The Sincerest Form of Flattery
by coxorangepippin

Summary

“Yuuri, my darling, my own, light of my drear existence; how would you like to pay off your student debt early?”

That was where it had started. That day, that conversation; Yuuri had soon learned that thanks to Phichit’s family connections, it was easy to sell a very, very good forgery for absolutely eye-watering prices.

AU in which Yuuri is a phenomenally talented artist, and Phichit has some less-than-legitimate family contacts; they set up a thriving business selling forged paintings, and one of the buyers is a Russian who apparently has more money than sense.

Little do they know, he has no interest in the paintings; just in the man selling them.
A Business Opportunity

Yuuri Katsuki was a criminal.

Not a violent, guns-and-theft burglar; an altogether more civilised breed of criminal, one who had never touched a knife, wouldn’t know what to do with a gun if you gave it to him with a diagram and helpfully simple instructions, and one who spent most of his time in environments that had more silk and velvet than hard drugs and harder hearts.

Yuuri Katsuki was a forger.

Specifically, he was a forger of fine art. He had always been immensely talented with a paintbrush; some of his sketches from his toddler years were better than most paintings in the more modern galleries of the world. As he had grown, his talent had grown with him; by twelve, he had been producing passable copies of the old masters, and had begun expanding his repertoire.

His favourite had always been Turner; the diffuse array of sunlight and steam and colour was restful to paint, a gentle relaxation after the harsh and brilliant colours of Picasso or Dali.

Yuuri had gone on to university to study fine art. Whilst he was there, he had made an acquaintance; one Phichit Chulanont, a Thai student who was brilliant, and beautiful, and hiding a dark secret.

It took some time for it to come to light. The two of them had grown closer gradually, as the terms progressed, until one evening near the end of first year.

“Yuuri,” Phichit said carefully, lying upside on Yuuri’s bed in his immaculately tidy room, “Have you ever tried to paint an exact copy of one of the pieces we study?”

Yuuri had blushed, and nodded; he pulled out a few canvasses from where they were carelessly slung on top of the wardrobe, and showed them to Phichit.

“It’s what I do to relax,” Yuuri confessed, still slightly flushed with embarrassment. “I know it isn’t exactly original, or technically legal or anything, but…”

Phichit had studied the canvasses for a few long, silent minutes. Yuuri watched him, slightly worried by the Grin that was stealing over his face. It was the Grin which had earned the honour of a capital letter, due to the fact that it always spelled some sort of world-ending trouble for Yuuri; Phichit had nearly caused them both to be sent down on numerous occasions. Most memorably, the night on which they had stolen a college punt and had a picnic in the middle of the lake of the Master’s garden had started with a Grin like that; it had ended with them breaking into the Master’s living room, and falling asleep on his sofas. The maid had woken them in the morning with a piercing scream, and only Phichit’s most charming ‘we’re so terribly sorry, we were locked out, and we were too scared to sleep in the street please forgive us’ pleading expression had got them out of trouble.

And now, Yuuri was really worried. As Phichit studied his paintings, the Grin had grown wider even than it had been at the beginning of that night.

Phichit laid the canvasses carefully down on Yuuri’s bed, and looked up at him. He spoke slowly
and carefully, every syllable dropping into the air between them like a pebble in water; Yuuri had no way of knowing how far the ripples of that conversation would take him.

“Yuuri, my darling, my own, light of my drear existence; how would you like to pay off your student debt early?”

That was where it had started. That day, that conversation; Yuuri had soon learned that thanks to Phichit’s family connections, it was easy to sell a very, very good forgery for absolutely eye-watering prices.

He had had a few qualms about the legality of the situation; but in the end, he was broke, and he was a damn good artist. Why should it matter if he painted the bloody picture, or someone who was long dead, if no one could tell the difference? Value was subjective; his art, however, was objectively beautiful.

And after a while, Yuuri stopped worrying about the legality of it. Specifically, he stopped worrying the day in third year when he paid off his student debt completely, and had enough saved to cover the rest of the course. He and Phichit bought several bottles of champagne to celebrate, and once Yuuri got over his absolutely apocalyptic hangover the next day, he and Phichit had a long, serious discussion about their future. And then they rang Phichit’s father, and had the same conversation with him.

In the course of an afternoon, their future was decided. They would take over the art fencing side of the Chulanont family empire as soon as they left university.

