that he ever smelled such a thing, but his imagination didn’t have to take that far of a leap to know he was right.

He rinsed himself clean and stepped out of the shower, wrapping himself up in a towel from the small table that apparently had some type of heater in it as the towel was warm. He wasn’t sure what to do with it after he dried himself. Looking around, he decided just to throw it over the shower door.

He made his way out into the torture room, or playroom as Viktor had called it, and found a small pillow on the floor where Viktor had placed him yesterday. He assumed that’s where he was supposed to be and knelt, putting his hands on his knees and straightening his back to wait trembling in the warm room for Viktor’s return.

Viktor entered behind him, closing the door softly and securing the lock. His quiet footsteps came closer; Yuri’s heart began to race. Viktor took the side of his neck in his hand and kissed the other side, taking his time to savor him. Pulling back with a sigh, he stroked a finger down his neck over the place he had just kissed.

“Are you ready?”
“Ye—yes, Viktor.”

“Are you nervous?” He stepped around to watch him for his response. He was fresh from the shower as well but his hair had been dried. He wore a soft gray t-shirt like the one he had given him before and loose black pants that rode low on his hips, revealing a patch of skin over his lower abs that made him want to lick kisses over it as Viktor leaned over to rest his hand on his cheek. He looked softer, more intimate but still as intimidating as ever. Maybe even more so as his look suggested an intimacy not shared with others.

“Yes, Viktor.”

He took his hand and tugged him to his feet, wrapping his arms around him. “Is there anything you need to feel more comfortable?”

“No, Viktor; yes, Viktor.” He wrapped his arms around him as well and buried his face into his shoulder. “Just this? For a minute.”

He tightened his grip. “Of course. Let me know when you’re ready.”

He relaxed into Viktor’s hold, tension easing from his body. He still trembled from his nerves, but he didn’t feel so much like he had been shoved twisted into a cage for metal bars to dig at his flesh. “Thank you. I’m okay now.”

His arms tightened, breathing deeply into his skin before letting go. “Get on the table lying on your back.”

(16) He climbed onto the padded leather top and flipped onto his back. Viktor looked him over, raking through every inch with his attentive, hungered gaze as he circled him. Yuri’s breath spiked, his nerves twitching as though they were actually being touched. The distance charging the air around them and his eyes darkened in the dim light thickened the air like the approach of a summer storm on the plains—the sky darkened to a greenish tinge, warning of the impending ripping of the world around him.

Viktor moved to the end of the table. “Grab your knees and pull them up to your shoulders.”

His trembling hands moved to obey his order, gripping his knees hard in an attempt to stabilize himself, but that just sent the trembling deeper into his thighs as he spread himself wide to Viktor’s view. He couldn’t see Viktor staring at him unless he strained to, but crushing embarrassment still burned his cheeks and drew tears to the edges of his eyes. He managed to hold his tears back by focusing on the center of the X standing on the side of the room.

“You’re so pretty, Yuri. You look so soft and fuckable.”

He whined and looked back, straining his head off the table to watch him.

“Truly. I want to bury myself right there,” Viktor dragged his nails along his thighs, scraping at the bruises and sending shivers of pleasure through him, “and feel your strong thighs wrapping around me, holding me in your softness and your heat and your pretty little hole as I turn it into a soaking, fucked-out mess.” He slopped kisses over the tenderest skin on both sides where his thighs ended; his gut lurched with a desperate craving for a touch a breath further than where he was.

The silk scarf fluttered over his skin as Viktor wrapped it around his knee. Replacing Yuri’s hand holding it up with his tension binding it to the table, he pulled tight, opening him even wider. He repeated the binding on the other side then balanced the tension on his body by wrapping another scarf around his hips and tying them down with just enough downward pressure toward the foot of
the table to secure him. “Are you comfortable?”

“Yes, Viktor.” He sighed as more tension melted from his body.

“Good. Start stroking yourself.”

He whimpered as he pressed his lips tight and took his cock in his hand which had already begun to harden with Viktor’s eyes and touch on him. Viktor watched him until he fully hardened then handed him a soft black leather strap with a gold buckle that attached before the end of the leather like the buckles on a bridle designed not to rub against skin.

“Put this on at the base of your cock and tighten it until it feels tight but not uncomfortable.”

He tightened it and felt pressure against the edges of his cock as he tucked the leather into the keeper, his nerves lighting up into a tingly spark.

“Good. Keep stroking yourself.”

Fisting his cock, swollen more than it had ever been, had him already twisting inside Viktor’s silks, his breath growing heavy while Viktor’s intent stare ensured that the blushing heat in him was from more than just pleasure. Pressure built inside him until he started gasping to release it.

“You look so beautiful, Yuri. I love that color on you.”

“What—ah! Um, what color?”

“Red. My red. The blue and purple under it are nice too. I like all the colors you let me paint on you. You look like mine.”

He cried out in a trembling gasp at the rippling touch of Viktor’s voice and stroked himself faster trying to relieve the building pressure.

“Are you getting close?”

“I—um, yes, no… I’m not sure. It—Ah! It feels… different!”

Viktor picked up a dressage whip and dragged the long thin cane against his body, over his thighs, over his stomach and his chest, and down his sides. A sharp sting sounded in his body just after the crack on his thigh which was immediately followed up by a series of whip bites up and down his thigh and then over to the next. He moved onto his stomach and chest, each crack of the whip sending his body skittering on the table as much as Viktor’s silks would allow.

“How about now?”

He whined and ground into the table with his hips bucking to meet his hand. “Yes, but still no. It feels… um harder to get there, but also—also a lot more intense.”

“Tell me when you feel like you’re about to come.”

“Yes, Viktor! Ah! Ngh! Ah-ha!” His voice broke apart as Viktor dropped down to lick his tongue over his nipple, flicking his tongue over it and pinching the other in his fingers, rolling and twisting it beneath his firm grip, sending sharp zaps of pain and pleasure to his cock.

Viktor leaned over him to switch sides, bathing one with his pain, the other with his tongue. He came back to the first and slipped his arms in under him, pulling him into his mouth now sucking hard and sending the brightness of fresh pain in to focus him through the swirling mess of pleasure.
“Ah! Vik—Ah! Close! I’m close!”

Viktor pulled back. “Stop.”

He cried out his distress at obeying this order but released his swollen, throbbing cock anyway. He lay a twitching, craving mess on the table as Viktor picked up a set of rose gold chains linking what looked to be small clamps.

“These are nipple clamps. They’re exactly what they sound like. I’m going to apply them to your nipples and adjust the pressure until it’s at your limit. Tell me when that is. Color?”

“Green.”

He placed the clamps on one side, and then the other. They had a bit of a squeeze, but it was hardly noticeable through his cock still begging to be released. He began twisting a screw on both at the same time, and the pressure steadily increased until it could solidly be called pain. He had an impulse to tell him to stop but decided instead to just let him do as he wished and let him crush as much pain into his body as he could.

Viktor pulled his hands back. “Color?”

“Green.” His nipples ached with an almost numb type of pain. He was beginning to learn that there were different pains like there were different kisses. Some caused recoil. Some felt warm. Some brought calm. Some stung when the touch was too brief. Some opened a craving that ached to be filled. And some were questions buried too deep for answers.

“I’m impressed. You did so well for me as expected. We might have to try the clover clamps next time.” He smiled and brushed his hand along his cheek. “Are you ready to put on a show for me?”

“Um. Yes, Viktor.”

Viktor cracked open a bottle of lube and let it drip down his ass to run over his hole then took Yuri’s hand and slipped his finger into his hot mouth and sucked hard as he slipped it out, sucking it back in again before it reached the end, this time slathering it with his saliva. He pulled his next two fingers into his mouth, sucking hard as he held his eyes on his and coated them all with his hot slickness. He pulled his dripping fingers from his mouth and brought his hand down to his ass, guiding his finger to spread his saliva over his hole. He leaned over, putting his arm on the other side of him, so he was right above him watching his face as he guided Yuri’s finger into himself. Yuri gasped in surprise then pressed his lips closed.

“No, Yuri. Show me. Always show me.” His scolding was as gentle as his expression. “I love your expressions.” He leaned down to kiss his throat. “You tell me so much with them. Don’t be silent.” He guided his hand back out of his hole then came back up to watch his face as he pushed it back in.

Yuri whined as the nerves around his finger lit up and stung his aching cock with more pleasure. He began panting lightly.

“Yes, that’s better, Yuri. Keep going with your finger, in and out.” He released the hold he had on his hand, but left it over the back of his, caressing it over the back and up his wrist then back down again. “How does it feel?”

“Um, a little… strange but um, I really like having, um, your spit… inside me.”

A slow smile spread across his face. “Yeah? How does it make you feel?”
“Hot. Really hot. Want—wanting more.”

His grin widened. “You do look so hot.” He kissed his neck and up over his cheek. “You keep going. I’ll be right back.”

Yuri whined as he pulled away to go to a cabinet behind them to Viktor’s amused delight. He returned a moment later with some pillows and slipped them in under him to raise his upper body up. The chains on the nipple clamps slid down his body tugging a fresh wave of pain into him. He gasped as his cock responded with more demands not to be ignored. Smirking, Viktor hooked a finger in the chains and pulled downward until Yuri was crying out. He gave a few more deep pulls then released it and moved to his ass. Yuri collapsed back onto the pillows, his chest heaving as his body tried to process the pain that wasn’t pain and the pleasure that wasn’t pleasure.

“Watch, Yuri.”

He lifted his head back up to watch himself fuck his finger into his ass and Viktor as he watched the same scene with excitement pulsing in the vein at his throat, his eyes flickering between the show at his ass and the displays across his face.

Viktor retook his hand and guided his second finger to his hole, leaning over to drip more saliva down the length of his fingers to pool at his ass. Viktor directed his second finger inside then paused his hand to let his body accept this new stretch. Turning to kiss the fresh marks he had laid down, he drew his hand back out and pressed it in again slowly, repeating until Yuri picked up the motion on his own, biting his lip as his face screwed up with the stretch of his hole sending his nerves quivering in yet new directions.

“Try to spread your fingers apart gently. I want to see inside you.”

“Yes,” his head fell back with the deep moan, “yes, Viktor.”

He lifted his head back up to watch as he’d been ordered and locked eyes on Viktor as he spread his hole open, a deep blush of embarrassment rushing into the spaces between pain and pleasure—water swelling the already dense sand on a beach with each fresh wave. His breath pulsed deeply trying to sort the sensations as Viktor licked his lips and kept his eyes fixed on his hole as he spread himself further and further for Viktor’s pleasure.

A burn started as he reached a new limit and paused until his body accepted that too then opened himself wider. His cock leaked onto his stomach, and Viktor’s eyes glanced up to make a note of it with a smile then watched his face before looking back to his gaping hole, swallowing hard. If it’s a show he wants, then that’s what he’s going to get. Viktor’s fingers stroked along the marks on his other thigh as he watched him stretch himself to his limit for his pleasure.

“God, you’re so fucking good, Yuri. Such a natural slut. You’d do anything no matter how dirty it is if I wanted it, wouldn’t you?”

“Ha! Yes! Yes, Viktor!” Viktor’s words made him find a new limit as they ripped apart the old one.

Viktor leaned over and dropped a river of saliva above his gaping hole to let it flow in, watching his face with a sexy smile on his. “My filthy virgin slut. So eager to be used for my pleasure. Would you put on a show for me in front of a crowd if I told you it would please me?”

“Yes, Viktor! Yes! Anything! Please use me to do anything that would make you feel good.”

“God, you’re such a fucking slut.” He rose up to whisper in his ear. “I fucking love it. My little virgin slut; he makes me feel so good. Do you want me to give you your first taste of a cock?”
“Please, please, please, Viktor. I want it so bad. I don’t know what I’m doing, but I’ll do my best to make you feel good.” Words he never dreamed of saying to another tipped from his lips to fill Viktor’s pleasure.

“I know you will, and that’s all you have to do, my gorgeous Yuri. You look so fucking hot right now. I’ve never seen anything I’ve ever wanted more.” He stroked his fingers down his cheek and over his neck. “Keep doing what you’re doing. I’ll be right back.” He picked up a curved purple dildo that was sitting on the cabinet then returned to the bottom of the table and spilled more lube over his ass. “Relax your fingers and curl them upward just a bit and stroke along that upper wall until you find a spot that feels different.”

He prodded about as Viktor said, but he couldn’t find what he was talking about.

“Having trouble?”

“Yes, Viktor.”

He retook his hand. “Here, curl your fingers a little more and let me move your hand.”

“Yes, Viktor.”

He relaxed his hand and Viktor began sliding it inside him, searching for something. Viktor watched his face as he narrowed in on a spot then thrust his fingers upward making his back arch off the pillows as colorful sparks lit in his eyes.

Viktor smiled. “There it is. Remember this spot. It’ll be your favorite. Stroke it a little on your own until you feel like you can locate it easily.”

Stroking more colors into his vision, he lost himself deeper into this world inside him that Viktor created but tried to hold enough focus to follow his instructions. “What is that?”

“It’s your prostate. It’s a small gland that men have that feels absolutely amazing.”

“Do—do you do this too?”

“Yes, sometimes. I typically top, but I’ve topped from the bottom before too.”

“What—ngh! What does that mean?”

“It means that I’d typically order you to take my cock, but ordering you to fuck me senseless is a possibility as well.”

“Ngh!” He whined as the images Viktor created layered behind the swirling colors in a fevered hallucination of unspeakable pleasure.

“Do you like the idea?”

“Yes, Viktor!”

He chuckled. “Such an eager slut. Be patient, zolotse.” He stuck the dildo in his mouth, sucking it into a dripping mess with his pink tongue lathing sloppy strokes along it then handed it to him. “Put this in and put the head of it right against that spot.”

“Yes, Viktor.” He pressed the head to his hole and slipped it in just enough for his walls to clamp down. He sucked back the breath of the bite.
“Just rest it there a minute. You’ll open back up if you relax.” He stroked his fingers over the new marks of pain to help him do just that, kissing lightly below the silks.

After a few seconds, he felt himself soften again, and he slipped the dildo the rest of the way in. He twisted it a bit until he got it seated against the right spot.

“Did you find it?”

“Yes, Viktor. I think so.”

“We’ll find out in a second. I’m going to turn it on and play with the settings. Tell me when I hit on any that feel particularly good.”

“Yes, Viktor.”

The dildo came to life with a deep thrumming writhing him inside gasping cries.

“Looks like you did a good job. Don’t worry about telling me. Your response will tell me everything.” He cycled through the settings until he found one that made him respond the way he wanted then increased the intensity until Yuri felt like he was about to break apart then lowered it one click, leaving it vibrating hard for a few seconds then shutting off and coming back on to torment him again. “Color?”

“Gre—Ah!” The cycle came back on and cut off his ability to speak. He panted out the rest of the word as it backed off again. “Green.”

“Good. Since you won’t be able to speak, we’re going to use a physical signal as your safe word. Pinch me hard twice if you need me to back off and three times followed by a long pinch if you’re safewording and need to stop.”

“Like morse code?”

He laughed. “Yes, exactly that.”

“Does it mean—Ah! Any—anything?”

“Well, the two pinches would represent the letter I which works as a shorthand for, ‘I need less,’ and the three pinches followed by the long one is a V which is, ‘Viktor, you need to stop.’ You got those?”

“Two pinches is yellow, three followed by a long one is red.”

“Very good. And make sure they’re hard so I don’t miss them. Don’t worry about hurting me. I prefer it on my ass, but anywhere on me you can reach is fine. Except my cock or balls, please unless you have no other option.” He laughed. “I’m not into pain.”

He couldn’t help laughing as well which cut off into whimpers with the vibrations rattling against his prostate again. “I would have guessed differently.”

He climbed onto the table, straddling his chest on his knees, resting lightly on him, tugging on the clamps. His cock was already rock hard, straining through the fabric and brushing against his throat. Viktor grabbed his hands and yanked his arms above his head. “Oh, I’m very much into your pain.” He leaned down to suck soft kisses onto the bare underside of each wrist then brought his hands down to rest on Viktor’s hips as he brought his own back up to hold around his neck. “Where are you okay with me cumming on you?”
“Anywhere.”

“Is there anywhere you’d most like it?”

His blush came back. Despite everything he had already exposed to him, he couldn’t help feeling the rush of embarrassment with every new layer ripped back. “Inside me, Viktor.” He spoke in a bare whisper as his blush heated his words away.

“My dirty little virgin slut wants me to cum down his throat for him to keep as his filthy little secret?” The hint of a smile warming his face as it always did when he said those words flooded them with affection.

“Yes. Yes, please, Viktor.”

“You want me to be the one to defile that pretty mouth of yours?”

“Please, Viktor.”

“Are you sure? That sweet mouth is the purest thing on you. Everything else on you begs for my touch shamelessly, but that mouth always begs as sweetly as an angel. You really want me to make it another filthy hole begging to be used for my pleasure?”

“Yes! Yes, Viktor. Please, Viktor. Please use me. Please let me feel you inside me.”

His smile widened as he slowly shook his head. “So sweet. You make sure you hold on to that sweetness even as I fuck it into a filthy, slutty mess. Can you do that for me?”

“Yes, Viktor. I’ll do anything you ask. Just, please. Please let me make you feel good.” He cried out as the vibrations came back on and wracked through his pleading body.

“Just relax as much as you can. If you can keep your throat relaxed, it helps keep your gag reflex calmer. Trying to swallow me down like you’re chugging beer can also help, and it feels amazing for me. Sorry, but I’m not the easiest option for your first time considering that I’m on the larger side.”

He chuckled. “Please, Viktor, let me taste your huge cock. I promise I’ll do my best not to let it overwhelm me.”

Viktor’s mouth gaped open in an indignant smile as he reached behind him to tug on the chains. “Are you sassing me?” He pulled harder bit by bit, laughing as Yuri’s cries of pain started to slip from his lips. “I think my little virgin slut thinks it’s funny to sass me. Or maybe that was his way to ask me for more pain. Did you want some more punishment?”

“Yes! Ah! Yes, Viktor!” He twisted under him making his hold on the chains pull harder against his hotly aching nipples.

Viktor pulled a little harder then dropped the chain and dropped a kiss to his throat. “I don’t mind a little funishment as long as you don’t let it wreck your obedience.”

“Funishment?”

“Playfully disobeying or being disrespectful to get me to punish you for fun. It’s a bratty behavior so just be careful about going too far, but I do have a sense of humor even here.”

“How will I know if I’m going too far?”

“You never have to worry about that. I will always inform you of the limits as you reach them. Now,
are you ready to taste my cock, my sassy little virgin slut?”

The vibrations made him whine and nod his head before he could answer properly. “Yes, Viktor. Please now?”

He rose up enough to slide his pants down below his ass, his freed cock dripping onto Yuri’s lips. He licked at the drop of precum, swiping it into his mouth to savor his first taste of Viktor.

Watching him with a smile, he stroked his cheek. “Do you like it?”

“Yes, Viktor,” he answered softly. “So much better than mine.”

“Go ahead. Take it all. You’ve more than earned it today. I’m so proud of you.”

His lips parted. His tongue sliding out to wet them, he rested them against Viktor’s head, looking up as his tongue flicked out to gather more of his sweet taste. Hitching his breath at their first contact, Viktor smiled and stroked his thumb over his cheek. Yuri slipped more of his head into his mouth and swirled his tongue lightly over the tip, stopping to explore the ridge underneath that connected his skin. Viktor’s eyes closed as his chest pulsed deeper. They opened again, and he watched him, his eyes soft, warm, affectionate, doing unspeakable things on top of the already unspeakable sensations trying to claim his attention from down below. Nothing could have pulled his focus away from that look in Viktor’s eyes directed at him.

He opened wider to take more of him in, sliding his ridge and the sensitive skin below his foreskin slowly in and out of his mouth. He sucked gently as he pulled out then worked his tongue around his head again as he slid him back in. Viktor’s breath grew heavier, his fingers lacing through Yuri’s hair, but he held still, gently gripping him as he let him take him at his own pace.

He worked him in further then brought his trembling hand up to stroke his fingers lightly down the length, feeling his velvety skin below them. Tracing the veins and ridges, he opened further and slid him back along his tongue. Viktor’s hand tightened. Yuri’s head swirled into a dizzying pleasure as everything in him joined at once. Moaning, he pressed further until Viktor hit the back of his throat, mindless pleasure raced down to his overstimulated cock and hole.

“Yes, Yuri. So good. You feel so good. So incredible. Do you like the way my cock feels in your mouth? You don’t have to use words.”

He nodded and moaned, taking him deeper and hit his gag reflex. He held him there trying to stay relaxed as Viktor had instructed, breathing heavily.

Viktor stroked his hair. “Yes, exactly right. You’re making me feel so good.” His breathy voice backing up his words made a fresh swirl of pleasure roll through him. Viktor smiled and regripped his hair. “My perfect virgin slut.” He took Yuri’s hand and wrapped it around the base of his cock, sliding it back to pull his skin tight. “Hold here. I like feeling it tighten when I go in your throat.”

Yuri moaned and pushed further until his reflex responded again. He tried to wait for it to calm, but he wanted to make Viktor feel good, so he started bobbing his head down his length.

Viktor tightened his grip to stop him as he started gagging. “Just wait. Wait until your body accepts me. I can wait too. Can you breathe?”

He nodded. He couldn’t breathe very well, but well enough and the diminished oxygen only heightened the dizzying pleasure.

“Good. You’re already making me feel so good. Just wait until you’re ready for more.”
He tried his best to follow his instructions, but with everything happening, waiting was the hardest thing to do. His body wanted to come so desperately, but it was held back and teetering on an edge with Viktor’s expert control. God, he needed to see Viktor lose control. He needed to see him fall apart by his touch. He needed Viktor to let go and use him damn it.

He swallowed him down as he pushed all the way until his lips met his hand then stopped, panting through his narrowed breath as he tried to hold back his body’s impulse to remove him from his throat. He kept swallowing him down as he found that helped him win his fight to keep him there, and Viktor’s cries growing louder with each gulp egged him on.

“Oh, god. Fuck, Yuri! Fuck that feels so good!” His head fell back as he panted, pulling hard at his hair. He lifted his head back to stare down at him with a nasty smirk. “You fucking slut. God, what you’ll do to satisfy me. You want me to use you, yes?”

He nodded, his pleading eyes fixed on the blue flame burning hotter than ever in his and Viktor's body trembling with a dangerous excitement on the brink of losing control.

“You want me to make you my filthy little whore?”

He nodded again as a cry slipped out of his stuffed mouth.

Both of Viktor’s hands came to his head to grip his hair and angle his head up to open his throat further as he started to thrust in tiny strokes inside his mouth. Yuri alternated between trying to relax and swallowing when his body stupidly felt like rejecting his cock.

“How does my virgin slut like being used like this? Does it feel good?”

He nodded quickly, moaning as pleasure pressed against every inch of his body. Viktor began thrusting harder, and something triggered at the back of his throat making a deep shiver rock through him. Shaking cries rolled out of Viktor’s mouth between his thrusts as he gained speed and power, his body melting under his control.

Finally giving up his restraint, Viktor fucked into his mouth. The pleasure inside him rose higher and higher. He had barely enough focus left to watch Viktor’s face and the deep flush over his cheeks and chest and shoulders as he shot his cum down his sloppy mouth spilling down his chest.

Viktor pulled out; he swallowed the rest of his cum down and greedily licked his lips drawing an amused smile from Viktor as he reached down to crank up the power of the vibrations and turn them into a steady stream. He removed the clamps which shockingly felt worse rather than better as blood forced its way back into his now painfully sensitive nipples. Viktor moved to the side to watch him writhe on the table. His fingers pinched and rolled his nipples, dropping him further into the pleasure cracking through him.

He distantly heard his cries screaming out of him as he finally exploded, every muscle in his body clenching hard as he came sending his cum shooting across his chest.

Viktor watched the last twitches of pleasure play across his body then switched off the vibrator and carefully removed it and released the buckle on the cock ring without touching him then dropped down to lap the cum from his body. He writhed some more as he passed over his nipples though he felt so drained, he didn’t even know his body could still move.

Viktor untied him from his silks and held Yuri’s neck inside his hands. “You’re so wonderful, Yuri. You made me feel so incredibly good. Thank you so much, my beautiful Yuri. I’m so proud of you. How are you feeling?”
He nodded slowly.

Viktor laughed. “Okay, that was your last non-verbal answer. Back to using your pretty words. Did you hold on to your sweetness for me like I asked?”

“I don’t know, Viktor.” His words sounded like he was drunk. “You’ll have to tell me. Am I still sweet enough for you?”

He nodded and dropped down to gather him in his arms, burying his face into his chest. “The sweetest. So perfect, Yuri. Did I make you feel good?”

“Oh, yeah. Yes, Viktor. That was… mind-blowing. I hope you know where you put it because I don’t.”

“Put what? Your mind?” Viktor looked up with a smile.

“Yes, Viktor.”

He chuckled. “Yeah, don’t worry. I’ve got it right here.” He touched his hand to his chest. “Right along with the rest of you.” He scooped him up into his arms and carried him into the jade room and placed him on the pillow, stopping to grab the lotion on the way. How he managed to do that while holding his weight after everything he’d done today was unknown to Yuri.

“You’re really strong. It’s so sexy.” He smiled, caressing his cheek as the swirling in his body settled into giddiness.

Viktor pulled him back into his arms to cuddle him as he laid down next to him. “I think you’re the sexiest person I’ve ever seen.” He kissed quickly all over him making him laugh and squeal with the tickling kisses.

He sighed as Viktor settled in to start massaging the lotion in over his fresh marks. “Why won’t you touch me?”

“What do you mean? I’m touching you right now.”

“I mean… where you set the limits. You said you didn’t want my first touch to be something potentially unpleasant, but you could touch me with your hands or… or your mouth and that wouldn’t be unpleasant at all, and then you’d be free to do what you want. It doesn’t have to be sex that I feel first.”

“I guess you’re not wrong there.”

“Soo…?” He tugged at the hem of his shirt.

“I think maybe I limited us more than I needed to because I could sense what a force you’d have on me. I think I was very wise to do that.”

“Is that your gentle way of turning me down again?” He dropped his hand from his shirt.

“Yes.” He picked his hand back up and kissed it. “Don’t take that as me rejecting you. It’s not. It’s the exact opposite. It’s me admitting that controlling myself around you is exceptionally difficult. It’s me admitting that you have me so under your spell; I can’t handle what I normally can. I tried pushing our limits today, and I nearly lost it. You have no idea what that took for me to hold back from you just now.”
“What do you mean? You were inside me.”

“I mean,” he took his throat in his hand and leaned down until his face was inches away, “I want to make you mine. All of you. I can withstand you touching me easier than I can hold myself back when I touch you because the more of you I grab, the more I want to take. I want to make you mine, and I know that you would let me.” Sighing, he sat back and released his hold. “But it would be fake because this is all still just a game to you.”

“It’s not.”

“It is, and don’t try to deny it. If it’s not a game, tell me. What are we really doing here?” He watched him as he struggled to answer, giving up the fight after a moment and lowering his eyes. Viktor lifted his chin back up to make him look at him again. “It’s okay. I’m still fine with the game. I know you need more time. Just don’t look so hurt when I hold back from giving you more of me when you held back first.”

“I’m sorry, Viktor.”

“You don’t need to apologize. I knew the situation going in. Don’t worry.” He smiled. “I want you to feel just as good as you’ve made me feel. Did you know that you were absolutely amazing tonight?” He tickled his sides to draw his laugh back out. “Seriously, that was the best blowjob I’ve ever had.”

“Li—” He slapped his hands over his mouth, his eyes wide.

Viktor laughed. “You look so cute like that I’ll ignore the fact that you were about to call me a liar again. This time. But it truly was. You know what makes for the best blowjobs?”

“No, Viktor.”

“A desire to please that runs so deep you get pleasure off of the other person’s pleasure. Add in a touch of pride in yourself and your work, and it knocks it out of the park. That’s exactly what you just gave me alongside those sweet cinnamon eyes of yours asking if I was happy the entire way.”

"I don't really have pride."

"Yes, you do. You put so much effort and attention into what you're doing, and you get pleasure from doing a good job. Someone without pride just doesn't care. You care very much."

"Yeah... I guess I do."

Viktor smoothed away his creased thoughts on his face as he worked the lotion in over him again and brought him back to that elevated, giddy place of bliss. He was so good. How did a man so incredibly good have so much time for him? So much patience; so much generosity. So much care. His heart ached at receiving so much from him, and it kept hurting worse by the second until he couldn’t take any more.

“Viktor? Please, can I massage you too?” He spoke over his shoulder as he lay on his stomach while Viktor worked over the back of his leg.

“No. This is your time to recover after the demands I put on you and your body.”

“My time… what time is it?”

“Five fifty-five.” His voice twinged with sadness.
He nodded and settled back onto the pillow. Five minutes. He can hold on for five more minutes.

Viktor kissed the bottom of each foot and sat back. “Six o’clock. You’re free.”

“Perfect.” He sat up and turned around, lifting up the hem of Viktor’s shirt. “May I?”

He looked confused but lifted his arms. “Sure. I was going to give it to you anyway. Put it on.”

“Yes, Viktor.” He put it over his head and sniffed deeply as he put his arms though. He nearly moaned as the scent of Viktor, slightly sweaty and soaked with sex, penetrated his body again. Oh, god—this shirt. He never wanted to take it off again.

He grinned. “It’s past six. You don’t have to speak to me like that.”

“Yes, Viktor. Your pants too.”

He laughed in surprise. “My pants? You want to steal everything from me? Fine.” He pretended to pout as he pulled them off and tossed them in his face. “Take them. Put those on too. It’ll be nicer than dirty stable jeans.”

“Yes, Viktor.” He slipped the pants on and climbed off the pillow to roll them up at the waist a bit and retie the drawstring. He couldn’t help noticing the slight dampness at the front, and it thrilled him to have it brushing over his bare cock. “Lay down.”

Viktor grinned and flopped onto the pillow on his back. “Like this?”

“Yes, Viktor. Do I have permission to touch everything?”

“Everything but my lips.”

“Thank you, Viktor. May I use your lotion?”

He smiled and nodded. “Do I have your permission to continue touching and kissing you as I have been?”

His blush swelled as he dipped his chin. “Yes, Viktor.”

He brushed his hand over his cheek. “Thank you.”

He straddled him, sitting as lightly as he could on his hips as he pumped the lotion into his hands. He warmed it between them before running them over his chest and shoulders pressing deeply into the muscle.

Viktor moaned. “Oh, Yuri. That feels so good. Why are you doing this though? Don’t you want to go?”

“You worked hard today. You deserve some pampering too. And I don’t want to be anywhere but right here.”

***
Chapter End Notes

Artist is Clarinda0110. Please share your love if you can over on Tumblr.

Spotify
16. Trust by Boy Epic
“Oh, Yuri. Yuri, just like that.” Viktor moaned. “So good. You’re so incredible at this. How?”

Yuri’s blushing smile squeezed onto his face as he pulled his hands away and sat back. “I’m glad you liked it. I just did what felt right.”

Pulling him into his arms, he snuggled him against his chest. “You should always do what feels right for you. That was incredible. The best massage I’ve ever had.”

Blushing harder, he buried his face into Viktor’s chest. “I don’t know how you could say that and mean it.”

“Wow. Progress already. That was a much better way to phrase your doubts without insulting me and forming your opinion on the matter before I have a chance to share my side. And it wasn’t even during the hours when you’d have to find a way to phrase it like that. I’m so proud of you, Yuri. Now maybe when I tell you that you made me feel so special and—cared for… you’ll believe me. At least a little.”

He nodded. “Yes, Viktor.”

He pulled him tighter for a kiss to his hair. “Thank you for giving me room to speak in there.”

“You’re welcome?”

Viktor sighed in satisfaction, tightening his arms. “How much longer do I have with you?”

“Um… I don’t know. What do you mean?”

“I mean, will you have dinner with me?”

He met Viktor’s gentle eyes. “You… want to have dinner with me?”

“Yes, I would like that, but it’s entirely your choice.”

He thought for a moment then dipped his chin. “Okay.”
He beamed. “Thank you, Yuri. What would you like? I can list a few options, or I can decide for us.”

“You decide, please.”

“As you wish.”

(17) They struggled to untangle themselves and leave the comfort of that little room. Viktor led them to the kitchen without stopping to clothe himself and began gathering ingredients from the fridge. “Can you slice these for a salad?” He filled his hands with bright vegetables then turned back to the fridge.

“Um, sure… Uh… are you going to put clothes on?”

“Nope.”

“Really?”

“Yes, really.”

“Uh… why not?”

He set some deep crimson steaks on the counter and sprinkled them with salt. “Would you rather not have dinner with me if I’m naked?”

“No… it’s—it’s fine. I’m just curious as to why. Do you always do this?”

“No. This is just for you.”

“Me?” His voice squeaked as he tumbled the veggies onto the cutting board. “Why?”

“I’m giving you an easier time picturing your audience naked.” He flipped his hair out of his face and winked.

He shook his head at him, wide-eyed. “Who even are you? You’re not… Nothing makes sense.”

“I could say the same for you, Yuri Katsuki. As soon as I start to think I’ve got you figured out, you start showing me something new.” He slipped an apron over his head and tied it around his bare waist then headed for the patio with the potatoes he had cut in half and spread with butter and seasonings and some fresh asparagus, stopping on the way to turn on the oven.

Yuri couldn’t help but giggle at the strings bouncing over his bare ass as he walked away from him.

“I heard that!” Viktor called with an amused lilt in his voice without looking back. “No laughing at me for being hospitable to my guest.”

Yuri kept giggling as he started slicing the tomatoes. “What kind of person calls this being hospitable? This is insane is what it is.”

“Makes sense to me,” he called from the patio. “I have a lovely dinner guest who feels uncomfortable under pressure, so I’m taking the pressure off. Plus, you’ve mentioned that you like the view, so why not let you enjoy it?”

“I don’t know if this is taking the pressure off.” He couldn’t stop his smile as he started on a bright orange pepper.
He watched him with his head tilted and a turn at the corner of his mouth. “I don’t know. Seems to be working to me.” He came in and set a cast iron skillet on the stove and cranked up the heat and poured some oil in. As soon as some wisps of smoke began drifting up from the pan, he placed the steaks in to violently sizzle. After a couple of minutes, he turned them over and placed the pan in the oven, turning off the stove.

“What do you mean by audience?”

He came up behind him, wrapping his arms around him and nuzzling into his neck as he worked. “Your issues with food aren’t just issues with food itself. There’s some connection there I haven’t quite worked out yet, but when you felt like I was watching you, you were nearly in tears and tried to run away, but you were able to relax when I redirected our focus to something else. I’d like to enjoy a conversation with you tonight rather than taking our focus off each other, so I decided to try this and see if making myself as non-threatening as possible would help keep the pressure off you.”

“If you think you naked is non-threatening, you’ve clearly never looked in a mirror before.”

He laughed as he removed himself to place a bowl in front of him for the salad. “At the very least it’s a good distraction that doesn’t require taking our focus off of each other, yes?”

Dumping the loaded cutting board into the bowl, he smiled. “Da.”

“Yuri! You remembered. Excellent pronunciation too.”

“It’s just one little syllable. It’d be kinda sad if I couldn’t even remember that one.”

“True. It is an easy one. Okay, what’s the word for trust?”

“Um… dobreyat?”

“Close. It’s doveryat’”

“Dov…eryat’”

“Excellent. I don’t want to spend all night quizzing you, so I’ll just ask one more.” He came back to slide a glass of red wine in front of him and wrap around his back again, his hands snaking up under his shirt, his voice low at his ear. “What’s the word for mine?”

He shivered at the growl from Viktor’s voice rippling down his spine. “Moy.”

“Excellent, Yuri. I’m so pleased that you remember that one so well. Moy krasivyy Yuri.”

His head leaned back onto Viktor’s shoulder as his lips traveled his neck. “I don’t think you taught me that one yet.”

“Hmm, I think you’re right, my beautiful Yuri.” He sighed. “But I don’t think I’m allowed to call you that right now, am I?”

“What’s it that they always say here? It’s a free country? You can say whatever you want.”

He shook his head. “I need your permission to call you mine. You’ve only given it until six.”

“Oh. Um, I guess it’s fine.”

He shook his head again. “If you’re only guessing, then it’s not fine. And I don’t trust your definition of fine.”
“Why would you want to?”

“Isn’t it obvious? I want to call you mine for as long as you’ll let me.”

“I can’t understand why.”

“I know. There are so many lies in there about yourself that are blocking out my truth.”

“They’re not lies.”

“I know you believe that too.” He stepped back and took a sip of his wine. “Will you get me a small bowl, please?” He put down his glass and went to the other counter to pick up the olive oil and balsamic vinegar.

“Yes, Viktor.” He turned to the cabinet and pulled down a white ceramic bowl.

“That wasn’t an order; it was a request for a favor.”

“I know.” He handed him the bowl.

Viktor paused looking down at him with another of his unreadable expressions with so many different things going into it before he took it. “Thank you, Yuri.” He spoke slowly with a smile lighting between his words.

He mixed together the oil and vinegar along with a few spices then went back to check the grill and pull the steaks from the oven. He smiled when he turned around to see the plates Yuri had set on the counter for him. “Do you enjoy serving my needs?” He slid the steaks onto the plates.

“Yes, Viktor.”

“Do you know why?”

“It just… feels good to make you happy.”

“It does, doesn’t it?” He watched him with that small, analyzing, warm smile then took the plates to the grill.

He came back and placed them in front of him so he could fill the rest of the plates with the salad and drizzle the dressing over it. Viktor took off his apron, and they gathered their utensils and wine then he led them to a staircase that went to a balcony nested high in the peaked domes of the roofs. The sun was just beginning to set against the dusted sky.

Viktor set down his plate and glass and the bottle of wine he had snagged on the way then pulled the chair out next to his and held his hand in front of himself gesturing to the chair as he bowed looking every bit a proper butler. (If a butler were ever to serve his guest naked that is.) Yuri shook his head at the sheer ridiculousness of the moment and sat on the plush cushion on the iron patio chair as Viktor pushed it in behind him. Viktor pulled his chair closer so they were sitting askew of each other with their knees brushing under the table while looking out over the stables lit with soft golden lanterns and a fiery sky.

“Bon Appétit.” Viktor raised his glass then took a sip.

He picked up his knife and fork and tried to cut into his steak as Viktor was doing but his hands started to shake. He dropped them back down with a clatter.

“Yuri, I’d love to see you enjoy the meal we made together.”
“I know. I’m trying.”

“Do you want me to give you an order?”

He glanced over at the man who somehow instantly retook his dominant aura in full force despite his ridiculous nudity. “Please, Viktor.”

“I’m going to back this one up with pain.”

“Yes, Viktor.”

He came around behind him putting one hand firmly around his throat while the other gripped the bruises on his inner thigh. He squeezed down on his thigh until Yuri started whimpering which quickly turned to moans as his body heated under Viktor’s grip. “Yuri, eat your food.” His voice carried the cool rasp of a threat. “You’re not just going to eat it; you’re going to enjoy it. You’re going to show me your appreciation by savoring every single bite. Do you understand me?”

His pulse throbbed against Viktor’s hand. “Yes, Viktor.”

“Show me you understand.” His grip tightened.

His hands trembled harder than before, but he picked up his knife and fork and cut off a piece and put it in his mouth, chewing slowly.

Viktor waited for him to swallow. “How is it?”

“It’s delicious. Thank you, Viktor.”

“Drink your wine.” He squeezed a little harder.

He picked up his glass and drank the decadent wine that chased the rush of Viktor’s grip with a loosening of his own. He melted into his hold as his body refreshed the calm he had in Viktor’s jade room.

“That’s it, Yuri.” He held tighter. “So good for me. Keep going. You need to enjoy all of it to please me. If you don’t there will be severe consequences. You don’t have a choice. You will satisfy me.”

He swallowed, his throat rippling against the hand holding his life. “Yes, Viktor.”

He released his hold and topped off his glass. “Excellent, Yuri. Now that we have that cleared up, we can move on to enjoying our time together, yes?”

He shivered as the heat from Viktor’s body was removed. “Yes, Viktor.”

Viktor stopped at a cedar trunk and pulled out a knitted blush blanket and wrapped its softness around Yuri’s shoulders.

“Thank—thank you.” His eyes followed him as he went back to his chair and resumed his meal. “Aren’t you cold? It’s a bit chilly with the sun dropping.”

“I’m Russian. It’d take a lot more than a little darkness to chill me.” Viktor watched him with a smile pulling on his lips as Yuri cut another bite and ate it with relatively little hesitation.

It was one of the best things he had ever tasted, and he was starving. Why—He didn’t have the answers to his questions. There was no point in asking himself. He looked to Viktor. “Why is it worse with you? It’s never been this bad before.”
“Hmm… that is a good question and there are a lot of factors to consider when teasing out an answer. You’ve really never experienced it like this before?”

“No, Viktor. It’s been a little uncomfortable sometimes before but never to the point where I had to be forced to eat. I mean you are the most gorgeous person I’ve ever seen, let alone shared a meal with, so maybe it’s just that.” He took a sip of wine as Viktor watched him with a smile creasing under his eyes.

“Thank you, but I think your issues with food have less to do with your image issues than you think. And it’s hard to say off of how few meals we’ve shared, but it seems to be getting worse, not better, when I consider that you should have been feeling pretty good and relaxed right now, and yet you weren’t able to take a single bite when the other meals you were able to eat at least a little before you met resistance. Exposure should be desensitizing you.” His eyes tightened a little as he thought.

“And the eggs and toast this morning you didn’t have much of an issue with…” He glanced at the plates in front of them. “I’m getting a bit of an idea here, but I don’t want to say anything until I have more information to confirm it. I will say that I believe it’s getting worse because I’m digging up whatever the root of it is. I think you’re going to find that a lot. Things will keep getting worse as we get closer to what it is that you really want me to remove.”

“I want you to remove? I never said anything like that.”

“Come now, I know you can understand that one as you understood what I needed from you without my explicit statement.”

“But I don’t need anything.”

“Oh, now that is a huge lie, but as most of yours are, it’s directed toward yourself. We all need something, Yuri. You’re no exception.”

He took a bite of his potato, frowning as he thought over Viktor’s words. “What do you need? I mean not what you need from me; just in general.”

“Hmm… what do I need… that is another excellent question. I need something that lasts. I need something that’s strong. The world—everything around me—feels like it’s moments away from either crumbling apart or flittering away. It’s always the little things too. I hope to have two more seasons with Toska, but he could take a misstep tomorrow and end it right there. No matter how much effort I put into building something strong, it’s always the little things that break it apart. I need something that doesn’t feel like that.”

“I hope you find it.”

“I hope so too.” He smiled gently. “I hope you realize what it is that you need. And I hope,” he refilled both of their glasses, “that I’m the one who can give it to you.”

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Yuri meandered back to his house through the fog that had descended down the hills in the cool air with his smile resting on the bliss Viktor had placed in his body. After a delicious meal filled with lighthearted conversation, he’d sent him off with hands dragging over his bruises as he ravaged his neck and chest with kisses just threatening a bite as a reward for finishing his dinner. He now felt as though the fog itself was carrying him down the hill. Lifting his shirt to his nose, he breathed deeply letting Viktor’s scent dizzy his senses again. Dropping it as he reached his door, he tugged it back into place to make sure the bruises on his chest were covered.
“Yuri!” Phichit tossed his phone aside and jumped up from the couch where the box of leftover pizza from last night sat on the coffee table along with two wine glasses and threw his arms around him again.

He put his hands up between them just before Phichit landed.

He jumped back. “Damn it, I forgot. You’re still bruised, aren’t you? I’m so sorry. I was just worried about you again. Where were you?” His eyes ran over him inspecting his strange outfit.

“I, uh, I was with Viktor.”

“He made you stay overtime? He’s always really strict about making us go home on time… Oh, was he making you make up for being late the other day?”

“Uh, yeah.”

“That sucks. What was he having you do that late?”

He glanced down at the oversized clothing hanging on his body. “Um, Viktor wanted… a yoga partner and asked me to help him. To, um, make sure he was moving correctly. He can’t afford to injure himself right at the start of the season.”

“Right. Of course not. So… are those his clothes you’re wearing? They look a little big on you.”

“Uh, yeah. I showered and changed there so we wouldn’t be working out in stable clothes, and he lent me this, so I didn’t have to make a trip back down here.”

“Ah. That makes sense.” He glanced at his empty hands. “You left your clothes there?”

“Oh, yeah.” He rubbed the back of his neck. “I, uh, guess I forgot them.”

“Oh. I wish I had known you weren’t going to be back at six. I thought we were going to watch a movie tonight.”

He winced. “Ah, crap. I did say that, didn’t I? I’m so sorry. I completely forgot about that. I should have texted you.”

“It’s fine. It’s not a big deal.”

He looked over at the box and cringed again. “You waited for me, didn’t you?”

“A bit. I ate a little because I was starving, but I can still eat and it’s not too late to watch a movie if you still wanted to.”

“Actually… I kinda already ate. I’m so sorry. Viktor wanted to make sure we ate something after working all day, so we didn’t pass out. And, um, I’m really kind of too tired for a movie tonight. I think I’m just going to go to bed. I’m really really sorry.”

“Don’t worry about it. It’s fine. You can’t help it that your boss asked you to stay late. Is it going to be a permanent thing? The yoga?”

“Um… I really don’t know. I’m sorry. I’ll make sure I text you next time so this doesn’t happen again.”

“Don’t worry about it, Yuri. I’m not mad.” He smiled. “In fact, now that Viktor’s not around…” He leaned in and put them into a kiss, his tongue slipping into his mouth.
Even though Phichit was only touching one small part of him, he felt his touch all over his body. He flinched back, breaking the kiss. “I’m sorry. I’m just really exhausted.”

His face fell a bit, but he held onto his smile. “I bet. Viktor must have worked you hard today if he was upset enough about yesterday to make you stay after. Go get some rest. I’ll be here tomorrow too.”

“I’m sorry again. Have a good night.” He waved and stopped in the bathroom to brush his teeth then collapsed onto his bed, glancing at the nightstand next to him as he checked his alarm on his phone and set the little digital clock on the stand for a few minutes after. He pulled out Viktor’s lotion bottle and sniffed deeply then impulsively put a dab on his finger and spread it over his lips before he dropped off to sleep, his nose buried inside Viktor’s shirt.

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He dropped to his knees, a strange lightness soaking into him. A soft sigh of relief escaped as he bowed as neatly as he could. Straightening his back as he rose back up, he lifted his eyes to Viktor’s delighted face.

“I love the bow.” He stood and walked over to him with his face still shining. “That is an excellent touch which you’ve now spoiled me on, so I expect to see it every morning.”

He smiled as Viktor’s pleasure became his own pride. “Yes, Viktor.”

His hand brushed over his cheek to his hold on the side of his neck. “Thank you for giving me another day with you.”

He shuddered as his touch both grounded him and expanded the lightness filling him even though his response was still stuck in his mouth. “Thank you for… offering me you… for another day.”

Shivering hot breath ran over his neck as Viktor’s lips chased it. “My Yuri. So warm and inviting.” His voice dropped with his rumbling lust. “Feels so good to have your trust wrapped so thick and hot and tight around me. I intend to push deep today. I need to expose more of you. Will you take more of me?”

He whimpered as his body clenched around every word then gasped and fell into Viktor’s steadying hands, his desire spiking to dangerous levels. “Yes. Yes, Viktor.”

A sighing moan escaped from deep in his chest. “So sinfully delectable. My Yuri. What a perfect way to begin our day together.” With one last sucking kiss to his neck that screamed of restraint, he stood and held out his hand.

His eyes were wild yet again, his breath heaving before he was able to calm himself enough to put his hand in Viktor’s.

He helped him to his feet, his fingers caressing the roll of flab above his hip that had been exposed when his shirt rode up before Viktor tugged it back into place. “How did you sleep?”

“Um, really well actually. I fell asleep as soon as I got home.”

“Really.” His eyebrows lifted then his face spread into a warm smile as he pulled him into his steady hands making Yuri’s barely regained composure fall apart. “That makes me so happy to hear.” Pulling him into a hug, he ran his hands down his back in long, soothing strokes. “Easy, Yuri. I will take care of that later.” He released him with a kiss to his cheek. “Come now. We’ve got a lot of work to do today.” He turned and they headed back up the hill once again.
He stared at the outfit Viktor laid out for him on the bed, his body still damp from their shower after their workout and his hair dripping onto his shoulders. A dark amethyst polo shirt that fell into a near black with dips in the sheen splayed over charcoal breeches laid behind tall black boots polished to an immaculate shine as though someone had once been wearing the outfit then sat on the edge of the bed and vanished into thin air leaving the clothes behind as the sole evidence of their existence.

“I can’t.”

“You can because this is my order.”

His body trembled, tears pricking his eyes. “Please, Viktor. I can’t. I can’t wear this.”

“Is that an acceptable answer to my orders?”

“No, Viktor. I’m sorry.”

“You can wear it, and you will wear it. Put it on and meet me in the kitchen in five minutes. Do not be late.” He turned and walked off leaving Yuri behind as he wiped at the tears on his face.

Five minutes didn’t give him even a moment to think or prepare. His tears ran down his cheeks, breath struggling through his sobs, as he put on the clothes that belonged on someone—anyone else. Nothing he’d worn had ever fit him better.

He zipped up the back of the boot and snapped the last closure shut and raced down to find Viktor in the kitchen waiting with open arms. He crashed into them, and Viktor caught him tight.

“Shh… you’re okay, my beautiful Yuri. You did so well for me. I’m so, so proud of you. I know that was hard for you.”

His sobs ran harder against his chest.

“Shh… easy, Yuri. You’re okay. Everything’s going to be fine. I promise.” He stroked his hair and kissed the top of his head. “I’m responsible for everything here. You don’t have to worry about a thing other than doing as I tell you, and you’re so good at that. Easy, Yuri. Slow your breath for me.”

He ran his hand down his back. “Good. Just like that. Nice and steady. That’s my good Yuri.”

Laughter broke through his sobs. “You talk to me like I’m a horse.”

He laughed and kissed his head. “I guess I do. But you are like a horse, aren’t you? So strong and brave but a little uneven crossing or a bit of flapping fabric can send you skittering away. But with the right leader you can put your trust in… you won’t hesitate to show the world what you can really do. I’m sure of it.” He stroked his head with long, rhythmic pets. “Easy, Yuri.” They both started laughing again, and Viktor lifted his face up to kiss the tears from his cheeks. “Let me see you.”

He released him and stood back for Viktor’s eyes to roam his body appraisingly.

“You look gorgeous, Yuri. Absolutely stunning. I’m so pleased I’ll get to see you looking this perfect every day.”

“I look wrong; I feel wrong.”

“Hmm…” He placed his finger on his lips to think. “There is one thing we can do to improve your appearance and make you feel better about this.” His finger dropped away from the dark lust on his
lips. “Kneel.” He took off his glasses and set them aside and combed his fingers through his still damp hair, pushing it away from his face as Yuri regarded him from his knees. “Take my cock out.”

His own lurched as he reached for Viktor’s buckle with shaking hands. He unzipped his breeches and carefully exposed his cock, already thickening under his touch. Looking up from under it, he licked his lips as he waited further instruction.

“Yes, you’re already looking better like this: on your knees and hungry for my cock. Go ahead. Make me feel good. But don’t make a mess.”

“Yes, Viktor.” He took him in his hand and licked over the tip, sighing as a calm pleasure washed over him with his taste. “Thank you, Viktor.”

He smiled and laced his fingers into Yuri’s hair. “That’s my good little virgin slut. Don’t spill a drop.”

“Yes, Viktor.”

He licked his head and ran his lips over the ridge as he admired the rapid swell filling his fist and his mouth. Looking up to watch his response, he slid him in until he hit the back of his throat then swallowed him further, breathing slowly to keep his throat from struggling against the intrusion as he moved him in his mouth. Viktor’s hands gripped his hair as his breath spiked; his eyes rolled back.

“Oh god, my Yuri. Such a good little virgin slut you are. Yes, just like that. You remembered so well.” He released one hand to caress his cheek. “Yes, you do look so much better with my cock in your mouth. You feel better too, don’t you?”

He nodded and took him in further, moaning as feeling more of Viktor inside him pushed his own pleasure deeper. The taste of his precum started filling his mouth and he sucked it down to the sound of Viktor’s cries laced with praises and curses, slurping and sucking along his length when it threatened to spill.

His cock started to pulse as his orgasm approached and Yuri pressed further, taking him in as much as his body would allow then moved in small thrusts trying to match the rhythm Viktor had used when he fucked into his mouth, watching Viktor struggle to keep his eyes on him through the pleasure trying to tear them away.

“Fuck. Fu—fuck, my Yuri. My perfect Yuri. So—Angh—ah!” His gasping words fell into just Yuri’s name stumbling and breaking over his lips as he filled him with his cum.

Swallowing every last bit of his taste, he pulled back and sucked the rest from his cock to clean him thoroughly as it twitched against his lips. Satisfied that he’d done as he was told, he wiped his chin and sat back, looking up to await further instructions.

Viktor didn’t take his eyes off him as he tucked himself back in and refastened his clothing; it filled him with a greedy pleasure that longed to keep Viktor’s eyes on him always.

Taking Yuri’s chin in his hand, he ran his thumb over his cheek. “That felt incredible. You did such an amazing job. You should be so proud of yourself. Even better than the first, and that was already mind-blowing.” He smiled and ran his thumb over his lips. “Such soft lips too.” He released his hold and turned to the table. “Come now. Time to eat.”

He ran his finger over his lips as he stood up. They were softer than usual. He joined him at the table where two plates of scrambled eggs and toast sat with a slice of honeydew melon and coffee.
Viktor filled their cups. “Sorry, I burnt the toast a little.”

“It’s okay. I don’t mind. Thank you, Viktor.” He picked up a piece and started eating while Viktor watched him carefully between bites.

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After breakfast, they went down to the tack room and Yuri gathered Toska’s tack then followed Viktor out who stopped at a saddle rack a bit past Toska’s stall.

“Put his things here and go get him. Time to teach you how to perform blood magic.” He smiled and tossed his hair into an adorable, sexy wink. When Yuri returned a minute later, he gestured for him to follow him into the little side aisle leading to the storage room where a horse vacuum stood. He flipped it on and picked up a shedding comb, a long straight handle of wood with a fine row of metal teeth coming off the edge.

“First thing is, make sure you’re not standing where you’ll be pulling the dirt and hair onto you. Stand behind the brush and push it away from you. Second thing.” He picked up a clean white towel from a stack on a shelf and tossed it over his shoulder. “Don’t use your clothes as a napkin.” He smiled and shook his head. “Surely your mother taught you that one.”

He cringed remembering the other day when every time his face got too loaded up with dirt and hair, he lifted the bottom of Viktor’s shirt used it to clear it away. By the end of the day, his shirt had been more brown than gray. It was just the simplest way to do things and dirt was an accepted cost of working with horses. But of course, Viktor had a better way. “Yes, Viktor.”

“You start with the shedding comb to help loosen the dirt and hair and follow right behind it with the vacuum before it has a chance to drift onto you and all over the aisle. I like the shedding comb first because it grips the hair better than a curry which sends it flying everywhere.” He started working long strokes down Toska’s body, taking an already clean horse and making him gleam. As soon as a light sheen of sweat worked up on Viktor’s skin from the muggy morning, he used the towel to dry it away before it could work as a magnet for the dirt. “All the horses are already used to the vacuum, so you shouldn’t have any issues there. If this one is in use, there’s another one in the main aisle and another at the far end by the stairs to the loft.”

Once he finished with the shedding comb, he picked up the rubber curry and repeated the same procedure, giving Toska a thorough massage with the rubber fingers who showed his appreciation with deep grunts. He picked up the hard brush next and again followed with the vacuum while also stopping every three strokes to run the vacuum over the brush itself. “You need to keep your brushes clean. You can’t clean a horse properly with a dirty brush.”

The long strokes of the polishing soft brush got the same treatment, and just when Yuri thought that any further efforts could only be wasted as Toska was already impeccable, he picked up a bottle of coat conditioner and a soft rag from the shelf next to the towels and used the rag to work the conditioner into his coat until he took on the luster of liquid silver with his dapples glinting even in the low light inside the barn. A thorough detangling of his mane and tail, picking his hooves of any dirt and stones, and a quick sweep of the aisle with the vacuum left the stable, the horse, and Viktor all spotless.

He turned to him with a smile. “See? Blood magic is easy with the right technique. Plus, I’ll let you in on one more little secret. The fabric is designed to repel dirt. It won’t hold up against your technique of burying yourself in as much dirt as possible, but it works fine for mine.” He smiled, amused at his own little jab. He tossed his dirty towels into a bin below the shelf. “Tack him up.”
“Yes, Viktor.” He put the crimson sport boots on his lower legs first then added the matching saddle pad that had a trim of gold rope around the edge and hefted the black dressage saddle weighted down with solid craftsmanship and fine leather over his back. Toska opened his mouth readily for the shiny gold bits Yuri had polished himself yesterday as he slid the headstall of the bridle over his ears.

He buckled everything in place then followed Viktor outside to the dressage arena that had no more fence than a one-foot rail lined with flowers to mark the border. Letters at regular intervals along the border that made absolutely no logical sense other than tradition marked the spots for the rider to give their cues. The only letter that did make sense was unmarked— an imaginary X in the center of the arena where every test began and ended with a salute.

He gave Viktor a leg up into the saddle then settled in to work on cleaning the jumping tack as Viktor rode through the labyrinthine weaving of a test on his gleaming horse after giving his salute to Yuri as if he were the judge.

It was Toska’s perfect obedience to Viktor’s faultless guidance that made him excel, and it was the dressage that many overlooked in favor of the more thrilling jumping that made that clear. Viktor had control of his every muscle and could alter each one at his call. While jumping is judged by the fences, it’s won on the ground. If Viktor needed a shorter path for a faster time, Toska would whip through the turn with a touch. If he needed him to contract and collect himself to hit the right mark, Toska would contain his forward momentum into a compact bundle and wait until Viktor released him. If Viktor needed him to cover a distance of five strides in four, Toska would stretch himself out and take up the extra ground simply by reaching for it. Viktor could take risks because he knew that whatever he asked, Toska would be there to provide it, leaving his mind free to find the best path for them.

It would be easy to miss what Viktor was truly doing out there with how quietly he sat and how subtle his commands were, but the way Toska came alive under his touch was unmistakable.

Viktor’s will flowed straight into Toska and took control of his speed and power and rendered them utterly balanced and precise. It was humanity finding a balance with nature and building a relationship that elevated them both on the trust that flowed in the unbreakable connection between them.

He had never in his life seen anything more worthy of being called perfect.

After Viktor dismounted, Yuri brought the saddle he had cleaned in and followed Viktor into the stable with Toska’s reins in his free hand. Finished untacking him, he rinsed the sweat from Toska’s body in the wash stall and iced his legs and put him back out in the pasture as Viktor had directed him then met him back in the tack room where Viktor stood in front of his cabinet.

“Get Avos’s brush box, saddle pad, boots, side reins, cavesson, lunge line and a lunge whip.” He opened the cabinet and pulled a helmet out of a box and sat it on his head, checking the fit. Satisfied, he handed it to him. “This is yours. You can leave it in my cabinet for now. His saddle racks now have his name. I was able to get the saddler to loan some temporary saddles for him that should fit you better until the custom ones come in.”

“Viktor.”

“Is there something you’d like to share regarding my orders?”

Yes! His body battled him to release this word. To scream at him that he couldn’t do it; that he was asking too much; that he had no idea what he was asking and what the consequences would be. He took in Viktor’s patient eyes asking for his trust. “No. No, Viktor.”
“That’s my good Yuri.” His lips touched his neck.

He gathered the listed items focusing on finding a spot for each one in the growing load in his arms rather than on the way they shook. He unloaded his arms at the saddle rack next to the vacuum then met Viktor at Avos’s stall next to Toska’s.

“Go get some cookies, so you can greet your horse.”

He whimpered at Viktor’s phrasing but went to the box and grabbed a few cookies and offered one to Avos who put on the deception of being a perfectly kind and obedient horse in order to gain the treat.

“Look at those eyes. He has the best puppy dog eyes I’ve ever seen on a horse.” Viktor shook his head. “I got suckered with those. I thought surely, he really was as sweet as he looks and just had some issues preventing him from obeying as he wanted to, but oh, how wrong I was. He enjoys disobedience. I’ve never seen him more content than after he’s ignored my every command then laughed in my face by taking the jump as he pleases and cleared it with six goddamn feet to spare.” He chuckled and joined Yuri stroking his neck on the other side while Avos chewed happily. “At least I can say he enjoys jumping. For all his faults, he’s never refused, and he has yet to even touch a rail. Alright, time to get him tacked.”

Yuri gave him one last scratch under his cheeks then slipped the chain through the halter and brought him out to the vacuum and groomed him as Viktor had taught. When he finished, he marveled at his perfectly clean outfit that had shed every errant hair and touched the still smooth skin on his forearm lacking the gritty coat he’d grown accustomed to wearing.

Viktor smiled as he slid his hand down Yuri’s other arm. “Yes, you do feel so much better like this. And you always want to look good for my eyes to enjoy and feel delicious for me to touch, yes?”

He shivered as Viktor’s hands traveled his body. “Ye—yes, Viktor.” His eyes fluttered closed as his breathing picked up with Viktor’s breath leading kisses over the back of his neck.

“And taste. You taste so much better after following my orders correctly. How good you are that you want to please me so much and learn so quickly how to do that. You’re taking me so well today. I’m about to stretch you wide open to fit everything I want to give you. You’re going to make yourself nice and soft for me and take me without complaint, yes?”

A violent heat quaked through him. “Vi—Viktor.” He moaned then gave his answer hot and breathy from his chest. “Yes, Viktor.”

He sighed. “Yes. That’s it. That’s what I need to feel.”

“I’m scared, Viktor.”

“I know you are. I promise everything will be fine. Don’t let your fear shut me out. Trust me instead of your fear.” His hands paused on his waist to grip him, steadying the quaking.

“Yes, Viktor.” He sighed, leaning into his hold as Viktor’s arms came to wrap around him.

“That’s my sweet Yuri. You know, you’re exactly who I hoped Avos was. But his sweet eyes were nothing but a lie. Yours are so honest.” He nuzzled in for one last kiss and sighed. “Tack him up and let’s go.”

“Yes, Viktor.”
He set to work getting Avos booted up in his teal sport boots and added the matching saddle pad that had the same gold trim as Toska’s then put on the black dressage saddle that Viktor had added a grab strap to on the front. Yuri tried not to be offended by that as he slipped the cavesson over his nose and around his ears. He attached the side reins to the rings on the sides then clipped the other end to the D-rings on the saddle, buckling everything in place. The lunge line clipped to the ring on the top of his nose, and Yuri held the long nylon webbing in a neat loop. He grabbed his helmet and the whip and followed Viktor out with Avos at his side.

Viktor led them to an indoor arena that had a pale gold wall set well inside the white steel beams of the rafters and angled toward them so mischievous horses’ feet would be stopped before the wall could bash the rider’s knees. Matching pale wood bleachers filled in the space between the arena wall and the wall of the building on both sides. Viktor closed the gate after them then went to close the large doors at the end leading outside while Yuri and Avos waited in the middle of the arena. Viktor returned and stood behind him, putting his hands over his.

“Send him out.”

He whimpered, the burn of Viktor’s command already feeling like too much.

“Yuri…” His voice dropped to threatening levels. “You don’t have any control here. Don’t think yourself strong enough to override mine.” His hands gripped down over his.

He sighed and flicked the whip at the ground; Avos moved out onto the circle around him while he unwound the line from his hand. How did Viktor’s voice like that bring him such peace and comfort? And how did Viktor always know exactly what it was he needed when he didn’t have a clue? “Thank you, Viktor. I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to resist.”

“I know you didn’t. You just needed my help. Trot him.”

He took a deep breath then flicked the whip at the ground again and clicked with the side of his tongue. “Trot.”

Avos tossed his head but moved into a huge trot that floated over the ground with each launch of his legs. The mane tossing about on his neck with his snorting breaths and the glossy shimmer on his coat were hypnotizing as he stood in place and pivoted in the center of the dizzying circle that blurred out everything beyond Avos circling him.

“What do you think of him?”

“He’s beautiful. He really is an amazing mover. He’s in the air more than he’s on the ground.”

“He’s got more. Move him out.”

He clicked again with his tongue and gave a firm crack with the whip above the ground; Avos responded with a powerful launch from his hindquarters and stretched out his stride beyond the limits of his body with his time suspended in the air letting him cover more ground than just his legs would allow.

“You’re a clicker, huh? I’m a kisser.” Viktor’s smile spread through the kiss on his neck.

He held back his smile. “I never would have guessed.”

Viktor laughed and pressed his teeth into the curve between his neck and shoulder and threatened a bite which he dropped with a kiss instead. “He’s still got more in there.” He placed a commanding kiss in the air and Avos snorted and moved out harder. “He’s actually pretty good on the lunge. I
think he thinks we interfere with his beauty too much on his back.” He watched him for a moment and laughed. “I can’t say he’s wrong. No matter how skilled the rider, I’ve never seen a horse give exactly under saddle what he can give when he’s free. A little flash gets sacrificed to our weight. Of course, they get a protected life in exchange, and you’ve now restored my hope that they enjoy our bond as much as we do. Ask for a walk.”

“Woah, easy… Walk.” He slid his voice through the words using his tone more than the words themselves to give meaning to the command, and Avos dropped back huffing and bobbing his head.

“Canter him.”

He clicked and cracked the whip sending up a little flurry of the footing. “Canter.”

Avos broke into a trot then rushed into a canter.

“Walk him again.”

“Woah… Walk.”

“That was you; not him. You didn’t feel it enough. Command him as I would. Remember, you’re acting out of my will; not your own. If I wouldn’t do it like that, neither will you.”

“Yes, Viktor.” He filled his lungs with his shaking breath and locked it in the base of his chest for his command to launch from. “Canter.” He clicked and cracked the whip; Avos cantered right off from the first beat.

“Good. Get some more engagement from him.”

“Yes, Viktor.” He flicked the whip toward his hind leg for a few strides to encourage him to step under his belly further and lift his back. When Avos responded he cooed his praise. “Good boy, Avos.” He asked for a little more and Avos rounded up through his back and stretched for the contact of the side reins. “Yes. That’s a good boy. Just like that.”

“Good, Yuri. Just like that.”

They both started laughing with Viktor dropping his face onto Yuri’s shoulder. Avos decided that since they couldn’t have the courtesy to give him his rightfully earned attention, he wouldn’t work for them and dropped back to a walk.

A man cleared his throat in the distance and they both sobered up their laughter and looked to the sound.

“Trot him.”

“Yes, Viktor.” He glanced at the man with dark hair standing on the other side of the gate then clicked and focused on getting the proper engagement from Avos while Viktor dealt with their intruder.

“Yes, Georgi?”

“Um, what are you doing?”

“I’m teaching my new hire how to lunge my horse properly. Do you need something?” He somehow managed to sound both annoyed and utterly disinterested at the same time. Typically, annoyance requires a certain amount of engagement with the subject, but Viktor didn’t seem to agree.
“Uh, the hay that came in this morning: Half of it is moldy. We’ve still got the last shipment we’re using up, but the loft was stinking like mold, so we just opened some bales, and about half of the ones we checked were bad.”

“Really? I’ve used Jake for years. He’s never given me a bad bale.”

“Check for yourself if you want, but I promise they’re bad. Not even fit for cows. The rest are likely to go soon too if the harvest went that bad.”

“No, I believe you. I just can’t believe Jake would mess up like that. We still have a few weeks of the old stock, right?”

“Yeah.”

“Thanks, Georgi.”

Georgi hesitated a moment, watching them, then glanced at Viktor’s face and walked off.

“Excellent, Yuri. You didn’t take your focus off your task even with the distraction. Walk him.”

He cued Avos back to the walk.

“Good. Just keep him walking. I’m going to remove my hands for a few minutes.”

“Please don’t.” His anxiety, which had been surprisingly quiet, leapt in his chest.

“You’ll be fine. I’m still right here, and it’s just a walk. It’s no different from leading him and you’re just fine with that.”

He sighed out as much tension as he could. “Yes, Viktor.” Trying to steady his cold, shaking hands, his eyes fixed on the ripples cascading over Avos’s perfect shoulder with his every step around the wide circle.

“Huh. That’s strange. Jake isn’t picking up.” Viktor frowned at his phone and tapped it again to make another call. “Sally, hi. It’s Viktor. I tried calling Jake about a shipment of hay, and I couldn’t get ahold of him… I see. I’m so sorry to hear that. Is it okay if I stop by to pay him a visit? Great. Can you text me the hospital he’s at along with your son’s phone number? Thanks, Sally. I’m so sorry again. Take care of yourself. I hope he gets well soon.” He tapped off his phone. “Apparently Jake fell ill and has been in and out of the hospital for the past few months. His son took over, but he clearly has no idea what he’s doing. He should though. I know Jake mentioned that he’s been training him to take over since he was a kid…”

He put the phone to his ear again. “Pete, this is Viktor Nikiforov calling. I heard about your father, and I’m very sorry to hear he’s been having health issues. He’s a good man, and I wish him well… The reason I’m calling is the shipment you dropped off this morning is rotten. How do you plan to address this? I assure you, it’s bad. My staff opened some of the bales and they’re full of mold. You are aware that moldy hay can be deadly to horses, correct? You’re lucky that my staff is so observant… Listen.” Viktor’s voice hardened. “Out of respect for your father and your unfortunate circumstances at taking over the business, I’m giving you a chance to correct this. What you proposed isn’t a solution at all. The next words out of your mouth better be an actual solution or your chance ends… And what would you do with it then?” Viktor’s anger flared off him in deep waves. “You fail to grasp the seriousness of the situation here. This isn’t a case of ‘not being satisfied with the quality.’ You delivered deadly hay to feed my horses. That entire batch is not safe to feed to any animal and needs to be recalled and your customers refunded immediately. If you can’t see that on your own, you’re unfit to take over for your father. You should be ashamed of yourself. Three
months and you’ve destroyed his reputation that he spent his entire life crafting.” He tapped off the phone and held it in his clenched fist, seething as he tried to keep himself contained.

“Viktor?”

“I’m okay. Just pissed. He first proposed just throwing in a few extra bales on my next order and then to take it back but sell it to someone else.” He shook his head and sent a text.

Phichit showed up a minute later. “Yeah, boss? What do you need?” He glanced at Yuri with a confused expression.

“The moldy hay. Jake’s business got taken over by his son who’s unfit to run it. The batch that just got harvested is rotten and should not be fed even if it seems fine and anything delivered in the last three months is suspect. The son has no intention to rectify the problem. Can you use our social media accounts to spread the word?”


“Yes. Also, contact the feed stores and inform them so they don’t refer new customers to him.”

“Yeah, no problem. Anything else?”

“Yes. Pull the bad hay from the loft and put it next to the fire pit then vacuum out every bit of bad hay and scrub down the floor with a ten percent bleach solution. Obviously, gather as many people as you need for this and wear face masks. Then I’d like you to plan a cookout for a bonfire for next Thursday at eight. Everyone who works or rides here and their families are invited.”

“Woah. That’s going to be a huge bonfire. I think we’re going to run a little short-handed with pulling the hay and still trying to get our regular chores done. Can we borrow Yuri for today?”

“No. Call the students trading work for lessons and see if any of them are interested in coming in. I can either pay them or offer extra lesson time. Their preference. You can wait to start planning the bonfire until tomorrow, but make sure the warnings go out right now. That’s all. Thank you, Phichit.”

“Yeah—yeah, sure. No problem.” He waved and walked off, glancing back at Yuri before he left.

Viktor sighed and ran his hands over Yuri’s shoulders and down to his hands, gripping around them harder than before, muttering under his breath. “…thinks he can steal you right out from my hands.”

His kisses reclaiming his neck were flooded with tension.

“Do you want to hurt me?”

Viktor stilled. “What? Why would you say that?”

“You’re upset, and you feel better after hurting me, right? I’m just saying you can hurt me if you want to.”

“Oh. Don’t say it like that. Ask if I want to give you pain. I separate the two in my head by calling what we do for pleasure giving you pain and actual unintentional pain by saying I hurt you. Giving implies it’s intentional and wanted while the other implies an unwanted accident.”

“Oh. I’m sorry, Viktor. I meant the intentional kind.”

“It’s okay. You didn’t know.”
“Do you want to give me pain, Viktor? Or—or I can make you feel good another way.”

He smiled against his neck and slid his hands down to wrap around his waist. “You’re so sweet to offer yourself to make me feel better. Just that is enough for now. Reverse him.”

“Yes, Viktor.”

They finished exercising Avos’s other side then Yuri called him in and stood trembling while Viktor pulled down the stirrups on the saddle and removed the side reins then checked the girth. Viktor took the lunge line from him and pulled his glasses off then put his helmet on, tightening it and checking the fit until he was satisfied that it would stay in place.

“Alright, Yuri. I’m going to give you a leg up and this time I want you to do it properly. Don’t punish him for accepting you on his back.”

“Yes, Viktor.” Tears rolled down his cheeks and into the divots of his wrinkled chin before falling off onto his still spotless shirt. “I have to do this?”

He seized his throat in his hand and leaned down to his ear. “You absolutely have no choice. I am going to have my way here whether you like it or not because I can see exactly what it is you need. So, be my good little slut and lay down and open yourself up for me so I can ravage you the way I want to.”

“Yes, Viktor.” He gasped and leaned harder into his hand. “Thank you.”

“Careful, Yuri. Press any harder and people will start seeing my marks on you.”

“I don’t care.”

“Oh, so cruelly close to the right answer.” He shook his head and dropped his hand. “Come on. Give me your leg.”

He turned and took hold of the saddle and breathed deeply trying to find a rhythm for his snarled heart. Placing his leg in Viktor’s hands, he looked over his shoulder at him. “What is the right answer?”

“That’s another one I want you to learn on your own. One, two, three.” He launched him up, and Yuri swung his leg over Avos’s haunches and settled lightly in the saddle. “Much better. You did great that time.” He adjusted the stirrups until they were the perfect length and checked the girth again to make sure the saddle wasn’t going anywhere then took a deep breath and paused before removing the lunge line. “You’re certain you’re not scared to ride him with no control but his?”

“I’m not scared of anything he can do to me.”

He smiled and shook his head. “Bravest rider I’ve ever met.” He pointed his finger in Avos’s face. “I swear, if you hurt him, I will make you into glue.”

Avos stared back, unimpressed with his threat.

(18) Viktor closed his eyes and unclipped the lunge line from the cavesson, freeing Avos to do as he wished within the confines of the empty arena. It took him half a beat before he realized his freedom and took off galloping. Resting his hands on his thighs, Yuri focused on finding the rhythm of his rough stride instead of on the way bile burned at the edge of his throat.

This was only the beginning if he didn’t stay away from Viktor.
His certainty that all of this was a terrible idea only grew stronger with every inch he allowed him in. But the only thing he had left was terrible ideas. He wasn’t capable of anything better.

Avos found the wall and slid to a stop, pivoting and darting off again in a new direction. His outside thigh braced against the sudden disappearance of Avos’s back from under him. He stretched his leg down and sat up taller, rather than allowing his natural instincts to curl him up, to fight the forces trying to tear him from his back until Avos settled in his new path and he was able to follow his rhythm once again.

He ran full out for several minutes, kicking up his heels and throwing in a few bucks here and there, but while his body was rattled from trying to keep up with his rough, capricious ride, he was still in place as Avos finally slowed to his explosive trot, snorting through the deep bellows of his lungs. His quads and abs burned as he fought to keep his hips forward enough to keep centered in his powerful movement. A few more turns around the arena and Avos stopped dead as if wondering what the crazy humans were up to now before he walked off, meandering about and poking his nose at any interesting tidbits he found to see if any of them were tasty.

“Wow. Yuri! That was incredible!” Viktor’s jaw hung open from behind his phone that he had fixed on them from his spot pressed against the gate. “How did you learn to ride like that?! I’ve never seen a better seat on a rider—ever. You moved as if you knew everything he was about to do even though there’s no way you could have. He was all over the place. How?” His eyes were huge with his mouth falling back open.

A coy smile flicked onto his panting lips. “Blood magic.”

“Oh, you little…” He shook his head and started laughing. “Okay. I’ll accept that answer as long as you promise to eventually tell me the truth as I did.”

“I promise I’ll show you.”

“Show me?”

“Yes, Viktor. I could tell you, but I think you’d enjoy it more if I show you.”

His eyes gleamed. “I can’t wait. You are utterly magical, Yuri Katsuki. How do you feel right now?”

“Like my spine is six inches higher than it used to be.” He laughed which came out all light and quivery with his body still trembling. “But… it felt good. Amazing actually.” His tears embraced his cheeks again as if they were returning home from a long visit in his eyes.

He switched off his phone and put it away as he stepped slowly toward them. “Why does that make you cry?”

“I hate that it felt good. I hate that I’m up here and that it feels so… right. I don’t belong here.”

He came closer checking to make sure he wouldn’t send Avos running again and followed his meandering around the ring. “I have never seen anything belong anywhere more than you do on that horse. He looked free. Just a few minutes ago, I was saying that I’ve never seen a horse give under saddle what he can give while he’s free; I just saw it. You didn’t weigh him down at all. And he didn’t look like he was trying to get rid of you. He looked like he was playing with you. We all know you belong there.” He shook his head, scowling. “Whatever this thing is telling you lies, it’s so wrong. It’s so incredibly wrong, and I hate that it exists in you of all people. I’m going to destroy it. Whatever it is. I don’t care. It doesn’t belong there. That’s the only thing here that doesn’t belong.”

“It’s not a lie.” His tears ran harder. “It’s the truth. I wish it wasn’t, but it is. I wish I could tell myself
that it’s all one big lie—one horrible nightmare—but I can’t.” His chest fell and he had to brace onto his hands to keep himself upright. “If I had a single thread I could grasp that said it was a lie, I would grab it and unravel it all in a heartbeat. I’ve looked for it, but it doesn’t exist.”

“That whatever happened may be true, but what’s inside you now is nothing but a lie. What happened is done. Right now… Right now, you just rode a horse that I even have a hard time riding without any control at all, and you looked stunning while doing it. Anything in your head telling you anything but that is blind and a liar.”

He wanted to believe him, searching himself for anything that would let him take Viktor’s words and leave his own behind. “I can’t. I can’t believe that. It’s not just in the past. It will happen again.” His fists tightened on his thighs as his tears turned to bone-rattling sobs. “It will happen again, Viktor.”

His eyes flashed open in surprise before they hardened. “Choose, Yuri. Either tell me what’s tearing you up inside, or trust me that I know what I’m doing with horses and won’t let anything bad happen to anyone under my protection to the best of my abilities. Whichever’s easier for you.”

He laughed a little through his sobs. “Trusting your skills with horses is the easiest thing in the world.”

“So then act like it.”

“I’m trying.”

“I know.” He gave a little shake of his head as he glanced down. “You don’t have to answer this next one because it’s not an order. It’s a plea. Please give me enough time. If you tear yourself away from me before I’ve had a real chance to reach you… I can find it, and I can destroy it if you give yourself to me for long enough. I promise.”

They stared at each other while he tried to find the yes, Viktor he knew would please him. His sobs quieted, but he could only summon a small smile and the shadow of a nod.

Viktor returned the wistful smile. “I’m going to push even deeper now because I think you’re strong enough to take it. I want you to follow his lead and cue with your legs and seat anything he offers. If he turns, press a little on the outside leg. If he slows or stops, restrict your seat. If he trots, give that little tap with your heels. So on and so forth. And praise after every one. You’re not controlling him, you’re following him.”

He choked on the surge of his tears started back up. “Viktor, I can’t.”

His jaw hardened his voice. “Two.”

“What?”

“That was the wrong answer, Yuri. You know that, and you will be punished for it later.” He pulled out his phone and made a quick note. “Two is how many hits with my belt that you’ll owe me for that infraction. And don’t get too excited at the idea. I know how to make you hate this pain.” The tension in his jaw washed out with the sadness touching his eyes. “What happened to my good little virgin slut who opened himself so far for me? Where did he run off to? I like you soft and vulnerable and so slutty you’ll let me do whatever I want to you. I hate feeling shut out from you.”

“I’m sorry, Viktor.”

“Prove it.”
“What? I don’t understand.”

“Prove that you’re sorry.”

“How?”

“Prove that you understand what it is that I want and that you’re willing to give it.”

He chewed on his lip as he thought then gave him his softened expression. “Please, Viktor. Please... order me to do more. I want to do more to please you. I want to show you that... that I trust you.” He drew in a trembling breath. “That I trust you more than my fear.”

“Good, Yuri. So good. I'll drop your punishment to a one if you actually prove your words with my next command. If you prove yourself a liar, three hits will be added.” He glanced at Avos who had stopped his wandering and was just waiting for something interesting to happen. “Ask him to walk.”

He was instantly blinded by tears but found the right words by feeling his way to something solid resting in his heart that hadn’t been there before. “Yes, Viktor.” His calves contracted into Avos’s sides for a brief touch, and he walked off with Yuri blind and deaf to the praises Viktor was spilling. The next order he was supposed to follow wrapped around his attention and returned his senses. He began following Avos’s wanderings with light pressures on his sides and praising him after every touch with his trembling voice and hand.

Viktor’s voice slowly faded in. “… so good! The best, Yuri! The absolute best! You look so beautiful up there. So incredibly beautiful.”

He glanced over at the Viktor blurred from his tears and lack of glasses, and he couldn’t be sure but it almost looked like he was wiping away tears from behind the phone he had fixed on him once again. He tightened his focus on following his order and following every little shift in Avos’s body with a matching pressure in his. While he had to keep fighting his body to stay supple enough through the nerves shaking tension into it, he found Avos moving in much more focused ways than his earlier wandering with his ears flicking back toward him in interest.

“He’s having fun, Yuri! He’s trying to figure out what game you guys are playing.”

Avos broke into a trot; he followed with his heels and Avos lifted his back and arched his neck forward creating a springier step that cushioned the blows rattling through his spine. It still took all his effort to absorb that powerful motion into his body and stay seated in the saddle, but at least it wasn’t as jarring.

“Look at that frame he’s offering, Yuri! He’s looking for your hands!” Viktor followed them with his camera at a far enough distance to keep out of the way of any sudden changes in his path.

Avos lifted further and rocked into some frolicking bucks and rears and leaps forward, tossing his head while Yuri tried his best not to let his play unseat him and slam him into his back.

“Look, Yuri! He’s doing airs for you! Apparently, he wants to be a dressage horse after all. Though I still doubt he’s got the tolerance for that much obedience. But you’re sitting it so well! Those hips and thighs... so talented.”

“You keep saying look. You know I can’t see, right?” He got caught back on another leap forward and had to scramble to get his shoulders back over his hips.

“Yes, I know that. It’s an expression. Though, how bad is your vision without glasses?”
“Pretty bad. Um, I can see clearly for maybe a foot or two.”

“Wow. That’s it?”

“Yes, Viktor.”

“How do you feel about contacts?”

“I don’t mind them. I’ve worn them for shows and stuff but haven’t in a while. They’re more expensive.”

Avos broke into a canter, and he followed with his cue and his praise then settled into the rolling stride that was far more comfortable than his hollowed-out gallop. He bucked here and there as he went, but as Viktor had said, they weren’t anything intended to toss him off, so it was fairly easy to sit them. Avos quieted his play and stretched out his canter as he arched his body further.

“Praise him!”

He scratched into the base of his mane then stroked his neck. “Good boy, Avos. You’re such a good boy. Whatta pretty pony.”

Avos’s ears flicked toward him to listen to his words.

“Wow, Yuri! You two look beautiful together! Look at that frame and that suspension. Just, wow. He loves this! I guess he really is just dominant. I think we can work with this. I’m so thrilled. Thank you, Yuri. This is so much better than I hoped it would go. I mean, I knew you said you can ride but… Wow! This is the most incredible thing I’ve ever seen. Just keep praising him and doing what you’re doing. So beautiful, Yuri.”

He kept cooing praises while stroking and scratching along his neck, his heart bunching and smoothing almost in rhythm with his strides as he struggled to submit to where Viktor had him. Avos slowed back down again to his bounding trot and Yuri restricted his seat for a moment then resumed his praise through the strides getting smoother to ride. Despite the improvement, he was exhausted from trying to keep up with him with muscles that had atrophied over a year, and Avos was showing no signs of tiring or losing interest in their game.

“Avos,” Viktor sang, holding his hand out. “Come on, boy. I’ve got something for you.” He made little kissing noises until he drew Avos’s attention and lured him in with the promise of cookies. Viktor carefully reached for Avos’s cavesson to clip the lunge line back on as he held out the offered cookie.

“You did so beautifully, Yuri. You can come down now.”

He jumped down onto his wobbly legs and into Viktor’s solid support then scratched the base of Avos’s mane and stroked his neck. “Thanks, boy. You did great.” His hand fell from his neck, and he turned to bury his face into Viktor’s chest with his sobs restrengthening.

Viktor breathed deeply as he left a kiss on the top of his head and held him tight. “Shh… you’re okay.”

“I’m not worried about me.”

“I’m well aware of that one. That doesn’t mean it’s not you who’s upset and in need of comfort. Thank you for turning to me to give you what you need. I want you to leave every tear you shed with me.”
He held him tighter because his weak, trembling body craved something solid and he couldn’t turn away if he tried. They held each other with all their strength until his tears ran dry.

He finally quieted again, and Viktor gently pushed him back and wiped the remaining tears from his face. “Go hose him down and put him away. Then, I’m going to have you locate a new hay supplier and locate a good florist between here and Duke Raleigh Hospital while I ride Bytiye. And this last one… You’re going to have to summon all your bravery. Can you do that for me?”

“Umm… Yes, Viktor?”

“You remember the woman who was riding with me yesterday morning?”

“Yes, Viktor.”

“Her name is Liliya. I need you to call her and ask her to cover my afternoon training horses and possibly the lessons too if we’re not back by then. She’s going to throw a fit because Yakov—you remember Yakov, right?”

“Yes, Viktor.”

“Yakov is her ex-husband. They’ve coexisted here by her taking mornings and him the afternoons, and she’s not going to be happy about having to see him. She’ll do it if you don’t let her intimidate you. She can smell fear, and she won’t do anything for someone she doesn’t respect. You’re speaking for me here so just act as I would. That’s all you have to do. Just call and ask with confidence.”

He cringed. “Yes, Viktor.”

“Alright, get to it.”

He led Avos to the crossties and untacked him then brought him to the wash stall and rinsed his body of sweat with cool water then turned the temperature down to just above freez ing and soaked away the damaging, inflammatory heat from his legs. His free hand scratched his soaked neck while they waited. “I’m so sorry, boy. I wish I could stop, but I can’t.”

“Oh, they don’t mind it.” Phichit beamed at him. “Don’t worry. They’ll stand in the snow happily without a bit of discomfort.”

His hand jerked at the sudden voice sending the water stream skittering about the wash stall. Aiming it back to his legs, he put on a smile then turned back and continued stroking Avos’s neck as he focused on his task. “I know.”

“How are you liking working for Viktor?”

“Um… it’s pretty good.”

“Can I ask… I’m just a little confused. You said you don’t ride. Why are you wearing riding clothes?”

“Viktor wanted me to wear this.”

“Oh really? Why?”

“He…” He searched for any lie that would be remotely believable but only had the truth which begged questions he also had no answers for. “He wants me to ride him.”
“Him?” Phichit looked at Avos then back at him. “Avos? He wants you to ride Avos?”

“Yes.”

“But… you don’t ride. That’s so dangerous. I can’t believe he’d be so reckless.”

“I said I don’t ride; not that I can’t ride.” His hand tightened on the hose as his voice snapped. Where did that burst of anger come from? And why the hell did he offer more information to lead him places he didn’t want to go? He winced as he kicked himself.

“Sorry. I didn’t mean to insult you. I just thought when you said you didn’t ride that meant… just that.”

“It’s okay. I’m sorry for snapping at you. It was a fair assumption.”

“So, being nosey again here. Sorry, I have a tendency for that, but why did you quit riding if you have the skills to ride a horse like Avos?”

“I wanted to.”

“That… doesn’t really answer the question, but if you don’t want to talk about it, that’s fine. How does Viktor know you can ride?”

“It was on my resume.” Lies dragging lies. His life was nothing but lies oozing from a gaping truth.

“On your resume? You rode professionally?”

A small shake of his head told his next lie and introduced the one after. “I just put it because it was relevant experience.”

“Oh, right. So, you changed your mind then on wanting to ride? That’s great! Maybe we can ride together sometime.”

“I didn’t change my mind. I don’t want to ride.”

“Viktor’s forcing you to ride even though you don’t want to? He’s forcing you to ride Avos? That…”

“He’s not forcing me. I could say no, but I’m not.” The water thwumped in little patters onto the cement floor as the shaking in his hand grabbed his aim and fired in chaotic directions. He tightened his hand to contain it as he moved to the next leg.

“Oh. Okay. Um, I should head back. I just stopped down here to grab my water. I don’t want to slack on my work just to chat with cute boys.” He smiled and winked. “I mean, I want to, but it’d be unfair to the other guys. Um, are you going to be home tonight?”

“I don’t know. I don’t know if Viktor wants to…”

“Do yoga?”

“Yeah. I don’t know if he’ll want to do yoga again today.”

“Oh, well, if you’re free… are you interested in doing something with me? It doesn’t have to be a movie if that’s too boring for you. We could do something else if you want.”

He turned to smile at him. “I like watching movies with you. It’s hard to find the energy for anything
else after working all day and getting up so early.”

He beamed. “I’m glad you like it. I thought maybe I was just… a little too boring for you.”

“If I’m free tonight, I’d definitely love to hang out with you and watch something.”

“Okay, great! Just let me know if you’re free.”

“Yeah, I’ll definitely let you know this time.”

“Don’t worry about it. I’m there either way. See you at home.” He waved and headed off down the aisle.

He shut off the water and felt Avos’s legs with shaking hands for any strange bumps or spots that didn’t cool the same as the rest. Finding nothing but clean, tight tendons, he unclipped him and slipped the lead over his nose to bring him back to his stall. He then went to Viktor’s office to use his laptop there to do the other things Viktor had asked of him with his anxiety continuing to spike.

By the time he made the call to Liliya, he didn’t have an ounce of courage in him. She was about to hang up with his task unfulfilled before he gave in to desperate pleading, ready to literally drop to his knees if he had any hope of her hearing that through his voice, begging her not to make him disappoint Viktor. He’d already be disappointed that he didn’t follow his instructions, but it would be worse if he also failed to get her to agree. She finally relented, and he breathed a sigh of relief and went to go find Viktor.

Viktor was leading his next training horse out to the arena and smiled upon seeing his return. “Yuri. You finished what I asked?”

“Yes, Viktor. I emailed you the details on the supplier and there’s a florist just next door to the hospital.”

“Excellent. How did the phone call with Liliya go?” He swung open the gate, and Yuri followed him in.

“Um… not so well at first… But I did get her to agree!”

Tension seized his shoulders and his hands stilled on the stirrup leather. “Explain that. How did you get her to agree?” He let go of the leather and turned to watch him.

Sensing that he was now in dangerous territory, his anxiety rose to the peak of a drop. “Um… I tried doing what you said, but I couldn’t. She was about to hang up and had said no so I…” With the look on Viktor’s face now lighting up exactly where he went wrong, he couldn’t bring himself to finish his sentence.

“You what, Yuri?” Anger slashed his words into weapons.

“I… I begged her.” He dropped his eyes to the ground.

“Look at me, Yuri. Don’t you dare hide from what you’ve done.”

He forced his eyes up, still cringing from his mistake. While Viktor’s voice held the edge of anger, his eyes were weakened with hurt. He was too fixed on having put that look on him to think of apologizing.

“You failed to follow my orders, and on top of that—you offered your submission to someone else
when you were mine.”

Tears returned to his eyes. “I—I didn’t! I’m yours! I just… I didn’t want to fail you! You asked me to get her to cover your afternoon, and she wasn’t going to, so I did the only thing I could do. I’m so sorry, Viktor! I’m yours. I swear. I just…. Didn’t think that’s what I was doing, but I get it. I do. I’m so sorry!”

“Except you weren’t following my order. What was my exact order, Yuri?”

“To… to call her and ask her to cover your afternoon work here. And to… have confidence and act as you would.”

“So, you did remember. You just chose to do it your way instead of mine.”

“I’m sorry, Viktor!”

“Stop apologizing. I don’t want to hear it right now. Did I tell you that you had to get her to agree?”

“No, Viktor. You… You just told me to ask her.”

“Yes. Sometimes I care about the results; sometimes I care about the process. You will know the difference because I will either specify a way to do it and, or, a result you are expected to achieve. If I don’t specify a way to do it, then you are free to do it as you wish as long as it’s completed, but that’s not what I asked here is it?”

“No, Viktor.”

“And I would normally let this first offense slide as you didn’t know that explicitly, but you’re smart enough that it’s reasonable to have expected you to figure that out. And I can’t overlook the fact that you offered yourself to someone else.” The shadow of a stuck cloud ashed his face. His mouth open, eyes wounded—searching, he stepped back. “Does your submission mean nothing? Is your sweet begging just empty words you’ll say to anyone to get your way? Could I have been anyone sitting in that office whom you begged to punish you? Is that all I am to you? A nameless, faceless means to satisfy your needs?”

“No, Viktor! I was just trying not to fail you! I swear it’s only you I want to submit to! Only you, Viktor.”

“But you did fail me because you decided that your way of doing things was better than mine. I don’t give orders blindly, Yuri. As long as you’ve done exactly as I’ve said, you’ve succeeded. And an honest attempt is accepted far more easily than complete disobedience.”

He nodded and sniffed back his tears. “Yes, Viktor. I’ll never make that mistake again. Please let me make it up to you.” His hand reached out as if to take Viktor’s, but he pulled it back to his side.

Viktor watched him still with that hollow look before closing his mouth and looking away. Setting his jaw, he looked back. “Two for failing to follow my orders as I’ve stated them. For giving your submission to someone else when you belong to me… Five. Just so you’re aware, five is my limit for a single offense and the numbers correlate directly with how much you’ve hurt me.”

Tears sputtered over his lips as he sucked his breath back into his lungs to burn. “Yes, Viktor.”

He stepped closer, forcing him to lift his head to meet his gaze. “You should also know that you’ve hit a hard limit for me. I won’t have any subs who treat their submission so lightly. I would have let anyone else go right now. I’m not terribly strict, but I do expect you to show that your submission
means as much to you as it does to me. If you treat it carelessly, I’ll assume it means nothing to you and will regard our relationship as the same.”

“Yes, Viktor. I understand. Please let me make it up to you now. I promise I’ll never do it again.”

“I’m willing to hear your apology now, but you’ll finish making it up to me tomorrow along with any other punishment you’ve accumulated during the week. Until then, your honest apology and efforts not to repeat your mistakes will suffice as amends.”

“Thank you, Viktor. I’m so incredibly sorry. I understand how I hurt you with that, and I swear that wasn’t my intent. I only want to make you happy. I’m so sorry. I won’t ever make you feel that again. In the sunlit hours between sixes, I am yours.”

He brushed the tears away with his thumbs. “Thank you, Yuri. I forgive you.”

He winced as Viktor kissed the remaining tears from his cheeks.

“It still hurts, doesn’t it?”

“Yes, Viktor. I’m so sorry I hurt you.”

“Pain does tend to linger, doesn’t it? And apologies don’t fix everything, so I am still hurt that you gave your submission to someone else, but we’ll remove all traces of that when you serve your punishment so it doesn’t fester. In the meantime, it’s nothing for us to worry about because I’ve forgiven you by accepting your apology. Don’t let your worry and regret drive us apart. You’re mine, and you’re right where you belong.”

“Yes, Viktor.” He closed his eyes and tried to relax as Viktor kissed the lingering tears. “Can I… You said she’d only agree if she respected me, but I was trying my best to act confidently, and she turned me down. Why would she agree when I begged?”

“You must have put on quite the display. She’s not easily impressed.”

“I still don’t understand.”

“You were probably faking it too much at first. You weren’t feeling it as you did with Avos. She could tell that and treated you as such. But you begged sincerely, and she found it impressive enough to earn her respect and agree.”

“I earned her respect by begging?”

“You think I don’t respect you?” He took a little step back, his eyebrows raised. “You think I view your submission as a weakness or something pathetic?”

“Um… I don’t know. I guess not, but I don’t see how you could respect me.”

He shook his head and came back in to grip his face in his hands. “I respect you, Yuri. Your submission is a precious gift I feel a great honor to receive. I admire you. I know I couldn’t handle what you do in our playroom. When you accept the pain I give, I’m in awe of you, both of your strength and your trust. I respect you, Yuri and your submission frees me as I hope it frees you.”

“Um… thank you, Viktor, but I still don’t understand. What does that have to do with Liliya?”

He smiled. “Liliya is a good Domme. She respects an honest act of submission as I do.”

“Oh.”
“Don’t repeat that to anyone. Just so you know, identities are supposed to be kept secret in this community. Many don’t want this side of their lives exposed.”

“Yes, Viktor. I understand.”

“Good.” He turned to the saddle. “Give me a leg up.”

“Yes, Viktor.”

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Surrounded by buckets bursting with flowers, Viktor held out a large bouquet of yellow lilies with crimson centers. “What do you think, Yuri? Do you like this one?”

“Yes, Viktor. It’s pretty.”

He smiled and turned to the clerk. “Do you know precisely how many flowers are in this?”

The woman’s face creased slightly as she thought. “Um… I’m sorry. I don’t.”

“No worries. Thank you.” Viktor gave her his best smile and started counting the flowers.

Yuri watched him, curious as to what he was doing but didn’t want to interrupt and make him lose count.

Satisfied, Viktor purchased the bouquet and selected one blossom from the bunch and handed it to him with a smile and a kiss on his cheek. “For you, zolotse.”

“Me? Why?”

“Why not you? I can’t think of anyone else I’d want to give the extra flower to.”

“Extra flower?”

“There was one too many. Old Russian superstition. You never give even numbers of flowers unless it’s a funeral and giving flowers to someone when they’re sick is the worst time to make that mistake.”

“Oh. Is Jake Russian?”

“No, but I am.”

He blushed as Viktor grinned at him. “Right.”

“Come on, zolotse.” He kissed his cheek again and wrapped his arm around his waist to lead him out of the shop and into Jake’s hospital room.

“Jake, good to see you again. I wish it was under much better lighting.” Viktor glanced up with a smile at the sickly fluorescent lights. “These things always make people look terrible. I’d like the inventor of these to have to always walk under them while holding a mirror.”

Jake coughed as he laughed. “Don’t worry. I still think you’re gorgeous.”

He laughed. “I was more worried about you over there. This lighting is doing nothing for you. You need to get back out in the sunshine where you belong.”
“Yeah, I tried to get one of the nurses to smuggle me in a bale of hay just to make this place smell a little better, but they all turned me down. Think you could give it a shot? You’d have a way better chance than I would.”

“You’ve got it.” Viktor filled the vase he bought along with the flowers with water and placed them on the side table.

“Aww, flowers for me? I’m blushing.” He struggled to sit up in the bed, and Viktor jumped forward to give him a hand. “Thanks. So, who’s your little flower thief?” He nodded in Yuri’s direction.

“Thief? I will have you know that he just saved your life. You were almost cursed with this flower, but Yuri bravely dove upon it and took it upon himself to carry the burden of the twenty-fourth flower.”

Jake raised a wired, gray eyebrow. “Do I wanna know what the hell you’re talkin’ about? Is this one of your superstition things?”

“Better safe than sorry.”

“Better sane than superstitious.” He laughed and looked at Yuri. “Word of advice. Don’t forget anything when you’re leavin’ the house. He won’t let you go back to get it. Bad luck or somethin’. I once forgot fifty bales of hay on his order and was gonna go back to get them, but he tackled me to stop me.”

“You lie.”

“Do not. Still got the scar on my knee to prove it.”

“Not my fault you can’t walk over straight ground.”

“There was a rock.”

“There’s always a rock.”

“Yeah, yeah. So, this one yours?”

“No.” Viktor turned to beam at Yuri. “I just hired him, but he’s already my favorite.”

“Employee?”

“Yes.”

“Oh, you scoundrel.” He smiled and shook a finger at him. “I thought you were always on the up and up, and here you are Bill Clintoning it.”

“That’s unfair,” he scoffed. “He was the President of the United States. It’s much easier for Yuri to turn me down.”

“You never looked in a mirror before? Clinton has to be president to match your natural gifts.” He turned to Yuri and jabbed his finger at Viktor. “This boy sexually harassing you? You can tell me. I’ve known him since he was all gangly bones, so I don’t mind taking him down a few if I need to.”

Yuri laughed. “No. He’s not hurting me.”

“See? He likes me.”
“Yeah, yeah, but I got my eye on you. You tell me if I need to give him a whoopin’, okay?”

Yuri tried his best to hold back his laughter. “Yes, sir.” He glanced at Viktor at realizing his words, but Viktor seemed unbothered with his smile still radiating onto him.

“Good. Now that’s settled, good of you to think of visiting your lowly hay supplier. I feel honored.”

“Nah, just being a decent human being. Anyone you’ve known longer than ten years deserves a visit and flowers.”

“You still got that horse of yours eatin’ gold instead of hay?”

“I do. Still hoping to turn him into pure gold on the outside too.”

“I think you’ve got enough medals to cover him by now.”

He laughed. “You might be right on that.”

“My boy shoulda delivered your next order today, right? How’d he do?”

“You want the truth?”

He nodded solemnly. “That bad?”

“Half of it was moldy.”

“Shit. I’m sorry.” Cringing, he flicked at a lump of scratchy hospital blanket. “Did you talk to him?”

“Yeah… That was the bad part.”

“Shit. Come on, spit it out.”

“His first offer was to throw in a few extra bales. His next was to take it back and sell it to someone else.”

“You’re fuckin’ with me.”

“I wish I was. I’m sorry.”

“That little shit. He knows better.” He shook his head. “I’m really sorry. I was hoping he’d at least care enough to do good for his mama’s sake. None of it got into your horses, right?”

“No. My guys caught it before that.”

“Good.” He shook his head again. “I wanna call him a son of a bitch but damn it.”

“You should know, I just put my best efforts into destroying your business. I’m sorry. I had to.”

“Yeah. You did.” Sighing, he stared up at the greenish lights. “Shit. I got no one else to run it. And my guys. And Sally. If it goes under… Can I give it to you? You don’t gotta pay me for it. Just don’t fire Sally or any of the guys. They’re all good. Been with me a long time.”

“I don’t know the first thing about hay farming.”

“But you know how to run a business.”

“Damn it, Jake, what do I need with a hay farm? Especially one that I literally just blacklisted a few
hours ago.”

“Just slap your name on it and that’ll be all fixed. Viktor Nikiforov, hay farmer.” He stretched his hands out in front of him, framing an imaginary banner. “It’s an impressive title, eh, Yuri?”

“He’d be impressive no matter what title he has.”

“Aww… Look at that cutie you got there. Alright, I can’t blame you for breaking any morals to be with that.”

“Hey, no buttering me up through him. That’s unfair.”

“He’s already got you weak, huh? I get it. That is unfair, so I’ll plead for my own weakness. Please. If you don’t take it, Sally’s not gonna have any way to support herself. She’s been takin’ care of me and my home and my kids and my business, and she’s been out of the workplace so long doing that, no one’s gonna take a second look at her that’d actually pay her enough to make it. Especially not with my medical bills on top of her too.”

Viktor sighed. “What’s your yearly net?”

“Thirty-five k.”

“Are you drawing a salary before that?”

“Nah. That’s it.”

“Wow. Why weren’t you charging more?”

He shrugged. “Good hay, fair prices. That’s what I built. That’s what I’m gonna keep doing.”

“Yeah, but that’s not fair to you.”

“It was better a few years back, but fuel’s been going up and well, everything’s been goin’ up.”

“Then so should you. Assets?”

“Two hundred acres. Don’t know what the current prices are on that. I got twenty of that in organic fruits and veggies that pull in most of the income with crop shares and farmer’s markets and the like. Few tractors, balers, tiller, seeder, trailer for an office, hay barn. All in good condition. I could get you a solid list a few days if you want.”

“No, that’s fine. Just trying to get a rough idea. Debts?”

“None.”

“How many employees?”

“Three guys, Sally on the phones and sellin’ at the markets, Pete if you wanna count him. Four to five.”

“So, four.”

Jake nodded. “Four.”

Viktor placed his finger on his lips as he thought. “One point five million. That’s my offer.”
“What are you talkin’ about? I said I’d just sign it over to you.”

“You taking my offer or not?”

“Man, that’s not an offer. That’s insane. You’ll never make that much back.”

“I’ll break even in forty-fifty years if I keep running it like you. I think I could do a little better.”

“You’re not planning on cutting pay or anything like that, right?”

“Of course not. I’d treat your guys like I do mine because they would be mine.”

“Damn it, you’re an asshole. You know that, right? Why you offering me that much? I didn’t ask for charity.”

“I know.”

“You know I can’t look her in the eye if I turn it down, right?”

“I know.”

“Goddamn asshole. I didn’t want your charity.” His voice roughened.

“Consider that point five back pay on your hay. You’ve been undercharging me. And you’ve got some decent assets there.”

He shook his head and scrubbed the tears off his face. “You goddamn asshole. Deal.” He buried his face in his hands. “Thank you, Viktor.”

“Thank you for being so reliable for so long. I appreciate it.”

He took a deep sniff then brought his head up from his hands, his eyes fuzzy red, and looked at Yuri. “If you’re not already considering it, marry this one. They don’t come better.”

He blushed and ducked his head.

“Aww, Jake, don’t put him on the spot like that. He’s shy.” He grinned and squeezed Yuri’s hand. “Though, I like the way you think.”

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They drove over to Viktor’s new farm after a few calls to lawyers to get everything finalized. Viktor walked straight into the tiny trailer set on the edge of the field without knocking. A man in his forties behind the desk jumped at his arrival.

“Pete Dewitt?”

“Yeah, that’s me.”

“You’re fired, effective immediately. Get your things and get out.”

“What the ever-loving fuck? Who the fuck do you think you are?”

“Viktor Nikiforov, new owner of this farm.” Viktor stared placidly at him, waiting for his brain to process his new situation.

“What the fuck?” He stared bewildered then jumped to his feet, slamming his hands on his desk.
“What the fuck did you do to my old man?! You go in there and bully him just ‘cause you didn’t like the hay?!”

“This deal was settled fair and square; our lawyers both assured us of that fact. You can confirm it with him if you like. If you fail to leave my property, I will have to resort to calling the police for trespassing. You have fifteen minutes.”

“Fuck you! Fucking pansy-ass prick! You think you can do whatever the fuck you want ‘cause you got money?!”

“No, I think I can do whatever I want with this business because it is mine.”

He came around the desk and gripped Viktor’s collar in his hand, red-twisted face straining to reach his height. “I’ll fucking kick your goddamn ass. I don’t give a fuck who you are, you fucking spoiled little shit. You don’t know the first goddamn thing about hay farming. You’re just a fucking sack of money on an ego trip.”

Viktor smiled. “You’re right. I don’t know the first thing about hay farming, but I still know more than you do on how to run this place right. Would you like to add assault to your trespassing charges?”

He glared at him, fuming, then released his shirt with a hard shove. “Fuck you, fucking sack of rotten money.” He continued his insults as he threw his stuff into a box after a raging call to his father confirmed Viktor’s position.

Viktor watched calmly as he exited the door. “There’s truly nothing more pathetic than watching a grown man throw a tantrum like a spoiled child. I can’t believe Jake is your father.” He shook his head. “How far you have failed him.”

“Fuck you!” He slammed the door as he left, rattling the trailer and everything in it.

Viktor turned to meet Yuri’s wide expression. “Quite eloquent, isn’t he?”

He started laughing. “Wow. He was… something else. How do you do that? Just stand there while he’s threatening and insulting you.”

“I’m not in the habit of giving people what they want when I’m not pleased with them.”

“Huh?”

“He wanted a fight; I refused to give him one. Pretty simple actually.” He pulled out his phone and sent a text then started digging through the mess Pete had left behind on the desk. “Help me sort these papers.”

“Yes, Viktor.”

They spent the next twenty minutes trying to make sense of the chaos with Viktor growing more irritated with every paper he picked up.

“Viktor? Are you okay?”

His hands balled up on the desk as his head twisted to the side. “Yeah. I just… You know I built that stable myself when I was fourteen? Everyone thinks I inherited it from my father like I did everything else, but it wasn’t there until I put it there. Of course, I used my dad’s money to build it, but back then, no one would take me seriously when I tried to contact suppliers and contractors. I
offered them upfront payments so they didn’t have to worry about that just to get them to work with me, but even after that they still treated me like a little kid playing games. I had to fight them to get them to do things my way even though they were supposed to be working for me.

“Jake was the first one to actually treat me with respect. He treated me exactly as he did every other customer. I started offering him upfront payments, and he refused, saying I wasn’t supposed to pay until I’d received the product and was happy with it. It’s a little thing, but those little things matter. Our lives are in the little things.

“I liked the way that felt and started expecting everyone else I was working with to treat me with respect too. If they didn’t, I just refused to work with them. It was amazing how much that one little thing affected me. I don’t think my stable would have ever taken off without it because that’s also what gave me the confidence I needed to convince people that I could be trusted.

“And I’m just pissed that a man like Jake could pour the energy needed into raising a child and have that piece of shit be the result of his efforts. He deserves better than that.”

Yuri stroked his fist and slid his hand up his arm, hesitating as he drew closer. Viktor turned his cheek toward him, still looking down at his fists. Finding his courage, Yuri brought his other hand up to his cheek and gently turned his face to him. Viktor’s breath picked up as he caressed his lips with his thumb and leaned in. Pressing his lips into Viktor’s cheek, he slid his hands up around his neck as Viktor reached for his hip.

“I’m sorry, Viktor. Can I do anything to help you feel better?”

Viktor pulled him in with his hands around his waist, sighing and relaxing his weight onto him. “You just did.” After a few minutes, he pulled his hand up and stroked his hair. “My sweet Yuri.” He sighed again and placed a kiss on his cheek. “Time to go.”

They walked outside and three men and one woman were walking up to the trailer from all directions. Viktor waited for them all to arrive then lifted his posture ever so slightly.

“Thank you for joining me. I’m sorry to pull you from your work; I’ll try to keep this brief. I’m Viktor Nikiforov. Jake just sold me his farm.” He waited for the surprised whispers from the three men to quiet. “I’m going to count to three, and I’d like you all to point to the person who knows the most about running this place. One. Two. Three.” Viktor smiled as everyone pointed at one man with sienna skin while he pointed to Sally. “Excellent. May I have your name, sir?”

“Javier.”

“Javier, congratulations; you’ve just been promoted to field manager. I’m not going to lie to you. I don’t know the first thing about farming, so you’ll have free rein to manage the crops as you see fit as long as they meet the standards Jake has set and as long as your farm manager doesn’t decide on a better way to do things.”

He scowled. “That’s not free rein at all. Pete’s…” He broke off and glanced at Sally. “Sorry.” She shook her head. “No, you’re right. Pete’s always been Pete.”

“You have no need to worry about him. I fired him. Yuri Katsuki here is your new farm manager.”

“What?!” Yuri gasped. Is he fucking serious?

Viktor nudged his side until he closed his mouth, straightened his back, and turned back to the group. “He’s as inexperienced at this as I am, but he will do an excellent job if you can all give him a little
time to learn and help him as he gets things figured out. He’s smart, dedicated, and a quick learner and most importantly: he’s a good person who cares deeply about what he does and takes pride in his work. I’m certain you will all enjoy working with him. He won’t be here every day as he works for me at my stable, so Javier will be in charge of day-to-day operations while Yuri will oversee the whole farm and make sure it’s running profitably and putting out a good product.

“Speaking of, we’ve got the issue of the bad harvest to deal with now. My first thought was to burn it, but since you’ve all done such a wonderful job over the years, I haven’t had to deal with moldy hay, so I have no idea if that’s the best course of action and wanted to check before I proceed.”

“Yeah, you can burn it,” Javier said, “but depending on how wet it is, it may not burn well, and if it smokes too bad, it’ll stink. Best is to compost it and use it.”

“Is that safe?”

“Sure. Composting is just letting things rot. Mold is rot. Time and heat cooks it all out and makes good soil.”

“Good. I’m going to need you guys to collect it back from anyone you delivered to and throw anything from that harvest still here in and compost it. Make sure you remove all of the bad hay. Bring some shop vacs with you and clean the floors with a bleach solution. And make sure you all wear masks when handling the bad hay.”

“That’s going to be a shit ton of compost.”

“If it’s more than what we can use ourselves reasonably, we can sell it and recoup some of the loss.”

Javier nodded his agreement of the plan.

“Since I had planned to burn it, I’ve already got a bonfire and cookout planned. I guess I’ll be switching to wood for the fire, but you all and your families are welcome to join us for the party next Thursday at eight. I know you’ve all been with Jake for a long time, and you’ve had some rough transitions here with his illness, but I’m hoping we’ll soon be able to operate as smoothly as it was with Jake at the lead. I’ve always admired and respected him, and I hope to do him proud by running this place to the best of my abilities. Does anyone have any questions?”

“Yeah, I got one. Pete cut our pay when he started here. Do you plan to keep that?”

“What’s your name?”

“Dan.”

“Thank you, Dan, for bringing that to our attention. Yuri, how would you like to handle this?”

Viktor turned to him and gave him an encouraging smile.

“Um… I, uh…” He stared at Viktor helplessly. Why was he throwing him under the bus like that? He had no idea how to run a farm, and now he’s expecting him to answer a question about the budget without looking at it? He chewed on his lip as he thought. Viktor knows he doesn’t know the finances. Viktor doesn’t care about the finances. It’s not about the money; it’s about the morals. He looked at Dan and straightened his back. “We will return your pay to what Jake was paying you effective immediately, and I will look at the finances as soon as possible to see what I can do to make this place more profitable for everyone.” His voice shook like crazy, but his answer still garnered applause from the small group as well as Viktor who also gave his brightest smile. Yuri blushed and shrank back into his collar until Viktor nudged his side.
Viktor concluded his meeting then they walked around the property exploring the singing land. The panting beat of crickets, the peeping of frogs in the stream running the east border, and the trilling notes of birds rose and fell over the gentle hills. They came to the garden where a long strip of wildflowers grew between the black soil of the garden and the billowing hay. Viktor, who had been carrying a pair of scissors from the office, cut a thick bundle of the still growing hay then snipped frilled white and blue, glossy yellow, and red bursts of flowers and laid them on top of the bundle. Satisfied with his bouquet, they went back to the trailer and searched the drawers. Pulling out a length of yellow ribbon, he snipped it off then tied the hay and flowers with a bow. Sally came in as he was finishing.

“Thank you, Viktor, for what you did and your offer… It was too much.”

“I did some math. It seemed right to me.”

She shook her head. “I hate to do this to you after all you’ve done, but since I can retire now, Jake needs lookin’ after and…”

“Say no more. You don’t need to apologize at all. I was hoping you two would take this opportunity to finally rest and recover.”

“I’ll stay on until you find someone to replace me. I’m not going to leave you high and dry here so take all the time you need to get settled and…” She started crying. “I’m sorry. Can I give you a hug?”

Viktor stepped around the desk and opened his arms. A small twinge of jealousy struck Yuri as Viktor held Sally in a tight hug that he instantly hated himself for. Viktor was just being a good person. He had no right to claim that away. He had no right to claim anything. He examined the shine on the boots that had dulled after just half a day on him until his irrational surge of possessiveness passed.

Viktor released her then handed her the bouquet. “Here. Will you bring these flowers to him the next time you visit? They’ll probably do best out of water.” He smiled and winked.

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(19) Yuri knelt on the black satin pillow, his body still damp and heated from the shower, staring at the dark nail buried in the pale wood in front of his right knee. Had the wood stretched around the blunt nail, spreading open some fibers and compressing others to accept it in? Or had the nail simply torn its way through, shredding everything in its path, the force of its very nature proving too strong for the wood to do anything but silently release its hope of ever being anywhere else ever again before the penetration was even complete. Or maybe it wasn’t either of them that bound them here together. Maybe it was the hammer striking blows upon them both that decided this wood and this nail would be wed—a marriage arranged by force, disguised as fate.

Maybe they clung to each other, the violence of their wedding march now over, seeking safety in their hold because they know if they ever let go of the other, the hammer will find them again.

He ran his finger over the head of the nail, his soft flesh falling into the divots gouged from the hammer and catching on the rough edge of wood wrapped around it: evidence the sander left behind. The wood smoothed out to a buttery consistency over the lightly waxed surface the further from the nail he went, but his finger kept coming back to caress the splintered edges of the hole.

The knob rattled behind him, and he jerked his hand back to his knee and straightened his back. The clunk of the lock reverberated in his body, grabbing the quivering tremors that had been wracking
through him all day and dragging them into deeper waves. Viktor’s hand came around his neck, then
his breath, his lips. Silk slid over his eyes and tightened around his head, blacking out the world.

“Color?”

Taking a deep breath, he let it trickle from his body around his answer. “Green.”

Viktor’s hands brushed down his back then took his hand in one and his waist in the other and
helped him to his feet. He eased him onto the cool leather of the padded table then pushed his legs
apart letting one fall open onto the table and holding the other folded in his arm. A bottle cracked
open and warm, slick liquid poured onto his cock and dripped down his hole.

“Finger yourself as you did yesterday.” Viktor’s voice was soft and low, dripping over him warmer
than the liquid coating him.

His finger slid easily inside, and he lined the second one up to join the first.

“Wait. Slow, Yuri. Take your time. Make it feel good.”

“Yes, Viktor.” He backed off with his second finger and focused on thrusting the first in and out of
his hole.

“Explore, Yuri. Don’t focus on the motions, focus on the sensations. You don’t know this part of
yourself yet. What feels good here?”

“Um… I don’t—”

“Don’t tell me, show me. I’m watching to learn exactly what you like.”

“Are you going to tie me up?”

“Yuri,” his voice scolded softly, his tongue caressing away the sharp edge of his tone, “didn’t I tell
you that I decide everything? I decide when to punish and when to praise, when to hold you down
and when to set you free. You don’t need to know my plans ahead of time because your only job is
to accept what I give you when I give it to you. If I feel you do need to know, I’ll tell you, but right
now, you’re supposed to be focusing on showing me what feels good, not on what’s going to
happen.”

“Yes, Viktor.”

He backed his finger out and felt along the raised rim, each bump and dip sending a different coded
message into his body. His head tipped back as those signals began to work their way through.

“Yes, that’s it, Yuri. That’s what I want to see.” His lips brushed a kiss just below his knee.

His finger dipped in and caressed the space between the outer band of muscle and the inner one,
stretching lightly the outer rim as he circled it. He played between those two rings feeling the rougher
outer one sending jittery signals and the slick inner one enjoying the deeper stretches, pulling out
occasionally to scrape his nails lightly against the skin above his hole. He moved his second finger
over to tease the outer rim while he probed deeper with the first. Slipping the second in, his head
tipped back further with the stretch filling with the satisfaction of a deep itch being scratched. When
his hole relaxed around the stretch, he spread his fingers apart to restore the feeling.

“You like the stretching more than the stroking?”
“Yes, Viktor.”

“Try thrusting while keeping your fingers apart like that.”

He pushed in and the stretch eased as he moved toward the narrow point of the V but as he pulled back out, the sudden expansion on the widened end of his fingers pulled a moan from his lips.

“Did that feel good?”

“Ha, yes, Viktor.” He thrust back in, opening his fingers even wider as he pulled back out. He groaned with the pleasure rolling down his shoulders and into his hips.

“You just love opening up for me, don’t you, Yuri?”

He nodded. “Yes, Viktor.”

“That’s good,” his voice came shivering right at his ear, “because I’m going to open you all the way.”

His earlobe was sucked into Viktor’s mouth right as he pulled out on another deep stretch and the cry coming from his lips rang in his ears. Viktor licked and sucked over his ear and his neck as he added a third finger to his stretch, thrusting his hips now to meet his hand.

“Tell me how it feels.” His breath rustled his voice into his ear followed by a lick along the edge.

“Ha, it feels good.”

Viktor’s hand ran down his torso and down his thigh to his knee and back again.

“It feels really good.” He leaned toward the direction Viktor’s voice was coming from, seeking more contact, but the warmth radiating from his body had vanished.

He put a rubbery stick into his free hand. “Here, put this in.”

He eased it into his loosened hole and twisted it until the curved head was against his gland then Viktor clicked it to life. His back arched with a gasp when a thick band of rotating beads rolled around his rim and more beads at the tip massaged his prostate. Twisting on the table without Viktor’s bonds to hold him down, he worried that he might fall off. Viktor would never allow that to happen.

“Feels good?”

“Yes, Viktor. So good.”

“Good. Stroke yourself.”

He took himself in hand and started pumping slick lube down his length.

“Slow, Yuri. I want you to take your time and make yourself feel amazing. You like to rush to the end as quickly as possible. This isn’t a chore to get over with. This is an experience for you to savor. How would I touch you?”

“With whips.” He held his smile tight.

He chuckled. “Ah, nice try, zolotse. No whips for you today, but I will give you that was a pretty funny answer.”
“No whips?”
“No. I want you to feel only pleasure today.”
“You mean… you’re not going to give me pain?”
“No pain; only pleasure.”
“Pain is pleasure.”

He chuckled again. “I understand that, but pleasure is also pleasure, so be good for me, and do as I told you.”

With slow, tight strokes down his length, he fought back the urge to argue that the pleasure he had felt on his own was nowhere near the pleasure he felt under Viktor’s whips.

“You’ve slowed down, but you’re still not being very good to yourself… How would you touch me? How would you make me feel good? Show me on yourself. Make me want to be in your hands.”

“I could just show you on you so you don’t have to imagine it.”

“Careful, Yuri. You’re starting to get a little bratty with my orders here. It’s not going to get you what you want. I don’t give people who don’t please me what they want, and brats don’t please me. Now be a good boy and make me long for your touch.” A lick up his neck carried his words back to his ear.

“Yes, Viktor.” He took his hand off for a minute to try to get his mind to quiet and accept what Viktor was giving him. The beads slowly rolling and stretching inside him had more of a soothing pleasure than a stimulating one, and he guessed that was no accident. He brought his hand back up and hesitated as the circle of his fist touched down on his head then he dragged it down, letting his grip adjust to the terrain. Softening and expanding over the ridge, tightening again to caress every freshly exposed nerve below his foreskin, his thumb running along the sensitive band where his skin connected under his head as he moved down, pulling the skin tighter and learning that Viktor was right; just that bit of stretching there felt amazing. He carried the stretch along as he moved down his shaft and over his balls, surrounding them with his hand and giving a gentle tug as he moved to the skin below them, running his finger around his stretched hole before he moved onto his thigh.

“Yes… That’s it, Yuri. That’s a hand I want touching me. It felt good, yes?” The tip of his tongue flicked against the skin behind his ear.

Moaning softly as he came back to flow his hand over himself again, he nodded. “Yes, Viktor. So good.”

He turned his face toward his voice seeking some part of him to taste. His lips landed on Viktor’s neck as he moved to grant him access. He sucked and kissed lightly along it as Viktor held his face against him, smiling as he drew out a moan from him.

Viktor pulled back gently. “Keep making love to yourself. I’ll be right back.” He withdrew his heat from him again but left a fresh drizzle of heated lube over his cock before his soft footsteps moved across the room.

His hand plunged down his length as his body contracted with pleasure rising inside him. Viktor returned just as the wave running through him settled. Focusing his efforts on the more sensitive structures around his head, he caressed each spot, exploring the ways his body liked touch the best.
“That’s my good Yuri, following my orders so nicely.”

Silk fluttered against his inner thigh, and he gasped as his body reacted with a deep thrust into his hand.

“Easy, Yuri. Keep it slow.”

Flowing ends of silk traveled his body, joining his hand in the places Viktor refused to touch with his own. Shivering under each lick of the cloth, he twisted through the unpredictable pleasure freely until Viktor tightened the silk around his left knee and hoisted it up and out to the side with the light clangs of jostling metal sounding above him. Another loop of silk caught his ankle to hold his whole leg bent and off the table then his other knee was drawn up in the same fashion. With his knees now above his hips and every inch of him bound, exposed, open to Viktor’s every whim, his blush burned into him again.

Viktor’s hands slipped down the back of his thighs, his fingers dropping into the widened valley of his ass, then carried his electrifying touch along the crease of his hips and back up his inner thighs to his knees. “Mmm… much better. Now I can reach so much more of you.” His hands fell down his thighs again. “Thank you for obeying so we can enjoy more pleasure together.”

“Are you enjoying this? I don’t feel like I’m doing anything for you.”

“You’re doing everything for me. You’re trusting me and obeying me, and that’s what I want to feel from you.” His hand gripped gently around his hip. “Remember, Yuri, all you have to worry about is if you’re doing as I’ve said. If you’re doing that, you can rest easy that it’s exactly right and that I’m perfectly happy with you and enjoying myself immensely. Are you doing as I’ve said right now?”

He was still touching himself as he’d been told but… “No, Viktor.”

“That’s right. You’re worrying about things that are outside of what I’ve told you. You can’t be focusing on making yourself feel good if you’re worried about me.”

He sighed and tried to bring his mind back to the sensations his hand was creating. “Yes, Viktor.”

It was harder than it should have been to obey his order. Every time he got his mind back to what his hand was doing or the beads massaging his ass, it’d flit right off again, not even anywhere specific; just a spacey, empty chaos grabbing control of his mind.

Viktor’s hand pressed down on his chest just above his bruises. “Submit.” His command brushed over his neck. “Submit, Yuri. You’re fighting when you need to submit.”

“How? I’m trying and… I don’t know how to obey this order.”

“Finding your submission is something you have to do on your own. I can guide you to it, and my pressures highlight where your resistance lies, but you are the one that needs to move away from the pressure so I can guide you deeper.”

He took a deep breath and relaxed on the table, his body stilling along with his emptied mind.

“No, Yuri. Don’t numb yourself. Numbing isn’t submitting. Numbing is shutting me out, blocking out my touch. I need you to feel everything; feel everything and accept everything and then feel even deeper.”

A hot liquid poured over his stomach and down his cock, dripping into the valley of his hip. The heat contracted against his skin, raising light goosebumps. Viktor’s tongue followed the trail and Yuri
cried out as pleasure washed over him with the hope that his tongue would follow the entire path.

“Good, Yuri. Make your hand feel like my tongue licking up your cock.”

He writhed on the table as his imagination replaced his hand with that very image, licking and sucking and pulling pleasure to wash over him straight from his core.

Viktor’s tongue licked the delicate skin next to his cock. “You taste so good, Yuri.” He moaned and drizzled a fresh trail of heat to chase with his tongue over his thighs. “So, so good.”

“What do I taste like?”

Chocolate covered cherries seeped over his tongue as Viktor’s finger slipped into his mouth. The syrup flooded his mouth and dripped down his chin. Viktor’s tongue chased it off his chin and up to his lip. He hesitated before licking right over it, a slow, savoring taste. “Delectable.” He sighed and licked his lip again while Yuri held perfectly still in shocked hope. “Only you taste even better than that because it’s not just the syrup that I’m tasting. It’s you. And you taste unexplainably good to me.” His tongue licked across his lip again, passing across his open gasp to taste the edge under his upper lip. His heat pulled away just a little. “Are you starting to understand? The more you submit, the more I can do.”

His left hand was wrapped in silk and tied above his head, slightly raised off the table so Viktor could access all of it as he could his legs. Finally freeing him from the task of pleasuring himself, he bound his right hand the same. His hands slipped under his body, lifting him slightly and dragging him down the table until a gentle stretch opened all his joints. Viktor bound his hips with that light downward tug to lock him fully in place.

Sighing as Viktor’s bonds wicked the stress from his body, he smiled at having pleased him enough to be rewarded this way. “Thank you, Viktor.”

“My good, sweet Yuri. Always so understanding and grateful. Yes, you’re doing so well for me. I know you’re struggling here to submit, but I can see that you’re trying so hard for me. Just relax and feel. That’s all I want you to do. Feel everything I give you.” His hand wrapped around his neck, his thumb brushing over his lips. “Don’t spill a drop.” A smile lightened his tone into a gentle laugh.

He returned the smile. “Yes, Viktor.”

Viktor created a map of his body with the syrup then explored it with his tongue, sometimes cooling the heat with a gentle blow of his breath across his wet skin only to douse it in heat again. His body pricked with the sensation.

Viktor’s mouth went down on his toes; he yelped at the tickling of his tongue twisting between them, but it started to feel good when Viktor’s increased enthusiasm became apparent.

He gasped in the sensation between tickling and pleasure. “Do…do you have…a, um, a foot fetish?”

He licked across the tips of his toes. “Am I so obvious even someone as inexperienced as you can figure that out?”

“I—I guess so?”

He laughed and licked the arch of his foot then released his foot. “You have lovely feet. I will fuck them someday, but not today. I’m surprised you commented on my foot fetish but not my fetish for your thighs which surpasses it greatly. Even if we never lift your limits, I could happily fuck your
thighs forever.”

“You want to keep me a virgin forever?” His tone fell flat.

He laughed. “No, I’d much rather be free to do whatever I want, but your thighs alone are enough to satisfy me. I can’t imagine what having all of you would do to me.” Heat poured over his throat followed by his tongue. “I’d be ruined for anyone else ever again.” His voice murmured low against his throat. “Now be quiet before I have to gag you.” His words rumbled with a threat.

He resisted the urge to point out that Viktor had spent most of the week encouraging him to talk and was now telling him to be quiet as he realized that this was an exception to his general command. Talking violated his immediate order to submit to what he was giving and immediate orders must override general ones.

Soft leather sinking down the backs of his thighs and nudging toward his stretched hole and his hardened cock flipped into scratching nails only teasing the edge of pain. He cried out and impulsively thrust up into the spikes, but he was bound, and Viktor flipped his touch back into caressing leather. Down the inner thighs now, he teased the pain he knew he craved but never gave, taunting him over his stomach, his sides, up the tender, tickling skin on his arms and down the backs, over his chest, and back around his legs, pulling cries from his lips with each step toward and away from pain. Over and over him again, Viktor tormented him with pleasure his restraint refused to give over to pain. He thought Viktor was done with his teasing when feathers dusted shivers over his skin, but that blinding promise of pain was always moments away.

Tears started soaking the silk around his eyes. “Please, Viktor, please give me pain.”

“No.”

“Please, I’m begging you. Please, Viktor. I need it.”

“No, you want pain. What you need is exactly what I give you. Are you doubting that I know what it is you need?”

“No, Viktor. I’m sorry. I didn’t mean that. I mean… I’m trying. I’m sorry. I’m trying to accept it. I’m… I’ll be good. I’m sorry.”

“That’s my sweet Yuri.”

A new shimmering heat poured over his foot and calf and Viktor’s massaging hands followed along with trails of a new kind of tool pricking the edge of pain. It felt a lot like the first tool he had used on him with the wheel of spikes only this was much wider and Viktor never deepened its touch. Silky pleasure and the tease of pain covered every inch of him that Viktor could reach, and after time refused to end, a single word rang in his head. Katsudon.

***
Chapter End Notes

Clarinda0110 is your lovey artist giving us some wonderful, wonderful smut. Share your love here or on Tumblr!

Spotify
17. Waiting Game by Banks
18. Worry by RHODES
19. Shelter by machineheart
The spikes rolled over his nipples, their sensitivity drawing him closer to the pain he needed, but they passed as quickly as they came. Katsudon. Viktor’s mouth on his inner elbow sending the pleasure out along his whole arm. Katsudon. Salt-soaked silk burned the sensitive skin around his eyes, but not enough. Katsudon. The spikes and his tongue both claimed a side next to his cock at the same time, trapping him in the pleasure that clamped down on him like a vice.

“Ah! Ngh! Ka—Yellow! Yellow.” He heaved as his tears soaked completely through the silk and started down the sides of his face. “Yellow. I’m sorry. I’m sorry, Viktor.”

The beads in his ass shut off. “Don’t apologize. You did exactly as you were told. What’s wrong?”

“I—I don’t know. Just please either give me pain or let me give you pleasure. This is… I don’t know.”

“What were you thinking and feeling just before you called yellow?”

“I was thinking… I couldn’t think of anything but—but katsudon. I’m sorry.”

“You don’t need to apologize. I’m going to take your blindfold off, okay?”

“Yes, Viktor.” The silk pulled from his eyes, he closed his eyes against the brightness of the dimmed lights in the dark room.

“It’s soaked… How long were you crying for before you called yellow?”

He opened his eyes to see him staring at the strip of black silk looking wounded with it limp and heavy in his hand. “Um, I don’t know. A while.”

“Can I touch you?” His eyes drooped into his rare, sad innocence.

“Yes, Viktor.”

He sat on the table next to him and held his hand against his cheek. “I’m sorry. I was pushing you to tears, and I didn’t even know it. I’m so sorry, Yuri.”

“It’s okay. You make me cry a lot.” He laughed.

“Yes, but I didn’t know this time. I should have known. I thought I knew what your crying sounded like, but I didn’t know this silent one. I should have been paying more attention.”

“Would you have stopped if you’d known?”
“No, but I would have used a lot more caution if I knew you were approaching a limit. I will likely push you to tears again, but I should always know when you’re getting close to your limit so you don’t have to tell me to back off. I’m sorry, Yuri. You did nothing wrong. This was entirely on me. I was trying to find your limit, not run over it. I’m so sorry.”

“I forgive you, Viktor.”

He smiled and rubbed his thumb against his cheek. “If you were wanting to safeword, it might be best to end this for today.”

“No, please, I was thinking about it, but I chose yellow. I don’t want to stop you.”

“And I don’t want to damage you. I’ll only continue if I’m convinced that I won’t be. Tell me what was going on.”

“I don’t know. I can’t explain it. It just felt like too much and not enough at the same time.”

“Too much pleasure, not enough pain, yes?”

“Yes, Viktor.”

“I’m thrilled with how much you love pain, but you should also be able to enjoy pleasure. I knew you’d struggle with this, but I wasn’t expecting it to be this bad. Why do you reject the pleasure I want to give you so hard?”

A fresh tear slipped down the side of his face, and Viktor’s thumb brushed it away. “You give me too much. You barely know me and you just… It’s just so much. I can’t handle it.”

“Do I barely know you? I know I still have a long way to go to know you completely, but do I really only barely know you?”

“No, Viktor.” He looked down then back into his soft eyes. “You know me better than anyone else.”

“The problem, my dearest Yuri, is that you can’t even imagine me finding you worth my time, and attention, and resources, and my—my care. And I’m trying to tell you every possible way I can that you are. I’d go up on the roof and scream it right now if I had any hope that would affect you, but I know it would have more effect on heating the air.

“And the bigger problem here is that it’s not just me you won’t accept pleasure from. You can’t even give yourself pleasure. You can get yourself off to satisfy a basic need as long as you get it over with as quickly as possible, but you can’t find yourself worth even a little bit of extra care from your own hand. It broke my heart when I realized just how bad this is for you.

“You deserve pleasure. You deserve to treat yourself right and accept the pleasure I want to give you. If I’m giving you anything, it’s because I think you deserve it. Actually, what I’m giving you is only a tiny fraction of what I think you deserve, and the only reason I’m not giving you more is that you’re not ready for it. You accept so little while I’m fighting so hard to give you more, and I’m not mad at you for that because I know you can’t help it, but I’m at a bit of a loss here to find my way around this block when I have so little room to maneuver. What can I do that will help you accept more?”

“Give me pain. Please. It helps so much.”

“I know it does, but that defeats the point of what I’m trying to do here as does letting you give me pleasure directly. While those are both good, you need to be able to accept simple pleasure. I really
think we should end this today, and we can try again when we’ve had some more time together and I’ve had time to think about a better way to help you through this.”

“Please don’t. I haven’t done anything for you.”

“That right there is the problem. One of them at least. You’re trying to control too much.”

“What? But I don’t want control.”

“Maybe not, but you’re still trying to do it. You’re treating me like a prostitute.”

“What?” He gasped and shook his head. “I’m—how?”

“You’re trying to pay me for everything I give.”

“I’m not… I’m… That is what I’m doing, isn’t it? Oh my god. I’m so sorry, Viktor.”

He laughed. “It’s fine. I found it pretty funny when I realized that’s what you’re doing, and I mean, at least you don’t think I’m a cheap whore.” He wiped at the horrified look on his face. “I don’t really mind that part, but you’re trying to pay me for what I give, and as soon as I hit that limit of what you feel you’re worth, you start holding me back because you’re not comfortable with letting me determine how much you’re worth to me. That would be a good thing to not let others determine your value except for the fact that you’re completely, utterly wrong about how much you’re worth. This is something you need to give over to me, so I can start correcting your perception of yourself.”

“I’ll try.”

“This one isn’t trying. It’s allowing. You said you’d consume me, so consume me damn it.” He smiled. “I’ve been holding onto everything by myself for far too long, and it’s just stagnant in there. I need you to take it. You’re not taking things from me that you need to pay for. This is a connection, so as long as you’re connecting with me as I am with you, whatever you take flows right back to me, refreshed and expanded and reshaped with your touch on it. I know that scares you too, but I love the way you feel, Yuri. The darkness you have hiding in there doesn’t scare me. It doesn’t hurt me. I don’t know exactly what it looks like, but I know what it feels like, and I’m still saying that I love the way you feel in my hands. Please trust me.”

“Keep going. I want to keep going. Please. I’m not very good at it, but I want to trust you more. Please show me how.”

He glanced at the oversized train station clock on the wall behind the giant X. “I’m going to need more time tonight if we’re to keep going. I don’t want to be racing the clock here.”

“Take all the time you want. Just… can you text Phichit that I won’t be back at six? I’m sorry. I just… when I had dinner with you, I didn’t tell him, and I’d said we could watch a movie before that, and he was waiting for me.”

“That’s fine, I can text him. But be careful about flaunting that cheap promise around. You never know when my self-control will break and I’ll take you up on it.”

“Cheap promise?”

“To take all the time I want. You don’t mean that.”

“I do. I don’t have anywhere else to be except tomorrow morning at six, but I doubt you’d hold me from that.”
He smiled, tight, his head tilted to the side. “So then let’s untie you, and we can go elope in Vegas right now, and I’ll move you in here, so I can spoil you until you beg for mercy for the rest of our lives.”

“What?!”

He winked. “See? You didn’t mean it.”

“You’re—you’re right. I’m sorry, Viktor.”

“It’s fine, Yuri. Is your phone in with your clothes?”

“Yes, Viktor.”

He went into the jade room and returned a moment later with his phone and put it to his finger to unlock it. Viktor smiled as he typed the message. “So sorry. Can’t make it back by six because I’m tied up in Viktor’s basement with a dildo up my ass. By the way, Friday’s his as well. I’m going to be with him all night long. Winky face.”

“You didn’t really say that, did you?”

“No,” he laughed, “though you’re not nearly as upset by that idea as I expected you to be. Is it because you trust that I’d never do something like that, or because you wouldn’t care if I did?” He turned the phone to him to read the message. “Is this one okay? I haven’t sent it yet.”

The message read, ‘Not gonna be back at 6. Sorry Viktor’s being an ass and making me stay late. Also just a heads up I’ve got plans for Friday night. I promised a friend I’d go with her to some stupid party to make her ex jealous and I’m probably gonna end up crashing there.’

“Oh… I guess that works. But I don’t know how I’d be making anyone jealous, and I told him I don’t really go to parties, and I wouldn’t call you an ass.”

Viktor cocked an eyebrow.

He blushed. “Well, not behind your back I wouldn’t.”

“Okay first of all, please get it through your head that you’re fucking hot. I mean, not just a little bit. I mean, enough to drive me fucking crazy with lust for you. And Phichit clearly agrees as do I’m sure a long string of broken men and women who didn’t stand a chance against your self-esteem. You’re not ‘acceptable’ to me or whatever it is that you say in your head to explain why I’d be saying these things. I think you’re so hot, I hired you on the spot without checking your background, which is probably a good thing as I would have discovered your lies too soon, just so I could stare at your ass and those thighs and that gorgeous face and find some way to get you to go out with me. You dropping to your knees and offering yourself up on a silver platter was just… I must have done something right in my life to earn a blessing from the universe like that. You’re hot. That’s all there is to say on that subject. Yes, Viktor?”

His blush hardened. “Yes, Viktor.”

“Good. Second of all, the closer the lie is to the truth, the easier it is to tell. Not often going to parties isn’t saying you don’t go at all, so you’re fine there. And lastly, I could take out you calling me an ass, but it’s far more believable with it in, and he doesn’t know you well enough to say otherwise, yes?”

“Yes, Viktor. It’s fine with me as is but… which friend? I’m not close to anyone here.”
“An old friend from your last stable. Any female name will work. Madison? That sounds like someone to go to a party with. Sending it?”

“Yes, Viktor.”

“And we’re done with him.” He returned the phone to the jade room, coming back in with a smile. “Now, where were we?” He sat back on the table with him and started tracing the bruises on his chest with his finger. “Don’t focus on how much you’re worth or how much I’m doing or what you’ve given. Focus on connecting with me by feeling what I give and giving what you feel.

“I was trying to get you to come indirectly by overstimulating you with pleasure the same as I did with pain on the first day, but you’re rejecting that too much right now to get you where I want you to be, so I’m going to take a slightly more direct path to your pleasure and push our limits a bit to help you through this. I will touch your cock and your hole, but only when there's no pain and only if you’re accepting me as I want to be accepted. The more you accept me, the more of myself I’ll use to touch you.”

“Please don’t. I thought I asked you not to offer me things that would hurt you.”

“And I thought you understood that I’m the one who decides what we do as long as it’s within your limits. Is me touching your entire body a zero or a one?”

“No, Viktor. It’s… it’s a three.”

(20) “Good. I think you’re worth the pain. If you don’t want me to feel it, then take it from me.” He leaned down to kiss his chest just below his collarbone as his hand clamped over his mouth, blocking his reply before he could think of one to give. “Take it from me and give it back to me as your pleasure. You’re so good at turning pain into pleasure. Can you let me feel what that’s like?”

He kissed slowly over his chest then went to the cabinet to grab a bottle of water and dripped a dark stain onto the bottom hem of his gray t-shirt. With a satisfied nod, he stripped his shirt from his body then grabbed the collar in both hands and ripped the shirt right in two.

Yuri gasped. “Viktor! What—”

He was cut off by Viktor taking one of the halves and tearing that in half again. He held it up and measured it by eye then placed it over Yuri’s eyes. “In case you didn’t catch this one, I think you’re worth everything up to the literal shirt off my back. Open your mouth.” Viktor slipped his hand in behind his head and lifted it up to tilt the water into his mouth pausing after each swallow. “Did you get enough to drink?”

“Yes, Viktor. Thank you.”

“How is the blindfold?”

“Good. But, um… I’m okay with it, but I think it’d be easier for me without it?”

“Tell me why.”

“I want to see you. Please?”

The blindfold slipped from his eyes to Viktor’s smiling face.

“I’m sorry. You tore up your shirt for nothing.”
“Nothing I do for you is ever for nothing. But I’m proud of you that you felt you might be putting me out by asking for something you needed, yet you did it anyway.” He kissed the open palms above his head and went to put his scraps of shirt on the cabinet.

Viktor stood between his raised legs, massaging long, slow, deep strokes down his thighs. Rumbles of pleasure and anticipation rolled through him, low thick clouds sparking with their carried storm over the open plain. Viktor watched him, his eyes focused rather than burning. A tremor in a frequency foreign to own rushed through his thighs. It took him a minute to realize it was Viktor’s hands. Was he… nervous?

Viktor reached up to the swaths of fabric, opening them to reveal a matrix of rings. After untying the silk, he let the fabric close to hide them away. He tied him as he did the day before with his knees up by his shoulders and splayed open.

Standing back to admire his work, his penetrating eyes rehardened his cock. “You like it when my eyes are on you.”

He whimpered with the flood of embarrassment senselessly rushing over him. “Yes, Viktor.”

He leaned over him and stroked a hand down his thigh, running into the crease and brushing over the skin between his cock and his hole. “That’s why you don’t like the blindfold. You like watching me as I watch you.”

He gasped, pleasure rising with Viktor’s hand teasing over his sensitive skin. “Yes, Viktor. You’re so beautiful, and you’re… you. Before it felt more like my imagination. Knowing it’s really you doing this… it’s overwhelming.”

He traced the back of his nails over the edge of his hole making his entire body contract with the sudden jolt of pleasure. Viktor leaned down toward his face. “Then I’ll make sure I never take my eyes off you.”

Viktor’s eyes locked on him as he traced above and around his hole; Yuri couldn’t look away.

He eased the dildo out and brought it to the cabinet where he picked up a new bottle of oil from a warmer. He tested the temperature on the underside of his arm then drizzled it from Yuri's fingertips down to his chest and followed it with his strokes coming back up along the other side of his arms in an unbroken circle. Nibbling, licking, and sucking along all ten fingers, he filled his palms with kisses to hold.

Moving to his side, he coated his hands with oil as he sat on the edge of the table. Brushing his fingers over his forehead and down his cheeks with featherlight touches. His finger lucent over his lips with gossamer strokes along the ends of nerves that found his touch so breathtakingly pleasurable, they summoned his whole body to experience it.

Taking his nipple gently into his mouth, his tongue caressed every ridge. Without the overwhelming pleasure of pain, his care and attention were magnified. How does he care about everything so much? Doesn’t he ever get exhausted from it? Viktor answered with a detailed search for his pleasure on his other nipple, and for the first time, Yuri wanted to fight the restraints just so he could hold him.

But that wasn’t what Viktor wanted from him right now. If it were, he’d be free to do so. What Viktor wanted was for him to accept whatever it was he wanted to give. Not just pain. Freedom and restraint. Confidence and submission. Striving and accepting. Giving and withholding. Pain and pleasure. His body opened like a fist released, and he fell into Viktor’s securing bonds.
“Yes, Yuri,” his voice soft against his skin, “yes. Just like that. So good. So soft in my hands.”

His voice eased him further, and Viktor murmured more praises that Yuri finally heard his sounds of pleasure in. They weren’t the wild cries of ecstasy demanding its say but the satisfied sighs of bliss settling in.

“Yes, my Yuri. Moy krasivyy, Yuri. This is just how I want you.”

He moved down, pulling more layers off his body with his tongue leading gentle sucks to draw them away. His kisses went to his thighs to lavish them with his pleasure, and Viktor’s sighs settled deeper as Yuri’s moans rose.

“Yes, my Yuri. Let me give you everything. It feels so good.”

“Please.” The word joined a moan from his lengthening throat as his head tipped back to let Viktor’s touch reach as far as it could. “Please let me feel all of you.”

“Those are the absolute sweetest words I’ve ever heard spoken. Yes, I have more to give you than just pain. That’s not all that I am, and that’s not all that you are.”

He whimpered as he reflexively fought his claim, but Viktor’s hands went to his stomach and his chest, putting just enough pressure to ease him back down.

“Shh… it’s okay, Yuri. Stay where you are and accept that too. My words are right, and the ones screaming against them are wrong. No matter how true you think they are, they’re not. I promise. Trust me, not your fear. Fear can lead people to do all sorts of things that are wrong for them and wrong for the world, and that’s where this fear is leading you. I will lead you to where you belong. All you have to do is trust me and go where my words take you.” He kissed the center of his chest. “Submit, Yuri.”

“Yes, Viktor.” Those words he had spoken so many times now shifted into living things taking root deep inside him and gave him something to hold onto in the chaos that consumed his mind. “Yes, Viktor.” He moaned as the pleasure rejoined them with Viktor’s hands dropping lower once again.

“Yes, perfect. So perfect, my Yuri.” Viktor stripped off his pants revealing his cock, stiff and dripping, and mounted the table, straddling him over his thighs. He brought one hand around the back of his neck while the other traced down the length of his body.

Warm, slick fingers caressed his hole, and his eyes stayed closed to savor the sensation that his own touch couldn’t hold a candle to. “Feels so good, Viktor.”

His fingers traced his cock, bare, slow brushes with his fingertips that lit every nerve in his body with flickering fire. Sweat beaded on his skin in a vain attempt to cool the flames. Viktor kissed it from his throat, leaving scalded flesh behind.

His fingertips surrounded his cock stroking up and down twisting pathways in slow drags that he craved to be faster, but each little shift of his fingers over the bumps and ridges jolted more pleasure through his body. His body clenched and pulsed and heaved. He cried out wanting to move to release the building pressure, but Viktor gave him nowhere to go but deeper into it, so that’s where he went as Viktor’s finger slipped into his hole, tracing every nerve inside his rim. He cried out louder and Viktor rewarded him with the lightest of stretching tugs giving him more sensation and pleasure than anything his own hand could achieve.

“Viktor! Yes, Viktor! Please… Please. It’s so good.”
“What are you begging for, Yuri?”

He shuddered at the sound of his voice, a low, warm growl. “You. You. Your pleasure. Your pain. Anything as long as it comes from you. Please, Viktor.”

Viktor closed his eyes and tipped his head into a new kiss on his throat. “Yes, my sweet Yuri. That’s what I want to hear.” He thrust his hips long and slow, their cocks next to each other, barely, barely touching, and pressed between their slick stomachs. Viktor rocked over his shivering body, clutching him tight and laying kisses everywhere that he could reach but his lips.

“Ah! Yes, Viktor! Yes, Viktor! Feels so good! Feels so—Ah!” He broke into sobs of pleasure as Viktor rewarded him with a little more pressure and a faster rhythm. “Viktor! I’m—I’m going to come.”

“Yes, good. Come for me, zolotse. Let me see this pleasure.” Platinum fringe falling in front of his eyes—soothing warmth and destructive burn all at once, pleasure flickering on his face, he picked up the pace, his eyes never leaving his. “Come for me, my Yuri.”

With those blue eyes giving him everything there was inside him, it was Viktor filling him now without his mind trying to make sense of it by dicing him up to make him easier to take. He wasn’t easy to take, so much, too much in every way, but the force inside him Viktor created made him crave him that much more. He roiled through his pleasure as he came inside the pressure and heat between them.

Viktor gave a few final thrusts then stillled with his eyes closed and his cock still pulsing with desire as his chest heaved. He glanced at him and lunged forward then flinched back and sucked desperate kisses into his chest, his body trembling. “My Yuri. That was so good. You did so well.”

“Viktor? Are you okay?”

He smiled and sucked deeper kisses. “Never better, zolotse. How did it feel?”

“You… didn’t come.”

“Yuri,” his tone gave warning, “I asked you a question.”

“I’m sorry! It felt good. Everything you did felt so much better than anything I did. And when I came… it felt like you.”

His eyes were bright as he glanced up. “Did you like the way I feel inside you?”

“Yes, Viktor.” The words churned the pleasure flowing through him still, and a soft moan escaped as Viktor’s lips found a sensitive spot on his neck.

“Aren’t those words starting to feel good?”


He smiled into another kiss. “I’m so glad. You’ve made me so happy. Thank you so much, my beautiful Yuri.” He sat up and caressed his face before he stood to untie him.

His arms felt both stiff and light as Viktor slowly brought them down to relax on his body while he freed his hips and legs as well then untangled him from the loose silk and scooped him into his arms.

“I’m not giving you any pleasure?”
“You already did.”

“But… you’re so hard. It must be painful. I can’t help you come?”

“No.” His voice was stern, but his eyes were still gentle as they gazed at each other while he carried him into the jade room. “It’ll go down. I’m so happy with you. That’s all you need to think about.”

He winced but sighed. “Yes, Viktor.”

“That’s my good Yuri. So happy you’ve made me.”

He sat him on the edge of the pillow and turned on the water to fill the tub, adding a heaping scoop of bath salts that filled the room with his signature scent. He helped him into the porcelain tub then sat on the floor next to him holding his hand.

“Please join me?”

Viktor smiled and slid into the tub behind him, holding him tight in his arms and slowly laying kisses over his neck and shoulders.

Irritation poked at his bliss, and it took him a minute to figure out why and then another after that to work up the courage to say what he needed to say. “Is it okay… can you not kiss me right now? I’m sorry, it just—”

“It’s okay, I understand. Is the holding okay?”

“Yes, Viktor. It feels good.”

He tightened his arms, and they both relaxed back into the warm stillness with only the sound of Viktor’s heart beating below his ear.

The water grew cool, and Viktor’s whisper sounded at his ear. “Join me for dinner?”

He nodded, a fresh smile on his face. “Yes, Viktor.”

“Do you mind takeout? I thought it might be good to go over what we need to do with Jake’s farm.”

“That sounds good.”

“Thai? Indian? Chinese? Oh, there’s a great middle eastern place that has amazing lamb kabobs.”

“Yeah, that sounds good.”

“It’s technically work, so you’re free to change your mind here and go home and rest. I’ve put you through a lot today.”

He laughed. “Yeah, just a bit, but if you want me, I’d still like to stay.”

“I do want you to stay. Thank you.”

They climbed out of the tub and Viktor dressed him in his black pants and a gray shirt then put on a white t-shirt and navy pants that were two sizes too small for him. He slid the pants down low so they weren’t so short on him and the t-shirt stretched across his sculpted body, exposing the skin on his lower stomach that demanded Yuri’s tongue.

“Viktor?”
“You said you told Phichit we were doing yoga, but it’s going to be suspicious if you keep coming home in my clothes. This way you can have clothes that fit you that also smell like me, and I can have ones that smell like you.”

“You—you want that?”

“Yes. Very much. I think you smell delicious too.”

“How do you do all of this so quickly? I just told you that this morning.”

“I solve my problems like the spoiled trust-fund kid that I am, and just throw money at it until the problem is solved. The more money I throw, the faster it gets done.” He smiled and winked when Yuri started laughing. “Though, that seems to have the opposite effect on you.”

They headed upstairs, and Viktor placed an order on his phone and then poured some wine while they waited. They sat on the floor in front of an emerald couch in a peacock blue living room that had paintings of peacocks and more stuffed ones like the one in Viktor’s room while they sorted through the papers that Viktor had brought home from Jake’s.

“Can I ask, what does your family do?”

“My dad started his own oil company when he was only twenty that drilled in the places in Russia no one wanted to go to. He was the first to go deep into eastern Siberia and up into the Arctic. While a few more have followed his lead, there’s still nothing there except the little camps he built for his workers. It’s a harsh place to go looking for fortune, but there’s tons of oil if you’re bold enough to go that far for it. Fortune favors the bold as he likes to say which is true but too much boldness can become recklessness. So, there you go. Not only am I terrible enough to have been born into money, I was born into oil money.” He took a deep drink from his glass. “My mom likes the peacocks.”

“Huh?”

“You were looking at them. You seemed curious.”

“Oh. Yeah, I was. So, you grew up here with them then?”

“No. I grew up in Russia for the most part. This was their summer home.” He glanced at the peacock on the wall and smiled. “She isn’t that pretty. My mom. I think she’s beautiful, but objectively speaking, she’s a little on the plain side. You have to take more than a glance to see her beauty. She said people always thought she was my nanny since I look like my dad rather than her.

"She likes the peacocks because it’s the males that are the flashy ones while the females are duller to blend in. My dad always told her it was better that way; that humans got it all wrong by throwing women out to be ornamental and exposing them to higher risks to be seen that way when they’re supposed to be protected. He said the males were supposed to prove their worth to the females because theirs was already a given.”

“Your dad sounds like an interesting person.”

“He certainly thinks so.” He chuckled and went to get the door when the doorbell rang.

They arranged the food and the laptop and the papers and themselves among the furniture until they were in an ordered chaos with Yuri seated against Viktor’s body which leaned against the couch in the center of it all.

Viktor’s hands were occupied with Yuri and the paper he was currently frowning at, so Yuri held up
a stick of lamb for him.

Viktor smiled and took a bite. “Thank you.” His response sounded a bit clipped, and while they were comfortable, their interactions were feeling a bit off.

He ripped a bite of the lamb off the stick which was meltingly tender and seasoned to perfection with exotic flavorings as he thought then held it out to Viktor again. “You—you can kiss me again if—if you want to. And, um, zolotse is okay too.”

He grinned and pulled him so tight he lifted off the ground as Viktor twisted him to the side to kiss every inch of his exposed neck and shoulder while he squealed with the ticklish attack. “Thank you, zolotse.” He settled them back into place and kissed the top of his head as he looked back to the paper. “Man, hay farming is rough. How did I get into this business? Oh yeah, I’m a sucker.”

“No, you just have a big heart and the resources to match.”

He smiled and squished him to fit a kiss on his cheek. “And I have you to help me. What do you think we should do? If I have to hire someone to replace Sally, that’s going to more than take up the profits.” He laughed. “I’d have had to pay Sally something anyway as she was just sharing his profits before. Probably why he tried to insist on me just taking it rather than paying for it. I don’t really care if it turns a profit or not, but on principle, I’d rather not have it be draining money.”

“Well like he said, the fruits and veggies bring in most of the profit. What if we expanded that? Would that work?”

“That is an excellent idea, but he’s growing a bit of a surplus right now. He’s selling at all the farmer’s markets within a reasonable distance, and he was advertising his crop shares decently, so we’d have to come up with some other way to sell them before we think about expanding them. His hay isn’t as profitable, but it’s at least consistent, and he sells everything he grows. He’s actually running it pretty efficiently if I look back to before Pete took over. It was pretty smug of me to think I could do better without even looking at it.”

“Maybe. But I doubt you’re wrong.” He offered Viktor his wine and took a sip of his own. “I… I think I have a crazy idea. I mean really crazy, so I won’t be hurt if you don’t like it…”

“Tell me. I love crazy ideas.”

“Okay, um… what about doing a farm to table restaurant? Like, isn’t that a popular thing now? And he’s already certified organic, and the land is really pretty, and there’s that peak you can see the land and the mountains from, and it’s not too far from town. It’d need a ton of investment though. The building and advertising and a greenhouse for the winter and getting people who know how to do that sort of thing… And I don’t know if it’s a good idea or not, but it just kind of popped into my head and…”

“First of all, I love that idea. Second of all, I hate how you presented it. Don’t steal my enthusiasm for a great idea with a presentation like that. Let me show you how it should have been done.

“Hey, Viktor, I just thought of an amazing idea. We’ve got this stunning piece of land in a pristine scenic setting with a sizeable population nearby that’s growing more delicious fruits and vegetables than we can sell directly, so I was thinking about adding more value to them by transforming them into delicious meals and opening an organic farm to table restaurant on the land. It would merge all the wonderful assets this farm has into one main product that already has a growing and enthusiastic market. We need to do some research on the feasibility and potential profits, but I think it’s really worth looking into. What do you think?”
“To which I would have replied, ‘Yes, Yuri! I love that idea! You’re absolutely right that the market is eager for something like this, and it would create more jobs and bring value not just to us but to the community as well, and I can’t think of a better place to do something like that. Let’s look into it right now. We should start with some market research and go from there. How did you come up with such a brilliant idea?’ “

“Um, well, when tourism started slowing down in my hometown and onsen started going under, my mom started selling her homecooked meals and opened up a part of our home as kind of a restaurant slash gathering place to hang out in and drink beer and watch sports after taking a bath and people seemed to like that. It’s the only onsen left still open in my town. So, um, I just kinda thought about that for here.”

“Wow. Your mom has an excellent understanding of business. I’m very impressed. That’s where a lot of people go wrong. When things start getting bad, they cut back and start offering less value and things just keep spiraling down because the offerings get less and less attractive. She did exactly the opposite and offered more value which goes against some basic logic but is exactly what you’re supposed to do, and she did it safely by offering what she already had without throwing in tons of capital to offer that extra value. Did she go to school for business?”

“No, she married my dad and had my sister right out of high school.”

“Wow. So, she just figured that out on her own. Well, now I know where you get your smarts from. I had to go to college for years to learn stuff like that.”

“Oh really? You went to school for business?”

“Yeah, I have an MBA. I wasn’t sure what else to do besides horses, and that seemed like a safe bet and helped me run my stable better. And apparently, now it’s going to be useful for when old farmers shove their hay farms onto me and my brilliant farm manager comes up with excellent ideas needing some business sense to execute.” He hugged him tighter into a kiss to his shoulder. “Really, Yuri. I do love that idea, and I’m so proud of you that you came up with it. I knew you’d be good at this. If we’re going to do a true farm to table, we should look into raising animals there too. Maybe it’s a good thing that I killed a good chunk of the hay business. We can shift it from selling to outsiders to just growing what we need to feed my horses here and the animals there. What type of food would you want to do?”

“Shouldn’t we look first to see if we can even do it before we start thinking about stuff like that?”

“Yes, you don’t want to get too attached to an idea before you’ve done the research, but the research feels so much easier to do if you’re at least excited by the idea. It’s okay to indulge in some excitement for your amazing idea before we throw it into reality.”

“Okay, um… this may seem random to other people but obvious to us, but what about Russian, Japanese fusion?”

“Perfect. Strange is good. It makes it more compelling, and I think that’d make a wonderful fusion. What would you think about adding a little French twist too? My mom is French, so I have a fondness for the food and culture plus French is always a good draw.”

“Oh really? I didn’t know that. Do you speak French?”

“Oui, mon chéri. Fluently.”

“Wow. I don’t think I’ve had enough French food to identify it really, but I do know they’re known
for it, and I trust that you know what’s best, so I’m more than fine with that.”

(21) “What’s Japanese for yes?”

“Hai.”

“Hai…” He mulled over the word with the lamb chased with wine from Yuri’s hands. “Oui Da Hai. A name for the restaurant. Oui Da Hai. Yes in each of the three languages. Yes, yes, yes: also commonly cried out during passionate sex. A sensual, romantic place for pleasure as a prelude to pleasure. What do you think?”

“I like it.” He blushed into his glass of wine as Viktor’s hand slipped down into his pants to stroke the skin above his thigh. “Especially the way you say it. It sounds like…” He blushed deeper as Viktor’s silence told him he didn’t intend to fill in his sentence for him. “Like sex.”

“Say it for me.”

“Oui Da Hai.”

“Slower, like how you say yes, Viktor.”

He dropped his voice as he breathed out his tension. “Oui… Da… Hai.” The words came out slightly quivery with his nervousness, but Viktor moaned softly and pulled him tighter.

“Yes, it does sound like sex. Say it again. Like a magic spell. Make it come into existence. I want this.”

He twisted back and gazed into Viktor’s eyes then dropped down to kiss his trembling lips along Viktor’s neck. “Oui Da Hai,” he slowly breathed against his skin.

Viktor shivered and pulled him tighter. “Again.”

He moved his kisses to the line below his ear. “Oui Da Hai.” He drew out the last yes in a breathy kiss that made Viktor gasp.

“Yes, Yuri,” he shivered, “so, so good. Again. Please.”

He kissed down to his collarbone, his hands sliding down his stomach. “Oui… Da… Hai.” He looked up at Viktor as he threw his leg over his hips, straddling him. He kissed a new line on his neck, whispering those three words against his skin.

Viktor started to harden against his rocking hips, and Yuri pressed into him tighter. Viktor seized the back of his neck as he closed his eyes, flinching into his quickening breath. He looked back, his eyes wild with lust. “Yuri… I don’t know if I can control myself if you keep going.”

He pulled out of his distant hold to grab him tighter, grinding his hips against him as he leaned into his ear. “So then don’t.”

He groaned. “Your limits…”

He shook his head. “Your limits. Those aren’t mine. They’re yours. Do whatever you want to me.”

He whimpered, a soft, helpless sound he never imagined Viktor could make. “So cruel. Saying things you don’t mean.”

“What if I do?” He thrust their cocks together in the deep friction of the fabric between them.
He gave a breathy laugh. “Answering with a question of course.” He gripped his waist but allowed the motion of his hips to flow unhindered. “Too many questions and walls in there still to mean it.”

“So, take them from me. Give me your answers. Make me jump anything in our way.” He gasped with the rising heat.

He shook his head but held him tighter still, feverish lips on his shoulder. “I can’t force your submission. You have to give it to me. Any other way and—” he sucked in a deep gasp as pleasure rolled through his body, “and you’ll fight me and want to run away as soon as the lust wears off because you didn’t choose this. I only want it if it’s your gift to me. I won’t ruin what we have by taking you too soon. This is the best way. Trust me.”

“Yes, Viktor.” He pressed his face into his neck as he gave the only answer he had to give. “Yes, Viktor.”

Viktor groaned and pulled back to watch his face, their lips dancing dangerously close to a kiss as they panted open-mouthed and pulling closer. Viktor leaned in just enough for their lips to spark with a touch then turned and dove into his neck sucking kisses so deep, Yuri was sure he was leaving marks. He gasped and tilted his chin up to allow him room to leave more as Viktor’s hands clung desperately to his low back.

“Oh Da Hai…” He moaned and thrust faster as their cocks pulsed against each other through the thin fabric. “Viktor! Ah! I’m—”

“Oh Da Hai,” he moaned into his neck. “Me too. Come for me, zolotse. Come for me.”

The sound of his voice was the last thing he needed to tip over the edge and plummet into pleasure. He cried out as Viktor joined him and they came into their mutual ecstasy.

Viktor tossed him down sending papers scattering and pinned him to the floor with his weight, yanking Yuri’s shirt up over his lips, crashing down onto them with his own. Viktor kissed him feverish and hurried, hard, claiming, and demanding without kissing him at all as he gripped him near to bruising. Heat and wetness seeped through the fabric along with hints of Viktor’s sweet tongue. He pulled back to a gentle play of their lips then rolled onto his back, pulling Yuri on top of him, their breaths pressing into the other’s.

“I’m sorry. I couldn’t—” Viktor gulped and swallowed hard. “I couldn’t kiss you, and I couldn’t not kiss you.”

“It’s okay. I liked it. A lot.”

He smoothed the sweaty bangs out of Yuri’s face. “Really?”

“It’s… it’s my favorite kiss.”

“But it wasn’t a kiss.”

He tucked his face into his chest to tame the heat. “Still my favorite.” He glanced up and was rewarded with Viktor looking at him with an expression he couldn’t define but still wanted to claim.

Viktor smiled and brushed his lips with his fingers then held him tighter and stared up at the ceiling. “Wow. Yuri Katsuki put the moves on me after seducing the hell out of me. That was… deliciously unexpected.”

“I didn’t seduce you.”
His head jerked back down. “Uh, you damn well did. Holy shit. I’ve never been so seduced in my life.”

“I was just doing what you said.”

“That was well beyond what I said. I didn’t tell you to kiss me or ride me like your life depended on it. That’s what I love about you. You don’t just follow my orders like a robot. You take them and obey them perfectly while adding so much of yourself into them. I asked you to say three little words, and you seduced me with them until I was so turned on, I couldn’t even think.”

“Oh.”

“Oh? That’s what you have to say for yourself? Oh?” He laughed and kissed his forehead. “Oh.” He shook his head then pressed his thumb to Yuri’s lip. “How are you feeling?”

“Amazing. But, um, I ruined our pants. I’m sorry.”

He chuckled. “No worries. I have an entire wardrobe for you here.”

“Of course, you do.” He tried to glare at him, but it came out all wavery with the smile trying to force its way through.

He laughed and kissed his forehead. “I mean, I haven’t had the time to really fill it out, but I’ve got plenty of the basics.”

He turned his face into Viktor’s chest and held him tighter then forced himself to let go. “I think I should get going. If it gets too late…”

“Yeah.” He sighed, resigned, but held him tighter. “You don’t have to hide us. Just so you know. I’m only hiding because that’s what you want. It’s not what I want. You don’t have to respond, I just wanted you to know how I feel.”

“… I know. I’m sorry.” He sat up, and Viktor nudged his glasses back into place.

They stripped off their pants and used them to clean themselves up then went up to Viktor’s bedroom where he gave him a new pair and put new pants on himself. They pulled off their shirts and handed them to each other to put on the now perfectly fitting clothes. Yuri lifted the shirt to his nose, blushing, but not stopping, as Viktor watched him with his lopsided smile.

“Is it right?”

“Yes, Viktor but… I like your gray shirt more. It’s a little cozier.”

“Bring it to me tomorrow, and I’ll exchange it with a fresh one. You should still go home in these.”

“Yes, Viktor. Thank you.” He checked his neck in the mirror and was irrationally slightly disappointed to see that Viktor hadn’t left any marks behind.

Viktor led him to the door with his hand on his low back then leaned down to kiss the corner of his mouth. “Goodnight, Yuri. Call me if you need anything.”

He picked up the bag containing his workout clothes they had left at the front door and put it over his shoulder then smiled and reached up to press his fingers to his lips. “Thank you. Goodnight, Viktor.”

Viktor kissed his fingers then pulled his hand up to kiss his knuckles as well then Yuri started for the hill.
“Yuri? You can take your car down if you want.”

“I know, but it’s such a short walk, and it makes more sense to have it here since I really only need it when I’m running errands for you.”

“As long as that’s your real reason that’s fine.”

“It is. Goodnight, Viktor. I’ll see you in the morning.”

He smiled. “Yeah, I’ll see you in the morning.”

When he reached the stables at the bottom of the hill, he looked back to see Viktor’s figure still shadowed in the glowing rectangle of light behind him.

He opened his door, and Phichit bounded up as usual but stopped before leaping on him.

“I remembered this time.” He beamed.

“Yeah, thanks.”

“Are you still bruised?”

“Yeah.”

“Wow. You must have gotten yourself pretty good.”

“Yeah, it was a pretty nasty fall. I wasn’t looking where I was going.” He was looking where he was going, and it was straight down the wrong path. Viktor was right. He was letting himself get carried away every time they were together. He just couldn’t stop.

He watched Phichit waiting for an opening to try to pull him from that path. “So, what are we watching? It’s a little late, but I think we have time for a movie if you want.”

He beamed. “I do want. Um… have you seen Breakfast at Tiffany’s?”

“No? What is that?”

He gasped. “You haven’t even heard of it? Oh my god. We have to watch it. It’s soo good. Oh, but it’s an old movie, and there’s a really racist depiction of a Japanese man. It’s just a short part, but is that going to bother you?”

“It’s just a movie. I’ll live.”

“Okay, great.” He started hunting down the movie from his collection. “So, what have you been up to? I haven’t really had a chance to talk to you.”

“Uh, mostly just grooming and running errands for Viktor. But you know the thing with the moldy hay?” He sucked in a deep breath and prepared himself to do it exactly as Viktor had said. “Well, Jake twisted Viktor’s arm until he bought his farm. He didn’t really want it at all, but he didn’t want Jake to suffer with someone buying the land and developing it or something like that and letting his guys go, so he agreed.”

“Wow. So, Viktor’s a hay farmer now?”

He laughed. “Yeah. He’s so thrilled about that, he shoved it onto me to manage. I mean he’s got one of the guys there who actually knows how to grow hay managing that part, but apparently, I’m
supposed to try to at least keep it from draining him.”

“Wow, really? Do you have experience with stuff like that?”

“Uh, not really, and he doesn’t care. He just said to make sure it doesn’t bankrupt him and not to hassle him with any of the details.”

He laughed. “Oh, you’re fine then. I don’t think you could do that if you tried. I mean, not that I know what he makes in a year, but he’s clearly loaded. Oh! Here it is!” He waved his bounty in the air then popped it in the player. “Wine?”

“Uh, no. I’m good, thanks.” He sat down and pulled his legs up onto the couch, wrapping his arms around them.

Phichit flopped down next to him and kissed his cheek as the screen came to life. “So how was yoga?”

“Um… intense.”

“Yeah, Viktor’s always intense. I can help relax you if you want.” He leaned in for a kiss.

Just let him do it. This is where he belongs: living an uneventful life, a solid wall between them. Viktor’s face broke through his mind. His quiet smiles and beaming praise; his gentle innocence asking him to open. His burn slavering at the bit to claim. He pulled back. “Um, is it okay if we… Um…” Shit. That was dumb.

“Go slow?”

“Yeah.” He sighed in relief with Phichit offering the perfect solution. He just needed some time to let go, time to let the inevitable decay false hopes. “Go slow. I’m sorry, I just—”

“It’s okay. That’s fine. You don’t have a lot of experience dating, do you? I don’t mean that in a bad way at all, just you seem a little awkward, but in a really cute way!”

He smiled. “Yeah. I don’t have a lot of experience. Thanks for understanding.”

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He flopped onto his bed dressed in Viktor’s gray shirt and tried to sleep, but he was wired and knew further tossing and turning would only twist the wires tighter. He grabbed the book from the nightstand to pick up where he left off.

Chapter Six

How to tell if he’s into you

Ah, the wonderful dance between being a conceited dick and an oblivious ass. It’s a hard road to travel, full of indirect messages that can be interpreted in dozens of ways. Spoiler alert: If he’s always into you, you’re either a conceited dick or Viktor Nikiforov.

What?! That can’t be—He read over the words until his eyes blurred.

Don’t know who that is? Do yourself a favor and google it. Don’t have a kink for skin-tight white pants and knee-high leather boots? Congratulations, now you do. Even this specimen of human perfection with the most exquisite command of pleasure that has ever graced this earth knows that not everyone’s into him. If you think you’re surpassing that, wow have you got some serious ego to
contend with. Get on that. It’s annoying as hell. Trust me. Everyone thinks so.

Viktor knows this Christophe Giacometti well enough for him to put him in his book? How? Were they lovers? He certainly seems into him and seems to imply that he knows what his pleasure feels like. Are they still involved? Are these questions he’s allowed to ask? Are these questions he should ask?

On the other side, if he’s never into you, you’re an oblivious ass. Even Hitler had a wife. Someone out there will be into you.

Now as for the in between which most of us are—Actually, hold up a second. Before we go there, let’s cover the topic you should always ask yourself first before you start worrying about whether or not he wants you. Are you into him? Yeah, I know, it should be obvious, and if you’re wanting to know if he’s into you, that’s a pretty big clue that you’re into him, but that’s not always the case, and a little study of this question up front can save you some serious heartache. So, here’s a handy little checklist. Check two or more? You’ve got some sparks to flame. Check four or more? Awesome. You’re into him, and the relationship has serious potential.

1. You smile and laugh and generally have a great time with him even if what you’re doing isn’t all that fun. Maybe even doing your taxes doesn’t seem that bad if he’s by your side.
2. You’re eager to help him when he needs it. Is he stranded and out of gas? You’re there at mile marker forty-seven, swinging the red can. He needs someone to help him move? You volunteer and do it with a smile (see point one). Is he upset and in need of a tissue? Your shirt is soaked before you hand one over.
3. You don’t just know the color of his eyes; you know every fleck of green or gold and how many freckles are on his right cheek and his left because you can’t keep your eyes off him. It’s science, mon chéri. Couples in love spend far more time looking at each other than people engaging in casual conversation do. So, if you’re looking at him far more than you would someone else, and especially if you direct more of your attention to him in a group, your eyes are telling you your answer.
4. You make him the priority. Yes, you’ve still got to go to work and feed the dog, but you drop anything you can to be with him and hand over as much precious free time as you can. Those prime Friday and Saturday time slots are his, and you couldn’t be more thrilled about it. Sunday is his too? Great. You’re there listening to him complain about his shitty Monday without trying to get off the phone as soon as possible? Woah, sweetie, do you even need the rest of this list?
5. You don’t just lend a sympathetic ear when he’s upset. You find yourself reacting to his emotions as if they were yours. His happiness is yours and guess what? So is his pain. You don’t just say, “Aww, that’s too bad. I’m sorry,” and carry on with your day. You need to make him feel better because damn it, it hurts when you don’t.
6. You remember the little things. How he likes his coffee, which paper he reads (do people still do that?), his favorite food... If you know more than his mother does, you’re either his secretary or way, way into him (or a stalker, but let’s not go there).
7. Following off number six, you’re interested in the little things. You want to know how he likes his coffee and what paper he reads and his favorite food and not just because you’ll get fired if you don’t. You want to know what he loves and what he fears. You want to know his past; every warm fuzzy and every scar.
8. You find yourself using we followed by the future tense a whole lot. He’s included in your plans for the future because, naturally, he’ll be there.
9. Our and ours. Possessions, plans, plots to polish off the president (okay maybe not that last one; I was just on a roll with the alliteration there) are joined with ours more often than not. This one tends to come in later than the rest, so if you’re there, you’re there, mon chéri.
10. You’ve checked every item on this list. The birds are singing. You’re becoming the best
version of yourself. And are those wedding bells you hear? They very well could be. If you’re here, you’re in deep.

Now, want to know if he’s into you? Reverse every item on this list into his perspective and check it again. You’ve checked number ten twice now? I want an invitation to not just the wedding but the bachelor party too (I’ll bring the stripper pole) because, congratulations, baby, you’re in love. Real, lasting, sappy, let’s grow old together kind of love.

Now, if you want to know if a potential hook up is into you, just ask. It’s not worth the—

He shut the book and tossed it back into his nightstand.

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Chapter End Notes

Thank you, Clarinda, for your lovely art! Please share your love on Tumblr if you can! :-)

Spotify
20. Soldier by Fleurie
21. Come and Get Me by Sleeping Wolf
Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

"I know better than to trust you."

Chapter Notes

Moderate NSFW warning for the art! There's nudity with the top few inches of cock exposed but not in an overtly sexual setting. It's at the end of the chapter so you won't miss anything by going back when the image starts to come up.

In the section of aisle tucked away behind a corner that Viktor’s horses were in to protect them from the busier main aisle, the endless buzz of the vacuum droned on as Yuri polished Avos’s copper coat. Viktor’s way may be cleaner and more effective, but it was far less peaceful.

“Something on your mind, Yuri?” Viktor traced a finger over the back of his neck, ruffling the ends of his hair.

“I’m just tired like I told you before.” He gave a hard flick with the brush sending loose hair and dirt flying and had to wipe it from his skin before he continued with more careful strokes.

“Yes, not getting enough sleep would explain your mood, but I feel like there’s something more.”

He bit his lip, watching the light bloom across Avos’s neck as he gave his head a light shake. It was an irrelevant question. Viktor wanted him to ask it. “Am—am I allowed to ask about your past?” The answer didn’t matter. Nothing they were doing mattered. Nothing he was feeling mattered. It was just morbid curiosity; a little self-flagellation to keep himself in check. Worded, of course, to Viktor’s approval.

“Yes. I’ve already told you, you’re allowed to ask me questions.”

“But I mean… personal questions.”

“I never excluded them. You can assume that something is allowed unless I’ve said otherwise or basic logic tells you it would violate an order.”

He dropped the hard brush in the bucket and picked up the soft brush to start back at his neck. “I’ve—I’ve been reading that book… the, uh, the one when I moved in…”

“The Gay Man’s Bible?”

“Yeah, uh, that one. Um… did you know that you’re in it?”

He laughed. “Is that what’s been nagging at you? You could have called or texted me as soon as it came up instead of worrying about it. That’s always an option for you: to reach out to me when you
need me, even if it’s outside our hours. Yes, I know I’m in it. Chris asked and I gave him my okay as long as he didn’t reveal anything personal. I wasn’t quite expecting what he ended up writing, but I don’t see why it’s got you so worked up.”

“Were you two… lovers?”

“Not in the sense that you’re using that word, no. If you’re asking if I’ve had sex with him, then yes.”

He paused to stare at him, yet another atrociously skewed expression on his face. “How do you say stuff like that so casually?”

“Because it was just a casual thing. We’re friends. We had sex during some scenes together. It’s not really that strange. Humans have sex as just about every animal on the planet does. It feels good. It’s healthy. There’s nothing strange about it. Now, are you upset because I can so easily say things like,” he leaned in, putting his hand on his hip and pulling him closer, “Yuri, I had so much fun with you last night. Your body, your cock felt incredible on mine, and I am dreaming about the moment you give yourself over to me so I can fuck you into places beyond your wildest fantasies,” he placed a kiss on the goosebumps on his neck and released him, “or are you jealous that I have a past that includes other people?”

He shivered out the effects of Viktor’s words and set back into grooming Avos. “Neither? Maybe… intimidated. Your past lovers are, I’m sure, all incredible, beautiful people and include a literal sex expert. What could you enjoy about me after having that?”

“Hmm… that is a good question. What do I enjoy about you? Well, as we discussed last night, you’re beautiful. You’re challenging but not because you’re fighting me. You’re funny and intelligent. You’re kind and compassionate. You’re trustworthy.”

“I lie all the time. I’m not trustworthy.”

“One.” His voice lashed against him, his punishment already working into him before he’d given it. “You asked me a question and are now arguing with my answer. I know you lie. I help you lie. That doesn’t make you untrustworthy to me. I don’t care what other people might answer because to me you are trustworthy and mine is the only opinion I care about when it comes to you.”

“But I’m not, Viktor. I’m—”

“Two.”

He winced at the lash again but couldn’t keep himself from the need to argue. The fact that Viktor would likely beat him black and blue for it only drove the impulse harder. “Please don’t trust me. I’ll only let you down.”

“Too bad. I do. You don’t decide what I do with you. If you don’t want to feel like you’ve let me down, then don’t. But you’re not going to stop me from putting my faith in you. You’re also not going to stop me from putting you on that horse, and you’re not going to get me to give you the pain you want by arguing. Unless you enjoy my suffering, you’re not going to enjoy your punishment.”

“What? I don’t understand.”

“You will. Behave yourself, and I promise I will give you all the pain your body can take tonight.”

His eyes brightened with relief already brushing its cool hand across his fevered skin. “Really?”
He leaned over him to slide his hand down his thigh and grip his fading bruises. “Really.” He kissed the back of his neck. “Don’t ever forget that I know what it is that you want and what you need and as long as you trust me, I will give you more than you can imagine. You don’t have to worry. I will never forget that you’re the little pain slut who fell to his knees begging me to punish you. Trust me, Yuri. Don’t waste our time fighting. The more time you give me, the more I can give you.”

He trembled with pleasure flicking through him, leaning into Viktor’s solid body. “Yes, Viktor.” He moaned quietly at the release of his tension as Viktor’s will overtook his own. “Thank you, Viktor. I’m sorry.”

“You’re forgiven. This. The last piece of the answer I was giving is this. What you’re feeling now, I’m feeling too. No one else has ever given me that. You don’t have to worry. You’re mine. That’s all you need to know.”

“Yes, Viktor.” He closed his eyes as another soft moan spilled over his lips with his words and Viktor’s caressing hands joining with pleasure as their bond. “Yes, Viktor. Why does that feel so good?”

“Your training is starting to take effect. I’ve rewarded you nearly every time you’ve said it so now your brain is releasing those good chemicals just upon the words alone. I’m impressed though. It’s taken effect much sooner than I expected. You must really enjoy my rewards.” His hand passed over his clothed cock as it made its way up his body.

He shuddered. “Viktor, you’re going to make me hard.”

“Just a little.” His hand moved down again to trace the outline of his cock in the tight breeches. “You’re still fine. Tack him up and let’s go.”

“Yes, Viktor.” He pressed his lips against a gasp as Viktor palmed him, slowly dragging his heat over his cock.

“Good, Yuri. Let’s make those words feel even better for you. You’ll give me plenty of opportunities, yes?”

He trembled before the words left his mouth. “Yes, Viktor.”

“That’s my good, beautiful Yuri. Right back where I want you.” His fingers clawed lightly over his dangerously interested cock with his lips over his neck.

“Yes, Viktor. Yes, Viktor. Yes, Viktor.”

Viktor’s hand clamped over his mouth as heat flashed through his body. “Easy, Yuri. You’re going to get yourself too worked up. Let me control it.” His hand moved off his mouth to allow his response.

“Yes, Viktor.”

He hugged him tight, allowing the rush of heat to settle in his quiet arms. “That’s my good Yuri.” After a moment, he stepped back to allow him to complete his orders.

He got him tacked in the jumping saddle and cavesson, and they went back to the indoor arena to lunge him that now held a single jump in the middle. Viktor had gotten his okay in the tack room to set it up, and now he was curious too to see if Avos would try to take it on his own.

Viktor was checking the girth as Yuri glanced at the jump yet again.
“Nervous?”

“Yes, Viktor, but I was just thinking that it was lower than I expected.” The fence was only about two feet high. Avos could step over it if he felt like it.

“Yes, I know you can both do higher, and I’m sure he’ll be insulted by that height, but I don’t want to push you too much. He’ll take it higher anyway if he does take it. He always overjumps so be on guard for that.”

“Yes, Viktor.” A warm swirl passed through him easing out some of his tension as he took his place at Avos’s side.

Viktor tossed him up and adjusted the stirrups and checked the girth one more time before letting him loose. His body was sore all over from riding yesterday and their workouts but at least he was feeling a little strength returning as Avos galloped around the ring. He didn’t have to brace his muscles as hard to keep up with him even without the deep seat of the dressage saddle to help hold him in place.

He rose up into a two-point position with his upper body folded down and his ass sticking out behind him, only his knees and lower legs holding him in place. The position took the shock out of his spine and put it into his absorbing knees and thighs. He had a higher risk of falling like this in Avos’s sudden turns, but that was hardly a concern. He sank his weight into his heels and focused on keeping his upper body solid and balanced over his center point while he followed his motions with his pressures and praise. Avos jolted to the side, and he dropped back into the saddle for a moment to rebalance before coming up again.

“Beautiful, Yuri! You’re looking so amazing up there! How are you feeling?”

“Um… okay, I think.”

“Better than yesterday?”

“Yes, Viktor.” Tension dropped out a little more allowing him a better posture in his shoulders.

“Beautiful, Yuri.” Viktor gave his soft smile. “So beautiful. Feels better, yes?”

“Yes, Viktor.” He sighed, easing into his movements a little more.

“Again.”

“Yes, Viktor.”

“So good, Yuri. So beautiful. You look amazing on him.”

Avos’s movement rippled through them, and his sudden turn to the jump went right along with the rest without a break in their motion. He waited as Avos collected at the base of the jump letting him compress Yuri’s body as his front end rose up, pushing his hips back as he rose with him so his shoulders could balance over his knees. Avos’s hind legs thrust off the ground, and they lifted into the air together. His hands went forward as they would if he had reins, along the sides of his neck, but he left his weight where it belonged: centered in their aligned cores. Avos overjumped as promised but his set up was clean and straight, so the arc flowed smoothly from the ground. Avos trotted off snorting from the landing, and Yuri went into a posting trot, rising out of the saddle with his thrusts and settling back on the next beat, the rush of the jump still buzzing through him.

“Yuri! That was so good!” Viktor thrust his hands into the air. “That was absolutely perfect positioning! Your leg! Your freakin’ leg was as solid as a rock! You’re so incredibly talented!” He
pressed his hands over his gaping smile then dropped them with his eyes still sparkling. “What did you think?”

“He’s a lot easier than I expected.” He gave another pat on Avos’s neck with his shaking hand.

Viktor laughed. “You make me look utterly incompetent at riding that horse. I can’t get over how beautifully you go together. He loves you. Whatever you’re doing up there is perfect for him. You’re so… musical. You have perfect rhythm, and you flow so well with him, but you’re not floppy up there either. I hate that, seeing riders who think they’re helping by hanging loose and going wherever the forces put them instead of staying quiet where the horse’s center actually is. You’ve got that balance perfected and you’re still so young to have mastered that so well.”

“I had a good trainer.”

“You must have. Wow. How did it feel?”

“Um… it felt… good.”

Viktor waited, watching him for a moment. “No tears?”

Stuck between sheer panic and the thrill of doing something he used to love, his emotions had nowhere to go to relieve him of the burning pressure. “I guess not.”

“Wow, Yuri. Amazing! God, how good you are. Just amazing.”

Avos circled around to line up the jump again from the other direction. He charged for it and took it at an angle, landing with a surprise buck that almost tossed Yuri off, but his rewired instincts from endless training and experience kept him from eating dirt, and he settled himself back into the saddle.

“Good recovery!”

Avos retook the jump, this time holding a straight line and actually taking a reasonable amount of effort to make it over rather than putting senseless energy into jumping air. He praised him for having some brains in there as they cantered off from the landing.

“Beautiful, Yuri! Nicely done! Wow, that horse loves to jump. And he just adores you.” He whistled and offered cookies to draw Avos over and patted his neck as he clipped on the lunge line. “He chose you too. Now both of us have to wait for you to choose us.

“He is just as good as I thought he was. He was just very picky about who he chose as his rider. The person I bought him from said he tossed his riders more often than not so you should feel very honored.” He kissed Avos’s forehead. “Good boy. You chose very well. I must say, you have excellent taste, and you’ve earned my respect. I hereby remove your title of ‘asshole.’ Now we can keep each other company while we wait for him, yes?” He gave him another kiss and scratched behind his ear. “Don’t worry, buddy, I’ll do everything I can so we can both keep him. You just keep doing what you’re doing. I’m sure he likes you too.”

God, how was he so cute around his horses? Yuri’s manically stupid smile slipped onto his face and he couldn’t stop it though he tried which only made it worse.

Viktor watched him with a silly smile starting on his face as he continued to coo to Avos. “See that? He does like us. We just have to help him. Poor thing is so scared.”

Avos got bored and bobbed his head, nudging Viktor’s chest to encourage him to do something else.
“I know, right? What does he have to be afraid of? He’s ridiculously talented. I’m certain you two could give me some serious competition even on Toska. I’ve never had a challenger like him. He could steal everything from me. And I’ll tell you a secret. Come here, don’t tell anyone, okay?” He leaned in to stage-whisper in his ear. “I would love that. It would make starting over worth it to have a challenger nipping at my heels.” He leaned back and patted his neck, looking over to Yuri with his smile still in place. “You can get down.”

He hopped down and into Viktor’s open arms. That frozen burn of his emotions bulged against the limits of his body, locking out his thoughts and sensations. Viktor’s quiet, strong arms helped ease it back down and cleared his mind enough for a few tears to leak through until it receded deeper into him.

Viktor kissed his head. “That’s my good Yuri, yes?”

“Yes, Viktor.” He sighed into his hold.

“Good, Yuri.” He pushed him back to kiss his cheek. “Put him away and meet me in the outdoor. I should be on the course today, but I have special training I want to do, and I think it’d be easier in the ring to do it.”

“Yes, Viktor. Um, do I need to bring anything?”

“Just yourself.”

“But—”

“Yuri…” His warning rang out sweet and clear.

“Yes, Viktor.”

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After getting Avos cleaned up and put away he met Viktor in the outdoor who was just about to get on Bytiye.

“Oh good. Excellent timing.” He bent his left leg back and Yuri tossed him up. “I want you to stand in the middle of the ring and watch me.”

“Um, yes, Viktor.”

He moved to a spot between the lines for the jumps and watched while Viktor warmed Bytiye up on his long rein. Viktor was wearing violet today with his white breeches and had put him in a Tibetan monk’s robe gold with the charcoal breeches. He couldn’t help but notice that the colors went rather well together. He doubted it was an accident. Viktor didn’t do things on accident.

Viktor took his golden horse down the first line of jumps and pulled him up to ride over to Yuri, looking back at the rail on the ground. “What can I do better?”

“What?”

“You have a bad habit of that. Asking me to repeat myself when you fully heard and understood my question.”

“Um… I don’t know what you could do better. You’re perfect.”

“No one’s perfect, and I know damn well that I’m not nearly as solid over the fences as you are, so
“Tell me. What can I do better?”

“Um… well, your rhythm is a little weak, so he doesn’t have a strong rhythm himself. Toska must have a good natural rhythm because I don’t see that on him. You must have been relying on that so you didn’t develop it in yourself as much.”

“Excellent, Yuri. That was very sound advice. Thank you. Do you have any specific exercises that you prefer for strengthening rhythm?”

“Having someone call out a rhythm can be helpful until you internalize it.” His lips twitched into a smile. “My old trainer uses a metronome. She’d set it to the right speed for the horse and call it out endlessly. I trained with it for years. I can still hear the exact little swict, swict, swict sound it made when I passed by.”

Viktor smiled warmly. “That’s a brilliant idea. You grew up with so many intelligent people around you.”

“Yeah. I did. I was really lucky.”

“I bet we can find an app for that, yes?”

“Yes, Viktor.” He pulled out his phone and started looking. A few minutes later he had one installed on his phone that sounded nearly identical to the one Minako had.

“Excellent. I take it we should start with some ground work?”

“Yes, Viktor.”

“Good. Tell me which gait you want and sound it out for me.”

“Yes, Viktor. Let me get his walk worked out first.”

“Short rein or long? There is a clear difference on him.”

“Long rein but driving him forward should get you something in the middle, right? He gets tense and choppy with the short rein so hopefully a steadier, slower rhythm will help correct that.”

“Yes, that sounds good.” He took Bytiye out to the rail and drove him into a marching walk while Yuri adjusted the settings.

Set to a beat that should work for him, Yuri began clapping a four-beat rhythm, emphasizing the first beat when Bytiye’s inside hind leg swung forward. The little driving pushes in Viktor’s seat and legs began to time with his claps, and he took up the reins just a bit, squeezing his fingers lightly in time as well to keep him from rushing forward. Little by little, the steady rhythm calmed Bytiye, and Viktor was able to take up the reins until he had a soft contact with his mouth without his brain switching into go mode.

“How am I doing, Yuri?” Viktor smiled as he passed by.

“Beautifully, of course.”

“Am I ready for more?”

“Yes, for now. You’ll have to drill each one a lot to internalize it. Eventually you’ll be able to find any horse’s rhythm in a few strides and the stronger your rhythm is, the easier you can alter theirs as needed.”
“Excellent. Trot next?”

“Yes, Viktor.”

He let out the reins a bit and cued him to trot and slowly picked them back up again as he timed his lifts from the saddle to Yuri’s claps rather than Bytiye’s thrusts and used his legs to drive him to match. They repeated the process through the canter and the gallop and Viktor slowed him back to a walk and rode closer so they could hear each other speak.

“Wow, Yuri. That really is helpful for him. I’ve tried so many times picking up the reins a little bit at a time like that, and he’d always tense at the slightest touch of the rein. Having that consistent rhythm gave him something to focus on that was staying the same, and he didn’t notice that slow tightening in the reins. I’m going for a jump, and I want you to call the rhythm that will get me to the right mark. I’ll time it and release him exactly as you direct.”

He gasped as panic seized his throat. “No! You’re the rider! Don’t give that to me!”

“On your knees.” His expression darkened and his voice growled menacingly.

He dropped into the pale gold footing.

“Three.” His voice banged with the gavel dropped. “You’ve forgotten, Yuri, who’s really in charge here. That was an order and you are required to follow it no matter what you think of it.”

“Yes, Viktor.” He fought back the tears that welled up in his eyes. “I’m sorry, Viktor.”

“Stand up.” He waited for him to get back on his feet. “Let’s try this again. I am the rider, and I would never do something with my beloved horse that I considered too risky. I am taking the jump, and I will time his strides and his release to what you tell me. If we crash right through the fence, that is still my responsibility because I am the one giving this order. Understood?”

His tears spilled over. “Yes, Viktor.”

“Come here.”

He walked over and Viktor reached down to wipe his tears away.

“You’re still holding onto your worries. Give them to me. Why do you want them?”

“I don’t know.”

“This is another pressure you need to move away from. You’re following my orders most of the time, but you’re not trusting them. You’re not trusting me. When we start going outside of your comfort zone, that lights up like a forest fire. Let me guide you. I won’t lead you wrong. I promise.”

He smiled gently and leaned down, tugging him up onto his toes for a kiss to his cheek. “Okay, I’m going to take the birch oxer coming off a circle from the corner at a canter. If things are going well, I’m going to continue the diagonal line, and you will continue marking my rhythm.” He pointed out his path to the jump made of the fallen ghosts of trees.

He closed his eyes and kissed the ornate logo branded into the top of his boot by his knee and would swear he could still taste and smell the smoked edges where the fire had brushed its darkening licks over the light leather. “Yes, Viktor.”

He appraised him with a smirk shading his smile. “Now this is a fun development. I love it when you offer such surprising and adorable glimpses into your kinks. I know you had an interest in my whip
but was the boot also drawing your attention when we met?”

He blushed and released his hold on his boot. “Um… maybe a little.”

“You don’t have to feel ashamed of your kinks. I want to know every little thing that turns you on. I promise, you won’t shock me.” He put the end of his crop under Yuri’s chin and lifted it up until their eyes were locked. “Kiss it again.”

He leaned into the trill of pleasure and pressed his lips to his boot.

“Lick it.”

His tongue ran over the soft edges of the sunken logo, his eyes still fixed on Viktor’s as the heat passed from the brand into him.

Viktor tilted his head, his smirk deepening. “Does this pair of boots hold more of an interest for you than my dressage boots do?”

“Maybe, um, yes, Viktor.”

“What about them is so interesting?”

“Um… I like the color and um, the logo. How it… contrasts. It’s beautiful.”

“You like how an artist took something simple and functional and branded it permanently with their skilled hand rendering it more beautiful and interesting?”

He shivered. “Yes—Yes, Viktor.”

His whip tipped his chin up further. “You like all of this, don’t you?”

“Yes, Viktor.” He squirmed trying to keep himself contained.

“Be my good virgin slut and maybe we can play here one day. That one will have to be a very special reward though, so you’ll have to really impress me.”

“Yes, Viktor.”

“Good, Yuri.” He dropped the whip from his chin and trotted off. “Go ahead.”

He considered setting the metronome to help him, but he hadn’t yet figured out the speed for his faster pace to the jumps and decided it would be more of a hinderance than a help to his own established rhythm. Viktor picked up his canter and made the loop and Yuri measured it with his eyes, bobbing his head as he picked up his beat and slowed it just a click to keep Bytiye measured. Five strides to the fence. He started clapping as Viktor passed the halfway point on the circle; Viktor timed his half halts to keep Bytiye checked and balanced to Yuri’s rhythm. Bytiye’s natural fire surged, but Viktor tightened his control and held him to the beat, driving and checking in turn to keep him to it. Yuri’s heart raced as they approached the jump but the takeoff was right. Bytiye sailed over with a rounder arc than usual, making a tight, clean jump.

Viktor patted his neck and looked ahead to the next jump. Yuri jogged to keep up with the line as he continued his loud claps, his stinging palms helping to distract from the static in his mind. A bounce jump was next and Bytiye leapt into the small gap between the fences and bounded back out again immediately after landing. Viktor sailed over the triple bar and then the last vertical, both clean and well-arched.
Viktor came over beaming. “That was the best he’s ever gone. Still a little rushed but nice and clean, and I felt like I had more control of him. Everything felt more predictable.”

“Yeah, I didn’t want to go too far off his natural rhythm. If you keep working on it, you should be able to work him down slower.”

“Beautiful. Thank you, Yuri. I’m so proud of you. You’re so talented, yes?”

He blushed. “Yes, Viktor.”

He smiled and stroked the crop over his cock, enhancing his words. “That’s my good, Yuri.” He touched the crop over his lips like a kiss. “What else do you see that I could be better at?”

“Um… It’s a really minor thing, and it doesn’t really get in your way at all, but… you’re thinking about how to take the jump wrong, so your lower leg isn’t as solid as it could be.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“You’re thinking up because the horse is coming up, and you’re trying to will the horse over the jump with that forward leap of your body, but it doesn’t work like that. You know that, so your position is a lot better than most people who think that, but it’s still there messing you up a little. You need to think down.” He turned to the side so Viktor could see his balance as he mimicked a wide squat over a horse. “Most people think of jumps as up so they lean their upper body forward and rise up in the saddle as the horse takes off.” He mimicked the rise, pushing off the balls of his feet and leaning his upper body forward of his feet, wobbling and having to curl his toes to hold his balance in the precarious position. “You see riders do this all the time, right? But it doesn’t look as bad because they’ve got the horse’s neck to lean on and help hold their balance. And this is actually considered correct by many people, equitation hunters especially, with the hips over the heels as you would be in for a basic riding position, but it’s not balanced, and you’ll see that clearly on the bigger jumps. Even if you’re strong enough to hold this position like you are without getting up on the horse’s neck, you’re still fighting the forces of the leg wanting to slip back, and your shoulders are ahead of the ideal balance point. You need to think down.”

He dropped back into the basic two-point position and then squatted lower letting his hips thrust backward while his lower leg stayed perfectly solid beneath his shoulders as his body folded into a balanced jumping position. “You sink your upper body down like a squat and let the horse push your knees up toward your armpits as he rises up. Your leg won’t go anywhere, and you’ll be perfectly balanced throughout the whole jump. Your leg will be where you need it to give effective cues over the fence, and it gives you more drive on the takeoff to have your leg where it belongs than the upper body jump ever will.”

“Wow, Yuri. That was the clearest instruction I’ve ever received, and you’re so right.” He rose up out of the saddle and played between the two demonstrations he had offered, feeling the tipping of the forward lift he had to correct with strength and the easy balance of the squat.

“Since you never do that forward lift, your shoulders are always over their shoulders rather than ahead of them onto the neck making it safer. The FEI did a study and in every fatal summersault fall, the rider’s shoulders were coming forward ahead of the horse’s. It makes sense if they’re lowering the horse’s arc over the jump with their weight on the forehand and making him catch his forearm on the obstacle.”

“Wow. I mean, I know it’s safer to stay with the horse, but I didn’t know about that study, and I didn’t know how to correct it so easily. Yuri… You’re not just good at this; you’re incredible. Did you ever teach before?”
“Yes, Viktor.” The pleasure of the words battled the fear that rose with Viktor’s clear set up. “A lot. Um, I started when I was about twelve helping my instructor with the younger students and up until I quit.”

“What number?”

He stared at the pale footing, trying to calculate his fear and transform it into an easily understood and manipulated number. “One and a half.”

He laughed. “Now that’s a new one. Please explain your new numbering system. I’m very intrigued.”

“Um, it causes anxiety, and I really don’t want to do it, but I can’t think of any specific limits, so I’d do it if I’m forced to, but it’s really not a two either.”

“Is it like the lunging?”

He looked up, relieved yet again that Viktor had understood what was inside of him better than he did. “Yes, Viktor. But maybe lunging is like… a one and three quarters.”

“I understand. Okay, thank you, Yuri. I’m going to take a few more fences and try out your way. Tell me if I’m doing something wrong or if you see how I can do it better.”

He cringed. “Yes, Viktor.”

“You don’t like that. Tell me why.”

“What if I tell you something wrong?”

“Do you know how to ride?”

“Yes, Viktor.”

“How well? Don’t give me your opinions. Just facts.”

“I was at the upper levels when I quit.”

“Would you ever say something that you don’t believe is correct and beneficial or that’s beyond your knowledge?”

“No, Viktor.”

“Will I take any advice that I believe is faulty or dangerous?”

“No, Viktor.”

“So why are you worried now?”

“I—I’m okay.” He sucked in a deep breath and let it out. “Thank you, Viktor.”

“That’s my good, Yuri.”

“Um, raising your stirrups a hole, maybe two, might help too. The more compact your fold is, the more balanced you are.”

“More like a jockey?”
“Yes, Viktor.”

“Come here, zolotse.”

He came over, and Viktor caressed his face. “I’m so proud of you.” He dropped his feet from the irons. “Correct my stirrups.”

“Yes, Viktor.” He pulled the leather to expose the buckle from under the flap that covers it to protect the rider from rubbing on it. “One hole or two?”

“I gave you a result to achieve, not a way to do it. Correct it as you see fit.”

His mouth twisted to the side; his eyes narrowed as he looked up. “You certainly didn’t lie about not going easy on me.” Yanking the free end of the leather up, he popped the buckle loose.

Satisfaction stretched on Viktor’s face. “I’m glad you’ve grasped one thing at least.”

He started to slip the peg into the first hole up then closed his eyes and slid it up another hole and pulled the buckle back into place and moved to do the other side the same.

Viktor put his feet back in the stirrups and played with the strange adjustment, rising up and down in the saddle.

“How does it feel? It’s partly personal preference, so lower can work too.”

“Preferences are often just what you’re used to. I’m sure I’ll adjust to this. Well done, Yuri.”

Viktor trotted him out, taking a few laps around the ring to adjust to the shorter stirrups and control the lift out of the saddle that had him rising higher than usual. “Mark my rhythm again. I’m taking him down this line.” He pointed to the line over the Russian nesting dolls, and Yuri started up his beat.

A few lines later and Viktor was riding over, his smile beaming its brightest. “Amazing. Absolutely amazing. That felt incredible, and he went so well. It wasn’t quite like on Toska, but it’s the closest we’ve ever come to that. How did we look?”

“Incredible. Your leg was perfect.”

“Thank you, Yuri. I’m so proud of you, and you’re proud of yourself, yes?”

“Yes, Viktor.”

“Ah, I want to give you a hug, but someone’s coming.” He jumped down and handed his reins to Yuri.

Phichit came up to the rail waving to Yuri as he stopped in front of Viktor. “Wow, he’s looking great. Looks like Toska’s finally got his successor.”

“Possibly. Did you need something?” He smiled politely.

“Yeah, I wanted to ask if you were planning on cooking yourself or if you were going to cater this one.”

“I’ll cook myself. The usual cookout fare is fine. Don’t worry about getting the supplies. Just make a list of anything we’ll need and how much, and I’ll send Yuri out for them.”
“Okay, great. I just wanted to check before I called someone.”

“Thank you for checking, though texting is a little faster and saves you a trip over here.” Viktor smiled as sweetly as one should for expressing standard concern.

Phichit returned the smile. “You’re right. I’ll do that next time.”

“Of course. Thank you, Phichit.”

They spent the rest of the morning with Yuri alternating between clapping out a rhythm for Viktor and counting it out whenever his hands or his voice grew tired until it was time to head back up the hill for lunch.

Yuri started up the katsudon in the kitchen while Viktor attended to the business side of his stable at his laptop on the kitchen table.

“Have you made any plans for the next few months?”

“Um, other than here? No, Viktor.”

“Are you interested in joining me at shows to work as my groom there? We didn’t discuss this when you were hired, so it’s up to you if you’d like to. I can bring Georgi if you’d prefer.”

His head snapped up from stirring the onions. “No, I’ll go!”

The clicking of the keys halted as Viktor looked up with a smile.

“Um, I mean. Yes, Viktor. I’ll go with you.”

“Excellent. I, of course, cover all travel expenses and meals and you get double your rate for hours worked on the road.”

“You don’t have to pay me more. You already pay me more than enough.”

“I will pay you exactly as I would pay anyone else filling that role. Are you asking me to give you preferential treatment?” His professional mask was solidly in place, but the satisfied smirk played in his eyes and his voice.

“You are absurdly good at getting your way.” He frowned and dug at the onions in the pan so they wouldn’t burn.

His smirk broke apart his mask as he resumed typing. “I just sent you an email of dates that I’ll need you.”

“Should I take it as complete, or should I ask you before I make any plans outside of our hours?”

“It’s complete as far as I know, but I like the idea of what you’re offering.” His smirk warmed just a touch.

“Yes, Viktor.”

He scattered the finished bowls with scallions and placed Viktor’s in front of him with a small bow then sat across from him with his own.

Viktor closed his laptop and smiled. “I will never get over how adorable that little bow is when you hand things to me. Thank you, Yuri. It looks delicious.” He took a careful bite of the steaming bowl.
“Wow. This is really good.” He took another bite. “I mean, really, really good. You’re improving so much in every area. I’m so proud of you.” He glanced at his untouched bowl. “Eat, Yuri.”

He put a piece of crispy pork topped with egg and onions to his lips and unlocked his jaw to take a small bite. Sickness flushed through his body, and his chopsticks clattered in his bowl.

“Yuri? What’s wrong?” Viktor leaned forward and pressed a cool hand onto his forehead.

“Do I have to eat it?”

“Yes.”

“Please, Viktor.”

“Go get one of the pillows from the couch.”

“Yes, Viktor.” He returned a moment later with a teal and sage chevroned pillow.

“Put it on the floor at my feet.” He had turned away from the table, so Yuri had room to do so. “Get your bowl and give it to me.”

“Yes, Viktor.” He handed the bowl over, and Viktor handed him his.

“Kneel.” He gestured at the pillow. “Feed me. But,” he put up one finger to pause him, “you can only feed me a bite after you’ve taken one from me first.”

His face crumpled with dry tears. “Please, Viktor. Not this.”

“Are you safewording?”

His hands clenched on his knees. “No, Viktor.”

“Then go ahead.” He held out a bite of katsudon on the end of his chopsticks. “Open your mouth.”

“You won’t eat at all if I don’t, will you?”

“No.”

“Why do you go so far for me?”

He shrugged. “You’re mine. Would I let one of my horses suffer if I had a way to prevent it even if it was uncomfortable or painful to me?”

“No, Viktor.”

“Yes, and you’re not a horse. You’re my Yuri.” The back of his hand stroked his cheek. “Now open up.” He tipped Yuri’s head up with his hand under his chin.

“You come up with the strangest things. I hope you know that.” He opened his mouth, and Viktor filled it.

He smiled. “Strange is good. I can’t rewire your brain with what you already know. Fresh experiences allow me more openings as long as they’re still connecting to the right things. Besides, you gave me the idea for this one yourself last night.” He opened his mouth for Yuri to fill.

“It’s all so chaotic though. I thought being predictable made training easier.”
Viktor passed him another bite. “For some things, but when you’re trying to build trust, working through a variety of experiences together is essential.” He opened his mouth to receive another bite then offered one back. “Besides, it’s not as chaotic as you think. It’s all stemming from two main things I want you to learn.”

Swallowing the lump of food, he held up another bite. “Which are?”

“One is that I believe in you. Far more than you do. I think you’re capable of so much, and I want to see you achieve it.” His lips pulled the katsudon from Yuri’s hand, glistening and wrapping softly around the sticks. He touched Yuri’s face as he swallowed. “The second is one you need to look for yourself.”

“Where do I look?” His lips parted.

“Wherever you find answers.”

He frowned in thought as he brought another bite to Viktor. “What is your favorite food?”

“You know, I don’t really know. I don’t think I’ve ever had a favorite anything other than Toska. I’ve always more enjoyed experiencing a wide variety of things.” He accepted his next bite with his eyes closed into a satisfied smile. His clear eyes refocused on him as he gave him another taste. “But I’m really liking this. Can you make it become my favorite?”

“I don’t… I’ll do my best.”

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Yuri stood in the outdoor arena with Viktor and Yura who was warming up his horse. The afternoon sun was already becoming uncomfortably hot, but the tree-lined rail provided a welcome escape.

Viktor pressed a quick hand to Yuri’s lower back and dropped it. “Tell Yura that my throat is sore and you will be relaying all of my instructions.”

Yuri looked to him, pleading but resigned as he grasped another piece of himself. “You’re brutal. You know that, right?”

He gave a little half-smile as he looked down at him. “I’m certain of it. Be my good little virgin slut, and I’ll give you a taste of just how brutal I can really be tonight.”

He shivered and summoned the voice he needed to be heard clear across a football field. “Yura! Viktor’s throat is sore, so he’s going to have me relay all of his instructions.”

“What?! Hell no! I’m not paying for that!”

“Tell him he can get down and leave then. No Viktor says. Just relay the message.”

“You can get down and leave then.”

“He can not teach, but he can’t make me leave the arena!”

“I wouldn’t be so certain of that. He gets his way. Don’t ever doubt that. And this is his property.” He tensed as he checked Viktor’s reaction to his impromptu outburst.
“Well done, Yuri. Just like that. If you have anything to add at all, do it. Tell him to take the birch oxer a few times. He likes jumping. It might calm him down.”

He took a deep breath and resummed his voice. “Make a circle over the birch oxer and keep it up.”

Yura glowered as he rode over to them. “Pick someone else.” His voice laced with venom as he glared at Yuri.

“Excuse me?” Viktor asked.

“If you really have a sore throat and need someone to relay instructions that’s fine as long as it’s anyone but him.”

Viktor’s eyebrows flicked up then he smiled. “Still pissed about the name? This is who I picked. Take the jump.”

“I don’t give a shit about the stupid name, Vitya.” He smeared the nickname through his defiant anger. “I’m just not going to take instruction from someone like him.”

“Take the jump, Yura.” His voice took on an unmistakably dangerous edge.

“Make me.”

“I have no interest in making you do anything. Your only two choices are to cooperate or leave. I’m preferring the latter, so I wouldn’t recommend using up too many more choices here, or I’ll remove yours altogether and decide for you.”

Yura’s green eyes fixed on Yuri with disgust. “Why him?”

“Why not him?”

“You won’t let me answer that question.” He sneered, seeming satisfied with himself that he got a dig in and left to start his circle for the jump.

“Wow. Sorry, Yuri. He’s really being his whole ass today.”

“It’s fine. I’ve had worse.”

“You’ve given yourself worse. Far worse. I’m still sorry.” He nodded at Yura and Pantera leaping over the oxer. “What’s he doing wrong?”

“Everything. He rides like a rich kid.” He glanced over with a smile at Viktor’s indignant expression. “You’re an exception.”

He laughed. “Okay, do tell, how does one ride like a rich kid?”

“He hasn’t actually learned anything. He’s just been slapped on one expensive babysitter after another, and they make him look halfway decent and collect the ribbons for him. He chose Pantera though, didn’t he?”

“Yes, but how can you tell?”

“He looks frustrated. Pantera’s not a babysitter at all. He’s expecting his ride to go one way, and it’s just not happening, so he’s totally lost on what to do.” He chuckled. “And he looks like a horse a punk teenager would pick.”
Viktor laughed. “He does at that. What would you have him correct first?”

“No jumping until he learns how to ride but his ego won’t be able to take that hit, so lower jumps, and he needs form and rhythm training too. He’s way too aggressive. He’s just flinging himself at the jump.”

“Come on. Let’s lower the line. What are we setting it to?”

He eyed Yura taking another turn at the fence splayed out over his horse’s neck and nearly a whole stride too early. “Eighteen inches.”


He grabbed one of the cups on the next jump in the line. “I thought you liked me soft.”

“For me. Confidence is sexy. You know what you’re doing here. Do it.”

“Yes, Viktor.” He put the pin through the new hole then looked across to him. “I still need you.”

“I’d be devastated if you didn’t.” He smiled gently, and they moved to the next jump. “How are you feeling with this?”

“Um… nervous. Shaky.”

“Color?”

“…Green.”

They finished changing the line, and Yuri ordered Yura to work over the cavaletti while they lowered the oxer as well as he’d been ordered to do by Viktor. They went back to the other side of the rail to avoid the heat in the middle, and Yuri leaned against Viktor’s side for a brief touch.

Viktor grasped his hand to give it a squeeze. “Don’t worry. Yura won’t give you any control over him until you’re ready to take it. That’s why I picked him to start with despite his unpleasantness. He won’t accept anything you’re telling him without a fight unless he agrees. And I won’t let him follow something I think is wrong.”

Yuri righted himself and took a shaky breath. “You want me to teach as much as I can?”

“Yes. I’m here to provide any support you need, but the more you take control, the happier you’ll make me.”

“Yes, Viktor.” He sighed out another deep breath and strengthened his voice. “Yura! Come here.” He glowered at him but trotted over with disdain all over his face. “What?”

“What kind of rider do you want to be?”

“An eventer, duh.” He rolled his eyes. “You’re so—”

“Watch it, Yura.” Viktor’s voice snapped like the crack of a whip making Yura jump slightly.

He glanced at Viktor to regain his strength then looked back to Yura. “What I meant was: Do you want to rely on your horse to carry you through as nothing but a burden, or do you want to be skilled enough to be an effective and equal partner?”
“I want to win.”

“People win both ways. Which way do you want to win?”

He sneered down at him as he tightened the reins to halt Pantera’s bored shifting. “I want to be good. Why are you asking me? Not like you’d be able to teach me that.”

“Knock off that attitude right now, or your lesson is done.” Viktor took a step forward to place himself in front of Yuri. “Yuri is the most competent rider I’ve ever seen, and he’s an excellent teacher. He’s been improving my riding all day. You should consider yourself lucky to be receiving his expertise. I won’t tolerate you disrespecting him. You have no idea how thin the ice you’re skating on is, so I suggest you shut your mouth and listen.”

“Wow. I didn’t expect you to be so stupid. I thought you knew what you were doing, but if you’re taking lessons from him, maybe you’re not as good as you think you are.”

Viktor stepped back to Yuri’s side and smiled. “You overestimate your importance to me. I really have no motive to keep you here at all. I don’t need your money, I have no desire to correct your shitty behavior, and I certainly don’t consider your opinion of me to be worth anything at all. You’re only allowed to be here as long as I tolerate you. So, would you like to learn how to actually be worthy of that horse you love so much, or are you going to leave and continue on as the talentless spoiled little shit you are right now that’s nothing but a burden to those you depend on?” He smiled sweetly as he waited for his answer.

“Fine. I’ll listen.” He rolled his eyes then glared at Yuri again.

“We won’t have this conversation again. The next time will simply be me telling you to get your shit and get out.” He nodded at Yuri to encourage him to take over.

“Um… so, what I was saying before was that right now the only thing you know how to do is pull the reins and kick, and you’re not doing either of those well, and Pantera’s getting frustrated with you. You both have the potential to be great, but you need to drill the basics and learn how to be effective rather than just bullying him while flopping around on his back. It’s going to feel like a step back, but you’ll be a lot stronger for it in the long run. We’re going to start with your form.” He ducked through the slats of the fence and walked up to them, reaching out for the saddle. “First of all, you need shorter stirrups.”

“Don’t touch my horse.” His snarl was quiet but ripped at Yuri’s tenuous grasp of confidence. “I can do it myself.” He yanked the stirrup down and twisted his lip in disgust as he stared down at him, keeping his voice quiet, away from Viktor’s ears. “I don’t want you anywhere near my horse. I’m not as dumb as Viktor. I know better than to trust you.”

He managed to finish Yura’s lesson though his words reverberated in his head since then, rattling his chest like a bass line too deep to notice anything else above it. I know better than to trust you. That made two of them. But did he really mean it with that much accuracy? Viktor reassured him several times that he was an asshole to everyone, but he couldn’t shake the specificity of the way his words cut.

He knelt now on the pillow, naked, waiting for Viktor’s punishment. Viktor had promised its unpleasantness, but he couldn’t stop himself from feeling thrilled at the prospect. It hadn’t yet been a week, but he now craved Viktor’s pain and needed it to drown out everything else inside him. It was the only thing that could.
I know better than to trust you. It summed him up so neatly. So accurately. All the chaotic thoughts in his head suddenly had a clear direction. One simple phrase to gather around and they swelled with their new leader.

The sound of the lock rattled inside him deeper than his own mind, and he breathed a sigh of relief as it shut off and handed his body over to Viktor’s control. Viktor’s firm but soft grasp came at his neck. He sighed with his strength flowing into him and leaned into his hand.

“Come with me.” His hand wrapped around his.

He looked up with a small smile as he rose to his feet. “Yes, Viktor.”

Viktor, wearing a fresh riding outfit, black polo, shiny black boots, and his white breeches, cupped his cheek in his hand. “So beautifully you say that.” He led him to the red velvet couch stretched along the damask wall and sat him down. He took a seat next to him, holding both of his hands.

“We’re first going to discuss our week, both things that went wrong and things that went well, as we will do every week at this time. It’s our chance to make sure we’re on the same page and have dealt with any challenges we’ve faced properly. My behavior is up for discussion here too, so don’t be bashful about telling me things you liked or didn’t like. We’ll then go into the punishment room, and I’ll execute the punishment you’ve earned from the week to purge us of any lingering negative feelings surrounding it and put those sins to rest for good. We’ll then come back here to talk again and reconnect, and we’ll move onto the scene. Questions?”

“No, Viktor.”

“Color?”

“Green.”

“Good. Let me start by saying how impressed with you I am. You’ve given me so much this week. You’ve let me in so much more than I expected and have given so much of yourself to me and that makes me feel absolutely incredible. I’ve never felt anything like this. Not even close. You let me put you back on a horse, and I can’t even begin to comprehend just how painful that was for you. I can only go by what I felt from you which was just overwhelming trust. I’ve inflicted lots of pain, and I’ve never felt that much trust from someone, so I can only imagine that what you endured for me was nearly insurmountable. I don’t know how you even did it.”

“Only because of you. I don’t think anything or anyone else would have gotten me to do that.”

He smiled and lifted his knuckles to kiss them. “See? So utterly perfect. How can you not understand what I feel about you when you say such perfect things? Can’t you imagine what I feel to be told something like that? To be told that I’m so special to you?”

“Maybe. A little. If it was from someone whose opinion of you could matter.”

He flinched and shook his head. “Three,” he whispered flinching harder. “Yuri, why do you hurt me so much by being so cruel to yourself? Why do you insist on hurting what’s precious to me and then forcing me to hurt him further because you’re the one who hurt him? These thoughts you have about yourself are wrong, and they hurt you just as much as they hurt me. I can only hope right now that eventually my punishment will make you cringe away from even the idea of hurting yourself like that as much as I do.” He cupped Yuri’s face between his hands. “You’re precious to me. Your opinion matters to me. You matter to me. Don’t hurt someone so important to me.”
“I’m confused on how to follow that order while also following your order to share my thoughts.”

“Do exactly what you did the other day when I praised you. Present your thoughts to me as just that. Thoughts. Questions. Not judgments of yourself. I’m the judge. I decide what punishments you deserve; not you. I control how much pain you receive and when and how. Your job is to submit to that. Stop trying to punish yourself. I’m in control of that now, and I’ll do a much better job than you have done.”

He laughed lightly. “Cocky much? I’ve got a lot of experience there.”

“Not at all. Punishments aren’t supposed to last. They’re supposed to be quick and help you grow past the incident. You’re absolutely atrocious at punishing yourself by those standards, aren’t you? You haven’t moved past anything.”

He stared down at their hands. “Yes, Viktor. I’m sorry for being sassy.”

He smiled and brushed his cheek up to lift his face back to his. “I like your sassiness. You’re only sassy when you’re feeling comfortable with me. It feels different than typical brat behavior. It feels more like you’re connecting with me rather than challenging my authority or being disrespectful. As long as you’re not disobeying an order with your sassiness, you can assume I’m enjoying it.”

“Yes, Viktor.”

“Alright, let’s talk about the big one this week: Your submission to Liliya during my hours. I really do hate to punish you for that one because it stemmed from ignorance, not defiance, but it was just such a painful thing for me that it overrides that distinction. I wouldn’t be able to move past it without being assured of your complete education on just how important that is to me. The betrayal of our time together was only half of it. I rely on the safety I feel in having earned your trust and your submission, and if I feel like those are things you could hand to anyone for the pettiest of reasons, then they’re not something I can rely on.”

“Yes, Viktor. I think I can understand that one.”

“I need you to completely understand it. If I feel unsafe with you, like what we have is flimsy and not built on anything substantial, I’ll end it. That’s not something I’m capable of enduring. Especially not with you. The more you make me feel that what you give me is something precious to you and something you protect as much as I do, the more confident in us I’ll feel.”

“Is that why you’ve been trying to get me to act confident when we’re around others?”

“I want you confident always. Submission isn’t the opposite of confidence. I want you to have confidence in yourself, in your submission, and in me. You don’t have confidence anywhere right now. It feels unsteady with you because of that. You’re not sure of anything even when I think some things should be quite apparent to you by now.”

“Like what?”

“Am I confusing? Am I unclear in my signals and commands?”

“No, Viktor. Not at all.”

“So, what are you picking up from me on how I feel about you?”

He blushed and ducked his head. “You… you like me.”
He laughed and lifted his eyes back up to his. “That’s one way to put it if you’d like to claim the title of King of the Understatements. Yes, I do like you. You should be able to say much more than that with confidence. See how that works? You have no confidence in yourself, so you can’t understand me. Nothing I say gets through in there. You have your mind locked far away from me where I can’t reach it, and I have to rely on your pathetically inaccurate relay of my messages to get anything to you. It’s very frustrating on my end. It feels a bit like I’m screaming at a brick wall.”

“I’m sorry, Viktor.”

“It’s okay. That one doesn’t require an apology. I don’t expect you to just hand everything to me so easily within days of meeting me. You’ve given me far more than what I expected. I’m just telling you, so you know the direction you have to move in. I want full access to not just your body but your mind as well, and as long as we’re moving in that direction, I’m satisfied.”

“Yes, Viktor.”

“Also, you’re allowed to be nice to people. I saw you worry over calling Jake sir, but there was no need for that. That’s not submission. That’s a general nicety. Even if you’d said you begged someone, I would have taken it in the more lighthearted way that’s not a serious submission. It’s only because I know Liliya as I do that I knew what you did went far beyond something light. You weren’t asking Liliya for a favor, you were opening yourself up to accept her judgment of what you’re worth and begging her to find you worthy enough of her fulfillment of your needs. That’s my job.”

“Yes, Viktor.”

“I have my own hard limits, and the biggest one is infidelity of any sort. That may sound strange to you considering how okay I am with our lack of commitment outside of our hours but that’s just the way I see it. We’ve made a commitment to each other during these hours, and I promise I will never break that for a single second. I expect the same from you. That’s why you must be on time and why I won’t tolerate you making yourself vulnerable to anyone else.”

“How? I—I am vulnerable to other people’s opinions of me. I always have been. I’m… I think that I’m mentally weak.”

His praising smile spread slowly on his face. “Yes, Yuri. I’m so proud of you. You gave me an actual thought there without a judgment even though you wanted to. You’re not weak. Nothing about you is weak. You’re lost; not weak. You’re hurt; not weak. It takes a lot of strength to battle your mind as you do and look how much you’ve won this week. How many times did your mind tell you to run?”

He laughed with a tinge of bitterness. “I don’t know. Dozens.”

His smile gathered a bit of water at the corners of his eyes as it reached them. “You battled your mind that much to stay by my side in spite of everything I was putting you through?”

“Yeah… I guess so. Yes, Viktor.”

He tugged him in for a soft kiss on his cheek. “And here you are. You won every single battle. I’m proud of you and so overwhelmed by how much you did for me. Thank you, Yuri.”

“I needed your help though. I couldn’t have done any of it without you.”

He sighed and kissed his other cheek. “Even better. But you say that as if you still think it’s a weakness to submit; to need someone. As if saying you need me isn’t a gift. I hate this idea that
“we’re somehow better if we’re totally independent and alone. As if not needing anything or anyone makes us strong. It makes us weak. Maybe that’s why you feel so weak. You’re dealing with your pain all alone so weakness is all you can feel because it’s draining you. Find strength and shelter in me, and I’ll look for mine in you, and maybe then we both won’t feel so vulnerable to the world.”

“You feel vulnerable?”

“I’ve been alone for a long time. I speak from experience on what that does. I remember feeling safe and strong, and it was when energy flowed freely between me and the people I loved, supporting each other and being supported. Every year away from that, I feel more vulnerable. Don’t you remember what that felt like growing up in such a loving family?”

“Not really. I’ve never been good at relying on people, especially not when I’m upset. I was lucky enough to have great parents and a big sister who was always looking out for me along with many others but… I don’t know. I just couldn’t accept their help very well. My first instinct is always to run away and hide.”

He nodded slowly, processing this information. “What about me? Do you have any comments on our week together?”

“Um… It was a lot. So much. Too much.”

“What specifically was too much?”

“You give me too much. A car. You gave me a car.”

He smiled. “Still not over that one, huh?”

“No! How could I be? You gave me a fucking car! You knew me for a day, and you gave me a car.”

“It was a great day.” He smiled and tickled his inner thigh when his face screwed up into one of his expressions that conveyed nothing but the confusion on what his response actually was. “Would it help if I told you that I am so grotesquely rich that had no more impact on my bank account than a cup of coffee would?”

His face twisted further into his confused response. “No? I don’t know. It’s a car!”

“And I have more money than I know what to do with, so whenever I see something I don’t like that could be effectively solved with my money, I do it. I didn’t like you driving around in a death trap, and the equivalent cost of a cup of coffee for your safety and my piece of mind was a no-brainer.”

“I still didn’t like it.”

He sighed. “Will it make you feel better if I make you feel less special here? I wrote a bigger check than the cost of that car to help get medicine, food, and education to people in poverty-stricken areas that very day, and I will again next month and the month after and that’s not the only cause I support. Hell, I dropped over a million dollars on a hay farm.”

He peeked up from his pout. “Maybe.”

“Don’t begrudge me having a conscience here. I enjoy my lifestyle, but I’m not going to go to my grave having hoarded every penny I can or blown it all on strippers and coke. I’d like to do something more than that with my life. Getting you a car was just a symptom of that desire and not because I see you as a charity case. I just didn’t like it, and I could fix it easily so why wouldn’t I? Wouldn’t you?”
“Yeah… maybe… I guess that sounds… reasonable. I would feel like a jackass if I could help someone that easily and didn’t.”

“Exactly. You really want me to feel like a jackass and not help you when I’m both fully capable of it and have a strong desire to do so?”

He whined. “But it’s a car.”

Viktor mock whined right back and poked his side. “But it’s my humanity.” He laughed as Yuri squirmed under his fingers on his ribs. “Is a car really more important than that? Who’s being materialistic here? The rich boy or the one who wants to guilt me for valuing my humanity over money?”

He buried his face in his hands muffling a sobbing, defeated laugh. “You’re no fair at all. You don’t just go for the kill. You go for utter decimation.”

“I told you I was brutal.” He kissed his knuckles on both hands and dropped their joined hands back in his lap. “What else?”

“Um… nothing else really. You’re intense and relentless and brutal and… I liked it.”

He smiled. “What did you like the most?” The smile drew tight, and he cocked an eyebrow. “I mean other than the pain.”

“I liked… you. You’re not who I expected you to be. I liked getting to see you like this and the moments when you… opened up a little. I liked that moment in Jake’s office when you made me feel like I was actually comforting you and before that too in the arena.”

“You were. That was one of my favorite moments too. It was one of the few times you offered something and I felt like it was offered just because you wanted to. Nothing more. Nothing less. You respected my limits and didn’t make me rebuff you in such a tender moment. And it was so incredibly sweet and made me feel truly comforted and connected with you. Can we have more moments like that?”

“I hope so. I think so.” He frowned and bit his lip. “Yes, Viktor.”

He pulled him into his arms. “Thank you, Yuri.”

Viktor released him with a kiss on his cheek. “Onto the punishment you’ve earned. We discussed the big one already and your cruelness to yourself. Overall you did very well with only minor defiance of my orders, and I’m so proud of you that I hate to punish you, but it’s important for you to learn this, and I hope with time the punishments decrease to the point of not needing to give you any at all.

“The main thing you need to work on is not accepting your first impulsive response that stems from fear. You’ll feel the fear, I’m sure, for a while still, but you need to pause when you feel it and consider which of the voices you want to obey: your fear’s or mine?”

“I understand that, but it’s so hard. It’s so strong and so hard to fight.”

“I know and look how many times you won against it. And the times you lost a little in the beginning, you only needed a bit of my help to overcome it. Rely on me more, and that fear won’t stand a chance. Not with both of us against it.” He brushed the back of his fingers over his cheek and settled his hand around his neck. “It hurts me when you choose anything over me. I want to be your first and only choice. I want to be your support and your comfort. Turn to me; accept me. Don’t reject me.”
“I’ll… try. It’s… stronger than you know.”

“And we’re stronger than you know.” He closed his eyes and kissed his forehead. “Come on.”

He led him to a room in the alcove opposite the jade room. It was bare. Dingy gray walls and nothing but an exposed lightbulb in the center of the room hanging from a cord over a sawhorse padded with a few coarsely woven blankets. A basic tub sink on the back wall, and a small desk with a chair in the far corner. The desk held two bowls on each side. One wooden and the other—the only thing that looked like it belonged in Viktor’s house—made of crystal, one half hidden in the dark corners, the other shattering rainbows in the light.

“First of all, no ‘Yes, Viktor’ in here. I’ll try to avoid any questions requiring a yes answer, but if I can’t, simply say yes or nod. Sit down at the desk, both feet flat on the floor and back straight.”

He took a seat on the roughly sanded wooden chair with his heart racing with the uncertainty of what to expect. An oddly shaped leather belt laid between the two bowls. With the end too fat to fit through the buckle, it was clearly designed for use as a tool rather than something to wear. One basic spiral bound notebook and another leather journal sat on the desk’s edge.

Viktor placed his phone down next to him. “This is the punishment I’m giving you and the reasons why. Take the notebook and for all the ones you accept as fair and just, write a line in the book with, ‘I hurt Viktor by,’ and follow that up with what you have done. Do you have any questions?”

He looked over the phone, tapping it to keep the light on when it started to dim. “It’s… shorter than I expected. I messed up a lot more than this.”

“Messing up and doing something requiring punishment are two different things.”

“But… if I made a mistake, I should be punished for it, right? What about me being late? You expected me to be there and I failed you.”

“You’re already making up that time to me in a way I see fit. I decide the punishment, Yuri. Not you. Your only choice is to accept what I’ve given or end this.”

“You’re too nice to me.”

“Hardly. You yourself say that I’m brutal, and I pushed you to your breaking point more than once. Once I even pushed you over your breaking point. I’m not holding back in that regard. If you’re looking for a Dom who will bully you and just use brute force for every little infraction, I’m not the Dom for you. That might very well be the kind of Dom you want, but I’m the Dom you need.”

“I don’t want a different Dom.”

“Then don’t try to make me something I’m not. I don’t bend to you; you bend to me. It’s not always comfortable, and every time you feel that discomfort, you start poking at me trying to make me bend
to what will make you feel comfortable. That’s not the way this is going to work. You need to start trying to change yourself when you feel that discomfort.”

He cringed. “Yes, V—Yes. I get it. I’m sorry. I’ll try to do that.”

“Good. Go ahead.” He touched his finger to the sensor on the phone to turn it back on.

He turned back to the spiral bound notebook and copied the first line.

*I hurt Viktor by failing to trust his assessment of my capabilities and replying to an order with “I can’t.”*

*I hurt Viktor by deciding that I know more than he does about his opinions and arguing with his answer to a question I asked.*

*I hurt Viktor by continuing to think I knew more than he did on his opinions and continued arguing even after I had been corrected.* He sounded so egotistical here, and it was hard to imagine himself that way, but that was really what he’d done. He cringed and sank into the chair as he started the next line.

Viktor jabbed him in his side with his finger making him yelp back into his straight posture. “Don’t cower from the pain. Take it.”

His side ached with a dull throb that he wanted to rub away, but he moved his pen instead.

*I hurt Viktor by deciding that my way of doing things was superior to his and performed an order the way I wanted rather than the way he wanted.* His chest ached at the memory of that specific screw up, and he had to fight the impulse to flinch back from it again.

*I hurt Viktor by rejecting him and his control over me, preferring my own control and rejecting his order.* His eyes closed with pain for a moment before he moved onto the next.

*I hurt Viktor by being cruel to someone he cares about and—* His pen jittered on the paper, and he had to wait to get his shaking under control enough to continue. *Saying his opinions are worthless, saying he couldn’t possibly matter to Viktor, saying Viktor is wrong to value him and forced Viktor to hurt someone he wants to protect.* He wanted to apologize to ease the pain, but he pressed on instead.

*I hurt Viktor by stealing away a gift I gave to him and giving it to someone else.* A tear rolled down his cheek as he sat the pen back down.

“Good, Yuri. Are you unclear at all about how I see and feel your sins?”

“No, Viktor.”

“Open the drawer. You’ll find some leather cleaning supplies. I want you to clean my belt while reading that list out loud until you’re done. Use the water in the bowl. Make sure you’re feeling the pain you caused me while you do this.”

He took the tools from the drawer and slid the wooden bowl closer that was filled with water and began reading aloud as he polished the brown leather belt until it gleamed in the dim light. Polishing the belt with Viktor’s pain, his chest ached harder with each dip of his sponge into the water, his heart clenching tighter as he squeezed the sponge in his fist to remove the excess water that dripped through his fingers. He inspected the belt for any missed spots the best he could, and when he was satisfied that he’d done enough to satisfy Viktor, he laid it on the table and waited for his next
instructions.

“Now, if you’ve fully accepted your punishment and you understand what you did wrong, bring the belt to me and present your body to me over the sawhorse. Rip out the paper from the notebook and bring it with you.”

He tore out the paper and handed Viktor the belt and bent forward over the rough blankets itching at his skin and waited, trembling as he looked over the paper. He’d hurt him so much.

Viktor inspected his work on the belt then wrapped the narrow end around his hand leaving the fatter end to hang from his tightened fist. His hand touched down on Yuri’s back making him startle at the sudden, gentle touch. “Don’t move.” His hand pressed firmer into his back as he nudged his feet out to spread them wider and take away his closed off, protective stance. “Read each item on the list, pausing only long enough for me to deliver the punishment between each one. Focus on what you’re doing. Feel what it is that I’m giving you. I’m sharing with you what you made me feel by committing these sins. Do I enjoy pain, Yuri?”

“No, Viktor.”

“Is it your right to give me pain by refusing the role you’ve willingly taken on?”

“No, Viktor.”

“You’re accepting back the pain that you gave me as I felt it, not as you would. If you accept this, say, ‘I accept your punishment.’ “

His whole body trembled with the fear of anticipation. “I accept your punishment.”

“Start reading.”

“I hurt Viktor by failing to trust his assessment of my capabilities and replying to an order with, ‘I can’t.’ “

The belt cracked down sharply on his ass but not nearly as hard as he expected. It barely hurt at all beyond the initial sting.

“Next. Don’t make me wait for you.”

“I hurt Viktor by deciding that I know more than he does about his opinions and arguing with his answer to a question I asked.”

Another slap in a spot just next to the first.

“Feel what you are saying. Don’t hide from that pain by focusing on the one on your ass.”

“I hurt Viktor by continuing to think I knew more than he did on his opinions and continued arguing even after I had been corrected.”

Two more stings on two new spots on his ass, and his heart flinched in response.

“I hurt Viktor by deciding that my way of doing things was superior to his and performed an order the way I wanted rather than the way he wanted.” The sting of pain hit before his belt cracked down on the other side of his ass and fresh tears rose to his eyes.

“I hurt Viktor by rejecting him and his control over me, preferring my own control and rejecting his order.” Who did he think he was? Rejecting Viktor? Finding his opinions worth more than his?
Preferring his own shitty control to Viktor’s expert one? The questions hurt more than the three new stinging touches each over a fresh patch of skin. A tear dropped onto the page.

“I hurt Viktor by being cruel to someone he cares about and saying his opinions are worthless, saying he couldn’t possibly matter to Viktor, saying Viktor is wrong to value him and forced Viktor to hurt someone he wants to protect.” Even this, accepting his punishment, was hurting Viktor further. Forcing him to punish him when he didn’t want to just because he couldn’t do what he’d agreed to do. The tears fell down his cheeks. “I’m sorry, Viktor. I’m sorry.”

“Keep reading.”

“I hurt Viktor by stealing away a gift I gave to him and giving it to someone else.” The force didn’t increase, but the cracks from the belt struck all the way into his heart. He didn’t just do that once. He did it by small degrees every time he failed to obey. He’d agreed to give himself over to him, and he kept trying to steal himself back. Why? His body rattled with his sobs as Viktor’s hands smoothed over his stinging flesh and kissed every spot he had touched with his belt.

“Thank you, Yuri. You did so well for me.”

“Why are you thanking me?” His chest squeezed tighter. “I made you do that, and you didn’t want to. I hurt you over and over because I couldn’t do what I agreed to.”

(22) Viktor pulled him up from the sawhorse and into his arms. “You’re right on both counts, but you did exactly what you need to do to make it up to me.”

“You didn’t punish me for making you punish me though. How do I make that one up? And you didn’t punish me nearly enough. I hurt you so many times.” He had the audacity to bury into him deeper to try to relieve the pain he well deserved, and Viktor responded by holding him tighter.

“What did you learn from this?” He softly shushed his deepening sobs.

“I kept rejecting you and stealing back what I’d given you every time I disobeyed or argued. I’m so sorry.”

“Good, Yuri. And now you’ve made up for making me punish you. As long as you’ve learned what you were supposed to, it was worth it.”

“I didn’t do enough. I’m so sorry. Please let me do more.”

“You’ve done enough. Don’t forget the other side of accepting my punishment. I’ve given all that I think you deserve. It’s time to let the rest go.”

“It still hurts.”

“I know it does, but that’s only because you’re refusing to let go. I don’t want to dwell on any past hurts, so you have to let this go.”

“How? I don’t know how.” He coughed away the choking sobs.

He wrapped his arms tighter until he had a solid hold on each of his shoulders and started squeezing them in an alternating rhythm the same way they used little alternating pressures on a bit to ease a horse into submission. “What do you feel the most right now?”

“It hurts. My chest. It hurts so much.”
“Why does it hurt?”

“I hurt you. I took your pain. I made you feel this bad.”

“Do you really think I was hurting like this? You took my pain, yes, but that was done the moment the sting on your ass went away. What you’re feeling now is your pain. This is your reaction. What is causing such a violent reaction in you?” His hands kept up the steadying rhythm back and forth across each shoulder.

“I failed you.”

“What did I say about your performance this week on the couch?”

“You—you said you were proud of me. That I did better than you expected.”

“Yes, and now you’ve come to the conclusion that you’ve failed me. Do I feel like you have failed me?”

“You said I did when I messed up the phone call.”

He winced. “Ah, I did, didn’t I? But that was just one little moment. I certainly wasn’t speaking about you overall. It was one little moment of poor behavior that only happened because you didn’t fully understand. It’s done, and you’ve made up for it completely. It’s not a shining memory, but it shouldn’t be a painful one either. It’s now just a lesson you have learned. And I learned something just now too. I’m making a note to never use that phrase with you again. You can’t fixate on that one moment. We’ve had so many together this week. How many times did I say ‘good’ or that I was proud of you or happy with you?”

“I don’t know. Hundreds.”

“Yes, and you’re fixating on the few times I was less than happy with you and making judgments on yourself from extremely limited and biased data. That is exactly why you’re not to be trusted when it comes to matters of yourself. Do I think you have failed me?” His hands pulsed as steady as his heartbeat and his own heartbeat slowed with each pulse.

“No. No, Viktor.”

“That’s right. Far, far from it. I’m absolutely thrilled with you. I’m practically floating with how happy I am with you. You don’t know how to let go because you don’t focus on the right things. What just happened?”

“You punished me.”

“Focus on you. What did you do?”

“I… accepted your punishment.”

“Yes. And before that?”

“I talked with you on the couch.”

“Was it a pleasant talk?”

“Most of it was.”

“What was unpleasant?”
“I messed up and made you give me more punishment.”

“What else?”

“You made me admit that I was being unreasonable about the car. I still can’t believe how you did that one.”

He chuckled. “I’m rather proud of myself for that. Anything else that was negative?”

“No, Viktor.”

“Good. Now tell me what was enjoyable.”

“I held your hands… I like it when you touch me. Um, just talking to you is nice. I… had your attention the whole time. I… I earned your praise. Lots of it.”

“Yes, good, Yuri. Anything else? It’s okay to change your focus here to anything you enjoyed.”

“You gave me good advice and helped me clarify some things to help me better please you. I don’t know what else to say, but I just liked talking to you.”

“Did you feel closer to me during that?”

He nodded.

“So, we had an enjoyable, fulfilling, and educational conversation that bonded us deeper. And then what happened?”

“I accepted your punishment.” A calmness took control of the raging emotions inside him and held them in a soft frame, taking the shock out, making them into something he knew how to ride.

“You did everything exactly as I said?”

He nodded.

“So, you’ve pleased me then?”

Sighing, he nodded as the motion inside him halted.

“Good, Yuri. Just like that. And what’s happening right now?”

“You’re holding me.”

“And how does that feel?”

“Safe. Warm. I can hear your heartbeat and feel your hands, and it’s relaxing.”

“Am I giving you myself right now?”

He nodded.

“Why?”

“Because you want to.”

“Why do I want to?”
“Because… because it feels good for you… to be with me. When I’m accepting you.”

“Yes, Yuri.” He gave a few more squeezes then kissed his head and pulled back. “Do you have anything else to say on your sins this week or my punishment? This is your last chance to bring them up. Once we’re done here, we’re done with them. The only thing I expect you to hold onto from this is your lessons. I expect everything else to be left here.”

He twisted to examine his unmarked ass. “You didn’t hit me very hard.”

He put his hand on his face, watching his eyes with sincerity. “I will never leave a mark on you out of anger or hurt feelings. The physical pain you felt was symbolic and was used to drive my psychological points. I love the bruises on you, and I hope you grow to love them too. I’m not going to leave you with any that have this bad pain lingering in them.”

One side of his face turned into a pout. “How do you always make everything right?”

“I devote as much care and attention to this as I do my horses. Whatever level of performance you’d expect from me there, you should expect the same from me here. Anything else?”

“No, Viktor.”

Viktor directed him to the desk to write down what he had learned in the leather journal. When he finished, he was directed to pull out two lighters from the drawer and handed one to Viktor and kept the other.

Placing the paper containing his sins into the crystal bowl, they each took a side, touching their fire to it. Yuri watched as the fire came to life inside the sparkling bowl, living solely to purify his sins with its heat.

His eyes fixed on the sight that drove strange, steady emotions into him that he had never felt before, heated and vibrant but peaceful. The paper burned to ash, and the purifying flames went out from the bowl but grew inside him.

He wiped the belt once on each side with a fresh sponge dampened in the bowl of water, pressing his weight over his arm to wipe away his sins and the pain he’d put into it. He placed it back on the top of the desk then washed the ash from the crystal bowl with the bowl of water then took it to the sink and poured it out. Returning the bowls each to their corners with a swipe of a towel, every trace of his sins wiped clean. Viktor led him out of the room, locking it away.

He settled him back into his arms on the couch, his hand brushing over his forehead with his kisses. “How do you feel?”

“I… don’t know. I’ve never felt anything like this.”

“Good. You did everything perfectly, and I’m so proud of you. Thank you for accepting my punishment so we can begin a new week together with our bond refreshed and strengthened.”

Viktor snuggled him closer and let them sit quietly for a moment before he started listing off every little thing he could think of that he enjoyed about their week together and encouraged him to do the same. Viktor’s list was ridiculously long, and he felt bad that he wasn’t able to give as much detail as Viktor did, but Viktor didn’t seem to mind at all, instead only beaming brighter with each thing he said. He made a note to pay closer attention next week so he’d have more to say. By the end, they were holding each other tighter through laughter and smiles. Watching his brilliant eyes, his smile widened as he thought of one more thing to say.
“I loved being punished.”

Viktor laughed and rolled his eyes. “Of course, you did.”

“No, not like that. That pain was horrible but… after. With the fire and the water and the ritual of it all and how I felt after.”

“Do you enjoy rituals?”

“Maybe? I guess so. I’ve always enjoyed the cultural rituals growing up, and when I’m stressed… I like doing drills and stuff like that. I never really considered them being rituals, but what I felt after the punishment was like an intense version of what I feel doing the repetitive drills. I never got bored with all of the circles in dressage when a lot of the other riders complained about them. I find them soothing.”

He nodded. “You find comfort in using symbols to express yourself and performing tasks you know you can succeed at because you know what to expect?”

“Yes, Viktor. I think that sounds right.”

“That’s excellent to know. I’ve never been big into rituals, generally favoring fresh experiences myself, but I’m more than happy to work on developing some for you and expanding the ones we have. When do you feel that rituals would be the most helpful to you?”

“Um, I really like kneeling in the mornings and the little ritual exchange we’ve been doing there. Um, when I’m stressed. I don’t know what exactly to do there—”

“Don’t worry about that. I’ll figure out the what.”

“Right. Um, so when I’m stressed, I think the hugging is nice, but we can’t always do that so maybe something we could do that wouldn’t be super weird in front of others?”

He smiled. “Right. I’ll think on that one.”

“And um… maybe when we say goodnight. I’ve been feeling good when I leave but a little off-balance, and it’s probably just me adjusting to this still, but it might be nice overall.”

“Good. Give me a little time to think these over, and I’ll come up with something for you.”

He smiled. “Thank you, Viktor.” He blushed and glanced down before returning his gaze to his eyes. “You’re so sweet.” The slight gasp and blush on Viktor’s cheeks along with his bewildered smile inspired his next question spoken with a slight crease between his brows. “Has anyone ever told you that?”

“No. Not since I was a kid.”

“Really? That’s… hard to believe. You’re as sweet as you are brutal.”

He laughed and pulled his face closer for his kisses with his eyes looking a bit watery. “I’m glad I got to hear that from you.” He left a few more kisses on his cheeks then released him. “Are you ready for my brutal side?”

“Yes, Viktor.” He moaned lightly at the words and the promise.

He chuckled and nuzzled in a kiss to his neck. “Good.”
He brought him over to the big X on the side of the room and chained him to it at his wrists and his feet with iron shackles with his back exposed to Viktor’s whim. “Comfortable?”

“Yes, Viktor.”

“Good. I’m going to play with my whips today. Color?”

“Green. Please.”

His hands melted shivery paths along the back of his body before leaving him in excruciating anticipation. He returned, his flogger tickling his thighs.

“Let’s make you pretty for the party.”

***
The artist this time is me again.

Spotify
22. It's Alright by Fractures
Chapter 12

Chapter Summary

Viktor reveals his deepest desires.

Chapter Notes

Nudity warning on the art! The first artwork is safeish. Just lingerie levels of undress. The one below that is definitely NSFW! As always, they're at the end of the chapter so just stop when you hit them. Thank you, Clarinda, for two beautiful works this time!

Also, I did not put all of the kinks depicted at the party in the tags as most of them are relatively brief mentions and I'd rather leave the tags for what the characters participate in. If you want a full list of the kinks depicted at the party, scroll to the end notes. I'll put them in there.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Yuri stood in the shower off Viktor’s bedroom as Viktor stripped him of every skin cell that had anything but the utmost commitment to being a part of him. He wasn’t certain of everything he was doing, but Viktor had mentioned something about acid and the grit in the potion was backed up with the sandpaper gloves Viktor had working vigorously over his body. This was after applying and rinsing and applying again various concoctions over a ridiculous amount of time rather than doing another scene during his promised hour. Viktor promised he’d satisfy that need later, which he didn’t doubt, but he couldn’t stop the itch building inside him that Viktor’s scrubbing couldn’t take away.

It was a strange kind of sensation bordering on pain, not altogether unpleasant especially when Viktor went over his bruises without any restraint, but he needed something deeper like what Viktor had given him last night.

He looked down at the bruises on his chest, mottled, fading ones from earlier in the week lying behind freshly cut welts of garnet drawn by the thin dressage whip. Between the welts and his first bruises, lines the color of a ripe fig formed a V on one pec and an N on the other. They were mirrored on his on his shoulder blades. The lines swooped gracefully over his skin, formed with Viktor’s skill and his desire to make what was his beautiful. Yuri would swear that the marks passed all the way through him to meet in the center of his chest.

He’d spent forever in front of the mirror last night looking at them rather than sleeping as he should, but he didn’t feel tired in the morning at all. He buzzed with electricity that fired off deep waves of pleasure any time he was reminded of their presence. Viktor made sure he couldn’t forget.

He was typically pretty handsy with him, but today was on an entirely different level. Every chance he could get, Viktor was hugging him around the waist from behind, his finger tracing his marks. They almost got caught more than once, but Viktor had been able to cover it by walking past him to get something as if that was his mission the whole time and just happened to pass a little too closely.
Two sides of himself battled for his relief and disappointment each time. The marks cried out on behalf of disappointment, wanting to scream openly that he was Viktor’s. He was nearly a helpless mess from the battle, but simple logic won out in the end. The bruises were temporary. They would fade in a few days. No sense in laying claim to a state that couldn’t last.

Viktor stripped his body barer than naked until he was satisfied that there was nothing left to be removed. After slathering him in a richer version of his lotion, he sent him out to wait for him to finish in the shower himself. With nothing to do but wait with a towel around his waist, he looked around Viktor’s room again. His eyes landed on the picture on the top shelf.

He doubted it would be considered an intrusion to look at it as he had been invited in, and it was in plain sight, but something about its location being so high up made it seem like something in hiding. Or at least partially so. And why, for all his talk about framing pictures, did he have only one? A man like Viktor should have so many people in his life he’d have a hard time finding places for them all, but from what he’d said and what he was seeing, Viktor’s life was almost as sparse as his; just with a fancier shell. Why?

He could easily get just about anyone he wanted (even sex expert Christophe Giacometti agreed), so why did he say he was so alone for so long? He tried to think of a single logical answer for that but came up with nothing other than he wanted to be.

If that were true, why did he seem so sad about it, and why was he the one he had consuming his time now? Every time he inched closer to the bookshelf, his heart raced like he was doing something illicit and he’d turn back away. After a few minutes of vacillation, he sat down on the bed to wait for him rather than satisfy his curiosity.

Viktor came out of the bathroom, his hair dried and styled into his usual swooping fringe, dressed in gray dress pants and a crimson shirt, open at the collar, sleeves rolled up and held in place with gold bands around his arms. The chain of a pocket watch dangled from the breast of a gray vest. He looked like a 1920s businessman just getting off work who was now ready for pleasure.

Yuri had thought he didn’t get any hotter than in his basic riding clothes, but when Viktor’s eyes fixed on him with sudden lust and stalked toward him, his muscles rippling below those rolled up shirt sleeves, Yuri was incapacitated. His mind ripped straight from his body.

His heart raced as Viktor shoved him back onto the bed, his eyes burning as he dropped to kiss his chest. Placing his knee between his legs, he stripped the towel from him, using his knee to push him higher onto the bed, his lips on his neck.

“Viktor?” The question wavered in his breathless throat.

Viktor clamped his hand over Yuri’s mouth as he switched to the other side of his neck then brought his kisses to his chest. Viktor’s free arm slipped in under his waist and held him tight, lifting him off the bed as he inched him higher without pausing his reverent kisses over the initials marked on his chest.

Yuri was already rock hard between them, his body shaking with desire, anticipation, and a hint of fear. What did Viktor plan to do? This was what he wanted, wasn’t it? To have Viktor make the decision for him. Claim him without asking his input because his input was always wrong anyway. He couldn’t make this decision. But if Viktor did…

Viktor moaned and worked his mouth lower, nudging his legs wider apart to give him room. Little helpless sounds dropped muffled from Yuri’s mouth as he let his legs fall open, Viktor’s mouth falling to his thighs, kissing and sucking along the fleshiest part painted deeply with his bruises. His
body pulsed hard with every kiss and cried out yes, Viktor, with every clench. God yes, Viktor! Please hear it. Just do it before it’s over. It’s enough like this.

“Here. My initials. I need them right here.” Viktor switched to his other thigh. “But that means I’d have to restrain myself enough to let these heal and not get too excited and ruin them with more bruises on top. I don’t want to restrain myself. That’s why it’s so hard to do it.”

So, don’t. He couldn’t tell him that with words, but his body might work. He drew his legs wider and rocked his hips toward him. Yes, please, Viktor. Just once.

Viktor got the message and sat back chuckling lightly, heaving to recover his breath and released his hold on his mouth. “Sorry, zolotse. I got a little carried away seeing you in my bed like that.”

Tears drew up to his eyes but stayed contained as he gasped air back into his lungs. “Why did you stop?”

“You’re still not ready for me not to.” His eyes burned bright as he looked between his face and his chest and traveling down to his hardened, dripping cock twitching angrily at the interruption. “You want it like that though, don’t you? Not with me asking but with me taking.”

He wished for Viktor’s hand back over his mouth to hide his soul-bearing whimpers. Not like that would have hidden the shiver of pleasure that ran through him. No sense in hiding anything from him. He knew anyway. Still, the words were hard to speak. “Yes, Viktor.” His face burned hot with his blush.

“God, how perfect you are.” His hand slid down his body to wrap gently around his cock.

Slow drags had him grabbing for the sheets to have anything to help hold him onto the planet.

“So pretty, so smart, so good for me.” He leaned down to his neck covering his whimpering mouth yet again with his hand as he kissed up to his jawline. “So badly you want to be mine. I want to give you what you want, but first, I will give you what you need. My pretty Yuri. I absolutely love those marks on you. You’re beautiful always, but you’re stunning when you look like mine. Yes?” He moved his hand off to allow his reply.

“Ngh! Hai! Yes, Viktor.”

“So perfect.” Dropping down lower, his mouth joined his hand with little licks over his head.

He gasped, arching off the bed, his twisting body searching for any weight to hold him down. “Viktor! Oh my god; I’m going to come.”

“No, you’re not. Not yet. Hold it back and let me play some more.”

“I—I can’t. It feels so—I don’t know how.” Tears built in his eyes as his pleasure rose, threatening his disobedience.

“Clench like you’re waiting to pee, slow your breath and relax your body in an inward sort of pull. Focus on enjoying feeling my hands and mouth on you for as long as you can.” He resumed his licks over his head, curling his tongue to caress under and around the ridge but at a slower pace than before, helping him back off the edge a little.

The very fact that Viktor wanted to help him succeed was nearly enough to throw him over, but he held on, pleasure coursing nearly as intense as Viktor’s pain. He obeyed his instructions the best he could and rode the smooth edge Viktor created, his easy touch giving him what he needed to please
him. Viktor was never against him. Not for a single second. He always wanted him to win.

He wanted more; he wanted less, but he stayed writhing in the middle until Viktor pulled back and went to the closet, leaving him heaving in the agony of incomplete pleasure.

Viktor looked back with a wicked smirk. “Such a good little slut you are. You never look better than when you’re so desperate for me.”

“Are—” He gulped, his body splayed wide open on the bed, acutely vulnerable to anything he wanted from him. “Are you going to frame it?”

Viktor whipped back, his eyes on fire, searching his pocket for his phone. “Can I?”

His chin dipped once. “Yes, Viktor.” He gasped as the words spiked his pleasure right back to where it was with Viktor’s touch on him. “Anything—Anything you want.”

Viktor was firing off shots as he came closer, rearranging him as he liked, occasionally spiking his pleasure again with more hot licks along his cock. “Everything. I want everything.” He flipped him onto his stomach, pulling his hips back over his splayed knees and pushing his upper body down. His hand dragged along his arched spine pulling groans from both of them. He stood back to take more pictures of his ass presented to him for the taking, his cock hanging heavy between his legs, and the initials beaten into his back.

Yuri looked back at his gorgeous face savaged with lust and his cock straining against unforgiving fabric.

“Oh god, Yuri. A picture’s not enough to capture that. You look like fucking perfection.” He reached for the nightstand and pulled out a bottle of lube and poured it over his hole. “I’m going to film you begging for me. Open yourself up and show me how much you want me to take you.”

“Yes, Viktor.” His hand went to his hole, spreading the lube around before working his finger in. He gasped and closed his eyes at the still foreign sensation of penetration. “Yes, Viktor. Anything for you. Anything you want; I want.” His second finger slipped in, and he started grinding into the satisfying stretch, moaning deeply and keeping his eyes fixed on Viktor and his unwavering focus on him. “I want you, Viktor. Please.” His fingers spread apart, opening himself to Viktor’s view.

He groaned and palmed his cock with his free hand, his grip tightening on the phone. “So fucking beautiful. My pretty little slut. You’re my little virgin slut, aren’t you, Yuri?”

“Yes, Viktor.” Pleasure rolled through him to his spreading fingers. “Yours. Please take me. I need you.”

“You don’t even know what it feels like yet you want it so bad.”

“I do. So bad. Please, Viktor. I want to make you feel good. I want to satisfy you. Anything that will make you happy; I want to do. Please use me, Viktor.” He moaned and pushed harder onto his hand. “My body is yours. Please find your pleasure in me. I promise I’ll be your good little slut and let you do whatever you want.” His words tumbled over the cliff: droplets of a waterfall tossed ahead of the body of the river still in place.

Viktor’s breath caught on another deep groan. “Why would you offer that without even knowing what it would be like?”

He gasped, his fingers finding his prostate as he slid a third one in to stroke it while the other two held him open for Viktor. “Because I trust you. Because I know that what you want is to give me
what I need. I need you, Viktor. Please. I’ll be so good for you. I promise.”

“I know you will, precious.” He came closer and stroked his fingertips over Yuri’s heavy cock, putting his phone away. “You’re so perfect. Give me everything, so I can give you everything.”

“I am… What else do I need to give you?”

“Everything.” He gently took hold of his hand and eased him back out of his hole. Flipping him onto his back, he caressed his thigh with the back of his hand. “All of it.”

He nodded, his body dropping back away from the edge. “Not yet then.”

He smiled and swiped his thumb over his lips. “Not yet.” He laid kisses over his initials. “Thank you, Yuri. Those pictures and that video are some of the best gifts I’ve ever received. I’ll treasure them forever.”

“Really?”

“Yes.” He chuckled, his smile pressing to his skin. “You are the hottest person I’ve ever laid eyes on. Eros incarnate.”

“I… I’m not—you really think I’m… hot?” He cringed.

“I have photographic evidence.” He grinned and bit his nipple as he pulled out his phone. He scrolled through the roll, his tongue flicking over his nipple as he searched for what he wanted. He turned the screen to him. Yuri looking at him, his brown eyes wide with unabashed lust, on his knees, his body ready with Viktor’s initials above his hole waiting for his cock to fill him as much as he wanted. “Tell me that’s anything other than sexy. I dare you.”

The view of his initials clear and unreversed in a mirror swelled him with pride and pleasure. “I won’t dare you. You wouldn’t like it.”

He rewarded him with a deep sucking bite to his nipple. “That’s my good Yuri.” He put his phone back in his pocket and left him to cool off on the bed.

He returned a moment later with a hanger draped with leather and lace, a pair of black heels with a red sole, and a small black pouch. “Come here, beautiful.” Viktor tugged him up from the bed and turned his face to him. Holding his eyelid tight, he ran a black pencil around the edge, using his fingers to smudge it as he went. He dabbed a little gold shimmer on the tops of his cheekbones then swiped a light gloss over his lips and wiped his hands off on a tissue. He pulled out a jar of some type of paste and combed it through his hair, slicking it back from his face then pulled back to study him with a smile. “Gorgeous.” He kissed his cheek and zipped the pouch back up. “Put on the stockings, the underwear, and the shoes. I’ll help you with the corset.”

Corset? “Yes, Viktor.”

Viktor left to wash off his hands while he wiped the lube off with the towel. He slipped on the skimpy red underwear trimmed with black lace that left half of his ass still exposed at the bottom and pulled the black stockings up his silky-smooth legs that stopped with a wide band of lace right at the bottom of his ass. They had a bit of a fishnet pattern to them but were lined and comfortable on his skin.

He put on the shoes and stood up to test them out, wobbling on the thin spikes. How did women do this? They made it look so easy. He could barely stand. He took a few wobbling steps around trying to figure out how to make it work without embarrassing Viktor by not even being able to walk.
The only part left to the outfit was a black leather corset with red laces that didn’t look like it would be covering much at all. But if it at least held in his pudgy stomach he could call that a win. Viktor likely picked it for just that reason, so he’d feel more comfortable. Not likely. Of course, he did.

Viktor came back and led him to a wall, holding out his arm for him to use as support which made walking in the heels something close to doable. Viktor slipped a black tube of a shirt on him that only covered his middle then opened the gold buckles at the front of the corset and undid the gold buttons holding it together. He wrapped it around over the liner and hooked him into it with the gold buttons then did up the buckles that came from black velvet straps of varying thicknesses crisscrossing in all directions in an artistic grab around his waist.

Turning him around to use the wall to lean on as he did up the laces in the back, he went slow and steady, gently easing him into the confinement, pausing to give him breaks and let the corset settle onto his body. With Viktor’s care, it wasn’t intolerable at all even as it squeezed tight. It felt like another one of Viktor’s bonds. One he could wear anywhere. One he would expose to a room full of people with Viktor’s initials claiming him to everyone who glanced his way. He shuddered at the thought and had to lean onto his forearms along the wall for support.

“Oh? What’s on your mind, Yuri?” Viktor’s satisfied grin traced his words as he tied it off and attached the stocking to the garters hanging from the bottom of the corset.

“The— the corset. It feels like your bonds. And your initials. Everyone will see them, won’t they?”

He leaned down to his ear, his hand stroking over the swell of his ass, fingers picking at the hem of the stockings. “I made sure of it.”

He gasped and sunk his mouth down over his arm, trying to keep from ruining his outfit right there.

“You like that, yes, Yuri? You want everyone there to know without a doubt that you’re mine?”

He nodded, whimpering into his mouthful of flesh before pulling off to answer. “Yes, Viktor.” He whined as his knees buckled below him.

Viktor caught him around the waist and helped him stay upright, but his touch only weakened him further. “My pretty Yuri. Let me look at you.”

He calmed himself enough to turn around with some deep breathing and stood, still trembling, as Viktor’s eyes raked his body.

“So gorgeous. Just one more thing.” He pulled out a small box from his pocket and opened it to reveal a set of shiny gold nipple clamps with five diamonds of varying sizes in a cascading cluster, each hanging from a delicate chain. Viktor picked it up to put it on him; they sparkled brilliantly in the light. Smiling, he lightly clamped it into place. “A gift for you.”

“Please don’t tell me these are real.”

He fingered the constellation of diamonds letting them drip from his touch before giving the clamps a hard tug. “Of course, they’re real. I would never give you something fake.”

“Viktor,” he whined. “I don’t need this.”

“Thank you, Viktor, is the appropriate response.”

Watching the diamonds sparking light below his initials, drawing more attention to them, he couldn’t find himself anything but pleased. He bit his lip and looked back up. “Thank you, Viktor. They’re
Smiling, he kissed his cheek that was now almost the same height as his. “Not nearly as beautiful as you. You look stunning.”

“Thank you but, um, how am I going to walk? I tried it on my own and can barely stand without you.”

“I have no intention of leaving you alone. But, just in case, you can practice a little here.” He backed up to the other side of the room. “Walk to me as I told you on our first day. Shoulders back, chin up. You still walk heel to toe as you normally would but step one foot in front of the other in a straight line, and put more of your weight into your hips, letting them sway while holding your core strong.”

“Um, quick question… How do you know how to walk in heels?”

He laughed. “I googled it.”

“Oh, so you’re just about as clueless as I am here.”

He smiled. “Just a bit. Try it out. The source seemed legit.”

He followed Viktor’s googled instructions and found himself settling into the strange gait after a few steps. After a few laps across his room, he was feeling steady enough, and he sort of liked the feeling of confidence sinking into his body. Viktor’s smile growing brighter with each pass only encouraged that.

“God, you look so sexy. You need to see yourself. Come on.” He took his hand and led him into his enormous closet to stand him in front of a full-length mirror. “See? You look beautiful.”

He didn’t recognize the person in front of him apart from the thick thighs and ass and the flesh oozing out at the top and bottom of the corset. He poked at the flesh on his ribs with his nose wrinkled. Viktor rolled his eyes.

“Yuri, you’re ignoring the overall image screaming how beautiful you are and zeroing in on one tiny thing that is a totally normal part of having a body. What do you think happens when you squeeze one part of your body and not another? You’re not made of plastic; you’re made of soft flesh, and I mean that in the best of ways.

“I do genuinely prefer you with exactly the body you have. The only reason I’d ever prefer you toned is from the confidence it would give you, and even that is only a consolation prize because I’d much rather you be confident in this body. I would have forced the issue, but there is one practical benefit to you looking anything other than this, and that’s so you’re strong enough to compete should we get you that far. Other than that, this body is superior in every way. You’re literally my ideal type.”

“How?”

He gave a light toss of his shoulder. “I like what I like. You look perfect for grabbing and fucking you into oblivion and then cuddling after. I can’t keep my hands off of you.” He ran his hand over his ass to prove his point. “Look at yourself. All of you. What do you see? Tell me.”

“Um… my thighs and ass that I think are always too big no matter what I do.”

“Really?” His eyes lit up. “You won’t lose them if you lose weight?”
“No, Viktor.”

“Perfect. I feel much better about our workouts now.” He grabbed a handful of his ass then gave it a smack. “See? You’re perfect for manhandling. I don’t have to be as cautious with you.”

“Really?”

“Yes, really. That flesh is protective. I can go much harder on you than I can on someone who’s thinner without having to worry as much about hitting too deep. It makes it much more satisfying for me.”

“Oh.”

“I should have opened with that, yes?”

He smiled a little. “Yes, Viktor.”

“What else do you see?”

He took in the makeup and feminine clothes on his more masculine upper body and feminine lower body. “Um, I look a little androgynous.”

“How do you feel about that?”

“I’m not sure. I guess, I don’t have any strong feelings on that. I don’t mind it.”

“Perfect because I think it’s so sexy. It’s like you were made specifically to please me.”

He preened a little at Viktor’s sincere praise. “How so?”

“I’m romantically gay but sexually bi. I’ve been with men and women almost equally. I have a preference for men overall, but I often find the lower body on a female more appealing. It’s rare for me to find that on a male, but when I do, it’s by far my top choice.”

“Oh, really? I didn’t realize that.”

“Does it bother you?”

“No, Viktor. Not at all.” He smiled. “I guess I’m glad then that I… suit you.”

He beamed. “Yes, Yuri. Now you’re getting it. You have a preference for more sculpted, masculine bodies, so that’s what you want to see on yourself and find anything other than that less than ideal. I have a preference for softer, more fluid looking bodies which is exactly what you have. I like seeing your body yield to my hands.” He grabbed more handfuls of his ass and thighs, kneading them in his hands as he smiled into kisses over the top of his shoulder. “See? Perfect.” He traced the letters on his chest. “Would I put my name on anything other than what I considered the highest quality?”

He smiled as he shrunk back into Viktor’s support behind him. “No, Viktor.”

“That’s right. And I have very high standards. You exceed every one. What else do you see?”

Strands of hair escaping Viktor’s hold fell into his face. “Um, I think my hair looks a little messy. It’s not staying where you put it.”

“And I think it looks sexy as hell because it looks like we were just doing deliciously dirty things. Yes?”
The heat rose on his cheeks. “Yes, Viktor. I guess I can… see that.”

“What do you think is the most attractive on you?”

“Um…” His blush grew hotter. “I guess my eyes.”

“Excellent choice. I’d personally choose everything, but your eyes are particularly beautiful.” He stood next to him, straightening his posture and offering his arm to hold for support. “How do we look together?”

His eyes snapped wide realizing that’s how people would see them all night. Viktor’s name blaring on his chest above the eye-catching diamonds; Viktor claiming him without leaving a single doubt in the mind of anyone who glanced their way. They didn’t match at all, but looking between them, they… complimented each other. “Um, good.”

“That’s all we get? I know this is hard for you, but give me a little more.”

“Um… we look… right… Together.”

He beamed and kissed his cheek, fueling the blush to burn brighter. “We are right together. We fit perfectly. Time to go, zolotse.”

He led him out of the bedroom, slowing his pace to make it easier to keep up with him in the wobbly shoes, and brought him to an expansive garage off the back of the house that held several cars all built in a time when style and power were the first and only concerns for suitability.

(23) “I forgot to mention my favorite car.” He smiled as he led him to a sleek black thing that screamed raw power with its long, sharp front end and a roof that swept into the vented back, weighted to look like it was already in motion with the front end lifted. “I like all of them, but this one is a definite favorite.” He opened the passenger door and helped him into the car smelling of grease, gasoline, and hint of must embedded in the fibers after over half a century of life, closing it behind him. He came around to the driver’s side and ripped it to life with a deep growl. “Nineteen sixty-seven Shelby Mustang. One of the finest things ever to be put on four wheels.”

The car roared as Viktor put it into gear and tapped a button overhead that began closing the garage door before they made it out. Thrilled satisfaction sank into his entire being as he floored the pedal, racing the closing door.

Yuri considered being terrified for a brief moment but the focus in Viktor’s eyes that he had every time he rode or picked up a whip dropped the tension out of his shoulders and into his cock. Viktor made it out with time to spare and slowed his car back to a throaty rumble as he drove around the house to the hill where he stopped at the top.

“I hate to say this, darling, but you might want to hide until we’re out of the gates. There’s a blanket at your feet. Duck down and put it over you.”

“Yes, Viktor.” He unfolded the blanket and tried to bend forward, but the corset wouldn’t let him fold in half like that. “Um, Viktor? I have some—”

“The corset?”

“Yes, Viktor.”

“Can you lay on your side?” He lifted his arm off the gear shift to open space.
“On your lap?”

“Yes.”

“Um, won’t that look suspicious?”

“The guard won’t be inspecting my car. This is just so no one sees you in passing.”

“Oh. Um, I can try?”

“Go ahead.”

He shifted onto his hip and put his head on Viktor’s thigh while he covered him with the blanket.

“There we go. This should work. Comfy?”

“A little stuffy, but yes, Viktor.”

“It’ll only be for a minute.” He rested his arm on him to put the car back into gear. He chuckled as the car started to move. “I can’t believe I’m smuggling a boy out of my own home like this; like some teen sneaking their boyfriend out the window. You’re always coming up with something new for me.”

“I’m sorry?”

“Don’t be sorry for that. You’re so much fun.” The car turned and roared to life, and Viktor lifted his arm to free him. “It’s safe. You can get up now.”

He pulled the blanket from his head and folded it up to place it back at his feet. Yuri had never understood the appeal of such wasted power in a car that would never stretch out to its full potential, but watching Viktor hold such massive raw power in a tight coil exposed the allure.

Hunting down the mountain curves with his ravenous car, accelerating through the smooth turns, his jaw tight behind the satisfied curl of his lips and unwavering focus in his eyes as his hand shifted through the gears, Viktor’s sex appeal became a palpable thing. The power simmering from the engine through the seat vibrated through his cock and all the way into his core. He found himself squirming to keep himself under control.

Viktor’s eyes flicked to him for a brief second then back to the road with a smirk. “Something the matter, Yuri?”

“You’re so fucking hot.” He cringed as he realized that he had voiced his thoughts unfiltered without considering them for a second but quickly recovered to ogle him some more.

He chuckled, but the curl of his lips tightened with his praise and the car accelerated just a touch. “Thank you, beautiful. Are you okay over there or are you going to make a mess of your outfit?”

“I don’t know. You’re so, so fucking hot. How are you so hot?” He blushed, but for once it wasn’t from embarrassment.

Viktor smiled. “You’re not nervous for the party?”

The trees whipped past them at an alarming rate, but the smooth control of the turns never wavered. “I should be terrified of dying in a fiery crash right now, but you’re too hot for me to care. If this is how I go, it’s a great last moment.” He didn’t bother with the handle on the door. He felt instead like he was on Viktor’s table, fear and danger reshaping and weighting pleasure heavier in his body.
“You’re not dying. I’m not done with you yet.”

“I know.”

He turned onto the highway leading into the city. “Rules for the party are simple. Be on your best behavior. Any disobedience will be punished much harsher here. You’re reflecting on me, so keep that in mind.”

“Yes, Viktor.”

“Also, people are exposing the deepest parts of themselves here, things that are normally kept totally private, so treat them with the same care you’d like to receive. There may be things that shock or disgust you, but you are to keep those reactions to yourself. You can talk quietly with me about it if you want. I understand expressing a bit of surprise, and that’s normal for someone new to the scene, so it shouldn’t be harmful to anyone there, but no expressing revulsion or horror in a way that anyone can see it no matter how strongly you may feel it. Imagine that these people are sharing a page from their diary with you, trusting you to be gentle and accepting. You can imagine the damage you could cause by saying or acting like they’re disgusting or weird for liking something, yes?”

“Yes, Viktor. I understand.”

“Good.” He flew by the cars in the slow lane, looking over behind them to check for clearance before ducking into the right lane to get around a slow car lingering in the fast lane. With a clear route ahead of him, his car growled as he opened it up and moved his hand from the shifter onto Yuri’s thigh. “Stay by my side at all times. If you need something, tell me. If you feel uncomfortable, tell me. Talking to me about anything is always your safe bet, yes?”

“Yes, Viktor.”

“And lastly, have fun. If anything looks intriguing to you, tell me. Treat it as a chance to explore your sexuality and find new things that turn you on.”

“I don’t think I need to be any more turned on.” Viktor’s fingers dangerously close to his tingling cock made him acutely aware of that fact. “You already have that mastered.”

He smiled, little crinkles forming around his eyes. “You’re so cute. You’ve barely even scratched the surface of what I can make you feel.”

They survived the drive into the city, and Viktor’s hand returned to the shifter to navigate the tight streets. They came to a stop at a red light at the top of a steep hill.

“Shit.” Viktor glanced in the rearview mirror at the car stopping behind them. “Asshole,” he muttered, shaking his head.

“What’s wrong?”

“Ah, nothing much. Just people have no idea that cars with manual transmissions roll back before going forward when stopped on a hill. The guy behind us is too close.”

“You mean we’re going to hit him?”

“No. You’re just going to have to hold on a bit.”

“Huh?” For the first time since racing the garage door, he got a little worried as he grabbed the door handle.
The light turned green, and Viktor revved the engine as the car lingered in place with his right foot split between both the gas and the brake while his left foot pressed the clutch pedal to the floor. He waited while the cars in front of him got well ahead while the car behind them started honking angrily that he hadn’t gone yet. Viktor cursed him under his breath in both English and Russian as his engine snarled then launched them forward with every bit of power it possessed.

He was pinned to the back of the seat, unable to move as Viktor ripped through the first three gears then hit the brakes to slow enough as they approached the cars that were down the block just a moment ago. He braced against the force flinging him forward, his free hand grasping at Viktor’s leg. They eased into a steadier pace, and he pried his hand off the door to shake it out, his eyes huge and his chest heaving, his other hand still fixed to Viktor’s thigh.

“You okay, zolotse? Sorry about that. It’s only that bad when the hills are steep and they don’t give me any room to work with.”

“I’m fine.” His voice squeaked through his tight throat. “That was… an interesting driving technique…”

“Yeah, the only way to get out of that situation is to get enough power going to defeat gravity before you let off the brake.”

“I guess it’s a good thing it’s got so much power then. I was thinking it was useless since you can’t go fast enough to use it.”

“You always need more power than what you use on a regular basis to get you out of a jam. The horse that has more in him than you know what to do with for the average ride is also the one who will save your ass when you misjudge a jump, yes?”

“Ah, that’s true. Yes, Viktor.”

“And my commands are only so effective when they’re gentle because you can feel the power I have at my disposal to enforce them if need be.”

He nodded. “Yes, Viktor.”

“Plus, while this one is a bit on the overkill side, it just feels good to have that power in your hands.” He clasped his hands tighter on the wheel as he turned into a parking garage and wound his car up the tight spiral to bring it to the upper levels. At the top, he parked the car, the sudden quiet spinning eerily in his head after the prowling engine cut off. “Wait there.”

He didn’t have to say it. Viktor told him to wait every time. He seemed to take pride in acting chivalrous. He didn’t like it at first, but Viktor had a particular kind of smile any time Yuri let him take care of him without fussing about it. Half warm, half proud and lighting up every glimmer in his eyes: It was a hard look to refuse to put on him.

At least this time, he was truly grateful for the assistance as Viktor opened his door and held out his hand, holding a black duffle bag he had retrieved from the trunk in the other. Viktor took his trembling hand and pulled it to his mouth with a kiss before tucking him next to his side. “Nervous?”

“A little.”

“You have nothing to worry about. Just follow my every word, and you’ll be fine.”

He nodded and leaned onto his support as much as he desired. “Yes, Viktor.”
He led him down a short hallway, rather non-descript, like what you’d expect any office building to look like, to a set of dark mahogany double doors with large gold letters matching the ones on his body. A V and an N were lashed onto the doors with gilded whip marks.

Yuri turned to him, his eyes huge despite the fact that it was so obvious he should have expected it. “Yours?”

“Mine.” The side of his mouth twisted up as he pushed a button on an intercom and a crackling voice sounded.

“Welcome to The Loft at VN. Do you have an appointment?”

“Hey, Red. It’s me.”

The door buzzed, and Viktor pushed it open, escorting him through ahead of him then retaking his arm at his side as they entered the spacious lobby thrumming with dampened music coming from behind closed doors. The walls and ceiling were a deep cocoa, almost the same as the color in his bedroom, with a toffee-streaked marble floor. Gold padded benches like you might find in a Victorian parlor ran down one side of the wall while brown leather chairs with looping wicker backs ran up the other leading up to a desk with the whole front panel and sides illuminated behind a crosshatch pattern of gilded whip lashes.

Crystal encrusted golden rings above them—three twisted together holding thick curtains of gold strands seeping glimmers of light between the strands gathered up in the center, a few dangling free—formed a row of chandeliers between sconces warming the walls.

A pretty young woman stood at the desk with short, wavy cherry hair. Panels of flowing fabric passed over her shoulders, open over straps crossing her chest as her only covering till they rejoined again below her navel with a wide belt. She looked vaguely familiar, but he couldn’t place her.

Her cobalt eyes widened as they approached. “Boss? You have someone with you? Who is this cutie?” Her friendly smile flashed onto her face as she stepped around the desk revealing more straps around her thighs where the panels split back apart over both legs as they descended to the floor. She took Yuri’s free hand as she examined up and down his body unabashedly, her eyes widening further as she took in his marks.

“Red, this is Eros; Eros, Red.”

Yuri’s eyes shot over to Viktor trying to make sense of what he’d said, but Viktor just nodded at him indicating he should say hi. “Um, nice to meet you.” He blinked, trying to refocus his new contacts so he could see if there was any reason for the familiar vibe she was giving off.

“Nice to meet you as well.” She had a Russian accent, a little thicker than Viktor’s. “Wow. Eros. Let me look at you.” She tugged at his hand slightly to pull him away from Viktor.

He waited for Viktor’s encouraging nod before he allowed her to remove him from his arm. She held his hand firmly as if she understood that he was precarious without him as she circled to his back and let out another gasping wow before she moved back to his front. He glanced at Viktor again, confusion and worry on his face.

“That’s enough, Red.”

She handed him carefully back to Viktor then stepped back and beamed at him from a more comfortable distance. “Wow. Boss, you didn’t even warn me before you brought a heart attack in here. I didn’t know I was going to have to be on high alert for damage control tonight.”
“Where’s the fun in that?” Viktor grinned and kissed her cheek. “Can I get your help with something? This is Eros’s first time wearing heels. We practiced a little at home, but it’d be great to get a woman’s tips for making it easier for him.”

“Of course. Walk for me please so I know where you’re at.”

He stepped away from Viktor’s arm again and walked to where Red had backed up.

“Good, you’re stepping right, go back and let me see you from behind.”

He walked back to Viktor.

“You need to swing your hips more. Every step should ring like a Pavlovian bell to the male brain. You want to seduce him with your walk. Not just that, but it really is more comfortable since that’s what the shoes make you do.”

He nodded and walked back to her letting his hips swing freely.

“Yes! You’ve nailed it! Wow. So quickly you got that.”

“What she said. Walk for me again, beautiful. That was so sexy.”

He followed Viktor’s command to keep walking back and forth for him while he ogled him unapologetically.

“Wow. Eros. So much eros.” He kissed his cheek as he pulled him back to his arm. “I almost regret that I won’t be walking behind you all night.” He gave Red another peck as he led him away.

“Thanks, Red. You look gorgeous, by the way. I love the dress.”

He leaned into his ear as they left her bubbling on his praise. “You may recognize her from the stable. Don’t say anything about this place to her there. If she recognizes you, she won’t say anything either. As far as both of you are concerned, the two worlds don’t exist in the same universe. We have different names here as well to help keep that distinction clear and our identities private.”

“Yes, Viktor.” That’s where he’d recognized her from. He hadn’t talked to her yet, but he’d seen her in passing a few times. “But… Eros? Me?”

“Absolutely you.”

“How did she end up working here too?”

“She got here on accident really. She came with a friend to one of the parties after she started at the stable. It was a bit of an uncomfortable surprise when we recognized each other, but it ended up working out fine. She was interested in being more involved here, so I let her have the front desk position.”

“I see. Wait, if we have different names, what about yes, Viktor?”

“It’s fine. Keep using it. You’re allowed to call me Viktor as you like.”

They turned down a hallway lined with doors on the right side with gold nameplates and a row of magenta orchids in glass vials lit from below on the left. They passed the first nameplate reading, ‘The Lion’. The next, ‘The Wolf’ followed by, ‘Minx,’ ‘The Madame,’ and at the end, ‘The Boss.’ Viktor opened that door with his finger on the sensor by the handle and brought him inside, setting down his bag at the door.
“I have a few matters to attend to here before we join the party. Kneel right here and wait for me.” He pointed to the magenta pillow in the middle of the room that looked like any other executive’s office apart from rings hanging from the ceiling and a wall of whips and paddles next to a large cabinet he imagined held many more tools inside.

He dropped down carefully using Viktor’s hand to help him and rested his hands on his knees, straightening his posture more than usual with the help of the corset. Folded straight and attentive to Viktor’s needs and his belly held firmly in place, a hint of the idea that he could look desirable like this lit in his mind.

Viktor took a seat at the mahogany desk and opened his laptop. Having nothing to do but watch him work, he traced his chiseled lines with his eyes. The slight dimple in his chin, the ripple in his solid forearms as his fingers moved over the keys, the warm light glinting in his unwavering eyes. His cock started to fill as a heated frustration rose in his chest. The more time passed, the more those conflicting feelings grew. More turned on but more annoyed. Viktor’s eyes flicked to him for the barest of seconds before his attention went back to his work and jealousy burst in his chest followed by fear.

Viktor never went that long without looking at him or interacting with him in some way. Had he messed up? Was he being punished? He racked his brain for anything he could have done to hurt him, but he found nothing specific. Viktor was just growing bored with him. He just wasn’t interesting enough to hold his attention for long. Viktor would have told him if he did something specific. The more he worried he was right, the more the jealousy grew and the more turned on he got watching his flawless beauty. The toxic, haphazard concoction burned through him.

“Come here, Yuri.” Viktor kept his eyes fixed on his screen. Relieved to have his name on his lips again, he cautiously got to his feet and walked to him.

Viktor slid his chair back a bit without stopping his work. “Kneel at my feet.”

He dropped down using nothing but his own support and looked up eagerly, but Viktor’s eyes still didn’t go to his.

“Suck my cock.” He said it as if he was asking his secretary to move his four o’clock appointment, but Yuri could only sigh in relief as he scrambled for Viktor’s buckle and pulled his glorious cock free. If he was allowing him to pleasure him, he wasn’t mad and still wanted to feel his touch on him.

“Thank you, Viktor.” He looked up to catch Viktor glancing at him with a faint smile before he went back to work. He sighed again as he licked his lips and wrapped them around his head, his tongue flicking over him as he slowly sank down on his length. Viktor hardened quickly in his mouth, but he gave away nothing with his face.

Alternating between exploring his cock with his tongue and working him deeper into his mouth, Yuri’s eyes kept flicking up to Viktor’s face to catch any hint of his enjoyment. Other than his cock pulsing in his mouth and clenching when he went to a spot he remembered Viktor liking before, Viktor had no reaction to anything he was doing. His fingers typed steadily between clicks of his mouse. Was he not doing a good job? Viktor had always liked what he’d done before. Was he just being nice because he was new at it?

Frustration solidified as he grasped him firmly and plunged him deeper into his mouth, letting him slip back in his throat before pulling off again to suck and lick over the parts he hadn’t reached and the places he knew he liked best. Viktor’s chest rose and fell in deeper waves, and his thighs started to tremble, but still, he kept on working, ignoring him as he reached for some papers he had printed.
out and started writing.

Pissed that he was being ignored in favor of paperwork, Yuri made it his mission to make it impossible for him to do anything but look at him. Moving all his fingers out of the way except for a circle he made with his thumb and index finger not even coming close to meeting around the base of his cock to hold him back as he liked, he picked up a steady rhythm. Viktor’s breath rasped, his body twitching against his will, but his determined hand pressed on over the papers.

Taking the reactions his betraying body gave as encouragement that he was on the right course, he held his pace steady as he drew nearer to his pleasure. Every stroke brought him past the point where his gag reflex kicked in but it soon began to subside in its reaction, and he pushed his strokes deeper. Whimpers eked out from Viktor’s pressed lips, and Yuri’s satisfied smile stretched around his cock.

Viktor’s hand jerked across the paper; red heat climbed his face. Remembering that Viktor liked the stretch as he went in and realizing that he needed to relax it first to make him experience the stretch fully, he brought the circle of his fingers up as he lifted off his cock and pushed them back down as he took him into his throat all the way until his nose buried in his heated scent. Yuri brimmed with pride that he had done it—he’d taken all of him—as he took up a steady rhythm holding him deep inside his throat.

“Fuck!” Viktor’s fists slammed down as his pen skittered across the desk. “Holy sh—shit. Yuri. Yuri. Oh my god! So—so—so—oh, fuck!” He pressed deeper into the chair trying not to thrust into his mouth. “Oh my—Fuck!” His whole body clenching and twisting, his hands went to Yuri’s hair mussing it further as he gripped hard. “Shit! So fucking good! Angh! Ngh! Yu—” He tried to look at him, but his body was twisting too much to allow him to look for long.

It wasn’t what Yuri was trying for. It was so much better.

Viktor kept trying to look at him, but his body kept tearing his eyes away. Writhing and arching in the seat, the only thing that stayed steady was the grip in his hair with his cries spilling freely as he came down his throat.

It was a strange feeling, being stuffed and filled, his throat stretched around him, but having won his battle, it became a mark of pride. This is what success here felt like. It felt good. He looked up at Viktor’s sweaty, flushed face just coming down enough to gape at him. Viktor blinked to focus as he tried to shake some senses back into his head. Finally, his eyes settled on him with a warm, bewildered smile.

“How did you do that? How did you take all of me?”

“Um… you remember the book? Well, uh, there was a tip in there I read earlier this week about—about giving better blowjobs, and he’d said to use your toothbrush and every time you brush your teeth to put it back in your throat and kinda move it around and desensitize your gag reflex. He said some people take a few months but others are luckier and it only takes a few days and, uh, I guess I’m one of the luckier ones?”

“No, I’m the lucky one.” He released his hold on his hair to cup his face in his hands and kiss his cheeks everywhere on both sides. “Holy shit. You’re the best. The absolute best. I can’t believe you took it upon yourself to learn how to pleasure me better even though I already said you are amazing. And I’ve had people deep throat me before but no one has ever thought to add in that stretch that I like at the same time, and it just made it a million times better.”

“Really? You said you liked it, and it’s easy to do, so it seemed kinda obvious to me to do it?”
He smiled and pulled him up to put him in his lap and leave his praise on his neck. “That’s because you’re the best.” His voice murmured low against his skin. “Perfect. Wonderful. Amazing.”

“You were working through most of it.” He pouted like a petulant child but couldn’t bring himself to be embarrassed about that with how thoroughly annoyed with it he was.

Viktor laughed and picked up the paper he had been writing on to show him. It was a letter he was adding a handwritten note to the bottom of. He’d gotten a few clear words in related to the letter, but they’d quickly devolved into shaky scratches of Yuri’s name and curses scrambling over the paper. Yuri’s chest flooded with pride and satisfaction as he studied the page.

“I’m going to have to shred this one and try again.” He laughed gently against the tender skin on his throat.

“No! Please don’t shred it. Can—can I have it? Please?”

He grinned as he pulled back to observe him. “You want it?”

“Yes, Viktor. Please?”

“How badly do you want it?”

“I… I want to frame it.”

Beaming, he pulled him into his arms, holding him tight. “It’s yours, zolotse. I’ll get it framed for you.” He kissed along the lines of his marks. “You’re very competitive, aren’t you?”

He cringed. “Yes, Viktor.”

“Don’t cringe over that. Not if it drives you to do that. Holy shit. The best ever. I love this. Did you enjoy it?”

“Um… it was really annoying at first but… it felt really good to—win.”