And take over they did. Yuuri and Phichit worked together as only people who have seen each other in every stage of a hangover can; seamlessly, and complimenting each other’s weaknesses with their own strengths. Phichit was garrulous; Yuuri more reserved. Yuuri was quietly charming; Phichit was so charismatic that sometimes rooms didn’t feel big enough for his personality. They learned, over time, to judge which of them could sell a painting more effectively.

They never got caught.

Yuuri perfected his forgeries. They never sold more than five in a year, and never more than one on the same continent; that was more than enough to keep their salaries ridiculously high. With every successful fence, they grew wilder, happier, more sure of their success.

Until the day that they set off for Russia with a supposedly undiscovered Monet.

It was ambitious, and Yuuri later realised, perilously stupid; Monet’s life was so well documented that there was very little chance a painting such as the one he had produced would go unnoticed.

But they landed in Moscow, and went to scout the buyer before their meeting. He was a big-shot in some incomprehensible finance industry; Yuuri had never got the hang of derivatives, or whatever it was his spectacularly wealthy clients traded in. However, they knew where he ate lunch every day, thanks to Phichit’s father’s network of intelligence; they headed for the sushi restaurant, bundled up against the cold.

They seated themselves at a corner table, facing the door, and ordered some of the absurdly expensive dishes. Phichit handled the menu, and chose a bottle of sake that cost more than a normal family earned in a month.

They waited for their quarry to arrive.

When he finally stepped through the door, Phichit kicked Yuuri in the shin under the table, in a
silent shout of glee. He was tall, he was pale; he had elegantly drooping nearly-white hair, which hung in an artful spill across one eye. His suit was clearly tailored to perfection, but even so, the body that it framed was a masterpiece in itself; Yuuri felt a slight blush rising into his cheeks at the sight of those broad shoulders, overlaid in rich, soft cloth.

Victor Nikiforov seated himself at an out of the way table, and signalled to the water to bring his usual. Phichit leaned in close to Yuuri, and murmured quietly enough that no one else would be able to hear. “So, I’m thinking that you ought to take this one, much as I wish I could. Those cheekbones! It’s a wonder he doesn’t cut himself on them. But I think he’d respond better to your particular brand of quiet charm.” Phichit broke off, and glanced over Yuuri’s shoulder for a moment. “And now I’m absolutely sure you ought to take this one, because he’s staring at you.”

Yuuri resisted the urge to turn around with a gargantuan effort. “Staring? At me?”

Phichit nodded, and smiled in a way that was a little too predatory to be comforting. “Like a man who has never seen the sun before, my love. So, be sure to be nice to him. He might even become a repeat customer.”

Yuuri waited a seemly length of time, and then gave into temptation, and glanced over his shoulder to the out-of-the-way table.

Blue eyes met his own. Yuuri felt a rush of heat dancing down his spine.

He broke their gaze, and turned back around to face Phichit, who by now was barely able to contain his glee. “Oh, my beloved. Be careful with that one. I’m not sure whether he’ll be more interested in the painting, or you.”

Phichit took a sip of his sake, appreciating the smooth, slightly bitter taste as it ran across his palate. “Whichever it is, have fun, dear heart. Let’s be going; we have to choose you a suit that will ensnare a heart.”

He dragged Yuuri upright, and flung down enough money to cover the bill and a sizeable tip carelessly onto the table.

They headed back out into the freezing air. Yuuri felt eyes on him until they turned the corner, and were lost to view.

Chapter End Notes

I've written another AU! This time it's crime! And art! And probably the most ridiculously inaccurate piece of writing to ever grace this website! But I'm having fun so please be nice!

I'm afraid I am not a professional forger, nor am I a crime boss; my knowledge on both these things is therefore equivocal at best. So please forgive any glaring errors that you spot if you are an actual crime boss/forger, or have the confidence of one.

The rest of this fic is nearly finished; it should be up very soon, and by very soon I mean probably tomorrow or the day after. Please leave kudos/a comment if you
enjoyed it, because it makes me super happy.

Love to everyone reading as always x
Victor Nikiforov had requested that Yuuri meet him in a private room at his club. It was a modern, understated, plate-glass and leather type of club; everything was sleek, and so obviously terrifyingly expensive that even Yuuri, with his extensive experience of the high-end and high-priced, was afraid to touch anything.

He had brought the painting with him, wrapped in layers of protective microfiber, housed within a reinforced steel framed box. Nothing could jostle it; it had to appear as though it really were priceless, irreplaceable, and not as though Yuuri could make one just like it in a few days.