“Hmm… I’m definitely going to use this trait of yours to my advantage. Stand up and bend over my desk. I want to give you a little reward. You deserve more, but this is all I can give you right now.”

He leaned onto his forearms over the desk. Viktor pulled his hips back and widened his stance then yanked the underwear up out of his way. Running his hand over his ass and stroking the sensitive skin between his hole and his balls before he left him in anticipation.

His hand cracked down on his bare ass; heat flared in his body along with a pleasure that was both the craving for more and the satisfaction of fulfillment at once. Each crack drove both sensations higher and deeper, and he whimpered into his arm as his body shivered and his cock began leaking.

“Viktor? I’m getting wet.” He gasped as Viktor’s hand came down harder.

“Good. I want you out there looking like mine in every way.” His hand burst against his remaining control, and Yuri cried out as his legs started to wobble. “Hold still for me, baby.”

He whined, trying his best to follow his order, his entire throbbing body: the enemy he had to battle. His cock strained against the fabric it was soaking as he bit into the flesh on his forearm to help him focus.

Viktor halted. “No. Only I give you pain.”
He released his arm with a gasp. “I’m sorry!”

“You need a sharper pain too?”

He nodded. “Please, yes, Viktor.”

His hand cracked down again once more as he dropped down on top of him, his weight pressing him into the desk as he sank his teeth into the top of his shoulder just beyond the edge of where a shirt collar could cover it. His hands slid over his thighs and his ass, dipping into the crevice of his thighs but refused to go further because there was pain. Knowing what his touch felt like there, it was pure torture not to have it.

“Please, Viktor. Please touch me. I promise you won’t traumatize me. Please, I need it so badly.”

Viktor responded with a tightening of his jaws and hand drawing back to resume his cracks on his ass. Yuri could feel his words through the bite at his neck. *Submit. You have to submit.*

“Yes, Viktor.” He moaned as his pleasure spiked and his body dropped. “Yes, Viktor. Whatever you want.”

Viktor rewarded him with more pain bringing him right to the edge before he pulled back and lifted him from the desk. “That’s my good Yuri. I’m so proud of you.” He kissed his indented bite mark gently as he stroked the wetness over his hardened cock. “Now you look perfect. Let’s go.”

His eyes widened as his body clamped in unexpected pleasure. “Viktor?”

“Color?”

He gasped with Viktor’s firm grasp of his head. “Um…” His body screaming with pleasure raged against his mind screaming about dangers unknown. One look into Viktor’s patient eyes and his opposing mind laid down, though, it didn’t stop grumbling about lions in the brush or whatever it was it was afraid of. “Green.”

“Beautiful.” He leaned in as he stroked firmly down the front of his cock in a delicious drag, his breath drifting over his skin. “Mine.”

He shivered into the hold he took on Viktor’s arm. “Yes, Viktor.”

Viktor’s chest swelled as he led him to the door.

Applause and lascivious eyes met them on the other side. Red and three men were clustered in the hallway not even making a motion at pretending to be ashamed at being caught listening in. Yuri’s entire body burned scarlet as he huddled into Viktor’s side.

Viktor shook his head at them but beamed as pride swelled his chest further. “What are you miscreants doing out here? Red, you should be at the desk.”

“Right, sorry, Boss. I just had to tell them.” She scampered off back to her station, wiggling her eyebrows at Yuri as she left.

One of the men still applauding with approving nods had hair and skin almost the same color of light brown giving him a golden glow. He carried a thick black whip coiled in his hand and wore black leather pants under a red and gold tailcoat and top hat with his toned chest exposed. He was smaller in stature, but that whip and his presence made his aspect more substantial than his physical size.
A black-haired Korean man next to him with a stern face was about the same size only his cold expression made him much more intimidating despite the fact he carried no tools and wore nothing but a pair of black pants.

The third man who was larger, even bigger than Viktor, had his green eyes rimmed deeply with sable liner and bronze shimmer covering every inch of exposed skin, which was quite a vast territory with him wearing nothing but a thong and nipple clamps with several layers of chains dangling over his sculpted abs. On his head was a set of two tiny ears covered in luxurious fur matching the color around his eyes.

He caught Yuri looking him over and turned to reveal a matching tail, short and sleek looking like it was sprouting naturally from his plump ass. He winked as he gave it a little shake and came to Viktor’s free side to toss his arm over his shoulder after looking over Yuri thoroughly. “Oh, my, my, mon cher. Who is this tasty little thing you’ve got pleasing you so?”

“This is Eros. Eros, this is Lion,” he gestured to the young man in the top hat, “Wolf,” he pointed to the Korean man, “and Minx, though,” he looked at the man draped on his shoulders, “can I out you here? I need to thank you.”

“Oh?” He chuckled delightedly. “Go for it. What did I do?”

“Eros has read your work. Bless you for your toothbrush tip.”

Minx, apparently also Christophe Giacometti, groaned and put his hands on his ass to stretch out his back. “Oh, that thing? The Gay Man’s Bible? Oh my god, you should have asked permission to bring up my horrible youth. What kind of pretentious ass writes a self-help book and proclaims themselves a sex expert at nineteen?” He chuckled and shook his head. “I guess that would be me. Pleasure to meet a reader of my work even if it is one of my early ones.” He took Yuri’s hand and gave it a kiss.

Painfully aware of his still hardened state that was getting worse rather than better that only he seemed to have any concern for, he found his words trickier than usual, but he didn’t want to let Viktor down. “It’s really good. I haven’t finished it yet, but it’s been very… enlightening.”

“Aren’t you a doll? Thank you, mon chéri.” He released his hand with another kiss. “But I hope that you’ll read one of my newer books and judge me by that rather than my idiot teenage self.”

“I would have never guessed it was written by someone so young. You seem very… uh… experienced?” He cringed hoping he wouldn’t take that in a negative way.

“Well, I am a huge slut, so I did have a lot more experience than your average nineteen-year-old.” He winked, and Yuri breathed a sigh of relief that apparently, he didn’t take being called a slut as an insult either.

The light caught the shimmer on Minx’s shoulder highlighting raised scars across it looking like claw marks or… whip marks. Jealousy and a wave of hatred for the friendly, surprisingly unpretentious man in front of him made everything but those glittering marks fall away.

He had Viktor’s marks permanently on him, and he hated him for it. He grabbed harder to Viktor’s arm as he scrambled for rationality to fall back into his lust-addled mind. Viktor had marked Minx by accident, and it made him feel awful. So bad that he didn’t ever do another scene with him. He never touched him again. Those careless marks strewn over his shoulder had driven him away as permanently as they themselves were.
His marks were given to him. Viktor chose to lay down every single lash exactly where he put it to form his own name on his body, and those were what had been drawing all three of the men’s attention while his aroused cock got barely a passing notice. Gloating pride at being the one Viktor chose maybe wasn’t the noblest thing to cling to, but it was the only thing that eased his anxious jealousy back down.

“Yuri?” Viktor’s voice came whispering at his ear. “What’s wrong?”

“Huh?” He startled at the suddenness of Viktor’s voice striking his focus back into the room. He glanced around at them all watching him with concern. Shit. How long had he spaced out this time? “I’m fine. I’m sorry, Viktor. I promise I’m fine.”

“Are you sure? I tried to get your attention, and I couldn’t.”

He cringed, hiding his expression in Viktor’s neck. “I’m so sorry. I shouldn’t have let my focus wander. I’ll do better.”

“I’m not worried about that. I’m worried about you. Why did your focus change so hard like that?”

“I… I saw his scars. I didn’t like it.”

Viktor’s warm arms wrapped around him. “You got that jealous?” His warm lilt lifted his voice as he hugged him tighter. “I chose you. His were a mistake.”

“I know.”

“Good, Yuri.” He kissed over his face. “Good.” He turned back out of their huddle and Yuri straightened at his side.

“God, how precious.” Minx smiled and shook his head. “Make him scream on one side of the door and cuddle you close on the other. And in that order? Bravo.” He held his hands up in slow applause. “I didn’t think anyone would achieve either one of those let alone both. You—Oooh! Oh! Oh yeeesss… So—” Arching his back, his cock jumped to attention and pleasure rolled down his body. “Ah, damn.” He stood back straight despite the quiet buzzing that could only be coming from the tail vibrating at his ass. “So close yet so far.” He shook his head. “They really suck tonight. Don’t you hate it when that happens? I want to come damn it.”

“I, uh…” He looked to Viktor having no idea how to respond.

“Eros is a virgin. He’s never played any of your dirty games.”

“What?” Minx and the two others gaped at him. “You mean like… a virgin, virgin?”

“Yes. I’m the only one who’s touched him other than kissing.”

“What?! You’re joking. How long have you had him?”

“Not quite a week yet.”

“And he made you scream like that?” Minx’s jaw dropped further with every word. He shook his head and dropped to his knees in front of Yuri. “Mon cher. Teach me your ways. What did you do to him?”

“Um…” He looked at Viktor and got his approving nod. “I just did what he likes?”

He laughed riotously while the other two nodded with a ‘not bad’ type of expression. “That is such a
brilliantly simple bit of advice. I’m going to steal it if you don’t mind.”

“No, go ahead.”

Minx stood back up chuckling and looked at Viktor. “What number is he?”

“One.”

“Oh my god. You’re serious?”

“Yes.”

“Not even a week?”

“He was late to an appointment with me on Monday, and he felt so bad about that he dropped to his knees, begging me to punish him. He’s been mine twelve hours a day since then.”

“You’re kidding. Did he know?”

“He understood the hints I gave him on some level, but not really, no.”

“Wow.”

All three men now studied him with far more impressed expressions on their faces, Lion particularly so.

“You brought him here after that little time?” Wolf spoke flatly as if he was disapproving of Viktor’s lack of care.

“Yes.”

“Weren’t you worried?”

“No.”

He nodded once, his stone face unchanged. “Nice to meet you, Eros.”

“Uh, yeah, nice to meet you as well.”

Lion offered his hand with a pleasant smile. “You’re very beautiful. The Boss is lucky to have such a lovely canvas to put his mark on.”

“Um, thank you. Nice to meet you.”

He nodded. “Yes, nice to meet you.”

“Oh! Oh! This one’s close!” Minx wriggled down to his tail. “I think it’s—And no. Goddamn it, one of you win already! I’m dying here!” he shouted down the hallway to no one in particular.

Viktor chuckled. “Playing ‘Here Minxy’?”

“Yes, and they’re all awful at it. It’s been a damn hour, and no one has gotten me further than a little tease.”

“Sorry, baby doll. I’m sure one of them will get it.” He turned to explain to Yuri. “He likes playing this game where he passes around the remote for his plug and whoever lands on the right combination for him gets him for the night.”
“Really? Like… whoever?”

“It’s surprisingly effective for finding the right person to please me,” Minx purred. “This plug is special in that it does nothing for me on every setting but one specific combination, but that one is, oh my god, fabulously good. It’s delightfully fun, and I’ve never been disappointed by the winner. There are so many combinations on this thing, he really has to have either a ton of persistence or a ton of luck. Either way, I consider him blessed.”

“Of course, he can always back out if he doesn’t like the winner for whatever reason but Minx has never been one to back down.”

“Never. The ones I’ve initially been a bit meh about are often my favorites in the end, so I give just about anyone or anything a chance.” He rolled through a deep shudder and dropped to his hands and knees. “Oh god. This is it. Don’t you dare give up.” He moaned and rocked his hips, his breath spiking as he got closer. “Yes! Lion, please be a dear and call the winner over here? I can’t quite make it to him. Oh god yes!”

“You’ve got it, Minxy.” Lion went to the end of the hallway and opened the doors to the right letting the music thump freely. “We’ve got a winner! Come collect your prize.”

A hulking man with a thick waist and thick arms and a thick everything strapped and studded in leather followed him down the hall with a satisfied smile and a remote in his hand that had a green wristband on it like the ones you’d find at carnival rides. He stopped in front of Minx and lifted his face from his throes of building pleasure. “I knew you’d be mine tonight.”

Minx looked him up and down with a smile quirking on his lips. “I don’t know about that. I haven’t come yet. Could still pick another winner.”

“You think so?” He grasped his ear and pulled him to his knees, reaching into Minx’s thong and pulling out his cock as he pushed a button on the remote making the buzzing and Minx’s cries grow louder. “I think I’m going to make you my bitch tonight.” He pulled out his thick cock and shoved it into Minx’s mouth. “Why don’t you do something more useful with that mouth instead of being a smart-mouthed little brat.” He pushed him all the way down his length, and when Minx responded by sucking him with fervor, he rewarded him with his fist jerking over his cock. “That’s right. I knew you were my little bitch. Make it good.”

“Don’t worry, he likes it.” Viktor leaned over to whisper in his ear as Yuri watched them with his eyes huge. “With everything you see here you can assume that it looks a whole lot scarier than it feels to the person it’s being done to.”

“Yeah, but he doesn’t know him, right? How do they know about limits and stuff?”

“The winner is random, but those who are playing have to enter the contest first. They check in with Red when they arrive. See the wristband on him?”

“Yes, Viktor.”

“That means he’s gone over his checklist and Red has interviewed him and given him her approval to play. To Minx, that band is a mark that he’s safe. He won’t play with anyone without it. Plus, he’s in a public setting which is safer.”

“Oh. That sounds better.”

“Safety is always first here.”
“Right.” He smiled. “It’s your place. I should have assumed you had that covered. So… why is this your place?”

“I wanted a nice, safe place to play, and I like having control of things myself.”

“What about your home?”

“It’s very rare for me to bring someone there. They have to drive through the gates so having an endless stream of new people visiting me there starts to spread rumors.”

“Endless?”

He smiled and kissed his cheek. “You’re adorable when you’re jealous. I train subs. I’m a professional Dom in my free time.”

“I… I’m not sure I understand.”

“People new to the scene come to me because of my reputation, and I introduce them to this world in a safe way so when they go to someone else, they know how they’re supposed to be treated, and the person taking them gets a sub with most of the initial kinks worked out. We also train Doms here on how to be good Doms and provide general classes to anyone who wants to learn. Minx is my top Dom trainer. It’s rare to find good subs able to do that who are willing to put themselves at a higher risk with someone inexperienced, but he’s the best at it. The more people we educate on good practices, the further that extends. It’s my way of doing my part to keep this fun and safe for those who choose to participate.”

His heart rate kicked up. “I see… so how long do your subs usually stay with you?”

“It depends. Some a few weeks, others a few months. Never more than that.”

“Oh. I…” He wanted to cry, but he shoved it down deep to deal with later. A few weeks or months from now he estimated. “I guess I got lucky that I ended up with someone who knows so much for my… first.” This was a good thing. Knowing Viktor fully intended to end it soon took the pressure off him to do it. Maybe he could just enjoy it a little while things ran their course.

“You got extremely lucky.” His voice went hard. “Had you wandered into this with anyone else… I don’t even want to imagine what would have happened to you if even a mediocre Dom got his hands on you. You are such a special case; you take every bit of my knowledge and attention to take care of you. Just imagine what your experience would have been like if I had taken your first checklist as an honest representation of what you are okay with. Imagine me spending this past week calling you cruel names instead of the sweet things I say.”

He cringed feeling words he hadn’t even suggested.

“See, you can feel that now that I’ve shown you the difference. Imagine me diving right in with pain in areas that haven’t even begun to understand pleasure. You might think you want that but really think for a second on how that might wire your brain permanently to have that be your first connection.”

He nodded. “I think I understand that.”

“And the things you do actually need are the ones you hide and reject the hardest and need me to ignore you saying and acting like you’re not okay and force you into it anyway.” He shook his head. “Many would take everything you say as clear consent and be so assured by that they wouldn’t notice your signals to what you really need and would destroy you without even realizing it. You
have no idea how dangerous you are to your own self, and that terrifies me.”

Taking this turn of their conversation to the soundtrack of slurping and moaning from a real-life porno not two feet away was a surreal experience he doubted would ever be matched in strangeness. Minx writhed looking like he was in agony holding on to his order not to come until his dom did while doing his best to bring him there as quickly as possible to end his torment. Finally choking down his load, he released with a deep cry spilling all over the floor.

“Good boy. Clean up your mess.” The winning dom put his heavy boot on Minx’s back and shoved his face to the floor as Viktor led him away.

Viktor stopped at a man standing at the end of the hall with shaggy light brown hair and a sweet but chiseled face who was wearing a green wristband. “Better luck next time.”

“Yeah, I hope so.”

“Want a hint?”

“No, I want to win him fair and square.” He stared down the hall at the man lapping the floor with a wistful smile.

“Good man. I’m rooting for you.” He leaned in to speak into Yuri’s ear as they walked away. “He’d be so good for Minx. He’s been trying to catch his attention, but Minx gets way too distracted with his games. I’m hoping he can snag him one of these times so he can prove how good for him he’d be.”

(24) Viktor opened the door, and the elegant loft they entered plunged into the depths of a cave. A vast room with stone outcroppings covering the walls and stalactites dripping from the ceiling in various shades of that espresso brown veined with glittering crystals rose and fell from a pit down to the left that glowed with a soft light, filled with magenta couches and cushions and chairs that people were lounging in, up to an elevated dance floor with a DJ stand next to a long stage jutting out from velvet magenta curtains with a number of dips and rises in the floor along the way. Torches littered the walls and pillars of jagged stone, throwing off flickering firelight: both eerie and comfortable at the same time.

A screaming man to his right had an entire fist inside his ass while numerous people tied to the stone pillars by embedded iron rings were either being whipped or waiting to be whipped.

Large pieces of equipment like the ones in Viktor’s playroom, along with a great number more that he didn’t recognize, covered the undulating terrain along with the thick of people using them and mingling about all wearing outfits Yuri’s brain hadn’t begun to process.

Between the pit filled with couches and a stone bar, a stream of turquoise water carrying a lick of calm was lit from within and cast waves of light rippling over the sparkling bottles and glasses lining the wall.

In the center of the cave, a human heart hung suspended from the ceiling. A matrix of red and blue ropes supporting a boulder formed the left lobe while a naked woman filled in the right lobe with her bent knees forming the point. Yuri marveled: How it was created, the stunning artistic skill woven into every knot, the serenity of the woman radiating out to every edge of the room. His jaw fell slack along with the rest of his body taking in the overwhelming sight.

“Welcome to The Cave.”

Pungent with sex and earth after a rainstorm, the air pounded with music and screams and moans and
the sizzling cracks of whips and every second in there gave his mind fifty more things to process while he was still working through the first five.

The doors closed behind him, sealing him in this alternate world his mind lacked a single concept of, and he was knocked into Viktor’s side by a naked man leaping at him from the ground, floppy ears on his head, a panting tongue, and a tail raised high and excited from his ass. Viktor steadied him as the man barked at him excitedly as if trying to get him to play.

“Down, boy. Bad puppy.” A woman wearing a leather mini dress and thigh-high boots snapped a leash attached to a collar around his neck and smacked a crop across the man’s ass making him whimper and crawl over to her feet to present his ass to her for more punishment. “You don’t jump on people.” She cracked the whip over him until he bowed down on his front end and looked up at Yuri apologetically. “I’m sorry. He’s still a new puppy. He gets a little overexcited sometimes when he sees someone he likes.”

“It’s—it’s okay.” He looked to Viktor to see if his response was okay and received an approving nod.

Viktor reached out to scratch behind the dog’s ears when he came over and sat politely at his feet. “What a cute puppy you are.”

“Good boy. That’s how you greet people you want to play with.” The woman pushed a button on a remote making the tail wag, and the puppy howled with a sound of pleasure.

The tail went still, and the puppy barked excitedly as he came over to Yuri and sat at his feet looking up eagerly.

Yuri cast a glance to Viktor then bent forward with a hesitant smile to scratch the top of his head. “Are you a good boy?”

The puppy barked again and nuzzled into his hand then circled around him jumping in the air and barking occasionally looking at his owner.

“He likes you.” She smiled at Yuri. “He’s very excited to see The Boss in here with someone so stunning on his arm. He pulled me right over here so he could say hi first.”

“Oh, hi.” Yuri blushed like crazy as he pat his head again but thankfully the dim lights hid most of that. “It’s nice to meet you…” He looked to his owner to learn his name.

“Snow.”

“Snow, like Jon Snow? Are you a Game of Thrones fan?” He spoke with excitement as one should for communicating with a puppy.

He barked eagerly.

“Me too.”

The puppy barked again then went back to his owner to sit at her feet and whine.

She leaned down to give him a kiss. “Yes, you’ve been a good boy. That’s how you play with new friends.” She made his tail wag again, and the puppy clung to her leg, humping it as he licked the thigh of her boot. She stroked his head absentmindedly as she turned her attention to Viktor while her puppy whined with pleasure. “And who is your new…” She looked between them trying to figure out his role. He’d like to know that himself.
“This is Eros. Eros, this is Lady Rose.”

She offered her hand, and Yuri shook it. “Eros, that’s quite a fitting name. Is this your first time here?”

“Yes.”

She smiled, flicking her long red hair behind her back. “Well, I feel honored that we got the chance to greet you first. I’m sorry my puppy was so rude in his greeting.”

“It’s okay, really. I like dogs.” It felt strange knowing he was talking about a person even though the statement itself was true. “Puppies can be easily forgiven. They don’t know any better.”

She beamed at him. “I’m glad he didn’t harm you.” She looked to Viktor sincerely. “My apologies.”

“No harm done. I’m going to show him around. I’ll catch up with you some more later.”

Viktor led him deeper into the cave as the puppy came all over his owner’s boot.

She shook her head at him with an indulging smile. “Look at this mess I have to clean now. You’re so troublesome.”

Viktor stopped him a few feet away to smile as he pulled him in to stroke over his cock. “So good Yuri. You made me so proud there. You were flawless.” He kissed over his neck and dropped down to kiss his marks pulling him tighter into his arm while the other hand slipped inside his underwear to stroke his bare cock and fill it back up completely.

Yuri shivered as he looked around the room to see nearly everyone in the vicinity watching them. “Viktor… everyone’s watching.”

“I know. I want to show you off tonight. I want them all to see how beautiful you are in my hands. Color?”

Red heat raced through him, and he gushed precum over Viktor’s hand. “Green.” He choked on the word as more heat filled him at agreeing so easily even though he had no idea how extensively Viktor meant that. Would they be playing here? Viktor had promised they would be later.

He pressed into Viktor’s touch when he rewarded his trust by swiping through the slick fluid and running his thumb over his head. Their eyes bored into him, but Viktor’s touch was stronger and claimed the majority of his focus. His body went soft in his arms, his eyes fluttering back as Viktor took their attention and used it to hold him in place for a new kind of pleasure—one that rose from the depths as a part of himself he never knew existed—one wholly opposed to who he thought he was and who he would claim to be. “Viktor,” he purred, “It feels so good.”

He arched him back over his forearm to kiss his marks and up to his throat. “So beautiful.” His hand slipped out from his underwear, and he brought his thumb up to his mouth.

Understanding what it was he wanted from him, his tongue flicked at the tip. He cleaned him with long, slow draws along his sensitive palm making Viktor shiver as his hand closed around the side of his face and Yuri pulled him into his mouth sucking slowly. Viktor lifted him back upright and pulled his thumb from his mouth staring at him with his eyes flickering in the firelight and a tug at his lips.

“How gorgeous you are.”
He put him back at his side with his body brought again to its peak and paraded him past eyes raking his body, trying to tear into him to see what secrets he held to put him on Viktor’s arm, whispering to each other as they passed. Viktor seemed unconcerned for what they might have to say, so he tried to lock them out too, listening only for what Viktor had to say.

“What do you think so far?”

“Umm… In the hallway, I was thinking that nothing could be stranger than our conversation set to the soundtrack of a porno, and then I took one step inside, and that was instantly surpassed tenfold. So, you know, I’m a little cautious about determining any of the rest of this as the strangest thing ever.”

Viktor laughed and snuggled him close for a kiss to his cheek, sparking violent whispers in the bystanders. “I think it’s a rite of passage to be accosted by something bizarre upon entering. I think mine far surpasses yours.”

“Really? What happened?”

“Oh my god. So, this was back when I was an eighteen-year-old kid, just barely, a complete virgin—even less experience than you—and I walk into my very first experience with any of this, and I’m greeted by the sight of my riding instructor, the very Yakov you’ve met, hogtied on the floor with Liliya stomping on his balls with a pair of heels.”

“No,” he gasped.

“Oh yeah. We all just stared at each other completely frozen until Yakov comes a few seconds later because there are very few things more humiliating than having your student seeing you like that, and Liliya steps off him and comes over to me, looking me up and down and says, ‘I can usually tell with a glance, but I can’t tell with you. Do you want to be in his place or mine?’ And I’m still just horrified, but I manage to say yours, and she says, ‘Are you willing to put in the effort it takes to be good, or do you just want to take the power without working for it?’ I say I want to be good, and she says, ‘Okay. He is your trainer during the day; I can train you at night. Do you accept?’ And after a few more moments to get my brain working right again, I agree. It ended up being one of the best things I’ve ever agreed to. She spent a few years training me, and I wouldn’t have been anything close to what I am now without her expertise. It’s why I wanted to then guide others myself.”

“Wow. So, how did she train you?”

“She taught me about good practices and how to read my sub and handle whips and just about every other tool you can think of. I did all my first scenes with her watching over me to make sure I didn’t hurt them, so I ended up having my first time with her guiding and instructing me which was so very awkward at first, but it turned out to be immensely helpful.”

“Wow. That is… Wow. You didn’t want to have your first time… normally?”

“No. Normally included things I wasn’t comfortable with. It’s a big part of why I was drawn to this. I could control what I was okay with and only do those, and no one questioned it or thought it was strange or expected me to do it even if I wasn’t okay with it.”

He nodded. “So, your boyfriend didn’t mind being watched for that?”

“It wasn’t a boyfriend. Just a random sub Liliya picked for me. She was nice, but I never saw her again after.”

“I thought you said you didn’t do that outside of relationships.”
“Now. Things you’re comfortable with can change over time.”

“Oh. So, you… got less okay with being that intimate over time?”

“Yes. It was just too close for me and harder for me to control, so it was better to drop it.”

“Oh. I’m sorry if I’m prying too much.”

“Don’t apologize for trying to get to know me. I want you to.”

“Yes, Viktor.”

Leather was the dominant theme among the outfits followed by latex and lace and corsets and metal on parts of the body he’d never expected metal to be worn with tails filling in a surprising number on the chart. Dog tails, fox tails, bunny tails, horse tails: all attached to eager subs, many of them attached to leashes, who seemed to take delight in shaking and swaying their perked-up asses.

A woman in a dressage show outfit with breeches, boots, a tailcoat and top hat walked by leading another woman dressed head to toe in black latex with a horse head over her own complete with a bridle. A flowing black tail followed them, and Yuri watched them go with an inkling of suspicion rising.

“Please don’t put any tails on me.” He gave Viktor the best pleading eyes he could manage.

Viktor laughed. “No? But I think you’d look cute with a little bunny tail.” He poked his nose making it wrinkle before he kissed it.

He pondered this a moment. “Well… maybe.” He considered the possibilities of playing like that, and it maybe had some potential for fun. Rabbits are known for their vigorous breeding abilities.

“No a horse tail?”

He shook his head. “I’ve got plenty of horses. I want something new.”

They passed scene after scene of people being whipped and flogged with all sorts of exciting tools, and Yuri found himself aching with his desire for Viktor to use them on him. He’d been turned on and traveling the borderlands of ecstasy for hours now, and he wasn’t sure how much more he could take. A man beat the bound breasts of a woman with a flogger that had the ends capped with metal studs. A shiver rolled through him and settled neatly in his cock.

“Oh? What’s got your interest?”

He nodded in the direction of the woman bound to one of the stone pillars. “His flogger. It looks a little different. What is it?”

“Cat ‘o nine tails or cat for short. Do you like it?”

He watched the flogger draw red lines with every lash while the woman screamed with agony that gasped into pleasure. “Yes, Viktor.”

“That one’s more intense. It has a much higher risk of breaking the skin and a lot more pain.”

He looked over with his eyes bright.

Viktor chuckled and poked his nose again. “You just love going zero to sixty as fast as you can, don’t you? I can start dialing up the pain for you as long as you keep being my delicious little virgin slut.” His lips and hand raked over his neck and cock. “Give me every reason to give you everything
“Yes, Viktor.” He whimpered as an orgasm drew near.

He led him away as he whispered into his ear. “Be patient, zolotse.”

Viktor stopped at a naked woman covered in whip marks and black tally marks on her ass with her head and hands locked up in wooden stocks holding her in place.

She smiled, sighing as she licked her lips. “Boss. Please help me fulfill my punishment? Please fuck my throat until I gag. I’ll let you go as deep as you want. I’ll make it so good for you.”

He glared down at her as if she’d displeased him in some way. “I see you haven’t improved from last time. You’re disappointing me, Mouse.” The chill that settled over him sunk into Yuri’s bones.

She put on a show of looking ashamed, but a slight sheen in her eye that Yuri recognized all too well revealed her excitement at having captured Viktor’s attention. “I’m sorry, Boss. I didn’t mean to disappoint you. Please punish me, so I can learn how to be a good sub. Please, Boss? Please, please punish me, so I can learn how to make you proud.”

“You should already know how to make me proud.” He read the tally marks on her ass and tsk’d as he looked to the dom standing over her. “How long has she been in the stocks for?”

“Two hours.”

“Two hours and you only got five people to fuck you? You can’t even entice them into using a free hole for a few minutes? You’ve got three of them and not one of them was worth stopping at to fuck however they liked?” He shook his head with disdain settling over him like a cloak. “You want me to punish you one last time so you can have one last hope at ever making me proud?”

“Yes, Boss! Please, Boss! Please, please punish me.”

He leaned over to grab her face, a sneer on his own. “It’s going to hurt, and I won’t be the one to pick up your pieces.”

Her eyes lit up while Yuri shrunk back from that tone in his voice even if it wasn’t directed at him. How could she be excited? Didn’t she know that Viktor was screaming danger with every breath? “Please, Boss, give it to me hard. Please, I can take it.”

“Pay close attention.”

“I will. I promise I’ll be good.”

He patted her cheek, his flicker of a smile not shaking the disdain at all. “Good girl. This one’s a secret I’m going to share. A Dom is never weaker; never stronger; never more satisfied; never hungrier… than when he’s holding honest submission in his hands. Nothing is harder for him to resist.

“You, little Mouse, are so easy to resist, you’re not even worth a lazy fuck.” He let go of her face like he was throwing away a piece of revolting trash and turned to Yuri, shedding his cloak with a warm smile just for him. “My beautiful Eros. Kiss me.”

He gasped along with the shattered woman in the stocks. Kiss him? Where? Those were questions. Not a real kiss then. No other specifications. Anywhere but there. He gave a soft smile as he picked up Viktor’s hand and pressed a gentle kiss to his knuckles. Viktor sighed, his smile crinkling as he
held his face gently. Yuri pecked the back of his hand then moved up to the exposed dip in his throat by his open shirt collar, softly laying kisses, licking gently over his skin.

Viktor sighed again and pulled him in close, wrapping his arms around him as he tilted his head to allow him to go further. “Yes, that’s it. It feels so good, my beautiful Eros. Make me feel it completely.”

He raked his fingers through the back of his hair, his tongue stroking and lips closing over the edge of his jaw in the gentlest kisses he had as Viktor melted into his body. “Viktor,” he sighed, “you feel so good. Thank you.”

“Yes, zolotse, yes. That’s it. You feel so amazing.” He sighed, relaxing deeper into his arms. “Let’s go see something more interesting.”

“Yes, Viktor.” He retook his spot on his arm as Viktor gave him a kiss on his cheek.

“Lord Jones? A word please?” He waved Mouse’s dom over.

Yuri glanced back at the woman while they were talking whose eyes burned with hatred for him with a depth he’d never before experienced. If she was Viktor’s old sub was this what his future looked like? He pictured tally marks on his ass offered up to anyone who liked it instead of Viktor’s name written so beautifully where everyone could see and clung to his arm a little tighter as he turned back to Viktor’s conversation. His heart made little shivering attempts to shake off her glare on his back.

“Good and make sure you’re extra attentive to her, okay? Let me know if there are any problems.”

“Will do, Boss.”

He led them away without looking back at his aftermath.

“Who—who was she?”

“Just an old sub. Not one I’m proud of. I had to kick her out to one of my other Doms rather than letting her graduate with my stamp of approval. Sadly, not everyone can be taught. This just isn’t right for some people, but they cling to it anyway. I’m hoping that will wake her up to the fact that she’s just not suited to be a sub. Better to make her let go of this and find what she is suited for.”

“Graduate?”

“When my subs have earned my approval for having achieved my standards for training, they’re allowed to take part in a graduation ceremony of sorts. Some choose not to, and that’s fine, they still earn my mark and can say they graduated from my training, but most see it as an honor and are excited to participate.”

“What is the ceremony?”

“You’ll see later tonight.”

A man passed by, completely naked apart from a leash leading out from the center of his erect cock. Yuri studied him trying to figure out how it was attached. He was walking a little too slowly for his dom, so he gave him a pull, yanking his cock tight until he caught up.

He turned to Viktor, his expression asking the question for him. “How?”
“Ah, he’s got a cock screw in.”

“A what?” Something thick rolled through him that felt like horror with those two words used so closely together, but it had a hot edge that carved tremors into him on its way.

He tilted his head as he studied him with a smile. “Oh, that’s an interesting one.”

Viktor scanned the room for a moment then led him up to one of the higher levels and stopped at a scene with a man tied up to an elaborate chair with his legs spread and bound like a frog and a large rubber ball strapped to his mouth as another man selected a long, twisted rod from a metal tray and coated it in lube. He slipped it right into the slit of his penis and let it sink into his body.

Yuri’s eyes fixed on the twists sparkling brighter before they disappeared into his body. It was so long, he didn’t expect it all to go in, but slowly it plunged into him until it disappeared completely. Yuri was transfixed the whole way. The dom turned on the vibrator in his ass then grasped both the small ring that was the only part exposed of the metal rod and the vibrator and thrust them both into his sub at the same time. The sub’s muffled screams sounded so much louder than they were as the flickering light of a nearby torch timed with his desperate writhing.

Yuri’s body was on fire as he leaned over to ask Viktor a question without taking his eyes off that sparkling rod flaring and extinguishing with every thrust. “What is that?”

“Sounding. They’re hitting the prostate directly like that rather than going through the walls of the ass along with the entire urinal tract being sensitive, so it’s a very profound pleasure or so I’m told. You can also go deeper and go right through the prostate which is even more intense.”

“Through it?”

“Yes. The urethra passes through the center of the prostate, so you can reach it by going all the way to the end. You can also stimulate by going wider, using thicker rods and plugs and stretching the urethra.”

His legs clamped together instinctively trying to hide the pulsing in his cock.

Viktor’s hand disappeared from his support and ripped into his ass making him yelp with the sudden pain. “You don’t hide from me. It’s my right to know every reaction you have and to put you on display as I see fit.”

“Yes, Viktor!” His cock straining against the tight fabric holding it against his stomach, he straightened back out, spreading his feet slightly as he retook Viktor’s offered arm. He glanced around at the others watching him and turned in to Viktor to bury his face in his shoulder as his cock pulsed thick and hot and heavy with an orgasm weighing on it. “I’m gonna come.”

“No. Not yet.”

He whined and snuggled in deeper when Viktor wrapped him in his arms. “I’m dying here.”

“What’s turning you on more? The sounding? The idea of me stretching out your every hole? The people watching you get so pretty and ready for me, watching you bare yourself to me completely, watching—seeing how clearly you are mine?”

He gasped. “Yes, Viktor. All of it.” His heart raced through his chest as he tried to slow his breath to hold onto Viktor’s order. “Please. I’m… I need help.”

“Oh? Shall I ask if someone here is willing to help you?”
“No, Viktor!” His eyes shot up with horror. “Please, Viktor, no.”

“You weren’t specific, so I assumed you were just looking for help in general. Is that not the case?”

“No, Viktor. I need your help.”

He smiled and kissed his cheek as his hands wrapped around to his shoulders, and he started up his alternating rhythm to give him something else to focus on. “That’s much better, zolotse. Do you want to go see something less exciting or do you want to see the end?”

His body had backed away significantly with the scare Viktor had given him, and his calming technique dropped him further into safer territory though he was still thoroughly turned on. “I want to stay, but can I stay like this?”

“Yes.”

“Thank you, Viktor.” He sighed and turned his face to the side, resting his head on Viktor’s shoulder as he watched the scene play out. “What do you think of it?”

“I think anything that turns you on that much is hot as hell.”

“But… if I didn’t react like that… would you like it? Have you ever done it?”

“Yes, I’ve done it, given it rather, not had it done myself. I didn’t have a strong opinion on it though until just now. Now, I’m dying to try it on you. And since it’s not painful unless I choose to make it so, it’s something that’s on the table for trying now.”

“Oh.” His cock gave a few rapid pulses against Viktor’s stomach.

Viktor grinned. “Number?”

“Three.” He squirmed as another orgasm peaked before he remembered he was supposed to relax and breathe slowly to hold it at bay. He took a few deep breaths until the sensation dialed back a few degrees. “I… is there anything else that you… want to do?”

“Hmm… other than the things you know about, I tend to be fairly simple in my kinks. I like things that give me lots of options for play and have some artistry to them. Kinbaku. I’m dying to try that one on you. You’d look so gorgeous.”

He looked up at him with confusion. “Kinbaku? That’s a Japanese word, but it doesn’t mean anything sexual. It means to tie tightly.”

Viktor pointed to the human heart above them. “Kinbaku or shibari. Both are used here with some debate on their actual meanings; though, I do understand they originated in Japanese bondage circles which are the ones who passed on the lovely art of bondage with ropes tied with an emphasis on the aesthetics.”

“Oh. That… makes sense. I could see how they’d be used like that. What’s the difference here in the way the words are used?”

“Well, a common one is that kinbaku involves more of the experience of being tied up and has a deep emotional connection, using the ropes to communicate with your partner. Shibari is a bit more generic rope bondage but still in an aesthetic way.”

He nodded. “Interesting. It’s funny hearing everyday words used to mean things like that.”
“Is that something you think you’d like more now understanding what it is? You’d marked rope bondage as a two on your chart.”

He observed the woman still resting peacefully with her hands folded up against her own heart, her energy thrumming through the whole work, infusing it with life. Bytiye. That’s what Viktor had described. Existence expanding to completeness. He pointed up at her. “Bytiye, yes?”

He looked up trying to figure out what he meant then a slow smile spread over his face. “Da. Bytiye.”

“Three.”

The scene ended with a forceful gush of cum as the rod was pulled out and Viktor led him away. “I didn’t expect that one for you, but it makes sense. You still have a lot of things buried in there.”

“Is that bad? Am I weird?”

“No. You’re perfect. You’re kinky as hell, and I love it.”

“I… didn’t know I was kinky.”

“How would you? You have to experience things to know your reaction to them.”

He stopped him at another scene where a man had his balls bound tightly in a rope. A woman took them in her gloved hand and skewered them straight through with a needle. That same rush he felt at hearing the words cock screw floated through him only it carried a wave of nausea and blackness along with it.

“No. Viktor, please no.”

He was already leading him away before he finished his short sentence. “It’s okay. Slow breaths. Do you want to go sit down for a minute?”

“No, Viktor, I’m okay.” The nausea and spinning in his head eased as they walked further away. “Have you ever done that one?”

“Yes.”

“Do—do you like it?”

“Yes. It’s a nice change of pace. Very serene type of pain. I’ve had some describe it like acupuncture. The size of the needle plays a big role in how much pain you feel.”

“I want to go back.”

His lip quirked with displeasure. “You almost passed out.”

“Please? I’ll be fine.”

He scanned him over once then checked him deeper and nodded. “Okay, but if you start getting woozy again, I’m taking you away.”

“Yes, Viktor.”

Viktor walked him back, glancing down at him with a smile flickering on his face that he tried to hide away when he looked back ahead. “You want to go back for me, don’t you?”
He dipped his head with a smile. “Yes, Viktor. If you like it, I want to at least try to like it too.”

“You make me feel so good, Yuri. Thank you.”

By the time they came back, the sub held several more needles in his balls and piercing through his shaft. Yuri’s stomach churned, but he held it down and tried to keep his breathing even.

“How are you doing?” Viktor leaned in to keep his voice just to him even though the music would have covered it anyway with it set to create a bubble for private speech between anyone within a foot of each other where the more intense scenes were carried out and expanded that bubble wider toward the soft pit where the music quieted along with the scenes. Had Viktor ordered it that way or just shaped it with his attention?

“I’m okay. I’m calming down a bit.” It was true, but sickness still coated his insides. At least his mind started pricking with curiosity that helped distract him as he watched Viktor watching the scene with that flame sparking in his eyes as another needle passed straight through the sub’s cock. “What number is this for you?”

“Three. On you, it’d be a four.” He chuckled. “I’m using your flexible numbering system here. I like it.”

He swallowed the nauseous saliva flooding his mouth, picturing himself in that position. “Why a four for me?”

“You had an intense reaction to it, and while it wasn’t pleasant, it’s not impassive. The things you look at calmly on first glance are rarely the ones you love the most. It often happens that a little exposure flips that strong reaction from negative to positive. You would have gone through that transformation entirely to please me which increases my desire for it. I could create all sorts of beautiful designs on you. This Domme isn’t really showing off the artistry of it which is fine as she’s going for sensation rather than art, but I like making it beautiful too. The pain is not nearly as intense as it looks. You’d likely find it to be more of a meditative session than anything else, unless it’s a strong fear of needles driving that reaction.”

“No, Viktor. I’m generally not afraid of needles but needles there… yeah, that’s…” He shuddered rather than finish his sentence.

“Well, that would be off-limits for you anyway for now. Needles can go many other places. They’re another very flexible tool.”

He couldn’t remember answering this one on the checklist and guessed that Viktor had crossed it out. “Three.”

“Three?” His eyes widened. “I wasn’t expecting anything other than a zero for now, but if you’re going to give me a positive number, I would have guessed a two.”

“For you: a three.”

“Yuri…” His face melted as he grabbed him into kisses, laughing as he squirmed under his tickling breath. “That both delights me and concerns me. That right there is why you’re not to be trusted for anything you say about what you desire without confirming evidence. It’s not really a three. You don’t deeply desire it. You’re just willing to try it because I want to. That’s a two.”

“I understand the numbering system. I do deeply desire it because you want it so badly.”

“Yuri!” He littered him with more bubbling laughter and kisses as the audience watched him with
great curiosity. “You’re such a sweet little liar.”

“I’m not lying.”

“I know you think that.” He kissed his nose and settled him back at his side.

The domme picked up some small clamps attached to wires and started connecting them to the needles.

“What’s she doing?”

“Electricity, nice touch. The electric current passes through the needles and increases the sensation.”

“Would I like that?”

“Most likely. The needles alone would be too boring for you once you get used to them. Not enough pain for my little pain slut.” He smiled and gave his nipple clamp a little tug. “Though it depends on how you feel about the electricity in general. You love pain from impact play and seemed to like the sharper pain from my teeth, so I think there’s a good chance you’d like the needle pain as well, but electricity is another kind of pain. Even masochists don’t always love every type of pain. You can love some and hate others.”

“Oh. Will we be trying it?”

“Yes, soon. Come on. Let’s go see some other things.” He searched for something new then grinned. “Maybe something fluffy.”

He couldn’t say he wasn’t relieved to go, but the next sight he was brought to left his mind so reeling in confusion, he longed for the focus the needles had given him back. A tiger, like the ones used for sports mascots, was humping a screaming bunny bent forward over a table. He watched their plush fur bouncing off each other with his head tilted.

“Viktor?”

He laughed as he pulled him in to hide his reaction. “Is it getting you hot?”

“Um… no? Is it supposed to?”

“It does for some.”

He jerked back to watch his face. “Does it make you hot?”

“No, can’t say that it does.”

“Why?”

“Why what?”

“Why are they doing that?”

He shrugged. “They like it. I didn’t think this would be one of yours, but you surprise me a lot, so I thought I’d check.”

“I don’t get it. Why?”

“Careful. Watch your face. You’re starting to look a little horrified.”
“Yes, Viktor. I’m sorry.” He took a deep breath to clear his expression.

“Better. As for you not getting it, what’s there to get? They enjoy it. It brings them pleasure. It doesn’t have to be analyzed and a thesis written on it for it to be a valid form of pleasure.”

“Have you ever…”

“Yes.”

He nodded slowly trying to contain his reaction. “Okay.”

He laughed and kissed his efforts. “Better. I’ve had subs into it so why not? To help you narrow down your questions, the answer to have I tried it is yes to just about everything you see here tonight. There’s only about two things I can think of that I haven’t tried and never will. There might be a handful of other things I haven’t tried that particular variation of, but I’ll have likely done something similar.”

“Okay. I’m sorry if I offended you.”

“You didn’t. I’m comfortable with my experiences. Though someone newer or less comfortable could be hurt by your reaction. Work on being more accepting.”

“Yes, Viktor. So… what did you dress up as?”

He smiled and bopped his nose. “A polar bear.”

“Did you like it?”

“The suit was hot,” he laughed, “and I mean that in the non-erotic sense. It was so hot in there. And the paws made it so hard to do anything. I didn’t hate the experience, but it wasn’t my favorite either. The roleplaying was fun. I always enjoy that.”

“Do you… still have it?”

“Oh! Interested now, are we?”

“My mind is interested. My cock isn’t.”

He gave a surprised laugh and pulled him in to kiss his forehead, still laughing. “Zero to sixty in three seconds flat. That’s you. You speak so timidly and then out of nowhere such a bold statement. Do you want to see me in it?”

“Yes, Viktor.” He grinned and kissed his cheek. “I can’t picture it. I need to see it.”

“Are you sure? It could be dangerous. I tend to get very into what I’m doing. I just might forget that I’m not a wild animal and decide to hunt you.” His hand curled around his thigh.

Confusion settled into his now very interested cock. “Viktor?”

He leaned in, his words growling in his ear. “And running would do you no good at all. It would only make me crave you that much more.” His hands clutched at the softness of his ass, pulling his hips into his heat. “I’d tear into you and claim you as my tasty prize… Make a meal out of that lusciously tender flesh.”

“Viktor…” he rolled into his grip and groaned, “how do you make everything so damn hot?”
“I know what you like.” He released him and led him to another bizarre inch of the cave.

They walked past a woman strung up on metal rods holding her arms and legs apart wearing nothing but a black hood covering her whole head except for small slits for her to breathe. Her dom stood nearby watching her.

“What are they doing?”

“Sensory deprivation play. A more extreme version of what we tried with the blindfold.”

“Oh.”

The dom ran his hands over her body then up to her breasts, caressing them before giving a hard-twisting pinch then went back to soft caresses as her body tensed and then slackened. He was a little jealous that she had it with pain. He would have been able to endure it longer with that. Viktor didn’t treat his failure there as one, and he knew he was supposed to accept his version, but he couldn’t help feeling like he’d failed.

“I want to try it again. With the blindfold.”

“You will when I decide you’re ready for that. You struggled even without the blindfold. We need to work through that first.”

“How do I get better at it?”

“You need to let go of trying to punish yourself, and I need to figure out how to make your mind a less terrifying place to visit. I know one part that I’m still working you toward, but there’s still a lot more I have to work out. I’m sorry. Your mind is a complex one to figure out, and I’m trying to do it with very little information. I’m not using that as an excuse, just an explanation for why I’m struggling to find the right key here for you. We’ll get there though. I promise. Just have some faith in me.”

He saw it as his failure? “It wasn’t your fault. I was the one who couldn’t handle it.”

“I’m the Dom. It’s always my fault. Everything is always my responsibility. If I push you into something you can’t do, it’s because I misjudged your current state or didn’t give you the right tools to succeed. Your life is in my hands. I’m as responsible for everything you experience as I am for my horses. The only time you ever bear any responsibility is when you reject my control and choose your own instead.”

“You don’t mind that?”

“I love it. The heavier your life rests in my hands, the more secure I feel.”

(25) A couple in a clear box just big enough to fit them hung from the ceiling on metal poles behind the heart. Steam clung to the walls and ran down in rivulets as the couple pressed into each other in a fit of passionate sex. The simplicity of it drew his attention, and Viktor stopped to let him watch.

“Small spaces and, or exhibitionism kink,” Viktor supplied. “Likely both. Do you like it?”

“Yes, Viktor.”

“Which part?”

“Um…” He imagined himself up there and could only picture it with Viktor, a crowd below them
watching Viktor fuck him, seeing their desire for each other cling to the walls as a physical entity. “You. You fucking me.” He gulped, his eyes staying locked on the box holding his fantasy in clear sight. “Everyone watching you fuck me.”

He moved over behind him, slipping his hand inside his underwear to take a firm grasp of his cock and started jerking him slowly, his fingers trailing after his thrusts. His lips over his neck, the eyes constantly on them more focused than usual, Yuri rested his trembling body into Viktor’s supporting one.

“Like this? Having them watch every bit of pleasure I give to you? Knowing they can only watch and desire because you’re the only one who can feel my touch?”

“Yes, Viktor.”

His thumb circled his slick head. “Exhibition kink. It’s a big one for you. I’d love to fuck you up there. You know,” his hand slipped down to caress his hole with his fingers now slick, “once a year we have a fancy dinner party here. It’s an evening of finery and kink, and because I’m the boss, I always sit at the head of the table. I’m picturing finishing the dessert course and still not feeling satiated and throwing you over the table… fucking you right there where everyone can see me open you up and take my pleasure from you… How does that sound?” His finger slipped in followed by a second and a desperate gasping fell from Yuri’s lips.

He rocked into the stretch begging for more. “Please, yes, Viktor. I would love that.” His face screwed against the assault of pleasure. “Please, can I come?”

“Oh, I like the way you said that much more. Asking me so prettily.” He took his cock in hand as well, forcing pleasure into him in both places with agonizing restraint. “I’d love to say yes, but it’s not time yet.”

He whined. “Please, Viktor. When is it time?”

“When I say it is.” The growl in his tone and the thrusts gaining force demanded his submission as he brought him to a new peak higher than any he had felt before and didn’t back off. “Don’t you dare come. You’re mine. Everything you experience is mine to control. Don’t steal it from me.”

He gasped and tried to relax into his quaking body, trying to hold in everything he gave. “I won’t. I won’t. I won’t fight you, and you—won’t let me fail.”

“Perfect.” He sighed and stretched his pleasure wider and deeper. “You’re perfect. I won’t let you fail. You’re right. As long as you’re in my hands, you won’t fail.”

“Yes, Viktor.”

His fingers stroked over his prostate building the pressure inside him until his ability to obey started to crack. Viktor pulled his hands free and turned him into the safety of his arms, taking away the force of their eyes while his body eased back down. “Beautiful, Yuri. Perfect. Trust me, and you will never fail. I won’t let you. Remember that one.”

Viktor led him around some more, pointing out more confusing, terrifying, and stimulating kinks and sights than his mind had slots for, while eyes and whispers followed them the entire time. Some were comfortable enough to strike up a conversation with Viktor, but apart from the puppy, no one even approached Yuri without first speaking to Viktor, and if Viktor didn’t like a question or turn of the conversation, he’d shut it down without hesitation. When Yuri struggled to find his words, he’d bolster him with a tighter grip or a kiss on his cheek. He didn’t have to worry about stammering
awkwardly, try to find the right small talk that wouldn’t make him feel like an utter failure at being a normal member of society. He wasn’t normal. Nothing about this was normal. He’d never felt more at ease at a party.

Viktor paused him yet again to pull him into his arms and bring him to another peak, stroking his cock until he was ready to break, disregarding everyone but him. Holding him at the top longer than usual, Viktor grinned at his agony. “That’s right, beautiful. Hold on. You can hold on as long as I want you to, yes?”

“Yes, Viktor!” He gasped as the words made his cock twitch dangerously.

“Not yet. Not yet, beautiful. I know you can do it. For me. I know you will do it.”

He found a space just under his skin where the pleasure could sit without feeling like such a risk.

“Yes, Viktor. More. I’ll hold on through more if that’s what you want from me.”

Viktor fell into his own pleasure melting on his face. “Yes. So perfect. God, you’re like a drug.” He picked up the pace on his cock sparing him no kindness. “Yes, more. I want so much more.”

“Yes, Viktor.” All he had to do was follow his order, and he’d be fine. He relaxed around his challenge, his body both stimulated and relaxed, stretching him between the extremes. Viktor knew what he was doing, and as he rested in Viktor’s pleasure, he could feel the shifting strokes and rhythm that metered what he felt and see his eyes focused on every twitch of his muscles to know precisely when to change. A small laugh escaped his lips. He wasn’t lacking in rhythm; he was just used to changing it to best fit rapidly changing states.

He pulled off with a kiss to his cheek. “Very good, zolotse. What was so funny?”

“Um, just that I figured out why your rhythm on the horses sucks.”

“Oh!” He laughed, playfully swatting his ass. “Is that so? Do share.”

“You mastered rhythm here, not there. You change your rhythm a lot in response to what’s happening here, but the horses need something steadier and for you to override their changes with that steadiness.”

He shook his head slowly with a smile. “God you’re sexy when you show off how insightful and smart you are.” He layered him in tickling kisses, breaking them both into a fit of laughter. “So. So. Smart. Sexy. So sexy.”

“Viktor!” Yuri squealed as he pushed back against his kisses. “It tickles!”

Viktor didn’t let up, wresting his kisses and praises onto him until a woman in a short black dress with a long sheer train that reached to the floor and a blue beacon of light streaming up from the center of her back walked up and cleared her throat.

Viktor looked over like he’d been caught in the cookie jar. “Oh, Madame, how are you? You look lovely in that dress.”

“Vitya…” She fell into a string of Russian burying the nickname in the incoherence, or she would have likely been able to do that had Yura not spoken it so clearly every time he addressed Viktor today.

Viktor smiled as he settled Yuri back to his spot on his arm. “I wholeheartedly disagree, and it’s rude to speak a foreign language in front of someone who doesn’t speak it when they’re a part of the
She raised her eyebrows. “A part of the conversation? Fine. If that’s how you want to treat your sub.” Her tone carried her disapproval in no uncertain terms.

“It is.” Viktor’s tight smile carried his threat just as clearly.

“Fine. May I have your attention alone for a moment? There’s something I need to discuss with you.”

“It’s a party, Madame. Can it wait?”

“No, it cannot.”

“Fine. I’ll give you five minutes. That’s it.” He turned to Yuri and kissed his cheek. “Wait right here for me, zolotse.”

“Yes, Viktor.”

Madame pulled in a quick breath before her stern face creased further into a frown, and she stepped away to wait for him. Viktor joined her a few feet away where they picked up a conversation that flowed in heated Russian.

A hand grabbed Yuri’s ass, fingers digging into his bruises. “What a little pain piggy you are. Wanna play?” A man’s deep voice crept down his neck.

Before Yuri could think to move or respond in any way, Viktor had his hand clinched around a man’s face, higher than his, but Viktor’s rage was already dragging him down. “Get on your fucking knees right now.” His accent thickened, his tone showing all the power he had at his disposal, held back only by his wavering humanity.

“I’m a Dom. I don’t fucking kneel.” Terror cowered behind his strong words.

“Get on your fucking knees if you want any hope of ever finding a partner ever again, you fucking shit stain who dares call himself Dom. I will make it my life’s mission to inform every person you meet that you are as close to being a Dom as festering sewage is to being fine wine.”

The man sank halfway down then stopped. “You can’t fucking do anything to me.”

Viktor yanked his hand down as he stomped on the back of his calf to drop him the rest of the way. He seethed from inches away, his hand shaking as it gouged bruises in his face. “It wasn’t fucking optional.”

“Ow! Hey, man, you can’t do this! This is assault.”

Viktor’s rage turned incredulous. “What do you think what you just did to my sub was?”

“I was just asking if he wanted to play.”

“Oh? Is that all? Fine. Then I’m in the wrong here, and I’ll call the police for you, and you can explain to them exactly what you did and then exactly what I did and see what they have to say.” He made a move to pull out his phone without dropping his grip.

“Okay! Okay! I’m sorry! I didn’t know it was like that.”

“You didn’t know it was like what? That you fucking ask before you put your hands on someone?
That you fucking ask before using names no one in polite society would use? You didn’t know that the basic standards of being a human being still apply? You didn’t know those are held even stricter because we play so close to the line? You didn’t know that breaking that for a second instantly turns this from being fun and pleasurable to being assault and rape? You didn’t know that consent is not fucking optional?"

The room turned eerily silent below the still playing music with everyone in the area halting all their conversations and activities to watch.

“I’m sorry. Okay? I’m sorry.”

“Why are you apologizing to me? It’s him you hurt. To me, you just fucking beg for my mercy.” He dropped his face and stood back straight. “Kiss the ground at his feet and start groveling.”

The man dropped down to kiss the ground while spewing apologies.

Viktor took Yuri in his arms and stroked his face gently. “Are you okay?"

“Yes, Viktor. I’m fine. It wasn’t anything major. Please don’t do anything that would get you into trouble over me.”

“He touched you, Yuri. He said things to you that were beyond unacceptable. It needs to be dealt with.”

“I know, but I’m just saying that I’m fine. Really. He didn’t get to me. It just startled me, and then you were there. That’s it.”

“I’m glad you’re okay.”

“I am. Really. Please calm down. I don’t want to see you this stressed over it.” He brushed his thumb over his cheek before he rested a kiss on it. “Please?”

“You’re sweet, and I’m glad that you weren’t traumatized by it, but I’m going to deal with him as I see fit. What he did was not okay, and he needs to learn.”

“Yes, Viktor.”

“Good, Yuri.” He turned his attention back to the man still apologizing profusely, his posture bracing his power. “You will stay on your knees the rest of the evening. If someone asks why you are on your knees, you are to say, ‘Because I didn’t know I was supposed get consent before I touched someone’s body or began play, and I thought it was okay to grab The Boss’s sub’s ass and use degrading names before I even said hi.’ Fail to do that even once, and my threat from earlier becomes your future. Do not underestimate my ability or determination to haunt you the rest of your life. Does someone have paper and a marker?” He waited a moment until both were hand delivered. He smiled at the pale young man who delivered it with quaking hands. “Thank you.”

He wrote a message on the paper then propped it on his lap. ‘I think I’m a Dom, but I’m on my knees. Ask me why.’

The man read it then looked back up to his Viktor. “You’re going to ruin my reputation.”

“You’re the one who created your reputation. I’m just letting everyone know where it stands.” His lip snarled in disgust. “Madame, get someone to stand guard over him for the rest of the night to ensure my orders are followed.”
“Yes, sir.” She lifted her dress slightly to unholster a radio from a strap on her thigh.

Viktor gave her a quick nod then led him away.

As soon as they got out of view, Viktor stopped to recheck him. His hands cradled his face. “You’re sure you’re okay?”

“Yes, Viktor. I was just a little surprised. That’s all.”

“You know that what he called you has nothing to do with your body, right? It’s just a derogatory term that some people like to be called who really enjoy pain. He was referring to the bruises on you. That’s it.”

“I understand. I was just trying to figure out what he was saying to be honest.”

“Good. I’m so sorry, Yuri. I shouldn’t have let that happen.”

“It’s fine. You didn’t do it.”

“I’m supposed to control everything that happens to you, and I didn’t control this. I’m so, so very sorry. I’ll do everything I can not to let it happen again.”

“Are you going to never let me out of your sight for a second? Because that’s all you were gone for.”

He sighed. “I guess it’s unreasonable to say yes to that, isn’t it?”

“Yes, Viktor. I’m fine. I promise.”

“Use a different word.”

“I’m great. I’m stupendous. I’ve never been so comfortable at a party before.”

He smiled just a bit. “Is that so?”

“Yes, Viktor.”

“Even though I’ve been doing all sorts of scandalous things with you?”

He blushed. “I—I kind of like it.”

He hummed appreciatively as he slid back in to raise his pleasure once again. “That’s because you’re a kinky little thing, aren’t you?”

His back curled, thrusting him into his touch. “Ah! Hai—Yes, Viktor.”

“You’re certain you’re okay? This doesn’t feel uncomfortable to you?”

“No, Viktor. Just—just so good.”

“Good.” He kissed his cheek as he found a new, crueler spot.

“Um, can I ask—is it rude to ask… now?”

“Ask what?”

“Ngh, ah, um that was Liliya, wasn’t it? She looked familiar, but I wasn’t sure.”
“Yes.”

“Oh. Ungh—ah! Sorry. It just feels so good.”

He chuckled. “It’s supposed to.”

“Yes, but um, should I wait to talk? Or—”

Viktor shifted and somehow made something already incredible ten times that.

“Oh god. So good.”

“Keep talking. Do your best to talk as you normally would.”

“Ngh! Yes, Viktor. So um, I wanted to ask about—about her—oh god.” He gripped Viktor’s shoulders to save himself just a little from his ruthlessness. “The blue light?”

“Oh. She’s a cave monitor. She walks around making sure people are all playing by the rules, and nothing’s getting too carried away. There’s a few of them here, but Madame is the Mistress of this place.” He pointed out a few more blue lights shining up to the ceiling wavering about that he just now noticed. “If you ever need help for anything, and I’m not there, find one of the blue lights. If it’s not urgent, I prefer it if you seek out Madame specifically. You can always tell which one is her because her light is always the steadiest. She takes great pride in that.”

He looked around and did spot one steady stream of light that barely wavered. “Oh yeah, I can see her. Um, oh god you’re so—um so I also wanted to ask you about—Ahngh! Do you get along?”

“Usually, yes. It can be tense at times because we have a strange power balance with her being my elder and teacher for so many years, but I’m the owner here and her boss, plus she is a freelance trainer at the stable, so we have a kind of delicate balance with that, but for the most part it’s mutual respect keeping it working.”

“Oh, um, she seemed… unhappy? Um, with me?”

“No, not with you. With me. It’s just a difference in styles. She’s never quite accepted the fact that I have my own now.”

“Oh. Um, Ah! Ha! Viktor! You’re—so mean.”

He leaned in to kiss behind his ear as he pushed him closer to the edge. “Don’t ever forget it, beautiful.” He dropped back to retake his arm with another kiss. “Come on. Let’s get something to drink.”

Viktor brought him to the bar crossing the stone bridge over the glowing river. He sat him on one of the stools and caught the bartender’s attention who came hustling over. “Two of whatever non-alcoholic drinks you feel like making. Something light.”

“You’ve got it, Boss.” He started grabbing bottles and cups as he went to his next customer who ordered a whiskey on the rocks. “Count to ten and back again for me, nice and fast.”

Yuri’s brow wrinkled. “Why is he having him count?”

“He’s checking his sobriety. No one’s allowed to get drunk here. Alcohol at all isn’t the greatest idea but some people are here just to socialize and aren’t playing, so it makes it more enjoyable for them, and I’m not going to tell a bunch of adults they can’t have a drink or two if that’s what they prefer. I
just try to draw the line at anything unacceptably risky and being drunk and what we do here is unacceptably risky.”

The bartender slid over two glasses of a bubbling red drink, still clear enough to see the flickering lights wriggling through the tiny bubbles. Viktor led him over to the quieter couches and took an open spot next to Lady Rose and her puppy and pulled him into his lap. Yuri sighed and wriggled his toes letting the blood recirculate from the torture devices called shoes. Viktor’s warm arms around him made him feel safe even in the pit filled with a thorough mix of strangeness.

Since Viktor’s arms were filled with him again, he held out his glass for him to drink as he took a sip of his own. Watermelon. Sweet and crisp with a few other flavors floating around in there that finished with a hint of salt and pepper, it restored his energy and balance as he drank it down.

Viktor took a sip and smiled, kissing his cheek as his hand snaked into his underwear to placidly stroke his cock. “Thank you, zolotse.”

Heat raced to his cheeks as Snow watched them unabashedly from only inches away on the floor, but Viktor’s strokes were soothing, and the combination felt like the first steps into the onsen, its intense heat stripping the stress from his body. Settling now into this state Viktor had kept him in for so long, he began to accept it deeper into his body instead of letting it ride on the surface while he did everything to hold it at bay. As soon as it dropped in, it expanded. His head fell onto Viktor’s shoulder as he opened more to give him more room inside him.

Viktor grew hard beneath him as he leaned in to whisper in his ear. “Yes, that’s it my beautiful Yuri. Let me in just like that. It feels so good inside you.”

“Yes, Viktor,” he nuzzled in, his voice a bare whisper. “As far as you want.”

He made a sound of pleasure, something between a growl and a whine and found another pathway on his cock to slide in deeper. “That was real. You meant that.” He closed his eyes and pressed his face into Yuri’s neck. “That’s true submission. That’s what I want from you. Thank you.” He pressed into kisses over his neck. “Stay right there and enjoy it, but finish your drink.”

“Yes, Viktor.”

A few people near them whipped their heads around and started whispering to each other at hearing him use Viktor’s name, but he ignored them to follow his order. The whispers expanded rapidly from the little pebble Yuri had dropped.

The puppy whined quietly as he watched them stroking his own cock as well and looked at his owner pleadingly.

Lady Rose smiled at them. “He loves your sub. He wants to know if he can play with him.”

Yuri didn’t bother with worrying about what Viktor would say. That was outside of his orders, and anything other than his word and his touch felt so far away.

“He can watch and play from a distance. No touching.”

It wasn’t relief he felt but pleasure. Somehow even more pleasure at having placed his trust in Viktor not to push him places he didn’t want to go and having that upheld without a single waver between them.

The puppy gave a disappointed whine but palmed his cock a little more rapidly.
Viktor smiled at him. “Sorry, boy. I don’t share him.” That garnered more murmurs from the attentive crowd, but Viktor paid them no attention.

“How long have you had him?” Lady Rose smiled as she slung back on the couch.

“Five days.”

“Five days? That’s it? He’s so well trained. Was he ever a sub to anyone else?”

“No.”

“Wow. You seem to have quite the bond already.”

His smile crinkled up to his eyes. “Thank you. Yes, I’m so proud of him. He learns so quickly, and he wants to please so badly, and he’s so strong. He’s pushed through everything I’ve given him so far, and I’ve not been going easy. He adapts so beautifully to whatever I ask of him.”

“I see that. I have to say I’m a little surprised you’re not interested in sharing him. You’ve always been keen to show off your best subs.”

“Eros is special. He’s a virgin. I’m hoping to give him every first touch.”

Yuri stirred enough from soaking in pleasure to gaze up at him with a smile quirked on his lips. “’Cept kisses.”

Viktor smiled and nipped at his nose. “Drink your drink, my sassy little virgin slut.”

Lady Rose laughed with her eyes wide while her puppy grew more excited in his play. “A virgin? That’s incredible. You’re still only hoping to be his first? It looks pretty certain to me.”

“Eros is never as simple as he looks.”

(26) They chatted a bit longer with a few other people coming over to join Snow in blatantly jerking off to Viktor’s ministrations on Yuri. The more people watched, the hotter he got, and every rise in degree got Viktor’s cock throbbing harder and his hand seeking his pleasure with more earnest. It was a vicious cycle that forced Yuri to abandon their empty drink glasses to the floor while he clung to Viktor’s neck, writhing into muffled sobs.

“Hey, my pretty thing. Are you enjoying them all watching you?”

He whimpered and nodded. “Yes, Viktor.” His thighs clamped down trying to dampen just how much he liked it. It wasn’t him. This kink didn’t fit him. He was always trying to keep himself as invisible as possible. But the way their eyes burned into him as an extension of Viktor’s touch, one he commanded as easily as his own hand, he couldn’t deny its certain power over him. He didn’t just want to be Viktor’s; he wanted everyone to know he was Viktor’s. Erase any uncertainty in their minds. Maybe then it would erase it from his own. Shame burned his cheeks. The delusion had run off with him yet again, and he had no reins in his hands to stop it.

“Come on, beautiful, I want to show you off.” Viktor turned him facing outward on his lap and tugged his legs apart a few inches. Discovering Yuri’s resistance, his body stiffened. His hands played over his thighs, making a show of teasing their audience as his voice growled in his ear. “What is this, Yuri? I know you want this. I can see it all over you. You’re mine, and I am going to do whatever I want with you. I want to show you off. I love having a crowd admiring the work I’m proud of, so open your legs.”
His breath heaved in his chest as Viktor’s words of strength and reassurance corroded his resistance, and he wriggled his legs out a little wider. “You do?”

“I do, and if you think that little bit is enough to please me, you’re so wrong. You think you can get away with giving me anything less than everything I want? I want to show off my beautiful sub who fell to his knees begging me to punish him, and if you think a little thing like your shame is going to stop me from getting what I want and giving you what you need, you haven’t learned a damn thing.” His hands slipped between his trembling legs, preparing his grip. “You know how to stop me if that’s what you feel like doing. Otherwise, open your legs, and don’t you dare make me tell you again.” His hands dug into his soft flesh, ripping his last bit of resistance and prying his legs apart.

Viktor spread his legs as wide as they could go then pulled off his shoes and brought his feet up onto the couch to straddle him. Stroking along the inside of his thighs, his fingers caught in the lace circling his legs, teasing both Yuri and their bulging audience with his vulnerability.

With his blush scalding every inch of his skin, his cock twitched thickly showing Viktor exactly how much he liked being exposed for their attention without him saying a word. Oh god. He was going to come; he liked it too much; he was going to disobey Viktor and fail him just when he was trying to show off what he was proud of. He whimpered as he scrambled to hold on.

“Yes, that’s it, beautiful.” His voice softened back to the gentle rumbles of his idling engine. “I want to show off how beautiful my sub is and how good he is in my hands.” He slipped back inside his underwear, still keeping him covered. “I want them to see my softest Yuri.”

He coated his fingers with the fluid from his dripping cock, Yuri’s heart slamming into the walls of his chest, his vision flickering at the edges as Viktor slipped his first finger in, then his second, opening him up as soon as his body gave.

More people gathered wanting to know what the commotion was. They packed the small, sunken space and surrounded them from behind on the higher floor looking down to take in every angle. Sex ripened in the air over the leather and wet earth richer here next to the stream than anywhere else. Their strangeness descended upon him in full as his eyes darted from one eye-catching sight to the next. The one thing they had in common was their eyes all focused on him. If Viktor said he was worth looking at, that was more than enough for them.

Pushing in over each other to get a better view, they started up pleas of, “Please let us see him.” Polite, respectful, but desperate all the same.

Viktor shifted him on his lap to give himself more access and the audience a better view as he slipped a third finger inside, his underwear still blocking their view. “What do you want, zolotse?”

He arched back, his hands straining at Viktor’s neck to hold onto him, to hold onto his faith that he could hold onto his order to wait, to hold onto the promised truth of his words that he wanted it as badly as he did. His heart kicked up harder, staining every one of his throbbing senses blood red. “I want whatever you want to give me.” His rushing breath crushed him against the corset. “Please, Viktor, give me whatever you are willing to give.”

Viktor groaned as the crowd made approving sounds at his answer and slid a fourth finger in giving him as much stretch as his body could take, his own neglected cock twitching against Yuri’s back.

Sweat poured over his convulsing body as the audience pleaded with Viktor for more, begging him to show them his virgin hole.

“Color?” His voice breathless at his ear nearly made him come right there.
“Green. Please don’t let me fail. I need all of your help.”

“I won’t. I’ve got you.”

Taking his fingers back out of his hole, he gave him a moment of respite as he taunted their audience with his fingers playing over him.

His lips cooling his scalding neck, he nudged his underwear over exposing the head of his streaming cock to the licking air. His fingers danced along the length, teasing them with tugs at the elastic lace, unfurling him to their view one tiny bit at a time. Easing the underwear to the side, he bared his hole to the crowd leaning in as close as they could possibly get. Their craving to be the one to touch him, the one to open him, rested on his skin from their panting breath, but he knew not one of them would dare try when everything on him screamed Viktor’s claim.

Viktor coated his fingers with lube slipped from his pocket and traced his hole, slipping just into the edge and back out again, making a show of their first view of his penetration. Slowly, smoothly, he sank his finger in and the crowd groaned, as weak to his command as Yuri was. Viktor pulled back then pressed his second finger in as well, spreading them apart just enough for Yuri to feel as he eased back out. Thrusting his two fingers up to his knuckles, he pulled at his pleasure in his favorite spot as he eased every one of them into a groaning rhythm.

How was he not on fire yet? How had his heart not shattered inside his chest?

Alternating the first two fingers on each hand, Viktor pressed in and back out again, catching his rim and holding him open for a flashing glance inside as his other two fingers moved in to take its place. Fucking into him fully for the first time, stretching him as wide as he wanted with each change in hands, he rode Yuri’s body to a gasping, trembling peak, his cries of pleasure, shaped as they could only be by Viktor’s touch, leaving his mark in the air as well. Pausing him right at the edge, a deep groan filled the space. Catching his rim, Viktor held him stretched tight, as open as he could get him for their audience to gawk and admire.

His thickened blood carried his pulsing heartbeat to every inch as Viktor lifted him up into the cradle of his arms to lap at his cockhead and give everyone a better view, his fingers tugging at his rim as they shifted. He’d never felt so desperate for anything in his life as he was to come, but Viktor wasn’t done showing him off, and he was stronger than the people in the crowd already spilling into tissues that had been passed around and each other’s mouths.

Viktor pulled off to whisper in his ear. “Look at them, Yuri. Look how badly they want you. But I’m the only one who can have you. I’m the only one who can make you feel like this.”

“Yes, Viktor. Yours. I’m yours.”

His fingers filled his hole again as he thrust in over his gland, his hot tongue back on his cock before he pulled back again, his voice lifting to reach their entire audience with his sadistic glint. “And what if I’m cruel? What if I don’t let you come even now? Even after all this teasing?”

“I’m still yours.”

“And what if I push you harder than you ever imagined you’d go?” His voice dropped back to just him. “My cock is aching for you. I want to be inside you so badly, and you are so, so ready for me. What if I steal your perfect first time and take you right here and now?”

“I’m still yours. But,” he smiled, turning to kiss his cheek and drop his voice, “you can’t steal my perfect first time because if it’s with you, it’s perfect.”
He pressed his face into Yuri’s neck, his face scrunching hard against his skin, his fingers snaring him open once again, stretching him to his limit. “Yuri. You’re perfect. You’re so perfect. I—I—Tell me what you want. I want to give you whatever you want right now.”

“I want what you want to give me.” His pulse pounded in his throat, his palms, his stomach, his aching, leaking cock and twitching hole in a new rhythm all from the beast inside his veins snarling its claim to his life. Viktor. Viktor’s touch laying claim to everything inside him as it raged against the iron walls holding his own begging, desperate heart, tearing it apart one piece at a time.

Viktor buried his face deeper into his neck, opening him further to the new limit his body gave as the audience murmured their praise and approval. “I don’t have words for you. Perfect doesn’t do you justice.” He pulled out as he moved Yuri into the spot on the couch he was just in, laying him on his back and pushed his legs back to lift his hips higher. He worked his hand back in with all four fingers up to his knuckles, letting him feel that stretch once again from the beginning.

Thrusting up into his prostate, his body opened and stuffed with his hand, he split him apart with pleasure. Just when he thought it impossible to feel any more, his knuckles slid into him giving him more of everything with every deep thrust. “My beautiful Eros. Put on your best show for me. I won’t take my eyes off you.”

“I can come?” Hopeful. Desperate. Begging and accepting.

Viktor grinned wickedly as he took ahold of his cock and picked up a pace with both hands that went against every bit of humanity he ever claimed. “When I say you can.”

Nothing to hide from him or anyone he wanted to show him to, he sobbed at his cruel tease, the wrenching force with which he milked his body of pleasure, the fear that he’d fail him. Viktor went harder, faster still, burying his hand up to the base of his thumb on every thrust. Bared open, his fear spilled out.

He couldn’t hold on. It was too much. Too brutal. Too relentless. Too good. Viktor used every single thing he knew about him as a weapon and attacked without mercy.

He was going to fail. He was going to let him down in front of everyone. Viktor had spent years crafting his reputation as the finest and had preserved it by keeping his distance from anyone who could taint it, and he had chosen him, of all people, to stand by his side as a reflection of his skill. Why? Why him?

“Come on, zolotse. Give me more. I’m not going to stop until I get what I want. I’ve got you, and I’m not letting you go, so you better find the answer. It’s the only way you’re getting free.” He shifted his stroke or performed blood magic or whatever it was he had that only he could do to perfection and broke him even deeper.

His screams and sobs floated somewhere above the pleasure Viktor smothered him in as he searched for the key. Sifting through their every moment, he seized upon something solid. All he had to do was exactly what Viktor said, and he’d be fine. Viktor wouldn’t let him fail. Nailed into his mind, it settled into place surrounded by the jagged edges of his struggle.

His body writhing beyond any control of his own, jerking and spasming, screaming as Viktor directed, Yuri locked eyes on him, knowing he could wait until he had pleased him fully no matter what he demanded of him. A tender smile formed below the inferno in Viktor’s eyes.

“Come for me, zolotse.”
“Yes, Viktor.” He managed a twitching smile just before his body exploded. Clamping down around Viktor’s hand thrusting harder than ever, driving him back apart, his cum shot all over his corset and onto his chest and over his face, every single touch beginning from the start of their day at six fused into one single punch.

It didn’t end.

He emptied himself of every cry of ecstasy he had, but in the timeless space Viktor created, it didn’t end.

Viktor’s tongue lapping over his chest was the first thing he felt that wasn’t his body ripping apart. His whispering words came next as his broken pieces fused into an arrangement that pleased Viktor better. Yuri brought his hands over the sides of Viktor’s head, and as he came up closer, he kissed the top of his head. “Thank you.”

Viktor glanced up, surprised, happy, then in agony before he dropped back into bruising kisses over his chest, taking care not to ruin his marks. Finally back under his own control, he looked up with a sweet smile. “You’re welcome. Thank you for being perfect.” He dabbed at his corset with the wet towel someone had handed him.

Yuri glanced around, noticing for the first time the applause and cheers filling their part of the cave. “He’s a virgin. Only five days,” was heard reaching out to the far reaches of the enormous crowd. Viktor finished cleaning him, pride filling his chest and smile then pulled him back into his lap on the couch. The bartender was kind enough to bring them two fresh drinks, and Viktor thanked him then ordered Yuri to drink, holding him tight and snuggling kisses over his skin.

“Perfect. Perfect. Perfect. Perfect is so pale compared to you. I don’t have enough to give you. I’m sorry.”

“This is perfect.” Viktor still buzzed inside his veins, his unabated joy bubbling through him as his own. He took a sip of his fizzy, sweet drink then kissed his temple and held it out to him.

He closed his eyes and smushed his face against Yuri’s before placing a kiss on his cheek and accepting his offer. “Thank you, zolotse.”

Minx shoved the crowd out of his way that hadn’t dispersed at all and laid down on the floor above them, staring at them wide-eyed and shaking his head. “Goddamn.”

“Hey! I didn’t say you could leave me!” his Dom for the night bellowed.

Minx looked back with a Cheshire smile. “Don’t worry, Daddy. You’ll make me pay for it later. I trust you’ll give it to me nice and hard. I’ve been so bad.” He purred and arched his back to give his tail a little shake.

He relaxed a little with Minx handing him the keys to saving his face. “You bet your ass I will.”

“Make me remember it, Daddy.” He winked and turned back to Viktor. “God fucking damn. How long were you edging that boy for?”

“What time is it now?”

“Just about ten thirty.”

“Then about five hours of more or less solid edging plus consistent teasing over the course of the day starting at six a.m.”
The crowd gasped and started relaying the vital info to anyone that had missed it.

“Fucking hell. I knew you were a goddamn sadist with the best of them but goddamn. Five hours? Poor baby is just a virgin. You had no mercy?”

“None.” His twisted smile flashed. “He loved it, didn’t you, zolte?”

He nodded. “Yes, Viktor. So good. You made me feel so amazing.”

Minx’s jaw fell open as he waited for a punishment that didn’t come. “That’s not a slip?”

“No. I told him to keep using it. He was good enough to ask though as soon as I told him we typically use different names.” He smiled into another prideful kiss.

“What are his kinks?”

“We haven’t had the chance to test anything beyond interest besides impact play and obviously exhibitionism, but he seems to have a bit of a size kink, and he nearly came just watching the sounding, so that seems to be another solid one.”

He blushed with the pain of Viktor exposing him that way too, but the pride and joy he had lighting him up made it another pleasurable penetration to take.

“He nearly passed out watching the needle play but went right back for me and started to relax a little and agreed to try it because it’s one of mine, so I’m hoping that one will flip for him. I’m going to try kinbaku on him as well, and I’m fairly certain that will be something he enjoys. He likes active challenges though, so it’ll be a challenge for him to submit to stillness like that, but he likes my looser bonds, and I have confidence in him.” He brushed a gentle hand over his forehead. “He’s got a few more that I’m picking up on, but I want to keep them to myself for now.”

Yuri glanced up. What ones were these? He’d listed all the ones he knew of.

“Goddamn. He’s fucking perfect for you.”

“I know.”

“I want to hear it from you. What did he do to you on the other side of that door? I’m dying to know. I’ve never heard you scream.”

“He did exactly what he said. He gave me what I liked while deepthroating me. He took me all the way.”

“He’s never given a blowjob before Monday, and he deepthroated you? Fuck, I can’t deepthroat you. You’re too thick to fit down my throat.”

Viktor grinned. “It was Tuesday for his first. And he loves a challenge. I was doing paperwork, and he hated being ignored, so he made damn sure I couldn’t do anything but think of him after I ordered him to suck my cock.” He pulled Yuri back out of his sinking blush with his praising kisses over his face while Minx laughed and the crowd churned over the information. “I loved it so much.”

“Really?”

“Yes.” His eyes widened as he tried to force as much meaning into the word as he could.

“Absolutely loved it.”

“Which one is your favorite with him?” Minx asked.
He turned back to their audience relishing in his pride in him. “All of it is my favorite, but what first impressed me was that he comes from pain alone. In our very first scene, he came solely from my whips on his torso and thighs. His cock and hole were untouched.”

“Oh, putain.” Minx shook his head. “Fuck, Boss, you’re making me want him, and I haven’t tried topping in years.”

Viktor scoffed. “You try topping in every scene.”

“True, but I always want to be stopped.” He winked his Dom.

“He can’t really come just from pain. Especially not that soon.” A voice in the audience called out.

“I’d never make a claim I can’t prove. I’d prove it right now, but he just came. He needs a little time to recover.”

“Ah, he’s young. Give him a go. If he’s as good as you say he should be fine.”

“No.” Viktor turned away from the voices backing up the first to smile at him and give him more kisses, his indifference to their words sharpening his point. When they quieted, he tossed them a few breadcrumbs of his attention. “Maybe if I feel he’s ready for it later, we’ll play again.”

The crowd gave eager nods, showing they would all be good, hoping he’d give them more of what they wanted.

“If you do play again, can we see the blowjob?” Lady Rose asked.

Viktor put his finger to his lips as he thought, teasing them with a smile. “Perhaps.”

Yuri added his finger to Viktor’s lips. “Please, Viktor? I want to make you feel as good as you made me feel. Please let me.”

Viktor laughed and pulled him closer as the crowd cheered for his begging on their behalf. “You’re already thinking about more?”

He blushed and nodded. “Yes, Viktor.” He pressed his lips against his ear. “Oui Da Hai. I want you so much. You have no idea.”

Viktor shuddered as his cock snapped against Yuri’s leg. He groaned, pulling him into his chest to prevent more words. “Dear god, save me.”

“What did he say?” Minx rolled in closer.

“Just a private little seduction.” He winked. “But he’s helping you all get what you want.”

The crowd cheered the name Viktor gave him: Eros.

“Can we see a first time trying a new kink?” Someone else asked.

Viktor laughed. “You just did.”

“But… another one?”

Viktor shook his head. “You’re all insatiable.”

“We want to see all of his firsts,” Minx purred. “Share them with us, please.”
“Yes, please!” Echoed through the group. “He loves it!”

Viktor glanced down at him, cocking a playful eyebrow as if he didn’t already know his answer.

His blush deepened, but he nodded. “I do.”

He smiled, shaking his head once again. “I have a new name for you. My insatiable virgin slut.”

The crowd roared.

Viktor studied the stage, thoughts running over his face then glanced down at him and kissed his cheek. “You really think you’re ready for more?”

“Um, yes, Viktor.”

“Show me you can get it up again. Leave it covered.”

He glanced around at the eyes that perked with new interest and gulped. “Um, yes, Viktor.” His hand trembled as he started to stroke over his cock. It was one thing letting Viktor do it and something entirely different to do it himself. His heart quivered timidly as he opened his legs a bit and lifted out of the safety of Viktor’s tight hold to open up his body to his own hand. He didn’t respond at first. With his thoughts flitting around too many things and nothing at all, he had a hard time staying focused on his order.

Viktor’s voice whispered at the edge of his ear. “One finger at the tip then a slow drag down to your hole. As slow as you can make it.”

His eyes closed as he wiggled his legs apart to give him room to follow his order. “Yes, Viktor.” His cock twitched before he even began and by the time he reached the end, his cock was warm and tingly with another order resting in his mind. He followed his every word, and within minutes, his cock was begging to be freed.

“That’s my beautiful, zolotse. So good for me. When you’re like this, I don’t have to be afraid of pushing you. I know you’ll make me so proud. Do you want to please me more?”

“Yes, Viktor. Nothing feels better than giving you everything you want. Please let me?”

The crowd sighed at his response.

“Yes, you’re so, so good. I’m going to use you to show off everything I can do. You are the only one who can do that.”

“Yes, Viktor.” He moaned and grazed his fingers down his length on his own that carried a shiver up his body.

“Goddamn,” Minx whispered. “What are you saying to him?”

“That’s just for him. He’s the one who makes them mean anything other than simple words.” He took his hand to release him from his order. “If you all can be on your best behavior, I’ll show you more of what he can do on the stage. If you prove yourselves worthy of witnessing it, after the auction, I’ll be playing with his virginity.” He kissed Yuri’s cheek and brought him to his feet as the crowd clamored over this information. “Spread the word.”

Viktor was walking him up to the stage when his mind began to come back to his control which of course directed his heart into all sorts of chaotic directions. “Um, Viktor? I have some information
that may be useful to you. May I share it?”

“Yes, zolotse.”

“I, um, have really bad performance anxiety. I don’t know if I can do this.”

“You just gave a perfect performance.”

“But I didn’t know I was going to. I just responded to what you said. Now I know I’m giving a performance, and my anxiety is starting to go up. I’m scared.”

“What are you scared of?”

“Um,” he cringed “that I’ll fail you. That I’ll embarrass you.”

“Did you fail just now? Did you embarrass me?”

“No, Viktor.”

“Why not?”

His voice softened. “Because you won’t let me.”

“That’s right. Your anxiety was going up at the end of that performance too, but you looked for the answer in the right place, and you found it. I won’t let you fail. I promise.”

“But that’s only when I’m totally under your control. What if my anxiety holds you out?”

He stopped. “On your knees.”

He dropped to the ground as quickly as the shoes would let him.

Viktor leaned down to hold his face between his fingers. “You doubt my ability to make you submit? You doubt my power over you? You doubt I can handle your fear?”

He shook his head, pressing into his grip. “No, Viktor. I’m sorry. I’m so sorry. I don’t doubt you. I know you can make me submit no matter what. I’m so sorry!”

“Stand up.”

He got back to his feet under his own wobbling power with Viktor’s held out of reach.

“Where does it feel better for you? There with Anxiety as your Dom where it will tell you to run and hide from everything you love? Or here by my side with me as your Dom who will absolutely use any force necessary to demand anything of you that I want.”

“With you. Please. With you.”

“Then come here and take my arm and never make me hear of any power over you but my own again.”

He sighed and took his warm, strong arm and leaned onto it as much as he liked as Viktor led him backstage. “How do I follow that order? It’s been there for so long.”

“How do you feel my strength the most?”

“In—in your voice, the tone of it when it’s strong and clear, and when you make me kneel.”
“And how does anxiety make you feel its strength the most?”

“In its words. It says so many things I can’t hear anything else over it. It’s chaotic in there. Fuzzy and unfocused, but it hurts. The little barbs it catches me with spins me from one direction to another. I never know where I’m going. All I know is it hurts, and it tells me to run and so I do.” His tears welled up, and Viktor’s hands were there to brush them away. “And in my heart. It races and steals my strength making me feel weak and shaky all over.”

“When you feel that, I want you to say, ‘Viktor, I need to feel your strength.’ If we’re alone, and it’s something that is possible at that moment, I will order you to stay and then order you to kneel. If I’m not there, or if there are others who shouldn’t witness that, I want you to tell yourself, ‘I need to feel Viktor’s strength,’ and then say, ‘stay’ as you squeeze your left fist and, ‘kneel’ as you squeeze your right and keep going back and forth making sure you can hear them in my tone and feel your submission to me in your body until they’re the only things you can hear and your mind is cleared enough to proceed. That is my permanent order. You don’t have to doubt or ask if it’s changed. It won’t. It overrides everything else.”

“Yes, Viktor.”

“Good, Yuri. I’ve got you. I’m not going to let you fail, yes?”

“Yes, Viktor.”

He smiled and stroked his cock lightly as he ordered the stagehands to prep for a surprise early show before the auction and to add mics to Yuri at his mouth and his thighs then turned back to him while some guy started clipping wires to him. “Ah, not there. The stockings are coming off, and I need a clear space on the thighs. The underwear is out too.” He put his hand on Yuri’s face with a firm but gentle look. “Stay. Let them do what they need to. I’ll be right back, and I expect to find you right here.”

He planted his feet and braced against the certain battle his mind would wage against his order lodged in his mind. “Yes, Viktor.”

“God, you say that so pretty every time. It just keeps getting better.” He kissed his cheek and left him to obey. “If any of you touch him in any way that is not absolutely necessary to accomplish my order, you will be dealing with the basest side of myself.”

He stood through Viktor’s order with Anxiety battling Viktor’s word which achieved nothing and left his mind gashed and bleeding as the sole casualty. It was the one pain he’d felt from Viktor’s touch so far that stayed as pain through and through. His mind was always his weak point. Viktor knew that too. Whenever he wanted to truly hurt him, that’s right where he hit. His mind and his heart. Both weak and timid. Both cowered from Viktor’s touch while his body screamed for it.

The backstage area filled with men and women dressed and polished into their finest kinkwear or their finest skin. The man strapping mics into his corset and around his head finished with him and went off before Viktor returned leaving him standing awkwardly in the center of everything still fighting his mind to stay.

A black duffle bag dropped next to him. Viktor’s arms were around him only moments before his kisses were. “Well done, zolotse. You stayed perfectly. I’m so proud of you. Come on.” He led him away from the gaping-mouthed cluster to the edge of the curtains. “Are you nervous?”

Viktor had a mic over his ear, and he carried a thin yellow stick. Yuri guessed it was likely used to hit him, but other than that he had no idea what he planned.
“Yes, Viktor.”

“How bad?”

“Um… less than the first order with Avos.”

“More than the second?”

“Yes, Viktor.”

“Good. Follow my every word, and you’ll be fine.”

“Yes, Viktor.”

(27) Walking through the magenta curtains, they stepped out onto the thin stage where nearly everyone in the place was huddled at the edges while ignoring the chairs set out at a polite distance. The crowd erupted into applause laced with wolf whistles and chants of Eros. Holding tighter to Viktor, he heard his panting breath rising above the noise of the crowd. Their mics were already on, amplifying their every sound.

Viktor paraded him to the end of the stage. “Thank you all for such a warm reception for my beautiful Eros.”

They all cheered again and as they died out one man called out above the crowd, “That’s because we love him! Will you share him after you get the first taste?”

The crowd clamored their cheers and agreement and begging with some protests that Viktor hadn’t told them about the first show, so some of them missed it and therefore deserved first dibs.

Viktor laughed. “Okay, okay, calm down. I am truly sorry to anyone who missed it. I would have absolutely announced it, so every one of you got the chance to witness something so spectacular, but it was impromptu so that just wasn’t to be. I hope to make up for that though right here and now, and I expect you all to be nothing but the most pristine examples of what this is all about for my beautiful Eros.”

They all cheered their promises to be good.

“On that note, you, the festering sewage on his knees, I didn’t get your name yet, but you know who you are. Go kneel in the hallway. Make sure you bring your sign and put it back where I had it.”

The man got up and scampered across the room with a blue beacon and boos and hisses following him the whole way.

“Ah, much better. Alright, so welcome to our very special performance. Why am I doing this? To be honest, it’s because I’m so damn proud of him I can’t help but share it with those who can appreciate him properly and because I want him to experience all that he desires.” He paused again for the crowd. “Now, Eros, do you know what I have planned for you?”

He dug his shaking hands into Viktor’s forearm. “No, Viktor.”

“How long have you been my sub for?”

“Five days.” The mic amplified every rustle of his heavy breath.

“Have you enjoyed it?”
Did Viktor want him to make him look good, or did he want him to be honest? He’d ordered honesty and hadn’t given him anything to contradict that. Still, he shook with fear. “Most—most of it.”

He smiled. “What don’t you like?”

“When I f—When I make—… When I steal myself back from your control. When you punish me for that.”

“What do you like?”

“Everything else.”

“Be more specific.”

“You.”

The crowd aww’d.

Viktor grinned and pulled him in to kiss his cheek. “You are too sweet for words. Why is a single word your answer when I ask you to be specific?”

“Because you make everything happen, so if I like something it’s because you knew I would like it and decided to give it to me, so really everything I’ve experienced is just you. You in different ways, different touches, different pains and experiences. It’s all just you surprising me with one thing after another.” His shaking, breathless voice rattled over the sighing, applauding crowd.

“Perfect. As expected. Five days and I already know I can rely on your absolutely perfect response to everything I ask of you. It feels so good.” He arched him back to expose his marks to his kisses. “If anyone was wondering, he absolutely earned these, and you’ll see why right now.” He pulled him back up and moved him over to stand in front of him, and just that small removal of his support and exposure had him shaking harder, his breath rattling so noisily no one could miss hearing the fear in it. “Are you scared?”

“No, Viktor. Terrified.”

“You have performance anxiety, yes?”

“Yes, Viktor.”

“How bad is it?”

“The worst.”

“And yet you’re up here, ready to put on a show because I told you to.”

“Yes, Viktor.”

“Now, the million-dollar question, do you want to know what I have planned for you?” His voice took on that breathy tone that hinted at his excitement.

Did he want to know? He felt like he had entering his playroom for the first time with terror and arousal and no idea what to expect only so much thicker. He shook his head slowly. “No, Viktor.” His body clenched so hard against a stab of arousal he doubled over.

Viktor’s arms came warm and steady around him. “You hate it when I blindfold your eyes, but you love it when I blindfold your mind.”
He gasped at another deeper stab of arousal, his cock rising to display it all to everyone there. “Yes, Viktor.”

“I want you to guess at why that is.”

“Be—because… I love trusting you with everything. As long as I can see it’s you, I’m okay.”

His lips covered his neck with his savoring sighs. “Yes, zolotse, so perfect.” He lifted up his foot to remove one shoe and then the other leaving him spinning in the sudden vulnerability the drop in height left him in. “There is absolutely no touching allowed, but you all are welcome to look as much as you want, come as close as you want, as I do whatever I like to this sweet, innocent boy.”

Viktor covered him in kisses as the crowd panted their arousal through cheers and groans. His hands went down to his stockings and unclipped the garters. “Take them off. Keep your eyes on your audience. Focus on their eyes watching you.” He stepped back leaving him alone on the end of the stage to follow his order.

He peeled them from his smooth legs to the soundtrack of his broken breath and cheers and screams from the audience.

“The underwear too.”

He sucked in a breath then nodded, holding his eyes on the crowd even though he wanted to close them tight to see his face in front of him. “Yes, Viktor.” It was so much harder to follow the commands he had to actively do. Simply allowing him to do what he liked was comforting in a way. Still terrifying at times, but this… this was painful in the worst of ways, and Viktor loved it.

He could hear the excitement pick up in his breath as his hands tugged the top of the underwear free from the corset. His own breath rushed desperately through the air creating a windstorm in the cave with his rising panic. He tugged them down over his aroused cockhead and whimpered when the crowd groaned with approval.

This pain wasn’t pain instantly switching to pleasure; it was pain and pleasure riding side by side as he slid them down the rest of the way and left them lying on the stage. His pleasure and distress filled the cave, and the crowd quieted to listen.

“Walk forward three steps and drop to your knees pretty as you can for me.”

“Yes, Viktor.” He lifted his chin and pulled his shoulders back as he took the three steps forward and sank to his knees which landed right at the edge of the stage. His pleasure and distress filled the cave, and the crowd quieted to listen.

“Beautiful, Eros. You’re doing so well for me.”

The crowd only inches away nodded their agreement and murmured their own praises.

“Open up your legs. Let them all see how much you like this.”

How far did he want? Viktor wanted everything. He spread his knees until his thighs split straight out from the sides of his body. That had pulled his knees back from where Viktor put them. He glanced down at them, deciding for a moment, then pushed his body forward through the pain until they were back at the edge of the stage. The move left his cock sticking straight out into the audience, forcing the people right in front of him to pull back to prevent breaking their order not to touch.

Viktor gasped and held his breath while Yuri’s raced harder than ever. Had he done it wrong? Had
he displeased him by risking that touch? Time stripped away from him waiting to know if that sound was good or bad.

“My god.” Viktor’s breath gushed out. “My god. There needs to be a word better than perfect. I have only one that I can’t share. His name. His name is all mine, and this right here is what it means to me. Not perfect. Beyond perfect. Precisely as I said but then even more, always in the direction he knows I want from him. What were you thinking about thrusting your cock right into the audience like that?”

“I—was—was thinking… I wasn’t really thinking about that at all. I was thinking about how best to please you, and I just knew they’d move out of the way.”

“How did you know that?”

“You ordered it.”

“Eros, you bring me more pride and pleasure than you can ever realize. That right there is why I gave him my own name on his body after just five days, and why I let him keep it on his tongue even here. Yes, zolotse, yes.” His voice melted from his body and into Yuri’s. “You did perfectly. So beautiful.” His hands brushed down over his shoulders soothing his pain with pleasure.

“Th—thank you, Viktor.” His cock dripped onto the ground far below him.

The people gathered closest watched it fall.

“You guys up close here need to back up just a bit more. I don’t want to get you in the face with my cane.” He waited for them to move then checked that he had enough range for his swing and seemed satisfied with them still close enough for him to feel their breath over his wet cockhead. “You’ve never even seen this tool have you, Eros?”

“No, Viktor.”

“Can you guess how badly it hurts?”

“As much as you want to make it hurt.”

“Ah, so smart. Look into your audience’s eyes. Don’t pull away from them no matter what I make you feel. Don’t come until I tell you.”

His breath howling through the cave, he worked on keeping his first order, finding the eyes of someone who was not Viktor and looking into them, feeling them watching him, before he sought out another set of eyes who was also not Viktor and feeling their force over him, weakening him, raising his panic and his arousal and then his shame when they smiled at their clear effect on him. Viktor stroked his thighs with the cane, teasing him with its bite before the pain started as he murmured praises of how good he was and how strong he was to obey such a hard order.

Little patters started up. Amplified by the mics on the bottom of his corset, it sounded like fat raindrops were falling from the stalactites. Heat warmed on his thighs, and the promise of pain quieted his mind just a bit as he locked onto another set of eyes that were not Viktor’s.

A rattling crack of thunder from his cane then back to the little patters then again on the other side. His fisted hands behind his hips opened up as the thunder became more frequent and the first gulps of pain quenched his dry nerves. Pain rose in his body with steady rolls of thunder falling back into that warm summer rain over his skin.
Viktor struck with deep lightening cracks, and his cock bobbed with his deep clenches of the best pain he had given him so far. The crowd: a mix of the softest of soft and the hardest of hard and endless strangeness in between; his trembling gaze took in every one of their penetrations. Fear, shame, pain, pleasure. Guilt. Everything rose higher until he was swallowed into the heated storm.

It didn’t take long for an orgasm to start weighting his cock, pulling his body away from Viktor’s grip and into the audience holding his focus. Viktor’s hand worked into the laces on his back and kept his swaying body from toppling over. Relaxing, pulling in, holding everything—holding Viktor deeper inside him, letting him fill him to breaking for as long as possible, his voice screamed over the audience everything that Viktor gave him was a drug beyond imagination.

The thunderstorm ripping through the cave turned savage as he chomped at the air, drool dripping down his chin as he strained against the demand to relax, the demand to stay focused when every muscle in his body was spastic with pleasure at heights he hadn’t known. However much force he thought Viktor had, he always had more. Everything in him snapped electric and bright with Viktor striking on all fronts.

Trying to hold back from simple pleasure was a walk in the park compared to holding back from releasing the pleasure that came from pain. Every crack of his cane demanded release while his simple, steady words still said, “Not yet.”

_Not yet. Not yet. Not yet._ It was the only bit of dry land, a sharp edge for him to grab. Clear and easy to find but excruciating to hold. He wanted to beg for mercy, beg for release, but this was what Viktor wanted him to feel. He wanted his mind put under the worst of conditions then silenced under his force, and so it was for as long as he wanted it to be. It was so easy for him. A few little swings of his wrist and two simple words and he was broken between them, and that’s how he’d stay until Viktor decided he wanted him a different way.

The whip stilled just before Viktor’s voice whispered into his ear and whistled through the quieted cave, an order carried on the wind. “Come for me, zolotse.”

His release was the final crack of lightning in the storm Viktor created large enough to flood the massive space. His eyes sparked with vivid light, holding his order not to look away, as everything Viktor shoved into his body rushed forth all at once while everyone screamed his name. Jolts of crackling electricity played through his body long after the storm silenced.

He looked up at Viktor’s smiling face. “I did great, right?”

“Oh, you did. So amazing. So beautiful. I’m so proud of you.” He kissed his forehead as he wiped off his chin. “Flip over onto your hands and knees. Show them that I didn’t cheat by putting anything in your ass.”

“Yes, Viktor.” His voice, both floaty and grounded at once.

Viktor helped him back from the edge and onto his knees where he pushed him low enough for his still twitching cock to drag on the stage. “Open yourself up. Show them nothing is inside.”

“Yes, Viktor.” He sighed and rested his cheek on the floor as he slipped his fingers into his ass that Viktor had lubed for him and slowly pulled them apart. His cock twitched harder, blood already rushing back in as he saw them all leaning in to get a good look.

Viktor chuckled. “Wow. You really are insatiable, aren’t you?”

“I don’t know, Viktor. Am I?”
“Yes,” he laughed, “I’d say so. That should have wiped you for a while especially after your earlier show. You did so good for me. Do you want more of my touch?”

“Yes, please! Please, Viktor.” His body buzzed through his pleasure and bubbling bliss. “That felt so, so good. Please, I’ll hold on as long as you want.”

“I know you will, baby. You’re so good for me. I’m done beating you though. I want to be gentle with you now.”

“Yes, Viktor. Whatever you want.”

“How nice and soft you are for me.”

“Well, I should be after you tenderized me.”

Viktor laughed so hard he clutched his sides while the audience cheered along with him. “God, you’re precious.” He bent down to give him some kisses then laid down on his back with his head at the end of the stage. “Come here, zolotse. Get on my face.”

The crowd whistled and cheered while he crawled over then swung his leg over him as if he were mounting a horse. Viktor’s hands wrapped around his ass and he kissed his thighs on both sides before taking his cock into his mouth all the way down.

Yuri’s cry of pleasure and surprise ripped through the cave, the first still bouncing freely as more chased it. “Oh my god! Viktor!” His back arched pushing further into the pleasure wrapping around him as comfortably as his arms but as heated as his pain. “Oh fuck! Oh my god, that—that feels so good! Ngh! Viktor!”

His fingers slipped into his ass and worked him open quickly giving him the most satisfying stretch he had felt yet. He held him open to the audience with both hands while he sucked his cock into pleasure rolling as smooth and easy as the hills blanketed with fog.

“Holy shit that feels so good! Why were you holding out on me? You’re so mean.” He turned back to glare at him.

Viktor laughed so hard he had to gasp around him which tickled and cooled his cock. He pulled off for a second to swat his ass while the audience pealed with laughter. “I’m trying to make you feel good. Stop making me laugh.”

“I can suck your cock if my mouth is getting me into trouble. It’s right here.” He grinned at him as he stroked over his cock.

“Eros gets so giddy after I beat him. He’s so funny. Why do you want to suck my cock?”

“Cause I’m the best at it—you said so. It feels so good to take you all the way. And you have the best cock. It’s so huge and pretty.”

“Oh, right answer. So good. Go ahead, zolotse.”

“Yes! Thank you, Viktor.” He giggled as he pulled him free. “You’re already so hard. You like touching me so much, I don’t even have to touch you at all to get you like this.” He stroked lovingly along his cock as he stared at it. “So pretty just for me.”

The audience howled with laughter.
“I thought this was supposed to shut you up,” Viktor laughed. “Get to work.”

“Yes, Vikto—” He broke off as Viktor pulled his ass down more to lick around the edges and into his opened hole. “Oh fuck. Oh my god. Oh—oh shit. I’m not listening. I’m sorry!” He made up for his error by taking him down as far as he could and then because he didn’t want anyone to think that Viktor was wrong about him being the best, he opened his throat and swallowed him down to the root.

Viktor pulled off with a gasp, arching up into him. “Oh fuck! Fuck, zoltse! You’re so fucking good.”

Not to be outdone, Viktor took him back into his mouth and silenced them both with a competitive focus taking over the pleasure, each one trying to make the other pull off to release the building cries and curses.

Pleasure finally settling them both, they relaxed into heated slurps and moans boiling the air. The audience milled around them, coming up onto the stage to watch as closely as they wanted as Viktor had allowed. With the freshened pleasure burning off his giddy state and without pain to silence his mind, he became acutely aware of the fact that Minx had laid down to watch him, putting his face right next to his slurping mouth. A few others followed his lead.

People were lining up to gape into his virgin hole which Viktor was stretching wider and wider, their breath tickling the edges of his rim as they got as close as they could without touching. His body scalded with pleasure and then with embarrassment that he so clearly liked it. Minx winked at him with a deep grin. An orgasm peaked, and Viktor pulled off.

“Not yet, baby. Not everyone’s gotten a good look yet. Everyone wants a chance to see your pretty hole.”

He whimpered as his cock pulsed and dripped onto Viktor’s face with the tops of his ears burning.

Viktor teased his cock with little licks. “You like that, don’t you? You like them all keeping their eyes just on you as you put on a show for them.”

He whimpered and nodded trying to focus on doing a good job for Viktor so he wouldn’t come from his words as more pulses hit his gut.

“You’re all welcome to say any nice things you want about him. No derogatory language even if it’s phrased nicely. Only I call him a slut.”

The crowd eagerly took him up on his offer with a swell of praises about how he was so pretty and such a natural sub that any Dom would be proud of and how he was taking Viktor’s cock so well and how he had the most enticing hole and how jealous they were that Viktor had already staked his claim. So much focus on him raised both his pride and his embarrassment equally adding heavy punches to his pleasure.

Viktor worked his fingers around his ass, sliding and stretching him all around, licking and nibbling little kisses over his cock, trying to keep the fist tightening within him from taking over too soon. Yuri could feel Viktor’s orgasm twitching through his cock deep in his throat which must have taken much more effort for him to hold back with Yuri having no skill at metering his pleasure.

Viktor’s body writhed beneath him, trying to hold on. Yuri could tell he was losing the battle before Viktor released his order and took him fully back into his mouth. A little extra tug from Viktor’s hands sent him over the edge as he emptied into his mouth. They came to the sounds of their cheering audience.
Viktor heaved for a moment then flipped him onto his back and covered him with his kisses and smiles. “So, so pretty you are. So perfect. So good. Did you like your first blowjob?”

He nodded and pecked his cheek. “Yes, Viktor. Thank you. Felt amazing.”

The crowd aww’d again as they backed up to give them some room while finishing out their applause. Viktor redressed him then jumped down off the stage and pulled him down after, taking a spot in the first row while a stagehand cleaned up their mess and another removed their mics. Viktor tucked his cock between Yuri’s thighs as he put him in his lap and kissed his cheek.

“Keep me warm. Feels good there.”

“Yes, Viktor.” He snuggled into him and his ever-present kisses. Before closing his legs around him, he glanced down at the welts covering his bright red and purple thighs, each one with a sharp edge on each side and struck to form V’s all over the inside of his thighs. He smiled and nuzzled into Viktor’s neck. “Thank you. They’re so pretty.”

“You’re so pretty.”

He sighed. “If you say so.”

“I do.” He pressed a kiss to his temple as the lights dimmed everywhere around them and concentrated in thick streams on the stage.

Lion took the stage, cracking his long whip as he walked to the end with tantalizing snaps.

“What is that?” Yuri whispered.

“Bullwhip.”

“Looks fun.”

“It is. I’ll show you someday.”

He reached down to stroke Viktor’s head sticking out between his thighs and smiled as it responded to his touch. He continued caressing it as Lion welcomed them and the music came back up a bit quieter than before. A naked woman with chains on her wrists walked down the stage while Lion rattled off facts about her including age, height, weight, her kinks, limits, achievements, and personality facts.

“Alright, guys, this one’s an extra special one. She’s up for permanent slave status twenty-four seven. Let’s start the bidding at five thousand.” He started taking the bids which rapidly tallied up.

“Did he say, permanent slave? Like… permanent? Whoever buys her tonight owns her forever?”

“Yes. That one is very rare, but it does happen. Think of it as an arranged marriage of sorts that she initiates. We use the term slave but don’t take it literally. It just designates more the type of BDSM style she’s comfortable with. In this case, slave status, she wants to be completely dominated in every aspect of her life while serving her Master typically in domestic ways. She’s not one of my subs, so I don’t know her, but I think it’s likely she has a kink for being bought. Look at the flush on her cheeks and how her breath is quick. Embarrassment also causes flushing, but it tends to come with shrinking in and cringing. She’s opening, receptive. The bigger the stakes for being bought, the more it turns her on.”

“Yeah, but like what happens after the auction? She just goes off and lives happily ever after with the
highest bidder?”

“That’s likely exactly what she’s hoping for. But like all of this, if you want to end it, you can. Slavery, real slavery, is obviously wrong and illegal. This is slavery in name only. She can leave it the same as she’d leave any relationship. I don’t agree with this method of finding a partner myself, but it’s a valid way to do it. Mmm… that feels so nice, zolotse.”

“In general, or what I just did?”

“Both, but the last thing you did felt particularly nice.”

He repeated the stroke over his head that he liked and tried to seal it in his memory as the whip cracked sealing the final bid at one hundred and fifty thousand dollars. “Woah. That’s so much money. Who can afford that?”

Viktor laughed. “You’re sitting on one. Do you want to know how much your chair is worth?”

“No!” He hissed his whisper with as much force as he could manage. “Sorry, I meant, no, Viktor. I absolutely do not want to know.”

Several more people were auctioned off for various lengths of time and amounts. Most common was to be auctioned for a few hours up to a day or so. A week on occasion. That at least felt a lot more reasonable. The amounts were smaller for those shorter times too but still a crazy high number for Yuri to wrap his brain around. Some of the auctioned tried to drive up their prices by performing talents or dancing or being alluring or shy and dressing up or disrobing to portray the image they wanted.

“Now for the crème de la crème, les Dauphin et Dauphine de VN!” Lion gave three sharp cracks to punctuate his announcement.

The audience perked up and applauded wildly as the first young man came out. Tall, cut like a knife, gorgeous face. He was wearing a chastity cage around his cock which he had learned was thing some people liked and that those people were not him. Lion started listing his stats the same as the rest and then gave him a grade of approval of a four.

“Grade of approval? What’s that?”

“These are my graduates now. They all receive the title of Dauphin or Dauphine de VN, French prince and princess respectively, and a final grade from me.”

“Oh. So that one… you’ve… played with him?”

“I trained him. That does involve scenes, yes. If you want to know how far I went with him sexually, he’s sucked my cock, and I gave him handjobs and shoved toys and my fingers up his ass.” He looked down at him with an amused raised eyebrow.

“Oh. He’s uh… I guess I can see why you gave him a high score.”

“Four is fairly low. It’s on a ten-point scale.”

“Oh. That—why?”

“Most of my subs rank somewhere in the three to six range.”

“Why so low?”
“I’m not impressed enough to rank them higher. They meet the minimum standards, but they don’t surprise me with anything special.”

“Has anyone ever gotten a ten?”

“No.”

“Why is he on the low end even for your average scores?”

“He thought that because he’s pretty that should be enough to please me. He never fully grasped the fact that I considered him average at best and that he should actually work harder to make me desire him. He kept thinking I was just playing with him whenever I explained that. It took me a while to convince him that I wasn’t.”

“Oh. That’s… a little harsh, no?”

“He had a flaw that needed correction. It was irritating and getting it through his head that being pretty isn’t enough will serve him in the long run. I told you, I never go easy.”

“I meant more that you only considered him average. He looks like a model.”

“He’s not my type. I thought I already told you what my type is.”

“Yeah, but he has a decent butt.”

He chuckled. “It’s not just butts; it’s the overall feel. And I like darker features. Like yours. Does he look like you?”

“No, Viktor.”

“Then he’s not my ideal type.” He smiled and kissed his cheek as his old sub was sold off for a day of fun for ten thousand dollars.

A woman with long brown hair came out next entirely nude. She was a touch on the plump side but still well-toned. She had a ranking of six and was being auctioned for a month.

“You liked her?”

“Yeah, she was sweet. She learned quickly.”

“Why—why not keep her?”

“I don’t keep any of them. They know this going in. It helps keep them from getting too attached to me, and I always demand play with others unless it’s a hard limit for them. The stocks you saw the other sub in is generally how I break them in and they go back to it whenever they need to be reminded of their place, so it usually ends up that I’ve touched them less than others have. And this graduation ceremony helps break our relationship in a positive way by framing it as an honor to go to their first real Dom who is the one who desires them the most.

“This is set up the same as Minx’s game where they have to be vetted before bidding and their first play sessions are supervised so it’s safe. It’s actually worked out quite well for a lot of them. I’ve had several end up marrying their first Dom.” He kissed his cheek. “You’re making me feel so nice, Yuri. Thank you. Come on, I want to make sure you’re hydrated before we begin the next one.”

Viktor tucked himself away much to his grumbling protest that his pants were so cold and brought him over to the bar for another of the bartender’s tasty drinks while another three of his subs were
auctioned off.

After insisting he use the bathroom to remove the liquid he just put into him, he sent him backstage to have a couple of sound guys stick two black circles to his back and have him speak and scream while they tweaked some settings on a laptop until they were satisfied while Viktor went off to prep for the scene.

He came back with his soothing kisses greeting him first. “How are you doing, Yuri?”

“I’m… I don’t know how I’m doing. I’m scared but not scared. I’m calm but excited. I don’t have a word for it. In this language or Japanese.”

“Do you feel safe?”

He smiled and dipped his chin. “Yes, Viktor.”

“Good. You’re still okay with going out there not having any idea what I have planned for you?”

“Yes, Viktor.”

He smiled. “Thank you for trusting me so much. You do need to know a few things though. They’ll be vague now, but they’ll make sense once I do them to you. If you feel any tingling or numbness or any significant pain, tell me immediately. This is not a pain scene. There might be very light pain or discomfort, but it’s not intended to hurt you physically. If it does, tell me immediately. If you feel nauseated, light-headed or like you can’t breathe, tell me immediately. I’m relying on you to communicate clearly with me. I watch you as carefully as I can but some things can’t be seen and can only be felt. You need to tell me if you experience them. Understand?”

“Yes, Viktor.”

“That being said, I want you to let me go as deep as I need to here. This one is going to hurt and not in the ways you expect. I want you to hold on for me as hard as you can. But even though this is in front of others, you will never disappoint me by following an order; you can only disappoint me by breaking it. What is my order regarding your safeword?”

“To use it if I need to.”

“Good, Yuri. That is extremely important. I need to know that you absolutely will use your safeword if you feel you need it.”

“Yes, Viktor. I will.”

“Good. You also need to know that this is not a roleplaying scene. Every word I say to you is the absolute truth. Take them as such.”

“Yes, Viktor. We’re going to the line you like to walk, aren’t we?”

“God how smart you are.” He grinned and grabbed his hips to pull him in. “You do know you’re smart, right?”

“Um, I guess I always did well in school.”

“How well?”

“I graduated number two in my class.”
He smiled. “You hated that didn’t you?”

He blushed. “Yes, Viktor.”

“Don’t be ashamed of that trait. I love it. I’d only let the number one submissive wear my name on his body.”

The blush deepened, but he smiled. “I’m number one?”

“Absolutely.”

“What grade would you give me?”

“You’re not graduating.”

“But if I was…”

He leaned in, kissing over his bite mark and threatening another where it couldn’t be hidden. “I’m not finished with you.” He left a lingering kiss then took his arm. “Time to go.”

He led him out through a side door to the clear area below the heart in the middle of the cave. Just to the side of it, a gold ring now hung from the ceiling. The audience gathered, the music shut off, and the cave quieted other to just the whispers among the crowd. Viktor stopped him below the ring where his black bag sat and nodded to the DJ at the stand. A quiet, wavering beat started up that didn’t sound like any music he had ever heard.

Viktor’s hands rested over his shoulders as he stood behind him to address their audience. “I only have one order for you all for this scene. Be silent.”

Viktor swallowed against something thick as he dropped his lips to his ear. “You should know… You’ve unlocked something in me that I’ve been trying to hold back. I tried to hold it back longer, but I can’t. I don’t want to just play with you. I don’t want to just punish you. You asked about my kinks and what I enjoy. My answer then was true. I enjoy things that are flexible and artistic because those are usually the right tools I need, but anything that looks like the right tool to satisfy what it is that I really want burns me with lust just as easily.” He paused to take a deep breath as the quivering beat got a little louder and more erratic. “My deepest desire, Yuri, is that I want to break you.”

The liquid beat raced just as Yuri realized the sound filling the cave was his own heart.

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Kink list for the party (not including ones already in the tags): Degradation, name calling (Bitch), rough handling, forced cum licking, slutty games, puppy play, pony play, animal play, anal fisting, cock sounding, cock screws/plugs, sex with strangers as punishment, needle play, cock and ball torture, electric stim, kinbaku, furries, sensory deprivation play, breast/ball bondage, slave auction. I'm fairly certain I got them all, but so sorry, I'm not reading through 35k words for the 5th time to confirm.
Artist for both works is Clarinda0110. Please check it out/share on [Tumblr](https://www.tumblr.com)

**Spotify**
23. Play With Fire by Sam Tinnesz  
24. Devil's Playground by The Rigs  
25. Shatter Me by Lindsey Stirling feat. Lzzy Hale  
26. Welcome to the Fire by Willyecho  
27. Blindfold by Sleeping Wolf
Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

Pleasure between fears.

Chapter Notes

**Major warning on this chapter!** Those who might be triggered by themes of sexual assault might want to check out the clearer/spoiler warning in the end notes before reading. That's not what's in here but it can read close enough for those who are sensitive to those themes.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

His heartbeat throbbed against the walls with Viktor's broken voice following its unstable rhythm.

“I’m a sadist. You know that already. I get off on your pain, and the more pain there is, the more I crave it. But I’m not just talking about the thrilling pain you turn into pleasure. I mean the pain that hurts too. Your wounds and scars and your tortured mind and panicked heart, and those are the things I want to break the most. The more it hurts you down to your core, the harder it is for me to resist.

“I tried—I tried to leave you whole so you could leave this without any of my scars if you chose, but you’re just so fragile you started cracking with my very first touch. I touched you as gently as I could, and you just fell apart in my hands. That was stunning just by itself, but then you opened up all the way to that twisted core… and I could see it. All your fault lines, exactly what you would look like with my scars all over you, through you… I’ve never wanted to shatter anything more.

“But I don’t want to break you into pieces and leave you lying on the ground. That’s boring and leaves you as nothing worth looking at and takes no skill at all. I want to break you into art.

“I should have been more careful. I shouldn’t have pushed our limits before you had truly chosen this. I knew it when I set them up that we were playing the most dangerous of games, and those limits holding me back from you were our only safety net. But I let them slip and gave us more room to play but also more room to fall.

“I thought I was strong enough to resist, maybe I could have, but then I did something worse. I put my name on your body and gave myself a taste of something I really shouldn’t have tasted.

“And then that look on your face when you saw what I had done… I felt it snap, the last thread holding you safely away, and you fell completely into my hands.

“But I still tried. Really, I did. I tried to tell myself that one day is not long enough, that you’re not really ready for me to see what you’re made of, that you still haven’t truly chosen this, but you put yourself in my hands so gently, so completely, so openly, I couldn’t resist making one little scar just for me, just to see what it would look like. And so, I gave a little squeeze on that inner core—the
parts of you even you didn’t know existed, and you just cracked so beautifully.

“And I tried to tell myself that was enough, but then you steadied yourself for me and made yourself whole again around my little cracks, and they just looked so pretty I had to do it again. And again. And again. Each time I went harder, each time you got stronger, more beautiful, more fascinating. And every time I told myself to put you down and just let you rest by my side for now, you’d start to dim and retreat into your cage and I—I had to see what would happen if I broke you into pieces.

“And so, I shattered you. I ripped you open the rest of the way and exposed you, and my god, you looked so beautiful like that. You snapped and sparked like a log in the fire, and I was afraid I’d burn you into ash, but you only got brighter the deeper I went. And then you healed so quickly, so solidly, stronger than before. As if your body was just waiting for those cracks to be there—as if they were meant to be there and were missing, and so, I did it again.

“And now, Yuri, now you have my scars all over you, and I can see myself burning within you, and you look so beautiful there are no words. And I know now that I can’t stop myself. I won’t be able to do anything but break you over and over again until no part of you exists without my scars, and unless you get yourself as far away from me as you can get, I will either destroy you completely and irrevocably or make you my life’s work.

“I’ve told you I’m no monster, but I’m afraid I’m lying to myself because even though I should tell you to run… the only thing I can order you to do is to stay.”

His heartbeat raced a broken beat, stuttering to a stop before clunking ahead as hard as his broken engine in his rusted car that slammed into the hood every time his foot went to the gas. “Yes, Viktor. I’m yours. Use me to fill your deepest desires.”

The crowd stared at them, faces gaped and eyes glittering in the dim light as a herd of animals hiding in the dark, not knowing a word of what was said but feeling it all the same through the broken rhythm of his heart.

Viktor pulled a twisted length of red rope from his bag. “Even though even I don’t know which way this will end, keep following my every word. It’s your only chance.”

He swallowed, cold burning his skin as it crept over him. “Yes, Viktor.”

He looped the rope over his shoulder then bent down to remove Yuri’s shoes, his hands sliding up his legs to unclip the garters and pull the stockings from his legs. His underwear came down next with Viktor gulping back his desire as he looked up at him, the tight control that was his constant mask finally stripped from his face but with his focus clearer than ever. The face of a predator, starved but strong, the first taste of blood just hitting his tongue.

He came around behind him, and Yuri’s heart shrank into his chest as it scrambled to get away when Viktor untied the bow from his corset and began loosening the laces.

A tear slipped down his cheek. “Please, no.”

His fingers ripped at the laces until the corset was gaping around his body. “You know that’s not going to stop me. You’re mine, Yuri, and all the pleading and begging in the world won’t stop me from doing what I want with what’s mine.” His hands came around to the buckles undoing them with noisy clatters. The gold triangle hooks popped free from the buttons and the corset fell from his body. Viktor tugged the lining down over his hips and stepped him out of it leaving him stripped and on display while his scrambling heartbeat scraped the walls, seeking a way out.
Grasping his wrist, Viktor folded his arm up behind his back until he had a hold of his other elbow then folded the other up the same and began wrapping them together with the smooth rope. Tying it off with a firm knot, he passed the rope around his upper chest, his hands smooth and steady as they wound the rope tightly around him. After enclosing his chest and arms in his bonds so he couldn’t escape his hold in any direction, he passed the rope through his fingers like clasping hands and sealed the rope in place.

Pulling another rope from his bag, he wove it into the cage over the center of his chest and passed it over the ring, pulling it taught until his weight was barely supported by the rope. Looping it over a few more times, he tied it off then began ensnaring his hips. He couldn’t hear his heartbeat over the screaming in his mind telling him to run. It was already too late for that. Viktor had him in his grasp and he wouldn’t let go until he was done.

He looked around at the audience. There were enough of them. If he screamed for help, surely at least one of them might care enough to release him. But they were Viktor’s too. Why were they still standing there watching Viktor tie a boring, doughy man to a ring? How could this be in any way entertaining?

Maybe it was amusement. Just one big joke that Viktor would choose him to flaunt as if he were bathed in gold. As a rope hooked around his knee and Viktor hoisted it up, he saw that none of them looked amused in the least. They were still watching him with the same wonder they had in their eyes when he was on stage.

Viktor bound his leg so it was folded in half with the ropes a little looser over his fresh marks, but still, it was going nowhere as Viktor adjusted the ropes, pulling it up higher, leaving his weight split between the ropes and his leg on the ground. Attaching the rope he left loosely over his hips so it caught them just off-center toward his raised leg, he lifted them up too until his body was arched backward over the stable strength of Viktor’s ropes pressing into his back.

He shifted in the ropes as Viktor folded his other leg in half and bundled it neatly with a basket weave of rope over the top of his foot and around the arch, pointing it as he had done the other one. With his leg left hanging from his body in a neat package, it weighed on his hips, opening them away from the grab of the rope.

Finished with his work, Viktor stood back to stare as Yuri shifted and twisted, trying to find any sort of comfort or balance in his new state. He expected him to smile as he always does when he’s satisfied, but instead, he just watched him struggle while his heartbeat pleaded for escape.

After a few minutes of quiet watching and desperate struggling, Viktor walked to his bag and picked something up and brought it to his face. Soft fabric enveloped his head, covering his eyes and nose as Viktor tied it in place.

“Viktor. Viktor, please. Please let me see you.” His heartbeat, wet and thick, began to drown in Viktor’s silence. “Please. I’m begging you. Please let me see you. I’m scared. Viktor, please. Please. I’m so scared.” Struggling to break free of the swaying ropes only left him spinning in place. His jerking attempts to stop it only sent him skittering more. “Please, Viktor. Please, you know I don’t like this. Please just give me a minute, and I’ll try again, but please take it off. Please, Viktor.” He gave up trying to hold his head up to watch what was happening and let it fall back where Viktor had obviously wanted it and felt an opening of his body even though it was encased in rope.

A hand slid over his stomach and that simple caress of Viktor’s—wait. Was it Viktor’s? He hadn’t forbidden them from touching him this time. As long as they were silent, they could do what they wanted, and Viktor always shared his subs.
He sucked his stomach away from the touch as the fingertips lifted off. “Viktor? That was you, right?”

Another hand went over his thigh; he jerked at the touch making him sway in the ropes. Viktor’s hand. It must be Viktor’s hand. It feels right, doesn’t it? Can he know after five days what his touch feels like especially when he had nothing to compare it to?

The hands touched everywhere over him. It felt impossible for it to only be one person, but maybe it wasn’t. Maybe it just felt like more in his head. Fingertips brushed over his cock, and he shuddered.

“Viktor, you’re the only one touching me, right?”

His answer was the rising tremors in his heart and a slick finger over his hole.

“Viktor, please just tell me if it’s you. Please?”

The finger pressed in and he screamed.

“Viktor! Viktor, please! I need to know!”

A second finger slipped in and opened up inside him, pulling out while still splayed wide, giving him the stretch only Viktor knew he liked. His heart nearly shut off entirely in his relief.

It slammed back into the wall of his chest when he realized Viktor could have told anyone that. He was out there alone twice and had all the opportunity in the world to tell someone to touch him like that. Or more than one person even. Forced play with others and swinging had been crossed out on the list, so it wasn’t on his limits. Viktor didn’t even know it was a zero for him.

“Viktor, I don’t want anyone but you touching me. Please. I know it wasn’t answered but please. It’s a limit for me. Please don’t let anyone else but you touch me.” Cold dragged through his veins.

The fingers inside his ass added a third and opened right over his prostate. He screamed with terror and pleasure as they dragged slowly out of him and thrust in again in exactly the same spot.

“Viktor! Viktor! Please! Please just tell me! Is it you? I need to know! Please!” Was a prostate that easy to find? They’re in the same place on everyone, right? But Viktor had to search for it a little too. But he wasn’t using his own hand. Would he have been able to find it instantly with his own? Can someone else?

“Viktor, how can I follow your every word if you won’t say anything?! Please, please just say it’s you! Tell me it’s you! Viktor!”

Deafened by his screams of Viktor’s name and his own heartbeat, he struggled to get away, making him just rock harder on the hand slowly fucking him open.

The fingers came out and something thick and warm nudged at his hole. Oh god. Was Viktor going to let someone else take his virginity? He’d said it would happen earlier. The cock slipped over his hole, sliding between his cheeks and occasionally nudging at his hole as he sobbed. It was big. So big. It was going to hurt. There was no way something that big could go in without hurting.


The cock slid faster, nudging more insistently, more frequently at his hole. So excited by the misery he was inflicting, it throbbed heavy against him.
“Viktor! Viktor! Please! Viktor!” With every scream of terror coming from inside him hammering him from the outside as well, his mind shattered into splinters.

*Follow my every word.* How could he do that when there weren’t any words? He said it so specifically. *Follow my every word.*

His body shook as tears soaked the fabric that clung to his face a bit differently than the first blindfold had. His desperate heaving drew in the scents and taste of the cave. He breathed in deeper trying to grasp the words for something ringing through the splinters in his mind.

Viktor’s scent. His t-shirt. The one he’d torn into a blindfold and was now over his head. He’d brought it for him. He kept breathing through his nose, the thin fabric allowing air to pass easily, and Viktor’s scent, the little piece of home in this strange place, the fact that Viktor planned this little gesture of comfort drew endless words to his mind.

His fingers tightened around Viktor’s clasping ropes. It was Viktor. Even if it wasn’t him who was touching him, it was still what Viktor wanted him to feel, and so it was still Viktor’s touch just in a way he didn’t expect. If Viktor wanted someone else to take his virginity, that was his right. He was his to do with what he liked. He stopped screaming and stopped struggling. His body dropped into the swaying ropes exactly how Viktor wanted him to be.

A soft kiss to his inner thigh and his body melted into the ropes. Viktor. He could practically hear the gentle, ‘Easy, zolotse,’ in the kiss. Of course, it was Viktor himself. It could only be him.

He always knew it was him. His mind was just blocking out the truth with panic and easy answers. He had said over and over that he wanted to be the one. He was Viktor’s not to share but to possess. To show off, but hold close. To protect and shape until he was safe even from himself.

He felt a little stupid that he thought for a second it could be anyone but him, but that was obviously what Viktor had wanted him to think. He wasn’t just capable of controlling his body; he could absolutely seize control of his mind as well. He insulted him by ever thinking otherwise.

With his screams quieted, his heartbeat pounded against the walls of his chest and the walls of the cave with a strength and steadiness he had never felt. It wasn’t his weak heart racing in timid little directions; it was his heart beating steady and still in the center with every bit of life he had in him, confident that this was exactly where he was supposed to be. That no matter what happened here in Viktor’s hands, it was safe.

Tears of relief flowed easily, caught in Viktor’s shirt the same as his hands always caught every one. His heart slammed so hard into his chest he thought it might break, but it only felt stronger with every beat.

God, it felt so good under Viktor’s absolute control. His body supported safely in an easy sway, his mind dropped below his strengthened, centered heart so it simply floated, his own weight grounding and opening him to whatever Viktor wanted, his own arms solid against his back, lifting himself up to Viktor’s hands. Viktor pulled back to let him drift in this perfect sensation then the crinkle of packages torn open and the slight clanging of metal and Viktor sank into the center of his cock.

Thick and warm, spreading his cock open just enough for a satisfying stretch but not enough to hurt, he sank deeper and deeper into his body and through his every cell. He gasped as his heart beat even stronger but just as steady as he kept going deeper until he reached his core, and Yuri exploded with life. He was blind, but he could see colors. Pleasure coursed over his tongue, through his heart, down to the marrow of his bones. His mouth gaped with ecstasy, but he had no cries to give because every drop of euphoria was held so deep inside him it didn’t have a chance of escape. Viktor rocked his
cock gently back and forth, churning the waves of pleasure sealed inside him then closed his lips around his cock and took him into himself.

Viktor inside him at the same time as he was inside Viktor was impossible, and yet, he’d done it. Infusing the metal sound with his touch, forcing him to accept anything he gave the same as he accepted him, it felt no different than Viktor himself penetrating him in a place he hadn’t known was possible before today.

With his cock plugged up tightly, he had no chance of disobeying his order not to release, so he simply relaxed into how Viktor rocked pleasure into him, going into his body as if he had places inside him designed to hold just this very feeling.

His mouth did little more than rock the sound inside him and wrap his cock in his gentle warmth, but the pleasure was vivid, dripping down his nerves. He slipped his fingers into his hole and started stroking his gland from the other side as well and an orgasm rolled through him without release—more intense than anything he had ever felt followed quickly by another and another.

With even his writhing dampened in Viktor’s tight ropes, his silent cries and heartbeat strong enough to shatter the walls were the only evidence left behind of their jagged but perfect union.

Viktor stilled and then withdrew the sound and Yuri nearly sobbed to have it back. Viktor kissed his thigh then licked his cock that was harder than it had ever been, opening a pathway for the pleasure to boil up to his skin. “You can come as soon as you feel like.” That was all the warning he gave before he sucked his cock to an inch of his life.

His cries broke free and battled his amplified heart to be the sound that would deafen them all. Viktor had an orgasm ready for him after just moments, but he didn’t want this to end. He held on as long as he could, but he didn’t stand a chance against Viktor’s pleasure unleashed. He erupted into his mouth and clamped around his fingers, pulsing until he returned every bit of what Viktor gave.

Viktor marked his path up to his head with kisses laid over his body then teased his lips with his cock until he opened up and gave himself over for his pleasure. Viktor was so hard, bigger, thicker than ever, but his body gave no resistance as he fucked into his mouth, releasing all the desperation that had built in his restraint. Viktor came with heavy cries coming from a depth in him only Yuri’s shattering could give him.

He pulled out and left a few trembling kisses as he pulled off the blindfold and sank to the ground, cradling Yuri’s head in his hands as he rested his cheek next to his.

Yuri sighed, a smile on his lips natural with the position Viktor put him in. “Viktor. Was I good for you?”

“The best. The absolute best. You killed me, zolotse. I can’t give you your kisses right now because I can’t even move. Give me a second please.” His body rocked with his heaving breath.

He turned to kiss his cheek. “It’s okay. Take your time. It’s comfy here.”

He chuckled weakly. “Sixty to zero. Two seconds flat. Chaotic little bunny.”

“Hmm… you kinky people really like turning people into animals.”

Viktor laughed until he cried, his body shaking them both. He wiped his hand across his face to clear his tears. “Newsflash, sweetness, you’re one of the kinkiest people I know.”

“Mmm… If you say so.”
“Oh, I do. I’ve never had a newbie slip so easily into the setting or find so many tantalizing things that interested them at first sight. It just seemed appropriate to take the kinkiest part of your virginity here.” He looked up, smiling a smile Yuri hadn’t yet seen, and stroked his cheek. “Hey, beautiful. You look so gorgeous.”

“You’re the gorgeous one.” He sighed when Viktor protested with a kiss to his forehead shaking his head. “I wish I could see your work. It feels comfy, and the part I can see is pretty.”

“I’m going to fill my house with pictures of you.” He gave him another kiss on his forehead then pried his still shaking body from the ground. “I’m going to get some pictures of him. If you all could clear out behind him, please, I’d appreciate it.”

Taking that as their cue the scene was done, the audience finally exploded, screaming their applause as they cleared out for Viktor. Yuri’s settled heartbeat shut off from the room which was a bit disorienting at first, but it still beat as steady as Viktor decided it should in his chest. Viktor snapped his pictures as he relaxed and enjoyed the gentle sway of the ropes while people kept coming up to give them their praises which mostly consisted of, “Holy shit, that was intense.” A large portion of them teamed up to give themselves their own releases from the tension Viktor created.

Yuri smiled as Viktor started untying him. “You’re so powerful.”

Viktor kissed his cheek with a smile. “You’re so strong to take it all.” He paused his work to watch him, affection melting his eyes. “You’re so beautiful. I’ve never seen anything more stunning. Thank you, zolotse. That felt incredible. You… I was afraid of telling you, of showing you just how deep my brutality goes. Thank you for accepting me so easily.”

“I knew it was there. I told you, I’m a virgin, but I’m not stupid. I could see the spark in your eyes every time I was afraid. I knew you were holding back.”

He left another kiss and resumed his work. “You know it’s not just fear, right? It’s tormenting you and pushing you in every way I can while you choose to stay anyway, while you fight to stay with me. I will never be easy and comfortable to take. I like strange things, and I don’t really know why. I just know that I feel a rush and then at peace when it goes the way it’s supposed to. The more afraid you are, the more it hurts, the harder you have to hold on, the deeper the rush.

“I’ve never tried pushing anyone that far before. I’ve never had a sub who I felt confident enough in to both hold on as hard as possible but end it if they needed to, and it was such a huge risk to try it with you so soon, but I had the perfect set up and I just… I knew you would be perfect for me.” He pulled him free from the last bit of rope and steadied him in his arms, looking deep into his eyes. “Thank you. Thank you so much, Yuri. You just gave me more pleasure than I’ve ever felt and then made me feel so… safe. What can I give you?”

“I don’t know, clothes might be nice.” He smiled and kissed his cheek.

Viktor laughed and shook his head. “Anything for you, zolotse.” He dug through his bag and pulled out a worn gray t-shirt and his soft black pants and put them over his body after checking him for any marks he didn’t like and removing the microphones from his back.

He had rope marks now that left pretty red twists around his limbs. He couldn’t stop himself from running his fingers over the indentations on his arms. “How long will they last?”

“Just a few hours. They’ll be gone in the morning.”

He pouted as Viktor packed up his equipment and cleaned the area then led him back to the couches.
and ordered them another round of drinks.

Viktor snuggled him in close, watching his face. “You’re upset they’ll be gone soon?”

“Yes, Viktor. They’re pretty. I like them.”

He smiled and kissed his head, smoothing away his pout. “Then I’ll just have to do them again, won’t I?”

He practically purred at the idea and had zero shame about that as he tried to bury even deeper into his arms. “Yes, Viktor.”

The music picked back up but gentler than before as people either went back to playing or made their way out the door. The heart was slowly lowered, and Yuri watched with fascination as they pulled it apart piece by piece to free the woman inside. He had been wondering how she stayed in it so long, but he would have happily stayed in Viktor’s ropes for as long as he would let him, and now, he was a little jealous that she had gotten to stay so long.

Minx sat next to them with a grin on his face. “So… when’s the wedding?”

Viktor shook his head. “Have you no propriety at all?”

“Absolutely none.”

“It’s been five days. Don’t put him on the spot like that.”

“Fine, fine. Okay, I’ll ask my next burning question. How did it feel?”

“Umm…” Yuri sipped his drink as he tried to find any way to describe it. “Indescribable. I don’t know how there could be anything better.”

“Oh, zolotse, there is so much more to make you feel. I didn’t even go into the prostate for that one. It was just the entrance I reached. We need a few more times to get you nicely stretched out before I try to go all the way.”

“What?!” Yuri’s screech startled nearly everyone around them, and he clapped his hand over his mouth in apology. “You’re not serious.” He watched his face. “Oh my god. You are serious. How are you serious? Oh my god. I’m gonna die. I knew you were a bad idea.”

Viktor laughed as he held his head to his chest and covered him with kisses between his laughter. “Oh my god, you are so cute! How is that what makes you say I’m a bad idea? I’m a bad idea for a lot of reasons, but that is one of my highlights.”

“Oh, is that the truth.” Minx laughed. “I couldn’t stand subbing for you for many reasons, but that pleasure you have mastered still had me crawling on my knees for it. And that was years ago. I can’t even imagine how good you are now.”

“He’s the best. The absolute best at everything. It’s impossible anyone could be better.” Yuri glared at him that he could dare to say otherwise which, if he considered it, was highly irrational based on how much he hated the fact that he knew his touch at all.

Minx chuckled. “Getting protective of your Dom, I see. What a sweet little pet you are.”

“We haven’t discussed what he is yet, but I agree he is the absolute sweetest.”

“I’d love to interview you sometime for research for my books. It looks like The Boss has taken you
on a hell of a ride for your introduction to sex. Nothing simple and straightforward about that at all.”

“Um… I don’t know. Ask him.” God, he loved that he had such an easy answer available to him. And if Viktor wanted him to do it, it was easier to do anything with his word backing him up.

“I’ll allow it in a little bit when we get more settled ourselves, and I’m there to keep your dirty mind in check.”

“That works for me.”

Yuri smiled and kissed his cheek for his perfect answer. “Thank you.”

Minx shook his head. “My god. So, when’s the wedding again?”

Viktor playfully shoved his head. “Shut up, brat.” He looked back down at Yuri with his lips drawn to the side. “For the record, if you ever leave me, don’t ever do with anyone else what you did with me. Any of it. I should have told you long ago just how dangerous you are, but since it was me you were risking so much for… I’m telling myself that it’s only because of me that you’re doing it. I just wanted you to know so you wouldn’t be putting yourself into danger. You could have been so hurt so many times. You barely know me.”

Minx’s playful smile fell away. “God, mon chéri, he’s so right. I know how he is as a Dom, and he’s my best friend, and I was still scared for you. I kept telling myself that he would never do something he thought would actually damage you, but damn, that was terrifying. He’s only known you for five days. I don’t even know how he felt okay with doing something like that so soon.”

“It has been a short time, but he’s also been my sub for twelve hours a day in that time. That’s equivalent to over a year of training if going by the schedule my training subs have. I know how he responds to my commands and where his mind would go with that, and how to comfort him and lead him through the scene. But that’s only why I felt okay with it. You should absolutely not have been. Anyone can keep up a front for five days. That terror you felt was real and for a damn good reason.”

“Yes, Viktor, but you’re right. It is only you. I knew you weren’t faking. I’ve been with you twelve hours a day too, and I see how you treat your horses so naturally and how they respond to you. You can’t fake their trust in you. It’s only you.”

He smiled. “I know. I wasn’t expecting you to react quite so hard at the idea of anyone other than me touching you. Even a hand on your stomach was too much if it wasn’t mine.” His face creased a little. “Do you know why they didn’t touch you even though I had lifted that ban?”

“No, Viktor.”

“I thought not. They didn’t have an explicit no from me, but they didn’t have an explicit yes either. I only told them no when either they asked or I needed you to know for sure they wouldn’t touch you, but they know not to touch you unless they’ve gotten a yes. It’s the first rule here. The same goes for your limits. You were afraid that I didn’t know it was a zero, but anything you hadn’t given me a yes to was automatically a zero.

“I hate that your roommate kissed you, not just because I’m jealous, but because he shouldn’t have kissed you by surprise when you were drunk and barely knew him. I’m glad you weren’t upset by it, but I was. If I wouldn’t be outing the fact that we’ve discussed your kissing habits, I would have absolutely had a discussion with him about that.”

“Yes, Viktor.”
“Oh, he’s right again, sweetie. That is so not okay. Listen, if you ever leave him for some stupid, insane reason, give me a call if you ever want to get into this again. I mean it. He’s my friend, but I would have no issues talking to you and helping you keep yourself safe. Boss?”

“That is an excellent idea.” He pulled out his phone. “I just sent you his number. Take him up on his offer if that ever comes up. It’s just a smart idea to have that backup, okay?”

“Yes, Viktor.”

Minx shook his head with his eyebrows lifted. “Protect that baby. He needs it.”

Viktor hugged him a little tighter. “I will.”

Viktor’s body hadn’t stopped trembling even now as he watched him rest. “You screamed for me. I was the one who put you there, but you didn’t scream for help. You only screamed for me.”

“It was the only thing that felt safe.”

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Back at home in Viktor’s bedroom, Viktor started stripping the clothes from Yuri’s drained and blissful body.

Yuri clutched around his chest, holding onto them tight. “But they’re cozy. I like them. Please, can I keep them?”

Viktor smiled and kissed his cheek. “I have something better and we need to rinse off all that sweat and makeup.”

He sighed and relinquished his hold. “Fine. Yes, Viktor.”

Viktor stripped himself and brought him into the shower, slowly caressing his body with a gentle sponge as Yuri sat on the stool with the warm spray hitting his back.

“You like taking care of me.”

The light caught the little flecks of green in Viktor’s eyes as he pulled his hand up to his smiling lips giving them the depth and power of an ocean wave. ”Yes, zolotse.”

He nodded slowly then used Viktor’s grip on his hand to tug him in and press a kiss to the top of his head, scrunching his eyes closed as he held it there. “Thank you.”

Viktor looked up at him, blinking in surprise with his hand held over the spot he had kissed. Slowly, his hand came back down and he resumed his gentle washing with a smile on his face.

He frowned and chewed on his lip, which Viktor halted with a light tug. “You’re not a monster.”

His hand stuttered to a stop. “What was that?”

He reached out to stroke his cheek. “You’re not a monster. You’re afraid you’re a monster. That you’ve been pushing me too hard and risking too much. I love your torment. It’s clear and focused, and there’s always a right answer just below the surface, and it ends.

“I’ve never felt torment end before. It always just sort of fades, and sometimes it’s quiet, but it always comes right back making me churn for the answer to stop it, but it’s always the same questions, and no matter how many answers I try, they never really work.
“Your torments shut down my own and end with a clear answer that makes me stronger, that I can hold onto as true. And then on top of that, you give me unspeakable pleasure as a reward for having pleased you, for doing a good job, for finding the answer you dropped into my cage. If you think that part of you is something I should fear, you’re wrong. It’s the best part of you for me. You’re not a monster, Viktor. Not to me.”

He blinked rapidly while his mouth worked in little waves, not meeting his eyes. “What am I to you?”

“A gift.”

“Yuri. I—” His voice cracked, dropping his head onto Yuri’s knees.

“It’s okay. Give me whatever you want to give me.” He combed through his wet hair, tugging at the short ends, and Viktor’s sobs broke free. He wiped his cheek, and Viktor caught his hand to press it to his lips and held it through it all.

***

Pulling him out to dry him, Viktor turned the dryer to warm and lightly raked through his hair, letting the warm air drift down his skin. After putting some lotion on his fresh marks and drying his own hair, he finally brought him to bed, tucking him into the silky sheets while still completely naked.

“Um… Viktor? I usually sleep in clothes.”

“Not with me you don’t.” He slid in next to him, also completely naked, and watched his face on the pillow for several moments before slowly reaching out his hand to find Yuri’s fingertips with a hesitant touch. “Hi, beautiful.” Clasping his hand, he tugged it onto his hip then reached for the rest of him and pulled him into his body, tangling them up in each other as tightly as his ropes.

Yuri sighed and buried his nose into the scent coming straight from his skin. “Oh, I need to set my alarm. I have somewhere to be in the morning.”

“Oh? Where’s that?”

“In your office, on my knees.”

He smiled and pulled him tighter. “You’re with me. You don’t have to leave me just to meet me again in my office.”

“You said no exceptions.”

He chuckled into a kiss against his floppy hair. “You’re right. I did. Temporary order: Tomorrow you can sleep in a bit. As long as you’re in my bed, you can stay there until I tell you otherwise.”

“Yes, Viktor.” He closed his eyes and pressed his face back into his chest with a sigh.

“Sweet dreams, my beautiful Yuri. Thank you.”

He nodded but fell asleep before he could think of a decent reply to give.

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Chapter End Notes
Chapter warning: Yuri's panic and Viktor's silence to his questions lead him to believe people other than Viktor might be touching him intimately. He is not okay with this and panics over it. No one other than Viktor ever touches him in reality. He is not traumatized in the end.
Chapter 14

Chapter Summary

Flip a coin.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

(28) Slackened cold wriggled in, separating him from Viktor’s taught warmth. He whimpered as his hands sought him out. “Viktor?” His voice crackled with the grogginess of half-sleep.

“Shh… sleep, darling. I’ll be right back.”

“Yes, Viktor,” mumbled out as he pulled in tight to himself trying to hold on to the last bit of his warmth.

He drifted in that in-between state of sleep and wake until Viktor slipped back into the bed, his body chilled and smelling of the fresh stable and early morning air. They both shivered upon contact as they reentwined, but slowly their temperatures exchanged until the passes heated them beyond their normal range.

“Sorry, couldn’t quite fall asleep. I tried.”

“It’s okay. You can sleep now, yes?”

“Yes, Viktor.” He sighed and burrowed into his warmth and obeyed until bright panels of light fell over his eyes.

He groaned at the interruption to the most blissful sleep he could remember having. Finally cracking his eyes open, his heart stopped at the sight of Viktor with a tender smile just for him. How was it possible?

“Good morning, zolotse.” He took a deep sniff of his skin before drifting his kisses down it. “How are you feeling?”

He sighed as he stretched out his achy body to find his answer then curled back in to wrap around him again. “Perfect.”

He hummed. “That’s what I like to hear. Are you sore?”

“The right amount.” He kissed his chest and pulled back just enough to watch his face lit in the morning light. “How are you?”

“Perfect. I got to wake up to the best sight and feeling twice this morning. It felt so good.”

He blushed lightly and tucked back into his chest. “Me too.”

They rested there a little longer, trading kisses on chests for kisses on cheeks until Yuri’s stomach started rumbling.
Viktor gave him one last lingering kiss to his forehead. “Wait here. I’ll bring you breakfast.”

“Please, can I help you?”

“I’d rather you rest, but I’m willing to consider it if you tell me why.”

“I’d rather be with you.”

“Yuri!” Laughing, he tackled him with kisses, clasping his wrists above his head. “You’re just the sweetest. The best.” He left a few more kisses over his palms then sighed and released him. “You’re sure you’re not in any bad pain?”

“I’m sure.”

“Okay. Come on.” He gave him pants and his gray t-shirt in the perfect stage of worn from his closet and slipped on black pants himself, leaving his torso cruelly bare as they headed for the kitchen.

“So… did you start a collection or something? How do you have so many always on hand?”

“I figured out it only takes a few hours of me wearing it to put my scent on it enough, so I just wear a new one for a few hours in the evening and then you have it for the next day. Do you want more variety in colors or material?”

“No, Viktor. I like it always being the same.”

He smiled and kissed his head as he opened the fridge. “Then that’s what you’ll have.” He pulled out a colander lined with paper towels filled with a mound of something white and the bowl sitting under it to capture the liquid along with a carton of eggs. “Are you ready to try some real Russian food?”

“Yes, Viktor. What is that?”

“Ricotta.”

“Wait. That’s Italian.” He went to the coffee maker to get a fresh pot brewing.

He laughed. “Yes, but it’s the closest I could find to the right cheese in the states. It’s too watery though, so I drain it overnight. Then it’s just about perfect.” He dumped the ricotta into a bowl and added some eggs and a bit of sugar and salt and a scoop of flour then mixed the whole mass together into a yellow glob. “And that’s pretty much it. Can you get the butter?”

“Yes, Viktor.” He pulled out the butter while Viktor turned on the burner under the griddle on his stove.

He slathered the griddle with the butter then grabbed two spoons and handed him one. “Here, take a small scoop and drop it on the griddle. You can get them pretty close. They don’t expand much, but still leave room to flip them.” He dropped a small scoop of the cheese batter onto the frothy butter while Yuri started in on the other side.

“So, what are these?”

“Syrniki. They’re vkusno and have a lot of protein.”

“Vkusno?”

“Delicious.” He flipped them over with a small spatula to let the other side cook. “Can you get some —” he smiled as he glanced at the plates Yuri was setting down next to him, “plates.” He kissed his
cheek and pointed to the plates. “Tarelki. Thank you, zolotse. We’re going to need one more tarelka to put the rest on. I always make more than what I can eat since they make great little snacks to keep in the fridge. They’re just as good cold as they are warm.”

“Yes, Viktor.” He handed him the other plate, and Viktor started pulling them from the griddle. “Tarelki is plates, tarelka is one plate?”

“Yes, very good, Yuri.” He gave him a beaming smile and a kiss on his cheek. “You want to make sure you don’t overcook them. Just long enough to let them get a little brown. And never too much flour, just enough to bind the batter. That’s the worst part to get wrong.” He topped the small stacks of pancakes with a huge dollop of sour cream that slid down the edges and a spoon of cherry preserves.

“Sour cream on pancakes?”

“Smetana on everything.” He laughed and handed him a plate. “It’s not Russian without smetana.”

They sat at the table streaming with morning light by the large windows that glimpsed the lower pastures with some coffee Yuri poured for them.

Yuri took a bite of the lightly sweet, pillowy pancakes with the sour cream that balanced nicely with the preserves then smiled. “It’s vkusno.”

Viktor beamed. “Excellent, Yuri. I’m so glad you like them.” He started eating as he saw him eating without hesitation. “So, what’s your research saying on our restaurant so far?”

“Um, honestly, I’m still trying to make sense of how to do the research in the first place. I mean, I got that company doing the market research you told me about, and I’m still waiting for them to finish that, and I’m doing research on what exactly a restaurant needs to run, so I can start pricing equipment and overhead costs. And the architect is drawing up plans and a proposal. She was out there yesterday to see the site. Sorry, I didn’t tell you that.”

“It’s okay. It sounds like you’re doing a great job. It is so much to cover, but I’m certain if you keep working through it, you’ll get it all sorted. I want you to learn as much as you can and do as much of it yourself as you can, but don’t be shy about asking me for help. I want you to use every resource you have available to you, and I’m one of them.”

“Yes, Viktor.” He took a lingering sip of his coffee, enjoying the buzzing warmth lighting up his brain. “In that case, can you help me understand the projected income? I mean, how do you predict that? Isn’t it entirely dependent on how many people actually come out?”

“Yes. It’s really just an estimate. That’s all this is. You gather as much information as you can to make an educated and reasonable estimate, but don’t think of it too literally or too precisely. It’s not going to match in the end. I’ve started many businesses, and I’ve never had those initial estimates be the actual results. This really is just a way to filter out the worst of ideas and things that just won’t happen no matter what you do and make sure you know what you do need to succeed.”

“Oh. How many businesses do you have? I know about the stable and the loft and the farm obviously, but there are others?”

“Yes, several. Or many if you consider the ones I’m invested in but mainly play a silent role. I don’t entirely rely on what my dad gave me. I’ve grown that over the years myself. The stable started turning a profit for me before I got access to my trust fund, and I was able to buy him out after a few years. Then when I got access to it, I started investing in businesses I found interesting. In addition to
the ones you know of, I have complete ownership of an alternative energy company and varying levels of investment and interest in, I think, about twenty or so more. Plus a few charities I started. I’d have to look it up to tell you concretely.”

“Wow. How do you have time for all of that?”

“Most of my waking hours are spent working. And it’s not like I’m doing all of it myself. I’m able to hire whatever help I need to help me manage the rest. I’m a manager. I oversee and make plans and guide while they execute my vision.”

“An alternative energy company? Isn’t that sort of against your best interests if you stand to inherit an oil company?”

The corner of his mouth turned up. “Yes. It was the first thing I invested in with the oil money once I had full control. My dad is an idealist for many things, but when it comes to success and fortune, he’s a complete pragmatist. I’m just an idealist for everything. The business I start are all idealistic and are things I’d like to see grow in our world.”

“Like what?”

“Well, I’d like to actually preserve our planet as a place to live, so that’s a big one for a lot of them. There’s an advanced tech one that is doing some really cool work that both improves our standards of living while reducing our consumption of resources and another that’s working on geoengineering which may be a sad necessity to reverse the effects of our current destruction. We’ve already pushed too far over the limit, and while geoengineering is risky, it might be the only way to go back.”

“So, you’re basically a multimillionaire control freak living alone in a Russian castle who wants to engineer our entire world and society and who takes pleasure in causing people pain.”

He laughed. “Well, I suppose that is all true. I have no defense against your charges.” Taking a sip of his coffee, he leveled his eyes at him. “Do I frighten you?”

He smiled. “No. I’ve never felt safer about our future.” He scraped up some of the sour cream and preserves lingering on the plate with the side of his fork. “How do I not know this? I mean, you seem like a very noteworthy individual, and I’ve obviously followed the horse world, so I knew of you before I started here, but the only thing I knew was that you are the best eventer in the world. Even articles about you were pretty limited for what they shared.”

“I like to keep quiet about my varied interests mainly for exactly what you just said. If someone had a whole picture of my interests combined with my influence, well… I really don’t care to hear what rumors about me would be inspired by that.” He smiled as he cleared their plates. “I’m proud of you. You ate everything without a fuss.” He put the plates into the dishwasher and wiped down the griddle. “I’m just teaching today so you can stay here and rest and work on Oui Da Hai planning if you feel up for it.”

“I can’t work down there with you? It’s not really any different if I’m working on the laptop there or here, right?”

“I suppose not. Alright, you can work down there. Let’s go get changed.”

“Yes, Viktor.” He picked up their empty coffee cups and put them in the dishwasher then prepped the meat and loaded the rice cooker for their lunch later and followed him back upstairs. He started pulling on a pair of black breeches, sitting at the edge of the bed.

Viktor pulled a sapphire polo over his head. “What’s so fascinating about my bookshelf, Yuri?”
“What do you mean?”

“You keep looking at it.”

“Oh, um, I was just kinda curious about the picture.” He picked up the gray polo from the bed.

“Is that all? I’ve been watching you look at it since you first came in here. You could have simply asked me. You really like torturing yourself rather than taking the simpler, more direct route, don’t you?” He smiled as he lifted it from the shelf. “It’s going to be a little anti-climactic after that build up you gave it in your head.” He handed it over as Yuri finished tucking in his shirt.

It was a picture of him as a child with waist-length hair and a man who was so clearly his father, he would have believed it to be a picture of Viktor himself. A woman, who he guessed was his mother, stood almost the same height as young Viktor with natural blonde hair. He’d heard of people described as having a square-shaped face, but hers was literally so with a tiny, slightly hooked nose and wide green eyes. Viktor was right. At first glance, she looked rather plain with almost a strange face, but with a few more moments of gaze, her overall aspect took on a youthful, fairylike appearance that was echoed and expanded in young Viktor. In fact, he could now see her innocent features in Viktor’s pleading expressions. His parents hugged him tightly in the photo, beaming as brightly as Viktor did in the middle.

It was an innocently simple picture, but the fact that it was so tucked away was enhanced by a slight snag in Viktor’s casual expression. The photo was simple, but something about it wasn’t. He studied Viktor to decide if he should ask further, and the lengths Viktor went to to hide the deeper significance told him the answer. Viktor wanted him to believe the surface view at least for now. He would likely tell him if he asked, but he wasn’t quite ready to offer that part of himself yet.

Yuri smiled, his eyes widened with a bit of surprise. “You had long hair?”

“I did.” His smile looked a touch relieved. “Until I was nineteen.”

“Really? That’s so… why?”

“Hmm… I guess because I liked it. It was fun surprising people. They could never guess if I was a boy or a girl, and it was fun seeing their reactions to me whichever way they leaned. Plus, I got a lot of compliments on it, and I’m a bit of a sucker for that. I liked catching people’s attention.”

“It was very beautiful. You look so different though. So delicate.”

“Well, I was a child.” He laughed.

“Why did you cut it?”

“It just didn’t suit the image I wanted to have any more.”

“Do you have any pictures from just before you cut it?”

“Yes. Would you like to see?”

“Yes!” He held back his lips between his teeth. “I mean, yes, Viktor.”

He laughed. “Why are you so excited by my hair?”

“Um… just that I didn’t know that about you, and it’s kind of a surprising thing to learn.”

“Hmm, if you’re going to react so cutely when you learn more about me, maybe I should share more
often.”

“Yes, Viktor. I do want to know more about you.”

He smiled as he pulled out a photo album from one of his dresser drawers and started flipping through it. Landing on the right pages, he handed him the book. “I had no idea you were so curious about my past.”

“Of course, I’m curious.” He took in the sight of Viktor’s silver hair cascading around his rippling body as he held a young Toska with a blue ribbon clipped to his bridle.

“His first one.”

“You’re so beautiful.” Sighing, he devoured the page filled with photos of the start of their reign.

Viktor turned the page, and Yuri gasped. Viktor galloping bareback in the pasture, his hair flying out behind him on the wind. He looked a little younger and slimmer than he did now, but not by much. Viktor turned the page again to reveal young Viktor and baby Toska nibbling at the ends of his hair, and in the next photo Viktor scolding him followed by a hug and a kiss on his neck in the one after.

Yuri smiled as he ran his fingertips over the photos tucked in the plastic envelopes. “You’re so unfair. You were just as beautiful as a teen as you are now. Did you never have an awkward stage?”

“Maybe not physically but coming here with nothing but broken textbook English and culture shock made it a little challenging to fit in with the other kids. It probably didn’t help any that their after-school activities included going to the mall while mine was building a horse stable.”

“You moved here as a teen?”

“Yes,” his eyes flicked down as his face creased for the briefest moment, “to go to school here to prepare for college. My dad said that having a degree from an American school would help me get further in business even though Russian schools were clearly superior in every way.” He chuckled, but it sounded a little stiffer than usual. “If you can’t tell by the house, he has a lot of pride in Russia.”

“I see. Why did you build the stable?”

He breathed out a little sigh as a warm smile came onto his face, and he stroked Yuri’s cheek. “I only half hired you for your ass. I would have hired you without that as soon as you gave your reason for leaving your last job.”

“Huh?”

“You said you quit because you didn’t care for the way they treated the horses.”

“Yes, but what’s that got to do with the stable?”

“I had Toska there when I first got him. I caught them being rough with him, and he was just a baby. I decided I couldn’t trust anyone but myself to take care of him, so I built this place for him and as many other horses I could take care of.”

“Really? Wow.”

His hands slid down to settle on Yuri’s hips. “You quit that place knowing you had nowhere to go but your car, didn’t you?”
“Yes, Viktor.”

“I’m impressed with your integrity. That must have been a hard decision to make.”

He shrugged. “Not really. It would have been harder to stay.”

“How long were you living in your car for?”

“Three months or so.”

He gasped. “Over the winter? It was a particularly nasty one this year too.”

“It wasn’t so bad. At least I had shelter.”

“Still. I can’t even imagine that. How did you survive?”

“I sold my blood.”

“What?” Viktor gasped like he’d been punched in the gut as he gripped him harder. “Please tell me you’re joking.”

“I’m not? Well, my plasma to be more specific.”

“You sold your blood to survive?” He looked horrified. “I don’t even know what to say.”

He shrugged again. “I could donate twice a week and made forty bucks for each donation. It wasn’t great, but I was able to pay for a cheap gym membership and keep my phone bill paid and some food and gas.”

“Did you suffer any side effects?”

“Um… well, I passed out a few times?”

“What?!”

“Yeah, I googled it though and found out that the ingredient they use to stop blood clotting can bind to calcium and lower your levels, so I tried drinking milk more often, and that seemed to help some. I’d still get really tired, but at least I wasn’t passing out.”

“Oh my god. When did you last do this?”

“Last week.”

“Oh my god. I should have known this. I was beating you in that state. Why didn’t you list it under your medical info?”

“It wasn’t really a medical procedure. Just a way to make some cash.”

“Yuri! There’s not a distinction for things like that between if you do it for money or not.”

“I’m fine though. I’ve been feeling much better since I started here. I don’t feel any symptoms anymore.”

He shook his head, his eyes still wide in shock. “You risked your health for eighty dollars a week just to survive, and you shrug like it’s no big deal?”

“It wasn’t. I was fairly lucky. Others there were much worse off than I was.”
“So what, you have to be at the absolute bottom to consider that what you’re going through is not okay?”

“I knew it wasn’t great, but what else was I going to do? I had to get money somehow. That was the best I could find until I found another job.”

“I don’t understand it. I’m not capable of understanding it. It’s so beyond my own view that I can’t even imagine being in that situation and reacting anything like how you are.”

He smiled and put his hands against Viktor’s cheeks. “Well, that makes two of us. I can’t picture your life at all either.”

He huffed out his tension then smiled. “At least we both understand the horses.”

He kissed his cheek. “Right.”

Yuri stopped in the kitchen to grab the laptop Viktor had gotten him (because why wouldn’t he?) then followed him down to the stable. He settled against a tree next to the arena and set to work making sense of endless numbers and pieces of equipment and procedures and health codes and staffing requirements and… the list was endless. Every new thread unraveled dragged fifty more into the knot.

Still, the answer was buried in there somewhere. It had to be. It was another of Viktor’s torments. And while this one was harder and required more endurance than the rest, at least he knew the answer he was looking for: yes or no.

“Do we know if we’re doing this yet?” Viktor leaned over the fence post while waiting for his next student to arrive with a coy smile.

“I have no idea. I’m sorry. There’s just so much information.”

“I know. It’s okay. I only ask out of excitement. Don’t feel rushed to give me an answer. I can be patient.”

He looked up from another article explaining a concept he had already read three on and still wasn’t quite grasping with a sigh and a smile. “Thank you, Viktor.”

“Anything I can help you figure out?”

“Um, well, I’ve read a few articles about exit strategies, and that’s apparently important to plan for now, and I understand the definition, but I’m not sure what a good exit strategy is.”

“Exit strategies in the planning stages are mostly to assure investors they’ll be able to recover at least some of their investment if the business goes south, but you’ve already got all the investment you need, and I’m not terribly worried about losing what I put in. But to answer your question, exit strategies for small businesses like this are pretty limited. You can either close up shop and sell off assets or sell the business. Selling the business is almost always the best option. It has more value sold whole and operational even if it’s not doing too well.

“You do want to plan for the possibility that the business might not be worth running to you anymore, and that’s mainly done by considering what it would take to make a smooth handoff to someone else. Let’s say you mire yourself in the day-to-day operations, and you’re the only one who knows what’s going on there. If you leave, you take that value with you and strip it from the business. Plus, it demands that your attention is focused entirely on the business because it will fail without it. Setting it up so it can run without your direct involvement makes your life easier and frees
“you to do what you like rather than getting bogged down in running the business, and it assures that if you ever do want to leave it, you can hand it off smoothly without stripping any value.”

“How do I do that?”

“By creating systems for everything and hiring and training the appropriate employees who can keep it running efficiently even without you.”

“Systems?”

“Structures put into place that automatically do the things that need doing. Let’s say for marketing. You obviously need to market the business consistently. It’s not a one and done thing. You can either spend time each month putting up ads and mailing out postcards and so on, or you can set up a method of those things getting done automatically without you.

“The simplest and best way would be to hire a marketing company. They’ll be efficient, have their own systems in place that you can rely on, and it’s their specialty. They’ll do a much better job than you will as a novice. You’ll know you have all the systems in place that you need if you could totally ignore the business for a month and have it operating just as well or even better when you come back. That’s how I can run so many businesses. I don’t want you running a restaurant; I want you managing a business.”

“Ah, that helps. Thank you, Viktor. I was thinking I had to figure out every little detail, but if I can find the right companies and employees that specialize in what needs to be done, I can let them handle the details?”

“Yes, that’s exactly right. Your job is the overall picture. Getting everything gathered and organized and having others actually run it. I don’t expect you to become an expert in every little thing that needs doing. You just need to understand them on a higher level so you know what to look for and can identify good solutions from bad.”

Phichit passed by leading one of the horses out to the pastures and waved to Yuri. “How was the party?”

“Uh, it was great.”

“Awesome. I hope you didn’t party too hard and have some left for tonight.” He gave him a beaming smile.

“Uh, I’ll be fine.”

“Oh, are you guys going to a party tonight?” Viktor asked.

“We’re just having a little party here so Yuri can meet everyone.”

“Ah, that’s an excellent idea. I hope you have a good time.”

“Thanks! Do—you want to come?”

“Thank you for the invite, but I don’t think you want your boss at your party. It makes it rather difficult to vent about how awful he is when he’s right there.” He smiled and winked. “Plus, I’ve got some things to do in the city tonight.” In the city? Did he mean at the loft? Is he training subs tonight?

“We would never do that. You’re the best boss. The invitation stands if you change your mind.” He
waved and continued on with the horse.

Viktor finished his morning lessons before they went back to his house for another round of katsudon. Yuri chewed on his lip as he scooped the rice out of the cooker that had enough settings to jet it off to the moon if that’s what Viktor wished and topped it with the sauce, egg, and pork. It was starting to look a little nicer at least. He sprinkled on the scallions and picked up the chopsticks to deliver the bowls to the table. His hands started shaking before he took a bite.

Viktor’s mouth quirked to the side as he watched his jaw lock against the food. “You did so well with breakfast, I had hoped this would be a little easier for you too.”

“I’m sorry, Viktor.”

“It’s okay. I know you’re trying.” He stood and pulled Yuri’s chair back a bit then knelt at his feet. He unzipped Yuri’s breeches and pulled his cock free. “You can come when you’ve finished every bite.”

“Yours is going to get cold.”

“Two. That’s arguing and worrying about things that are mine to worry about.”

He flinched. “Yes, Viktor. I’m sorry.”

“Apology accepted.” He dropped onto him with his intentions not to go easy clear in the reckless pleasure already bathing his cock.

“Viktor!” He gasped as blood raced from his churning mind to his rising cock. He picked up his chopsticks with trembling hands and tried to shovel the food in as quickly as he could so Viktor wouldn’t have to wait.

Viktor picked up his pace to match until an orgasm was bubbling dangerously in his core. He was so close to coming, the slightest breeze over his cock would make him disobey. He wasn’t pleasing him. He was warning him with his threatening pleasure.

Ah, crap. He was worrying about the same thing again. Viktor wanted him to slow down and enjoy it. Focus on feeling his pleasure on him for as long as he can. He paused to take a quaking breath and refocus his mind on what Viktor wanted from him.

He grabbed a strip of meat with some egg and lifted the pork to his mouth. He smiled. It was good. Not as good as his mom’s, but as good as any other katsudon he’d had in Japan. Maybe even better than some. He’d made katsudon.

A tear rolled down his cheek as Viktor rewarded his answer with comfortable pleasure. He wanted him to linger, to savor his own success. Salting and piercing the meat with a fork in the morning had made it tender, well-seasoned, and juicy. Viktor’s tongue dragged hot and slow as his mouth sealed just enough to create a slight suction drawing pleasure across his body. He moaned as he filled his mouth with another bite. So good. Sweet and savory at once and satisfying. He'd caramelized the onions before adding the liquid. He couldn’t remember if his mom did it that way, but it had been suggested as a way to add flavor to anything, so he tried it to enrich his previously bland sauce.


The pleasure ached as he filled himself with every one. The places those things used to live had shriveled in his rejection, so now it was pleasure turning to pain as they forced their way in. He finished his bowl and pleasure overtook him, tears trying to relieve the glut stuffing his body. Viktor
clasped his hand as he emptied into his mouth.

He moved over into the chair next to him and pulled him into his lap, his hand smoothing over his back as he ruined his shirt yet again. “I’m so proud of you, Yuri. You did so well. Shh… it’s okay.” He squeezed him tighter as he kissed his head. “You’re okay. I promise. You did so well for me, and you’re so smart to figure out exactly what I was telling you.”

His sobs rocked him harder at Viktor’s lavish praise. Viktor took a deep breath and smothered him with more, driving every tear from his body with every kind word he could think to give.

Empty now—too empty—his fingertips stroked over Viktor’s cock. “Did I do good enough?”

“You did so good, Yuri, but I want to know why you want it.”

“It feels too empty, incomplete without your pleasure too.”

“Go ahead.”

(29) “Thank you.” He sighed and dropped to his knees as Viktor pulled his bowl over. He pulled him out and teased him with little licks until he was nicely hard. Moaning with satisfaction, he stuffed himself with Viktor’s cock, pleasure as Viktor would experience it soaking into him.

“Ungh, Yuri! Oh god. Sweetheart, you need to learn how not to make me come in two seconds.”

He pulled off with a deep smack of his lips making Viktor grab his shoulder to steady himself. “Sorry, how do I do that?”

He chuckled and brushed his fingertips over his cheek. “Slow your rhythm when you see my body twitch and tense. And you don’t have to take me all right at the start. Save it for the end. Tease me with it, since now I know you can do it, I’ll be wondering with every stroke if that one will be it or not.”

“Yes, Viktor.” He wanted to protest that taking him all felt too good to resist, but this was about pleasing him, and if teasing him would do that, then that’s what he’d do. He licked his lips and started up again just sucking lightly over his head as his tongue flicked against it.

“Yeesss, Yuri. So good.” He took a bite of the katsudon and moaned. “Vkusno! Oh, so good, Yuri. Both what you’re doing and what you did. It feels so good, and your katsudon is so tasty. Oh my god. I’m in heaven.” He groaned and took another bite. “Oh my god. So, so good. I can’t believe this.”

Smiling, he slowly took him in deeper and backed out again even slower after almost letting him slip into his throat.

Viktor groaned, his eyes rolling as they closed. “Oh shit, that was perfect. I’m going to die of pleasure, just so you know. ‘Killed by Yuri Katsuki—died the happiest man in the world’ is going on my grave.”

He filled his mouth with katsudon, moaning unabashedly as Yuri tried out different ways of pleasing him. Slower, faster, deeper suction, teasing licks, longer and shorter strokes, all changed up and combined in turn as he watched Viktor flood with pleasure.

Viktor finished his meal and put his bowl down and covered him with more praise. “Ungh, Yuri. Yuri, it feels so good. You did such a good job. Best meal I’ve ever had. You can make me come now.”
He looked up from sucking along the side of his cock. “Is that an order?”

He smiled. “Have you got an idea for how you want to please me?”

“Yes, Viktor.” Kissing his head, he swirled licks onto it.

He settled back in his chair. “Pleasure me as you like.”

“Thank you, Viktor.” He took him back in, and he knew Viktor was expecting him to tease him further as he had been doing, so instead, he took him all the way down and pressed his free hand against his stomach to sense the telling clenches as his other hand gave him a deeper stretch than he usually did.

“Oh my god, Yuri! I thought you didn’t want to make me come yet.”

Slowly, he dragged back out, adding suction as soon as his throat was empty enough to do so and pulled back all the way to the tip before plunging down again in the same slow rhythm.

“Oh, shiiit,” he huffed as his hands clamped down on Yuri’s shoulders, “that felt amazing.”

He drew back again to the tip and caressed his tongue against the spot just below his ridge that always made him twitch before going back down as steady as he had before. Keeping his rhythm deep and slow, he kept the stretch and suction going as his tongue explored every spot he had discovered during his teasing while Viktor fell apart in his hands.

Viktor never lost control. He never got thoroughly teased because he always knew what his subs were going to do. He wanted to be surprised, so he decided to give him a taste of his own medicine. Driving him to the edge of release without giving enough to go over, his own steady rhythm set the pace for his tongue dancing over every one of his favorite spots. What would happen if he didn’t go faster as Viktor liked to do at the end to drive him over the edge? If Viktor did it, it must be the most effective way, but would this work too? Judging by the contorting puddle of Viktor, it seemed to be good so far.

“Please.” His voice was the softest of whispers. Almost indistinguishable from his heaving breath, only the harder P giving it away. “Please, Yuri. I’m already dead. I’m in heaven it feels so good. Please make me come.”

Moaning as he pushed deep once again, he gorged himself on Viktor’s thick cock and his words even thicker with pleasure. He made Viktor beg. Had anyone ever made him beg before?

He pulled back, the tells of a rising orgasm in the pulsing grip of his core and the twitching of his cock. He resisted the urge to go faster and instead chose the combination that Viktor responded to the best. Down with a twist of his hand leading into the stretch and his extended tongue shifted over to run along the path just left of center that seemed to be more sensitive than anywhere else, burying him deep in his throat as he made slow attempts to swallow him even more. Viktor came clinging to Yuri with all his strength as he cried out his name.

Viktor slumped in the chair and twitching still as his orgasm played out its final touches. He looked up at the ceiling with unfocused eyes. “He made me beg. Oh my god. He made me beg.” His eyes lowered to his. “You made me beg. Yuri, that was incredible. It felt so… so amazing. There are no words for how amazing that felt. You made me beg, Yuri.” His mouth hung open as he stared at him in disbelief.

He kissed his oversensitive cock, smiling as it twitched in his hand. “Am I the first one to do that? Did I surprise you?”
“Yes to both. I can’t believe you made me beg. I was utterly helpless. I told you to pleasure me as you liked and suddenly, I’m just lost in you. You did things I’ve never felt, and I don’t even know how that’s possible considering how many different people have tried their best to please me. How did you think of doing it like that?”

“Um, I just thought that you might not have had anyone do to you what you do to them. The edging gets almost painful after a while, so I knew you wouldn’t like it to that degree, but I thought you might like a little bit because it does make the orgasms more intense.”

“That is so true. Everyone’s always in a rush to please me as soon as possible, and it ends up all feeling the same no matter what they do. But you did more than just that. You hit every perfect spot.”

“I tried to memorize the spots that made you react more when I was teasing you.”

“Oh my god, Yuri. You make me helpless. I don’t think you understand just how good you are. You made me beg.”

He hid his beaming smile with more kisses and light licks to his cock.

“You genuinely like doing that, don’t you?”

“Yes, Viktor. You feel so good inside me.”

He smiled and pulled him up from his knees to cuddle him and cover him with kisses. “Now, that is the way to a man’s heart. Cook him the best meal ever then give him mind-blowing pleasure while he enjoys it.”

“You really liked the katsudon?”

“You made it my favorite, hands down. It was so good.”

“My mom’s is better.”

“Don’t do that. Don’t take away your victory by belittling it. I told you to make it my favorite, and you did. I don’t care if your mom’s might be better. I loved your katsudon. It was so tasty even without the blowjob. You really did an amazing job. I want you to give your recipe to the chef at our restaurant and teach them how to make it so we can put it on the menu.”

“We don’t even know if it will happen yet.”

“I’m confident it will.”

“You really liked it that much?”

“Yes, Yuri. I truly did. It was so well-balanced and satisfying. I’m not known for being easy to please. I would have no hesitation to tell you if it was bad. I’m not flattering you. You did an excellent job, and you earned my praise. Every bit of it.”

His cheeks touched pink as he kissed Viktor’s cheek. “Thank you. I’m glad you liked it.”

“Shit. I learned something else critically important about you.”

“What’s that?”

“Never unleash you when I have to work after.” He laughed and kissed his forehead. “How do you expect me to teach like this?”
“Um, well putting your cock away first might be a good idea.”

He laughed, pressing his forehead against Yuri’s. “Yes, thank you, zolotse. My brain is still pure goo after what you did to me. I might have forgotten that.”

“And, um, you might want a new shirt. I’m sorry, I ruined it.”

“No, you followed my orders to leave your tears with me. But yes, I do need a new shirt. Come on.” He kissed his forehead again then tucked his cock away but left his pants unzipped as he pulled the polo from his body.

Yuri groaned as he went to the counters to clean up his mess. “You’re so hot. It’s so unfair.”

“I’m unfair? Who just made me comatose with pleasure then slapped my ass and sent me off to work?”

“I did not!” He giggled as Viktor grinned at him, stalking forward like he was about to pounce.

“Oh, you have no idea how brutal you are with that innocence.” He crept around the corner, his hands raised into claws. “Make me beg for you, and you don’t even know what you did. Make me work to get what I want. Make me need to give you everything while you barely accept anything. What if I just,” his hands came down to scoop his thighs up in his hands and set him on the counter, his mouth inches from his, his eyes burning with hunger, “force you to accept it. Hold you down until I’ve given you everything I want to give, until I don’t feel like I’m going to burst holding it all inside me.”

He leaned in, his hands gripping him tight as his mouth was held just in front of his. “That’s what I want to do.” He took his chin in his hand then turned Yuri’s head to land his kiss on the edge of his jaw and sighed. “But what I need is your choice.” He kissed his cheek and left to go change his shirt.

Yuri heaved on the counter, staring down at his hardened cock. “Seriously? You can’t let me have any dignity, can you? We knew he was going to stop. He has to teach, you idiot.”

Viktor’s muffled laugh drifted around the corner.

He groaned as his whole face turned red. “You’re so mean!”

“And you’re so adorable!”

He shook his head as he jumped down and started cleaning, giving his stupid cock the silent treatment.

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(30) Yuri was just coming out of Viktor’s office after spending the past hour on the phone contacting several companies to get quotes on their services. Table linens and marketing stats and recruiters were running through his head, but those were only background noise to the fact that it was nearly five and time for another scene with Viktor. What did he plan to do? He mentioned they would play with the electricity soon. Is that what he had planned for today? Or maybe something they’d seen at the party. Or the sounding again. He wouldn’t mind repeating that one at all.

He was walking through the short aisle between the tack rooms that led from Viktor’s office to the main aisle lost in his thoughts when he bumped right into someone. “Oh! I’m so sorry. I wasn’t paying attention to where I was going.”
“Of course, you weren’t.”

The snarl told of only one person it could be before he pushed his glasses into place. Yura.

“You never know where you’re going, do you? You never pay attention. You just wander around destroying everything in your path.”

A crushing hand seized his throat, choking him while tears burned behind his eyes. He didn’t mean it — He couldn’t mean it the way he was taking it. “I—I’m sorry. You’re right. It’s all my fault. I—I wasn’t paying attention. Are you hurt?”

Sneering, he dug into his pocket, pulling something out and clenching it in his hand. “I don’t know. I can’t decide. Why don’t I flip a coin to find out?” He pinched the shiny penny between his fingers, holding it up for him to see.

He gasped as every broken piece locked so far inside himself even Viktor couldn’t reach it twisted their jagged points inside his heart. “What?” He drowned in the tears he locked away.

Yura tossed the penny in the air and snatched it before it hit the ground over and over, his sadistic sneer widening. “Heads it’s not hurt, tails it is. Let’s see… hurt?” He flipped the penny in the air, caught it, and slammed it onto the back of his hand. He lifted his hand to peek. “Not hurt.” He flipped the penny again. “Hurt? Not hurt.” He shook his head as he checked the penny resting on the back of his hand. “You’d think this would give me the right answer, but it’s just not. Why don’t you try? I’m sure it’ll come up with the right answer for you.” He tossed the penny at him.

He screamed and clamped his hands over his mouth as the penny struck his chest then fell to the bricks, bouncing a few times before it lay still on the ground.

Yura stared down at it then looked back up with his cruel smile gone and nothing but hatred in his eyes. “You would drop that, wouldn’t you, Yuri Katsuki.” He pulled another coin from his pocket and tossed it in the air, snagging it from its fall as he turned and walked away.

His hands stayed clamped over his mouth as his heart raced with the clammy panic shorting out the circuits in his brain until he dissolved into the snow found on empty stations of old television sets. A distant voice crackled his name behind the deafening static. He had as much hope of responding as he would sorting those black and white specks into a whole image.

“Yuri! Yuri! What’s wrong?!” Viktor’s hands were shaking him as he tried to pull him back into his grip. “Yuri! Please, tell me!” He couldn’t get a response, so he scanned the area for clues. His eyes followed Yuri’s line of sight and settled on the ground in front of him. He slowly bent down and picked up the penny.

Yuri sucked in a fresh breath, and his head jerked away.

“This? A penny has you like this?”

“Please,” his voice croaked as he shook his head, trying to escape while nailed in place, “please get it away.”

He tucked it into his pocket and tried to grab him again, but he jerked back. “Is that not far enough?” He shook his head.

“Okay. I’ll go throw it away.”
“No! Don’t! Please!”

“Shh… It’s okay. I won’t. Tell me, where should I put it?”

“Keep it safe. Keep it away from me.”

“Does it have to be away from you to be safe?”

He nodded.

“Go into my office, and wait for me there. I’ll put it somewhere safe.”

“I can’t. I can’t move.” His voice sounded hollow, distant as the static tried to mimic him.

“Yuri, go run and hide in my office and wait for me on your knees there.” He braced his command with the threat of his anger, driving him a step back. “That’s where it’s safe.”

“If I hide in your office… it'll be safe?” His foot moved another step back.

“Yes, Yuri. Go now.”

He turned and raced to the office and fell onto his knees, huddling into a ball with his hands over his head, trying to block the screams in his head as bile sought justice in his guilty stomach.

Viktor came in a minute later and put his hand on his back.

“Punish me. Punish me. Please. Beat me as hard as you can. Please.”

“I’m not beating you like this.”

“Please, Viktor. Please. I need it.”

“I don’t know what’s going on in your head, so I can’t confirm that. Tell me, Yuri. How did a penny make you like this?”

“I can’t. You said it was okay. It’s okay—if I don’t tell you this.”

“You don’t have to tell me this if it’s part of the exception I granted, but I won’t be beating you or doing any type of scene with you like this and not knowing what’s going on.”

His mind brimming with hollow static scrambled for anything to get what he needed. “I—I panicked in a scene last night, and you were okay with that.”

“Yes, because I knew what you were panicking about, and I knew how to control it. I’m clueless here because you won’t trust me enough to tell me, Yuri, please. I thought I understood your panic in this area, but I’m not getting how a penny ties into it at all. I promise you can tell me whatever it is. Please trust me and share this with me.”

“I—” He gnashed against the gag in his mouth. “I can’t. I’m sorry. I can’t.” Hands ripped at his hair as his sobs broke free.

Viktor pried his hands away and tried to gather him in his arms, but Yuri pushed against him. “Yuri! What the hell is going on?”

“I don’t—I don’t deserve it. Please, Viktor, I can’t.”
“I decide what you deserve.” His voice lowered to a growl as he sat down, wrestling him into his arms, pinning him tight as he fought to get away. “You’re getting my comfort. That’s what you need.”

He felt like he was going to be sick at Viktor’s touch. He thrashed against him, sobbing desperately to get away. He needed to be anywhere but here.

A knock came at the door, and Viktor shoved his face into his chest to bury his sobs.


“No. Go away. Ask me tomorrow or send me a text.”

He waited for the footsteps to fade out then released his face and retook his firmer hold on his wrists. “It’s okay, Yuri. You deserve my comfort right now, and I don’t care what you think about it. You’re going to get it. Submit to it, Yuri. Submit to me.” He locked his arms around him and threw his leg over his, hooking it around the leg behind his back to hold him in place.

He couldn’t stop. The static screamed, piercing panic over clattering wood. He had to get away before he destroyed more.

“Shit, you’re a lot stronger than you look.” His hands slipped on Yuri’s sweaty skin, and he scrambled to regain his hold. “Yuri, tell me your name.”

He heard the command—the demand to obey—but he didn’t have the control over himself to hand it to Viktor. Instead, his hands pushed harder, fingers digging into Viktor’s chest.

Viktor yanked him back tighter, using all his strength to hold him where he had no leverage to fight. “Where were you born?”

He tried to answer. Some part of his brain held the answer, but it was lost on the way to his mouth. His head twisted in a wretched shake.

“Where are you right now?”

“Arena.”

He sucked in a breath. There was a long pause before his next question came. “What do you see?”

“It’s so loud. Too loud to see.”

“What do you hear?”

He torqued his head. “Too loud to hear.”

“What’s too loud?”

“Nothing. Everything. It won’t stop screaming.”

“What’s screaming?”

“The static. It won’t stop screaming. It’s so scared. Have you ever heard something so scared?”

“No. I haven’t.” Viktor’s voice broke as he kissed his head. “Who is with you right now?”

“Viktor.”
He sighed. “Is Viktor in the arena?”

He shook his head.

“Where is Viktor?”

“In his office.”

“And you’re with him?”

He nodded. “Yes, Viktor.” The static skipped into silence for a beat before resuming, but it was enough to regain control of his limbs enough to lock them in place so he couldn’t fight.

He sighed again and kissed his head. “Good, Yuri. So good. I’m so proud of you. If you’re with him, that means you’re in the office too, right?”

He nodded. “Yes, Viktor. Viktor wasn’t there.”

“Good, Yuri. You’re right. I wasn’t there then. If you’re with me, you’re not there either. Where are you right now?”

“With Viktor. In his office.”

“Yes, Yuri. That’s exactly right. You’re with me. What do you smell?”


“Good, Yuri. You’re doing so well for me. What do you see?”

“Your medals and ribbons. Pictures. Of you and Toska.”

“Yes, Yuri. That’s right. Look at me.” He smiled when he obeyed. “Good, Yuri. What do you see now?”

“Your eyes. Always so pretty.”

He smiled and kissed his cheek. “There’s my sweet Yuri. What do you feel?”

He shook his head. “Nothing. Empty.”

His face creased but he tried to hold his smile in place. “It’s okay. That’ll go away, and you’ll feel something again soon. This will pass. It’s only temporary. It’s okay, Yuri. You’re safe.”

“I shouldn’t be.”

“Yes, you absolutely should be. You’re mine, and I want what’s mine to be safe and protected. You don’t get a say.”

He nodded. “Yes, Viktor.”

“Good, Yuri. Can you hear my voice?”

“Sort of. It’s scratchy.”

“Because of the static?”

He nodded. “Yes, Viktor.”
“How long have you had the static?”

“How long have you had the static?”

“Always. It wasn’t so loud before. It was silent static. Now, it’s so loud. It hurts.”

“Your head hurts?”

He nodded. “Yes, Viktor.”

“Okay, I’ll get you some medicine when I’m certain you’re safe. Is the static always loud now?”

“It’s louder than it was before but not usually this loud.”

“What made it loud?”

His face crumpled as he shook his head.

“Okay, you don’t have to answer that one. Have you had this loud static since you started here?”

“Yes. On Avos. Not this loud.”

“Does it only get this loud when it has something to do with horses?”

“Yes, Viktor.”

“Say it again.” His command sharpened his voice to help it slice through the static.

“Yes, Viktor.”

“Good, Yuri. Say it again.”

“Yes, Viktor.”

“Good, Yuri. Does my voice sound clearer?”

He nodded. “Yes, Viktor.”

“Good. What’s your order? What are you supposed to do when you feel this?”

He clawed through the static, trying to find the answer. He knew there was one. Viktor was asking. It was somewhere in there. It had to be. He wouldn’t ask if it wasn’t. He seized upon something sharp. It drew blood across his tongue as he forced the words out. “Viktor—I need—I need to feel… your strength.”

“That’s right, Yuri. You found it. Stay, Yuri. Kneel.” He released his arms and lifted his leg off him to allow him to obey.

His body numbly made its way to his spot in front of his desk, crawling on his hands and knees. He tucked his feet under him and dragged his body upright, resting his fists on his knees.

“Soft, Yuri. Eyes up and relax your hands. Gentle squeezes back and forth.”

He lifted his chin and opened his hands, resting his palms on his thighs.

“Soft, Yuri. Eyes up and relax your hands. Gentle squeezes back and forth.”

He lifted his chin and opened his hands, resting his palms on his thighs.

“Good, Yuri. Stay. Kneel. Just like that. Work on getting as soft as you can for me while I’m gone. Submit to what I want from you. You know how to please me. What’s your order?”

“Good, Yuri. Don’t you dare break that order. There will be severe consequences if I find you gone when I come back.”

“Yes, Viktor.”

“Good, Yuri.” He left, closing the door behind him.

Stay. Kneel. Be soft. His hands pulsed back and forth. Be soft. How does he do that? What did it feel like when Viktor praised him for being soft enough? Warm; easy; quiet; still. His muscles around his chest and throat unclenched allowing air to pass through his lungs. His slowing breath dropped his shoulders from his ears, and he found a better posture that would please Viktor more.

Viktor returned and stopped to observe him. “Excellent, Yuri. You did exactly as I said. You’re so good. Is the static getting a little quieter?”

“Yes, Viktor.”

“Is it still there?”

“Yes, Viktor.”

“You’re doing so well for me. Here, take this.” He put some pills in his mouth and offered a bottle of water.

He swallowed them down without thinking to ask what they were.

“Good, Yuri.” He put the bottle on his desk and sat on the edge, looking down at him. “Do you trust me?”

“Yes, Viktor.”

“Then why can’t you tell me what this is?”

He shook his head, flinching. “I can’t.”

“You mean you literally can’t? You can’t make the words come out?”

He sighed and nodded. “Yes, Viktor.”

Reaching behind him, he opened the drawer to the printer and grabbed a piece of paper and handed it to him with a pen. “Can you write it?”

Pressing the pen to the paper on the floor, he tried to drag the words onto the page, but he only managed a shaky line that tore a hole through the page. His breath seized; Viktor snatched the paper back and crumpled it into a ball.

“Oh, it’s okay, Yuri.” He tossed the paper into the wastebasket behind his desk. “Stay. Kneel. Be soft.”

He nodded and lifted his eyes back to Viktor’s. “Yes, Viktor.”

He studied him with his finger against his lips, examining his sub he was so afraid of destroying. He worried for nothing. He can’t destroy something already gone. He had come to him already obliterated. “What are you feeling right now?”

“Fuzzy. Numb.”
“Everywhere?”

“Yes, Viktor.”

“Has this happened before?”

“Yes, Viktor.”

“How did you get through it?”

“I ran.”

“How far did you run?”

“Until the ground ran out. Until I hit the ocean.”

“Here.”

“I had to turn back a little bit to get here. I didn’t stop until I couldn’t drive any further.” He bit his lip and shook his head, his eyes watering. “I didn’t go far enough. It followed me. I shouldn’t have turned back.”

“You can’t outrun your problems. You have to stay and face them if you ever hope to be free of them. If you have to run, run here. Any time. Even in your hours. Run to my office, kneel, and send me a text to let me know you’re here. This place is always safe for you to come to.” He moved his laptop onto the shelf behind his desk along with his golden horse statue. “Take off your boots and lie on your back on my desk.”

“Yes, Viktor.” He undid the snaps then slid the zippers down the back of his boots then stepped out of them and onto the desk with the shaky numbness fumbling his motions the whole way.

Viktor picked up his wrists to examine them along with the rest of his arms. “Shit. These are going to bruise. I’m sorry, Yuri. I didn’t mean to hold you that roughly, but you were fighting me so hard. Are you okay?”

“I didn’t even notice anything.”

“They’re going to be harder to cover. Long sleeves right now are more than a little strange. I can get you some makeup.”

“I’m not worried about them.”

“Yuri, these aren’t going to be explainable any way other than someone grabbing you violently. Then you either have to say you were attacked or wanted it. Or I suppose you could go with the truth and say you panicked, and I had to hold you down so you didn’t hurt yourself.”

“I’ll just wear long sleeves.”

“Alright, Yuri.” He kissed over the bruises. “I am sorry. I didn’t mean to hurt you.”

“It didn’t hurt. I wish it did.”

He gave a small, sad laugh. “Yeah, I know you do. I want you to focus on two things now. Stay and be soft. Connect to your body through my order.”

“Yes, Viktor.”
He pressed his hands into Yuri’s shoulders and held the deep pressure without moving for several seconds. Slowly releasing his hold, he moved to another spot a few inches away. He worked over his entire front then flipped him and pressed over his back as well while Yuri struggled to keep his focus on his orders. The static was quieter, but his focus was still fuzzy making his hold on Viktor’s command waver.

Viktor finished his massage over his feet then stroked slowly from head to toe a few times before he pulled his hands back. “It’s six o’clock. You’re free.” His eyes wavered between scrunching in thought and drooping, sadness flicking at the corner of his mouth. His posture slumped unnaturally before he pulled his shoulders back upon catching Yuri’s eyes.

He sat up and hopped down to pull his boots on. “Thank you, Viktor.”

Wincing, he gave a little shake of his head. “You can stay. I’d like you to stay. I’m still worried about you.”

“I’m fine. I’m sorry I fought you. I didn’t mean to.”

“I know you didn’t. That’s what worries me. Please stay?”

“You said you have to go into the city tonight, and I promised Phichit I’d go to this party. I can’t stay.”

“If you want to come over after your party, you’re more than welcome.”

He fastened the last snap and stood up with a huff. “I’m fine, Viktor. You don’t have to worry about me.”

“Now I’m even more worried.”

“I’m better. The static is quiet.”

He shook his head, tossing his hair out of his face, narrowing his eyes as he dropped his voice to his insistent tone. “If you need anything at all… call me, Yuri. You haven’t taken me up on that even though there were times you should have.”

“I will if I need to, but I haven’t needed to.”

“You are atrocious at knowing your own needs. If you feel off in any way, if you get so much as a mosquito bite or a bad case of the hiccups, I want you to call me. Please.”

He came around the desk to kiss his cheek. Lingering for a moment, he found a smile to reassure him. “You worry too much. I’m just going to be here eating pizza and drinking beer. Please don’t worry about me? I’ll see you on Monday.”

Viktor caught his fingers before he could leave. “Please… Can I get a hug?” His mother’s innocent face shone through his eyes peeking under his fringe.

He smiled and nodded, stepping back over and opening his arms. Sighing, he relaxed against his chest, finding something like normal there. “You look like your mom sometimes.”

“Huh? No, I’m nearly a carbon copy of my dad.”

“In your expressions sometimes like just now. And your face has just a little more softness than your dad’s. It makes you prettier than him.”
He squeezed him tighter. “Thank you. No one has ever seen her in me in any way. I always found that sad. She never said anything, but I’m sure it must have hurt her to have strangers act so shocked to find out I was hers. And for you to say her influence improved on his… If you ever meet her, please tell her that.”

“I will.”

“Thank you, Yuri, for the most amazing week of my life.”

“Thank you, Viktor, for the strangest week of my life.” He laughed. “I’m pretty confident in saying that now. I doubt anything could ever be stranger than… any of it. But it was the best week too. Thank you. And thank you for this. It’s a good way to end our days together.”

“Oh, I was still working on something for that. This isn’t really a ritual.”

“If you do it consistently it is. It doesn’t have to be complicated. I like simple.”

“Can I give you kisses?”

“Yes, Viktor.”

He smiled and pressed his lips to his cheek. “Thank you, Yuri, for another amazing day with you. Please, I’m begging you, call me if you feel off about anything. With the sudden drop in endorphins, you can experience sub drop which can make you feel depressed or lethargic or any number of emotional or physical imbalances. I was hoping to help carry you over Sunday with our scene today, but it didn’t happen, so just be extra alert of what you’re feeling tomorrow and contact me, please. I can help you with anything you’re going through, but I can’t help you if you don’t reach out to me. Actually, just please, call me tomorrow and check in with me so I don’t have to worry so much?”

“Oh, I’ll call you. Thank you for being so generous. And thank you for everything, Viktor.” He kissed his cheek then headed for the cottage, taking the longer path around the stable rather than the shorter one through it.

He opened the front door, and Phichit bounded up to him. He opened his arms and Phichit grinned and leapt into a hug. He didn’t land hard enough.

“Your bruises are gone?”

“It’s fine.”

Phichit pulled back blushing then kissed his cheek. “So, give me details. How was your party? Did you successfully make the ex jealous?”

He started taking off his boots which was a welcome diversion from eye contact. “I doubt it. I have no idea why she’d want me for that. But the party was fine. Pretty much exactly what you’d expect.” He told a lot of lies lately, but that one was easily in the top five. The guilt that hadn’t stopped burning in his stomach appreciated the extra fuel. He put the boots on the rack. “I’m going to go shower and change.”

“Oh, cool. I’m going to place the order for pizza. Any requests?”

“Anything’s fine.”

“All anchovies and pineapple it is.” He grinned.
He gave a weak laugh. “I’d still eat it. I just wouldn’t be thrilled about it.”

Stopping in his room to get his clothes so he wouldn’t have to walk from the bathroom to his bedroom in a towel, he opened his closet and pondered which of the two long-sleeved button-up shirts he owned he should wear. Gray or blue? He grabbed the gray one and a pair of jeans from his dresser. Fewer choices made things so much simpler.

Checking himself over in the mirror, he made sure the open collar of his shirt wouldn’t shift enough to expose any of his bruises. It looked a bit derpy with the sleeves down and buttoned, but with fingerprints blooming on his arms all the way down to his wrists which bore the brunt of it, anything else wasn’t an option. Bracing himself for the horrors of a party, he opened the door.

“Hey, Yuri! While you’re over there, can you grab the beer from the garage? I forgot to put it in the fridge earlier.”

“Yeah, no problem.” He opened the side door leading to the garage. Dragging the cases over so he wouldn’t have to put his clean feet on the dusty floor, he braced his hand on the hood of his car so he wouldn’t fall over. Another chunk of rust knocked loose with the jostling. He watched it fall, breaking into flakes and dust on the concrete floor.

“TJ’s Towing. How can I help you?... Hello?... Is anyone there?”

He tapped the phone off and put it away, throwing the card into the glovebox on top of the brand-new manual. Viktor hadn’t told him to sell his car, and it’s not like he could anyway. That went beyond their terms. It was just a suggestion.

Just a suggestion. Right. Maybe it was factually true, and Viktor wouldn’t punish him for it, but he would be hurt by it. Why keep it? It’s not like it’s going to last more than a few months at best. The only thing it was going to do was show Viktor he truly wasn’t his outside of his hours. Not even deferring to him enough to take a reasonable suggestion. Is that what he wanted? He didn’t know. He didn’t know anything anymore. He just reacted. Went wherever the forces put him.

The box dragging on the gritty concrete turned up the volume of the static a click. Heaving it up into his arms along with the other one, he kicked the door shut behind him.

“Did you get lost?” Phichit beamed as he took one of the cases from him and started putting the cans into the freezer.

“Huh? Was I out there for a long time?” His hands shook as he tore the other box open. The static went up another few clicks.

“A little bit, yeah.”

“Oh, I’m sorry.” He cracked open one of the cans and started drinking.

“Eww… Warm beer? You’re killing me. I’m sorry I didn’t put them in earlier, but these will be cold in about twenty minutes.”

“It’s not that bad.” He alternated between helping Phichit load the freezer and chugging the beer.

“If you really want to start drinking now, there’s some liquor in the cabinet over there.” He pointed behind Yuri. “That’ll be much better than warm beer.”

“I really shouldn’t drink liquor. That’s a terrible idea for me.”
“Oh really?” A mischievous grin spread on his face. “Tell me, Yuri Katsuki, are you a troublesome drunk?”

“Umm… maybe.”

“Oh my god. What kind of trouble are we talking here? Like dancing on tables or starting brawls or oh! Are you a great ideas drunk?”

“Great ideas?”

“You know the people who always get amazingly bad great ideas and immediately want to go do them and get everyone else in trouble too?”

“Uhh… I… dance. And maybe a bit of the great ideas too.”

“Oh my god. That is awesome! What have you done?”

“I tried to get a tattoo once? They turned me down because I was obviously wasted, but I apparently… uh, challenged the tattoo artist to a dance-off? I said that I wasn’t drunk and could prove it by beating him in a dance-off.”

“Oh my god! Did he take you up on it?”

“No. He wasn’t amused according to my sources. Thank god. He was probably sick of drunk idiots like me wanting him to do stupid, stupid shit to their bodies.”

“What was the tattoo you wanted?”

“I don’t remember, but I’m sure it was something awful.” He cracked another warm one open to toast another wonderfully blatant lie. He’d take the truth of what he’d wanted tattooed on his ass to his grave.

“Oh my god.” He cringed. “I need a drink just to watch you drink that.” He opened the cabinet and pulled down a bottle of tequila and some shot glasses then grabbed some limes from the fridge and started cutting them into wedges.


Phichit took the plate and set the limes on it. “Huh? What did you say?”

“Huh? Oh. Um, nothing really. Just thinking about work stuff.”

“How is work going?”

“Um, chaos. I still haven’t the faintest idea of how to run the farm. I’m still sorting through so much information there trying to learn as quickly as I can.”

“Don’t stress too much. Viktor’s hard for sure, but as long as he sees that you’re making a good effort, he’s pretty patient too.”

“Yeah, I got that. Thanks though. I still want to do a good job.”

“I’m sure. Was it something you wanted to do?”

“I guess? I don’t know really. He… asked, and it just seemed right to go along with it.”
He laughed. “That’s an interesting way to sort your job choices.” He poured a glass and licked his hand then sprinkled it with salt. “One shot with me?” He held out the shaker.

“All right fine. One.”

He licked his hand and seasoned himself while Phichit poured another shot. He picked up the glass of golden liquor and paused to let his brain consider how much of a terrible idea this one was. Was it, ‘I shouldn’t have taken the expiration date on the milk as a general guideline’ bad or ‘I want to permanently disfigure my body in the most embarrassing of ways’ bad? He licked his hand and tossed it back. It tasted like: ‘I haven’t even considered that my abilities to fuck up my life reached such heights.’ The tang of the lime settled it nicely.

Phichit hissed through the burn. “Damn, I shouldn’t have cheaped out here.”

“It was fine. Tasted smooth enough to me.”

“Yeah, well you also drink warm beer, so your opinion is invalid. Freakin’ masochist.” He shook his head and poured another shot.

“What? I’m not—I mean it doesn’t taste great, but it’s not that bad.” The tequila quieted the static back down. He was grateful for its assistance.

Phichit held up the bottle as a question; Yuri answered with his glass.

“Woot! Party time! I’ve been dying for this all week. I’m glad I finally get to spend time with you again. How long is Viktor going to make you stay after? Do you know yet?”

He didn’t bother with the salt this time and just tossed the glass back. “No clue. But if he wants me to stay late, well he pays enough I’m not going to risk losing this job.”

“True. I never realized how much a decent salary and the best working conditions you can hope for can give a boss the power to grab you by the balls. I’d clean this place in a French maid outfit if he asked me to.”

He laughed. “I doubt he’d… ask that.” He would absolutely ask that; just not of Phichit.

“I mean, where else can you get even half of what he pays? Jesus, when my old roommate quit, I seriously asked if he was right in the head.”

“You didn’t really say that.”

“I did. He said he was going to another stable. Like… where? Why? To take a massive pay cut? He wouldn’t give me any details, but I shouldn’t have expected that from him. He never says anything unless it’s absolutely necessary.”

Someone knocked on the door as they opened it. “Knock knock! I’m coming in!”

“Mila!” Phichit tossed his arms up even though she couldn’t see. “We’re in the kitchen getting wasted! Join us!”

“Ooh, fun. What are we drinking?”

“Tequila. Or warm beer if you’re a masochist like Yuri.”

“Eww, Yuri, what a terrible first impress—” she came around the corner and stopped dead, her head tilted. “—ion. So… You’re Yuri, huh?” She took a step closer, narrowed eyes.
He chugged down the last of his warm beer and extended his hand. “You must be Mila.”

Another knock sounded.

“Come in!” Phichit called. He waited, but the door didn’t open. “Damn Georgi. I swear he’s a vampire. Needs me to open the door for him to come in.” He shook his head and went to answer.

Mila stepped in, making him back up into the wall as she eyed him up and down. “So… You’re Yuri.” Snatching the glasses from his face, she pushed back his hair. “Oh… Yuri. What games you play.” She shook her head and put his glasses back on as she leaned in closer. “You know Peach is really into you, right?”

“I know. Please don’t say anything.”

She stepped back and grabbed the bottle. “Say anything about what? You should maybe say some things though.” She poured a glass and held it up. “Na zdrovye.”

His hands quaked as he poured his next shot. It tasted catastrophic. His head swirled with the rising static, and the sloshing focus of the tequila only made it worse.

He went into the bathroom, trying to undo his bad decisions with his finger down his throat, but with his gag reflex desensitized, it had no effect. Chris had warned of this. The trade-off for the ability to suck a dick all the way was not having a functioning gag reflex, and that meant a higher risk of choking and, apparently, no way to undo poor life choices.

Groaning, he pulled out his phone. He could call Viktor. Ask him to come to the party or get him out of there. But he’d probably be in the city right now. Training his subs. Letting other people give him pleasure. He shoved his phone in his pocket and stumbled back out the door.

Phichit had some upbeat music going, and two new people had shown up.

“Yuri! There you are. Praying to the porcelain gods already?”

“No, I wish. I already drank too much.”

“Ah, the pizza will be here soon. It’ll help soak it up.”

“That’s a myth.” Georgi sniffed. “Nice to meet you officially, Yuri. Viktor sure has kept you well-hidden there.”

Lion and Mila exchanged glances.

“Yeah, he’s been keeping me busy. Nice to meet you too.”

“And this is Leo and Emil.” Phichit pointed to Lion and a taller man with a goatee.

Leo did a better job than Mila at hiding his judgment of his lies, but it was still there in his glances between him and Phichit. Emil was a blissfully benign presence and was nearly as friendly as Phichit. Yuri found himself hovering near him as the rest of them started in on the pizzas that had been delivered during his failed attempt at redemption.

“So, how long have you been riding for?” Emil asked.

“I don’t ride.”

“Really? I thought you were riding Avos.”
“Um, not really. I’m more just sitting on him. Viktor wanted to… try a new training technique for him, so I’m the test dummy for it.”

“Well, you must know how to ride to stay on him,” Georgi said.

“He didn’t even have a bridle on. I was just sitting there. That’s not really riding.”

“Uh, that’s riding. That’s advanced riding. Why do you say you don’t ride if you’re riding a horse like Avos bridleless?”

“I just don’t—It’s not riding. It’s just sitting there. I’m not telling him to do anything. I don’t ride.”

“Okay, fine. How do you know how to sit on a horse?”

“I used to ride, okay? I don’t anymore. I quit, and I won’t ever ride again.” Yes, he will. That’s what Viktor wants. He will absolutely get what he wants. Viktor won’t let him fail. He won’t just ride, he’ll compete.

“Why did you quit?” Emil’s head tilted in innocent confusion.

“I didn’t want to ride anymore.”

“But you are riding,” Georgi said.

“Alright, guys, just drop it,” Phichit said. “He’s a little touchy about this. Have some pizza, Yuri.”

“I’m not hungry.”

“Really? Weren’t you working all day?”

“Just on the hay farm. It’s not strenuous.”

“Still, it’s dinner time. Eat something.”

“I’m not hungry. Does anyone else want a drink?” He went to the kitchen and pulled the now cold beers from the freezer and put them in the fridge, grabbing one for himself as well as the others who wanted one on his way back. He unloaded the beer to its proper recipients and another one into the most improper location for it to be. His mouth.

“Alright, I’ve gotta ask, what is your job description?” Georgi asked.

“I uh, don’t really have one. When I agreed to be his personal assistant, that kinda came with anything he wanted me to do.”

“Ooh, I see.” Mila raised her can slightly before she took a sip. “Instead of hiring a bunch of people to do all those random little tasks he needs done, he just got you.”

He had no idea if she was trying to help him or not with her complete condemnation of him earlier, but this answer at least seemed reasonable. “Yeah, thanks. That’s exactly it.”

“Okay, so he’s got you doing what now? I mean, other than not riding.” Georgi cocked an eyebrow.

“Um, grooming mostly. Taking the hay farm off his hands, um, some errands. Cooking his lunch. Uh…”

“Did I see you teaching Yura the other day?” Emil asked.
“Uh… yeah. I guess so.”

“Why? Viktor is the best there is. Why would he have someone else teaching?” Georgi asked. “And Yura wouldn’t be happy with someone other than Viktor teaching him. I mean, what level were you at when you quit?”

“I, uh,” he blinked rapidly trying to hold back the tears, “I was up to advanced.”

“Hey guys, let’s change the subject.” Leo’s voice had the same firmness Viktor’s had when issuing a command, but his tone was a little softer. He gave Yuri a quick smile.

“Wait, but, what?” Phichit was staring at him, his jaw dropped. “You mean you were riding at nearly the same level as Viktor? Why would you quit that, Yuri? Were you competing against him?”

“Seriously? He’s clearly not comfortable answering those questions. I thought this was supposed to be a party; not an interrogation.” Leo’s voice cracked harder.

He tried to give him a smile in thanks as he polished off his beer and headed back into the kitchen.

“Alright, I’ll drop Yuri’s little secrets over there. I’ve got one on Viktor to share.” Georgi’s voice lit with the delight of gossip waiting to be released. “I went to ask him a question earlier this evening, and I’m pretty sure I heard him crying in his office. Like… hard crying. He sent me away and told me to ask him tomorrow.”

Yuri skipped the glass and poured the bottle into his mouth.

“Tomorrow? But tomorrow’s Sunday,” Emil said.

“Right? I’m pretty sure he wasn’t aware of that.”

Yuri came back in with a beer in hand. “Why would you do that? Why would you spread things about him that you’re just guessing at? What if it’s not true?” His words slurred into those of a belligerent drunk.

“Well, I know what I heard.”

“And? What if he was watching a video or something?”

“Oh, yeah, I guess that’s a possibility.”

“And even if he was crying, what a shitty thing to go around spreading like some kind of dirty secret. Is he bad for crying?”

“Well, no.”

“So why would you do that to him? Doesn’t he give you more than enough? Doesn’t he treat you with respect?”

He cringed and downed his beer. “Yeah.”

“So, why would you give him this in exchange?”

“Yeah, okay.”

“Wow, Yuri. I had no idea you had such strong feelings for your new boss already.” Phichit studied him with a strange intensity.
He peered down into the can and lifted it to his lips. “I just hate gossip.” He mumbled against the can as he took a sip, “People should keep things to themselves.”

“Well,” Mila sighed and clapped her hands, “who’s up for a game of Gloom?”

They gathered around the coffee table, moving the pizza boxes to the floor, and set up a card game where the objective was to make your players as miserable as possible while your opponents did good things to undo their misery. It was a weird and twisted game that at least took the focus off him and onto telling stories about the suffering they inflicted upon themselves, and he was able to make the somewhat wiser decision to switch to beer and steer well clear of the tequila. The actual wise decision would have been to not drink any of the tequila and only about half of the beer, but he was left to his own devices, and bad decisions were his forte.

The static grew louder again, but instead of the fuzzy scream of terror, it was clearer, little glitches of pictures coming in and cutting out to rainbow lines. Tally marks on his ass. Viktor’s smile. The penny on the ground. Himself on stage again in shackles and Lion’s whip sealing the bid. Viktor begging for his mercy. Viktor’s tears on his knees. Clattering green and white. The coin flipping in the air. Yura’s eyes. Avos’s powerful stride. Mila’s judgment. Viktor’s innocent eyes...

His thoughts slopped about in his head as they played several rounds of the game. When his hand wasn’t bringing beer to his mouth, it was joining the other to hold down the shaking as he held his cards.

He polished off the bottom of another can, rattling it to get every last drop. “Hey, uh, question. Yura’s new here, right?”

“Yeah, sort of. He’s the newest one here. He’s been here about six months or so, maybe a little longer,” Phichit said. “Ha! I delighted your Balthazar the Unfaithful Hound with ducklings. He just couldn’t resist their little quacking and found joy and loyalty to his new friends.” He set the transparent card down on Yuri’s.

“Oh? You think that’s enough to change his cold, uncaring heart? You weren’t paying close enough attention. That smile wasn’t one of joy. It was one of dark pleasure at plotting their demise. He released his pack of vicious poodles and reveled in the havoc of duckling fluff. But karma found Balthazar, and after finishing with the ducklings, the pack turned on him, and he was pursued by pitiless poodles.” He laid down the card on his own undoing Phichit’s attack of happiness.

“Woah, that was some dark story-telling, Yuri.” Phichit nodded appreciatively. “Who knew you had such twisted things behind such a sweet face.”

“Don’t let appearances deceive you.” He drew a new card to replace the one he had played. “Does anyone know where Yura was before?”

“Umm… I think somewhere in the Midwest?” Emil said.

“Yeah, Michigan I think,” Georgi said. “He’s mentioned Detroit before. Why the interest in Yura?”

“Just curious.”

Maybe he could try being sick now. His stomach was undoubtedly angry enough at him. Yura knew. Was he going to say anything? If he knew… if he saw him on Avos… there was no way he wouldn’t tell. That would be the end of him and Viktor right there. Viktor probably thought he was blaming himself for something that wasn’t really his fault. As soon as he learned the truth—

He should call Viktor. Just tell him so he can go ahead and end it now. But he can’t. He can’t
because he’s in the city getting blowjobs from pretty people, and Yuri can’t talk. Not like he deserves to call anyway. Seeking relief from something he deserved punishment for. How pathetic. God, alcohol was a horrendously stupid idea. The static wouldn’t stop sloshing.

“Hey, are you okay?” Leo leaned over to examine his eyes.

“I just drank too much. I’m fine. I’m gonna go to the bathroom. I forfeit or whatever.” He waved his hand at the game as he stood up.

“But you were crushing us again,” Phichit said. “You can’t just forfeit. We’ll wait for you.”

“Don’t have to do that. I quit.”

He stumbled into the bathroom and laid down on the cool tiles while the screaming room spun around him. Too many things. Too much everything. He needed to end it.

(31) A hand rapped on the door. “Yuri? Are you okay?”

Yeah, that’d work. Take away the one thing that has Viktor interested in him. He wanted his virgin slut. Wanted to make him his. Wanted to put him on a horse. Wanted to make him compete. He’d do it too. There was no stopping him unless it wasn’t what he wanted anymore. He can stop at any time. Right. He’s too weak to stop it himself. Can’t do anything but go where the forces put him. He needs Viktor to stop it for him.

He picked himself off the floor and opened the door. Make himself into a boring old slut. Then Viktor can just dump him before it goes any further. It needs to be done.

“Um…” Phichit shifted uncomfortably under Yuri’s stare. “Everyone’s gone. You’ve been in there a while. I just wanted to make sure you’re okay.”

“Do you want to kiss me?”

“Oh, yeah. I’ve been trying to kiss you again all week.”

He grabbed him, his mouth slopping everywhere, but Phichit didn’t seem to mind. Yuri put his hands on his waist and started pushing him back to his bedroom.

“Mine? Yours is closer.”

He shook his head and kept leading him back. “Your room.”

“Oh, that’s fine. But I thought you wanted to go slow.”

“This’s slow enough.” He kissed him again to quiet him. His voice was too soft. It added to the chaos in his head. He got Phichit into his room and closed the door and started taking off Phichit’s shirt, bringing his sloven kisses down as the shirt came unbuttoned.

Phichit reached to turn on the lamp next to him.

He grabbed his hand and yanked it back. “No! No lights.”

“But I want to see you, Yuri. You have nothing to be ashamed of. I think you’re really hot. Please, can we turn on a little light?”

“No. No lights.” He kissed him again to shut him up then felt bad about it. “Sorry. I just…”
“Okay, it’s fine.”

“Sorry,” he mumbled again as he moved down to Phichit’s pants to unbutton them.

Phichit grabbed at some of his bruises, but it wasn’t hard enough. His own mouth on Phichit’s stomach turned bruising in his frustration.

“Ow, Yuri, it’s uh, a little rough.”

“Sorry.” His hands fumbled for his own zipper as he cringed back.

“It’s okay. We should have maybe talked about this before but are you a top or a bottom?”

“What are you?”

“A bottom.”

“That’s fine. Should still work.”

He laughed. “Still work? Are you a verse?”

“Sure. I don’t know.” He went back up to his mouth to shut him up again. So much talking. He just wanted to get it over with. His frustration spilled out in his sloppy, hard kisses as he grabbed Phichit’s wandering hands and pinned them to the bed. Why did there have to be so much touching?

He shook his head, breaking away from their kiss. “Ow! Yuri! You’re hurting me.”

He released his hands and jumped back, staring down at him in the dim light. “I’m sorry! I’m sorry!”

He pushed up onto his elbows and ran his hand over Yuri’s chest. “It’s okay. Um, can I ask you… are you a virgin? It’s okay if you are. I really like you no matter what kind of experience you have, and I’d be honored to be your first.”

“I can’t—I can’t do this. I’m sorry. I’m so sorry. I didn’t mean to hurt you.” He scrambled off the bed.

“It’s okay, Yuri. Don’t freak out.” He crawled forward and grabbed his hand. “We can go slow just like how you wanted.” He rose up onto his knees and grabbed his shirt to start kissing him again.

He shook his head and shoved him back onto the bed. “I can’t. I’m sorry. I can’t.” He raced out of the room and into his own, locking the door before he fell onto his bed.

Phichit knocked on his door. “It’s okay, Yuri. Let’s just talk about this. We don’t have to do anything right now if you’re not ready. Just please talk to me?”

The static was so loud he barely heard him. Curling up into a tight ball, he put the pillow over his head trying to block it out.

“Yuri! Please, let’s just talk about this. It’s really not a big deal.” He waited a minute for him to respond then his footsteps went down the hall.

Everything was spinning, and he couldn’t make it stop. Like some creaking haunted carnival ride that trapped him with no escape. His stomach wouldn’t stop seeking justice for every awful decision he made.

His tears started up, and just before they crippled him, his fingers grasped at the lump under his
covers. He pulled Viktor’s t-shirt out and started unbuttoning his sleeves so he could trade his own shirt for Viktor’s but didn’t have enough time before his sobs took over. He clutched it to his chest, huddled into his anguish.

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The first cracks of light lit the wilted petals resting on the dresser where they had fallen from the drooping blooms. He had stared at them all night, numb, deaf in the static that never quieted in the hours he waited. The light grew a little brighter casting the first shadows below the dead flowers. He should have thrown them away already. Instead, he waited for them to rot into their inevitable end. It was so much worse. Watching them slowly die and knowing there was nothing he could do to stop it.

Daylight hours were approaching and would only bring more. More days with Viktor pushing him, confident that he’d be able to achieve everything he wanted him to. Every second with him was a gift, but it was a gift that was stolen because he knew he’d never be able to make him proud in the long run.

Viktor would hit his wall just as he had, and there was no way around it.

He’d spent years trying to do just that, and nothing on this planet would break it. Viktor would try. He would absolutely try with everything he was capable of, and he’d do nothing but smash himself into it until he was shattered just as he had done.

He climbed out of bed and went into the kitchen to grab some trash bags from under the sink. Ripping open his dressers, he shoved his clothes in by the armful. He pulled the remaining clothes from his closet and tied the bags, glancing at the books on the shelves for a second before deciding they would stay. He was done this time for good. He’d get a job doing anything but horses. It was stupid to keep clinging to the scraps of his life. All this could have been avoided if he was capable of making a single good decision.

He grabbed his sleeping bag and pillow and was about to head out the door when he spotted Viktor’s shirt still lying in the middle of the bed.

Just stop. Stop trying to cling to things that aren’t his. Didn’t he just make that decision two seconds ago? What was so fucking broken in his head that he can’t even stick to a good decision for two seconds? These things don’t belong with him. He’ll only destroy them. The horses. Viktor. It was the only end for them in his hands.

He tried to force himself away, leaving the shirt behind like he was the lotion and the book and the riding clothes, but he couldn’t. He cringed trying to tear himself away, but his body wouldn’t move.

Stay. Kneel.

Wincing, his hand snatched the shirt from the bed as he turned to leave.

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Chapter End Notes

Your lovely artist is Clarinda. Please check out her work on Tumblr if you can!

Spotify
28. Bloom by The Paper Kites
29. Russian Soul by Skott  
30. Bad Things by The Phantoms  
31. Scars by Boy Epic  
32. Dark (Martin Hviid Remix) by Siv Jakobsen
Chapter 15

Chapter Summary

Debris and memories.

Chapter Notes

Mild warning on the art. Obvious BDSM themes and a tiny bit of ass.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

(33) His car rattled down the cobblestone path, the first streaks of light highlighting the treacherous distant terrain. Beckoning fog called for weary travelers to rest on its illusory body and be trapped forever in a pit of lost souls.

He had no idea where he was going, but at least he had some money to work with this time. Between the signing bonus and his paycheck that had luckily been deposited on Friday, he had more than enough for a one-way ticket to Japan. He cringed, hating the idea, even though it was probably the best thing to do.

He came up to the split in the path that went either to the gate or down to the stable. Lifting off the gas, he started to make the turn to the gate then swerved at the last second to go to the stable instead. He couldn’t leave without giving at least one goodbye.

Stopping at the wide door, he cut off his engine then untied one of the bags in the backseat to rummage through it, sniffing his shirts until he found one that seemed worn enough. It was a strange goodbye note, but it was the only one he had to give. Viktor would understand it.

He walked down the dark aisle, the horses greeting him with soft nickers and huffing breath taking in his scent. God, he would miss that. The scent that smelled more like home than home did, their soft sounds giving cadence to the easy quiet. It always made so much sense. When nothing else made sense—when his own mind didn’t make sense—this always did. They were content to just wait with him until the quiet cleared his mind and their steady muscles soothed his trembling hands. But it wasn’t that anymore. Now, it was just debris and memories.

He opened Avos’s stall and slipped in. “Hey, buddy. Sorry to wake you.” He patted his glossy neck, burying his fingers in his mane. They tightened as thick tears rolled down his cheeks. “I’m sorry.” His voice broke; he grasped the coarse hairs tighter. “I need you to do something for me. Tell him goodbye for me, please? I can’t.” His throat swelled till he only had cracks for his voice to squeak through. “Tell him it’s not his fault. Tell him he is far better than I deserve. I didn’t deserve a single glance from him and what he gave me… Even though I don’t deserve to, I’m going to hold on to every bit of it.

“And you…” He used his free hand to scratch his favorite spot under his cheeks while Avos craned his head. “You’re the most incredible animal I’ve ever seen. Don’t give Viktor a hard time, and he’ll guide you perfectly through the most amazing of adventures. You won’t find better than him, so just
trust him, okay?

“Maybe if I had fewer glitches in my brain… You are everything I wanted. I can’t tell you how much it hurts to see what could have been so clearly.”

He had to stop while his body forced out more tears at once than it had the capacity for, leaving him gasping in silent sobs. “I wish I wasn’t so broken. There’s not even a reason for it. I was just born cursed with a mind too broken to hold all the dreams it created. I want to hold on so bad, but I can’t. That’s what will destroy you: Me holding on selfishly when I shouldn’t.”

He released his hand from his mane and pressed one last kiss to his solid neck. “I’m sorry. It’s the best I can give you.” He wove his shirt into the bars on the front of the stall and latched the door behind him.

A second latch echoed his own. “That’s all I get, huh?”

His soles ground on the gritty brick as he whipped around. He gasped at the figure standing in front of Toska’s stall, his pale bare torso illuminating the dark. “Viktor? What are—”

“I expected more. More than an overheard goodbye and an empty shirt.” Tears glistened in his voice. “I thought I had earned at least a little of your faith. I guess I was wrong.”

“What do you mean? I do trust you. This has nothing to do with that.”

“Faith and trust aren’t the same. You trust me not to hurt you, but you have no faith in me. You have no faith that I’m capable of fixing a few little glitches. You have no faith that I’m capable of helping you find the strength you need to hold all of your dreams.”

“I do know that you’ll get me to compete again! That’s the problem! I know what you want to do with me, and I know you will absolutely succeed in making me do it. You’ll put me out there with complete faith that I will please you as I have done, and I won’t! I’ll destroy it all, and you’ll blame yourself for my failure! I don’t want to give that to you, Viktor! You have no idea how awful it feels!”

“Stop doing that, Yuri! Stop imposing your view over mine! Stop hearing your words instead of mine! Stop thinking you know everything that will happen to you! You don’t know anything!” His hand flung out to the side, his voice halting the gentle quiet, replacing it with his binding silence.

“If you really are incapable of having faith in me, go ahead and go. I’m not going to chase you down again and again every time you choose something over me. I can’t play that game. Just know that if you do, you’ll have disappointed me more than anyone ever has, and I will go the rest of my life feeling that disappointment and that hurt as a scar.” His fist thumped against the center of his chest, bruised from his struggle to hold on to him.

“Viktor… I—” Every time. A single touch of his words, and that’s all he needed to shatter him into pieces, each one shaped precisely as he wanted it. It was excruciating standing there watching Viktor’s tears fall knowing he had caused them and every bit of his self-preservation was telling him to leave him with them. He couldn’t take it if he destroyed them too. He’d never survive that. What Viktor was demanding was his life.

He watched him in their mutual agony until he couldn’t take any more. He walked forward and dropped to his knees.

“Are you mine?”
“Yes, Viktor.” He was bent onto his hands, unable to kneel the way it would please him through the pain.

“Then act like it.”

“I’m trying. It hurts.”

“Good. Make it hurt more.”

He sat up and lifted his eyes against the tears holding him down, opening his chest that wanted to curl in to protect, settling his weight on his feet that wanted to run.

“You are here to please me. Don’t ever think for a second that I will allow you to do anything that doesn’t please me when you are in my hands.” He pulled his cock out of his black pants, already hardening with Yuri’s tears at his feet and pushed him onto it. “Make me believe in you again. Show me that you’re as strong as I thought you were.”

He had no idea what time it was. The horses would be fed at six. People could be coming any minute for all he knew. He went as slowly as he could, taking the time to give his attention to every spot he liked best.

“Show me how much you like being mine even when it hurts.”

He unbuttoned his jeans and pulled them and his boxers down to his knees, opening his kneeling stance as he worked over his cock just enough to get the slickness on his fingers that he needed to slip into his hole.

“Make yourself come as many times as you can while you wait to make me come until I tell you.”

He was massively hungover and exhausted and still sobbing on Viktor’s cock from the pain and the absolute last thing he wanted to do right now was to come. He took his own cock in hand as he made deep thrusts down on Viktor and inside himself, his mouth dragging pleasure slowly from Viktor’s body while his hands raced to obey. He managed a quick orgasm but trying for another right after was worse than the first with his cock wanting anything but his touch.

“Wait to touch your cock for just a minute. Focus on your prostate until the oversensitivity passes.”

Obeying the only voice that would both torture him and guide him through it, he waited until his cock recovered while starting the pleasure building again in his ass until his cock responded yet again and he forced another orgasm from his body. Viktor demanded five orgasms from him while he let his sparkling tears fall like cutting diamonds onto Yuri’s face before he finally allowed him to end his tears with pleasure.

Viktor dropped to his knees in front of him, still heaving from his release as he held his face in his hands. “You were going to leave me.” He gasped as a sudden sob surprised him with the depth of his pain. “You were going to leave me.”

“I’m sorry! I’m so sorry! Please. I’ll do anything. I’m so sorry. I didn’t want to hurt you.”

“But you did. You hurt me because you couldn’t have faith in me. You couldn’t believe that I am capable enough. You couldn’t believe that I wouldn’t put you in a position I had any doubts of you succeeding in. You thought that I valued putting you on a horse over you.”

“But you don’t even know what it is!”
“And there you go doubting me yet again! You think I can’t adapt to whatever new information comes our way or that I’d be so reckless as to put you in a situation I don’t have enough information about to control. I won’t fail you, Yuri! I promise! Please have faith in me.” His voice shook with his sobs.

“I’m sorry, Viktor! Please let me make it up to you! Please tell me how to make you stop hurting!”

He shook his head and wiped off his face. “You prove yourself to me. Come on.” He stood up and pulled Yuri to his feet and redressed him. “Drive your car up to my house and meet me there.”

“Yes, Viktor.”

Climbing into his car, he realized that Viktor had given him an order that left him free to drive off if he wished. Made it easy in fact. All he had to do was turn left instead of right. He made leaving the easy choice, the freest choice, while staying with him was guaranteed to be the hardest path.

He could refuse. Take the route without the tough questions. Viktor had no interest in him if that was ever a choice he’d make. His horses, as different as they all were, all had one thing in common. They never refused. Not once. He didn’t mind them a little too bold or reckless or chaotic as long as when it came down to it, they’d have the courage to make the jump.

His car lugged up the steep hill, straining in a high-pitched whine as he reached the peak. If Viktor wanted his life, he could have it. Not like he was doing anything with it anyway.

He got into the kitchen and had no idea what to do with his shaking, sick, terrified body, so he knelt where Viktor had first put him and waited for his next direction.

Viktor came in and threw Yuri’s shirt into the trash. He observed him, unsmiling, for several moments. “Did you eat last night?”

“No, Viktor.”

He nodded and went to the fridge to start making breakfast.

“Can I help you?”

“No.”

“Yes, Viktor.”

“How hungover are you?”

“Very.”

He opened a jar of pickles and poured their juice into a glass and brought it to him. “Drink this.”

“Yes, Viktor.” He chugged down the salty, sour juice, trying not to think too much about the pungent taste.

He took the empty glass back and pulled out a jar of chunky, orange liquid that looked to be some kind of home-canned soup. Breaking the metal seal with a pop, he poured it into a pot to heat up then gathered a head of garlic, a block of cream cheese, and fresh dill and began mashing them together in a bowl along with some salt and pepper. He added the entire head of garlic, tasted it, then started peeling and pressing an additional head of garlic into the bowl. Yuri watched with some concern as he spread the mixture onto two slices of black bread. His nose burned from all that raw garlic even
from halfway across the room.

Viktor served up two bowls of the soup and topped them with sour cream and dill then brought them to the table along with the garlic-laden bread. “Come here and eat.”

“Yes, Viktor.” He went over to the table and tried to eat but couldn’t keep his eyes off the bruises on Viktor’s chest.

“You’ll hurt me more by disobeying my orders. Eat, Yuri.”

“Huh?” He looked up to his face watching him. “I’m sorry, Viktor.” He forced the soup into his mouth.

“How is it?”

“It’s vkusno.” He cringed as his eyes flicked back to his chest. “Thank you, Viktor.”

“Try the bread.”

His eyes shifted to the bread wafting the most potent odor of raw garlic he’d ever smelled with a wary look. Viktor’s mouth made the barest tug at the corner when he glanced back before picking up the slice.

His mouth burned as if he’d bitten into a glob of undiluted wasabi and tears sprang to his eyes. Coughing, he shoveled the soup into his mouth. He cleared his throat. “Um… That’s an… unusual punishment.”

A silent laugh shook Viktor’s shoulders as he picked up his own piece of bread and took a huge bite. “Vkusno.”

“Oh my god. You… like it?”

“Try a few more bites. You’ll get used to it and then it’s quite tasty.”

“If you say so…” The next bite was harder to take than the first now knowing the exact way it turned into a flash fire of garlic in his head. He ate it anyway and chewed slowly trying to get himself used to it as Viktor wanted. It took a few more bites before the shock of garlic wore off, and he began to taste the cream cheese that tempered the bite and the hearty bread that had a slight tang and hint of licorice, coffee, and cocoa. It began to take on an addictive flavor, and he found himself devouring the rest of it.

Viktor smiled as he swallowed the last bite. “So?”

“It’s really good. How is it good?”

“It’s the perfect food for my little masochist. You have to work for the rewards.” They managed to smile at each other for the first time in what now felt like forever. “Would you like some more?”

“Yes, please.”

He got up to get him another slice, stopping to kiss his head on the way. “That’s the first time you’ve wanted more.”

“Oh, um, I’m—”

“You better not be about to apologize.”
“Um… I was.”

He shook his head and delivered another slice of bread. “What have I been trying to get you to do this whole time?”

“Eat?”

“Yes. So, what would I think about you wanting more?”

“You’d be happy.”

“Very good, Yuri. So, why were you about to apologize for doing something that pleases me? Do you not like pleasing me?”

“No, Viktor. I love pleasing you. I’m sorry.”

He sighed. “How long are you mine for?”

“As long as you want me.”

He nodded, and they resumed eating in silence.

After they finished, Viktor held a lingering kiss to his cheek as a reward for eating everything and brought the bowls into the kitchen. He then brought him up to his bedroom and made him take a shower and put him into his bed. “Feeling better?”

“Yes, Viktor. Thank you.”

Viktor’s undeserved care gnawed on his tattered heart.

“Sleep. I have some lessons to teach later this morning. I’ll come back after them and wake you so you don’t ruin your sleep tonight.” He started changing into his riding clothes.

“You work on Sundays too?”

“The students who come in today take care of the horses so you guys can have a day off, and I teach them in exchange.”

“So, then you never have a day off.”

“No, but I don’t mind. I don’t need one.”

“You never need a break?”

“To do what?”

“I don’t know. Relax, socialize, do something fun.”

“I socialized on Friday and riding horses is fun. And relaxing is just sitting around being lonely. I don’t feel a strong need for that.”

“Can I do something for you today? Please?”

“You can sleep. That’s what I want from you.” He drew the curtains across the windows to block out the rising light.

“Yes, Viktor.” He turned to his side and tried to block out everything else so he could follow his
order. “Viktor… why were you there? In the stable.”

“I feed Toska every morning at five since I ride him when everyone else is getting fed. Or I did rather, before we started working out then.”

“Oh. That’s where you went the other morning?”

“Yes.”

“I can come earlier in the morning, so I don’t mess up your schedule.”

“No, you can’t. You even said yourself you can barely wake up that early. I’m fine with our schedule. If I had an issue with it, I would have given you different orders. Sleep, Yuri. Don’t leave my bed unless it’s to use the bathroom or get something to eat from the kitchen.”

“Yes, Viktor.”

“And for the love of fucking god, call me if you need anything. That is an order since you’re mine. I will be beyond pissed if you break that one so err on the side of false alarms, yes?”

“Yes, Viktor.”

He kissed his forehead and left him to obey.

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Cool air blew over his skin, pierced with Viktor’s hot kisses. Viktor smiled as Yuri opened his eyes and watched him laying kisses over his stomach, the blankets stripped away.

“Good afternoon. Did you sleep the whole time?”

“Yes, Viktor.”

“Excellent.” He licked over his cock to reward his answer. “How are you feeling?”

“Um… not bad. The hangover seems to have gone away.”

“Good. There’s lunch waiting downstairs. Let’s go.” He moved back to let him up and started for the door.

“Um… do I get clothes?”

“No.”

He took a deep breath and followed him out. “Yes, Viktor.”

Viktor brought him to the black and white marble theater room lit with the dim lights high on the wall and sat him down in front of him, opening his legs and drawing his feet up onto the couch. He handed him a sandwich made on the same black bread from this morning as he scrolled through the movies and selected a porno wrapped up in a decadent historical story of hedonistic royalty. Viktor lubed up his fingers as Yuri took a bite of the sandwich and slipped one into his hole.

“How is it?”

He coughed at the sudden penetration of overwhelming flavor in his mouth and Viktor’s intense pleasure already working through his ass as another finger joined the first. The bread had the same
garlic spread from earlier and a grainy mustard with red onions, ham and melted swiss. He nodded with his eyes wide. “Um, it’s good.”

Viktor laughed. “You don’t have to be polite. I always want your honest answers.”

He took another bite, and without the surprise, the flavors were still more than intense, but in the same way everything about Viktor was intense. “No, I like it. It’s vkusno. Thank you.”

“You’re welcome.” He picked up his own sandwich and started eating as he worked Yuri’s ass open to the ripe soundtrack of the porno.

He groaned and dropped his head back onto Viktor’s shoulder. “You’re going to make me sexually attracted to food.”

“Perfect. It’s a hell of a lot better than your current response.” He inched him closer to orgasm as they ate.

The porno ended with Yuri still desperate to finish himself, jealous of the actors on the screen who’d gotten to come so many times. Viktor switched to a thriller as his now freed second hand started in on his cock.

“Viktor? What number is my punishment for almost running away?”

“You’re free to leave any time you wish. There’s no punishment.”

“Please punish me? I hurt you.”

He gave a little shake of his head. “I’m not going to punish you for trying to leave. That is your right, and I won’t force you into staying. I wouldn’t even want you if that was something I had to do to keep you. But you are right that you hurt me. Why didn’t you call me? Why didn’t you give me a chance to help you?”

“You were in the city.”

“I was right here worried sick about you. Even if I had gone into the city, I would have come right back the moment you called.”

“Oh.”

“You are so smart, and you have a very intuitive way of solving problems. You come up with answers almost instantly from very limited information, and you trust them, which is great because most of the time you are right.

“The problem is that you feed the question into your subconscious and take whatever answer it spits out as the truth. If it isn’t going to that dark, twisted part of your subconscious, you have a brilliant and insightful answer that you act on easily. If it does go to that dark place, you have an answer that is so far removed from reality that you trust as the truth just as much.

“I need to figure out how to clean out that subconscious, and you need to recognize when your answers are the breathtakingly brilliant answers I love and when they’re the ones that come from nothing but that mess inside your head.”

“How do you know what happens in my head? I’ve never even thought of that, but it sounds right.”

“From the tests you took and confirming it by seeing it in action. Everyone has different ways of
solving problems, and I can see them when I give challenging orders. Some look for external clues, some look to the past and give answers that were correct before, some come up with several options for the right answer, so on and so forth.

“You glance at me to get whatever external clues you need then look away and process them, subconsciously linking them to anything stored in there. An onsen and a hay farm have nothing in common on the surface, but you found a commonality between them and used one to answer the problem with the other.

“People who think intuitively create patterns and connect dots like that and come up with wild answers sometimes because they can connect to such random things in there. I actually use intuitive thinking primarily too, but you don’t consider several answers and explore them like I would. You get one right answer and run with it. It’s your biggest asset and your biggest downfall.”

“This is, um, interesting getting a lecture on how my mind works with, shit that feels so good, your… this.” He rolled his hips into Viktor’s hands chasing his pleasure higher.

“I have so much to teach you about yourself. You better hold on, sweetness. I’m going to be absolutely vicious until you’ve learned everything I need you to know.”

“Yes, Viktor.” He leaned harder into him as Viktor drove him higher without any room to take a single breath wrong. “Break me.”

The movie was one of the most terrifying Yuri had seen, enhanced by the fact that every time he wanted to cringe and hide, Viktor held him in place and opened him further. Forcing him to face his fears, teaching him to open to Viktor when he felt afraid. He rewarded him with pleasure so intense, so close to orgasm it was nearly indistinguishable from it when he began to draw his legs apart more and relax onto Viktor’s body in response to his fear.

His heart beat loud and solid once again. Viktor could keep him like this on the edge of satisfaction, everything in his body risen higher to the point of breaking for all eternity, and it’d be the most blissful and welcomed hell.

He didn’t know how long he stayed ripped apart in Viktor’s hands for, but he’d continued long after the movie ended, holding him right at the brink without backing down for a moment.

Viktor abruptly removed his hands and left him heaving on the couch in a quivering mess. “Go to the playroom and wait for me.”

He left without telling him how long he had. Yuri decided to err on caution’s side and scrambled to his feet then raced down to the playroom. The chair that had been against the wall that looked like two weathered rib cages pressed together stood in the cleared middle of the room, the two tables pushed to the sides. An old Hollywood style spotlight hovered over it, yet to be turned on, and a huge black plug, nearly as thick as Viktor’s cock, stood straight up in the center.

Viktor came in wearing his riding clothes, black polo and locked the door then went to the chair and poured lube over the plug. “Have a seat.”

“Yes, Viktor.” His heart raced as he dropped down onto the spike, his breath catching as his body opened wide to take it. “Oh my god. It’s so big.”

“Go slow and relax. You’ll be fine.”

“Yes, Viktor.” His fingers splayed over the arms of the chair as the heels of his hands pressed in to keep himself from dropping too quickly. His body was already sweaty, shaking, and still mid-fuck
from Viktor’s hours of edging. At least his ass was already more than well warmed up but this thing was still splitting him right apart as he eased onto it. And Viktor was even bigger. He groaned and sank onto the thickest part faster than his ass advised. He paused, his breath catching in erratic jerks as he waited for his body to adjust.

“What were you just thinking?”

His blush rose in full force, both that he was so pathetically obvious and that he’d have to speak his fantasies aloud with half a plug rammed up his ass. “I was thinking about how you… are bigger than this.”

“You’re right. I am. No one can match what I can give you.” He took Yuri’s cock in his hand and brought him back to the edge as he plunged down the rest of the way. “How does it feel?”

His head fell forward, heaving into the strange sensation of being completely stuffed, his body straining around the stretch, as his eyes lifted up to meet Viktor’s. “Um… it feels… wow. How does anyone take you if even this feels like this?”

“You’ll be just fine taking me. I promise. Do you like the feeling?”

“Yes, Viktor.” Closing his eyes, he dropped his head. “So good.”

“Good.” He picked up some leather cuffs and fastened them around his ankles and to the ribs of the chair then cuffed his wrists to the arms of the chair as well. With a length of tawny rope, he secured his hips.

(34) The lights went out, and the spotlight came on, the purple glow of a blacklight turning everything eldritch neon. Viktor dropped down in front of him, his hair glowing violet and his face catching alien shadows. A cord of light jumped from Viktor’s extended tongue and entered Yuri’s nipple. A static shock rose the hairs on the back of his neck—his body jolted with pain. Hands clamping the wooden arms, his ass clenched around the plug, his yelp of distress still ringing in the air.

Viktor’s tongue flicked sparks and more cords of electricity, stitching them together with thick threads in the gap between them as the air hissed and popped.

“Viktor! Oh my god, what is that?! How?!”

His tongue came closer; he cringed, squirming to get away as the sparks flared, certain that his touch would feel even worse. He shrieked as Viktor’s tongue landed followed by his sealing lips which turned out to be a wild overreaction as the sensation calmed to a warm throbbing pulse heating his skin ahead of Viktor’s gentle licks.

“Viktor, how?!”

Viktor looked up, his expression distorted in the obscure light, stealing the comfort he relied on. His head tilted with a purple grin as he stitched his hands to his thighs with piercing shocks firing out from palms to fingertips.

Viktor’s hands touched down; Yuri shrieked again—already forgetting his previous lesson. Again, they settled to a pulsing touch before he lifted off and hovered over him, stitching his entire body to him with electric zaps.

“How does it feel?”
“Ah! Uh, painful.”

“Do you like this pain?”

He wriggled with Viktor’s hands traveling over his thighs. “Um… I’m not sure.”

His tongue flared out over the head of his cock, just out of reach of the threads. Yuri’s skin prickled with his threat. He wouldn’t. It hurt, and he hadn’t said anything about lifting those limits yet. Viktor crept closer, his hands zapping over his stomach sharper than before. His hand went up to his nipple as he dropped closer to his cock with his tongue. Pain arced through his body.

“No! No! I don’t like it!”

Viktor plunged his cock into his mouth as his hands gripped him tight, pulling him into the ropes. Yuri screamed, but all the electricity had been extinguished, and the only thing he felt was Viktor’s heated pleasure bathing his cock.

He moaned, pushing into him as much as the ropes would allow, his body still tingling with the rush. “How? How did you do that?”

He sucked him back to the edge then pulled off, his tongue lighting up with sparks again as he licked over his tender thigh jolting at the touch. Viktor’s electrified hands hovered over his own, pricking him with pain as he was just out of reach that soothed into that warm electric pulse as they grasped him firmly.

“It feels good when you touch me all the way, but it hurts when you’re just out of reach.”

Viktor smiled at the same time as he realized that was exactly what Viktor wanted him to learn. “Good, Yuri.”

His hands came up to the side of his face, reinforcing his lesson with harsh zaps followed by his intensified but pleasurable grip. Viktor leaned in, his lips shocking Yuri’s with pain that jumped to his tongue as Yuri gasped and opened his mouth. Viktor held it there as Yuri squirmed and whined with the pain.

Was he going to kiss him? Shit. Another question. How long was he going to hold it for? It hurt in the worst of ways, pain sizzling on his lips and tongue. He kept his mouth open, trying to find the right submission that would earn his solid touch and relieve this misery. He hated this pain, but the temperature rose in Viktor’s palms, his endurance of it anyway giving Viktor heated ecstasy.

A weird kind of pleasure twisted in his gut at pleasing him at his own expense; not a craving pleasure, one that satisfied something deep in himself nothing else had touched yet. He opened to the pain, his cries of distress flowing along the electric threads into Viktor’s body.

Viktor watched his fight with a smile curling his torturous kiss. Which side of him was stronger: The side that wanted to run, or the side that wanted to stay?

Viktor’s hand left his face for a moment then returned with the kiss of torture kicked up to unbearable levels. Tears started down his cheeks as the halves splintered further, sparking along the fault lines as he lost the ability to fight himself and clung to the only solid piece left in his brain.
Stay. Kneel.

He stopped struggling and relaxed into the pain.

Viktor’s kiss moved to his throat, landing his buzzing touch solidly on his skin and ending the torture with pleasure before he pulled back. “That’s what you’ve asked me to endure every moment you are near enough to reach but too far for me to grab.”

He stepped back and picked up two floggers, one familiar and one with a thick cord coming from the handle and leading to a black box on the padded table. Sparks flared off the flogger with the cable as the tails fluttered against each other.

Oh shit. “Viktor?”

That purple grin flared as Viktor dragged the tails of the electrified flogger over his thigh. Yuri yelped, the startling pain snapping into a shower of sparks. Not pleased with the level of his cry, Viktor turned to the box to adjust it.

The widened, alien grin was the only warning he got before the tails slapped his stomach with a pain like he’d laid across a live power line. He shrieked, but it still wasn’t to Viktor’s liking, and he adjusted the box again.

Oh fuck.

The tails snapped, and Yuri screamed as pain stood every hair on end, charging the air around him. The air took on the odor of a boiling waterfall as Viktor struck again and again with searing zaps until Yuri’s screams were tuned precisely to his liking.

Viktor stood back, analyzing his heaving body. “Color?”

His mind screamed no, but that buried piece of him curled into a satisfied coil as he answered. “Green.”

“What’s your name?”

“Yu—” he swallowed the fear to clear his mouth— “Yuri Katsuki.”

He struck his stomach with the leather tails biting in, driving the galvanizing pain deeper. “You hesitate on your own name? What’s your name?”

“Yuri Katsuki!”

The gentle flogger dropped on the top of his thigh, offering the familiar, pleasured pain as a reward.

“Better. Where were you born?”

“Hasetsu—” he gulped then cringed, knowing already he’d messed up— “Hasetsu.” He braced for the impact of the electric pain but wasn’t prepared for it to strike his upper arm next. He hissed and jerked away, and Viktor lashed again harder.

“Stay still.”

“Yes, Viktor!” He planted his elbows on the arms of the chair and steeled his resolve to obey.

“What country is Hasetsu in?”
He hesitated, expecting his next answer to be Hasetsu with his imperfect response before, and it took a moment for his brain to adjust to the new information. “Japan.”

A violent jolt struck his inner thigh, and he instinctively clamped them shut.

“Don’t you dare. You hold yourself open for me no matter how much it hurts.”

“Yes, Viktor! I’m sorry!” He pried his legs back apart and held them pressed against the bars of the chair while Viktor tested his resolve with lash after lash over both thighs with the worst type of pain bouncing between them.

Worse than the kiss of torture, he could do nothing but scream as he warred against his contracting and contorting body to hold on to his order.

Convinced that he’d learned his lesson, Viktor rewarded him with his sweet pain that soothed the pain of his torture. “Do you miss Hasetsu?”

He froze. He didn’t know which answer to give. ‘I don’t know’ didn’t seem like the right response, but he didn’t know any other. “I don’t know.” He winced, bracing for the punishment for both his pause and his crappy answer.

Viktor tilted his head, both floggers dangling still. “Why don’t you know?”

“I don’t—I don’t know how to face them. I miss them, but it’s easier to hide the truth… from far away.”

The shadows distorted on his face as he tucked his flogger under his arm and caressed the back of his hand with his familiar touch, wrapping his fingers around his pinky. “That must be so difficult to hold such a weight that it makes you relieved to be separated from people you love.”

He retook his flogger in hand. “Who was your best friend growing up?”

The corner of his mouth twitched with a smile. “The horses.”

The purple creased below his eyes. “Mine too. What about a human best friend?”

“Yuko.”

“The one who married your childhood bully, yes?”

“Yes, Viktor.”

He rewarded with gentle lashes warming his stomach and the tops of his thighs. “She didn’t dislike him for being mean to you?”

He laughed. “She yelled at him for that all the time. I think that’s how they ended up together. Their interactions were always so heated, and one day that passion just clicked and turned into something else. She’s still always yelling at him though.” He chuckled. “I guess I can say now he probably likes it. I never really understood that before, how they can look so wrong on the surface, but you can just tell they’re so deeply right for each other.”

Viktor smiled and warmed his skin with pleasure again. “Thank you for such a detailed answer. What was your biggest fear as a child?”

“Everything. I was such a timid child. Well, I still am I guess, but it was worse then. But probably my biggest fear was failing. I think that’s the only reason I ever found the courage to push myself.
The only thing worse than being afraid of everything was accomplishing nothing because of my fear.”

“So, you conquered your fears with more fear?” His kind flogger worked over him with a pleasant bite.

“Yes, Viktor.”

“What did you hate the most as a child?” He paused for his answer.

“I hated being seen as weak just because I wasn’t as bold as the rest of the kids were. I hated feeling weak and being babied and coddled. My family was great about that, encouraging me to keep trying, and my trainer, pushing me to ride harder and harder horses. The other kids though and teachers and my grandparents often saw me as weak and in need of protection or mocking in the case of the other kids. I couldn’t stand that.” He moaned as Viktor rewarded him.

Viktor stood back, watching him, letting tension and anticipation charge the air. “What do you fear the most now?”

“I don’t—I don’t know.”

Electric pain wired his body tight, and he cried out as Viktor refused to relent.

“What do you fear the most now?” His voice bellowed above the crackling whip.

“I don’t know!”

“That’s a bullshit lie, and you know it.” He cracked the flogger over the tops of his thighs, sparks flying in the violent light.

“Myself!” He gasped as Viktor switched instantly to the reward. His head dropped under the pleasure. “Myself.”

“What do you hate the most now?”

He glanced up, his chin still dropped to his chest. “Myself.”

Viktor paused, neither rewarding nor punishing. “What happened last night?”

“I got drunk. Started doing shots of tequila. Tried to make myself throw up when it made the static worse again, but it didn’t work.”

He praised with the lush bite of his good flogger. “Because of me, yes? You desensitized your gag reflex.”

“Yes, Viktor.”

“What else happened?”

“I was going to call you right after... I decided not to because I thought you were in the city training your subs. Georgi started asking about my job and about riding Avos. He heard me crying in the office, but he thought it was you and was gossiping about it, so I yelled at him. I didn’t tell him it was me though... We played a game, and I was drunk, and the static was sloshing everywhere, and I couldn’t get it to stop. I couldn’t stop thinking, and the more I drank, the worse it got.”

“What were you thinking about?”
“Everything. Avos. You putting me on him. You wanting me to compete. Being sold or, more likely, tally marks on my ass.”

“Being sold? What do you mean?”

“You auction your subs, right? If they please you. If not, they get tally marks on their ass.”

“You think I’m going to sell you?”

“If I’m lucky. If you think I’m good enough to graduate.”

“Alright, if that’s what you want, I’ll sell you.”

“What?! That’s not what I want!”

“Too late. You came up with a shitty answer to what we are, so now you’re going to face the consequences.”

His heart sank, hopes he hadn’t known he was holding vanishing from his grip. “You’re really… going to sell me?”

“Yes. Tell me, Yuri. Not, that this is going to save you from that fate now, but is that what I thought we were?”

“I don’t know.”

The pain of his scolding ran in a sharp current over his stomach.

“Use that brain of yours. You have more than enough evidence to find the right answer if you look in the right spot.”

“I don’t know! The best I can think of is that you want me for my virginity! I tried—Last night—”

The flogger conducting his punishment struck again.

“What did you do last night?”

“I tried to sleep with Phichit! To end it! To take away the one thing I have that you might want from me so you would end it for me.”

He couldn’t look up to see his alien response, Viktor’s real look of pain holding his mind, blinding. The look he had when his carelessness had hurt him before, when he accidentally chose Liliya over him—now purposely choosing Phichit over him; over his pleas to be the one; over his pleas to be allowed to help. That was all Viktor wanted, and he couldn’t… choose him. Viktor was right. He was a liar. His words: nothing but lust.

“Would that have worked?”

He gasped, looking up at the unexpected steadiness of his voice and the waiting whips. “I don’t understand the question.”

“Would I have ended it if you’d slept with Phichit?”

“I don’t know. How would I know that?”

His right hand holding the venomous flogger flared out before striking. “You’re still not looking in
the right spot for your answers. How many people would you have to fuck in your hours to make me end it?” The flogger voiced his displeasure at having to wait for the answer.

“You wouldn’t.” He gasped. “You wouldn’t end it for that.”

His left hand took over, rewarding now with his favorite strokes. “Yes, Yuri. You could fuck a thousand men, and as long as you’re mine when we’ve agreed, I would still smile at you as you dropped to your knees. I would still crave my chance with you just as much. Where did you find that answer?”

“In your words.” He shook his head at his own stupidity. “Your words as you said them. Not in my mess that swallowed them.”

“Now answer my other question. Were you ever just another one of my subs?”

He shook his head. “No, Viktor. You said they knew going in what they were to you. I didn’t know.”

He cracked with both whips on the tops of his thighs at the same time. “It’s the right answer, but I hate that’s the reason you chose for why. Give me more reasons for why that’s not true.”

“Chris said he’d never seen you cuddle with your subs.”

He punished him with the electricity. “That’s a true answer, but you’re looking in the wrong spot.”

He lifted his cramped hands off the arms to stretch them out before regripping the chair. “You said you don’t have sex outside of relationships, but you offered to take my virginity if I chose to be with only you. You were offering a relationship on the very first day.” His eyes widened as he took in his own words.

“Actually, I was trying to indicate my interest in a relationship with you starting at your interview and at every possible turn past that without being too overbearing about it. Perhaps I should have gone a touch more to the overbearing side of it, yes?”

“You wanted me even before I asked you to punish me?”

“What were my first words to you?”

He cringed, the words tasting bitter and camphoric. “Wow. You’re gorgeous.”

“Gee, tell me how you really felt about that.” His mouth drew tight, but despite his sarcasm, he knew he was supposed to answer.

“I thought you were making fun of me.”

Electricity lacerated his thigh. “I hate that answer so much.” He shook his head and struck his other thigh as well. “So fucking much. Was I making fun of you?”

Stinging sweat trickled into his eyes. “No, Viktor. You were sincere.”

His good whip flicked down. “Thank fucking god. At least I can say we’ve made a hell of a lot of progress in a week. So, Yuri, do I want you?”

“Yes, Viktor.”

“As what? A training sub to pass off to someone else?”
He shook his head. “As yours.”

“Good, Yuri.” He rewarded his answer until his pleasure was spiked back to the edge.

Viktor stopped and stared him down, tension rising in his body. “What color was the horse?”

“What? Which horse?”

The static shocks fired through his thighs as Viktor held the tips of the flogger above him, transferring to kinetic pain contorting inside his body. He fought to obey his order to stay.

“What color was the horse?”

His mouth pulled into a grimace as he held back the desire to beg for mercy. He couldn’t. He couldn’t say anything. “I don’t know what you’re asking me.”

“Don’t you dare lie to me!” The flogger cracked once more, harder than any he had taken then pulled back, tips flicking sparks before they stilled.

He unplugged the flogger and put it on the table which should have been a sign for relief to take over, but with the tension in Viktor’s body, Yuri knew better.

His heart raced to a sickening beat as Viktor slid a metal plate under his ass attached to a ball chain. He picked up a silver letter opener with a Fleur de Lis on the top and dragged it over Yuri’s forearm. He jumped at the touch, but it was nothing more than a soft caress of the metal, his skin completely unharmed. He looked up, and Viktor’s wicked eyes and twisted smile told him that his fears were innocently understated. That was the last thing he saw before Viktor’s t-shirt blinded his eyes.

“What color was the horse?”

A hot knife slashed deep through his arm when he didn’t answer, and he screamed. The pain ended the instant Viktor lifted the blade from his skin. What was that? He would have sworn that he felt his skin gaping open, his muscle fibers sliced apart down to the bone, but it would have still hurt after he stopped cutting. Wouldn’t it?

“What color was the horse?”

The knife sliced his belly open in a diagonal line; his scream pierced his own eardrums. “I can’t! I can’t! Please, Viktor! I can’t say it!”

Viktor slashed his body as he pleaded for him to stop, coming around behind him to carve deep lines down his back. “What color was the horse?”

“I can’t! Please! I would tell you if I could! Please, Viktor! Please! I can’t answer this!”

Viktor grabbed his head and twisted it to the side, exposing his neck. His head pulsed deep under the touch of his hands like his electrified touch from earlier but coming from the inside out rather than the outside in. Viktor’s breath rushed over his ear as he licked a spark onto the edge. The point of the knife dug into his neck. “What color was the horse?” The blade dragged from his spine around his neck toward the front.

“I don’t—I can’t—Please, Viktor!” He screamed as the knife crept closer to his artery. “Bay! He was a bay!”

The knife halted but didn’t relent, pain still driving through him with its sharp edge.
“You can see his black mane and brown neck, yes?”

“Yes, Viktor!” He squealed through his grimace.

“Could you see that in the office?”

“No, Viktor! Please!”

“What do you see besides his neck?”

“My—My hands. The reins.”

“Where on his neck are your hands?”

“Next to his crest.”

“What else do you see?”

He shook his head, panic bubbling over. “I don’t—”

The knife dropped from his neck. “Okay, thank you, Yuri. I think I’ve gotten what I need for now.”

He released him with an electric kiss to his neck as he pulled the sopping blindfold from his eyes. He hadn’t noticed he’d been crying. Viktor placed the letter opener back on the table, and his gentle hands smoothed over his unbroken skin that he would have sworn was carved into ribbons.

Viktor adjusted the box again and switched the blacklight for the dimmed chandelier above them and ran his hand over his arm making little champagne bubbles tickle his skin with light sparks.

“How does that feel?”

He sniffed back his tears. “It tickles.”

“Does it hurt at all?”

“No, Viktor.”

“Good. You did so well for me, zolotse. I’m so proud of you.”

He shook his head, his sobs deepening. “How can you want me?”

“I want you more than I’ve ever wanted anything.” He licked the air just above his cock pouring those tickling bubbles over him. “Let me show you how good you feel to me. Come whenever you’re ready.”

He licked slowly down his length, his tongue tingly and his lips popping bubbles, taking him into the effervescent heat of his electrified mouth. It didn’t take long before the pleasure Viktor wanted him to feel overtook him and released all the pressure he had churned into a fizzing mess. His ass pulsed around the plug as his cum poured out in a thick deluge.

Viktor smiled as he licked his lips and covered him with sparkling kisses as he untied him.

“You,” Yuri looked up with his eyes still dripping tears, “please?”

“Yes, zolotse. You did so well. I just have to untie you first so I can reach you.” He unhooked the last cuff from his wrist and pulled him to the edge of the seat, sliding the metal plate along with him.
Untucking his shirt, Viktor pulled it over his head then bent down to take off his boots followed by his breeches. His cock straining against his black briefs popped free as he pulled them off as well.

Smiling, he stroked the back of his hand over Yuri’s cheeks then took his hand and covered his fingers with lube picked up from the table. “I want to feel more of you.” He directed his hand to his ass.

His eyes widened as he realized what Viktor wanted. “I don’t know how. I’m afraid I’ll hurt you.”

“You won’t hurt me.” He kissed his forehead. “Go slow. Start with one. I don’t like more than three.”

“Yes, Viktor.” He brought his hand around and brushed his fingers over his hole making Viktor jump. He jerked his hand back. “I’m sorry!”

“It’s okay. It wasn’t you. It’s just been a while since I’ve had anyone touch me there, and you’re electrified, so the sensation was just a bit surprising. I’m sorry for startling you.”

“I’m electrified?”

“Yes. The plate you’re sitting on is running a current over your whole body. When you touch me, it sends the electricity to me.”

“Oh.” He didn’t feel anything different in his own body. He knew it could be explained with science, but it felt like Viktor’s blood magic. “You like electricity?”

“On the low settings, yes. I love it. Tease me a lot. It’s more intense when you’re just above touching me; less so, but deeper, when you are.”

“Yes, Viktor.” Taking a deep breath, he brought his hand back and started stroking his hole.

He leaned his weight onto his hands on Yuri’s shoulders and hissed at his touch then sighed and dropped his head. “Yes, Yuri. Feels so good.”

Taking the encouragement, he licked the air around Viktor’s cock watching in fascination as the streams of lightning flowed from his tongue to him. His tongue tingled and went a little numb, but otherwise, he felt no different. Viktor groaned and his cock pulsed rapidly.

“Okay, maybe don’t tease me too much. You’ve already got me so turned on.”

He smiled and licked his head as he eased one finger inside him. Holy shit. He was inside Viktor. It was just a finger, but he could feel the tight muscle holding onto him and his slick walls. He looked up with another wavering expression, and Viktor smiled and kissed his forehead.

Exploring inside him, he made little licks over his cock mesmerized by the sparks and the new whines and gasps coming from Viktor’s mouth. Tracing a second finger around his hole, he sucked gently on his head. With a low whine, Viktor’s hands tightened on his shoulders. He slipped his second finger in with the first and searched for the right spot while his hole pulsed around him and his breath came in ragged pants. Curling his fingers, he found a lump on his front wall. Viktor jolted forward and gasped.

He pulled off his cock. “Is that it?”

“Yeah, you found it.”
“Am I doing okay? Does it feel good?”

“It feels amazing. You’re doing too well. I’m trying so hard not to come right now.”

“Should I back off?”

“No. Keep going.”

“Yes, Viktor.”

He took him back in his mouth and massaged his gland, his free hand brushing the air over his ass then sliding a trail of sparks around to his stomach. Viktor twitched, his hands gripping Yuri’s hair, his knees buckling under the sensations. Yuri plunged him deep in his throat then drew back and licked fizzing sparks over him.

Viktor’s erratic cries switched from breathy gasps to deep groans and curses as he explored all the ways he was allowed to touch him. He was allowed to cripple his strength and take his control. He was allowed to enter his body. Viktor trusted him. How? How could he trust him? How could he want him?

He wrapped his arm under Viktor’s ass to give him his strength to lean on as he slipped a third finger in and switched from exploring his pleasure to chasing it. Viktor curled into him; tears rolled down Yuri’s cheeks.

Viktor trusted him, and he handled that trust so carelessly at every turn. He wasn’t just careless with it. He broke it. Trying to leave him. Being too stupid to understand what Viktor was telling him. Now Viktor had to punish him for that by selling him. Would it be permanent? Would that be the end of them?

Viktor came, his weight collapsing onto Yuri while he gave him all his strength to hold him up.

Viktor switched off the electricity and wiped his tears then carried him into the jade room, kissing his body the whole way and murmuring his praises. He set him down on the cloud cushion and snuggled him tight to the point of crushing. Yuri returned the embrace in kind.

“I ruined it, didn’t I? I had an actual chance with you, and I ruined it. You weren’t going to sell me, but now you are.”

“You’re both very right and incredibly wrong. I wasn’t going to sell you, that’s true. The only reason why I’m selling you now is that you were so convinced despite all logic and evidence that that’s all you were to me, and you need to learn how to face your fears to see what they’re really made of. You didn’t ruin anything though. You gave me information that I requested that led me to the decision that this experience will benefit you.”

“Selling me will benefit me?”

“Yes.”

“Will I… how long will I be sold for?”

“A day.”

He sucked in a breath. That was… better than he’d hoped, but if Viktor didn’t care about his virginity… “Would I have to do whatever he wants? If he wanted to fuck me…”
“What number would that be for you?”

“Zero.”

He nodded. “You can fill out a checklist for him specifically, and you wouldn’t disappoint me by doing that. I’m glad that’s a zero for you. But it would please me if you were on that stage willing to offer the highest bidder anything you’d offer to me simply because that’s what I want to see. I want to see you face your fears without holding back.”

He nodded. “You said the first play sessions are supervised… Would you be there?”

“If you’d like me to be.”

“Yes, Viktor. Would you… would you still want me after that day is over… after he fucked me? Would I come back to you?”

“Would you want to come back to me?”

“Yes, Viktor.”

“If you find the right answer, then yes.”

A test. He had a chance of getting it right. Viktor believed he could get it right. He wouldn’t ask if he didn’t. He nodded. “Yes, Viktor. I’ll let him do what he wants if that’s what you think is best.”

“I do.”

He pressed his face into his chest as his tears soaked them both. “I wanted it to be you. I’m sorry I couldn’t have enough faith in you for that. I’m sorry I tried to ruin it and almost ran away.”

“It’s okay, zolotse. Everything’s going to be fine. I promise. Trust me. Have faith in me. Submit to me.”

“Yes, Viktor.” His tears seeped across Viktor’s chest as his body unlocked another storm of grief.

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Later that night, Viktor had fed him and dressed him in a striped black button-down that came from Viktor’s selected wardrobe for him along with a pair of well-tailored jeans and put him in the car without informing him of where they were going or what they were doing. They arrived at a small airfield, and Viktor nodded to the waiting pilots and handed off their luggage to an attendant then ushered him up the stairs onto a lavish private jet.

“Viktor? Please tell me what the hell is going on? Where are we going?”

“You’ll see when we get there.”

“How long are we going for?”

“You’ll know when I tell you it’s time to leave.”

“Viktor! How do I explain where I am when someone asks?”

“If by someone you mean Phichit, I already took care of that. He thinks you’re going with me to look at horses.”
“Is that what we’re doing?”

“No.”

“Well, we’ll be back by Thursday at the latest, right? You planned a party then.”

“It’s going to rain on Thursday which worked out nicely for me. Now I have more time to give you your reward. I rescheduled the party to a more convenient day.”

“Reward? I… I just tried to leave you. Why are you rewarding me?”

“You earned this before, remember? When you rode Avos for me.”

“A trip to god knows where on a private jet? What the actual hell is this?”

Viktor smiled and kissed his nose as he settled him into a plush white leather seat. “Submit, Yuri.”

The attendant brought them glasses of champagne and chocolate covered strawberries to keep them occupied while the plane took off, and Viktor ensured that he ate every one he offered.

Once they were solidly in the air, Viktor led him to the bedroom in the back of the plane and closed the door then stripped them both naked and put them to bed. Viktor pulled him into his arms with a desperation which had been there since this morning and wouldn’t shake from his grip. He wanted to ask again where they were going, but he wouldn’t answer. Viktor needed to feel his solid submission after he’d threatened it. He pressed his face into his heated chest and returned his desperate grasp.

“Yes, Viktor.”

***
Thank you Clarinda for the beautiful art! Please check it out on Tumblr!

Spotify
33. Don't Let Me Go (acoustic) by RAIGN
34. Miracle by The Score
“You’re awake.” Viktor’s voice, soft and sweet with his smile hanging in the notes, drifted into his consciousness.

“Am I?”

“Well, considering you’ve been kissing my chest and groping my ass, I’m gonna say yes unless you have an odd form of sleepwalking.”

He jerked his hand back from the firm hunk of Viktor’s ass he was holding. “I’m—”

“You don’t have to apologize. You’re allowed to take liberties with my body when we’re cuddling.”

He grinned and kissed his nose. “I like it.”

“Thank you, Viktor.” He regrasped his ass and slid his kisses over to his nipple, licking, sucking, and nibbling as it budded under his touch. He massaged his ass, his fingers slipping deeper until they were brushing over his hole.

“Mmm… Yuri… are you horny?”

“What? I—” he jerked his hand back.

“What’s wrong? I wasn’t scolding you. You should tell me if you’re feeling horny.”

"What? No. It just… feels nice to be close to you."

"Oh? And you aren't feeling satisfied with how close you already are?"

"Umm…. maybe not?"

"Yeah, so that’s called feeling horny."

He brought his hand up to cover his flaming face as he groaned.

"Or lusty, lascivious, thirsty, salacious, amorous, aroused, lewd—"

“You know a lot of words for… that.”

He tugged his hand away from his face and put it back on his ass. “Try it out. Tell me you’re feeling horny.”

Staring at his chest, he tried to summon whatever morning strength he had to force the words out. “I’m feeling—”
“My eyes are up here, sweetheart.”

Cringing, he forced his eyes up to his smirking blue ones. “I’m feeling… horny.” He groaned and buried his face back into his chest as Viktor chuckled with delight. “That’s such a terrible word.”

“It is. Do you have any suggestions to replace it? How would you describe what you’re feeling?”

He resumed kissing his chest, each taste of his skin fueling a hunger for more rather than satisfying it. “I’m feeling… ravenous.”

“Oh, such a powerful word. I didn’t realize your hunger ran so deep.” He pulled Yuri’s face up out of his chest to look at him when he groaned and tried to hide. “I love it.”

“If that’s what this feeling is, I’m always ravenous around you.”

“Hmm… is that so?” He tossed his leg over Yuri’s hip. “Have I not been keeping you satisfied enough?”

“No, Viktor. That’s not it at all.”

He opened a drawer behind him and pulled out a bottle then covered Yuri’s fingers with the slick liquid and put his hand back to his ass and coated his own as well as their cocks and tossed the bottle aside. “Go ahead, my ravenous little bunny.” He put his arm between Yuri’s legs and started circling his hole. “You have a very high libido, don’t you?” He slipped in and started stretching him gently.

Taking his lead, he did the same, relishing once again the fact he was inside Viktor’s body with a much clearer state of mind to both appreciate it and turn red with embarrassment. “Umm… I don’t know what normal would be for that, so I don’t really know how to answer.”

“How often do you masturbate?”

He made a helpless little whine in protest of the question but was already resigned to answer. “Um, just about every night. It helps me sleep. Sometimes more.”

“More?”

“If I have free time, it can sometimes be a few times a day.”

“Wow. Yeah, I’d say that’s high for sure. How many times do you make yourself come in a session?”

“Um… a few? I recover pretty quickly.”

“Yeah, I definitely noticed that one. It looks like I need to do a better job of keeping you satisfied.”

“You already do far more than enough.”

“If you’re anything other than one hundred percent satisfied and then some, I haven’t done enough.” He worked in another finger and started stroking his prostate, rolling his hips when Yuri responded in kind. Groaning, he slid their cocks together and rocked deeper onto Yuri’s fingers. “I wonder if that’s your natural level or just a side effect of being a twenty-three-year-old virgin.”

“I don’t know.”

He smiled, triggering the erratic quivers in his body with another finger. “I wouldn’t expect you to.”
He closed his eyes and kissed gently over his bruised chest. “You taste so good.” Something crept up and grabbed hold of his jaw compelling him to lose his restraint and take in deeper mouthfuls of his flesh. His kisses locked up with tension as he battled the cruel urge.

“What’s on your mind, Yuri?” His rocking thrusts sped up, raising the heat in their bodies.

He shook his head. “Not—not really my mind… I don’t know. In my jaw… I want to hurt you.”

“Hurt me? In what way?” His breathy pants didn’t lose their rhythm.

“I—I want to… kiss you harder.”

He laughed. “So, kiss me harder.”

“I thought you didn’t like pain.”

“That doesn’t mean you have to treat me like I’m made of glass. I love your gentle kisses, but harder kisses are welcome as well. Don’t restrain yourself. I’ll tell you if you need to hold back.”

“What if I bruise you?”

“I don’t mind a few love bites. Just keep them out of highly visible areas.” Lifting Yuri’s chin, he kissed along his jaw. “Let me feel your passion, Yuri. Go as far as you want within the limits I’ve set.”

“You haven’t set many limits for me.”

Viktor smiled.

“Oh.”

He dropped his lips back to his chest and licked gentle kisses over to his nipple. Viktor’s hand pressed into his back, pulling him closer and giving him encouragement. Sucking him deep into his mouth, his fingers dug into Viktor’s back. Viktor groaned and dropped his head back, arching into his body. Yuri started to release him, but Viktor’s hand came up to block him from pulling away.

“Don’t you dare stop. It feels so good.” He moaned when Yuri took his nipple back in with more force, his hips rocking harder and faster. “Yes, Yuri, let me feel all of your desires.”

He sucked, feeling the satisfying fill of his mouth with Viktor’s flesh and caressed his nipple with his tongue. He wasn’t sure what to do with the fingers in his ass, so he mimicked Viktor’s motions but with a little less stretching and more gentle stroking over his gland. His sucking kisses wandered his chest as his fingers latched onto his hold on Viktor’s back. Viktor’s rhythm had his mind fading into their heated bliss.

“Oui, da, hai... Feels so good.” Viktor’s voice, low and rumbly, tangled around his pleasure. “Come whenever you want.”

He laughed. “Whenever you want. I can’t hold back once you’ve decided I should come.” He twisted to suck his other nipple into his mouth and savor the solid clamp of his mouth around his body.

“Oh? I’ve got you so trained I don’t even need to give you those commands verbally? You can feel them from my touch alone?”

“Yes, Viktor.”
“So good, Yuri.” He tipped him right into an orgasm, rewarding his obedience and followed moments after, muffling their cries into each other’s bodies. “The best, Yuri.” His hot breath filtered through his hair as they came back down followed by his kisses. “My Yuri.” That desperation gripped his voice and stuck to his grasping hands and biting kisses as he pushed him onto his back and waged a conquering war against him.

Closing his eyes, he made himself as soft as he could, his arms stretched overhead. “How—how high is your libido?” He peeked down at him to see his response.

He glanced up with his lips still sucking a bruise onto his stomach and smiled. “Decently high. Not quite as high as yours but that’s good. I can play with you all sorts of ways and still have enough left to satisfy all of my desires.” He sighed and planted his lips on new territory. “Don’t be afraid of touching me. You didn’t hurt me at all. That only felt amazing.”

“Yes, Viktor.”

He smiled then flopped back at his side and pulled him into his arms, relaxing contentedly.

“So, is this your plane?”

“No, I rented it.”

“Why? Won’t a commercial flight get us there?”

“A commercial flight would announce where we’re going.”

“You… rented a private jet to keep a surprise a few hours longer?”

“Yes. Timing is everything. I want to see your expression when you realize where you are.”

“Wouldn’t it be the same as when I found out where we were going?”

“No.”

“What if I guessed where we were going?”

“No! Don’t guess! Shut your brain off!” He pounced on him, his fingers on his ribs making him squeal and fight to get free.

“I can’t help it!” He gasped at Viktor’s merciless attack, screaming with laughter as he tried to get away. “I can’t shut my brain off!”

“Do it! No guessing allowed!” He grinned, his eyes sparkling with his glee.

“Okay! Okay! I’ll do my best!”

Viktor stopped his attack and plopped down next to him, holding him in his arms. “That’s all I ask. Your best is more than good enough for me.”

“Help me? Distract me?”

“Okay, let’s see… how shall I distract you?” His fingers traced over his skin. “Do you want to come again?”

He shook his head. “No, Viktor. I’m feeling satisfied like this.”
He smiled and kissed his forehead. “Good. Are you hungry?”

“Maybe a little, but is it okay if we stay like this a little longer? It’s nice.”

He gave Yuri’s favorite smile, the one that affected his eyes more than his lips. “As you wish.”

“We could… talk?”

“Yes, that sounds like a good idea. What would you like to talk about?”

“What was your biggest fear as a child?”

“Ooh, going deep right off the bat.”

“I’m—”

“Stop assuming anything I say that isn’t outright praise is criticism. Unless I’m unmistakably mad, assume I’m thrilled beyond delight because that is my baseline state with you.”

“Oh. Um, yes, Viktor.”

“Better.” He smiled and kissed his nose. “As for your question, I don’t remember being afraid of anything. I grew up secure and loved and in the best circumstances anyone could ask for. The Soviet Union ended when I was too little to remember it or the years after that were filled with confusion and uncertainty. I probably had a few minor childhood fears that every kid has, but nothing so major that I can remember it distinctly.

“The fact that I embraced my feminine side as easily as my masculine one might have been some concern growing up in Russia, but that was mostly for my parents to worry about. I never cared what anyone thought, and that let me get away with doing what I wanted and having people pass it off as youthful charm. If someone did give me crap, there was almost always a babushka nearby to tear into them.”

“Babushka?”

“Grandma.”

“Oh, you were close with your grandma?”

“Yes, but I wasn’t referring to just my own grandmothers. Any old woman on the street was just as likely as my own grandmother to protect me. Babushki are to be both respected and feared. They are opinionated and let their opinions, particularly on children, be known to anyone violating them. Do not ever argue with a babushka. You will not win.”

“Not even you?”

“I wouldn’t even think of trying. If babushka says you’re cold; you’re cold. If babushka says you’re hungry; you’re hungry. And spoiler alert: you’re always cold, and unless she’s seen you pack away enough food to feed an army within the last hour, you’re always hungry.”

Yuri laughed and tried to hold it back which only made him laugh harder. “That sounds very familiar.”

“Are… are you calling me a babushka?”

“I’m not saying anything…”
He tried for a stern look but couldn’t hold it and fell into Yuri’s laughter, clutching him tighter.

***

Leading him down the steps off the plane, Viktor’s arm offered the only guidance and security Yuri was allowed, his eyes covered by a blindfold much to his discomfort. Viktor led him into the cool of early morning that held the promise of a beautiful day. Or he supposed it could be evening or just a cool day in general, but it had that distinctly evil feel of a barely formed day.

He hadn’t known what time it was since before the party. It was disorienting, but at least Viktor’s side had the steadiness of familiarity. Strange how quickly that had formed. Viktor was right. By putting him through the strangest and most challenging of experiences while Viktor’s side remained unfaltering, he’d clung to it that much harder and learned how steady and safe it was.

Viktor ushered him into a car and buckled him in then rejoined him, taking his hand on the other side.

Not too long after, the car came to a stop, and Viktor untied the blindfold. “Are you ready?”

“Yes, Viktor.”

“Do you have any idea where you are?”

“No, Viktor.”

“Perfect. See? Your best is more than enough.” He dropped the blindfold from his eyes. “Open your eyes, Yuri.”

He blinked, the Sight in front of him so familiar it was burned into his consciousness with eighteen years of memories layered one on top of the other, yet it had been so long since he’d seen it, it didn’t feel real at all.

Home.

His heart surged with joy then pain over the lies he’d desecrated this place with. He still remembered the first one. ‘It went fine. I didn’t take any ribbons, but it was fine. I’m fine, Kaasan. I’m not crying. I just have a little cold.’

Viktor gripped his shaking hand and wiped at his tears while his eyes stayed fixed on the home he’d broken along with everything else. “Yuri? What’s wrong, zolotse? This isn’t quite the reaction I was expecting.” His hand rubbed slowly over his back.

“They don’t know. I lied to them.”

“It’s okay. I’ll help you.”

“I lied to them, Viktor. So many times. I don’t deserve to see them.”

“Three.” His voice cracked him with his punishment, making him flinch as if he’d already served it. “I decide what you deserve. You deserve to see your family and feel their love. You need to be here.”

“It hurts, Viktor.”

“Oh good. This is something you need to feel then. You’ve protected yourself in all the wrong ways. It’s going to hurt as I rip open those scars to let them heal the way I think they should.” He wrapped
his arms around his transfixed body. “It’s going to be okay, zolotse. I promise. They love you so much, and they’re so excited to see you. Focus on that. I’ll help you with the rest.”

“Yes, Viktor.” He tried to will himself forward with Viktor’s command, but it wasn’t enough to overcome this wall. “I’m going to lie to them again. Right to their faces.”

“No. Just stay quiet if you need to. I’ll lie for you.”

“Is that any better?”

“I think so, yes. You’ve protected yourself with lies and hiding and running. I know you’re not ready for the truth yet, but we can at least work our way toward it by halting your lies and letting me protect you any way I need to. If that means lies for right now, I’m fine with that. And you won’t be the one lying. I will.”

“I’m not certain that’s a big distinction.”

“It’s not. Baby steps.”

He couldn’t stop the sardonic laugh that escaped. “Baby steps. Right. I didn’t know you knew what those were.”

Chuckling, he kissed his neck. “I do actually. You know that pony, I know you’ve ridden one like this, the one when you were a kid and just learning to ride, and no matter how much you pulled or kicked, that pony just wouldn’t budge?”

“Yes, Viktor. Ponies are the devil.”

He laughed harder and dropped his forehead onto his shoulder. “I do actually. You know that pony, I know you’ve ridden one like this, the one when you were a kid and just learning to ride, and no matter how much you pulled or kicked, that pony just wouldn’t budge?”

“Yes, Viktor. Ponies are the devil.”

He laughed harder and dropped his forehead onto his shoulder. “They are. The absolute worst. Well, my dear, sometimes you’re Toska who’s so in sync with me it’s almost like he’s reading my thoughts, and sometimes you’re the pony. So, we’re either taking five-foot fences, or I’m flailing my limbs at you to get you to budge. Either way, I’m going all out, so I think your perspective is a little skewed. Come on, zolotse. Time for you to go home.” He wiped away his tears then came around to take him out of the car, putting him at his side to lead him into his own house.

Yuri opened the door that had likely never once been locked since it had been built.

His mom came bounding up, skidding to a stop as she reached the genkan where they were taking off their shoes. “Yuri-chan! Welcome home!” She hid her excited shaking in her clasped hands as her eyes glistened with her contained tears.

He swallowed back his own. “Hi, Kaasan. I’m sorry it’s been so long.” His throat swelled with the restrained sobs.

“None of that. I’m so glad you’re home. Come in, come in.” She turned to Viktor and the space between her eyes crinkled as she focused on pronouncing the English as clearly as she could. “Viktor, I’m Hiroko. It so nice to meet you. Thank you so much for bringing our Yuri-chan home.”

He brushed his hair out of his face as he glanced between them with his head cocked in confusion for brief second before he put on his best smile. “There’s no need to thank me. I’m happy to bring him home. He’s been without a visit for far too long.” He took her offered hand as they stepped into the house. “It’s a pleasure to meet you as well. You have a beautiful home.”

His dad poked his head out of the window by the kitchen. “Yuri-chan! Is that you? How are you?”
“Hi, Tousan. I’m good. You’re looking well.”

“I am. I am. Viktor, it nice to meet you.”

“Thank you. It’s nice to meet you as well.”

“Thank you very much for bringing our son home.”

He smiled. “It was no problem at all. I’m glad I was able to.”

His sister came by carrying a stack of towels. She stopped and leaned back against the wall.

“Yuchan, hi. How ya doing?”

“I’m good. How are you?”

“Same as usual. So, this is…” She glanced over at Viktor with her eyes narrowed. “Sorry, mom wasn’t too clear on who exactly you are.”

“I’m Viktor. Yuri’s boyfriend.”

Boyfriend?! Boyfriend?! He stood on his toes to reach Viktor’s ear to hiss into it. “Boyfriend?”

He leaned down. “Would you rather I explain the exact nature of our relationship?”

He dropped back and took Viktor’s arm. “Yup. This is Viktor. My… boyfriend.” His stomach did a little flop. He wasn’t supposed to lie. Was that a lie? He glanced at Viktor. He didn’t look mad. Was it okay if he was just backing up what Viktor had said? His stomach flopped again. Was it not a lie?

“Nice to meet you. You must be Mari?” Viktor extended his hand, and Mari jostled her load to her hip to take it.

“Yeah, that’s me. Mom thought you were his boss?”

“Ah, yeah. I’m that too.”

Mari’s eyebrow cocked up as her chin dropped and her eyes shifted to Yuri. “Really.”

He cringed. “It’s fine, Neechan.”

“Uh huh. Well, you can go soak in the hot springs if you like. We’ve got another hour till we open, so it’ll be quiet, but we have to tidy up the locker rooms so we might run into you.”

“No, that’s okay. Maybe later tonight.”

She shrugged and shifted her load of towels back into her arms. “Suit yourselves.”

“Well, come in come in.” His mom waved them in. “We set you up a bed in the banquet room since it bigger. Are you hungry? We just ate, but I can make you something.”

“No thanks. We ate on the plane.” Yuri grabbed two of the suitcases the driver had followed them in with and brought them into the house, leading Viktor to the room. He slid the shoji door open and rolled the suitcases in then went back for more. Were they going to be there a while or was Viktor just a heavy packer? “If you tell me which one is mine, I can bring it into my room.”

“Your room?”
“Um… the one I grew up in?”

“Do your parents have a strong objection to us sharing a bed?”

“No. We’re adults, and they don’t mind the gay thing.”

“Then you’re in your room.”

“Yes, Viktor.”

“How soundproof are these walls?”

“Not very. They muffle a bit, but a normal conversation can be heard easily.”

“Well then, come here.” He pulled him onto the bed and drew him into his arms. “You don’t hug your family?” He kept his voice to a gentle whisper.

“Um… not really anymore, no.”

“Wow. But you like hugs, yes?”

“Yes, Viktor, with you. You’re the only one I’ve really hugged since I was a little kid.”

“Oh,” he sighed, melting into a smile, “that’s so perfect. But I still don’t understand how you can stop hugging your family.”

“I don’t know. It’s just… We kinda stopped doing that as I grew up.”

“I see. I have to say, that really wasn’t the reunion I was expecting. I know you have some conflicted feelings about being here, but I would have expected more excitement especially from them.”

“They were thrilled.”

“Really?”

“Yes. My mom especially. She was so happy.”

His eyebrows creased. “How could you… tell?”

He huffed a breath of laughter. “We’re Japanese. We don’t show emotion overtly like much of the rest of the world does. The deeper you feel something, the quieter you are about it. You have to read the eyes and tone of voice to understand. Only a tiny bit is expressed in the words and on the face, but if you look carefully, you can see how deeply it’s felt.”

“So, that’s how you’re so attentive to what I’m feeling. I must be so obvious to you. I was thinking it’s because you’re used to reading the body language of the horses like I am.”

“It’s both probably. I’m on the sensitive side even for being Japanese. But you don’t seem obvious to me. You seem fake, and that makes it harder to understand what you’re really feeling.”

“I’m fake? You think everything I show about how I feel is a lie?”

He shook his head. “No, Viktor. I get that it’s not now that I know you express like Americans do. It’s still hard to take what you show at face value though. Overriding that cultural upbringing is hard. It was so strange coming to America where everyone is so loud with their emotions and expressions. It took me a while to get that they were being sincere or polite by being so expressive and that they
saw me as unemotional.” He laughed. “Can you imagine? Me, unemotional?” He shook his head. “I have to run the emotions through a translator too, and that’s harder than the words sometimes. I know I’m supposed to express more on my face, but I’m never really sure of what or how.”

“That’s where those adorable expressions come from?” He laughed. “You really are confused on how to express yourself, stuck between Japanese and American.”

“Yes, Viktor. With a dose of anxiety thrown in there usually just to make sure I come across as completely strange.”

“How do I make it easier for you to understand what I feel?”

“I understand you now that I know I should take what you show as sincere. I wasn’t sure before how Russians express and what you were showing was impossible to be true.”

“No, how do I make you feel it without having to translate or understand in the logical part of your mind only? How do I make your heart understand?”

He started chewing on his lip as he thought which he stopped as Viktor’s hand came up to stop him. He smiled. “More like this. The little, quiet things you do. Being quiet together and the smiles that are more in your eyes than on your mouth. But I like your big smile too. It’s so cute.” His eyes crinkled at Viktor’s indignation. “It is. Shaped just like a heart. I like the way you express too. I’m starting to understand it deeper.”

“Good. I’ll try to show more in your language too.”

Viktor’s hands had drifted in under Yuri’s shirt and were now tracing over his skin, paying particular attention to his initials. “Since we’re only in the way here right now, is there anywhere you want to go see?”

“Um… Not really? I spent most of my time at the stable, and I don’t really want to go there right now. I can take you to some nice places around here though. There’s Hasetsu Castle that has a ninja house inside.”

“Wow, ninjas?! Really?! That sounds so cool!”

He laughed. “You sound like a little kid.”

“Psh. Did I ruin your image of me as your Dom with my excitement?”

He stretched out his arms then gripped him back tighter and kissed his nose. “No, Viktor. I like it when you’re cute too.”

“Good. But that sounds really fun. I’d love to see it.”

“Okay. Oh! The fuji should be in season. They’re very pretty.”

“Fuji? The mountain? Is that near here?”

“No, not the mountain. Flowers. They’re uh… I’m not sure of the name in English. They hang from the trees…” He pulled out his phone to look up the translation. “Ah, wisteria in English.” He turned the phone so he could see the pictures of the blossoming trees.

“Oh, that looks so pretty. Yes, let’s go there. We should do a quick workout first. Is there a playground nearby?”
“Oh my god. Now? In public? With how you like to workout? We’re going to make spectacles of ourselves.”

“Is that frowned upon?”

“Very much so. You can get away with it. You’re a foreigner. You don’t know any better, but I’m Japanese.”