The doors to the club were opened by an unfeasibly enormous man, who clearly had some fairly impressive weaponry strapped to his skin beneath the expensive suit he wore; Yuuri felt a thrill of genuine fear as he saw the distinct outline holster at the man’s hip. He was ushered through reception by a respectful attendant, along a corridor, and into a lift that was as big as his bedroom. They were whisked upwards, and finally reached the door of Victor Nikiforov’s private room.

The attendant knocked, and opened the door when he heard a voice call *Da* through the thick, polished dark wood. He backed away, ushering Yuuri into the room.

Yuuri stepped through the door.

Victor’s jaw dropped.

“It’s you!” he said, in English lightly accented with dark Russian vowels. He was clearly utterly shocked. Yuuri felt his heart flutter slightly. “From the restaurant!”

Yuuri stepped forwards into the room, his feet making no noise on the absurdly plush carpet. Victor sat opposite him, at one end of a table that had two place settings, facing the door. It had clearly been a power move, intended to establish Victor as the dominant party in the conversation; but now, with his mouth hanging inelegantly open, half standing out of his chair, that impression had been somewhat ruined.

“It’s me,” Yuuri said in the quiet purring voice he used for these meetings. However attractive Victor was, he was just a mark, just a buyer, just a…an absurdly beautiful buyer. Even with his mouth still open, and his tie very nearly hanging into his wine.

Victor became aware of his inelegant position, and stood up. Yuuri could see he was trying to re-gather the identity that he projected so carefully about himself like a cloak.

Yuuri extended a hand across the dark wooden table, intending to shake Victor’s and get them past the awkward moment; but Victor didn’t shake his hand. He took it gently in the tips of his fingers, bent his head, and brushed his lips lightly across the back of it. Yuuri was so taken aback that he nearly jerked out of Victor’s grip; but the heat that Victor’s barely-touching lips left on his skin kept his hand frozen in place.

Victor straightened again, and spoke, his shock no longer visible on the angular planes of his face. “My apologies, Mr Katsuki; I was surprised to recognise you, when I had expected a stranger.”

Yuuri nodded an acknowledgement of the apology, and Victor stepped around the table to pull his
chair out for him. Yuuri sat, and Victor slid it under him at just the right moment.

*Oh, he’s good,* Yuuri thought. *Very good. But I’m better.*

Victor sat down again, and as if at a signal, a waiter stepped through the door.

Victor looked at Yuuri. “What would you like to drink? I had started with red wine, but if you would prefer anything else…” Victor trailed off, and Yuuri shook his head.

“Red would be perfect,” he said, arching his eyebrows with a smile that he knew would look flawless in the low lighting. He knew, because he’d practised it until Phichit had said it would make even him swoon.

Victor licked his lips, and gestured to the waiter at his glass. “More of this,” he said, not looking away from Yuuri. “And then bring us the tasting menu. Make sure it is perfect.”

The waiter nodded deferentially, and exited the room like a barely-present ghost. Yuuri wondered how much he was paid to put up with these ridiculous rich men.

“Dinner?” Yuuri asked, slightly surprised; usually the buyers only wanted to see the painting, make polite and sparkling small talk for a while, and then leave with their new prized possession.

Victor nodded. “I’m so sorry; how terribly impolite of me. I should have asked first. I just thought that someone who eats at the same sushi restaurant as me clearly has excellent culinary opinions, and not to try the menu here would be a crime. It is truly glorious.” Victor looked up as the waiter re-entered the room, bringing with him two glasses and a bottle. He filled them both to what Yuuri would have been prepared to bet was mathematically perfectly half full, and placed them carefully in front of himself and Victor, before disappearing again.

Victor picked up the glass, and raised it towards Yuuri. Yuuri lifted his own, and the ring of priceless crystal against priceless crystal was bell-like, divine.

Victor leaned forwards in his chair, his blue eyes intent on Yuuri. There was something in his gaze which wasn’t quite lust, or love, or awe, but borrowed something from all of them…Yuuri found it slightly discomfiting. He wasn’t used to people looking at him like that.

“After dinner, if you would be so kind, we can discuss the painting. I am very eager to see it. But first, Mr Katsuki, tell me about yourself. How did you come to be in the art world?”

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The food was, as Victor had promised, glorious. They ate tiny plates of each dish, presented as though they were art in themselves; they drank a different wine with each course, and Yuuri felt even his extremely high tolerance being tested.

And Victor and he talked. Victor seemed fascinated by him; his interest was so disarmingly genuine that Yuuri nearly incriminated himself more than once, and he had to kick himself mentally. *Don’t go ruining yourself over a pair of pretty eyes,* he castigated himself in a voice which sounded an awful lot like Phichit. *Or pretty hair. Or hands. Or shoulders. Or cheekbones.*

They talked, and they laughed. Victor wouldn’t share many details about his own life, beyond
those which were publicly available; Yuuri found his strange reticence felt like a challenge.

Finally, the meal was over. Yuuri stood solemnly. He always enjoyed this moment. The performance, the spectacle of it…it felt like something profound.

He reached for the reinforced case where it lay by the table, and placed it on the polished wooden surface. Yuuri clicked open the very intimidating lock, and opened the lid, waiting for the gasp of admiration that he knew was coming.

Except it didn’t. Yuuri glance up, surprised, and saw the reason.

Victor wasn’t looking at the case; he was gazing into Yuuri’s face. Yuuri pointedly stared downwards, and Victor flushed slightly, and followed his gaze.

“Oh!”

*There it is,* thought Yuuri with satisfaction. He gazed at his handiwork; he had done a particularly fine job with this one. The colours were perfect, the shapes were organic and fluid, the stippled finished of the surface was as close to the original as Monet himself could have produced.

Yuuri enjoyed the hush following the reveal, and was prepared to revel in appreciation of his work for as long as it was offered; but Victor broke the hallowed silence after just a few seconds.

Normally, at this point, Yuuri expected buyers to frown, and hem, and haw, and prevaricate about the price for about half an hour while he wore them down to about half of his initial figure. He always started high; he always got what he wanted, in the end. But this time…

“I’ll take it. Name your price, contact my company, and I’ll wire it to you.”

Yuuri blinked.

Victor looked up at him, their foreheads close together as they bent over the painting.

“Is that alright?” he asked, his voice suddenly wary; “I’ve never bought a painting like this before, so I’m not sure how it’s done, but…”

Yuuri could have been felled with a feather at that moment. He gathered the splintered remains of his brain enough to speak. “No, no! You’re perfect. That’s perfect, I mean. I’ll have my estimate with you by tomorrow morning. It’s been a pleasure, Mr Nikiforov.”

Yuuri extended his hand, and this time Victor did take it, holding it firmly without shaking it. “Call me Victor,” he said emphatically. “Mr Katsuki. Yuuri. I am very keen to buy more paintings like this; I am starting an art collection for my country estate. Will you contact me the next time anything comes up? Anything at all?”

Yuuri blinked again. He had never been at a loss for words so often in his life. Did this man have any idea what he was doing…?

“Of course, Victor. I’d be delighted to. I’m sure something will come up soon that you will be interested in. And now, I really must be going-” Yuuri smiled, slightly dazedly, and tried to maintain his equilibrium for long enough to leave the room.

Victor smiled at him suddenly, dazzling, heart-shaped, and heart-stoppingly beautiful; nothing like the perfect, crafted smiles he had used all evening. It made his face rounder, his eyes crinkle shut; Yuuri felt his heart skip a beat.
“Thank you for your company, Yuuri. It was a pleasure to meet you, and I look forward to working with you in the future. Have a safe journey home!”

Yuuri blinked again, and turned to leave; he walked into the doorframe on his way out, and the attendant gave him a pitying glance. As he climbed into the waiting taxi, he was still slightly dazzled by Victor’s smile.

Phichit was going to dance on the rooftops when he heard the carte blanche price he had managed to get, although it hadn’t exactly been his skill that had won it; but Yuuri wasn’t, for once, thinking about the money. He was thinking about blue eyes, and a reticence which he thought must be hiding something, and how he was going to find out what it was.

Victor waited for the door to shut behind Yuuri. He took a deep breath in through his long nose, counted to seven, and then breathed out, trying to slow his heart rate from the pace it had galloped to when Yuuri had grasped his hand.

Victor stared at the doorframe, trying to pinpoint the exact spot, the exact hallowed spot, that Yuuri had walked into face first.

He thought he found it; a whorl of wood, which he envied with his whole heart in that moment.

Victor took another deep breath in, and let it gust out again immediately.

He stared at the doorframe, and spoke into the silence of the expensively upholstered meeting room.