He laughed and poked his side. “No, I don’t. And you’re with me so just say you’re keeping the crazy foreigner company.”

He groaned and covered his face. “Yes, Viktor. At least it’s still early. There won’t be too many people out. Please, no climbing on you?”

“As you wish.”

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A lilting breeze gave words to swaying plumes who whispered them to each other as devoutly as lovers exchanging vows. The scent of lilac and honey cascaded along the wisteria that had lived and died and lived once again over more than a century.

Arched bands of alternating blue, purple, gold, and pink flowers hung in clusters like grapes. Each cluster held dozens of little peapod buds that opened into a light teardrop petal sheltering a furled dark cocoon below. A brightened center nestled between them where they joined.

Viktor had him tucked against his side as they meandered the tunnel of flowers banked by sloping grass and bamboo trellises filled with the dark, gnarled vines rooting the blooms. Dappled light filtered through the blossoms and played delicately across Viktor’s gentle smile that he had focused more in his direction than on the flowers.

Yuri’s heart wouldn’t stop fluttering every time he glanced his way. His mind had been broken too many times to leave his concepts intact, and now his body simply responded as Viktor laid down fresh ones with every touch and smile. It was the worst torment he’d come up with yet.

Conflicting, broken shards of his old ones tore through his mind as they raged against the invading force, guarding the cracked dark core in a valiant last stand.

Viktor wanted him. He enjoyed being around him no matter how dull, flabby and broken he was. Viktor didn’t see him that way at all. He didn’t deserve it. Viktor would hate that he thought that. Would he still feel the same if he knew the truth?

Viktor said he could adapt to whatever it was; he asked him to have faith in him. But it wasn’t a matter of faith. It was unforgivable. There was no way Viktor could look at him the same way if he knew—after he knew. Viktor would learn the truth. That was his next mission, and he wouldn’t fail. Viktor didn’t know how to fail.

Was he right then? If Viktor determined that his past wasn’t enough to end… whatever this was, did that make it so? Could he still want to feel their connection after knowing all it held? Viktor was used to working with horses whose connection was always pure. Viktor’s own sin he hated so much was nothing compared to his. A simple accident and an unintentional mark that Chris ended up liking. No harm done really. If he hated that little crime, if he looked so ashamed when he barely toed outside the lines, if he destroyed people over shitty business practices and grabbing asses, how could he see what he had done as anything other than unforgivable?
“Your thoughts look quite heavy over there. Share them with me?”

It was phrased as a question, but it was backed by his standing order. It was an almost impossible order to follow. His thoughts were ephemeral, sinking from the realm of clarity into murky emotion the instant they were formed, and his focus shifting outward severed the line he was following. Putting them into words was like trying to catch fog. He was never able to recreate them in his mouth the exact way they had burst in his mind unless they were formed in his mouth directly which was something he avoided at all costs as those never failed to be anything but stupid.

“I’m just… trying to find the answer to your torment.”

“My torment? I don’t have you under any that I’m aware of. I’m trying to reward you.”

“You are. I’m sorry. I don’t really mean—”

“Yes, you did. Don’t back out of what you said. I’m not mad. I’m trying to understand what you meant.”

He sighed as he saw that his curious expression matched his words. “I mean… I don’t know how to explain it.”

“Try.”

“You… want me.”

“That’s your torment? Yes. I want you. I’m still confused about why your expression looked so heavy if that’s what you were thinking.”

“I’m… afraid. Afraid it will… change. Once you know.”

“Ah. Hmm… how do I fix that… The only thing I can do is prove it to you. I can tell you it won’t change, but that won’t convince you, will it?”

“No, Viktor.”

“I’ve brought you to the edge of a drop here. You’re going to have to choose at some point. Take that leap forward and trust that there’s solid ground on the other side because I told you it’s safe to jump or refuse and back away from my connection. There aren’t any other options here.”

“Yes, Viktor. I’m trying. It just… It hurts, and I’m afraid.”

“It’s okay. I’m not in a rush.” He chuckled. “Contrary to all evidence, I’m not. I’m just responding to where you’re at. I want you to make a real choice that you’re confident in. If you need to pause here and take some time to decide on what you want, I’ll wait until you’re ready to commit.”

“Commit?”

“Yes.”

“Commit… to you? Is that what you want from me?”

“Yes. Have I not been clear on that?”

“I think you have but just to be clear… You’re not just talking about committing to telling you…” He glanced over to take courage from Viktor’s patient expression. “You’re talking about committing to a relationship? Like… a boyfriend?”
“Yes.”

“What… what would that look like? How—I mean…”

“To be honest, I don’t know exactly what it would look like for us. That would depend on us, wouldn’t it?”

“Yes, Viktor… I mean… how would we… be? Like a typical relationship like everyone else has or would you always be my Dom like how we are now or…”

“What would you want? Do you want time off from what we have to just be whatever everyone else calls normal, or do you want a twenty-four-seven Dom/sub relationship?”

“I don’t know. I don’t know what a normal relationship is like.”

“Well, the best I can describe it is that a normal relationship would be like how we are when you choose to spend time with me in your hours without telling me to be your Dom. Like dinner on the roof.”

“But you ended up having to be my Dom anyway to get me to eat.”

“Only for a brief moment, but yes that is true that you’ve wanted me to be your Dom when you choose to spend time with me. We could try it now. Since this is a reward, I don’t have to be your Dom at all while we’re here. I can give you time off.”

“Would that mean no play while we’re here?”

“I don’t even know how we’d play while we’re here if the walls are so thin. They’d hear even a light spanking.”

“Oh, um… There are…” He cringed at the embarrassment of having to be so forward. “Um, there are love hotels we could go to.”

His face lit with delight even as a question tilted his head. “Love hotels? What’s that?”

“Um, a solution to thin walls. People go there so they can… have sex. It’s like a hotel, but you rent the room by the hour.”

“Perfect. I wondered how people managed living in houses like that. Yes, we could do that. I can offer you as much playtime as you want then, and the rest of the time we could try out what a normal relationship would look like for us.”

“That seems unfair to you. What would you get out of it?”

His eyes drew into a heavy line as the corner of his mouth pulled tight. His eyebrow cocked as he stared down at him. “You mean other than enjoying all this relaxing time with you in such a beautiful location and enjoying any playtime we have together? Gee, I don’t know, Yuri, what could I possibly get out of that?”

“Oh. Right. You like spending time with me for some strange reason.”

His eyes narrowed further then the corner of his mouth relaxed into a smile. “Yes, for some strange reason. I wish I could say you’re wrong, but I can’t explain our connection in words either. But I know I mean that in a much more positive way than you do.

“As for what it would look like with a twenty-four-seven Dom/sub relationship, we could try that out
as well. It would be like how we are usually but hopefully with you taking advantage of the freedoms afforded to you. You hold yourself under a much tighter control than mine.

“If we try that, test the limits. Let me stop you so you know where they really are. See if you can imagine yourself living like that. We can even do a trial of both. Spend some time in a twenty-four-seven relationship and some time just being Yuri and Viktor together and see which one we prefer.”

“We could do that, but what do you want? Don’t you have a preference?”

“My preference is you. As long as you let me sexually dominate you, I’m flexible on the rest. That’s the only thing I really need.”

“Oh. But if you were answering this… what would you want?”

“You want me to tell you the answer for you?” He smiled like he was humoring a child. “As soon as I state my preference, that will be what you choose as well. This is too big for that. I want your true preference.”

“Yes, Viktor. Can we start with the twenty-four-seven one? I feel like I need you like that right now. I’m not sure… how to be here.”

He smiled and pulled him in for a kiss to his forehead making them stagger about on the path. “Yes, zolotse. As you wish.”

A small smile formed as he snuggled closer to him and let his weight rest harder on Viktor’s supporting arm. “That reaction… does that reveal a preference?”

“Nice try. It reveals me rewarding you for asking for what you need so clearly.” He kissed his forehead again then got them back to walking in a neater line.

“How long do I get to keep you like this?”

“Oh, such a sweet way to phrase that.” He smiled and wobbled their path again as he left another peck on his forehead. “Until I tell you it’s time to switch.”

He sighed. “You know my anxiety really hates not knowing what’s going to happen.”

“I know. I’m not giving that asshole anything of what it wants. Your anxiety can go fuck itself. You’re mine.” He leaned in, bringing the heated tones to Yuri’s ear that coursed through his body as if they had a physical weight and will. “And you know how much you love being mine so just submit and enjoy it.” He pulled him in tighter for his kisses.

Viktor glanced at the people all casting stares at them. “How culturally inappropriate am I being right now?”

“Extremely. I would only say moderately since you’re not kissing me on the lips, but with how you do everything… extremely.”

“Do you mind?”

“It’s okay. You’re a foreigner. You don’t know any better.”

He laughed. “That feels a bit condescending.”

“It might be. There’s a freedom afforded to you by their acceptance of the fact that you just don’t know how to be Japanese, but I think it’s the same type of freedom and forgiveness you’d give to a
“Would it be best if I try to fit in more?”

“There’s no point. You’re not Japanese, and you never will be. You’re inherently a spectacle here. You could speak flawless Japanese and never make a cultural faux pas, and you’d still be treated as a foreigner. Even among us there’s a strong sense of group unity that by extension excludes anyone not in the group, so you’ll find inclusion and exclusion among school clubs and towns and things like that. You won’t be treated badly, just not as one of us. Things are slowly changing, but for the most part, that’s still very much true.”

“You are Japanese though. Do you get judged harsher for my behavior?”

“Yes, Viktor, but what’s the point of having a hot, foreign boyfriend if you don’t sometimes break the rules?” He blushed hard at realizing his words as Viktor’s mouth gaped open in surprise. “I mean, that’s just what it looks like to them! I don’t mean—”

He smiled and kissed his neck almost chastely in the act itself, but with every ounce of sexuality he possessed dripping from his lips into Yuri’s melting response. “Why indeed.”

Viktor pulled out his phone to snap a quick picture of him still blushing and smiling then of one of them together. He looked up at the flowers. “Did you know that wisteria symbolizes endurance and is used to bless new beginnings such as the start of a business or partnership or a new relationship or marriage?”

“I might have heard something like that before.”

“Do you know what it symbolizes beyond that?”

“No, Viktor.”

“Excellent because I looked it up while you were in the shower, and I have a little story I created for you based on its symbolism.”

“Really?”

“Yes, really. You like to express yourself through symbols, so I thought you might like this.” He brought them to a little bench on the side of the path and sat down. “There’s a wisteria tree here in Japan that’s over twelve hundred years old. It’s weathered typhoons and earthquakes and seen more destruction and life than either of us could ever experience. I’m picturing it at the start of its life, and forgive me if I take a few artistic liberties here, I’m picturing it first sprouting up from the ground, reaching out and grabbing ahold of the support offered to it within easy reach by the one who lovingly planted it, enjoying its first years being tenderly cared for and supported.

“After a few years, it grew its first blooms and rejoiced at how lovely it was and delighted in the people gathered at its base to see its first beauty. They murmured about the gentle sway of the blossoms and how it bowed so humbly even though it had every reason to boast as it was the most stunning in the garden and had the most intoxicating fragrance.

“But as quickly as that beauty came, it was gone again. Its blossoms withered on the ground, and the wisteria wept at the loss. It grew out, searching around itself for anything to help it restore its former glory, but not only did it find nothing, it found that it had grown past its old support and the one who had planted it moved on, leaving the wisteria nowhere to go but stretched out on its belly along the ground.”
“And so, it did. With nothing else it could do, it grew further, racing away from its roots and seeking anything to help it become what it was meant to be. The next season brought the blooms once again, but they didn’t sway in the breeze, arching gracefully toward the ground. Its fragrance was muted as it lay weeping in the deep mud of spring.

“But all its seeking wasn’t a waste. A quivering tendril, vivid green with its life bleeding out into its last hopes caught the eye of a passerby who followed the twisted path it carved to the devastated little plant buried under its own heavy vines.

“The vine cried out, ‘Don’t look at me! I’m hideous!’

“But the man set to work pruning away the heavy, gnarled vines that did nothing but suffocate and drove huge beams deep into the ground for the rest of the vines to grow upon.

“The sad little vine cried out, ‘What are you doing? I’ll never need beams so thick, and I’ll never reach such heights. Why do you mock me?’

“The man just smiled and said, ‘You know not what you are,’ and dug more holes for more beams further out from the base until beams covered the open land, leaving only a little clearing for the man to build a house upon.

“Cautiously, the little vine reached out and hooked its tendrils around the nearest beam and sighed in relief with the stable ground on which to rest. Quickly, it picked the rest of its vines up out of the shifting mud and grasped onto the first ring of beams around it. ‘I look ridiculous,’ it thought, ‘growing on such huge beams when I’m just a spindly, broken thing.’ But it held on tighter as more vines shot forth.

“By the end of the first year, the little vine had filled in the first ring of beams, and a fragile hope had just begun to set in right before the snow started to fall and its growth halted. Its vines trembled in the bare cold as it asked the man, ‘Why? Why did you do this for me?’

“The man simply hung a lantern on one of its sturdy vines and laid a blanket out beneath it so they could watch the first snowfall together and said, ‘I wanted to give you what you need.’

“‘But I don’t need this!’ the wisteria cried. ‘It’s too much! I’ll only waste your efforts.’

“The man just said, ‘Have faith,’ and looked up to watch the drifting flakes.

“Spring came again, and the first buds began growing on the lush little patch of vines. The wisteria was overcome with joy that quickly turned to sorrow when only one stunted bloom came into flower.

“‘What’s wrong, little vine?’ the man asked the weeping plant.

“‘I’m not what I was before. I wanted to at least give you some beauty for all that you did.’

“The man smiled and said, ‘Have faith.’

“‘In what?’ the vine asked.

“‘In us,’ the man replied.

“Another season passed, and the little wisteria was now grabbing onto the second ring of beams, and its vines had grown thick and strong. More buds sprouted on the wisteria than it had ever held before. They flowered into the most elegant of sweeping blooms, and the wisteria wept with joy as it
knelt in gratitude. ‘Thank you, thank you, thank you,’ it cried. ‘Thank you for holding me up, so I could bloom again.’

“The man replied, ‘Thank you for sharing your beauty with me.’

“But as quickly as the blooms came, they fell yet again, and the little vine wept in sorrow. ‘I’m sorry! I didn’t mean to let them fall. Please forgive me. I’ll try to grow more again as soon as I can.’

‘Can you shade me from the sun instead? It’s hot, and my skin is so pale. That’s what I really need right now.’

‘Yes, of course, I’ll use my leaves to protect you.’ The vine stopped weeping so it could hold still and keep back the sun with its full branches and sent all its energy into growing more so the man could have more shade. The little vine was happy again until fall came and its leaves began to drop.

“The man rested his hand upon one of its strong limbs and said, ‘Thank you for turning such a lovely shade of gold for me. You look so beautiful.’

“The vine sobbed. ‘But my leaves are falling. How will I protect you without them?’

‘You’re doing well, little vine,’ the man said. ‘I was going to ask you to drop them to let the sun warm me in the winter. How kind of you to offer to fill this need as well.’

The little vine smiled and said, ‘Yes, of course. You want the sun on your skin in the winter. I’m happy to let it through.’

Winter came yet again, and the vine stood happily bare as the man hung another lantern on its body and sat to watch the snow cover the land.

“The following spring, the vine had so many blossoms, the scent drifted down the road and lured in neighbors to admire the lovely vine. ‘Your flowers make the most delicious wine,’ the man said. ‘May I pluck them?’

“The wisteria was torn. It loved its blossoms the most and loved the praises lavished upon it from the neighbors gathered below them, but they would fall anyway, and the vine felt so much joy at being useful to the man that cared for it so lovingly, so it agreed.

“The man waited until the first touch of wilt laid upon the flowers before plucking them. He sat below the vines, out of the way of the sun, as he carefully stripped the petals from the green stems.

‘Why are you pulling them apart?’ the vine asked.

‘Because you’re poisonous, little vine. The stems and seeds will kill me.’

“The wisteria was horrified. ‘I’m poisonous?! Why would you help me live?! Why would you put your house next to me?! Why would you make me into wine?!’

‘Because you needed me. Because I enjoy you.’

“The man came out a few days later carrying a jug of sparkling pink wine and sat at the base where the thickest vines twisted into a tight spiral. ‘Thank you for the wine.’ He smiled and brought the cup to his lips.

‘No! Please don’t drink it! What if it kills you?!”

‘It won’t. Your flowers are safe and delicious. I was careful to only use them.’
‘What if you made a mistake?! Please don’t risk it!’ The vine wailed and quivered in the breeze, but it was powerless to stop him.

“The man took a deep drink and smiled. ‘Delicious. Thank you, little vine.’ He gathered up his extra jugs and gave them away to his neighbors who returned to also thank the wisteria for its wine and offer the man seeds and roots to plant. The man thanked them and set about digging a garden around the last ring of beams that the vine was rapidly gaining on.

‘No! Don’t plant it there! What if I contaminate your food?’ the vine cried.

‘You won’t. You’ll make them grow stronger. Your roots feed the soil.’

“In the fall, the man harvested a plentiful crop, and he tucked away as much as he could use and gave away the rest.

“The winter lantern hung on its vine once again, and the wisteria mused over what it had experienced since the man heard its cries. It had grown so big and strong, those beams that once mocked him with their height and span now felt just right. It covered nearly everything the man owned. ‘Don’t you want to prune me back?’ the wisteria asked. I’m getting so big. All you have is me and this little house and a tiny edge of a garden. Don’t you want more than just me?’

‘What for?’ the man asked.

‘I don’t know. To have something else. Some trees you don’t have to support. Flowers that bloom all summer.’

‘I’ve lived among trees that don’t need me. They make me feel lonely and useless. And why would I trade flowers that bloom all year as the most joyful wine for tasteless flowers that only bloom for a summer? Don’t despair that you aren’t like them. I rejoiced when I found you and saw that you’re not a tree that will only bear my touch as a burden but a vine that needs it to thrive.’

“Years went by, and together, the little wisteria and the man grew rich with life. The wisteria was heavy with blossoms every spring, each one kneeling with respect and gratitude toward the man who held them from the ground to be admired.

“It grew wild with joy over all the ways it could serve the needs of the man. It never minded when he tucked an errant vine back into its support or snipped away the weak ones to make room for new. The man’s children played and grew strong in the wisteria’s thick vines and learned to be careful not to put their weight on the branches that were not yet ready to carry them. The wisteria whispered to them when they fell to calm their tears, ‘Have faith.’

“After a long life spent beloved for the generosity the little vine funded, the man came out on the first snowfall and hung a lantern on the thickest vine. He spread his blanket out with weak and trembling hands. His lungs coughed with his efforts. Resting back against the twined trunk, he closed his eyes. ‘Thank you, little vine, for taking care of me all these years.’

‘What do you mean? It’s you who takes care of me.’

“The man shook his head. ‘No. I just gave you a little support so you could be what you are. You’re the one who gave me beauty and shelter and company and warmth and nourishment and joy. My time is up while yours will endure. That’s why I put my life in you. I wanted to feel something without an end. I wanted to taste the eternity of a promise.’

‘Your time is up? What do you mean? How will I endure if you’re not there to care for me?’
“The man smiled. ‘You can endure a heartbreak. You have strength and the wisdom to always keep growing. The very first thing I saw you do was endure a heartbreak and the harshest of conditions. And now that you know what you are and what you need, I know you can do just one more thing for me. Please, will you do it, little vine?’

‘I’ll do anything for you. What can I do now?’

‘Live.’

“The man gave his last breath to his beloved little vine.

“The little wisteria wept all winter, and in the spring, its blossoms were said to be the loveliest ever. They bowed low in respect for the life of the man that had rescued it from a life spent crawling through the mud and now lay buried below its sheltering vines.

“And so, it has stood for twelve hundred years, living through all the endless heartbreaks and harshness this world has to offer, and still it endures as an eternal promise."

Yuri sucked in a breath to hold the tears from his cheeks. “You’re not dying, are you?”

He shook his head. “I’m dying at the same rate as everyone else. Did you like my story?”

“I loved it. It’s so beautiful. I can’t believe you just came up with that.”

“Ah, just a few facts and accepted symbols I worked together on the drive over here. I’m glad you liked it. I want to get a picture of us here. Ask someone if they wouldn’t mind taking one for us.”

“Yes, Viktor.” He searched for the right person to ask, passing over the elderly who likely wouldn’t be comfortable using the camera on the phone and landed on a woman in her twenties or so who didn’t seem to be in any big rush. “Please, can I trouble you for a moment to take a photo of me and my…” he glanced at Viktor, unsure of what to say out of habit even though Viktor would have no way to help him, not knowing what he’d said.

She smiled. “Ah, I see how it is. Yes, of course. It’s no trouble at all.” She held out her hands.

Viktor took her cue to hand over his phone with a smile. “Arigatou gozaimasu.”

“Oh! So good Japanese!” the woman replied in English.

Viktor laughed. “I’m sure it was terrible. I only looked up the most basic of the basic phrases since I’m so lucky to have a translator available to me whenever I need him. Would you mind taking a few shots?”

“No, no, not at all.”

Viktor led him to a spot a few feet away from the bench and stood facing him, his finger slipped under Yuri’s chin as he held his hand. They gave each other quiet smiles as they waited for the woman to finish.

“Oh, all done!” She handed the camera back with a smile. “Good luck,” she said in Japanese, giving Yuri a coy smile. “You two are very cute together.”

“Thank—thank you.” The tops of his ears burned.

“What did she say?” Viktor tucked his phone back into his pocket.
“Um… that we’re cute… together.”

“Ah,” he took Yuri’s arm and resumed their path under the kneeling blossoms. “Sweet girl. Was my pronunciation okay, or was she just flattering me?”

“The Japanese are very polite.” Yuri bit back a smile as Viktor scoffed and poked his side.

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The guests at the onsen were all gone, and his mom was busy in the kitchen as the rest of them sat out around the table drinking beer.

A coil of cigarette smoke held tight around Mari as she studied Yuri and Viktor with a slight draw to her lips, taking note of each firm tug Yuri made to his shirt sleeves. “Little warm for long sleeves today.”

“Ah, uh…” he looked to Viktor to fill in the lie.

“Yuri was just feeling a little cold this morning.” Viktor’s smile flashed distractingly enough for most normal people, but his sister wasn’t any more normal than he was.

She focused harder on Yuri. “Are you sick?”

“No. I’m fine, Neechan.”

She gave a slight nod, her eyes narrowing as she glanced at Viktor.

The front door opened and someone walked in, slamming it shut behind them.

“Pour me a big one, Toshiya-san! It’s time to celebrate!”

Oh no. Yuri ducked into his shirt collar. Of course, Minako would be invited. She’d be harder than the rest of them to keep in the dark.

“Yuuuriiii-chan,” Minako sang out in that menacingly sweet tone as she danced into the room with a cardboard box tucked under her arm. “Welcome home!”

Viktor’s expression wrinkled as he watched Yuri, trying to figure out his reaction before he turned back and jerked back at the sight. “Minako.”

She stopped dead. “Viktor? What are you doing here? Wait… You’re not Yuri’s new boss Hiroko told me about, are you?”

“That’d be me.”

“Oh my god. Son of a bitch. Yuri-chan!” She put her hand on her cocked hip. “Why did you not tell me you were at Viktor’s stable now?”

“Um… I didn’t think to mention it?”

“Oh, you little… I swear you are something else. When did you start there?” She plopped down on Yuri’s other side and dropped the box between them as she took a gulp of the beer his dad slid over to her.

“Um…” Shit. A lie was needed, but Viktor wouldn’t know which one to give. “Not too long ago.” Vague answers weren’t lies, right? He asked Viktor with a glance, and he seemed to agree.
“Well, damn. I bet you’re floating on cloud nine right now.”

“Yuri,” Viktor smiled sweetly, “how is it that my biggest competition just walked into your house as if she lives here?”

“Um… because she basically does? Minako-sensei and my mom have been friends their whole lives. And she was kinda my trainer?”

“Kinda?” Minako’s mug slammed onto the table. “Kinda your trainer? I taught you practically everything you know, and I get a kinda?”

“I didn’t mean it like that.”

“Punk.” She shook her head and started in on her beer again. She reached over to poke his stomach. “What is that gut you’ve got hiding under there?”

“Hey! Don’t be rude to my employee.” Viktor’s eyes flashed dangerously though he tried to temper his bite for politeness.

“You’ve let him get that out of shape? I would have expected you to have higher—”

“Employee?” Mari cocked her head. “I would think boyfriend would be higher than that title.”

“Boyfriend?!” Minako screeched. “You’re dating the competition? I’m so betrayed. Though, I should have expected you to sell me out for that.” She waved her hand in Viktor’s direction.

“Please, Minako-sensei. Just don’t say anything? Please?” Yuri begged her with the most potent look he could give her.

“I do find boyfriend to be the preferred title for him,” Viktor smiled at Mari. “I just happened to use employee since I was using my authority over him to protect him just then.”

“Protect him? From me?” Minako laughed. “That’s rich. I should be protecting him from you. Seems you’ve finally taken my warnings about him to heart. What’s your plan? To date him to keep him from kicking your ass? I haven’t heard anything about any wins from him in a long time.”

“Wait.” Viktor put his hand up. “You don’t mean to tell me that he is the prodigy you were always telling me about?”

“Yeah, that’s my Yuri-chan. As soon as he finds the right horse for him, he’s going to kick both of our asses.”

“Oh my god.” Viktor’s mouth hung open as he stared at Yuri. “She was just telling me about you a couple weeks ago at Badminton. How did I not know that was you? She’s told me about you for years.”

“Wait, when did you move to Viktor’s stable? How does he not know that I trained you? Wouldn’t you ask where he trained when you hired him?”

“It wasn’t something I typically ask about for—”

Yuri made a small squeak, trying to find the right words to convey a warning but had nothing and hoped his pathetic sound was enough.

Viktor studied him carefully. “… for riding?” He leaned in to whisper in his ear. “They don’t know you stopped riding?”
“That would have required an explanation for why.”

“I see. What do they know?”

“Lots of lies. They know I left the trainer I was working under a year ago to work at a stable on the East Coast. I wasn’t specific. They still think I compete. I make up placements.”

“But never a win?”

“No, Viktor.”

Mari watched them as they returned to the wider conversation with her suspicion burning as sharp as the pointed end of her cigarette.

“You don’t ask where your riders trained when you hire them?” Minako arched an eyebrow.

“Well, he’s the first one I’ve ever hired to ride, so I don’t have a standard for that yet. You’re right though. I should add that question in if I ever hire another rider.”

“What’d you even hire him for? So he can sit around collecting fifth and sixth on some shit horse you don’t want?”

“Avos is one of the finest prospects I’ve come across.”

“Then why aren’t you riding him? Isn’t Toska about ready to retire?”

“We didn’t click. I hoped Yuri would be able to work with him.”

“Hmph.” She sat back and torqued her mouth to the side. “Well, at least you’ve got him on the right horse. Why aren’t they doing better than bottom rung if the horse is as good as you say? He can grab a blue on a horse that’s ready for the glue factory after just a few months. I haven’t heard about any wins from him in what? Over a year at least. Has he been working with your horse that whole time?”

Viktor glanced over at Yuri who gave him the tiniest nod he could manage as he ducked into his beer. “Yes. Avos is particularly moody.”

She snorted. “Right. Not buying it. ‘Moody’ wouldn’t even bat his eye. He doesn’t even start having fun until they reach ‘Satan’s personal mount who has a vendetta against everything on two legs.’ “

“We’re trying out a new training technique. It takes time.”

“Oh yeah? What would that be?”

“I’m not giving away my secrets to my biggest competition. Nice try.”

“Fine.” She huffed and pushed her empty mug over to his dad for a refill. “You going to Luhmühlen?”

“Yeah, are you?”

“No. I’m not doing any other than Badminton. I want to concentrate my efforts on Rio. I’ve gotta steal that reigning Olympic champion title from you.”

“Not happening, sorry. I’ve promised Toska one last Olympic gold.”

“Are you worried about Michelet designing the course?”
“Not for me. Maybe a little worried for you.” He grinned as he sighed just a little that they seemed to have gotten past Yuri’s shady year.

“Psh, I claimed my Grand Slam title on one of his courses. A title you have yet to win since you only know how to ride one horse.” A gloating laugh spilled into her beer. “As evidenced by the fact you have to hire my student to ride your next prospect for you.”

“He’s got Bytiye to focus on.” Yuri squared his shoulders as his jaw tightened. Why did he always get so defensive of him? He can defend himself just fine. “He’s the fastest horse I’ve ever seen, and they’re doing amazing together.”

Viktor smiled and squeezed his hand. “Thank you, Yuri. I’m likely never going to win the Grand Slam unless they change the scheduling. I like focusing on one horse at a time. So rude of them to make it so you have to have two mounts going to win.”

“I think they did it on purpose to weed out riders who only know how to ride one horse.” She gave him a playful sneer. “You have to be able to take multiple horses to the top. Not just hold on as one push-button horse carries you around.”

“He trained Toska himself when he was just a teenager. That horse is only so good because only Viktor has ever touched him.” Yuri leaned in to glare at her. “He could take a hundred horses to the top if he started them all like he did Toska.”

Minako sighed. “Nothing’s changed I see. I guess that’s a good thing.”

“Are you suggesting I should find a couple of babies and train them?” Viktor asked.

“Well, why not?” Yuri asked. “You did that with Toska and look how well it worked. I don’t understand why you wouldn’t do that again.”

“Well, I didn’t really accept that Toska was almost done until recently. I thought I could just skip the early years and start with one who’s ready for real training. Do you think that’s the wrong way to go about it?”

“No, Viktor. Not wrong. You’re doing great on Bytiye, and I’m sure he’ll go to the top, but I think you don’t have that connection with him that you do with Toska and maybe training them right from the start is what you need to build that.”

“You might be right about that. Maybe we’ll make a quick stop in Europe on the way home to see what this year’s foals are looking like.”

“Oh god.” Minako rolled her eyes and cast a raised eyebrow to Mari who replied in kind. “ ‘Make a quick stop in Europe.’ I can’t believe I actually heard a phrase like that with my own two ears. I feel like I owe a cover charge just to listen.”

“Oh, come off it. How else would I say that? You’ve probably been to Europe more times than I have.”

“Yeah, well—”

His mom came out carrying a large tray of bowls. “Minako-senpai, are you causing trouble with our guest?”

“ ‘Course not, Hirochan. Just the usual shit talk with Viktor. Why didn’t you tell me it was Viktor he was working for?’”
“I thought I say Viktor.”

“Well, yeah, but you didn’t say it was that Viktor.”

“That Viktor?”

“Viktor Nikiforov?”

“Oh! Nikiforov. I misheard on the phone. That Viktor. It’s okay. He bring Yuri-chan home. He very welcome guest.” She smiled at him sweetly as she put a large bowl of katsudon down in front of him. “Please enjoy.”

“Thank you. This looks delicious.” His hand went to Yuri’s thigh that was tucked under the table and gripped the welts and bruises as he glanced the sickness creeping onto his face. “Yes, Yuri?”

“Yes, Viktor.” His voice squeaked and cracked, but Viktor still rewarded him with his programmed response to those words and the fresh pain coming in through his marks. He stared at the bowl in front of him, the static in his mind screaming. “My mom makes the best katsudon.” His voice managed nothing more than a broken whisper.

Viktor’s hand clamped harder, trying to make his signal louder than the static. It wasn’t working. His whole body trembled as sickness scorched his skin.

“I bet she does. You said this is your favorite, yes?”

“Yes, Viktor.” He couldn’t hear his own voice.

“Have you won anything recently, Yuri-chan?” Minako asked.

He flinched.

“That’s what I thought.”

Viktor broke his focus from Yuri to examine her with confusion. “What’s that mean?”

“Oh, just that he gains weight easily so the deal was that he can only have katsudon after a win.”

The weight of a sudden understanding settled on Viktor’s shoulders as he searched Yuri’s face with pain in his eyes.

“He clearly wasn’t sticking to that without me around.” Minako poked his stomach.

“Shut up and keep your hands off him.” He froze everyone at the table with his unmasked anger slamming into them. “Why would you do that? Why would you make that connection for him? Didn’t you consider at all what—” He stared into Yuri’s wide eyes for a second before shaking his head to regain his control. “I’m sorry. I’m sorry for the outburst. Please forgive me, Hiroko. You made a lovely meal, and I’m ruining it.”

“It okay. Please don’t worry about it. Let’s eat.”

“That sounds like a good idea, yes?” He looked back to Yuri.

“Yes, Viktor.” The words caught in his throat. He looked over to see Viktor patiently waiting for him. He wasn’t going to eat unless he did. He tried to pick up his chopsticks, but his hand was shaking too hard.
“Is your hand still hurting, zolotse? I can feed you if it hurts too much.”

“Oh, what happened?” His mom’s eyebrows wrinkled with concern.

“Nothing serious. He just got the rope around his hand when Avos was acting up. I got him checked out. He’s fine. It still just hurts a bit yes, Yuri?”

“Yes, Viktor.”

“Come here.” He loaded up Yuri’s chopsticks with a bite of katsudon and tugged him over with his hand sinking deeper into his thigh. “Let me help you.”

“I can do it.”

“You’re clearly hurting, zolotse. Let me help you. I insist.”

He sucked in a quick breath to gain control of the tears that wanted to spill. “Yes, Viktor.”

“You have to open your mouth, zolotse.” He gave him a gentle smile as his hand crushed more calming pain into him.

He couldn’t open his mouth, but he didn’t have a choice. He had to find some way to please him regardless of his body’s thoughts on the matter. It was the same as the party. Just be soft and let him do what he wants. Unlocking his jaw just enough, Viktor slipped in a bite of food.

“So good, yes, Yuri?”

He chewed and swallowed as quickly as he could to get it down before his brain could fully register it. “Yes, Viktor. You try some too?”

He smiled and nodded and took a bite from his own bowl. “Vkusno! So tasty. It’s delicious, Hiroko. Thank you.”

She beamed at his praise. “Thank you. I’m glad you like.”

“Yuri’s right. This must be the best food in all of Japan.” He handed Yuri his mug. “Drink, Yuri. You’ve done so well for me. It’s time to relax and celebrate.” He picked up his own and drank deeply to encourage him.

“Oh? Did he win something after all?” Minako refocused on them after trading many glances with Mari.

“He doesn’t need to win to please me. He’s doing just as I’ve asked of him and is doing an excellent job of getting Avos where he needs to be. That horse loves him. He hates everyone including me, but he loves Yuri.” He held up another bite for him to take.

“Well, yeah. He has a knack for those horses. He is part horse, so he gets them in a way normal people don’t.”

Viktor huffed a small laugh. “You’re not wrong there.”

“Speaking of, I’ve got a horse I could use you on, Yuri-chan.”

“Sorry, I can’t allow that.” Viktor smiled regretfully.

“What?”
“I can’t risk him getting hurt here.”

“Oh, he’s not going to get hurt. He can handle much worse than this one.”

“Sorry, that’s not a risk I can allow him to take. Haven’t you ever read Seabiscuit? Red Pollard got injured doing just this.”

“Oh my god. You’re crazy. He’s not going to get hurt. Don’t you know what skills he has in the job you hired him for?”

“I know what he’s capable of. I’m just not going to let him take an unnecessary risk that will ultimately have no benefit. He won’t be here long enough to do anything with your horse.”

“I don’t need him to train him. Just figure out his glitches for me. He can do that in a few rides at most.”

“Are you saying you need your old student to teach you how to ride your horse?”

“No, I don’t need him to. He’s just faster at it than I am, and I’m getting too old for too many rough rides. If he can save me some, my ego’s not going to stop me from asking him to.”

“I really am sorry, Minako. I’m not trying to be difficult here. I just need him in top condition to keep to the schedule I have at home.”

“Isn’t this something for Yuri-chan to decide?” Mari asked. “He’s on vacation right now, isn’t he? And it’s not like you own him.”

“It’s fine, Neechan. He’s not wrong. If this could affect my performance for him, it’s in his rights to say no.”

“Uh huh.”

“It’s fine. I’m on vacation, right? Do I have to ride?”

She settled back a bit. “Guess not.”

“Alright, maybe let’s stop the horse talk?” His dad handed out a fresh round of beer. “Our Yuri-chan home. Viktor right. Time to celebrate.”

“Don’t celebrate too hard, dear.” His mom smiled affectionately. “We do have work tomorrow. I need your belly unpainted.”

“There’s a possibility of it being painted?” Viktor’s eyebrows lifted in amusement as he quickly tamped down his defensive bristles.

“Oh god.” Mari groaned. “He’s the worst. He gets drunk and embarrasses all of Hasetsu for having him as a member.”

“Oh, hush,” his mom chided while smiling still at his dad. “He just very playful and funny.”

“Thank you, dearest. At least someone appreciate my sense of humor.” His dad returned her smile.

Viktor’s attention swapped between feeding Yuri and himself and watching his parent’s interactions with a strange amount of interest. Yuri knew Viktor would want him to enjoy the katsudon, but it was too much. He had to swallow it while still half-chewed just to keep from throwing up. Viktor kept moving his hand to different spots on his thigh as soon as one spot grew numb to the pain.
“What’s in the box, Minako-chan?” His dad asked.

“Oh, I don’t know actually. This is for Yuri-chan. It came in the mail for him. Open it up.”

“For me?” He started pulling off the packing tape. “Why would they send it to you?”

“When you left Michigan you left some stuff behind. Celestino didn’t have your new address to send it to you. Remember I told you I had it?”

He froze with the box half-opened; his eyes widened in horror. “I told you to throw it away.”

“Why? That’s so wasteful. If you don’t want whatever it is, I’m sure someone else might. Celestino went to the expense of shipping it, so he must have thought it had some value.”

“I’m certain no one else wants it.” He tried to stick the tape back down, but it wouldn’t hold anymore. He wrestled with it to make it stick anyway, pressing it against the box with all of his will.

“Oh, ew. Is it something dirty?”

“No!”

“Well, then open it up. Maybe you’re wrong.”

Viktor, help. He looked over at him with pleading eyes.

“Maybe it’s something personal. Let’s just eat. He can open it later if he wants to.”

He sighed, giving him a smile and brushing his thigh under the table to convey his gratitude. Viktor was always so good to him. Always knowing when to push and when to let him rest.

The crinkling of tape popping open followed by the slow drag of opening cardboard flaps tightened his hand until his fingers gouged dents into Viktor’s thigh. Viktor looked at him with his brow wrinkled then over his shoulder to the box. He strained a little to see better then looked back at him, his brow wrinkled further with his lifted eyebrows and his mouth hanging open.

“Yuri?”

Yuri looked back to the box that had popped open to reveal a picture of Viktor on Toska on the cover of a scrapbook.

“Why do you have a picture of me?” He reached over him to drag the box closer. “Yuri? What is this?”

Groaning, he clinched his eyes. “Go ahead.”

Viktor dragged the box around behind him, pulled out the scrapbook, and started flipping through it. “Oh my god. Yuri…” He flipped through page after page of pictures of him at shows. He reached the end and picked up the next book which held magazine covers and articles. Rolls of the few posters he could find of him were unveiled along with the posters he had made himself from the better photos he had taken. Viktor laid them carefully on the table then pulled out the bubble-wrapped Breyer horses, both the actual models of Toska and the other gray warmbloods that just happened to look like him and the little Viktor doll that went with them. He laid them all out in front of him and stared with his mouth hanging open. “Oh my god. You were—”

“A stalker.”
“—my fan.” He looked over at him. “Stalker?”

“Well, I mean, I didn’t show up at your house or anything creepy like that. I mean, at least not intentionally! I didn’t even know that was your ad! Just at shows when you were in public, I’d take pictures since there wasn’t any official merchandise in the beginning, and it was so hard to find it even once you were at the top, and I really looked up to you and…”

“I know you didn’t show up for a job with me intentionally. I wrote it that way on purpose. Walk me through the rest though.”

“Um, well, I went with Minako-senpai to an event when I was sixteen. Bromont, in two thousand nine. I don’t know if you’d remember that—”

“Of course, I remember that. It was Toska’s first win at an international event.”

“Well, I saw you ride, and you were just… so beautiful to watch. You were courageous and bold but so elegant and good to your horse at the same time. I wanted to reach you. To… ride with you.” He had to stop talking.

Viktor grabbed his hand and held it tight. “So, you followed my career since then?”

“Yes, Viktor.”

“Wow. I don’t know what to say. Did we ever meet before your interview?”

“No, Viktor. Not really. I saw you from a distance, and Minako-senpai offered to introduce me a few times but I…”

“He said he wanted to meet you as his competitor, right, Yuri-chan?” Minako said. “What was it you said once? You wanted to beat him then have katsudon with him. Your victory and his consolation prize. It looks like you got pretty close to that. I mean, at least you’re working for him and having katsudon with him.”

“Oh, Yuri.” Viktor stared at the bowls in front of them with pain crippling his face.

“I’m so sorry. I didn’t know how to tell you.”

Minako pored over one of the books. “Wow, Yuri-chan. Even I didn’t know how dedicated to him you are.”

“Yeah, I’m gonna need to see this.” Mari reached for one of the books and flipped through it. “Wow. So, my brother is officially the biggest dork ever. Thank Tousan for those genes. Geez, Yuri-chan. You’ve been dating the guy for a year, and he didn’t know your obsession with him ran this deep or this long?”

“We haven’t been dating for a year.”

“Well, whatever. You didn’t even mention you were his fan?”

“He did tell me he read articles about me, but that would be true of just about anyone who reads horse magazines.” Viktor shook his head to bring himself back to normal again but didn’t quite find it. “I guess this explains the look on your face when you were looking at my old pictures. It’s okay, Yuri. You don’t have to be embarrassed. It’s sweet, and I’m honored that you looked up to me so much. I just wish I’d known.”
“I’m sorry, Viktor.”

He shook his head. “It’s not necessary. It’s only natural that I don’t know everything right at the start.” He picked up another bite of food. “Come on, open your mouth for me.”

“I’m getting full.”

“No, you still have some left. Your mom made this just for you to welcome you home. You don’t want her to think you don’t appreciate it, do you?”

He shut his eyes. “Of course not.” He opened his mouth and let Viktor do as he wished. “Dearest, will you feed me like that when I old and weak?” His dad asked, smiling at his mom.

“Only if you keep brush my hair when I sick.”

He smiled and dropped his chin. “Hai.”

“Oh, that’s so sweet.” Viktor sighed. “How long have you been married?”

“Thirty-one year,” his mom replied.

“Wow. Amazing. You don’t look nearly old enough to have been married so long or have grown children already.”

She blushed and hid her face away. “Stop. You too nice.”

“I’m never too nice. I’m honest to a fault usually.” Viktor leaned in to whisper in Yuri’s ear while the rest were distracted with a new turn of the conversation. “You’re doing so well, Yuri. Keep going. Just a few more bites.”

He leaned forward to whisper back. “I’m sorry. I’m making you play the bad guy and lie for me.”

His whisper turned into a light growl. “You’re making me do what now? I think you’re confused about what kind of power you have here. You make me do nothing. I only ever do and say what I want to do and say.” He shoved another bite of food into Yuri’s mouth.

He had to sit with Viktor’s words until he could speak again, feeling how they eased his tension the same as before the revelation of his obsession. Viktor really didn’t seem bothered by it. “I’m sorry. You’re right. I’m overstepping.”

“Good, Yuri. I want you to enjoy your last few bites fully.”

“I can’t.”

“Two. That was an order. You can always follow my orders.”

“I’m sorry. I meant to say I have information for you regarding your order. May I share it?”

“Yes.”

“I’m going to be sick if I do. I’m already having to hold it back.”

“My order still stands. If you get sick, that’s my fault, and I’ll take responsibility. Go ahead.” He held up another bite for him to take.
He chewed it fully, but it tasted like sand in his mouth with nausea taking over the flavor.

“How is it?”

He gave a little shake of his head. “Can’t taste it.”

“You’re doing so well, zolotse. You’re doing exactly as I ordered. Submit to where I have you.” He held up another bite.

“Yes, Viktor.” He got a rush of the slightly sweet and savory flavor when his body responded by relaxing automatically to those words. Tears threatened his eyes.

Viktor smiled and left a discrete little kiss on his neck as he whispered. “So good, Yuri. I’m proud of you. Keep going. Last bite. You can do it.” He held up the last bit of his mom’s katsudon. “Don’t you dare tell your mother, but yours is better.”

“What?”

Viktor shoved the food into his open mouth. “Yes, I mean it. I like yours better. Hers is wonderful, but yours is my favorite. Your sauce is a little richer, and I like how you leave the pork out of the eggs when cooking them and just put it on top so it stays crispy.”

He smiled as Viktor’s surprise praise startled him and halted the static, allowing him to fully taste his mom’s katsudon as he judged it against his own. It was better than he remembered. Tears overwhelmed him, and it took everything he had not to let them go.

Viktor put the chopsticks down with his smile tender on his face. “I forgot where the bathroom is. Can you show me?”

He dipped his chin with a smile through his battle with his tears and stood up. “Yes, Viktor.”

Viktor followed him until they got to the hall where he took over and led him to their temporary bedroom and pulled him in. Sliding the paper door shut, he shoved him up against the solid wall and kissed him all over as Yuri’s tears broke free. He rested his head on Viktor’s shoulder and held him tight.

“It was a mistake.”

Viktor paused his kisses just long enough to speak. “What was?” His mouth went right back to his neck.

“The pork. I didn’t realize that’s what I was supposed to do and by the time I did, you were starting to like it, so I didn’t want to change it drastically.”

“Well, then you made the right choice because it yours is the best in the world.”

He gave a bitter laugh. “You’re too sweet.”

“Your mom’s is the best in Japan, yes?”

“Yes, Viktor.”

“And yours is better. So, it’s the best in the world.”

“My mom’s is so much better.”
“One. Don’t argue with me about my opinion. Maybe to you, your mom’s is the best, but to me, yours is. You made yours to please me. It has all the emotional warmth for me as your mom’s does for you.”

“Really?”

“Always really. You did so well for me. Both making your own katsudon and eating your mom’s even though it was so hard for you.

“I’m so unbelievably pissed at Minako. How dare she take something so connected to your mom’s love and turn something unconditional into something you have to win to deserve. She was wrong, Yuri. It was a cruel thing to do at all and with just how disastrous that connection turned out to be… God, I was so fucking pissed.”

“She didn’t mean to. She didn’t think about it like that.”

“I know she didn’t. People aren’t careful enough with each other. She didn’t consider for a second the possible consequences of doing that to you. How long ago did she do that?”

“I don’t know. Maybe when I was an early teenager or so.”

“Did you ever eat katsudon outside of winning after that?”

“Yes, Viktor. Sometimes. My mom tried to stick to her deal, but she’d sometimes make it for dinner, or if I was upset about something, she’d make it for me. Or if I just really wanted it, I could ask her to make it, and she would.”

“Did you ever feel guilty about eating it during those times?”

“Yes, Viktor. Not every time, but sometimes.”

“Which conditions would make you feel the guiltiest?”

“Maybe… when I asked her for it.”

He pulled back to watch him with sadness drooping his eyes. “Oh, Yuri. This explains so much. Why didn’t you tell me katsudon had this connection for you?”

“I didn’t really think about it. It’s been five years since I’ve been home, and a lot has happened since then.”

“You don’t have to win to enjoy love and comfort. You don’t have to win to ask for what you need. You don’t have to meet someone else’s minimum physical standard to feed yourself. You deserve these things because you’re human and these are things humans need to live.”

He flinched with Viktor’s words fitting strangely inside his mind.

Viktor winced in response. “You’re killing me, zolotse. Once a day at a bare minimum, I want you to ask me for something you need. It doesn’t have to be big. It can be as simple as a hug. But ask me and enjoy it when I give it to you.”

“Can I get a hug?”

“I am hugging you.”

“Tighter, please?”
He laughed and pulled him in as tight as he could. “Of course, zolotse.”

“Does this count?”

“Yes.”

He sighed and relaxed into his arms as his body began to settle. “Thank you.”

He held him another few minutes until his body returned to normal even if the static was a bit kicked up. He let him go with a sigh. “We should probably go back.”

Viktor gripped his chin to lift his face. “Let me look at you.” His thumb pressed over Yuri’s lips as he kissed his forehead. “Go rinse your face first.”

“Yes, Viktor.” His chest softened a bit more with the rush of Viktor’s programmed praise.

He rinsed his face, and they returned to the table where refilled mugs were waiting for them along with bowls of anmitsu. He sighed. Of course, his mom would make dessert tonight. He gave Viktor a weary look as they sat down.

“Oh, this looks delicious and so pretty!” Viktor beamed his best smile at his mom. “What’s in it?”

“Um, banana, kiwi, strawberries, but you can see those. Green tea ice cream. I not sure how to say rest in English. Yuri-chan?”

He smiled. “I’m not sure what Japanese food is in English either. I’ve never had to learn. Um, this is red bean paste.” He pointed to the red paste centered over the clear cubes. “And um, something like jello under it. The white round things are like chewy dumplings. They’re made from rice flour, right, Kaachan?”

“Yes.”

“And sweet syrup, like brown sugar syrup kinda. Sorry, I’m not very good at translating this. It’s good though.”

“I’m sure it is. Open up, zolotse.”

He groaned but complied. He could have fed himself this without too much of a problem, but his hand was apparently too injured a few minutes ago, so they had to keep up the lie.

Viktor took a bite of his own. “Wow! So good! There’s so many flavors and textures, but it’s so well-balanced and refreshing. Thank you, Hiroko, for this delicious meal.”

She blushed as she beamed. “I’m glad you like.”

“I’m surprised Yuri-chan’s letting you feed him.” Mari rested her chin on her hand propped on the table, poking absentmindedly at her own bowl. “He had a broken arm once, and he refused to let us help him. He used his left hand instead and made a mess like a baby.”

“Oh, I’m hating it, but Viktor enjoys it when I let him take care of me, so I try not to fight too much.” Hey, something truthful he could share. Imagine that.

“And I appreciate your efforts so much.” Viktor smiled and had to stop himself from the habitual kiss he wanted to give.

After the dinner from hell that didn’t want to end finally ended, they hung out in the living room.
chatting about thankfully insignificant topics until Minako left and his family all went to sleep.

They staggered out to the onsen, slightly past tipsy from all of the beer and stripped and washed. Viktor found the tiny stool more than awkward and uncomfortable and wondered why they didn’t just have shower stalls but accepted tradition as justifiable enough and tried to adapt. For as domineering as he was in his own space, he was surprisingly good at being gracious in others’.

They walked out to the moonlit pool of water, billows of steam rising from the dark surface glowing in the soft light of the yellow lanterns. They broke the stillness of the water then Viktor broke the silence in the air with a deep hiss he used to cover a cry of pain.

“Holy shit that’s hot. Fuck. How do people go in this?”

Yuri, already halfway in, looked back with a giggle. “You get used to it. Go slowly.” He sank blissfully into the deep water and sighed. “So good. I missed this so much. Thank you, Viktor, for bringing me home. I’m sorry I didn’t say it earlier.”

The corner of his mouth ticked down. “Of course, you wouldn’t say it earlier. That’s when you were faced with love and comfort. But give you the pain you were raised in, and it comes out without a problem.” He dipped his toe in again. “Geez, no wonder you’re a masochist if you were raised to see this as pleasure. This isn’t a hot tub. This is freaking boiling water.”

He laughed. “Yeah, it’s a little hotter than most people outside of Japan are used to. I think that’s another reason we were able to stay open when others closed. We kept it suited to the locals and made the foreigners adapt. A lot of the rest of the onsen lowered the temperature to make it more comfortable for the tourists. When they stopped coming, we still had the locals at least. Don’t worry. I’ve never seen a foreigner not be able to adapt eventually.”

“Alright, I’ll learn to be a bit of a masochist to enjoy this with you.” He stuck his foot in and held it there, forcing his body to adapt. Bit by bit, he won his battle and made his way to Yuri then sank next to him with a sigh. “Okay, I get it. I finally get what a masochist really goes through when I push them. I’ve tried enduring pain before just to understand that, but it was never anything but pain for me. I’d maybe get a little endorphin rush but not enough to counter all the pain. This was pain that eventually rewarded with pleasure if I just endured it enough. Yes? Am I right on this?”

“Yes, Viktor. It does feel like a mild version of what you do to me.”

“Mild?! Holy shit. I mean… I know I push you, but damn. I’m in awe of your strength yet again.” He put his arms around him and pulled him into his lap.

“Most of it turns to pleasure almost instantly. The electricity took some endurance, but it also gave me the biggest release.”

“Yeah, there was a big emotional component to that too.” He slowly covered him with his sensual kisses as they relaxed. A smile spread on his lips. “You don’t collect anything, huh?”

“Well, it was true. I’d left them behind. I thought Celestino would just throw them out or something. But how would I say to a complete stranger who’s also my boss, ‘Yeah, I collect you’?”

He laughed and hugged him tighter. “Okay, fair enough. It really is sweet though. You put so much effort into that. I’m honestly touched that I meant so much to you even before I knew you. I didn’t think I mattered that much to anyone and to find out it’s my sweet Yuri that I mattered to… It’s really overwhelming.”

“What do you mean you don’t matter to anyone? You’re Viktor Nikiforov. You’re the best eventer
the sport has ever seen, and on top of that, you’re an inspiration to so many riders that kindness and
gentleness really can come out on top. You matter so much to the entire world, and that’s not even
going into how you treat everyone who works for you which is I’m guessing not an insignificant
number of people or how you teach people to be safe and enforce consent while playing potentially
dangerous games. You even said that through you, several people have found lifelong happiness.
How could you not matter to them?”

He sucked in a deep breath, taking courage from Viktor’s words saying he wanted him to push the
boundaries. “And what about your parents? You clearly mattered to them in that photo, and you said
you grew up loved and the way you speak, they’re still alive, right?”

“Yes.”

“Are you saying you don’t think you matter to them now?”

He winced. “I’m not so sure that I do.”

“What? Viktor… what happened?”

(35) He watched him for several moments, deciding. He traced the fading initials on Yuri’s chest
with his finger. “It’s a long story. I’ll try to keep it short, but it starts before I was born.

“Many little kids are raised on love stories and fairy tales. I was raised on one fairy tale above all. My
parents’.

“They met in the in the very mountains you can see from the roof of the house.”

“Where we had dinner?”

“Yes. They were on vacation and were hiking the Appalachian Trail. They both had a sense of
adventure, so they ended up taking a side trail that was more dangerous and went by a steep cliff. It
had rained the night before and my mom slipped on a wet rock and tumbled off the edge of the cliff.

“She managed to grab ahold of the ledge and had one foot on a rock sticking out below, but she
didn’t have the strength to pull herself back up. She screamed for help even though she thought no
one was around to hear her, but luckily, my dad was. He came racing down from the top of the trail
and pulled her up. She laid on top of him as they both stared at each other, adrenaline running
through them. They said that they felt the warmest fear they’d ever felt.

“My mom was so relieved and grateful, she insisted he let her take him to dinner. And so, they went
and hit it off, both of them feeling a profound connection they had never experienced, and at the end
of their trip, they kissed each other goodbye and fell irretrievably in love.

“My dad asked her to come home with him instead of back to France, and she did. They fell heart
first into this crazy romance and were married within a year and had me the year after.

“The first years were nothing short of magical. They were so blissfully happy. They built the house I
live in now with the Russian exterior and the French interior and planned to live in it, in the place
they had met, when my dad retired. We went there on summer vacations, and we’d all hike up the
mountain and have a picnic on the anniversary, and they told me this story over and over again. It
was my favorite. I loved every sappy love story and fairy tale, but theirs was my absolute favorite
because it was real. They were proof it didn’t just exist in stories. I believed wholeheartedly in eternal
love at first kiss.

“And then the fights started and got worse by the year, but there were still plenty of moments when
they were deeply in love. I thought it would be okay because how could it be anything other than that with how much they loved each other? Then when I was twelve, my dad cheated on my mom, and that was the end of their happily ever after.

“I didn’t understand. I asked my mom what happened; how he could do something so awful when they loved each other so much, and she said that they just stopped doing the little things for each other that had at first come so naturally. She said their love was so easy, they never learned how to put in the effort to keep it.

“At first, they tried to keep things normal for me, but my mom started taking more and longer vacations, and she got depressed faster after each one ended. I eventually figured out that she couldn’t stand to be around me. I look exactly like the person who had broken her heart, and I was looking more like him with every passing day. Now, she can barely look at me at all. I haven’t seen her for years. She still loves me. I know she does. She just… can’t stand to look at me.

“She travels the world and calls and sends me gifts. She just can’t ever stop in at my house. I tried to travel out to visit her, but I’d always bring back that look she had in the first years after the divorce, so I stopped.

“I lived with my dad and his new girlfriend after my mom’s travels started. I’ve always had my sadistic side. I was never cruel, but I like pushing people. It’s how I feel love. I like feeling them stay with me even when it’s tough. I started pushing my dad harder partly because I was mad at him, but also, I just needed him to prove he still loved me.

“He used to understand that. I don’t know if he understood it explicitly, but any time I pushed him, he pushed back and would make a little game of it. He never got mad at me for it. But his new girlfriend hated it. She said I was a problem child and needed discipline. My dad tried to appease her and stop me. I pushed harder, and I hated her. She discovered my truly cruel side.

“ Anything I could do to make her miserable, I did. I didn’t even know I was capable of such things. She’s tacky and vain, so that’s usually what I attacked the hardest. As the final straw, I swapped out her shampoo with hair remover, and while she figured it out fast enough with the smell and rinsed it out before she was completely bald, her hair was so damaged, she had to cut it all off. I got so much satisfaction watching her cry about it that I started to understand what I was. She called me a monster and demanded that my dad get rid of me, or she was leaving. So, he did.

“He sent me to school in America with the pretense of it being for college, but I knew he was really choosing her over me.”

He paused, staring off into the lantern-lit steam, tracing his name on his chest. He pinched Yuri’s nipple as if to break himself out of a dream. Yuri tipped back to give him more access, gripping him tighter. Viktor looked back, staring at his lips before sighing gently and pulling him back close.

“Since he already had a house in North Carolina, that’s where he sent me along with a nanny until I was eighteen. I caused problems at school too and was about to get kicked out so he finally asked what it would take to get me to cooperate enough to graduate. I demanded Toska and kept my end of the deal. I got my horse and then the stable when I threatened to revert to my old ways without it, and he got his new life and his new whirlwind romance without the clinging monster from his old one.”

“Oh my god. Viktor. They left you alone in a foreign country in a house that symbolizes their shattered love when you were still just a kid?”

“Pretty much. And you, Yuri… You terrify me, but not for the reasons you think I should be. You’re
exactly the kind of romance my parents had, but unlike them, I know how it ends after the happily ever after. But I can’t stop myself, and I’m falling hard while you still don’t know what you want. I’m trying to keep my stupid heart in check until you’re sure, but I’m failing. I’ve already come so close to losing completely so many times.

“This is why I need you to be sure. My heart already is, and I’m terrified of how this will end, but you’re making me believe in you; that something like this can last if we both try hard enough to make it last. You should know something else too… remember how I said I believed in love at first kiss?”

“Yes, Viktor.”

“I still do. Maybe it’s stupid and childish, but I do. There’s still a part of me that wants that epic love even though it’s also my biggest nightmare. I vowed long ago I wouldn’t kiss anyone until I was sure it was real and it would be forever. Until I knew this person was the one I’d be spending the rest of my life with.

“It was kind of a stupid vow to make because you usually have to kiss more than a few people along the way to find that and most people aren’t okay with progressing anywhere in dating without a kiss first. Even my parents weren’t each other’s first kiss. But that’s what I decided because I can’t handle having that last illusion shattered, and I’ve held to it. Every single person I’ve met has been a zero for that kiss with one single exception.”

He pushed back, staring at him in shock. “You mean…”

He glanced up with a timid smile. “You’re the only person I’ve ever given a one to. I haven’t had my first kiss.”

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Chapter End Notes

The first artwork is mine. Second is Clarinda’s. Please check it out on Tumblr and share if you like :-)

Spotify
35. All the King’s Horses by Karmina
Chapter 17

Chapter Summary

It was a long hour, okay?

Chapter Notes

NSFW warning on the art! There are two arts again. First is safe, second is very much so not safe but oh so lovely. Thank you, Clarinda!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

(36) “You mean… You’re actually saying that I… I’m someone you’re… After a day. After a day you—you’re actually considering… me?”

“No, I was willing to throw away my vow and give you that kiss with nothing but my hopes behind it. You wouldn’t let me. Without even knowing, you wouldn’t let me… Now—my vow still intact—I’m past considering. I only have one question left, and you hold the answer.”

“Me? I hold the answer? How can I have that answer for you?”

“You’ve had the answer to every question I had. I questioned if we were compatible, if we could trust each other, if you were capable of putting in real effort in your side of a relationship, if you were attentive and responsive to my needs, if you were someone I was capable of giving everything to, if you had the strength to choose to stay with me no matter how difficult it was. You answered with a resounding yes to every one. My only question now is if you can kiss me without any questions of your own knowing what that kiss means to me.”

“I don’t—I don’t know. I don’t even know how to respond to any of this.”

“I know. It’s okay. I don’t expect an answer from you right now. I didn’t mean to put this on you so soon, but you asked, and if I was telling you that story, explaining all of it made the most sense.”

“But how? Why? Why me? I don’t understand how—” He broke off to stare at Viktor, open-mouthed, stupid expression on his face once again.

“Are you really telling me you don’t feel the connection we have?”

“I do, but I don’t understand how you could be feeling anything close to what I feel for you.”

“I’m certain I’m feeling what we have stronger than you are right now. Yes, I mean it. I always mean it. I’m not going to try to explain it though because I want your answer to come from you, not me. You have to understand what we have as deeply as I do.”

“You’re really telling me that as soon as I can say yes to that question… I can kiss you? I can kiss you, and it… it would be forever? Me? You’re sure? After a week—after knowing I’m keeping something from you and you know it’s something bad—me? I’m the one you… want to keep?”
“Yes, Yuri. You. Forever. That’s what I want. That kiss from you would be immeasurable.”

Staring at Viktor’s face, the soft blue eyes, the slightly parted lips that suddenly held both a welcome and a promise, his body leaned forward while his mind stayed in place, reeling at Viktor’s confession. Of course, he could say yes. There wasn’t a chance in hell he’d ever find anyone better. Better didn’t exist. Caching sight of the water trailing down Viktor’s neck, he shifted his path to reach it with his tongue. Feeling the weight of that kiss now, he needed some time to think.

He kissed slowly along Viktor’s neck as Viktor tilted his head away and bared it to him. He didn’t need to test out a relationship with him. He could live with him any way Viktor wanted, and it would be a life beyond his wildest dreams. Submitting to him wasn’t a burden or a restraint at all. He hadn’t ever felt as free as he did with Viktor. His lips moved up to his jaw, and Viktor held him tighter, tilting his head further. He had no interest in anyone else. He’d never had interest in anyone besides Viktor.

Over his cheek, kisses plucked from his lips as tenderly as the strings of a serenade under moonlight. He reached the corner of his mouth. Viktor’s lips parted with a quick intake of breath as his heart throbbed against Yuri’s chest.

He wasn’t going to stop him.

He trusted him not to take that kiss from him if it didn’t mean forever. But if it did… He paused, their breath passing flirtatious glances over parted lips. Of course, he could promise forever. It would be the easiest promise to make. He pushed forward, his mouth brushing Viktor’s.

But what if Viktor really couldn’t want him after learning his secret? Caught in the snare of insight, he suddenly understood how a kiss could be a question. He knew the answer as well. He would hate him for stealing this kiss from him.

He pulled back. Pain settled on his face as he dropped his forehead to Viktor’s. “I’m sorry. I can’t.”

He sucked back a small wince as he nodded. “I know. It’s okay. Take your time.” He kissed over his face. “Thank you for not kissing me when you weren’t sure. It feels good that I can trust you with this.”

“I don’t want to hurt you.”

“I know, zolotse. You don’t want to hurt anything. You’re so gentle and have such a good heart.”

He looked back up and frowned. “Your face is getting really red. Are you feeling okay?”

“I’m a little light-headed, but I’ll be fine.”

He shook his head. “You need to get out. You’re not used to the heat. You’ll pass out.”

He grinned and kissed his cheek. “Is that an order?”

“No, Viktor. It’s a warning. I’ve had to fish more than one tourist from the water. Please?”

“As you wish, zolotse.” He kissed his cheek again then shifted him off his lap. He wobbled as he stood up, and Yuri put his arms out to steady him. “Thanks.” He smiled sheepishly. “Looks like you were right.”

“Just move slowly.” He wrapped his arm around Viktor’s waist and put his arm over his shoulders to lean on as they made their way back into the changing room and sat him on the bench. Yuri handed
him a green yukata. “I can help you put it on.”

“It’s okay. I’m feeling steadier again.”

Yuri nodded and changed into a yukata himself.

“How do I look?” Viktor put his arms out then put one on his hip to pose. The pants and the sleeves were too short on him, and he hadn’t tied the belt tight enough, so the top was pulling open and exposing most of his chest and abs. One side was slipping from his shoulder.

“Indecent.”

He looked down at himself. “Oh? Did I do it wrong?”

“Completely wrong. And completely right.” He couldn’t help the lascivious smile tugging on his lips as he looked him over.

“Is that so?” He grinned and pulled him closer. “Am I making you want to do bad things to me and this robe?”

“Hai. Yes, Viktor.”

He smiled as he kissed his neck. “Making you forget which language you’re supposed to use?”

Moaning, he tipped his head back. “Yes, Viktor.”

“Well then, let’s go to bed, and I’ll take care of you as a thank you for taking care of me. You’ll have to be very quiet though.”

“Yes, Viktor.” His eyes closed as Viktor moved to the other side and melted his already softened body.

He pulled back and tugged his hand. “Let’s go, zolotse, before I take you apart here.”

They almost made it to the makeshift bedroom before a waft of cigarette smoke halted Yuri in his tracks. He turned to see the bright end of Mari’s cigarette burning as a single point of light in the dark.

(37) “I’d like to talk to my brother. Alone.”

“It’s late. Can’t we talk in the morning?”

“Nope.”

“Go ahead, zolotse. It’s okay. I’ll wait for you in the room.”

Damn. He hoped Viktor would get him out of it, but that’d probably look bad if he tried, and Mari was already suspicious. He took the last bit of strength he could from him. “Yes, Viktor.”

Viktor gave his hand a little squeeze then released him to follow Mari into the kitchen. He shouldn’t be afraid to speak to his own sister, but with the tone in her voice and everything that had happened, his anxiety was starting up.

Mari didn’t wait to reach the kitchen before she started in with a low mocking. “ ‘Yes, Viktor. Yes, Viktor.’ What is that, huh?”
“What do you mean?”

She gave him a little push to shove him the rest of the way into the kitchen, letting the solid wooden door swing shut behind them. It was the only place in the house to have a private conversation outside of the bathroom. “Oh, come on. You’re a terrible liar. You’ve always been a terrible liar. You used to know that and not even try, but now you’re lying all the time. Why has Viktor got you lying to us?”

“What do you mean? He’s not telling me to lie at all.”

“Yeah, I don’t believe that. You started acting really strange the same time you started working for him. I know you’ve been lying to us since you left Celestino and started with Viktor. Mom and dad might believe your lies, but I know you’re full of shit. I was going to leave it alone since I figured it was your business to tell us if you wanted to or not, but now, I see you with him, and I don’t like it at all. What the hell has he been doing to you?”

Shit. He’d tied Viktor into that whole year with their lie, and now there was no separating him from it. And he wasn’t supposed to lie to her. How the hell was he going to get out of this? At least the next answer was an honest one. “He’s been doing nothing but being good to me.”

“Bullshit. He’s abusing you.”

“What? What the hell, Neechan? Why would you even think that? Viktor is never anything but good to me.”

“Right. Treating you like he owns you. Making you lie to your family. Coming up with his own weird, shitty lies himself. He can’t even answer straight on what he hired you for. What did he hire you for? To suck his dick?”

“Neechan!”

“Making you cover up bruises and lying about that.” She held his exposed wrist up in the bright moonlight coming in through the window. “I know you have more. I saw you in the water.”

“What the fuck? Why? Were you spying on me?”

She huffed and took a long drag of her cigarette. “I was just peeking to make sure you weren’t doing gross things to the water and maybe, yeah, I was spying on you a little because I’m worried about you, Yuri-chan. He’s abusing you. Listen, you don’t have to be afraid to tell me. I’m your big sister. I’ll kick his ass, you know I would, and I know Minako-sensei would gladly join me.”

“He’s not abusing me! I like it! Okay? I like it. He only ever does what I like.” His face flamed red in the cool dark.

“What the fuck? You’re trying to tell me you like being hurt?”

“Yeah, I do. Just stop accusing him of being a bad person. He’s not. He’s better than I deserve.”

“Better than you deserve? What the hell? He beats you and makes you think you like it, and he’s better than you deserve?”

“He’s not making me do anything, Neechan! I like it! I asked him to do it.”

“You asked him to do it? Why? Oh, ew. Is this like that weird sex thing? You get off on him whipping you?”
“Yeah. I mean, it’s not that weird, but yeah. It’s that.”

“Oh god.” She cringed looking disgusted and pulled a long drag from her cigarette. “Ew. Really? You? But you’re so… You’re really into that?”

“Yeah.”

“Why?”

“I don’t know. Why do you like piercings?”

“I like the way they look.”

“Well, I like the way that feels.”

“But… why?”

“I don’t know, Neechan. Do I really have to discuss my sexual preferences with you?”

“Oh, ew. No. Please don’t. But that means he enjoys beating you?”

“Yes.”

“What kind of sick pervert gets off on beating people?”

“Shut up. Don’t talk about him like that.” His hands tightened at his sides as his voice dropped into his rarely used menacing tones.

She held her free hand up in surrender as the other took in another drag. “Okay, fine.”

“Viktor is a good person. He only ever does it to people who want him to.”

“Right. You might have explained the bruises, but there’s still a hell of a lot that’s not adding up about him. Why does he treat you like that? Like he owns you. And you talk so strangely around him with that constant, ‘Yes, Viktor,’ shit.”

“It’s… It’s a part of it. He dominates me, and I submit to what he says.”

“That’s fucked up.”

“It’s not.”

“It is. You just do whatever he says? You? You don’t do what anyone says.”

“I do what he says. Most of the time.”

“So, what, if he told you to jump off a bridge, you’d do it?”

“He wouldn’t.”

“I didn’t mean that literally.”

“Well, I did. He wouldn’t. He wouldn’t ever tell me to do anything that’s not good for me. He cares about me and only does what’s best for me.”

“Right. If that’s true, why have you given up pursuing your dream? You submit to him now, so you don’t want to beat him anymore? You don’t even put in the effort to win?”
“It’s not like that.”

“Right. And he’s making up shitty excuses about not letting you ride why?”

“He doesn’t want me to get hurt. How is that bad?”

She laughed. “Right. He beats you for fun but is worried about you falling off a horse? And if I were trying to keep you from riding Minako-sensei’s horse, I might have used your supposedly injured hand. But he seemed to have forgotten all about that right then.” Shit. She wasn’t wrong. “Why won’t he let you ride, Yuri-chan? Have you been riding at all since you’ve been there?”

“Yeah. I’ve been riding Avos like he said.”

“And you’re competing on him?”

Fuck. “Yeah.” Shit. He’d have to confess that one to Viktor.

“And why aren’t you doing better? Minako-sensei says you should be.”

“We’re doing some basic training with him for now instead of pushing him when he’s not ready.”

“So, you’re holding him back?”

“Yeah.” Not a lie, but Viktor would hate it more that it wasn’t.

“Why compete at all then? Why not just wait?”

Shit. He was such a shitty liar. That much was so true. “Because it gets him used to it.” It was kind of true. It would be a good reason to keep competing, but also not true that they’re doing it. Did it count? He’d just tell Viktor and let him sort it out.

She eyed him suspiciously. “You’re lucky I don’t know anything about horses. I’ll be running that one by Minako-sensei though because I think all of this sounds like bullshit.”

“Do whatever you want.”

“What’s going on with you? There’s something more than just him beating you and whatever this weird relationship is.”

Nothing’s going on. I’m just tired, okay?

“Yeah, sure. You’re just tired. That totally explains all of your weirdness for the past year. Why did you even leave Celestino? Viktor said you had no way to know you were going to work for him, just to remind you. If you’re going to lie to my face, at least have the decency to make them good, so I don’t have to think that you think I’m that dumb.”

“I left because of what I told you. I wanted to do something new.”

“Halfway across the country? It’s a huge fucking country. That’s not a small jump there. And you had a lot of students and clients built up. That’s just stupid to leave all that and start somewhere new doing the same thing.”

“Well, I did. I’m tired. Can I go to bed now?” Before he owes Viktor his entire ass?

“Yeah, whatever.” She waved her hand toward the door as she dragged in her smoke. “I still don’t like him. I think he’s bad for you, and I don’t trust him or you right now.” Her hand with the
cigarette fell limply to her side, knocking a trail of ash onto the tiles. “What happened to you out there?”

“I’m fine, Neechan. Good night.” He slapped the door open and nearly ran back to Viktor.

***

Yuri stepped on the scale in the bathroom and frowned then stepped off and tried again.

“What’s wrong, zolotse?” Viktor looked over from the mirror where he was shaving his face.

“I’ve gained two kilos this past week, and I gained another kilo the week before.” They’d been in Japan for a week now, and Viktor had taken him everywhere, shoving every delicious food he could find into him. He’d bumped up their workouts, but they hadn’t been doing physical work all day either. At least there was plenty of hiking and stairs.

“Really? Impressive.”

“No! Not impressive! Shit. I’m sorry. I meant to say I don’t think it’s impressive.”

He sighed. “One, but thank you for the self-correction.”

“How can you call that impressive? I thought you were trying to help me lose weight.”

“Come here. Stand for inspection. Be soft for me.”

He stood with his feet apart and his hands behind his head, naked still from their shower and focused on relaxing his body.

Viktor scrutinized him, poking at his belly a thoroughly embarrassing amount, smushing his softness around while he tried to stay soft and accept that if Viktor was doing it, it was good. He felt over his arms and legs then grabbed his ass and pressed a kiss to his forehead while still covered in shaving cream. “Impressive.”

“Viktor!” He wiped the shaving cream from his forehead, pouting at him.

He chuckled. “You don’t owe me that one anymore. You’re too cute, so it’s forgiven.”

“But I’m gaining weight. How can that be impressive?”

“Trust me.”

He stepped into his jeans, which felt comfortable enough at least, then slipped on a navy-blue shirt and buttoned it up. He swung his arms around as he shifted in the constraining fabric. “My clothes are getting too tight.”

“Come here.” He jiggled the waistband of his jeans and tugged at the thighs and his shirt. “Let me see your arms again.”

He pulled off the shirt.

Viktor took his wrist and flipped it over. “I can barely see these. Someone would have to be looking for them to notice. You can likely get away with wearing a t-shirt now, or I can give you one of my shirts.”

“I’ll wear a t-shirt. It’d be nice not to wear long sleeves anymore.”
“I’m sorry, zolotse. I never meant to mark you up like that.”

“I know. It was my fault. It wasn’t that bad.”

“Let me finish with my face, and I’ll get you a shirt. Looks like I’ll have to get you some new clothes.”

“Or I could eat less.”

“Two.”

“I’m sorry, Viktor.”

“Apology accepted. I promise, you look sexier than ever.”

“Really?”

“Always. The sexiest person I’ve ever seen.” He rinsed his razor in the sink then dragged it slowly along his throat. “Are you excited for tonight?”

He grinned and came up behind him, wrapping his arms around Viktor’s bare waist, kissing his back till little shivers danced along his skin. “Thrilled.” His hands drifted down to the edge of Viktor’s towel. “Please?”

“But you just did,” he sputtered, flinging his hand at the shower which had taken an absurd amount of time with how distracted they got from cleaning.

“Again? Please?” Peeking over his shoulder, he caught his gaze in the mirror and gave him puppy eyes which Viktor had no defense against.

“Oh, you little… I should stop that because you’re going to get all kinds of spoiled but luckily for you, I like spoiling you, and you’re way too damn cute.”

“Soo… is that a yes?”

He pretended to sigh, but his tight, little smile gave him away. “Go ahead. Make yourself come first though. Twice. Then again with me.”

“Yes, Viktor.” He pulled the towel away and dropped to his knees while Viktor returned to shaving his face.

***

Viktor gripped the wheel of the car, peering through the dark to catch the little flashes of a discernible world before they rushed incomprehensibly by.

“Wait, wait! That was it!” Yuri looked from the map on his phone to the kanji on the sign.

Viktor hit the brakes then checked behind him as he backed up.

“Sorry, it’s so faded it was hard to see. Honestly, we’re lucky it existed at all.” Google maps had failed them several kilometers ago, and he now had to find their way through the backroads of rural Japan in the dark rain.

“It’s okay. You found it. At least we’re not lost.”
“I’m not so sure that’s a good thing. This is turning more into the start of a bad horror movie by the minute. I think reaching our destination is ill-advised. I’d be screaming at us for being idiots if we were on a screen right now.”

He laughed. “Don’t worry. It’ll be fine. Isn’t Japan super safe and filled with wonderful people?”

“Sure, and a smattering of weirdos just to keep things interesting same as anywhere. And uh,” he watched the soggy trees lining the road creep past, “this looks like ideal gathering grounds for vengeful spirits.”

“Vengeful spirits? Now you’re worried about the supernatural? I thought you were worried about weirdos.”

“Yeah, that too. Anything sounds good to worry about right now. You know this is the second time I’ve been lured into a b-rated horror flick with you.”

“Second?”

“Yeah, my uber-rich new boss leading me to his sex slash torture slash murder room in the basement of his Russian castle was the first.”

He laughed. “You were really worried I was going to murder you?”

“I apologized to my mom in my head for being so dumb.”

“Ah, I’m pleased to hear you at least recognized that what you were doing was incredibly dangerous. I promise, you’re not getting murdered ever. Not by me or anyone else.”

“Uh huh. It worries me that’s a promise you have to make.”

“Do you want to turn back?”

“No, Viktor. I’m just messing with you. Well, I mean, this really is the start of a bad horror movie, and I really did apologize to my mom in your basement, but I’m not that worried.”

He smiled and picked up Yuri’s hand to leave a kiss on the back of it. “I’m glad you at least trust me not to let you get murdered.”

“Eh, I’ve had a good run.” Glancing over, he winked.

“Yuri!” He pressed more laughing kisses to his hand.

They managed to find their way to an old farmhouse that bared the address of their destination without encountering any vengeful spirits and walked up to the door lit outside by a single lantern. The door opened as they approached.

A serious-looking older man in a traditional kimono stood in the glowing light, studying them before stepping back to allow them in. Maybe he was worried about being murdered as well. He had more to worry about than they did as there were two of them who each outsized him. Viktor’s heavy duffle bag likely did nothing to ease those concerns. Yuri gave both of their greetings in Japanese as politely as he could as they bowed low with Viktor doing a fine job of it after Yuri’s lessons. Master N returned the bow then invited them in.

They slipped off their shoes and stepped into the open heart of the home. An original L-shaped firepit was in the center with a black iron teapot hanging over an open flame from a charred beam.
Dark chestnut wood covered the floors and walls along with the soft glow of light filtered through shoji doors and an eclectic assortment of antique furniture, pottery, and woven baskets. They knelt at the low table they were ushered to next to the firepit.

Master N offered them a tray of sweets while he began preparing the matcha. Viktor watched his skilled, attentive movements with a fixed attention. It wasn’t quite a formal tea ceremony, but Master N still filled the bowls with a ritual aesthetic that arose naturally from his care. They washed down the chewy sweets with the creamy, slightly bitter green tea served in rustic porcelain until their taste buds were refreshed with perfect balance.

“Tell me about your partner.” Master N gestured to Viktor but spoke only Japanese so Yuri made the translation, trying to recreate the way he spoke with warm formality so Viktor could understand the full experience.

Viktor smiled at Yuri. “He’s funny. I’m only just now beginning to learn that because he seems too timid and serious at first to have much of a sense of humor, but when he’s feeling comfortable, he looks at everything in such an amusing way that colors everything with a subtle delight.”

The corner of Yuri’s mouth pulled tight. “You’re really going to make me translate that?”

“Every word.”

He gave a small sigh before trying to recreate Viktor’s words for Master N while his face began to heat. Talking about himself in the third person was beyond strange and sickening when it was cloying flattery.

Viktor waited for him to finish then resumed his answer. “He’s intelligent in the same way that he’s funny. He’s always looking deeply at the world around him and filters it through his unique understanding and pulls everything in to deepen his understanding further. He keeps most of his thoughts to himself and has a hard time sharing them even when he’s trying to, but the depth of his understanding is both persistent and startling in the way he can add meaning to every little thing.

“He doesn’t always understand himself very well because his emotional focus is turned outward. The only times it turns inward is when his anxiety drives him to retreat where that brilliant mind of his turns on itself. He can get trapped then in his deep wounds, and he needs help getting out.”

“What is the nature of these wounds?”

“Guilt. A lack of trust in himself.”

“Does he trust others?”

Viktor studied him for a moment while considering his answer. “He’s closed to most. He doesn’t distrust them, but he doesn’t let them in enough to say he trusts them either.”

“Does he trust you?”

“Yes. No matter how hard I push him, he’s always right by my side with this serenity that only comes out when I ask for his strength and his trust.”

Master N gave a light bow then gestured to Yuri. “Tell me about your partner.”

“He’s strong in the way bamboo is strong. He’s not rigid, but he’s supportive through any situation and can sharpen into the neatest of points to pierce his words straight to the heart.”
He spoke first in Japanese then paused to make the translation before he forgot all he said. “He’s warm and expansive. He nurtures what’s good and relentlessly drives away the bad. He’s creative and doesn’t get stuck in his ways, but he respects things that are reliably good…”

“He’s surprising. He has a joy when exploring new things, approaching them with a child’s sense of exploration, but he isn’t naïve and is willing to put in the work to fully understand, and that allows him to succeed to the highest levels in whatever he sets his focus to. He’s an absolutely hopeless romantic and gets pleasure and pride from taking care of me and his horses. He’s lonely.”

“I’m not lonely anymore, zolotse.”

Yuri made the translation of Viktor’s correction and the meaning of the nickname which brought a smile to Master N’s face.

“Thank you for sharing. It’s good to know where you’re coming from and what forces I can expect to come up, so I know where to begin. Viktor-san, can we please begin with you undressing your partner? Please take care to begin with a focus on connecting with him.”

Viktor stood and helped him to his feet then stood facing him as he unbuttoned his shirt while staring into his eyes with a reassuring smile. He paused over his open chest and pressed his hand over his heart that had begun to shake.

It’s not like he hadn’t been far more exposed than this, but this time he wasn’t riding a pleasure high, instead jumping to his upper limits from a cold start. Viktor laced his neck and chest with kisses as he worked his way down the buttons then brushed the shirt from his body with his hands sliding down his arms.

“Hi, beautiful. What are you thinking?”

“I’m focused on staying soft for you.”

“Good.” His hands slid down to Yuri’s jeans and popped them open. “That’s my good Yuri. Just stand nice and pretty for me just like you’re doing.”

“Yes, Viktor.” He sighed as his shoulders melted away from his ears.

“What did you say to him there?” Master N asked. "If it’s not too personal to share.”

He translated the question for Viktor and received his nod to share and explain. “I just said, ‘Yes, Viktor.’ He rewards me with a touch or praise almost every time I say it, so now my body relaxes and I feel pleasure just saying those words.”

“Shibui. Beautiful.”

“Shibui?” Viktor asked.

“It doesn’t have an English translation. Not one I know at least. Sorry. It’s like the beauty in something simple and natural. It has character and texture, but it’s unobtrusive. Something that appears simple on the surface but has layers of texture or meaning.”

“Its beauty grows over the years as well,” Master N said. “Every time he says it, it takes on more meaning. Beautiful.” He smiled and gave a small bow of acknowledgment to Viktor.

Viktor returned the light bow then slipped Yuri’s pants and socks off and nibbled kisses along his stomach as he tugged his boxers down. Having freed him from his clothes, Viktor trailed his fingers
over the front of his body then came around behind him to hold him tight. “It’s okay, zolotse. I’m here. You’re safe. I promise.”

He pressed into Viktor’s support as Master N studied him.

“May I touch him?”

“Color?”

“Green.”

“Go ahead.”

Master N’s thick, stubby hand ran softly over Yuri’s shoulder and down his arm then grasped his wrist and tugged at his range of motion in all directions. “Every body is different, every time. I like to begin by feeling what this body is doing today. Every day, every hour, it needs something different. You must tune in to what it needs to give it that. Giving the body what it needs will always give you the best results. Sometimes those results are less aesthetic than you’d like, but often I find they’re the most aesthetic, and if I allow the times that are less than perfect, the body trusts me more the next time and is more willing to yield.

“Begin mapping the areas that have too much energy and those that don’t have enough. You can use the rope to press the energy into balance. Begin forming a picture in your mind of where his body wants to go.” He moved onto his other arm.

Viktor began at his neck, pressing lightly into his muscles. “By using the rope to balance the energy, do you mean you put the rope over the tight areas?”

“Sometimes. Sometimes you draw the limb away to stretch and open the area for the energy to flow out. Listen to the spots, and they’ll tell you which they need. It’s like massage. Press and open the energy to flow to the areas that need it. Don’t put rope over areas that are already weak. It will weaken them further. But your touch can invigorate and strengthen those areas and help draw the energy there.” He picked up Yuri’s leg and started checking his range of motion, holding it out at various angles and keeping it there as he studied his body.

“When you say, ‘Don’t put rope over weak areas,’ do you mean at all? Even if it’s purely aesthetic and puts no pressure on him?”

“Yes. The body can feel that closure and will be reluctant to open there. When the whole piece is in unison, it will resonate with the balance of freedom and restraint that has been drawn by deep understanding and care. You are communicating with him, not the aesthetic. By telling him clearly you understand his every need and will put nothing else above that, he will become one with your ropes.”

“That’s beautifully said and makes a lot of sense. Thank you.” He smiled and nodded a bow to the master.

“Like here.” Master N pressed into the top of his thigh. “Here, he’s very tight. He needs to open, but you don’t want to just draw him up into a tight bow and force it. He needs to be gently opened first. His whole leg is compressed. I’d start by lengthening them with gentle weight. Inversion by the ankles and a hip harness to relieve weight until it’s balanced between the arms, hips, and ankles. Begin with a takate kote. Red rope would I think be best for this one.”

Viktor nodded and pulled a thin red rope from his bag then drew Yuri’s arms behind his back and folded them as he had when he tied him at the party. He, of course, decorated him with kisses as he
worked, smoothly and snugly winding the rope around him. After passing the rope around his arms, he slipped his fingers in under it and smoothed his skin toward his back. It was a tiny gesture, but it made the rope sit much more comfortably.

After passing the rope over the top and bottom of his chest, he began to pull it over his shoulders, feeling for the knots of tension next to his neck that were always there and passing the rope right over it, adjusting its grip until it would stay exactly where he wanted it.

His body started giving to Viktor’s ropes, releasing the strain of holding himself to his own will.

“Good,” Master N said. “Very good. You have excellent skill, and you incorporated my lessons nicely. I’ve heard good things about the West’s adaptation of our techniques. I’m pleased to see they’re true. Are you among the best where you’re from?”

“I would say that I’m decently skilled, but I use it more for a purpose generally and don’t push the limits with it very much. There are others who have a stronger focus on it whose skill far surpasses mine. I have one who works in my club regularly who is nothing short of an artist.”

“Wonderful. You have the ability to become an artist yourself if that is a path you’d like to pursue.”

“With Yuri as my muse, that is a good possibility. He looks so beautiful in my ropes.”

“He is very suited to rope, and it’s rare to find men in that position. I think you as a pair will make stunning art.”

He picked up his camera as Viktor began wrapping rope around the top of Yuri’s hips. Master N was renowned for his photography both in the kink community and outside of it with many pieces of rural Japan and the people in it receiving accolades. That had been his final selling point for Viktor who jumped at the chance to learn more and preserve their experience together.

Viktor wrapped bands around the tops of his thighs then brought the rope up at a slight angle to catch the widest part of his hips before tying it off in a simple, but beautiful knot at the lowest part of his stomach. Again, he smoothed his skin and adjusted the ropes until they settled into place on his body as if they belonged there.

Master N pointed to the beam above them. “Tie him here.”

Viktor frowned at the charred and crackled surface of the beam. “It’s burnt. It doesn’t look safe.”

“I assure you, it is. I tie many people to it. The burn is only on the surface to protect it from fire, bugs, and rot. It’s stood through many earthquakes for over ninety years.”

“Forgive me for not taking your word for it, but I need to test it first.”

“Please, go ahead.”

Viktor looked up to spot then jumped and grabbed the beam, tossing himself up above the beam and letting his weight fall back onto it while it stayed rock solid under his hands. After a few jumps, he dropped back to the ground. Satisfied that it was stable enough, he began hitching Yuri up.

He passed ropes over the beam then tied it to the ropes on his back, lifting him up to his tiptoes, then pulled his hips up until they were above his head. Releasing the rope supporting his upper body, he slowly dropped his head down until he was upside down.

He refastened the rope coming off his back and adjusted it until his weight was split between the
rope burying itself into his body around his hips and the ropes over his shoulders that now had a deep pressure on those tense knots.

Viktor brought his leg up to hook his heel over the rope coming from his hips and brought the other leg up to cross over the first then wrapped his ankles together and secured them to the beam, evening the pressure all over him until he felt like he was floating through a dream with the world twisted upside down.

Viktor stepped back to analyze his work and make a few adjustments. “How are you feeling?”

“Um… fluid. I feel like my body is dripping into my head.”

He chuckled. “Is that pleasant or unpleasant?”

“It’s strange. But not unpleasant.”

“Hmm…” His fingertips drifted down his thighs, and his palms caressed his stomach, sweeping around to his back. “And how does that feel?”

His eyes closed as he smiled. “Like you.” He peeked up at him to admire the flicker of confusion that passed on Viktor’s face before his quiet, blush-stained smile took its place.

He nestled a kiss between the ropes on his hip to the little hollow of skin just below the bone. Tickling it with his finger, his nose crinkled as he left another kiss. “I like how the ropes frame this spot here for me. It’s like a little secret spot to store kisses.”

“Oh my god, you’re cute. How are you so cute?”

“All of your cute is rubbing off on me.” He left one more kiss before he stepped back to admire his work.

“Very good.” Master N circled around, his camera softly snapping. “Simple but well-executed. Clean lines and well-balanced. Excellent connection. Bring his energy up higher so it can flow better and show his vitality.”

“By that you mean?”

Yuri blushed as he listened to what he was going to have to translate from Master N and nearly strangled on the words as he forced them out. “Stimulate him until he is filled but not stiff. Stiff won’t look right, and he still needs gentle stimulation.”

Viktor chuckled. “Now this is interesting. My sub is ordering me to suck his cock.”

“I’m not! Mas—”

Viktor wrapped his tongue around his cock hanging under the ropes pulled away from his hips by the rope attached to the beam and sucked gently as his hands pulled his swaying body into him.

“Oh shit.” Yuri hissed as his toes curled and his back arched. “I’m still… still not used to this and every time you—Ungh, Viktor! You do that—Unbearably good.”

He responded by sucking him in deeper and clutching his ass, his tongue curling around every blissful spot until Yuri’s body was pulsing with the blood rushing everywhere in new directions.

He heard Master N speaking, but his brain wasn’t capable of processing what he said let alone translating it until Viktor pulled off with Master N’s hand on his shoulder.
“Sorry! Sorry. He was saying, ‘That’s enough.’ “

Viktor chuckled. “Didn’t wanna hear that one, huh?”

“No, Viktor. I just couldn’t process anything. You’re lethal.” He gasped as Viktor stepped back and let Master N take his photos while his cock hung damp and heavy on his stomach. He wriggled and sighed as he tried to adjust to Viktor’s disappearance.

“You don’t like this. Why not?”

“You’re gone, and I’m… I’m turned on and… want you.”

He gave him a satisfied smile. “You want me, huh? I leave you untouched for three seconds, and you’re already fussing about it? I’ve made you wait much longer than this.”

“But when you do that… you’re always touching me, or you build me up so high, the break is welcome, and I can still feel your touch inside me. It feels good even without coming.”

“Ah, so I have a new way to challenge you then. Turn you on just enough to get you going and leave you waiting. This should be fun.” He grinned devilishly.

He groaned. “Please no. This is the worst.”

“I promise I’ll—”

“You two talk too much,” Master N scolded them lightly as he waited with his camera for Yuri to stop pouting. “Like children.”

They giggled at how right his words were which only made them that much more accurate which made them laugh harder.

“Then please get photos of us being children as well.” Viktor smiled and winked at Yuri. “I want all of him captured.”

Master N couldn’t help smiling at the pun as his camera shutter resumed its preserving blink. “It looks like you’ve succeeded.”

“I hope you’re right.”

“Please get him to relax more.”

“Hey, Yuri, be a good boy and submit to where I have you, and I’ll reward you with lots of my touch.”

“Yes, Viktor.” He sighed as his joints opened up and gravity pulled on him exactly the way Viktor had ordered.

Viktor came back to “refresh his energy” every couple of minutes with sadistic glee brimming every time he left him again untouched. After he’d had his fill, Viktor pulled him down from the ropes and held him tight while his body readjusted to being upright once again.

“Good.” Master N handed Viktor a woman’s red kimono with a white nagajuban for underneath along with a white obi with a small gold leaf pattern to tie it. “You can use cloth and objects to add drama and balance or create a scene. Plus, half-dressed is much sexier and more intriguing than completely naked.”
He guided Viktor into tying Yuri into the kimono with all kinds of artistic disarray before he shuffled over to a back door and picked up an umbrella. “Come to the garden.” He held the umbrella carefully over his camera as he stepped out.

They went out into the dark and still pouring rain where the master had already set up two industrial lights. He flipped the switch and illuminated a traditional Zen garden that had been neatly raked before the storm. A red maple with thick branches sat in the corner behind the lights.

Viktor made a few passes around his chest with the rope then tied him to a thick branch just tight enough for some support without taking him off the ground then hitched up one leg by the knee and tied it to another branch until his thighs were split apart, leaving the kimono gaping open at the front. Something about being exposed when he should rightfully be covered had his blush sitting heavy on his skin and the raindrops sizzling on contact.

Viktor placed a broken board across his shoulders and hung Yuri’s arms over the top of it and adjusted the long fabric until it draped just right around him. “God, you look sexy like this. He is so right. That kimono is doing all sorts of good things for you.”

Steam rose from Yuri’s skin.

“Make yourself even prettier for me. Seduce me.”

How? What did he want? He bit his lip and dropped his head, looking to the side, his eyes cast down. He let his lips part and tasted the rain as it rolled down his cheeks and onto his tongue. He usually liked him looking at him, confident, but he had him more vulnerable than usual, left him exposed in the rain and clinging to nothing but a broken board and a few strands of rope for support. He wanted to see him more vulnerable, but not in despair. Viktor hated it when he was distraught. He didn’t want to see him hopeless. He wanted a display of trust.

He lifted his face to the sky and tasted the rain straight from the clouds as his head tipped back and his face flooded with a confident serenity that rested on a solid trust in Viktor. He would soon free him and wrap him in heat and comfort to erase any discomfort and give him boundless pleasure as a reward for proving the strength of his trust.

“Beautiful. Perfect. My gorgeous Yuri.” His praises coated him thicker than the rain as he untied him and brought him inside. Viktor stripped him naked once again and dried him with a warm towel Master N handed over then dressed him in one of Viktor’s own white button-down shirts pulled from his black bag. Viktor sat him in front of the fire as he dried off and changed into his black pants. He sat in front of the fire and bundled Yuri into his lap, the heat from his bare torso penetrating the thin fabric of Yuri’s shirt.

He tucked his cold fingers against Viktor’s rapidly warming skin. Viktor covered them, pressing them harder against him as he kissed his damp hair. Master N offered more sweets and began preparing another round of tea. He paused to snap a picture of them cuddled together then returned to the tea with a smile. Viktor lifted Yuri’s fingers up to kiss each one then tucked them back against a new, warmer patch of skin.

Yuri clutched the warm bowl and took little sips as his body unbound the cold inside him and released it, leaving him melted against Viktor. The shirt slipped off his shoulder, and he admired the pretty twists imprinted into his skin on his arm. Master N set down his tea and picked up his camera to take some more photos, focusing on the rope markings then on the two of them together.

Once they were warm and dry and the tea and sweets were finished, Master N got up and returned a few moments later with two poles of bamboo. “Have you ever used bamboo?”
“No. I’ve only used rings or fixed attachment points.”

“Bamboo is good for spreading the body or creating strong visual lines. You can use different sizes to create different visual effects. And you can use it for sensation. Two thin pieces on either side of a nipple and tied together can create clamps like this,” He picked up a set of chopsticks and held them over Yuri’s chest and mimicked how they’d tie together, “and you can twist like so,” he rotated the chopsticks so they went from horizontal to vertical, “and tie the two sets together.”

“Oh, that’s fun.” Viktor nodded appreciatively. “That’s something you can’t do with standard clamps.”

“You can also use it to train him. If you tie them to his thighs and form an X over his stomach, when his thighs are open, he’s safe, but if he closes, his penis gets caught in the joint for a sharp correction. I wouldn’t recommend this unless he’s already well-behaved as he could hurt himself too much if he closes too hard.”

“What an interesting tool.” He picked up one of the large pieces of bamboo and examined it while they discussed what they’d do next. Viktor left him with a kiss to his forehead to wait while Master N showed him how to attach the bamboo to the beam.

After waiting in anticipation of their plans for far too long, he nearly skipped over when Viktor finally summoned him.

Viktor grinned and grabbed him by the waist as he approached then kissed his chest and bent him over his arm, lifting the shirt to expose his ass all in one fell swoop. “There’s my happy virgin slut. You look excited.” He pushed two fingers in then started scissoring him open.

“Yes, Viktor.”

Viktor reached into his bag then stuffed him with a plug. “That’s my good little virgin slut.” He filled him completely, fucking him gently with the thickest bulge before seating it fully inside him. He lifted him up and turned him around then began unbuttoning his shirt. “So nice and soft you’re being. You opened right up for me without any resistance.”

(38) He pulled off the white shirt and picked up a jute rope with a natural golden sheen and hooked Yuri’s arms over the bamboo that was tied up parallel to the floor. He began tying his upper arms together, marking his work with kisses as he went.

His wrists were drawn out and bound to the ends of the bamboo. Viktor began attaching another large piece of bamboo to hang below the first. The smooth coolness of the bamboo rested against the sensitive skin behind his thighs, contrasting with the fibrous texture of the rope. Viktor finished by wrapping the loose ends of the rope back up the columns holding the lower pole up with one rope twisting up on its own and two running side by side creating a functional, neat, and beautiful support.

Master N adjusted the twists slightly, so they spaced out more as they reached the end rather than the perfect spacing Viktor had. “Don’t try too hard to be perfect. Beautiful is better than perfect. Beautiful can breathe. Don’t strangle him with perfect.”

Viktor nodded then wrapped a rope around his waist and settled it over the top of his hips, crossing the ends over his pubic bone, winding it around the tops of his thighs. He paused for a moment, deciding as he felt over his legs. He laid the rope down in three loose loops over his thigh then did the other leg the same and hitched his hips to the upper bamboo with just enough tension to support him.
Viktor came around behind him and laid his lips over his neck as he hoisted his foot up then joined it with the other and tied them to the upper bar, stretching him back as far as he could go. Finishing off his bonds, Viktor’s hands came around to his hips and gripped down as his words nipped at his ear.

“Feels good?” His fingertips brushed the skin on his lower stomach sensitized further by the tautness of his stretch bringing the nerves to the surface.

His head dropped back then rolled to the side to open his neck to Viktor’s kisses. “Yes, Viktor.”

“Good, Yuri.” Stepping back to the front, he observed his work. “Beautiful. I love the bamboo. It works like a spreader bar, but it’s more flexible and much more attractive.”

He reached into his bag and pulled out a small black case and a bottle of sanitizer and a sachet of lube. Wiping his hands down with sanitizer, he pulled out one of the long, silver sounds with a gentle curve at the end that had knobs and bumps from its sterile bag and coated it in lube.

Yuri’s blood thickened as Viktor approached and took him in hand then slipped the first bullet-shaped bead into the slit of his cock. Yuri knew he was going to do it as he’d had to translate, but he wasn’t expecting it so soon, thinking he’d hold off to the end. As the ridges slipped slowly into him, he wished he had because his end was coming much sooner than he knew Viktor would like. His cock constricted around the sound as he hardened in a flash. He whimpered but had nowhere to go with his body thrust forward into Viktor’s hands.

“Hold on for me, sweetness.”

“Faster please? If—Angh! If it’s all the way in, it helps if I can’t come.”

“Oh, you can still come with a sound in.”

“Well, yeah, I wasn’t talking about the—” he gasped and whimpered near tears as it got closer to his prostate “—prostate orgasm. I mean the regular one.”

“I know. That’s what I was talking about too.”

“Oh shit. Really?”

“Yes.”

“Shit. I almost fucked up at the party then. I thought I couldn’t, so I didn’t try to hold back. I’m sorry.”

“Did you cum before I told you?”

“No, Viktor.”

“Then you did great. Remember, part of it is relaxing. Also, you weren’t entirely wrong. It depends on the sound. If it fits tight enough, it can block. This one would likely leak some. But the main thing that affects your obedience there is how much I stimulate your cock.” He grasped the ring that was the only part of the sound left still exposed and began slowly thrusting it into him.

“Oh god. Oh fuck. Viktor! I’m so close! Please. Please, mercy?” It was too much. He wanted to retreat but couldn’t. The pleasure coiled like venom in his gut, burning and congealing his blood.

He answered with more cruelty, picking up the pace a notch and grasping the base of the plug in his ass and pulling it out until he was stretched on the widest bulge again and pushed it back in, angling
it for his prostate as he began slowly thrusting with that as well.

Viktor’s smile full of bliss, satisfaction, and the thrill of a craving for more spread on his face. “Submit, Yuri.”

“Fuck. Fuck. I ca—It’s so much.”

“Ooh, lucky catch there. What can you endure?” His sadistic pleasure rolled off in thick waves and filled Yuri’s body.

He stared up at the charred beam above him as tears collected in his eyes then looked back at Viktor with them still held at bay. “Anything you tell me to.”

“There’s my good Yuri.” He seated both the sound and the plug fully into his body and let go with a kiss to his cheek which was only a relief for a moment before he realized he intended to leave him there in the wastelands of pleasure.

He went to his bag and pulled out a white sheet and spread it below him then opened a bottle of massage oil and began covering his chest and stomach with sensual strokes. With firm twists of his hand wrapping his cock, he massaged him both inside and out.

His toes flexed and curled as he writhed on the poles as much as he could move as pleasure skewered his thighs and stomach. “Vi—Viktor, please.”

“You must really like this one. You don’t usually beg for mercy this much.”

“Yes, Viktor.” He groaned with the extra hit. “Feels so good.”

“I’m not anywhere close to being done with you.” He gave him one last good tug then dropped down to give him a few licks for good measure then winked then went to his bag.

He came back holding a thick, crimson candle and a lighter. Flicking the lighter on, he touched it to the wick and waited for a moment for the wax to pool. He spilled it onto the back of his own hand then held it a little higher and poured again. Holding it above Yuri’s chest, he tipped out a drop then stopped the flow. “How does it feel.”

“Warm.”

“Not enough for you, huh?” He grinned and lowered his hand a bit then tipped out a small stream of wax that wriggled down his chest like the fireworks that turned into ash snakes once lit that he used to play with as a kid. “How’s that?”

“Feels good.”

“Does it hurt at all? I don’t want pain.”

“No, Viktor.”

“Good.”

He poured out another, thicker stream over his nipple and down onto his stomach that carried that same electric tingle of loving fingers carding through hair. He shivered as his head tipped back. Viktor turned on the plug in his ass that apparently vibrated then coated his chest with the wax that dripped onto his stomach before it fully hardened one small stream at a time, pausing on occasion to play with his toys some more.
Viktor kept him floating in the easy side of agony with dry orgasms rolling through his body every few minutes. It was still strange. Deeper, but not like he was used to. Not quite a release. More like a churning up of everything inside him until it was frothing to get out. The hot wax soothed and balanced just to the edge of pain that drifted away into a comforting hand pressed against his chest.

Viktor’s lips melted smoother than the wax down his neck. “Tell me a secret.”

His brain scrambled under the pleasure trying to make sense of what he wanted. “What?”

“Tell me a secret.”

“About what?”

“Anything I don’t know.” One of his hands pulled him tight into his body while the other thrust the sound slowly into him.

Anything… He smiled and focused his eyes on him which took every bit of control he had left to his name. “I like looking at you.”

His lips tightened with displeasure. “That’s not really a secret.”

“I mean, I like looking at you, not just because you’re pretty, but because it makes me feel good to see you. I don’t like looking at people very much. Even ones I think are cute or I know well. It makes me uncomfortable, and I always feel like looking away again quickly. I like looking at you because it makes me feel good.

“At first—at first, before I knew you, it was admiration and… hope that I felt. Now—now, when I look at you… I feel safe. Safety and admiration and pleasure and everything good a person can feel, I feel when I look at you. I like looking at you, and I want to do it as much as I can. I’m sor—sorry it’s not a very good secret, but it was the one I thought to tell.”

“It was perfect.” His lips had stilled, and he just held his face against his neck. “It was perfect. As always.” He turned up the vibrations on the plug and pushed a little faster and deeper with the sound until it was massaging deeper inside his prostate as his other hand grasped around his slick cock and brought him to the boiling edge of release. “Come for me, zolotse.”

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The next day, Yuri woke up to the announcement from Viktor that it was time to switch and play at what normal couples do which was already off on the wrong foot as normal couples typically didn’t negotiate trial relationships. Though, he guessed they were all trial relationships just without saying as much at the start. When did they become real? When someone confessed love? At marriage? What even was a normal relationship? What did they have to do differently? What still stood and what was gone? If he wasn’t his Dom, that meant all his orders were gone, right? Would they still play?

Viktor brushed his cheek with his fingertips. “Questions?”

“How?”

He laughed. “I have no idea. I never got very far in dating without that whole kissing part, so I’m just about as clueless as you are here.”

He turned onto his side so he could face him, his fingertips reaching out to caress his chest. “I’m guessing, ‘yes, Viktor,’ is out?”
“Yes. You’re not banned from using it because that would be an order. Just use it as you would naturally, I guess.”

“And I don’t have to do what you tell me?”

“No.”

“Can we still play?”

“God, yes. As long as you want to that is.”

“Yes, Viktor.” He bit his lip as the flood of pleasure hit his brain and filtered down to his body. “That’s not supposed to happen.”

“But it will. It would fade without reinforcement, so if you want it to go away faster, say it less.”

“Yes, Viktor.” Cringing, he pressed his face into Viktor’s chest. “Sorry. It just feels right to say.”

He kissed his head. “It’s okay. You’re free to say it as you wish.”

“What if I don’t want it to fade?” He glanced up when Viktor’s response didn’t come. “Oh.”

“I’m going to work out. Would you like to join me?”

“I can say no?”

“Yes.”

He thought about it for a second, and while staying in bed and sleeping some more sounded rather nice, getting back in shape was important, and Viktor hadn’t been slacking on feeding him. “Yes, Viktor. I’ll go.”

They got out of bed, and Yuri made it while Viktor changed into his shorts. Finishing his task, he looked at the end of the bed where Viktor usually left an outfit for him but saw nothing.

“Um, what should I wear?”

“Whatever you want.”

He frowned as he considered his options at the dresser. Viktor gave him so many options. It was too much to sort through to decide. Snatching the first pair of shorts he saw, he closed the drawer and went over to Viktor’s side and pulled out one of his stash of worn gray t-shirts and grinned as he held it up. “Can I borrow your shirt?”

He smiled and nodded his assent and Yuri changed into it, pleased with himself that he’d managed that first hurdle then sighed at the fact that getting dressed was a hurdle at all. He’d managed just fine before Viktor. Why was it suddenly so hard?

They headed into the kitchen for some water and a pre-workout banana. They usually took them back into their room so Viktor could train him which Mari had acted all kinds of confused about and then horrified when she realized they likely needed the privacy for some perverted reason which she was, of course, not wrong about. Now, they stood in the kitchen while she did some early prep for the cooking and ate while trying to ignore the glances she threw their way. The banana tasted wrong, and his body was wired from denied expectations of pleasure.

“Viktor…” He gave him a plaintive look as he choked down another wrong bite of banana.
“I know. It should get easier after a couple of days.”

He sighed and forced himself to finish the bland banana, and they headed out, jogging down to the beach as their warmup. Their feet hit the sand, and they took off, racing each other as hard as they could until Yuri conceded defeat and they dropped back to a walk. They had stopped using Viktor’s timer a while ago, instead pushing harder off each other than the timer ever drove them. Before they fully recovered, Viktor gave a nod, and they took off again. At least this part still felt right.

Finishing their run, they bounded up to the bars at the playground and jumped up and began their pull-ups. Yuri was actually able to hold his body up and mostly horizontal now and kept pace with Viktor decently. He still wasn’t quite at his peak performance, but not shameful anymore either. He dropped back down with a huff as they completed their last set and looked over to Viktor with an expectant smile.

“Nice work. Ready for triceps?”

“Yes, Viktor.” He frowned as he followed him to the lower parallel bars, trying to figure out what was missing in his chest. Right. Viktor wasn’t trying to shape his efforts. Over the top praise was out too. He grabbed the bars and started lowering himself down, holding his feet off the ground.

“Did I say something wrong?”

“No, Viktor. Not wrong. Just… different.”

He gave a sad little smile. “Sorry. I’m not really sure what’s normal encouragement and what’s me trying to praise you for doing something I like. You really are impressive with how quickly you’re improving.”

“Thanks. I used to be pretty decent at this stuff. I shouldn’t have stopped doing strength training at the gym.”

“Why did you stop?”

“I don’t know. Running felt better and I guess… it just didn’t feel like I needed that anymore.”

“Why wouldn’t you need to be strong? Even without riding, it’s just a sign of good health.”

Taking advantage of the fact that he didn’t have to struggle to explain something he didn’t have the faintest clue of how to explain, he shrugged.

“Alright.” Viktor dropped down and went back to the higher bar. “Join me for abs if you like.”

He hesitated. He’d sounded sort of mad. Was he wrong to just shrug? He wasn’t required to answer, but it was probably rude to answer with a shrug. If Viktor were just his… boyfriend. Would shrugging be an acceptable response? Probably not. They’re supposed to be getting to know each other, right? He came over to the bar where Viktor was already halfway done with his first set and jumped up to join him. “I’m sorry. I just didn’t know how to respond.”

“It’s okay. You’re free to answer as you like.”

“Yeah, but it was rude. I’m sorry.”

“It’s okay.” He gave him a little smile then used his powerful arms to shift over to the side and leave a kiss on his cheek. “You’re forgiven.”
Finished with their workout, they jogged back to the house and got into the shower. They usually took turns washing each other which had at first seemed nonsensical to Yuri and confusing as to how he could do it as an act of submission while Viktor did as an act of dominance, but he truly did feel submissive whether he was washing Viktor or holding still while Viktor washed him, and he guessed that Viktor likely felt dominant just the same. The meaning doesn’t come from the act. It comes from how you view the act. That’s what Viktor had said. Now, washing himself, the act was laborious to a ridiculous degree. He wanted to quit halfway through, but he was struck by an idea as he washed his thighs.

Pressing his thighs together, he pushed the sponge between them releasing a thick stream of lather. Dragging the sponge slowly back out, he pulled it around to his popped-out ass while his free hand took to gliding over his skin, occasionally grabbing handfuls of the flesh Viktor liked to grab the most. He could seduce him. Right? That was something normal couples did. Moaning almost imperceptibly, he tipped his head back and squeezed the sponge over his chest then went back to his thighs knowing they had the greatest chance of luring him in.

“Yuri… That shower you’re taking looks positively filthy.”

He wiped the smile off his face before he turned back to give him the most innocent eyes he could manage. “What do you mean?”

“Oh, you little... I know you’re not that innocent. You know exactly what you’re doing.”

“And what would that be?” He crushed a fresh stream of creamy suds from the sponge to trickle down his thighs as he smirked.

He grabbed his waist and pulled him in, steam pouring off his chest. “Tempting me with your body.”

“Is that so? Are you feeling tempted, Viktor?”

Yanking him around, he pushed his back up against the tiles, looming over him. “Name your price.”

“Huh?”

“Name your price. You want my soul, you little temptress? If you’re playing wicked games, they must come at wicked prices. So, what do I have to pay for a taste of you?”

He got lost in Viktor’s scorched blue eyes trying to find the ability to speak again. Fuck, he was so hot. Still, he couldn’t let him win the game he started. “Say my name. When you come, say my name as if you’ve never said anyone’s name before.”

“That’s easy. Your name is the only one that has ever tasted the pleasure on my lips.”

Fuck, he was so much better at this than he was. Viktor thrust his cock between Yuri’s thighs as he took him in hand. Viktor’s free hand went up to muffle Yuri’s cries as he thrust hard and dirty into him with a slap of flesh that would be unmistakable if anyone paused at the door for too long.

Keeping him trapped within his gaze, Viktor held him at the edge for just a moment before spilling him over without warning as Viktor whispered his name in his ear as a reverent oath. His lips covered his neck as they came down, Yuri clinging to him with shaking hands at the stampede of pleasure.

Satisfied but not, Yuri finished his shower trying to place what was off. Viktor had still dominated him, taking control of the game he started and gave him no less pleasure than he ever had even if it was quick, which they often had to do to fit it in with everything else in a day, so what was wrong?
Don’t wait too long to decide on what it is you really want, Yuri. I’ve never much cared for games. I find real sports much more satisfying.

It was a game.

Somewhere along the way, he’d started to understand exactly what it was they were doing and having to go back to Viktor just playing at being his Dom felt empty. Maybe it would get better after a few days like he said. Viktor didn’t seem to know where the line was any better than he did. A few days seemed reasonable to adjust to their shift.

Faced with the overwhelming drawer again, he grabbed the first pair of jeans he saw then went back to Viktór’s drawer and picked up another freshly-worn gray shirt. “Can I borrow another?”

Viktor smiled and bopped his nose. “You’re going to run out faster than I can supply them at this rate.”

“Oh. Yeah, that’s fine.” He started to put it back.

“I didn’t say no. Go ahead.” He pulled a clean one from his drawer and pulled it over his head. “I’ll just have to keep up the supply.”

Tears inexplicably rose in his throat. “But… you don’t like dressing so casually when we’re out.”

“It’s fine. Go ahead, Yuri. Really. It’s okay.”

“No. It’s fine. I can wear something else. I don’t want to make you wear something you don’t want to.”

“Suit yourself, but I’m not changing no matter what you decide.” He pulled a pair of white jeans over his skimpy black underwear.

He started to fold the shirt back up but couldn’t bring himself to put it back in the drawer and instead put it on feeling guilty that Viktor was only dressed in what he considered pajamas because of him. Having overcome another absurd hurdle, they went out to join his family for breakfast.

Mari rolled her eyes upon spotting them. “Ugh. Now you’re dressing alike? I never imagined my little brother being so cheesy. Oh, right. This is Viktor’s doing.”

“Actually, it is my fault.”

She sighed and handed them the coffee. “I don’t get you anymore.”

Yeah, not like he could blame her. The Yuri she knew was long gone. “Thanks.” He stared at the food in front of him that his mom set down. Shit. He could eat this, but if he did, that’d break their lie about his hand. He had no idea what he’d do without Viktor to force feed him the katsudon his mom was serving nearly every day. But that wasn’t his role anymore. He now had to feed himself as well as dress himself. He gave a silent laugh at how pathetic he was, shaking his head at himself that these were now challenging tasks.

“How’s your hand feeling, zolotse?”

“It’s better.”

“Are you sure? I don’t mind feeding you still.”

He’d gotten far too dependent. Putting a stop to it was probably for the best. “Yeah, I’m sure.”
He picked up his chopsticks and glanced over. Viktor had started eating, but he was annoyed. He knew as well as Yuri did that the next bowl of katsudon was going to be nearly impossible without his help. His family would certainly notice his shaking. Oh well. Too late now. He picked up a bite of rice and brought the heavy sticks to his mouth. He shook his head again. Ridiculous.

“So, what do you want to do today?” Viktor glanced over putting his annoyance away.

“Um, I don’t know. What do you want to do?”

“I asked you first.”

“But I don’t know what I want to do.”

“Well, we could go visit a shrine or go hiking or see Yuko again or stop in at Minako’s or… it’s your country. You should know better than I do of what’s here.”

“Well, I was never a tourist here. I don’t really know those things as much. Um… Just decide. I’m fine with wherever you want to go.”

“What is your preference?”

“I don’t have a preference. I’m fine with anything. Do you want to go shopping? You like that.”

“But you hate shopping.”

“But you like it.”

“But you hate it.”

“It’s fine. I’ll go shopping. I won’t complain.”

“But I know you don’t want to do that. Let’s do something we’d both enjoy.”

“I’ll enjoy it if you do. I’m not picky.”

Viktor sighed. “You’re killing me, Yuri. Just pick something that sounds fun to you.”

“I can’t think of anything.”

“Come on, Yuri. You must have a personal opinion or preference in there somewhere.”

“I must not because I really don’t care. It really doesn’t matter. I’ll have fun if I’m with you.”

“That’s really sweet of you, but you need to pick something you want to do.”

“Why? What I want is to not pick something, but you’re trying to make me do that anyway.”

He huffed and stabbed at a chunk of sweet potato. “Fine. I guess I am. We can just stay in and relax then I guess.”

“But you don’t want to do that. I thought we were supposed to find something we both wanted to do.”

“Well, that’s clearly not happening, is it?” He glared at his barely touched plate. “You should eat your food.”

“I’m not hungry.”
“Your mom made us a delicious breakfast.”

“Yes, she did, but I’m just not hungry.”

“I doubt that.”

“So then doubt it.” Twisting his fists up in his shirt, he held back the familiar waver in his throat.

“Yuri,” a smile bearing a white flag fluttered on his face, “is your hand really better? I can keep feeding you. It’s not a problem.”

He wanted to say yes, but he’d already said he was fine, and it was just pathetic that he really did need Viktor to feed him. “I’m fine.”

“Yeah, I see that.” His mouth cut hard lines. “I always know when you’re fine, Yuri.”

“Well, you can’t do anything about it now, can you?”

“I can help you. I’m your boyfriend, right? That’s something boyfriends can do.”

He grabbed a bite of natto and shoved it in his face then glared at Viktor. “I want to go shopping.”

“But you don’t.”

“But I do.”

“Oh. My. God. You two are so fucking weird,” Mari hissed, taking a deep drag of her cigarette. They must have really annoyed her. She usually didn’t start smoking until later in the day.

“Mari-chan! Don’t be so rude,” his mom scolded.

“But they are! Oh my god, how can you stand listening to them?”

“It just a little fight. It happen to every couple.”

“But they don’t fight. Yuri-chan is like creepily easy going around him. I thought they were weird before, but this is just weird and annoying. Whatever you broke, fix it.”

“I would think you’d like this better,” Viktor said. “Like your mom said, we’re being normal.”

“Well, normal looks weird on you guys. Just stop whatever you’re doing.”

“Isn’t that something for Yuri and me to worry about?”

“She’s right.” Yuri scowled at his uneaten food, guilt and annoyance churning knots in his stomach. “I hate this.”

“Just give it a little time, and we’ll work it out.”

“Work out what? How to argue? How to break everything we built? How to slowly resent each other because we can’t be who we are? I hate this, Viktor.”

“It’s not even been a day. You can’t really—”

“I can. I hate this. Please?”

“It’s been barely over an hour.”
“I don’t care. This sucks.”

“You’re sure? Absolutely sure?”

Huffing lightly, he looked up at him with pouting eyes. Sure, he was pathetic, but Viktor never made him feel pathetic. Like an alchemist, Viktor could take away the angered emotions grating his insides and replace them with comfort and even pride. “My hand hurts.”

“Oh, thank god.” Viktor lunged, tackling him to the floor with kisses to his face while he squealed.

“Viktor!” He laughed and pushed back at him then drowned in relief when Viktor didn’t budge and instead kissed him harder.

“Worst hour of my life.” His lips smacked over his forehead in the rudest display of affection.

He sighed and closed his eyes and let Viktor’s relief smother them both. Grasping his solid body, he took a deep breath then stretched up to leave a clinging kiss on Viktor’s neck. Viktor pulled back in surprise then smiled warmly and pulled him up into his side.

Viktor grabbed a bite of natto from Yuri’s bowl. “Open up, zolotse.”

“Yes, Viktor.” He rested against Viktor’s side as he rushed back into Yuri’s body exactly where he should be and took what Viktor gave.

Hugging him tighter, he kissed the top of his head. “So good, zolotse, yes?”

“Yes, Viktor.”

“So. Fucking. Weeeird.” Mari slapped her hands on the table as she leaned in to hiss then sat back shaking her head and breathed in her cigarette as if the smoke would carry her away from them if she could just hold enough of it.

“Stop it,” his mom scolded. “They’re cute.”

“Tousan’s with me.”

“No, Kaachan is right. They look very happy.” His dad took a sip of his tea with a smile. “And maybe a little weird.”

“See?” Mari flung her hand at them. “Thank you.”

Yuri stuck his tongue out then opened up for Viktor again.

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Another blissful week passed before Viktor announced that they’d be leaving. Well, blissful apart from the fact that Viktor had let his bruises all fade and refused to give him more. He gave him pain that wouldn’t leave marks, but he missed the familiar whips, crops, and floggers. His family had organized a going away party, and Viktor was now picking out their last outfits while Yuri packed the rest of the suitcases.

Zipping up the last case, he grabbed the cream-colored shirt from the bed and put it on. It wrapped one side over the other like a yukata but hung loosely, exposing the top few inches of his pecs. A midnight blue jacket with wide sleeves, slightly more tailored than its traditional inspiration, went over it and stopped about mid-thigh. A pair of black pants that clung to his thighs finished off the look that Viktor had chosen during a trip to Tokyo with his family after he had secretly booked the
entire onsen for three days, so they could have time off and join them as they explored more of Japan.

Yuri stared at the strange figure he made in the mirror with his subtly high-fashion outfit and glasses-free face and slicked back hair. He tugged at the pants. “Aren’t these a little tight?”

“Seriously? Still? I would think even you would see how hot you are now.”

He had managed to lose the belly fat and had some definition in his stomach now, but he’d also put on more muscle in his arms and legs making them thicker than ever. Even if logically he knew it was muscle, it still felt weird. “I’m not as soft as I was. Aren’t I less appealing to you now? I’m not your type.”

“Do you look like you?”

“Um…” He squinted in confusion. “Yes? Who else could I look like?”

“Then you’re exactly my type.” He smiled and kissed his head then dropped his hands away from the toggles on his red shirt leaving the mandarin collar still open several inches.

“Viktor…” Melting at his words, he clutched Viktor’s shirt to pull him in and kiss his chest as he rested his forehead on him. “You’re too sweet.”

“Do you feel better like this?”

“Yeah. I still feel a bit strange, I’ve never had this much muscle, but it feels better overall.”

“Good. You look so sexy, Yuri.”

“Am I still… fuckable to you?”

“Oohf, such a powerful question.” He grabbed his legs and hoisted them around his waist then dropped them both on the bed. Smoothing his hand over his face, he left kisses on his open skin. “Fucking you would be the greatest pleasure of my life. You are so completely fuckable. I would fuck you every single night and thank you for the honor. I would—”

“Okay! Okay! I get it.” He giggled with Viktor’s insistent lips on his neck then gripped his hair and stretched up to kiss his forehead. “Thank you.”

He pulled him from the bed and smoothed his hair back into place with his sweet smile. “Anytime. Come on.” He took his hand and led him out to the kitchen where his mom was prepping for dinner. He took an apron off the wall and handed it to him. “I volunteered you to help your mom make katsudon.”

“Oh, okay. Are you going to help us too?”

“No, I offered to help your dad set up the tables and the music.”

“But—” He clung harder to his hand. What if his mom asked him something he had to lie about? Lying to his mom’s face was more than he could take.

Viktor kissed his forehead and freed his hand. “You’ll have fun. I’m just out there if you need me.”

Nodding as Viktor pulled away he whispered, “Yes, Viktor,” and watched him go.
“Something wrong?”

He shook his head and folded up his sleeves and turned to her with a smile. “Everything’s fine, Kaachan. What do you want me to do?”

“Vikchan said you learned how to make katsudon for him and that you made it a little different to suit his tastes. I want to try your version.”

“But it’s not as good as yours.”

“Oh, stop it. I’m sure it’s delicious. I’ve had my katsudon so many times. I want to try my Yuri-chan’s version.”

“Okay. Um, we need to get the rice going, and I usually salt the meat earlier, but it should still be fine like this.”

“I already started the rice.”

He nodded and grabbed the pork from the fridge as well as the salt and a fork.

His mom held up a wooden mallet then puzzled at his hand. “A fork?”

“To pierce the meat. It makes it more tender and brings the salt deeper. What’s the mallet for?”

“I pound the meat thinner. It also tenderizes.”

“Oh, that’s how you do it. The meat I could find in the store was always thicker, but I couldn’t find it any thinner, so I started using a fork after reading it would help.”

“Okay, let’s do it.” She smiled and put down the mallet and grabbed a fork as well and they laid out the meat and started stabbing away after covering it with a healthy sprinkle of salt.

A sudden, selfish desire sparked that he recoiled from at first, but Viktor would be thrilled if he asked… “Can… can you make one for me that’s like how you make it?”

“Of course, I can.” She picked up her mallet at started pounding out one of the pieces.

“Thanks, Kaachan.”

She smiled. “I’m glad you still like mine.” Finished pounding out the meat, she set the mallet in the sink. “Pepper?”

“Pepper? Oh, um, I don’t use pepper. Should I?”

“We’re making it your way so whatever you do is fine.”

He thought about it for a second, and while Viktor had said his was good, more flavor couldn’t hurt, right? Viktor liked stronger flavors. “Sure. Let’s use pepper.” They covered both sides of the meat then dusted it with flour then egg and panko and left them to sit while the coating got nicely stuck to the meat. At least they did that part the same. “Where’s the hon dashi?”

“Hon dashi? Yuri-chan, no.” His mom gasped looking horrified. “Dashi is so simple to make. Why not make it?”

“Well, I couldn’t find bonito flakes, but they had instant dashi, so I just used that.”
“I… I guess I can go to the store. It won’t take me long.”

“No, let’s make it.”

“Oh, thank god.”

He laughed. “Sorry, Kaachan. I didn’t mean to commit a sacrilege.”

“It’s fine. If you don’t have bonito, it can’t be helped. I’ll make sure you go home with plenty. Call me if you run out. I’ll send more.”

“Okay, so how do I make dashi?”

“Simple.” His mom pulled out a pot along with bonito flakes and konbu.

Working their way through the rest of the recipe as the bustle of the party rose outside, they traded techniques along the way until what they had was a hybrid of both. It was smooth sailing until they hit the part with the eggs.

“You don’t cook the meat in the eggs?”

“No, I misread the recipe and then didn’t really check after that because I thought I knew and now Viktor likes it that way. The flavors are okay. Just the texture is different.”

“Okay, let’s do it.” His mom nodded firmly as if she’d just steeled herself to go bungee jumping.

Yuri couldn’t help but laugh and kiss her cheek as he wrapped his arm around her shoulders. “You’re so cute, Kaachan.”

She startled then blushed as a smile spread wider and wider across her face until her eyes were sparkling with tears. “Yuri-chan… I missed you so much.”

“I know, Kaachan.” He pulled her in for a tighter hug. “I’m so sorry. I missed you too.” He blinked against his own tears.

She sniffed, trying to regain control. “Sorry, sorry.”

“It’s okay.” Holding her a little tighter, he kissed the top of her head.

“Is everything okay out there really? I’ve been so worried about you.”

“Yeah. Everything’s fine now. It was… kinda bad for a while but Viktor… he helps.”

“Good. He’s really as good to you as he seems?”

“Even better than you know.”

“Good.” She pulled back and held his arms for a moment, looking up with a smile then wiped her face on her apron and turned to the pans. “Okay, how do we do this?”

Bringing the trays loaded with steaming bowls of katsudon through the door, they were greeted by the cheers of the already drunken party guests. The three little rugrats, who had clearly taken after their father, nearly tripped Yuri as they rushed up to claim their favorite bowls from the tray before he could set it down.

“Hey! Miscreants,” he chided with a smile setting down the tray.
They squealed and ran off with their haul.

“Ooh, this looks good, Yuri-chan. Sorry about my girls.” Yuko took the bowl he handed over with her always kind smile.

“Don’t worry about it. I blame Nishigori anyway.”

“As you should,” she laughed. “They are absolutely his children.”

“Hey, I was the most well-behaved child ever.” Nishigori snatched his bowl with his protest while Yuri and Yuko exchanged glances. “What’s that look for? I was.”

“Uh huh. Whatever you say, honey.” Yuko took a bite of her food. “Woah. This is the best katsudon ever! Yuri-chan, you made this?”

“Me and my mom.” He handed a bowl to Viktor who took it with a kiss to his cheek.

“But this isn’t your mom’s recipe. This is like… You know those cooking shows where they take something simple and make it fancy? This is that. Deconstructed katsudon. Oh my god, it’s so good!” She shoveled the katsudon into her mouth.

Yuri smiled in thanks as his mom handed him her katsudon.

“Wow, Yuri! She’s right. This is even better than before.” Viktor beamed and kissed his cheek.

“My mom gave me some advice too, and we ended up combining the recipes.” He looked over to his mom who was taking her first cautious bite. “Is it okay?”

“It delicious! So tasty, Yuri-chan.”

The rest of their crowd murmured their agreement as they started in on their bowls.

“Yours looks different.” Viktor cocked his head looking at Yuri’s bowl.

“Yeah, I asked my mom to make her version for me.”

“You did? Really?” His eyes watered as they widened in surprise.

“Yes, Viktor.”

“Oh my god. I’m so proud of you, Yuri.” He pulled him in close to whisper more praises in his ear.

Viktor released him, and he picked up his chopsticks.

“I can do it.”

“It’s okay. I think I’ve got it.” Picking up a strip of meat with only a slight tremor in his hand, he took a bite and smiled.

“Is it good?”

“The best.” He blinked away a few overwhelmed tears and took another bite.

“Yuri,” Viktor’s voice and smile wavered as he pulled him in again to cover him with kisses, keeping his voice low, “I’m so incredibly proud of you.”

“Thank you.” He stretched up to kiss his cheek. “For everything.”
“Try a bite of yours too. It’s really good.” He held out a bite for him from his own bowl.

“Yeah, it’s pretty good too. It’s better with my mom’s help.”

Viktor pulled him in under his free arm and kissed his head. “I’m so proud.”

He finished every bite of his mom’s katsudon by himself despite the tinge of sickness in his stomach then huddled into Viktor’s tight arms to relieve that as well. They ate a little too much and drank a little too much while Yuri stayed quietly stuck to Viktor’s side and enjoyed the last bit of time with his family and friends.

“Yuuuriii…” Viktor gave him a little pinch, and he jumped with a gasp, his heart slamming into his chest. “Woah, sweetheart, easy.” He rubbed his back with slow strokes. “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to scare you. Are you okay?”

“Yeah, I…” His voice was too squeaky for him to talk through.

“I was trying to get your attention, and you weren’t responding again.”

“Sorry. Sorry, I—” He had to get out of there. He scrambled against Viktor’s hold.

Viktor held him tighter. “Yuri? What’s going on?”

Mari looked over from where she was talking to Minako. “Just let him go. He’s just like that sometimes. He’ll come back when he feels better. It’ll make it worse if you try to make him stay.”

Viktor considered her advice for a moment then shook his head. “Stay, Yuri.” He leaned in to bring his rumbling command just to him. “Kneel. Just in your mind. You don’t have to really do it. Remember your order? Stay, kneel, and squeeze your hands back and forth. Focus on just that. Be soft for me.” He moved his hands up to his shoulders and started up his gentle back and forth rhythm. “You’re okay, zolotse. You’re here with me. You’re safe. Yes?”

“Ye—yes. Yes, Viktor.” He breathed out deeply as he felt his mind sink under Viktor’s control. He started matching Viktor’s rhythm with his hands, focusing on his task. Be soft. Viktor likes it when he’s soft. His chest shook harder as he let his shoulders soften away from his ears, but after a minute, that started to quiet as well.

“That’s my good Yuri. Just like that. You’re so good at doing what I’ve asked even when it’s hard like this. You’re so strong to find the strength to obey even when your body is fighting you. I’m so proud of you for staying with me through this.”

Sighing, he relaxed into his side as the attack started to lose its grip.

“So good, Yuri. I’m so proud of you.” He pulled him into a hug and stroked his head. “Are you able to tell me what happened?”

“Um… an anxiety attack. I get them randomly sometimes too.”

“I’m sorry. That was my fault, wasn’t it? I scared you.”

“No, Viktor. I was already in it. That spaciness… it usually starts like that. Not always, but a lot of the time. I get… out of it. Like I don’t feel like I’m really here or something will catch my attention, and I’ll focus on that and not be aware of anything else, but I’m also not really seeing whatever it was that caught my attention either.”
“Like being transfixed on something?”

“Yeah. Like an old hypnotist movie or something.”

“And then you start to feel scared?”

“Yeah, sometimes. Sometimes I just float around in that spaciess for a while. I guess it’s my body’s way of protecting me from the anxiety attack? Or that’s what I was told at least. It’s like my mind realizes that I’m scared before I do and just sorta leaves until it’s over. Or until the anxiety gets too high and breaks through.”

“And I broke that protective measure by startling you. I’m so sorry.”

“No, please, break it. I hate the spaciess more than any of the rest of it. I don’t even know what’s happening then. I just feel wrong. At least when I feel the shakiness and racing heart, I know what it is, and I know it will go away. And it’s dangerous. I just go around not really being aware of what I’m doing or—” He gasped as tears suddenly strangled his words.

“Yuri? Shh… it’s okay, zolotse.” He pressed his face into his chest to help him hide. “Shh… we can talk more later. Stay. Kneel. You’re okay.”

“Pain. Please?”

Grabbing a piece of flesh on his side, he pinched down until a soothing hint of pain released. “I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have asked you for more details here. Stay, kneel, and be soft. You’re so good for me, yes?”

“Yes, Viktor. Thank you.” Taking a deep breath, he sat back up, his tears tucked away for now.

“Anytime you need.”

Viktor kept him talking about any little bits of nonsense he could think of until he was smiling easily again.

Mari came over and sat next to Viktor. “How did you get him to stay?”

“I just told him to and then gave him something to focus on to help him do that.”

Her mouth twisted up. “That’s it?”

“That’s it.”

“When he leaves, it’s usually for a few hours at least. I was expecting him to be done for the night.” She looked between them, a decision playing in her eyes then gave a slight bow to Viktor. “Please take care of him.”

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After a long plane ride home with a stop at the stable where Viktor had gotten Toska on the way where they got to play with dozens of the cutest little foals, they arrived home late on a Wednesday night and took advantage of one more night together with no appearances to uphold. He lay snuggled against Viktor's chest, hating the fact that tomorrow night he’d have to sleep alone. Well, he didn’t have to. He could just kiss him and make that promise, but every time he thought about it, fear coiled in his stomach and struck his heart.

“Yuri… I need to tell you something.” Viktor smoothed Yuri's hair and kissed his head. "The party
this Friday… Just because I don’t want this to be a huge surprise for you there… You’re going up for auction.”

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Chapter End Notes

And Clarinda is the lovely artist for both arts this week. Check them out on [Tumblr](https://example.tumblr.com).

**Spotify**
36. Hardest of Hearts by Florence + The Machines
37. Cringe - Stripped by Matt Maeson
38. My Demons by Starset
Chapter 18

Chapter Summary

Going once... going twice...

Chapter Notes

Art is safe. It doesn't really fit any scenes here but Clarinda did a great job of recreating one of Viktor's old photos so we're sharing.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Viktor removed himself from Yuri’s side in the jade room, the scent of his lotion still thick, as if he were removing his own skin and handed him his clothes. “So, back to normal then? Six to six.”

“I guess so.” He slipped his t-shirt over his aching chest.

They’d had their punishment day and while he hadn’t been too bad, mostly just minor arguing and being cruel to himself, Viktor had followed it up with another sensory session where he’d been ordered to masturbate ‘nicely,’ which was the last thing he wanted after being reminded of the ways he disappointed Viktor. Exactly why he ordered it. At least he’d been allowed to give him a blowjob this time which made it slightly better. Finished dressing, he put his glasses on and followed Viktor upstairs.

Stopping in the kitchen, they began loading the counter up with all the food they had prepped earlier in the day for the cookout that evening and got everything all set up. Yuri pulled out the trays of little Russian dumplings, varenky, they had made earlier that afternoon and set them next to the enormous pot of water Viktor had boiling on the stove. He grabbed Viktor around the waist and held on, burying his face in his back.

“Yuri? What’s wrong?”

“I’m not leaving, but I’m not yours. I don’t know how to switch, and people are coming any minute.”

“Ah, right. The ending ritual. I’m sorry, I forgot about it. It’s been so long since I’ve had to say goodbye to you.” He turned around and held him in his arms, breathing a kiss to the top of his head. “Thank you for every wonderful moment you spent with me. You’re free now.”

He shook his head and clung tighter. “I hate it when you say that. The, ‘You’re free now.’ Please say something else?”

“Okay.” He smiled into his kiss as he thought. “What about… Come back to me soon.”

“Much better.” Taking a deep breath, he gripped him tighter. “Viktor?”

“Yes?”
“The auction… will I get it right?”

“I have complete faith in you.” He kissed his head one more time then pushed him back. “People will be coming.” Turning back to the counter, he started dropping the varenyky into the boiling water.

“What do you want me to do next?”

“You can grab something to drink and relax. You’re a guest now.”

“I want to help.”

“Okay, thank you for your offer. Do you want to start the grill?”

“Yes, Viktor.” He went out to light the grill then came back in and went to the fridge. “What would you like to drink?”

“What ever you’re having.”

“I’m not drinking. That’s just a disaster waiting to happen. Don’t you remember the last party I drank at?”

“Yes, I was there. You had a few drinks and other than a minor anxiety attack, all was well.”

“Oh, right. I forgot about that one. I meant the one here. At Phichit’s place.”

“Phichit’s? Isn’t that your house too?”

“Right. It’s just… I haven’t been there much.”

“I’ll be a responsible host and cut you off before you get yourself into trouble. Or you can decide on a number of drinks to have beforehand and stick to it.”

“That’s a good idea. No hard liquor and three regular drinks.”

“Sounds reasonable to me.”

He grabbed two of Viktor’s favorite, and likely very expensive, beers from the fridge and handed him one, making sure to turn the label out and bowing slightly as he did so just as his mom had taught him to serve guests.

Viktor smiled and cracked his beer open. “I swear that’s the cutest thing ever.”

“What is?” Mila came up and kissed Viktor on the cheek as she hopped up onto the counter, peering into the pot. “Ooh, that looks tasty. I haven’t had varenyky in ages. Can you get me a beer, Yuri?”

“Sure.”

Viktor shook his head at her. “I swear you are something else, you know that?”

“What? You said to just come in and make ourselves at home. I’m very obedient.” She winked.

“Like hell you are.”

She kissed Yuri’s cheek as he handed her a beer. “Thanks, baby doll. So, what was the cutest thing ever?”
Viktor glanced at the patio then banged the water from the spoon then went right back to stirring the pot. Strange. It was the first non-sensical action Yuri had ever seen him do. “Oh, just the babies we looked at.”

“They must be the cutest babies ever.” Phichit came in through the open patio along with Georgi and Leo and another small boy he hadn’t met before and gave Yuri an awkward smile. “It took you three weeks to look at them.” After a moment of thought, he leaned forward and kissed Yuri’s cheek. “Hey. Good to see you.”

“Yeah, uh,” he glanced over to Viktor’s tightened hand on the spoon then looked back and tried to smile. “You too.”

“So, did you buy any?” Mila asked.

“Yeah. They won’t be ready to come home until November though.” Viktor’s annoyance chipped at his voice as he banged the water out of the slotted spoon fishing the varenyky from the boiling water.

“Oooh, let me see! You have pictures, right? What breed did you get? Do you have names yet?” Was she oblivious to the tension or trying to cover it?

“No names yet, and they’re Dutch Warmbloods like Toska. There’s pictures. Yuri? Want to get my phone? My hands are a bit tied at the moment.”

“Yes, Viktor.” He grabbed the phone from the back pocket of his jeans, entered his passcode, and tapped on the folder with his pictures that sat over the picture of him on Avos for the first time that was his background.

“Wow. You gave him full access to your phone?” Phichit asked.

“Why not? I don’t hire people I can’t trust. I had some contacts in there I wanted him to call. It was easier to let him use my phone. Help yourself to any drinks. I’ve got wine on the counter and beer in the fridge.”

Phichit nodded and headed for the fridge. “Thanks.”

Yuri flipped past the endless photos focused on him more than on the foals until he found the two babies he got standing side by side, nipping at each other’s faces. Another little gray because Viktor said it was his lucky color making him edge out another one he had also liked and the other one black. Well, mousy brown right now, but he’d be black when his foal coat shed out. He held up the phone for the rest of them to see.

“Aww, so cute!” Mila cooed over the screen. “You’re so right. They are the cutest ever. Did you get both?”

“Yeah. Yuri, show them the other two.”

“Which other two?”

“The little chestnut and the silver black.”

“The chestnut that kept trying to kick me?”

“That’s the one.” He bit back a smile. “I got those two as well.”

“Wait, really? I thought….” Shit. What was he supposed to say? Wasn’t he there specifically to help
him decide on the horses? “You decided to go with them after all then…”

“I did. They’re both going to be trickier to train, but they’ve got potential, and I know exactly what they need to reach it.”

Hiding his whimper in a deep chug of beer, he found the right photos and held them up for everyone to see while trying to contain the freak out from Viktor’s obvious plans. He wasn’t sure how successful he was.

“Silver black?” the small new kid asked. “I haven’t heard of that color.”

“It’s a black coat, often with dapples, with a silver or wheat colored mane and tail. Silver gene over black base,” Leo said with a smile. “It’s a rare variation. You guys haven’t met yet, have you? Yuri, this is Guang Hong. He took over the position you were originally going to fill.”

“Nice to meet you.” Yuri shook his hand. “Are you liking it here so far?”

“Yeah, well, I’ve been here for a while. I used to just work on Sundays, but Viktor asked if I wanted a permanent position now that I’m done with high school.”

“Oh, well, congratulations.” He switched off the phone and stuck it back in Viktor’s pocket who was seasoning the burgers, successfully avoiding the grabbing of his waist that he itched to do. “What else should I do?”

“Do you want to put the music on and throw the corn on the grill?”

“Yes, Viktor.” He tried to keep his voice low enough so others wouldn’t pay too much attention to what he was saying. It was a fairly benign phrase to say if only he didn’t say it so much. He had to stop; at least throw in a yeah, sure here and there to make it sound more natural, but he couldn’t. Yes, Viktor just felt right and if he tried to deny it, his tongue chafed until it tasted it. “What kind of music?”

“Anything you guys want.”

“Um…”

“Come on, Yuri, I’ll help you.” Phichit brightened for the first time since they’d said hi in the aisle of the stable with their abrupted evening shoving its way between their greeting. He flipped through the touchscreen Yuri brought him to in Viktor’s office creating a new playlist with intense speed and focus.

“Looks like you’ve got this better than I do. I’ll go start the corn.”

“Oh, yeah, sure.” His smile fell. “Hey, Yuri? Are… are you mad at me?”

“No, why would I be mad at you?”

“Um, just that at our party… and you seem a little like you’re trying to get away from me.”

“I’m not mad. I’m just not very good at picking music, so I’m not much help here.”

“That’s really all it is?” He glanced into the kitchen.

“Yeah, that’s it. I’m not mad at you, I swear.”

A bit of his normal smile returned. “Okay, good. I’m glad you’re back. You were gone a long time.”
“I guess so. It didn’t feel very long.”

“Well yeah, playing with babies for three weeks is better than working. He really took that long to decide?”

“Yeah, he said he wanted to be sure before he gave so much commitment to them. He’ll have bonded with them for at least five years before he really knows if he’s got what he’s looking for. It would be tough to break that bond if they’re not.”

“True.”

Wow. His lies were getting much more convincing. “Yeah, I’m gonna go take care of the corn.” He turned and grabbed the bags from the counter and laid the cobs out over the grates on the grill still inside their husks.

A hand grabbed Yuri’s ass as a kiss landed on his cheek. “Looks like your new master is giving you very thorough training.”

“Woah!” He jumped back then saw familiar green eyes and a mop of blond curls. “Oh, hi.”

Chris smiled and held him by the shoulders to look him over. “You look amazing, sweetie. Good to see you again.”

“I don’t think we know each other…”

“Oh, right. Shit. I’m sorry. I mean, I’m Chris. Nice to meet you.” He held out his hand. “Please don’t tell Viktor. He’ll lecture me until my eyes bleed.”

He laughed. “Yeah, it’s fine. No one saw.” He took his hand. “I’m Yuri. Nice to meet you.”

“Yuri, ah…. That makes sense now. I couldn’t make out what he was saying in there other than he was very enthusiastic.” He winked.

“No one here knows about us. Other than the obvious people…”

“Right. Your secret is safe with me.”

“Can I get you something to drink?”

“Aww, aren’t you a sweetie. Wine would be great, thanks.”