“I’m going to marry that man.”

Chapter End Notes

So there you have it; the rest of this is nearly written, and should be up within a few days. I hope you enjoyed this very silly, flufftacular fic so far; if you did, please leave me a comment/kudos, because it really does make my entire day. And give me the motivation to keep writing.

Love to everyone reading <3
The second time Yuuri Katsuki saw Victor Nikiforov, they were in France, and it was summer.

It had been five months since their first meeting in a Russian sushi restaurant; in that time, Victor had texted Yuuri three times. Once, a follow up request that Yuuri contact him the next time he had anything, anything at all to sell, and the remaining two times, pictures of his dog. Yuuri had been baffled, but appreciative; he had sent back pictures of his own childhood dog, and Victor had apparently been satisfied with that, judging by the number of exclamation marks in his replies. Phichit found the whole thing hysterical; he refused to elaborate on why, even when Yuuri prodded him about it for weeks on end.

This time, Yuuri sold Victor a very passable ‘lost Turner sketch’, and was again given carte blanche to name his own price. They ate in a restaurant that stood high above Paris, and which allowed the diners to gaze out over the famous city skyline as they ate.

Victor asked him about his childhood, and his favourite colour, and his taste in wine.

Yuuri learned that Victor loved the snow, and always spent the winter in Moscow.

The third time they met, only a few months later, was in London. It was autumn, and chilly rain drove across the capital. Victor was unsurprisingly a member of yet another very exclusive club, and Yuuri ate at the top of one of the most distinguished buildings on Pall Mall; if anything, the waiters here were even quieter and more discrete than the ones in the Russian club. Yuuri sold Victor a particularly good imitation of a Degas charcoal sketch, of a ballerina mid-pirouette.

Victor asked him about his favourite artists, his family, and his happiest memory.

Yuuri learned that Victor hated whiskey, and that he missed Makkachin constantly when he was not home.

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Yuuri sipped his tea, and stared out over the city skyline.

He was in his flat in London, the one that he and Phichit shared. They had more than enough money to live separately by this point; in fact, they could probably have a house on every continent if they wanted, but living together had become a habit as natural as breathing, and neither wanted to interrupt their equilibrium.

Yuuri curled his feet under himself, and burrowed deeper into the enormous sofa; it was pale blue, and like everything else in their richly but sparsely furnished flat, like the tea Yuuri was drinking, it was the best quality money could buy.
Yuuri was thinking about Victor.

Victor was a puzzle. A conundrum. Yuuri found him more and more intriguing every time they met, and that was very, very dangerous.

Yuuri knew that Victor wasn’t quite above board. No one got that rich from legal activities; given that he was Russian, it was a fair guess that he had ties to the Mafia. And Yuuri was defrauding him on a regular basis.

He ought to be scared, he knew. He took a sip of his tea, and let the clean, slightly bitter taste run over his palate. He ought to be scared, but all he could feel was…

Guilty.

Yuuri frowned, and felt a headache threatening. He had never had an attack of conscience like this before, but...when Victor smiled, Yuuri felt as though by his presence, he was sullying something beautiful. He was there under false pretences. A pretender, a liar, a thief.

And for some reason, he found that the idea hurt.

Initially, Yuuri had tried to talk himself out of his fit of conscience. Victor was a buyer, that was all.

A charming, rich, and kind buyer. A buyer with eyes that could charm fire from the Gods. A buyer with arms that looked as though they could support Yuuri’s weight easily….

Yuuri groaned, and set his tea down on the glass coffee table. He knew it wouldn’t be long before Phichit asked him to go and see Victor again, to sell him another beautiful forgery; but in that moment, in his flat which had recently been redecorated with Victor’s money, Yuuri made a decision.

Defrauding Victor was different, somehow, from defrauding the mindless, witless billionaires who only wanted a name to hang on a wall.

He was different. He was special.

And Yuuri would see him once more, and then never again.

He wasn’t sure why the thought made his heart sink to the bottom of his stomach, but he assumed it was a side effect of his little-used and unfamiliar conscience.

He finished his tea, and picked up his phone. Victor had texted, again; Yuuri, smiling, began to text him back.

Phichit, who had been watching Yuuri from the doorway, unseen, smiled to himself, and then disappeared back into his bedroom.