“Red or white?”

“Red.”

Yura came into the kitchen as he went back in to get him a glass. Shit. His hands started shaking as he hurried to get to the wine which was thankfully also further from him. Fuck. He needed to get away. He guessed he could just leave, but Viktor would be hurt and everyone else would think he’s an even bigger freak than they already did. He had to stay. Stay. Kneel. The wine splashed on the counter as he missed the glass. “Fuck.”

Viktor looked over. “Everything okay?”

“Everything’s fine. I just spilled some wine. I’m sorry.” He tried to rip a paper towel from the holder but it spun too freely, and he ended up wrestling with a trail of paper. “Shit.”
Viktor came over and spun the paper towels back onto the roll then held it while he tore one off.

“Thanks.”

“It’s just some wine. Don’t worry about it. Are you really okay?”

“I’m fine.”

“I see that. Can I help with anything?”

“Give me something to do?”

“Okay. Can you make sure the hose is hooked up and the fire extinguishers are out there?”

“Yes, Viktor.” He mopped up the mess and brought the wine out to Chris then went out to the open space beyond the patio where he had piled dead branches that he had cleaned up from along their running trail into a large firepit. He already knew everything was set, but the escape and the distraction were both welcome.

Stay. Kneel. Come on, hold it together. After checking everything three times, he went back in with his hands still shaking, trying to avoid looking at Yura at all costs. It was nearly impossible with how Yura’s glaring eyes followed him. A few more people had arrived, including the guys from the hay farm and their families.

A little girl with golden skin and long, dark curls came up to Yuri and crossed her arms, pouting.

“Papa says you’re his boss. Why are you being bad to him?”

“What? Um, I’m sorry.”

Javier looked mortified as he scooped her up. “Ah, preciosa, no. He’s my boss, but he’s a good one. The other guy that was bad is gone. He won’t be here.” He looked over at Yuri sheepishly. “I’m so sorry.”

“It’s okay. I haven’t done enough to earn your praise as a good boss.”

“You pay me fairly and leave me alone to do my work. That’s the best boss I can ask for.”

“Oh, well then, I’m glad my utter lack of knowledge of what I’m doing is working out for you. And really, it’s Viktor who set your wages.”

“Hey, I’m not going to question a good thing. You both are great.” He tapped his daughter’s nose with a finger. “Say sorry to Mr. Katsuki.”

“I’m sorry, Mr. Katki.”

He smiled. “It’s okay. And you can call me Yuri. Both of you.”

“Oh, you were asking about a guy who knows animals? I think I found someone.”

“Great. Have them text me.”

“Was that news on the restaurant front I heard?” Viktor asked, not concerned about anyone hearing at all. Was it something they were keeping secret? Should they be? It was technically work…

“Uh, yeah, yes, Viktor. Javier was just saying he knows someone who might be able to help us out with the animals.”
“Oh, perfect. Thanks.”

“Animals? Restaurant?” Phichit looked between them.

“Yeah, Yuri had a great idea for the farm. Rather than let it struggle on as a hay farm, he’s going to turn it into a farm to table restaurant.”

“Oh, awesome!” Mila cried. “Do we get free food there?”

Viktor shook his head at her. “Shameless. Fine. Anyone who works for me and their immediate family can get one free meal a month.”

“Yes!” Mila raised her can to him.

“Viktor, we don’t even know if it’s going to work out yet.”

“I say it is.”

“A restaurant.” Phichit nodded to no one in particular. “That’s… a twist. Why a restaurant?”

“Yuri analyzed the features the land has and decided it would be the best use for it, and I agreed wholeheartedly.”

“Do you guys know anything about running a restaurant?”

“Yuri’s learning very quickly, and I have more than enough experience in business.”

“Well yeah, but a horse stable is very different from a restaurant.”

“He has an MBA.” Yuri folded his arms to hide his shaking and calm himself from the glaring eyes across the room. “He knows how to run any type of business.” Oh shit. Was that something Viktor didn’t want known? He should have just let him speak.

“Thank you for your vote of confidence.” He smiled normally and didn’t sound mad. “Really though, it’s my money on the line, so I think I’ll decide for myself if it’s a good investment or not and who is competent enough to run it.” His smile stretched just a little too tight as his head tilted to the side.

“Right. You probably wouldn’t even notice the loss.” Phichit’s eyebrows flicked up as he raised his can.

“I’m comfortable with the risk.”

“Phichit, show me where the music is. I wanna add some songs to your list.” Mila jumped down from the counter and grabbed his hand.

(39) Viktor’s house and yard filled with dozens of people from the stable and their families and far, far too many people who had seen him doing things that likely shamed a hundred generations of his ancestors, along with Phichit and Yura. Yuri was quite honestly surprised that his head hadn’t exploded from the pressure of the static. He practically clung to Viktor’s side all night, only leaving for the endless little tasks Viktor gave him to keep him occupied. After the sun dipped below the mountains, Viktor sent him out to start the bonfire.

Phichit came out looking more than a little drunk. “Hey, you’re not at work. You don’t have to do everything he tells you. It’s a party. Relax and have fun.”
“It’s not fair to make Viktor do everything while we all have fun.”

“Hey, this is what he wanted to do. He could have had it catered. Not like he doesn’t have the money to do whatever it is he wants.” He took a long swig of beer.

“Well, it just doesn’t seem right not to help him.” He touched the lighter to the clean hay buried inside the sticks to get it going while everyone came out to see. Spotting Yura’s glare, he went back to find Viktor’s side.

“Dance with me!” Mila grabbed Phichit’s hand and pulled him next to the blazing fire, swinging him around. After a minute, Phichit seemed to get into it and smiled brightly as they twirled around the fire with others coming out to join them.

“Do you want to dance?” Viktor looked down at him, his arms folded across his chest just as Yuri’s were to prevent their casual touches they didn’t have to think about in Japan.

He shook his head. “I wouldn’t be able to… not be yours.”

“Right.”

Chris came up and held out his hand to Yuri. “Come dance with me.”

“Thanks, but I think I’d rather not.”

He shook his head. “If you two are trying not to let anyone know about you, you’re doing a piss poor job of it. Dance with me.”

He glanced up at Viktor.

“He’s right, but you don’t have to.”

“Do you think it’s a good idea?”

“Probably.” He didn’t look happy with his own answer.

“Um, I guess if Viktor thinks it’s a good idea?”

Viktor gave a slight nod, and Chris grabbed his hand and pulled him out to the fire.

Chris twirled him around while Yuri let him take him wherever he wanted, doing just enough to keep up with him. “Your hands are shaking, mon chéri. Are you afraid of me?”

“No, sorry. I’m just… feeling anxious.”

“Ah, that’s why you’ve been clinging to him. Well, among other reasons. What’s got you so anxious?”

He shook his head. “A lot of stuff. I don’t really like parties.”

He laughed. “Right. You seem just fine at some parties.”

He bit his lip as the flames and people whirled by.

“Why are you guys trying to hide your relationship?”

“We don’t really have a relationship. He’s only my Dom when I’m at work.”
“And why is that? You’re so clearly right for each other.”

“I don’t know if he… can really want me.”

“Are you fucking kidding me? Do you have any idea how into you he is?”

“Yeah, but—”

“No. If there’s a but, you’re not getting it. You know he’s never once allowed a sub to stand by his side? They’re required to walk five feet behind him at all times. More if they’ve pissed him off, less if he’s pleased with them but never closer than three feet unless they’re on their knees. He doesn’t let anyone close to him, and he had you sitting on his face while he laughed about it. He held you in his lap and let everyone there know in no uncertain terms that you’re his. He put his fucking name on your body. You get it? You’re his. He’s never laid claim to anything like that but that horse of his. So, the only thing I can figure here is that he’s not yours, and for the life of me, I can’t even guess at why that’d be because you look at him the exact same way he looks at you.”

Phichit danced up with Mila, smiling brightly. “Let’s switch partners.” He grabbed Yuri’s hand and pulled him away. “I wanna see this drunk Yuri dancing.”

“Sorry, I’m not drunk.”

“Well, that’s an easy fix.”

“I’m not drinking any more. I have to work tomorrow. I can’t be late.”

“Oh. Well, dance with me anyway and just pretend you’re drunk.” He smiled and twirled him around.

“I’m terrible at playing pretend.” He let Phichit spin him around a bit, trying to keep his eyes off of Viktor standing just outside of the patio light watching them. When that look became unbearable, he pulled up and dropped his hands. “I’m thirsty. I need a drink.”

“I thought you weren’t drinking.”

“Water, I mean.”

“Ah, dance with me again when you come back?”

“I’m not really feeling like dancing tonight. Sorry.” He stopped on his way into the kitchen to ask Viktor if he wanted anything then came back out with a glass of wine for him and a bottle of water for himself then stayed stuck to his side the rest of the night, refusing to budge for any reason and return that look to Viktor’s face that he had while watching him dance with Phichit.

The fire eventually died out, and people started heading out while he helped Viktor clean up.

“Are you coming?” Phichit asked. “We can walk home together.”

“Oh, sorry, you go on ahead. I’m going to be a little bit. I want to help clean up.”

“Right.”

“Come walk me home, Peach.” Mila grabbed his arm and tugged him to the door.

“Emil can walk you home. He lives with you.”
“But I need two big, strong men to walk me home. Otherwise, I might get scared. Please?” She batted her big, blue eyes.

He stared at Yuri for a second then followed her out. “Yeah, sure. Whatever.”

“My hero!” She sighed and dropped her head on his shoulder.

After everyone left, Yuri launched himself at Viktor, burying himself against his chest.

“Woah, easy, zolotse. What’s wrong?”

“I missed you.”

“I was right here.”

He shook his head and pressed his face harder into his chest. “I missed you.”

“I missed you too.” He pulled him tighter and kissed his head.

“Please don’t sell me.”

“I’m going to.”

“I know. I just wanted you to know that I don’t want it.”

“Thank you for telling me, and thank you for doing it anyway. Your trust here feels amazing. Everything will be fine.”

He released the tears that had building all night, sobbing into Viktor’s chest.

“Shh… It’s okay, zolotse. I promise everything will be fine.”

He held him until he stopped crying then Viktor sent him home to get some sleep, refusing his further offers to help.

Phichit was waiting on the couch when he got in. “Hey, can we talk?”

He cringed. They really should talk, but he didn’t have it in him tonight. “It’s pretty late, and we’ve got to wake up early. Can we talk another time?”

“Yeah, I guess so.”

“Sorry. We’ll talk soon. Have a good night.” He waved and snuck off to his room.

***

Yuri stood backstage, his heart pounding sickness into his stomach, dressed in nothing but gold chains draped over his shoulders and down his stomach and white underwear that was sheer to the point of see-through. Gold rope wrapped over his hips in a basket weave pattern and held a piece of the same white gauze flowing down his hip as a half-skirt. Gold heels lashed to his feet with kinbaku knots up his calves while more gold kinbaku circled his wrists. His skin, soft and clean and devoid of marks. He would have looked rather angelic were it not for his eyes painted with red and black sweeping lines, red lips, and slicked back hair.

“God you look so… seductive.”
Yuri was shaking so hard, his teeth started chattering as the last person before him headed out for his turn. Yuri was going to be last on the stage.

“You just need one more thing to be perfect.” Slipping his hand into the underwear that really shouldn’t be called such, he stroked him to hardness. “Submit to where I have you. No matter what happens, I am the one doing this to you, yes?”

“Yes, Viktor.”

“And you’re always okay in the end with anything I choose to do to you, yes?”

“Yes, Viktor.”

“I have one last order for you before you go out. When you’re out there, don’t focus on what you’re afraid of. Focus on what it is that you want.”

The whip cracked, sealing the final bid and Viktor removed his hand leaving him filled but not rock hard and walked over to the curtain, pausing with his hand gripping the magenta velvet before stepping through.

Yuri was to wait until Viktor announced him. He couldn’t do this. He was going to be sick. He looked around for something good to throw up in while Viktor’s voice carried over the cheering audience.

“Thank you, all. It’s good to be back. I have something very special going up for sale tonight, but before I do that, I’d like to officially announce the closure of my training program. I know some of you are already aware that I ended my personal training sessions last month, but the ones auctioned here tonight are the very last to earn the title of Dauphin or Dauphine de VN.” He waited for the murmurs of surprise to die out. “Going up for auction now is the very last graduate and the prime result of the culmination of my experience.

“This is the sub that Doms dream of. He has a strength and a stubbornness in his submission that he uses to continuously ask me for more. He takes pride in being strong enough to take anything I want to give him, and he is more than strong enough to take it all. He’s intelligent, and he uses that to find the best way to serve me, always surprising me with what he’s able to come up with.

“He’s horny as all hell. Seriously, I thought he might kill me trying to keep up with him.” He paused while the audience cheered. “His Dom will have more than enough to play with there. And on that note, he has some fantastically fun kinks, which I’ll let Lion detail, and is open to pushing his limits.

“He’s kind and gentle and is always a soft respite from the stress and the challenges of a day. He works hard and offers to work harder and bring more pleasure. No one has ever brought me more pride, and that is why he is the only graduate ever to earn a perfect ten and my promise that a more exquisite taste of submission doesn’t exist. May I present to you the last Dauphin de VN, Eros!”

The crowd burst out into a cacophony of excited and confused screams as he forced himself past the curtain and onto the stage.

“Oh, and because I’m guessing many of you have this question at the forefront of your minds, yes, he’s still a virgin, and yes, his highest bidder will have the option to take it from him.” He stepped off the stage and took his spot in the center of the first row while the crowd roiled in its screams and murmurs.

“Come down here a little closer.” Lion gave him a friendly smile as he waved him to the end of the stage. “We all want to get a good look at you.”
Yuri’s eyes darted among the audience while he shuffled to the end. Shit. He wasn’t doing it right. Viktor would hate that. He tried to force his chin up in the last few steps, but couldn’t. His body was quaking too hard to have the control necessary to obey. Stay. Kneel. Stay. Kneel. His hands pulsed against his sides as his shoulders curled in.

“Well, The Boss is certainly going out with a bang here. This fine specimen is going up for sale from Saturday night at six to Sunday night at six for a full twenty-four hours. As was already stated, he’s not putting any restrictions to his normal limits so what you see marked on his chart is all on the table.” He gestured to the attendants handing out little pamphlets containing all of his pertinent information. “I think we’re going to be starting the bidding a little higher at twenty thousand.”

What the shit? Why so high? That’s just insane. Maybe that meant no one would buy him.

“Do I hear twenty thousand for—”

“Twenty!” A hand raised in the audience.

“Alright, I’ve got twenty for this virgin sex god who’s way into sounding, kinbaku, impact play, and exhibitionism. Do I have twenty-five?”

“Twenty-five!”

Another hand shot up before Lion could speak again. “Thirty!”

“Thirty-five!”

The world glitched in and out through the static as he watched hand after hand shoot up. He flinched at every one, jerking his head to locate the owner of the hand who might become his new Dom until the static took over completely and he blanked out, frozen on the stage. Frozen apart from the shaking rattling his bones and the fists still pumping Viktor’s rhythm, trying to keep his heart beating through the numbness of terror.

His perpetual command broke through the static, and he blinked, searching for Viktor’s face in the crowd. Viktor put him here. What was his order? He didn’t like this torment. He needed it to end. Viktor gave him what he needed to end it. He must have. He always did.

“Three hundred!”


Yuri gasped as he fixed on the hand in the air. It was attached to a round, bearded man in studded leather he didn’t even want to shake hands with. No. Not like this. It couldn’t end like this. He searched for Viktor again.

He wasn’t happy. Through the blinding stage lights, he could see Viktor’s face telling him he was failing. What was his order? What was it? Trying to find the right answer felt like trying to scoop water into a mountain. Everything he grasped ran out before it could form anything solid. What was his order? Submit. Submit to where he was and… He searched the anger on Viktor’s face. Focus on what it was he wanted.

What did he want? What did it matter what he wanted? Not like he could do anything to get it. Still, that was his order. What did he want? He wanted to not be there. But that wasn’t the right answer because Viktor put him there. His eyes flicked back to the man eyeing him with his disgusting plans wetting his lips then looked back at Viktor before his panic stole his ability to think again.
It couldn’t end like this. He needed time to fix it. No, no, no! It was approaching too fast. He didn’t have time. What did he want? What did he want?

Lion’s whip danced on the stage as his hand coiled to strike. “Three hundred going twice.”

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Chapter End Notes
Please share your art love with Clarinda over on Instagram!

Spotify
39. Half Light by BANNERS
40. Out of Time by Hidden Citizens
Chapter 19

Chapter Summary

Sold

Chapter Notes

NSFW Warning on the art! The first one is safeish and was done by the lovely Clarinda. Second one is mine (I usually put them in order of where they go in the story but they're flipped here due to nsfw reasons) and is NSFW. Not terribly sexual but there is 50% of a semi-erect cock exposed. Let's see what Tumblr does with this one...

See the end of the chapter for more notes

What did he want? He didn’t want anything anymore. Wanting is a poison that amputates wise restraint. Wanting nothing is a weight that suffocates the breath from a life. He’d carved the unbearable poison from his body but one more second of that weight and his remaining life would be extinguished. Looking up, his eyes locked on Viktor and the poisoned arrow of Eros struck his heart again.

He wanted Viktor.

He wanted to please him. He wanted to make him proud. He wanted to be the reason he smiled and the reason he sighed in contentment as he clutched him tighter. He wanted him not just for his first time, not just for one time, but as his. His Dom; his friend; his lover; his Viktor. He wanted Viktor, and that wanting was the sweetest poison.

(41) How could he get him? He had him, but then he screwed it up. So stupid. Shit, that’s just a waste of time. He was running out of time. How could he get him in the mere moments he had left?

His body stilled as his order to submit took over, his shoulders softening as his chest opened across the chasm separating him from Viktor. He smiled, coy, inviting, desirable. Please, bid? Bid, and he’ll give him everything he hoped for and then more. Bid, Viktor.

“Three ten.” Viktor’s hand came down and pressed against his chest, smiling as he mouthed, ‘Beautiful,’ over the crowded whispers.

Lion’s whip returned to limp strip of leather at his side. “I have three ten from The Boss in a surprise last second bid. Do I have any challengers?”

“Three twenty!” The previous highest bidder cried out the indignity of having the toy that was already his in his mind stolen from him.

Shit. It was so much money. Too much to ask Viktor to spend. Still, Viktor was what he wanted, and that poison was fast acting. Viktor was waiting for him. Watching, waiting to see what he’d do next. Would he make him proud? How could he keep him bidding?
Seduce him.

Lifting his chest further, he picked his chin up higher and put himself on display as if he was the most desirable one to ever step on the stage. Not as if. Viktor said he was. He was the best sub Viktor ever had. The only one to score a ten. He turned his leg out and rested his hand on his thigh, a hint of a cocky smile playing on his lips. Viktor couldn’t resist this. He gave his thigh a firm squeeze for good measure.

“Three fifty!” Viktor grinned, his eyes scrunch nearly shut from his pride bursting.

“Three fifty-five!”

Yuri glanced at the new challenger that was apparently freshly inspired by the turn of his confidence then looked back at Viktor and smiled before turning away and running his hands up his legs and over his ass as he’d done when he’d successfully seduced him in the shower. Glancing back over his shoulder, he winked. Viktor’s whistle in response followed by his new bid made him turn back to keep his giddy smile from ruining the act.

He swayed to the beat pumping through the cave. A shimmy of his hips made his chains shiver with the delight of being set free. Stepping back around, he kept up the sway of his hips and the roll of his body in a tease of a dance that promised that this was merely a taste. Did Viktor want more? He could have everything if he fought off the fresh wave of challengers that arose for the new battle. He stroked his hand slowly over his cock, his head tipping back.

Viktor, high on pleasure, pride, and surprise tightened his grip on his knee and smiled brighter every time Yuri responded to a bid by anyone who was not Viktor by seducing him more and ignoring the fact that this only sparked more bids and drove his price ever higher.

The audience chattered wildly over the abrupt change and the skyrocketing price while their fleeting eyes wondered what the hell Viktor was doing. None of that mattered. Viktor knew what he was doing, and his eyes never once wavered from Yuri just as Yuri’s never wavered from him.

“I’ve got seven hundred sixty going once... Seven hundred sixty going twice… Sold to The Boss for seven hundred and sixty thousand dollars.” Lion’s whip cracked ending the torture for everyone who tried to take what was Viktor’s. “Wow. Come collect your property, Boss.”

Viktor came up onto the stage grinning so hard his smile looked about to crack. Yuri sank to his knees at his feet, dizzy with the pleasure that always comes at the end of Viktor’s torments.

Viktor reached out to stroke his face, his smile turning to tender pride. “Hi, my beautiful. You did so well.” He clasped Yuri’s hand and pulled him to his feet then pulled him into his arms. “What was that adorably sexy little dance you did?”

“I was just following my orders and trying to tell you what I couldn’t use words to say.” He kissed his cheek leaving a red lip print behind then left more as Viktor pulled him in tighter.

“You speak so beautifully in any language.”

“Tease!” The clamoring audience finally sorted out what had happened and turned on Viktor with a friendly attack. “Cheater!”

Viktor laughed and turned to them just enough to speak while holding him tighter. “I didn’t cheat. There’s nothing saying I can’t bid as well. You all had a fair shot. I could have not put him up for auction at all and just kept him safely for myself, but I decided that my last graduate deserved a proper graduation ceremony.”
“Cruel tease!” Apparently not mollified by Viktor’s words the crowd clamored louder. “Make it up to us! Fuck him on stage!” The crowd went wild for this suggestion, following it up with a widespread chant. “Fuck him on stage! Fuck him on stage!”

He put his finger to his lips, pretending to consider their suggestion. “While I have no doubt Eros would love that, I promised him perfect, and I intend to deliver. I will plan something special for you all for his first full performance.”

The crowd quieted to dull grumbling, somewhat appeased by his promise.

“Geez, you all have gotten spoiled quick. Eros is far too potent. I need to ration him lest you all start thinking you have a claim to what’s mine.”

The audience quieted. “Sorry, Boss!”

“That’s better.” He turned his full attention back to Yuri, his fingers stroking through his hair. “God, I’m so happy with you. I’ve never seen anyone more beautiful or seductive in my life. What do you want to do? Do you want to stay and play a bit?”

“Can we go home? I want to be alone with you.”

“Oof, sweetest words ever. Of course, zolotse. Let me just finish up here, and I’ll take you home.” He turned back to address the audience while Yuri smeread more red lipstick across his neck.

“Thank you all so much for supporting my training program all these years. The auctions will continue on as long as we have willing participants, which I highly encourage as it’s a fun way to meet new people and support a good cause. Lion, would you like to take it from here?”

“For those who are just joining us who haven’t yet heard and as a reminder to those who have, one hundred percent of the profits of this club and all of the proceeds of the auction are donated to the Kapel Shelter which provides protection, legal aid, and the start of a new life to all victims of domestic violence regardless of age, gender, or sexual orientation. Thank you all to those who bid and those who offered their time as a gift.

“I’d like to take this opportunity to thank you, Boss, for all the good you’ve done for our community. Tonight, we’re sending a record-breaking nine hundred and twenty thousand dollars to the shelter with the biggest chunk of that being thanks to you, and that is only a drop in the bucket compared to everything you’ve done.” He paused while the audience rose to their feet cheering and whistling.

“Thank you; you all are too kind. I’m just happy to be a part of such a wonderful community. You know, Eros inspired an idea tonight. What would you all think about a reverse auction where we put the Doms up for sale?” He listened a moment for the crowd to cheer their response. “Alright, I think that sounds like an enthusiastic yes to me. I’m going out of town again soon so give me a few weeks to get it organized, and we’ll see how this goes. If you’re interested in participating, either bidding or selling, see Red at the front desk. Our Doms might need a little encouragement to enter, so if you subs have any Doms whose whip handling you’re lusting after or whose rope work leaves you in knots, maybe some extra sweet words from you will be the incentive they need to get up on stage.”

“Are you going up for auction?”

“No.” Yuri glared at the one who asked, clutching Viktor tighter. He was probably wrong to speak out like that, but he didn’t care. He’d take the punishment.

Viktor laughed and kissed his head. “What he said. I think I’ve been up for sale for far too long.” He led Yuri backstage. “Come now, my Prince. Your carriage awaits.”
“You’re such a sappy, romantic dork.”

“Yeah, but you’re mine, so you’ve just gotta deal with it for the next… forty-two hours. Are you going to call katsudon over my soft side again?”

“Psh, I never called it the first time. I can handle all of it.”

“I don’t think you quite realize just how much sappy is still hiding in there…”

***

Yuri sat, sadly dressed in an absurdly expensive suit, tearing open an envelope that had his name on it alone in Viktor’s bedroom rather than naked in his arms or in his whips as he’d expected to be. He had no idea of what to expect as Viktor’s slave for the next twenty-four hours, but getting dressed up for a fancy dinner was the last thing he expected. Maybe it was all just a part of Viktor trying to make a perfect first time for him. Of course, he’d take the cheesy angle and make everything ‘romantic’ even if he didn’t have to. He pulled a letter from the envelope and unfolded it.

My Dearest Yuri,

I’m not going to spend this page waxing poetic over each of your delightful body parts, claiming things like: your eyes are as the sweet spice of cinnamon, or your smile is both the catastrophic clutch of a heart attack and its own cure, or your arms mar my body’s ability to feel whole while missing their warm emphasis of your care. I’m not that cheesy. (Though, all are true.) What I will say is you’ve done the impossible and let me glimpse everything I’ve ever dreamed of supported by the hope that we can both tread carefully enough to never wake us out of it.

I can see a future worth looking at for the first time in forever, and it’s completely filled with you. Filled with your passion and sweetness, your comfort and surprises, your yes, Viktor’s and challenges, your light and your darkness. I want all of it, every bit that is you. Life is nothing but a burden when carried alone, but it’s nothing short of magic when its tasks are transformed into blessings by trading the care of another with their care of you. Since you’ve come into my life, I feel that magic again.

Because I’ve only asked you for a promise yet haven’t yet made a promise myself, I’m making one now which is the same I made in Russian when you asked to hear me speak it. It’s even truer now in English though I’ve omitted one small piece of the translation which I’d rather tell you another time and replaced it with something else just as true. It may not be word for word what I said, but the spirit of the message is still the same.

Yuri, I can’t believe I’ve just met you, and you already make me so certain that you are the one I’ve been searching for. I love your smile. I love your eyes. I love the way you say my name. I love how much you’re willing to allow me in and how you make me feel that what I’m feeling, I might not be alone in despite how hurt and lost you are. I want you, Yuri, and I promise, if you choose me, I will spend as many minutes as you are willing to give me making you just as happy as you make me. Please choose me. I beg you.

To elaborate on this promise that has only grown since I first made it, I promise that I will never let you regret choosing me. I promise I will be loyal—nothing and no one could ever break my commitment to you. I promise I will never take you for granted or let our relationship fade through neglect. I promise you will always have my protection from others, the world, and yourself. And I promise, Yuri, that nothing you’ve done in the past will make me waver on these promises for a single second.
I don’t expect a response right now. Take all the time you need to be certain of your own promises as well as of mine. They’re there waiting for you whenever you’re ready. And if I’m wrong, if I’m not who you want to make these promises to, that’s okay too. I’d be devastated but grateful for every moment you gave me. I just wanted you to know in black and white exactly how much I cherish the time we’ve spent together, and I’ll never pass up even the most fleeting impulse to share how deeply I feel about you in the sappiest of ways.

All my care and all my hope,

Viktor

Geez, how was he supposed to respond to this? Viktor said he didn’t expect a response, but he didn’t know what to feel in his own body about such an overwhelming letter let alone put words to it to give to someone else. He was grateful that Viktor had left him in private to sort it out himself before he was faced with coming up with an even halfway decent non-response. Thank you? Was that right? Really? Thank you to all that? After everything Viktor has given him, he can’t even come up with a shoddy response.

It wasn’t a lack of desire. He wanted Viktor. That want flowed amok through his bloodstream where it burned against his fear and left him wishing for a coup de grâce rather than face the pocket knife amputation of the chunks of himself that had grown around that fear to contain it. This letter was the smooth, wooden handle pressed firmly into his palm.

He checked the time. Viktor was waiting. Whatever pathetic nonsense his brain spewed out in the moment would have to do. He raced downstairs then slowed to a walk as he approached the foyer where Viktor was waiting in his suit with an enormous bouquet of vibrant flowers.

“Wow. You look gorgeous.” Viktor handed him the flowers as he kissed his cheek.

“Thank you. So do you.” He blushed, unreasonably awkward for the circumstances which was apparently totally reasonable according to his body’s unrelenting insistence upon it. Shifting the flowers in his arms, the paper crumpled between his fingers. “Oh! Your letter. I’m creasing it.”

“Here, give me those. I’ll put them in water.”

“Thank you.” He handed them over then followed Viktor into the kitchen as he pulled a vase from the cabinet and started filling it. “And um, your letter too. Thank you. Shit, I’m sorry. I was trying to come up with something better than thank you.”

“It wasn’t meant to put you on the spot. I meant it when I said I didn’t expect any response so thank you is already far more than I was expecting.” He placed the flowers in the vase and fluffed them out then turned around and kissed his cheek. “Really. Don’t strain yourself to give me a response that you’re not ready to give.”

Covering Viktor’s lips with his hand, he stretched up on his toes and pressed a kiss to his own fingers, lingering as he used his other arm to pull him close. Slowly, he dropped back down but kept his eyes lifted to Viktor’s fighting the urge to hide his face. “Thank you. It was beautiful.”

Viktor flipped his hand around and held it against his mouth as he kissed the side Yuri had kissed. “Thank you for inspiring it.” He brought his hand back down over his arm and led him out to his favorite car.

They arrived at a tidy white farmhouse outside the city set on pristine farmland. Yuri balked at recognizing the name. “Viktor, this place came up in my research for market saturation. It’s insanely
expensive.”

He dragged him forward without missing a beat. “It’s also very good. Plus, it’s good to scope out your competition.”

“I crossed it off as competition. I’d never have something that competes with this.”

“Why? They’re doing something very similar to what you want to do. Why wouldn’t you make it your goal to compete with them and then outdo them? I thought that competitiveness would come out here.”

“I have no idea what I’m doing.”

“You keep saying that and yet you keep applying what you’ve learned in fascinating new ways. And I think you’re forgetting that no one’s expecting you to cook the meals yourself. You hire a chef of this caliber and give them what they need to perform at their best, and that’s how you have a top-quality restaurant. You’re excellent at figuring out people’s needs, and that is why I trust you to be in charge. Business is just filling people’s needs. Well, ideally anyway. You’re starting to have confidence in yourself that you can fill my needs not just to the bare minimum, but beyond expectations. Start believing that here too because I do.” He held the door open and ushered him in.

“Yes, Viktor.”

“Good, Yuri.” He pecked him on the cheek then turned to the host with a smile. “Nikiforov, seven o’clock reservation.”

“Yes, sir. Right this way.” He tapped the screen then led them to a cozy table in the corner with a wide view of the idyllic land.

A waiter came by and took their order which was Viktor deciding on the chef’s tasting menu along with the recommended pairings for wine. Yuri stared at the first course that was set down before him, the familiar sickness taking root.

“What’s wrong, Yuri?”

“I know exactly how much this costs, and it’s so much. You already spent a ridiculous amount of money on me, and that was all my fault too because I couldn’t take your words with the honesty you promised in them.”

“Yes, I did spend a significant sum of money to make you mine today. You’re my slave. You do what I tell you to do. You wear what I tell you to wear. You eat what I tell you to eat. Your sole responsibility is to obey and make yourself into nothing but a source of pleasure for me. What would bring me pleasure now is enjoying this meal with you along with your smile and delightful conversation. You will eat and enjoy yourself, and you are not to mention or even think about expense until my time is up.”

“Yes, Viktor.” He picked up his fork and took a bite, his words easing the grip on his stomach.

“Good, Yuri. How is it?”

“Vkusno.”

He smiled and took a bite himself. “Yes, it is vkusno. Also, just so you know, I would have emptied every penny in my bank account to buy you if it came to that, and I would have done it gladly. I’m happy you went up for auction. It was so hot watching you seduce me like that. I wasn’t expecting
you to make such a show of it. I was just hoping for a little less shaking and keeping focused on me.”

He smiled and blushed as he took another bite. “I’m glad I was able to please you.”

“Perfect. See? Worth every penny and more.”

“At least it’s going to a good cause. Kapel Shelter. That sounds a little bit like Russian.”

“It sounds a lot more like Russian when it’s pronounced correctly.” He winked. “There’s a soft sign after that L. I decided not to bother with the accent mark because I figured people calling were far more concerned with things other than pronunciation.”

He smiled. “What does that one mean?”

“It’s a sunny day when icicles start melting.”

“So, there weren’t any shelters here already?”

“There were, but they were only for women and weren’t serving the community as well as I thought they should. Too many people were falling through the cracks.”

“How are you always so good?”

“I care. Sometimes too much.”

“Too much?”

“I always want what’s ideal and can be too harsh on the things that aren’t. I try to be more accepting, but you know when you can know something logically, but it just doesn’t sit right in your brain, and you react against your better judgment?”

“Yes, Viktor. I know that one very well.”

“I’ve worked on that one a lot by reconsidering what I consider ideal and valuing things in more realistic ways, but it’s still a struggle sometimes.”

Exactly as he’d thought. Viktor still saw him as that ideal he was searching for. How would he feel when he didn’t live up to it? “What if I never ride? What if I never touch the reins again? What would you think of that?”

“Honestly… I’d see it as a failure. Not yours. Mine. I’d see it as me failing to give you what you needed because I know you need this. You’re no different from me here, and I know how miserable I’d be without riding. If I couldn’t give that back to you, I’d feel like I was letting you live with a part of your soul missing.” He took a sip of his wine and smiled. “But I’m not worried. You’re progressing exactly as I’d hoped on Avos. Don’t worry, Yuri. I won’t push you anywhere before you’re ready. There’s absolutely no rush on getting you to pick up the reins again.”

He blinked against his watering eyes. “But what if I can’t? I mean what if it’s physically impossible for me?”

“Have faith, Yuri. There are endless options to explore to get you what you need to succeed. You’ve had your anxiety even before you stopped riding, yes?”

“Yes, Viktor.”

“Have you tried anything to help you? Medication or anything like that?”
“Yes, Viktor. It made it worse. Well, some symptoms got better like the racing heart, but that’s never been a huge concern of mine because I could always ignore it well enough. The worst is the spaciness like I said and that only got worse with the side effects. It was nearly constant. I couldn’t remember anything or focus. It felt like my brain turned to mush. I was also getting dizzy a lot. I hated how I felt on it, so I stopped.”

“Okay, that’s fine. There’s still a lot of options we can explore to help you with your anxiety. You seem to already be improving at least from what I’ve seen.”

“Your orders help a lot. You always make them easy for me to focus on. It helps me feel solid and clear enough to ignore the rest of the chaos. I’m sorry. I started talking about my stupid issues when you wanted to enjoy our meal.”

“Who says I’m not enjoying myself? I enjoy all of our conversations. If I didn’t want to talk about something with you, we wouldn’t be.”

He let out a deep breath and smiled. “Yes, Viktor.”

“What do you think of the food?”

“It’s good.”

“What do you really think of it?”

He glanced down at the lobster on his plate swimming in a cream-colored sauce. “Um, I don’t know. I don’t think I’m sophisticated enough to judge something like this.”

“You have taste buds, yes?”

He chuckled. “Yes, Viktor.”

“Then you’re qualified to give your opinion on it. Tell me.”

“Um, it’s good, but it doesn’t really taste like the ocean anymore. My mom always told me that seafood should taste slightly of the ocean. I’ve never gotten seafood here as good as it is in Japan though, so I think this is as good as anything else I’ve had in America.”

“Why do you think that is? We’re on the coast here too. We should be able to get fresh seafood.”

“I think it’s over seasoned. The sauce is a little rich and covering up the natural flavors.”

“I think I agree with you. It’s also a little overcooked. The seafood in Japan was much better. See? There’s plenty of room to beat out even a place like this, and you recognize what that is. When you hire a chef, hire one that makes fish like how you knew it growing up.”

The waiter came by to clear their plates and bring new ones. “How is everything so far?”

“It’s good,” Viktor said. “May I ask how the lobster was cooked?”

“It was poached in butter and served in a white chocolate cream sauce.”

“Thank you.”

The waiter left them to their glass domes filled with smoke.

“Well, that explains why the lobster didn’t taste like lobster anymore.” He chuckled. “Now this is
interesting.” He lifted the dome releasing a thick plume of smoke that spoke of unspeakable pleasure to the primitive parts of their brains that had them both leaning in with their eyes closed to savor the scent of fire-crisped beef. “Mmm… this smells promising.”

Yuri followed his lead and popped a bite into his mouth. “Mmm, so good!” He blushed at his overeager response. “Sorry.”

“Don’t apologize. That’s the best response to food I’ve seen from you yet. I love it. Relax. Be yourself. That’s what pleases me the most.”

“Yes, Viktor. Can I ask you… You don’t like your house, do you?”

He smiled. “Did you know Russians don’t wear shoes in the house either?”

“Oh, really? No, I didn’t know that.” He paused, considering why this would be his answer. The feeling of complete disrespect he had whenever his shod foot stepped on a floor settled in. And Viktor was almost always wearing his stable-clad boots too. Not even Viktor could keep those clean. Oh. “You hate it that much?”

“That might be a little strong. Part of it is practicality as I said. The boots are hard to take off, and I’m spoiled enough here to say it’s not like I have to clean the floor, but…” He frowned and stabbed a bite. “It’s my dad’s biggest pet peeve. At least for the things I used to do as a kid to annoy him. Boots on the floor was the quickest way to get his attention. He could be in the middle of an important meeting and still that sound would drive him out to scold me with absolute certainty.”

“Oh, Viktor.” His heart cracked as Viktor’s eyes fluttered up to his before looking back to his plate to cut another bite.

“He still comes out to the house sometimes. It doesn’t bother him like it does my mom. He always comes by surprise and brings her too. Just whenever the mood strikes or whenever he remembers he has a son.

“Answering the door like that, seeing that look on his face makes his visit bearable. He asked me about it once, if I always wore them or peeked out and put them on just for him. I said that I always wore them. He asked why, and I said, ‘How else would you know with absolute certainty wherever you are in the world, think of it at any given moment of the day and know that I am here with my boots on?’ ”

“I’m so sorry, Viktor. That’s awful.” He winced again at another crack on his heart and the lack of words to respond anywhere close to how he should. “Why do you stay there?”

“I love my stable. I wouldn’t want to leave that.”

“Yeah, but I mean you could renovate or build another house or something.”

“It’s in perfect condition. It would be so wasteful to tear it down. And I suppose I could build another house elsewhere on the property, but then what would I do with that place? I’d have to look at it anyway and again, it just seems too wasteful to let it sit there empty. I could sell off that little piece of the property, but I’d still have to look at it, and who in their right mind would want to buy a Russian castle?”

“A Russian.”

He laughed. “Yeah, thanks, I don’t think we can handle any more crazy Russians in our population density there. I’ve considered these options. I hate it, but I can’t stand the idea of tearing it down or
“giving up the control of it to someone else either.”

“I hate the idea of you continuing to live there like that. I always thought you looked sad there, and now that I know why… What if you moved it?”

“Moved it?”

“Yeah, like have someone buy it but move it off your property onto their own so you don’t have to look at it. I have no idea what something like that would cost, but if you sold it cheap enough, it might be worth it… I don’t know. It was just a random idea I had.”

“Move it.”

“Yeah, and put something there that you want.”

He stared at him, his mouth hanging open and his fork hovering in the air. “Move the castle. That’s… brilliant.”

“Really?”

“Yes, really. I can’t believe I never thought of that. Move the castle. What a brilliantly absurd idea! I love it, Yuri. What should I put there instead?”

“Something that makes you happy.”

“Hmm… what would lure you there?”

“I don’t know. What you’ve been doing seems to be working…”

“Is it? Should I just make one giant sex dungeon?”

“Viktor!” He started laughing, covering the bright red spewing over his face. “I think you might want at least a few spaces fit for polite company.”

“Okay, so like ten percent vanilla kitchen and living room, ninety percent sex dungeon?” He winked, grinning.

“That sounds maybe a little unreasonable. I think limiting it to eighty percent is a good idea.”

“Perfect. Contact the architect on Monday. Tell her my plans.”

“Oh god. Let her finish the restaurant before you scare her off. I like her plans for it.”

“Ah right, we might need a different architect anyway. I don’t know if she specializes in sex dungeons as well.”

They finished the rest of the main courses, laughing and bantering over proper sex dungeons and what Viktor would really want in a house. As they were waiting for the dessert to come out, Viktor handed him something beneath the table. Something soft but firm in some type of satin bag. He started to pull it up to look at it.

“Ah, you don’t want to do that.” He leaned across the table and lowered his voice. “Tuck it into your jacket and go into the men’s room and masturbate with it. Send me pictures. Clean it with soap and water when you’re done.”

Heat flashed through his body. “What if someone comes in?”
“Then they’ll learn just how much of my slut you are. Get to it.”

He tucked it into his waistband and closed his jacket over it then headed into the bathroom with his heart racing. Was Viktor getting him ready for later? What if someone really did come in? He went into the stall and closed the door then opened the bag to see what Viktor had given him.

He pulled out a flesh-colored dildo obviously modeled after a real cock along with a bottle of lube. It was decently sized though not as big as Viktor. How was he supposed to see behind himself well enough to get the camera right? He hooked the strings for the bag onto the door then slipped his phone between them and switched it to video. Should he ask permission to change the order or surprise him? Pictures could be selected from a video, so he was still following orders exactly. This was the kind of change Viktor would love as a surprise.

He turned it on and made sure the whole stall was captured then hit record and blew a kiss to the camera, his face red and his hand shaking, of course, then turned around and unbuttoned his pants. Slicking up his fingers then the dildo, he slipped his first finger in followed by his second, turning back to watch the camera while relaxing as much as he could to let his response show unfiltered on his face.

A moan bubbled up from deep inside him as he pushed the dildo in. Stifling his cry as he stuffed himself, he took himself in hand as he began thrusting with both hands. “Ngh, ah, Viktor. Viktor.” He closed his eyes as he imagined it to be him. He wouldn’t have to imagine much longer. Surely Viktor would take his virginity tonight. He’d paid good money for him. Oh fuck. Being Viktor’s bought slut did beautifully sadistic things with the pleasure building inside him. Viktor would want to know what he was just thinking there to inspire such a reaction. Had anyone come in while he was distracted? Who cares? Pleasing Viktor was his prime objective.

“I was thinking… I was thinking about how I’m your bought slut, your slave purchased solely to give you pleasure…” He gulped as speaking the words had a more profound effect than thinking them did. “It makes me so hot. I like being your slut. I like giving you so much pleasure you can’t look at anyone but me. I like filling your cries with my name. Get your money’s worth, Viktor. I’m your virgin slut, right? Take what you want from me. Please? It makes me so fucking hot.”

He shuddered as the pleasure spiked, and his hands instinctively chased after it. “Oh fuck. Fuck me, Viktor. Please? You. I want it to be you. I’m ready, and it’s you.” He came with a guttural groan as he looked back at the camera the best he could with his eyes rolling shut in bliss.

Heaving, he emptied his body again and put his suit back in order. Faced with his next task, he steeled himself by sending Viktor the video and imagining his face upon receiving it as he walked out to the sinks. He washed it quickly but thoroughly and dried it then put it back in the bag along with the bottle and washed his hands. He was just walking out, his face bright red, as someone came in and paused as he sniffed carefully, the scent of sex still potent in the air. Yuri nodded briefly then pushed the door out past him and went back to Viktor, trying to keep calm.

Viktor had his headphones in and his phone clutched tightly in his hand, a flush over his cheeks and his nose. He glanced up as Yuri sat down then went back to the video. Yuri smiled as he watched Viktor’s obvious battle with his control and took a bite of the chocolate souffle waiting at his spot.

Viktor finally looked up and pulled the headphones from his ears. “Wow. So hot. So much eros. Did anyone hear you?”

“No, Viktor. I don’t think so. Someone came in just as I was leaving, and he might have known something was up but nothing provable. This is really good.” He pointed to the dessert with his spoon and a light smirk he tried to hold back.
“I’m so fucking hard right now. Again, I underestimated your potency.” He tried to turn his attention back to the food and took a bite. “It is good, but not nearly as inspired as you.”

“Maybe we should bring it home. It would taste delicious licking it off your cock.” He winked as Viktor stared at him, his mouth gaping with a shudder running through him.

“Holy fuck, Yuri. Where did that come from?”

“Should I not?”

“No, you absolutely should. You’re just killing me a little here. We’ll have to finish this here since we’re not going home yet, but I will consider options for your suggestion.”

“Oh, really? We’re not going home?”

“Not yet. Finish your food.”

Damn. He was hoping his little display would be enough to make Viktor drag him back home and fuck him senseless, but he was still going to have to wait a little longer. Oh well. His edging was always fun.

They finished their meal and ended up parked in an isolated corner of a parking garage in the city.

“Strip yourself naked.”

“Here? Like naked naked?”

“That’s what I said, isn’t it?”

“Uh… yes, Viktor.”

He glanced around. It looked empty enough. He started undressing. Was Viktor going to take his virginity in a car? That seemed… unlikely for him. Unless he wanted them both to have that heated, awkward, cheesy cliché of a first time from American movies they both had missed. Viktor started undressing as well but stopped before getting completely naked and wriggled into a pair of black leather pants. He left on his navy button-up shirt but took off the tie and rolled up the sleeves. Okay, so, sex seemed to be out… He scooched his boxers down and then off leaving himself completely naked and wondering what Viktor’s plans were.

“Put your feet up on the seat.”

He pulled his feet up while Viktor dug through his bag, checking out the window to see if anyone was coming.

“Stop worrying. It’s my job to worry about if someone’s coming and if that means I want to hide you or not. You’re my bought virgin slut. If I want to strip you down and fuck you in the middle of the street, I will, and you will do nothing but comply and show me how much you love it.”

He whined as Viktor’s words traveled down to his cock and started filling it.

Viktor grinned as he shook his head. “You’re such a dirty slut.”

His toes curled, gripping the edge of the seat as his blood rushed into his cock. “Viktor.”

“Viktor what? What do you need?”
“You.”

“Be more specific. I can do lots of things to you.”

“I know. Any of it. I love everything you do.”

“I love that response, but what do you want the most? What are you hoping for? Look at me when you answer.”

He fixed on his eyes as his body wanted him to duck and hide. “I want you to fuck me.”

“Here? Now?”

“Yes, Viktor. Anywhere.”

He swiped the precum dripping down his cock with his finger and put it in Yuri’s mouth as he leaned over and whispered in his ear. “No.” He pressed a slick toy up to his hole and slipped it inside. “Get dressed.” He pulled back and handed him a set of clothes.

“Like—like this?” He yelped as the plug came to life, vibrating against his prostate.

“Get to it, slut. You understand your orders.”

“Oh, shit. Viktor…” He shook out the pile of clothes in his arms and slipped on the red shorts with a slight gold shimmer that he doubted were long enough to fully cover his ass then put on the sheer black button-up shirt over it.

Viktor handed him a pair of black heels with red soles then came around to open the door and help him out of the car. Looking him over, he undid a few of the buttons Yuri did up, exposing his chest and the top of his abs then rolled up the sleeves. “Let’s go.”

“Like this?” They weren’t anywhere near his club. “Are—are we going out in public like this?”

He rested his hand on the hood of his car, a dangerous smile on his lips as he looked down at it. Grabbing him, he threw him over the hood, still hot from the drive and yanked his hips back, jerking the fabric of his shorts up to expose his ass. His hand cracked down over his ass in a ferocious pace that echoed throughout the garage.

“You question my orders too much, slut. You’re mine. You get that? I bought you. Your body belongs to me. Your mind belongs to me. Your desires belong to me. Everything you are is mine. I thought I already told you, but apparently, I need to make myself clear. If I stop in the middle of a store and tell you to suck my cock, you don’t ask me if I’m serious or if I really mean it. I never give orders I don’t mean. You drop to your fucking knees and start sucking because what are you?”

“I’m your virgin slut.”

“Louder.” His hand burned hotter than the metal Yuri ground his cock against, groaning.

“I’m your filthy virgin slut.”

“Louder!” The cracks of his hand rang in Yuri’s ears.

“I’m your filthy virgin slut!” His own voice silenced the smacks of Viktor’s hand, much to his dismay.
“Don’t come.” Viktor turned up the vibrations on the plug as he reached around to the front and pulled his cock out to start jerking him off slowly. “That’s right, pretty baby. See this? Mine. All of you is mine to play with whenever and wherever I feel like. I’m going to parade you down the street looking just like this, and you’re going to walk by my side proudly because you are my pretty virgin slut, yes?”

“Yes, Viktor.” Moaning, he fought the urge to thrust into Viktor’s hand.

He put him back away and shut off the plug as he pulled him back upright. Smiling, he pulled him in while he kissed his neck, letting his body relax. “That’s my good, Yuri. You like that?”

He nodded. “Yes, Viktor. Very much. How—how would I ask you to do that again?”

He chuckled. “That’s funishment. I’ll do it if I’m in the mood for it and you’re doing something I don’t particularly like but can live with or find amusing as it’s obviously very encouraging of the behavior.”

“What things are those?”

He smiled and kissed his nose. “You’re just going to have to pay attention to get what you want. I can’t make it too easy on you.” He put him on his arm and turned on the plug to a low buzzing. “By the way, I do expect at least a show of it temporarily correcting your behavior even if you’d really like to repeat it to get me to do it again. Too much of that gets too bratty for my tastes.”

“Yes, Viktor.” He straightened his back and balanced on the spikes letting his hips sway as Mila had told him, rocking the toy across his gland.

Viktor walked him a couple blocks down the street, quietly preening over the attention they drew. Yuri, plain old boring Yuri, would have died of mortification at being the center of such a display, especially with something shoved up his ass and buzzing its constant reminder, but Viktor’s Yuri, the Yuri that was freed by Viktor’s limits that wrapped snugly, safely around him, was enchanted by the freedom to be anything that pleased them both.

Viktor led him into a nightclub, showing both of their ID’s at the door. Must not be somewhere he went regularly. Scantily dressed men already covered the floor, grinding on each other to thumping house music. The stage with a stripper pole was unused. Must be too early in the evening still.

Viktor leaned in to shout over the music. “What would you like to drink?”

“Um, I’m already a little tipsy from the wine. I probably shouldn’t drink anymore.”

“It’s fine. I’ll keep you out of trouble.”

“I… can be a handful when I’m drunk. You’re sure?”

“I’m absolutely certain.” He grinned. “I want to see this.”

“Then I’ll have whatever you want to give me.”

They went to the bar where Viktor ordered them a couple of sweet cocktails then led them out to the dance floor with fresh ones after they finished their first round. Yuri swayed to the beat, relaxing against Viktor’s body as he downed the second drink, the vibrations of the plug shutting off just long enough for his alcohol-ridden mind to forget about them until they came back on again. A third was procured, and while Viktor stopped at two, Yuri kept going until he was solidly drunk and pulling at Viktor’s shirt which was just way too much clothing in the way of what he wanted. He started
unbuttoning it as he left kisses down Viktor’s chest.

Viktor’s hands drifted down to his swaying ass and cupped it firmly. “You’re a good dancer.”

He smirked. “You have no idea. I think about one more drink will do it.”

“How?” Viktor’s eyes sparkled.

“Blood magic.”

“Oh, I’ll be right back then. Don’t let anyone touch you.”

“Yes, Viktor.” He closed his eyes and lifted his arms, dancing to the beat while he waited for Viktor to return.

“Hey, baby, wanna dance?” A hand snaked around Yuri’s side.

He smacked it away and turned around to glare at the offender. “I’m Viktor’s. Don’t touch me. Only Viktor can touch me.”

He held his hands up and took a step back. “Okay, sweetie. Sorry.”

“Next person who touches me will get punched. I’m Viktor’s. It’s not that hard to understand. I’m Viktor’s slut. No one else’s.”

He laughed. “Okay, baby. I’ll spread the word. Tell Viktor I’m sorry.”

“Good.” He closed his eyes and went back to dancing, confident that the widespread knowledge that he was Viktor’s would keep him safe from intruding hands.

Viktor came back and handed him his drink. “Everything okay?”

“Yes, Viktor. Someone touched my side, but I slapped him, and now he’s telling everyone I’m Viktor’s slut. He says he’s sorry.” He turned around and ground his ass against him.

Viktor laughed. “I bet he is. You really told him you’re my slut?”

“Yes, Viktor. Why wouldn’t I? Aren’t I?”

“Of course, you are. I’m just surprised you said it to a stranger so easily.” His hands traveled down to Yuri’s hips as his lips nibbled over his neck. “You’re so good and so sexy.”

“You’re the sexy one. You’re so hot, and I’m so, so horny.”

“Are you now?” He grinned and turned up the plug until Yuri whimpered.

(42) “Mmmhmm. Totally ravenous. Please fuck me? I’m so ready for you to fuck me.” A new song came on that he recognized even with the DJ’s remixed beat under it. “Ooh, I love this song! Can I dance for you?”

“Dance for me?” He looked at the pole Yuri was pointing at with eager eyes. “Go for it. I can’t wait to see this.”

Yuri gripped his shirt and pulled him in until their foreheads pressed together and stared into Viktor’s eyes with his own expression deadly serious. “Don’t take your eyes off me. I’m only dancing for you.” Releasing him and leaving him stunned, he climbed up on the stage and left his drink at the
The lights, spotting a worthy performance in his firm grip of the pole, directed the audience’s attention to him with their trusted critique blazing and bright. Confirming Viktor’s attention was still on him, he smiled and blew him a kiss then pulled himself up from the floor with his single hand on the pole, spinning around it, his head tipped back, and his body arched into clean lines. Bringing his calf around the pole, he hooked on while his free hand worked down the buttons on his shirt earning a whistle from Viktor and his panting, bewildered attention. The shirt slipped from his shoulders, and he freed one arm from its sleeve then flipped to the other side of the pole as his eyes cast down to Viktor along with his fluttering shirt.

Holding himself out to the side, his body parallel to the floor with the grip in his hands alone, he let one shoe fall followed by the other. Winking at Viktor’s mouthed, ‘Holy shit,’ his body supple and strong, he flipped through poses on the pole turning himself and Viktor’s viewpoint end over end.

Breathless and bound to the beat, intoxicated on confidence, freedom, and the glimmer in Viktor’s eye, he wound his dance around the pole. With it locked between his thighs, he released his hands and arched back to a growing chorus of, “Viktor’s slut! Viktor’s slut!”

Viktor laughed and beamed with pride. His eyes were struck with his sudden fire which was the only warning Yuri got before the plug cranked up.

His head swimming with alcohol and pleasure, he groaned and ran his hand over his cock seeking his friction. “Ngh, Viktor!”

He likely couldn’t hear him over the music, but he certainly got his response and turned the vibrations higher.

Gasping, Yuri grabbed back onto the pole and slid back to the floor, taking the time to savor the hard drag on his cock on the way down. His hips clinging to the beat, his mind drifting into bliss, he let the music and pleasure and satisfaction of Viktor’s rapt attention take over.

God, he felt good. He hadn’t felt like this in forever. It wasn’t just the alcohol; It was the freedom Viktor’s approval gave him. He was just Yuri, doing what felt good, and Viktor said it was okay, so it was. He wasn’t just free and lost, left to keep himself safe and healthy even though he had shit skills in both of those. He was safe and freer than he’d ever been on his own because of Viktor’s protection.

All he had to do was obey a few simple rules, and inside those, he had the freedom to be and do anything he wanted. And the looks on Viktor’s face when he took full advantage of that… The look right now as he owned the stage and the lights and the crowd chanting his most honored title… The look as he took his challenge vibrating through his body and thrived on it…

The song ended, and he bounced off the stage and over to Viktor, giddy on the high of pleasing him so much and the recovered love of something else he’d left behind.

Viktor gripped his ass and pulled him in tight. “What was that?” His voice and eyes breathless in reverence.

“Blood magic.” He grinned and hopped up to peck his cheek. “I told you I’d show you.”

“That… that is how you ride so well?”

“Did you know Minako is a world-renowned ballerina?”
“Um, no.”

“Yeah, she won awards and everything. She grew up riding and dancing, and she focused on dancing when she was younger since you have to be young for that and when she retired, she switched to full-time eventing.

“She always says that riders forget that they’re athletes too and don’t do what other top athletes would do to compete, things like cross-training. She says dance is the best cross-training for riders since it’s all about keeping control of your body and your center still and strong while moving in every possible direction. Plus, there’s the rhythm and balance and suppleness and moving with a partner. She says if you know how to lead and follow with confidence in a dance, you know how to be clear and responsive to your horse. So, she taught me dance with the riding.”

“Are you serious? So, you know ballet?”

“Yes, Viktor, and ballroom dances and belly dancing and pole dancing obviously. She told me if I can hold onto a pole with just my thighs, holding onto a horse would be a piece of cake. Plus, she said it’d be a skill I’d be happy to have when I’m older… I think I finally understand why.” He put his finger on Viktor’s lip, dragging it down and enhancing the still-gaping expression on his face. “It’s fun putting that look on your face.”

“Wow, Yuri. You once accused me of holding out on you, but you’ve been holding out on me big time.”

“Are you mad?” He grinned and wriggled his hips against him.

“So mad. And the only thing that will make it up to me is if you dance with me.”

“It’d be easier if I lead since, I know the steps. Is that okay?”

“I don’t know. Will I still be your Dom if you lead me through a dance?” He held back a smile as he gripped his ass tighter.

(43) He grinned and grabbed his hand then spun him around and dipped him to the floor.

Viktor gazed up at him, that magical astonishment on his face yet again then smiled and stroked his face. “My sexy, strong, talented Prince. I should have rated you an eleven. I should have known there was still so much more to you that surpasses even my wildest dreams.”

He pulled him up then rocked him around the floor through the sexiest of the Latin dances with the plug still pulsing unignorable pleasure into him that changed with every move and laughter breaking their rhythm but fitting soundly in the easy flow between them.

After hours of dancing, they finally made their way home where instead of taking him to bed, Viktor broke out the vodka bottle.

Several shots in and all their clothing gone from their bodies and onto the floor of the living room and Russian drinking songs spilling from their lips, the bottle of the chocolate cherry sauce leaking onto the floor still clinging to Yuri’s tongue, Viktor scrambled to his feet. “Oh! Oh! Wait there. I have an idea.”

“Where are you going? I don’t like it when you’re gone.” He whined and reached out for him but let his hand fall limply back to the floor to follow his orders. Even if drunken, they were still his orders.

“Play with yourself,” Viktor called down the hall as he cranked the plug to its max. “Don’t come!”
“Yes, Viktor!” He took himself in hand.

He was lost on the edge of release when something soft and warm nuzzled at his neck.

“What’s this I’ve found? A sexy little bunny all horny and ready for mating?” Viktor’s voice sounded strange, muffled and deeper than usual.

He looked up. A polar bear loomed over him. He screamed and shoved its face as he scrambled away—as if that would save him.

Stopped on the other side of the room, he clutched his chest as he recovered his breath. He looked exactly like a real polar bear only a little… sexier. “Holy shit, Viktor. You scared the shit out of me. I swear I thought you were a real bear for a second.”

“Who is this Viktor you speak of?” He stalked toward him on all fours. “I am Nanook, King of the Bears, and decider of the worth of men. You shouldn’t have run little bunny. I was just investigating what you were up to, but now you’ve triggered my prey drive, and you look so tasty.” His body lowered and tensed.

“Viktor…” He put his hands up and backed away toward the door. The plug shut off in his ass.

“Your Viktor isn’t here to save you. You better run, little bunny. I can’t stop myself anymore. I’m going to make a meal out of you.” He lunged.

Yuri squealed and ran for the kitchen, backing up and circling around the island as Viktor—Nanook—caught up. He dodged toward the doorway, but Nanook was right there, standing on his hind legs and towering over him. He was blocked. Glancing back at the patio door, he backed up slowly then made his break for it. Scrambling with the knob, he barely got it open in time. Nanook’s paw scraping deep lines on his leg as he ran through. Stumbling around the side of the house with the bear right on his heels, he came back to the front door and slipped inside, slamming it shut behind him and heaved against it.

“Oh, what a clever little bunny you are. Using the doorknob to slow me down. I love it when my meals play hard to get. It makes them that much tastier when I finally sink my teeth in.”

The doorknob rattled then the rustling moved away from the door. Oh shit. He was going to come back in through the patio. He had to hide. He raced into his office and searched for a good spot. Behind the curtain? No, that was so obvious. There was a little space between the cabinets and the wall. He tucked himself into the smallest ball possible between them and hoped it would be overlooked. If it wasn’t…

“Where did that little bunny go? He thinks he’s so clever hiding on me. He’s only making me that much hungrier. I will find you, little bunny, and you will be mine.” Nanook stalked into the office on all fours, his nose in the air sniffing him out. He circled around checking behind the plant and the curtain while the bunny’s heart raced from the terror and suspense. Scanning the room again, he made his way to the door and then stopped. Slowly, his head turned to the cabinet, and he locked eyes on the petrified rabbit. “Found you.” The smirk, smooth and slick in his voice.

The bunny made a run for it, but he wasn’t fast enough. Nanook caught him and threw him over the desk, his claws digging into his flesh. A paw raked down his trembling spine, drawing lines of pain between the silky fur.

“Oh god, you look just delectable. I’m ravenous for you.” His teeth came down around the bunny’s neck.
“Please! Please don’t eat me!”

“What a silly bunny. He thinks he can stop a bear from eating a bunny.” His claws dragged over the tender skin of the bunny’s thighs as he kicked his feet apart.

“Please! I’ll do anything! Just please don’t eat me!”

“Oh? And what do you think you can offer me that would be better than a tasty meal?”

“You—you can fuck me. I’ll give you all the pleasure you want.”

His paw wrapped around the bunny’s cock, sliding his soft fur over it. “I already planned on that, silly little bunny. I always play with my food.” His other paw shivered more pain through his thighs.

He groaned as the vibrator kicked up to its highest levels, pressed in the best angle against his prostate. His eyes fluttered shut, and a stream of drool fell onto the desk. “Please, I’ll…”

Nanook slathered his thighs with lube then brought his feet back together and crossed one over the other then slipped his cock between them and began thrusting. His heavy, warm, soft body pressed down over the bunny’s back as he drove them into pleasure. “You’ll what? What will you do to save yourself?”

“I’ll… I’ll have your cubs!”

“What was that? My cubs?”

“Yes, Vi—Nanook. Make me pregnant, and I’ll give you cubs, and I’ll take good care of them and raise them to be strong like you, and I’ll give you pleasure every night.”

“Hmm… that is an intriguing offer… You want to have my babies?” His paw clawed down his back.

Groaning, he pushed back into him, tightening his thighs. “Yes, Viktor,” he whispered, “yes, Nanook.”

“Alright, I accept. You’ll have as many cubs as I can fill you with and be my sex slave for the rest of our lives. If you fail to please me, I’ll just eat you then.”

“Yes, Nanook. Please fill me with your babies and take as much pleasure from me as you want. Just… please take care of me?”

He nuzzled against his neck. “You have my protection.” Grasping the plug, he pulled it back, then slowly fucked him with the thick bulge stretching his hole with every stroke. “Come for me, my sweet bunny.”

Grunting and growling his pleasure, Nanook came between his thighs as the bunny split apart on the pleasure below him, squealing and gasping from the power of the bear tearing through his tiny body.

Collapsed onto the floor, Nanook pulled him into his plush fur and cuddled him close. He was so soft and so big, he nearly disappeared entirely into Nanook’s body. He nuzzled in deeper.

“Oh my god. That was so hot. I’m so hot. I feel like I’m in the onsen.” Viktor pulled the head off gasping, pushing his sweaty hair from his forehead. “Sorry. I couldn’t keep it on anymore.” He booped his nose with the pad of his paw. “Did you like it?”

“Uh, yes, Viktor. It really started feeling real there. I didn’t think I’d like that that much, but you
made it so hot. And the claws. Oh my god. I loved the claws.”

He laughed. “And apparently you have a breeding kink.”

“Breeding kink?”

“You want to have my babies?”

“God, yes. I didn’t know I did but holy shit. I wish you’d really fucked me and cum inside.”

Viktor started cracking up. “Oh my god. Learning your kinks when you’re drunk is the best. I love unfiltered Yuri. You really wanted to lose your virginity in a furry fantasy?”

“Well, you made it hot. I wouldn’t have cared.”

He laughed. “Well, I’m glad my standards are higher than yours there.”

Yuri started pawing through the fur.

“What are you doing?”

“I’m looking for it.”

“Looking for what?”

“Your cock. How does it work in here?”

He laughed and pulled it out of a slit in the fur that opened far enough to see his hole as well.

“Woah…” Yuri moved down so he could see better. “You can get fucked in this too?” His fingers rubbed lightly over Viktor’s hole.

“Yeah. I decided more options were always better.”

“Hey, Viktor… Can I ride you?”

“Ride me? You want to fuck me?”

“No, I mean ride you. You’re so big and soft like this. I want to ride you like a horse.”

“You… want to ride me.”

He nodded eagerly. “Please?”

“Well, I guess I’ve never seen you that enthusiastic to ride anything… Okay.” He put his cock away and flipped onto his hands and knees. “Climb on.”

“Wait. Can you wear the head too?”

“Oh my god. The things I’ll do for you.” He shook his head and put the bear head back on. “Climb on, little bunny. I’ll take you to bed.”

“Yes! Finally.” He hopped onto Nanook’s soft, strong, plush back and held on as he carried him up the stairs the best he could with the alcohol messing with his coordination and Nanook’s gait not quite as smooth as the horses’.

Reaching their bed, he slid off, and Nanook picked him up and placed him in, kissing him on the
cheek.

“I’ll be right back, my sweet bunny bride. I just need to rinse the sweat off.”

Exhausted from their evening, Yuri’s body cruelly decided to fall asleep before Viktor returned. Viktor cruelly decided to let him sleep until morning.

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Yuri woke, his head throbbing in the bright light. Groaning, he pressed against Viktor’s bare chest then pulled back. “Aww, crap. I fell asleep. I’m sorry.”

“Why are you sorry? I put you to bed. I expected you to sleep.”

“But… weren’t you going to fuck me?”

He chuckled and pressed a kiss to his head. “Patience, zolotse. We have plenty of time for that. Breakfast first. Come.” He climbed out of bed and put on his black pants. “You go naked. Grab the lube.”

“Yes, Viktor.” His headache suddenly insignificant, he grabbed the lube from the nightstand and bounded out after him.

Viktor bent him over the table and gave him a quick but thorough spanking that eased the pain in his head then left him to go make breakfast. “Get yourself ready for me. That is your order until you’re told otherwise. You are to stay ready and set to come with a single sexual touch from me.”

“Yes, Viktor.” He poured the lube into his hand and slipped his fingers into his hole then slowly worked over his cock until his body had the first twitches of pleasure starting up. The specificity of his order concerned him. Viktor was always thinking particularly cruel things the more specific he got.

Viktor came over with a glass of pickle juice and set it in front of him. “Drink this.” His hand brushed over his ass. “Move your hand for me. Don’t come. I’m just checking you.”

“Yes, Viktor.” He braced his forearms on the table as he picked up the glass and tipped it back while Viktor’s fingers plunged into his ass. Oh fuck. He whined, his knees buckling as Viktor thrust slowly into him, stretching his fingers apart to check his progress. So, that was his game.

He gave him a firm slap on his ass. “Don’t move. My slut is to always hold still for my inspections.”

He straightened his legs and dropped his forehead onto his arms. “Yes, Viktor. I’m sorry.”

“Good.” He caught his fingers on his rim and pulled him open then bent down to peer inside. “Good, Yuri. You look nice and pretty for me here. All clean and pink. Let’s see, how do you taste today?” He licked into his hole, sucking and nibbling gently on his rim. Pulling back, he thrust his fingers back deep inside. “Very nice. You taste delicious just as I hoped.” His fingers worked over his prostate, feeling out every edge then stopped on one extra sensitive spot. “You need to massage more here.” He worked over it as he took his cock in hand and stroked his length. “You feel this spot? You can find it on your own?”

“Ngh, hai! Yes! Yes, Viktor.”

“Good, Yuri.” He pulled out and went back to the stove. “And I want your cock harder too.”
He slipped his fingers back in and found the spot Viktor had wanted him to massage and set himself to it, steeling his resolve to please Viktor fully.

Viktor came back over with their plates and coffees. “Keep going. I’ll feed you.”

Picking his head off the table, he smiled. “Thank you. You’re so good to me.”

Viktor beamed and offered him a bite. “You’re just the sweetest.”

After finishing their breakfast, Viktor left and returned with an armful of dildos and toys he dropped in front of Yuri’s face. “Let’s check your progress again. You’re where I told you to be? If I put my cock in, you’d come with one thrust?”

“I—I think so. I mean… I don’t know what that feels like, so it’s hard to answer.”

“That’s okay. As long as you think you’re obeying at your best, I trust that you are.” He picked up one of the smaller dildos. “Time for another inspection.” He slipped it in and gave a few thrusts then tsk’d and pulled it out. “That one’s too small.” He picked up another that was substantially larger and eased it into his hole that stretched tightly around it. “Much better.” Thrusting it through his taught rim, he moved Yuri’s hand out of the way to take his cock. “This still needs to be harder.”

“Yes, Viktor.” He took himself back in hand and pumped faster, clenching back the release as Viktor rewarded him with targeted thrusts over his gland.

“Good, Yuri. I need to make sure those words are still feeling the best for you. I feel I’ve been slacking a bit there. I’m sorry. I’ll fix that now with a good training session. Keep saying them, giving me ten seconds between each one to reward you thoroughly.”

“Yes, Viktor.” He started counting while Viktor lavished him in praises and fucked him with the toy. Taking a quick breath to steady himself, he repeated it again which Viktor rewarded with faster thrusts and taking his cock in hand himself to free him from the task he was becoming too uncoordinated to do properly. He had to stay focused enough to keep count.

“Remember, yes, Viktor should relax you as well as bring you pleasure. Focus on relaxing more into this.”

“Yes, Viktor.” He started counting out the seconds, keeping his breath slow and steady as Viktor trained his every cell to resonate with those words. His legs trembled but stayed solid as he brought the pleasure deeper into his core, the center of his body pulsing warm and seeping bliss to his every border.

“Good, Yuri. You’re so good, my sweet baby. I want these words to refocus you on me as well. They should work like a half-halt, rebalancing you and keeping you calm, directed, and engaged.”

“Yes, Viktor.”

His rhythm steadied, forcing Yuri to yield, his trust that he would stay with him infusing Yuri with the same, Viktor’s thrusts melded into a steady stream of sensation. Engaged in the bliss entering his body, Yuri knew where it’d go and how he’d respond. He could follow its path and move with it rather than be jolted out of position.

Yes, Viktor—steady, deep, trusted pleasure. Pleasure that focused and calmed him and gave him confidence that he could handle anything he felt.

Once Viktor was satisfied that he was responding as he should be, he pulled the toy from his ass and
left him sweaty and steady and heaving on the table. “Let’s check our work now, shall we?”

“Yes, Viktor.” Pleasure surged, his every cell vibrating a song and sensation. Sensation: a raw material Viktor could work into any shape and frame his mind and heart and form. A sensation that perfected him with a pleasure bright and sweet on his tongue as his cock dripped onto the floor.

“Oh, so beautiful. Look how nicely you came into frame for me. I’m going to work in some regular training sessions like that to make sure those words stay nice and effective for you.”

“Yes, Viktor.” He began fisting his cock once again to keep to Viktor’s order. He could give Viktor more satisfaction than that. He pumped faster and brought himself back to the trembling edge of a different pleasure Viktor wanted him to feel. A pleasure raw, erratic, and primal.

“Good, Yuri. You’re doing so good.” He picked up a metal, duck-bill looking thing from the table. “I need to take some measurements. This might be a little cold.” He eased the freezing, hard metal inside him then opened it wider and wider until he was gaping at his absolute limit. “That’s my good Yuri. Wait right there.” He let the handle go leaving the weight of the toy to tug at his hole.

Still pumping his cock, he reached back to feel what it was Viktor was doing to him then twisted back to try to see.

Viktor came back in carrying his laptop and smiled upon catching him blushing. “Curious about your body?”

“Yes, Viktor.” He sucked in a breath with the surge checking him back into ordered pleasure. He then unleashed it with faster pumps deepening the pleasure Viktor now wanted him to feel.

“Get up all the way onto the table and lay on your back, knees bent, so your ass is right at the edge. I’ll be back again.” He left Yuri to follow his order which was a trick with his ass gaping and hanging metal like an ornament. Viktor returned with a small mirror and handed it to him. “Here, take a look.” He slipped a pillow in behind his head.

He didn’t really want to see himself that clearly. He was more curious about what Viktor was doing, but an order wasn’t meant to be refused. He held up the mirror and angled it toward his slick walls. “Wow. That’s... Um...”

“Beautiful. You look cozy and slick and warm and sexy. Feel free to watch me work, but don’t forget about your order.” He pulled out a tape measurer and lined it up against his hole. He typed in the number then picked up a long, longer than his forearm, thin dildo and fed it into his ass through his open hole. It was so strange feeling it suddenly inside him without feeling it pass through. He couldn’t stop himself from watching. Viktor slid it higher until a sharp pang hit his stomach.

“You felt that?”

“Yes, Viktor. What was that?”

“I reached the end of your rectum. There’s a sphincter muscle there like the ones in your hole that separates it from the rest of the colon that takes a sharp turn there. I’m measuring how far I have to go before I hit it.” He put his finger on the dildo where he stopped and pulled it out then lined it up to the tape measure. “Seven inches with the outside of your ass included. You’re a little short there. Let’s see if you can get used to me penetrating that inner muscle. Tell me if it hurts.” He slid the thin, snake-like dildo back in and stopped at the pang in his stomach then gently pressed against it, twisting and easing the dildo past it. “How did that feel?”

“Really weird, but not awful.”
“Good, Yuri.” He gave a few thrusts in deeper then backed out and penetrated it again. He repeated the process until Yuri started to relax and turn more of his attention back to his order with his cock.

“Very nice. What we lack in anatomical compatibility, you more than make up for with your ability to turn anything I do to you into pleasure.” He started thrusting into him with a steady pace in and out of the deep inner muscle. “How does it feel now?”

“Really deep, and still strange, but good.”

“Good, Yuri. Relax as much as you can. I want to see if I can open you more.” He left the dildo in place and turned the screws on the metal toy, so it expanded further inside him. “This is a speculum, just so you know.”

“Ah, thank you.”

He typed in the new number then removed the dildo and the speculum. He poked and prodded around his loose hole. “Hmm… you could use some better recovery here. I’m going to put you through a training exercise. It shouldn’t be painful, but it will require your excellent endurance.” He grinned wickedly as he picked up a twisted metal plug and pushed it into his ass.

A band around the base of his cock and balls went next followed by a sound with thick beads down his cock. Viktor finished off his set up with a square, sticky patch stuck between his cock and his hole and wires snapped to each one. He turned on a little box they were attached to that was different than the electricity he had used before. Strange tingling pulses started up.

Viktor controlled the box, slowly increasing the sensation that turned into twitches, then deep pulses until every muscle in his pelvis clamped down. His hole and his cock tightened hard against the probes holding him open, and the sound lifted out of his cock with the force. After a few seconds, it released, and the sound sank back down in that rawest of pleasures that deep penetration gave him.

“Oh shit, what was that?”

“E-stim. It triggers muscle contractions.”

The electricity surged again, and the muscles he never knew could be trained shocked him with their force.

“Alright, since you don’t have to do anything but lay there while that’s running, let’s do a little restaurant planning.” He opened his laptop and sat down next to him.

The sound sank back down, slowly fucking him with his own muscle contractions. “Yes, Viktor.” He sobbed lightly. “Um, did you see the last email I sent with my progress?”

“No yet. Let me read that now.” He turned up the pace of the contractions.

He sobbed a little less lightly as his body pulsed rapidly out of his control.

“Something wrong?”

“No, Viktor. I’m just… your filthy whore, trying not to come from simple training.” His whole body tensed harder from his own words along with the contractions down below.

“Oh, Yuri,” he grabbed his chin in his hand and gave it a little shake as he smiled, “but what a good, pretty little whore you are.” He picked up Yuri’s laptop and put it on his stomach. “Alright, start redoing the competition analysis and the overview. I know both of those need to be redone.”
“Yes, Viktor.”

After about twenty minutes, Viktor shut off the e-stim and removed the plug from his ass but left everything else in place. He picked up a thick dildo that barely fit and worked it into him. “Here, fuck yourself with this until it goes in easy. Go slow.” He removed the laptop from his stomach and set it aside.

Yuri fucked himself on the dildo as he kept to his order with his hand around his cock massaging around the beads of the sound still inside him.

“You can do better than that.”

“Yes, Viktor.” He brought himself closer to his disobedience for Viktor’s pleasure letting the torment flow freely through him.

“Good. Now, what do you think about this one?” He turned his computer so he could see the screen.

“Um, I like it.”

After he got himself stretched out enough to take the dildo easily, Viktor selected a black set of anal beads that weren’t beads at all, but cones stacked one on top of each other. He pushed it into him which went in easily enough after the much bigger dildo, but pulling them back out, his hole caught on every one and tugged hard before releasing and clamping down harder on the narrow points making the next base of the cone harder to take. It left him squirming on the table as Viktor pulled them back out.

Viktor fucked him with it for a few minutes before setting it down and putting the metal plug back in. “You still need a lot more training. I want you to be able to open right up as wide as I need for anything I want to do to you and then go right back to being nice and tight for me.”

The e-stim went back on, a little harder than before, and they went back to work. After many more cycles of stretching and toning and checking his progress with the cone beads, lasting all the way to lunch, Viktor was finally satisfied with his condition. Broken, pliant, and still strong.

“That should do it for today, but we’ll work this training into your morning workouts along with your ‘yes, Viktor’ training. We’ll have to spend less time then so be prepared for it to be much more intense.” He put in the plug with the beads that rotated around his hole and sat him in the chair then covered his cock with a gently vibrating cock sleeve. “Here this should keep you warm and obedient. Let me know when you need more stimulation.” He went to the fridge to prepare their lunch.

When Viktor returned with their plates, Yuri knew the best way to thank him. “More, please.”

He grinned. “How much more?”

“However much I need to please you.”

He turned up the dials until he saw Yuri struggling to hold on but still in control enough to eat his lunch.

“Thank you, Viktor.”

He smiled and kissed his forehead. “The best.”

After they finished, Viktor finally released him from his order then shoved a strange, metal, bulb-
shaped toy in where the plug had been which he called an ass lock and brought him down to the
playroom. Yuri floated the whole way down.

(44) Viktor put him on the floor and tied his hands to some low hanging iron rings stretching them
overhead then pulled on the base of the toy in his ass. It opened up inside him wider than anything he
had ever felt and tugged at his hole as Viktor hooked a chain to it. He gave a little tug and the toy
locked fully into place inside him gave him no choice but to follow the leash attached to his ass.
Viktor worked him into position then chained the other end to the floor leaving him unable to move
at all with his arms stretched tight and anything more than a shift upward tugging hard at his ass and
keeping him in place.

Wrapping his cock in a sheath of chain maille, he clipped wires to it then rigged up a vibrating wand
to sit at the underside of his cock head, and another one a little lower. What the hell was he planning?
Viktor answered with enthusiasm and sadism and a package of needles.

“Oh shit. Viktor?”

“I want to push my virgin slut’s limits. Color?”

He gulped. “Green. Where are they going?”

He smiled. “I love so much how you answered and then asked. Your stomach and your nipples.
Color?”

His eyes went white with fear. His nipples. That was definitely going to hurt. “Green.”

Viktor knelt, gloves on his hands, and cleaned his skin with alcohol and opened the package.
“They’re brand new and completely sterile. There is a slight risk of infection as there always is when
breaking the skin, but I’ve taken every precaution to minimize that.” He lined up a needle to the skin
just above his cock. Color?

The cool clench of fear seized him, and his brain fought through the floating pleasure he’d been in to
warn him of the danger and beg him to stop. He’d never felt better about tuning out that coward.
Pleasing Viktor was always the safest option. The safest option that always gave him the most
satisfaction. He smiled. “For you, green. For you, always green.”

“Oh, you’re so beautiful.” He slid the needle into his skin, in one side and out the other in a double
punch of pain that heated away the fear with dizzying bliss. “How was it?”

“Nice. Not too bad and feels good after.”

He beamed and had to stop to kiss over his neck and cheeks. “My best Yuri. You make me feel so
amazing. You’re just perfect.” He sat back up and lined up another needle offset from the first and a
little higher. “Ready?”

“Yes, Viktor.”

There was another sharp pinch of pain then the needle gliding under his skin and out the other side,
locking the sensation in place. Viktor nudged at the needles, and he liked how he could feel him
under his skin. Viktor would want to know what had him smiling.

“I can feel you under my skin—your sensations. I like it.”

He had to stop again to cover him with kisses before he continued piercing him along his stomach,
one side then the other until he had created a V. His skin, hot and slick from the pain and pleasure
intermingling inside it, and when he realized Viktor was marking him with his name again, his whole body began thrumming with ecstasy.

Viktor reached his nipples and paused, the point of the needle pricking his skin. “Ready?”

“Yes, Viktor.”

The fear crept up again which released with a deep shudder as Viktor slowly pushed through then twisted and tugged at the needle making his precum gush and seep through the holes of the chain maille.

“God, look at you. You’re such a perfect pain slut. I’ve never seen anything like you. So gorgeous.” He finished his name through the other nipple with another shot of pain that traveled straight to his cock. “Fuck. So beautiful.” He wove a thin strand of wire around each needle giving them playful tugs and twists as he went then hooked it up with the other wire that connected to the one attached to his cock. He turned on the electricity and let it flow over his cock and through the needles with the lightest of settings. “How does that feel?”

“Mmm… so good, Viktor. Feels like… you’re pouring champagne over me.”

“Perfect.” He turned it off then hooked up another wire to the metal toy inside him and turned it back on. “How does that one feel?”

“A little weaker than the rest, but good.”

He turned it up a click. “That?”

His body filled with sparkling pleasure that pressed hard against his prostate. “Yes, Viktor. So good.”

“Good, Yuri.” He turned on the vibrator resting against the metal sheath. The tremors wrapped excited around him. He cranked it up until an orgasm was threatening his already exhausted control with the strongest mix of pain and pleasure Viktor had given him yet.

“Fuck! Fuck! Please! Please, Viktor! Let me come. Please, let me come!”

“What’s that? You’re my filthy virgin slut who’d do anything to come?”

“Yes, Viktor! Anything! I’m such a slut! I’m your slut! Please, please let me come! I’m begging you!” Tears pricked at his eyes and then flowed freely when Viktor turned it up higher. “Please! Please, Viktor! Please, I’m yours. Just tell me. Anything!”

“I want you to wait.”

His teeth gnashed at the air as he fought to find the right answer. “Yes, Viktor!” His answer came out as a high-pitched strain against his control.

He turned it up again. “I want you to wait.”

“Yes, Viktor! Yes!”

He turned it up again.

Yuri thrashed against the holds, his heels digging in and slipping across the floor. His ass had just enough elasticity with the toy locking him in place to move off the vibrators, but he knew Viktor would hate that so he pushed himself back against them, his heart pounding, his skin slick with sweat
and pain and pleasure.

“Wait.”

“Yes, Viktor!”

Again and again, he cranked it up demanding that he wait. Viktor had to take himself out of his pants and stroke himself to find relief from going untouched while Yuri’s struggle filled him with pleasure. “God, so fucking perfect. You’d stay here all day if I told you to.”

“Yes, Viktor! Let me—Let me suck—Please, your cock. I want—want to give you all of your pleasure.”

“Fuck. My perfect, perfect slut.” He stuffed his cock in his mouth and didn’t take long to start thrusting in a desperate search of his release and fill his throat with his cum. Pulling out with a deep gasp, he licked his cum from Yuri’s lip and smiled. “Come for me, beautiful.”

Yuri’s vision went black at the edges as he finally released, draining everything inside him with violent tremors. He gasped in relief as it slowed only to realize with horror that Viktor hadn’t shut off his torture device.

Viktor grinned. “Keep coming, beautiful.”

His cock softened, but it was still held in place next to the lower vibrator. Its vibrations ached against his raw cock, the pain of which triggered a fresh bout of pleasure and after a minute or so, his cock came back to life to come for Viktor’s pleasure again. Over and over the cycle repeated until he had nothing left inside him, and he wasn’t sure if the orgasms he felt were pleasure or pain which only gave him a stronger release of whatever was knotted inside him.

Lost but safe in the world of Viktor’s creation, his touch effervescent below his skin, his fears faced and conquered and turned to pleasure just because Viktor ordered it. Yuri fingered the jagged edges surrounding the rivets on the handle of the pocket knife, Viktor’s promises honing the edge. He seized it in his hand.

Viktor used his mouth to come twice more before he shut it off and released him from the rig, removing the needles. He covered him with an ointment and snuggled him in the jade room, whispering his praises.

Bringing him to the theater room, Viktor ordered them takeout and set up a lighthearted comedy to watch as he kept him snuggled and warm on the couch. It was halfway through the movie before Yuri realized that their time was almost up.

“Viktor, are you going to fuck me today?”

He chuckled and kissed his cheek. “I love how confident you’re being, but no.”

“Wait, really?”

“Yes. I promised you perfect, and that’s what you’re going to get. Call me old-fashioned, but I don’t think buying your first time falls under perfect.” The corner of his eye twitched almost like the flash of a wince.

“But… I thought whoever bought me was going to fuck me.”

“Well, you gave me that option, but I’m choosing not to take it.”
“Damn it.”

He chuckled and kissed his head. “Patience, zolotse. You gave me more than my money’s worth today. I absolutely want to fuck you, but I want to do it right.”

He sighed and settled back onto him. “Yes, Viktor.”

“By the way, I discovered the first thing I can’t do with you.”

He pouted. “I can do it! Let me try again, please?”

He shook his head. “Sorry, I don’t think any number of tries will help you. I can’t mind fuck you.”

“Huh?”

“It’s when you put your sub in a predicament where they can keep away from something unpleasant, but it’s a struggle to do so, and they often get exhausted and give up and go into the pain. It’s fun watching them fight to resist your power and then giving in to it anyway. You always go straight into the pain. I was trying to mindfuck you in the playroom with how you could move away from the vibrator, but it pulled at the lock in your ass. You realized I wanted you at that vibrator and just kept yourself on it.”

“Well, that’s what you wanted, so that’s what I did.”

He pulled him in and kissed his head. “My perfect Yuri.”

Six o’clock hit, and Yuri was tempted to just kiss him and stay forever, but he had to take care of one thing first. Viktor deserved a perfect first kiss, and it wouldn’t be perfect without taking care of one neglected loose end he should have tied up long ago.

He walked down to the cottage, preparing himself for the unpleasantness.

“Phichit? You here?” He peeked in the garage. His car was gone. Damn it. Oh well, he could do it when he got in. He went into his room and checked his alarms before picking up The Gay Man’s Bible to finish the last few pages. His eyes started drifting shut, and he struggled to keep awake. He had to talk to Phichit so they could start their next week off right. He’d been lying for far too long.

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Chapter End Notes

First art is by Clarinda on Instagram

Second art is by me.

Spotify
41. Glitter and Gold by Barns Courtney
42. Nothin' Like This by The Phantoms
43. Come With Me Now by KONGOS
44. Everything is Color by Through Juniper Vale
Chapter 20

Chapter Summary

For want of a minute

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

(45) “Yuuuri…”

Yuri groaned and stirred in his bed, caught on the barbs of a deep sleep. “Huh?”

“Five forty-four. Time to kill me.” Phichit stood at the end of his bed.

He shot up in a disoriented panic, scrambling out of his bed, tripping in the sheets tangled around his legs. “What time is it?!?”

“I just told you. It’s five forty-four.”

“In the morning?!?”

“Yeah, what’s wrong?”

He sank back to his bed, his trembling hand pressed over his chest. “Oh, thank god. You scared the shit out of me. I thought I was late to work.” Scrubbing his hands over his face, he tried to find reality again. He checked his clock. Five forty-four a.m. He sighed with relief.

“Sorry. I didn’t mean to scare you. I just wanted to talk for a second.”

“I’m really sorry, but I have to get to work. I can’t be late. Can we talk tonight?”

“It won’t take long.”

“Alright.” He sighed and rubbed his face again. “What did you want?”

“I want you to kill me.”

He peered over at him, sliding his glasses onto his face, but they didn’t help him make sense of his words as well as they helped him make sense of the world. “What?”

“I woke you up before five forty-five because I want you to put me out of my misery. You and Viktor…” His mouth screwed up as he looked at the floor. “You guys have something, don’t you?” He looked back up, staring at the oversized gray t-shirt Yuri was wearing.

“Yeah.” He flinched at the wrinkle of tears on Phichit’s face. “I’m really sorry. I should have told you sooner, but in the beginning, I wasn’t sure what was happening, and then I was gone. And I was going to talk to you last night, but then you were gone…”

“You lied to me.” He sniffed and looked back down as a tear fell.
“I did. I’m so sorry. I wasn’t trying to hurt you. I like you; I really do. I just… didn’t know how to handle it, so I didn’t.”

“And the party... Why did you try to sleep with me if you weren’t interested?”

“I was really messed up that night. I’m really sorry.”

“Why didn’t you just tell me you weren’t interested? It would have been a lot easier to take if you’d just been honest with me right in the beginning.”

“I didn’t know how to be honest. I’ve never been good at conversations like that, and…” He cringed, a truth he didn’t want to face bubbling up from beneath his lies. “I guess I was using you. I didn’t really know that’s what I was doing, but I think a part of me wanted to keep you there as an excuse… a reason not to give in to what I really wanted. I’m so sorry, Phichit. I wasn’t trying to hurt you. I just—I didn’t know how to deal with anything that was happening.”

“Yeah, I’m sorry too. You weren’t really giving me a whole lot to show that you were interested, but I just kept pushing because I really hoped… We just really seemed to hit it off in the beginning, and I probably was reading more into it than what was really there because I liked you so much.” He scrubbed his fingers through his sleep-ridden hair. “And I realized I was competing against Viktor a while ago, but I just… didn’t want to lose for once.”

“We did hit it off, and I do really like you but as a friend.”

He shook his head with a pained smile. “Yeah, as a friend. Always as a friend.”

He glanced at the clock and cringed as he stood up. “I’m really sorry, but I really have to get ready for work.”

He tried to stop up his tears. “Yeah, sure. Go ahead. Don’t want to keep Viktor waiting.” He made a step toward the door but didn’t seem to be able to go further than that.

“Hey, are you okay?”

“I just wish—” his voice cracked as his tears broke free. “I just wish I was someone’s best option for once.”

He looked between Phichit with his face buried in his hands, his shoulders shaking and the clock rapidly ticking time away. He’d hurt him enough. Kicking him out like this would just be heartless.

Yuri came over and wrapped his arms around him. “I’m so sorry. I didn’t mean to hurt you.”

Phichit held on tight. “It’s not just you. Every time I like a guy, he’s either just looking for a hookup, or he just likes me as a friend. There’s always a Viktor. Always someone better than me. There’s always a better option than me.”

“That’s not true. For someone, you’re the best option.”

He laughed, an alien bitterness sticking to the notes. “Right. Who would I ever be the best for? I’m average in absolutely everything.”

“That’s not true. You’re really cute. Far above average there. You make movies even more entertaining than the movie itself, and those have millions of dollars put into making them as entertaining as possible. You’re a wizard with social media and have tons of friends all over the world from that... I haven’t seen you ride yet, but I know if you’re riding with Viktor, you’re
anything but average. And I barely know you still. Someone who takes the time to get to know you will be able to rattle off an embarrassingly long list of things that he thinks you’re the best at. I promise there’s someone out there who will see you as the only choice for him. Just have a little faith. He’s out there. You just haven’t found him yet.”

“I hope you’re right.”

“I know I am.”

He let him go and started wiping his face. “Thanks, Yuri. I’m sorry. Go ahead. I don’t want to get you in trouble with your boss.” He laughed. “Not like he’d fire you for being late though.” He headed toward the door and then stopped. “We can be friends, right? I meant it when I said I like you.”

He smiled. “Yeah, I’d definitely like that.”

Phichit smiled, dimmer than usual, but at least it was real. “Good.”

He left, and Yuri raced to get dressed, cursing under his breath the whole time. Six a.m. He was officially late. Should he send him a text to let him know he’s on his way? That would just take more time. A simple omw wouldn’t cut it. Just get there faster.

He stumbled pulling the shorts on and crashed into the corner of the dresser. “Ow, fuck.” Pressing his hand to his bruised hip, he scoffed at the irony, but dresser corners just sucked. He pulled his socks on and raced for the door, jamming his shoes onto his feet. Shit. Shit. Shit. Why did everything take so damn long? Finally shod, he raced for Viktor’s office as fast as he could.

(46) He burst in through the door, apologies already spilling from his lips as he started dropping to his knees.

Viktor held up his hand. “Wait just a second, Yuri.”

“You—you don’t want me to kneel?” Terror struck his heart as he stood back straight on legs on the verge of giving out.

“No.” His mask was frozen on his face, but the thickness of the clarity in his voice revealed how much it was hiding. “Was there an emergency of some sort?”

“No, Viktor. Phichit needed me. I—”

He closed his eyes, a grimace distorting his perfect features. “Get out.”

“What?”

He fixed his eyes back on him, devoid of any expression he knew. “Get out. Go see Phichit. He can tell you how to do the job you were hired for.” His voice, his face, vicious in their attack of restraint.

“What?” Fear slicked up his throat and into his eyes, its indifferent hold clamping down on his throat, strangling the life it was meant to protect. “You don’t—You’re not—”

He stood up, his hands slamming onto his desk. “Go, Yuri! Go do the job you were hired for!”

“Viktor, please. Please.” Scrambling for a way to breathe, scrambling for just one clear thought, scrambling for the right answer he knew was there somewhere but he just couldn’t quite grasp, scrambling for the key to the lock on his mind that he needed to find the key in the first place, he
grabbed ahold of something thick, but it felt wrong as it scrambled from his tongue. “I have information regarding your order! May I share it?!” He watched in horror as the final wrong answer hammered upon all the rest he had given and sealed his fate in Viktor’s eyes.

“No! You knew—You knew what I—” His head jerked with the set of his jaw. “Get out, Yuri! Now!”

He took a shocked step back as numb tears rolled down his face. “Viktor, please—”

His finger jabbed toward the door. “Get out, Yuri! Leave! Get out right now!”

He stumbled jabbed behind him for the doorknob. “Please. Viktor.” He stared at him gaping, watching as a nightmare overtook the dream he was so close to achieving.

“Get out!” His hand trembled as tears rolled down his face.

His mind went blank. Blank as a lung paused between inhale and exhale. Blank as a page that needed to be filled before a crushing deadline. Blank like the eyes of a blinded owl as he watched the teardrops splinter into shards of green and white piercing the mahogany desk.

He staggered back through the doorway and down the aisle, his heart seizing in his chest. Stay. Kneel. His fists tightened as he ran, blindly seeking a location that didn’t exist anymore.

Stay, kneel, stay, kneel, stay, kneel… His mind churning over the blank order, he collapsed onto a row of hay bales in the loft and crushed his fingers into the brittle hay.

***

“Yuri? Yuri, what are you doing up here?” Phichit reached over and put his hand on his forehead. “Are you feeling—”

Yuri knocked his hand away and sat up, backing into the corner. “Don’t touch me! Only—only Viktor—” He sucked in a gasping breath as sobs that had been locked away shattered inside his chest. “Only Viktor. Oh my god.” He pressed his shaking hand over his mouth as he stared at Phichit, his eyes wide with terror. “Oh my god. I messed up. I messed up. He warned me. I knew what it meant to him. I should have asked first. I should have called him and explained first. He would have—but I didn’t. I didn’t. I let him think—Oh my god.”

“Woah, Yuri, calm down. What’s going on?”

“Vik—Viktor he—” Heaving in taunting, empty air, he buried his head in his hands.

“Easy, Yuri. Take a deep breath. You’re going to pass out if you keep breathing like that.”

“He dumped me.”

“What?”

“Viktor dumped me.”

“What? Why? I thought… You guys looked so… together at the bonfire.”

“I messed up. Everything was fine, and then I didn’t—I didn’t—couldn’t think. I knew, but I couldn’t think it in the moment. I should have called him. The right answer was right there if I’d just—if I’d just stopped long enough to—if I’d just called him, he would have understood. I chose you over him.”
“What? No, you didn’t.”

He shook his head. “That’s what he sees. I gave his time to you, and I—I told him I wanted to end it. Oh my god. He sat there thinking I wanted to end it and then I gave his time to you.”

“Wait. Viktor dumped you because you were a couple of minutes late?”

“I knew. I wasn’t supposed to be late. I made a commitment to him, and I broke it.”

“I don’t understand. Why would he care that much about a few minutes?”

“It’s not just a few minutes. It meant so much more to him. It was his limit. He gave me one hard limit, and I broke it.” His tears ran down his arms and dripped off his elbow.

“Easy, Yuri. You need to take the day off. Come on. I’ll help you get home.” He reached down to help him up, but Yuri jerked back.

“No! I have to stay!”

“You’re not in any condition to be working right now.”

“I have to stay! I can’t run. I can’t. I have—have to stay. He told me to stay no matter what.”

“What? He said you can’t take the day off?”

He shook his head. “I just have to stay. Please, just tell me what to do.”

“Go home.”

“No! With the horses. I’m supposed to be doing the job I was hired for. What do I do?” He tried to get up, but his legs were weak and numb. He collapsed back onto the bales.

“You’re allowed to take days off. Use one.”

“Phichit! Just tell me what to do! Please!” His fists thumped into the hay as he forced himself back to his feet.

He eyed him for a minute, but as Yuri managed to stay upright, he sighed. “Alright, alright. Come on. I was filling the cart for their lunch. You can help me.”

“Lunch? It’s already lunch?”

“Yeah. Have you been up here the whole time? I didn’t see you when we gave them breakfast. I just heard you now.”

“I think so. I left his office and then you were here. I don’t really know…”

Alright, well, come on if you want to work that badly.” He headed for the half-filled cart on the other side of the loft. “Hey, Yuri, I don’t really understand what happened, but it was my fault, wasn’t it? You said you couldn’t be late, and I insisted.”

He shook his head. “It was my fault. I should have called. He said to call him for anything I needed, and I needed five minutes. I should have called him. I should have talked to you sooner.”

“I’m still really sorry. I didn’t mean to mess things up.”
“It was my fault. It was all my fault. I knew. I just couldn’t…” He grabbed a hay bale and tossed it onto the cart. “I couldn’t think. I couldn’t just stop for one second and think.” He doubled over sobbing as he picked up another bale, the static rampant in his mind.

“Yuri, please just go home. You can’t work like this. I’ll tell Viktor, so you don’t have to.”

“No! Don’t say anything to him! Please! It’ll make it worse! Please, don’t say anything about me at all.”

“Alright, I can have one of the other guys tell him you needed to go home. Just stop torturing yourself, and rest until you feel better.”

“I’m fine!” He slung another bale onto the pile with weak, rubbery arms.

They stacked the cart with Phichit’s silence and Yuri’s sobbing then hauled it over to the lift. Yuri wiped his face, trying to get himself back together as they went down. They started throwing hay into the bins for the horses that were already inside. Toska, Avos, and Bytiye nickered when they saw him and stretched their necks out to welcome him with quivery sniffs. He threw their hay in as quickly as he could, but they weren’t satisfied with that. Flinching, he went to the cookie box and pulled out three treats, handing them out along with some scritches and kisses. He paused at Avos, their foreheads pressed together.

“I’m sorry. I messed it up. I knew I was going to; I just didn’t expect it to be like this.” He gave him a quick kiss then turned away, glancing back at Toska still looking for more. “I’m sorry.” His chin quivering, he swiped away the tears as he walked back to the cart.

He spent the rest of the day cleaning stalls in a numb haze. Viktor came and went over and over, a new horse at his side each time, never once glancing in his direction. By the tension in his jaw and his shoulders, he knew he was there. Yuri watched him groom his next horse right in front of the stall he was cleaning.

Viktor slipped the bridle on then took the reins over the horse’s head. He paused before walking forward, his eyes fixed ahead to the end of the aisle. “Did you take your lunch break yet?”

His heart lurched at hearing his voice directed to him even if his eyes didn’t follow. “No, Viktor.”

He nodded. “Go eat.”

“Yes, Viktor.” His voice crumpled, tears and pleasure striking at the same time.

They stared at each other, tears rolling down Yuri’s cheeks.

Viktor’s mouth opened like he wanted to say something then he closed it and looked back ahead. “It’ll fade.” The horse’s metal shoes marked his lingering exit.

He stared after him as he disappeared into the light at the end of the aisle. “I don’t want it to.”

***

Six a.m., his hand was on the doorknob of Viktor’s office waiting for something to happen—Waiting for Viktor to release his hand and free him of the tight check he’d placed on him.

The door opened; Yuri stumbled back as they nearly collided. Viktor jerked back in surprise then flinched and put his mask on.
“Is there something you needed?”
You. “Um… I…”

He shook his head and started down the aisle. “Get to work.”

“Yes, Viktor.”

He paused then continued on. “Stop saying that.”

“Wait, Viktor, I…”

He turned back, looking just above Yuri’s head rather than at him.

“The architect sent over her final plans along with the estimate last night. Um, I didn’t respond because I didn’t know if that was… if I was still… Um, if you still wanted me… to work on that.”

“Do you want to keep working on it?”

“Yes, Viktor.” He lifted the inside of his shirt to wipe the tears from his face.

“Then I don’t see why you shouldn’t. You’re doing good work on it.”

“Thank you… Viktor.” He looked up just in time to catch the flicker of Viktor’s eyes before he looked back above him.

“Next week, I don’t need you to come with me to Germany.”

“Oh.” He sucked in a quick resistance against his collapsing chest. “Is Georgi going instead?”

“No. He’s not interested in the overtime. It’s fine. I can manage on my own.”

“You have three horses going. That’s too much to do on your own. If you don’t want me, what about one of the others?”

“Leo and Mila are busy. Phichit… Emil has a friend coming in from Italy. Guang Hong is still too inexperienced. I’ll manage.”

“I can still go.”

“I’m not going to force you to—”

“I want to.” He stared at the bricks as his hands tightened. “Please?” He looked back up to catch another flicker of Viktor’s gaze.

“If that’s what you want.”

“Yes, Viktor.”

His face twisted up as he slowly jerked his head and turned away. “Stop saying it.” His boots drove hard into the brick.

***

He sifted through the pale shavings, watching them fall back to the floor, his Sisyphean punishment hooked to the needle marks writing Viktor’s name still on his skin. Would Viktor ever release him from this torment? Was there any atonement he could do to earn his forgiveness?
“What, you’re not hanging around your bodyguard anymore?” Yura leaned onto the open stall front, sneering.

He glanced up then threw his pitchfork into the full wheelbarrow and pushed it out into the aisle.

“Oh, did he finally figure it out? That you can’t be trusted?” He followed him down the aisle. “Don’t get why you’re still here then. Why he wouldn’t kick you out, or why you wouldn’t run.” His lip curled as he dug into his pocket. He pulled out a silver coin and started flipping it in the air, catching it, and flipping it again. “That’s what you do, isn’t it?”

He dropped the handles, letting the back of the wheelbarrow clang on the brick, and turned back to face him wincing. “You saw.”

“Yeah, I fucking saw it.” He gripped the coin in his hand, his anger tightening against the tears glistening in his green eyes. “I fucking saw all of it. Still see it most nights. Bet you sleep like a baby though.”

He couldn’t even attempt to resist the tears that fell down his cheeks and dripped from his chin. “I’m sorry. I’m so sorry.”

His jaw churned against his anger. “Yeah, like that means anything.” He shook his head then threw the quarter at Yuri, watching with a bare smile as it pinged off his chest.

Yuri watched it bounce on the bricks before it settled. With his stomach lit on fire and the static raging a sea of green and white in his mind, he reached down and picked it up and put it in his pocket.

Yura’s smile chewed over his hurt and his anger as he pulled out another coin and started flipping it.

“How many do I owe you?”

“I don’t know yet.” Yura chucked the next coin at him and watched as he slowly picked it up and put it in his pocket then stood back straight to face him, trembling and tears still falling from his face. He started flipping his next coin.

“Hey, what the hell is this?” Viktor gripped Yura’s hand and pried the coin from it then looked at Yuri, first in confusion then a flicker of pain when the understanding hit before his mask went back into place. “Get out, Yura. You have thirty days to find a new place to keep your horse.”

“What? What the shit? You’re going to let him stay?” He jabbed his finger at Yuri in indignation then sneered. “Or do you not know yet? Did he fuck up something else?”

“I’m not discussing this. You have thirty days, and in the meantime, you’re not to even look at Yuri. Understand?”

“Please don’t kick him out.” Yuri struggled to focus through the screaming static. “It’s my fault. Fire me if you want, but please don’t kick him out. Please, Viktor. Don’t make me do this to him too.”

“Fine. Whatever you want, Yuri. Don’t let him interfere with your work then.”

“Yes, Viktor.” He sighed as the static cleared only to be struck with the pain—sharp, brutal, and agonizing in the worst of ways—with the numbness lifted.

Viktor shook his head and walked away leaving the two of them to stare at each other, neither one knowing how to respond next.
“This doesn’t make us even.” Yura snarled as he grabbed another coin.

“I know.”

“Good.” He whipped the coin at him as hard as he could before he walked away. He looked back to make sure Yuri had picked it up before he turned back and headed for his horse’s stall.

***

Yuri sat in his room, his shirt off, tracing Viktor’s initials on his chest that he’d written on with a purple sharpie, recreating the whip lashes the best he could. The needle marks had vanished, and his body felt naked without his name. After an endless number of mind-numbing passes, he glanced at his nightstand that held his copy of *The Gay Man’s Bible* then sat up with a jerk and grabbed his phone.

“Oh, oh, shit that’s good. Yuri darling, how are you?” Chris purred into the phone along with a slew of moans and curses.

“Um. I can call back another time.”

“It’s fine. What can I do for you, mon chéri? Looking for some specialized tips to make him happy?” He could nearly hear his wink through the phone.

“Viktor dumped me.”

“What? Is this a joke?”

“Viktor dumped me.” He sniffed and wiped at his face. “How do I get him back?”

“Hey, hey, get off me for just a second.” Chris’s voice came muffled through the speaker. “I don’t know. Play with yourself. I’ll make it up to you when I’m done.” His breath heaved loudly in Yuri’s ear. “Sorry, sweetie. I’m all yours. What do you mean he dumped you?”

“I was five minutes late because my roommate needed me and my main rule was to be on time, and if I ever wanted to end it, I was supposed to just show up late, so he thought I wanted to end it, but then I basically said, ‘Just kidding. I was hanging out with the guy who has a crush on me instead.’ “

“Oh, honey.” His breath hissed through his teeth. “That’s a tough one. I don’t know exactly what his damage is there, but I know it’s a sore point for him.”

“I know I fucked up. How do I make it up to him? How do I get him to take me back?”

There was a long pause as he considered his answer. “I’m sorry, sweetie, but… he doesn’t take anyone back.”

***
Chapter End Notes

Thank you, Clarinda, for the art! Check it out on Instagram!

Spotify
45. Sigh No More by Mumford and Sons
46. Kingdom Fall by Claire Wyndham
Chapter 21

Chapter Summary

Don't

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Stay. Kneel. Stay. Kneel. Yuri’s fists worked around the gray t-shirt sitting on his lap, listening to Chris’s condemnation of his fate.

“I wish I could tell you something else, but once he’s done, he’s done. He’ll cut all ties with someone for the smallest of infractions and the more he likes them, the harder and faster he cuts. I’m not really sure what his deal is with that… The best I can say is more generalized advice. I have no idea if this will work on him and honestly, I doubt it will, but just give him space to get over some of the hurt but stick close enough to show him your sincere regret and efforts not to repeat the mistake.” He sighed. “How are you holding up, sweetie?”

“As okay as I can be, I guess.”

“Make sure you’re taking care of yourself. Has he told you about sub drop?”

“Yeah, he gave me some tips a while back.”

“Good. I’m pretty certain you’re in it, so just be extra careful and don’t do anything drastic right now. Whatever it is, it wouldn’t be coming from a sound decision. If you want, I can set you up with a Dom to help taper you off a little here. Lion might be good. You know him.”

“I don’t want anyone but Viktor.”

“I get that, but this doesn’t have to be an intimate thing. I promise this wouldn’t be an issue for him on getting back together. It’s about your health. He would understand this one.”

“I only want Viktor. I don’t like anyone else touching me.”

“Alright, well, call me if you need anything, anytime. I’m sorry I couldn’t be of more help, but I wish you all the luck, and I really do hope you get him back.”

“Thanks, Chris. Sorry I, uh, interrupted you.”

“It’s just sex. It’s not that important. Call me any time. I mean it... Of course, I wasn’t calling you a lousy lay. I was just saying—” His voice muffled into the background then clicked off.

(47) He dropped his phone to the side then pulled out a dildo Viktor had given him and the lube. He slicked himself up then pressed it in and pulled Viktor’s t-shirt up to his nose. “Yes, Viktor.” He began thrusting, taking himself in hand as well as he pulled in deep breaths of the fading scent. His throat ached with his tears as he forced another one through his rawed body. “Yes, Viktor.”

***
He clicked on the next lesson in the online course Viktor had enrolled him in that was supposed to teach him how to run a restaurant while trying to keep his scattered focus in one place.

A hesitant knock came at the door. “Yuri?”

“Yeah?”

“Can I come in?”

He sighed and paused the video. “Yeah.”

Phichit came in and flashed an unsure smile. “You haven’t done anything but work in days. Why don’t we watch a movie or talk or something?”

“I’m sorry, I can’t. I’ve really got to work on this.”

“You should take a break. You can’t go non-stop.”

“I’m fine.” He looked back at the screen hoping he’d take the hint.

He sighed. “We’re friends, right?”

“Huh? Yeah, why?”

“Good.” He stomped over and grabbed his hand and pulled him from the bed, setting aside his laptop. “As your friend, I’m saying you need to take a break because you’re going to go crazy if you keep this up.” He hauled him out to the couch and sat him down then took the other side facing him. “Talk. Or not. Pick a movie instead if you want. Just sit here in silence if you like. Do anything other than more work for Viktor because if that’s what you choose, I’m going to drag you right back out here again.”

He stared at him, wrapping his arms around the knees drawn up to his chest.

“Okay, let’s try talking. So… What happened? You seem way more upset than you should be for the end of a one-month relationship. You can tell me anything. I won’t tell anyone else, and I’m not going to be hurt by what you say.” He waited, marking Yuri’s silence with a twist of his lips. “Okay, I’ll try starting you off. He’s your boss… Did he pressure you?”

“No!”

He jerked back. “Okay, that’s a vehement no then. Did you pressure him?” He smiled and waggled his eyebrows.

A smile twitched on his lips. “No.”

“Okay, so how did you guys get together?”

“Um… That’s… difficult to say.”

“Difficult how?”

“Um… Well… It was kinda a… business transaction at the start? Or at least that’s what I thought. He didn’t think that.”

“A business transaction.” He nodded, staring at the plush hamster sitting on the coffee table then looked back and held his hands up. “Hey, no judgment.”
“I don’t mean like that. I’m not a prostitute. Well… I’m not sure if charity counts for that…”

“Wait. What?”

“Um… I kinda sold myself for charity? Viktor bought me.”

“Woah. So that’s how you got together?”

“No. That was last weekend. We were already…”

“Um… so… okay… Let’s go back to this business transaction then. How did you get together?”

“I was late to work that first morning and… Um. I asked him to punish me, and so he did.”

“Woah. So, you’re into the hardcore stuff then. Well, there goes my idea that you’re a virgin.”

“I am.”

“Wait. Seriously? You are. Like still? You’re still a virgin?”

“Yeah.”

“Oh shit. You’ve gotta tell me what happened. I promise my lips are sealed.”

Bit by bit, Phichit dragged the story out of him until they were both staring blankly at the spots in front of them, processing.

“So… Yoga.” Phichit nodded slowly still staring ahead of himself.

"Yeah, sorry."

"Wow. So yeah, we never would have worked. Two bottoms do a disappointment make. Well, that’s good to know.” Phichit beamed then smiled a little gentler upon catching his huddled expression. “I really am sorry, Yuri. For how I messed things up and where you’re at now. I was being a dramatic little shit.”

He pulled his knees tighter against his mouth. “I have to fix it. I need him back. I’m so lost without him. I always knew I needed something, something to give me a direction and stability I didn’t have on my own. He gave that to me before I even knew him and after… he just sealed all the gaps inside me and didn’t let anything through but him and his orders and now… I’m just so lost, Phichit. So lost and so empty, and I don’t know how to fix it.” Sobbing, he clung to his brittle self.

“Hey, come here.” He tugged him down until his head was resting in his lap and stroked his fingers through his hair. “Shh… It’s going to be okay.” He started humming gently then picked up a little tune in his native Thai.

***

(48) Busying the quiet around them in the tack room, getting things ready for their trip to Luhmühlen, Yuri and Viktor gave their attention to everything but the crater between them brimming with loose ends of words, abruptlyed touches, mistimed glances, festering longing, and spilling all their empty hours between sixes.

“Well, I think that’s it. You can lock this up and bring it out.” Viktor tapped the chest stuffed with all the endless gear just one of the horses would need for the trip.
“Yes, Viktor.” He winced at the pleasure now twisted with the pain of his own touch.

Viktor watched him process the pain, teasing out the lingering bits that were still Viktor and leaning into them. His eyes, soft for the briefest moment, crushed with anger. “Stop saying it.”

“I don’t want to, and you don’t give me orders anymore, do you?”

He shook his head and turned away, facing the wall of bridles they had already checked three times to ensure they’d all been packed. “You’re only making it worse. It should be fading by now.”

“I’m not letting it.”

“What?” He whipped around and glared in disbelief. “What do you mean you’re not letting it?”

“You know exactly what I mean.”

He turned and headed for the door. “Bring that out with you.”

“Yes, Viktor.”

He stopped, gripping the door frame and spoke without looking back. “You know I feel it too. Every time. I can’t take it anymore, so please just stop.”

His heart thudded an awkward beat of hope and fear. “Make me.”

His hand tightened to white before he walked away.

Damn it. That was bratty. Of course, he wouldn’t respond to that. He grabbed the handle on the chest and rolled it out. He didn’t know what else to do. He’d tried being as perfectly submissive as he could be. He’d tried giving him space and just being professional. Nothing brought out even a hint of his warmth.

The rational part of him urged him to give it time, but the more time passed, the more he felt Viktor hardening in his growing distance. Soon, his chance to reach him would be no more than summer winds had of brushing the face of an icy lake.

Viktor glanced up from his spot hunched at one of his training horse’s legs, strapping shipping boots on, to where Yuri was clattering the chest down the aisle then went back to his work. “Load that up then get Menace ready.” He braced himself for Yuri’s reply then glanced up when it didn’t come.

He fixed his eyes on Viktor’s gaze, willing him with everything he had to keep his eyes on him then let the faint memory of a smile touch his lips. “Yes, Viktor.” He could endure the pain longer than Viktor could. What would happen when he broke? He had nothing left to try or lose.

Viktor growled under his breath and went back to his work.

***

With the horses shipped off for their flight, Yuri and Viktor headed to the airport for theirs.

Checked in and through security, Viktor led him away from the gate to a bar. “Sit. Eat. Order whatever you like. It’s on me.”

“I’m not hungry.”

He stared down at the bar, his thumb digging into the edge. “Have you been eating?”
“Yes, Viktor.”

He flinched and pressed in harder until his thumb slipped off. “Three times a day?”

“Not usually.”

“I’m making it a requirement for your continued employment. Three meals a day. I need my employees all performing at their best. You can’t do that without enough fuel for your body.”

“I don’t think you’re allowed to require something like that.”

“Take it up with the labor board then. I’m not changing it.”

His heart surged with pleasure at feeling Viktor’s force once again even if it was from a distance. “Yes, Viktor.” He felt bad for responding to his care with pain and putting that look on his face again, but it seemed to be doing something at least. “I’ll have whatever you’re having.”

He nodded and gave their order to the bartender then they sat in silence until it was delivered. Viktor waited until Yuri picked up his sandwich and started eating before he began eating as well.

After several more moments of silence, Viktor glanced over. “Have you been… okay?”

“Yes, Viktor.”

His jaw clenched, and he closed his eyes for a moment then gave his head a little shake and took a bite of his sandwich. “I heard you talked to Chris. I’m glad. He’s a good person to talk to if you need help… adjusting.”

“Yes, Viktor.”

They went back into silence a while longer before Viktor cleared his mouth with a deep drink of his beer to speak again. “Why are you letting Yura throw coins at you?”

“I pick them up. We’re not making a mess.”

“That’s not what I mean. I mean, I don’t think that’s a healthy thing to do.” He shook his head a took a swig of his beer. "I should have just kicked him out.”

“Thank you for not.”

Viktor met his eyes fully and held it for the first time in an eternity. “You both need this?”

He paused, considering his question, and while he wouldn’t have put it into words like that, it rang with truth. “Yes, Viktor.” His body softened just as Viktor liked with the genuine response that tasted so sweet compared to all the bitter ones he had given.

Viktor slowly cringed as he tried not to feel his own response in kind. “Please stop. I’m begging you.”

As Yuri’s silence told him of his intentions to continue, he slid his plate over and moved to the next seat away and stayed silent the rest of their meal.

Tucked in next to each other in the wide seats of first-class, they had more than enough room to avoid each other, and by the time they arrived in Germany, they had managed to make the long journey with no more than five words spoken between them. Yuri felt a growing sickness at how easily Viktor settled into that silence.
They arrived at the hotel where Viktor gave his easy professionalism to the clerk at the counter until she smiled and handed over a key.

“Room four o’ two. Thank you!”

“Ah, crap. I forgot to change the reservation. I need two rooms. Is there another one available?” He forgot? Seriously?

“One second. Let me check… Yes, we do. I can get you another room on the next floor down.”

His jaw bunched as he nodded. “Yeah, that’s fine.”

“Okay, great!” She smiled and slid over another card. “Room three o’ eight.”

He grabbed the card and handed it to Yuri without looking and walked over to the elevators. Yuri pulled his own suitcase and Viktor’s extra one along behind him. Making their way to Viktor’s room, they stopped at the door. Yuri handed over his bag then fumbled with their silence.

Viktor watched him then nodded. “Meet me in the lobby in an hour so we can make sure the horses get settled in.” He paused, and as Yuri opened his mouth to respond, Viktor narrowed his eyes and spoke over him. “Do not be late.”

He flinched and looked down at the elaborate red carpet. “I’m sorry.”

Viktor stepped back into his room and slammed the door.

Yuri stared at the solid oak, brimstone tears pooling in his eyes, spilling over as he turned away.

Forty-five minutes later, Yuri was waiting in the lobby. Trying to break Viktor was only pushing him harder away. No matter what he tried, it was all the same result. Viktor just didn’t want him anymore.

It settled so perfectly in his mind, he jolted at the now strange ease bringing up that familiar, old, boring pain. He should be used to it, but it gripped like a vice after knowing all the lush, surprising, blissful pains Viktor could give. He just didn’t want to anymore. He didn’t want him anymore. How could he? Viktor gave him his trust, and he betrayed it, and here he was selfishly trying to hurt him more.

He didn’t notice he was crying until he heard Viktor’s soft, hesitant lilt of his name.

“Yuri?”

His head jerked up with a gasp, and he stared at Viktor open-mouthed before he noticed all the people staring at him. He rubbed his face on his shirt. “Sorry.” He glanced up then put his face back in his shirt. “Sorry. I’ll stop.” He scrubbed at his face as if he could stop the new ones from coming if he just rubbed hard enough. “I’ll stop.”

Viktor waited, watching until he pulled himself somewhat back together. “We need to go.” His voice felt weak, timid.

Yuri nodded once, still staring at the marble floor.

Viktor hesitated then walked away. Yuri followed.

***
After getting the horses settled into their stalls, they turned their focus to the trunks.

“Pull everything out, inspect it thoroughly, triple-check that everything is there, and put it all back in with the regular padlock. Put the TSA locks back in the trunk.”

He nodded and set himself to work with Menace’s things, checking the leather for cracks, feeling for any embedded sharp objects, making sure nothing had been tampered with or lost in the flight. Viktor watched him work for a moment then turned to Toska’s tack and did the same.

He tried to move quickly enough to get through the third trunk before Viktor did, but Viktor was far more seasoned at this drill and joined him as he pulled out the first saddle. Viktor reached over him to grab the jumping saddle and accidentally brushed his hand on the way.

Viktor jerked back as if it had burned. “Sorry.”

“I can get out of your way if I’m not being helpful enough here and do something else.”

“It’s fine. This is the last thing we need to do. Stay.” His voice held the tone of a solid order.

Yuri’s face crumpled as he nodded and set himself to checking the dressage saddle.

Viktor glanced over then flipped the saddle upside down to check underneath. “I’m sorry.”

“It’s fine.”

They worked in silence a little while longer before Viktor broke it. “Thank you for coming to help me. I appreciate it.”

“Anytime.” Yuri’s chin quivered as he put the brush box back into the trunk. “I think that’s it.”

Viktor nodded. “We should get some food. You don’t know your way around so come with me.”

“Thank you.”

Viktor brought him to a little pub that was across the street from the hotel and sat them at the bar, likely favoring them now so they wouldn’t have to look at each other. As they ate, Viktor began going over their schedule and what he needed Yuri to do and when.

As Viktor spoke with growing comfort, they settled into the distance between them. Yuri watched with slow panic as Viktor locked them into their new roles. This was as close as he was allowed to get. Nothing but an employee on the fringe of his life. That was his punishment. He’d been wanting Viktor to punish him deeper, and like all things he wanted, he got it, only to have it be mangled in his hands.

The elevator stopped on the third floor, and Yuri stepped out.

“Goodnight, Yuri.” Smooth, easy, comfortable.


Viktor’s hand smacked against the closing door and held it open. “Yuri?” He paused for the silent response. “They’re Germans. Everything is always on time. Don’t be late.”

“I won’t.” He turned and headed down the hall.
Yuri stood in the lobby, Viktor’s favorite coffee in hand, ten minutes before he was due to meet him. Viktor came down looking unusually ragged in his expression, though just as pristine as always everywhere else.

“Thank you.” He took the cup and took a sip and smiled. “You didn’t have to.”

“It’s my job to make things as easy as possible for you.”

“Right.” He stared down at his cup, eyebrows creased. “Shall we?”

He nodded and followed him out.

The first day was easy with just the cross country course walk for Viktor and the horse inspections to get ready for followed by a day of schooling, but the standard chaos hit on the third day with two horses to get ready for dressage in the morning and Toska following it up with his dressage test in the afternoon and Viktor to get and keep even more pristine than usual through all the sweat and dirt.

Yuri watched Viktor and Toska dance through their test, their rhythm better than ever, from the sidelines. Nearly as close as he’d dreamed of, but achingly far. Their joint silver glimmered in the bright daylight under Viktor’s top hat and tailcoat brighter than any gold.

Viktor exited the arena hanging his praise around Toska’s neck with his tight arms and a bright smile. “That’s my best boy. You never fail me. Always such a good boy.” He fished a peppermint out of his pocket, and Toska stretched his head back to take it from him. He sat up still beaming and looked at Yuri. “How’d we do?”


“No one’s perfect. How’d we really do?”

“I don’t know. I’m just a groom.” He looked away to blink away the tears before the cameras could capture them.

Viktor’s smile fell, and he jumped down. “Right. Cool him down and put him away.”

He nodded and walked off with Toska nosing his hand for treats.

The fourth day brought cross country—a four-mile gallop over solid obstacles, ditches, and drops. It was the most physically demanding, dangerous, and thrilling part of the event. At this level, one course was beyond exhausting. Viktor had three and none of Yuri’s stamina. Still, he was Viktor Nikiforov, and after two challenging courses, he was still prepping for his hardest one with the same determination and focus he always had despite the slight limp in his step.

Viktor pulled off his boots then his dirty white breeches slopped with mud from the water obstacles and carefully stepped into a fresh pair. Yuri watched him, deciding what he should do before he remembered it was his job to make things as smooth as possible for him.

“Are you hurt?”

“I just tweaked my back a bit on the last drop. I’ll be fine.” He winced as he pulled off his soaked teal polo and picked up another to replace it with.

Yuri put down Toska’s brushes and handed Viktor his drink. “Sit.” He pointed to the trunk. “I’ll
massage it.”

He hesitated, but complied, sitting at the end of the trunk, his shirt in his hands. Yuri sat behind him and reached out with a shaking hand.

He poked into the muscle, trying not to think about how much more he wanted to feel. “Here?”

“A little higher.”

He moved his hand up and pressed in. “Here?”

“Yeah. Have you got a clock out?”

“Yeah. I won’t let you be late.” He pressed into the sore spot, gently trying to ease it out. “It’s my job.”

Viktor held his breath as Yuri worked in deeper then let it out with a rush as he dropped onto his elbows. “Thank you.”

“It’s no problem. It’s why I’m here.”

“You keep saying that. Like you’re reminding yourself.”

“I am.”

They dressed themselves in their silence again, using the barest number of words possible to get through to the final day. Stadium jumping.

Yuri woke up the morning of, sick to his stomach. He raced into the bathroom and gripped the toilet, heaving into it. Shit. He didn’t have time for this. He wasn’t the one competing. So stupid. He retched into the toilet one more time then got up and washed his face and his mouth thoroughly and shoved his body away to deal with its problems itself.

He had to be on time.

He waited in the lobby, coffees in hand and even darker circles under his eyes. Viktor came down wearing a crimson blazer filled in at his throat with a fluffy stock tie and his uniform white breeches with black boots and holding a bag filled with spares and studied him with a tilt of his head.

“How are you feeling?”

“I’ll get everything done on time.”

“That’s not what I—”

He shoved his coffee into his hand. “We should get going.”

His hands trembled as he got Viktor’s first training horse tacked up. He fumbled with the buckles on the bridle as Menace bobbed his head away from him, prancing nervously in the aisle. “Shit. Stand still.”

“Woah, easy.” Viktor slipped in and took over, pushing him out of the way. “You’re making him nervous. What’s up, Yuri?”

“I’m sorry. I’ll do better.”
Viktor paused, the noseband half-buckled in his hands. “So, it was stadium, huh?”

He blinked at his tears. “I’ll do better. I promise.”

He turned around and studied Yuri who was staring down at the end of the aisle. “Hey, just calm down. You’re doing a good job.” He reached out to comfort him with a clinical hand on his shoulder.

He flinched back and handed Viktor his helmet. Viktor stared at him then took it and led Menace out to the warmup ring while Yuri went to get his next mount ready.

Calm down. Don’t fuck it up. He managed to get Fleet of Mind out then traded with Viktor and kept Menace walking to keep him loose until his round. Viktor was scheduled nearly back to back on them with only a single rider in between. He had to keep it together. Viktor wouldn’t have time to calm his horses back down if he riled them up. He kept Menace walking as far away from the arena as possible.

Viktor came back to swap the horses again. He smiled upon taking the reins from him. “Thank you for all your hard work. And my back is feeling good today thanks to you.”

“I’m glad.” His face and his voice did everything they could to make sure Viktor didn’t take that with even a hint of sincerity.

Viktor flinched and put the reins over Menace’s head and stood by the saddle for a leg up. Settling onto the horse’s back, he picked up his stirrups and headed for the ring. “Wish me luck.” He reflected as much sincerity as Yuri had given him.

“You’re Viktor Nikiforov. You don’t need it. I’ll wish your competitors luck.” He tried for a smile and almost managed.

Viktor flashed a quick smile then turned his focus to the competition. Yuri paced with Fleet, one part of him wanting to stay as far away as possible, the other inching him closer with every pass, unable to pass up the chance to watch Viktor compete from so close.

Viktor was well ahead, but stadium was the table turner where one careless jump could wipe out all the efforts of the past two days. The closer Yuri got, the more his stomach churned and keeping his emotions in check so he didn’t disturb his sensitive charge was nearly impossible. He was about to turn back when Viktor glanced over, searching for him. A tiny, but genuine, curve of Viktor’s lips as he turned back was all he needed to convince him to stay.

Yuri fought his impulse to run as he watched Viktor sail smoothly over every jump, his calm direction leading him even from so vast a distance. He kept his hand stroking over Fleet’s neck, but it did little good to keep him quiet when everything about Yuri’s presence warned that danger lurked somewhere nearby.

Finished with a clear round and a good time, Viktor rode over at the top of the leaderboards, leaning over his horse’s neck to feed him peppermints for his efforts. He looked up upon reaching Yuri, a smile still on his face. He wasn’t sure if it was just leftover from his horse or meant for him.

“Thank you for teaching me. It feels much more comfortable and solid out there.” He jumped down then went to Fleet’s side for his leg up.

“I’m glad I was useful.” He tossed Viktor into the saddle and Fleet skittered about as he picked up his reins.
“Woah, easy, buddy.” He patted his neck. “We’re all good here. No need to panic. You’ll do just fine.”

“Sorry. It’s my fault. I should have stayed further away.”

“You’re doing just fine as well, Yuri. Relax.” The announcer called his name, and he headed into the arena.

Yuri watched as Fleet tossed his head around the wobbly circle while Viktor struggled to keep him in check. Coming to the first jump, Viktor managed to get him in order enough, but he crow hopped on the landing, messing up the strides to the next fence and leaving him with an awkward half stride. Viktor had to decide at the last second whether to take the jump from further back or check him enough to put in that needed stride and ride up to the base.

Deciding that his horse had enough in him for the long jump, he made the most of the last stride, stretching him out to cover as much ground as he could then checked him onto his hind end. Fleet almost made it over clean, but he nicked the back rail on the oxer coming down. Yuri gasped as the rail came down, his stomach churning.

That was his fault. He should have stayed away. He knew better. He wasn’t safe that close.

Viktor finished the rest of his round clear and rode over to where Yuri was frozen in place. “Yuri, Menace needs to be cooled down. His muscles are going to stiffen up.”

“I’m sorry. I’m sorry.” He forced himself to move again, moving further from the arena. “I messed up your round. I’m so sorry.”

“You didn’t do anything. I should have let him have a bit more freedom to work out his tension on the circle. I’m always responsible for what happens out there.”

“But I’m the one who made him nervous.”

“Yuri, look at me.” He waited for Yuri to stop and cast his eyes over, flinching. “You’re doing a good job holding yourself together right now. Just relax. I’ve knocked down rails before, and I’ll do it again. Besides,” he smiled with the strain of kindness when he still could barely look at him plucking at his veneer. He patted his horse’s neck and jumped down, “it’s not like I can win two golds in the same event. One of them had to win it.”

They listened as the winners of the three-star were announced with Viktor taking gold on Menace and bronze on Fleet of Mind. He’d cost him silver.

His fists tightened as he stared at the ground. Stay. Kneel. “I’m sorry. I’ll go get Toska ready.”

***

Two gold medals and one bronze around his neck, Viktor helped Yuri get the horses packed up for the shipping company and sent them off with lots of hugs and peppermints for a job well done. He turned to Yuri with that same veneered smile. “Thank you for everything. Today especially. I know it was difficult for you. Come on, let’s stop at the beer tent before we head out. I’ll buy you a drink.”

“Thanks. I think I’ll just head back to the hotel and get packed.”

“That can wait. Relax just a little first before we have to get back on a plane and right back to work.”

The tension from the past two weeks rose into his shoulders and spilled from his mouth. “What do
You want from me, Viktor? You want me to hang out with you now and play at normal boss and employee? Before you couldn’t get away from me fast enough, and now that I’ve accepted that I’m nothing to you, you want me to pretend like I’m something after all? What? What should I be to you, Viktor? How do I make you happy? I’ve tried everything, and I don’t know what to do anymore, so just tell me, Viktor; what do I do?”

“You’re free to do whatever you want. If you’re unhappy working for me, you can leave whenever you like.”

“Is that what you want from me? You want me to quit? If that’s the case, why not just fire me? Or are you afraid that’ll look bad or that I’ll sue you or something? I won’t. If you want me gone, just order me to leave, and I’ll go!”

“I want you to be happy, Yuri. Wherever you are.” He spoke to the shine on his boots then turned and headed out.

“I don’t know how to do that!”

Viktor hesitated then pressed on.

***

Back on the plane to home, Viktor slept deeply next to him, a fit stirring in his dreams. He twitched, little whimpers slipping out as he clutched the blanket spread over him. “Yu—Yuri.”

“Huh?” He looked over, but Viktor was still fast asleep, his name just a whisper of his dreams.

“Go. Get out—out of here.” He tossed and fell onto Yuri’s chest as he replayed that horrible day in his subconscious.

Yuri’s tears at being forced to hear it again rolled across Viktor’s cheek and onto his lips.

“Yuri.” He clutched at Yuri’s shirt.

Did he wake up? “Viktor?”

His eyelids fluttered, still deep inside his dream as he rolled further onto him. “Don’t.”

***
Thank you, Clarinda, for your lovely art! Check it out on [Instagram](https://www.instagram.com).
47. Bruises by Lewis Capaldi
48. The Other Side by Ruelle
(49) Don’t. Don’t what? That was all he said before settling into his sleep. Yuri lifted a trembling hand and brushed his fingertips across Viktor’s cheekbone. First, a hesitant touch that jerked back on the first contact, but when Viktor didn’t stir, he caressed him a little more boldly with featherlight touches over his lips and through his hair. He looked so innocent like this, unable to keep his dreams where they belonged.

Why, Viktor? Why did five minutes end them? Why wouldn’t he even let him explain? Why did five minutes hurt so much?

His finger brushed over virgin lips that had once spoke so generously, so tenderly, so vulnerably and that Yuri had left bare and open without a single reassurance that he ever wanted him for anything other than sex. Viktor’s every open-hearted confession and promise was met with nothing but his response that his fear was still greater than his trust.

He trusted Viktor with his body and his mind, but when Viktor asked him to trust him with his heart as well, having already given his over, he’d replied that he was choosing his fear instead. And still, he was so patient, understanding that his fear was nearly insurmountable.

Until he’d played games with his limits. Until he’d told him that he wasn’t worth the one simple thing he needed to assure the abandoned boy inside him that he wouldn’t be discarded again.

He’d taken and taken and taken and had every one of his needs filled, and he hadn’t even glanced his direction to see that Viktor had opened himself to do it while still standing on Yuri’s unstable ground.

He bent down to press a kiss to his forehead. “I’m sorry. I let you down. I didn’t give enough support for your trust to be safe.”

He let his arm fall around him and pulled him closer as he rested his head on his pillow and pretended to sleep. It hurt so much to hold him, but it hurt worse to let him go.

His feigning became reality, and he slept until soft noises pressed into a wet spot on his shirt. Yuri’s hand reflexively curled around the hand gripping his, but he relaxed it again and fell back into his act as Viktor’s silent sobs cut off. He felt Viktor peek up then assured of his sleep he went right back to holding him tight.

They stayed in their mutual act until the flight attendant came by to tell them to prepare for landing.

Viktor jerked up then nudged Yuri. “You have to move your seat up.”

“Huh?” He rubbed his eyes and sat up.
He glanced at Yuri’s shirt that was still wet from the tears that stopped and started as they crossed the ocean. “Your seat. We’re landing.”

“Oh.” He sat up, and as he caught Viktor’s eye, they exchanged both the understanding of the act and the promise to keep it.

***

Six a.m., he was on his knees outside of Viktor’s office. Georgi passed by and gave him a strange look but continued on his way when he didn’t pay him any attention. He was there for Viktor. He didn’t care who saw or what they thought of him. If this is as close as he was allowed to be, that’s where he’d stay. Trying to surge ahead and push closer and letting their distance grow were both the wrong answers.

Viktor opened his door and startled upon seeing him. “Yuri! What are you doing?” He shook his head. “Get to work.”

“Yes.” He stood up, holding his tongue against the word clamoring to escape.

He cringed. “Just stop. You’re only dragging it out.”

“Stop what exactly?”

He sighed and shook his head. “Just get to work.”

“Yes.” He headed for the hayloft.

“Yuri?”

“Yes?”

He paused. “Have you eaten this morning?”

“Yes.”

“Good.”

Viktor walked off, and Yuri left to do the job Viktor wanted him to do.

***

Six a.m. Yuri was on his knees again, the brick digging into his shins and bringing a welcome pain that cleared his mind.

Viktor stepped out then paused, staring at him unsmiling. “Did you eat?”

“Yes.”

He nodded. “Get to work.”

“Yes.” He stood and walked to the main aisle where Yura and Guang Hong were stopped, gaping at him then headed to the hayloft without giving them a second thought.

***

Six a.m., the brick under his shins gouging his flesh and the chaos from his mind.
Viktor’s door opened a crack then paused before he stepped through. “It’s only going to hurt worse when this ends the longer you drag it out.” He stared at his silent response. “Did you eat?”

“Yes.”

“Get to work.”

He stood up. “Yes. I had a question. The contractor says they’ll be ready to start construction in about two weeks. You’d wanted to do a groundbreaking ceremony. I wasn’t sure if that was still true.” Flooding memories of their conversations and laughter and plans rushed in, and he held firm so Viktor could find a steady ground in him as they flooded him too.

Viktor met his gaze with tears pooling in his eyes and held it while he swallowed them back. “You’ve done well, and your successes should be celebrated. Plus, we must appease the spirits, right?” He made an attempt at a smile.

He smiled. “Right.”

“I’ll make arrangements.”

“Thank you. I’m glad my work is pleasing you.”

The barest hint of his true smile tugged at his lips. “Get to work.”

“Yes.”

***

(50) On a bright Sunday after endless stilted yeses, Yuri was dressed in a suit Viktor had given him headed to the hay farm on the last day it would be called a hay farm, their plans making the first jump from the safety of their minds into the crushing world.

Sweat beaded on his neck and he adjusted the temperature controls until it blew a cool, but not chilling, stream of air. Working climate control. It was his favorite feature of his new car next to the silent and stable engine. The red hunk of metal that was now nothing but a crushed cube hadn’t had working heat or air conditioning the last year and a half of its life. Viktor had insisted he take the new car along with the rest of the gifts he’d given him. They sat on his bookshelf along with copies of the pictures Viktor had taken.

He pulled into the parking lot and looked up to the top of the hill where the trailer had been towed away. Viktor now stood in its place. His heart halted at the sight of him so beautiful in the morning light, surging when he turned at his arrival with his real smile tugging briefly before he winced and turned back to stare into the distant mountains.

He stepped out of the car and walked up to him, the pain pooling in his heart and settling in for a lengthy visit. He smiled as he approached. “Good morning, Viktor.” He blushed as his smile dipped. “You look incredible. You’re so beautiful in this light.”

His head tilted as he gave him a confused smile. “Thank you. You do as well.” His eyes lingered just a moment longer than usual before he winced and turned back to the mountains. “We should get down there to welcome people. They should be arriving.” He spoke with nothing but flat efficiency in his voice.

“Yes.”
The Shinto priest they had found in Japan and had to fly in for the ceremony was already laying out the offerings on a table inside a square of bamboo poles linked together and made sacred with rope. Strips of jagged paper dangled from the rope to attract the kami. A little mound of dirt with a tuft of fresh hay sticking out of the top of it waited to be used for the symbolic groundbreaking.

They made their way down to the parking lot and shook hands and accepted congratulations from the incoming guests.

Jake came in assisted by a wheelchair pushed by Sally, smiling so blissfully at being on his farm once again. He beamed at Viktor, and when he offered his hand to shake, Jake knocked it out of the way and pulled him down for a hug. Letting him go with hard pats on his back, he opened his arms to Yuri. “Hey, Yuri! Come on over here.” He paused as Yuri came over. “Wait, do Japanese people hug? Is that okay?”

He laughed. “Yeah, it’s fine.” He leaned down and accepted his gruff but warm hug. “It’s good to see you out of the hospital.”

“Yeah, it sure is good to see my old land again before ya tear it up.”

“I’m sorry! I thought Viktor got your okay with our plans!”

“Yeah, I’m just teasin’ ya. I love the idea. I’m proud of the both of you.”

“Thank you, sir.”

“Geez, stuff it with that sir stuff. Call me Jake.” He turned to whisper in his ear. “That boy treating you right?”

He smiled around the ache in his heart. “We’re not together anymore, but yeah. He’s treating me right.”

“Aw, shit. I’m sorry. That’s a damn shame honestly. I thought you boys looked good together. Can ya fix it?”

“I’m trying.”

“Good. Keep tryin’. That boy needs someone something fierce.”

“I will. And thank you for your blessing of our plans. It means a lot.”

He patted his back and released him. “I’d bitch if ya’ll wanted to put a condo or a strip mall in here or something, but as long as my guys still have a good job, I’m happy.”

They finished receiving all the guests and instructed the media where to set up then took their spots in the front row for the ceremony.

The priest, dressed in a brightly colored kimono, began calling down the spirits by bowing, clapping, and chanting then purified the altar, the site, and the leaders of the project. Yuri, Viktor, the architect, and the general contractor then followed the priest around to the corners of the site and purified the land with salt, sake, and rice while the priest shook branches covered in strips of paper to chase the evil spirits and impurities away.

Returning to the altar, they offered the kami branches of sacred sakaki, bowing twice, clapping twice, making a silent prayer for the blessings of the kami and the success of the project, then bowing once more in respect. One by one, those in attendance offered sakaki branches.
Once everyone had made their offerings and prayers, the priest placed an amulet in the pile of dirt, and together Yuri and Viktor struck the pile three times with a wooden hoe. The architect and the general contractor each followed and did the same.

Completing the ceremony with tiny porcelain cups of sake, the priest sent the kami off with a deep chant and handed the amulet to the contractor to place in the foundation of the building for continued protection and good luck.

The Mayor kicked off the second portion with a grand speech about investing in and building their community, and Yuri tried to focus on that rather than on the fact that he knew exactly how much he liked his Domme’s purple strap-on who was sitting in a pretty floral dress and a first lady smile in the front row.

The architect followed with a presentation of her beautiful drawings of the future restaurant and a short speech about the project and her inspiration for the successful combination of three distinct cultures into one building that also blended into the landscape and enhanced its beauty rather than dominated it. It was no small a feat, and she had achieved it beyond what they had hoped.

Viktor shook her hand and took to the front. “Thank you all for joining us today to celebrate our achievements, share our hopes, and remember the responsibility we have to the land and those who inhabit it with us.

“Once upon a time, I was a little boy who dreamed of great everything. Great dreams, great adventures… great love.” He cleared his throat as his eyes flickered to Yuri and away again.

“And then I grew up, and through a series of insignificant events, I somehow ended up as the proud owner of a hay farm.” He paused for the chuckling in the crowd to stop. “I’m still not quite sure how Jake suckered me into that other than the simple fact that I am a huge sucker. What I am sure about is that this humble little turn of my life will stand proudly on my shelf of achievements side by side with international and Olympic gold, and that is entirely thanks to my business partner, Yuri.

“I was prepared to let this land sit as a struggling hay farm and be nothing but a burden. What a sad fate for such a beautiful piece of land—to sit so unloved and unappreciated. But Yuri found the hidden potential in it and is working tirelessly to bring that potential to life, fighting his own inexperience and doubts and all the endless challenges that come with starting a business.

“He is doing a marvelous job, and I know he will only get better as this project moves forward. I hope you all as members of the community we wish to serve with our endeavor will lend your support to this project as a whole and to Yuri in particular. I am so proud of what we are creating and especially of Yuri who, when suddenly faced with the nonsensical challenge of running a hay farm when he had neither the experience or impulse to do so, has made sense of it so well, he’s raised up every bit of good this land has to offer and is presenting it to you all now as something each one of us can take pride in as a part of our community and appreciate for years to come.

“Thank you, Yuri, for all your efforts. I’m so grateful I had you to rely on for that strange twist of my life.” He gave a smile every bit as dazzling as it wasn’t real as he choked on the last line of his speech and took a seat.

Yuri went up next, and though his body trembled, he stood firm at the head of the crowd. “Thank you, Viktor. Thank you. I don’t say it enough. I’m not very good at communicating in general, but that one is a special failing.

“Throughout my life, I’ve been blessed with lots of support from those around me, but I’ve been too locked up in my own head to be anything but selfish to those who’ve given it. Too busy either
running scared or chasing my own dreams and desires, I haven’t looked back to them to see what
they needed from me.

“I tried to pay back what I owe with a simple dollar for dollar, which to be honest, I can never do,
when instead I should have done the same for them as they’ve done for me and put in the effort to
look for and support their weak areas. Returning in kind isn’t kind when what they’ve given isn’t
what they need.

“Viktor’s right that I never once expected to run a hay farm and even less to turn that farm into a
restaurant. It came as a surprise blessing out of nowhere when my life was at its lowest. I chose a
random door to enter, and I got so unbelievably lucky that behind that door was Viktor. He’s given
me more than I could ever hope to repay, so instead of blindly trying for the impossible, I’m going to
look for the areas that need my strength to thrive and give it to them as an unfailling promise. Thank
you, Viktor, for making me strong enough to do that.

“What I hope for this project is that it will stand as a promise as steadfast and enduring as the wisteria
we’ll plant here today. I hope that its cries of yes aren’t just seen as a wild, mindless expression of
pleasure, but as a promise. Oui Da Hai. Yes, I will enrich you. Yes, I will protect you. Yes, I will
serve you. A promise between those who dine here to celebrate their connection and a promise from
me to the community I thrive in. Thank you.” He bowed and held for their applause.

Viktor stood and applauded to the point of pain wincing through the smile on his face.

Yuri gave him his most sincere smile. “Thank you. Please, have a seat. Viktor has one last thing he’d
like to share with you all. It’s a story which he created himself and holds a message I’ll carry in my
heart the rest of my life.”

Viktor came back to the front and retold his story of the little wisteria vine, polished from its
spontaneous first telling and even more beautiful than Yuri remembered. He concluded to wild
applause then ushered them all to the Japanese styled arbor stretching from the parking lot all the way
to where the front door will stand. Trenches dug along either side of it had been blessed privately the
day before it went in.

Viktor stood by the first burlap sack holding a little wisteria vine while Yuri stood by another on the
other side of the entrance. “I’d first like to say thank you to George, our contractor, for working
around my fanciful plans and allowing his work to be more challenging just to indulge them.” He
shook his hand with a pat on his back. “And now I’d like you all to join in our project and help us
plant hopes, promises, and faith that good things will come to all of us and watch as time only makes
them grow stronger with its wisdom.”

Yuri knelt and placed the tender little wisteria into the ground and packed it in snugly with his
promises and faith. He watched Viktor, his head bowed heavy with the pain, as he planted his
wisteria with memories.

Yuri patted the dirt to smooth it out then went over to join him and silently placed his promises there
too. Viktor stared down the rest of the path where their friends and coworkers and couples were
smiling and laughing across the path. He glanced back to Yuri then stood and walked to the far end
to assist an older woman struggling with the heavy bag of dirt the little plant sat in. Yuri took the lash
then finished planting Viktor’s wisteria and followed his lead to do the same and assist anyone else
who needed his help.

The ceremony concluded and everyone gone, Viktor stood back at the top of the hill, staring into the
mountains. Yuri approached, still trying to decide what he needed when Viktor spoke.
“You gave a beautiful speech.”

“You gave a beautiful speech.”

Viktor nodded and went back into his silence.

“Those are the same mountains you can see from your house, aren’t they?”

He nodded. “You can see them from just about every high point here. As soon as I go up, there they are.”

He was trying to think of the right response when Viktor spoke again.

“You know, some days, I wish he’d just let her go right there. Not that I wish her dead or anything. Just that if he was going to accomplish nothing but creating me and leaving her devastated, I wish he hadn’t bothered at all. What he did was the cruelest thing. He let her believe it was real and eternal. Vowed that it was.

“I still remember how much hope she had when things got tough that it’d work out. That was what he’d led her to believe and then… instead of giving them a chance, he went off and chose someone else. Someone easier to deal with. Left the hard stuff for her and me.”

Yuri didn’t bother trying to hold his tears back. “You’re right. It was cruel. That’s not what I—”

Viktor shook his head and headed down the hill. “I don’t want to hear it.”

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Six a.m. Yuri was on his knees with Viktor looking down on him, his face darker than usual, a silence stretched thick between them.

“Do you enjoy torturing me now?”

“No.”

“Then why are you doing this?”

“I need to. Am I too close? Shall I move further back?”

“What if I say I don’t want you anywhere in my stable on your knees?”

“Then I’ll kneel at my house at six a.m. and race to make sure that I’m here before six o’ one. Is that what you’d like me to do?”

He turned away. “Just get to work.” After two steps he stopped but made no other move.

“Yes, I ate.”

He nodded and walked away.

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(51) Six p.m., Yuri’s hand was on Viktor’s doorknob as he took a few breaths to steady his courage. Before the minute gave, he opened it and stepped in.

“Yuri!” He startled then snarled. “What are you doing? I didn’t give you permission to enter.”
“Then call security. I have something you need to hear, and I’m not leaving until you’ve heard it. You’ve got yourself stuck in your own torment, and you don’t know how to find your way out, so I’m going to help you.

“I failed you, Viktor. I didn’t just fail you by five minutes; I failed you every time I neglected to tell you that I was never once deciding between you and Phichit. I failed you every single time you opened your heart to me, and I responded that my fear was greater than what I feel for you. I failed you when I left you alone in the middle of your greatest fear.

“You’ve been chosen over and abandoned by those who were supposed to love and care for you, and you’re so terrified of it happening again that you look for any little sign of it so you can end it before you’re destroyed because you know your heart can’t take another break like that.

“I’m ashamed that while you were giving me everything I needed and more, I was neglecting you and offering you nothing but sex. Even worse, I gave you multiple reasons to think I’d do nothing but break your heart.

“I ran from you rather than trust you as someone I could confide in and rely on when I wasn’t bound to your order. I used my roommate to shield myself from you so that every single night you could sit there in your house of broken love and wonder if I was fucking him. By the way, kissing him was never a three. It was always a zero. I didn’t open up to you unless it was forced from me. I should have told you two months ago that Yura apparently knows who I am and what my past is. I suspected he knew something on the first day I taught him, and I stayed silent because my secret was more important than trusting you.

“And still, through all of that, you were patient and understanding and willing to let me take as much time as I needed to fully open to you as long as I could give you just a little reassurance that you were at least important enough to me to not break our commitment.

“I failed you, and I failed you, and I failed you, so when I accidentally said you weren’t, your trust and your faith in me fell from the shitty tower I put it on, and I made you feel every one of those thirteen years here alone and abandoned by those you trusted. I’m so incredibly sorry that I hurt you like that. But I need you to know: I wasn’t choosing Phichit over you. I was choosing my humanity and taking the first step to becoming the person who can look at you with the same pride in my heart you always had when looking at me.

“Phichit came into my room that morning and confronted me about us, and I admitted the truth—that we were together and that I was choosing you.

“I had a moment when he was crying before I went to comfort him where I almost thought I should call you and ask you for those few minutes I needed to console him rather than kick him out of my room like that, but I didn’t because your reassurance that you would understand my failures was so strong, I felt that reassurance before the thought even formed. But I didn’t give you a second of thought this entire time to realize that you had none. I’m correcting that now.

“I have chosen you, Viktor. I don’t mean for my first time, but as the man I will follow through whatever comes our way. This isn’t conditional. It’s not dependent on you taking me back to where I was in your life.

“If you never take me back into your arms, and I remain solely as your loyal employee or even if you decide you can’t stand to be around me anymore, and I go back to just being your number one fan, that’s more than enough for me because following you, even from a distance, has always given me that crucial part of me, that direction, I’m lacking and gives me the safety I need from my own destructive self.
“Your mom was wrong. They didn’t end over the little things. Those were merely a symptom of letting each other starve for what they really needed while they chased perfect love instead. You give me what I need so thoroughly, I feel it regardless of what form it takes or how much distance is between us, and I will do the same for you.

“You didn’t need to find a perfect love because it doesn’t exist and deep down, you know that. You needed to find the person you can rely on for the rest of your life and that person is me.”

He walked over to his desk, his hands balled up against his fear and straddled his lap. He took off his glasses and set them on his desk. Holding Viktor’s face between his hands, he leaned in.

“I’m giving you my forever, Viktor—for whatever you may want to do with it—and I promise: I won’t ever let you feel unsafe with me or abandoned again. And even though I’m scared out of my fucking mind right now about what you will choose to do with my future, I’m still choosing you over my fear, and I always will. I promise there is no one safer to give your first kiss to.” His lips brushed Viktor’s.

Viktor flinched and jerked back, his eyes wide and soft, vulnerable. “Yuri.”

“It’s not a question, Viktor.” He held his face with just enough firmness to steady him as he held his mouth to Viktor’s parted lips. “It’s not a question.”

Viktor’s heart raced against his chest as they panted, holding through their fear to exchange the trust they once had only this time open-eyed and knowing exactly what it was that they held.

His thumbs caught Viktor’s tears as he licked gently at his lip. “It’s not a question.” His promise murmured into their kiss as he brought them the rest of the way.

Viktor’s tongue caressed his, hesitant at first, little touches along his edges, then firmer, slowly pulling him back into his grasp. Yuri soaked in their kiss as pleasure overtook him unlike one he ever knew. Warm and shivery as it swirled and stripped him bare of his strength but dropped him safely into Viktor’s strengthening arms.

He kissed ravenously, ravaging their connection for any pleasure he could guide into their kiss as Viktor replied with a growing desperation to feel all of him again. Softening and softening further, Yuri drew him in until he no longer knew what was his body and what was Viktor’s and which was his pleasure and which was Viktor’s. It was all just theirs.

Viktor eased back, slowing and lifting their kiss until it turned to soft little catches of their lips, their foreheads pressed together.

Yuri gasped, his mind spinning. “That was all I had to say. I’ll leave now if you want me to.” He wriggled back.

Viktor yanked him back tight. “Don’t you dare.”

He closed his eyes and bowed his head as he smiled in relief. “Yes.”

“Yes, Viktor.”

He jerked up with a gasp, tears springing to his eyes and spilling over. “Yes… Viktor.”

“You’re mine? You’re fully, completely mine? No limits, no exceptions, no clocks?”

“Yes, Viktor.” He gasped a quick sob as pleasure tinged with the pain of their separation joined into
the pleasure still lingering from their kiss. “Yes, Viktor, yes, Viktor, yes, Viktor. I am yours. I have
been for a while. I just… forgot to tell you.”

“You forgot to tell me.” He shook his head, looking up in bewilderment. “You forgot to tell me.”

“I did. I’m sorry. I thought you knew. I thought I was so pathetically obvious that it didn’t need
saying. My question wasn’t if I wanted you or if I was yours. It was if you could still want me after
you knew. I was afraid you would decide that you couldn’t want me and then hate me for stealing
your kiss.”

“What changed your mind?”

“Nothing. I’m still afraid of that. I just couldn’t let you suffer anymore, so I decided to trust in your
words instead.”

He cringed. “I really dumped you because of the five minutes you were using to clear the path for us
to be together?”

“No, Viktor. You dumped me because I couldn’t even give you the bare minimum of what you
needed. I’ll never let you starve for what you need again.” He smiled and tapped Viktor’s lip.
“You’re my Viktor, and I will take care of you with the same strength you’ve given me.”

“I’m still so sorry. I should have at least heard you out. I acted out of panic and pain, and I’m not
very good at dealing with pain. I’m so sorry, Yuri. So sor—”

“Shh…” He stroked his fingers over Viktor’s lips. “It’s okay. I know what doing stupid shit in a
panic is like. I shouldn’t have given you the pain in the first place. It’s not my place to do that.”

“Yuri, my Yuri.” His face broke with the light of everything hitting him at once. “Oh my god. My
Yuri. You’re my Yuri forever.”

“Yes, Viktor.”

Viktor grabbed him into a kiss, forceful glee and melting pleasure joining them as time ticked on
without end.

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Chapter End Notes

Please send Clarinda some love for her art on Instagram if you like it!

Spotify
49. Love me- Acoustic by WiDE AWAKE
50. Storm by Koethe
51. Fear on Fire by Ruelle
Chapter 23

Chapter Summary

Unspoken fears, fidelity, and fairy tales.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

(52) Their boots scattered on the floor, hands slipping beneath shirts, Yuri lay wrapped up in Viktor in his bed, his lips burning and raw as he gasped for air before going in for another kiss.

After a few minutes, Viktor broke away and fell onto his back, his hands pressed over his lips then hissed and jerked them back. “Oww… Yuri, kissing hurts.”

He laughed and snuggled against his chest. “I think it only hurts if you do it too much.”

“Well, that sucks. I want to kiss you too much.”

“Oh, I know! I can just kiss it all better.” He grinned and hopped up into a kiss that plunged from playful to passionate before Viktor pulled away again with a whimper.

“I think that only works for you here.”

Viktor’s lips were blister red and swollen, and Yuri pouted while he thought about what to do about it. “I’ll be right back.” He climbed out of bed but was caught on Viktor’s hand.

“Don’t leave me.”

“Please? I promise I’ll be right back.”

He sighed and let him go. “Okay.”

He went downstairs to the freezer and put ice cubes into a towel then came back up and stopped in the bathroom to get the lip balm. Climbing back into Viktor’s open arms, he pressed the ice to his lips and held it through his whimpers until the cold began to take effect. After a few minutes, he set it aside and covered his lips with the balm. “Better?”

“Much, thank you. Now you.” He pushed him onto his back and held the ice over his lips while watching him with a hesitancy in his eyes. After several minutes, he picked up the balm and dabbed it on. “Yuri? Am I a good kisser?”

He grabbed ahold of the hand still pressing a finger to his lips and pulled it closer for a kiss to his palm. “Yes, Viktor. The best.”

“Really? You’re not flattering me?”

“Really. You’re the absolute best I’ve ever had, not that I’ve had much to compare it to, but still. You make me feel what I’ve always read a kiss should feel like. All warm and dizzy and so soft I can barely stand.”
He smiled and kissed his now protected lips. “It’s the same for me with you.” He looked over at the clock on the nightstand. “Ah, crap. I should have fed you hours ago. I’m sorry. I guess clocks are still useful for some things. What would you like to eat?”

“Anything that doesn’t require me to be decently separated from you.”
He smiled and dropped closer. “Oh yeah?”

“Yeah. I want to be indecently close.”

Viktor’s lips closed around his as he pulled him from the bed and into his crushing grip.

“Obscenely close.” He grabbed his back and held on as he used his moment of breath to convince Viktor to steal more.

After several more minutes, Viktor pulled back again and grabbed his phone to put in an order then went right back to kissing him.

They held each other as if they could erase every moment apart if they just held on tight enough and stayed like that until they were interrupted by the doorbell. Viktor hauled him up and wrapped his legs around his waist to carry him downstairs, still kissing, pausing only long enough to make it down the stairs without dying, their lips still joined. Viktor pinned him to the wall to hold him up as he freed one hand to answer the door, his lips still furiously kissing Yuri’s.

“Oh, hi. I’ve got—”

“Mmmhmm.” He gestured for the man to put the food on the floor then held his hand out to take the slip. Viktor stopped kissing just long enough to speak but didn’t let his mouth leave Yuri’s. “How much to untraumatize you?”

The delivery boy took a quick glance at the house. “A hundred.”

Viktor signed then handed it back.

“Jesus fuck, dude. A thousand? You’re sure? This isn’t a mistake?”

Viktor shook his head.

“Thanks, man!”

Viktor nodded and waved, his mouth still working over Yuri’s as the delivery boy closed the door for them.

“You really paid him that much just so you didn’t have to stop kissing me for ten seconds?” Yuri mumbled into their kiss.

“Worth every penny.” He carefully slid Yuri down the wall as he bent to grab the bag of food.

Landing him on the couch in the peacock room, Viktor released him with one last deep kiss then sat down next to him, pulled him into his lap, and served up their food. He piled three black takeout containers packed with sushi onto Yuri’s lap then pulled out three more for himself and two cans of Sapporo.

“Holy crap, you got so much food.”

“i was starving. I’m sure you are too.”
“Yeah, but I’ll never be able to eat all of this.”

“Eat until you’re full. We can save anything we don’t finish.”

“Yes, Viktor.” He sighed and dropped his head back onto Viktor’s chest. “It feels so good to say that again. Not quite like before… more like relief. Like coming home.”

He squeezed him and kissed his head, holding it before releasing him with a sigh. “I missed you so much.” He kissed his head again which somehow made Yuri absurdly happy that he still liked those kisses too. “Eat up.”

“Yes, Viktor.” He cracked the lid open and snapped his chopsticks apart then stuffed a piece of salmon sushi into his mouth. “Mmm… so good.” The food suddenly triggering the ache of hunger, he quickly stuffed his face with another then made quick work of the first box and started in on the second.

“I’m so proud of you, Yuri. I’m thrilled that you’ve kept yourself up so well on your own. I really am. I kept expecting you to… need me, and you just didn’t. You were so strong through everything.” His cheek twitched as he glanced down.

“Why do you look sad about that?”

He looked back up at him with a dampened smile. “It’s too shitty of me to say. Being strong on your own is a good thing, especially in those circumstances.”

He chewed slowly as he thought. “You wanted me to need you?”

Shame dropped his head. “Yeah, I did. I was stuck like you said, but the times I was able to put myself aside a little and connect with you again how I desperately wanted to, it was when you looked like you needed my help. With Yura and eating and at the event… But you never really did. Each time you stood on your own stronger than I’ve ever seen.

“I shouldn’t have any right to feel this way, but it hurt. A lot. It felt like you had gotten everything you needed from me and then cast me aside so you wouldn’t have to deal with the… challenges of being with me anymore.”

“What challenges?” He put his hand on Viktor’s cheek and turned his face back up to look at him. “Seriously, what challenges? What is so extraordinarily difficult about you that is just so far beyond the normal challenges everyone has? I don’t get it. Please explain it to me.”

“I dumped you over five minutes.”

“No one dumps anyone over five minutes unless they’re completely insane which you’re not. I must have gotten close on my guess of how I made you feel, but I want to hear it from you.”

“You were pretty much spot on.”

“Please tell me in your words?”

“You want to know just that morning or all of it?”

“All of it.”

He nodded slowly as he thought. “At first… It was incredible. I mean, indescribably amazing. From the first moment I saw you, there was this feeling… not love at first sight but something softer, like…”
feeling what we could be. I don’t know if that makes sense, but it was like… despite how panicked you were, you just clicked in right next to my side as if you belonged there. It felt like taking up Toska’s reins.

“I wanted to date you; like a normal person. I wanted to slowly get to know you and win your heart one tiny bit at a time. Being a Dom is a huge part of who I am, so I wanted to test if we’d be compatible there before I went down that horribly ill-advised path of dating my employee, so I gave you those little cues. You picked up on them much stronger than I anticipated.” He laughed. “I didn’t realize how sensitive you are, so imagine my surprise when you dropped to your knees asking me to punish you. I didn’t think you could have had that much certainty or been that forward.

“So, I’m staring down at you, and there’s what I wanted and Phichit already trying to steal you away and what you so clearly needed all competing for my decision. Phichit couldn’t give you what you needed, but I could, and if I did, it would help with two problems rather than one, and I thought, ‘It’s fine. We can develop a relationship this way just as well. It’ll just be different than what I had in mind.’ So, I decided to give you what you needed.”

“And push away what you did.”

“I didn’t really need that. I just wanted to see what it was like. And with how shy you were, I had hope that we might be able to develop a relationship without feeling forced into kissing on the first, second, third date, or whenever people normally do it.”

“The hopeless romantic who grew up on fairy tales and believing in one perfect true love and still hadn’t kissed anyone in hopes of finding it didn’t need those sappy, romantic, innocent first dates? I’m going to disagree hard on that one.”

“You might be right.” He took in Yuri’s cocked eyebrow. “Okay, you’re right. I really wanted that with you. Don’t get me wrong, I love every moment I’ve spent with you and knowing we were so compatible was a huge reassurance as that’s a pretty big deal-breaker. I just wish we’d gotten a little of that early stuff.

“But it was still perfect because there was still so much sweetness from you and getting to pull your personality out of your shell was like a thousand New Year’s presents with every little bit revealed. And how you rode for me after just one day… I don’t know if that meant as much to you as it did to me, but to me it was everything.

“I don’t regret how we started because you made it so magical even if it wasn’t what I had in mind. So how do I say this without making you think that I didn’t enjoy every second we spent together…”

“Say it however it’s truest for you. I believe you, and you’ve made me strong enough to keep that belief through anything you need to tell me now.”

He smiled and took his hand to kiss it then left it clasped in his lap. “I meant every word I said to you. Every day with you was the most incredible experience. But just underneath it… It was a game, and you were the hologram in the center holding my heart and playing out my every fantasy while I raced the clock to win—to make you a real thing I could hold—before time ran out. And every night I had to let you go and give you to another player, and every time I was more afraid that you wouldn’t come back. Either I’d push you too hard and demand too much, or Phichit would win you over with his easy charm.

“I fell so hard and so fast into exactly what my parents had, and on top of it, I had their ending sitting right next to our beginning. This… panic slipped in that we were playing out their story, and I knew it’d crush me ten times harder than their ending did if we ended too.
“Those moments in the morning right after you chose me once again, for a few brief moments you felt real. You felt like mine without an ending lurking. I needed more of that so badly, and you needed more help than what my limits would allow, and I thought if we both needed it, it was fine; it was right. It was a sign that we were progressing. So, I let our clearly defined limits slide, and I touched you before you were real. I made a huge mistake.

“Allowing myself take a taste of that victory before I’d won… I got lost in the game. I didn’t know what was real and what was fantasy and the more we connected, the more perfect you became in the center, playing each fantasy tailored perfectly to me, so I just held onto that as hard as I could and tried to find a clear path through it all without letting you fall.

“When we had our scene at the party and you said, ‘We’re going to the edge you like, aren’t we?’ We were already there. The moment I let myself claim you so deeply… I didn’t realize it as I did it. I thought it was just a little temporary bruise. A mark so everyone there would know you weren’t just another one of my subs. But when you looked at me and felt what I had done as deeply as I did… We were at the edge of my limits and we didn’t come back.

“And then you tried to run. Choosing Phichit rather than giving me that extra time I needed to help you—rather than call me—you ran from me. I listened to you explain that it was a few tiny glitches that I lost to, and all of my fears became so real. You were absolutely going to vanish from my life over the tiniest of problems. Over thinking I’d let a horse bring us down.

“But then you didn’t. You stayed. But from then on, you kept glitching in and out too. Every time you hesitated, or hid, or revealed what you had been hiding and proved how much you were still holding back from me, you’d disappear from my view entirely and bring that panic to the surface, only to come back with words even sweeter, an image more taunting in its perfection.

“When you were with me, it felt so right and so real, but I couldn’t tell if it was real for you too. I needed you to end the game, but you refused.

“Then we got home from Japan. After weeks of building something that felt so close to real, after not having to give you up every night, after knowing exactly how well we fit together: your car was there.

“I don’t know how to describe what it felt like seeing that broken thing still loaded up with your bags… Despite how much we’d grown together, you still hadn’t ended our game, and looking at that car you refused to let go of, it was just so obvious that your fear and your past and your option to leave were what you were truly holding onto, and your hold on what I had given you was just for show.

“The panic overtook me, and I couldn’t do anything to stop it because what I needed to end it was unreasonable. It was unreasonable to expect you to overcome all your fears in a month and give yourself to me for the rest of your life. It was unreasonable to push for an answer you said over and over that you weren’t ready to give.

“Even if I had tried to push for it, I would always have doubts: that you hadn’t really given yourself to me; that you were just following what I wanted rather than what you wanted, that you were just caught up in the feelings you were experiencing for the first time—a choice like that would absolutely fall apart one day. So, I encouraged you to take your time and tried to have the same faith I’d asked of you.

“And then there was Phichit kissing you, still thinking he had a chance—meaning you hadn’t yet told him otherwise. And when I asked you to dance, after all that time together where I’d thought we’d started to build something that might actually be a real relationship… You couldn’t even risk
Phichit seeing you look happy while dancing with me the same as everyone else was. And he got to
dance with you instead…

“I started to think that maybe your feelings for him were stronger than I knew, and I wondered
exactly what it was that we had because, at that point, I had no freaking clue. I felt like I was pouring
my heart out to you while begging you to just tell me it was real, and that I wasn’t alone.” He
grasped Yuri’s hand as it moved up to wipe the tears from his cheeks and held it pressed against his
face.

“And then there was the auction and you telling me again that I was the one you wanted for your
first only this time you seemed so confident in it. I wanted so much to give you your first time, but
when I’d offered, I’d imagined that our relationship would be developed far before you were ready
sexually. I never considered that it could go the other way with how uncomfortable you were just
discussing sex.

I decided to wait for that commitment from you because I couldn’t imagine it with you with so much
restraint as I’d done before. And if I was wrong about what I was seeing, I wouldn’t have been able
to live with myself if you were only giving it to me because I had bought you and your only certainty
was that I was a better option than a stranger.

“So, I gave you the letter to confirm where you were at. I meant it when I said I didn’t expect a
response, but… I hoped for one. I hoped that what I saw on stage was you finally ending the game,
but you gave me another, ‘I don’t know yet.’

“I was honestly fine with you needing more time, but then, just after denying me again, in the
bathroom, you said exactly what I needed to hear because suddenly you seemed like you knew what
you were saying, like you were sure of wanting it to be me, telling me when you didn’t have to.
Only… I thought you knew that sex with me meant a relationship, a real relationship, but you said it
in another lust-filled haze. I’d hoped when you’d said those words for real, they would be…”

“Said any way other than with something shoved up my ass.” Yuri cringed in utter mortification. “I
only ever told you I wanted you when I was begging you to fuck me.”

“Yeah. It was hot. I mean it. It was so hot, and one half of me really loved that but the other half…”

“Needed to know I wanted you for something other than sex. Fuck. I’m so sorry, Viktor.”

“I’m not upset that I heard it like that. I just got really confused because you did sound so sincere, but
you had literally just rejected our relationship again, so I thought I was mistaken and just seeing a
sincerity in you that I desperately wanted to see.

“I thought about asking you to clarify, but I didn’t want to pressure you to give me a response, so I
told myself that surely those were thoughts you’d share with me when you were ready. I’d ordered
you to after all.

“Then our time was up. You went home, the question of if you wanted a relationship with me still on
the table.

“And then you were late.

“I told you I saw choosing to give the time you’d promised to me to someone else as infidelity when
I punished you for breaking the same limit before with Liliya. I realize that’s a lot stricter view than
most people take, but there’s no way you wouldn’t know why I’d feel so strongly about that.

“When you were late, I sat there thinking that you wanted to end it, that you were done with me.
That hurt worse than I can say. But then you came in, and suddenly you weren’t done and had instead just broken the one limit that meant the most to me.

“I was hurt and angry, but I was hoping so much that it was something forgivable, something outside of your control. When you told me it wasn’t an emergency and you’d just chosen Phichit over me despite knowing how important it was to me… I felt cheated on and betrayed in the worst of ways.

“After everything I gave you and every moment of brutal honesty and vulnerability I offered to show you it was safe, to convince you it was real for me… You just didn’t care about me. All I ever really was to you was a means to your needs.

“I needed you to wake me up from the nightmare I was in. I needed your answer that it was real and that you did care for me in every way that I care for you. Instead, you handed me the rules of the game and told me to keep playing.

“I just couldn’t play anymore.”

His tears spread below Yuri’s hands as he tried to keep their salt from reaching his wounded lips.

“Of course, I realize now that had I played just one second longer, you would have given me that.”

“I’m so sorry. I hurt you so much, and you’re right; I was playing games with you. I didn’t realize that’s what I was doing, but everything you felt was my doing because I didn’t really consider your needs at all beyond pleasing you in your orders even though you told me you were terrified of me and exactly why.

“I didn’t even think for a second that I should maybe say something to ease your fears. And I knew I was using Phichit to keep that wall between us which was already an incredibly shitty thing to do to both of you and even worse to keep doing it when I was fully aware of just how painful that is for you.” He looked up at the ceiling, cringing in disbelief at just how badly he’d failed at being a decent human being to him. Wincing, he looked back at Viktor. “I should have told you how real it was for me and how little Phichit mattered to us, but I could only worry about if you really wanted me after you’d told me again and again that you did.

“And after… I was still hurting you. Using, ‘Yes, Viktor’ intentionally to hurt you. Caring more about what I needed than what you needed… I failed you so hard, and I’m so sorry, Viktor. How can I make it up to you?”

He shook his head and wiped the tears from Yuri’s cheeks. “We’re doing that now. You’ve been punished far more than enough. And I’m the one who failed you. I wasn’t supposed to let you fail. I don’t know what I could have done differently because what you needed was space and patience, and what I needed was the exact opposite, but I should have done something…” He frowned at the arm of the couch as he tried to find his answer.

“You should have ordered me to serve your needs. All of them. That’s what I’m here for. Why did you ignore them? Isn’t that what you’ve been training me not to do?”

“Exactly. You needed training in getting your needs met. I couldn’t have done that if I was overriding your needs with mine, and what you needed there was perfectly reasonable. What I needed was entirely not.”

They stared at each other, trying to find an answer to an impossible riddle before Yuri spoke.

“When’s the last time you ordered a sub to serve your needs other than sexually?”
Viktor thought a moment before responding. “Never. That’s not what they’re there for. I’m there to make sure their needs are met when playing those games. If I let them serve my more intimate needs, that just leads to deepening the attachment that was designed to be severed.”

“So, when you said you like feeling the deepest connection possible with someone and this was how you found that…”

“That was a true statement. That was as close as I’d gotten to having a connection that feels safe and substantial with someone even if it was for a short time. Actually, that part might have helped. I knew the ending. I didn’t have to worry about it.” A wistful smile pulled at his lips. “I told you, I don’t have much experience with relationships. I knew I wanted that with you, but I didn’t know how to be a Dom with something like that. I’m sorry if I misrepresented myself to you. I knew I felt strongly about you, but I didn’t realize how quickly it was going to grow until we were in it, and I was in over my head with that fear holding me under.”

“You didn’t misrepresent yourself. I wasn’t expecting a relationship with you. I don’t really know what I was expecting to be honest. I just… reacted. The thought only came after you lifted enough of my burdens to allow it.

“That weekend after the auction, in our scene with the needles, I had decided on you. I wanted to kiss you and just stay with you at the end, but I wanted it to be right which meant talking to Phichit first, and I didn’t want to say anything to you until I had.

“I should have just told you. That’s what you’d told me to do. The second I knew, I was supposed to come running to you. I was supposed to share all my thoughts. I am responsible because I failed to follow your orders in multiple ways, and I tried to take control of the situation on my own and left you without that vital information.”

“So much that was unsaid.” He shook his head and gave him a short kiss then left his hands holding his face. “What’s done is done. I’m glad we have everything out in the open, but I don’t think it’s going to serve us to spend more time trying to figure out what we could have done differently then. I think we need to use those lessons to figure out our future instead.

“Communication, full communication was our one big downfall, and I’d thought I was doing enough to keep our communication open, but I obviously wasn’t. I’m open to hearing your suggestions if you have any.”

He turned his head to kiss Viktor’s palm, holding his hand against his face then turned back, leaving his hand over Viktor’s. “I think just knowing where we both stand is already helpful. We’re not on rocky ground anymore. And now I know just how critical that order to share my thoughts is. But I also think you’re just as bad about getting your needs met as I am. Was. Order me to fill your needs. All of them. I need to know I’m not failing you like that again, so if I’m not doing enough on my own, order it. I want to give that to you, please. I’m not going anywhere unless you order it, so please rely on me for everything you need.”

“What I need is to be overbearingly clingy. I need endless assurances that we’re solid and that our ending doesn’t exist outside of death. Maybe with enough time, I can be less… pathetic with my needs, but for right now…” He looked down, cringing at his own broken heart speaking for once.

“Four. That sounds really good to me. Please use me as much as you like. It feels really good to know I’m capable of giving you everything you need.”

He looked up smiling, his eyes still damp with his diamond tears. “Is this a dream? You’re too far beyond what I’d dreamed of to be real.”
“Your dreams must be so small then.”

“Oh my god, Yuri.” He yanked him in and kissed him roughly, giving sweet pain with their pleasure that softened to a gentle press of their lips, lingering before their release. “My Yuri.”

“You know, I wouldn’t have minded. I wouldn’t have run from you for that. Even then. It would have been reassuring. You demanding me like that. If there’s room inside me for anything to slip in between me and what I want, it’s always anxiety that takes up that space and pushes it away from me. I wouldn’t have seen you as too much. Just safe.”

“That’s really good to know now, but I couldn’t have done that then. Even if you had told me, I couldn’t have been certain that was real or if it was just your sub frenzy talking. I couldn’t have taken that risk of putting so many demands on you without you being free to find the way out if you chose. You needed me to hold back, and I don’t regret doing that regardless of the consequences.”

He smiled and kissed him as tenderly as he could. “Then thank you for taking care of me so well even though it cost you so much.”

“Anytime, beautiful.” He gave him another kiss before turning back to his food and grabbing one with an orange sauce on top. He popped it in his mouth then hissed. “Ow, ow, ow! Shit that burns.”

“What’s wrong?”

“Spicy tuna and chapped lips do not mix. Oww…”

He put his food on the floor and jumped up to bring him a glass of milk. “Here. It should help. Also, why did you order spicy tuna?” He shook his head as Viktor looked up at him pitifully.

“Thank you.” He took a drink, burying his lips in the milk. “And because it’s tasty, and I’ve never had to deal with kissing aftercare before. I didn’t think of it.” He pouted as he glared at the traitorous tuna. “So cruel to be so tasty yet have such barbs. Oh! I ordered you one as well. Don’t eat it.”

“I already did.” He sat back in Viktor’s lap and picked up his food.

“All of it?”

“Yes, Viktor.”

“How?”

“It burned a little, but it wasn’t bad.”

“Oh my god. You’re not human.”

“I’m pretty sure I am, but if you say I’m not, then I must not be. What am I then?” He smiled and gently kissed Viktor’s burnt lips just because he could.


He cringed. “Can you please not call me that?”

“Call you what?”

“Perfect.”
“But I do think you’re perfect. I know it may not be the textbook definition of being flawless, but every other word falls so short when trying to describe you.”

“It seems dangerous to say. You might not mean it literally, but I think that impossible standard still slips in whether you want it to or not. I’m not perfect, and I didn’t offer you a perfect love. Just me. Is that enough for you?”

“It’s more than I ever dreamed of.” He pushed his bangs out of his face as he tugged him in for a kiss. “However, you’re wrong here in trying to bring down my image of you. Idealizing your partner is a good thing. It’s associated with higher, longer-lasting levels of happiness in the relationship.”

“Really? That doesn’t seem right. Doesn’t being realistic lead to less disappointment?”

“Why are you so afraid of disappointing me?”

Squirming, he ducked his head. “Because I still think I will.”

“Look at me.” He lifted his chin with his finger until Yuri brought his eyes up to meet his. “I’m not stupid. I have a pretty good idea of what you’re hiding. I know you’re not literally perfect. I know you have flaws and that sometimes we’ll fight and get on each other’s nerves.

“I choose to see you in a positive light and focus on your good qualities while minimizing the bad, and I choose to keep our magic alive by glossing over our challenges while celebrating our successes and happy moments because what does being realistic really mean? Giving equal weight to the good and the bad? More often people mean it by focusing on the bad more than the good. That sounds like certain disaster to me and the science agrees.

“Being slightly delusional here doesn’t lead to disappointment; it leads to valuing the good far more than the bad, and it makes those tough moments easier to take with so much good around them which is also another key to lasting relationships. They don’t have to be problem-free; They just have to have more good than bad. They say a ratio of about five good things for every one bad is a happy, successful relationship. This doesn’t happen by minimizing our problems because it’s nearly impossible to remove problems from life, but by increasing our good.

“So, my idealism here actually gives you more freedom from literal perfection. The more good we see in each other and in our relationship, the more problems we can withstand and our relationship will hold that much more magic because of it.

“So, you mean that being delusional idealistic in the same vein as those fairy tales you grew up on is actually… the most realistic chance of succeeding long-term?”

He grinned and kissed his nose. “It’s scientifically proven, my Prince.”

Viktor poked at his sushi; thoughts heavy on his face. “What I lost when my parents divorced was my solid faith in my idealism. I was still idealistic, that’s just a part of me I can’t change, but I stopped believing in my own vision and started focusing on all the ways it could be brought down and put my energy to finding every one of them and eradicating them to protect it.

“I believed as you just said that being realistic was the right way to be and that my idealism was a flaw and something to tame. I started giving those little problems more weight than they deserved and ended up seeing them as an omen.

“That harshness I mentioned at our dinner after the auction, I thought it came from my idealism, but I’m thinking it came from me focusing on all those flaws in my ideal vision, trying to be more realistic because those were what scared me enough to react harshly. Not that they existed, but that I
thought they were more important than they were.

“I’d leave people because I was afraid each little flaw was simply a sign of what was to come. I’d think, if we have this problem now, it’s only going to get worse. Those small problems always grow until they destroy everything.”

His fingers stroked through Yuri’s bangs, letting them flutter back down as he smiled the sweetest of smiles. “I’m just now putting this together, but that’s what you were doing for me. You were bringing back my faith in the positive side of things.

“When you challenged my view of whether Toska could really love me or not and basically said that if I didn’t know, why not choose to believe the good side. Or when you told me that it wasn’t about the medals but about sharing my view of how the sport should be that mattered.

“And the more I embraced that beautiful vision of you, the more the things haunting it fell away...” He brushed his hand over Yuri’s cheek and brought it around behind his neck to steady him for a kiss with sadness in his eyes and seeping from his tongue. “I just wasn’t able to make it all the way back in time. If I’d just been able to trust the good that you were showing me... This past month wouldn’t have happened.”

“Avos. Blind faith that it’ll all work out.”

He smiled that gentle, tender smile that crinkled below his eyes. “Yes. Avos. He’s missed you, you know. He’s been ten times more difficult, trying to tell me he wants you back. I should have listened sooner.”

“I missed him too.”

“Really?”

“Yes, Viktor. I didn’t stop riding because I stopped loving horses. I really love that horse, honestly.” He smiled. “He’s perfect.”

He grinned. “See? Perspective. If I have to deal with him, he’s an asshole, but when I see him with you, he’s incredible. You don’t see the same flaws in him that I do, or they just aren’t as important to you, so rather than try to hammer them out of him as I do and piss him off, you take them as the little bumps they are and just keep going.

“It doesn’t mean they don’t exist, or you think he’s something he’s not. He just has so much good for you, the flaws hardly register. And why would you want them to? So they can annoy you the same as they annoy me?”

He nodded as he thought, cracking open the lid for the next container and tried to ignore the cream cheese in the next roll. Seriously? Cream cheese? Who thought of that? He took a sip of his beer to clear the gunk from his mouth so he could speak.

“That actually makes a lot of sense. Anxiety is basically a hyperfocus on the danger and the possible negative outcomes, and it leads to more disastrous results and worsening negative thoughts and actions because it messes you up and creates its own evidence. It makes sense that even a mild version of that would have the same trends.”

“Yeah, Chris yelled at me after you called him. He said there are always reasons to end it, and if that’s all I was willing to see, I’d never find anything but an end. He then threw that research at me and told me I had no idea who I was because the blinded idiot holding out for his first kiss who looked at you with stars in his eyes was the one who could actually make it work. He said for once, I
was living up to my own idealism and was seeing so much good in you, the bad didn’t stand a chance. He asked what’d happened, but I wasn't able to explain it then.”

“What about your parents? Didn’t they have that same idealism at the beginning?”

“They did, but I think there are two kinds of idealism. There’s the idealism that sees flaws as a threat and idealism that says they don’t matter. They had the idealism I was stuck in where they saw the flaws in what they had clearly and worried about their presence and allowed them to drag them down with their focus turning to them.

“Then there’s the kind I had as a kid and began relearning with you—the kind that says the flaws are inconsequential in the face of so much good and deserve only the attention necessary to deal with them. So basically, what I think I’m saying is that idealism without faith in itself is dangerous, but idealism with faith is…”

“Ideal.”

He smiled. “Yeah, that. I was trying to use a bit more variety in words there, but that works.

“I’m not saying here at all that you were wrong with what you said about how they let each other starve while focusing on that perfection, every word you said in that speech was pure brilliance, but I think both the substantial base and the magic are needed.”

His grin widened as he watched Yuri polish off the last piece of his sushi. “What was that you said again? You’ll never be able to eat all of that?” He tickled his side.

He squealed and wriggled then quickly nestled back into the space he created between them. “I was hungrier than I thought, apparently.”

“Good. I’m so proud of you, Yuri.” He lifted his chin for a kiss then gave him a tight squeeze and sighed as they relaxed into each other. “You’d wanted at one point to call me Sir. Is that still something you’d like? Because we’re there now if you would.”

“Would it be bad if I said no? Not because I don’t want that relationship, but because I like calling you Viktor. It’s not something I’d ever have to stop no matter where we are because the only strange part about it is how much I use it which can be controlled.”

“I agree entirely. It already has so much meaning for both of us that I prefer it as well. I just wanted to check with you.” He laughed and kissed his nose. “You do like saying it far more than I require.”

“Well, it feels good.”

“True. Maybe I did a little too good of a job training that one. Does it really still feel good for you after all this time?”

“Yes, Viktor. It feels even better now. More like relief than pleasure.”

“Hmm... I’ll consider how to adjust your training to maintain that if that’s what you’d prefer to feel with it.”

“Yes, Viktor. It feels steadier and clears my mind better. It’s more like the moments after rather than the build to the peak.”

“Then that’s what I’ll do.”
“Thank you. You’re so good to me.” He gave him a kiss that turned bittersweet as an idea struck. “Viktor, can we start over? I mean, not entirely. I don’t want to erase everything we’ve experienced, but this feels like something new, and I’d like a chance to do it right rather than letting my issues define everything for us.”

“What did you have in mind?”

His cheeks heated as he glanced down, his senseless embarrassment rising again. “Would you like to go on… a date—a date with me?” He forced his eyes back up to catch Viktor’s stunned expression.

“Yuri! You want to ask me out?”

“Or—or you can ask me if you prefer. I want to give you those first dates we missed.”

“You do? Really?”

“Yes, Viktor. I think it’d be nice too.”

“What would that mean for us? Would I still be your Dom? Would you still want to play?”

“I think… I think it’d be best if you were so you wouldn’t have to worry about whether or not I’m yours, and I’d be okay with playing, but I think however you wanted our relationship to start would be best.”

“So, you want to roleplay then? Roleplay an alternative start to our relationship?”

His eyes lit with a smile at Viktor capturing, once again, exactly what he was trying to convey. “Yes, Viktor. Behind it, you’re still my Dom, and I’m still your Yuri, but we can pretend, so you don’t have to miss out on anything.”

“So, I can order you to give me that fantasy I had playing over and over in my head between our interview and when you asked me to punish you?”

“Yes, Viktor. You’re my Dom. You can order anything you like from me. Isn’t that how this is supposed to work?”

“Yes, in theory. I’ve never had so many options available to me before. Oh my god. My Yuri.” His eyes flickered with one passing delight after another as each possibility burst like a cascade of fireworks in his mind. “Oh, this is going to be so hard though. I just got you back in my arms, and I don’t want to let you go for a second. But this is a perfect time to do it if we were going to... Tomorrow. Tomorrow we start the roleplay that we’re back at the start. Tonight, I just want to kiss you and hold you in my arms all night.”

“Yes, Viktor. Do I still kneel at six a.m.?”

“I want to change that rule. I want you to greet me in the morning by kneeling and say goodnight by kneeling again, and we’ll exchange thank you’s for our day together and check-in to make sure both of us have had our needs met. However, I want to pause that while doing this roleplay so it can feel as real as possible. Do you have any objections or concerns?”

“No, Viktor. That sounds like a very well thought out rule. It seems a little more flexible than what we had before?”

“Yes, no specific time. Just make your best effort to make it the first thing you do upon seeing me. Illnesses and any long distances apart are obviously excluded from that requirement. Now that you’re
always mine, there’s no start and no end to mark. It’s just us taking time to show mutual respect for each other and our roles.”

“If I’m always yours and before you didn’t like me giving your time away to others… Will I be allowed to spend time with friends? Not that I have that many, but like calling them in Japan or spending time with Phichit because we kinda bonded as friends while we were apart…”

“Of course you’re allowed to have friends. Just ask for the time you’d like to spend with them or anything else you might like to do. Ninety-nine percent of the time, I’ll say yes. The only reason why I might not is if I have something specific planned with you. Your time is mine first since it was your gift to me, but I’m not going to use my power over you to deny you a full life. As before, ask me for anything you need or want, and I’m more than happy to provide it. And I’m glad you and Phichit were able to work out a friendship. That’s what I’d hoped for you two all along.”

“Oh, um, you should know, I told him about you. I’m sorry. I just didn’t know how to share my experiences without sharing that… I didn’t tell him about anyone else at the stable though. I know you said I shouldn’t, so even though I wasn’t yours then, I’ll accept any punishment you want to give.”

“There’s no punishment. Your experiences are yours to share as you like, and I trust that you wouldn’t have shared it with someone you didn’t trust to keep it quiet.”

“No, he promised he wouldn’t say anything. He was interested in seeing your club though next time we go. He was assuming we’d fix everything.”

He smiled. “What would have given him that impression?”

“Um, I guess the way I told him about us… He said we sounded perfect for each other and it was the kind of thing that demanded fate to wait for our stupidity to get out of our way.”

“You must have done a good job of telling him. He is aware that the chances are good he’d see us playing at the club, right? I mean, he could always move somewhere else if he didn’t want to see it, but I tend to make a spectacle of you.”

“Oh, he’s aware. He’s very, fully aware of what you like to do to me there.”

“Wow. You gave him all the details then.”

“Is that okay?”

“It’s more than okay. It makes me very happy to know he’s been thoroughly informed of how completely you’re mine.”

“So, you’re really okay with us being friends, right? I mean really okay. Not just you trying not to be jealous and controlling because I’d understand if you didn’t like this.”

“I’m really, truly okay with it. I trust you, Yuri. Now that I know where your feelings and loyalty lie and know that he knows that too, I have no reason to be jealous of him. I still might appreciate a little extra reassurance from you any time you spend time with him or anyone else who might have a crush on you, but I do trust you. Do you have any other questions or concerns?”

“Um, you still haven’t answered about that date really…”

“Oh, right. I would love to go on a date with you, but would you have asked me first when we just met?”
“God no, Viktor.”

“Then let me ask first, and you ask me again when you think you might have been confident enough
to.”

“Maybe on our wedding night. Maybe.”

“Yuri!” He laughed with his surprise leading his amusement. “You are so cute and so hilarious.”

“I don’t think I’m that funny.”

“Good thing your opinions on yourself don’t count unless they’re approved first because that one is
wholeheartedly rejected. I find you highly amusing at the most surprising of times. Go ahead, you
know what you’re supposed to do.”

He sighed, trying his best to contain his eye roll. “My opinion on my sense of humor is incorrect and
was formed from an incomplete view. Viktor thinks I’m funny—”

“Is that the word I used?”

“—hilarious. And as this aspect of myself pleases him, no improvement is needed. I reject my
opinion on this matter and accept Viktor’s instead. I am hilarious, and I’m proud that I’m able to
bring him joy with my sense of humor.”

“Very good, Yuri, though a little less sass in that tone next time.” He beamed and leaned forward for
a kiss then stopped, “Oh! I can kiss you for rewards now.” His smile turned blushing as he ducked
his head and directed it to himself. “Sorry, I just got excited by that.”

He pulled him in again and kissed him slow and delicately, exploring the pleasure in their tongues
then released him with a sigh. “The pain is definitely worth it.” Pulling him back tight into his arms,
he smoothed his hair with his hand. “Any other questions or concerns?”

“Hmm… I am curious about when you plan on taking my virginity, but I’m content with letting you
plan when and how and whether or not I should be informed first. Actually, the anticipation feels
pretty good.”

“God, do you have any idea how sweet your submission tastes? You giving me your future and
binding yourself to it with our kiss, not even knowing what I’ll do with it and having every reason to
think that it might not be what you hoped… I’m telling you now, I’ve never even heard of such a
pure act of submission before.” His smile brought his kiss to Yuri's forehead. “You really know how
to seduce a Dom.”

“You like it when I seduce you?”

“Mmm, very much. I love it when you make the craving to grab you overwhelming, and I love it
even more when I can act on it.” Squeezing him tight, he pulled his chin up for a kiss. “There’s
nothing else I don’t know about other than the secret we’re still getting to, right?”

“Hmm… there could be little things, minor past experiences that I can’t think of off the top of my
head, but nothing that would have any significant impact on us.”

“Nothing like me not knowing you’re my number one fan or anything like that? Because while I get
why you wouldn’t have wanted to share that right at the start, I really should have known since that
had a pretty significant impact on our power balance. Even more so than me being your boss did.”
“Um… I can maybe think of one thing that’s completely stupid but kinda has to do with that… It’s so embarrassing though and really was nothing more than me being a drunk idiot who very luckily didn’t succeed in my stupid drunk ideas.”

“Tell me.”

He cringed. “Promise not to laugh at me, please?”

“You have my word, but I reserve the right to a little bit of laughter at your adorableness because I have a feeling I’ll find this far cuter than you do, but I promise it won’t be me laughing at you.”

“Alright. So… Um… Let’s just say that had I succeeded, you would have had quite the shock when you undressed me for the first time.”

“Ooh, I’m intrigued now. Go on.”

“I—I was very, very, very drunk, like completely smashed. Keep this in mind, please.”

“Got it. Not a sound decision.”

“Right. Like not even close. Um, I tried to get a tattoo.”

“What tattoo?”

He cringed so hard he thought his face might crack. “Um, on my ass… I wanted to get, ‘Property of Viktor Nikiforov,’ tattooed on my ass.”

He burst out laughing so hard, it made Yuri jump. “Oh my god! Yuri!”

“You promised!”

“I said I reserve laughter at your adorableness. Oh my god. That is precious. I would have died. Had I undressed you and found that you would have had to call nine one one. Oh my god, I love that. It would have saved us so much suffering. I wish you had succeeded.” He kissed Yuri’s pouting lips. “I swear, I think it’s completely adorable. After I died, I would have been over the moon with excitement.”

“I am so glad I didn’t succeed. How tacky and utterly embarrassing would that have been? I likely would have answered a complete hell no to the nudity question.”

“True. It maybe lacks in a little artfulness, but I would have loved the sentiment. Come here, precious. Stop pouting.” He tightened his hug into a kiss. “I’m thrilled you shared that with me. You’re right it doesn’t change anything, but it does confirm something I suspected.”

“What would that be?”

“Marking kink?”

“Me?”

“Yes, you. Who else would I be talking about? You love having my name marked on your body. Likely other forms of marking as well.”

“Oh. Um… Yeah, I guess I do.”

“You guess? I have an idea, but it can’t be something you’re guessing at.”
“No, Viktor. It’s not a guess. I… when we were apart, I wrote your initials on me like how you made them with your whip.”

He winced. “Oh, Yuri. I’m so sorry. Are they still there?”

“No, Viktor. Once I figured out how much I’d hurt you, I didn’t feel like I had a right to even pretend that.”

“You are mine, and you’ve more than earned my name on your body. I’ll prove just how much you’ve earned that soon enough.” His eyes softened into the sweetest of smiles as he slipped him off his lap and took his hand. “Come on, my beautiful Yuri, let’s go to bed.”

“You’re not going to tell me your idea?”

He smiled and hoisted him back into his arms. “Nope.”

“Viktor! I wanna know. I’m so curious. Please?” He pulled up the best puppy dog eyes he could manage.

He narrowed his eyes with a smile. “I see you haven’t forgotten how to manipulate me.” He kissed him until Yuri’s attack melted away. “No.”

He pouted but then smiled to himself as the excitement of a new surprise from Viktor settled in.

“Grab the bag so you can throw it out.” He leaned down so Yuri could reach it.

“Yes, Viktor.” He picked it up and Viktor carried him into the kitchen. “You have an odd idea of my service.”

“Hardly. You’re doing the work, and I’m getting exactly what I want which is to not let you go for a second.”

They headed upstairs and washed off the dirt of the day, lingering in exploring each other’s bodies as if it were the first time all over again, kisses mixed with steaming drops of water and tender gazes and touches heating out that empty chill that had clawed their insides for the past month.

After drying off and finishing Viktor’s elaborate nighttime routine, they locked their bodies together, relishing the absence of barriers with kisses and touches.

Viktor’s hand rested over Yuri’s cheek as he stared at him for the longest time, his eyes softened with deep emotion weighing on him. “Thank you.”

“For what?”

“For saving us. For your gift. I promise, I will cherish you and always hear your side. You’ve more than proven yourself worthy of every bit of faith life will ever demand us to have in each other. I’m so sorry and so incredibly grateful that you chose to fight for us through all the pain.”

“I’m sorry too that I demanded more faith than I’d earned. And I’m just as grateful to you. The Yuri you met wouldn’t have been able to do anything but run and self-destruct. For helping me be a better, stronger person, for your forgiveness for the pain I caused, thank you, Viktor.” His fingers brushed over Viktor’s cheek as he gave him the tenderest of kisses he could. “I would be even more grateful if you could do one little thing for me.”

“Oh? What would that be?”
“Never make me eat sushi with cream cheese again.”

Viktor buried his face in Yuri’s neck as his body shook with laughter and clutched him tighter. “Cream cheese and sushi is a hard limit. Got it.”

“Well, I don’t know if I’d go that far. It’s probably about a one and a half.”

“Ooh, I might be able to use that then. Like washing your mouth out with soap. Every time you say something bad about yourself, you’ll have to eat one piece of cream cheese sushi.”

Yuri groaned. “I’d prefer the soap.”

***
Chapter End Notes

Please, if you're so inclined, give your love for the art to Clarinda either here or on Instagram!

Spotify
52. Price by Koethe
Chapter 24

Chapter Summary

Onslaught

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

(53) After the most painful of goodbyes and no less than fifty ‘one last kisses,’ Yuri stood in a stall letting the golden shavings filter down from his fork, trying to set his role in his mind so he could give Viktor the best fantasy he was capable of. He was the old Yuri again. Timid and too shy to even look at Viktor but with his issues tamed so they wouldn’t dominate once again.

“Hey, Yuri.” Viktor beamed at him from the aisle, Bytiye at his side. “How are you settling in?”

“Huh?” He glanced up then right back at his fork, a little giddy bubble rising in his chest. “Oh. Um, good. Thanks.”

“Good. I’m glad to hear it. Do you have any questions about anything?”

“Umm… I don’t think so. Unless I’m not doing something right?”

“No, not at all. You’re doing a great job. I’m thrilled you’re here.” His voice trilled around his sweet purr that hinted at all the dangerous pleasure he had at his control.

His body shuddered at that tone driving memories of sensations to the surface. “Uh, thank you. Me—me too.”

Viktor’s eyes raked him as he gave a pleased hum. “You’re looking good, Yuri. Keep it up.”

He blushed and nodded, not lifting his eyes from the stall floor, his ability to blush at the slightest provocation welcome for once.

“Are you feeling okay?”

His eyes shot up. “Huh?”

“You’re looking a little flushed. Is the work too strenuous, or is it something else?” His smirk made the barest of attempts to stay concealed.

“Oh. Um. I’m—I’m fine. The work’s not that hard.”

“So, something else then?” His finger trailed over the iron bar set in the front of the stall.

“Maybe—maybe it’s just the heat.”

“Hmm, it is looking rather hot today.”

“Looking? Your English is better than mine, but I think—I think looking is the wrong word there. You can’t see heat.” Great. Correcting his grammar. So sexy. He cringed and stabbed through the
shavings. At least being an embarrassing mess still came naturally.

“I certainly can from where I’m standing.”

That actually worked? His stupid mouth hung open in genuine surprise as he took in Viktor’s smirk.

He winked. “Keep up the good work, Yuri. I’ll check in with you later.” His whip cracked on his boot as he walked away with his horse clomping the bricks next to him.

His eyes followed him the whole way, dying just a little as he sagged onto his upright pitchfork.

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The sun blazing sweat onto his face, Yuri dragged it away with his forearm before it could sting his eyes. He glanced over as Viktor was coming out from the stable just in time to see him stumble then stop dead, his chest caved in as he stared at Yuri.

“Wow. So thirsty.” Viktor’s hand pressed into his chest.

“Huh? What was that?”

“You look… Thirsty. So thirsty.”

Yuri looked down to hide his smile as Viktor cleared his throat, recovered his impeccable posture, and sauntered over.

“You look hot. Are you staying hydrated?”

“Yeah,” he paused, debating for a second if the thought that struck him was too bold for the old Yuri or not before giving in to the impulse, “are you?” He had to fight the smirk from taking over his face. A smirk was definitely too bold.

“O bozhe,” Viktor muttered under his breath. “Not nearly enough. I’m parched. Why don’t you join me for lunch? There’s a little place nearby that has the most delicious fresh-squeezed juices. I’d hate to see you succumb to the heat.”

“You’ve clearly never experienced a Kyushu summer. I was raised in the heat. I’m a little more worried about the Russian.” Old Yuri would definitely not have said that so soon or so sober but judging by the flummoxed smile on Viktor’s face, it wasn’t a bad way to go.

“I’m a little worried about the Russian as well. I wasn’t expecting such an onslaught today.”

“The weather report didn’t warn you?”

“Not for this.” His eyes were wide, melting down at the outer corners as he shook his head lightly, then straightened himself to bring his senses back. “What do you say? My treat to welcome you to my team.”

Old Yuri would have likely found an excuse, but this was supposed to be a fantasy. He didn’t have to make him work so hard just to spend some time with him. “Um… Yes, V—Um, yeah. I think I can do that.”

He beamed. “Great! Let’s go. I’ll drive.”

He glanced at the full wheelbarrow in front of him. “Sure, I just have to dump this shit first.” He cringed at the sudden faceplant from not half bad to the least sexy thing that he could have said. “I’m
—I’m so sorry. I didn’t mean—”

Viktor pulled his hand away from his mouth, still laughing. “Don’t worry about it. Shit is shit. You don’t need to mince words around me. Go dump the shit. I’ll wait for you.”

His face still flaming red and cringing, he decided that his eyes closed was a much better state for them currently. “I should clean up at least a little too.”

“How about I meet you out here in ten minutes?”

He peeked his eyes open then relaxed at the sight of Viktor’s easy smile. “Yeah, that sounds good.”

“Perfect.” He winked and walked off, leaving him alone with his shit.

Shaking his head, he heaved the wheelbarrow forward. At least being utterly embarrassing was completely in character.

Hunched over the sink in the stable’s bathroom, he cupped the cool water over his face and around the back of his neck watching the dirt run in dark streaks down his forearms. Viktor still had blood magic no matter what he said. No matter how pristine the stable, walking into one was always like stepping into a cloak of dust and grit that hung in the air waiting to welcome its guests. Embarrassing missteps aside, roleplaying was fun, and he was still high from their reunion while the all too brief taste of Viktor’s lips added just the right amount of bittersweet and longing.

Shutting off the water, he looked himself over to make sure he hadn’t missed any obvious patches of dirt. At least he didn’t have to worry about the smell. Viktor found it as comforting as he did. Finding nothing too objectionable in the mirror beyond your typical sweaty, dirty stable worker which should come as no surprise to Viktor, he headed out to meet him out front.

“Wow. You clean up nice.” Viktor uncrossed his boot and stepped away from the black sedan he was leaning on.

His eyes narrowed, and his head tilted as he tried to figure out Viktor’s angle. “I look exactly the same.”

“Thank god.” Viktor’s blue eyes were brilliant in the midafternoon sun over Yuri’s favorite version of his smile.

His face reddened at the sweet comment as he stepped into the passenger’s side, trying to restrain himself from silencing the tension with a kiss. Viktor slid in next to him, and they headed off in the strange silence of his electric engine—a compensation for his inefficient toys. Yuri had never considered himself a car buff in the slightest, but he found himself missing that dirty growl that suited Viktor so well.

They pulled up to a shack on the side of the road made of rummaged scraps of wood painted the color of marigolds with picnic tables sprawled below the canopy of trees. Behind the counter, sky blue shelves stacked with mounds of fruit, framing the smiling face of an older woman and what looked to be her granddaughter’s bored teenage glare.

Tantalizing smoke drifted off from a huge black grill to the side. A man with a bandana tied around his forehead to keep the sweat from his eyes while he tended it raised his tongs in greeting to Viktor along with a broad smile that gleamed against his dark skin which Viktor returned in kind. The woman gave the girl a nudge until her face righted itself to the bare minimum for service.

“What do you want?”
“Collette.” The woman snapped a quick glare at the girl then turned to Viktor with an apologetic smile and words that likely matched in what Yuri guessed was French, though accented differently than he’d heard before.

Viktor laughed and smiled at the girl. “Don’t be too hard on her. I used to hate it when my dad dragged me to his work too. Though he worked in the Arctic, so I think I had a bit more of a valid complaint there.”

“The Arctic?” Collette asked. “Is he a scientist or something?”

“Oh, wouldn’t that have been nice? No, he’s there for nearly the opposite reason. He’s drilling it for oil.”

She eyed him, debating if he deserved the spit in his food on behalf of the ozone layer as well as his dad did.

Viktor held up his hands in defense. “Can’t help who your parents are.”

“God is that the truth.” She cast her grandmother a look then turned back to Viktor and smiled. “What can I get you?”

Viktor turned to Yuri. “What would you like?”

“Um, I don’t know. What do you recommend?”

“It’s all amazing here, but I think you’d like the grilled fish the best.”

He smiled. “Oh yeah? What are you basing that on?”

He put his finger to his lips, pretending to think, then winked. “A hunch.”

He laughed. “Okay, let’s see how accurate this hunch is.”

Viktor ordered and led them toward a picnic table under the shadiest tree. He stopped short of it and flopped into the grass, grinning up at Yuri. “Join me?”

He wanted to drop right on top of him, but that wasn’t allowed right now, so he begrudgingly laid down next to him an appropriate ‘shy Yuri in the vicinity of Viktor Nikiforov’ distance away.

Viktor glanced at the four-foot stretch of grass between them then at Yuri with a smile. “I won’t bite. Here.”

He blushed at the whimper he tried to bury with a cough, which Viktor noted with a smirk. Yuri scooted carefully closer then glanced at the span of green still between them, up at Viktor’s waiting face, and scooted even closer, his heart racing away into the fantasy with the playful tension between them. “You’re—you’re not worried about grass stains?”

“Nah, I’m not going to waste my life worrying about something as insignificant as a stain. It’d be a sin to pass up a pleasure like lying in the grass under a tree on a hot day for fear of a tiny blemish.”

He nodded, trying to think of something else light to talk about, which was harder than it should be. He was never any good at small talk, and he’d liked that Viktor was willing to dive in deep with him right off the bat, but now, filling in that gap their bypass had given them was the most important thing he could do for him. He glanced over to the stand. “So, they’re French?”

Viktor shook his head. “Guadeloupians. One of those little islands in the Caribbean. It’s part of
“France, so it’s the official language. I haven’t met the granddaughter before, but Maélie and Johan came here maybe three years back? And started this place up shortly after that. I’ve been coming here regularly since then. They’re good people, and the food is amazing.

“That’s the thing I love the most about America—their history of immigration and being a place to seek a better life for anyone. For the most part, I’ve found people here are pretty accepting. My Russianness is usually a source of interest, and people can be so cute when they find those little differences that no one really thinks about being a part of their culture but are.”

“Like what?”

“Hmm… I remember when my classmates first saw me counting on my fingers to start a race in gym class. No one took off because they were all trying to figure out what I was doing.”

“Really? What was so strange?”

“How you’re taught to count on your fingers is a cultural thing. See, Americans do like this.” He closed his fist in the air and put his fingers up starting with the index finger and going toward his pinky by lastly putting up his thumb. “Russians do it like this.” He put his hand up with his fingers open and closed them into a fist one by one, starting with his pinky and ending with his thumb.

He put his hand up next to Viktor’s and copied his strange style finding it awkward to put his pinky down without the ring finger joining it. Viktor reached over and gently took the back of his hand and held his ring finger in place as Yuri tried to close his pinky alone. His heart trilled at the simple touch, and when he glanced over, Viktor’s cheeks flushed pink as he smiled to himself then deepened when he realized he’d been caught.

He returned Viktor’s nervous smile and nodded. “In Japan, we do it like the Americans for showing someone else, but if we’re counting for ourselves, it’s like this.” He held his fingers up and put them down, starting with his thumb and ending on his pinky then paused with his hand in a fist. “Six to ten goes backward. So, the little finger opens for six then the ring, seven, middle eight, index nine, and thumb ten leaving your hand back open again and you never have to put down your pencil.” He demonstrated while Viktor copied him.

“You have a whole separate system for showing others versus counting privately?”

“Yeah.”

“How very Japanese.”

He laughed. “Yeah, I guess it is. Are you familiar with Japanese culture?”

“I’ve been learning some recently. It’s a fascinating culture.”

“Oh? What do you find so interesting?”

“I like the care and respect that goes into much of what you do and the little rituals that form around everyday things. The celebration of nature and respect for it that’s such a huge part of your culture as well is amazing. The idea that everything has a spirit that should be respected is probably my favorite part.”

“Why is that?”

“It’s just so… inclusive? I guess is the word I want there. If something, even a material object, has a
spirit worthy of respect, it encourages people to take care of their things and not to waste or neglect them. If nature has spirits, it should be protected and not taken for granted. If people have spirits, we should be careful with them and see that which unites us. None of these are particularly new or unique ideas, but the idea that they should happen simply because they exist and that existence is a living, breathing thing worthy of reverence gives it more power, I think. I’m not sure if I’m explaining it well, but it just really appeals to me.”

“It makes sense.”

Collette came over with their food, and they sat up to take it with thanks. Yuri’s plate was filled with a huge piece of fish along with rice and beans, watermelon, and sliced banana. He took a bite of the fish and his eyes rolled back in his head.

“Oh my god. So good.” The fish was tender and fresh inside but was coated with a crust of herbs and spices that had a bit of heat. He took a drink of the cucumber and pear juice that balanced the burn well.

Viktor grinned. “I’m glad you like it so much.”

“Yeah, it’s really good. Looks like your hunch was right.”

Viktor offered his plate. “Here. Try some of mine too, so I know for next time.”

He pried some of his chicken off the bone with the plastic fork which was tender enough to do without a knife and popped it in his mouth. “Mmm, also very good, but I do like the fish more.” He smiled. “Next time?”

Viktor’s smile at watching him enjoy the food so thoroughly took on an adorable quirk. “Yeah, that is if you’d ever want to join me again.”

“You’d want me to?”

“I would. I find your company very enjoyable. The view’s always nicer when you’re around too.”

“Are—are you flirting with me, Viktor?”

“That depends.”

“On?”

“Would you call it flirting or would you call it harassment?”

He smiled and leaned in a little closer. Definitely not old Yuri, but he was tired of being him. “Well, that depends too.”

“On?”

“Why you’d be flirting with me. Are your intentions pure?”

He smiled slowly, leaning in, their fingers brushing as he looked him over. “If we’re talking about my intentions with your body, definitely not. If we’re talking about my intentions with your heart,” his pinky hooked around Yuri’s, “the absolute purest. Will you go on a date with me?”

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Later that night, he was dressed in clean workout clothes, riding in Viktor’s car with no clue of
where they were going or what they were doing. The workout clothes Viktor instructed weren’t quite what he was expecting, which should be the expectation at this point. Viktor never stopped surprising him.

They pulled up to a building, and, shockingly, Viktor didn’t tell him to close his eyes to keep the surprise two seconds longer and instead let the sign reveal his plans.

“Rock climbing?”

“Yeah, it seemed fun. Have you ever done it?”

“No. Have you?”

“Nope.” He chuckled. “Blind leading the blind here. Don’t worry. I won’t let you get hurt.”

They got out of the car and headed in.

“Seems like a hard thing to promise when you have no idea what to expect.”

“Simple, I just won’t let you do anything until I’m confident it’s safe.”

“Walking through a parking lot isn’t safe. We could get hit by a car before we even get in.”

He pursed his lips but smiled through it. “Reasonably safe. I can’t be one hundred percent infallible. Can you trust me anyway?”

He glanced over as if he were debating his question then smiled. “I’ll take my chances. You seem like you might be worth it.”

He grinned. “Oh yeah? What are you basing that on?”

Shrugging, he opened the door and held it for Viktor. “A hunch.”

Viktor stumbled at the tiny switch of their roles then smiled and walked through. “Thank you. Aren’t you a gentleman?”

“I aim to please.” He winked. Two could play at the dropping hints game.

(54) After going through the short lesson on how not to accidentally kill your date and how to tack themselves up properly, or whatever they called it in rock climbing, they were left alone with a staggering wall littered with paths of confusion leading five stories up and meager knowledge of how to preserve their lives.

Viktor, apparently deciding that this was more than enough to go on, turned to him with his smile burning bright. “So, do you want to go first, or do you want me to?”

“Umm…” He stared up, feeling a little woozy before he’d even climbed an inch. Both prospects were terrifying. Basic self-preservation said to keep his feet on the ground, but if Viktor went first, that meant it was on him not to drop the rope. “I’ll go first if that’s okay with you.”

“Go ahead.”

He stepped forward and clipped the carabiner dangling from a rope attached to the top of the wall to the front of his harness and glanced to make sure Viktor had his end of the rope. He grabbed ahold of one of the candy-colored holds.
“Wait. You’re supposed to say something first.”

“Do I have to? It seems silly. I checked, and you had the rope.”

All the humor wiped off his face. “I think communication is absolutely mandatory when your life and safety are on the line.”

“Yes, Viktor. You’re right. That was stupid of me.”

He smiled a peace offering. “It does sound a little silly, but I think it’s a worthy trade-off.”

“It is. On belay.”

“Belay on.”

“Climbing.”

“Climb on.”

His hands started shaking before he even got his feet six inches off the mat. Taking a deep breath, he stretched for the next hold he saw.

“Hey, Yuri.”

He paused, his body slathered awkwardly against the wall and looked back over his shoulder.

“First one to the top wins.”

“But I’ve got an advantage if I’m going first.”

“Good. It’s been a while since I had someone to chase for the gold.”

“I would think you couldn’t stand being anywhere but the top.”

“You can only stay on the peak of a mountain for so long before you get cold, hungry, and lonely. I welcome any challenge except a challenge to my bond with the things that matter the most to me.”

“You can’t stand the risk of losing them.”

“That’s right. Besides, I’ve got a height advantage which apparently makes it a little easier to reach where you need to, so I think it balances in the end.”

“What do we win?”

“Another date.”

He laughed. “There’s not much of a risk to losing then, huh?”

“I like having a sure thing there.”

“How about loser has to pay?”

“Is that a yes to another date?”

“If we don’t die on this one.” He turned back to the wall and sought out a good place to put his hand.

Pulling himself up was easier than he expected, but finding the right path was much harder. He
found himself stuck more than once with nothing within his reach until Viktor guided him to a hold that miraculously appeared from nowhere. He paused yet again, studying the puzzle in front of him, every muscle in his body burning and his hands aching.

“What about the one to your left? It’s at about ten o’clock.”

He glanced down at Viktor now dizzyingly below him before seeking out the hold. He’d gotten further than he expected, but he was still a long way from the top, and he didn’t know how much longer he could hold on. Stretching up on his toes, he reached for the grip, but his body was shaking too hard. He slipped from the wall into a moment of sheer terror.

Swinging solidly in place, he scrambled for the wall so he could climb back down and relieve Viktor of his weight.

“Just put your feet out to push against the wall like the instructor said. I’ll lower you.”

“Aren’t I heavy?”

“No. I can hold you all day like this. It’s fine. Put your feet out, so you don’t hit the wall. I’m lowering you.”

“Okay.” He followed his instructions, and in no time, he was back on the ground. “Off belay.”

Viktor smiled and loosened the rope. “Belay off.” He put his hands on Yuri’s shoulders to steady his shaking body. “So? How was it?”

“Rappelling down is exactly as much fun as the movies make it look.” He grinned, an exhilarating rush similar to the one Viktor’s pain gave him taking over the fear. “It wasn’t what I expected at all. It was a lot more technically challenging than I thought it would be. I mean it was physically tough too, but that part wasn’t quite as bad as I’d expected. It really wasn’t difficult to hold me?”

“Nope, not at all. We’ll wait a few minutes for you to recover before I go. It does take a little arm strength to belay but not tons.”

“So…” He racked his brain for something he could ask about that he didn’t already know and would be an appropriate ‘first-date’ topic. “What’s your favorite childhood memory?”

“Oh, that’s easy. The time I burned my babushka’s summer house.”

“What?”

He laughed. “Not on purpose.”

“Still. What?”

“Well, we were out at the dacha, the summer house, over New Year’s and my dad told me to make some tea for us. So, most other countries when making tea put the water over the fire. Not Russians. Russians put the fire inside the water.”

“How is that even possible?”

“With a samovar. Basically, it’s this elaborate vessel with a little chimney in the center that you build a small fire in and the water goes in a chamber around that.”

“Ah, okay.”
“So, there’s a bit of a process involved, and I’d done it enough with my parents to know how, and the first step was always bringing it outside because it burns wood. It was winter in Russia and particularly cold that day, so I thought I’d be smart and do it inside.”

“Oh no.”

“Yeah, that went as well as you’d expect. I’d set it up on her table, of course, right in front of the curtains, and when the room started filling with smoke, I realized my mistake. I tried to put the cap on to put out the fire, but my eyes were burning, so I couldn’t see well enough, and I knocked it over into the curtains and caught them on fire.”

“Oh my god. Wait. How was this your favorite memory?”

“I’m getting there. So, this place had no running water. It’d been my great grandfather’s, so despite my dad’s offers to buy them a nicer place, they were sticking with it. Anyway, no running water. It all came from a well outside. It would have taken too long to trek out there and fill the bucket and haul it back over and over, so I had another brilliant idea and grabbed some snow and threw it at the fire. At least that idea was better than the first, and it seemed to work a little, so my family all started hauling snowballs at the fire like a bunch of maniacs.”

“Oh god. I can totally picture that.”

“Yeah, we might as well have finished with a good squat and some sunflower seeds.”

Yuri chuckled at the image of Viktor filling in the place of the actors in one of the skit shows they’d watched poking fun at the gopnik who were the source of that particular stereotype.

“So, my dedushka, my grandpa, missed and hit my babushka in the face and without missing a beat he says, ‘Sorry, beloved, I was just throwing wherever I felt heat.’ “

“So, it runs in the family for a few generations back then.”

Viktor grinned and poked his side. “I have absolutely no defense against that. You speak the truth. Babushka retaliated of course, and Dedushka grinned and threw one at my mom. The fire was mostly out at that point, and everyone just started throwing snowballs at each other inside the house.”

“ Mostly out?”

“Yeah, we threw a few in its direction as well, but it was just smoking a little still, and everything around it was pretty well soaked. The house got absolutely covered with snow, and I had to clean everything up, obviously, which took me all night, but we all had such a good time with that stupid indoor snowball fight, it was my favorite New Year’s.” He glanced down at the mats and chuckled. “I’m still not allowed to make tea at Babushka’s.”

“You’re kidding. Oh my god. There is a place in this world where you’re not trusted enough to make tea? You’re—You’re Viktor Nikiforov, and you can’t make tea. That… mind-boggling is the word I think I want there.”

“Babushka has an excellent memory and a special love for those curtains. What about you? What’s your favorite memory?”

“Hmm… Minako had just gotten in this racehorse for retraining. She wasn’t much, little and had nothing but a few starts on her record, but she didn’t know that. She had such an attitude on her and carried herself like she was the best horse you ever laid eyes on. I agreed. I begged Minako to let me try riding her, but she said no. I ended up sneaking in one night.”
He smiled. “How old were you?”

“Twelve. Minako had trained me well enough at that point that I felt comfortable on all the usual horses, and I really wanted a harder challenge, and I felt like she was just holding me back because she was afraid I would get hurt which was pretty reasonable, but at the time it just made me mad. And Nishigori had been picking on me pretty bad that week, calling me a weakling and stuff like that, so I went out in the middle of the night to hide there as I usually did when I was upset. I really wasn’t planning on doing anything but sit with her, but all that irritation at feeling weak and my sometimes shoddy impulse control… I decided to go for a quick ride.

“At first, it was incredible. She had so much spirit in her, and it was such a rush, the best feeling I’d had. For once I wasn’t a scared little kid, but a real rider. It was amazing. But then she spooked at some shadows, and even a failed racehorse was much faster than anything I’d ridden before. I fell off and broke my arm.”

“Oof.”

“Yeah, it was pretty bad, but that wasn’t the worst of it. I couldn’t put her back with a broken arm, so I had to go fess up to Minako. She was so pissed. I’ve never seen her angrier than she was right then.”

“How long did you wait before you tried again?” He cocked his eyebrow and grinned.

He glanced up, sheepishly. “I started asking about two days after I got out of the hospital. I gave her a day to cool off first.”

“Wow. A whole day.”

“I would have been ready to try again the second they were done putting the cast on, but I was solidly grounded, and there’s no way they’d let me ride with a broken arm. I figured if I was already in as much trouble as I could be in, it couldn’t hurt to start wearing her down earlier. I knew it’d take me at least a few weeks either way.

“I think it took at least another two months after the cast came off before she relented. She just sighed, and I’ve never seen her look more disappointed when she said, ‘You’re one of those riders, huh?’ But she then just said, ‘Fine. You’re going to be the best at it if I have anything to say about it.’

“That was easily my happiest moment up till recently. She let me ride that horse and started seeking out other difficult horses for me to ride. I started to build up a small training clientele after a little bit. Nothing much, but it made me so happy that people thought I was good enough at it to pay me.”

“Wow. And I thought I started young in this business at fourteen. You had me beat by two whole years.”

“One year. It took me about that long to figure out how to ride them.”

“Why did you come to America if you were already doing well there?”

“Partly for a new challenge. Eventing isn’t as popular in Japan as it is here, so there were more opportunities, and the economy was tanked, so there were fewer clients to split between Minako and me. I decided to leave so I wouldn’t be competing against her.”

“Wow again. You left your home and moved halfway around the world so you wouldn’t ruin your trainer’s business?”
“I can be competitive, but that would have just been a losing battle for both of us. I would have had to take her client base entirely to be even moderately successful. That would have been the worst of victories.”

“I love that you did that. Both for how it speaks about who you are and because it gave us the opportunity to meet. Are you recovered?”

“Yeah, I was fine a while ago. Sorry, I should have said something.”

“It’s okay. I was enjoying our conversation.” He went to the wall and clipped himself in then stopped to smile at him. “I just realized, both of our favorite memories are rather bittersweet, aren’t they?”

“It makes sense.”

“How so?”

“The bitter makes the sweet taste sweeter.”

They exchanged smiles then Viktor started climbing, his body rippling and winding its way up the wall with all the determination of a river set on flowing upstream.

How did he do that? He barely paused before grasping a clean path, showing off the same skill that had attracted Yuri in the first place. He never hesitated on a course no matter what mess he found himself stuck in. Always taking a strange turn no one else but him would think to take and brushing off the mire as easily as a lazy tail flicking a fly.

It was almost hypnotizing enough to make him forget about the rope holding Viktor’s life in his hands. Almost. His hands shook harder as they took up the slack—up, down, grab, slide; never taking his hand off for a second—than they did when he was on the wall himself.

The higher Viktor got, the deeper the sick feeling in his stomach crept. What if he wasn’t strong enough? Viktor weighed more than he did, and Viktor could hold his weight even without a rig to help him. He doubted he could say the same. Up, down, grab, slide—his hands took up the slack, keeping a constant tension in the rope but not so much that he’d interfere with Viktor’s movement.

The sickness reached into his mind, and the static scattered his thoughts away, replacing them with incoherent fear. His hands started to sweat, and the panic that it’d make his hands too slippery to hold the rope weakened his legs, feeding the gluttonous circle.

He almost called out to beg Viktor to come down, but as he opened his mouth, he remembered the chalk bag hanging behind him. He hadn’t felt like he needed it while climbing, but now he made a silent prayer of thanks as he reached one hand back and coated it with chalk then the other. This bit of security regained; he found the strength to keep going. Viktor wasn’t worried. He could do this. Up, down, grab, slide.

Viktor slipped from a hold; Yuri nearly collapsed with his fear stealing everything from him that he needed for there not to be a reason to fear in the first place. Daring himself to look, he saw Viktor dangling solidly and felt little in his own body besides a firm tug against his harness with his own bodyweight doing most of the work with his arms only having to hold the rope down and locked into the bite of the rig. Oh. It really wasn’t bad at all.

He tightened his hands in preparation, trying to steady away the lingering static and found himself pulsing his fists in Viktor’s rhythm against the rope. “Lowering?”
“Yeah, go ahead.”

He nodded and took a deep breath then slowly let the rope slip through his hands.

Viktor, safely back on the ground, grinned. “That is fun.” His smile fell away as took in the chalk all over the quivering Yuri. “Are you okay?”

His head spinning even more now that he didn’t have something demanding his focus, he sank to the mats to relieve his jellied body of his own weight. “Yeah, I…”

Viktor sat down next to him. “What set you off?”

“Um, all of it. I had the rope in my hands like—like reins and your life attached to it, and my hands got sweaty and…”

He nodded and put his hand over Yuri’s chalky one. “I’m sorry. I thought this was plenty different from horses. I didn’t think about how much pressure being in that position would put on you. We can go somewhere else.”

He shook his head. “I’ll be okay. After you fell, and I felt what it was like, it wasn’t as bad. I’m just… I need a minute.”

“Take all the minutes you want.” His nose crinkled over the bridge as he caught a small smile from Yuri. “You’re not going to drop me. You’re not as out of control like that as you think.”

Flinching away, he tucked his knees to his chest. “If that’s true, I’m worse than I think.”

“Shit.” He shook his head as he looked away to think, studying the anchors at the top of one of the shorter walls. “Three, by the way. For later. So, being out of control is bad, but being in control is worse?”

“I don’t know. They both just say different shades of awful.”

“Two for the implication there.” He laced his fingers into Yuri’s despite his punishing words. “So, if being in control is bad, and being out of control is bad… You’re not going to drop me because I told you not to, and you always do what I say.”

“Yes, Viktor, but I have—”

“Just tell me. You have a permanent yes to that question.”

“Yes, Viktor. I was blanking out pretty hard there. I almost lost control entirely despite how critical it was for me not to.”

“What did you do instead?”

“Huh?”

“You obviously didn’t. What did you do to prevent that?”

“I was about to tell you I needed to stop, but then I remembered the chalk and tried that. Having a solid grip again helped me feel a little better.”

“So, you were reaching a limit which you were about to inform me of, but you also looked to the resources you had available to you and used them to back away from your limit. That sounds like a responsible method of managing your anxiety, and I approve with one change: You need to tell me
as soon as your state shifts, so I have plenty of advance warning that we’re heading somewhere that’s riskier. You still have that bad habit of trying to put off telling me things until it’s at the very limit.”

“I was just trying to not do this—to not let my issues interfere.”

“Are you really arguing in favor of breaking one of my very first orders which we’ve just learned exactly how important it is?”

“No, Viktor. You’re right. Following your orders is always first.”

“Good. All of this could have been avoided entirely if you’d just told me right from the start that you were feeling a bit nervous about doing it. We wouldn’t have even had to break the roleplay. I could have gone up just a bit and let you feel what it was like a few times until you felt confident in yourself.”

“Yes, Viktor. You’re right. I should have been more honest. I’m sorry.” He glanced around at the crowded gym. “Is there a way to tell you without announcing it to everyone nearby?”

“Yes, give me a second to think.” He hooked his index finger and pressed it to his lips. “Okay, let’s keep with a numbering system since we’re used to it. If you’re not experiencing anxiety at all, it’s a three. If a little bit, a two, significant, one. Your limit is zero of course or your safe word. Just say, “Viktor, updating you with a two, or some language to that effect. Feel free to improvise a little there. Works for you?”

“Yes, Viktor.”

“Good. If you feel okay with continuing, I feel more than safe with my life in your hands. I’m also okay with doing something else, or if you need to end this roleplay entirely, that’s okay too.”

There he goes again letting Anxiety wedge between what they both wanted. “No, Viktor. I don’t want to end it. Thank you for pausing though. It helped. Sorry for dragging along a third wheel.”

He smiled and kissed his forehead. “Anytime, beautiful. Can I say this now? The reason I picked rock climbing—the view. My god, do you not disappoint.” He grinned and tickled Yuri’s side drawing out a light laugh.

“Viktor,” he pushed against him then took advantage of the break to rest his head on Viktor’s shoulder. With the deep pain of ripping himself away, he righted himself to resume their roleplay. “You’re not half bad either. I got a little dizzy watching you. Sorry I got all weak on you from it.”

He grinned and kissed his forehead again before removing his hand. “That is the most flattering thing anyone’s ever told me.”

He snorted. “I doubt it. You probably can’t go to the dry cleaner’s without at least five offers to have your babies on the way.”

“Hmm…I have had someone recently offer me that…”

He blushed hard then smiled to himself that his anxiety had lowered enough to allow embarrassment through again. What a messed-up life he had that crushing embarrassment was a sign of normal functioning.

A few minutes later, they were back at the wall, and Yuri was back in his comfortable position of having his life in Viktor’s hands.
“Hey, Yuri. I just had a thought. I have this horse who’s a huge pain in my ass. He should be right up your alley. Want to skip cleaning some stalls and ride him for me?”

He thought they’d be waiting on more riding until they were done with this but, of course, Viktor found a way to work it in seamlessly. Anxiety saw the easy opening to the side. He could say no. Viktor wasn’t ordering as his Dom; he was asking. He could refuse without consequence. Viktor would make sure to bury his disappointment and carry on as if the question hadn’t been asked.

He smiled at the pain. “Yeah, that sounds like fun.”

“Really?”

“Yeah, it’s been a while since I’ve been on a horse, and I… missed it.” His heart clenched at just how true that was.

“I’m sorry it’s been so long.” He winced but kept his eyes on Yuri to keep track of his movements on the wall.

“It’s okay. It’s nice knowing that I did miss it. It’s easy to not notice how much something means to you until you have a chance to miss it, you know?”

“Yes, I do.” He watched Yuri study the puzzle in front of him for a minute before offering his assistance. “To your right. You’ll have to stretch a bit, but I think you can reach it.”

He shook his head as the hold popped into view. “How do you always see what I can’t? It’s like you just speak and put them on the wall because I swear, I looked everywhere and just didn’t see it.” He tried to stretch for it but was a few inches too short.

“Use your other hand to pull yourself up higher. You kinda have to do a one-arm pull-up and swing for it.”

He fixed his grip on his left hand and made the swing, grasping the hold and finding good toe holds below it to rest his shaking arms. “Thanks.”

“Nice job! And to answer your question, being on the ground is easier to see than up there.”

“Yes, but even when you were up there you didn’t have any trouble either.”

“I just go wherever I see an opening and stretch and do what it takes to reach it. You look like you’re trying to figure out which ones you can reach. Just go for the next one you see and worry about how to get there, not if you can. If you fall, you fall. I’ve got you.”

He shook his head and spotted another hold close by and gained a few more inches of wall. “It’s not just going for any opening. I know it’s not. Some openings are the wrong ones. You never take the wrong one.”

“I hit on something, didn’t I?”

“Yes, Viktor.”

“Well, you are right. Sometimes the path you choose is the wrong one, but I still think what I said is true. You have to go down some wrong paths to develop an intuition for what the right ones look like. I don’t think it’s something that can be analyzed because there are just too many variables, and often, when things are in motion, you just don’t have that time. Your gut isn’t infallible, but it’s more reliable than you think. It’s how I’ve won gold so many times.”
“The wrong path can be catastrophic.”

“Yes, it can be. So can getting yourself stuck in one place. Failing to act when necessary is just as bad as a wrong action. Actually, it’s worse. Life doesn’t stop and wait for you to figure shit out so sitting and waiting when you need to be moving ahead is always the wrong answer. At least you’ve got a chance if you’re going somewhere.”

He stared at the puzzle trying to tamp down his need to know which of the candy-colored holds was the best option and instead lurched for the first one his eye caught on. It was further than he thought it was, and he grasped nothing but air. He scrambled to regain his original hold and once steadied, he kicked off from his toes and launched himself for the same hold again without clinging to his safety net.

Grasping it with one hand, his body weight nearly ripped it from his grip as he dropped from it like lead, but he held on and pulled himself up to another hold higher up, ignoring the one to his side that would have simply left him in place. He heard Viktor’s cheers from much further away than they should be with his racing heart drowning them out.

He kept on as Viktor had advised for a few more holds, gaining height much faster than he had his way until he overestimated his power for another distant hold or underestimated his fatigue and snapped down from the wall onto Viktor’s hold of the rope.

“Good job, Yuri! Are you tired, or do you want to keep going some more?”

“Um,” he swallowed against his thundering heart, “I think… I could use a break. Lower.”

“Lowering.” Viktor slowly brought him down until he was on the ground. He had to restrain himself from the pouncing praise he clearly wanted to give. “You did so well! See? It’s a bit riskier, but it’s also—” He studied Yuri. “You’re shaking. Are you okay?”

“Yeah, I’m fine. It’s just… a bit scary up there, and your way is a tad bit terrifying.”

Viktor narrowed his eyes. “Terrifying in the ‘I’ve never done this and heights are a sane thing to be scared of’ way or…”

“Um, first for sure, heights are not my favorite thing, and maybe some of the second too. I’m about a two.”

He nodded. “Are you having fun?”

He smiled and nodded. “Yeah, it’s a rush. Terrifying fun.”

Viktor laughed and touched his finger to Yuri’s nose. “Good.”

With both of them starting to get the hang of this rock climbing thing, they spent more time reaching closer to the top and less time dangling from the end of a rope. After a solid hour of non-stop shaking from anxiety, terror, and exhilaration, Yuri felt as though he’d been tossed through the wash cycle. Still, that top of the wall was getting tantalizingly close, so he pressed on.

He glanced down at Viktor, so tiny from over four stories up, and instantly regretted his decision as his brain went woozy and his courage to reach higher waned. “Viktor, lower!” He had to use every bit of his instructor’s voice to be heard from so far away and hoped it was enough. The echo back of Viktor’s reply swept relief over him as he pushed away from the wall.

Back on the ground, he laid right down onto the mats, sprawled out on the sweet, solid ground,
unconcerned for any impression he may be giving off of having a torrid love affair with how he embraced it.

Viktor chuckled at him face-planted into the mats, sprawled into a stunning rendition of a starfish. “Psyched yourself out, huh?”

“Yeah. It’s so high. So fucking high. My arms hurt more just thinking about it.”

He sat down next to him and took his hand. “You’ve been shoveling all day too. May I?”

He puzzled through the exhaustion for a moment to figure out what he was asking permission to do before he remembered that information was hardly necessary. “Go ahead.”

Viktor began massaging his hand, smiling to himself as he paused from time to time to lay feathered strokes over his fingers as he examined them. “Are you ready for some food?”

“Yes!” He’d never been more ready for food. “Oh, oops. Google says I’m supposed to be on my best behavior on a first date. I don’t think anything I’m doing right now qualifies.”

He chuckled. “It’s a great first date. The point is to get to know each other. We can’t do that if we’re pretending to be someone else.” He stepped over to Yuri’s other side to get his other arm rather than making him move. “You googled how to go on a first date?”

“Well, yeah. I didn’t know how to do it. Oh, but what about our bet? Neither of us reached the top. I can keep going in a few minutes.”

“No, you’re already overworked. We can just have a goal for next time.” Pausing to grab Yuri’s attention, he kissed the back of his hand, claiming all the seduction that every cheesy romance flick failed to capture with the gesture. How? They were in the middle of a sweaty, clattering gym, and his hand probably tasted like chalk, and yet, the giddy smile Viktor tried to contain ensured Yuri’s heart could do nothing but melt.

Viktor gave his hand a little tug to wipe him from the mats. “Come on. Let’s go eat.”

After a delicious and relaxing dinner filled with wine and lighthearted chatter about the most appropriate of first-date topics, Viktor drove them home and right up to Yuri’s door, which he looked ridiculously happy about as he ordered—requested him to wait.

“You know, I can open the door.” Despite his words, he took Viktor’s offered hand.

“Yes, I know that. I was just raised that’s how a man treats his date. Gender roles are still pretty solidly in place in Russia, so just consider me a bit old-fashioned when it comes to dating. I know you’re not a woman, but it’s more about how I was raised to behave, and since you’re my date, it’s what I do. Do you mind it terribly?”

“No, it’s okay.” He smiled as they headed to the front door. “Thank you.”

Viktor stopped at the door and brushed his fingers over Yuri’s cheek, smiling at the blush it drew. “No, thank you. I had a wonderful time with you tonight. I hope you did as well.” His fingers moved up to nibble at the ends of Yuri’s hair as he licked his kiss-burned lips and leaned in.

Was he going to kiss him? His heart racing at the prospect, he found himself gripping Viktor’s hand for support. “Uh, yeah, I—yeah, I did. I had a lot of fun with you.”

He leaned in all the way but bypassed his mouth and landed his lips next to his ear instead. “Little
break time to ask you if you’re happy with how everything went.”

“Yes, Viktor. Did—did I do okay? I was trying to be how I would have been then, but it was too hard to keep pretending to be nervous around you. Except sometimes. Like now.”

He chuckled. “Oh no. My date was comfortable enough around me to relax and enjoy himself. How will I ever recover?”

He laughed. “Okay, point taken.”

“I’m making you nervous?”

“A little. Just right now. I don’t know if—what you’re going to do.”

“Good.” He pulled back slightly and paused to watch him, then leaned back down to kiss his cheek. “Goodnight, Yuri. I look forward to tomorrow.”

He grasped Viktor’s hand harder, nowhere near ready to let him go. “Me—me too.” With a deep force of will, he relaxed his grip and smiled. “Thank you, Viktor. Sweet dreams.”

“If you’re wishing it, I’m certain they will be.” He pressed his thumb to Yuri’s lips and with a restraint equal to the force Yuri used to release him, he smiled and stepped back. “Sweet dreams, Yuri.” He turned and headed for his car.

Forcing himself inside because watching him leave would certainly lead to him clutching to him and begging for relief, he was smacked in the face with a house filled with flowers.

Phichit was on his phone in the thick of them on the couch with a smile and an arched brow as he looked up. “I take it everything went well.” He chuckled at Yuri’s bewildered expression. “He’s something else, isn’t he?”

“Viktor?” He took in the wild mix of flowers spilling over the living room and kitchen and leading to what was certainly a filled bedroom that put his initial bouquet to shame with his jaw dragging.

“Who else?”

Seizing a fist full of flowers, he turned and ran back outside. “Wait! Viktor!”

Viktor’s brake lights lit and his car abruptly stopped just barely before he jumped out of the car. “Yuri! What’s—”

He thrust the flowers into his hand as he leapt into a kiss to his cheek. “Thank you.”

Blinking at the flowers then at Yuri, Viktor slowly smiled. “For me?”

“Yes.”

“But I gave them to you.”

“That means they’re mine now, right?”

“Yes.”

“Then for you. Sorry, it’s so small compared to what you gave.”

Viktor smiled as he counted the flowers then pulled one from the bunch and handed it back to him.
“Do you know why Russians consider giving an even number of flowers to be bad luck?”

“No.”

“The gift symbolizes the relationship and things that are even are complete. Whole. Finished. I hope to never be even with you.”

“You want me to remain indebted to you forever?”

“You’ve got that wrong. I’m the one who’s indebted to you.”

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(55) Yuri stood in the middle of the outdoor arena, tickling Avos’s lip as he flapped it and bobbed his head as if it were the greatest game ever while Viktor adjusted the jumps to be easy from any angle the crazy horse decided to take them at. He dropped his hand, and Avos nudged him until he resumed their game. Smiling, he grabbed his head to pull him in for a forehead kiss before tickling his lip again.

Most horses don’t like having their heads grabbed like that, but Avos never minded. He thrived on chaotic energy, and the unexpected was never a source of worry but delight. That’s why he and Viktor never got along. Too much alike, though, Viktor would be offended if he ever heard that one. But he wasn’t wrong. ‘Not riding’ Avos was the closest thing he knew to following Viktor’s orders. He never knew what either of them were going to do next, but as long as he focused on staying with them, it was always safe and exhilarating.

Still, the sudden jump to the outdoor and the full course laid out in it told him that Viktor’s plans were hurtling toward a place his anxiety wanted no part of.

“Viktor?” His voice wavered over the open ground. “Don’t forget to square the oxers and take down the triple bar.”

Viktor came over with his head cocked. “You think I’d forget?”

“No, Viktor. I was just… reminding you. I guess.”

“You need some control here, or you need me to take it from you?”

His face scrunched as he thought of how to voice the churning inside him. “It’s—nevermind. It was just something to say. Please forget about it. I trust you to do it.”

He glanced back at the course then back to Yuri, his mouth drawn in thought. “What if I didn’t?”

“Huh?”

He shrugged. “I doubt it’d make any difference to this horse. He’s gonna jump it as if it were a five-footer no matter what it is. A fly would bother him more than a hidden back rail. So, what if I didn’t square them?”

“But—but that’s dangerous if he takes them wrong.”

“Did you hear what I just said?”

“Yes, Viktor. I still think it’s too risky even with him.”

“I think it’s still within a tolerable level of risk, so what if I left it, Yuri? What would that be for
you?"

He stared at the ground trying to find the yes Viktor he was always looking for, but those were the only words that wouldn’t come within his grasp. He cringed. “A limit.”

“What kind of limit?”

“Zero. I’m so—”

“Never apologize for your honesty. I have no intention to increase the risk here anyway when we’re already playing in the upper limits. I was just curious about that reaction. Thank you for clarifying it for me. Did you actually think I might overlook that one, or was it just something you needed to say?”

“Just something I needed to say. I know you take care of your horses.”

He smiled and took Yuri’s chin in his hand. “I take care of you too.” Dropping his hand, he resumed that touch of distance they both yearned to overcome that marked their roleplay. “I hope you don’t mind my unconventional training techniques. I’m certain you’ll do just fine. Just, if you feel him setting up to take the arena fence, don’t let him.”

His fists balled against what that order meant. Taking control of him, if only for a moment. “You think he’ll listen to just a leg?”

“I think he’ll listen to your leg. If he does ignore it, bail. I’d rather have a loose horse than a loose horse with a rider.”

He nodded once and stood by the saddle, left leg bent back at the knee. Viktor grabbed it and tossed him up then unhooked the cavesson and sent Avos off with a pat on his butt.

Avos snorted in his freedom with his bounding trot then bolted into a gallop, the rhythm syncopated with his carefree bucks. With more obstacles in their way, Avos wriggled and skewed through his chosen path, the sun flaring off his coat like kicked up embers. He was really feeling good today. He must have missed this as much as he did.

Yuri followed his every move, his hips and knees absorbing every jarring jolt while the pressure from his legs matched his movements so instantaneously, a small doubt slipped in about who was leading who.

Avos headed for an easy vertical, but he was at his usual chaotic angle that would have Yuri’s knee blowing kisses to the wooden standard holding the jump poles. If he was lucky. He could also hit it hard enough to knock the standard over and into their path.

His hips shifting over, his leg pressed against his side. Avos shifted under him to rebalance his weight and move away from the pressure until a nice, centered entrance to the jump opened up in front of them.

Viktor cheered as Avos cantered away from the jump. “Praise! Yuri! Praise him! That was so good! You corrected him so nicely! You—you corrected him. Yuri!” He pressed his hand over his mouth as his eyes watered. “Yuri, I’m so proud of you. So crazily, ridiculously proud. I didn’t even have to tell you. I have to break for just a moment to tell you, you’ve earned another huge reward later. Where are you at for your anxiety?”

“A half.” His hands pressed into Avos’s withers to steady himself from the shrouding dizziness.
Viktor whistled and reached into his pocket. “Come here, boy. I’ve—”

“Wait. Give me a second. I—I can—”

“Good, Yuri. Stay just like that. Kneel in your mind and wait. It’ll pass.”

He fisted hunks of Avos’s mane, pulsing his hands against his grip, leaning onto the support of his powerful neck. *Stay. Kneel.*

“You did the right thing. He was choosing a bad angle, and you did what you knew was best and put him on the right path. I’m impressed that you did it, and I’m impressed that he responded so beautifully. He trusts you, Yuri and you earned that.”

“Not that. Please. Please don’t say that.”

“Which part? That he trusts you?”

He nodded.

“But it’s the truth, and you know it as well as I do.”

“Please. I can’t think about that. If I do, I can’t do this.”

“You’re wrong. You can do it because I told you to, and you’re always strong enough for that. If you’re not feeling that the first day back, I understand. We can stop for today and try again tomorrow.”

“It’s not that. It’s that I keep doing this. I keep letting my stupid issues interfere with everything! I’m sick of it. It was my stupid issues that made you give up what you wanted in the first place; it was my stupid issues that made me hold myself back from you and make you think that I could ever choose Phichit over you; and it was my stupid issues that ruined everything I was trying to achieve in the first place, and I’m so fucking sick of it!

“I’m sick of you having to keep pushing everything else away for them, and I’m sick of feeling like this! So, please just ignore them for right now. You’ve already done more than enough to help me cope with them, so just let me pretend for five minutes that they’re not the biggest part of me. Please, Viktor. Let me give this to you the way we both want it.” He blinked hard against the tears he was sick of holding back and sick of shedding.

“They’re not the biggest part of you. Not even close.”

“Well, I can’t feel that when all I see is all the endless things they break. Please let me pretend as much as possible that they don’t exist. Just for right now. I’ll safeword if I need your help. I know you see it as a failure to push me to that point, but that’s what I need right now. Just give me every second I can manage to hold on to before they take over completely.”

“Okay, Yuri. I still want you to keep me updated on where you’re at. Speaking of…”

“One and a half.”

“Good. I’m glad yelling at me seemed to help you over your dizzy spell a bit.” He gave him a small smile.

“I’m sorry. I wasn’t really yelling at you. More like yelling at the universe. You just happen to be at the center of it.”
He gave him that crinkly smile. “Just happen to be, huh?”

“Yeah, something like that.”

“How’s he feel for you?”

He took a few breaths to right his head and himself and released his grasp on Avos’s mane even though it didn’t bother Avos either way. “Good. He’s the most incredible horse I’ve… ridden.”

He beamed. “I’m so thrilled to hear you say that. You ride so beautifully too. I’m ashamed that I hired someone of your talent to clean stalls instead of ride. Actually, I’ve really got more stable hands than I need right now. How would you like a different position in the stable? One… a little closer to mine.”

“Closer to yours… Viktor, are you trying to use my position as an opportunity to seduce me?”

“Man, I can’t say anything without you calling me out.”

“Is that an admission of guilt? You didn’t deny it…”

“I am a terribly guilty man when it comes to you, Yuri Katsuki.”

Girding himself against a battle he held buried the best he could, he braced the right side of his body, creating a wall that guided Avos away from his meandering and brought them closer to Viktor.

He paused; his own smile matching Viktor’s swelled with pride as he watched him. “Then I accept. Let me show you what I can really do so you can best use me as you see fit.”

“Yuri, are you—”

(56) “Watch me, please. I’m doing this for you.” He cued Avos to trot and guided him to the corner to pick up a circle at a canter. With the way Viktor had trained them both, it was nothing more than a blink’s change in timing to go from following to leading. He’d brought him as close as he could possibly get so that change that was everything in his head was nothing in its execution.

Avos accepted the small change in the timing of the pressure as though it were the natural course of their game. Harmony: a horse’s basic nature down to their core. In his lifetime of riding, if he had to pick one word to describe them and what he learned and what he got from them, that would be it. Their safety was in group harmony. As long as you proved yourself a worthy member, they’d do anything they could to stay with you.

Some horses welcomed new members freely, but Yuri never truly understood those having no concept himself of seeing the world as a generally safe place. His own mind saw danger everywhere and had to be coaxed past it all. Most decided early on that he wasn’t worth the effort and either passed him by or derided him for his weakness. Working with horses that needed that coaxing was the closest thing he knew to truly understanding another until Viktor.

Avos didn’t need as much coaxing as most of the horses he worked with. He just liked being messed with as little as possible. He trusted his own guidance more than his rider’s and never doubted his own ability. He was clever and courageous and bold and if Yuri could just focus on finding that harmony with him…

He let out an easy breath, and as he did so, the side of his body solidified into a wall and eased the pressure into Avos’s side like a gentle lean. He liked that slow build of pressure more than the quick, well-timed cues Viktor gave. Some horses are naturally more sensitive than others. Some Yuri had
ridden even needed the rider’s breath to remain perfectly steady to keep them calm. Avos wasn’t quite that bad, but it seemed like he appreciated the cue feeling like a suggestion more than a command.

Easing him over a little more, they sailed over the dead center of the first vertical then bypassed the square oxer to take the bounce combo to the right instead. Avos overjumped the entrance jump as usual, but the tight collection of his energy required to hop right back out again over the second jump dampened his efforts to just the height necessary to clear it. Yuri cooed soft praises to him as he used both free hands to stroke his neck and turned him for the vertical set up in the nesting dolls.

Avos’s ears flicked back to listen to his soothing words. He had no idea what they meant, but he listened for the tone and relaxed as he read the emotions Yuri spoke with it. Avos took the jump with only a minor excess of caution, and Yuri felt his relief on the other side as he landed, spared from the unnecessarily harsh landing.

Their emotions beginning to sync, Yuri’s static fell away to a dull roar in the back of his mind while a bittersweet thrill surged ahead. It couldn’t last. Eventually, he’d hit his wall. But for right now; for five minutes, he could pretend that this was nothing but a simple joy again.

The rings on the noseband of the cavesson jingled on the landing of another decent jump. Without reins to support his cues, he kept to the easy paths and wide turns, but Avos responded much better than he would have guessed and seemed to find the same thrill Yuri did in their somewhat wobbly course.

He picked up speed and with little to check him, Yuri had no choice but to slow him as much as possible with his seat and go with the rest, hoping for the best, trusting Avos to get them safely over.

He laughed as they sailed from a long takeoff over the water jump which already required a long jump on its own. Viktor couldn’t have picked a more appropriate name for this horse. He landed with just a back hoof in the shallow pool which was pretty impressive for the span he’d tried for.

“You idiot. Not even you can clear a distance like that. Get up a little closer next time.” His instructions fell on ears deaf to the meaning but picking up every hint of amusement. “You know avos’ needs some brains to back it up too. We can’t rely entirely on luck.” He patted his neck and turned him for a narrow barrel.

Yuri always liked the narrow jumps. They said so much about the connection between the horse and rider. It was easier, inviting even, to bypass it with a simple sidestep. The fact that the horse chose to take it anyway proved how willing he was to put in that effort for his rider. Viktor and Toska never took them any way but dead center.

Without reins to steady him and especially with his penchant for crooked jumps and strange angles, he wasn’t certain if Avos would take it, but there was little risk to trying. If he didn’t want to, he’d just run right past it.

He didn’t.

He made a nice, neat little jump right over the middle then slowly downshifted through his gaits back to a walk with Yuri restricting his seat as much as possible to signal the end of their trip. Even that bundle of energy must be getting tired by now. He brought him over to Viktor, beaming.

“You’re so good!”
He glanced back at the small crowd that had formed to watch, likely expecting certain disaster, and were now cheering—with one exception—then turned back to Viktor before it could sink into his head. “He’s an amazing horse.”

“With you. How the ever-loving hell did you ride him like that?”

“He just had a few glitches to work out. He’s such a good boy,” he crooned as he stroked his neck with a trembling hand.

“You look… how did it feel?”

“I’ll pay for this later, but for right now… It just feels amazing. Thank you, Viktor. He’s the most amazing animal I’ve ever gotten the chance to ride.” He leaned down to convey the praise to Avos in a language he could understand, nibbling his fingers through the base of his mane. He sat up and tried to keep the regret from his face. “I can teach you what you need to do, so you don’t need me for him.” He patted his neck again with a forced smile. This was the right path for him. “You found Toska’s successor after all.”

“The very fact that you were the one to figure him out only proves which one of us deserves this horse. I might be able to mimic you, but I won’t have that connection you do with him. You’re his rider.”

“I’ll never be the rider he deserves.”

“He and I both strongly disagree.”

Avos, bored of just standing around, wandered off to the water jump and dropped his muzzle for a drink, his lips sucking up the water with deep gulps.

“Ew, Avos. Seriously? Wait five minutes, and I’ll get you some clean water.”

Avos stepped forward, fully in the pool and started pawing at the water. Yuri tried to make him go forward, but he liked his plans much more.

“Avos! No!” Viktor raced over waving his arms at him to get him to move, but Avos dropped into the water.

Stepping off as Avos’s side hit the ground, Yuri stood watching as he rolled over the saddle, grunting in pleasure. “You idiot.” He glanced over at Viktor and smiled. “At least he’s not afraid of water.”

Viktor stood by Yuri’s side admitting defeat, cringing as he watched Avos have way too much fun with his shenanigans. “Ugh, the saddle, Avos. It’s brand new. Did you have to?”

Avos replied by standing up and shaking like a dog to remove the water, flinging it all over them as the saddle vibrated on his back.

Yuri wiped his face off with his hand then glanced at Viktor, his perfect white breeches splattered with dirty water, with a smile. “Looks like I’ll be cleaning some tack in the near future?”

Viktor laughed and shook his head when Avos came back over to see what game they’d be playing next. “Yeah, looks like it.”

Yuri clipped the lunge line back on and headed back in to clean him up.
Meeting him at the gate, Yura’s glare softened with a touch of curiosity. “No reins?”

He shook his head. “I can’t. I can’t touch them.”

He studied him a moment further then deepened his scowl. “Good. At least you know which one of you has the brains.” He stepped back to let him through.

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Chapter End Notes

Artist again is Clarinda. Check it out on her [Tumblr](https:// clarinda.tumblr.com/)

**Spotify**
53. Make Believe by Les Friction
54. Rough Draft by Sarah Solovoy
55. Hold On by Final Child
56. Wild Horses by Bishop Briggs
Chapter 25

Chapter Summary

Where do we land?

Chapter Notes

!NSFW Warning on the art! The first is mine, and it's nsfw but not graphic nsfw. No bits and pieces shown but clear what's happening. (And has been waiting since January to see the light of day.) The second is Clarinda's (also waiting for forever for me to get back to posting) and is decidedly, graphically NSFW. Thank you again, Clarinda!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

They stood outside Yuri’s front door, Viktor’s hand on the small of Yuri’s back as he pulled him in with a hand on his chin and his intense stare.

“Sweet dreams, Yuri.” He left a lingering kiss on his cheek as he held him tight.

After prying themselves apart, Yuri begged him for more with one last squeeze of his hand then let go. “Goodnight, Viktor.”

Viktor left after yet another amazing date, this time a hot air balloon ride followed by dinner at a place that required suits. Yuri forced himself inside and knelt on the floor in front of the couch, faceplanting into it next to Phichit who was playing a video game. Yuri groaned and screamed quietly into the cushion.

Phichit laughed. “Having fun?” His fingers mashed over the buttons in a rapid-fire attack.

“He’s so hot. Viciously hot. Sadistically hot. I’m gonna die, Peach.”

“I don’t think anyone’s ever died from having a too-hot boyfriend before. But he would be the one to have that disorder named after him.”

He groaned again and tried to find the strength to lift his head to breathe again but couldn’t, instead just turning to the side. “You don’t understand. It’s been two weeks plus a whole month before that one night, and all we did was kiss. We spend every day together and go out every night, and I can’t even touch him. I don’t know how much longer he plans to keep this up for.”

“You big baby. I’m sure he’s as bad off as you. It won’t be too much longer. Go jerk off before your balls explode and get some sleep.”

Turning back into the cushion, he wailed, “I can’t.”

“What do you mean you can’t? Of course, you can. You do know how to do it, right?”

“He won’t let me.”
He paused the game. “He won’t let you?”

“It was his last order before we started this. I’m banned from it until further notice.”

“Seriously? That’s… That’s just mean.”

“I know! Ugh, I hate this the most. He’s just so unfair looking like that and being all sweet and perfect, and I can’t do anything about it.”

“So, why are you going along with it?”

“Because when he does let me…”

“Go ahead. Finish that sentence. I’m very curious here to understand why someone would let someone else torture them.”

“I don’t know how to finish it. It’s like… every bit of agony turns to pleasure but magnified by a hundred. And there’s pride too. That you were able to endure it; that you were able to please him. And once you get used to enduring it… knowing you can endure something like that, you feel more confident that you can handle everything else in life too. The world feels a little less intimidating.”

“That’s a pretty freakin’ deep answer to why you let him give you blue balls.” He started laughing, the gentle sound like the chime of a bell on a shop door offsetting his teasing. “I didn’t know you were so inspired by your balls, Yuri.”

He picked up the pillow that had flopped onto his head and tossed it in Phichit’s direction. “Shut up. I’m going to my room.” He pried himself off the couch away from the still laughing Phichit.

“Are you going to write a poem? ‘Lessons from the balls of blue. Oh, how I yearn—’ ”

“Shut up. I’ve got training to do.”

“Training? You worked out this morning.”

“Yeah, not that kind of training.”

“Well, what kind of training are you doing this late at night?”

“More orders from Viktor.”

“Huh?”

“I have to be… ready for him.”

“Oooh… right. Ready for his horse cock, so it doesn’t send you to the hospital.”

“Oh my god. You don’t ever shut up, do you?” He picked up the other pillow on the end of the couch and threw it at him.

Catching it with a grin, he tossed it right back. “Never. How very considerate of him. But I thought you can’t get off.”

“I can’t.”

“Oh shit. Okay, yeah, that’s pretty freakin’ sadistic.”
“Right?”

“Okay, okay. I’ll stop laughing at your pain. That is some anti-Geneva convention level torture there.” He waved Yuri off and resumed his game. “I’ll pray for your balls!”

“Thanks. They need it. I would die a thousand deaths at his hands and thank him for every one.” He pointed his finger at him from behind his back as he walked down the hallway. “If you’re going to mock me, get it right. I wouldn’t write shitty poetry about my balls.”

“I’ll look out for your Pulitzer in the mail!”

He closed his door and locked it just in case then pulled out his dildo and the lube and called Viktor’s number. Once the heavy silence picked up indicating Viktor was there and listening, he put the phone on speaker and set it next to him. Viktor wouldn’t speak or give him any indication if he was pleasuring himself alongside him, but Yuri knew he’d be listening for every sound of his obedience.

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At the end of his shift, Yuri stopped by Viktor’s horses to say goodnight before going home to get cleaned up for their date. He grabbed some cookies from the box and went to Toska first since he had both seniority and the most voracious appetite for them. Toska still had his nose buried in the hay as he came over.

Yuri frowned. “Hey, buddy, I’ve got cookies.”

Toska lifted his head and stretched out to take the treat then bobbed his head in satisfaction before dropping his nose back to the hay.

He stepped into the stall and pressed his ear against his ribcage, listening for the low rumblings and high-pitched pings of a healthy digesting horse. He called Toska back up then lifted his lip and pressed against his gum and counted the time before the color returned and checked his pulse and respiration.

Satisfied that all was well, he frowned again and went out to check the meter on his waterer and compared it to that morning’s number on the chart on the front of his stall and checked it against his average.

He watched him eat another minute then went to hand out the rest of the cookies to the other impatient horses before stopping in at Viktor’s office where he could always be found if he wasn’t with his horses or in his house with Yuri.

“Hey, Viktor? I don’t see any major cause for alarm, but… Toska seemed a bit off just now.”

He jumped up, stricken with worry, and headed for his stall. “What do you mean?”

“I gave him a cookie as I usually do, and I had to tell him I had it before he came over. He’s eating though, and he’s been drinking too. His gut sounds fine, and capillary refill is good. Pulse and respiration are also good. I didn’t temp him yet. I wanted to tell you first.”

He nodded and stopped in the tack room for the first aid kit. Toska nickered upon seeing him and came up to greet him.

Viktor smiled and patted his neck. “Hey, malysh. Yuri says you’re not feeling well. You seem alright to me.”
“I think you’re more enticing than the cookie was.”

He smiled. “Is that right? You do love me more than the cookies at least a smidge?”

“I don’t know. Maybe I caught him off-guard, and I’m reading too much into it.”

“I hope so.” He pulled out the thermometer and lube then handed Yuri the bag and stepped into the stall to take Toska’s temperature. “Temp is good. He always runs a bit to the warm side.” He ran his hands over Toska’s body then stood back and frowned. “Calling the vet over nothing but a three-second delay in getting a cookie is a bit ridiculous but…” He put his finger over his lips as he thought then looked to Yuri. “You felt like he was off?”

“I’m not certain now. He looks fine.”

“Then. You felt that pang that says something’s wrong?”

“Yeah.”

He pulled out his phone and dialed. After a brief conversation, Viktor thanked the vet and hung up. “She says just to watch him for now and call if anything changes. I’m sorry, I’m going to have to cancel for tonight.”

“We don’t have to cancel. We can have a date right here.”

“You don’t mind? It’s going to be one very boring date.”

“I’m not leaving you here to worry by yourself, and I always enjoy any time I spend with you. Should I place an order for takeout?”

He smiled and stroked his cheek. “Yeah, that sounds good. Thanks.”

“Should we pull his food?”

He thought a moment. “Pulling it takes away a reliable indicator of how he’s doing, but letting him add more if he’s blocked is a bad idea… Let’s pull it to be safe but check his interest with a nibble when we check vitals.”

“Sounds good.”

Yuri placed the order then called down to security to notify them while Viktor took the food away from an indignant Toska.

They ate and talked and laughed while keeping an eye on Toska and checking his vitals every half an hour. Yuri tried his best to keep Viktor distracted, which he seemed to be pretty successful at, but he could tell that Viktor was also doing his best not to let his worry show.

A few hours into their watch, Yuri glanced around the stall. “He should have pooped by now, shouldn’t he?”

Viktor’s eyes squeezed shut. “Fuck.” He pulled out his phone. “Can you get his lead?”

He hopped up while Viktor made another call to the vet and brought Toska out to the aisle. Viktor came out, still on the phone, and held up a finger to order him to wait while he disappeared down the aisle. He returned a moment later with a white syringe. He pulled the cap off and stuck the tip into the corner of Toska’s mouth.
“Is the vet coming out?”

“No, she doesn’t think it’s serious yet, and she’s out on other calls right now. We’re hoping the Banamine and a good walk will take care of it.” He traded the empty syringe for the lead. “Come on, malysh.” He gave his horse a quick kiss and headed for the arena.

“I’ll get the lights.”

“Thank you, zolotse.”

(57) He watched Viktor walk around the indoor arena, his focus fixed on his task as if a single breath wrong would blow it all away. His hand trembled white around the lead clenched in it.

“Viktor? He’s going to be okay.”

He nodded imperceptibly as he passed by, his eyes still holding up his brittle determination.

What could he do for him? Nothing really. Colic ranged from a simple belly ache to fatal and could traverse that span in a blink. Most cases were minor and nothing to worry about. With Toska’s vitals looking good and his lack of distress, a bit of walking to unblock him was the most likely cure, and the vet seemed to think so as well. But that lurking worst case made colic a curse word among horse owners and caused more anxiety and sleepless nights than any other condition.

Yuri’d known three that were lost to colic. How many had Viktor known? Likely about the same. It was no wonder that Viktor had begun to obsess over the frailty of his world. For as big and strong as they were, horses were uniquely fragile, and after losing the safety of a home, Viktor’s whole life had been wrapped up in this horse; all his comfort and companionship relying on an animal for whom a broken leg was a fatal condition.

After watching Viktor grind his worry into the arena footing for fifteen minutes, Yuri came over and put his hand over Viktor’s on the lead. “Let me, please? We don’t know how long he’s going to need this for so switching out seems like a good idea before either of us are exhausted. Plus, we can give him a little rest and check his vitals when we switch.”

He watched him a moment, not breathing, then looked at Toska and back to Yuri before letting out his breath. “Okay. That sounds like a good plan.”

They did a quick check and offered him some hay and water before Yuri started up his laps around the ring, willing him to get better with every step. “Come on, buddy. Please get better. He’s doing everything he can to make sure you make it past thirty, so he’s nowhere near ready to let you go. You’ve still got one more Olympic gold to go for, and I think you can easily make another season. Probably the one after that too.

“I can tell how much you love competing with him, and there’s still millions of blades of grass for you to eat. You know the moment you even hint that you’re weary of competing he’s going to just let you sit in a field and enjoy the sunshine the rest of your days and be the prettiest, most expensive lawn ornament out there. You don’t want to miss that.

“You got so lucky that he chose you. You have no idea. I’ve known so many horses that wished they had someone like Viktor to take care of them. You know the only thing he really wants is for you to stay by his side for as long as you possibly can, so please give him that?”

He prattled on as they wandered. Words always came easily when he was talking to them. The gentle flicks of their ears showing they were listening without ever caring how much sense he made and instead just enjoyed the soothing cadence of whatever he spilled always inspired easy rambling.
Viktor came over with a soft smile as he took the lead. “What were you saying to him?”

“Nonsense mostly. Distractions for the both of us. Telling him about the millions of blades of grass out there waiting for him to get better.”

“You know what inspires him.” He chuckled. “He’d jump a hundred fences for a single peppermint after and think he got a fair deal out of it.” He turned to watch Toska, his face screwed up, holding back his tears. “You know, I went to pick him out, and all the other babies went off to play after checking me out. He just stayed with me, nibbling on my hair. Even when I walked around to see the rest some more, he followed me. He knew he was mine before I did. I got so lucky that he chose me.”

“Funny. I just told him the same about you.” He grabbed Viktor’s hand and squeezed it. “He’s going to be okay. The vet’s not worried.”

“I am.”

“I know. Me too.” He made the rounds to recheck Toska then started to head back to the benches, but Viktor grabbed his hand.

“Thank you for staying with me. Having you here helps.”

He smiled and squeezed his hand back. “I’ll be here as long as you need me.”

Hours into the night, Toska began kicking and biting his belly. Viktor stopped, disheveled and defeated by worry, unable to face the reality of his best friend’s worsening condition.

Seeking out Yuri who came to join him at his side, he snapped out of it enough to pull the phone from his pocket and dial. The call to the vet only replaced his stupor with agitation as he received obviously not good news.

“She’s still out on calls. Apparently, it’s been back to back emergencies. She still thinks he’s okay until she can make it out, but I don’t know. Should I just bring him to the clinic? I’d hate to put him through the stress of a trailer ride when he’s in pain, but he’s getting worse… I don’t know what the best call is right now.”

“Yes, you do. You always know. Tell me what to do.”

He froze, holding all movement as he put every bit of energy he had to making his decision. His eyes fixed on Yuri with all the clarity and authority of an order. “Go get the trailer ready.”

He ran off to the office to grab Viktor’s keys to the truck, flipping on the light to the parking lot on his way out of the stable. He opened the tailgate and pulled the truck out then backed it up to the trailer. Hearing the jaws lock in place, he ran out to finish hitching it up, leaving the truck door ajar. Pitching the chocks into the tack room, he slammed the tailgate shut and chugged the trailer over to the arena doors.

Toska was on the ground, Viktor tugging desperately at his halter.

Viktor looked up, anguished, as he ran over. “He went down, and I can’t get him up! Grab a rope!”

Yuri raced back to the tack room in the trailer and grabbed one of the lunge lines. Unwinding it as he bolted back, he tossed the loose end around Toska’s hindquarters. Viktor grabbed it and the lead still attached to his head while Yuri held the other end of the lunge line. Together, they put all their strength to hauling up an animal they had no hope of lifting without his help.
“Please, Toska. Please, malysh. Please get up. We’re going to get you some help, but you’ve gotta get up and get on the trailer. Please, malysh. Please get up.” Viktor’s boots slipped across the footing as he leaned back against the ropes as hard as he could. “Please, malysh. I don’t care if you never go over another fence again if you just get up this one time.”

Toska groaned and fell onto his side.

“Yuri.” Viktor’s tears spilled down his cheeks, horror dragging through his simple plea.

Fix him—that’s what he’d wanted to order but knew would be unfair to do. But it was there in the cry of his name. He always did as Viktor ordered, so if he just ordered it, Yuri could somehow make it happen, right? Right? Couldn’t he? Just fix him. The simplest and hardest of orders. One Viktor didn’t even realize he could give.

He hadn’t done it in over eight years, and he’d never done it without supervision. If he messed up, he could make things worse. Even kill him right then and there.

There was a chance the vet could still make it in time, and she was a far safer option. If he messed up… He stared at Viktor, their mutual horror billowing around them. If he messed up—If he didn’t.

Yes, Viktor.

“Tell me you have a tube and Epsom salt.”

Viktor clung to his confusion as his only hope with fate looking settled a moment ago. “A tube? Like to tube him?”

“Yes. I can do it.”

“Yuri, that’s so risky. If you go down the wrong pipe, you’ll end up in his lungs, and if you’re pouring water in…”

“I know how.”

“But we don’t even know for sure what it is. Colic can be any number of things.”

“I can rule out reflux and relieve any gas distension with the tube, and those are the major risk factors for adding water to him. I could do a rectal exam to confirm my suspicions, but that’s adding more risk, and I don’t have sedatives to make it safer or first aid if there’s a tear. But I’m pretty sure it’s an impaction in the pelvic flexure with his signs and where he’s been tender to the touch. If we get the Epsom salt into him, it’ll flood his intestine with water and hopefully break it up and help him move it along. If you have it—if you trust me…”

“Yes. Yes, to both. The Epsom salt is in the house. I’ll go up and get it. What else do you need?”

“Two buckets; warm water, not hot, in one of them. Lube, towels, hand sanitizer, electrolytes, Epsom salt, the tube, and a funnel or a pump. Put the tube in the bucket with warm water when you bring it down.”

Viktor handed him the lead then sprinted off.

He knelt and cradled Toska’s head in his lap, trying to prevent him from rolling. The last thing he needed was a hunk of food twisting his intestines up. “Just hang in there. I’m going to get you feeling better soon, okay?” Uncertainty made his words taste like lies. He sat listening to the still rumbling engine rather than tell more. Please hurry, Viktor. Before his courage gives out.
Viktor returned, red-faced and gasping, water splashing onto him from the bucket. “What should I do?”

“Keep him calm.” He moved out of the way for Viktor to take his spot at Toska’s head then cleaned his hands and removed the tube, now softened from the warm water, so he could mix up the solution of electrolytes and Epsom salt.

He lubed up the tube and grasped Toska’s nostril, rubbing lightly to introduce the incoming sensation. “Hey, buddy. Just stay calm just like that. It feels funny, but it doesn’t hurt much. That’s a good boy.” He slipped the tube into his nose while Viktor took over the gentle words. He eased the tube up then down toward his throat and paused at the entrance. “Swallow for me, buddy.” He stroked his throat to encourage him.

Toska flipped his head up a bit then swallowed the tube down, trying to clear the foreign invader.

“There’s a good boy.”

Toska made a light cough but recovered and dropped his head back onto Viktor’s lap. He watched the tube go down his throat as a little bulge passing from the outside. A good sign that he’d made it in the right pipe. Putting the end to his mouth, he sucked to confirm the negative pressure of the esophagus then blew into it to help inflate it and ease the passage of the tube.

Feeling resistance at the entrance of his stomach, he paused and eased it in then sniffed the end of the tube to check for gastric odors. All signs checked that he was in the right spot, he wiggled the tube into what should be the bottom of his stomach and created a suction with his mouth again until fluid started rising up the tube. He dropped the end to spill into the empty bucket. A small bit of sweet smelling healthy green fluid gurgled out. He wiggled the tube, cleaned off the end, and tried again. After a few attempts to get more resulted in nothing, he attached the pump to the end of the tube and started pumping in the solution he’d mixed up.

“You’re in the stomach?” Viktor glanced up, trying to hide his concern.

“Yes. I’m certain of it.”

He closed his eyes and nodded. “Good.”

Yuri tried to think of anything he could do to distract him while he pumped steadily. “It’s good you had the tube and a pump.”

“Yeah, I like to keep backups of the common equipment in case the vet had to use hers on a previous call or it broke or something. How do you know how to do this?”

“Minako. Horses aren’t as popular in Japan as they are here, so there’s fewer resources for them. The nearest vet was two hours away from us. The nearest emergency clinic was a few islands away. If there was a problem, we had to deal with it ourselves.

“We’d usually call the vet to consult, but Minako got him to teach her just about everything he could do on a farm call, and she taught me most of it. I never really felt comfortable doing it even with her supervision, but if we didn’t, the horses wouldn’t have much of a chance.”

“Thank you for taking the risk for me. Even if it doesn’t go as we hope, it’s not your fault, and I will never blame you. I gave the approval.” He smiled as his fingers combed through Toska’s forelock. “That woman is a treasure-trove. I’ve always respected her as a competitor, but I just realized how much I owe her for her influence on you.”
“Yeah, I got really lucky to have such amazing people raising me. I wish I’d done a better job of showing my gratitude to them.”

“There’s still plenty of time to do that.”

“Yeah.” He emptied the bucket then withdrew the tube, pausing to grasp the top of Toska’s nose as he neared the end. “Hold still. I don’t need you flipping your head up and giving yourself a nosebleed here. I think we’ve all got enough stress without that.” Easing the rest of the tube out, he sighed with relief and stroked his face. “Good boy. You’re such a good patient. Now we just wait. Were you able to get in a call to the vet since things got worse?”

“Yeah, I called when I was at the house. She says she’s her next stop, but she still might be a bit. She’s stitching up a horse that got tangled in a bundle of old wire and panicked.”

He cringed. “Oof.”

“Yeah. It sounded bad.”

They waited quietly for about twenty minutes, Toska’s strained breathing making any further communication impossible until he started nipping at his stomach and trying to roll. They leapt out of his way to avoid his thrashing hooves.

Viktor gasped. “Yuri.”

“No, this might be good. It might be a sign that it’s moving. Let’s try to get him up again.” He looped the lunge line around his haunches again, careful to avoid his flailing, and set to hauling against it as hard as they could while both grasped his lead and pulled against his head. “Come on, Toska. Get up.” He gritted his teeth against the strain, the lunge line wrapped around his forearm and biting in. “Get up. You can do it. I know you can.”

Toska tucked his back hooves under him to shift his hips, and with a deep groan, he got to his wobbly, splayed feet.

“Yes! That’s my good boy!” Viktor threw his arms around his neck then backed up to take the lead. “Come on. Let’s walk a bit. I know it hurts, but it’ll help.” He got Toska to take some small steps forward then picked up a slow but steady pace.

A few laps later and his impaction passed, bringing tears of relief to both of them and a deep sigh to Toska who then poked Viktor’s shoulder with his nose wondering where the treats were.

Viktor laughed and clung to his horse’s neck, sobs and laughter blending into one. “I can’t believe I’m crying over horse shit.”

“You’ve never had one with a bad impaction before?”

“Yeah, but it wasn’t mine, and the vet was able to make it out much sooner. It was less stressful.”

“Oh. I have a few times now.”

He laughed. “That’s because you’re more sensitive than me. Come here.” He held his arm open then tucked him into Toska’s neck with him. “There are no words to express my gratitude.”

“I didn’t do much. It’s—”

Viktor’s lips cushioned the detonation of their restraint but not enough to prevent it from shredding
Yuri’s strength into shrapnel. He whimpered, not even making a futile attempt at finding it before collapsing into Viktor’s arms, kissing him back as if he were owed the taste of every breath Viktor would ever take.

Viktor’s hands clawed at his low back scrambling to hold him tighter. He broke off to little catches to let them breathe fully for just a moment before grasping him back again. Their tongues cried each other’s names in a silent chant that acted as a balm against the terribly long night.

“I’ve never been kissed over horse shit. That one’s new.”

Viktor laughed, pressing his forehead to Yuri’s as he cleared his cheeks of the remaining tears. “Sorry. It wasn’t the most romantic of first kisses, was it?”

“It was perfect. But you can always try again if you’re not happy with it.”

“Try again? I don’t think that’s how firsts work.”

“It does for us. Take all the first kisses you want from me. Just say it, and it is.”

“Oh yeah?” He grinned and leaned toward another kiss. “You think I have that kind of power to make things become something else just because I said it should?”

“You do with me.”

“Is that so?” He dropped his humor to watch him with that look—the intensity of his blue flame but softer, gentler. Their lips caught in the tenderest of kisses for just a moment. “If I say that’s our first kiss?”

“Then, it is.”

“What about this one?” He lingered their anticipation, bringing them together one slow inch at a time.

Yuri smiled; his eyes closed, still savoring the taste of Viktor. “It’s the most satisfying of first kisses.”

“What if I want to jump to an alternate timeline and make our first kiss one after you’ve barged into my office to demand that I accept you as mine for all time?”

“My time is yours to wind however you like. Forward, backward, any direction you choose. My reality is whatever you make it to be.”

“What an offer to make me after only dating for three weeks.”

“Has it only been that long? It feels like I’ve known you for several lifetimes at least.”

“Oh, my heart.” He clutched his chest. “What a romantic notion—that we don’t just have this lifetime but all the ones in which we can find each other again.”

“Every lifetime. I’ll always find you; my eyes are blind to everyone but you.”

His expression weakened, his eyes searching Yuri’s. “You really know how to seduce a hopeless romantic.” He pulled them closer, pursuing Yuri’s lips for his stolen strength.

“Hello!” A woman’s voice called out in a sweet sing-song moments before she appeared at the arena gate wearing blood-stained jeans and a t-shirt. “Oh, sorry. It looks like I interrupted a celebration. I hope. He’s on his feet again so that must be a good sign.” She put her hand on the short wall next to
the gate and hopped it, her bag in tow, rather than open the gate. “Toska baby, were you making your dad worry just for fun? Was he not giving you enough attention?”

Viktor smiled. “I have been a little preoccupied lately, but he’s been getting double his daily dosage of love and cookies. And yeah, he seems like he’s passed it.”

“Good. I love it when I’m rendered useless. Let me just take a quick look here.” She pulled out her stethoscope and pressed it along Toska’s belly, listening at several points on both sides then looped it around her neck as she made note of his other vitals. “I’m Lynn, by the way. Please forgive my appearance. Hazzard of the trade. I’m guessing you’re the Yuri that did my job for me?”

“Uh, yeah, sorry. I know I really shouldn’t, but he needed it, and we couldn’t get him up.”

“What signs did you check that you were in his stomach?”

“I waited for him to swallow it. He only coughed once. I saw it going down his throat. I checked for negative pressure and stomach odors. I suctioned out stomach fluid, it’s in that bucket.” He gestured to one of the buckets next to them. “It looked healthy and of a normal amount to me.”

She peeked in the bucket. “How many times did you attempt to draw fluid before you added?”

“Five. I didn’t get anything after the first two.”

“No noticeable gas release when you entered the stomach?”

“No, ma’am.”

“Viktor said you suspected an impaction at the pelvic flexure?”

“Yes, ma’am. He was tender only in that area, and he wasn’t passing any feces, so an impaction seemed most likely. Plus, I thought that a torsion or entrapment would have a faster onset along with more bloating.”

“You ever consider going to vet school?”

“Um, no. Never.”

“Why not? You’d make a good vet.”

“I don’t want that kind of responsibility.”

She smiled. “Next time, go ahead and tube him before he’s on the ground. I mean, hopefully, there isn’t a next time, and hopefully, I’d be able to make it out much sooner, it was just one of those nights, but with how many horses are here, there’s bound to be a next time. Just call me first so you’re acting under my guidance and you’re not practicing medicine without a license or anything like that. Or, what I’m trying to say is you did good, and Toska and Viktor are both very lucky you were here.”

“Don’t we know it.” Viktor patted Toska’s neck as he investigated the vet to see if she was holding the cookies.

Lynn laughed and rubbed her fist over his forehead. “Yeah, you’re definitely feeling better. You know you’ve spoiled this horse completely rotten, right? His telltale sign was a slight delay in getting a cookie.” She shook her head.

“Oh, I know. I’m such a sucker. How can I be a hard ass against sweet eyes like that?”
“You’re too soft.” She shook her finger at him as she went to inspect the pile Toska left. Bending down, she frowned and poked at it. She held up a piece of green plastic. “Well, here’s our culprit.”

Viktor glared at Toska, his mouth drawn to the side. “Seriously?”

“Well,” Yuri laughed, “in his defense, it is green. Maybe it blew into the pasture, and he thought it was grass.”

“You idiot. We’ve talked about this.”

“You had to tell him not to eat plastic?”

“He had a penchant for eating all sorts of random things when he was a baby. I thought he outgrew that.”

Lynn’s phone rang, and she sighed lightly before answering, already walking back to her bag. “I’m on my way.” She hung up. “Welp, I’m off again. It looks like everything here is good. I doubt he’ll have any further issues, but just keep a close eye on him the rest of the day and probably give him a few days off training just to be sure.” She jogged off and hopped the wall again, waving before she disappeared down the aisle. “Bye, Yuri! Nice to meet you!”

“Get some rest!” Viktor called after her.

She laughed.

“Should I put the trailer back?”

“No. Leave it for now just in case, but we should shut off the engine and put everything away.”

“I’ll take care of it.” He jogged over to the truck and switched off the ignition then cleaned up the arena and rinsed the equipment and put it away.

He found Viktor on the floor of the stall staring blankly at Toska as he munched on his hay.

Sitting down next to him, he took his hand. “Hey, he’s okay.”

“I know.” His expression didn’t change. After a few minutes of silence, he crumbled. “A piece of plastic. He’s in the prime of his life. He’s never once had even a minor injury while doing one of the most dangerous sports. And a piece of plastic nearly killed him.”

He didn’t know what to say. Viktor’s deepest fears lay torn open and validated, and there was nothing he could say to counter it because that really was the nature of loving these delicate beasts.

He put his arm around Viktor’s back and tugged him over. “I’m here.”

He slumped onto him then fell until his head rested in Yuri’s lap.

“I’m here.” His fingers combed through Viktor’s hair as he sobbed. “I’m here.”

***

They sat in his stall, talking as much as was necessary to keep each other awake, but otherwise let the hours sag with silence with neither having the energy for more. Passing off the watch when the crew came in to feed at six a.m., they went up to Viktor’s house and showered then passed out in the bed, clinging to each other throughout their unconsciousness.
The late afternoon sun blaring through the windows as it dipped in the sky, they awoke but lay in stillness, unable to shake off the stupor.

Viktor’s hand came up to stroke Yuri’s hair as he kissed his forehead and sighed. “I had plans for you tonight, but I don’t think I’m in the right state to go out. I’m sorry. They were good plans too, but I just… don’t have it in me.”

Yuri laid kisses over his chest as he thought about what he could do. “Do you think you have it in you to put on a suit?”

“A suit?”

“Yes.”

“For staying in?”

“Yes. I have an idea to help you feel better, and since we’re staying in, if you get tired, we can just do something else.”

He grinned. “Will you help me out of it if I can’t find the energy for that later?”

“Anything you want.”

“That sounds promising. What is your plan?”

“Can I surprise you?”

“I’d love that.” He pulled him in for a slow kiss then sighed. “You’re the best cure.”

“I need to run to my house to change. Give me about forty-five minutes? I’ll meet you on the roof.”

He nodded and made a move to release him but then snatched him back and pinned him to the bed, weighting him with kisses to take with him for their long separation.

Released to fill in his plans, he jogged to his house. He changed into a suit, slicked his hair back, and traded his glasses for contacts then walked back so he wouldn’t get himself all sweaty and started cooking. It’d been a while since he made it. He hoped he hadn’t forgotten anything. With five minutes left, he grabbed a lighter and candles and set the music to play on the roof.

Viktor stepped out onto the balcony and sighed. “Oh, Yuri, this is so amazing. It’s so incredibly sweet of you to do this. Thank you.”

He smiled and pulled out Viktor’s chair. “I’m glad you like it.” He couldn’t pass their closeness by without giving him a kiss before going to his seat.

“Katsudon, my favorite. How did you know?”

He chuckled. “A hunch. I’m glad you like it. It’s my favorite too. Well, I like my mom’s better, but this is good too.”

Pride filled his eyes as he smiled. “You make me so happy.” Taking a bite of food, he sighed. “Vkusno. Oh, so good, Yuri.”

“Thank you.” Blushing, he picked up his chopsticks.

“So, I have good news. I accepted an offer on the house yesterday.”
“Really? That’s great news. When do they move it?”

“We’re closing next month, and they have another month after that to move it off the property. I should be able to have a construction crew ready to go by then.”

“I think we might need to put all the horses inside for that one.”

“Good call.” He chuckled. “I can’t imagine their reactions to a castle rolling down the road.”

“Toska would glance up then go right back to his grass.”

“If that.”

“Right?” He laughed and took a sip of wine that was blissfully kind to his overwrought mind. “You’re not going to have a house here then for a few months at least. Where are you going to live?”

“Oh.”

“Does that upset you?”

“No, not really. It’s just strange that everyone would be living here but you, and you’d be so far away.”

He smiled. “Well, I don’t think we can call a few miles ‘so far away,’ but I agree. Not being on my land will be strange for sure, and any distance further from you is distasteful.”

Nibbling a bite of katsudon from his chopsticks, his wine-loosened mind stirred up a desire and pried it loose from Anxiety’s hands trying to shove it back down. “You—you could live with me.”

“Are you serious?”

“I know it’s a lot smaller than you’re used to, but it’s nice, and I think you’d be happier here than off somewhere else even if the other place is nicer, and it wouldn’t mess with your schedule as much having to drive out here at five to feed Toska, and I mean it’s not like it’d be a long time, so you could think of it as just an extended hotel stay and… yes. I’m serious.”

“I’d love to.”

He finally looked up from his bowl. “Really? It’s really not what you’re used to, and it’d be three of us sharing that one little place, and we’d be sharing one small room, so you couldn’t get any space from me if you wanted it and—”

“Hey, I built that place, you know. You’re making it sound like it’s awful to live there.”

“No, that’s not what I mean at all. It’s really nice, and I think it’s a perfect place to live. I just thought it wasn’t what you’re used to. I’m sorry. I didn’t—”

“Relax. I’m just teasing you. I would never force an employee to live somewhere I’d be horrified to live in myself. This will be a good test to see how accurate my imagination was there. I’d love to live with you. That sounds like such a cozy life.”

“Really? You really want to?”

“I’d absolutely love to. Thank you, Yuri. Again. I feel like every other word out of my mouth to you
is thank you, and I still don’t feel like I’m saying it nearly enough.”

“I can feel it. It’s enough.”

“Yuri.” His name dripped through Viktor’s voice as he took his hand.

He returned the gentle squeeze then leaned in. “Can I ask you something… not from this timeline?”

“Yes.”

“Sorry, it just popped into my head, and I had to ask… When you had people coming into your house to look at it… Did they see the basement?”

“Yes. People generally want to see the entire house that they’re purchasing.”

“I mean… did you clear out your playroom first?”

“No. I decided it wasn’t worth moving the equipment out before I had to because I didn’t know how long it would take to sell or when I’d need it next.”

“So, you just… let people take a tour through a Russian castle and just stumble upon a sex dungeon in the basement?” He pressed his hand to his mouth to hold back his laughter.

“I mean… is that not the most expected thing to find in a Russian castle?” He smiled, his own laughter starting to build.

“Did the realtor warn them first?”

He sat up and cleared his throat then turned his hand over as if he were presenting a rare gem at auction. “And over here we’ve got a truly unique little room. It features a hidden grid system of iron rings on the ceiling, great for versatile storage of your most treasured items. The previous owner assures that they’re strong and durable, so you can rest assured that your property will remain safe and sound.”

Yuri giggled and took on the easily-imagined horrified look of someone stumbling into that room. “What’s—what’s that furniture for?”

Viktor laughed and resumed his chipper salesman impression. “Oh, that’s a lovely example the traditional slash avant-garde aesthetic this property executes masterfully. This house really supports bold furnishing choices.”

He raised a skeptical eyebrow. “Uh huh. And the whips and paddles?”

“Oh, the owner does train horses. I think those are some tools of the trade?”

“I… I don’t think you train horses with spiked paddles…”

“They might be antiques. Come, let’s take a look at the nice uh… storage room around the corner here.”

They fell into a fit of laughter that took several minutes to fully recover from.

Viktor wiped his face and shrugged. “Someone went through that and said, ‘I’ll take it,’ so it must not be that bad.”

“Or it was the selling point.” Yuri watched him shake his hair back into order. “Can I ask you
something else? When you went in to get your hair cut did you just bring in a picture of Toska or…"

He gaped indignantly. “Are you saying I look like a horse?”

“"I mean, a very pretty horse, but I see a slight resemblance there.” Grinning, he reached over and brushed at the hair that fell over his eyes like a forelock.

“Oh, you little…” He lunged and grasped Yuri’s hands, pinning them to his thighs as his burning eyes led their kiss. Pulling back just enough to speak, Viktor stared down at him, that part of him that he had restrained for so long now screaming to be freed. “As long as you think I’m at least a pretty horse, I can live with that.” He caught another kiss with a checked nip of his bottom lip, his hands tightening in his hold.

“The prettiest of the show ponies.” Released, Yuri panted and held back the urge to reach for more. “Dance with me?”

(58) “I’d love to.” Tugging him up from the chair, Viktor twirled him around and pulled him into his swaying arms.

Yuri took a strong posture and began leading Viktor from the following position, pulling him along until he figured out the basic steps of a tango and began leading, hesitantly at first, but with growing surety with Yuri’s embellishments telling him he was doing enough to showcase his skill.

He added more resistance to make Viktor lead with more strength, pushing into him and bringing their lips close enough for the restraint of a kiss to spark their dance with tension.

The long steps of a lover ushering his partner to bed pushed Yuri backward until he bent over Viktor’s knee and submitted to his hand running over his body. Viktor lingered, his hand trembling over Yuri’s throat before brushing behind his neck and lifting him back up to drag away the lingering light in the sky.

Another song closed; Viktor stared down at him unmoving as a new song picked up, a look in his eyes Yuri hadn’t yet seen. “Did you mean it?”

He waited, his heart picking up speed in their stillness, knowing Viktor would clarify without him asking.

“Did you mean it when you said if it was me it was perfect?” His hands held around Yuri’s neck. Swallowing hard, he pressed his racing heart against Viktor’s. “Yes.”

“I need you. There’s—there’s something I need to say and I…” He pressed his forehead against Yuri’s. “I need you and I can’t… I need to know that you mean it. For you; not for me. Tell me your honest thoughts without any regard for me. Tell me if you truly only need me to call your first time perfect.”

“Say it again. Like how you just said it.”

He paused, his fingers sliding into Yuri’s hair then tipping his head up. “I need you. I can’t wait anymore.” Nipping kisses onto his neck, he gripped Yuri into his rising heat. His voice dropped into the low rumbling that twisted inside Yuri’s gut. “I need you, Yuri, and you’re mine.” He pushed him toward the stairs, his lips burning against his skin.