*I love that boy, but he is an idiot.*

*******

It was the fourth time that Yuuri arranged to meet Victor that it all went wrong. Disastrously,
world-endingly wrong. Or, if you had asked Yuuri a few years later, that was the meeting in which it had all gone right.

Yuuri was back in Russia, and though the winter had not yet set in, the air was cold enough to make him shiver as he stepped out of his hotel, and slid gratefully into a cab. Phichit was not with him in the country this time; Victor was an established client, and therefore there was no need for both of them to be there to scope out the buyer.

Yuuri was no longer nervous about their meetings; Victor was always a pleasure to dine with. Always a pleasure to see, full stop, actually. In fact, Yuuri would probably be quite grateful at this point just to be in the same room as him. Yuuri sighed, as he watched the brightly lit restaurants flashing past the cab window. It was for the best...

Yuuri’s taxi pulled up to the reinforced glass door of the club, and Yuuri stepped out, the cold air winding fingers through his suit. He braced himself; he would have to make the most of this dinner.

This is the last time, he promised himself as he walked through the lobby, this is absolutely the last time I will sell Victor Nikiforov a forgery.

Victor was waiting for him, as always. He smiled radiantly when Yuuri walked into the room, and kissed him on both cheeks, having graduated from his hand the last time they met. It made Yuuri slightly dizzy to feel the places where his mouth had touched burning as though branded.

Yuuri sat down at the table, and pushed the painting in its reinforced case (a ‘Renoir’, this time) to the side. He picked up the glass of wine that Victor had already poured for him, and they clinked glasses with a smile.

“It is wonderful to see you again, Yuuri,” said Victor, with the long-drawn out, darkened vowels that turned Yuuri’s name into music. “You look well. Makkachin says hello.”

Yuuri smiled, and took a sip of his wine. It was perfect; of course it was. Victor knew his tastes, by now.

“I’m glad to see you again, too. Is Makkachin here tonight?”

Victor looked downcast for a moment. “No; there are no dogs allowed in the club, no matter how much you bribe the bouncers.” Victor paused for a moment, looking thoughtful. Suddenly he sat up ramrod straight.

“Yuuri,” he said, his voice contained but vibrating with excitement, “How about we get out of here, and go and see Makkachin? We could get takeaway. You know me well enough by now not to be impressed by all this, anyway,” he said, waving a hand dismissively at all the furnishings which probably cost as much as small house.

Yuuri looked at Victor’s bright expression, and for a split second considered how dangerous this was; he was not unknown in the underground art world, and it was foolish at best to get into a car that could drive him anywhere…

But Victor’s eyes were wide and pleading, and Yuuri knew that he was going to say yes whatever he asked, so he may as well bite the bullet.

“Of course!” he said, with a smile as bright as Victor’s own. “I’d love to. I’m honoured that you would invite me to your home,” he added, slightly more formally, trying to maintain at least the veneer of a business negotiation for a few moments longer, even if it was just for his own
conscience.

Victor shot up out of his chair, and bounded across the room to Yuuri. He left their wine undrunk, and seized Yuuri’s hand, dragging him out through the corridor and into the lobby.

The staff stared for just a fraction of a second at their joined hands, and then resumed their politely disinterested professional boredom.

“My car, if you would,” said Victor. A young man in the club uniform nodded, and his fingers flew across the screen of a tablet; about thirty seconds later, an engine revved outside the front of the building, the sound gently rattling an orchid on its glass plinth.

“Your car, Mr Nikiforov,” said the uniformed young man. Victor, still holding Yuuri’s hand tightly, pulled him gently towards the door.

Outside was the most understated, and simultaneously outrageous sports car Yuuri had ever seen. It was black, low slung, sleek; like everything about Victor, it managed to be ostentatiously good quality without being tasteless.

Victor drove them. He said that he never trusted any driver but himself, and Yuuri felt an alarm bell ring somewhere in the back of his mind. Hadn’t Phichit’s father, the Actual Crime Boss, said something similar…?

They arrived at Victor’s town house within fifteen minutes. He tossed the keys to a waiting staff member, who seemed to be wearing a surprisingly bulky jacket, and then gestured for Yuuri to follow him.

Yuuri, however, was standing on the pavement, staring up at the building in front of him with a strange, warm sensation in his chest. The house was…so Victor. It was enormous, naturally, given how wealthy Victor seemed to be; but it was all so stylish. Elegant. Exactly how Yuuri would decorate, if he had unlimited funds.

Victor pressed a button, and the high, reinforced gate that barred the front entrance whirred open. Yuuri followed him up the steps, and into the high-ceilinged entrance hall, which had a warmly polished wooden floor, and two enormous deep-green carpeted staircases branching off into the upper levels. Everything was just as perfectly appointed as Yuuri expected; vases of flowers stood on most of the surfaces, and huge canvasses dominated the walls, beautiful paintings of grey and gold and blue.

There were approximately two seconds of silence, and then there was the sound of paws clicking on tile; distant, but rapidly approaching. Victor’s face shone, and he spun to face the staircase.

An enormous poodle came bounding down it, mouth open in joy, tongue lolling, deliriously happy. Yuuri recognised her from the many pictures that Victor had sent him. Makkachin leapt at Victor, showing no regard for how expensive his suit probably was; within seconds, he was covered in drool from Makkachin’s enthusiastic kisses. Yuuri smiled, heart warmed.

Makkachin paused, and noticed Yuuri. She sniffed the air a few times, and then padded slowly closer, sniffing at his shoes. Victor waited, tense, more worried than Yuuri had ever seen him. His tension was infectious; Yuuri found himself wondering if he ought to have brought some kind of dog treat as a vibe.

Makkachin clearly decided that Yuuri passed whatever test she had been subjecting him to. She leapt up towards his face, barking, mouth open in transports of joy at having made a new friend.
Yuuri laughed, and crouched, giving her better access to lick his cheek. He rubbed his hands through her thick fur, and murmured compliments to her; “How pretty, how clever to have grown such lovely fur, yes, you’re so pretty Makka! I’m so happy to meet you at last! I’m your biggest fan!”

Yuuri laughed as she licked his other cheek, and looked up to see Victor holding on to one of the tall bannisters at the end of the huge staircase. His face was shocked, his eyes bright; Yuuri stood up, suddenly uncertain.

“Are you alright? I’m sorry, I should have asked- some people don’t like their dogs being played with without asking, I’m sorry-”

Victor cut him off with a wave of his hand, and suddenly he smiled, one of the rare and brilliant heart-shaped smiles that Yuuri always felt were a reward, somehow. ”No, no! I’m just….she doesn’t always take to strangers. I’m happy she likes you so much. Though of course I knew she would. Anyway. Yes. Drink?”

They retired to one of the balconies on the upper floors; it looked out over the chilly skyline of Moscow, lit with endless tiny pinpricks of light that were bars, restaurants, offices, but from this distance looked like constellations.

Victor handed him a glass of wine, and Yuuri sipped it, staring out at the dark night. It was beautiful, but something was wrong, something was….

Yuuri suddenly realised his hands felt terribly empty, and started. “Oh, damn!” he cried, setting his wine down on the wide railing; “I left the painting in the car! I’m so sorry, Victor, I didn’t mean to be so rude, I was just…” Yuuri trailed off, and moved to run back down the stairs and look for it.

Victor stopped him with a hand on his arm, and another of his brilliant smiles.

“Please don’t worry, Yuuri; it will be perfectly safe in my garage. Safer, probably, than it would be in yours. And besides, it’s not like it’s a real Renoir, so even if someone stole it the damage wouldn’t be too bad; apart from, of course, your wasted hours.”

Yuuri looked at the hand on his arm. And then he looked into Victor’s eyes. And felt his heart drop about forty feet, to smash on the cold, hard Moscow street.

He opened his mouth, but could think of nothing to say. Victor looked away, still smiling, gazing out at the Moscow night. He sipped his wine unconcernedly, as though he had not just brought Yuuri’s life crashing down around his ears.

Yuuri felt cold dread settle in his stomach, mixing with betrayal, mixing with guilt, in a cocktail of bile and pain. He asked the question which he always known he might have to ask, one day, if he angered the wrong buyer.

“So…have you brought me here to kill me?”

The words were dropped into the air carefully, each one cold and hard and full of knives.

Victor dropped his wine glass.

It shattered on balcony, sending brilliant crystal sparkling outwards in a shower of shards.

Victor looked as though Yuuri had shot him. “Yuuri…I…what? What do you mean?”
Yuuri glared at him defiantly. Victor looked so…hurt. And that hurt to see. But damn it if he was going to go down so easily.

“You know. That the paintings are fake, I mean. And that I do them. And you’ve brought me here to a place where no one knows I am, and therefore where no one will look for me, and where no one will even hear the gunshot. Are you going to kill me?”