“That’s all I need—to be yours.”
Viktor shoved him back but held his shoulders at arm’s length, searching him for honesty. Silently, he took his hand and led him down into the house. Yuri gripped his hand, his heart racing, as he was pulled into the bedroom. Stopping at the foot of the bed, the full moon streaming through the tall arched windows in the darkened room, Viktor’s hands came up to cradle his face, warming their kiss, then moved down to strip Yuri naked.

Departing him with kisses over his chest, Viktor pushed him back onto the bed and stood back to bare his own body to the moonlight, stepping into the transcension that Yuri had first seen so many years ago.

An angel, a demon. He was both, so he was neither. He was flawed, and he was perfect. The contradiction settled easily into Yuri’s mind. Viktor stood still, just watching him. Untouchable, yet the most substantial thing Yuri had ever felt. Viktor was pleasure, and he was pain.

Opposites don’t sit with the span of a universe between them, but in a tight embrace charging the flow between their poles with life.

(59) His heart pounded against his chest as Viktor approached, caging him in his arms and blocking his exit with his knee. “Viktor, I’m scared.”

“What are you scared of, zoltse?”

He brought his trembling hands up to Viktor’s face, to his hair spilling moonlight and smiled. “Nothing.”

He smiled and clasped his hand to kiss it. “I promise I’ll take care of you.” He brought Yuri’s hand to his racing heart as he dropped into a kiss.

Marking his way down Yuri’s body with tender kisses, Viktor stopped at his cock and teased him with sweet pecks and nibbles until he gained full hardness then sucked him deep into his mouth without warning.

Yuri nearly came right there from that first solid touch after months of waiting. He cried out as he arched off the bed and deeper into Viktor’s tight, hot mouth. “Help! Please! I need your help, Viktor! I can’t—Ngh!” He gasped with the friction of Viktor pulling off, his toes clenching to help him hold on. He lay gasping as Viktor chuckled.

“So good you’ve been, my pretty little virgin slut. You’ve been that ready for me the whole time?”

“Yes, Viktor.”

“That’s my sweet Yuri.” He lunged for his mouth, kissing him deep and desperate. “God, I’ve missed you.” His thumb wiped the shine from Yuri’s cheek.

“I won’t be your virgin slut much longer.”

“No, you’ll be my slut. Even better.” He dropped for another kiss and spoke against his lips. “Nothing between us.” He left him with another kiss to savor the way it tasted like sin and redemption and returned to his cock with thick drags of his tongue bringing him back to the edge and settling him there. Moving lower, he spread his cheeks apart and lapped at his hole. Pushing his thighs up higher, he worked his tongue inside and swirled it around his rim.

Moaning, he pushed into the soothing, stimulating sensations. “You’ve never done that before.” He squirmed and cried out as Viktor's tongue tugged at his hole.
He pulled back with a kiss to each thigh and stretched over Yuri to grab the bottle of lube. “I wanted to save it as a special treat for this. You like?” He returned to his ass with his probing tongue, watching him for his responses.

Heat beaded on his skin as he writhed under Viktor’s firm hands. “Yes, Viktor. Feels so good.”

Adding his slick fingers in alongside his tongue, Viktor worked him over until he was a shivery, sloppy mess at home on Viktor’s ledge—a trophy propped up for him to admire as he liked. Next to the whips, it was his favorite agony.

Viktor sat up and slicked up his own cock then repositioned himself between Yuri’s thighs. His head pressed against his hole. “Are you ready?”

He nodded then tensed as the pressure against his hole increased. “Wait.” He swallowed hard; his heart thumping as loudly as it was in the cave as Viktor waited for him to find words for his fear. “What do I do?”

“Whatever feels the best to do.”

“That’s it? I don’t know how… It’s too open. Please help me respond right?”

He smiled, soft and gentle, as his hand came around to lightly grip the front of his throat. He brought his lips to his ear. “Relax, beautiful. I’m going to take what’s mine.” His head pushed into his hole. His back arched off the bed as Viktor slowly split him open. “Ah, Viktor! You’re so much bigger than the toy!” He squealed and fisted the bedsheets.

Using tiny strokes to ease into his scrambling body, he paused to use his free hand to scoop under his back and pull him closer. “Relax, Yuri. There’s no sense in fighting me. You are mine.” He nibbled and sucked at his earlobe and down to his neck. “Mine for all time. I’m certain you can take me. You always please me.”

Heaving, he wrapped his quaking legs around Viktor’s hips seeking more of his support. Finding it just as steadying as he hoped, he focused on breathing deeply to help him relax as Viktor wanted.

“That’s right, beautiful. Show me all your honest responses. You’re doing so well. You feel so good.” He closed them into a kiss as he worked deeper inside him until he hit the pang deep in his stomach and stopped. “I’m in. You took me so beautifully.”

He felt stuffed with Viktor to every edge, but when he glanced down to where they were connected, his body pulsing hard against the stretch, he still wasn’t completely in. “You’re not going all the way?”

“I haven’t had much chance to train that part of you, and I’m thicker than the toy you had there. I don’t want to hurt you.”

“Please try? I’ll tell you if it’s too much. I want all of you. Please let me have you, Viktor.”

“How are you always so perfect?” Using his hold on his hips, he hoisted him up higher until only his shoulders were pressed into the mattress. Pushing against the limit, he held a steady pressure until his walls gave then rocked his hips to push deeper. “How are you doing?”

He couldn’t do anything but gape, his eyes huge as Viktor stretched his insides open to make room for himself, shocked little squeaks leaking from his mouth.
He stopped. “Yuri?”

Still incapable of a single word, he tightened his legs to pull them still closer and nodded. His fist tightened around the sheets so hard he thought they might tear.

He chuckled and resumed his slow push. “That’s my sweet Yuri. You feel so incredible.” His thighs pressed against the backs of Yuri’s and he paused, heaving, his hand coming down to rest on Yuri’s chest while the other strengthened his support behind his back. “You did it. You took all of me.” He gave him a moment to adjust to the crippling fullness. “I’m going to start moving.”

He nodded and readjusted his hands to make sure he had a solid grip on the sheets and tightened his legs around Viktor.

He laughed. “I won’t be able to move if you hold me that tightly.”

“Oh, sorry.” He regretfully started to drop his legs, but Viktor caught them.

“Just put them a little higher. Then you can hold as much as you want.” He adjusted them up near his waist. “Just don’t break me.” He laughed and tapped his nose. Sighing, he kissed both thighs just below his knees. “Feels even better than I imagined. Ready?”

He nodded, and Viktor slowly withdrew his length, stopping as his head hooked onto his rim then sank back in until his hips pressed deep into Yuri’s soft flesh. Yuri cried out one strangled sob as his head tipped back over the pillow behind him. His eyes squeezed shut, the dim light of the moon too much for his overstimulated body to take. Again, Viktor withdrew, long and slow then filled him again to bursting. Yuri could do nothing but feel his body shatter with every inch.

“Yuri? I need to tell you something.” Even as he spoke, his rhythm didn’t change from that stroke between ecstasy and agony. “Look at me, please.” He waited for him to find enough control of his own body to obey. Pressing his thumb to Yuri’s lip, he smiled. “I love you.”

“What?” His heart scurried away in fear. “You—you don’t—You can’t—” His head craned back and forth as he shrunk back away from him. “It’s impossible. You don’t know. You can’t.”

His stunned eyes widened, his hips missing a beat. “You’re really reacting like this? I thought it would be a little anti-climactic because you already knew. I told you every single way but this one.”

Shaking off the shock, he followed his retreat and dropped down until his weight pinned Yuri to the bed. He picked up the pace, overwhelming his mind with sensation.

“I love you, Yuri. I’ve loved you since the day when you rode for me. When just after pushing your tightest limits for me, you rejected my offered kiss simply because you didn’t want to be selfish and hurt me. You didn’t even know why. You just accepted that it would because you didn’t yet understand the conditions of my limits. I had been thinking about that moment as we ate lunch and when you asked me to tell you something in Russian, the only thing I could think to say was I love you. That’s what I omitted from the letter.

“I loved you then. I loved you in every glorious moment together and in every eternity of anguish apart. I love you now so much I feel like every time I look at you my whole body is screaming it so loud the whole world can hear. And I am absolutely certain, Yuri, that I will love you in every moment to come. With you, I finally feel like I’m home. I love you, Yuri.” Pushing his knees up to his shoulders, he took his cock in hand, his fingers sliding over every mind-blowing spot as he drove harder into him. “Submit.”

“I ca—I ca—” His head thrashed with the onslaught, half-formed syllables catching on his lips.
A steady slap of flesh picked up as Viktor went harder still. “Submit, Yuri.” His skin turned slick as he went faster, driving until Yuri’s voice was tearing through the night. “Submit, my love.”

He writhed underneath him, suffocating under the splitting pressure. He can’t possibly love someone who’s done what he has. He could barely believe that he’d want him to serve his needs once he knew. His hands came up to push against Viktor’s shoulders in a feeble attempt to escape. Viktor held steady, but he couldn’t stop the small wince of pain. Yuri’s arms went limp.

Who was he to tell him he was wrong? Especially about his own feelings. Arrogant again. Stop trying to poke at him and reject him every time he feels uncomfortable. He’s the one that needs to change. He moved away from the pressure, and a clear path opened up.

He brought his fingertips up to Viktor’s face. “Yes, Viktor.” He smiled, brushing his thumb over his lips. “I love you too.” He pulled him down, stretching up to meet him in a kiss. When he released him, tears trickled down his fingers.

“Sorry. I just… You make me so happy.” He laughed and plunged into another kiss as Yuri tried to wipe all the tears from his face. “I love you so much.” The words got mangled in their lips.

“I love you, Viktor, more than I could tell you.” He clung to him with all his strength—the only thing safe that he knew in this foreign world.

Viktor turned him inside out and back again, his rhythm going from long and slow to hard and fast; teasing short strokes to so deep, he felt like he was splitting him open through his very center. He was so much more intense than any of the toys he’d had yet more comfortable like he was carved just for him. And hot. So hot. He melted with the heat penetrating him. He couldn’t stop shaking, feeling like he was already in an orgasm yet still desperate to come.

His limbs gripped Viktor, slipped off, and gripped him tighter, seeking him for relief. “Please let me come. I might die.”

He laughed. “You’re freed from your order to wait. Come whenever you feel like it.”

He shook his head, gasping. “Can’t. So used to waiting now, I feel like I’m there but can’t—can’t go over. Need your words.”

“Are you serious?”

“Yes, Viktor.”

He stared at him, his mouth hanging open. “I—I need to test this. Are you up for just a little torment?”

“Yes, Viktor. As much as you want.” His cock clenched at his words. Handing his body over to satisfy every one of Viktor’s whims never failed to pique his arousal.

Viktor swiped his finger over his leaking cockhead and sucked it off. “My slut tastes so good. How’s your ass doing?”

“Feels… so good.”

“No pain?”

“No, Viktor. You feel so much better than the toys.”
“Come whenever you can.” He sat back and thrust his hips forward, pounding into him with smooth snaps of his hips, his fist jerking over his cock. He ran ramrod over his prostate with every stroke as he used the entirety of his skill to make him come.

Yuri screamed, spasming and bucking into him. His cries drowned out the sound of their flesh, but still, he couldn’t tumble from the edge.

After god knows how much time, Viktor stared at him in amazement, his sadistic gleam playing in his eyes. “Wow. Amazing. So incredible, Yuri. I didn’t even intend to control you to that level. At least not yet anyway. You want to come?”

“With you. Get—Ah, fuck!” He had to stop to summon more control from his quaking body. “Get your fill of me.”

“That’ll never happen.”

“Till you’re satisfied then. For now. Use me to satisfy all of you.”

His hand clamped down on his cock hard enough to bring a light pain. “That’s a dangerous notion right now. That beast is positively ravenous.”

“Good. So am I.”

“I promised gentle.”

“I’ll love… whatever experience you want to give me, but—” he gasped as Viktor’s hips snapped harder, escaping his control for just a moment before he regained it—“are you making love to an ideal or to me?”

“Jesus, Yuri. How do you do that? How do you just rip open my eyes damn near every time you open your mouth?” He kissed the struggle to answer from him. “Rhetorical. There are no words to explain you.”

Sensing his lingering hesitation, he tightened his thighs. “If I’m screwed up, it’s not because of you. Please fill me with you. I hate it when you hold back.”

“Yuri.” He kissed the front of his throat.

“Make love to me. Torment me. It all feels like you, and I love it.”

“God, I love you.” His shoulders softened away from his ears, and the brutal flow of his hips struck harder as it smoothed out with him sinking into his freedom. Nothing looked better on him than that glint in his eyes when deciding his path from an open course.

His hand on Yuri’s cock tightened until he released squeals of pain. “Let’s see if I can make you come with pain too.” He struck his ass with stinging blows as his fingers pinched his head making him leak all over. “What a messy slut you are.” His fingers slipped off his head with a hard jerk. “How’s the pain?”

He drank it down like drops of water to a man two months into the Sahara. “More. Need so much more. Please, Viktor?”

With a shake of his head, he leaned down, Yuri’s balls in his hand pulled away from their tight clench waiting to cum and kissed him so deeply Yuri felt it join his cock churning pleasure in his core. “You are my ideal.”
Viktor pried his thighs from his body and pushed them up for Yuri to hold open. He wiggled another pillow in under his hips to free both of his hands then ran his fingers down his thighs, admiring his canvas with unbridled delight. The gentle strokes painted erratic shudders onto him, not knowing when or how they’d turn to pain heightening their impact.

Viktor traced his hole stretched to its limit with his finger then trailed it up toward his cock, stopping just below his balls and stroked him with feathery touches as he thrust slowly inside him. Yuri worried that his caution had returned.

A quirk of Viktor’s lips was the only warning he had before that blue flame raged. He crushed his prostate between his hand and his cock now thrusting hard inside him, his open position allowing him to strike deeper. Yuri instinctively tried to pull away from the overwhelming sensation, but Viktor caught his balls and held him tight, his hand over his prostate crushing harder with deep massaging strokes as he squealed.

“Where does my slut think he’s going? You’re the only one who can satisfy me, so you’re going to stay right here until I am completely satisfied.”

“Yes, Viktor!”

Releasing his balls, he struck his thighs red, basking in his struggle to stay in place with convulsions wracking his body. Wave after wave of deep orgasms emanating from his prostate had Yuri screaming in rapture as Viktor made love to him with pleasure and with pain.

Branding his first experience into his mind so brightly the memory would last several lifetimes at least, Viktor didn’t stop until he was sobbing for his mercy. His body wrung of every bit of pleasure that had been built and stored and exhausted in a way he’d never known, his heart used its little strength left to clench in fear when Viktor’s twisted smile flashed as he took his cock in hand and began jerking him off with peaking thrusts of his cock. He dropped to whisper in his ear.

“Come for me, my love.”

His cock erupted with thick ropes of cum drenching his stomach and running off onto the bed as he came longer and harder than he ever had. As he neared his end, Viktor clutched him tight, chasing his own orgasm and filling him with heat. Finally finding enough release, they fell into the embrace of stillness and each other.

“Oh my god.” Yuri stared up at the ceiling, unable to stop trembling, unable to move.

Slowly, Viktor’s grounding kisses started up over his bruised and bitten neck and shoulder. “How was it?”

“Oh my god.”

“Is that a good oh my god or bad?”

“Oh my god. It’s… You… I love you so fucking much. I think I died at least ten times.”

He chuckled. “You wanted me to not hold back.”

“That’s how much you were holding back?!?” He winced. His throat already ached with all the screaming he had already done.

“Well, you have been very effective for training my stamina plus the months of torture waiting for this. Are you okay? Did I push you too far?”
“Viktor,” he demanded the strength from his own body to bring his hands to Viktor’s face. “It was perfect.” He kissed him as tenderly as he could and broke away with a smile. “It was perfect.”

He smiled and ran his finger over Yuri’s lip. “Yeah, it was.” He closed his eyes and nuzzled him close. “I love you so much it feels like it’s going to break me. I thought it would get better after I told you, but I feel it even more now.”

“Thank you for this, for everything… for loving me. You’ll always have every bit of love I can give you.”

They lay cuddling and kissing and sipping warm water from a bottle left on the nightstand until their strength returned enough to consider anything other than the cloud of bliss they floated on.

Viktor pried himself away from Yuri and the cum that had started to dry. He looked down at it smeared over their stomachs and chests and leaking from his ass trying to hold back laughter. “Wow. That’s… a lot of cum.”

“Yeah? Wanna take a guess as to whose fault that is? Do you know Phichit mocked me and my blue balls every single day for the past week?”

He grinned. “Was it too much for my little masochist?”

“No, Viktor.”

“Good. Get up and give me your ass.” He gave his thigh a smack.

“Huh? You must be joking.” Despite his protest, he still struggled to his hands and knees and turned his ass to face him.

“Good boy.” He slipped his fingers into his still-soaked hole and started inspecting him, his phone held up as a flashlight.

Embarrassment crept up his ears with Viktor taking his time to do a thorough job. “Viktor,” he whined, “I hate it when you do this.”

“Oh? In that case, I’ll need to do some training to increase your tolerance for my inspections. They’re not optional. I’m responsible for your health and well-being. I need to know your condition at all times.”

He blushed harder, having a pretty good idea of what that training would involve. “Yes, Viktor.”

“That’s my good Yuri. I’m very proud of you for sharing your thoughts even if they may have negative consequences. You’re so honest and so brave.” He stretched his hole as his fingers ran around the rim, making Yuri’s cock twitch. “Now, you must be joking.”

“Sorry. I can’t help craving you. Especially when you’re touching me. But I’m more than satisfied. Really.”

“Well, your ass held up very well, not a single tear, but I don’t want to push it more tonight, and I doubt I’d be able to get it up again anytime soon, so you’re going to fuck me.” He withdrew his hand and pushed him back down.

“Huh?! Really, I’m okay. It was just a reaction to what you were doing.”

“I’m sorry,” he smiled a dangerous smile, “did that sound like a question to you?”
“No, Viktor. I just… I don’t know how, and I’m afraid I’ll hurt you.”

“All you have to do is exactly as I say, and you’ll be fine. I was planning on having you fuck me anyway. I wasn’t expecting to go so hard the first time, but with your stamina, I think you’ll be fine.” He flipped onto his hands and knees. “Get me ready with your tongue. Start by just licking over the outside.”

“Ye—yes, Viktor.” He took Viktor’s perfect ass in his hands and gave him a tentative lick.

He yelped and jerked away. “Don’t tickle me. I gave you an order. Be confident in it.”

“Yes, Viktor. I’m sorry.”

“Apology accepted. Go ahead.”

He took a deep breath then started back in with kisses and caresses over his firm cheeks, building his confidence. Spreading him open to give himself more room, he swiped the flat of his tongue over his hole, earning a soft moan from him.

Encouraged by the response, he focused on savoring this new part of Viktor. It didn’t really taste any different from the rest of him, mostly tasting of the sweet, earthy salt that covered him from the sweat. He had grown to love that flavor over the weeks in Japan as it was always given to him as a reward for doing well.

Moaning, Viktor pushed toward him. "You're doing great, my love. Is everything okay for you?"

“Yes, Viktor. I just wish I could see you better.”

He leaned down onto one forearm so he could turn back and watch him trail kisses down his back, his face melting with pleasure. “Better?”

He smiled at the softening effect he had on him that only his horses came close to matching. “Yes, Viktor.” Sliding his hands up to Viktor’s nipples, he started caressing them. Red shivered down his spine.

Moving back to his ass, he nuzzled in deep and licked slowly over every ridge then worked his tongue inside as Viktor had done to him. Viktor shuddered and moaned, and Yuri gave his nipples a light pinch as he worked in deeper; Viktor’s body sagged toward the bed. His mouth and his hands caressing every bit of him he could reach drew out the sweetest moans from Viktor he had ever heard, making his own arousal grow.

“Oh my god, so good. Feels so good, Yuri. Use your fingers too.”

Kissing down his thighs, he reached for the lube and covered his fingers. Stroking his hole, he slipped a finger inside.

Viktor jumped and clamped down on him, then taking deep breaths, started to relax again. Yuri frowned. He was certain he’d been as careful as he could, and it wasn’t the first time he’d reacted like that. His mind started grinding through the puzzle in front of him as it did when he was riding a tricky horse until he realized he could ask for more information.

“You seem a little jumpy. Am I being too rough or sudden?”

“No, you’re doing great. It’s just me. I… didn’t have a great experience with this once. The guy who was my first was also a Dom. I guess there was some jealousy on his end which I found out later. He
tried to dominate me and put me in my place so to speak. I tore pretty badly. I’ve enjoyed it other
times, but I’m always a little tense in the beginning.”

“Oh my god. I’m so sorry, Viktor. That’s awful. We don’t have to do this at all. Really. I’m more
than happy just receiving.”

“No, I want you to experience it, and I’m comfortable with you. I just can be a little jumpy. Don’t
worry too much about it. I’ll relax more as we get into it.”

“If I don’t hurt you.”

“You won’t. If I didn’t just break you, you’re not going to break me. It was only because he was
trying to hurt me that he did. You’d never do that. I’m waiting for you to follow your orders so get
on it.”

“Yes, Viktor.” He spoke with the same gentle tones he used on the horses. The more Viktor tried to
make him dismiss his pain with the ease with which he spoke it, the deeper it affected him. He’d
dropped for it before but not again. “Instead of fucking you, can I have the freedom to make love to
you? Not following your orders, just showing you how I feel.”

(60) “Yes, Yuri, yes. Do whatever you want to me.”

His heart squeezed in his chest. “Oh.” He earned Viktor’s complete trust. He suddenly understood
why Viktor wanted to feel that it was something precious to him and how he felt so clearly all the
times when he offered nothing but cheap words. It wasn’t himself that he was offering but his
worthlessness. The things that were hard for him to offer—his faith, his heart, his fears—those were
the things that Viktor treasured. “I just felt it—what you feel when I say that and mean it.”

“Incredible, isn’t it?”

“Yes, Viktor.” He leaned over him and caught his chin to turn his face for a kiss. “I love you so
much.” His hands stroked over Viktor’s body as he left kisses over his shoulder and down his back.
“Can I…” He pushed Viktor’s hip until he was sitting back on the bed, facing him. Nudging
Viktor’s legs apart, he kissed him, soft, slow tastes of his lips, his hand cradling the back of his head,
lightly fingering the silk of his hair.

Stroking his thigh with the back of his hand, he brought his hand closer to his hole as he wicked soft
moans from him with his tongue. Relaxing his own body before trying to make Viktor relax his, he
circled his hole lightly until his confidence that they were safe bled into him.

Feeling his body give in his arms, he eased his finger in the tiniest amount then waited for his
complete relaxation to go further. One centimeter, one breath, one lingering kiss and caress at a time,
he opened him to his touch. By the time he had his third finger in, Viktor was clinging to him,
trembling and rock hard, red staining his perfect skin.

He withdrew his fingers to the sound of Viktor’s whining protest and turned him back onto his hands
and knees, kneeling behind him, returning to the position Viktor had chosen. With all his focus on
staying calm for Viktor, he lined his cock up feeling steady.

As he settled inside him, he had to stop to regain his senses with Viktor’s heat and tightness drawing
them away. “How are you doing?”
“Perfect. You’re perfect, Yuri. Start whenever you’re ready.”

He nodded; his eyes closed. “I need a minute.”

“Are you okay?”

He nodded again. “You feel… so good.”

Viktor gripped his hand tighter in response.

Drawing his hips back, pleasure coiled. Striking like a towering ocean wave as he plunged forward, it held him under as he fought to keep his control. “Oh my fuck.” He hissed as Viktor pushed back on him with his own deep groans. “Oh my god. This is…” He couldn’t finish his thoughts. Falling back into him a second time stripped his mind bare.

He made love to his voice rattled and broken with pleasure, to the expression on his face as he kept his eyes on him the best he could, to the push of his hips reaching to join him sooner, to the red blooming over his skin in the pale light, to the taste of his skin, to his climax crying his order to come.

Viktor collapsed on the bed, and Yuri followed him down, smothering him with his weight and his kisses, knowing nothing would make him breathe easier.

***

Yuri woke to a blinding sun and buried his face into Viktor, the night before reaching into the day through the delicious ache in his body and memories turning his lips.

Below the sheets, Viktor slipped something small and hard onto the ring finger of his right hand.

“Marry me.”

***
The first art was done by me. The second was done by the lovely Clarinda and can be found on Pillowfort. Please share your love!

Spotify
57. Glass Vase by Riley Pearce
58. Movement by Hozier
59. Black Sea by Natasha Blume
60. Power Over Me by Dermot Kennedy
Chapter 26

Chapter Summary

The moment of truths

Chapter Notes

Art is mine and not quite NSFW, but probably wouldn't want it on a work screen anyway.

This should go without saying, but nothing in this fic is endorsed for real-life solutions as is always true with all fiction. It's an abstract rendering of reality, not a literal transcription. I exaggerate or omit aspects of reality to create a view of it that I feel has a value worth your attention and interaction to withdraw that value.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

(61) “Is—is that an order?”

“It’s a plea. I was going to ask you a few months from now to elaborate fanfare—carriages, doves, string quartet, and the like; every cliched inch of the whole nine yards—but I woke up and saw you in my arms, and I just couldn’t. Not ask you.

“I have absolutely no control over my love for you. I would have a better chance of spinning the earth the other direction than of silencing its expressions. We can have a long engagement if you like, but I want so desperately to see my ring on your finger as a symbol of our love and commitment to each other.” His hand trembled as he squeezed Yuri’s tighter. And I need you to understand in a language that is crystal clear to you exactly what you mean to me.

“Marry me so I can take care of you the way you deserve to be cared for. Marry me so your doubts about what you mean to me will be suffocated at the root. Marry me because you love me as eternally as I love you. Please marry me, Yuri.”

“You—you just gave up your fairytale proposal?”

“I gave up nothing. I’m loving you the way that’s perfect for us. Too fast, too much, too impulsive.” He smiled. “What else would you expect from a couple of eventers? Besides, the wedding will take planning. I’ll get my fairytale dream there. If you say yes, that is.”

“What if… you change your mind?”

He pulled his hand up from under the sheets. A golden ring cast the morning rays right back to the sun. “I put this here intending to never remove it again. The only one who can undo it is you. I will not let one distant flaw ruin everything we have, no matter how big it is. Have faith in me. This isn’t me trying to prove our love; it’s my expression of it. This ring, and everything it means, is what I feel for you.”
He pressed his face back to Viktor’s chest, his eyes wide and his heart racing. His fears screamed as the ring gathering heat from the sun and his pulse burned on his finger. He watched Viktor’s eyes pleading for his faith, a feeling long-since gone nudging back in: Hope.

“Yes, Viktor.”

“Really?” His eyes flooded with tears.

“Yes, Viktor. I’ll marry you whenever you want.”

Squeezing his eyes shut, he held Yuri’s face in his hands, their foreheads pressed together. “Thank you.” His tears dripped onto Yuri’s cheeks. “I love you so much.” He brought them into a kiss that lingered over shared magnitudes, fueling a rising passion.

Viktor's hands traversed his body. “How sore are you?”

“Perfectly.”

He smiled and grabbed the lube from the nightstand then drew Yuri’s leg over his hip, fingers drawing the stretch he loved so much. “So beautifully you’re opening up for me, my love. Stay relaxed, just like that.” He slid into Yuri’s silent shock and rocked his hips in gentle, slow strokes.

Holding tight through lips, arms, legs, they wandered each other’s bodies as if they were taking a stroll down a beach, waves lapping at toes. Just as Yuri rose to the first gentle peak, Viktor summoned his pleasure with his whispered order and filled him with his seed.

Coming back down, they refused to release their hold in the slightest and instead lay bound in each other.

Viktor’s kisses dotted his cheeks. “How was it?”

“Kinky.” He grinned and nipped at Viktor’s chest.

Laughing, he held him tighter. “Yeah? You were still able to enjoy something so mellow?”

“Yes, Viktor.” He sighed and closed his eyes basking in the afterglow. “I told you, if it’s you, it’s perfect. But, can I say, I’m happy my first time was the way you gave it to me and not like that. I would have seriously wondered what the big deal was if you’d tried to satisfy me after all that time apart with just that. That was like… two bites of katsudon. Good but not nearly enough.”

“I knew I was going to ruin you for anything normal.”

“Wasn’t that your goal? To break me until I was unfit for anyone but you?”

“I was so cruelly selfish.”

“Do you regret it?”

“Not in the slightest.”

“Good. I think I was already unfit for anyone but you. Last night was the first time I ever felt truly satisfied. I even woke up satisfied, which never happens. Or, I was satisfied until you got me going again…”

His eyes ran down his bruised and bitten body splayed out in the tangle of sheets, a new course already taking shape in his mind. “That sweet little tease wasn’t enough, huh? I can’t allow that.” His
lip curled, and he pounced.

***

Sweaty, dripping cum, and fresh red marks and bruises blaring new memories, Yuri stood in front of Viktor looking up at him in awe. His Dom in full force for the first time in far too long.

Small bruises dotted Viktor’s chest where he’d allowed him to mark him with deep kisses as well and a matching gold ring now sat on his finger, placed there with eternal whispers of his love.

“Kneel.”

“Yes, Viktor.” Sinking to his knees, he slipped out from under the burden of a mind and a life and a heart too heavy to carry alone.

Viktor slipped it on finding security in its weight and comfort in having Yuri’s life wrapped around his. “Perfect. My precious, beautiful zolotse.” He took Yuri’s chin in his hand and his cheek under his thumb. His ring pressed into his flesh. “My love. Thank you for giving me another day with you.”

***

Chained up in Viktor’s playroom, his arms splayed out in thick metal cuffs, bandages wrapped around his wrists for protection, Yuri had no idea whether he should feel excitement or fear.

Viktor had a strange edge to him all day that grew sharper as their playtime neared. The closest he could compare it to was the day when he’d tried to run. He’d also let his bruises heal, which promised a hard session soon. Viktor was always most excited by a blank canvas to play on.

Dressed in his breeches and boots and the black polo he favored for their games, he picked up the ass lock that filled his hand and unscrewed the handle. He selected a massive, silver, two-pronged fork from the table spread with his tools and screwed it onto the lock where the handle had been. The whole contraption was longer than Viktor’s forearm, and he knew from experience just how big that lock would get inside him. Yuri’s eyes flared, having no idea what he could possibly use that set up for but with a solid idea of where it would go.

Viktor walked over and pressed the rounded ball on the head of the lock to his already-prepped hole and eased it in. It stopped at the flared base of the lock, leaving the fork sticking out of his body. Viktor pulled the handle out, letting the ball slide down the leaves of the lock and spread them open inside him. He gave it a twist to make sure one of the leaves was against his prostate then returned to his table, leaving Yuri to struggle with the expansion and weight of the device tugging at his hole. It was so much more potent when he was standing than it’d been when he was lying on the floor, and now, it had added weight too.

Viktor picked up a black rubber sack and a bottle of gel and squeezed some inside. Stretching it open, he wrangled his balls inside and slipped his cock through the loop on top. Yuri’s concern grew as the device did nothing but cup him with a comfortable squeeze. The ones that looked and felt the most innocuous always ended up with the sharpest bite.

Alcohol wafted by as Viktor cleaned his hands. So far, that’d meant either needles or sounds. Yuri hoped it was the sounds. Please, just one known pleasure in the minefield being installed in his body. Viktor opened his autoclave and picked up a long, flexible silver-beaded one that he had yet to feel. Oh, it looked so good. He couldn’t contain his excitement as Viktor approached.
He started slipping it in then grinned, taking Yuri’s face in his free hand and giving it a little shake. “You filthy slut. You just love being stuffed in every direction.”

He shuddered as the sound reached deeper than any he had felt so far. “Yes, Viktor.”

“Is my slut nice and soft for me as he should be?”

His body was still struggling with the lock in his ass, tensing and releasing against the weight, making it softly fuck him which was likely only encouraging the contractions. “No, Viktor. Not quite. I’m sorry. I’m trying.”

“We’re coming up to a tight bend here, and the only way it’ll possibly fit with that lock in your ass too is if you’re as soft as you can be. I want to go deeper, so you’re going to open up for me, yes?”

“Yes, Viktor.” Taking deep breaths, he tried to control the contractions until the weight settled against his bulging hole. Keeping his eyes closed to hold that still softness inside him, he nodded. “I’m yours. Do what you want to me.”

“That’s my sweet Yuri.” He kissed him as he eased deeper, the sound shifting from going down to going straight back into him.

Yuri’s eyes shot open; Viktor kept his kiss calm and measured as he slid the sound through the center of his prostate. He whined, trying to keep his softness as an orgasm emanating from that spot already rose to the brink. Viktor fucked him with the sound slowly through the virgin center of his pleasure with the lock pressing on it from the other side. Yuri’s heart shuddered, fear of the devastating force building inside him gasping through their kiss.

Viktor couldn’t possibly mean something this hard already. They were just getting started. But Viktor kept fucking him in earnest and coming from his prostate was always allowed. It was one of Viktor’s favorite ways to torment him, and it didn’t end his fun. Not that a typical orgasm ruined his fun for long anyway. Just as the waves of pleasure were about to crash over, Viktor stopped.

“That’s my good slut. No coming at all yet. Tell me any time you feel close.”

His body throbbed with the pleasure still sitting on the edge as he stared at him, horrified. “Huh?”

His hand cracked down on his ass, and his other gripped around his cock, clamping down over the rod inside. “What was that? Is that how my slut responds to my orders?” His voice growled as his lip curled.

“No, Viktor! I’m sorry!”

“Are you my good slut, or are you just a filthy whore who wants to come more than he wants to please me.”

“I’m your good slut! I promise I’ll please you! I’m sorry, Viktor!”

He released his hold. “Good. Let’s try this again. No coming at all. You will tell me if you get close.”

“Yes, Viktor.”

He shoved his face to the side with his thumb. “Good boy.”

Viktor picked up a set of wires attached to his e-stim box and hooked two onto the device cupping
his balls, one into the end of the sound, and completed the circuit with a sticky electrode slapped onto
his stomach just above his cock. He turned it on and started playing with the settings until he had it
solidly in torment mode with teasing waves filling him from the inside out.

The waves made his balls try to contract, but the device held them stretched down, creating a deep
pull through his groin and crushing his balls between the forces. With the sound hooked into his
prostate, it couldn’t slide out as before and instead buried the energy inside him. His will and ability
to resist started crumbling in Viktor’s hands.

Back at his table, Viktor picked up a violin bow and plugged it into his static electric box. He turned
up the dials and held his finger to the strings. An arc of light jumped between his finger and the bow
making him hiss and turn up the box.

“This one is a new toy I bought just for you. I saw it, and this whole scene just fell into place in my
mind. See, the way they did the strings, the current bounces between them gaining power with each
pass, so my box that already has quite a bite is amplified even further.” Smiling, he ran his finger
down the length of the strings that snapped and popped against his skin.

He flipped off the chandelier and switched the spotlight to heat and blind then picked up his soft
flogger and approached, bouncing the handles in his hands to get the right grip, excitement
sharpening on that edge in his eyes.

Flipping the bow over in his hand, he drew the smooth backside down his chest. He jumped
expecting pain then shivered at the soft strokes of pleasure. Viktor caressed him with the tickling tails
of the flogger then smoothed the itch away with the wood of the bow over his entire body.

He stopped back in front of him with a kiss.

(62) “I’ve been patient and understanding of your need to protect yourself from unbearable pain, but
I hate that there’s a part of you that you still won’t let me touch. You’re curled around it, protecting
it, because you are absolutely terrified of what shattering it open will do. I hoped that you would
eventually trust me enough to let me near it willingly, but apparently, that’s not going to happen. I’m
done waiting.”

He struck the fork sticking out of him with the back of the bow as another wave of electricity hit.
Yuri screamed, his knees giving out as soundwaves of pain rang through the lock and incapacitated
his mind.

The resounding ding was still thrumming through the room when Viktor flipped the bow to the string
side and drew it across the tuning fork. Static crackled through his gland and every stretched inch of
his hole. He bellowed like the deer already caught in the jaws, thrashing blindly in his chains.

Viktor smiled. “Oh, you’re going to sing like an angel for me.” He took another kiss from his lips as
if he were committing the taste to memory before they were stained.

“Who am I?”

“My Viktor.”

He smiled and gave him a light slap with the flogger. “Yes, I love that answer. How do I feel about
you?”

“You love me.”

Another, firmer slap. “Yes, I do. How much do I love you?”
His lips twitched in a smile. “Ridiculous amounts.”

He smiled. “I can’t argue with that answer, but I’m detecting a bit of self-depreciation with it. I’ll let it slide this time since you’re not wrong. Do you deserve my love?”

He froze.

“Oh, Yuri.” The bow drew across his chest, contorting him with screams. “Answers are mandatory, but that silence just said so much. We’re still all the way down there, huh? I thought we’d made more progress than that.” He pulled the bow away but held it ready. “I already know. Give words to that answer. Do you deserve my love?”

The bow played over his body until an answer screamed from his lips. “No, Viktor!”

He drew the bow over the head of his cock and winced at his piercing screams. “Color?”

He panted, his weight straining his shoulders. “Green.”

“That answer hurt so much, didn’t it?”

“Yes, Viktor.”

“It hurt me just as much.” He caressed his cheek with his thumb. “Thank you for your honesty. I love how brave you are.” He resumed his strengthened stance. “Why don’t you feel like you deserve my love?”

“You’re Viktor Nikiforov. You’re the most beautiful man on the planet. You’re intelligent and kind, generous, the softest and hardest Dom. You’re—you’re the best rider in the world. Not just the best at winning medals but the best period. You always treat your horses with all the love and respect they deserve and… have the skills to keep them safe.”

The bow played across his nipples. “I’ve never been so angry to be complimented so lavishly. That’s the exact same opinion you had when we met. I’ve had zero impact on your self-esteem, huh? Because if that’s what I am as a reason for why you don’t deserve my love, that means you’re not anything close to those things, yes?”

“Yes, Viktor.” He screamed in agony with the bow over the fork.

“But I don’t believe that answer at all. I don’t believe that I’ve really had zero impact on how you see yourself. You’ve grown far too much for that to be true. I think those are just the easy things for you to say. I’m disappointed in that, Yuri. I expect more from you than to take the easy way out and give me cheap lies. Which one of those lies was the hardest to say?”

They weren’t lies. They were all true. How could anyone put them in the same league? Anyone except Viktor that is. He was nothing compared to him. Except… “The one about the riding.” He leaned into the sweet thud of the flogger then braced for the attack. “But it’s not a lie. I am nowhere near your skill.” He looked up when his answer was met with nothing.

“That lie hurts to say, doesn’t it?”

“It’s not a lie. I wish I were at your level. I tried my best to be…I failed.”

“I don’t believe that.” His bow played a song across the fork then waited in silence for his screams to die out. “You know you’re not just as good as me but better than me.”
“I’m not!”

“You’re not stupid. Don’t lie to me thinking I’m stupid. Which one of us can ride every single horse they meet?”

“I can’t ride at all!”

Viktor stepped back in surprise. “Wow. I know you’re not that blind. Explain that answer.”

Anger seethed between his teeth. “If you’re talking about which one of us can sit on a horse better, yeah, it’s me. But that’s not what riding is, and you know it. Being able to stick with them is just a tiny piece of what we do. The horses are the ones who give the real physical power. What are we? The mind. That’s what riding is. A human mind applied to the raw power of nature in perfect harmony. Yours? Your direction, your focus, your ability to make the right decision under the worst pressures? Your mind is flawless. Mine is a broken mess.”

He paced between the light and shadow, obscured by both. He stopped halfway between them. “What is your dream?”

“I don’t have one.”

“Lie.” He drew the bow over the fork as if he were playing a serenade, his head tilted with his eyes closed reveling in his cries. He stepped back into the darkness. “Why did you come here?”

“I don’t understand the question.” He gasped, trying to get his legs to work correctly under him to relieve his shoulders. “Here, where? This room?”

“This state. This town. You were running blind, yes?”

“Yes, Viktor.”

“Only, it wasn’t blind, was it? You could have run in any direction, yet, you ended up here. In my state. In my town. You had to have known this was where I lived, yes?”

“Yes, Viktor.”

“And you weren’t just applying for any job. You could have worked in any number of places if you were as desperate as you were, yet you held out three months for another job listing as close to horses as your fears would allow. Did you see any openings at other stables in nearby towns?”

“Yes, Viktor. But they weren’t offering anything close to what you were.”

“But you were desperate, no? You were selling your blood to the point of passing out just to survive. Did you see any of them before you saw my opening?”

He cringed, Viktor’s chisel chipping at the lies cemented on his mind. “Yes, Viktor.”

“You—living in your car, selling your blood—you looked at a solid opening and passed because it was in the wrong town.”

“Ye—yes, Viktor.”

He put the tip of the bow under Yuri’s chin and lifted it. “Because you were desperate but not for food or a job or money. You were desperate to save your dream, and you thought your best chance of that was with me.”
“You said yourself, I couldn’t have known it was you!”

“Maybe you didn’t know, but you certainly hoped it was, didn’t you? If it wasn’t in this town, it
couldn’t be me, but if it was…”

“No, Viktor! I didn’t hope for anything. I couldn’t hope for anything. I was just one big mess
reacting blindly to everything.”

“You weren’t blind, and the only reason why you were confused about what you were feeling was
that you were lying to yourself and running from it. That’s what you were really running from. Not
the incident that happened, but your own desire for it not to be the end. That’s what you’re afraid
of.”

“That’s not true!”

“Lies!” He struck the bow on his cock. “’I’ll pay for this later.’ That’s what you’d said after your
ride on Avos. You knew you were going to beat yourself up for enjoying it. You took control; you
loved it. And you wanted more. That’s what you were going to pay for.”

“That’s not true! It was that I was stupid enough to risk taking that control!”

“Lies.” His bow seethed over his chest and down his stomach. “That may have played a small part,
but what I said is the root of it. What is your dream?”

“I don’t have one!” His screams rattled his own eardrums.

“What is your dream?”

“I don’t have one! Please, Viktor! I don’t—”

“What is your dream?”

“I gave it up! I gave it up, Viktor! Please—”

“What is your dream?!” Viktor’s roar crippled his screams until he was gasping in silent agony.

“I want to compete with you!”

Viktor rewarded with the flogger while Yuri wished for the bow.

(63) He stood back heaving then tossed his tools onto the table and pulled his shirt from his body.

He picked up a long black whip that danced in his hand like a captured snake. Standing back, his
body flowed up from his feet, into his hips and shoulders and down his arm held to the side in one
sinuous wave.

The whip coiled then cracked the air next to Yuri; his knees buckled in fear. He tried to regrasp some
support, but his strength had been liquified with the soundwaves of the bullwhip and left him to hang
from his chains.

Viktor’s tight body flicked off crumbs of his power that met the world with the cracks of a sonic
boom. Licking the air with shards of the sound barrier, Viktor warmed up until the bullwhip settled
in his hand as an extension of it. He came around behind Yuri and stroked his hand down his back,
making him gasp and pull away then fall back into his strung-up, racing heart.

“Don’t move.”
Yuri’s chest rose and fell in a light, breathy panic, but he resolved himself to the pain and his obedience.

“What were the conditions like that day?”

When he didn’t answer immediately, the whip broke the air next to him, making him shriek.

“Consider that your only warning. You should have used it on a harder question. Answer me.”

“Sunny!” He gasped, somehow expecting an impact despite his answer. None came; he tried to control his breath. “The ground was dry and good. The courses were well-designed. Challenging but not too hard.”

“What level was it?”

“Prelim.”

“Was the horse new to that level?”

“Yes, Viktor. His—his first time.” Tears started down his cheeks and settled in to stay awhile. He didn’t bother protesting.

“How were you that day?”

“Okay at first. In the warmup ring, someone didn’t call their jump; we nearly crashed. I was able to pull up in time, and no one was hurt, but it rattled me.”

“Was your horse rattled?”

“No, Viktor.”

“It was the last day, stadium, yes?”

“Yes, Viktor.”

“Was he your horse?”

“No, Viktor. A training horse.”

“What was his name?”

The whip struck.

“What was his name, Yuri?”

He cringed and shook his head and found another lash that forced the answer out with his gasp. “Flip A Coin!”

His whip rested still on the ground. “So, that’s what Yura’s been torturing you with. His name. What was his barn name? Coin?”

“Yes, Viktor.”

The leather squeaked as he tightened his grip on the handle again. “Had you been riding him long?”

“A few months.”
“Was it your first event with him?”

“Yes, Viktor.”

“What were your scores like for the previous days?”

“Good. We were in the lead.”

“You entered the ring for your turn a little rattled, but your horse was good, and everything else was fine, yes?”

“Yes, Viktor.”

“What happens next?”

He couldn’t answer. All he could do was brace for the impact. The whip sliced across his upper back with a venomous sting that seeped across his body. He screamed, his hips twisting with his feet scrambling under him, but his back stayed in place for another lashing as reddened pain coated his eyes.

Just when he thought he knew its bite, it slashed harder.

“I can slice you clean open for those answers if I have to. Answer the damn question, Yuri.”

Each lash grew its power until words silenced by his beating heart bled from his tongue. “Everything was going right, but then I thought I saw something on the jump next to me, but it was just some loose filler. When I looked back, I lost the course, and I didn’t know where the next fence was!”

“Did you look for it?”

“Yes? No? I don’t know! I—wasn’t there! The static—I didn’t know what I was doing! I should have pulled up! I should have scratched before I entered! I knew—I knew I—”

“What did you do instead?”

“I—” He froze; the whip lashed his ass.

“What did you do instead?!?”

“I turned for the next jump I saw! I—didn’t know I was doing it!” He gasped with his sobs choking out his words.

“What happened then?”

“It—it was an oxer and—and—I should have turned away or pulled up, but it was right there, and I didn’t—it was too late. It was backward. I should—should have—” He was crushed between the pain and his sobs and the pleasure pulsing through his core.

“You took it backward.”

“Ye—yes—” His head hung heavy, pulling at the welts on his back, spilling drool down his chin. “Yes, Viktor. I didn’t even help him over it. I just… stopped riding.”

“He caught the back rail.”

He nodded and took the lash.
“What happened to the horse?”

He shook his head. The whip demanded answers.

“What happened to the horse!”

He screamed his throat bloody, Viktor’s whip searching his body for the answer it craved.

“What happened to the horse, Yuri! Say it!” He heaved with his effort, the whip slashing through everything in its path. “Say it! Say it, Yuri! What happened to the horse!”

(64) “I killed him!” His gasp silenced everything. He stood, his lips numb, his body numb, his mind numb to the final shot of the war lodged in his heart.

Viktor came around to face him, the whip tight in his hand.

His head hung heavy. “Punish me, Viktor. Give me what I deserve.”

Viktor stared at him, pain in his eyes.

He glared at his restraint. “Punish me! Don’t hold back! You know I deserve it!” He tried to get his feet under him to bring him closer to Viktor’s whip, but they gave out and dropped him back into the chains.

Viktor cringed, looking down to the handle in his hand then back at him.

“Punish me! Viktor! You promised! I kill—” His eyes went wild in his panic. “You coward! You promised you’d punish me! Beat me, you coward! You know I deserve it! You promised!” He scrambled as Viktor stood still. “Why won’t you punish me?! I killed—I killed him! I killed him!”

His throat strained with the force of his screams.

Viktor’s whip fell to the ground. His hand stroked over Yuri’s cock, bringing him to orgasm.

He tried to pull away. “No, no, no, no, no! Punish me, Viktor! You promised! Punish me! I don’t want—”

“Come for me.”

His release shattered him to dust.

He hung empty and sobbing as Viktor removed everything from his body and pulled him down from his chains and into his arms.

“I killed him. I killed him.” The words sputtered through his lips like a sucking wound.

“I forgive you.”

"I killed him! Don’t you get that?! I killed him! Why wouldn’t you—”

“I know, Yuri. I know what you did. I love you, and I forgive you.”

“You can’t! It was my fault! It was all my fault! Every bit of it!”

“I disagree with that. There was a good bit of bad luck playing a role there too. Riders go off course all the time—”
“I didn’t just go off course! I stopped riding! I was supposed to be in control, and I wasn’t! He trusted me, and I killed him! It was the stupidest mistake to make too. Red flag on the right, white on the left. They spell it out for you which way the jump is supposed to be taken, and I didn’t see it. I just…”

“There’s people who train oxers backward intentionally. I don’t like it, but they’ve been jumped that way thousands of times without incident.”

“Do they train it in a show while pushing the horse’s level without the horse knowing the back rail is there?”

“No. You’re right, that is reckless, but I’m just saying that simply jumping an oxer backward isn’t the end of the world. Even if the horse hits the rail, rails get hit all the time. They’re supposed to knock down safely. Something must have gone wrong there. How exactly did he die?”

He shook his head. “I don’t know. I wasn’t… in my body. When it happened. And after…”

“Tell me everything you saw up to and over the jump.”

“I saw… my hands on the reins. I was transfixed. I couldn’t… And then the jump splintering—green and white splinters—and Coin screaming and people screaming and the officials running over and the reins still in my hands. After all that, I hadn’t let go.

“I ran. I ran and hid, and when I saw them dragging his body with the tractor, I ran and didn’t stop until I got here.”

He smoothed his hand over his sweaty hair. “You ran to exactly where you needed to be.” He kissed a few tears away. “How did Coin’s owner react?”

“She blamed me as she should. I didn’t talk to her, but she called and left messages saying she was going to sue me. I had been saving up to buy my own horse—one good enough to get me to you. I was almost there. I had just started looking for one. I sent her everything I had and didn’t hear from her again, so I’m guessing she was satisfied with that. Are you going to try to spin this as somehow, magically, not my fault?”

“I promised not to lie to you and I won’t here. You messed up, yes. You knew your anxiety was up, and you knew how you react to that, and you chose to compete anyway. You got distracted and forgot your course and didn’t correct properly when you realized you were off.

“You and bad luck both shared equal roles in that disaster, and that is true of almost all of them. You’re not the only one to have ever killed a horse by accident. This is a dangerous sport we do—one of the most dangerous in the world. Horses and riders die every year. We’re human, and we make mistakes and most of them we can correct easily enough, but sometimes they’re too big and sometimes luck butts in and compounds the mistakes.

“You still deserve to keep living your life the way you want to. You don’t deserve a life sentence for your mistakes.”

“Yeah? How do I do that without killing them? You’ve seen me. You know I’m dangerous to be in control and don’t you dare say differently because you know that’s a lie. I kept pushing, knowing I was dangerous, because I was selfish and wanted to compete with you.”

“If I order you to ride, all of that responsibility is on me. You don’t have to wor—”

“I’m not giving that to you, Viktor! I refuse! It’s a limit! You think you can handle that, but what
happens when I kill another one? Because I will. I’ll be out there even worse than I was before, and I’ll fuck up, and it’ll be Avos’s body that’s dragged off the course! You really think you want to live with that for the rest of your life?! You really think I’ll just wash my hands of it and say it’s your problem?!

“You said that if you don’t give this back to me, you’ll see it as a failure. Now you know. We’ll always have this failure hanging over our heads. I failed you from the start because I knew you wanted to get me to ride again, and I knew it would never happen. I knew those zeros would never change.

“I gave you false hope with that one. I should have written a zero like I tried to do. You say I don’t have to compete, but you know that’s a lie to yourself. That’s not how you operate. You like the furthest limits, and this one ends right here, dead on the ground.

“You will never be able to see this limit as anything but a failure. When you look at me, that’s what you’ll feel, and it won’t matter if you think it’s your failure or mine. You’ll look at me and feel failure, so I will never be anything but a failure, and you won’t be able to stop the compulsion to keep away from me. I know what I’d give and what I’d do to rid myself of feeling my failures every day.

“I kissed you and stole your first kiss, knowing we’d reach this point right here, because I can’t seem to stop doing things that I know are terrible ideas.”

He jumped like he’d been cracked with his whip. “You think kissing me was a terrible idea?”

“I think every single thing I’ve done since the day I first saw you was a terrible idea because that was the day I decided I had to compete with you while knowing it was dangerous to even try. Killing Coin was inevitable after that day, and so is killing Avos if I continue to try.

“The only good decision I’ve made in seven years was to stop. You know I’m right. You know if it were anyone but me, you wouldn’t think twice about keeping them as far away from your horses as possible.

“But now you’ve gone and made me admit that I never really stopped trying, so I didn’t even do one thing right.”

“There are options we can look into to fix your—”

“My anxiety’s not fixable, Viktor! There is no cure! The medicines don’t work for me, and even those can only reduce it at best! I’ve tried fixing it and working around it, and this is what it got me! This has been my limit since birth, and it’s a fucking brick wall! Everything that tries to move it ends up smashed and broken! If you try—and I know you’re going to try—I’ve known it all along that you will never accept this without trying your absolute best to push that limit—you’re going to end up just as shattered as me.

“I won’t let you try. I can’t. I can’t live with more bodies at the base of that wall. I’ve thrown enough at it. As long as it exists—and it does and always will—riding will always be a zero. So, tell me, Viktor, because blood magic’s all we’ve got here, what’s your magic spell to make all of this better?”

“I don’t know.”

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Chapter End Notes

Spotify
61. You Belong to Me by Cat Pierce
62. When the Truth Hunts You Down by Sam Tinnesz
63. Heart of the Darkness by Sam Tinnesz
64. The War by SYML
Chapter 27

Chapter Summary

Can't take it back.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“And now you understand my point from the very beginning. Now you know why I tried to resist you, and now you see how shitty my ability to resist bad decisions really is. I should have gone west. I should have taken a job not with horses. I should have turned around and walked right back out the gate the second you got close enough for me to realize it was really you. I should have, I should have, I should have. Every single step of my life is stalked by I should have.”

“I think you’re exactly where you need to be, and I think you would have destroyed both our lives had you actually followed through on any of your ‘good decisions.’ I maybe wouldn’t have known it directly, but if you hadn’t come here—if you hadn’t given me a chance—I would have never known a life with you. You have no idea what kind of agony that life was.

“I can’t argue that your logic isn’t sound or that those decisions wouldn’t have been the best ones to make, but I’ve never been so glad to know someone so awful at making the right logical choice because that idiotic heart you’re following instead is right for us.

“I don’t know how to fix this or what my magic spell is, but I do know that this—what you’re allowing me right now—is guaranteed failure.” He brought his knuckles to his mouth. “Let me try.”

“No! I told you—”

“Let me try. I promise I won’t smash myself into your wall. I promise I’ll be careful and do everything in my power to keep all of us safe.”

“It’s impossible. There is no cure. It doesn’t exist. Trust me, I know. I’ve looked everywhere.”

“Let me try.”

“It’s impossible.” Freshly heated tears burned his raw cheeks. He pressed his face into Viktor’s chest to relieve the pain. “It’s impossible.”

“Give it to me, Yuri, and let me try.”

Unable to bear that pain any longer, he nodded. His sobs poured salt as it tore open.

Viktor’s arms wrapped around him, pulling him tight, gentle hands cradling his bloodied core. “Shh… I forgive you. I forgive you. It’s okay to still want this. I forgive you, Yuri.”

Viktor’s absolution flowed as Yuri’s pain bled out.

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(65) A rocking horse sat in the middle of their playroom, modified to have real riding reins dangling from the hole that formed its mouth. Yuri knelt on his pillow in front of it in confusion. A few minutes later, Nanook walked into the room on all fours. Yuri jumped then started laughing and looked between the rocking horse and the living stuffed bear.

“Are we actually playing today?” He held his sides. “Like little kids?”

“Do little kids play these games?” Nanook pushed him forward and slipped a plug into his ass and turned it on. “Huh, little bunny?”

He moaned and glanced back at the pink fluff of a bunny tail sticking out of him. “No, Nanook.”

His soft paw stroked his cock with his nails trailing after making Yuri’s body erupt in goosebumps. “How’s my sweet bunny doing?”

He bit his lip to resist pushing into his paw for more. “So good, but still waiting for you to knock me up.”

“Don’t worry, my darling wife. I will one day.”

“It’s impos—” He sucked back the rest of the word with the threat of deep claws on his cock. “Yes, Nanook. I’ll have your babies whenever you’re ready to give them to me.” He shuddered, Nanook’s hot breath on his neck.

“Thank you, my love.” He lifted his head just enough to kiss his neck then put it back and plopped a set of bunny ears on Yuri’s head. “I need you to ride my horse for me. He needs a little of your magic to come alive. Go get on.”

He stood up with the vibrations still running in his ass and mounted the absurdly small rocking horse, his cock sticking up in the air. Viktor tried and failed to hold back his laughter. The more he tried to stop, the more he couldn’t. He sunk to the floor and pulled his head off to wipe the tears from his eyes.

“Viktor!” he wailed despite his own laughter. “Stop laughing at me. You’re making me self-conscious here.”

“I’m sorry. I’m sorry. I had this one here, so I didn’t buy a new one, but it’s obviously from when I was a baby.” He wiped his face and put Nanook’s head back on.

“You mean this is your first mount that I get to ride?” His eyes lit up, half in mockery and half in genuine delight at being offered such exclusive fan access.

“Yes, it is. His name is Loshadka.”

“What’s that mean?”

“Horsie.”

He tried to suppress his giggles and did a better job of it than Viktor did, though, maybe Viktor’s sight was a bit more ridiculous.

“Hey, I was three.”

He stroked the horse’s wooden neck. “Hi, Loshadka. Hi, horsie. Are you a good boy?”

“The best. He never once threw me off.”
“Has Toska ever thrown you? I’ve always wanted to know that.”

“He’s never bucked once. He was so good from day one. He did spook once at one of his first events, maybe the third or so. Someone fired up an obnoxious truck when we were approaching a jump. I came off, and after taking a few steps away, he came back over to me looking so concerned as to why I was on the ground and not on his back. I think he vowed to never do it again because he hasn’t. He’s completely bombproof.

“I fell off a couple other times riding bareback just because I was still learning how, but that’s about it.” He put the reins over the horse’s neck, and Yuri’s heart lost its rhythm. “You’re already feeling anxious just having them there without touching them?”

“Yes, Viktor.”

“How bad?”

“One.”

“Wow. Okay, just sit and rock gently and focus on your orders. Stay. Kneel. Back and forth.” He turned up the plug to give his mind a battle between stimulation and relaxation to focus on and make the reins fade from importance.

“Where are you at?”

“Two and a half.”

“Excellent. You’re doing such a good job, zolotse. Close your eyes, keep squeezing your fists.”

“Yes, Viktor.” He closed his eyes and tried to relax further. Not seeing them helped, but he still knew they were there. Thin braided leather brushed over the back of his hand. His heart slammed into his chest; his hands jerked back. “Half. Please—”

“Shh… it’s okay. Put your hands back.”

“I can’t. I can’t.”

“Shh… easy, Yuri.” He stroked down his arm until his muscles unlocked enough to tug one arm forward then the other. “That’s my good bunny. It’s okay. We’re just playing today and having fun. My bunny wants to ride me, yes? But you’ve never ridden before, so I have to show you how. Open up your hand for me so I can show you how to hold them. Keep your eyes closed.”

“I can’t, Viktor.”

“You can. Let me try. Everyone is perfectly safe here. There’s no risk at all. Open up your hand and let me try. It’s okay if you get scared. Just stay with me, and I’ll help you through it.”

“I can’t. I can’t. I can’t.” His eyes squeezed shut as he tried to force his hand open to obey. “I can’t.” His fingers opened a crack, and Viktor slipped the rein in then held his hand shut. He tried to pull his hand away to rid himself of the vile leather, but Viktor held fast.


Tears sprung to his eyes as his panic took the shape of flying splinters and screams. “Please, Viktor, get it away from me.” He strained against Viktor’s arms wrapped around his back and down to his
hand, holding him in place.

“No. You’re the one who needs to bend here. You’re rigid and in the wrong place. You’re seeing it?”

“Yes, Viktor.”

“Stay. Kneel. Back and forth, Yuri. You can do this. Where are you?”

“Our playroom.” His fist twitched over the rein.

“Good, Yuri. More. You can do it. Who is with you right now?”

“You, Viktor.”

“Good. Is it safe when you’re with me?”

“Yes, Viktor.”

“Good, Yuri. Squeeze your fists. Don’t run. Don’t get locked in place. Stay nice and soft and responsive to my touch, and I will get us through this safely. I promise. Your body and your mind are lying to you right now. There is no danger. You can trust my words, yes?”

“Yes, Viktor.” The static crackled at the edges, and slowly, the image faded till it was just the numb noise in his head.

“You’re safe, Lashodka is safe, I’m safe, and that rein in your hand is safe. I chose to put it there, and you say I never choose wrong when it comes to them, yes?”

“Yes, Viktor.” Slowly his fists started their rhythm, which spiked his anxiety at first as he squeezed down on the rein, but after a few passes, his hand stopped trying to spit out the offending leather.

“Good, Yuri. So beautifully soft you’re getting for me. I love you so much, and I’m so proud of you. Keep going just like that.” He slipped the other rein into his hand then clamped down on both to make sure he wouldn’t reject them, but the second went much smoother than the first. “So good, my beautiful Yuri.”

Viktor pulled off the head of his costume so he could leave kisses down his neck and shoulders while he held him tight in his soft fur from behind. “My sweet bunny, let me just adjust them a bit. You’ve got to put the rein between your pinky and your ring finger like this.” He adjusted one rein, so it went in between his fingers and exited out the top of his fist under his thumb. “Good. Keep your thumb over it here just like that to hold it secure and hold it like you’re holding a little bird. Firm, so he doesn’t flap away, but gentle.” He stroked over his shaking hands until they softened just a bit. “Good, just like that. Now you put the other one the same.”

Cringing back into Viktor’s strength, he flipped his pinky over the rein and turned his fist so his thumb was on top.

“So good. Just like that. You’re such a clever little bunny.” His hands slid down his arms and tugged at the loose end of the rein, slipping it through his hand. “You’ve got to keep your reins short enough to feel your horse’s mouth. That’s your communication line. When it’s secure on both ends, he’ll be able to feel and respond to the tiniest pressures of your hand. How are you feeling?”

“Um, one.”
“Okay, keep your eyes closed and focus on your orders. Let me know when we’re at a two or better.”

“Yes, Viktor.”

His paws soothed his trembling body, stroking his cock and back up his chest, down his shoulders, keeping him in that balance between sexually excited and relaxed. He whispered sweet words in his ear in an endless stream of encouragement and support.

Yuri braced the calm that had settled over him, preparing for the next step. “Two.”

“Good. Stay just like that, and open your eyes. Don’t look down yet; just open them.” He rewarded with a paw over his cock when he obeyed. “Good, Yuri. Where are you at?”

“About the same. Maybe one and a half.”

“Good. Stay like that and tell me when we’re back at a two.”

After a minute, he nodded. “Two.”

“Look down, beautiful. Keep your eyes on your hands as much as possible, but look away if you need to collect yourself again.”

He became transfixed the instant he looked down, shards of green and white scattering at the edges of his vision and chaos erupting in his mind. He tried to look back up but couldn’t. Panic rose through his chest.

“Look up, Yuri.” He used every bit of strength he had in his voice as his paw smacked under his chin to help him break the spell.

He startled, but the scare broke him free, and he stared at the ceiling, trying to regain his softness.

“Come back down for me just a little. Look straight ahead how you were before.”

He dropped his head, fixing his eyes on the distant rack of tools.

After a few minutes, his paws helped him regain his calm. “Good, Yuri. I want you to glance down this time. Just one second down then right back.”

One-second glances at a time, Viktor slowly forced him to accept the trigger in his hands until he could look down and away at will. He moved on to getting him to use the reins, which he rewarded by pulling him off the horse and flooding his body with pleasure when he’d managed to do it with only minor shaking.

Yuri lay gasping, thinking they were finished for the day, when Viktor put Nanook’s head back on and slipped a bit with reins attached into his mouth and got on all fours.

“Climb on, little bunny. We’re going to bed.”

More? He silently sobbed. He was already more than worn out with Anxiety taking the ninety-five percent cut of his energy that it thought was a fair deal. But an order is an order and following them was always worth it. He crawled on his hands and knees over to his back and used it to drag himself to his feet with Anxiety shoving its way back in for that last five percent.

“Is my bunny too tired?”
“I’m never too tired for you.”

“Oh my god, you’re just the sweetest. We’re almost done, and then I’ll take good care of you. I just need you to do one last thing. I forgot how to get to the bedroom. I need you to guide me there. Pick up the reins.”

“You forgot how to get to your own bedroom?”

“I did.” He laughed airily and slightly embarrassed and completely convincing of its genuineness. “You know how forgetful I can sometimes be.”

“You could have been an actor.” He settled onto his cozy back and resumed the battle with his oldest foe to win the remainder of his submission and give it to Viktor.

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(66) Coming around the back of the stable, a coin bounced off Yuri’s back. He turned around and searched the grass for it with a sudden wave of annoyance. He hadn’t felt anything other than trembling panic with every coin Yura threw. The change startled him. Slowly, his fingers seized on the penny. He stood and put it back into Yura’s hand.

“I think I’m done with this game.”

Yura took a step back, confusion and anger intertwining. “What do you mean you’re done? You don’t get to decide that.”

“Actually, I do.”

“What the hell? This isn’t a fucking game.”

“Isn’t it? We’ve been playing this game with the coin rather than talk about what it’s really about, so why don’t we do that now.”

“Fuck you. I don’t want to talk to you about anything.”

“I think you do. Why else would you be demanding my attention? What did I do to you, Yura?”

“Are you fucking serious right now? You’re really going to ask me that fucking question? How fucking stupid are you?”

Viktor came out after spotting their confrontation from the aisle and stood back to monitor it.

“Can I have a few minutes alone to finish this, please?”

“You’re okay?”

“Yes, Viktor.”

He nodded and went back inside.

Yura sneered. “Why don’t you just go and have your daddy change your diaper.”

“We’re not into that. I know I hurt you, but I don’t know how exactly. Please tell me?”

“How the fuck don’t you know? I can’t believe I’m wasting breath on someone so fucking dumb.”
“I don’t remember it fully. Only little fragments. And I have no idea how you fit into it other than you saw it, but I don’t know what you saw because that’s part of what I don’t know. I only know that I took an oxer backward, and he likely got caught on the lower back rail he couldn’t see. I don’t remember anything between making that turn and running away.” He closed his eyes and tightened his fists. “You saw me kill Coin. Please tell me how I did it?”

“You seriously don’t remember me? You don’t remember killing a fucking horse?”

“I don’t. Please tell me? I need to know, and I think you need to tell me.”

Turning to scowl at the distant trees, he folded his arms. “You yelled at my mom.”

“Huh?”

“Well, not really yelled. Just… made her listen, I guess. I had just switched to Celestino’s stable after being dragged through every other stable in the area. My mom gets all pissy at my trainers and my horses whenever I don’t win and blames it on them and drags me to a new place with a new, more expensive horse. So fucking annoying. But I’m used to it, so whatever.

“I went to an event with Celestino after like a fucking week on my new horse, cause my mom insisted we go, and didn’t place at all. She got all bitchy of course and was going to pull the same shit, and you were there when she was throwing her fit, and you were all like, ‘He’s never going to make it at the top if you don’t give him a chance to really learn to ride. Push-button horses can win for you at lower levels, but at the top, he’s going to be left behind.’

“And she was all like, ‘Well, what do you suggest then, person I’ve never heard of?’ And you said she should let me take a step back on competing and find a horse I can bond with and who will challenge me. And Celestino said that if she wanted to switch coaches, she should switch to you and stick with it for at least a year before she even considered changing again. And she actually fucking agreed.”

He finally looked back at Yuri, hurt rising in his eyes. “I got Pantera and wanted to tell you and went to the stable. Celestino said you were out at an event, so I decided to go out there and see what kind of a rider you were, and you were fucking good. I saw you riding horses that were fighting you the whole way and actually placing on them. And I thought, for once, things might not completely suck.

“And then I watched you take an oxer backwards. And I watched the pole fucking shatter and stab him in the fucking gut. You didn’t even move off his back! You didn’t release your hands, so he just smashed through all of it! You didn’t even give him a chance to clear it! He knocked the front pole onto the back one and broke it as he came down on the back end, and the broken end was sticking up as he fell, and he just fucking impaled himself on it!” Tear-stained eyelashes hammered his delicate cheeks.

“And he was panicking, and you just fucking ran. You fucking ran. You didn’t stand there and watch him struggle till he fucking died, and you didn’t watch them chain him to a fucking tractor and drag him out; blood fucking everywhere.” He whipped the penny at him as hard as he could as his tears broke open. “I did. I did, and I can’t stop watching it!”

“I’m so sorry, Yura. I—”

“That’s not even the worst of it! My mom found out what you did because, of course, that was the only thing people could talk about, and she said she wasn’t going to be taking advice from you or anyone who would hire you, so she quit the stable yet again and was going to sell Pantera, but she’d burned through every decent stable in the area and decided to move me out here to train with that
idiot which meant I had to move halfway across the fucking country and leave my boyfriend behind.

“And almost a fucking year later, guess who shows up. If my mom comes out and sees you here, she’ll fucking move me again and probably sell Pantera too. And he was going to kick me out if I wasn’t fucking nice to you and forced me to take lessons from you. And I fucking hate you so much because my life and an innocent horse’s life were destroyed all because you don’t know where you’re fucking going!”

“I’m so sor—”

“How did you not fucking know?! There are fucking flags telling you which way the jump is set up!”

“I have anxiety.”

“What? You’re telling me you fucked up because you got a little scared?”

“It’s not just a little scared. It’s like staring into the eyes of a starving lion with nothing to protect you. Sometimes it is just a little scared, but everyone feels that. Anxiety is like facing your death over and over and over. It’s cruel words screaming in your head that override everything else, and sometimes they don’t even make sense. It’s just fear and noise.

“Everyone who has it feels it a little differently. For me, the worst is that I get spacey, and my short-term memory gets flaky. The things I’ve done over and over stay, so I revert to doing something familiar or easy and get locked into them without much awareness until it passes.

“With a course, I’ve only got a day at best to memorize it, often just a few hours, and that’s while still doing everything that needs to get done at an event at the same time, and I usually had several horses going at once in different classes, so I’d have several courses to memorize and keep track of which was for which.

“Cross country was easier because the path is usually marked with tape, or the jumps are so spread out, the course is apparent. Stadium, it’s just one big cluster of fences, and I’ve got nothing but my short-term memory to rely on. It feels like someone is asking me to remember a shopping list while being hunted.

“That day, someone didn’t call their jump in the warmup, and we nearly crashed. It set off my anxiety, but it wasn’t bad enough to make me scratch. Then the breeze blew some filler on the jump next to me, and I panicked, thinking for a second that there was another horse there, and the course dropped from my mind. That made me panic even harder, and I lost control of my own body and actions. I was stuck, and there was no way out until it decided to let me go. I don’t think it really did until I met Viktor.

“I killed Coin, and I ran from it, and I feel so much shame about both of those, I can’t stand it. And I hate that there’s this empty space in my head where that memory should go. I know that it happened, but it doesn’t feel real, and I feel that if I at least had the solid weight of a real memory there, I might be able to process it in some way, but all I’ve got is the same monster in my head that made me do it in the first place. And I can’t run from it, and I’m powerless to fight it.” He wiped his tears inside his shirt.

Yura stared at him, his face playing through all the anger and confusion and hurt before he stared back at the trees. “Yeah, well, having the memory doesn’t help any. It’s just as shitty. Trust me.” He looked back at him, light snarls flickering in his study of him. “I thought you were better than him.” His thumb jerked toward the aisle where Viktor waited. “I was excited to have someone who was
“I don’t know how to answer that. I stopped riding after the accident and swore I’d never get on a horse again, but Viktor… He wants me to ride again and has been pushing me to do it.”

“And you’re okay with that?”

“Not at all. I’m terrified.”

“What the fuck is he thinking? He thinks it just won’t happen again?”

“No, he knows how dangerous I am, but he wants to try to find a way to fix it.”

“Well, is it possible?”

“No. There’s no cure for it.”

“What the fuck then? He’s going to try to cure something the doctors can’t?”

“I don’t know what his plan is. I just know he promised he would do everything he could to keep everyone safe while he tried, and that’s enough for me.”

“Seriously?”

“Seriously.”

They alternated between staring each other down and staring anywhere but at each other.

“You really didn’t remember me?”

“I remember the conversation with your mom, but I only saw you once with a helmet on. I would have never put the two together. I’m sorry.”

His toe gouged out a chunk of grass. “How do I stop seeing it?”

“I don’t know. I can’t either.”

“You said you didn’t remember it.”

“I don’t. I just see the fragments I do remember and hear loud static like an old tv set. It drowns out my mind with so much nothing.” His tears rose. “I’m so sorry for giving that to you. I can’t take it back. I wish I could.” He glanced at the dull penny, still lying in the grass. No matter how many he took, he couldn’t take it back.

Yuri looked back up. “You should get your mom to take you to a doctor that can help you.”

He shook his head. “She’d never do that. That’d mean admitting there’s something wrong with me.”
“I’m so sorry, Yura. I am so, so incredibly sorry for how I hurt you. I wish I could do more than say, I’m sorry, but I can’t. You’re absolutely right that I should be the one with that memory; not you. I don’t expect you to forgive me, but if there’s ever anything I can do for you, please tell me. I’m so sorry.” He caught a fresh sob against his shirt and more followed, each harder than the last. “I’m so, so sorry.”

He made his way back to Viktor to put his pieces in his hands.

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(67) A couple of weeks later, he went out to meet Viktor in the outdoor arena near midnight, their playtime postponed till then. He had been ordered to wear his riding clothes which had him on edge until he saw Viktor under the arena lights.

His body silvered in a latex bodysuit, horse hoof boots, and a silver tail sticking out of his ass, Viktor was on all fours but much taller than he should have been. Rather than going down to his knees, he’d attached horse leg stilts to his hands to match his leg length. Yuri doubled over laughing.

“Hey, no laughing at me. You said you wanted to play here one day.”

“This is not what I had in mind!” He cried from laughter. “Viktor, I know I said you look like a horse, but I didn’t mean it that seriously.”

“Well, how do I look?”

He tried to right himself enough to look him over properly, but that only made him laugh harder when he fully took in the sight. “You look like a colt. Your legs. Oh my god, your legs are so long!”

“I’m no colt. I’m a sexy stallion.” He flipped his hair out of his face.

“You’re going to be soo tall when you grow up. Eighteen hands at least.”

“Psh. I get into a full-on ponyplay suit for you, and you mock me. Do you know how hard this thing is to put on?”

“I’m sorry; I’m sorry.” He struggled to hold back his laughter though he was nowhere near done. He’ll likely be sitting somewhere at eighty years old, and his mind will flash to this moment, and he’ll laugh all over again. He wiped his eyes and came over to stroke his natural silver mane below the ears propped on his head. “You’re the prettiest pony.”

“That’s better. Go ahead and tack me up.” He nodded at a saddle and bridle hanging on a jump pole.

“You’re going to be sooo tall when you grow up. Eighteen hands at least.”

“Are you sure you’re old enough to ride?”

“Hush, you brat.” His laughter undermined his order.

He walked over and investigated the strange-looking bridle. It had been designed to fit over a human head rather than a horse head, and he wasn’t quite sure how to put it on.

“I’m not going to be able to give orders with the bit in my mouth, but you know what I expect of you and what I would say. Just take me around and get a feel for things and then we’ll try some jumps.”

“How high can you jump?”

He nodded at one of the verticals that had been lowered earlier for his students. “I was able to make it over that without a rider just fine. I think I’ll still be okay with you on me. We’ll need to use a safe
signal since I can’t talk or remove it myself to talk with the hooves on. If I paw the ground, that’s your cue to ungag me.”

“Yes, Viktor.” He held the bit to his mouth. “Anything else before I gag you?”

“Hmm… I could always tell you how much I love you and how grateful I am to you again. I think you’ve got the rest.”

“I got that too.” He smiled and gave him a kiss. He held the bit to his open mouth then buckled the strap around his head, taking care not to pull his horse ears off, then did the one under his chin and the final one at the base of his skull. “Comfortable?”

He nodded.

The saddle was a real pony saddle that had a specialized girth, much shorter, wider, and stretchier than a real one. He carried it over and stopped. “Where do I put it? With the girth behind your arms like a regular saddle or around your waist like a belt?”

He shrugged.

“You’ve never done this before?”

His head bobbled between yes and no. He gestured to his outfit and nodded his head then pointed his hoof at the saddle and shook it.

“You’ve done some but not riding?”

He nodded.

“But I’m guessing it wasn’t you who was the horse.”

He looked up at him with a withering look.

He laughed. “I get it; I’m special.”

He beamed which looked ridiculous with a black rubber bit crammed in his mouth.

“I’m going to try where I’d put it on a horse first, okay?”

He nodded.

He slipped the saddle on his mid-back where the girth fell behind his arms and tightened it snugly. “How is that?”

He wiggled and walked around, testing the restriction. The stilts had been rigged up with some mechanical system that allowed them to extend when he brought his arm forward and fold up as a horse’s would when he picked it back up. He still looked like a newborn colt with how he wobbled on those legs, but it was an impressive system. Viktor nodded and stood to be mounted.

He swung his leg over Viktor’s back then adjusted the stirrups. With a slight hesitation, he picked up the reins; he could practically feel Viktor’s praise purring through him. He rose in the saddle a few times trying to find a comfortable balance.

It felt strange to have no barrel to hug with his legs and figuring out what to do with them was a bit of a trick. He finally settled on something close to right as he knew it and hoped for the best. He brought his heels back to touch the sides of Viktor’s thighs in lieu of the missing barrel.
Viktor stepped forward, and Yuri tipped back, getting left behind as if he’d never ridden a day in his life. With garbled grabs for his balance, he managed to get himself back upright and in balance with Viktor’s steady plodding. He scratched his fingers through his hair.

“What a good boy you are. You’re so sweet to tolerate my flailing without taking off on me.”

Viktor stopped and looked back at him, his eyebrow raised.

“Too much?”

He laughed and shook his head in frustration that he couldn’t talk then answered his question with another shake of his head and walked forward, tipping Yuri back once again.

“Geez, this is so hard with nothing to hold onto. You need to be fatter.” He tried his best to stabilize himself around the empty air while stroking away Viktor’s frustration. “You hate the bit the most, huh?”

He nodded vigorously.

“Okay, I’ll stop talking and focus on the riding.” He brought his heels back to Viktor’s thighs and gave a little tap as he clucked with his tongue. He couldn’t help laughing when Viktor cast a dirty look his way before breaking into a trot. Or not so much a trot as a tangle of limbs as Viktor tried to figure out how to get the diagonal pairs moving correctly under Yuri’s shifting weight.

He tried rising into a posting trot only to have his legs swing back on the pendulous stirrup leathers and send him thumping down on Viktor’s back. “Sorry, sorry. Sitting trot it is.” He got back into position and tried to ride the rough, unbalanced, and arrhythmic movement. Would putting him in a frame help like it did with the horses? He squeezed with his heels to push him into his softly supporting hands, little back and forth squeezes on the reins to encourage him to drop his head and arch his back. When Viktor responded, he stroked his neck and cooed his praise and tried to bite back his laughter. It did feel better.

After a few laps around the ring and trying out a canter which worked much better than the trot once Viktor figured out how to get his limbs in the right pattern, he circled him around and set up the jump. His hands started shaking a bit, but the ridiculousness of the situation and the minuscule height of the jump kept the full-on attack away.

He sat up as the jump approached and made the best calculation of Viktor’s stride and rhythm as he could to make sure he’d stride evenly to the takeoff spot. Upper body sinking down, his hips lifted slightly from the saddle, steadying his leg as much as possible. Viktor wobbled as he took off, and Yuri’s leg slipped back, pitching him onto Viktor’s shoulders. Viktor’s front legs hit the jump, tumbling them to the ground.

They lay twisted up together, laughing. Viktor’s legged arms wrapped around Yuri as he let out a muffled oww.

“I’m sorry; I’m sorry. Are you okay?” Yuri fumbled for the straps to remove Viktor’s gag.

He gasped in relief as it came off. “Oh, thank god. Yes, I’m okay. Are you?”

“Yes, Viktor.”

“What happened to that perfect leg of yours?”

“You wobbled! I couldn’t help it!”
“I wobbled? You were wobbling all over the place!” Laughing, he squeezed him tight.

“Do you have any idea how hard it is to balance on something as rough and unbalanced as you with nothing to hold onto?”

“Oh, so it’s all my fault, huh?” He grinned.

“Yes, it is, Viktor.” He stuck his tongue out at him, which was promptly ensnared with a kiss.

“Good.” He kissed his head then lay gasping. “Horses are saints.”

“To be fair, they make much better horses than you do. I don’t think they suffer quite so much.”

“True. If you couldn’t ride me, I must be the most difficult horse in the world.” He looked down at him, smiling warmly. “I’m so proud of you. But you owe me the best blowjob for that.”

Grinning, he began searching for his zipper. “Yes, Viktor.”

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Chapter End Notes

Spotify

65. Come Follow Me Down by George Taylor
66. I'm So Sorry by Imagine Dragons
67. Miracle Pill by The Goo Goo Dolls
Chapter 28

Chapter Summary

Control

Chapter Notes

Art is safe but a wee bit slutty. Thank you, Clarinda, for all of your art and betaing on this fic!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Yuri was grooming one of Viktor’s training horses while he tended to a phone call when Phichit came over, his nervous energy sending the horse skittering in the crossties.

"Oh, sorry." He stroked the horse’s neck trying to calm them both back down though it had more effect on the horse. “What do I wear?”

“Huh?”

“For the party. Oh my god, what else could I be talking about?”

“Oh, um, I have no idea.”

“Seriously? What are you wearing?”

“I don’t know. Whatever Viktor puts me in.”

“Which would be…”

He shrugged. “Something slutty but classy.”

“Ugh, you’re so not helpful.”

“Sorry. Okay well, I guess it depends on if you’re a Dom or a sub.”

“I’m neither?”

He glanced over the hum of the vacuum with his eyebrow raised. “Doubt it.”

“Huh?”

“Not that I’m all that experienced, but I think people generally don’t go to BDSM clubs who have no interest in it.” He tried to hide the arch smile.

“But I’m not… I’m just curious is all.”

“Uh-huh. I said the same thing about boys.” He flicked off the vacuum and tossed the brushes into
the box. He shoved his hip against the horse’s shoulder and picked up his hoof to clean it. “If you had to pick one…”

He fiddled with his fingers as if he were texting out his thoughts. “Uh, well, I’m a bottom so…”

“That doesn’t mean anything. You can bottom and still be a Dom, or you can be a switch.”

“I don’t know then.”

He put the first hoof down and moved to the back one. “Okay, you don’t have to know now, but Viktor once explained it to me like this: Do you need to feel wanted or needed?”

His eyes widened as he let out a soft huff. “Wanted.”

He turned around and smiled. “There you go then. It’s not set in stone, but that’s a sub’s answer. Your power comes from inviting someone into your vulnerability. Wear something that hints at that—or screams it, depending on your taste.”

Warm arms wrapped around him, and Yuri leaned into them with a smile.

“My Yuri’s gotten so confident.” Viktor’s lips pressed against his neck.

“Yes, Viktor.” He sighed and melted further into him.

“So good, beautiful. My perfect love.”

Phichit made a little garbled noise in the back of his throat.

Viktor chuckled. “Sorry, but not. If you’re going to be joining us, you should be well used to this because it’s going to be way worse there.”

“No, it’s not that. Just, ugh, you’re like a walking chick flick cliché, and I love it, and it makes me sick with jealousy, and I’m so happy that Yuri found his balls to give to you because this is just the cutest shit ever.”

Viktor laughed again. “That’s a whole lot of conflicted feelings in one sentence.”

“Story of my life. Seriously though, I’m not jealous of you in that I want Yuri, more like jealous of what you have.”

“Glad to hear it. The first is impossible for you to achieve, but the second is well within your grasp.” He winked with the slyness of a secret held, and Yuri glanced up at him, trying to figure out what it could be. “Listen to what Yuri said. Don’t be afraid to go all out. I promise you will be outdone.”

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Blood red shirt hugging his chest, rolled up to his elbows, a trim tie holding him obscenely proper, Viktor pulled up to the cottage in an antique convertible, sunglasses on, and honked the horn. Phichit came out in a long-sleeved, black fishnet shirt, torn open over his chest and waxed black jeans.

With a quirk of a smile, Viktor looked over as he approached. “Get in, loser. We’re going kinking.”

“Mean Girls reference. Nïce.”

“Movie?” Yuri asked.
“Oh my god, you live under a rock.” Phichit put his hand on the car and jumped into the backseat, grinning. “God damn, Yuri. What the shit are you wearing?”

He looked down to the black straps crossing every which way over his torso and thighs, nothing else besides black lacy underwear and his diamond clamps. His face had more coverage than his body with smoky eyes and red lips. “Viktor says I look good.”

He laughed. “Yeah, that’s what I meant.”

“Oh, thanks. You look great too. You know you and Viktor have a very similar taste in movies.”

“Ooh, we should have a movie night.”

“Hell, yeah.” Viktor put the car in reverse and headed for the city, smirking as Yuri tried and failed to keep his eyes off the tightness of the black leather pants taunting his restraint.

***

Viktor pulled into his reserved spot in the garage. “Get out and give me your ass over the trunk. Time for an inspection.”

Yuri gawked at Phichit, his heart in a race to the bottom of his chest. Somehow, doing this in front of Phichit was a million times worse than doing it for the crowd at the club. “Here? Now?”

“Always here. Always now,” Viktor growled as he got out of the car.

“But he hasn’t even gone inside yet…” He locked eyes on Phichit who was staring back in shock and curiosity.

“Then he can close his eyes if he likes or get out and watch. I don’t really care what he does. As for you…” He ripped open his door, yanked him out, and slammed him over the fin on the back of the car, tearing away his flimsy underwear with a hard jerk. “I guess you won’t be getting these since you forgot whose ass that is.” His slicked fingers plunged into him, tugging him open and running his fingers around to check his condition.

Phichit couldn’t tear his eyes away as Yuri moaned onto Viktor’s hand, his cock hardening.

Viktor smirked and flicked it with his finger. “You’re welcome to look as much as you want, Peach. As long as you don’t touch him, I don’t care what you do.”

“Seriously?” Phichit cautiously climbed out of the car, keeping his wide eyes fixed on Yuri. “Like… how much do you mean that?”

“I mean it exactly as I said it. No touching, no calling him names. Everything else is fine.”

“Calling him names? I wouldn’t…” Phichit came closer, and Yuri couldn’t help pushing back to fuck himself on Viktor’s fingers, excitement and embarrassment crawling down his arched spine.

Viktor slapped his ass. “Hold still, you filthy slut. This is an inspection, not pleasure.”

Whining, he smothered his mouth in his arm to collect himself. “Yes, Viktor. I’m sorry.”

Satisfying himself with Yuri’s cringing blush, he filled his ass with lube and shoved in a plug with a rubied end. “What a slut you are.” With a light spank, he pulled him from the car and drizzled lube over Yuri’s cock. “Make sure no one forgets it tonight. You’re going to keep yourself hard the whole time. If you drip on my floor, you’re going to lick it up and wait with your tongue on the ground for
He pulled a small black rectangle out from his bag on the backseat and flicked it on. A stream of blue light ran from one metal prong to the other.

His eyes widened. “Is that… a taser?”

“Close. Stun gun, actually.”

His eyes widened further, just imagining it. “How does it feel?”

“You’re going to hate it.” He grinned and turned it off then slung his bag over his shoulder.

“Viktor, I’m not going to be able to obey that. I can’t stop the precum.”

Nibbling kisses on his neck, he snapped the straps on his thighs. “I know exactly how much of a messy slut you are. Don’t misunderstand my order though. I gave it clearly. I didn’t say not to. I just said what was going to happen if you do.”

He shivered, fear and excitement gripping his voice. “Viktor.”

His hand clasped around his waist to support his shaking thighs. “I figured out how to mindfuck you. There is nothing I can’t do to you. Forgive me for ever saying otherwise.”

“Yes, Viktor.” He shivered into his hand and Phichit’s gaze and Viktor’s arms as they walked up the corridor to the front desk where Red waited with a sly smile.

“Mila? What the hell are you doing here?”

She stuck her hand out and took Phichit’s. “I’m Red. Nice to meet you…”

“Oh, um, Peach.”

She laughed. “Well, that one didn’t go far. Just how kinky are us horse people? For fuck’s sake, everyone’s here now. Eros, it’s great to see you again. I thought you guys might not ever come back. You look gorgeous.” She came around to kiss his cheek after getting Viktor’s nod of approval, which felt way more than strange with his hand fucking him in earnest, but she seemed barely concerned. The buzzer sounded, and she leaned over the desk to press the intercom. “The Loft at VN. Do you have an appointment?”

“Oh, yeah, um… I have an appointment at seven o’ three?” a young woman’s voice sounded through the speaker.

She buzzed her in, still giggling at Phichit’s expression, then glanced at the door and froze with her mouth gaping open in stuck speech. “Holy shit,” she breathed, looking as if she’d just seen the answer to the universe on a billboard sign creaking above a dusty gas station. “Fuck me, and tie her to my bedpost.”

They all looked back to see what had caught her attention. A young woman stood at the entrance marveling at the decor with long black hair and an iris bodycon dress wrapping a tight bronze frame.

Viktor turned back, chuckling. “Which one is it?”

“Yes.” Red hadn’t moved a millimeter from when she walked in, her hand still in midair in its path back to her side. “I wonder if she’s into corsets. Oh, rope too. Please tell me she’s into rope. Fuck. I need to tie her up. My whip. I can already see it on her ass. Fuck, Boss, please tell me she’s into latex.” She whimpered as the woman started toward her. “Help. How do I…”
Viktor put his hand on her shoulder and leaned in, holding back his laughter. “Why don’t you start with hi.”

“Right. Hi.”

“Go get her, baby Domme.” He kissed her cheek and led Yuri away with Phichit following. He glanced back to smile at the flustered greeting. “Oh, so cute.”

(68) He left his bag in his office then threw open the door and led them inside to the cacophony of hundreds of writhing sex acts laced together with cracking pain.

Phichit’s jaw fell open as he lagged in next to Yuri. “Holy shit. What even is this?” He scanned the room, rummaging for slots in his brain to hold the compounding sights.

Minx came slinking over, a grin on his face and nothing else. Even his tail was stripped from him tonight. “Eros,” he purred, “it’s been so long. I’m so glad to see you again.” He glanced down at the hand working over his cock. His mouth fell open as he looked to Viktor’s hand. “Rings? Are you serious—”

“Where the fuck did you get the right to walk away from where I put you?” The man with the shaggy brown hair and long-gone sweetness glared at Minx with an intensity that made Yuri cower.

“Sorry, Sir. I’ll be right back. I just have to—” He yelped as a hand cracked his ass.

“You have to what?” His Dom stood over him, Minx’s hair gripped in his hand dragging him to his knees, a smile daring him to misbehave.

Minx looked up, awe, lust, respect, and a tinge of heightening fear softening him as he settled on his knees, his hands turning up in surrender. “Serve you.”

“How beautiful you look when you’re in the right place.” His hand tightened to tip his head up for a kiss. A shiver ran down Minx’s spine as the kiss broke away with his Dom yanking his hair harder. “Put your hands out for your punishment.”

“Yes, Sir.” He placed his hands out in front of him to receive the strokes of a yellow cane, reverence still in his voice.

Viktor turned to Yuri with his grin splitting his face. “Oh, this is such a great night already.”

Yuri nuzzled into his neck to leave it with his kiss. “You’re so cute.”

Viktor grabbed him into his arms and smothered him with kisses everywhere but his lips just as he used to until the puppy whining at his feet for his attention finally earned his pity. “Go ahead; you can say hi.”

Snow leapt and spun in circles as Yuri bent down to pet him with Phichit looking on in utter confusion. “Hi, boy. How’ve you been?” He pressed back a whine with his lips as his cock threatened to spill and fucked himself harder for Viktor’s pleasure as he looked on. Two steps in the door and he was already taken apart. He leaned into Viktor’s side and gripped tighter to the tingling edge of disobedience.

Snow yipped excitedly and nuzzled Yuri’s leg.

“Yeah, it’s good to see you again too.” He gasped, stroking closer to danger as Viktor’s thrill resonated through him. Liquid crept up from the base. “Have you been behaving yourself?”
He ducked sheepishly and looked to his Owner to answer.

“Yeah, he’s been pretty good. He’s gotten into a bit of mischief but nothing unforgivable.”

“Ah, you shouldn’t trouble your Owner. You want to be a good boy for her, right?” He scratched his head.

Lady Rose smiled. “I love your sub. He’s such a good influence.”

Viktor beamed. “Thank you. I’m so proud of him.”

“How long have you been edging him for this time?”

“Just started.”

“Seriously? He looks broken already.” Her eyes wide, she tipped her head in acknowledgment. “So, have you sealed the deal yet?”

“Thoroughly. But sorry, Snow, he’s not ever going to be available to anyone but me.”

Snow whined and ducked his head.

“Eros is all mine, but I’d like you to meet Peach.” He gestured to him and introduced Lady Rose and Snow.

“Another one of yours?”

“No, he’s just a friend here to check it out. Please help me make him feel welcome.”

“Ah, nice to meet you, Peach.” She smiled and took Phichit’s hand.

Phichit still hadn’t worn off an ounce of shock but managed to find one of his famous smiles for her. "Yeah, nice to meet you too."

She glanced down at Snow who had suddenly taken an interest in the cute, unattached boy. “Are you interested in any play?”

“Uuhhh…” He looked to Viktor for help who stayed quiet to let him answer on his own. “I don’t know really. I’m gay.”

“Oh, I meant for my puppy. He loves playing with new friends.”

“Oh. Um…”

“No worries. Take your time and look around. Come find us if you decide you’re interested.”

He relaxed a little and found a brighter smile. “Yeah, thanks. I’ll think about it.” They moved deeper into the club with Phichit looking back at the puppy sadly watching them go. “What even is this place?” He cringed as they passed by a light flogging. “Oof, that looks so painful.”

Yuri giggled. “Hardly. It feels like a nice massage.”

“Really?”

“Don’t take his word for it,” Viktor said. “He’s the worst person to ask how painful something is. It really can be quite painful, depending on how it’s done. But the nice thing is, you can always start
slow and see where your limit is. You don’t have to be a full-blown masochist to enjoy this.”

“I feel like I’d be the biggest baby. I don’t know if I could handle any of this.”

“You won’t know if you don’t try. You might surprise yourself.” Viktor tugged at Yuri’s sparkling clamps, and that little hint of pain was enough to break his hold.

Yuri looked down at the drops with fear spiking his breath.

“Why did you stop?”

He glanced down at his cock, hairs pricking his neck and resumed his ministrations as he sank to his knees. “Viktor, please.”

He glanced at the drips on the floor then turned on his crackling stun gun and waited. Trembling, he licked at the salty drops, his ass exposed. Viktor’s light fingers touched first, forcing a yelp. Before he could suck back in a breath to refill his voice, the prongs clapped fire through his balls and left them burning and throbbing, gone before he could scream. Viktor was right. It was awful.

There was no build-up. Nothing to process other than fear and agony. The pain sparked white-hot around his eyes.

“Ah, you took your tongue off the floor. That one didn’t count.”

His heart choked his throat, tears already spilling to the floor as he readjusted his hips to take more. Their audience marveled at seeing him pulled from Viktor's pedestal, debased and on the floor.

“How is it? You can take your tongue off to answer.”

“The worst of the worst.”

“Hardly. Cattle prods are much worse.”

He whimpered, already caught in the snare.

“Don’t worry, lovely. I don’t have it on me right now, and I’m quite liking this reaction.” He stroked the cool prods over his tender balls and chuckled when he recoiled from the harmless touch.

“How many?”

“Ooh, you’ve never asked that question before. This must be doing fantastic things for you. One for one. One zap for every drop you spill, but you have to obey for them to count.”

He sobbed, his cock already on the verge of earning him more. He put his tongue back on the floor and spread his knees as he worked himself at a pace that before Viktor’s training would have made him cum long ago. If he caught them with his hand before they spilled… No. Viktor would hate that. He didn’t forbid it, but it was an escape of his pressures. A twist away as Avos liked to do. He had to be between Viktor’s opposing pleasures. His mind gnawed on the challenge.

Three more drops fell to the floor, and Viktor moved him back to clean those too and accept his punishment. He wanted anything but to accept it. He took each one. His hips jolted with the electricity forcing the contraction through his pelvis and his thighs when Viktor touched those too while his tongue stayed flat on the floor. Anything to prevent more.

He was near hyperventilation when Viktor pulled him up and stroked away the fear and pain, giving him a moment of rest from his orders. Taking his chin in his hand, he tipped him up for a tender kiss,
holding his trembling body tight in the wild murmurs of their audience. “So good for me, my love.” He put him on his arm and refreshed the coating of lube before continuing their tour.

Phichit glanced over, horror painted over intrigue.

For the first time, Yuri found it almost impossible to hold Viktor’s edge. The threat of that pain slowed his hand, and it took all his will to keep it going. Viktor didn’t say he had to be on the edge—just that he needed to be hard. He was still following orders if he backed off… No. Viktor hated the bare minimum. He pushed into his hand and Viktor’s pleasure at watching his struggle.

Two more drops spilled, and his heart seized. His thighs clamping, he descended to his knees. Opening them again took every ounce of his submission. He licked the drops with his eyes squeezed tight.

“Look at me.”

He twisted back, his eyes lighting on the weapon, wrenching them up to his face.

“Did you know you have the most beautiful pain expression?”

“No, Viktor.”

“You do. You look like you’re being fucked by God.”

“Aren’t I?”

“Oof, outstanding answer. But flattery won’t save you.” His prongs caressed skittish thighs.

“It’s not flattery. I worship you more than any other god I know.”

“You are completely unfair, saying such perfect things in the middle of a punishment. How are you saying such perfect things so sincerely in the middle of a punishment you hate?”

“I’m just following your orders and sharing my honest thoughts.”

Fingers shivered down his back as his mouth took his ear. “I’m going to fuck you till your sins taste divine.” Licking a kiss into his mouth, he buried the prongs into his prostate and savored his screams.

Pain seized pleasure, crushing it in its grip. Muscles meant for ecstasy submitted to the force of agony and swelled their strength against him. He had no means to stop it, only to submit.

Viktor held till time never existed. Closing with the last note of his kiss, he stood above his aching mess and held his voice out as a hand. “Come back where you belong.”

Despite only being touched in one spot, he hurt everywhere like he’d just returned from a journey to the center of the earth. Rising to his feet, he took Viktor’s arm, his chin lifted. Sweat trickled down his back. “That was only one.”

He held his other hand out, speckled with cloudy drops. “I held for them all.”

Cradling his hand in both of his, he glanced up then kissed his palm clean. “Thank you, Viktor.”

His soft smile crinkled as he gave him a squeeze and led them forward.

“What the shit.” Phichit’s eyes were huge. “That was so hot. Why was that so hot?”
Viktor opened his mouth to respond then stopped short to study a woman who had been watching them, thigh-high heels, handcuffs dangling from a belt. “Mouse?”

She smiled. “Actually, it’s Selena now.”

“Well, look at you.” He grinned as he looked her over. “You finally figured it out.”

“Yeah, thanks for that shove. I was a little mixed up on what I was feeling for you, but when I saw what you had with him… I realized I was jealous. Of you.”

He smiled and kissed her cheek. “I’m proud of you. You’ll make a great Domme.”

She blushed with his praise finally earned. “Thank you, Boss.” She glanced at Yuri’s hand then to Viktor’s. “Congratulations to both of you. You make an inspiring pair.”

Viktor gave their thanks and led them onward while he summed up the exchange Phichit had missed for him.

“That really happens? Going from one to the other?” Phichit asked.

“Yeah, it’s actually fairly common for some to start out thinking they’re subs and then realize later that they’re not. I’ve found it to be far rarer in reverse. I think it seems easier to enter this from the sub side. Trying to be in control when you have no idea what you’re doing is an enormous pressure. As a plus side, it tends to make them better Doms because they know exactly what it feels like to be in that role.”

They wandered around some more, explaining to Phichit the things he was seeing. Eyes focused on them as they explored, and Yuri knew he wasn’t doing enough to make Viktor proud. He was only doing enough to keep him silent—the worst state for him. He was trying, but the pain that filled him now was the dull ache of pleasure drawing him closer to a pain he’d give anything to avoid. His battle played out on his face.

Which did Viktor want more: His perfect obedience making him surpass his limits—the display of his dominance over his body? Or his inability to resist his force—submission to his torment? Viktor loved them both.

Yuri was clear on which one he wanted, but it wasn’t possible. He had no control over that. Prongs sparked again; he realized he wanted it. Desperately. His control let loose was a terrifying thing but under Viktor’s pressures… an extension of his.

Viktor pulled him up, wild-eyed and trying to form words.

“I wa—I want…”

“What do you want, my love?” His hand smoothed over his hair.

“Control.”

He slowly smiled. “You never take long to find it.” He put the stun gun away in his back pocket. “You were mistaken on your limits. You always wanted control. It’s panic-inducing for you when it’s not there. You just feel when it’s with you, that’s the only time it doesn’t exist. It does, Yuri.

“My control over you would be worthless if there were none in you to grasp. My will has no force in you without yours. My mind, my pleasure, my heart—they all must have places to rest inside you. That’s why I chose you, my love. You’re the only one who can offer a home to every part of me.
What you see in me, I see in you.”

His words edged between the cracks in his broken mind, settling, sealing. His chin quivered as he hid inside his chest. “Yes, Viktor.”

His pieces put back together and his underwear returned—well, a new pair—he walked quietly, proudly at Viktor’s side, drawing more attention than when he was undone, their rings scattering whispers into their audience with each torch flare.

They stopped to explain a scene where a woman had pieces of peeled ginger stuffed inside her.

Phichit’s head tilted, confused. “Isn’t that what they used to do to horses when selling them?”

“Yes,” Viktor said, “a terrible practice.”

“But not for humans…”

“Eh, I’m still not a fan of it.”

“Oh, really? Why not?”

“It can get stuck in the ass and overall it’s just not as enjoyable as it seems it should be. Most of the ginger you can buy in the store is too bland. Eros would get bored if I tried it on him.” He smiled at Yuri’s pout. “Don’t worry, love. I have my own solution to that problem. You haven’t tried my hell lube yet.”

His eyes lit up. “What is that?”

“A blend of ginger extract and capsaicin—the chemical that makes peppers spicy. The concentrated ginger has more punch and has a deeper burn while the pepper is a brighter burn. They work beautifully together.” Fingers trailing the divot of Yuri’s spine, his voice riled a thunderstorm of pleasure. “Fill you up and fuck you into fire.”

“Please,” shivered, breathless. “But won’t that hurt you?”

“You think I haven’t learned how to play with fire without getting burned?”

He shuddered, immersed in the fire already in his eyes.

Phichit dove behind Yuri, ducking to hide from view. “Holy shit. It’s him. I know him.”

Yuri tamped down the loss of immediate gratification and savored anticipation instead. “Who?”

“My old roommate,” he hissed. “Shit. He’s coming this way. Holy shit. Save me.”

“The one you told me about?”

“Yes!”

Viktor laughed, the spark of a plan in his eyes. What was he up to? “Come on out and say hi, Peach. Don’t be shy.”

Phichit gasped at the betrayal then slunk out from behind Yuri. “Uh, hi, Seung-Gil.”

Wolf’s impassive exterior leaked iced shock. Metal claws attached to his fingertips dug into his flesh with his balled fists. “What are you doing here?” Horror hiding behind his front, his eyes flicked to
Viktor.

Phichit cringed. “Uh, just checking it out is all.”

“The Boss brought you.” He could have sounded livid though it was hard to tell.

“Um, yes? No, not really. I came because Yu—Eros told me about it. It’s, uh, good to see you again. How’ve you been?”

He strangled whatever his real reaction was in his throat.

“Wow.” Viktor shook his head with his mouth drawn tight. “Silver platter and that’s all you can muster, huh? Oh, right. Allergic to silver. Shall I bring him away?”

A light growl snapped over his features. “I’m good. How are you?”

“Uh… I’m good. I never—I mean never—would have expected to find you here.”

“You’re even less likely to belong here. Shouldn’t you be off watching some idiotic romance?”

“Wow.” Viktor rolled his eyes so hard his head sank under the effort. “Truly, Wolf. Just, wow. I should have required charm school for you. I can’t watch any more of this. I’m going to get Eros ready for his performance. Take Peach, buy him a drink, and make him feel comfortable here. Can you manage that?”

“Yes, Boss.”

Phichit gaped at the double betrayal. “You’re leaving me alone?”

“No, I’m leaving you with Wolf. He’ll be on his best behavior. I hope.”

“You’re taking him back before the auction.” Wolf could have been giving Viktor an order or asking a question. It was impossible to tell either way.

“Yeah, come find us in the audience.” Question most likely based on Viktor’s lack of concern. He took Yuri and made their escape.

“What is going on with that?”

“Oh, just a couple of fated idiots.” He grinned.

“Really?”

“Yeah, Wolf’s been pining for him for years. He never had the courage to do anything about it because he believed that there was no way Peach could be into this lifestyle with how soft he is, and well, you just saw how awful he is at… being human. I encouraged him to try, but he quit the stable when he couldn’t take it anymore instead.”

“Oh, really? Peach thinks he wants to murder him. Possibly.”

He laughed with pure delight. “That’s amazing. You know those movies where the girl never notices the way the guy is looking at her because she’s always looking away when he smiles at her?”

“Yes, Viktor.”

He waved his hand back behind him. “Those two.”
Viktor took him backstage to get him warmed up and mentally prepared for his performance then came back out to meet Peach and Wolf in the crowd gathering at the base of the stage and took their seats for the auction. Phichit’s eyes followed the vanishing Wolf, creasing with confusion.

“So…” Tucked into Viktor’s arm, Yuri nudged Phichit’s side with his elbow. “How did it go?”

“Um… I… don’t know. I think he was trying to be nice. I saw him smile.” Jolting out of his concentration on the crowd of strangers that had closed Wolf’s path, he turned to Yuri. “I saw him smile. He was… cute.”

“Oh yeah? When did he smile?” He glanced up to meet Viktor’s conspiratorial grin.

“What’s that look for?”

“Just answer the question.”

“Uh, when I told him his claws were kinda hot. I mean, it was barely a smile.”

“Wolf is pretty hot.” He checked Viktor for any crossed lines but was firmly safe with Viktor eating up every morsel of the story.

“Yeah, but he’s scary as hell.”

“Viktor’s never hotter than when he’s got me a little afraid.” Winking, he turned his attention to Minx who had taken the stage with Lion’s bullwhip in hand. Shuddering into the pleasure, he gave Viktor his best pleading eyes. “Again?”

“As you wish.”

Minx auctioned off several Doms who looked to have no clue how to present themselves for sale with it conflicting so harshly with their personas. So many of them that he’d met seemed to be putting on an act more than letting it arise naturally as Viktor did. He was never concerned for if he appeared Domly enough. He was a Dom. He had nothing to prove.

_Could I have been anyone sitting in that office?_ He smiled at the absurdity. Only Viktor could have told him who they were with a tap on his boot.

Wolf came up next and stood stoically at the end of the stage, making a few robotic attempts at posing. Peach glanced around as the bids went up, shifting in his seat.

“You want to bid?” Viktor asked.

“I don’t know. I mean, I’m kinda curious to know what it’s like…”

“The only way to know is to do it. Wolf is a great choice.”

“He hates me.”

“I assure you, he does not.”

“You didn’t live—”

“Peach, put up your freaking hand and bid. Try it for an hour. If you don’t like it, you can stop at any time. But I promise you, Wolf is who you want to bid on.”

Glancing between Viktor’s sincerity and Wolf on the stage, his hand creaked up.
“Oh, I’ve got a bid—” Minx cocked his head. “Sorry, I don’t think I’ve got an approval on you.”

Viktor’s grin was reaching cracking. “He’s approved.”

“Alright, Boss approval for the save. I’ve got one fifty for a delicious hour with this handsome devil. He’s got a fine snap on that whip: one of the fastest I’ve felt. And he really knows how to get into a scene. Don’t let his cool exterior fool you; he’s a complete animal. Who will give me one sixty? I promise he’s worth way more.” Having Minx run the auction was a great idea with him having first-hand knowledge of a lot of them.

Another bid went over Phichit’s. He squirmed, deciding. His hand went up. The bids crept higher as did Peach’s determination, but he suddenly stopped with another’s bid on the table.

“Why did you stop?” Viktor hissed.

“I can’t afford any more. I’ve got an event coming up.”

“Keep bidding.”

“Huh?”

“Keep bidding. Don’t worry about the money. Just do it.”

“Wait, are you—”

Viktor rolled his eyes. “Put your hand up before you lose.”

He snatched the bid back for two fifty then glanced at Viktor, who nodded for him to keep going.

The bid sealed, and Viktor cheered louder than anyone while Phichit sat stunned.

“I—I bought a dom. I bought a dom. What do I do with a dom?”

“You submit,” Yuri said.

“That’s it?”

“Yeah, that’s it.”

Still grinning, Viktor tickled him, whispering in his ear. “You little… You’re not going to clue him in at all?”

He grinned back and shrugged. “He’s heard my story. It’s not my fault if he only paid attention to the parts of it he wanted to hear.”

“Just submit. Do what he says. Yeah, okay. That shouldn’t be too hard.” Phichit gave a hesitant smile to Wolf, who was still standing stunned at the end of the stage.

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Yuri waited behind the curtain for Viktor to call him out, his fingers flexing, flaring as he shook out his hands. He’d done a few performances many years ago when he was with Minako, but short of some drunken bouts on a pole, he had no experience since then. His eyes closed; his head bowed.

Stay. Kneel.
“… So, with no further ado: Eros, come entertain my guests.”

Hand gripping the edge of the curtain, he paused, breathing into the panic, and put Viktor’s order into his mind, melting at the satisfying slices through his own thoughts as it made its way in.

(69) Shoving the curtain aside on the first beat, he stepped out, toes dragging on his trailing foot as he made his way to the pole at the back of the stage, lights dimming to violet. Sinking to his knees, hands sliding up parted thighs, he arched back and gripped the pole in both hands. Pulling his body from the ground, cascading fears out his toes, sublimating into Viktor’s will—a sigh of wisteria on post.

Inverted on the pole, he dropped his legs into a split, striking the hard beat. Closing, wrapping around the pole, he twisted through strobing beams of light, heavy drum, and powerful, gasping, begging voice. Pleasure coursing his veins, his feet touched down just long enough to thrust out from his grip and flash into spinning holds and coils navigating the maze of orders in pursuit of his control, offering all that he could find to Viktor.

Reaching for the top, he slid down face first, pole between his thighs till he landed on his belly and kicked over the push of his hands back to his knees.

The audience screamed as the song ended, and Viktor took the end of the stage, a twist of rope tossed over his shoulder.

(70) Imbued with elegance from the confidence Viktor had given him, he stood and slinked toward him: skinned drums and raining rattles marking his strut.

Taking his hands, Viktor gave his shoulders a little shake and burn lit his eyes as he pushed him back into the tribal beat. Yuri’s hips twisting, his feet kicking, he followed the press of Viktor’s tango. Smirking, he grabbed Viktor’s tie and yanked it from his neck then feigned a quick getaway with his prize. Viktor ripped him back into his arms, taking back the tie and tossing it to the ground. His hands went up to Viktor’s face in reverence then down to his collar and pulled his buttons apart until he had a swath of skin for his descending kisses, tugging Viktor’s shirt astray.

Grabbing his arm, Viktor whipped him around to face the audience. With Viktor behind him, straps of his clothing slipped from his body. Sliding his palm gripped with restraint down Yuri’s thighs, he stripped him of every bit of cloth.

Viktor whipped him back through a turn into his chest as he led into a lunge, Yuri’s leg hooked over the top of his thigh.

Holding the heaving tension, Yuri pulled at Viktor’s shirt till it was untucked and held together by two buttons. Viktor pulled the golden rope from his shoulder and let the coil fall to the ground as he unwound a twist and caught Yuri’s back and dragged him back into their dance.

With the audience’s cheers nearly drowning the music, Viktor wrapped Yuri into the rope till it was secured around his chest in disarray then gripped the knot in the back and tipped him over the end of the stage. His arms out to the sides, he leaned into his trust with a smile and let his weight fall into Viktor’s ropes.

Pulling him back up, letting the ropes fall away, Viktor bent him back over his thigh. Yuri’s arms dropping overhead, Viktor’s hand stroked down his body, lifted his pointed leg, and snaked down his thighs, access to no part of him denied as Viktor nudged his legs to part.

He pulled out the toy and dropped it to the stage, plunging his fingers in, pulling out with a smack on
his ass. Lifting him back to take his hands, Viktor drew him tight into his hold.

Yuri used Viktor’s new, but steady, support to embellish their dance till lust retook him, and he ripped Viktor’s shirt from his body, buttons bouncing at his feet, crimson fluttering to the floor.

A playful scold on his face, he snatched the rope from the stage and wrapped it around his thighs, binding them tight and dragging him down with the rope crossed over his shoulders. Reaching up to pull Viktor down with him, he stole a kiss—reveling in Viktor’s melt into his lips. He hit his knees, reverent at the feet of a panting, disheveled Viktor.

Viktor pushed his chest to the floor, letting the rope slacken as he took his wrists in hand and pinned them behind his back. He sank slowly into him, picking up deep, rolling thrusts with his hips as Yuri turned his face to the side to watch their audience marvel at Viktor’s ability to take him to pieces. His mouth gaped open, eyes rolling back as Viktor found the perfect rhythm and spiced it with the burning smack of his hand.

***

Heading up Viktor’s staircase to his bedroom, his ears still rang with the audience’s screams, his body with the private lust Viktor sparked and left open. Viktor never left his torments unrewarded. Their show had been its own opening and closing, leaving Viktor’s earlier torment untouched. His body cried for the pleasure it was promised.

(71) Twitchy lust on the brink, he couldn’t stop his flickering glances to the silent set of his jaw. His mouth opened at the doorway to plead when Viktor snatched his wrist and slammed his back into the wall, his mouth tearing at his lips, his hands ripping at his clothes. Viktor’s mouth along the edge of his jaw, he pulled his thighs up to wrap around his waist. On the floor: the clink of diamonds.

Stretching one hand over, Viktor took something from the dresser. Yuri looked into the center of their heat where Viktor was twisting a set of reins into shackles.

Panic toned arousal.

Snaring his hands above his head, he left the ends to brush over his hands, his fist anchoring him to the wall as he grunted into him.

Feverish kisses reaching to soothe each other raised more heat. Yuri grasped the dangling reins, twining his fingers as Viktor fucked him, his bite sinking into his neck.

He tried to scream out. It stuck in his throat and shattered across his face. His lips burned; flesh bitten —struck.

Riving, rending till Yuri existed only in the light of abyss, Viktor—gasping, desperate—fucked his flesh bruised. Tremors of excitement rattling, his voice nipped into his ear. “Come for me.”

Pleasure detonated and sent his fragments soaked in bliss backward and forward through time, painting over it all.

Viktor withdrew to admire his dripping art pinned to the wall, fingers still gripping the reins.

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The final art by Clarinda! Thank you again! Please leave your thoughts either here or on
Tumblr.

**Spotify**
68. Twisted by MISSIO
69. Bloodstream by Transviolet
70. Throne by Saint Mesa
71. Flesh by Simon Curtis
(72) A sway-backed dun with aged hollows above his eyes plodded at Yuri’s side as he led him to the indoor arena, his hands sick on the reins. The same as when he first had to use them to lead a horse after the accident. He’d managed to get over it then by reminding himself that he’d never use them again; they were just a stand-in lead rope. No different. He couldn’t tell himself that now.

Viktor swung open the gate for him. Yuri rooted into the arena footing as if becoming a tree would have any effect on Viktor’s order. He started sobbing as Viktor held out his hands to ledge his shin. It was worse than his first time back on. He couldn’t tell himself there were no reins. There were. He couldn’t tell himself it would end as soon as Viktor got bored. He wouldn’t. He couldn’t tell himself he didn’t want it. He did.

Viktor had stripped him of every layer, going beyond his skin, his muscles, his bones, to the parts he was most ashamed of and laid them bare to the world. He’d offer him no protection—just his firm push at the small of his back and his words whispering in his ear.

Heaving into the saddle, his mind roared as Viktor put the reins in his hands.

“Please. Please, I don’t want to do this.”

“Five,” Viktor growled. “You know well-better than to lie to me.”

“I’m sorry, Viktor.” Words blubbered between his lips. “But what good is the truth going to do? I can’t—it’s a zero. It’s always going to be a zero.”

“Yet, here you are. Riding. Either that one changed because you wanted it to, or I’m breaking your limits. Which one is it?”

He sucked in a breath. “I—I want it.” He sobbed over the pointed withers of the patient horse. “I want it, Viktor. I’m sorry. I just don’t know how—how it’ll ever be okay.”

“That’s my job. That’s not for you to worry about. I’ll make it okay. I promise.”

“How?”

“I don’t know yet. I can’t see that far ahead.”

“Then how can you promise?”

“I have faith in myself that I will find the answer you need; I have faith in you to have the strength to apply it; I have faith in us.
“For now, just take a deep breath. You know he’s not going to do anything but walk on the rail.” His lips quirked into a half-smile. “Not God himself could convince him to do anything else.” He waved his hand at Captain and kissed the air. “Move out.”

Captain creaked his joints over to the rail and settled into the rut carved in his mind over twenty-three years of teaching new riders.

“Sit up, Yuri. Take up the reins. You know I hate cowering under my orders.”

“Yes, Viktor.” Still sobbing, he straightened his back and drew the reins through his fingers till he had Captain’s mouth in his hands. “Good boy,” sputtered out as he scratched into his mane.

Endless tears later, Yuri was tacking Avos, his jumping saddle secured to his back. They were moving into the outdoor, and Viktor was out there taking down all the triple bars and oxers. Yuri kept his mouth shut tight to hold his heart inside as he strapped on Avos’s boots.

“Yuri, thank god.” Phichit came up and stopped, stroking Avos’s curious nose. “I need your help.”

“With what?”

“Oh, well, on our date last night, Seung-Gil told me something, and I think I messed up. No, I know I messed up.”

Relieved for the simple distraction, he paused, stroking Avos’s hip and watched Phichit’s fluster with a smile. “Oh? What’d you do?”

“Uh… okay so he kinda told me he was a… furry, and I kinda started laughing. Hysterically. And I maybe made a few jokes…”

“He wasn’t kidding.”

“Nope. Now he’s not responding to my texts, and I don’t know what to do.” He wailed and wrapped his arms around Avos’s neck for support. “Help me, Yuri. I didn’t mean to. I really like him. How do I fix it?”

Smiling, he patted copper hip and picked up the bridle. “You’d make a cute hamster.”

He gently pushed aside a gaping Peach to slip the bit into Avos’s mouth. “Sorry I’ve got to go. I can’t keep Viktor waiting.”

Phichit nodded silently and stepped back to give him room. Yuri couldn’t help giggling as he made his way out to Viktor.

Viktor beamed upon spotting him. “You’re in a surprisingly good mood. What’s up?”

“Phichit just figured out he’s dating a furry.”

He laughed. “That one always comes as a shocker to people. I’m not too sure why. It’s one of the lightest kinks.”

“You should send him a text of where to get a hamster suit.”

Laughing still, he kissed his lips and pulled out his phone. “Done and done. Get on up, cowboy.”
“Cowboy?” He laughed in surprise. “Where did that one come from?”

He shrugged. “Just trying to make you laugh. It worked.” Kissing him again, he slid his hands down to grip his shin.

Settling into the sickness and the saddle, Yuri took up the reins and moved Avos out. He liked the lightest of touches on the reins, which suited Yuri just fine. As they picked up a loosening trot, his panic started to rise. He was usually able to hold on a little longer, but the looming jumps they had yet to try had him on a harder edge than usual. “One.”

“Stop.”

He halted his horse and patted his neck, soothing both him and Avos. Viktor’s finger went to his lips as he thought.

“I want you to do this. Every time you feel your anxiety hit that fuzzy state, I want you to stop him. Don’t wait for my order. As soon as you feel clear again, continue.”

"Yes, Viktor." He wasn’t sure what that was going to achieve, but that wasn’t his concern.

Waiting for his mind to calm back down, he eased his cue into Avos’s sides. Back and forth they went with Anxiety leading the way till Viktor grew tired of his hesitancy and stood by a small crossrail.

“Take it.”

“I can’t.”

“Two. That’s not a proper response. You can. Avos is insulted that you think there’s any way he can’t clear this. He could clear it while having a good roll in the dirt.”

His smile twitched, and he patted Avos’s neck. “Sorry for insulting you.”

“That’s better. Take it.”

He circled to pick up a trot to the fence. His hands light on the reins, checking his rhythm with his body rather than his hands. Three strides out, he settled into the saddle and sat up, keeping his mind focused on his task. They’d done this before. Viktor said it was fine, so it was. He barely had to move at all to make the little rise with Avos’s hop. He cantered away seeking something more interesting as Yuri’s mind went dizzy. He pulled him to a stop.

Viktor came over grinning and grabbed his shirt collar to pull him down for a kiss. “You did it.” His hands cradled his face for another kiss. “You rode—you jumped for me. You broke all your limits for me. I love you so much, Yuri. Thank you.” His pride rolled into his kiss.

Guilty tears joined Viktor’s pride. He was too optimistic. He could maybe push him here enough to do a simple round, but he’d never get where Viktor wanted him: competing. It was impossible. Anxiety crushed his body with the force of how impossible it was. Fused into his bones, it was a part of him, married in the heat of a star.

Viktor released him with orders to continue. All he asked of him was to try. He could give him that much at least. Taking up the reins again, he pushed through his hardest limits. He just had to try; the outcome didn’t matter. They were lying to themselves.

Yura came out to hang on a post and watch him take the halting course. He passed by him a few
times, not sure of what he was doing there, but at least his glare was replaced with skeptical interest. It’d been lessening over the past few weeks, faster when his mom came out and looked right at Yuri and asked him where she could find her son. Apparently, he was well-below her recognition. She likely didn’t even know his name. Cueing another halt at the command of Anxiety right in front of him, he glanced at Viktor then back to Yura. He seemed like he was waiting for something.

“Uh, hey, Yura. What’s up?”

“My boyfriend’s moving out here.”

The surprise of his friendly answer jolted his mind out of the static. “Oh, really? That’s good news.”

He smiled just a little. “Yeah, he’s a really good DJ, and this club out here scouted him and offered him a job.”

He took in Viktor’s strangely stoic expression. “That’s awesome. What club?”

“I don’t know. He won’t tell me anything about it; just that it’s a private club. He’s kinda a jerk about that sometimes. Treats me like a little kid just cause he hit eighteen before me.” He scowled off into the grass but then resumed his small smile that changed his entire being. Yuri had only seen it when directed at his horse. “But he’s going to be moving out in a couple of weeks.”

“That’s really awesome, Yura. I’m happy for you.”

“Yeah, thanks.” He turned to Viktor. “Hey, can you make him a pass so I don’t have to call down every time he comes out?”

“Sure.” He was trying way too hard to hold back his smile. He would have been more convincing of his innocence had he tried a little less, though Yura seemed to fail to notice.

They shifted back into awkward glances. Finally, Yura locked his eyes on Yuri. “I figured out what I want from you. I want you to teach me again.”

“Seriously?”

“Yeah, seriously. So, hurry up and learn how to ride. I’m not going to have a pathetic loser who can’t even ride a horse as my trainer.”

Viktor turned to snap but stopped as he caught Yuri’s smile.

“You’d do best with both of us. Viktor’s great at a lot of things I’m not.”

“And vice versa.” Seeing how undisturbed Yuri was with the mewling insults, Viktor softened. “That sounds like a great idea.”

Smiling, Yura nodded. After a second, he waved at the jumps with his scowl tamping his smile. “Well, what the hell are you waiting for?”

***

Winter had driven them inside months ago, but Yuri was still stagnating over simple courses. He could make it through a full course now without needing to stop as long as there wasn’t a single challenge in sight. Or any oxers. The one time Viktor had tried, it ended with having to pull him from Avos in a full-blown panic. They were all growing frustrated, and it was a struggle for Yuri to persist at the pointless exercise.
He was halfway through a bland but successful course, having avoided anything that could be called
difficult, when Viktor grimaced at the ground. “Stop. Just stop, Yuri. You’re driving me crazy.” He
looked up, trying not to say what he was saying. “What happened to my Yuri who never stopped
pushing harder? You’ve locked out any more attempts from me to push you, and now you’re just
going around and around without making any more progress.”

“I told you—” He tightened his fists, trying to hold back the surge of anger. Shaking his head, he
jumped down, the ground jolting through his frozen legs. “I told you: this is where it ends. I knew
exactly this. I knew I wouldn’t be able to do it, and I knew you wouldn’t be able to stand that. I told
you every way I could, and you didn’t want to hear it! You made promises instead of hearing me! I
can’t—I can’t do this, Viktor!”

“I’m not upset that you’re not flying around an advanced course yet; I’m upset because you’re just
stagnating. You’re not even trying to push yourself anymore.”

“Because I can’t! I can’t! Every time I try, I lose control! I can’t fucking do it, Viktor!”

Viktor reached for him, but Yuri stepped back. Viktor’s hand dropped to his side. “I think we need a
little break. Go work on the restaurant. We’ll talk tonight.”

“Yes, Viktor.” His lip curled as he spat the words at him.

Viktor stared with shocked eyes. “Yuri. You haven’t ever said it like that. Even when we were apart,
you didn’t say it so cruelly.” Tears crystallized under the pressure of bedrock fear dripped down his
cheeks.

He stood gaping while his mind parted the thick curtains of anger to realize what he’d done. “I’m
sorry; I’m sorry.” Stepping forward, he took his hand and salted lips. “I love you. I’m so sorry. I
shouldn’t have said it when I was so angry. I’m yours, Viktor. I’m yours. I just got scared.” He tried
to kiss away every cutting tear.

“Go up to the house.” His order lacked any strength as he looked past him, his tears stopped, not
dried.

“Yes, Viktor.” He spoke it as gently as he could, but Viktor still flinched as though he’d struck him.
He left him still and headed to the home they’d built together, empty.

***

Spring stepped upon Winter’s toes until it retreated from the browned grass and breathed her life
back into it once again. Yuri was back in the outdoor, having made little progress from the last time
he was there.

They were at his wall. Just as he’d promised.

He didn’t know what Viktor was waiting for. He should have just ended it and put them both out of
their misery, but he was still pushing as much as his limits would allow. How had he not tired of this
yet?

Viktor had set up an oxer, and while he’d promised he wouldn’t order him to take it, it still had
Anxiety screaming. Instead of ordering him to take it, he ordered him to keep taking the jumps
around it. Finally, Anxiety had enough, and he pulled Avos to a stop. He praised him as he and
Viktor quietly stared each other down.

“Again.”
“Why?” He drooped onto his hands, shoulders slumped. “I’m taking the punishment for that because I have to know why. We’re not getting anywhere. Just what is it that we’re doing here?”

His jaw flinched over the weight on his mouth. “I haven’t given up on you. Are you giving up on me?”

“No, Viktor. Of course not. I love you. I just don’t understand why. I can’t do it. Do I have to compete to be with you?”

“Yes.”

He startled at the answer. He’d asked, but he hadn’t expected anything other than a no.

“Not because of me but because of you. You’re not you unless you’re pursuing your passions. You don’t know how to be anything else—just look at these last few months. That’s why, when faced with the end of your journey, you ran six hundred miles to find me because I was the spark that lit you all those years ago and you needed to keep burning. You think you could still love me if I let you go out?”

He opened his mouth to answer; Viktor’s expression stopped him. He didn’t want to hear the lie, and he couldn’t withstand the truth.

Viktor went over to the in and out next to the oxer and brought the standards closer so Avos wouldn’t have a full stride between them, creating a demand for Yuri’s alert attention. “Again.”

He sucked in a breath with Anxiety spiking and shook his head. “I can’t. It’s going up.”

“Do it anyway. I’m seeing something happening and pushing you is the only way to know. We’ve been stagnating because you haven’t been pushing yourself at all, and you’ve lost your faith in me. Nothing can change like this. If you have any faith in me left, take the jump.”

Anxiety surged ahead as he took his reins back up. He tried to hold back the destructive force that was his mind long enough to complete one question Viktor desperately needed him to answer. A stride out from the first fence of the combo, his eyes cast upon the oxer; his mind cut out into scattering shards.

Viktor’s cheers fogged through the piercing noise. “Yes! I knew it! Thank you, Yuri.” He tugged him down to give him his praise.

His heart thundered in his chest as he looked around. Avos was stopped at the base of the jump. “What happened?”

“He stopped.”

“I didn’t—I didn't stop him. I know I didn’t. I lost control before I could.”

“I know.” He was grinning ear to ear. “He stopped, Yuri. Do you get that? He knew you had stopped riding, so he stopped just as you trained him to do.”

“What?”

“He’s been stopping so quickly every time you asked, and I started seeing him slowing even before you halted him. He can feel when you’re like that, and he stops. Yuri, are you getting what that means?”
He stared at him, his mouth open, not quite grasping what was right in front of him.

“He’s your seeing-eye horse. You don’t have to worry about what happens when you lose control because he’s going to stop.”

“But… what if he doesn’t?”

“He will. Trust him. He’s been doing it every time for weeks now. He stops for you the same way a service dog will stop at a street. They’ve even trained some minis to be guide-horses. It’s not just possible; that’s what you have right now.”

“I’m going to train him to refuse.”

“So what? He’s your horse. That’s what you need. He’s trained for you. So fucking what if you enter a competition and it ends with refusals. If you can manage to trust him enough, you’ll be able to make it through. He’s only stopping when you start losing control.”

“Seriously?”

“Only one way to find out.” He grinned. “Ride that horse like only my Yuri can.”

Anxiety raging at being thwarted, he picked up the reins and eyed one of the challenges Avos could easily do yet he had avoided. “Yes, Viktor.”

***

Framed by drapes of wisteria and the sun setting over the mountains, Yuri and Viktor welcomed their guests to the grand opening of Oui Da Hai. Viktor’s pride roiled over the hills, his arm firmly clenched to Yuri’s side, sneaking kisses between handshakes. Lovers coupled below enduring promises made their way inside the thick stone walls reminiscent of a French farmhouse built from stones unearthed on site. The arching lines of a Japanese roof swept along the hills.

The last guest welcomed, they headed to their table. Paper shoji screens painted with traditional red and gold Russian patterns cozied the vast space and created a sense of order that opened toward the large, wisteria-covered patio overlooking the mountains. Pale honey and chestnut lay on the floor in herringbone. Charred beams above. A Russian wood-burning stove made of brick claimed the center wall by the kitchen, turning out loaves of crackling bread and promises of enticing warmth in winter. Art from Viktor’s old house hung on walls intermingled with sparse brushstrokes of abstract Japanese art. Lintels of thick wood spanned windows opened to peaceful cows and pigs grazing a good downwind distance away, so their pungent, earthy scent only lent the flowered breeze complexity.

Taking their spot on the patio surrounded by their friends and coworkers and all the rest of their guests, sparkling wisteria wine burst on their tongues after a toast from Viktor and a round of applause. They dined on fresh delicacies never tasted anywhere in the world, cultures intermingling, nods of respect and admiration glancing over the plate. Their chef spent months blending ingredients and cultures into unity with the thread of simple, fresh food binding.

Yuri excused himself to the bathroom before the next course and returned with the waitress who waited for him to sit before she set the wide matte cobalt plates before them.

Sauce, the color and consistency of molasses, brushed into kanji over the plate. A bed of rice raked into a sand garden sat next to it, draped in silken egg, spilling caramelized onions. Strips of crispy, golden pork leaned against the mound topped with threads of scallions. Shards of torn wisteria splattered the plate.
“Oh, katsudon,” Viktor sighed. “This is perfect, Yuri. And so pretty. What’s it say?”

“Love.”


He tried some from his plate, scraping up the sauce that had been thickened to make up for its deconstruction from the rice to help it cling. “So, how does it compare to mine?”

Viktor froze, struggling between his desire to tender his confidence and his promise never to lie. “I still love yours the best.”

He narrowed his eyes. “You lie.”

“I do not. Okay yeah, if I’m judging by taste alone, this would beat it, but it’s made by a master chef. It’s not reasonable to compare yourself there. But I still maintain that I love yours the best because it’s yours, and you made it for me.”

Shaking his head, he leaned into a kiss. “You’re a sappy fool, you know that, right?”

“I’m thrilled to be if it gets me kisses like that.”

“You love me way too much.”

“Nope. The perfect amount.”

He went back to his plate, grinning, and took another bite. “So, you really think the chef made this, huh?”

“Yes. Wait.” His eyes shot over with suspicion. “Didn’t he?”

His grin widened.

“Yuri,” he laughed, “who made this?”

“I did.”

His chopsticks clattered on the plate. “You’re joking.”

“Nope.”

“Seriously?” He glanced around at all the others chatting over how wonderful the food was. “Did you make all of them?”

“God no. Just ours. I figured messing up ours would be forgivable.”

“But you didn’t. Yuri, it’s so good! I’m so proud of you. How? How did you even have time? You were only gone a few minutes.”

“I made most of it earlier. I just had to cook the pork and egg and assemble it. Well, I didn’t make the rice. I just took from the main batch. But I got Pierre to show me how he was making it. He’s been teaching me for a couple of weeks now.”

With a shake of his head, he pulled him in for a kiss. “Loving you is an extreme sport. So. Heartburstingly. Proud.”
The arena went hazy with Viktor’s order to take the oxer ringing in his mind. It was just a jump. No harder than any of the rest as long as it’s taken right. They were set up right—he checked three times before picking up the circle. Avos started to slow. *Stay. Kneel.* Don’t look at the jump; look past it—jumping 101.

Avos launched over the oxer and stopped dead on the landing, tossing Yuri up onto his neck. He righted his trembling body as Viktor cheered.

After he could take the oxers and keep going afterward, Viktor pointed to the wrong side of an oxer. “Circle him around it, let him get a good look at what he’s jumping, give him a tap with the crop on the takeoff so he knows to make a bigger effort, then take the offset.”

Panic shot through his heart. “No! I—” Without his conscious effort, his protest cut off by Viktor’s training in his throat.

“You can. He will clear it. Just don’t stop riding. You’ll make it if you keep riding and trust him to make it over. You need to push as hard as I do. I can’t drag you there. Take the jump.”

“Vik—Please tell me why. I need to know this time what your plan is.”

He smiled. “Good, Yuri. Thank you for asking nicely for what you need rather than resisting.

“You’re right; you’ll never make it through an event like this. You’re way too scared of taking them wrong, so I’m eliminating that fear.”

“By… having me take them wrong?”

“Yes. There’s no reason why you can’t. You and your horse are more than capable of taking a challenging jump. That’s all that is. There is no wrong way here; just varying levels of difficulty. That’s my secret to that blood magic. I don’t worry about if the choice I’ve made is the right one or not. I made it, and that’s the path I’m on, so I ride it the best I can. I’ve made thousands of riskier choices, but I don’t stop riding them. You’ve got a much better chance of things working out like that than of never making a wrong turn.

“You messed up not because you made a wrong turn, but because when you saw it wasn’t the right answer, you just gave up and panicked over it. If you had kept riding and cued him that the jump was bigger than what he was seeing, he likely would have made it.

“Your anxiety messes you up, yes, and no, we can’t remove it. But for that grenade inside your head that you’re clutching… I know how to remove the firing pin. You get triggered by your anxiety itself. You think it has more power than you. You feel it start to rise and you give up, conceding to it before you’ve even fought. And you know how I know that? Because of all the times I watched you quit, fearing yourself incapable these past few months without my order to push through, without an answer for you to find, and all the times I watched you fight back—and win—because you knew I would never ask for something outside your skills. You knew it was within your grasp, so you fought.

“I’m sorry it took me so long to find the answer for you, but I’ve found it, and I believe in it more than any other answer I’ve handed to you. Here’s my plan for this torment: I’m going to make you ride every bad turn I can think of so you can learn as well as I do: it doesn’t matter what turn you make, Yuri. You’re capable of riding all of them.”
Viktor stood by the jump waiting. “Am I wrong?”

He studied the oxer, trying to put aside his fear. It was only three feet. Avos had far more than enough to clear it. He was the type of jumper riders dream of: bold but careful. He never hit a rail. He never refused.

Yuri had managed to tame his overzealous jump to a beautiful, scopey jump that made other riders stop to drool envy then puzzle over why he was still holding him back so much. He and Viktor both deserved nothing less than his absolute best effort for everything they did for him.

They both deserved his trust.

He picked up the circle and started up a steady mantra of yes, Viktor in his head to hold the static at bay, fitting it to the rhythm of his stride. Turning in to line it up five strides out, he pushed him into a strong but measured stride. No hesitation—it wasn’t allowed. Sitting back, he gave him his head to let him take a good look at the fence and put his leg on early so he wouldn’t surprise him with the final cue. Avos collected for the jump. Yuri gave a final squeeze with his heels with a tap of the crop then made his move as smoothly as he could to stay out of his way.

The crop was unnecessary. Avos, of course, cleared it with room to spare.

He cantered up to Viktor spinning, beaming. Viktor pulled him from Avos and onto him, tackling him to the ground with his praise.

***

They could now jump every fence, in every order, in every direction. Wavering filler, barking dogs, bad distances… Every single hazard Viktor could think to train: drilled into Yuri’s confidence as well-within his skills; every loose thread stitched through him in his training drawn tight till he rendered his confidence bombproof.

Tackling the first event since the accident, he put his anxiety into making Avos gleam.

Dressage had gone well, but he hadn’t expected many problems there. The biggest risk was looking like an idiot if he forgot the test, and he was well used to that. Cross country was more nerve-wracking, but Viktor had selected an event that had a straightforward course. Getting lost was nearly impossible, and they were competing well-below their level. On day three, they were in the lead, which was already a bad place for him to be, and stadium was up.

Viktor stood over him, watching. After seeing him go for his third pass with the body brush, he yanked it out of his hand and pulled him away. “Time to get you ready.”

“Wait, but Av—”

“Peach?”

“On it.” Phichit tossed the sheet over Avos’s back to keep him clean as Viktor dragged him away.

Viktor pulled him into the bathroom and hoisted him onto the sink, stripping his breeches down to his knees. He stopped to stare a moment, a tiny smile on his face, at the V and N tattooed on him, one inside each thigh. He stopped every time. Yuri couldn’t help but smile back as Viktor glanced back up, giddiness spreading his smile wider.

Yuri stroked his hair, his fingers gripping as he reached the ends. “When are you going to get used to those?”
“Never.” His fingers traced the lightly embellished black letters holding his name over his favorite skin. “They’re so beautiful; you’re so beautiful.” Glancing up, he pressed his lips to each one.

Yuri’s heart stopped and tumbled into disbelief. How was this man real? His? Viktor’s lashes fluttered as he admired them again before kissing his way to his cock.

Moaning, he arched into his pleasure, gripping him tighter, relaxing into it as Viktor wanted. He sucked him tight into the space he wanted him to be: out of Anxiety’s grip. He couldn’t help the small thrusts into Viktor’s mouth as pleasure built higher. He responded by gripping the bruises on his thighs, brightening the bliss. Viktor brought him to the cusp then left his hand to keep him there while he gave his order.

“Come for me; ride for me.” Plunging back onto his cock, he took back every bit of pleasure he gave.

Emptied of tension, he slumped onto the mirror, panting. “Yes, Viktor.”

“That’s my beloved.”

“You? Please?”

“God you’re so cute.” Bopping his nose, he gave him a kiss. “You can suck my cock when you finish the course.”

“Yes, Viktor.”

He slipped off Yuri’s blazer and then his shirt and hung them on the door. Cupping his hand under cool water, he brought it over Yuri’s feverish neck and trickled the heat away. “You’re going to be just fine, zolotse. It doesn’t matter which way you go. There’s nothing out there you can’t handle. Just keep riding for me.”

“Yes, Viktor.” Closing his eyes, another hand of water bathed his neck, down his chest.

Viktor soothed him with his touches and words as they recited the course together, carving it into his mind as an order.

Shined up as cleanly as his horse, his anxiety in his body where it should be, (he could handle the shaking any day as long as it stayed out of his mind) he swung up into the saddle and took up the reins. Stay. Kneel. This was where Viktor put him. It was safe.

His name was called, and they entered the ring. He didn’t bother glancing back at Viktor; he knew he was behind him.

Giving a quick nod to the judge, he waited for the starting bell. It chimed and picking up a circle, he looked to the first jump. An oxer. Of course, it had to be first. There were two on the course. One relatively simple; the other, wider spread but still well-within their skills. Anxiety choked his mind as they approached. Avos skidded to a stop at the base.

He looked back at Viktor, who stood watching with a smile. Just keep riding. That was his only order.

His time had already started. He wasn’t likely to make it without time faults anymore, and he already used his only penalty for refusal: the next would be elimination. Whatever lead he had vanished, but Avos had stopped; just as he did at home. With another quick glance to Viktor, he circled back to try again.
Stay. Kneel.

They landed, and Viktor’s cheers erupted. He couldn’t help laughing in relief as he glanced back. While everyone else was politely clapping, Viktor had his fists thrust in the air and was screaming as if he intended to convince every person there of his insanity.

Oxer to the sunrise vertical, to the right.

Viktor’s order traced his skin just as it had when he put it there. He turned and saw the pink and gold standards painted with the break of day. He followed Viktor’s order around the course, Avos taking each one with ease while the audience ooh’d over his beauty. His ears flicked around, listening.

He patted his neck. “You like that, boy, don’t you? You are the prettiest pony. You’re such a good boy.”

His ears flicked back to catch his praise. Yuri laughed, shaky and breathless. So much like Viktor.

The next oxer came up, and Avos started to slow. Shit. Yes, Viktor, yes, Viktor, yes, Viktor. The mantra calmed his heart and relaxed his body, and he squeezed his bruised thighs against the saddle to scrub his mind clean with pain as he breathed into his orders.

Stay. Kneel. Take the oxer.

Yes, Viktor.

Finding their cadence in the last few strides, they flew over and listened to his screams.

***

It had all been a terrible idea. He was destroyed—just as he knew he would be—just as Viktor had promised. Broken down to dust and returned to the universe, so Viktor could call him back out with the sweet tones of his name on his lips. Arranged by beauty rather than logic, empty spaces filled with experiences and memories collected from every random turn, he held him together with nothing but the drive of his leg and the touch of his hand.

His anxiety was a part of him, just as he’d said, but Viktor disarmed it as soon as he’d been allowed. He’d guarded it for so long, made Viktor rip the trigger from his hands. Why?

Because he had to know before he took that step where it would lead. Playing with fate, searching the future for a guarantee no human was ever granted. Taking Ouija board answers as fate while straining to ride a course he wasn’t on. It was a stupid game to play. There is no such thing as a good idea—only actions taken which lead one way or another.

There’s no way to know ahead of time which way they’ll go. Even the best ideas can turn wrong, and the biggest risks can land clean. Two paths diverging off a choice, one we feel safe to call good, the other riddled with challenges and danger and allure. Looking down them both, he knew which one he’d always choose in the end.

The choice made; the only thing left to do—

Viktor rode up on Bytiye (Toska back at home eating his grass with a final Olympic gold sealing his legacy for all time) ready for competition with his vest and armband in place, sunlight glinting off his brilliant smile as if he’d eaten diamonds for breakfast. (He had nibbled on his clamps a little last night.) “First one to four-star gold gets a week of nothing but their desires filled.”
“Oh, you mean the same as every other week with you?” Grinning, he rode Avos closer to nip his lips with a kiss.

He whimpered with his heart melting into his words. “You’re just the sweetest. But you’re right. It’s so hard to think of a solid bet when there’s nothing the other wouldn’t give on a regular basis anyway.”

“Hmm… I can think of one thing I can give you if you win…” He grabbed his collar to hold them together on their dancing horses while he whispered in his ear, savoring the blush on his cheeks. “I’ll take a pen and make love to you, writing on you every single thing I felt watching you win your first from a distance and every single thing I feel getting to be by your side for all the rest. I’ll cover you with my love letter.”

“Oh, Yuri… That’s perfect. I want that so much. It’s the perfect incentive.” He stroked his cheek as he released him, his heart already melting at the romance. “Alright, I’ve thought of one for you too. If you kick my ass, I’ll beat yours ten times as hard and…” He smiled, gripping around Yuri’s waist to hold his voice to his ear. “I’ll get you that baby you want.”

“What? Are you serious?” He gasped, tears he hardly knew—tears of joy and longing, only felt twice in his life as he proclaimed his eternal love for Viktor when he received his tattoos and at their wedding, pricked at his eyes.

“I am.”

“Even if you beat me would you still—”

“Shh… don’t break the fantasy. Of course, I would.” He smiled then pulled him in by the waist to nuzzle in his voice weighted with desires waiting to be realized. “But don’t you want to be able to tell our child that you fought for them? That your strength is why they’re ours? That you battled for years to bring them from our words to our arms?”

He melted into a sigh. “Yes, Viktor. Oh, you did it again. You made it so… perfect.”

(73) He winked and picked up Bytiye’s reins, holding his swelling beast in check. “You ready?”

Taking up Avos’s reins, excitement surged. “Yes, Viktor.”

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Chapter End Notes

Spotify
72. Miracle by The Score
73. Ready Set Let’s go by Sam Tinnesz
74. Till Your Heart is Still by Vian Izak

That's it for me. If you're interested in reading it again in the future, I highly suggest downloading a copy because the chances of it staying up are slim to none. Same for any of my other fics. (The ones written with Clarinda will still be found under her name, Clarinda0110.) Thanks to everyone who made it to the end of this rough draft. I hope it was worth it.
Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!