Victor stepped closer to Yuuri, one single step, his shoes crunching against the shattered wineglass. His eyes were wide, his mouth slightly open; he raked a hand through the elegant fall of silver hair that usually covered one eye, dragging it backwards so that he could stare at Yuuri’s face uninterrupted.

“My God,” he said, after he had examined him for a few moments. “You’re serious.”

Yuuri jerked his chin upwards defiantly. Victor took another step towards him, but Yuuri took one backwards, closer to the edge of the balcony.

Victor held his hands up in the universal sign that he was unarmed, and the expression in his eyes was…pained. Deeply pained. Yuuri was so surprised to see it that he lost some of his wariness for a moment.

Victor stared at him for a few more moments, and finally broke the silence. “Yuuri. I brought you here because I wanted you to meet Makkachin. I wanted you to meet Makkachin because her approval is important to me. And in this case, her approval is important to me because from the first night that I met you, I have wanted to marry you.”

Yuuri didn’t know what he had been expecting, but it hadn’t been this. He gaped, utterly nonplussed for a moment.

When Victor’s words registered one by one in his suddenly slow brain, they chased the cold fear away, sending feathers of heat shooting through his chest instead.

Victor took a step closer, and Yuuri didn’t back away. “I thought that you knew. I mean, I’m not exactly…on the right side of the law. Of course I had the paintings examined by experts who are also…free with their talents, as you are. They said that the paintings were perfect in their own right, by the way. But I didn’t care about that. Yuuri, did you think I gave you a blank cheque because I’m an art connoisseur?”

Victor took one final step forwards, and now he was close enough for Yuuri to feel his body heat through the chill air. Victor placed one hand on Yuuri’s cheek, and leaned forwards. “All I wanted was to see you again. I would have paid a thousand times what you asked for, if it meant you would agree to another dinner. Yuuri. I don’t care about the paintings. I mean, I care, because you painted them, but-”

Victor’s words were cut off as Yuuri kissed him. He closed the few inches between their faces softly, gently, and then pulled away.

Victor was momentarily speechless, and raised his fingers to his lips, touching the place Yuuri had kissed him with awe. And then, he placed one hand under Yuuri’s chin, and tilted his face upwards, kissing him back with a wild abandon that made Yuuri’s skin flash-burn; Victor had one hand on his cheek, the other at his back, and he was everywhere, and all he could taste was Victor, Victor…
The next morning, Yuuri texted Phichit that he would probably be back in a few days. Probably.

Phichit sent back such an inordinate amount of exclamation marks that Yuuri hid his phone under one of Victor’s pillows, blushing fiercely.

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As it happened, Yuuri did not go home after a few days. He did not even go home after a few weeks. After a few months, home was no longer the house he owned with Phichit back in England; it was this tall, sleek Moscow town house, and the smell of Victor on the pillows, and a poodle who had apparently had more of a say in his happiness than he had realised.

Yuuri was no longer worried that Victor was going to kill him. Among other reasons (for example, the hundred thousand times Victor had told him he loved him, that he would raze the world to the ground for him, that Yuuri had only to ask for something and it would be his) this was because he and Phichit worked for Victor now; not as underlings, but as ‘business partners’. Phichit’s father had not been delighted about it, but as he had said, they had to make their own way in the world.

And Yuuri did. He and Victor made their own way in the world, and they did it together.

And for the rest of their lives, Victor never took down the four paintings on their bedroom wall; four perfect imitations, of a Monet, a Turner, a Degas, and a Renoir.

He preferred them to the originals, anyway.

Chapter End Notes

So......firstly and most importantly.....

THANK YOU. Oh my goodness, thank you so much, because the response to this fluff-fest has been so generous and kind and lovely that I might actually cry. Real human tears here, y’all.

I am actually kind of terrified to post this chapter! I really, really hope you like it!

(Also I realised that I accidentally said this was a 4 chapter fic; sorry! It's only three! This is the end. The finale. The final countdown.)

Thank you so much for reading this- if you wanna be pals, come and say hi to me on Tumblr! I'm at cox-orange-pippin, and I'm taking requests for oneshot/short fics this sort of length at the moment!

Endless love and adoration to you all- you are angels, every one.
**********EDIT: PREQUEL NOW PUBLISHED!**********

The Chulanont-Katsuki Guide to University:
http://archiveofourown.org/works/13614045/chapters/31256154

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!